Dog Robber

Jim Colling Adventure Series
Book I

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To my wife, Margie, who read the drafts and asked the right questions, and whose support was essential to tell the story of Jim Colling and Elizabeth Hamilton. I dedicate Dog Robber to her, with my love.

Prologue

April, 1945

The American officer had been crouched in a depression behind a fallen pine tree since just after midnight. He shifted his weight as quietly as possible, and winced at the pain in his cramped calves. The pale early-spring dawn had begun to spread through the northern Italian mountains around him. Light was filtering slowly through the haze that had not yet disappeared from among the pines, and he resumed his vigil, peering intently through the tree's broken branches. Through breaks in the treetops, he could just make out portions of the logging road that ran along the curve of the slope below his position. Nothing moved, and he felt the nervousness that had been with him in varying degrees throughout the night become more acute.

He was not a veteran of combat, or even really trained for it. He had experienced his share of shellings and bombings as his unit had moved slowly northward through Italy, but this was the first time he had actually found himself this close to the front lines. The insignia on the collars of his shirt under his field jacket indicated he was a major assigned to the Signal Corps. He was used to being a mile or so behind the lines, his contact with the enemy limited to eavesdropping on their radio transmissions. The newspapers said that the German defenses were "collapsing," but he was astute enough to know that pockets of resistance still remained, and he was concerned that his small detachment would have the misfortune to encounter some group of diehards, especially if they were Waffen SS or paratroopers.

The fact that he was able to speak and understand German well enough to be capable of eavesdropping and interviewing prisoners of war was the main reason he now found himself this far out in front of the advancing American army. He shifted the carbine in his hands so that its barrel pointed forward. The soldiers who had been assigned to accompany him were volunteers from the Tenth Mountain, and he took some comfort in their seasoned appearance and attitude. Lieutenant Schwartz was somewhere to his left, and two enlisted men, Bergman and Cohn, were to his right. He could just see the olive-drab top of the helmet of one of them. All his companions had Thompson submachine guns, and he was confident in their ability to use them. He hoped they would not have the need to test their proficiency.

The faint sound of an engine down the slope and to his left grew in intensity. Its pitch was too high to be that of a tank, and he guessed that what he was hearing was a truck laboring up the steep rutted road. The driver was downshifting and pressing the accelerator to get the most out of an over-used engine and low-grade gasoline. The vehicle passed an opening in the trees, and he caught a glimpse of the familiar shape of a Fiat, painted Wehrmacht gray. The truck's engine was roaring as it reached the level clearing where they had arranged for

the meeting to take place, but quieted to a still-labored idle once the little Italian truck was no longer being forced to make the climb.

The American major watched as a figure in German Feldgrau opened the passenger door of the truck's cab and stepped to the ground. The uniform was immaculate, the silver rank insignia and decorations on the front of his tunic contrasting with its sober grayness. The American wondered to himself how Kraut officers always managed to look as if they had just come from a dress parade.

The German swept his eyes across the forested hill in front of him, finally looking directly at where the Americans were hidden. He shouted something over his shoulder, and the truck's driver swung down from the cab, a submachine gun suspended from his neck. Two more German soldiers, also carrying submachine guns, vaulted over the tailgate and took up positions at the rear of the Fiat.

Cupping his hands to his mouth, the German officer called out in German, "All is quiet. You may come down. I am 'Otto.'"

"And I am 'Fred,'" replied the Major in German as he emerged from the woods and walked towards the SS officer. Lieutenant Schwartz and Corporal Bergman warily followed him, Thompsons at the ready.

"Guten Tag," the German greeted the American, extending his hand. The American didn't take it.

Instead he responded, "Greetings, Sturmbannführer," noting the man's SS rank insignia, and continuing in German, "Do you have the goods?"

"Of course, Herr Major," replied the SS officer, glancing at the gold oak leaves on the American's shirt. "Step this way," he gestured towards the rear of the truck, ordering his men to drop the tailgate.

The major peered into the dark interior of the Fiat's bed and saw nothing until one of the German soldiers shone a flashlight inside. Wide-eyed faces stared back. A child whimpered and was instantly silenced.

"Raus, Juden!" shouted one of the soldiers, waving his submachine gun for emphasis, and displaying a familiar enjoyment with the task that caused the American officer to grit his teeth.

He turned on the German officer, "Tell your men to desist from addressing these people in that way. You shall, from this minute, treat them with respect. They are no longer your prisoners."

The Sturmbannführer seemed surprised at the American's outburst, but he instructed his men to do as the American had asked.

The ten men, twelve women and five children who eventually emerged from the truck looked as if they were on their last legs. One of the women collapsed as soon as she was lowered to the ground. The American officer quickly ordered everyone to sit down, hoping to avoid anyone else dropping in their tracks. While watching the former prisoners being assisted from the Fiat, the American had been dimly aware that another vehicle had reached the clearing, coming from the opposite direction than that of the Germans.

The big US Army truck pulled to a stop several yards from the Wehrmacht vehicle. PFC Benjamin Cohn, a Thompson submachine gun resting on his hip, jumped down from the truck's running board. He took one look at the huddled group of individuals sitting on the ground, and with a cursory request to Lieutenant Schwartz for permission to get rations and water for the refugees, he went to the back of the American truck, and was soon distributing K rations and passing around canteens.

Lieutenant Schwartz came to stand beside the major and said in a low voice, "Want us to get rid of these Krauts, sir?"

The major replied, "No, Lieutenant. General McKimmon's guaranteed them a safe conduct. If we welch on it, it will screw things up royally as far as future cooperation is concerned, and you and your men will get the court martial of all court martials."

The American major had been studying the former prisoners and after a few moments, he asked the SS officer, "They are all Jews?"

"Yes, Herr Major."

"And they were all assigned to the facility at Oldenberg?"

"Yes, all."

"They do not seem to be in any shape to have performed technical work."

The SS officer sniffed, "Compared to many others, they have been well-treated. Plenty to eat, medical care, nice warm place to sleep. They are the lucky ones. They appear as they do because of the difficulty of transporting them to this place."

"Which ones are the Poles?" asked the American officer.

"None. These are all Jews, no gentiles. The Poles were moved before I could obtain a requisition and the proper papers," replied the Sturmbannführer.

"The Poles were most important to us. I thought that was made perfectly clear."

"Understood. But I can do only what is possible. You realize the risks that I and my men have taken even to do this."

"My general has made arrangements that you and your men will be recognized for this, as promised," said the American, more than a hint of irony in his voice.

"The war cannot last much longer, Herr Major. I wish only that it shall be remembered that I and my men, SS men all, saved the lives of some Jews. I think that will be most important to us in the future."

The American major gave the German officer an icy look, then said, "You may return to your lines, Sturmbannführer."

As he watched the Germans climb into their Fiat and chug away, he wondered whether any of the SS men would survive the war, and if any of them did, whether what had occurred here this day would make any difference to them. He shouted at Lieutenant Schwartz that it was time to load up their charges so they could return to their own lines.

Chapter One

August-September, 1945

Private James T. Colling watched the green fields and orchards of the Belgian countryside roll past the window of his railway carriage. He found it difficult to reconcile what he was seeing with the newsreels of battles that had occurred here only a few months ago. If he had left college to enlist a year earlier, as he had wished, he would have been part of it. As it was, his father had convinced him to finish his second year, and the Germans had surrendered two weeks before classes ended. During basic training, everyone in his company had expected to be part of the invasion of Japan. But for the success of the Manhattan Project, his life, like many others, might have taken an altogether different direction. Now fate, and the unfathomable administrative processes of the U.S. Army, had decided he would be part of the occupation of Germany.

Hostilities in this part of Europe had concluded nearly eight months before, and the first summer of peace for the Belgians in five years was coming to an end. The last remnants of scorched, rusting hulks of trucks and other military vehicles were still sometimes seen, scattered along the sides of the roads that occasionally chanced to parallel the railway tracks. Civilians in small groups were here and there picking over the salvageable remnants, apparently continuing to find bits and pieces that would bring some money from the scrap dealers. Colling calculated that some of them must have been scavenging for almost a year, and winter would probably see the disappearance into some final junkyard of the last, most obvious evidence that armies had once faced each other on this plain.

The fields that ran to the hills on the horizon presented a green contrast to the gray shabbiness of the towns and cities through which the train rolled. For the first time in five years, the farmers would not see their crops requisitioned by an occupying army. It seemed to Colling that they might have come back to the soil with an unusual enthusiasm that boded well for a good harvest.

Here in the countryside, the smell of masonry dust that had permeated the air in the urban areas through which they had passed was absent. The sky itself seemed bluer and clearer. From the way that recent issues of Life and Newsweek portrayed what lay ahead in Germany, Colling expected that the optimism he seemed to sense in Belgium, technically one of the winners in the conflict, would not survive once he crossed the border to the losing side.

He glanced at the five other American soldiers who were his travelling companions. They were slouched in their seats, their eyes closed, sleeping or trying to. From the insignia on their uniforms, he knew that they were Signal Corps men, and their service stripes and ribbons, together with the fact that they were all wearing the new unofficial "Ike" jackets, advertised that they had much more military experience that he. The chevrons on their sleeves also told him that all of them out-ranked him, so that when they had first filed into the compartment in Antwerp, the reticence towards non-commissioned officers he had learned in basic training had prevailed, and he had not initiated any conversation. Other than a nod of acknowledgement in his direction,

none of them had said anything before leaning back and closing their eyes or pulling their caps down over their faces.

The railway car in which they were riding had seen better days. Below the window, a piece of plywood served as a patch in its side, and there were other signs that it might have been the target of gunfire in the recent past. The carriage swayed and bounced constantly, confirming the dilapidated state of tracks that had been repaired too many times. Perhaps because of the movement, Colling found himself dozing, and he eventually dropped off into a light sleep.

He had not closed his eyes for nearly 24 hours. He had been too restless to sleep as the transport sailed up the estuary into Antwerp near midnight, and he had gone to stand at the rail with his fellow soldiers, taking in his first impression of the buildings and lights of Europe drifting by. It seemed that simultaneously with the ship's docking had come the shouted orders to prepare for disembarkation. Leaving the transport did not occur as rapidly. After better than an hour standing packed together on the transport's deck with their baggage at their feet, the troops were finally bustled down the gangplank to the floodlighted wharf, where non-commissioned officers and port officials wearing black armbands with "Transportation Corps" emblazoned in white were sorting the men out in preparation for the next leg of the journey. More waiting followed. Like everyone else, Colling eventually dropped his duffel bag and used it to sit on, but he was too distracted by the new sounds, sights and smells around him to do so immediately.

The NCOs continued to search their clip-boards and call off names as they directed the men on the quay into groups. It was more than an hour before he heard his name called, and he was directed to a line of fifteen or twenty men. A corporal wearing one of the Transportation Corps brassards called Colling's group to attention and marched them to the train, where assignments to specific cars and compartments were made. That had been before dawn, and it was now mid-afternoon.

A sudden rough jarring of the car, accompanied by a series of metallic clanking noises, woke him. A stooped gray-haired conductor glanced into their compartment and moved on. A few minutes later, there was the sound of movement and voices in the companionway, and a pair of railway officials wearing a different style of uniform walked past, speaking in German, and he realized that they must be changing crews in preparation for entering Germany.

The stop had awakened his companions, and they were looking out the window and asking where they were.

Colling offered, "Germany, I think. We're in the British Zone right now. The train crew that just came on was speaking German, and those are British MPs on the platform outside." He extended his hand to the nearest signalman, "Hi, I'm Jim Colling."

As he leaned across to shake Colling's hand, he introduced himself as Joe Vitarelli. The three chevrons with a "T" underneath on his sleeves marked him as a sergeant technician fourth grade. Vitarelli went on to give the names of the other four men seated in the compartment, pointing to each of them as he did so. They, in turn, each gave a short greeting as they shook hands with Colling.

The accents that he was hearing told Colling the men were probably from the New York-New Jersey area. Vitarelli confirmed that supposition when he announced that he and his friends were from New York; then he asked, "Where you from, kid?"

Colling replied, "Wisconsin. A little town called Belle Cors. Most people haven't heard of it. It's actually about half-way between Milwaukee and St. Paul, Minnesota."

Vitarelli gave him a quizzical smile, "You just get drafted?"

"No, I signed up."

"Jesus, why?"

The other signalmen laughed at the way Vitarelli emphasized the "why?" in his response.

"It was back in June. I figured I had to, and I thought I'd be going to Japan."

"Lucky for you we got the A-bomb. Looks like the Japs are gonna give up."

"Yeah," said Colling, "All the guys in my basic training company actually had orders for the West Coast, and when we went to get on the train, they sent us the opposite direction, to Charleston. There was about twenty of us who were enlistees, and they put us on a steamer for Europe."

"Well, it looks like none of us is going to see the States for awhile."

"You guys over here long?"

One of Vitarelli's friends spoke up, "Ever since '42. We was all in the National Guard together in New York. Second New York Signal Company."

"Federalized into the 485th Signal Company," said Vitarelli, adding, "Yeah, we all joined the National Guard long before Pearl Harbor."

"By mistake," said a little corporal sitting near the compartment door.

"Come on, Dobson," said Vitarelli, "You did it for the money, just like the rest of us."

"Yeah, Dobson," said the other tech-four sitting next to Vitarelli, "You liked that check from Uncle Sam. Times was hard."

"My wife liked it better," replied Dobson, and the other soldiers laughed.

Vitarelli explained, "I joined the Guard, 'cause it was twenty bucks drill pay every three months, and full Army pay for summer maneuvers. I had a good job with the phone company, but the extra cash was a big help."

"Yeah, Joe, things was just fine until we got federalized in '41," said the tech-four who had spoken earlier. Turning to Colling, he went on, "We got called up in time for the Louisiana maneuvers. That was a crock of shit, I have to tell you. Just like Noah, it rained forty days and forty nights."

"And now, instead of sending us home, we get to go and rebuild Germany," said Dobson.

"But you guys have been in a long time," said Colling. "You should be heading home for discharge."

"Not the way it works, kid," said Vitarelli. "We do not have enough points, and you need eighty-five to qualify for discharge."

"But you've been over here for more than three years," responded Colling.

The tech-four sneered, "Yeah, but in England, not in combat. We've spent the last three years giving Scotland the best damn telephone system in the world."

Vitarelli came back at him; "Right, Al, but at least we weren't at Normandy, getting our asses shot off." He turned to Colling, "See, the limeys gave the Air Force all these airfields in Scotland to use, and there wasn't enough phone lines, so we had to run 'em. We was all over Scotland, and even down in England some," and speaking to the other signalmen, he said, "And you guys have to admit it was good duty. Them Scottish lassies was real friendly…especially the ones whose husbands was off fighting the war."

The signalmen nodded their heads in agreement. Al and Dobson began discussing the comparative virtues of Scottish women versus American girls, versus Italian females, and Colling quietly took it all in. The other signalmen interjected their own opinions, causing the argument to become more intense.

Vitarelli had not joined in, and he leaned back and turned to Colling, "Yeah, well, it wasn't so bad," he said. He looked up at the ceiling. "Jesus," he exclaimed.

Everyone looked up at once to where he was staring. A piece of ragged plywood had been nailed to the ceiling of the compartment, and was now hanging down a few inches, apparently dislodged as a result of the train's movement and vibration. Daylight could be seen above it.

"Shit," said Al, "Them's bullet holes. This here train must have got the once-over from one of our bombers."

"More likely a P-51 or '-47 on a strafing run," said the tech-four whom Colling had heard the others call Hank, with an air of superior knowledge.

Having realized that the top of the car had been penetrated, the men almost as one looked down to see if they had missed corresponding holes in the floor of the compartment. They found it intact.

Colling called their attention to the similar piece of plywood under the window.

"Shit, it's a wonder this Goddamn train is still running," said Al.

"You think anyone got killed in here?" asked Dobson, slightly nervous.

"Well, if they did, somebody did a good job of cleaning up the mess," said Vitarelli. This caused all the signalmen to begin examining the upholstery for bloodstains and bullet holes. Finding none, they continued to speculate among themselves on how many Germans might have been slaughtered by the machine guns of the strafing plane.

Their conversation was cut short when the door to the compartment was slid open by a thin-faced German wearing a dirty raincoat. A soiled shirt collar and threadbare tie showed above the lapels of the raincoat. The man stepped into the crowded compartment and in heavily accented English, asked, "Do any of you wish to exchange for German currency?"

Dobson was the first to speak, "All's we got is English money."

“That is good,” said the German. “I can make you trade for German marks. You will need them for the beer and the ladies, now you are in Germany.”

The signalmen began bringing out their wallets. Dobson held out some folded bills to the German, “Here’s five pounds.”

The German pulled a folded leather case from the inside pocket of his raincoat. He began leafing through the banknotes that it held. After extracting several bills, which he quickly counted, he said to Dobson, “Here, my friend, is your money, one hundred marks, Allied Military Currency. Good money for Germany.”

Colling reached up and stopped Dobson’s arm as he was about to hand his money to the German. Staring into the man’s face, Colling spoke in German, “Ein moment, Herr Geldswechsler. If it is correct what I have read in yesterday’s Stars and Stripes, the mark trades properly at ten American cents. At somewhat over four dollars the pound is, making five pounds worth more than twenty dollars. This man here is entitled to over two hundred marks. I fear that you are cheating him.”

With a startled expression, the money-changer backed away as Colling reached for him, and eluding Colling, stepped quickly into the companionway and hurried away.

“What was that all about?” asked Dobson.

“He was getting ready to screw you, I think,” replied Vitarelli.

Colling explained to Dobson that the German was trying to give him half as many German marks as his five pounds would bring at the American Express office, bringing forth a stream of curses and threats to the absent money-changer from the little corporal.

Vitarelli interrupted his diatribe to ask Colling, “Where did you learn to speak Kraut?”

“My dad’s mother,” responded Colling. “She lives with my mom and dad, and they all encouraged me to learn the language. There’s lots of Germans in my home town, and it helped my dad’s business to be able to talk to them.”

Vitarelli asked Colling what business his father was in, and Colling described his father’s drug store in Belle Cors. He told the sergeant how he started out jerking sodas, then moved up to working behind the prescription counter and delivering prescriptions. Vitarelli spoke of his work for the Bell Telephone Company before the war, and of his wife and two children, showing Colling snapshots from his wallet. The other signalmen talked quietly among themselves, dozed or simply sat looking out the train window.

Colling had taken notice in passing of the signs on the railway stations at each stop that revealed that the first German city they had traveled through was Aachen, and that they had then turned south, passing eventually through Bonn. Picturing in his mind the occupation map of Germany that he had seen in Life, he was aware that they had passed through the British Zone and were skirting the French Zone to their west. The conversation in the compartment had distracted him from the scenery outside, and when he and Vitarelli paused in their discussion, he was able to pay more attention to what could be seen from the train window. Destruction was more evident outside than it had been in Belgium, if that were possible. The people he saw looked dirty, tired and despondent, and he realized he was seeing the outward signs of a defeated people. He felt no pity for them, however, having convinced himself that they had chosen leaders who had brought them to this state. Despite his conscious acceptance of their fate, he was unable to shake off a sense of sadness that he had not experienced previously.

Ever since he had left home to go to college, Colling had made it a habit to write his parents at least once a week, and when there was a pause in the conversation with Vitarelli, Colling dug into his bag and brought out the leather folder that held his stationery. As Colling uncapped his fountain pen and started to write, Vitarelli pulled his garrison cap over his face and leaned his head back on his seat. Colling’s last letter home had been mailed the day before he left basic training camp, so Colling filled six pages with a description of the ocean voyage, his arrival in Europe, and his impressions of what he had seen since leaving Antwerp. When he had finished, he placed the addressed envelope in his inside jacket pocket, promising himself he would look for a place to mail it at the next stop.

It was early evening when the transition from open country to shattered buildings and heaps of broken masonry signaled their approach to another German city. At the stops in each major city over the past few hours, a conductor had walked the cars, calling out the place-name. This time was no different, and they soon heard the German shouting a guttural, “Frankfurt Am Main.”

Before the train came to a full stop, they were all on their feet, pulling their bags off the overhead racks. The final lurch threw them against each other, and then, the railway car motionless, they stood waiting, unconsciously whispering in the unaccustomed quiet. Colling shook Vitarelli's hand, "Nice to have met you, Sarge. I doubt we'll ever run into each other again, but if you're ever down in the 61st Division area, look me up." Vitarelli thanked Colling for saving Dobson's cash, and hearing him, Dobson repeated his own thanks. A Signal Corps captain came down the companionway, shouting for the 485th. to de-train, and the signalmen shambled out of the compartment. Colling followed close behind, his duffel bag over his right shoulder, and a smaller bag in his left hand.

The signal company was falling into formation on the train platform when Colling stepped down from the car, and he made his way around the milling soldiers, looking for a sign that would direct him to the military transport office.

As Colling made his way along the platform, he saw that there were two large warehouses across the tracks, and the remnants of a rail yard behind the stationhouse. He guessed that the principal railway stations closer to the city center were no doubt flattened, and this outlying station was serving as the Army's terminal for the city. Behind him, he could hear the shouted commands of the signal company officers marching off their troops as he opened the door marked "Transportation Office."

A technical sergeant with a bored expression on his face was engrossed in his work at a desk behind the high ticket counter. Something or someone had ripped off the barrier that had been on top of the counter, so that where normally there would have been two or three barred ticket windows, there was now only a flat surface. Colling could see a pink-faced second lieutenant at his own desk, set further back from the counter. Colling eased the weight of his duffel bag to the floor.

"Sergeant, can you tell me when the next train to the 61st Division will be leaving?"

Without looking up from his work, the technical sergeant answered, "No train to the 61st until day after tomorrow. If you want to go to Munich first, you can go tomorrow noon time, but you might not be able to make connections from there back to division headquarters at Landsgau."

"What about billeting, Sergeant?"

"Closest is at Camp Chesterfield. That's about three miles that way," the transportation sergeant said, motioning over his shoulder towards the rail yard. "There ain't no motor transport running this time of day, so you'll have to hoof it. Or you can sleep here, but the floor is the best we can offer."

"I noticed a bench outside, can I sack out there?"

"Yeah, I guess, but there's four more trains due through here tonight, so you won't have much peace and quiet."

"Any place I can mail a letter, Sarge?"

"Yeah, drop it in that wire tray at the end of the counter," he said, still not looking up from his work.

Colling tossed the letter into the tray, which was labeled "Mail," hefted his duffel and stepped outside onto the now-deserted platform. In the fading evening light, he observed the open doors of a warehouse on the other side of the tracks from where he stood. The warehouse was well lit, and through the high open freight doors he could see a soldier working at a desk. Colling climbed down from the platform and picked his way across the tracks to the building opposite. He had to throw his bags up onto the loading dock and then boost himself up. His luggage in hand, he walked up to the man at the desk. Closer up, he could see that he had corporal's stripes. He was also the first Negro soldier that Colling had ever seen. He didn't look up from the stack of papers in front of him as Colling approached.

"Hi, Corporal. Any chance I can sack out on top of one of those crates over there?" Colling asked, pointing to a stack of wooden boxes.

"Well, sir, I guess you could do that. Makes no mind to me. But it might be better for you to use that cot over there instead. It be a might more comfortable."

Colling followed the corporal's gaze, and saw that an area had been curtained off, and several folding cots had been set up. Colling thanked him and carried his gear over. "Does it make any difference which one I take?" he asked.

"Take the one farthest to the back. The others is my crew's."

Colling dropped his bags at the foot of the cot that the corporal had indicated. He took off his jacket, and was about to lie down, when he realized he had not eaten since breakfast. "Is there a mess hall near here?"

"Onliest one for white troops is over to Camp Chesterfield."

"That's pretty far away."

"Yep. And probably not serving now anyway. But we got our own rations here. If you wants to scrounge, you might find somepin' to eat over there," replied the corporal, pointing to another curtained area half-hidden behind a stack of boxes.

When Colling pulled back the curtain, he saw that a makeshift kitchen had been arranged next to a tap projecting out of the wall over a stone sink, made up of an Army field refrigerator and two hot-plates resting on a table. "Should be some eggs and maybe some ham in the fridge," called out the colored soldier. Colling discovered that he was correct. He found a frying pan and, in a few minutes, he was wolfing down four scrambled eggs and slices of fried ham. When he finished, he washed the dirty pan, plate and utensils.

"How do you guys get your rations?" he asked.

"Truck come from our battalion mess tent over to other side of the city once a week."

"You guys sure seem isolated here."

"Well, we is supposed to have a squad of ten or twelve men, but everybody is having to work unloading and loading over to the main depot. Only me and two others assigned here."

Colling stepped over to stand beside the Negro. "Need any help?"

"I don't reckon you know anything about filing, do you?"

"Sure. Just show me what you want, and I'd be happy to do it. By the way, Corporal, my name's Jim Colling, what's yours?"

The corporal hesitated a moment, then said, "Woodrow Blackshear." Colling extended his hand, and they shook hands.

"Well, Corporal Blackshear, let's get started. What do you need me to do?"

The corporal showed Colling several piles of papers. He explained that the two other men he was supposed to have help him had left on a three-day pass with the permission of their Quartermaster Company's commanding officer, Captain Quincy. The captain was running the company because the first sergeant had returned to the States, and the closest other NCO, a staff sergeant, was at the supply depot six miles away. Captain Quincy was white, and disposed to be lenient to his colored enlisted men, and Blackshear was not pleased that he had given both his men passes at the same time.

Colling quickly grasped the filing method as the Negro explained it, and began working on the stack of papers. He worked steadily, distracted only by the trains that rattled in and out of the station through the night. It was nearly 22:00 when he pushed the last of the supply requisition forms into a file folder and placed it into a file cabinet. He was taking his first real break of the evening, drinking a cup of coffee that he had brewed in the makeshift kitchen, when the corporal spoke to him, "Don't often see a white soldier willing to help out a colored soldier, Mr. Colling."

"I'm not a 'mister,' Corporal. For crying out loud, you out-rank me."

"Well, anyway, I wants to thank you."

"My pleasure. After all, you're giving me a place to sleep. And it looks like I'll be here all day tomorrow, so if there's anything else I can do, just let me know."

"Does you know how to type?"

"Yep, and run a mimeograph machine, too."

"Lord say! You must be heading to be a company clerk."

"Nope. Just a rifleman. In basic training, I didn't make a big deal of the fact I could type. My dad was in the First War, and he advised me never to volunteer for anything."

Corporal Blackshear declared their work done for the day, and as he was pulling the warehouse doors shut and cutting off the lights, Colling undressed and slipped into his own cot.

The sound of the doors sliding open on their rollers the next morning woke him from a sound sleep. Blackshear greeted him cheerfully, "Good morning. The latrine is over to the back there. Krauts was pretty fancy. They's a shower in there if you wants to clean up."

The tiled shower did not have hot water, but the spray was welcome nevertheless. Colling dug out a clean shirt from his duffel bag, and sat down to eat the breakfast of eggs, bacon and toast that Blackshear had fixed for them. As they ate, the Negro corporal explained that the warehouse they were in was used to stock furniture

and miscellaneous items. The main supply depot he had mentioned the night before was located in a larger freight yard, and handled food, clothing and other materiel.

When Colling asked about gas and ammunition, Blackshear reminded him that the Ordnance Corps was responsible for those. Blackshear went on to describe how he was unable to transfer the information from the many requisitions that had been received to the manifest forms required to ship out the items. He figured he was about a week behind because he had to use the "hunt and peck" method of typing. He had been working on filling out the forms when Colling had arrived. Neither of Blackshear's helpers could type either, but they would be able to pull the ordered items together for shipment, once the manifests were ready.

Colling told him that if he would show him what needed to be done, he would help him.

Colling quickly discovered that completing the forms was not particularly difficult. While his typing was not as skilled as a trained stenographer's might have been, he was able to finish most of the manifests fairly quickly, especially if only one or two items had to be listed. For lengthier requisitions, producing the finished paperwork was a more burdensome task.

The arrival of the first train of the day interrupted his concentration, and he took the occasion to have another cup of coffee. He watched the usual flurry of activity as troops were unloaded and marched off to their destinations. It did not seem to Colling that any soldiers ever boarded a train, and he considered that the next day, he might be the first to do so. When the locomotive pulled out of the station, Colling noticed two figures standing on the platform. The two newly arrived soldiers seemed to be trying to figure out what they were going to do next, when Colling shouted over to them.

"You guys waiting for the train to the 61st?"

"Yeah," replied one of them.

"If you don't want to hike over to Camp Chesterfield, why don't you come over here? We got a place to sleep, and food."

The two men clambered down from the platform and crossed the tracks carrying their duffel bags. Colling gave each of them a hand up onto the warehouse loading dock. He asked, "What outfit in the 61st are you guys headed for?"

The taller of the men responded, "Sixty-first Quartermaster Battalion," as he offered his hand to Colling. "I'm Jim Hendricks, and this is Wally Prentice."

"My pleasure," said Colling, introducing himself and Corporal Blackshear. The two soldiers seemed surprised to see the Negro, and Colling thought it best to keep the conversation moving. He explained that he had been helping Blackshear with his paperwork, and that he would greatly appreciate Hendricks' and Prentice's assistance, since they were probably more familiar with quartermaster procedure and forms than he was.

Hendricks walked over to the typewriter that Colling had been using, and examined the form that was still rolled into it. He commented, "Looks to me like you're doing okay. A couple of overstrikes, but most supply sergeants overlook those."

Colling offered the two men coffee, which they gratefully accepted. As they drank, Colling spoke quietly, seeming to want to keep their conversation from the Negro corporal, who was stacking crates as he assembled an order. "This colored guy has been real nice to me, guys. There's cots here, a shower, and he's got a kitchen where we can fix our own food. It was a lot better for me than walking all the way to Camp Chesterfield. He's really not a bad guy, and he needs help. I don't know how you feel about it, but I would appreciate it a lot if you could give us a hand."

"Hell, Jim," Hendricks said to Colling, "We ain't got nothing against coloreds. If this setup is as good as you say, I got no objection to doing what we can. It's better than hanging around over at that train station." Prentice nodded his agreement and the two men asked what they could do to help.

As the day progressed, the two quartermaster soldiers took over the typing, and Colling and Blackshear worked at pulling together each of the orders and separating them for shipment. Some of the containers were heavy, and as Colling worked up a sweat, he stripped off his shirt and worked in his undershirt.

At one point, Colling noticed several large wooden crates with the name "Peerless Products" stenciled on them. He mentioned to Blackshear that his father's drug store had had a Peerless fountain, and asked what military equipment that Peerless was making for the Army. Blackshear laughed, "Same thing, Mr. Colling. Those is soda fountains, would you believe." Colling voiced his amazement, and Blackshear explained that the

crates contained six complete soda fountains. None of them had been requisitioned yet, and Blackshear doubted that anyone even knew they existed.

Corporal Blackshear took time to prepare lunch and then dinner for them as the day went by, and he proved to be skillful in converting simple Army rations into meals for which the three white soldiers praised him enthusiastically.

As night fell, all the paperwork had been completed, and the last of the orders had been filled. Before Blackshear shut the warehouse doors for the night, Colling crossed to the train depot and confirmed that the train to the 61st would leave at about 10:00 the next morning. When he returned, he copied the warehouse telephone number onto a slip of paper and put it into his wallet.

Surprisingly, their train arrived early, and Colling and the two quartermaster men had to hurry across the tracks to board. Blackshear had expressed his thanks many times as they prepared to depart, and as they left, handed each of them a paper sack which, they later discovered, held a ham sandwich.

They found a compartment with three empty seats, joining three middle-aged German civilians, two women and a man. Colling had supposed that the train was exclusively for allied military personnel, and he asked the man politely in German how they came to be travelling. He and his female companions were obviously taken aback when Colling addressed his question in their native language, but the man, after introducing himself as Doctor Kindlebergen, explained that they were returning to Munich to resume his prewar practice. What the physician referred to as the "Old Government" had conscripted him and the two women, his wife and her sister, both nurses, to work in a military hospital in Karlsruhe. They had recently been released from that service, and were now going home. For the benefit of Hendricks and Prentice, Colling relayed the three civilians' situation to the two soldiers. He had the impression that the other two soldiers felt uneasy in the presence of the Germans, who seemed to reciprocate the feeling. As a result, after his initial attempt to initiate an on-going conversation, he thought better of continuing to do so; the six occupants of the compartment kept quietly to themselves as the train rattled southward towards their destination.

As the conductor announced that they were arriving in Ulm, a technical sergeant passed the door to their compartment, and paused long enough to tell them that the Japanese surrender had been signed in Tokyo Bay. Colling translated for the German doctor and the two women, and added, "The war is finally over. Der Krieg zuletzt ist beendet."

The three Germans remained on the train to Munich, while Colling and his two fellow soldiers were directed to another platform where they would make connections to the 61st Divisioin area. After a short wait in Ulm, they boarded a half-filled four-car day coach train that chugged slowly out of the city's Bahnhof. Four hours later, their impending arrival in 61st Division territory was signaled by a first lieutenant and a corporal with Transportation Corps armbands coming down the aisle of the car, asking to see everyone's travel orders.

While the corporal inspected the papers of the German passengers, the transport lieutenant directed his attention to the military personnel on board. He came to Hendricks and Prentice, and after reading their orders, informed them that the 61st Quartermaster Battalion was in Landsgau. They would have to stay on the train for about an hour more. When the officer read Colling's orders, he told him, "Grabensheim's where you get off, Private. The 40th is headquartered in Kummersfeld, which is about 40 kilometers south, and this train doesn't go there. The station master can direct you to transportation to regimental HQ."

The Grabensheim railway station and the surrounding yards displayed no discernible war damage. The station itself was a plain stucco building of a yellowish color which Colling took to be the result of years of locomotive exhaust. Its roof extended over the platform and provided cover on the other three sides of the structure. Inside, Colling inquired in German at one of two barred ticket windows where he might find the station-master. The clerk pointed to a door with a frosted glass window in it. Freshly painted black lettering on the glass said, "Transportation Office, U.S. Army."

The office was furnished with four desks, at one of which a sergeant sat typing. Colling pulled out his orders and announced that he was assigned to the 40th Infantry. The sergeant quickly scanned the sheet of paper and said, "The 40th is headquartered in Kummersfeld, about 40 klicks down the road. Normally, I would tell you to catch somebody headed that way, but it's too late in the day. But…if you go out of the station and cross the square, you'll see a street, it's marked 'Friedrichstrasse,' and if you go up that street, you'll see a kaserne, a barracks; and that's the headquarters of the first battalion of the 40th. They can put you up for the night, and you can get a ride to Regiment at Kummersfeld tomorrow."

Colling thanked the transportation sergeant and, folding his orders into the inside pocket of his jacket, hoisted his duffel bag onto his shoulder and walked out of the front entrance of the railway station and onto the Grabensheim Bahnhofplatz. Two American military policemen stood talking beside the door. They glanced at Colling, but then ignored him as he strode across the cobble-stones of the square and around the ornate octagonal fountain in its center. Most of the few civilians who were on the streets averted their eyes as Colling passed, but two small blond-haired children, hand-in-hand with their mother, stared at him as he walked by, and he greeted them in German. Their wide-eyed replies were cut off as they were tugged away down the street.

Friedrichstrasse led uphill away from the square, and Colling was breathing heavily when the kaserne came into view. It was a large three-story affair, its entrance gateway flanked by twin round towers with conical roofs. He looked up to see on its high front walls larger-than-life faded full-color paintings of two eighteenth-century German soldiers in resplendent uniforms. Under each of them were inscriptions in ornate scrolls, indicating that the kaserne was at one time home to the 27th Bavarian Regiment of Fusiliers.

Colling stepped into the vaulted tunnel that served as the kaserne's main entryway. For some reason he had expected to find sentries outside, but there were none. His eyes had not fully adjusted to the darkness of the tunnel when he was surprised by a voice speaking from a window to his right, asking him what he wanted. He turned to see an American soldier staring at him through glass from which a semicircle had been removed at the bottom. Colling produced his orders and shoved them through the opening. The guard, who Colling could now see, was a private first class, looked at the papers and pushed them back to Colling. "Over to your right is the battalion HQ," said the PFC, "Take these over there. See Sergeant Ferguson."

As Colling walked out of the entrance tunnel, its cobble-stone pavement gave way to a gravel driveway that ran along each side of an open square surrounded by the four walls of the kaserne In the center of the square, in an open grassy rectangle, stood a flagpole from which hung a limp American flag. Keeping to the gravel, Colling followed the directions given by the PFC and headed towards a pair of double doors surmounted by a plain black-on-white sign reading "Headquarters, 1st Bn., 40th U.S. Infantry." As he took in his surroundings, Colling noticed that there appeared to be bomb or artillery damage to the two upper floors of the portion of the barracks on the side of the square opposite the headquarters, and to the roof of the building in front of him.

He climbed the steps to the double doors under the headquarters sign and quietly let himself in. The entrance opened into a wide wooden-floored hallway. Two American soldiers in fatigues were on their hands and knees at the far end, polishing the floor. They looked up as Colling entered, and one said, "Hey, buddy, look out! Don't scuff up the wax."

Colling apologized and began stepping carefully as he searched for an office. The same soldier who had warned him pointed to a door on Colling's left and told him, "The battalion orderly room is in there."

Master Sergeant Jeffrey Ferguson sat behind a desk to which was tacked a placard with his name and rank on it. He was leaning back in his chair, his feet on the desk, smoking a cigar. He straightened up as Colling walked in. Colling estimated the sergeant to be in his mid-forties, and Colling guessed that Ferguson had been in the Army for a long time.

Colling snapped to attention in front of the desk. "Private James Colling reporting, Sergeant. I have orders for the 40th Infantry," he said, handing his orders to Ferguson.

Ferguson read while Colling stood stiffly. The sergeant made no comment as he scanned the papers. Finally, he said, "Stand at ease, Private. Now ordinarily, I would send you up to Regiment, and let them figure out what battalion they would assign you to. But I expect that over the next couple of months, I will have to watch the good part of this battalion ship out for the States, and I would also expect that replacements will not be something I can look forward to getting. As a result, Private, I am going to keep you here. You are henceforth a member of the Headquarters of the First Battalion. I am supposed to have eighty-four men, and I presently have less than sixty, most of whom will no doubt receive their discharge orders next week, and head happily back State-side."

Stepping past Colling to the door, Ferguson shouted, "Carley, come in here, on the double!"

One of the men who had been waxing the floor appeared at the door as Ferguson stepped back behind his desk.

"Take Colling here and show him where to bunk. Put him with D Company. Get Sergeant Chambers to sign him out his field gear and a rifle. And Colling, once you've got your stuff unpacked, report back here. Don't waste any time."

Carley lead Colling out into the square, and once outside, he turned and offered his hand.

"Bill Carley," he said.

"Jim Colling," replied Colling.

"You been in long?" asked Carley, as they headed towards the building opposite the entrance to the kaserne.

"Since June. I figured I'd be in on Japan."

"Lucky for you they dropped the bomb on the little yellow bastards."

"How about you? How long you been with the 40th?"

"A little over a year now. I was a replacement just before the Hurt-gen."

"You mean the Hürtgen Forest?"

"Yeah."

"I hear that was pretty rough."

"It wasn't easy," said Carley without elaboration, as they reached the steps leading up to another set of double doors. Carley pointed out the mess hall and day room as they walked down the wide hallway, which was lined by windows opening onto the central parade ground. They reached a broad staircase, and Carley ran quickly up, Colling struggling to match his speed, encumbered by his bags. From the second floor hallway that duplicated the one below, Carley gestured Colling into a barracks room. Pointing to one of the double bunks, he advised, "You can dump your stuff on that one there. That wall locker there is yours."

Colling dropped his duffel onto the bed, and Carley urged, "Come on. We need to get down to the supply room to get your field gear."

Leading Colling back to the first floor, Carley directed him through a door stating it led to the supply room, where they found a slightly overweight and balding staff sergeant and two younger soldiers sitting behind a long counter of dark polished wood. Shelves loaded with various items of military hardware filled the room behind the counter. Carley spoke, "Sergeant Morton, this here is Colling. Sergeant Ferguson's put him in the HQ, and wants him to check out his field gear."

Staff Sergeant Morton stepped to the counter and looked Colling over. "Fresh meat, huh?" he said as his two companions grinned. Morton pulled a clipboard from beneath the counter, and removing a form from it, asked Colling to fill it out. It asked for Colling's name, rank and serial number, and date of service. As Colling started writing, one of the other soldiers had begun removing items from the shelves and piling them on the counter, where Sergeant Morton sorted them out. Colling hesitated and stopped filling in blanks when he came to the body of the form, which consisted of a list of equipment, and Morton, without looking up, said, "I'll fill in the rest of it." He took the sheet of paper from Colling and placed it on the clipboard; then, as he pointed to or touched each piece of equipment in turn, he checked off the appropriate box, reading each line item aloud. One of his assistants, a private first class, repeated the process as the supply sergeant went through his ritual. When they were finished, they pushed the olive-drab pile towards Colling. "Sign here," said Morton, offering the clipboard. After Colling scribbled his name at the place where the sergeant pointed, Morton said, "Welcome to the 40th, Private."

Without offering to carry anything, Carley led the way back to the second-floor barracks room. Colling sorted out the helmet and liner, webbing, field pack, canteen, and bayonet onto his bunk. Carley interrupted, "We got to get Sergeant Delonzo to check you out an M-1."

They returned to the first floor, where Carley led him through the mess hall and out into a yard at its rear. Across the yard was what apparently had been a large stable that had been converted into a garage. Two-and-a-half- and three-quarter-ton trucks and jeeps were parked in a line to one side. Colling could hear the clanging sounds of someone working on machinery emanating from the doors of the garage.

They were greeted by a tall lanky corporal as they approached. "What you doin' back here, Carley? Ferguson send you to clean the grease pit?"

"No, Snuffy. Ferguson wants Sergeant Delonzo to check a rifle out to Colling here."

The corporal offered Colling a hand from which he had been wiping engine grime, and Colling took it. "I'm Henry Smith, but folks call me 'Snuffy.' Don't know exactly why," he said, grinning. "Must be 'cause I'm from Kentucky. Sergeant is in his office, Carley. I'm goin' to go get washed up before chow call."

Technical Sergeant Delonzo was at a desk in the glassed-in office located in one corner of the garage. The sergeant was irritated that Ferguson expected him to do the paperwork necessary to get Colling a rifle, muttering that that was the first sergeant's job, and besides, it was nearly time for supper, but he completed the

necessary form, and then conducted Colling back to his barracks room. Carley excused himself to go ask Ferguson if he could knock off work and eat.

When they reached the barracks bay, Delonzo showed Colling where his M-1 was located in the weapons rack in the aisle between the rows of double cots. The sergeant unlocked the bar securing the rifles, and handed one to Colling, telling him to confirm the serial number as he read it out. As Delonzo replaced the weapon and locked the bar, he told Colling to remember which one was his. "If and when you pull guard duty, you'll be issued ammo by the sergeant of the guard," he said, "And you'll have to account for every round when you come off duty. That means if you expend any rounds, you have to bring back the brass." Colling was surprised that there was the possibility of having to fire a rifle, now that the war was over, but he said only, "Yes, Sergeant," making a mental note to be sure and pick up any expended cartridge casings to be counted, if the need arose.

As Delonzo was leaving the barracks room, a group of soldiers had to step aside to let him pass so that they could enter. Most of them paid little attention to Colling, but several came over and introduced themselves, then hurriedly left for the mess hall. Colling, remembering Sergeant Ferguson's instructions, remained behind to unpack and arrange his equipment as he had been taught in basic training. When not sure of what to do with a particular item, he imitated how others had set up things. When he finished, he changed into fatigues and reported to the battalion office.

Sergeant Ferguson was not in his office. An acne-faced corporal manned a desk just inside the door. Colling informed him that Sergeant Ferguson had told him to report back after drawing his equipment and weapon. The corporal went back to reading his comic book, saying, "Ferguson's gone to eat. He won't be back, probably, so if I was you, I'd go eat, and come back in the A.M."

As Colling started to leave, the corporal added, "And you'd better change. No fatigues allowed in the mess hall. And by the way, Sergeant Ferguson left these for you," he said, tossing Colling a half-dozen 61st Division patches secured by a rubber band.

The mess hall served beef stew, which some of the other men told Colling was not unusual. It appeared that the food was good but monotonous: the First Battalion was reputed to have a comparatively good mess hall. After eating, a number of the men left to get into their field gear, draw weapons, and report for guard duty.

Colling returned to the barrack-room, where he began sewing the blue and white 61st Division patches onto his uniforms. He had completed one shirt and his jacket, doing a passable job but one that would have displeased his mother, when Carley invited Colling to the day room to meet some of the other men. The day room, which in Army logic could not be used by the troops during the day, was furnished with two over-stuffed couches and several easy chairs, as well as a few tables, all occupied by card players. Carley introduced Colling to several of the men, and when invited to join a poker game in progress, asked Colling if he wanted to play. Declining the invitation from the card players with the excuse that he was broke, Colling took a place on one of the couches, picking up a tattered month-old copy of Stars and Stripes.

Before he had a chance to look at the newspaper, two PFCs approached him. The taller and thinner of the two introduced himself as Al Langenstreet, and turning to the other man, said, "And this is David McGee, better known as 'Fibber.'"

McGee did not seem pleased with the nickname, "Yeah, Al, and my girl friend's name is Molly." Colling responded that they could call him Jim, glad that his last name was not similar to that of some radio or movie personality.

Langenstreet dropped onto the couch, while McGee pulled one of the large easy chairs closer, and once seated, asked, "We got a kind of a survey going here, and since you're new, and you just came from the States, and you probably seen all the latest movies, so we wanted to ask…who is your favorite female movie star? So far, most of the guys say Betty Grable. Personally, I think Ginger Rogers is tops, but Dave here disagrees, he says it's that new gal, Laura Bacall."

"Lau-ren Bacall," corrected McGee. "They say she's only eighteen, but did you see how she handled Bogart in To Have and Have Not? We just saw it last week over to Regiment. She is the kind of hand-full I'd like to handle." Because McGee was short and stocky, had a prematurely receding hairline and wore glasses, Colling hoped that McGee was not optimistic about his wishes being fulfilled.

Colling offered his opinion; "I kind of like Katharine Hepburn."

Langenstreet scoffed, "Too stuck up. Too much of a society dame." McGee nodded his head in agreement.

Colling defended his position, “Did you guys see Bringing Up Baby? She wasn’t stuck up in that one.”

“That was because of Cary Grant,” replied Langenstreet, “He made the movie funny, and she had to go along with the gag. In fact, that was what made it funny…she was a society dame, and she was chasing around after that dog and running after that tiger and all.”

“Leopard,” corrected McGee.

“Well, guys, I have to stick with my opinion. I don’t mind a classy woman. Could I ask you guys a question?”

“Sure,” said Langenstreet, and McGee echoed him.

“There doesn’t seem to be enough guys here to be a whole battalion. Where is everybody?”

Langenstreet took on an air of authority, “Only D Company and the headquarters are housed here in this kaserne. Company A is out pulling security duty at what is known as Camp 146, the POW/DP camp north of here. They got German POW’s and the DP’s,…former slave workers, some of them are women and children, out there. They got to hold the Krauts and the DPs in separate compounds; otherwise they’d kill each other. It ain’t no picnic, I’m telling you. AMGOT, that’s ‘American Military Government,’ is in charge of the camp.”

He explained that the camp had been used as a POW camp for allied prisoners by the Germans, but they had all been released and sent home right after it was liberated by 61st Division troops. Now the tables were turned and there were Germans on the inside of the wire. He added that the Germans remained imprisoned because of suspected or actual Nazi ties, while the workers were officially classified as “Displaced Persons,” awaiting repatriation. Both Langenstreet and McGee had been to the camp, and offered their opinion that it was necessary that the DPs be kept confined because there was a well-founded belief that they would take revenge on the German civilian populace if allowed to roam at large.

McGee offered, “If a German turns out to be an SS officer or high up in the Nazi Party, he goes straight to prison in Munich, and most likely will get tried as a war criminal. But if they decide he’s only an enlisted man, they usually turn him loose, but not always. All the SS got tattoos on their arms, so they have to sort out the EM from the officers.”

He went on to explain that the DPs were interviewed and prepared for return to their native countries. That had been easy for those from countries like France and Belgium, and even Greece and Italy, but many of the ones from Poland and Yugoslavia were not enthusiastic about returning home. As a result, they were not forthcoming about exactly where they had resided before the Germans put them to forced labor.

Colling asked about the other companies in the battalion, and Langenstreet went on, “B Company is guarding a hydro-electric dam about thirty kilometers to the northwest. The place was fortified when we took it, so those guys spend their time sitting behind machine guns in sand-bagged bunkers, which is not the way I would want to spend my time.”

He added that quarters at the dam were not bad, since they consisted of barracks built for the Luftwaffe anti-aircraft outfit that had been stationed there. The modern concrete buildings had been taken intact, and were, in his opinion, better than the kaserne that housed D Company.

“And what about C Company?” asked Colling.

“Oh, Jesus,” said Langenstreet. “They got the worst duty of all. They’re out in tents near Niessen. That’s about fifty klicks northeast of here.” The job of C Company was to guard several bridges and tunnels along the railroad and highways leading from the north and east. As a result, the company was scattered out over a wide area, housed in small clusters of tents at several locations. Their food had to be trucked to them, and there was little change from living conditions in the battlefield. The only real difference was that there was no one shooting at them. At least not very often.

The two soldiers assured Colling that their own quarters here in Grabensheim were comfortable by comparison, except that half the kaserne was uninhabitable because of the bomb damage Colling had noticed when he arrived. Ironically, the place had not been a target. Someone had loosed a stick of bombs by mistake in the last couple of days of the war. Fortunately, the bombs had not scored a direct hit, but had exploded along the street paralleling one side of the barracks, taking off the top story on that part of the building.

D Company’s assignment was to provide sentries for the rail yards in Grabensheim, and the rail and road bridges north and south of the town. The rail yards were home to the piles of coal that would be the major source of fuel supply during the coming winter, and D Company’s job was to interfere routinely with the Germans’ routine attempts to pilfer from it.

That led to a discussion regarding the barter economy that prevailed in Germany. When McGee told him that cigarettes were prized more than currency, Colling replied that he had read about that in Time magazine, and had actually got a sailor to buy him two packs of Lucky's from Ship's Stores before he left his troop transport in Antwerp, even though he did not smoke.

McGee advised, "If you want, Jim, since you don't smoke, you can sell me your cigarette ration every month, no trouble at all." Colling told him that he had not yet been issued a card, and Langenstreet and McGee assured him he would get one from Ferguson.

A group of men wearing field gear with slung rifles trooped by in the hallway, causing Langenstreet to comment that D Company was still lucky that its men were able to return by truck to the kaserne when not at their guard posts. Colling interrupted to ask whether the Germans had surrendered the kaserne when the 40th arrived. Langenstreet answered that the place had been deserted. It was believed that it had been used as a training facility, and had been pretty much abandoned in the closing days of the war. The Americans had just walked in and taken over.

The day room had become hazy with cigarette smoke, and Colling felt the need for some fresh air, and then realized that his day had begun many hours ago. Langenstreet and McGee had begun to argue about whether the kaserne had been used by the SS or not when Colling interrupted, "Sorry, guys, I'm bushed. I think I'm going to head for the sack."

McGee responded, "Breakfast is from 05:00 to 06:00. Formation's at 07:00."

Colling thanked him and told both men good night.

Chapter Two

September-October, 1945

The morning formation was not a lengthy affair. A first sergeant whose name Colling had not been told called the troops to attention, then stood them at ease. He proceeded to read off the names of squads and sections with their assignments for the day. From the quiet groans, Colling was able to guess which were the least favorable. Colling's name was not called, and he concluded he should just report to Sergeant Ferguson. The formation ended with a brief lecture concerning the anti-fraternization regulations, with a reminder that it was a court-martial offense to become friendly with the German population, especially the female part. The first sergeant glared when there were snickers from the ranks, but finished his monologue as required. The men were called back to attention, then dismissed.

Colling had changed into fatigues immediately after breakfast, and when the assembly was dismissed, he went straight to Ferguson's office. The same corporal who had been there the evening before was sweeping the floor. He looked up as Colling entered, "Sergeant's not here yet.

Have a seat over there." Colling took one of the four chairs set against the wall. He sat quietly, cap in hand, for a few moments, then offered, "Anything I can help you with?"

The corporal hesitated, "Yeah, I guess so. Take this cloth and dust everything that don't move."

Colling was dusting the top of a file cabinet when Ferguson strolled into the office. The sergeant frowned when he saw Colling had been put to work doing what was supposed to be the corporal's responsibility. "Found a helper, Hughes?" Ferguson said to the corporal. Hughes straightened quickly and replied, "Yes, Sergeant."

"Well, that's just ducky, Corporal. You're relieved."

Corporal Hughes took his jacket and cap from a coat rack on the wall and hurriedly left the office. Ferguson turned to Colling, who had been standing quietly beside the file cabinet. As the Sergeant's gaze caught him, Colling stiffened to attention. "Private Colling reporting, Sergeant."

"I recall, Private, that you were supposed to report yesterday."

"Yes, Sergeant. When I finished getting my gear stowed, I came back here and the corporal who was just here, Corporal…?"

"Hughes," Ferguson completed Colling's sentence.

"Yessir. Corporal Hughes said you weren't here, and I should come back this morning."

There was silence for a few moments as Ferguson stared at him, and Colling considered it best to not be the first to speak.

"All right. You passed two jeeps parked outside." Colling nodded his head. Ferguson continued, "You'll find a bucket and rags in the latrine at the end of the hall. Wash the jeeps and when you're done, report back here. Sorry, but there's no soap."

"Sergeant, can I have permission to go and see if I can get some soap over at the mess hall?"

"Okay. But I want to see you scrubbing those vehicles in short order."

Colling assured the sergeant that he would take only a few minutes. He retrieved the bucket and rags from a locker in the latrine and carried them outside. He noticed a water spigot projecting from the wall close by, and tried the handle. Water gushed out. Leaving the pail beside the water tap, he hurried to the tunnel across the square that would take him to the rear of the mess hall.

Two Germans were hosing out garbage cans beside the door to the kitchen. They wore the blue smocks and loose trousers common to European laborers. One was wearing a hat that looked as if it would have been more at home on a bank clerk, while the other had a slouch cap pulled down to just above his eyes. Colling spoke to them in German, "Bitte, have you soap?"

The man with the hat seemed surprised, then answered, "Yes, over there," pointing to two cakes of yellow Army soap lying on the steps.

"And perhaps another hose?" asked Colling.

"Not here. This is the only one."

"You said, 'Not here,'" said Colling. "Does that mean you could find for me a hose, for say, two cigarettes?"

The man in the slouch cap answered first, "For three cigarettes for each of us, I can get you a hose, but not so long."

"I only need perhaps four or five meters." Colling pulled a pack of Lucky Strikes from the pocket of his fatigue jacket. He extracted six cigarettes and held them up. "I need the hose right away. And a cake of the soap, too."

With a gesture that he would return quickly, the German with the slouch cap trotted away through a gate opening onto the street next to the kaserne. Colling handed one of the cigarettes to the other German, who lit it immediately, and inhaled deeply with an expression of satisfaction on his face. He looked at Colling and gesturing with his cigarette, asked if he would join him. Colling replied that he did not smoke, and the German grinned and predicted that Colling would have many pleasant days in Germany, speaking the language, and being able to put his cigarette ration to many beneficial uses. Colling introduced himself and learned that the German's name was Helmut Eisenschmit.

"And you do this work for the Army?" asked Colling.

"Yes. It's good work. There are only four of us, to do all the 'KP' as you Americans say, but we get all the leftovers from the kitchen before anything is thrown away. Your mess sergeant is a good man."

"Now I understand why I haven't heard about KP duty," responded Colling.

"Yes, Herr Colling. It is good for the Americans that you do not have to do 'KP,' good for me. Ach, here comes Rudi with your hose."

Rudi came running up with a length of hose. It had been cut from a longer length, and only one end sported an attachment, and Colling noted with relief that it was a fitting that could be attached to the spigot. He turned over the other five cigarettes, picked up a cake of soap, and ran back to the jeeps.

He was rinsing off the second jeep when Ferguson came down the steps. "Where'd you find the hose?" asked the sergeant.

"Bought it off the German KP's, Sergeant."

"Hmm. How much?"

"Six cigarettes, Sergeant."

Ferguson laughed. "Cooley had to give 'em a full carton to get one for the mess hall. And they swore that it was the only hose left in town."

"Helps to be able to talk to them in their own language, Sergeant."

"You speak German?"

"I sure do, Sergeant. Learned it at my grandma's knee."

Ferguson considered for a moment. "I don't suppose you can type."

"Sure can, Sergeant," said Colling, using a wet rag to wipe off the jeep's rear wheel.

"When you finish up here, come inside."

"Yes, Sergeant."

Colling wiped the last moisture off the hood of the jeep and stood back to admire his work. Carley walked by, a mop over his shoulder. "Ferguson'll have you washing Major Harris' Kraut car next, Colling," he said, without turning around.

"And you'll still be swabbing floors, Bill," responded Colling.

Colling drew to attention in front of Sergeant Ferguson's desk. "Reporting, Sergeant."

"You ever type a morning report, Colling?"

"No, Sergeant, but if you show me how, I can."

Ferguson took Colling through a door into the next room. He pointed to a bespectacled corporal painfully typing at one of three desks that crowded the office. "This is Corporal Worth, Battalion Clerk. He'll show you what to do. Worth, this is Private Colling. He says he knows how to type, so show him how to do the morning report. If he's good enough, he'll be here permanently."

When Ferguson had returned to his own office, Worth informed Colling that the sergeant was an impossible task-master, and that he, Worth, was anxiously awaiting the day when he would receive his discharge orders, which should be any time now. The clerk showed Colling the morning reports, and how they were to be completed. Every man in the battalion headquarters detachment had to be listed, with his situation. Was he available for duty? On furlough? In the hospital? A.W.O.L.? Transferred or discharged? Everything had to be typed to perfection, and Colling could see from the number of incomplete discarded forms in the wastebasket that Worth had made several fresh starts in his efforts. Corporal Worth explained that once the roster for the headquarters detachment had been completed, each of the morning reports sent over from the battalion's four company clerks had to be checked against the previous days' for accuracy. Any discrepancies had to be called to Ferguson's attention. The battalion adjutant, Lieutenant Averback, was on leave in Paris, as were most of the battalion's officers. Only Major Harris, the battalion commanding officer, and the line officers in charge of the three companies that were located in their outlying assignments were present with their units. Worth offered his opinion that when those officers who were on leave did return, the others would depart on leave themselves, or receive their discharge orders. All of which meant that Ferguson as Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge was effectively running the battalion.

Even though Colling did not ask, Worth continued to provide a non-stop narrative about the battalion as Colling typed the report. Major Harris was shacked-up with the good-looking blonde wife of a Wehrmacht colonel who was missing on the Eastern Front, at the colonel's mansion outside town. The battalion commanding officer only came to the kaserne a couple of times a week, driving the German colonel's Mercedes. The Major did not seem to be taking the anti-fraternization rules seriously.

Colling found that, in spite of Worth's continuing monologue, with a little concentration he was able to complete the required form with a fair degree of ease. He finally pulled the document out of the typewriter and handed it to the corporal, interrupting him in mid-sentence as he was describing Major Harris' Kraut woman's apparently considerable physical attributes. Worth looked over the report and looked up at Colling in amazement. "I usually take all morning to finish one of these. You done it in less than an hour."

"Should we take it to the Sergeant," asked Colling.

"If we do, he'll find something else for us to do, and it might not have anything to do with working in the office."

"I think we had better take that chance," replied Colling. Worth told him he could do what he wanted, but he was going to stay at his desk.

Ferguson raised his eyebrows when Colling laid the morning report in front of him. The sergeant examined it carefully, and seeming to find no error or omission, told Colling he had done well. He then asked, "How much education you have, Colling?"

"It's in my 201 file, Sergeant."

"Your 201 hasn't arrived yet."

"Two years of college, Sergeant."

"Why were you drafted? You had a deferment, didn't you?"

"I did, Sergeant, but two of my best friends who signed up out of high school were killed in action. I thought it was time I took my share of responsibility."

"I thought the Army stopped taking enlistments right after V-E day," said Ferguson.

"That's right, Sergeant. I would have enlisted, but I had to volunteer for the draft instead. Then at the reception center, after I was processed in, I asked for a year's extension, so it turned out the same. I'm in for three years."

"If you want my opinion, that was kind of stupid, son. I joined in '25 because I couldn't find a job, and considered myself lucky when they took me. If you hadn't asked to extend, you'd still be back in the States now, instead of here."

"Yes, Sergeant," was all that Colling could say.

"Well, anyway, you've got the job as battalion clerk."

"Thanks, Sergeant, but I wouldn't want to see Corporal Worth lose his job."

"He won't. He needs to stay around to show you what to do. Besides, he's got eighty-five points, so he'll be heading home soon."

Colling had read and heard about the point system that determined when men would be discharged. He could not say that he understood it fully, but he knew that eighty-five points were enough to put a man at the head of the line.

It turned out that Ferguson's prediction about Worth was accurate. The corporal's orders for discharge, along with those of over 200 other men in the First Battalion, arrived from Divisional Headquarters within the week, directing them to report to Antwerp by the 20th of September for embarkation to the continental United States.

The movement of so many men required the drawing of multiple sets of documents for each of them, consisting of the paperwork associated with turning in their equipment, arranging for termination of dependent allotments at the correct time, reimbursement for domestic travel once ashore and discharged, and all the other details that had to be addressed in the transition from military to civilian life. All of this meant that Colling spent long hours in the clerk's office. Worth was so distracted with his anticipation of a renewed life far from the Army that he was not of much help. Consequently, Colling found himself regularly working far into the evening. While Ferguson did not participate in Colling's labors, it was clear to Colling that the sergeant was appreciative of his efforts.

Three days after he had assumed his assignment as battalion clerk, Colling was reminded that he had not been paid since before leaving the States, when Sergeant Ferguson informed him he was arranging transportation for him to visit Regimental Headquarters in Kummersfeld in order to draw his pay for August from the paymaster, and to make sure he would be paid regularly at the end of each month with the rest of the battalion.

It was nearly two weeks later that Ferguson asked Colling to step into his office. Tossing a set of private first class stripes to Colling, Ferguson said, "Might as well have these. The Major agrees. You've only got four months in, but you deserve a promotion. Times sure have changed. Took me nearly two years before I made PFC."

Colling thanked the sergeant, then somewhat hesitantly, said "Sarge, when are they going to repair the kaserne?"

"We have a requisition in with the Engineers, but roads and bridges have priority. It looks like C Company is going to have a cold winter."

"If I could make a suggestion, Sarge…"

"Yeah, what?"

"You might be able to find German workers who could do the job."

"What would we pay them with? We have a petty cash allotment for minor expenditures, but there's not enough to cover a major construction project. We can draw up to 5000 Marks a month, that's only $500.00 a month. Of course, I haven't used anything since we been here, so we got a credit of 15,000 Marks on the books right now. But that's still not enough to do much."

"Sarge, I've been talking to the German KP workers, and they've been pretty friendly. If we can get the guys in the battalion to give us their unused cigarette rations, the Germans will work for cigarettes instead of money."

"You think you can buy the materials with cigarettes, too?"

"The Germans I've talked to say there's a lot of materials that can be salvaged, especially from those buildings across the street that were hit by the same bombs that hit the kaserne."

"It will cost to salvage. The government isn't willing to pay for it like they do in the cities. This place wasn't hit hard enough to make clearing rubble a problem."

"Well, it was just a thought, Sarge."

"Hold on," said Ferguson, "Don't be so quick to give up. Come with me."

The sergeant led Colling out of the office and down the hallway. They came to an unmarked door. Pulling a ring of keys from his pocket, Ferguson unlocked it. A storage room lay behind the door. Stacked from floor to ceiling were large cardboard cartons labeled with the names "P. Lorillard and Company" and "American Tobacco Company." Colling realized that he was looking at several thousand packs of cigarettes.

Ferguson, obviously amused, explained, "The Battalion received this shipment of cigarettes the last week in May. Remember, Uncle Sam handed out free cigarettes to all units in combat. We missed our allotment for three months, from February to April, and then this caught up with us. Some kind of a snafu. We got our monthly allotment for May, but these are for the three months we missed. They sent it all at once. Two cartons a month for a full battalion, a thousand men. That's six thousand cartons you're looking at. They started issuing tobacco ration cards in June, and everyone has to buy their own smokes now. I been trying to figure out what to do with them. A couple of more months and they'll start to go stale."

"Could we use them to pay for the repairs?"

"We could; we sure could."

"You want me to see if I can find some Germans who can do the job, Sarge?"

"I'll give you a pass off the kaserne and a travel authorization for a jeep. But you've got to keep up with your work in the office."

Colling first went to the mess hall, looking for the German KP workers. He found Eisenschmitt in the kitchen, scrubbing pots with another worker.

"Helmut," said Colling in German, "How goes it?"

"Ach, the young American who does not smoke," answered the German with a smile.

"Jim Colling," said Colling. "I've come to see if you can direct me to a someone who is a builder. Someone who can repair the kaserne."

"Yes, Colling, I now remember your name. I see you have now the PFC made."

"Do you know such a person?"

"Yes, I think you may find that a man, Klaus Zinsmann by name, could do this work."

"Where might I find him?"

"If you take the Ludwigstrasse, that is the main street through the town, you will come to a side street, an alley. Zinsmann lives at number 8, Trebensallee."

Colling thanked Eisenschmitt and returned to the orderly room. He explained to Ferguson that he had the name of a possible contractor to do the work. The sergeant handed over a signed travel authorization and told him to take one of the jeeps parked in front of the headquarters.

While Ludwigstrasse was lined with shops and stores with mostly empty display windows, and formed what had once been the commercial center of Grabensheim, it was a winding cobble-stone affair that went uphill from the square in front of the railway station. Colling's jeep bounced over the stones as he drove slowly in first gear, looking for Trebensallee. He nearly missed the oval blue and white sign on the side of a building that marked a narrow passageway with an arched entrance. He pulled the jeep over and parked it against the curb, making sure that there was enough clearance remaining between it and the street to allow other vehicles to pass. While there was little or no German motor traffic, Colling gauged there was enough space to permit an Army deuce-and-a-half to pass, and felt he had left ample room.

Number 8 was identified by the fact that it was located between numbers 7 and 9; its worn black-painted door bore no marking of its own. Colling rapped, and when there was no response, knocked again with more force. He caught a glimpse of the curtain being pulled back slightly from the window to the right of the door, and knew that someone was at home. He knocked again and called out Zinsmann's name. A voice from inside responded, "Moment, bitte."

The door opened and Colling was looking at a hard-faced man buttoning his shirt. He told Colling that he did not speak English. Colling replied in German, "I am looking for Klaus Zinsmann."

"On American Army business?" asked the man, glancing up and down the alley to see if Colling had anyone with him.

"Somewhat. Are you Klaus Zinsmann?"

After a second's hesitation, the man answered, "Yes, I am Klaus Zinsmann."

"I understand you are a builder. Is that so?"

"I was a builder, yes."

"I am here to offer you a job reconstructing the kaserne. As you know, it was damaged by aerial bombs. If you can find a crew of men to do the work, the Army is prepared to pay you."

"What authority do you have? You are only a private soldier, not an officer."

"I come because I speak German. My superiors do not. If you will come with me to the kaserne, I will arrange for you to speak to my sergeant."

Zinsmann went to get his coat and hat. He did not invite Colling to enter, but Colling, standing at the open door, could see into the interior of the apartment, which appeared worn but clean. Colling sensed a woman's touch, and could hear Zinsmann speaking to someone in the rear of the place. He assumed Zinsmann had a wife.

The German came back, putting on his coat. Colling led him to the jeep, and after assuring the man that a German riding in a U.S. military vehicle was authorized by his orders, Zinsmann got into the front seat.

Accompanied by Colling and Ferguson, Zinsmann inspected the damaged buildings, scribbling in a small notebook as he went from room to room. As he assessed the damage, he sometimes directed questions in German at Colling, some of which Colling was able to answer, and those that he could not, Colling translated for Ferguson. Colling made it clear that materials would have to be salvaged, since the Americans could provide little, if any, that were new. This did not seem to bother Zinsmann unduly.

When Zinsmann announced that he had finished, the three men went to Ferguson's office. Zinsmann remained standing in front of the sergeant's desk while Ferguson and Colling were seated. Ferguson did not offer the German a chair.

Ferguson directed himself to Colling, "Ask him if he can do the work."

Colling asked the question in German, and Zinsmann began speaking, referring to his notes. When he had finished, Colling turned to Ferguson, "He thinks he can complete the work in three or four months, if we can find the building materials. He knows of some men in the town who will form a crew to do the work, if the Army can pay more than what they are usually paid. He knows carpenters, masons, electricians, plumbers, and so on. He thinks he will need about thirty men."

Ferguson responded, "Tell him I need the job done in eight weeks, no more. Tell him we will pay 10 Marks a day to each of his men, 20 Marks for him, in Military Currency, plus a carton of American cigarettes a week. They'll have to work six days a week, twelve or more hours a day. If he does the work okay and on time, he gets an additional ten cartons of cigarettes."

Colling translated the sergeant's offer into German. Zinsmann thought for a moment, then proposed, "The work will be done as he says, but I will receive two cartons of cigarettes a week."

Colling relayed the message, "Sarge, he says he wants two cartons for himself every week."

"Okay," said Ferguson, "But he doesn't get the second carton until two weeks into the work, when I see how good a job he does. If it looks like progress is being made, then he gets his two cartons a week, and the extra carton for the first two weeks. If things don't go well, he gets fired, and so does his crew."

When Colling conveyed Ferguson's response, Zinsmann nodded his head in approval, "It is done, then. Tell your sergeant that the kaserne will be repaired as I have promised, if he can tell me where we will get lumber and bricks and so on."

Ferguson answered promptly when Colling stated Zinsmann's qualified response, "Tell him that he will find most of what he needs in the bombed building across the street from the kaserne."

"But Sarge," said Colling, "I thought that place is off limits to any salvage work going on over there, and besides, can we get authorization to do that?"

"Yeah, we already have it," replied Ferguson. "The old couple that owned the place, it was a furniture store and warehouse, were both killed in the bombing. After we talked about it, I checked with AMGOT, and their three sons were all killed in action, so they got no heirs. That means the property goes to the government and right now all German government property is subject to seizure and use by the Allied forces of occupation. The Major says he'll stand behind it if we just go over there and take what we want."

"Are we going to use any of our guys to do the salvage?"

"Yeah, along with the German crew."

"What about asking if there's anybody who wants to volunteer to do the reconstruction work, too? I bet there's lots of guys who would like to do that kind of work, rather than close order drill, guard duty and cleaning the barracks."

"Good idea, Colling," said Ferguson. "Spread the word in D Company, but not the headquarters, that anyone who wants to work on the construction gets relieved from regular duty. We still have to have enough men to provide guards at our assignments, so if there's a lot of volunteers, I'll have to cut off the number who can volunteer. Anyhow, we'll see how it goes."

Colling told Zinsmann that he would have extra help from the Americans, and about the salvage plan. Zinsmann asked, "You will be acting as interpreter, so that on this job, the Americans I will be able to communicate with, yes?"

"If Sergeant Ferguson approves, I can." Turning to Ferguson, Colling told him what Zinsmann had asked.

"You can for awhile, but I know of a couple of guys who can speak a few words of Kraut. Sergeant Dorfman, for instance. He ain't as good as you, but he never had any trouble bossing prisoners around. Tell him,…what's his name, anyway?"

"Klaus Zinsmann, Sarge."

"Yeah, Zinsmann. What's the American name for 'Klaus?'"

"I don't think there is one, Sarge."

"How about 'Charley?' Yeah, I think we'll call him 'Charley.'"

Colling informed Zinsmann that Ferguson had just bestowed the name "Charley" on him. The German shrugged, then said, "Charley it is, if the sergeant prefers it so."

Colling went on to explain to Zinsmann that there would be German-speaking soldiers assigned to the American work force, but that if there were a need for detailed translation, that he would be available.

The response from the men of D Company to working on the construction project was more enthusiastic than might have been expected, and Ferguson, with Colling's help, was able to pick men who had some experience in the building trades, and they discovered that there were experienced carpenters, electricians, masons and plumbers serving in the company. When Colling wondered out loud why the Army had not assigned those men to the Engineers, Ferguson just laughed.

The task of clearing away the damaged portions of the kaserne progressed simultaneously with the extraction of lumber, bricks, roof tiles, wiring and piping from the destroyed furniture warehouse. The store's stock in trade had been severely depleted by rationing imposed by the war, so the warehouse was nearly empty when American 500-pound bombs came through the roof of the structure. What little that had remained of the furniture had been carried off to be used as firewood by scavenging towns-people.

When he could find time from his work in the battalion office, Colling spoke with Zinsmann about how the work was progressing, and the German seemed pleased. He showed Colling the stacks of salvaged materials that were growing in the parade ground's gravel drive, and was most proud of their ability to extract several huge undamaged roof beams.

Ferguson also made it a point to oversee the salvage, and he instructed Dorfman that he was responsible to see that his men and the Germans worked cooperatively with each other. Notwithstanding Dorfman's tendency to speak German markedly louder than he did English, there seemed to be little friction between the two groups. In fact, Colling noticed that the Americans were using bits and pieces of German in their conversations, and that the Germans were doing the same with English.

The damaged portions of the roof of the kaserne had been removed, and the first of the replacement beams was being lifted into place when Zinsmann approached Colling in the battalion office. "It is time we obtained the other building materials that are needed," said the German. Colling had not looked forward to having to inform Ferguson of the additional things that would have to be purchased, especially when the balance in the battalion's petty cash fund was being depleted by their paying the German workers.

"What is it that is needed?"

"Cement, plaster, some plumbing fixtures, some pipe, and so on. I have made a list."

Colling read Zinsmann's notations, trying to calculate the cost of what he saw, and doubting that most of the items would be available at any price.

"I have a suggestion to make," said Zinsmann.

Colling looked up, and the German continued, "You are aware, of course, of the hotel at Herrensee?"

"Yes," said Colling. The existence of the lake-side resort several kilometers to the north was well known to the men at the kaserne. During the summer months, Major Harris had provided a truck on weekends to take men there to swim, but the advent of cooler weather had brought the visits to a halt. The hotel itself was empty, with only a small staff remaining in residence. Colling knew that the battalion day room couches and easy chairs had been brought from the hotel on Harris' orders. No one seemed to know how the hotel workers were paid, why they remained, or, in fact, how they survived.

"You are perhaps not aware that the hotel was a favorite of certain Nazi Party functionaries."

Colling confessed that he did not know that.

"It is true," continued Zinsmann. "The Party took possession of the resort some years past, long before the war. I believe that the property is held in title by the NSDAP, or should I say, 'was' held in title. Your American government now owns it."

"If that is so, what does that have to do with your list of building materials?"

"I am given to understand by sources with whom I am familiar, that there were plans to expand the hotel which were curtailed by the surrender. Certain Party officials had even at the height of the war the ability to divert scarce items to their own use. I think we will find in the cellar of the hotel that it contains much of what is needed for the kaserne."

As Colling, with Zinsmann at his side, drove the jeep up the long gravel driveway leading to the hotel, he was impressed. He had joined the battalion too late to take advantage of Major Harris' swimming arrangements, and this was the first time he had seen the place. The hotel itself was a large white three-story structure facing the lake. The hotel lobby and restaurant were contained in a central building that was flanked by two wings extending in opposite directions. A landscaped lawn and gardens led down to the water's edge, where a flag-stoned terrace fronted the lake. The entire complex was surrounded by woods that screened and isolated it from the outside.

They were greeted by a thin balding German who stood nervously behind the registration desk. Colling suspected that the man's previous experience with Americans had left him with the mission of trying to prevent the hotel's property from being further diminished as much as possible.

When Colling greeted him in German, he seemed taken aback.

"You speak German well," he said without much enthusiasm.

"Thank you. What is your name, please?" asked Colling.

"Fritz Müller."

"Herr Müller, my name is James Colling, and this is Herr Zinsmann, under contract with the American forces. We have come to retrieve the building materials which are stored in your cellar."

Müller eyed Colling and Zinsmann carefully, obviously weighing whether they did actually have knowledge of what was in the hotel's basement. He answered only when Colling repeated his statement more forcefully. "Yes, yes. The building materials. It has been such a long time, I cannot guarantee that they are all in order."

"Show us, please," said Colling.

They were led through a spacious dining room and the kitchen behind it, then down a set of stairs into a cavernous cellar. Colling and Zinsmann followed Müller through several chambers until they arrived at one in which was stacked with not only lumber, but a quantity of sacks, buckets and crates. Zinsmann examined the containers excitedly, telling Colling that it looked like everything they would need was there.

Colling noted that the materials were stacked near a ramp leading down from what he guessed was an outside entrance to the cellar. He confirmed this with Müller, and asked that they exit using the ramp. Müller informed him that the door was padlocked from the outside. Colling told him to find the keys, and Müller took them around the hotel to a set of double wooden doors set into the ground. When Müller removed the padlock, they were able to walk down the ramp to the stored supplies. After they were outside once again, Müller replaced the padlock, and Colling asked him for the key. Müller seemed reluctant, but handed the key over without argument.

On their return to Grabensheim, Colling informed Ferguson about what he had learned, and drove the sergeant to the Herrensee, their jeep followed by two 2½-ton trucks. The transfer of everything in the cellar took two trips with the trucks, but by nightfall, the materials were stacked neatly in the kaserne's cellar.

As the trucks were driven away to the motor pool, Ferguson asked Colling if he would like a beer. In Ferguson's office, the sergeant opened a foot-locker that Colling had seen against the wall behind the desk, and

pulled out two bottles of beer, handing one to Colling. It was cold and wet, and Colling realized that the footlocker must have been made into an ice chest of some sort.

Sensing Colling's curiosity, Ferguson said, "Little trick I learned in Panama. Galvanized steel lining. The boys in the motor pool made it for me."

The German beer bottle had a ceramic stopper held in place by a spring, and Colling pushed it up to open the bottle. He took a long drink as Ferguson did the same. Ferguson leaned back in his chair, took out a cigar and lit it. After he exhaled a cloud of smoke at the ceiling, he said, "Major's going to be very pleased. And if the Major's pleased, the Old Man will be pleased."

"You mean Colonel Harrington?" asked Colling. He knew the regimental commander's name, but had never met him.

"Yeah," replied Ferguson, and after pausing in thought for a moment or two, he went on, "You know the Old Man was in the First War? He was a second looey. Graduated from V.M.I. in '17 and went right over. Got the Silver Star and the Croix de Guerre. In those days, the Silver Star wasn't a medal, just a star on the campaign ribbon. He never has said what he got 'em for. But if he was anything like he was in the Hurt-gen, he earned 'em."

"What happened in the Hurt-gen, Sarge?" asked Colling, pronouncing the forest's name in the manner favored by his fellow American soldiers.

A shadow crossed Ferguson's face, and when he spoke, it was with a hoarseness that Colling had not heard before.

"The 'Meat Grinder' was what they called the Hurt-gen Forest. Bastogne and the Battle of the Bulge get more publicity, but the damn Hurt-gen started before either one of them did, and went on 'til they were over. They just kept feeding men into it. Whole divisions were used up. We were lucky that the 61st didn't go in until late. We got to Belgium in October of '44, and we weren't sent into the line until early December. Three other divisions were sent in and were so chopped up that they had to be pulled out. That was how we got picked. The 28th Division was pulled out and we had to go in.

"The Second Battalion was leading, in the center, and we were trying to advance. That was the orders, 'Advance.' Our battalion was on the right, and the Third was on the left. Nobody could see shit. Everybody was catching hell, and most guys just hunkered down. The artillery was hell. The Germans were firing airbursts in the trees, and guys were taking pieces of wood that was like shrapnel. Even us guys in headquarters were taking fire. I ain't never seen nothing like it, and I hope I never do again.

"Anyway, the Old Man sees that the Germans have counter-attacked against the Second, with tanks. Those big sons-a-bitches, Tigers. Two of 'em. And the Old Man comes running through the battalion HQ area, carrying a carbine, and he tells me and the other guys to get the headquarters troops together, everybody, and get into the line behind the Second. And we did it. The Old Man is right there with us, popping off that carbine and cussing a streak. Somebody from one of the line companies put a satchel charge into the tracks of one of the tanks, and stopped it. Bazooka guys finished it off, once they could get close enough. The Old Man led five guys against the other, and Private Higgins, a fucking assistant cook, managed to climb up and get a grenade through the hatch. He got killed right after. The Old Man got hit, not bad it turned out, but two of the guys with him bought it. Old Man put Higgins in for the Medal of Honor, but I don't think they gave it to him. They did give the Old Man the D.S.C. Bastard deserved it, I tell you."

Colling had noticed that when Ferguson was wearing dress uniform, a red and blue ribbon was among the others above the left breast pocket of his jacket, and he asked, "Is that where you got the Bronze Star?"

Ferguson looked away. "Yeah. Old Man thought I deserved it for some reason. But there were a lot of guys who deserved it more." He paused in thought for a moment, then took a long pull from his beer. He put his cigar to his mouth and inhaled, and still in thought, blew a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling.

Colling asked, "What about Major Harris?"

"The Major is a good officer. He was ahead of where we were, with B Company. He was the company CO then. The Old Man moved him up to Major when Major Sellars got wounded. Sellars was our old battalion CO. Harris has seen more action than I think anybody in the battalion. He was National Guard before the war. He was in on North Africa, then Sicily, and the invasion of Italy. They shipped him to us after we got to England. He was a captain, and he was a 'seasoned' officer that they thought we needed."

Colling had heard from some of the men who had been with the 40th Infantry for awhile that the regiment had arrived on the continent of Europe in the fall of 1944, and had not been part of the Normandy invasion, or the advance across France. He asked, "None of the guys seems to know. The 40th is a regular regiment, but how is it that it's in a high-numbered division, the 61st?"

Ferguson answered, "The 40th and the other two regiments in the 61st are all regular regiments. They were 'orphan' regiments that were not assigned to any division when the war started. The 40th was in Panama, and the 64th was in Trinidad. The 70th was out in Colorado some place. In '43, the Army decided to pull all of these regular outfits into one division, and so they moved everybody to Fort Collins, Colorado and created the 61st Division. We was supposed to be a mountain division, but they gave up on that. Fact is, even before Pearl Harbor, they had bled off most of the personnel from all three regiments to provide experienced regular soldiers in the new outfits that were being put together.

"Anyway, they filled up the ranks with recruits and draftees to bring the 61st up to strength, then shipped us out to England. We got there in September of '44, spent a couple of weeks there, then went to France. They put us through more training in France, then we moved into Belgium, then the Hurt-gen. After that, we were pulled back out to get replacements, which we needed a lot of after the Hurt-gen, and then the division was part of Patton's drive south. That part of it was mostly skirmishing, but we did take some casualties."

They sat quietly for a few minutes. Ferguson took another beer from the footlocker, and offered a second to Colling, who declined.

Colling inquired, "How long were you in Panama, Sarge?"

"Five years. Got a wife and three kids there. She's Panamanian. I hope I get sent back there after this tour. I been in since '25, and I been to China, to the Philippines, Dominican Republic and Panama. Been stationed at three posts in the U.S., none of which I would like to go back to. Only Panama. But you got to go where Uncle Sam sends you. Anyway, as soon as I know, I'll make arrangements for Anita and the kids to join me, wherever it is. I don't know how she'll like being away from her folks."

"Well, Sarge, thanks for the beer," said Colling as he stood up, "I got to be at work in the morning, so I'll call it a day."

With the supplies from the Hotel Herrensee, the construction work proceeded very rapidly. The Germans worked every day of the week except Sunday. Ferguson held a payday each Saturday afternoon in his office, where he counted out Military Marks to the workers and handed them their carton of cigarettes. The Americans working on the repairs did so only five days a week. Saturday mornings continued to be reserved for inspections, according to Army tradition, after which the men who did not have weekend duty were free to leave the kaserne for the day. Ferguson granted a few overnight and three-day passes, but only for trips to Munich or the Garmisch recreational area. Overnight stays in the area surrounding the kaserne were discouraged. Day travel passes were granted to men wishing to visit the post exchange and movie theatre in Kummersfeld, and Major Harris ordered a truck to provide transportation for that purpose.

Colling spent some of his off-duty hours drinking beer and conversing with other soldiers whom he had come to think of as friends. On several occasions, they rode the truck to Kummers-feld to see a movie. Colling's friends asked if they could use the jeep he drove during the day, and he had to explain that Sergeant Ferguson had authorized him to use the vehicle strictly for official business, and he did not want to risk losing the privilege by abusing it.

When not engaged in these pursuits, Colling explored the kaserne. Much of the space was not suited to serving as housing for troops, and much of the building was not fully utilized. Colling visited the rooms that had been designated the battalion dispensary. Next to it he discovered a large vacant collection of rooms that appeared to have been used by the Germans as a canteen, located on the same side of the quadrangle as the battalion orderly room. Most rooms were bare of furnishings. He questioned Zinsmann, and was told that the townspeople had been told that the kaserne was a designated training center for some unspecified Wehrmacht specialty. No artifact remained in the facility to suggest what it might have been, except for the Henschel trucks.

They were gray-painted monsters with black Wehrmacht crosses still on their doors and sides. They were rated at 10 tons, appeared to be brand new, and had diesel engines. Since all the battalion's American vehicles used gasoline, fuel for the Henschels was not immediately available, and so they sat parked, side by side, inside the motor pool garage. They had not been moved since they were discovered when the battalion took over the kaserne. Colling made a mental note to keep their existence in mind should the need arise.

Leisure activities filled only part of Colling's schedule. While his assignment as battalion clerk relieved him of sentry duty and cleaning and polishing responsibilities other than his office and personal equipment, Major Harris insisted that everyone participate in morning calisthenics, fire-arms practice on the firing range, and a monthly ten-mile hike. Harris required the battalion headquarters detachment to support D Company, the battalion weapons company, and Colling found himself answering to the company's senior NCO, First Sergeant Mike Hornsby, when it came to soldiering. Consequently, Colling learned how to serve the .50 caliber machine gun, the 57 millimeter gun, and the 81 millimeter mortar. He also gained new, but never fully appreciated, experience in carrying his allotted share of the dismantled machine guns and mortars, and ammunition for them for ten miles, wearing full field equipment.

Colling was also subject to the Saturday morning barracks inspections conducted by Major Harris or another of the battalion's officers, accompanied by one of the senior NCO's. Colling found he actually had an easier time passing inspection than others did who had been away from basic training for a longer period of time.

The first batch of his mail from Belle Cors finally caught up with him. Most was addressed to him at his basic training unit, but the most recent envelope carried his address at the 40th Regiment, 61st Division and the Army Post Office number. His mother was the letter-writer for his parents, although his father would sometimes pen a line or two at the bottom of the last page. Her correspondence was filled with news about his hometown, primarily concerning friends and acquaintances he had known in high school. Some of his mother's news was about the marriages of his contemporaries; some about those who would not return from the war. She included an ample number of clippings from the local newspaper to supplement her own account of things. One clipping was a wedding announcement concerning a girl of whom he had been particularly fond. She had married someone who had graduated from their high school a couple of years ahead of them, recently discharged from the Air Force as a captain. One day, as he read yet another clipping describing a bride's dress and the church decorations, the thought came to him that it was like news from another world of which he was no longer a part.

Chapter Three

October, 1945

Colling had finished the day's paperwork, and carried the last items needing Ferguson's and Harris' signatures to the master sergeant's desk. Outside the window, the rear of the ¾ -ton truck that came each week from the PX at Kummersfeld was surrounded by soldiers seeking to purchase razor blades, shoe polish, candy bars, cigarettes, and other incidentals.

Colling commented, "Sarge, it sure would be nice if we could have our own PX here."

Ferguson, without looking up from the papers he was signing, said, "Yeah, but Regiment isn't gonna give us anyone to run it, even if we could get them to agree we could open one."

"I could run it, Sarge."

Ferguson looked up. "You could, huh?"

"Yeah. It can't be much different from running a drug store, and I helped my dad run his since I was thirteen."

"And who am I gonna get to be battalion clerk?"

"I can do it in the evenings, after work."

"Regiment will never approve it."

"They would if we had a soda fountain. We could build the PX around that."

Ferguson snickered and said, "And where are we gonna get a soda fountain?"

"I know where there's one."

"And where might that be?" asked Ferguson doubtfully.

"Frankfurt. While I was there waiting for the train, I helped out a guy in supply. I saw the fountains with my own eyes, all crated up and nowhere to go. I could give him a call and make sure they're still there, then go and get one."

"Assuming they're still available, and are not now in some USO club in Frankfurt, how do you expect to get it here."

"Like I said, go get them. You know those Henschel trucks that Sergeant Delonzo has? One of them would do."

"And how do we get diesel fuel? Those babies don't take gasoline, you know."

"We could trade one of the artillery outfits gas for diesel. Their prime movers use diesel, and everybody wants gas for their jeeps."

Ferguson rubbed his chin, thinking over Colling's proposal.

"It might work," said the sergeant, "Jesus, how long you been thinking about this?"

"Only just now, Sarge."

Ferguson was openly dubious at the extemporariness of Colling's plan, but he pushed the telephone over towards Colling and said, "Go ahead and see if you can call him."

Colling took the paper he had written Blackshear's number on from his wallet and dialed. A woman's voice came on the line, informing him that the number was not a local one, and asked him where he was attempting to call. Colling informed her, citing Blackshear's unit and the fact that it was located in Frankfurt. He was told to hold the line, and after a few minutes punctuated by static, he heard Blackshear's voice. "Woodrow? This is Jim Colling. Remember me?" said Colling.

"Yessuh, I do. How is you, Mister Jim?"

"Just plain 'Jim,' Woodrow. I'm fine. Wondered if those Peerless fountain setups were still there?"

"Jes' tak'n up room, Jim."

"Is it possible I can come get one?"

"If you got a requisition, sure you can."

Colling asked for the item number, and wrote as Blackshear called out the sequence of numbers. When he had finished, Colling thanked the corporal and hung up.

"It's all set, Sarge. If you can get the Major to sign a requisition, all we need to do is go pick it up."

"When you get it here, where are you going to put it?"

"Where the Germans had their canteen," replied Colling.

"What canteen?"

"It's on the other side of the dispensary, two doors down from ours here. There's water lines in there, and electricity. Klaus…I mean Charley, should be able to help us set it up."

It took three days for Ferguson to work out a swap of 100 gallons of gasoline for the same amount of diesel fuel. The master sergeant of the division's 105 millimeter battalion was happy to make the exchange, which both NCOs agreed could be "lost" on their inventory records. At the same time, Delonzo had the German trucks' gray paint covered with olive drab, and large white stars replaced the crosses on their doors. The 40th Infantry unit designation was added to the bumpers. Zinsmann provided a crash course in deciphering the truck's dashboard, and explained the shift pattern for the transmission.

The cab of the Henschel was wide enough to accommodate three men, and Ferguson selected Sergeant Pierce as ranking NCO, and Snuffy Smith as driver. Colling would go as interpreter and to find their way to the warehouse. Ferguson insisted they arm themselves, and issued Smith and Colling pistol belts with holstered .45 automatics. Pierce wore his own, and told Colling to bring his M-1 rifle as well.

The highways of Germany had suffered during the last two years of the war. Because the priority of the occupation forces was the restoration of the country's railway system, roads were a secondary consideration, and not well suited to significant long-distance travel. The Henschel had to negotiate potholes, craters, and areas where pavement had been stripped away from the roadbed. Few bridges remained intact, and twice their heavy truck had to be ferried across rivers by barge. On most other occasions, they used Bailey or pontoon bridges erected by Army engineers parallel to the wreckage of destroyed German structures.

The drive to Frankfurt took three days. Two over-night stays were needed because they dared not travel at night, due to the condition of the roads. On both nights, they were able to find billets with other units they encountered along the way, and considered themselves fortunate that they did not have to sleep in the truck's cargo compartment.

Arrival by motor transport followed a different route than the railway that Colling had used when he departed Frankfurt, and it required stopping and asking directions several times before they found their way to the rail yards where the quartermaster warehouse was located.

As the Henschel pulled up, and Colling dropped down from the cab, Blackshear greeted him effusively, and Colling noted that the Negro wore sergeant's stripes.

"I see you're moving up in the world, Sergeant," grinned Colling.

"Yessuh. And I got me more help since you was here."

Colling introduced Pierce and Smith, and Blackshear invited all three men to follow him into the warehouse. Colling noticed that repairs seemed to have been completed on adjacent storage facilities, and additional Negro quartermaster troops were working on their loading docks.

Blackshear pointed out the large crates marked "Peerless." They did not appear to have been moved since Colling last saw them. The Negro sergeant called out to a group of his subordinates, telling them they needed to load one of the soda fountains onto the Henschel truck parked outside. Blackshear told Snuffy Smith that he could back their truck up to a loading dock to the rear of the warehouse, and soon the three white men and the quartermaster troops were pushing the heavy containers into the Henschel. Blackshear commented with some amazement at the size of the German vehicle, and Colling's resourcefulness in finding it.

As the men were loading the last of the wooden crates, Blackshear took Colling aside and showed him a stack of smaller cardboard boxes. "Those is the supplies you is gonna need. They's ice cream mix, flavorin's, stuff like that. It may take you awhile to get that stuff through regular channels. This way, as soon as you is set up, you be in business."

"I hadn't really thought about that part of it, Woodrow. I owe you a thanks."

"Think nothin' of it, Mr. Jim. You done got me out of a tight spot once't, and I is glad to help you out."

With another round of congratulations to Blackshear on his promotion, Colling climbed into the Henschel, and he and his companions pulled away from the warehouse. The return trip was of equal duration, but their familiarity with the route meant there were fewer surprises, so that the two men not driving the truck often used the time to sleep.

When the big Henschel pulled up in the courtyard of the Grabensheim kaserne, Ferguson strode down the headquarters' steps to meet them. He quickly assembled a crew to unload the soda fountain components, uncrate them, and move them into the canteen. Colling discovered that Klaus had used the six days that they had been gone to construct a long counter along one side of the large main room of the former canteen that Colling envisioned would be the PX dining area, if approval were given to establish one. The place had been furnished in their absence with tables and chairs that Colling assumed had come from the Herrensee resort. Colling was amazed that the German had accurately estimated the space necessary to accommodate the ice cream freezer, refrigerator, sinks and other pieces of fountain equipment. When Colling asked him about the source of his information, Zinsmann responded that Sergeant Ferguson had provided an American magazine with a picture of a typical drugstore fountain. The German had also had water and electrical service installed in the proper locations. Colling was concerned that the Peerless apparatus would be of American voltage and current, but on inspection, the refrigeration compressors proved to be equipped with European style electric motors.

Once everything was operating as it should, Colling turned to the problem of filling the freezers with ice cream. The Peerless company, in putting together the components of the soda fountain for Army use, seemed to have thought of everything, and included with the fountain equipment was a ten-gallon churning tub freezer in which to make the ice cream. All that remained was to locate the milk and cream to be added to the dry mix that Blackshear had had the forethought to send with them.

The district around Grabensheim boasted a number of dairy farms, and Colling was aware that a small milk-processing factory lay on the outskirts of town. Taking time from supervising the completion of the work on the fountain, he sought out the manager of the plant in the man's office. Colling explained that the Army was interested in purchasing cream, to be made into ice cream. He explained that the Army had the flavored dry mixes, and the means to turn it into the finished product.

The German manager, Herr Braun, a ruddy-cheeked rotund individual whose access to the factory's output had undoubtedly helped him avoid the decline in nutrition experienced by others in the population in the preceding years, reacted cagily to Colling's inquiry. The dairy was already a supplier of milk and butter to the American forces in the area, and even under fixed price controls, was enjoying a fair degree of prosperity. Colling could see that Braun was visualizing additional Marks flowing into his pockets, and was obviously calculating how gullible the young soldier might be. The German was surprised when Colling rejected his first price, and when the American mentioned the price limits set by the occupation government, quickly realized that he would be making a profit from the sale, but not to the degree that he had anticipated. A deal was struck

for the kaserne to pick up a regular supply of fresh cream each week, with Colling to take the first shipment of twenty liters with him immediately.

A notice had been posted on the battalion bulletin board, offering additional pay for any soldier interested in employment behind the counter in the canteen. From the candidates who presented themselves, Colling selected three men who were able to demonstrate that they knew how to prepare sundaes and sodas. Banana splits would have to wait until the mess hall would be able to supply their main ingredient. Following the instruction booklet that came with the fountain, Colling found it easy to turn out a few gallons of ice cream. For the time being, he limited the choice to chocolate, vanilla and strawberry.

It was a Friday evening when the last syrup dispenser was filled and tubs of the newly-made ice cream dropped into the freezers. Since the following day was Saturday, Ferguson posted a notice that it would open for business at 13:00, after the battalion's routine weekly inspection had been completed.

The opening was a rousing success. Major Harris insisted on a ribbon-cutting, and the battalion's officers were the first to be served. Most of the men had not tasted fresh ice cream for many months, having to content themselves with the small Dixie cups of the dessert that were served from time to time in the mess hall. By mid-afternoon, Colling was forced to send to the German dairy for additional cream, and was running the ice cream machine steadily to keep up with demand. Men from the Regimental Headquarters Company and the First Battalion at Kummersfeld began arriving, and it was necessary for Ferguson to order a line formed outside, and allow men to enter only as others left the building. There was some decline in business at supper-time, so that Colling and Ferguson were able to tally up the day's receipts. Even at two Marks or 20 cents per dish, and three Marks or 30 cents for a sundae, there were several hundred AMC Marks and over $50.00 in U.S. coin and currency in the cash box under the counter.

After the mess hall stopped serving supper, the PX began to fill up again, but the crowds were not so great that Ferguson had to re-institute the waiting line. At about 19:00, Colonel Harrington arrived with two other officers from Regiment. Instead of their standing in line at the counter to place their orders, Ferguson ushered them to a table, and the colonel ordered a chocolate sundae. His fellow officers followed suit. Colling brought the ice cream on a tray, and as he placed a bowl in front of each of them, Ferguson introduced him to Colonel Harrington. The regimental commander was a tall, lean man with gray showing at the temples of his crew-cut hair. Serious and dignified, but with a slight twinkle in his light blue eyes, the man was everything Sergeant Ferguson had led Colling to believe he was, and Colling understood why so many of the men in the regiment who had fought beside the Colonel had such a high opinion of him.

Harrington nodded his head in appreciation as he tasted his sundae, and he commented to Colling, "Good ice cream, Son."

Colling was standing next to Ferguson beside the table, uncertain as to whether he should come to full attention, and he answered, "Thank you, sir. Glad you like it."

The Colonel went on, "I understand you and Ferguson were responsible for getting that repair work over there under way," nodding his head in the direction of the barracks across the quadrant.

"Yes, sir. I just served as translator for Sergeant Ferguson. He organized the work, sir."

The Colonel smiled and said to Ferguson, "Good work, Sergeant."

Ferguson answered seriously, "Thank you, sir."

"Sergeant, is there any chance you can 'organize' some repairs for the Third Battalion? They're in tents at the airfield, and the Luftwaffe barracks would be better quarters if they could be put to rights."

"I can have PFC Colling bring our German contractor out there, sir, if you'd like."

"Do that, Sergeant. Just have this Zinsmann fellow go out there and make an estimate of what has to be done, and how much it will cost, then he and Colling can report to Captain Barretson here," he said, nodding towards one of the officers seated with him, who acknowledged the introduction. "The Captain is commanding the Third until they get a new CO."

Colling was awed that Harrington would have knowledge of Zinsmann's name, and had additional respect for the man. He now understood why Ferguson felt the way he did about Harrington.

Ferguson promised Colling's services to the Colonel and the two enlisted men excused themselves. Once out of earshot, Ferguson said, "See what I mean about the Old Man? He knows everything that goes on."

"Maybe this will be an opportunity to get him to approve us having our own PX here," said Colling.

"Could be, could be," answered the sergeant.

The soda fountain continued to be popular for the remainder of the weekend, and Ferguson decided to limit its weekday hours to 17:00 to 20:00, so that Colling would be able to perform his clerical duties. The other men employed there used some of the hours it was closed to clean the place and manufacture a stock of ice cream.

On the Monday following Colonel Harrington's invitation, Colling drove Klaus to the airfield near Kummersfeld. The installation had been carved by Luftwaffe engineers from the middle of a pine forest. During the fighting, the field had been subject to several air attacks that had caused considerable damage. Since the surrender, the runway had been filled and repaired by the U.S. Army, and a wooden control tower erected to replace the modern concrete one destroyed by Allied aircraft. A small detachment of Army Air Force personnel manned the field, which was being used primarily for emergency landings.

The complex of two-story barracks built by the Luftwaffe was roofless and windowless, although its concrete walls remained for the most part intact. Klaus surveyed the damage, making his usual notes, and when he was finished, they drove to the orderly rows of squad tents housing the Third Battalion. The first sergeant they found in the headquarters tent directed them to Kummers-feld, where he informed them they would find Captain Barretson.

The headquarters of the Third Battalion was located on the ground floor of the large city hall located in the town's center. Colonel Harrington had commandeered the building primarily for the use of his Regimental Headquarters Company, but had also provided some accommodation for the nearby Third Battalion. Colling was reminded to some extent of the Grabensheim kaserne when he saw that the Rathaus walls facing the main street were decorated with color paintings of figures in Bavarian costume.

The Third Battalion's orderly room was manned by a staff sergeant, who admitted them into Captain Barretson's office. After Colling presented himself and saluted, the Captain invited the two men to be seated. With Colling translating, the officer asked questions and accepted Zinsmann's explanations of the repair work that was required. Materials were, as always, a major consideration. Barretson assured them that lumber and roofing materials would be found, as well as the plumbing and electrical wiring requirements that Zinsmann outlined.

Eventually, they came to the matter of paying the workmen. Colling explained to Barretson that the First Battalion had paid for its work by using a combination of AMC Marks and cigarettes. Barretson's response was that the Colonel had so informed him. Without further comment, the captain indicated that the Third Battalion would be able to enter into the same arrangement, a tacit suggestion to Colling that they too must have received a cigarette over-shipment.

With a handshake for Barretson, Zinsmann promised that he would have a work party on site by the end of the following week, and that if the materials were made available, and weather permitting, the repairs should be completed by mid-December.

As they were leaving his office, Barretson advised them to go to the Regimental Head-quarters office across the hall from his own, as Colonel Harrington had something for them. When Colling identified himself, the master sergeant behind the desk handed him a manila envelope addressed to Major Harris. During the ride back to Grabensheim, Colling wondered what its contents might be.

Ferguson opened the envelope immediately when Colling delivered it to him, and after reading the documents inside, announced that the Colonel had given his permission for the Grabensheim kaserne to open its own PX. There was also a note from Harrington suggesting that the Red Cross office in Kummersfeld be contacted, and a request made for some Red Cross girls to host a party, perhaps a Halloween party, in the new Grabensheim soda fountain.

Over the next few days, Colling was engaged with obtaining inventory from the Kummers-feld PX and setting up a portion of the old canteen as a store. He also recommended to Ferguson that two men from D Company be assigned on a part-time basis to work in the PX. His normal duties as battalion clerk continued as well, although Ferguson permitted him time away from the office to see to all the things that needed to be done. He had forgotten about the Colonel's suggestion concerning the Halloween party, until Ferguson instructed him to type up a flyer to be posted on the bulletin board announcing the affair would be held at 19:00 on Tuesday, October 30.

The Red Cross girls arrived in a ¾-ton truck driven by a sergeant from regimental headquarters. They quickly drew a crowd of admirers, who vied for the chance to help them carry in the boxes of decorations and other things needed for the party. Shortly afterwards, another truck arrived carrying a five-piece band, and when

the doors opened at seven, the waiting throng quickly filled the PX to capacity. A place had been cleared for use as a dance floor, and the band was playing a variety of swing tunes. Colling was busy behind the counter, acting as cashier, and assisting in serving the refreshments. He had not had time to watch the girls' arrival, and was conscious as he worked only that the women were young and attractive, and all dressed in gray frocks with white blouses. Red Cross patches were sown on the front of their dresses. There was much laughter and carousing as the young women encouraged the participants in an apple-bobbing contest. When the women took partners to dance the jitterbug on the tiny dance floor, the watching soldiers enthusiastically showed their appreciation, which drew Colling's attention to one of the girls in particular.

Blonde and very pretty, she knew how to dance, and was drawing more than her share of applause, cheers and whistles from those watching. Colling was trying to figure out how he could best introduce himself when he realized Ferguson was standing beside him. He realized that his attention to the blonde must have been obvious when Ferguson spoke in his ear in order to be heard over the din, "Forget it, Colling. Red Cross girls are officer territory."

Before he could respond, Colling was called away to take someone's money, and later, when he was able to do so, he observed that all three of the women were surrounded by officers. In the blonde's case, by two very attentive first lieutenants that he did not recognize, and whom he assumed had come up from Kummersfeld for the event. When the girl threw back her head with laughter at something one of the lieutenants said, Colling turned away and retreated to his duties behind the counter. Later, when the party was nearing its end, he realized that he had not seen her leave. He assumed he would probably never see her again, and relegated any thought about her to the back of his mind.

Chapter Four

November, 1945

Colling was in the midst of the battalion day report when there was a loud commotion in Sergeant Ferguson's office. Colling rose from his desk and stuck his head through the door to investigate. Two sergeants whom Colling recognized from A Company were talking excitedly with Ferguson.

"Damn near cut our heads off, Sarge!" exclaimed one, a staff sergeant.

His agitation was shared by the three-striper sergeant with him, "Yeah, Sarge, Krauts booby-trapped the road."

Ferguson told the men to calm down and explain what had happened.

The staff sergeant responded, "We was driving in from the DP camp when our jeep hit a wire stretched across the road. If we hadn't had our windshield up, we'd 'a both been killed."

At this point, Major Harris emerged from his office. Colling was a little surprised to see the Major, whose presence at the kaserne was a sometimes event. Without any prompting, the two sergeants repeated their story to the Major, who was obviously very angry.

"God damn Krauts! Sergeant, pull together a party of men and search the farms along the road. You men," said Harris to the two sergeants, "Show them where this happened. Pick up anybody that looks suspicious. Get me Division on the phone. This shit has got to stop!"

Ferguson sent Colling to find First Sergeant Hornsby, whom Colling brought back to the orderly room. Ferguson explained what had happened, and Hornsby went off to the barracks to find men to form a party to search for the person or persons who had strung the wire. Ferguson told Colling to get into his field gear, draw a rifle and ammunition, and accompany Sergeant Hornsby as interpreter.

The detachment ended up consisting of Hornsby, five other men from D company and Colling. Hornsby rode in a jeep with one man, following behind the vehicle driven by the two A Company sergeants to the scene of their near-decapitation. Colling and the other four men brought up the rear in a ¾ -ton weapons carrier. As Colling sat in the back of the vehicle with his M-1 clasped between his knees, he thought about the possibility that he might find himself in a firefight against one of the "Werewolf" organizations that the Nazis had boasted would wage guerrilla warfare against the occupation forces. More disturbing, he might find himself being shot at in return. There had been bombings of U.S. installations in the northern part of the occupation zone, random gunfire directed at American troops, causing a number of casualties, and assassinations of Germans whom the diehard Nazis decided were being too cooperative with the "Amis."

The lead jeep stopped suddenly as they came to a slight rise in the road. Before the three vehicles were completely stopped, Hornsby's men jumped out and quickly took up positions along the tree lines on either side of the road. Colling followed suit and crouched a few yards behind one of them. The First Sergeant walked in the center of the road to where the two sergeants pointed, and found the severed wire, each of its halves still attached to the two trees to which it had been anchored. The two NCO's admitted that they had not stopped after they hit it, but had driven straight on to the Grabensheim kaserne.

Hornsby picked up one of the lengths of wire; as he turned it between his fingers, Colling could hear him say, "Telephone wire. Looks like Kraut issue. The bastards tied it around the trees on both sides. Must have meant to get the first jeep to drive through. Dumb asses didn't figure on the windshield being up, though."

The man in front of Colling was glancing around, into the woods and back and forth the length of the narrow road. Colling saw that the other soldiers were doing the same, and realized that Hornsby had picked all combat veterans, and that their movements and behavior were based on experience.

Hornsby had walked slowly back to stand beside his jeep, conversing with the two sergeants on either side of him. Seeming suddenly to make up his mind, he shouted, "Mount up, you guys. We passed a farmhouse beyond those trees back there. Let's go visit." The squad clambered into the vehicles, and making a U-turn, they raced back in the direction from which they had come.

Hornsby pointed out a dirt road leading off the highway less than a kilometer from where they had stopped, and following the wave of his hand, the three vehicles turned off onto a rutted track and jounced along for some distance, passing recently-harvested grain fields on both sides. They slid to a stop on the loose gravel of the farmhouse's drive. Hornsby jumped out of his jeep and ran to bang with his fist on the front door of the long white stucco structure.

Colling stuck his head out of the canvas cover on the weapons carrier and looked up at the farmhouse. He counted two stories and a small window in the eaves indicating a third floor attic. The structure was typically Bavarian, with the farmer's living quarters attached to a cow barn in the rear. As Colling was taking in his surroundings, the other soldiers were dismounting and filing quietly around both sides of the building, rifles at the ready. Someone pulled on the sleeve of Colling's field jacket, and he jumped down from the rear of the truck.

The staff sergeant from the jeep that had hit the wire had produced his own carbine from somewhere, and was standing to Hornsby's left. The other sergeant held a .45 and had positioned himself to the First Sergeant's right. Hornsby continued to pound on the door, shouting, "Raus!" repeatedly. Colling came up behind the First Sergeant, ready to play his role as interpreter.

After some time, the door opened a crack and a woman's voice cried, "Nicht shiessen, nicht shiessen."

Colling offered, "She's saying not to shoot, Sarge."

"I know what the hell she's saying, Private," replied Hornsby, who pushed the door open and waved his pistol for the woman to come out.

She came out cautiously, looking from Hornsby to the other Americans, and to either side of her house, where Hornsby's men were crouched, weapons at the ready. Colling estimated that she was about 50 years of age, based on her worn features and calloused hands. He was later to learn that he had overestimated her age by nearly fifteen years.

As soon as she was clear of the doorway, Hornsby ordered the two sergeants standing beside him to search the place. He called for Colling to come forward, "Ask the frau here if anyone else is here."

Colling asked the question in German, and the woman responded that only herself and her two boys were on the farm. Colling passed this along to Hornsby, then asked the woman to identify herself. "Bergheim, Hilde Bergheim," she answered timidly, adding that her papers were in the house. Colling asked her sons' names, and she told him they were Karl and Otto, ages fourteen and twelve.

Colling told her to have them come out, and after a slight pause, she shouted their names in the direction of a field of grain stubble on the other side of the farmyard. She had to repeat herself before two heads appeared out of what must have been a ditch bordering the field. Before the two boys had covered half the distance to the farmhouse, they had a soldier apiece behind them, prodding them on with their rifles.

Just as the two youths reached where Hornsby, Colling and their mother were standing, the two sergeants who had been searching the house emerged. The staff sergeant was triumphantly carrying a roll of telephone

wire, which he dropped at Hornsby's feet. The sergeant who followed him dropped a Mauser Model 98 rifle on top of the wire. "Found these in the cellar behind some stuff, Sarge."

Hornsby looked down at the results of the search, and the staff sergeant continued, "There's two German field telephones still down there. No other weapons that we could find, though."

Hornsby asked, "Any ammo?"

"Only six rounds," said the three-striper sergeant, pulling a handful of cartridges from the pocket of his field jacket and holding his hand out to Hornsby.

Turning to the Germans, the First Sergeant, close to shouting, asked in a loud voice, "You know what the penalty is for having firearms?"

Colling repeated the question with less emotion, and Frau Bergheim began to cry, sobbing only the words, "Bitte, bitte."

Hornsby interrupted before Colling could speak, "Yeah, lady, 'Please, please.' Don't give me that shit. You know who put a wire across the road over there? Damn near killed two of my men." Colling noted that in his rage, the first sergeant seemed to overlook the fact that the two sergeants whose jeep had encountered the wire were not part of D Company.

The entire detachment had now gathered in a loose circle around the Germans. Karl and Otto were silent, looking down at their feet.

Hornsby motioned with his pistol towards the side of the farmhouse. "Get them two up against the wall. We'll settle this right now." Two of the Americans grabbed each of the German boys by their arms and started to drag them around the corner of the house. Their mother clutched at Hornsby's sleeve, sobbing and crying, "Nein, nein. Bitte."

Colling was frozen. He wanted to remind the first sergeant that what he was about to do was not right, and probably illegal as well, but the grim expressions on the faces of the other soldiers stopped him. The group had moved only a few steps when another jeep drove noisily into the yard and slid to a halt. Before the vehicle was fully stopped, its passenger was standing up in the passenger seat, leaning over the windshield. Colling recognized him as Lieutenant Peterson, one of the platoon leaders from D Company.

Hornsby came to a semblance of attention as the lieutenant alighted from the jeep and strode towards them.

"What's going on here, Sergeant?" asked Peterson, removing his helmet to disclose a shock of untidy red hair that he attempted to smooth back.

"Caught these Krauts, sir. They're the ones who set the wire on Staff Sergeant Hardesty and Sergeant Norman here."

"Are you sure?"

"Yessir. There's a spool of field telephone wire and a '98 over there, sir," Hornsby replied, pointing to the piled articles.

"Have the prisoners been questioned, Sergeant?"

"Er...no sir. Not yet, anyway."

"And that was what you were getting ready to do, right, Sergeant?"

"Right. Yessir. Colling there is our interpreter. We was just getting ready to question them, Sir."

Colling stepped forward and awkwardly saluted.

"I can see you haven't been with us long, Private," said Peterson. "Otherwise you wouldn't be saluting out here in the open. Just a little rule we had so the Krauts wouldn't know who the officers were. How old are these boys, Colling?"

"Twelve and fourteen, Sir."

"Question them and find out if there are any more like them around here. Is that their mother over there?"

"Yessir. Frau Bergheim. The boys are Karl, he's the oldest; and Otto, he's twelve."

"Try to calm her down. That bawling is becoming a nuisance."

"I'll try, Sir."

Colling approached Frau Bergheim and placed his hand on her arm. Speaking quietly in German, he told her not to worry. Lieutenant Peterson was here and had taken charge. "The Oberleutnant is disturbed by your crying, Frau Bergheim. Please try to control yourself."

Dabbing at her tears with a corner of her apron, she seemed to regain some composure. When he felt that she was ready, he asked her about the telephones, the wire and the rifle. She told him that three Wehrmacht men

had wandered onto the farm in the last days of the war. When word was received of the surrender, they had left. She had provided them with civilian clothes, and assumed that they had attempted to simply go home. Two of them had had pistols, which they took with them, but the third left his rifle and what ammunition he had left. The telephone equipment they had brought with them, and abandoned it as well.

Colling inquired about her husband, and she replied that he had gone to Munich in March on business, and had not returned. She assumed he had been killed in an air raid. As a farmer, he had been exempted from military service, and she had never expected to be a widow. They had been fortunate to keep Karl, the older son, from being drafted for the Volkssturm in the last days, and she could not understand why the boys would have done what they were accused of.

Colling talked to Karl first, who readily admitted that he and his brother had placed the wire. Some other boys that they knew were talking of the Werewolf fighters, and the need to resist the Allied forces. Colling asked Karl if he had been a member of the Hitlerjugend, and the boy answered that he had not, but that he would have if his father had not forbade it. Herr Bergheim wanted his boys to devote their time to their farm work, and used that as an excuse for them not to accept invitations to join. Karl insisted that Otto was only following him, and should not be held to account for following the lead of his older brother.

Otto cried softly through Colling's interrogation, tears streaming down his cheeks. While admitting that he helped his brother, he was unable or unwilling to explain their actions. Colling concluded that Karl was probably correct when he stated that the younger boy had no malicious motive in setting the wire in place.

The interviews did not take long, and Colling reported what he had learned to Peterson. The officer shook his head and commented that the boys would have to be arrested and turned over to the Military Police in Munich. Peterson told Colling to inform Frau Bergheim of the bad news, then ordered Hornsby to get Karl and Otto into the back of the truck for the trip to Grabensheim.

Frau Bergheim burst into tears once again when Colling relayed the lieutenant's message. Colling promised to make inquiries about the boys' fate and see that she was informed. She did, however, have the presence of mind, to dash into the house before the ¾-ton departed and obtain her sons' identity papers, which she handed to them at the last minute. She waved to the boys as the truck drove away, but the gesture was not returned, and Colling, from the back seat of the last jeep in line, looked back at her lonely figure until she was out of sight.

Over the next three weeks, Colling kept his promise and telephoned Munich frequently to trace the whereabouts and fate of the Bergheim boys. He eventually learned that both of them had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and had been transferred to a camp north of the city reserved for youthful offenders. He made two journeys to the Bergheim farm. The first was to tell Frau Bergheim that her boys were being prosecuted by the Occupation Authority for possession of firearms and acts against public order. More serious charges of engaging in hostilities and assault on occupation forces had been dropped. The second trip was to inform Frau Bergheim of the sentences that had been imposed on Karl and Otto. He had no satisfactory answers when the woman asked him how she was supposed to plant her crops in the coming year, without the boys to help. Luckily, the harvest for this year was in, but next year would be much more difficult.

His excursions to the farm did not go unnoticed by his fellow soldiers, and he had to listen to speculation about what he and the Frau must be doing at the isolated farmhouse. Colling defused the worst of the annoying commentary by refusing to deny anything, and just smiling and saying that he would never be indiscreet. This was viewed as mysterious by those who had never heard anyone actually use the word except in the movies.

Zinsmann's crew completed their work on the kaserne two days before Thanksgiving. Ferguson had found cots and other furniture for the troop quarters, and everything was in place for C Company before the holiday arrived. The tents that the company had occupied since May were struck, and the men moved into their new billets, glad to be in warmer and more comfortable surroundings. Trucks began the routine back-and-forth transportation of the company's personnel to their assigned guard posts.

A surprise visit by Harris, Ferguson and Colling to the resort at Herrensee, apparently based on information provided by the major's German mistress, produced sufficient liquor from the hotel's cellar to stock the bar in the new officers' club on the renovated ground floor of the kaserne. Major Harris managed to find, from some unrevealed source, an additional supply of good bourbon, which the German hotel had not had; and Colling made a contact with a local brewery to supply beer. Colonel Harrington visited and was pleased, saying he looked forward to Zinsmann completing the repair of the Luftwaffe barracks for the Third Battalion. The

colonel's pleasure was relayed to Major Harris, who passed it along to Sergeant Ferguson, who shared it with Colling.

As a result, Colling found Thanksgiving, his first holiday with the 40th Infantry, to be most agreeable. The Army had managed to distribute turkeys to the troops, and Thanksgiving dinner was done up in traditional style, with all the trimmings, including cranberry sauce made by the cooks from cranberries that everyone speculated must have been flown in from the States. The German K.P. workers were extremely happy at the quality and quantity of left-overs they were allowed to take home. Colling's attitude was not shared by many of his fellow soldiers, a large number of whom had expected to be home for Thanksgiving. There was a great deal of complaining about whether or not they would see Christmas in the States, in accordance with what they considered to have been a solemn promise by President Truman. The fact that Stars and Stripes and all the Stateside papers and newsreels were full of news about the upcoming trial in Nuremberg of the principal Nazi leaders seemed to reinforce their belief that the war really was over, and there was no reason for them not to be sent home and discharged.

On the Monday after the holiday, speculative thoughts of going home were dampened by an announcement from Regiment that Colonel Harrington's pride in the refurbished kaserne had caused him to invite the commanding general of the 61st Division, Major General Aubertson, who would be accompanied by Brigadier Wendle of the British Forces, for a visit to have lunch at the Grabensheim barracks.

Ferguson immediately appointed First Sergeant Hornsby to organize a suitable reception, and detailed Colling to act as his assistant, based on his demonstrated resourcefulness. Major Harris spoke to the battalion's officers and impressed them with the necessity of foregoing leave and being present when the general officers arrived.

An honor guard was chosen and additional close-order drill sessions were begun. Hornsby demanded perfection from the men assigned to the guard, and uniforms and equipment were polished endlessly. Colling asked Zinsmann if he could procure some high-gloss black paint for the guard's helmet liners, and when he mysteriously did so, Colling located and enlisted a German sign painter from the town to reproduce the 61st Division's insignia on the sides of the helmets.

Colling suggested that music might be appropriate, but because there was no band available, it would have to be recorded marches, played on the portable record player that Sergeant Delonzo had carried across Europe in the back of the ¾-ton motor pool truck. Securing Sousa records from one of Ferguson's friends at Division headquarters was easier than Colling had imagined it would be, but finding a record with British tunes proved more elusive. Colling finally located a recording of Rule Britannia buried under other merchandise in the rear of a radio repair shop in Grabensheim. The owner of the shop expressed his pride at the record escaping the notice of the Gestapo for so many years, but seemed relieved to sell it to Colling. One of Zinsmann's electricians did not take long to figure out how to amplify the music so it would play from the loudspeakers that had been installed by the kaserne's former German tenants.

The food to be served was a problem. Thanksgiving had depleted the mess hall's stores, and Technical Sergeant Cooley, the battalion mess sergeant, announced that the projected menu looked as if it would consist of either stew or bologna sandwiches. Colling asked Zinsmann where one might obtain black market sausage, and the next day, he informed Colling that lunch would be prepared by some women he knew, and would consist of Weissewurst, dumplings and sauerkraut, accompanied by beer and white wine, topped off with assorted Viennese pastries, if Sergeant Cooley could provide a kilo of sugar – all for only thirty cartons of cigarettes. Colling told Ferguson, who happily agreed. Ferguson also told Sergeant Cooley that his role would be confined to providing and supervising the waiters for the luncheon. Major Harris brought Ferguson a stack of white gloves for the waiters to wear: he informed the master sergeant that he had borrowed them from the servants' quarters at the Countess' villa.

On the appointed day, the generals arrived, riding in an open command car, followed by two other olive-drab Plymouths carrying their aides and other staff officers. Marches boomed impressively from the loudspeakers, and the honor guard briskly went through its drill. As an added touch, Colling had suggested that two 37-millimeter anti-tank guns be placed in the square, and an appropriate salute fired. When no one could ascertain how many guns a major general was due, Major Harris had instructed the staff sergeant in charge of the artillery to fire three volleys, on the theory that what was good enough for a funeral would be good enough for the generals. As the guns banged out, the command car was driven slowly around the quadrangle and pulled up in

front of the honor guard. Major Harris stepped forward from his position in front of the formation, and invited Colonel Harrington and the two general officers to inspect the honor guard. The officers marched quickstep between the ranks of the guard, and then were led by Harris to the new officers' club, where the lunch had been laid out.

Colonel Harrington and the visiting dignitaries were then ushered up the steps and into the club. A few minutes later, word came from the Colonel that the troops could stand down and be dismissed.

Ferguson, Hornsby and Colling waited expectantly in the battalion orderly room for Major Harris to return with word of the outcome of the visit, once the generals had departed. The two sergeants smoked cigars and sipped beer, exchanging stories and recollections, while Colling listened and pretended to work at his desk in the next office.

Ferguson was watching the parade ground through the window, and when he noticed the entourage exiting the officers' club and returning to their vehicles, he told Hornsby. Colling joined the two men at the window and saw the command cars disappearing through the archway of the kaserne's gate. He also saw Major Harris striding across the square towards the orderly room, and a few moments later, the Major came through the door.

"Happy as clams!" exclaimed Harris, smiling broadly.

"Congratulations, sir," said Ferguson.

"They loved it. Aubertson told the Old Man what a great job he was doing, and bragged to the Limey brigadier about how fortunate he was to have the Old Man commanding one of his regiments. Confidentially, the Old Man could get that star he deserves from this."

The two sergeants were listening to Harris' complimentary comments concerning the food when the door opened and Colonel Harrington stepped into the room, causing immediate silence. Major Harris was the first to speak, "Sir. Welcome."

"Thank you, Major. I left General Aubertson and Brigadier Wendle to their own devices and came back to express my thanks for the manner in which you handled this affair."

"It was really nothing, sir. The men wanted to show off for the general and the brigadier. You know, let the English know that Yanks can show a little spit and polish, too."

"I particularly want to thank you, Sergeant Ferguson," said Harrington, "And you, too, Sergeant Hornsby. The honor guard was well turned-out, as I might have expected. First class job, both of you."

The two sergeants stood at attention, trying to keep the smiles on their faces from growing wider. Both men nodded in response to the colonel's words, then Ferguson spoke, "And don't forget PFC Colling, sir. He did a good job."

Harrington turned towards Colling, who had been standing rigidly at attention since the colonel had entered the orderly room, "You're the man who brought the Regiment ice cream, aren't you, son?"

"Yessir," was all that Colling could think of to say.

"Seems you have a lot of initiative. The Major and Sergeant Ferguson here might want to think about giving you a shot at NCO. At any rate, gentlemen, you all have done the 40th proud, and I thank you. I have a jeep waiting, so I'll take my leave."

As soon as Colonel Harrington was out the door, Harris clapped Ferguson on the shoulder, grinning all the while. "Well done, well done, Sergeant. You too, Hornsby. Give all the men in the honor guard a three-day pass. Let 'em go to Munich if they want."

"The waiters, too, sir?"

"Right, right. But remind 'em all not to fraternize with any of those fräuleins in Munich."

"Yessir. We'll do that, sir," replied Ferguson with a smile.

"What about Colling, sir?" asked Hornsby.

"Right, you too, Colling. Go have yourself some fun."

Colling replied in a serious tone of voice, "But no fraternizing, sir."

The Major laughed, "I understand you've found yourself a home-away-from-home with an older woman, Private, so maybe you won't be going to Munich."

Colling felt his face getting red, "No sir, I mean, yessir, I will be going to Munich. Frau Bergheim is just a friend.…"

Harris laughed at Colling's discomfort, "Right, Private, just a friend. Sounds like you're breaking the no-fraternization rules already."

The two sergeants were also amused by Colling's embarrassment, and so Colling thought it best to avoid any attempt to explain.

Chapter Five

December, 1945

The Battalion began to lose personnel at an even greater rate after Thanksgiving, as the Army worked to send as many 85-point men as possible home for discharge before Christmas. Colling was kept engaged with the resulting paperwork, and supervising PX operations, so that he had little time for anything else.

He had used the three-day pass that Major Harris had given as a reward for the successful hosting of the general officers to visit Austria. The weather had been miserable, however, and he had spent much of his time sitting in front of the fire in the ski lodge designated as an Army Recreational Facility, sipping bad Austrian brandy and reading tattered paperbacks that had been left behind by former guests. The place was filled with American soldiers, but aside from some older women who were employed by the hotel, there was no female companionship in evidence. He made two slogging walks in the wet snow to try and view some of the mountain scenery, but gave up after the second attempt badly soaked his one pair of Army dress shoes.

When he came back from Austria, Sergeant Ferguson presented him with his technician fifth class stripes, and told him that Major Harris had followed Colonel Harrington's advice. The two chevrons with a "T" in a semicircle underneath meant he would draw more pay, and could be addressed as "Corporal." Ferguson once again reminded him that in the pre-war Army, it would have taken as much as five years for promotion to corporal.

The work by Zinsmann and his crew at the Kummersfeld Luftwaffe field was proceeding well, in spite of the encroaching cold and some light snowfalls. The day after Pearl Harbor Day, however, newly-promoted Major Barretson telephoned from Third Battalion headquarters to ask Colling to come to Kummersfeld to translate so that the major and Zinsmann could discuss a "snafu" that had developed in the construction.

Zinsmann was waiting outside Barretson's office when Colling arrived. The German did not have time to explain what was happening before they were summoned into the Major's presence. Colling came to attention and saluted. Barretson off-handedly returned the salute and said, "It seems we have a problem, Corporal. Tell Herr Zinsmann that he will not get paid unless I can get my men under roof before the weather gets any worse."

"What's the problem, sir?"

"Herr Zinsmann tells me he cannot get windows for the barracks."

Zinsmann explained to Colling in German, "All glass in Germany is allocated to the highest priority. It is impossible to find any."

Colling translated the German's explanation.

Barretson replied, "Our contract was for completion of the construction before winter set in. I've asked everywhere for glass, but nobody has any available. Only officially approved reconstruction can get any. And we're not officially-approved, as you know."

"Sir, if you would, let me see if some contacts I have can dig up what you need."

Zinsmann offered, "We can use boards over the windows if glass is not found."

Colling did not offer to convey the German's idea to Barretson, sensing that it would only make the Major angry. "I'll let you know this afternoon, sir, if we can find some windows." To Zinsmann, he asked, "Can you give me the measurements of the windows that you will need?"

The German produced a sheet torn from his notepad filled with figures. Colling told him that he would have to make a clearer list for him, then turned back to the Major, "I'll have Herr Zinsmann give me a list, and I'll call this afternoon, sir."

Barretson conceded, but warned Colling he would expect to hear from him no later than that afternoon.

Outside, sitting in the jeep, Zinsmann carefully prepared a list of what was required. Colling read it over and, after asking a few questions for clarification, felt that he understood the German's cramped writing. He dropped Zinsmann off at the airfield, then drove back to Grabensheim.

Colling explained the problem to Ferguson, who thought for a few minutes, then said, "You know, I know a guy who's down in Italy with the Quartermasters. I haven't seen him since we were in Panama together, but he dropped me a couple of letters, and I think I know his outfit. Maybe I can reach him."

"But can he get any glass, Sarge?"

"Last I heard, he was supplying stuff for building for the Army down there."

Ferguson searched through the drawers of his desk for some time before he pulled out some well-worn envelopes that had been clipped together. "Here they are, Master Sergeant Anthony Gaetano, 1067th Quartermaster Detachment. He was in Milan. I hope he's still there."

After several failed attempts to make the long-distance connection to Italy, Ferguson finally located the 1067th, and after several more static-filled connections punctuated by sudden disconnections, was able to get through to Gaetano. The two men chatted for awhile, and Colling listened to Ferguson's end of the conversation as the master sergeant reminisced about their prior service together. Ferguson eventually asked Gaetano about the windows, and apparently the Quartermaster Sergeant assured him that Italy was the right place to come for glass. The Italian glass factories had returned to almost 75% of their previous production capacity, and for cash, whatever you wanted was available. Gaetano suggested that Ferguson wire him the sizes and quantity that was needed, and he would have them made up. Only one problem existed. This would be an unofficial transaction, and it was unlikely that he could arrange transportation, especially across Austria and into Germany. Ferguson responded that he would figure out a way to bring the windows to Germany if Gaetano would see that they were manufactured. With promises of a later telephone call to establish the details, Ferguson hung up the phone.

Colling immediately telephoned Barretson to advise him that there was a good chance that windows would be found in Italy. But Major Barretson would have to find a way to have the 61st Division Headquarters in Munich authorize the use of its teletype equipment to send the inventory of windows to the 1067th in Milan. Colling would type out Zinsmann's list and have it in the Major's hands by the following morning. Colling didn't tell Barretson about the lack of transportation, even if the teletyped message could be sent.

Ferguson was tracing a route on a map spread out on his desk when Colling finished typing the list for Major Barretson. Colling looked over his shoulder and asked, "Trying to find a way to get them back here, Sarge?"

"Yeah, but the only sure route over the mountains is by rail. The roads are in real bad shape. I was thinking about sending the Henschels, like we did for the fountain equipment from Frankfurt."

"Couldn't the trucks be loaded on a flat-bed railroad car until they got to Milan?"

"If Harrington would authorize it, it's possible. There ain't much freight going south these days, and he should be able to get a requisition for train space."

Another call to Barretson elicited his assurance that Colonel Harrington would sign travel authorizations and a rail requisition for Italy. A preliminary assessment by Ferguson and Colling indicated that two flatbeds would be needed to handle the two Henschels. Because the First Battalion's vehicles would be used, it would be Ferguson's responsibility to pick the drivers and others who would go with them. Ferguson reminded Major Barretson that they would also need an authorization to draw additional gasoline that could be traded for diesel fuel. The Major would also have to arrange for Allied Military Marks to be drawn from Finance in a sum sufficient to pay for the windows. Gaetano had provided an estimate that 20,000 Marks would be needed.

The following afternoon, Major Barretson telephoned to let them know that he had been successful in having Division telegraph the list of needed windows to Gaetano at the 1067th. Ferguson called Gaetano and confirmed its receipt. Sergeant Gaetano informed Ferguson that the windows would be ready within two or three days.

Colling asked Ferguson to be allowed to make the trip to Italy, and the sergeant agreed. Colling's presence would be justified on the grounds that a German translator might be needed, but Ferguson had another plan in mind, and wanted Colling to supervise it.

Ferguson explained that he had asked, and learned, from Gaetano that German beer was a much-sought-after commodity in Italy. Ferguson had calculated that if they were able to load the Henschels with beer purchased in Grabensheim and sell it in Italy, they would make enough to perhaps pay for the windows in Italian Lire, and make something extra on the side. The Allied Military Marks supplied by Major Barretson would be used to pay for the beer.

Colling calculated how many 20-liter barrels of beer that 20,000 Marks would buy, and concluded that even with having to pay for the empty barrels, they would have 250 barrels of beer to sell in Italy. Gaetano had given Ferguson the name of a contact in Milan whom Gaetano had said would give 750 Italian Lire per barrel. With the Lira at four to the Allied Mark, the profit would be more than 100 Marks, or over $10.00, per barrel. Ferguson's share would be a third, with Colling and the other men splitting the other two-thirds.

Unlike the great majority of men in the occupation forces, Colling had not engaged to any great degree in black marketeering and currency exchange manipulation. He had used his cigarette ration card to buy cigarettes at the PX price of fifty cents a carton, knowing that the same carton would bring up to 200 Allied Marks on the black market in Munich. Rumor had it that a carton of American cigarettes could be sold to the Russians in Berlin for up to 400 Allied Marks.

The Marks could then be exchanged by American soldiers back into dollars, so that a fifty-cent investment would return $20.00. Similar profits could be made with other commodities purchased in the PX, such as candy and other goods. Some members of the occupation forces dealt not only in cigarettes, but also in coffee, sugar and gasoline purloined from Army stores.

Colling had traded his cigarette ration with both Germans and his fellow soldiers, but had not done so with thoughts of large profits. The coffee and sugar he had taken to Frau Bergheim had been obtained by swapping cigarettes with Sergeant Cooley's cooks, and he had a Leica camera, Zeiss binoculars, and a small radio that had been paid for with packs of Lucky Strikes. All of which meant that Colling was surprised not at the amount of money that Ferguson's plan would produce, but that he was willing to think in such a way at all. He had not previously given it much thought, but when confronted with this side of Ferguson that he had not seen before, he recognized how much restraint the sergeant had been exercising in not using the large quantity of cigarettes in his possession for his own financial benefit.

He would be sharing about $1600 with the five other men that the master sergeant had selected to make the trip to Italy. Staff Sergeant Gambelli from C Company was to be in charge. His ability to speak Italian would be useful once they reached Milan. Sergeants Harms and Caseman were picked because of their combat experience. Snuffy Smith and a PFC named Cole would drive. Ferguson warned all of them that Italy was a potentially dangerous place. Communist partisans still controlled the northern mountains, and it was only because of the guerrillas' connections with the Italian railway labor unions that rail travel moved relatively unscathed. Motor vehicle traffic in the Italian Alpine was non-existent. Anyone moving by truck or automobile was certain to be stopped by the partisans, usually robbed and sometimes killed. Even when on the train, Gambelli's men should expect the occasional pot shot and be prepared to shoot back. Harms would have a BAR to provide extra firepower. Everyone else would carry .45's and a carbine or an M1.

Colling made arrangements with the best of the local breweries for the beer, and Smith and Cole brought their Henschels at night to be loaded by the brewery workers. Once the loading was complete, Colling locked the trucks' rear doors and affixed one of the wire seals he had been given by Ferguson to each one. Travel papers had been furnished by Barretson, complete with Colonel Harrington's own signature. Colling stowed an extra typewriter behind the seat of the truck he would ride in, together with a supply of blank forms, stationery and official rubber stamps, as well as the extra wire seals. All of them wore overcoats, field webbing and helmets, and had their weapons close at hand.

They drove the Henschels to Feldberg, just north of the Austrian border, where two flatbed railway cars awaited them. Before the trucks were driven onto the cars, American MP's and German customs officers inspected the sealed doors and checked the papers that Staff Sergeant Gambelli presented. The inquiry was superficial and took no more than five minutes. A half-hour later, they were sitting in the cabs of the big trucks, watching the Austrian countryside go by.

Even though they were wrapped in their overcoats, the Alpine cold was penetrating, and at the first stop, Gambelli decided that they would take turns riding the flatbeds with the Henschels. Four men would remain in the single passenger day-coach attached to their train, while one man would stay with each truck. At each stop, they would switch.

Colling drew the second round of riding with the trucks, and he had become stiff with cold when he saw with relief that they were drawing into a station close to the Italian border. He was looking forward to a steaming cup of anything hot as he climbed down the short ladder from the flatbed car and dropped to the ground. They had stopped some distance from the station, which was barely visible through a haze that hung whitely around them. As he walked towards the passenger car, he noticed a military truck of unfamiliar design parked across the tracks. It was painted a different shade of olive drab, unlike those of the German army. As he was trying to make out its unit markings, he realized that it was British, and wondered why it was so far from the railway depot and any obvious road.

Sergeant Harms, who had been riding in the truck behind his, caught up with Colling as he joined Gambelli and the other men, who had left the passenger car and were gazing around at the mist-covered forest surrounding them. They too had noticed the British vehicle and were discussing it among themselves, their breath making clouds as they spoke.

When a figure exited the truck and walked towards them, they stopped talking and watched the man who was approaching them. As he drew closer, the insignia on his shoulders was visible, and they recognized that he was a British officer. He was not wearing an overcoat, but his jacket was pulled close around his neck, and a black and white checked muffler covered his throat. He wore one of the standard British canvas holsters with a side arm attached to a lanyard. His nose and ears were red with the cold.

"Cheerio, chaps," he said, his breath blowing a cloud of vapor. "May I speak with your officer?"

Staff Sergeant Gambelli touched the rim of his helmet with his finger in a loose approximation of a salute, and answered nonchalantly, "I'm NCO-I-C, sir. No officer."

"Ah, very well, Sergeant," answered the British officer, eyeing Gambelli's chevrons, then sweeping his gaze over the other men, "My name is Pritchard, Major Pritchard. Am I right to imagine that you chaps are on your way to Italy?"

"Yessir," replied Gambelli.

"And what city, might I ask?"

"Milano," said Gambelli, using the Italian pronunciation.

"Splendid. I don't suppose I might prevail upon you to take a bit of mail to Milan for me?"

"Mail, sir?"

"Ah…yes, Sergeant. Actually, it's a bit of parcel post, if you know what I mean."

"Not exactly, sir."

Major Pritchard smiled broadly, as if indulging a small child, "Well, actually, Sergeant, I could make it worth your while, you and your lads here, to take something to Milan for me."

Gambelli smiled back, "And I guess I'm not gonna know what the 'parcel post' is, right?"

"That would be correct, Sergeant."

"How much, Major?"

"How much what, Sergeant?"

"Well…both, how much do you want us to carry, and how much will you pay?"

"Quite," said Pritchard, "My lorry over there has the cargo in its rear, and I and my sergeant will ride along, in the passenger car, of course, and we will require you to give us a lift to a place in Milan."

"And how much for the fare?" asked Gambelli.

"How does 10,000 Lire sound?"

Gambelli was about to answer when Colling interrupted, "Sarge, could we talk about this?"

"Yeah, sure. Excuse us, Major."

Once at a distance from the British major that Colling decided was out of earshot, he pulled his fellow American soldiers into a huddle around him. Colling spoke first, "Sarge, guys, the Major here has got something he wants smuggled into Italy real bad, and 10,000 Lire is only $250.00. Frankly, I do not want to take the risk of going to the stockade or an Italian jail for a lousy forty bucks apiece. I say we ask him for 300,000 Lire and see what he says, that's 50,000 apiece. If he comes back with a decent counter-offer, we can take it, but I think whatever it is he's carrying, it's worth a lot more than six or seven grand."

Gambelli nodded his head in approval, and the other men followed suit. They walked back to where the Major was standing, and Gambelli spoke, "We got official seals, so we can open our trucks and reseal 'em after your stuff is inside. We got travel papers to clear us to Milan with no searches. That's worth a lot. We want 300,000 Lire, no more, no less."

Without the least hesitation, Pritchard said, "Done. Let's get my 'stuff' as you call it, transferred right away. No telling how long a stop we have here, and time is of the essence."

The British vehicle was quickly pulled alongside the tracks, and while the Major and Gambelli watched, the British sergeant and the other Americans rapidly unloaded a series of crates of various shapes and sizes and handed them up into the rear Henschel. Colling guessed that some contained paintings, based on their flat shape, and it was easy to further surmise that the others contained sculpture or similar objects. Colling had broken the seal on the truck's doors when it was opened, and once the cargo was all inside, he re-applied a new seal.

The British sergeant drove the English vehicle across the tracks and into the woods, and a few moments later came loping towards the train. He reached the passenger car just as the train began to move, and was clambering up its steps when the car jerked forward. Inside, Colling lifted a battered coffepot from the coal stove in one end of the third-class railway car and poured himself a mug of what he discovered was bitter-tasting ersatz brew. The taste was abominable, but the warmth he felt when he drank was welcome. Gambelli and Smith were out on the flatbeds, riding with the Henschels. The two British soldiers took seats at the far end of the car, leaving the Americans clustered around the stove. There was little apparent inclination to speak, and soon Colling's three companions and the British sergeant were asleep. Colling sipped his coffee while Pritchard stared out the window.

The inspection of the Henschels when they crossed the Italian border at the Brenner Pass was as perfunctory as that they had experienced when leaving Germany for Austria, but actually gaining approval to proceed took more time. The Italian customs guards believed themselves obliged to notify the American Military Police to come look at the U.S. travel authorization documents, which took time. Then the British Military Police were summoned to review Major Pritchard's papers, which took even more time. Eventually, everything was found to be in order, and after a glance at the seals on the trucks' doors, the Italian guards cleared the two flatbed cars. More time passed as the Italians examined the other six freight cars making up the train, but eventually, they waved them forward into Italy.

They skirted the Trentino Altobegan, passing through Bressanone, Bolzano and Trento, then turning west towards Brescia, past Bergamo, and then into Milan. Despite Ferguson's warnings about partisan activity, the journey was uneventful. The bitter cold gradually abated, but it remained cold enough for the men to wear their overcoats when outside the passenger car. They were able to take off the heavy coats only when the train pulled into a station on the eastern outskirts of the city, just as they finished eating their breakfast of K rations. The trucks were driven off the railway cars, and Major Pritchard squeezed into the Henschel that contained his cargo, while his sergeant rode in the other.

Pritchard directed them through the streets of Milan. He seemed familiar with the city, and confident that he knew where he was going. After many twists and turns, he pointed out a walled compound and ordered Smith to pull the truck up to the double wooden doors in its arched gateway. Pritchard alighted from the Henschel and pulled the bell cord dangling beside the entrance. After a short conversation with someone through a small barred window in the door, the doors swung wide and Pritchard motioned them inside.

Colling cut the seal on the truck's rear doors and the gang of Italians who appeared to unload the vehicle soon had removed all of the Major's crates and boxes and carried them into the building. When the last item had been handed down from the Henschel, Colling closed, locked and resealed it. Major Pritchard pulled a thick roll of Italian currency from inside his jacket and counted out thirty new 10,000 Lire banknotes and handed them to Gambelli. The Americans climbed back into their trucks and drove out of the compound.

Gambelli had to stop and ask directions to the address of a dealer in wines and liquors whose name they had been given by Sergeant Gaetano. The address turned out to be a run-down warehouse located north of the Milan city limits. They backed the trucks up to one of the large doors at one side of the building, and Sergeant Gambelli went in search of the proprietor. When the Italian appeared, walking beside Gambelli, he was talking and gesturing excitedly. Gambelli waved his hand for Colling to join them.

"He says he can only pay 400 Lire per barrel for the beer," explained the sergeant. "Ferguson's buddy gave us a bum steer."

"Does he speak English?" asked Colling.

"I don't know," replied Gambelli, but the Italian interrupted by responding that he understood a little English.

"My name is Colling, Signore. What is yours, please?"

"Caltineri, Mr. Colling. Caltineri."

Speaking formally to impress the Italian, Colling lamented, "I so regret that we will have to take this good German beer that we have brought all the way to Italy to the second buyer that was recommended to us. Adio, Signor Caltineri."

Colling turned as if leaving, gesturing to Gambelli to do the same, when Caltineri asked them to stop. Colling responded that they must be on their way, that they could get a better price elsewhere. The Italian asked Colling to reconsider, and after a few minutes of bargaining back and forth, the Italian offered 600 Lire per

barrel. Colling countered with 900 Lire, and Caltineri told him to take his beer and leave. Again, however, as Colling turned away, the Italian called him back. Fifteen more minutes of haggling, and they had settled on a price of 720 Lire, and Caltineri took Gambelli to his office to be paid. The Sergeant returned with a large wad of Italian banknotes in his hand, which he and Colling re-counted. It came to 180,000 Lire.

While they were counting the money, Caltineri had shouted for his workers to help unload the trucks, and as they worked, had one of his men bring a bottle of Chianti for he and the Americans to share while they watched his men haul the beer barrels into the warehouse. The wine was not to Colling's taste, but Gambelli and the other soldiers repeatedly emptied their glasses as they toasted Italy, King Victor Emmanuel, Harry Truman and the United States of America.

While the consumption of the Chianti was taking place, Colling strolled around the yard and took the opportunity to look through the warehouse doors to satisfy his curiosity. He saw stacks of crates with stenciled labeling that he assumed to be Italian wines, cardboard boxes marked Schenley's and Old Granddad, and other containers that he recognized as brands of Scotch, Irish and Canadian whiskies. Caltineri was obviously an important purveyor of alcoholic beverages. The Italian noticed Colling's interest in his inventory, and came and stood beside him, "Very nice, yes?" Caltineri asked.

"Very nice. I have some Lire of my own that I might use to buy some Italian spirits to re-sell in Germany, perhaps."

"I have just the thing, Signor Colling, Torre d'Oro. It is a fine, how you say, liguore, clear gold in color, an anisette. Very expensivo when the impost is paid."

"How much, Signor Caltineri?"

"What I have has no impost stamps."

"No tax has been paid, then?"

"Correct."

"I will be immediately removing it from Italy, so there should be no tax."

"True. You are very perceptive. Perhaps also because you are American soldier, this will be even more possible."

"How much?"

"400 Lire per bottle."

Colling scoffed, "Ridiculous. Americans will buy nothing that sells for $10.00 a bottle. I can pay 100 Lire and still make money when I sell for 200 Lire."

The Italian huffed as if insulted, "Impossible. I can ask no less than 300."

The bargaining continued, with Caltineri ultimately agreeing to sell a case of twelve bottles of the liqueur for 1500 Lire. Colling asked for thirty cases, and handed over the five banknotes that he had received from Gambelli as his share from Major Pritchard. Caltineri pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and returned five large 1,000 lire notes to Colling. He then ordered his men to load the Torre d'Oro onto one of the Henschels. As they did so, Colling asked to open some of the cases at random and verify their contents. All the bottles were sealed and appeared to be filled with the gold liqueur.

Sergeant Gambelli had observed the loading of the Italian liqueur, and asked Colling as he was pad-locking the doors of the Henschel, "What you up to, Colling?"

"Just making a little investment, Sarge. I bought some Torre D'Oro. I may be able to sell it in Germany when we get back."

"Hey, Torre D'Oro is good stuff. My Mama always used to get a bottle for Christmas, when she could afford it."

Caltineri gave them directions to the factory where they were to pick up the windows, and after a short drive, they pulled into its walled storage yard. Several long open sheds, which seemed to have been recently constructed, took up most of the space in the compound. About half were stacked with prefabricated building components, including doors, lintels, and windows. When Sergeant Gambelli presented himself at the factory office, he found that they were expected, and the manager led him to one of the sheds, where there were rows of crates of complete window frames lined up. As the Italian checked them off against his order sheets, the Americans, with the help of two laborers that the manager had called, passed the windows into the trucks. Colling stationed himself inside the Henschel with his liqueur, making sure that the cargo was stacked around the cases of bottles to protect them from damage.

Once the trucks were loaded, Gambelli settled accounts with the factory manager. When the staff sergeant climbed up into the cab of the leading Henschel, he told Colling and Smith, the driver, that they had had to pay 92,000 Lire, which was more than they had expected, but they were still left with 88,000 Lire. Gambelli counted out 30,000 Lire as Sergeant Ferguson's share, and tucked it inside his field jacket. He tried splitting the remaining money into six equal shares, but since the smallest denominations were 1000 Lire, he had two stacks of bills with only 9,000 Lire, while the other four contained 10,000 Lire each. Colling told him to give him 8,000 Lire, and once the Italian currency was exchanged into dollars, the other men could each give him $8.00. The staff sergeant couldn't follow the calculations that Colling was making, so Colling asked Gambelli for a piece of paper and wrote out the figures. By showing that converting the 58,000 Lire into dollars would give each man about $242.00, and that Colling's 8,000 Lire would be only $200.00, Gambelli saw that Colling would still come out slightly behind the other men. Colling brushed off Gambelli's suggestion that the other men contribute more than $8.00, explaining that he thought he would make more than enough from selling the Torre D'Oro. Gambelli agreed that the money they had received from Major Pritchard was by far the more lucrative transaction, and that the profit from the sale of the beer was secondary.

They were driving through Milan towards the railway terminal when Gambelli suggested that they stop and find some wine and women before their return journey. The train north to Austria was not due to leave until 21:00, and there was ample time to enjoy the pleasures of Italy.

Smith readily agreed, and at the next street corner, he pulled the truck to the curb so that Gambelli could put his head out the window and ask a male passer-by for the whereabouts of the nearest bordello. After a short conversation in Italian, the staff sergeant pointed ahead of them, saying that he had been given the address of the best whorehouse in Milan.

The men in the truck behind them undoubtedly wondered where Sergeant Gambelli was going, but they dutifully followed the first Henschel as it wove its way through the streets of Milan. The house that Gambelli was seeking was on one side of a small square that proved an ideal place for parking their vehicles. A tavern occupied the ground floor, and the crew of the second truck at first thought it was Gambelli's destination, until the staff sergeant explained otherwise.

As Gambelli started to lead the men across the square, Colling suggested, "Sarge, somebody better stick with the trucks. I'm okay with being the one to do it. You guys are going to have to leave your weapons, and somebody has to keep an eye on them."

Gambelli responded, "You're right. I'll send one of the other guys to spell you as soon as he gets his ashes hauled."

"No need, Sarge. I'm not up much on whorehouses."

"Eye-talyen pussy is the best in the world, Colling," urged the sergeant.

"I know, Sarge, but I'd just as soon wait out here and have a glass of wine over there at one of those outdoor tables," said Colling, nodding towards a café on the opposite side of the street. In truth, Colling wanted to mention that there was a good chance that Gambelli could find himself with a good case of the clap in about a week, but he did not do so.

The table proved chilly in the fading December afternoon, and Colling decided to try Grappa instead of wine. He leaned back in his chair, sipping the Italian brandy, thinking about what Christmas would be like back in Belle Cors, and wistfully regretting that he would not be there. He thought about the best way that he might dispose of the Torre D'Oro. He had a little over $1100 invested in it, and guessed he could re-sell the 360 bottles for $7.00 or $8.00 each. If things worked out well, he would have over $3000.00 in cash after the profit from the sale of the liqueur was added to the other money he had accumulated – not as much as others had managed to gain from the occupation, but a decent amount.

It was fully dark when Colling honked the lead Henschel's horn to remind Gambelli and the others that they had to meet their train. The Americans emerged from the tavern in varying stages of drunkenness, their clothes disheveled. Colling decided that Harms was the least intoxicated, and suggested he drive the second truck, while Colling himself would take the first. Gambelli's speech was slurred, and he swayed back and forth in the cab of the Henschel as Colling found his way back to the outlying rail yard where they had left the flat-bed cars that morning.

All of them spent most of the return train journey sleeping, when not taking their turns riding in the cabs of the trucks. They were able to make connections to the Kummersfeld railway station, where the vehicles were

driven off the flatbed cars. Major Barretson met them at the station and they followed his jeep to the airfield. Zinsmann's men quickly unloaded the windows. Colling made sure he was in the truck with his Torre D'Oro as the rest of the cargo was taken off. Gambelli distracted Major Barretson so that he would not see that there were boxes remaining in the Henschel after the last of the windows was removed.

Ferguson was pleased to receive the 30,000 Lire that made up his share of the profit on the beer. He gave the returning men passes so that the Italian currency could be changed into dollars at the American Express office in Munich. Colling told Ferguson he would rather have a three-day pass to one of the Army recreation centers around Garmisch, and gave his lire to Smith to exchange for him. When the corporal returned from his weekend in Munich, Colling added the dollars that Smith brought him to his other cash.

Colling had secreted the Italian liqueur in the same storage room that held the Battalion's cigarette surplus. Ferguson had made him a second key to the locker, so that as fresh cigarettes were received for the PX, Colling would have access to replace the older stock, which was then sold across the post exchange's counter.

A week later, with Ferguson's permission, Colling checked out a ¾-ton weapons carrier from the motor pool, placed the cases of Torre D'Oro in it, and used his pass to go to Garmisch. Sergeant Ferguson had given him the name of a master sergeant who served as an assistant to the officer managing one of the Army clubs. Ferguson had heard that Master Sergeant O'Donnell might be able to do something for Colling regarding the Italian liqueur.

As instructed, Colling telephoned O'Donnell as soon as he arrived in Garmisch. The sergeant suggested they meet at a Gästhaus located in the woods at the edge of the town. Colling found the place easily, following the master sergeant's directions, and parked his truck so that he could see it from the window of the tavern. When he entered the dimly lit main room, he discovered that it was not much warmer inside than it was outside, and with one exception, the place was devoid of customers.

Master Sergeant O'Donnell was sitting alone at a table with a glass of beer in front of him. He was a big man, sullen, balding and pink-faced. He did not say anything as Colling joined him. Colling ordered a beer from the aproned waiter who came to take his order.

"Sergeant Ferguson at the 40th told me you might be able to help me."

"Maybe. What is it you're looking for?" replied O'Donnell, as the waiter set Colling's beer on the table.

"I'm not looking for anything. I just got back from Italy, and I might have something you might want."

"Like what?"

"You buy booze for the club, right?"

"Yeah. But I don't need any chianti or any of that other Italian shit. Nobody wants it unless you serve Italian food, and we don't."

"It's not wine. You ever hear of Torre D'Oro?"

The sergeant's eyes narrowed. "Yeah. But I've had a bunch of slick-o's try to foist off home-made liqueurs on me before."

"This stuff's genuine. I got thirty cases, 360 bottles, and I want $10 a bottle for it."

"You're nuts. That stuff retails for $9.95 in New York."

"Before the war, maybe. But nobody's seen this stuff in years."

"How'd you get it?"

"Never mind. I got it without any stamps on it. You interested? If not, I got some more people I can try," said Colling.

"I ain't payin' no sawbuck a bottle, I'll tell you that."

"So make a reasonable offer, maybe we can trade."

"I can go maybe five a bottle."

Colling stood up, "Forget it. See you sometime."

"Wait," said the sergeant. "Sit down."

Colling dropped back into his chair. "I said make a reasonable offer, for Christ's sake, Sarge."

"Okay, okay. Seven."

"Make it eight and we got a deal."

"I got to go get some cash," replied O'Donnell. "That's nearly three grand, and I ain't got that much on me. How soon can you deliver?"

"Right now. This deal has to be done in the next sixty minutes, or I hit the road."

"Okay. My jeep's outside. Follow me back to the club. I'll point to where you can park, and I'll be back as soon as I get the money and a truck to carry the booze."

O'Donnell drove fast, and Colling was concerned that the jolting the ¾-ton was taking over the frost-damaged German road might break some of the liqueur bottles. They entered Garmisch, and he soon saw the sergeant waving and pointing towards a place in a field bordering the road that appeared to be used as a turn-around or parking area. The truck's tires crunched over patches of ice as Colling pulled in. He watched O'Donnell's jeep disappear around a curve.

Colling pulled the holstered .45 automatic from underneath his seat and removed the weapon, chambered a round and placed the pistol beside him. He had fired a .45 only for familiarization at the range behind the kaserne, but felt a nervous confidence that he could use it if necessary. Its presence would also serve as a deterrent, should O'Donnell have an idea he could pull a fast one.

The last of the warmth from the weapons carrier's heater had dissipated, and Colling tugged his field jacket more tightly around him as the cold crept into the cab. He was debating whether to drive away when a 2½-ton truck came around the curve where O'Donnell had gone. The truck pulled in beside the ¾-ton, and then was backed until the two vehicles' cargo beds were facing each other. Colling slipped the .45 into his waistband under his jacket and got out. Sergeant O'Donnell and a technical sergeant dropped down from the cab of the deuce-and-a-half. O'Donnell lifted the tarpaulin covering the back of Colling's truck and peered inside at the stacked cases of Torre D'Oro. "Can I have a sample?" he asked.

"Sure," said Colling. "Go ahead and climb in and pick any one you want."

The master sergeant dropped the weapons carrier's tailgate and clambered inside. Colling watched as he opened several of the cardboard cartons and pulled bottles into view, turning them and then holding them to the light. Colling stood so that he could see the technical sergeant out of the corner of his eye, but the other soldier seemed more interested in what O'Donnell was doing than planning any assault on Colling. O'Donnell finally selected one of the bottles of liqueur and drew the cork. He touched his finger to the wetness on its tip and then touched his tongue. He replaced the cork, slid the bottle back into its carton and climbed out of the truck. He then produced a roll of bills from the pocket of his jacket and peeled off hundreds, fifties and twenties, counting as he did so. When he reached $2880, he handed Colling the cash. "Good deal, kid," he said, "Let's get these boxes into the deuce-and-a-half."

As he returned to Grabensheim, Colling realized that he had more cash in his pocket than he had ever seen. Even at Christmas time in his father's drug store, daily receipts had seldom totaled more than a couple of thousand dollars. He began thinking how best to secure what he had. He could deposit the funds in his soldier's funds with the Finance office, but that would raise questions about how a corporal making $60 a month had accumulated thousands of dollars, especially since he had not been drawing full pay, but had left better than half his pay on deposit in his soldier's account since joining the Battalion. He decided to see if he could find a place to hide his cash.

With that in mind, he had Zinsmann provide him with a thin piece of wood paneling cut to the exact dimensions of the rear of the top shelf in his wall locker. When no one was in the barracks, he fitted the wood into place so that it formed a false back behind which he could securely hide his money.

Colling's absences had prompted Ferguson to find a replacement clerk. Private William Tracy was a thin, nervous 18-year old draftee who had been serving as the company clerk for C Company. He had joined the Battalion just before the German surrender, and had made it known that he knew how to type. Sergeant Ferguson had suspected that Tracy did this to try and get a job at Battalion headquarters, away from any fighting. As a result, he made sure Tracy stayed with a line company. But with hostilities ended, Ferguson realized his decision had become pointless, and so he had brought Tracy over to fill in for Colling. While with C Company, Tracy had been reduced in rank from private first class when he was caught sleeping at his guard post. Ferguson had no plans to promote him, and Tracy reciprocated by frequently expressing his desire to see the expiration of his term of service and discharge.

The Battalion lost almost half of its personnel in the weeks leading up to Christmas. The Army was seeing success in sending men home for discharge, and both Colling and Tracy were kept busy processing paperwork for those who were departing on a daily basis. When he was not working in the Battalion office, Colling was in the PX, supervising the two men who comprised the Exchange's staff. He was also preoccupied with making

sure that a Christmas party that the Regimental morale officer, Captain Hallowell, had scheduled to be held in the Grabensheim PX actually occurred.

Since the reconstruction at Grabensheim kaserne and the Kummersfeld barracks now provided quarters for designated officers' clubs, Colonel Harrington had decreed that attendance at the planned Christmas party be limited to enlisted men only. Because beer would be served at the party, there was an expression of concern by some of the Regiment's officers that the men might not treat the Red Cross girls who would be at the event with respect. Major Harris, as commanding officer at the Grabensheim kaserne, assured the Colonel that he would drop in to the PX periodically, and vouched for the men's behavior, but also asked that a squad of MP's be on hand as a precaution.

Because the troops at Kummersfeld were attending their own Christmas celebration, there was not as large a crowd as there had been at the inauguration of the ice cream fountain, and it was not necessary to control admission to the PX. Even so, the place was filled to capacity. The only real open space consisted of the small dance floor, where men took turns jitterbugging with the Red Cross girls. Six of the women had arrived in two staff cars from Kummersfeld, and while two of them served cake and coffee from a table at the rear of the room, the other four took turns dancing with the men. Between the loud voices of the celebrating soldiers and the four-piece band, Colling had to shout to be heard over the noise as he supervised the men serving beer and tending the fountain.

He had just finished handing over a glass of beer to a sergeant from A Company when he looked up to see the blonde Red Cross girl he had noticed at the fountain opening night. She had flashing blue eyes that matched her smile.

She said, "I hear you're the one they call 'Dog Robber.'"

Colling felt his face redden as he tried to think of something to say, and the girl's smile broadened at his discomfort. His throat had gone dry, but he managed to blurt out, "Where did you hear that?" He instantly imagined how stupid he must look and sound.

"Colonel Harrington's the one who decided you deserve the name."

Two soldiers had elbowed their way on either side of the blonde, asking her to dance while at the same time asking Colling for another beer apiece. While he drew the beers, Colling said, "My name is Jim Colling. What's yours?"

"Liz Hamilton," she replied, and then to the men beside her, "You guys have to give me a break. Go cut in on Janet or Rosie. I'll be back to dance in a minute."

The interruption had allowed Colling to recover some of his composure, and he asked, "Where you from, Miss Hamilton?"

"You can call me Liz," she answered. "I'm from Pennsylvania originally, but I've lived all over. How about you?"

"Little place in Wisconsin called Belle Cors. I don't imagine you've ever heard of it."

"You're right. I never have. Well, I have to get back to duty. If you get a break from the bar, I'm available for a dance. Just cut in."

"Any chance we can talk when the band takes a break?"

"Maybe. I'm sure all of us will want to sit down and rest, and if you can find me, I'd like that."

Colling was washing glasses when the room suddenly grew much quieter, and then the band-leader announced that there would be a short break. Colling asked one of the other bartenders to take over for him and looked for Elizabeth in the crowd. He spotted her just as she dropped into a chair behind the table holding the cake. He picked up a chair for himself as he walked towards her. He placed it beside her and seated himself.

"I'm taking you up on your offer."

"No dance now. I am exhausted."

"Like they say, you knew it would be like this when you signed up."

She laughed and said, "Yes, I guess I did." In a more serious tone, she went on, "I hear you speak German very well."

"Ja. Ich spreche Deutsch. Meine Vater und Grossmutter hat mir lassen gelernen."

She responded in German, "You have less accent than I do."

He continued to speak in German as well, "My grandmother says she knows I am an American. The same for the Germans that I know here."

"You seem to do well. The Colonel and your Major think highly of you."

Switching to English, Colling responded, "Is that why they call me 'Dog Robber?'"

"I'm sorry, I thought it was a compliment."

"It might be, in a back-handed sort of way. A dog robber was what an officer's servant was called, 'way back, because he got the scraps left over after the officer fed his dogs. Now it means anyone who is able to keep his superiors happy by finagling or scrounging for them."

"Well, you do make your superiors very happy. And I think that's a good thing."

The music started again and Elizabeth stood up, "Well, back to work."

Colling reluctantly rose from his chair, "Any chance I can see you again?"

She replied, "Listen, I do some interpreting out at Camp 146, the DP camp. They might be able to use another person who speaks German. If you want, I can ask about your going out there with me. I go mornings during the week."

"Sure. I'd love to."

"I'll see what I can do," she said over her shoulder as she was pulled towards the dance floor by a soldier anxious to dance.

The party's final event was the singing of Christmas carols, led by the Red Cross girls. Since their speaking with one another, Colling hadn't been able to take his eyes off Elizabeth, and had searched her out at every opportunity as he worked behind the bar. Now, as she stood facing the roomful of half-drunken soldiers, shoulder to shoulder with the other young women, their voices raised in Adeste Fidelis, he was certain that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

The Christmas carols had been Major Harris' idea, and it worked as planned. The men quietly filed from the PX when the bandleader took the microphone and wished everyone a good night and a Merry Christmas. The staff cars were waiting outside for the Red Cross girls. Many of the soldiers waved and shouted holiday wishes at the cars as they drove through the gate of the kaserne.

Colling spent most of Christmas Day sleeping. Cleaning up the PX following the party had lasted until two in the morning. The kaserne was quiet. Many of those men who were not assigned to guard duty had walked into Grabensheim, and despite the non-fraternization rules, seemed to have arranged to spend the day with some of the town's young women. Major Harris was nowhere to be seen, and Colling later learned his commanding officer had hosted a Christmas dinner at his mistress' villa for the officers of the battalion. The countess' cook had been provided with a turkey and other foodstuffs from the battalion mess hall to prepare the meal.

In response to public opinion at home, and in order to live up to its own press releases, the Army had shipped thousands of turkeys and tons of food to provide traditional Christmas dinners to its troops in Europe, out-doing even its Thanksgiving efforts. Colling left the mess hall after the specially scheduled mid-afternoon feast feeling over-full.

The following day was Wednesday, and Colling reported to Battalion Headquarters as usual immediately after breakfast. He put Tracy to work on the morning report and was sorting through the mail that had arrived on Monday. Preparations for the holiday had resulted in correspondence being set aside to be dealt with later. Ferguson arrived just before eight, having finished his breakfast in the mess hall with the other senior NCOs. The Master Sergeant had little to say as he reviewed Tracy's completed report. Colling and Tracy started typing the departure forms for the men whose transfer or discharge orders had been received. There were fewer in number than earlier in the month, and Colling was thinking about asking Sergeant Ferguson whether he could leave the remainder of the paperwork with Tracy to go attend to his responsibilities at the PX.

The telephone rang and Colling answered. He recognized the voice of Captain Emerson, the Regimental Adjutant. The captain asked for Ferguson. After several yessirs, Ferguson hung up the phone and looked over at Colling. "Seems like the Colonel wants you to go out to the DP camp with that Red Cross gal. They need an interpreter."

Colling was unsure of how to respond. Ferguson appeared irritated. The sergeant continued, "She's been driven out there every day by one of the Old Man's drivers. Now you got to do it. You start tomorrow morning. Pick her up in Kummersfeld at seven sharp. Red Cross billets. In the Rathaus where the Regimental HQ is, third floor."

"Right, Sarge."

"And carry a .45. No telling what you'll run into on the roads."

Elizabeth Hamilton was waiting in front of the Kummersfeld city hall which housed the 40th Regiment's headquarters when Colling pulled up in his jeep. She was bundled in her dark blue Red Cross cloak, wearing galoshes from which she tapped the slush before turning in her seat to bring her legs into the vehicle. She was pulling the canvas and plexiglass door closed as Colling spoke, "Hope you haven't been waiting long."

"Nope. Just came outside. I thought it was better than having you have to come in and try to get someone to find me."

Colling asked if there were a route to the camp that was shorter than retracing his steps through Grabensheim, and Elizabeth informed him that there was not. The road he had used to get to Kummersfeld had been plowed clear of snow, but a crew of Germans under supervision of some U.S. Engineers was still working from Grabensheim north to Camp 146. Elizabeth suggested that they wait and proceed behind the workmen as they cleared the roadway. She assured him that she would explain any late arrival as being due to inclement weather.

They were sitting in silence, watching the line of Germans shoveling, when Colling asked, "How many of the DP's speak German? I've heard most of them are former slave laborers. Poles and Czechs, mainly."

"They are," Elizabeth replied. "I'm involved in trying to place them. They seem to be more comfortable when someone speaks to them in Polish."

Colling smiled and quoted a Polish verse, "'Eyes blue as the sky above the steppes, hair like the golden grain that reaches to touch it.'"

Startled, Elizabeth looked at him, "You speak Polish, too?" And then in Polish, "Was that from your father and grandmother too?"

"Nope. My Mom's side of the family. Her parents and her brothers and sisters were all born in Poland. She was the first one born in the U.S.A."

Elizabeth said, "My mother was born in Poland. She still has relatives living there."

"Must be rough right now, with the way things are over there."

"That's true. We worry about how things are going to turn out."

"Well, if the Communists take over, it won't be good," responded Colling.

"It's unusual having two sides of a family with differing backgrounds. My German is school-taught; it doesn't come from speaking it at home."

"Where did you go to school?"

"College at Middlebury in Vermont. You?"

"Two years at Wisconsin. Pharmacy school. I left after my sophomore year to enlist."

Elizabeth did not respond, and Colling asked, "Did you graduate from Middlebury?"

"Yes. I guess that makes me an older woman, doesn't it?"

Colling was taken by surprise by her response, and uncomfortably offered the only thing he could think of, "I wouldn't say that."

She laughed and said, "I didn't mean to embarrass you." More soberly, she added, "Anyway, it's true. I am older than you. And besides, I'm married."

Colling was doubly surprised at her revelation. "But you're not wearing a ring."

"Well, when I say I'm married, I mean I used to be…or actually, still am. My husband's been missing in action since January."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Thanks."

"What happened?" asked Colling.

"He was…is…a flyer. He was on a B-29, flying missions over Japan. He didn't come back from one of them."

Elizabeth had become pensive, and Colling wished he could think of something appropriate to say. He said, "Well, there are reports all the time about flight crews that went down in China or Siberia, and are only just now turning up."

She looked at him, "That's why I'm still hoping. The Air Force said their last communication indicated they were headed west, away from the Sea of Japan. They might have landed in Siberia, that was closest."

"So did you join the Red Cross after you heard…about him?"

Elizabeth seemed to welcome his question as a chance to change the subject, "Lord, no. I joined to try and get near him when he was ordered overseas. I was stuck in Texas, in a little town near the airbase where he trained. When he left to go overseas, I thought I could stick it out, but it was too hot and dirty, I couldn't stand it, so I went back to live with my parents. I thought first about joining the WACS, but decided I didn't like to march, so I picked the Red Cross. The war over here was almost over, and I thought sure they would send me to the Pacific, but they didn't."

"I had the same thought,…that I would go to the Pacific…but I was wrong too," said Colling.

"Why did you join? You could have stayed in college."

Colling responded, "I had two of my high school friends get killed the same week. At least we got word the same week that they were killed. Both of them were in the Pacific, and I decided I should do something. My dad was against it. So was my mom. But I signed up anyway."

"Do you regret it?" she asked.

"I have mixed feelings. Duty isn't so bad. We work hard, but at least nobody's shooting at me. On the other hand, I feel kind of let-down that the war was over before I got into it."

"Be glad you didn't see combat. Lots of boys in the infantry didn't come back."

A passing ¾-ton truck made them realize that the road crew had moved off far down the road. Colling put the jeep in gear and followed the other vehicle to where the Germans were shoveling. The truck bravely plowed forward through the snow and disappeared, but Colling stopped to wait for more road to be cleared.

Elizabeth asked him, "Am I right that your father owns a drug store in your home town?"

"Right. I have a job waiting after I get through college and pass my boards. Actually, I have a job waiting there any time. I worked after school since I was twelve. Started out delivering for the store on my bicycle."

"Is that how you learned to speak German and Polish so well?"

"Well, like I said, my dad's mother's side of the family are all German, and our town is in an area where most everyone is of German descent, especially the farmers. So my dad insisted that I and my sisters learn to speak German. My grandmother lived with us, and when we were home, she made us speak Deutsch. I used it a lot in the store, too. Our customers appreciated it,…that we would speak to them in German. And I took four years of German class in high school, and one year of German Lit as an elective when I got to college."

"And the Polish?" Elizabeth asked.

"That's from my mom's side of the family. Since I was six, I spent every summer on my Uncle Tadeuzs' farm, and they didn't speak anything but Polish. And every time my mom's people came to the house, they would always talk to me in Polish. So I picked it up pretty well. My Aunt Maria gave me kid's books in Polish to read when I was at the farm. I still can't read it too well, not as good as German, but I can get along okay."

Elizabeth pointed through the windshield to where a grader being used by the Engineers as a snowplow had appeared beyond the German workmen and was headed towards them. The Germans stopped shoveling when they saw that the road ahead was being cleared by the machine. Within a few minutes, Colling and Elizabeth were able to proceed to Camp 146.

Elizabeth was known to the guard who stopped them at the gate, and he waved the jeep through. Colling had never visited the camp previously, and Elizabeth directed him to a large building in the center of the camp that served as American Military Government headquarters. She introduced him to Major Brumerson, the AMGOT officer in charge. Brumerson made his own brief introductions of Colling to several AMGOT technical sergeants and staff sergeants. When Elizabeth told Brumerson that Colling was fluent in Polish, the Major expressed his pleasure, and asked Elizabeth to show Colling where and how to interview the day's schedule of DP's.

The interviews were conducted in a bare room with pine-board walls. Windows frosted with the cold let in some light, supplemented by a bulb with a large green shade hung over each of the tables at which the interpreters and their interviewees sat. Elizabeth gave Colling a sheet of paper filled with numbered questions in Polish. A pad of ruled paper on which he was to write the answers was furnished. She reminded him to record the answers in both Polish and English. He could do the translation after each interview was completed.

Elizabeth explained, "We ask where they are from in Poland. Most of them don't want to go back, so they make up answers. We also ask about family, which causes some inconsistent answers. This bunch today has been interviewed before, and I bet they don't have the same answers as the last time. We won't know, since we

don't have their last answers, but I may remember what some of them told me, and I can't let on if I think they're telling me something different."

The interviews proved to be interesting and beneficial to Colling. He found his facility with the Polish language increasing as the day went by. He had not conversed in Polish since his last visit to his uncle's farm, months before, and he had to ask the first man whom he interviewed, who claimed to be a farm worker from some village in the western part of the country, to repeat his answers more than once. By the end of the day, however, his ear had attuned so that he was scribbling the responses to his questions without difficulty.

He and Elizabeth shared lunch in the mess hall reserved for the camp staff. It consisted of bologna sandwiches and coffee. Colling made a mental note to tell Ferguson that Sergeant Cooley needed to pay a visit to Camp 146, and look in on the cooks that he had assigned to its kitchen. Over the unappetizing sandwiches, Elizabeth told him about her background. Her father was a history professor at Penn State. He had met her mother at his prior position at the University of Pittsburgh, where she was a graduate assistant in Chemistry. Elizabeth was an only child, and her parents had had hopes that she would follow a teaching career as they had. She was not enthused about an academic life, but had given in and gone to Middlebury, in accordance with their wishes. She graduated with the class of 1943, receiving a bachelor's degree in European literature, with dual minors in Polish and German.

She had met her husband when she returned home the summer after graduation, still uncertain as to what she would do. He was an officer candidate attending the University's wartime training program for Air Force officers. They were married when he completed the course, and moved to Texas, where he underwent his final phase of flight training. The only place that they could find in which to live was a three-room former tourist cabin. It seemed to her to be always either too hot or too cold. It was eternally dusty, and the roar of airplane engines overhead never ceased.

In the fall of 1944 he received his orders and left for the Pacific theater. She went back to Pennsylvania. His letters to her were not permitted to reveal exactly where he was, or what he was doing. She joined the Red Cross and was assigned as a nurses' aide to an Army hospital near College Station. She applied for overseas duty, selecting Hawaii from the list of possibilities. She received instead an assignment to England. When she arrived in Portsmouth with a group of thirty other Red Cross employees, they were soon thereafter sent on to France. She spent Christmas, 1944, in Paris, working at an Army hospital. In January, she received a telegram that had been forwarded from Pennsylvania, informing her that her husband was missing in action. She described herself as being in a "state of distraction" for the next few months, but she had continued to do hospital work. In June, she had been notified that she was picked to serve as a morale-boosting Red Cross girl for the occupation forces. She was assigned to the 61st Division, and when it was discovered she could speak Polish, she was tapped for additional duty as an interpreter for AMGOT.

Camp 146 had been built by the Germans as a prisoner-of-war facility for captured Allied soldiers. The 61st Division had originally taken it over to house the thousands of Germans who had surrendered in the closing days of the war. Within two months, AMGOT had assumed control, and droves of former slave workers had begun to arrive. Most of the German POWs had been released by summer's end, but a few hundred remained, segregated from the DPs in a guarded compound. The DPs were also held under guard, to prevent their roaming loose on the German countryside and causing "incidents" with the former ruling class.

The return of the workers to their home countries had not proceeded rapidly, and there were still over five thousand men, women and children in the camp. Dozens more arrived from through-out Germany and Western Europe each week, and it seemed that the population of Camp 146 would never be reduced to zero. There were rumors that the United Nations would be taking over administration of the refugee situation, but no one yet knew what the infant UN would be doing, or when. Consequently, the Army continued to do what it could; trying to find a way to return their charges to their countries of origin; while also trying to sort out from among the Germans, those who would be prosecuted for war crimes, and those who would simply be released.

They had been going to Camp 146 together for only three days when Friday arrived. Colling thought about asking her what her plans for the weekend might be, but opted not to. After Saturday inspection, he went to the Battalion orderly room and checked the work that Tracy had performed in his absence. He found few errors, and was satisfied that the Battalion clerk's responsibilities were being met. On Sunday, after speaking to the men on duty in the PX, he accepted Carley and McGee's invitation to ride the truck to Kummersfeld and see Spellbound, which had just arrived from the States.

On Monday morning, Major Brumerson told them that interrogation work would end at noon, since the next day would be New Year's. On the way back to Kummersfeld, Colling asked Elizabeth if she would be able to join him at the Grabensheim kaserne PX for the New Year's Eve celebration there. He was disappointed when she told him that she had a previous commitment to attend the party to be held at the Kummersfeld officers' club. He pressed her and asked if she could join him for lunch on New Year's Day, and was doubly disappointed when she apologized and said she had other plans.

He recalled Ferguson's warning that Red Cross girls were "officers-only," and resigned himself to accept the wisdom of the sergeant's advice.

Chapter Six

January-February, 1946

After the holidays, the daily drive to Camp 146 settled into a routine. Colling would pick Elizabeth up each weekday morning, and their day would be spent questioning refugees. Following their initial exchange of information about themselves, their conversations in the jeep and at lunch moved on to joking about the camp's food, the foibles of their fellow Americans, and the sometimes-humorous answers provided by the Polish DP's. Colling did not repeat his efforts to see Elizabeth outside their working relationship. He had come to accept the fact that she had no interest in a relationship with an enlisted man, and he made a special effort to not let his disappointment show.

His belief that she was from a different world than his was reinforced one day as they rode in the jeep, when she pointed out some buildings to their right, some distance from the road.

"Do you know what's there?" she asked.

"No idea," Colling responded, without looking away from his driving.

"Part of the Austrian Riding Academy. General Patton brought them out under the Russians' noses. When the weather improves, I'll go back to riding with them. The horses are wonderful. Do you ride?"

The off-handed way she dropped Patton's name as if she were personally acquainted with him irritated Colling, and he had to remind himself that he was not being rational as he tried to answer in a level tone, "Sure. I grew up on the farm, remember? Used to ride all the time. Farm horses."

"No, but these aren't farm horses, Jim. They're thoroughbreds. Lippizanners."

"Never heard of them," he replied, trying to stifle his pique.

Seemingly heedless that Colling was becoming annoyed, she continued, "We used to ride all the time back home. I used to love fox hunting."

"That was for high-society people where I come from. In fact, I don't even know if anybody in Wisconsin does it."

"I'm sorry, Jim. I bet I sounded like some kind of snob."

Her apology disarmed him, and all he could think of to say was, "That's okay."

"Would you like to ride with me, when it gets warmer?"

"Sure, why not? I promise not to fall off." And embarrass you, he thought to himself.

"You'll love it. Even though they're called the 'Austrian Riding Academy,' the stables are run by Hungarians."

"A left-over from the Austro-Hungarian Empire?" Colling asked with a smile.

"Could be. Anyway, the official line is that they are Hungarians who didn't go along with the Nazi line. Patton is trying to get them into the United States, but they're stuck here for the time being."

"Well, if they'll let a tech-five ride one of their thoroughbreds, I'll be happy to ride with you."

She smiled at him, but didn't respond.

Major Brumerson stopped Colling as they entered the camp headquarters, "Corporal, I understand you speak some German."

"Yessir."

"I need someone to interrogate a couple of tough nuts. We think these Krauts were SS officers, but they keep telling us they were only Wehrmacht non-coms."

"I'd be glad to try and help, sir, but I'm not trained for intelligence work."

"No matter. We'll give you a list of questions."

The two Germans were questioned separately, one after the other. Each interview lasted more than an hour. The interrogations were conducted in a room with a mirror mounted on one wall which Colling suspected was one-way glass. Colling worked from the paper Brumerson gave him. He listened to the answers that were given, and tried to ask follow-up questions. Colling found both men to be confident to the point of arrogance, and he understood why the AMGOT staff believed they were Nazi officers.

When he completed the interviews, Colling reported to Brumerson. After handing the major his notes, he said, "Sorry, sir. I don't think I got anywhere with them."

Brumerson smiled. "You did a good job, Corporal. Both of them slipped up a couple of times. My boys will have an opening tomorrow that may let us pry more out of them. Thanks."

Colling saluted and left the major's office, wondering what part of what the Germans had said would be useful. He could not recall any of their responses that he would classify as out of the ordinary.

Colling was not asked to interview any more Germans in the weeks that followed, but continued to work with the Polish inmates. He also found himself looking forward to, and enjoying being in, Elizabeth's company five days a week, despite his sense of hopelessness in there being a more serious relationship. On weekends, he caught up on work at Battalion headquarters and the PX. He watched soldiers go home for discharge, and helped process replacements. The new men consisted of both transfers from other units and new recruits out of training. The Battalion was under-strength, but the numbers were relatively stable. Some of the old regulars like Ferguson, Cooley and Delonzo were still with the unit, while others, such as First Sergeant Hornsby, moved on to other assignments. Aside from Major Harris, the Battalion's officers were turning over rapidly. A new Captain named Mason arrived to replace the commander of Company B. Captain Mason wore a 101st Airborne Division patch and Airborne wings. Within days, he had imposed tough discipline and additional training on the men guarding the hydro-electric dam, and there was talk throughout the Battalion that he would be setting the standard for the rest of the company officers.

The turnover of personnel resulted in an unexpected opportunity for Colling. It began when one of the staff sergeants who had his discharge orders approached Colling to ask if he would be interested in buying two of his tailored gabardine dress shirts. It was known that Colling had cash, and the sergeant thought that Colling would like to improve his appearance. Since the two men were about the same size, Colling tried on the shirts and found that they fitted reasonably well. The sergeant wanted three dollars apiece. He told Colling he had paid five at a military tailor shop outside the gate at Fort Bliss. Colling offered him five dollars for both shirts, and the sergeant accepted. The first purchase led to others, and soon Colling found himself in business, buying tailored uniform clothing from those leaving the Army and re-selling it to new men who had recently joined the Battalion. He also found that some of the old-timers would sell him items near the end of the month, then re-purchase them on payday, so that the same shirts were bought and sold more than once.

Ferguson did not comment on the fact that Colling maintained a rack of shirts and trousers in the storage room where the master sergeant kept his stock of cigarettes, and Colling took it as tacit approval. He was realizing a profit of only two to three dollars on each item sold, but the fact that he had ready money to buy meant that he had first choice of anything that was offered. His position at Battalion headquarters permitted him to be the first to greet new arrivals with a suggestion that tailored uniform shirts might enhance their appearance and impress their sergeants and officers.

He had studiously avoided purchasing officers' uniforms, even though he received frequent offers to sell from departing lieutenants. He was not in a position to approach new officers to sell items of clothing to them; in addition, Army regulations forbade impersonating an officer, and possession of an officer's uniform could easily lead to trouble. So it was that when Lieutenant Peterson came to the orderly room one Saturday afternoon and asked him if he could do him a favor and purchase a full set of uniforms from him, his first reaction was to refuse. Peterson persisted, saying, "Colling, I really need you to help me out with this. Lieutenant Spiegel said he'd buy my extra set of olive drabs, but I got my orders and have to leave tomorrow. Meantime, he's on temporary duty to some kind of a school in Munich for the rest of the week. He agreed to pay me $200 for the complete set…jacket, pants, shirts, caps, shoes, everything. If you can give me $175.00, you can make a quick $25.00 when he gets back from Munich."

"Well, sir, if I get caught with a lieutenant's uniform, I'm in big trouble."

"It'll only be a couple of days. Nobody's gonna find out. I'll leave a note that he can pick the stuff up from you."

"Sir, I don't know about this."

"Look, Colling, I know you're a straight shooter. There's no rank insignia on the jacket. If anybody asks, tell 'em you didn't know it was an officer's outfit."

"They'd know by the cut, sir."

"Colling, I'm in a pinch here. I'm going back to civilian life, and I won't be able to get rid of this uniform once I'm back in the States. Besides, Spiegel is expecting to get them. And I could use the cash. What do you say, huh?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Okay, make it $150.00. You get to make a little more, and everybody's better off."

Colling hesitated for a moment, then answered, "Okay, sir. But only for you. Don't tell anyone else about this."

Peterson brought the uniform and accessories in a B-4 bag and Colling gave him his money. Colling hung the jacket, trousers and shirts in the storage room and placed the caps, shoes and belts underneath the rack. He placed the uniform so that he hoped it would not be noticeable to any of his enlisted customers. As it turned out, Colling found it impossible to sell Peterson's uniform to Lieutenant Spiegel. Spiegel was reassigned to a staff position somewhere else in the American Zone, and did not return to the Battalion. Colling debated whether or not to discard the uniform, but was unable to bring himself to throw away $150.00 of good money.

Towards the end of January, Staff Sergeant Gambelli, in the course of buying a tailored shirt and trousers, asked if Colling could get one of his German friends to show Gambelli and some of the other men how to use their souvenir Lugers and Walther P-38's. Colling immediately thought of Zinsmann, and when he inquired, to Colling's surprise, the German offered to meet them on the firing range behind the kaserne the following Saturday afternoon.

There were more than a dozen Americans at the range when Colling and Zinsmann arrived. Colling had come to act as interpreter, but also out of curiosity. Gambelli had a small crate of German parabellum 9-millimeter ammunition that had been captured sometime in the waning days of the war, and each of the Americans had brought at least one German pistol. Gambelli had three…a Luger and two P-38s. Zinsmann set to work demonstrating how to dismantle and reassemble each of the weapons, with Colling interpreting his instructions. Zinsmann spoke authoritatively, and Colling suspected that the German must have served as a firearms instructor at some time in his career.

Zinsmann next conducted firing practice, watching each of the men as they squeezed off shots at the closest targets down the range, 50 meters away. The German used binoculars that one of the Americans had thought to bring, to check the accuracy of their shooting. Zinsmann made suggestions to each of the men about technique, saying "Gut, sehr gut," when his instructions were followed.

Gambelli finished emptying the magazine in his Luger and offered Colling a turn. Colling at first hesitated, but Zinsmann encouraged him to try the pistol. Colling found that the weapon handled well, with much less recoil than an Army .45. As Colling reloaded the pistol for a second round of fire, Zinsmann asked, "You have never a man shot, is that so?"

Colling answered, "No, I have not."

The German continued, "The Luger is a fine weapon. But it is accurate only to about ten meters. After that, it is only with great luck that anything is hit. I would give you the advice that if you ever must shoot a man, that you allow him to come as close as possible before doing so."

"That could prove difficult."

"Not if he does not know you are armed. Conceal the fact that you are armed as long as possible. A man that you must kill will come close to kill you if he thinks you are unarmed. When you do shoot, aim for the center of the chest or the head. Never hesitate once you know you must kill a man. It must be one act to aim the pistol and shoot. Do not think about anything else but shooting him. Do not consider that he is a man like yourself. If you do that, you will be dead. Here, try holding the Luger at your side. That's it. Now bring it up to shoulder height in one movement, taking aim and pulling the trigger."

Colling did as the German instructed, raising the Luger and firing it until it became one continuous motion. He fired two more full magazines in the same manner, then joined Zinsmann and the other soldiers in dismantling the weapons and cleaning them as the German instructed. Before Colling left to drive Zinsmann back to Number 8 Trebensallee, Gambelli invited Colling to return to the range the following day and help use

up the remaining stock of 9-millimeter ammunition. Colling took the sergeant at his word, and spent three hours on Sunday afternoon practicing with Gambelli's pistols.

Colling mentioned his experience with Zinsmann, and the German's advice, to Elizabeth on Monday during the drive to Camp 146. She listened to his description of Zinsmann's performance, and asked, "Do you think he's a Nazi?"

Colling thought a moment, then said, "I really don't know. The other Germans see him as a figure of authority, but I really don't know."

"If you found out he is, would you be willing to turn him in?"

"Sure, if I knew he was a war criminal. If he was just Waffen SS, I don't think I would."

Elizabeth pressed him, "But the SS did terrible things."

"Well, like I said, if I knew he committed war crimes, he'd have to pay for it."

"So you would protect him if you didn't think he did any of those things?"

"I didn't say I'd protect him. Jesus, Elizabeth,…pardon my language.., but I didn't say that. Why the sudden interest?"

There was a pause before she replied, "I only wondered if you think he's your friend."

"He isn't a friend. He's an acquaintance. Somebody that I was able to get to do work for the Army. He's just another German."

They rode in silence for awhile, Colling aware that she was thinking about something. This was the first time that he could remember that she had expressed anything of a political nature. He realized that, in spite of numerous conversations about her upbringing, he had no idea whether her family was Republican or Democrat. Her comments had led him to believe that she had come from at least moderate wealth, more likely upper middle class, but that didn't tell him whether she would have cast her vote for Dewey or Roosevelt. Colling himself was not yet twenty-one, and any consideration of how he would vote remained somewhat theoretical.

The questions in his mind were not resolved before they arrived at the camp, nor was there any discussion related to politics while they ate lunch, principally because they were joined by the two Polish-speaking AMGOT technical sergeants who formed the other half of the interrogation team, and they wanted to talk only about their upcoming furlough in Switzerland.

That afternoon, however, they had just driven through the camp gate when Elizabeth spoke, "I saw an interview with some soldier in Stars and Stripes where he said the Russians were the best soldiers in the world."

"Could be. Enough of them died fighting the Germans."

"Roosevelt had a lot of praise for the Russians during the war."

"Yeah, I remember." Colling decided to remain non-committal until he understood what Elizabeth was getting at, and particularly that maybe she was hinting about what side of the political fence she was on.

Elizabeth continued, "Roosevelt didn't seem to think there was anything wrong with the Soviet Union."

Colling decided to go on the offensive, "How about you? You think the Soviet Union's okay?"

She flared at his question, "My mother was born in Poland. How do you think I feel?"

"I'd guess you probably don't agree with F.D.R."

"Good guess. Nobody remembers that Stalin invaded Poland at the same time Hitler did. Only Stalin got to keep his half when the war was over."

"Third," corrected Colling, adding, "Russia only took a third of Poland, not half. But you're right, they did get to keep it. Part of the deal at Teheran or Potsdam, I can't remember which."

"And what do you think?" she asked testily.

"My family came from Poland, too, Elizabeth. So I know all about the Soviet invasion in '39. That's all my uncles talked about. They came from eastern Poland, and the family members that stayed behind now live in the Soviet Union. Fact is, I don't much like it."

"So you don't agree with F.D.R.'s opinion about 'Uncle Joe'?"

"My folks didn't agree with F.D.R., period. My dad voted Republican in every election from 1932 to 1944. He's a small business owner, and he disagrees with almost everything the Democrats stand for, and I agree with my dad. Does that answer your question?"

"What about the Communists?"

"They're the same or worse than the Nazis. They do the same things…burn churches, kill anyone who speaks out against them. But there are lots of people who swallow their line. My mom had a cousin who was a

Party member in Milwaukee. He died in January and they sent her his effects. A trunk full of propaganda leaflets he must have saved from before the German invasion of Russia…anti-British stuff and keeping America out of the war. He did a sudden about-face in June of '41, and started preaching that we needed to go to war against Germany. A week before, he was praising the German army, saying how great it was that they were beating the imperialist British in North Africa. Strictly Party line. My dad told my mom he didn't have a brain in his head."

Elizabeth made no further comment, and Colling dropped her off in Kummersfeld wondering whether he had been too outspoken. He had been told by his father when he started high school that it was best to confine one's political viewpoint to family discussions. There were more Democratic voters in Belle Cors than Republicans, and flaunting one's politics could be bad for business. This was the first time that he could remember that he had expressed himself to an outsider.

To his surprise and relief, Elizabeth did not mention their political discussion when they next rode together. As time went by, he realized that he still did not really know what political party she might support. He was reasonably certain that she shared his opinion concerning the Soviets, but she had not made any explicit comment supporting either political party. He decided not to bring up the issue on his own. If Elizabeth chose to talk about politics, he would respond, but would not engage in any arguments on the subject.

February brought a series of releases of displaced persons from Camp 146. The Czechs, Italians, and Yugoslavians in Camp 146 had been choosing overwhelmingly to return to their native countries, and many had been leaving in small groups all winter. The Poles and Russians making up the bulk of the population had resisted any repatriation, but now they were being forced to depart, either being placed on eastbound trains, or assigned to other camps established by the UN closer to the larger cities in the British and American Zones. The new camps were said to provide better quarters, with the added attraction that the DP's were permitted to leave during the day to do paid work, primarily on reconstruction projects.

The decrease in the number of inmates meant that Colling and Elizabeth were less in demand as interpreters. Major Brumerson first reduced their work schedule to three days a week, and eventually told Colling that he would not be needed.

Colling informed Sergeant Ferguson that Major Brumerson had relieved him from his interpreter's duties, and that he would have more time to devote to his responsibilities at headquarters, but asked if he could continue to serve as Miss Hamilton's driver on the Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays she would need to be driven to Camp 146. Sergeant Ferguson looked at him with a knowing smile and gave him permission.

Colling's greater availability at the kaserne proved to be opportune, because the Battalion lost two of its medics in mid-February. They had taken advantage of the Army's re-enlistment offer, which granted a thirty-day furlough in the States and choice of duty station to anyone who signed up for an additional three-year term of service. Both men had chosen Fort Ord, California, to be near what they believed would be sandy beaches, sunshine and Hollywood starlets.

Ferguson made attempts to replace his medics, but with no result, so that Colling found him complaining one Tuesday morning about the need to provide transportation from Grabensheim to the Regimental aid station in Kummersfeld for soldiers answering sick call.

Colling interrupted the sergeant's grumbling, "Sarge, what about me holding sick call?"

Ferguson said, "You ain't a qualified medic, Colling."

"Sarge, sick call is not much different from working a prescription counter in a drug store. You listen to what's wrong, and either give some medication or send 'em to a doctor. That's all Willman and Bradley did when they were here."

"But they gave shots, too."

"I can do that. My dad taught me. I gave shots all the time on my uncle's farm."

"But not to people, right?"

"Yeah, but it's even easier on human beings. At least you can see the veins when there's no fur in the way."

"I must be nuts to even listen to you, Colling."

"But what other choice do you have, Sarge? I can do it, give me a shot at it."

"Poor choice of words. Besides, three days a week, you got to drive that Hamilton dame out to the camp. Sick call is in the morning, and you won't be here half the time."

"Sick call is at 06:00, Sarge. I can ask Miss Hamilton if I can pick her up at 08:30 instead of 07:00. That way, I can see everyone who shows up for sick call, and drive anyone who needs to see the doctor to Kummersfeld. I can pick them up on my way back from the camp in the morning, or when I bring Elizabe…I mean.., Miss Hamilton, back to her quarters in the afternoon."

"Okay, Colling. I'll go for this if you can convince the Regimental Surgeon that you're qualified to be a medic. I'll call and make an appointment for you to see him this afternoon."

The Regimental Surgeon was Doctor Lewisohn, whose somewhat hurried and distracted manner, Colling imagined, was due to his being the only American doctor in the area. The Regiment's allotted complement of medical personnel was severely depleted by discharges and transfers.

Colling explained to Lewisohn, who held the rank of Captain, that he had experience working with his father in the family pharmacy, and that he had completed two years of college, majoring in pharmacy. Lewisohn asked him a series of questions about simple diseases and injuries, and how Colling would treat them. The physician quizzed him concerning medications, their uses and dosages. Appearing to be satisfied with the extent of Colling's knowledge, Lewisohn took Colling into one of the examining rooms and called in a sergeant who was the doctor's assistant. He made Colling first demonstrate the splinting of various fractures, being careful only to refer to the broken bones by their anatomical names. The doctor was pleased that Colling knew the difference between the tibia and the humerus. The test ended with Colling giving the sergeant first an intramuscular injection of a half-c.c. of sterile saline, then inserting an intravenous needle in the sergeant's arm. The sergeant had blanched when Lewisohn told him he was about to be a guinea pig, but closed his eyes and extended his arm to Colling. When Colling completed the insertion of both needles on the first attempt, and without incident, the sergeant told Colling that his intravenous technique was about the best he had ever seen. Lewisohn informed Colling that he would be happy to sign any order assigning Colling to the Grabensheim dispensary as a medic, and expressed his relief that someone competent would be able to take sick call and take some of the workload off the Regimental aid station.

Before Colling returned to Grabensheim, he sought out Elizabeth in the Red Cross quarters. He had to give his name to a middle-aged Red Cross matron behind a desk that barred entrance into the female Red Cross billet, who then went in search of Elizabeth. The matron returned to her desk, and a few minutes later, Elizabeth appeared. He explained his new assignment as a medic and asked her if, in the future, he could pick her up at 08:30 rather than 07:00, and she agreed. Only after Colling was seated in his jeep did he realize that she had been wearing a civilian dress, and that she might have been interrupted as she was dressing to go out for the evening.

Colling found himself slightly nervous as he unlocked the dispensary door on Friday morning and, for the first time, announced to the half-dozen waiting soldiers that sick call was in progress. He had spent the better part of the previous afternoon and evening familiarizing himself with the location of instruments and supplies, and making sure that there was a stock of each of the items that made up the Army Standard Drug Stock List. He discovered that the two medics whom he was replacing had done a good job of keeping things in order. The only thing that he found to be in short supply was envelopes of a dozen aspirin. He made up forty of the small envelopes, filling in the printed block on the front of each of the small white envelopes by writing "Aspirin – 5 grains" and "Take two every 4 hours."

The first two men in line had diarrhea, and Colling provided each of them with a bottle of bismuth subnitrate suspension. The next man was one of the replacement privates who had serious blisters on his feet from poorly fitting shoes. Colling showed him how to lance the blisters with a needle and apply protective tape. He also used a prescription pad to write a note to Staff Sergeant Morton in the supply room, that the soldier needed new, better fitting shoes. Because Morton had decided to remain in the Army, he was actively seeking promotion to technical sergeant, and Colling was reasonably certain that the new footwear would be provided without any argument.

A corporal from C Company presented with a sprained ankle that needed taping, and after Colling had wrapped it, he instructed the man as to how he could do so himself for the next few days, and gave him a roll of three-inch gauze dressing and another of adhesive tape. After filling out a relief-from-duty form for the man to give to his first sergeant, he gave him an envelope containing a half-dozen tablets of aspirin with codeine, and told him to return if the swelling did not come down within a day or two.

Three men had symptoms of gonorrhea, and after telephoning Dr. Lewisohn and obtaining his advice and authorization, Colling gave the men injections of penicillin, and packages of the new penicillin tablets, reminding them that they would have to unwrap them from the foil they were sealed in, and hold them in their mouths to get them to work. He warned them that if they did not follow his directions, they would have to return that afternoon and three times a day for the following five days for a series of injections. Colling dealt with the remaining minor ailments in what he believed was an efficient way, and was gratified to see that the line of waiting men had almost disappeared. Each patient's complaint, symptoms and treatment had to be carefully entered in the dispensary log, and the same information duplicated on the sick call report. Colling soon realized that this took at least as long as the treatment itself.

The final patient was one of Cooley's kitchen assistants, a PFC who had taken his place at the end of the line. He came into the examining room bent over, complaining of a severe "belly-ache." Colling took the man's temperature, felt his abdomen, and decided to place a second call to Dr. Lewisohn. After a short conference, the physician confirmed Colling's suspicions, and told him he would send an ambulance to bring the man to Kummersfeld. Colling reminded Lewisohn that he would be on his way to Kummersfeld within the hour, and the doctor agreed that if Colling could bring him, it would save time.

Colling was about to assist the PFC from the dispensary to Colling's jeep when Sergeant Gambelli appeared, apparently having held back from waiting with the other men. Embarrassed, he complained of having had the "crabs" for some time. After hastily consulting a typewritten instruction sheet left behind by the previous medics, Colling told him to shave his pubic hair and liberally apply DDT powder to his groin area. Colling restrained himself from asking the sergeant if his opinion of Italian women had changed as he handed him an envelope containing a supply of DDT. Colling asked Gambelli to inform Sergeant Ferguson that sick call was over, and he was transporting a sick man to the regimental aid station.

Luckily there was no snow and the road was dry, so that Colling managed to drive the familiar route to the aid station in Kummersfeld in record time. Two medics came out to meet them to carry the soldier inside as soon as Colling's jeep pulled up. Colling helped them lift the man onto a wheeled litter and push it down the hallway to where they met Dr. Lewisohn, who was wearing a surgical gown. The doctor walked beside the litter, asking questions of the man and Colling, as they rolled the groaning PFC into a room that served as a crude operating facility. After some further examination, the doctor told Colling and those who would not be assisting with the appendectomy to clear the room.

Colling had tossed the dispensary log-book and clipboard holding the sick call reports into the back seat of the jeep, and before going to pick up Elizabeth, he completed his entries sitting in front of the aid station. He noticed an olive-drab Army ambulance arrive, and guessed that following surgery, the mess-hall PFC would be transferred to the 61st Division field hospital near Landsgau, or perhaps even to the general hospital in Munich. The ambulance was still there when he started the jeep and drove to the Kummersfeld Rathaus that housed the Red Cross.

Elizabeth was waiting on the curb. She greeted him cheerfully as she slipped into the passenger seat, and asked, "How was your first day as a medic?"

"Not bad. I had an appendicitis I had to bring down. That's why I was a little late."

"I didn't notice," she replied.

Colling went on to describe his other patients, omitting the gonorrhea cases and Gambelli's problem. She asked what he would be doing the rest of the day while she was at Camp 146, and he told her he would return to the kaserne and check on Tracy's clerking and how things were going at the PX. He explained that he would have to complete the dispensary paperwork as well, but that he would have that completed in time to drive her back to her quarters.

He was surprised when she asked if he could pick her up at the camp at noon, instead of later in the afternoon, as he usually did. He asked why, expecting her to say that she had made arrangements for a long weekend. But instead, she responded, "It's Friday, and I feel like having a nice lunch somewhere. There's that little Gasthaus about half-way between the camp and Grabensheim. Why don't we try it."

Colling felt a pleasant sensation in his chest, and answered, "Yeah, sure. I don't know what the food will be like, but I'd enjoy that."

"I've heard the food is fairly good. The Hungarians from the Riding Academy say they eat there all the time."

His pleasure suddenly dampened, Colling said little for the remainder of their journey together. He dropped her at the camp's headquarters, promised he would return to retrieve her at noon, and returned to Grabensheim.

The tasks that he had described to Elizabeth took little time to complete once he was back at the kaserne. His final job was to make sure all of the dispensary paperwork for that morning's sick call was in order. Afterwards, he collected his belongings from the barracks squad room and carried them to new quarters in a room adjoining the dispensary. One of the benefits that the medics had enjoyed was separate billeting, in order to be readily available in case of a medical emergency.

There were two large rooms available. Finding no difference between them, Colling selected the one furthest from the door to the dispensary and moved in. The room was meant to house two, and when he had finished putting his own clothing and equipment in one of the wall lockers, and making sure his funds were as well-concealed as before, he transferred the uniforms that he had been keeping in the storage room with Ferguson's cigarettes into the second locker. An added amenity of the medics' quarters was a desk and chair for each occupant. He noted that the room was large enough to accommodate two additional wall lockers, and promised himself he would find a way to add them to the room's furnishings.

Before leaving for Camp 146, Colling informed Tracy that he would be driving Miss Hamilton at an earlier time, and asked that he convey that information to Ferguson. Any acutely ill or injured men should be sent to the aid station at Regiment.

The Gasthaus Weisse Hirsch was located on the side of a hill, and a walled flagstone terrace had been built to provide a view of a small glen and low, forested hills beyond. There was no outside dining provided during the winter, but the smiling innkeeper seated Colling and Elizabeth at a table next to a window overlooking the deserted terrace. When Colling spoke to the man in German and indicated that he would be paying with American dollars, not Military Marks, his face brightened even more. Colling asked Elizabeth, and she agreed that the choice of food should be left to the proprietor. After bringing them each a stein of beer, his wife and teen-aged daughters started by serving them hot potato-vegetable soup, followed by thick Bratwursten with red cabbage and boiled potatoes. The innkeeper apologized when he brought a tall bottle of Riesling, explaining that his wine cellar was much depleted by the war. That apology was followed by a second, that the lack of sugar and coffee meant that there would be no proper conclusion to the meal. The combination of beer and wine that he had consumed led Colling to suggest that he might bring both missing commodities on their next visit. He asked the proprietor for his name and was told that it was Schuler.

As it turned out, over the following weeks, Colling did bring several pounds of sugar and several of coffee to Herr Schuler at the Weisse Hirsch. Lunch on Friday became a routine for Colling and Elizabeth throughout February, and their return to Kummersfeld and Grabensheim came later with each passing week.

When not driving Elizabeth, Colling found himself kept very busy. There was less time required to oversee the Battalion clerk responsibilities, and the men assigned to the PX required little of his time, but his duties as a medic seemed to grow. He seldom had time to attend movies on Saturday evenings with his friends from the Battalion. And aside from their time together in the jeep and Friday lunch, he did not see Elizabeth. Whenever he started to imagine how she must be spending her weekends, he deliberately put such thoughts out of his mind.

Colling maintained his contacts with the German community. Once when calling on Zinsmann concerning some plumbing repair work that was needed at the kaserne, he found that the German's apartment at 8 Trebensallee had been refurbished and filled with new furniture. He concluded that the builder was doing well. For the first time, Zinsmann introduced him to a woman whom he said was his wife, and to three young children who were playing on the apartment's living room floor. Colling had his doubts about Zinsmann's description of the relationship, since the youngest of the children addressed him as "Onkel Klaus" during the visit.

Colling also continued to visit Frau Bergheim, taking her coffee and sugar and what news of her sons as he was able to obtain through Ferguson's contacts in Munich. Despite the firmly-held and frequently-stated beliefs of his fellow soldiers, the relationship with the farmer's widow was devoid of any romantic or sexual interest.

Chapter Seven

March-April, 1946

The beginning of March brought more days without snow, and slightly warmer temperatures. Spring had not yet arrived, however, and there were few days when the sun was in the sky for any sustained period. Snow had been replaced by chilling rain, and the gray gloom of winter was still present, just in different form. This served to make the second Friday in March unusual, when the sun broke through the clouds as they drove to the camp. Before she left the jeep, Elizabeth asked if they might be able to have a picnic at lunch time. When Colling arrived to pick her up at noon, he had a basket in the rear of the jeep from the Weisse Hirsch that Herr Schuler and his wife had packed with ham sandwiches and potato salad. There were two bottles of beer and one of wine as well, and a small chocolate cake made possible by the sugar and chocolate supplied to Herr Schuler by Colling.

They found a spot on a hillside where the ground was pushing up new green growth. Colling spread an Army blanket and they sat quietly eating the meal that the innkeeper and his wife had prepared. Before he had completely finished his cake, Colling put down his fork and announced, "Sorry, I can't eat any more. If I ate like this every day, I wouldn't fit into my uniform."

Elizabeth placed her fork on the small dish that held her cake and agreed, "You're right. I wonder what the Germans are going to do when rationing ends? They'll all be as fat as hogs."

Colling laughed. "As far as I can tell, the Master Race all looked pretty fit before the war. I don't imagine they'll all become over-weight."

"Maybe not, but there were lots of fat Bürgermeisters and Hausfraus around before the war."

They continued to speculate on what lay in store for Germany as Elizabeth repacked the picnic basket. When she finished, they sat in silence for a few moments, both of them looking off into the distance. The sun was fully out, and the sky blue and filled with puffy white clouds. Colling was contemplating how quiet their hillside was when Elizabeth spoke.

"Jim, I want to tell you something," she said, her tone more serious than he was used to.

"What's that?"

"Jim, I want you to know I think you're very nice."

Her statement was unexpected, and Colling was unable to think of a response immediately. His mind raced, expecting her next statement to be that she did not want to see him anymore, perhaps telling him about some lieutenant or captain with whom she had decided she was in love.

Seeing he had been taken off guard, she smiled and continued, "Oh, Jim, I can see what you're thinking. You think I'm going to give you the brush-off. But you're wrong. You should know I like you very much…."

Before she could finish, he put his arms around her and kissed her. She returned his embrace, and Colling felt a rush of excitement. When they pulled apart, they were both slightly out of breath. Elizabeth was the first to speak, "Golly, that was nice."

"Ummm," said Colling, as he pulled her to him again. As she came into his arms, he pushed her back onto the blanket. After a few moments, he felt her struggling, and when he took his lips from hers, her arms were on his shoulders, and she was saying, "Wait, wait, Jim." She sat up and he leaned away from her.

"Whew!" she said. "You don't make a pass at me all this time, and now it's sirens and flashing lights."

"I'm sorry…," he started to say, when she interrupted.

"You don't need to apologize. It's just that I didn't think things would be quite so intense so quickly."

"We can do whatever you like, Liz. I promise you I won't push it."

"Well, I think it should be a little slower. I hope there isn't anyone around, watching us."

This made Colling survey their surroundings. He could see no one, but he understood how she might be uncomfortable, being out in the open. He said, "Liz, you know I think I fell for you the first time I saw you. I thought you were the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen."

Elizabeth blushed. "I have to be honest, Jim. I was curious to meet you, but I wasn't attracted to you the first time."

"I can understand that. I was just some guy behind a bar. And an enlisted man at that."

"Do you want to know when I first got interested?"

"Sure."

"The first time we drove to the camp, and got stuck because of all the snow that day. You were so interested in me, and we talked about a lot of things I never talked about with anybody before."

"Not even your husband?"

She paused for a moment, “No, not even him. I believe that I actually know more about you than I did about him.”

Taking note of her use of the past tense, and wondering whether it was inadvertent or not, Colling said, “You understand, Liz, one of the reasons I never made a pass at you was because I didn’t know how you still felt about him. I mean, you were married, and still waiting to know about him being missing in action.”

“I’ve decided he isn’t coming back, Jim. For awhile I was hopeful, but it’s been over a year now. If he were alive, the Air Force would have heard something.”

Colling thought about what she had said. He knew there was a risk involved in becoming more deeply involved with her. There was always the chance that her husband would turn up. He could be in the hills of Manchuria right now, isolated in some village, perhaps injured and unable to communicate with the outside world. Colling looked at her and she turned to him so that he was staring into her eyes. He said, “Will you be my girl, Liz?”

He could see her eyes filling, and then she said softly, “Yes, Jim, I will.”

They kissed again, as passionately as before, but after a few minutes, she let him know they needed to stop. She asked, “Jim, is there some place we could go and have some privacy?”

“Well, the Weisse Hirsch, maybe.”

“Not there. The Schulers know us. If we take a room, they’ll know what we’re doing. Or at least they’ll think they’ll know what we’re doing. And besides, the Hungarians eat there, and we can’t be sure there won’t be any gossip. No, I don’t think a Gasthaus is the answer.”

They discussed possibilities. The Red Cross billets were guarded and off-limits to men. His quarters at the kaserne did not have guaranteed privacy, and getting Elizabeth in and out of the post without being seen would be impossible. Colling promised to think about what they could do. In the meantime, he suggested that they could neck in the jeep. She laughed and told him that he would get in trouble for misappropriation of government property.

As a matter of fact, they did neck in the jeep at every opportunity over the next couple of weeks. One of the Camp 146 AMGOT sergeants mentioned to Elizabeth that Major Brumerson had commented that she seemed to be arriving late with more frequency, and Ferguson asked Colling why he was arriving back at Grabensheim so late on the afternoons he was driving “that Red Cross dame around.” It looked as if it would only be a matter of time before they would be discovered in the parked jeep, and someone in the military hierarchy would intervene to bring an end to Colling’s acting as Elizabeth’s chauffeur.

With this threat foremost in his mind, Colling had been casting about desperately to think of a place where they might find privacy. When the solution presented itself, he thought how foolish he had been not to think of it sooner.

Colling was making his usual delivery of a pound each of sugar and coffee to Frau Bergheim when it dawned on him that her farmhouse was large and she was the only one living there. As he sat with her at the table in the tiled kitchen drinking coffee while she smoked a cigarette, a ritual in his visits to the farm, he began to ask questions about the house. He casually asked when it had been built and by whom, its size and so on. When he asked the number of bedrooms, the German Hausfrau’s face broke into a broad smile.

“You have perhaps a girl, Colling? And you wish a place for privacy to have, yes?”

Colling realized his face was reddening as he answered, “Well, yes, Frau Bergheim. I am thinking if that might be possible.”

“Come,” she said, rising from her chair and beckoning him to follow. She took him to a flight of stairs, and as they ascended, she commented, “When my husband Josef and I first were married, his father and mother owned the farm. Josef and I were given the garret in which to live. Josef with his own hands finished it to make it suitable. My husband was also a very modern man. He convinced his father to install plumbing and electricity. The NSDAP government subsidized such improvements.”

Colling had noted that as the Germans he met came to know him better, there was less hesitancy to avoid referring to the Nazis, although most of them used the initials standing for Nationalsozialistiche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, the official name of the Nazi party, rather than the term “Nazi.” He had yet to hear any German use Hitler’s name in a positive manner.

They had arrived on the third-floor landing. Frau Bergheim ushered him into a pleasant gabled room. A set of double windows at the far end was framed by the angles of the roof. Its plastered interior walls were set off

by dark wood trim around the doors and windows. Its furnishings consisted of a double bed, a dresser and a small table that could serve as a desk or dressing table. Frau Bergheim proudly pointed out a door, behind which was a small room with a toilet and sink. "Josef put that in for me. There is a bath downstairs, but having the water closet up here meant we did not have to use the outhouse or go to the kitchen to wash. And the furnace downstairs means there is heat," she said, gesturing towards a small radiator against one wall.

"Frau Bergheim," asked Colling, "Is it possible that I could rent this room from you?"

"Of course. Is not that why I have showed you the room?"

"Of course. And how much would the rent be?"

"Nothing. You have been very kind to me. You have brought me news of my boys. You have brought me sugar, coffee and cigarettes. I could not ask you to pay me for this room. And if you tell me when you will be here, I will be somewhere else at that time. We who have farms in this neighborhood help each other, and I can be at another farm on any day you may name."

"I will need the room on Fridays. If we…I…will be here any other day, I will tell you in advance."

"Good. So then it is done," she replied. As she handed him the key to the house, she said, "If she is a nice German girl, be true to her."

Colling told Elizabeth about their good fortune the following day. Because it was only Wednesday, he had nearly three days to wait. When Friday came, they ate a hasty meal at the Weisse Hirsch, then drove to Frau Bergheim's farm. Everything was deserted, and Colling parked the jeep inside the barn that was attached to the farmhouse.

When Elizabeth walked into their room, she exclaimed, "Oh, Jim, it's just perfect!" She went to the windows. "Jim, there's a flower box. When it gets warmer, we can open the windows and enjoy the flowers blooming."

Frau Bergheim had anticipated their visit, and had opened the valve on the radiator. The room was a comfortable temperature, and feeling awkward and not knowing what else to say, Colling commented that the room was warm. Elizabeth smiled.

She said, "I think I'll use the WC to change. Why don't you turn down the bed."

Elizabeth closed the door to the water closet behind her, and Colling hastily undressed and slid under the covers. After a few minutes, Elizabeth emerged, wearing, as far as Colling could judge, only her slip. She slipped in beside him. Without hesitation, their bodies and lips were pressed together, their excitement growing. The heat of her body was urging him on, and Colling fought to control his physical reactions, holding back and prolonging the inevitable. He thought back to the instructions he had read in Dr. Fishburn's Manual of Successful Marriage that his parents had seemed to have carelessly left on the bookshelf in his father's study when he was fourteen. He also visualized the diagrams of the female anatomy from the human physiology books he had studied in college. His attention to pleasing Elizabeth slowed his own impulses, so that he felt in control when her movements became more spasmodic, and she began to moan and cry out, first softly, then with more intensity, until her pelvis thrust wildly upwards and he sensed she had had an orgasm. Once he entered her, his own movements matched hers, and he was unable to prolong the arrival of his own climax.

They lay entwined for some time, whispering endearments. When Colling finally withdrew and settled beside her, Elizabeth asked, "My gosh, where did you learn to do that?"

He smiled down at her, "I paid a lot of attention in anatomy class."

"Oh, really? Don't try and tell me this is your first time."

"Yep," he replied.

"You're kidding!"

"No, really."

Elizabeth suddenly sat upright, "Ohmigosh! You weren't using anything!" She jumped from the bed and ran into the water closet. Colling could hear water running, then after a short while, she returned. Colling watched her as she walked towards the bed, nude, and thought how beautiful she was.

As she sat on the bed, she said, "One good thing. It's probably my safe time. Keep your fingers crossed that a little Jimmy doesn't show up in nine months."

Colling was contrite, "I'm sorry. I got some rubbers from the pro station at the kaserne, but things went so, you know,…fast, that I forgot to put one on."

"Well, from now on, we have to use them," she replied, leaning over to kiss him.

"I promise I will, Sweetheart," he said.

She pulled closer to him and whispered in his ear, "Maybe you want to start right now." He felt his excitement grow as her hand stroked him, and she said, "Maybe I ought to make sure by putting it on for you."

Afterwards, as they dressed, Elizabeth suggested that they confine their love-making to Fridays. One day a week when their whereabouts could not be accounted for by their superiors was risky enough. If they were spending three afternoons in bed at the Bergheim farm, they were sure to be discovered, and repercussions would certainly follow. While Colling was not happy with the prospect of having to see and be near Elizabeth when he could not make love to her, he did have to admit that her caution made sense. Ferguson was already suspicious. In fact, Colling would have guessed that the sergeant had a pretty good idea why he was taking so much time to drive Elizabeth home on Friday afternoons. Elizabeth had mentioned to him that the supervisor and chaperone of the female Red Cross staff, Miss Boysen, had interrogated her on the same subject. Elizabeth had passed it off as wanting to enjoy lunch at the Weisse Hirsch, as a change from the Kummersfeld mess hall food, but Boysen, who saw protecting the reputations and chastity of her charges as a special mission, made no secret of her skepticism.

Accordingly, Colling and Elizabeth fell into a routine as the next few weeks passed. They would indulge themselves at the farmhouse, then eat at the Weisse Hirsch. As the days grew warmer, they would sometimes have Herr Schuler pack a picnic basket and bring it back to the farm.

Colling was certain that he had never been so happy, but his light-heartedness was tempered by concern about the future. While he did not share his thoughts with Elizabeth, he spent a significant amount of time contemplating what their fate would be if she were to say yes to his proposal of marriage. He wanted to complete his studies, but was unsure how he could manage to support Elizabeth as his wife at the same time. There had been one married student when he attended college, but the man's family had been wealthy, and there had been money from some kind of trust fund. Those of his fellow soldiers who were married seemed to universally complain about the effect that the sparse Army pay had on their wives. There was some discussion about the proposed educational funding for veterans that was being debated in Congress. The alternative, of course, was to return to Belle Cors and work for his father. Or possibly find a job elsewhere. He was not sure how Elizabeth would take to living in a small town. After all, he was convinced that her background placed her far above anything she would find in Wisconsin.

His military duties also continued to keep him occupied. Three replacement medics arrived at the First Battalion, two PFCs and a private. The PFCs, Hermanson and Prevatt, were transfers from an armored battalion that had been deactivated; Private Barnes was fresh out of training. Ferguson immediately sent the two PFCs to Company A at Camp 146, to replace the medics there who had received their discharge orders. Barnes was assigned to Colling, and the two of them held sick call together, dealing with the routine complaints and ailments that came to them.

As units were dissolved, their personnel who were not eligible for discharge were used to fill gaps in the forces remaining in the Army of Occupation. Consequently, men continued to come and go from the 40th Regiment, and Colling was frequently called upon to help support the battalion clerks, now numbering three, in typing and mimeographing the mass of paperwork involved. Because of Colling's initiative and leadership, Ferguson relied on him and continued to have an increasing confidence in him, so that Colling's relationship with the master sergeant was one of growing mutual respect.

Major Harris began to spend more time in the battalion headquarters, and when Colling remarked on it, Ferguson told him, "The Herr Oberst came home. Seems he was able to get away from the Russki's and surrender to the Limeys up north. They've had him in a POW cage all this time. Finally cleared him and sent him on his way. Bastard had to walk home."

"Did he catch the Major and his wife together?" asked Colling.

"No. Lucky for the Major, he was here when he showed up at the villa. The Countess made a phone call to tip him off."

"Didn't Major Harris have his clothes and stuff out there?"

"Yeah. He had me drive out and pick it up. I made like the Army had commandeered the place as an officers' billet. I doubt if the Oberst bought it. Things might be a little tense at the dinner table these days," said Ferguson with a smile.

"You think the Count will turn the Major in for fraternization?"

"Could be, but the Old Man will ignore it. Harris was always one of his favorites. That's why nothin' has been said about it all this time."

"What do you think the Major is going to do?"

"Well, you know he has a wife and two kids back in North Carolina. Up to now, he didn't seem too anxious to request to go home. His brother's been after him to come help him run the family saw-mill. Yesterday he asked me to fill out the paperwork, and I need you to do it on the Q-T. It ain't a good idea for it to get around too early that he's leaving."

Colling completed the forms needed for Major Harris' request for transfer to inactive reserve status, and put them on the Major's desk for his signature. As he did so, he happened to think that Ferguson was probably going to be leaving soon himself.

A week later, it was announced that Colonel Harrington had been approved for promotion to brigadier general. Sergeant Ferguson was elated, since the Colonel had promised him that if he received his star, he would use his influence to see that Ferguson was assigned to Panama. Colling wondered what type of men would replace the Old Man and the senior NCO.

Colling picked Elizabeth up at Camp 146 that afternoon. It was Friday, and he was looking forward to their afternoon together. They had just driven through the camp gate and he was about to voice his thoughts on the subject of Harrington and Ferguson's replacements when she spoke first, "Jim, they've fired me."

Startled, he said, "What? What do you mean?"

"Most of the DP's have left, and Major Brumerson told me today that he appreciated all I had done for them, but they wouldn't need my services anymore."

Colling's mind was racing. Without the need to serve as Elizabeth's driver, there would be no excuse for their being together. He asked, "Any chance you can get another assignment where you would need me to drive?"

She didn't look at him, but he could see that she was frowning. "No, I can't think of anything."

"I think Ferguson would still let me use the jeep if I told him I had to see some Germans on Army business."

"But Miss Boysen would never approve me riding along, Jim."

"Maybe we can go to Munich and get a hotel room. I can get a weekend pass."

"I can't do that. We have parties we have to host, and we have to serve doughnuts and hot dogs when the sports teams are playing, and baseball is just starting up. Besides, I wouldn't want to be going to some tawdry hotel room. It just makes me cringe to think about it."

Discouraged by her comments, Colling did not reply, and they drove in gloomy silence.

Colling had made arrangements with Herr Schuler for a picnic basket to be ready for them at the Weisse Hirsch. Colling decided that they would eat at the farmhouse. The atmosphere in their room was in contrast to the cheerfulness he normally encountered when he climbed the stairs after hiding the jeep in the barn. Elizabeth had laid out their lunch, and they ate the sandwiches, their conversation limited to comments on Herr Schuler's food.

Elizabeth poured herself a glass of Moselwein that the innkeeper had managed to procure from some source that he refused to reveal. After taking a sip, she said, "Jim, I have an idea."

"What's that?" answered Colling, pausing as he drank from a bottle of beer.

"Well, I have been thinking about something I need to do. Maybe we can do it together. I need your help."

His curiosity aroused, Colling asked, "What do you want to do?"

"I don't think I've mentioned it, but I still have relatives in Poland. My mother's brother…my uncle…is still there. I've been asking about the chances of getting him to the States, and the Red Cross has said they can help."

"So how do I figure in?"

"Well, you could go with me. You speak Polish, and they say things are pretty dangerous over there. It would be safer for me to have someone with me. And Mildred...Miss Boysen… wouldn't object if I had Colonel Harrington's okay, and she knew I would be accompanied."

"Not if she knew it was me that was accompanying you, she wouldn't."

"Well, she would if she thought an officer was going with me."

Colling was taken aback, "But I'm not an officer. And I don't intend to be court-martialed for impersonating an officer."

"But it would mean we could be together. We could go as husband and wife."

"There's such things as ID cards, and travel papers. We'd be crossing borders, and they would be looking at everything. I could go to the stockade if I get caught, and you probably would too," he said emphatically.

"Jim. Don't worry. I have connections. I can get papers, a uniform for you, everything."

"You have connections?" he asked, "Where do you get connections?"

She touched his arm, smiling at him, "My parents know some people who are connected with the Polish exile government. The exile government is opposing the Communists, and they've still got ways to get papers and so on, from when they were helping the resistance against the Germans."

Colling was aware that the Polish communists, with strong support from the Russian occupation forces, were engaged in a bitter contest with other factions, including the government-in-exile that had recently returned from its wartime seat in London, for control of Poland. So far, the communists had not been able to gain power, although the presence of the Red Army was a powerful influence in their favor.

He asked, "How is it your parents know these people?"

"They contributed money from before 1939, and still do. Members of the exile government were guests in our house. I met many of them."

"Why doesn't your uncle just pack up and leave?"

"It's very difficult. If I…we…as Americans are there with him when he leaves, the Russians are less likely to stop him. An American passport still carries a lot of weight."

They continued discussing the prospects of successfully extricating Elizabeth's uncle from Poland. Eventually, Colling reminded her why they were at the farmhouse. After they had made love, he considered what it would be like when their trysting came to an end, and then he thought about what it would be like to spend a week or two sleeping with Elizabeth every night, especially when he had no idea how or when they could arrange an opportunity to be together after their return. She continued to reassure him that there would be no real danger, and she won him over, in spite of his more cautious instincts.

Colling told her about Lieutenant Peterson's uniforms, and that they were his size. He had not tried them on, but he estimated that they were a good fit. Elizabeth told him to request a travel authorization for Prague, and two weeks' furlough. It was said that the city had been untouched by the war, and although it could not surpass Paris in terms of entertainment; it was a popular tourist destination for American soldiers. She assured him that she would have documents identifying him as a second lieutenant.

He sensed somewhat uncomfortably that she must have been planning this for some time, since she seemed to have most of the details worked out. Their journey would begin the following Thursday, when they would travel by train to Munich, where his transformation into an officer would occur. Prague would be their next stop, and then on into Poland.

That afternoon, Ferguson authorized his furlough request without comment, and Major Harris signed it. He asked for two weeks, with a report-in date of May 10. According to Elizabeth, their purpose would more likely be fulfilled in less time.

Colling used the intervening days to make his own preparations. After trying them on and finding them a perfect fit, he packed Peterson's uniforms into the B-4 bag, using olive-drab tape to mask the lieutenant's name and serial number painted on its sides. He traded five packs of cigarettes for a battered but sturdy leather suitcase at the shoemaker's shop where he had purchased his Leica camera. For five more packs, the proprietor agreed to sew a panel into the bottom of one side to create a hidden compartment. Colling selected the case because it felt heavy when empty, and hoped that even when its visible contents were removed, the weight of any concealed items would not be noticeable. The German did not seem surprised at Colling's request, and Colling concluded that calls for such alterations to luggage must have been common-place in the Reich, and apparently the American occupation had not seen any diminishment in demand.

He wrote a letter to his parents, explaining that they might not hear from him for awhile, being purposefully vague, saying that his unit would be on maneuvers where no postal facilities would be available.

On Tuesday night, he walked into Grabensheim and went to Zinsmann's apartment. The German's woman answered the door. When she recognized Colling, she called over her shoulder for Zinsmann. The builder greeted him eagerly and offered him a seat in one of the armchairs from the Herrensee hotel. Zinsmann shouted at his woman to bring two beers. When she brought the bottles, two children followed at her heels, and Zinsmann shooed them to their room. After taking a drink of beer, Colling spoke, "Klaus, I have a favor to ask."

"Anything, Colling, anything," answered the German.

"I wish to borrow a Luger."

Zinsmann's eyes narrowed. "I have no Luger. Firearms are forbidden."

Colling continued, "I know this is correct. I also know that if you do not have a pistol, you can get one. I also know that you were a member of the Waffen SS. It will assure you to know that many times I have been asked about this, and I have always denied your involvement in such things. For this alone, you should know you can trust me. It is not my intent to betray you."

Zinsmann did not answer immediately. He stared fixedly at Colling, who met his gaze without wavering. After a few moments, the German said, "How much ammunition will you need?"

"I had not thought on this, but I would imagine that perhaps fifty cartridges would be sufficient."

Zinsmann rose and left the room. He returned carrying something wrapped in a piece of soft cloth. He unwrapped it to disclose a Luger, which he handed to Colling. "Here it is. It is my present to you." From his pants pocket, Zinsmann pulled a pasteboard box and held it out. "Here is a box of fifty. My present to you as well."

"Many thanks, Klaus," replied Colling as he shoved the pistol and ammunition into the pockets of his field jacket.

The German responded, "I have never seen this pistol before. You must never say where it is you got it."

"You have my word, my friend. It is my memory at this moment that I bought it for $50 from a comrade who took it from a Wehrmacht officer that he wounded and captured."

Zinsmann laughed. "Much luck, Colling. And be on guard."

Colling assured him that he would and quietly slipped out into the night. As he walked back to the kaserne, he thought of the instructions that the German had given him on the firing range, and wondered whether he would have to use the pistol, and what he would do if he had to.

Colling and Elizabeth had agreed that she would be on the train from Kummersfeld, and he would board at Grabensheim. The cars were all third-class with wooden bench seats and no compartments, and the B-4 bag and suitcase, which contained the Luger and $500 of his cache in its hidden compartment, made an awkward burden as he walked the length of the train searching for her. He found her seated between two German women, so that he could not sit beside her. She was wearing her dark blue Red Cross uniform, and was conversing excitedly with the women in German, acting the part of a newcomer to the country, marveling at the novelty of being in a foreign land. Colling sat several seats away, attempting to concentrate on a Stars and Stripes that he had brought with him, while glancing continually in Elizabeth's direction.

Some progress had been made in repairing the Munich Hauptbahnhof, but it was not yet receiving local trains, so they were forced to disembark at a temporary outlying terminal. Colling and Elizabeth fell into step together as they exited their car. Fortunately, temporary rest-room facilities constructed of plywood had been recently added to the small station, so that Colling would have a place to change into his officer's uniform. He hoped that Elizabeth had remembered that he had told her that he did not have second lieutenant's insignia. If she had forgotten about that detail, there was no chance he would pass as an officer.

As if she had been reading his thoughts, she drew him aside and handed him a manila envelope. "Here are your new papers. You'll see everything's there." Then she took his hand and pressed something into his palm. "Those were my husband's," she said. "I'll be waiting for you near the ticket windows."

As he walked towards the men's room, he opened his hand to find a set of gold second-lieutenant's bars.

The multitude of dark blue uniforms worn by German railway workers, both men and women, caused Colling some difficulty in locating Elizabeth in the throng that crowded the railway station, but at last he saw her standing a short distance from the row of ticket windows that filled one wall. He joined her, and together they stepped to the window. Colling asked for two first-class round-trip tickets to Prague. The clerk handed them over as Colling gave him Military Marks in payment.

A porter, intent upon making sure that no American officer had to carry his own luggage, had hurried over to take his bags from him when he emerged from the restroom. Now, his hands free, Colling realized that he was being saluted by passing enlisted men, and he self-consciously touched the bill of his service cap in return. He hoped that the fact that he would appear to be a young newly-minted second lieutenant would account for any defects in protocol. At any rate, most of the soldiers who saluted him did so while ogling Elizabeth, so that it was unlikely that anything that he failed to do properly would draw much attention.

Before boarding the train to Prague, Colling deposited the B-4 bag that now contained his enlisted man's uniform and papers with the baggage checkroom. He then mailed the ticket stub to himself at the Grabensheim kaserne in an envelope he had addressed the night before.

The railway tracks east from Munich were in slightly better condition than those in the western part of the Occupied Zones of Germany. They had a compartment to themselves, and Colling took out the identity documents that Elizabeth had given him. There was a U.S. passport in the name of James Collins. His birthplace was listed as Milwaukee, and the month and day of his birth were his own. The year was two years earlier, making him twenty-two years of age. Colling noticed that the cover of the passport was worn, giving the appearance it had seen some previous use. The issue date was 1938, and there were several entry stamps from South American countries. Next to a triangular stamp labeled Venezuela was a penned notation, Estudiante Turista.

Both the passport and the "Collins" military identity card had his photograph on them, and he asked Elizabeth how she had managed that detail. She laughed and asked him if he recalled her taking his picture at the Bergheim farm. He realized that she had taken several photos that day, and remembered how she had insisted that he not wear his uniform jacket. The snapshot now on the ID card showed him wearing a uniform shirt and tie, so that his rank was indeterminate. Colling also remembered that Elizabeth had brought her camera along on one of their Fridays at the farm, more than a month previously, and felt a renewed sense of uneasiness at the thought that she might have been making plans for this journey well in advance of discussing it with him.

There were also Army travel authorization forms, furlough orders and safe passage documents addressed to the various Occupying Powers made out in his name. Presumably, the last would impress any Russians they might encounter. Included was a U.S. Department of State certificate of marriage for James Collins and Elizabeth Collins, dated January, 1946. It said that they had been married at the United States consulate in Munich. There was no indication of a church ceremony, and Colling wondered if such an oversight might prove troublesome in the future. Colling carefully folded everything and placed it in his wallet.

Elizabeth outlined to him what she termed their "cover story." He had not heard the phrase before, but understood its meaning instantly. She showed him her "orders" on Red Cross stationery. She was to proceed to Warsaw and determine what relief supplies might be furnished by the American Red Cross in Germany to meet Polish needs. She was being escorted by her husband, an American Army officer assigned to the American Military Government, who was familiar with the inventories of surplus supplies and equipment held by the U.S. Army in Germany which might be available for transfer to the Red Cross in Poland. Elizabeth gave him a thick loose-leaf notebook containing many typed pages of what appeared to be inventory lists, with stock numbers, quantities on hand, and so on, which he placed in his suitcase.

Colling knew that leaving American-occupied Germany would entail scrutiny by the U.S. Army, and he hoped his masquerading as an officer would not be found out. As it was, there was nothing to be concerned about. The two American MP's who came through the cars asking for papers were very cordial to Colling and Elizabeth, and particularly attentive to Elizabeth. When they saw that Colling was from Milwaukee, they asked him what he thought the Chicago Cubs chances were of going to the Series again in '46. He said he was hopeful, but that the Tigers were more likely to repeat the trip than the Cubs. The MP's laughed and admitted that they were both from Detroit and big Tigers fans. Since Colling had always been a Cubs fan, he bantered with them for awhile, realizing he was getting the worst of the exchange. The discussion about baseball resulted in there being no real examination of their documents, at which the military policemen had barely glanced.

Despite the fact that Colling knew that Prague was a popular destination for U.S. soldiers on furlough, and that he and Elizabeth were not the only Americans on their train, he was apprehensive as they rolled out of Germany and into Czechoslovakia, remembering the delays and interrogations involved in crossing frontiers when he had traveled to Italy. In part, his concerns seemed to be borne out. Although the officials on the Czech side of the border seemed to be used to the sight of American uniforms, they were still very conscientious. They carefully looked at each of the items of documentation as they were presented, even though Colling suspected their command of written English was limited. They asked many questions, including whether they were carrying money or firearms. Colling showed them the mixture of Military Marks and dollars in his wallet that totaled a little more than $100. Elizabeth opened her purse and held up a handful of Allied Military Currency and two ten-dollar bills. When the border guards asked to search their luggage, Colling obliged by pulling their

bags from the overhead rack and opening them on the seats. After some slight poking around in the folded clothes, the Czechs seemed satisfied, shook Colling's hand, bowed to Elizabeth and left the compartment.

Prague was spectacular to look at in the late April afternoon, but noisy. The scarcity of rubber tires during the war had caused most vehicles, both motorized and those pulled by draft animals, to be fitted with iron-rimmed wheels, and their clatter on the city's cobblestone streets was at times deafening. Elizabeth held her hands over her ears for most of their ride from the railway station to their hotel. The driver of their horse-drawn carriage called out that they were passing through Václavské Námesti. When Colling indicated that he did not understand, the man spoke in accented German to tell him that the English name was "Wenceslas Square," and Colling made the connection with the Christmas carol.

The Hotel Bohemia had been a favorite of the Germans during their occupation of Czechoslovakia, when it had been known as the Böhmenhof, and the owners continued to strive to maintain the best of standards. The restaurant offered a better selection of meat than Colling had seen in Germany, and for that matter, under rationing before he left the States. They both selected veal dishes which turned out to be delicious. The wine was a disappointment, being a poor imitation of a red Bordeaux, and they left half the bottle. By the time they had finished eating, night had fallen, and the desk clerk warned them that it might not be advisable to walk the streets in the dark. There was only limited lighting, and certain "bad elements" were apt to be encountered.

Fortunately, the street noise diminished in volume before midnight, so that their sleep was undisturbed. On reflection the next morning, Colling was of the opinion, which he did not share with Elizabeth, that their love-making had left both of them so tired that they were oblivious to anything outside the windows of their room.

Colling was used to a large breakfast, and the coffee and roll that the hotel provided was a poor substitute. His stomach was growling as they alighted from the carriage that delivered them to the central train station. It continued as he stood in line to exchange dollars for Czech Kronen with which to purchase tickets to Warsaw. His hunger did not abate when they were settled into the first-class compartment that had cost 4000 Kronen, over $100. The purchase of the tickets had taken almost all of the American dollars he was carrying on his person, and meant that he might not be able to pay for a decent meal until he could dig into the extra cash in his suitcase. He was in a foul mood when he told Elizabeth the price of the train tickets. She told him not to worry and asked him to lift her suitcase from the overhead rack. She deftly opened it and pulled away the inner lining, which appeared to Colling to have been glued to a cardboard or thin wooden panel. Behind the panel were several envelopes. Elizabeth removed one and handed it to him. Inside was a sheaf of U.S. currency. He riffled the bills and whistled softly.

"How much is here?" he asked.

"There should be $500 in that envelope. I have $5,000 altogether."

"Why so much cash?"

"Sometimes you have to grease a few palms. And expenses, too."

"You expecting to have to bribe somebody?"

"Maybe. You don't know the kind of people we'll have to deal with. I do."

"You've had to do this before, you mean?"

"Not really. But my father and mother know how it is. That's why they sent me the money. Maybe we won't have to use much of it. Maybe we will. I don't know. Anyway, now we can go to the dining car…if there is one…and have something to eat. I'm sure they'll be happy to take dollars."

There was a dining car, and for himself, Colling ordered an omelet with cheese, ham and onions. Elizabeth wanted only coffee and a pastry. When his food came, Colling downed it quickly, and when he was done, asked the waiter to bring more coffee and another pastry. Elizabeth watched him as he finished the pastry in a half-dozen bites. After the last of it was gone, he leaned back and sighed.

Elizabeth smiled at him and said, "You act as if you haven't eaten in a week."

"My stomach would have agreed with you. It's nice to taste real eggs again. All we get in the mess hall is the powdered kind."

It was fortunate that they ate when they did. A few dozen kilometers east of Prague, the condition of the rails changed dramatically, and the cars began lurching over uneven tracks worse than those Colling had experienced in northern Germany the previous September. The train slowed noticeably, and Colling estimated that they were traveling at less than twenty-five miles an hour. Moving at this slow pace, they did not reach the Polish border until well past noon.

Chapter Eight

April-May, 1946

They were paid no attention by the Czech border police before the train crossed into Poland.

The Czechs seemed more intent on exiting the train than in keeping an eye on its passengers. When they reached the frontier, the locomotive ground to a halt in Czechoslovakian territory, and most of the crew and all the officials left the train. The Czechs trudged past the carriage towards their own country as the train rolled slowly forward onto a siding on the Polish side.

Once across, the exchange of Czech railway personnel for Polish was completed, and Colling watched as a group of a half dozen men climbed the steps into their carriage. They were wearing a ragtag variety of uniforms that seemed to have been pieced together from Russian, German and Polish military and Railway Service origins. They began going from compartment to compartment while the train was held on the siding. All of them were armed with either rifles or circular-drummed Russian submachine guns slung over their shoulders.

When they entered Colling's and Elizabeth's compartment, and were greeted by the couple wearing American uniforms and speaking fluent Polish, the Poles' reaction was enthusiastic. They asked all sorts of questions about the United States, and related stories about friends and relatives who had immigrated to America. One of them pulled out an unlabeled bottle of clear liquid which he identified as vodka, and passed it over to Colling, who made as if drinking, turning it up, but letting little of the liquid pass his lips. Even at that, he coughed as he handed the bottle back. The Poles laughed and circulated the bottle among themselves, and Colling was asked what he thought of Polish vodka. He truthfully told them that he found it stronger than what he was used to, and they laughed again. Colling refused a second pull from the bottle, and noticed that they had not offered Elizabeth any. While he concluded that this must be a mark of their respect; he also realized that the men were glancing appreciatively at Elizabeth, but at the same time their actions toward her were almost shy, and he guessed that none of them had probably encountered a woman as attractive in some time, if ever.

The visit concluded with a cursory examination of the couple's papers, a dismissal with a wave of Colling's offer to allow them to search the luggage, and then the group moved on to the next compartment loudly laughing and talking, after wishing them a safe and pleasant journey to Warsaw.

The condition of the railway road-beds in Poland turned out to be no better than anywhere else in Eastern Europe, and in many instances, somewhat worse than what they had experienced thus far. Not only was there constant jolting, swaying and vibrating, with an associated clamor, but in many places there was only a single set of rails, so that they were literally side-tracked for hours at a time, to permit those in charge of the Polish railway, for reasons of their own, to hold the main line open.

Their first-class compartment did not have sleeping accommodations, but since they were the only ones occupying it, they were able to stretch out on the seats and sleep when night fell. They found that the dining car, while still attached to the train, had no cooks or waiters. An old man sat at one end of the car, selling hot tea which an old woman, presumably his wife, was brewing on the stove in the car's kitchen.

As they reached stations along their route, vendors on their platforms offered apples and pears, sausage, ham, bread and cheese. Colling purchased a selection of these offerings at noon and later in the day. With hot tea from the dining car, they at least did not go hungry.

Almost thirty-six hours after leaving Czechoslovakia, the train pulled into a makeshift terminal on the eastern edge of the city of Warsaw. Colling and Elizabeth were not surprised to hear that the main terminal was undergoing repairs. Transportation to the city center was provided by horse-drawn wagons with makeshift plank seats nailed across their beds. They and several others of the train's passengers clambered on board one of them, quickly filling it to capacity. When he saw their American uniforms, their driver, with an almost exaggerated show of chivalry, indicated that Elizabeth should ride beside him on the cart's seat, while Colling was seated directly behind, his legs resting on their piled luggage.

Elizabeth asked to be taken to the Polonia. She and the driver carried on a running conversation about the city as they drove through battered streets filled with work parties of both men and women clearing the rubble of collapsed and shattered buildings.

Colling was surprised that the streets were as busy as they were. There were few motor vehicles, but lots of horse-drawn traffic and crowds of pedestrians. The street-cars seemed to be fully back in operation, clanging away as they rattled along. Colling tapped Elizabeth on the shoulder to point out a shiny bright red double-

decker London bus plying its way. The driver explained that the busses were a gift from the British. So far, however, they carried no advertising placards on their sides.

The Hotel Polonia had served as headquarters for the Germans throughout the war, and had by some odd circumstance escaped major damage. It was now filled with foreigners, mostly diplomats from the Allies and neutral nations, as well as opportunists looking for quick and tidy profits in an uncertain political and economic environment.

The lobby of the Polonia was crowded. In walking from the front door to the registration desk, Colling was able to identify over ten different languages being spoken. At the desk, he presented their passports and his travel papers to the clerk while Elizabeth stood by his side. The man smiled at Elizabeth and frowned at Colling. When Colling addressed him in Polish, the clerk's attitude warmed, and he asked pleasantly if they had reservations.

Colling was about to say no, when Elizabeth interrupted, "Please, yes, you will find them under the name of Collins,…Lieutenant and Mrs. James T. Collins. We are here with the Red Cross."

The clerk searched in a small file-box and pulled out a card, "Ah, yes, Madame. Here it is. Unfortunately, our accommodations are limited, but we do have one room for you. The management requires now that payment be made in advance. It says you will be staying two weeks. If you will sign the register, please, lieutenant, sir," he said, turning the registration book to face Colling. As Colling wrote "Lt. and Mrs. Collins," the clerk continued, "And lieutenant, sir, I must prevail upon you for 14,000 zlotys."

Colling counted out $140 in U.S. dollars, and reminded himself to ask Elizabeth why she had taken the room for two weeks, when she knew his furlough expired in a little over a week. If they weren't back in Germany on schedule, he would be likely to lose his stripes and forfeit his pay as well.

The clerk called out, and a bellhop was immediately at their side, lifting their bags. The collar and cuffs of his blue-trimmed gray uniform were threadbare, and it was large for his thin frame. Taking the room key from the desk clerk, he asked Colling and Elizabeth to follow him.

Their room was on the fourth floor. It was in better condition than Colling would have predicted when he registered. It was furnished with a comfortable double bed, two drab over-stuffed chairs, and a writing desk. There was a water closet with an ancient sink and toilet, but no bath. The bellhop provided him with an answer before he could ask, and informed them that the bath was at the end of the corridor.

Colling gave the man a dollar bill as a tip, and closed the door after him. He turned to Elizabeth, "How come you reserved this room for two weeks? I've got to be back at the kaserne next Wednesday."

Elizabeth didn't answer, but placed her finger over her lips, pointing up at the ceiling light. As Colling looked upwards at the gesture, she answered, "Well, you know, darling, I thought we'd take an extra day or two for ourselves."

Still pointing, she drew him into the water closet and turned on the faucets full force. She spoke softly directly into his ear, "There are probably listening devices in the room. The Russians have microphones in every room in the Polonia. Try and carry on a normal conversation, but don't give away any secrets."

She shut off the water and asked in a cheery voice, "Darling, can we get something to eat? I'm simply starved after that terrible food on the train."

Looking around their room, he responded, "I suppose they have a restaurant downstairs. Let's give it a try."

Elizabeth began chattering about what might be on the restaurant's menu, while she opened her suitcase and extracted the envelopes of cash, which she stuffed into her purse. Colling took this as a hint, and opened his own bag and pulled out his own money and the Luger. He shoved the Luger into the back of his belt, under his uniform jacket, and put the folded currency and the box of cartridges into his pants pocket. They re-closed their luggage and, before leaving the room, Elizabeth plucked two hairs from her head and looped one around the catches on each of their suitcases, so that if they were opened, the strands of hair would be broken.

In the hallway, she leaned close to him and said in a whisper, "Bringing a gun was not a good idea, my love. If they catch you with it, we're in trouble."

He pulled her closer to him and spoke into her ear, "Just a precaution, Liz. I'm keeping it. I'll find a safe place to hide it, don't worry."

Colling was pleasantly surprised to find that the Polonia's restaurant served excellent food. They started with a Žurek, a traditional Polish mushroom soup, followed by a garden salad. The main course consisted of pork roast, mashed potatoes, and bowls of fresh vegetables from which they served themselves. When they thought

they could eat no more, their waiter brought a tray of assorted pastries, from which they selected makowiec, or poppy seed cakes. Colling had not eaten food like this since he had left for college. While Elizabeth knew the Polish words for almost all the dishes, she admitted to Colling that she had not ever tasted most of them.

After they finished eating, Colling suggested he exchange some of their dollars for Polish currency, and the registration clerk directed him to a cashier's window on the opposite side of the lobby. The banknotes he received in return for his dollars were of simple design and plainly printed, and Colling was told by the cashier that the bills had been provided courtesy of the Russians.

Elizabeth asked if they could see something of the city, and they left the hotel and strolled arm-in-arm among the crowd circling the round plaza close by the Polonia, known to the Polish as a rondo, where Marszawkovska and Jerozolimskie streets intersected. Colling's American uniform drew stares, especially from the Russian soldiers they passed. One or two, recognizing that he wore officer's insignia, saluted. Most did not.

One man in British-style uniform with Polish insignia saluted Colling as he approached, then stopped them and greeted them in English. The Polish soldier explained that he had fought with the Polish Brigade attached to the British forces. When he learned they spoke Polish, he began enthusiastically describing his service in Italy, his demobilization and return to Poland after six years as an exile. As they stood talking, a few of the passing throng stopped to listen and add their own comments. Some of them wanted to know if either of the Americans was from Chicago. When Colling told them he was from Wisconsin, which is near Chicago, they all started asking if he knew various of their friends and relatives who lived there. Colling recognized none of the names thrown at him, and politely expressed that he had not heard of any of them, explaining that Chicago has over two million residents. The questioning would probably not have ended if Elizabeth had not interrupted to say that they must return to their hotel. Even then, it took some effort to tear themselves away and return to the Polonia.

As they retraced their steps, a battered black Renault sedan parked on the opposite side of the boulevard, across from the Polonia's main entrance, caught Colling's eye. Two men were seated in its front seat. As Colling and Elizabeth crossed the street, Colling glanced towards the car and the man in the passenger seat, whom Colling had observed was watching them intently, quickly looked away. The driver had a newspaper held up in front of his face.

Once in the crowded hotel lobby, Colling spoke softly to Elizabeth as they waited for the elevator, "I think we're being watched."

Elizabeth looked cautiously around and asked, "Who?"

"Outside across the street. Two men in a black car."

The elevator door opened and the operator motioned them in with an impatient, "Come, come." After telling the man their floor, they rode without speaking until they reached it.

In their room, Elizabeth inspected their bags to see if the strands of hair had been disturbed, and gesturing a caution to Colling not to speak, pointed out that they had been. The two of them quickly surveyed the rest of the room, noting that some of their personal articles seemed to not be in the same positions in which they had been left.

As quietly as possible, Colling moved the chair from the desk and placed it under the light fixture. He then climbed up to get a better look. The room had a high ceiling, so that he had to stretch upwards to look over the rim of the lamp's broad shade. Elizabeth was correct. A thin wire coiled down around the chain suspending the lamp, and ended in a small black wafer of a microphone.

While he had been standing on the chair, Elizabeth had kept up a vocal one-sided running commentary about their stay in Prague compared to Warsaw, the Polonia's restaurant, and the elevator operator, while walking noisily around the room. Colling returned the chair to its place under the desk, and nodded his head affirmatively to Elizabeth, pointing up at the light.

On an inspiration, Colling said, "You know what? I wonder if we could get a radio? We might be able to get the Armed Forces Network. Even if we can't, we might at least get some music."

Elizabeth replied, "That would be great. I'd love some music."

The telephone was ancient but did get Colling through to the front desk. He was assured that a radio could be brought to their room, but an additional charge of 100 zlotys per day was necessary. Colling gave his assurance that the extra expense did not present a problem.

While they waited for the radio to arrive, they continued to converse about as many inconsequential subjects as came to mind, but then Colling interjected, “I love you.”

Elizabeth was obviously disconcerted by his statement, and he interpreted her reaction to be due to her being surprised by his sudden change of subject. She recovered quickly, however, and responded, “I love you, too, Jim.”

Colling had just put his arms around her and was kissing her when the bellman knocked on the door. He was carrying a large old-fashioned table radio, which he ceremoniously placed on the desk and after some fuss, managed to plug it in. The bellman turned the apparatus on, and twisted the dial slowly, searching for a clear signal. He was finally rewarded when the voice of a Polish announcer boomed out, giving the weather report for central Poland. Colling thanked him and tipped him 50 zlotys.

When they were alone, Colling adjusted the radio’s dial so that the result was a low-pitched hum, fluctuating occasionally with a shriller tone. He then raised the volume. He motioned Elizabeth closer and speaking softly, said, “I don’t know how well this will work, but maybe it will interfere with their mike.”

“Good grief, it’s annoying!” she said, “I don’t know how long I can stand it.”

“Long enough for us to talk, I hope. Those two guys in the black car outside I am pretty sure are keeping an eye on us. If they’re still there tomorrow, we can be sure of it.”

“So what do you want to do about it?”

“We can’t do much, but I don’t think we’re going to have much luck finding your uncle with the police, or whoever they are, in tow.”

“Since they have a car, I would guess they’re Russian, NKVD, most likely. Word is, that’s who’s got microphones in all these rooms.”

“I’m worried, Liz. We’re being watched, and I think they knew we were coming.”

Her hands clasped over her ears, Elizabeth said, “I don’t think so. This is just the way they do with all foreigners. The Russians don’t trust anyone. Once I get to Red Cross headquarters, everything will be fine. Now please, turn that thing off.”

Colling twisted the dial some more, producing a range of noise, then tuned back to the Warsaw station and reduced the volume. For the consumption of whoever was listening, he said, “Damn. We can’t get A.F.N. I hope this station has some decent music.”

The prospect of someone eavesdropping on them while they had sexual intercourse was at first inhibiting, but they decided that their not doing so might raise suspicions. Remaining as quiet as possible, they began making love, and as things progressed, their intruders were forgotten. Afterwards, when they were lying side by side, sated, Colling began moaning and sighing dramatically. Suppressing a giggle, Elizabeth followed suit. After awhile, they became quiet, and Colling whispered in her ear, “That will give them something to talk about.”

The Renault was still there the following morning when they exited the Polonia. They boarded the street-car that the desk clerk had told them would take them south on Marzalkowska to Red Cross headquarters. Colling looked back to see the black sedan pull from the curb to follow the trolley and watched as it slowly matched their route and speed, confirming without a doubt Colling’s suspicions about the assignment of its two occupants. He glanced at Elizabeth sitting upright beside him. She seemed preoccupied, and he did not mention the car trailing them, or his own apprehensions, which had begun to increase as he evaluated their situation.

The headquarters of the Polish Red Cross in Warsaw had been set up in a large mansion that Colling guessed must have belonged at one time to a wealthy member of Warsaw’s merchant class. The Red Cross flag hung from a pole over the house’s front doors.

In the spacious tiled foyer, a woman receptionist greeted them from behind the Rococo table that served her as a desk. She appeared to Colling to have been expecting their arrival. When Elizabeth asked to speak to the Director, she excused herself and disappeared through a door behind her. She re-emerged a short time later, followed by a tall bearded man. He enthusiastically shook both Elizabeth’s and Colling’s hands, introducing himself as Gregoris Zabiewski, director of the Warsaw office of the Polish Red Cross.

He was wearing a gray Russian-style blouse over trousers of the same color that were tucked into low black boots. The white armband emblazoned with a red cross that he wore was apparently intended to identify him as a Red Cross official. Colling found the costume strikingly reminiscent of official Soviet dress, and wondered whether it was imitation or genuine. Despite his appearance, Zabiewski’s manner was friendly as he greeted

them in broken English and conducted them to his office. Elizabeth switched to Polish and informed him that Colling, her "husband," spoke the language as well.

Elizabeth handed over the letters on American Red Cross stationery that she had shown to Colling in Germany, and indicated to Zabiewski that she had requested of her superiors with the American Red Cross that because of her fluency with the language, that she be permitted to contact the Polish Red Cross on a lower, somewhat unofficial level, regarding assistance that might be provided to it. At the same time, she continued, her husband, Lieutenant Collins, who was with the American occupation government, had been given an inventory of surplus supplies of various sorts that the American Army was willing, at the request of the American Red Cross, to see transferred to assist the Polish Red Cross and the Polish people. Elizabeth was speaking in a formal and precise manner that Colling was not used to hearing her use, and he had the impression that her speech might have been prepared ahead of time, perhaps even rehearsed.

Zabiewski expressed his pleasure at the offer of assistance. Elizabeth asked if she might view the facilities in the Warsaw area that were operated by Zabiewski's office, and he responded that he would personally conduct them on such a tour. Colling was somewhat surprised when Elizabeth told Zabiewski that her husband would probably make better use of his time by comparing his inventory against the list of needs that her superiors had informed her would be provided by the Warsaw headquarters. She would accompany Zabiewski by herself to visit the local Red Cross operations.

Zabiewski saw to it that Colling was ensconced at a desk in a tiny office and provided with a sheaf of papers listing items that the Polish Red Cross was supposed to need, and which it was presumed that the Americans could provide.

Colling pulled out the notebook that he had carried in his suitcase from Germany, and began to make a show of comparing it with the list he had been given. He used a pencil that he found in the desk drawer to check off items in his inventory and make cryptic notes in the margins of Zabiewski's list. He made enough entries so he felt it would look as if his efforts were genuine, and laid down the pencil. He stood up, stretched and went to the one window in the room. It looked out over a courtyard that he estimated was at the rear of the mansion. He began pacing, both with the intent of relieving his boredom and having some exercise. At some point he looked up at the high ceiling and observed the crystal chandelier that hung from its center. It had apparently been converted to electricity since its original installation, and Colling circled, examining the wires that twined down the ornate gilt chain attaching it to the ceiling. A nudge of curiosity caused him to pull the desk under the light and climb up for a closer look. He found that he was still not close enough, and placed the chair on top of the desk. Playing the acrobat, he was finally at eye level with the chandelier, and saw what he had suspected he would find. He carefully replaced the desk and chair as he had found them.

He estimated that at least two hours had passed since he had entered the room, and he was seated in the chair, leaning back, his feet on the desk, when Elizabeth came through the door. She greeted him, but before she could say more, he placed his finger to his lips and pointed to the light. She looked up and her eyes widened, then she nodded her head in acknowledgement of his cautionary gesture.

"Mr. Zabiewski is very nice," she said brightly, "I mentioned I would like to find my uncle, and he said he would provide his car."

"Can he help you locate where he is?" asked Colling cautiously, wary even though Elizabeth seemed to have no compunction about someone listening in on their conversation.

"He said he would do what he could, but everything is in such turmoil these days."

Gathering up his notebook and Zabiewski's lists, Colling nodded towards the door and said, "Let me take these lists back to him. There are some things we have on hand and in sufficient quantity, but most things we don't have or can't spare."

Colling said the same thing to Zabiewski when they met him in his office and Colling handed him the list of the director's requests. Colling apologetically explained that approval from Heidelberg remained necessary, but that he had marked those items that he believed were in Army warehouses. He would seek the needed authorizations once he had returned to Germany. Zabiewski appeared to take Colling at his word, saying he would make arrangements for transportation of the goods to Warsaw from the Polish frontier.

Zabiewski offered to have his driver return them to the Polonia, but Elizabeth declined, saying she enjoyed riding the streetcar and taking in the sights. Zabiewski commented that Warsaw was once much more beautiful

than one would believe from its present appearance, and expressed his belief that it would not be long before the city was restored to its former self.

Instead of boarding a streetcar at the nearest stop, Colling and Elizabeth walked along, his arm around her waist, to all appearances two young Americans without a care in the world, enjoying the warm Spring day. In truth, they were engaged in an earnest discussion, although their facial expressions did not betray it. They both were aware of the black Renault that doggedly followed.

Smiling all the while, Colling spoke through his teeth, "Are you sure this plan is a good one."

She hissed back at him, "Of course. If you will just calm down, everything will be alright."

"But this guy Zabiewski looks like a Russian commissar; he has a mike planted in his own building to eavesdrop on us; and you think you can trust him to help you get your uncle out?"

"Things will work out. Just wait and see. Zabiewski is Polish and he doesn't like the Russians very much. He warned me about the Russians putting microphones everywhere, including in Red Cross headquarters."

Even though Colling continued to argue, Elizabeth also continued to respond that his fears were unfounded. When Elizabeth told him she did not want to discuss it further, Colling decided it was useless to persist in trying to convince her. When he saw the streetcar with their number at a stop ahead of them, he led her to the line of people waiting to board. The trolley was crowded, and they had to stand in the aisle, struggling to stay upright in the swaying carriage. The Renault followed in their wake. They stepped down from the streetcar on the far side of the rondo near the Polonia and walked the circular sidewalk to the hotel. The black sedan drove past them and pulled to a stop in the side street beside the hotel, positioned so as to have a view of both the side and main entrances to the building.

Instead of immediately entering the Polonia, Colling pointed to a cluster of tables arrayed on the sidewalk across the street, and pulled Elizabeth by the arm, suggesting they have something to eat. They took seats at one of the small tables that appeared to have been recently repainted. They ordered sandwiches and tea from the stooped waiter who came to serve them. With the combination of street noise and the chattering conversations at the tables around them, Colling felt confident that they could not be overheard.

"Elizabeth, do you really think Zabiewski can be trusted to help you find your uncle?"

"Oh, Jim, not again. Would you please not worry so much. I don't need Zabiewski to find my uncle. I know exactly where he is."

"Does the fact that you haven't told Zabiewski that mean that you do have some doubts about how far you can trust him?"

"Well, something did tell me keep that little piece of information to myself. But we do need the Red Cross to get us a car to go get him. So as far as that's concerned, I do have to trust him. There's no way around it. And besides, we're set up for just getting on the train to Prague with my uncle and going there. Our identity papers won't let us do anything else."

Their food came and they continued their discussion while they ate. As Colling took a sip of warm tea from the glass that the waiter had brought, he noticed a man wearing a black leather jacket approach the table behind Elizabeth, and lean over to whisper something to the man and woman seated there. The couple suddenly stood up and left the table, leaving half their meal unfinished. The man then sat down and pulled out a newspaper. When the waiter approached him, he ordered tea, and Colling realized that his conversation with Elizabeth could be easily overhead.

Elizabeth was starting to speak when he changed the subject by observing what a fine day it was. Without demonstrating any surprise at the sudden shift, Elizabeth agreed with him. Colling then leaned across and took her hand and told Elizabeth that he loved her, both for the benefit of the man at the next table, and because he enjoyed saying the words. She smiled and silently mouthed the words, "I love you, too."

They finished eating, and Colling asked the waiter to bring their bill. He paid, and as they walked past the black-jacketed man, Elizabeth glanced down at him, then turned her head away as he stared back at her over his newspaper. She said nothing to Colling as they crossed the street to the Polonia.

When they reached their room, Elizabeth turned on the radio and adjusted the dial until the sounds of a symphony orchestra filled the room. She raised the volume, and turned to Colling. He sensed her nervousness and placed his hands on her shoulders, pulling her close to him.

She whispered in his ear, "That man at the café. I saw Zabiewski talking to him today. He didn't see me. It was at an orphanage we visited. I was talking to one of the nurses when I saw the two of them together outside."

“So now are you going to believe me?”

She took a step back and said softly, “We need to get new papers.”

“Do you have a way to do that?” he asked.

“I think so. But we’re going to have to get away from the men who are watching us.”

They both jumped as there was a loud knock at the door. Colling opened it to reveal a dark-haired man in a white suit, who began speaking rapidly in a loud voice. Colling shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he did not understand what he was saying, when the man brushed past him and turned off the radio with an emphatic twist of its dial.

Colling asked, “Excuse me, sir, but what are you doing?”

“I am shutting off the musica, senhor,” he responded irately.

Suddenly realizing what effect the noise that they had been creating with the radio must have been having on the other hotel guests, Colling apologized, then introduced himself and Elizabeth as “Lieutenant and Mrs. Collins.” The intruder’s demeanor changed dramatically when Elizabeth smiled at him and acknowledged Colling’s introduction, and he stepped forward stiffly, bowed and taking her hand, kissed it.

“João Mendoza Espinoza de Cahinas, à suas ordens, senhora.”

Elizabeth graciously thanked Senhor Mendoza and asked if he spoke English or Polish.

Mendoza admitted that his Polish was not very good, but he did have a little English. He explained that he and his wife were in Warsaw with the Brazilian trade mission. He apologized for his abruptness about the radio, and Colling and Elizabeth repeated their apology for causing any discomfort to Mendoza and his wife.

The Brazilian asked if Tenente Collins and his lovely esposa would wish to join him and Senhora Mendoza in their room for a glass of wine. Before Colling could respond, Elizabeth accepted the invitation.

The Mendozas’ room was next to Colling’s and Elizabeth’s. It was also arranged and furnished in the same sparse and shabby manner, with the exception that the room seemed to be filled with luggage. Two large steamer trunks stood against one wall, and suitcases were stacked around the room. The wardrobe was ajar, and Colling could see that clothing on hangers was arranged on the inside of both its doors.

Senhora Isabel Mendoza was an attractive brunette who seemed glad to have another woman to whom to talk. Once Mendoza had poured them all a glass of white wine, begging their indulgence that he was forced to use the plain water glasses that were all that the hotel was willing to supply to its guests’ rooms, Senhora Mendoza and Elizabeth sat on the bed chatting while Colling and Mendoza took the two easy chairs. Colling expressed his compliments concerning Mendoza’s choice of wine, and the Brazilian explained that it was Portuguese, from Oporto and called by the name vinho verde, or “green wine.” At hearing this, Colling saw that the clear wine was in fact colored with a tinge of green.

When Mendoza asked their purpose for being in Warsaw, Colling described their mission to obtain supplies for the Polish Red Cross. In turn, Colling asked Mendoza about the trade mission, and was informed that Brazil had a surplus of coffee that it was anxious to export worldwide. Mendoza was only one of many representatives that the South American country had sent to Europe as soon as the war was over, in an attempt to restore pre-war levels of overseas sales of the beans.

Mendoza was in the middle of a description of the optimum conditions for growing coffee beans when Elizabeth came to stand beside Colling’s chair and interrupted.

“Darling, Isabel has offered to solve our shortage of something to wear.”

Colling was not expecting to hear what Elizabeth had said, and he was unable to think of anything to say except, “Oh?”

“Yes, Darling. I explained to Isabel how it was so hard to get around without a lot of unwanted attention when both of us are in uniform, and she has offered to lend me a couple of her dresses, and she tells me Joào has an extra suit or two that you can borrow.”

Mendoza laughed and said, “Of course, of course. But I must say that my esposa is unlikely to miss a ‘couple’ of dresses from this inventory she has carried from Sao Paulo.” Senhora Mendoza said something to him in Portuguese, and he laughed again. His response to her in the same language caused her to laugh as well. Mendoza explained that Isabel had asked him if he would prefer that she go shopping here in Warsaw, and he told her she would have to settle for the only fashion salon in town, the city’s flea market.

Colling and Elizabeth returned to their room carrying the clothes that the Mendozas had lent them. The Brazilian couple had insisted they borrow several changes, but Colling and Elizabeth had declined all but one

outfit apiece. Additional searches of their room were to be expected, and apparel that had not been there earlier would undoubtedly heighten the interest of those watching them.

They remained in their room until dusk. Colling tore a piece of paper from his notebook and wrote a "Do Not Disturb" sign that he closed in the door to their room so that it was over the doorknob. He also telephoned the registration desk to ask that any messages be held until morning, as they would be sleeping.

Dressed in the Mendozas' clothes, they strolled leisurely through the Polonia's lobby. To hide her blonde hair, Elizabeth had tucked it into one of the turbans that had become fashionable during the war. Senhor Mendoza's light brown suit was slightly large for Colling, but he did not believe it would be noticeable. He pulled down the brim of the Panama hat that the Brazilian had lent him as they walked through the Polonia's front doors. They did not look in the direction of the Renault when they exited the hotel and crossed the street. They climbed into the first of a line of horse-drawn cabs that stood at the curb. Once the driver had snapped his reins and the carriage had pulled into traffic, Colling looked cautiously back to see that the black sedan was still parked where it had been that afternoon, and was not following them. Elizabeth told the driver they wished to go to Potok, and the man told her that it was at a considerable distance. Colling assured him that the fare would be paid.

It took a little more than an hour to reach the neighborhood Elizabeth was seeking. She had given the driver no specific address, but when he announced that they were in Potok, Elizabeth asked to be left on the nearest street corner. They stood for a moment while Elizabeth looked around. The few passers-by looked at them curiously as they walked past them. A middle-aged woman pushing a small cart paused for a moment while negotiating the curb, and Elizabeth stopped her and asked if she knew where the bicycle shop of Mishkie Oblieska might be located. The woman, clearly surprised that this well-dressed foreigner was speaking to her in Polish, nodded and replied that Oblieska's shop was on the next street. Colling and Elizabeth both thanked the woman and followed the direction in which she had pointed.

No sign identified the bicycle shop, but it was not difficult to pick it out on the street, because several battered bicycles were propped under its one large dirty window. Double doors stood open beside the window, and Colling guessed that at one time the place might have been used as a garage. Inside the entrance, a man was bent over a bicycle held upside down in a rack specially built for the purpose. Another man, apparently the bicycle's owner, was watching the mechanic work, and asking questions. Colling and Elizabeth stepped to one side of the doors and stood quietly, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. The customer noticed them and tapped the other man's shoulder and nodded in their direction when he looked up.

Speaking Polish, Colling said, "Please finish with this man's vehicle. We are in no hurry."

The mechanic looked at them curiously, said something to the bicycle's owner, and turned back to his work. The customer continued to eye Colling and Elizabeth until the shop owner stated that he was finished with the repairs. He pulled the bike from the support and gently dropped it wheels first, letting it bounce down onto the floor. The bicycle's owner mounted it and pedaled for a few feet, testing it. He voiced his satisfaction with the repairs and paid the mechanic a price that appeared to have been previously agreed.

When the customer had departed, Elizabeth stepped forward and asked if she might be speaking to Mishkie Oblieska.

"Who wishes to know this?" the mechanic replied.

"Someone who knew Sosabowski," she replied.

The man nodded, "Would that be Colonel Davisson?"

"The very one, sir," replied Elizabeth.

"I am Oblieska. Come into my office."

The shop's office was dingy, lit only by one bare low-wattage bulb hanging from the ceiling. Oblieska moved a box from a chair so that Elizabeth would have a place to sit. When she hesitated, he took a rag from his back pocket and wiped off the seat. When Elizabeth was seated, she said, "I need to speak with Davisson's friend."

"Why?" asked Oblieska.

"We need documents. We have money," she replied.

"If you have money, you are either British or Americans."

Colling, tired of the cat-and-mouse game, answered, "Americans."

Oblieska raised his eyebrows and looked at Colling. “Why should Americans need documents. Just show your passports.”

Elizabeth interjected, “We need documents for some others who are not fortunate enough to have U.S. passports.”

“How much money do you have?” asked Oblieska.

“Enough,” replied Elizabeth.

Oblieska smiled, appearing to size up Colling, then he said, “Yes, all right. Let me close up the shop and I will find Davisson’s friend for you.”

The Pole left them for a moment to shut and padlock the shop’s double doors. He then came back into the office and turned off all the lights, leaving Colling and Elizabeth standing in the dark. “Wait here. I will return in a short while,” he said, just before slipping out the front door and locking it behind him.

Colling tried the door, and found that it did not open from the inside.

“Well, if he’s gone to get the NKVD, we’ve had it,” he commented. Elizabeth did not respond.

A half-hour elapsed before they saw Oblieska outside the door of the shop, then the key turned in the lock and he stepped into the room. Gesturing for them to follow him, he led them out into the street, and after locking the shop once again, he asked them to come with him. They crept along the narrow dark street until light could be seen coming from an open doorway. Oblieska ushered them inside, and they saw that the place was a tavern. It appeared to be empty, with the exception of a lone bartender who watched them from behind a makeshift bar made of rough planks that ran the length of one wall of the room. Oblieska pointed to the rear of the tavern and whispered that the man they wanted to see was waiting for them there, behind a partition that screened off the rear of the establishment. Oblieska then seated himself near the entrance.

The man sitting primly at a table behind the partition smiled at them and asked them to join him. Colling could see that he was wearing an expensive-looking gray suit under his open topcoat. Without being asked, the bartender brought three small glasses of beer and then returned to his place behind the bar.

The well-dressed man took a sip from his glass, then said, “I am Tomek. I am a friend of Colonel Davisson’s. I will not ask your names, that is best. I understand you wish documents.”

“Yes, for ourselves and three others,” said Elizabeth.

Colling was surprised at the request. He had not expected that she would want papers for anyone other than her uncle.

Tomek continued, “Are these three others men or women?”

“All men.”

“And these are to be Polish documents?”

“Yes, of course,” she replied, “We will also need travel papers for Prague, by rail.” To Colling’s surprise, she handed Tomek what he realized were extra copies of their passport photos. Tomek opened a briefcase that sat on the floor beside his chair and dropped the pictures inside.

“Do you have photographs of the others?” he asked.

“No. Use those of any middle-aged men. No one in Poland looks like they used to, anyway.”

Tomek nodded his understanding, then said, “I understand you have American dollars.”

“Yes,” said Elizabeth, “How much will be necessary?”

“If you can give me, say, two hundred dollars now, and two hundred more when I deliver the documents, that should be sufficient.”

Elizabeth opened her purse and without revealing its contents, appeared to be counting. She eventually withdrew some folded bills and handed them to Tomek. He quickly leafed through them and appeared satisfied that he had been given the amount he had requested, and tucked the money into his coat pocket.

“Where are you staying?” he asked.

Elizabeth hesitated, then answered, “The Polonia.”

Tomek inquired of Elizabeth, “Do you know the restaurant Treskie that is on the rondo across from the hotel?”

Colling replied first, “Yes, we have passed it when walking.”

Tomek looked surprised, then said smiling, “Ah…the young American does speak after all. I was of the impression that the lady was in charge.”

Embarrassed and angry, Colling did not respond, and Tomek looked at Elizabeth, "I will meet you tomorrow at the Treskie at 1700. I will have the papers then." He stood and nodded at them.

Taking this as a cue, Colling and Elizabeth also stood, then turned and walked out of the tavern, leaving Tomek watching their departure. Oblieska met them at the door and accompanied them until they had reached his shop.

Colling asked what was available as transportation to take them back to the center of Warsaw, adding that he would be willing to pay if Oblieska knew of someone who had a cart or a carriage. The Pole told them to wait while he went to talk to a friend, and shortly thereafter, a horse-drawn cart appeared with Oblieska seated beside the driver. After a short discussion and agreement about the fee, the man drove them to the city's center. They asked to be dropped on Marszawkovska a few blocks from the Polonia, and walked the remainder of the distance.

The two men in the black sedan were still where they had last seen them. One appeared to be sleeping while the other was indifferent to them as they strolled past.

A folded piece of paper was tucked above Colling's "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door to their room. It was a message from Zabiewski, informing her that there were several Red Cross officials to whom she had not yet spoken who wished to meet her. An appointment had been arranged for 9:30 the next morning; his car and driver would pick her up at 9:00. While Colling continued to wonder why Elizabeth had arranged for documents for three men, he did not ask her for an explanation.

Over breakfast in the busy hotel restaurant, Colling reminded Elizabeth that they would have to return the Mendozas' clothes, and convinced her that it would be a good idea to assume the appearance of ordinary Poles once they left Warsaw. He told her he would make it seem as if he were remaining at the Polonia, perhaps to forestall additional searches of their room, and attempt to slip out and see if he could purchase suitable attire.

They made a show of saying goodbye outside the hotel when Elizabeth left with Zabiewski's driver, and Colling returned to their room. The maid was in the final stages of making up the bed when he walked in. He sat in one of the easy chairs, reading an old issue of Time that he had packed in his suitcase in Germany, as the maid finished her work. He then waited an additional half-hour to see if anyone would intrude. He opened his notebook on the desk and turned on the radio. He hoped that his eavesdroppers would assume he was working and become less vigilant.

Leaving his uniform jacket behind, Colling slipped out into the corridor and used the stairwell at one end to reach the ground floor. He discovered that the stairs led further down, into the hotel basement. At mid-morning, the Polonia's staff seemed to be occupied with cleaning guests' rooms and he did not encounter anyone in the utility areas under the building.

Colling found a set of faded blue coveralls hanging from a peg, under which stood a pair of rubber boots that seemed to go with them. The coveralls were of a size that allowed them to fit his own clothing with ease. The boots could not be pulled on over his shoes, so he removed the brown Army oxfords and hid them on the back of the shelf above the peg that had held the overalls. In the process, he found a dirty slouch cap that he pulled on as a further addition to his disguise. The rubber boots were a little large for him, and made walking slightly clumsy, but he guessed that they would serve his purpose. To complete the picture, he decided to use a handcart he found standing beside the stairway leading upward to what he surmised was the street.

The stairway did lead from the basement to the sidewalk, and Colling blinked at the sunlight as he came out into the sun. The black Renault had been moved from its usual spot, and was at the curb not twenty feet from him. The car's driver turned from his newspaper to glance at him, and then, without any indication of interest, returned to what he had been doing. Colling realized he had been holding his breath, and he let it escape as he hurried off pushing the handcart. He did not look back.

After he turned the nearest corner, he stopped a woman passing by and asked where the closest street market was. She gave him directions, and as she did so, he was able to orient himself and realized that he had emerged from the Polonia on Poznanska Street. As he thought about the Renault's new location, which did not have a view of the hotel's front entrance, he concluded that either the surveillance was being conducted from two identical vehicles, or the effort to watch him was not considered to be of any great importance..

The market was set up in a street that had been cleared between high piles of rubble on both of its sides. Some vendors had set up canopies over rough tables displaying their goods, others operated from blankets and tarpaulins laid on the ground. Colling spotted several racks from which clothes were hanging, and headed in

their direction. He found the proprietor of the largest selection to be an old man who was doing a good business, but seemed to love to haggle. It took some time for Colling to select the items he wanted. He could not remove the coveralls to try on the men's items, so that he had to hold up them up to himself to get some idea of their possible fit. He had to do the same when it came to picking items that would fit Elizabeth.

He bought a worn suit for himself, together with two extra shirts and another pair of trousers, a pair of shoes that he guessed were German military issue, and some well-worn underwear and socks. The shoes had seen a lot of use, but they had new soles and fitted well.

Buying clothes for Elizabeth was a more difficult task. Colling ended up choosing two dresses and a light coat to serve as her primary articles of clothing. When he set aside several pairs of old-fashioned underwear that resembled what Colling had heard called "Bloomers," the old man snickered. However, when Colling showed him his roll of zlotys, he became very accommodating, and suggested additional items of women's underwear, stockings, and kerchiefs to cover the hair. Colling was uncertain as to Elizabeth's shoe size, so he selected three pairs of slightly different sizes that he estimated would fit her, taking care to chose the sturdiest that were available.

Playing the old man's game, Colling objected vigorously to the asking price, the old proprietor's face lit up, and he bargained with gusto. When they had finally agreed on what was to be paid, in a gesture of magnanimity the old man provided a large canvas bag in which Colling might carry his purchases. As Colling was counting zlotys into his hand, the old man asked what part of Poland he was from, since he did not recognize Colling's accent. Colling told him he was from Pomerania, and the clothes were for he and his wife, and they were leaving soon for their home village, now that the Germans had been driven out. The old man seemed satisfied with the explanation and wished Colling a safe journey.

The men in the black car paid no attention to Colling when he slipped back into the Polonia, but there were several staff members in the room where Colling had found the overalls. He decided that boldness was the best course, and after replacing the handcart where he had found it, he removed the boots and coveralls and put them away as if it were something he did every day. He retrieved and put on his own shoes, and then, hoisting the bag of clothes onto his back, climbed the stairs to the fourth floor. None of the hotel personnel spoke to him or acted as if they had seen anything out of the ordinary.

The radio was still blaring when he entered their room. He dumped out the clothes on the bed, and sorted his into one pile, and Elizabeth's into another. He then tried on the suit and extra trousers. They fit, even though they were slightly loose, but he had noticed that five years of limited nutrition had resulted in most people in Poland having clothes that were too large for them.

Keeping out one change of clothing, Colling packed the remainder of the newly-purchased clothes into his suitcase, making sure his Luger and money were safely hidden, then shoved the case into the bottom of the wardrobe. He fidgeted until Elizabeth returned at mid-afternoon. She gave him a running commentary on the Red Cross people she had met, praising Zabiewski effusively, telling him how the Director would be providing them his own car to take them to Poznan so she could locate her uncle.

As she spoke, Elizabeth began going through the women's items, slowly shaking her head as she examined them. She held up a pair of the Bloomers and gave him with a quizzical look. He gestured for her to try on the shoes, and was pleased when she indicated that all three pairs would do, although one pair seemed to fit better than the others. After she selected what she would need to wear, he helped her pack everything else into her case. They then stuffed their uniforms and other American clothes into the canvas bag. They hid their United States passports and Colling's Army identity card and travel orders in the secret compartment in Colling's suitcase.

Shortly before 5:00 P.M., they put on their borrowed Brazilian attire and strolled through the Polonia's lobby and out the front doors. Out of the corner of his eye, Colling noticed that the Renault was parked once again where its occupants could view the hotel's main entrance. Colling and Elizabeth started circling the rondo towards the Treskie Restaurant. The black sedan did not move, and Colling was certain that they had once again not been noticed.

Half way around the circular plaza, Colling's shoulder was tapped, startling him so that he jumped. He turned, as did Elizabeth, to see Tomek walking close behind them. The Pole hissed at them to keep walking, then he passed them and turned into a narrow passageway, motioning with a nod of his head for them to follow.

Tomek gestured them past him as he kept an eye on the alley's entrance. When it appeared that no one was behind them, he stepped closer and pulled out a large manila envelope that he handed to Elizabeth.

"I think these should do."

Elizabeth examined the documents, opening each of the identity books in turn. She handed Colling one, and he found it to be his own. The familiar photo she had taken at Frau Bergheim's farm stared back at him. Somehow, he thought it looked to be a younger man.

Elizabeth pronounced the papers satisfactory, and handed Tomek $200. He smiled and said, "I think perhaps you might add one hundred more, please. I found my expenses have outrun my original estimate."

Without comment, Elizabeth fished a hundred-dollar bill from her purse. Tomek's eyes widened at the denomination, but then he placed it with the other money and put it in his inside coat pocket. "Goodbye, and good luck," he said, and hurried out of the alley.

Colling and Elizabeth decided to continue on to the Treskie. Most of its tables were unoccupied, since the Warsaw custom was to eat much later in the evening. In order that their waiter would not discern anything unusual, they ordered coffee, accompanied by fruit and pastry. When they had finished, they strolled arm-in-arm back to the Polonia. The Renault had not moved.

Colling attempted to return the Mendozas' clothing, but when he knocked on their door, there was no answer. He ultimately put everything on hangers from the wardrobe in his and Elizabeth's room and wrote out a note to the maid to return them to the Mendozas' room.

Taking time to examine his new identity papers more closely, Colling learned that his name would be Jan Tadeusz Woznica. Elizabeth's was Elzbieta Jadwicka Woznica. Woznica was a machinist who had been working in the Skoda works in Czechoslovakia, and had been born in a small village near Koszalin. Elizabeth was his wife; her papers showed that she had worked as a laborer in the same factory as her husband. The travel authorization to Prague was accompanied by a letter offering employment from a tool and die firm in Czechoslovakia. The couple was returning to paid employment in the newly-rejuvenated Czech industry for a period of one year, when they would be required to return to Poland. Colling had new respect for Tomek. The man was very thorough.

As soon as it was dark, they dressed in the clothes he had bought in the flea market. With Colling carrying his suitcase and the canvas bag, and Elizabeth her own, they used the stairs to descend to the basement. The hotel staff that Colling had encountered when he returned was gone. They climbed the flight of stairs to the outside door, and Colling opened it a crack. The Renault was not parked on the side street. He opened the door slightly wider and peered around it. He could not see the car and guessed it was still parked closer to the main entrance, and that the two men in it had probably decided that Colling and Elizabeth were unlikely to leave their room for the remainder of the night.

Colling told Elizabeth that he would be waiting for her around the first corner to their right, and that she should delay ten minutes before following him. He then slipped out of the door and walked quickly away.

It seemed to him that more than ten minutes passed before Elizabeth joined him. They looked back to see if they were being followed, saw no one, and then set off for the closest street-car stop. They asked directions for the railway depot, and were told which street-car would take them there.

The terminal was bustling with activity, and Colling asked Elizabeth to wait for him while he disposed of the bag containing their uniforms. She picked a place to one side and he left her sitting on their two suitcases.

He found the railway baggage facility was as makeshift an affair as the terminal itself. A large wire cage had been built on a wooden frame and filled with shelves made of planks that were stacked with trunks, suitcases, bags and parcels of all shapes and sizes. Colling filled out a tag with the name Janos Krepeska, and addressed it to the central train station in Prague. He then attached it to the canvas bag and paid for it to be shipped as addressed. He had serious doubts that he would ever see it again.

He rejoined Elizabeth and they proceeded to the ticket windows. As they slowly worked their way to the head of the line, he asked, "Two for Poznan, right?"

"No. Kracow. Two for Kracow."

Silently vowing he would never be surprised by anything Elizabeth did ever again, Colling asked for two one-way tickets to Krakow, third-class.

Chapter Nine

May-June, 1946

Colling had not expected to encounter mountains in Poland. Like most Americans, and in spite of his Polish ancestry, he had always pictured Poland as a land of flat steppes. In truth, southern Poland, called by the Poles the Mawopolska, was an alpine region. Kracow, ancient capital of Poland, lay tucked in a valley amid green hills, surrounded by distant snow-tipped ranges.

Their journey south had been as slow and tiresome as before, with frequent side-tracking and much rocking and jolting over hastily-repaired roadbeds. It was not until the morning of the second day after leaving Warsaw that they reached the main railway station on the eastern edge of Kracow. Avoiding the several horse-drawn taxis that waited at the station, they walked towards the Rynek Glowny, the famous great square of the city, keeping up the appearance of a poor refugee couple.

At a farmer's market a few blocks from the square, they asked directions to somewhere to stay and were told that old Pani Macziewsie took in boarders and might have a vacancy in her house.

Their knock brought the gray-haired Madame Macziewsie to her door. When Colling explained that they had heard she had rooms to let, she asked if they had money. When Colling replied that they did, she ushered them over the threshold and up three flights of narrow stairs to a garret room with a single small window overlooking a roof at the rear of the house. The only article that could be said to be furniture was a small bed with ropes in place of springs. A mat on the floor appeared to be intended to provide additional sleeping accommodations.

When Madame Macziewskie smilingly told Colling the room would be 200 zlotys a day with meals, he apologized and made as if to leave, saying that he and his wife could not afford so much. The old landlady stopped him and asked in a less friendly way if 100 zlotys was too much. Colling shook his head and with eyes downcast, admitted that it was. He pulled a few of the Russian-made zloty notes from his pocket and showed her that he had only 300 zlotys left. The old woman grudgingly agreed to accept 50 zlotys for the night, but she would not feed them. Colling paid her, adding that if he could find work the next day, they might be able to stay longer.

Once Madame Macziewskie had clattered off down the stairs, they opened their suitcases and removed their money and the extra forged documents. Colling tucked the Luger into the back of his belt and found a corner in the eaves in which to conceal the box of cartridges. The cash was divided between Elizabeth's purse and the inside pocket of Colling's suit coat. Elizabeth pulled up her skirt and put the extra sets of identity papers inside the front of the bloomers she was wearing. They could now leave the boarding house without concern that the landlady might rifle through their belongings, but knowing that they had perhaps assumed a greater risk if they were stopped and searched on the street.

They found a food vendor in the open-air market where they had asked directions, and bought bread, sausage and cheese. As they sat eating on a nearby stone bench, Colling asked if she had an address where her uncle could be found.

"Yes. It's not really a residence," she said, "It's a school where he teaches."

"Do you have any idea where it is from here?" Colling asked.

"I think so. It's quite a walk, but it's early yet. A little village called Zapieskowa, south of the main part of town."

"Do you think those shoes of yours will hold up with all this hiking?"

"They're fine," she said, looking down at her feet.

Zapieskowa was, by Colling's estimate, five or six miles from where they had started, since it was well over an hour later when Elizabeth announced that she thought they had reached the place. There were no road signs of any kind, and they had had to stop and ask directions several times. They were not alone on the road. A fair number of travelers were also walking. Farmers with their horse-drawn carts, women with large bundles on their backs, couples like themselves, carrying suitcases, some with small children tagging along, all were bound for their own destinations. Bands of armed men wearing the same nondescript mixture of uniforms that they had seen on the train when they crossed the Polish border seemed to have stationed themselves at key crossroads and intersections. Those walking by were randomly stopped for no apparent logical reason. Colling and Elizabeth were asked for their identification on two occasions. The demeanor displayed towards the couple was less amicable now that they no longer wore American uniforms and their papers showed them to be Polish.

While they were not searched, there was a demand each time to see their passports, and each time, Colling also handed over 100 zlotys in payment of what the men who described themselves as the militia called an "impost," which seemed to be the only requirement to their being allowed to pass, because examination of their papers was perfunctory in both cases.

The village consisted of a number of whitewashed peasant cottages lining an unpaved dusty street. Halfway down the street, however, stood a two-story building of more substantial construction, which Colling correctly guessed was the school for which they were searching. Fortunately, there was a small park across the street from the front of the school. Colling and Elizabeth sat waiting on the single bench that was available. Few people passed by, and there was no motor traffic. They sat side by side, saying little, waiting. Colling was growing restless, and was about to suggest they leave and return later when the faint sound of a bell ringing came from the direction of the school. A few minutes later, a crowd of adolescents came down its steps and scattered in different directions. A woman came to the doorway and shouted a reminder that the students had only an hour for lunch, and must return by one o'clock.

Colling pulled his Bulova wristwatch from his pocket to see that it was noon. He had decided not to put it in the canvas bag he had sent to Prague. While his possession of the American timepiece could prove to be a problem, he kept it off his wrist and in his trouser pocket, as much to keep it from being confiscated by a militiaman as to conceal it. If questioned, he intended to say he had purchased it from a downed British flyer. If necessary, however, he would just throw it away.

Suddenly, Elizabeth pulled at his sleeve and said, "Let's go."

The hallway of the school smelt musty, and after the bright sunshine they had left outside, it took a moment for their eyes to adjust to its darkness. Elizabeth led the way to the stairs to the second floor. As they stepped into the upper hallway, voices could be heard coming from one end of the building. They walked softly towards the sound and found a small group that they surmised was the faculty sitting in a room around a table. Elizabeth surveyed the people in the room, then stepping forward, she cried out, "Uncle Karol!" to a white-haired man seated with the rest. The old man peered intently through his spectacles at the woman who had so suddenly interrupted his lunch, then stood and crossed the room, taking Elizabeth in his arms.

"Elzbieta. How have you come here?" he asked.

"Uncle Karol, it has been so long. My husband, Jan, and I have come from Warsaw to see you," she replied, pulling Colling forward to shake hands.

Karol had to introduce each of his colleagues to the couple, hesitating over the unfamiliar name Woznica. When the greetings and shaking of hands was completed, Elizabeth asked the old man if they could speak privately.

She led Karol and Colling to the far end of the hallway where they could not be overheard.

"Uncle Karol, it is so wonderful to see you," she said. "I have come to get you to the United States."

"I had been told you were coming. But how is this possible?"

"Connections have been made. Everything is arranged, but we must move quickly."

"I cannot do that, little one. If I were to leave so suddenly, suspicions would be aroused, and frankly, three of those people that you just met are Communists. If they learn the reason for your coming, they will notify the authorities immediately. And besides this, I have to notify Jan and Tomasz."

Colling now understood why Elizabeth had had Tomek prepare two extra sets of papers. He did not understand, however, why she had not told him about these two men.

"Are they nearby?" asked Elizabeth.

"Yes. They have been working on farms near here, waiting for you to come."

"Wives and children?"

"As you know, my wife died two years ago. I do not know where my sons are. Jan's wife and child disappeared during the evacuation from Oldenberg. Tomasz's wife and children are somewhere, but he will not say. He says they are safe."

"So there will be only the three of you?" inquired Elizabeth.

"Yes. Tomasz thinks perhaps he can get his wife and children out after he is able to get to the United States."

Colling stood silently listening to this exchange. Aside from the fact that the number of individuals they were expected to help escape to the West had tripled, the reference to Oldenberg was puzzling. Oldenberg was in Germany, which meant that Karol and his friends must have been there within the past few months, perhaps

earlier. If so, that meant that they had been there when the Nazis were still running things. Maybe they were collaborators. If so, it was understandable why Elizabeth would want to get them out of Poland. But then, by aiding them, she could find herself in deep trouble…and himself as well. He tried to think where he had heard Oldenberg mentioned. He knew there was something about the place that he had read, or someone had told him about, but he could not recall what it was.

He thought about the possibility that he could be held equally accountable for Elizabeth's activities, if she were working to shield potential war criminals, and then he also recalled that his furlough was close to expiring, and if he weren't back in Grabensheim within the week, he would be facing AWOL charges as well as whatever else might be in store for him if he and Elizabeth were found to be assisting wanted fugitives.

Colling suddenly realized that Elizabeth was speaking to him.

"Jan, we must leave Uncle Karol to finish his afternoon classes," she was saying, pulling at his arm.

He mumbled a goodbye to Karol and followed Elizabeth from the school. Once out of earshot, she told him that they were to meet with Karol and the two other men at Karol's house after dark. Colling was not enthused with the prospect of the long walk back into Kracow, but realized that it would be necessary to gather their belongings, and that to do otherwise might arouse unwanted interest on the part of their landlady and others.

He need not have worried about Madame Macziewskie's curiosity; the old lady was waiting for them when they arrived hot and dusty at the front stoop of her house. With a hint of sarcasm in her voice, she wanted to know if Mr. Woznica or his wife had been able to find work. On an impulse, Colling told her that they had. He said that they had both been offered work on a farm to the east of the city, about ten kilometers in the country. The farmer had a room above his barn for them, and while they would not receive much in the way of wages, they would eat with the owner's family and the other hands. He and Mrs. Woznica would be leaving as soon as they could, since it was a long walk back to their new quarters. He countered the frown growing on her face by offering her 50 additional zlotys by way of compensation for their leaving on such short notice.

After they trudged up the stairs to their room, Elizabeth dropped onto the narrow bed and said in a low voice, "Boy, you can make up a story on the spot!"

"At least I came up with an excuse for our leaving so quickly."

"That you did. Have you always been able to make up tales like that with a straight face?"

"I've gotten better at it lately," said Colling wryly, as he began packing his suitcase. Elizabeth eyed him, and without saying anything, pulled her own case from the corner and opened it on the bed.

They waited until it was nearly dark before retracing their steps to Zapieskowa. The bands of armed militia were not to be seen, and when they passed through one small hamlet, the loud sounds coming from a tavern indicated that they were probably spending the day's impost collections. Elizabeth skirted the main street through Zapieskowa and led Colling to a cottage set back from the road among a stand of trees on the southern edge of the town.

Karol opened the door to Elizabeth's knock and took them through a narrow hallway into the kitchen. Two men were sitting at the round wooden table in the center of the room. They looked up and watched Colling and Elizabeth as they entered. An open bottle of clear liquid that Colling surmised was vodka stood in the center of the table. Karol introduced the men as Jan and Tomasz, without mentioning their last names. Jan was the younger of the two, dark-haired and with a thin face that Colling guessed was the result of either illness or prolonged anxiety, or both. Tomasz was middle-aged and, like Karol, wore glasses. He looked fit and better fed than Jan, but it seemed to Colling that he shared with the younger man the same air of nervous anxiety.

Karol invited Elizabeth and Colling to join them at the table. Jan poured some of the vodka into a glass for each of them. Beginning immediately with the reason for their meeting, Elizabeth explained that she had identity papers and travel authorizations for Vienna, and that the following day, they would all leave by train for Czechoslovakia, then across into Austria. The three men seemed pleased at the prospect, and were in the middle of discussing the various steps that each of them would have to take to prepare to depart Poland, when Colling interjected, "I do not think this is such a good idea, Elzbieta."

She turned to him, her eyes narrowing, "It's all worked out, Jim," she said in English.

He responded in the same language, "It's a bad idea, Liz. Let me tell you why. We were watched from the minute we arrived in Warsaw. Someone knew we were coming. And I bet they're looking for us right now. That little red herring you dropped about Poznan won't fool them for long."

She tried to interrupt, and he held up his hand to silence her and continued, “If we try getting on a train to Vienna, they’ll be on us before you can say ‘Jack Robinson.’ The only reason we got out of Warsaw when we did was because we didn’t follow the pre-arranged plan. Our only chance now is to improvise.”

Elizabeth looked steadily at him for what seemed a long time. The three Poles, obviously not fully understanding what was being said, watched them expectantly, waiting for an explanation.

“My orders were to bring them to Vienna. There are people waiting there for us. If we don’t arrive, they’ll wonder what happened. They’ll probably imagine the worst…that we’ve been captured by the NKVD,” said Elizabeth.

“And what will they do if they think that?” asked Colling.

“There isn’t anything that they can do. They might make some inquiries. Maybe raise a stink with the Polish Red Cross. But I don’t think they would really do anything.”

“They’d write us off, right?”

“Probably,” she replied with an air of resignation.

“Then so what if we find another way out?” asked Colling.

“And what might that way be, pray tell?”

“I’m not exactly sure. I have to think about it for awhile. But I know that trying to get on that train to Vienna will be the end for certain.”

Reverting to Polish, Elizabeth spoke to their companions, “My husband is concerned about taking the railway across Czechoslovakia to Austria. He does not believe it to be safe. He will have another plan to offer after he has had time to devise one.”

The Poles all began expressing their alarm and dismay simultaneously, until Colling waved his hands and asked them to listen to him.

“My wife has spoken the truth when she says I have no plan at this moment, but I will have one soon. You must realize that the Russians are looking for us.”

An alarmed expression spread across the faces of all three men, and Colling was certain that they were close to panic.

He continued, “We are safe for now, but we must not do what was originally planned. I believe someone has betrayed us, actually betrayed us before Elzbieta and I ever arrived in Poland.”

Tomasz interjected, “You are Americans. If the NKVD arrests us, you will be expelled, and we are the ones who will be imprisoned, or worse.”

Jan nodded his agreement, but then Karol spoke, “They are more likely to be shot than ourselves, Tomasz. We at least have some value to the Russians.” Gesturing at Colling and Elizabeth, he said, “These two will just disappear.”

Karol’s comment caused the hair on the back of Colling’s neck to rise. His concern about being punished for being AWOL was inconsequential in comparison with what he had just heard, but knowing that Karol and his friends needed reassurance, he forced himself to calmly ask, “Is it possible that all of us can remain a few days in your house, Uncle Karol?”

“Of course. But I am not sure what Jan and Tomasz must yet do. If they do not return to the farms where they have been working, there will be questions.”

Nodding towards the two men, Colling said, “Let Jan and Tomasz go about their business as usual. You, Uncle Karol, will teach your classes tomorrow. It will be hardest for you, Uncle Karol, to find an excuse for leaving your position. We must find one so that your fellow teachers and the headmaster will have no suspicions. In the meantime, Elzbieta and I will give thought to how this must be done.”

After Jan and Tomasz agreed that they would be prepared to leave at a moment’s notice, the two men slipped out the door and into the night. Karol showed Colling and Elizabeth to their quarters in a bedroom on the second floor of the house. He explained that the school provided his housing, and that he normally shared the place with a married couple and two other teachers. The other four, however, had been called to Warsaw for a “political” purpose, as Karol described it, with a dour expression on his face. They were not expected to return anytime soon.

Their bedroom was comfortable and clean. Karol explained that the tiled laundry room on the first floor actually was equipped with a bathtub and a sink with a hand pump for drawing water. By using a bucket, it was possible to fill the small coal-fired water heater that was mounted on the wall next to the tub and have a hot

bath. Elizabeth took advantage of this unexpected luxury first, and Colling followed her. The water had grown tepid, and he remained in the tub only long enough to scrub himself. As he washed the stubble on his face, he thought about how good a shave would feel. His American shaving kit had been left behind in Warsaw, and he had not asked to borrow a razor from Karol. Sitting in the rapidly-cooling water, he resigned himself to the fact that he would have to allow his beard to continue to grow, admitting to himself that unshaven, he would blend into the mass of refugees travelling across Poland.

When he slipped into bed beside Elizabeth, he intended to ask her the full names of Karol and the other Poles, but as if anticipating his thoughts, she said, "Jim, I think it's best if you just know these men by their first names, in case you're questioned." Before he could say anything, she embraced him and placed her lips on his. They made love using the last of the prophylactics he had brought with him.

The sound of Karol moving about the house awoke them the next morning, and they joined him for breakfast of eggs and sausage. There was tea instead of coffee, but otherwise the meal was good. When Colling mentioned that food seemed to be more plentiful in Poland than in Germany, Karol boasted that the soil of Poland was the most fertile, and Polish farmers were the most industrious, in all of Europe, and besides, they had had a few more months of peace than the Germans.

As they ate, Karol indicated that he had been thinking about how he might explain the need to ask for permission to be absent from his post. He had decided that if Elizabeth would write a letter, he would explain that his mother in Lublin had become very ill and was on her deathbed, and he would ask for a few days' leave to be by her side. Before he left for the school, he dictated the letter for Elizabeth to write. Colling was surprised to see the ease with which she wrote the Polish cursive. Karol held the letter up and read it, and after only a few corrections and suggestions, he folded it into a square and had Elizabeth write his name on it. He then used a small circle of gummed paper to seal the letter, then tore it open. After folding and unfolding it several times, he tucked it into his coat pocket, picked up his battered briefcase, and pulling on a battered fedora, headed off to the school.

Colling had asked Karol whether he had a map of Poland, and had been told that there was one in the drawer of the desk in what was the parlor of the house. As soon as Karol had departed, Colling found it and spread it on the kitchen table. He traced the routes towards the Czech border; towards Germany; the eastern border with the Soviet Union, and even southeast to Romania. Elizabeth finished washing dishes and came to stand beside him.

"The shortest route is still across Czechoslovakia to Vienna," she said.

"I know, but I have a feeling that that's not the way to go. I think the Russians will be waiting for us anywhere we try to cross into Czechoslovakia, even if we're on foot."

Colling paused and looked up at Elizabeth, "And by the way, there's something I've been meaning to ask. What did Karol mean last night when he said that they were of value to the Russians?"

"I really don't know what he meant," replied Elizabeth.

"Were they collaborators with the Nazis? Do the Russians want them as war criminals?"

"No, of course not. I wouldn't have anything to do with Nazis."

"Then what were they doing in Oldenberg?" he challenged.

She let out a long sigh, then said, "All right. You might as well know." Pausing, she continued, "They were transported to Germany as slave laborers. I spent most of my time at Camp 146 trying to find someone who had known them there. I finally found someone who did. That's where I got the information about their location here. They were not collaborators, it that's what you're thinking. They were prisoners who managed to escape towards the end of the fighting."

"And all three are your uncles?"

"Well, Uncle Karol is. Jan and Tomasz are related to him, so they're cousins or something like that."

"You told me we were coming to Poland to find your uncle. One person. Then back in Warsaw, you had Tomek make up documents for three men. I wondered why, but didn't ask. Now it's clear you came here to find all three. What was it? Didn't you trust me?"

Elizabeth tried to sooth him, saying, "Jim, you know I trust you. It was just that I didn't really know about Jan and Tomasz then. I only found out about them just before we left Germany."

"And you decided not to mention it? That's a little strange."

"I didn't think it was important."

Colling shook his head. “Never mind. What’s done is done. Now we have to figure out how to get all five of us out of Poland without getting caught.”

“Vienna is still closer,” persisted Elizabeth.

“Yeah,” said Colling, as he turned his attention once again to the map. Elizabeth left his side and he heard her going up the stairs.

When she returned, he said, “I’ve been thinking about it. Like I said, heading for Vienna is out. They’ll expect us to run to the nearest western border. Also, Romania is out. Too many Russians, and the Romanians don’t like Poles at all. If we head directly south into Czechoslovakia, we have to cross the mountains, and even at this time of the year, I don’t think your three charges are in any shape to make it. Besides, we would have to dodge the Russians and the Czechs, since the Czechs don’t like Polish refugees either. I think we need to head north. If we can get to the Baltic, we might be able to catch a fishing boat across to Sweden.”

Elizabeth frowned, “That’s a long way to go by train.”

“Not by train. We walk.”

“But that will take weeks, Jim.”

“There are thousands of people wandering back and forth across Poland. The Russians will be watching every train station. They can’t watch every road. We’ll just blend in with the crowd. It isn’t important how long it takes, just so long as we get there.”

“How far is it?” she asked.

“Four or five hundred kilometers, I would guess. If we can make 30 kilometers a day, we should be at the Baltic in less than three weeks.”

“Won’t we stand out, five people just walking along?”

“I’ve been thinking about that. If we can get a farm cart, we can say we’re a family headed back to our home village. You know, refugees who were transported by the Germans.”

When Karol came home from work, Colling outlined his plan. Karol suggested that Jan or Tomasz might know where a horse and a wagon or cart might be purchased. He gave Colling directions to each of the farms where the two men worked.

The place where Tomasz was employed as a farmhand was closer to Zapieskowa, so Colling went there first. He found the Pole alone, shoveling manure in the barn. When Colling called out his name, he stopped his work and stepped forward to greet the American.

“Some work for a metallurgist with a university degree, heh?” said Tomasz.

Colling was not surprised at the comment. While his ability to discern nuances in the Polish language was not perfect, he had suspected from the syntax and vocabulary used by Karol’s associates that they were educated men.

“Once you become accustomed to the odor, you discover that shoveling dung is not so bad a way to keep fit,” said Colling, grinning. “I know. I have done that sort of work before.”

Tomasz laughed, then asked, “What brings you here?”

“I come seeking the purchase of a wagon or cart, together with a horse to pull the same.”

Tomasz thought a moment, then replied, “The boss of this place, Panowie Weizescie has been attempting to purchase a cart from his neighbor, but they cannot agree on a price.”

“Will such cart come with a horse, as well?”

“No. But Panowie Weizescie has two or three horses he will sell, if he finds the price to be acceptable. May I ask why you wish a cart?”

“Yes, you may. We will use it to carry our belongings when we leave this place.”

“Then we are to go on foot?”

“Yes. All will be explained before we depart.”

Tomasz gestured towards the stalls in the rear of the barn. “The horses are there.”

Horses were a mainstay on Colling’s uncles’ farms in Wisconsin, but the three that Tomasz showed him were not as large or as healthy-looking. His facial expression must have betrayed his thoughts, because Tomasz explained that the farm owner’s better horses were out being worked in the fields. These were ones that might be for sale.

Tomasz pointed him in the direction where the farmer might be found, and after a lengthy walk, Colling found a group of men and women plowing and sowing by hand. Cap in hand, he bowed slightly and asked to speak to Panowie Weizescie.

A bearded man, his clothes less threadbare than the others, stepped forward and identified himself as the Panowie.

"Your Honor, my name is Jan Woznica, and I have been told that you have a horse to sell," said Colling.

"Yes, that is true," replied Weizescie, sizing Colling up. "But I must have cash, Jan Woznica. I will not barter my horse for some chickens or a few bags of grain."

"Understood, your honor. I have cash," said Colling, pulling his roll of zloty banknotes from his pocket and holding it up for the farmer to see.

Shouting over his shoulder that the planting of the field should continue without him, Weizescie ordered Colling to follow him and began walking rapidly in the direction from which Colling had just come.

Tomasz was still shoveling when they walked into the barn. Weizescie grunted a response to Tomasz's greeting and brushed past him. Colling followed close behind, ignoring Tomasz and acting as if he were not acquainted with him. The Panowie began extolling the virtues of a brown horse that looked to Colling to be on its last legs. Instead, Colling picked out a smaller gray mare that looked healthier and asked her price. Weizescie let out a barking laugh and said, "You are a judge of horses, Jan Woznica. This is the best of the lot."

"And how much, your honor, are you asking?" said Colling.

"Twenty thousand zlotys. Not a groszie less."

"That is very dear, your honor. If I were to offer fifty dollars, American, would you sell for that price?"

The Panowie Weizescie's eyes narrowed. "How comes it to be that Jan Woznica has American dollars?"

Colling stared back confidently and said, "I have a brother in Chicago in the United States of America who has sent me some money."

"Oh, yes," said Weizescie, smiling slyly at Colling, "Well, then, I would say that I would sell this horse for perhaps one hundred dollars."

Colling gave a snort of disdain and turned to walk away, saying, "Thank you for your time, Panowie Weizescie. I must look elsewhere."

"Wait, wait, Jan Woznica. Not so fast. A man must bargain, is that not so? One does not always take the first offer."

Colling stopped and replied, "I will pay you sixty dollars, Panowie Weizescie, for this gray horse, and not a cent more."

Weizescie laughed. "Done, Jan Woznica."

"And you will provide a bridle for that price, I assume, Panowie Weizescie?" said Colling.

Weizescie laughed again. "Yes, yes, Jan Woznica."

Colling counted out three twenty-dollar bills, which Weizescie held up to the light. Seemingly satisfied, the Pole helped Colling place the bridle on the gray horse, and Colling led the animal out of the barn. He passed Tomasz as if he were a stranger, saying nothing to him.

In the farmyard, Colling said to Weizescie, "Panowie Weizescie, I need to purchase a cart for this horse to pull. I have been told that your neighbor might have such a cart for sale. Is that so?"

Colling suspected that the Panowie was not happy that his neighbor might also be coming into some American dollars through the sale of his wagon, but grudgingly, Weizescie answered in the affirmative. He provided directions to the neighboring farm owned by Petr Kazowskis, pointing in the direction of the route that would be the shortest.

The farmer Kazowskis was suspicious of Colling when he introduced himself and said that he had been told by Panowie Weizescie that there was a cart for sale. As a result, Kazowskis was more difficult to deal with, and Colling had a continuing concern as he spoke to the man that he might not be able to conclude the purchase. Kazowskis also had a multitude of questions about Jan Woznica, asking about his accent, his origins, why he needed a cart, and where he was going. Colling began to be convinced that the man would gossip about the Pole from Pomerania who had bought his wagon.

While he haggled over how much he would pay and whether Kazowskis should throw in a set of harness, Colling embellished his story considerably, telling Kazowskis how he was really buying the cart for use on the farm he had recently purchased jointly with his brother, located near the Hungarian frontier. He complained that

the Hungarians had stolen everything they could lay their hands on, and if they were to get a crop planted this spring, he had to get back as soon as possible. He described his own imaginary family of a wife and three children, and added how he and his brother had to care for their aged mother, their father having died of pneumonia the previous winter. He explained away his origins near the Baltic by saying that they had been expelled by the Germans even before 1939 and remained here in the south. When he finally paid for the cart and a set of harness with fifty dollars in U.S. currency, he repeated what he had said to Weizescie about having relatives in Chicago who fortunately had been able to send money.

The wagon was a four-wheeled conveyance of typical Polish design. The rough wood from which it was constructed had weathered to a dull gray color, but the axles and wheels were solid and well greased. With a little help from Kazowskis, Colling managed to get the little mare between the cart's traces and harnessed, but rather than immediately driving the horse to pull the unfamiliar cart, Colling chose to instead lead the little mare by the bridle and walked beside her back to Karol's.

He turned the horse loose in a small fenced pasture behind the house, after unhitching her from the wagon in a shed that seemed to have been made to hold a carriage. Elizabeth was seated at the kitchen table, and he joined her. She brought him a glass of hot tea, and he recounted his experiences with the Polish farmers as he sipped the sweet liquid. She laughed at the autobiography he had concocted for Kazowskis, and repeated her amazement at his ability to construct plausible stories on short notice. She admitted that despite her initial misgivings, she had thought about his plan and concluded that attempting to reach the Baltic was perhaps the approach most likely to succeed. Together they decided that they should start their journey on the day after next. It would be Saturday, market day, and the roads would be busier than usual, providing more of a crowd into which they might blend.

Rather than heading towards Krakow, they took the road eastward until they reached the first place that was worthy to be called a town, where they joined the crowd thronging its market. There they purchased bread, sausage, cabbages and beets. Elizabeth picked out an assortment of pots, pans and cheap metal plates, cups and eating utensils. Colling bought a keg that he lashed to the side of the cart and filled with water from the town well. Some pieces of canvas to serve as ground cloths and a blanket apiece were also added to the cargo in the back of the wagon. As an afterthought, Colling purchased a dozen sacks of potatoes and threw them in on top of their luggage. If asked, they could say they were returning from market or going to market, as might be appropriate under the circumstances. The last items to be added were a canister of tea, a small bag of salt, some black pepper and several other spices that Elizabeth said would be essential if she was to be able to cook decent meals for all of them. To avoid arousing undue curiosity or calling attention to themselves, they used Polish currency for all their transactions.

Fully provisioned, they left the town by a route that Colling guessed would lead them in a northerly direction. Karol indicated he was somewhat familiar with the area, and following his advice, by mid-afternoon they found themselves on a road that a passing farmer assured them would take them northwest to Lodz.

They continued to encounter bands of armed militia that had posted themselves at every crossroads and junction. They, like everyone else, were halted every few kilometers, questioned and asked to pay for the privilege of passing. Their papers were never closely examined, even when they were asked to produce them. On a few occasions, Soviet trucks roared past, leaving clouds of choking dust in their wakes. The roads were like rivers of humanity, filled with thousands of people heading in different directions; walking, riding in carts, some on bicycles, and a rare few in motor vehicles. Colling, Elizabeth and their three charges were an unremarkable and unnoticed part of it all.

Each day blended with another. They arose early each morning and were usually moving shortly after the sun was above the horizon. When late afternoon arrived, they would begin searching for a place to camp and spend the night. There always seemed to be an unoccupied copse of trees to be found, sometimes with a stream or river nearby. When no water was available at their camp-site, the keg on the wagon would be filled from a town fountain or well. They found that food could be purchased from the farms they passed along the way to supplement what they carried with them, and Elizabeth managed to turn simple fare into passable meals in spite of the difficulty of cooking over an open fire. Colling estimated that they were covering only 20 to 25 kilometers a day, but there seemed to be no way to increase the distance they were able to travel from sunup to dusk, given the number of times they were stopped, and the generally slow pace of the others using the road.

Moving with any haste would have made them stand out from the crowd. Colling lost track of the number of days that had passed, but he was certain that May 10 was one of them, and that he was officially AWOL.

They had been traveling for more than a week when they spent a night camped in a grove of trees about a hundred meters off the road. At first light, Colling partially awoke when some sub-conscious part of his mind failed to hear the sounds of Elizabeth preparing their breakfast, and then a shout caused him to sit up suddenly, his blanket still wrapped around him.

A man with a rifle in his hand had his arm around Elizabeth's throat, almost lifting her feet from the ground. Tomasz and Jan were held at bay by another man pointing his rifle at them as they crouched where they had been sleeping. Karol was standing, and a third man was threatening him with his rifle as well. All three men were wearing the shabby remnants of Wehrmacht uniforms, and Colling recognized their weapons as German-issue Mausers.

The man holding Elizabeth waved his rifle at Colling, shouting in German and broken Polish for him to stand up. Because of Elizabeth's struggles, he was having difficulty holding onto her and aiming the Mauser at the same time.

Colling's hand closed on the Luger that had been at his side during the night. He feigned ignorance of what the man was saying, trying to give the impression that he was not fully awake as he struggled to free himself from the blanket. Once he pushed aside the blanket, he slowly stood, the pistol held concealed along the seam of his baggy trousers. When he was fully upright, he quickly raised the Luger and shot the man holding Elizabeth through the head. Almost reflexively, he turned and put a second bullet into the chest of the man guarding Karol. He had started to bring his aim to bear on the third German when the man bolted, crashing away through the underbrush as he tried to put distance between himself and Colling. Colling ran after him, quickly gaining ground. The man he was pursuing was slowed by the pack he was wearing and the rifle in his hands. Colling caught up with him as he slid down the side of the gully to the bank of the stream where they had drawn their water the previous evening.

The German regained his feet and looked back at Colling standing above him on the edge of the embankment. He raised his rifle and fired wildly, then turned to run again when Colling shot him in the back of the thigh. He went down screaming, and was writhing on the ground, holding his leg, as Colling dropped down into the gully and walked over to him. Colling was dimly aware that Elizabeth was saying something to him when he fired his next shot into the German's face. Suddenly, she was beside him, holding his arm, her breath labored from running after him.

"Good God, Jim!" She said, "You didn't need to do that."

Colling looked at her dully, the smoking Luger again held at his side. He began to shake, and he recognized that he was experiencing the after-effects of the rush of adrenaline that had begun when he shot the first German. He forced himself to control the involuntary physiological reaction, and the shaking began to subside. When Elizabeth put her arms around him and started to lead him back to the campsite, he stopped and said, "No, wait. We need to search him and get his rifle." He returned to crouch over the dead man and, while Elizabeth watched, he began rifling through the pockets of his jacket, turning up the man's army paybook, some snapshots that Colling consciously did not look at closely, a worn Wehrmacht-issue Polish phrase book and a tattered Esso map of Poland.

Colling next emptied the man's rucksack onto the ground. There were a few items of dirty clothing, some canned food, and a half-eaten loaf of stale bread. Colling shook out the rolled blanket strapped to the bottom of the pack, but found nothing. In the rucksack's side pocket, Colling found a little over two thousand zlotys, some reichsmarks, a few pieces of Wehrmacht military currency and a cloth bag full of jewelry, mostly gold wedding rings. Mixed in with the trinkets were a half-dozen or so gold tooth fillings, the sight of which made Elizabeth wince.

Colling pocketed the money and returned the food to the pack. He went through the ammunition pouches on the German's belt and removed the cartridges and dropped them into the pack. Picking up the Mauser, he took Elizabeth by the arm and led her back to the camp.

He found that the three Poles had completed their own search of the bodies of the other two dead men. Jan was sitting cross-legged by the fire eating from an open can of what Colling guessed was some kind of meat stew. Karol and Tomasz had just finished wrapping the bodies of the Germans in the water-proof ground-cloths they had taken from their backpacks. A blanket had been piled with the items that they had turned up in their

search of the two men. They consisted of money and jewelry, some food, and the usual identification documents.

The shots that had been fired did not appear to have aroused anyone's curiosity. Colling guessed that gunshots in the Polish countryside were not all that unusual.

He said to no one in particular, "It is best that we bury these bodies. Did one of them have an entrenching shovel, by chance?"

Karol held up one of the short-handled tools, saying, "Yes. This scum had one. Probably used it to bury their shit. Now we use it to bury him and his comrades."

Elizabeth reminded them, "Someone must bring the other man's body here to be buried, as well."

"Just so," said Karol. "But not here. We must take all three to the edge of that field over there. The ground has been recently plowed and will be softer, and the decay of their bodies will not pollute the stream. Their remains will serve to enrich the soil of Poland, so there will be at least one good thing that will result from their having come to this place."

Tomasz and Jan volunteered to fetch the body from the gully, and Colling helped Karol drag the other two to where Karol proposed to inter them. The digging went quickly with the four of them taking turns, but the sun was well up in the morning sky when the last spade-full of earth was tamped into place.

When they returned to the campsite, they found Elizabeth had prepared a breakfast made in large part from the canned goods that the Germans had been carrying. As they ate, they speculated that the dead men had been deserters who had found it more attractive to remain behind as bandits in Poland than to try and walk back to Germany. Colling could sense that Elizabeth was still upset with him for killing the third man, and even when the three Poles began relating tales of German depredations and atrocities, the expression on her face told him that she had not accepted what had happened.

The dead men's papers and the gold tooth fillings were buried with them. Colling was uncertain as to the wisdom of keeping the looted jewelry, which might have to be explained at some point, but in the end, he decided that having gold to trade outweighed the risk. The zlotys would be useful, of course. The reichsmarks and Wehrmacht currency were burned to ashes in the campfire. The rifles and ammunition were hidden in the bed of the wagon. Oddly enough, the possession of German firearms would cause little stir in a country where so many had served as partisans against the occupation forces.

In the immediate aftermath of the encounter, Colling found little time to ponder what had happened. His initial adrenaline rush had quickly subsided, and his thoughts and actions were concentrated on the urgency of burying the bodies, breaking camp, loading the wagon and resuming their journey as unobtrusively and quickly as possible. The physical and mental exertion involved in being constantly on the alert to their surroundings, made more acute by his recent experience with the men he had killed, provided a distraction that lasted throughout the day's journey. It was not until he wrapped himself in his blanket and tried to sleep that he began to relive what had happened and question his actions. He thought back to how uncertain he had been of whether he would be able to use his M-1 during the raid on Frau Bergheim's farm, and tried to reconcile that with the ease and efficiency with which he had used the Luger to kill three men within a matter of a minute or two. He attributed his reaction to the first two Germans to a combination of seeing Elizabeth in danger and the time he had spent on the firing range under Zinsmann's tutelage. But that left the third German, and he wondered why there had been no hesitation in killing the wounded man. Recreating the scene in his mind, he realized that he had felt no fear, only what seemed to be an automatic concentration on aiming and firing without hesitation. He slept fitfully, unable to rid himself of the recurring vivid images of each of his shots striking home.

They walked north, and the pleasant days of May passed one by one. Traffic became heavier and Russian troops more evident as they drew closer to Lodz, and they decided that it would be best if they would swing in a wide circle around the city. Militia bands continued to be present on all the country roads they traveled, and their store of zlotys was steadily depleted as they paid the required imposts at each stop. Eerily absent was any sign that the Soviet authorities were looking for them, and they passed the two Red Army checkpoints they encountered without incident, even though the Russians were much more thorough about checking their identity papers. It was all so effortless that Colling began thinking that perhaps there was some grand plot in place to trap them at the time and place that would be most to the NKVD's liking.

They purchased food in the markets in the villages they passed through, but they avoided the larger towns and continued to make camp each night. Most of the time they found a place among the trees, and were

frequently joined by other travelers. When the only suitable place to stop was near a farm, they were careful to ask permission before starting their cooking fire and spreading their blankets. Colling found that his sleep was disturbed by intrusive thoughts and dreams with less frequency as the days passed.

Their little procession continued northwards, and crossed the main east-west rail tracks more than twenty kilometers to the west of Lodz. They then began to turn westward in a curve that would take them to the Vistula and northwest to Danzig. On the second day after leaving the rail line behind them, Colling noticed that there seemed to be fewer people passing them in the opposite direction. They also encountered a declining number of the improvised checkpoints manned by Polish militiamen.

One such day, as they rested in the shade of a tree beside the road, eating their mid-day meal, a man came walking from the direction in which they were headed. He ambled up to where they were seated on the ground and dropped down beside them with a tired, "Dzién dobry." He looked fatigued and hungry. Colling offered him water from their keg and Elizabeth put some slices of ham between two pieces of bread and handed it to him. The man thanked them profusely, offering to pay, but Colling refused his money.

Between mouthfuls, the Pole informed them that things were not good on the road ahead of them. He himself had turned back. The Russians were asking for papers, and anyone who did not live close to where they were stopped was being rounded up. It was his guess that they were being sent to labor camps. He thought it looked as if the Russians wanted to put an end to all the refugees wandering across Poland. He was from the eastern region that had become part of the Soviet Union in 1939, from near Dubno, and he wanted nothing more to do with the Russians. His plan now was to head for Warsaw and look for work, and he advised them to do the same.

When the Pole said he thought he had best resume his travels, Elizabeth gave him the remains of a loaf of bread, and a piece of sausage. When he had departed, Colling asked everyone to gather around so they might discuss what they should do.

Elizabeth was the first to offer her opinion, "I think we must continue as we have, but move carefully and avoid the Russians."

Karol and his friends nodded in agreement.

Colling interjected, "We can go on as we have only with the greatest risk. It will be only a matter of time until we will be stopped by the Russians and required to produce our papers. When that happens, it will be a great surprise if we are not arrested."

Elizabeth started to speak, but Colling held up his hand and continued, "We must find a place where we might stay for awhile. To learn what lies ahead. Where the Russians are, what roads they are watching, and so on. I think we must head north to the Vistula, then follow it towards Danzig. Certainly we will come to a farm or a cottage where we can find shelter."

Karol and his two colleagues responded by voicing their strong objections to Colling's plan. Jan complained of his fatigue after having walked so far and believed the best course was to continue northwestwards directly towards Danzig. Tomasz reminded everyone that they had easily passed through previous Russian checkpoints, and it was possible their guest was mistaken. They would be going out of their way; it would waste time; and they were tired. Karol expressed his belief that it was unrealistic to expect that anyone would allow them shelter without payment, and their money could not last indefinitely.

Elizabeth called for silence. She then said to the three Poles, "All of you must realize, as I do, that Jan Woznica here has kept us from the Reds. I have given it much thought, and I must now admit that if we had ridden the train to Czechoslovakia, as I had wished, we would all now be in the hands of the NKVD. I am willing to trust now in his judgement. Let us look at the map and see what is the best way to go to the Vistula."

Karol and his friends murmured their assent, although Colling sensed that it was less than enthusiastic. He unfolded the Esso map and they gathered around as he traced a possible route from where he thought they were to the river. As best he could determine, it appeared that they were a few kilometers south of the crossroads village of Krosniewice. If they turned northeast, it appeared that in two to three days, with luck, they would be on the banks of the Vistula. The route he proposed to take was shown on the roadmap as following narrow blue lines labeled "local roads," which, in Colling's mind, meant there was less chance of encountering Russian patrols or checkpoints.

Wary of entering Krosniewice, they left the main road before they reached the town in favor of a rutted track that led eastward. Over the next three days, they passed through several poor villages, but no market towns. The

roads were of even worse quality than those they had been traveling, and their little gray horse struggled at times to pull their cart over their uneven surfaces. Without markets, there was no opportunity to replenish their supplies, and their breakfast on the morning of the day they reached the river consisted of boiled potatoes.

Colling had pictured the Vistula as having the sort of river-banks he was used to. He was surprised when they instead encountered the outer fringes of the reed marshes that bordered the river. The Esso map did not offer a clue as to where they might find access to the Vistula itself, without traversing many meters of muddy grass. It appeared that towns in either direction were located on the river, but Colling feared that entering them would mean encountering Russian troops. Instead, he said they should set up camp where they were, while he went on a scouting expedition towards the village west of them. He promised Elizabeth he would keep to a path that skirted the marshes, and not go into the town if he saw anything suspicious.

Chapter Ten

June, 1946

If Colling had returned to the road that paralleled the Vistula, he would not have seen the cottage with its barn and workshop. As he approached the little cluster of buildings, he observed that smoke was rising from the chimney of the cottage, and he could hear the sound of a hammer from within a long shed situated close to the water's edge.

The reeds had been cleared from the Vistula's bank and a passage cut through their dense growth to provide an access channel to the river. Colling watched as a flat barge floated serenely by fifty meters out in the river, kept on course by four oarsmen manning long sweeps.

Colling shouted a greeting as he approached the shed, and a bearded man stepped out to meet him. He held a large hammer in his hand, and Colling, not wanting to appear to pose a threat, stopped at some distance from him.

"Dzién dobry!" said Colling. "I am called Jan Woznica. I mean no harm. My family and I have come a long distance. We were looking for a place where we might encamp for the night. Is that possible?"

The man grunted and replied, "I am called Petr Zaminoski. You may camp over there," he said, pointing towards a small stand of trees.

"Do you have food?" asked Colling. "We have money and can pay."

"Bring your family, then we shall talk," Zaminoski said, hefting the hammer onto his shoulder.

Colling returned less than an hour later, leading the little gray mare pulling the wagon. He wheeled it into place in the shade provided by a pair of stunted trees and set the horse free to graze in a nearby patch of grass. Elizabeth cleared a place for a fire, and Colling and Tomasz created a simple shelter by stretching a canvas tarpaulin from one side of the wagon. They were just completing their usual routine of setting up camp when Zaminoski walked up to join them. A woman holding an infant and a girl of about seven or eight were with him. The girl clung to her mother's skirts, looking shyly at the strangers. Zaminoski still carried his hammer on his shoulder.

"This is my wife, Natalia, and my daughter, Maria. The little one is Marek, after his grandfather," said Zaminoski. "Natalia, this man is called Jan Woznica," he continued, pointing at Colling.

Colling reached out to shake the hands of Zaminoski and his wife, then turned and introduced Elizabeth and the three men with them. When Elizabeth made a fuss over the baby, Natalia immediately invited her to the house, and the women went off together.

Zaminoski invited the men to see his workshop in the shed, which turned out to be a boat-house. He was working on repairs to a hull resting upside down on sawhorses. Colling estimated the craft was about sixteen feet long. When Zaminoski mentioned that the length of the vessel was five meters, he did the conversion and congratulated himself on his accuracy.

"You build boats, then, Petr Zaminoski?" asked Colling.

"Not so much build these days. It is difficult to find materials…wood. All has to be shipped from the south. Mostly now I repair boats. I take parts from two or three to make one whole again."

Admiring the boat on which the man was working, Colling asked, "Would it be possible for us to work for you in exchange for our keep, Petr Zaminoski?"

"I am a poor man, Jan Woznica. I cannot afford to pay wages, and we have little food to spare. Besides, you do not seem to be boatwrights, or even carpenters."

"True enough, Petr Zaminoski. But we are used to hard work. Perhaps we can do simple things and allow you to perform the work that requires your skill."

"The most difficult work is retrieving broken boats from the marshes." At Colling's quizzical look, he continued, "When the Germans retreated before the Red Army, they crossed the Vistula in anything that would float. This stretch of the river is where they came ashore, and the remains of much of their transport is scattered among the reeds. The one in my shed that I am working on at present took me four days to drag from where I found it."

"With four of us, it should only take one day to bring you another," smiled Colling.

"Jan Woznica, you will find it is no pleasant thing to be in freezing water to your chest while your feet are deep in mud."

"I have cleaned stables, and it can be no more unpleasant than having your feet deep in manure," interjected Tomasz.

Colling countered, "True, Tomasz, but the manure is usually much warmer."

Zaminoski laughed out loud with the rest of them, then said, "All right, gentlemen. Perhaps you can pull out one of the bigger boats for me to repair, so I can make more money."

That evening, the five travelers sat around their campfire eating a stew that Elizabeth and Natalia had brought from the cottage. Elizabeth had contributed some of the potatoes from their cart, and the Zaminoskis had added two rabbits taken from a line of traps at the edge of the marsh.

As they ate, Elizabeth said to Colling, "They have a tin bathtub in the cottage. Natalia said if we would haul and heat the water, we could take a bath in the barn. I would really love a bath, Jim."

"I'm sure I could use one as well," he responded. It had been several days since they had found a camping place close to a running stream or river, and those occasions had provided the only opportunity to wash. Even at that, their clothes had not been washed since before they had left Warsaw, and Colling imagined how they must smell. He agreed to move the tub to the barn and draw the water to be heated in a large iron kettle that hung from a tripod in the middle of the yard, if Elizabeth would start the fire. When Karol, Tomasz and Jan discerned what Colling and Elizabeth were doing, they joined in, and used all the buckets they could find to bring water. Elizabeth went first, and when she was finished, the men took their turns. Colling deferred to the Poles, so that he was the last to bathe. He discarded the bath water still in the tub and filled it afresh, and he luxuriated as he immersed himself and used a piece of soap to work up a lather. While he was still soaking, Elizabeth came in and took away his grimy clothes. She brought other clothing from their suitcases, and informed him she was washing what he had been wearing because they were filthy. The things she brought him had not been washed in the recent past, but were not nearly as pungent as the ones she took away.

The following day, Zaminoski led them along the edge of the reeds and pointed to where they could see the prow of a sunken vessel. Realizing that the work would be muddy, Colling stripped bare before wading into the water. The three Poles followed suit, and soon the four men were tugging and pushing a thirty-foot boat through the marsh towards Zaminoski's boathouse. There was a large hole in the bottom of the boat, which prevented its being floated, so that they were reduced to using main force to move it along. It took them the better part of the morning, but finally they dragged the hull up onto the bank outside the workshop. They returned to the place where the boat had been found and retrieved another smaller vessel by the end of the day. The days that followed were as exhausting as the first, made more difficult as they were forced to travel ever greater distances to locate the sunken hulks.

Along with Karol and Tomasz, Colling began to feel that the hard physical labor was making him stronger, especially as they were well fed by the meals Elizabeth and Natalia prepared for them. Jan, however, did not seem well, and Colling suspected, from his color and his tendency towards fits of coughing, that the man had tuberculosis. By unspoken agreement, he was allotted the less demanding task of searching the riverbank for half-sunken boats.

By the end of the week, there was a line of beached hulls near the boathouse, and Zaminoski told them they could cease their retrieval efforts. Instead, he showed them how to remove useable parts from the boats, and how to judge when damaged planking and ribbing could be salvaged and reshaped. The wood that was removed was stacked against the side of the boathouse to permit it to dry. Anything that was not of any value was used as

firewood. Once the lumber was no longer wet, the boatman instructed them in scraping and sanding off any paint or other foreign matter.

Zaminoski finished the vessel on which he was working, and when its buyer came, the two of them launched it into the river and the man rowed away. The boatwright had been paid for his work in restoring the boat, but Colling suspected that he had not received enough to allow him to continue to feed such a large household. A day or two later, Colling approached Zaminoski out of the earshot of the others and pressed the last of his zlotys into his hand, telling him, "For Natalia to buy food."

The boatwright looked at the banknotes for a moment, and before he could reply, Colling continued, "We do not wish to be a burden. Your hospitality has been greatly appreciated, and we do not wish to abuse it."

"But you will help with the boats, will you not?" asked Zaminoski. "Your labor will pay for your keep."

"We cannot stay long," responded Colling. "We may not be able to fully repay what you have provided."

"Since you have come here, I have not asked your destination."

"We go to Pomerania. That is our homeland."

"You know, Jan Woznica, that the Russians are blockading all the roads to the west, and they have guards on all the bridges across the rivers. I have heard that anyone who does not possess papers giving permission to travel is sent to a labor camp. You do not seem to me to be the sort that would have such papers."

Colling paused a moment, then said, "You are right, Petr Zaminoski. But as soon as we have rested a bit more, we will attempt to slip past the Russians."

"There are too many of them, and it is said they patrol the roads in lorries day and night."

"We must take the chance."

"Why not stay here? Two men came to me yesterday, asking to purchase boats. With your help, we can build many boats."

"I thank you, Petr Zaminoski, but we must be on our way," said Colling. "We will stay long enough for you to complete two more boats, but then we will go."

That night as Colling and Elizabeth lay curled together under their blankets in the barn, Colling told her that he had given Zaminoski all of their remaining zlotys. He asked that she take some of their American currency from her suitcase so that he could go into the town the following day to exchange it for Polish banknotes.

Elizabeth handed him three twenty-dollar notes the next morning before they joined the others in the farmhouse for breakfast. When he had eaten, he told Zaminoski that he had to go to town to obtain some zlotys. Colling explained that he had some small items of jewelry that he hoped to sell, and asked the boatwright where the best place to do so might be. Zaminoski informed him that the closest town with a market was Wilistka, some ten kilometers to the north. He went on to say that, with no Jews left in Poland, the tavern-keeper whose establishment was on the town's main square was the only person who was known to buy jewelry. Zaminoski warned him that Wilistka was the site of a bridge across the river, and there was a garrison of Russians. He advised caution, and that if stopped, he should say that he was a workman for Zaminoski the boat-builder. He also warned Colling that the tavern-keeper was involved in the black market and was probably an informer for the Russians as well.

With two of the twenties in his shoe, and the other tucked deep in the pocket of his jacket, together with one of the wedding rings taken from the German deserters, Colling walked the dusty road to Wilistka. He met no one, and he quickly surmised that the Red Army patrols must be achieving their objective in stopping the movement of refugees in the region. Once he heard the sound of a truck approaching from behind him and he slipped into a handy screen of bushes until it drove past. Through the cloud of dust thrown up by its wheels he saw that it was a Dodge deuce-and-a-half with a half-dozen Russian soldiers seated in it. Red stars were painted where white ones would have been on a U.S. Army vehicle.

Contrary to previous experience, no militia groups had stationed themselves on the outskirts of the town, and Colling strolled through its streets to the central square. A market was in progress, and a fair crowd was milling around the displays of produce and other goods offered for sale. Colling tried to act as if he were familiar with the place, and found his way to the tavern described by Zaminoski. A couple of worn folding tables and chairs were grouped in front of its entrance, but it was too early in the day for them to be occupied.

The tavern was dark after the brightness of the square, and it took Colling's eyes a few seconds to adjust to the change. A heavy man stood behind a well-worn bar, and Colling guessed that he was the owner.

"Dzién dobry!" said Colling.

"Dzién dobry," answered the barkeep. "How can I serve you?"

"I would have a glass of vodka, if I could sell this for cash," said Colling, pushing the gold wedding ring across the top of the bar.

The man's eyes narrowed, and Colling sensed that he was torn between caution and greed.

"Do I look like a Jew to you, Countryman, that I would be a buyer of gold?" said the tavern-keeper, feigning insult.

"Everyone knows that there are no Jews in Poland any more," said Colling, "And others now have the opportunity to make the money that they stole from honest working Poles for so long."

The barkeep seemed to like what he heard. He picked up the ring, held it to the light, tested its weight in his palm, and then bit it. Apparently satisfied, he said, "I can give you 500 zlotys."

Colling held out his hand, "I will find another buyer. Please give back the ring."

The man continued to hold the ring in his clenched fist, then replied, "Seven hundred."

"Done, if you throw in a glass of vodka to boot." said Colling.

The tavern-keeper counted out a stack of Russian-made bills, then poured Colling a small tumbler of clear liquid. It sent fire down Colling's throat when he drank it, and he fought the urge to cough as his eyes watered. When he could speak, he held out his hand to the barman, and said in a hoarse voice, "My name is Jan Woznica. I am Petr Zaminoski's cousin. I am working for him."

"Good to meet you," said the tavern-keeper, "I am Zosi Baretszokowski. I own this place."

"Panowie Baretszokowski, sir," said Colling, placing the twenty-dollar bill from his pocket on the counter, "I have here some American money that I wish to change into Polish. With no Jews about, can you do that for me?"

The tavern-owner's mouth opened as if he were about to speak, then it closed abruptly at the same time that Colling felt the grip of a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see that a Russian soldier was the one holding him. In badly broken Polish, the soldier ordered, "You come…me, please." He forcefully tugged Colling towards the door. Baretszokowski turned away as if nothing unusual were happening, and gave his full attention to the small cluster of bottles on the shelf behind the bar.

Colling was debating whether to attempt to break away from the Russian when he saw that he was being dragged towards an olive-drab Plymouth staff car with large red stars painted on its front doors. His heart raced and he was on the verge of panic when the soldier shoved him roughly into the back seat, then leaned with his back to the door, blocking any chance of leaving the vehicle.

Beside him on the seat was another Russian. This one's uniform was of much higher quality and better cut than that of the man who had pushed him into the car. While he was unfamiliar with Russian insignia, the gold on the man's shoulder boards told Colling that the man must be an officer, and probably one of relatively high rank.

The Russian officer looked Colling over carefully, then spoke in the same broken Polish that the other Russian had used, "I am Colonel Kuznetskoff."

Not sure what to say, Colling forced himself to remain calm, and replied, "Yes, Colonel, sir. I am called Jan Woznica, sir. What have I done that has offended you, sir?"

"Nothing, Woznica. My driver watches the tavern. Baretszokowski is known to me to buy and sell things of interest. My driver is under orders to bring me anyone who is in possession of American money. Since he has brought me you, I must guess that you have American money. Is that so?"

The twenty-dollar bill was still clenched in Colling's fist, and he opened his hand so that Kuznetskoff could see it. The Russian took the note and unfolded it, holding it up to the window of the car and studying it carefully.

"Where did you come to have this American money, Woznica?" asked the Colonel.

"It came from relatives in the United States," stuttered Colling nervously.

"Yes," said the Russian with a sly smile, "All Poles seem to have relatives in the United States who send them money. All of them live in Chicago."

There was no doubt in Colling's mind that he was on the verge of being arrested, if he were not already under arrest. He did not know whether the Russians had formally to declare that he was arrested or not. But it made no difference. His destiny now was to be sent off to a labor camp. He would never see Elizabeth again. When he didn't return to Grabensheim, he would be listed as a deserter from the Army, and his family would be

shamed. If the Russians found out he was an American, that would be even worse. He might be classified as a defector, someone who favored Communism. And if they interrogated him, would he tell them about Elizabeth and Karol and his friends? What about Zaminoski and his family? Would they be arrested too? The Reds were as prone as the Nazis had been to putting people into concentration camps. Despair overwhelmed him as he resigned himself to the helplessness of his situation. He only hoped that he would not betray Elizabeth and the others.

He was jarred from this gloomy train of thought by the Colonel, who asked, "Will you take 3000 zlotys for this American twenty dollars, Woznica?"

The question was so unexpected that Colling found himself at a loss for words, and it seemed to him that it was taking an eternity to answer, but he finally choked out, "Well, yes, Colonel, sir. That is very generous."

"Have your relatives sent you more such American money, Woznica?"

"Some, Colonel, sir."

"Do you have it with you, Woznica?"

"No, Colonel, sir," lied Colling.

"Well, then. I am here almost every day. I will be here tomorrow. If you bring more American money, I will pay the same rate, 150 zlotys to the dollar."

"Yes, Colonel, sir. I will try to return tomorrow," said Colling, adding, "If my wife will allow it."

The Russian laughed, "She had better allow it, Woznica, or I will come looking for you."

"Yes, Colonel, sir. I will tell her what you have said."

Kuznetskoff took a large wallet from inside his coat and handed three thousand-zloty notes to Colling. The bills were new, and the thought crossed Colling's mind that the Russians must be making sure that their ranking officers were well supplied with cash.

Walking away from the staff car on unsteady legs, Colling forced himself not to look back. With each step, he expected to feel a hand closing on him again. It was not until he was well outside the town limits that he felt confident enough to turn around to see if he were being followed. There was no one behind him.

During his return journey to Zaminoski's, Colling remembered that he had told the tavern-owner that he was staying with the boatwright. He wondered how much the Russian driver understood of the conversation, and whether Kuznetskoff would arrive with a truckload of soldiers to arrest them all, Zaminoski and his family included. Colling walked faster, as if reaching the boathouse a few minutes earlier would somehow result in their escape if the colonel were in pursuit.

Elizabeth came out of the house to meet him, and he told her of his encounter with the Russian officer. When he had finished, she said, "Don't be overly concerned, Jim. The Reds are giving their troops fistfuls of currency to spend in all the occupied zones. This Kuznetskoff fellow is as interested in buying hard currency as any black marketeer. He's more interested in you bringing him some more U.S. dollars than in arresting you."

"Still," replied Colling, "I think we ought to ask Jan to watch the road to town and raise an alarm if it looks as if the Russians are on their way here."

Elizabeth agreed, and they found Jan sitting in the boathouse, scraping the paint from planks taken from the salvaged boats. Colling explained what had happened to Zaminoski and the others, and they sent Jan off with one of the Mausers. If he were to see Russian soldiers leaving the main road for the boatyard, he was to fire a shot into the air.

Colling took Jan's place cleaning the recovered wood, expecting at any moment to hear a warning gunshot. When the end of their workday arrived without incident, and Jan returned from his post to join the evening meal, Colling was ready to concede that Elizabeth was right. While they ate, whether Colling should return to trade more dollars for zlotys on the following day was debated. The consensus was that he should make another exchange, as a final test of the Russian Colonel's intentions, and as a way to avoid arousing the officer's ire. It was agreed that Colling would also buy provisions, since his use of the new 1000-zloty notes would be less conspicuous than if Natalia were to spend them in the market.

The olive drab Plymouth was parked in the same place as it had been the previous day. Colling passed by slowly, searching for the Russian driver, when he heard a hiss, and saw Kuznetskoff beckoning to him from the rear window of the car. The officer pushed open the door and Colling slid into the seat beside him.

"Welcome, Woznica."

"Thank you, Colonel, sir."

The Russian grinned, “You have American dollars, Woznica?”

“Yes, Colonel, sir,” said Colling as he produced the two twenties he had carried in his shoe the day before, and handed them over.

“Very nice. I see that your wife has good sense,” Kuznetskoff said as he counted six thousand zlotys into Colling’s hand. “Have your relatives in the United States sent you more than this?”

“Sorry, no, Colonel, sir. This was from before the war. It is the last of the dollars.”

“If you should receive more, you will remember me, will you not, Woznica?”

“For sure, Colonel, sir. May I go now?”

Kuznetskoff dismissed him, and Colling left the car. An hour later, he had a cloth sack over his shoulder filled with food and other items he had purchased in the Wilistka marketplace. No one seemed to take any interest in the fact that he presented new 1000-zloty notes in payment.

The restoration of the boats proceeded without incident. They were undisturbed by visits by Russian troops. Colling had once helped his uncle repair a wagon, and he found that what he had learned from that experience was similar to what was required to fit planks onto the ribs of the boats. Karol and Tomasz also had no difficulty in picking up the manual skills required by the work.

Zaminoski and Colling were finishing painting the second vessel that Colling had promised to see to completion when the boatwright asked, “Jan Woznica, you will leave soon, I suppose?”

“Yes, Petr Zaminoski. We must.”

“The Russians are thick on the roads to the west, and all the bridges have guards.”

“I know. But we have no choice. We must go while the weather is still decent.”

“I have a suggestion, Jan Woznica, about how you might complete your journey to Pomerania.”

“Do you know of a road that might not be guarded, Petr Zaminoski?”

“Yes, there is one road, you might say. The river.”

Colling thought for a moment, then replied, “A boat?”

“Yes, Jan Woznica. I can build you a boat, and show you how you might use the Vistula to reach Danzig. From there, you can without doubt find a fishing boat to take you along the coast to the west.”

“But one would need papers to show the Russians patrolling the river. And so many people in one boat would be suspicious.”

“Not if you were on official business, Jan Woznica,” grinned the boatwright.

Zaminoski explained that the watercraft he was selling were used ostensibly for fishing, but that even the Soviets must be able to guess that some of his customers were using them to ferry contraband across the river. It was rumored that if only black market merchandise was involved, and the proper bribes were paid, then a blind eye was turned to the traffic. Trouble came if the cargo was made up of human beings. It was true that five people in one boat would invite trouble from the Russians, but if there were an excuse for their presence, then it would be possible for them to drift unimpeded to the Baltic.

“But what ‘official business’ would allow such a thing to happen?” asked Colling.

“River surveyors,” said Zaminoski. “They were common before the war, and even during. The currents change the channel in the river. A survey of depth and location must be made. I have not seen them at work since the end of the fighting, but such bureaucracy must return. In my younger days, I worked on a survey crew. I still have the papers, including some blank forms. With a little imagination, we can outfit all of you.”

“But we will need a large vessel,” said Colling.

“True, but there is an eight-meter hull there on the shore that we can put to rights. It will be perfect,” replied Zaminoski, becoming more enthusiastic as his plan began to take shape.

Colling had to agree that it seemed the idea was sound. He called Elizabeth, Karol, Tomasz and Jan together and allowed Zaminoski to tell them of his proposal. As it was outlined to them, and began to sink in, in contrast to the round of objections that had been raised to each of Colling’s decisions, Zaminoski’s concept quickly became a project involving all of them.

As soon as the paint was dry on the boat on which Colling and the boatwright had been working, it was replaced on the sawhorses by the hulk of the larger vessel that had been hastily dragged into the boathouse, and repairs on its damaged structure were begun.

Once the project was underway, preparations began, and each of them did his part to put all of its various pieces into place.

Natalia went off to Wilistka to buy five sets of similar blue work jackets and pants that would serve as a kind of uniform for each of them. Karol revealed a heretofore-concealed ability to create documents, using the examples and blank forms provided by Zaminoski. Colling made depth-sounding poles from straight saplings he found growing alongside the nearby road.

Natalia cut up an extra pair of the blue work trousers and made cloth caps for each of them. She and Elizabeth cut small red stars from scrap fabric and sewed them onto the front of the caps. Elizabeth theorized that the Communist insignia was likely to carry some weight with the Russians they were certain to encounter.

Their boat was completed and launched two weeks after Zaminoski first broached his idea to Colling. It was a trim little craft, complete with a small cabin. Zaminoski used the metal from tin cans to fashion numbers and letters that he painted black and affixed to the boat's bow. He assured them that the markings were consistent with those used by the Polish River Service before 1939. Colling did not object, but silently hoped that obsolete insignia would not give them away.

The boat was finally provisioned and fully equipped, and Colling announced that it was time to leave. Zaminoski informed him that they could not leave the following morning, as it was a Sunday, and river surveyors were government workers who would not be working on the Sabbath. Natalia prepared a farewell dinner, and the two women cried on each other's shoulders at the prospect of their never seeing one another again. Colling gave Zaminoski the cart and the little gray mare. The Mausers and ammunition were in the boat's cabin, as well as their luggage. Colling kept his Luger shoved into the back waistband of his trousers.

When Monday arrived, they set out in the pre-dawn hours, and Colling noted from the official-looking "work record" that had been created by Karol that it was the 24th of June. He had lost track of time, and realized that he had been in the U.S. Army for over a year. Because he was now undoubtedly classified as a deserter, if he made it out of Poland, he was probably destined to spend the rest of his enlistment, perhaps longer, in a military prison somewhere.

They allowed themselves to be carried by the Vistula's current, rowing occasionally, and from time to time making it appear as if they were testing the depth of the river, especially when river barges or other vessels passed them, or they observed that they were being watched from the shore. Their progress was leisurely, and they agreed that their mode of travel was far less tiring than their walk from Krakow. They stopped at islands or lonely stretches where the riverbank was not marshy to establish camp each night.

Three days passed in this manner without incident, but at mid-morning of the fourth day, as they rounded the bend by which the Vistula curved back upon itself and headed north-easterly, they looked up at the sound of a boat's engine. The approaching vessel was still not in sight, and Colling ordered Jan and Tomasz, who were manning the sweeps, to stop their rowing. Elizabeth quickly took up a position in the bow with a clipboard, and Colling began using the pole to take depth soundings.

The motor launch that came around the bend towards them flew a red and white flag which at that distance could make it either Polish or Soviet. As it drew closer, they made out the familiar brown Russian uniforms of the two soldiers on its forward deck. Its small wheelhouse was manned by men in dark blue uniforms. The soldiers held sub-machine guns at the ready, although the weapons were not as yet pointed at them. It was small comfort to Colling when he recognized that the launch's flag was Polish.

Colling raised his hand in a friendly wave, calling out one of the Polish hailing phrases that Zaminoski had taught him were used by those who sailed the river. One of the men in blue emerged on deck and returned the greeting in Polish. Colling let out a small sigh of relief when he heard the fluent use of the language and saw the two gold stripes on the sleeves of the man's coat. It appeared that the boat was manned in part by Poles, and perhaps was under Polish command. His relief was tempered by the presence of the Russians, whose vigilant attitude did not relax as the patrol vessel pulled alongside their boat.

"What is your business on the river?" shouted the launch's officer.

"River survey, Lieutenant, sir," said Colling, making an educated guess about the man's rank, which was apparently correct, since the man did not attempt to board them, but simply looked down into their boat. When his gaze fell on Elizabeth, he touched the visor of cap in her direction.

"Good day, Lady," said the officer.

"Good day to you, sir," replied Elizabeth with a smile.

"I see that the Survey Service has improved the looks of its crewmen," said the officer, "Lieutenant Sobieskie, at your service."

"Elzbieta Woznica, Comrade Lieutenant," replied Elizabeth, "Women must serve as well as men."

At the word 'Comrade,' there was a noticeable relaxation on the part of the two Soviet soldiers, who lowered their weapons. Lieutenant Sobieskie seemed slightly embarrassed. He returned his cap to his head, and asked Colling for their identification. As he examined the documents that Colling handed him, Colling was surprised to hear Elizabeth speaking Russian to the two soldiers, who both laughed in response to whatever it was that she was saying. When Colling turned around, he saw the two men crouched down on the launch's bow, engrossed in conversation with Elizabeth, who was standing with one hand on the side of the patrol boat.

Sobieskie leafed quickly through the papers he had been given, commenting to himself as much as Colling that the Survey Service seemed to be still using up old forms. He glanced towards Elizabeth and the two Russians, one of whom had handed Elizabeth a cigarette, then quickly back to the papers as she turned up her face to exhale a cloud of smoke. Seeming to be satisfied that he had performed his duty, Sobieskie clambered back onto the launch and waved at the helmsman to proceed. The two Russians were smiling and waving as the motor launch pulled away and left them in its wake.

As soon as the patrol boat was out of sight, Elizabeth coughed and tossed the cigarette overboard, "God, those are awful!" she said in English.

"I didn't know you spoke Russian," said Colling, the tone of his voice conveying his annoyance, both at her concealing her linguistic ability and her flirting with the two soldiers.

"Not very well, but those two will think it's a Polish accent," she replied, "And if you can contain your male pride for a minute, I found out their base is at Torún. We passed it yesterday. I told them we would be up that way in a few days, and I'd have a drink with them. They're on their way back from down river. I told them I was with the Polish People's Liberation Army during the war, and how much I missed big Russian men. I also think it was the red stars on our caps and my calling them 'Comrades' that did the trick."

Colling had to agree that her performance had played a big part in their being taken at face value for a survey crew. Elizabeth added that they had told her that the patrol's schedule was such that they would probably see them again before they reached Danzig.

The amount of barge traffic on the Vistula had increased steadily as they moved closer to the Baltic, and they were forced to move ever more slowly, pretending to be carrying out survey work, as they wended their way northward. The days were warm and sunny, and their progress leisurely. Provisions had been brought for a ten-day journey, and Colling began to consider what would be involved in someone going ashore to buy food. He had decided that the next small town they came to would be where a foray in search of supplies would be made, but when Karol informed him that they were within a half-day from Danzig, that plan was set aside.

They had one more encounter with the patrol boat a little more than a kilometer from where the canal system linking the Vistula with Danzig intersected the river. The motor launch pulled alongside them once again, but this time the two Russian soldiers had their sub-machine guns slung over their shoulders, and were grinning and waving, calling out "Elzbieta" as they approached.

Colling had been concerned that Sobieskie might ask his superiors about the presence of survey crews working the river, but apparently it had not entered the officer's mind to do so, because their meeting was cordial. Colling went so far as to invite the Lieutenant on board their boat to have some vodka while Elizabeth chatted with the Russians.

When at last they parted company with the patrol boat, Elizabeth told Colling that they had best move quickly and enter the connecting canal that would take them to the port facilities. The Russians had asked her if she had yet had to deal with the "Bastard" …in their terms…who commanded the Red Navy vessel watching the mouth of the Vistula. When she admitted she had not had that pleasure, they advised her that the man had no liking for Poles, and it would be best to avoid him if they could.

With all four men straining at the long oars and Elizabeth at the tiller, and aided by the current, they made good progress through the canal, steering past moored barges and smaller craft, until they reached the anchorage. There were more than a dozen ships spread out before them, and they rowed about, looking for an American or British flag. The words, Orion Belle, Baltimore, painted on the stern of a freighter caught Colling's eye, and he told Elizabeth to steer towards it.

Their boat bumped against the hull, drawing the attention of a crewman who leaned over the side and cursed at them to stand clear. Colling shouted back, "We're Americans! Drop a ladder." A few minutes later, a rope ladder was lowered down the side of the Orion Belle, and shortly after that, Colling, Elizabeth and the three

Poles were standing on the deck, their luggage in hand. Elizabeth immediately opened her bag and rummaged for their U.S. passports, which she quickly found and handed over to the uniformed officer who seemed to be in charge.

"I'm Langford, First Officer," he said as he compared Colling and Elizabeth with the photographs in their passports. "Who are these men?" he asked, pointing to Karol, Tomasz and Jan.

"They're under my protection, Mr. Langford," said Elizabeth. "They're Polish nationals who have been granted asylum by the U.S. government."

"And who might you be, Miss…Hamilton?" asked Langford, glancing down at her passport.

"Actually, my name is Collins. This is my husband, Jim. We're just recently married, and the name on my passport hasn't been changed yet, but he has our marriage certificate. My husband is an officer in the American armed forces. I'm with the American Red Cross, and if I can just see your captain, I can explain further."

The First Officer looked at the shabby work clothes they were wearing and the caps with red stars on them and remarked, "You certainly don't look like what you say you are, ma'am."

"I know, Mr. Langford, but we have had a difficult journey. I really would like to see your captain in private so I can explain everything."

She was interrupted by a noise coming from beside the ship, and when Colling glanced over the railing, he saw a large gray-painted escort vessel wallowing alongside. The same crewman who had shouted at them to stand clear repeated his warning to the new arrival, and received another shout from the other boat in return.

"It's one of them Russky patrol ships, sir," said the sailor to Langford, who came to the ship's side to see for himself, but before he could do so, a naval officer climbed over the rail, having used the rope ladder that not been pulled up after Colling, Elizabeth and their companions had reached the deck. The officer was immediately followed by two sailors armed with rifles. Colling rapidly deduced that they were Russians.

The officer was speaking angrily in broken English, demanding that Langford hand over the five of them to him. About a dozen of the Orion Belle's crew had gathered around, voicing their bad opinion of the naval officer and his men, and the Russian sailors began nervously fingering their rifles. Colling had his Luger in the back waistband of his trousers, and he slid his hand under his jacket and took hold of the butt of the weapon, ready to pull it out.

Langford was motioning with his hands and calling for quiet, but before he could speak, another American joined the group, and Colling concluded that he must be the freighter's captain.

"What the hell is going on here?" demanded the newcomer. He then noticed Elizabeth and added, "Sorry, ma'am."

Langford explained, "Captain, this Russian officer wants us to give him these people. Two of them are carrying American passports," and pointing to Colling, "That fellow is an American Army officer, and the lady works for the Red Cross." Langford handed their passports to his superior.

The Russian officer started to interrupt, but the captain of the Orion Belle spoke first, "Well, Loo-ten-itzky, or whatever you call yourself, my name is Stackhouse, and I'm master of this vessel, which is registered in the U.S. of A., and under contract to the U.S. government. You ain't gonna come on board my ship demanding nothing. The Polish port authorities are still in charge here, no matter what you say, so if you want anything, go get 'em, and we'll talk. In the meantime, get off my ship. The Belle made fifteen runs across the North Atlantic; we still got our guns, and my crew knows how to use 'em."

Colling looked up to see what Stackhouse was waving his arm at, and saw that men were pulling the canvas cover off the twin barrels of a dual 40-millimeter cannon pointing skyward from a round emplacement at the bow. When he glanced toward the stern, he realized that the ship still carried its complement of weapons, which Colling guessed would also include a couple of five-inch guns. That the covers had just been pulled from twin forties told him that the captain must have given the order to do so before joining the group on the deck.

The Russian officer's face had gone pale. He stared anxiously at the twin barrels which were being lowered and traversed towards where they stood. Colling could not see how any shots from the gun could reach the cutter, which was too close to the freighter's hull and out of its line of fire. About the only thing that he could see would possibly be hit if the 40-millimeters opened fire, was the top of its radio mast, but the Russian captain looked nervous nevertheless. Perhaps he was thinking about the consequences of an "international incident" on his career. Without another word to Stackhouse, he gestured for his men to leave and followed them over the side. The rope ladder was pulled up as soon as the Russians were safely back on their boat.

Stackhouse thumbed through the passports that he had been handed.

"You're Elizabeth Hamilton, I suppose," he said to Elizabeth.

"Yes, Captain. Could we go to your cabin and talk in private?"

"Yes ma'am, you can," said Stackhouse, indicating with a wave of his arm that his cabin must be located somewhere in the tall superstructure amidships that housed the ship's bridge. Colling started to follow, when Elizabeth turned and said, "Jim, why don't you see if Mr. Langford can find us quarters somewhere. I'll take care of this."

Langford led Colling and the three Poles to what had apparently been designated at one time as the ship's passenger accommodations. The four small cabins were located on the main deck. Each had twin bunks. Each of the Poles took a cabin for himself, leaving Colling and Elizabeth with the remaining one.

Colling sat restlessly waiting for nearly an hour before Elizabeth joined him. She was telling him that Stackhouse had agreed that they would not be forced off the Orion Belle, when they felt the ship move. Elizabeth added that the tide must have changed, because the freighter was due to leave on the outgoing flood.

Elizabeth noticed the cabin's tiny bathroom, which was not much larger than water closet but did contain a shower stall, and began to undress. "God, I have so wanted a hot shower for so long," she said. When she stepped out some time later, she had wrapped herself in a towel and had used another as a turban. She looked at Colling and offered, "You next, Big Boy. I asked Captain Stackhouse if he could find us some decent clothes, and he said he would see what he could do. If you want to shower, they may be here before you're done."

The shower was wonderful. Colling was surprised at the spray of heated fresh water. He would not have expected it after his experience on the troop transport that had brought him to Europe, with its cold salt-water showers. When he emerged from the cramped bathroom, a towel wrapped around his waist, Elizabeth was dressed, wearing a woolen shirt and dungarees that seemed to fit her reasonably well. She also had on socks and tennis shoes. A similar outfit was laid out on one of the bunks, and Colling dropped the towel and began dressing.

"Next stop is Stockholm," said Elizabeth. "We get off there. Captain Stackhouse will radio ahead to tell them we're coming."

"Fine. I'm glad to see you have everything under control," replied Colling sullenly.

Elizabeth ignored his mood, and continued on, telling him that they would be back in Germany in just a few days. That reminded Colling that the issue of his desertion still loomed ahead, but he did not mention his concern.

Chapter Eleven

July-September, 1946

The Orion Belle docked late in the afternoon of the fifth day after leaving Danzig. As Colling and Elizabeth stood at the rail watching the ship's crew and the Swedes on the wharf engaged in bringing the vessel alongside the wharf, she informed him she had asked Captain Stackhouse to radio ahead to the American embassy. When the side of the Orion Belle bumped gently against the pier, she suggested they gather their belongings from their cabin and prepare to disembark.

They were met by three men wearing trench coats. Their appearance and demeanor reminded Colling of stereotypical espionage agents he had seen in the movies, and he wondered whether the men were imitating Hollywood, or was it the other way around? Each of the men was standing by one of three cabs lined up on the dock. While the taxi drivers loaded their meager luggage into the trunks of the cars, the men issued polite instructions, directed the three Poles to crowd into the nearest vehicle, while Colling was motioned into the second, and Elizabeth into the third. The man who slid into the back of the cab beside Colling introduced himself as Andrew Quarles. After directing the driver to take them to the Svenska Metropole, he settled back in his seat. Quarles was silent until they had left the dock area, but then began pointing out various Stockholm landmarks as they drove through the city's streets. When Colling opened his mouth to ask whether the others were going to the Metropole as well, Quarles cut him off before he could speak, nodding at the back of the taxi driver's head. Taking the hint, Colling turned his attention to staring at the buildings lining the broad avenues

along which they were speeding, and made up his mind to postpone any attempt to obtain answers to the more pressing questions that he would have liked to have had answered.

Quarles approached the registration desk when they arrived at the Metropole, and checked Colling in. The clerk eyed Colling standing beside Quarles, still wearing seaman's denims and turtleneck, but seemed to accept Quarles' explanation that Colling was an American sailor who had recently been pulled from the sea, and that the American Embassy had taken him under its wing. The cab driver had appeared with Colling's battered suitcase in hand, and Quarles ordered it taken to Colling's room. Colling was about to follow his suitcase into the elevator, when Quarles pulled at his arm, motioning with his head towards the hotel dining room.

The maitre-de seemed displeased by Colling's casual appearance, but seated them nevertheless. Quarles told him to order what he wanted, and Colling asked for a steak and potatoes, salad, fresh fruit, cheese, calling back the waiter to tell him he also wanted ice cream for dessert. Quarles sat with him, drinking only coffee, watching Colling intently as he progressed hungrily through his meal. Quarles offered no conversation, and Colling decided to concentrate on what was in truth the best meal he had had in weeks.

When Colling had finished eating, Quarles signed the check and accompanied Colling to the door of his room, handed him the key, and warned him to stay put and not leave the hotel. Colling had not slept well on the Orion Belle, and admitted to himself that he was in no mood to go sightseeing in Stockholm. He took a hot shower and went to bed, where he slept soundly despite the fact that it was still bright daylight outside at nine o'clock at night.

The Svenska Metropole was not among the best hotels in Stockholm, but reasonably comfortable, and its rooms and furnishings were in decidedly better condition than those of the Polonia. Their taxi had not been followed by either of the others, and Colling had no idea where Karol, Tomasz and Jan might be. He had had a slim expectation that Elizabeth would eventually arrive and share his quarters, but she had not rejoined him after they separated at the quayside.

Because of the lack of any means of contraception, he had not made love to Elizabeth since their last night at Karol's house. He had wanted to renew their physical relationship on the Orion Belle, but she continued to resist his attentions out of her expressed fear of pregnancy, and they had slept separately in their bunks on the ship. He had hoped that once in Stockholm, he would be able to buy prophylactics. He considered how he might broach the subject with Quarles, but decided that the matter was too sensitive to discuss.

The next morning, Colling had just emerged from the bathroom to hear a knock on the door. He opened it to find Quarles, accompanied by a bellman with a hanger over one shoulder holding a navy blue pinstripe suit and his other arm wrapped around a stack of cardboard boxes; a hatbox dangled from his fingers. The bellman pushed past Colling and dropped the boxes in a jumble on the unmade bed, and then hung the suit in the room's wardrobe. When Colling casually lifted the lids of the boxes, he saw that they contained shirt, tie, underwear, socks and shoes. The hatbox held a snap-brim hat.

Quarles asked Colling to get dressed and join him for breakfast in the dining room, as he pressed a tip into the bellman's hand. Without saying anything else, Quarles followed on the bellman's heels as the two men left Colling's room.

A different maitre-de led Colling to Quarles' table, where he found that Quarles had already ordered a full breakfast for each of them, instead of the usual continental-style coffee and a roll. The waiter was just placing the food on the table as Colling sat down. When Quarles greeted him, Colling congratulated him on choosing the right sizes for his new clothes.

Quarles answered, "Miss Hamilton gave them to me."

Colling tried to remember when he would have discussed his clothing sizes with Elizabeth, and recalled a casual conversation they had one afternoon as they were lying in bed at Frau Bergheim's, when they had told each other their different measurements. He recalled that he had had the notion at the time that he might buy her some article of clothing as a gift, and had seen the discussion as a way of finding out what sizes she wore. Quarles' response revealed that the correct interpretation that he should have placed on her questions was that they were just another way of gaining information to be filed away for future use. He suppressed his irritation, picked up his fork and began eating.

Quarles finished his own breakfast and, as Colling continued eating, indicated that it was possible that he might answer some of the questions that Colling had raised the previous day.

"For instance, you wanted to know where Miss Hamilton is," said Quarles. "She flew out last night to London, and then she'll be on her way to the States. You'll be headed back to the Army in Germany with me on a flight this afternoon. Don't worry, your absence will be covered. We've arranged for you to have been given a 'TDY,' a temporary duty stint, in Paris. Liz,…I mean Miss Hamilton, got us to pick up your bags at the Munich Bahnhof, so you'll have your own uniform back when you land at Rhein-Main."

"What about Karol and his friends?" asked Colling.

"I can't tell you where they went, but they've left already."

"Karol isn't Liz's uncle, is he?" asked Colling, making an intuitive guess.

Quarles hesitated momentarily: "A distant relation."

"What was this all about, sir?"

"We had to get some people out of Poland, and Liz was picked to do it. She asked you along for the ride because you could speak the language and it provided a plausible story, the young American couple assisting the Red Cross and all."

"But things didn't work out like they were supposed to, did they?"

"Nope. It was supposed to be an in-and-out operation, but the Reds were tipped. Liz told us you were pretty resourceful. She said if it hadn't have been for you, they might not have made it. You know, if you're interested, you could put in for a commission and an assignment to our outfit."

"What do you mean by outfit, the OSS?" asked Colling.

"Nah. The Office of Strategic Services is no more…disbanded." Quarles watched Colling's face as he continued, "Donovan recruited too many people who admire the way the Russians do things, if you know what I mean. We're kind of a separate operation."

Colling's opinion of the OSS was, as with most Americans, derived principally from the movies, where it was portrayed as an efficient intelligence operation filled with courageous volunteers who were more than willing to sacrifice their lives for the United States of America. This was the first time that he had ever heard it disparaged, or that Communists had been part of it. As a result, a certain level of skepticism about Quarles colored his answer, "Well, I don't know. I'm kind of set right now on finishing my enlistment and getting out of the Army."

"I understand. But you have a lot of aptitude, so if you change your mind, I'm stationed at HQ in Heidelberg. Here's where you can reach me. Just give me a call," he said, handing Colling a card on which the name "Major Andrew Quarles, U.S.A." was printed. Pencilled under the name was a phone number.

That afternoon Colling and Quarles left Stockholm on a TWA flight to Paris. It was Colling's first flight, and he was both nervous and curious. He watched in fascination from the plane's tiny window as they gained altitude, and had some understanding of how flyers could become addicted to their trade. They were soon over the Baltic, and with little new to see except sunlight reflecting off the water below, Colling turned his attention to a copy of The Saturday Evening Post that the stewardess had brought him soon after boarding. He had not seen an issue of the Post since leaving home, and he realized how much he missed seeing its Norman Rockwell covers and the cartoons scattered through its pages. The several articles discussing what was to be done with post-war Europe did not hold his interest, and he absorbed himself in the new C. S. Forester story.

He finished reading and, as he closed the magazine, looked at Quarles seated beside him, his head resting on the back of his seat, seeming to doze. Quarles must have sensed he was being observed, as he sat upright and looked around, as if suddenly awakened. He noticed Colling and said, "Sorry. My reaction to flying. I always seem to fall asleep."

Colling said, "This is the first time I've been up in a plane. I don't think I could sleep."

"I have something for you," replied Quarles, as if he had almost forgotten an important detail.

He pulled a thick manila envelope from inside his coat and handed it to Colling. Colling opened it to find it contained a stack of U.S. dollars and an Army travel authorization from Paris to Grabensheim. When Colling raised his eyebrows at the cash, Quarles said, "There's a thousand there. Elizabeth told us you used some of your own money. Just say this is for 'expenses' and to replace what you spent." Colling thought that Quarles was particularly generous, but kept himself from saying so.

There was also a typewritten list of names and addresses that Quarles suggested he memorize if he were to explain his temporary duty assignment in Paris. Colling asked where he might write to Elizabeth, and Quarles recited a Philadelphia address that Colling wrote on the outside of the envelope.

Not quite four hours after leaving Stockholm, they landed at the Aeroport d'Paris, which, like the rest of Paris, had suffered little physical damage from the war. Quarles directed him to the U.S. Army Air Force terminal where he could catch a military flight to Rhein-Main, and then a train from Frankfurt to his home base. Quarles explained that he was not returning to Heidelberg right away, but would be remaining in Paris. He wished Colling luck before turning and walking away.

The Air Force flight office was in a wooden barracks outside the modern civilian airport terminal. His suitcase in hand, dressed in civilian clothes, Colling asked the Air Force staff sergeant behind the counter when the next flight to Germany might be. Seemingly disinterested in Colling's appearance or circumstances, the sergeant informed Colling that the next military flight to Rhein-Main would be in the morning.

Colling thought it would be a little ostentatious to take cash from the envelope Quarles had given him, so he kept it in his inside coat pocket. Instead, he used money he had taken from the secret compartment in his suitcase before leaving his room at the Metropole to pay the staff sergeant for postage stamps and a package of stationery that he selected from a wire display rack on the counter. He wrote to his parents, explaining that the maneuvers had lasted far longer than he had anticipated. He then composed a letter to Elizabeth, deliberately avoiding sentimentality. When he re-read what he had written, the end result sounded flat. The only time he used the word "love" was in the closing. He decided not to try and redo the letter, and instead, folded it into an envelope and copied the address Quarles had given him onto it. There was a mail box on the wall of the waiting room into which he dropped the letters.

He spent the rest of the evening studying the sheet of paper that Quarles had given him and reading old issues of Time, Newsweek, and Esquire and more recent copies of Stars and Stripes that were scattered on the benches in the waiting room. He eventually went to sleep curled up on one of them, until he was shaken awake by an Air Force corporal who told him that he could board the C-47 that would take him to the Air Force base at Rhein-Main. The flight was shorter, but less comfortable than the commercial one from Stockholm. Seats for passengers on the transport plane were the same aluminum benches on the sides of the aircraft that paratroopers used, and Colling's knees were cramped against one of the crates that were stacked in its center.

Colling's B-4 bag was waiting for him at the Army baggage counter at Rhein-Main. He found a restroom where he washed and changed into his uniform. He was surprised to discover that the shirts had been laundered and folded, and that the trousers and jacket had been cleaned and pressed. The civilian clothes and the folded B-4 bag were packed into the suitcase. He caught a ride in an Air Force corporal's jeep to the familiar Army railway terminal outside Frankfurt. He had to rush to board his train, and was seated just as it began pulling away from the station. He was able to take only a short glance across the tracks to the Quartermaster warehouse. There was no sign of Sergeant Blackshear, and he wondered what might have happened to him. He speculated that he had probably received his discharge and returned home in the States since he had last seen him.

There was no noticeable change in the railway station in Grabensheim since he had boarded his train in April. Two military policemen were still on duty outside the main entrance, and they eyed him as carefully as they had the first time he had arrived. He crossed the cobblestone town square and began the steep walk to the kaserne.

Ferguson was behind his desk in the orderly room when he reported in. The master sergeant looked up from the papers he was studying and smiled.

Colling grinned back and said briskly, "Technician Fifth Grade Colling reporting from temporary duty, Sergeant."

"Welcome back, soldier," replied Ferguson. "I was wondering whether I'd ever see you again."

"Ah, you knew I'd be back, Sarge."

"Yeah, but I've got my reassignment orders. I'm headed for the States on Monday, then to Panama. Colonel…I mean General Harrington, was able to pull some strings for me. A couple more days and you'd of missed me."

"Should I report to Major Harris, too?" asked Colling.

"Major Harris went home over a month ago, right after you left. Major Vincent is the Battalion CO now. And yes, he wants to see you."

Ferguson knocked on the door to the battalion commander's office and, after hearing an "Enter," led Colling into the room, standing aside so that Colling could come to attention directly in front of the major's desk. Colling saluted, stated his name and announced that he was reporting.

Major Vincent returned the salute, picked up a file from a stack on his desk, and, appearing to ignore Colling, opened the folder and examined its contents. Colling estimated Vincent to be in his late thirties or early forties. The officer wore gold-rimmed glasses, was what might be described as "pudgy," and had begun to lose his hair, leaving a widow's peak. Out of the corner of his eye, Colling could see Ferguson standing beside him, expressionless and at ease, swaying slightly back and forth. After what seemed a long time, the major looked up and in a dry tone of voice said, "So you're Collings."

"Yessir. But that's 'Colling,' sir, no 's' on the end."

Vincent noticed Sergeant Ferguson, and said, "You're dismissed, Sergeant." Ferguson snapped to attention, said, "Yessir," and left the office.

The major turned his attention back to the file, told Colling to stand at ease, then commented, "You know, Collings, that this situation with you is the strangest I have ever experienced in my years in the Army."

Colling ignored the second mispronunciation of his name and asked, "How so, sir?"

"Well, you take fourteen days' furlough to visit Munich and the Bavarian recreation centers. Then the day before your furlough expires, Division gets a teletype advising that you have been ordered on TDY to some outfit called the 'Paris Recreation Service Detachment.' The orders are back-dated, effective on the fourth day of your furlough. The temporary duty assignment is open-ended, 'Until further notice.' I placed a call last month to Paris to attempt to contact the commanding officer of the 'Paris Recreation Service Detachment,' and the operator informed me that no such unit was listed. Where have you been, Corporal?"

"Paris, sir. I was in Garmisch when I met a tech sergeant who was on furlough from Paris. We got to talking, and he said he had heard what we were able to do with our PX and all. His CO, a major…I can't remember his name right now, sir…was also in Garmisch, and the sergeant, his name was Smith, sir, took me over to meet him. The major asked me if I would be interested in going temporary duty to Paris. Well, sir, you can imagine. I jumped at the chance. Two days later, I went back with them, and the major said he would cut TDY orders for me and send them back here."

"Was this major your commander in Paris?"

"No, sir," replied Colling, mentally running through the list of names that Quarles had provided, "My CO was a Captain Whitehead. He was in charge of the detachment."

"Where were you billeted?" asked Vincent.

Colling again envisioned Quarles' list, "Pension Montrette, sir. It wasn't a fancy place, but the old lady, Madame Bissonette, who ran it was nice."

Major Vincent continued to eye Colling suspiciously. "You say you did some kind of PX work?"

"Yessir. I helped design the layout of snack bars and soda fountains for a couple of rec centers in Paris, and then trained the employees. The French people the Army hired had never seen anything like it, and it took awhile."

Vincent sighed, looked directly at Colling, and said,"I've heard of your reputation, Corporal. Some of the officers and NCO's have told me that you were known as a finagler with a knack for currying favor."

Colling started to speak, but the major stopped him.

"I want to warn you, Corporal, that I am not as tolerant as others might have been."

"Yessir," said Colling.

"If I hear of you doing anything that is the least bit outside the rules, you will have to answer to me."

"Yessir. Understood, sir."

Vincent did not speak for a few moments, and Colling expected to be dismissed, but the major continued, "And one other thing…I received a call the day before yesterday from a Major General Reed at USAREUR headquarters in Heidelberg, recommending that you be promoted to Tech-4. Said it was for your 'inestimable' assistance."

Colling was stunned, and could only say, "Sir?"

"Yes. The phone call was followed up by teletype yesterday. Yesterday was the Fourth of July, Corporal. I have never seen headquarters confirm a personnel action on a holiday."

"Yessir," replied Colling, unable to think of anything else to say.

"Much as I may have reservations, Corporal," said Vincent, "I am not inclined to ignore the personal recommendation of a general officer. Sergeant Ferguson has the signed promotion orders on his desk. You are dismissed."

Ferguson had a wide grin on his face when Colling came out of Major Vincent's office.

"Well, kid, you made sergeant in a little over a year. Congratulations," he said, handing Colling a mimeographed page that proclaimed him to have been advanced from technician fifth grade to technician fourth grade.

"Yeah, thanks, Sarge," said Colling, still unable to fully comprehend it all.

"Let's go over to the NCO Club and have a beer," suggested Ferguson.

"I didn't know we had an NCO Club."

"Yep, and I can get us in even this early in the morning," said Ferguson, and then shouted at the clerks in the next office that he was going to inspect the enlisted men's quarters and would not be back for a couple of hours.

The Grabensheim Kaserne NCO Club was in the cellar under the PX. It was decorated like a Bavarian gasthof, complete with a row of the cut-off ends of three large beer barrels set in one wall. A German was washing glassware in the kitchen behind the bar. When he heard the door open, he came out to see who it was. He greeted Ferguson in accented English, and the sergeant introduced him to Colling as "Fritz." Colling responded in German, and the man seemed delighted. At Ferguson's request, he brought them two draft beers at the booth that the sergeant selected towards the back of the room.

As they sat sipping the beer, Ferguson brought Colling up to date on events at the kaserne. Major Harris, of course, had returned home to North Carolina. The Countess and her Wehrmacht colonel husband were apparently reconciled, or at least there was no sign of an impending split. Many of the battalion's men had received either discharge or reassignment orders, and Ferguson guessed that Colling would not know most of the men that were now stationed at the kaserne. Ferguson ticked off the names of the soldiers who were still with the battalion, and Colling figured out that only "Snuffy" Smith, who was now a three-stripe sergeant, and Sergeant Dorfmann, who had worked with Zinsmann on the reconstruction of the barracks, were men he had known very well before he went on furlough. Dorfmann had re-enlisted and opted to remain in Germany because he had a German fräulein, and Ferguson suspected that he would marry the girl if and when the fraternization rule was rescinded.

Most of the surplus cigarettes were gone, sold by Ferguson on the German market for American Military marks, which the master sergeant had then converted into dollars and wired to his wife in Panama. Ferguson had set aside fifty cartons for Colling and stored them in a foot locker in Colling's new quarters. The sergeant had moved Colling's two wall lockers to another room behind the dispensary to make room for a staff sergeant named Purcell, a transfer from a tank outfit whom Vincent had appointed as non-commissioned-officer-in-charge of the Grabensheim medical detachment. Ferguson did not have a great deal of respect for Purcell, and vowed he would not let the man touch him if he became ill or were injured. There were two new PFC medics who seemed to be doing a decent job, despite Staff Sergeant Purcell's inept supervision. Colling asked to what job he would be assigned, now that he had returned, and Ferguson told him that he did not know, but that Vincent had indicated that he would personally decide Colling's assignment within the battalion. Ferguson advised him that he would have to report later in the day, as soon as he was settled into his quarters, and get his instructions from the Major.

With Harrington gone, a new commander had taken over at Regiment, Colonel Alphonse R. Brazenholm. Ferguson thought he was a pretty good officer; not as good as Colonel Harrington, in Ferguson's opinion, but Brazenholm was a combat veteran, tough but fair. Vincent was another matter. He was a federalized State Guard officer who had been called up after Pearl Harbor. Ferguson was unsure, but had heard that the man had been an assistant manager in a department store in Ohio in civilian life. He had come in as a captain, and had been assigned as a corps staff officer from the beginning, in G-1, personnel. Ferguson estimated that Vincent had not been within twenty miles of the front lines in his career. The Major loved personnel files, and was in his element with the flow of men through the battalion, which had not abated since Colling was serving as battalion clerk. Vincent had decided to remain on active duty and make the Army a career, but Ferguson believed that the reduction-in-force that was continuing would result in the Major being transferred to reserve status.

As a matter of fact, Ferguson went on, the entire 40th Regiment was under-strength, and rumor had it that the 61st Division itself was to be de-activated; either by the end of the year, or Spring of 1947. If the Division were wrapped up, the 40th would probably be deactivated as well. The regiment had been brought out of mothballs on the eve of war in 1939, for the first time since the Civil War, and did not have a history or prestige that

Ferguson thought would motivate the Pentagon to keep it on the active list. Major Vincent would be out in the cold when his command ceased to exist.

Colling wondered where he would be reassigned if the 40th were disbanded, and Ferguson told him not to worry about it. At best, he might be sent back to the States and maybe given an early discharge. Colling was uncertain as to whether he would welcome that, but he did admit to himself that a transfer Stateside would permit him to locate Elizabeth; and if he returned to civilian life, he could resume his education.

Ferguson swallowed the last of his beer and said, "We better be getting back to work. You got to get your stuff unpacked and find out where Vincent wants you to work, and I got to make my presence known elsewhere, otherwise the Major might tell my next CO that I was a gold-bricker. By the way, I got a stack of mail for you."

As they stood up to leave, Ferguson commented, "We all got a pay raise on July One. T-5's went from $66.00 a month to $90.00. We lost our $25.00 overseas pay, though, so that would have been a dollar less a month at your old grade. But since you go to T-4, I think that puts you at $100 per."

Colling reflected that he had not drawn any pay since the end of March, and his pay account would have accumulated for three months. He wondered if Ferguson had noticed that while he had supposedly been in Paris on TDY, he had had no apparent need for money.

He easily found the room into which Ferguson told him he had moved his lockers. The padlocks on each of the wall lockers were in place. One was still filled with the surplus uniforms he had been selling, and while there was a jumble of some items in its bottom because it had been moved, everything appeared to be intact. His other locker was also in disorder, but he found nothing missing. The remainder of his cash, nearly two thousand dollars, was safe behind the false panel in the upper shelf. He added the money Quarles had given him to it.

Colling had straightened out both lockers before he noticed the extra footlocker in the room in addition to the one at the foot of his cot. It was not locked, and when Colling lifted its lid, he saw that it was filled with cartons of cigarettes. He closed the lid and reminded himself to buy another padlock.

The PX was closed when he tried the front door, so he used the back entrance. There was a PFC whom he did not recognize marking merchandise and shelving it.

"Sorry, Corporal, we're closed," said the PFC.

"I used to work here, Private," responded Colling. "What's your name?"

"Bolton."

"Good, Bolton. I just got promoted to T-4, and I need some stripes."

"You must be Colling," replied Bolton.

"You got that right."

"We hear a lot about you from some of the old guys. They call you 'Dog Robber.'"

"Yeah, I guess some do. You got a lot of new merchandise in here now. Where are the stripes?"

Bolton showed him a box of technician-fourth-grade insignia, and Colling counted out several sets of the three chevrons surmounting a "T" that denoted his new rank.

As he paid him, the PFC said, "Sarge, if you don't want to try and sew them on yourself, there's a Kraut lady that will do it for a couple of marks each."

"Thanks, Bolton. I'll bring over my shirts and jackets to have it done. I think I'll have to be the one to sew a set on what I'm wearing, though."

Colling returned to his quarters and set about attaching the new stripes to his jacket and one shirt. When he was done, he went to the latrine and checked their appearance in the mirror. Satisfied, he returned to the orderly room. Ferguson was not there, and Colling asked the corporal on duty if he could see Major Vincent.

The major seemed surprised and slightly irritated that Colling had managed to sew on his new rank insignia so quickly.

"Technician Fourth Grade Colling reporting, sir," said Colling, saluting.

"At ease, Sergeant," replied Vincent. "What brings you here again?"

"Sergeant Ferguson said you were going to give me my assignment, sir."

"Ah, yes, correct." Major Vincent picked up Colling's personnel file again and opened it. After perusing it for a moment or two, he asked, "I see that you were assigned as a medic, even though you had no training as such."

"Correct, sir. They were short of medics, and I had some experience, so Dr. Lewisohn okay'ed me as a medic."

"I see that. Captain Lewisohn has a very glowing letter in here about you. Says you are one of the best medical corpsmen he has seen."

"I was unaware of that, sir."

"I also see you served as battalion clerk, and were essentially in charge of the PX. And you did some work as a translator for AMGOT at Camp 146."

"Yessir."

"You were a busy boy indeed, Collings."

Colling felt his face turning red at the major's use of the word "boy," and his persistent mispronunciation of his name, but gritted his teeth and replied, "Yessir."

Vincent continued, "Well, Collings, I think your talents as a medic are the most useful attribute that you have at present. Both medics assigned to Camp 146 have transfer orders effective on Monday, reassigned to a general hospital they've established in Munich. I understand there are two doctors among the camp's inmates who are providing medical care, but the commander, Major Brumerson, insists that we provide Army medics to support his staff and our men from A Company. I think this will be an excellent assignment for you."

"Yessir. Do you want me to move to the camp right away, sir?"

"Yes, of course. Have one of the clerks get someone from the motor pool to drive you."

Colling repacked his B-4 bag and, on his way to the motor pool, delivered an armful of clothing to Bolton in the PX, in order to have his new rank insignia sewn on. Snuffy Smith, now wearing the three chevrons of a sergeant, had volunteered to drive him to Camp 146 when he learned who his passenger would be, and Colling was glad to see the Kentuckian.

When they pulled through the kaserne gate and were on the road to the camp, Smith asked Colling if he had heard about the Major's Fourth of July parade. Colling admitted that Ferguson had not mentioned it, Smith laughed and began describing how Vincent had decided that the garrison would put on a display of American military pageantry for the local German population. It had taken a week to prepare for the event.

The Major had had the square in front of the train station rigged with loudspeakers, to provide marching music. A reviewing stand was constructed in the square. Eighty men from each of the three companies housed in the kaserne were selected. Vincent ordered all their helmet liners to be repainted a uniform glossy olive drab, and he had produced from somewhere, decals of the 61st Division patch to be affixed to the sides of each liner. Daily close order drill was held by way of rehearsal. At mid-morning on the Fourth, the column of men in their best uniforms and the shiny new helmet liners, rifles on their shoulders, were marched out of the main gate of the kaserne and down the street to the square. Stars and Stripes Forever blared from the loudspeakers, followed up by the Caisson Song. The troops were drawn up in ranks on three sides of the square, and Major Vincent, with the Bürgermeister, members of the town council and their spouses sitting on the grandstand behind him, made a speech about the deep sense of patriotism that he was experiencing on the holiday.

Colling asked if many of the German townspeople had attended.

"Hell, yes. Krauts love a parade," answered Smith. "Some of the kids even marched beside the guys when they went back to the kaserne. But most all of the GIs thought it was really dumb."

Colling thought to himself that dumb was probably an applicable adjective when it came to Vincent's way of running the battalion.

Major Brumerson remembered him when he reported to him. Colling explained that he had been assigned to the camp guard company as a medic, and Brumerson asked one of his clerks to take Colling to the dispensary. Before Colling left, the major asked if he would be available as an interpreter, if the need arose, and Colling agreed that he would do so.

The Camp 146 dispensary was in a wooden barracks within the guards' section of the camp, separated from the main compound by a barbed-wire fence. The medical facility shared the building with the headquarters for Company A, and the corporal Brumerson had assigned to conduct Colling to the dispensary first took him to the company's orderly room. The corporal left quickly, leaving him standing in front of the desk of Company A's senior non-commissioned officer. Colling came to attention and stated his name.

First Sergeant Calvin Prinzman's stern expression did not change as he looked Colling over, glancing at the new stripes on his sleeves. "Well, Colling. If it ain't the Dog Robber," he said, his face breaking into a broad

grin. “Sergeant Ferguson just now phoned to tell me you were on your way here. He says you’re a pretty good medic, among other things.”

“Thanks, Sarge. I hope I can live up to my reputation,” said Colling, maintaining a serious expression on his face.

Prinzman laughed out loud, then said, “I’ll be damned, if Ferguson wasn’t right. You are a cool customer. Come on, I’ll introduce you to the Company CO, Lieutenant Wallerman, then show you your quarters.”

First Lieutenant Wallerman was not much older than Colling. He greeted Colling with an outstretched hand after Colling had completed the formality of saluting him and announcing that he was reporting. The young officer commented that he was acting company commander until someone more senior could be assigned. He told Colling he was pleased to have him on board as a medic and wished him well, leaving Sergeant Prinzman to conduct Colling to his billet.

Company A’s four-man complement of medics was billeted in two small rooms adjoining the dispensary itself. Each room held two cots, two footlockers on stands, and two wall lockers. First Sergeant Prinzman told Colling that he had his choice of where he wanted to sleep, since he would be, for the foreseeable future, the only Army medic assigned to the post. On their way to the medic quarters, they had passed through the examining room, and Colling had seen two men in white coats and two women in nurses’ uniforms tending to patients. There were no American soldiers present, and Colling assumed that the day’s sick call for the guards must have been completed. He asked Prinzman about it.

“Yeah,” said the sergeant, “Right now we been having to take all our sick call to the Regimental Aid Station at Kummersfeld. We got an ambulance, and I have one of our guys drive whoever goes on sick call over there. Now that you’re here, only the serious cases will have to go to Regiment.”

“How many report every morning?” asked Colling.

“Anywheres from none to three or four most days. There was three this morning, and they went to Kummersfeld,” said Prinzman, then continued, “You’ll complete the Daily Sick Report and give it to me. I’ll send it up to Ferguson at Battalion, then it goes to Regiment. Sick call is at 07:00, right after breakfast, which is at 06:00. We have our own mess hall, separate from the DPs.”

“Can I help out these people with the DP’s?”

“Sure, if you want. But only after you get done with our personnel. They take priority. And if you got to drive anyone to Regiment, that comes first.”

“Right, Sarge. If it’s okay with you, I’ll put my stuff away and then familiarize myself with what I’ll have to do.”

“Fine, but first let me introduce you to our doctors,” said Prinzman, leading Colling over to the two men and two women wearing white.

Both of the men stopped what they were doing and stepped forward.

Gesturing to the thinner of the two, Prinzman said, “This here is Dr. Parn. His real name is too hard to say, so we just call him ‘Dr. Parn.’ This here is Sergeant Colling.”

Colling took the hand that the doctor offered and said in Polish, “It is my honor to meet you, Doktor…?”

The physician smiled broadly and said, “My honor as well, Sergeant. My name is Parnieskaya, Antonin Parnieskaya. My colleague is Dr. Avram Cheska.”

Colling shook the second doctor’s hand. Parnieskaya began to ask him how he had come to speak Polish when Prinzman interrupted, “I see you speaka da lingo, Colling.”

“Right, Sarge.”

“Well, you should get along fine. I’ll be calling on you the next time I can’t get one of the Polacks to figure out what I’m trying to tell ‘em. Anyway, it’s all yours. Good luck,” said the sergeant.

The doctors called over the nurses to be introduced to Colling. Both women were young and pretty, although Maria, a red-head, had bad teeth. Barbara, blonde and a few pounds heavier than Maria, smiled mischievously at Colling, and he wondered with how many of the camp’s American staff she was on familiar terms.

Colling offered to assist with the patients, who had been left where they were by the interruption he had caused, and Dr. Parnieskaya led him to his patient and began explaining his symptoms and condition. Colling had to ask for an explanation of some of the Polish medical terms that were used, because he had not heard them before. Dr. Cheska did the same thing with the woman he was tending to, and as Colling stood by his side,

Barbara brushed against him as she handed the doctor a tray of instruments. Cheska noticed the contact out of the corner of his eye and glared at the young nurse, who appeared to ignore him as she smiled at Colling.

These were the last patients of the day, and when they had departed, Parnieskaya, Cheska and Colling seated themselves around one of the examining tables while the women went about cleaning the room. Parnieskaya produced three bottles of German beer from the back of the dispensary's refrigerator, and as they sat drinking, he asked Colling about his background and what life was like in the United States. Colling answered, then reciprocated with questions of his own, and found that Parnieskaya had been a surgeon in Warsaw, while Cheska had practiced general medicine in a small town near the Czech border. Both men had been forced by the German occupation to work in general hospitals in the southwest of Poland. As the Soviet advance approached, they had been ordered first to a hospital in Czechoslovakia, then Austria, and finally into Bavaria. They counted themselves fortunate that they had been able to turn themselves over to the Americans.

Maria and Barbara had only limited formal training as nurses, having learned what they knew tending to the sick and wounded brought to the various hospitals to which they had been assigned by the Germans. They had been working with Parnieskaya and Cheska since their paths had crossed in Czechoslovakia. The doctors were impressed that the two women performed their nursing duties well, and had continued to instruct them in caring for the sick and injured.

As the sun began to set, an American sergeant appeared at the door and announced, "Okay, folks. Back to the barracks. It's curfew time."

As the nurses walked down the steps past the soldier, he winked at Barbara and said, "Hubba hubba, Baby."

Colling remembered that he had neglected to unpack his bags when he had told Sergeant Prinzman he would, and now that he was alone in the dispensary, he undertook to do so. He was sorting out the last of the things he had brought with him from Grabensheim when he heard footsteps in the examining room. He encountered a tired-looking PFC hanging up a clipboard on a hook near the door. When the soldier saw him, he said, "Hi, Sarge. Just bringing back the vehicle log on the ambulance. All the guys who went up this morning all came back with me."

"Okay. I'm Colling. I'm the new medic."

"Glad to see you here, Sarge. I ain't got no medic training, and it makes me nervous to have to drive casualties around. My name is Trueman. And I know what you're gonna say. But my name is spelt with an 'e' in it, and my first name ain't 'Harry.'"

"Right. What is your first name?"

"Arthur…Art for short."

"You'll be driving tomorrow?"

"I'd have to check with Sergeant Prinzman, but now that you're here, I think it's your job."

"Okay. Thanks, Art."

"My pleasure. Say, if you haven't eaten, there's late chow over at the mess hall. It's only sandwiches, but it's something to eat," offered Trueman.

There were trays piled with sandwiches wrapped in waxed paper on the mess hall's serving counter. Trueman explained that the guard shift changes meant that food was made available around the clock. As they sat eating their sandwiches and drinking coffee, Trueman gossiped about the idiosyncrasies of Company A's various officers and NCOs. When Colling asked him, he also explained the more important of the standard operating procedures for Camp 146, and the relationship that the men of the guard company had with the AMGOT staff. He was free with information about the DPs, and when Colling asked about Barbara, Trueman told Colling how lucky he was to be working with her in the dispensary, but did not elaborate, except to warn him to look out for Dr. Cheska if he decided to "make a play" for the girl. By the time Colling returned to his quarters, he felt he knew almost everything he would have to know about his new assignment.

The final days of summer passed one by one. Early morning of each day was taken up seeing soldiers from the guard company, most of whom Colling was able to treat on his own. There were the usual upset stomachs, diarrhea, sore throats, rashes, venereal diseases and headaches. Occasionally there was a more complicated case requiring him to telephone Dr. Lewisohn for advice. A few times he had to put someone in the ambulance and drive to Kummersfeld to have a bone set, or to have a more serious infection looked after. When not caring for his fellow soldiers, he assisted the two Polish physicians. He asked questions and believed that he was learning

more each day about the treatment of different diseases and injuries. He remained the only Army medic at the camp.

At the first opportunity, he had used the ambulance to gather the belongings that he had left behind at the Grabensheim kaserne. There was less occasion at Camp 146 to deal in tailored uniform shirts and the like, but he was able to sell some items to the men of Company A and the AMGOT contingent. A bus provided transportation to the PX and movies in Kummersfeld on weekends. Colling made new friends with the men with whom he was stationed, and seldom ran into anyone else from the Battalion who had been there when he first arrived. The Nuremberg trial of the Nazi hierarchy continued to hold top place in Stars and Stripes, Life and Newsweek, as well as the newsreels that preceded every movie. Colling found that, even though none of his German acquaintances wanted to discuss the proceedings, and few of his fellow soldiers found the subject more interesting than the most recent major league baseball team standings, almost all the DP's at Camp 146 followed each day's developments closely, and consistently voiced their opinions about the defendants' guilt and the most suitable forms of execution that should be utilized.

Colling wrote several letters to Elizabeth, but received none in response. As the weeks passed and he heard nothing, he became more angry and resentful towards her. He concluded that she had used him in her scheme to bring out the three Poles, and that everything they had shared together had simply been of no importance to her. He decided not to continue to write, and tried to get her out of his mind. Barbara continued to flirt with him, telling him to call her by the familiar form of her name, Basia. He was tempted to invite her to his quarters after hours, but did not do so out of consideration for Dr. Cheska, who was obviously smitten with the girl.

He managed to find time to stop by and see Frau Bergheim, and found that both her sons were at the farm, having been released from custody only a week previous to his visit. She thanked him repeatedly for using his influence to obtain clemency for the boys, and even though he continued to deny that he had had anything to do with it, she was convinced that it was he who had arranged it. When he returned from the farm, Colling mentioned the boys' release to Major Brumerson, who told him that AMGOT had ordered a general review of all convictions of German civilians for violations of occupation regulations that had occurred in the immediate aftermath of the war. Brumerson conjectured that the boys' cases had carried a high priority for clemency because of their ages. Colling decided it was useless to argue with Frau Bergheim about her perception that he had influence that he did not actually possess. He did tell a young second lieutenant who was rumored to have a German girlfriend that he might want to discuss renting the garret room from Frau Bergheim, and was confident that she would continue to have access to American cigarettes, coffee and sugar.

On a Sunday in the middle of September, the troops at Camp 146 were informed without any prior warning that new currency restrictions would go into effect on Monday. At that time, U.S. dollars would no longer be authorized for use by American forces in Germany. Instead, all transactions on military bases would be conducted in what were called "Military Payment Certificates." The government had decided it had had enough of profiteering by American servicemen, using the favorable exchange rate for American Military marks as the basis for a widespread black market. Army personnel would no longer receive their pay in American currency, but in the new certificates. Possession of U.S. cash, even coinage greater than a penny, was prohibited, and everyone was instructed to turn in their dollars for an equal amount of Military Payment Certificates, which could be used only on United States military installations. Military marks would no longer be convertible into dollars.

Colling had traded in cigarettes, either bartering them directly with Germans, or swapping them with the mess sergeants for coffee and sugar to use as gifts for Frau Bergheim and others. He had not engaged in the black market, although he had profited from selling uniforms and charging interest on small loans to his fellow soldiers. Nevertheless, the new currency rules and exchange restrictions meant that his business dealings would be severely limited. He decided he would not exchange the fairly large amount of cash he was currently holding, although he did stand in line with the other men of Company A and hand over $27.60 to a Finance Corps officer and, in return, received a handful of crisp new gray and black certificates of equal face value.

Colling had not visited the Grabensheim kaserne since shortly after his reassignment to Camp 146 in July, when, in the course of transporting a patient to the Regimental Aid Station, Dr. Lewisohn asked him to go out of his way to deliver several cartons of medical supplies to the First Battalion dispensary on his way back to the DP Camp. He had just come out of the dispensary after unloading the boxes from the ambulance when Snuffy Smith walked up to greet him.

"How's everthin' goin', Jim?"

"Hey, Snuffy. I'm fine. How about you? I'd have thought you would have gone home by now."

"I did. I done re-enlisted. Got thirty days furlough in the States, then came back."

"You got a home in the Army."

"That's what they say. I also got me a little fraw-line," said Smith with a smile.

"Well that's great, Snuffy," said Colling.

"Say, Jim, that was too bad about that little gal of you'rn."

"What little gal?" asked Colling, frowning.

"Why that little Red Cross gal. Didn't you know? She was killed in a jeep accident last week."

Colling was unable to speak. Elizabeth was in the States. Snuffy must be mistaken. He had to be. Finally, he said, "That can't be, Snuff. She's been in the States for almost three months."

"Her name was Elizabeth Hamilton, weren't it?" asked Smith.

"Yeah, sure. But it can't be the same girl."

"Well, it was in the Blue Circle News, by golly."

The Blue Circle News was the 61st Division weekly newspaper. Published in Landsgau, the Division's headquarters, it circulated throughout the division's area of responsibility, but seldom reached outlying locations such as Camp 146. In fact, only a few copies had ever reached Grabensheim when Colling was there.

Smith continued, "Come on, I'll show you." He pulled Colling towards the battalion orderly room. A much-read copy of the newspaper was among the reading material stacked on a low table, and Smith picked it up and pointed Colling to the bottom of the front page.

POPULAR RED CROSS GIRL KILLED

IN ROAD ACCIDENT

Elizabeth Hamilton, a Red Cross girl who had been with the Division since last June, was killed yesterday when the jeep she was driving skidded on a wet road near Diegenger. A Polish officer who was riding with her was also killed.

Miss Hamilton was from Philadelphia, and her remains will be returned there for burial. Miss Hamilton was well- known to the men of the 40th Infantry, where she served until recently as hostess at many parties and celebrations.

She will be remembered as the pretty blonde who helped serve doughnuts from the Red Cross wagon at most Division sports events. Full honors were rendered for Miss Hamilton at Division HQ at Copeland Kaserne. 61st Division commander, Maj. Gen. B.R. Smith, and Division staff, including Brig.Gen. Tansley and Cols. Kerrick and McCarthy, were in attendance.

A contingent attended representing the Hungarian Riding Academy, where Miss Hamilton had made many friends among the Hungarian equestrians. The staff of the News extends its sincere condolences.

Colling became aware of a distant sound that turned out to be the voice of a heavy-set master sergeant asking he and Smith what they wanted in the sergeant's orderly room. While Smith was explaining that he just wanted to show Colling the Blue Circle News, Colling could only stand speechless, staring down at the newspaper, which had become a blur.

The next thing he was aware of was Smith shaking him by the arm, and Colling looked up to see that the master sergeant's red, flushed face was inches from his own, and he heard his name being shouted at him.

"Dammit, Colling! Can't you answer when I speak to you?"

Colling could only stutter out, "Sorry, Sarge."

Still shaking Colling's arm, Smith interjected, "Jim, this is Sergeant Brookline. He's the new Battalion NCO-I-C."

Colling repeated his apology, trying to regain his composure, "Sorry, Sarge. I just got some bad news."

"Yeah, Sarge, girl he knew got killed," said Smith. "He just now found out about it."

"Well, Sergeant," said Brookline to Colling in a slightly calmer tone, "That's too bad, but I expect an answer when I ask a question. Neither one of you got any business being in my orderly room, so clear out."

"Right, Sarge, we're goin'" said Smith, leading Colling towards the door.

Smith asked him if he would be all right as Colling slid behind the wheel of the ambulance. Colling told him he would, that he just needed a few minutes to himself. He did not notice Smith walk away. There was a lump in his throat and he fought back the tears welling in his eyes. He could picture Elizabeth's face, and everything

she had ever said to him and everything they had ever done together seemed to flood through his mind. He could only think that she was gone and that there would never, ever be a time when he would see her again. He rested his forehead on the steering wheel, and his chest ached with the realization that he would never see her again.

He did not know how long he had been sitting there when he raised his head and saw that he was being watched by two soldiers whom he did not know. They were privates in fatigues who were obviously on some sort of work detail, and were uncertain what to do about this sergeant who was sitting with his head on the steering wheel of an ambulance parked in the kaserne quadrangle. To solve their dilemma, he started the engine and drove out of the square, back to Camp 146.

The following days were very difficult for Colling. He tried to concentrate on his work in the dispensary, but found himself constantly distracted by thoughts of Elizabeth. He finally spoke to Dr. Parnieskaya about it, telling him only that she had been an American girl that he had cared very much for. He did not use the word "love" to describe his relationship with her. Parnieskaya told him that he had lost his wife and three children in the war, and suggested that time would heal his sorrow, even though it would never disappear. Afterwards, Colling was uncertain whether the discussion improved his state of mind or not. Colling also spoke to Dr. Cheska, who told him that visiting a loved one's place of burial was considered by some as a way in which to salve the heart. When Colling pointed out that her grave would be in Pennsylvania, the doctor advised that perhaps a visit to the place where the accident had occurred might be a substitute.

While Diegenger was in the 61st Division area, it was outside that of the 40th Infantry. The town and surrounding countryside was within the region controlled by the 67th Infantry Regiment, nearly a hundred kilometers east of Camp 146. In order to get there, Colling would need a vehicle, and the ambulance mileage was closely monitored.

Major Brumerson had not heard of Elizabeth's death, and was visibly shaken when Colling told him. When Colling explained what he had in mind, Brumerson readily agreed to his request to borrow a jeep. Colling telephoned Dr. Lewisohn and told him he wanted to have the following Tuesday off, after sick call was concluded, and assuming that there was no one to transport to Kummersfeld. Colling did not tell him the reason for his request, but the doctor consented and told him he would send a pass to him.

With the signed authorization in the breast pocket of his new Eisenhower jacket, Colling drove towards Diegenger. The newspaper article had not said exactly where the accident took place, but when Colling arrived in the little village, he made a stop at a gasthof in the center of town. He asked the waitress who brought him a glass of beer and a brötchen about the Red Cross girl and Polish officer who were killed nearby, and the girl directed him to a place a few kilometers outside the town.

He easily found where the crash had occurred. The waitress had accurately described a curve in the road and a large oak tree that would be marked by prominent gashes in its trunk. As he sat surveying the scene of the accident, Colling tried to picture what must have happened, although he had difficulty understanding how a skid could have taken place on the rough macadam surface. In icy conditions, perhaps, but he could not imagine the road becoming sufficiently slippery through water alone.

Colling sat in the parked jeep for some time, staring at the tree. He thought of Elizabeth, but there was only heartache, not the overwhelming grief that he had experienced on first learning of her death. At last he started the jeep and pulled back onto the narrow highway.

As he came fully around the curve, there was a Signal Corps crew working on the telephone lines alongside the road. Colling almost drove by, but on a whim, he hit the brakes and skidded the jeep to a halt, then made a full turn that brought him back beside the signalmen's truck. As Colling cut off the vehicle's engine, he recognized the soldier coming towards him. He raised his hand and waved, calling out, "Hey, Sergeant Vitarelli. Long time no see."

"I'll be damned! If it ain't the kid from the train. Jim was the name, right?"

"Right, Sarge."

Looking at Colling's chevrons, Vitarelli said, "Looks like you've moved up in the world."

"You, too, Sarge," said Colling, pointing to the staff sergeant's stripes that the signalman was wearing.

"Yeah. I got to like it here, so I asked to stay on active duty for a couple more years. The rest of the guys from the 485th went home after the first of the year. What are you doing around here?"

"I had a friend killed in an accident back there. I came to see where it happened."

"You mean the Red Cross lady and the other guy?" asked Vitarelli.

"Yeah. You know about it?"

"We was here when it happened."

"No kidding?" said Colling. "Did you see it?"

"Not really. We heard it though. We was working on them poles down there," said Vitarelli, pointing. "We heard a bang and we all got in the truck to go see what happened."

Colling was listening intently, and Vitarelli continued, "It was the damnedest thing, though. The MPs was there when we got there, and it couldn't have been but a couple of minutes after we heard the bang."

"You mean that there were MPs there right after the accident?"

"Yeah. And the nearest MP post is at least twenty kilometers from here."

Colling asked, "Did you help the MPs?"

"Impossible. They told us to beat it. We offered to help, but they told us to get in our truck and get back to work. The head MP was a master sergeant, so who was we to argue?"

"Did you see the bodies?"

"Yeah, that was the other strange thing. Both bodies was laid out side-by-side, all straightened out and all. Next thing we know, there's an ambulance pulling up and they real quick loaded them up. They took off about the same time we did, only in the opposite direction."

Colling was trying to apply reason to what he was being told, but much of it was not logical. Vitarelli broke in on his thoughts, "Was your friend the guy wearing the British uniform?"

"No, the girl."

Vitarelli raised his eyebrows and said, "Well, I guess you could call that old lady a 'girl,' but frankly, for me, it's a stretch."

"Old lady?" asked Colling.

"The old gal that got killed."

"I don't understand. She wasn't an old lady…at least not the girl I knew." said Colling, incredulous.

"I saw her laid out before they tossed a blanket over her. She had white hair. She was sixty if she was a day."

Colling looked closely at Vitarelli and asked, "You sure she just didn't have blonde hair?"

"I'm tellin' ya, she had white hair, not blonde. Jesus, I know the difference."

"Okay, okay. I believe you," said Colling. "Listen, thanks a lot. Take care of yourself and if you get over near the DP camp above Grabensheim, drop in and I'll buy you a beer."

"I doubt I'll get over that way," replied Vitarelli, "But if I do, I'll take you up on that. So long."

Colling's mind was racing all the way back to Camp 146. It did not sound as if Elizabeth had died in the crash. He could not be sure, but he felt his heart lift with the possibility that she was still alive. But his enjoyment of the moment was tempered with the thought that Elizabeth was again at the center of some kind of deception. He went over in his mind the number of times that Elizabeth had deceived him. She had not been honest with him about her reasons for their travelling to Poland. She had not told him everything about for whom she seemed to be working. She had lied about her relationship to Karol and the other Poles. It was obvious to him that her return to the States was imaginary, and that she had not responded to his letters in order to keep him unaware that she was in Germany. Colling went back to those first weeks they had together, when she had demonstrated such passion, and wondered whether that had been part of a pre-conceived plan to seduce him into accompanying her to Poland.

Colling was telling himself that the logical thing to do would be to just forget about her when the emotion of his rising anger over-ruled reason, and caused him to resolve to find Elizabeth and confront her. He decided he would start asking questions and see where it would lead him.

Instead of returning to the camp, he continued on towards Grabensheim until he saw the inconspicuous black and white sign with the words Reiten Akademie written over an arrow. He followed its direction and turned from the main road onto a gravel drive flanked by tall trees that took him about a half kilometer to a scattering of buildings surrounding a large fenced equestrian exercise yard. He parked the jeep next to a long stable. As he alighted, he was approached by an athletic-looking man wearing a black turtleneck sweater above spotless white jodhpurs and highly-polished brown riding boots. "Polo player," came to Colling's mind.

"Can I help you, sir?" asked the horseman in German.

"Yes," responded Colling in the same language, "I understand Miss Hamilton used to ride here."

"Ah, Miss Hamilton…" replied the man, his facial expression changing like a cloud passing. "Yes, she did. But no more, I fear. She had a most unfortunate accident."

"That I have heard. Did you know her well?"

"Yes, of course. All of us did. Why do you ask?"

"I was a friend," said Colling. "I learned of her accident only recently, and I wish to lessen the burden on my heart by speaking to those who might have seen her in her final days."

"Yes, I understand. My name is Otto. Otto Breksauer."

"My name is Wilson Smith, Herr Breksauer," lied Colling.

"How may I help you, Sergeant?"

"When was the last time you saw Miss Hamilton, Herr Breksauer?"

"I did not, Sergeant, but I am told that she was here the day of the accident, Sergeant, of course. She was on her way back to her quarters in Landsgau with Lieutenant Janzieskie."

Colling thought for a moment, then asked, "She was wearing her riding clothes, then?"

"That is what I understand. Why do you ask?"

"A supposition on my part, Herr Breksauer, only spoken out loud. Did she ride frequently with Lieutenant Janzieskie?"

"Only recently. Was he perhaps a rival of yours for Miss Hamilton's affections?" asked Breksauer, eyeing Colling cautiously.

"No. Nothing of the sort. I have no such feelings for Miss Hamilton. It has been some time even since I had seen her. We had worked together on some social events for the soldiers in Grabensheim and Kummersfeld only."

Colling asked, "Is there anyone here who might have seen her on the day of the accident?"

"Alas, no, Sergeant," said the horseman, his response too glib for Colling's taste, "The Hungarians who were here that day have all gone to England, I believe, for a riding exhibition."

On a whim, Colling continued, "Did she ride often with Major Quarles?"

Breksauer hesitated for a moment, as if considering whether Colling might already know the answer, "Oh, sometimes. But not for some time now. I understood him to be a close friend, and because he would ride only when visiting Miss Hamilton from Karlsruhe, I do not expect to see him again."

Colling thanked Breksheim, sympathized with him about Elizabeth's death at so young an age, and left the riding academy with more questions than answers swirling in his head.

Colling found Sergeant Prinzman in the orderly room and reported that he had returned with Major Brumer's jeep. He then asked, "Sarge, do you know any of the MPs up at Division?"

"Yeah. I think so, unless he got rotated home, I know a sergeant who used to be a squad leader under me over in the 345th. He transferred to the MPs a couple of months after the Krauts surrendered. Why do you ask?"

"Well, you know I wanted to go up and see where that Red Cross girl I used to date was killed. Anyway, Dr. Cheska told me that if I wanted to get over it so I could sleep better, that I should feel satisfied I know all about the accident. There were a couple of things I didn't understand after I found where it happened. I figured that the MPs might have a report that would give more info."

Prinzman smiled wryly, "That gal really got under your skin, didn't she?"

"I guess so, Sarge," admitted Colling. "It would help if I could go up there and talk to somebody and read the report."

The sergeant said he would see what he could do, and picked up the telephone. Colling listened as Prinzman asked the operator for the number of the 361st Military Police Battalion headquarters and as the first sergeant talked to a succession of individuals on the other end of the line. Finally, Prinzman warmly greeted someone he called "Mike," and after exchanging pleasantries, asked if he would be willing to speak to Colling. When Prinzman hung up the phone he said, "It's all set. Mike'll be in the headquarters office in Landsgau tomorrow. You can go up and see him right after you clear up sick call. I would guess the Major will let you have the jeep again."

The 61st Division's military police battalion headquarters was in a building that had once housed a Landpolizei station, set in the triangle of land where the principal road leading into Landsgau divided to become two of the town's streets. The two-story stucco building's walled courtyard was filled with U.S. Army vehicles, and Colling had to squeeze his jeep between two others painted with white military police markings.

Prinzman had told Colling to ask for Staff Sergeant Mike Childers. The German girl who was seated at the reception counter picked up the telephone and told Childers he had a visitor. As they waited for the sergeant to appear, Colling chatted with the girl in German. She was telling him how fortunate she thought herself to be to have employment with the U.S. Army when Childers came out of an inner office and extended his hand to Colling.

After exchanging greetings, Childers took Colling aside and said, "Prinzman said you wanted to look at the accident report on that Red Cross gal."

"Right," answered Colling.

"Well, I pulled it outta the files, and I ain't sure I can show it to you."

"How come?"

"The two guys who signed it haven't been with the battalion since July. Both of them was shipped home to the States for discharge. The accident happened in the first week of September, according to the report, when they wasn't here."

"Was one of them a master sergeant?" interrupted Colling.

Childers looked puzzled, "No. Why would you ask that? Everybody knows Sergeant Monahan is the Battalion NCO-I-C, and he don't write accident reports."

"Can you tell me what ranks they were?"

"Yeah. A corporal and a PFC."

When Colling didn't say anything, Childers went on, "What also makes me nervous about all this is that the records clerk told me when I mentioned I wanted the report that he was supposed to tell the CO if anyone asked for that particular report. I got a look at it only because I told the clerk that I was trying to track down a vehicle theft and wanted the serial number off the jeep to make sure I had all of 'em accounted for. As it turns out, somebody red-lined that specific jeep the day before the accident and dropped it off the Table of Equipment for a Quartermaster outfit that's not part of the Division. When I saw that, I just went and put the report back in the drawer. I would suggest you hightail it back to whatever outfit you're with, and don't say nothin' to nobody."

Colling thanked Childers and told him he would take his advice. As he walked towards his jeep, he had the feeling that he was being watched, but when he turned around, he did not see anyone who seemed to be paying any attention to him.

He headed out of Landsgau towards the camp, but at the first crossroads, headed for Diegenger instead. He drove through the village and revisited the road where he had encountered Vitarelli, but saw no Signal Corps vehicles. Hoping to both quench his thirst and obtain directions to where the signalmen might be, he stopped at the tavern where he had received directions to the site of Elizabeth's accident. When Colling asked the same waitress whether she knew the soldiers who had been working on the phone lines, she told him that they were billeted in the telephone exchange at the edge of town.

Colling found the exchange and saw several Signal Corps trucks parked behind the building. He pulled in and parked his jeep beside one of them. A set of steps led up to a door. When Colling opened it, he found himself in what appeared to be a canteen where American soldiers were seated at a half-dozen tables eating. They were being served what appeared to be beef stew by two German girls, and there was considerable laughter and good-natured chiding of the women as they filled the mens' plates. Colling quickly understood why there would be a preference for a hot meal served by a couple of pretty fräuleine, rather than sandwiches eaten by the side of the road.

One of his companions poked Vitarelli and pointed at Colling, and the staff sergeant left his table and joined him at the door. The signalman was less voluble than the last time they had spoken. Without saying anything, Vitarelli motioned for Colling to follow him outside. Once they were standing on the back steps of the telephone exchange, he said, "I wish you hadn't of come back."

"What's the matter?" asked Colling.

"The CO called me on the carpet the day after we talked about that accident. He told me that I was not to talk to nobody about it. Said if me or any of my crew was caught wasting their time gossiping with passers-by about the accident, we'd all get busted. Made me promise not to bring it up again. I could get in trouble just tellin' you this."

"I understand. I'll get the hell out of here," promised Colling. "Just one thing…Are you sure the woman was wearing a Red Cross uniform?"

"Hell, yes. Dark blue, complete with shoulder patches and everything. Now I got to go."

Colling watched as the door closed behind the signalman, then returned to his jeep. He hoped Vitarelli would not find himself in difficulty with his superiors on account of the visit.

Chapter Twelve

September-October, 1946

Colling had considered all the possibilities that might explain what he now firmly believed was a staged accident to make it seem as if Elizabeth had died. It was obvious to him that someone with connections far beyond the headquarters of the 61st Division had to be involved. What continued to baffle him was the reason why those higher-ups would want to go to the trouble to arrange a faked death of a girl who, as far as Colling knew, was somewhere back home in the States. Try as he might, he could find no rational basis for it. More disconcerting was the realization, as he turned all that he knew over in his mind, that he had to admit that he had very limited knowledge about Elizabeth's role with whatever organization it was that Quarles represented. With each unanswered letter he had written to Elizabeth, he had become more and more to accept the fact that she probably really had no further interest in him, and that all her affection, verbal and physical, had only been intended to draw him into accompanying her to Poland. And annoying him more each time he thought about it was the possibility, transparently hinted at by Quarles, that he was intended only to be an embellishment to the role she was playing, and not part of the mission. Even when he had he forced her to accept him as an equal and decision-maker, she had not told him all she knew. Colling thought back to her flirtatious encounter with the Russians on the river, and the way she had taken charge once they were on board the Orion Belle, as well as how quickly she seemed to have curtailed their intimacy, once her use for him had ended.

The grief he had experienced when he first had read that she had died had faded as his belief that Elizabeth still lived grew, to be replaced by a persistent and profound anger, based upon the recurring irritation Colling had felt each time he sensed deception, regularly fueled by a sense of betrayal. He remained torn between reason, which told him to forget her, and the irrational obsession that held out what he knew was a dream fantasy of having her forever.

He had been required in his first-year English course at college to read Maugham's Of Human Bondage. At the time, he could not understand how Philip Carey could be so stupid as to be unable to break free of the vicious tart who treated him so badly, and had thought the premise of the novel somewhat unimaginable. Colling could now concede to himself that the book did find some reflection in his own behavior.

In the end, he found himself unable to forget Elizabeth, and he decided he must continue to ask questions, even if they lead him to something that would fill him with even more turmoil.

Colling telephoned the number that Quarles had written on his calling card. A female operator with a New Jersey accent answered, and when Colling asked for the major, he was told that he was not available. When he attempted to leave the number of the A Company orderly room for a return call, the operator informed him that she could not take a number, and that he would have to try again.

When Colling could find time from his duties, he made several more calls over the next two days, with the same result. He had used the telephone on the company clerk's desk, with Sergeant Prinzman's permission. Although the first sergeant had been in the orderly room and had overheard most of his conversations with the Heidelberg telephone operator, he had not made any comment to Colling about them. When Colling entered the office after completing sick call on the third day of his futile attempts to reach Quarles, Prinzman asked, "Colling, how many times you figure you're going to try and reach this guy?"

"I don't know, Sarge. I'm about ready to ask for a furlough and go up there and track him down."

"Is this about that gal that got killed?"

"Yeah."

"What's this Major Quarles got to do with her?"

Colling considered how much he would reveal, then said, "She knew him from the Hungarian Riding Academy. I wanted to see if he could tell me about how she was doing before the accident happened."

Prinzman looked somewhat puzzled, then asked, "You mean those stables where Patton set up that Kraut cavalry outfit?"

"The same. The General loved his horses. Word is, if he hadn't have put them under his protection, those mounts would have ended up on a lot of German dinner tables last winter."

"Yeah. I heard about that. What do you think this major in Heidelberg will be able to tell you?"

"I don't know, but Dr. Parn says it might do me good to talk about her."

"You got any time off coming?"

"I should. When I ended up TDY instead of on furlough last time, they gave me back my furlough days."

"Okay, look. I'll get Lieutenant Wallerman to sign enough back-to-back three-day passes to give you twelve days off. Will that be enough time?"

"I'll either catch him there or I won't, Sarge. If I don't, I won't need to go again. Thanks."

The following afternoon, Prinzman provided, along with the four sequentially-dated three-day passes, a travel voucher for Heidelberg. After making arrangements with Captain Lewisohn to have one of the Aid Station medics fill in for him, Colling packed a small canvas bag and caught a ride on a deuce-and-a-half going to Grabensheim. When he checked with the travel office at the railway station, he was told that a train was not scheduled until the following morning. Rather than look for a bunk at the Grabensheim kaserne which could entail having to deal with Major Vincent, Colling elected to sleep in the waiting room.

He arrived in Heidelberg late in the afternoon. The rails had undergone a considerable amount of repair and replacement, and the car that he rode in was in much better condition than those he had previously experienced, resulting in the ride being relatively free of jolts and jarring.

The old university town was set picturesquely on hills on either side of a river, with no visible signs of having been damaged by the war. It had become a popular destination for American soldiers on leave, and several hotels had been set aside for use by the occupation forces. Colling easily found accommodations, and asked the German desk clerk for directions to a good restaurant. The man's advice turned out to be good, and afterwards, well-fed and tired, Colling returned to his room and dropped into bed.

The next morning, Colling asked where he could find a place serving a full "Englische" breakfast, and was told how to get to the main PX snack bar. He was surprised to find the crowded restaurant closely resembled an American lunchroom, complete with chrome-legged tables and chairs, a long soda fountain, shiny napkin dispensers, salt and pepper shakers, and a juke box playing swing. He ordered bacon and eggs from the crisply-uniformed German waitress, and read that morning's Stars and Stripes as he ate. It was clear that the headquarters of the United States Army in Europe enjoyed amenities far superior to those available to the outlying garrisons.

After eating, Colling found a Deutsches Post office where he was able to use a phone booth. When he heard the nasal voice of the woman he had spoken to so many times previously, instead of identifying himself as "Sergeant Colling," he spoke in Polish and stated that "Jan Woznica" was calling for Major Quarles. In distinction to how she had handled Colling's prior calls, the operator replied in fluent Polish and asked him to wait a moment. A few seconds later, she came back on the line and told him she would put his call through to the Major.

Colling recognized Quarles' voice when he answered the phone in badly-accented Polish, "Hello. This is Major Quarles. Who is this?"

"Jan Woznica, Major. Remember me?"

Quarles was silent for what seemed a long time, then he reverted to English and said, "Yes, I do. What do you want?"

"I need to talk to you. I've been trying to reach you for some time now, but your telephone operator wouldn't put me through."

Colling was surprised at Quarles' response, "I apologize. I didn't know about it."

"I need to talk to you face-to-face. Where can I find you?"

"Go to the main lecture hall of the university. When you are facing the building's front door, turn to your right and go to the second street. We're in a brick building with a sign in English, 'Library Services' beside one of the entrances. The receptionist will direct you after that."

"I'll be there as soon as I can."

"I'll be waiting for you," said Quarles before hanging up the telephone.

The Post Office clerk was able to give him directions, and Colling easily found the building with a simple blue and white "Library Services" sign mounted to one side of a heavy wooden door turned gray by too many

winters without being varnished. The narrow entrance hallway had been converted into a reception area. A desk filled one side of the room. Behind it sat a middle-aged woman in civilian dress who scrutinized Colling carefully from the time he closed the door behind him until he was standing in front of her.

"Yes, can I help you, Sergeant?" she asked.

"I'm here to see Major Quarles, ma'am."

"Name?"

"Sergeant James Colling, ma'am."

The woman picked up the receiver of the telephone on her desk and announced that Sergeant Colling had arrived. She directed him up the stairs and to the second door on the left on the next floor.

Colling knocked on the darkened oak of Quarles' office door and heard an invitation to enter.

Quarles was standing to one side of his desk, leafing through the contents of a file folder. The office was lined with bookshelves enclosed behind glass doors. The Major's desk was a massive mahogany affair decorated with intricate carvings. A worn leather couch and three matching easy chairs were arranged in front of the desk, while a large high-backed leather swivel chair was behind it.

Colling, out of habit, stood at attention and saluted, announcing his name. Quarles looked up, casually returned the salute, and told Colling to sit down.

The Major dropped into his own chair and asked, "Now, what can I do for you?"

Colling decided he would come straight to it, "I heard that Elizabeth had been killed."

A sad expression crossed Quarles' face, and he said, "Yes. Very sad. Tragic. She was so young, full of life. I know you were close, and all I can say is how sorry I am."

"I don't think it's true," replied Colling, watching Quarles' facial expression carefully.

Quarles' eyes narrowed as he asked, "Oh? What makes you think that?"

"I found out the woman who was killed was old and white-haired. The MPs who signed the accident report were in the States when the accident occurred. The jeep was red-lined before the crash ever happened. Herr Berksauer at the riding academy speaks from a script when discussing Elizabeth, and everyone else who seems to be a witness has been told to shut up."

Quarles' mouth twisted in a wry smile, "So you're the one who was poking around. I might have known. You've got a little bit too much curiosity, and initiative, for your own good, Colling."

"All I want is to know that Elizabeth is all right."

Quarles did not reply, seeming to Colling to be like a man weighing his options, making up his mind what to do. Colling waited for him, and finally Quarles said, "I'm taking a big risk telling you anything, you know."

"Try me," answered Colling.

After a moment's pause, Quarles said, "She got picked up by the Russians in Poland. We don't know exactly where she is, but we believe she's their prisoner. She hasn't made a progress drop for a couple of weeks." Noting Colling's quizzical look, Quarles continued, "She's supposed to send a postcard every day to one of a bunch of addresses here in Germany in DP camps. It takes a few days, but we can keep track of where she is, and if she's okay. We pulled off the accident thing in hopes it would throw the Russians off, maybe buy her some time if she was forced to give them her real name, and when they checked, they would think that Elizabeth Hamilton was dead."

Colling felt his heart sink. This was worse than her being dead. He could imagine what it must be like for her, and if she were found to be an American agent, it was certain she would be interrogated, abused, tortured . . .then disposed of in some horrific way. He fought back the images that flashed in his mind.

Quarles' voice broke in, "Want a drink? I know it's early, but you look like you could use one." He rose and walked to a cabinet beside his desk, and opening its doors, brought out a bottle of bourbon whiskey and two glasses. He poured a finger in each, and handed one to Colling.

It was unusual for Colling to have anything stronger than beer, but he tipped the whiskey back into his throat, hoping to distract himself from the unpleasant thoughts he was having. The liquor took his breath away, and he tried not to cough. Quarles lifted the bottle, offering another drink, and Colling slid his glass across the desk. The Major poured a larger portion and pushed it back. Colling took the whiskey and raised it to his lips, sipping slowly, hoping to quench his mounting urge to cough.

"Now you know," said Quarles. "Feel better?"

"No," said Colling in a hoarse voice. "Why was she in Poland in the first place?"

"She went back for Tomasz' wife and kids."

"Why, for God's sake?"

"The guy wouldn't work without 'em." Aware by the expression on Colling's face that he did not understand, Quarles continued, "Tomasz is a metallurgist. The work he does is very important to the U.S. That's why we wanted to get him out of Poland in the first place. Anyway, he misses his wife and kids, two little girls. He threatened to kind of go on strike if we didn't try and bring them to the States. So Liz volunteered to go back."

"Couldn't someone else do it?" asked Colling.

"Liz was the only one who knew where they were. Tomasz told her and she promised to keep it a secret. When the mission to get Tomasz, Karol and Jan out didn't go as planned, Liz realized that we had some holes in our security, so she refused to tell anyone, including yours truly, where the wife and kids were."

Colling asked, "Tomasz and the others were into something big, weren't they? They mentioned being at Oldenberg, and I remember now that that is the place that the Germans were said to have a research facility, trying to come up with the A-Bomb before we did."

"Very astute. You're right. Karol is Doktor Karol Priaskenie, a physicist and friend of an Italian guy named Fermi. Doktor Tomasz Zaletski is a metallurgist, specializing in development of certain metals that are used to make tubing that is used in certain other specialized research. And Jan Kalensa, also a Doktor, is a mathematician who has studied certain theories of calculating the acceleration of certain other things that Doktor Karol Priaskenie is interested in. All three of them were in a velvet-glove forced labor facility run by the Nazis. They were in Oldenberg, and when the Russians got close, they were moved westwards. Then when Patton drove into southern Germany, in the confusion, they somehow got away and back to Poland.

"Priaskenie is actually a cousin of Liz' mother, and there was a connection made. Liz was the obvious one to go get 'em. Priaskenie's wife died from cancer at Oldenberg, and Kalensa doesn't have a family. But Tomasz Zaletski does, and he took care to have them tucked away someplace safe before he agreed to attempt an escape from Poland. He was pretty sure that you all wouldn't make it. Now that he's out, and saw how 'easy' it was, he wants wife and kiddies out too. And that's what's probably cost Liz her life," said Quarles, averting his gaze from Colling and with a deep sigh, holding his forehead with both hands.

Now it was Colling's turn to distract the other man from his thoughts, and he asked, "How did Liz ever get into this kind of business, anyway?"

Quarles raised his head and after swallowing, responded, "She originally wanted to do something 'useful' after she got word her husband was missing. She actually did join the Red Cross and ask for duty in the Far East. But she got sent to Europe instead. I met her at a cocktail party here in Heidelberg, right after she arrived from working in Paris. When I learned she was fluent in Polish and passable in German and Russian, I asked her if she would be interested in working for us. She said yes."

"And who is this 'us' you're talking about?"

Quarles looked at Colling intently, "You know I had a full background check done on you, don't you?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Yeah. Right after you got back. All I found out is, you're the real McCoy. All-American boy. Small town. Middle class. Only thing is, you found your calling in the Army. A real Dog Robber. Able to get things done. Make your commanding officers look good, earn their gratitude. They move you up the ladder faster than normal. You got some shady things going on. Nothing really illegal…at least that anyone can prove…and you make a little money. You get a reputation. Not a bad reputation, just a reputation as the guy to go to if somebody wants something. You speak German, so you get along good with the locals. Maybe too good, if that Kraut Zinsmann's SS background ever becomes an issue and it rubs off on you. You meet Liz and you hit it off.

"You know, I made a couple of passes at her, and got the brush-off. A nice brush-off, but a 'Thanks, but no thanks,' brush-off. And from what I understand, you made it 'way past first base, although out of respect for Liz, I won't go any further with that. What does all this mean? It means I guess I can trust you with what I'm gonna tell you. Am I right?"

"I've kept my mouth shut so far about Poland and everything else, haven't I? I'm sure you checked, didn't you?"

"Right you are, I did, and you've kept your lips zipped." Quarles leveled a steady gaze at Colling, who sensed that the man was making up his mind about something. "Okay, here goes. You probably don't know it,

but from even before the war, our intelligence services were ordered not to conduct any kind of operations against the Soviets. That came from the highest, and I mean highest authority, if you understand what I mean."

"The War Department?" asked Colling.

"Higher," said Quarles. "Not the State Department, not the Navy Department or the War Department. It came from above them. More than that, I will not say."

Colling found Quarles' assertion unbelievable. He was apparently referring to the White House. He recalled his father's occasional comments about Roosevelt's seeming affinity for the Reds from the time he was first elected, but this was far beyond that. Colling asked, "Aren't you violating those orders, doing what you're doing?"

"Kind of. Say we're sort of bending the rules. Some people in Washington don't mind so much if we can produce people like Karol and his friends for them. But others do, so we have to kind of be inconspicuous."

"Who are you, exactly?"

"Actually, Army Field Intelligence. We were attached to the Seventh Army in Italy, interrogating German prisoners and listening in to their field radio transmissions. When the war ended, we were in Austria, and got approached by some Russians who didn't like Uncle Joe, who wanted to get to America. We obliged them, under the table, of course. Since then, we've scattered, but we manage to do a few things now and then. We don't get much help from any of the regular strategic intelligence offices, but there is a general officer or two who is willing to keep us in business. We do about the same things we did against the Germans, interrogate and listen to the radio. Nowadays we ask questions of Russian soldiers who've defected, and listen to Russian radio traffic.

"In addition, we sometimes run a little operation like the one you and Elizabeth did. I won't say we are real successful, especially when certain people find out what we're up to and alert the other side."

Colling asked, "Where is Elizabeth?"

"I don't know," admitted Quarles. "We think she was picked up in Krakow or somewhere near there, since the last card we got from her was post-marked from there."

"How long has it been?"

"Over three weeks now."

"That's forever if you're in a Russian prison."

"I know," replied Quarles, his voice tired.

"And this faked-death trick could result in her being subjected to even worse treatment. Did you think of that when you came up with it?" asked Colling, his voice rising.

"It seemed like the best way to confuse the Reds," said Quarles.

Colling sat thinking for a few moments, then said, "I guess the only way is for me to go and get her."

Quarles half-stood and leaned over his desk, "Are you nuts?" he said. "You have no way of even knowing if she's still alive."

"Just because you've written her off doesn't mean I have to," responded Colling.

Quarles dropped back into his chair. He seemed to have considered what Colling had said and decided that the young soldier seated across from him might be crazy enough to succeed. "I can help with papers and such," he offered.

"I don't think so," said Colling, "I'd rather go it alone. I can't trust your organization to keep a secret. The fewer people who know, the better."

Quarles stood up and went to a small cabinet behind his desk. When he opened its doors, Colling saw that it contained a safe. Quarles spun the combination dial and pulled the safe door to one side. Reaching inside, he brought out an envelope and tossed it onto his desk in front of Colling. "This might help," he said.

The envelope was filled with U.S. currency. Colling was reminded of the cash that Elizabeth had carried with her to Poland.

"There's $5,000 there. It's the standard amount," said Quarles.

"If you're not exactly operating officially, how do you get money like this?" asked Colling.

"We captured a lot of German and Italian banks during the war. You'd be surprised how many of them had American cash in their vaults. As Field Intelligence, we had authority to take custody of it, and we've been financing ourselves as we go along."

Colling stood to leave, and Quarles looked uneasy, as if he were regretting acquiescing in Colling's efforts, perhaps wondering if the money he had just handed over would end up in Colling's pocket instead of being used as intended. He extended his hand, and as Colling took it, said, "Good luck, Jim. Liz was using the name 'Anna Zariski." Her cover was that she was a farm girl trying to get back to Krakow from a labor camp in Germany. If I find out where she is, I'll see you get the word. I hope you make it."

"Thanks, Major. I'm sure going to give it one hell of a try."

Colling was half way out the office door when he asked, "Who was the Polish officer that was in the jeep?"

"Somebody that had to be got rid of. Nobody you'd know."

Despite the confident attitude he had shown Quarles, Colling had not had the vaguest idea what he would do next, but as he walked through the streets away from the University district, a plan began to form. He returned to his hotel and thought over each element of what he must do, and what lay ahead of him. Elizabeth had been in Russian hands for nearly a month. There was as much chance that she had been executed as there was that she was still alive. He surmised that it would be fairly easy to enter Poland. The most difficult task would be simply discovering her whereabouts.

Late in the afternoon, he stopped pacing his room to go for lunch at the main PX. The hamburger and French fries that he ordered were a change from Army mess hall fare and German food that he had grown accustomed to in the past year, but the state of preoccupation that he was experiencing did not allow him to enjoy the meal fully. Close to four-thirty, he retraced his steps to the Deutsches Post office. He told the attendant behind the counter that he wished to place a transatlantic call, gave him the number, and was told to have a seat on one of the benches in the lobby. An hour passed before his name was called. Colling gave the cashier a twenty-dollar bill when he was asked to pay the charge of 180 marks in advance, and received his change in American Military marks. His money was accepted without comment in spite of the rule against U.S. military personnel possessing American currency. He was directed to one of the line of telephone booths along one wall.

The booth did not have a standard German telephone handset like the one he had used to call Quarles that morning. This one was equiped with a flat circular receiver which had to be held to his ear while he spoke into a mouthpiece mounted in the wall. He was surprised at the clarity of the connection when he heard his mother's voice speaking from the telephone in his father's drugstore.

"Hello, Mom? It's me, Jim."

"Where are you, son?"

"I'm in Germany. How's Dad?""He's fine, son. He's right here."

Colling's father came on the line, "Hello, Jim, my boy. Are you coming home soon?"

"No, Dad. I called to say hello and to ask Mom to send me some things."

His father replied, "I can guess this is costing you a lot of money, Jim, so I'll turn it back to your mother. I've got customers anyway. Tell her all the news so she can tell me."

"I will, Dad. Take care of yourself and don't work too hard."

His mother's voice returned, "Did you tell Dad you were coming home, son?"

"No, Mom. I just called to say hello and ask you if you could do something important for me."

"What's that, son?"

"Have you still got Cousin Jerry's things?"

"Yes, they're in his trunk in the attic. I packed everything in mothballs. I have no earthly idea why I saved anything, but I did."

"I thought you had. Listen, I need you to pack all of his stuff into three or four cardboard boxes and ship them to me."

"What on earth for?"

"The Germans need old clothes, and I've made some friends who can use them."He was depending on his mother's innate charitable nature as a motivator, and he was right in doing so. She immediately agreed, saying, "Those poor people. What they've been through. We saw the newsreels at the movies last Saturday, and it must just be awful over there."

"It's not too bad where I am, Mom, but they are having a hard time. Anyway, I also need all his papers, everything. I wanted to show the guys in my outfit some of that stuff. Can you do that?"

"Of course, son, if that's what you want."

"I'll wire you some money. You need to send it air express, so it gets here as soon as possible. It's very, very important. Dad has shipped stuff by air from Milwaukee, he'll know how to do it."

"I don't understand what you could want with all that junk, son, but if you say you want it, I'll see you get it. When will you be coming home?"

"As things look now, it looks like it will be next year at the earliest. Maybe not until just before my enlistment's up in '48."

"The Gottlieb boy got a thirty-day furlough to come home from Japan."

"He probably had to reenlist to get it, Mom. Now don't forget to get that stuff off to me as soon as you can. It's urgent."

"Yes, son. It's going to be hard to get through the holidays again this year, without you here. Sally Dombrosky asks about you every time she comes in the store."

"Well, say hi to her for me, will you?" said Colling, trying to place who Sally Dombrosky was.

A woman's voice speaking German said that Colling's allotted time had nearly expired, and Colling told his mother he would have to cut the call short.

"All right, son. It was so nice to hear your voice. I'll be sending you some cookies for Thanksgiving and Christmas, just like I did last year."

"Be sure to send Cousin Jerry's stuff first, though, okay?"

"Of course."

"Goodbye, Mom."

"Goodbye, son."

Colling asked the Post Office clerk if he could telegraph some funds to an address in Wisconsin, U.S.A., and was told that it was possible to do so. He decided to send fifty dollars, and once again his American currency was accepted without comment.

Before returning to his room, Colling walked back to the PX and asked an MP on duty outside where he could find a timetable for the trains headed south. He was directed to a bulletin board just inside the building, and discovered that there was a train leaving that evening that would allow him to make connections for Grabensheim.

When he appeared in the Company A orderly room the next afternoon, Prinzman asked him why he had returned so soon. Colling explained that he had been able to locate Major Quarles and finish his business with him the first day after arriving in Heidelberg. Prinzman wondered out loud why Colling had not stayed to see the sights and relax for awhile, and Colling told him he felt obligated to get back to his work in the dispensary.

In one sense, he was glad to resume taking sick call and assisting the Polish physicians with their patients, because it helped make the time pass more quickly and kept him from fidgeting while he waited for his mother's packages to arrive. Three days later he almost cheered when Prinzman told him that the 40th's Battalion orderly room had called to say he had four parcels with Colling's name on them waiting for him. Because they had been mailed air express, Sergeant Brookline had thought it best to telephone Camp 146 right away to let him know of their arrival.

Colling asked Prinzman if he could use the ambulance to pick up the packages that his mother had shipped to him. He suggested that he could retrieve his mail on his way to Kummers-feld, as he had to pick up one of the guards who had been hospitalized in Munich and who had been sent to the Regimental Aid Station for return to the camp. Prinzman gave his approval; and that night after supper, alone in his quarters in the Dispensary, Colling was able to begin opening the boxes.

His mother had divided the contents of Cousin Jerry's trunk into four cardboard cartons, distributing the garments evenly so that the other items in each box were padded by clothing. Underneath the clothing were a number of back issues of the Daily Worker, both the New York and Milwaukee editions; a supply of stationery, including envelopes and paper with the letterheads of the Socialist Worker's Committee of Milwaukee of the Communist Party of the U.S.A.; blank membership cards in the same organization; Milwaukee Daily Worker stationery; a bundle of propaganda leaflets supporting Germany in its war against Imperialist Britain, obviously printed before June of 1941; and other Communist Party literature extolling the virtues of the people's party. In the bottom of one box were a copy of The Communist Manifesto and an English translation of Das Kapital, as well as works by Hemingway, Steinbeck and Upton Sinclair.

Tucked in between two well-worn tweed jackets, Colling found Jerzy Krazinsky's wallet. Inside was his Communist Party membership card, his press card from the Milwaukee Daily Worker, some labor union membership cards, an identification card from the Holland Manufacturing Company with Cousin Jerry's picture attached, and some scraps of paper with scribbled reminders, phone numbers and addresses that meant nothing to Colling. A single manila file folder held a half-dozen congratulatory letters addressed to Comrade Krazinsky, thanking him for his service to the Party.

There were only two photographs in the wallet. One of Stalin and the other of Colling's mother as a young girl. She was primly seated, her ankles crossed, posing for the photographer. From the style of her dress, Colling guessed that it must have been taken when she was in high school. She had been a very pretty girl, and it was not impossible to suppose that Cousin Jerry probably had a crush on Colling's mother. The absence of any other family or personal snapshots attested to Cousin Jerry's solitary existence.

Cousin Jerry had been shunned by the rest of the family for his politics when Stalin signed the pact with Hitler in August of 1939, and as far as Colling knew, his mother had been the only one of his relatives who had maintained any sort of contact with him. He had never married, and he died alone in a rooming house in Milwaukee in January of 1945. Colling remembered his mother asking him to take time from college to go with her to the city to make funeral arrangements and, afterwards, packing his belongings into the single trunk and bringing it back with them to Belle Cors. Colling recalled that at the time he had considered it an imposition on him to do so, so soon after his return to school following the Christmas holidays.

Colling tried on the clothes, finding that while the jackets and suit coats were a little large, but not noticeably so; the trousers fit too loosely in the waist and their cuffs fell short an inch or more from reaching the tops of his shoes. He remembered that someone had mentioned that there was a DP in the camp who was a tailor, and he stacked the trousers to one side so that he could ask to have them altered.

Luckily the two pairs of shoes fit well. If they had not, he would have either had to wear his Army issue shoes or find one of the DP's willing to sell him a pair of European manufacture. Either way, that would not be consistent with the deception he had in mind.

Its success would also depend heavily on the battered Remington field typewriter in the dispensary. Cousin Jerry's membership card in the Communist Party of the United States of America showed his birth year as 1897. Colling first made a comparison of the typeface on the Remington with that on the card and found them extremely close. The Party card was worn from being carried in Cousin Jerry's wallet, so that Colling's efforts at erasing the four digits of the year were noticeable only by very close examination. He practiced typing "1924" several times on a blank piece of paper, then held his breath and rolled the card into the typewriter, tediously aligning it to the place where the type would strike. Four soft, quick taps of the keys later, and he had completed the alteration. After he had dulled the fresh appearance of the numbers with a few light touches with an eraser, he congratulated himself on his work. He was certain that the change would be noticeable only upon very careful scrutiny. He placed his faith in the anticipation that most people to whom he would show the card would see only the name of the organization, and that of the bearer, and pay no particular attention to other details.

Colling strolled over to the Company A orderly room. Prinzman's clerk slept on a cot set up in front of the first sergeant's desk, and he was in his underwear, smoking a cigarette and reading a comic book. Colling asked if he could use the typewriter, saying the ribbon in the dispensary's had broken. Barely looking up from his magazine, the PFC told him he was welcome to do so.

The clerk's typewriter was a Royal with a larger type size. Colling filled out one of the blank Milwaukee Socialist Worker's Party cards in Cousin Jerry's name, entering the 1924 birth year. He then composed two letters, using the stationery from the Socialist Worker's Party and the Milwaukee Daily Worker. He typed the addresses he had chosen on the envelopes, thanked the clerk, who was still absorbed in what Colling saw was Superman Comics, and returned to his quarters.

Colling sorted through the union membership cards, chose five that had no birth date information on them, and put the altered Party card, the new card he had just typed, and the Milwaukee Daily Worker press card into the wallet. He added the various scraps of paper with Cousin Jerry's notes on them. He then scanned through old issues of the Milwaukee Daily Worker from 1944 until he saw Cousin Jerry's byline, and then clipped the article. He had three such press clippings before he stopped and tucked them into one of the wallet's compartments.

Before hanging the two jackets and the suit coats in the wall locker containing the uniforms that he was holding for sale, Colling went through their pockets. He found a crumpled pack of Lucky Strikes with one cigarette left, some match books with the names of Milwaukee bars and restaurants on them, and a dollar bill. Colling decided to conduct a similar search of the stack of trousers, and turned up only another match book. He set all of these items aside for future use.

Colling packed the newspapers, stationery and pamphlets into one box. The wallet, shoes, underwear, socks and a slouch cap and a hat that had been part of the shipment he packed into the battered suitcase he had carried in Poland. He checked his Luger and its cartridges, which had remained hidden in the suitcase's secret compartment since his return. Colling had cleaned and oiled the pistol on board the Orion Belle, and it did not appear to require any additional attention before he returned it to its hiding place. He added Quarles' envelope with the $5,000 before closing the false panel concealing the compartment. He stowed the suitcase and box in one of the cabinets under a counter in the dispensary.

The following day was Saturday, and Lieutenant Wallerman and First Sergeant Prinzman conducted their weekly inspection of Colling and his quarters prior to sick call. Colling was always careful to make sure that his uniforms, equipment and his billet were neat, clean and up to Army standards, which meant that Wallerman and Prinzman did little more than stick their heads into the room and glance around before the first sergeant told Colling he could stand down.

Two men had presented for sick call and were waiting for medical attention. Since it was Saturday, and most of the company would be given passes to leave the camp, Colling knew that they were probably not gold-bricking. The first man, an AMGOT sergeant, had fallen down the steps to his barracks the night before, and Colling suspected he had fractured his wrist. Dr. Parnieskaya walked in as he was examining the soldier, and when Colling asked for his opinion, the Polish physician confirmed that the man should go to Kummersfeld to the aid station. Parnieskaya helped Colling apply a splint to the injured sergeant's lower arm, and Colling told him to have a seat and wait while Colling took care of the second man.

He was a PFC from Company A who had just been relieved from guard duty in one of the camp's towers. The man could hardly speak and was running a high temperature. When Colling looked down his throat, all he could see was inflamed tissue. Colling placed a telephone call to the aid station and asked for one of the regimental doctors to give permission to administer penicillin for what appeared to be a strep throat. Dr. Lewisohn came on the line, and after Colling had described what he had observed, he was authorized to go ahead and give penicillin by injection for the next three days, then to start penicillin tablets to be taken for another four days.

Colling stopped by the orderly room to inform Sergeant Prinzman that he would be transporting the sergeant with the broken wrist to Kummersfeld, and that if the man were discharged, he would be bringing him back after a cast had been placed on his arm. When Colling dropped off the injured man, he was told that he would be kept at the regimental aid station overnight. It was not yet noon, so Colling drove the ambulance to Grabensheim. The town was filled with wandering American soldiers, window-shopping and ogling the few German women brave enough to share the streets with them.

Colling parked the ambulance near the arched entrance to Trebensallee and knocked on Zinsmann's familiar door. His knock was answered by the little girl whom Colling recognized as having seen the last time he had visited the German. She appeared to recognize him as well and, leaving Colling standing on the doorstep, ran back into the apartment calling for Onkel Klaus.

When Zinsmann appeared a few moments later, he greeted Colling warmly, inviting him in. Colling noticed that the sitting room's furnishings had improved since his last visit. He asked how the builder was faring, and Zinsmann informed him that he had just signed a third contract with the American Military Government to repair buildings for use by the occupation forces. The contractor told him that he now owned four trucks and employed nearly a hundred men in his company, Zinsmann Bauwerke. With the Americans able to furnish building materials and pay the best prices, he was able to hire skilled tradesmen when others could not.

Zinsmann brought out a bottle of bourbon whiskey which, he boasted, was a gift from an American colonel who was particularly pleased with the work he had done. As he poured some of the liquor into glasses for himself and Colling, he shouted at his woman to bring them some lunch. A few seconds later, the woman Colling knew as Zinsmann's wife appeared and scolded her husband for shouting at her in front of guests. She then disappeared in the direction of the apartment's kitchen.

Colling sipped at his whiskey while Zinsmann swallowed his first glassful at one gulp. The German poured himself a larger refill and drank nearly half of it at once. He then looked at Colling and asked, "You have used the Luger wherever it was you were?"

"Yes," replied Colling. "I used it."

"And you perhaps have killed someone?"

"Yes," said Colling, "I regret to say so."

"You can say who?"

"They were Germans. Deserters who were in the business of robbing people."

"Ach, bastards," said Zinsmann. "We shot them ourselves if we caught up with them."

"I did what you told me," said Colling, "But afterwards it was not pleasant."

"How many did you shoot?" asked Zinsmann, wide-eyed.

"Three."

"Mein Gott," hissed Zinsmann, "Three? All at one time?"

"Yes."" I would not have thought it of you, Colling."

"I would not have thought it of myself, either," said Colling, "But I have learned to do many things I did not imagine possible a few months ago."

Zinsmann shook his head and finished off the last of his third glass of whiskey.

Colling continued, "I have another favor or two to ask of you."

"Another pistol, perhaps?"

"Nothing so easy. I am in need of some American passports."

"You could get one at the American consulate in Munich, could you not?"

"I need these in names other than my own."

The corners of Zinsmann's mouth turned up in a sly grin, and he said, "Something else you have learned, my friend?"

Colling did not answer, and his silence seemed to prompt Zinsmann to respond to the American's request, "Your best chance is in Switzerland. I know of someone who is able to provide forged papers…for a price, of course."

"Of course."

"I can give you the address. I cannot go there with you. I have no papers that will permit the border to be crossed."

"I understand," said Colling. "Give me this address."

As Zinsmann handed him a slip of paper with the address written on it, he also pressed a small object into Colling's palm. "Wear this on the inside of your lapel so it cannot be seen, but show it when you reach the address that has been given. It may prove to be a talisman will serve you well. What is your second request?"

"I wish to obtain a set of spectacles, but with what I believe are called, 'non-refractive lenses.' "

"Plain lenses, then?" asked Zinsmann.

"Correct. I need them for theatrical purposes."

Zinsmann laughed. "To play a part, of that I am sure. If you will ask at the address in Zurich, I am certain someone there can oblige you."

When Colling arrived back at Camp 146, he went to the orderly room looking for Prinzman, and was directed to the mess hall, where he found the first sergeant eating a slice of chocolate pie and drinking coffee with the company's mess sergeant, Staff Sergeant Knecherson. When Prinzman saw him, he waved him over to their table and asked if he wanted some pie. Not wanting to offend either of the two sergeants, Colling accepted the invitation. With the first forkful, he was glad that he had taken the sergeants' offer. Colling congratulated Knecherson on his recipe, and Prinzman laughed and informed him that one of the mess sergeant's women DP cooks was the baker. All Knecherson had done was provide the chocolate and other ingredients.

Colling ate the last bite of pie and picked up his coffee cup before asking Prinzman if he could get a pass to go to Switzerland to go sight-seeing. Prinzman agreed that if he could get someone to cover sick call, then he would provide a couple of consecutive three-day passes. He reminded Colling that the Swiss government restricted U.S. military personnel to five days in the country, and that he would have to remain in uniform during his stay.

On Monday morning, Colling spoke to Dr. Lewisohn by telephone and gained his permission to allow Dr. Parnieskaya and Dr. Cheska to see any American soldiers who showed up for sick call. Later that afternoon, he was boarding a train for Zurich.

Chapter Thirteen

OCtober-December, 1946

The address in Zurich that Zinsmann had provided turned out to be tucked away in a narrow side street. A sign hanging over the street displayed a picture of a pair of eyeglasses and proclaimed that the optician Klopfer practiced his profession inside. It was barely eight o'clock in the morning, and Colling hoped that he would find the place open as he tried the door. He was pleased to find it unlocked.

The interior of the establishment was not well lit, and the dark wood of its furnishings did little to alleviate the gloom. A rotund little man greeted Colling from behind a counter that filled the width of the shop. As Colling came closer, the proprietor saw that he was wearing an American uniform and repeated his greeting in English. Colling decided that speaking German would be more appropriate. He watched the little man's eyes widen as he explained that a friend in the Kameradschaft had suggested that he locate "Rudolf," who might be able to assist him. The man's mouth dropped open when Colling turned the lapel of his Ike jacket to show the button with the black swastika in the center of a red circle.

"But you are American, yes?" asked the man.

"Nein, ich bin Volksdeutsche. I am born in the U.S.A., but my family answered the call and returned to the Fatherland in '39. I have served in the Wehrmacht. This Ami uniform I have stolen only by the greatest of fortune. The Amis are after me, and I am seeking help with papers so that I may return to America. There is a greater chance that I might disappear there. If I am found out and arrested by the Amis, I will be shot as a traitor."

The little man extended his hand to Colling and said, "I am Klopfer. I may be able to help."

"I require four American passports, two for a man, that is me, only two different names. The two others for women, one young, the other older, perhaps 35 or 40 years of age. These last two will have no photos."

Klopfer raised his eyebrows, "You have fräuleine with you?"

"Und kinder. Two little girls. I will need the certificates to accompany the passport of the younger woman."

"That may be difficult. I am not sure what appearance such certificates might have."

"You will have to discover this, and soon."

The optician looked doubtful, but slowly nodded his head.

"I do not have their pictures, they will have to be added later. I have only one of myself. I wish the other to be with spectacles. As an optician, I would wager that you might provide me with a pair with…how is it said?..non-refractive lenses and take my photo wearing them. The one with the glasses must go on the passport in the name of Krazinsky. I have also prepared the names and other information to be used," replied Colling, pushing across the counter the photograph he had had taken of himself three days earlier in Grabensheim by a photographer friend of Zinsmann's, and the written instructions for the other passports.

"Of course, Kamerad. I have a pair of spectacles that will suit the bill," said Klopfer, reaching under the counter and producing a leather case from which he extracted a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. He handed them to Colling. "Put them on."

The glasses felt odd, but the lenses were as he had requested and did not impair his vision. Klopfer invited him into the rear of the shop, and after hastily stretching a sheet across some shelves, asked him to pose in front of it. Colling removed his uniform jacket before Klopfer snapped several pictures with a small camera, then said, "I will develop the film and have the passports by tomorrow afternoon."

Klopfer paused as he rewound the camera, "May I know your real name?"

"It is best that you do not," said Colling, adding what he hoped was the right tone of menace in his voice, "For reasons of security. You must also consider the names I have given you as confidential, and that you will destroy any extra photographs. I trust you will be as discreet as you have been about others of the Kameradschaft. We would not wish to lose your services."

"Yes, yes. I understand completely. Everything will be with the utmost secrecy," said Klopfer, his hands fluttering nervously. "You may come back and pick up everything tomorrow afternoon."

"No. I would prefer that you deliver them in a public place. I will be waiting for you at the Café Aubergen tomorrow at three. I will be seated by the window. Cross the square to the Café and come inside. I will pass you as you are entering, and as I do, you will slip me a folded newspaper containing the passports."

"Very well. But I am not used to such intrigue."

"I have not been caught by the Amis for the reason that I am always cautious. I wish to keep it so. And I will keep these spectacles you have been so kind as to provide."

"There is also the matter of payment," said Klopfer cautiously.

"Just so," replied Colling. "How much?"

"Eight hundred American dollars or the equivalent in francs,..Swiss francs…that is, or sterling."

Colling pulled an envelope from inside his jacket and handed it to Klopfer. "You will find three hundred there. Once I have examined the passports, I will drop the balance through the mail slot in your door before I leave Switzerland."

Klopfer tore open the envelope and thumbed through the bills inside. He smiled and said, "You will be pleased, I am sure, sir. The blank passports were stolen from the American embassy in Rome only a few weeks ago. Very nice indeed. Completely authentic."

"I will depend on it," replied Colling, slipping the case with his new glasses into his inside pocket.

Colling arrived at the Café Aubergen at noon the following day. It was drizzling and chilly, and the few people who were on the streets were, for the most part, walking purposefully to wherever they were going in order to get out of the weather. Colling asked for a seat near the café's window. He had brought a supply of magazines and newspapers that he half-pretended to read as he watched the square outside. He ordered a lunch of lamb stew and potatoes, and ate slowly so as to kill as much time as possible, and afterwards leisurely sipped at a cup of coffee. The café was not busy, and his occupying a table for an extended period of time seemed to go unnoticed, despite the fact that he was alone and in American uniform. Colling could see nothing that would suggest that the café or the square in front of it was under surveillance. There were no loitering pedestrians or parked automobiles with their front seats occupied. No one entering or leaving the café seemed to pay any attention to him.

At precisely three, Klopfer came walking across the square directly towards the Café Aubergen. As Klopfer entered, Colling rose from his table, moving so as to intercept Klopfer's path between the café's tables. Surprisingly, the exchange took place almost as if it had not happened. Colling headed back to his hotel without looking back.

The passports were well done. All the entry and exit stamps were as Colling had requested. The children's certificates seemed to be plausible, even if they turned out to be not strictly accurate representations of what the State Department was using these days. He checked out of his hotel, but instead of heading directly to the train station, he digressed so that he could drop an envelope into the optical shop's mail slot. By the following morning, he was in Karlsruhe, and that afternoon, the train deposited him at the Grabensheim Bahnhof, where he caught a ride in a Quartermaster deuce-and-a-half to Camp 146.

Instead of approaching Prinzman for permission for a furlough, he took the opportunity to speak directly with Captain Lewisohn the following day when he delivered one of Sergeant Kneckerson's cooks to have a serious burn to his hand treated. As usual, the doctor looked harried. A young Army surgeon had recently been assigned to the Regimental Aid Station which helped to relieve some of the pressure that Lewisohn had been under as the sole physician for the regiment, but the inexperienced first lieutenant continued to want to confer with him on nearly every case.

Lewisohn was standing in the hallway, clutching a clipboard filled with a sheaf of forms, writing hurriedly, when Colling found him.

"Sir," said Colling.

"Yes, Colling. What is it?"

"Sir, I was wondering if you would approve a furlough for me."

The doctor looked up from his papers, "Colling, you know you're the best medic I've got. I wish I had a dozen more like you. I really can't spare you right now."

"But sir, the two Polish doctors did fine while I was in Switzerland. They can hold down the fort for a few days."

"Where do you want to go? Not back to the States, I hope."

"No sir. I just want fifteen days to go to Paris. I was there a couple of months ago on TDY, and I met a girl…."

"I see," said Lewisohn, smiling. "German girls aren't good enough for you?"

"There's a fraternization rule, sir. GI's aren't supposed to have anything to do with the locals."

"Right. All the dripping dicks we see must be my imagination."

"Well, sir, I didn't say everybody went by the rule. But this girl is French, and there isn't any rule about fraternizing with our allies."

"I hope you don't come back with a dose. Our guys coming back from leave in Paris seem to have some strain of the clap that must have been imported from their North African colonies."

"No sir. This gal is from a good family. She works for the Army."

"What's her name?"

Colling had anticipated the question, "Suzette, sir. Suzette Dumarques. She's very nice."

"Okay, Colling. You talked me into it. But if I have to prescribe penicillin for you when you come back, so help me…."

"Thanks, sir. I'll be leaving tomorrow or the next day. Can I have Sergeant Prinzman call you to confirm your authorization, Sir?"

"Sure. Have a good time," said Lewisohn, his attention returning to his clipboard. Without looking up, he added, "By the way, by the time you get back from your furlough, you'll most likely find yourself assigned to a medical dispensary under the 511th General Hospital in Munich. The Division is being deactivated. The regimental medical detachment is splitting off into the new unit."

"What about A Company at the camp, Sir?"

"Word is, they go to AMGOT as a security detachment. Anyone with time left in the rest of the 40th is being transferred to a whole bunch of Quartermaster, AMGOT and other service units. Guys with short time are going home for discharge, or if they want to stay in, for reassignment in the States."

"What outfit will be at the Grabensheim kaserne, Sir?"

"No one's really sure, but it could be one of the new Constabulary outfits. You'll find out when you get back from Paris. Right now, it looks like you'll be working for me, since I'll be CO of the new dispensary, and I sent in a personnel request list with your name on it to Division."

As he drove back to the camp, Colling smiled, thinking about no longer having to answer to Major Vincent. By the time he returned, he guessed that the Major could be one of those riffed out of the Army. For once, the phrase, "For the good of the service," would be especially applicable to an officer's separation from active duty.

Colling repeated his story about his reasons for wanting a furlough to go to Paris to First Sergeant Prinzman, who seemed annoyed that Colling had chosen to ask for Captain Lewisohn's approval before his own, but he told Colling he would have the furlough orders and travel authorizations typed out and sent to Lewisohn for his signature. Prinzman also mentioned that he would have to pay for his train ticket. American military personnel no longer were able to ride the Reichsbahn for free.

Sergeant Prinzman had already been informed about the deactivation of the 61st Division, and he confirmed for Colling's benefit that A Company was being placed under Major Brumerson's command, renamed and numbered as the 1067th Security Detachment. Lieutenant Wallerman would continue as the detachment's CO, but their authorized strength had been dropped to only seventy-five men. Prinzman would remain in his role as first sergeant. He grinned when he told Colling that Colling would have the "misfortune" to miss the ceremony Colonel Brazenholm had scheduled to take place at the Grabensheim kaserne the following Saturday, at which the 40th Infantry would officially stand down.

Colling had the approved furlough in his hands two days later. He was already packed. The familiar old suitcase that had served him well in Poland now held Cousin Jerry's clothes, long since altered to fit Colling by a woman DP who was a seamstress. It also was filled with items that Colling had carefully selected from the contents of Cousin Jerry's trunk. Colling made one last check to make sure the Luger and extra ammunition, cash and the forged passports he had brought back from Zurich were still snug in their concealed receptacle. Almost as an afterthought, he took four vials of penicillin and a box of the new oral tablets and added them to the secret compartment. A canvas zipper bag was required to accommodate some of Cousin Jerry's clothing that would not fit in the suitcase, and Colling stuffed the second bag inside the B-4 he would use to store his uniform once he reached Munich. He placed two envelopes in the inner pocket of his Eisenhower jacket.

In the Munich Bahnhof, Colling found the men's restroom and changed into Cousin Jerry's clothes. He had let his hair grow, and he mussed it into a semi-unkempt state, then put on the pair of glasses Klopfer had given him. He looked at himself in the mirror over one of the sinks, and silently hoped that his appearance would match the photo in his new forged passport. He left his own wallet and personal effects in the B-4 bag before checking it at the baggage hold desk. He boarded the train wearing Cousin Jerry's best suit, his new identity papers and the envelopes transferred to it from his uniform jacket. Wearing the glasses was a distraction at first, but by the time he was seated in his train compartment, he had become passably used to their presence.

Colling followed the same route as had been used the previous summer, from Munich to Prague, and then on to Warsaw. In April, his American officer's uniform had assured swift examination of his papers. This time, dressed in Cousin Jerry's civilian clothes, customs and police officials asked for his identification at every turn. When he produced the American passport in Jerzy Krazinsky's name, however, the attitude of most of them became deferential. No one questioned its authenticity, and Colling gratefully acknowledged to himself that Herr Klopfer seemed to be a skilled practitioner of his dubious trade.

Colling did not wish to leave any more of a trail than was absolutely necessary, so he avoided checking into any hotel. He either slept in his seat on the train, or when it was necessary to lay over, stretched out on a bench in the railway station. This added to his unkempt appearance, something that was not altogether unwanted.

The crossing into Poland was significantly different from his previous experience. There were no Polish militiamen asking for documents. Instead, a trio of Russians went from compartment to compartment, and their review of the passengers' papers was unhurried and thorough. Two of them were Red Army enlisted men, sub-machine guns slung over their shoulders. The senior officer, whose blue collar tabs and hat band marked him as NKVD, was brusque to the point of rudeness when he asked in accented Polish to see Colling's identification. Colling answered in the same language, trying to affect a noticeable American accent. When Colling handed his passport to the officer, and the Russian saw the United States eagle on its green cover, he stared intently at Colling and spoke in English, "Mister Krazinsky. You speak Polish well for an American."

The statement seemed to Colling to call for an answer, and he replied in English, "Yes, Comrade. I am Polish-American. From Milwaukee. That is in Wisconsin. There are many people of Polish descent there. Many immigrants."

The NKVD man was carefully turning the pages of the passport. "You have other identification perhaps?"

"Yes, of course, Comrade," answered Colling, taking out his wallet and showing the Russian first his Communist Party card, then pulling other cards from the recesses of the wallet and handing them over.

The NKVD officer looked up from the Party card and commented, "So you are one of our American Comrades. Welcome to Poland. Where are you going, and what is your business?"

"I am on my way to Warsaw. I go to seek out the headquarters of the Party. I have come to express the solidarity of the American Party with that of Poland's. It is clear that there is a struggle between reactionary forces and the triumph of Socialism in Poland. I have come to lend some small help to that struggle," replied Colling, trying to appear suitably naïve and use the correct cliches.

"You do not mind if we search your luggage?"

"Not at all," said Colling, reaching to the overhead rack and pulling down his suitcase and the canvas bag and placing them on the seat.

With a wave of his hand and some words in Russian, the NKVD officer directed his two companions to conduct a search. They pawed through the clothes until they found the documents that were underneath them. They seemed pleased to have uncovered something, and one of them handed the stack of paper to the officer, a triumphant look.

"Mister Krazinsky, I am Major Bresnikov," said the Russian as he leafed through the documents.

"I am pleased to meet you, Comrade Major," said Colling.

Bresnikov gave special attention to some of the items he was examining, appearing to read them carefully, and Colling wondered how much a command of written English the officer really possessed.

At last the Russian gave an order to the two soldiers, and they began replacing the documents and clothing in the bags. He handed Colling his papers and said, "Again I welcome you to Poland, Comrade Krazinsky. Have a safe journey. One of my men will stay with you until Piotrkow. I will arrange for another man to take over there to see that you are escorted to Warsaw."

All Colling could think of to say was, "Thank you, Comrade Major. I am honored."

A few minutes later, a Polish customs official passed through, asked for Colling's passport, and used a rubber stamp to mark his entry into Poland.

The Russian soldier that Bresnikov had assigned to Colling could not speak English, and seemed to know only a few words in Polish. After rudimentary attempts at conversation, Colling gave up and took out a copy of For Whom the Bell Tolls that he had found among Cousin Jerry's things, and read while his escort sat stoically, his PPSh sub-machine gun in his lap, staring fixedly out the window.

His guard was changed in Piotrkow, where another Red Army soldier took over from the first. Apparently Bresnikov had telephoned or wired ahead with the news of Jerzy Krazinsky's arrival in Poland. The second soldier was even less talkative than the first, and Colling nodded off after only a few pages of Hemingway. He was awakened by the Russian soldier shaking him by the shoulder, and realized they were pulling into the makeshift Warsaw terminal.

They had not experienced the delays in travelling by train across Poland that they had in the spring, and Colling concluded that the Russians, or someone, must have repaired or replaced enough railway track so that they were not repeatedly forced to wait on sidings for other trains to pass. Even at that, the better part of a day had passed between Colling's entry into Poland and his arrival in Warsaw.

Colling's escort insisted on carrying his suitcase, leaving Colling with only the small canvas bag in his hand as they stepped down onto the platform. They were approached almost immediately by an NKVD officer, followed by a pair of Red Army enlisted men. The officer ordered one of his men to take Colling's suitcase from his escort on the train, who re-boarded, apparently to return to Piotrkow.

"I am Captain Ensilnos, at your service, Comrade," said the NKVD man in English.

"My pleasure, Comrade Captain," replied Colling.

"I come to take you to Party headquarters."

"I very much appreciate that, Comrade Captain."

"Come, follow me, Comrade Krazinsky," said the officer, motioning for Colling to follow him.

Captain Ensilnos had been provided by his superiors with a jeep that he drove wildly through Warsaw's crowded streets, using the horn to clear a path through the traffic. Sitting beside the Russian in the jeep's front seat, Colling held onto the windshield with his right hand while bracing himself with his left hand against the dashboard. The pair of Red Army enlisted men somehow managed to remain in their seats in the rear without being thrown out as the officer negotiated corners on what Colling would have sworn were two wheels.

They slid to a stop in front of a large building that Colling surmised had originally been the residence of a wealthy family. Colling was reminded of the headquarters of the Polish Red Cross from his previous visit. A large red banner embellished with the hammer and sickle hung across the front of the building. On a pole over the door flew the Polish national flag, from which the Polish eagle had been removed, leaving only two plain fields of red and white. There was no sign or other indication that the building was Communist Party headquarters.

Ensilnos led Colling up the steps, leaving the two soldiers to watch the luggage. Inside, the place was bustling with activity as people walked back and forth through the circular entrance hall. A young woman sat behind a desk, and Ensilnos strode over and told her that there was an American Comrade with an important message for Comrade Vojanski. She picked up the telephone and spoke to someone, and a few moments later a man emerged and asked Colling to accompany him. The Russian captain seated himself on the receptionist's desk and said he would wait until Colling returned, a wink at Colling conveying his apparent intention to use the time to flirt with the pretty receptionist.

Comrade Vojanski was a tall thin man whose pale sunken face suggested to Colling that he was suffering from some chronic illness. As soon as the door to Vojanski's office closed behind the man who had ushered Colling in, Vojanski extended his hand and said, "Welcome, Comrade. I am Melan Vojanski, Chief Deputy to the Party Secretary, and in charge of this office. I have been informed that you come to demonstrate your solidarity with your Polish Comrades."

"Yes, Comrade Vojanski, I do. I am Jerzy…Jerry…Krazinsky, from Milwaukee, U.S.A. I have been sent by my Comrades from the United States…the Milwaukee Workers' Committee to be precise, to show our tangible support for your struggle." Colling took the envelopes he had been carrying in his inside coat pocket and handed them to Vojanski. Vojanski tore open the first envelope, which was addressed to the First Secretary,

Communist Party of Poland, and extracted the letter which was inside. He handed it back to Colling, saying, "I regret that I do not read English, Comrade. You will have to translate."

"Yes, of course, Comrade Chief Deputy. The letter is addressed to the First Secretary and says, 'In solidarity with the brave people of Poland, the Communist Party of the U.S.A., Milwaukee Workers' Committee; the Comrades of America express their support for the gallant struggle of the Polish people to overcome the reactionary forces of the former fascist rulers of Poland and to elect a socialist government and establish the People's Republic of Poland. To support that objective, the sum of three thousand dollars is given. Long live Comrade Stalin and the Socialist Republics!' signed, Walter Bellows, Chief Secretary, Milwaukee Chapter, Communist Party of the U.S.A."

Vojanski smiled, and tore open the second, thicker envelope. He thumbed through the sheaf of American dollars, then said, "The Party thanks you, Comrade Krazinsky, and your Comrades in Milwaukee."

"You are welcome, Comrade Chief Deputy. I will convey your thanks when I return to America."

"And when will that be, Comrade Krazinsky?" asked Vojanski.

"I have some personal business first, Comrade, then I will return."

"And what might your personal business be?"

"I wish to find some relatives of my mother from whom we have not heard since before the war began, Comrade."

"Are they here in Warsaw?"

"No, Comrade Chief Deputy. They were heard from last in the south, in a village east of Krakow. I will have to travel there in search of them."

"You will need the assistance of the Party to travel, Comrade. There are restrictions in place that limit unauthorized movement about the country."

"Is it possible that that might be arranged, Comrade Chief Deputy?"

"Of course. It will also give you the opportunity to see something of Poland. I will provide a travel authorization by rail to Krakow, then the Party can furnish motor transport. It will make it much easier to move about between those small towns." Vojanski used the telephone on his desk to speak to someone, then invited Colling to take a seat while they waited. He asked Colling about the situation in the United States, and Colling told him that the Party was under attack on all sides from J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI. Things were sure to become worse now that the Republicans had won so many Congressional seats in the recent elections. Colling explained that he had had to slip out of the country by taking a bus to New Orleans, then finding a tramp steamer that would take him to Europe. He spun a tale of having had to work his way across, washing dishes in the ship's galley, until they arrived in Bordeaux. He described how he had made his way across France and Germany to Munich, where he took a train for Warsaw.

Colling was finishing his story when the man who had brought him to Vojanski's office walked in and placed some papers in front of the Chief Deputy. Vojanski quickly read the documents, then signed them with a flourish. He handed them to Colling, who saw that they were, in effect, a safe conduct and travel authorization good anywhere in Poland. Colling folded them and put them in his inside jacket pocket. He thanked Vojanski profusely before saying goodbye.

Captain Ensilnos was still seated on the desk where Colling had left him, leaning across it and speaking to the young receptionist, who seemed to be giving the NKVD man her rapt attention. He looked up at Colling's approach and abruptly terminated his conversation with the girl, saying, "At your service, Comrade." Colling nodded and asked if a taxi could be found for him.

"It is my duty to see that you reach your hotel safely, Comrade. Do you have arrangements somewhere?" said Ensilnos.

"No, Comrade Captain. I have to find a place."

"Not to worry, Comrade. All Americans stay at the Polonia."

"Is it expensive, Comrade Captain? I'm on a budget…limited funds, you know," said Colling, not sure that the Russian understood him.

The NKVD officer seemed surprised. “I thought all Americans had plenty of money,” he said.

“Unfortunately, I’m not one of them, Comrade Captain.”

“Not to worry, Comrade. I will ask the Polonia to give you a special price. Come this way.”

The ride to the Polonia was as frightening as the earlier one to Party headquarters. Ensilnos skidded the jeep to a stop in front of the hotel, and as he switched off the engine, he smiled over at Colling and asked, “I hear that every American soldier has a jeep. Is that true?”

“I do not believe so, Comrade. I have not been in the American army, but I do not believe so.” said Colling as he climbed out, giving thanks to God he was still alive.

Ensilnos ordered the soldiers to bring the luggage, then led Colling to the Polonia’s registration desk. The clerk was not someone Colling recognized from his earlier stay, and for that he was thankful. The man was clearly intimidated by the NKVD officer, and nervously turned the hotel register for Colling to sign. Ensilnos simply stated that Comrade Krazinsky was to have a “special price,” and the clerk readily agreed.

The NKVD Captain bid Colling farewell as a bellman took the luggage from the soldiers and led him to his room. The accommodations were even shabbier than Colling remembered. He partially unpacked, hanging his suits and jackets in the armoire, but leaving everything else in his suitcase and the canvas bag. He checked the chandelier and found a microphone, as he had expected. Taking the risk that his things would not be searched if he did not leave the hotel itself, Colling went to the lobby to exchange dollars for zlotys and have dinner. The cashier gave him colorful new banknotes which were different from the Russian occupation notes he was used to. Colling wanted to ask if the older currency was still accepted, but caught himself at the last moment, when he realized that that might betray that this was not his first visit to post-war Poland.

Night had fallen by the time he finished eating. Everything was as he had left it when he returned, and he guessed that there had been no search. He made a noisy show of brushing his teeth and preparing for bed. Once he had turned off the lights, he dressed silently and quietly slipped into the hallway and down the stairs to the cellar. He easily found his way to the street exit. There were no pedestrians on this side of the hotel, and a careful scan of the street did not suggest that there was any surveillance. He walked hurriedly and turned the corner into the closest side street. He stopped and waited to see if he were being followed, and when nothing happened, he went to find a way to return to the neighborhood near Potok where he would find Oblieska’s bicycle shop.

The horse-drawn cart that served as a taxi left him at the same street corner where he and Elizabeth had been dropped off months before. It seemed to Colling as if it had been an eternity. He stopped a passerby and asked for the bicycle shop and was given directions.

Nothing appeared to have changed. The shop’s windows were as dingy as they had been, and someone was working in the dimly-lit interior. Colling pushed open the door and saw Oblieska bent over a workbench, scraping away with a file on something. The Pole started when Colling said, “Oblieska?”

He did not seem to recognize Colling, and Colling used the phrases that he had heard Elizabeth use, “I know someone who knew Sosabowski.”

Without hesitation, Oblieska asked, “Who would that be?”

“Colonel Davisson.”

The Pole’s eyes narrowed, and he stepped closer, looking intently at Colling, who moved forward out of the shadows.

“I have seen you before,” said Oblieska.

“True. I was with a young woman then.”

“Yes, now I remember. You did not wear spectacles then. It appears you have not yet been caught.”

“Not yet. I need to see Tomek.”

Oblieska did not make him wait in the shop this time, but led Colling straight to the tavern where they had met with Tomek earlier in the year. The tavern was busier than it had been. The establishment’s patrons were all male, dressed in workmen’s clothing, smoking and conversing quietly with one another over what Colling took to be beer or ale. Some glanced up as Colling and Oblieska entered, but none evidenced any particular interest in the two newcomers.

Oblieska whispered something to the bar-keep, who left his post for a few moments while he and Colling stood waiting at the bar. When he returned, he nodded at Oblieska, and the Pole asked Colling to follow him to

the screened-off area at the rear of the tavern. Tomek was seated at his table as before, and he smiled when he recognized Colling.

"Well, if it isn't the silent young man who let his woman do all the talking."

"The woman is not here this time," said Colling, his face expressionless.

Tomek chuckled. "Just so. Why have you come?"

"Why else? I need papers." Colling pulled the safe conduct Vojanski had given him from his jacket pocket. Handing it to Tomek, he said, "Can you duplicate this? Using some other names, of course."

Tomek examined the document carefully, looking at the Polish and Russian printed text, then softly commented, "I have heard of these, but never have I seen one. You must have been very clever to come into possession of it."

Colling responded, "Note that it is signed by Chief Deputy Secretary Vojanski and bears the printed signature of the Commander of Soviet Forces in Poland."

"Yes. If I have one sample of anything, I can make more, of course. There is a chance, you know, that they change these periodically, and that this version will become obsolete at some time."

"I will assume that risk, Friend Tomek. I have written down the names I wish to have used," said Colling, passing over the list of details. "And I will need several extras in blank, as well. And the original returned to me."

"How soon must you have them?"

"Tomorrow afternoon at the latest."

Tomek let out a long sigh, then said, "For you, I will accomplish this. But it will cost you."

"How much?"

"Say five hundred American dollars."

"If you do as good a job as last time, that is a fair price."

Tomek chuckled again, "If I do not do a good job, for you it does not matter anyway."

Colling counted out five hundred dollars and handed the stack of bills to Tomek, asking, "Where do I take delivery?"

"As before. Go to the Treskie at 1300 of the clock."

Colling shook Tomek's hand and stood up to leave.

"One moment," said Tomek. "I have been asked to deliver this to Jan Woznica, should I see him again." The forger handed Colling a folded ten-zlotys note of Russian printing.

Colling looked at the banknote and saw that someone had written "Dwiespestka" in one of the margins. There was an upright oval with what appeared to be a lightning flash through its center drawn after the word.

Colling asked, "Do you know what this means?"

"No," said Tomek, "I do not. It was given to me by an old woman on the street, who asked me to give it to Jan Woznica. You are fortunate I happened to remember the name that was used on your papers before. I almost dismissed it as foolishness until you came here tonight with Oblieska."

"Thank you," replied Colling, once again shaking Tomek's hand.

As he and Oblieska walked side-by-side through the narrow dark streets to the bicycle shop, Oblieska said, "Dwiespestka is a town in the south, east of Krakow. I do not know what the drawing might signify."

Colling found a horse-drawn taxi willing to take him to the city center. The folded zloty note was in his wallet, and he had to admit that it was an ingenious way to keep and send written communications. Money with names and addresses written on it was a fairly common sight and likely to escape notice among someone's personal effects. It was also almost certain that any cash that a person was carrying when arrested would be either stolen by the policemen themselves, or confiscated and spent without being examined.

Colling had just finished dressing the following morning when a bellman brought a note from the registration desk, asking if he intended to catch the morning train for Krakow. Obviously, the NKVD or someone from Party headquarters was keeping the hotel informed about his travel plans. On his way to breakfast, he stopped at the front desk and informed the clerk that he would be taking the afternoon train to Krakow, and would check out later in the day. He professed a desire to see something of Warsaw before he left.

In keeping with the stated reason for delaying his departure, he left the Polonia and strolled around the adjacent streets, gawking at the war damage and at the shops and street vendors' merchandise. He avoided any conversations with the people he encountered, limiting himself to simple civilities as he wandered about. He

was headed to the Treskie, as if to have lunch, when Tomek approached him from behind and motioned for him to follow him into an alleyway. Colling was handed an envelope that he slipped into his coat pocket, and Tomek walked quickly away. Colling resumed his path to the Treskie, where he ate his lunch. It did not appear to him that he was being watched, but he did concede that the authorities may have become more subtle in their surveillance techniques since his last visit to Warsaw.

When Colling arrived in the hotel lobby to check out, Captain Ensilnos was waiting for him at the front desk. The NKVD man stood at Colling's side while he checked out and paid his bill. As they walked away from the registration desk, the Russian said, "See, I told you that you would receive a special price. Less than half what they charge other foreigners."

Colling expressed his appreciation for Ensilnos' assistance as he climbed into the Russian's jeep, then braced himself for the ride to the train station. He thanked Ensilnos again as he boarded his train. The officer had not left Colling's side from the moment they met at the Polonia. Colling was looking forward to finally being free of the man as he said his goodbyes, when Ensilnos informed him that another Russian would be escorting him to Krakow. The soldier had blue NKVD trim on his uniform, although Colling guessed that he was an enlisted man, rather than an officer.

Colling expected that his companion would be as reticent as the other Soviet soldiers he had ridden with, but the young NKVD man spoke fairly decent English. He introduced himself as Pankovski, explained that he was a staff sergeant, and asked Colling question after question about the United States, particularly about Milwaukee, his family and his work with the Communist Party. It did not take Colling long to conclude that Pankovski was not merely curious, but that his task might be to extract information from Jerry Krazinsky. Colling answered truthfully when he could, but invented answers when it was necessary. The NKVD sergeant, if that were truly his rank, was not particularly adept at concealing what he was doing, and Colling played his part by trying to give the impression that he himself was possessed of the hopeless naivete of socialist idealism. Colling asked questions of the young officer when the occasion arose, and feigned enthusiastic envy when Pankovski boasted that he had once been selected to serve in an honor guard for the Great Comrade Stalin, and had stood "no more than three meters from the Great Man himself."

Their conversation waned once night had fallen, and Colling slept fitfully as the train rattled on towards Krakow. At some point, he must have dozed off more soundly, because he was awakened by a combination of daylight pouring through the train carriage window and Pankovski's prodding his shoulder, announcing loudly that they were in Krakow.

Staff Sergeant Pankovski handed Colling over to a man in civilian clothes who was introduced as his driver, Comrade Jalesow. The NKVD man disappeared into the terminal, and Jalesow asked Colling to follow him. Colling followed, carrying his own luggage, and as they walked beside one another, Jalesow explained that his first name was Georg. He was dressed in rumpled working man's attire, wearing a short overcoat with a slouch cap pulled down tight on his head. When they emerged from the train station itself, a blast of cold wind hit Colling, and he realized he would have to unpack his overcoat. Jalesow waited impatiently while Colling opened his suitcase and rummaged until he found his coat and put it on. The Pole then led Colling to a battered pickup truck.

Noting Colling's apparent surprise that his motor transport was not to be a car, Jalesow said, "The truck is better suited to the roads in the country. Throw your things in the back." Colling tossed his luggage into the bed of the truck beside four jerry cans that he guessed held gasoline. He recalled that filling stations were not common in the Polish countryside.

The pickup looked like a Ford Model A to Colling, but once he was in the cab beside Jalesow, he realized that it must have come from one of Henry Ford's plants that had been built in Russia in the 1930s. It was a duplicate of the delivery truck he had driven so often for his father, but without the Ford emblem or name anywhere on it. Colling asked if they could find a place where he could eat breakfast, and Jalesow pulled into the yard of a house near the outskirts of the city. There were no signs indicating it was a restaurant, but when they stepped through the door, Colling saw that it was apparently an old wayside inn. Rough wooden tables filled the large, low-ceilinged dining room, which was filled with workmen and farmers. The air was blue with tobacco smoke.

There was no menu, and Jalesow ordered for Colling and himself, and soon thereafter, the sweating red-faced waitress who had taken their order dropped a tin plate piled with sausage, red cabbage and potatoes in

front of them. A quick second trip and she brought two mugs and a metal pitcher of hot tea. The food was delicious, and Colling ate without pause or wasted effort. Jalesow did the same, and when their plates were removed and they were sipping their tea, Jalesow asked where he was to take Colling.

"I am not certain, Comrade Jalesow," said Colling. "I have no address, only a description of a small village to the east of Krakow, perhaps one hundred kilometers. I thought perhaps we could drive in that direction, then when it appears we may have come far enough, begin to ask for my relatives."

"Comrade Krazinsky, do these persons have a name?" asked Jalesow.

"Of course, Comrade. Theirs is Krazinsky, as mine is. A cousin of my father. He is called Josef and his wife, Maria. When we last heard, they had three children."

"So we are looking for one Josef Krazinsky and his wife, Maria?"

"Yes, Comrade.""I have traveled widely in these parts, Comrade, and this name I have not heard."

"They may not still be in this vicinity, but perhaps we can find those with whom they have stayed, and obtain a new address from them."

Jalesow snorted and said, "You pay the bill, Comrade. I need to piss. I will meet you at the truck."

A light snow began to fall as they drove east from Krakow. After about sixty kilometers, Colling suggested that they might begin asking along the way for the Krazinskys, and with every village and town, they would find a tavernkeeper, barber or shopkeeper, and Colling would ask earnestly about his fictitious relatives. Jalesow was obviously bored and impatient with the process, but Colling noticed when they reached a town where a gold and white sign with the word Poczta announced the place boasted a post office, Jalesow said he had to make a telephone call. Colling strolled down the street so that when Jalesow emerged from the post office he could not see him. Colling waited until Jalesow moved off in another direction, obviously searching for him, then he went into the post office. He approached the young girl behind the counter, and asked, "My friend thinks he may have not paid the correct tariff for the telephone call he made a few moments ago. Could you verify, please?"

The girl turned and pulled a slip of paper from a spike behind her and showed it to Colling, "No, sir. It is correct. Four hundred zlotys to Warsaw."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," said Colling, smiling and watching the young woman blush at his use of French. He had memorized the telephone number when she showed him the paper, uncertain as to how knowing it might serve him in the future.

Before reentering the street, Colling glanced out and waited as he saw Jalesow take another side street in his search for him. He then stepped out and sauntered to the truck. Jalesow returned to the square just as Colling reached his side of the pickup.

Jalesow asked, "Where have you been?"

Colling pointed vaguely towards the other side of the square, "Down there. No one knows of any Krazinskys here. We should go on."

Jalesow scowled at him and said, "You must remain nearby. You are my responsibility. Anything can happen." Then adding what he must have thought Colling would perceive as the ultimate peril, "There are reactionary forces hereabouts. Remnants of the Home Army."

Colling tried to put an alarmed and frightened expression on his face as he hurriedly climbed into his seat in the truck. He glanced over at Jalesow and could see that the Pole was wearing a satisfied smirk on his face.

Their routine continued over the next couple of days. They would find an inn or a sympathetic Communist Party member's house to spend their nights and provide their breakfast and supper. The mid-day meal was found in a tavern or café. Jalesow continued to make a telephone call each day, and Colling was certain he was reporting in to his superiors. On one such occasion, when Jalesow returned to the truck after completing his visit to the local post office, Colling told him that he had been informed that there was a couple named Krazinsky in the town of Dwiespestka. Jalesow grumbled that Dwiespestka was another fifty kilometers to the east, but agreed to take Colling there, even though the snow might make some of their journey difficult.

Dwiespestka was spread along both sides of a winding road that had become the main street of the town. Shops and houses opened almost directly onto the cobblestone pavement. As Jalesow drove slowly to the center of the town, Colling looked for some clue as to what the oval and lightning symbol drawn beside the town's name might mean. He noticed nothing that answered his question.

The street widened into a semicircle that appeared to be the town's center. A weathered blue and gold metal sign with the word Poczta under the familiar horn and lightning symbol was displayed on one of the buildings. Jalesow parked the truck in front of the post office and indicated he had to make his usual telephone call. Colling got out of the cab and walked about, slapping his arms to ward off the cold. They had driven through a series of snow flurries throughout the day, and Colling estimated that a covering of about an inch, perhaps slightly more, had accumulated on the ground.

Jalesow emerged from the post office in an obvious hurry. He ordered Colling back into the pickup, then made a complete turn and began driving out of Dwiespestka, back in the direction from which they had just come. The Pole seemed to be unusually nervous, and Colling asked, "What might be wrong, Comrade?"

"We must return to Krakow as soon as possible," said Jalesow.

"Is there some emergency, Comrade?"

"No. You will find out when we have arrived there."

They drove in silence, Jalesow was applying the accelerator more than he had thus far, and the truck began to slide from time to time on the loose snow. The Pole recovered expertly each time, however, bringing the vehicle back onto a straight course.

Jalesow's edgy behavior was making Colling increasingly nervous himself, and as much as he did not want to believe it, he surmised that his companion's NKVD superiors must have discovered something that made them suspicious of his identity and the story he had so carefully woven. That brought the realization that if he did not evade Jalesow very soon, he would find himself in a Russian prison.

Jalesow slowed the truck to negotiate a curve, but used too much brake, and they began to slide sideways. They might have skidded faster and further had the back wheels not encountered some obstacle, perhaps a deep rut or a stone at the side of the road, and as Jalesow down-shifted and used the clutch to bring the vehicle under control, they slowed considerably. At that point, Colling decided that there was no way he would risk trying to talk his way out of the situation he was certain he was in. He opened the pickup's door and jumped out.

The drifted snow cushioned his fall to some degree, but he came down hard on his shoulder and hip, the wind momentarily knocked out of him. He looked up to see Jalesow fighting to bring the swerving truck to a halt, and could hear him shouting something. Colling pushed himself to his feet, then in a stumbling run, took off into the forest. His fall had knocked his glasses off, but he did not stop to look for them. In seconds he was among the trees. As he plunged through the shallow covering of snow, he cursed himself for his impetuosity, thinking that he might have better been served by staying with Jalesow and trying to somehow retrieve his Luger and seize the truck.

Now he was running through a freezing forest, to where he did not know. If he had not been a suspect before this, he certainly was now. His breath was coming in gasps, and his heart was pounding. He could not hear anyone behind him and considered stopping to rest, but discarded that idea and ran on. He noticed a clearing in the trees ahead, and suddenly found himself in the open. A second later, he saw that he had come back to the road. He had either run in a circle, or the road had curved back on itself, and what was worse, the Ford pickup was headed right for him. Colling hesitated for just a moment too long before turning to run back among the trees. He heard the truck's door slam and he knew Jalesow was after him, and Jalesow was not exhausted from just having run two hundred meters or more.

Colling did not look back, but he could tell that the Pole was closing the gap between them. His crashing footsteps grew louder with each of Colling's strides, and Colling began to hear his pursuer's labored breathing over his own. It would only be a matter of seconds until he was overtaken.

A small clearing had occurred when several trees had fallen, and Colling exerted a burst of energy when he entered the open ground, but then he stumbled, barely recovered his balance, and stumbled again, going down on his knees. He could hear Jalesow stop some distance behind him. He tried to estimate how far behind him the Pole was. He heard slow steady footsteps approaching, and he crawled on all fours, knowing that he was not going to win the race. He closed his eyes, reflexively wishing that when he opened them, this would prove to be a dream, but that did not happen. What he did see when he opened his eyes was a flat stone the size of his hand. He slid his hand over the stone, grasping it firmly, feeling its icy surface fill his palm.

The snow crunched as Jalesow walked up behind him. Colling spoke in a whisper, choking out the words, "Please, Comrade. What have I done? Please, please, Comrade." Colling raised his voice, adding a catch to it, "Comrade, please." He babbled on, begging for his life, as Jalesow, saying nothing, came closer. Colling did not

rise from his position, did not turn his head. He lifted it only enough to look to his side, where out of the corner of his eye, he could see Jalesow's shadow on the snow. Colling knew he was going to have to estimate where Jalesow would be standing. He conjectured that he would have less than a second to get in the first blow. Perhaps he would be successful in knocking the Pole down, gaining some advantage. His heart sank when he saw the shadow of Jalesow's arm, terminating in the unmistakable blunt outline of an automatic pistol, separate from the solid outline of his shadow on the snow and raise to point at the back of his head.

Colling knew that he would have to come to his feet and turn in a half-circle in order to strike Jalesow in the head. Nothing else would be acceptable. A miss because the man was too far away would be fatal. A glancing blow, or a poorly aimed swing would have the same result.

Gauging the possible distance, Colling said a silent prayer as he continued to loudly plead, then he sprang up, his right arm outstretched, spinning completely around so that the stone smashed into Jalesow's left temple.

Colling did not hear the soft grunt that erupted from the Pole's lips as the man was hit because the pistol exploded close beside him. Jalesow had dropped as if pole-axed. Colling shook in the aftermath of an adrenaline rush, then shivered again when realized in an instant that the Pole was left-handed, and during his swing, Colling's left arm had shoved the gun to one side, resulting in the bullet passing harmlessly an inch or two from Colling's left side. If Jalesow had been right-handed, Colling might have managed to hit him with the stone, but the gun would not have been swept aside, and he would have been shot. At such close range, he would probably have been mortally wounded.

Jalesow moaned, and Colling knelt beside him and hit him twice more in the left temple with the stone. Blood splattered from the Pole's fractured skull, and his eyes clouded, there was a spasm in his legs that lifted his feet off the ground momentarily, then he was still, staring blankly at the gray sky above the trees.

Colling shuddered as Jalesow died. He did not know whether it was because of the cold, or because of what he had just so methodically done. He rifled through the Pole's pockets. He found an identity card that showed that the Pole's occupation was a truck driver. A small leather bound notebook had a number of notations, and Colling saw that they included the names of the towns they had traveled through since leaving Krakow, with dates and times they had been there. Inside the front cover of the notepad was the telephone number Colling had been shown by the post office clerk. Other entries seemed to be expense notations, and Colling cursed the dead man under his breath when he saw that most of them were for lodging and meals for which Colling himself had paid.

Colling took Jalesow's wallet and the other papers and effects from his body and stuffed them into his own pockets. He removed the shoulder holster Jalesow had been wearing and took off his own overcoat and jacket to put it on. He picked up the Russian pistol from where it had fallen and, after checking the safety, shoved it into the holster. He then took the dead man by his heels and dragged him until he could roll him under a fallen tree trunk. The body was already growing stiff with the cold, and the light snow had resumed. In an hour or so, all sign of their struggle would be gone.

The Soviet Ford was beside the road. There were no footprints or tracks to show that anyone else had passed by since the chase through the woods. The keys were in the ignition, and the engine started easily. Jalesow had known how to care for his truck.

It took a moment for Colling to orient himself, but then he realized all he had to do was follow the fast-disappearing tire tracks of the pickup to return to where they had started. In doing so, he learned that he had not run in a circle, but that the road had in fact curved back on itself. By some miracle, he found his glasses close by the impression in a snowdrift that his fall had made when he jumped from the pickup.

The buildings of Dwiespestka appeared ahead of him, and Colling decided he should not revisit the town in the truck, as that might attract attention he did not want. He spied what looked like a logging track leading off the road and took it until he was well into the forest. He hid the truck behind some snow-covered underbrush, and continued on foot into Dwiespestka.

He went first to the post office where he requested a line to Warsaw. In a few minutes, the postal clerk told him that his call had been connected. Trying his best to imitate Jalesow's coarse accent, Colling said, "Hello," into the mouthpiece.

A woman's voice answered, "Yes, Communications. Name please."

"Jalesow here."

"Number please."

Colling was taken aback. He had the dead man's notepad in his hand, and he flipped to the inside front cover. Just above the telephone number he was calling was written "587."

"Five eight seven," replied Colling.

"Why have you called again, Comrade Jalesow?" asked the woman.

"To report a problem. The American panicked and tried to run."

"You have him?"

"He had an accident. A nine-gram accident."

"That is unfortunate. You will return to Krakow?"

"Yes, and I will bring the American, but it may take a few days. It is snowing here and the roads are bad."

"Very well. Good luck and safe journey."

Colling felt satisfied that he had bought himself a little time, at least. He thought that the mention of a nine-gram accident had been a nice touch, based on his having remembered Karol's mentioning that the Russians termed a gunshot to the back of the head as "giving nine grams" to the victim, a reference to the weight of the pistol bullet.

He stepped into the cold street from the post office and asked himself how he would go about finding out the meaning of the oval and lightning drawing. He took the ten-zlotys note from his wallet and looked at it once again, wondering what it meant. He decided his only course was to thoroughly explore Dwiespestka and see what might turn up. As a last resort, he could draw the symbol for someone and ask if they recognized it.

Colling walked the length of the town's main street, searching for anything resembling the drawing on the banknote. At the town's center, a second street intersected the primary thoroughfare, and he took it, glancing from side to side as he walked along. He almost missed the symbol because it was painted on the lower corner of the shop's window, and frost had obscured most of it. He had in fact passed the place before he realized what his eyes had seen. He retraced his steps and verified that the oval with the lightning bolt through it was indeed there. The sign in the window said Elektryk S. Kwonowski.

A stout middle-aged woman was behind the counter, and as he closed the door behind him, her greeting was cheerful. "Yes, good sir. What may we do for you today?"

Colling thought it an odd question, considering that the store's shelves were bare except for one small stack of light bulbs.

"I am not sure," said Colling. He took out the ten-zlotys note and showed it to the woman. "A friend gave me this. I am seeking someone, and was told you might help."

"This is an electrical repair shop, sir. My husband's, to be exact."

Colling decided to try another approach, and said, "I know someone who knew Sosabowski."

The woman paused, then said, "Who might that be?"

"Colonel Davisson."

"Just a moment. I must fetch my husband," said Mrs. Kwonowski, leaving Colling standing in front of the counter.

Sebastien Kwonowski was wiping his hands on a rag as he emerged from the shop's back room. He appeared both puzzled and annoyed at Colling's presence. His wife stood close behind him, eyeing Colling. The electrical shop owner was tall and spare, his face lined and his hair gray. His slight scowl added to an air of cynicism about him that was the opposite of his wife's sunny disposition.

"You know Davisson?"

"Yes," said Colling.

"From where do you know him?" asked the electrician.

Colling was unsure what he should say. There might be an additional recognition phrase, but he had no idea what it was. If this were the wrong place, it wouldn't make much difference what he said. If it turned out it was the right place, maybe not knowing the counter-sign would put an end to any possible help in finding Elizabeth, but he knew he had to at least try something.

"I don't know where I know him from," said Colling, realizing how silly he must sound. Before Kwonowski could speak, he went on, "I have come looking for a young woman who has been taken by the Soviets. I was told that you might be able to help. If you cannot, I will leave."

Kwonowski's wife stood on tiptoes and whispered something in her husband's ear.

"You may have been properly directed, but in truth I know nothing of any woman."

"Is there a prison nearby?"

"Yes. The Russians have a camp outside the town. The Germans used it as a labor camp, and the Soviets have made it into a prison camp. Maria, bring tea for our guest, and we will talk of this," said Kwonowski, motioning Colling into the back of the store.

The rear of the shop held a workbench on which parts were scattered. Kwonowski pulled two chairs together around a tiny table. Seeing Colling surveying the room, he said, "We are fortunate in this part of Poland. The government built a hydro dam some years ago, so we have electricity. Many places in the countryside do not have such a luxury. And in truth, I would not be able to have such a business outside a big city if that were not so."

Maria brought a tray with two glasses and a pot of tea. She poured each of them a glass, then returned to tend to the store.

"But at that," continued Kwonowski, "Business is not so good. If I did not have the repair work at the camp to keep me busy, we would have to live in Krakow."

"So you have been to the camp?" asked Colling.

"Before we speak of this, I wish to know your name."

"Of course. I apologize for my rudeness. My name is Jerzy…Jerry…Krazinsky. I am an American. From Milwaukee, U.S.A."

"You speak Polish well."

"Thank you. I learned from my mother and her family."

"Very good. My name is Sebastien Kwonowski. Now you wished to know if I have been to the camp. Certainly. The camp generator is an old one. Of British manufacture, installed when the camp was built for the forestry service by the old government, before the war. Even when the Germans were here, they could not keep it running, and I was asked to do so. If I had not been part of the underground, I would have surely been marked as a collaborator. As it was, I was able to provide much useful information by having access to the camp. That is true today, as well, with the Russians in charge."

"Would you be able to find out if a young woman is held there. Blonde, blue-eyed, in her early twenties. Quite pretty."

"And her name?"

Colling thought for a moment. He decided he did not want anyone asking around at the camp for Anna Zariski. That might arouse considerable undesired interest. He answered the electrician by saying, "I do not know what name she was using when she was arrested. I would prefer that her real name not be used."

Kwonowski nodded his head and said, "Fair enough. It is better no names be used. If she is there, I can find out. This woman, she is your woman?"

"Not exactly. A friend only. She is married to another."

"That is good. Once a woman has been in the camp, she will not look as you remember her. In truth, she may not be as you remember her. If she is still alive, that is."

A cold chill went up Colling's spine. To divert his imagination, he said, "If she is in the camp, can she be rescued?"

"I do not think that possible. The Russians are very careful not to lose any of their possessions."

"Would there be no way to save her, then?" asked Colling with a sinking heart.

"Prisoners are there to be interrogated. After that, if they do not die in the process, they are taken east to the slave camps, where they are worked or starved to death. Usually, when they are taken there, they are on death's door as it is."

"Is it possible to know in advance when the prisoners are being transported?"

"Not prisoners, my friend. This is a small camp. 'Prisoner' is more like it. One at a time. The Russian camp guards from the east come in a motorcar and get them."

"Not by the truckload, then?"

"No. As I said, one at a time. Rarely, two. I have a farmer friend whose fields are near the highway, and often when working, he has seen the Russians drive by with prisoners, God preserve their souls," said Kwonowski, crossing himself.

"Would it be possible to know when my friend might be moved, if she is still alive?"

"First we must know if she lives. Then I may have someone who can answer the question of when."

Colling paused, then added, “I have a truck outside the town that I wish might remain better concealed.”

“I think I have the place. I will return with you to your truck and then show you where it might be kept safely, away from prying eyes.”

Chapter Fourteen

December, 1946 – February, 1947

Kwonowski donned his overcoat and led Colling out into a fenced yard behind the shop. Two bicycles were leaning against the building’s rear wall, and the electrician invited Colling to use one of them. They rode together to the woods where Colling had hidden Jalesow’s truck.

When he saw the pickup, Kwonowski whistled under his breath to show he was impressed that Colling was in possession of a Soviet Ford, but he stopped short of asking Colling how he had managed to do so. They threw the bicycles into the back of the truck, and Kwonowski told Colling he would show him where to drive.

Once on the main road, the electrician gave directions that took them several kilometers further east of Dwiespestka. Colling had begun to wonder whether the man knew where he was going when Kwonowski suddenly pointed to two pines that seemed to be more widely spaced than the others in the forest on the left side of the road. Colling skidded to a halt, and Kwonowski told him to drive between the trees, assuring him that there was enough clearance for the truck.

A rough narrow track had been cut through the woods, winding in and out between the trees. After some time, the track widened, and Colling could see that it was paved with gravel. They traveled along for a kilometer or so before they emerged from the forest into a wide driveway in front of a two-story villa sheltered by the overhanging boughs of massive firs. The house was white stucco, trimmed in dark wood. Its gables were rounded in the usual style of Polish country mansions. Colling could see outbuildings behind the main house, and as they stepped out of the truck, he could faintly hear barnyard sounds coming from that direction.

The villa’s front door opened as Colling and Kwonowski crunched across the gravel driveway, and a heavily-built man wearing an old-fashioned black formal frock coat came down the semicircular steps leading to the mansion’s entrance.

“Dzien Dobry, Kwonowski,” said the man in accented Polish, “What brings you out here?”

Gesturing to Colling, Kwonowski replied, “Hermann, this is Mr. Krazinsky, from the United States of America. Might we see the Countess, please?”

Colling extended his hand, and Hermann took it, saying, “Welcome, Mr. Krazinsky. I am Hermann, butler to the Countess. Follow me.”

The interior of the villa was expensively furnished in walnut and mahogany. Oil paintings decorated the walls, and there were stands holding bronze and marble sculptures in the entrance hall. Colling guessed that the Countess was not only appreciative of the arts, but had the wherewithal to indulge her tastes.

Hermann ushered them in a book-lined library off the entrance hall and asked them to remain there while he fetched the Countess. Colling seated himself in a chair and leaned back and crossed his legs. He noticed that Kwonowski took a chair as well, but sat stiffly without leaning back, his cap held in his hands. The electrician pointed to the chandelier and said, “Electric lights, no?”

When Colling looked up and noticed that the light from the chandelier did in fact come from electric bulbs, he was taken aback. Before he could comment, Kwonowski continued, “They are too far from town to have use of Dwiespestka’s hydro power. The Count was trained as an engineer. The estate has a water-driven sawmill about a half-kilometer off, and he added a generator right after he bought the place.”

“And that is how you came to know the Countess?” asked Colling.

“For truth. The Count was smart enough to lay in a supply of spare parts, and I have maintained the generator and the electrical system these many years. But a shaft bearing is, I fear, not long for this world, and then, unless a replacement can be brought from Germany, there will no electricity for the estate.”

Kwonowski was explaining something about the voltage differential between the generator and the house when Hermann returned accompanied by a frail white-haired old woman, leaning on his arm for support. The butler announced, “Gentlemen. The Countess von Brechtsler.”

Kwonowski rose immediately and bowed slightly to the Countess, and Colling decided he should do the same. As Colling straightened he looked up to see the old woman staring at him. She asked, "Who is this person, Sebastien?"

"An American, Madame," said Kwonowski. "His name is Krazinsky."

Colling stepped forward and said, "Jerry Krazinsky, Madame. From Milwaukee, U.S.A."

"I know perfectly well where Milwaukee is, young man."

"Yes, Madame," said Colling sheepishly.

"And what occasion is it that brings you here?" she asked Colling.

Kwonowski interjected, "Mr. Krazinsky does not wish to encounter the Russians, Madame."

"Nor do I, Sebastien, nor do I. Am I to assume, Mr. Krazinsky, that you seek shelter?"

"I would be most appreciative if you could provide, Madame. I am prepared to pay."

"This is not a hotel, Mr. Krazinsky. We do not charge our guests room and board," said the Countess. She sized Colling up for a moment, then continued, "You speak Polish quite well. Somewhat of a slight accent, but not bad. You could pass for a Pomeranian Pole."

Surprised, all Colling could think of to say was, "Thank you, Madame. I learned from the family of my mother. They were all born in Poland."

"What brings you to Poland, young man?"

"A woman friend has been taken by the Russians, Madame. It is possible that she is being held in the camp near here. It is my ambition to free her, if I can."

"You know of this, Sebastien?" asked the Countess, turning to Kwonowski.

"Yes, Madame. This is why it is important that Mr. Krazinsky have a safe place to stay while he proceeds about his business. He has a motor vehicle that he wishes to put out of sight, as well."

"Very well," said the Countess, "Hermann, after you have taken me back to my sitting room, show Mr. Krazinsky where he might conceal his motorcar, and then show him to one of the bedrooms. Sebastien, you may be assured that Mr. Krazinsky will be well-cared for. Mr. Krazinsky, you will join me for supper at eight."

Colling and Kwonowski waited in the library until Hermann returned from escorting the Countess to her room. The butler showed Colling the stables where he was able to park the pickup. Kwonowski took his bicycle from the truck, leaving the other for Colling to use if he should have a need to return to Dwiespestka. The electrician explained that he knew one of the camp guards, and the man would be in the tavern in town that night. Kwonowski would try to find out if he knew of a young blonde woman prisoner, and would return to the villa with any news the following day.

Refusing to let Hermann carry his luggage, Colling followed the butler to a bedroom on the second floor. There was a bath down the hall, and Colling indulged himself with a hot soak before putting on fresh clothes before he would join the Countess for dinner.

Hermann knocked on Colling's door a minute or so before eight, and took him to a sitting room at the end of hall on the same floor. A table for two had been prepared, set elegantly with linen, crystal and sterling. They were served a first-rate Zurek soup by a maid whom the Countess addressed as Helga. The soup was followed by thick sliced pork roast in gravy, potatoes and vegetables. The meal seemed more for Colling's benefit than the Countess, who had been served only small portions and, even at that, picked at her food.

When they were alone, Colling spoke to her in German, asking how she came to be in Poland, instead of Germany. The Countess at first seemed startled that he spoke the language, then pleased. Colling explained that he actually had some formal education in the German language, while he had simply learned Polish from speaking it with his relatives.

The Countess admitted that, except for occasionally conversing with her two servants, she had not spoken German in years. The opportunity to do so seemed to open the floodgates, and she was soon matter-of-factly telling Colling of her background.

Her late husband had been a businessman who had seen opportunity in Poland between the wars. Count von Brechtsler had established himself with the Pilsudski government and became a success at everything from agriculture to banking. Their primary residence remained in Berlin, but they spent considerable time in their houses in Warsaw and Krakow as well. The villa hidden in the forest was a vacation home where they could escape to the countryside.

They had three children, two sons and a daughter, all of whom had become adherents of Adolf Hitler. Her daughter married a primary school teacher whose ambition for higher station led him to join the SS. The Countess did admit that he looked quite handsome in his black and silver uniform. The Count died in 1936, and the Countess, disgusted by the Nazis' boorish manners as much as anything, deserted Berlin for the villa, where she had remained ever since. By 1938, both her sons had left the family business in the hands of managers to become officers in the Wehrmacht. She had last seen her older son two months after the invasion of Poland. He had brought a group of his fellow officers to the villa. They had been most gracious and charming, but as they were leaving, her son suggested that he have someone from his unit dynamite the bridge over which the estate's main access road passed, in order to isolate the place. She had taken his advice, and it had turned out to be fortuitous. The track through the forest that Kwonowski had shown Colling had become the only way in or out. The locals were aware, of course, but neither German nor Russian troops passing through the area had stumbled upon their hideaway. She had helped and supported the Home Army guerrillas who operated in the area, and the villa had remained unmolested. The estate actually consisted of a cluster of working tenant farms, and throughout the war they had been better fed than most.

She had not received correspondence from her children since the summer of 1943. It was assumed that her sons were either dead or prisoners of the Russians, and that her daughter and grandchildren…there were two…had been killed by Allied bombs. Their attachment to Hitler had put the final touch to an estrangement that had begun before the Count's death, and she had resigned herself to the prospect that she was destined to be the last of the Von Brechstlers.

The Countess asked Colling about his family, and he answered with a mixture of fact and fiction, leaving out any reference to his namesake's Communist background or his own prior history with the Army. He did go into some detail concerning his objective of rescuing Elizabeth, if she were still alive. The Countess listened intently to his story, but made little comment.

Colling slept well that night in a comfortable bed, a significant improvement over the Polonia and the inns and hostels he had stayed in since leaving Krakow. He awoke the next morning and realized that he had not dreamed of Jalesow. Except for that momentary rush of emotion after striking Jalesow down, he believed himself to have been unaffected by the man's death. He had been bothered for days after the episode with the German deserters, and he wondered whether killing another human being was something that became easier with repetition.

Hermann served him breakfast alone, explaining that the Countess was not feeling well. Later in the morning, Colling was seated in the library where he and Kwonowski had waited for the Countess, reading another Chapter in For Whom the Bell Tolls, when Hermann put his head in the door and told him they had visitors, and to stay out of sight.

Colling shut the double doors to the library, but remained standing near them in order to learn as much as he could. From what he was able to hear, the visitor was a doctor who had come from Krakow. The physician was conducted upstairs to the Countess' sitting room, and a half-hour later, Colling heard him speaking to Hermann, giving instructions on increasing the dosage of morphine. Once the doctor had gone, Colling confronted Hermann and bluntly asked what was wrong with the Countess.

"Alas, Mr. Krazinsky, the Countess is gravely ill with a malignancy," said the butler.

"Is it the cancer?" asked Colling.

"Just so. Her pain requires greater and greater amounts of morphine."

Colling expressed his regrets that the Countess was so ill. Hermann thanked him in a dejected tone of voice and excused himself.

Kwonowski arrived at mid-afternoon. He joined Colling in the library. He closed the doors behind him, and after removing his overcoat and hat, related what he had been able to discover. The evening before, the electrician had met in the village tavern with the soldier who was assigned to the guard detail at the camp. Kwonowski was of the opinion that the man's information was reasonably trustworthy, explaining that the guard was a native of eastern Poland who had been drafted into the Red Army in 1944 during the Soviet advance. Prior to his conscription, he had managed four years of successfully avoiding military service. He was unhappy that he was not being allowed to return home now that the war was over, and had no love for the

NKVD officers who were in charge of the prison. He did, however, consider himself lucky to be a cook, which was better than standing in a guard tower with a rifle. His duties allowed him access to the prisoners' quarters to supervise the distribution of food, and he was able to confirm that a young blonde woman was being held at the camp.

That morning, Kwonowski himself had bicycled to the camp to perform routine maintenance on the old generator. In the course of inspecting it, he had managed to strike up a conversation with the sergeant who was assigned to accompany him while he did his work, and ask about the blonde woman prisoner. To provide an explanation about his interest, Kwonowski told the sergeant that there were rumors in the village that she was a German motion picture actress, and asked if she was as good looking as the gossip said she was. The guard had laughed and told Kwonowski, "Not any more."

When Kwonowski saw the pained look that this brought to Colling's face, he apologized, but Colling told the electrician to go on with his story.

Speaking gently, Kwonowski continued, telling Colling that the sergeant had said that it appeared that the NKVD was through with the blonde woman, and that she would be sent to the east within the next few days.

Colling asked, "Can you take me to the camp? Someplace where I can look it over?"

"Of course," said Kwonowski. "Fetch your bicycle and I will take you there."

Before leaving, Colling asked Hermann if there were a pair of binoculars in the house, and the butler obligingly went off and returned with a large leather case.

Kwonowski and Colling pedalled towards Dwiespestka first, then the Pole showed Colling a place where they could push their bicycles through the woods to the top of a forested ridge overlooking the camp. They moved cautiously to the edge of the forest, remaining concealed behind a snow-covered fallen tree. The compound was about half a kilometer from them, and Colling used the high-powered field glasses to survey the place. There were several wooden barracks, a larger building that Colling guessed was the headquarters where it was likely interrogations took place, and a scattering of other smaller structures. Kwonowski pointed out the shed where the camp generator was located, as well as the cookhouse.

As they watched, an olive-drab car with red stars on its sides chugged into sight on the road below where Colling and Kwonowski were hidden. Beside him, Kwonowski said, "Same time of day, always." The car turned in and came to a stop in front of the camp gate, which was then opened by as soldier who emerged from a sentry box. The car, which Colling recognized as an old Opel, pulled in front of the main structure. Two uniformed men climbed out of the car and stamped up the building's steps and disappeared inside. Colling could see that the trim on their peaked caps was red, indicating they were probably Red Army, and not NKVD.

After several minutes, the two soldiers returned, followed by two men wearing Soviet enlisted men's uniforms. The second pair of soldiers was supporting a man between them who seemed to have difficulty walking, and they were half-dragging, half-carrying his limp form. The man was wrapped in a blanket, but Colling could see that his feet were bare, and that he was probably wearing a pajama-like prison uniform.

Kwonowski whispered in his ear, "The drivers are Russians. They don't want to have to touch the prisoners. Afraid of catching something. They let the Polish guards do the dirty work."

The two Russian soldiers took their places in the front of the Opel, while the two guards half-threw their burden into the back seat. With a cloud of smoke from its exhaust, the car started and was driven out of the camp.

Colling said, "I've seen what I came to see."

The afternoon sun was low in the sky when they made it back to the main road to Dwiespestka. The air had become colder, and Kwonowski wanted to return home before dark. Before they parted, however, Colling asked, "Do you know of some men who might be available to assist me?"

"There are many hereabouts who would be willing."

"I have money to pay," added Colling.

"That would be welcome. Times are hard."

"I will need three men. Good men, not afraid and able to keep their mouths shut."

"I know such men," said Kwonowski.

"And three wagons with horses. I will drive one of them. These also I will pay for."

"Easily done."

"And some crates with fowl or pigs, small pigs."

Kwonowski frowned, a puzzled look on his face. “You wish livestock? I would have thought you would want men with firearms.”

“It is my wish to use guile, not force,” replied Colling.

The Pole rubbed his chin, and after a moment’s reflection, said, “Chickens are best.”

“I want nice plump chickens,” said Colling. “A dozen or two.”

“One of the men who will do this with you has such chickens. It will be done.”

“Tell each of the men I will pay one hundred American dollars for their services. And two dollars for any chicken that is not back in its cage after the work is done. You must bring these men to the Countess’ villa tomorrow, so that I may tell them what they must do.”

“Just so,” said Kwonowski, “Tomorrow at 1600 it shall be.”

Early the next morning, Colling went to take the pickup from the stable where it had been hidden. He was already in its cab when Hermann appeared and rapped on the truck’s window.

“Yes, Hermann, what is it?” asked Colling.

“Pardon, sir, but driving this vehicle upon the roads may prove very dangerous. The Russians are known to patrol now and again.”

“But I must use it, Hermann. I have some errands that I must perform that require that I travel some distance.”

“You might wish to use the motorcycle, Mr. Krazinsky. It might prove less conspicuous.”

“You have a motorcycle?” asked Colling, a touch of disbelief in his voice.

“Oh, quite so, sir. Let me show you,” said the butler, indicating that Colling should follow him.

The motorcycle was an older German model with the Zundapp trademark on its sides. It had not been driven in some time, and it took some prompting from Colling and Hermann before it finally sputtered into life. Colling had learned to ride his Uncle Otto’s motorcycle, an old Indian model, around the country roads near the farm where he spent his summers, but he had to ask Hermann to give him some pointers on how to operate the German machine. Colling filled the tank with gasoline from one of the pickup’s jerry cans, and after a few spins around the stable yard, he felt confident enough to take it on the road.

Colling found the motorcycle handled well, in spite of the poor condition of the road and the frozen ruts he encountered. He sought out the route that he discerned led east from the prison camp, and rode until he came around a curve and saw the camp’s cluster of buildings in the distance. He then backtracked, looking for a place where he might put to work the plan he had in mind.

About five kilometers from where he started he found what he wanted. The road curved to the left, sharply enough so that anyone rounding the curve would not have a clear line of sight in the direction from where they had just come. Colling found a suitable place to conceal a horse-drawn wagon in the forest bordering the road. Now it would be necessary to put everything into place and hope that things would work out as he envisioned.

Colling was warming himself before the fire in the villa’s kitchen, watching Helga and Hermann piece together a mannequin from discarded articles of clothing, when the Countess unexpectedly walked through the door.

Hermann jumped as she asked, “Hermann, what is going on here? You have not asked what I wish for lunch.”

“Sorry, Madame,” replied the butler, while Helga dropped what she was doing and went to the stove, saying that there was soup and stew cooking.

“You have still not answered my question,” said the Countess, “What are you doing?”

Colling interjected, “Assisting me, Highness. I have diverted them with a task, and for that I humbly apologize.”

“And what may this task be, Herr Krazinsky?”

“The assembly of a mannequin, Highness. It is my intent to substitute it for the young lady I wish to rescue from the Russians.”

“That will not prove to be a lasting ruse, Herr Krazinsky. If you are able to make a substitution, it is certain to be discovered in short order.”

“True, Highness, but I hope to gain enough time to permit us to put some distance between ourselves and them.”

"And then they will tear this countryside apart looking for you. That will create great hardship for the people who live here."

"I will instruct everyone that they are to cooperate with the authorities and tell them we have fled westwards," said Colling, his words more confident than his thoughts.

"I would not think Sebastien will appreciate an interrogation, nor would I or those for whom I am responsible. I would not want the Russians finding my home. They are barbarians."

This was the one aspect of his plan that Colling had been wrestling with. Try as he might, he could see no way in which Sebastien and the Countess, and the others who would be helping him, would not be subject to harm in the aftermath of his escape. He had no answer, and the only thing he could think of to say was, "If no one resists them, the Russians should have no reason to harm anyone."

The Countess said, "Hmmpf," and turning on her heel, told Hermann to bring her lunch to her in her sitting room.

That afternoon, Kwonowski and three men arrived in two wagons. The electrician introduced them, all farmers in the region, and one-time members of the Polish Home Army. Colling took them to the stable and outlined his plan to them as they eagerly listened, offering comments and suggestions to improve their chances of success.

Colling expressed frankly that his main concern was timing. Kwonowski had told him that the transport from the camp took place late in the afternoon, and the electrician repeated his earlier statement. One of the farmers confirmed what Kwonowski said. His was the farm bordering the camp, and he had seen the Russians driving to and from the place on many occasions. He added that the reason for this was that the prisoners were driven only so far as Koltraskow, fifty kilometers away, where they were put on a train to be sent further east. The car had to conform to the railway schedule, so that the prisoners could be placed directly on the train. There was no place in Koltraskow where they could be held, and the station master, who carried some weight because he was a Communist, did not want prisoners waiting anywhere near his station.

When he had finished, Colling reminded them of the risk involved, both to themselves and their families and friends, and offered them to chance to withdraw. None of them accepted, and in fact, expressed their pleasure at the opportunity to irritate the Russians.

Kwonowski explained that one of the wagons was Colling's, and they would return to their homes in the second. Colling reminded them of the curve in the road where they were to rendezvous the next day at mid-afternoon.

Throughout the following day, Colling was filled with nervous anticipation. He and Hermann placed the mannequin in the wagon under a tarpaulin. Hermann had somewhere borrowed peasant's clothes for Colling to wear, and Colling repeatedly went over in his mind what was to take place before the day ended. He realized that they could not be certain that there would be a transport that afternoon, or that when it occurred, that Elizabeth would be the prisoner being transported. He carried his Luger, prepared to use it if he had to.

Just after noon, he set out in the cart, and not quite two hours later, he found the Poles waiting for him beside the road in two wagons at the place he had designated. One of the wagons, with two of the men riding in it, held a high stack of wooden slatted cages filled with quietly squawking chickens. In front of it was the second wagon, driven by only one man. Colling reminded the Poles of what they must do, then drove his wagon far ahead of them around the curve and pulled in among the trees.

An hour had passed before Colling heard the Opel's coughing engine, and a few seconds later the car passed his hiding place, headed towards the camp. Colling hoped that his companions were now moving slowly towards him as planned. He stood on the seat of his wagon to obtain a better view of the road in the direction of the camp. He estimated he was afforded a clear view of over two kilometers, and he watched expectantly with the binoculars for the car's return.

The winter sun was bright overhead, and Colling first saw the car as a small moving dark spot in the clear air. As it came closer, he adjusted the binoculars to keep the vehicle in as sharp a focus as possible. He wanted to see into the back seat, but the car was jostling over the road so that it made it difficult to hold its image steady.

It took a split second for what he was seeing to register, then he realized that the figure seated in the car's rear seat was that of a man. It was too late to try and drive the wagon to warn his companions, and he almost panicked. But then in an instant, he jumped from the wagon seat to the ground and took off running through the

woods towards where he estimated the other two wagons would be by now. He broke from the cover of the trees just as the driver of the first wagon was alighting, and Colling shouted at him to get back on his cart and drive into the forest. The men on the second wagon heard him and reacted first, the driver slapping its horse and steering for an opening in the pines. Colling took the bridle of the horse pulling the other wagon and with its driver urging the horse on, managed to pull among the trees just seconds before the Opel rounded the curve. As the car passed, Colling could see that the prisoner whose head lolled back against the seat was indeed male.

Colling told the farmers that they could return to their homes, but to meet again at the same time and place the next day. As he drove his wagon back to the villa, Colling cursed himself for all the mistakes he had made. He had not prepared a way to be certain it was Elizabeth being transported; he had not anticipated the need to call off the rescue attempt at the last minute; he had not even thought it would have to be called off, and now he wondered whether the Russians in the car had noticed the tracks of the wagons they had passed leading into the woods, and whether they would find that strange. If they attempted the same thing tomorrow, would those in the car find it odd that they would pass the same farm wagons on the same road two days in a row?

Feeling utterly frustrated, he unhitched the horse in the villa's stable, and gave the animal a rub-down to drive out the cold. After seeing that it was fed, he went into the house. Helga had a hot meal waiting on the table in the kitchen, and invited him to sit and eat. Hermann came in a few minutes later and asked why he had not had one of the farm hands see to the horse and cart. Colling snapped that he needed the exercise, and the two servants left him to eat alone.

That night, Kwonowski visited the villa. The electrician had already heard about the false start that had occurred that afternoon. He told Colling that it was almost certain that the blonde woman prisoner would be transported the next day. Colling stopped himself from saying that he had heard that before, and told the Pole that there would be another attempt.

After breakfast the following morning, Colling rode the Zundapp to the place where he had waited with his wagon the previous day. He left the motorcycle covered with some branches and hiked back to the villa. There was less in the way of preparation to be done, and for some reason he could not discern, Colling found himself calmer than he had been the day before.

The rendezvous with the two wagons on the road was repeated, and after positioning his own wagon, Colling uncovered the Zundapp and rode to the place overlooking the camp where he and Kwonowski had hidden themselves two days before. It was not long until the same olive-drab Opel arrived, and the two Russians entered the headquarters building. Soon after, they came out followed by two guards carrying a limp figure between them. Colling recognized Elizabeth's face, thinner and paler, above the blanket that was wrapped around her.

Colling pushed the motorcycle down the reverse slope of the ridge for a short distance before starting the engine and racing off towards the road. He was well ahead of the Opel, and was already in the seat of his wagon, watching with the binoculars as the car came into view.

The Polish farmers played their parts to perfection. The Opel slid to a stop when it encountered the first wagon slewed across the road, one of its wheels off, and the driver waving his arms excitedly at the car. The second wagon, piled with the cages holding the chickens, was behind the disabled vehicle, and Colling heard a crash as the cages pitched over its side.

At first only the Russian driving the Opel stepped out of the car, shouting in Russian for the Pole to move his wagon. When the farmer continued to run in circles, shouting and cursing, the driver walked forward to a point where he could see that the road ahead around the curve was filled with running chickens, and that two men were trying to catch them. The driver shouted at the other Russian, and he jumped from the car. The two of them ran out of sight around the curve, chasing the chickens.

Colling reached into the wagon bed and pulled at the tarpaulin to uncover the mannequin. He was startled when the mannequin sat up, and he saw that it was the Countess. She hissed at him, "Hurry, before they come back," and pushed herself clumsily out of the cart. Colling started to protest, but the Countess grabbed him around the waist and said, "Hush. You must help me to the car. Hurry. No arguments."

Moving as quickly as they could, they reached the car and Colling pulled open the rear door. There was no response as he pulled Elizabeth towards him, then the Countess had taken the blanket and wrapped it around herself. She slipped into the back seat of the Opel and waved Colling away as she pulled the door closed.

Carrying Elizabeth in his arms, Colling ran towards the trees, hoping he would reach them before the Russians caught enough chickens to satisfy themselves.

He was in among the trees and shaking out a blanket with which to cover Elizabeth when he became aware that the two Russians were walking towards their car, each carrying a brace of flapping chickens. Colling watched them from the corner of his eye as he placed the blanket gently around Elizabeth. He was shocked at how thin she was, and how light a burden she made as he lifted her into the back of the wagon.

The Russians were laughing at the Polish farmers who were demanding the return of their chickens. They climbed back into their car without even a glance towards the back seat, and driving off the road to avoid the disabled wagon, roared away in a cloud of smoke.

When the Opel was out of sight, Colling trotted over to the three Poles, who were now laughing and slapping their knees in delight. He pulled money from his pocket and paid each of the men as he had agreed, adding a bonus of twenty dollars apiece which he explained was for their false start the day before. By the time Colling returned to his own wagon, the three men had lifted up the first wagon, and were in the process of replacing the wheel that it had lost. Colling guessed that within a few minutes, they would have vanished from sight.

When they arrived at the villa, Hermann and Helga rushed out to the wagon and followed Colling into the house. He carried Elizabeth in his arms up the stairs and into a bedroom that he had asked be made ready to receive a guest.

Elizabeth was in a delirium, semi-consciousness, moaning softly and muttering unintelligibly, and he could feel the heat of her fever the minute he had unwrapped her from the blanket. He was about to place her gently on the bed, when Helga waved him away with a flutter of her hands, and told him to wait. She brought large Turkish towels that she placed over the coverlet, then signaled that he should lay her down. He helped Helga remove the filthy prison uniform dress, and it was then that saw the bruises and sores on her legs and arms and the red marks circling her wrists and ankles.

Elizabeth began to shiver, and Helga told him to turn his back while she removed the tattered shift that she was wearing under the dress. Colling left the room as the maid began to gently sponge bathe her. He returned in a few minutes with a length of rope that he strung across the room and then draped with a sheet to screen the bed from the rest of the room.

Helga called to him to have Hermann bring one of the Countess' flannel nightgowns. Colling found the butler in the kitchen, stirring a steaming pot on the big wood stove. Colling relayed Helga's request, then followed Hermann as he produced a soft woolen nightdress from a dresser in his mistress's bedroom. Colling handed Helga the gown over the top of the makeshift screen, and in a few moments the maid announced that he could tell Hermann to bring the soup.

Colling held Elizabeth up so that Helga could feed her the hot broth, and each spoonful seemed to restore some of her strength. After awhile, however, she would take no more and Colling laid her back on the pillows. He placed his ear to her chest and could hear the congestion in her lungs. Colling guessed she had pneumonia. He went to his suitcase and took out the penicillin he had brought with him from Germany. She groaned when he gave her the injection, then dropped off to sleep.

Colling sat in a chair beside her bed for the next three days, leaving only for a few minutes at a time, and then only when Helga took his place. He continued to give her penicillin at six-hour intervals around the clock, estimating the dose based on his experience. Within 24 hours, the fever had subsided. The day after that, she opened her eyes and seemed to recognize him. In her delirium, she had appeared confused by his presence, and Colling did not attempt to explain. In those first days, Elizabeth spent most of her time sleeping, sometimes fitfully as her fever rose and fell, awakening only long enough to permit him or Helga to give her meat broth and soup.

On the fourth day, after Elizabeth seemed out of danger, Colling, realizing he had been remiss in not doing so earlier, asked Hermann about the Countess, expressing his concern with what the Russians might do to her when they became aware that she had been substituted for Elizabeth.

"I would not worry, Herr Krazinsky. There is no sign that the Russians know that this has taken place."

"I continue to be concerned about the Countess, nevertheless, Hermann," said Colling.

"I would not be, Herr Krazinsky. The Countess took with her a supply of morphia that had been prescribed to relieve the pain of her malignancy. She stated to me that it was her intention that she would not be alive when they reached Koltraskow. She believed that her death might have some usefulness."

Colling was appalled at the butler's revelation: "How could you let her do such a thing, Hermann?"

"Herr Krazinsky, I have served the von Brechtsler family for over twenty-five years, since I was a young man discharged from the Kaiser's army after the first war. I learned that nothing I could say or do would ever change the Countess' mind once she was determined upon something. So it is that I do not argue with her. In this she had made up her mind, and was not to be dissuaded."

"We must mourn her then?" asked Colling.

"Just so. I have had a date of her death engraved upon her tombstone. So far as anyone shall know, she is buried in the graveyard here on the estate."

"What about that doctor who visits?" asked Colling.

"He will not come again for several weeks. We will tell him that Madame died during the winter when the roads were impassable. That would not be altogether unexpected."

Kwonowski came to the villa at the end of the week to report that all was quiet. He was amazed that so far there was nothing to suggest that the Russians had discovered that Elizabeth had escaped. Colling told him about the Countess, and tears welled in the Pole's eyes.

"She was a great lady," said Kwonowski.

"Quite so. It is sad that she will be buried in some unknown forgotten place."

"The people hereabouts will not forget her."

After Colling had said goodbye to Kwonowski, he climbed the stairs to Elizabeth's room. He found her sitting up in bed, for the first time seeming fully awake. Helga was in a chair beside the bed, the remains of a meal on a tray on the bedside table. When Elizabeth saw Colling, her eyes brightened and as she spoke, the English that Colling had not heard for so long was strange to his ears.

"Jim. It is you. I thought it was a dream. When did you start wearing glasses?"

"Careful," said Colling, "They know me as Jerry Krazinsky around here. And the glasses are a long story."

She nodded as if that piece of information was not unusual and continued, "And where are we. This lady said we were at the estate of the Countess von Brechstler. Are we in Germany?"

"No, Poland. In the south, east of Krakow."

"I was in prison," she added soberly.

"Yes. The Russians had you."

Helga rose from her chair and interjected, "I must clear these dishes, Herr Krazinsky. If you will excuse me."

"Of course, Helga. Thank you very much."

Elizabeth watched as the maid gathered the tray and left the room.

"If we're in Poland, why is everyone speaking German?" Colling had a perception by the tone of her voice that she was asking the question to avoid discussing something else.

"The Countess was from Berlin, but her husband did business in Poland before the war."

"I see. How did 'Herr Krazinsky' come to end up here?"

"It's a long story. How are you?"

"Better, I think. It still hurts when I breathe."

"You had pneumonia. I gave you penicillin."

"How did you know where I was?"

"Quarles helped. At least I think it was him. I was given the name of a town and a contact. When I learned there was a prison camp nearby, I figured it out."

"So you came to Poland looking for me?"

"Yes," he said, uncertain as to whether to add anything else.

Elizabeth looked down at her folded hands. Without lifting her head, she said, "You might be sorry you did."

Colling sat beside her on the bed, placing his hand over hers, "I'm not sorry. I'm glad I was able to get you away from them."

She lifted her head to look directly at him. Her eyes were filled with tears. "Jim, they did things to me in there. Bad things." She stopped, choking back a sob.

Colling placed his arm around her shoulders, whispering to her, "Shhh. It's all right. Shh."

She was crying softly, her shoulders shaking. He held her close and tried to comfort her, but he felt helpless. The quiet words he was uttering seemed useless and empty. At last she drew back, dropping back against the pillow.

"Give me some time, Jim. Just give me some time."

Colling agreed, sensing that she wanted him to leave. She turned her head away into the pillow as he closed the door behind him.

If it had not been for Hermann, Colling would have forgotten that Christmas was almost upon them. He found the butler decorating a tree that had been set up in a large room across the entrance foyer from the library.

"Not so happy a Christmas this year, Hermann?" said Colling.

"The Countess always maintained the tradition, even throughout the war. I think it is up to us to continue as long as we are able to do so."

"Just so."

Hermann did not look up from hanging one brightly colored glass ornament after another on the tree, as he added, "The tenant farmers will expect a Yule gift. I am not certain what to do."

"How many are there?" asked Colling.

"Six farmers and their wives and children. Madame always gave them Polish gold coins, but the last of those were gone last year. One gold piece for each man and woman, and some small thing for each child. This year I have made toy wagons from wood for the boys, and Helga has sewed dresses for the girls. But the parents, alas, will have nothing."

"I have some money," said Colling, "Not gold, but American dollars. I owe you, and the Countess, much. It is only fitting that I do this."

"Better Polish currency, Herr Krazinsky. Dollars would be noticed."

"I have some zlotys, Hermann. A few thousand perhaps," offered Colling, taking one of the ornaments and placing it on the tree.

"That will do nicely. The farmers are worried that things will be unsettled with the Countess' death. This will help reassure them."

Elizabeth's recovery was proceeding apace. Her fever was gone, and Colling stopped the penicillin injections and started her on tablets, instructing her to hold them in her mouth until they dissolved. He explained that if she were to swallow them, they would be digested and of no effect. She had been out of bed for almost a week when she and Helga discovered that she could wear the Countess' clothes. The color had returned to her cheeks, and she was no longer the pitifully thin figure that Colling had carried up the stairs.

Kwonowski visited every week or so to bring them news. There continued to be no sign that the Russians were aware that the woman who had died in their custody was not Elizabeth, but there had been inquiries about two men in a pickup truck, one an American. Kwonowski had seen to it that the NKVD men who had come asking had been told that the truck had last been seen weeks ago, during a heavy snow storm, heading towards Krakow, but with only one man, a Pole, at the wheel. The story had to be repeated more than once, as different officers came in their cars, asking the same questions. Finally, the visits had ceased, and Kwonowski guessed that the Russians must have decided that in the blizzard, the truck had fallen into a ravine or through the ice of one of the lakes that bordered the road between Dwiespestka and the city. Kwonowski advised against taking the Ford from its hiding place in the stable.

On Christmas eve, the tenant farmers and their families gathered in a group before the villa, and Hermann and Helga invited them in to see the decorated tree. Both the adults and the children shyly accepted pastries and glasses of hot sweet tea from trays held by Helga and Elizabeth, then Hermann made a short speech in which he noted the Countess' passing. When he was finished, he distributed to each of the adults envelopes which Colling knew to contain two thousand zlotys. When the last of the Yule money was handed over, Hermann asked for everyone's attention. He then announced, as he gave each of the six men a large folded vellum document, that the Countess von Brechtsler had bequeathed to each of them the land that they were farming. They were no longer tenants, but landowners.

The farmers and their wives exhibited a mixture of joy and sorrow, and tears flowed freely as they hugged first Hermann, then Colling, Helga and Elizabeth. When some semblance of calm had returned, Elizabeth and Helga sat beside the tree and called the names of each of the farmer's children and gave them their gifts. Hermann brought out a bottle of Hennessey and poured a small glass for each of the adults. They then drank in unison to the memory of Countess von Brechtsler.

When their guests had gone, Colling invited Hermann and Helga to join Elizabeth and himself in the library. Over a snifter of the French cognac, Colling explained that as soon as the weather cleared, and assuming that

the Russians did not discover them by then, that he and Elizabeth would be leaving for Krakow to take the train to Vienna.

Seated comfortably in his easy chair, Hermann looked at Colling over the rim of his brandy glass, then said, "The trains are well-guarded these days, Herr Krazinsky. You and Elzbieta are most likely to be apprehended by the Russians."

"We have not the choice to walk," replied Colling.

"Perhaps to go by motorcar," said Hermann.

"The pickup is not possible," said Colling, "The Russians are looking for it."

"Come with me," said the butler.

After they put on their overcoats, Colling followed Hermann across the snow-covered yard to the stables. The butler led him past the parked Ford truck to the end of the building, to where what was obviously a car was hidden under a piece of lightweight canvas. With a flourish, Hermann pulled the covering off to reveal a black Mercedes limousine.

"It is Madame's. It has not been on a road in many years, since the summer of 1939. But I have placed it on blocks to preserve the tires, and I have started the engine each month and run it for awhile. I believe that it will function perfectly. I have oil and petrol, and there is grease to lubricate the bearings before it is driven."

Colling considered this development as Hermann went on showing him the car. He had admittedly been worried about his and Elizabeth's travelling by rail. He was uncertain as to whether the forged travel documents were still valid, and the American passports could prove to be a fatal giveaway, even though the cover story he had constructed was about as good as he could make it. Another plan began to hatch, and he asked Hermann, "Do I understand correctly that by using this car it will be possible for you and Helga to accompany us?"

"I had thought that, of course, Herr Krazinsky. With Madame gone, there is nothing here for us. We wish very much to return to Germany."

"What of your papers?"

"We have Reich passports, from before the war, but with endorsements from the pre-war government that authorize our residing in Poland. I do not know how such documents will be treated now."

Colling gave what the butler had said some thought before answering. Tomasz' wife and children would presumably have Polish documents, which would be replaced by the American passport and the children's authorizations that Colling had gone to lengths to obtain. He considered whether the wife's papers might be altered enough to allow Helga to use them. He still had Jelasow's identification that Hermann might use. Having an escort authorized by the NKVD might lend more plausibility to their masquerade. Everything was beginning to point towards using the limousine.

He finally said, "I think that it will be possible for you to accompany us. But we must wait until the snows have gone. The roads must be passable. And you and Helga will have roles to play that you must learn."

"I know I can be of much service, Herr Krazinsky. Many times I drove Madame to Warsaw and other places. The war may have changed things somewhat, but I believe that I can find my way anywhere in this country."

Colling was more concerned about being caught than with their finding their way, and he asked, "Will there need to be a change in the license plates?"

"I do not know if any differences may exist since before the war. But we have the papers from the Ford truck to look at," suggested the butler.

There were no registration documents to be found in the pickup. Colling looked at the license plate on the truck to compare it with that on the Mercedes. Except for the difference in the numbers, he could see no discernible distinction between the two. Hermann informed him that the government did not furnish license plates, only the numbers to be used. Each vehicle owner was required to have the plates made in a garage, according to certain specifications, and these did not change over time.

Using the Mercedes would entail a more elaborate scheme that he had imagined would be necessary, but its complicated nature could paradoxically mean that it stood a greater chance of success. Colling made up his mind to take the risk of using the car.

Hermann brought him the papers from the limousine, and Colling saw that it was registered to Produkcja Generalny Polski. Hermann explained that 'P.G.P.' was one of the Count's old corporations in Warsaw. As far as Hermann knew, all its assets had been either destroyed in the war or seized by the Germans, the Poles or the

Russians, who knew? Colling wondered how far the corporate registration would carry them. At least the name 'von Brechtsler' was not on the papers, which would be certain to engender questions.

Colling told Hermann he should prepare the Mercedes for a long journey. Fortunately, they had a supply of gasoline from the pickup. He returned to the mansion and found Elizabeth in her room, sitting in bed and reading one of the books from the library. His own aptitude with written Polish was limited, and he envied her access to the contents of the estate's collection of books, none of which seemed to be in English.

"The Countess had a Mercedes. We'll be using it to get to Vienna," he said as she looked up from her reading. He sat on the bed beside her.

She did not react immediately to this news, but then said, "Won't driving around Poland in a Mercedes be a bit ostentatious?"

"I have American passports for us both. Hermann can go as our chauffeur, and Helga as your maid. We also have to find Tomasz' wife and daughters first. I brought papers for them."

"And according to those papers, who will they be?"

"Our daughters and their nanny."

"My, aren't we the Ritz! Who are we going to be, the Rockefellers?"

"No. Big shot Communists from the U.S.A."

She laughed, "Good Lord, Jim. Who is going to believe that? And the little girls won't pass for Americans. I doubt if they speak a word of English."

"We don't let them get asked questions."

"This is crazy. Besides, if we're supposed to be American Reds, the Russians wouldn't just let their guests roam around without keeping tabs on them."

"Right. That's why Hermann is going to be a Polish NKVD operative. I don't think he'd pass as a Russian, or I'd try that."

"Where are you going to get identification papers for that little masquerade?" she asked.

"I came to Poland as an American Party member. The ruse worked…for a while. They assigned a keeper to me, to keep tabs on what I was doing. I have his papers for Hermann."

Elizabeth looked uncomfortable as she asked, "Is it best I not ask how you got them?"

"Probably better you not know the details."

"All right," She paused, then asked, "But I do need to know some other details. Who are we going to be?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Warrencliffe, III. The son and daughter-in-law of wealthy supporters of the world socialist movement. Dad owns a publishing house that puts out avant-garde stuff that doesn't sell very well. Money's inherited, mostly in commercial real estate. The kids, that's us, have taken things even farther and are both Party members."

Elizabeth smiled and asked, "Where did you ever dig this story up?"

"From The Daily Worker," said Colling, taking the folded newspaper from his jacket pocket and handing it to her. "My cousin Jerry… that's where the 'Herr Krazinsky' comes from…was a Party member in Milwaukee. I had my mom send his things to me. I remembered that he had saved a bunch of Daily Workers. What you are looking at is an article about the old man giving a speech at a meeting in New York. Has his picture and bio. Says he has kids, and I thought we could be them."

"Are they from New York?" she asked.

"From Chicago. Ever been to Chicago?"

"Once, when Daddy took us to a convention there. I was twelve, I think."

"You'll have to wing it, but I know my way around Chicago, and can do most of the talking. I'm taking the Daily Workers along to embellish things if we need to. If we get to the point where they want more detailed information, it will be too late, anyway."

"It will be too late for me, Jim. I won't let them take me alive. I won't go through it again."

"I have a Russian pistol. I'll teach you how to use it if you want."

"I would appreciate that. I'd advise you, if you brought that Luger of yours, to think about using it on yourself if you have to. And if you have to, use it on me, too."

"I don't think there's any need to talk like that!"

"I mean it, Jim. You don't want to know all the things that they do to you in there. You wouldn't want to go through them, and I won't do it again."

He put his arm around her shoulders to comfort her and she rested her head on his chest. When she raised her face to look at him, his lips met hers briefly, and she pushed him away. “I can’t, Jim. Not yet.”

He had been aware that his desire for Elizabeth had grown each day as he had watched her become healthier and stronger, but he had kept both his words and his actions towards her in check, sensing that her experiences in the camp must have been dreadful. Now, as Elizabeth drew away from him, his heart ached with despair for both of them. Even if they did survive, he was certain that nothing would be as it had been in those terribly few happy days they had had together the previous spring.

The New Year came and went. The days passed, and on those when the sun broke through the clouds, Colling and Elizabeth took long walks through the estate’s forests. They exchanged stories from their childhoods, consciously avoiding discussion of Elizabeth’s imprisonment and any recollection of their days together at Frau Bergheim’s.

Kwonowski came to visit and told them that the national elections had resulted in the Russian-sponsored coalition gaining control of the government. Things would be much worse now. Thousands of members of the Home Army had been arrested, and many killed, in the months leading up to the election. Local members were keeping a low profile, hoping not to come to the attention of the Russians or the Polish Communists. Kwonowski counted himself fortunate that his work in the resistance during the war had required him to appear to collaborate with the Germans openly. He was not known locally as a Home Army member, and his technical skills were likely to continue to make him useful to the new regime. He nevertheless had a pessimistic, if not morose, opinion about what the future would hold, and informed Colling he would not jeopardize them by returning to the villa again.

Hermann applied himself to the renovation of the limousine, and before long, he had it out, driving it around the stable yard. One day, as Colling watched the butler working on the vehicle, he commented on Hermann’s mechanical ability, and Hermann told him a little of his personal history.

In his estimation, it had been a stroke of luck that he had been assigned to transportation corps soon after being joining the Kaiser’s army. That was where he learned to drive, and to repair automobiles. After his discharge at the end of the war, he was fortunate to find work in a garage in Berlin where Count von Brechtsler kept his cars, and the Count had come to know who he was. The Count’s chauffeur was killed by a stray bullet when he was unlucky enough to have driven one of von Brechstler’s cars into a street where a street-battle, so common after the war, was being waged between two opposing factions of Strassenkämpfer. No matter how unfortunate this event was for the chauffeur, it proved to be the opposite for Hermann,because he was offered the dead man’s position the following day. He had started as chauffeur, with his duties including repair and maintenance of the Count’s three autos, and then after a time, he was taken into the house and instructed as a butler. He had followed the Count and Countess to Poland, married a Polish woman when the von Brechtslers were living in Warsaw for a few years, and learned to speak fairly decent Polish. After his first wife died of influenza, he married Helga, who had joined the household when the von Brechstlers made a two months’ visit to Berlin.

As Hermann came to the end of his narrative, Colling realized that he did not know the man’s last name, and on asking, discovered that it was Breitmann. Addressing him for the first time as “Herr Breitmann,” Colling began the preparations for the journey ahead of them by explaining what he and Helga would have to be prepared to do to make their escape from Poland successful.

Chapter Fifteen

February, 1947

Elizabeth informed him that Zaletski’s wife and daughters were hiding in a village only twenty kilometers west of Dwiespestka. She had been trying to arrange transportation there from Krakow when she was stopped on the street in a routine check of identity papers. Unfortunately, the group of officials who she encountered included an NKVD lieutenant who recognized the name “Anna Zariski” as someone for whom they were looking. Elizabeth had been cautious about not disclosing her departure date or itinerary before she left, and Quarles was the only one who knew the reason she was going to Poland. But she had obtained her identity papers through someone Quarles used in Heidelberg, and she was certain that the source of the betrayal must be there.

Colling agreed, pointing out that the previous spring, the documents that had been prepared for the two of them in Germany seemed to mark them from the start, while those they obtained from Tomek had served them well all the way to the end. He told her about Jalesow, and how he could not, for the life of him, figure out how the Reds had seen through his impersonation of Jerzy Krazinsky. He did not think that they had any idea who he really was, only that they had not accepted his role as a Milwaukee cell member as genuine. He speculated that in the ever-suspicious Communist mind, it had been necessary to make inquiries about the American who came bringing a cash donation. He speculated that it had probably not been too difficult for them to find someone in the Party in Milwaukee who had known his cousin and who gave them the news that Jerry Krazinsky was dead.

Discussing what might have gone wrong in the past, and seeking to come up with logical explanations for what had occurred, seemed to permit Elizabeth, at least to a limited extent, to come to grips with what she had experienced. For the first time, she began relating parts of what had happened to her, discussing them in such an objective way that Colling characterized it in his mind as forced indifference.

She was proud that she had not betrayed Tomasz' family. But she had disclosed everything that she knew about Quarles and his organization, little enough that it was. She said she might have mentioned Tomek, but she could not be sure. She remembered babbling on at one point about the Hungarian Riding Academy, and the people she had known there.

Colling described the staged jeep accident, and the quirk of fate in his meeting Vitarelli that put him on the path to discover that she had not been killed. He left out mention of his initial reaction when he thought she was dead. Elizabeth listened, then thought for a moment, and said that that would explain why her captors had come back persistently with questions about her identity, even though by the second week, she thought she had told them her entire life history.

Colling asked her if she had told them about himself, and when she said she had never, to the best of her knowledge, spoken of him, what should have come as a relief was in fact painful, as he supposed that she had not thought him important enough to warrant betrayal.

Elizabeth managed to talk about the substance of the questions she had been asked, and how she had answered. She did not discuss the prison living conditions, or what had been done to her by her captors, and Colling made no effort to draw that information from her.

Once Colling knew where Tomasz' wife and daughters were, he gave his attention to devising a scheme to bring them to the von Brechstler estate. He did not want to use the Mercedes, because he did not want news of its existence to be discussed in the district. The pickup was out of the question, what with the Russians having made inquiries about it, and the chance that they might run into a Soviet patrol of some sort on the road.

The village where the three were hiding was too far away for walking in winter. He settled upon employing the wagon he had used in rescuing Elizabeth. Elizabeth would have to accompany him, since only she knew the code words that would identify her as their rescuer.

A few dry days in February, and a slight rise in temperature, left the roads clear of ice and snow, although small drifts of white remained along their edges. Colling hoped that the increase would not be warm enough to cause a thaw and turn the roads into mud. Hermann was able to borrow clothes from somewhere that left Colling and Elizabeth looking like a local peasant couple. The following morning, they bundled into the cart, and set off before dawn.

Their disguise was necessarily impromptu, and they carried no papers. Colling calculated that it was reasonable to assume that Polish peasants travelling by wagon would be seen as locals going about their business, and would not be stopped by Russians or Polish communists they might chance to meet along the way. If they were, they would have to put on a show of ignorance and try and talk their way out of any difficulty. As it turned out, they passed a few farmers walking with axes over their shoulders, apparently headed to cut firewood, and only one other vehicle, a cartload of hay whose driver seemed to be sleeping while his horse found its way to wherever it was going.

Fortunately, Tomasz had given Elizabeth precise directions on how to reach the house they were seeking, in order to avoid having to ask directions. The village was small and poor, composed of perhaps twenty houses, most of them made of logs, each cottage surrounded by a rough picket fence. Its streets consisted of three dirt tracks crossing the rutted highway. There was nothing that looked like a store or shop, although Colling guessed that one larger house on the main road might serve as a tavern of sorts.

They found the small log house on one of the side streets just where Tomasz described it as being. Oddly enough, a neatly-lettered sign was nailed to the low fence in front, stating Sckowa or "School." Colling found it hard to imagine why anyone would locate a school in a poor village such as this place. He also wondered at the advisability of using it as a hiding place, since it would seem natural that the Communists would make it a priority to know what was being taught in any school operating within their territory.

With Elizabeth beside him on the front stoop of the house, Colling knocked at the door. They could hear children's voices while they waited. Colling knocked a second time, and the door was opened by a thin balding man who seemed to be about fifty. He looked them up and down through a thick pair of glasses, and then asked, "Yes, what can I do for you?"

Before Colling could respond, Elizabeth asked, "Do you have someone who can teach my daughter the piano?"

The man looked puzzled, then invited them in. They found themselves in a large room that was obviously the kitchen. In another room directly in front of them they could see a group of children seated at small tables, arranged as a classroom. A woman's voice could be heard, dictating what sounded as if it were a lesson about the alphabet. Their host invited them to sit at the long table in front of the fireplace, where something was cooking in a large kettle suspended over the fire.

The man left them for a few minutes, then returned from somewhere else in the house with a pretty dark-haired woman in her thirties. She asked, "I understand you wish piano lessons. Is there a preferred composer?"

Elizabeth said, "Chopin, of course."

The woman's face broke into a smile, and she turned to the man who had let them in, "I believe these people are friends of Tomasz'. I am Elena and this is Tomasz' brother, Stefan Zaletski."

Stefan stepped forward to offer his hand to Colling, and for the first time, Colling noticed the red enameled star pinned to the lapel of the man's vest. Colling hesitated for a moment, and his reaction was noticed by the Pole, who reached up and touched the pin. Before either man could speak, Elena said, "Do not pay too much heed to Stefan's decorations. It is a matter of survival."

"Sorry," said Elizabeth, "But we did not expect a Party member."

"Not to worry," said Elena, "To be a school master, one must display the proper credentials."

"Yes," added Stefan. "The pin was given to me by a German soldier who had taken it from the cap of a Soviet soldier whom he had killed. The Kraut happened to be grateful for a bottle of vodka I gave him. I wear it now because the Reds have already visited our village, and will come again. When they see the red star, they show some friendliness."

Colling decided it was best to finish the introductions, and said that their names were Jan and Elzbieta Woznica. He was about to remind everyone that they should be on their way when Stefan offered tea. He quickly found glasses and soon the four of them were seated at the table. Elizabeth did not appear to share his concern that they not delay, and she began asking questions about the school and the Zaletskis.

Stefan had taught in schools in Krakow and Warsaw before deciding to accept an appointment as a rural schoolmaster under the pre-war Polish government. He and his wife, also a teacher…it was she teaching the class in the next room…had been sent to a number of postings, and just before the German invasion, had come here. There had been little fighting in the vicinity, and it had turned out to be a relatively quiet, though very difficult, five years in getting through the war. Life was primitive, and food was often in short supply. The few Nazi and Soviet troops that did wander through found little to loot, and by hiding in the woods, they had avoided being victims of the soldiers' anger or caprice.

Elizabeth finished her tea and set her glass on the table. She looked at Elena, "How soon can you have the girls' things and your own packed?"

"Very soon. It will not take long. Let me fetch the girls."

Elena Zaletski was true to her word, and not more than a half-hour had passed before she and her two girls were clambering into the wagon with their luggage. Stefan and his wife Maria bid Elena a tearful goodbye. Before climbing up to sit in the driver's seat, Colling gave the schoolmaster five twenty-dollar bills. Stefan stared wide-eyed at the banknotes, then, as Colling pressed the bills towards him, quickly folded them and stuffed them into his trousers pocket. The man and his wife stood waving at them as Colling urged the little mare down the path to the main road.

Elena had introduced her daughters' as Katya and Basia, adding that Katya was eleven and Basia eight. Colling asked if either of the girls spoke English, and Elena, puzzled at the question, told him that they knew only Polish. Colling then asked Elena if she spoke English, and she said, "Yes, a little." Colling informed her that she and the girls would have to learn at least some English, and quite soon.

The return to the villa was even less eventful than their journey that morning. The winter roads were still relatively empty, and Colling conjectured that the fact that there were many Home Army veterans in the south of Poland might be a possible inhibiting factor in the Russians and Polish Reds putting out any regular patrols. Colling suspected that that would change by spring, and it would be important to move quickly at the first real break in the weather.

Colling had debated with himself about the best route to take out of Poland, and decided that he wanted the opinions of Hermann and Elizabeth in reaching a final decision. One evening, he asked that they join him in the kitchen, and over hot glasses of sweet tea, speaking German, he told them that he wanted their comments regarding the best way out of the country. On the table, Colling spread an Esso roadmap he had found in the pickup's glove compartment.

Hermann spoke first, running his finger over the map, "Herr Krazinsky, the closest border is south, but the roads through the mountains are not good, and crossing into Czechoslovakia will be difficult. We are as likely as not to be turned back even by the Czech authorities, and all crossings have in place Russians as well."

Colling gently reminded Hermann that he would soon have to substitute "Mister Warrencliffe" for "Herr Krazinsky" when addressing him, then, pointing to the map, said, "There are, I believe, certain other possibilities. We might go west towards the Czech border. The distance there across Czechoslovakia to Austria is not great, and if we could reach the U.S. area of Vienna, we would be safe. But we would have to cross the Soviet zone of Austria for a long space of time before we could reach the American zone of Vienna. We might also go farther north, then across the border to Prague, then into Germany. Or, we might choose northwest, around Czechoslovakia and directly to Germany, but that is all the Russian Zone, and more dangerous than Poland."

"What about our route last summer?" asked Elizabeth in English.

"You mean north to the Baltic?" said Colling, responding in German for the butler's benefit.

Elizabeth apologized to Hermann, then responded in German, "Yes. It would be my thought that there will be less problem with checkpoints inside Poland than at the borders. And thus far, no one seems to be seeking us," she replied.

Hermann nodded his head in agreement, "Yes, Herr…Mister…Warrencliffe, this is a good idea. The Count and Madame went to the seashore on a number of occasions. That was the summer, of course, but I know the way."

Colling had thought about going north to the sea, as had been done before, but had some hesitancy because of the probable condition of the roads, and he voiced that concern.

Hermann replied, "It will, I believe, require that we go to Warsaw. You must understand that before the war, even, the only reasonably decent roads were between the major cities. I think, in truth, there are few or no other passable roads. The highway from Krakow to Warsaw will be necessary, then to Danzig…I believe, however, they call it now 'Gdansk.'"

"And once there?" asked Colling. "How will we manage to cross the sea?"

"Alas, Herr…Warrencliffe…, I have no certain answer for that. Perhaps find a boat of some kind."

"Maybe another Orion Belle, Jim?" asked Elizabeth.

"Not too likely," said Colling, "I have read that shipping from the West has been severely limited in this past year. I do not believe we will encounter an Orion Belle in Gdansk. It might be possible to hire a fisherman who would be willing to take us across."

Hermann interjected, "Even before the war, every fisherman on the Baltic was known to do some smuggling. It could even be more prevalent, given the current political climate."

Try as he might, Colling could not see any other alternative that might work as well. None of them were without their uncertainties and risks, but the Baltic seemed to be the most promising. "Done," he said, "We go to the Baltic. Our story will be that we wish to see the coast, even if it is the wrong season of the year. We are tourists, travelling on Papa's money, seeing a new communist state being born."

"We're going to have to have lots of luck on our side to pull this off," said Elizabeth in English.

"You bet," said Colling in the same language.

A good part of their time over the next two weeks was spent drilling the two little girls and their mother in a series of English phrases and reminding the children that they must avoid speaking Polish whenever strangers, especially policemen or soldiers, were present. Colling's greatest worry was that these instructions would be forgotten, but Elizabeth had learned from Elena that the children had followed her directions to be close-mouthed while they had been in hiding for the past year, and believed that there would be no mistakes.

Elizabeth made a selection from the Countess' wardrobe of a number of items, most with expensive Paris and New York labels. Helga proved to be a skilled seamstress, and she shortened the hems of the skirts to conform to the current style. Altering the men's suits and other clothing that had once belonged to the Count was more difficult, but eventually Colling had a selection of clothing that would enable him to be seen as a well-dressed young American with a taste for the European styles.

Colling also went over Hermann's role with him, rehearsing and quizzing him regarding his new identity. Helga was a lesser concern. Her role as maid was close to reality, and would require nothing more complicated than remaining close-lipped. She needed only to remember to address Colling and Elizabeth by the right assumed names, and understand who the other members of their party were supposed to be.

No snow fell during the final week of February, and Colling decided that the time had come. They would leave before dawn on Monday, March 3, 1947. His two weeks' furlough had begun in November, and he should have been back with his unit before Thanksgiving. He had been AWOL for over 90 days, and accepted the fact that he was now classified as a deserter three times over.

Chapter Sixteen

March, 1947

They reached Krakow by mid-afternoon of their first day of travel. The big Mercedes limousine provided a surprisingly comfortable ride. Hermann drove, with Elizabeth and Colling in the front seat beside him. Elena and the children rode in the spacious back with Helga. The larger pieces of luggage were in the trunk, together with a few bottles of wine and cognac that Hermann insisted that they bring with them, and some tins of caviar and other delicacies. The chrome pull-down rack on the rear of the car was filled with jerry cans of gasoline and an extra spare tire. The heavy vehicle rode well over the rutted country roads. They stopped only occasionally to stretch their legs, and at noon ate a lunch comprised of sandwiches from a picnic basket that Helga had prepared before they departed.

Colling told Hermann not to stop in Krakow, despite the butler's warning that there would be no hotels between there and Czestochowa, and only poor accommodations there. Colling reminded him that success depended heavily on speed.

Outside Krakow they encountered their first checkpoint, their path barred by several saw-horses placed across the road. The place was manned by soldiers in Russian-style uniforms wearing Polish insignia, backed up by a contingent of Red Army men. They all stared pointedly at the big Mercedes, talking among themselves, and Colling guessed that they were discussing this unusual event.

The Polish lieutenant who approached the driver's window asked for their papers. As they had rehearsed, Hermann first handed over his identification as a police operative, then the general safe conduct pass that Tomek had prepared from the template that Colling had provided. Colling got out of his side of the car and walked around to hand over the American passports for himself, Elizabeth and Elena, and the certificates for the girls. Tucked into his and Elizabeth's passports were their Communist Party of the U.S.A. membership cards. Hermann shouted gruffly at Helga, who gave him her Polish identity papers, which he handed over to the Pole.

A Russian officer came to join the Polish lieutenant, and the two of them thumbed through the documents. They looked up as Colling said in English, "Everything in order, Comrades?"

The Polish officer apparently understood him, because he asked, with a heavy accent, "Mister, where you going?"

"Warsaw," replied Colling, "We've been touring the country. Just came down from Warsaw the other day, down the Vistula. We left Tarnow late yesterday. Thought we'd have a look at Krakow before going back to Warsaw." As soon as he got the words out, Colling prayed that he would not be asked where they had stayed in Krakow.

The Russian officer held out his hand, saying something in Russian, and the Polish lieutenant said, "He welcomes you to Poland. He sees you are Communist from America. He is happy to…how is said? Make your acquaintance."

Colling shook the Russian's hand and said, "Tell him I am honored to be in the new People's Republic of Poland. I am much impressed, and will tell my comrades at home about the progress that has been made here."

The Polish officer translated, and Colling suspected his Russian was nearly as bad as his English, but the Russian officer smiled broadly. Their documents were returned to them, and smiling, Colling climbed back into the limousine. The Polish lieutenant said something to Hermann before he rolled up his window, and as they drove past the barrier of sawhorses that the soldiers had moved aside for them, he said, "He told me I was lucky to have such an assignment, driving rich Americans around. Told me to ask for a gratuity."

They were in Czestochowa just after dusk. Hermann asked at a post office where he might find accommodations for the night, and they were directed to what was apparently the town's only hotel, a small, run-down place on the outskirts that looked as if it had been converted from a private residence. In the dark, the shabby appearance of its exterior was not noticeable, but as they filed into the entrance hall that served as a lobby, they could see that the establishment had seen better days.

The hotel's two staff members, a clerk and a maid, were friendly, however, and the rooms were warm. When they tried the hotel's dining room, they found that the one dish appearing on the menu, cabbage cooked with spiced ground meat, was plain but filling. Colling slept beside Elizabeth for the first time in nearly a year, and during the night she embraced him in her sleep, murmuring something. He returned the embrace, but did not wake her.

They bundled into the limousine early the next morning. The innkeeper was extremely pleased when Colling paid him in dollars, and wished them all a safe journey, waving from the steps of the hotel as they drove away.

There were four more stops by officials as they made their way towards Warsaw. Each time, their American passports, the general safe conduct pass and the Party identification seemed to make an impression, and they were waved on their way. At one checkpoint, a half-intoxicated Russian major insisted that Hermann, Colling and Elizabeth drink vodka with him, toasting the triumph of socialism and the Great Comrade Stalin. Colling was concerned that the Russian would not be satisfied with their drinking one glass with him, and hit upon the idea of making the man a gift of a bottle of the Countess' cognac, diverting his attention long enough for them to slip away.

Colling told Hermann that he did not want to enter Warsaw proper, but to circle it. The butler said he had never done so when driving the Count and Madame, and was unsure of what roads to take. They eventually pulled out the Esso map and traced a circuitous route around the city that would bring them to the main road leading north. Colling hoped that the roads were as they had been in 1938, when the map was printed.

They reached the place where they would leave the main highway to detour around Warsaw as the sun was low in the sky. Hermann was hesitant about trying to find their way in the dark. He said that he might know of a place where they might spend the night, and Colling agreed to pass the turnoff and allow Hermann to take them to where he guessed they might find accommodations.

Even in the waning light, Hermann had little difficulty locating the house for which he was looking. It was a large mansion on a tree-lined street of similar houses on the city's outskirts. Hermann explained that one of the Count's business managers had owned the home, and it was possible that the man was still living there. Colling was not as optimistic, and said so.

Hermann pulled the bell cord that hung beside the mansion's wrought-iron gate. A few minutes later, a stooped old man came out to see who had rung. He was someone Hermann did not know, but when Hermann asked for Panowie Bronoskowicz, the old man opened the gate and invited them in.

The Count's former manager greeted Hermann warmly and asked about the Countess. Hermann told him that she had died, and Bronoskowicz expressed his condolences. After some reminisces about the von Brechstlers, Hermann introduced Colling and asked if they might find shelter for the night for themselves and five others travelling with them. Bronoskowicz explained that he was required to share his house with four families who had been assigned to him by the government. They were all pretty decent folk, he admitted, but he no longer had any guest bedrooms to offer. After a moment's thought, however, he extended an invitation for their party to sleep in his part of the mansion. He had a bedroom, bath and sitting room, and thought that if they were willing to sleep on the floor for one night, they would be crowded but indoors and warm.

Bronoskowicz showed Hermann where he might park the Mercedes behind the house, and then led his new-found guests to his rooms. The women took over the task of using bedclothes and blankets from the limousine to provide places for everyone to sleep. When the children had been put to bed on the floor of their host's bedroom, the adults gathered in the sitting room and shared cognac from one of the bottles brought from the villa. Bronoskowicz had much to say about the current state of things in Poland, as well as his experiences during the war. He had been pressed into service running factories by first the Germans, then the Polish national liberation government, and now the Communist government. He was of the opinion that his current bosses were undoubtedly the worst. They were only able to set quotas, but found it impossible to provide the raw materials or skilled labor required to meet them. He fully expected to be demoted to worker status at any time, or perhaps worse, to be sent to a labor camp.

Their presence in the house did not seem to arouse any particular interest in the other tenants, although as they loaded the Mercedes early the following morning, they could see faces peering from the windows overlooking the parked limousine. Colling was anxious to be off, but before he left, he handed Bronoskowicz a roll containing five hundred dollars, telling him that he should use the money to get out of Poland at the earliest opportunity.

They passed some stretches of scenery that looked familiar to Colling and Elizabeth as they traveled in a circle around Warsaw. They encountered no checkpoints on what were essentially dirt tracks through farm country. The fields on either side were bare, flecked by patches of snow, and they passed only a handful of locals using the road.

When they emerged onto the main highway to Danzig, it was not long before they saw the Vistula. Colling wondered what had happened to the boatman, Petr Zaminoski, and his family, and whether the Russian colonel was still trading currency in the town square of that nearby village. He could not recall its name. He looked over at Elizabeth and asked himself if she were having the same thoughts.

The first checkpoint of the day was at a bridge crossing a tributary of the Vistula that Colling understood to be the Brda. The bridge was made of steel and appeared to have been put in place parallel to the ruins of the former bridge by Russian engineers. It was similar to others Colling had seen in Germany, and he guessed it to be of American manufacture. A black and white striped pole served as a barrier on their end of the bridge, and Colling could see its twin at the bridge's north end. There were no Polish guards around, only Red Army troops, and the blue collar flashes and cap bands of the officers in charge marked them as NKVD. Colling felt a nervous flutter in the pit of his stomach as one of the NKVD men asked Hermann for their papers while his companions sized up the Mercedes and its passengers.

Colling kept to his usual practice, and exited his side of the car and walked around it to stand beside the Russian. The officer barely glanced up from scrutinizing Hermann's police identity card, and Colling said in English, smiling and in as cheerful a voice as he could muster, "Greetings, Comrade! Here are our passports."

Colling did not know whether it was the English or his display of good humor towards a secret police officer that caught the Russian's attention, but the man turned to him and responded in slightly accented English, "Greetings. You are Englishman or American?"

"Americans. Having a look at Poland. The Party office in Warsaw was really swell in getting us permission to travel."

The NKVD man took the passports that Colling had been holding out to him. He began to slowly read through each of them, pulling out the Party cards and staring at them. Suddenly he shouted something in Russian, and a second NKVD man came over to join them. The first officer handed the documents to his companion and asked what sounded to Colling like a question. A discussion between the two ensued, seemingly some kind of argument. Colling suddenly realized that Elizabeth was standing at his side. She spoke to the two officers in Russian, and they both bowed slightly to her and responded in a more respectful tone of voice.

Elizabeth had the copy of The Daily Worker with the story about Warrencliffe Senior, and opened it to show it to them, pointing to the picture and to Colling. She went on conversing with the Russians, and they were soon both smiling, and at one point, laughed with her at something she said. Elizabeth turned towards the limousine and motioned with her hand, calling Helga's name. The maid emerged from the car with two bottles of Hennessey, the last two bottles by Colling's count, and handed them to Elizabeth, who in turn presented them to the NKVD men. At this, the officer that Colling had spoken to first brushed past him and approached the rear

passenger door that Helga had left standing open, and stuck his head into the car, smiling at the two little girls and asking in his accented English, “How are you, little girls?”

In unison, the children answered him, “Fine, sir. How are you?”

Colling was hoping that the conversation would not go on, but the NKVD man was encouraged by the girls’ response, and after responding to their question with, “I am fines, too,” asked, “What is names, please?”

“Barbara, sir,” said Basia.

“Katherine, sir,” said Katya.

The Russian laughed, saying to Elizabeth, “You have such pretty childrens. Like mother,” then after looking at Colling, “But not blondes hair, like mother. More dark, like father.” And with that, he clapped Colling on the back.

The second NKVD man returned the passports and other papers to Colling, touched the visor of his cap with his finger, and shouted for the striped pole to be raised.

The barrier on the other side of the bridge also went up to allow them to pass, and as they drove under it, Colling could hear Elena telling the girls that they had been wonderful. He asked Elizabeth, “What did you tell them?”

“Same story you cooked up. Your daddy has lots of money, but he’s a socialist. We joined the Party because we wanted a cause. Love Stalin, all that jazz.”

“What was it they were laughing about?”

“They complimented me on my looks, and I told them American Communists were not so serious as they are in Europe.”

Colling blurted out, “Too bad you couldn’t use your charm like that when they arrested you,” and then immediately regretted it.

Elizabeth stared straight ahead through the limousine’s windshield, saying nothing, then in a flat voice, she said, “It was the papers. They trusted the papers you gave them. I didn’t have the right papers.” Colling could see tears forming in her eyes.

“I’m sorry, Liz. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“It doesn’t matter. Forget it,” she replied.

Colling could think of nothing to say in response. The two girls in the back were chattering with their mother and Helga, but Colling and Elizabeth rode in silence. Hermann made no attempt to start a conversation, seemingly disconcerted by the tension that he sensed had arisen between the man and woman seated beside him.

As they passed through the next town, Colling told Hermann that he wanted to stop if there was a tavern or café. A place with several tables outside its door was in the central square, and Hermann pulled up in front of it as he had been asked. Colling instructed the others to wait in the car while he went inside. A few minutes later, he came back carrying a basket filled with a half-dozen bottles of vodka. After placing them in the trunk of the limousine, he returned the basket to the tavern’s owner and climbed back into the car. He explained that with the cognac gone, they would need something else with which to bribe the Russians.

They were stopped three more times before reaching Gdansk, as it was now called. On each occasion, Colling and Elizabeth worked as a team; Colling playing the friendly American communist, and Elizabeth his more sophisticated Russian-speaking wife. They were amazed that no one seemed the least bit surprised that their party was proceeding across Poland in a big German luxury car. Elena and her girls were superb, answering in English when addressed.

Once through the city, they drove north and west along the coast towards the region’s resort areas. Hermann mentioned that he was most familiar with the Grand Hotel in Sopot, which had been a favorite of the von Brechstler’s, but admitted that he had no idea what condition the place might be in at present. Colling reminded him that they needed a less conspicuous place to stay while they arranged for passage across the Baltic, and Elizabeth agreed. At that point, Elena broke in to say that she knew of a seaside town with pensions and small hotels where she and Tomasz had stayed before the war, and provided directions to Hermann on how to get there.

Colling decided that the village to which Elena led them would be described as “picturesque” in a tourist guide. A short row of perhaps seven or eight houses fronting the sea all held signs indicating they accepted guests. Within walking distance, a small harbor for fishing boats had been created by the construction of two breakwaters. A cluster of buildings across the street from the docks served as the center of town.

Elena pointed out the house in which she and her husband had spent a week one summer, and Colling selected another, not wishing to take the chance that she might be recognized. They parked in front, and Colling climbed the steps and knocked on the door. It was answered by the gray-haired proprietress, and when he explained in Polish that they were seeking accommodations for a few days, she welcomed him in. When he asked where they might keep their car, she directed him to a large shed behind the house that could serve as a garage, reached by a track running through the grass-covered dunes behind the row of houses. After they had removed their luggage, Colling told Hermann where to take the Mercedes and put it out of sight.

Colling had asked to rent three rooms, and the landlady, who told them her name was Klara Vollmer, took them up the stairs to show them their accommodations. She somewhat proudly told Colling that she had been born in Germany, and asked that he call her "Frau Vollmer."

Colling counted, and determined that the little hotel had ten rooms and no guests other than themselves. Frau Vollmer apologized that there had been no electricity since the district power plant had no coal, and what light there was would be provided by oil lamps. The fireplaces in their rooms would take off the chill. She advised that there was no coal and wood was scarce, so they would probably be warmer during the day if they stayed in the dining room or the sitting room downstairs. A few pieces of kindling would be provided at night. There was running water from a cistern located on a hill behind them, and they had had plenty of rain, so the water closets were functioning as they should. If anyone wanted a bath, it would require heating water in the kitchen and carrying it upstairs to the bathroom that served all ten of the guest rooms.

As he signed the register, he had a view of the dining room, furnished with a scattering of small tables. It was located to the left of the foyer, and on the opposite side was a large room with a pair of sofas and easy chairs that Frau Vollmer referred to as the sitting room. When the old lady discovered that they had not yet eaten, she invited them to seat themselves in the dining room while she prepared supper.

As they sat waiting, they could hear the old lady clattering around in the next room, and after a few minutes, Helga rose and pushed through the swinging door to the kitchen, asking if she might be of help. Colling could discern a conversation in progress, and although he could not distinguish what was being said, Helga did not return immediately, leading him to believe that the German maid's offer had been accepted.

When she did reappear, Helga came carrying a tray covered with glasses of hot tea. She indicated that it would not be much longer before their meal arrived. Elizabeth suggested that they pull three of the tables together so that they would all be sitting with one another as they ate, and Colling and Hermann dutifully rearranged the tables and chairs. The two little girls looked as if they were tired, and Colling asked Elena how they were holding up after such a long motor trip. She assured him that a good night's sleep would do wonders.

Frau Vollmer finally came in pushing a serving cart holding a huge tureen. Helga followed with their place settings and bowls, which she distributed in front of each of them. The landlady ladled out a thick fish stew; when Colling tasted it, he found it delicious, and said so. As Helga dipped her spoon into her bowl, she informed them that this was Baltic eel chowder. After a momentary pause, Colling decided he did not care what kind of sea animal he was eating, it was still delicious. He noticed that Elizabeth had shown no particular reaction to what Helga had said, and concluded that her upbringing had probably included more culinary sophistication than his own.

The landlady had brought in a basket of tan-colored bread while they ate, and she apologized for its poor quality. Colling tasted some of it, and had to admit that she was right. Elizabeth asked if there were anything to put on the bread, and Frau Vollmer went off and came back with a large jar of German-labeled orange marmalade. She mumbled that she had only two more left in the pantry as she placed it on the table. Colling found that the bread became edible if it had a thick layer of marmalade on it, and he told Elizabeth how clever she was for thinking of it.

For a moment the others were talking among themselves and it was if Colling and Elizabeth were alone, and he took her hand and whispered an apology for his behavior and the comment he had made at the checkpoint. He asked her forgiveness for saying what he said, knowing it must have been so hurtful to her. She squeezed his hand and said, "It's not important. I'll get over it." Her response left him feeling worse than he had before he had made the apology.

As Helga and Frau Vollmer were clearing away the dishes, Colling told Elizabeth he wanted to visit the fishing village to see if arrangements could be made for their passage to Sweden. He told her it would be best if he went alone.

It was dark and a chill wind was blowing off the sea as he walked into the village. A lit doorway caught his attention, and he headed towards it. He found that it was a tavern, filled with fishermen quietly drinking. The air was hazy with tobacco smoke. As he walked in, his expensive topcoat and polished shoes immediately caught the attention of those nearest the door, and a sudden silence spread quickly over the room.

Colling asked the man tending the bar for vodka. The tavern's patrons continued to watch him silently. A small tumbler of clear liquid was placed before him, and Colling steeled himself, then tipped it up and drank it in one gulp.

"You are not from around here," said the barkeep.

"No. From farther west. Near the German border."

"You are at old lady Vollmer's place. You came from Gdansk in a big German car. First one we have seen in these parts for a long time," was the reply, as a second glass of vodka was poured.

This time Colling sipped his drink. "Yes. We want to go home."

"So why not use your big car and do so," said a bearded man at a nearby table.

"The roads are not good. Better we go by boat."

"We are fishermen, not excursion boatmen," said another man.

"I can pay, if anyone is interested."

"The Coast Guard watches closely. Maybe you are from the government yourself," said someone.

"Maybe I am," said Colling. "Do I look like I am from the government?"

There was a scattering of laughter, then the tavern keeper said, "In truth, you seem like a big shot American. Your accent sounds of it. "

"If that is so, then you must conclude for certain that I am not from the government."

There was a murmuring in the room, then an unshaven man of about fifty wearing a worn fisherman's sweater stepped forward and asked, "Who played in the World Series last year?"

Sports had not been foremost in Colling's mind the previous fall, and he had to wrack his brain for the answer, "The Cardinals…St. Louis…and the Boston Red Sox. The Cardinals won."

His questioner laughed and said, "This chap is an American for certain."

The barkeep filled Colling's half-empty glass to the brim, smiled and said, "One of my cousins lives in Chicago. You have been to Chicago?"

"Yes. I am from Wisconsin, but that is near to Chicago, and I have been there often." He noticed that everyone was listening intently, and decided it was the right time to display American generosity. "I wish to purchase vodka for everyone," he said, placing his last two 1000-zloty notes on the bar.

As he had hoped, this was greeted with enthusiasm, and there was a push to the bar to pick up the glasses that the bartender was filling. Most of the men took the vodka and returned to their tables, and since Colling continued sipping at his own vodka without adding anything to the general conversation, they resumed drinking, smoking and conversing among themselves.

The fisherman who had questioned Colling remained beside him at the bar. "I am called Mikal Boroszki. How is it you speak Polish?"

"My mother's family," answered Colling. "I am called Stanley Warrencliffe, but you may call me 'Stan'." Then he asked, "And how is it a man of the Baltic knows of American baseball?"

"I used to live in the U.S.A., Stan. In New York City. From time to time some old friends there send me issues of Dziennik Polski, the Polish language newspaper, so I keep up with U.S.A. news."

"And you have no wish to return to America?" asked Colling.

"It is a long story. Someday perhaps."

"Do you have a boat?"

"Yes. My son and myself and two crewmen fish these waters."

"Would you be interested in taking on some passengers?"

"One must be cautious, Stan. It is forbidden."

"Does that mean you are saying 'no'?"

"Come see me early tomorrow morning, before the sun is fully up, and we will talk. My boat is the white one, trimmed in blue, the Syrena."

Colling downed his drink, voiced a general goodbye to the tavern patrons, and walked back to the little hotel.

He found Elizabeth already in bed. Next to the fireplace were a washbowl and a kettle of tepid water that Elizabeth had apparently heated in the kitchen and brought upstairs to their room. He undressed and washed himself with a cloth before climbing into bed. When he slipped under the covers, he felt the warmth that her body had generated. She turned to him and wrapped her arms around him.

"I'm sorry, Jim. I've been awful to you."

"Don't worry about it, Liz. I haven't been so great to you myself."

"Make love to me, Jim."

"Are you ready? We don't have to if you still…."

She silenced him with her lips, pressing tightly to him and caressing the back of his neck. He responded hungrily, overwhelmed by her intensity and the familiar reaction of her body that he had not known for so long. He was about to pull back in order to search for a prophylactic from his suitcase when he felt her hands on him, and she whispered, "I took one out already, Jim," as she made sure it was properly in place.

Elizabeth was still sleeping soundly when Colling woke, sensing that it was morning, even though it was still dark. He looked at his wristwatch to confirm that it was indeed 5:00 A.M., then slipped from underneath the covers, using care not to wake her. As he shaved, using cold water in the tiny bathroom at the end of the hall, he considered how little understanding he had of what made Elizabeth tick. He finally decided that his confusion was probably not unique, and that other men found themselves in the same quandary when it came to trying to understand the female mind.

She did not wake up as he dressed, and he left her there to go meet Boroszki. The sky was turning gray to the east as he walked down the hotel's steps.

Colling found Boroszki's boat moored at quayside. The dock was bustling with activity as the little fleet of fishing boats prepared to go to sea. Some of the other vessels were already in the harbor, headed out through the gap between the high breakwaters. The Syrena was among the last four tied to the dock.

A young man was on the deck, straightening the folds of a net that was piled haphazardly in the waist of the boat. Colling asked for Boroszki, and the young man shouted towards the wheelhouse behind him. Boroszki emerged, crossed the deck and climbed onto the wharf with Colling. The young man moved off out of earshot, perhaps deliberately, thought Colling.

"Dzien Dobry!" said Colling.

"The same," said the fisherman.

"Is now the time we might talk?" asked Colling.

"Just so."

"There are seven of us, five adults and two children. We wish to go to Sweden."

"Not possible, Stan. The damned Swedes are as bad as the Russians. If they catch you in their waters without authorization, they knock holes in the bottom of your boat and hand you over to the Polish Coast Guard or the Red Navy."

"West along the coast then?" suggested Colling.

"You wish to avoid the Reds, is that not so?"

"Yes."

"Most of the distance, the coast is that of the Russian Zone of Germany. One must go far enough to reach the British Zone," said Boroszki.

"Have you ever done this?"

"Once in awhile since the war has ended, to take some Polish vodka to trade for English tobacco, Yes. Never before have I carried people. The authorities everywhere will overlook a little smuggling for a bottle of vodka or two, or a tin of tobacco. I do not think they will be so lenient about people."

"I will pay well for this," said Colling, just as two men climbed onto the deck from out of a large hatchway. Boroszki turned to see what Colling was looking at, then said, "Those are my crewmen. They are reliable."

"I would hope so. As I was saying, I will pay well."

"It is very dangerous," said Boroszki, "There are patrols, and my boat is not so fast. We cannot outrun them."

"I have U.S. dollars. I will pay one hundred for each person. That is seven hundred dollars."

The fisherman looked Colling in the eye for a moment, then said, "I might have known an American would have money. I will do it, for the reason that you are American, and I like Americans…but also…," He grinned,

“Because you pay. But first I must buy petrol. The ration we receive from the government is not sufficient. It will have to be on the black market.”

“How much for the petrol?” asked Colling.

“Say another one hundred. I will need that much now.”

“Done,” said Colling, pulling out the folded bills he from his trousers pocket, and counting out $100 in tens and twenties. As he replaced the money, he realized how little was left of his cash. He asked, “When do we leave?”

Boroszki looked at the gray sky, “In three days. Now we must go to catch the fish. We return in two days, then the next day, we will go. It will be late in the afternoon, that way the first miles will be at night. There is also a greater chance that we will have a fog. If so, that will be even better.”

Happening to think of it, Colling said, “I have extra petrol for my motorcar. Does your engine burn automotive fuel?”

“Yes, I will send Janek, my son, back with you to bring it down. I will still buy more so we will hope to have plenty.”

The young man working with the nets turned out to be Boroszki’s son. Colling took him to the shed behind the hotel and removed the two jerrycans that were still full from the Mercedes’ rear rack. Janek remarked that the empty jerrycans would be useful as well, and they carried those to the dockside along with the full cans. The twenty-liter containers full of gasoline were heavy, and Colling found himself breathing heavily by the time they reached the boat. Janek did not seem in the least affected as he handed the jerrycans down to his father.

Frau Vollmer saw him as he entered the hotel foyer, and invited him to come eat his breakfast. She placed a dish of boiled whitefish and small potatoes in front of him as he seated himself in the dining room. He was raising the first fork-full of fish to his mouth when Elizabeth appeared in the doorway. She joined him, and Frau Vollmer bustled away to bring her breakfast.

Elizabeth smiled at him as she placed her hand on his arm, “I had a wonderful evening, sir.”

“I’m pleased to hear that. I could say the same thing, only mine was better than wonderful.”

They were interrupted by the arrival of Elizabeth’s food. She looked at it and laughed as he said, “Hope you like fish. That’s all they have around here.”

Frau Vollmer had brought hot tea, served as usual in glasses, and after they had finished eating, they sat sipping it slowly, looking at each other, but saying little. The landlady came out of the kitchen and asked if they had enjoyed their meal. Colling assured her that it was delicious, and the old lady apologized for the lack of anything but fish.

A few minutes later, Hermann and Helga, followed by Elena and the girls, arrived, and Frau Vollmer went off to bring more food. Colling told them with a smile, “Wait until you see what a treat you will be having for breakfast, my friends.”

Basia and Katya stared at the boiled fish until their mother told them to eat, and then they did so with a marked lack of enthusiasm.

Colling spoke quietly as the others ate, describing his arrangements with Boroszki, and telling them to be packed and ready to go in three days. He added that the fisherman was hoping for an afternoon fog to rise that would cover their departure, and that they must be prepared to move quickly when the time came.

Following his own instructions, Colling returned with Elizabeth to their room and completed as much packing as they could. He counted the last of his dollars from the compartment in his suitcase, and checked the Luger and extra ammunition. The Russian pistol he had promised Elizabeth was still in Hermann’s possession, as part of his disguise, and he noticed she watched carefully when he replaced the Luger in its hiding place. He held out sufficient cash to pay Boroszki.

After breakfast, everyone wanted to walk on the beach across the road from the hotel. Colling went with them, holding Elizabeth’s hand as they strolled up and down, nervously hoping that his companions would decide they wanted to go back to their lodgings and remain out of sight. Eventually, the cold wind from the Baltic dampened enthusiasm, and Colling was relieved when everyone returned to the hotel.

The next two days passed uneventfully, although Colling’s anxiety was heightened by his companions’ continued desire to occupy themselves with outdoor activities, even though the temperature remained cold. Elena took the girls to play in the dunes each day. Hermann and Helga took long walks on the beach, and into

the village, where Colling was certain their presence would generate gossip. Elizabeth wanted to do the same, and against his best judgment, he obliged her.

Every meal consisted of some variety of fish, prepared in various ways. Helga, Elena and Elizabeth all tried their hands at helping Frau Vollmer with the cooking, but Colling found himself wishing for a good Polish sausage and black bread.

Each night, their love-making was as intense as it was on their first night at the hotel. When Colling took time to think about it, he had to admit that he was perplexed. He decided, however, to set aside any thoughts he might have about the hurt she had caused him in the past, and to simply enjoy the present, and not attempt to analyze what was going on.

The afternoon of the day before they were to leave, Colling took Elizabeth for a stroll to the village to watch the fishing fleet return. The Syrena was the last boat to enter the harbor, and he pointed it out to her. Colling did not take her to meet Boroszki, having decided it was best to keep their distance until the time came to board.

He had learned from discussions with Frau Vollmer that all the boats were required to unload their catches at the government-run fishery at a larger town down the coast, where they also were permitted to purchase their allotment of fuel. Colling assumed that Boroszki would have conducted his black-market transaction for additional gasoline there.

The following morning, Colling rose before dawn and went to the dock. Boroszki and his son were on board, using a hose to wash down the deck. The fisherman greeted him and invited him to join him in the wheelhouse, while Janek finished their work. Boroszki confirmed that he would be ready to leave in the late afternoon. Colling was about to pay him what he had promised when Boroszki told him he would take only half, with the other half to be due when they were safely ashore in Lübeck, in the British Zone.

Colling returned to the hotel, where he found that Frau Vollmer had his breakfast waiting for him. Soon after, he was joined by the rest of the party. He let them know that they would be leaving that afternoon. As usual, everyone wanted to spend time outside, and Elena and her daughters went to their customary spot in the dunes so that the girls could build sand castles. Hermann and Helga wanted to take one last walk on the beach, and Elizabeth said that she and Colling would go with them.

This time, Colling was in no hurry to come back to the hotel, and it was well after 12:00 when they trooped into the dining room for a lunch consisting of another of Frau Vollmer's fish stews. They ate in a leisurely fashion, consciously killing time, so that it was mid-afternoon before they had finished their tea and the women had helped Frau Vollmer clear the table. As they filed out of the dining room, Colling sent them all to finish their packing.

He had everyone bring down their bags and pile them in the sitting room, where they would all wait until it was time to leave. He was settling accounts with Frau Vollmer in the dining room when he happened to glance out of the window, to see a man cautiously approaching the shed where the Mercedes was hidden. The man disappeared around the shed's corner to where its doors were located, and Colling was certain he would be opening them and discovering the limousine. His suspicions were confirmed when the man reappeared and waved his hand, signaling to someone in front of the hotel.

Colling was considering what to do in response to what he had just seen when there was the sound of someone entering the foyer. Frau Vollmer went to see who it might be, and Colling followed a few steps behind her. Over the old lady's shoulder, he could see two men in the little reception area. One was a big man who had positioned himself so as to block the doorway. The other, slimmer and a bit older and obviously in charge, was looking around as if surveying the place. Colling's heart skipped a beat when he saw that they were both wearing black leather jackets. He had seen enough men dressed in similar fashion to know that these two had to be plain-clothes policemen.

The one in charge looked intently at Colling, as if trying to match a description he had been given with the man at whom he was staring, and said, "You are Krazinsky, yes?"

Colling was unsure of how he should respond, so he said nothing.

The policeman smiled with a knowing expression, "Or should I call you Mister Var…ren…cliffe?" stumbling over the pronunciation.

Colling was pondering whether to try and bluff his way through when the sliding doors to the hotel's sitting room opened, and Elizabeth was in the doorway, the others behind her. She said nothing, and Colling spoke first in English, "My name is Stanley Warrencliffe. I don't speak Polish. Are you asking after me?"

The policeman pulled a folded case from his jacket pocket and flipped it open, revealing an official-looking card that Colling assumed was his identification. As he replaced it, the officer said in accented English, "Inspector Zavek, Krakow Criminal Police. I have questions to ask, Mister Var-ren-cliffe. Everyone's papers, please."

There was a flurry of activity as the group in the sitting room searched for their passports and other documents and handed them over. Elizabeth had Colling's passport as well as her own in her hand when she gave them to Zavek. The officer looked up at each of the members of their little party in turn as he slowly worked his way through the stack of documents, matching the photos with their faces. Finally he said, "You are known in Dwiespestka as Krazinsky, sir. Do you perhaps have another passport in that name?"

Cousin Jerry's passport was in the concealed compartment in his suitcase, and Colling had no intention of disclosing its location. He said, in his most blustering manner, "See here, my good man, my wife and I and our children are touring Poland at the behest of the new government. You can see that we have passes, and that our documents are in order. I know nothing about anyone named Krazinsky. If you are through with us, I would suggest you leave us in peace."

Zavek smiled again as if not believing a word Colling had said. He said, "Whatever your name is, dear sir, you and your friends are in, how is it said? Deep trouble. I wish to question all of you about the disappearance of the Countess von Brechstler. Do any of you deny that you were at her estate only a few days ago?" His eye caught Hermann, and he stepped over and took him by the arm, pulling him forward, "And you, my friend, are the Countess' butler, and that woman there is your wife and maid to the Countess. Do you deny this? In spite of the fact that you give me papers that show you to be a Polish operative for the NKVD?"

With this, Colling knew that continuing to rely on their contrived identities was not going to work, and his mind darted about, trying to decide what to do. Before he could speak, Elizabeth said in Polish, "Inspector, do you know of the camp at Dwiespestka?"

"Yes," Zavek said cautiously, as if admitting such knowledge could be dangerous.

"I was a prisoner in that camp for over four months, Inspector. Do you know it is an interrogation camp?"

The policeman's expression changed. Elizabeth was looking right at him, and he returned her gaze for only a few seconds before glancing in Colling's direction. He said, "My nephew was there for only a month last summer. I was able to use some connections to have him released. He was questioned, yes, I know this. A foolish boy, goading the Reds."

"I will not be a prisoner of the Russians again, Inspector," said Elizabeth defiantly. "This man," she pointed at Colling, "Freed me. We wish only to go to the West. The others go with us."

Zavek seemed to be thinking for a moment, then he said, "There is the matter of the Countess. Her doctor came to her estate and was told by the tenants that she had died suddenly and had been buried. A gravestone seemed to bear this out, but the priest with whom the doctor drove from Krakow became suspicious. The Countess was a devout Catholic, and would have sought last rites. That was not done. We were informed, and when the grave was exhumed, no body was found. It was assumed that foul play had occurred, because the tenants all swore that the Countess had not been seen since before Christmas, and that this man, Breitmann, and his wife had continued to occupy the Countess' house along with this Krazinsky and the blonde woman called 'Elzbieta," who came from out of nowhere. I suspect that some or all of you had some hand in the Countess' disappearance, perhaps her death."

As the inspector finished speaking, Colling said, "The Countess gave her life for Elizabeth, this woman here who was known as 'Elzbieta' to those at the estate. She substituted herself for Elizabeth to permit her to escape. It is a long story, but it is my belief that the Countess died in Russian hands, and they have not discovered that she was not Elizabeth. So that is that. You may believe me or not, but it is the truth."

Zavek replied, "There is also the matter of the missing property of the Countess."

"Yes," said Colling. "The Mercedes was hers, and you are welcome to it. We have no further use for it. We also have some of her clothes and those of her late husband that I am wearing. We will leave with you as much of these as we can. All else was left as we found it."

"We are informed by the Countess' solicitor that an inventory of her property included a quantity of gold coins, English gold coins to be exact. You have no knowledge of this?"

Colling looked at Hermann and caught a barely perceptible shrug of the man's shoulders, which together with the sheepish expression on his face, told him that the butler might know where the coins were.

Zavek noticed the silent exchange between the two men, and he angrily turned on Hermann, "Well, you damned Kraut, do you know where this gold is?"

"The Countess bequeathed it to us in her will," replied Hermann.

The policeman reacted scornfully, "You are aware that German nationals can no longer inherit from Polish estates, are you not? This law was passed by the liberation government. Give back these coins, Kraut."

Hermann opened his mouth as if to speak, then appeared to think better of it, and went to his valise. A few seconds later, he appeared with a leather pouch that he dropped into Zavek's outstretched palm. The policeman had just placed the bag in his coat pocket when there was a banging on the entry door. The burly policeman who had been standing guard turned and opened it to permit two more black-jacketed men to enter.

"NKVD," said the first man through the door in a loud voice. "Everyone remain where you are." His Polish was accented, and Colling guessed that he was Russian. The big Polish policeman and the second NKVD man through the door stood eyeing one another, like two boxers in the ring.

Zavek was the first to speak, "I am Inspector Zavek, Criminal Police. These people are in my custody."

"On what charges?" asked the Russian.

"Suspicion of murder."

"I hereby arrest them as enemies of the State," said the Russian, "That takes precedence."

"Not with me," responded Zavek. "I have already arrested them, and I will take them to Gdansk for further interrogation."

"You cannot. This is a State Security matter, Policeman. I will take charge now. You may leave."

"No, I will not. These people are my prisoners, and I will not relinquish custody of them without proper authority."

"I am Major Klamnikov, NKVD. I am your authority. You may leave."

"I will not, my dear Major. I have not completed my investigation of a homicide, and I must question them. Once that is completed, you are welcome to them. Unless, that is, my superiors decide they will be tried for the crimes they have committed."

"I warn you, Policeman, there are two of us, and we are prepared to use force, if necessary."

Zavek grinned lopsidedly and said, "There are three of us, NKVD-man, another of my men is out back. And there are more on the way from Gdansk. I telephoned for assistance some time ago, and more Polish police should be here momentarily. I do not wish to discuss this any more. Go to your headquarters in Gdansk if you want, but I will not budge without written orders to relinquish this scum to you."

The Russian major sputtered, but then, shouting something in Russian over his shoulder, he scrambled down the hotel steps, his companion following on his heels, and into a sedan parked at the curb behind an old black Renault that apparently had brought Zavek and his men.

Zavek watched the car until it was out of sight, then he turned to Colling, "More police officers from Gdansk will in truth be here soon. We will take the Mercedes and drive back to Gdansk. We will do some things to avoid the dear Major finding us right away, but I cannot give you much time. If you have some means to leave this place, I would do so immediately. You will be reported as having escaped from my custody, and I can promise you the Reds will be combing this part of the coast very soon thereafter."

"What will happen to you?" asked Colling.

"I will have to contend with that. A demotion perhaps, but my men and I were Home Army, so that would be accelerating the inevitable at any rate. Good luck to you and your friends."

"And to you," said Colling.

They were gathering their things when a battered truck occupied by four uniformed Polish policemen pulled up outside. Zavek was speaking to them at the curb when the Countess' Mercedes appeared, one of Zavek's men at the wheel.

The police inspector turned and waved before climbing into the passenger seat of the limousine, and the little caravan sped off.

Their landlady provided a hand cart on which they loaded their luggage, and with Colling and Hermann pushing it, they walked to the harbor. The sky was overcast, but there was no sign of the fog that Boroszki had predicted, and Colling began weighing the alternatives that might be open to them. He could think of none.

Boroszki's boat was still moored where it had been that morning, although no one was in sight. As Colling dropped down onto the deck, Boroszki stuck his head out of a hatchway behind the wheelhouse. He emerged

and stood looking at the little party of refugees standing above him on the quay. From the dour look on his face, Colling suspected that the fisherman might be having second thoughts about his agreement.

"Did you find fuel?" asked Colling.

"Yes, for certain. Janek is below, clearing a place for your people. Come, you must board," he said, reaching up to take the waist of Katya and lift her down into the boat.

Within a few minutes, their luggage had been carried down the hatchway, and they had found places for themselves on the tarpaulins that Boroszki's son had spread over piles of nets in the vessel's hold. Boroszki asked Colling to join him in the wheelhouse, and he was amazed when he climbed the ladder to the deck to find the first tendrils of fog creeping in from the sea. By the time Boroszki had started the engine and they had cast off their moorings, the entire bay was blanketed in a thin haze that grew more dense with each passing minute. Half way across the harbor, the lights on either side of the opening in the breakwater were their only guide to the open sea.

Janek stationed himself on the prow, watching the white wall ahead of them, listening intently. They ran without lights, the only noise the chug of the boat's motor. Boroszki had the wheelhouse windows propped wide open, scanning ahead as he held the wheel. Colling asked where the other crewmen were, and Boroszki informed him that they were not to be taken on this trip. It was safer for them if he and his son were the only members of the crew on board.

The fisherman was grinning as he asked Colling, "Have I not well predicted this fog?"

"You should be a…" Colling could not think of the Polish word, so he used the English, "…Meteorologist."

"What is that?" asked Boroszki.

"A scientist whose profession it is to predict the weather," replied Colling.

"Phff," said the fisherman, "Any sailor can do this without being a damned scientist."

"Just so," said Colling.

"For instance, I say we will have storms in the next day or so."

"That will not be good," replied Colling.

"Not so. It will be good. The patrols do not like bad weather. If we are not blown off course, we may reach the British Zone of Germany without an encounter with them."

Colling stood beside Boroszki for some time, looking out through the open windows. After a time, however, he moved away from the wheel and seated himself on a bench at the rear of the wheelhouse. As he did so, Boroszki said, "Be careful, Stan, where you are sitting."

"Why?" asked Colling.

"Lift up the seat," said Boroszki with a grin.

Colling stood and raised the bench, which turned out to be the lid of a locker. Inside was a Russian submachine gun that Colling recognized as a PPSh, three extra round drum magazines for the gun and three German potato-masher hand grenades.

Colling whistled through his teeth. "Where did you get these?" he asked.

"During the war. The PPSh I got from a dead Russian, and the grenades from a dead damned Kraut."

Colling dropped the bench lid back into place and sat down. "Let's hope we do not have to use them," he said.

The boat chugged on through the fog. They seemed to be making significant progress, and Colling went below deck to find the rest of his companions wrapped in blankets that Janek must have brought them. Hermann and Helga were huddled together, sleeping. Elena and her daughters were awake. She was quietly reading a book to them in Polish. Elizabeth was curled up in a blanket, and when he dropped down beside her, he saw that she was awake.

"How is it going?" she asked.

"Not bad. You can't see the nose on your face out there, but Boroszki seems to know what he's doing."

"How long before we reach friendly territory?"

"Don't know. A couple of days, maybe more. Boroszki says there's going to be a storm. He was right about the fog, so I guess he'll be right about that too."

The fog was still there early the next morning. The only sign that the night had passed was a faint lightening of the haze around them. During the night, Colling and Hermann had relieved Janek to allow him to get something to eat and to sleep. Boroszki insisted he should remain at the helm, but Colling finally convinced him

that he could take over for a short while, if the fisherman would give him some instruction on how to steer and operate the boat's engine. After he had been at the wheel for a time, Colling found the task unnerving, and the need to be constantly alert had left him feeling exhausted when Boroszki finally returned to take over.

By mid-morning, the combination of the sun rising in the sky and a light breeze from the sea had caused the fog to dissipate. To their left they could see a green strip of land in the distance, and Boroszki informed them that it was Pomerania. He increased the speed of the engine as visibility improved, and they were soon plunging along through rolling waves. Hermann and Helga became seasick and spent a significant amount of time first leaning over the rail, then in the hold shivering in their blankets. Colling had discovered when he sailed on the troop transport that brought him to Europe that for some undefinable reason he did not become seasick. He stood on the bow, holding onto one of the stays, enjoying the feel of the boat moving under him. Neither Elizabeth nor Elena looked as if they were finding the voyage to be a particularly pleasant experience, but they had not yet gone to the rail. It was Colling's opinion that Elizabeth, at least, was determined not to allow herself to become sick so long as he was not. The two little girls seemed to be enjoying themselves as they played hop-scotch on the heaving deck.

They met no patrol boats, although they did pass scattered clusters of fishing boats and caught glimpses of the occasional freighter on the horizon. Boroszki kept his distance from other vessels, and they sailed doggedly along. Colling had no idea of what the speed of the Syrena might be, and when he asked Boroszki, he simply shrugged his shoulders.

The weather remained clear, and Colling chided Boroszki about the accuracy of his prognostications. The fisherman stuck to his original prediction, however, and continued to promise that they would have a real blow before they reached their destination.

As it happened, the wind started to pick up as the sun was about to set on their second day at sea. Within an hour, it was howling through the rigging, and the boat was rolling and plunging so that Colling was doubtful that Boroszki's strenuous work at the wheel could control their course. In the last half-hour of daylight, a sleet-filled rain began to slash down, impeding their vision and making the open deck a place of freezing misery.

Boroszki explained to Colling that this was an inopportune time for the weather to act up. Through the rain, he pointed to a dark strip on the horizon, "Rügen. We have passed the mouth of the Oder, and now we must go north to bring us around the peninsula. The wind is from the east, and we must head for open water if we are not to be blown ashore. More chance for a patrol to see us."

Somehow Boroszki managed to keep the Syrena on a northerly course, but from Colling's position as lookout in the bow, he could imagine the Rügen peninsula drawing closer and closer, even though nothing was visible in the darkness except the waves breaking on the bow of the boat. About midnight, Colling noticed a perceptible change of direction in the wind. What had been hitting him on the right side of his face now came from behind. He did not know how the Polish fisherman had done it, but he guessed that they had rounded the Rügen peninsula. When Janek came to take his place as lookout, he shouted the question to him, and the young sailor grinned back and nodded his head.

Colling returned to the wheelhouse after Janek had relieved him. He had to shout at Boroszki to make himself understood over the noise of the storm. He was trying to congratulate the fisherman on his ability to predict the weather when Boroszki suddenly pointed in the direction Colling knew as "right," but had learned to call "starboard." At first, Colling could not understand at what the man was pointing, then he saw a flash of bright light that rose and then dipped away.

"Patrol!" shouted Boroszki.

Colling watched as the light increased in size and brightness. It was obvious that the source of the light was moving much faster than they were, and was gaining on them. Within minutes, the light had grown to a circle, and Colling realized that it was a spotlight. The movement of the two vessels made it difficult for whoever was aiming the light to keep it trained on the Syrena, but it periodically swept over them, causing a momentary blaze of blinding white in the wheelhouse.

The patrol boat was coming closer each minute, although with the wind now at their back, the little fishing boat was moving with increased speed. Colling thought he heard a shout, but it was blown away in an instant. Boroszki was hunched over the wheel, staring straight ahead, his hand on the throttle as if he could urge the boat to outrun its pursuer. Colling could now distinguish the other vessel's shape, and saw that it was larger

than the Syrena, but without much greater freeboard, so that if the two boats were alongside one another, the cutter's fore deck would only be about two feet higher than the main deck of the fishing boat.

A shape on the patrol boat's forward deck could only be a gun of some kind. Colling's theory was confirmed when three figures ran forward, slipping and sliding as they did so, and a tarpaulin was pulled off to reveal the weapon. At first, Colling could not tell whether it was a machine gun or something heavier, perhaps a 20- or 40-millimeter cannon; then they opened fire.

The first stream of tracers passed over the deck just in front of the wheelhouse, confirming for Colling that the cutter's armament consisted of a heavy machine gun. The second volley struck somewhere in the hull, he could not be sure where. The disconnected pitching of the two boats was making it hard for the gunner. Shots continued to be fired, but more seemed to be going wild than were finding their mark.

All at once, there was a deafening roar that coincided with Colling losing his footing and sliding to the floor of the wheelhouse. He felt, more than saw, splinters and other debris flying past his face, mixed with the smell of smoke and scorched wood. The next burst of fire went high, above the wheelhouse. Colling crawled towards Boroszki, who was now on the floor under the wheel, which was spinning wildly. Colling felt his hand touch something warm and wet, and he lifted it to see that there was a pool of blood seeping from under the fisherman.

The boat plunged again, then wallowed awkwardly. Colling wondered where Janek was, and quickly concluded he could easily be dead or have fallen over the side. On all fours, fighting to keep some sort of traction on the pitching deck, Colling crept to the locker holding Boroszki's gun and the grenades. A second volley of shots hit the wheelhouse, high this time, just under the ceiling, and Colling clapped his hands over his ears and clamped his eyes closed to shut out the noise and the fragments flying through the air.

Somehow he retrieved the sub-machine gun, wrapped its sling around his arm as he had seen Russian soldiers do, and crawled out of the wheelhouse door onto the tiny flying bridge. The cutter was coming close alongside now, within twenty meters, and he could see the pale faces of the machine gun crew through the biting driven rain. The gunner fired off another volley that passed over the after deck. The fishing boat's rigging had been shredded by the machine gun, and long lengths of line whipped out from its mast, cracking in the wind. The gunners had not seen Colling yet, as he crouched behind the riddled panel that served as the bridge's railing. If they managed to improve their aim, he thought, the next burst would likely be reserved for the wheelhouse.

The cutter suddenly lunged forward, its bow no more than ten meters from the side of the fishing boat, and Colling stood, the sub-machine gun held deep into his shoulder, the sling wrapped tight to pull it in and hold its muzzle down. He fumbled for a moment before he found the safety, assumed it would be on, and pushed until he sensed he had released it.

Just before he fired, the gunners saw him. He thought he could see their eyes open wide in amazement, then they were gone. His burst of fire had swept the forward deck of the patrol boat clean. The distance to the other vessel's deck was lengthening as he fired again, and he could not see where his shots had gone. For a moment, the distance between the two vessels widened markedly, and he thought that they might be calling off the chase, but then the cutter lunged forward again, and he realized that they were trying to ram the smaller boat.

With no gunfire from the other vessel, Colling was able to walk upright to return to the locker for the grenades. He had seen a film demonstrating German weapons in basic training, and understood that he had to pull the ring from the grenade's handle before tossing it, but he had no idea how long it would be before it detonated. He guessed he would soon learn, and perhaps it would be a fatal lesson.

The cutter was so close that throwing the grenades far enough to reach its deck would not be difficult. What was a problem was the disjointed movement of both boats. His first try resulted in the grenade bouncing across the patrol boat's forward deck and into the sea. He supposed it must have exploded at some time, but he heard nothing.

The second grenade also bounced, but did not go over the side. Colling had held it to a count of two before throwing it, and it went off with a sharp crash, shattering the cutter's windscreen. The concussion knocked Colling back against the wheelhouse, and he at first imagined that there had been a particularly nasty gust of wind. Colling's face was numb from the cold, and initially he thought that the stinging pain he felt on the right side of his face was caused by sleet mixed with the spray from the sea. But when he put his hand to his cheek he felt warm moisture and looked down to see blood smeared on his fingers.

The grenade's damage to the patrol boat had apparently befuddled its crew, and it dropped back, slewing away from the Syrena. But then it came forward again. Someone had regained control of its wheel and was renewing the attempt to ram. Colling saw a flash of light through the cutter's smashed windscreen, and then heard something buzz sharply past the right side of his head. One of the crew was apparently shooting at him, and he crouched quickly behind the plywood bridge rail, hoping that the shooter would not test its ability to protect him by peppering it with gunfire. Through a crack in the thin wooden panel, he watched as the cutter again settled on its course, headed for the side of the fishing boat.

Colling pulled the last grenade from under his slicker, waiting to pull the pin when the cutter came closer. When only five meters again separated the hulls of the two vessels, he stood and tossed the grenade onto its deck. He watched as it bounced across the deck and thought it would go on into the sea, but then the cutter lifted suddenly, and the grenade bounced back and disappeared. At first, Colling thought he might have missed its dropping between the Syrena and the patrol boat, but then there was a loud bang and flame leaped skyward from the fore-deck of the cutter. He realized that a hatch must have been opened to allow ammunition to be passed to the machine gunners, and then not closed. A second after the first blast, another shot up from the cutter, then a series of explosions erupted, throwing pieces of the patrol craft high in the air.

The Syrena was chugging on, and Colling suddenly remembered that there was no one at the wheel. At the same time, the thought crossed his mind that it was a miracle that the little fishing boat had remained on course throughout the attack. He rushed back into the wheelhouse to find Janek steering and Helga and Elizabeth crouched over the older Boroszki.

"We came up the stairs on the other side," said Elizabeth, anticipating his question.

"Is anyone else hurt?" asked Colling, slinging the PPSh over his shoulder and dropping down beside the fisherman.

"Hermann was hit in the arm, but it doesn't look bad. We wrapped a handkerchief around it, and he's down in the engine room, keeping things going. Everyone else is okay."

Boroszki moaned as Colling lifted Helga's hands away from his wounds to examine him.

"He's been hit with more than one round," said Colling, letting Helga attempt to staunch his bleeding. "I'm afraid this isn't good. He needs a doctor."

"What are you saying?" asked Janek, not understanding the English being spoken around him. "How is my Papa?"

"It is bad, I fear," said Colling. "He has been shot by the machine gun, and his wounds are serious."

Janek's eyes were filling with tears, and Colling took the wheel, motioning for him to be with his father. He told the two women to take some shirts from his suitcase and tear them into bandages, and to bring blankets to wrap him in. While Colling manned the wheel, Elizabeth and Helga did their best to bind Boroszki's wounds and keep him warm. Colling was afraid to make any attempt to move him from the wheelhouse; instead, he told them to place him beside the bench locker.

The storm raged on, becoming no worse or no better, for the next few hours. Colling convinced Janek to conduct a survey of the Syrena for damage, and he reported that there were some holes in the hull close to the waterline that were causing them to take on water, but none below, and if everyone would take turns on the pump, he believed they would stay afloat. The engine was still running, the steering had not failed, there was a spare compass to replace the one that had been destroyed in the wheelhouse, and the east wind was pushing them closer and closer to Lübeck and the British Zone. Janek had no idea, however, how far they had yet to travel. Colling prayed that there would continue to be a degree of nasty weather – not heavy, just nasty – and that there would be no fog. Boroszki could navigate this coast using only an old chart, a compass and his instincts. Colling had only the compass and the old chart.

While Janek manned the wheel, Colling took out the chart and tried to gauge the distance from where he estimated they were, north of the Rügen peninsula, and concluded that they might be about a hundred and twenty miles from the mouth of the Elbe River, the demarcation between the Russian and British Zones. Lübeck and safety were a short distance further to the west of the river. He had no idea of their present speed, but even if they were moving at eight knots, they would be at sea for another sixteen hours, plenty of time to be noticed by another patrol boat.

They had seen some fishing boats and freighters, but no naval vessels, since the encounter with the cutter. Colling wondered why there was no pursuit. He would have imagined that the patrol boat had a radio, and had

sent a message, notifying the shore that they were pursuing the Syrena, and relaying their course and location, but there was no sign that anyone was interested in them. Had the cutter's radio mast carried away in the storm? Was its radio damaged or inoperative? He decided it was better that he did not think about such things too much.

The weather moderated, and the sky was blue again. The sea continued heavy. The Syrena plunged along through mounting waves. Elizabeth asked if Colling would show her how to steer, and he found she did a passable job of holding the boat on a steady course. While Elizabeth was at the wheel, Janek brought some boards and paint from below and began to attempt to repair some of the damage that had been inflicted. The amount of wood available for repairs was limited, however, and the young fisherman ended up pulling planks from the main deck hatch cover to serve as replacement material. He had completed repairs to the flailing rigging before the storm had fully abated. As Colling watched Janek plug holes and replace parts of the wheelhouse, he was amazed at how much of the shattered structure Janek was able restore to a semblance of its former appearance in such a short time.

Boroszki did not die, but he did not regain consciousness. Colling debated with himself about hailing one of the passing freighters and seeking medical attention for the fisherman. Because that would put all of them in jeopardy, he decided against it.

At one point, an airplane flew over, so high that it was impossible to discern its markings. It continued on its way, oblivious to them. The gray form of a warship appeared on the horizon north of them, then was gone out of sight. Each of these encounters left Colling dry-mouthed and on edge. After he had weighed the relative risks of being caught with the Russian sub-machine gun and being without it, he took the PPSh and the extra drums of ammunition and threw them over the side.

It was fully dark when they reached the Lübeck Bucht, the mouth of the bay that had permitted the city its role as a thriving seaport since Hanseatic times. They could see Travemünde in the distance on their right, a few lights showing. As they crept along, Janek voiced his fear that they might entangle themselves with the considerable amount of wreckage that littered the estuary. Colling took up a post on the bow, straining to see anything that looked as if it might pose an obstacle to their progress. They had somehow managed to come this far without meeting any other Russian patrols, and Colling did not want such good fortune to be dashed by their tearing the bottom of the Syrena out on the carcass of some submerged ship.

Colling heard the approaching patrol boat before its spotlight came to life and froze them in its glare. A voice from the darkness called out in German, "Stand to and prepare to be boarded."

On a whim, Colling replied in English, "We're Americans. Don't shoot."

The same voice, closer now, responded in English, "Put your hands up. If you are Yanks, we'll know soon enough."

There was a bump as the patrol craft came alongside the Syrena, and a sailor in Royal Navy blue with an Enfield rifle held in one hand jumped onto the fishing boat's deck. Colling was standing with his hands raised, and he shouted to Janek at the wheel in Polish to raise his as well.

A second later, a second seaman with petty officer's insignia on the sleeve of his peacoat came aboard, looked at Colling and asked, "What the bloody 'ell are you doing here, Yank?"

"We've come from Poland," said Colling, without lowering his hands.

"Poland? Bloody 'ell!"

"Yes, we have refugees with us who are seeking asylum."

"Well, I don't know about that, Yank. What's your name?"

"James T. Colling, sir. I'm a sergeant in the U.S. Army."

"Bloody 'ell!" repeated the petty officer.

By this time, the rest of their party had clambered out onto the deck. Elizabeth stepped forward and said, "We have a badly injured man aboard. Is it possible that you can get him some medical attention?"

"And who might you be?" asked the petty officer.

"I am Elizabeth Hamilton. I'm an American as well." Gesturing to the little group standing behind her, she continued, "These two are German nationals. That woman and the little girls are Polish. They are all under the protection of the United States Government. Now I really would appreciate it…your name, please?"

"Sylvester, ma'am. Arthur Sylvester, ."

“Yes, well, Mr. Sylvester, I really would appreciate it if you could help us get the captain of this ship to a doctor.”

Petty Officer Sylvester looked at the bedraggled cluster of humanity standing on the deck, seemed to ponder whether he should allow Elizabeth to take charge of the situation, then shouted over his shoulder, “’Arry, have Jenkins and Pitch come over here. We ‘ave an injured man needs carried to ‘ospital.”

When Sylvester discovered that Boroszki, a Pole, was the injured man, he informed Colling and Elizabeth that he would have to be taken to a German hospital, and not to that of the English military. The patrol boat led the Syrena to a dock where they tied up. A British Army ambulance appeared and Boroszki was loaded into it. Janek climbed in after him.

The rest of their party brought their luggage on deck and transferred it onto the wharf. Sylvester and his men stood waiting with them until a truck arrived to take them to what the petty officer called “The Transit Station.”

The Transit Station turned out to be a series of wooden buildings surrounded by a barbed-wire fence. They were helped down from the truck by a squad of red-capped British MPs who stacked their baggage to one side and refused to allow them access to it. After being searched and their papers confiscated, Hermann and Colling were separated from the women, and conducted to one of the barracks, where they were placed in separate rooms. Colling heard the sound of the bolt being shot on the door, and wondered how long he was going to remain locked up.

His quarters were not much worse than the U.S. Army provided to its troops. He was brought a tray of food at each meal. There was oatmeal for breakfast and lots of plain white spaghetti for lunch and supper, apparently something to which the British were used. On his second day, for supper he was brought a portion of tinned corned beef to go with the spaghetti. He wondered how Elizabeth was faring, imagining that she was no doubt letting their jailers know her opinion of the cuisine. He spent his time pacing back and forth, or sleeping on the cell’s single cot, wrapped in a blanket.

As he was finishing up his breakfast oatmeal on the morning of the third day, two red-caps came and took him from the barracks to another building in the compound, and Colling felt pleased that he would finally be able to explain things and gain their release.

He was ushered into a room furnished only with a table and two chairs. A British major was sitting behind the table. The officer did not rise; he was concentrating on a file folder spread out in front of him. His only acknowledgement of Colling’s presence was a wave of his hand towards the chair facing him.

“I am Major Fullerton. I wish to ask you some questions. Your name, please,” asked the officer.

“James T. Colling, sir. U.S. Army. Tech Sergeant fourth class. Serial Number 08-845-655.”

“Are you certain you want to be James Colling?” asked Fullerton.

“That’s who I am, sir.”

“Well, on your person you had an American passport in the name of one Stanley Warrencliffe, together with a considerable amount of other identification indicating your membership in the American Communist Party. Hidden in your suitcase, we found another American Passport in the name of Jerzy Krazinsky. We found no documents concerning James T. Colling.”

“That’s who I am, sir. The other papers were what I used to allow me to travel in Poland.”

“Ah, yes. Well, Sergeant Colling, if that is who you are, you are listed as a deserter from the United States Army. I would expect that we would turn you over forthwith to the American authorities.”

“Sir, if you will contact Major Andrew Quarles, in headquarters at Heidelberg, he’ll be able to vouch for me.”

“Interesting. You know, His Majesty’s government does not have a favorable view of individuals who utilize a variety of pseudonyms in travelling about.”

“Yessir. I understand, but Major Quarles can straighten this all out, if you will just call him.”

“Who is Elena Berman?”

Fullerton was using Elena’s name from the forged passport Colling had had prepared in Zurich, so that she could play the role of the girls’ nanny. Colling debated whether he should persist in the masquerade. After a pause, however, he decided to forego any more falsehoods. He finally said, “She and her daughters were Miss Hamilton’s responsibility. She can fill you in on the details. I really don’t know that much.”

“Ah, yes. Miss Hamilton. According to her passport, she is, if you are really Stanley Warrencliffe..,your wife.”

"As I said, sir, Stanley Warrencliffe is a name I used to permit me to travel in Poland."

"But the two Germans, Hermann and Helga Breitmann, are of the belief that you and this Miss Hamilton are husband and wife. Apparently you conducted yourselves as such, having no hesitation about sharing a bed."

"Well, that's a long story, sir."

"Undoubtedly. According to the information we have, Miss Elizabeth Hamilton was killed in an accident last fall. Strange that she would rise from the dead."

"Sir, if you would just contact Major Quarles…."

Fullerton interrupted, "The Soviet authorities in Poland are of the opinion that one 'Jerry' Krazinsky, an American of Polish extraction, has been engaged in the Polish black market to a considerable extent. Apparently gasoline and American cigarettes were the principal commodities in question. The Russians want Mr. Krazinsky returned to Poland, and have so informed His Majesty's government. In addition, it appears that Mr. Krazinsky and the blonde American woman known as either 'Elzbieta' or 'Delores Warrencliffe,' take your choice; as well as this German couple, the Breitmanns, escaped from the custody of the Polish Criminal Police while charged with the murder of an elderly Polish woman in the south of the country."

"All that is not exactly true," said Colling.

"Nevertheless, my inclination is to return all four of you to Poland. Let them sort it all out."

"What about Elena and the girls?" asked Colling.

"I am not aware that they are involved in anything. However, as Polish nationals, if the Polish government requests their return, they would be sent back."

"And Boroszki and his son?"

"The old man goes back to Poland as soon as he can be moved. The son can go back with the lot of you."

"How is Boroszki?" asked Colling.

"Surprisingly well. Those damned Jerry doctors do know how to patch up the near-dead. Of course, the old bird is tough as nails, which helps."

"Sir, I beg you, before anything is done, get in touch with Major Quarles. He will be able to explain everything."

"As a matter of fact, that has been attempted, at the insistence of this woman who calls herself Hamilton. Major Quarles is no longer attached to the American Army in Heidelberg. They seem to have lost track of him. Nice try on your part, though."

"Then at least contact my parents. They live in Bel Cors, Wisconsin. Tim and Hilda Colling. They'll confirm who I am."

"If you are James T. Colling, as you say, you are a deserter, and I am not in the habit of discussing matters with the family members of deserters and criminals."

Colling was taken back to his barracks-room cell. He gave consideration to how he might escape. Even if he could manage to get away, he could think of no way that he could save the others. He did not know exactly where he was, he had no money, no papers. It was clearly a hopeless proposition. Within a few days, he would be in a Soviet prison somewhere, and sometime after that when they were through with him, a bullet to the back of the neck. Tears welled in his eyes as he thought about what would happen to Elizabeth. He wondered who would tell his parents.

Colling remained curled on his cot the rest of the day, feeling sorry for himself and considering whether it might not be better to attempt to grab a pistol from the holster of one of the British MPs. Not to harm anyone, but in the hope that if he did so, maybe they would shoot him dead. That would solve all his problems.

He was still thinking about it when his door was opened by two of his guards. When he had heard their footsteps outside his cell, he had expected breakfast to be shoved through the opening in the door, and was surprised when they told him to come with them. He assumed that he was being taken to be transported back to Poland, and was about to ask why they did not have at least the decency to provide breakfast before sending him off, when he realized that he was being conducted to the building where he had met with Fullerton the day before.

There was no one in the interrogation room, and they told him to sit in the chair he had occupied while being questioned. One of the red-caps remained standing behind him, blocking his path to the door.

He heard someone come in, but did not turn to see who it was. Unexpectedly, he felt a hand on his shoulder, and he looked up to see Andrew Quarles, wearing a trench coat, dressed in civilian clothes, standing over him. Major Fullerton stood behind him.

Quarles spoke first, "Jesus Christ, Jim! I thought you were dead!"

Colling felt a wave of relief sweep over him, "Am I glad to see you. They said they couldn't find you."

"They ran me down in London. Apparently Major Fullerton tried to reach me in Heidelberg with some tale about a guy calling himself Colling and a blonde named Elizabeth showing up in Lübeck on a Polish fishing boat. When I heard, I flew to Hamburg right away."

Fullerton said, "Is this the man you told me about, Colonel?"

"This is him. He was doing a little job for me and covered his tracks so well he can't prove who he really is. Is Miss Hamilton here?"

"Yes," said the British major, "I'll ask that she be brought from her quarters." Then to the MP at the door, he said, "Corporal, would you bring the woman prisoner who calls herself Elizabeth Hamilton?"

"I can't believe you made it," said Quarles. "I understand that you brought out Dr. Zaletski's wife and daughters as well."

"Yes," said Colling. "We also have some other people, a German couple named Breitmann, and two Polish fishermen. You can't let any of them be sent back to Poland."

Quarles turned to Fullerton, "I'll take custody of all these people, Major. Anyone who's helpful to my people deserves to be helped any way possible."

Elizabeth was led in by the British MP corporal. When she saw Quarles, her face broke into a smile, "Andrew! Thank God they found you!" and ran forward and put her arms around his neck. Quarles looked sheepishly over her shoulder at Colling, who grinned back.

After disengaging himself from Elizabeth, Quarles said, "Major, would you be so kind as to have the other members of Sergeant Colling's party brought here?"

Within a few minutes, Hermann and Helga and Elena Zaletski and the girls had been ushered into the room. Fullerton apologized that Janek Boroszki was being held by Royal Navy authorities, but had been sent for.

Quarles explained that all of them would be on their way to the American Zone as soon as transportation could be arranged. He spoke with Elena, and told her how much her husband had missed her and the girls, and how happy he would be to see them in the United States. He asked the Breitmanns if they wished to immigrate to the States or remain in Germany, and Colling was surprised when Hermann asked if they might return to Berlin, the American Zone, of course. Janek was brought in, and Quarles informed him that he and his father could go to the U.S. if they wished. A smile lit up the young fisherman's face when Quarles mentioned that they would find fishing the Grand Banks from New England was a possibility. Until the elder Boroszki was ready to be moved, he could remain here in Lübeck, and Major Fullerton assured him he would be given quarters near the German hospital where his father was.

Major Fullerton instructed his MPs to bring everyone's belongings to their rooms, which would remain unlocked, while the British Army figured out how to arrange transport. Quarles indicated that he could arrange the necessary Air Force flights from Hamburg. As everyone else filed out of the room, Quarles asked Colling and Elizabeth to remain.

As soon as the three of them were alone, Colling asked Quarles, "Did I hear Major Fullerton call you 'Colonel'?"

"Yeah. I made light colonel in January. Now, I want to know…how did you manage to get away from the Russkies? We intercepted a message in December that 'the American' travelling in southern Poland had been disposed of. I figured it was you. And we heard from some other sources that the blonde woman named Zariski had died in a labor camp. I can't believe you two are both still alive."

"Did you inform my parents that I had been killed?" asked Colling.

"Nope. I had enough of a problem figuring out how to let Elizabeth's father and mother know that she wasn't really killed in a jeep accident without compromising her, and telling your parents that you were dead was just too damned complicated. I did make sure some post cards 'from field maneuvers' in North Africa, were sent in your name. I had figured out that I might have to have you involved in another jeep accident somewhere in Morocco. If it's any consolation, you would have received full military honors, and maybe a medal."

Colling smiled, then said, "I suppose I won't get many military honors when I get back to my outfit."

"Right you are. I didn't arrange a cover story for you this time, and you're still listed as a deserter. I can probably see that you don't get picked up before you manage to report in to the 511th General Hospital in Munich…that's where the headquarters for the Kummersfeld dispensary is now located… but I can't guarantee what happens next. I would suggest you show appropriate remorse and ask for company punishment, rather than a court martial. I might be able to arrange that that be accepted."

Quarles turned to Elizabeth, "What about you, Liz? I can get you some kind of a posting in London, if you want."

"No, Andrew, I need a rest. I'd like to go back to the States and see my parents."

Colling said, "Major, could you leave Liz and myself by ourselves for a little bit?"

"Sure. I expect you two have some things to talk over," said Quarles.

When Quarles had closed the door behind him, Colling asked, "When will I see you again, Liz?"

"I don't know, Jim. Maybe you can get a furlough to the States. You have my address in Philadephia."

"That's not good enough, Liz. I want you to marry me."

"Let's give it some time, Jim. I'm not sure I'm ready for this right now. Things are too unsettled. I can't even be sure I'm free to marry you."

"I don't want you to get away from me again, Liz. I thought it was over, and then when I heard that you had been killed, I didn't know what to do."

"I do love you, Jim, but you've got more than a year to go in the Army, and then you want to go back to college. There's a lot than can happen in that time. Maybe I'll hear more from the Air Force about Brian."

Colling was not used to hearing her use her missing husband's name, and not inclined to believe the man would suddenly reappear after having been unheard from in over two years. In an almost subconscious form of denial, he ignored her comments and continued to press his own argument, "It's pretty common these days for couples to be married while still in college. They even have something called 'Married Student Villages' at a lot of schools."

"Well, maybe after you're through with the Army. But you know, you might decide to stay in. Andrew can get you a commission, you know," she said, deftly diverting him from the point he was trying to make.

"I don't think I want to make the service a career."

"Well, then, after you're discharged, come to Philadelphia and we can talk about it."

"This sounds like a brush-off, Liz." he said.

"It isn't, Jim. I just want to go slow."

It became clear to him that Elizabeth was not going to change her mind, and Colling reluctantly admitted to himself that further argument would be useless. He felt he had achieved one concession when he extracted her promise to answer his letters. They shared one final kiss, and then went to join Quarles.

Epilogue

March, 1947

The British provided cars to drive all of them to an RAF airfield outside Hamburg. In the waiting area, Colling had a chance to go through his luggage. He found that Fullerton had returned his Luger and the ammunition, and all of Cousin Jerry's papers. Even the forged passports and documents were in the suitcase. He had exactly thirty dollars left, and a few small zloty notes. He was considering asking Quarles for the replacement of his personal funds when the man handed him an envelope. Inside was $5,000. Quarles winked at him when Colling looked up from riffling through the currency.

Colling said goodbye to the Breitmanns, wishing them well. Hermann smiled slyly, telling him that the British had been good enough to return the bag of gold sovereigns that he had hidden in his wife's suitcase, and when Colling's eyebrows raised, laughed and asked him if he really believed that he had handed over all the Countess' bequest to Inspector Zavek. He told Colling he had plans to open a garage in Berlin, in the American Zone, of course.

Colling also wished Elena Zaletski and her girls the best of luck in the United States, and Elena told him that they would never forget him. He did not know what to say in response, and could only watch in silence as they walked out to the C-47 that would take them to London.

Elizabeth was assigned to the same plane as the Zaletski family. Before following them onto the plane, she took Colling in her arms and kissed him passionately. Then she whispered in his ear, “Please understand, Jim. I promise we’ll see each other again. Trust me.”

Quarles indicated he would stay behind to make sure that the Boroszkis would be protected until they were able to travel to the United States. Colling would take a flight into Munich, where Quarles had alerted the Military Police to ignore Sergeant Colling so that he could voluntarily report in at the 511th General Hospital.

Colling had been allotted a place on the last Air Force C-47 to leave Hamburg that day. He tried to sleep during the flight, but the noise and vibration made that impossible.

He took a taxi from the Munich airport to the railway station. He was surprised that when he turned over the check stub that he had kept concealed under the insole of his shoe, his B-4 bag was returned to him. His uniform smelled musty, and after he had shaken it out and put it on, it fit him more loosely that it had in the fall, a sign of how much weight he must have lost.

Once in uniform, he was able to catch a ride in a jeep with a corporal who said he would be passing the hospital on his way to perform some errand, and within minutes, Colling was walking through the ornate black iron gates of the 511th General Hospital. He acted as if his arrival was routine, not stopping to check in at the guard post.

Colling followed the signs in the building’s corridors and found his way to the door marked “Hospital Headquarters.” A tech-5 was manning the desk in the outer office, and Colling gave him his name and informed him he was reporting in. Colling was asked to wait, and he stood in the “at ease” position until he was told to come into the inner office.

Colling had snapped to attention and saluted before he recognized the figure seated behind the desk. Major Vincent looked up and smiled at him, “Well, Collings, I see you have decided to rejoin us.” To the tech-5, Vincent added, “Corporal, call the Provost Marshal’s office and tell them we have a deserter for the stockade.”

Author’s Postscript

Those readers who are familiar with the Order of Battle of the U.S. Army in World War II will undoubtedly recognize that there was no 61st Division that actively served in the European Theater of Operations, nor has there ever been an infantry regiment designated as the 40th in the Army organizational tables. The 61st was a “Ghost” division that was proposed to be organized, but dropped from consideration in 1943 due to financial and manpower limitations.

The author’s 61st is modeled after the 71st Division, which was actually formed from “orphan” Regular Army infantry regiments, and served with distinction in the closing months of the war. The 71st , nick-named the “Red Circle” division because of the red circle that enclosed the divisional number on its unit shoulder patches, was considered a “Regular Army” division, resulting in its remaining part of the occupation forces in Germany until well into 1946. Many of the events recounted in Dog Robber were drawn directly from the pages of the 71st Division newspaper, the Red Circle Times, published in postwar Germany.

The military and political policies and events described are part of the historical record, no matter that they have generally been forgotten by all but historians specializing in the post-World War II era in Europe.

Jim Colling has quite a few months left in his enlistment, and will undoubtedly find himself called upon to engage in further adventures.

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