

The Case of the Nazi Canary

A SEATON BEGG MYSTERY

The Nazis entrusted the future of their party to the capable hands of Sir Seaton Begg, Metatemporal Detective -the only man who could possibly destroy them!

By **MICHAEL MOORCOCK**

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The Masked Buckaroo, The White Wolf's Legend, The Affair Of The Seven Virgins, Lost Sorceress Of The Silent Citadel, Kane Of Old Mars, The Moon Hawk, Calling Jerry Cornell!, The Caribbean Crisis, The Metatemporal Detective, Again; Seaton Begg!, The Adventure Of The Texan's Honour, Buchan Of Whitehall, The "Sir Milk And Blood" Case, The Case Of The Printer's Devil, The Case Of The Chinese Agent, The War Lord Of The Air, Through The Shaving Mirror, The Tarot Murder Case, The Case Of The Dreamthief's Daughter, and many other best-selling "thrillers" of crime and the supernatural.

CHAPTER ONE MESSAGE FROM MUNICH

It was, or would be, the misty autumn of 1931. A suite of comfortable bachelor apartments in the highest tower of London's exclusive Sporting Club Square.

Sir Seaton Begg, former MI5 special operator now metatemporal investigator, reached across the fire-grate, singeing the sleeve of his smoking jacket. As he examined the silk, his aquiline, unconventionally handsome features were illuminated by the fire.

"What d'you make of that, Taffy?"

John "Taffy" Sinclair, Begg's best and oldest friend, and the leading Home Office pathologist, accepted the rectangle of yellow paper. The balding giant had the mild but sturdy rectitude of an East End bishop. Balancing a cup of Darjeeling in one hand, he sank back into the depths of his armchair to read. Moments later, with an impatient expression, he set the telegram aside.

"The National Socialists?" Taffy frowned. "Sort of German Mus-solini-ites? Aren't they even worse than the commies for going around beating up honest citizens? And, of course, there's that lunatic anti-Jewish muck."

Begg smiled a familiar, almost sly, smile. "I gather they will restore 'German pride' and so forth, meaning, no doubt, the military. A very attractive message to the heavy industrialists, naturally, who find more profit in swords than ploughshares." He lifted delicate bone china to his full, masculine lips. "The armorers and their jackals."

Like Sinclair, Begg supported world disarmament under the League of Nations and was disappointed when Woodrow Wilson had been forced to placate the parochial exigencies of his Congress by quitting the League.

Begg continued with some emphasis. "Look here, Taffy, read that thing again and let me know any other names you recognize, apart from their Little Corporal destined to become their German Napoleon."

"You mean that awful oik who looks like Charlie Chaplin? Musso's effeminate pal Mr. Hitler? The Nazi general secretary or whatever he styles himself. Nothing new, is it?"

"I'd agree he seems to be preaching a familiar line of l'intoxica-tion special." Sinclair reached a taper into the fire and relit his pipe. "These chaps have been getting more dangerous since the successes of Primo Riviera and Mussolini, of course." He puffed heroically on his briar.

"I agree, old man." Begg glanced into the fire. For an instant his eyes burned an angry red. "Come on, Taffy. Be a pal and glance at that wire again."

Reluctantly, Sinclair adjusted his spectacles. "Well, Hess is a pretty common German name. But don't you know a Baron von Hess? Some sort of relative of your cousin, Count von Bek?"

"Von Bek?" Begg laughed at this mention of his old sparring partner, known to the British public as Monsieur Zodiac, the Albino, Count of Crime. "I doubt if my cousin would deign to involve himself in this. It's not what you call an epicurean crime, eh? What about this Fräulein Raubal?"

"Her first name, Geli, is short for Angela, I believe. Raubal's a fairly common name in southern Germany and Austria. Who is she, do you know?"

"Herr Hitler's mistress, my dear chap." Begg smiled self-indulgently, at once mocking and forgiving his own relish

for scandal. "They are also, one hears, close relatives."

Sinclair shook his head. "Afraid I don't follow the German gossip columns."

"You should, old boy." The lean detective sprang from his chair. He tapped out his own pipe against the fireplace. "You'd learn a lot more from them, Taffy, than from any piece of biased front-page news." He waved at the untidy stacks of *Der Spiegel*, *SvenskeDagbladet*, *Berliner Paste*, and *Muncbener Telegraf* which shared not always agreeable space with *Le Figaro*, *Les Temps*, *Al Misr*, *The Times of India*, *The Cape Times*, *El Pais*, *La Posta*, and the Berlin-published *Munda Veritas*. Few were open at the early pages. "Now, anything else?"

"Well, the thing's from Briennerstrasse. Seems to be genuine. That's a pretty posh avenue in the salubrious bit of Munich. Papal Nuncio's there and all that. So these chaps seem to have some powerful backers, as you say. Naturally, Begg, you wouldn't consider working for such people!"

"Well, I agree it might be a bit unsavory to take their money, but I'm curious. Fascinating, eh, the dreams of power of failed shopkeepers and frustrated shipping clerks?"

"That's downright perverse, Begg!" exclaimed the sensitive Celt. "Keep 'em away with a ten-foot pole, I say."

"Currently President Stalin's favorite foreign policy strategy, the ten-foot Pole." Sir Seaton referred to Lenin's successor, who led the Bolshevik Party in the Duma and was spouting nationalistic rubbish every day, winning votes from Monsieur Trotsky, the liberal internationalist. "Poland as a buffer zone in case civil war breaks out in Germany. Could be the touch paper for another world conflict."

"Germany's safe enough," Taffy insisted. "She has the best and most just political constitution in the world. Certainly better than ours. Even sturdier than the American."

Like so many old Harrovians, but unlike his former schoolfellow Begg, Sinclair had a comfortable, phlegmatic belief in the sense of the commons and their strong survival instinct both as social democrats and as self-interested individuals with jobs and businesses to ensure. War made economic sense for a couple of years at most and then began impoverishing the participants. It was the one lesson learned from the recent beastliness ending with the Treaty of Versailles.

Begg took back the German wire and read it aloud, translating swiftly. *"My dear Sir Seaton: Here in Germany we have long admired the exploits of your famous English detectives. We are sufficiently impressed with your national virtues as a detecting folk to inquire if you, paramount in your specialized profession, would care to come at once to Munich, where you will have the satisfaction of rescuing a reputation, bringing the guilty to justice, and also knowing you have saved a noble and betrayed nation. The reputation is that of our country's most able philosopher-general. I refer, of course, to our Guide Herr Adolf Hitler, author of Mein Kampf and bearer of the Iron Cross, who has been devastated by the murder of his ward, Fräulein 'Geli' Raubal, and whose reputation could be ruined by the scandal. With a view to seeing the triumph of justice, could we, the National Socialist Party, enjoin you to lose no speed in taking the earliest zeppelin from Manchester to Munich? While B.O.A.C. provides an excellent run from Croydon and appears quicker, there is a long delay making stops at Berlin and Frankfurt, therefore we recommend you take the modern German vessel which leaves Manchester Moss Side field at five PM and arrives at ten AM the next morning. An excellent train leaves Kings Cross at two pm and connects with the airship, the Spirit of Nuremberg. Please excuse the brevity of this telegram. My inner voices tell me you are destined to save not merely Germany but the entire Western world from an appalling catastrophe and become the best-loved Englishman our country has ever known. On the presumption that you will accept our case, as you accept your historic destiny, I have sent, via courier, all necessary first-class travel documents for yourself and an assistant, together with documents enabling you to bring any personal transport you favor. We are, you see, familiar with your foibles. I will personally be at Munich International Aerodrome to meet the ZZ. 700. I look forward to the honor of shaking your hand. Writing in all admiration and expectation that your famous sense of fair play will move your conscience, I am, Yours Most Sincerely, Rudolf Hess, Deputy Leader, The N.S.D.A.P., Briennerstrasse, Munich, Bavaria, Germany.*

"Rum style, eh?"

"About as laconic as his countryman Nietzsche," reflected Sinclair with a snort. "No doubt the poor blighter's trench-crazy. Harmless enough, I'm sure, but still barking barmy. I mean to say, old sport, you are our leading metatemporal snooper. There's all sorts of ordinary 'tecs could do this job. This case is merely about a particularly grubby murder of a girl, who was probably no better than she ought to be, by a seedy petit bourgeois who sets himself up as the savior of the world. He'll likely find his true destiny, if not on the gallows, among the sandwich-board men of Hyde Park Corner, warning against the dangers of red meat and Asian invasion. A distinct case of an undersatisfied libido and an overstimulated ego, I'd say."

"Quite so, old man. I know your penchant for the Viennese trick cyclists. But surely you wouldn't wish to see the wrong cove found guilty of such an unpleasant crime?"

"There's no chance he's guilty, I suppose?" Sinclair instantly regretted his words. "No, no. Of course we must assume his innocence. But there are many more deserving cases around the world, I'm sure."

"Few of them cases allowing me to take the very latest in aerial luxury liners and even put yourself and Dolly on the payroll without question."

"It's no good, Begg, the idea's unpalatable to me. . . ."

With an athlete's impatient speed, Begg crossed to his vast, untidy bureau, and tugged something out of a pigeonhole. "Besides, our tickets arrived not ten minutes before you turned up for tea. Oh, say you'll do it, old man. I promise you, the adventure will be an education, if nothing else."

Taffy began to grumble, but by midnight he was on his feet, phoning down for his Daimler. He would meet Begg,

he promised, at Kings Cross, where they would travel to Manchester that afternoon on the high-speed *M & E Flyer*, so as to be safely aboard the zep by four-thirty.

Begg was delighted. He trusted and needed his old comrade's judgment and cool head. Their personalities were complementary, like a couple of very different fives players. This time Begg felt he had involved himself in a job that would have him holding his nose for longer than he cared.

As for the Presbyterian Taffy, he would still be debating the morality of accepting the tickets when they met the next day and began the journey to Munich.

CHAPTER TWO HOMICIDE OR SUICIDE?

Sir Seaton and Taffy had fought the "pickle-fork brigade" for too long to hate them. They understood that your average Fritz wasn't so very different from your average Tommy and that it took self-interested and foolish politicians to make men kill one another. Yet for all his certainty that the War to End War had done its work, Begg knew that vigilance was forever the price of freedom. Few threats to our hard-won rights came from the expected sources. The unexpected angle of attack was generally successful. Authority is by nature conservative and therefore never truly prepared for surprises. It was Seaton Begg's job always to be prepared for the unexpected. That was why the Admiralty, the War Office, the Home Office, and the Foreign Office all continued to pay him substantial retainers to investigate any affair that, in their opinion, required the specialized services of one versed in the subtleties of alternative timelines, which he was able to cross with rare ease. It was also why they encouraged him to take the occasional foreign case.

The service aboard the *Spirit of Nuremberg* was impeccable. This made Taffy a little nervous.

"Sort of military feel about it, if you know what I mean. Sometimes I think I prefer the old, sloppy cockneys we get on the Croydon-Paris run."

Begg was amused by this. "Sit back and enjoy it, old man," he said. He had asked for that morning's Munich newspapers, which were full of the recently averted bomb attack on the new Miami-Havana rail tunnel. After quickly scanning the headlines, Begg ignored this news, and concentrated his attention on the newspapers' interiors, especially the back sections.

"I see a well-known hater of Hitler and Co. is leading a new orchestra at the Carlton Tea Rooms. Though wisely he has adopted another name. Margarita Sarfati remains Mussolini's most trusted art advisor, and the Nazis berate the Duce for keeping a Jewish mistress with decadent modernist tastes. Roosevelt is proclaimed the new Mussolini by some American papers and the new Stalin by the Hearst press, who are supporting Hitler. And Marion Davies, Hearst's longtime mistress, is secretly keeping a liason with Max Peters, the Jewish cowboy star who is such a close friend of Mussolini. Ah, the intrigues of the powerful. . . . The Raubal murder case has proved meat and drink for the left-wing press. They are thirsty for any sign of Hitler's downfall, it seems. But the public still expects evidence if it's going to change its loyalties now!"

Taffy hated gossip. Deprived of his *Times*, he contented himself with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine's* crossword puzzle, which he found surprisingly straightforward.

The wind and rain thudded hard against the huge airship's canopy as she swayed at anchor between forward and stern masts. In spite of the stirring waltz tunes coming over the Tannoy, there was still an air of adventure about boarding an airship, especially in bad weather when you realized how much you were at the mercy of elemental nature. Outside the windows, Moss Side Field was obscured by mist and even Manchester's famous chimneys were hardly visible, wrapped, as they were, in cloaks of their own making. Begg had been pleased to see the smoke.

"Those chimneys are alive, Taffy," he had said upon boarding. "And a live chimney means a living wage for those poor devils in the factory towns."

Since Begg needed to make notes, they had ordered cabin service. At seven PM sharp, as the lights of London faded on their starboard bow and they saw below the faint white flecks of waves, there came a discreet knock on their door. At Begg's command, a short, jolly, red-faced waiter entered their little sitting room. They had already decided on their menu and the efficient waiter soon converted a writing table to a dining table and laid it with a bright, white cloth. He then proceeded to bring the first courses, which, while of the heavy German type, were eaten by the pair with considerable zest. A good white wine helped the meal down.

The signs of dining magically removed, Taffy took up a light novel and read for an hour while Begg continued to make notes and refer to the newspapers. Eventually, the pathologist could stay awake no longer and, with a yawning "Good night, old man," decided to turn in. He took the sleeping cubicle to the left of the main room. He knew from experience not to compete with Seaton Begg, who needed at most five hours' sleep in twenty-four.

Indeed, when Sinclair rose to use the well-designed hidden amenities, it seemed Begg had done no more than change into his pajamas while retaining his place and posture from the previous night.

Only the scenery below had changed. They had crossed the North Sea and were now making their way above the neat fields of the German lowlands. In another two hours they would berth in Munich, the *Spirit's* home port. Meanwhile there was a full English breakfast to consume and wash down with what, even Sinclair admitted, was a passable cup of Assam.

Munich Aerodrome had the very latest in winching masts. Disembarking from the fully grounded zeppelin, Begg and Sinclair descended the ship's staircase. They were greeted at the bottom by a tall, rather cadaverous individual in a

poorly fitting Norfolk jacket of chocolate brown, two swastika armbands in the German colors of black, red, and white, rather baggy riding breeches, and highly polished polo boots. He offered them a *Quo Vadis* Roman salute, made famous in the popular film drama, then immediately began to pump Begg's hand.

"This is such an honor, Sir Seaton. I have read about you so much. I myself have a natural affinity with the British aristocracy. I so admire your Prince of Wales. The best of English and German blood breed fine specimens of humanity, eh?" Then his affable manner turned abruptly anxious. "Might I know your eating habits?"

Begg, as Sinclair could tell, was a little taken aback by Herr Hess's intensity.

"Eating habits?"

"I ask because of lunch," Hess confided.

Begg gave every appearance of insouciance as he replied. "A plate of weisswurst and a pint or two of your marvelous beer will suit us down to the ground, old chap."

Hess frowned. "Both Alf"—he coughed, anxious to let the investigators know he was on such intimate terms with Hitler—"I mean Herr Hitler and myself are convinced vegans. We are firmly opposed to the cruel treatment of animals and understand the dangers to health involved in eating their slaughtered meat." He shuddered. "Adolf Hitler is a man of considerable feeling. He would not harm a fly, let alone another human being. I hope you don't judge us all by Berlin decadence or aggression, which is largely a foreign and alien invention, anyway."

As they talked, they strolled through the passenger foyer of the great modern aerodrome. Over a dozen pairs of steel masts held ships, or awaited vessels from all over southern and eastern Europe. The 'drome was one of Munich's very latest monuments to municipal pride.

The weather was much improved and a warm, golden sun was reflected in the silvery hulls of the airships. Through massing white clouds, rays of sunlight struck the distant outlines of Munich herself, her twisted gables and glittering spires. As they reached the exit, Begg was delighted to see Dolly waiting for them at the curbside.

Dolly was Begg's massive, supercharged Duesenberg touring car, custom-made, powered by a V-12 engine tuned to take the great automobile up to two hundred miles an hour if necessary.

Sinclair slipped discreetly into the shadows of the backseats, leaving Hess to sit next to Begg as the detective engaged the engine and gears. With a mighty purring roar, they were soon on their way to Munich, following Hess's precise directions. In what seemed a quixotic request, Begg asked Hess to give him a quick tour of the city and take them to the Nazi HQ, familiarly known as the Brown House, before lunch. Knowing the ways of English detectives to be mysterious and circuitous, Hess did not hesitate in obeying.

Sinclair had visited the city several times and had an affection for it, but Begg knew Berlin much better. He remarked on Munich's pleasant architecture, the broad tree-lined avenues and parks, her well-appointed public galleries and museums, her extraordinary Grimmelshausen Museum, which warned of the horrors of war, the little landing fields, right on the edge of the city, where the autogyro buses came and went.

Hess had lived here for much of his life. He pointed out the various sights. Munich was a busy provincial metropolis with an excellent public transport system, chiefly trams and buses, though increasingly the autogyro companies were taking business from the main lines. As her many churches indicated, she was predominantly Catholic by religion. Her almost Italian embrace of modernity was striking, especially since so much of her new architecture was in the vein of Gaudi and the Viennese moderns. The Nazis, Hess informed them primly, would tear down all decadent architecture and replace it with impressive classical designs. Meanwhile the old Bavarian capital had the baroque quaintness usually associated with German provinces, tributes to the taste and vision of her princes and governors.

Dolly was soon purring through the old quarter of the city, making a circuit of the huge, covered market, then driving along another avenue, sparsely occupied by large mansions and official buildings, some flying the flags of other nations. Here Hess gave the order to stop. They had arrived at the Brown House, the N.S.D.A.P. head-quarters. The respectable surroundings made one think twice about the party's violent image. The huge silk Nazi "hooked cross" banners were very striking as they stirred in the faint, westerly breeze.

Once at the Brown House, Hess's status was confirmed. Smartly uniformed SA men in their odd ski-cap headgear and brown uniforms sprang to open the doors of the car, and the three occupants were greeted with a barrage of "Heil Hitlers" and lifted arms, as they entered the busy vestibule decorated in the very latest "Folkic" style. Bustling as it was, the place had a mournful, depressed quality, as if everyone in it grieved for their leader's loss and feared for his safety in the face of slander and scandal.

Now Hess became a different man. He took on the authority and manner of a high-ranking officer as he led the two Englishmen through the simple, quasi-rustic foyer and up the low, wide staircase.

"This is the Führer's own office."

Hess guided them into a large, triangular room dominated by a portrait of Hitler himself, his hands in Napoleonic pose, his stern, cool eyes fixed on the problems of the Nation and those who would threaten Germany's security again. Outside there appeared to be a large amount of building work going on.

"We are making a barracks for the SA boys," explained Hess. "This place, of course, is a natural target for Sozie attack." Sozie was the slang for Socialist, just as Nazi was slang for National Socialist. The street clashes between the two groups had become endemic and notorious throughout Germany.

"I'd be obliged, Herr Hess," said Begg, "if you wouldn't mind telling us again exactly what you know about the circumstances surrounding the discovery of poor Fräulein Raubal's body. I know you were the first party member on the scene."

"Naturally the Winters called me first," agreed Hess. His black, bushy eyebrows twitched as if with a life of their own. He pulled at his earlobes and, grinding his teeth, stared into a middle distance where he seemed to be looking at a

cinema screen presenting the events he described.

"Geli is Alf's ward, you know. His niece. His half sister's child. When he moved into his new apartment in Prinzregensburgstrasse he needed someone to look after the place, so he invited his sister to come and be his housekeeper. He insisted she bring her daughter Geli, too. He was, I will admit, a little infatuated, but more in the way a childless man might yearn for a daughter. He doted on the girl. He bought her whatever she wanted. He paid for drama lessons. Singing lessons. Dancing lessons. He took her with him everywhere he went."

"Even to political meetings?" asked Begg, making a note.

"Even to those. His career had begun to prosper. The SA were glad to see him with a girl from time to time. He paid for the singing lessons, because she had a talent for operetta, which Adolf loves. Of course there were more puritanical party comrades, such as Heinrich Himmler, who disapproved of this relationship. Himmler felt it detracted from Hitler's seriousness, and it made him vulnerable to the anti-Nazi press. There were vile rumors, of course, but those are always attached to successful politicians.

"Geli caused the odd scene in public, and Alf seemed unable to control her. Alf knew how Himmler felt, but he ignored him. Geli fired his political engine, he told Himmler. Without Geli he could not give the speeches which swayed the crowds.

"But it was not only Himmler who noticed," Hess said, "how much less the rich ladies would give to party funds when they saw their beloved Herr Hitler, who on other occasions had laid his head in their laps, with his niece. They had influence over their husbands. And the industrialists Adolf wanted to win over were not too sure about a man who took his niece everywhere he went.

"I know there were strong arguments in this very room. Once Adolf became so incensed by what he said was interference in his private life that he fell to the floor and began to tear at the carpet with his teeth. He can be very wearing sometimes. That is why few of us ever wish to upset him. . . ."

"The carpet?" declared Sinclair. "With his teeth?"

"I wasn't there on that occasion, but Röhm, Strasser, and Doctor Göbbels were, as I recall."

"You have told us about Captain Röhm, but have not explained about Herr Strasser and Doctor Göbbels."

"Personally, I prefer Röhm, for all his predilections. He is at least an honest soldier and as loyal to Hitler as I am. Gregor Strasser is the leader of our party in the Reichstag. He's a bit of a left-winger. A very distinguished man, but rather at odds with Adolf over the direction of the party. Strasser is more socialist than nationalist. Doctor Göbbels is the intellectual of the party. A frail little man with a club-foot. He represents what I call 'the Berlin faction'—those who have more recently attached themselves to our party's destiny."

"And would any of these think the death of Geli Raubal would benefit Herr Hitler and the party?" Begg enquired, staring out at the construction in what had once been a rather pretty garden.

"Oh, all of them would probably say something like it." Hess nodded absently, looking about the room, its sparse furniture, rather as if he saw it for the first time. "But saying and doing are very different things. I can't see Röhm, who thought Geli a bit of a doxy, or Strasser, who was the last one to want scandal, or Göbbels, who is our chief propagandist, threatening either Hitler's career or the party's prospects by killing Geli. And Captain Goring has no interest in such things. Göbbels might have made her an offer she couldn't refuse. Röhm might have frightened her away. Strasser would have told her to keep her nose clean and not embarrass the Führer."

"And this Herr Himmler?"

"He's a cold fish. He has Hitler's ear. He has wheedled his way into the Führer's confidences in recent years. I thought he might have been behind that sniper's assassination attempt. They tried to kill me, you know. But I heard the rifle shot in time and flung myself flat. I still live in fear in case the sniper should try again—"

"You were telling us about Herr Himmler."

"Head of Hitler's personal bodyguard. Big rival of Röhm, who runs the SA, our storm troopers. He did hate the relationship. But he, too, knows that the party is on the very brink of sweeping the country. As far as I know he is in Berlin. Why would he jeopardize his own career? You see, there are no real suspects within the party. This is the work of communists and their backers. Our self-interest would not be served by scandal."

"True," agreed Begg. "So you believe there was perhaps a political motive for her death. And what about a personal one?"

"You will have to ask others about that." Hess was suddenly very subdued.

Under Begg's clever prompting, Hess revealed all he knew of the Geli Raubal murder case.

Hitler was becoming increasingly jealous of Geli, who grew steadily bored with his prolonged absences from the flat. His political career took him farther and farther from Munich for longer periods. She, being a young, spirited woman, had wanted more gaiety in her life and eventually had asked her uncle Alf if he would pay for her to go to Vienna, where she had more friends and where she could get far better voice lessons than in Munich.

Hitler had objected to this. He had not wanted her to go to Vienna. He had not wanted her to leave their flat. He was becoming even more suspicious of her. He threatened and wheedled, and it seemed she calmed down. Then, on the morning he was due to leave for an important speaking tour, there was another row. "It was to involve some crucial secret meetings, for there are those in our party who do not believe Alf should be courting the rich at all. Yet without them, we are nothing." Hess paused, his voice taking on an increasingly retrospective tone.

"That same morning, Geli had found one of her pet canaries dead on the floor of its cage. She had become hysterical. She threatened Hitler. She said that if he did not let her go to Vienna she would kill herself. Then she threatened to spill the beans about 'everything.'"

"Everything?" Begg lifted an eyebrow.

Hess did not know what "everything" was, he said. But Sinclair recognized Begg's sudden alertness.

"Well, Hitler's car was to call for him early that morning, after breakfast. He could not cancel his engagements. But Geli demanded that he either stay with her or let her go to Vienna. Again Hitler refused. Even as he got into the car, Geli appeared on the balcony above. 'So you won't let me go to Vienna?' she had shouted.

"Hitler's reply had been a terse 'No.' Then the automobile had driven away."

Hours later Hitler was meeting his new backers. He stayed overnight at the Deutscherhof in Nuremberg. There were many witnesses. At eight-thirty the next morning, the housekeeper, Annie Winter, arrived at Prinzregensburgstrasse to begin work. The flat was silent. Frau Winter knocked several times, without getting a response.

Eventually she sent for her butler husband, to force it. They found

Geli.

"She appeared to have shot herself. Beside her lay the dead canary, spattered with her blood. She was shot in the heart."

Hitler's Walther 9.5 mm automatic pistol lay near her hand. She had been dead for some hours. Hess had been called. Eventually, he called the police.

"You have to be certain who you call, Sir Seaton. The Munich police have a decided anti-Nazi bias and would love to use something like this against the Führer."

The police had soon decided Fräulein Raubal could not easily have shot herself at that angle and that she had probably been murdered. Nobody believed it was suicide.

"And it could not have been Alf, Sir Seaton, however it seems. Alf was miles away, in Nuremberg, when the crime occurred. You can see how easy it will be, perhaps, to prove he paid someone to kill her. But he loved Geli, Sir Seaton. He lived for her. He is too gentle. Too idealistic. I fear that if the case isn't cleared up rapidly, by one such as yourself, it will mean the end of Alf's career and, because he is our most important spokesman, the dissolution of the Nazi Party. Please stop this from happening, Sir Seaton. Please say you will help us!"

Begg's features were hidden from Hess and the astonished Sinclair as he spoke reassuringly.

"Of course I will, Mr. Hess. It's not the sort of problem one solves every day. And we do love a challenge—don't we, Taffy?"

The pathologist was taken aback. "If you say so, old boy."

Sometimes even Taffy Sinclair found his friend's game very hard to follow.

CHAPTER THREE LEADING THE MASTER RACE

Begg's first stop after lunch was to the murder scene itself. Prinzregensburgstrasse was the smart area where "Führer" Hitler now lived. On the way, Hess explained how the Winters had called him and he in turn had tried to telephone Hitler in Nuremberg. But Hitler had already left Nuremberg and was traveling to his next appointment. Apparently he was singing snatches of song, entertaining the other occupants of the car with jokes, impressions of people they had just met.

"Many people, Sir Seaton, have no idea what a marvelous entertainer Alf is. He used to keep us in fits of laughter on those long tours. He could impersonate anyone. Pompous innkeepers, party officials, intense old maids, famous politicians! He could have gone onstage as a comedian if he had not been chosen to lead his people."

Hess recollected the question. "Well, the hotel sent a boy after Herr Hitler's car, and when he got the message Alf almost collapsed. Everyone says it was completely unexpected. Indeed the first words from his lips, I understand, were 'Who has done this?' He had the car turned, his appointments canceled, telephoned me the first chance he got, and came back at once to Munich. It was my suggestion I next call the Munich Police Headquarters and he assented. And then I sent you a telegram. My staff arranged your tickets and so on."

"The police weren't suspicious concerning the time you waited before telephoning them?"

"I explained that I myself had been in a state of some shock after seeing poor Geli's body." He paused and then looked with a strange, new innocence into Begg's face. "I know I am a suspect, Sir Seaton, but I seek peace and security and pride from the Nazi Party, not violence. This is what most of us in Germany want. The thought of killing a mouse makes me sick. The thought of killing some poor, foolish creature who had been flattered and cajoled into waters well above her natural depth, that is abominable. You must not judge us all by those who 'goose-step' through the main streets of our towns with banners and bludgeons. Yet remember those poor lads were boys when they went to war, and what they saw in the trenches and learned to do in the trenches never left them, especially when they found they had no jobs. ..."

Rudolf Hess continued this apologia all the way to the flat in Prinzregensburgstrasse, an imposing modern classical building built on the corner of a broad, quiet avenue. Hitler's flat was on the second floor. It was light, airy, and luxurious in a subdued, up-to-date way. Doors led in several directions from the main vestibule, suggesting servants' quarters and guest apartments. Certainly there was every way in which Hitler, his half sister, and niece could live together in such a flat very respectably indeed.

Minutes later, Sir Seaton was interviewing Herr and Frau Winter themselves. The couple had found Geli on the carpet in her bedroom, only partially dressed, as if she had been disturbed at her toilet.

The Winters were clearly shaken by what had happened. At that moment Frau Winter resembled a bewildered

mole, in her gray cardigan, gray blouse, skirt, and stockings. This dour appearance was not, Begg guessed, natural to her. Herr Winter's features, on the other hand, seemed habitually surly, yet his voice was agreeable enough. Neither man nor woman was of very high intelligence. They both confirmed, under Begg's questioning, that Hitler and his niece had quarreled increasingly as his political career made demands on his time. But the party needed Hitler.

"Even I have fallen under his oratorical spell," said Winter seriously. "It is almost impossible to escape his charm when he wants something from you. Crowds love him. Without him the party would be lost. But as a result, he spent even less time with Geli. You couldn't really blame her. She grew restless; he grew jealous."

"He had plenty to be jealous about, too," Frau Winter interjected with an angry twitter. "She was not a good girl, Sir Seaton."

Herr Winter reluctantly conceded. "I think she had plenty of company when Herr Hitler was gone. In particular that tall, blond SS man who wanted her to run off to Vienna with him . . . Himmler's chap."

"You saw them?" Begg demanded.

"Just as we saw the whips and the blood after one of Herr Hitler's 'sessions,'" she said primly.

"Whips?" asked a startled Begg. "Blood?"

Herr Winter interrupted hastily, too late to silence his wife. "It was Herr Hitler's way of relaxing. He carries heavy responsibilities. It is often the way with important men, not so? We are people of the world here. We all know what goes on in Berlin."

Having verified with the Winters the events of the recent past, Sir Seaton Begg thanked them gravely and made to leave. Taffy Sinclair in particular seemed glad of some fresh air.

Back in the Duesenberg, Begg asked a further question of Hess. "Tell me, old boy, did Herr Hitler ever have his niece watched? And was he ever blackmailed?"

"Aha! I knew I had approached the right detective. You realized. Unfortunately, since the blackmail, he's grown suspicious of everyone. Yes, he did have a couple of SA men in plainclothes keeping an eye on her, but they were incompetent. Himmler wanted to use SS people. He thinks they're more efficient. So yes, he watched her, but you can't really blame him for that."

"Blackmail?" said Sinclair from the shadows in the back, unable to contain himself. "Your leader was being blackmailed?"

"A couple of years ago. That's not what the blackmailer called it, of course, Herr Sinclair. But Putzi, Hitler's foreign-press secretary, handled the details of that. Putzi's half-American, a great source of vitality, you know. We all love him. Only his jokes and piano playing can cheer Alf up when he's really depressed. ..."

Begg had begun to realize Hess had to be kept on course or he would wander off down all kinds of twists and turns in the story. He slowed the car behind a stopping tram, then indicated that he was going to pass. Slowly he increased pressure on the accelerator. "Putzi?" "A nickname, naturally. Putzi Hanfstaengl was at Harvard. He's an art expert. Has a gallery in Munich. His firm publishes the official engraved portraits of Hitler, Strasser, Röhm, Goring, myself, and the other eminent Nazis. Anyway, Putzi took the money to the blackmailer—we weren't rich in those days and it was hard to scrape together—and got the material back. Probably nothing especially bad. But, of course, Alf became much less trusting after that."

"Does Herr Hanfstaengl usually enjoy a drink at the Hotel Bavaria?"

Hess's enormous eyebrows almost met his hairline.

"Mein Gott, Sir Seaton! You are indeed the genius they say you are. That is remarkable deduction. Putzi's natural American vitality has been drained, it seems, by recent events. He has never really been at ease since we began to gain real power. A little bit of a playboy, I suppose, but a good fellow and a loyal friend."

After that, Begg asked no more questions. He darted Sinclair a vindicated glance, for he had gotten that information from one of his much-loved "gossip columns." He told Hess he would like to drive around and think the case through for a while. Hess showed some impatience, but his admiration for the English detective soon reminded him of his manners. Heels were clicked as Hess was dropped off at the Brown House. Then Begg had touched the feather-light wheel of the superb roadster and turned her back toward central Munich.

CHAPTER FOUR FEAR AND TREMBLING

As usual, Sinclair was amazed at Begg's extraordinary retentive memory, which had drawn itself a precise map of the town and was able to thread Dolly's massive bonnet through the winding streets of old Munich as if the driver had lived there all his life.

Soon they were leaving the Duesenberg in the safekeeping of the Hotel Bavaria's garage and strolling into the plush and brass of the old-fashioned main bar. Clearly the Bavaria was more popular with those who preferred to be in bed with a good book by eight PM. The bar was large, but sparsely occupied, save for one middle-aged couple dancing to the strains of Franz Lehar played by an ancient orchestral ensemble half-hidden by palms and curtains on the distant dais. At a shadowed table two smart young men upon second glance turned out to be smart young women. Against the walls leaned a couple of sleepy-eyed old waiters and at the bar sat two young couples from the local "cocktail set" who had lost their way to the latest jazz party. Slumped alone, as far away from the couples as possible, wearing a great, bulky English tweed overcoat, sat a giant of a man nursing a drink which seemed tiny in his monstrous

hands.

With his huge, pale head and irregular features, an expression of solemn gloom on his long face, the lone drinker looked almost comical. He glanced up in some curiosity as they entered. Begg wasted no time in introducing himself and his colleague. "You are Herr Hitler's foreign-press secretary, I understand. Too often in Berlin, these days, I suppose. We've been hired to prove your boss's innocence."

Herr "Putzi" Hanfstaengl did not seem greatly surprised that Begg knew his name. He lifted his hand in a salute before returning it to the glass. "You guys from the *Times*, are you?" He spoke in English with an educated American accent. He was clearly drunk. "I told your colleagues—when the *Times* turns up, that'll be a sign this is actually an international story." He let out an enormous sigh and drew himself to his full six and a half feet.

"You've been trying to keep all this speculation out of the papers, I suppose."

"What do you think, sport?" Hanfstaengl tossed back his drink and snapped his fingers for a refill. "It's not doing anyone much good, least of all Alf himself. He's gone under the bed, as we say, and won't come out. And I'm talking too much. Have a schnapps!" Again he snapped for the waiter, who disappeared through a door and a little later appeared behind the bar to serve them. Begg and Sinclair modified their orders to beers, but Hanfstaengl hardly noticed.

"We're not from the newspapers," Begg told him before the drinks arrived. "We're private detectives employed by Herr Hess. Anything you tell us we will use in the processes of justice."

The lumbering half-American seemed relieved to hear this. He loosened his big coat and made himself more comfortable. As he listened to the tunes of Strauss and Lehar, he relaxed. "This isn't for publication. I have your word on it?"

"Our word as English gentlemen," said Begg.

For a while "Putzi" chatted about the old days of the Nazi Party when there were only a few of them, when Hitler had been released from prison a hero, the author of *Mein Kampf*, which was published here in Munich by Max Amman. "We have a concession on pictures of the Nazi hierarchy and Amman publishes what they write. It's pretty much our only business. This scandal could wreck us." Since the party's success in elections, sales had climbed. *Mein Kampf* was now a best-seller and it was money from royalties, Hanfstaengl insisted, not from secret financiers, which was paying for the Mercedes and the place in Prinzregensburgstrasse. He seemed to be answering questions neither Begg nor Sinclair had asked. And when Sir Seaton threw the big query at him, he was rather surprised, glad that he did not have to hide something from the detective. It was dawning on him at last who Begg and Sinclair were.

"You really are the ace sleuths they say you are," he said. "I know those Sexton Blake things are heavily sensationalized, but it's surprising how like him you are. Do you remember *The Affair of the Jade Skull*?"

Blake was, of course, the name said to disguise the identity of Sir Seaton Begg in a long series of stories written for *The Union Jack*, *The Sexton Blake Library*, and other popular British publications known as tuppenny skinnies and four-penny fats.

"I'm surprised they're read at all beyond the London gutters," said Begg, who made a point of never reading the "bloods."

"Speaking of which—what about that material itself? I've seen some of it, of course. The stuff Hitler was being blackmailed with? Weren't you the middleman on that?"

Only Taffy Sinclair knew that his friend had just told a small, deliberate lie.

"What earthly need is there for you to know more? If you've seen how dreadful that stuff is—?" Hanfstaengl's brow cleared. "Oh, I get it. You have to eliminate suspects. You're looking for an alibi." He sipped his drink. "Well, I, too, dealt through a middleman. An SA sergeant who had got himself mixed up in something he didn't like. Called himself Braun, I think. Nobody ever proved it, but he pretty much confirmed who the blackmailer was and nobody was surprised. It was that crazy old Heironymite. Stempfle. I'm not sure how a member of an order of hermits, like Father Stempfle, can spend quite so much time drinking in the seedier Munich beer halls, but there you are. He has a certain following, of course. Writer and editor, I think. He worked for Amman once."

"The publisher?"

"Do you know him? Funny chap. Never really took to him. He's putting Hitler up at the moment. My view is that Amman could be cheating Hitler of his royalties. What if he's covering his tracks? Could Geli have found something out, do you think?"

"You mean she knew too much?"

"Well," said Hanfstaengl, glancing up at the big clock over the bar, "she wasn't exactly an innocent, was she? Those letters! Foul. But his pictures were worse. It was my own fault. I was curious. I wish I'd never looked." He let out a great sigh. "Party funds paid the black-mailer, you know. The stuff was impossibly disgusting. I said I'd burn it—but he—Alf—wanted it back."

The orchestra had begun to play a polka. The couple on the dance floor were having difficulty keeping time. Begg studied the musicians for any sign of cynicism but found none.

Hanfstaengl's tongue, never very tight at the best of times, it seemed, was becoming looser by the moment. "After that, things were never the same. Hitler changed. Everything turned a little sour. You want to ask crazy old Stempfle about it. I'm still convinced only he could have had the inside knowledge. ..."

"But where could I find this hermit?"

"Well, there's a chance he'll be at home in his cottage. It's out in the Munich woods there." He jabbed his hand toward the door. "Couple of miles or so. Do you have a map?"

Sinclair produced one and Hanfstaengl plotted their course for them. "I'd go with you myself, but I'm a bit

vulnerable at the moment. I think someone's already had a potshot at me with a rifle. Be a bit careful, sport. There are lots of homeless people in the woods these days. They could spell danger for a stranger. Even some of our locals have been held up at gunpoint and robbed."

Begg shook hands with Hanfstaengl and said that he was much obliged. "One last question, Herr Hanfstaengl." He hesitated.

"Fire away," said "Putzi."

"Who do you think killed Geli Raubal?"

Hanfstaengl looked down.

"You have an idea, I know," said Begg.

Hanfstaengl turned back, offering Begg a cigarette from his case, which Begg refused. "Killed that poor little neurotic girl? Almost anyone but Hitler."

"But you have an idea, I know."

Hanfstaengl drained his glass. "Well, she was seeing this SS guy. ..."

"Name?"

"Never heard one, but I think they planned to go to Vienna together. Hitler knew all about it, of course. Or at least he guessed what he didn't know."

"And had her killed?"

Hanfstaengl snorted sardonically. "Oh, no. He doesn't have the guts." His face had turned a terrible greenish white.

"Who does—?" Begg asked, but Hanfstaengl was already heading from the room, begging his pardon, acting like a man whose food had disagreed with him.

"Poor fellow," murmured Begg, "I don't think he has a taste for the poison or the antidote. ..."

CHAPTER FIVE THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION

An hour or so later, Taffy Sinclair was shining the hand-torch down onto their map, trying to work out what Hanfstaengl had shown them. All around them in the woods were the camps of people who had been ruined by Germany's recent economic troubles. While Munich herself seemed wealthy enough, the homeless had been pushed to the outlying suburbs and woodlands, to fend for themselves as best they could. The detectives saw fires burning and shadows flitting around them, but the forest people were too wary to reveal themselves and would not respond when Begg or Sinclair called out to them.

"I suppose it's fair enough that a follower of Saint Heironymous the Hermit makes himself hard to find," declared Sinclair, "but I think this place was less populated and with fewer caves when—aha!" His torchlight had fallen on the penciled mark. "Just up this road and stop. Should be a cottage here."

The car's brilliant headlights made day of night, picking up the building ahead as if lit for the cinema, with great, elongated black shadows spreading away through the moonlit forest. An ancient, thatched, much-buttressed cottage was revealed. The place had two main chimneys, three downstairs windows and three up, including the dormer, which had its own chimney. The whole place leaned and declined in a dozen different directions, so that even the straw resembled a series of dirty, ill-fitting wigs.

"This has got to be it." Noting shadows moving in the nearby trees, Sir Seaton climbed from the car and walked across the weed-grown path to the old door of Gothic oak and black iron, hammering on it heavily and calling out in his most authoritative tone: "Open up! Metatemporal detectives! Come along, Father Stempfle, sir! Let us in."

A grinding of locks and rattling chains confirmed Sir Seaton's inspired guess. A face that looked as if it had been folded, stretched, and refolded many times regarded them in the light of the lamp it held over the chink in the door, still latched by a massive row of steel links.

"Open up, sir."

Seeing their faces seemed to weaken the old man's resolve, for another bolt turned and the door creaked slowly open.

Begg followed Stempfle into the hermit's horrible candlelit den, which stank of mold, old food, woodsmoke, and dust. Everywhere were piles of books, manuscripts, scrolls. There was no doubt the man was a scholar, but whether he followed God or the Devil was hard to determine. In a small grate, a sparse, damp fire emitted a little heat.

"You're a close friend of Adolf Hitler, I gather, Father?" Begg hardly gave the unshaven old man in the filthy cassock a chance to catch his breath.

Father Stempfle stuttered. "I wouldn't say that. I have very little to do with him, these days."

"You helped him write his book—*Mein Kampf*, is it?"

Now Begg's long hours of reading and study were coming to his aid as usual. Sinclair remembered how impressed he so often was with his friend's ability to put together a jigsaw with pieces from so many apparently disparate sources.

Father Stempfle began to turn scarlet. He fumed. In his mephitic cassock and sandals, he stamped about his paper-strewn study until it seemed the unevenly stacked piles of books would fall and bury them all alive. "Helped him, my good sir? Helped that illiterate little trench terrier, that scum of Vienna's pervert's quarter? Helped him? I wrote most of it. The manuscript was unreadable until his publisher asked me to work on it. Ask Max Amman. He'll confirm

everything. He and Hitler fell out over it. Or perhaps he has now been persuaded to lie by Röhm and his apes. My arguments are the purest and the best. You can tell them because I offer a much more sophisticated analysis of the Jewish problem. Hitler's contribution was a whine of self-pity. For years Amman didn't publicize the book widely enough. Now, of course, it's selling very well. And do I get a pfennig in royalties?" The squalid old monk shuffled to a stop, his face breaking into something which might have been a grin. "Of course, it'll sell even better once they know about the murder. ..."

Begg had no stomach for this. He drew a large handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. "You think Hitler killed her?"

"Nobody seems to think he's up to it," murmured Sinclair. "Not a strong man, physically at least. A pacifist, we were learning today ..."

Stempfle crushed old parchment in his hands as he moved toward the fire. Something had made him feel the cold. "He says he hates violence. But you should see how cruelly he treats that dog of his. Wulf? He calls it such a name so that he can demonstrate his own masculinity the better. I think he is capable of any violence."

Sinclair stepped forward. "What about those pictures—those letters—the blackmail attempt?"

"Oh, he's calling it blackmail now, is he? I simply wanted fair reimbursement for the work I'd done. ..." Stempfle glowered into the fire, which seemed to flicker in sympathy.

"If you still have some of that stuff, I could see that it got into the appropriate hands. Would it not strengthen the case against Hitler?"

Stempfle snorted. The sound was almost gleeful. "It would top and tail him nicely, true. ..."

"That material is here?"

Stempfle grew cunning. "The originals are elsewhere, in safekeeping. Still, I don't mind showing you the copies."

"I am prepared to pay one hundred pounds for the privilege," declared Sir Seaton.

At this the old man moved with slightly greater alacrity, ascending a ladder, moving a picture, rattling a combination, then going through the whole process backward again. When he came down, he had an envelope in his hands. Begg paid him in the four crisp twenty-five-pound notes he held ready, and Sinclair accepted the envelope, casually drawing out the first photograph and then blanching at what he saw. He returned the photograph to the envelope and covered his mouth. "Great Jehovah, Begg! I had no idea! Why would any woman involve herself in this? Or any man demand it?" Now he knew why Angela Raubal could not help being a disturbed young woman and why Hanfstaengl had left the bar so swiftly.

Stempfle's crooked body shook with glee. "Not how Adolf might wish to be remembered, eh? They would make excellent illustrations for certain works of the Marquis de Sade, no? I think I've been very modest in my request for my share of the royalties. Since I suspect you are already representing him, you can tell him that the originals of these are much more expensive!"

"I've yet to become a blackmailer's runner, Father Stempfle," Begg protested mildly. "Good night to you."

He ducked beneath the warped lintel and began to make for his car, Sinclair slightly ahead of him. Only then did the two men realize that someone was beside their car, trying to force the lock. With a roar of rage Sinclair seized and grappled with the ill-smelling thieves. But there were at least a dozen of them. Others slipped out of the shadows, clubs and fists flailing as they came to their companions' assistance.

Begg was skilled in most forms of unarmed combat.

"Hold them for me for a moment, old man!" He carefully removed his hat and then weighed in.

Several of the assailants soon lay on the ground. The others began to regroup, still a threat.

Then, suddenly, Begg heard a sharp thud against the tree nearest his head and the distinctive crack of a high-powered Mauser rifle. Almost immediately, as if familiar with the sound, the vagrants melted back into the trees. Sinclair paused, ready to pursue them, but with a smile Begg retrieved his hat and hurried his friend into the car. "No one else intends us any harm, Taffy. But it might be wise to keep moving."

Within the wholesome comfort of the great automobile, Sinclair was still more upset by the photographs than afraid of the gunshot. He continued to vent his disgust. "How could he make her—? I mean—?"

"Not a position any sane creature would volunteer for," Begg agreed. He began to reverse the car back down the short drive. "I think it's time we paid a call on the local cop shop, don't you?"

CHAPTER SIX THE FEDERAL AGENT

As it happened, there was no need to visit the police station. Arriving back at their hotel's foyer and collecting their keys, they were immediately confronted by an extraordinarily beautiful young woman who rose from a couch and came toward them smiling. Her full red lips and dark red hair worn in a fashionable wave were complemented by her green evening dress as she stretched a gloved hand toward Sir Seaton.

He bent to kiss it. Of course they had immediately recognized the woman. Once a ruthless adventuress whose love affair with Begg had resulted in her decision to make herself his ally, she was now a freelancer. Unlike Begg she took retainers from any government that valued her skill.

From her reticule the woman took a small book on which was fastened a metal badge. After they had glanced at it, she returned it swiftly to its place.

"My dear Countess von Bek," exclaimed Sir Seaton, "I had no idea you were in Munich. Are you staying here?"

"Nearby, Sir Seaton. I wondered if you had seen my cousin lately?" This was prearranged code. Countess Rose von Bek wanted to speak urgently and privately. Begg immediately led them into the deserted sitting room, ordered some tea, and closed the doors.

Once they were settled and the tea served, Sir Seaton relaxed. "So, my dear Rose, we appear to be working on the same case? Can you say who your client is?"

The adventuress responded with her usual charm. "I have made no more a secret of it than have you, Seaton. The German Federal Government Special Political Service. They sent me down from Berlin to give support to the local cops—the ones who don't actually believe Herr Hitler to be the next world savior and that Jews are damned to hell for not accepting the Messiah. So far I've met a good number of decent cops and some very clever newspapermen."

"So we find ourselves on different sides in this case. I take it, therefore, you know who killed Geli Raubal?"

She took an ironic sip from her Dresden cup. "We've been working on the broader political associations."

"But surely everything we need to know hinges on the circumstances and solution of this case?" Taffy Sinclair chipped in.

"No doubt, Mr. Sinclair. But the government's priorities aren't always our own." She spoke softly, anxious not to offend him. "I agree it is possible to argue that Fräulein Raubal's death is emblematic, if not symptomatic, of her times, but at the moment we're worrying that the National Socialists have a sizable representation in Parliament. And a large amount of armed support. We are thinking 'civil war' here. *Cberchez la femme* is not a game we often play in my section."

Taffy mumbled some polite apology and said he thought it was time he turned in, but Begg insisted he stay. "I think I'm going to need your help tonight, old man."

"Tonight?"

"Afraid so."

Sinclair rather reluctantly poured himself a fresh cup of Earl Grey.

"Was the corpse still in the apartment when you arrived on the scene?" Begg asked his old paramour.

"Hinkel of the *Taggeblat* called us. He's our best man down here. So I caught the express from Berlin and was here in time to have a look at the body."

"You're certain she was murdered? How? Did some expert sniper shoot her through the window?"

Rose was certain. "Nothing so complicated. Someone's made a clumsy attempt to make it look as if she'd shot herself through the heart. Hitler's gun—easy accessibility. Dead canary nearby—she'd been carrying it around all day—no doubt adding to the impression that she was suicidal. But the angle of entry was wrong. Someone shot her, Seaton, while she was lying on the rug—probably during an amorous moment. Half-undressed. Evidently an intimate. And Hitler was certainly an intimate. . . ."

"You've seen these pictures?" He handed her the envelope.

"No wonder the poor girl was confused." Even the countess winced at what she saw. "They might have tried to push her toward suicide but she wouldn't fall. Eventually someone shot her at close range, then put the gun in her hand so it seemed suicide. Only there were too many clues to the contrary."

"Any chance of taking a look at the corpse?" Taffy's dry, decisive tone was unexpected.

"Engaging your gears at last, are we, Taffy?" said Begg jumping to his feet. "Come on, Countess. Get us to the morgue, posthaste!"

Responding with almost gleeful alacrity, Countess von Bek allowed Sinclair to open the door for her. Dolly was still outside, so within moments the investigators were on their way to the Munich police headquarters.

The countess had already established her authority there. She led the way directly through the building to a door marked "Inspector Hoffmann." The round, red-faced inspector assured them that he knew them all by reputation and had the greatest respect for their skills. He was grateful, he said, for their cooperation.

"However," said the bluff Bavarian when they were all seated, "I ought to tell you that I'm convinced Hitler killed her during quite a nasty fight. Fortunately for your client, Sir Seaton, he has the best possible alibi—with dozens of witnesses to show he could not possibly have committed the murder. Hess? What do you think? Was it Hess who contacted you, Sir Seaton?"

They all agreed Hess was an unlikely suspect. Indeed, not one of the party hierarchy had an evident motive. All had perfect alibis. A hired killer? Begg put the notion to Hoffmann, who remained convinced that Hitler was the murderer. Another lover? Vaguely mysterious figures had been reported as coming and going, but Geli, of course, had not advertised them. "Coffee?" Hoffmann touched an electric bell.

After coffee, Hoffman led them down to the morgue, a clean, tiled, up-to-date department with refrigerated cabinets, dissecting tables, and the latest in analytical instruments. Taffy was impressed, unable to hold back his praise for the splendid facilities. "I can't tell you how old-fashioned Scotland Yard looks in comparison. You can't beat the Germans at this sort of thing."

Herr Hoffman was visibly flattered.

"Practical science and sublime art," murmured Taffy.

Inspector Hoffmann rather proudly crossed the mortuary. "Wait until you see this, my friend." He went to a bank of switches, each with a number. He flipped a toggle and then, magically, one of the drawers began to open!

"The wonders of 'electronics!'" cried Begg. Then he moved quickly toward the projecting steel box, where he knew he would find the mortal remains of Hitler's mistress.

Begg's expression changed to one of deep pity as he studied the contents. Even Sinclair stood back, paying some sort of respect to the corpse. Begg touched the skin, inspected the wound, and then, frowning, bent as if to kiss the

frozen lips.

A shocked word froze on Sinclair's tongue as Begg straightened up, his nose wrinkling almost in disgust. "See what you think, Taffy."

After Sinclair had inspected the corpse, Hoffmann turned the switch to send the temporary coffin back into its gleaming, stainless-steel housing.

"I know we're on opposite sides in this, Sir Seaton," Hoffman said, "but I have to insist the obvious suspect is the masochist. Herr Hitler. Hired killers? Communists? Mysterious lovers? How could we find them? The Winters noted only one lover but hinted at many others. They would not be on our side in court. I suppose I shouldn't be saying this. But I know your analytical powers, Sir Seaton. And your thirst for justice."

"And you know something of the science of psychiatry?" chimed in Taffy.

"Of course, I first studied in Vienna. To me this Hitler matter seems a classic case of the father figure and the bored young protegee. The father becomes obsessively possessive. The more he grows like that, the more she seeks to break free in the only way she knows—affairs of the heart. One after another. The father, unable to watch her hourly, pretends it isn't happening. The daughter grows bolder. No one can ignore what is going on. Her affairs become common gossip. Eventually his ego can be suppressed no longer. ..." He turned to Begg. "You saw the marks on her face and shoulders?"

"Indeed I did," said the detective.

"He had beaten the poor little thing black and blue!" Sinclair barely controlled his anger. "They were fighting, as you say, and brought Hitler's gun into play. Next thing, 'Bang,' and the girl's dead on the carpet."

"Lovers' quarrel?" said Rose von Bek. "Maybe. But I prefer to believe the girl knows too much about our suspect's sex life as well as political plans. Election coming up. She tries blackmail. Second time it's happened. Could she have been behind the first attempt? He snaps." She spread her hands, palms out. "Open and shut." She made fists. "This isn't the first time Herr Adolf Hitler has been involved in some sadistic business or other, I take it."

Hoffmann nodded. "But, if it could be proven, Hitler's enemies would be dancing in the streets. His chances of wheedling any more concessions from Hindenburg would disappear at once. Hindenburg already considers him a parvenu. So he has to go to great lengths to build an alibi."

Begg became uncomfortable at this. "You seem to hate Hitler," he suggested. "Yet you seem to be a conservative yourself. ..."

"I hate Bolshevism." Hoffmann searched through a gleaming filing cabinet for the documents he needed. "But I am also a Catholic, and all the Nazis' antireligious talk, especially against the Jews, who are amongst the most law-abiding people in the nation, is too much for me to stomach. I know Hitler did this murder, but that alibi ..."

"No way he could have come back, committed the crime, then returned to Nuremberg?" asked Sinclair.

"Too many people know him in Nuremberg. He is very popular there. They would have noticed something. Of course, he could have used another car altogether, and a disguise. I think you'll agree the bruises might have been delivered earlier than the gunshot?"

All three nodded.

"So," continued Hoffmann, "she knew too much. There was a fight. The gun. A shot. I don't say it was premeditated. Then he gets into the car and heads for Nuremberg, guessing nobody would want to disturb her until the next morning. He locked her door with his own key. No doubt he had had it made long before."

Begg smiled almost apologetically, adding: "And then she appears on the balcony. No doubt she has at last got Hitler's message."

Stemming the blood from her wounded heart she calls: 'So you won't let me go to Vienna?'"

"Pretty clear, I'd say." The countess recognized Begg's rather inappropriate black humor.

"I think Hitler beat her up. Then one of his henchmen went back and shot her. Maybe some kind of 'Murder in the Cathedral' situation? I gather that's how Mussolini learned he was responsible for his first murder. Overzealous followers. So who shot her? Röhm? He's ruthless enough and he doesn't much like women. Himmler? A cold fish, but too far away at the time. Same with Goring or Göbbels, if we assume they didn't come to Munich incognito."

"I think our people would have known about it," said the countess.

"Ours, too, most likely," confirmed Hoffmann, rubbing at his red jowls. "They have orders to keep track of who goes in and out of the Brown House."

"So we have a dozen suspects and nothing which leads to any of them." Sinclair lifted his eyebrows. "But two of you at least are convinced Hitler did it. What about you, Begg? What do you think?"

"I'm beginning to get an idea of who killed Geli Raubal, and I think I can guess why. But there is another element here." Begg frowned deeply. "I think in the morning we'll set off for Berchtesgaden, for Herr Amman's little hideaway. You, presumably, have already interviewed Hitler, Inspector Hoffmann?"

"As soon as he arrived back from Nuremberg, of course. He seemed in a state of shock, but, as stated, his alibi was airtight. Of course, you will wish to prove he didn't do it, Sir Seaton, and I admit the cards are stacked in your favor."

"Not exactly, old boy. But I agree with you that as things stand, any case against Herr Hitler couldn't be proven in a court of law."

With a courteous good night to the policeman, Begg escorted his two friends outside. In the street his car was being guarded by a uniformed constable, who saluted as soon as he recognized Countess von Bek and opened the doors for them.

It was only a short drive to the hotel and most of it was spent in silence as the three investigators thought over

what they had learned.

"I suppose there's no chance of me coming down with you?" asked the countess. "Since Herr Hitler isn't my client."

"Exactly," murmured Begg, concentrating on the unfamiliar streets. "And I think even you'd agree, Rose, that client confidentiality, at least at this stage, is sacrosanct."

While Begg waited with the engine running, Sinclair saw the beautiful adventuress through the doors of her hotel. As they drove off, Sinclair said: "She wants our Mr. Hitler hanged, no doubt about it. She's afraid you'll get him off the hook. Are you sure he didn't do it?"

"I merely noted," said the detective with what seemed inappropriate cheerfulness, "that there was no evidence directly linking Hitler with the murder of his niece. Nothing to convince a jury. Don't worry, Taffy. One way or another justice will out. I have a feeling we will meet at least one more old acquaintance before this business is over."

CHAPTER SEVEN INTERVIEW WITH A SAVIOR

Hess now took the Duesenberg's backseat. They had been driving for some hours, making for the lodge at Berchtesgaden where Adolf Hitler had retreated, apparently in deep mourning for the loss of his niece. The surrounding scenery was both dramatic and beautiful, with high hills and pinewoods, giving the air a rich, invigorating quality.

"The Führer is very sensitive. His mind is of a higher order than most. He always comes here when things go wrong. Here he collects himself and makes something of his experience." The hero worship in Hess's tone was tangible and had become extremely familiar to the two Englishmen.

Sinclair's expression, could Hess have seen it, would have revealed that he had already had far too much of this sort of talk. But Begg remained apparently affable. "Bit like Mr. Gandhi, I suppose," he suggested.

"Perhaps." Hess seemed uncomfortable with the comparison.

They turned another corner of the winding road. Ahead was a pleasant, rustic hunting chalet of the kind many Germans built for their summer season. As they drove up a tall, thickset, grim-faced man with a head so thoroughly bald it might have been shaven hurried from the door to greet them. They were, of course, already expected.

"Ah," declared Sir Seaton Begg, climbing from his car, "I take it I have the pleasure of addressing Reichstag Leader Strasser?" He put out his hand and it was firmly shaken.

Gregor Strasser's face was clouded, but he knew his manners. He spoke in a soft, well-educated voice. "We are so glad you have come to help us, Sir Seaton, though I am not sure Herr Hitler is in any real condition to speak to you." He was almost disapproving. "Hitler has gone into one of his hysterical states again. Always been one to hide under the blankets during a crisis. Hasn't been out of bed since he got here. Won't talk to me. Will hardly talk to Röhm."

"Captain Röhm is here also." Begg was clearly pleased. "Excellent. You, I presume, don't believe that Herr Hitler's guilty?"

"I speak, of course, from loyalty as well as conviction. But Herr Hitler loved his niece. He was, of course, very possessive. Even when my brother Otto expressed willingness to take her to a dance, Hitler furiously forbade it. I felt sorry for her. A bit of a bird in a gilded cage, you know. But while Hitler might speak rather fiercely in public, he rarely exposed Geli to that side of himself. It was Himmler who hated her. Even Alf knew that! But I really think she must have killed herself."

"The police evidence suggests she was killed, as you probably know." Now all three men had paused on the veranda outside the front door.

"Surely you don't believe—?" The big politician purpled.

Begg put a reassuring hand on Strasser's arm. "Fear not, old sport. I think we are going to be able to tell you something about the real killer soon. But I really must speak to your Führer, you know."

The house was decorated like a typical hunting lodge, though without the usual trophies of animal heads and skins. Hitler hated such signs of violence against animals, and his host pandered to him. Otherwise, with its hat stands and gun racks of antlers and its heavy rugs and old, comfortable furniture, it felt familiar and secure. Off the main reception room a broad staircase rose up into the darkness of a landing where, no doubt, the bedrooms were. A big fire burned in the grate. The surround was carved with bears, stags, and other game. Leaning against it was a short, stocky individual with a hideous scar marring half his rather pudgy face. He was dressed in what, apart from its brown color, resembled the regular uniform of a Wehrmacht officer, with Nazi emblems on collar, cuffs, and sleeves. Knocking back a ballon of brandy, he came forward, greeting them in a surprisingly hearty rich Bavarian accent. In private, none of these men used the Hitler salute. "Grüss Gott, Sir Seaton. Just as we're at the point of real power someone's trying to sabotage the party's chances. What can you do for us?"

"A miracle would help," said Strasser, pouring schnapps for the two men.

Captain Röhm helped himself to another large cognac.

Only Hess did not join them in a drink. He almost immediately made an excuse and disappeared upstairs, presumably to report to his old friend and leader.

Röhm was the worse for drink. He leaned easily, excessively relaxed as the habitual drunkard usually is. In spite of his hideous appearance, his tightly buttoned and belted uniform, there was an almost sensitive set to his features, a haunted look to his eyes which suggested he knew and rather approved of the arguments against almost every

statement he made. His rough charm, his loyalty, his bluntness allowed him to survive. Not long after he had returned from Bolivia, affectionate Spartan letters from Röhm to a young cadet had been published in the yellow press. Yet somehow Röhm had survived the scandal, and even today made no secret of his Greek tendencies.

"I gather Herr Hitler has taken his niece's suicide to heart." Begg strolled to the gun rack and casually examined the rifles. He was interrupted by a gusty, brandy-laden laugh at once sardonic and angry.

"Suicide! Absolutely, my dear Sir Seaton! Suicide! Certainly! And I'm the bloody Virgin of Lourdes." Still chuckling, the Brown-shirt leader, considered by many to be the most powerful man in Germany, turned to throw his cigar butt into the flames.

"Perhaps if we had a word with Herr Hitler himself?"

Again the Herculean snort. "Good luck, my friend. He's a wreck. Maybe you can get more sense out of him than we can. He's a classic

Austrian. All talk and trousers and useless in a crisis. Feckless as they come. Yet he's my leader, and I live with it. I am an infantile man, at heart, and a wicked one. I offer my loyalty to whichever leader best serves my interest. I have too many weaknesses to be more than an ordinary soldier taking orders."

"You've known him a long time?" Begg asked quietly.

"I threw in with Alf, as we knew him in the trenches, soon after the Stab in the Back of the Armistice. Just as we were on the verge of winning, victory was stolen from us by Jews and Socialists at home. I didn't need to explain anything to Alf. We had a lot in common. He was a great infiltrator. Used to get in with the Commies, find out what they were up to, then report back to me. They say he won the Iron Cross for bravery, as a runner in the trenches, but that's not his talent. My guess is that he was terrified the whole time. No choice. Run the lines or be shot as a coward. He's always managed to slip away from the violence. Bad precedent, of course, in a soldier. Learns the wrong lessons." Röhm shrugged. "I doubt if he ever had to shoot anyone personally in his life. Good luck to you, my dear sir."

Strasser was sober and collected. He put down his glass half-finished. "Let me see if the Führer is ready."

As he walked up the staircase, Sinclair murmured to Begg, "Classic case of manic depression, eh?"

From the landing above, Rudolph Hess peered down. "I have very good hearing, Mr. Sinclair. We reject the debased jargon of the Jew Freud. We have perfectly good German words and good German precedents to describe our leader's state of spirit. Goethe, himself, I believe coined several ..."

"Our Anglo-Saxon phrase would be 'barkingbarmy,' Herr Hess." Sinclair craned to look at their customer. "Would that be better?"

Hess adopted a haughty manner. "Perhaps," he said. "Herr Strasser. Would you like to bring them now?"

With a somewhat theatrical movement of his hand, Gregor Strasser motioned for the two Englishmen to follow him up the stairs.

Hitler's room was at the far end of the landing. There was only faint flickering candlelight issuing from it. When, at Hess's knock, they entered, they found a dark, ill-smelling room in which guttered a few church candles of yellow wax, placed here and there on dressing table and nightstands. The Englishmen were immediately reminded of Father Stempfle's den. The mirror of the dressing table reflected a man's naked legs, scrawny feet. The knees were bare. The man had hastily pulled on a raincoat in lieu of a dressing gown.

Adolf Hitler sat at the end of his bed. Clearly he had just allowed himself to be coaxed out of bed. He sat hunched with his hands folded in front of him and did not look up as Begg and Sinclair were introduced. Then a thin whine, like a distant turbine, started in the man's throat. "No, no, no. I can't. I can't. I can't."

Strasser stepped forward. "Just a few minutes, Alf. They want to find out who killed Geli. This means you'll be able to punish the culprit and put an end to suspicion within the party. It will save your career."

"What do I care for my career now that my angel is dead?" The soft, Austrian accent was unexpected.

When the man looked up, a ghastly intelligence in his sleepless eyes, even Begg was shocked. Hitler had the familiar red blotches on his cheekbones, the drawn lines of anxiety, a face so mad and yet so utterly without redeeming character that one might have been looking at a damned soul in Limbo. It was all the two men could do not to turn away in disgust.

Now Hitler began to mumble in a monotone. "She loved life. She loved her Uncle Alf. We had so much in common. She would never have killed herself. Somebody shot her!"

"It is a possibility we're looking into, Herr Hitler. Do you have any suspicions?"

"Naturally, I am convinced who killed her, but how can we hope to bring them to justice? They are masters of this kind of conspiracy. Oh, Geli, Geli, my perfect angel." He began to weep then, with tears streaming from those mad eyes. He spoke with sudden clarity and force. "They'll get me next, you know. They killed her with my gun. It was to make it seem as if I had done it. And where are they now, these traitors and saboteurs? Returned to Berlin and Moscow. You'll never catch them. They come and go like poisoned gas. They couldn't kill me, so they killed poor Geli. You waste your time, Englishman. Already there have been serious attempts on my life. I am doomed. I carry too great a burden on my shoulders. I am a lone voice against chaos and Bolshevik Jewry."

"Quite a responsibility!" agreed Sir Seaton, backing toward the door. "We'll take up no more of your time, Herr Hitler."

As they walked down the stairs, strange, mewling noises continued to come from Hitler's room. Hess had remained with his master. Strasser shook his head, speaking softly. "You wouldn't believe it, gentlemen. Hitler's a different creature on a public platform."

They had returned to the fireplace, where Röhm still lounged, and he agreed vigorously. "It's as if the crowd feeds its energy to him. He stands there sometimes for minutes before he speaks, drawing in that energy. He's a kind of

vampire, I suppose." The SA leader drained his glass and sighed.

Strasser interrupted. "He's our best bet for chancellor. We all know that. He has something the crowd responds to. But once we are in power, we'll find him a more suitable position—head of propaganda, perhaps." He started as, softly, upstairs, a door closed.

Strasser dropped his voice still lower. "In a few days Hitler has an appointment with Chancellor Hindenburg. It looks as if, so long as we keep our noses clean, old Hindenburg will name Alf as his successor. But if Alf remains like—like what you saw upstairs—he won't make any other impression than the obvious one. So you don't have much time, I'm afraid, Sir Seaton."

"I'll do my best, Captain Röhm. And, of course, I'll be grateful for any help." Sir Seaton reached to shake hands, but Röhm was taking his cap and greatcoat down from the antlered peg.

"Give me a lift back to Munich. I might have a lead for you." Sinclair was astonished at how rapidly Röhm had sobered.

Hess decided that he should remain at his leader's side, and Strasser had also decided to spend the night, so Röhm joined Sir Seaton in the front while Taffy again found himself in the profoundly comfortable leather of the back. Against his will, he began to doze and did not hear the whole exchange between Röhm and Begg.

"She had only one lover, you know that?" announced Röhm. "I think he might have been assigned to guard her. My chaps were keeping a watch. She had a lot of guards, but this one was special. I think she was infatuated with him. A tall SS captain, by all accounts. Blond. Always wore dark glasses. He's disappeared out of the picture since the shooting. They say he was Himmler's spy, but he didn't seem to be following anyone's orders much. Himmler hated old Geli, you know. I had a soft spot for her. Bit of a whore, like myself. Maybe she died because she knew too much. Maybe that's what'll happen to me, too." Again that monstrous, grunting laugh, far too big for the size of the soft, battle-scarred face.

Captain Röhm was staying at the Brown House that night. His own flat, he reported with a laugh, was full. It was dusk as they dropped him off. "Where to, now, Seaton? Bed?" Sinclair asked hopefully.

"I'm afraid not, Taffy. There's just time to catch the last few musical numbers and get a decent glass of Russian tea at the Carlton Tea Rooms! You remember I was studying the entertainment pages on the way over. This will help take the taste of that schnapps out of your mouth, eh?"

CHAPTER EIGHT THE VIOLINIST OF THE CAFE ORCHESTRA

As Taffy Sinclair enjoyed the strange mixture of black Russia tea and a plate of small weisswürst, he relaxed to the strains of Ketalby's "In a Persian Market," played by the group of musicians on the stand. It was their last performance of the evening. All the players were seated save for their leader, a tall man with close-cropped hair and wearing impeccable evening dress. He stood in the shadows of the curtain and played the violin with extraordinary beauty and skill. When Begg tipped the waiter heavily and put a folded note on the plate, Sinclair thought his friend was asking for one of his favorite sentimental tunes, such as "The Gypsy" or "The Merry Widow Waltz," but neither of these was played before the musicians brought their performance to an end.

Sinclair was surprised when the tall violinist, having replaced his instrument in its case, strolled over to their table. Then, when the albino removed his dark glasses, Sinclair realized with a shock that he sat across the table from Sir Seaton Begg's cousin and archenemy, the notorious Count Zodiac, wanted for countless daring crimes throughout the Empire. More than once the two had crossed swords on the

Continent and only a few months earlier Count Zodiac had been thwarted by Begg in his daring attempt to rob the New York-bound aerial express. In London, where Zodiac commanded an almost fanatical loyalty from the crooks of Smith's Kitchen, the most notorious den of thieves in Christendom, they had fought many times. A year earlier Zodiac had succeeded in stealing the British Crown Jewels, only to have them snatched back by Begg as he tried to make his underwater escape from the city.

The red-eyed albino had a charming, crooked smile. "So, gentlemen, you have discovered how I earn my living, these days. . . ."

Begg grinned almost boyishly at this. "Good evening, Count Zodiac. Perhaps I am too familiar with your aliases. The Tarot Tea Orchestra rather betrayed you? But I hear you work for Heinrich Himmler now. . . ."

For a split second Zodiac's expression changed to one of anger. Then again he was all urbane affability. "Is Himmler claiming that? Scum like him can't employ me, Sir Seaton." He sat back in his chair, lighting a pungent, black cigarette. "However, you might find that Himmler and the others have all been playing my game. . . ." He chuckled with deep pleasure.

Sinclair, who had been up for too long and drunk too much schnapps, lost his usual discretion then. He leaned across the table. "Look here, Count von Bek, did you kill Geli Raubal? You seem to be the only one who had the opportunity, if not the motive! You are the mysterious SS man, eh?"

"Captain Zeiss," said Begg.

Zodiac drew a deep, ennuï-ridden sigh. Ignoring Sinclair, he addressed Begg directly, reaching across the table and handing him a pasteboard card. "I was at this address until yesterday. You might find it interesting. Even useful." He turned, bowing, to Sinclair. "We all work in the ways which best suit our temperaments, I think, Mr. Sinclair? Who

is to say in our good or our evil intentions we unknowingly serve the causes of law or chaos?"

With that, the albino turned on his heel, picked up his violin case, and disappeared into the night.

Sinclair, stunned for a moment, leapt to his feet and pursued the albino, but he soon returned, shaking his head: lost him. Begg continued to sip his tea, studying the card. "We don't need to follow him. Taffy. He has left us his most recent address."

Begg frowned down at the card in his hand. "Do you feel like making a visit to the Hotel Rembrandt? It's just around the corner. We can walk."

"Oh, good heavens, Begg! This is unbelievable!" Taffy Sinclair was staring aghast at a handful of papers and photographs. He had just opened the writing bureau in Room 25. Count Zodiac's room at the Hotel Rembrandt looked as if it had been hastily vacated.

Sir Seaton Begg was inspecting the wardrobe. He picked up and put back a black Mauser rifle with a telescopic sight. "There's our red herring. Zodiac was no doubt trying to sow further suspicion amongst the Nazis. And look at this!" On hangers hung a complete SS captain's uniform. The metatemporal detective offered it to his friend. "And look here, Taffy. Bloodstains. They fit perfectly with the suspected shooting."

"And these—these—letters from Himmler to Captain Zeiss, asking him to seduce that poor girl, compromise her, then kill her, so that Himmler could continue his blackmailing of Hitler through a third party. There's a note here that even suggests Himmler was responsible for the initial blackmail a couple of years ago! The most damning evidence! So your cousin, von Bek, is a common murderer, after all! And in Captain Himmler's employ?"

"It certainly appears so." Begg looked around for a bag. "Come on, Taffy. We'd better take these togs to Hitler."

"Surely we should get them to Inspector Hoffmann as soon as possible? Zodiac must be captured!"

"I remind you again, Taffy, that Herr Hitler is our paying client and it is our duty to show him the evidence before it is presented to the police."

"But Great Jehovah, Begg, this overrides any client loyalty!"

"I'm afraid not, Taffy I remember the way to Berchtesgaden. You'd better come with me, old man, whatever your scruples. I need a witness and someone at my shoulder if the client decides to kill the messenger."

Only this persuaded the pathologist to accompany his friend, but he did so in brooding silence. Begg seemed completely insouciant, whistling fragments from musical comedies as the great car bore them relentlessly up toward Hitler's retreat.

Only because Rudolf Hess was convinced they had good news for Hitler were the Englishmen allowed into the fusty stench of the Nazi leader's lair. Again he greeted them in nothing but his mackintosh, his eyes as mad as ever. He moved between gross self-pity and rage against his niece's killers, sometimes in seconds. But when he at last looked at the evidence Begg and Sinclair had brought with them, he was stunned into a cold, sudden pseudo-sanity.

"Himmler! He was behind the assassination attempts. Failing to kill any of us, he made his victim an innocent young girl! He always hated her. He has grown closer and closer to me, building up the SS on my behalf, he says. They warned me he had Jewish blood, but I laughed at them. And all the time he plotted against me in this subtle way, getting at me through Geli, using one of his own men to—ugh!" He stood up suddenly, bowing with both hands at his sides, and brought his bare heels together. "I am most grateful to you gentlemen. You have done everything Hess promised. Naturally you will receive your fee. Herr Hess will take you to the Brown House at once."

Even Hess seemed surprised by this sudden volte-face.

"No need, old boy." Sir Seaton Begg lifted his hat. "Have this one on me. I am happy to serve the cause of justice."

Though dressed only in a mackintosh, Hitler visibly grew an inch or two. "You have served not only my interests and those of my great party, Sir Seaton. You have served the interests of the entire free world. Hess. We shall need the Mercedes. There is something I must take care of at once. Thank you again." He lifted his arm in his familiar salute.

"Only too happy to oblige, old chap." And with that Begg steered an open-mouthed Sinclair into the fir-rich air of the sub-Alpine forests.

"Take a good gulp, Taffy," he murmured.

"Are you out of your mind, Begg? That chap's about as unbalanced as it's possible to be without falling off the planet. You've no idea what notions you've given him."

"Oh, I think the ones he was meant to be given, Taffy. Perhaps you already suspect the truth? In this case we served a client other than we thought!"

By now Dolly's headlights were piercing the dark shadows of the German night. Taffy, still deprived of his usual amount of sleep, began to doze in the seat beside his friend. He was awakened to realize that Begg was driving far slower than usual and that the head-lamps of another car were coming from behind. He watched in some astonishment, as if dreaming. The great Mercedes swept past them, overtaking at almost one hundred miles an hour. Sinclair made out Herr Hitler in the backseat. Hess was with him. Strasser appeared to be driving. Before he began to fall back to sleep, he remembered noticing that Hitler appeared to be wearing a suit and a tie and asking Begg where Hitler was going at this time of night.

"Berlin, I'd guess." Sir Seaton kept Dolly at a steady pace.

"We're going to Berlin?"

"Good Lord no, old boy. Our work's done here. We're going home. If I put on a little speed at the crossroads, we should be just in time to catch the dawn zeppelin for London."

Without Sinclair's knowledge, Begg had already stowed the luggage. There had been no hotel bill to settle. By

dawn they reached the great Munich Aerodrome and were soon installed in a comfortable suite. Through the portholes came floods of intermittent sunshine caused by the movement of the ship in her cables. A radio bulletin playing on the State Radio took on a rather excited air, and as soon as he had disrobed, washed, and settled in his seat, Begg turned the volume up.

He listened in some amusement, but Sinclair was aghast at the news. He even failed to notice the almost effortless lifting of the huge liner as she uncoupled from her masts and began her journey to London.

There had effectively been a complete disintegration of the Nazis. Already the Reichstag party seemed divided into opposing camps headed by Strasser and Goring. Nazi officials were issuing contradictory statements since the arrest earlier that morning of Adolf Hitler, self-confessed murderer of the man he termed the "Jew Fifth Columnist Himmler," hitherto his trusted aide and an ex—chicken farmer. Hitler understood that he could no longer hope to be vice-chancellor, but now it scarcely mattered, since he had in his own words "torn out the heart of the hydra sucking the life from Germany, keeping the nation safe against injustice and horror for a thousand years."

"You effectively put the gun into Hitler's hand and killed Himmler!" cried Sinclair. "Really, Begg, sometimes . . ."

"I told you, Taffy, that I did what I was supposed to do. Zodiac knew only too well that there are few better and more trustworthy messengers than you and me. So he sent us to Hitler with the evidence he had carefully manufactured over months. Those papers were enough to convince almost anyone and in a bad light they were even harder to detect. But they were forgeries, old man. Planted for someone to find. Just as those apparent sniper shots which always missed their targets were intended to distract attention from what was actually being accomplished. Zodiac had been looking for a good way to make the Nazi leadership fall out. When he knew we were on to him, he simply made us his cat's-paws. Pretty audacious, eh."

"But Zodiac killed that poor creature, Fräulein Raubal," insisted Taffy.

"Not at all, Taffy, though you could argue Hitler effectively drove her to her death. She killed herself, as everyone insisted. She tested the poison first. You smelled that distinctive odor as readily as I did."

"Cyanide!"

"Exactly. The smell of cyanide, if taken by mouth, lingers on the lips long after the taker has gone to the hereafter. That dead canary the young lady carried around all day. She had already tried the stuff on the bird and saw that it worked. She took a pretty heavy dosage, I'd say. The police remained deceived by the gunshot. The way she lay on the floor made it seem to others that she had died in the throes of passion. But I believe she died in the throes of death."

"But she was shot, Begg. Shot by Zodiac!"

"True."

"So Zodiac is the real murderer. ..."

"No."

There was a knock at their door and Begg called, "Come in!" A busboy with a salver presented him with a card which he glanced at; then he smiled and tucked it into his upper waistcoat pocket. He offered the boy a silver coin. "Ask Countess von Bek to join us at her pleasure." He beamed across at a bewildered Taffy.

"No?"

"No. Zodiac was, of course, Fräulein Raubal's lover. He played the violin by night and courted her by day. By whatever clever devices, he had provided himself with the assignment of keeping guard on her, knowing that he planned to seduce her. But I think he also planned to save her. He took some conventional 'glamour' pictures of her. He made those Himmler forgeries we showed Hitler. I don't think he had any plan to kill the girl. But he did want her to run away with him. So he suggested they go to Vienna together. He told her to demand of Hitler that she be allowed to stay with her relatives and study singing there. It was a plan she had already toyed with. So she did as she was told. But Hitler, as we know, had reached the end of his tolerance." Begg rose to his feet to open their door, bowing Countess Rose into their rather cramped quarters. Offering her his chair, he brought her rapidly up-to-date and then, leaning beside the porthole, continued.

"Someone, probably an SA spy, had reported the 'secret lover,' even if they had not been able to say who it was. So Hitler refused. Under no circumstances could she go to Vienna. She again threatened suicide. He did not believe her. Neither, I suspect, would 'Captain Zeiss' have believed her. But when he let himself into the apartment late that night, he found poor Geli Raubal on the floor, having tasted the torments of cyanide. She had left a note, no doubt. This went against his plans, but he had to go through with the rest of it. He pocketed the note. He found Hitler's gun, shot the already dead Geli through the heart in a way deliberately to draw suspicion on someone, placed the gun in her hand with equally deliberate clumsiness, then left the police and investigators, like ourselves, to conclude that the young woman had been murdered, either by Hitler or one of his lieutenants."

The Countess Rose sat back in her seat, her eyes gleaming with admiration. "So Hoffmann and myself were completely fooled. Only the fact that Hitler had an ironclad alibi stopped us from arresting him."

"Zodiac already had his original plan, which he modified. He knew that Hitler could not be 'framed.' So he planned to let his men discover the clothing and documents at the Hotel Rembrandt. Since I caught up with him so much sooner than he expected, he merely decided to use me as his messenger! He was always a clever customer. Even those pictures, released to the press, would be enough to threaten the fortunes of Hitler and his party. But Zodiac wanted to be dead certain. That was why he had forged some Himmler documents to make sure all in the party were suspect. He hoped they would find their way to Hitler. I made sure that they did. The consequences then followed like clockwork. Leading to a satisfactory resolution, I think you'll agree, Taffy. Sometimes it is just about possible for two wrongs to make a right."

Rose von Bek clapped her hands together as another knock came at the door. "Ah. That will be our breakfast champagne!"

But Sinclair's Presbyterian soul was not yet ready to accept the full burden of these unwelcome demonstrations. He rose gracefully, so that Begg might have his chair.

"If you'll forgive me, I'll take a stroll up to the dining hall and avail myself of the full English breakfast. I think an occasion like this calls for some honest fried bread, fried tomatoes, mushrooms, and black pudding. Traditional fortification."

"Very well, old boy. To each his own poison. I trust you'll rejoin us as soon as you can." Begg lifted a victorious glass.

Declaring that he would probably take a turn or two about the observation deck before he rejoined them, Sinclair stepped into the corridor and closed the door on his colleagues.

Once in the corridor, the pathologist stared thoughtfully at the tranquil, dreaming German fields and villages passing below. A man trained to follow the law and to play the game by the regular rules, Sinclair mused that this was not the first time that his association with his friend Seaton Begg troubled him.

He shook his head, the delicious scent of frying bacon drawing his attention back to breakfast. He put the problem behind him. For all his moral dilemma, Taffy Sinclair was forced to admit that his friend had assured, by the most unconventional, even cynical methods, by the most circuitous path, that justice had again been done.

NOTE: While originally scheduled for the May 1932 issue of *The Thriller Library*, Amalgamated Press, London, this story is said to have been withdrawn from publication at the request of Buckingham Palace and Downing Street. The author and high-ranking civil servant John Buchan is said to have been involved. It is published here for the first time.