



BLUE FLAME

NEXUS

Robert A Webster

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Blue Flame

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

Webster R.

Blue Flame / R. Webster — «Tektime S.r.l.s.»,

This fast-paced Supernatural Thriller takes you from battles raging beneath turbulent seas to the dark stillness of space, where mortals, angels, and demons, battle to mold the populus of planet earth. Death comes to us all; whatever creed, colour, religion, or gender we are, it is an inescapable fact. For most of us, our work on this mortal plane is over, but for the few, their job has just begun. Introducing, P.A.T.H., Paranormal Assisted Treasure Hunters; three psychically gifted individuals brought together to form a powerful mediatory force between the Mortal World and the Spiritual Plane. Assisted by their spirit protectors and commissioned by lost souls, they find treasures hidden by the souls during their lifetime which they give to their mortal beneficiaries. This fast-paced supernatural thriller follows a sinister plot planned during World War 2 and instigated in the present day, as the team need to discover the connection between the demon spirit of the twentieth century's greatest despot and his son, the current US President, in Book 1 Return of The Reich. In its race to discover another planet to colonise for its overstretched population, humanity overlooked one thing. When a planetary event occurs around planet earth, the Afterlife Guardians send the PATH team on three quests, the outcome of which will determine the fate of humankind. Should they succeed, people will continue with their safe but chaotic existence. However, failure could be a terrifying, yet necessary option, in this gripping climax - book 2, Covenant of the Gods

Содержание

1	10
2	13
3	15
4	22
5	30
6	38
7	47
8	54
9	59
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	68

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Robert A Webster asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

First edition



Table of Contents

Part One

1

If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed

2

If you want to shine like the sun, first you have to burn like it.

3

Things are not always right because they are hard, but if they are right one must not mind if they are also hard.

4

For there is one thing we must never forget; the majority can never replace the man.

5

The man who has no sense of history, is like a man who has no ears or eyes

6

The true guide of life is to do what is right.

[7](#)

If you're going through hell, keep going.

[8](#)

You never can tell whether bad luck may not after all turn out to be good luck

[9](#)

Life doesn't forgive weakness.

[10](#)

Never deprive someone of hope; it may be all they have

[11](#)

Mankind grew strong through eternal struggle; it follows that he shall perish through eternal peace

[12](#)

God's and beasts, that is what our world is made of

[13](#)

Anyone can deal with victory. Only the mighty can bear defeat

[14](#)

The price of greatness is responsibility over each of your thoughts

[15](#)

If freedom is short of weapons, we must compensate with willpower

[16](#)

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

[17](#)

Words build bridges into unexplored regions

[18](#)

Difficulties mastered are opportunities won.

[19](#)

To improve is to change, so to be perfect is to have changed often.

[20](#)

It is a fine thing to be honest, but it is also very important to be right

[21](#)

Epilogue

[23](#)

In the not too distant future

[24](#)

Awakening

[25](#)

Revelation

[26](#)

If the oceans die, we die. We can't live on this planet with a dead ocean

[27](#)

The New Frontier

[28](#)

There's money to be made by driving a species extinct

[29](#)

There is no such thing as sustainable seafood in a dying ocean

[30](#)

Bad actors make convincing politicians

[31](#)

Lesson 1: Greed stops the ability of a species to live in harmony with its environment

[32](#)

Death is a great Equaliser

[33](#)

Life is a terminal illness

[34](#)

Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master

[35](#)

There is Friendship in the heart of danger

[36](#)

Arrogance is knowledge without wisdom

[37](#)

There is no such thing as a foolproof plan if there are fools about

[38](#)

When love kills love

[39](#)

Lesson 2: Technology nurtures the human race

[40](#)

You need a crime, a detective, and the solution.

[41](#)

Love can start with an unexpected hello

[42](#)

Everything is an illusion

[43](#)

Into the Belly of the Beast

[44](#)

There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact

[45](#)

Never attempt to win by force what can be won by deception

[46](#)

Lesson 3: Faith is a commodity easily bought

[47](#)

Revelation 2

[48](#)

Awakening 2

[49](#)

— Next —

[50](#)

Appendix

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Robert A Webster](#)

P.A.T.H

Paranormal Assisted Treasure Hunters



Return of the Reich

1

If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed

Total devastation surrounded the solitary figure. Bombed-out buildings and semi-submerged wrecks of a decimated fleet were all that remained of a navy that once dominated the oceans. The man stood at the end of a concrete jetty, lost in his thoughts with his hands clasped behind his back. His weary features and silver hair made him appear far older than his fifty-six years as he gazed at the ocean, cursing under his breath. With the rumble of explosions in the distance, he inhaled, filling his lungs with tarnished, salty sea air.

* * *

Several hours earlier, the dockside swarmed with military personnel. Throughout the night they had unloaded boxes and crates from trucks, sweating and swearing as they struggled to load them onto a sleek black U-boat by moonlight. Having to run for cover occasionally as the now familiar drone of Merlin engines roared overhead, dropping their deadly payloads around them.

With their job now done, the soldiers, sapped of their strength, murmured as they clambered aboard the trucks and then driven away. The smell of cordite lingered, along with a film of oil and diesel fuel that covered the water's surface inside the harbour.

The dockside was now quiet, with a few of the U-boat's crew and a handful of black-uniformed SS officers milling around the gangway.

The senior officer received a call through his portable field telephone and he barked out orders. Activity resumed as SS soldiers with machine guns rounded up the U-boat's crew and ushered them aboard the vessel, while the senior SS officer and two junior officers remained on the dockside.

The hatches closed and the three SS officers went to the foot of the gangway. A black Mercedes 770-K with darkened windows pulled up beside them and the junior officers opened the vehicle's doors. They snapped to attention as a man and woman stepped out.

The man ignored the SS soldiers and headed along the jetty. The young officers glanced wide-eyed at each other while the woman spoke to the senior SS officer.

"Let's leave him for a while, Hans; this could be the last time he will see his beloved country."

Hans Kruger, the senior SS officer, clicked his heels together and nodded to confirm the woman's request. They watched the man ranting to himself as he strode up the jetty. Hans then ordered the junior SS officers to escort the woman to join the man on the jetty.

Hans watched them walk a short distance. He then took out his pistol and, hiding it behind his back, marched over to the Mercedes and tapped on the driver's window. The driver, looking at the grinning SS officer, wound down the window and Hans shot him in the head. Holstering his smoking Luger, Hans then went over to wait at the foot of the gangway.

The man had remained undisturbed until the sound of strident footsteps approaching broke his train of thought as the woman stopped behind him, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. He smelled her familiar reassuring fragrance as she said in a soft voice, "They're ready to leave."

He turned and smiled at the woman. The two young officers who accompanied her snapped to attention, raised an arm in salute, and stared ahead to avoid eye contact with the man, who gazed once more at the hills and countryside surrounding the crater-filled and demolished buildings of the once-great dockyard. The rusted and twisted metallic hulks that strewn around the harbour were the corpses of a once-proud fleet. Tears welled up in his eyes, knowing that he would never return. Composing himself, he walked with the woman by his side. They strode past the escorts, who fell in behind them and marched toward the large black U-boat, moored at the centre of the partly destroyed jetty. The vessel gently rolled from side to side, moved by rippling waves of the gentle spring tide.

The group walked up to the foot of the U-boat's gangway and stopped in front of Hans. "Everything set?" the man asked.

Hans snapped to attention, confirming that everything was going according to plan, with the crew detained for now in the forward compartment. The man glanced at the car parked several yards away. He again addressed the officer. "Well done, SS-Oberführer. What about the other matter?" he asked. The officer then removed a photograph from his pocket and handed it to him. He stared at it for a few moments and then gave it to the woman, who, after glancing at the photo, smiled and put the picture in her handbag.

"Very well... Let's get underway," said the man and walked up the gangway with the woman at his side. Without turning back, they headed inside the side hatch of the conning tower.

SS-Oberführer Hans Kruger was a tall, well-built man. He had a domineering presence who commanded both respect and fear. Although a commando, his real forte was far more sinister. He only took his orders from two men: his boss, SS-Gruppenführer Heinrich Müller, head of the feared Gestapo, and the man who had just entered the U-boat.

Hans remained on the dockside and marched over to the two escort officers.

"You served the Fatherland well. Your families will be proud of you."

The two young officers stood erect and motionless. Hans removed his Luger from its holster, placed the barrel against the forehead of one young officer, and fired a shot between his eyes, killing him instantly. The other soldier urinated but remained motionless; his eyes squinted under the rim of his black peak cap before his end came.

Hans dragged the lifeless bodies over to the parked car one at a time, dumping them onto the back seat. He removed a container of diesel from the car's boot and doused the flammable mix over the corpses and the car. He stood back and threw in a lit match and as the flames spread, Hans strode up the gangway into the vessel.

The U-boat became a hive of activity, as submariners came out of the hatchways and cast off the mooring lines. The Captain and several of his submariners went onto the conning tower bridge, where the Captain gave orders to the deck crew to make ready to shove off. It was a well-orchestrated routine, carried out and performed many times by this experienced and battle-hardened crew. The submariners, after completing their tasks, headed back inside the vessel. Having experienced war in all its savagery, the crew ignored the blazing Mercedes as they readied the vessel for sea.

The U-boat slewed away from the jetty, heading toward the mouth of the small port of Farge estuary. The vessel sailed out of the harbour and, like a sleek whale, eased its way into open water.

Apart from the Captain, the conning tower crew went below decks. Korvettenkapitän Karl Viktor watched as the vessel picked up speed, leaving his country in its wake. An explosion echoed from the jetty as the diesel ignited the Mercedes fuel tank, blowing it and its dead occupants to smithereens.

Captain Viktor stroked the black rubber coating of the conning bridge and listened to the battery banks whirring as they reached 17 knots. He watched the bow as the sleek vessel cut through the water, and he looked back in anger at the land and black plumes of smoke in the distance. Hearing the rumble of explosions as the Allies pounded the nearby town, he thought, 'this is truly a magnificent vessel. With a fleet of these *Elektroboote's we could have won the war.'

He took off his cap to let the sea breeze blow across his head and looked at the gauges.

"Seven fathoms, sir," said the Dive Officer over the intercom.

"Very well... Prepare to dive the boat and level out at four metres," ordered the Captain.

"Yes sir," said the Dive Officer and repeated the order to the control crew.

"Open main vents, rig out bow planes, and set down ten degrees," ordered the Captain.

A sudden bustle of motion signalled the crew's compliance.

"Bow planes set, sir," confirmed the Dive Officer.

The Captain then gave the order.

“Dive the boat!”

Sirens wailed to alert the occupants that the U-boat was submerging. With plumes of water whooshing out of the ballast tanks, the Captain left the conning tower, closed the hatch behind him, and went down into the hot, cramped control room. He realised that they were transporting human cargo along with looted treasure, but unsure of whom.

The Captain hung on to the periscope until the U-Boat levelled off at four metres and then he went to check the gauges.

Hans came into the control room, sneering, as he smelled sweat and grease in the noisy confined section, he handed the Captain a sealed envelope.

“Here are your orders!” he snapped as the Captain opened the envelope and read its contents.

“It’s signed by the Führer,” said Hans, glaring at the Captain, who after reading his instructions knew that his vessel would no longer have any contact with the outside world.

The war-weary commander looked at Hans and then gave orders to the control room crew.

“Helmsman, starboard 15, steer 3-5-Zero. Down planes ten degrees, make our depth 15 metres.”

The helmsman repeated the order aloud and eased forward on the helm control.

The Captain smirked as Kruger lost his balance and grabbed onto a hot metal pipe, wincing as the boat made a gentle descent. Captain Viktor went to the U-boat’s intercom and ordered all officers’ to the wardroom. He went to his chart table, took out charts of their destination, and he and Hans Kruger left the control room, passing two SS soldiers in the communications cabin removing the U-boats radio.

The Elektroboote angled down, gliding under the cold grey North Sea.

*In Appendix

Type XX’s U-boats were also known as **Elektroboote** and the first submarines designed to operate entirely submerged.

2

If you want to shine like the sun, first you have to burn like it.

Ryan rushed over, shook the Keeper's shoulders, and looking into his glazed eyes, yelled, "Church, Church... are you okay?"

Church squinted at Ryan and then around the room. He wiped vomit from around his mouth with his hand as his faculties returned. Composing himself, but appearing unaware of his surroundings, he put his cluttered desk in order.

Ryan stood back and watched as colour returned to Church's ashen face and he stopped trembling. When Church appeared to be back to his normal self, Ryan said, "That was a powerful one boss. Pinky and I felt it in the living room."

Church coughed as he focused on Ryan, and with a quake in his voice, replied, "That was the worst experience and the most powerful spirit that I have ever encountered."

Ryan frowned as he glared at the mess in the portal room, "Who was it?" he asked.

The answer never came. The door swung open and a woman in her twenties with short blonde hair entered the room carrying two mugs. She went over to Church and Ryan.

"Are you okay, Church?" Pinky asked, sounding concerned as she handed both men a mug of tea and said, "Here drink this."

"Thanks, but I need something stronger than tea, Pinky," said Church, his hands trembling as he took the mug.

"I know, so I put a drop of Johnny Walker in it," Pinky replied and smiled.

"Great!" exclaimed Ryan, who after slurping his tea winced

"Duh, not for you dopey," said Pinky and chuckled. She then saw something in the corner of the room and gasped.

Church took a drink of his beverage. He felt the whisky hitting the back of his throat and caressing his oesophagus as it eased down, giving him a warm glow. Church exhaled, picked up his notepad, glanced at it, and then replaced it on the desk. Ryan picked up the pad.

Pinky went to the sink, brought over a damp flannel, and wiped Church's face, while Ryan looked at Church's notes and scratched his chin.

The PATH team gathered around Church's desk with items strewn about the top, resembling the aftermath of a drunken Saturday night brawl.

After clearing his throat, Church said, "Right, team. It looks like we have our next assignment."

Church righted his overturned laptop, checked it was okay, turned it on, and entered a password.

"Look, it scorched the wall," said Pinky, pointing to the corner wall. "And looking at you boss, it did more than that, you look terrified. We knew it was serious after the air got cold before it felt sucked out of the living room," she said, scowling.

"So who was it?" Ryan asked, and smirked, adding, "Ooh, is there lots of lovely treasure to be had, and why did you write your spirit notes in German? I can't understand them."

"Anybody we know?" Pinky asked.

"Granny Pearl never came, did she? I can't smell Brussels sprouts," said Ryan and then looked confused, "I can't smell anything."

Church took another slurp of his drink and with a quake in his voice said, "No Ryan, you won't smell anything with this spirit." He shuddered, took a deep breath, and continued, "And to answer your questions, then Yes, I imagine there's a great deal of treasure, and no, Granny Pearl never appeared and that's what's scares me."

Church leaned forward and typed on the laptop keypad.

“And the answers to your other question.” Church quivered, and said, “This individual was German, and do we know him? Oh, most definitely.”

Church paused as a face appeared on his laptop screen. He turned the computer screen around so that Ryan and Pinky could view the image and continued, “We all know of him. The entire world knew this character, who, according to Grandpa Jack was a bloody menace.”

Pinky and Ryan gasped when they stared at the image on the screen.

Church frowned and announced, “I can sense you both feel troubled. I am scared after my encounter with this powerful spirit.” Pinky and Ryan heard the nervousness in Church’s voice as they glared at the image in disbelief while Church studied his notes and scribbled certain portions of his text in English on another notepad. Ryan broke the silence.

“I don’t understand boss, why now?” He pointed to the screen and continued. “He’s been dead for over 60 years.”

Church looked up from his notes, leaned forward and said, “It was not only the fact of whom or what this individual was that worries me.” He tapped the face on the screen and continued, “We also need to be concerned about the recipient.”

Church slid his notepad over and showed a name he had circled on his notes to the inquisitive Pinky and Ryan.

There was a stunned silence as Pinky and Ryan stared at the screen and the name on the notepad.

Pinky leant forward, pointed at the screen, and asked, “What’s the connection and how was that possible?”

“I don’t know, that’s what we need to find out,” said Church tapping his fingers on the desk.

Church then frowned and through pierced lips told them, “This was not the first time one of these demons came to this portal.” Still shaking, he glanced at the pentagram painted on the wooden floor in the corner of the room and said, “I know of an encounter we had with a Diabolus at our portal centuries ago and a more recent encounter with another Diabolus in the spirit world years ago, which I believe was the same one that I just met.”

Puzzled, Ryan frowned and asked, “What’s a Diabolus?”

“I will explain later,” said Church, who went to the safe, took out a thick ancient leather-bound book, came back over, and placed it on the desk. “Let me decipher all my notes and read the journal again,” said Church, opening the book and searching through the brittle pages for the relevant section.

“I am not happy with this one, boss. Something doesn’t feel right. Do we have to take the assignment?” Ryan asked, fidgeting and looking at Pinky.

“Perhaps a cheese and ham sandwich would help,” smiled Pinky, trying to lighten the mood, knowing that Ryan would do anything if the reward involved food.

“Oh, well why didn’t you say that before?” chuckled Ryan, “When do we start?” he asked, with nervousness he tried to disguise.

Church looked at his team. After this powerful encounter and knowing what it was, he felt scared. He knew from the journal the dangers of any encounter with a Diabolus, and after what he’d just experienced, did not want to put them in harm’s way. Even though they looked calm, Church sensed fear in the pair and realised that none of them were ready for an assignment of this magnitude. He closed the book, leant on the desk, smiled, and announced, “Okay, we won’t take this case.”

“Phew,” Pinky sighed with relief.

Although pleased with Church’s decision, Ryan had a niggling doubt and asked, “Can we do that?”

Church reply never came, as a flickering blue flame filled the corner of the room along with a familiar aroma and, sniffing the air, Ryan announced. “I smell Brussels sprouts, Granny Pearl’s here.”

3

Things are not always right because they are hard, but if they are right one must not mind if they are also hard.

The PATH team lived in a 16th Century thatched-roofed cottage built in a clearing within a dense woodland area of Clifton Moor, close to York city. This secluded cottage belonged to Churchill Potts junior, who inherited it from his grandparents, Pearl and Jack Potts. The cottage had been in the Potts family for generations and although this quaint old cottage appeared like something from a Brothers Grimm folktale; it held a remarkable secret.

* * *

During the mid-sixteenth century, a wealthy Englishman, Robert Potts, had the cottage built at a specific secluded location. This was ideal for Robert and his family and perfect for the inhabitants of the surrounding towns and villages. The townsfolk felt certain Robert was a Warlock, so the further away he was, the better.

With England in turmoil after the civil war ended and after they beheaded Charles I, a Cromwell-controlled protectorate government, one with deep puritanical beliefs, now ran the country. The English people felt terrified and confused. This fear paved the way for a government-backed religious crusade to rid the country of those considered heretics, so witches and warlocks became an indoctrinated terror. This fear led to the formation of the 'Witch Finders.' These individuals scoured the country on high government salaries, flushing out evil forces that allegedly manifested into human form.

Robert was from a wealthy and respectable family. He had fought during the English civil war as an infantry officer in Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads. His father was a minister at York Abbey, and after witnessing many bloody battles, Robert knew he wanted to follow his father's example and serve God within the clergy. He returned to York after the war ended when he was seventeen. His father used his influence to push his son through the ranks to a junior ministerial position within York Abbey. Robert had suffered headaches throughout his childhood and heard incoherent voices when nobody was there, especially on the battlefield. Unable to understand why, and afraid to seek advice for fear of being accused of being cursed, he ignored it. Robert was a handsome young man but his ashen complexion gave him a ghostly appearance.

Everything changed on his eighteenth birthday when his headaches became severe and the voices became louder, although still a myriad of sounds, he heard cries for help and could sense despair. Everybody now seemed bathed in a white light, apart from him, who glowed with the colours of the rainbow. This terrified Robert and convinced he was a warlock, feared for his life. Robert altered overnight, becoming reclusive and no longer attending the clergy or fulfilled his duties, spending his time in his room alone which disturbed his respectable parents.

Robert went out most evenings, strolling along smoggy, cobbled city streets of York, amongst the hustle and bustle of street vendors, entertainers, and taverns. Although different from his sheltered religious upbringing, the streets seemed to beckon him. He knew he would find something there, but did not know what.

It was on one of these nightly excursions when he met Elizabeth cooking at a small street vendor's stall,

"Can I tempt you to some lovely tripe and onions, Robert?" She smiled.

"What!" exclaimed Robert, taken aback how she knew his name, as he had never laid eyes on the girl before. Robert saw a crimson aura surrounding her and realised that she was also different.

Robert returned to her stall every night to see the pretty brunette with rosy cheeks that seemed to glow against her pale skin. Elizabeth instigated the courtship and asked him to take her out, which

in those days was unheard of, and she could have ended up in prison or far worse. Robert became intrigued and besotted with Elizabeth, who was almost 19-years-old.

“We are special my love.” She’d told Robert. “We are Chosen-ones, and when we find our portal, thou will be the Keeper, and I will be thy Guide.”

This always confused Robert, but he accepted her strange behaviour because he was in love and wanted to marry Elizabeth. His parents wouldn’t give their consent to this union until Robert announced Elizabeth was pregnant. His parent, although outraged, went ahead with the marriage with it being inconceivable to have a child out of wedlock. Not only would it have destroyed the family’s reputation but also they didn’t want to upset Robert’s uncle, as this man terrified people. His uncle was Mathew Hopkins, known throughout England as the Witch Finder General. Robert and Elizabeth married straight away and lived in a cobblestone cottage on his parent’s estate.

Elizabeth, now seven months pregnant, looked radiant, and Robert looked forward to the birth of their first child.

One evening as the pair chatted by candlelight, Robert felt a sharp pain in his head. Elizabeth, knowing of the headaches, reassured him they would go when the time was right, explaining that she too used to get them, and it was only restless spirits trying to contact him.

“They get worse,” said Robert groaning and glancing over at his wife, who appeared to be talking into a large flickering blue flame by the wall.”

After squinting through the pain for a few minutes, his headache stopped and he looked at Elizabeth smiling at him.

He looked at the wall, but the flame had gone and feeling bewildered he looked at his wife, whose crimson aura now had a faint multi-coloured glow surrounding her stomach.

“My love, I must go,” said Elizabeth.

“What?” asked Robert, taken aback, “Go where?”

“I need to prepare for our eternal task ahead.” She said, with calmness in her voice.

Robert stammered, “I don’t understand. Thou art my wife and I forbid thee to go anywhere. What about our child?”

“Goodbye my love, don’t worry, I will see thee soon, and we will all be together,” said Elizabeth, who smiled and closed her eyes,

“What’s happening? Elizabeth, open thy eyes, I want to talk to thee,” said Robert, frowning.

Elizabeth’s body juddered and then convulsed.

“Elizabeth, Elizabeth!” shouted Robert. His eyes widened as he rushed over to his wife as her crimson aura faded.

It took over an hour for a doctor and midwife to arrive on horseback and looked at each other in astonishment when the midwife delivered a healthy baby boy from Elizabeth’s body.

Elizabeth’s death devastated Robert. He spent days and sometimes weeks in bed, ignoring everyone. He never acknowledged his son, refusing to give the child a name and blaming the infant of killing his beloved Elizabeth.

Several years passed and the reclusive Robert stayed alone in his cottage while his parents raised his son, who they named him William.

Late one night while Robert lay in bed watching the candle flicker, staring as the flames went through their nightly dance. He rubbed his temples, “Argh, damn these headaches,” he said aloud.

Closing his eyes as the pain intensified, he smelt Tripe and Onions. Robert felt confused as a large flickering blue flame appeared by the side of the candle with a crimson apparition swirling at its centre. Robert sat up in bed and stared wide-eyed at the light, which got brighter. Then a familiar voice said, “Robert, my love, I haven’t got long to explain. Thee must come and find me and our portal, so we can all be together.”

“Elizabeth” he gasped, startled by the apparition which became clear and he could now see Elizabeth smiling at him.

“I don’t understand. Where art thou? Am I dreaming?” spluttered Robert.

Elizabeth put her arms out and repeated, “My love, thee must come and find me and our portal. It is close by.”

Robert looked agog as the apparition faded, but he felt euphoric and no longer in pain.

After his contact with Elizabeth’s spirit and although he thought it was a dream, Robert knew that he needed to find the portal that Elizabeth told him about, praying that if he found it, he would see her again. He scoured the Yorkshire countryside on horseback for several weeks.

One warm clear night, he came across a large circular clearing within a dense forest area of Clifton Moor. The large patch of ground seemed out of place amongst the woodland, but Robert felt drawn to this area and dismounted. Robert led his horse out of the woods and went over to the circular area. He saw rocks assembled in neat rows around the circle, with a large scorched area in its centre.

Robert cringed, ‘A witch’s coven,’ he thought, ‘Damn, I did not know witches were in this area?’

He turned around, grabbed the horse’s reins, and as he placed his foot in the stirrup, a sharp pain shot through his head.

‘Argh, not now,’ he thought, as the pain intensified.

“Robert, Robert!” said a familiar voice behind him. He removed his foot from the stirrup and swung around.

In the centre of the circle, a vivid blue flame flickered around a figure bathed in a crimson glow. Although unable to make out any distinctive features, he recognised the voice. He dropped to his knees and stared into the light.

“Elizabeth, Elizabeth,” he wailed.

“Robert, thee has found our home,” said Elizabeth, with her soothing voice comforting Robert, and the pain in his head stopped as she continued. “I have a lot to teach thee my love, but first, thee must build protection around our portal and bring our son to make our family complete.”

Robert gazed into the portal feeling euphoric. He saw Elizabeth’s shimmering apparition and went over to the portal and she warned him. “Do not enter the portal my love.”

Robert stopped and gazed at his wife. In a dreamy daze, he looked at his body now glowing with colours, and as he gazed at his hands, he screamed “But how? What is this sorcery? I am cursed.”

Elizabeth giggled and said, “Thou art not cursed my husband, what thee is seeing is thy aura.”

Elizabeth explained a little over the next hour, and Robert, with his new understanding, left the portal to start with his task ahead.

Over the next few months, Robert worked tirelessly. With his parents’ money and a few overpaid builders from the nearby town, he built a thatched-roofed cottage on the patch of land surrounding the portal. Robert designed the cottage so the portal would appear in a corner of a room on the ground floor, which would be his bedroom. Even though his parents were concerned about Williams’s safety, they allowed Robert to take his son. Robert and William moved into the cottage and the three of them lived there undisturbed.

The Potts reared livestock and grew fruits and vegetables, which kept them isolated from the outside world. Elizabeth’s spirit taught Robert about the world she now inhabited. She explained about the *Gift and advised him how to use his Keeper’s power wisely to protect the portal and help lost souls enter the afterlife. Robert then taught his son and William grew up believing that it was normal for his father to speak to an area of his bedroom, and, even though he saw nothing, he believed his father when said he was speaking with his mother. Robert schooled him, and they worked and lived off their land. Robert walked to Radcliff town several times a month for supplies. The townsfolk were always suspicious and afraid of the Potts family. However, knowing who Robert’s uncle was, they did not want to risk their being accused of sorcery and burned at the stake, so they ignored the Potts.

* * *

William first encountered his mother on his 18th birthday. He was reading a manuscript by candlelight on a chilly winter's evening when he felt a sharp pain in his head. He screamed as he saw multi-coloured lights envelop him and he rushed into his father's bedroom.

"Father, Father, look at my body, it ..."

William gasped and stood in awe at the sight in front of him as a warm blue flame filled the corner of the room, with a shimmering crimson figure at its centre.

He couldn't make out any features, however, he felt euphoric, and the pain in his head went, leaving just a warm narcotic feeling. His father stood to the side of the blue flame and, with his multi-coloured aura radiating, he smiled and announced, "William, meet thy mother."

Over the next few years, they lived as a complete, although strange, family.

Elizabeth instructed William to find a wife who would be his Guide when he was twenty-one-years-old. She told him that it was time for his joining and said where he would find his Chosen-one.

William found his Guide, a girl named Rebecca. She was 16, and in jail in the village of Woodford awaiting trial for witchcraft. He instantly fell in love with her and using his elderly uncle's influence had Rebecca released. Rebecca and William married and she moved into the Potts cottage where shortly after they had a daughter who was a Keeper.

Robert died at 65-years-old. His and Elizabeth's spirits continued to teach William until he and Rebecca died. Elizabeth and Robert went to the afterlife while William and Rebecca's spirits taught their children and grandchildren, continuing with the bloodline throughout the ages.

* * *

Centuries passed, with roads now built around the area of the Potts secluded thatched-roofed cottage.

The portals previous Keeper and Guide, Jack and Pearl Potts, had not updated the cottage for many years and had remained reclusive during their lives there, preferring to keep away from the towns populous. Pearl, the Keeper, was a cheerful woman with many friends, although very few in the mortal world. Jack, the Guide, on the other hand, was a grumpy old sod, who grumbled most of the time.

Church's father, Churchill Potts senior, never acquired the gift, so when he was 17-years-old he joined the army, where he met and married June, a civilian teacher at his barracks. They distanced themselves from Pearl and Jack as their weird ways scared June. They moved into a modern detached house in York city centre, where their only son was born in 1965. They named him Churchill, the same as his father, who his father, Jack, had named him after his hero Winston Churchill, so Churchill senior also gave the odd name to his son.

Pearl and Jack had no contact with Churchill senior or June for many years but went to the hospital when June was in labour. Pearl told her son that her grandson would have the gift, and it would be powerful. Churchill Senior didn't want to know and was uninterested.

Several years later Jack passed away. Churchill senior, not wanting to lose his inheritance, reunited Pearl with his family.

Church's childhood was far from normal, spending his weekends with his grandmother Pearl at her old cottage. Granny Pearl lived alone after Jack passed away, although she told Church that she spoke to Jack every night and he would one day meet his grandpa Jack. Church grew close to his grandmother and loved spending weekends and holidays at the cottage, although it always smelled of Brussels sprouts. It felt comfortable and homely to Church, who went to primary school in York but found it difficult to make friends with the other kids wary of his strange behaviour. Granny Pearl had told him that he had a special gift and although he considered this special gift a pain in the arse, he preferred to spend time with her as opposed to other kids. The countryside surrounding the cottage was picturesque and alive with wildlife going about their daily ramblings. It was a grand adventure for a curious, solitary little boy.

Young Church could not understand why he was different. His blinding headaches, voices, and pallid complexion gave his teachers cause for concern, and they pressured his parents to seek help. Churchill senior and June persuaded them that he had a hereditary disorder and that it was nothing to worry about, they now distanced themselves from Church.

* * *

Granny Pearl died when Church was fifteen-years-old and bequeathed the cottage to him for his 18th birthday. He felt lonely without Granny Pearl, but she had told him that he would see her again and for reasons unbeknownst to him, he believed her.

Pearl left strict instructions the cottage remained sealed until then, and only when Church moved in, would his parents get their inheritance.

When Granny Pearl died, the lawyer from Mason & Mason, an old family lawyer for Pearl and Jack, gave Church an ancient key on a silver chain and told him to keep it safe until his eighteenth birthday. Church hung the key chain around his neck.

During the eighties, while the other kids grew up around discotheques and Duran-Duran, Church, stayed home alone, with his strange erratic behaviour making him an outcast.

Church finished school when he was 16 with no ambitions or future direction. His mother and father accepted this and ignored him as he rarely left his room. On the eve of his 18th birthday, Church's life changed and he awoke with a sharp pain in his temples. He had never experienced such intense pain. He sat up in bed, squeezed his hand against his head, and through the pain noticed a vivid column of blue flame. His pain subsided and he stared at the plume as it increased in size. Something else illuminated his senses; the familiar smell of Brussels sprouts. He watched in awe as the myriad of colours took shape. An unfocused human bathed in multi-coloured flames formed within the centre of the column and a familiar voice that he had not heard for three years, said, "Hello Churchill, you have grown. I don't have long to talk and I know you feel confused, but when you move into the cottage, all will become clear. I have a lot to teach you."

"Granny Pearl," he stammered as the figure became clearer.

"Yes Church, and you have nothing to worry about, your life will be better from now on."

The figure then faded along with the blue flame; leaving Church bewildered but feeling euphoric. Smiling, he drifted into a blissful slumber.

Churchill senior phoned Mason & Mason solicitors to confirm his son was moving in the following day and wanted his inheritance. The lawyer informed him that it was somewhere in the house and that young Church would know where it was when they got there.

The following morning, Church's parents woke him early and drove him to the cottage, eager to find their inheritance and settle Church into his new home. Churchill senior had seen his father bringing in small valuable items into the cottage when he was a child and Jack had always told him that one day the Potts treasure would be his.

Church smiled during the brief journey and thought of the fond memories he had of the small thatched-roofed cottage and happy about being able to live there alone. With his parents ignoring him over the past few years he'd become a recluse, but as they approached the cottage, he had a strange feeling he would not be alone for long.

The car pulled up and Church felt the fresh crisp country air of his surroundings on his face. Churchill senior struggled with the old lock and after cursing and grunting, he shoved the door open and they went inside.

"It smells musty," June grumbled.

Church smelt something else and smiled.

With the cottage sealed and furnishings covered, it had remained in good condition. The Potts removed the cloths and June rushed around and gave the downstairs a cursory clean. The electrical switches and appliances, although archaic, were in working order. Churchill senior arranged for the

power supply reconnected and when Jack was alive he had plumbed in a system of pipes from the outside well into the house, so Church had power and fresh running water.

Church looked around smiling; he knew every part of this cottage. Except for one room that Granny Pearl kept locked, he had played around every other part of the cottage as a child.

Churchill senior and June looked anxious, so after June put food and other stuff she had brought with them in the cupboards, his father said,

“Okay son, we want to get back to York, The lawyer said you know where our inheritance was, so if you would give us that, we can be on our way, and we will see you later.”

Church looked puzzled and threw up his hands. “I don’t know where it is?” He said.

His parents glared at him; Church senior sighed and said, “That solicitor’s an idiot and it’s just like mum to give us the run-around. Oh well, I imagine that it is around here somewhere. I suppose we better search.”

“This place gives me the creeps, so I will look outside.” Said June and rushed out.

“I’ll go look upstairs, you look down here,” said Churchill senior.

Church wandered around and felt drawn to the room on the ground floor that Granny Pearl had always kept locked. When young Church had asked why she had always told him it was her and Grandpa Jack’s special room that he could not go in... yet.

Church went over, turned the knob, and opened the door.

He gasped upon entering the room as a vivid blue flame flickered at the centre of the pentagram, with its light filling the corner of the room, and two shimmering apparitions at its centre, one glowed crimson, the other multi-coloured, and the familiar aroma of Brussels sprouts wafted around the room, along with a faint trace of Brylcreem.

“Happy birthday young Churchill,” said a man’s voice, followed by a familiar woman’s voice, “Churchill, meet your Grandpa, Jack.”

Church giggled and said, “Hello Grandpa Jack, and Granny Pearl... Fancy meeting you here.”

Both spirits chuckled. Granny Pearl then said. “Happy birthday Church; we can talk later, but for now, let’s make your parents happy so they will leave and we can begin your tutoring.”

“Your dad always was a greedy, money-grabbing little sod,” interrupted Jack.

“Be quiet Jack, we have to help Church.” Pearl curtly replied.

“You must have been secretly seeing the bloody milkman. Certainly no son of mine,” grumbled Jack.

“Shush stupid,” snapped Pearl. Church looked on at this exchange between the two spirits and chuckled. He knew his life would now change for the better.

Pearl gave Church directions to an area outside the cottage and told him that he would find a chest buried there containing various items. She instructed him on what to give his parents and what he must keep.

Church left the portal room and called his father downstairs. Although he and his father had never spoken about his gift, Churchill senior was aware his parents were different. He also knew his son was different and had the gift, so it did not surprise him when he said that Pearl had told him where she buried their inheritance.

“Okay son. Let’s go find it, but say nothing to June about your grandmother’s ghost.”

Church and his parents found the spot under a large, gnarled oak tree root, marked by a Cross and Rose symbol scorched into the ground. Church dug up an ancient chest, took the ancient key and chain from around his neck, and opened the lock.

The old lid creaked open, and they all peered inside.

Churchill senior and June smiled.

The chest contained various items of gold and silver jewellery adorned with rough-cut precious stones, along with gold coins and ingots.

Churchill senior grinned as he picked up a coin dating back to the 16th century, while June picked up a bejewelled necklace and put it against her neck, getting the nod of approval from her husband.

Church was more interested in an old leather-bound journal he saw at the bottom.

They took the chest into the cottage and laid it on the kitchen table. While June fetched a cold box from the car containing sandwiches and cakes she had brought along, Churchill senior loaded items from the chest into a duffel bag.

Church removed the book and glanced within the pages, made from varying materials, from old parchment to typing paper. The journal, compiled over the centuries by different authors, with the later entries put in by his grandmother, who he knew had an old typewriter.

Once the box was empty, Church locked it and replaced the key around his neck as Pearl had instructed. He placed the chest into an old cupboard in the scullery.

After eating the sandwiches and cakes, Churchill senior announced, “Okay son we will leave you to settle in and until you have a phone installed, I will visit once a week and bring you fresh supplies.”

Church knew they were impatient to leave and go to value and sell their inheritance. “Thanks dad,” he said, happy they were leaving.

“Will you be alright Churchill? You don’t have to stay if you don’t want to,” said June, sounding concerned.

“I will be fine mum,” Church replied and smiled.

“He’ll be okay, come on let’s go June. We have a lot to do,” said Churchill senior heading for the door.

His parents drove away looking delighted with their newfound wealth.

With his parents gone, Church went to the portal room to learn about the family business.

4

For there is one thing we must never forget; the majority can never replace the man.

The year was 1945. Magnificent buildings that once stood proudly in the opulent city of Berlin now lay in rubble, decimated by an angry world hell-bent on exacting revenge by annihilating the city and making German people atone for the atrocities committed by their country over the past few years.

Although spring was in the air, no aromas of freshly mown grass and fragrant flowers carried on the warm breeze. Instead, the overpowering smells of cordite, napalm, and the vile stench from the charred, rotting corpses, which lay strewn amongst the rubble-filled graveyard of the city.

With World War 2 almost over and while the demoralised German people came to terms with an uncertain future, the leaders of this fallen nation were now deep within a bunker, planning their next and final atrocity.

* * *

Located fifty feet beneath the once picturesque Gardens of the Reichskanzlei chancellery building, there was a large concrete and steel bunker. Within the bunker, several sections built to protect the occupants from the Allied bombing blitz. Inside the bunker gathered a group of men, which included several military figures and a few civilians. They gathered around a large table while their leader screamed at them, and by their nervous expressions, they were terrified of this individual.

Adolf Hitler looked furious as he glared at his War Cabinet and senior officials of his Nazi Party, in a large plush conference room within the 'Führerbunker.'

Hitler pounded his fist onto the desk and hunched over the table with rage in his eyes.

"Because of your incompetence, we are losing this war," he hollered.

He looked into each face around him, giving them all an icy-cold stare. His steely eyes burrowed into their souls. He composed himself, inhaled, swept his fringe away from his forehead, glared at General Wilhelm Kietel, and said, "Kietel, give me some good news."

Kietel's hands shook as he organised charts on the desk, and with a quiver in his voice said, "My Führer, I have no good news. The American, European, and Russian forces will be in Berlin by next week."

Again incensed, Hitler shouted obscenities and accusations of treason at the General, who hung his head looking embarrassed and afraid.

Hitler then focused his attention on a large man dressed in a white uniform.

He asked Herman Goering, "What about our beloved Luftwaffe?"

"Führer, we only have a few planes and pilots remaining, although we..."

"Silence!" Hitler commanded. Outraged, he struck the table hard again.

"I suppose our great fleet is also finished." He glared at Admiral Raeder, who nodded and replied, "We are still fighting Führer, but we are taking heavy losses from the enemy."

Hitler remained silent for a few moments and then addressed the group. "We must regroup and win this war. Our enemy is inferior to us." He continued with his orders. "Hienrich, you and the S.S., along with Walter and Alfred, round up anyone who can carry a weapon, old men or young boys, and get them to defend their fatherland."

Hienrich Himmler, Field Marshal Walter Von Brauchitsch and General Alfred Jodl clicked their heels in salute. "At once Führer," They said, confirming that they would carry out Hitler's order, although they realised the futility.

Hitler leant over the table, sighed, and lowered his head. The others noticed his hands shaking as he mumbled to himself.

“My Fuehrer; we must get you out of Germany,” said Max Amann, a senior Nazi Party official. “We have false Red Cross papers for you and Eva with an escape route planned. We can...”

Hitler looked up, giving Amann a cold stare, stopping him in mid-speech.

“Do you mean a *Ratline, Max?” He asked.

“Yes, my Fuehrer, we planned one for you,” Max stammered, looking nervous.

“Do you think of your Fuehrer as a rat Max?” said Hitler, sounding calm.

“No Fuehrer, I am concerned about...”

“Your concerns do not interest me, Amann!” Hitler yelled interrupting Amann, who hung his head and looked at the floor as the tempo in Hitler’s voice reached a crescendo. He again slapped the desk hard and returned to staring at the individuals, screaming, “I will never leave my beloved Germany. Only you fools think this war is lost. I am the German people, and I will have victory. We cannot be defeated. We are the superior race, and I am your Fuehrer. There will be no surrender or escape for anyone.” He stood silent for a moment and looked at certain individuals, who nodded as his gaze fell upon them. He then bellowed, “Do I make myself clear? No escape and no surrender... Now get out of my sight.”

He slouched again over the table as some of the men left the room ignored by Hitler.

Several men remained behind, unnoticed by the others who left with their heads lowered, avoiding Hitler’s gaze, and wrath.

Two guards closed the large doors behind the last man to leave. Hitler looked at the six individuals remaining in the room.

SS – Gruppenfuehrer Heinrich Müller - Chief of the Gestapo.

SS- Oberfuehrer Benno Von Arent.

Gross Admiral, Karl Dönitz.

Professor Kurt Gutzig.

SS – Hauptsturmfuehrer Doctor Josef Mengele, and Professor Hellmuth Walter.

Hitler smiled at the men, and sounding calm, asked, “Has everything been prepared, gentlemen?”

All six raised briefcases, showing the Fuehrer. Hitler smiled.

“Excellent,” he said and shouted over to a guard at the door.

A guard marched over to Hitler, giving him a smart ‘hitlergruss.’ *Nazi salute.*

“Take the Gross Admiral, Doctor Mengele, and the professors to the stateroom and ensure they are granted all necessary comforts,” he ordered, and then spoke to the four, “Karl, Kurt, Hellmuth, Josef, excuse me, we have an important matter to deal with first. I will summon you when ready.”

The four saluted Hitler and followed the guard out of the conference room.

Hitler faced the two remaining SS officers smiled and said, “Heinrich, Benno, we have guests waiting to see us, so let’s retire to more comfortable surroundings.”

He turned and went over to a wall where a large red flag with a white circle and black swastika imprinted on it hung over a doorway. He moved the flag to one side and pushed a section of the wall. A door opened and the three head down a well-lit shaft, with only a gentle buzz, heard from the air filtration units’ battery generators. They walked the short distance along the tunnel, entering through a door into Hitler’s drawing-room.

Another Nazi flag was on the wall and in front of the flag was a large desk, with a telephone on one corner, and a strongbox placed at its centre. The red chest had a swastika symbol painted on each side, with **STRENG GEHEIM: BUCH MOSE** (TOP SECRET: GENESIS) stencilled across the top.

In the centre of the room, several armchairs were around a large coffee table. The main entrance to Hitler’s drawing-room was from double doors opposite, with two armed SS soldiers stationed outside, and another SS soldier stood by the side of a well-stocked drinks cabinet. The soldier snapped to attention when the party entered the room.

Chandeliers illuminated the room and several art masterpieces adorned each wall. A large, ornate hearth situated to the right of the room with a raging, smokeless coal fire, burning behind a golden antique fire surround and a false York Stone chimney. Despite having powerful air filters and extractors hidden behind the chimney, the room smelt of coal.

Even without windows and natural light, the room resembled an elaborate drawing-room, although it was underground and encased in thick concrete and steel.

Already seated in the room, was a young blonde woman, Hans Kruger, and a small, dark-haired, middle-aged man. They all rose when Hitler entered.

Hitler instructed them all to take a seat and offered them a drink.

“Hans, Erik, Eva,” said Hitler, smiling at those already in the room. He sat on the middle chair, looked at the five and said, “You know why we are here, so let’s get on with it.”

The guard placed drinks on the table beside the men and woman and then left the room.

“Eva, you don’t need to be here for this, so go to your room,” he commanded Eva Braun, who nodded, smiled at the men, took her drink, and left the room.

Gestapo Chief Heinrich Müller removed maps from his case and laid them out on the table and they all leaned over to look.

Hitler pointed to an area marked on the map and asked, “You are sure there are no enemy forces in this area?”

Müller looked at Hitler and replied, “Yes, Führrer, I am positive. This area has no strategic value or use, so there is no military activity there.”

Hitler looked over at the chisel-jawed Hans Kruger and enquired, “Is everything prepared, Hans?”

Hans Kruger sat upright, staring straight ahead. “Yes my Führrer, my team is ready and awaiting your order.”

Hitler looked at the map, smiled, and addressed the smaller man, “Erik, you have done well with this find. Are you prepared?”

“Yes, my Führrer, everything has been taken care of, and our equipment will work,” said the little Jewish man, smirking.

Hitler smiled and asked, “How do you know it will work, Erik? We haven’t been able to test it.”

The small Jewish man pushed his wire-rimmed spectacles further up the bridge of his nose, smiled, and with an air of confidence, said, “I am sure Führrer,”

This small Jewish man seemed not to hold any fear of the Führrer, which puzzled the military men in the room. They all had the same lingering doubts about Erik Jan Hanussen. Hitler was a staunch anti-Semitic, so wondered why this Jew was always allowed an immediate audience with Hitler. They knew Erik always stayed close to their Führrer, who would always listen to his advice, more so than any other of his war chiefs. They could not understand their close relationship and Erik unnerved them all with his sinister, creepy demeanour.

Hitler studied the plans and the markings of a small valley alongside a glacial stream, near the town of Schenkenzell, in the Kinzigtal valley at the edge of the Black Forest. A square grid drawn around an area in the small valley appeared to be a planned excavation site.

“Make sure you don’t slow them down Erik,” said Hitler, who smiled at Erik Jan Hanussen, his ‘Jewish psychic.’ Erik smiled back, and looking nervous, glanced at the large Hans Kruger, Hitler’s Leibstandarte SS, personal bodyguard, and assassin, sitting next to him.

“No my Führrer, I will try not to.” stammered Erik.

“Kruger, make sure no harm befalls Erik. The third Reich’s continuing existence and future 1,000-year reign rest on your shoulders,” said Hitler, glaring at Hans.

“I will take good care of Herr Jan Hanussen, My Führrer,” said Hans, smirking at Erik.

“You have your orders, so carry them out. Failure is not an option and will result in your death Hans,” said Hitler, with a menace in his voice.

Hans and Erik stood up and saluted Hitler. Hans marched out of the room with Erik stumbling behind him.

Once they left the room, SS-Oberführer Benno Von Arent, the Nazi specialist agent for art and treasures, removed a small stack of pictures and photographs from his case and placed them on the table. Hitler picked them up one at a time, scrutinised them and separated them into two piles.

“These will go with us,” he said and tapped at one pile.

“And these would go along to the other bunker once Hans and Erik had completed their task, and you have built it,” he pointed to the other pile.

Benno Von Arent nodded and picked up the piles. He clipped the individual papers together and replaced them into his case.

“We want them at both locations in three days,” Hitler ordered.

“Yes, Führer,” said Von Arent, and as he collected his things together, Hitler gave him a stark warning, “I will check none are missing Von Arent. Now go!” commanded Hitler.

Benno Von Arent stood and saluted before he left the room.

Now alone, Hitler leant forward, stared at Müller, and asked, “How are my two Jewish decoys?”

Müller nodded and said, “They are fine. The surgery went well and they are both enjoying all the trappings of being first-class citizens again... until we need them,” he smirked.

“And you are certain that their bodies won’t be recognised?”

“Yes Führer, I have given strict instructions on the incendiary to use for maximum effect. I will use two of your staff to make the discovery, which will be more convincing when they are captured,” explained Müller and sounding confident assured him, “There was no way to identify the remains. That technology may be decades away and by that time our beloved third Reich will once again dominate the world.”

Hitler sighed, smiled, and asked, “Was everything else on schedule Heinrich?”

Müller nodded and replied, “Once Hans completed his mission, he will then carry out your next order, and then we can start again. Germany and the Third Reich will once again be the world’s superior power under your leadership and guidance my Führer.”

Hitler smirked at the SS officer, and then shouted at the two guards, “Bring Dönitz and Walter.”

The guard marched away to fetch the two men. Müller packed away the maps and then he and Hitler chatted until Gross Admiral Karl Dönitz and Professor Hellmuth Walter came into the room; followed by Eva Braun, knowing she would be included in this part of the plan.

They sat around the large coffee table. Professor Hellmuth Walter took pictures, blueprints, and schematics from his bag and placed them on the table.

Professor Hellmuth Walter, a tall stocky man with slick back grey hair was not a military man but a brilliant and innovative engineer, who felt nervous and overawed by Hitler’s presence. He fidgeted and stammered as he showed the group a schematic of a U-boat and explained about that phase of the operation.

“The vessel we are using to transport you and the other items was a refitted new *XX series Elektroboote with my revolutionary peroxide battery engines,” said Hellmuth as he tapped on the schematic and continued. “A sound-absorbent rubber coating covered the U-boat, to make it less of an ASDIC/Sonar target. The boat’s system had a chemical bubble-making decoy, known as ‘Bold,’ named after the mythical sprite of German folklore.”

“I only want simple facts Mr Walter. What does that mean?” asked Hitler.

“Well Führer, it means the U-boat would be undetectable by radar or sonar so invisible to all enemy vessels, and the new engine would make it to your destination submerged, using a snorkel to recharge the batteries.” He said, and to avoid Hitler’s gaze pointed again at the schematics.

Hellmuth showed the group the rear section of the U-boat with the torpedo room and crew compartments removed and replaced by a cargo storage area. He told them, “The storage is now eight separate sections, only accessible from the deck and Cranes could load and unload containers into

the separate sections which are part of the structure so as not to compromise the watertight integrity of the U-boat in rough seas.” He pointed to the conning tower and said, “For extra cargo storage and an entryway for you Führer, this has been heightened and reinforced. This remodelling still enables the crew access up to the conning tower bridge.” Hellmuth looked up and assured them that he had calculated for the extra weight and doubled the ballast tanks’ volume to compensate for the additional 800 tons.

“What about armament?” asked Müller “What would happen if the U-boat came under attack?”

Gross Admiral Karl Dönitz answered that question as Hellmuth Walter appeared flustered and shuffled his papers around looking nervous.

“We still have six torpedoes in the forward section,” said the Admiral, staring at Müller.

“Would six be sufficient?” asked Hitler, sounding concerned.

“Oh yes, my Führer. You cannot shoot what you can’t see,” stammered Hellmuth Walter.

Hitler gave him an icy stare, and in a threatening tone replied, “I hope so Mr Walter.”

Noticing Hellmuth was about to piss his pants, Dönitz produced a red folder from his case with, STRENG GEHEIM : BUCH MOSE, marked on the front, which he laid on the table.

They leant forward to study the folder. The front page contained an enlarged photograph of a battle-hardened Naval Officer.

“This is Korvettenkapitän Karl Viktor,” said Dönitz, as he handed a photo to Hitler. “Viktor was one of my best wolf pack commanders and his submariner crew are loyal. They sank 187 merchant ships in the Atlantic and patrolled the Gulf of Mexico, with 130 kills credited to him. Viktor is a loyal and respected commander, with two iron crosses.”

Hitler studied the photo. Dönitz turned more pages from the folder. Hitler snatched the files and glanced at it.

Dönitz, perturbed by this, skipped the details and explained. “The barges will rendezvous with the U-boat at the coordinates in Argentine waters at the scheduled time and offload the cargo. The barges will then sail to a cargo dock in Retiro and unload the items into our disguised vehicles. The U-boat will then sail into international waters and surrender to the American fleet.”

Hitler then glanced at Müller who nodded and grinned.

Hitler continued reading the folder and looking at the relevant pictures as Dönitz continued, “A motor launch will take you, Eva, and Hans to the beach at Costa de la Platas en Barazeregui. A Focke-Achgells FA-33 hubschrauber helicopter with the presidential crest will then fly you to Quinta de Olivos palace in Buenos Aires. President Peron will meet you there. He told me that he is looking forward to spending some time with you and Eva.”

Eva Braun smiled; she remembered how she had enjoyed the previous visits and liked President Juan Peron’s wife, Maria Eva Duarte de Peron, simply known as Eva Peron. However, Hitler never shared her sentiments.

“I have met President Peron many times. He is not a man that I trust,” sneered Hitler.

“The Gestapo are ready my Führer. Peron will not be any cause for concern. He will be well-compensated, so their feeble army will be the strongest in the region, thanks to our generous donation and technology,” reassured Müller, his interruption annoying Dönitz.

“What about Peron and the Americans? Are you certain we can trust him not to betray us?” Hitler asked.

Dönitz explained, “America was putting pressure on Peron to choose sides, but they cannot give him what we can offer. If they ever found out he collaborated with us, they would no doubt put Argentina on their ‘Exkremente liste.’ Shit list. Peron already lied to them and told them Argentina had declared war on our fatherland. He’s assured the Americans that the Argentine navy will patrol the area of Rio de Planta in the South Atlantic, our rendezvous point, so we have no concern over being intercepted or disturbed by enemy warships.”

“What we can give, we can also take away and give to his opponents, and Peron knows that. Knowing our power, he will co-operate. He is our Latin American pet,” said Müller, receiving a contemptuous glare from Dönitz for interrupting him.

“Have you also offered President Rios of Chile the same deal?” Hitler asked, smirking.

“Of course, Führrer.” Müller smiled.

“That sounds satisfactory. I only want to be in Argentina for four days at the most, until we make our final relocation,” insisted Hitler, and feeling confident he continued to read Dönitz’s Genesis folder, and asked, “How and when do we begin the operation?”

“We will take you to the U-boat at Farge port. Kruger should have completed his mission at Schenkenzell and will meet you at the U-boat in three days.” Müller explained.

Hitler again studied the details and asked, “What about our false papers?”

Gross Admiral Dönitz took a small brown bag from his case and handed it to Hitler, who opened it and removed several bundles of papers, some containing photos.

“Everything was prepared for every stage my Führrer,” said Dönitz. He rubbed the Iron-Cross on his skirt collar and smirked at Müller.

“These are exceptional,” said Hitler scrutinizing the documents. He looked at the men and said, “Three days it is then. You still have a lot of work to do, so carry out my orders, but make sure you double-check everything. You have your Führrer’s life in your hands. Müller, keep me informed of Kruger’s progress.” He sat back in his chair.

Müller nodded and said, “Yes, My Führrer.”

Hitler and Eva remained seated while the others in the room got up and walked towards the door.

“Heinrich,” he called out to Müller. “Tell the guards to fetch Doctor Mengele and Professor Gutzieg.”

“Yes, my Führrer,” said Müller exiting the room, leaving Adolf and Eva alone to carry on looking at their new papers and reading the files.

The telephone ringing disturbed the couple. Hitler got off his chair and went to answer.

The caller was SS-Obersturmbannführer, Adolf Eichmann, a call that Hitler was expecting.

Hitler got straight to the point, and asked, “Has everything gone according to plan Eichmann?”

Eichmann replied, and Eva saw Hitler becoming irate as he snapped, “You are already behind schedule. What do you mean 90% complete? Are the Jews dead?”

Again, Eichmann replied, and after giving details, Hitler said, “So, the result of the project is 100% of the 500 unprotected test subjects died, but none of the 20 immunised individuals affected?” Hitler calmed down, smiled, and said, “Eichmann, that sounds to me to like a 100% success.”

Hitler heard artillery shells exploding in the background and asked, “Are those the enemies’ shells or ours?”

Eichmann told him that they were British artillery closing in on their position.

He then explained about his 10%, shortfall of success and needed more time to monitor the immunised surviving test subjects, so could not guarantee the immunisation’s success, or if its effects were permanent or only temporary. Eichmann said he needed time to work on an airborne delivery system.

“We have no time for that. I must get this information immediately,” said Hitler, and with urgency in his voice, added, “We can leave those small details for the future. You must get here with all haste. Can you avoid capture?”

Eichmann assured him that if he was to leave now that his men would cover him so he could avoid the enemies advance on the concentration camp.

“What about the scientist and our successful test subjects, are they with you now?” asked Hitler.

Eichmann confirmed they were also in the room, along with a few of his soldier’s as ordered.

“Get here as soon as you can, Eichmann. I am waiting, and you know what you must do?” continued Hitler and with a sinister tone to his voice, added, “Leave no trace Eichmann... Do you understand?”

Hitler heard Adolf Eichmann issue an order to his men, and the sound of automatic gunfire reverberated through the telephone. Hitler smirked and hung up.

Professor Kurt Gutzieg and S.S. Hauptsturmführer Doctor Josef Mengele stood in the doorway along with their soldier escorts. They had overheard the end of the call, which sent a chill through both the medical academics.

Hitler looked over at the men and ordered, “Please be seated gentlemen,” motioning for them to sit alongside Eva.

Professor Kurt Gutzieg took his BUCH MOSE folder from his case and placed it on the coffee table. Hitler joined them and the professor opened the folder. Gutzieg took out five A4 size documents, four of which had details filled in with photographs clipped to them. The fifth sheet was almost blank, with no photograph. Kurt handed them to Hitler, who held up the sheet of paper and asked, “What about this sheet. Why are there only a few details on this one?”

Mengele answered, “She is still about two days from delivery. We don’t yet have any details about the infant.” He then chuckled, “This one doesn’t want to come out.”

Hitler sneered and said, “I want to know everything about this one, too.”

Mengele nodded and assured him that he would have the details and a photo as soon as possible.

“Make sure that I do,” said Hitler glaring at Josef Mengele to serve as a warning not to chuckle or make light of the subject. Mengele got the message and stayed silent. Hitler showed the documents to Eva who looked at each photograph and smiled at the black and white images of mothers cradling newborn infants.

Kurt Gutzieg then smiled and said, “This process I named GutziegEsterne OvarielienInseminatin, and it has been a great success.” He produced a separate file from within his Genesis folder and was about to explain his technique when Hitler abruptly cut him off and asked, “Have you any other copies of this technique?” (decades later it’s known as *I.V.F).

“Yes, Führer,” said Kurt, looking confused as he reached into his case and took out a small journal.

“Everything on my research is in this book. However, the BUCH MOSE file, also had the details,” said Gutzieg.

“Anything else?” Hitler asked, glaring at the professor.

“No Führer,” announced Gutzieg, furrowing his brow and looking nervous.

Hitler held out his hand, and the professor handed him his journal, assuming he wanted to study it. Instead, Hitler went over to the fireplace, tossed the professor’s journal into the flames, and then re-joined the group. Noticing the shocked disbelief on Professor Gutzieg’s face, he said, “If this fell into the wrong hands, they would realise we have done something using this technique and investigate, and we can’t allow that, can we Kurt?”

Gutzieg watched his work burn. He sighed, shook his head, and replied, “No, my Führer.”

Hitler flicked through the rest of the folder and asked Mengele, “Are you familiar with the professor’s technique, Josef?”

Mengele had known Hitler for some time, so became suspicious of his question and said. “No Führer, the Professor never involved me in his research.”

Kurt Gutzieg looked shocked by Mengele’s reply, because he had spent a great deal of time assisting him and knew his techniques, so why lie? A horrifying thought entered his mind. He felt nauseous and afraid as Mengele, changing the subject, said, “All mothers and children are in excellent health and ecstatic with their miracle babies. They are all in different hospitals, so they will never meet or know the truth. The medical staff wouldn’t suspect anything because we used the miracle babies as a sign that things would improve for Germany with these omens.”

“Are you certain nobody had any idea what happened?” Hitler asked, with menace in his voice. Mengele nodded, “Positive Fuehrer; they all think they were amongst the hundreds that we sterilized. They don’t realise the process was different for them, so when they became pregnant they assumed it was either the failure of the sterilization or a miracle,” Mengele assured him.

“Kurt, you performed all these embryo techniques?” Hitler asked.

Still numb with shock, Gutzieg replied, “Yes Fuehrer.” He glared at Mengele and told Hitler, “I performed yours and Eva’s egg fertilization and the implantation into our subjects,” although he felt unsure why he should protect Mengele, but thought history would now remember him alone, with his ego bigger than his life.

Hitler took all the folders from the table and went over to the BUCH MOSE strongbox. He removed a key chain from around his neck and put it into the lock. Lights flashed from the keyhole, scanning the key. The lock’s mechanism clattered and went silent as the lid popped open slightly. He lifted the lid and shouted over at the two men, “You’ve destroyed any samples.”

“Yes, Fuehrer. We disposed of everything as per your orders,” confirmed Mengele.

Hitler put the files into the box, closed the lid, and removed the key. Tumblers fell into position, locking the chest. Hitler re-joined the sitting group. Eva was still smiling, unaware of the fate of one of the two men who sat beside her and who had provided Hitler and herself with heirs.

“Thank you gentlemen; that will be all... Josef, don’t forget my 5th photo and information,” said Hitler and summoned the guards.

“I will take care of that personally Fuehrer,” said Mengele as two guards came over and Hitler spoke to one, who then glared at Kurt Gutzieg.

Gutzieg and Mengele stood. Gutzieg trembled and Mengele smirked, as Hitler ordered, “Take the doctor and professor topside and make sure they are well taken care of.”

The soldiers snapped to attention and escorted the two out of the room. Gutzieg dawdled, terrified of his impending doom. He was a proud man and even though knowing he would never see his family again, he accepted his fate with dignity. Glancing back at Hitler with his back turned speaking to Eva, he looked at the embers of his life’s work, smouldering within the flames.

“Herr Professor, please come this way,” said the guard as he lagged behind Mengele and his escort.

5

The man who has no sense of history, is like a man who has no ears or eyes

Granny Pearl explained to Church over his first few days at the cottage what their edict entailed and how they provided a link between the mortal world and the celestial plane.

She explained, “When someone died unexpectedly, some of them they left something unresolved in the mortal world, so and are unwilling to go into the light of the afterlife. These are lost souls, and your task, Church, was to resolve these spirits issues in the mortal world to let them find peace so they will pass over to the afterlife. These cases usually involved finding something of value hidden by the deceased which they want given to their relatives.”

Church realised this could be a difficult task. He had to be a researcher, private detective, and a grievance counsellor, having to deal with whatever challenges he came across.

Granny Pearl explained how, and over time told him the rules he must follow.

Church spent many hours in the portal room with Granny Pearl and Grandpa Jack’s spirits tutoring him. This education felt comfortable and normal, giving him a sense of belonging, away from the outside world that ridiculed him.

Church studied the Potts journal. His mother and father gave him some money after cashing in their inheritance and Church had a phone installed. He knew he had to learn how to run the family business to make his reclusive lifestyle possible and be independent.

Every Keeper of a portal kept a journal. Robert and Elizabeth Potts started the Potts journal in the 16th century, with updates recorded by Keepers throughout the ages when changes occurred in either world.

He learned:

Portals: These celestial gateways connected the spirit world to the mortal world. In the mortal world, **permanent portals** were on consecrated ground throughout the world and guarded by mortal Keepers and Guides and at fixed locations. There were also **temporary portals**. These opened briefly and could appear anywhere. Portals appear as a large vivid blue flickering flame and, depending upon the spirit inside, their coloured aura appeared in the centre, with portals only visible to Chosen ones.

Granny Pearl told Church that their portal, although over 400 years old, was relatively new, and known as: ‘The Potts Portal,’ which Church thought sounded cool, but she also gave him a stark warning about portals.

“Mortal Keepers and Guides must never enter a portal.”

Auras: Every human being has an aura surrounding them and only seen by individuals possessing the gift. In life, these auras appear in various colours surrounding the body. Apart from gifted ones’, everybody’s aura is white. Individuals with the gift auras are different colours. Guides have a crimson aura, and Keepers of Portals such as Church and Granny Pearl, have multi-coloured spectral auras, like shimmering rainbows. These auras are mortals’ souls and in death, become orbs of energy with memories to exist in the spirit world and the afterlife. There had been black auras encountered throughout the ages but these were extremely rare occurrences.

The Gift is a psychic power bestowed upon selected individuals when soul and body combined at birth. It is an undetectable gene, known as the spirit gene. This ability allows people with the gift to contact the spirit world, along with processing certain powers.

Chosen-ones: People possessing the gift passed down through bloodlines. These are the guardians of portals, known as Keepers and Guides. These people possess certain extra powers and have clearer insight and knowledge of the spirit world. Chosen ones were partnered at birth, and once they meet in later life when the time was right for their joining, they stay together for eternity.

Keepers: Spirit and Mortal, are guardians and custodians of permanent portals. They are the connection between the mortal and spirit world, to help lost souls find peace and closure. At the Potts's Portal, Granny Pearl is the Spirit Keeper and Church is the mortal Keeper. Jack is Pearl's Spirit Guide, and thus far, the jury is still out on Church's mortal Guide. A mortal Keeper's gift comes with powers to assist them, such as the ability to see portals and spirits. They can sense emotions in spirits and gifted individuals, along with other abilities needed to communicate with spirits and mortals.

The one Church found useful was his ability to understand every human language, written and spoken, in both modern-day and ancient texts. Church often wondered how many lifetimes it would take an intellectual to achieve this. Church decided to have some fun, so telephoned his old school. He wanted to speak with Mr Grimley, a teacher whom Church had always disliked, as he called him Pin-Brain Potts. Grimley, the French and German tutor, was fond of spouting off in either language to show off. He always reminded Church of a certain Nazi dictator and he chuckled as he dialled the number.

"Hello, Richard Grimley speaking," answered the teacher.

Church didn't announce himself, he just said, "You are a twat," in German, French, Spanish, Swahili and any other language that popped into his head. He continued until an angry Grimley hung up the phone.

Guides: Spirit and Mortal. Spirit Guides take lost souls to a permanent portal to contact the Spirit Keeper. Mortal Guides assist Keepers with their quest to resolving problems and only **Chosen-ones Guides** can see portals and spirits.

Individuals who have the gift but not Chosen-ones are also known as **Guides**. These people in life are mediums, clairvoyants, spiritualists, etc. When they die and become Spirit Guides and stay at the first level to help lost souls. These Spirit Guides are many and take lost souls to the right portals Spirit Guide or Keeper. They also use temporary portals to contact mortal Guides, although this contact is brief and instigated by the living Guide, via séances or other means to contact the spiritual realm. These Spirit Guides have restrictions and the mortal Guides cannot see spirits or portals, although they can see mortal's auras, hear spirits, and smell their odours. Their gift was not passed down the bloodline and they have no joining, so whom they married was their choice.

All Spirit Keepers and Guides give off a familiar smell associated with them in their lifetime that only people with the gift could smell. The Keeper's odours are stronger. Granny Pearl's odour was of Brussels sprouts, while Jack's odour smelled of Brylcreem, which made Church worried about using Brut body splash.

Church was nineteen when Granny Pearl introduced him to his first assignment and as Church fixed a leaking tap in the toilet, he smelled Brussels sprouts.

'Granny Pearl's early.' he thought as he made his way to the portal room.

Granny Pearl was in the Portal along with a white spirit. She introduced Church to Albert Wright, a recently deceased 79-year-old man who was now a lost soul with a problem. Church felt sadness coming from Albert's soul as he related his story, while Church wrote the details on a large notepad, which he referred to as 'Spirit notes.'

PATH GTR 001: Fishermans Friend

Albert's tale began 30 years ago, during the late 1950s. Albert was the skipper of the trawler 'Ross Rodney' sailing from the port of Grimsby.

With calms seas, they fished for cod on the Anthony Bank fishing grounds in the North Sea. Coming to the end of a trip and with the fish hold almost full, dawn broke as they hauled in the last catch of the season. The bulging net covered the deck and the crew removed the cod-end spilling fish wriggling onto the slippery deck. The five-man deck crew went to work, sorting the catch. The crew saw several large boxes amongst the writhing fish and removed eight boxes from the nets. They carried them below deck until they had finished sorting, gutting, and icing their catch. While steaming home, the crew gathered in the galley to investigate their find. They gasped in amazement when they

opened the first wooden box and found it contained gold bars and the seven other boxes contained the same, with a small-engraved brass plaque fixed onto each box.

SS BATAVIER V

Dutch/Batavier line. Amsterdam:

Built: Gourley Brothers & Co.

Commissioned: 1903.

Delighted, but shocked by this treasure, Albert and his crew knew they must keep their discovery quiet, realising that the English government would take the gold off them as the country still suffered from post-war expenses, so they buried the loot in Albert's garden amongst his vegetable patch.

Several days into their next trip, on a bitterly cold January morning, they set the trawl nets into a calm sea. Albert started the slow trawl and then he and the crew felt a thud on the port side. The Bosun went across the slippery deck to investigate as an explosion ripped through the side of the vessel, violently rocking the boat, and throwing the Bosun into the icy cold ocean. They had struck an unexploded mine, one of the many from World War 2, still floating around the North Sea. The small trawler listed and started sinking, with the crew tossed into the bitter, cold, merciless North Sea. Immersed in the frigid water, Albert panicked and splashed around, his drenched woollen deck clothes now became like a lead suit dragging him under to a watery grave. Accepting his fate, he stopped splashing and prayed as he sank beneath the waves. His hand then touched something and he grabbed onto a piece of fishing net attached to the Rodney and hauled himself back to the surface. The little trawler turned turtle, leaving the keel exposed above the waterline. Albert pulled himself onto the icy cold metal of the keel. With the last of his strength, he entwined himself in the netting. He resembled Captain Ahab snared to Moby Dick.

Luck or fate was on Albert's side, as a trawler fishing nearby saw the Rodney's plight and steamed towards the stricken vessel. The trawler, aptly named the Samaritan, pulled alongside the upturned hull, the crew saw Albert lying exhausted, and as hypothermia took hold, he felt at peace. He closed his eyes and said a prayer before he heard someone yelling and the engines of another trawler.

"Grab the float," yelled a crewman as Albert heard the dull thud of a cork float hit the overturned hull. He glanced over and saw the rope of the rings of cork slipping off. He grabbed the rope and, untangling himself from the Rodney's net, clung on as the Samaritans crew hauled him through the frigid water and onto their deck.

The Samaritan's fearless crew, after pulling Albert from the clutches of an icy, watery grave, searched the surrounding area but unable to find the rest of Rodney's crew.

Mariners are superstitious and Albert, now fearing the Bataviers treasure cursed, never touched the gold for decades.

Albert lived in his home in Grimsby throughout his life. He and his wife had a son, Keith, who had a son, named John.

Losing the Rodney and its crew devastated Albert, although he continued to skipper trawlers until he hung up his oilskins and retired from fishing at 65 years old. He'd seen the decline of the industry he loved over the next ten years and with his wife dying a few years earlier, he knew his end drew near. He wanted to leave his family something of value. One night, he was watching a T.V. program on the BBC about a treasure unearthed in England. The program mentioned that the finders kept all the proceeds. Albert knew then what he must do. Even though he feared the gold cursed, he felt that maybe the curse would lift if he passed it on to help others. At least proceeds from the sale would come in handy for his grandson John and his family, with him being out of work and a new baby on the way.

Albert wrote to the admiralty and various government departments. The government responded by writing him a letter, informing him about the vessel: Steam Ship SS.Batavia V, which sank in May 1916, along with its cargo of gold, rice, etc. The letter explained about the vessel and its contents

insured by a Swiss company, so with no one salvaging the wreck or its contents, the gold legally belonged to him.

On receiving the letter, Albert dug the boxes the following day. Unfortunately, the fickle finger of fate stepped in, and Albert suffered a fatal heart attack. He died before his planned excavation.

“I would like you to help my grandson John find the gold,” said Albert and gave Church instructions and relevant information he thought useful.

“Good luck Church,” said Granny Pearl, as her and Albert’s spirits faded, and the portal closed. Church read his notes and called his parents.

The following day, Church borrowed his mother’s battered, second-hand Ford Escort car and drove the four hours to the northeast coast. He arrived at Albert’s old house in Grimsby late afternoon.

John, a fisherman like his father and grandfather but with the fishing industry in severe decline, with most of the trawler fleet decommissioned, John was unemployed. Albert had bequeathed his house, including the contents to John, and he and his pregnant wife had moved in several days ago.

Church sat outside in the car, trying to figure out his best approach. Albert had told Church that as a child, John would often visit, but he had seen little of him over the past few years. Using this information, Church figured out a plan. John and his wife Sandra were in the kitchen unpacking boxes when Church knocked on the door. John answered.

“Hello John. My name is Church and I was a friend of your Grandad’s,” Church smiled and extended his hand.

John frowned and looked bewildered. “He never mentioned you,” he said and shook Church’s hand.

“Probably not,” said Church. “The last time I spoke to Albert he told me that you rarely visited, but he often spoke about you.”

John sighed, as it had been well over a year since he had last seen his Grandad.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you Church. What can I do for you?” asked John.

“I wanted to offer my condolences and tell you that your Grandad mentioned something that concerned him the last time we spoke,”

“Who’s at the door?” shouted Sandra from the kitchen.

“A friend of Grandads,” John shouted.

“Invite them in, but tell them we are in the middle of unpacking, so excuse the mess.”

“Yes dear,” said John smiling and said, “Come inside Church, we can chat over a cuppa.”

Sandra joined them in the living room bringing in two mugs of tea and the three sat on a couch. Church told the couple how he was a neighbour until his family recently moved. “I often came to see Albert and listen to his stories. One of the neighbours called my dad and told him that Albert passed away. I came to see you and keep a promise that I made to Albert. He wanted to make sure you found the gold,” said Church.

John chuckled and said “Not you too. Grandad used to rave on when I was a child about this cursed treasure buried in the garden. I never believed him. It was only a fairy-tale,” he laughed and said, “Don’t tell me that you believed him.”

Church smiled and said, “Well, he had me fooled, especially after showing me the letter.”

John frowned and asked, “What letter?”

“The one from the government,” said Church. “Didn’t you read it?”

John and Sandra looked at each other.

John shrugged and said, “No, we have seen no letter.”

“Oh, that’s strange,” said Church. “Perhaps it’s still here somewhere. It was very important, so I doubt if Albert threw it away.”

John thought for a moment and went to find the box of papers that he was about to put in the rubbish. He brought in the cardboard box containing letters, papers, and various photos.

John placed the box on the table, and they rifled through it.

“Is this it?” Sandra asked, holding up a government-franked envelope.

“Yep, that’s it,” said Church, hoping it was.

John read out the letter from the admiralty. When he’d finished, he looked shocked and said,

“It says we own the gold, great!” he and Sandra smiled at each other and then John’s expression change as he screwed up his face and said, “Hang on a minute; what gold? Not Grandad’s fairy-story gold.” He then smiled and said, “Grandad was a great one for stories and exaggerating.”

“Maybe so,” Church said, “But Albert told me where it’s buried.”

“Why didn’t he dig it up before then?” John asked, sounding suspicious.

“Albert told me it was cursed for anyone, except you, John,” said Church.

John smirked and said, “And you believed him?”

“Albert was a mariner and superstitious, so yes, I believed him,” said Church, knowing that John also being a fisherman would understand about fate.

“What do you want?” Sandra asked sounding abrupt.

“Nothing,” said Church.

“We’ve only known you for a few minutes, and you want us to dig up our lawn because you made friends with a crazy old man,” said Sandra glaring at him.

“I know it sounds bizarre, but what do you have to lose? I know where to dig, so if I am wrong, you can laugh me out of your home... But what if I’m right?” Church asked and gazed at the couple.

Church and John took turns digging at the spot where Albert had instructed. They had only excavated down a short way when John’s shovel struck something solid. They removed the boxes and, joined by Sandra, opened the first box of gold ingots. John and Sandra’s eyes widened and they gasped.

“He wasn’t such a crazy old man after all, was he?” said Church grinning.

John fumbled for words while examining one of the gold bars. “There must be a bloody fortune here!”

“And it’s all yours,” said Church.

They spent the rest of that day and the following morning at banks and gold traders around Lincolnshire with the Admiralty letter in hand. They sold some of the gold bars and the rest John put in a bank’s safety box. Church spent the night in a spare room at John and Sandra’s.

The following day, Church said he had to leave.

“You are a godsend, Churchill Potts,” said Sandra, hugging Church.

“Yeah, you’ve changed our lives for sure,” said John, with tears welling up as he rubbed his pregnant wife’s stomach, and added, “At least he will have a good start in life.”

“Or she,” interrupted Sandra,

“Thanks to Albert” Church reminded them.

John faced the heavens and said aloud, “Cheers, Grandad.”

He then handed Church an envelope and one gold bar. “Here Church, take this as a token of our gratitude.”

Church opened the envelope and pulled out a bundle of crisp banknotes.

“It’s the least we can do,” insisted John. “Now, put it to good use and make sure you keep in touch.”

Granny Pearl had told Church that he could not charge a payment for his help. However, John insisted on him taking the gift, as did many others who Church helped.

Church thanked the couple. He put the money and gold bar into his pocket and said his goodbyes.

Church drove home thinking about how to spend his fortune. ‘Five hundred pounds and a chunk of gold for a few days’ work, that’s fantastic,’ he thought, never having seen that much money before, although he knew it was not always going to be that simple or lucrative.

Church arrived back at the cottage early in the evening. From the familiar smell that greeted him, he knew Granny Pearl was waiting in the portal room. Feeling excited, he went to tell Pearl about his success, and he felt an overwhelming feeling of happiness. He smiled and stood in front of the portal, facing Granny Pearl and Albert.

“You’ve done well Church,” said granny Pearl, adding, “Albert is ready to pass over, but wants to thank you.”

“What’s happening? I have felt nothing like this before,” said Church, feeling euphoric. “It’s amazing.”

“It is the emotion from Albert. A pure feeling of closure and peace,” said Granny Pearl.

“It’s time for me to leave now,” said Albert. “Thank you young Churchill, you will make a great Keeper.”

Church saw the smiling face of an old sea-dog smiling as Albert’s shimmering white apparition faded.

PATH GTR 001: Fisherman’s Friend: Case closed.

* * *

Churchill was an enthusiastic and focused student, spending time during the day repairing and updating the cottage with money he had made from the family business. Apart from when he was away on assignments, Church seldom left the cottage, with his evenings spent with Pearl and Jack in the portal room.

Church used the money from John to buy an Acorn computer to record his assignments and other information. Fitting a washbasin, mirror, and kitchenette in the portal room, he bought a mahogany desk and along with his desktop computer, he felt like an executive in his new office.

Church recorded his observations on his computer, he wrote:

The spirit world has two levels. The first level is similar to border control, known by various names over the centuries depending on religion and culture; Purgatory, Limbo, Twear-Youmork. This level is the soul’s first port of call when mortal life expires. Every soul passes through here and transcends through to the final level ‘afterlife’, commonly referred to as Heaven, Nirvana, Jannat, etc. The afterlife is the soul’s final resting place and a place of no return, so it is unknown.

Granny Pearl and the Potts journal described the first level, which I compare with the ringed planet Saturn. The immense globe of intense white light of the afterlife would be Saturn, while the rings are countless orbs of light.

These orbs vary in colour. Large glowing blue orbs are portals and the multi-coloured lights pulsating in the centre that are spirit Keepers. Crimson orbs orbiting portals or inside are the Chosen-ones’ Spirit Guides and the many smaller crimson orbs that flit about are the Spirit Guides.

The constant streams of bright white orbs are new souls passing through on their journey to become one with the afterlife. Granny Pearl described this as columns of glowing white ants heading for their nest and explained that this little solar system was in perpetual movement: a cacophony of colours, like slow-moving fizzy bubbles of light, with Guides, Keepers, portals, and souls.

Church surmised these lessons thus:

Humans are individuals with their values, ethics, and beliefs. There are leaders, followers, good people, and evil people, with different coloured skin. In life, there are Christians, Muslims, Buddhist, etc. In death, people shed their mortal shell and pass into a state of being, which passed through the first level, then immediately onto the afterlife. However, some souls have something important they need resolving in the mortal world before passing over. These lost souls leave the organised flow to the afterlife to seek out a Spirit Guide to take them to a Keeper at permanent portals or through temporary portals to contact the mortal world, through a mortal Guide at a séance.

Other souls that won’t go into the light taking them on their celestial journey, cannot accept the fact that they are dead. They hang around the mortal plane, convinced that their family will contact them. These lost souls can detect gifted ones’ auras and until they fledge bombard them with

futile attempts to make contact, which gave the young one's gifted blinding headaches and hearing incoherent voices. These souls, once located and reassured by Spirit Guides, continue to the afterlife.

Some souls flatly refuse to pass over for no reason at all. Known to mortals as ghosts and poltergeists, they haunt buildings or a fixed point, poignant to a significant part of their lives. They stay on the mortal world and manifest themselves to scare the bejesus out of people. They were usually grouchy people in life and a nuisance in death but usually pass over when they get bored or exorcised.

* * *

One day, in 1986, Granny Pearl came to the portal. Church picked up emotion from his Spirit Keeper that he had never felt before... fear.

"Hello Granny Pearl... what's the matter?"

Church could hear the concern in her trembling voice as she told him, "Church, the afterlife's in turmoil. I haven't long to explain and I will come and tell you more when we have restored order. In the meantime, you need to research Diabolus in the journal, so you are prepared. Be careful my grandson."

The portal closed and Church rubbed his chin. "That didn't sound good," he said aloud and took the journal from the cupboard, put it on his desk, and looked through the pages. He came across several entries in the journal relating to the subject and read about spirits with dark blue and black auras, known as **Aura Diabolus**. Church read that this phenomenon, which although extremely rare and inexplicable, Keepers described it as pure evil, capable of damaging the fabric of the spirit world, leaving turmoil in the celestial plane for decades. He became more concerned when he read about the doom the mortal world faced should a Diabolus re-enter the living world as a spirit.

Referred to in the journal as **Diabolus** or **Demon spirits**, he read the shortlist of mortals with Aura Diabolus in the past, with only the last two names he recognised, the others pre-dated mortals history books. One was Genghis Khan, and as he looked at the most recent name, a cold shiver went through his body. Church felt concerned about the portal that the Diabolus entered into the mortal world through.

Church made a cup of tea and studied the ancient English text about the last Diabolus encounter. He read how that demon had come in through the Potts portal.

The entry was dated March 1859.

Mortal Keeper: Joshua Potts. Spirit Keeper: Samuel Potts.

Joshua had written:

"I had a terrifying encounter with a powerful Diabolus spirit, known in the living world as Adam Weishaupt S.J., a professor, Jesuit, mass-murderer, and founder of the Illuminati, who entered the spirit world and thwarted all attempts by Spirit Keepers and Guides to contain the demon. The Diabolus flitted from Portal to Portal before finding and entering ours. I was unprepared, with little knowledge known or written about these demons.

I was awaiting my father, the Spirit Keeper when the demon burst into my portal sucking the life out of the room and knocking me off my feet. With fear and trepidation...."

Joshua described his epic battle with the Diabolus, using all his power to keep him in the portal room until his Spirit Keeper, accompanied by many other spirit guardians rushed through the portal. Joshua described the scene and then wrote. "Although it took our combined strength, the spirit guardians ushered the demon back through the portal and herded it to the afterlife."

Joshua then wrote a stark warning. "It is crucial to avoid these demon spirits leaving a portal that a pentagram along with our symbols of protection must encircle all portals. These symbols would contain any spirit within the portal with no soul able to cross."

Church then noticed Joshua's writing became a scrawl as he wrote: "It has been several days since my encounter with the Diabolus. I feel that with the demon entering my body, some of his demonic spirit remains inside me, making me weak and unable to regain my strength. I am now

preparing to take my place as the next Spirit Keeper at our portal, to expel what remains of this demon for eternity.”

Church looked at the heading of the next entry also dated March 1859 and gasped:

Mortal Keeper: Arron Potts - Spirit Keeper: Joshua Potts.

Confused and shaken, Church took a drink, sighed, and stared into his cup, deep in thought. ‘It’s 1986, I don’t know of anyone nowadays who I would describe as pure evil, so if there was now a Diabolus, who could it possibly be?’

After wiping pearls of sweat from his brow, Church looked over at the faint pentagram and symbols painted on the floor in the corner of the portal room and thought. ‘From what I’ve just read and the terrifying emotion that I picked up from Granny Pearl, I hope I never come across a Diabolus.’

6

The true guide of life is to do what is right.

Years passed, and with Church almost forty, he felt content with his strange lifestyle. With his stocky build, thinning hair and jovial features, he could be mistaken for Bob Hoskins, and with his powerful gift, he had led a solitary life, only meeting people briefly while on assignments.

Granny Pearl noticed a change in his demeanour. She knew it was a time for a change to occur in his life. She had explained many times about the Joining, the time when Chosen-ones found their eternal partner. Although usually at an early age, there was no timescale for the joining and Church was not looking forward to that bit.

He now thought himself to be too old and hoped the spirit world had overlooked this part of his edict after the turmoil the Diabolus had caused decades ago. Besides, what did he know about women? He'd never had one and couldn't see much use for them.

Some of his rewards had been generous and he'd amassed treasure and money, living well within his means. The external features of the cottage remained untouched, but he had landscaped the grounds with a large wall and gated fence now surrounding the property with a new BMW 3 series parked in his new garage. His driveway now led to the main road into Radcliff town.

He had modernised the interior of the four-bedroom cottage with modern furnishings throughout and large televisions in every room along with the most up-to-date computers and surveillance equipment. Large monitors and a flat-screen TV now hung in the portal room, which had now become his plush office and where he spent most of his time. He had redesigned his kitchen with more storage facilities to stock food and other supplies for months at a time.

The remote cottage suited Church during the early years as his gift made him reclusive. By the time he would become familiar with his special talents, he had grown accustomed to the solitude... although he was never alone.

Church decided a few years earlier to form a company. He called the company Paranormal Assisted Treasure Hunter, or PATH, for short. He found this to be a good icebreaker when meeting the relatives of the lost souls, making first contact less obtrusive and reassuring.

* * *

His ability to converse in every language came in useful with one of his most important cases. PATH PNK183: 2009.

Church was in the portal room when Granny Pearl, accompanied by a Danish spirit named Heidi, came into the portal. He not only picked up Heidi's sad emotion, but she had a crimson aura, so he realised she was a Spirit Guide.

Church felt baffled why a Spirit Guide needed help. Granny Pearl, detecting his confusion said, "As you know Church, Guides cannot use their power to help themselves and Heidi's problem was special." Both spirits sniggered and Church picked up a mischievous emotion from Granny Pearl, one he had not felt before from his Spirit Keeper.

He frowned at Granny Pearl smirking, as Heidi related her story.

Heidi lived alone until her death aged fifty-two in a small village near Aalborg, Denmark.

As a teenager, Heidi became reclusive, suffering from frequent headaches and claiming to hear voices. Heidi's sister, Greta, was different, although twins, Heidi had a pallid complexion and looked drawn, while Greta had rosy cheeks and was outgoing, unlike her standoffish sister.

To earn money for the family, after finishing school they found work on a small dairy farm in the next village. Greta would go into the village at night to party, while Heidi remained in her room, becoming ever more distant and reclusive as the headaches and voices intensified. While Greta

dreamt of Prince Charming and living happily ever after, Heidi dreamed of normalcy, believing she was mentally ill.

Before long, the sisters ran the farm because the elderly owners could not work.

Heidi and Greta continued working the farm until the owners passed away. First, the wife and a few months later, the husband, with the farm bequeathed to their son, Svend Pinquist, who had moved to England during World War II to fight alongside the Allies. He remained in England after the war, where he married and started a family.

Svend and his wife, along with their twenty-year-old son, Harold, came to the farm to bury their father and sort out the estate. Harold and Greta, now almost eighteen, fell for each other.

Svend sold the farm, giving both Greta and Heidi a chunk of money to resettle. Heidi bought a small house in the village, while Greta and Harold married and moved to England. It was many years before Harold and Greta had a daughter, and Heidi told Church that their daughter, Sharon, would be eighteen the following day.

Heidi told him that she stayed alone in her house throughout her life. Greta and Harold visited her several times, but never stayed long and stopped coming after their daughter's birth, breaking off all contact with her and with her unable to speak English, she had no way to track them down.

Church saw Heidi's spirit smiling as she then explained, "I discovered about my gift when a Spirit Guide named Peter came and spoke to me on my eighteen birthday. He explained about the gift and told me that I was a mortal Guide. I worked the rest of my life as a local medium, with Peter as my Spirit Guide."

Heidi went silent, so Church asked, "What do you want me to find? Did you leave treasure hidden in Denmark?"

"No," said Heidi. "It's not a treasure I need to find. I want to pass straight to the afterlife, but there is a troubled relative that I need to help first."

Church knew that non-chosen one's Spirit Guides could pass to the afterlife at any time. Heidi continued, "I knew my gift was not passed through bloodlines so I assumed that I was the only one with the gift. However, I now know my twin sister Greta had the spirit gene that remained dormant but has somehow passed to her daughter, a gifted one, although she doesn't realise it."

Church read his notes and said, "I'm confused. This is a Spirit Guide's job. Grandpa Jack can do this. I am a Keeper and I..."

Granny Pearl interrupted, "This time Church, there is no treasure involved. This time, it's personal." She sniggered.

Church felt the mischievous emotion again emanating from Granny Pearl's spirit.

"What do you mean personal?" he asked, and then looked aghast as he realised, 'Bollocks, she must be a Chosen-one,' so he repeated, "What do you mean by personal?"

His question went ignored as Heidi gave him directions, and although listening and taking spirit notes, he mumbled as his mind focused elsewhere.

Heidi finished giving her instructions, so Church asked again, "Now, what do you mean by personal?"

Again, no reply was forthcoming as the two apparitions faded with the sound of women's prankish giggling echoing around the portal room.

"Come back here and explain what you meant about personal," demanded Church, at the now empty portal.

"Granny Pearl!"

Silence.

"Granny Pearl."

This played on Church's mind while he drove his shiny new BMW 3 series along the A19 towards Mexborough. "Why did they not just come out and say that I was about to meet my wife." He mumbled. "I am too bloody old for this nonsense."

Church had already spoken to Harold on the phone before he left as part of his preparation. Church intended to introduce himself as an investigator for the deceased's estate. He'd told Harold that he was a UK agent for a Danish law firm and that he had some information and items to pass on from Heidi.

Church took with him an antique ring, which he would use to break the ice and meet the family. He pulled up outside the Pinquist's terraced house on a small council estate.

He sat for a while and poured over his notes while the butterflies in his stomach settled. Church tried to imagine what his bride-to-be would be like, He had thought about the age difference. He was almost forty and she was eighteen today. He smirked as he imagined walking into the house and greeted by a young, demure, Princess Diana lookalike with an enigmatic smile.

After several moments, he composed himself, went to the house, and knocked on the door.

Greta answered.

"Hello, Mrs Pinquist. I called earlier. I'm Churchill Potts. Your sister Heidi's representatives in Denmark sent me... Sorry for your loss."

In her now broad Yorkshire accent, but with a Danish twang still audible, Greta said, "Hello, Mr Potts. I'm Greta, Heidi's sister. We've been expecting you; please come in."

She led Church to the living room, where Harold sat in a large armchair in front of the television. The house smelled of bleach and Church saw it was spotlessly clean.

Harold stood up when Church entered and introduced himself. Harold motioned for Church to sit and Greta sat next to him on a sofa while Harold moved his armchair around to face them both. Church noticed Greta was an attractive middle-aged woman. Her blonde wavy hair made her look a lot younger than Harold, and it was good to put a clearer face to Heidi. He noticed Greta's aura was white, but with a slight tinge of crimson. 'Probably with a Guide's power, Heidi wouldn't have noticed this,' he thought.

"Thank you for coming, Mr Potts. The Danish embassy only told us recently that Heidi died. We lost contact with her years ago. I'm afraid we weren't close," said Greta, who looked guilty, and throwing Harold a piqued glare, said. "The last time we visited Heidi was when Sharon was born and we haven't seen her since."

"I understand she left some property for us?" Harold said, grinning.

"Well, sort of," said Church. He took a small velvet box, containing the antique ring from his jacket pocket and took out the ring, showing it to the couple.

Greta gasped, "I have never seen that before," she said, admiring the large, valuable looking antiquity.

"Now Mr Potts, what do you mean by; it was sort of for us?" asked Harold.

"Please call me Church. And the ring is for your daughter, Sharon, and my instructions were to give her this on her eighteen birthday, which I believe is today," said Church, pulling out a sheet of headed paper that he'd made on his PC from his inside jacket pocket.

Harold and Greta looked puzzled, and although Church's ability never stretched to picking up normal mortals emotions, he could see their embarrassment and guilt.

"But, Sharon never met Heidi. The only time she has seen her was just after she was born," said Greta fidgeting.

"Be quiet Greta, you're repeating yourself," snapped Harold and continued, "That's okay Church. We can give it to Sharon later. She is sick in her bed at the moment." He stammered and looked at Greta for backup.

"Yes," said Greta. "No problem, we will give it to her later... she will be pleased."

"I'm sorry," said Church, showing them the paper, "but my instructions were specific. I have to hand the ring personally to Sharon."

He handed the couple the letter. He had added an extra incentive, which they read with their eyes widening as they read the bottom section.

Designer / Manufacturer.

Georg Jensen, Copenhagen, Circa: 1925.

Commissioned for: Alexandrine of Mecklenburg-Schwenn.

24 kt gold setting

1 x 7 carat Emerald, oval cut (AGL 2) excellent

7 x 0.5 carat Diamonds, round, brilliant-cut (GIA E)

Total weight gold 9.4(gms)

Appraised: €730,000.

Church noticed the Pinguists' expressions change as they both looked amazed at the ring and saw the name of its previous owner. Church prided himself on this deception and thought adding the Georg Jensen crest was a nice touch, although maybe putting the old queen consort of Denmark as the previous owner might have been overkill.

"How did Heidi get this?" Greta stammered.

"I don't know." said Church, "but you can see why I have to follow Heidi's wishes; the item is of great value."

Whilst still holding onto the document, Church could see Harold and Greta pondering, and Harold sighed and said, "Sharon has been sick for some time. The doctors say she has got adolescent schizophrenia, so she never leaves her room."

"She gets violent," interrupted Greta, sounding embarrassed, which got her an indignant stare from Harold, who continued, "It is a little difficult to see her now. She had a bad episode this morning, claiming the dead were talking to her again and ranting about a ghost called Jack."

"We had to sedate her." interrupted Greta.

Church sat back onto the sofa.

'Grandpa Jack must have already contacted her. At least they are making my job easier,' he thought. Church smiled and said, "I've had experience with these types of cases, which is why Denmark contacted my company and sent me along," Church produced a business card from his top pocket and handed it to Harold.

"PATH," said Harold, "What's that?"

"I'll explain later, but let me assure you I am only here to help you and Sharon. Now, if I could see her, I am sure I can help. I can give her the heirloom which she can sign over to you if she wishes."

Church's last sentence gave the Pinguists' the incentive he had hoped, as Harold sighed and said, "Greta, go upstairs and see if Sharon is awake yet and tell her she has a visitor."

Greta nodded, nervously got off the sofa, and went upstairs. Harold tried to engage Church in meaningless conversation, but Church's thoughts and senses concentrated on what was going on upstairs. He had felt the presence of the gift from the moment he had entered, but could not detect any emotion from the gifted one, which surprised him. 'She must be in a deep sleep.' He thought.

A deep emotion hit him. Fear and confusion surged through his body, emotions that he hadn't felt to this degree.

Although taken aback by the sudden surge, he remained calm.

He could hear Greta's voice and then another voice yelling, "Fuck off, out of my room."

Church heard Greta trying to calm Sharon down and obscenities went on for several minutes, until silence.

Greta came back downstairs and into the living room, shaking her head and looking bemused.

"What happened?" Church asked, seeing Greta shaken.

"I'm not sure," said Greta. "One minute she was shouting and screaming as usual and then she went silent as if someone slapped her. She then smiled at me and said, "Please send Church up, Mother."

"That's an improvement already," said Harold, who then asked, "Why do you have a stupid, bewildered look on your face Greta?"

Greta took a deep breath and said, “I didn’t tell her that she had a visitor, and I certainly never mentioned his name.”

Church then picked up another emotion coming from upstairs... Hope.

Church got off the sofa, putting the ring in his pocket, but leaving the valuation letter on the coffee table for the Pinquists to ponder over.

“I will go by myself to see Sharon if that’s okay with you,” he said.

“That’s fine. Go to the top of the stairs. It’s the first room on the right,” said Harold, putting his arm around his shaken wife’s shoulders.

Church looked at Harold consoling his wife and as he climbed the stair thought, ‘I bet that’s seldom witnessed in this house.’

He knocked on the door of the first room on the right.

“Come in, Church,” said Sharon, her voice sounding hoarse.

Church entered the room. His first impression was of a hospital ward. It looked clinical, with pill bottles and injection ampoules laid out on the top of a large white bedside cabinet, along with a carafe of water and a single glass. A yellow plastic box was on another table, used for sharps disposal.

Sharon lay in the bed. She looked groggy after her morning dose of sedative. She looked ashen, with her crimson aura dim. Church saw an empty ampoule of Midazolam, a strong sedative, on the cabinet top and an empty syringe.

Church noticed the teenager had the same wavy blonde hair like her mother, although matted and uncombed.

Sharon sat up in bed and swung her feet over the side, appearing to be in a trance.

‘Effects of the drugs,’ thought Church. He wondered why he hadn’t felt the ‘thunderbolt’ (Cupid’s arrow) like Granny Pearl said she had when she first met Jack. From what he knew about the Joining, it was what all Keeper and Guides experience when they meet their Chosen-one.

“Happy birthday Sharon, my name is Church.”

“I know,” said the girl. “I have been expecting you... Call me Pinky,” she said as she leaned over to the cabinet and took a tin from a drawer. “Are you my angel?” she asked, still trying to focus. “You are covered in a rainbow. Apart from Jack, the red angel I saw this morning, and I, everybody else I have seen was just white. Mind you, I thought Jack was my imagination until you arrived as he said you would. I have been hearing voices in my head for so long and getting blinding headaches.”

She opened the tin and pulled out a hand-rolled cigarette, which she lit and blew marijuana smoke around the room. Putting the joint in an ashtray, she filled a glass with water, opened a bottle of pills from the collection of neuroleptic medications, and swallowed a small yellow pill with the water.

“Clozaryl,” she said, tapping the plastic bottle top. “New wonder drug for crackpots,” she chuckled and held out her arms and showed Church. “This is all over me; I am glowing red, that isn’t normal. I thought it was the drugs giving me hallucinations until I saw you.”

Church smiled and said, “For people like us that is normal and to answer your question, I am not an angel. What you see is my aura, the same as I can see yours, it’s not red, it is crimson. I am a Keeper, so mine is multi-coloured, and this morning my grandfather Jack’s spirit visited you. You aren’t crazy Pinky, just different,” said Church reassuringly. “We are special.”

Pinky closed her eyes as she was feeling high, but juddered awake and concentrated on Church.

“What about all the voices and headaches? Jack told me some crazy weird shit, saying you would explain everything,” she said, adding, “unless it was the drugs. None of this seems real.”

Church remembered his days of confusion and fear, so he could empathise with this young frightened woman.

“Jack told you that I would come, didn’t he?” Church asked.

“Yes,” said Pinky.

“And I am here,” said Church.

Pinky thought for a moment and slurred, "Yeah."

"Therefore, everything Jack told you must be true... I will try to explain in more detail... but first" said Church, taking her hands. Pinky felt a strange power course through her body, like a warm wave of electricity. Her aura now glowed and she felt clarity.

"Wow! What happened?" she asked, gazing around the room. "I feel great, drug-free."

"As I said," said Church, "We are special and help each other as well as lost souls."

While Sharon smiled and looked at him, Church went over to the corner of the room and fetched over a small plastic chair.

"Jack told me that once you come, my headaches and different voices would stop pecking at my head. Is that true?" She asked, and said, "That would be my best birthday present."

"Yes, they will stop now," Church assured her as he sat and smiled at her, "Let me explain,"

Church spent the next hour or so explaining about the gift and their edict in life, and about her auntie Heidi. Although he never mentioned she was his chosen bride.

Greta then came into the room and asked. "Is everything okay? Have you taken your medication Sharon? Would you like a cup of tea Church?"

"No, thank you, I'm fine," said Church.

"Isn't it a lovely ring Sharon? Okay. I'll leave you to it then. Shout if you need anything, and don't forget to take your pills Sharon."

Greta backed out of the door, closing it behind her.

"What was that stupid woman talking about?" Pinky asked.

Church had forgotten about the ring, with explaining to Pinky about the gift and the spirit world, so told her the ring was a ploy which they could use to their advantage.

Church told Pinky that she needed more time to learn about everything and experience things, so she could get a clearer understanding. He suggested that she came to his cottage.

This came as a shock to Pinky, but she felt relieved. Although everything Church had told her seemed unbelievable, she'd trusted Church from the moment she met him.

She glanced around her sparse unwelcoming room and said, "When do we leave?" She asked, smiled, and looked at Church who frowned and appeared nervous. "What's wrong?" She asked

Church sighed, gazed into her blue eyes, and told her about the Chosen-ones joining.

Pinky grinned as she listened to Church's voice get croakier. When he'd finished, Pinky smiled and put her hand on his thinning hairline and stroked the top of his head "So you and I are supposed to fall madly in love?" she whispered.

Church nodded.

Pinky chuckled, slapped his head, and said, "Bah, don't talk shite! You look like Bob Hoskins, and I certainly wouldn't go out with him, let alone marry him."

They stared at each other for a moment, before bursting out laughing.

"These Spirits of yours must be as bonkers as I was, are they on drugs?" giggled Pinky.

"They certainly got it wrong this time," chuckled Church, hoping that they had.

They laughed for several minutes before Pinky looked sullen and said, "My parents got money from the government for taking care of me, so they would never let me go."

Church showed her the ring.

"Maybe they will with this," he said and told her his plan.

Church went into the living room. Greta and Harold sat on the sofa pouring over pictures of new cars in magazines. Harold had never worked, and after they had spent the money that he'd inherited from his grandparents many years ago, they had lived off government benefits. Pinky, although an annoyance to them, served them well, with generous carers allowance payments.

"I need to take Pinky to the facility at my cottage for treatment; she needed more help which I can provide there," said Church.

Harold and Greta looked at one another. "Will we get extra payments?" asked Harold.

Church shook his head and said, “No, but the treatment is free.”

The Pinquist’s mumbled and whispered to each other shaking their heads.

Church and Pinky knew they weren’t about to allow their golden goose to go anywhere without an incentive. Church took the letter from the table, folded it and added, “Oh, and Sharon told me she would give you the ring if you’d let me help her. But I understand if you aren’t happy to let her come.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Harold, looking as if someone had just taken away his favourite toy. “Let’s not be too hasty, Church.” he stammered, “If you think you can help her. Sharon already seems a lot better since you arrived.”

“Yes,” agreed Greta. “Maybe for a short while will be okay, she is eighteen now, so can make her own decisions.”

* * *

“Isn’t greed great?” said Church, driving along the motorway.

“Yeah, I knew those two greedy parents of mine would jump at the chance for the money. The only problem is, what happens when they find out the ring did not belong to the Queen of Denmark and isn’t worth that much?” enquired Pinky from the passenger seat.

“Oh, that,” smiled Church.

“The ring was one of my favourite rewards. I will explain how that works later, but it was given to me by...”

“Just get on with it,” Pinky interrupted and feigned a yawn.

Church smiled and continued,

“What I said about the ring was almost true. It was from the 19th century. However, it did not belong to Alexandrine of Mecklenburg-Schwenn, nor was it made by Jensen. It’s a Sybil Dunlop ring and made for the wife of Logie Baird. I estimate the value to be around the same and knowing your parents, even for such a short period, I imagine they will not care about anything but its value.”

“Made for Yogi Bear’s wife, that’s cool,” Pinky chuckled.

“Logie Baird, not Yogi Bear,” Church continued, “He invented the television.” Church saw Pinky smirking and knew she was joking. He smiled as Pinky then asked,

“So why feed them all that rubbish about Denmark then smartarse, hmm?”

“Well, it would’ve sounded stupid saying Heidi had a ring from England when she’d never been away from Denmark in her life, wouldn’t it?” said Church, sounding smug.

“Hmm, I suppose so,” Pinky said, shrugging her shoulders.

“Besides, it made them feel guilty about not visiting Heidi,” said Church.

Pinky asked question after question during the ride to the cottage. Church told her he would explain later and relieved when he pulled up outside the front door of the cottage. Pinky felt happy; it was just as Church had described and how she had imagined.

“It looks like it’s had a woman’s touch,” she commented.

Church laughed and helped her unload her belongings from the car boot, went inside, and showed her to one of the upstairs rooms.

“This will be your room. Anything you need, just ask. You unpack, and I’ll cook us something to eat and show you around,” said Church, leaving Pinky to accustom herself to her new surroundings. For the first time in her life, she felt comfortable and had a sense of belonging.

* * *

Greta and Harold went upstairs to clean Pinky’s room after she and Church drove away. They felt delighted and had already picked out which model of Toyota they wanted.

They went inside the room and noticed how tidy Pinky had left it. Her medications and a tin of marijuana rolled cigarettes, arranged neatly on the bedside cabinet top, with a note leaning against the water carafe, which read:

‘I won’t need these. I’m going home.’

They looked puzzled for a fleeting moment and then went back to discussing their Toyota.

Pinky showered and started putting her clothes away into a wardrobe. Church knocked on the door.

“Sorry to disturb you Pinky, but we have some visitors who I think you’ll want to meet,” he said.

“I didn’t hear anyone knocking,” said Pinky as she walked outside the room. They both went downstairs and into the portal room, with Church chuckling.

Church led Pinky over to the portal, “This is the portal I told you about. Meet my grandmother Pearl and your auntie Heidi.” He said.

Pinky stood facing the portal, screwed up her face, looked at Church, and said, “There’s nothing there; although I can smell of Brussels sprouts and tulips... Oh, and now something else.”

“That’s Brylcreem you can now smell,” said Granny Pearl. “Happy birthday Sharon.”

“Hello Sharon.” said Grandpa Jack, “Welcome home.”

“Oh, Hi Jack,” said Pinky, “What’s happening?”

“Church will explain everything later, and better. Won’t you Churchill?” said Granny Pearl, chastising him.

Church, still confused, stammered as Granny Pearl continued, “Meet your auntie, Heidi.”

“Happy Birthday Sharon,” said Heidi, and with spirits communicating through thought, Pinky had a happy conversation with Heidi about their lives.

Church stood back frowning and kept glancing at his smirking grandparents.

Auntie and niece finished their conversation and Granny Pearl said, “You’ve done excellent work, Church, although you need to teach Sharon a lot more.”

Church felt he was being ‘battered’ up, like a lamb going to the slaughter. Although he had only known Pinky for a short time, he’d become fond of this jovial, troubled girl, although more like a father opposed to a husband, and he certainly felt no throbbing passion for this teenager. Pinky felt the same depth of passion for Church... Zero.

Granny Pearl continued, “Treasure’s not your reward this time, Church. It’s far more important.”

Church, becoming frustrated, said, “Okay, Gran, let’s cut to the chase... When and where?”

“When and where what, Churchill?” Granny Pearl asked and Church could hear Jack and Heidi giggling.

“When are we to marry? I presume you will give us directions on that; you seem to meddle with everything else in my life.”

“Marry!” exclaimed Granny Pearl chuckling. “Who mentioned anything about marriage?”

“But you’ve been insinuating ever since I started this case about marriage, talking about Chosen-ones and the fact I am getting older, and this one was special, but no treasure etc.”

Granny Pearl chuckled. “I never mentioned your Chosen-one, Church, Sharon is not a Chosen-one, but a Guide and a special one. Didn’t you realise that when she couldn’t see us?”

Church groaned and said, “Yes I thought that was strange... You buggers have been winding me up.”

Laughter came from the portal.

“What are you laughing at?” asked Church, glaring at Pinky.

“Hard luck Bob Hoskins, Perhaps, you’ll find someone your age.”

Church chuckled as Granny Pearl still smirking, told them, “We have had a great deal of turmoil in the spirit world since the demon spirit entered almost two decades ago. It would be unwise for you to meet your eternal partner now. However, Heidi wanted her niece settled and content with her gift. Sharon will be your apprentice, so you can teach her the ways of our worlds,” said Pearl.

“You bloody spirits have a wicked sense of humour,” said Pinky, a sentiment echoed by Church. Laughter filled the room.

The Portals blue flame glowed again as another crimson spirit joined the group. It was Peter, Heidi’s old Spirit Guide.

“Are you ready Heidi?” asked Peter.

“Yes,” said Heidi and told Church and Pinky, “Thank you both. I am now going to the afterlife with Peter, so I wish you both all the happiness and luck you deserve in life. Pinky, learn from Church, he is a wonderful Keeper, stay safe and be wise,”

Peter and Heidi fused into one intense ball of crimson light and euphoria surged through Church and Pinky. Their energy then disappeared, leaving Granny Pearl and Jack.

“Was Peter the reason why Heidi doesn’t want to stay a Spirit Guide?” Church asked.

“Yes,” said Pearl. “They fell in love after spending all those years together talking as Spirit Guide and clairvoyant, although they couldn’t be together in life, they can spend eternity together.”

Granny Pearl sniggered and said, “Sorry about you two. I think you would have made a lovely couple.”

“Yeah, and she would stop you bathing in that stink that you call Brut,” added Grandpa Jack, chortling.

“Yeah, very funny, you old fossils,” smiled Church.

Pinky marvelled at the euphoric feeling she was experiencing.

“Wow! I feel great. I’ve never felt this good before, not even on cannabis,” she said grinning.

“Sorry child, that was the only time you will experience this emotion, only Keepers have this part of the gift,” Pearl told her.

“Lucky bastard,” said Pinky, light-heartedly.

“Hah, and that is me Miss Pinquist, my young apprentice,” joked Church, with a condescending air of mocking superiority.

“Don’t be so cocksure, my boy,” interrupted Granny Pearl. “Your wife will also have this power with her gift.”

“Hmm, not that again,” Church groaned, “I think we have established that I am not to marry yet.”

“Not yet... but soon Church... very soon.”

“What do you mean, very soon?” Church asked.

Granny Pearl and Grandpa Jack faded, still sniggering.

“What do you mean by, very soon?” Church repeated.

Pinky basked in her euphoric state, as Church shouted at the now empty portal,

“Granny Pearl!”

Silence.

“Granny Pearl!”

“Bloody woman’s done her disappearing act again,” said Church sounding frustrated.

Pinky stood and sniffed the air.

“When I first came in, I could smell Brussels sprouts and tulips, but it’s gone now,” said Pinky.

“Don’t get accustomed to the tulip smell, that was your auntie Heidi,” grumbled Church, now in a foul mood.

The Paranormal Assisted Treasure Hunter was now Hunters.

PNK183: Apprentice and family: 2009 : Case Closed.

7

If you're going through hell, keep going.

On a crisp spring morning in the Kinzigtal alpine valley, puffs of white smoke billowed out of the stone chimney of an isolated white Nordic stone cottage. A pleasant aroma from the cottage drifted on the breeze as Twigg Hansen and his pregnant wife, Freda, prepared their meals for the day. Bread baking in the wood-fired oven gave the cottage and surroundings a homely smell. Twigg and Freda, a young married German couple, lived at the cottage. Twigg worked his land and took care of livestock while Freda took care of the household chores. She visited the nearby town of Schenkenzell on occasions if a resident who lived there had a problem that Freda could help with. Their secluded, simple life was idyllic and far different from the rest of their country, with its previously decadent features now war-ravaged and rubble. Twigg and Freda knew nothing about the Second World War and the stupidity that had been devastating the mortal world for many years. This homestead and the Hansen Clan had survived untouched and unhindered for millennia... until now.

* * *

Twigg and Freda had finished eating breakfast when an invisible force shocked the couple, sending an icy chill through them both. Twigg was a tall, well-built, German man with long blonde hair and piercing blue eyes. It seemed hard to imagine that anything could put fear into this individual, but something had. He went outside and heard a distant rumble coming from within the dense Black Forest. Feeling a sense of foreboding, he heard a drone of engines above him and looked up. He saw large round parachutes with men and equipment, drifting down from an aeroplane and heading towards the cottage.

Twigg watched as they neared the ground. One, in particular, caught his attention. He gasped and rushed inside to Freda.

Hans Kruger and his crack commandos landed on the soft earth in the clearing surrounding the cottage and removed their parachutes and other items they carried with them. Kruger waited for the last man to land and helped the clumsy man remove his parachute. The shell-shocked Jewish man took his spectacles from his pocket and nodded at Kruger as he put on and adjusted his glasses.

Kruger looked down and smirked at Erik, "Wait here," he ordered.

After checking his men were armed and prepared, Kruger and his six commandos' ran toward the small cottage and stopped at the door.

Kruger gave hand signals and a soldier barged the door, which splintered and fell. The first soldier crashed through the doorway and a look of horror came across his face as he received a blow on his head from a large sledgehammer wielded by Twigg. A second soldier charged in receiving the same greeting. Both soldiers with their heads and faces covered in blood splayed out on the floor. Twigg stood back with rage in his eyes and waited.

Hans Kruger, seeing the demise of his men, looked inside the cottage at Twigg, who smiled as if beckoning him to enter. His remaining commandos had their weapons trained on Twigg, but they had strict orders not to shoot, with him needed alive.

Kruger walked through the doorway and the two giant men stood facing each other.

"What do you want," snarled Twigg, glaring at Kruger.

"Put the hammer down, now!" said Kruger pointing his weapon at Twigg's head.

Twigg, afraid for his and Freda's lives, swung his large hammer at Hans, who moved out of the way and smashed the stock of his MP40 submachine gun into Twigg's jaw, stunning him. Twigg stood back and shook his head to regain his faculties. Hans then fired the machine gun into the air as a warning and again pointed the gun at Twigg.

"Drop the hammer," ordered Hans.

Hans's remaining commandos came in. Still pointing their weapons at Twigg, they looked at their fallen comrades now groaning on the floor.

Twigg looked at the commandos, and with a steely glare charged at them, wielding his hammer like the mighty god Thor. He swung at Kruger, who again dodged the blow and they all attempted to subdue this tiger of a man with hand-to-hand techniques, ramming their weapons hard into his body, which proved ineffective. Twigg and his hammer wreaked havoc amongst the tough battle-hardened warriors.

The skirmish went on for several moments until the last member of the assault team stumbled through the door. Suddenly, the fighting ceased. Twigg's body appeared to go limp. His hammer fell to his side as he stared at the newcomer. The bruised and bloodied commandos again pointed their weapons at the shaking, and now subdued Twigg.

"I told you to wait outside," snapped Kruger.

Erik smiled at Kruger and then looked at Twigg, "Where is your Guide?" he asked.

Hans's commandos looked amazed and felt confused about how Twigg had no fear of them, yet appeared terrified by an insignificant, puny Jew.

Twigg said nothing and gasped for air as Erik repeated, "Where is your Guide?"

A commando pushed Twigg onto a chair as Erik looked around.

"Come with me," ordered Erik. He and Kruger went upstairs and Erik went over to a large pine cupboard in the bedroom and opened the door.

Freda sat trembling in the cupboard and glared at Erik as Kruger motioned her with his gun to come out.

They took her downstairs and directed her to a stool to sit beside her husband. The commandos went outside to fetch in the equipment that parachuted down with them, while Erik Jan Hanussen sat on a stool in front of the Hansen's, grinning like the Cheshire cat.

"What do you want demon?" asked Twigg.

Erik said nothing. He kept looking at the cellar door and smiling.

Over the next hour, men took equipment into the cottage cellar. Twigg and Freda sat and held hands, comforting each other while trying to figure out what was happening at their portal. "We must let my father know, the spirit world will know what to do," whispered Twigg, who also felt concerned about the rumbling outside getting louder.

Once they had installed the equipment to Erik's satisfaction, Hans came up from the cellar holding a Luger pistol and motioned for Twigg and Freda to go with him into the cellar.

Erik waited at the bottom of the steps and grinned when he saw the shocked expressions on the faces of the couple when they saw what now lay in their portal room. Twigg gasped when he saw the pentagram and symbols that surrounded their portal and had protected their family for generations, stripped off the wooden floor and replaced with other symbols that he knew and feared.

The couple turned around and saw an empty glass room resembling a large aquarium with a door. The Hansen's looked inside the room at what looked like a glass coffin placed at its centre, with drawings and scripts painted on the walls of the glass room and the coffin. Twigg felt concerned and looked at Freda after reading the ancient texts on both glass compartments.

Hans beckoned them over to the glass rooms door and shoved Freda through the glass door and over to the coffin.

Twigg, enraged, was about to attack Hans again when Erik shouted, "Come here, Keeper."

Twigg trembled and went over to Erik standing with the commandos by the portal, while Hans Kruger ordered Freda to lie down in the coffin.

Freda rubbed her stomach, comforting her unborn infant as Hans closed the lid. He picked up a large jar marked 'Schwefel', Sulphur and poured the powder in a circle around the coffin.

Twigg became furious when he looked back and saw this and punched the soldier closest to him. The other troopers tried to mob him, hoping they would not get a repeated thrashing. A scuffle

never occurred, as Erik moved in front of Twigg, who went numb. Erik walked forward, forcing Twigg to back up towards the Hansen's portal.

"Summon the spirit 'Aufpasser,' Keeper, Guardian," demanded Erik.

There was no need as Fritz Hansen, the Spirit Keeper, after detecting strange anomalies at the portal went to investigate and materialised in the earthly portal.

Fritz felt fear coming from his son and his pregnant daughter-in-law, who he saw lying in a glass coffin looking helpless. He saw the protective pentagram and symbols replaced and became concerned as the mortal with the demon aura now stood in front of him and gave him a stark warning, "If you attempt to raise the alarm in the spirit world, it would not bode well for your mortal family," said Erik pointing to Freda.

The bemused commandos in the room could not understand what was happening and Hans ordered them to go upstairs which they did with great haste because they felt scared.

Fritz waited to see what would transpire before summoning help and knew his Spirit Guide wife would not be far away.

"What do you want demon?" Fritz asked.

Hans looked on bemused. Erik appeared to be speaking to an empty spot on the floor. 'What is this devilry' thought Hans, as he slowly edged his way behind Twigg as instructed to await the signal from Hitler's Jewish psychic.

Hans was a mortal spectator in the room and could not perceive what the others were witnessing.

The room became a swirling kaleidoscope of illuminated vivid colours. Crimson lights emanated from the glass coffin containing Freda, the two Keeper's myriad of rainbow colours swirling around the portal, and the dark blue, almost black, aura emanating from Erik.

Twigg glared at Erik, and asked again, "What are you doing, and what do you want?"

"I am here to help mankind. They have lost their way and need guidance. I demand the help of the spirits to accomplish my goals," said Erik.

"You can demand nothing demon, your kind only wanted to destroy mankind," said Twigg and sounding defiant, added, "We will stop you as we have always done in the past."

"And what do you hope to achieve?" Fritz asked.

Erik grinned and told them, "With your cooperation, I can bring about new world order and ..."

While the Keepers glared at Erik as he spoke and unable to pick up any emotion to know he was lying, Twigg and Fritz did not notice Hans, who now stood behind Twigg.

Eric had, and seeing Hans in position, yelled, "Now, Hans!"

Hans lunged at Twigg, pushing him to the location on the floor that Erik had shown him. Fritz saw this, panicked, and tried to flee back into the spirit world, but with everything happening too fast, Hans had forced Twigg into the portal before Fritz could escape.

"Excellent, excellent," shouted Erik, clapping excitedly. "Right on target."

Hans looked on in horror as the mighty Twigg shook. A force seemed to enter Twigg's body, knocking Hans of his feet. Hans watched from the wooden floor, as Twigg stood fixed to the spot, convulsing as if some powerful invisible force shook him. Hans saw Twigg's face distort and small particles of flesh floating away from his body, swirling around him. Watching with horror, Hans saw Twigg disintegrating before his eyes which unnerved him and he looked at Erik grinning as he stared where moments ago Twigg stood.

What Hans didn't see was the portal's blue flames intensifying, as a multi-coloured tornado swirled around violently as the two Keepers intertwined, stuck together like conjoined twins. After several moments, the blue flame disappeared, leaving the fused slow-spinning rainbow vortices rotating around a flameless portal

Erik laughed and sounding condescending, said aloud. "I knew I could do it. My calculations were correct, "I have closed a portal. Now me and the Fuehrer can live forever."

Erik then looked down at Hans on the floor with his mouth agape. 'You're not so tough in my world,' he thought, sneering at him.

Hans got to his feet, and trembling like a frightened child, asked, "What devilry is this?"

"You need not know, so carry out your orders. Now, give me your pistol," snapped the Jew.

Hans's hand shook as he handed Erik his Luger.

Erik walked into the glass room and over to the glass coffin. He opened the lid, pointed the Luger, and as Freda put her hands up to protect herself, Erik fired two shots, one into Freda's head, and another into her stomach and closed the lid.

"You're going nowhere," he said to the corpse and smirked as two crimson spirits filled the coffin, like red smoke in the wind.

He looked over at the swirling rainbows in the portal, grinned, and shouted, "At least you can spend eternity close to each other," he laughed as the crimson lights settled down, as Freda, now a Spirit Guide, realised the situation was hopeless. She watched her husband and father-in-law's spinning auras, before melding with the smaller crimson light of her unborn child within her prison.

Erik went over to Hans and looked up at his ashen face glaring wide-eyed at him as he handed back his Luger, smirked, and said, "You have done good work here SS-Oberführer, the Führer will be pleased."

Erik and the trembling Hans left the cellar and went upstairs. Hans's commandos saw their leader shaken. They all thought that the sooner this part of their mission was over the better, they'd never felt so scared. These soldiers were the elite of the German army and although they had witnessed and caused many scenes of death and carnage, this was something that seemed far worse than simply dying.

They all went outside the cottage and looked towards the edge of the Black Forest as the rumbling became louder and the first row of trees collapsed forward. With the sound of splintering and cracking wood, two large Weinmach MS40 heavily armoured earthmovers pushed their way through. Smaller diggers, cranes, and various other excavation and building equipment, along with trucks carrying men and supplies, followed closely behind.

The convoy made its way sluggishly toward the cottage.

Hans looked at his watch. The slow pace of the machines infuriated Hans and his men. The heavy vehicles only appeared to inch their way forward. The commandos all looked relieved when they saw three vehicles swerve past the others and speed towards them. Two half-track Maultier cargo trucks and a Kubelwagon jeep approached the cottage.

Hans breathed a sigh of relief as he saw his replacement, SS-Oberführer, Benno Von Arent, sitting in the front.

"Good, now we can get away from this place," Hans told his relieved, battered, bruised, and terrified men.

Erik glanced at Hans and smirked as the Kubelwagon stopped in front of him and the commandos.

Benno got out and saluted them. They returned the salute and Benno, Eric, and Hans went inside the cottage. Benno took blueprints and other documents from a case and laid them out on the kitchen table.

"You don't look well SS-Oberführer, you look like you have seen a ghost, was everything alright," asked Benno as Hans trembled and glanced at the cellar door.

"Yes, he is fine," said Erik smirking, eager to get on with the next phase.

A truck pulled up outside and a dozen infantry soldiers jumped out and formed up into a line. The Gestapo officers gave the soldiers their orders and they unloaded their cargo of furniture. Hans's commandos offered to lend a hand until they found out the items were going to the cellar.

Another truck pulled up. This one's rear compartment was armoured and its cargo differed from the first having various sized, heavy narrow crates and a rectangular red strongbox.

Hans, Benno, and Erik were organising and planning. Erik stopped when his furniture came through the cottage. He went with the soldiers down to the cellar to oversee the delivery.

It didn't take long to complete the task. The soldiers went outside to wait for the slow, heavy excavation equipment and to speak with the commandos who told them about the creepy cellar.

Hans, Erik, and Benno came outside. Benno pointed out the area for the excavation and building of an underground bunker.

Erik gave an order to a Gestapo officer, who marched to the back of the armoured truck.

Benno looked at his watch and told Hans, "Your job is finished here SS-Oberführer. You need to carry out your next assignment. There is a camouflaged Junkers Ju252 cargo plane waiting at a makeshift airstrip, 40k North West, at the rim of the Black Forest. The plane will take you and your team to a transitory airstrip near Farge port. A truck will pick you up from there."

Hans smiled and breathed a sigh of relief as Benno clicked his heels together... "Heil Hitler!"

The commandos returned the salute and Hans ordered his men into the Kubelwagon.

"Wait!" shouted Erik stood behind the BUCH MOSE strongbox,beckoning Hans to return.

Hans glared at Erik as he got out of the Kubelwagon and went over to Erik, who said, "You know how important this is, and the Führer insisted that you and I place this into its new home." He smirked.

The Kubelwagon drove around the slow oncoming convoy of heavy machinery and along tracks and small roads around the Black Forrest region. The commandos, relieved to be away from the cottage, remained deep in thought and confused as they made the slow journey to the airstrip. Milky orange dusk enveloped the sky as they reached the Junkers, covered in camouflage netting. The pilot ordered them to hurry with the plane not being equipped to fly at night.

Hans's men removed the netting, and the pilot started the Jumo 211F engines. Hans and his commandos climbed aboard and the plane took off. The commandos, still unnerved by their experience, stared ahead in silence throughout the short flight.

Hans looked at his watch in the moonlight, "2:00 am. We could have walked there quicker," he grumbled. He and his men had now been waiting on a small roadside at the now deserted airstrip for several hours. They then heard engines and saw headlights coming toward them.

Four 'Moles,' Opel Maultier trucks loaded with cargo and troops pulled up alongside them. Hans and his men climbed into the back of one vehicle for the short journey. The night sky was quiet, but everyone on the vehicles knew at any moment things could change. All the troops looked on edge as they listened for the sound of aircraft.

They arrived at a jetty at the port of Farge, pulling up alongside a sleek U-boat, where two young SS officers met them. "Heil Hitler!" said the fresh-faced youngsters, snapping to attention and raising their arm in salute. Hans returned their salutes, marched past them, and boarded the U-boat, followed by his commandos.

Previously, pity was not in Kruger's nature, but after the unnerving events he'd witnessed at the cottage, he could not help but feel sorrow for the two young officers. He knew there was no room on the U-boat to accommodate them, so they would be a disposable loose end.

The other troops got out of the trucks and started offloading the cargo into the U-boat. Several of the U-boat crew came from below decks and assisted. They loaded small heavy wooden crates, marked with a large black stencil:

PRODUCTO DE ARGENTINA

MAQUINARIA AGRICOLA

Argentine agricultural machinery.

Captain Viktor came on deck, while the rest of his officers stayed below supervising the storage of the heavy cargo. Several other trucks arrived during the night with storage containers that dockside cranes hoisted into watertight compartments. Other trucks arrived with smaller crates they loaded into the conning storage area within the vessel. Several hours into the offload they all ran for cover

as allied bombers flew overhead, dropping their payloads onto the nearby town of Bremen and the Valentin submarine pens close by. The bombing was brief and once over they continued with the loading. By daybreak, the U-boat's crew felt exhausted.

The Captain stood on the conning bridge and watched his men load the last of the cargo into the U-boat. He felt angry, because not only was his crew's complement less than half, just twenty-eight men but also they had to work tirelessly loading the boat. He, along with the rest of Germany knew they'd lost the war and knew they were transporting looted- treasure.

Kruger and his men came out of the U-boat, now attired in black S.S. uniforms.

The sailors just milled around on the jetty.

The Captain thought that with the U-boat now loaded, they should soon be underway. He wanted to get back out onto the familiar ocean, maybe for the last time. Karl always hoped that he would die at sea, a maritime warrior.

Hans issued an order to his men and they rounded up the U-boat crew at gunpoint and ushered them aboard. Hans then ordered the Captain to join his men. Captain Viktor clenched his fists, angry about getting orders from an S.S. murderer, but he had no choice; his orders had come from the top.

The SS commandos locked the crew in the hot forward compartment of the vessel with the six remaining torpedoes.

"What's happening sir," asked a submariner.

"I don't know but we'd better rest," said the Captain who sat on the cramped steel floor, rested his head on his knees, and thought about his wife and kids.

The jetty was now silent, except for screeching seagulls and the groan of twisted wrecks, buffeted by the waves.

Hans Kruger and the two young SS officers stood on the jetty. Kruger looked at his watch, satisfied that everything had gone according to schedule. All he had to do now was wait for the Fuehrer.

* * *

With the battle raging outside, a grisly sight greeted S.S. Officers Otto Guensche and Heinz Linge, as they entered Hitler's quarters within the deserted Fuehrer bunker. After hearing two shots and seeing an SS officer leaving Hitler's drawing-room, they carried out their orders.

Adolf Hitler, dressed in his beige uniform and Eva Braun in a blue floral skirt lay dead in what appeared to be a suicide tryst. Their faces contorted with blood staining their clothes, floor, and furniture. Wispy smoke drifted from the barrel of a Luger pistol lying on the floor beside Hitler's body. Both he and Braun had white powder around their lips, with a bottle of cyanide capsules, and an empty carafe of water overturned on the table. Small gunshot wounds on their heads still smouldered as Otto and Heinz, glanced at each other, smiled, covered the bodies with plain woollen blankets, and lifted them onto trolleys. They wheeled them to the bunker's elevator and took them to the surface. With no ceremony and little respect paid to the corpses as Heinz, Hitler's former valet, and Otto, spat on the corpses before wheeling the bodies outside and dumping them into a bomb crater within the gardens of the chancellery. Artillery shells and gunfire exploded around the buildings as the two S.S. Officers' removed the cap off a large tin drum and poured a pungent-smelling liquid over the corpses. They ignited the fuel, and with a whoosh, the two bodies erupted into flame.

The two men watched as the corpses incinerated in the inferno. Otto noticed something strange as Hitler's jacket dissolved in the flame. He nudged Heinz and pointed to Hitler's forearm. Heinz looked and shrugged.

"The bastard isn't dead," said Otto.

Heinz sighed as the inflammable incendiary mix took only minutes to incinerate the flesh from the bodies, leaving only ash and bone.

"We can say nothing about this," said Otto sounding concerned.

Heinz nodded, and the pair walked away from the cremation, heading away from the bomb-wrecked gardens and toward the sound of battle to surrender.

The following day, newspapers around the world headlined the news: Adolf Hitler is dead. They reported that he and Eva Braun committed suicide. The world celebrated as the war in Europe was over.

Neither Otto nor Heinz ever mentioned what they saw on Hitler's body as it burned at the war crimes trial in Nuremberg. They told the court that they had seen Hitler and Braun's corpses, along with the cyanide and Luger. They told prosecutors that their orders came directly from SS – Gruppenführer Heinrich Müller Chief of the Gestapo before he fled Germany with his whereabouts unknown.

Otto and Heinz went to their graves without ever telling anyone what they saw tattooed on Hitler's forearm; the concentration camp serial number of its Jewish resident.

While Germany burned, Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun sat drinking cognac in their cabin, as the U-boat headed towards its final destination. They laughed and joked as they discussed their future together, seemingly unconcerned about the fate of war-ravaged Germany. Hitler knew with his cargo he would rebuild his shattered Reich, either in this life or the next.

8

You never can tell whether bad luck may not after all turn out to be good luck

Silence fell over the capacity crowd at the Sheffield arena, where minutes earlier the raucous sound of cheering and yelling coursed through the stadium. Two boxers had stood toe-to-toe in the centre of a ring, slugging it out for the European middleweight crown.

The popular boxer from Sheffield had dominated the first few rounds of the fight and the crowd cheered him on. Now in the sixth round, he knew by looking at his bruised opponent that he could finish the fight after feeling less power coming from his punches. Although an earlier clash of heads left a minor cut on his eyebrow that the last punch opened but he ignored it and thundered a shot into the fighter ribs. He grinned as the fighter winced, dropped his hands, and left the way open for a clean left hook to the jaw which he knew would end the fight with a knockout. He was about to deliver the haymaker when his body juddered and with a shocked expression, collapsed to the floor.

The cheering stopped, and the audience looked stunned as the referee pointed and the other fighter went to stand in his corner, shrugging and shaking his head. The referee knelt and checked the fighter.

“It’s a bloody fix. He never touched him,” yelled someone in the audience, followed by jeering and booing that echoed around the arena.

The referee stood up and looked shocked as he beckoned the ring doctor.

With their hometown hero now lying motionless in the centre of the ring, the crowd went silent watching the ring doctor examined the fallen fighter.

Pandemonium ensued as the doctor ordered the ring cleared. Corner men and the other fighter who looked shaken left the ring. Everyone in attendance knew the situation was dire, and the fallen fighter now had another fight to win, the fight for his life. The ring announcer reassured the audience while the doctor and the fighter’s trainer performed CPR on the splayed-out boxer.

Paramedics arrived on the scene and went into the ring with their portable monitors and lifesaving equipment. A paramedic set up an Ambu-bag and intubated the boxer, then squeezed the bag to get air into his lungs. Another paramedic charged up a portable defibrillator, and when the gauges reached 100 joules, he shouted, “Charged.”

The doctor placed paddles on the man’s chest. “Clear,” instructed the doctor as he pressed the button, sending a powerful surge of electricity coursing through the boxer’s body, arching it off the canvas floor.

They watched the portable monitor showing the man’s heart rhythm as a flat line, so the doctor increased the voltage to the maximum 300 joules and shocked him again. The paramedic handed the doctor a syringe containing Epinephrine, which he then injected into the boxer’s chest.

The medics continued CPR several for minutes until the doctor checked the boxer’s pupils and confirmed the information on the monitor.

“Fixed and dilated,” said the doctor. “And it’s reading flat line on the monitor.” He looked at his watch and said, “Time of death, 19:05.”

The medical team lifted the boxer out of the ring, put him on a gurney, and wheeled him out of the arena, with the sound of crying and mourning filling the stadium. They put the body in the ambulance and covered it with a sheet.

The ambulance drove away, heading to the Hallamshire hospital. The doctor, a medic, and the boxer’s trainer sat in the back, along with the body.

Gus, the trainer, held his head in his hands, and after several minutes, mumbled, “I don’t know what happened. One minute he was winning, the next he...”

A loud belch emanated from the corpse, making them jump.

“It’s just a reflex,” said the doctor as the boxer sat bolt upright and the sheet slipped off.

“What round is it Gus?” asked the boxer.

“Round six,” stuttered the shocked trainer taken aback.

“Did I win?” asked the boxer.

With his mouth agape, Gus nodded, and the boxer lay back down.

Although taken by surprise the medic’s reflexes kicked in and he placed monitors and re-sited the lifesaving equipment onto the sleeping boxer.

“Arrhythmia... sinus rhythm and respirations are normal,” he told the doctor.

The bemused doctor looked at his watch and exclaimed, “That’s impossible. He’s been dead for nineteen minutes!”

The ambulance pulled up to the front of the accident and emergency department. The dazed doctor, paramedics, and trainer went inside, while the hospital staff wheeled the sleeping boxer to the Intensive Care Unit.

PATH RC389: 2011

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Vibrant sights and sounds of nature filled the woodland around the cottage, with the trees, foliage and flowers in full bloom, the quaint old cottage looked picturesque. Church and Pinky spent most of their time outside walking among the hedgerows. Church had set up a website www.PATH.com, which now provided him and Pinky with a useful tool for the first contact in finding relatives of lost soul’s location, using Google maps.

One evening, while Church sat at his desk updating the website, the familiar smell of Brussels sprouts filled the room.

He smiled and looked at the portal as Granny Pearl appeared.

“Hi Gran,” said Church, “Have you got another assignment for us?” He asked, hoping it would be lucrative, like the last one.

Church pressed a button on his newly installed intercom.

“Pinky, Granny Pearl’s here.”

“Church, I have another assignment for you both. We have a problem, and with the upheaval and damage repair still going on within the spirit world after the Diabolus encounter, we hoped you would help. The location was close,” Granny Pearl told him.

Pinky came in the portal room.

“Hello, Sharon, I hope you are well.”

“Hi, Granny Pearl,” said Sharon, facing the portal. “Yes, I am okay. Have you got another assignment for us?”

Pinky sat at Church’s desk while Granny Pearl explained, “A psychic surge emitted from a split in the fabric of our world, hitting the mortal world. Although extremely rare and usually harmless, it was the first time that a surge hit someone who was injured. Because of this, the mortal died, entering our world before his time. We returned the soul but he now has the gift and unprepared. We sent a Spirit Guide to make contact, but a mortal intervention’s needed, as the newly gifted one doesn’t seem to get on with the Guide we sent.”

Church nodded at Pinky, who smiled.

“Yeah, it sounds simple enough. No problem Gran, give me the details.”

* * *

People inundated the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital wanting to see the wonder patient. Journalists waited for the story from the man who had been clinically dead for almost 20 minutes and came back. The head of the hospital restricted the number of visitors, only allowing close friends and relatives.

The boxer settled into a private ward. Although still attached to monitors, he was free of the tubes and drips, so he could move around the room.

'I'm bored,' he thought, 'I hope I'm not here long, and the voices in my head stop annoying me.' His thoughts interrupted by the odour of onions filling the room and he sighed, 'Oh, not again' he thought.

"Hello, laddie," said a Scottish voice.

"Piss off, Hamish," shouted the boxer.

"Now laddie, duna be like that," said the voice. "I have something important to tell yee."

"Don't you always...Spirits, Guides, the gift; always important, but only a load of bollocks. Anyway, you are only my imagination because I may have brain damage, the doctor told me," said the fighter and yelled. "Now bugger off."

"Ach, jest listen to me fer one last time, and then I'll be oot of your life forever," said Hamish's spirit.

"Good, because I used to like onions until your stink turned up."

Hamish, the Spirit Guide, spoke to the boxer for several minutes and gave him some instructions. The boxer wanting to get rid of the annoying voice in his head and get back to enjoying onions.

Twilight eased out the sun to take over its night shift. The boxer sat at the window of his private hospital room watching this daily cosmic battle unfold. He had never noticed before, the wonderful, simple things that happen daily on our little blue planet. Because of his near-death experience, he did not intend to let anything, however insignificant, pass unnoticed.

A nurse came into his room to tell him that he had two visitors and asked if they could come in.

"They said you were expecting them," said the nurse.

"Yes, I am," he said, "Let them in please."

A middle-aged man and a young woman entered the room and went over to the fighter. Ryan felt confused; he had seen people bathed in white lights but put that down to his head injury. Now he wasn't so sure and gaped as the pair approached. He saw the girl had a crimson aura radiating around her, while the man's looked like a rainbow.

"Hello, my name is Church, and this is Pinky. You must be Ryan... and a tad bit confused," said Church.

Ryan nodded his head and turning pale, said, "Am I going crazy, as all this sounds unbelievable," He looked at the pair and mumbled, "but I suppose you two being here like Hamish said you would be made it credible. Although, a tad bit confused, was a bloody understatement." He pointed at Pinky and continued, "You are the same colour as me. He then pointed at Church, "apart from me and you two, everyone else has a white glow."

Pinky looked gooeey-eyed at Ryan's muscular figure. 'He's a bit of alright.' She thought as Church said, "We are special." He smiled at Ryan and his tone soothed and reassured him as Church continued, "I'll explain things to you and know you have a lot of questions."

Church explained about the spirit world, the gift, Guides, and Keepers, along with their role as Paranormal Assisted Treasure Hunters.

The conversation went on for over an hour, with Church explaining and Ryan asking question after question. Ryan told him that Hamish had given him the same information, but it sounded ludicrous coming from a voice in his head called Hamish. Ryan now felt guilty about the times he had been rude to Hamish.

"You're bloody lucky," Pinky told him, "We had to go through far worse. You had one spirit Guide; normally we have many voices trying to get through at the start, not to mention the blinding headaches. It felt like a flock of birds pecking my head until my guardian angel explained things and helped me." She smiled at Church and told Ryan, "My Spirit Guide auntie sent Church to rescue me three years ago and he's here to help you too, Ryan Clark."

Church felt Ryan's emotion change from fear and confusion to comfort and reassurance. He sensed that he was still unconvinced, so said, "I know you're still confused and have a lot more questions. I also know you are hungry and want a cheese sandwich, so we will continue this conversation tomorrow morning."

Ryan, although taken aback about the sandwich, it confirmed he was dealing with someone special but felt weary and ask them to come the next day.

A nurse came into the room with Ryan's medication and noticed Church and Pinky getting ready to leave.

"We'll see you in the morning Ryan" Said Church. Pinky mumbled under her breath about him being a sexy man, as she followed Church outside, closing the door behind her.

Ryan felt contented as he swallowed his medication.

"Any chance of a sandwich?" he asked.

The nurse smiled. "I'm sure the kitchen will make an exception for the 'wonder' patient," she chuckled and asked, "What would you like in it?"

Ryan paused, smiled, and said, "Cheese and Hamish."

"What?"

"Sorry, I meant cheese and onion," said Ryan, grinning.

* * *

Church and Pinky stepped into the warm summer night and checked into a local bed and breakfast.

The next morning, Church, Pinky, and Ryan reconvened in the hospital room.

Church sensed Ryan's anxiety.

After a long discussion, Ryan fell silent. He'd had the answers to most of his concerns, except for one, so he asked,

"What can I do with this power, and how do I use it to make a living? Do I work as some sort of fortune-teller at the local fair? What use is it? My boxing career is finished. I would never pass another medical."

There was silence as Church considered Ryan's quandary. He was older than others who had received the gift, so Church wondered if he could accept this new power.

Pinky broke the awkward silence,

"Why doesn't he come and work with us Church?" she asked.

Church thought for a moment and decided that they could certainly use some muscle, as some of his initial contacts had not gone as expected.

Church nodded, smiled, and said, "What do you think Ryan? Do you want to come and work with us at PATH, now that you know what we do?"

Ryan rubbed his chin.

"What's the pay like?" he asked.

Pinky chuckled and said, "What pay?"

Church smiled and shrugged, "I have never considered pay." He said, "We live well, and if either of us wanted anything, we went out and bought it."

"Live well, does that mean plenty of food?" he asked.

"Oh yes," said Pink, adding, "Church is a great cook."

Ryan smiled and Church sensed another emotion coming from him, as he chuckled and said, "It sounded more like a family."

Pinky and Church nodded as they smiled at him.

Ryan was 29 years old. A boxer from an early age, he spent most of his time with trainers and other boxers. He had been lodging with Gus above the boxing gym for four years and had no contact with his family for some time

“Hmm, I get discharged today. Can I think about your offer and let you know later?” Ryan asked.

“Of course Ryan, take your time... it’s a big decision,” said Church, but he already knew the answer.

* * *

Ryan put away his clothes that he had earlier collected from the gym. When they first arrived at the quaint old cottage, Ryan expected Lurch Adams to answer the door and fight off cobwebs, but felt pleasantly surprised by its plush, modern interior. Ryan liked his room, with a large T.V. and music system, an en-suite bathroom and Jacuzzi, he felt at home. He looked out of the window at the large tree and bushes surrounding the cottage. ‘This place was well hidden, I wonder where little red riding hood hangs out?’ he chuckled.

Church told Ryan to settle in, while he cooked them all something to eat. Ryan unpacked his belongings and caught a whiff of pleasing aromas.

‘Yummy.’ he thought, ‘Church must be cooking a roast dinner.’

He sniffed the air, trying to distinguish the smells. ‘Hmm... Brussels sprouts and onions, I hope there’s a roast chicken to go with that.’ he thought.

There came a knock on his door. Pinky popped her head in and said, “One of the family’s here to meet you, and she’s brought a friend of yours along to say hello.”

Ryan looked puzzled and said, “I didn’t hear anyone knocking at the front door.”

Pinky chuckled as she and Ryan headed for the portal room. The PATH team was now complete.

PATH RC389: Gift for the dead: 2011: Case Closed.

9

Life doesn't forgive weakness.

What remained of the German population felt terrified. The war had been over for several months, and the conquering Allies were dividing the country. The Soviet Bloc carved a sizable chunk for itself, with America and its European counterparts splitting up the rest. Berlin was a city in ruins. Brick and stone carcasses were all that remained of the once-splendid metropolis. The vile stench of decaying corpses and stagnant sewerage hung over the city like noxious smog. The people and their lands were now in a tug-of-war between the victorious powers. Many stories of atrocities filtered through about maltreatment of the German citizens. The Allies pillaged what they could get their hands on and the Russians mercilessly raped and murdered German women in revenge for the mistreatment of Russian women and the atrocities caused by the German army upon their people.

The shabby overcrowded hospital ward bustled with activity. American soldiers and medics brought in wounded from the sporadic skirmishes around the city, with German patients shoved out to make room for them.

The Berlin hospital had been more fortunate than most, as it was only partially destroyed in the blitz bombings, leaving certain sections functional. It bustled with activity 24 hours a day.

Martina suckled her infant and, along with her husband Stefan, observed all the activity. They wondered how long it would be before they would also be thrown out, having already been there for almost a month. Doctor Rudolf Flanman had been protecting them since he discovered their infant son had a mild case of asthma, although the infant always seemed healthy to his parents. The doctor fended off any attempts to remove them as he and the medical staff referred to their child as the 'miracle' baby. This situation was ideal for Martina and Stefan, with their home destroyed in the blitz. Stefan had slept on a thin mattress under Martina's bed, sharing her meagre rations. Dr Rudolf Flanman was a rotund, bespectacled man, with patches of grey hair on either side of his otherwise bald head. He had a large grey beard and protruding uneven teeth, which made him look a cross between the Nutty Professor and Santa Claus. Flanman looked to be in his mid-sixties, and his jovial demeanour made it easy for him to gain his patients' confidence. Martina and Stefan liked and trusted this dependable medical man and his judgment.

The couple had a black-and-white photograph taped to Martina's headboard that showed Martina smiling as she held their baby son, who now looked content as he suckled on his mother's breast.

Two-armed American G.I.'s and a civilian came into the ward and went to Martina's bed. The officer, dressed in a beige and brown dress uniform, and the civilian in a grey suit, went over to Martina's bedside, while the N.C.O. in combat fatigues, closed the privacy curtain around the bed and stayed outside to stand guard.

"What do you want?" stammered Stefan, putting his hand on his wife's leg.

The officer took a folder from a leather briefcase while the man in the suit told the couple, "This is Lieutenant Sykes, and my name is Max. I am an interpreter." He said and looked at Stefan and asked, "Are you, Professor Stefan Adolf Schuler?"

"Yes, I am," replied Stefan.

"Do you speak English professor?" lieutenant Sykes asked.

Stefan looked at the large American officer and replied, "Yes, a little."

"Good, that'll make it easier," said the lieutenant and smiled at the brilliant young engineering professor.

Martina, feeling embarrassed, covered herself, removed the infant from her breast and wrapped the baby in a blanket.

Lieutenant Sykes opened the folder marked 'Operation Paperclip,' he took out a document, showed it to Stefan, and asked, "Is this the project that you were involved with?"

Stefan studied the document.

"Yes, I worked on that project," he said, and with a quake in his voice, asked, "Why?"

Sykes ignored the question and ordered, "You and your family have to come with us now, professor."

A commotion outside the curtain interrupted them.

"What's happening Sergeant?" yelled Sykes.

"Sir, a nurse is insisting she comes in to attend to the baby. He needs his treatment."

"Tell her to wait," ordered Sykes, and after putting the folder back in his case, called back to the sergeant, "Okay, tell her to come in."

A nurse came behind the curtain and glared at Sykes. 'Wow!' thought Sykes 'She's a sight for sore eyes.' he smiled at the nurse who frowned at him and spoke to a now relieved looking Martina and Stefan in German.

She then snapped at Sykes in English, "What is happening? What do you want with my patient?"

"And you are?" asked Sykes, gazing into the nurse's blue eyes.

"I'm staff nurse Steffi Beike, and this is my patient," she curtly replied and put down a tray containing medicines and ointments.

"My name is Lieutenant Sykes ma'am. I need to take the professor's family with me. American doctors will now take care of them."

The angry nurse gave Martina a small glass of dark brown medicine to drink while she checked the baby's vital signs. She then rubbed ointment on the now wailing infant's chest, and while Martina tried to settle her baby, nurse Steffi glared at Sykes and stormed out.

* * *

* * *

General Andy 'Bash' Brownlow stood in front of the thirty-five people in the room in the bombed offices of the Reichstag. The audience comprised of men, women, children, and one sleeping baby. General Brownlow, having lost many of his soldiers in battle, loathed the Germans.

With Max translating, the abrupt General told them they would relocate to the United States. He explained how, as they were the top specialists in their respected fields, their talents and expertise would now work for Uncle Sam under the top-secret operation known as 'Operation Paperclip.'

The small crowd mumbled and fidgeted as they listened to Bash as he told them what would be expected of them, although he explained little else, appearing irritated having to wait for Max to translate.

After twenty minutes he said, "You will leave tomorrow morning and taken to the port of Lubek. From there you will sail to the U.S. to start new lives."

The audience gasped as Max translated and then the General gave them a stark warning,

"Until you land on U.S soil, you are persona non-grata. We want you to help us, but we do not need you, so if have any thoughts about being invaluable...don't. You're all expendable."

The audience became confused, frightened, and sceptical, but they sat and listened whilst Max translated.

While Stefan kept his arm around his wife and son to comfort them, he looked around the room and saw a few of his colleagues. Amongst them were Weirner Von Braun and Wilhelm Jungert, both rocket scientists who had worked on the V2 rocket programme alongside him.

General Brownlow ordered the officers to take care of the details before he stormed out of the room.

Lieutenant Sykes, came over to the family, smiled, and said, "I am your liaison officer and assigned to handle your paperwork. Please follow me."

Sykes accompanied the Schuler's through the various departments. An American army doctor examined the baby, but after finding no sign of asthma, he told them that their infant was a normal, healthy baby. This made Martina and Stefan angry although they said nothing to the American doctor or Sykes.

They spoke to each other in German, "These Americans neither know nor care about the German people. Our son has asthma and they know it," said Martina as she smiled at the doctor.

They knew that they had no other option but to accept the fact they were now of a second-class, hated race.

Other families and single men kept arriving at different times throughout the day.

The men issued old black suits, with grey skirts and white blouses for the women. Shorts, blazers, and blouses for the children.

After being ushered through different departments throughout the day, by mid-afternoon, Lieutenant Sykes, Martina, and Stefan now sat in an office around a small desk.

Sykes took a folder from his leather case with 'Joseph & Jane Wolffe' written on the front. Sykes decided Stefan knew enough English that he did not need a translator. He opened the folder containing papers and documents relating to the couple, telling them, "You will no longer be known as Martina and Stefan Schuler." He slid papers and documents to the couple and said, "You are now Joseph and Jane Wolffe."

The Schuler's looked at their new identity papers. Sykes was about to explain a little about what work Joseph would do in the USA and where they would live; when he looked at the baby.

"Goddamn!" he exclaimed, then read the folder again, and noticed something amiss. He looked at the couple and smiled. "There is nothing in mentioned in here about the baby," he said, feeling stupid over how he could have overlooked this.

Sykes sighed and thought for a moment. He knew with all the turmoil in Germany, paperwork was the last thing on any Germans mind, but the U.S. government had made exceptions for anyone under Operation Paperclip.

"That won't be too much of a problem." he said, "I'll just make him a U.S birth certificate."

Sykes left the office and returned a few minutes later with a blank document. He sat and with his pen in hand asked,

"Okay, "What do you call him?"

The couple had not considered the baby's name with all the chaos going on around them. They looked at each other, then at Sykes.

Stefan shrugged and said, "We haven't yet chosen a name"

After an awkward silence as the three smiled at one another, Stefan broke the silence and asked, "What is your first name, Lieutenant Sykes?"

Lieutenant Sykes, looking confused, said, "George... George Sykes."

Stefan looked at his wife, who nodded.

"George it is then," Stefan said and continued, "George Wolffe."

Lieutenant George Sykes smiled as he wrote the name George Wolffe in the relevant boxes.

Stefan and Martina told him George's date of birth and as they were due to settle in Pennsylvania once in America, he wrote Newtown as the place of birth. After filling in the form, he left the room and went to another office for it to be typed and authorised.

He returned to the room and told them about Stefan's new job and their new home until a woman arrived with a typed and stamped U.S. birth certificate.

"That is all we need to do here." Said Sykes and looking at his watch told them, "I will take you to your sleeping quarters. You need to get some rest, it will be a long day, and you have an early start," said Sykes.

He stood up and shook Stefan's hand, smiled at Martina and said, "Please remember professor, from this point on, you are Joseph and Jane Wolffe." He tickled the sleeping baby's chin, and added,

“And let’s not forget, baby George Wolffe.” He smiled and told them, “Take good care of yourselves and good luck in the U.S.A.”

* * *

George Sykes felt bored. He’d had a tiring day escorting and interviewing people, although he felt good about the new Wolffe family.

‘A little highlight, to make a shitty job and a monotonous day worthwhile,’ he thought while driving his Willy Jeep around the rubble of Berlin’s pot-holed roads. Several streetlights powered by emergency generators illuminated the road. Sykes felt lonely and homesick but did not want to return to the barracks yet, so he stopped at a small café near the Berlin hospital. Seeing lights piercing through the boarded-up building, he thought. ‘I’ll grab a coffee real quick.’ He turned off the engine and went inside the small café.

People were sitting down chatting and drinking. The talking ceased when George entered and an uneasy silence fell upon the café as Sykes walked to a small empty table and took a seat. He appeared to be the focus of attention as the customers glared at him. He tried to catch the waitress’s attention, who he noticed was a little overweight with harsh features.

‘A veritable pig in knickers,’ thought George and chuckled.

Determined to get a cup of coffee, he raised his hand and shouted, “Coffee over here, please.”

The German customers looked on in disgust at this brash Yank. Sykes noticed that most of the customers wore either doctor’s white coats or nurse’s uniforms. Deciding that he’d had enough of rude Germans after his run-in earlier at the hospital with the pushy, but beautiful nurse, and realising a coffee would not be forthcoming, he sighed. He went ignored as the chatter in the café resumed.

‘If my coffee ever arrived, it would taste like bilge water, and one of the Krauts would probably have spat in it,’ thought George, ‘I might as well go back to his barracks to grab a cup of coffee there.’ He got off the chair and walked towards the door.

“Hello Lieutenant,” said a voice behind him.

He swung around to face the nurse from earlier.

“You aren’t leaving already?” she asked and smiled.

“Hello nurse erm ...?” said George, embarrassed.

“Steffi,” she said and pointed to a table in the corner where a balding strange-looking doctor sat. “Please, come join us, lieutenant,” she said.

“Please... Call me George, and no, but thanks. I will call it a night and get a coffee at the barracks,” he said, thinking how amazing this woman looked and smelled as he told her. “Besides, the service here isn’t too great.” He looked over at the waitress leant on the counter.

Steffi barked an order at ‘the veritable pig in knickers’ who rushed behind the counter.

“Your coffee is on its way George.” smiled Steffi. She took hold of George’s hand, led him over to her table, and introduced him to Dr Rudolf Flanman.

* * *

A fleet of black saloon cars with a white star painted on each side pulled up at the dockside. It was mid-afternoon and it had taken almost nine hours to drive the ‘Operation Paperclip’ party 320 kilometres to the port of Lubek. They had spent the previous night sleeping on canvas stretchers, cramped together in a large bomb shelter under the demolished remains of the bombed-out Reichstag building. Scientists, engineering specialists, and their families were woken early morning, before being ushered into the fleet of the commandeered German vehicles.

With American military personnel as their drivers and escorts, they drove through the wreckage and shells of the former buildings of Berlin, before getting onto the open roadways heading west. Although the distance should have taken four to five hours, they had to navigate around bombed unusable roads and the many roadblocks and checkpoints set up by the Allies. The noisy old saloons smelled of exhaust fumes. Jane, Joseph, and baby George sat in the rear of the saloon car, with Jane having to waft fumes away from baby Georges face as the infant wailed constantly.

The driver was a cheerful U.S. G.I army sergeant, and in the front seat was a young G.I captain, whom the Wolfes thought looked far too serious. The sergeant tried to engage in friendly banter with the Wolfe's several times but was chastised by the captain.

Arriving at the port, they stopped alongside a 14,200-ton U.S. liberty cargo ship: the S.S. John H. Brown. This would be the last time many of them would ever see Germany again. The voyage was to take almost a month. General Brownlow was the liaison officer in charge of coordinating the group of men, women, and children. He would accompany them on this leg of their journey, which he was happy to do, as it meant he was going home and getting away from the Berlin stench and the people who he despised.

Sergeant Hickster carried Joseph, Jane, and baby George's luggage as they boarded the cargo ship, along with the rest of the group. As Sergeant Hickster escorted them to their quarters, he whispered in German, "My name is Tomas. What's yours?"

Joseph looked surprised and was about to introduce himself when a loud booming voice echoed behind them.

"Sergeant Hickster, I warned you not to speak to these people."

"Sorry sir," said the sergeant. "I was just..."

"Take the bags into their cabin," barked the young captain, looking enraged.

With the captain waiting outside the cabin, Sergeant Hickster placed the Wolfe's bags beside a set of bunk beds and went up to the deck to chat with one of the ship's crew.

The captain escorted the Wolfe's to an eating area where General Brownlow waited with their instructions for this part of the journey.

He gave strict orders not to have any contact with the crew and be a separate community until they reached the United States. He told them that once in America, they would be transported to their respective areas to begin their new lives, and he warned them, "You are all prohibited from going onto the deck for the entire voyage. You have an area below decks for recreation and exercise with a separate galley and eating area. Anyone who breaks these rules will be shot."

After the briefing, they all silently went to their cabins and unpacked their belongings. Joseph and Jane sat on their hard bunk bed. Jane started to cry, which made George cry. Joseph put his arm around his wife and son, and said, "At least we are safe, we are better off than most of the German people." Jane nodded and sobbed as she cradled George. "Maybe it will be fine at least there was no more war, and apart from that nasty General, the Americans whom we have met so far have not been so bad. Besides, some of our friends are here, so we are not alone," said Joseph and kissed Jane and George.

Jane sighed, nodded, wiped the tears from her eyes, handed George to Joseph, and said, "I will check the kitchen and see if I can find us something to eat."

"It's called a galley on a ship darling," smiled Joseph.

Two hours later, the John H. Brown edged away from the dockside. The cargo of refugees stared out of their portholes as the vessel made its way out of the port. They all had tears in their eyes as they gazed back at their war-ravaged and decimated country that got further away from the ships wake.

* * *

Lieutenant George Sykes, Staff Nurse Steffi Beike, and Dr Rudolph Flanman sat around a small, round, brass-hammered table in a corner of the small café. Steffi apologised to George for her abruptness earlier but explained that they and the Schuler's had become close, so it came as a shock to her and the doctor when George took them away. Both Dr Flanman and Steffi spoke English and probed George for information about the family. They told him how concerned they were about the baby.

George, feeling uncomfortable with the questions, took a drink of coffee. He looked at the pair smiling at him, and said, "I am sorry, but I am not at liberty to divulge any information about the

Schuler's or my work. But don't worry, I guarantee that the family are safe and will be well taken care of."

Steffi smiled and said, "We understand George, let's change the subject. How's the coffee?"

The conversation changed, although Steffi and Rudolph occasionally spoke to each other in German, George felt more at ease. The waitress brought small plates of food to the table, and they ate and chatted for another hour. George could not take his eyes off Steffi. She was a beautiful woman in her mid-twenties. Her wavy blonde hair clipped back into a bundle, which reminded George of Rita Hayworth, the American actress, dancer, and pin-up: every serviceman's dream girl. Except this Rita Hayworth had deep crystal blue eyes, which George gazed into. He had not thought about, much less been, this close to a woman in a very long time.

The doctor smiled as he noticed the young lieutenant's ardour and excused himself, leaving the pair alone.

George told Steffi that before the war, he was a schoolteacher from California. He had served in the US Army for two years, and although a tall muscular man, due to his education, he had served in administrative roles. The couple enjoyed each other's company, and George felt relaxed and secure with Steffi, despite the rocky start, for which she constantly apologised.

Steffi told George that she wanted to be a surgeon and had spent several years at an English university. Her mother was English and her father German, which posed a quandary during the commencement of hostilities. With her family living in Germany, she returned there after completed half of her surgical training because the country needed nurses. They had been talking for some time, so hadn't noticed that the other customers had long since gone from the café. The waitress leant against the counter, staring at the couple. Time seemed to have stood still for George, and he didn't want the night to end, unlike the pig in knickers, who kept coughing and looking at her watch.

Steffi smiled and whispered, "I think she wants us to leave."

George looked at the waitress and asked for the bill.

"That's okay, there's no need to pay here," said Steffi and stood up and held out her hand. "Thank you for a great evening lieutenant. It's a pity it has to end," she said.

George did not quite know what to do with her hand: shake it, kiss it, slap it... what?

He decided to be gallant and kiss it. Steffi chuckled and put her hand over her mouth.

"What did I do wrong, ma'am?" asked George.

"Nothing," said Steffi still giggling, "Nothing at all."

George also started to laugh.

"I was only supposed to shake it, wasn't I?" he said, looking embarrassed, "I was being gallant, like an English knight."

"Thank you Sir George," said Steffi as she curtsied.

"Can I have the pleasure of seeing you again m' lady?" asked George, smiling.

"I would like that very much," replied Steffi as they stared into each other's eyes for a few moments. Steffi said goodbye and started to walk out of the café. She looked back at George, smiled, and said, "I finish work at 4 o'clock. I will meet you here at 5." She never waited for the reply and left the café, closing the door behind her.

* * *

A happy Lieutenant Sykes pulled up to the small café at 4:45 pm the following day. With a spring in his step, he hopped out of his jeep and went in. He had spent the day doing more paperwork that was monotonous and thinking about Steffi.

Steffi was already at a table. George looked at his watch, thinking it had stopped. "Sorry, am I late?" He said tapping his watch.

"You're not late George, I am early, I was missing you," said Steffi and giggled.

A smiling George sat down, and Steffi ordered him a coffee.

“What have you got in your bag?” Steffi asked, noticing that George was carrying a brown paper bag. He pulled out two sets of nylon stockings and two blocks of chocolate and handed them to Steffi.

The waitress brought over his coffee. He brought out a smaller block of chocolate and gave it to her. The veritable pig in knickers looked puzzled. “Danke,” she said and walked away.

“Damn,” George said and then joked, “I thought that would make her smile. Do you think anything would make that woman crack a smile?”

Steffi laughed and said, “Try asking her to marry you. That may work.”

They both broke into childish laughter.

These daily trysts continued over the next few days. Steffi and George met at the same time and place. After eating, Steffi would then take George on a Guided tour around the ruins of Berlin. She showed George where she used to go dancing and her local shops. Although the buildings were now just burnt-out shells, the detail in which Steffi described the city, made it easy for George to imagine what it was like in its former glory. Their meetings were short, as curfew was in place for the Germans. After 10 pm, the only people remaining on the city streets were the military.

George’s feelings for Steffi grew. They had kissed several times, usually a peck on the cheek when he dropped her off at the hospital. She told George she wanted a relationship, which suited George, now besotted with this beautiful and intelligent woman.

Steffi occasionally mentioned the Schuler’s, especially the baby, but George had always reiterated what he had told her at their first meeting about not divulging his work. Steffi explained why the baby was a miracle, telling George that after Martina was sterilized, she fell pregnant.

One afternoon, George met Steffi as usual. She seemed excited about something, asking George to skip his coffee. They got into his jeep and Steffi directed him to a street of derelict buildings. The streets during that time of day were full of workers, military men, and machines clearing away rubble. With loose debris already cleared from that street, apart from a few people squatting in their old wrecked homes, the street was deserted. Steffi told George to stop halfway down the street, and they stopped outside a bombed-out house.

“This was my aunt and uncle’s house,” said Steffi, and the couple went inside.

Steffi led George into the living room and after removing a little rubble left on the floor, she opened a large wooden hatch. George helped her lifting the hatch open to reveal a set of steps. Steffi went down first, flipping a switch on a dark wall mid-way down. There came a slight rumble and whirring sound like a car motor starting. She tried several more times until the generator kicked into life and illuminated the stairwell and a cellar at the bottom.

“My uncle was an engineer. He made this bomb-shelter,” Steffi told George as they walked into a small, well-lit room. George noticed a sofa and a single bed, along with various cupboards containing tins of food and water in the brick cellar. It looked similar to his room at the barracks.

George looked around the room and asked, “What happened to your uncle and aunt? This place appears secure enough.”

“The allies shot them when my uncle tried to surrender,” said Steffi sounding nonchalant. She then walked up to George, threw her arms around him, and kissed him passionately.

They lay on the small bed, embracing and caressing each other. Steffi got off the bed and, with George gazing at her, removed her clothes, revealing her luscious, slender body. She gave George an impish smile while she took off his uniform. The rest of the world would be slow to accept or trust the German people again. However, Lieutenant George Sykes had passed the acceptance stage. Although surrounded by destruction and violence, he had found an inner peace being in love with Steffi. Oblivious to the outside world, they shared themselves.

“I could murder a cup of coffee,” joked George, as they lay entwined in each other.

“Oh, I think you want to go see the waitress at the café. I know you like her; you bring her chocolate.” joked Steffi.

“Yep, you’ve caught me: I love the veritable pig in knickers,” said George, as he gave Steffi another lingering kiss.

George had never considered his future before. It had never been a big issue until now. He was unsure how long he would remain in Germany. He knew Steffi would never leave, as she had already told him that she wanted to help rebuild her tattered nation. Feeling both happy, and melancholy, he said, “I know I have only known you a short while, but I can’t imagine not having you in my life.”

“Are you going to propose George Sykes?” Steffi interrupted, looking enigmatic.

George laughed, and mumbled, “No, I just want a coffee.”

They laughed again and Steffi feigned anger.

“You want the pig in knickers to have your babies, don’t you?” she frowned.

“Caught me again,” teased George.

“Baby George Sykes,” said Steffi and giggled.

“Then there would be two babies George’s walking around,” said George and chuckled.

Steffi furrowed her brow and said, “You never mentioned that you had a child... or that you were married.”

George smiled and told her, “I haven’t got children and I am not married.”

George saw Steffi frown and seeing how confused and upset she appeared, and with no doubt about Steffi’s honesty, told her, “Your friends, the Schuler’s, named their baby son after me.”

Steffi looked taken aback and asked George, “Why would Martina and Stefan Schuler name their baby, George Sykes?”

George chuckled and said, “No, silly. They named their baby, George Wolffe. They only used my first name.”

The couple chatted, laughed, and held each other until they noticed the time was drawing near curfew for Steffi. They slowly dressed and went outside.

As George drove back to the barracks, his thoughts were on his future with Steffi even if it meant him staying in Germany. With a smile a mile wide, he returned to the barracks and lay awake on his bunk. For George, the next day could not come soon enough. He formulated plans that would allow them to be together. He was well aware his senior officers would try to dissuade him from marrying a German, the same way he would have done to any of the soldiers under his command. Nevertheless, he felt ecstatic.

After George dropped Steffi at the hospital, she went to the hospital’s basement and walked along a dark corridor into a small office.

Dr Flanman sat behind a desk reading notes. He looked up, smiled, and asked, “Did you get the information?”

Steffi smiled and nodded.

Doctor Flanman smiled and took out a BUCH MOSE folder from his drawer. Flanman removed a file with a partially filled out form with a photograph attached to the top. The photograph was identical to the one Martina had pinned onto her hospital headboard.

Steffi gave Flanman the vital information she had acquired. The doctor smiled and filled in the missing space on the form.

Name: George Wolffe.

Dr Flanman said, “You have done well. Now that we have this vital piece of information for the Führer, we can get out of here. I am tired of the stench.”

He stood up, removed his clear glass spectacles and false dental crowns to reveal his normal teeth. He took off his shirt and unhooked a padded bodysuit. Going over to a mirror, he yanked off his grey false beard and other prosthetics that had aged him. Rubbing his now bald head, he sat back down and made a phone call while Steffi went to a wardrobe and took out two folded uniforms and two tin helmets with US insignia. She changed into her uniform. Flanman hung up the telephone and

closed the BUCH MOSE folder. He placed it into a brown leather folder with a white star and U.S. Presidential seal stencilled on the front.

Flanman changed into a U.S. Colonels uniform. He went into his top drawer and took out forged military I.D.s for Lt. Col. David Sanders, U.S. Diplomatic attaché, and Lt. Sharon Foreman.

Rudolf Flanman looked at his watch while Steffi went over to a gas stove and boiled the kettle.

They had just finished drinking tea when an American G.I. knocked and entered. Sergeant Hickman clicked his heels together, "Heil Hitler!" he said, saluting them both.

The two returned the hitlergruss and then Flanman asked him, "Everything set?"

"Yes sir. We have a clear passage through to the port. On my way back I briefed the checkpoints that I would be bringing an American VIP through soon," replied Hickman in German.

"Were there any problems?" asked Steffi.

Hickman smirked, "Only an obnoxious American captain, but he has been taken care of," said Hickman, "I apologise for not getting more information on the destination, but the John H. Brown's crew wasn't told."

"You briefed our spy on board to tell us anything that we need to know?" asked Steffi.

"Yes, he will call to inform us of any useful information when they dock in America," said Hickster.

"Okay, let's go meet with our Fühler," said Flanman, standing and putting on his helmet.

They walked outside to the U.S.-marked saloon, passing a pile of stacked rubble by the side of the road. Hickman looked at the pile with disdain.

"A befitting tomb for the arrogant U.S. Army captain," snarled Hickman, AKA, SS-Standartenführer Tomas Schroeder. He, along with SS-Hauptsturmführer, Dr. Josef Mengele – 'The Angel of death,' and Kriminalkommissar, Katrina Frume of the Gestapo, codename: Schwarze Witwe, the black widow, got into the car and drove away.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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