

Godesburg Forschungsinstitut, Bonn, 1935:

Jakob was so absorbed in watching the dolls work, finally work *properly*, that he forgot to stay wary of the older boys. When they pushed into his dormitory room he didn't have time to hide them. He was caught; he had played hooky from morning exercise class to fix his dolls, and wasn't supposed to be here. Even if he dared complain to the *Schulleiter* he would be the one punished for misbehavior. He cowered on his narrow bed as the boys moved in a semicircle around him, wolves ringing a deer. They watched as Jakob's creations, a fashionable man and woman, marched in their pre-designed pattern around the bed. The man's arms swung with mechanical jauntiness. The dolls' painted heads turned to one side, paused, then turned the other way, as though watching scenery far more interesting than the edge of Jakob's mattress.

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"Playing with girl toys, Koppe?" sneered Gunter. Puberty had been as kind to Gunter as it had been cruel to Jakob, and Gunter's size and strength made him the unquestioned leader. The rest of the boys laughed as though Gunter had said something exceptionally clever, their guffaws less like mirth and more like anger forced through a press the shape of a grin. Jakob hugged his knees in terror. He was used to being knocked aside in the hallways or tripped during athletics, but until now he had always been very careful never to be alone with the pack, always cautious that a teacher was within earshot. The reek of malice and sweat filled the tiny room.

The door swung open again. The boys turned almost as one to see *Direktor* Zweig himself standing in the doorframe, clearly displeased. Behind him stood a military man in a uniform Jakob did not recognize. Zweig glowered at the rapidly deflating older boys. "I see that I will have to instruct the matron to pay closer attention during roll call," he snapped. "May I remind you boys that if you do not feel compelled to follow the rules of the *Forschungsinstitut*, you are welcome to return to the state orphanage. No? Then please report to the matron for cleaning detail, or I will find you something less pleasant to do."

Günter and his friends scrambled to get out of the room, banging into the doorframe and one another as they tried to flee without running into either the *Direktor* or the strange man in his impeccably pressed black-and-silver uniform. The man gazed after them mildly. He made a small exclamation as Jakob's dolls collided with his leg. He picked up the male doll for a closer inspection.

"Exquisite workmanship," he said. "But a still a toy."

"With apologies, Herr Oberst, the most interesting feature of these dolls is not their automatic movement, clever though it is." Zweig took a half-step to scoop up the female doll. He flipped the simple dress up over the doll's swiveling head to reveal a small hinged door set in the doll's back. He paused to remove a monocle from his pocket and fix it over his right eye before opening the small door, and holding it up for the Oberst's inspection.

"Herr Oberst, do you see this lozenge, the size of a grain of rice? It is the doll's battery. It is not driven by clockwork, but by extremely compact electrical power. Jakob works frequently in the laboratory. I confess I do not understand the principles of what he is able to produce, but it is far beyond the capabilities of even our senior instructors. It is astonishing, given that the boy's records show him to be primarily of Hungarian ancestry, but--"

The Oberst shifted his weight slightly; Zweig stopped talking as though he had been struck. "I have read your reports quite thoroughly, Herr Direktor. Please have the boy ready to leave for the *Anlage* this afternoon—oh, and kindly destroy your copies of his records."

For the first time since entering the room, the man turned to look at Jakob. His expression was unreadable. Jakob dropped his gaze to the doll that dangled from the Oberst's hand. Its head swiveled, paused, swiveled again, driven by the battery that had so interested the *Direktor*. Jakob wished with all his might that he had spent the morning in athletics.

Fox Chase Supper Club, Philadelphia, 1943:

Nigel Mallory placed his knife and fork precisely at the top of his plate to indicate to the waitstaff that he was finished. "No, George, the food is absolutely wonderful. I'm simply not used to your large American portions. Good God! a steak this size for one man?" He sighed and patted his stomach. "If I clean my plate I'll have no room for port later."

George DeRuyver laughed. "We can't have that. The port here is as good as the food. We'll have it in the private room, though, when our other guest arrives."

"I'm rather surprised he didn't join us. You said Mr. Rawlings is a cattle rancher, did you not? I'd have thought such a man would appreciate a good prime rib of beef."

DeRuyver fell silent as the neatly-clad waiter glided to their table to remove their plates. There was a moment of hesitation as the waiter noted that Mallory's steak was only half-eaten, but years of practice reasserted themselves and the waiter continued to remove dishes as though nothing were amiss. "An aperitif or cigars, gentlemen?"

"Thank you, I've already made arrangements." DeRuyver crumpled his starched linen napkin onto the table. "Nigel, if you'll be so good as to come with me, we have a private sitting room reserved. I've given instructions that our other guest be shown up when he arrives."

"I believe he's already arrived," Mallory observed. At the front of the restaurant, the concierge was admitting a man who stood out like a brass band on a croquet green. At least half a foot taller than the servers who milled around him, he was dressed in a tan frock coat and pants, high leather boots, and a huge, wide-brimmed hat, which he swept from his head as soon as he crossed the threshold into the club proper. Around his neck was a bolo tie fastened with a clasp of bright silver.

DeRuyver caught the concierge's eye and the man was escorted across the club, leaving well-bred murmuring in his wake. He moved with surprising compactness and grace for a man of his size. He extended his hand to DeRuyver. "Been an awful long time, George. It's good to see you," he said. He was remarkably soft-voiced; Mallory had expected the Texas drawl to accompany a voice as harsh and blaring as a foghorn.

DeRuyver shook his hand enthusiastically and turned to Mallory. "Nigel, may I present Frank Rawlings, lately of Presidio. Mr. Rawlings, this is Nigel Mallory, a long-time associate and friend. I'm sure you gentlemen have much in common, but we'd best discuss it in private. If you'll join me for port?"

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The port was indeed good, Mallory thought, although he noticed that Rawlings seemed to drink very little. He did join them in smoking DeRuyver's fine Cuban cigars. They talked lightly about the latest news of the war and of political developments. Mallory knew that DeRuyver was delaying the real meat of the business until the cigars and port were finished, a civilized custom of which he approved, but he was unsure if the big Texan was taking the delay in stride. At last the crystal decanter had been emptied to its dregs. DeRuyver dropped the butt of his Cohiba into the ashtray and pushed it to the edge of his desk. With a slim brass key, he unlocked a drawer at the bottom of his desk and removed the contents, setting them on the leather desk pad in front of him. Mallory

set his empty glass to one side and moved next to DeRuyver. He noted that Rawlings had done the same, although, unfortunately, his glass of port was still a quarter-full and likely to go to waste.

Arrayed on the leather pad was a tattered, leather-bound address book; ADRESSBUCH was stamped on its cover in faded gold script. A manila envelope poked out from between the pages. DeRuyver removed his spectacles from his pocket and placed them on the bridge of his nose before extracting the envelope, then hesitated. "I don't suppose one of you gentlemen carries a letter opener? I can't think where I've left mine."

Mallory reached for the pearl-handled penknife he always carried in his breast pocket, but Rawlings had already produced a simple folding knife with a plain wooden handle. DeRuyver took it with a grateful nod and used it to slit the flap of the envelope. A number of small metal objects, the size of a woman's little finger, spilled from the envelope. They had tiny ornate handles and slender, blunt-edged blades. DeRuyver put the knife down and extracted a photograph from the envelope, then placed it the image on top of the address book for Mallory and Rawlings to examine. He removed his folding glasses and laid them down on photograph, rubbing his eyes. "Please excuse me; it's been a difficult several days and I'm a bit short of sleep," he said. "Take a look and tell me what you think."²

"Looks like a burned-out car," Rawlings said finally. "Heck of a place to leave it."

"Quite so," Mallory said. "I don't see a road or byway behind the car, so what in God's name was it doing in the middle of a forest? And what does it have to do with your German address book? Or with these," he added, picking up one of the strange metal objects. It was silvery and surprisingly well-balanced. He slipped it into his pocket.

"This car, gentlemen, belonged to a German named Franz Mehler. He was a spy for Her Majesty, specifically assigned to investigate and ferret out information on the enemy's scientific investigations. He had been sending us dispatches about some of their less reputable projects—occult research, that sort of thing—but they have branched out into more realistic, and more dangerous, areas of scientific knowledge." He tapped the photograph of the car. "Mehler was driving to a rendezvous in Hanover. We believe, from what reports we have gathered, that his car was destroyed by some kind of explosive device."

"In the middle of a forest?"

"The Black Forest," DeRuyver said. "Hundreds of kilometers to the south-west of Hanover."

"I'm afraid I still don't see the mystery here, George," Mallory said lightly. "You're attempting to learn why he chose to drive all the way to lower Germany?"

"Nigel. The *explosion* happened on the outskirts of Hanover. The car was discovered four hours later in the Black Forest, by chance. There is no possible way Mehler could have driven that distance in so short a time. Especially dead and in the shell of a car hollowed out by an explosion that touched nothing around it."

Mallory picked up the photograph and turned it over. There was nothing written on the back, no answer to DeRuyver's question, as though it had been a logic game in a boy's book of magic tricks.

"So if I understand you aright," Rawlings said slowly, "you're tellin' us that this Mehler's car blew up in Hanover and turned up later a long ways in the middle of a forest, where it had no right to be even if he could of driven it."

"Yes. And we believe that this oddity has something to do with the scientific activity Mehler was investigating." DeRuyver tossed the envelope across the desk. Unlike the photograph, this one did have writing on it, neatly printed in block letters: AKTION ZEITSPRUNG.

Mallory blinked. "Some kind of project... 'springtime' Referring to the season?"

"A leap in time," Rawlings said. "I believe what George here is getting at is that the Jerries are lookin' into quantum mechanics."

"Quantum...mechanics," said Mallory. "I see. Einstein, time and space, that sort of thing?"

Rawlings dipped his head in acknowledgement. "That's right, Mr. Mallory—"

"Please feel free to call me Nigel. I know we English are famous for our formality, sir, but as you and I are working together in this sensitive matter...and as you are also a friend of George's, here, I see no reason to stand on ceremony."

"Especially as Frank would then have to call you Lord Baden-Preswyck," DeRuyver said dryly.

One corner of Rawlings's mouth quirked up in a smile. "And I'd have to be askin' you to call me Don Marques Lucero de Vialpando, on account of my mother's side bein' *vaqueros* of some notable family. But Frank will do just fine."

"You continue to amaze me, Frank," Mallory said. "But, may I hasten to clarify, in a good way. Would you please explain more of what you mean by quantum mechanics, as I would guess from George's expression that if I am in the dark on the subject, he is not far behind me, cursing his torch for having run out of electricity prematurely."

"Although I have read some of the Agency's summaries on the topic by its flickering light. But I agree, it would help all of us if Frank were to explain further."

Rawlings waved his hands awkwardly, as though searching for a way to cut a topic the size of his home state down to fit in small space and time available to the three men. "It's a hard thing to wrap your mind around, you understand, even if you're as smart as a whip like Einstein or Dirac or any o' those gentlemen. For what George here is talkin' about, there are theories about how quantum particles have electro-magnetic fields, and if you affect 'em properly, you can change where that object is in space. Or maybe even in time."

"Good God," said Mallory softly. "Teleportation and time travel."

Rawlings nodded. "I don't suppose I have to explain to y'all how that would affect the war."

"No. No, I don't suppose you do. So we think that the Nazis have perfected teleportation? And that they used it to send Mehler's bombed-out vehicle to the Black Forest? What good are we going to be in this instance?"

"We don't believe they've got it perfected," DeRuyver said. "They seem to be relying on one of their prodigies, in particular. Mehler was taking down information about their scientists. Fortunately for us, we recovered his address book from his apartment as soon as we learned of his death, before the Gestapo was able to trace back to where Mehler lived."

He opened the address book and began to leaf through the pages. Names and numbers scrawled in ink appeared and were buried. He stopped at the tab labeled 'N' and pointed to a name with a series of odd, cypheric symbols scrawled next to it. "Niemann, Jakob," he read. "Scientific prodigy, raised in one of their hothouses, installed in a secret

research facility in North Africa. One of those geniuses who is, fortunately, so far above his comrades in learning that he hasn't managed to teach them what he knows. If we can extract him and bring him back to the Allies, his knowledge can turn the tide of the war."

"And if he doesn't want to come along with us?" Rawlings asked.

Mallory picked up the folding knife from DeRuyver's desk and turned it idly in his fingers. Then in a motion so quick it could hardly be seen, he threw it at his companion. Rawlings had no time to react before the knife hissed past his shoulder and buried itself in the wood paneling of the room. Mallory rose from a crouching position, smiling, and opened his hand to reveal Rawlings's bolo tie and silver clasp. The thrown knife had sliced it neatly through and Mallory had caught it before it struck the floor.

"If you're the brains of this team, Frank, I suppose that leaves me to be the brawn," he said. "One way or another, Niemann will not be helping the enemy."

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Manassour, Algeria, 1943:

Mallory gazed down at the *souk* below their hotel window again and, seeing nothing suspicious, pulled the single curtain shut. He turned to Rawlings, sitting in the room's sole chair, his booted feet propped up on the dangerously wobbly end table. "You've been awfully quiet for most of this trip," Mallory observed. "I hope you're not still angry about the bolo tie."

"What? Naw, I don't mind that. I was looking over this dossier George gave us." He pulled out a paper stamped TOP SECRET in blurred red ink. "Possibility of Interference by Outside Interests—now that gets me right worried."

"Here, let me see," said Mallory. He scanned the list quickly. "Most of these are Nazis...hm...think the list is just a jot out of date, I know quite well that at least two of these chaps are in custody. Agents of the Japanese emperor, not so likely out here. Partisans, yes—well, well. I do believe I know why George gave us this list."

Rawlings looked at the name underlined by Mallory's finger. "'Zhu Li Mei'," he read. "Ain't that a woman's name?"

"My friend, if I had tuppence for every time you give me cause to admire your breadth of knowledge, I would buy myself an earldom. Li Mei is indeed a woman, but do not let that deceive you. Not, you understand, that I would expect a man such as yourself to be lulled into foolishness by the appearance of femininity."

"You sound as though you have some particular knowledge of this Li Mei. Leastways that George expected you to."

Mallory smiled, his eyes far away. "You must understand that, unlike yourself, I am not a man of great learning. Oh, like all nobly born young Englishmen, I had a good education. I understand French perfectly, Greek and Latin somewhat, can do sums and compose poetry if necessary, but my intellectual achievements were never astonishing. My physical abilities, however, were, and I garnered myself modest honors in the field of athletics. But my true interests lay not in organized sports but in the martial arts—the fighting skills perfected and taught in the Far East.

"It was not unusual for a young man of my station to spend time traveling abroad. My parents granted me a modest allowance and their blessings. I made perfunctory stops in the great cities of Europe, those I had not previously visited, and then made my way to China. It was years before I, never much of a study, mastered the language, and many more before I was able to obtain the training I sought. There are many schools of the deadly arts in China, you see, but few that are of any worth, and fewer still that will take those who are not Chinese."

"But you found one that did?" Rawlings asked.

"Indeed I did. It was not the original Shaolin Temple; that place of learning, in its truest form, vanished long ago. But its masters spread across China, to the most remote and hidden locations, so that only truly dedicated students would seek them out. That is where I learned the deadly arts that allowed me to so neatly cut your bolo tie. And it is also where I met Li Mei. As you might have guessed, women were no more welcomed at the traditional schools than *gwailo* were, and so it was not surprising that a determined woman would have been taught by the same master I was."

"So what's she doing here on George's list?"

"Ah. Well, when our training was complete—rather, I should say, complete enough for us to be released into the world without shaming our teacher—we sought rather different paths. I returned home, and enrolled in Her Majesty's service. Li Mei is beholden to no government.

She is a mercenary assassin, selling her deadly services to the highest bidder. I am sure that George would have heard if she had been hired by the Nazis, but it is possible word of this Niemann has leaked out to some other...interested party."

Rawlings looked thoughtful. "So do you think you could handle this lady if she showed up? Or would she be a problem?"

"She might be a problem," Mallory admitted. "She is highly skilled. Not that I have compunctions about killing a woman, if necessary."

Rawlings unfurled from his chair and walked to his plain suitcase. He unlatched the lid and flipped it open, then felt around the bottom. There was a soft click and the hidden half of the suitcase swung open. There, cushioned in folds of cotton, lay two of the biggest revolvers Mallory had ever seen. Their long barrels were offset by their curved handles, inlaid with mother-of-pearl with a great silver star set precisely in the middle of the grip. "That's good to hear," he said. "Neither do I, if it comes to that."

"I admit to a touch of surprise," Mallory said. "The gallantry of Southern gentlemen is legendary even outside of America. I feared you might have hesitation in harming a member of the fair sex."

Rawlings looked steadily at his companion. "If I had to kill Miss Zhu it'd be a right shame, but she wouldn't be the first woman on the business end of Mr. Colt's finest. You know well as I do that she ain't the only woman in this line of work."

"The female is the deadliest of the species," he agreed. "Though our contact tonight, while female, is a nun. I don't believe that we shall need to defend ourselves from her."

"Well, I've known a few nuns I wouldn't want to turn my back on," Rawlings said. "But I warrant you're right. How long till we meet up with this contact?"

"Another hour, when the sun has set a bit. Then it will be cooler, and we will be less conspicuous." Mallory hesitated. "Frank, I don't mean to pry, but I confess I am eaten up with curiosity as to how a Texan gentleman such as yourself came to work for the OSS.."

"Since you were kind enough to tell me a little about your own self, seems like I can't hardly refuse," Rawlings said. He took one of the revolvers and a small cleaning kit from the suitcase and sat heavily down

in the wobbly wooden chair. He broke the chamber of the gun and checked it meticulously as he talked.

"Well. You prob'ly noticed earlier that even though I got a title from a *vaquero* family through my mama, God rest her, my last name is Rawlings. Mama was the oldest daughter in her family and a headstrong little thing. Her parents, my grandparents, had a match all planned out for her. Nice boy from another *vaquero* family on t'other side of the border. Waal, Mama never did take to being told what to do, and she up and ran off with a *gringo* rancher." Rawlings grinned. "Snuck right out of her *quinceañera* in her pretty white dress, grabbed my daddy and dragged him off to the church, paid Father Diego a whole bunch of silver to do the sacrament right then and there. So she was rightly married in the Church and the eyes of God and there wasn't nothing nobody could do about it!

"Her family settled down after a while, but her suitor never did. Luis Aragon y Domingo, hotheaded even by Mexican standards. Took it as a personal insult. But he waited, made all nice, said he understood. Then he waited. My mama and daddy had another baby before me, little girl named Maricela. Pretty as a picture, she was. I came along a few years later. Anyways, when Maricela was just about old enough for her own *quinceañera*, Daddy rode with her to town to buy some ribbons for her dress. I was sick with a fever, so Daddy said he'd ride with her to town and let Mama take care of me."

Rawlings looked down at his lap. Mallory saw that he had snapped the chamber shut and wrapped his huge hand around the grip, one finger over the trigger guard. Rawlings carefully put the gun on the table, out of his immediate reach.

"I remember it clear as if it happened yesterday. Mama was sitting at the piano and I was on the settee, sick as a dog, drinking ice tea and listening to her play. The hired hands came running into the house. One of 'em was all bloody, where he'd been shot in the shoulder, but he rode back anyway with the news. Luis Aragon y Domingo had jumped Daddy and Maricela as they rode out, killed 'em both and rode off laughing. Probably did worse, but I was sick and I didn't understand everything the hired hand was telling Mama. And she just...fell over. Right at the piano, dead with grief."³

Rawlings got up and picked up the second revolver. "So you can imagine by the time I got done in Mexico, bein' an orphan with Luis Aragon y Domingo's blood on my hands and a fugitive from all his surviving male relations, I was looking for a little less conspicuous of a

lifestyle. Now, are we going to this fool church or are we gonna sit and talk old times till the cows come home?"

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Mallory walked quietly through the dusky cool of the small chapel. It was odd, in a way, that there should be a Catholic church in this sprawling, lawless city of sin. On the other hand, he reflected, why not? Sin drew missionaries like honey drew flies, and Manassour was likely not the worst hellhole that had brought a church to its bosom.

He approached the altar and genuflected. It felt odd to a lifelong Anglican such as himself, but Rawlings had been careful to show him the proper etiquette. The church was empty, at any rate, so it was unlikely if he erred that he would be discovered. He dropped a small copper coin into the donations box to pay for a votive candle. A huge candelabra full of them stood at the front of the church, none of its candles less than half-way. Mallory lit the candle and set it on an empty bracket. He sat on the other side of the candelabra and glanced over at his contact, waiting for her to speak.

She looked at him sidelong.⁴ She was ancient, though Mallory guessed not so much as her wrinkled visage suggested; the harsh Algerian sun was not kind to those used to the milder sun of Europe.

He bowed his head, pretending to pray. "Sister Marina," he murmured. "My employers tell me to assure you that the tooth of St. Vasilije has been brought to safety. Now I assume you have information to exchange to me?"

The nun flinched. "I despise this war," she said in heavily accented English. "Yes. I have your information. This Niemann is here, in German hospital. X-ray wing. We go to hospital, pray for sick people when needed. Many come to God when very sick."

"I would imagine so. You are sure of this information?"

"Yes, very—" There was a crack, and the old nun froze. Mallory did not wait to see if the gunshot had killed her before diving beneath the pew and rolling. More shots rang out. Silence. Then heavy footsteps on the wood-plank floor of the church. A voice barked orders in German. He counted: three, possibly four, terrible odds given his tactical disadvantage. He crawled silently under the pews and cursed himself for telling Rawlings to stay out for at least twenty minutes. The Texan might have been in danger as well, but he had those hand cannons he called revolvers. He slipped farther back toward the wall of the church. If he

could stay in the shadows, there was a chance, a very slim chance, that he might break for the door before the Germans could fire at him.

To his right, there was a wet, meaty sound. A man screamed, high and terrified like a rabbit being worried by a dog. "*Gott in Himmel!*" someone cried, and then there was a burst of gunfire. Mallory bobbed up between the pews, his Webley clutched in his right hand, in time to see Li Mei spinning away from her dying foe,⁵ withdrawing her curved sword from his ribcage as the last living soldier in the church turned to flee. Mallory shrugged and re-holstered the Webley. Li Mei opened her hand and her sword, powered by her momentum, buried itself in the fleeing German's neck.

Silent as a cat, she stepped around the pooling blood and withdrew her sword from the corpse. She held its edge up to the light for a moment before turning to Mallory.

"Why did you put your gun away?"

"No sense in wasting the shot," he said. "You would have killed him just as quickly."

"Flatterer," she laughed. She turned the point of the blade so that it was even with Mallory's head. "Are you not afraid that I will turn it against you?"

"I would be a fool not to be," he replied. "But tell me, what are you doing here, and in such a conspicuous dress?"

"All the women dress brightly here, Nigel. A simple veil conceals my features, though there are women of every race in this armpit of a city."

The heavy wooden door to the church creaked open on its uneven hinges. Li Mei turned, her sword balanced between her hands like a bird ready to launch itself into flight. Frank Rawlings had to stoop to fit through the door. Mallory's heart stopped for a moment, afraid that the Texan would be wielding his guns—which would mean Li Mei would cut him down immediately—but in his hand was only the brim of his enormous Stetson. "Afternoon, Ma'am," he said courteously. "I heard some shootin' and thought I'd better head in a bit early, but it looks as though you've got the situation well covered."

"A *gentleman!*" Li Mei said delightedly. "And handsome. Mallory, I forgive you for being a bother."

"I am ever so grateful," Mallory said. "Would you please be so kind as to let us know whether you intend to be a hindrance to our mission? If we need to settle this with a bloodbath, I myself would just as soon finish it now rather than later."

"You won't believe me, silly man, but I am not here for you. I am being by the Nazi party to handle an..internal dispute. I stopped here to gather information about *my* task. If you have one of your silly nationalist missions, I will help you, if it does not take me out of my way."

"Only as far as the hospital. But with these gentlemen dead, I would imagine our mission is not much of a secret. We'd better hurry."

"Indeed," Li Mei said. She slipped her sword into a fold of her brilliantly-colored clothing and retied a veil over her face and hair. Rawlings stood aside and held the door for her to go first. "You see?" she told Mallory, her voice muffled by the veil. "A gentleman! How could I refuse to help?"

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There was something in the air of the hospital that made Mallory edgy. He observed that even Rawlings seemed to be on edge. Getting into the hospital had been no trouble; the German soldiers stationed in this part of the world had gotten weary of their tedious, endless duty shifts, with no enemy worse than a pickpocket in sight. It was simple enough to evade the infrequent guard patrols as they made their way to a deep sub-basement of the hospital, finally reaching the heavy steel doors labeled RÖNTGEN – GEFARENBEREICH - EINLASS VERBOTEN.

"X-rays?" Rawlings whispered. "They kidding?"

"I believe it's just to keep the hospital staff out," Mallory whispered back. "Dangerous radiation scares people away. Ready?"

He pulled the door open slowly, silently, peering through the crack. He paused, then turned back to his companions. "Li Mei, are you quite sure you haven't gone through this area before?"

"What?" she said, annoyed. "Of course not. Why?"

"Because everyone's dead."

They swung the doors open all the way. The research area was the size of an indoor tennis court, broad and high-ceilinged, with a single

heavy door like an airlock at the far end. White-coated corpses littered the room. The three spies moved cautiously around the bodies, listening for guards or indeed anyone living, but there was only silence.

"No blood," Li Mei whispered. "Very strange."

"Look at this," said Mallory. He pointed to the body of a middle-aged man in a white coat and laboratory overalls. Test tubes protruded from the man's back in neat rows. It reminded him of the inside of a radio set.

Rawlings tugged on one of the tubes experimentally. "It feels as though it's...part of his body," he said. He paled suddenly "Nigel—the car. If this man was teleported, the way that Mehler's car was, and there was something already in the way—"

Cold fear washed over Mallory. "Two things can't be in the same place at the same time. It's impossible."

"At the same time, yes. But this is quantum teleportation. Time and space *ain't* all happening the same. If Niemann is moving things around, they could jump, just like Mehler and his car."

There was a low, electrical crackle from the far end of the room. The wall seemed to blur and the room darkened. A teenage boy stood where the door had been. Not a boy—Mallory shook his head, confused—everything was red, and somehow far away at the same time—

The boy turned to look at Li Mei. "*Hallo*," he said uncertainly. The very sound of his words seemed to warp and echo. "*Sprechen sie Deutch?* You are very pretty, Miss. My name is Jakob. What's yours?"

Li Mei sneered. "*Totenfrau*," she said, and drew her sword to throw it at the boy. The world went red and stretched again. Mallory felt the vertigo of an awful feeling of *déjà vu*. Li Mei paused, a look of surprise on her face. Her sword was buried to the hilt in the center of her chest and she collapsed silently.

"No!" Jakob cried. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to—the machine, I can't control it anymore—" He took a step forward as the flow of time and space around him left red afterimages on Mallory's eyes.⁶ "Help me, please, I might be able to undo it—oh, I'm so sorry—" The red flashed gone and he had shifted position somehow. As had Rawlings, and Mallory, and Li Mei's corpse. So had the laboratory equipment. Mallory knew they would have to move very carefully now.

"Son," Rawlings said. His hands rested on his hips, just above the holsters of his Colt revolvers. "We're going to take you out of here, away from these people who've been treatin' you bad. But you know well as I do that we can't move safe with your machine going like that. A man might just find himself with a gut full of bullets for turning the wrong direction. How do we shut it off?"

"*I don't know!*" the boy screamed. "Zeitsprung—everything's forward and back—I tried to turn it off but it's *in me*, I made myself the power! So they couldn't kill me and take it! I can't turn it off!"

Mallory reached into his pocket. He kept his gaze fixed on the patterns of red, counting the fluctuations. Not much different from counting the movements of a *kata* or guessing where the rugby ball was going to be. In between the flashes he scooted forward, avoiding the furnishings, and when the count was right he brought his hand out of his pocket and made a gentle toss.

Mehler's small silver throwing knife floated out of his hand six inches into the warp of the red time-space shift and reappeared in Jakob Niemann's skull, the small ornate knob jutting from his left temporal lobe. The boy gave a small jerk and fell to the floor.

Mallory held his breath and counted, but the red shift did not occur. He got carefully to his feet.

"It's gone," Rawlings said. "I was countin' too, but I was afraid if I reached for my guns I'd have ended up like your lady friend there. Glad you kept your wits about you."

"You've enough wits for both of us," Mallory said. "It was blind luck on my part. Well, that, and of course I was able to recognize Mehler's little throwing knives for what they were. I'd no idea that I might use them in such a fashion, of course."

Rawlings stooped over to close Li Mei's eyes. He straightened up and crossed himself. "Guess them Jerrys will have to settle their infighting another way," he said. "What say you and me look around here, collect up the boy's notes, and then get the hell back to the good old U.S. of A? I reckon we better be out of here before the guards decide to take a peek around."

Mallory nodded "I couldn't agree more," he said. "A shame that we couldn't bring young Jakob back to the Allies. Can you imagine...the knowledge we might be able to use, to end the war..."

"Best that knowledge stays buried," Rawlings said quietly. "Could be of use, but somehow people always manage to put that kind of thing to misuse."

Mallory could not think of anything to say. He stepped over the body of his old friend and went to help Rawlings finish their mission.

¹ cower.jpg

² the first mystery.jpg

³ grief.jpg

⁴ wax.jpg

⁵ blur.jpg

⁶ one step.jpg