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THE NEW YORK TIMES

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The master of
fictional espionage

DEIGHTON

**FUNERAL IN
BERLIN**

SECRET FILE # 3



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LEN DEIGHTON

Len Deighton was born in 1929. He worked as a railway clerk before doing his National Service in the RAF as a photographer attached to the Special Investigation Branch.

After his discharge in 1949, he went to art school – first to the St Martin’s School of Art, and then to the Royal College of Art on a scholarship. His mother was a professional cook and he grew up with an interest in cookery – a subject he was later to make his own in an animated strip for the *Observer* and in two cookery books. He worked for a while as an illustrator in New York and as art director of an advertising agency in London.

Deciding it was time to settle down, Deighton moved to the Dordogne where he started work on his first book, *The Ipcress File*. Published in 1962, the book was an immediate success.

Since then his work has gone from strength to strength, varying from espionage novels to war, general fiction and non-fiction. The BBC made *Bomber* into a day-long radio drama in ‘real time’. Deighton’s history of World War Two, *Blood, Tears and Folly*, was published to wide acclaim – Jack Higgins called it ‘an absolute landmark’.

As Max Hastings observed, Deighton captured a time and a mood – ‘To those of us who were in our twenties in the 1960s, his books seemed the coolest, funkiest, most sophisticated things we’d ever read’ – and his books have now deservedly become classics.

By Len Deighton

Fiction

The Ipcress File

Horse Under Water

Funeral in Berlin

Billion-Dollar Brain

An Expensive Place to Die

Only When I Larf

Bomber

Declarations of War

Close-Up

Spy Story

Yesterday's Spy

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Spy

SS-GB

XPD

Goodbye Mickey Mouse

Mamista

City of Gold

Violent Ward

The Samson Series

Berlin Game

Mexico Set

London Match

Winter: A Berlin Family 1899–1945

Spy Hook

Spy Line

Spy Sinker

Faith

Hope

Charity

Non-fiction

Action Cook Book

Fighter: The True Story of the Battle of Britain

Airshipwreck

Basic French Cooking

Blitzkrieg: From the Rise of Hitler to the Fall of Dunkirk

ABC of French Food

Blood, Tears and Folly

Funeral in Berlin





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Introduction

Standing at the bar of the National Film Theatre there was a plump balding man of about fifty. He was unmistakably German and despite his fluent command of the English language he was having some difficulty with the barman. I went to sort it out and found it was no more than a shortage of change on the till.

The man was Kurt Jung-Alsen and it was a film he had directed – *The Vengeance of Private Pooler* – that was showing that evening as part of a festival of films from communist East Germany. I had no idea of what a warm friendship would develop from this chance meeting and what a tremendous change in my life this mutual trust would bring.

It was rewarding to show Kurt around London because he was so knowledgeable and so appreciative. Like any self-respecting German he was prepared for everything and had a notebook listing the places he must see. The Sunday morning street market in Petticoat Lane was on his list. Today was Sunday and here he was. Guessing that he would arrive on time I had coffee ready. ‘You’d better see this, Herr Jung-Alsen.’ I took him into the sitting room where I had been watching BBC TV carrying the alarming news that the communists were building a Wall right across Berlin.

Kurt went back there, of course. He was certainly no communist but his home and all his possessions were at stake. Kurt was a dedicated Berliner and had a successful pre-war career in theatre production before becoming a film director. The following summer I toured Czechoslovakia in my battered little VW Beetle car. Nearing the Ukraine border I had some difficulties with the local police there because I hadn’t stuck to my prearranged route and itinerary. In fact, I had written ‘camping’ into the blank space on the visa form and then wandered around stopping when and where I chose. From Prague I drove north to Berlin. In those days the Cold War was very chilly. I had been delayed in setting out and it was about 2.00am when I was flagged down by Russian army traffic police because I was on a road that led directly into East Berlin. They had spotted my British licence plate. There were very few Western vehicles coming north from Prague and the Russian military decreed that foreigners like me must approach Berlin only from the west. With a military escort I was taken to the local army barracks and held there. A young Russian officer decided it was an opportunity to try out his English language skills, which were on a par with my command of Russian. It was after an hour or so of limited communication that I remembered that I had an unopened bottle of brandy in my baggage. It was soon opened and eventually the officer was telephoning some unknown person with the news that everything was all right after all. Accompanied by a Russian army jeep I was allowed to proceed up the forbidden road. I arrived at the Adlon Hotel in East Berlin just as they were mopping the lobby of this dilapidated remnant of the old luxury hotel.

It was a dramatic beginning to my stay in East Berlin. Kurt more than returned any favour I had done for him in London. He introduced me to many people and made me feel at home. As I said to him, not once but many times, that of all my friends he was the only one that enjoyed the bourgeois benefits of domestic servants and a valuable art collection. And this was communism? I made a few forays to West Berlin and came back with all manner of desirables for Kurt and his friends. A child’s wheelchair, asparagus and ladies fashion magazines such as *Burda* was one consignment. The wheelchair was a tight fit in my car and I was grilled about it but *Burda* magazine was the only thing

confiscated that time; I suppose the border guards had fashion-conscious wives. But while I was feeling at home in East Berlin I was aware of the fact that I had no friends or acquaintances in West Berlin. On subsequent visits to the city, that gradually changed until I had very good and generous friends in West Berlin, but that initial stay in East Berlin had a lasting effect upon the way I saw it all. And Kurt was kind enough to include me in the listed production staff for a film he made about the Spanish Civil War. This included journeys and long periods in East Germany, and the chance to visit towns such as Leipzig and Weimar; grim and grey under communist rule. In Weimar I was accommodated in the Elephant Hotel, which was a favourite stopover for Adolf Hitler. Kurt told me that the room I was given was the one Hitler always used. The bath was about six feet long; the biggest bath tub I have ever been in. Despite his earnest assurances, I always suspected that Kurt might have been joking. He was a droll fellow and he liked to counter what he said was my English sense of humour with japes of his own.

Berlin was soon a second home to me. I became obsessed by Berlin. I studied its history and collected old photographs of its streets, street life and architecture. I talked to many who had served and many who had suffered under the Third Reich. I still can wander through its streets and alleys and see the past, even when there is little evidence of the past remaining. I learned about its electricity, gas and sewage systems, much of which could not be divided and had to be shared; a fact kept secret by both sides. The whimsical way in which the town was split made it even more bizarre. It was a microcosm of a divided world.

In all my time behind the 'iron curtain' I made no secret of my dislike of the repressive and regimented society that is essential to socialism. I had been advised by a very experienced English newspaperman to air my 'capitalist' beliefs. As far as I could tell, this procedure in no way impeded my life and my researches. I did have the occasional confrontation with cops and bureaucrats but suffered no lasting damage.

My second book – *Horse Under Water* – had sidestepped the Cold War but now I was in the front line. The critics had been kind to my previous books and this encouragement helped me to discover what sort of books I wanted to write. I'd never had any childhood ambitions to be a writer, so I was not tempted to write 'serious literature'. My feelings have never changed. This is not because I think that serious literature is too serious. It's because I think most serious literature is not serious at all.

By some measures, *Funeral in Berlin* was my most successful book. The American edition spent several months on the New York bestseller list. *The New York Times*, *Life* magazine and the news magazine all gave the book a generous reception. To get away from it all, I went for a holiday in Paris and spent my days researching the town's best restaurants. Perhaps I should have gone to New York instead but I had become a professional writer, and I decided that any writer's fatal enemies were alcohol and praise.

LEN DEIGHTON, 2000

ALLEN W. DULLES (then director CIA): 'You, Mr Chairman, may have seen some of my intelligence reports from time to time.'

MR KHRUSHCHEV: 'I believe we get the same reports – and probably from the same people.'

MR DULLES: 'Maybe we should pool our efforts.'

MR KHRUSHCHEV: 'Yes. We should buy our intelligence data together and save money. We'd have to pay the people only once.'

News Item, September 1959

'But what good came of it at last?'

Quoth little Peterkin,

'Why, that I cannot tell,' said he: –

'But 'twas a famous victory.'

SOUTHEY, After Blenheim

'If I am right the Germans will say I was a German and the French will say I was a Jew; if I am wrong the Germans will say I was a Jew and the French will say I was a German.'

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Most of the people who engaged in this unsavoury work had very little interest in the cause which they were paid to promote. They did not take their parts too seriously, and one or the other would occasionally go over to the opposite side, for espionage is an international and artistic profession, in which opinions matter less than the art of perfidy.

DR R. LEWINSOHN,
The Career of Sir Basil Zaharoff

Funeral in Berlin

Secret File No. 3

Players move alternately –
only one at a time.

Saturday, October 5th

It was one of those artificially hot days that they used to call ‘Indian summer’. It was no time to be paying a call to Bina Gardens, in south-west London, if there was a time for it.

Outside the house I sought there was a bright card tied to the railings with green twine. On it a large exact capitals was penned ‘Lost – Siamese cat. Answers to the name Confucius.’

Answers what? I walked up the steps where the sun was warming up a pint of Jersey and a banana flavour yoghurt. Tucked behind the bottles a *Daily Mail* peeped its headline ‘Berlin a new crisis’. There were buttons on that door-post like on a pearly king’s hat but only one said ‘Robin J. Hallam FRSA’ in a flowing copper-plate; that was the one I pressed.

‘You haven’t seen Confucius?’

‘No,’ I said.

‘I only missed him last night.’

‘Really,’ I said, feigning warm interest.

‘The bedroom window doesn’t close properly,’ said Hallam. He was a gaunt-faced man of about forty-five well preserved years. His dark-grey flannel suit was baggy and in the lapel of it he wore three neat discs of egg yolk, like the Legion of Honour.

‘You will be one of Dawlish’s little men,’ he said.

He exposed a white palm and I walked into the cool stone hall while he closed the daylight out.

He said, ‘Could you let me have a shilling – the gas will go any moment.’

I gave him one and he galloped away with it.

Hallam’s room was tidy the way a cramped room has to be. He had a desk that was a sink and a cupboard that was a bed and under my feet a battered kettle on a gas ring was sending Indian signals to the bookcase. Flies were whining in great bed-spring spirals of sound, then going to the window to beat on it with their feet. Through the window there was a large section of grey brick wall; on it there were two perfect rectangles of white sunlight reflected from some high sunny place. I moved through Bartok LPs and sank into a mutilated chair. Hallam turned on the tap in the disguised sink and there was a chugging sound like a bronchial road-drill. He rinsed the cups and wiped them on a tea-cloth that depicted the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace in primary colours. There was a clink as he set the cups into their ordained saucers.

‘Don’t tell me. You’ve come about the Semitsa business’, he said to the gas meter as he poured boiling water on to the Darjeeling. ‘You like Darjeeling?’

‘Darjeeling’s OK,’ I said. ‘What I’m not so keen about is you batting that name about like that. Have you ever heard of the Official Secrets Act?’

‘My dear boy, I am trussed up with the OS Act twice a year like a very old and intractable turkey. He put half a dozen wrapped sugar pieces on the table and said, ‘You won’t take milk in Darjeeling’: wasn’t a question. He sipped his unsweetened tea from an antique Meissen cup; around mine it sa

‘British Railways SR’ in brown grot letters.

‘So you are the man who is going to make Semitsa defect from the Moscow Academy of Science and come to work in the west; no, don’t tell me.’ He waved down my protest with a limp palm. ‘I’ll tell you. In the last decade not one Soviet scientist has defected westward. Did you ever ask yourself why?’ I unwrapped one of the sugar pieces; the paper had ‘Lyons Corner House’ printed on it in small blue letters.

‘This fellow Semitsa. A member of the Academy. Not a party member because he doesn’t *need* to be; Academy boys are the top dogs – the new elite. He probably gets about six thousand roubles a month. Tax paid. On top of that he can keep any money he gets for lecturing, writing or being on TV. The lab restaurants are fabulous – *fabulous*. He has a town house and a country cottage. He has a new Zil every year and when he feels in the mood there is a special holiday resort on the Black Sea which only the Academy people use. If he dies his wife gets a gigantic pension and his children get special educational opportunities in any case. He works in the Genetics of Molecular Biology department where they use refrigerated ultra centrifuges.’ Hallam waved his sugar cube at me.

‘They are one of the basic tools of modern biology and they cost around ten thousand pounds each. He waited while that sank in.

‘Semitsa has twelve of them. Electron microscopes cost around fourteen thousand pounds each, he ..’

‘OK,’ I said. ‘What are you trying to do, recruit me?’

‘I’m trying to let you see this situation from Semitsa’s point of view,’ said Hallam. ‘His biggest problems at this moment are likely to be whether to give his son a Zaporozhets or a Moskvich motor car for a twenty-first birthday present, and deciding which of his servants is stealing his Scotch whisky.’

Hallam unwrapped the sugar cube and ate it with a loud crunching noise.

‘What are you offering him? Have you seen those semi-detached houses they are putting the Porto people into? And as for the labs, they are little more than hardboard shacks. He’ll think it’s the prison camp and keep asking when he gets released,’ Hallam tittered.

‘OK,’ I said. ‘That’s enough dialectical materialism for one cup of Darjeeling. Just tell me if your people at the Home Office will do your bit if we deliver him to you.’

Hallam tittered again and extended a finger like he was tapping me on the nose.

‘You get him first, that’s all I’m saying. We’d love to have him. He’s the best enzyme man in the world today, but you just get him first.’

He popped another piece of sugar in his mouth and said, ‘We’d just love him, *love* him.’

One of the flies was beating on the window trying to escape; the sound of its buzzing wings rose to a loud frantic hammering. The tiny body smashing itself against the glass made faint clicks. As the energy oozed out of it, it sank down the glass, kicking and fluttering in fury at the force that had solidified the very air. Hallam poured more tea and dug around inside one of his little cupboards. He moved a packet of Omo and a wad of travel agents’ literature. The top leaflet showed people waving out of a bus which was parked in the Alhambra and said ‘Suntraps of Spain’ in blobby lettering. Across the side of the bus it said, ‘For as little as 31 guineas.’ He found a brightly coloured packet and gave a little yap of triumph.

‘Custard creams,’ he said.

He arranged two of them on an oval dish. 'I don't eat breakfast on Saturdays. Sometimes I go down the El Mokka for a sausage-and-chip lunch but quite often I manage with a biscuit.'

'Thanks,' I said. I took one.

'You can't trust the waiter there, though,' said Hallam.

'In what way?' I asked.

'They pad the bills,' said Hallam. 'Last week I found a shilling for bread and butter slipped in.' He picked up the final few biscuit crumbs with a moistened finger-tip.

Outside in the hall I could hear a woman's voice saying, 'If I've told you once I've told you a thousand times – no bicycles.'

I couldn't hear the man's voice properly but the woman's voice said, 'Outside – that's what we pay road taxes for.'

Hallam said, '*I never* have bread and butter.'

I sipped my tea and nodded while Hallam opened the window for the fly.

Hallam said, 'And what's more he knows it.' Hallam gave a little laugh at the irony of life with an emphasis on the frailty of human nature.

'He knows it,' said Hallam again. Suddenly he said to me, 'You aren't sitting on my Bartoks by any chance?'

Hallam counted his records in case I had hidden a couple in my raincoat. He collected the cups and saucers and stacked them near the sink ready for washing.

He plucked back his sleeve to commune with a large wristwatch. He looked at it for a second or so before he carefully undid the grimy leather strap. The glass was scratched with a thousand tiny scratches and one or two deep ones. The green hands had come to rest at 9.15. Hallam held the watch to his ear.

'It's 11.20,' I told him.

He shushed me and his eyes rolled gently to demonstrate the expertise with which he was listening to the silent mechanism.

I could take a hint. Hallam had the door open before I had even said, 'Well I must . . .'

He walked behind me through the hall to make sure that I didn't steal the lino. A fanlight over the entrance let a William Morris design in coloured sunlight fall across the stone floor. Fixed against one wall was a pay telephone with notices and old undelivered mail marked 'Inland Revenue' tucked behind the telephone directories. One notice said 'Miss Mortimer is away in Spain on business.' It was written in lipstick on the back of a used envelope.

At waist level the old brown wallpaper had suffered a series of horizontal white gashes. From the floor under them Hallam picked up a tin that had the words 'Acme Puncture Outfit' enmeshed in a design of scrolls, daisies and bicycle wheels. He made a clicking noise with his tongue and put the tin on top of the A-D telephone directory.

Hallam gripped the huge street door with two hands. Another notice on it said 'Slamming this door at night disturbs early risers.' The *Daily Mail* and the yoghurt were still in the same position and from farther down the street I could hear the clink of milk bottles.

Hallam offered me a hand like a dead animal. 'Best enzyme man,' he said.

I nodded. 'In the world,' I said, and eased sideways through the partly open door.

‘Give him this,’ said Hallam. He pushed a wrapped cube of Lyons sugar into my hand.

‘Semitsa?’ I said very quietly.

‘The milkman’s horse, you silly. There. Friendly creature. And if you do see Confucius . . .’

‘OK,’ I said. I walked down the steps into the hot dusty sunlight.

‘My goodness. I haven’t paid you back for the gasmeter shilling,’ said Hallam. It was a simple statement of fact; he wasn’t turning his pockets out.

‘Donate it to the RSPCA,’ I called. Hallam nodded. I looked around but there was no sign of Confucius anywhere.

¹ Over £2,000.

Robin James Hallam

Saturday, October 5th

After his visitor had left Hallam looked in the mirror again. He was trying to guess his age.

‘Forty-two,’ he said to himself.

His hair was all there, that was one good thing. A man with plenty of hair looked young. It would need a little colouring of course but then colouring his hair was something he had thought of doing for years before he had this problem of finding a new job. ‘Brown,’ he thought, ‘a mousy brown.’ So that it wouldn’t be too obvious; no point in going in for one of those really bright colours because it would be spotted as phoney in two minutes. He turned his head and tried to see how much of his profile he could see in reflection. He had a lean, very aristocratic Anglo-Saxon face. The nose had sharp ridges and the cheekbones were tight under his skin. A thoroughbred. He often thought of himself as a racehorse. It was a pleasant thought and one that was easily associated with acres of green grass, horse shows, grouse-shooting, hunt balls, elegant men and bejewelled women. He liked to think of himself in that context even though his function as a thoroughbred was nearer the seat of Government. He liked that; the seat of Government. Hallam laughed at his reflection and his reflection laughed back at him in a friendly, dignified, handsome way. He decided to tell someone at the office but it was difficult to decide which one of them would appreciate the joke – so many of them were dullards.

Hallam walked back to the gramophone. He stroked the shiny immaculate veneer top and took pleasure in the silent way it opened; well-made – British made. He selected a record from his large collection. They were all there, all the finest composers of the twentieth century. Berg, Stravinsky, Ives. He selected a recording of a work of Schönberg. The shiny black disc was impeccable. It was as hygienic and dustfree as as as . . . why wasn’t there anything as clean as his records? He put it on the gramophone and applied the pick-up head to the merest brim of the record. He did this skilfully. There was a faint hissing noise, then the room was suddenly full of rich sounds: ‘Variations for wind band.’ He liked it. He sat well back in his chair, fidgeting his back to find the exact position of maximum comfort like a cat. ‘Like a cat,’ he thought and he was pleased with that thought. He listened to the plaited threads of the instrumental sounds and decided that when the music stopped he would have a cigarette. ‘After both sides,’ he thought: ‘after I’ve played both sides I will have a cigarette.’ He rested back in the chair again, pleased with the self-imposed discipline.

He thought of himself as a monk-like person. Once, in the toilet at the office, he had heard one of the junior clerks refer to him as an ‘old hermit’. He had liked that. He looked around at his cell-like room. Every item there had been carefully chosen. He was a man who understood quality in the old-fashioned sense of the word. How he despised those people who have a fancy modern oven and the only heat frozen supermarket food in it. All he had was a gas ring but it was what you cooked on it that counted. Fresh country eggs and bacon, there was nothing in the world to beat that. Cooked carefully, cooked in butter even though he wasn’t a man given to extravagance. Few women understood how to cook eggs and bacon. Or anything else. He remembered a housekeeper he had had at one time, she always broke the yolks of the eggs and had tiny black burnt specks on the whites. She didn’t clean the pan properly. It was as simple as that. She didn’t clean the pan properly. The times he had told her. He walked across to the washbasin and looked in the mirror. ‘Mrs Henderson,’ he mouthed the word

‘you simply must clean the pan with paper – not with water – thoroughly before you fry eggs and bacon.’ He gave a pleasant smile. It wasn’t a nervous smile, on the other hand it wasn’t the sort of smile that encouraged argument. It was in fact exactly the right sort of smile for this situation. He rather prided himself on his ability to provide the right sort of smile for every occasion.

The music was still playing but he decided to have a cigarette anyway, he certainly wasn’t going to become a slave to his own machine. What he decided to do was to compromise. He could have had a cigarette but it would be one of the Bachelor brand – the cheap ones that he kept in the large cigarette box for visitors. He rather prided himself on his ability to compromise. He went across to the cigarette box. There were four in there. He decided not to take one of those. Four was about right. Yes. He got the Player’s No. 3 from a box of twenty that he kept in the cutlery drawer. ‘Thirty-nine,’ he thought suddenly. ‘That’s what I shall give as my age.’

The sound ended abruptly. Hallam took the record and washed it and dressed it and put it to bed with tender devotion. He remembered the girl who had given him the record. That red-haired girl he met at the awful Saddle Room. A pleasant girl in a way. American, volatile, rather incoherent in her speech mannerisms, but then Hallam supposed that there were no proper schooling facilities in America. He felt sorry for the girl. No he didn’t. He didn’t feel sorry for any girls, they were all so carnivorous. What’s more some of them were none too clean. He thought about this man that Dawlish had just sent along to see him; he wouldn’t be at all surprised if he had been to school in America. Hallam picked up the Siamese cat.

‘Where is your little sister?’ he asked her. If only they could talk. They were more intelligent than many humans. The cat stretched its legs and the long claws sank into the shoulder of Hallam’s suit and dragged at it with a tearing sound.

‘Secret Service man?’ thought Hallam. He laughed out loud and the cat looked up in surprise.

‘Upstart,’ said Hallam.

He put a finger against the cat’s ear. The cat purred. An upstart from Burnley – a supercilious, anti-public-school technician who thought he was an administrator.

‘We must do our duty,’ said Hallam quietly to himself. It was the duty of men in Government; they mustn’t be too influenced by the personalities of Government servants. He preferred to think of the Secret Service man as a Government servant rather like the man with the wart who did the savings bank accounts at the Post Office. He said ‘Government servant’ aloud and thought of all the ways he could work the phrase into the next conversation he had with that man.

Hallam put the Player’s No. 3 into his real ebony cigarette holder. He lit it while watching himself in the mirror. He parted his hair a little more towards the centre. He might as well lunch at the coffee bar. They did a very fine egg and chips there. The waiter was Italian and Hallam always ordered the Italian. Not very trustworthy the Italians, Hallam decided, it’s all a matter of breeding. He sorted out his change and put ninepence in his ticket pocket for a tip. He gave a final look round before leaving. Fang was asleep. The ashtray that his visitor had used was brimming with cigarette ends. Foreign, coarse, cheap, inferior cigarettes.

Hallam picked up the ashtray with a shudder and tipped the contents into the little bin where the tea-leaves went. He felt in many ways the type of cigarette that man smoked typified him. So did the man’s clothes, they were mass-produced, off-the-peg clothes. Hallam decided he did not like the man that Dawlish had sent to see him. He didn’t like him at all.

Where pieces are used to protect other pieces,
there will be high casualty rate. Better by far
to assign only pawns to supporting roles.

Saturday, October 5th

‘Best enzyme man in the world,’ I said.

I heard Dawlish cough.

‘Best what?’ he said.

‘Enzyme man,’ I said, ‘and Hallam would just *love* him.’

‘Good,’ said Dawlish. I flipped the switch of my squawk box and turned back to the documents on my desk.

‘Edmond Dorf,’ I read.

I riffed through the battered British passport.

‘You are always saying that foreign names are more convincingly English,’ said my secretary.

‘But not Dorf,’ I said, ‘especially not *Edmond* Dorf. I don’t *feel* like an Edmond Dorf.’

‘Now don’t go metaphysical on me,’ said Jean, ‘Whom do you feel like?’

I liked that ‘whom’ – you’ve got to pay real money these days to get a secretary that could say that.

‘Eh?’ I said.

‘What sort of name do you feel like?’ said Jean very slowly and patiently. It was a danger signal.

‘Flint McCrae,’ I said.

‘Act your age,’ said Jean and she picked up the Semitsa file and walked towards the door.

‘I’m not being horrible Edmond Dorf,’ I said a little louder.

‘You don’t have to shout,’ said Jean, ‘and I’m afraid the travel vouchers and tickets are ordered. Berlin has been told to expect Edmond Dorf. If you want it changed now you must do it yourself unless I leave the Semitsa work.’

Jean was my secretary, really it was her job to do as I told her.

‘OK,’ I said.

She said, ‘Let me be the first to congratulate you on a wise decision, Mr Dorf,’ and left the room quickly.

Dawlish was my boss. He was around fifty, slim and meticulous like a well-bred boa-constrictor. He moved with languid English grace across the room from his desk and stood staring out into the jungle of Charlotte Street.

‘They thought one wasn’t serious at first,’ he said to the window.

‘Uh huh,’ I said; I didn’t want to appear too interested.

‘They thought I was joking – even the wife thought I wouldn’t go through with it.’ He turned away from the window and fixed me with a mocking gaze. ‘But now I’ve done it and I don’t intend to kick them off.’

‘Is that what they want you to do?’ I said. I wished I had been listening more closely.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘and I’m not going to do it.’ He walked across to me in the big leather armchair like Perry Mason appealing to the jury. ‘I like weeds. It’s as simple as that. Some people like one sort of plants and some people like others. I like weeds.’

‘They are easy to cultivate,’ I said.

‘Not really,’ said Dawlish sharply. ‘The most powerful ones tend to strangle the others. I’ve got hedge parsley, comfrey, meadow cranes-bill, primroses . . . it’s just like a country lane, not a damned by-pass. One has wild birds and butterflies. It’s something to walk in; not one of these things with flower-beds, laid out like a cemetery.’

‘I agree,’ I said. I agreed.

Dawlish sat down at his antique desk and arranged some typewritten sheets with file cards that his secretary had brought from the IBM machine. He aligned all the paperwork in geometrical patterns with his pencils and stapling machine and then began to polish his spectacles.

‘And thistles,’ said Dawlish.

‘Pardon?’ I said.

‘I’ve got a lot of thistles,’ said Dawlish, ‘because they attract butterflies. Later we’ll have tortoiseshells, red admirals, yellow brimstones, perhaps even commas. Fabulous. The weed-killers are destroying life in the country – it’s a disgrace.’ He picked up one of the folders and began to read it. He nodded once or twice and then put it down.

‘I rely on you to be discreet,’ he said.

‘That sounds like a change of policy,’ I said. Dawlish sprinkled a cold smile over me. He wore the sort of spectacles that customs men tap for hollow noises. He rested them on his large ears and then tucked a handkerchief as big as a bedsheet into his cuff. It was a signal that we were what Dawlish called ‘on parade’.

Dawlish said, ‘Johnnie Vulkan’. Then he rubbed the palms of his hands together.

I knew the sort of thing Dawlish was going to complain about now. We had other people in Berlin, of course, but Vulkan was the one we always used; he was efficient, understood what we needed, he knew the Berlin layout and, most important, he was noisy enough to draw attention away from our residential boys whom we preferred to let lie fallow as long as possible.

Dawlish was saying ‘. . . can’t expect any of our people to be saints . . .’ I remembered Vulkan. He could deliver a bomb or a baby and smile as he did it.

‘. . . no orthodox way of collecting information and there never can be . . .’ Vulkan may have had a mixed political background but he knew Berlin. He knew every cellar, bandstand, bank account, brothel and abortionist from Potsdam to Pankow. Dawlish sniffed loudly and rubbed his hands again.

‘Even earning additional payments need not be out of the question but unless he gives us full details of these associations he will no longer enjoy the protection of this department.’

‘Protection,’ I said. ‘What sort of protection have we ever offered him? The only protection he ever had from us was old-fashioned money. People like Vulkan are in danger – physical danger – every moment of every day. The only weapon they have is money. If Vulkan is always asking for more, it’s worth considering the motives.’

‘Men like Vulkan don’t have motives,’ said Dawlish. ‘Don’t misunderstand me. Vulkan is working for us – however remotely – and one will work like the very deuce to see that he is looked after, but

don't move this discussion into the sublime world of philosophy. Our friend Vulkan changes his motive every time he comes through that East Berlin checkpoint. When men become double agents it's just a matter of time before they lose their grip on reality. They begin to drown in a sea of confusion. Any piece of information they can snatch at will keep them afloat and alive for a few more hours.'

'You want to write Vulkan off?'

'Not at all,' said Dawlish, 'but one does want to keep him in a cul-de-sac. A fellow working again for us can be very useful if we have him in a nice sterile test-tube.'

'You are being a bit complacent,' I said. Dawlish raised an eyebrow.

'Vulkan is good,' I said. 'Look at his record. 1948: his blockade prediction was with the intelligence department eleven weeks before FOIU¹ and fifteen weeks before Ross had heard anything. He can't tell us that if you are selecting his drinking companions.'

'Wait now . . . ' said Dawlish.

'Let me finish, sir,' I insisted. 'The point I'm making is, that the moment Vulkan feels we are putting him on ice he'll shop around for another job. Ross at the War Office or O'Brien at the FO will whip him into the Olympia Stadion² and that's the last we will see of him. Certainly they will all turn up to support and agree with you at the Combined Intelligence Meetings but they'll go behind your back and employ him.'

Dawlish touched his finger-tips together and looked at me sardonically.

'You think I am too old for this job, don't you?'

I said nothing.

'If we decide not to continue with Vulkan's contract there is no question of leaving him available for the highest bidder.'

I didn't think old Dawlish could make me shiver.

¹ Foreign Office Intelligence Unit.

² West Berlin HQ. MI6 use the offices.

The Berlin Defence is a classic defence
by means of counter-attack.

Sunday, October 6th

The parade ground of Europe has always been that vast area of scrub and lonely villages that stretch eastward from the Elbe – some say as far as the Urals. But halfway between the Elbe and the Oder, sitting at attention upon Brandenburg, is Prussia's major town – Berlin.

From two thousand feet the Soviet Army War Memorial in Treptower Park is the first thing you notice. It's in the Russian sector. In a space like a dozen football pitches a cast of a Red Army soldier makes the Statue of Liberty look like it's standing in a hole. Over Marx-Engels Platz the plane banks steeply south towards Tempelhof and the thin veins of water shone in the bright sunshine. The Spree flows through Berlin as a spilt pail of water flows through a building site. The river and its canals are lean and hungry and they slink furtively under roads that do not acknowledge them by even the smallest hump. Nowhere does a grand bridge and a wide flow of water divide the city into two halves. Instead it is bricked-up buildings and sections of breeze block that bisect the city, ending suddenly and unpredictably like the lava flow of a cold-water Pompeii.

Johnnie Vulkan brought a friend and a black Cadillac to meet me at Tempelhof.

'Major Bailis, US Army,' said Johnnie. I shook hands with a tall leathery American who was buttoned deep into a white Aquascutum trench coat. He offered me a cigar while the baggage was being checked.

'It's good to have you with us,' said the major and Johnnie said the same.

'Thanks,' I said. 'This is a town where one needs friends.'

'We've put you into the Frühling,' the major said. 'It's small, comfortable, unobtrusive and very very Berlin.'

'Fine,' I said; it sounded OK.

Johnnie moved quickly through the traffic in the sleek Cadillac. Cutting across the city from west to east is a ten-lane highway that successive generations have named 'Unter den Linden' and 'Strasse des 17. Juni' and once was a gigantic path leading through the Brandenburger Tor to the royal palace.

'We just call it Big Street,' said the American as Johnnie moved into the fast lane. In the distance the statue on the Tor glinted gold in the afternoon sun, beyond it in the Soviet sector a flat concrete plain named Marx-Engels Platz stood where communist demolition teams had razed the Schloss Hohenzollern.

We turned towards the Hilton.

Just a little way down the street beyond the shell of the Gedächtniskirche with its slick modern tower – like a tricky sort of hi-fi speaker cabinet – apeing the old broken one is Kranzlers, a café that spreads itself across the Kurfürstendamm pavement. We ordered coffee and the US army major sat on the far side of the table and spent ten minutes tying the laces of his shoes. Across in the 'Quick Café' two girls with silver hair were eating Bockwurst.

I looked at Johnnie Vulkan. Growing older seemed to agree with him. He didn't look a day over

forty, his hair was like a tailored Brillo pad and his face tanned. He wore a well-cut Berlin suit (English pinhead worsted). He leaned back in his chair and pointed a finger lazily towards me. His hair was so sunburned that his nails seemed pale pink. He said, 'Before we start, let's get one thing clear. No one here needs help; you are superfluous to requirements as far as I am concerned. Just remember that; stay out of the way and everything will be OK. Get in the way and . . .' He shrugged his shoulders. 'This is a dangerous town.' He kept his hand pointing into my face and gave a flash of a smile.

I looked at him for a moment. I looked at his smile and at his hand.

'Next time you point a finger at someone, Johnnie,' I said, 'remember that three of your fingers are pointing back at you.' He lowered his hand as though it had become heavy.

'Stok is our contact,' he said quietly.

I was surprised. Stok was a Red Army colonel in State Security.¹

'It's official then?' I asked. 'An official exchange.'

Vulkan chuckled and glanced at the major.

'It's more what you might call extra-curricular. Official but extra-curricular,' he said again, loud enough for the American to hear. The American laughed and went back to his shoelace.

'The way we hear it, there is a lot of extra-curricular activity here in Berlin.'

'Dawlish been complaining?' Vulkan asked, captiously.

'Hinting.'

'Well, you tell him I'll have to have more than my present lousy two thousand a month if it's exclusive service he's after.'

'You tell him,' I said. 'He's on the phone.'

'Look,' said Vulkan, his solid gold wristwatch peeping out from the pristine cuff. 'Dawlish has no idea of the situation here. My contact with Stok is . . .' Vulkan made a movement with his cupped hand to indicate a superlative.

'Stok is one thousand times brighter than Dawlish and he runs *his* show from on the spot, not from an office desk hundreds of miles away. If I can bring Semitsa over the wire it will be because I personally know some important people in this town. People I can rely on and who can rely on me. All Dawlish has to do is collect the kudos and leave me alone.'

'What I think Dawlish needs to know,' I said, 'is what Colonel Stok will require in return if he delivers Semitsa – what you call – over the wire.'

'Almost certainly cash.'

'I had a premonition it would be.'

'Wait a minute, wait a minute,' said Vulkan, loud enough to bring the American out of his reverie. 'Major Bailis is the official US Army observer for this transaction. I don't have to put up with dirty talk like that.'

The American took off his sun-glasses and said, 'Yes, siree. That's the size of it.' Then he put his glasses back on again.

I said, 'Just to make quite sure that you don't promise anything we wouldn't like: make sure I'm there at your next meeting with comrade Colonel Stok, eh?'

'Difficult,' said Johnnie.

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