

You Must Remember This



By

Freddie Clegg

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Prologue

Do you ever wonder, as you sit and watch a movie, about what happened to those characters on the screen before the story you are watching starts? Or what was going on elsewhere as the movie tells its tale? Or about how their lives pan out after the movie ends and you have left the cinema and made your way home? (All right, maybe I've just been to see some dull movies lately.)

This tale features some of those characters, immortalised on film by Bogart, Bergman, Dooley Wilson, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains and Tim Moxon.

There's a couple of people from the real world in here too but of course this story is as fictional for them as it is for the characters that we've known from favourite movies.

As for our hero, the story picks up not long after the conclusion of "The Golden Age". Avid fans of Freddie's Tales will recall that "The Golden Age" ended with Freddie in Florida and some thoughts about what happened to Freddie next. In fact, as is often the case with information about Freddie Clegg, this turns out not to have been entirely accurate.

The suggestion that he had been involved with the Special Operations Executive now appears to be wrong. Although Freddie did get involved in secret operations in Europe it wasn't quite as it originally appeared. Nor did Sandy flee France in the face of the German advance as had been previously thought. She stayed and made her own special contribution to the war effort as you'll learn.

I'll leave you to work out who should be playing Freddie, Elly, Sandy and the others when they come to make the movie of "You Must Remember This".

As for the rest of it, Robert Harris isn't the only one with insights as to what was going on at Bletchley Park in the 1940's.

Bar Talk : Paris, June 1940

June 13th, 1940. Barely three weeks after the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk was completed, German forces were pressing closely on the outskirts of Paris.

In the cellar of a small café in Montmartre, one Englishman was hard at work.

Freddie Clegg tightened the rope that held Mademoiselle Louise Barchant to the solid wooden chair on which she was seated. He ignored the gagged groans of Louise and those of her friend Annette Coursonne as she struggled against her own restraints. Clegg fussed at each knot, checking the tension of the rope, the lay of the cords, the way in which the ropes wound securely around the limbs of his victim and the rungs and struts of the chair. It was, Clegg, concluded, still the part of his work that he most enjoyed; the simple craft of restraining a captive so that she is held securely, unable to escape, and yet with no more discomfort than was absolutely desirable. It made a pleasant change in some ways, Clegg thought, He'd been disappointed to have to break up the old organisation but, with the war, it was all getting too big and too complicated. There were some benefits, however, he reflected. It meant he could go back to this; doing what he was good at, what he enjoyed.

Louise gave a frustrated groan of impotence as her struggles failed to make any impression on her captivity, her evident anger and frustration stifled by the cloth that filled her mouth. Freddie smiled, pleased that she was still showing such spirited resistance. That was the good thing about girls from the night clubs; they were used to working hard for their living. The Trocadero made it so easy too. It was never any problem for an ardent admirer to get to see the girls. And with all the uncertainty and panic in the city no one was going to miss them. Freddie waved at Louise and Annette with a mock salute and headed off towards the stairs that led up and out of the cellar prison. The girls scowled at him as he left them. He picked his way through the wine cases and barrels that were piled, untidily around the room. Most of the good stuff had been drunk. There was no point in leaving that for the Germans. Clegg locked the door behind him., ignoring the plaintive muffled groans of the girls.

He emerged into the bar of La Belle Aurore. Rick, the owner, was sitting at a table near the bar. On the far side of the room Sam, the bar's pianist and one of the finest jazz musicians in Paris, was chatting with the small knot of girls that had gathered around him as he improvised a short tune at the keyboard.

Clegg leant on the bar and ordered a Pastis. He turned to Rick. "One for you?" he asked.

Richard Blaine looked up from the table and shook his head. "Come on Freddie," he said. "You know I never drink with customers."

Freddie looked apologetic. "Sorry," he said. "I guess you've got other things on your mind right now, too."

"Haven't we all?" Rick nodded towards the open door of the café. Outside the streets were quiet except for the not so distant thump of German artillery. The sound of the shell fire was louder, closer, than it had been that morning. Clegg looked down at the milky coloured drink, pondering for a few moments whether he preferred the smoother, French, take on aniseed flavoured alcohol over the Greek or the Turkish. There wasn't much to choose, he decided, sinking the contents of the glass.

Sam was closing the lid on his piano; the girls waving as they left. He came across to where Rick was sitting. "Time to go, Boss," he said. "You don't want to keep Miss Ilsa waiting and the Marseilles train ain't gonna wait for either of you."

Freddie reflected on the impact that "Miss Ilsa" had had on his friend. He was just disappointed that he hadn't had the chance to meet the woman that seemed to have made such a change in Rick's life.

"Sure Sam," Rick said getting to his feet. He turned to Freddie. "It's good of you to close things up here."

"That's OK," Freddie replied raising his glass of pastis. "I guess the Germans don't have quite as much interest in meeting me as they do you and I've got a few loose ends to tidy up. It will be another day before they're in the city anyhow."

"Well, make sure you get yourself out of here soon. Paris isn't going to be too healthy, even for a man of your resources."

Freddie acknowledged Rick's remarks with a nod as he downed the last of his drink. "Well, thanks for the use of the cellar," he said.

Rick shook his head. "I don't want to know," he said. "Somehow, Freddie, I don't feel everything you get up to is quite legal." He smiled as he grabbed his hat and trench coat. "Come on Sam," he said moving to the door.

Sam was trying to collect up his sheet music. "You go on, Mr Richard," he said. "I'll catch you up." Rick pulled his hat on and stepped out onto the streets of Montmartre as they glistened in the late afternoon rain of a summer storm. Sam pushed the piano back against the wall. He disappeared upstairs for a while and then came back down with a small battered suitcase. He went back to the piano to retrieve his music.

Freddie watched as Sam pulled the sheets of music together into a bundle. "Rick's changed," he said.

Sam looked up. He seemed reluctant to leave but he was never the most talkative of men, especially when it came to discussing his employer. "I wouldn't know about that, Mr Freddie," he replied.

"Oh, come on, Sam." Clegg admired Sam's loyalty but sometimes he appeared to be trying to seem dumber than anyone could be in reality. "This Miss Ilsa must be quite something."

"He sure thinks so." He turned back to the pile of music on the chair of the piano. "Songs From The Shows," said the top one, "Everybody's Welcome – Hermann Hupfeld". Clegg looked at it sceptically. Hupfeld? What sort of name was that for a songwriter?

Freddie poured another glass of the aniseed liquor. "Well, good luck in Marseilles, or wherever," he said lifting his glass in a toast as Sam collected his case. The phone on the bar rang, Clegg picked it up. "Hi Rick," he said. "No, he's still here. I guess he was just leaving. OK. Sure. I'll tell him. No, it's no trouble." He put the receiver down.

"Ilsa's not at the station," he said. Sam rolled his eyes in apprehension. "Rick says can you stop by her hotel on the way over?"

"Sure thing," Sam said, looking no happier. He picked up the bundle of music. "I guess I should be going, anyway."

A face appeared at the door. A French urchin child was waving an envelope. "Message for Mr Blaine," he called. Sam grabbed it, seeing the crest of Ilsa's hotel. "I got a bad feeling about this whole thing, Mr Freddie," he said, pushing the letter into his pocket as he headed out.

"Tell Rick to call me in London," Freddie said. "When he gets to where ever he's planning to go. Look after him, Sam."

"Sure thing Mr Freddie," said the pianist as he elbowed his way around the urchin and out, pushing the door shut behind him.

Clegg watched him go. The bar was suddenly quiet enough to allow the complaining grunts of the two girls in the basement to become faintly audible. It wasn't a problem for Clegg, he didn't expect to have to keep them there long.

The door to the bar opened again. An enormously tall man in French military officer's uniform, his kepi adding to his height so that he had to stoop to pass through the door, entered. He was followed by two troopers.

Clegg looked up and raised his almost empty glass. "Mon Général," he smiled. "It doesn't sound as though things are going so well." The sounds of German artillery fire were getting closer still and there wasn't much evidence of any returning fire from the French positions.

The Frenchman shrugged. "For now things do not look good," he said. "But whatever happens some of us will fight on."

"And in the mean time you look to your amusements?"

"What else can we do? Are things as agreed?"

"The two young ladies are available for you down stairs," said Clegg. "I assume that you have transport available. You'll no doubt wish to examine them before parting with the fee."

The general gave a nod. Clegg gestured towards the door to the cellar. The two men went through the door and down the steps.

The general smiled as he saw the two helpless girls. The girls, eyes wide with terror, gave muffled grunts of confusion at the sight of their visitor. "Splendid, Monsieur Clegg, splendid. If only my troops were as successful at meeting their commitments as you are, then the Germans would not have taken a single step onto French soil." He stepped up to each of the girls in turn, staring at them closely, moving their heads left and then right in spite of their gagged protests, pushing up Louise Barchant's skirt to gain a better view of her legs. "Exactly as agreed. And collaborators too, I believe? All the better." He stood up and reached into his jacket, pulling out a battered leather wallet. "Now for my part." The general counted out a growing pile of £100 notes onto one of the wine barrels.

"The Trocadero's loss, is your gain, General. I fear their German sugar-daddy will miss them but such is war," Clegg smiled scooping up the pile of money. "I'm sorry it had to be Sterling, but you see how things are."

The general gave Clegg a supercilious look. "For now, perhaps. We will see how well you British do when the Germans are on your beaches and in your fields." He gestured to the two troopers. They trotted down the steps into the cellar and set to releasing the girls from their chairs. Keeping their wrists and ankles bound each hoisted one girl onto his shoulder and stood smartly to attention, steadying a struggling girl with one arm while saluting with the other. Not an easy trick, thought Clegg.

"Carry on," said the general and the troopers carried their wriggling captives out of the cellar. Clegg and the general shook hands. "Are you going back to London?"

Clegg nodded.

"Go west," advised the general. "There will be boats leaving from Cherbourg and Saint Malo. I have to be in London tomorrow or the day after. I may see you there. As for my toys," he

nodded towards the door the two girls had been carried through, "well, I am sure I will find somewhere to keep them."

"Well, good luck, General," Clegg said as the Frenchman picked up his kepi. "I hope you get the chance to enjoy them."

Air Raid Precautions : London, March 1941

It was dark and cold. The whine of the air raid siren sounding the "all clear" cut through the night, blotting out the hissing and crackling sound from the fires that raged a block or so from where Clegg was standing. "Inconvenient," he thought, "I wasn't quite finished." It wasn't too much of a problem though; it would be a while before folk emerged from the shelters.

As if to add to his difficulties, the wall of a nearby building collapsed with a crumbling crash, spewing a jet of dust across the roadway beside him. He scowled at the rubble, brushing himself down as he did so.

Freddie Clegg had found the blitz a lot less of an imposition than most of his fellow Londoners. While many of them were spending uncomfortable nights in the Underground or in makeshift shelters of their own, Clegg was hard at work. The raids were coming almost every night now. Two hundred bombers at a time or more they said. He'd watched them fly over many times - Heinkels with their soft rounded wings; Junkers, engines throbbing with a characteristic beat; Dorniers, slim as pencils and fragile looking but still capable of delivering a powerful load of incendiaries and high explosive. Anti-aircraft fire didn't seem effective and he'd seen nothing of the promised night fighter successes. Occasionally a bomber would be coned in the brilliant shafts of a pair of search lights and the concentration of fire would bring it down. But there still seemed plenty more to come the next night, and the next.

Clegg didn't mind, though - so many of his enterprises benefited from the blackout. The police were busily occupied with coping with the effects of the raids. The streets were deserted; broken buildings left dark corners. As long as you took no notice of the falling bombs and the collapsing masonry and stayed away from the spivs and the black marketeers that were making the most of the opportunities for "liberating" bomb damaged property, you had the city to yourself.

An unconscious girl of twenty two or three, the latest focus of Clegg's attentions, was lying propped against a half demolished wall. Her unconscious state might seem to have been the consequences of German military activity. In all honesty, though, Clegg had to confess it was entirely due to the pad of chloroform he had pressed against her face. Her brown tweed coat fell open as Clegg dragged her wrists behind her back so that he could tie them with the length of cord he had pulled from his pocket. She was still wearing her steel helmet with the letters "ARP" on the front but Clegg noted with satisfaction that she'd obviously come straight from the club to take her turn on Air Raid Precautions, watching for fires. Her coat fell open. Clegg could see her cigarette girl's outfit beneath it. The absurdly short skirt gave Clegg an agreeable prospect of her stocking clad legs. He'd seen her a few times at the Windmill. No doubt Mrs Van Damme would be sorry to lose her.

Clegg felt a small pang of guilt as he tightened the cords. It was a shame that her public spiritedness in going out on fire watch should have placed her at risk from the likes of him. But at least the bombers had gone, he thought as he looked skywards for a moment. Her fire watching wouldn't be needed any more tonight.

Clegg considered the girl as she lay limply on the dust and rubble strewn linoleum floor of the bombed out building. He was pleased with his choice. She'd have plenty of chances to make a new contribution to the war effort. After all someone had to keep the Middle East on the Allies' side if they were going to keep hold of essential supplies of oil. London showgirls and hostesses still represented a valuable commodity with those whose influence counted in and around Baghdad. Clegg felt it was almost his patriotic duty to meet the demand.

The girl began to stir. Clegg thought for a moment. Should he gag her first or tie her ankles? She slumped back again, her head lolling limply, a trickle of dust from the wall above coursing down across her forehead. There wasn't much risk of her either running or crying out, Clegg

decided. Since he still had cords in his hand he lashed her ankles together, his hands brushing across her nylon covered calves. "It isn't easy," Clegg, thought. "Too much risk of being distracted. People don't appreciate how hard I have to work to keep my mind on what I am doing." Forcing himself to concentrate on his task, he focussed his attention on the cords and the knots, threading the cords between her feet and ankles to cinch them tightly together. He pulled the girl's own scarf from her neck, knotted it in the middle, pushed the knot between the girl's lips and then tied the scarf in place as a gag. By now the girl was stirring again, this time with more effect. Realising her situation she groaned into her gag and struggled against the cords that held her arms and legs. Clegg bent down beside her. In what was intended to be a reassuring gesture, he reached forward to brush away a strand of hair from the girl's face. She, fearing a slap or worse, tried to pull away from him, taking no comfort from his look of concern.

Clegg's attention was attracted by the sound of bricks tumbling as someone made their way through the rubble. The girl, sensing the chance of rescue, tried to squeal. Clegg pressed his hand over her mouth adding to the muffling effect of her gag. Standing in the doorway, silhouetted by the flickering flames of the fires raised by the bombers' incendiaries, was a woman. As she came closer the girl saw she was dressed in a blue serge battledress with the insignia of the Auxiliary Fire Service on it. Worried that this newcomer would also fall prey to her attacker the girl courageously tried to kick out in an attempt to dislodge some of the bomb damaged wall as a warning. Her attacker, though, simply waved at the woman and turned around to pick the girl up from where she was laying.

Clegg hoisted the girl over his shoulder. "Did you get the appliance, Elly?" he asked.

Elsbeth Grant nodded as Clegg carried the girl by her. She looked back into the remains of the room where the girl had been grabbed. The girl's ARP helmet, her gasmask case, her handbag, were all that there was to show where she had been. It would be enough. It would just be assumed that she'd been buried in the rubble. Heaven knew, enough of them were.

She stopped for a moment as she saw the girl's ration card sticking out from her handbag. That could be useful, she thought. She reconsidered. A missing ration card would look odd. Better to leave it there. Besides, Freddie wasn't exactly letting them go short. He had enough contacts in the black market.

The girl squealed again as she realised where Clegg was taking her. In the dark of the bomb damaged road, between the craters and piles of rubble, stood a small truck with the AFS crest on the side. A trailer pump, hung about with hoses and ladders was hitched to the back of the truck. Elly pushed by and swung open the back of the trailer pump, revealing a small false compartment. Clegg carefully set the girl inside it before Elly, ignoring the girl's cries of increasing distress, pushed the door back into place and twirled home the butterfly nuts that closed it securely.

Clegg walked around to the passenger side, Elly to the driver's. As she got in Clegg pulled a cigarette from a pack of Players Navy Cut. He struck a match, cupping the flame in his hands to light the cigarette.

"Oi!" came the voice of an officious ARP warden from some way off. "Put that ruddy light out!"

Clegg flicked the match into the gloom of the bomb damaged building. He stared at the flames streaming skywards in the aftermath of the raid. It looked like the East End had got it bad again. Another loud "crump", followed by a flash of flame and a cloud of smoke announced the detonation of another bomb; delayed action, maybe, or just a faulty fuse. "Put that light out!" thought Freddie as he stared at the way that the fires in the Docks cast an orange glow across the whole of the eastern sky. "Somebody ought to tell Jerry that."

Clegg climbed into the truck as Elly started the motor and the two of them drove off with their helpless passenger squealing almost inaudibly in the trailer behind. He was pleased with the evening's work. The girl would keep his bank account in the black for a little longer.

Gaslight : London, September 1941

The Gaslight Club was in Great Compton Street. Soho retained, even in war time, its air of corrupt pleasure. A curious mix of illicit sexuality and hedonistic enjoyment seemed to infuse the smoke stained bricks of the buildings. The garish neon signs were gone from the clubs, of course, banished by the blackout legislation but there were plenty of servicemen on leave, keen to find a way to forget about life for a while. Sharp suited men still slouched at the entrance to the clubs, enticing passers by with their promises of a "lovely time with lovely girls".

Clegg knew better. He pushed his way across the road towards the Gaslight Club with no such hopes. It was lunchtime but he was pretty sure that this was no place to eat. It was just the place suggested by the Lieutenant Commander when he'd phoned earlier that morning. He seemed to think he had a proposition that would interest Clegg. For his part, Clegg doubted it. He disliked getting involved with the military, unless of course they were customers like the general.

The barker at the club door met his gaze as Clegg went by. "They'll look after you downstairs," he said.

"I'm sure they will," said Clegg evenly, although he wasn't sure of anything of the sort.

He wasn't looking forward to the meeting. He had a suspicion of military types and he wasn't at all sure why the Lieutenant Commander had asked to meet him. He had avoided conscription so far by virtue of having a reserved occupation. Somehow his business had been designated as essential war work. It had required quite a few favours to get that organised and he still owed a few "amusements" to some people at the Board of Trade. After all that effort, Clegg didn't want some military type rocking the boat.

At the foot of the stairs a girl peered out from behind a desk and offered to check his hat and coat. There were only half a dozen other coats on the rack behind her. It didn't look like the place was too busy, Clegg thought.

He left his coat with her and pushed his way through a beaded curtain into the bar. Three of the dozen or so tables were occupied. Two airman were enjoying the attentions of a pair of well endowed girls who were busily soaking up what ever pop had been decanted into the champagne bottles that sat in ice coolers beside their table. In the far corner two men in civvies were deep in conversation about some, probably illicit, business venture. Clegg thought he knew one of them. Standing at the bar was a man in naval officer's uniform, he raised his hand in recognition. Clegg found that disturbing in itself.

Freddie walked across to the bar. "Hullo, Clegg. I'm Strangways," the officer said, introducing himself.

Clegg looked at the man. His uniform had the well-used look of a career naval officer but carried the wavy stripes of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve; he hadn't just joined up as far as Clegg could see. On the other hand, Clegg didn't think he'd been at sea for quite a while. The man's pale complexion spoke of a war that had been spent indoors and ashore; the briefcase that lay on the bar beside him was padlocked to his wrist. What was more, on the far side of the bar a particularly attractive WRNS officer was watching them both closely.

"So, why does Naval Intelligence want to talk to me?" said Clegg.

"Whatever makes you imagine that I'm anything to do with that lot?" Strangways responded, defensively.

"Only way a Wavy Navy type like you could get to lay alongside a Jenny like that," Clegg said nodding towards the girl and enjoying the bristling reaction that his remark provoked. The Wren smiled back at Clegg. Only a third officer, Freddie thought looking at the single ring of gold braid on the sleeve of her jacket, but she seemed to have the measure of the Lieutenant Commander.

Strangways sucked his teeth to control his annoyance. "She's got nothing to do with this Clegg."

"Please yourself," said Clegg. He didn't suppose it mattered much although he was disappointed not to have the excuse to be introduced to the girl..

"Do you want a drink?" Strangways asked in an attempt to recover the initiative. Clegg knew that the best he was likely to get was a thin beer or a watered down scotch. He shook his head. Strangways fumbled in his jacket pocket for a key to his case. "I'm told you're a man who can get things done." Clegg peered back, not saying anything. "A man with European contacts. A man with particular skills." Clegg's sense of discomfort was rising. Although he didn't fool himself that no one in the intelligence services knew about some of his projects he was disturbed to be confronted by such suggestions from a relatively junior officer. He went on in an even more disturbing vein. "I hear you have particular expertise in the acquisition, transport and storage of certain rather specialised sorts of merchandise."

"I think you must have the wrong man." Clegg never enjoyed attracting attention. He'd spent his life avoiding the scrutiny of the police, border officials and others that took a dim view of his entrepreneurial activities. The attentions of the military and military intelligence in particular were always unwelcome as far as he was concerned.

"I don't think so," said Strangways, pulling two photographs from his briefcase. The grainy black and white prints showed two girls clad only in their underwear, shackled, gagged with heavy leather straps and chained by their necks in what looked like a stone cell.

Clegg looked at the pictures. "They say that sort of thing's very popular around here," he said nodding to the empty tables in the club. "When the punters are in, of course."

"I thought you might recognise them," said Strangways. "But, then, there have been so many haven't there? Louise Barchant? Annette Coursonne?"

Clegg peered at them again. There had been plenty of girls but he prided himself on trying never to forget those he abducted. He remembered the girls but he wasn't keen to let Strangways know. "Really," he said, feigning indifference. "French girls, then, by the sound of it. Should I know 'em?"

Strangways smiled patiently and took the photographs back. "As you say, French. In fact it was a Frenchman who suggested I talk to you. The Général sends his regards." Clegg gave no indication that he understood anything of what Strangways was talking about but that didn't deter the naval officer and Clegg was disturbed by the mention of the general. "Let's just assume for a moment that I'm talking to the right man. Suppose, just for a moment, that I needed to get hold of a number of girls."

"You're in the right place. This club is not the best but I'm told the girls are accommodating."

"Let's say specific girls. Particular girls with a particular contribution to make to the security of the nation and the war effort. Girls that happen to be somewhere in mainland Europe. In places, let us say, where we might have some difficulty in operating."

Clegg was feeling progressively more uncomfortable.

"In that case we might want to find a specialist to help us. Someone with skills that our own teams lack. Someone with contacts that would give a mission a greater chance of success."

"Someone sufficiently lacking in foresight to go wandering around Europe under the noses of the Wehrmacht?" Clegg was keen to bring the conversation to an end. There was nothing that Strangways had said that was even remotely interesting. "Let me remind you. You've used considerable energy and the efforts of His Majesty's navy in removing a large number of troops from just that position, Lieutenant Commander. In case you've forgotten, it was only just over a year ago that you Navy lot were pulling khaki types off the beaches of Dunkerque with anything that could float. Or were you sat in some comfortable bunker somewhere?" Strangways bristled. Clegg knew his remark had hit home, Strangways didn't look like a man who would relish being in the thick of things. "Going across to the European mainland doesn't sound like my idea of a sensible career move at present. I hope you find someone with the unlikely combination of the required skills and the necessary lack of imagination to go. I don't think it's quite my idea of an interesting project. Good afternoon." Clegg got up to leave. The Wren officer looked disappointed.

Strangways closed his briefcase with the air of a man who was frustrated by his failure but hardly surprised. "Good afternoon, Mr Clegg," he said. "I'm sorry if I had the wrong man."

"No need to apologise," said Clegg politely as Strangways closed his briefcase and collected his Wren officer. Freddie watched as the girl stepped out on her way back to the stairway that led out of the club. From the combination of the higher than regulation heels, a skirt tighter than would be approved by the Admiralty and the fact that she'd been able to get hold of silk stockings in a time of severe shortages, he could only assume she had more influence than her junior rank would imply. Whatever the reason, Clegg was happy to enjoy the view. He enjoyed the wink she shot him from under her tri-corn hat, too.

Play Time : London, October 1941

Freddie always found it hard to resist a pretty face. One way or another.

On this occasion he hadn't.

Third Officer Angela Parsons sat up with a grin. "Nice apartment," Freddie Clegg said from the door to her bedroom. He was clutching two cups of tea. "I couldn't find the saucers," he apologised. Clegg sat on the end of the bed that he'd just left and passed one cup to Angela. "Handy for the Admiralty here in St James's."

Angela pushed a strand of blonde hair back from her face. "Yes," she said, "Daddy's been very good. It's frightfully expensive. I don't know how the other girls get by on just their service pay."

The same way you are doing, Clegg thought to himself as she took the tea.

Angela's uniform was scattered across the bedroom, evidence of the enthusiasm with which the two of them had embarked on a night of carnal amusement. Clegg had to admit that he had enjoyed himself. If you were going to be seduced by a female intelligence officer then Angela ought to be near the top of your list, he felt. Not the most sophisticated lover perhaps but she'd had an enthusiastic approach to the sexual act that made up for any lack of technique in Clegg's view. And once she'd shed her uniform the body underneath it was every bit as appealing as he had expected it to be.

Clegg sipped his tea. He wasn't sure why she'd been asked to bed him. Surely they didn't think it gave them any leverage? Elly was well beyond worrying about what he got up to when the two of them weren't together. And they couldn't imagine he'd have said anything to compromise the business, unless their understanding of how he operated was a great deal worse than he would have expected. Added to that of course it was downright unfair, asking the girl to get involved with him. In other times he'd have been tempted to add her to his catalogue. These days he was being a great deal more selective but they weren't to know that.

"You're a kinky man, Mr Clegg," Angela smiled. "And you owe me a new pair of stockings. You've ruined them tying them around my wrists like that. Still, it was fun. I've never been tied up for sex before."

Clegg smiled back. You've joined an elite group, he thought, there's not many women tied up by me that end up getting loose again. "Not even with Strangways?" he said. "Or is it the other way round with him?"

"Does he look like a playful man to you?" Angela asked.

"Maybe not," said Clegg. "Maybe he just likes playing second hand."

Angela looked offended. "You're not suggesting he asked me to sleep with you?"

"Of course he did. I'm just sorry not to have given you what you wanted."

"You're too modest," Angela laughed. Clegg thought she was deliberately misunderstanding him. "I had a lovely time." Angela rolled over on the bed. The sheet slipped from her naked back. Clegg could see the bite marks he'd left on the nape of her neck and remembered how she'd whinnied when he'd given them to her. She'd sounded genuine enough then but the best ones always did.

"Is he a good pimp, otherwise?" Clegg reached across and patted Angela's backside.

"That's not a nice way to talk about the Lieutenant Commander," Angela chided. "I don't make a habit of this."

"How many does it need to be for a habit? One a week? More?"

Angela threw a pillow at Clegg. He ducked. It missed. When he sat up Angela was toying with the ruined pair of stockings. "Since these have been laddered beyond repair, I don't suppose it matters if we try that again does it?" she asked flirtatiously.

Clegg took them from her. "No, not at all," he said, approaching her on the bed.

Angela looked up at him. "Oh, Freddie," she said, "I just don't know what I'd do if you tied my wrists to the bed rail. I know you said you don't like the nautical life but you do seem to know a few sailor's knots."

"Let's find out," said Clegg with a grin, advancing towards her.

Underground : London, October 1941

Eight hours later, Clegg was walking along Haymarket in the early evening. He was pondering the problem of the girl that he was planning to pick up later that night.

Added to that, Angela had wanted the two of them to get together again. Their tumble had been fun but he'd got work to do and that came first. The problem with the new girl was going to be transport. He had a buyer but they weren't keen on coming to London.

Freddie couldn't blame them. He side-stepped a small pile of rubble that had been shovelled out of the road. The blitz had eased but it was hardly the healthiest environment. Worse than that, though, it was getting devilish difficult to ship merchandise through conventional channels. No flights from London naturally, the threat from the Luftwaffe was too great unless you could persuade a squadron or two of Hurricanes to provide an escort and Freddie knew that even his persuasive powers wouldn't stretch to that. There were the BOAC Dakota's and Albatrosses from Bristol but they were hardly a substitute for the sort of capability he used to have with the seaplanes. As for transport by sea; well it was hard enough to get space on a freighter and there was the problem of the U-boats too.

That would have been bad enough but his latest client wanted him to take the risk on the shipment. Life was getting too complicated Freddie felt. Maybe he could get the client to take delivery in Morocco or somewhere like that. He'd be able to organise a boat or something to get there.

He was still deep in thought when the black Daimler pulled up alongside him. As the window wound down a familiar but unwelcome face stared out. It was Strangways. Much to Clegg's disappointment he didn't have his Wren officer in tow but then, Clegg thought, I guess Angela's done the job he wanted her to do. A shame that Strangways wasn't getting any benefit from it.

"I wondered if you could spare an hour," he said. "There's someone that wants to see you. A friend of the General."

Clegg sighed. None of this boded well but he got into the car anyway. It pulled away from the curb, drove up to Piccadilly Circus and then doubled back on itself, heading back towards Trafalgar Square and Whitehall.

The Daimler swept by the Admiralty – Clegg had half expected them to stop there - and on, down Whitehall, passing Horse Guards Parade. It turned into Great George Street and stopped outside the heavily sandbagged entrance of a large building. A soldier stepped forward and opened the car door. "After you," said Strangways to Clegg as the two of them left the car and headed inside passing a saluting sentry and a sign saying "Office of Works". They turned down a corridor, threading their way through piles of building materials. There was a strong smell of new paint and freshly sawn wood. Outside the rising and falling wail of air raid sirens announced the start of another night's attacks by the Heinkels, Dorniers and Junkers of Goering's Luftwaffe.

Strangways led the way through a door guarded by another sentry, flashing a pass at him to gain entry. They went down stairs into the basement of the building. Clegg looked in surprise as the stairs led down through a four feet thick slab of solid concrete. As they left the stairway it became obvious that a vast warren of offices, meeting rooms, and communications centres had been built beneath street level.

Strangways stopped outside a door with the sign "65a" and knocked. "Come!" a voice bellowed from within and Clegg found himself being ushered into the presence of the British

Prime Minister. "Lieutenant Commander Strangways, sir," Strangways said coming stiffly to attention and saluting. "This is Mr Clegg."

"Ahh, good, good." Churchill was sitting at a small desk; a bed to his right was made up ready in case some crisis that night prevented him from returning to Downing Street. He was exactly as Clegg had imagined from his photographs and the newsreels; the pugilistic expression, spotted bow tie, pinstriped suit, gold chain stretched across his waistcoat, seeming to keep his belly in check. Churchill folded the papers he was working on and slid them into a file.

This boded ill as far as Clegg was concerned. He could imagine that Churchill was less likely to take no for an answer than Stangways had been. On the other hand, if you were going to get suckered in to a project for British Intelligence once that had the direct backing of the PM was probably a better bet than one that didn't.

There was one other in the room, a young intense looking man who was busy polishing his spectacles. Churchill took a long look at Clegg before breaking into a smile. "Right Clegg," he said, "what do you know about GC&CS?"

"Sir!" Strangways exclaimed with a pained expression, "Mr Clegg's not cleared."

"No, I don't suppose he is," Winston responded, "but it will make things a little difficult if he doesn't know what we're asking him to do." Now Clegg knew he was really in trouble.

Freddie was able to reply with honesty. "Absolutely nothing sir."

"I'm very glad to hear it," Churchill chortled, his eyes twinkling. "Very glad to hear it indeed. GC&CS is the Government Code and Cipher School. Very clever chaps. Helping us a lot. Trying to break the German codes. Give us a bit of warning about what the Nazis" – he pronounced it 'Narzees' with an inbuilt sneer – "might be up to and when."

"You're trying to crack their Enigma machines, then?" Clegg asked quietly. Strangways made a choking noise and turned pale.

The other man in the room looked up from polishing his spectacles. "Yes, we are actually," he said quietly.

"Sorry," said Churchill, "should have introduced you. Clegg, this is Turing from GC&CS." Clegg nodded. "Can I ask how you know about Enigma?"

Clegg explained, "I used to own a few." Strangways gave another strangled grunt. "The Germans produced a commercial model. Used by banks and the like. I had quite a large business concern in the '30's. UK, Europe, USA. Our branches needed to exchange information and some of that information was, let's say, commercially sensitive. Fortunately I came across the products of Chiffriermaschinen-AG. Bought some of their early models. Met a chap called Scherbius. Very bright fellow." Turing looked up again. The penetrating way in which he stared at Clegg suggested that he agreed with Freddie's assessment. "We had, oh I suppose, six of their machines in all. Worked very well for what we wanted. Certainly none of our competitors ever managed to get to grips with any of our coded material as far as I know. I can imagine that German coded transmissions must be more or less impregnable."

"Yes. The Germans think that too," said Turing. "They know that it's virtually impossible to read anything that has been encrypted with the machine. As you'll know, you need the rotor setting, the plug board settings, and the starting position. Of course, if you know some of those then it becomes mathematically possible to discover the content of messages."

"Only if you find some way of doing sums extremely quickly," Clegg muttered.

"Yes," said Turing, without elaborating further. "Quite."

Churchill looked at Turing who said no more. The Prime Minister continued, "the Germans use five rotors and select three for any day's transmissions. We have acquired a large quantity of encoded text from a source in Czechoslovakia. We suspect this text may contain information of value to the war effort. We need insights into what the Germans are planning in the East. Mr Stalin may be able to stop their advance, they may of course succumb to the vastness of Russia and the Russian winter just as Napoleon did. But, Herr Hitler and his henchmen will have plans for what they intend to do with all that 'lebensraum' on the plains of Mother Russia." Churchill spoke the German word as though it left an unpleasant taste in his mouth. "We don't know what these documents are and we haven't found a way to break into them yet. We need a way into the code – what Mr Turing's friends call a 'crib'. Some hint about how they were encoded."

Strangways was looking more unhappy by the minute but Turing appeared relaxed and Churchill seemed happy to continue. "One thing we do know is that the documents were produced under the direction of a Gestapo Major while he was in Prague late last year. We also know that this Major had a sense of humour and an eye for the ladies. Had quite a little collection of them by all accounts and lets say found a way of mixing business with pleasure when it came to encrypting his documents."

Clegg wasn't a fan of the Nazis – if nothing else they'd seriously disrupted his business - but he was interested by the unknown Major.

Churchill went on. "Somewhere in Europe, according to our information, there were five women each with a sequence of numbers and letters tattooed on their backs. These are the rotor settings and plug board settings that we believe were used to encode the documents. Apparently, or so our sources say, our Gestapo Major would get the girls together whenever he needed to encode or decode the information. He'd line them up, strip them off, set the rotors and plug boards from their tattoos and off he'd go."

Churchill stopped to allow Clegg to consider his words. He mistook Clegg's look of impressed disbelief for one of distaste. "It's deviant, I agree, Mister Clegg but, from what the intelligence services tell me about some of those in Herr Hitler's entourage, hardly the greatest depths of depravity that is to be found in those places subject to the heel of the Nazi boot."

"Disgraceful," said Clegg, dryly, "I don't know what the world is coming to."

"My information, Mr Clegg, is that you are a man that could find these tattooed women and arrange for my friend Mr Turing to have access to them." Turing looked embarrassed at the thought. "I have hopes that then Mr Turing and his friends would then be able to let us know exactly what the documents are, That might allow us to embarrass or otherwise exploit those named in the papers. I imagine you can see the value to our war effort."

Clegg could see Churchill's point. Winston was staring at him over the rim of his half-rimmed spectacles. Clegg nodded.

"Unfortunately," Churchill continued, "the Lieutenant Commander here tells me that you are less than keen. I just thought I'd add my own encouragement. You see I'd have thought it was much more your sort of thing than, say, enlistment and a posting in the Merchant Marine. I was sure you'd much rather be dealing with something like this."

The PM's intelligence was excellent thought Clegg. There were few things he relished less than time at sea and the opportunity for a close up confrontation with the Admiral Dönitz's U-boats. He'd said as much to Angela. "Fuck," he thought.

Churchill retrieved one of his trademark cigars from a case, clipped the end and lit it. He prodded it towards Clegg. "Can I assume you'll help?" The smoke from his cigar curled upwards creating a hazy halo above his head.

"Can I ask how you know about these young ladies?" Clegg countered, avoiding giving Churchill a direct answer. He was annoyed with himself for giving away his lack of enthusiasm for a nautical life but in all conscience if Churchill had set his mind to something there probably wasn't much choice anyway. Besides, the evening with Angela had been fun and if he was going to be persuaded anyway maybe it had been worth it.

"Yes," said Strangways, joining in for the first time. "You know two of them already. Louise Barchant and Annette Coursonne. We found out quite a lot from them."

"Bugger," thought Clegg.

"The General was most puzzled by the marks on their backs. Surprised you didn't notice them yourself."

Clegg looked back, surprised by the PM's coarseness. "I prefer to conduct myself with ladies in a face to face manner," he said.

Churchill chortled. "Better than Mon Général," he said. "The man fucks like a duck!" Turing and Strangways both coughed with embarrassment at the PM's indiscretion. Clegg wondered how he knew or if he was simply being insulting. "Still, gentlemen, if you'll excuse me." Churchill took his watch from his waistcoat pocket. "I have a cabinet meeting in five minutes." From above there was the dull thump of bombs detonating nearby. "There's a war on, you know. I'll leave you three to sort things out."

Strangways pulled himself up, saluted and turned towards the door. Clegg followed him, puzzled by the fact that Turing appeared to be remaining behind for the meeting of the War Cabinet. Outside in the corridor, Clegg said, "I didn't think I'd actually agreed, did you?"

"That's rather his way," the Lieutenant Commander replied. "Do you want me to tell him that you didn't?"

Clegg shook his head. The thought of life on a freighter or tanker didn't appeal, even without what he'd heard about the successes of German submarines. "No. You'd better tell me where a bit more about these women."

Strangways showed him into another office and the two men sat down at the table. He took some photographs from his briefcase and pushed them in front of Clegg. "Mademoiselle Barchant," he said pushing one forward, "and Mademoiselle Coursonne."

Clegg looked at the sequences of numbers tattooed on the women, low down on their backs. "So that's what we're looking for," he said peering at the marks. "Two down, three to go. Do we know who the others are? And who is the mysterious Major? "

"We know about two of the other girls. Tereza Aucune and Anna Prosizc. Both Czech, from Prague originally but according to Coursonne they are now in Paris. As to the other one, we're not sure about her identity. We're hoping the next two will be able to help. As for the Major. His name is Strasser, Heinrich Strasser. He was in Paris too for a while, still has a base there, we think. He now seems to be acting as some sort of military attaché in Vichy France."

"A couple of other things," said Clegg. "Why do you need the women themselves? Wouldn't photographs of the tattoos do?"

"At a pinch yes. If we were certain about how the arrangement worked. We'd really rather like some of our people to talk to the girls though, get an insight into how the Major worked things. These two have given us some pointers but we're not there yet. If you can't get the girls then a photograph would do but we'd rather have the whole thing."

Clegg grunted. It made things more complicated but no doubt he'd find a way of getting them back. Assuming he found them. "All right," he said, "but won't the Germans suspect you're cracking their codes if we pick these women up? "

"We don't believe so. All our information is that this was an illicit operation; completely unapproved. Strasser will be very reluctant for his amusements to come to the attention of his superiors and as far as they are concerned these are just five women that have been part of his department at various times. He won't be making a noise about it and no one else will understand the significance."

Clegg was disappointed, he'd thought that he had found an out, but there were the more practical difficulties. "Paris is a big city. Any thoughts where I might start looking? I found the other two young ladies rather by chance." Clegg thought back, remembering that he'd spotted them in the Belle Aurore, Rick's bar. He wondered where Rick, Sam and Ilsa had got to. He hadn't heard anything since he'd seen Sam leaving for Ilsa's hotel and the train for Marseilles.

"So we understand. Well, Tereza Aucune shouldn't be too difficult." Strangways pulled a rolled-up poster from his bag and spread it out on the table in front of Clegg. On the previous Thursday, if the poster was to be believed, Tereza Aucune had given a performance of Hindemith's Cello Concerto in G with the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire under Charles Munch.

Hindemith! Freddie rolled his eyes. He didn't know much about music but he knew what he didn't like. Suddenly the North Atlantic convoys were sounding more attractive.

Still, on the up side, Freddie thought, a classical cello soloist shouldn't be too difficult to find. "Any ideas how I might get there? I'm told the Golden Arrow isn't running just at the moment." Clegg asked.

Strangways smiled tolerantly. "We'll fly you in. Dalton's agreed that SOE will support this."

"Better than a bloody boat, anyway." Clegg was always happier in the air.

Strangways outlined the details and wound up the discussions. He showed the way out of Churchill's bunker and back up towards the street. As they left they passed Third Officer Angela Parsons. At least she had the decency to look embarrassed, thought Clegg. She went through a door marked "CinC North Atlantic" before they reached her. Clegg hoped the officer on the other side of the door was keeping his wits about him.

Insertion: Sussex, November 1941

It was dark, Clegg stood in the lee of the hangar with Elly. Clegg was clutching the battered suitcases that contained all he would take with him on his trip into occupied France. Clegg preferred flying but he preferred doing it from the pilot's seat. He wasn't by nature a passenger.

Strangways appeared from inside the hangar, accompanied by Angela. That's convenient, thought, Clegg. He'd been going to get Elly to take a look at her; just in case there was any need, you understand. It wasn't that he held a grudge, she'd only been doing her job and he'd enjoyed himself anyway but business was business.. Maybe she'd be good for the General. He'd be looking for a substitute now that he'd had to give up Louise Barchant and Annette Coursonne.

Two aircraftmen were manhandling the large hangar doors, opening up the cavernous building. "What chariot of delight have you got for me, Strangways?" Clegg called. The last time he had flown to France he'd been piloting his own racing seaplane. He'd missed flying since war broke out but even he couldn't get fuel for private flying and given the choice between dodging Messerschmitt's in RAF Fighter Command or the German night fighters and ack-ack in Bomber Command, he'd decided to avoid both.

There was the cough of an aero engine starting up inside the hangar. The cough and splutter was followed by a sullen throbbing sound. As soon as he heard it, Clegg knew that what awaited him was no sleek, streamlined, high performance machine. "That's a Bristol Mercury," he called. "I'm not going over in a bloody Lysander, am I?"

Strangways didn't need to answer. The ungainly looking, high winged mono-plane, taxied slowly out like a pelican in search of its lunch. Elly looked across at Clegg. She knew he wouldn't be pleased. Clegg watched as the 'plane almost waddled towards them. It stopped. Strangways stepped up to it and slid back the rear half of the canopy. Grabbing his hat to keep it in place as he stepped into the wash of the Lysander's propeller, Clegg stepped up to the short ladder. Strangways shook his hand and wished him good luck. "Piccolo," he said. Clegg looked puzzled. "Your code name," he said with exasperation. Clegg had been told about it many times. "Your contact will use it to identify themselves, use it if you need to contact us; when you're ready to come back." Clegg nodded. He understood perfectly but it was hard to resist upsetting Strangways. The Wren could see Freddie was teasing Strangways, she hid her grin behind her hand and a cough. Strangways scowled at her. Freddie could see Elly was studying her carefully with an experienced eye. That was the good thing about working with Elly, Freddie thought, she always had an eye for opportunities.

Clegg climbed into the cabin. The great expanse of perspex left him feeling very exposed. Elly gave a nod. He nodded back. They didn't much go in for fond farewells. Strangways slid the canopy shut and the aircraft taxied out onto the pitch black field.

There was no exchange of radio messages with the tower, just a single flash of a green light. With a further cough the Lysander's engine was coaxed into progressively higher revolutions and the aircraft began to bounce, almost loping across the field. Elly looked across at the aircraft. Clegg was peering out. He didn't look happy.

The pilot didn't bother climbing to any great height. As Clegg looked around the battered interior of the plane he felt he understood why. Somehow the whole thing seemed safer as long as it was closer to the ground.

It was a moonless night and cloudy as well. At least thought Clegg, there would be little risk of fighters spotting them. The RAF's night time operations were mainly directed at Germany itself and the fighters would be up over Holland and Belgium as Bomber Command headed

off to Frankfurt or Cologne. From what Clegg had heard Bomber Command couldn't hit anything in daylight, so they had a better chance of getting within miles of the target at night. It did mean that the Germans had little real night fighter activity over this part of the continent, though.

The Lysander was slow but even so it wasn't long before Clegg saw the coast of France approaching. Heaven only knew how the pilot could find a landing ground in the dark like this. The pilot pointed out of the cabin towards the ground. Clegg followed his gesture. For one brief moment a car's headlights came on and then, almost at once, flicked off again.

It wasn't much but it was obviously enough for the pilot who started his approach.

The Lysander slid closer to the ground and seemed to slow to a walking pace as the great barn-door like flaps came down from the back of its wings. It skated over the hedge surrounding the edge of the field, sliding between two tall trees that were closer than Clegg would have liked. The plane dropped with a thump and a rumble onto the ground. They were still going too quickly towards the line of trees on the far side of the field for Clegg's taste but the pilot hauled the tail down onto the field and then applied the Lysander's powerful brakes. The plane shuddered to a stop.

"Terrific," thought Clegg, "almost twenty feet to spare. Nearly as much as we missed those trees by."

The pilot slid back the canopy of the aircraft and looked around to where Clegg was sitting. "If you would like to hop out, that would suit me nicely," he said. "I really don't like to hang around too long. Folk around here don't like planes dropping into their fields at night." Clegg climbed out, clutching his suitcase. He was barely off the ladder when the plane's engine roared and it bounced off across the field to make its take off run. Clegg watched it go, leaving him alone in the pitch dark field.

A crack of a twig to their left drew Freddie's attention. Instinctively he dropped into a crouch and turned to face the noise.

"Piccolo," said a woman's voice, "please, this way."

Clegg could just make out a human form in the shadows of the hedge. "Allez vous ens," he responded in his less than excellent French, inviting the woman to lead the way. The woman began to move along the edge of the field. Clegg followed her through a gate and onto a rough track. As they emerged from the gate, Clegg heard the sound of a car approaching. The woman gestured for him to crouch back against the hedge and the two of them waited for the car to slide to a halt beside them. The woman urged him forward into the back of the car and climbed in alongside him. Their driver let the sound of the departing Lysander die away before starting off.

"Where are we going?" Clegg asked.

"I don't know," the woman answered. "We take you to Evreux. Then you're someone else's problem. We don't know where you go. They don't know where you came from. It's safer that way."

Clegg nodded. He used similar techniques for ransom pick-ups so he could hardly complain now. Even so, he was a little disappointed. The woman had looked attractive – or at least as far as he could tell in the pitch dark of the field and now the car.

The woman didn't speak again until they passed the town sign on the edge of Evreux. "We will drop you near the railway station," she said. "Take the road towards the centre. Someone will contact you." The car stopped and the woman leant across Clegg to open the door. She

didn't say anything. Clegg got out. The car drove away without anyone saying anything. It started to rain.

Clegg pulled the brim of his hat down, turned up the collar of his trench coat and started to trudge towards the town centre. He was passing a boulangerie when the flash of a match and the glow of a lighted cigarette drew his attention to the shop doorway. "My orchestra is looking for a piccolo," the voice behind the cigarette said. Clegg was pleased to note it was another woman.

"I prefer brass to woodwind," Clegg responded, giving the code words he had been taught in London. The woman beckoned for Clegg to come inside.

The smell of yeast and fresh baked bread filled the shop. "No problems getting flour?" said Clegg.

"We bake for the Boche," the woman said. "They seem to make sure that we get supplies." She shrugged. "At least we can divert a little to the local people." In the far corner three men were busily, disassembling, oiling, and reassembling rifles. "And a baker is expected to be working early in the morning. Nobody worries about our comings and goings."

Clegg nodded. It made sense. "I am headed to Paris," he said.

A familiar voice behind him said, "Perhaps I can give you a lift."

Clegg knew who it was at once. "Hello Sandy," he said, "how's the Chateau?" As he turned around to face Comtesse Sandra he drew in his breath sharply, almost choking as he saw she was wearing the full dress uniform of a Hauptsturmführer in the SS Leibstandarte - Adolf Hitler. "I assume you're still on our side," Clegg said. "In spite of appearances to the contrary."

"I might not like their politics," the Comtesse said, adjusting the collar of her tightly fitting black jacket, "but the uniforms are a lot better than anything the British army has, with the possible exception of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders. Besides, this attracts a lot less attention here."

Clegg thought this most unlikely given the way the uniform fitted her. "I think the boots suit you better than the kilt would," Clegg said, gallantly. "But isn't that a bit conspicuous?"

"Perhaps but the Germans seem to assume that if I'm wearing it I'm entitled to be wearing it. And it's worth it, Freddie, if only for the black leather coat." Freddie smiled. "Still come on. You said you wanted to go to Paris and I promised you a lift." She picked up her coat and her peaked officer's cap. She pointed to the door. "The car's out the back."

The Mercedes convertible looked a lot more comfortable than the Citroen that Clegg had been picked up in. In the front a blonde haired girl sat behind the wheel waiting for them. Clegg and Sandy climbed into the back of the car. Sandy leant forward and spoke quietly to the driver. "Put your bloody forage cap on, chérie, if you don't want a very hard spanking," she hissed. "And then take us to Paris."

Parisian Walkways : France, December 1941

The Mercedes pulled away. Clegg sat back watching the early morning light creep across the French countryside. Sandy pulled a Gauloise from a pack lodged in the pouch on the back of the seat in front of her. She offered one to Freddie. He shook his head. It was too early in the morning to have the skin taken off his throat.

"How do you come to be working with the French Resistance?" Freddie asked.

"Well I was somewhat upset by the loss of the Château as you can imagine. Besides, I thought it was rather appropriate, given my interests, Freddie. I'm a sort of Maquis De Sade."

Clegg winced at the pun. He'd never got used to Sandy's rather cavalier attitude to the business that they both were in. He'd always favoured a quieter, more personal approach to the business of abducting and trading women as slaves. The flamboyance of Sandy's European operation wasn't for him, although he had to confess fond memories of some of the parties she had thrown for her clients.

The car motored on. Sandy's blonde driver did a competent job of steering the car round the occasional pot hole left by the fighting from the previous year. Mostly they'd been filled in. The Germans were good at that sort of thing. Clegg saw the sign for Versailles. 10 or 12 miles from here he thought. They'd made good time. A motor cycle overtook them, the rider not giving Sandy a second glance. Clegg began to feel more comfortable.

As they swept through the old city wall at the Porte d'Issy an old Frenchman scowled at the passing car while a squad of soldiers came to a halt as their Obergefreiter threw an enthusiastic "Sieg Heil". It was obviously a good enough disguise, Clegg decided.

They drove on. They passed the Ecole Militaire and red, white and black swastika flags hanging limply from masts in the Champ De Mars. driving in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower as it looked down with what seemed sullen disapproval at the grey clad troops marching around its base and the the Champ de Mars. They crossed the Pont D'Iena and turned along the bank of the Seine, the Trocadero on their right. They drove on into Passy. Finally the car turned through gates with the sign "Notre Dame De Grace".

Dear heavens, Clegg thought, she's set up shop in a convent.

They stopped. Sandy and her driver got out and Clegg followed them. One of the nuns emerged and drove the car away to park it in what Clegg took to be the convent's stable block.

"You'll want to press on with your task," Sandy said as she showed Clegg through into the rooms she had arranged for him. Clegg nodded.

"I need to track down a girl," he said. "Well, three of them actually."

"How very unusual," responded the Comtesse with heavy irony. "Well, let me know if I can help."

"Thanks," said Clegg. "I will." He spent the morning tramping the streets of Paris, getting the feel of the place once more. He went back up to Montmartre. The Belle Aurore was deserted. There was no sign that it had been opened since the Germans had arrived. He thought maybe he could make use of the cellar if things didn't work out with Sandy's operation but it would be a whole lot easier with her help and she seemed willing enough so far at least.

He headed back towards the Seine. He was lucky. Passing the Trocadero he saw a poster. The Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire were performing that night. Clegg decided to treat himself to an evening's culture.

Wagner, Beethoven, Bruckner. The programme was predictable, Clegg guessed, given the sea of grey uniforms in the audience and certainly better than Hindemith. The Beethoven and the Bruckner were fine, thought Clegg but when it came to the Wagner he agreed with Mark Twain. When he'd said that Wagner's music was better than it sounded he'd hit the nail on the head.

The concert gave Clegg the chance to study Tereza Aucune. From his seat in the circle, peering through his opera glasses, he could clearly see the girl, staring fixedly at the conductor, fingering the strings and bowing her cello with intensity. From what he could see the Major was evidently a man of taste. But then Freddie knew that already from Annette and Louise.

The concert ended. Clegg was in the street by the stage door as Tereza emerged, hefting her instrument. Keeping his distance he followed her as she searched in vain for a taxi. Giving up, she decided to walk. It wasn't an easy task given the size of the cello but she had evidently had the practice. Clegg felt a bit guilty but then helping women out of difficulties wasn't really his style.

She didn't have too far to go. Clegg watched as she stopped outside a house in Passy. She wrestled her cello up the short flight of steps to the building's columned portico. As she reached the top of the steps the front door of the house opened. Waiting to welcome her in, highlighted in the glow of a light within the hall, was a young blonde woman. As she stood the doorway, Clegg could see she was wearing a black skirt, white shirt and black tie. On her arm she wore a red armband that carried the Nazi insignia of a white disk and black swastika. "Ah," thought Clegg as Tereza went inside, "that could make things more complicated."

Clegg took a good look around the outside of the house, avoided a squad of German troops as they marched by, and then headed back to the convent. Sandy was as good as her word when Clegg asked if she could arrange some a surveillance of the Passy house and its occupants. Late the following afternoon, Sister Sarah was able to offer Clegg the results of her visit.

"It is a very grand house," she said. "Occupied by a Major Strasser." Clegg was pleased by that piece of information at least. "It had been commandeered from a French family, of course, but they are no longer there."

"You had a good chance to look around?"

"Oh yes. Tereza Aucune is a good catholic girl. She was only too happy to see me when she heard I was collecting alms for the convent. Major Strasser is away but Mademoiselle Aucune continues to live there. There are two others in the house. Two of Major Strasser's people. Heidi and Helga they are called. Whether they are babysitters, or guards I could not say."

"How easy would it be to enter the house unobserved?"

"Not so difficult, I think. The gardens at the rear are not overlooked – Mademoiselle asked me to take tea with her there. There is a conservatory that opens off the lounge. But any action you plan will need to be taken soon. I suspect that the occupants are about to leave."

"For what reason?"

"Who can say. All I can tell you, Monsieur Clegg, is that the house is full of boxes, crates, packing cases. And Mademoiselle Aucune is very upset. While I was there a despatch rider

arrived bringing a telegram. I was just leaving. I heard Mademoiselle Aucune crying, weeping, sobbing. Distracted. I offered to comfort her but Heidi, I think it was, asked me to leave."

Clegg was pleased with the report but concerned at the urgency that the turn of events at the Passy house seemed to urge. "Thank you, Sister," he said as the young nun took her leave. Clegg turned to the Comtesse. "I will need a van," he said. "And two men, if you can spare them."

Sandy provided everything that Freddie had asked for. The van was a small Citroen; rusting, nondescript and unlikely to attract attention. The two men, Jacques and Jules, both long standing members of Sandy's team, turned up with a bored manner that Freddie found comforting. He hated enthusiastic amateurs.

Freddie found himself in the garden of the Passy house with Jacques. Jules was around the side of the house in the van waiting for their signal. As Sister Sarah had said, there was little effort needed to get inside. Clegg easily slipped the catch on the conservatory and the two of them were soon through it and into the lounge. The darkened room was filled with crates and half packed boxes just as Sarah had told them.

They heard a voice from the corridor outside. "Ich setze es in das Hinterzimmer ein, Helga. Im großen Fall."

That will be Heidi, Clegg thought and she's coming in here to put something in that big case. A moment later, only just giving Clegg and Jacques enough time to get behind the door, Heidi came in. As she groped for the light switch Clegg grabbed her wrist, pulled her into the room and pushed her back against the wall. The papers that she was carrying went flying. He had his hand over her mouth before she could cry out. Jacques, helpfully jammed the barrel of his pistol against her throat. Heidi understood what was required of her and froze staring in terror at the two men. Clegg pulled a scarf from his pocket, knotted it and pushed the knot between Heidi's teeth. He tied the scarf tightly in place, forcing a moan from the girl.

Jacques kept the pistol pointing at her as Clegg grabbed her arms and pulled her wrists behind her back. A handy length of rope from the one of the packing cases served to bind her wrists, ankles, knees and arms. Clegg pushed the helpless Heidi to the floor and then jerked her ankles up to her wrists to leave her hog-tied. He smiled at Jacques and gave him a thumbs up sign, then pointed to the door and upwards indicating that their next quarry would probably be on the first floor. Jacques nodded and smiled in response and then followed Clegg as the two of them slipped carefully out of the lounge and onto the main staircase of the house. From above they could hear the sound of a cello, its plaintive air filling the house.

As they made their way up the stairs, Helga's voice could be heard calling. "Heidi, wo bist du? Komst du mir helfe, bitte." Clegg and Jacques stepped quietly along the corridor. Heidi wouldn't be coming to help Helga any time soon. The door to one of the bedrooms was standing partly open. Clegg peered around it. Helga was standing with his back to him, packing clothes into a suit case. She was half undressed, her skirt tossed across the bed rail, her stockinged legs emerging from beneath the tail of her white shirt. Clegg and Jacques approached the woman silently from behind. As they closed on her she straightened up. Jacques sensing the risk of discovery brought the butt of his pistol up sharply catching the girl in the back of the skull just where her two blonde pigtailed split out from her head. She gave the quietest "Nnngh" as she toppled forward to slump across a pile of clothes, unconscious.

"I will deal with this one," Jacques said, reaching for a pair of stockings from the suitcase and using them to tie Helga's wrists behind her back. Clegg could tell that he wasn't being gentle about it. Then he took the belt from her skirt and jerked that tightly around her elbows, dragging them together until they almost touched. Another pair of stockings served to secure her ankles.

Clegg could see she was starting to recover consciousness. "Looks like sleeping beauty is getting over it. Better do something to keep her quiet," he said.

The Frenchman nodded and then smiled. He pulled the red white and black swastika armband from the girl's sleeve and pushed it between her lips as she started to stir.

"Gaa—ark," the girls spluttered as she revived. Jacques pulled a scarf across her mouth to hold the armband gag in place. "One day Hitler will have to eat his words," Jacques said. "For now though this will do."

Clegg looked down at the captive Helga. She was already struggling, trying to free herself and snarling at her captors. Sprawled on the floor she had already laddered her stockings in her efforts and rucked the tail of her shirt up to her waist. Freddie was enjoying the view and it was enough to confirm that she wasn't tattooed as Louise and Annette had been. She wasn't one of the girl's he was looking for. Somehow he didn't think that Heidi was either.

With Heidi and Helga taken care of, Jacques and Freddie were free to turn their attention to Tereza. If the sound of the cello was anything to go by, she had not noticed what was happening. Clegg and Jacques climbed the stairs to the second floor following the doleful sound. Freddie recognised the music; Elgar's Cello Concerto. It was good to hear some English music after the previous night's concert.

They crept up to the door of the room from which the sound was coming. Clegg stood to one side of the door, Jacques to the other, pistol at the ready. Clegg pushed the door open slowly.

In the middle of the room, Tereza Aucune sat bowing with passionate intensity at her cello. She was, as far as Clegg could tell, completely naked. Tears ran down her face, leaving it streaked with mascara. She seemed unaware of them as they crossed the room. It was only as Jacques and Clegg stood directly beside her that she looked up her face distorted with grief. She extended her right arm pointing with her bow to the table at the side of the room.

Clegg walked across and picked up the telegram laying there. "Regret to inform you," it said, "Major Heinrich Strasser killed this evening in the course of duties at the airport in Casablanca. Police units of L'État Français are investigating. Heil Hitler. Heinze. German Consul to Morocco." More complications, Clegg thought.

Tereza looked again at the pair of them. As if coming to her senses she looked back and forth between Freddie and Jacques. Slowly she dropped her bow and brought her hands up to her mouth. "Oh good," thought Clegg, "she's going to scream."

Luckily Jacques standing closer to her had the same thought. He was beside her, clamping his hand over her mouth before the scream left her lips. Freddie caught the neck of the cello as the instrument slipped from her grasp. In almost the same instant Tereza fainted, the weight of her naked body limp in Jacques' arms as he lowered her to the carpet. It made things easier. Clegg laid the cello down, took some cord from his pocket and secured her wrists behind her, noticing as he did so that she carried the tattoo that Strangways had spoken of. At least it was the right woman he thought.

"Can you get her downstairs?" Clegg asked Jacques.

"Sure." The Gallic shrug suggested he regularly had to deal with naked, unconscious, women. Freddie thought about it for a moment. Knowing the sort of work that Sandy used him for, he probably hid.

"Find three crates and get her, Heidi and Helga out onto the truck. No one is going to be worried about a few more packing cases leaving here. I need to have a look around if I'm going to get a fix on the other girls."

"Sure," said Jacques again, lifting Tereza up and putting her over his shoulder, curling one arm around her buttocks as he carried her, still limp, out of the room.

Freddie set to looking for clues. The telegram might help, he thought. As he picked it up he noticed a photograph on the table beneath it. The black and white picture showed a group in a restaurant. Mainly girls, Clegg thought. He could see Tereza, and recognised Louise Barchant and Annette Coursonne as well. There was a man in the middle in a German officer's uniform. "So, is this Strasser?" Clegg thought. There was another woman in the photograph that Clegg didn't recognise. "And in that case is this Anna Proszic? Or the mysterious other woman?"

One end of the photograph had been torn away. Clegg looked around and under the table to see if he could find the missing part. It wasn't there. It wasn't in the waste paper basket either. Irritated at being unable to find the piece he pocketed the photograph and the telegram. He rummaged around some more looking for files or anything else that would give him a clue to the whereabouts of his remaining quarries but Strasser or his people had been thorough.

Tereza's handbag lay on the floor beside her discarded clothes. Clegg emptied out the contents onto the table. He picked his way through the pile of personal items. Lipstick, a powder compact, a cigarette case in gold and red enamel, a matching cigarette lighter and a small purse. Clegg turned the cigarette case over. On the back was inscribed, "HS To My Cryptic Clue TA"

Clegg looked pleased. That, at least, was a clue. He opened the case. As well as the cigarettes, the case held another photograph. It was the same German officer. Clegg was feeling more confident that this was the late Major Strasser. He turned the photograph over. On the back was written "For TA, to remember me by. H"

Apart from interrogating Heidi and Helga, an activity Clegg that thought might be amusing if unproductive, and maybe Tereza, there was one other possibility to try to find out something more about Major Strasser's "Code Book" as he called them. Heidi had been bringing in a heap of files when they had jumped her. Maybe they held something of use. Clegg ran back down stairs.

As he passed through the lobby, Jacques and his pal were wheeling out a large crate. From the muffled sounds within Clegg guessed it was one of the girls.

When Clegg went back into the room where they'd snatched Heidi. He found the pile of papers she'd been carrying and thumbed through them. Mostly they were routine; confiscation orders. arrest warrants; copies of reports to Berlin. One though looked helpful. It was a schedule of costs for Strasser's Prague office. There, on the second page, was a list of people in the various departments and sure enough the list for "Verschlüsselungsdienstleistungen" - "Cryptographic Services" - contained some familiar names. T. Aucune, L Barchant, A, Coursonne, A Proszic. There was one other name, the name of the other woman he was seeking, Clegg guessed; I. Lanz. Handwritten alongside each of the surnames was "Tereza", "Louise", "Annette", "Anna" and "Irena". It wasn't a lot, thought Freddie, but it was a start.

The other document of interest was a letter informing Major Heinrich Strasser that he was to conclude his work in Paris and to report to the offices of Admiral Canaris's Naval Intelligence Unit in Lisbon, the Abwehr.

"Curious," thought Clegg, "obviously the girls were packing things up for the move but their boss had taken something of a detour if the telegram announcing his demise is right. And if he was supposed to be in Lisbon, what the hell had he been doing in Morocco?"

A Convent Upbringing: Paris, December 1941

It was an hour or so later when Clegg found himself back at the convent. Sandy was there to greet him. "Oh Freddie, you can't just come back with one woman, can you?" she scolded.

Clegg shrugged his shoulders. At least that was one Gallic custom he had no problem with assimilating. "It didn't seem wise to leave them there. They're not causing too much trouble are they?"

"No, not at all. Sister Sarah has been pleased to have the opportunity to help your two Bavarian ladies."

"Help?"

"Oh yes. The order here is particularly keen on humility as a virtue and I fear that is not a quality much shown by the occupying forces. This is a very strict order, great believers in mortification of the flesh as a way of achieving a better state. Let's say that Sister Sarah is determined to see that Heidi and Helga do just that."

Clegg had a good idea what she meant. It would be churlish to suggest, he felt, that Sister Sarah was taking any pleasure from the discomfort of two members of the military oppressors of her home city. "And how is Tereza?"

"Distraught," Sandy looked concerned. "She is securely held, of course. Manacled and in a cell. But I tell you Freddie if we were to sit her in the street she would still be there this evening."

"I need to talk to her," Clegg said. "I don't have a route to the fourth girl or the fifth beyond a couple of names."

"Of course. I'm not sure you will discover anything but I will take you to see her. She is still naked." Sandy saw Clegg's questioning eyebrow. "We have given her clothes but she ignores them. Anyway it's hardly like you to object! It's this way." Sandy gestured off to a side corridor and Clegg followed her.

She led the way past a series of small sparsely furnished rooms, the nun's cells Clegg assumed.

Clegg passed the door of another room where the sounds of blows and Sister Sarah's exhortations of "Repent!" were punctuated by garbled grunts.

At the end of the corridor, Sandy unlocked a door and the two went inside. Tereza Aucune was sitting on the edge of the simple wooden framed bed, still naked. A single steel chain ran from her ankle to a ring in the wall. Next to her, on the bed, a pile of clothes lay untouched. On the table beside the bed, a simple meal had been ignored. Her face was streaked with tears, her expression bleak and empty.

"Tereza," Sandy said gently. "There is someone to see you."

The girl looked up. "Do you have news of Heinrich?" she gasped. "Tell me it's not true. How could it be true? He said we would be together. In Lisbon. We would all be together." She seemed completely oblivious of her abduction and the fact that she was held prisoner. Her only thought was of Strasser.

Clegg found himself unaccustomedly touched by the girl's desperate denial of Strasser's death but his compassion was leavened by his anxiousness to ensure that he went on with his mission.

"All of you together?" he said sitting beside Tereza on the bed. "You and Louise and Annette."

Tereza smiled through her tears as if recalling some happy memory. She sat up on the bed, drew her knees up to her chest and hugged herself, staring blankly over Clegg's shoulder. "And Anna and Irena. All of us. It is so difficult here in Paris. So much harder than Prague. I have not seen Louise and Annette for weeks. And now this awful news. Tell me it's not true."

Clegg never found it difficult lying to women but for once he didn't have to. "I don't know," he said. "These things happen but these are confusing times." Still, Clegg thought it was good to have Irena's name confirmed.

"Can I have my cello. It lets me think of him. And us."

"I'll see what I can do," Clegg said looking at Sandy who gave him a "how the hell am I supposed to get that now?" look. "Were you and Irena and Anna to travel together to Lisbon?"

"Lisbon?"

"To be reunited with Heinrich."

"Oh please, yes, please."

"But were you and Irena and Anna to travel together?"

"Irena, Irena Lanz. Anna Proszisc. Together to Lisbon?"

"With Heinrich?" She looked up again. "To be with Heinrich?"

Clegg could feel himself losing patience. Tereza was so distracted by the shock of the news of Strasser's death that any attempt at a normal conversation was impossible. "We'll see," he said gently. "We'll see."

He turned his back on the girl and left the cell, Sandy following. "That's not going to get us very far," he said despondently. "Do what you can to find her a cello. Who knows, maybe she can work out her grief in some way."

"You shouldn't be so despondent, Freddie," Sandy said as the pair walked back down the corridor, passing the door to the cell where Heidi and Helga were still being encouraged by Sister Sarah to accept humility as a virtue.

They made their way to a room that Sandy had obviously adopted as her command centre. It looked like it had belonged to the Mother Superior of the order. Stained glass gothic windows sent coloured light shimmering across a large oak desk. On Sandy's desk was the pile of documents that Clegg had retrieved from the Passy house, together with Tereza's lighter and cigarette case.

"One interesting thing," Sandy said picking up the cigarette case. "Did you look at this?"

"Sure," said Freddie, "the engraving was interesting."

"How about the cigarettes?"

"Not my brand," Clegg responded. "I prefer Players."

"Not anyone's brand if you want to stay healthy," Sandy said opening the case and selecting one of the cigarettes. She twisted it and it came apart into two halves. She handed them to Freddie.

"Typical, spy stuff, I guess," said Freddie. He turned the two pieces over in his hands, pushing them back together. "Pretty convincing."

"Nasty too. There was lethal poison in that. A small phial of potassium cyanide. "

"Hmm," said Clegg. "Herr Strasser obviously expects a lot of his ladies. It's not sufficient for them to mourn him, perhaps."

"Maybe," said Sandy. "But what next, Freddie?"

"I don't know. It's a complete dead-end. Up until now, I thought I was just looking for two women in Paris. Now they might be in Paris or they might be in Lisbon."

"But not just any women, Freddie. At least you have names. And with names you may make progress."

"Where do you suggest I start? The telephone directory? I'm sure that a great deal of effort has been put into keeping that up to date since the Wehrmacht moved in." Clegg sank down with a despondent air into a large armchair.

"You could start by relaxing. Take your mind of things. You're as obsessive as Tereza and her cello." She tossed a magazine across to him.

Freddie scowled at her as he caught the issue of Match. The last thing he wanted right now was some light reading.

"Look at the cover, Freddie," said Sandy as she leant back against the desk.

"At The Autumn Collections," the headline said, in French. Good grief, Clegg thought, with everything else going on they can still think about fashion. A striking black and white picture adorned the front of the magazine. A tall slender, pale skinned, dark haired, woman, elegant in a long dark gown that seemed to flow over her body like chocolate sauce, stood at the head of a series of steps. She was stretching languorously against a classical column. Clegg was impressed by her dark beauty but excited by the caption beneath. "Anna Prozisc Arrives From Prague". Freddie looked across at Sandy. "Why on earth didn't you tell me?"

"Freddie," Sandy chided, "you've only just come up with a name. It was only when you were talking to Tereza that you mentioned it was an Anna Prozisc you were looking for. I can't guarantee that she's the one, of course..."

"I think she will be," Freddie beamed. "I don't know how common a name that is in Czechoslovakia but she looks like just the sort of girl Strasser would go for if the others are anything to go by. Now all we have to do is find her."

Fashion Victim : Paris, December 1941

Anna Prozisc was not a woman to let a simple thing like global conflict interfere with her enthusiasm for haute couture. As a result it hadn't been hard to track her down.

Two of Sandy's "nuns" had kept watch on the fashion houses in the Boulevard Hausmann, under the guise of collecting alms for the poor. On the second day, Sandy was able to tell Clegg that they had spotted her.

Clegg and Sandy took off in a taxi along the right bank, Sandy for once eschewing a military uniform to allow her to pose as a woman seeking out a fashionable new outfit.

To call the establishment where they ended up a shop was rather like calling Notre Dame a church, Freddie thought. The high ceilings, lavish furnishings, chandeliers and supercilious staff all spoke of an establishment used to catering for those who had little concern about how much anything cost. "Where are the clothes then?" Freddie hissed to Sandy as they entered through the tall revolving door that led them into a vast open reception room.

"Don't be so provincial," Sandy smirked. "Here the clothes come to you. You can play the attentive husband while I try on a few things and see if I can find out if Anna is still here."

Clegg grunted. This wasn't his sort of place at all. At least Elly had the good manners to clothe herself without his involvement.

An obsequious man with a thin pencil moustache made his way across the room towards them. "Madame," he oiled, "Monsieur. Comment pouvons-nous vous enchanter aujourd'hui?"

"Something for the Spring," Sandy urged. "Something bright. Something flowered. Something to banish the cares of the world. I feel sure you can please me."

"Of course Madame, please come this way. Would Monsieur like to....?" Clegg shook his head. "Very well." The two of them disappeared through a door.

Clegg sat down. As he waited an animated argument from the end of the room drew Clegg's attention. A Luftwaffe officer was backing into the room being harangued by a woman that Clegg immediately recognised as Anna Prozisc. Clegg had some sympathy with the man. Flying against a Spitfire was probably a less daunting prospect than that of confronting Anna Prozisc in full flow if the present exhibition was anything to go by. The officer held up his hands in mock surrender and backed away returning to the room in which Freddie sat.

"Frauen!" he exclaimed, he exclaimed, throwing his hands up in exasperation as he took his seat.

Freddie's sympathetic grunt was a sufficient response. He understood German but he knew that if he tried to engage in conversation his accent was likely to give him away. Fortunately the usual level of exchange between men waiting for their women to emerge from a changing room prevailed. Clegg buried himself in a magazine.

The two of them sat waiting for their women. The German with increasing impatience, Freddie with increasing puzzlement.

Eventually, Sandy emerged, followed by one of the shop's flunky's carrying a pile of boxes. "I see you had a successful shop," said Freddie.

"In more ways than one," Sandy said as she led the way out of the shop and flagged down a taxi. She and Clegg climbed in. The flunky piled the parcels in as well.

"What now?" said Clegg as the cab sped down the Boulevard Hausmann and on down to the Place De l'Etoile.

"I'm meeting a very good friend for dinner," Sandy smiled.

"And how does that help?"

"You haven't asked me who the friend is," she said.

"All right," said Freddie, humouring her. "Who are you having dinner with?"

"My new friend, Anna," she said with a laugh. "We got on famously. Girls chatting about fashion; the problems of shopping with men in tow; you know the sort of thing."

Freddie knew exactly.

"One other thing. She was boasting of her conquests. First a Gestapo Major, she said, now a Luftwaffe Oberstleutnant, next she wants an U-boat commander. I think she might be the lady you are looking for."

The taxi stopped outside the convent and the two of them got out. Gallantly, Freddie collected Sandy's parcels.

As he got through the door of the convent the plaintive sound of a cello filled the air. Clegg and Sandy went through to her office to discuss their next moves. Over the course of an hour and a bottle of claret a plan began to emerge. While Sandy went off to dinner with her new friend, Freddie and Jacques went to pay a call on the apartment of Anna Prozic.

"Bon soir," Clegg smiled affably to the maid that opened the door. "Nous chercherons Mademoiselle Prozic."

The maid's French was as halting as Freddie's when she answered, "I'm afraid Miss Prozic is out." Clegg assumed she had been brought from Prague by Anna.

"I wonder if we might wait. Herr Strasser said..."

At the mention of the Major's name, the maid ushered them in. "Please," she said. "Miss Prozic will be anxious to hear any news that you have of the Major." She showed them into a comfortably furnished lounge. "Please have a seat," she said. "May I get you some coffee, perhaps? I do not expect Miss Prozic to return for an hour or more."

"If it's not too much trouble," said Clegg.

"No, of course," the maid responded, scuttling away to the kitchen.

Clegg took the opportunity to nose around. The apartment wasn't large, as far as he could tell there was a the lounge, a dining room, Anna's bedroom, a bathroom, the kitchen and beyond that a small bed sitting room used by the maid. It wouldn't take Jacques and him long to set things up as they wanted.

The maid was the first to discover that their intentions towards Miss Prozic weren't entirely honourable. Freddie was only too happy to engage the girl in conversation as she put down the tray of coffee things. "You must have found Paris strange, after Prague," he said.

"Oh, not so strange," the girl replied. "We have been here many times. Before the war Miss Prozic, she always came for the collections. Spring and autumn. We were often in Paris and ... Mmmmm!"

Jacques who had worked his way around behind the maid while she was talking had struck. With one hand over the girl's mouth to cut off any cry and the other around her waist preventing her struggles, he had her helpless. As she wriggled, trying to escape from Jacques's grasp she kicked out.

Jacques simply grinned. "Reste tranquille, petite," he urged.

Clegg got up from his chair pulling a length of cloth and a hank of cord from his pocket. He rarely went anywhere without the tools of his trade. Jacques loosed his grip on the girl's mouth for just long enough to let Clegg push a wad of the cloth between her teeth. She groaned as he wrapped the cloth around her head two or three times before knotting it off. With the cloth gag ensuring her silence or at least muffling her protests, Jacques span the girl around. Freddie grabbed her wrists and tied them behind her back, winding the cord around them in the figure eight fashion he always used.

She was still trying to resist the two men's attentions as Jacques wrestled her to the floor. Further lengths of cord around her ankles and knees put paid to much of her resistance and with his captive more or less helpless, Clegg was able to take a little time to find some heavier rope in the bag he had brought and to put that to use around her arms and her waist. "The hall closet, for now, I think," he said to Jacques and the two of them picked up the still wriggling maid, Jacques at her shoulders, Clegg at her feet. They carried her out to the hall, and down past the door to the kitchen. Clegg pulled open the door of the closet that he had spotted earlier. They pushed the helpless girl inside, dumping her down between the mops, brooms and cleaning things that the cupboard held. She was looking up at them with a combination of fear and defiance as Clegg pushed the door closed.

"Now," he said to his colleague. "Miss Prozic and her maid are going to be leaving Paris all of a sudden. Perhaps we had better pack a few bags for them. It would never do for people to think they had left without even taking a few overnight things."

Freddie headed off to Anna's room, Jacques to the maid's. In Anna's, a closet held suitcases, Clegg grabbed a selection of Anna's clothes from the wardrobe and the chest of drawers. Jacques did the same for the poor girl that was trussed in the hall closet. They had more or less finished when they heard the sound of the front door opening and Anna's voice calling, "Milena. Milena! Where are you girl?"

Obligingly Milena, the maid, answered the call of her mistress with a muffled cry from the closet and a kick against the closet door. Anna, responding to the sound went in search. "Milena? Where are you?" Another grunt, another kick, drew Anna down the corridor, past her own bedroom where Clegg and Jacques were waiting. Anna opened the door to the closet and threw her hands up to her mouth on seeing the bound and gagged maid within. "Oh no!" she exclaimed. "What's happened? Who did this to you?"

She got her answer almost at once as Clegg and Jacques meted out to Anna the same treatment that the maid had received. In moments the Czech girl was sprawled on the floor, her wrists and ankles tightly bound and her mouth stuffed with enough cloth to muffle the least cry.

The same removal van that had helped relocate Heidi, Helga and Tereza, turned up a little later to collect Anna and Milena.

Clegg found himself back in the convent.

"So," said Clegg to Sandy. "You can get Tereza and Anna back to the UK for me?"

"Yes," she said. "We had a Lysander drop off one of their supply pods last week. It's concealed in a barn near where you landed. It's just big enough to take your two young

ladies, provided they don't move around too much and I think we can organise that. London say they will organise a pick up flight and a diversionary raid to make sure the girls get out safely."

"That's more than they did when they flew me in," said Clegg, peevishly.

"Don't take it personally, Freddie," Sandy smiled.

"How will you get the girls out to the farm? The Germans seem a lot more jittery right now."

"One thing there is no shortage of in war, Freddie, and that is death. We have a small chapel here in the convent that is sometime used by an undertaker of our acquaintance. It is somewhere that the departed can rest on their road to their final resting place. It is not uncommon for a hearse to be seen entering or leaving the convent."

"And at some point in the future the hearse may be carrying coffins which contain bodies that are not, in fact, dead?"

"Exactly, Freddie. Leave it to us. Tereza and Anna will get to London."

Clegg felt a moment of sympathy for the horror that the two of them would experience when confronted with the coffins, but on the other hand, it would turn out better than they'd expect. "And Heidi, Helga, Milena?"

"Well, Freddie, you don't imagine I'd do this entirely out of the goodness of my heart, do you?" Sandy said. "Let's just say they'll help me to offset some of the expenses related to your visit. We'll hang on to them for a while. Heidi and Helga especially are giving some of the sisters here the chance to rediscover their missionary zeal. I still have some trade routes open. Surely you don't begrudge me that?"

Freddie could hardly object. Sandy's help had been invaluable and he was reliant on her assistance for the next stage of his mission too. "Do your trade routes reach down into Portugal?" he asked.

Sandy nodded. "Oh yes," she said, provided you don't mind sharing the trip with some escaping RAF types. Is that where you're off to next?"

Clegg nodded. "Yes," he said. "Lisbon seems to be my next port of call."

Haystack: Lisbon, January 1942

At least Sandy managed to get me a contact, Clegg thought as he made his way into town.

Potentially this was the most difficult part of his mission. He had a name – Irena Lanz – of someone that might or might not be in the country. That was about all he had to go on in a city he didn't know; in a country whose language he didn't understand. The one consolation was that the place was a hot bed of refugees and the intelligence services of the Allies and the Wehrmacht. Deception, evasion, and desperation were the currency of many of those that had come to the city in the last few months. That at least was something Freddie felt comfortable with.

Clegg's hotel was welcoming enough. The suite he had booked into was comfortable if a little faded. The bar seemed as good a place as any in which to start. Clegg ordered a beer and took it to a corner table, using the opportunity to watch the ebb and flow of men and women, couples, groups forming and dissolving.

He'd been watching a man and woman deep in almost conspiratorial conversation when a short dark man appeared beside his table. "The Comtesse suggested that you might need someone to show you around."

Clegg looked up. The man was neatly, almost fastidiously, dressed. His hair slick, greased, flat against his scalp almost as though it was painted on. A thin moustache stretched across his upper lip.

"Eduardo," the man said extending a hand. "Mr Clegg?"

Clegg shook it. "Freddie. Call me Freddie. Would you like a drink?" he said, waving to the girl behind the bar.

"I'll take a vinhos verdes," Eduardo responded as she arrived at the table. "What are you looking for in Lisbon?"

"A woman," Clegg answered.

Eduardo peered around the room. A good half of the couples there looked as though they were looking for a room you could rent by the hour. He leant forward. "That should pose no problem in Lisbon, Mr Freddie. Unless of course you seek a particular one."

Clegg smiled, tolerantly. He summarised what he knew from his own researches and what Sister Sarah had been able to extract from Heidi, Helga, Anna and Tereza. It wasn't much. "In her twenties," he said. "May be Czech possibly Nordic but has certainly spent time in Prague. Name of Irena Lanz. Arrived in Lisbon within the last two weeks, most likely by plane from Paris via Madrid."

"If that is how she came then it should not be difficult to track her down," Eduardo said encouragingly. "I have friends at the airport, friends in the customs service. They will know. Give me a day." Eduardo finished his wine.

"Of course," said Clegg. He pointed to Eduardo's glass. "Another?" he suggested.

Eduardo shook his head. "Thank you but, no," he said. "I will see what I can do this evening. Perhaps I can find my friends in relaxed mood." He got to his feet, picked up his hat and left.

Clegg spent the following day wandering around the city. Eduardo joined him again in the bar of the hotel that evening.

"A difficult day, my friend," he said. "You are sure of the name?"

"No," Clegg responded. "She could be travelling under another name, of course."

"Certainly no one of that name has flown into Lisbon in the last month, from Madrid or anywhere else. There have been a number of Czech's entering the country. From North Africa and Spain. There are many refugees but few of them can afford to fly. Those that get here try to reach America. Or the more foolish try to return."

"Why on earth would anyone want to return to Czechoslovakia, now?"

"Well, one man would. A thorn in the side of the occupying forces. A man that has rallied opposition to the Nazi's where ever he has gone. Viktor Lazlo."

"You say that name like I should know him."

"He is famous to all who oppose Hitler and his gang."

Freddie shook his head. "Sorry, never heard of the chap."

Eduardo sighed. "No matter. He understands the Czech emigré community. He may be able to help you. But there is not much time. He leaves for America soon. With his wife."

Piri Piri , Hot Stuff : Lisbon, January 1942

Clegg entered the restaurant. Eduardo was sitting at a table with a pale, aesthetic looking man in a white suit and a striped shirt. His wavy hair gave him an almost boyish look but his hooded eyes and the white streak of hair from his forehead spoke of darker times and places.

Beside him sat a woman of luminous beauty, dressed in a white silk dress, her stole looped loosely over her blonde hair. "Freddie," Eduardo beamed. "Come! This is Viktor and this," he gestured to the woman, "is his wife, Ilsa."

Clegg joined them at the table. "Mr Lazlo, an honour. I've heard much of your efforts," he lied, shaking Viktor's hand. "Mrs Lazlo, a delight." That, at least, was true – Ilsa managed to draw every eye in the room towards herself. If Clegg had been asked to explain why he would have found it difficult; her flawless complexion, perhaps; her look of complete openness; the way she moved. Freddie wasn't sure. What he did know was that she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. And he'd seen more than a few.

Viktor and Ilsa both smiled. "How can I help, Mr Clegg?" Viktor said.

Freddie explained his quest. It was hard to be explicit. He didn't want to mention Strasser, the other girls or their tattoos. Viktor listened attentively interrupting only occasionally to ask questions or to clarify some point or other. He seemed content for Freddie to tell his tale but as the story unfolded Ilsa seemed to get progressively more nervous. She drew her stole more closely around her neck, peering closely at Clegg as he spoke, twisting her wedding ring nervously. As Viktor finished his meal, Ilsa got up and excused herself.

"I have to go back, darling," she said. She turned to Freddie. "A pleasure to meet you, Mr Clegg." Viktor kissed his wife as she left.

Viktor watched her go. "A remarkable woman," he said. "You have no idea what she has sacrificed for me and how much she has contributed to our cause." He turned back towards Clegg. "And can I ask why you seek the woman you are looking for?"

Clegg spread his hands. "The less we know of each other's reasons for what we do, the better, I feel." Viktor nodded understandingly. "Let us just say this woman has been involved with the Germans; perhaps the SS, perhaps Gestapo, perhaps Abwehr. To what end I do not know but there are those who wish to discuss her work, to understand more of how the Germans can be defeated, to help liberate the people of your country, Viktor, and the other oppressed peoples of Europe."

"Well spoken, Mister Clegg," Lazlo exclaimed. "You remind me a lot of a man I met recently. Someone that claimed he stuck his neck out for nobody but still proved himself one of the bravest defenders of freedom. I will do what I can to help you but, I confess, I cannot think of anyone within the Czech community here that fits your description. My wife and I leave for America at the end of the week but I will do what I can before then." He got to his feet. "And now, if you will excuse me..?"

Clegg nodded and thanked him. "Of course," he said. "Please let me know if you hear anything that could help."

"Naturally," said Viktor as he left.

Eduardo looked glum. "I'm sorry, Freddie," he said. "I had thought that Viktor would be able to help."

Clegg reassured him. "Do not worry, Eduardo, I am sure that we will make progress. Let's have some more wine."

As Eduardo went in search of a waiter, Freddie sat thinking. He wondered if the Ilsa that Rick had gone off with in Paris had been as beautiful as Lazlo's wife. If she was, it was no wonder that Rick had been so infatuated. Even so she had seemed uncomfortable, as though she felt Freddie knew more about her than he was revealing. It puzzled Clegg. Generally, he knew a lot less about what was going on than most people gave him credit for. He'd asked Elly once why that should be. She'd told him not to worry about it. "The trick's working," she'd said, "just keep it up."

He hoped Rick was all right. Clegg had half expected to hear something either from him or of him but, although he'd mentioned his name a few times in Paris no one had heard anything there. That wasn't surprising, thought Freddie. They were all more worried by what was going on around them.

Maybe, when he'd finished all this, he'd try and find Rick. Get across to Marseilles somehow. If he'd got a bar there it would be the best place in town to drink at anyway. Someone would know where he'd gone.

Eduardo reappeared. Another bottle of wine arrived shortly after. Eduardo was scowling over his glass. "I'm not sure," he said, "that Lazlo was as helpful as he could have been. I will go over to his hotel and ask him if he can suggest another line of enquiry. He is not long here in Lisbon but perhaps he knows someone else we could talk with."

Freddie nodded. "Well," he said, "I've no other routes right now and I'd hate to disappoint London. Anything else Lazlo can tell us would help."

Clegg and Eduardo finished their wine. Freddie didn't like leaving a half full bottle but it was better for Eduardo to do as he'd suggested. They left the bar heading off in different directions; Freddie to his hotel, Eduardo to find Victor Lazlo.

Bedroom Manoeuvres : Lisbon , January 1942

Clegg got back to his hotel. It was late. He made his way along ornate corridors with their slightly faded décor, to his suite. As he entered the suite he stopped. Draped across one of the chairs was a white silk dress. Beside the chair, a pair of high heeled sandals lay discarded on the floor.

As a result, when Clegg pushed open the door to his bedroom he wasn't surprised to see a woman in his bed. Neither was he surprised to see that it was Ilsa.

"Mrs Lazlo," said Freddie, coolly, "I think you may have the wrong room. Possibly even the wrong hotel."

She looked at him with a coy expression. Sprawled back against the pillows, a sheet pulled up almost to her neck, it was still obvious that she was naked.

"Please," she said, "call me Ilsa. Ilsa Lund. I always think it vulgar to mention my husband's name at times like these."

Freddie sat down at the end of the bed. "Vulgar to mention his name but not to appear naked in another man's bed, Miss Lund?" He was intrigued by the woman, not least because it had been an Ilsa Lund that Rick had been seeing in Paris. If this was the same woman he wondered what had happened in the intervening time. How come she was now married to Lazlo? When had she and Rick split up? In Marseilles or after that? In any case, he was wary. The last time that he had encountered a naked woman sitting up in bed he'd ended up talking himself into his current situation.

Ilsa smiled, ignoring Freddie's seeming disapproval. "Champagne?" she suggested pointing to a bottle in an ice bucket beside the bed. "I found the Piri Piri so hot earlier." She pushed a strand of hair back from her face, clutching the sheet around her with her other hand as she knelt up.

Never one to turn down a glass of champagne, especially in the company of a beautiful woman, Clegg reached for the bottle and pushed out the cork with a satisfying pop. "It was spicy, but I haven't felt the need to tear off my clothes," Clegg said.

"Is that your famous English reserve?"

"Perhaps. Maybe it's my famous English reluctance to bed another man's wife." Clegg poured two glasses of the sparkling wine and passed one to Ilsa.

"In these times? Surely with death at every door we owe it to ourselves to take our pleasures when we can."

"Perhaps. Perhaps," said Freddie. "And I am sure it would be a pleasure, indeed." Ilsa turned away from him, reaching out to place her glass on the bedside table. As she did so the sheet slid down her back and Clegg saw, emerging from behind it, a series of numbers tattooed on the lower part of her back just above her right buttock. In the same moment he knew that he had found the last of those he was searching for. He also suspected that he knew why she was there. "Well," he said, "it would be most ungentlemanly to in any way disappoint a lady. Wouldn't it help you to cool down if you removed that sheet?"

Ilsa laughed, pulling the sheet closer to her. "Perhaps you should take it from me?" Clegg came closer as she lay back. The telephone in the other room rang. Its insistent tone was sufficient to divert Clegg.

"Don't go too far," Clegg smiled as he stood up, putting down his glass of wine alongside Ilsa's. "I must answer that."

He crossed the bedroom and stepped into the lounge. The telephone on the desk continued to ring in irritated fashion. He picked up the receiver. Eduardo's voice on the other end hissed, "Freddie, are you safe?"

Clegg looked over his shoulder at the reclining Ilsa. He doubted it. He pulled the door of the bedroom closed. "Of course," he said. "What is it?"

"It's Lazlo," he said. "He's dead. Shot in his hotel room. I went back to see him as we agreed. He left me for a few moments and didn't come back. I found him on the floor. Quite dead. Ilsa has gone too. Do you suppose it is the work of German agents?"

"Hmm," said Freddie, distracted by the thought of Ilsa in the other room and her possible intentions. "Why don't you stop by the hotel in an hour or so? Be careful."

Clegg was about to put down the handset when he heard the click of another receiver being replaced. Ilsa had evidently been listening on the bedroom extension. As he stepped away from the desk he noticed Ilsa's handbag poking out from under where she had discarded her dress. He picked it up, surprised by its weight until he saw the pistol within. He sniffed the barrel. It had been fired recently.

"Freddie," Ilsa's voice called from the bedroom. "You are neglecting me." Clegg slipped the pistol into his pocket and returned to where Ilsa was waiting. He slipped off his jacket, leaving it on the floor beside the bed. As he sat down Ilsa slid towards him, her hands gliding across his chest, unfastening his shirt as the sheet that covered her fell away. Ilsa pulled back and crossed her arms across herself, covering her naked breasts with an unconvincing attempt at modesty. "Champagne," she said, turning around to pick up a glass. "We should toast stolen pleasures."

Smoking Is Hazardous To Your Health : Lisbon, January 1942

As Ilsa passed him the glass Clegg noticed her cigarette case on the bedside table. It was identical to Tereza's. Clegg wasn't sure why he hadn't noticed it before. The bright red enamel shone like a beacon. Then he realised. When he had left the room it must have been face down, its gold, engraved face lying upwards. Ilsa had obviously moved it for some reason. As he lifted the glass of champagne towards his lips he suddenly realised why. He looked across at Ilsa and saw her watching him closely.

He threw the champagne in her face. She yelled, falling back on the bed. Clegg dived for his jacket, wresting Ilsa's pistol from his pocket.

Ilsa, wiping the champagne from her eyes, blinked as he threatened her with the weapon. "Please put your hands up, Mrs Lazlo," he said. "Or should it be Miss Lund or perhaps, even, Irena Lanz?"

Ilsa glowered at him.

"Out of bed, please," he ordered. Ilsa got up from the bed, completely naked, her hands raised. Clegg walked behind her, picked up the cigarette case and thumbed it open. Inside the two halves of a false cigarette, identical to the one in Tereza's case, betrayed Ilsa's intentions. "I don't imagine that the poison was in your drink, was it?" Clegg asked rhetorically. "Let's go through to the lounge," Clegg suggested with a wave of the pistol. "Somehow I'm not thinking of going to bed just now."

Ilsa walked ahead of him across the room. Clegg watched the perfect smoothness of her back and the exquisite line of her buttocks, cursing his luck. "She might have let me fuck her first," he thought. He followed her. "On the chair, here, please," he said picking up Ilsa's discarded dress and underwear. She sat down.

Clegg tied her wrists to the heavy arms of the chair using her stockings. She yelped as he pulled the knots tight. Clegg was less than sympathetic. He pulled them tighter still.

He tore two strips of cloth from her dress and used them to fasten her ankles one to each of the two front legs of the chair. With Ilsa helplessly bound, Clegg turned to pick up her handbag. He emptied out the contents on to his desk.

"My, my," said Clegg as he picked out an airplane ticket. "And I thought you were leaving for America by boat with Vitkor. Where does this take you, I wonder? Back to Paris?" He opened the paper folder. "Ah," he said, "to Prague. Does this suggest that your Gestapo masters are intending to rebuild Herr Strasser's operations, I wonder." Ilsa glowered at Clegg. He hadn't really expected a response. All she did in answer to his remarks was to struggle fruitlessly in an attempt to free herself from the chair.

Clegg went on sorting through the handbag's contents. He took out an envelop, a letter, a small card and a photograph. He read them through and knew what he had to do once he had dealt with Ilsa.

"If, you'll excuse me," he said, "I need to make some telephone calls." Clegg ripped another length of cloth from Ilsa's dress and pulled it across her mouth as a gag. Ilsa grunted in complaint.

By the time, Eduardo reached Clegg's hotel Ilsa's wrists and ankles were raw from her attempts to free herself.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," he said as Clegg opened the door and he saw the naked and helpless Ilsa.

"Not in the least," said Clegg. "I thought we were going to enjoy ourselves but I didn't like the wine she offered me." Eduardo looked puzzled. "Don't worry about it. We need to get this young lady back to England. I wondered if you could help."

Eduardo tugged at his chin. "Hmm," he said. "I can move her pretty much anywhere in Lisbon but further than that is difficult."

"The airport?"

"Yes, of course."

"That will be excellent. I have spoken to the British Embassy. There will be papers ready in the morning. A poor woman unfortunately has to return to the UK after falling ill over here. She is being flown back on the British Overseas Airways flight leaving first thing tomorrow. Mrs Lazlo here will be that woman. I need somewhere to keep her until then and a doctor to see that she is suitably tranquillised for the flight. I understand it can be distressing for those that are unwell."

"That can certainly be arranged," Eduardo smiled. The naked Ilsa scowled. "I presume you want some clothes for her as well."

"If possible," Clegg smiled. "I'm afraid her dress got torn in a fit of passion."

Parting : London, January 1942

Elsbeth Grant sat at her dressing table, staring into the mirror. It had been a busy few weeks. She looked out through her bedroom window and across Kensington Gardens on a cold crisp morning. It was time to go.

Behind her, the woman in Elly's bed stretched with a contented sigh. Elly looked across at Angela Parsons and then at the telegram delivered the previous evening that meant it was time to bring their short but mutually enjoyable relationship to a close.

Angela had proved a far more engaging project than Strangways. The Wren had been happy to share her recent life. Elly suspected Strangways boss had encouraged her but she felt she'd had the better end of the bargain.

Freddie would be pleased to hear that the girls from Paris had arrived safely, if somewhat bruised, dazed and confused. Although Angela hadn't given much away, it sounded to Elly as though they were already proving their worth. Freddie would be pleased that his efforts had been worthwhile, Turing and his team were happily beavering away (if that was the word) at Station X and the results were already beginning to come through. The only problem was that the Bletchley team weren't restricting themselves to the deciphering capabilities of the Major's "Codebook".

Word was that the girls were also helping to alleviate the out-of-hours boredom of those working deep in the Buckinghamshire countryside. Not that anyone in the Intelligence Services had much time. The fall out from 7th December 1941 was still settling and many of the crypt-analysts had been focussing on Japanese material rather than worrying about Strangways' Czechoslovakian problem.

Elly had been able to convince Strangways that it would be useful for her to be around when the Lysander brought Tereza and Anna back to the UK. It hadn't been difficult. Strangways was as susceptible to her charms as Freddie had been to Angela's. More so, to her considerable relief, she hadn't actually needed to bed him to get her way.

Freddie wouldn't have been surprised to learn that Sandy had been as competent as ever in shipping the two girls from Paris. They had been well packed in the Lysander's pod for their trip, although Sandy's concerns would have been more for their safety than their comfort.

They must have had a frightening experience, Elly felt. She had some sympathy with them. She could imagine the terror that they must have felt as they were being strapped up, loaded in and then surrounded by the kapok filled bags that had been packed around them to give them some protection against the cold and vibration of the flight. Still, that must have been nothing to the sensations that they must have felt as the pod was fitted beneath the aircraft, and the noise vibration and cold as the plane had bounced across the field, into the air and off over the Channel. They had both looked relieved when the Lysander's pod had been lowered to the tarmac and opened.

Unfortunately their relief hadn't last long. If the girls had expected to be freed of their straps they were disappointed.

Strangways had supervised. The two had been lifted from the pod and carried across to a waiting military truck. With his two charges dumped in the back under the guard of a bored looking, cigarette smoking, lance corporal, the driver had saluted and driven off with two other cars following. Elly couldn't be sure but sitting in the back of one of them was someone that looked an awful lot like the Prime Minister.

"Are you coming back to bed?" Angela called across to Elly, interrupting her thoughts.

Elly shook her head. "No, I've got to go." She rummaged in the drawer of her dressing table pulling out two hanks of cord, a scarf, a pad of cotton material and a small bottle labelled, "chloroform". She slipped them into her handbag. She never went far without the tools of her trade.

Angela looked sulky. "Will you be long?"

Elly pulled an envelop from her handbag. She looked again at the telegram that had let her know that Freddie was on his way back. Angela hadn't bothered to tell her – maybe she didn't know in any case. Strangways hadn't told her either and he certainly would. "A while," she said, knowing it was unlikely that the two would see one another ever again.

"I have to go out myself," Angela said.

I'll bet you do, thought Elly, believing that they were both headed to the same destination.

"Have you heard anything from Lisbon?" Angela asked.

Elly couldn't tell if she was asking because she didn't know or because she was interested to learn whether Elly had some other source of information. She shook her head. Lying came easily to her.

"The Lieutenant Commander is being very dull," Angela said. Elly felt Angela shouldn't be surprised but she'd become used to Angela's way of trying to wheedle information out of her, dropping the odd little fact and waiting for Elly's reaction. By now she should have worked out she wasn't getting anything back. "There's some material that's proving impossible to crack. They're hoping that the arrival of the fifth girl will solve that."

"Well, that's what you'd expect, I guess," Elly responded enigmatically. She wondered idly for a moment whether Angela would be better trussed and gagged in the closet or tied to the bed but in the end decided that would only cause more problems; there was no reason why Angela shouldn't meet the flight. It just meant that Elly would have to stay out of her sight at the airport.

Elly looked again into her handbag at the ropes, the cloth and the chloroform. No, they were destined for someone other than Angela, she thought.

BOAC Flight : Bristol, January 1942

The De Havilland Albatross carrying Clegg and the drugged and barely conscious Ilsa landed at Whitchurch Aerodrome on the outskirts of Bristol.

As the aircraft taxied up to the terminal building, Clegg peered out to see Strangways waiting for them. Beside him Angela, neat in her WRNS uniform, presented a picture of military efficiency.

The aircraft rolled to a stop. Strangways waved an ambulance forward. Clegg helped the groggy and confused Ilsa to stagger down the aircraft steps and into the back of a military ambulance. As the doors closed one of the nurses helped Ilsa onto a bed and then proceeded to strap her down. The drugs were wearing off. Ilsa put up a bit of a struggle but the nurse was obviously experienced in dealing with unwilling patients and soon had her subdued. The ambulance started to move off towards the road for Bristol and the A4 to London.

“So, five out of five,” said Strangways with reluctant admiration. “You must be pleased.”

“If it keeps you off my back, old man, I'm delighted. I think you'll find you've got all that there is of the Major's code book.”

“The others were not shipped in the best of condition.”

“My handling agent in France assured me they would be provided with adequate packaging.”

“It wasn't the packaging. There was some suggestion that staff at your handling agent had been doing just that.”

Freddie grinned. From what he remembered of the Comtesse's operations, she'd never discouraged her staff from amusing themselves with her guests as long as it didn't interfere with what she was hoping to get for them. He could just imagine the sort of treatment that the haughty nature of Anna Prozisc might have provoked and Tereza's bemused state wouldn't have saved her from the attentions of Sandy's guards, either.

“It didn't interfere with the tattoos, did it?” Freddie said.

Strangways, shook his head. “No. It's just, well, not the sort of thing we expected.”

“Sorry, old man, Clegg responded cheerily. He was confident that Strangway's concerns were very much his own rather than those of his superiors. “You didn't say you wanted them in mint condition. Anyway your bosses will just be happy that you've got what you wanted.”

“Well, the PM is happy enough, certainly. And Turing is very confident he'll be able to do something now he has all five girls. ”

“So, can I leave Miss Lanz or Lund or whoever in your capable hands?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Good. I'd keep her strapped down if I were you. She's apt to be a little lively. But if you're happy with the goods, I'll bid you farewell.” It saddened Freddie to be parting with a woman without some exchange of cash but, he thought, I suppose it's all for King and Country.

“Don't you want a lift back to London?” Strangways clearly thought Clegg had taken leave of his senses. “The PM wants to see you tomorrow. He's got a lot on his mind at the moment. Thought you might pick up a project he's thinking about in Singapore.”

Clegg was pleased that he had other plans. After what the Japanese had done to Pearl Harbour the further away from the Far East he could stay, the better. He just look back at Strangways blankly.

Strangways didn't appear to be in any position to press him further. Clegg took his chance to leave. "I'm sorry to disappoint him," Clegg said, "but I've got some private business to deal with and I need to be on the flight back to Lisbon. Give Turing my regards. Tell him not to have too much fun with the girls."

"No risk of that," said Strangways caustically as Clegg turned back towards the aircraft. "Heaven knows how I'm going to explain this to Winnie."

As he got back on the 'plane he was greeted by the stewardess. "Welcome aboard, Sir," she said.

The voice was familiar. Clegg realised that it was Elly and smiled broadly. "Excellent," he said, "excellent." He looked around the cabin. Only two of the other seats on the flight were taken. He spoke quietly as Elly pulled the door to the aircraft closed behind him and the engines fired up. "I take it you're not actually in the employ of British Overseas Airways?"

Elly shook her head.

"And can I assume that the uniform you are wearing, in fact belongs to someone else?"

Elly nodded.

"I thought so," said Clegg. "It's a little small for you and while I wouldn't complain,..."

"Please take a seat, Sir and fasten your seat belt," Elly interrupted. "We'll be taking off shortly."

Clegg smiled and found his way to his seat. It wasn't long before the countryside of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall was slipping away beneath them. They left the mainland behind and the plane headed out over the Scillies and on towards the Bay of Biscay.

If the uniform Elly was wearing was a little snug on her, it was nothing to the snugness of the ropes wrapped around the girl that it had originally belonged to. In a small hut on the edge of the airfield she sat, roped to a chair, wearing only her underwear, her mouth stuffed with a wad of cloth, another cloth wound around her eyes as a blindfold. On the far side of the room a brutish looking man sat guarding her. "Now, don't you worry my dear," he said in a friendly tone. "We're going to spend a little time here and then there's this gent I want you to meet what will help you find a whole new interesting career." The girl gave a distressed mew as she struggled on the chair but she wasn't in any position to disagree.

As the ambulance carrying the tranquillised Ilsa headed off towards Bletchley, Strangways travelled back to London.

When he got there his boss was furious that Clegg had just waltzed off. "The PM isn't going to like this at all," Admiral Messervy said, with a scowl. "In fact, I think we had better organise a little trip to get you out of the way for a while. How do you feel about a posting to Jamaica, say?"

Reunion : Brazzaville, February 1942

Much to Clegg's irritation, the train he was travelling on with Elly was making painfully slow progress. It was taking forever to make its way up the Congo Valley, inland from Pointe Noire. It seemed to gasp at every bend and incline as it tried to cope with the uneven track and the tropical heat.

The journey gave Clegg some time to think about the girls that were now back, he assumed, in Station X. He had some concerns. At least with his usual clients he knew how the girls would be treated. He was much less confident that the yahoo's from the English public school system that filled British Intelligence had the slightest idea of what to do with a woman. Still, he thought, philosophically, it was hardly his problem.

Eventually the locomotive coughed its way around the last curve of its 300 mile journey, and sighed with apparent relief as it slid to a halt in the ramshackle station in Brazzaville.

It was the letter, card and photograph in Ilsa's handbag that had brought them here.

The photograph of Rick and Ilsa beside the Eiffel Tower had confirmed Freddie's suspicion that Ilsa was the woman that Rick had met in Paris. The card from Rick's Cafe Americain, Casablanca had provided their destination if Freddie was going to find Rick and tell her of Ilsa's fate. The letter? Well, it had looked like a lot of personal stuff. Freddie didn't really read it, just taking in that it was in Rick's handwriting. The date on it had been from when they were both still in Paris.

Clegg and Elly had made their way from Lisbon to Casablanca. They'd been lucky there. That was where Clegg had met the fat man. Ferrari had bought the Cafe Americain when Rick left. Sam was still there too, of course, but he wasn't saying anything about his old boss. Ferrari had told Freddie as much as was known about the events of the past few weeks.

He'd told them to try the Free French garrison in Brazzaville.

Clegg peered out of the carriage window. At the end of a platform a dapper looking French police officer was waiting patiently. As Clegg hefted their suitcases from the train and Elly followed him out on to the platform, the Frenchman approached. "Monsieur Clegg?" he asked. "Monsieur Freddie Clegg?"

Clegg, wary as ever at being approached by the police, held out his hand and nodded slowly. The Frenchman shook it warmly took one step back and saluted. "Captain Renault," he announced. "Louis Renault. At your service."

Clegg understood at once. He'd heard about Renault from Ferrari in Casablanca.

According to Ferrari, Lazlo and Ilsa had turned up in Casablanca. There had been some fuss about letters of transit to allow them to leave. Strasser had been there too, looking for the same letters. Strasser had been shot at the airport. The police were still looking for the culprit. They'd been interviewing the usual suspects but without result. Renault and Rick had left shortly afterwards. Ferrari had his own idea as to who was responsible. The rumour was that Renault and Rick had gone to Brazzaville. It looked like the rumours were right.

"A pleasure to meet you, Louis," Freddie said. "Señor Ferrari sends his regards. He hopes you will stay away a little longer – the roulette wheel is doing better in your absence." Renault gave a half embarrassed smile. "This is my associate, Elspeth Grant." Clegg noticed Renault's appraising look. Renault was evidently as incorrigible as his reputation had suggested. Still, Clegg thought, Elly was well able to look after herself. "I was hoping to meet up with Rick," Freddie said. "Don't tell me he's off in the jungle."

"No, no, not at all. A small difficulty. We had heard you were coming. Rick asked if I could meet you." Freddie and Elly followed Renault out to his car for the drive into town. Renault pulled up outside the battered, colonial style, Hotel Du Monde. The three of them went inside. Rick was sitting at a table in the bar staring at an empty glass. The half full bottle of Scotch beside it suggested that it wouldn't be empty for long.

Freddie looked around. If this was the best Brazzaville had to offer it wasn't much. On the other hand, he was glad to be there. He was pretty sure that if he'd stayed in London Strangways would have had him on a boat to Singapore by now. He wasn't planning to go back for quite a while. That's why he was pleased that Elly had turned up when she did. She would have guessed he wouldn't be stopping in England long.

Anyway, Freddie thought, even if he hadn't fancied the trip to Brazzaville, he had owed it to his friend to let him know about Ilsa.

Freddie decided that he had best get it over with. "Rick," he said. Blaine looked up barely recognising his friend through his liquor induced haze. "I brought you some news. About Ilsa." Rick blinked. Freddie could see that he'd heard what he said. "She's in England."

"I thought she was on her way to America. With Viktor," Rick slurred.

"She had a change of plan. It wasn't entirely voluntary."

"And Viktor?"

"Not so lucky, I'm afraid. He died in Lisbon." Rick looked puzzled, as though Freddie's news had indeed broken through his alcoholic fog. Freddie knew that the best way to cope with Rick's drinking was to ignore it. He'd sober up soon enough. "She killed him, Rick. Shot him in his hotel room when she realised she was about to be exposed. Tried to kill me too."

Now Rick was alert. And sober too. He pushed the bottle and the glass to one side. "Exposed?" he said. "As what?"

"As a German spy, as Strasser's lover. One of his lovers. She was one of Strasser's agents. She was helping the SS in Prague. The Czech and Slovak population will not be disappointed that she won't be coming back."

Rick looked unbelieving but pressed Freddie to continue even so. "But she'd been in a Gestapo detention centre. She had this dreadful tattoo where they'd marked her with her camp number and origin. Letters and numbers. It covered most of one buttock."

"It was nothing to do with the camps, Rick." Freddie wasn't keen to elaborate on Ilsa's contribution of Strasser's code book. "Let's just say you did the Allies a great favour when you shot Strasser."

Louis Renault raised an eyebrow at the accusation, even though he knew that Freddie would have been given every benefit of the Casablanca rumour machine. Rick grunted, unwilling to accept any praise. "And Lazlo? Viktor Lazlo had done so much there. What about him?"

"Genuine as far as I can say. She used him as her cover. He gave her access to places she could never had got to on her own. And when she no longer needed him... Well, I don't think she had any qualms about bringing Mr Lazlo's contribution to the war effort to an end...."

"But she had come to Casablanca to escape. If what you say is true, then she could have gone anywhere with Strasser's permission."

"Yes, but only in places where the Nazi writ runs. The whole 'letters of transit' thing was a scheme by Strasser to get Ilsa to the USA. Imagine the value of an agent there with the reputation of a resistance heroine, cruelly widowed from her freedom fighting husband, escaping from a war torn Europe."

Rick sighed, seeming to accept what Freddie was saying. "How do you know she was the Ilsa I'd been seeing in Paris? How did you get here?"

Freddie reached into his jacket and pulled out the envelop he had taken from Ilsa's handbag. "She was carrying this." Freddie tossed it across to Rick. "After that we followed the trail from Casablanca courtesy of Señor Ferrari at the Blue Parrot. By the way, Sam sends his regards. He says the place isn't the same without you."

Rick opened the envelope. Inside was the letter from Rick to Ilsa; the card from Rick's bar in Casablanca; the photograph of Rick and Ilsa standing at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

"At least she kept it," he said, holding up the photograph. "She'd said we'd always have Paris."

Freddie shook his head. "Let it go, Rick," he said. "Sink all the Scotch you like but let it go."

"I accused her of deceiving me, when she came to Casablanca. Asked if she'd left me for Lazlo or if there had been others in between." Freddie looked on sympathetically. "Asked her if she wasn't the kind that tells. Maybe I was closer to the mark than I thought." He downed his drink and poured another.

Freddie lifted his glass in a toast to his old friend. "Women," he said. "There's always another one." Elly raised a querulous eyebrow.

Rick grunted but lifted his own glass in response. "You should know, Freddie, you should know," he said.

Renault turned to Freddie. "You'll stay in Brazzaville a while? Rick needs his friends now."

Freddie considered his whiskey for a moment. "I thought I might. I'd hate to leave Rick in the lurch. Besides, with so many of the gallant young men of the tropical colonies away fighting I wondered if some of the women they left behind might be at a loose end. I'm sure many of them must be bored and lonely. Must be a way I could help change that for them."

"Some sort of social circle, perhaps?" Renault seemed to be impressed by Clegg's enthusiasm.

"Some thing like that. Help them broaden their cultural horizons, meet interesting new people, that sort of thing...."

Elly wasn't surprised. Clegg usually had an ulterior motive. She knew she'd need to get used to mosquito nets and the stifling heat. It looked like they were going back into business in the Dark Continent.

Epilogue: Bletchley, August 2007

The young Fred Clegg was enjoying the outing. It had been a long car journey up through the Buckinghamshire countryside, past Luton and Whipsnade but in the end he'd found the place without trouble. He wasn't much of a one for museums normally but, when he'd learned of the family connection and heard about what his grandfather had been up to during the war, he had felt that he just had to come.

Sitting in the library of the Mansion in Bletchley Park, Fred had been happy to listen to the guide describing the work that had gone on there during the second world war; the story of the code breakers; of Turing, Colossus and the Bombes. The guide had recited the accolade given by Churchill to the those that had worked there - "the geese that laid the golden eggs but never cackled" he'd called them.

Fred knew what the guide meant. According to his father, it had certainly been a long time after the war before his grandfather had said anything about what he knew of what had gone on there.

Fred followed the group of visitors as the guide led the way out of the Mansion and around the outbuildings that had housed the teams that had worked on the Ultra material – the code name given to the Enigma intercepts.

The tour wound its way around the complex, finishing up at the working replica of one of Turing's Bombes. The clatter of the machine's rotors was impressive enough, it was daunting to think what the noise must have been like with ten of the things running.

Eventually they found their way back to the Mansion. "Ladies and Gentlemen," the guide said, "there's one last thing we'd like to show you and, frankly to ask for your help. We know that a lot of the visitors here have family recollections of things that went on at Station X which were never recorded and we're rather baffled by a recent find." He led the way back across the stable yard to one of the cottages that had been used Dilly Knox and Turing. "You see that room up there," he said pointing to the windows in a small turret. "That room we know was used by Alan Turing in the early part of the war. He moved out to work with the others in the huts as they were built. He came back here, according to the archives, in January 1942 for a period of about two months. We don't know what he was working on or why he moved back in.

"All we do know is that there were two important projects going on at that time. One was work that was being done on intercepting the Japanese radio traffic following Pearl Harbour and the invasion of the Philippines. The other, and perhaps more intriguing, was the so-called "Heydrich Decrypts". We know that material related to Reinhard Heydrich's rule in Czechoslovakia as Protector of Bohemia and Moravia was being worked on at Station X in late 1941 but apparently without success. It has always been assumed that this in some way related to Heydrich's involvement in the infamous Der Wannsee Conference but that Station X failed to decrypt it before the meeting. Some historians have suggested that Station X continued to work on this material into 1942 with greater success and that it led to the mission that resulted in the assassination of Heydrich in May 1942. The assumption has always been that this work was led by Turing."

Fred sat listening. It all seemed to tie in quite nicely although his Grandfather had never mentioned the Heydrich thing. Fred didn't think Grandpa had ever found out what it was that the girl's tattoos had been used for. That would have been like him. Once he'd finished with something he didn't go back.

Their guide continued. "This year, though, we opened up the loft space in the top of the turret. We were very surprised to discover five sets of what looked like manacles with chains linking

them to heavy rings set in the walls. The space was equipped like a small cell but we have no record of it being used before, during or after the war. It may have had something to do with when the building was a stable or it may have had some other function. It just goes to show that Bletchley still has its secrets.”

Fred thought back to one of his favourite movies and to the tales that his grandfather had told him about where fiction ended and fact began. He wasn't at all sure that the world was ready for the full story of Major Strasser's Code Book yet. He could imagine what might well have gone on in the loft of the turret and it didn't fit with the stiff upper lip image of the British during the second world war.

Besides there were his own enterprises to think about and he certainly didn't want to draw attention to them.

THE END

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