



**JOHN
LE CARRÉ**

AUTHOR OF TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
A SMALL TOWN IN GERMANY



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A SMALL TOWN IN GERMANY

JOHN LE CARRÉ, the pseudonym for David Cornwell, was a member of the British Foreign Service from 1959 to 1964. His third novel, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, became a worldwide bestseller. He has written twenty-two novels, which have been published in thirty-six languages. Many of his books have been made into films, including *The Constant Gardener*, *The Russia House*, *The Little Drummer Girl*, and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.

LE JOHN

CARRÉ

A SMALL TOWN IN
GERMANY



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INTRODUCTION

JOHN LE CARRÉ

March 1991

A *Small Town in Germany* is printed with aversion in my memory, and I can think of little good to say of it until I begin to remember its three principal protagonists: the former refugee, Harting; the acidly pragmatic British diplomat, Bradfield; and the driven and unhappy investigator, Alan Turner, whose part I secretly allocated to myself. Then reluctantly I have to concede that I did, after all, achieve much of what I had wanted to achieve, and that the novel is not the eyesore I always imagine it to be.

The reasons for my aversion are many. The first is that I had set out to write something close to a black comedy about British political manners, and yet the result was widely perceived to be ferociously anti-German.

And perhaps it was. The West Germany of Konrad Adenauer was not all lovely by any means: old players from the Hitler time were two-a-penny, whether they were such men as Adenauer's own *éminence grise*, Herr Globke, who had had a hand in drafting Hitler's Nuremberg laws discriminating against the Jews, or such luminaries of the Free Democratic Party as Herr Achenbach, who helped organise the deportation of French Jews from Paris, or the ebullient Herr Zogelmann, who only eighteen years before had been a high-ranking figure in the Hitler Youth. In the West German police, the judiciary, the intelligence fraternity, and the armed services, in industry and science and the teaching professions and, most particularly, in the bureaucracy, old Nazis abounded, either because they had done nothing for which they could be purged, or because they had been deemed indispensable to West Germany's reconstruction. But most often because their cases had laid gathering dust in someone's drawer, filed and forgotten as part of a tacit agreement between NATO partners to put the past behind us.

To a young Englishman such as myself, whose fascination for Germany's culture and history had begun in childhood, Bonn in the early sixties was a spooky place indeed. Sometimes the very streets the city felt like a perilously thin surface laid hastily upon the recent dreadful past, like one of those nicely mown grass mounds at Belsen concentration camp, covering the mute agony of the innocent dead. The monstrosity, when you allowed yourself to think of it, was so close: in the hewn faces of the over-fifties –

what did *you* do in the war, Mummy? – in the sudden recognition of an undemolished piece of Nazi architecture, in the forgetful use of a phrase of Nazi terminology in the mouth of a German parliamentarian or official. Too frequently, the jargon of forgetting sounded as grating as the jargon that Bonn was trying so busily to forget. The very term “the vanquishing of the past,” spoken in German, has the clatter of a military manoeuvre. Germans, like the English, are branded on their tongues.

Sitting in the Bundestag's diplomatic gallery, day after day – I was a Second Secretary in the British Embassy at the time – listening to the succession of classroom speeches, of which the texts were available in advance, I made little effort to prevent my imagination from flying beyond the walls of my confinement, and speculating about the collective memories, some honourable, some tragic, and some shameful, that comprised the experience of these sombrely

clad middle-aged men and women seated a few feet below me. Studying their walled-up faces and self-conscious manners as they trooped to the rostrum, I asked myself what stories these people might not tell if ever they were set free.

For we were still wondering, we British, we former Allies, all of us who to a greater or lesser extent had suffered from the dreadful march of German nationalism: who are they now? And who have they yet to become? Could they do it a third time in this century?

And we wonder it to this day. Particularly to this day: aloud in the popular press, and somewhat more quietly in our think tanks and the large backrooms of Whitehall. But not always so quietly; for it is only a few months ago, indeed, that an august body of Germany-watchers assembled at Chequers to address itself to the sixty-four-thousand-dollar German question, and someone blew the gaff. The question seemed to be roughly this: As a reunified Germany acquires superpower status within the European Community, who will she be, can we trust her, and what use will she make of her power?

The leaked conclusions were not pretty, and they said as much about the British character as the German.

And the extraordinary thing is that, fully thirty years ago, between bouts of fighting the Cold War and gamely protesting our support for a reunified Germany (in the confidence it would never be achieved), we too were asking ourselves the same turgid questions, if in slightly different terms. Will the streets split? we asked each other. Will the huge past burst through the wafer-thin surface? For how much longer can the tailor's dummy of the German Economic Miracle tolerate the sackcloth of defeat, and give blind obedience to NATO?

And always our answer was the same: for as long as they are rich. For as long as the money flows and they come back with a suntan from their holidays in Italy, we have nothing to fear.

Nevertheless, while we poured our tax-free Scotch down their throats and listened to their monologues on The German Problem and their protestations of eternal Anglophilia, we watched them like hawks for the first sign of a defection. Would they sneak off to the Russians and do a deal behind our backs – a reunified Germany in exchange for an unaligned one? They tried it occasionally, but never with much conviction. Was the Adenauer–de Gaulle love affair a plot to weaken the Anglo-American grasp on the German collar? “De Gaulle wants the same as we do,” Harold Macmillan remarked sadly, in my hearing, after the collapse of the first British attempt to enter the common Market, “but without us.” And each time a daft political grouping of the far right popped up – in Bavaria, in Schleswig-Holstein, in one of the old spawning beds of anti-Semitism or Pan-Germanism – we at once telegraphed our report of it to London, measuring its significance against the prevailing state of the German economy. We were, I think now, fairly simplistic.

But, then, never forget that diplomats are amateurs. They are not politicians, they are not trained analysts or economists or sociologists or lawyers or historians – certainly the British variety aren't. They are for the most part Oxbridge Arts men posing as local experts, and often quite as wrong-headed as you might expect.

And our Bonn Embassy was precisely what our Embassies are everywhere: a bastion of English phobias about the country in which it was situated. Its style and prejudices were informed by an expatriate vision of suburban England which was certainly long out-of-date, and probably had never existed anyway. It was a place made schizophrenic by Britain's continuing self-perception as the victor in the '39–'45 war, and by our much humbler and more realistic role as supplicant for German support for our belated entry into the European Community. It was further complicated by our continuing military presence in Germany, and by our joint custody, under the Four Power Status, of the former German capital, Berlin. Our best German-watcher was an escapee from

Colditz Castle prisoner-of-war camp, then in East Germany. Our Head of Chancery (the Embassy's Political Section) was a much-decorated former submarine commander from the Royal Navy. Several of our local staff were German Jews who had fled to Britain before the war and, like Harting, returned to Germany as members of the British Control Commission. Both our Ambassadors during my time had previously served in Moscow, both had been privy to the inmost councils of Cold War planning. The social atmosphere, in my recollection, was much as the book describes: neurotic and grudging under the soggy weight of the Nibelung mist.

To pull a single thread out of this world and spin it into a story proved extraordinarily difficult, not least because of the sheer number of possibilities. Theoretically, I wanted a story in which the past haunted the present; which reflected our growing dependence upon a nation we had so recently vanquished; and which spoke also to our anxieties about a resurgence of the nationalist passions that might be smouldering beneath the affluent surface. But what form should such a resurgence take? I certainly did not believe in a crude return of Nazism, a dramatic renaissance of the old guard. I believed that, if a threat came from anywhere, it came from the grey centre, in a form closer to the movement of resentful shopkeepers and small bourgeois that was looming in France under the leadership of Poujade. I was aware also of profound discontent of the frustrated German young, who were beginning to vent their rage against West German affluence, and West German subservience to NATO: does anyone remember Danny the Red any more?

In my fanciful prediction of how those currents might eventually reveal themselves, I was manifestly wrong. But I was right at least in positing a student movement of impotent fury against the West German establishment, even if it ultimately painted itself, at its most extreme, in the disgusting colours of the Baader-Meinhof gang, with its alarming echelons of secret and less secret supporters drawn from German intellectuals. I was right also to imagine that such a force would be virtually apolitical: that its platform would consist of vague, unfinished, anarchistic rhetoric, of which the implementation was the only message.

And anyway, I didn't expect to be right. I wanted an informed nightmare, not an accurate prophecy. My aim was to tell what I might best call a political ghost story. And for better or worse that's what the book became.

* * *

The ghost, of course, is Leo Harting. Alan Turner is his exorcist, Rawley Bradfield is the luckless owner of the haunted house. None of these characters had a model in reality: no Harting, to my knowledge, ever lived, though in my day there were dozens of variations of him, manning the little ex-Control Commission offices that continued to function under other names up and down the country, long after the formal ending of the Occupation. No Bradfield with a cuckolding wife commanded our Chancery, no Alan Turner from London came and tore our lives to pieces. No lazy, clever homosexual named de Lisle watched him do it.

But Herr Jünger lived. And Herr Jünger was real, though his name and likeness are nowhere in the book. Herr Jünger was one of our two Embassy fixers, employed by the Administration Section. Do they have such people still? Bet your bottom dollar they do. Herr Jünger had an office on the ground floor, and his job was to get you diplomatic number plates for your car, and diplomatic concessions from the airlines, and diplomatic petrol coupons, and your new radio, and your new television and your new washing-machine, and your cases of Dutch beer or Scotch whisky – and yes, of course, poor Harting's hair-dryers also – and all at the discounted, duty-free prices offered to pampered diplomats.

Herr Jünger was an old, silky-haired, kindly man, of extraordinary patience, and when he was yelled at by the diplomatic wives with their six-acre voices, he barely flinched. And my private conviction, contrary to everyone else's, was that Herr Jünger never made a bean out of any of us, because he was so anxious to please. So I stole Herr Jünger's hair-dryers, and I stole a little of his relationship with his employers also, and I gave them to Leo Harting, in order to beef up the servant's part that Leo was obliged to play in order to survive. And whether Herr Jünger ever knew it I still don't know, though about fifteen years ago, quite by accident, I bumped into him at Cologne airport.

He was much older than I remembered him, and his cobwebbed skin had acquired the baby softness of age. I spotted him long before he spotted me. He sat at a corner table of the restaurant in the departure lounge, sipping a beer and watching the modern world go by, and he looked as though he had been at his table all day long. Finally he saw me, and gently accepted my hand, and gently said my name. He had no luggage beside him, not even the obligatory German briefcase. He wore a Fair Isle cardigan with leather patches on the sleeves, something he might have bought long ago from one of his own mail-order catalogues. He looked *englisch*.

"Where are you travelling to, Herr Jünger?" I asked him.

Nowhere, he replied with a smile. He came here most weekdays now. Sometimes Sundays also. I think he said his wife had died. Certainly he was alone.

"So are you collecting material for a novel?" I asked him, as a joke.

No, he was writing no novel, sir, he replied with another smile.

"But all day here with no book to read, Herr Jünger," I protested. "What are you doing here? Are you a spy?"

Herr Jünger held up a finger to command my silence. "Listen," he said, still smiling.

So I listened, making a special listener's face for Herr Jünger, because he was an old man who wanted me to listen. But what was I supposed to listen to, when all I could hear was a male announcer telling us in several languages that the flight to somewhere was embarking at gate something?

"That's my son," he explained, with a pride which to this day I cannot forget. And I realised that his raised finger was pointing at the loudspeakers.

* * *

I wrote the first drafts of my book in Vienna, where Simon Wiesenthal, the celebrated Nazi-hunter, helped me put together the gruesome past of Klaus Karfeld, the villain of the novel. I lived in the former apartment of the late Herbert von Karajan, the conductor. It was pure accident. At first, whenever I came home, all the doors were magically opened ahead of me by unseen hands, for it turned out that the Maestro was inclined to be tetchy when he returned from his performances, and could not abide opening doors.

In Vienna also I was able to hear at first-hand the language of unvarnished anti-Semitism, and it gave the spike to my writing about Bonn's old guard. "If you are studying the disease," Wiesenthal advised, "you have to live in the swamp." He was referring to Vienna. I brought the book back to England still unfinished, and several times I was within a gnat's eyelash of giving it up altogether. It was a divorce time in my life, and awful, both for my poor faithful wife and me. And the book blocked me, and I blocked the book, and I kept thinking: With all the hells I am visiting, why do I bother to describe one that I have invented? If you want Alan Turner explained to you, perhaps you should imagine me, or yourself, at a time when we see so much, and feel so much, and yet resist every sensible conclusion to our perceptions.

Then one day I took myself back to Bonn in great secrecy, with pounds and pounds of handwritten manuscript in my good German briefcase, and I holed up in a hotel room in Remagen that overlooked the Rhine. Remember the bridge at Remagen? Why should you? Yet it saw one of the fiercest battles ever fought by the Americans against the Germans, and it took the Allies across the Rhine.

And there, at Remagen, a kind angel helped me bring the project to an end. In some ways, it is still not the book I wanted to write. But what book ever is?

PROLOGUE

The Hunter and the Hunted

Ten minutes to midnight: a pious Friday in May and a fine river mist lying in the market square. Bonn was a Balkan city, stained and secret, drawn over with tramwire. Bonn was a dark house where someone had died, a house draped in Catholic black and guarded by policemen. Their leather coats glistened in the lamplight, the black flags hung over them like birds. It was as if all but they had heard the alarm and fled. Now a car, now a pedestrian hurried past, and the silence followed like a wake. A tram sounded, but far away. In the grocer's shop, from a pyramid of tins, the handwritten notice advertised the emergency: 'Lay in your store now!' Among the crumbs, marzipan pigs like hairless mice proclaimed the forgotten Saint's Day.

Only the posters spoke. From trees and lanterns they fought their futile war, each at the same height as if that were the regulation; they were printed in radiant paint, mounted on hardboard, and draped in thin streamers of black bunting, and they rose at him vividly as he hastened past. 'Send the Foreign Workers Home!' 'Rid Us of the Whore Bonn!' 'Unite Germany First, Europe Second!' And the largest was set above them, in a tall streamer right across the street: 'Open the road East, the road West has failed.' His dark eyes paid them no attention. A policeman stamped his boots and grimaced at him, making a hard joke of the weather; another challenged him but without conviction; and one called 'Guten Abend' but he offered no reply; for he had no mind for any but the plumper figure a hundred paces ahead of him who trotted hurriedly down the wide avenue, entering the shadow of a black flag, emerging as the tallow lamplight took him back.

The dark had made no ceremony of coming nor the grey day of leaving, but the night was crisp for once and smelt of winter. For most months, Bonn is not a place of seasons; the climate is all indoors, climate of headaches, warm and flat like bottled water, a climate of waiting, of bitter tastes taken from the slow river, of fatigue and reluctant growth, and the air is an exhausted wind fallen on the plain, and the dusk when it comes is nothing but a darkening of the day's mist, a lighting of tube lamps in the howling streets. But on that spring night the winter had come back to visit, slipping up the Rhine valley under cover of the predatory darkness, and it quickened them as they went, hurt them with its unexpected chill. The eyes of the smaller man, straining ahead of him, shed tears of cold.

The avenue curved, taking them past the yellow walls of the University. 'Democrats! Hang the Press Baron!' 'The World belongs to the Young!' 'Let the English Lordlings beg!' 'Axel Springer to the gallows!' 'Long Live Axel Springer!' 'Protest is Freedom.' These posters were done in woodcut on a student press. Overhead the young foliage glittered in a fragmented canopy of green glass. The lights were brighter here, the police fewer. The men strode on, neither faster nor slower; the first busily, with a beadle's flurry. His stride though swift was stagy and awkward, as if he had stepped down from somewhere grander; a walk replete with a German burgher's dignity. His arms swung shortly at his sides and his back was straight. Did he know he was being followed? His head was held stiff in authority, but authority became him poorly. A man drawn forward by what he saw? Or driven by what lay behind? Was it fear that prevented him from turning? A man of substance does not move his head. The second man stepped lightly in his wake. A sprite, weightless as the dark, slipping

through the shadows as if they were a net: a clown stalking a courtier.

~~They entered a narrow alley; the air was filled with the smells of sour food. Once more the walls~~ cried to them, now in the tell-tale liturgy of German advertising: 'Strong Men Drink Beer!' 'Knowledge is Power, Read Molden Books!' Here for the first time the echo of their footsteps mingled in unmistakable challenge; here for the first time the man of substance seemed to waken, sensing the danger behind. It was no more than a slur, a tiny imperfection in the determined rhythm of his portly march; but it took him to the edge of the pavement, away from the darkness of the walls, and he seemed to find comfort in the brighter places, where the lamplight and the policemen could protect him. Yet his pursuer did not relent. 'Meet us in Hanover!' the poster cried. 'Karfeld speaks in Hanover!' 'Meet us in Hanover on Sunday!'

An empty tram rolled past, its windows protected with adhesive mesh. A single church bell began its monotonous chime, a dirge for Christian virtue in an empty city. They were walking again, closer together, but still the man in front did not look back. They rounded another corner; ahead of them, the great spire of the Minster was cut like thin metal against the empty sky. Reluctantly the first chimes were answered by others, until all over the town there rose a slow cacophony of uncertain peals. An Angelus? An air raid? A young policeman, standing in the doorway of a sports shop, bared his head. In the Cathedral porch, a candle burned in a bowl of red glass; to one side stood a religious bookshop. The plump man paused, leaned forward as if to examine something in the window; glanced down the road; and in that moment the light from the window shone full upon his features. The smaller man ran forward: stopped; ran forward again; and was too late.

The limousine had drawn up, an Opel Rekord driven by a pale man hidden in the smoked glass. Its back door opened and closed; ponderously it gathered speed, indifferent to the one sharp cry, a cry of fury and of accusation, of total loss and total bitterness which, drawn as if by force from the breast of him who uttered it, rang abruptly down the empty street and, as abruptly, died. The policeman spun around, shone his torch. Held in its beam, the small man did not move; he was staring after the limousine. Shaking over the cobbles, skidding on the wet tramlines, disregarding the traffic lights, it had vanished westward towards the illuminated hills.

'Who are you?'

The beam rested on the coat of English tweed, too hairy for such a little man, the fine, neat shoes grey with mud, the dark, unblinking eyes.

'Who are you?' the policeman repeated; for the bells were everywhere now, and their echoes persisted eerily.

One small hand disappeared into the folds of the coat and emerged with a leather holder. The policeman accepted it gingerly, unfastened the catch while he juggled with his torch and the black pistol he clutched inexpertly in his left hand.

'What was it?' the policeman asked, as he handed back the wallet. 'Why did you call out?'

The small man gave no answer. He had walked a few paces along the pavement.

'You never saw him before?' he asked, still looking after the car. 'You don't know who he was?' He spoke softly, as if there were children sleeping upstairs; a vulnerable voice, respectful of silence.

'No.'

The sharp, lined face broke into a conciliatory smile. 'Forgive me. I made a silly mistake. I thought I recognised him.' His accent was neither wholly English nor wholly German, but a privately elected no-man's-land, picked and set between the two. And he would move it, he seemed to say, a little in either direction, if it chanced to inconvenience the listener.

'It's the season,' the small man said, determined to make conversation. 'The sudden cold, one

looks at people more.' He had opened a tin of small Dutch cigars and was offering them to the policeman. The policeman declined so he lit one for himself.

'It's the riots,' the policeman answered slowly, 'the flags, the slogans. We're all nervous these days. This week Hanover, last week Frankfurt. It upsets the natural order.' He was a young man and had studied for his appointment. 'They should forbid them more,' he added, using the common dictum. 'Like the Communists.'

He saluted loosely; once more the stranger smiled, a last affecting smile, dependent, hinting at friendship, dwindling reluctantly. And was gone. Remaining where he was, the policeman listened attentively to the fading footfall. Now it stopped; to be resumed again, more quickly – was it his imagination? – with greater conviction than before. For a moment he pondered.

'In Bonn,' he said to himself with an inward sigh, recalling the stranger's weightless tread, 'even the flies are official.'

Taking out his notebook, he carefully wrote down the time and place and nature of the incident. He was not a fast-thinking man, but admired for his thoroughness. This done, he added the number of the motor-car, which for some reason had remained in his mind. Suddenly he stopped; and stared at what he had written; at the name and the car number; and he thought of the plump man and the long, marching stride, and his heart began beating very fast. He thought of the secret instruction he had read on the recreation-room noticeboard, and the little muffled photograph from long ago. The notebook still in his hand, he ran off for the telephone kiosk as fast as his boots would carry him.

Way over there in a
Small town in Germany

There lived a shoemaker
Schumann was his name
Ich bin ein Musikant
Ich bin für das Vaterland
I have a big bass drum
And this is how I play!

A drinking song sung in British military messes in Occupied Germany, with obscene variations, to the tune of the 'Marche Militaire'

Mr Meadows and Mr Cork

‘**W**hy don’t you get out and walk? I would if I was your age. Quicker than sitting with this scum.’

‘I’ll be all right,’ said Cork, the albino cypher clerk, and looked anxiously at the older man in the driving seat beside him. ‘We’ll just have to hurry slowly,’ he added in his most conciliatory tone. Cork was a cockney, bright as paint, and it worried him to see Meadows all het up. ‘We’ll just have to let it happen to us, won’t we, Arthur?’

‘I’d like to throw the whole bloody lot of them in the Rhine.’

‘You know you wouldn’t really.’

It was Saturday morning, nine o’clock. The road from Friesdorf to the Embassy was packed tight with protesting cars, the pavements lined with photographs of the Movement’s leader, and the banners were stretched across the road like advertisements at a rally: ‘The West has deceived us; Germans can look East without shame.’ ‘End the Coca-Cola culture now!’ At the very centre of the long column sat Cork and Meadows, becalmed while the clamour of horns rose all round them in unceasing concert. Sometimes they sounded in series starting at the front and working slowly back, so that their roar passed overhead like an aeroplane; sometimes in unison, dash dot dash, K for Karfeld our elected leader; and sometimes they just had a free for all, tuning for the symphony.

‘What the hell do they want with it, then? All the screaming? Bloody good haircut, that’s what has of them need, a good hiding and back to school.’

‘It’s the farmers,’ Cork said, ‘I told you, they’re picketing the Bundestag.’

‘Farmers? This lot? They’d die if they got their feet wet, half of them. Kids. Look at that crowd there then. Disgusting, that’s what I call it.’

To their right, in a red Volkswagen, sat three students, two boys and a girl. The driver wore a leather jacket and very long hair, and he was gazing intently through his windscreen at the car in front. His slim palm poised over the steering wheel, waiting for the signal to blow his horn. His two companions, intertwined, were kissing deeply.

‘They’re the supporting cast,’ Cork said. ‘It’s a lark for them. You know the students’ slogan: “Freedom’s only real when you’re fighting for it.” It’s not so different from what’s going on at home is it? Hear what they did in Grosvenor Square last night?’ Cork asked, attempting once again to shift the ground. ‘If that’s education, I’ll stick to ignorance.’

But Meadows would not be distracted.

‘They ought to bring in the National Service,’ he declared, glaring at the Volkswagen. ‘That would sort them out.’

‘They’ve got it already. They’ve had it twenty years or more.’ Sensing that Meadows was preparing to relent, Cork chose the subject most likely to encourage him. ‘Here, how did Myra’s birthday party go, then? Good show, was it? I’ll bet she had a lovely time.’

But for some reason the question only cast Meadows into even deeper gloom, and after that Cork chose silence as the wiser course. He had tried everything, and to no effect. Meadows was a decent, churchy sort of bloke, the kind they didn't make any more, and worth a good deal of anybody's time; but there was a limit even to Cork's filial devotion. He'd tried the new Rover which Meadows had bought for his retirement, tax free and at a ten per cent discount. He'd admired its build, its comfort and its fittings until he was blue in the face, and all he'd got for his trouble was a grunt. He'd tried the Exiles Motoring Club, of which Meadows was a keen supporter; he'd tried the Commonwealth Children's Sports Day which they hoped to run that afternoon in the Embassy gardens. And now he had even tried last night's big party, which they hadn't liked to attend because of Janet's baby being so near; and as far as Cork was concerned, that was the whole menu and Meadows could lump it. Short of a holiday, Cork decided, short of a long, sunny holiday away from Karfeld and the Brussels negotiations, and away from his daughter Myra, Arthur Meadows was heading for the bend.

'Here,' said Cork trying one more throw, 'Dutch Shell's up another bob.'

'And Guest Keen are down three.'

Cork had resolutely invested in non-British stock, but Meadows preferred to pay the price of patriotism.

'They'll go up again after Brussels, don't you worry.'

'Who are you kidding? The talks are as good as dead, aren't they? I may not have your intelligence but I can read, you know.'

Meadowes, as Cork was the very first to concede, had every excuse for melancholy, quite apart from his investments in British steel. He'd come with hardly a break from four years in Warsaw, which was enough to make anyone jumpy. He was on his last posting and facing retirement in the autumn, and in Cork's experience they got worse, not better, the nearer the day came. Not to mention having a nervous wreck for a daughter: Myra Meadowes was on the road to recovery, true enough, but if one half of what they said of her was to be believed, she'd got a long way to go yet.

Add to that the responsibilities of Chancery Registrar – of handling, that is, a political archive in the hottest crisis any of them could remember – and you had more than your work cut out. Even Cork tucked away in Cyphers, had felt the draught a bit, what with the extra traffic, and the extra hours, and Janet's baby coming on, and the do-this-by-yesterday that you got from most of Chancery; and his own experience, as he well knew, was nothing beside what old Arthur had had to cope with. It was the coming from all directions, Cork decided, that threw you these days. You never knew where it would happen next. One minute you'd be getting off a Reply Immediate on the Bremen riots, or tomorrow's jamboree in Hanover, the next they'd be coming back at you with the gold rush, or Brussels, or raising another few hundred millions in Frankfurt and Zurich; and if it was tough in Cyphers, it was tougher still for those who had to track down the files, enter up the loose papers, mark in the new entries and get them back into circulation again . . . which reminded him, for some reason, that he must telephon his accountant. If the Krupp labour front was going on like this, he might take a little look at Swedish steel, just an in-and-outer for the baby's bank account . . .

'Hullo,' said Cork brightening. 'Going to have a scrap, are we?'

Two policemen had stepped off the kerb to remonstrate with a large agricultural man in a Mercedes diesel. First he lowered the window and shouted at them; now he opened the door and shouted at them again. Quite suddenly, the police withdrew. Cork yawned in disappointment.

Once upon a time, Cork remembered wistfully, panics came singly. You had a scream on the Berlin corridor, Russian helicopters teasing up the border, an up-and-downer with the Four Powers Steering Committee in Washington. Or there was intrigue: suspected German diplomatic initiative in

Moscow that had to be nipped in the bud, a suspected fiddle on the Rhodesian embargo, hushing up a Rhine Army riot in Minden. And that was that. You bolted your food, opened shop, and stayed till the job was done; and you went home a free man. That was that; that was what life was made of; that was Bonn. Whether you were a dip like de Lisle, or a non-dip behind the green baize door, the scene was the same: a bit of drama, a lot of hot air, then tickle up the stocks and shares a bit, back to boredom and roll on your next posting.

Until Karfeld. Cork gazed disconsolately at the posters. Until Karfeld came along. Nine months, he reflected – the vast features were plump and lifeless, the expression one of flatulent sincerity – nine months since Arthur Meadows had come bustling through the connecting door from Registry with the news of the Kiel demonstrations, the surprise nomination, the student sit-in, and the little bit of violence they had gradually learnt to expect. Who caught it that time? Some Socialist counter-demonstrators. One beaten to death, one stoned . . . it used to shock them in the old days. They were green then. Christ, he thought, it might have been ten years ago; but Cork could date it almost to the hour.

Kiel was the morning the Embassy doctor announced that Janet was expecting. From that day on, nothing had ever been the same.

The horns broke wildly into song again; the convoy jerked forward and stopped abruptly, clanging and screeching all different notes.

‘Any luck with those files then?’ Cork enquired, his mind lighting upon the suspected cause of Meadows’ anxiety.

‘No.’

‘Trolley hasn’t turned up?’

‘No, the trolley has *not* turned up.’

Ball-bearings, Cork thought suddenly: some nice little Swedish outfit with a get-up-and-go approach, a firm capable of moving in fast . . . two hundred quid’s worth and away we all go . . .

‘Come on, Arthur, don’t let it get you down. It’s not Warsaw, you know: you’re in Bonn now. Look: know how many cups they’re shy of in the canteen, just in the last six weeks alone? Not broken mind, just lost: twenty-four.’

Meadows was unimpressed.

‘Now who wants to pinch an Embassy cup? No one. People are absent-minded. They’re *involved*. It’s the crisis, see. It’s happening everywhere. It’s the same with files.’

‘Cups aren’t secret, that’s the difference.’

‘Nor’s file trolleys,’ Cork pleaded, ‘if it comes to that. Nor’s the two-bar electric fire from the conference room which Admin are doing their nut about. Nor’s the long-carriage typewriter from the Pool, nor – listen, Arthur, *you* can’t be blamed, not with so much going on; how can you? You know what dips are when they get to drafting telegrams. Look at de Lisle, look at Gaveston: dreamers. I’m not saying they aren’t geniuses but they don’t know where they are half the time, their heads are in the clouds. You can’t be blamed for that.’

‘I *can* be blamed. I’m responsible.’

‘All right, torture yourself,’ Cork snapped, his last patience gone. ‘Anyway it’s Bradfield’s responsibility, not yours. He’s Head of Chancery; he’s responsible for security.’

With this parting comment, Cork once more fell to surveying the unprepossessing scene about him. In more ways than one, he decided, Karfeld had a lot to answer for.

* * *

The prospect which presented itself to Cork would have offered little comfort to any man, whatever his preoccupation. The weather was wretched. A blank Rhineland mist, like breath upon a mirror, lay over the whole developed wilderness of bureaucratic Bonn. Giant buildings, still unfinished, rose glumly out of the untilled fields. Ahead of him the British Embassy, all its windows lit, stood on its brown heathland like a makeshift hospital in the twilight of the battle. At the front gate, the Union Jack, mysteriously at half mast, drooped sadly over a cluster of German policemen.

The very choice of Bonn as the waiting house for Berlin has long been an anomaly; it is now an abuse. Perhaps only the Germans, having elected a Chancellor, would have brought their capital city his door. To accommodate the immigration of diplomats, politicians and government servants which attended this unlooked-for honour – and also to keep them at a distance – the townspeople have built complete suburb outside their city walls. It was through the southern end of this that the traffic was now attempting to pass: a jumble of stodgy towers and lowflung contemporary hutments which stretched along the dual carriageway almost as far as the amiable sanatorium settlement of Bad Godesberg, whose principal industry, having once been bottled water, is now diplomacy. True, some Ministries have been admitted to Bonn itself, and have added their fake masonry to the cobbled courtyards; true, some Embassies are in Bad Godesberg; but the seat of Federal Government and the great majority of the ninety-odd Foreign Missions accredited to it, not to mention the lobbyists, the press, the political parties, the refugee organisations, the official residences of Federal Dignitaries, the Kuratorium for Invisible Germany, and the whole bureaucratic superstructure of West Germany's provisional capital, are to be found to either side of this one arterial carriageway between the former seat of the Bishop of Cologne and the Victorian villas of a Rhineland spa.

Of this unnatural capital village, of this island state, which lacks both political identity and social hinterland, and is permanently committed to the condition of impermanence, the British Embassy is an inseparable part. Imagine a sprawling factory block of no merit, the kind of building you see in dozens on the western by-pass, usually with a symbol of its product set out on the roof; paint about it a sullen Rhenish sky, add an indefinable hint of Nazi architecture, just a breath, no more, and erect in the rough ground behind it two fading goalposts for the recreation of the unwashed, and you have portrayed with fair accuracy the mind and force of England in the Federal Republic. With one sprawling limb it holds down the past, with another it smoothes the present; while a third searches anxiously in the wet Rhenish earth to find what is buried for the future. Built as the Occupation drew to its premature end, it catches precisely that mood of graceless renunciation; a stone face turned towards a former foe, a grey smile offered to the present ally. To Cork's left, as they finally entered its gates, lay the headquarters of the Red Cross, to his right a Mercedes factory; behind him, across the road, the Social Democrats and a Coca-Cola depot. The Embassy is cut off from these improbable neighbours by a strip of waste land which, strewn with sorrel and bare clay, runs flatly to the neglected Rhine. This field is known as Bonn's green belt and is an object of great pride to the city's planners.

One day, perhaps, they will move to Berlin; the contingency, even in Bonn, is occasionally spoken of. One day, perhaps, the whole grey mountain will slip down the Autobahn and silently take its place in the wet car parks of the gutted Reichstag; until that happens, these concrete tents will remain, discreetly temporary in deference to the dream, discreetly permanent in deference to reality; they will remain, multiply, and grow; for in Bonn, movement has replaced progress, and whatever will not grow must die.

* * *

Parking the car in his customary place behind the canteen, Meadows walked slowly round it, as he always did after a journey, testing the handles and checking the coachwork for the marks of an errant pebble. Still deep in thought he crossed the forecourt to the front porch where two British military policemen, a sergeant and a corporal, were examining passes. Cork, still offended, followed at a distance, so that by the time he reached the front door Meadows was already deep in conversation with the sentries.

‘Who are *you* then?’ the sergeant was wanting to know.

‘Meadowes of Registry. He works for me.’ Meadows tried to look over the sergeant’s shoulder, but the sergeant drew back the list against his tunic. ‘He’s been off sick, you see. I wanted to enquire

‘Then why’s he under Ground Floor?’

‘He has a room there. He has two functions. Two different jobs. One with me, one on the ground floor.’

‘Zero,’ said the sergeant, looking at the list again. A bunch of typists, their skirts as short as the Ambassador permitted, came fluttering up the steps behind them.

Meadowes lingered, still unconvinced. ‘You mean he’s not come in?’ he asked with tenderness which longs for contradiction.

‘That’s what I do mean. Zero. He’s not come in. He’s not here. Right?’

They followed the girls into the lobby. Cork took his arm and drew him back into the shadow of the basement grille.

‘What’s going on, Arthur? What’s your problem? It’s not just the missing files, is it? What’s eating you up?’

‘Nothing’s eating me.’

‘Then what’s all that about Leo being ill? He hasn’t had a day’s illness in his life.’

Meadowes did not reply.

‘What’s Leo been up to?’ Cork demanded with deep suspicion.

‘Nothing.’

‘Then why did you ask about him? You can’t have lost him as well! Blimey, they’ve been trying to lose Leo for twenty years.’

Cork felt the decent hesitation in Meadows, the proximity of revelation and the reluctant drawing back.

‘You can’t be responsible for Leo. Nobody can. You can’t be everyone’s father, Arthur. He’s probably out flogging a few petrol coupons.’

The words were barely spoken before Meadows rounded on him, very angry indeed.

‘Don’t you talk like that, d’you hear? Don’t you dare! Leo’s not like that; it’s a shocking thing to say of anyone; flogging petrol coupons. Just because he’s – a temporary.’

Cork’s expression, as he followed Meadows at a safe distance up the open-tread staircase to the first floor, spoke for itself. If that was what age did for you, retirement at sixty didn’t come a day too early. Cork’s own retirement would be from it to a Greek island. Crete, he thought; Spetsai. I could swing it at forty if those ball-bearings come home. Well, forty-five anyway.

* * *

A step along the corridor from Registry lay the cypher room and a step beyond that, the small, bright office occupied by Peter de Lisle. Chancery means no more than political section; its young men are

the elite. It is here, if anywhere, that the popular dream of the brilliant English diplomat may be realised; and in no one more nearly than Peter de Lisle. He was an elegant, willowy, almost beautiful person, whose youth had persisted obstinately into his early forties, and his manner was languid to the point of lethargy. This lethargy was not affected, but simply deceptive. De Lisle's family tree had been disastrously pruned by two wars, and further depleted by a succession of small but violent catastrophes. A brother had died in a car accident; an uncle had committed suicide; a second brother was drowned on holiday in Penzance. Thus by degrees de Lisle himself had acquired both the energies and the duties of an improbable survivor. He had much rather not been called at all, his manner implied; but since that was the way of things, he had no alternative but to wear the mantle.

As Meadows and Cork entered their separate estates, de Lisle was on the point of gathering together the sheets of blue draft paper which lay scattered in artistic confusion on his desk. Having shuffled them casually into order, he buttoned his waistcoat, stretched, cast a wistful look at the picture of Lake Windermere, issued by the Ministry of Works with the kind permission of the London Midland and Scottish Railway, and drifted contentedly on to the landing to greet the new day. Lingering at the long window, he peered downward for a moment at the spines of the farmers' black cars and the small islands of blue where the police lights flashed.

'They have this *passion* for steel,' he observed to Mickie Crabbe, a ragged, leaky-eyed man permanently crippled by a hangover. Crabbe was slowly ascending the stairs, one hand reassuringly upon the banister, his thin shoulders hunched protectively. 'I'd quite forgotten. I'd remembered the blood, but forgotten the steel.'

'Rather,' Crabbe muttered. 'Rather,' and his voice trailed after him like the shreds of his own life. Only his hair had not aged; it grew dark and luxuriant on his little head, as if fertilised by alcohol.

'Sports,' Crabbe cried, making an unscheduled halt. 'Bloody marquee isn't up.'

'It'll come,' de Lisle assured him kindly. 'It's been held up by the Peasants' Revolt.'

'Back way empty as a church on the other road; bloody Huns,' Crabbe added vaguely as if it were a greeting, and continued painfully down his appointed track.

Slowly following him along the passage, de Lisle pushed open door after door, peering inside to call a name or a greeting, until he arrived by degrees at the Head of Chancery's room; and here he knocked hard, and leaned in.

'All present, Rawley,' he said. 'Ready when you are.'

'I'm ready now.'

'I say, you haven't pinched my electric fan by any chance, have you? It's absolutely vanished.'

'Fortunately I am not a kleptomaniac.'

'Ludwig Siebkron's asking for a meeting at four o'clock,' de Lisle added quietly, 'at the Ministry of the Interior. He won't say why. I pressed him and he got shirty. He just said he wanted to discuss our security arrangements.'

'Our arrangements are perfectly adequate as they stand. We discussed them with him last week; he is dining with me on Tuesday. I cannot imagine we need to do any more. The place is crawling with police as it is. I refuse to let him make a fortress of us.'

The voice was austere and self-sufficient, an academic voice, yet military; a voice which held much in reserve; a voice which guarded its secrets and its sovereignty, drawled out but bitten short. Taking a step into the room, de Lisle closed the door and dropped the latch.

'How did it go last night?'

'Adequately. You may read the minute if you wish. Meadows is taking it to the Ambassador.'

'I imagined that was what Siebkron was ringing about.'

'I am not obliged to report to Siebkron; nor do I intend to. And I have no idea why he telephoned this hour, nor why he should call a meeting. Your imagination is ahead of my own.'

'All the same, I accepted for you. It seemed wise.'

'At what time are we bidden?'

'Four o'clock. He's sending transport.'

Bradfield frowned in disapproval.

'He's worried about the traffic. He thinks an escort would make things easier,' de Lisle explained

'I see. I thought for a moment he was saving us the expense.'

It was a joke they shared in silence.

‘I Could Hear Their Screaming on the Telephone . . .’

The daily Chancery meeting in Bonn takes place in the ordinary way at ten o’clock, a time which allows everyone to open his mail, glance at his telegrams and his German newspapers and perhaps recover from the wearisome social round of the night before. As a ritual, de Lisle often likened it to morning prayers in an agnostic community: though contributing little in the way of inspiration or instruction, it set a tone for the day, served as a roll-call and imparted a sense of corporate activity. Once upon a time, Saturdays had been tweedy, voluntary, semi-retired affairs which restored one’s lost detachment and one’s sense of leisure. All that was gone now. Saturdays had been assumed into the general condition of alarm, and subjected to the discipline of weekdays.

They entered singly, de Lisle at their head. Those whose habit was to greet one another did so; the rest took their places silently in the half circle of chairs, either glancing through their bundles of coloured telegrams or staring blankly out of the big window at the remnants of their weekend. The morning fog was dispersing; black clouds had collected over the concrete rear wing of the Embassy; the aerials on the flat roof hung like surrealist trees against the new dark.

‘Pretty ominous for the sports, I must say,’ Mickie Crabbe called out, but Crabbe had no standing in Chancery and no one bothered to reply.

Facing them, alone at his steel desk, Bradfield ignored their arrival. He belonged to that school of civil servants who read with a pen; for it ran swiftly with his eye from line to line, poised at any time to correct or annotate.

‘Can anyone tell me,’ he enquired without lifting his head, ‘how I translate *Geltungsbedürfnis*?’

‘A need to assert oneself,’ de Lisle suggested, and watched the pen pounce, and kill, and rise again.

‘How very good. Shall we begin?’

Jenny Pargiter was the Information Officer and the only woman present. She read querulously as she were contradicting a popular view; and she read without hope, secretly knowing that it was the lot of any woman, when imparting news, not to be believed.

‘Apart from the farmers, Rawley, the main news item is yesterday’s incident in Cologne, when student demonstrators, assisted by steel workers from Krupps, overturned the American Ambassador’s car.’

‘The American Ambassador’s *empty* car. There is a difference, you know.’ He scribbled something in the margin of a telegram. Mickie Crabbe from his place at the door, mistakenly assuming this interruption to be humorous, laughed nervously.

‘They also attacked an old man and chained him to the railings in the station square with his head shaved and a label round his neck saying “I tore down the Movement’s posters”. He’s not supposed to be seriously hurt.’

‘Supposed?’

‘Considered.’

‘Peter, you made a telegram during the night. We shall see a copy no doubt?’

‘It sets out the principal implications.’

‘Which are?’

De Lisle was equal to this. ‘That the alliance between the dissident students and Karfeld’s Movement is progressing fast. That the vicious circle continues: unrest creates unemployment, unemployment creates unrest. Halbach, the student leader, spent most of yesterday closeted with Karfeld in Cologne. They cooked the thing up together.’

‘It was Halbach, was it not, who also led the anti-British student delegation to Brussels in January. The one that pelted Haliday-Pride with mud?’

‘I have made that point in the telegram.’

‘Go on, Jenny, please.’

‘Most major papers carry comment.’

‘Samples only.’

‘*Neue Ruhrzeitung* and allied papers put their main emphasis on the youth of the demonstrators. They insist that they are not brownshirts and hooligans, but young Germans wholly disenchanted with the institutions of Bonn.’

‘Who isn’t?’ de Lisle murmured.

‘Thank you, Peter,’ Bradfield said, without a trace of gratitude, and Jenny Pargiter blushed quite needlessly.

‘Both *Welt* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine* draw parallels with recent events in England; they refer specifically to the anti-Vietnam protests in London, the race riots in Birmingham and the Owner Tenants Association protests on coloured housing. Both speak of the widespread alienation of voters from their elected Governments whether in England or Germany. The trouble begins with taxation, according to the *Frankfurter*; if the taxpayer doesn’t think his money is being sensibly used, he argues that his vote is being wasted as well. They call it the new inertia.’

‘Ah. Another slogan has been forged.’

Weary from his long vigil and the sheer familiarity of the topics, de Lisle listened at a distance, hearing the old phrases like an off-station broadcast: *increasingly worried by the anti-democratic sentiments of both left and right . . . the Federal Coalition Government should understand that only a really strong leadership, even at the expense of certain extravagant minorities, can contribute to European unity . . . Germans must recover confidence, must think of politics as the solvent between thought and action . . .*

What was it, he wondered idly, about the jargon of German politics which, even in translation, rendered them totally unreal? Metaphysical fluff, that was the term he had introduced into his telegram last night, and he was rather pleased with it. A German had only to embark upon a political topic to be swept away in a current of ludicrous abstracts . . . Yet was it only the abstracts that were so elusive? Even the most obvious fact was curiously implausible; even the most gruesome event, by the time it had travelled to Bonn, seemed to have lost its flavour. He tried to imagine what it would be like to be beaten up by Halbach’s students; to be slapped until your cheeks bled; to be shaved and chained and kicked . . . it all seemed so far away. Yet where was Cologne? Seventeen miles? Seventeen thousand? He should get about more, he told himself, he should attend the meetings and see it happen on the ground. Yet how could he, when he and Bradfield between them drafted every major policy despatch? And when so many delicate and potentially embarrassing matters had to be taken

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