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, a 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 notice-board, 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'.

1

Mr Meadowes and Mr Cork

'Why 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes, 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 half 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes into even deeper gloom, and after that Cork chose silence as the wiser course. He had tried everything, and to no effect. Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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 telephone 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes' 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.'

Meadowes 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.

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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 to 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 a 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, Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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.' Meadowes 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 Ambassadress 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 Meadowes, 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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 Meadowes 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. Meadowes 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 at 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.

2
'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 if 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 care of here . . .

Jenny Pargiter was warming to her task. The *Neue Zürcher* had a speculative piece on our chances in Brussels, she was saying; she considered it vital that everyone in Chancery read it *most* closely. De Lisle sighed audibly. Would Bradfield never turn her off?

'The writer says we have *absolutely* no negotiating points left, Rawley. None. HMG is as played out as Bonn; no support with the electorate and very little with the parliamentary party. HMG sees Brussels as the magic cure for all the British ills; but ironically can only succeed by the goodwill of another failing Government.'

'Quite.'

'And even more ironically, the Common Market has virtually ceased to exist.'

'Quite.'

'The piece is called *The Beggar's Opera*. They also make the point that Karfeld is undermining our chances of effective German support for our application.'

'It all sounds very predictable to me.'

'And that Karfeld's plea for a Bonn–Moscow trade axis to exclude the French *and* the Anglo-Saxons is receiving serious attention in some circles.'

'What circles, I wonder?' Bradfield murmured and the pen descended once more. 'The term Anglo-Saxon is out of court,' he added. 'I refuse to have my provenance dictated by de Gaulle.' This was a cue for the older graduates to raise a judicious intellectual laugh.

'What do the *Russians* think about the Bonn–Moscow axis?'

someone ventured from the centre. It might have been Jackson, an ex-Colonial man who liked to offer common sense as an antidote to intellectual hot air. 'I mean, surely that's half the point, isn't it? Has anyone put it to them as a proposition?'

'See our last despatch,' de Lisle said.

Through the open window he fancied he could still hear the plaintive chorus of the farmers' horns. That's Bonn, he thought suddenly: that road is our world; how many names did it have on those five miles between Mehlem and Bonn? Six? Seven? That's us: a verbal battle for something nobody wants. A constant, sterile cacophony of claim and protest. However new the models, however fast the traffic, however violent the collision, however high the buildings, the route is unchanged and the destination irrelevant.

'We'll keep the rest very short, shall we? Mickie?'

'I say, my God, yes.'

Crabbe, jerking into life, embarked upon a long and unintelligible story he had picked up from the *New York Times* correspondent at the American Club, who in turn had heard it from Karl-Heinz Saab, who in turn had heard it from someone in Siebkron's office. It was said that Karfeld was actually in Bonn last night; that after appearing with the students in Cologne yesterday, he had not, as was popularly believed, returned to Hanover to prepare for tomorrow's rally, but had driven himself by a back route to Bonn and attended a secret meeting in the town.

'They say he spoke to Ludwig Siebkron, you see, Rawley,' said Crabbe, but whatever conviction his voice might once have carried was strained thin by innumerable cocktails.

Bradfield, however, was irritated by this report, and struck back quite hard.

'They *always* say he spoke to Ludwig Siebkron. Why the devil shouldn't the two of them talk to one another? Siebkron's in charge of public order; Karfeld has a lot of enemies. Tell London,' he added wearily, making another note. 'Send them a telegram reporting the rumour. It can do no harm.' A gust of rain struck suddenly upward at the steel-framed window, and the angry rattle startled them all.

'Poor old Commonwealth Sports,' Crabbe whispered, but once again his concern received no recognition.

'Discipline,' Bradfield continued. 'Tomorrow's rally in Hanover begins at ten-thirty. It seems an extraordinary time to demonstrate but I understand they have a football match in the afternoon. They play on Sundays here. I cannot imagine it will have any effect on us, but the Ambassador is asking all staff to remain at home after Matins unless they have business in the Embassy. At Siebkron's request there will be additional German police at the front and rear gates throughout Sunday, and for some extraordinary reasons of his own, plainclothes men will be in attendance at the sports this afternoon.'

'And plainer clothes,' de Lisle breathed, recalling a private joke, 'I have *never* seen.'

'Be quiet. Security. We have received the printed Embassy passes from London and these will be distributed on Monday and shown at all times thereafter. Fire Drill. For your information there will be a practice muster at midday on Monday. Perhaps you should all make a point of being available, it sets an example for the Junior Staff. Welfare. Commonwealth Sports this afternoon in the rear gardens of the Embassy; eliminating races. Once again I suggest you all put in an appearance. With your wives of course,' he added, as if that placed an even heavier burden on them. 'Mickie, the Ghanaian Chargé will need looking after. Keep him away from the Ambassadress.'

'Can I just make a point here, Rawley?' Crabbe writhed nervously; the cords of his neck were like chicken legs, stiffeners in the declining flesh. 'The Ambassadress is presenting the prizes at four, you see. Four. Could everyone sort of gravitate to the main marquee at quarter to? Sorry,' he added. 'Quarter to four, Rawley. Sorry.' It was said that he had been one of Montgomery's aides in the war and this was all that was left.

'Noted. Jenny?'

Nothing that *they* would listen to, her shrug declared.

De Lisle addressed them all, using as his focal point that middle air which is the special territory of the British ruling class.

'May I ask whether anyone is working on the Personalities Survey? Meadowes is pestering me for it and I swear I haven't touched it for months.'

'Who's it marked out to?'

'Well, me apparently.'

'In that case,' Bradfield said shortly, 'presumably you drew it.'

'I don't think I did, that's the point. I'm perfectly happy to take the rap, but I can't imagine what I would have wanted with it.'

'Well, *has* anyone got it?'

All Crabbe's statements were confessions.

'It's marked out to me, too,' he whispered, from his dark place by the door, 'you see, Rawley.'

They waited.

'Before Peter, I'm supposed to have had it, and put it back. According to Meadowes, Rawley.'

Still no one helped him.

'Two weeks, Rawley. Only I never touched it. Sorry. Arthur Meadowes went for me like a maniac. No good, you see. Didn't have it. Lot of dirt about German industrialists. Not my form. I told Meadowes: best thing is ask Leo. He does Personalities. They're Leo's pigeon.'

He grinned weakly along the line of his colleagues until he came to the window where the empty chair was. Suddenly they were all peering in the same direction, at the empty chair; not with alarm or revelation, but curiously, noticing an absence for the first time. It was a plain chair of varnished pine, different from the others and slightly pink in colour, hinting remotely at the boudoir; and it had a small, embroidered cushion on the seat.

'Where is he?' Bradfield asked shortly. He alone had not followed Crabbe's gaze. 'Where's Harting?'

No one answered. No one looked at Bradfield. Jenny Pargiter, scarlet in the face, stared at her mannish, practical hands which rested on her broad lap.

'Stuck on that dreary ferry, I should think,' said de Lisle, coming too quickly to the rescue. 'God knows what the farmers are doing *that* side of the river.'

'Someone find out, will they?' Bradfield asked, in the most disinterested tone. 'Ring his house or something, will you?'

It is a matter of record that no one who was present took this instruction as his own; and that they left the room in curious disarray, looking neither at Bradfield nor at one another, nor at Jenny Pargiter, whose confusion seemed beyond all bearing.

The last sack race was over. The strong wind, whipping over the waste land, dashed pebbles of rain against the flapping canvas. The wet rigging creaked painfully. Inside the marquee, the surviving children, mostly coloured, had rallied to the mast. The small flags of the Commonwealth, creased by storage and diminished by secession, swung unhappy in disarray. Beneath them, Mickie Crabbe, assisted by Cork the cypher clerk, was mustering the winners for the prize-giving.

'M'butu, Alistair,' Cork whispered. 'Where the hell's he got to?'

Crabbe put the megaphone to his mouth:

'Will Master Alistair M'butu please come forward. Alistair M'butu . . . Jesus,' he muttered, 'I can't even tell them apart.'

'And Kitty Delassus. She's white.'

'And Miss Kitty Delassus, please,' Crabbe added, nervously slurring the final 's'; for names, he had found by bitter experience, were a source of unholy offence.

The Ambassadress, in ragged mink, waited benignly at her trestle table behind a motley of gift-wrapped parcels from the Naafi. The wind struck again, venomously; the Ghanaian Chargé, despondent at Crabbe's side, shuddered and pulled up the fur collar of his overcoat.

'Disqualify them,' Cork urged. 'Give the prizes to the runners-up.'

'I'll wring his neck,' Crabbe declared, blinking violently. 'I'll wring his bloody neck. Skulking the other side of the river. Whoopsadaisy.'

Janet Cork, heavily pregnant, had located the missing children and added them to the winners' enclosure.

'Wait till Monday,' Crabbe whispered, raising the megaphone to his lips, 'I'll tell him a thing or two.'