

EINSTEIN'S SHADOW

Allen M. Steele

Allen M. Steele tells us that the inspiration for “Einstein’s Shadow” arose from “a lifelong fascination with the Bel Geddes airliner, which really was proposed in the early thirties as a means of transatlantic air travel. These vessels occasionally showed up in SF stories published in that period, but not so much since then.” *Arkwright*, the author’s next novel, should be out from Tor in March.

i

The world knew him as Dr. Einstein, the greatest mind of the twentieth century. For a couple of days in October 1933, I knew him as Albert. Our acquaintance began as just another job, but it turned into something more than that. How could it not, when matters of women, revenge, and quantum physics were involved?

I wouldn’t have gotten mixed up in the whole affair if I hadn’t already been in London. The Harrell-Egan Detective Agency—my partner and I were in the New York phone book; you could find us under *Private Eyes*, *Gumshoes*, or *Goons*—had been hired to tail a wealthy young bank executive on a business trip to England. No one was worried whether he was absconding with someone else’s money; he was engaged to the daughter of the bank’s president, and the old man was concerned that his future son-in-law might be seeing someone else on the side—namely, the young buck’s secretary, a pretty little thing considerably more attractive than his fiancée. So I booked a cabin on the First Class deck of the RMS *Aquitania* where I could keep an eye on the two-bedroom suite they were sharing, and bribed chambermaids and porters to let me know what they were finding behind closed doors.

So far as I could tell, the father of the bride had nothing to worry about. Over the course of the next three days, my spies reported that the beau and his secretary stayed out of each other’s beds, and when they were in public they behaved just the way they were supposed to, as two professionals on an overseas business trip. I went so far as to sidle up to my quarry in the first-class saloon, buy him a drink, and make some suggestive comments about his traveling companion, hinting that she might be just the sort of lady with whom he’d enjoy cuddling up to on a cold night at sea. He was properly scandalized; in fact, if I hadn’t hastily apologized, I might have left the bar with a bloody nose. Or, more likely, been forced to give him one . . . I’m not easy to hit.

By the time the two of them disembarked in Liverpool and caught a cab into London, they'd pretty much confirmed my suspicions that they were not up to no good. Even Shirley Temple would have considered them dull. I trailed them to their hotel across from Hyde Park, observed from a discreet distance in the lobby while they checked into separate rooms, then went to my slightly cheaper hotel a few blocks away and sent a cable to my client, informing him that he had nothing to worry about: our man would be a fine husband for his daughter, albeit boring as hell.

I offered to continue surveillance, but the client was satisfied by my report. Besides, keeping me on retainer was an expensive proposition, particularly considering that his bank had lately come close to shutting its doors for good. So my job was done, and I had a few days to kill before I caught another Cunard liner back to the States. I hadn't been in England since the war, though, and my expenses were paid, so I decided to play tourist for a while. My partner could take care of business until I got home.

The second night in London, I was getting ready to step out for the evening—dinner in Piccadilly, maybe a show after that—when there was a knock on the door. I hadn't ordered room service, and it was too late in the day for the chambermaid. "Who's there?"

"Mr. James Egan? May I speak with you, please?"

The voice from the other side of the door was polite and had a public-school British accent, but there was just enough of an edge to it to make me suspect that it belonged to a flatfoot. And no one calls me James, not even my mother. Had to be a cop. I opened the door a couple of inches. "Show me the tin."

A tall, stringy-looking fellow with a horse face blinked at me. "Pardon me?"

"I want to see your badge."

"How did you know I'm . . . ?"

"Just a hunch."

He reached into his overcoat, pulled out a patent-leather badge holder, flipped it open to reveal a gold detective's shield. "Proof enough, I hope?"

"It'll do." I swung the door the rest of the way open. "C'mon in. Care for a drink?"

"Thank you, but no." My caller put his badge away and stuck out his hand. "Inspector Nigel Graham, Metropolitan Police. Mr. Egan . . ."

"Call me Sonny." I shook his hand. "That's how I knew you were a cop. The only way you'd be using my first name is if you've looked at my passport, and the only way you'd get to see that is if you'd shown your badge to the desk clerk and told him to fetch it from the safe."

An appreciative smile, a knowing nod. "Excellent deduction. My compliments. Care to take a crack at where I was before I came here?"

"Sorry. That's as much like Sherlock Holmes as I'm going to get." I went back to fastening my cuff links. The job had called for me to bring proper eveningwear, and there was no sense in letting my penguin suit stay in my suitcase for the rest of the trip. "So what brings you here?"

"I'd like for you to come with me," he replied, and quickly shook his head when I cast him a sharp look. "Oh no, you're not in any trouble. In fact, someone would like to speak with you about retaining your services."

"Really?" I fastened my collar and reached for my black tie. "Is there a shortage of dicks in London?"

Again, the curious look. "Oh . . . you mean detectives! Sorry, American slang often baffles me. No, no, Scotland Yard has no lack of plainclothes operatives. In this instance, though, we and our associates have need of someone who doesn't have any official standing . . . that is, who's not attached to any particular government agency, either here or in the States."

"I see." I swung the tie around my neck and began to curl it into a bow. "And who're your associates?"

"I'm not at liberty to discuss that. But I can tell you we're heading for the American embassy."

"Really?" I wasn't expecting that. Indeed, this was a new one; Harrell-Egan had never had Uncle Sam as a client before. "I wasn't aware that my country held me in such high regard."

Graham sat down on the edge of my bed and waited for me to finish getting dressed. "Again, I can't tell you very much. I can inform you, though, that when the Yanks began casting about for someone on this side of the pond to do a small errand for them, your name came up as someone considered trustworthy and reliable. You just completed an assignment, didn't you?" I nodded. "That's who recommended you . . . your last employer."

"Is that a fact?" My most recent client must have more pull than I thought, for the government to come to him asking for advice on good P.I.'s. "Glad to know I've scored points for customer satisfaction."

"Yes, well—" Graham glanced at his watch "—we have someone waiting for us, so if you'd kindly hurry . . ."

"Not a problem." I pulled on my tails, picked up my top hat and cane, checked my appearance in the mirror. I looked like a sharp-dressed young American out for a night on the town. The embassy staff had better appreciate my appearance. I opened the bureau drawer and pulled out my money clip, then snagged the room key. "All set. Let's go."

Graham eyed me. "You're not carrying a gun?"

"A fan of detective stories, aren't you?" I asked, but he didn't smile. "No, I didn't bring one with me. My last job didn't call for me to carry a piece." Not to mention that the U.K. had very stringent laws regarding private handgun possession.

"Hmm." He opened the door. "Well, we'll have to do something about that. Perhaps my department can loan you a weapon."

That stopped me. "You think I'm going to need a gun?"

"It'll put quite a few people's minds at ease if you carried one, yes."

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The American embassy was located on Portland Place in the Marylebone district. The taxi Graham had waiting outside my hotel got us there in just a few minutes. We didn't come in through the front entrance, though, but instead entered through a side door in the alley, out of sight from the street. An embassy staffer was waiting for us; he escorted us upstairs to the third floor and left us in an ordinary office with a portrait of George Washington overlooking a teak writing desk. Through tall windows, street lamps were just beginning to come on.

I was starting to wonder who had the bright idea of hanging a picture of General Washington in the British embassy when the door opened again. The man who entered the room was in his mid-fifties, trim and grey-haired. One look at my outfit and he chuckled in a way that managed to be both friendly and condescending at the same time.

"I hope I'm not disrupting any plans you may have had for the evening." He had a Boston accent, with an affected English lilt.

"Not at all. I always dress like this." I didn't get up from my seat, as Graham had, but instead casually twirled my top hat around on the tip of my cane.

"Yes . . . quite." He was trying for dry British humor, but he'd probably grown up playing stickball in Southie. He couldn't think of a comeback, so he settled for offer-

ing a handshake. "Richard O'Donnell, assistant consul. And you're James Egan . . . or may I call you Sonny?"

"Sonny will do." I didn't trust men whose handshakes were as limp as his, but I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. "Inspector Graham here told me how you found me, but he didn't tell me why. Want to give me the lowdown?"

O'Donnell glanced at Graham, did a double take. "Where's the other man? The one I spoke to yesterday?"

"I've been assigned to the case," Graham replied. "The chief superintendent understands I have knowledge of this sort of thing . . . German intelligence operations, that is."

"Yes, of course. Very well." O'Donnell turned to me again. "If by 'lowdown' you mean an explanation . . ."

"I wouldn't mind getting one."

"By all means." He strolled over to a sideboard. "Drink?"

"Bourbon if you have it. Water if you don't."

"Bourbon, I have . . . from Kentucky, of course. I'm afraid I've never developed a taste for scotch." He picked up a crystal decanter and poured a couple of fingers into a pair of glasses. "What do you know about Dr. Albert Einstein? Provided that you've heard of him, of course."

He didn't really think I was an idiot, did he? I decided that I didn't like him after all. "I've heard of him. German scientist. Said to be one of the smartest men in the world, although I'm sure there's a few poker players who'd give him a run for his money."

"If you know any card sharps who've developed something as profound as the theory of relativity, please let me know. There are certain people in our country who'd love to meet them." O'Donnell's back was turned to Graham and me as he walked behind his desk, and I took the moment to share an annoyed glance with my friend from Scotland Yard. "But, yes . . . Dr. Einstein is a genius, and quite a famous one at that. And he happens to be in trouble."

O'Donnell sat down at his desk, placing his drink untasted on the blotter. "As I'm certain you're aware, over the past few years there has been a change of government in Germany. The National Socialist Party . . . the Nazis . . . have become more popular, and in the last election they managed to get their leader installed as president . . ."

"Gregor Strasser. I read the papers."

"Glad to hear it," O'Donnell replied, and I hid the look on my face by sipping my drink. It was Kentucky bourbon, all right, but the cheap kind. He probably couldn't tell the difference. "Because Strasser is less strident than the man he deposed, people think he's more liberal. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our intelligence sources doubt the allegation that Adolf Hitler shot himself, and believe instead that Strasser orchestrated a coup within the Nazi inner circle. Either way, he's just a slicker version of the last fellow. Little has changed since he's become president, and this includes the treatment of German Jews."

"Which makes Dr. Einstein a particular target," Graham said. "He's come under attack within academic circles, with some of his detractors denouncing his work as 'Jewish science,' whatever that is. He doesn't mind confronting those chaps at all . . . it just gives him a chance to toy with them before swatting them down . . . but lately it's become more serious."

"Death threats?" I asked.

"Yes . . . and if the Nazis continue to crack down on the Jewish population, they probably won't be mere threats for much longer." Graham's expression was grim.

"Fortunately, Dr. Einstein is well aware of the risks he'd be taking if he stays in Germany," O'Donnell continued. "Earlier this year, he paid a visit to the United States for a speaking engagement in California. He didn't immediately return to

Germany, though, but instead went first to Belgium, and then to England, where he and his wife have been houseguests of an M.P. in Norfolk for the past few weeks. During this time, the Nazis seized his home and belongings, and it's pretty clear that he'll be immediately arrested if he sets foot in his country again."

"On what charges?"

"I don't think the Nazis need any charges," Graham said dryly. "They'll arrest him for being Albert Einstein."

"He has many friends, though, and just as many options." O'Donnell picked up his drink and absently swirled it around. "He's had offers for positions at universities all over Europe, but apparently he's decided to put as much distance between him and Germany as he can and accepted a position at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey."

He said the last as if there was vinegar in his glass. I suppose he was disappointed that Einstein wasn't taking a job at Harvard; by then I'd noticed his class ring. "Until he actually gets to the States, though, and requests political asylum, everyone agrees it's probably best that we keep up the pretense that he's simply returning for another speaking engagement. If the Nazis were to become aware that Dr. Einstein is planning to defect, they might attempt to abduct him and bring him back to Germany."

"Or worse, liquidate him," Graham said quietly. "Anti-Semitic propaganda aside, the Nazis must be aware that losing him would be a major blow . . . particularly since it's becoming apparent that Strasser intends to rebuild the German war machine and needs advanced technology to do this. If they can't have him, they may want to make sure no one can."

"So we want to get him to America as fast as possible." O'Donnell turned his chair sideways to gaze out the window behind his desk. "Dr. Einstein has agreed to this, and we're preparing to get him out of England by the next available means . . ."

"That would be the *Berengaria*," I said. "Leaves for New York next Thursday. I've already booked a cabin."

"No." O'Donnell shook his head. "The state department believes that, the longer Dr. Einstein and his wife remain in England, the greater the chance of him being assassinated by a German agent. And even once they're aboard a ship, he won't be entirely safe. No, I'm afraid we're going to have to spirit them out of Great Britain another way . . . and that's aboard the *Valkyrie*."

I stared at him, not quite believing what he was saying. "The *Valkyrie* is a German aircraft."

"Operated by Dornier-Luftwaffe Air Lines, which in turn is owned by the German government." Graham slowly nodded. "Yes, we're all too aware of this fact, Mr. . . . Sonny, sorry. But it's faster than an ocean liner."

"The idea is still crazy."

"Not so much as you think." There was a smug look on O'Donnell's face as he turned around again to pick up his drink. "We believe the Nazis will be less inclined to suspect that he's defecting if he and his wife are traveling to New York on a German airliner. And even if they do, with so many people aboard, an assassination would be rather difficult, don't you think?"

"I think it's the riskiest plan I've ever . . ."

"The *Valkyrie* stops in London on its way from Frankfurt to New York, and will depart from the Vauxhall wharf tomorrow at 1:30 P.M." O'Donnell sipped his whiskey. "Dr. Einstein and his wife Elsa have already been booked into a first-class cabin, and you've been booked into the one next to theirs."

"As their bodyguard," I said, and O'Donnell nodded. "Why me? Why not one of your people?" I crooked a thumb in Graham's direction. "Or his people, for that matter."

"Oh, I'm coming along as well," Graham said. "Not as a bodyguard, though, but as

an intelligence asset. I'll be in second class, where you can find me."

"If German agents are watching Dr. Einstein, they'll recognize anyone Scotland Yard puts on him as protection," Graham said. "Same for any American military or diplomatic officials. Their presence could tip the agents off that a defection is taking place. But no one will recognize you, Sonny. You're unknown to them. Therefore, you'll be able to keep a discreet eye on the Einsteins while not appearing to be a bodyguard."

"You've come highly recommended from your last employer." O'Donnell put down his glass, folded his hands together in his lap. "I suppose you weren't aware that he has the ear of some rather powerful people in Washington? When they put out the word that they were looking for someone in London who could take on this particular task . . ."

"Okay, I get it." The bourbon wasn't so bad just then. I shrugged as I polished it off. "At least I'll be going home in luxury." I paused. "You realize, of course, this isn't a volunteer effort."

O'Donnell said nothing. Instead he reached into his desk, pulled out an envelope and slid it across the desk to me. "This covers half your fee. You'll receive the other half once the Einsteins arrive safely in America."

I opened the envelope, peeked inside, and did my best not show my expression. There were enough American greenbacks in there to cover Harrell-Egan's office rent for the next few months; whatever came after that would be pure profit. "It'll do. I'll let you know if I have any additional expenses."

O'Donnell glared at me. On top of everything else, apparently he was also a skinflint. As I stood up and turned toward the tree where I'd left my hat, coat, and cane, he said, "I trust you're still not planning to go out on the town this evening."

"No. A quiet dinner some place, then back to my room. I'll need my rest, after all."

"I wouldn't worry," Graham said. "Chances are, it'll be an uneventful trip."

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I rendezvoused with Graham at noon the next day in the pub at Vauxhall Station, the terminus for the English leg of the *Valkyrie's* flight. Even at midday, I could smell the nearby Thames. It's not the world's largest river, but it does set some sort of record as the most odorous. Over a ploughman's lunch and a couple of pints of Newcastle, Graham slipped a small wooden box to me beneath the table. Keeping it out of sight, I opened the container and peeked inside. The box held a Colt .45 semi-automatic, along with an extra clip.

"Where did you get this?" I asked. Scotland Yard didn't routinely furnish its officers with high-caliber weapons.

"Our arsenal has a few American firearms on hand," Graham said quietly. "We figured this would be adequate."

I didn't want to tell him that I seldom carried a gun, and when I did it was usually a Smith & Wesson .38 snub-nosed revolver suitable for a coat pocket. "Don't worry," he added, noticing my raised eyebrow, "I brought a shoulder holster as well. We'd prefer if you went armed at all times."

I closed the box, but kept it in my lap. "You said last night this would be a quiet trip."

"Just in case." He glanced at his watch. "Best hurry. The Einsteins will be here in a few minutes."

The sidewalk outside the station was crowded, mainly with rail passengers, but also quite a few people arriving to board the *Valkyrie*. I'd stepped into the men's room and, in the privacy of a toilet stall, loaded the .45 and donned the shoulder hol-

ster. My jacket and overcoat concealed the gun well enough that no one on the sidewalk seemed to notice, but nonetheless it felt like I was carrying a cannon beneath my left armpit. I was beginning to wonder if this was really necessary when a sedan pulled up in front of the station and Graham tapped me on the arm.

"Here we go," he murmured.

As we approached the car, the front passenger door opened and another man stepped out. "You're the escorts?" he asked. I nodded and Graham flashed his badge. "All right, here he is." A quick glance about the sidewalk, then the plainclothes cop opened the sedan's rear door. A moment passed, then a short, stocky figure emerged from the back of the car.

Today, everyone knows who Albert Einstein was and what he looked like. He's become one of the most recognizable faces in history; his caricature is on bagel shops and popcorn bags and children's toys, his image so familiar that it's been debased to the point of meaninglessness. People who have no idea what $e=mc^2$ actually means immediately recognize him, although some of them would probably tell you that he invented the atomic bomb or was really a space alien.

But this was 1933, and while Einstein was famous, he wasn't yet an icon. The person who stood blinking in the midday sun of a cool London day was a middle-aged man in a rumpled black overcoat and a shapeless fedora pulled low over graying, ill-kempt hair. His bushy mustache was still dark, and although the corners of his eyes were crinkled with perpetual amusement, the rest of his face wasn't yet heavily lined. He regarded everything from beneath the brim of his hat with a certain air of bewilderment, as if he didn't quite know where he was or why he'd been brought here.

"This is not an airfield," he said, his German accent so thick I had to listen hard to understand what he said. "I was told we were going to board a plane."

The plainclothesman kept the smile on his face. "The plane you'll be using is amphibious, Dr. Einstein. It can only take off and land on water." He pointed to the nearby Vauxhall Bridge, where a broad set of stairs led down to the river. "It's moored down there. Now, if you'll let me introduce you . . ."

"Where is our baggage?" A plump, grey-haired woman in a cloche hat and a fur-colored overcoat crawled out of the sedan and angrily glanced about. "Our trunks, Albert's violin case . . . where did they go?"

"Your belongings been brought here separately, Mrs. Einstein. They're already on the plane." Graham stepped forward to offer his hand. "Please let me introduce myself. I'm Nigel Graham, and this is Sonny Egan. We'll be accompanying you as your escorts."

"Our . . . escorts?" Einstein peered first at Graham, then at me. "You'll be traveling with us to America?"

"Yes, sir." I stood at Graham's shoulder and addressed both Einsteins. "I'll be in the cabin next to yours and will be with you at all times. Nigel will be elsewhere on the plane."

"So you're going to be Albert's bodyguard." Elsa stared me straight in the eye. I could tell at once she was a tough old gal, accustomed to defending her husband. I didn't learn until later that she was also his cousin.

I shrugged. "Think of me as your shadow. That way you can pretend I'm not there."

A mischievous smile appeared within Einstein's mustache. "A shadow?" he asked, and I nodded. "And you're also an American?" I nodded again; that much was obvious. His gaze drifted to the open front of my overcoat, and from the slight widening of his eyes I could tell that he'd spotted the Colt. Then he looked up at me again and, in a very grave voice, whispered, "I know who you are . . ."

He thrust his right arm across the bottom of his face until all I could see were a pair of sharp eyes glaring at me from beneath the lowered brim of his hat. "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" he intoned, and added a laugh very

much like that of the announcer of the *Blue Coal Radio Revue*.

"Albert! Stop that!" Elsa swatted his arm.

"Oh, I love that show." Einstein was still grinning as he lowered his arm. He took my hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Egan. Call me Albert."

"All right . . . and you can call me Sonny." We shook on it, and I glanced at his driver. "Okay, we'll take it from here. Albert, Mrs. Einstein . . . this way, please."

Graham placed himself beside Elsa, and I took up position beside Albert, and the four of us began making our way through the crowd. For a minute or so, I thought we might reach the plane without anyone catching on, but we hadn't even gotten to the steps when a taxi screeched to a halt at the curb. The doors opened and, like clowns from a circus car, a half-dozen or so reporters fell over one another in their mad scramble to be the first one out. They spotted us in an instant, and before Graham and I could do much about it, the Einsteins were surrounded by men with cameras and notebooks.

"Dr. Einstein, are you leaving England?"

"Are you moving to America? Is it permanent?"

"What do you think of Strasser?"

"Al! Hey, Al . . . *smile!*"

Albert looked at the Speed Graphic camera being thrust in his face and insolently stuck out his tongue. The bulb flashed, and then I pushed the photographer aside before he could get a shot of Albert giving him a rude gesture. Elsa, on the other hand, was lapping it up; she beamed at the cameras like a starlet on the red carpet, and I think she would have stopped and given an interview right there on the spot if Graham and I hadn't been present.

But the reporters weren't the worst of it. Until they showed up, no one at Vauxhall Station had recognized Einstein; he was just a little, grey-haired Jewish man with his frumpy wife, being led to the wharf by a couple of young men who might have been their sons or nephews. At the sound of his name, though, people turned to look . . . and within seconds, the reporters were outnumbered by men, women, and children pressing in upon us from all sides, with everyone yelling Albert's name, shoving hands forward for him to shake, pieces of paper for him to autograph, babies for him to kiss . . .

"Oh, dear," Albert murmured, his voice almost lost beneath the cacophony. "This isn't what I wanted."

Neither did I. In terms of security, it was a nightmare. The faces around us were smiling, happy, and excited, but any one of those hands could just as well be holding a gun or a knife. From the edge of the crowd, I heard a police whistle. Looking around, I spotted a bobby helmet. But it was too far away and the crowd was too dense. We had to get out of there.

"Grab hold of my arm," I said to Albert. He nodded and did as I asked, and I repeated the same instruction to Elsa. Graham caught on; he linked arms with Elsa, and then the four of us, like a Broadway chorus line, began marching forward in lockstep, with Graham and I raising our arms to gently but firmly push people away. The bobby caught up with us; whistle in his mouth and nightstick extended, he got in front and plowed through the mob, unapologetically shoving aside press and public alike.

We'd almost reached the top of the stairs, where a gate had been set up to check the tickets of departing Dornier-Luftwaffe passengers, when my roving eye spotted a young woman standing at the edge of the crowd. In her early thirties, dark-haired and olive-skinned, stocky and yet attractive in a bohemian sort of way, she had the exotic looks of someone of ethnic European heritage. My gaze might have passed over her in an instant were it not for one thing: the intense hatred with which she regarded Einstein, the utter scorn that stood in contrast to the wonder and joy of everyone else around us.

If she was any closer, I thought, I'd be watching her hands.

She stayed where she was. Our eyes met for an instant, though, and she quickly looked away. I darted a glance at Albert—apparently he hadn't noticed her, for there was an amused and unworried grin on his face—and when I looked around again, the young woman had disappeared.

Well, okay. So everyone in the world doesn't love Albert Einstein. If I could just get him to the good ol' U.S. of A., we'd be leaving a lot of those people behind. Then Herr Strasser and his minions could rant about Jewish scientists all they wanted.

Finally, we reached the stairs. Graham and I handed the tickets to a smiling young man with perfect Aryan looks standing behind a lectern marked with the winged Dornier-Luftwaffe logo. He checked out tickets and tore away the top page of each, then wished us a pleasant trip ("Why, thank you," said Albert) before letting us pass through the gate. The bobby held back everyone who wasn't holding up a ticket, and we left the crowd behind and began to walk down the stairs to the plane.

At this point, I thought our troubles were over. I had no way of knowing that they'd only just begun.

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iv

The Dornier-Luftwaffe RF-01 is long gone, of course. Although the *Valkyrie* was meant to be the first of a fleet of *Riesigflugzeuge*, it was the only one of its kind. The *Valkyrie* exists today only in photographs, newsreel footage, and the fading memories of those who are old enough to remember it. It was too big to build, too expensive to operate, too much ahead of its time . . . and that's too bad. It was an impressive machine.

Seen from the stairs leading down to the wharf, the *Valkyrie* resembled an enormous silver boomerang mounted atop two giant pontoons, with a smaller boomerang on top of the first. The airliner took the form of a giant wing with a span of 528 feet; from the forward bow to the rear tips of its catamaran pontoons, it was 235 feet long, and from the waterline, it was as tall as a nine-story building.

But those are just statistics. Let's put it another way: it was *huge*.

The *Valkyrie* floated on the Thames below Vauxhall Bridge because this was the only place in the metropolitan London area where it could land; no airfield in the world could accommodate an aircraft that size. All landings, in fact, were on rivers—the Main in Frankfurt, the Hudson in New York. The *Valkyrie* was a flying ocean liner whose twenty 1,900 horsepower engines were vulnerable to salt corrosion. These three-blade prop engines were mounted on both sides of the upper nacelle: ten forward, ten aft, in a push-pull configuration.

The American architect Norman Bel Geddes and German aeronautical engineer O.A. Keller had designed the *Valkyrie* to meet the challenge of providing non-stop transatlantic passenger air travel, specifically between London and Chicago. Unfortunately, they proposed their airliner just before the New York stock market crashed; the group of Chicago businessmen who'd been interested in building the ship backed away when it became apparent that they'd soon be selling apples from pushcarts on Michigan Avenue. The airliner might have remained on Bel Geddes's drawing board if Gregor Strasser's second in command, Hermann Goering, hadn't heard about it. A former World War I flying ace, Goering had an intense interest in aeronautics, and he managed to persuade *der führer* to invest in the project as an alternative to the giant passenger dirigibles proposed by Count von Zeppelin. Since the dirigibles were dependent on hydrogen for loft, the Bel Geddes airliner was considered a safer design . . .

Not to mention more adaptable for military use. As Graham and I escorted Albert and Elsa across the wharf to the floating pier leading out to the *Valkyrie's* port pontoon, I couldn't help but wonder if there were plans for conversion of a civilian airliner to a military troop ship. Five decks of portholes ran the length of each of the pontoons and three decks of the main hull; the *Valkyrie* had accommodations for 451 passengers and 155 crewmembers, and it wasn't hard to imagine them replaced by an invasion force of the same size.

Of course, at the time, that was a silly thought. Strasser had repeatedly stated that the Nazis wanted only peace. Still, it was hard to ignore the bright red swastika painted on the hull. And when the war finally did break out, one of the first targets for British air raids was the *Valkyrie's* hangar in Frankfurt.

"Have you ever seen anything so enormous?" Elsa stopped midway across the wharf to crane her head back and peer up at the vast wing looming above us. "Albert, this is the biggest thing I've ever seen."

"Hmph . . . the Eiffel Tower is bigger." Albert took off his hat and shaded his eyes against the sunlight glaring off the *Valkyrie's* fuselage. "Couldn't they have accomplished the same thing with a smaller aircraft?"

"Oh, you . . ." Elsa gave her husband a sour look. "No imagination."

"Yes, my darling. As you say." Albert gave me a sidelong look, and I tried not to smile when he winked at me. "Come, my dear . . . our behemoth awaits."

Two booths were set up on the pier in front of the gangways: one for first class passengers, the other for everyone else. Graham stayed with us until we joined the line for the first class booth, but no sooner had he walked away to join the second line than a young British officer in a dark blue Dornier-Luftwaffe uniform stepped from behind the booth and walked over to us. There were lieutenant's bars on his shoulder boards, and the embroidered patch above his left pocket was stitched OSWALD.

"Dr. Einstein? Mrs. Einstein?" He ignored me. "Please come this way. We've been expecting you."

Albert blinked, and Elsa nervously took his arm. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I don't understand. Who . . . ?"

"Is there a problem, Lieutenant?" I asked, stepping forward.

Oswald regarded me as if I'd just crawled out from under the bridge. "Are you accompanying them?" he asked. I nodded, and he gave me a frosty smile. "Their accommodations have been changed. Compliments of the captain, they're to be moved from the first class section on deck seven to the master suite on deck eight."

"Oh, my . . . really?" Elsa raised an eyebrow. "I didn't realize Dornier-Luftwaffe took such good care of its passengers."

"Particularly Jews," Albert quietly added.

Elsa shushed him. Oswald did a good job of pretending not to notice. "Captain Schumann is an admirer of yours, Dr. Einstein. It is an honor to have you aboard the *Valkyrie*, and he wants to make your trip as comfortable as possible. Your belongings have already been taken there."

"Thank you," Albert said. "And our companion, Mr. Egan? Where will he . . . ?"

"Mr. Egan will continue to enjoy our hospitality on the first class deck." He looked at me. "I'm sorry, sir, but the master suite has only one bedroom, and the *Valkyrie* doesn't provide roll-away beds for its guests."

I didn't like it. My instructions were to stick with Albert and Elsa at all times. This looked like a deliberate attempt to separate us. Yet there was little I could do about it without revealing that I was their bodyguard, and therefore tipping off the Nazis that Albert was, indeed, planning to defect.

Albert and I traded a silent glance, and he gave me the slightest of nods. We'd work something out once we were airborne. "Thank you, Lieutenant," he said. "We accept

your invitation. Elsa, Sonny . . .”

Oswald wasn't pleased that I was coming aboard with them, but he didn't want to risk offending Albert, so he had little choice but to let me fall in behind the Einsteins as he led them around the line of first class passengers. I caught a glimpse of Graham standing in line with the second and third class passengers. His face displayed no expression as our eyes briefly met, but I could tell he'd overheard the conversation and was just as concerned as I was.

And the girl I'd spotted on the sidewalk was there, too. Standing near the back of Graham's line, she quickly looked away when I glanced at her. She pretended to examine the ticket in her hand, but it was clear she'd been quietly watching as well. Maybe she was just a Strasser sympathizer who had a grudge against Albert, but . . .

In any case, I pegged her as someone worth keeping an eye on.

* * *

v

We entered the RF-01 through a passenger hatch on deck two, amid a row of small, double-occupancy third class cabins at the waterline of the port pontoon. Stairs led upward, but Oswald took us instead to an elevator midway down the corridor. Its operator closed the grate behind us; he pulled up the control wheel and the elevator quietly ascended.

As we rose through the airliner, passing from the pontoon into the center hull of the immense wing, we caught brief glimpses of the rest of the ship—the lower passenger decks, the foyer leading to the main dining room, the entrance to the solarium and games court, the promenade and first class cabins—until we reached deck eight, the airliner's highest level besides the engine nacelle above us.

“And here we are,” Oswald said as the operator brought the cage to a halt and opened the door. The lieutenant led us down a narrow carpeted hallway past the officers' quarters on the right, pausing for a moment at a large door to our left. “This is the control room. Once you've been shown your quarters, Captain Schumann would be pleased if you'd join us for the takeoff.”

“We'd be delighted,” Albert said.

“And where will I be staying?” I asked

“We have a stateroom reserved for you just downstairs.” Oswald pointed to a nearby companionway. “If you take those down one flight, your room is the second to the right.”

Bad arrangement. It put me too far away from the Einsteins. I said nothing, though, as I followed them and Oswald a few more steps down the corridor, where he stopped to unlock an unmarked door next to the captain's quarters. We walked into a two-room suite not much larger than an ordinary bedroom, yet furnished in as modern an Art Deco style as the most luxurious Manhattan hotel. A floor-to-ceiling window took up an entire wall of the parlor; we were high atop the airliner, looking down from the port bow onto the busy Thames, where police boats were clearing river traffic from the mile-long stretch between the Vauxhall and Chelsea bridges.

One look, and Elsa moaned and rushed into the adjacent bedroom. Albert quietly tutted and followed her, but not before he paused at the window to hastily close the drapes. “Is there anything wrong, Dr. Einstein?” Oswald asked.

“Nothing to worry about,” Albert replied. “Our bags are here, yes?”

That was obviously not the reason why Elsa fled the room, but the lieutenant didn't press the issue. Albert hastily went after his wife, and I was taking note of the fact that the parlor had a sofa just big enough for me to sleep on when a telephone on

the coffee table rang. Oswald picked it up, listened for a moment. "Yes, sir, we'll be there soon. Thank you." He hung up and turned to Albert, who'd just stuck his head through the door. "That was the captain. We'll be departing in ten minutes. Dr. Einstein, Mrs. Einstein, if you'd care to follow me . . . ?"

"I would prefer to remain here, if you don't mind," Elsa said from the next room.

Glancing past Albert, I saw that she'd already removed her hat and shoes and was stretched out across the bed, an arm thrown over her eyes. Albert gave me an apologetic look. "Heights and air travel don't suit her very well, I'm afraid. I think it's better if we remain here. . . ."

"No, Albert . . . go, go." Still covering her eyes, she flapped a hand at her husband. "You're expected, and it would be rude if you didn't. I'll be fine. Take Sonny with you."

I was glad she'd said that. It meant that I was taking her place, and therefore wouldn't have to argue with Oswald if the lieutenant objected. But Oswald didn't seem to mind. "Yes, ma'am. I'll have the ship's doctor come up once we're underway to see how you're doing. In the meantime . . . gentlemen, this way, please?"

He led Albert and me back down the corridor, where another key opened the door to the control room. We entered a compartment about the size of a steamship bridge, V-shaped with broad windows on either side of the delta. The pilot, copilot, and navigator were seated beneath the windows; the flight engineer and radio operator had their own stations behind them, and in the center of the compartment was the captain's chair, situated so that he could swivel in any direction.

As we came in, the captain turned about to face us. "Ah . . . Dr. Einstein!" A short, wiry man in his mid-thirties, he stood up to thrust forward his hand. "A pleasure to meet you. I'm Max Schumann, captain of the *Valkyrie*."

"A pleasure to meet you as well, *Herr Kapitan*." Einstein shook his hand guardedly, his face showing little of the pleasure I'd seen earlier. Apparently he'd noticed the same thing I had: a small red Nazi Party button on the captain's lapel.

If the captain had any misgivings about having a Jewish scientist aboard his aircraft, though, I couldn't tell. Schumann took Albert around the control room, introducing him to each of his officers, all of whom greeted him just as enthusiastically as Schumann had. While this was going on, Oswald ducked outside again, returning a few minutes later with a white-jacketed steward carrying a pair of folding aluminum-frame chairs. They were set up against the rear bulkhead where they wouldn't tip over when the *Valkyrie* took off. Schumann made sure we were comfortable, then returned to his seat.

By then, the river had been cleared of all boats and barges. On the other side of the Thames, a large crowd had gathered along Grosvenor Road, waiting to see the *Valkyrie* take flight. The copilot reported that all passengers and crew were aboard and that the hatches were secure, and the engineer stated that each of the engines had been tested and was ready for full start. A final radio test, then Captain Schumann ordered the dock to be withdrawn and the aircraft to be towed to position.

"Mind if I smoke, Captain?" Albert asked.

Schumann glanced over his shoulder at him. Albert already had his briar pipe and tobacco pouch out and was gazing at him expectantly, "No . . . not at all," he said, even though there was a *Rachen Verboten* sign on the bulkhead above Albert's head that the scientist couldn't have missed seeing. "Be my guest."

Albert nodded, smiled, and stuffed his pipe. The tobacco he smoked would have felled an ox at twenty paces. It didn't bother me much, but I saw the captain wrinkle his nose. Albert glanced at me and gave me a sly wink. Yes, he'd seen the sign. He was doing this deliberately.

The first sensation of movement came a minute later when a tugboat began dragging the *Valkyrie* by its forward mooring line away from the wharf, while tenders on

both the port and starboard sides helped push the giant aircraft to its takeoff position, in the center of the river and facing directly downstream. From the control room, much of London's southwest side could be seen, from Victoria Station to Buckingham Palace, all the way out to the Royal Albert Hall and the green space of Kensington Gardens.

As the tug and tenders began to move away, Schumann picked up a microphone and had the radio operator put him on the ship's speakers. Speaking first in German, then in English, he asked all passengers to be seated and remain that way until told that it was all right to move about the aircraft. He put away the mike and, speaking in German, told the pilots to start the engines.

It took *Valkyrie* nearly the entire length of the river between the two bridges to become airborne. Moving slowly at first, but building speed with each passing second, the giant aircraft rushed down the Thames, its mammoth pontoons sending dovetails of water high into the air, its twenty engines moaning loudly even through the soundproofed fuselage. Because the Thames had a shallow bend in this part of the river, *Valkyrie* came close to first one bank, then another.

As the Chelsea Bridge became steadily larger, I saw Albert balling his fists in his lap, the pipe stem clenched between his teeth. I couldn't blame him. The takeoff was tight, with no room for error.

And yet, seemingly at the last possible moment, the pontoons lifted away from the river, and the prow tilted back in plenty of time to clear the bridge. A last, brief glimpse of London, then the colossus rose into the sky, the sun glaring through the windows as the RF-01 veered slightly starboard, making a gradual turn to the northwest. Then it leveled off and continued its long ascent to ten thousand feet, where it would remain for the next thirty-three hours of its transatlantic flight.

Albert was grinning like a kid. He knocked out his pipe over a waste can, thanked Schumann for inviting him to witness the takeoff—"I'll never forget this for as long as I live!"—and then he let Oswald escort him back to his cabin. I was about to follow him in, but the lieutenant tapped me on the shoulder.

"Perhaps you'd like to see your stateroom, sir," Oswald said. "You can come back to see Dr. Einstein any time after that."

I didn't intend to spend a lot of time in my cabin, but for the sake of appearance at least, I needed to go along with him. So I let Oswald lead me downstairs to deck seven, which stretched the entire length of *Valkyrie's* hull. My room was farther away than he'd led me to believe; as we walked down the promenade, passing first class passengers standing at the railing to watch the English countryside below, I couldn't help but again suspect that someone was making an effort to separate Albert Einstein from his traveling companion.

That was confirmed as soon as Oswald unlocked the door to my stateroom and stepped aside. There was already someone in the room, a man in a black leather overcoat who stood up from a chair as I walked in.

"You are James Egan?" he asked, his voice thickened by a German accent. "Very good. My name is Hans Lentz, and I am with the German state police."

* * *

vi

Lentz could have come straight from a Hitchcock film: tall, trim, and hawk-faced, his head shaved at the sides and back so that only the top of his scalp was covered by black hair. I didn't have to ask how he knew my name or how he'd gotten into my quarters; anyone who read the papers knew about the *Geheime Staatspolizei*, the

Gestapo recently formed to enforce the Fatherland's increasingly stringent laws. The only question was why he was here.

"Yeah, I'm Egan." I didn't tell him that my friends call me Sonny; he was clearly not my friend. "Sorry, but I think you're in the wrong room."

"No, I think not." Lentz looked past me at Oswald, cocked his head toward the hall. The lieutenant said nothing, but instead stepped back from the door and quietly closed it, leaving us alone. "On this aircraft, I can go where I please."

"Really? Well, the engines could probably use another inspection. Why don't you go up there and have a look?"

No smile. He glanced over at my bed. My suitcase lay on top of it, unlatched; apparently he'd taken the liberty of searching it. "I have reason to believe you may be carrying a firearm. If that is so, I want to see it."

There was no point in denying what he already knew. I opened my coat and showed him the Colt slung beneath my left arm. "Give it to me," Lentz said, holding out his hand. "It is forbidden for passengers to carry weapons aboard German aircraft."

"Is that so?" I made no move to surrender the Colt. "Well, this may be a German aircraft, but we're over Great Britain, and there's no English law that says I can't bring a gun on a plane."

I was bluffing; I didn't know anything of the kind. But I was betting that Lentz didn't either. Apparently I'd assumed correctly. His hand clenched into a fist, then he slowly lowered it. "I do not appreciate your lack of cooperation, Herr Egan."

"And I don't appreciate you entering my cabin and going through my stuff, Herr Lentz, so let's just call it even." Figuring that it might be wise to defuse the situation, I tried a different tack. Shrugging off my overcoat and throwing it on the bed, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a pack of Camels. "Want to tell me what this is all about?" I asked, shaking out a cigarette for myself before offering one to him.

Lentz eyed the pack suspiciously before accepting a smoke. "You're accompanying Professor Einstein and his wife, are you not?" he asked, and I nodded. "May I inquire about the nature of your relationship?"

I took my time lighting my cigarette and his, then took a seat on the bed. "Old friend of the family."

Lentz sat down again, saying nothing but simply regarding me with cool appraisal. He held his cigarette between his thumb and index finger, like a kid who'd learned how to smoke just yesterday; I don't think it was something he did very often, because he didn't inhale all the way and his face looked a bit green. Still, he managed not to cough, I'll give him that.

"Old friend of the family," he said after a moment, repeating what I'd told him. "I think not. I think you are actually a bodyguard."

"You can think what you like. You're still not getting my gun."

The faintest hint of a smile, then he took one more puff from his cigarette before stubbing it out in the small glass ashtray on the table. "Perhaps we should . . . get things straight, yes? Is that the proper American phrase?"

"Close enough." He must have seen a few of our movies. "Go on."

"Very well . . . let me assure you that Professor Einstein and his wife are not in danger so long as they're aboard this ship. My government suspects that they may be going to America this time not merely for a visit, but permanently." A pause. "Is this true?"

"I have no idea."

"If it is, then we have no interest in standing in the way. Quite the opposite, in fact. Einstein leaving Germany just means there is one less Jew in the Fatherland. Good riddance."

"Interesting way of putting that."

Another smirk. “Mr. Egan, if I had any interest in returning Einstein to Germany, all I would have to do is instruct Captain Schumann to turn the *Valkyrie* around and fly back to Frankfurt. He could always claim engine trouble, and my people would put the Einsteins under arrest as soon as we landed.” He shook his head. “I am not going to do that. America can have them, and as many other Jews as they want.”

“I’ll let President Roosevelt know that the next time I see him.”

Lentz stared at me as if he didn’t know whether to take me seriously or not. Either way, he decided to let the comment pass. He got up from the chair. “Since I have let you know where we stand, you are now aware that it is not necessary to guard Professor Einstein, and therefore your weapon is not needed. This being the case, I must request that you keep your gun in your cabin. If I see it on your person again, I will summon the stewards and have them remove it from you . . . by force, if required.”

I didn’t say anything, but simply nodded as I stood up. Lentz got the message. “Very well, then,” he said as he walked toward the door. “*Auf wiedersehen.*”

“Yeah. Nice day to you, too.” I opened the door and let him out, and closed it behind him. As an afterthought, I took the chair and propped it at an angle beneath the knob. If I couldn’t lock the door against him, at least I could make it difficult for him to get back in.

I should have felt a little better, now that I’d been told that the Nazis didn’t care whether or not Albert defected to America, but I didn’t. That would have meant trusting a Gestapo officer, and I wasn’t ready to do that. My job hadn’t changed. It just meant that I couldn’t carry my gun, that’s all.

I smiled. Lentz had forbidden me from wearing my gun in my holster. He hadn’t said anything about putting it in the Einsteins’ suite where I could get to it when I slept on their sofa. Which is what I intended to do until we got to New York.

* * *

vii

With that thought in mind, I went back upstairs to deck eight. Albert answered my knock at the door with a finger raised to his lips; Elsa was napping in the next room, and he was passing the time until dinner with his pipe and a book. He closed the bedroom room and listened while I quietly told him about my encounter with Lentz. Albert was relieved that the Nazis apparently had no interest in repatriating him to Germany, but agreed that we shouldn’t take Lentz’s word at face value. I’d stick with him and Elsa for the remainder of the flight, even if it meant sharing their suite overnight. However, his brow furrowed when I removed the Colt from my shoulder holster and kneeled down to slide it beneath the sofa.

“What’s the Shadow without his gun?” he asked.

I chuckled at this, but he had a point. “Guess I’ll have to rely on charm,” I replied. “If Lentz catches me with this, he’ll take it away. Maybe throw me in the brig, too, if this bird has one.”

“It’s certainly big enough.” Albert picked up a booklet gold-stamped with the Dornier-Luftwaffe logo and a silhouette of the *Valkyrie*. “Do you know this aircraft even has a games court? And at night it doubles as a music hall?”

“Why, are you interested?”

Albert opened the booklet and peered at it. “Tonight, the Brandenburg String Quartet will be performing a selection of Mozart. It would be a pleasant way to spend the evening.” He glanced about the stateroom. “And I imagine even these quarters will become a bit stale if we spend the entire trip in them.”

“Then we’ll go. I’ll see about reserving some good seats.” I made sure the gun

couldn't be spotted by any casual visitors before I got up from the floor. "I'll be back before dinner. Don't go anywhere without me."

"Never." He picked up his book—*The World Set Free* by H.G. Wells—and, after a moment's absent-minded search, found his pipe where he'd left it smoldering on the coffee table. "I shall remain here till I see the whites of your eyes."

I left and went back downstairs, this time all the way down to deck four in the starboard pontoon where Graham was staying. I hadn't yet made it down there, though, when I found him coming up the stairs from second class. He was meaning to find me, believing that the Einsteins and I were still quartered together in first class. I let him know about the new arrangements and how we'd been separated. We needed to talk, but not in his room: he was sharing a cabin with a Berlin businessman who was an enthusiastic supporter of Herr Strasser and his policies.

I wasn't sure about my room either—Lentz might have done something else in there beside search my belongings—so we went upstairs to deck five. Just forward of the foyer was a broad, wedge-shaped passenger lounge, where leather couches and loveseats faced the row of windows at the bow. By then, *Valkyrie* had left the Irish coast behind and was out over the ocean; with its engines throttled back to ninety mph, the enormous aircraft was chasing the afternoon sun, the long journey through the night still a few hours away.

We found a couple of armchairs off to the side, and Graham beckoned a steward and asked him to fetch a couple of drinks from the bar. Around us, passengers were watching the ocean, reading newspapers, chatting amongst themselves. A little boy ran by, holding aloft a tin-toy replica of the RF-01; he nearly collided with a young couple in tennis togs passing through the lounge on their way to the games court. Which reminded me . . .

"Albert wants to go to the concert tonight," I said. "I wonder who I have to see about reservations?"

It was a casual comment, but Graham shook his head. "No. They should remain in their cabin at all times."

"Why? I don't see the harm in letting them be seen in public." I pointed to the pair of double doors behind us; they led to the main dining room, just forward of the games court. "Dinner and a show . . . what could be more normal?"

"They could become targets."

"For who? The Gestapo?" I reiterated my conversation with Lentz. "I don't trust him either," I finished, acknowledging the skeptical look Graham gave me, "but I don't think he's going to try anything while dozens of people are . . ."

"The Gestapo isn't the only thing we need to look out for." Graham bent a little closer, lowering his voice so as not to be overheard. "There's an individual aboard who may pose a threat. Someone who's not . . . that is, someone who may not necessarily be affiliated with the secret police."

I don't like it when people hide important information from me, and Graham was being just a little too mysterious for my taste. "Look," I said, unable to keep the irritation from my voice, "if Scotland Yard knows something I should know, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me in on it."

Graham's lips drew together in a tight line. There was definitely information that he was reluctant to reveal. One look at my face, though, told him that he wasn't getting out of here until he spilled the beans. "Very well," he said reluctantly, "there's a woman aboard who means to do harm to Dr. Einstein."

I remembered the face I'd seen in the crowd at Vauxhall Station and again on the dock just before we boarded. "Young lady? Dark hair, early thirties, kind of intense?"

"You've seen her?"

"Just before we came aboard. Want to tell me who she is?"

“Her name is Lieserl . . . Lieserl Maric.” Graham looked about to make sure we weren’t being overheard. The steward was returning with our drinks. Graham waited until he’d placed them on the table before us and I’d signed for them, and it wasn’t until we were alone again that the inspector continued. “She’s Serbian, and we have reason to believe that she bears a grudge against Dr. Einstein.”

“What sort of . . . ?”

“Never mind. It’s not important.” Graham shook his head. “What is important is that she must be kept away from them. If she’s on the plane, it can only be because she has had intentions.”

Remembering the way she’d been staring at Albert, I couldn’t argue. “Very well, then—” I picked up my scotch and water, took a sip just so it wouldn’t go to waste, and started to get up “—I’ll go warn Albert that . . .”

“No!”

Graham grabbed my wrist and yanked me back into my seat. Before I could argue, he leaned in, close enough that I couldn’t help but see the fear in his eyes. “Whatever you do, “ he hissed, “you must *not* tell Dr. Einstein or his wife that Lieserl is aboard, or even that you know her name! Do you understand?”

“What are you . . . ?”

“Do you understand?”

Until then, my impression of Nigel Graham was that he was the sort of detective one finds in any police department, the kind who rises through the ranks not by wearing out shoe leather but by kissing up to his superiors so he can get the cushy assignments like shepherding German scientists across the Atlantic. In that moment, though, there was something about him that made me not only reconsider my opinion, but also wonder . . .

“Sure. Whatever you say.” I forced a grin, playing the dumb gumshoe willing to do what he was told so long as there was a paycheck at the end of it. “Mum’s the word.”

“Right.” Graham relaxed, letting go of my wrist as he settled back in his chair. “Sorry to be so . . . well, surely you understand there are certain things about this affair that can’t be discussed.” He seemed to remember his martini, because he picked it up and took a small taste. “Just do your job and watch the Einsteins, and I’m sure this flight will be nice and uneventful.”

I nodded and made small talk with him while I finished my drink. Then I looked at my watch, commented that I still needed to make dinner reservations, and excused myself. It took just a few minutes to reserve a table for Albert, Elsa, and me during the last seating. All the seats for the evening concert had been taken, but a flash of green and the casual mention of Albert’s name was sufficient to persuade the concierge to move three first class passengers to the waiting list.

But my work wasn’t done yet.

I went up a couple of decks to the radio room and had the wireless operator send a telegram to Richard O’Donnell, he with the bad taste in Kentucky bourbon who resided at the American embassy in London.

Until a few minutes ago, I’d had no doubts about Graham. He’d shown me his shield, and as a former cop myself, I wasn’t inclined to question the legitimacy of a fellow lawman. Something about him had begun to rub me the wrong way, though, and I’d just realized a peculiar thing: O’Donnell hadn’t recognized Graham when he’d brought me to the embassy, and neither had the Scotland Yard driver who’d delivered the Einsteins to Vauxhall Station.

So I sent O’Donnell a cable:

PLEASE CONFIRM WHEREABOUTS OF MET
INSPECTOR NIGEL GRAHAM STOP IS HE

ABOARD MY FLIGHT QUESTION STOP
URGENT STOP

I watched the operator key it into his wireless, then went back to my cabin, took off my shoes, and lay down for a little while. I knew I should be with the Einsteins, but I wanted to be alone until I got a response. I could only hope that O'Donnell would take me seriously.

Apparently he did. It took a little while, but the sun was just beginning to paint red the high clouds upon the western horizon when I was awakened by a knock at the door. A steward was waiting outside, a sealed envelope resting on the silver platter he carried. I tipped him and took the envelope into my cabin, where I ripped it open and read the telegram O'Donnell had just sent me:

CHECKED WITH MET STOP GRAHAM NOT
ASSIGNED TO CASE STOP HE IS A TRAFFIC
COP IN MAYFAIR STOP WHO IS WITH
YOU QUESTION STOP

Good question, indeed.

* * *

viii

The games court was located aft of the main dining room, in the solarium built within *Valkyrie's* tail section. During the last dinner seating, stewards moved in and cleared away the tennis equipment, badminton nets, and shuffleboards, rolled carpets across the parquet floor, and set up rows of folding chairs in front of a small, elevated stage, with a handful of upholstered armchairs in the first row. By the time dessert and coffee were being served, the solarium had been transformed into an airborne concert hall.

A couple of hours earlier, Albert, Elsa, and I had joined the rest of the first class passengers for the last seating. I was glad I'd brought formal wear on this trip. Albert had, too, but while I looked like I might be wearing a bulletproof vest under my tails, Albert was unexpectedly dapper. As it turned out, the reservations I'd made were redundant: at Captain Schumann's insistence, we joined him at his table, in the middle of the dining room where everyone could see us. By then, every passenger and crew member was aware that Albert Einstein was on their flight; all eyes were upon the couple the moment they walked into the dining room, and it wasn't until Schumann called for Oswald and asked him to stand behind Albert's chair that the other passengers were dissuaded from coming over for handshakes and autographs.

Unlike the scene at Vauxhall Station earlier in the day, this time the situation was under control. Albert didn't wallow in the attention, but neither did he appear to mind it very much. He'd become comfortable with celebrity, accepting it as inevitable, and his presence had an effect on people that was sometimes subtle. When we came to the captain's table, one of the first things I noticed was that the Nazi button was missing from Schumann's uniform.

Albert noticed this, too. "So, *Herr Kapitän*," he said once we'd been seated, "I take it you've reconsidered your political affiliation since the last time we saw one another?"

Schumann's expression became stony. There was a twinkle in Albert's eye as he said this; I was coming to realize that impudence was part of his personality. Schumann might be one of his admirers, the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazis notwithstanding, but the jab was irresistible.

"If you're speaking of my National Socialist button," Schumann said, "I'm afraid I forgot to wear it this evening. Shall I return to my cabin and retrieve it?"

“Oh, please don’t,” Albert replied. “Not on my account.”

Elsa swatted his wrist. I found the linen napkin in my lap and coughed into it to hide my laughter. I was very glad Lentz wasn’t at the table. He might have reconsidered his promise to leave Albert alone on his way to America.

But the Gestapo officer was nowhere to be seen, and neither was Nigel Graham, the man I now knew to be an imposter. I didn’t tell the Einsteins what I’d learned when I came to their cabin to pick them up for dinner, but when Albert stepped into the bedroom to help Elsa fasten her pearl necklace, I took the opportunity to retrieve the Colt from beneath the sofa. The necessity of formal eveningwear had given me a new place to hide my gun: in the garter strap of my right leg, where it was concealed by the trouser cuff. Not the best place for a concealed weapon, but the fact that Graham wasn’t who he’d said he was had made me just as suspicious of him as anyone else aboard the *Valkyrie*.

Yet Graham didn’t appear for dinner, nor did Lieserl Maric. I spent dinner watching everyone who entered the dining room, but neither of them made an appearance. I was beginning to think the evening would pass uneventfully when Albert muttered something in disgust. It was in German, but it sounded like a curse.

“Pardon me, *Herr Doktor*?” Captain Schumann broke away from chatting with Elsa. “Is there something wrong?”

Albert didn’t say anything, but instead cast an angry glare at the orchestra balcony overlooking the dining room. The quartet who would be performing later that evening was playing a medley of Strauss waltzes for the dinner hour, and while they sounded perfectly fine to me, something about them had raised Albert’s ire.

“The violinist doesn’t know his instrument very well,” he grumbled. “I could saw wood better than that.”

I’ve always been more of a jazz man myself. To me, all string quartets sound like old guys sawing wood. Schumann was amused. “Is that a fact?” he asked, sitting back in his chair. “It may interest you to know that Reich Marshall Goering himself selected the Brandenburg String Quartet to be *Valkyrie*’s musical entertainment for this season.”

“Oh, well then . . . I suppose that explains everything.” An indifferent shrug. “We all know Party officials cannot err.”

An instant later he winced and jerked slightly. I believe Elsa had kicked him in the ankle. The damage was already done, though. Schumann had caught the implied insult, and another jab at the Nazis couldn’t be ignored. “And you believe you could do better, Dr. Einstein?” he asked, no longer affording him the dignity of addressing him as *Herr Doktor*.

“Of course. No question whatsoever.”

“Then perhaps we should give you the opportunity of joining the quartet as a quest accompanist.” Schumann gave him a tight smile. “I’m sure your fellow passengers would be thrilled to witness a performance by someone as illustrious as yourself.”

“Albert . . .” Elsa began.

“It’s all right, my darling.” Albert gently patted her hand as he returned the captain’s smile. He knew a challenge had been made, and he didn’t hesitate to accept. “I would be only too pleased to do so, Captain Schumann,” he said, then looked over his shoulder at Oswald. “Lieutenant, would you be so kind as to return to my suite and retrieve my violin? You’ll find the case in the bedroom closet.”

And this was how, a little more than an hour later, I found myself sitting beside Albert and Elsa in the front row, watching as the Brandenburg String Quartet made their way through *A Little Night Music*. The solarium was filled with passengers who’d come for the performance, and with the lights dimmed and cool blue moonlight streaming in through the plate-glass windows high above, the deck had become something surreal, a conservatoire ten thousand feet above the Atlantic.

Albert sat with his legs crossed and a finger raised to his lips, regarding the quartet as if studying an unknown species that had crawled into view from beneath a rock. The violinist who'd given him offense was acutely aware of the scrutiny; the longer Albert stared at him, the more nervous he became, until his bow trembled each time he laid it upon the strings.

Elsa must have noticed this, because at one point she leaned over to her husband and whispered something in his ear. Albert rolled his eyes, but he reluctantly nodded and, lowering his hand from his face, forced a smile. I was about to say something to Albert myself—like *cut it out, you're scaring the poor man*—when I caught furtive movement from the corner of my eye. Looking around, I spotted Graham standing at the edge of the audience, making small but urgent gestures to get my attention.

There was no person I wanted to see more than Nigel Graham. Quietly excusing myself from Albert and Elsa, I rose from my seat and quickly strode across the deck to where he stood. Graham started to say something to me, but I grasped his elbow and pulled him away. Albert was watching us curiously as I yanked Graham behind a row of ceiling support columns. Shielded from the stage and the audience, I pushed him against the duralumin beam and planted my hand beside his head so he couldn't get away.

"Hello, Inspector Graham," I whispered, "or whoever you really are."

His eyes widened. "Sonny, I don't know what you're . . ."

"Oh, no. Don't get cute with me." The telegram I'd received from O'Donnell was in my pocket. I pulled it out, unfolded it, and handed it to Graham. "You're a long way from Mayfair, aren't you?" I asked as he held it close to his face to make out the words. "Or maybe you want to tell me there's two cops in London with the same name?"

Even in the half-light of the solarium, I could tell that Graham's face had become pale. He didn't say anything as he handed the cable back to me. I waited for an explanation, and after a moment he let out his breath and shook his head.

"Look," he began, "I know how this seems, and believe me, there's an explanation. But right now, you have to trust me. Einstein's life is in danger this very minute, and you're the only person who can save him."

"How can I trust you if . . . ?"

"Listen to me!" He started to grab my jacket lapels, but I did it first; an instant later, he found himself slammed against the beam with my other fist ready to punch him into tomorrow. But he wasn't giving up. "Listen!" he hissed. "Don't worry about me! Worry about Lieser! She's here, right now . . . *and she's going to kill Einstein!*"

I'm not always the sharpest pencil in the box, but I've got a knack for knowing when people are trying to pull my leg. And so far as I could tell, Graham—or whoever he was—was on the level. "How can you know this?" I demanded, keeping my voice low but not relaxing my grip on him. "Are you working with her?"

"No! I swear to you, I'm not! I . . . I just know that she . . ."

Applause from the audience. The quartet had finished the Mozart piece. Still keeping Graham pinned against the column, I turned my head a little to see what was going on. The passengers were still clapping when Captain Schumann walked forward, raising his hands for silence.

"*Danke shoen . . . danke . . .* thank you," he said. "And now, as a special treat, we have a surprise this evening, a celebrity who will be joining the Brandenburg String Quartet for a special performance." He made a grand gesture to the front row. "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome . . . Dr. Albert Einstein!"

Another round of applause, louder now, as Albert rose from his chair and sauntered to the stage. In his hands were the violin and bow Oswald had brought from his stateroom. A quick bow to the audience, then he took a seat in the small wooden chair that had been placed for him on the stage. Albert turned to the quartet.

“*String Quintet No. 3 in C Major*, if you please,” he said, then cast a sour glance at the first-chair violinist. “Try to keep up,” he quietly added.

A titter from those in the first few rows who’d caught the remark. The violinist scowled, but obediently exchanged his instrument for a viola as Albert nestled his own violin under his chin. He touched the bow to the strings, and there was a moment in which the room seemed to hold its breath. Then the first sprightly notes danced from beneath his bow, and an instant later the quartet joined in.

If Albert had never devised the Special Theory of Relativity or written any of the papers that overturned physics in the first decades of the twentieth century, it’s possible that he might have become a first-rate concert violinist. The Brandenburg String Quartet was quickly reduced to journeyman status; its members were competent, yes, perhaps even gifted in a modest way, but if anyone ever doubted that Albert Einstein was a genius, they witnessed its physical manifestation in a performance that was both flawless and heartfelt. The audience sat breathless as Albert, captured in the moonlight, effortlessly soared through the Mozart piece.

So did I. And that’s how I nearly missed Lieserl.

Fate was on Albert’s side, though. She’d entered the solarium from the dining room and, keeping to the shadows, silently walked alongside the audience. She was less than twenty feet from the stage when she moved past the columns behind which Graham and I were standing.

“There she is!” Graham reached up to tear my hand from his collar. “For God’s sake, man, get her!”

I noticed that she was holding a folded silk shawl in front of her, as if to conceal something in her hands. She must have heard Graham, for her face snapped toward us. Her eyes went wide when she saw me standing just a few feet behind her. A flash of recognition—she must have realized that I was the man she’d seen on the wharf earlier that day—then she turned away and, as Albert’s bow weaved toward the closure of the allegro, bolted for the stage.

I didn’t have time to bend down and retrieve the Colt from beneath my pants leg. Charging from behind the column, I threw myself upon her. Lieserl didn’t hear me coming; she screamed and staggered forward as I wrapped my arms around her, and there was a soft thump beneath our feet as the long-bladed carving knife she’d been hiding beneath the shawl fell to the floor.

Men and women shouted as they turned to see a young woman struggling against a large fellow who’d grabbed her from behind. Some gallant fool sitting nearby jumped up from his seat. He was going to try and hit me, I think, but Graham got in his way. Then I tripped over the hem of Lieserl’s skirt and we fell together to the floor, where she continued to twist in my arms, howling like an enraged animal.

Albert had stopped playing the second he’d heard her scream. Rising from his chair, he watched in confusion as the two of us fought just a few feet away. A couple of stewards were rushing to help me, and I caught a glimpse of Hans Lentz running down the center aisle, when Lieserl managed to push herself up on her elbows. Fighting me like a madwoman, her hair and dress in disarray, she looked straight at Albert.

“Johnnie!” she yelled, her mouth twisting into a maniacal grin. “Johnnie! My mother sends her best regards, Johnnie!”

Then the crewmen and the Gestapo agent were all around us. I didn’t see the look on Albert’s face, but I did hear the harsh, discordant sound of his violin falling from his hands and breaking its neck upon the stage floor.

* * *

I joined the *Valkyrie* officers who hastily ushered Albert and Elsa from the solarium and back upstairs to their stateroom. If I'd had a choice, I would have instead taken control of Lieserl, but Lentz beat me to it. He and a petty officer handcuffed the young woman and spirited her out of the room and down a companionway. I tried to follow, but Lentz wouldn't let me. Besides, Albert was my primary responsibility; I had to look after him and Elsa first.

Meanwhile, Graham had simply vanished. In the confusion following the attack, he disappeared into the frightened crowd of passengers. I had a lot of questions for him, too, but I had to remind myself that he wasn't my immediate concern. I could always find him later.

So I followed Schumann, Oswald, and the other officers who'd formed a triangle around Albert and Elsa seconds after Lieserl was pushed facedown against the floor. The officers hustled them to the nearest lift; I stayed out of the way until we reached deck eight, then reasserted myself as the Einsteins' "traveling companion." No one objected; my true role had become obvious by then, and they were aware that, if it hadn't been for me, Albert would probably be sprawled across the solarium floor with a knife in his chest.

For his part, Albert was amazingly calm. He turned away the ship's doctor, insisting that neither he nor his wife had been harmed, and accepted Schumann's repeated apologies with a quiet smile and assurances that he wasn't to blame. All he wanted was some schnapps for him and his wife; that sent Oswald scurrying downstairs to the bar, and once the captain finally left a moment later, Albert quietly closed the door behind him, walked over to the sofa, and collapsed upon it like a man who'd just carried a twenty-pound bag of sand up a hill.

He stared into space for a long moment. His tux was rumpled, his tie was askew, and until then I wouldn't have thought it possible for his hair to get any wilder. He let out his breath, then gazed down at his empty hands.

"My violin," he murmured. "My poor, poor violin." He raised his eyes to look at me. "You don't suppose you could recover it, do you? I'd like to see if I could get it repaired, once we reach America."

"Sure, Albert. Anything . . ."

"Anything?" Until now, Elsa had been remarkably cool, saying little to anyone but simply allowing herself to be taken from place to place. In the privacy of her quarters, though, that was coming to an end. "Anything?" she repeated, staring at me in outrage. "Then find out who that woman was, and why she wished to murder my husband!"

My thoughts exactly. Before I could say more, though, she turned on Albert. "Why did she call you Johnnie? And what did she mean about her mother . . . Albert, was this someone else with whom you've had an affair? Is that what this is about?"

"I have no idea what she was talking about," he replied. "She must have been deranged."

I'd heard that mechanical tone many times before, seen that same blank expression, in countless interrogation rooms and jail cells. It was the voice of denial. Albert was a genius, but that didn't give him any special talent for lying.

"You have no idea who she was?" I asked.

"I've never seen that woman before in my life." Albert looked me straight in the eye, and I knew that this, at least, was true. Lieserl was a stranger to him.

"Have you ever . . . ?" I began, but stopped myself before I could finish. I wanted to ask him if he'd ever heard of Lieserl Maric, but remembered what Graham had said to me: *Whatever you do, you must not tell Dr. Einstein or his wife that Lieserl is*

aboard, or even that you know her name! Until I located Graham and talked to him again, it seemed prudent that I do as he said.

"Never mind." I turned to the door. "Look, I'm going to check on some things. The worst of this is probably over, but . . . well, stay in your room, and don't open the door for anyone except me, Lieutenant Oswald, or Captain Schumann. Okay?"

"Very well." Albert gazed out the window at the moonlight rippling across the dark waters of the Atlantic. I think he was more upset about breaking his violin than nearly losing his life. Or maybe there was something else on his mind. I twisted the doorknob to lock it, then left their cabin and headed downstairs.

Graham wasn't in his cabin. His roommate told me that he'd returned just long enough to change out of his dinner jacket and put on a sport coat, then left again. I went back upstairs and roamed the upper decks until I found him in a small bar-room on Deck Seven just off the promenade.

He was sitting alone at the bar, staring into the drink before him. He barely looked up when I sat down beside him; I think he'd been expecting me to find him. "I imagine you have some questions," he said, and the thickness of his tongue told me that the whisky on the bar wasn't the first one he'd had.

"Loads." The bartender started to come over, but I waved him off. "Let's start with the obvious . . . who are you?"

"I can't tell you that."

"You mean you won't," I said, and he shrugged: same thing. "All right, then. I'll call my friend Lentz and turn the matter over to him. I imagine the Gestapo will be interested to know there's someone aboard posing as a Scotland Yard inspector. Most likely he'll have you detained until the plane returns to Germany, then . . ."

"I'll tell you anything but that." Graham picked up a swizzle stick and idly swirled it around his glass. "Whatever else you want to talk about, we can . . . but not who I really am or where I come from. That's something I cannot tell you. Do we have an agreement?"

I'd been bluffing, and he'd called it. I didn't like dealing with someone who kept secrets, but if Graham was adamant about not allowing me to know his identity, there was little I could do about it. And I owed him for tipping me off about Lieserl. If he hadn't warned me, Albert might be dead.

"All right," I said, "let's try a different question. Who's Lieserl Maric, and what does she have against Albert?"

"Lieserl is his daughter."

"I didn't know he had one."

"No one does. He has two stepdaughters with Elsa, Margot and Ilse, and two grown sons from his first marriage, Eduard and Hans Mark. But before them, he had a daughter, too. Lieserl was born in 1902 before he and his first wife, Mileva, were married . . . but since Albert's parents didn't approve of the engagement and an illegitimate child would have ruined his chances of getting a position with the Swiss patent office, they kept the pregnancy secret. So Lieserl was born in Novi Sad, where Mileva's parents lived in Serbia, and a friend of hers adopted the little girl a short time later."

"That must have broken his heart."

Graham shrugged. "Who's to know? He never even laid eyes on her." He picked up his drink. "Albert did his best to eliminate all records of Lieserl's birth. Even Elsa doesn't know she existed, because he didn't tell his own family about her. When she was adopted, she took the last name of Mileva's friend, and therefore grew up believing that she was another woman's daughter." He smiled as he took a sip. "All these years, Little Lieserl has been in Albert's shadow . . . until now."

"How did she find out? That Albert's her father, I mean."

"After Albert and Mileva divorced in 1918, Mileva moved back to Serbia. By then, Lieserl was a young woman, still living with her adoptive mother and unaware that

a famous man was her father. Mileva waited until she was full grown before she reestablished contact with her daughter, and it wasn't until just a few years ago that she let Lieserl know the truth. By then, the woman had reason to hate Albert and turn her daughter against him."

Putting down the empty glass, Graham hunched forward to fold his arms together on the bar. "Albert has another secret," he said quietly once I'd moved closer to hear him. "He wasn't solely responsible for the Special Theory of Relativity. Mileva had a lot to do with it. Although the concepts are entirely his creation, she did much of the supporting work. She was a talented mathematician, which is how they met when they were physics students in Zurich. Math bored him and she was better at it anyway, so she did most of the number-crunching. . . ."

"The what?"

"Never mind." He shook his head. "Anyway, he should have shared credit with her. Around the time that his work was becoming known within the scientific community, their relationship was going sour, and not long after that their marriage came apart. Albert was always something of a ladies' man, and when he started spending time with his cousin Elsa, Mileva left him and moved away. As part of the divorce settlement, Albert agreed to give her the money he'd receive if he won the Nobel Prize. The money eventually went to her, but he refused to acknowledge her contributions. So while he went on to become famous . . ."

"She was forgotten," I finished. "And eventually she told all this to Lieserl."

"That's pretty much it, yes." Graham slowly let out his breath; I could smell the whisky. "Lieserl took her mother's maiden name in tribute to her, but that wasn't enough. When she learned that Albert was heading to America aboard this plane, this gave her a date and place that he would be, and an opportunity for her to . . ."

"Kill me."

I looked around, and found Albert standing behind us.

How long he'd been there, I didn't know. Sometime in the past few minutes, he'd quietly entered the bar and slipped up behind Graham and me, where he'd eavesdropped on our conversation. And it was pointless to ask how he'd figured out where we were. After all, he was a genius.

Hearing his voice, Graham slowly turned his head to peer at him. "Oh, God," he muttered, then closed his eyes and let his head fall on the bar. "Tell me this isn't happening."

"Very well, then . . . it's not happening." Albert had changed out of his formal wear into an old pair of trousers, a baggy sweater, his overcoat and hat. In the dimness of the bar, he was an anonymous presence; only a few other people were in there, and no one recognized him. "And while you're hallucinating," he went on, "perhaps you could explain how you know so much about Mileva and my daughter."

"And how you knew Lieserl would be aboard and what she was planning," I added. "Don't tell me you got this information from Scotland Yard . . . we both know that's not true."

Albert shot me an astonished look. I shook my head, and he nodded in silent understanding: Nigel Graham wasn't who he'd claimed to be. Graham kept his head on the bar for another few seconds or so before reluctantly sitting up again. "I . . . can't. It's too dangerous for you to know these things. Too much would be upset."

Albert regarded him for a long, quiet moment. There was something going on behind those sharp blue eyes: a mind accustomed to delving into the nature of space-time was probing another mystery. "All right, then," he said at last, "let's go find Lieserl. Perhaps she'll have some answers."

Graham's mouth fell open. "No! You can't . . ."

"Of course I can," Albert said. "Just try to stop me."

* * *

The bartender told us where Lieserl was probably being held: in the brig, next to the purser's office on Deck Four of the starboard pontoon. The petty officer who'd taken her into custody was standing guard outside. His eyes bulged when he saw Albert Einstein coming down the corridor, and although Graham's detective shield was bogus, it was real enough to get him to unlock the steel-reinforced door.

The room was small, plain, and windowless, furnished with only a small cot and a toilet. Lieserl lay upon the thin mattress; someone had taken away her jewelry and shoes, and thin smears running down her cheeks showed where tears had ruined her makeup. She didn't react when Graham and I came in, and I'm not sure she even recognized me as the man who'd tackled her during the concert. But she sat up when Albert entered behind us, and for a moment I thought she was going to hurl herself at him again.

"Johnnie," she breathed.

"Hello, Lieserl." Albert caught the sidelong glance I'd given him. "Johnnie was her mother's pet name for me . . . don't ask why." A faint smile, and he added, "If I needed any more proof that you're my daughter, that was it. How is Mileva, by the way?"

"She hates you more than ever." Lieserl's eyes bored into him. She remained seated on the narrow bed, but every muscle of her small, slender body was coiled tight. Keeping my hands out of my pockets, I moved beside Albert, ready to grab her if she tried another attack.

Albert lowered his gaze and shook his head. "I'm very sorry to hear this. I never meant her any harm. Your mother was my little Dollie, and for a time . . . including when you were born . . . she and I were very much in love. But I suppose she's never . . ."

"If you loved her so much," Lieserl snarled, "then why did you abandon us?" Her fists bunched, she moved a little closer to the edge of the bed. I cleared my throat. That was enough to warn her not to try anything. A wary glance in my direction, and she sat back again. "Why did you abandon *me*? Tonight was the first time you've ever seen me, father! It took trying to put a knife in your heart for you to acknowledge my existence!"

"I know . . . and giving you up was the worst mistake I ever made." Albert couldn't meet her gaze. He'd taken off his hat when we came in; now his hands nervously rumbled its brim, twisting it out of shape. "It was a stupid thing that we did . . . that I did . . . putting you up for adoption. I should have immediately married your mother and told my family to go to hell if they didn't like it, and accepted the consequences if the Swiss patent office rescinded their job offer. But—" an embarrassed shrug—"we were young and immature, and didn't want the responsibility of . . ."

"Don't blame her! Mother wanted to keep me!"

"No." Albert sighed as he raised his eyes to look her straight in the eye. "I'm sorry, but that's not true. She's probably told you something different, but think for a moment . . . if she'd really wanted to keep you, then she would have remained in Zurich and had you out of wedlock. Instead, she went back to Novi Sad to live with her family until she delivered you, because she knew that this way she'd find someone in her hometown who'd take you without anyone in Switzerland being the wiser." He paused. "This was what we'd agreed upon, Lieserl. I didn't make her do anything that she didn't want to do . . . my Dollie had a stronger will than that."

"I don't believe you." But her voice was soft and shaky as she said this.

"I'm sorry, but it's the truth."

"But you . . . you denied her credit!" Just as it seemed as though it was being quelled, Lieserl's temper blazed forth again. "She could have become as famous as you, if you hadn't denied her the right to be known as the coauthor of your theories!"

"For the work I did through 1905 . . . perhaps, yes. She did help me quite a bit, and I should have acknowledged her role." Again, Albert shook his head. "But when Elsa came into my life, Mileva very quickly went from being my wife and lover to my nemesis, and giving her credit for anything was the farthest thing from my mind. I'm sorry, my dear child, but she shares the blame for this as well. I only hope that she spent the prize money well."

Lieserl's mouth trembled. She looked as if she wanted to retort, but couldn't manage the words. In that instant, I saw a little of Albert in the intensity of her eyes. It was obvious that multiple thoughts, some contradictory of one another, were swirling through her mind; she was the child of two highly intelligent people, and had been poisoned by one of them.

At last she spoke, and it was only a whisper. "I hate you."

Albert didn't look away. "I never hated you. Perhaps I never loved you, either, but . . . there has never been a day that I haven't thought of you." A pause. "If things had only been a little different, we might . . ."

"What is going on here?"

In years to come, the world would learn that the Gestapo was neither subtle nor had a knack for good timing. I figured that out when Hans Lentz unapologetically marched into the brig. Graham stepped aside as the Gestapo officer glared at Albert and me, arms folded across his chest. "I didn't authorize any visits with the prisoner. Remove yourselves at once."

Albert glared at him, irritated by the interruption. "The prisoner, as you call her, is . . ."

"Don't you think Dr. Einstein has the right to confront his assailant?" Graham cut off Albert before he could finish. "We don't even know who she is, or why she'd want to kill him . . . do you?"

Albert's gaze darted from Graham to me, and back to Graham again. Without asking, he realized that it wouldn't be wise to give Lentz any information he didn't already know. But was Lentz aware that this volatile young woman was Albert's daughter? Graham was clearly probing him to find out.

"No." Lentz's demeanor softened a little. "No, we do not. All we know is that the knife was stolen from the kitchen. I attempted to question her after we took her into custody, but she won't tell us anything except her name . . . Lieserl." He looked at Albert. "Have you ever encountered her before, Dr. Einstein?"

"No. I've never met her before in my life," Albert said truthfully. He turned to Lieserl again. "Have we ever met before? I cannot recall."

Lieserl was quiet for a moment. "No," she whispered, her voice so soft it was hard to hear. "I have never met Dr. Einstein until this evening."

"Then why did you attempt to kill him?" Lentz demanded.

Again, Lieserl didn't respond at once. She stared at the floor, her hands clutched between her legs. I held my breath, hoping that she'd realize, as I had, what might happen to her if she told an unconvincing story. The Nazis were willing to let Albert walk free of this aircraft once it reached New York, but if they became aware that Lieserl was his daughter, they might decide to detain her indefinitely for reasons of their own . . . perhaps as a hostage, thus making sure that he'd never do any scientific research for the Americans that might work against them.

I hoped she was smart, and a good liar, too.

"I . . . I don't know," she said at last. "I . . . there are voices in my head, I mean, telling me I . . ." She shook her head, then looked up at Albert and me. "Did I do

something wrong? Why am I here?"

Albert's eyes widened, and for an instant I caught a glimpse of a smile beneath his mustache. "No . . . no, you've done nothing wrong. Not in the slightest."

Catching Lentz's eye, I cocked my head to a corner of the room. He nodded and stepped aside. "She's out of her mind," I murmured once our backs were turned. "Crazy as a bedbug, if you know what I mean."

"Plainly so, yes." Lentz nodded. "Once we return to Germany, she will be taken to a sanitarium where she can be admitted for treatment."

I'd overplayed my hand. "Well, I'm not sure if . . ."

"Pardon me . . . if I may?" Albert walked over to join us. "While I respect the efficiency of German hospitals," he said quietly, "I happen to know an outstanding doctor in New York, a psychiatrist who specializes in the disorders of the mind. If you'll release the young lady to my custody . . . or at least the custody of the New York authorities . . . I'd be willing to take her to my friend and recommend that she undergo treatment. At my expense, of course."

Lentz was hesitant. He gazed thoughtfully at Lieserl, evidently weighing his options. "It would make a lot of sense," I added. "This way, we'd have a better chance of keeping this matter under wraps . . . just a minor incident that happened en route. If she were sent back to Germany, though, the newspapers . . ."

"No. You are correct." Lentz quickly shook his head. It was clear that he didn't want to do anything that might raise the interest of the press and cast his government in a bad light. Getting rid of Lieserl in America was in his best interest. "Thank you for the offer, Dr. Einstein. Your generosity is appreciated."

"As is your sympathy and understanding," Albert said dryly.

The irony was lost on Lentz. Nodding slightly, he turned toward the door. "*Herr Inspektor*, as a representative of Scotland Yard, is this a satisfactory . . . *Herr Inspektor*?"

Looking about, I saw no one behind us except the petty officer standing watch in the corridor. Sometime in the past several minutes, Graham had vanished.

* * *

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I didn't see him again for the rest of the flight.

The remainder of the trip was uneventful. I took Albert back to his stateroom and firmly told him to remain there with Elsa until we reached New York. He didn't object and neither did his wife. His close brush had sobered both of them. So they didn't roam the ship, but instead spent the following day reading and looking out the window at the ocean, with their meals delivered to their room by stewards.

I spent most of my time playing bodyguard, although by then it was obvious that they were out of danger. Lieserl was the only person aboard we'd needed to worry about, and she was under lock and key in the brig. Albert didn't tell Elsa what he'd learned about the identity of his assailant; so far as she was concerned, the young lady who'd interrupted her husband's performance was a mentally disturbed stranger, nothing more or less.

Albert had made sure of that. "Elsa doesn't have to know about Lieserl, does she?" he asked as I walked him back upstairs to his room.

"Not unless you tell her. Will you?"

He was quiet for a moment. "Perhaps . . . but not yet. I need to figure out what to do about her . . . my daughter, I mean." He gave me a sharp look. "You'll help me get her off the aircraft once we reach America, yes?"

"Of course," I said, and a telegram to O'Donnell took care of that detail. When the *Valkyrie* landed in the Hudson the following evening, two plainclothes New York police officers were waiting on the dock to take Lieserl into custody. Lieserl Maric was the first person to leave the plane; no one on the dock paid attention to her as she walked down the gangplank on Lentz's arm, her handcuffs hidden by her overcoat sleeves. I watched from a porthole as she was helped into the back of a police car parked dockside; she never looked back, and I never saw her again.

Not in person, anyway. But I'd see plenty of her in time to come. We all would.

The press was waiting for Albert. They surrounded him and Elsa as soon as they came ashore; their arrival in America was heralded by camera flashes and the shouted questions of reporters, each of them wanting to know the same things: *Are you leaving Germany for good, Dr. Einstein? Are you fleeing Strasser?* Albert smiled and waved and gave noncommittal answers; no one knew about the attack the night before, and when they found out, they chalked it up to a random assault by a crazy person, barely worth a column inch.

I quietly walked alongside Albert and Elsa, holding up a hand to ward off the more intrusive newspaper hounds, until we reached the sedan awaiting him on the wharf. Before he climbed into the back, he turned to me.

"Thank you, Sonny," he said, holding out his hand.

"You're welcome, Dr. Einstein," I replied. "Good luck to you."

"And you," he said. And then he was gone. The Packard drove off into the cool Manhattan night, carrying him into history.

I returned to the dock and watched the passengers as they disembarked from the *Valkyrie*. While the plane was still in the air, I'd left Albert's suite a couple of times to go down to Graham's room. He never returned to his quarters, though, or so his roommate told me, and a tour of the public areas failed to turn him up. The RF-01 was a mammoth aircraft, though, so there were plenty of places for him to hide.

Even so, I didn't see him get off the plane. Somehow or another, he managed to leave without being spotted . . . by me, at least. I even went over to where the passenger baggage was being unloaded from the cargo hold. I found a suitcase with his name on the tag, but it went unclaimed. I stuck around a little while longer, then decided that this was one of life's mysteries that would remain unsolved. My job was done. I picked up my bags, hailed one of the last cabs at the taxi stand, and told the driver to take me to my place in Queens.

That should have been the end of the story, but it wasn't.

* * *

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A few weeks later, I was cooling my heels at my office on West 53rd Street when there was a knock at the anteroom door.

I was there alone that day. My partner was on a job and our secretary had called in sick, so it was left to me to stick around to answer the phone. An unexpected visitor was a welcome break from the magazine I'd picked up at the newsstand down the block; I could see his silhouette through the door's frosted glass panel.

"Come in," I called, and dropped the new issue of *Black Mask* on my desk. The door opened, and who should walk in but the ghost who went by the name of Nigel Graham.

"Hello, Sonny," he said. "Long time no see."

I stared at him for a couple of seconds. It actually took me that long to remember him. It had been just over a month since I'd flown back from England with Albert,

and since then I'd had several jobs. It was sometimes hard to remember the details of every single case my partner and I handled, even those left hanging. Then I recognized Graham, and had to control the impulse to jump up from my seat and grab him before he got away again.

"Hello, Nigel," I said, "or whoever you are. Who are you, anyway?"

"Nigel Graham is as good a name as any. The police officer I borrowed it from doesn't seem to mind." He took off his hat and motioned to the leather chair in front of my desk, the one our clients used when they came to see us. "Mind if I sit? It's just a social call this time, but I think I owe you a visit."

"What you owe me are explanations." But I nodded toward the chair anyway.

"I know . . . and I apologize for that." He removed his overcoat and folded it across the arm of his chair before sitting down. "It was necessary for me to make myself scarce just then . . . back on the *Valkyrie*, that is, when you and Dr. Einstein were questioning Lieserl and that Gestapo officer showed up. If any of you had asked me the wrong question . . . such as the ones you'd asked already . . . then it could have influenced the outcome in—" a moment of hesitation, followed by a shrug—"let's call it an even more unexpected direction. So I took the opportunity to disappear, and made sure than none of you found me again."

"I was wondering about that. How did you get off the plane anyway? And where were you hiding? I looked all over the place."

"Did you know there's a couple of lookouts . . . sort of like crow's nests . . . built into the wing stabilizers on each end of the plane? They're put there to help the crew make landings in tight places, but no one ever uses them." A rueful smile. "Rather cold, but I managed to remain hidden there until we reached New York. I found an extra pair of coveralls in a locker, so I put them on and posed as a crewman when we landed. All I had to do was jump aboard one of the tenders that came out into the river to meet the plane and ride it back to shore."

"Slick, very slick," I said. "Almost as fancy as the stunt you pulled in the first place." He gave me a questioning look. "Posing as a Scotland Yard cop," I added. "What was the point of that?"

"Ah! Well . . . that's sort of the whole point of everything, isn't it?" Resting his elbows on his knees and clasping his hands together, he bent a little closer. "Hiring you as Dr. Einstein's bodyguard, getting you on the *Valkyrie*, making sure that you knew about Lieserl and the danger she posed when I couldn't persuade you to keep him away from the concert that evening . . . almost as if it was all anticipated, wouldn't you say?"

"I don't know, pal . . . you tell me."

Graham didn't respond at once. Looking about, he spotted the mystery magazine on my desk. "See, it's like this," he said as he reached over to pick it up. "People tend to think of the Universe as being one big place that just goes on and on forever, but it's really not like that at all. In reality, there are many, many universes . . . literally countless . . . coexisting at the same instant on parallel planes, like the pages of this magazine." He ruffled the pulp's unevenly cut pages. "They're separate from one another, but at the same time they're related, with events in one often influencing the events in another in discrete yet noticeable ways. Understand?"

"Yeah. Sure."

Still smiling, he closed his eyes and shook his head. "No, you don't. Most people, when they learn about multiple universes . . . the multiverse . . . for the first time, tend to disbelieve it. It's not something that's obvious with the naked eye. Even Dr. Einstein doesn't quite believe it, and yet it's his special theory of relativity that spawned the underlying science of quantum mechanics. Albert called it . . . or rather, *will* call it, in just a year or so . . . 'spooky action at a distance.'"

"You're talking about all this as if it happened in the past."

"For me, it *did* happen in the past. Or rather, in the past of your page of the multiverse." He held up the magazine again and opened it to a page at random. "This is your Universe—" he flipped to another page at random "—and this is the one I'm from. Understand?"

"Uh-huh. I think so." On one hand, I'd pegged Graham as a crackpot. On the other, he was a pretty damned persuasive crackpot. Either way, I figured that it couldn't hurt to hear what he had to say. It wouldn't be long before men in white jackets showed up to take him back to the farm. "Go on."

"As I said, very often certain events . . . and certain individuals . . . influence the outcome of parallel events in other planes of the multiverse, No one really knows why this happens. It just does. In this instance, one of those keystone individuals is Albert Einstein . . . who, in this page of the Universe, was supposed to have been stabbed to death by his estranged daughter while traveling to America in 1933. This incident altered the course of history in tragic ways that I can't tell you . . ."

"Oh, of course not."

"What I *can* tell you, though, is that your own actions changed events in an unpredictable fashion." Graham rifled through the magazine again. "When you didn't shoot Lieserl . . . which is why I gave you the gun, so you'd end her life before she murdered Albert . . . you created a new page that didn't previously exist."

"Whoa . . . okay, stop right there." I held up a hand. "Look, I've been putting up with this, buddy, but you've just jumped off the deep end. Are you saying you came back through time . . .?"

"Not 'back through' . . . across. From one time-frame to another."

"Through, across, whatever." He was starting to confuse me . . . which was strange, because that could only mean that I was actually beginning to believe this stuff.

"What you're telling me is that you'd set things up so that I'd kill Lieserl . . ."

"And therefore prevent worse things from happening, yes." Graham nodded. "As I said, I can't . . . or rather, I refuse to . . . tell you exactly what those are. However, I'll let you know this much . . . in most pages of the multiverse, it's important that Albert Einstein remain alive through the middle of this century, because of the crucial role he'll play in the outcome of major events in the future."

"Uh-huh." I was no longer hoping the men in the white coats would show up. They might take me, too.

"That's why I came over here and posed as a Scotland Yard detective . . . to lure a previously uninvolved individual such as you into taking the steps necessary to save Dr. Einstein. But saving both him and Lieserl wasn't what we anticipated."

"And who is 'we'?"

"A group . . . a secret organization, if you will . . . dedicated to preserving human existence in all planes of the multiverse." As he spoke, Graham dropped the magazine back on my desk, then reached into a vest pocket. "We operate in subtle ways, and sometimes it's necessary to recruit contemporary inhabitants . . . or residents, as we call you . . . to work for us so that our hand will remain unseen."

Pulling out a metal card folder, he flipped it open and withdrew a white business card. "You've got talent, Sonny," Graham said as he stood up. "Talent we may need to call upon again." He placed the card face down on top of the magazine. "Keep this somewhere safe. It may be useful to you at a later date."

I didn't pick up the card, but instead watched as he pulled on his coat. "Just one more thing," I asked, and he nodded. "You said that saving both Albert and Lieserl changed everything. What do you mean by that?"

Graham picked up his hat, gazed at it thoughtfully. "I can't tell you that either," he said after a few moments, "but I'll give you something to think about. Lieserl is a lit-

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tle crazy, but she's most definitely her father's daughter. Now . . . imagine the possibilities of Albert Einstein reaching some sort of reconciliation with her, and then having a protégé to follow in his footsteps."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"Live long enough and you will." Graham put on his hat, walked toward the door. "Goodbye, Sonny. Perhaps we'll meet again."

The door closed behind him, and I reached across the desk to pick up the card. Embossed on it was:

Quantum Mechanics, Inc.

Nothing else. No street address, no phone number. Just a white cardboard rectangle with three words. Or so it seemed.

Spooky events at a distance. That's what Graham said Albert called this sort of thing. I thought about calling him in New Jersey and asking him to explain it to me, but decided against it. Even he might not believe me.

So I dropped the card in my desk drawer, and waited to see what would happen next.