

Chapter 1

They had briefly motored along Fleet Street in the City of London when Jonas caught their chauffeur's worried glance in his rear-view mirror.

"Mr. Shaw sir, I fear we have someone following us."

"We do?" Jonas frowned at Charly beside him. Then he peered above his *Financial Times* to their driver, who had slid back the glass panel that separated the rear passenger seats from the front.

"Yes, sir." Their driver turned his wizened face slightly towards Jonas to ensure he could be heard over the traffic. "When we passed Essex Street. I thought he might be tailing; now I'm sure."

Jonas stared out the rear limousine window. The congestion at that spring hour, a squawking chaotic mess of cars, trucks, and buses, infuriatingly thick as ever. On the crowded sidewalks, some protesters in black leather jackets shook fists and waved signs: BOYCOTT THE LONDON DAILY NEWS and SHAME ON TYCOON RUMBOLD. "That Bentley behind us?"

The chauffeur glanced up again to his rear-view mirror. "No sir. Three vehicles back. That beige van. It just passed the Golden Horse pub and Barclay's Bank. It's in front of that red double-decker bus now."

"You sure, Nigel?"

"Absolutely, sir. It's kept us in sight for several blocks. Ever since Seton Hall."

"Christ!" Jonas tossed his *Times* aside. "You see, Charly? I told you this would happen again. Sooner or later." He withdrew a newspaper from his leather satchel beside him and shook it at her. "You're not just another run-of-the-mill journalist."

"He said for the umpteenth time."

“Yes, dear, for the umpteenth time. You write stuff like this. Article after article in the *London Daily News* calling for a homeland for displaced Jews—”

“All right, all right, Jonas. Enough.”

“The war’s over, but Britain still has Nazi sympathizers. You have a too casual attitude to danger.”

“Oh I do, do I?”

“Yes, dear, you do. That bullet hole there in our—”

“I said, all right, Jonas. Your dark Irish eyes glaring at me say everything. Point made.”

“I hope so. Finally.”

She shifted around and gazed out the rear limo window. “The beige van three vehicles back, Nigel?”

“That one, Miss Lawrence. It just passed that solicitor and advocate office.”

“Any others?”

“None that I’ve spotted, sir.”

They stopped at a traffic light at Fetter Lane. “You really think they’re Nazi sympathizers, Jonas?” she asked.

“It wouldn’t surprise me. Not one bit. Those death threats we’ve gotten out at Cotswolds. The hate mail delivered to the *Daily News*. The letters to Mr. Rumbold. From Hitler lovers or thugs hired by some in the British establishment. God knows, you’ve angered some pretty powerful people.”

“I hope so. It serves them right. I hate, just hate, those bullies. Just like you, dear.”

“Sir, the driver’s pulled directly behind us. He’s blinking his front headlights. Looks like he wants us to pull over. Should we?”

“Hell no, Nigel. Could be a trap.” The traffic light turned green. “Try to lose them somehow.”

“In this traffic? Your Rolls-Royce can only do so much, sir. But I’ll try.”

An ambush on Fleet Street? Jonas wondered. Amid the crowds and traffic? At the very center of British journalistic influence and power? Battles had happened there before. Charly’s publisher had picked some nasty fights with the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Sun*. He had beat them too with splashy front-page exclusives. Still an actual hit and in broad daylight? He found that somehow hard to believe. And yet that tail, which now drove illegally.

For a moment, no vehicles came at them from the other two lanes; the driver of the beige van pulled even with them on their right. A newsboy’s cap pulled down nearly eye level, he glanced at them. He had a nose that looked broken from some street fight, Jonas noticed, and gave him an indifferent look; to Charly a two-finger salute and a brief smile.

“What on earth?”

“What?” Jonas reached for his Colt 1911 in his shoulder holster.

Charly gripped his arm and shook her head. “No, don’t. It’s Tommy Corbyn, Mr. Rumbold’s chief bodyguard and confidante.”

The bodyguard-driver signaled them in the direction of the cars ahead as he once more pulled back into his lane. His gestures and mouthing of words unmistakable to Jonas. Follow him.

“Mr. Rumbold doesn’t go anywhere without him these days. Where he is, Mr. Rumbold’s usually close by.” She leaned forward. “Nigel, that delivery van, follow it.”

“Not too close, Nigel. You hear? Two, three cars back until we see what’s what.”

“Not too close, yes sir, Mr. Shaw.”

They followed discreetly three cars behind. They passed the *Daily News*’ elegant eight-story art deco headquarters on the left. There Mr. Rumbold, Jonas noticed, had doubled security to four near the revolving front door. Next an Irish pub. At the intersection, they turned left and headed north on equally crowded Farringdon Street. More protesters in black jackets shouted and angrily waved their placards.

“This is a sticky wicket, Mr. Shaw. This traffic’s heavier than normal. That recent heavy rain isn’t helping either.”

Jonas clapped him reassuringly on the shoulder through the opening. “You’re doing fine, Nigel.” He shifted his gaze to the beige van ahead. The publisher’s experienced driver appeared to execute a surveillance detection routine, as though he feared someone tailed them both. He wove in and out of a warren of narrow side streets. He stopped momentarily curbside next to a shop that sold buttons and fabric. Then he motored on westward, making his way through the unending noisy traffic, past unending pedestrians, in the German bomb-damaged ancient capital struggling back after the recent war. Eventually they reached the southwest part of Greater London.

“I see, sir,” Nigel said, turning south onto Wilfred Street, “the old British sun is playing hide-and-seek again.”

And it was, Jonas noticed, looking out his side window. The fickle weather had turned from sunny to cloudy with heavy showers threatening.

They reached an alley at last, the sounds of the bustling metropolis dropping away as they bumped over cobblestones. Halfway down, Jonas caught a sign, TRADESMAN’S ENTRANCE, on the backside of a grimy brick building.

Tradesman’s entrance to what? he wondered. Their chauffeur, still following

the van, steered down a tarred ramp into a dim underground garage. It was poorly lit by a lone florescent light strip, running along the ceiling's center, that flickered off and on.

Tommy Corbyn executed a U-turn, the van's wheels squealing his impatience over something. He eased the van back into a darkened patch of parking space and hefted his bulk out. "Cheers," he said to them. Two more security men, youthful and limber, hopped out of the van's rear. Each wore a dark suit that didn't hide their muscled shoulders and chests. One of them, looking like a loan shark enforcer, strolled quickly over to the garage's now closed rolling door. He cupped his hands around his eyes and squinted out a peep hole.

"Expecting trouble?" Jonas asked.

"Could be, squire," Tommy Corbyn said. "These days, you never know."

"What are you talking about, Tommy?" Charly asked, concern in her voice.

"What's this about?"

"I'm just the pickup man, Miss Lawrence. It's Mr. Rumbold's show."

Jonas picked up a strong smell of car exhaust fumes and oil. Here and there off to his right, a few other cars lay parked at a distance from theirs. Someone must have instructed the drivers to keep away.

"Spot any MI5 bad boys, Axel?" Tommy called out to the bodyguard, who had positioned himself by the closed garage door.

"So far, so good, Tommy."

"Let's hope our luck holds." Tommy Corbyn shifted to Jonas and Charly. "We caught the Security Service this morning being naughty again. Parked right across the street, they were. The cheeky bastards watching Mr. Rumbold's Mayfair townhouse. Bloody fools must think there's only one way in and out of that mansion. Trying to scare us is what we think." He jammed a hand suddenly into his jacket as if for a gun, then relaxed. A cat or rat—Jonas

couldn't be sure because of the poor light—had scampered across their path to a rubbish bin. “Who knows you two are still in London?” the bodyguard asked Charly, glancing sideways at her.

“Just our servants and our security. And of course, our chauffeur.”

“Discreet is he?”

“Nigel? Absolutely. Does he have to stay?”

“For everyone's safety, yes.” He kept his eyes on her. “And those servants and groundskeeper at your manor? Discreet as your Nigel, are they?”

“A hundred percent.”

“Every single one close-lipped?”

“Every single one.”

“Good. Let's hope they keep their bloody mouths shut.”

“Tommy, why all these questions for God's sake? I usually see Mr. Rumbold only at his annual Boxing Day party at his estate and on Remembrance Sunday.”

Tommy Corbyn laughed, as though he delighted in conspiracy. “Mr. Rumbold's show, Miss Lawrence. His show all the way.”

They reached four oil drums off to their left that blocked further passage.

Tommy muttered something about Mr. Rumbold talking with Hotel Eden management for better underground parking lighting.

The scruffy Eden? Of all the damn places. Jonas shook his head in disbelief. He had heard rumors the luxurious St. Ermin's had housed some Special Operations Executive staff during the last war. The majestic Grand Central, too, might have served as a debriefing center for returning escaped Brit

soldiers. But the dowdy Edwardian Eden for anything clandestine? He must have hurried past countless times on Buckingham Palace Road after leaving Victoria Station and only noticed its tarnished historical plaque and red-coated doorman. Just another traveling salesman's soot-scarred way station near Buckingham Palace that had survived the German air blitz.

"Milo, if you would." Tommy unbuttoned his coat. He tossed it to the other bodyguard, who had approached, a man with a blunt head that could serve as a battering ram. Tommy bent waist level, wrapped his weight-lifter arms in a bear grip part way around an oil drum. With an occasional grunt of effort, he wrestled it over on its rim, banging it carelessly against the right wall. "One down, three to go."

"Need any help?" Jonas asked.

"I'm fine, mate. Helps me work off that Indian Pale Ale beer I drink in what off-hours Mr. Rumbold kindly gives."

"That security?"

"That it is. Each filled to the brim with cement." Tommy Corbyn thumped a meaty fist down hard on the top of one drum, sending a dull echo around the garage. "Never a single breach into Mr. Rumbold's secret sanctum. Kept us as safe as the Buckingham Palace royals." He wiped sweat from his forehead. Then he struggled with three more drums, rolling each over on its rim to the right wall until he had cleared a path. "This way."

Milo tossed Tommy's jacket back to him, then rolled on its rim the first of the four oil drums back into place, blocking once more any passage. Charly glanced at Jonas, shrugged puzzlement over Tommy Corbyn's request. Tommy Corbyn led the way ahead into the gloom.

Chapter 2

They reached a blackened metal door, flush with the dark brick wall, Jonas didn't notice until they were within a foot or two. Tommy Corbyn unlocked it, then led them with no small talk zigzagging through a series of dim, chilly brick passages until they reached a service elevator.

Someone, Jonas noticed, had stripped the lift of most markings. All that remained was an Otis Elevator brass plaque on one wall panel as though someone might crave anonymity. And still Tommy Corbyn offered no small talk. He only gazed up at the brass arrow that ticked off the floor indicator lights as the elevator slowly rattled its way up. Third floor. Fourth. Fifth. Finally, the sixth floor and a long, desolate, silent corridor until they reached 625, the last room at the end of the faded burgundy carpeted hallway.

Somewhere outside Big Ben struck the hour, faintly, but authoritatively. He glanced at his wristwatch. Two in the afternoon. The chimes reassured him for the experience didn't seem quite real. He and Charly might be settling into their Cotswolds manor about then, happy to have escaped the noise, dirt, and personal danger in London were it not for this abrupt and odd interruption.

Tommy knocked twice sharply with a ringed knuckle. Jonas suspected someone among Rumbold's retinue squinted through the peep hole. Immediately the door opened part way as if they were expected. Charly slipped in sideways, then Jonas, feeling a conspirator in a hotel of innocents. Lastly Tommy, who took one last glance up and down the corridor. Then he eased the door shut with one massive hand. With the other, he flicked the four dead bolts firmly into place.