The ENIGMA GAME

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For Tina,
my travelling companion

Part One

Odysseus

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Flight Lieutenant James G. Beaufort-Stuart:

The night of 6/7 November 1940 – how many of us dead in that raid?

I don't know.

I know nine men in 648 Squadron's A-Flight were killed that night just because of *weather*. Two planes collided in fog just before landing, and one came down heavy with ice. But I don't know how many in A-Flight fell to enemy fire.

How many in B-Flight, then? My own lads … I ought to know that, at least.

But I don't. Not offhand. I'd have to sit and count. I probably made a note in my logbook. That night wasn't the first time we took a heavy loss, and it wasn't the last time. *Buckets of blood*. It wasn't as many as last time. Anyway it's hard to remember all the losses, which for Bristol Blenheim bomber crews was just about every mission, and I get some of the dead men muddled when I try to count. The Royal Air Force isn't going to win the war flying Bristol Blenheims.

I'd argued with Wing Commander Talbot Cromwell before we took off on that mission. That wasn't the first time, either. I knew he didn't like me, and I risked an official reprimand, or worse, a demotion, every time I challenged him. We didn't see eye to eye on *anything*.

'We'll never find German warships if we're flying at twenty thousand feet!' I told my commanding officer. I didn't even try to hide my anger. 'There's no hope in hell of a Blenheim hitting anything from that height anyway. The bomb doors don't always open when you want them to, and up there you can't tell whether a speck out the window is an enemy destroyer or a bit of runway mud stuck on the Perspex!'

'Are you quite finished, Flight Lieutenant Beaufort-Stuart?' said Cromwell, lowering his eyebrows like barrier gates. 'You'll fly at twenty thousand feet, and so will all your men. Orders are orders. That's where Coastal Command wants you to fly. I take my instructions from headquarters and you take yours from me.'

Cromwell and I had been at each other since the day we first came together about two weeks earlier.

He got transferred to us in October when we moved to Shetland as the Battle of Britain came to an end. Our squadron patrolled the North Sea for the Royal Air Force, the RAF, just as we'd done at other bases all through the summer of 1940. But Cromwell's role with 648 Squadron was new. Before he got lumbered with us, he'd commanded a squadron of speedy new Spitfire fighters. In August and September, while we were flying Blenheims under cover of cloud on low-level bombing raids targeting German ships, he'd been sending fighter pilots into soaring dogfights in the sun.

None of our experiences matched up. He couldn't manage twin engines and didn't join us when we flew. And he didn't like it that at nineteen years old I was half his age, shorter and slighter than most of the other lads and barely needing a shave, yet I talked back. He didn't like that all of B-Flight were on my side because they were Blenheim airmen too; maybe I looked like a schoolboy, but they knew I wasn't. I'd been their flight leader since August.

And sending us on a bombing raid with only a half-moon to light us, above cloud at twenty thousand feet? I was reckless with frustration.

'It's stupid, *stupid* – everyone knows it. The men are complaining. *You* know it's stupid. *Above the cloud?* We won't be able to see the sea, let alone ships in the dark! And the air's too thin up there for a Blenheim to operate efficiently. It's not like flying a Spitfire! We cruise best at fifteen thousand feet, and when we're in combat we take it as low as we can, it helps camouflage us. And the Jerries – the German fighters all *know* they can go higher and faster, and they circle like vultures, *waiting*—'

'None of my Spitfire pilots complained about danger,' Cromwell said coldly. 'I expect more of a young man of your calibre, *Beaufort-Stuart*. This sounds like lack of moral fibre.'

Lack of moral fibre – that wonderful euphemism for cowardice.

I couldn't let him accuse me, or worse, my 648 Squadron airmen, of being cowards.

I said stiffly, 'Sir. I'm leading B-Flight on a mission tonight. I want the best for them.'

'When you go in at low level, you get shot up by enemy anti-aircraft guns,' Cromwell told me, as if I didn't know. 'We need to change our tactics.'

It was true that most of our losses came from guns on the ground or at sea level. I couldn't argue with that. But I felt sure that a raid at twenty thousand feet would end in the same tears for different reasons, or at best, be completely pointless because we wouldn't hit anything. It wasn't the first time Coastal Command had tried it.

However, with no winning counterargument, off we went, hoping a few of us would make it back safely in five hours or so. Following orders.

The Blenheims were like a herd of shadowy brontosauri waiting on the airfield in the dark beneath the high cloud.

'Come on, Scotty, buck up,' said David Silvermont, my navigator, as we lowered ourselves in our bulky flight suits through the forward hatch of that night's plane. Being the only Scot in the squadron meant that I mostly hadn't been called Jamie for the past year or so, except on leave. 'We can't have you in a funk, it brings everybody down. The lads take your moods very seriously.'

'Wing Commander Cromwell bloody well doesn't,' I retorted. 'I wish he'd have a go at you sometime instead of me.'

'No chance, as you're the officer in charge. Anyway I am much bigger and older than you, and better looking too and probably smarter, so he doesn't dare.'

'And you have a bigger head than me!' I laughed.

Most of those things were true, as David Silvermont was two years my senior and had been halfway through a

medical degree when the war started. But he was also my best friend. He was easy to like and smooth with girls, with the brooding dark looks of a film star, and was good at breaking up fights and at making me laugh. Silver read poetry before he went to bed; he played Mozart on the cracked fiddle he'd found in the officers' lounge when we were off duty; but those highbrow occupations didn't stop him plotting a course by dead reckoning, or spotting enemy convoys, or having a sense of humour.

He was a wizard navigator.

'What's up?' called our air gunner and wireless operator, Colin Oldham, from his place in the back of the Blenheim.

'Just the usual scrapping with Cromwell,' I grumbled. 'Accused me of "lack of moral fibre".'

'Rubbish! He's not flying tonight, is he!' Colin exclaimed.

'I expect he doesn't like your poncey double-barrelled surname,' Silver teased me. 'It reminds the old Roundhead that your dad's the Earl of Craigie, and then he wants to start the Civil War over again. Can't have teenage toffs telling him what to do.'

Colin howled. '"The Old Roundhead"! Suits him!'

'I don't tell him what to do,' I protested, checking the instruments and controls while Silver and Colin belted their harnesses in place. 'I make polite suggestions about what *not* to do. And being the youngest of five sons doesn't mean a thing. They ran out of titles before they got to me.'

'It's your classical education he doesn't like,' put in Colin.

'I'll make a list, shall I? Perhaps if I were taller or bigger or grew a moustache—'

'He doesn't like me much, either,' Silver said with sympathy.

'You both make him feel inferior,' said Colin. 'All that heady talk in the officers' lounge comparing hydraulics to blood pressure. He can't keep up.'

'Hydraulics and blood pressure are endlessly fascinating,' said Silver. He spread his chart on his knees, holding his electric torch ready in his gauntleted hand. He declared with satisfaction, 'From tonight I shall always think of him as the Old Roundhead.'

My B-Flight aircrews knew what we were doing that night – three planes in my own Pimms Section and three in Madeira Section, with three men in each plane. In a few minutes I'd be in the sky in the dark in charge of eighteen men, counting myself, and in a few hours half of them would be dead.

I didn't know then what the full toll of that night would be, and I tried to lighten the tone as we set out. I called over the radio to Pimms and Madeira as we took off. 'Setting course for target and climbing to twenty thousand feet, as per orders from the Old Roundhead.'

Over the intercom I heard Colin behind me laughing again.

'The Old Roundhead might be keeping a listening watch,' Silver warned me.

'I don't mind. I'll get another damned reprimand. He already knows what I think of him.'

We flew obediently high, heading for a flotilla of German warships that was supposed to be cruising fifty miles off the Norwegian coast. After about an hour and a half, maybe we

were over the ships we were supposed to hit and maybe we weren't. The sky was clear and blue-black, but the half-moon lit the thin cloud below us like a sheet of milky Chinese silk. I could see the other B-Flight planes standing out in black silhouette like decals against that cloud.

So, too, could the German Messerschmitt 110 night fighters on patrol.

We didn't have lights and neither did they, and we didn't see them coming. They can fly a hundred miles an hour faster than we can. But Silver and I both saw the streaks of green flame as the tracers flew from the first rounds of their thundering guns. And we saw the explosion of golden fire as the bullets struck an engine on another Blenheim in our formation.

Silver opened the observer's panel in the window next to his head and twisted around to stick his nose out so he could see behind us. 'There's one on our tail!' he cried. '*Dive, dive*—'

'Down, *everybody get down*!' I called to my lads over the radio. 'Use the cloud! Get into it or below it where they can't see you! Drop your bombs if you have to, lose the weight—'

I pushed my own plane into a nosedive. Our only hope against an Me-110 was to get away from it. Hide in cloud, camouflage yourself against the earth's surface. For a moment, behind me, I could hear Colin's gun rattling back at our attackers.

In a Blenheim, the air gunner has to sit with his head up out of the plane in a bubble of Perspex like a goldfish bowl on a window sill. The gunner's turret is often the first thing that goes when the Jerries are after you. And that's exactly

what happened that night, with a deafening bang that I felt more than heard. *God*. The wind in the cockpit, after our turret exploded, howling around us as we sped towards the black sea below. The mess of blood and bone that had been Colin, all over the inside of the plane and the back of Silver's leather helmet.

That missed me, anyway – I was protected from Colin by the bulkhead between the pilot's seat and the radio equipment.

The sky went small and grey. I was diving too fast – in another few seconds the increased gravity would knock us out.

I must have levelled up somehow.

I skimmed so low over the sea, when I reached it, that the poor Blenheim's tail wheel snagged in a swell and snapped off.

In front of us, seawater erupted like a geyser as someone overhead got rid of their explosives, and I was too close to the surface to turn away from the pluming waterspout. I had to fly through it. We lost windowpanes in the front cockpit and Silver's charts were soaked, but we were still flying on the other side.

We were being bombed by our *own planes*.

We saw two Blenheims go plummeting in flames into the water around us while we struggled away from the waves.

It was the morning of 7 November 1940, and I was so stunned and spent after I landed back at our base in Shetland that I couldn't think. I shut down the engines, and Silver and I sat in silence. We didn't even try to get out.

Then a couple of mechanics climbed on the wing to open the hatches, and Silver looked up. He put a hand on my shoulder and said softly, 'Nice flying, Scotty, as per usual. Thanks for getting us home.'

He'd taken off his gloves to rescue the charts and to use the pencils and flight calculator on the way back. His hands must have been freezing. But he made the same cheesy joke every time we landed safely – he'd be able to play the violin again. He pulled the little box of rosin from his knee pocket, the lucky charm that went with him on every op, and held it between thumb and forefinger with both hands in front of his face.

'Look, everything still in one piece.'

He couldn't *not* say it. He couldn't *not* take the rosin with him. I had a charm too, in the breast pocket of my uniform beneath my flight suit, a perfectly round quartz pebble from the Iron Age hill fort on my father's grouse moor.

'You're welcome,' I croaked.

Our clothes were soaked with seawater and Colin Oldham's blood. It was all over the cockpit, and we had to climb through it to get out the hatch.

Half an hour later I sat down in front of Flight Officer Phyllis Pennyworth, our brisk, chirpy robin of a Women's Auxiliary Air Force interrogator who was in charge of grilling us after a mission – and I got so choked up I couldn't talk. I sat for a while with my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, and she just let me do that, didn't say anything, knew what was coming – or guessed, anyway.

When I looked up, the pretty pink had faded a bit from her rosy cheeks. She loved us all very much. But in the

debriefing room Pennyworth took care to be all business, and this time I was too broken and beat to do my job politely.

'Too many German planes to count,' I told her. 'Bloody Jerries in their bloody Messerschmitt 110s. Those Luftwaffe night fighters. Like a swarm of hornets – they know where we're coming from and what we're after, and they're a million miles an hour faster than us—'

'Not a million, Scotty,' Phyllis corrected me gently. Using my nickname instead of my rank title the way most of my lads did, so that I knew she cared, but reminding me to be precise so she could make an accurate report. She was a stickler for rules herself, and she was scared of the Old Roundhead.

'Might as well be a million.' It came out as a sort of sob. 'These old Blenheims we fly, these airborne buckets of bolts we're in, these crates don't have a chance against a Messerschmitt 110 night fighter!'

And I gave a real sob then, because of Colin.

I didn't tell Phyllis Pennyworth about the mess. She'd seen our busted-up plane – half the glass in the front cockpit punched out, a furrow ploughed in the airfield behind us by our tail because we'd lost the tail wheel, the gaping hole where the gunner's turret used to be. She wasn't stupid; she knew what had happened to Colin. She waited while I tried to pull myself together, and when I still didn't say anything, she sighed and put down her pen and lit a cigarette for me.

I took it and my hands didn't shake. I hadn't lost my nerve – I was angry. Not just at the Germans, our enemy. I was angry at my commanding officer, at Wing Commander

Talbot Cromwell, for being so blind to what we were up against, and at Coastal Command itself, whoever they were, making impossible rules in some comfortable headquarters in England while we bled our lives out in unforgiving sky and sea.

I tried to smoke. Phyllis passed me her ashtray. I was nearly angry at her, too, behaving herself and reporting to them. But she was good at her job, unlike Cromwell; she'd been with us since June and she knew us well.

'When we fly that high the mission is absolutely pointless, but when we come in at a low level to bomb the German ships, we get shot up by their anti-aircraft guns,' I said bitterly. 'I just want an advantage, you know? I want to know where their submarines are, or if there are night fighters about, before they're on top of us. Some wee thing. *One thing* that we can do better than the Germans. One surprising smack in their faces.'

'We stopped the invasion,' Phyllis said. 'You helped too, two months ago when we were fighting the Battle of Britain. We made them back off. That was a smack in their faces.'

'Now they're bombing our cities to blazes – that's not backing off!'

'We all want revenge,' Phyllis said softly.

That surprised me a little. I didn't think of earnest, diligent Flight Officer Pennyworth as someone who had unwholesome emotions that might involve a thirst for blood. I glanced up at her, thinking she might be offering mechanical sympathy to another shot-down airman – or I suppose I should say *shot up*, not *shot down*, as I'd managed to bring the crate back and land it in one piece.

Her eyes were red and her mouth was set in a stubborn, steely pout. I guess Flight Officer Pennyworth got the job partly because she didn't cry easily. Maybe she did want revenge.

'We'll win,' Phyllis said firmly. 'We'll keep fighting, and someday we'll win fair and square.'

I'd let my cigarette go out. I dumped it in the ashtray. What had Cromwell told me?

We need to change our tactics.

'I don't want to win fair and square any more,' I said through my teeth. '*I want to cheat*.'

Louisa Adair:

Daddy said I lost my Jamaican accent in one year. *One year* at the rather posh London school where my mother taught music, and I had a polite accent I'd picked up from my schoolteachers. I didn't even know it was happening. There wasn't any other obvious way to blend in, with my light brown skin and springing dark brown hair, tamed into plaits by Mummy and then into tight rolls by me when I got older. 'Me boonoonoonoos country gal is turning into a little English lady,' Daddy teased. But it stopped the other girls from teasing.

In November 1940, my polite English accent came in useful.

I was fifteen years old and both my parents were killed in a single month by German explosives, Mummy in an air

raid and Daddy in a sea battle, thousands of miles apart. My school closed because of the Blitz even before Mummy was killed, but I was old enough that I didn't need to stay in school anyway. Now I was stuck by myself in Mummy's rented attic room surrounded by falling bombs. Our elderly landladies looked in on me and made sure I didn't starve, but all I did in the first shocked horrible weeks after Mummy's death was bury my nose in books whose orphaned heroines got happy endings.

I reread *A Little Princess*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Anne of Green Gables*, but my literary friends began to feel disappointing. They didn't have to cope with air raids. Nobody was rude to them for being foreign. Sara Crewe was born in India and spoke Hindustani, but she still *looked* English. When people shooed her away it wasn't because she was brown.

I had a bit more money than Sara Crewe or Jane Eyre or Anne Shirley, that was true. There was twenty-five pounds in Mummy's post office account. But it wouldn't last forever. I had to have something to do when it ran out, or I would end up living in an air-raid shelter on an Underground platform. The only person I could go to was Granny Adair, Daddy's mother in Jamaica, and how was I going to get back to Jamaica, past the U-boats and destroyers? The *City of Benares*, full of evacuated children, was torpedoed by a German submarine in September!

I knew I couldn't go back. We'd moved to England when I was twelve, and I knew, because of the dustbin of rubbish true facts in the back of my head, that I could not live with Granny Adair. I'd have to earn my keep there by picking up stones in her tiny field of sugarcane, or herding her goats.

At best, taking in washing, which in the Jamaica bush means scrubbing sheets in the river and walking six miles with a laundry basket on your head. Three years in London had ruined me for such a life. No, if I am honest, it was Mummy's fault, with music lessons and library books and her pretty tailored suits. Even in our Jamaican bungalow we'd had a piano and a veranda and a little garden of English roses. And we *left* Kingston because Mummy was afraid of the workers' strikes and the Caribbean riots. Daddy grew up in the bush, but he went to sea when he was fifteen.

At *fifteen*! My age in November 1940. You can do that if you're a boy – even a West Indian boy can do that. The rules won't let any kind of girl do that. And I was a West Indian girl.

What can a West Indian girl do at fifteen?

A girl whose parents are both killed by enemy action and who burns, *burns* to fight back? A schoolgirl with no skills who stands in the street watching the vapour trails of the fighter planes and wants to be up there with them so badly that it *hurts*?

Some of those children on the *City of Benares* were rescued from the sea. They were the ones who hung on, who fought to stay awake in the cold water and who wouldn't let go of the wreckage that kept them afloat.

I am like those children. Not the ones who sank. The ones who *fought*.

Rules are made to be broken, Mummy always told me. She believed that you can get away with breaking rules if you are polite about it, and underneath her cultured British charm my mother was the boldest of rule-breakers, a white

Englishwoman who married a black Jamaican. But she was carefully polite. That's how she got around our landladies in London, with harp music and flute music and smart, stylish hats. Mummy had always been there to protect me from the rules. Now I was going to have to break them on my own.

I had to find work. At my age it wasn't going to be war work, but I had to pay rent and buy food. Sensible positions such as 'salesgirl in record shop' and 'music teacher's assistant' weren't the answer because time and again people made it clear they didn't want to hire someone with a tropical complexion, even a pale one – light brown, dark brown, it was all the same to the English. 'The Caribbean sun makes people lazy,' explained one well-meaning person as she turned me away.

And Mummy had trained me so carefully to be polite that I *thanked her* as I left.

Afterwards I sat on a bench by the Serpentine and cried.

But then I found Nancy Campbell's notice in the newspaper. Her old aunt Jane needed someone to look after her; I had to ring a number in Scotland to ask about it. And that was perfect, because over the telephone I was able to get around the rules by invisibly using my most practical, useful skill – my polite English accent.

I was surprised at how quickly my plan worked. Nancy Campbell, whoever she was, seemed ready to snap me up straightaway.

'You must be tidy, and able to make travel arrangements by yourself,' she told me. 'I'll send the rail fare if you're willing.'

It seemed too good to be true.

'But haven't you other people applying as well?' I asked.

'I'll accept the first suitable candidate who wants the position. I've lost count how many lasses have rung me, then changed their minds – oh, twenty, at least. No one wants to be seen with Aunt Jane, and that's the truth.'

'Is she West Indian?' I blurted, before I could stop myself.

'No,' said the Scotswoman. 'She's German.'

German!

'She's suspected of being a risk to national security,' the woman on the phone continued grimly. 'She has to be collected from an alien detainment camp on the Isle of Man.'

A risk to national security in an alien detainment camp!

Worrying I'd hang up on her, Mrs Campbell rushed to give me more information. 'My aunt's what they call "category C", a low-risk prisoner. She broke her hip last summer, hillwalking at eighty-two, silly woman! She needs help getting about. Not heavy lifting, just minding … and keeping her out of my way, to be honest. I have the pub to manage, and I can't look after an invalid. Aunt Jane is far too old to be locked up like a criminal anyway, though that's her own fault for lying about her age – she told the policemen who arrested her that she was sixty! And how she pulled off such a devilish falsehood, I can't tell you. I've a mind she *wanted* to be arrested – attention-seeking Jezebel! But the government's releasing quite a few folk they detained earlier this year. Most of them are Jewish and not Nazis at all, and people aren't happy about imprisoning folk the way the Germans do.'

Mrs Campbell paused for breath.

'Why did they arrest her?' I asked cautiously. 'Besides her being German?'

'She was a telegraphist. She worked five years in a wireless exchange in Berlin when she was a girl, sending Morse code, before she became an opera singer.' Mrs Campbell added hastily, 'But that was more than sixty years ago, in the *1870s*. Before the telephone – plenty of young ladies did the same! It's not as if she was Mata Hari, taking messages and spying in the Great War!'

A telegraphist and an opera singer! Morse code! I thought the old woman might turn out to be quite interesting. And I wasn't scared of an old woman, even if she was German. I *liked* old women. I liked our landladies, who were kind to me when Mummy and Daddy were killed. I liked Granny Adair.

Mrs Campbell elaborated, 'Aunt Jane's no blood relation, you understand. She's my father's brother's wife. They lived a wicked bohemian life, Uncle John and Aunt Jane, in the last century – Berlin, Vienna, Paris. She was famous the world over, to hear her tell it. Her real name is Johanna von Arnim, though she's Jane Warner now.'

'How is she? Can she walk?' I tried to think of any information I needed before the money for the phone call ran out. 'Did she live alone before she broke her hip?'

'Yes, she had a flat in London,' said Mrs Campbell. 'Uncle John had a long lease on it which expired ten years ago, and afterwards the landowner rented it to them year to year. But Uncle John's dead now, and Aunt Jane's let the flat go and has no place to live. At *eighty-two*! What am I to do with an eighty-two-year-old invalid who's made her living in music

halls – put her behind the bar? Oh – and you must be quiet about her being German. The pub is next to a Royal Air Force base, and the bomber lads often come here when they're not in the air.'

'Does your aunt speak English?' I asked.

Nancy Campbell huffed at the other end of the telephone line. 'Aye, did I not say? She married a Scotsman – they kept a London flat for fifty years! Of course she speaks English.'

I took the job over the telephone without the desperate Nancy Campbell seeing me. She was easily persuaded when I told her that Mummy had been a music teacher, and that I could play the flute and the piano. Mrs Campbell thought her operatic auntie would like to have a musical companion.

So I filled a pasteboard suitcase with books and sheet music, and a larger one with all the winter clothes I could cram into it. I said goodbye to the landladies at Number 88, Gibraltar Road, in Tooting. Then I started on my first journey all alone across the British Isles.

That journey passed in a swirl of November leaves and rain outside moving windows: train to Liverpool, overnight ferry to the Isle of Man, and another train to Rushen Camp, grey and wet, in a seaside town surrounded by barbed wire. I kept my nose in a book or pressed against the window the whole way, being polite to everyone, ignoring the stares, avoiding looking at anybody – just the way Mummy had always done when we went out together.

The prison guards were social workers, Society of Friends

volunteers, they said. A young woman wearing a patched cardigan, with her hair tied back in a school ribbon, led me up the stairs in a Victorian guest house converted into barracks. 'Are you from East Africa, perhaps? You do speak English very well. Was it difficult to pick up?'

She was as nice as possible, but annoyed me by asking the same old stupid questions, which I answered politely as usual.

'I'm from Jamaica. My mother was English.'

'Oh, Jamaica, even further! Don't you mind the cold? Here we are.'

She didn't give me a moment to answer about whether I minded the cold or not. She knocked and opened a door.

'On you go.' She waved me ahead of her.

I stepped into the room and came face to face with Johanna von Arnim.

The old woman sat swaddled in a mothy wool blanket. There were no curtains in her small room, which was filled entirely by the chair and bed and wardrobe. The window glass was slabbed with dark blue paint and tape because of the blackout, so that German bombers wouldn't see a light on the ground at night. The window was open to let in daylight, and the air inside was as cold and damp as outside.

Johanna von Arnim stared at the Friends volunteer with cool, pale blue eyes. Then she turned those eyes on me, and they widened in surprise.

I held my breath, ridiculously expecting her to say something in German.

Instead, she sang an English singing game.

'"*Who shall we send to take her away?*"'

Her voice was *amazing*. It was a rich, fruity mezzo-soprano, perhaps a little quavery with age, but not at all weak or thin. The song filled the room. When she stopped singing, the air seemed to hum with the memory of it.

I used to play 'Nuts in May' too, outside my primary school in Jamaica, holding hands with my friends in a circle beneath the Bombay mango tree. So I sang to her in reply.

'"*You'll have Miss to take you away!*"'

My own voice embarrassed me. It sounded like a tin whistle following a golden flute.

The old woman's parchment skin crinkled around those pale blue eyes into a silent laugh.

'Here I am,' I said. I held out my hand for her to shake.

'Which corner of the British Empire do you come from, my dusky maid?' she asked, shaking hands politely.

'Jamaica. I grew up in Kingston,' I said. 'My mother was English.'

I waited for her to compliment my English or ask me if I was cold, but she surprised me.

'Is that a flute you're carrying?' she asked. 'Do you play?'

I'd left my cases at the camp headquarters, but I had the flute on its strap over my shoulder. 'A bit,' I said cautiously.

Mummy would have told her I didn't like to practise. I didn't want to admit this right away to a professional opera singer. Or to the only person who'd started out by showing as much interest in my flute as in the colour of my skin.

'Frau von Arnim, this is Louisa Adair.' The woman from the camp office introduced us. 'Louisa can help you pack.'

'I don't want help packing,' said Frau von Arnim. 'My things are my own business. But I shall need assistance to get to the bank to collect my furs.'

'Your furs are at the bank?' I echoed.

'Yes, of course, we're not allowed locks. I don't trust that damned Nazi Ella Fiesler across the passage, and there are three children downstairs who stain everything they touch. They're not Nazis – they're just children. I cannot keep their sticky paws off my gramophone. If that martinet of a commander would allow us to listen to the radio they might be less trouble, but as it stands, my gramophone is the only entertainment in the house. Open the wardrobe – you'll see. Go on, girl, don't stand there staring.'

Not only could she speak English, but her English was flawlessly proper. She sounded like a radio announcer. Like a duchess. Like the Queen.

She watched me as a cat watches a bird, hungrily. I opened the wardrobe.

There was the gramophone, and next to it was a stack of records higher than my knees. Gowns bloomed like hibiscus and oleander on the rail, pushed to the back so she could reach the gramophone.

'Well, Louisa, now you've met Johanna von Arnim, help her to her feet,' said the young woman from the camp headquarters. I thought she must be evaluating me.

I clasped Frau von Arnim by the forearms and braced my heels while she pulled herself up. She was a good deal heavier than she looked.

'The coat, and then the sticks – ugh, dreadful things, I look like an old spider,' said Frau von Arnim. 'And my bag

beneath the pillow. The passbooks are behind the notes for one of the Django Reinhardts, I forget which.'

'Pardon?'

'In the record album,' she explained impatiently. 'At the bottom, beneath the frocks. That damned Nazi Ella Fiesler would never pick up a jazz record.'

Frau von Arnim got down the stairs by herself. I was relieved that she could manage stairs, but goodness, they seemed to take *forever* – she did them one at a time. The volunteer and I came down behind her. I carried her walking sticks, wondering if I should have gone first to break her fall if she went plummeting forward.

'You must have very strong arms,' I said.

'I have, girl,' she agreed.

And then a long plod to the bank, where we collected a mountain of furs. The Society of Friends woman came with us, watching how I got on. Frau von Arnim, frowning with hostility, examined each piece of fur and signed for it.

'I shall be withdrawing my savings, as well,' she announced with queenly pomp.

That was more complicated, and the bank manager took her into a private room to sort it out.

This left me alone with the detainment camp volunteer.

She grasped my arm and pulled me away from the bank manager's office. She glanced about to be sure none of the clerks were listening, and then she spoke to me quickly, with her voice carefully lowered.

'Thank you for coming for Frau von Arnim,' she said. 'She should have been released over a month ago, and frankly she ought never to have been sent here in the first place. It really

is too bad! She's well aware of why it's taken so long for her niece to find someone to help her travel. There's nothing worse than knowing nobody wants you.'

I nodded. I thought I understood that.

'Do keep a careful eye on her, won't you?' said the social worker. 'That fall she had on the cliffs was providential, if you ask me. We think she was planning to throw herself over the top when she made it to the edge.'

It took me a moment to realise she was serious.

Oh, heavens, did Nancy Campbell know *that* about her aunt? If she did, she'd been a bit secretive about it.

'Frau von Arnim has always been very unhappy here,' the camp volunteer explained, seeing my wary expression. 'The Rushen Camp women are allowed to go about the town freely, to the shops and the cinema and such, but Frau von Arnim would keep doing things we had to put a stop to. Bathing in the sea naked – at her age! Playing records at three o'clock in the morning, purposefully hiding library books when they were due to be returned. Tossing out other people's post! She'd say it was an accident, but she always picked out the ones belonging to people she didn't like. And then there would have to be consequences, so she wasn't allowed on the beach, or to the library, or to speak to the postman, and we had to move her three times in four months, and her gramophone got taken away for a bit … just constant scrapping with *everybody*. And it always ended in us having to treat her more and more like – like—'

I was sure she was going to say *more like a prisoner*, but she surprised me.

'More and more like a very elderly woman indeed.'

The social worker paused. She had me by the arm, as if she expected me to try to escape. She searched my face, no doubt wondering if I understood her.

I thought of Frau von Arnim's whacking great lie about her age. I put that together with what I'd seen of her in the past hour: stubborn, independent, regal and elegant, with a voice like a nightingale and a cupboard full of jazz records. She was still looking for adventure. Perhaps when she was arrested she imagined a few nights in prison before someone discovered how old she was – perhaps she imagined she would charm her guards with song, and then there might be outraged news headlines about her brave spirit and the injustice of her arrest, and people would remember her operatic past. Retired, perhaps, but not *old*.

A rule-breaker, just like Mummy.

Just like me.

'And now that she can't walk properly, of course she *does* have to be treated like an old woman,' the social worker finished.

'I expect she'll cheer up once she's off the island,' I said.

'I expect she'll cheer up now she has you to order about,' replied the social worker, at last letting go of my arm.

She smiled at me. Then she ruined it by adding ominously: 'Do take care that Frau von Arnim isn't allowed to hurt herself again.'

We had one last visit to the camp office. I was to be the Official Keeper of Documents, and there was a brief argument over my suitability for the job.

'Miss Adair is perhaps rather, um, perhaps too *young*?' said someone. 'To be entrusted with such responsibility, I mean.'

'I don't believe the commander would approve,' said another. 'Not if she saw the girl herself.'

'But she *hasn't* seen the girl,' protested Frau von Arnim, who was ready to leave.

What a stupid argument! I was sure it had nothing to do with my youth and everything to do with my skin colour.

I said, in my best English accent, 'I should think it will be rather difficult for Frau von Arnim to manage her walking sticks and her papers at the same time.'

In the end I was put properly in charge, with sheepish excuses as the Society of Friends people avoided looking me in the eye. But they apologised by making a bit of a fuss over Frau von Arnim before she left, and me as well, feasting us with scones slathered in jam and butter. 'There's no rationing here!' somebody told me. 'People on the mainland are envious when they find out how well the detainees eat. But we can't let it go to waste, can we? And we're not allowed to send any foodstuffs off the island. You must guzzle as much as you can before you go!'

I studied the documents they'd given me so grudgingly. It said *Johanna von Arnim* on the old woman's passport and her ration books and release papers. Hadn't Nancy Campbell told me her aunt was called Jane Warner now? But everyone in Rushen Camp called her Frau von Arnim. I wasn't sure how to keep her Germanness quiet, as Mrs Campbell said I should; or even what to call her.

★

The mainland ferry set sail for Liverpool, and I sighed with relief as I unwrapped the sandwiches I'd bought at a kiosk on the pier in Douglas. (*Roast beef!* I hadn't tasted beef that wasn't out of a tin since the war started.) Taxi, rail station, taxi, ferry, loading and unloading everything at each stop, helping Frau von Arnim in and out of vehicles and up and down from platforms – hauling all the travelling cases along with us again, hers full of record albums and mine full of books. There was the gramophone, too. We had to wear the furs; I felt like a trapper. Had Nancy Campbell suspected the fuss? She must have.

But at last I had a chance to breathe, with a long night at sea ahead. We weren't in a cabin, but the ferry lounge was more comfortable than the train, and Frau von Arnim's furs were incredibly warm and surprisingly light. I had never worn anything so soft. Johanna von Arnim sat straight and elegant in her own beaver coat and fox stole, with her back to the Isle of Man as we steamed away from it. Her thin powder-white hair peeped out beneath her fur hat, and her watery blue eyes gleamed as if they were wet.

'Good riddance to that godforsaken place,' she said abruptly. 'Tell me, my dear, how does a Jamaican schoolgirl end up traipsing across Britain with a released German detainee?'

I swallowed. I hadn't yet had to *tell* anyone about Mummy and Daddy being killed – my landladies were there when it happened, and it was nobody else's business. Mrs Campbell hadn't even asked.

'I needed work,' I said evasively.

'No people of your own to go to?'

'Not here,' I said.

I bent over my cup of tea.

'You're dreadfully young not to have any people,' said Johanna von Arnim.

I didn't want to talk about it.

But I'd just make it worse for later if I was mysterious. It wouldn't be the last time I'd have to tell someone, even if it was the first.

'My parents were killed by bombs last month,' I said. 'In the same week. Not in the same place. My mother, she was called Carrie, Caroline Adair – she – she was riding in the front of a bus that fell into a crater when Balham tube station was bombed. You might have seen the pictures in the papers.'

'No, we aren't allowed newspapers,' the old woman said gently. She cocked her head to favour her left ear, listening carefully over the ferry's engines. 'How terrible, and how unhappy you must be! Were you in the accident?'

I shook my head. This I *couldn't* talk about – that I hadn't been along. I hadn't been there when it happened, I hadn't been there when Mummy was taken away in the ambulance, I hadn't been there when she died all alone in the hospital four days later. No one needed to know that. No one could fix that, and I didn't want anyone to pretend to try.

'My father, Lenford Adair, was a merchant seaman on a ship that was torpedoed three days after my mother died,' I said carefully. 'I didn't find out until about two weeks later. Poor Daddy! I don't know if he knew what happened to Mummy. I sent a telegram, but it might not have reached

him. I can't decide if I hope he did know, or if I hope he didn't.' I swallowed again. 'Hundreds of men drowned. He hadn't been let in the Royal Navy because he wasn't born in Europe, but the German U-boats don't seem to care whether it's a navy or civilian ship they're sinking—'

I choked on my words, my face and eyes burning.

'I'm sorry!' I gasped. 'I didn't mean it to sound like anyone who's German—'

'It didn't,' she said. 'And the U-boats don't. Well done, Lenford Adair! Those merchant seamen are just as heroic as the military seamen, even if they're not in battle. I'm sorry they wouldn't let your father in the navy. There's nothing more frustrating than having an open door slammed in your face.'

It reminded me of what the social worker said: *There's nothing worse than knowing nobody wants you.*

'And grief is a burden you can never put down,' said the old woman. 'Though it gets easier to hide. I've been alone for three years. It doesn't feel very long.' She suddenly sounded stubborn. 'It *isn't* very long. It never stops hurting. You learn to bear the pain.'

'Do you?' I asked longingly, caught off guard by her intimacy and kindness.

She shrugged her thin shoulders. 'It depends on where you are and what you're doing.'

The social worker's warning nagged in my head. *Do keep a careful eye on her, won't you? Do take care that Frau von Arnim isn't allowed to hurt herself again.*

We'd finished our sandwiches. The old woman drooped and was instantly asleep, snoring lightly against my shoulder.

I didn't blame her. I couldn't remember ever being so tired in my life. Johanna von Arnim's sleek head pressed against me like a sandbag full of concrete. It hadn't been easy, talking about Mummy and Daddy. I let the tears come quietly and didn't make a noise. It was comforting to have the old woman's head lolling heavy and trusting against my shoulder.

I thought it would be impossible for her to steal off and throw herself into the Irish Sea without waking me up, so I gave up trying to keep my own eyes open.

I recognised the drone of German planes even in my sleep. I dreamed I was standing in Balham High Road back in London, staring at the sky. It was blue and empty, and I wasn't worried about being attacked. I was happy and excited, as if I were going to a party. I could hear the thudding engines all around and I held my breath, longing for the air battle to begin. I couldn't wait to cheer on the Spitfires and Hurricanes as they cut up the sky with their vapour trails.

Then I remembered what the bombers would do to Mummy, and woke myself with a sob.

The engines were real. The German air force, the Luftwaffe, was bombing the Liverpool docks. The ferry lounge lights had been switched off, but the ship steamed onward, with a kind of grim determination that reminded me of Mrs Campbell on the phone.

I jumped up and peeked beneath the blackout curtains. We hadn't far to go, but fire lit the low black land. The ship rocked, and I thought of U-boats and torpedoes. We were helpless. Had Daddy felt this way, waiting for his ship to

sink? I couldn't believe it. He must have had a job to do, right up to the instant he was killed.

I thought I would choke to death with wanting to fight back, to join in, to make a difference, to *do something*.

Johanna von Arnim slept peacefully, snoring gently.

Well, *she* was my responsibility. Looking after her was my wartime job right now, and it was too bad if it wasn't very exciting or even very patriotic. I sat down beside her again and sighed. It wouldn't matter anyway if our ship sank on the way to Liverpool.

But mercifully it didn't, and by the time we docked the raid was over. I hauled the cases and gramophone on to land as the all-clear sirens hooted. My wartime job was going to keep me fit, whatever else happened.

We spent hours in the city police station getting her registered, and then in the railway station at Liverpool Lime Street queuing to buy our tickets.

'Identity documents, miss?' the ticket seller asked, eyeing me suspiciously, when I finally got to the front of the line. I felt conspicuous in the fur coat.

Be polite, Lula, warned Mummy's calm, comforting voice in my head.

I gave a false, bright smile. 'Oh – yes, sorry! I haven't had to show ID to buy a rail ticket before.' Of course I hadn't. No one has to. But I dug in my school satchel for my National Registration card anyway.

'Please step aside so you don't hold up the queue,' said the ticket seller coolly.

My heart plummeted as I bit back rising anger. It is hard to stand your ground and politely break rules at the same

time. Why hadn't I parked Frau von Arnim with the luggage instead of shuffling everything along in the queue with us? If we lost our place I'd have to shift it all again—

The old woman reached over me with an official-looking booklet open to a smiling photograph of her own face. The ticket seller nodded and pushed the passport back.

'Apologies, madam, I didn't realise you were together.' He smiled at her over my shoulder.

'Well, we are,' said Frau von Arnim. 'Two singles for Stonehaven.' She added in a friendly way, 'We are visiting my niece in Scotland.'

My face burned as the horrid man thumped our tickets with the date stamp. I paid without saying anything.

'Thank you,' said the old woman as we turned away. But she might have been talking to me.

Afterwards we sat in the ladies' waiting room, surrounded by our piles of luggage, until it was time for our train.

'What did you show that man?' I asked. I was supposed to help her with her papers, and here was something she'd kept to herself.

The old woman gave a slow, shy smile, as if she were the one who was a bit embarrassed this time. She handed over the booklet and let me look at it.

It was an ordinary British passport, more ordinary than mine, even, because mine says JAMAICA across the front below BRITISH PASSPORT. The smiling photograph pasted inside was definitely a recent picture of the person sitting next to me – at least, it wasn't taken so long ago you couldn't tell who it was. But the name read clearly, *Jane Warner, British subject by birth*.

It also said she was a musician. And it said she was born in Aberdeen, in Scotland, in 1868, ten years later than the date on Johanna von Arnim's alien registration card.

'You can call me Jane,' said the old woman. 'It's what I call myself.'

I stared at the lying document, then looked up at the person who called herself Jane. The shy smile was gone. She watched me seriously, trusting me with a secret.

'*How did you get this?*' I demanded. It came out sounding very stern, and her thin shoulders cringed a little. Perhaps she was expecting me to take it away from her. That's what they'd have done at Rushen Camp if they'd known about it.

'It was my husband's,' she said defiantly. 'I kept it when he died. It wasn't until I was already locked up in that miserable place that I started fiddling with it. Of course they knew who I was, but I've called myself Jane Warner since the early thirties … And who doesn't look forward to a better life ahead? I thought I should be ready if the chance arose. It was simple to fix – a razor and ink is all it took. Rubbing the raised stamp on to the photograph was the difficult bit.'

She was more of a rule-breaker than I'd realised.

'You really ought not to use it,' I scolded. 'You could get into terrible trouble.'

She laughed. 'What do you think they would do? Put me in prison? At my age? Imagine!'

'It would be worse than the camp,' I argued.

'I was in prison for three weeks before I went to the camp, so I know what it would be like,' she told me.

I gazed at the glamorous smiling face of the elderly, but younger, woman in the fake passport.

'You don't need to show identification papers to buy a rail ticket,' said Jane Warner. 'That man was a bully. He was bullying *you*.'

'I know he was bullying me,' I said. 'People often do.'

I'd been saved by an old German woman! Suddenly I laughed too. 'Stupid bossy official! Aren't there enough rules already? I wish we could report him for making up extra ones.'

'Never mind,' said Jane. 'There's no danger to national security, and we have our rail tickets. If he goes on making up extra rules, the stupid bossy official may get himself in trouble without our assistance.'

I gave her back her husband's doctored passport.

'This is going to expire next year,' I pointed out.

'I'll worry about that next year,' said Jane.

I rang Mrs Campbell from the red telephone kiosk by the bus shelter on the Aberdeen road. That was as far as we could get to the village of Windyedge without having to walk, and Mrs Campbell said she'd arranged for someone to come in a car to collect us.

It felt like the end of the earth. I remembered, in a flash, a time when I'd been very small, following a path in the bush behind Granny Adair's tiny ramshackle house, and suddenly everything seemed strange. I was alone among the giant ferns and banana trees and huge Anansi spiderwebs, and I panicked. I wasn't lost – I shouldn't have been afraid. But I was terrified. I turned around and ran screeching

back down the path to Granny Adair's familiar shack and henhouses.

I felt a bit like that now. Only the bus shelter, the telephone kiosk, and a small postbox sunk in a stone wall showed it was the twentieth century. All around were brown winter fields dotted with sheep, a brown hillside wreathed in low clouds, and unhappy blackthorns stooped by sea wind. There weren't even any *signposts*. They'd all been taken down to confuse the Germans if they invaded. Smoke rose from the invisible village down the lane, almost a smell of tobacco, because they were burning peat, not coal – just as they'd done for thousands of years. Beyond the smoke stretched the sea, the cold North Sea.

But Mrs Campbell had said there was an aerodrome nearby, for a Royal Air Force bomber squadron. The airmen came to her pub. Perhaps I'd see some of them there, young British men returning from combat over the North Sea.

The longing I felt when I watched an air battle swelled up in my throat again until it was drowning me. What in the world was I going to do here, or learn to do here, to help win the war? Looking after Jane Warner would keep me from starving, but it wasn't going to lead to anything else, was it?

My chest grew tight with the same kind of panic I'd felt in the green strangeness of the Jamaica bush.

But I couldn't turn around and run screeching home this time.

Neither one of us could.