The Welsh Girl

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Extract

Prologue: September 1944

Outside, the technicolor sunset is giving way to the silvery sweep of searchlights over distant Cardiff as a hand tugs the blackout curtain across the sky. There's a scraping of chairs, then the snap of a switch as the projector starts up. The room fills with the sharp chemical smell of acetate, the ionised stink of scorched dust.

'Lights,' Rotheram calls, and the lamps are extinguished. On the makeshift screen – a bed sheet tacked to the wall, ironed creases still visible – an image blooms, blurred at first, then twisted into focus. Clouds. Wispy, cotton-wool clouds slide across the screen, and then the camera dips beneath them, and there's the city, spread out like a map. The screen fills with gothic script, Triumph des Willens, *and beneath it in shaky subtitles,* Triumph of the Will.

The watching men flicker in the reflected light. They're seated in a rough semicircle, a handful of dining chairs flanking a cracked leather armchair. Only the armchair faces the screen squarely. The men in the dining chairs are half turned from the film, looking back towards the projector, their eyes narrowed against its glare, studying the figure at their centre.

On the screen behind them, Adolf Hitler rides through the streets of Nuremberg in an open car. Crowds throng the side of the road, arms thrusting into the air, the salute rising and falling

like a great wave. In the car the Führer himself holds his arm up, not at the same sharp angle as the rest, but tipped back at the wrist, fingers slightly arched, as if balancing a silver salver.

The screen dissolves to a shot of Hitler on a podium as a battalion of men, glinting spades on their shoulders, march past in powdery sunlight. Beside and a little behind him on the stage is a severely handsome man, slimmer and taller than the Führer. In the next scene, this same figure is at a lectern, a glinting microphone before him, passionately exhorting the crowd. His hand saws the air; a shining lock of hair falls across his brow. He ends his speech crying 'Sieg heil' over and over until the crowd rings with it.

The reel runs out, and as the film is being changed a hand reaches out of the gloom and offers the figure in the armchair a cigarette. He fumbles it out of the pack and bows his head to take a light. There is the flash then flutter of flame, and in it his face is momentarily visible. Older, gaunter and more dishevelled, it is still recognisably the man from the screen: Rudolf Hess, former deputy führer of the Third Reich.

The film had been Rotheram's idea. He'd seen it first in 1936 in Berlin, taking a tram across town to a cinema in a district where he didn't think anyone would know him, not telling his mother where he was going.

She had been pressing for them to leave Germany for months by then, ever since his grandparents had fled to France the previous year. 'But they're Jewish,' he'd told her, as if she might have overlooked the fact. 'It's disgraceful how they've been hounded. But we aren't.' His father, long dead, had been, but his mother was the daughter of German Lutherans, who'd settled in Canada and made a fortune in timber. They'd sent her back to the motherland to study in Göttingen, where she'd met his father in 1912. In the eyes of Jews – the eyes of his father's family, say, who had spurned his marriage and supported his son and widow

only from a distance – Rotheram wasn't one of them. Yet in the eyes of the Nazis he was. A *mischling*, at least: a half-Jew.

He'd been dead set against leaving, even after seeing a fellow beaten in the street. It had happened so fast: the slap of running feet, a man rounding the corner, hand on his hat, chased by three others. Rotheram had no idea what was going on even as the boots went in, and then it was over, the thugs charging off, their victim curled on the wet cobbles. It was a busy street and no one moved, just watched the man roll on to one knee, pause for a moment, taking stock of his injuries, then pull himself to his feet and limp hurriedly away, not looking at any of them. *As if ashamed,* Rotheram thought. He'd barely realised what was happening, yet he felt as if he'd failed. Not a test of courage, not that, he told himself, but a test of comprehension. He felt stupid standing there gawking like all the rest. Too slow on the uptake to have time to fear for himself. When he told his mother, she clutched his hand and made him promise not to get involved in such things. He shook her off in disgust, repeated that he hadn't been afraid, but she told him sharply, 'You should have been.'

So he had gone to see the film the next week, to prove something. He arrived early and slipped into a seat towards the rear, hoping it would be a small crowd, but by the time the main feature began the theatre was full. He sat through the first half hour, his shoulders hunched, his arms crossed tightly to avoid any contact with the fellows sitting on either side of him. They were with their girlfriends – it had been a mistake to sit near the back – and when, after about ten minutes, the boy to his left started to kiss his girl, Rotheram didn't know what was making him more uncomfortable, the film or the couple. He was actually grateful when someone behind them harrumphed loudly, 'Show some respect.' When twenty minutes later the boy on his right tried something, Rotheram distinctly heard the girl slap the fellow's hand away.

By then, though, he was caught up in the film, its ecstatic

pageantry. The fervent masses on the screen seemed to merge with the crowd around him in the theatre. It might have been the two couples flanking him, but by the time the film was over he felt violently lonely. He wanted to have even a bit part in this great drama, and for a brief while in the darkened cinema, invisible in his seat, he felt as if he did. But then the lights came up and he hurried out, panicked by the sudden piercing thought that, if he could, he would want nothing more than to join the Nazis. In his haste, he trod on the toes of one of the girls, fleeing before he could apologise, fleeing from her little hiss of anger, her pointing finger. Outside, he must have run half a mile, feeling as if the crowd were at his back, ready to kill him for stepping on some girl's toes.

That was the day he realised he and his mother would have to leave.

It was her old Canadian connections that made it possible for them to come to England. Rotheram wondered what his father, killed at Verdun, would have made of that. Conceived in 1915 during his father's last leave, Rotheram had never met the man, although he still kept his frayed campaign ribbons pressed in his wallet, as proud of them as he was ashamed of having run from Germany.

He'd shown them, with a kind of shy defiance, to Colonel Hawkins one night in 1941, shortly after he'd been seconded to the Political Intelligence Division as a document translator.

'Ypres?' The old man had whistled in admiration, pointing to one decoration. 'Lord, we might have traded potshots. Staunch soldiers, those fellows. Took everything we threw at them.'

Rotheram's mother had been killed in the Blitz months earlier, and it was the first time he'd talked about his father to anyone since.

'Neither fish nor fowl, eh?' Hawkins said when he told him his background, and Rotheram nodded. He still wasn't sure what he could call himself – not German, not Jewish – but

serving under the CO, he'd felt for the first time as if he weren't running from something, but being led somewhere.

Back in 1941, the war had seemed as good as lost, the papers filled with defeats, yet Hawkins was winning small victories every few days across the interrogation table. The first story Rotheram heard about him was how he once questioned a suspected spy for thirteen hours straight, cracking him in the end only when he told the man he was free to go – told him in German, that is – and saw the fellow's shoulders sag in relief. Hawkins made winning the war seem a matter of wit and will, and Rotheram had been thrilled when the CO personally selected him from the translation pool to sit in on interrogations. Hawkins spoke excellent German himself, of course – he made Rotheram self-conscious of his own accented English – but he didn't always want to let on to the prisoners. 'Helps sometimes to let them think they know more than me.' It was a tactic he'd learned from his days as a journalist between the wars. Springing his German on them when they weren't expecting it was one of his simpler tricks.

Over the months they came up with other stunts. A couple of times, Hawkins had Rotheram translate so sloppily that the infuriated prisoners lost patience and broke into English themselves. Later, he began leaving Rotheram alone with a prisoner, stepping out to the WC while Rotheram offered the man a cigarette, warned him what Hawkins was capable of, advised him to talk: 'It's nothing to be ashamed of; anyone would.' He posed as a British student of German literature, professed an affinity for things German. 'You've a talent for sympathy,' Hawkins told him.

In truth Rotheram despised the prisoners, loved to see Hawkins break them. Once, they'd reversed the roles – boredom, as much as anything, dictating their tactics – and Hawkins had played the sympathetic one, hamming it up so much Rotheram thought he was being mocked. He listened from behind the door

as Hawkins offered the prisoner a smoke, warned him that Rotheram was a German Jew, implacable in his desire for revenge. The man had talked even before Rotheram returned to the room. He'd felt a stark thrill, but afterwards, in Hawkins's office, he told him, again, that he wasn't a Jew, and Hawkins eyed him carefully and said, 'I know, old boy, I know. It was just a ruse. No offence intended.'

'None taken,' Rotheram told him. 'Why do you think he believed it though?'

And Hawkins said, 'The reason most men believe anything. He was scared it was true.'

Rotheram had laughed. He couldn't say if loyalty to one man could grow into patriotism, but the harder he worked for Hawkins, the more suspects he questioned, the more British he felt.

Still, by the late summer of 1944, there were fewer and fewer prisoners at the London Cage, and Rotheram was missing the interrogations, missing the war, really. He'd been agitating for a transfer for a month. Quayle and his gang had moved across the Channel in late July; most of the questioning was being done in Cherbourg or by roving teams at the front. According to Hawkins, it was a miserable detail, France or no. So many men surrendering, hundreds a day – it was nothing but paperwork. 'Besides, I need you here, dear boy, to help put the jigsaw together.' They were beginning to identify defendants and witnesses for the prospective war crimes trials. The pieces of the puzzle. Rotheram had nodded and gone back to the dry work of processing the boxloads of interrogation reports coming in from Normandy.

There wasn't even much doing at Dover by then. In June and July, in the wake of D-day, he'd been used to heading down there two or three times a week, to the old racetrack where the POWs were processed, for a 'chat', as they called it, with the more interesting and recalcitrant cases. Once or twice he persuaded the local MPs to give him a captured uniform and put

him in with the unprocessed men to eavesdrop. He'd been shocked by the thrill of it – playing with fire, he'd thought – delighted in calling himself 'Steiner'. He'd got results, too, bagged a handful of officers posing as non-coms. By mid-August, the Allies closing in on Paris, he'd begged permission to make another visit to Dover, and tried the stunt again, but he must have seemed overeager. He'd been rumbled, had a rib broken before the guards could get to him.

Hawkins was furious when he heard about it. 'Why would you take such an idiotic risk? Seriously, what do you think you were playing at?'

Rotheram shrugged. 'I was going round the bend, sir. And now with Paris liberated . . .' The news had broken two days earlier. 'Sometimes it feels like I'm the bloody prisoner here.'

Hawkins smiled thinly.

'Then you should be able to fake it better. How did they spot you, by the way?'

'Lice,' Rotheram said, making a face. 'I didn't have any. They saw I wasn't scratching.'

The other shook his head.

'And how's the rib?'

'Sore, but I can work.'

'All right. You want some excitement, then?'

'Sir?'

Hawkins began writing out a chit on his blotter, and Rotheram felt a surge of excitement. Paris!

'I'm giving you a staff car, sending you on a little trip. You're off to Wales, my boy.'

'Wales?' It sounded like a joke. 'With respect, sir, I want to go east, not west.'

'Think of it as a little holiday,' the CO said drolly. 'You're going to see Hess.'

Rotheram paused, watching Hawkins's pen twitch across the page.

'Rudolf Hess?'

'No, Rudolph ruddy Reindeer. Who do you think?'

Rotheram had seen Hess once before, in Germany, in '35. The only one of the party leaders he'd ever glimpsed in person. It was at a football match. Hertha Berlin and Bayer Leverkusen. Hess had arrived with his entourage a little after kick-off. There'd been a popping of flashbulbs, a stirring in the crowd, and then the referee had blown the whistle and stopped the game for the players to give the Heil Hitler. Hess had returned the salute smartly and gone back to signing autographs. He'd been deputy führer then, a post he'd held until 1941 when he'd flown to Britain. It had been a sensation at the time – was he a traitor? was he on a secret mission? – but now Hess was almost an afterthought.

'Even if he has any secrets left they'd be old hat,' Rotheram observed.

'He still has at least one, apparently,' the CO said, placing the travel orders on top of a thick file. 'We don't know if he's sane or not. He's tried to kill himself a couple of times, and he's been claiming selective amnesia for years. Says he has no recollection of anything important. Not of his mission, not of the war. It's all a fog, supposedly.'

'He's acting?'

'If so, he's doing a splendid job. He's been maintaining the same story pretty much since landing in Scotland.'

Rotheram looked at the file on the desk between them, the dog-eared pages bound together with ribbon.

'What makes you think I'll be able to crack him?'

'Not sure you will, my boy. Plenty of others have had a go. Medics, intel bods. The Americans.'

'But you don't trust them.'

The CO sighed. 'Hess is the biggest name we have so far, and if there's a trial when this is all over, he's likely to be a star in it. Only not if he's gaga. Not if he's unbalanced, you follow? It'll

make a mockery. Problem is, if we don't put him up, it'll smell fishy to the Soviets. They're convinced he came here to conclude a peace between us and the Nazis to leave them free to concentrate in the East.' Hawkins shook his head. 'The one thing for sure is if he does end up in the dock, we'll be the buggers building the case. I just want someone I know to have a look-see.'

'This isn't exactly what I had in mind when I asked for a transfer.'

'"In which we serve," dear boy,' the CO told him with a shrug. 'You're going up the wall, so I'm giving you something.' He smiled, then craned forward again. 'You want a role in the trials? You want to play a part in that? Well, this is the beginning. Do this right and you might do yourself some good.'

It had been damp and overcast in London – Rotheram needed to let out the choke to get the car started – but by Cheltenham it was warm enough to roll his windows down, and motoring through the Marches into Wales, he found himself lifted by the rippling emerald country, the bright broad skies, so different from the narrow greyness of London.

Still, climbing into the Black Mountains felt like crossing into autumn. Fat drops of rain splattered the windscreen, and by the time he arrived, the metal of the film canisters was cold enough to sting his fingers as he carried them in from the car. He walked up the gravel drive to the manor house, remembering something Hawkins had once told him, that the gentry had put in gravel to announce their visitors. He had a moment to take in the ivy-bearded brick, the leaded windows crosshatched a second time with safety tape, and then he heard the bolt draw back on the heavy oak door.

'Ah,' the pinch-faced lieutenant who met him declared, 'I see you've brought our feature presentation.'

The lieutenant, a doctor in the RAMC who introduced

himself only as Mills, showed him into the parlour, where a projector had been set up. 'You've eaten already?' he asked brusquely, but Rotheram shook his head. There'd been only a meagre ploughman's at a sullen pub outside Cirencester. The doctor looked disconcerted. 'Well, look, not to be inhospitable, but could you possibly wait? Unless you're ravenous, I mean. Only, he's an early riser, so if you want to show it this evening, best start soon.' He smiled apologetically. 'Can't promise he won't nod off, otherwise.'

'It's fine.' Rotheram began loading the film. His fingers were so chilled they trembled, and it took him long minutes to thread the first reel through the sprockets.

'Nervous?' Mills asked.

'Cold,' Rotheram said, rubbing his fingers. 'Those will have to be turned,' he added, indicating the neat row of chairs and making a circling gesture, 'so we can watch him.'

'Right you are,' the other replied agreeably enough, although Rotheram noticed he didn't offer to light the fire in the grate.

Finally the film was ready, and Rotheram ran it forward for a few seconds, watching the test numbers flicker and count down, and then the opening shots from a plane descending over the city, the image ghostly in the still-bright room.

'Action,' Mills called jauntily.

Rotheram snapped the machine into reverse and the camera lifted back through the wispy clouds, the medieval rooftops dwindling, the soundtrack discordant and garbled. He'd tracked down the print at the censor's office – they'd impounded half a dozen copies at the start of the war – and he'd run it for himself the night before in his office, to make sure it was whole and to refamiliarise himself. He'd waited until everyone had left for the evening, afraid of being caught, as if it were pornography.

'All right,' he said, and Mills opened the door.

Someone must have been waiting for the signal, for less than a

minute later there were footsteps in the passage outside.

Rotheram expected a guard to come first, but it was Hess himself, stepping into the drawing room as if it were his home. He was greying and more drawn than Rotheram recalled from his pictures, his nose as sharp as a beak and his cheekbones swept up like wings under his skin, as if his face were about to take flight. Out of uniform, in a navy blue cardigan, darned at one elbow, he seemed stooped, retired, more a shy uncle than the fiery deputy führer. His shirt was pressed and buttoned to the throat, but he wore no tie, and Rotheram recalled he'd made two suicide attempts, according to the file: once opening his veins with a butter knife he had stolen and sharpened on an iron bedstead; a second time hurdling a third-storey banister. He was limping from that fall still, as he approached and held out his hand. Rotheram stared at it, slowly held out his own, but to one side, gesturing to the armchair. Hess ignored the insult, taking his place with only a wry '*Vielen Dank*', to which Rotheram found himself automatically mumbling, '*Bitte.*'

Two burly MP corporals followed Hess into the room, one taking a seat flanking him, the other carrying a salver with decanter and glasses, which he set on the sideboard. Last through the door was a delicate-featured officer whom Mills ushered over and introduced as Major Redgrave.

'Captain. I gather we have you to thank for the evening's entertainment.'

'I hope it'll be more than that, sir.'

'You've seen it already?'

Rotheram nodded, though he didn't say where.

The corporal appeared at his elbow, proffering glasses.

'Scotch, sirs?'

'And how do you propose to manage this?' Redgrave asked softly when they all had drinks.

'I'll run the film, observe his reactions, debrief him afterwards.'

'You think you'll know if he's lying?'

Rotheram watched the corporal bend down beside Hess and offer him the last glass on the salver.

'I hope so. There are signs to look for.'

Redgrave exchanged a glance with Mills. 'You know we've tried pretty much everything. Over the years.' He said it gently and without impatience, and it occurred to Rotheram that it was meant to comfort him, that they expected him to fail.

'Yes, sir.'

'Very well, then. Can't hurt to try. Whenever you're ready.'

Redgrave took a seat halfway between the screen and Hess, lowering himself stiffly, tugging up his trouser legs by the creases. Hess smiled at him questioningly, but the major just shrugged. Rotheram motioned Mills to draw the blackout curtain against the sunset, then threw the switch and took a seat across from the lieutenant and the major, studying the man in the armchair.

Back in London, the CO had offered Rotheram this job as if it were a plum, but until this moment he had felt like little more than a glorified delivery boy. Now here was Hess, one of the leading men of the party, right in front of him. And it occurred to Rotheram, stealing a glance at the screen, that the last time Hess had been in prison was after the Munich Putsch. He'd been Hitler's cellmate. He'd taken dictation of *Mein Kampf*.

Initially, Hess seemed entertained, watching the stately procession of staff cars, the pageantry. It was a captivating film, Rotheram knew, queasily fascinating in the way it made the ugly beautiful. He could see the two corporals were rapt, one of them moving his mouth to read the subtitles, and Mills and Redgrave kept swivelling their heads back and forth between the screen and Hess as if at a tennis match. But it was no effort for Rotheram to keep his eyes on the prisoner. The whole scene, since Hess had entered the room, seemed unreal. He couldn't quite believe he was in the man's presence, like the night he

thought he glimpsed Marlene Dietrich getting into a taxi in Leicester Square but afterwards could never be absolutely sure. If he took his eyes off Hess, he thought the man would disappear.

Hess himself watched with interest, but without comment, sipping his whisky, his foot occasionally keeping time with the music. Only once did Rotheram notice the man's gaze drifting towards him, then flicking away almost coyly. At the first reel change, he seemed inclined to talk, started to lean forward, but Rotheram, wanting to keep the film moving, busied himself with the projector. Hess accepted a cigarette from Mills, and the major asked him if he knew what he was watching, and he said yes, yes, of course. He recognised Herr Hitler; he understood that this was Germany before the war. He said he admired the marching. But when Redgrave asked if he remembered being there, Hess looked puzzled and shook his head.

'Your English is good,' Rotheram called from where he was bent over the projector. He didn't like the others asking too many questions.

'Thank you,' Hess told him. *'Und Ihr Deutsch.'*

Rotheram looked up and a loop of film slipped off the reel he was removing, swinging loose.

'I only meant you do not seem to need the subtitles, Captain.'

Rotheram recoiled the film tightly.

'But perhaps I should be complimenting you on your English instead.'

Mills barked out a little laugh and then looked puzzled. 'I'm not sure I get it.'

'It's not a joke,' Hess said pleasantly. 'I'm asking if Captain Roth-eram' – he drew the name out – 'is a German Jew.'

Rotheram felt the others turning to look at him, the major sitting up straighter. He kept his eyes on Hess but felt himself colouring in the gloom.

'Well,' Mills said. 'I'd never have guessed.'

'You have to know what to look for,' Hess said nonchalantly, as if it were a parlour trick.

'But Jews can't be German, Deputy Reichsführer,' Rotheram told him flatly. 'Or did you forget that also?'

Hess's lips twitched, a small moue.

'Besides, you're wrong.' But even as he said it, Rotheram was conscious of his accent asserting itself, as it did when he was tired or angry.

'My mistake, I'm sure.'

'Captain,' the major called wearily. 'Let's press on, shall we?'

The second reel moved to the evening events of the 1934 Reich Party Day, a grainy sea of flags waving in a torchlit parade, and finally to footage of Hess himself, starkly pale under the floodlights, rallying the crowd, leading the ovation until his voice cracked with the effort. In the drawing room, Rotheram watched Hess closely, saw him flinch slightly, his nostrils flaring as his younger face stared down at him. His eyes, beneath his bushy brows, widened as he watched, and he seemed to clutch himself, his crossed arms drawing tighter, his leg hitched higher on his thigh. The tip of his cigarette glowed in the dark, and the smoke twisted up through the projector's beam like a spirit. At the next break, he called for some light and said he needed to stretch his legs. He rose and walked twice around the room quickly, his limp jagged, his head bent.

Mills tried to join him. 'Are you cold?' But Hess waved him away, and the doctor approached Rotheram instead.

'How much longer?'

'One more reel.'

'Good. I don't want him too agitated.'

Rotheram looked up. 'Isn't that the point?'

'It's *your* point, my friend. My job's to keep him healthy. I don't want him stressed or overtired.'

'I understood—'

'You understood wrong,' Mills hissed. 'And don't be thinking you can go around my back to the old man. He and I have an understanding.'

Rotheram looked up and saw the major watching.

'Do you mind?' he asked Mills steadily. 'I'd like to start this.'

Mills turned and motioned curtly for one of the corporals to light a fire. There was a clatter of coal from the scuttle, and for a few seconds they all watched as the flame caught.

The final reel showed Hitler addressing the crowd, and Hess sank against the seat cushions as if he were trying to smother himself in the chair. Rotheram, glancing round, noticed Redgrave and Mills thoroughly engrossed in the film, intent on the younger Hess, the one formed from shadow and light. Turning back, he found Hess studying him. Their eyes met for a moment – Hess's dark, but shining – before Rotheram had to look away, his heart racing, as if the figure on the screen had met his gaze.

Afterwards, pacing the room once more, Hess repeated that yes, of course he recognised himself in the film, so he must accept that he had been there. Yet he had no memory of the events depicted. He touched the side of his head with his fingertips as if it were tender. 'All that is black to me.'

'No memory?' Rotheram asked. 'None at all? And yet you seem agitated. Disturbed.' The room was very still now without the tick and whirr of the projector.

'I wouldn't say so. Troubled, perhaps.'

'Troubled, very well. Why?'

'Troubled that I can't remember, of course. How would you feel if you were shown and told things you had done that you had no memory of? It is as if my life has been taken from me. That man was me, but also like an actor playing me.'

Hess sniffed. The chimney was drawing poorly. Mills raked through the coals with the poker, making them spit.

'Do you even want to remember?' Rotheram asked.

'*Natürlich*. A man *is* his memories, no? Besides, I'm told the tide has turned. Paris fallen? Germany facing defeat? I should like such memories of happier times.'

'The film made you happy, then? You enjoyed it?'

'Not happy!' Hess cried. He raised his hands in frustration, let them drop with a sigh. 'But you are trying to provoke me.'

There was a moment's silence, and then Mills said, 'You must be tired.'

'Yes,' Redgrave added. 'Perhaps it would be best if we conclude this evening, turn in.'

'Major,' Rotheram began, but when he looked at Redgrave's hangdog face, he stopped. He had been about to say that this was his interrogation, but it occurred to him suddenly that Mills was right. As far as he and the major were concerned, it was no interrogation at all. It wasn't that they thought Rotheram couldn't determine whether Hess was mad or not; they thought it was irrelevant. That unless Hess was raving or foaming at the mouth, he'd be put on trial. They believed the decision had already been taken. That was why they couldn't see any point in this. It was a sham in their eyes and, worse, to continue it a cruelty.

They expect me to find him fit, Rotheram thought, because they believe I'm a Jew.

He became aware that Redgrave and Mills were staring at him, waiting.

'I suppose I am finished,' he muttered.

Only Hess was not. He was standing at the pier glass scrutinising his own reflection. Turning his head from side to side to study his face.

He ran a hand through his lank hair, held it off his brow. 'Another thing I don't remember: growing old.' He smiled bleakly at them in the narrow mirror.

Rotheram spent a restless night in his bare cell of a room – the

former servants' quarters, he guessed, up a narrow flight of stairs at the back of the house.

It was all so unreasonable, he thought. He'd been brought up, nominally at least, Lutheran, his mother's faith; knew next to nothing about Judaism. In truth, he'd always resented his grandparents, refusing to write the thank-you letters his mother asked him to send in reply to their begrudging gifts, and he'd been secretly pleased when they'd fled to Paris, as if this proved something. Even when, two months after they'd left, his father's pension had been stopped, Rotheram had been convinced it was simply a mistake. The Nazi bureaucrats were just fools, too dense to understand a subtle distinction like matrilineal descent, something his mother had explained to him in childhood. He was in his second year of law at the university, but when he tried to register for classes the following term, he was told he wasn't eligible to matriculate and realised he was the fool. It made him think of an occasion years before, when, as a boy of thirteen or fourteen, he'd asked his mother yet again why he wasn't Jewish if his father was. Because the Jewish line runs through the mother, she'd told him. *Yes, but why?* he pressed, and she explained, a little exasperated, that she supposed it was because you could only be absolutely sure who your mother was, not your father. He went away and thought about that – deeply and narrowly, as a child will – and finally came back to her and asked if she was sure his father *was* his father. She'd stared at him for a long moment, then slapped him hard across the mouth. 'That sure,' she said.

Just before her death, she told him how she'd been spat on in the streets of Berlin in 1919. 'After Versailles,' she said. 'Because I was Canadian. *That's* what your grandparents could never forgive. I was a reminder of the enemy who'd killed their son. I wasn't *German* enough for them, you see?'

Among her possessions, after her funeral, he'd found a photograph of his father he'd never seen before. It must have

been taken on that last leave because he looked gaunt, his tunic loose on his frame, his features sharpened almost to caricature, no longer the smiling, slightly plump figure in a close-fitting uniform that Rotheram had seen in earlier poses. This was his father, he thought, and the figure had seemed to rebuke him.

And yet the following week he'd gone ahead and anglicised his name.

He looked at his watch – not quite one a.m. – and decided to try the CO. Hawkins was an insomniac – his own sleep ruined by so many round-the-clock interrogations – and often spent nights at his desk catching up on paperwork. Sure enough, he picked up on the second ring, sounding more alert than the sleepy operator who put Rotheram's call through.

Barefoot, greatcoat over his pyjamas, Rotheram huddled over the phone in the draughty hall and said he was ready to head back to London.

'You've made up your mind about Hess? That was quick.'

Rotheram hesitated, stared at some movement down the hall, realised it was his own reflection in a mirror.

'Not really.'

'What? Speak up.'

'No, sir,' Rotheram enunciated. He cupped his hand around the mouthpiece, conscious of the stillness of the house around him. 'I'm just not sure I'll be able to, under the circumstances.'

'So spend some more time. Take another run at him.'

'I don't think that'll do any good,' Rotheram offered.

'But why, for heaven's sake?' Hawkins seemed to be shouting in the quiet of the hallway.

And Rotheram was forced to admit that he was reluctant to find Hess sane because the thought of confirming Redgrave and Mills's assumptions rankled.

'Let me get this straight,' the CO said. 'You believe you can judge Hess fairly, but you're concerned that others won't see

that judgement as impartial because they think you're Jewish. Those are the horns of your dilemma?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, but do you ever think you might not be so impartial after all?'

'I'm sorry, sir,' Rotheram said tightly. 'Even if I were Jewish, I'm not sure why it should make me any less impartial than a Frenchman or a Russian.'

He heard Hawkins take a sip of something, and then another. Finally he asked, 'Tell me, my boy, honestly now, don't you ever think about your family? Your grandparents made for Paris, you say. Don't you wonder where they are, what's become of them?'

Rotheram was momentarily taken aback. He began to say no and stopped, unsure. Hawkins had taught him to recognise the pause before answering as a lie. It came to Rotheram that whatever he said now would seem false. So he was silent, which as Hawkins had taught him might mean a man was holding something back, or simply that he didn't know.

'I'm sorry, sir,' he whispered now. 'You'll have my report Monday morning.'

There was a long sigh at the other end of the line, and Rotheram felt how he'd failed Hawkins. But when the CO spoke again he sounded brusquely hearty.

'No need to hurry back, my boy. There've been some new orders, as a matter of fact. The POW department want someone to visit their camps up in North Wales. Something to do with screening and the re-education programme. Denazification and all that. Thought you'd be just the fellow to liaise. Anyhow, the orders should catch up with you there later today, or tomorrow at the latest.'

'What—?' Rotheram began, and stopped, silenced by the sound of his own cry in the still house as much as by Hawkins's steely jocularity.

Gripping the receiver, Rotheram told him stiffly that he

understood, and he did, although dully, as if his head were still ringing from the blow. The CO had been flattering him with this mission, he realised; more than that, it was a consolation prize. The decision *had* already been made, but not by Rotheram. Hess would be going to the trial, but Rotheram wouldn't. The closest he'd come to Germany, any time soon, was the image on the screen.

'You will be missed,' Hawkins said. He was the one whispering now. 'It's just that there's a sense that Jews ought not to be a big part of the process. To keep everything above board, so to speak. To avoid its looking like revenge. Can't stick a thumb on the scales of justice and all that. And really, that stunt at Dover.' He laughed ruefully. 'That's what you get for playing silly buggers.'

Rotheram was silent and the CO filled the pause by asking, 'By the way, how is Rudi, the old bastard?'

'Probably as sane as you or I,' Rotheram said, and Hawkins laughed again.

'Well, that's not saying much, dear boy. That's not saying very much at all.'

Rotheram held the receiver long after it had gone dead, reassured by the weight in his hand, until he heard a floorboard creak overhead, and finally set it gently back in its cradle. He wondered who else might be awake, whom he might have woken. Hess's room was on the second floor, and suddenly he hoped the Nazi might appear, escaping, any excuse for Rotheram to take him by the throat. On the landing, he peered down the corridor. There was Hess's guard, the corporal who'd served them Scotch, slumped in his chair, giving off a series of soft, flaring snores. Rotheram only meant to wake him, but as he stood before the guard, it seemed as easy to step over his outstretched legs and lay an ear to the door.

Nothing. Rotheram wondered if he was listening to an empty

room, if Hess had already fled (but no, the key was still in the lock) or thrown himself from his window (surely it was barred). Still nothing, except Rotheram's own pulse, like a wingbeat in his ears. Perhaps all he'd heard before was a particularly stentorian snore from the corporal. And yet he couldn't quite shake the conviction that the room was empty – not as if Hess had left it, precisely, but as if he'd never been there. Rotheram must have leaned closer, shifted his weight, for the floor beneath him gave a dry groan. He stifled his breath, counted the seconds. Nothing stirred, and yet the silence seemed subtly altered now, the silence of another listener, as if Hess were behind the door or under the covers or crouched in a corner listening to him, Rotheram, wondering about his intentions.

Rotheram felt his legs start to tremble, as if a chill had risen from the cold floor through his bare feet, and he stepped away. He was halfway to the stairs before he thought to turn back and aim a kick at the sleeping corporal.