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opening extract from

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PROLOGUE

6 July 1947. White Sands, New Mexico, USA. 3.15 a.m.

SPECIAL AGENT SAMPSON of the FBI pulled into the parking lot of the Ranch Horn Motel, cut the motor and coasted silently to a halt. Three more unmarked cars slid past him, lights and motors off, the hiss of their tyres masked by the chirping of cicadas in the trees.

'Are we sure he's in there?' whispered Special Agent McCarthy as the other cars emptied and a dozen or so agents approached across the vacant lot.

Sampson nodded towards a sky-blue Ford parked beneath the glare of security lights and unsheathed his revolver. 'No question. That's his vehicle. He checked in less than an hour ago.' Sampson pointed back up the dirt track to where several squad cars had set up a roadblock. Armed officers crouched in the dust, aiming their guns across the hoods.

'We've got the whole place locked down tight. He ain't going nowhere.'

Sampson nodded to a uniformed officer who lifted a loud-hailer to his mouth. As it crackled into life his amplified voice echoed loudly around the parking lot:

'Joseph Mitchell, this is the FBI. We are armed. We have your motel room surrounded. Come out with your hands up. I repeat, come out with your hands up or we will shoot.'

Sampson heard the *chk-chk* of automatic weapons being loaded.

The cicadas fell silent.

'Look,' said McCarthy. 'There.'

The curtains twitched and Sampson saw the silhouette of a face appear briefly at the window before the curtains fell back again. He signalled to the officer with the loud-hailer.

'All right,' he said. 'Once more.'

'Joseph Mitchell.' The voice was more insistent now. 'We are armed police and we have your room surrounded. Come out with your hands up or we will shoot.'

In his head, Sampson counted 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and knew Mitchell wasn't coming out.

'OK,' he said. 'Put one in.'

Two agents ran to the window, crouching either side. The first smashed the glass with his wooden

baton. The second pulled the pin on a tear-gas canister and lobbed it through the hole. There was a muffled explosion and white smoke billowed through the gap in the curtains.

Any second now, thought Sampson.

But there was nothing.

And when, two minutes later, no one had emerged, he nodded to McCarthy and they ran towards the door, McCarthy pointing his shotgun at the lock and blowing it apart in a ribbon of flame. As McCarthy stepped back, Sampson kicked the door off its hinges and ran forward, smoke and tear gas clawing at the back of his throat.

'Armed police!' he shouted, sweeping his standard-issue revolver around the darkened room. 'Stand still or I'll shoot!'

But as the smoke cleared, it quickly became apparent that this would not be necessary.

The room was empty.

Mitchell had vanished into thin air.

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BERRY

'NO,' SAID BERRY, pushing a lock of dark, straggly hair out of her eyes and glaring at the woman opposite. 'I've told you. I don't want to.'

'Well, love, there are lots of things in life that we don't want to do, but sometimes we just have to do them.'

As she spoke, Angie from Social Services clutched her file to her knees and stared around at the inside of the old, broken-down bus as if to make a point.

'It'll be for the best in the end. You'll see.'

'How can you say that?' snapped Berry, her eyes bright with anger. 'You don't know me. You don't know me at all.'

'Well, I know some things,' replied Angie. 'I know that you don't go to school. And I know that you're living alone in this old van.'

'It's a bus, not a van,' said Berry. 'And anyway, I'm

not alone. The other travellers look out for me.'

'They might look *out* for you,' said Angie. 'But they don't look *after* you. Anyway, you know as well as I do that there's an eviction notice on this site. They'll all be moving on in a couple of weeks. Has anyone said they'll take you with them?'

Berry didn't reply. She knew that times were hard and no one wanted an extra mouth to feed.

From now on, she was on her own.

'Look at you,' Angie continued. 'You're all skin and bone.' Her voice softened a little as she added, 'I just want to help you, that's all.'

'I don't need your help,' said Berry. 'I don't need anyone's help.' She pushed up the fraying sleeves of her green woollen cardigan and hugged her arms tightly to her chest. 'I can look after myself.'

'Look,' said Angie gently, trying another tack. 'I know you're upset. Who wouldn't be? I'd be angry if my mother had died and left me to cope on my own. I know you must be hurting. But that's why I'm here. We've finally got a local family who can take you until we find something more permanent. And the Head of Hillgrove School says you can start there next week.'

She gave Berry an encouraging look, as if this was supposed to be the best news ever.

'That'll give you a whole month to make friends before the end of term. Then you'll be able to start

afresh in September, along with everyone else.'

Berry stared out of the window and imagined herself drowning in a sea of uniforms.

'You're not listening,' she said quietly. 'I'm not going.'

'Well, I'm sorry, sweetheart,' Angie replied, her voice sympathetic but firm. 'I'm afraid that staying here is not an option. You're too young. In fact, I'm amazed it took us this long to find out about you.' She stood up, smoothing the creases from her skirt. 'Look, why don't you take the weekend to think things over? Maybe have a chat with the others, sort some of your stuff out. Meanwhile I'll get things organized my end and come back and see you on Monday. Then we'll talk some more. OK?'

She smiled, a reassuring smile.

'I know this is difficult for you, Berry. But it'll be for the best in the end. You'll see.'

Berry didn't look up until she heard the door click shut. Then she put her face in her hands and sobbed, not just for the mother she had lost, but for the life she had always known.

The life that was slipping away from her with every passing second.

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KRUGER

HIS VOICE TREMBLING, William Kruger pressed the phone against his ear and stared at the red and black Swastika flag pinned to the wall of his apartment. Outside, cicadas chirped in the hot New Mexico night.

'Are you absolutely sure it's him?' he asked. Although he was nearly fifty, Kruger was experiencing the kind of excitement he hadn't felt since his father first told him about Joseph Mitchell all those years ago. Now it seemed too good to be true.

Could they really have found him?

He listened for a few moments, nodded into the phone and then smiled. 'You have done well, my friend. Keep watch until I get there. I'll be with you as soon as I can.'

Replacing the phone, Kruger reached for the silver picture frame which took pride of place on his desk. In

it was a black and white photograph taken in 1944, a few months before everything had changed. It showed his father standing proudly with his fellow scientists outside a secret research facility in Germany. He was shaking hands with Adolf Hitler.

His father's face had been full of pride, as if he had waited all his life for such a moment. He'd had no way of knowing that, in less than a year, Germany would lose the war and he would be captured by the Americans. Captured and flown halfway round the world to New Mexico, where he would be made to work for them instead.

So by the time William Kruger was born in 1957, his father's spirit had already been broken, trying to feed his family on a few measly dollars a week. Right up until his death, he would sit on the end of the young William's bed and tell him, over and over, how the Americans had taken him away from the Fatherland and destroyed everything that he loved.

But he would also tell William his favourite story of all: about a strange, mysterious object that he had found many years ago, and a man called Mitchell who had taken it from him.

'I am dying,' his father told him one night, close to the end. 'But when I am gone I want you to do something for me, William. I want you to find it. Find Mitchell and take back what was mine. For this will be

my final gift to you. If you succeed, it will be within your power to become the greatest leader that Germany has ever known.'

In the playground, the American children would chant, 'Daddy was a Nazi, Daddy was a Nazi!' And as William lay sobbing in the dust, they would kick him and shout: 'Tell us, pig! Who's the master race now?'

But after his father died, something had hardened inside the young William. He had learned to stay on the fringes, melting into the background and silently holding on to his father's dream of bringing back what had been lost. *If only I can find it*, he had thought, *my whole life will be better.*

And now, after all these years, it seemed his dream was coming true.

He would catch a plane to England before dawn.

But first, there was something else that needed attending to.

Kruger left the car a couple of blocks from his destination and walked the rest of the way. It was one thirty in the morning and no one saw him walk up the suburban driveway and slip beneath the silver Buick that was parked there. Less than thirty minutes later, the job was done and he was driving along the main freeway towards Albuquerque airport.

At about the same time as the stewardess was checking Kruger's boarding pass and wishing him a pleasant flight, Andy Sampson of the FBI was closing his front door and watching the sun rise above San Pedro mountain, thinking how it was setting up to be another beautiful summer's day. Throwing his briefcase on the passenger seat of the car, he started the engine, engaged reverse gear and turned round to make sure he didn't scrape the wall on his way out.

This, as it turned out, was to be the least of his problems.

As the back wheels moved off the flat part of the drive and the car tilted backwards down the slope, there was the tiniest of clicks and then a massive explosion ripped through the interior with such force that a ball of flame punched its way through the roof, sending shards of jagged metal spinning high into the air. By the time the young woman across the road had opened her front door and started to scream, smoking fragments of debris were already pattering down into the streets and gardens all around her, falling from the sky like hot, black rain.