Prologue

Achterveld, Holland, April 30, 1945

"Konrad," a member of the HS-9 cell of the Dutch underground, stood with his partner "Pieter" in front of a makeshift camera platform. They were in Achterveld, a small Dutch village near Amersfoort, on the Allied side of the front lines. It was April 30 and they were waiting for the beginning of the Achterveld Conference, a meeting between leaders of the Allied and German armies on the Dutch front, days before the end of the war.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss Operation "Faust," the transportation of supplies by land across the Dutch front lines to feed the civilian population, who were starving after a long, cold winter. The Americans and British had begun dropping aid by air a few days before, but the tonnage was simply not enough. The proposal now was to use Canadian army trucks to ensure a reliable supply. It would be a delicate operation, since the war was not yet over and the German army in occupied Holland was refusing even to consider surrender.

It had been raining all night and the village streets were still wet. All around Konrad and Pieter, Allied staff officers in parade dress stood in small groups, passing time. Above and behind them, on a wooden platform jury-rigged across the cab-roofs of two pug-nosed Canadian Military Pattern trucks, an army newsreel cameraman adjusted his tripod. Everybody was waiting.

The street was broad, like a small Italian piazza. Across from where the two

resistance fighters were standing was the Sint-Jozef Kirk, an exuberant, strangely modern-looking building, with red-brick walls, porthole windows, and steeply angled roofs. To the north was a school building, newer and yet far more austere-looking. Large windows looking into empty classrooms. The blackout blinds were rolled up. Canadian sentries, standing conspicuously without sidearms, guarded a path that connected the church and the school.

A Mercedes sedan turned quickly into the square and pulled up in front of the church, splashing through puddles. It was a former German staff car and still bore Nazi identification plates, with white stars on the doors and trunk and a Dutch flag on the front right fender to announce its new allegiance. A tall, slightly bookish-looking officer jumped out on the driver’s side and started towards one of the groups of officers, hand outstretched — a politician’s greeting. Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, representing Queen Beatrix and the Dutch Government-in-Exile. He was dressed more eclectically than the other officers: a parade cap and leather bomber jacket over a dirty flight suit and muddy infantry boots. The informality of inherited power.

Bernhard moved among the groups of Allied officers, slapping backs and joking as he went. As he neared where Konrad was standing, the MPs let two young girls and a woman in her twenties through the cordon. They were dressed as for church and carried a bouquet of flowers in their hands. They walked up to the tall prince shyly, the older woman pushing the girls forward. They reached him and curtseyed.

“Dear Prince Bernhard,” they began in Dutch, speaking formally and carefully in unison, a sing-songy chant. It was a memorised speech.

“These flowers are a gift from the children of Achterveld for Princess Julianna in honour of her thirty-sixth birthday. Long may she live!”

There was a cheer from the crowd: “Hip, hip, Hoorah!” The traditional Dutch birthday greeting.

“Thank you, children,” Bernhard replied, also in Dutch, bending down and patting each child on the head. Konrad, who had deserted from the German navy a few months earlier, could hear the heavy German accent in the Prince’s Dutch. “Princess Juliana asked me to pass on her greetings and those of Queen Beatrix to you and your playmates. God Save the Queen!”

“God Save the Queen!” the crowd answered back, followed by another three cheers in honour of the Princess’s birthday. The girls and the young woman — their mother or teacher, Konrad couldn’t be sure — slipped back behind the sentries.

Suddenly, there was movement across the square. A group of senior Allied officers came out of the church, accompanied by staff and more sentries. They represented five different armies: Canadian, American, British, Russian, and Dutch. Prince Bernhard handed the flowers to an aide, and walked quickly back across the plaza to join them. The officers lined up side-by-side in a row, facing the road. Bernhard went to his Mercedes and leaned against the hood, settling into a posture of careful nonchalance.

A pair of military motorcycles, riding side-by-side, turned into the plaza. A second pair quickly followed. The riders were Canadian military policemen, Provosts. Like the sentries, none of them wore sidearms.

Two large American sedans came next, Packards, in single file. The first pulled up to the church, parallel to, but just past, Bernhard's Mercedes. A sentry stepped forward and opened the back door. A tall German officer stepped out wearing the black uniform of a Nazi political officer, followed by two aides. The crowd standing around Konrad and Pieter hissed: they recognised the Reichskommissar, Seyss-Inquart, himself.

A sentry pointed backwards, directing the Reichskommissar to where the Allied officers were standing. Seyss-Inquart took a step in that direction and then turned, a look of surprise on his face, to Bernhard and the Mercedes. The car, which had been "liberated" by the Dutch Resistance and given to the prince as a present only the week before, had been stolen from him. Bernhard patted the hood ostentatiously and smiled. The sentry gestured again and Seyss-Inquart turned back towards the other officers.

The first Packard drove off and the second took its place beside Bernhard's car. The sentry reached out once again to open the door. This time, three officers stepped out, one after the other. They were wearing the greenish-grey Waffenrock of the Wehrmacht, the German army. The first officer snapped to attention and gave a military salute. A sentry at his side started to raise a hand in return, before catching himself. A Canadian general gave a slight nod in acknowledgement. The other Allied officers remained motionless, under instructions from Eisenhower to avoid according any military honours to German officers. A second German officer stepped forward and repeated the salute. This time nobody on the Allied side moved. Then the third German officer stepped forward. He drew himself up,

paused, and then clicked his heels and threw his right arm out defiantly, stiff and straight. A Hitler salute.

The crowd hissed again. A sentry standing to Konrad's left blew a raspberry. "Nazi cunt!" he mumbled under his breath. Across the square, the Allied officers continued to stand impassively, staring ahead as if the Germans were invisible. A sentry motioned towards the school and the German officers began to walk. A third and a fourth car pulled up, each with officers from a different branch of the German military: colonels from the Luftwaffe. Vice Admirals from the Navy. An officer from the SS.

The last vehicle to arrive was a three-ton transport truck, another CMP. It replaced the last Packard, beside and parallel to Bernhard's Mercedes. A couple of sentries walked to the back and dropped the tailgate. Seven men, all dressed in civilian clothes, hopped down. As they walked towards the Allied officers, one of the civilians turned and waved to the crowd across the square.

"The 'Secret Councillors'," Pieter whispered. He was a Dutchman and had been a member of the cell for much longer than Konrad. "On our side, supposedly. This time."

The "Secret Councillors" were a group of Dutch civilian politicians and civil servants who had remained behind after the Nazi occupation. They ran the civil administration for the Germans, but were also in contact with the Dutch Government-in-Exile — a situation that meant they were trusted by no-one.

As the men passed in front of the Allied officers, Bernhard stood up and stepped into their path. He said something to the men and then signalled to a red-haired

Canadian officer, who stepped out of the line and came towards him. As they spoke, one of the councillors turned slightly towards the plaza, cupping his hands against the wind, to light a cigarette.

Konrad gave a start.

"For fuck's sake," he said, elbowing Pieter. "It's 'Lucky Luke'! Look!"

"Lucky Luke" was the codename the Dutch resistance used for a handsome electrician who had worked with several cells, including HS-9. He was a tinkerer and a scrounger and through his connections he could often get or manufacture weapons or tools that were otherwise hard to get: improvised mines and explosives, blasting caps, even German uniforms and sidearms stolen God-knows-how from God-knows-where.

Luke had been involved in several missions that had gone wrong over the years and was gradually coming under suspicion as a potential collaborator. The proof came when he had arranged to meet with Cor Steen, the leader of HS-9, and "Margriet," one of his deputies, to plan an assasination. The SS found out and were waiting at the cafe where the rendezvous was to take place. Cor had been captured and Margriet managed to escape, but Luke had failed to show up. The assumption was that he'd been pulled by his German masters and was now living in hiding somewhere. The resistance were on the lookout for him. He was near the top of every list of collaborators to be arrested — or lynched — as soon as the war was over.

Pieter was flirting with a pretty young woman from the village by this point and was no longer following the goings-on across the square. By the time Konrad got

his attention and directed his eye across the plaza, Lucky Luke — if that's who it had been — was no longer in view. He had passed with the rest of the Secret Councillors out of sight, behind Bernhard's car and the truck they had arrived in.

Konrad and Pieter stared at the front of the truck, waiting for the Councillors to reappear as they continued their route up to the school. Suddenly, however, there was a jerk and a belch of blue smoke, and the transport truck swung forward, heading in the low gear down the street. When it moved away, Konrad and Pieter could see the civilian councillors. They had been turned around by the sentry and were now walking at right angles to the school, away from the plaza and towards the church. Konrad did a quick count. He could see six men in civilian clothes and Bernhard in his bomber jacket and combat boots. But Luke and the red-haired Canadian officer had disappeared.

"That fucker's escaped again," Konrad muttered under his breath.

Chapter 1

It was October 21, 1966. A Friday. I was heading into work when I heard a familiar voice.

“Sendie!”

I was in a crowd of office boys and secretaries pushing up the Bay Street stairs into the Temple Building, where I had my office at the time. It was a few minutes to nine and the rush was on to catch the last lifts before the workday began.

“Sendie!”

I stopped and turned up toward the spot where the voice was coming from. It called out a third time and I saw her. At the top of the stairs. In front of the big dress-shop window that looked into the Temple lobby. Greta McCrae, the wife of my best friend and biggest client, Fitzpatrick McCrae.

As always, Greta looked like she belonged in the window instead of in front of it. She was dressed in a light woollen coat in a blue that matched her eyes and set off her hair. It had oversized buttons that fastened up to her neck against the morning chill and a hem that stopped a couple of daring inches above her knees. It looked good on her and she looked good in it.

But then she’d look good in anything. She was a beautiful woman.

I was feeling pretty fine myself. I’d bought a new $200 suit at Harry’s the week before and was wearing it for the first time this morning. I’d paired it with a pale-green silk tie, my light-grey Stetson, and some spit-polished Oxfords. Nothing like

Greta, but not too bad for a fella.

I waved back at Greta and called her name. She started down towards me, wading through the crowd against the current. When she got to where I was, she put her right hand on my shoulder and leaned in to kiss my cheek, European style. Pedestrians dammed up behind us, eddying past in a swirl of “tsks” and “sorries.” Greta ignored them, turning me around and tacking us silently across and up the stairs toward Flytes, the diner on the other side of the Bay Street entrance.

I’d been hoping to get an early start on the day. But Greta had other plans.

We reached the top of the stairs, and I pulled open the glass door to the restaurant. Margery, the waitress, looked up as we came in and started walking toward us, wiping her hands on her apron.

“For two?” she asked, looking at Greta.

“Over there. Beside the window,” Greta answered, pointing to a booth looking onto Bay Street.

The breakfast crowd had finished by this point, leaving only a few tables occupied: a group of women waiting for the stores to open and a carefully-dressed young man watching the big clock hanging in the lobby. A salesman, probably. Or interviewing for a job.

The booth Greta was pointing to was far back from the other diners. Marge gave me a secret wink as she led us over and got us seated. She took Greta’s coat and hung it on the stand that separated each booth. Underneath, Greta was wearing a yellow-and-white short-sleeved dress in a thick taffeta, like one of those Mondrian patterns the young women wear, except more expensive. She smoothed her skirt

and slid into the booth, taking the bench on the north side, facing the rest of the room. The salesman turned and stared.

Marge poured us some coffee and pulled two menus from the rack against the window. She gave one to Greta and the other to me. Squeezing me lightly by the shoulder, Marge turned and started back toward the other tables. The salesman looked quickly back to the clock as she caught his eye. We were to be left alone. Two women from the group of shoppers continued to look us over. Marge didn’t intimidate them.

Greta glanced quickly at the menu and put it down. We weren’t having breakfast. She poured some cream in her coffee and stirred. I waited. She would tell me what she wanted when she was ready.

Finally, she made up her mind. Reaching suddenly across the table, she took my right hand in both of hers, brushing my cup. It wobbled.

“Sendie,” she said. “It is Fitzpatrick. I am worried about him.”

My lungs started up again and I felt my back slump to its normal curve. It was a business call.

Chapter 2

I've told you that Fitzpatrick McCrae was my best friend and my biggest client. But to understand this story, you're going to have to learn a bit more about how we met and what it is I do for him.

So the first thing you need to know is that I'm a private investigator. A shamus. A dick.

Which sounds a lot more exciting than it is.

If you've seen a movie or read a novel, you already know what people like me do: solve murders that the police won't touch; rescue beautiful women from prostitution rings; help the wrongfully accused prove their innocence.

Except it's not really like that at all. At least not nowadays. Not at my end of town.

I mean, sure, you can find a couple of guys who will do that kind of thing for you — former beat cops and bouncers out in the suburbs who will watch your back, spy on your girl, or tell a blackmailer to back off. Maybe they'll even take on a damsel in distress or look into a murder when you don't like what the cops are saying. They wear cheap suits and worse hats. They work from home and their wives answer the phones and do the book-keeping. It's a tough life and the people who try it tend not to last very long.

Because one of the things you learn in this business is that it *is* a business — and that a business is where you work for clients who can pay you. Which rules out

most dead people and pretty much everybody who gets caught in prostitution rings or is picked up by the police. Work for the downtrodden and you’ll find you spend as much time chasing your clients’ bills as you do the people you’re supposed to find for them. There’s no money in voices crying in the night.

To be successful in the investigations business, you need customers who have cash to spend and reputations to protect. Rich people. People who own things. Like mansions, or yachts, or department stores. Or, even better, their lawyers. Half the private eyes in Toronto have their offices downtown in the business district, between Queen Street and Front. There are four of us in the Temple Building. Two next door in the Victory. Another two across the street in the Arts Guild. And that’s just this side of Bay and Richmond.

But being a private eye for the rich is not something you break into. The men who can afford Bay Street rates don’t like to tell their secrets to strangers. Their lawyers like it even less. To get a start, you have to have gone to the right schools, grown up in the right neighbourhood, or had a good war. Usually all three.

For me, it was a good war. A really good war.

I grew up in a poor part of town — on Edward Street, a little north of Queen, before they started knocking down houses to build the new City Hall. My parents owned a shop that sold newspapers and cigarettes to workers at the Eatons factory. When the war broke out, I signed up with the Provosts — the Military Police.

I had heard enough about 1914-1918 to know that I didn’t want to carry a rifle. So I decided to stay out of the infantry, even if that meant volunteering for

something else. The Provosts seemed perfect: overseas but out of the line. Busting drunks, directing traffic, and checking passes. An asshole, but safe. I joined at the beginning of December in 1939 and was on my way to England for training before the new year. I spent the spring in Aldershot and in the summer of 1940 was assigned as Provost Marshall — a kind of Military Police liaison officer — to the 48th Highlanders, an old Toronto regiment.

An old Toronto *infantry* regiment.

I stayed with 48th right through the war. We landed in Sicily in 1943 and fought our way up Italy and then across Holland. But I never did carry a rifle. In the Provosts, you got a revolver. A big old break-action Webley left over from the Great War. I might have hit a barn door with it once. But only because I was aiming at something else.

Chapter 3

The good part of my war was meeting Fitz McCrae. He was the Officer-in-Charge, or O/C, of the Highlanders' Headquarters Company — the men who maintain, staff, and move the general's office when the regiment is in the field. That's the place where the liaison officers — Provost, Artillery, Intelligence — begin their day, so I got to see a lot of him.

The 48th were the swankiest of Toronto's old militias, and McCrae was the swankiest of their young officers. His father was Darcy McCrae, the lawyer and former mayor. His mother was Helen McCrae, née Fitzpatrick, the daughter of the founder of Fitzpatrick Biscuits. So well-off and connected. Fitz went to school at Upper Canada College, university at Trinity, and law school at Osgood. He was articling at his father's law firm when the war began. A different world from me.

There was no question whether Fitz would volunteer or which regiment he'd sign up with. The "Glamour Boys" were a family tradition. Fitz's dad had been an officer in the Highlanders in the First World War. His grandfather had been something similar against the Boers. Fitz was commissioned as a second lieutenant and put in charge of HQ Company as soon as his training was over.

We became close friends during our time in England and Italy. At the end of the war, we were seconded together in Holland to Civil Affairs — the unit responsible for ensuring the smooth transfer of power to civilian hands. We lost touch for a while after I was demobbed, but ran into each other again about a decade later

when I was working for a downmarket investigations business in Montreal. Fitz invited me back home to work with his law firm, and then, after I set out on my own a few years later, started steering his friends and clients — the kind of rich friends and clients you need to succeed in this business — towards me.

It was while we were in Civil Affairs that I introduced Fitz to Greta.

Although we were working for the same unit, Fitz and I were in different sections. Fitz was in Legal, working on the rules governing the hand over to civilian authorities and establishing the post-war order; I was leading a group that was helping to decommission the Dutch underground.

Greta was one of the first people we interviewed. She'd been a law student before the war and joined the resistance after the workers' strike in 1941.

Like most women in the underground, Greta had started out as what the Italians called a *staffette*: a courier and secretary responsible for carrying messages, acting as a lookout, and forging documents. Ultimately she ended up running a safe house for deserters and escapees.

But Greta also took part in direct action, engaging with Nazis in the field. She had a reputation for being ruthless and fearless but also for an ability to put people at ease — the people she was supposed to kill.

Usually she'd go along with the other fighters to help by distracting the soldiers or acting as a decoy. But she could also handle things herself. Once, she told us, she was ordered to kill a man who was suspected of betraying a member of her cell to the Gestapo. She went with him on a date to the movies and then shot him in the back of the head, execution style, as soon as the lights went down. She

dropped the pistol and ended up in the foyer in a crowd of other women. After a quick check of their purses, the Germans let them go, preferring to focus on the men.

A few days after I interviewed her, we ran into each other again. Fitz and I were visiting a speakeasy along one of the canals in Amsterdam and Greta was behind the bar. She and McCrae hit it off immediately. A couple of days later they were inseparable and within the month Fitz told me she was pregnant. They married in November and the baby was born in Holland on the Dutch Christmas, in early December. They came back to Canada in the spring of 1946, and Greta began her new life in Toronto as the young war bride of an up-and-coming society lawyer and philanthropist.

Chapter 4

It was what that lawyer was up to now, twenty years later, that was worrying her...