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MONSTER
SPY**

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thrill-a-minute, so make sure you pick this one up.”
No Safer Place

FOR THE VERY MANY WHO HAVE SUFFERED SO MUCH
AT THE HANDS OF THE VERY FEW

First published in the UK in 2020 by Usborne Publishing Ltd., Usborne House,
83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England. www.usborne.com

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ISBN 9781474942393 FMAMJJASOND/20 04766/1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY.

MATT KILLEEN

DEVIL
DARLING
SPY

USBORNE

CHAPTER ONE

23RD AUGUST 1940

THE SIREN SEEMED MUFFLED. It was absorbed by the seemingly endless hills of mud, or it fled into the big grey sky and was gone. Either way it didn't seem particularly auspicious. It couldn't even startle the few disinterested seagulls that continued to squat on the grey metal tube, as if it really was just a drainpipe left lying on the side of a hill. They failed to notice the cables and wires that straggled into the mire along its length, or the branches and offshoots of pipework welded into the main cylinder at regular intervals.

However, the grey tube and muddy slope did have a more interested audience elsewhere. The cables trailed away to form an intricate path of black rubber lines, down into the valley and back up the facing slope. At their end, five hundred metres away, was a concrete blockhouse sunk into the hilltop. Through a small slit running horizontally across its length, a dozen eyes watched and waited.

The darkness inside managed to be both stuffy and damp.

The boards covering the floor were ill-fitting and filthy, marked with muddy footprints, the walls bare and unadorned. A rusty radio hid in a corner, emitting a quiet metallic hiss.

“*Zehn*,” a voice crackled through the speaker.

The men straightened up and crowded towards the light. Their uniforms varied in colour and design but shared a predominance of gold and silver braid, medals and epaulettes, and a thick sense of entitlement.

“*Neun... Acht... Sieben...*”

Even the least theatrical jackets had a great number of hoops, lines and decorations. One man stood apart, in a dark suit, expensive coat and hat.

“*Sechs... Fünf...*”

The man stared over someone’s garishly braided shoulder-board at the opposite hill, his bright blue eyes piercing and unreadable.

“*Vier... Drei... Zwei...*”

There was a shuffle of anticipation.

“*Eins... Null!*”

A swiftly rising whine built into separate hissing screams. Then sparks escaped from each of the pipe’s tributaries in an almost simultaneous cascade, creating one roaring sound from a chorus of individual howls. Fire exploded from the pipe’s summit with an unmistakable *thunk*, moments before the opening belched a cloud of thick black smoke.

The squarking of the scattering seagulls filled the sudden silence. There were a few tuts and disappointed noises from the assembled officers. Certainly the event seemed deeply anticlimactic.

“Did it work?” complained a portly *Luftwaffe* officer.

“Of course it worked, *Oberst*,” snapped a *Heer Generalmajor*.

He looked to one side. “How far?” he barked.

A nervous soldier sitting next to the radio coughed.

“One moment.” There was some excited chatter through the speaker. He adjusted his headphones. “Approximately seventy – seven-oh – kilometres, General.”

The general swung around and, with a triumphant smile, opened his arms to the waiting officers.

“Seventy kilometres, gentlemen. Seventy...and this is just a quarter-sized scale model. As you can now appreciate, a full-sized example would have a range of some two hundred and forty kilometres, deliver a shell weighing some *half a ton*... and fire every twenty seconds...”

“...if it’s reliable enough,” whined the *Luftwaffe* officer.

“The *finished* cannon will fire *every twenty seconds* and unlike the Paris Gun, the K-Five or any other traditional artillery piece, this gun barrel will not degrade and will not be damaged by repeated fire...”

“If it *can* be fired repeatedly...”

“*On-ke!*”

The distant scream tore through the room and stopped the argument dead.

A *Schutzstaffel* officer leaned towards the viewing window and started. “What on earth?”

Across the muddy valley a small figure in a red coat could be seen running from the cannon towards the blockhouse. She skidded and slid, almost toppling over in the deep sludge, but she remained upright and began to climb the hill.

“*On-ke!*”

She was pursued by two soldiers, themselves incapable of staying on their feet, twice falling into the sludge in their haste. The child’s beret fell off as she clambered up the slope, long braids of golden hair swinging as she moved.

“*Gottverdammte...*” swore the man in the dark suit loudly. “Herr *Generalmajor*, that is... She... Take me out there immediately.”

He turned for the door and began shooing the officers out of the way. They tried to move, but the room was crowded, so they bumped into one another in the gloom. Those furthest away were confused and everyone began asking questions. By the time the door was opened and the man reached the top of the steps to the open air, trailing the *Generalmajor*, the girl had summited the brow of the hill.

She was maybe twelve years old, small and slight. Mud was plastered up her legs and the hem of her coat was thick with sludge. Her eyes were red with tears and her face was contorted in hysterical panic. Glistening snot ran from her nose.

“*Onkel...*” she howled, spotting the man and charging the final few metres towards him. She leaped onto him, forcing him to stagger back a few steps, almost crashing into the collection of officers who had gathered behind him. He managed to catch her weight in his arms and hugged her close.

“Ursula! I told you to wait in the car.”

“You were gone so long I didn’t think you were coming back,” she wailed, hyperventilating and hiccupping in her rush to spill the words out. “So I went looking for you and there was a big bang and then these soldiers started yelling at me and—”

“Apologize to the general at once!” the man in the suit growled.

“Herr Haller...” The general coughed.

“*Now*, Ursula...”

“What was your daughter—” the general tried again.

“My niece, Herr *Generalmajor*...” Then he snapped at the girl: “Ursula!”

“Sorry, Herr *Generalmajor*,” the girl wailed and, with a shriek, began to sob again.

“We must leave... Gentlemen.” The man nodded to the crowd of uniforms behind the general and began to stride away over the hilltop.

“Herr Haller...”

“A most exciting test, Herr *Generalmajor*. I look forward to the contract,” the man called over his shoulder and the crying of the little girl.

The general found himself staring at the retreating figure, as did the guards and officers. After a moment the spell broke and everyone shambled back to the bunker, murmuring as if nothing had happened at all.

The man closed the car door and started the engine. The Mercedes grunted in the cold air and came to life. The little girl in the passenger seat stopped crying and tossed stray hairs away from her face. After a long, wet snort, she snapped her fingers at the man. He handed her a folded handkerchief that she shook loose before blowing her nose noisily.

“I’m getting too old for this *Quatsch*,” she spat.

The man smiled. "Did you get it?"

"Of course," she murmured, pulling what looked like a large grey firework from her coat.

"Then you aren't too old."

She made a face before holding the device up to the daylight that limped through the windshield. "I don't understand the fuss. This is just an oversized firecracker."

"Rocket-propelled shells. Bad news for London," he said, and then glanced down at something else that Sarah was holding. "What's that?"

It was a piece of porcelain, like part of a large cereal bowl.

"They were everywhere," Sarah said, holding it up to the light. "Hundreds of pieces. Is it important?"

"Maybe... You measured the barrel?"

"Hm-hm." She teased phlegm from her hair. "And I'd have rewired it, too, if that *Schwachkopf* hadn't stumbled into me."

"Language."

"Yes, right." She laughed.

"Seriously. You better not talk like that at the next party, Sarah Goldstein of Elsengrund. What will the cream of Berlin high society think?"

"Don't worry, I won't be there. I'll be bringing Ursula Haller, the sweet little National Socialist darling instead."

CHAPTER TWO

SARAH HAD INSISTED THEY LEAVE the apartment behind.

It didn't matter how much she had scrubbed, disinfected or bleached the floor, she could still see Foch's blood there. It was like a glossy, dark and stagnant lake that reflected the room. In this mirror world, the moment of his murder in her arms repeated endlessly. The SA officer had unmasked them and had been about to shoot the Captain; but self-defence or not, she had been complicit in the horror.

She had eventually rubbed off the varnish and begun to tear into the surface of the wood, but she could still see the blood. It was on her shoes, under her fingernails, in the creases of her skin. She couldn't tell where the remains of the SA *Sturmbannführer* ended and her own raw and bloody fingertips began. As for the bathroom where the Captain had dragged the corpse and then emerged over the course of two days with a series of old suitcases... Sarah couldn't even enter that room.