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Brandenburg

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Extract

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PART ONE

1

Edge of the Void

The man in the straw hat dogged his footsteps from the first, keeping his distance, yet never bothering to hide himself. Rosenharte saw him loitering outside the hotel when he checked in, then at the conference centre and later sitting at a cafe in Piazza dell'Unità, a mournful fellow with a washed-out face, who wore the hat unconvincingly on the back of his head as though he'd just won it in a shooting gallery.

At times he got so close that Rosenharte could see the ventilation holes in the side of the hat and a mark on the narrow brim. He wanted to be seen – that much was clear – and once or twice Rosenharte thought he was going to approach, but then he seemed to decide against it and darted away into a side street.

He wondered if the man was the visible part of the Stasi's surveillance operation in Trieste, put on his tail to remind him of their presence. Though he didn't need it; they had made it clear to him that the city would be saturated with officers. Everything he did would be watched.

Perhaps the man was being fielded by a Western agency as some kind of ploy to draw out the Stasi surveillance. But that didn't make sense either. If the Americans or British were watching – which surely they were – they would know about the Stasi and include them in their calculations. Eventually he concluded that the straw hat

was a detail, a side issue to something far more menacing.

He ignored the man and threw himself into the conference on the rise of artistic conscience in the late Renaissance, a theme that had drawn 150 academics from all over Europe. Between lectures and discussion groups, Dr Rudi Rosenharte explored the streets of the hot, carefree city that was so beautifully drenched in summer light. He took himself to the bars around the main square for cognac and espresso and watched the passing parade, marvelling at the unbelievable fullness and plenty of Italian life and – naturally – at the women. Even now his eyes were not dead to their charms, or to the contrast with life in East Germany where beauty was scorned as a bourgeois obsession and you couldn't buy a lemon from one month to the next.

Yet never for a moment did he forget that he had been brought to Trieste to rendezvous with an old lover – a lover who he knew had been dead for the best part of fifteen years but who the Stasi believed was alive.

On his third day in Trieste she made contact. Inside an envelope containing the daily conference bulletin was a handwritten note from Annalise Schering, which instructed him to walk unaccompanied to the end of 'Molo IV' – Pier Number Four – in the Old Port, where she would be waiting in the early evening with chilled champagne. There was much to admire about the letter: the handwriting was perfect, the romantic urgency of the sentiments just right and the location exactly the sort of desolate, neglected place Annalise would have chosen. It was as if the authors had bottled and preserved her essence. He read it several times before using the house phone in the hotel lobby to call Colonel Biermeier of the Stasi Main Directorate for Foreign Intelligence, the HVA, who was running the operation in Trieste. Biermeier came to his

hotel room to examine the letter just after three that afternoon.

'It's an obvious fake,' Rosenharte insisted to the back of Biermeier's head as he read it on the little balcony. 'It's a trap. They're trying to trick us. We should go back and forget the whole thing.'

The colonel shook his head and turned to him, his unhealthy white face and brilliantined dark-grey hair shining in the sunlight. He blew out his cheeks and flapped the front of his jacket against the heat. Rosenharte wasn't in the least fooled by these diversionary tactics. He returned a steady gaze, purposefully expelling the anxiety in his mind. Every pore of Biermeier leaked the Stasi odour, and Rosenharte briefly wondered how he had carried out so many operations in the West without being apprehended. 'No, Comrade Doktor, this is no fake. The handwriting matches our samples exactly. We will go ahead as Brigadier-General Schwarzmeer has ordered.'

'But if anything goes wrong, I'll be held responsible. You've got my brother in jail and he'll be punished. What justice is that?'

Biermeier smiled, came over to him and put an arm around his shoulder. 'Go, Rosenharte. See what the woman has to say. We believe there's much she can tell us.' He paused. 'Look, what's the problem? You give her dinner, win her affections as only you know how, and bring her back to us. Take her to bed, Rosenharte. Make her yours again.'

Rosenharte let out a bitter laugh, momentarily recalling the 'love tutorials' of the Stasi spy school. 'Make her yours again! You're still living in the fifties, Colonel.'

'You know what I mean. You were one of us before the Firm decided your talents lay elsewhere. You did this for a living. You, above anyone, know what to do with this

woman. I don't have to remind you that you have an obligation to the state equal to that of a serving officer.'

Rosenharte lit a Marlboro and inwardly grimaced. He hated the way the Stasi called themselves the Firm in imitation of the way the CIA used the word Company. 'Then you'll keep to our agreement and allow my brother Konrad and his family to go free if I meet her?'

Biermeier didn't respond.

'You *will* release them?' Rosenharte persisted.

The colonel turned and permitted himself a nod – a deniable nod.

'That's a yes?'

Biermeier closed his eyes and nodded again.

'I don't want your people following me. Pier Four is deserted and very exposed. I went there earlier. She'll spot anyone on my tail.'

'That's doubtless why she chose it. No, we won't follow you. We're relying on you to bring her to us. It's all on your shoulders.'

There was a gentle knock at the door. Biermeier opened it to a young officer carrying a plastic bag. 'This is Schaub. He will show you how to operate the listening device. We've got better equipment since you were in the service. You'll be impressed how small it is.'

Rosenharte sat down on the bed heavily. 'You expect me to seduce this woman wired up to Normannenstrasse?'

'I'll be the only one listening. Anyway, when it comes to that part of the evening you go to the bathroom and take it off. It's the conversation before that interests me, not your lovemaking, Rosenharte.'

Schaub tested the microphone and transmitter, then Rosenharte removed his shirt and submitted with mild protests as Schaub towelled the perspiration from his skin and taped the equipment to his chest and back.

'Some part of you must feel pride,' Biermeier told him. 'After all, you're going back into harness for the state.'

'Nothing could be further from the truth,' said Rosenharte. 'I was never any good at this kind of work.'

The colonel exhaled impatiently. 'Ah well, of course now you count yourself a member of the intelligentsia. You speak fancily and affect an air of superiority, but remember, I know the man behind the facade. I read your file. What was it one of your many girlfriends said? "A clever, selfish bastard."'

Schaub smirked then got up and left.

'You mean she didn't mention my lovable sense of humour?' said Rosenharte. 'My skills as a cook, my steadfastness, my sobriety, my modesty . . .'

Biermeier shook his head disdainfully.

'Well,' said Rosenharte, 'at least I'm a clever bastard who knows himself. How many of us can say that, Colonel?'

Biermeier shook his head and sat down.

'I'd like a shower before I meet her.' God, he was talking as if she was actually going to be there.

'Not possible,' the colonel said. 'Use that queer aftershave you bought for yourself.'

Before leaving Biermeier looked over the transmitter once more and fiddled with some tiny wires at the back of the microphone while Rosenharte held his arms up and looked out on the veranda. 'Remember to press the button at the side once you see her,' he said. 'It's easily forgotten.'

Just before six Rosenharte dressed, checked himself in the mirror and then left the hotel. He crossed the Piazza dell'Unità feeling the heat of the day still pulse from the stones beneath him and noticing the wheel of swifts in the sky. Did the Stasi know? Had they faked the letters from Annalise Schering to expose his great lie? No, no one in the

GDR could possibly know that she had killed herself fifteen years before; that he was as likely to find her at the end of Molo IV that evening as Greta Garbo.

He saw Annalise now, as he walked. The little apartment in Brussels on a winter's evening, he picking his way through the plants and the clutter of holiday trophies, finding her in the bath surrounded by candles and roses, her head resting on one arm lying along the side of the tub. Dead. Bloodied water. Vodka bottle. Pills. Needle of the overheated stereo clicking round the centre of Mahler's Fifth. His feelings then, as now, were guilt and a kind of horror at the operatic bathos of her death scene. Annalise always overdid things, that was for sure.

He passed through a series of parallel streets that led down to the sea, and reached Via Machiavelli where he paused, mopped his forehead and unstuck the back and front of his shirt from his skin. He set off again, never obviously glancing back, and made for the deserted quays where the big-hearted seaport opened its arms to the steamers of another century. There he looked at his watch – he was early – and, laying his jacket across the back of a bench, sat down to smoke a cigarette and stare across the flat calm of the Gulf of Trieste. Some way out to sea a ship lay at anchor, the only point of reference in the haze that had been building up through the long, hot afternoon. As he absently tried to determine where sea and sky met, it came to him that he had reached the edge of the void that separated East and West, a decorous no man's land of grand cafes and squares that looked like ballrooms, which was every bit as treacherous as the killing zone between the two Germanys.

Konrad would relish the ambiguity of Trieste, a frontier town that tried to forget the communist world at its back; and he'd shake with laughter at the idea of his brother's

tryst with a dead woman. Rosenharte allowed himself a quick, rueful smile, as though his brother was sitting on the bench beside him. It had the effect of briefly lessening his agitation but then he thought of his twin's plight as the Stasi's hostage. To ensure his cooperation and that he wouldn't defect, they were holding Konrad in prison. For good measure, they'd taken his wife Else in for questioning and placed Konnie's two boys in the care of the state. He wondered what Konrad would do in his situation and knew his brother would proceed with all caution and wait to see how things unfolded. There were always openings, he had said once. Even in the GDR no situation was ever hopeless.

He took a last drag on the cigarette and flicked it across the paving stones into the sea. A fish rose to the butt then darted away beneath the oily film of the harbour water. From the rear of the opera house behind him came the sound of a soprano warming up for the evening's performance. Rosenharte turned and listened with his head cocked and recognized Violetta's part from the first act of *La Traviata*. He looked up to the mountains that pressed Trieste to the sea and noticed columns of white cloud quite distinct from the haze that veiled the city.

His attention moved to a German-speaking couple, stout and sunburnt, who were sitting on a bench not far away swinging their legs like happy children. Stasi officers? He thought not: too well fed, too content. Austrian tourists, most likely. He watched them openly and the woman smiled back with a hint of admiration in her eyes. Then he rose and, hooking the jacket over his shoulder, he walked past, nodding to them both.

Ahead of him was Molo IV, a broad stone structure that protruded into the harbour with quays on both sides and a huge single-storey warehouse along its spine. He passed

through a gate near the old seaplane terminal, lifting a hand to a man reading a paper in a little cabin, and turned left to walk up the pier. On the way, he noted the few people around – two workmen stripping something from a roof, a man rigging a fishing rod, and some teenagers kicking a ball in the vast abandoned marshalling yard. They all looked plausibly engrossed. He walked on twenty yards, rounded a temporary fence that protected some pumping machinery and trudged up the pier, picking his way through the rusting iron debris and tufts of dead weeds that grew in cracks between the stones.

'Here he is,' said Macy Harp, nudging Robert Harland with his elbow. 'Bang on schedule like the bleeding Berlin Express.'

They both moved back from the doorway that led onto one of the heavy iron walkways running along outside the disused warehouse. This huge nineteenth-century complex lay at a right angle to Molo IV. They were about 200 yards from Rosenharte, who was moving away from them. Harland trained his binoculars on Rosenharte and reflected that both he and his quarry had much to lose if this went wrong. He had only been British Secret Intelligence Service station chief in Berlin for a year, and he was still on probation. This operation was one hell of a risk to take when he knew that most of the senior people at Century House regarded him as a field man without the necessary reserves of prudence. They couldn't deny he always got results but these were attributed to flair and boldness, two characteristics less favoured in M16 than either the public or the intelligence service imagined. The head of the European desk had given him a certain amount of support together with Macy Harp – the best odd-job man and, when required,

all-round creator of mayhem that the service had to offer – but Harland knew as well as anyone that many in Century House were actively hoping for the operation to fail. Harebrained, wild, impetuous – those would be the words murmured by his superiors across the lunch table at the Travellers Club – and his career would effectively be over.

He shook himself and concentrated on Rosenharte. He was every bit the specimen that the Stasi had deployed in Brussels all those years ago. At the time of the Schering operation his fake passport had put him at thirty-two, which would make him about forty-seven now. He had looked after himself: he was tanned, still slim and there wasn't a trace of grey in the sandy hair. But he betrayed a certain edginess and Harland could see he was moving without enthusiasm to the rendezvous point, glancing back and to his side every few paces. 'How many Stasi have we got?' he asked quietly.

Harp's habitually cheerful face squinted into a notebook. 'About a dozen. Our Italian friends think there are more, as many as twenty, but that's based on the crossings from Yugoslavia over the last forty-eight hours, not on observation in Trieste.'

'And what do we make of the character with the straw hat?'

'At first we thought he was Stasi because we've seen him a couple of times. Jamie Jay took a look at him this morning, followed him to a fleapit hotel in the New Port.'

'But how does he manage to be here ten minutes before Rosenharte?'

Macy Harp withdrew one of a ration of five cigarettes from a slender silver case and lit up. 'It's simple. He saw Rosenharte out here when he did his recce this morning, realized he had started off on the same route this evening

and decided to get here ahead of him.'

'Right,' said Harland doubtfully. 'But what the hell's he doing here?'

'Steady on, old chap. All will be revealed soon enough.'

'Where's Cuth?'

'Having a drink over there on the seafront. He can see everything from where he is. The Italians have taken pictures, so we've got a complete gallery back at his place.'

'He's too far away. Get him nearer.' Harland couldn't help showing his irritation.

Harp turned to him. 'Come on, Bobby, we're all doing this for the love of it – and you. Jay's taken leave to help out and Cuth Avocet's given up a week on the Tweed.'

'It's an official operation.'

'I know, I know. Still, you can't deny that the Office hasn't exactly given you all the support you need.'

Harland said nothing. Was it that obvious?

'Ah, I've got Jay,' said Harp a few moments later. 'He's lurking in one of the ruined sheds in the centre of the pier. You see him?'

'Right . . . look, I appreciate you giving your time, Macy, but I want you to understand that this does have the chief's blessing. It's very important. Could save a lot of lives.'

'I'm sure you're right, Bobby,' said Harp amenably. He looked around and sniffed the air. 'Christ, this place smells. What the hell was stored in here?'

'Hides. Uncured leather, I imagine.'

Harp looked around. 'You know the port machinery was entirely powered by water? Every crane, pulley, lift was powered by compressed water. Hydrodynamic power. Bloody amazing what they got up to in the nineteenth century.'

'Yes,' said Harland without interest. 'Are we certain

Rosenharte didn't make any calls from his hotel phone once he had found the note?'

'Can't be sure,' said Harp. 'We know the place is crawling with Stasi and they're likely to have set up a way of communicating with him without us knowing. The hotel is not the easiest place to watch.'

'I bloody well hope they don't think we're here. The idea is that it's just Annalise. If they get any hint of us we're finished.'

Harp nodded. 'Tell me about chummy down there. How come he's going to meet a woman he knows is dead?'

'Because the Stasi have forced him.'

'But why didn't he tell them she was dead?'

'Because he couldn't – not back in 1974 and especially not now. Suffice to say we put him in—'

'An impossible position. I see that, but how – the girl's death? Was he compromised? Has he been working for you?'

Harland remained motionless behind his binoculars.

'There's something I'm not getting,' said Harp.

'That's right, Macy.' He wasn't about to tell him everything, and anyway it was far too complicated.

Harp nodded. He knew better than to press the point. 'Christ, I'm not sure how long I can take this smell.'

Rosenharte caught sight of the man with the straw hat issuing from a ruined building on his right and coming down the pier towards him. Rosenharte slowed, then stopped and pressed the little button on the side of the device taped to his chest. The man was weaving like a drunk. As he got closer Rosenharte was able to get a measure of him. The little round beer paunch and poorly cut suit jacket unambiguously announced a citizen of the German Democratic Republic. His gaze was fixed on

Rosenharte and there was little doubt that he was making straight for him.

For a few seconds he expected some kind of violence, but then the man seemed to stumble, clutched at his thorax and cursed before brushing off the hat and rushing the few feet to where Rosenharte was standing. At the last moment he tried to dodge out of his path, but the man lunged to the right, snatched at his shirt and gripped it with such force that Rosenharte instinctively lashed out. The man looked aghast, and only then did Rosenharte understand that the face below him was contorted with pain and fear. He kept putting one hand to his throat and was searching wildly about him. A part of Rosenharte registered disgust at his breath and the foam that had gathered at the corners of his mouth, but he gripped him by the shoulders and told him in German to be still and he would try and find him some help. As he said it, he took in a lined brow beaded with sweat, two indentations on the nose where a pair of spectacles habitually rested, a filthy, frayed shirt collar and a day's growth of stubble. He shook him, looked into his eyes – there was no malevolence in the expression, merely panic – and told him again that he must help himself by calming down. He tried his halting Italian, but reverted to German and lowered his voice.

In Dresden he had once seen a man's eye poked out with an umbrella. People stood around as the blood gushed from the socket and the young man went into shock. A woman knelt down and held him and he calmed down almost immediately. So Rosenharte touched the man on the cheek and held him gently. This seemed to work for a little while, but then his eyes began to stare and his body shook with a series of convulsions that forced them both towards the edge of the quay. They staggered in

a drunken waltz for a few seconds, kicking up swirls of dust and snapping the dried weeds around them, until the man suddenly collapsed into his arms and pushed him against a large iron mooring bollard.

Now some words came from him. 'Rye . . . Ryszard . . . Rye . . . Kusimiak.' Rosenharte's backside came down involuntarily on the shiny warm surface of the bollard.

'Be still, for God's sake, or . . .' At that moment he lost his footing and found he had no purchase to stop the momentum of the other man. For a second he was suspended over the water, then he toppled from the bollard. Falling the four or five feet, he was certain he saw the man's hand reach to his pocket before he dropped forward and rolled down the quay wall into the water like a weighted sack.

More angry than shocked, Rosenharte surfaced and struck out to a chain that was hanging down from the top of the quay. He grabbed it, placed both feet against the barnacle-encrusted stone and began to haul himself up, pulling the chain through his hands. As he cleared the water line he heard a voice and looked up to see a man holding out his hand. He was yelling something in Italian. Rosenharte wrapped the slimy chain around one hand and took a few more steps, but at this point his angle to the quay made it impossible for him to proceed further. He moved to the left, then swung back in the opposite direction and reached out to grab hold of the Italian's hand. A few desperate moments of scrambling ensued before he was kneeling on the quay, hacking the seawater from his throat.

He wiped his eyes and looked up. Around them stood a semi-circle of teenage boys with fishing rods. Rosenharte gazed into a broad young face and a pair of intelligent blue eyes and nodded to show he was okay. The man put a

hand on his shoulder and said, 'You're okay; just stay there for a bit.' Rosenharte knew this was no Italian.

Then one of the boys caught sight of the body in the water and started shouting. All five stripped off and dived in, apparently unconcerned about what they might find. One unceremoniously yanked the man's head up by the hair while the others shoaled round and pushed the body towards the chain.

'Perhaps it's better that I speak German,' hissed the man after he'd instructed the boys in Italian to loop the chain under the body's arms and tie a knot.

It was the last thing Rosenharte wanted. He shook his head furiously, put his hand in his shirt and ripped the wire from his chest.

The man showed little surprise. 'Don't worry, it won't work after that soaking.'

'Who are you?'

'A friend of Annalise.' The man was looking back up the pier at the people who had materialized from nowhere.

'You're English?' said Rosenharte.

He nodded. 'Is he one of your people?' he asked, pointing to the water.

'My people? No.'

'Look, we're about to be joined by the police.' The Englishman gestured with his chin. Rosenharte turned to see a navy-blue Alfa Romeo threading its way through the scrap iron. 'Be at the Ristorante Grand Canale by nine thirty. Take a table outside, on the canal pontoon. Just make it seem as though you happened on the restaurant by chance. You got that?' He punched him lightly on the shoulder. 'Good fellow – everything will be okay.'

Rosenharte had seen the restaurant on the canal and thought that it looked expensive. He was about to protest, when one of the boys shouted at them to take up the slack

on the chain and begin hauling the body out of the water. They both looked over the quay to see that it had snagged on a protruding stone. At that moment two policemen jogged from their car to help pull the man over the edge. The Englishman knelt down and began rhythmically pumping at the man's back. Water began to dribble from the mouth but when the cough he was hoping for didn't come, he rolled the man over, felt his pulse and listened to his chest. His hands moved expertly around the body, at one point slipping inside his jacket. Then he took hold of the nose and chin and pushed the head back slightly. No sooner had he touched the man's lips with his own than he recoiled, wiping his mouth furiously on his shirt and spitting on the ground. One of the policemen attempted to take over, but the Englishman pulled him back saying there was something wrong. '*Attenzione, Signore, non e buono.*'

A sense of contagion swept the boys who had just clambered out of the water and they all began to back away from the body. Rosenharte looked down with a candid lack of emotion at first but then bafflement and shock hit him. He wondered what the sudden extinction of this ordinary human being meant for him. Things like this didn't just happen.

From the warehouse, Robert Harland watched the police car with Rosenharte inside disappear through the Old Port gates, followed by the ambulance carrying the body, and considered whether his operation was compromised. He too was certain that the struggle with the man on the pier and the death were significant. He turned to Cuth Avocet – the gaunt figure known throughout British SIS as the Bird – who had slipped up a back stairway to join them in the dusk of the old leather store. 'What the hell was that about?' he asked.

'Search me,' said the Bird. 'I guess we'll know a bit more when Jamie reports back.'

'At least he was in position,' Harp said.

'Point taken,' said Harland. He looked out over the water. 'We'd better get back to the van and start preparing the watch on the restaurant.'

'The fellow's hardly going to feel like meat and two veg after someone's just tried to do him in,' said the Bird lazily.

'It didn't look as though he was trying to kill him,' said Harland. 'I watched the whole thing. At the end Rosenharte was trying to help him. Let's be going.'

The Bird put out an arm. 'Perhaps you should wait for the area to clear first. There's a couple of bogies down there.' He pointed to two men who'd materialized from beneath them and were making for the dock gates.

'That makes . . .'

'Fourteen,' said Harp.

'So now we know what we're up against,' said Harland.

Half an hour later, Harland sat in the back of the black Volkswagen van with Jamie Jay, sorting through the contents of the black leather wallet that was still swollen from immersion in the Adriatic. Harland held up an identity card to the light and read out the name Franciscek Grycko. 'What's a bloody Pole doing here? The Stasi and the Polish spooks are barely on speaking terms. Normannenstrasse wouldn't involve them in something like this. They're considered far too insecure.'

Jay read one of the business cards, which had fallen out in a little wad. 'It says Grycko is a sales representative of a shoe business – International Quality Shoes, Wroclaw.'

'Shoe business!' said Harland contemptuously.

'There's no business like . . .' Seeing Harland's face Jay stifled the joke.

'It's a pity you didn't get his passport,' Harland said.

Jay looked offended. 'You try kissing a dead shoe salesman with vomit in his mouth and see how long you can stand feeling him up at the same time. As things are, I probably established some kind of record out there.'

'You think they knew each other?'

Jay shook his head. 'Rosenharte said the man had an attack of some sort – practically fell into his arms foaming at the mouth.'

'We saw it from the warehouse. I got the impression he was just trying to speak to him. What about the taste you mentioned? You think it was poison?'

Jay wrinkled his nose. 'Dunno. *I* feel okay.'

'Good. So who's monitoring his phone at the hotel?'

'Cuth has gone to take over from Jessie.'

'Christ, I hope Jessie's changed by now.'

'Of course. She'll look just the part. Rosenharte's going to fall in love all over again.'

'We don't need him to. All that matters is that the Stasi believe she really is Annalise.' Harland noticed the doubt in Jay's eyes. 'What?' he demanded.

'Well, there's so much that is out of our control.'

'It's an intelligence operation, for Pete's sake, Jamie, not a bloody garden party.'

'Well, we've done our best with the letters and Jessie, but in the end it all depends on Rosenharte's reaction.'

'Right,' said Harland. 'If for one moment he looks like he doesn't recognize her, or gives the slightest hint she isn't Annalise, he's lost and might as well defect tonight. He won't last a minute under Schwarzmeer's interrogation.'

'Schwarzmeer?'

'Yes, Brigadier-General Julius Schwarzmeer, director of the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung.' He paused and looked at Jay's eager face. 'Sorry, I forget that you're rather rusty on all this. Still, it's good of you to give your time like this.'

'The HVA is the foreign arm of the Stasi – a sub-section, right?'

'Yes, they're in the same building in Normannenstrasse and the HVA has officers in all the Stasi regional headquarters.'

'The same people, then?'

'The HVA are better trained, better paid and allowed to travel to the West. The ordinary Stasi officer has to make do with the occasional holiday in Bulgaria.'

'And the purpose of all this? I mean, I get the immediate aim, but what's the bigger picture?'

'If it comes off, you'll see. It may even help in your patch.'

'With all respect I very much doubt Oman is going to benefit from this.'

'You'd be surprised. Shake the sand out of your boots, Jamie. There's a lot to connect the problems in your part of the world with the Stasi. That's what this operation is about. That's why I have the chief's blessing and why the Joint Intelligence Committee so eagerly await the results of our efforts here tonight.' He stopped. 'Look, I'd better be getting along. I want to give the wallet to the Italians and I'm interested to hear what they've got to say about Rosenharte's state of mind after that business out on the pier.'

They climbed out the back of the van together. It was almost dark by now. Harland noticed that huge thunderclouds had formed and trapped the heat in the city. The last light from the west touched their summits and gave each a rosy peak.

Jay set off in the direction of the Grand Canal while Harland turned from the sea and headed for an old insurance building near the Carabinieri headquarters, where Ludovico Prelli was running the Italian surveillance

operation as a personal favour to Harland.

On reaching the building he passed a security check at the door and leapt up the echoing stairway to the first floor, where two men inspected his diplomatic passport. He was directed through a wide passage that was filled with some of Prelli's team of watchers. From within Prelli's office, a little way along the passage, Harland heard the low, humorous growl of Alan Griswald, his CIA counterpart in Berlin, who had excused himself from a family holiday in Venice to be in Trieste for the next twenty-four hours.

'Hey there,' said Harland. 'What news from the Rialto?'

'Nothing, 'cept I doted on your very absence, Bobby,' replied Griswald.

'It's good to have you here. Thanks for coming.'

'It was wonderful but I couldn't look at another Tintoretto ceiling.'

'Has Ludo filled you in on what just happened in the Old Port?' Harland shook Prelli's hand and gave him the wallet. 'He was a Pole named Grycko. A shoe salesman. Does that mean anything to you?'

Griswald shook his head. 'What did he die of?'

'Heart attack, maybe. He had a lot of saliva around his mouth. Maybe poison was involved, but my man tried to give him the kiss of life and he seems to be okay. Anyway, we'll have the post-mortem results by tomorrow. Right, Ludo?'

'No, by this evening, I think,' said the Italian.

Harland sat down. 'What did the police think of Rosenharte? What was his mood like when they took him back to the hotel?'

The Italian pressed his fingertips together and looked thoughtful. 'The police say they thought that he did not want to show what he was thinking. He was shocked but

he controlled himself, like you English.' He smiled at Harland.

Harland nodded, picked up the straw hat, which had been retrieved from Molo IV, and examined the inside rim. 'I wonder who the hell he was,' he said.