
Opening Extract from...

I Can't Begin to Tell You

Written by Elizabeth Buchan

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MICHAEL JOSEPH

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Chapter One

Day One

Kay Eberstern was moving as unobtrusively as she could manage through the tongue-shaped wood of ash and birch which ran alongside the lake on her husband's Danish estate. It was five o'clock on an early November evening in 1942.

It was imperative not to be seen.

At this time of the evening the men working on the estate went home and they would be taken aback if they caught sight of Kay lurking here. They would ask: 'What is the master's wife doing?' If it were peacetime, they might conclude that she was meeting a lover. But it was not peacetime. It was war, Hitler's war, and British-born Kay had got herself caught up in it. If she was spotted, gossiped over, or betrayed, there could be, almost certainly would be, serious repercussions for the Eberstern family.

Her orders had been to wait for an hour every evening in the wood at Rosenlund, for up to three days. Here she was to rendezvous with 'Felix', a British-trained agent who, if all had gone to plan, would have arrived in the area in order to set up resistance operations. She had also been warned that the plans might go awry and the mission aborted. The agent was being parachuted into Jutland and faced a difficult sea journey to Zealand and a subsequent cross-country one into the Køge area.

Kay could have no illusions as to what might happen to Tanne and Nils, her children, or to Bror, her husband. Everyone knew that the Danish police weren't backward in coming forward in rounding up anyone involved in this sort of activity and handing them over to the German *Gestapomen*.

Was outraged decency a sufficiently good reason to put Tanne and Nils, and her marriage to Bror, at risk? Was her refusal to tolerate evil, cruelty and a creeping fascism worth it?

Being seriously apprehensive was a new and unwelcome sensation and Kay was struggling to master it. If her task hadn't been so crucial, and in other circumstances, she might have set about analysing its effects. Damp palms and a queasy stomach were predictable. Less so, were the upsurges of bravado followed by the slump into panic. Like a disease, fear caused weakness and debilitation.

The winter was gearing up and, at this time of the evening, it was growing cold. She pushed her gloved hands into her pockets. Tomorrow, *if* there was a tomorrow, she would take pains to kit up more warmly. It hadn't occurred to her until she was actually standing and freezing in the wood that she should think practically and prepare. For a start, she needed a torch.

Why was she here?

What was happening back at the house? Had she been missed yet? Birgit was preparing dinner and Kay had been careful to tell her that she hadn't been sleeping well – not an untruth – and would be taking a nap.

An owl hooted: a hollow, eerie sound.

Kay shifted uneasily.

Two years ago, on 9 April 1940, Hitler marched into Denmark and declared it a Protectorate with a special blood-brother relationship with the Reich, completely ignoring the non-aggression pact which he had signed with Denmark.

It looked as though the Danes had been caught napping.

Rumours of Hitler's intentions had been circulating for months. Kay had turned into an obsessive listener to the BBC while it reported what was happening in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland – but in Denmark, even with Germany just next door, events had seemed removed, almost remote. She and Bror took their places at the breakfast table early on that

April morning, he pale and grim, she flushed and on edge. They gazed at each other and Kay imagined she heard in her head the appalled cries of protest at this new arrangement of Europe.

It had taken all day to get a phone connection to her mother in England. Fretful, anxious hours, and lipstick-stained cigarette butts were heaped in the ashtray by the time she got through.

'Kay . . .' Her mother was on the verge of weeping, which was unlike her. 'Your sisters and I have been desperate to hear from you. We've heard the news. Are you all right?'

'Are *you* all right?'

It was baffling how such important conversations could be reduced to the basics.

Kay searched to make the verbal connection mean something. 'We're getting over the shock.'

'Darling, couldn't you come home?'

Home.

She thought of Piccadilly Circus, of the lisle stockings she used to wear, of nips of sherry in meanly sized glasses and overdone beef for Sunday lunch, and of her mother standing in the passageway of her tiny cottage at the end of a waterlogged lane clutching the telephone receiver. She thought, too, of her mother's deferential, polite widowhood lived out on the edges of a society that didn't rate widows very highly.

Coming to live in Denmark, she had left all those things behind.

'Kay, I wish you didn't live so far away. I wish . . . I wish . . . I don't want to die without seeing you again.'

'You're not going to die, Mother. Do you hear me?'

Her mother pulled herself together, as Kay knew she would. 'I've taken in two little boys, evacuees. The bombing is so bad in London and they're sending all the children into the country. They had fleas! Imagine! They don't speak the King's English. But I'm getting used to it . . .'

The timed call limped to its three-minute limit.

England was cut off.

Kay shook herself, determined not to dip into homesickness. Her life was here now, in Denmark.

How hard it had been to keep the homesickness and misery at bay when she first arrived as a nervous and badly dressed bride. Having met Bror at her friend Emily's twenty-first dance, she had married him only six months later. It had been a fast and exciting transition. Too rapid, perhaps? Although she was deeply in love and saw her new life as an opportunity to be grasped, she had been ignorant of the battle she would face in turning herself into a woman capable of running Rosenlund. The Ebersterns expected conformity and there were times when she had had to fight to subdue her rebellion. There had also been occasional clashes with Bror, whose politics were more old-fashioned than hers.

Yet in those early days her senses had been stoked and stroked by physical love, by the sights and scents and tastes of a different country, by the challenge of mastering the Danish language and customs. It had been a time of languor, of sensuality and of plenty, when the glittering mysteries of ice and fog during the long dark Danish winters offered some compensation for the occasional moments of sadness.

Inside Kay's walking shoes, her toes were cramping.

Sweat had gathered at the bottom of her spine and the waistband of her skirt was unpleasantly damp. The truth was that she was frightened. Truly terrified she had made the wrong decision.

To steady herself, Kay started counting up to ten.

One . . . two . . .

They were lucky at Rosenlund. The war had not really hit them here yet – or in Køge, the ancient fishing port just three miles to the east. Only a short train ride from the capital, Rosenlund still could, and did, function along traditional rural lines. The seasons dictated its agenda. So it had been easy, and

natural perhaps, to duck away from the worst and for family life to continue, not so much blithely, but removed.

All the same. All the same . . . was a refrain that ran frequently through Kay's mind.

Elsewhere, Danes who opposed the Directorate were being rounded up. There were reports of torture and of murder in the streets and in the cells of Vestre prison in København (as Kay had learned to call it). Others were holed up in houses which they trusted to be safe, only to be betrayed by fellow Danes, the so-called *stikker*.

In the early days of their love affair, Bror told her: 'In Denmark it is a point of honour to care for our communities.'

Then, she believed him.

Anyone could see that in giving Bror possession of the eighteenth-century ochre-painted house, with its farmlands and woods occupying a fertile curve outside Køge, fate had dealt him a royal flush.

She had only to conjure the image of his tall, fair figure standing by the window in the elegantly proportioned drawing room, looking out across the lake to the fields and wooded clumps, to hear him say: 'As long as one field lies against another supporting it, there I shall be . . .' It was the voice of a man at ease with his task, caught up by an urgent, emotional, almost mystical, union with the land.

No one could accuse Bror of not caring for his inheritance.

'Three,' she muttered to herself. 'Four.'

Think of something else . . .

The early days . . .

Bror wooed Kay with stories of the Danes. Obviously. He told her of Vikings, of fishermen, artists, designers, navigators, wireless inventors, democrats. He told her of heroes and their voyages, of the Danes' ongoing tussle with the sea.

He described how the sea turned iron grey in winter and brilliant blue and amber in summer. He explained the geographical oddity which meant the Baltic froze in winter because

it wasn't very salty. He singled out the pebble beaches, the pines, the wild myrtle and gorse and the tiny islands which peppered the coastline.

He told of being the small boy, then the teenager, who got up before light and went out with his father to shoot duck on the mist-shrouded marshes. The making of a crack shot.

The salt tang. The silence. The swoop of the birds. The beating of their wings.

Almost word for word, Kay remembered what he said.

Bror painted a land of cool, clean beauty and astringent winds . . . all of which Kay discovered to be true when it became her home and she found happiness.

Bror Eberstern, her husband. To outsiders he was a courteous landowner, with a laconic, sometimes brusque, manner of which they could be afraid or daunted. Only a few intimates knew of his gentleness and tenderness and the reserve which masked his feelings.

No man was an island and it followed that no woman was either. Habit, children, their shared bed, their shared days, their deep feelings for each other – these created the ties which had grown thicker and tougher over the years. Yet Bror had gone and made a decision, a political one, which had the power to change her life.

Kay was angry about it. Bitterly so.

She shifted position, kicking up the undergrowth which smelled of leaf mould mixed with recent rain. So much of life had its scents and stinks: newborn babies, roasting pork, bad drains, fresh bread, the glamorous and addictive aroma of Turkish cigarettes, the tanning lorry, pink and white sweet peas. So did waking early in the morning to a world cleansed by the dark, to recently polished leather shoes, Bror's aura of tweed and tobacco . . . To be conscious was to engage with sensations in which she took endless pleasure. To be alive was a gloriously tactile experience, gloriously absorbing. Any eloquence she

might summon to describe what she was experiencing faltered in the face of the shimmery intensity of her feelings.

Five forty-five. Fifteen more minutes before time was up.

In wartime, the senses were assaulted in new ways. People were less clean, less well fed. Poverty and scarcity smelled different.

If poverty smelled, did fear smell too? These days fear and suspicion were everywhere. Danish police were checking every traveller on trains and on boats and ferries. *Gestapomen* patrolled the ports. Then there were the *stikker*. Nosy. Officious. Highly dangerous. And you never knew where they were.

That *stikker* were a big problem wasn't surprising. Their equivalents would be everywhere, including Britain. No society was incorruptible and no one's motives were unadulterated. When Kay's father lay dying, he let slip to his daughter a little of what he had learned amid the mud and the blood of the Great War: 'When you are cold and hungry and frightened . . . or wounded, you don't care about political philosophies or the passions which drive them. They fall away. You want to survive and you will sacrifice most things to do so . . .' Watching his features drain of life, she cried helplessly. At the time, her grief was too overwhelming for her to examine what her father had meant but the halting words must have rooted in her unconscious mind for she remembered them now.

A grey, insubstantial mist which had previously settled over the lake was shifting. The darkness folded down. There were noises which she half recognized, half not, for, in her state of heightened awareness, they appeared to be extra loud and ominous.

Time?

Five minutes to go. The knot in her chest slackened for she doubted Felix would turn up now – whoever he was. A hero? An opportunist? A non-conformist? A communist? It was common gossip that it was only the communists who demonstrated any open resistance in Denmark.

In the two years since Denmark had been occupied Kay had lived in a bubble. It had taken the lunch with Anton, Bror's cousin, for her to understand that some men and women were responding to the need to be decent and, believing their government to be supine, were taking matters into their own hands.

If that was so, what did Bror's actions make him?

Asking and answering the question made Kay feel dangerously out of kilter.

Crack.

What was that? Heartbeat accelerating, Kay whipped round. Nothing. Breathing out slowly, she refocused on the lake. The mist had now cleared and the light from the stars nipped and bobbed on the water.

Would Felix be tall, short, old, young? Was he Danish? Probably. Otherwise the language barrier would be too difficult. Even after twenty-five years in Denmark, Kay still spoke with a foreign inflection.

Time was up.

She was off the hook for today and, for all that she had resolved to be strong and resolute, she was thankful.

Glancing over her shoulder, she moved off in the direction of the house.

. . . 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag . . .' the ghost of her father sang in her ear in a cracked baritone. 'Can't you be quiet, dear?' said her mother . . .

Immersed in her marriage as Kay had been since she arrived here twenty-five years ago, occupied by motherhood and life at Rosenlund, she'd found that the power of England to evoke an intense response in her had diminished. Yet, since that April morning in 1940 when Hitler marched into Denmark, she had been winded at odd moments by homesickness – its jolt speeding through her body in an almost physical manner. 'Plucky little Britain is punching above its weight,' said Anton and she wanted to cry out: 'My country!' Then she remembered. No, England wasn't her country any longer. Denmark was.

Remember that.

Even so, she found herself wanting to rap people on the chest and to say: 'Do you understand Britain has gone it alone?'

Here in this wood, where Danish sphagnum moss lapped around her shoes and the smell of water pricked in her nostrils, Kay would have given much for the sight of the damp ox-eyed daisies and rose-bay willow herb growing outside her mother's cottage . . . to be sitting with friends in a dark, smoky Gaumount cinema . . . to be rattling along in a red London bus, to be dancing to the band in the Savoy in someone's arms – preferably Bror's but those of any warm, handsome male would do for that moment. It would mean being part of a nation who knew where they were. *Fighting Herr Schicklgruber.*

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Go home.

Chapter Two

A couple of weeks ago, out of the blue, Anton Eberstern, Bror's first cousin, had rung Kay at Rosenlund to invite her to lunch at one of København's most talked-about restaurants.

She went.

The restaurant was the sort of professional enterprise in whose cosmopolitan gloss was embedded the famous Danish *hygge* – a cultivated cosiness designed to shut out the world's troubles. *Hygge*, Kay reckoned, was the Danish riposte to the wear and tear of cruel winters, a fragmented territory and an often hostile sea.

Bror was going off on a ten-day fishing trip on Jutland with his cousins, the Federspiels, but he dispatched Kay to act as his eyes and ears. 'Anton must be up to something,' he said with the curious expression that she could never get to the bottom of. They occasionally discussed the antipathy between Bror and Anton – or, at least, Kay tried to discuss it, but she never got very far since Bror's response tended to be anything but rational. 'I don't think he's ever got over the fact that I have Rosenlund,' he once admitted. 'And he's rotten to women.' Kay had laughed and informed Bror that he had just made Anton seem twice as attractive. A womanizer with a slight grudge. 'Every woman in Denmark will make it her mission to heal him.'

The train had been crowded, as was usual these days, and the talk in the carriage had been of the watered-down milk which had become the norm and the difficulty of obtaining petrol. In København itself there were German soldiers in the streets, older and shabbier than might have been expected from the reputedly smart-as-paint *Wehrmacht*.

When Anton got up to greet her in the restaurant, she was startled by his neat blond moustache. 'That's new.'

'Admiring my beauty. Don't frown, darling. It's my tribute to Herr Hitler.' He smiled but not with huge amusement. 'Camouflage in war is sensible.'

She peered at Anton.

The cousins may have borne a family resemblance – the jawline, the blondness, a certain facial expression. That was deceptive. Temperamentally, they were chalk and cheese.

Anton was shorter and of slighter build than Bror. When not in his uniform, he displayed a fondness for cashmere coats, Savile Row tailoring and custom-made shoes. He loved political gossip and diplomatic intrigue and was well informed. He made the best of lunch companions.

In comparison to Rosenlund, Anton's house and land were modest – there being only a small acreage with which to enjoy a mystical relationship. If he minded – as Bror suggested – he never gave the slightest indication to Kay. A bachelor, he concentrated on love affairs, good wine, cigars and the flowers which he grew in his famed hothouses. To receive one of Anton's bouquets was said to be a signal for seduction. Life was too serious to be serious, he told Kay. She believed him until she grew wiser and more sceptical. Anton was a colonel in Danish military intelligence and, presumably, somewhere in the mix of charm and conviviality was a professional.

Anton ordered for them both.

Over the fish soup, he regarded Kay with his customary combination of overt lust and admiration. As the bride, Kay had found Anton's behaviour unsettling. These days, she found his lightness of touch attractive. Once or twice she had asked herself if his obvious admiration pandered to her vanity. Just a little? More than a little?

Anton raised a glass of Chablis. 'The hat is good, Kay. Blue on blonde hair is magnetic. Did you buy it on one of your little trips to Paris?'

The hat was royal blue with a black feather and wispy netting and nestled on Kay's piled-up hair. The effect was particularly good with the Eberstern pearls round her neck, something she knew perfectly well when she dressed for this meeting.

'Yes,' she said and sighed, remembering wet streets, perfume, garlic soup, making love with Bror in a hotel room. 'I miss Paris.'

'Did you wear it to seduce me?'

'Oh, the masculine mind.'

'Are you sure you didn't? Anything can happen after lunch, you know.' He held her gaze. 'I love you, Kay, for how quickly you stopped being British and dowdy after you came here.' There was a tiny pause. 'How are things at dear old Rosenlund?' A further pause. 'And dear old Bror? How's he taken it all?'

Bror had been angry and unsettled by the German takeover of the country. 'Think of the numbers, Kay,' he'd said in response to her frantic question as to why no one had gone out and fought. 'There are seventy-five million Germans and only four and a half million of us. Who do you expect to win? Who? Tell me . . .' He'd grasped her by the shoulders. '*Tell me*.'

She'd looked up at him. 'But not too . . .' The words were stillborn.

Geography and politics did not make up the whole story for Bror. There was also a question of kinship. The Ebersterns had German relations and knew Germany well. It was logical, Kay told herself. Inevitable. Bror wasn't British or American and part of his psyche responded to the Germanic traditions. Over the generations, German wives and husbands had come to live at Rosenlund, leaving echoes in the house and on the land. No wonder Bror's reaction to the Reich's presence was complex and, almost certainly, fraught with tensions.

Discussing Bror with Anton was tricky and she avoided it when possible. 'Making-do, like everyone else. Some of the men are trickling away to work in Germany.'

'Dear, oh dear,' said Anton.

She didn't mention that they had been forced to cut back on expenditure or, now short-handed, Bror got up earlier, held daily meetings with Arne, his foreman, and worked later to keep it all going.

The waiter topped up the glasses.

'Do you know what he has been up to?'

She sensed that this was a loaded question and instinct told her to keep her reply neutral. 'Business trips up here. Out in the fields. Talking to Arne. The usual.'

It wasn't quite true. With a touch of apprehension, she recollected Bror had – unusually – taken to closeting himself in the estate office to make phone calls. Once, she had answered the house telephone to an official-sounding voice asking to speak to her husband. That had been followed by an unexpected trip to København.

Anton chose his moment. 'Have you heard about the Declaration of Good Will?'

Something clicked. This lunch had been plotted out – a manoeuvre. More likely than not, she was being used to get at Bror for some purpose.

Anton continued: 'It's been drawn up by the Agricultural Ministry to keep the Germans quiet. Landowners have been asked to sign it. Has Bror mentioned it?'

The information came as a shock – and she was forced to take a moment before asking: 'What are you trying to tell me?'

Anton took on board her reaction. 'Have you heard about it?'

'I haven't, no.' She ran her finger around the rim of her wine glass and it gave off a tiny shriek. 'But if I had . . . ?'

He shrugged. 'If you sign a document such as the Declaration you are on the record. The Nazis are brilliant at records. I thought you should know.'

'Anton . . . ?' He was making her uneasy. 'Why should I know this?'

'Ask Bror.'

'I will.' Kay hoped her smile would mask her sudden terror that Bror had done something stupid. 'And where do *you* stand?'

She expected . . . well, what? A riff on the virtues of keeping one's head down? The impossibility of Denmark doing anything but what it was doing. Perhaps even admiration and support for the Reich? It was what many Danes believed.

His gaze shifted around the room and then focused hard on her face. 'Kay, the situation in Denmark is dismal but there are alternatives.'

She could not have been more surprised. 'Meaning?'

'This is for your ears only.' He waited for the implications to fall into place. 'Understood?'

An astonished Kay nodded. Anton poured out the last of the wine with his usual dispatch.

'Danes can't fight in the conventional way,' he said. 'But there are growing numbers of those opposed to the Nazis hiding up in Sweden and England. Some of them who've managed to reach London are being trained in undercover work. Intelligence-gathering, sabotage, mustering underground armies.'

It was as if an earthquake had shaken the restaurant and Kay was wandering, dazed, through the rubble. 'But isn't the Danish army working for the Nazis? Aren't you?'

'I'm working alongside . . .' Anton dropped his searchlight scrutiny. 'Everyone has to be very, very careful. They are not kind to what they call enemy terrorists.'

Kay dredged her memory. Not long ago, a story had done the rounds about a British-trained parachutist jumping out of a plane over Jutland and his parachute failing to open. His smashed body had been discovered by the authorities and the reprisals, once they had rounded up anyone they thought might have been involved, were very bad.

'So, in England . . . ?' she murmured.

'You miss it?' Anton must have caught her confusion and nostalgia.

'Yes. When the war began, I was horrified, of course. But since the invasion of Denmark I feel differently.' She tucked a strand of hair back into her chignon. 'Not surprising, is it?'

He was sympathetic, almost tender. 'It makes you realize what it means to you?'

'Yes. Big events do.'

Anton lowered his voice. 'Denmark is not high on the Allies' agenda. Even so, the British, including these people I was talking about, will give some support if we can get organized here. Unfortunately, this means they will interfere in ways we don't necessarily like but . . .' He shrugged. 'Can't be helped.'

Her bewilderment more or less under control, Kay strove to understand the implications. 'Surely, if there's trouble in Denmark, it will tie up the German troops here even though they are needed elsewhere.'

It was a small triumph of strategic thinking.

'So . . .' Anton gave one of his smiles. 'You do keep up.'

'Anton, look at me.' He obeyed immediately. 'You know I could betray you.'

The handsome features darkened. 'But you won't, Kay. Because you're British. Because you're no fascist.' Again, the tender note sounded. 'Because your heart beats to an English drum.'

She flinched.

Two tables away a couple blew kisses at each other. Across the room a man in a loud tweed suit was eating a solitary meal.

'These people you talk about in England . . . ?'

He got her gist. 'Who are they? A curious bunch. Bandits operating in the shadows. From what we can gather, and we are not supposed to know about it, there's an outfit based in London which trains men – and women – for undercover operations and infiltrates them into occupied countries. It has Prime Minister Churchill's backing . . . being a bit of a boy scout himself, he's very keen on it. We've seen it referred to in one report as the "SOE".' He spread his hands as if to say: *God*

knows what that stands for. 'But intelligence chatter has picked up talk about "The Firm". Its existence is top secret.'

'How did you make contact?'

'Darling Kay, the first rule is to never ask questions.'

'But you're taking a risk telling me. A big one.'

'Calculated, Kay.'

She stirred in her seat. Fingered the pearls at her neck. She had the oddest notion that Anton had unearthed an element in her of which she had not been aware.

'All sorts of things are needed. For instance, if we are going to work with the British we need safe houses for agents to hide up in. I've already organized one or two in Køge.' He stared at her and she felt, suddenly, older, more experienced, more laden with knowledge than she had ever imagined. 'You get the picture?'

She glanced up at the ceiling of the restaurant, its decorative plaster work reminding her of whipped cream. God only knew how it would survive if København was bombed like London.

Sense prevailed.

'If you're asking me, I can't,' she said. 'The children. Bror.'

'Tanne is twenty-four. Nils is twenty-two. Hardly children. And Bror . . .' Anton dismissed him with a gesture.

Bror had done something. But what?

Kay collected her wits. 'No,' she said.

Anton allowed a long moment to elapse into which she read disappointment, a slight contempt.

'I understand . . .'

It was clear that he didn't.

Anton snapped his fingers at the waiter, asked Kay if she wanted anything and ordered a double brandy for himself, then launched into a description of the *fester-kinder* party recently held by his neighbours . . . the buffet, the wines, the conversations, the nightmare of transport without petrol. He was at his most brilliantly diverting and it meant nothing.

'I must go,' she said at last. 'I'm sorry.'

'Don't be.' His lids dropped over his eyes. 'There is one thing . . . Some pamphlets need delivering to Lippiman's bakery in Køge.'

'That's simple,' she said and held out a hand. 'Give them to me.'

He raised his eyes. 'I don't think you understand, darling.'

Then she did.

'The previous courier was caught,' continued Anton. 'I need someone to pick up from the contact at the station and deliver them. Lippiman does the rest.'

The hidden parallel world in which Anton dealt was beginning to piece together. 'Mr Lippiman!' She glanced down at her left hand where the ring with the Eberstern diamonds caught the light. 'How surprising people are. I thought I knew him.'

'You thought you knew me.'

Kay sat very still. 'This is really you, Anton. I had no idea.' Something was shifting in her mind . . . but what? 'Why did I have no idea?'

'No one ever knows anyone.'

'Anton, what is Bror up to?'

He sat back in his chair. Easy and amused. Malicious. 'Ask him.'

There was a silence.

'I *really* must go.'

'Of course.' He reached over and captured one of Kay's hands. 'Would you do this? Just this once? The courier will wait on the platform for the afternoon train with a basket. It's just a matter of you taking the basket and dropping it in at the bakery on the way back.'

What had Anton done to her? She felt newly connected, but also disorientated – as if she had been pushed out of the shadow into blinding sun.

'It's very simple, Kay.'

With an excitement that was almost erotic, Kay allowed her hand to remain in his. 'If I am caught?'

'Ah.' He retrieved his hand. 'Then I would deny everything and swear my undying support of the Reich. Which means I'm unreliable and you are on your own. Understood?'

The girl standing on the platform where the Køge train was waiting was roughly the same age as Tanne – far, far too young to be putting herself in danger.

Kay's excitement drained and a faint nausea replaced it.

Someone should tell her. Someone should take her in hand and explain what it would mean to be found out. Where was her mother?

A basket was parked by the girl's feet and she was wearing inadequate-looking boots which Kay feared would let in the cold and wet.

Still some distance away, Kay stopped and pressed a hand to a cheek flushed from the wine at lunch. A couple of German soldiers in their green-grey – *feldgrau* – uniforms swaggered past her. Knowing they were being watched, they talked loudly, made jokes and showed off. Halfway down the platform, they stopped to light up cigarettes.

The girl with the basket stiffened visibly.

No, Kay willed her. *Act normally*.

Grasping her handbag strap, Kay walked up the platform. The girl registered Kay's presence. Then she turned her head away.

The movement exposed a delicate neck and its pale vulnerability triggered a violent reaction in Kay. It was like the moment when she had first held Tanne in her arms and had been overwhelmed by powerful and, as she had discovered, ineradicable impulses to protect her child.

The girl could be Tanne.

And if she had been Tanne?

The image of Rosenlund took shape, with every breath growing brighter and clearer – its high windows, the terraces, the lake, the fields and woods. She heard the sound of the

harvest being brought in, the squeal of the pigs herded up for slaughter, the clunk of the threshing machine. In a terrible old pair of linen trousers, Bror was climbing into the boat with a picnic basket, followed by the children. It was a sunny summer day, and the sun bounced off the water as they rowed over to Princess Sophia-Maria's island in the middle of the lake. She heard their shouts and the yell as one or other of them jumped into the always-freezing water.

Kay wasn't going to endanger them.

Denmark could hold its own. It would survive.

For God's sake.

Turning around abruptly, Kay made her way back down the platform, pushing against the tide of passengers heading for the train.

Common sense had triumphed – a powerful and protective shield which she had raised for the right reasons.

Chapter Three

Day Two

'So there you are,' said Bror. 'I wondered where you'd gone.'

Jacket in hand, Kay swivelled round. Bror was advancing down the tiled passage to the place where the family's outdoor clothing hung on labelled pegs – in Denmark it was important to keep track of warm clothing.

'Goodness, you startled me,' she said.

He observed the jacket in her hand and the brogues on her feet. 'Isn't it an odd time to be going out?'

She glanced at the pegs with the neatly stowed jackets and coats. There was Tanne's Norwegian hat, Nils's green Norfolk jacket bought on a trip back to England, Bror's hunter's jacket.

It was astonishing how, once the mind was made up, the lies slid as easily off the tongue as her breakfast *ymer*. 'The dogs seem restless and I need a bit of fresh air.'

'Do they?' Bror was surprised. 'They were out for hours with me this morning.' He pointed to the door at the end of the passage where the fanlight displayed the intensifying dusk. 'It's too dark and cold, Kay. Leave it for this evening. I'll take them out tomorrow.'

This was the Bror whom she knew so well – whose sweetness and gallantry she knew so well too.

'I don't think you understand. I want a little time to myself.'

He stuck his hands in his pockets, bent his fair head and seemed to be absorbed by the sight of his shoes. 'You can't remain angry with me, Kay. We have to be clever, both of us. Sooner or later you must accept the changes.' She was silent. Bror persisted. 'You're still very angry.'

Yes, she was.

She wanted to tell him that, since their conversation by the lake when Bror had told her the truth, something had changed between them. And something had changed in her, Kay, too. In doing what he had done, Bror had displaced the subtle balance of love and loyalty which had existed between them for so long.

She pulled on her jacket and buttoned it up, tight and hard. 'Yes. Very. Go back to your newspaper, Bror.'

In response, Bror reached behind her for his jacket. Hooking it off the peg, he said, 'I'm not letting you go out on your own. I'll come with you.'

The day after the København lunch, Kay rang Anton from the hall in Rosenlund. A fuzzy image of herself was reflected in the polished hall table while she talked – and it was as if she was watching a stranger. 'I've been thinking things over. A lot of things. Particularly what you told me about Bror.' She gathered her resolve. 'I need more chapter and verse.'

'Talk to him yourself.' Anton's voice sounded hollow down the line.

'Anton . . .'

Anton considered. 'I've got an appointment in Køge,' he said. 'Can you meet me there?'

It was done.

'Kay . . .' Before she put down the receiver, Anton sounded a warning. 'Remember what we agreed?' He was reminding her to say nothing. 'And, Kay, never talk on the phone.'

They met 'by chance' in Køge's main square.

It happened to be market day. Stalls lined the square and seethed with shoppers. Butchers were doing a good business as was the milk stall. Under a striped awning, the baker had laid out a display of Bror's favourite gingerbread which caught Kay's attention.

In uniform, Anton always presented a dapper sight. Out of it,

he blossomed into elegance. Today, since he was on home territory, he had slung a cashmere coat over his suit and a red silk scarf round his neck. Beside this magnificence Kay, in her second-best grey flannel costume with a grey felt hat which dipped over one eye, felt less modish than previously. He kissed her in a more or less cousinly fashion and as he led her to a bench he remarked that the hat wasn't a patch on the Parisian one.

He watched her fiddle with her gloves and waited patiently for her to begin.

'Those pamphlets? What was in them?'

He frowned. 'Don't waste my time, Kay.'

'I wouldn't do that,' she said.

'All right. It was a list of commandments. Don't work for Germany; or if you do, work badly. Join the fight for freedom. We're trying to get the message out to the outlying rural areas.'

After the positive feelings that resulted from not accepting the pamphlets, it had come as a shock to Kay to discover how one small non-action – as small as not stretching out a hand to pick up a basket – could so profoundly unsettle her equilibrium. For it had.

She laced her gloved fingers together. 'Anton, you do understand . . . ?'

But he wasn't interested in her protestations. 'The author was a brave man. He hid the copies in a room full of deadly bacteria in the Serum Institute and risked his life.'

'And the girl? What's happened to her?'

Anton shrugged. 'Not my business. Nor is it yours.'

What was done was done. Kay looked up and over to the canvas awnings flapping in the wind. 'Tell me more about this declaration or whatever it is.'

She knew perfectly well that she had fed Anton an opportunity to indulge in a little malice. He took it. 'How peculiar. You're always at pains to tell me that you two are as thick as thieves. Don't you and Bror . . . er, discuss?'

'That's the point. I can't ask him. He's still away until next

week, seeing the cousins in Jutland. Anyway, even you can appreciate it is difficult for us . . . for me.'

'*Are* you serious, Kay?'

She bit her lip and looked away. The twenty-four hours which had elapsed since her lunch with Anton had seen a crack opening in her loyalties to Bror. 'Yes,' she said.

He shifted closer to her on the bench. 'To repeat what I said at our . . . our delightful lunch . . . After the initial relief that Denmark's occupation would be relatively peaceful, unlike that in France or Poland, many Danes are increasingly questioning the situation. We don't want violence but no one can fail to notice that the British and Americans are both fighting. "Why aren't we in the fight?" these Danes will ask. And "What can we do?"'

A man in a trilby hat stopped to light a cigarette. He glanced at Kay and Anton. Anton fell silent and waited until he was out of earshot.

Touching her arm, he said, 'In your case, you might think: But I'm British and therefore I'm in the fight, but I'm not sure how. Because of the peculiar Danish situation, it isn't clear-cut.'

A woman in stout boots and carrying two milk churns clanked past.

'The British have made it clear to our contacts that they are too tight-arsed to fund an underground army here but they would, nevertheless, like us to provide intelligence and do lots of lovely sabotage. Railways, bridges, factories . . . you can imagine. Naturally, there's a problem. Intelligence and sabotage aren't always compatible because sabotage triggers reprisals and muddies the waters for the intelligence-gatherers.'

She stared at the houses on the opposite side of the square, the autumn sun illuminating the rich reds and burnt siennas of the painted facades. 'Surely it won't make any difference as it's likely there will always be reprisals?'

Anton raised an eyebrow. 'Kay, you've missed your vocation. Listen . . . German troops are constantly in transit to and from Norway. The Nazis also need to maintain garrisons here in case

the Allies invade through this route.' He allowed the last point to sink in. 'Granted, it's unlikely, but the Allies will invade one day, you know. The Germans also need to patrol the shipping routes bringing in the Norwegian minerals which they badly need. Bauxite for aluminium, for example. All of which makes them vulnerable.'

Her eyes narrowed.

She could imagine lines of German troops waiting for trains. Temperatures plummeting. Snow in piles. Breath steaming. Cigarette butts raining down. Grey-green uniforms. The men talking – Suisse Deutsch. Southern dialects. Prussian vowels. A babble. But maybe for those men . . . those boys . . . the Danish skies where the stars and planets burnt in the velvety black would be a reminder of home . . . ?

'You've gone quiet, Kay.'

She stirred. 'The people you're talking about . . . they are brave.'

'Yes.' For once Anton sounded completely sincere.

'Like the girl on the platform.'

'Stop thinking about her.'

She realized then that she envied these unknown people – for their commitment and their immunity to fear which, on some level, they had to have.

'Kay, I want you to think about something. I don't want you to make up your mind, just to think about it. In a few days' time there will be someone who will need a safe house in the area and a place to hide his wireless transmitter. Do you know what that is?'

'To send messages?'

'Good girl. I just want to point out that there are plenty of potential hiding places at Rosenlund.'

Yes. Yes, there were. Hundreds.

How many rooms were there? She could never remember. How many outhouses?

It was possible to spend more than a day combing through

the estate and still not be entirely sure that all of it had been covered. On first arriving at Rosenlund she had existed in a state of constant astonishment and it had taken her a couple of years to adjust to it.

Places to hide a clandestine wireless transmitter?

Kay turned to Anton. 'You love Rosenlund, don't you?'

Anton held out his cigarette case to Kay. She shook her head. He extracted one and lit up. 'Of course I love it. Wouldn't anyone?'

There were the outhouses – lots of them. There were the woods. And the workers' cottages, some of which were already empty because the men had left to work for the Reich.

She combed through the possibilities.

There was the house. Recently repainted in its customary soft ochre, its main rooms faced south towards the lake but others were tucked up under the eaves, or built along corridors infrequently used.

There was the garden. There was the avenue of limes which cast its lure to the walker: *Come down through me to the water's edge*.

There was the lake with Princess Sophia-Maria's island rising out of the winter's green-grey ice or the bright, hard clarity of the summer's blue spectrum. There was the island's summer house – a little decayed, smelling of winter mould and spring rain, rotting a little and home to spiders and their victims but, viewed from the shore, as pretty as a Fragonard fantasy.

If she brought in the bandits from the shadows . . . what then?

She glanced sideways at Anton. He was peacefully smoking his cigarette, one leg hooked over the other. Over the years, she had got him wrong. Maybe, maybe, she had got the other things wrong, too.

'I'll come with you,' Bror repeated. He was already buttoning up his jacket. 'It's too dark for you to be out on your own.'

The heat rose to her face and she turned her head away. 'Like I said, go and read your newspaper.'

But he gave her no choice and, in the end, she whistled up Sif and Thor, who hauled themselves reluctantly from their baskets.

'They don't look restless to me,' he remarked.

They left the house by the back door and walked around the kitchen garden. Kay urged that they should make for the lake. 'The moonlight on the water will make it easier to see where we're going,' she said.

Bror made no comment.

They were used to walking side by side: talking, sometimes linked together and usually with the dogs. Kay couldn't count the times she had only to turn her head and Bror would be there . . . on the cold days when their eyes and noses streamed, in the flat yellow summer sunshine, or on the midsummer nights when the sky was almost too crowded with stars.

They left the gardens behind and struck out along the rough path which was the alternative to the lime walk down to the lake. Sure-footed as ever, Bror set the pace. In the dark, he loomed large and solid.

For the first time ever, she wanted him gone.

Bror sensed her mood. 'You don't have to speak to me . . .' She could tell from his tone that there was a hint of a smile.

When they reached the lake's edge, Kay turned east towards the tongue-shaped wood and Sif and Thor, having woken from their torpor, foraged enthusiastically up ahead. Kay walked rapidly, managing to leave Bror in her wake, and as she neared the edge of the wood she whistled and the dogs came bounding up.

Bending down, she whispered in Thor's tensed, silky ear, 'Rabbits, go.'

The effect was immediate. Thor leaped crabwise, turned and raced along the shore, barking ferociously, with Sif in hot pursuit. The noise was exactly as Kay wished: fit to raise devils.

Bror caught up. 'You're exciting them for no reason.'

No reason?

She imagined the agent who might be mounting vigil among the trees – a man trained into living a secret life, carrying with him a clandestine wireless transmitter. If he was there, and she hoped he wasn't, he was probably cold and hungry and exhausted.

There was nothing she could do about it.

Would his training kick in at the sound of the dogs? Would he conclude: *I am being warned and I'd better get out?*

'Sorry,' she said. 'What's the time, Bror?'

He squinted down at his large square watch. 'Sixish.'

Sounding more conciliatory, she said, 'Perhaps we should go back.'

He caught her by the shoulders and pulled her to him.

Then he let her go.

It was then Kay understood: Bror was desperate to convince her that what he was doing was right. He needed her on his side.

She fell into step beside him. Day Two was over.