

WARTORN

BY DAVID SHIPLEY

PROLOGUE AND CHAPTER 1

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PROLOGUE

MUNICH AIRPORT

The airport is named after Franz Josef Strauss. To most British people, the name Strauss means music, but this Strauss was a politician. He's been dead for years and David Shipley has never heard of him, but that's how it is with politicians – they leave their mark for a long time. And David knows he's thinking about a dead politician to avoid thinking about what he's here for. This visit has been the thing foremost in his mind for more than a year. He's thought about it during the day and dreamed about it at night. Everyone he's told has said, 'Go! Go! Meet them. How can you not?' And here he is at last. And suddenly it doesn't seem quite such an obvious thing to do. What if they don't get on? What if these *others* aren't how he hopes they will be?

He's through passport control. He walked through Customs with no check. He's passed that very special door that always makes him think about birth... and death. The one that tells you, go through and there's no going back. And here he is in the arrivals hall. What he's witnessing is probably happening in every arrivals hall at every airport on every continent. People wrapping their arms around each other. People kissing. People shaking hands. Children rushing up to grandparents and hugging their legs. Some of these people last saw each other a few hours ago and some have not met for weeks, months and even years. But they know each other.

David Shipley's meeting is not like that. He's never met the people he's come to see. Exchanged letters, yes. Spoken on the phone, yes. But never met. In fact, he's only believed in their existence for a very short time. His father used to tell him stories. Stories about his life in wartime, the people he'd met and the things he'd done. But the stories were so far-fetched, David had believed that's exactly what they were... stories. Very entertaining to a small child, but increasingly embarrassing as the child became a teenager and then a man.

Then, in 2001, David's father had died. There'd been a lot of people at the funeral. Not as many as at the state interment of Franz Josef Strauss thirteen years earlier, but almost everyone present when Strauss was laid to rest was there to be seen; to make sure that political transitions didn't leave them out in the cold. To get into the television news programmes and the photographs in the next day's newspapers. People went to Peter Shipley's funeral because they remembered him. With love, with affection, with respect.

At the wake that followed, David mentioned his father's stories to an aunt. She looked perplexed; 'You think he made all that up?' she said. 'You don't think it happened the way he said it did?'

'Not possible. Surely? Behind the lines in Germany during World War II? Fraternising with locals? A love affair with a German woman? You've got to give credit to his imagination. He could have made a living at it. Could have been a writer.'

‘David, you may have a surprise coming. I suggest you take a closer look at what he told you. Put your doubts to one side and examine it as if you were taking a history exam.’

And that’s what he had done. And this was the result... a flight to Bavaria to meet people who had emerged from a life he had believed existed only in his father’s imagination. To meet Greta. Greta was sixteen years older than him, and German – but, if what he believed he had found out was true, Greta was his half-sister.

David looked around the hall again. He saw a face on which the state of nervous doubt precisely mirrored his own. Below it was a square of card. On the card was written his name. *David Shipley*. Taking a deep breath, he set off towards it.

CHAPTER 1

1921 *THE STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS*

Quarnford is a small village – really little more than a hamlet. Today, it's part of the Peak District National Park but Britain had no national parks in 1922. The Americans had Yosemite and, in another decade or so, the idea would spread across the Atlantic, but one hundred years ago the Peak District was very different from today. Locals could scrape a little extra money by working as beaters when the rich outsiders who owned huge chunks of the Peak District brought other rich outsiders to shoot pheasants. Other than that, most got by on what they could make from lead mining and smallholdings hacked out of the moorland. And, of course, from poaching. Survive to the age of seventy and satisfy the inspectors you had no savings and no other source of income, and the old-age pension would come at last to your rescue. But life expectancy in Britain at that time was sixty for women and fifty-six for men, so not many did.

A life like that brings its own worldview. You avoid any cost unless you're certain you can meet it, and one thing you certainly don't do is have a child out of wedlock. Who's going to pay to support the bastard? And so economic reality disguises itself as moral righteousness.

But, lust is lust, and power is power, and weakness is weakness. Henry Clarke was the local postmaster. Twenty years of marriage to Florence had left his domestic passion in a sorry state, but his libido sat up and took notice when

Florence hired Rebecca Taylor as their maid. Plump, innocent and young. What more could he want?

Well, for a start, he could want Florence out of the way. And he got his wish on the one day each week when Florence took the bus into Buxton. It wasn't far, but she was gone for hours. Henry put up the closed sign on the post office, locked the door and took the duster from Rebecca's hand. 'My dear, I have other duties for you.'

Rebecca knew what he wanted, and Rebecca was unwilling. Her mother and all her aunts had warned her what could happen to a maid who fell pregnant. But Rebecca needed this job and, if she lost it, would need a good character or she'd never get another. The weakness was all Rebecca's. Henry had the power. And the lust had Henry.

Rebecca's underwear was the kind known to men of the time as harvest festivals, after the line in the Harvest Festival hymn that runs, "All is safely gathered in." But it was not long before the underwear lay on the floor and the only thing gathered in by Rebecca's thighs was Henry.

When it was over – and it had not lasted long – Henry smothered Rebecca's face in kisses. He didn't quite bring himself to apologise because he wasn't really sorry. And he did it again the following week. And the week after that.

The outcome was inevitable. But by the time she could no longer hide it from Florence, she was nearly twelve weeks gone and it was far too late for any

Quarnford wise woman to remedy the matter. Florence told Henry to absent himself. 'Go for a walk. Don't come back till it's time for supper.'

* * *

A visitor to Quarnford would see a village of perhaps two hundred souls scattered around the junction of two roads with the New Inn at its centre. But that isn't how country parishes work. The national census taken the year before had found forty-two households in Quarnford itself but another 646 in Quarnford parish, scattered in farms and cottages, some of them remote, over the surrounding hills and dales. Florence knew every adult and most of the children in all of those 688 households. She was the postmaster's wife after all. She kept most of them at a distance. She allowed herself friendly relations with only some fifty of Quarnford's women. And of those, just five were close enough to be considered friends.

One of Florence's friends was Madeline Brown. It was Madeline who told Florence what to do. 'Are you going to turn the girl out?'

'That was my first idea. But she's a hard worker and a good girl.'

'A good girl? She...'

'I got the whole story. First out of her and then out of Henry. I'm telling you, none of it was Rebecca's fault. If anybody is to be turned out, it should be Henry. Men! What can you do with them? But he's a good provider and I don't want to face life without him.'

'Right. You know Ada Slack?'

'Her from Flash? Grace's daughter?'

'Her. You didn't see her around for a while... and then you did.'

Florence didn't need anyone to draw her a map. She said, 'She caught for a baby?'

'Don't ask me who the father was because Grace kept it all very quiet. I don't suppose anyone knows except her and Ada. And the man, of course, but I don't imagine he's troubled about it.'

'There isn't a child in that house.'

'They got Mrs Shipley to take it in.'

'Mrs Shipley?'

'She lives in Buxton. She takes children in and raises them as if they were her own. That's how she supports herself. She is a bit fussy who she takes but I reckon she'd think you were okay. You'd have to pay her, of course. But if Grace Slack can afford her, I'm sure you can.'

* * *

Florence made her usual trip to Buxton two days later. This time, Rebecca Taylor went with her. Not to make sure Henry kept his hands off her while Florence was away. Florence wanted to take a look at Mrs Shipley's household and, as a humane woman, she thought it right that Rebecca should see where the child she was going to bear might grow up.

The business part of the deal was quickly settled. Then Mrs Shipley put a cup of tea in front of Rebecca, who was more used to serving than to being served, and said, 'There are some things I need you to understand. Whether it's a boy or a girl, it isn't your child. It's mine. I don't mind seeing you outside somewhere watching the child, as long as you don't do it more than once in six months. On its birthday, if you want you can come and see me, have a cup of tea, and I'll make sure you catch sight of the kid. But you don't bring it a present, you don't talk to it, you don't let it see what you're thinking. Break any of those rules and you will take the child away with you. And I'll never have it back. Do you understand all that?'

Rebecca nodded.

'And do you accept it?'

Rebecca nodded again. In a very quiet voice she said, 'Yes. Yes, I accept.'

As they walked to the bus stop afterwards, Florence said, 'It's very good of her to let you see the child at all.'

'I know.'

Florence put a hand on Rebecca's arm. 'It's for the best. I know it's hard, and none of it is your fault, and if it wasn't for my husband's animal lusts you wouldn't be in this position. But it is for the best. For the child even more than for you.'

'I know.'

* * *

When they got home, Florence told Henry what had been agreed. Henry said, 'Two pounds! Every month! What's she going to be feeding this child on?'

'Two pounds a week, Henry. And six pounds for clothes twice a year. And if the child goes to school, the cost of its books.'

'How am I supposed to find that?'

'You've smoked your last pipe of tobacco, Henry. And you can cut your visits to the New Inn to Saturdays only.'

Henry did his best to look put upon, but really, he felt a bit of a dog. He and Florence had never had a child, even when they'd been regularly active in that department. Now, he'd fathered one. And on one of Quarnford's more desirable females. And he knew she hadn't lain with him willingly. Rape wasn't a nice word, and he wasn't prepared to use it about himself, but he'd certainly forced her. A little shiver ran through him. And he'd enjoyed it. Though he was in no doubt – Florence would make damned sure he never did it again... with Rebecca or anyone else.