

No Place to Run

A Fictional Tale of Evil and Retribution

by

William S. Hochman

Chapter 1

A Fresh Look at an Open Case

It was one of those hot and oppressive summer days in Manhattan where the temperature and the humidity raced each other to the high 90's, making for short tempers in the Midtown South Precinct on West 35th Street, given that the air conditioning in the building had taken an unexpected holiday.

Putting aside, for the moment, one of several open cases that cluttered his desk, Detective Lieutenant Bernard Francis Dolan rescued a day-old copy of the Daily News from a nearby waste basket to check the Yankees' game schedule over the next few days with that of the Cleveland Indians who had battled the Yankees throughout the 1953 season for the best record in the American League.

As far as Bernie Dolan was concerned, although the Yankees had strong and reliable hitters in their lineup, pitching was key to winning the pennant. And he was confident that the "Big Four" of Allie Reynolds, Vic Raschi, Eddie Lopat, and Whitey Ford, the kid from the Astoria section of Queens, who was back from his two-year stint in the Army, would anchor the team's rotation and carry the day, guiding the team, once again, to the World Series against the Brooklyn Dodgers. Nevertheless, as hopeful as he was about Yankee pitching, he could not put aside his concern that the Indians had Bob Feller, Mike Garcia, Bob Lemon, and Early Wynn on the mound.

As he looked over the Yankees' home schedule, he gave some thought to taking in one of the games at, "The Big House in the Bronx," as Yankee Stadium was fondly known, to give short relief from the daily grind of heading up the precinct's Detective Bureau, and easily contemplated the comfort of sitting in the shaded grandstand behind home plate sipping an ice cold Ballantine Beer and cheering yet another Yankee home run. But after a second glance at the open cases on his desk, it didn't take much convincing for the Detective to conclude that now was not the time for baseball, no matter how well the Yankees were playing. And

with that, he tossed the tabloid newspaper back into the waste basket and turned his attention to his work.

The open case that had the Detective's attention usually rested in the bottom drawer of his desk, as he was not anxious to revisit the frustration that troubled him over not being able to close the case even after so many months of investigation with little headway being made to find Jacob Bloch's killer, or learning why he was killed.

As the Detective saw it, there was a cruel irony to Bloch's death because he had not only endured the horrors of the Nazi death camps, but survived to become a respected businessman, operating a small diamond exchange on West 47th Street, just off of 6th Avenue in the heart of the Diamond District, only to be shot and killed, gangland style, in the very city that had given him refuge.

While the investigation remained open with no resolution currently in sight, the Detective had reached certain conclusions based on the evidence, as scant as it was.

First, that Bloch's death was not the result of a strong-arm robbery, or even a mugging, because when his body was found near midnight by a beat cop in an alley off of Canal Street, he was carrying \$10,000 in American Express traveler's checks and 3 packets of unset round and emerald cut diamonds having a value of about \$40,000. Bloch was on his way to meet another diamond dealer at the Metropole Restaurant which was fairly far away from where he was found. Thus, had robbery been the motive for Bloch's death, the traveler's checks and the diamonds would surely have been taken by his killer.

But what Detective Dolan did not yet know was that when Bloch left his apartment in the Chelsea neighborhood and walked to his car to drive to the Metropole Restaurant, he was intercepted by a stranger who spoke quietly to him in German while pressing the business end of a .32 automatic against Bloch's side and forced him to drive to that dark alley off of Canal Street where his body was later found.

The Detective also discounted car-jacking as the motive for Bloch's death. In fact, it was that his car's rear wheels blocked some of the narrow entry into the alley that prompted the beat cop to venture into the alley where he found Bloch. That particular alley had a previously known reputation for drug-dealing, but now was a convenient location during the daytime hours for the sale of knock-off

merchandise from China, such as fake name-brand watches and designer hand bags selling for just pennies of the actual value of the real items. And, the Detective also assumed that Bloch would not have left his car parked in that manner or that far from the restaurant where he was headed.

Detective Dolan also believed that the murder of Jacob Bloch was not just a random killing committed by some violent gang member who was completing his senseless gang initiation, or that Bloch just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Rather, it was his opinion that Bloch was specifically targeted, and that the single shot to the back of Bloch's head was triggered by a very experienced gunman. But why was he specifically targeted? That was the puzzle that troubled the Detective. And, even after so many months, he could still not put the pieces of the puzzle together.

As reluctant as he was to revisit his frustration, he knew that Jacob Bloch's murder wasn't going to solve itself, or by keeping his fingers crossed that some stroke of luck would shine a bright light on the killer. It needed the Detective's attention and his keen investigative skills to bring closure to the open case. And although he believed that he had fully covered all of the evidence and had not left anything unattended, there was always the chance that he had overlooked something crucial that might point him in the right direction. Thus, he would start again at the beginning, and that meant meeting once again with Irving Kasowitz who had been waiting for Jacob Bloch at the Metropole Restaurant the night he was murdered.

Chapter 2

The Meeting with Irving Kasowitz

As soon as the Detective walked out of the Midtown South Precinct into the early afternoon heat and heavy humidity, he abandoned any thought about getting some exercise and walking the ten blocks to the Diamond District. Instead, he had one of the Patrol Officers drive him to Irving Kasowitz's place of business with the small fan attached to the police cruiser's dashboard turned up full.

Detective Dolan had called Kasowitz earlier in the day alerting him that he wanted to talk with him again about Jacob Bloch, and Kasowitz was happy to oblige. He knew the Detective well, as the Midtown South Precinct had the Diamond District under its care. In fact, they were on a first name basis, and he

would do whatever he could to provide any information that might help the Detective solve the open case and bring Bloch's killer to justice.

The problem was that Kasowitz knew little and had few facts about Jacob Bloch's murder, and what he thought he knew was based fairly on speculation or personal opinion drawn from his many discussions with Bloch over the few years of their special friendship. And he had already offered that information to the Detective. So, there was really little in hard facts that Irving Kasowitz could provide. However, the Detective had been solving tough cases long enough to know that, occasionally, the passage of time sparks one's recollection of events or recalls information that might not have been originally shared.

Leaving the police cruiser, the Detective pulled back the heavy bronze-clad entrance door to the Empire State Diamond Company and was immediately spotted by Kasowitz who stepped his way to greet him with quiet humor.

"Well, look who's here. It's my favorite cop," which, overheard by two of his customers, turned their heads inquisitively toward the Detective. Kasowitz then greeted Bernie Dolan with a broad smile, a firm hand shake, and a pat on his shoulder while the Detective whispered,

"You know, Irving, with that kind of introduction, you're going to scare your customers into shopping at your competition," to which Kasowitz replied,

"Good! Then I can close this place and retire to my condo in Boca," bringing soft laughter from both of them.

Leaving the busy main floor to the quiet of Kasowitz's secured office in the rear of the showroom, the Detective, once again, carefully went over what each of them knew about Bloch's murder, but their talk was much more expansive and deliberate than just a repeat of what they had discussed previously months before.

According to Kasowitz, he was waiting for Bloch at the Metropole Restaurant because it was where they met frequently. It was Bloch's favorite restaurant because it reminded him of the restaurants his family often frequented in Berlin before the Nuremburg exclusionary laws went into effect in 1935, disenfranchising Germany's Jewish population and imposing blanket restrictions on them based on anti-Semitic and racist policies and propaganda.

Bloch considered Kasowitz not only an enduring friend, but a confidant with whom he could share very special information, and that friendship was returned in

kind by Kasowitz. Bloch had arranged to meet with Kasowitz on that particular evening because he wanted to discuss some, “business,” as he had put it, before beginning a trip the next day to Hamburg to meet with three men, who, like himself, had survived the camps. Adding to that, Detective Dolan commented,

“Well, he certainly had planned a trip to Hamburg because when we searched his apartment, as part of the homicide investigation, we found a small, packed suitcase on his bed and a Pan American Airlines ticket on the Stratocruiser from Idlewild to Berlin’s Templehof Airport, and a train voucher from there to Hamburg. So, he was just about on his way when he was murdered.”

Kasowitz commented how curious it was that as guardedly open, as Bloch was when they met privately, there was only modest contact between the two of them during the business day even though Bloch’s business, the “Manhattan Diamond Exchange,” was right next door to Kasowitz’s, showroom. That always seemed strange to him because most of the dealers in the district talked frequently with each other during the day about diamond values, pricing, appraisals, and other matters affecting their businesses. But not Bloch. He very much kept to himself and was reticent to a fault.

“Irving, given that you had a very special friendship with Bloch, do you know or, at least, have some idea of what the business was about that he wanted to discuss with you?” the Detective asked.

“I think I do, and I talked about it when we first met, but it might just be speculation on my part. Even so, I’ve thought about it quite a lot over the past months and even though it might be speculation, my gut tells me I’m on the right track. And that’s because of what I learned from my many previous meetings and discussions with Bloch. I believe it had to do with the possibility of Jacob, perhaps, not returning from his trip to Hamburg where he was to meet the men who were in the camps with him, and why he was meeting with them.

“You know,” Kasowitz continued, “Bloch was completely alone. Other than myself, I don’t think he had any other friends, at least that I know of, or ever mentioned by him, and why he chose me as his friend is a bit of a mystery. Perhaps it was because we were both from Berlin and we had that connection. Or, perhaps, the convenience of our businesses being right next to each other.

“At any rate, he lived alone in a small apartment in Chelsea and, as far as I know, had very little outside contact with either of his employees. But Bloch had

me understand that if anything ever did happen to him, he had made arrangements for his business to belong to both of them. That shows you just how alone he was. It also shows what a *mensch* he was, even after all that he had been through. Tell me, Bernie, do you know what a *mensch* is?”

With a slow smile crossing his face, Bernie Dolan answered, “Irv, I grew up in Brooklyn, so yes, I know what a *mensch* is,” and, then, without more, listened intently to Kasowitz explain why he thought his speculation was on the mark.

“You know, Bernie, he had no family. No family at all. His entire family was murdered in the Holocaust, including his wife and children, of whom he rarely spoke because it was such a private and painful subject. In fact, I know so little about them because any time I ventured to ask about them, he’d deflect the question and talk about something else. The subject was just too much for him. And as the only survivor of his entire family, and I mean his entire family, he carried that burden. A kind of survivor’s guilt. Maybe guilt’s not the right word, but I think you know what I mean.”

The Detective nodded his understanding and commented, “That’s a tough burden to bear. Very tough, indeed.”

“But what he was not slow to talk about was a particularly cruel and violent guard at the Mauthausen concentration camp who always carried a heavy club and used it enthusiastically against the prisoners. Bloch was held there for slave labor for over three years working first in the Granite quarries, and later in the munitions factory before being moved to Bergen-Belsen shortly before the end of the war where he was liberated. But it was in the quarries where he experienced the sheer evil of this particular guard and had never been able to put aside the pain and the helplessness of being subjugated to his cruelty. God only knows how he even survived what he went through.

“The guard’s name is Karl Swanick. But, according to Block, he’s had many names because knowing that the war was lost, he deserted the camp and was on the run for a long time. In fact, he even posed for a while as a survivor claiming that he had no identity papers because he dared not display his camp guard identity papers with the Nazi eagle and Swastika stamped on its cover. That would have put his life immediately in danger.

“Bloch and his survivor friends have been on his tail for a long time, but he’s been very elusive. And it’s not to bring him to justice in some court of law.

No, indeed. What I understood from Bloch's talks, he and the others want to find him and provide their own special brand of justice. Who knows what's in store for him if they ever do catch him. And that's what my gut tells me was the so-called business Bloch wanted to discuss with me and why he was going to Hamburg. I believe Bloch and his friends had finally found Swanick and were on their way to get him."

The Detective continued to listen to Kasowitz's theory about why Bloch was headed to Hamburg and, more and more, it seemed to make good sense. It was not something to which he had given much thought to before. But if Bloch and his friends were finally on Swanick's tail, why was Bloch killed in an alley off of Canal Street? The Detective could not yet tie those two events together.

"This guard, Swanick, wasn't even German; he was Bulgarian, but his name had a German extraction. Tell me, Bernie, do you know anything about Bulgarians?"

"Well, growing up in Bay Ridge, I can't say that I knew any Bulgarians, a lot of Irish," bringing a good laugh from both of them and, for just a moment, softening the seriousness of their conversation.

Kasowitz then observed, "It wasn't unusual for the Nazi's to call upon the Bulgarians to do some of their dirty work. It had been going on for years. And since they were actually aligned with the Nazi's during the war, it's no big surprise that Swanick was a Bulgarian.

"Before my family left Germany in 1933, after Hitler became Chancellor, and my father realized that there was no future for Jews in Germany, and the getting out was still possible, and we immigrated to America, many Bulgarians had worked in my father's manufacturing business. They were good workers and very tough guys. For the most part, those that I came into contact with at my father's plant had very little education and, pretty much, just kept to each other as a circle of friends. And, I found it curious that even though my father treated them very well, he was still a Jew, and it was pretty obvious that so many of them bore a deep dislike of Jews and had no use for them. Hesitating for just a moment, he solemnly whispered to himself, "But, then again, who does?"

Hearing the whispered remark, the Detective quickly asked with a hint of hurt in his tone, "Tell me, Irv, does that blanket indictment go for all Americans, as well?"

“C’mon Bernie, you and I know that there’s plenty of anti-Semitism here to go around. How about the private clubs that don’t accept Jews; or the colleges that have strict quotas for admission; or the big firms that have established hiring or promotion exclusions.

“For the most part, a lot of Americans simply tolerate us, whether in the big cities or in the small towns across the country. You know, *Noblesse Oblige*, and all that stuff. Even so, we get along pretty well within the limits of our respective religious and cultural beliefs.

“My friend, I consider you a good friend, and I believe the feeling is mutual. So, let’s not get side-tracked on this issue. And I know very well and understand that when your grandfather came here from Ireland, he was faced with, ‘Irish Need Not Apply,’ signs when he went looking for work. So, I’m not saying that we Jews have a monopoly on hatred and bigotry. It’s just that we’ve had a big share of it, and especially in recent years.”

Nodding his head in a gesture of common understanding, the Detective responded, “Fair enough.”

“You know, Bernie, for the most part, these camp guards never suffered any kind of punishment for what they did. Of course, some were brought to justice, so to speak, but with minor consequences because they convincingly claimed that they were just following orders and had no other choice. And when the war ended, some of them simply went back to where they were from, but most of them scattered elsewhere. And that was that. The war was over and, like it or not, the Allies had much more to do than to invest all of their time and effort in finding and prosecuting these guards. They had way bigger fish to fry. That’s why Bloch and his friends, and so many others like them, took it upon themselves to find them and dish out the punishment.”

“Irv, do you know who Bloch was in league with over the years to find Swanick? Especially, who was waiting for him in Hamburg,” the Detective inquired.

“I sure don’t, and Bloch never shared with me who, exactly, his friends were. Maybe that was his way of protecting them? What I do know is that they were in the camps with him and were also on the receiving end of what Swanick dished out. But as I said, although his discussions with me were quite open, they were still guarded.”

Then, the Detective offered, “You know, Irv, let’s assume that Bloch was the leader of his small group looking for Swanick. If so, maybe Swanick himself, or one or more of his pals who might also have been guards, took it upon themselves to somehow keep an eye on Bloch. And if he got too close to running Swanick to ground, the plan may have been to do away with Bloch for the purpose of scattering his friends. It would have been easy for someone local to keep tabs on Bloch. After all, he was in business right in the middle of New York City and next door to you, and it would have been easy to learn where he lived. That may not be too far-fetched a theory considering what you believe are the facts.”

“Good point, my friend; good point.”

Chapter 3

The Hunt for Karl Swanick

While Irving Kasowitz agreed with the Detective’s theory that Bloch’s death may have scared off his survivor companions in the hunt for the elusive Karl Swanick, quite to the contrary, they were, in fact, even more engaged and determined to run Swanick to ground.

When Bloch did not meet his three friends and collaborators in Hamburg, and there was no further communication at all from him, they knew that something was very wrong. And, it was not lost on them that Bloch may be dead. Their plan to find Swanick had been in the works for a long time, and it would have been completely out of character for Bloch simply to disregard the very plan he designed and be a no-show and incommunicado. Thus, they were prepared to carry it out without him and then quickly disappear from Hamburg, as Bloch had planned. But, as their plan to engage Swanick and deliver their special brand of justice relied on Bloch playing a pivotal role, the plan, without him, became even more problematic. Still, they would carry on, and it was left to one of the three remaining companions to finger Swanick.

From the time that Swanick knew the war was lost and deserted his post, he had wandered about the ruins of Europe keeping as low a profile as possible, so not to be exposed. While still a thug, Swanick was smart enough to show himself as just another displaced person, working wherever he could find work, and a victim of the ravages of war using ethnic Bulgarian aliases such as, Ivan Rashkov and Nikola Stoyanov, and finally having been able to obtain forged identity papers.

And, three years after the war ended, he finally made his way to Hamburg where he was able to sign on to merchant ships and sail away to the presumed safety of the North Sea and the open ocean. But, his ships always returned to Hamburg where he holed up waiting to sign on to yet another ship. It was a simple routine that Swanick always followed.

Between ships, Swanick stayed on the outskirts of Hamburg in rented rooms in cheap boarding houses near the docks where the Elbe River flowed into the North Sea, and did his heavy drinking in small beer halls where he made a few acquaintances with other seamen who, like Swanick, who was then known as, Viktor Dorogov, had good reasons to keep their true identities secret from one another. In other words, men on the run.

Given his reputation in the camps, Swanick assumed that there were men after him and always had his head on a swivel looking for recognizable faces and avoiding situations he could not control. But, his downfall was that he had a loose tongue when he had too much to drink, and the few people he drank with ultimately learned his true identity and that he had been a brutal guard in the camps. Having that information pushed them away from Swanick because of the danger that knowledge posed. They knew that they could be called upon by others to disclose what they knew and, if they refused, they just might simply disappear. But it was also information that could be put to good use for a price. And that tip was how Bloch's companions learned of Swanick's whereabouts, who conveyed the information to Bloch, who then hatched the plan to take down Swanick and mete out his punishment.

The plan was to take Swanick on the run. In other words, to know where he was doing his drinking and where his boarding house was located and take him on his way back to his rented room when his belly was full of beer and, perhaps, a little drunk. It was not lost on Bloch or his companions that even if he was drunk, Swanick was still a brute of a man and able to defend himself. So, taking him would have to be swift and lethal.

Even without Bloch, his companions still planned to take Swanick by lying in wait for him. They then knew from the tipped information that he did his drinking usually at a rundown beer hall called the, "Westerhof," and that the way back to his boarding house from the beer hall was a rough gravel path on the far side of an open field bordered by stands of tall trees. And that night, covered by

darkness and hidden in the tall trees, they waited for him and would spring the trap. It was a simple plan, and a good plan.

But that night, Swanick never took the path back to his rented room. Instead, he walked out of the Westerhof in the opposite direction from his boarding house and made his way down to the docks where the tanker, “Adonis,” was tied up, and on which Swanick had signed on as a Stoker. After resting a while in one of the crew’s quarter’s hammocks, he descended to the belly of the ship to stoke its furnaces so that it would be ready to sail on the early tide. And, early the next morning, the Adonis singled up its lines, left port, and headed out into the North Sea, and then later into the Atlantic Ocean, taking her load of crude oil and other cargo on a long voyage to Argentina. With stops along the way to unload cargo and load additional cargo, and stops on the return trip doing the same, it would be more than three months before the Adonis returned to Hamburg.

Once again, Swanick had slipped through his pursuer’s fingers. And so long as he was at sea, he was in no danger of being taken by those who hunted him, but not from their continuing plans to ultimately find him and bring his punishment to bear.

Chapter 4

A Repeat of the Plan

While Detective Dolan was looking over that day-old Daily News and contemplating whether Yankee hitting and pitching was good enough to win the race against the Cleveland Indians for the American League pennant, half a world away, the ship, Adonis, tied up at the Hamburg docks in the early afternoon. It had been at sea a long time and its crew was anxious to get ashore. And Jacob Bloch’s companions had slipped back into Hamburg and were ready, once again, to spring their trap to snatch Karl Swanick.

Walking down the gangway and leaving the ship, Swanick made his way, first to the Westerhof, and then to his boarding house and enjoyed his bed instead of the heavy canvass hammock that accommodated him the last three months. Later, waking in darkness, he left his bed and made his way back to the beer hall.

It was late; a light rain had begun to fall; and Jacob Bloch’s three friends, now executing Bloch’s plan without him, had to be sure that Swanick was in the

Westerhof. And there was only one way to be sure. That was for one of them to go into the beer hall, just like any other seaman, drink at the bar, and without drawing any attention, look around to see if he was there. The danger was that if Swanick recognized him, that would add an entirely different dimension to their plan and put all of their lives in danger. But luck was with them. The friend who volunteered to go into the beer hall spotted Swanick, and without drawing any attention to himself, finished his beer, left the Westerhof, and joined the others with the news that Swanick was there and drinking alone. With that news, they remained hidden in the darkness of the stand of tall trees and waited.

They waited for what seemed an eternity, keeping their eyes glued to the door of the beer hall, and then saw what they had waited so long to see. It was Swanick, leaving the beer hall, and clumsily walking the way one does who has had too much to drink, making his way on the darkened and rough gravel path headed back to his boarding house. It was time to spring the trap.

Leaving their darkened hiding place, they stepped onto the path and walked toward Swanick, feigning the wobbling steps of men who were drunk and speaking loudly in a slurred manner. As they approached him, one of them purposely bumped into Swanick and, as he began to angrily respond, the full swing of a heavy club met the side of his head knocking him to the ground and rendering him barely conscious. And with another blow to stop his groaning and keep him quiet, the three companions dragged Swanick off of the path to behind the line of tall trees where they had previously hidden, laid him on his back, and began to do what they had planned and waited so long to do.

Each of them was armed with a two-handed, heavy club, not unlike the club Swanick carried and used enthusiastically as a guard in the quarries. And in case anything had gone wrong on the path, one of them had an automatic pistol tucked into his belt.

With a vengeance born of what they had endured in the camps, they began clubbing Swanick over, and over, and over again. They cracked open and crushed his skull; made little more than a pulp of his face; shattered his chest and many of his ribs; and broke or smashed the bones in his arms and legs. It was over quickly, but the fury with which they undertook their work was such that when they stopped clubbing him, their panting came in quick, short breaths and was audible. And before leaving his corpse to whoever found it when daylight came, each of them spoke the names of some camp prisoners who had died by Swanick's

brutality or survived his cruelty. First on the list of spoken names was that of Jacob Bloch.

As a final measure of his punishment, the companions pinned a square of paper to his chest with the word, "*Schuldig*," scrolled across it, the German word for, "Guilty." Karl Swanick had finally been brought to justice.

Chapter 5

Investigations on Both Sides of the Ocean

When Detective Dolan returned to the Precinct after his meeting with Irving Kasowitz, it was a relief that the air conditioning in the building was working once again, making his office, at least tolerable, to continue his analysis of the details of his meeting. He felt that he knew a lot more now about Jacob Bloch than he did when he first took on the investigation of his murder. And he thought quietly to himself, that Kasowitz had been a lot more open and helpful this time around than he was when they first spoke many months ago. But, he still had to find the evidence that would lead him to Jacob Bloch's killer and learn why he was killed. That would take a good deal of experienced detective work with a little luck thrown in for good measure.

Given that the Detective had already concluded that Bloch was specifically targeted, and not just a random killing, he also concluded that if anyone was keeping tabs on Bloch, it, necessarily, had to be someone local. After all, it was only eight years after the war ended and many parts of Europe were still recovering from the shambles the war had wreaked upon the continent. Therefore, given the distance between New York City and Hamburg, and the difficulties with communication and its technicalities over that distance, he discounted any theory that Bloch could be watched from afar. In fact, the Detective was not even satisfied that Bloch was being watched at all. But if he was, it made sense that it had to be by someone local.

While Detective Dolan kept trying to make sense out of so many loose ends in his investigation, the sun broke through an overcast sky in Hamburg and brightened the open field bordered by the stands of tall trees where Karl Swanick's broken and battered body lay unattended and undiscovered for two nights and days until two seamen on their way to the docks stumbled across it.

When the police were summoned, they found that Swanick had been so badly beaten that it was difficult to even place his body on a gurney because the joints in his arms, legs and shoulders had all been shattered to bits and pieces. He was like a wooden puppet whose joints were held together with loose string and would collapse unless it was held upright by a control string.

With a search of his body, the police found a seaman's identity card showing Swanick as, Viktor Dorogov, and clearly forged identity papers claiming Bulgarian nationality.

As so many displaced persons and survivors of the war came through Hamburg looking for work on the ships occupying Germany's largest port, the police were not at all satisfied that Viktor Dorogov was, in fact, who his papers claimed him to be. And, given the extent of the beating he had taken, they were sure that several men had taken part, and did not assume that it was over some disagreement that blossomed into murder. No, indeed, they did not. They were satisfied that it was outright revenge, nothing more and nothing less because, since the end of the war, so many men with histories to hide had come to Hamburg looking to sign on to merchant ships for the safety of the open sea. So, the police would have to snoop around to find out what people might know about Viktor Dorogov, or whoever he was. And since the Westerhof was the closest beer hall to where Swanick's body was found, that was a good place to start.

As the police delivered Viktor Dorogov's broken body to the morgue, and were in no hurry to begin the investigation into who and what he was, the three companions, who two nights before had delivered Swanick's punishment, were gone, scattered to the winds, so to speak, and never to be seen again in Hamburg. But later, Irving Kasowitz would receive a short and cryptic message from them.

Chapter 6

The Hamburg Investigation

Inspector Gerhard Zehmer, an Oberleutnant in Hamburg's Bundespolizei, was assigned to the case and, after viewing Swanick's body in the morgue, agreed that it was murder with all the trappings of a revenge killing. He had seen it before and, no doubt, would see it again, as many men like Swanick were being hunted by those oppressed by them who not only wanted, but demanded, that their oppressors be brought to Justice. But, as the prosecution of concentration camp guards was not

a high priority on Germany's, "to do," list, many of those in authority just wanted to put the war behind them and turned a deaf ear such demands. Thus, men like Bloch and his friends, simply took matters into their own hands.

A few days after Swanick's body was found, Inspector Zehmer, accompanied by two police officers, made their way into the Westerhof and spoke quietly with the barman who was busy filling tall stein glasses with dark beer. He showed the barman the head-shot photographs of Swanick in his identity cards because any photograph of him taken in the morgue would have been useless given that his face was so badly beaten that he was completely unrecognizable. But the busy barman just shrugged his shoulders, briefly shook his head, and gave no indication that he recognized whoever it was looking back at him from his identity cards. That left the Inspector to take a more direct route to obtain information about one, Viktor Dorogov.

Stepping away from the bar with the police officers at his side, the Inspector raised his hands demanding quiet and called out, "Who of you here know, or are familiar with Viktor Dorogov? He was a seaman, presumably of Bulgarian nationality, and recently sailed on the ship Adonis."

There were mostly blank stares from the many customers, but as the Inspector slowly looked over their faces, two of them, sitting together, turned away from the Inspector's gaze, as if trying not to be noticed. But it was the very act of turning away that focused Inspector Zehmer's attention on them.

Taking both men to a spare table, the Inspector did not waste any time and asked directly whether they knew a seaman called Viktor Dorogov; did they ever have drinks with him; and what did they know about him. At first, they said nothing. They were obviously on edge about being questioned. And the Inspector sensed that he had chosen the right men from the crowd of customers.

Finally, after more urging, one them said, "I don't want trouble," to which Inspector Zehmer replied,

"Oh, you don't want trouble?" Well, unless you tell me exactly what you do know, I can assure you that there will be a great deal of trouble," and pointing a finger at the other man, added, "and that goes for you as well."

As they tried to avoid the Inspector's stare and his urgings, and still said nothing, the Inspector nodded to his police officers and said, "Take these men into custody and we'll interrogate them at police headquarters."

As the police officers approached the two men, and Inspector Zehmer rose from his chair, both men looked at one another, nodded their heads in an understanding of the predicament they were in, and the more talkative of the two said, “All right, never mind police headquarters. I’ll tell you what we know.” And with that, they explained that they did know Viktor Dorogov; that when he drank too much, he had a loose tongue and disclosed that his true name was Karl Swanick; that he had been a tough guard at the Mauthausen concentration camp; he felt that somebody was after him; and that’s why he was at sea most of the time and stayed ashore for just a few days before signing on to another ship.

“When we learned who he was, we didn’t drink with him anymore because of the danger he presented. So, we don’t know any more than that.”

The Inspector then knew what he hoped he would learn when he walked into the Westerhof, specifically, the true identity of Viktor Dorogov. He then asked, “Why didn’t you report him? You know that the police are always on the lookout for these former guards. You’re supposed to report them.”

To that question, they responded, “Like we said, we don’t want trouble.”

After Inspector Zehmer had the police officers take down the men’s personal information and retain their identity cards, he said, “You will come to police headquarters tomorrow for your identity cards. I don’t believe there will be any trouble, but I may want to ask you some more questions.”

The two men knew they would have to be there. They had no choice. Without identity cards, they could not find work; they could not travel from place to place; and they could not sign on to any merchant ship in the harbor. Disregarding the Inspector’s order was not an option and would cast them into a sea of uncertainty. The apprehension on their faces was palpable, as police headquarters in Hamburg was a place to stay away from.

Leaving the Westerhof, the Inspector reminded himself of the condition of Swanick’s body and was satisfied that some camp prisoners had caught up with him and administered their own brand of punishment. And, as he originally thought, Swanick’s murder was, in fact, a revenge killing. He would not waste any real time trying to solve the case because, in his mind, the punishment for what Swanick did had already been meted out. So, what was there to gain? Besides, who knows where the avenging men might be?

Chapter 7

Another Meeting with Detective Dolan

It was a slow day at the Empire State Diamond Company, and Irving Kasowitz was leisurely going through the afternoon mail when he came upon an envelope that had traveled far bearing French postage stamps, a Marseille postmark, and having no return address. Looking at the envelope, his breath quickened. It was a safe bet that he knew who posted that letter even without actually knowing the sender or his name.

Carefully opening the envelope and removing the letter, he saw that it was unsigned and contained a short and abrupt message written carefully in English. It said only, "Karl Swanick has had his day in court."

The impact of that message was clear and immediate. Reading those words, Kasowitz felt his whole body flex. His mind raced back to his many discussions with Jacob Bloch over the few years of their friendship and to the evening when he failed to appear at the Metropole Restaurant. It was as if Jacob Bloch was speaking to him from the grave.

Returning the letter to its envelope and carefully placing it in the inside pocket of his suit coat, Kasowitz asked one of his employees to look after the showroom, as he was headed out to the Midtown South Precinct to see Detective Dolan.

Hurrying through the double-door entrance to the precinct, it was obvious to the uniformed Officer at the reception desk that Kasowitz was troubled. The look on his face alone gave him concern. "Is there a problem, sir? Is there something you want to report?"

Responding, Kasowitz said, "I have to see Detective Dolan. It's very important. I have to see him now."

"Well, what's it about? Please tell me why you want to see him, so I can speak to the Detective and tell him."

"Well, please tell him it has to do with Jacob Bloch, and he'll know what it's about."

"OK, just wait right here, and take it easy, sir."

In just a few minutes, Detective Dolan appeared, greeted Kasowitz informally, and said, “Irv, come on back and we can have our talk.”

In the privacy and quiet of the Detective’s office, Kasowitz, without saying a word, reached into his suit coat pocket, took out the letter, and handed it over saying, “This came in the afternoon’s mail. I can just imagine what it means.”

Taking the letter out of its envelope and reading it, the Detective looked up at Kasowitz and said, “Well, I think this tells us that Jacob Bloch’s friends caught up with Karl Swanick and he’s dead. I can’t imagine it means anything else.” He then held the thin letter stationary up in the direction of his ceiling light to check for any latent fingerprints, but there were none, and offered, “The guy who wrote this letter was very careful. No prints.

“Irv, if you don’t mind, I’m going to keep this letter and use it as part of my investigation of Jacob Bloch’s murder.

“Bernie, why was that letter sent to me?”

“Oh, Irv, I think the answer to that is obvious. Although Jacob Bloch wanted to discuss with you the, “business,” of his planned trip to Hamburg, you told me yourself that over the course of your discussions with him, he chose not to specifically identify who his friends from the camps were. I think you said that his talks with you were very open, but still guarded. However, I believe that this letter was sent to you because Bloch gave your name and address to them in case anything happened to him, so you would know the outcome of their plan.”

“But, Bernie, why did I have to know? It was none of my affair.”

“Irv, I think the answer to why did you have to know is obvious, as well. You were not only Bloch’s only friend, as you say, but also his confidant. So, that’s why.”

“Bernie, by having this letter posted to me, do you think I’m in any danger?”

“Oh, I think not, Irv. You didn’t have a hand in any plan that Bloch and his friends put together. And you weren’t involved in any way in executing the plan. So, why worry.”

Responding, Kasowitz offered, “I guess I’m just a worrier at heart. But I’d feel a lot more comfortable if Jacob Bloch’s killer was behind bars.”

“I’m working on it, Irv. Believe me, I’m working on it.”

Chapter 8

Good Detective Work and a Little Bit of Luck

“Bernie, this is Frank Twomley up in the 19th. Are you still working on that Jacob Bloch case?” That call was the start of things falling nicely into place.

“Yes, I am, Frank,” Bernie Dolan answered. “But, I’ve been chasing my tail for months with very little results. What’s up?”

“Well, I have a hunch that I’ve got something that might be helpful. Hear me out.

“Last week, three guys got into a beef in a bar in Yorkville, and it escalated into a full out brawl with fists flying when one of the guys pulls out an automatic. But before he can pull the trigger and kill somebody, two other guys at the bar jump him, wrestle him to the floor, and hold him there until my cops arrive and arrest him.

“The guy’s name is Werner Rentsch. Apparently, he’s a German national, but his only identification is a foreign seaman’s identity card. No driver’s license; no work permit; no Social Security card. Nothing, but that seaman’s card. He’s been in New York for several months, and he got here as part of the crew of a merchant ship, the ‘S.S.Handzel,’ from Hamburg, Germany. I’ve checked the shipping records at the Port Authority, and that ship docked at Pier 52 six days before your Jacob Bloch was killed. But when that ship left here for the trip back to Hamburg, he wasn’t on it. He jumped ship and stayed here for whatever his reasons, and has been working odd jobs, here and there, off the books.

“I got some of this information from his long-lost cousin from the old country whose name is Frederick Hummel, because the only local address this guy, Rentsch, was able to give me was his cousin’s apartment on 86th Street where he was staying, on and off, since he’s been here.

“I spoke with the cousin yesterday. He wants no part of Rentsch and did not appear to be concerned that Rentsch had been arrested. He’s glad he’s out of his apartment because he was essentially a stranger to him and it was a royal pain in the you know where having him around. Until Rentsch came to New York on the Handzel, Hummel hadn’t seen him in dog’s years. But there’s a family hook-up somewhere between them.”

Before Frank Twomley continued, Detective Dolan interrupted and asked, “Where’s Rentsch now? I hope he’s still in custody and hasn’t been released and is just walking around New York.”

“Oh, no,” Twomley answered. “He’s been charged with Assault with a Deadly Weapon and we’ve got him locked up in the ‘Tombs.’ And he’s not going anywhere until we decide what to do with him. After all, he’s illegal; has no permanent local address; has no local occupation; and because he has a foreign seaman’s card, he’s a flight risk. So, we pretty much have him on ice. And, I don’t want the Feds’ getting involved because all they’ll do is deport him back to Germany and, once there, he might just disappear into the wood work. But Bernie, this long story takes me to my hunch that may be helpful”

Bernie Dolan then suggested, “I’d wager your hunch is about the automatic he pulled on the other guys during that brawl.”

“You bet it is.” And then, Twomley asked, “Do you have the slug that killed Jacob Bloch?”

Replying, Dolan said, “We not only have the slug, but also the cartridge case that held the slug. The beat cop who found Bloch in that alley also found the cartridge case. The killer wasn’t smart enough to get rid of it. The slug was discovered in Bloch’s skull during the autopsy by the Medical Examiner. So, Frank, I bet your hunch is also to do a ballistics match on the slug that killed Jacob Bloch. I assume you have the automatic.”

“Oh, yes I do. It’s right in front of me, and I can be down to your place within the hour.”

“Please do, Frank, and I’ll call Sam Rallis to do the testing. Frank, if this works out, and I’ve got my fingers and toes crossed, I owe you big-time.”

Chapter 9

The Ballistics analysis

Sam Rallis was the most experienced ballistics expert in the NYPD Crime Lab located in Jamaica, Queens. But he was like a doctor making house calls with his small black bag, and going from precinct to precinct on an on-call basis whenever needed in a hurry. This was one of those times.

A small firing range rested in the basement of the Midtown South Precinct. There, Detectives Dolan and Twomley put small cylindrical sponge pads in their ears to quiet the report of the .32 caliber automatic taken from Werner Rentsch holding seven rounds in its clip. It was one round short of a full eight round clip, and it was also one round that ended Jacob Bloch's life.

The Detectives positioned two heavy, firmly packed sand bags in tandem, down range, so that the fired slugs could be retrieved and tested for a ballistics match with the one slug that was removed from Jacob Bloch's skull.

Standing close to the wooden weapons bench in front of him, Detective Dolan took aim at the paper target just fifteen feet away in front of the sand bags. With quick squeezes of the weapon's trigger, he fired three rounds through the paper target into the sandbags. He then removed the weapon's clip, manually operated the slide to dislodge the next round which had been fed into the firing chamber, and visually inspected the chamber to ensure that the weapon was safe. With that, both Detectives retrieved the three slugs from the sand bags and collected the three spent cartridge cases, all of which would be tested for a ballistics match, or not, by Sam Rallis.

While the Detectives were at the downstairs firing range, Sam Rallis arrived at the precinct and set up his testing instruments in one of the vacant interview rooms.

Using discrete measuring instruments, Sam Rallis first inspected the spent cartridge case found near Jacob Bloch's body, and then the three cartridge cases just fired to view how they had been crimped to their respective slugs. Then, he inspected the face of each cartridge case to see whether there was any apparent variation in the weapon's firing pin's point of contact. Silently concluding that the crimping was identical, and that the points of contact were the same, he used his microscope for a finite look, making notes and calculations on the yellow pad in front of him as he continued the inspection. Then, turning to the Detectives, and with a look of calm assurance said, "In my professional opinion, all four of these cartridge cases were similarly crimped and fired from the same weapon." drawing broad smiles from both Detectives.

"But," he continued, "the real proof is the inspection of the slugs themselves. The markings on the slugs are like fingerprints and, if each is marked the same as the others, even with some variation to be expected within acceptable, technical

limits, then you've got a match. If not, then you don't have the weapon. So, let's take a look."

With that caution, the Detectives watched intently as Sam Rallis went about his work. He wetted each of the four slugs with solution from one of the numerous small bottles in his portable testing kit and, methodically, one by one, inspected each slug under his microscope which he tuned to high resolution, and continued to make notes and calculations as he proceeded.

The process seemed interminable to the Detectives, as Sam Rallis continued peering into his microscope, then looking away, then looking again, then looking away again, and repeating the maneuver, over and over again. Finally, when he was done with the microscopic inspection, he rechecked his notes and calculations, and with a deep sigh, leaned back into his chair, stretched his arms out wide, and rubbed the back of his neck. "Gentlemen," he said, in a voice brimming with a conviction not to be challenged, "all four of these slugs match. There's no question in my mind that they were all fired from the same .32 caliber automatic. No question at all. We have a match."

Hearing that, the Detectives virtually jumped for joy. They had the murder weapon and Jacob Bloch's killer. Werner Rentsch was their man.

The following day, Detective Dolan issued a request to the office of the Manhattan District Attorney to charge Werner Rentsch with Premeditated Murder for the killing of Jacob Bloch, an A-1 felony, subjecting him to the possibility of the death penalty or a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

Based on the Detective's follow-up written report, an accusatory complaint was issued; Werner Rentsch was arraigned on the charge; and he was then transferred from the "Tombs," in the city's Main Detention Center, to the Main Jail Complex on Riker's Island, where he would be held awaiting trial.

Chapter 10

Dinner at the Metropole Restaurant

With Werner Rentsch behind bars, Irving Kasowitz no longer was troubled by the perceived concern he felt for his own safety after receiving the unsigned letter that, "Karl Swanick has had his day in court." He was back, once again, to his daily routine of conducting business at the Empire State Diamond Company,

and planning to one day retire to his condo in Boca and live the good life on the beach.

As a token of his friendship with Detective Dolan, and as a kind of homage to Jacob Bloch, Kasowitz thought it would be appropriate for them to have dinner at the Metropole Restaurant. But, they were also joined by Frank Twomley, whose, “hunch,” was so influential to finding Jacob Bloch’s killer.

During the dinner conversation, Detective Twomley asked how it was that Werner Rentsch knew that Bloch and his friends were on the lookout for Karl Swanick.

Answering the question, Detective Dolan shared what he and Kasowitz had previously discussed that when the war ended, most of the guards from the camps scattered because of who they were, and many hoped to keep their identities secret by becoming merchant seamen and opting for the safety of the open sea. In fact, Werner Rentsch had been a guard at a Dachau sub-camp and, like Swanick, had abandoned his post when he knew the war was lost. And because so many of these former guards were sailing the seas, they had established and maintained a kind of informal network sharing information from ship to ship, and from port to port, about which of them was being hunted, and by whom.

Detective Dolan also suggested, as he had previously theorized with Kasowitz, that Bloch was killed to scare off his friends from any longer pursuing Swanick, as that tactic had apparently been successful in other cases.

After some further conversation about Jacob Bloch’s murder, Bernie Dolan brought a halt to the discussion by offering, “You know, with all this good food, there’s a whole lot of better things to talk about. For instance, there’s only two more weeks left in the season and the Yankees are up by six games over Cleveland, and they’re in town to play the Yanks tomorrow. Whitey Ford’s pitching against Mike Garcia at the stadium, and we could sit in the shaded grandstand behind home plate, drink a couple of cold ones, and cheer on the Yanks to victory. Anybody game?”

As if rehearsed, both Irving Kasowitz and Frank Twomley, with broad smiles on their faces, immediately raised their hands.

It would be a good day at the ballpark tomorrow, and especially so if the Yankees win.

Chapter 11

Reprise

As Bernie Dolan drove back to his apartment on the west side of Central Park, he thought about how all of the puzzle pieces of Jacob Bloch's murder had fallen nicely into place.

Although he was one of the best Detectives in the NYPD, he freely admitted to himself that it wasn't his diligent detective work that solved the case. And he laughed out loud when thinking that rather than his own talent on the job, it was a bar brawl up in Yorkville that focused attention on Werner Rentsch and brought him to justice as Jacob Bloch's killer. But that was okay with the Detective. It wasn't the first time, and no doubt would not be the last, that a stroke of luck would trump his own investigative skills.

As he walked into his apartment, he tossed his jacket over the back of a chair, undid his tie, and slumped into a soft chair feeling the satisfaction and true relief that all of the unknowns of Jacob Bloch's murder had been resolved. And to top it off, he felt secure in the comfort of knowing that, most likely, the Yankees were on their way to another World Series.

William S. Hochman, 2020
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