

STEVE BERRY



THE DEVIL'S GOLD

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THE DEVIL'S GOLD

STEVE BERRY

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Contents

Cover

Other Books by This Author

Title Page

Copyright

First Page

Excerpt from The Jefferson Key

About the Author

SANTIAGO, CHILE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 2

THREE WEEKS AGO

Jonathan Wyatt decided to wait before killing his target.

He'd followed Christopher Combs all across Chile, from one isolated village to the next, up into the mountains and back to the capital, wondering what the lying SOB was doing. To avoid exposure he'd stayed loose, well back from Combs, not making contact with any of the people his adversary had visited. Now his target was safely ensconced in an executive suite at the Ritz-Carlton—five hundred U.S. dollars a night, which raised a whole host of questions considering Combs' government salary—the reservation confirmed for the next ten days. To add a further insult, Combs was currently lying in the hotel's spa having the kinks in his fifty-eight-year-old back worked out.

Be patient.

That's what he'd told himself for the past eight years.

But it was hard.

Wyatt had been known within the intelligence community as a man of few words. He spoke sparingly, on purpose, which many times forced others to talk too much. Silence was an acquired art he'd mastered, and he knew what they'd called him behind his back.

The Sphinx.

But he hadn't cared.

And it mattered no longer.

His twenty-year career as an intelligence operative had ended eight years ago.

Thanks to Christopher Combs and Cotton Malone.

The latter brought the charges against him, which the former had assured would be quashed, calling the administrative hearing a mere formality. Two men had died in a bad situation. Malone blamed him for the deaths, calling them unnecessary and sacrificial.

He'd resented both allegations. He and Malone had found themselves trapped, under fire, with three agents nearby who could help. He was the senior in charge so he made the call to bring them in, but Malone had objected. So he'd coldcocked Malone with the butt of his revolver and ordered them in anyway.

Malone filed an indictment.

And he hated him for it.

The glory boy of the Magellan Billet and Stephanie Nelle, its director. He'd heard the tales of commendations Malone refused, and how he could do little to no wrong. Ex-navy commander. Lawyer. Pilot. You name it, Malone could do it.

He'd even made a convincing witness against him.

And the admin board—empowered apparently to second-guess people in the field—heard the testimony of Malone and three others, then ruled that he had indeed acted recklessly.

He was summarily fired with a loss of all benefits.

Chris Combs had been his immediate supervisor. An assistant director soon to be, as Combs had privately boasted, a director. To be sure, Wyatt had verified that Combs was definitely next in line for promotion. He'd worked under Combs for five years, his own successes surely helping to fuel the other's rise. Combs had repeatedly expressed his gratitude and told him that he'd need an assistant director. Twenty years of experience certainly qualified Wyatt. Moving up had always been in the back of his mind.

So the message had been clear.

We rise together.

But at the admin hearing, instead of backing him up, Combs sold him out, testifying that, in his opinion, a finding of recklessness was warranted.

Combs garnered his directorship.

Wyatt had been pink-slipped, spending the past eight years working contract jobs for various intelligence agencies in need of his experience but not his liability. They paid great, but were no substitute.

He wanted his career back. But that was gone.

Revenge?

Seemed that was all he had left.

And he'd been patient. Watching Combs. Waiting for the right moment.

Like now.

Combs had taken two weeks' leave and flown alone to Chile. Doing something outside the agency.

What exactly? He actually wanted to know.

So while Combs enjoyed himself at the Ritz-Carlton, and before he killed the bastard, he decided to find out.

He slowed the rental car as he drove into Turingia. The tiny Chilean hamlet's claim to fame was a popular thermal spring. Placards announced that asthma, bronchitis, digestive disorders, even dry skin could be cured—all of course for a price.

He navigated around a busy central plaza.

An ocher-colored church rose at one end, flanked by an arcade of shops, the quaintness stained only by gangly electric-wire poles. A residential section, west of town, looked more like the English countryside with timbered houses, angled roofs, and flowery trees. He knew about the old woman because a few days ago he'd followed Combs to her house. She lived amid a stand of tall araucaria, their puffy pine boughs stretching toward the sky. The house was a two-story structure longing for paint, its gabled tin roof thick with rust. Two horses grazed within an enclosure. He eased the car down a bumpy lane and parked near a fence trellised with morning glories.

The front door was answered by a birdlike woman with burnished gray-gold hair. Forked veins lined her spindly arms, and liver spots dotted her wrists. She appeared to be pushing seventy, but there was a spry look in her hazel eyes. When he introduced himself her eyebrows rose in apparent amusement and she threw him a smile that featured teeth like a jack-o'-lantern.

She invited him inside, her English laced with German. He sat on a settee upholstered in pink velveteen, while she reclined in an oversized chair draped with a flowered slipcover.

He learned her name was Isabel.

“And what is it you want?” she asked him.

“You had a visitor a few days ago.”

“Oh, yes. He was a lively one.”

“What did he want?”

She studied him with a calculating gaze, a tremor rocking her right eye. Her breaths came in low wheezes. Only the tick of a clock disturbed the tranquility.

“The same as you, apparently,” she said. “You seem like a lively one, too.”

She was playing him. Okay. He could do the same. “Have you lived here a long time?”

“All my life. But my family is from Heidelberg. My parents came here after the war. My father erected this house. Built with one-third heart, one-third hands, one-third understanding.”

He smiled, trying to place her at ease.

“An old German wisdom,” she noted.

“Was your father a solider?”

“Heavens, no. He worked for the postal service. He felt that Germany would never be the same after the war, so he left. I daresay he was right.”

He decided to return to what he wanted to know. “What did Mr. Combs want with you?”

“He showed me two photographs, a man and a woman, and wanted to know if I knew the faces. I told him they once lived near Lago Todos los Santos, at the Argentina border.”

“Why were those pictures so important to him?”

The corners of her eyebrows turned down. “Why is his business yours?”

He decided honesty might work best. “He and I have a debt to settle.”

“I can see that. You try hard to conceal your thoughts, but in your face, your eyes, your meaning is clear. The Brown Eminence was the same.”

He did not understand.

“In France, centuries ago,” she said, “there was the Red Eminence. Cardinal Richelieu, the king’s chief minister. Richelieu’s assistant, Father Joseph, was known as the Gray Eminence. Like his superior, he was a shadowy figure, both adept at managing power. Red and gray referred to their robes.” She paused. “Brown was the color of Nazi uniforms. Martin Bormann was the Brown Eminence.”

He thought about what he knew of Martin Bormann. Which wasn’t much. Hitler’s private secretary. The gatekeeper to the Führer. Second most powerful man in the Third Reich.

“The man in the photograph Herr Combs showed me. He was the Brown Eminence, though by then he called himself Luis.”

“And the woman?”

“She called herself Rikka, though she was Hitler’s widow.”

That name he knew. Eva Braun. She married Hitler in April 1945, shortly before they both committed suicide in the Führerbunker.

“What are you saying?”

Her watery eyes conveyed a look of annoyance. “Herr Combs was not as surprised as you.”

“What did he say about your information?”

“Did he cheat you?”

This old woman was good. A simple question, out of the blue, intended to elicit an emotional response.

“He’s a liar.”

“I thought the same. He lied to me. But he wanted to know where the two in his photos had lived. His questions actually surprised me. There was a time when men searched for the Brown Eminence. No one cared about the widow, all thought she was dead. Few even knew her face or name. But him. That one many wanted. He was a quetrupillán.”

He did not recognize the term and asked what it meant.

“A local Chilean word,” she said. “Mute devil. A bit like yourself.”

He ignored her jab. “What happened to Bormann and Braun?”

“They eventually went to live where no one could find them.”

He realized that, decades ago, the world had been a different place. No satellites, television, global newspapers, or Internet.

Hiding was much simpler, and many war criminals were successful at fading away.

Especially two people most of the world thought dead.

“Where did they go?”

She did not answer him.

“Did you ever speak of this before Combs’ visit?”

“No one has ever asked these questions. Why would anyone? I am an old woman living quietly. Who would even know I exist?”

“Chris Combs.”

“Then you must ask yourself. How was I found?”

He had no idea.

“You do not believe me?” she asked. “I see it in your eyes. You come to my home and ask these questions. I have answered honestly, yet you do not believe.”

What he believed mattered not. “What did Combs say to your answers?”

“He wanted corroboration. As I can see you do, too.” She slowly hinged herself up to her feet. “I’ll show you, as I did him.”

The day of Combs’ appearance Wyatt had waited down the highway, in the woods, where he could watch the driveway. Combs had stayed a little over an hour, then had driven back to Santiago. Wyatt had no idea what had happened during the visit.

Isabel shuffled toward the door. “Strange, though.”

He fixed his eyes on her as she stopped.

“You don’t look like a Nazi hunter.”

“I’m not.”

“But you are a hunter. That much I do know.”

He followed Isabel outside into a barn where farm equipment sat rusting in darkened shadows. Daws had chewed holes through the roof, and swallow nests occupied the crossbeams. From a rotting pile of cordwood a big gray cat greeted them with a long meow.

She shuffled toward an enclosure at the far end. A dirty dress hung from her spare frame like a coat on a nail, and rope-soled sandals covered her feet. She eased open a wooden door while old

hinges screamed their resistance. Within a space about eight feet square, three trunks were stacked.

“Those have been here for decades,” she said.

He stepped inside. A mouse scurried away at his approach.

She smiled. “Evi loves the mice.”

He reached for the top trunk and opened the lid.

Dust cascaded off.

Inside lay an assortment of belongings. On top were clothes—a double-breasted windbreaker jacket, a pair of trench boots, and a swastika armband.

“My father’s.”

“I thought he was a civil servant,” Wyatt said as he continued to sift through the trunk.

“You could not expect to rise in the government unless you were a party member.”

He lifted out a heart-shaped silver gorget upon which was affixed a gilded eight-point sunburst. Farther down he came across a bandolier and some ragged gauntlets.

Then it dawned on him. “Your father was SS?”

“Obviously.”

He was beginning to dislike her tone.

He noticed a stack of mildewed coupons bound together with a piece of brittle string. He studied the top coupon. Two sig-runes were imprinted in the left-hand corner beside the words STANDORT-KANTINE, beneath which was the ominous designation BUCHENWALD. At the lower right was the notation RM 2.

“What are these?” he asked.

“The guards in the camps were paid in tokens. They could use them to buy food and sundries in the camp canteen. Those were worth two reichsmarks each.”

“Buchenwald was an extermination camp. What was your father doing there?”

She shook her head. “My older brother. He was a guard in the Death’s Head Unit. The SS-Totenkopfverbände.”

He caught the German pride in her voice.

“Did he die in the war?”

“The Russians slaughtered him.”

He eased the top trunk down to the earthen floor, then started searching the second. More clothes, children’s keepsakes, and a curious item—a typewriter, its black metal casing rusted and battered.

“My father’s. Used during the war.”

He noticed the keys. The number row served the usual dual function. A semicolon appeared above the 1. Parentheses above 6 and 7. Other number keys likewise possessed punctuation as a second alternative. But above the 5 was a double sig-rune. SS. The typewriter had apparently been modified to accommodate the regime.

He was beginning to wonder about Isabel and her father.

He opened the last trunk.

Inside was crammed with letters and old newspapers. He lifted out one of the bundles.

The cat wandered in, and Isabel stroked the animal. “Such a good girl, Evi.”

He faced Isabel, who was still petting the cat. “Does Evi have any connection to Eva Braun?”

“Of course. Her closest friends used that nickname. I called her that myself. So I’ve named every cat I’ve owned since after her, in remembrance.”

His patience was wearing thin. “What’s your game?”

She continued to stroke the cat. “Whatever do you mean?”

He stepped toward her. Not the slightest hint of fear filled her eyes. They remained icy green marbles.

“You and Herr Combs are being played for fools.”

“By who?”

“The Brown Eminence.”

He’d already done the math. “He’s long dead.”

“Not his successors.”

Maybe they were Combs’ objective? “What’s their game?”

Her glare sharpened. “They are all we have left.”

“Who is we?”

“Those of us who believe.” Her eyes were hard with indignation.

“That was a long time ago. It’s over.”

“Yet you and Herr Combs are both still interested. Herr Combs knew that my father worked for the Führer. That’s why he came. He also knew it was Hitler’s wish that Bormann survive the war. A letter from Hitler himself directed my father to do whatever the Brown Eminence desired. So my father spent his life hiding Martin Bormann.”

He waited for more.

“Bormanns appeared everywhere. Those who searched had plenty to look for, but never the actual man.”

He vaguely recalled reading about Bormann sightings throughout Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay. A few Bormanns even turned themselves in to the authorities, claiming a need for justice in their old age, but all were eventually confirmed as either deranged or delirious.

“What does any of that matter anymore?”

“What you mean is, why did it matter to Herr Combs.”

That’s exactly what he meant.

“Bormann was no Hitler. The Führer was special. Politicians before him talked down. Bormann talked down. Hitler talked to us.”

It seemed she wanted to speak her mind, so he let her.

“I’ve watched Hitler speak many times on film. He would parade into a hall to some lively military tune. Oh, I loved that music. He always wore his brownshirt uniform and had the shiniest boots. Such a sight. People stood while he spoke, as they should. He loved them, and they loved him.”

She was clinging to a vicious fantasy. But if the memory loosened her tongue, he was willing to allow her the luxury.

“What happened to Bormann?” he asked again.

She spat on the floor. “He was a sloven bastard. The Führer made a horrible mistake trusting that one.”

“Why are you telling me all this?”

She shrugged. “Why not? As you say, it was a long time ago.”

“Could you—”

“I’m through talking to you.”

She started to leave the barn, the cat nipping at her heels.
He tried, “You speak of the past with reverence. Are you a Nazi?”
She stopped, turned back, and surveyed him with an insolent air of triumph.
“I am a faithful follower of my Führer.”
And she ambled off.

His visit with the old woman disturbed him. It was not at all what he'd expected. Never had he thought Martin Bormann, Eva Braun, and Adolf Hitler would be the subjects of their conversation.

Before leaving Turingia he parked the car under some shade trees and used his smartphone to access the Internet. There he found a concise summary of Martin Bormann's life.

Born in Halberstadt on June 17, 1900, the son of a former Prussian regimental sergeant major, Bormann dropped out of school to work on a farming estate in Mecklenburg. After serving briefly as a cannoneer in a field artillery regiment at the end of World War I, he joined the rightist Rossbach Freikorps. He eventually entered the National Socialist Party, becoming its regional press officer in Thuringia and then business manager in 1928. From 1928 to 1930 he was attached to the SA Supreme Command and in October 1933 he became a Reichsleiter of the party. A month later he was elected as a Nazi delegate to the Reichstag. From July 1933 until 1941 he was the chief of cabinet in the office of the deputy Führer, Rudolf Hess, acting as his personal secretary.

There he began his imperceptible rise to the center of power, slowly acquiring mastery over the Nazi bureaucratic mechanism and gaining Hitler's personal trust. In addition to administering Hitler's personal finances, he controlled the Gauleiters and Reichsleiters, the men who administered the various

lands in the Reich. His brutality, coarseness, lack of culture, and apparent insignificance led top Nazis to underestimate his abilities. His mentor Rudolf Hess' flight to Britain opened the way for him to step into Hess' shoes.

In May 1941 he became head of the party. Until the end of the war, Bormann was the fierce guardian of Nazi orthodoxy. He was an archfanatic when it came to racial policy, anti-Semitism, and the Kirchenkampf, the war between the churches. By the end of 1942 he was Hitler's private secretary, taking care of tiresome administrative details and steering Hitler into approval of his own schemes. Ordered by Hitler "to put the interests of the nation before his own feelings and to save himself," Bormann fled the Führerbunker on April 30, 1945, after Hitler was dead. Accounts of what happened afterward vary widely. According to some, Bormann was killed trying to cross Russian lines by an anti-tank shell. Doubts, however, have persisted and numerous sightings of Bormann have been reported, beginning in 1946. Having been sentenced to death in absentia at Nuremberg in October 1946, his true fate remains unknown.

All of the other sites he found confirmed the same information. Nobody really knew what happened. He then located what he could about Eva Braun.

Born in Munich in 1912 to a middle-class Catholic family, the daughter of a schoolteacher, Braun first met Hitler in the studio of his photographer friend Heinrich Hoffmann in 1929. She worked as Hoffmann's office assistant, later becoming a photo lab worker, helping to process pictures of Hitler.

Blond, fresh-faced, and athletic, she was fond of skiing, mountain climbing, gymnastics, and dancing.

After the death of Geli Raubal, Hitler's niece with whom he maintained a long love affair, Braun became his mistress, living in his Munich flat. In 1935, after an abortive suicide attempt, Hitler brought her to a Munich villa, near his home. In 1936 she moved to Berchtesgaden where she acted as Hitler's hostess. Every effort was made to conceal her relationship with Hitler, since the Führer was supposedly devoted solely to the nation. Few Germans knew of her existence. Even Hitler's closest associates were not certain of the relationship, since Hitler avoided suggestions of intimacy and would often degrade and belittle her intelligence. She spent most of her time exercising, brooding, reading cheap novelettes, and watching romantic films. Her loyalty to Hitler, though, never wavered. In April 1945 she joined Hitler in the Führerbunker, and eventually died with him as part of a suicide pact.

Several websites proposed the possibility that one or both of them had survived the war, along with Hitler, but Wyatt could locate no reference where any serious historian ever considered that a reality.

Yet Isabel did.

He decided to continue mimicking what Combs had done days ago and drove back to Santiago, finding the same tree-lined boulevard and the bookstore. The shop was located near the Plaza de Armas, in the heart of the city, about midway into an arcade of picturesque boutiques. Next door sat a café that displayed an assortment of lovely Camembert and cheddar cheeses. He'd dined there on the first visit, while waiting on Combs, enjoying some spicy sausage and salami.

From a cathedral at the far end of the boulevard bells signaled half past three. Storm clouds were rolling in off the volcanoes rising

to the west, and the afternoon sun was gradually fading behind a bank of thick cumulus. Rain would arrive by nightfall.

But by then he'd be somewhere else.

He entered the shop. The tinkle of a bell announced his presence.

"Buenas tardes," he said to the proprietor, a squat, overweight man with a bushy black mustache.

The man acknowledged the greeting and introduced himself as the owner, Gamero, using English. The proprietor wore the same bow tie and cloth suspenders that had adorned his rotund frame during Combs' visit.

"I need a moment of your time."

He displayed five one-hundred-dollar American bills to emphasize the importance of his request.

"You are fortunate. The day has been slow. No customers at the moment." Gamero plucked the money from his grasp. "I'll lock up early." The owner waddled to the door and twisted the lock. Then a smile formed on the man's fleshy lips. "How may I help you?"

"Tell me what you told Christopher Combs."

A puzzled look came to the man's face. "Two of you? After the same thing?"

"Which is?"

Gamero shook his head, then motioned and led him through a ragged curtain into the back of the shop. The building had apparently once housed a bank, since left over from that time was an iron vault. He watched while Gamero spun the bronze dial, released the tumblers, then eased open a heavy black door.

"See for yourself. Just as Combs did. I will be out front."

He entered the vault and yanked the chain on a bare bulb dangling from the ceiling. Eight filing cabinets were arranged against one wall. One door led out, but it was secured by a hasp lock. He studied the cabinets, noted their rust and decay, and concluded that time probably had not been kind to their contents.

He slid open one of the drawers.

Tattered folders and yellowed paper were packed tight inside. He removed a few samples and noted the writing, mostly in faded type.

German.

He could not read any of it.

He examined the other drawers. Each was similarly stuffed.

Apparently this was some sort of German records cache. Swastikas adorned many of the pages as part of the letterhead.

He heard the bell from the front of the store.

Then two pops, like balloons bursting.

Then, the bell again.

He left the vault and walked back toward the front. The shop was quiet. No one in sight. People milled back and forth outside the front windows on the sidewalk. Cars whizzed by on the boulevard beyond. Gamero, though, lay facedown on the floor in a pool of his own blood.

The pops had been from a sound-suppressed weapon, two exit wounds dotting the man's skull.

He checked for a pulse.

None.

He stepped to the front door, locking it from the inside. He then dragged Gamero behind the counter, out of view of the windows.

He needed to finish what he'd started.

Remembering the locked door inside the vault, he frisked the corpse, finding a set of keys. He retreated behind the curtain, back into the vault, and opened the hasp lock that secured the door.

He yanked the chain for another bare bulb.

The room was little more than a walk-in closet, its stone walls lined with wooden shelves sagging from an assortment of memorabilia.

Uniforms, busts, swords, pistols, all adorned with sig-runes and swastikas. He counted twenty tattered copies of Mein Kampf. Ceramics, too, mostly animals and statuettes. One, a storm trooper doll, had its arm raised in a salute. There were also beer steins, helmets, and a music box that still chimed.

Was Gamero a collector? Or a dealer?

Had this drawn Combs' attention?

He heard a noise from the front of the shop. In the store's silence, everything seemed amplified. He stepped back to the curtain and peered past. Two men were outside. One was jimmying the door

lock while the other stood in front, trying to block the view of passersby.

He decided that he wanted to know what these two were doing, so he retreated into the bowels of the building and slipped behind a ceiling-to-floor stack of cardboard boxes, each container overflowing with books. He was able to squeeze behind them just as the bell sounded, and he used the spaces between the stacks to watch as the two men pushed through the curtain and found the vault. Each carried a small briefcase, which was laid on the floor as they disappeared inside. He heard the metal drawers shriek open and the sound of paper fluttering, then more objects slamming the floor.

They were apparently emptying the memorabilia closet, too.

One of the men returned and retrieved a briefcase.

A couple of minutes went by, then they both exited the vault.

The second briefcase was opened, and Wyatt spotted four bundles of a gray material wrapped in clear plastic. Each was laid on the floor, down the hall, two on one side, two on the other. Protruding from each was a small black rectangle.

He knew exactly what he was looking at.

Plastic explosives with radio-controlled detonators.

The resulting fire would be hot and volatile, and little would remain afterward. Sure, it would clearly be arson, but it would be untraceable. If they were smart, the detonators were constructed of materials that would vaporize in the explosion. That was the kind he'd always used when he was a valued American intelligence agent.

Now he wasn't sure what he was anymore.

A whore, hired only when no one else was available.

That's what he felt like.

The men exited through the front door, the bell announcing their departure. He assumed they would move away from the building before detonating.

That meant he had maybe a minute or so.

He fled his hiding place and raced down the dim, narrow hall until he found a wooden door in the rear wall. He released the latch, opened it, and darted into an alleyway that stretched behind a row

of buildings. Finding the street, he slowed his pace, turned, and calmly walked down the sidewalk, blending with the people one block beyond the bookshop's main entrance.

An explosion rocked the afternoon.

But he kept going, toward where his car waited.

He left Santiago and drove back toward Turingia, a forty-minute ride across mountain roads sparse with traffic. He had to make it to Isabel. If those men had killed Gamero, she could well be a target, too. He wasn't sure why he cared, but he was concerned for the old woman.

What had Combs become involved with?

Certainly not what he had expected.

Not even close.

He entered Turingia, eased the car past shops settling down for the day, then sped out of town. He spied the farmhouse. All quiet. He motored the car down the dirt lane and parked near the barn.

The front door to the house hung open.

He slipped from the car and scooted to the entrance, stopping short, listening for movement.

No wind disturbed the trees. Frogs croaked out a distant concert.

He peered past the jamb.

Still and quiet.

He stepped inside and saw, to his right, Isabel's wizened body slouched in a rocker beside the hearth, a bullet hole in the head.

A sour presence of death laced the warm air.

Too late.

They'd apparently visited here first.

He closed the old woman's eyes, their barren stare disconcerting. Through the front door Evi scrambled inside and nestled close to Isabel's lifeless legs. The big gray cat seemed annoyed by her master's lack of interest and retreated to an empty chair.

He should look around.

But for what?

Hell if he knew.

The house was about a thousand square feet. In the bedroom he found a blond-wood table, its glossy surface supporting an oversized candle wrapped in fresh araucaria branches. Above the candle hung a portrait of Adolf Hitler, his fanatical gaze off to the heavens. Incredible. Here was this woman, seventy years after the fact, worshipping a maniac.

He studied the remainder of the sparsely furnished room, gazing at the sad debris of an old woman's life. A stove covered in glazed tiles filled one corner. A cabinet with center-opening doors, richly painted in the Bavarian style, contained clothes. A maple dresser sat opposite the narrow bed. Atop the dresser were three black-and-white photographs, each outlined by a tarnished silver frame. One was of a man wearing an SS uniform. No emotion showed on his face, just a blank stare, as if a smile would almost be painful. The shore of a lake loomed in the background, tall evergreen trees surrounding.

He searched the dresser drawers, then snuck a peek beneath the bed. Bundles of envelopes lay on the dusty planks.

He slid them out.

They all showed South African postmarks and a masculine handwriting, each addressed to Isabel in Turingia. He opened one of the envelopes. The letter, written in English, was signed by a Gerhard Schüb. He shuffled through the other envelopes. Their dates ranged from the 1960s to the 1980s. He decided to take them with him.

He returned his attention to the dresser and the other two photographs on display. One was of children, each around seven or eight. Two boys and three girls, dressed as if going to church in suits and skirts, posing together, a happy gathering. The final picture depicted two men. One was the same man from the other photo, this time minus his SS uniform. He wore lederhosen, the leather shorts supported by suspenders joined by an ornamented breast band that displayed a shiny swastika. A light-colored shirt covered his chest, knee-high stockings embraced his legs, a woolen cape draped his shoulders. The other man in the photo was short and heavy-chested with sparse black hair. He wore a double-breasted suit with a Nazi

armband. He studied the older face closely, noting a contrived smile that showed no teeth, a tight jaw, and a cagey gaze.

He decided to take the photos, too.

True, this wasn't his fight, but before he killed Combs he wanted to know what had led to these two murders.

He made his way back out of the house, careful to keep a close watch, but nothing generated any alarm.

Letters and photos in hand, he found his car and left.

He drove for half an hour, finally entering a town identified as Los Arana. The highway bisected a quiet residential section to the south and shops to the north. A grassy plaza filled the town center, dotted with lime trees. Between the twin towers of an oyster-colored church, framed like an architectural adornment, loomed the cone of a distant volcano. The streets were largely deserted. The lateness of the afternoon, he assumed.

He parked the car near an open café.

Inside, the tables were filled with black-browed, shaggy-haired men. A strong odor of toil filled the air. The thick ham sandwiches most of them enjoyed looked good, so he ordered one along with a carafe of wine.

While eating, he studied the letters.

February 7, 1969

Our arrival in Bloemfontein was uneventful. This is a strange place, Issie. Nearly five thousand feet above sea level, the air clear and light. Pieces of Europe are everywhere. Waterwheels, homesteads, rose gardens. There is a nearly perpetual battle with drought, pests, and bankers. Luis complains incessantly. He does not like this location. The Union of South Africa is a conflicted nation. It possesses two capitals. Johannesburg to the north is the political center. Bloemfontein here in the Free State is the judicial center. Why this is so no one can explain, though there is talk of merging both in Bloemfontein. The Free State is full of Dutch influence. Many still talk of the Anglo-Boer War, which ended only a hundred years ago. They still remember the concentration camps. Luis likes to tell me that the British invented the concept here when they slaughtered thirty thousand women and

children during the war. All things British are still hated here with a deep passion, which pleases Luis.

I wish you could see this country. Brown plains dotted with what the locals call peppercorn bushes, the flatness broken by iron-colored koppies. Flat-topped mountains line the horizon. We have taken a house on the outskirts of town. It stands in the shade of gum trees. You would love the bougainvillea that climbs its walls. Behind are a barn and a stable. Water mills revolve over springs. Without water there would be nothing but barren waste. Nighttime is the best of all. The veld grows silent and turns silver in the moonlight. Our dogs congregate beneath the windows. It is good they are there, as they keep the lions away.

The dogs are fearless. I envy their courage.

* * *

May 23, 1969

I miss you, Issie. Time is nearly irrelevant here.

I witnessed a curious sight a few days back. Luis and I drove to a town west of here. Not much there besides a red-roofed store, a Dutch Reformed church, and a petrol station. A farm was for sale and Luis wanted to be present when the mortgage was called. What a strange sight. Furniture piled in the sunlight, the moneylender leading the auction, the owner in shabby clothes, his wife and children in tears. Luis' bid was deemed low and he failed to secure the property, so he was not in a good humor. He lectured me that there is no place in this world for the weak. They clutter the strong with sympathy and for that they must be eliminated. He felt nothing for the family that would sleep without shelter. I felt for them, though. How could one not? But Luis seemed filled only with contempt.

He is a hard man, fueled by hate and even more by regret. Rikka is having a difficult time. He will not take her swimming or for a boat trip down the river, or simply sit beneath the trees and enjoy the day. She tries to make life bearable, if not for him, then for herself. He tries to please her with luxury. Their house is full of silver, mahogany, and books. No one comes to visit, though. He will not tolerate visitors. His suspicions have increased since we arrived, a phobia of doubt that consumes his every day. He is so dependent on me. Odd, actually. This man of power needing me to do, say, and see what he cannot. He is paralyzed by fear and part of me is glad.

* * *

January 14, 1971

We have moved again. This time closer to the border with Basutoland in the eastern highlands. I was promised my release from service by Christmas, but I am now told that Luis will not let me go. He still depends on me. I seem to be the only one he trusts, if that attribute can be applied to a man such as him. I doubt he trusts anyone or anything. I promise, Issie, I will broach the subject again with him soon.

Our new farm is lovely. It is an estate bought with profits from the gold mines. Luis was smart to invest. He continues to live a solitary life. Few venture this far east. I am still the messenger who travels into Bloemfontein. Books are my main duty. He consumes more than a dozen each month. I drive to town every three weeks when a shipment arrives. American book clubs provide the bulk of his taste. It is his one pleasure, and Rikka encourages the endeavor since it spares her the wrath of his boredom.

He is evil and does not deserve any luxury in life. If not for my duty I would end this charade. But I can't. It is not my nature, as I am sure you know.

Wyatt read with a growing fascination.

Each letter was signed, yours forever and always, love Gerhard. They were scattered over a breadth of time, and the insights were profound.

Clearly Schüb did not care for Martin Bormann, but his feelings for Isabel never waned.

November 19, 1971

This land is a feast for carnivores. I have learned that steaks, chops, and cutlets eaten beneath the stars with your fingers taste far better than anything inside on a plate. Oh, Issie, I only wish you could be here. But that is impossible. Luis does not know of these letters and would be furious if he did, but I must have someone with whom I share my thoughts and you, my darling, are the only person I trust completely.

Two days back we traveled to a farm in the south. We were told by another guest not to speak of the Anglo-Boer War. The Afrikaners who lived on the farm suffered humiliating losses at the hands of the British and still harbored deep resentment. The war has been over for a long time, so I wondered about the warning. Despite our efforts to avoid the topic, our host willingly spoke of how the British rounded up all the women and children and forced them into camps, their way of breaking the Boers, forcing the Kommandos into surrendering. Yet it had the opposite effect. The Boers fought harder. It was only when captured Kommandos were enticed to fight against their former compatriots, with the promise that their loved ones would be released from the camps, that the Boer back was

broken. Many accepted the invitation, and it was their treason that eventually cost the Boers the war. Our host had a name for those men. Hensoppers. I asked what it meant and he told me, "A hands upper." Then he spit upon the ground to show me what he thought of traitors.

* * *

March 15, 1972

I am about to drive north on my weekly trip to retrieve Luis' books and obtain what specialties Rikka desires. She has lately taken an interest in knitting. Her finished products are quite lovely, though there is little need for scarves and sweaters here. She seems to make them simply to irritate Luis, as he berates her constantly for the waste of time. She clearly delights in his discomfort. Luis has invested heavily in the gold mines and is reaping enormous profits. He has even shared some of that wealth, enough to allow me to purchase an adjoining tract of land and build a home. It is a sandstone building with a clay roof surrounded by a cherry orchard. It also has a stoep where I sit in the evenings and watch the zebra, topi, and gazelle. It is my home, Issie, and for once I am grateful to Luis.

* * *

June 23, 1976

Luis has been in an awful mood for several weeks. He has been reading books about the war. In one Goebbels was quoted as once saying, "Bormann is not a man of the people. He has not the qualifications for the real tasks of leadership. He is but a mere administrator, a clerk, nothing more." Bold words, Luis said, from a coward who killed himself and his wife and children. Luis speaks horribly of the Führer. He has nothing but contempt for him. He tells me that every political movement needs a revolutionary. Someone to acquire power by whatever means. Yet once it is acquired, that power must pass to those more capable of organization and control, those with the ability to administer, and it is they who ultimately rule. "Take pride in being a bureaucrat," he tells me. "For clerks rule the world."

Obviously Gerhard Schüb had not been Isabel's father, or brother, or any relation. He was apparently someone to whom she'd been emotionally attached, the two separated by Schüb's forced duty to the Brown Eminence.

No wonder she hated Bormann.

He found only one letter different from the rest. Though the envelope was addressed to Isabel, the handwriting was clearly not

Schüb's.

April 9, 1977

You do not know me, but I am aware of your long-standing correspondence with Gerhard. You would not have received a letter from Gerhard in several months and the reason for that is going to be difficult to accept. I know it has been for us. Gerhard passed on three months back. He long suffered from a variety of afflictions. But a cold he contracted progressed to flu, then to pneumonia, and he died peacefully in his sleep. He often spoke of you and I know he wanted to see you again, but alas that is not now possible. I thought it the decent thing to let you know, as your letters that have arrived since his death make clear that you are unaware of what the Lord hath done. I am so sorry for your loss. Gerhard was a good man. He will be forever missed.

With sad regret,
Gordon Donaldson

Wyatt felt the old woman's pain. Staring at the stack of envelopes, he realized they had been her life. He imagined her waiting for the next post, anxious to hear that perhaps Gerhard may finally be coming back to Chile from South Africa.

But that never happened. And now she was dead.

He wanted to know who killed her and why.

He finished his dinner and left the restaurant. Nightfall had come, and bright stars fluttered in a brilliant sky. A couple approached, arms wrapped around each other, the two walking slowly, enjoying the quiet.

He stepped aside and allowed them to pass.

An instant later the two lovers lunged back and he felt the barrel of a gun pressed to his neck.

"Stay still," the male said in his ear.

Two more men appeared from the darkness, rifles in hand. What was a moment before decent odds had just become impossible.

The man patted down Wyatt's jacket but found nothing. The letters were taken from his grasp.

"Let's go," the male said.

He was led away from the café toward a parked pickup truck. He climbed up. The two men with rifles followed, guarding him in a

dirty bed that smelled of dung.

They drove from town into the woods beyond. Startled animals dodged in and out of the thickets on either side of the roadway. Some crossed the pavement at the outer reaches of the truck's headlights, their amber eyes dancing like stars. He kept a close watch on the truck's course and surmised that they were headed east, a wide plain ahead shimmering beneath a burnished moon. Occasionally, groves of trees disturbed the flatness with irregular shadows.

The truck left the tarred surface and bounced its way through tall grass toward one of the groves. He decided that the roughness of the terrain would work to his advantage. After a couple hundred yards the truck stopped just short of the trees. Before the man and the woman in the cab could climb out, he rammed his elbow into the face of the guard to his right. He wrenched the rifle away from the second man and caught him with a solid uppercut, sending the body over the side and down to the grass. He pointed the muzzle of the rifle at the other man still lying in the truck bed and turned his attention to the two from the cab.

But strangely they did nothing in retaliation.

"No need for that," the driver said, pointing toward the trees. "There. He waits for you."

Though he knew he shouldn't, he allowed his eyes to follow the man's finger to a tight grove of trees with a clearing in between. Beside a roaring fire stood a short, thin figure. No features were visible, only the blackened outline of his shrunken form.

Wyatt jumped from the truck, rifle in hand, and trudged through knee-high grass. As he drew closer, the crackling blaze soaked away the night's chill. He saw that the fire was contained with a stone circle.

He kept the rifle pointed forward.

His chaotic thoughts sought unity.

"Good evening," the old man said. "I am Gerhard Schüb."

He lowered the rifle and pictured in his mind the image of the virile soldier wearing an SS uniform, the one he'd seen on Isabel's dresser.

Not the same person.

The old man huddled next to the fire, who now sat in a wooden slat chair, cast an unhealthy pallor. Sunken cheeks, veined eyes, a spent face. Two deep furrows tracked a path from his aquiline nose to the corner of his mouth. His bald pate and wiry frame carried the anemic look of someone not accustomed to the outdoors, though if he was Schüb he would have spent a lifetime in the African sun. Mottled brownish blue age spots dotted his cheeks and forehead and the backs of his bony wrists. But it was the eyes that drew Wyatt, bright and alive, reminiscent of ashes glowing from a dimming fire, feverish in their admiration of the blaze.

"You can't be Schüb," he said.

The gaze shifted from the fire. "No. I am not the man Isabel loved. He died long ago. But he was a good man, who lived a good life. So I took his name." The rasp of cigarettes echoed in the voice.

"Who are you?"

"Did you know your father?"

He hesitated a moment, then said, "I did. We were actually close."

"Did you admire him?"

"I did."

"You're lucky."

Disdain filled the wizened face. "Isabel was a good woman. But she felt a great loyalty to the Third Reich. She met Gerhard Schüb in Chile. They were both young, they fell in love. She also came to know Eva Braun. Schüb was sent to Africa, by Isabel's father, with Bormann and Braun. As you now know, he never returned to Chile."

"You wanted me to find those letters?"

"They were left for you."

"How did you know I would come back?"

Schüb sat silent for a moment, then said, "There's something you must know."

And the older man spoke.

His tone hypnotic, funereal.

The words barely audible over the crackle of the flames.

April 30, 1945. The Führer's mood had progressively worsened since yesterday when the generals informed him that Berlin was lost and a counter-offensive, which he thought would save the Reich, had not been initiated. He became incensed on learning that Himmler was negotiating independently with the Allies for peace. That made him suspect everything related to the SS, including the cyanide capsules they had been supplied for the bunker.

"They are fakes," he screamed. "The chicken farmer Himmler wants me taken alive so the Russians can display me like a zoo animal."

He fingered one of the capsules and declared it nothing more than a sedative.

"Malignancy," he lamented, "is rife."

To be sure of the poison, he retreated to the surface and watched as a capsule was administered to his favorite Alsatian. The dog's quick death seemed to satisfy him. The Führer then descended into the bunker and presented his two personal secretaries with capsules, commenting that he wished he could have provided a better parting gift. They thanked him for his kindness and he praised their service, wishing his generals would have been as loyal.

Earlier, everyone had been summoned to the bunker. Hitler appeared with Bormann. His eyes carried the same hazy glaze of late, a lock of hair plastered to his sweaty forehead, and he shuffled in what appeared a painful stoop. Dandruff flecked his shoulders, thick as dust, and the right side of his body trembled uncontrollably. The German people would have been amazed to see the weakened condition of their Supreme Leader. The staff was assembled in a line, and the Führer proceeded to shake each of their hands.

Bormann watched in silence.

Hitler muttered as he departed, "All is in order."

The end was near. This man, who by sheer personality had so completely dominated a nation, was about to end his life. So much relief spread through the people present that they hurried to ground level and held a dance in the canteen of the Chancellory. Officers, who days before would not have even acknowledged those beneath them, shook hands with their subordinates. Everyone seemed to realize that postwar Germany was going to be greatly different.

By noon the news was not good.

Russian troops occupied the Chancellory. The Tiergarten had been taken. The Potsdamer Platz and Weidendammer Bridge were lost.

Hitler accepted the dismal report without emotion.

At 2:00 PM he took lunch with his secretaries and cook. His wife, Eva, who normally ate with Hitler, was not there. Their marriage was little more than a day old. Such an odd wedding. The din of battle. The concrete walls. A humid moldy aroma that stained everything with a stench of confinement. Both declared that they were of pure Aryan descent and free of hereditary disease. Goebbels and Bormann served as official witnesses. The bride and groom barely smiled.

A queer sort of fulfillment amid overwhelming failure.

After lunch Hitler and his wife appeared together, and all were summoned again. Another farewell occurred with little emotion, then the Führer and Eva Braun returned to their quarters.

Within minutes a single gunshot was heard.

Bormann was the first into the room. A smell of cyanide smarted the eyes and forced a retreat while the air cleared. Hitler lay sprawled on the left side of the couch, a bullet hole the size of a silver mark in his skull.

Eva Braun lay on her right side.

A vase filled with tulips and white narcissi had fallen from an adjacent table, spilling water on her blue dress. There was no sign of blood upon her, but the remains of a glass ampule dotted her lips.

A woolen blanket was produced, and Hitler's body was wrapped inside. The Führer's valet, Linge, and Dr. Stumpfegger carried the body to ground level. Bormann wrapped Eva Braun's remains in a blanket. He shouldered the corpse and carried her from the room. One of the guards called to him, and he halted in the passageway. There was a brief discussion, and Bormann laid the body in an adjacent anteroom. He dealt with the guard, then passed Eva Braun's corpse to Kempka, who in turn passed her to Guensche, who then gave her to an SS officer who carried the body up to the Chancellery garden.

The two corpses were laid side by side, and petrol was poured over them. Russian guns boomed in the distance and someone mentioned that Ivan was less than two hundred meters away. A bomb exploded and drove the mourners into the shelter of a nearby porch. Bormann, Burgdorf, Goebbels, Guensche, Linge, and Kempka watched as Guensche dipped a rag into petrol, lit it, then tossed the burning fuse onto the bodies.

Sheets of flames erupted.

Everyone stood at attention, saluted, then withdrew.

“All that they destroyed,” Schüb said. “All who died. And it ended just like that.”

“What does it matter?”

“It matters a great deal. For you see, when they laid out Eva Braun’s corpse, something was different. Something no one at the time noticed. But who could blame them. So much was happening so fast.”

He waited.

“Her blue dress was no longer wet.”

Within hours of Hitler’s suicide, Bormann donned the uniform of an SS major general, crammed papers into a leather topcoat, and fled the Führerbunker. On the Weidendammer Bridge he encountered bazooka fire, but managed to flee the scene with only minor injuries. He commandeered a stray vehicle and drove to another underground bunker constructed in secret by Adolf Eichmann, equipped with food, water, and a generator. He stayed there a day, then slipped out of Berlin and headed north, dressed as a forest warden.

Across the Danish border he found a rescue group stationed there weeks before. He had prepared himself for the journey months earlier by burying two caches of gold coins, one in the north, the other in the south. He’d also secreted away banknotes and art treasures that could later be converted into cash. His political position gave him access to Lufthansa, cargo ships, and U-boats, and he’d utilized that privilege in the early months of 1945 to transport out of Germany all that he might need in the years ahead.

By the end of 1945 he was in Spain. He stayed there until March 1946. His face remained obscure until October 1946 when, after he was indicted for war crimes, his picture was posted throughout Europe. It was then he decided to leave the Continent, but not before dealing with Eva Braun.

They were in many ways similar. During the war she was intentionally kept in the background, denied the spotlight, forced to remain in the Bavarian Alps. Only those in Hitler’s innermost circle were familiar with her, so it was easy for her to meld into the postwar world.

She’d returned to Berlin against Hitler’s orders on April 15 to inform him she was pregnant. Hitler took the news calmly, but delayed fourteen days before finally marrying her. During that time he arranged, through Bormann, for her escape. By April 22 Hitler knew that he would never leave the bunker alive. Braun objected to surviving. She wanted to die with Hitler.

But he would not hear of it, particularly with her being pregnant.

A female SS captain was chosen by Bormann, one who possessed a build and look similar to Braun's. The woman was proud of the fact that she would be with the Führer in his final moments. She entered the bunker on April 30, an hour before Hitler and Braun were to lock themselves away for the final time. In the confusion of the day no one noticed her. People were routinely coming and going. With Bormann watching, she bit down on a cyanide capsule and ended her life. Her body, clothed in a blue dress identical to the one Braun would be wearing, was kept in an adjacent anteroom.

Bormann was the first to enter the bedroom after Hitler died. He sheathed Braun's body on the pretense of protecting her dignity. He realized all focus would be on Hitler, and he was correct. Braun's task was to lie still and be dead. It was Bormann who carried her from the bedroom, and after being called by a guard he momentarily deposited her body in an anteroom. That was not prearranged, but it provided Bormann an easy opportunity to make the switch, leaving Braun hidden in the anteroom while her substitute was burned with Hitler in the Chancellory garden above. In the chaos that followed, Braun, her physical appearance altered and dressed as the SS captain who'd arrived hours earlier, left the bunker.

She was flown out of Berlin to Austria on one of the last flights. From there she traveled by train to Switzerland, no different from thousands of other displaced women. Her journey, using new identity papers and money provided by Bormann, was easy.

Eventually, she made it to Spain, and there they stayed until the spring of 1946, under the protection of a local fascist leader. Transportation to South America was arranged on an oil transport by a Greek sympathizer, so they traveled to Chile. Nazis had congregated there since the war, most in heavily fortified estancias south of Santiago. Bormann felt crowded, so he and Braun settled near the Argentine border in the lake district until the lure of Africa drew him back across the Atlantic.

“Bormann never let Eva Braun forget that she owed him her life,” Schüb said. “He loved to retell the story of her survival, and the part he played. It was his way of asserting superiority, making sure she knew that he was the only reason she still breathed.”

Wyatt was amazed at what he was hearing. History had never been a great interest of his, but it was hard to ignore the impact of what Schüb was saying.

“They were married in Africa.”

“Why?”

“She was pregnant again, and he wanted the baby to be legitimate.” The older man paused. “Theirs was a difficult relationship. Her dead husband, the man she truly loved, told her to rely on Bormann. She tried to follow Hitler’s will, but Bormann was difficult. It helped that, before the war ended, their initial disdain of each other had somewhat faded. Bormann was the one who provided her with money. Took care of her needs. She respected his power.”

A moment of silence passed between them.

“Strange was his personality,” Schüb said. “Capable of murdering millions, yet concerned that his offspring would be called a bastard.”

“What happened to Hitler’s child?”

“Braun gave birth in January 1946. The baby was robust and healthy. That occurred while they were still in Spain. They did not arrive in Chile until early 1947. The child did not make the journey. Bormann took the baby at birth. He was tasked by Hitler with taking care of Braun and the child. But that never happened.”

He understood. Once Hitler was dead, Bormann made the rules.

“Eva Braun bled to death giving birth to Bormann’s child. That was in 1954.”

A muffled sound filled the air overhead, like a breeze. He glanced up to see birds, not a hurried or confused flight, but a pilgrimage, their shadows flitting across the moon.

“The night is their refuge,” Schüb said. “They will return at dawn.”

He continued to watch until the last of the shadows faded into the blackness. He faced Schüb and said, “Did you kill Isabel and the book dealer?”

There was hesitation while the old man caught his breath.

Then Schüb swiveled his head like an owl and said, “Be patient, Mr. Wyatt, and I will tell you everything.”

He wondered if that was a good thing.

I will tell you everything.

Why?

These secrets had stayed buried a long time. Why share them now? Particularly with someone who could repeat them.

Which made him wonder.

Was the next bullet to the head his?

“Christopher Combs has become a problem,” Schüb said. “He fancies himself a treasure hunter. Did you know that about him?”

He shook his head.

“He’s also a Nazi enthusiast. He has quite a collection hidden away.”

“You’ve seen it?”

“I sent men to steal a look.”

“Is Combs investigating you?”

Schüb chuckled. “I should say not. No, he’s after the gold.”

He listened as Schüb explained how, in the last days of the war, the Berlin Reichsbank was emptied, its contents transported south to the Alps and the National Redoubt, the supposed last stand of the Third Reich. Those assets came by railway from Berlin to Mittenwald. The American army wasn’t far away, and time was short. There were gold bars, boxes of bullion, bags of coins, and millions in foreign currency. It was supposed to be buried in mountain caches. Some was, by a special army detail. But only a fraction of that loot was found after the war.

“There is a great debate over exactly how much was actually buried,” Schüb said. “Later investigations indicated that American soldiers may even have discovered some of the gold and kept it. I’ve read FBI reports from the time, after they were called to Germany to investigate. The results were inconclusive. But if Americans did find the Reichsbank assets, it was still only a portion of the total that the bank held.”

Schüb reached beneath his jacket, produced a piece of paper, and handed it to him.

April 28, 1945

Delivery of the Reichsbank assets occurred without event in Mittenwald. An inventory was performed that revealed the following:

64 bags of gold (2 bars each for a total of 728 bars)

boxes of gold bullion

5 boxes of gold bars (each containing 4 bars)

bags of gold coins

1 boxes of gold weighing 150 kilos

0 boxes of gold coins

All banknote printing plates were disposed of in Lake Walchen per original orders. Cache locations were chosen on the north-facing mountain slopes at elevations varying from 100 to 200 meters and burial holes prepared during the night. Disposal occurred over the course of April 25 and 26, completed by the 27th.

“That is an English translation of a German memoranda from the time. Many call the Berlin Reichsbank the largest bank robbery in history.”

Wyatt motioned with the paper. “Why is this not in German?”

“Because you do not speak that language.”

He was impressed. “What else do you know about me?”

“That you have been tracking Combs. He betrayed you eight years ago and cost you a career. I’m assuming you came here to kill him.”

“You know a lot about me.”

“You did your job, and you did it well. You asked little besides loyalty and respect. Those I understand. You, of course, received neither from Combs.”

The pieces were beginning to fit. “Combs came here and started asking questions. He located Isabel and the book dealer. He was probing into something that you wanted to remain secret.”

“Not just me. There is another. You asked me a moment ago if I killed Isabel and the book dealer. I killed neither. But the book

dealer, Gamero, was going to sell Combs certain documents, like the one you hold. I tried to dissuade him, but he was far too greedy. Isabel. God bless her. She was bitter and angry and talked too much. Unfortunately, my brother was not as patient as I.”

“He killed them?”

“He is a difficult man. He attacks our common problem in a different manner. Killing is easy for him. He is much like his father.”

“And who is that?”

“Martin Bormann. He was the child born while they lived in Africa.”

He had another question but held it for the moment.

“My brother became heir to the family fortune. During the war, Bormann controlled the Adolf Hitler Endowment Fund of German Industry. Or, as history as labeled it, Hitler’s Bounty. The moneys came from German industrialists. Some paid willingly, others required encouragement. It was the price the wealthy paid for the privilege of profiting from the Reich. Bormann ruled that fund, and many believed that he diverted much of those assets into foreign accounts. They were right. Gamero’s file cabinets contained records of those transfers.”

“A bit stupid, wasn’t it? Keeping records.”

Schüb smiled. “Such was their fallacy. Nazis loved to write things down. Like that memo you hold. It records the transfer of much wealth at a time when it would have been far better to say nothing.”

He could not argue with that.

“Gamero was the son of a German immigrant. His father, along with countless others, filtered into Chile after the war. Some had relatives in the area, descendants of the original German émigrés who came, with the encouragement of the government, into central Chile during the 19th century. Gamero’s father had been a high-level diplomat in the foreign service, blessed with living abroad during the war, capable afterward of denying, with impunity, any involvement with war crimes.”

“Who are you?” he asked, truly wanting to know.

Schüb stared at the fire, still sitting slouched in the chair. “I am a man who bears a heavy burden. I think you can understand that,

can't you?"

"I came here to right a personal wrong. I don't care about your problems."

"I wish mine were as simple as yours."

Silence passed between them.

"My brother is dead," Schüb said. "I killed him myself a little while ago."

"Why am I still alive?"

"I want to show you something."

He followed Schüb across the grass, back into the woods, and onto a wide path. After ten minutes of walking, during which his host said nothing, he spied the citadel, the long ponderous edifice clinging to the mount of a sharply rising slope, its gray walls splashed with a sodium vapor glow.

They found a paved lane and followed the incline up to the main entrance. A solitary guard stood outside the wall, armed with a rifle.

"My brother's castle," Schüb said. "My guard."

"Where do you live?"

"Not here."

He surveyed the burg and its assortment of buildings, the walls dotted with mullion, dormer, and oriel windows. They walked into an inner courtyard. Several cars sat idle. Some of the windows above glowed with light, but most loomed dark and silent.

A lighted entrance seemed the way in. They started across the cobbles, passing the dark cars.

Inside was opulent, German, and medieval. Exactly what he would have expected.

"My brother clung to his heritage."

Schüb led them upstairs to a sleeping chamber. Wyatt noticed the enormous bed with bulbous Jacobean legs. Above its head hung a massive oil painting that depicted the archangel Michael with his sword directing anxious wayfarers toward heaven.

Then he noticed the panel. On the far side, in an alcove.

A slab of stone, hinged open.

They walked over and stepped inside. Stone stairs lined with a red carpet runner wound down in a tight circle. They slowly descended and finished standing on a polished gray slate floor, staring at a Nazi uniform. The dry air was clearly climate-controlled and humidified. The coarse stone walls, plastered and also painted gray, bore evidence from when they were hacked out of the bedrock. The chamber cut a twisting path, one room dissolving into another. There were flags, banners, even a replica of some SS altar. Countless figurines, a toy soldier set laid out on a colorful map of early-20th-century Europe, helmets, swords, daggers, caps, uniforms, windbreakers, pistols, rifles, gorgets, bandoliers, rings, jewelry, gauntlets, photographs, and a respectable number of paintings signed by Hitler himself.

“There are about three thousand items in all,” Schüb said. “A lifetime of effort. Perhaps the greatest collection of Nazism on the planet. As I said, my brother loved his heritage.”

Wyatt’s attention drifted ahead, where he spied more memorabilia. Schüb stopped at a headless mannequin, one of many that displayed a variety of 1930s-period clothing.

“This was the summer dress of a Sturmbannführer. A handsome white coat dotted with silver buttons, an Iron Cross, a scarlet armband, and a gold Horseman’s Badge affixed to the left breast pocket. By Hitler’s order the coat was worn only between April 1 and September 30, adorning the highest-ranking officers during ceremonial occasions at Berchtesgaden. To wear it any other time or place was unthinkable. Impressive, isn’t it? The Nazis were good at coating the rotten with a handsome veneer.”

He’d entered a macabre world, his mind reeling at the spectacle. And though he’d seen worse, he’d never seen stranger.

“When I see all this,” Schüb said, “I think of my childhood. Men, in secret, wearing armbands adorned with swastikas. Gorgets. Bandoliers. Gauntlets.” The older man pointed to a porcelain basset hound on display. “Prisoners at Dachau made those for the SS.”

He stared at the shiny white dog.

The subterranean labyrinth ended, ahead, at a solitary wooden door.

Schüb faced him. “Before we go in there, there’s something you must know.”

Bormann watched as Eva Braun writhed and screamed in agony. She was fighting the birth, though the midwife had cautioned her to relax. Her legs stiffened as another contraction racked her. She’d been nothing but difficult for the past few months. But their constant movement had clearly complicated things. They’d met up finally in Barcelona. He’d left Germany from the north, through Denmark and the Netherlands. She arrived from the south, starting in Switzerland and moving by rail into Italy, then across France. The Barcelona house had been used during the war as a secure location. Not taking any chances, he’d moved them farther into Spain, to an anonymous spot that he alone chose. The Führer was dead. He was in charge now.

And things were going to be different.

Braun screamed again.

He was tired of listening to her weakness.

She screamed again.

“When will this end?” he asked the midwife. She was a Spaniard who thankfully spoke German.

“The baby is coming now.”

Bormann stood behind the woman, whose head was plunged between Braun’s spread legs, each ankle tied to a post of the bed. Braun stretched the bindings, but the thick posts held firm.

“Hurry it,” he said.

“Talk to God about that,” the midwife said, never turning her head.

Another scream pierced the room. Thankfully, the farmhouse was isolated.

The midwife reached out as Braun gritted her teeth. “Now. Push with all you can muster.”

Braun’s head came up from the bed. For a moment Bormann’s gaze locked with hers. He wanted to tell her to shut up and finish, but it seemed that the end was at hand. Braun’s teeth were clenched tight, her face contorted, all her focus seemingly on expelling the baby from her womb.

“Yes,” the midwife said. “Yes.”

Braun pushed harder. Her breaths came short and shallow. Sweat soaked her. The woman grappled between Braun’s legs and Bormann watched as a head came into view, then shoulders, arms, chest, and finally legs as the fetus emerged.

“What is the sex?” he asked.

The midwife ignored him. Her attention remained on the infant now cradled in her arms, the umbilical cord tracing a path back inside the womb. Braun had relaxed and appeared unconscious.

He could not see the baby clearly, so he moved closer.

“The sex. Tell me,” he demanded.

“A boy.”

Had he heard right? “Truly?”

“You sound amazed.”

He recovered his emotions. No one must know what he thought. “I only speak of the joy he will bring to the mother.”

“It is good to have a son.”

The midwife turned her attention back to Braun as the afterbirth was expelled. He stepped away. A son. Hitler’s son. He recalled what his former supreme leader had told him after Braun had revealed in the Führerbunker that she was pregnant. There had been no anger, no joy. Just a placid acceptance. But Hitler had wanted the baby to survive, harboring a dream that his issue would one day resurrect the movement. So he released Bormann from his duty and instructed him to ensure that both Braun and the baby survived. Bormann had accepted the charge only as a way of escaping the death sentence that was Berlin. He hadn’t wanted to stay in the first place and had urged Hitler to flee south to the Alps. The fanatical idiot refused. Hitler had actually thought that he could rally enough military might to thwart the advancing American and Russian armies.

He glanced down and noticed that the midwife had tied the umbilical cord and cut away the tissue. The infant started to cry, and the woman swiped the tiny face with a wet rag.

“He is a beauty,” the midwife said.

“No flaws?”

“None I can see.”

Not what he wanted to hear.

“Give him to me.”

The woman laid the screaming baby in his arms. Sparse wisps of black hair matted the scalp. He wondered what Adolf Hitler would have thought to be here, holding his son, admiring what he and Eva Braun had conceived. Most likely he would have felt nothing. Hitler had been drawn to children, but only because they represented the perfect canvas for his political image.

He laid the baby beside a still-unconscious Eva Braun.

He then removed the Luger he'd carried since leaving the Führerbunker and fired one bullet into the midwife's skull.

The fat woman's body slammed to the floor.

Eva Braun never moved. Exhaustion claimed her. She would be told that the baby died at birth and the midwife was killed for incompetence. There would be no argument from her. Why should there be? They were now bound together. Their lives forever intertwined.

And that was fine.

She wasn't altogether unpleasant, and he realized that his ability to enjoy female companionship in the years ahead would be limited. He must be careful. He'd watched how a woman could undo a man. That was not going to happen to him. Eva Braun would do as she was told or he'd plant a bullet in her skull, too.

He carried the infant from the room.

Outside, in the shade of a porch that jutted from the front of the farmhouse sat a man. Bormann walked over and handed him the baby. "Raise him as your own."

The man's eyes were misty with pride. "He is his?"

"Absolutely."

"I heard a shot."

"The midwife's duty."

The man nodded. "There can be no witnesses."

"Just you and I, old friend."

"I will raise him well."

"It is of no matter to me any longer. I have done my duty."

A lie. He was supposed to raise the child himself. But he wanted no more reminders of Adolf Hitler.

The man rose from his chair and said, "Live long, old friend."

"I plan to."

And Bormann watched as his visitor headed for a car parked under the shade of a sprawling elm, the infant in his arms.

Schüb finished his story.

Voices broke the silence.

From behind where they stood.

Schüb ignored the sound and stepped forward, grasping a rope handle for the door.

They entered what appeared to be a funerary chamber, the spacious room lit by sconces. A far wall was lined with bookcases, illuminated by ceiling-mounted floodlights. The shelves teemed with odd-shaped volumes packed tight in rows. But what dominated the room were two sarcophagi, each flooded in a pool of blue-white light. The exteriors were of marble, one gray, the other pink, the pair similar in size.

“The pinkish tomb contains the mortal remains of my mother,” Schüb said. “Eva Braun. The other is Bormann’s.”

“Your brother was Bormann’s son, born in Africa,” Wyatt said. “You, though, were the baby born in Spain. You are the son of Adolf Hitler.”

Schüb’s face had a sad remorseful mien.

Then Wyatt saw the gold bars, stacked five feet high, at least six piles on pallets. “There must be several hundred million dollars’ worth of bullion there.”

“A fraction over a billion actually.”

“This is Hitler’s Bounty?”

“What is left of it.”

He’d never seen so much raw gold.

He stepped over and lifted one of the bars. Maybe thirty or so pounds. He studied the top, half expecting to see a swastika etched into the surface. But there was nothing.

“No links to Nazis remain,” Schüb said. “Those traces were removed long ago.”

“This is from the Reichsbank robbery? What was stashed in the Alps at the end of the war?”

“Some. Some more from the bounty. Other parts from unspeakable sources. Bormann took control of all those caches.”

He recalled what Isabel had called Bormann.

A quetrupillán. Mute devil.

“This is the devil’s gold?”

Schüb nodded. “A good way to describe it.”

“How did Bormann get it all here?”

“Simple, actually. Much of what was buried in the mountains were bags of iron bars and plain paper. The actual gold and

currency was moved farther south into Austria, where it stayed for many years. The man who raised me from birth personally supervised its eventual transportation here in the early 1950s. It took several years to accomplish, but it was accomplished.”

“How was all that kept secret?”

“There were men who still believed in the Reich. They did their job and took what they knew with them to their graves. They understood their duty. But of course each one realized that he, or his family, would be shot by the others if he revealed anything.” Schüb paused a moment, grabbing a breath. “They were but a few of those men, and eventually they all died. Bormann, though, survived. He possessed a great hatred for the follies of man, and all who knew him, like the real Gerhard Schüb, were aware of that fact. No tolerance for frailty or passion, no pity for those who’d done him harm. He wished his enemies to hell, and put them there in his heart. He was, quite simply, a man of wrath.” Schüb paused. “Or a devil, as you put it.”

“Yet men served him.”

Schüb took a disconsolate stroll around the stacks of gold bars, eyeing the gleaming metal in the cool glow of the light fixtures. “That is true.” He motioned to bookshelves. “Toward the end of his life Bormann and my adoptive father communicated more frequently. Bormann started writing down his thoughts. He did this while serving Hitler also. He was obsessive about note taking. ‘The savior of the administrator,’ he would say. He created meticulous journals. Textbooks, he called them. Before he died he gave the journals to my brother. Braun, too, maintained private dairies, which Bormann gave to him for safekeeping. I’ve read all of them. Her thoughts were of Hitler, Bormann, and what fate had prescribed for her. Bormann’s journals are far more extensive. I have read those, too. That is how I know what I know.”

Wyatt glanced at the shelves, the volumes in varying shapes, sizes, and colors.

“My brother stored them carefully. They have been here, underground, many years. I assure you, each is authentic and can sustain any test an expert cares to impose.”

He turned his attention back to the tombs. “Why are the bodies here?”

“My brother believed that they did not deserve an anonymous grave in Africa. They are his family.”

“But not yours.”

Schüb stepped to the smaller sarcophagus. Eva Braun’s. And lightly stroked the exterior. “She would be appalled.” The older man went silent for a moment. “Strange how she never saw either one of her children.”

He again heard voices from beyond the door.

“Our final visitor has arrived.”

He turned and watched as Chris Combs was led into the chamber at gunpoint. He hadn’t spoken to Combs since the administrative hearing, and they really hadn’t talked then. Combs had simply sold him out through his sworn testimony while he sat and listened. After, he intentionally made no contact. That day would come, he’d told himself many times.

A tinge of relief entered Combs’ eyes as he spotted Wyatt. “Are you their prisoner, too?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Then what is this?”

Finally, Combs noticed his surroundings, particularly the gold. “Holy Mother of God. It does exist.”

“That it does,” Schüb said.

“I knew it. I knew it all along. I’ve searched the records for years. Hoping. Finally, I found leads.” Combs faced Wyatt. “That’s why I came down here. To check them out.”

“Two people are dead thanks to you,” Wyatt said.

“I didn’t kill anyone.”

“No,” he said. “You just gave others a reason to do it.”

A puzzled look came to the liar’s face. Then Combs asked Schüb,

“Who are you?”

Wyatt decided to answer for him. “He is the son of Adolf Hitler.”

“You’re not serious.”

“I’m afraid he is,” Schüb said. “I am genetically linked to an unfathomable evil, though I abhor even the mention of anything

remotely related to National Socialism. Where some have the audacity to preach the good in Nazism, while rejecting the bad, I have nothing but revulsion for all that it was.”

“Why have I been brought here at gunpoint?” Combs asked. “I’m an American intelligence operative. Surely you know that.”

“This man, Wyatt, has come to kill you. Do you know that?”

“That true?” Combs asked him.

He nodded.

“Come on, Jonathan. That was eight years ago. I had to do it. You know that. I had to let you go. If I’d stuck with you at that hearing, we would have both gone down. I planned to take care of you afterward, and I did.”

“I didn’t want to be taken care of. I wanted you to keep your word.”

“Two men died in that warehouse. You ordered them in there.”

“It’s the risk we all take. I was under fire. Malone was under fire. We needed their help. That’s their job. But you sold me out to protect yourself.”

“I know. I know. It was a tough call for us both. But that board was going to find against you no matter what I said. I knew that.”

“If you’d told them that you, as my supervisor, had no problem with what happened, the outcome could have been different.”

“You don’t know that.”

“We’ll never know, thanks to you.”

“Why not Cotton Malone? Why aren’t you pissed at him? He brought the charges.”

“I haven’t forgotten that.”

“Look, Jonathan. I made sure you got plenty of contract work thrown your way. I know you’ve done well from that. I can make sure plenty more comes.”

“I wanted my career.”

Combs stood still and silent.

Schüb said, “In this room, Herr Combs, is everything you sought. This was my half brother’s estate. The final keeper of all secrets. He concealed the last remnants of the Third Reich. I despised him all of my life, as he did me. We were forced together since we shared the

same mother and a common heritage. The difference being I hated that past. He worshiped it.”

Combs stood near the larger sarcophagus, the one that held Bormann. “History will have to be rewritten.”

Schüb reached beneath his jacket and produced a pistol.

The old man aimed directly at Combs and fired three times.

Bullets sent Combs staggering back toward the wall of journals. Schüb then planted two more rounds into the skull. Combs said nothing, the attack coming too quickly for him to react. His eyes simply went blank as the life left him, and he dropped to the floor.

Schüb tossed the gun onto the body. “That is the second man I’ve killed today.”

A flick of his hand and the two men who’d brought Combs left.

Wyatt stood silent.

“When it came to the moment,” Schüb said, “I sensed that you may not have killed him. You speak of revenge, but your anger is more subtle. More private.”

“I’ve killed.”

“In the heat of battle, of course. But this battle is eight years cold. Could you have done what I just did?”

He thought about the question.

True, he’d killed, but not in cold blood.

Could he have done it?

“It’s time for you to go,” Schüb said. “Somebody has to know about all of this. Somebody has to know the truth. I chose you. But please know that I was no Nazi. I did not ask to have Hitler’s blood course through me. My brother longed to be me. He told me that many times. I longed to be someone else. That is why I assumed Gerhard’s name. My feeble attempt at salvation.” He went silent for a moment. “This Christopher Combs forced a final confrontation between brothers. Someone had finally found us, after all these years. My brother dreamed of glory. I hoped for anonymity. It is true that the world has changed, but in many ways it remains the same as seventy years ago. Hate still exists. Bigotry can be manipulated. The masses are gullible.”

The comments were colored by sadness and regret.

He understood. "It's over for you, too."

Schüb's hands gripped the marble of Eva Braun's tomb in a tight embrace. "It has been for a long time. I am the son of Adolf Hitler. Do you know how many would relish that fact? I would be their idol." Schüb surveyed him with an insolent look. "Even you, Wyatt. When you look at me, you think of him, don't you?"

He could not lie. "I do. But you're not him."

"Few will make that distinction. I will forever be his son. A product of Eva Braun, the disgusting whore who resides right here, beneath this marble. And make no mistake, that was what she was. A whore, pure and simple. She profited from the blood of millions, all the while professing love for a maniac. I have no desire to harbor her genes, either."

Schüb still held the gun, his face a shifting kaleidoscope of intense emotion.

He could sympathize.

There comes a time when everything must end. Eight years ago it had been his career. Ever since, he'd harbored a bitterness for Chris Combs.

Now that was gone.

It was Schüb's time to purge.

"Good luck to you," he said.

"You, too. My men have been told not to disturb you. They will deal with all of this. The house will be burned. I'm assuming they will keep the gold, which seems appropriate. With all that was done to amass this wealth, it ends up meaning nothing, carried off by insignificant souls."

Wyatt left and walked through the twisting galleries to the base of the spiral staircase leading up.

The past few hours had certainly been eye opening.

A shot thudded, like a balloon popping beneath a blanket.

He envisioned the scene. Gerhard Schüb had done exactly as had his natural father. He'd ended his life with his own hand. But where Hitler died a coward to avoid the repercussions from what he'd wrought, the son took his life in an act of desperation. Normally

suicide would be deemed a weakness, the result of a sick mind or an abandoned heart.

Here, it was the only means to stop it all.

Everything had a conclusion.

Which brought him to the question Chris Combs had posed. Why not Cotton Malone? Why aren't you pissed at him? Combs was right. Malone had brought the charges.

Could he have killed Combs?

Definitely. Schüb simply saved him the trouble.

Then the old man had done what needed to be done.

Just as he must.

Cotton Malone?

A job waiting for him back home might well provide the means to finally repay that debt. Another director, Andrea Carbonell of the National Intelligence Agency, had called, wanting to hire him. She'd offered big money and told him enough about the assignment for him to sense an opportunity.

Chris Combs.

One down.

Cotton Malone.

One to go.

Read on for an excerpt from Steve Berry's

The Jefferson Key

NEW YORK CITY

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, THE PRESENT

6:13 PM

ONE MISTAKE WAS NOT ENOUGH FOR COTTON MALONE.

He made two.

Error number one was being on the fifteenth floor of the Grand Hyatt hotel. The request had come from his old boss Stephanie Nelle, through an email sent two days ago. She needed to see him, in New York, on Saturday. Apparently, the subject matter was something they could discuss only in person. And apparently, it was important. He'd tried to call anyway, phoning Magellan Billet headquarters in Atlanta, but was told by her assistant, "She's been out of the office for six days now on DNC."

He knew better than to ask where.

DNC. Do Not Contact.

That meant don't call me, I'll call you.

He'd been there before himself—the agent in the field, deciding when best to report in. That status, though, was a bit unusual for the head of the Magellan Billet. Stephanie was responsible for all twelve of the department's covert operatives. Her task was to supervise. For her to be DNC meant that something extraordinary had attracted her attention.

He and Cassiopeia Vitt had decided to make a New York weekend of the trip, with dinner and a show after he discovered what Stephanie wanted. They'd flown from Copenhagen yesterday and checked into the St. Regis, a few blocks north of where he now stood. Cassiopeia chose the accommodations and, since she was also paying for them, he hadn't protested. Plus, it was hard to argue with regal ambience, breathtaking views, and a suite larger than his apartment in Denmark.

He'd replied to Stephanie's email and told her where he was staying. After breakfast this morning, a key card for the Grand Hyatt had been waiting at the St. Regis' front desk along with a room number and a note.

PLEASE MEET ME AT EXACTLY 6:15 THIS EVENING

He'd wondered about the word exactly, but realized his former boss suffered from an incurable case of obsessive behavior, which made her both a good administrator and aggravating. But he also knew she would not have contacted him if it wasn't truly important.

He inserted the key card, noting and ignoring the DO NOT DISTURB sign.

The indicator light on the door's electronic lock switched to green and the latch released.

The interior was spacious, with a king-sized bed covered in plush purple pillows. A work area was provided at an oak-top desk with an ergonomic chair. The room occupied a corner, two windows facing East 42nd Street, the other offering views west toward 5th Avenue. The rest of the décor was what would be expected from a high-class, Midtown Manhattan hotel.

Except for two things.

His gaze locked on the first: some sort of contraption, fashioned of what appeared to be aluminum struts, bolted together like an Erector Set. It stood before one of the front windows, left of the bed, facing outward. Atop the sturdy metal support sat a rectangular box, perhaps two feet by three, it too made of dull aluminum, its sides bolted together and centered on the window. More girders extended to the walls, front and back, one set on the floor, another braced a couple of feet above, seemingly anchoring the unit in place.

Was this what Stephanie meant when she'd said important?

A short barrel poked from the front of the box. There seemed no way to search its interior, short of unbolting the sides. Sets of gears adorned both the box and the frame. Chains ran the length of the supports, as if the whole thing was designed to move.

He reached for the second anomaly.

An envelope. Sealed. With his name on it.

He glanced at his watch. 6:17 PM.

Where was Stephanie?

He heard the shrill of sirens from outside.

With the envelope in hand, he stepped to one of the room's windows and glanced down fourteen stories. East 42nd Street was devoid of cars. Traffic had been cordoned off. He'd noticed the police outside when he'd arrived a few minutes ago.

Something was happening.

He knew the reputation of Cipriani across the street. He'd been inside before and recalled its marble columns, inlaid floors, and crystal chandeliers—a former bank, built in Italian Renaissance style, leased out for elite social gatherings. Just such an event seemed to be happening this evening, important enough to stop traffic, clear the sidewalks, and command the presence of half a dozen of New York City's finest, who stood before the elegant entrance.

Two police cars approached from the west, lights flashing, followed by an oversized black Cadillac DTS. Another New York City police car trailed. Two pennants rose from either side of the Cadillac's hood. One an American flag, the other the presidential standard.

Only one person rode in that car.

President Danny Daniels.

The motorcade wheeled to the curb before Cipriani. Doors opened. Three Secret Service agents sprang from the car, studied the surroundings, then signaled. Danny Daniels emerged, his tall, broad frame sheathed by a dark suit, white shirt, and powder-blue tie.

Malone heard whirring.

His gaze found the source.

The contraption had come to life.

Two retorts banged and the window on the other side of the room shattered, glass plunging downward to the sidewalk seventy-five feet below. Cool air rushed inside, as did the sounds of a pulsating city. Gears spun and the device telescoped through the now empty window frame.

He glanced down.

The window's shattering had attracted the Secret Service's attention. Heads were now angled up, toward the Grand Hyatt.

Everything happened in a matter of a few seconds.

Window gone. Device out. Then—

Rat-tat-tat.

Shots were fired at the president of the United States.

Agents smothered Daniels to the sidewalk.

Malone stuffed the envelope into his pocket and raced across the room, grabbing hold of the aluminum frame, trying to dislodge the device.

But it would not budge.

He searched for and spotted no power cords. The thing, apparently a remote-controlled, high-powered weapon, kept firing. He saw agents trying to maneuver their charge back to the car. He knew that once Daniels was inside, armor plating would provide protection.

The device spit out more rounds.

He dove out the window, balancing himself on the frame, and grabbed hold of the aluminum box. If he could yank it from side to side, or up and down, at least he could deflect its aim.

He managed to force the barrel left, but motors inside quickly compensated.

Below, with incoming fire momentarily deflected, agents stuffed Daniels back into the car, which wheeled away. Three men remained, along with the policemen who'd been waiting at Cipriani.

Guns were drawn.

His second mistake now became evident.

They started firing.

At him.

About the Author

Steve Berry is the New York Times bestselling author of *The Emperor's Tomb*, *The Paris Vendetta*, *The Charlemagne Pursuit*, *The Venetian Betrayal*, *The Alexandria Link*, *The Templar Legacy*, *The Third Secret*, *The Romanov Prophecy*, *The Amber Room*, and the short stories "The Balkan Escape" and "The Devil's Gold." His books have been translated into forty languages and sold in fifty-one countries. He lives in the historic city of St. Augustine, Florida, and is working on his next novel. He and his wife, Elizabeth, have founded History Matters, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving our heritage. To learn more about Steve Berry and the foundation, visit www.steveberry.org.

STEVE
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