

THE HOTEL



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PROLOGUE

Long before the end of World War Two, with the prospect of defeat looming on the horizon, the German hierarchy made preparations for a full-scale evacuation with high-ranking party officials taking priority and others following soon after.

There had already been a long-term plan for the movement of all assets, including vast amounts of gold and capital, to be secretly transferred out of Europe. These funds were essential for building the infrastructure and organisation of the future Fourth Reich. After this successful transfer of wealth numerous escape routes were established to provide quick and safe passage for all remaining key personnel.

A hidden fleet of U boats no longer engaged in naval warfare were now used to transport huge quantities of gold and equipment out of Germany, with the defunct torpedo areas now being replaced with giant containers for this purpose. Once all the vital cargo had been transported, and all the infrastructure had been set up, the fleet was then used to relocate tens of thousands of personnel.

Undetected under the seas, they constantly traveled back and forth along the established routes to Argentina and Antarctica, only stopping off at the Canary Islands to refuel. This Spanish controlled territory near the West coast of Africa was the location of a Nazi outpost that was always fully stocked with enough fuel and supplies for their continuing trips.

Top scientists with key knowledge and advanced technology had already been sent via this route to several secret underground bases located in Antarctica, such as Base 211, where they continued their research and development.

Later, some were seconded to the new projects being established in South America, with their first port of call the isolated region of Patagonia in the deep South of Argentina.

For decades before the war this remote area had been a popular holiday destination and the retirement location of choice for many Germans, with whole areas already completely colonized with expats. This was reflected in the local Germanic culture and ideals that mirrored those back home, with generations living in an established satellite state.

In particular, the resort town of San Carlos de Bariloche was a regular favourite, due to its proximity to a scenic lake district and surrounding mountain ranges. With the injection of significant investment from local German industrialists in 1930, it was redesigned as an exact copy of a Bavarian Alpine resort, along with the construction of a new direct rail connection to the capital Buenos Aires a few years later.

Safe havens such as Bariloche were also used for the locations of secret assimilation centres, initially for Nazi war criminals but later for all migrating officers, to help with their integration into either South American or North American societies. A halfway house to organise their future placement, new identities, allocated vocations, as well as their own secret missions.

For those who were planned to be fast tracked into American society, accommodation was provided through a series of exclusive hotels. Their assimilation process was conducted over a twelve week program, with the nominated candidates continuing to live there long after they had graduated, until such time they received orders for their future deployment.

A whole chain of such hotels had been established throughout both South and North America, all offering a bespoke service in giving selected candidates new identities. Each one had a state of the art medical facility in the basement, which included a clinic and operating theatre that specialised in revolutionary plastic surgery.

Expert doctors and consultants worked round the clock to process the never ending queue of subjects, solely focused on giving each one a completely new makeover. Once the plastic surgery procedure had been completed and all had healed, the next stage was a comprehensive training program to help them seamlessly integrate into the society that they had been assigned to infiltrate.

Most Germans living across South America who were not part of the Fourth Reich's future plans were not aware such places existed, all leading a normal life under the sun in what appeared to be a regular functioning society. Teachers, policemen, shopkeepers, along with every other profession continued about their business blissfully unaware, completely sheltered from this hidden reality that surrounded them.

This provided ideal cover for the waiting candidates, who just blended in with the rest of the expats without drawing any attention to themselves. As most of the hotels had already been established in each location for decades, and their clinics and medical facilities set up years before the end of the war for such an eventuality, there was no suspicion aroused from their presence.

1) THE ROOF

The drone of the small helicopter could be heard from far away, gradually increasing in volume as it hovered above the busy ants below, briefly deafening them before fading back to a distant murmur as it quickly flew ahead. Despite precautions taken, the noise inside the craft's cabin could not be shielded by the padded headphones worn by all those within, making any attempt at conversation almost impossible. The constant vibration was also becoming intolerable, causing rising anxiety and agitation for the two passengers who were not experienced with this form of travel. The uncomfortable seating, lack of insulation, and confined space further reminded them that this was no pleasure trip. Trying to distract himself from the stress cauldron in which he now stewed, the more senior of the two men stared out at the scrolling scenery, desperately trying to find some tranquility in its grandeur.

Suddenly the temperature plummeted dramatically, and with it the window's view soon became obscured by his breath, forming a temporary cloud on the cold pane of glass which quickly drew a wipe from his sleeve to resume his intent observation. He could now see the spindly shadow of their craft that was cast below, which stretched and stuttered hypnotically in line with the ever changing terrain, as they sped across the enchanting winter landscape. Before long they descended even lower, just skimming over the top of the dense frosted treeline, its arm-like branches seemingly trying to reach up and snatch them out of the sky. Ferrying its load with urgent haste, the craft continued to forge its way towards the growing bergs of clouds emerging on the horizon, that were rapidly forming with ominous intent.

The pilot turned his head over his shoulder and loudly informed the passengers with urgent concern that an unexpected weather front was fast moving in and that they should be prepared for a rocky trip. Within minutes they were predictably struck by very strong winds, rising in defiant protest at their unwelcome trespass, each jab further exposing their complete vulnerability.

This dramatic increase in turbulence soon prompted the junior officer to discreetly fasten his safety belt, who against previous advice had neglected to do so before, but now nervously sought its reassuring security. His superior continued to look out of the window, staring down at the memory below of what was once a road, as the light reflected brilliantly off its new treacherous white skin. This winding serpent scarred the land as it uncoiled its tail through the vast forest, dividing nature as it stretched its way through ancient trees, eventually leading to a fork in the road at the tip of its head.

They could now see their final destination, with the looming presence of a huge multi storey hotel emerging from the surrounding foliage. Bizarrely situated in the middle of nowhere, it was as if it had been plucked from the main street of a modern cosmopolitan city and unceremoniously cast down into this forgotten land. Dominating the landscape, it sat proudly gleaming as a beacon, clearly providing a remote island sanctuary, an oasis in the fierce sprawling wilderness that endeavored to consume it. From the ground it could have easily been missed, as its obscured entrance was set back from the passing road, hidden around the corner of an avenue of trees, and completely surrounded by a thick dark forest. The redundant road that usually met its entrance was the only route in or out, and now acted as an impenetrable barrier, drowning under an avalanche of successive snow drifts which had now rendered the hotel's occupants completely cut off from civilization.

Having previously not understood why his Captain had insisted on them flying to this hotel, the senior officer now fully appreciated why their mode of transport had been deemed so essential. Despite this logistical necessity, he still suspected that the top brass were reacting to their leash being pulled by someone of very high importance residing at the hotel. Cynically, he had read between the lines and recognised the echo of uneasy rumblings from those high above, speculating to himself that he had been chosen to attend as an old safe pair of hands, on an ambassadorial role to appease and resolve the issue as calmly and efficiently as possible.

The hotel's forward planning had evidently accounted for the present set of compromising circumstances, with the unusual provision of a helicopter landing pad high up on the very top of the roof. This was the only point within the grounds where a craft could actually land, as the narrow track through the trees that led to the main entrance was barely wide enough to take the delivery of a large truck. The small area just in front of the hotel was completely dominated by a large ornate stone fountain that left no room for any possible landing. This oversized monument clearly served as a roundabout for the tight one way road system that curled around it and then looped back on itself again to the exit. The surrounding dense forest that acted as a perimeter fence, almost encroaching onto the three sides of the building, completed the natural barrier.

Swooping down from the darkening clouds they could now see the landing pad perched high on its own bespoke pedestal, with a giant reflective capital letter H painted in its centre. As soon as they crossed the threshold of the hotel's grounds the craft was immediately attacked by sudden violent gusts that pummeled it with a succession of hefty blows. This truly tested the pilot's expert flying skills, finely developed from years of experience, as well as the nerve of both the novice passengers, as he desperately fought the controls. Once the horizon was level, and the craft was steady again, he turned around to address the more senior passenger.

"There's been a change of plan Inspector! The Captain has just sent orders over the radio for you to proceed alone! Something urgent has come up so we are to return to base for reassignment, and after we have finished we will come back to join you in due course" informed the Pilot with a diplomatic and slightly nervous tone, clearly not comfortable being the messenger of unwelcome news.

The pilot looked across at the Inspector's allocated subordinate to ensure that he had heard the message too, and then chuckled out loud, shaking his head with disbelief before turning back again. The junior officer was crouched down with his head firmly clasped between his legs, rocking back and forth in a nervous manner, still shaking with terror at their previous

turbulence. The Pilot continued to chuckle as he checked his instruments before their final approach, and turned back around again to address the Inspector, who was still digesting the unexpected change in plans.

"I am going to struggle to land her in this crosswind. Even if I did manage to land we could suddenly be blown over by one of these strong gusts. I'm afraid you are going to have to jump down out of the open door mid air. I can hover low enough so it will only be a meter or so. Not that far really" he directed with a reassuring voice.

The Inspector nodded reluctantly, with a stern look of resignation, knowing that there was no real choice, and that any contention was completely pointless. He also didn't want to lose face straight after the junior officer's embarrassing display.

"We will come back as soon as we have finished our mission and as soon as this storm passes! The Captain gave explicit instruction for you to proceed with the plan as previously discussed, he said that you would know how to handle it. Now prepare yourself! When I shout "Go" quickly open the side door and jump down, and don't forget to keep your head low and bend your knees on landing!" he implored with heightened urgency.

The Inspector gave a pointed look and a raised eyebrow of disdain, challenging the necessity of such an instruction, especially to someone of his seniority. He then turned away and unbuckled his safety belt, fastened his coat up to his collar, and readied himself for further direction. Gripping the cold handle tightly, he bent low ready to thrust himself through the gap as quickly as possible. Within a few seconds the pilot skilfully managed to steady the chopper to a level position, just a meter or so from the ground as promised, and quickly turned around one last time to shout at the Inspector.

"Go, go, go!" screeched the pilot at the top of his voice.

The last word he shouted was instantly drowned out by the onrushing wind that roared through the cabin to slap all within with an icy reproach, before being quelled by the quick closing of the door by the departing Inspector. Although he alighted the craft in one smooth motion, unseen to those on board he then fell awkwardly, slipping on the icy surface upon landing and badly twisting his left ankle. Too proud to show his pain, he quickly stood straight back up with gritted teeth and waved them off confidently, the pilot reciprocating with a final salute of respect, before they swiftly ascended and disappeared into the murk of the black clouds.

Buffeted by the sheer force and howls of contempt that conspired to drag him over the edge, the Inspector ambled forward in a slow and considered manner, gingerly creeping down the slope of the helipad. He gripped tightly through protective gloves onto its frozen handrail, trying to lessen the weight on his injured ankle, which he was delicately exploring with each step, desperately hoping that it was merely a sprain and nothing too serious. The icicles that had formed on the railing's metal frame were amazingly all pointing horizontally, creating an almost art deco design, indicating the continuing ferocity of the relentless winds.

In the far distance, across the open space of what seemed to be a no-man's land, stood a small cabin-like building that presumably housed the access entrance to the hotel below. Beyond this at the far end of the rooftop stood the foreboding silhouette of a gigantic water tower, its size quite disconcerting to the eye, almost unnerving as if an optical illusion. The Inspector tried to distract his mind from both his ankle's throbbing pain, and the fear of being blown over, by trying to work out how many millions of litres this behemoth carried in its belly, as he bravely continued to cross the rubicon.

Halfway towards the small structure he saw its door suddenly flung open, the harsh creaking and grating of metal upon metal piercing the billowing wind with its own rude announcement. A golden beacon of light followed, flooding out from the entrance, creating a bright channel of hope ahead of his precarious and unsteady path. The blurry outline of a figure gradually

emerged, bathing in the warm waves, earnestly shouting encouragement for him to hurry. The voice was struggling in the deafening maelstrom, as its owner's arms began beckoning to him with exaggerated gestures. As the Inspector approached closer to the light he began to quicken his pace, making an effort to stand up straighter than his previous hunched gait, conscious of making the right first impression. Luckily his pain had now dissipated to just a mere twinge, and thankfully there seemed to be no serious injury, the growing realization of which now bolstered his confidence. Returning from this brief break in concentration he suddenly realized that he had lost track of his count of the amount of litres in the water tower, which infuriated him more than it should have. As he tried to rise above this obsessive cloud in his mind, a strong gust rushed at him from behind, spitefully lashing out in frustration at the prospect of losing its quarry. Its final desperate lunge pushed him forward several meters towards the entrance, instead of over the side of the roof, and almost straight into the arms of the waiting figure basking within.

2) THE NINTH FLOOR

As soon as the Inspector was safely inside a giant guiding hand quickly slammed the heavy metal door shut behind them, immediately muting the incredible noise outside, which now left a soothing stillness within. This quietness only amplified the sound of the harsh scraping of the security bolt now being shunted across by the tall shadowy figure. Once satisfied that all was tightly secure, he spun around theatrically with an outstretched arm, shaking the Inspector's reciprocating hand with zeal.

"Welcome to our hotel! My name is Ernst Tarnat, I'm one of the residents here, currently staying in an apartment on the Ninth floor with my wife Dorethea. She is waiting below and is probably by now wondering where I have got to. We have been expecting you for some time Inspector, but with this increasingly violent storm we were beginning to fear that you would not be able to make it, or even worse that we may have lost you trying!" blurted the one man welcoming committee, with a slightly over enthusiastic and over confident manner.

As the resident stepped forward out of the shadows he paused under the flickering light fixed to the wall above, which partially illuminated his face, reflecting the curious glint in his eye and a suspicious wry grin. He stood approximately one hundred and eighty centimeters tall with a slim wiry build, bespectacled with a distinguished look that complimented his aristocratic accent. He wore a fine head of silver hair, not a strand out of place, that framed his tanned complexion, evidencing his prolonged stay in the local tropical climate.

The Inspector nodded his head slowly a few times in acknowledgement of this warm friendly introduction and the resident's seemingly genuine concern for his well being. Puzzled how he knew what his rank was, he decided not to dwell on it and just assumed that he had been told on the phone who was coming in. The Inspector returned the smile in kind, pausing to take a breath before responding.

"My name is Hobbs, Inspector Hobbs. I was instructed to come here as soon as possible, hence the arrival by helicopter. Apparently there has been a report from this hotel that a crime had been committed, a suspected homicide? I was told that I would be briefed further upon my arrival. Is the hotel manager available?" inquired the Inspector with a louder voice than intended, which echoed in the quietness of the sheltered stairwell.

As he finished speaking he realized that he was now beginning to thaw out, appreciating the growing circulation around his body that brought with it a welcome warming glow to his bones.

"Alas, the hotel manager is currently incommunicado! Our internal telephone communication system is out of order, the outside lines went down shortly after you were called, and now it seems the elevator is not working properly either. They must have all been affected by the storm, but I'm sure that he is busy somewhere below trying to restore everything. He raised the concern with the authorities, calling your superiors to request your presence here. Before the lines went down he called me internally to handover all the pertinent details, and word of your impending arrival, requesting that I come up and meet with you on the roof as soon as I heard a helicopter approach. You see, recently I've become somewhat of a right hand man to him! Now please, come with me down to my apartment, it's just on the next floor below. Once there I can explain everything in more private and comfortable surroundings!" he urged invitingly with a beaming smile.

As they turned towards the stairwell Ernst patted the Inspector on the back in a firm but friendly manner. However, this unexpected jolt caught him off balance on his injured ankle, causing him to stumble precariously towards the steep stairs. Ernst quickly reached out to grab him by both shoulders and yank him back in one motion, back up to the top step. The Inspector looked up at him in shock, not just for the near miss still flashing before his eyes, but also at his surprising strength and lightning quick reactions. However, despite this grateful save, he had a very uneasy feeling that this act was not as innocent as portrayed. Pausing a second, he decided to let the thought pass and go along with how it was presented, convincing himself that he was just being paranoid.

“Thank you, I think you saved me from a bad tumble there!” gasped the unnerved Inspector.

“You know what that means don’t you? You’re my responsibility now!” quipped the resident with a somewhat sinister undertone, accompanied by his continuing crocodilian grin.

The Inspector decided to ignore this comment and concerning look, continuing on down the stairs but now at a slightly slower pace, wary not to slip on the smooth stone steps before them, which soon led to a simple plain wooden doorway. The stairwell was dimly lit and featureless, just a functional access point, but was still immaculately clean. Even the wooden hand rail that guided their way down had a sheen of recent polish that propelled them forward quicker than desired. The Inspector speculated that tonight was probably not the first time this stairwell and helipad had been used that month, and it was quite possible this was the most frequent form of travel to and from the hotel. He then began to contemplate the cost and necessity of using such travel, and why would so many important persons be staying way out here in the middle of nowhere anyway. Before he could continue with these rambling thoughts he was distracted by the resident opening the wooden door to the hotel, who politely stood aside and waited for him to enter first. Once through the threshold of the entrance he instinctively paused and turned to wait for the resident to follow him through so he could take the lead, carefully closing the door behind them with a loud click.

The light within instantly blinded both men, forcing them to raise their hands up to shield their eyes until they became accustomed to its glare. Once the Inspector regained his focus he could see that the area immediately ahead seemed to be a typical hotel corridor, and directly opposite this entrance was another similar looking door to the one they had passed through. It too had a Spartan look of neglect and basic design, with neither of the two doors facing each other having any number or markings on them. The Inspector assumed that this door in front could be a storage cupboard for janitorial or maintenance purposes, but didn't bother to ask Ernst to confirm this. Next to these two utility entrances the end wall housed a very large window, from waist height to the ceiling, its pane polished to mirror like perfection

Reflecting their figures at the forefront of the painted scene, it clearly depicted them as the two unwanted and fleeting guests which they were. As the Inspector stared at his image he noticed how the window's pane was visibly quivering in protest at the constant shaking from the wind outside, which evidently failed to keep out the chill that was beginning to seep into his bones. The haunting whistling breeze of torment constantly filled the air with desperate woe, increasing in volume the longer they lingered.

Further down the hallway to their right were several other doorways, all wearing a shiny brass handle, and all of a darker wood than the two service doors, with an intricate carved design on the frame that was in keeping with the tradition of a grand hotel. The electric lamps fitted to the wall adjacent to each door wore a plush shade that somehow elevated their position, and clearly illuminated the matching polished brass fitting of their door number. Each one started with the number nine, and all had the same gothic style of typeface, with its distinct tail at the bottom of the number indicating its Germanic roots. The elevator entrance sat proudly half way down the corridor on the opposite facing wall to the flats, and boasted a modern looking face above the overhead grill, its positioning acting as a dividing line between the sets of flats on either side. As they passed it by the Inspector could distinctly hear a faint hum buzzing, as though something was active inside. All the flats seemed to be of a standard size, except for the double door entrance at the far end, which had to be the penthouse.

Ernst confidently strode off ahead of the Inspector at a much quicker pace, heading straight for the double doors, not hesitating to look at any of the other apartments or to check on the lift as he passed it, almost bouncing on the unusually plush carpet homeward bound, quite clearly king of the castle. Despite the evident grandeur, there was still a tired look to the corridor, which held a gloomy ambience that clouded the entire floor with a certain feeling of pessimism and neglect. As they approached the penthouse Ernst suddenly stopped and swatted a few times at a wasp that had descended and began to circle his head with annoying curiosity. "A wasp at this time of year, in this weather, where has he come from?" exclaimed the baffled Inspector.

Ernst expertly struck the irritant with the back of his hand, sending it crashing into the wall, watching with pride as it plummeted to the ground without further movement. Eerily, a clap of thunder rumbled overhead in synchronicity with the impact of the wasp and its fall, which brought a mutual smirk of acknowledgement but no further comment from either man. Ernst then pointed up high to the ceiling above the doorway where there was a huge wasp nest burrowed in between the join of the ceiling and the wall, clearly active with a few sentries buzzing around its entrance on patrol, coming in and out, to and fro.

“There’s another one high up above the elevator entrance too, although that one seems to be quieter now so it may be dormant due to the cold. According to the manager they are apparently protected and need to be carefully removed by pest control experts!” he snorted, trying not to laugh.

“Protected? Are you joking?” exclaimed the incredulous Inspector.

“He is supposed to be arranging removal but there has been no response so far, what with the recent blizzards. Quite frankly, I think he’s just making it all up! He’s either too lazy or too scared to do it himself. Anyhow, until such time, we just have to be careful. You’re not allergic to their stings are you?” checked Ernst, showing genuine concern for his well being.

“No, I’m not allergic to their stings, they’re just not my favorite creatures” continued the Inspector in a low voice as he intently watched another sentry leave its post and descend to invade his airspace.

“How on earth can they survive in these wintery conditions? queried the perplexed Inspector, looking down the corridor to the elevator to double check at the described nest, inwardly chastising himself for not already observing it when they passed by earlier.

Ernst just smirked and shrugged his shoulders without saying anything, before turning his back to enter his home. As he passed through the unlocked double doors, this lack of security in light of what had been reported seemed out of keeping with what the Inspector would have expected to such a concerning event.

Before going inside an uneasy feeling started to cloud his mind, spurring an instinct that something definitely wasn't quite right. As with his prior concerns he decided to just observe and reserve his personal judgment and comment to himself, for the time being at least. As he followed the resident through the entrance he carefully closed the doors, looking up again for any shadowing wasp that may be stalking them, of which thankfully there were none.

The reception room in the flat's entrance was an open square area on a split level with two steps leading up to the rest of the penthouse. Minimally decorated, there was a cloak room to the right and a small table on the left with a redundant telephone stood waist high with an ornate brass mirror above this. Ernst stood at attention with one hand on the cloak room door handle to keep it open and the other held out ready for the Inspector's overclothes. One by one he took the Inspector's hat, coat, and gloves all in one bundle, before turning to hang them neatly inside the cloak room next to the collection already stored. A quick glance at these items helped the Inspector to conjure up images of their owners and the possible characters waiting inside, as the sound of their voices could now be heard coming from the other room, which further helped dress his crystal ball.

Ernst shut the cloak room door more loudly than necessary, probably to announce their arrival and imminent entry, and quickly proceeded through the flat. They passed a relatively small kitchen on his left and then through a short dark corridor to the main living room ahead. As they entered the Inspector instinctively squinted his eyes from the incredibly bright light that was hanging down on a pendant from the ceiling, creating an oval pool of light that washed over the very large table in the centre of the room.

Three other residents, all female, were sitting down and clearly halfway through a game of cards. The green felt that covered the middle was camouflaged with playing cards, cash notes, full ashtrays, and drinks coasters with fine cut glasses on top. The open chair pulled out at the very front had a hand of cards placed face down in front and was evidently where Ernst was previously sitting, which prompted the Inspector to presume that the lady sitting next to his right was probably his wife.