

## Chapter 1

Nazi occupied Paris | July 1943

---

Viktor Neiman's legs felt stiff cramped in the rear cockpit of an RAF Lysander single engine aircraft. The cockpit's original design was for one passenger in addition to the pilot. Modifications made for the Lysander aircraft of Squadron 161 of the British Royal Airforce allowed for two passengers seated uncomfortably facing each other. RAF Squadron 161 was a highly secret special duties unit. The lumbering Lysander was perfectly suited to infiltrating British Special Operations Executive agents into Nazi occupied France and exfiltrating French Resistance operatives. Designed for reconnaissance, it had moveable slats that allowed it to reduce air speed to close to an aerodynamic stall speed of only 65 miles per hour. Ideal for short landings and takeoffs.

Neiman was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army but working as part of the newly created Office of Strategic Services. Spies and saboteurs patterned after the British SOE. With a head start in covert operations against the Nazis, the SOE mentored the OSS as part of the American-Anglo alliance fighting Nazi Germany.

Crossing the northern coast of France at low altitude to avoid German radar, Neiman could see the English Channel surf lit by the full moon on this summer night. The fortified coastline blacked out to prevent nighttime British bombing raids against

## MOSCOW WINTER

German defensive positions. An hour later, the pilot told them to look for lights indicating the landing site. Flashlights directed skyward once French Resistance fighters on the ground heard the engine of the Lysander. A risky maneuver for those on the ground and the occupants of the Lysander.

Neiman understood the difficulty of even finding the landing site at night with only moonlight and no navigational aids in the aircraft other than a compass. His last such mission was aborted forcing rescheduling to a month later to coincide with the next full moon. This mission looked to be on target as the pilot excitedly said, "There they are! Look about twenty degrees to the left of our heading."

As they approached closer, faint lights defined an L-shaped pattern. The pilot responded in Morse code with the acknowledgement recognition signal using a light mounted in the undercarriage. A couple of minutes later Neiman felt the Lysander lose speed rapidly and almost float down into a field surrounded by hedgerows.

Once on the ground, the Lysander rolled to the end of the long side of the L then turned left to line up for immediate take-off. The maneuver provided barely sufficient distance to take off and clear the trees as tall as a two-story house along the hedgerow.

Neiman popped the canopy and along with his SOE colleague climbed to the ground using the fixed ladder mounted to the side of the aircraft. Disembarked, they shook hands with two men who immediately climbed into the aircraft. Within a minute, the Lysander was again airborne.

The members of this resistance group known as *Alliance* quickly hustled Neiman and the SOE agent to an awaiting truck stacked with crates of produce. Neiman and the Brit hid amongst the crates out of site next to the cab. The driver explained he had papers allowing the produce truck as a civilian vehicle to move about at night. If stopped by German or French police, his presence explained as taking produce to arrive early for the open market in nearby Reims. The plan called for spending the night in Reims at a safe house then traveling by train to

## DOUGLAS CLARK

Paris. Their forged cover documents as railroad employees explaining their exempt status from forced labor service in Germany.

Neiman and the SOE agent left Reims Maison Blanche train station in the early morning without incident. Two hours later, they arrived in Paris at Gare de l'Est in the 10th Arrondissement district. Neiman knew Paris well having lived there for twenty years. They were to make their way on foot walking south to a rendezvous at the Fontaine Saint-Michel on the south side of the River Seine at noon. Missing that window, again at five o'clock. Their contact a street vendor selling used wrist watches.

A middle-aged man in a shabby suit stood to one side of the iconic fountain. A folding cart displayed his offering of watches on a felt tray. Behind him was a crutch propped against the pedestal supporting one of the winged lion statues.

Approaching the vendor, Neiman gave the recognition code. "My current watch does not keep accurate time. Do you have a reliable one for sale?"

"All these are fine instruments, Monsieur. Perhaps this Swiss military watch with a rugged stainless steel case?" the vendor said providing the appropriate counter response. "You are to go to 28 Rue Jean de Beauvais. Apartment 204. Announce yourself as Mr. Jones."

Although not required, Neiman bought the watch. Times were difficult for every Frenchman in occupied Paris especially those doing dangerous work with the Resistance.

No sooner had Neiman concluded the purchase than the shrill sound of a police whistle pierced the tranquility. Four French police began converging from two directions. The situation deteriorated rapidly.

The French police brandished revolvers coming straight toward the street vendor. A targeted arrest meaning the police had the vendor under surveillance. That meant waiting for the vendor to make a suspicious contact. Carrying two million francs hidden under a change of clothes and a shaving kit made bluffing their way out impossible if detained and searched. Suspected

## MOSCOW WINTER

of spying meant handing them over to the Gestapo and a very unpleasant ordeal.

The vendor however had no intention of submitting quietly. Producing his own handgun, he fired several shots striking one of the French police officers. The other three officers unleashed returning fire hitting the vendor with several rounds.

Having turned and walked several steps away from the vendor, Neiman and the SOE agent chose to appear as bystanders rather than react. Unarmed, there was little else they could do.

Two of the police officers approached them pointing weapons while the third looked to his wounded colleague. Blood began pooling on the sidewalk around the body of the street vendor.

One officer shouted, "Papers!"

Neiman and the SOE agent extracted their false French passports and travel authorizations as railroad employees handing them over while the other police officer covered them with his revolver.

"What is your business in Paris?" the officer said.

Neiman answered, "Transferred temporarily to work on new renovations to the main line to Lyon. We just arrived from Reims. Walking to Gare Lyon to report for work."

"Open your valises."

Both Neiman and the SOE agent set down their bags. The money was underneath their clothing in a false bottom. It would not withstand a thorough inspection.

The officer began pulling out the clothing from the SOE agent's bag and scattering the contents on the pavement. Neiman anticipated the uncovering of the bundles of French francs concealed in the bottom at any moment. Discovery would seal their fate. His training taught to remain focused looking for any opportunity no matter how desperate. Shot dead a better death than unrelenting torture to end with a worse death.

The police officer rummaging in his colleagues bag suddenly pulled out the false bottom. Seeing the money he exclaimed, "Mon dieu!"

## DOUGLAS CLARK

In that instant, the officer holding his pistol on Neiman looked toward his colleague. Neiman reacted without hesitation by moving into the man deflecting his gun arm while smashing his knee into his groin. The SOE agent immediately kicked the officer under the chin while still bent down going through his bag. Neiman disarmed the injured officer clutching his groin in agony.

The SOE agent was not as fortunate. While disabling the officer with his kick, the third officer shot him twice. Falling to his knees, the SOE agent returned fire but missed. The police officer shot him a third time.

With no way to save his colleague, Neiman grabbed his bag and the police officer's revolver then began running south down Boulevard Saint-Michel. The remaining uninjured officer took pursuit blowing his whistle.

Neiman then spotted two other police running north toward him forcing him to turn left onto the Rue de la Bucherie. The short street ended in two blocks to an open square and park next to ancient church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. The two additional police close behind him began firing. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his left hip causing him almost to fall.

He continued running into the park with trees and bushes but losing ground to the pursuing officers. Coming to a stone wall, he ducked behind it. He could not go on, the pain already sapping him of strength. He must make a stand here. Checking the police officer's revolver, he had six rounds. His only chance was to ambush his pursuers as they came around the corner of the wall only ten feet away. Kill or be captured. That meant reserving the last round for putting a bullet in his head. No assurance he could reach his cyanide tablet in time.

Seconds later, both police officers came running around the corner of the wall together fixed on closing the gap of their suspect. He shot both as they turned in surprise to find him kneeling only feet away against the wall.

While necessary for his survival, shooting French police nevertheless was profoundly disturbing. He was French. The German occupation forcing cooperation from the French civil serv-

## MOSCOW WINTER

ants. Impossible to understand the undoubtedly conflicted sense of duty these police officers experienced. Might they have instead chosen to be *résistants*?

The original officer that gave chase never appeared. Yet by no means safe. Neiman was in a bad way evidenced by just the effort of standing up proving difficult. A quarter of a mile to walk to the appointed rendezvous address. At least he knew the area intimately from his years attending the Sorbonne. The entire sector soon to be swarming with French police and perhaps the German Wehrmacht. Time was critical. Each step radiated intense pain. His left pant leg darkened with soaked blood.

The wailing of police sirens urged him to hurry. He held tight to the revolver in his pocket. A bullet better than days of torture by the Gestapo then death by guillotine, the French method of execution.

Ready to collapse, he came to the outer door of 28 Rue Jean de Beauvais. He rang number 204. A female voice answered. "Who is it?"

"Mr. Jones."

The door lock clicked open and he entered. Facing the staircase, he grabbed the handrail for support. Putting weight on his left leg was now impossible. It took a couple of minutes to hobble up four stairs. A pretty woman appeared at the top of the landing.

"Are you Jones?"

His face bathed in sweat he struggled in reply, "Yes. Wounded. Need help."

The woman rapidly descended the stairs. Seeing the blood, she took his valise and grabbed his left arm offering support.

"You are alone?"

"Yes. My colleague and the street vendor are dead. Shot by police."

Breathing heavily, they made slow progress but the woman pulled on his arm urgently.

"Please, we must move quickly before you are seen."

DOUGLAS CLARK

Once inside the apartment, Neiman collapsed on the floor. Not knowing what to do, the woman grabbed a cushion from the sofa and placed it under his head.

Weakly he said, "What is your name?"

"Best we use code names. Mine is Sparrow. You must remain Mr. Jones."

He nodded imperceptibly.

"I must make a telephone call," she said.

An hour later, the woman opened the door for three men. Neiman was still lying on the floor. She did what she could to make him comfortable. After removing his suit jacket, she gave him water, and tried to stem the bleeding with a sheet bound around his waist to compress the wound.

Moved to a bed, now barely conscious, the last thing he remembered was a large gauze pad placed over his nose. An hour later he woke. Still drowsy from the ether anesthetic, the pain in his hip was intense enough to make him gasp.

A man said, "A doctor just removed a bullet from your hip. You will survive but it will be some time before you can walk. My code name is Raven. For covert agents you and your colleague created an almighty disaster. French police and German Gestapo are conducting a widespread search. You must stay here to recover and take your chances. Tell me what happened."

Finished with recounting events, Raven said, "I understand. The street vendor was a good man. Wounded in the Great War. A jeweler by trade. Hard economic times then the German occupation forced him to sell used watches. Hated the *Boche*. Active in the *Résistance* since the German invasion. Died the death of a French patriot. Sorry about your colleague."

"I still have a mission to accomplish," Neiman said.

Raven raised his eyebrows. "Well the immediate concern is hiding you so you do not comprise our Paris network. Unfortunately, you are a liability."

Neiman's mission was to interview the source of extraordinary high-grade intelligence on the German rocket program for their V-1 and V-2 weapons threatening Britain. He knew only she was a young woman with the code name Amniarix. She was

## MOSCOW WINTER

part of a subnetwork called the *Druids* of the larger resistance organization Alliance. The face-to-face was to ascertain the credibility of the intelligence and determine the potential for expanding on the information.

"For that I am truly sorry. Fortunes of war for both of us. How is it this woman is able to consistently gather such highly secret information?"

"Not sure myself. You be the judge of that if we can arrange a meeting. She works as a translator for a French syndicate of industrialists. They often meet with German military staff in Paris to discuss commercial issues. That often involves arranging contracts with French firms supporting various German military programs. Including their rocket program."

By the strain and perspiration evident on Neiman's face, Raven said, "The doctor left morphine for the pain. I suggest Sparrow give you an injection and you rest. We can talk again tomorrow. Sparrow is one of my best agents. She will see to your needs since it is impossible to move you.

—

The search for the killer of the French police in the Latin Quarter tapered off after a few days when no informers offering information. Staying put proved the best security. The first days under the care of Sparrow were awkward. Getting to the toilet using a crutch still required Sparrow's help. Wearing only pajamas provided little decency when she needed to pull them down to change the dressing on the wound each day. Stepping into the bathtub to bathe required her assistance.

During one such moment, Neiman said, "repeatedly seeing me naked, isn't it about time we called each other by our real names?"

She smiled and blushed. "My name is Inga Jansons."

Both could feel the sexual attraction.

"I am Viktor Neiman. Glad to meet the woman risking her life for my sake."

"We all risk our lives fighting the Germans."



DOUGLAS CLARK

Neiman nodded. "Where are you from?"

"I was born in Latvia. My parents left Riga in 1920 during the post-WWI chaos. The newly created Latvian republic descended into economic depression with runaway inflation. My father was a jeweler. Our wealth was in jewels and gold affording the means of setting up a new life in Paris."

"Past tense? Is your father deceased?"

Her eyes downturned. "I do not know. You see I am Jewish. French police arrested both my parents from their jewelry shop last July. They were among the thousands of Jews in the great Vélodrome d'Hiver Roundup. Sent first to Drancy then onto the German concentration camps in the East. I do not know where or if they are still alive."

"How did you escape arrest?"

"I was living on my own at the time. Working for the Resistance since 1940. Using a false identity. Never identified as a Jew."

"What do you do in the Resistance?"

She gave him a mischievous smile. "I am a forger."

He laughed. "And how did you learn such a trade?"

"Taught by an expert. A brilliant young man. Only nineteen years old, he can forge anything. I work with him not far from here in an underground lab."

"Is that where you go most of the day?"

"No. Not since I have you as a houseguest. I have a legitimate day job. I am a still photographer at a film studio in Joinville-le-Pont near the Bois de Vincennes.

"That's quite a distance to commute. How do you get there?"

"By bicycle."

"We also have something else in common other than fighting the Nazis, Inga. Like you, I am French because I grew up in Paris. Born in Moscow to Jewish parents. Also like you, they became victims to a tyrant. In my case Joseph Stalin rather than Adolf Hitler. Been escaping from both these monsters all my life.

She nodded. "My mother was Russian. She spoke to me in both Russian and Latvian as a child. Do you speak Russian?"

Smiling, he replied, "Да."

## MOSCOW WINTER

"Wonderful. Raven also speaks Russian."

So began something of a domestic relationship. They talked about their pasts in Russian. Difficulties living in occupied Paris. German confiscation of all manner of goods for use in the war effort. Food shortages and rationing made survival increasingly a challenge. The black market became essential. Although the situation was better in the rural areas and the Vichy French State in the south, local demand for agricultural products prevented enough consumables reaching the occupied larger cities. Chronic fuel shortages created bleak winters.

Stuck inside the apartment they developed a bond. For Neiman, nighttime became a time of reflection and wrestling with his emotions. He slept in the only bed forcing her to sleep on the sofa. Attracted to this beautiful interesting woman perhaps sleeping naked during the hot nights just outside the bedroom made sleep difficult.

—

By the third week, Neiman sufficiently recovered to resume his mission. Jansons announced that Raven was bringing Amniarix to the apartment tomorrow morning. With a look of disappointment, she said, "Raven also said you are leaving the following day."

"Where am I going?"

"Back to London of course."

"How is that to happen?"

"You will take a train south to the unoccupied Vichy zone."

"How do I manage that?"

"You will travel under false papers as an injured railroad worker returning to your family home in a village outside Clermont-Ferrand for convalescence. Someone will meet your train when you disembark. They will identify you by description and the man walking with a limp and a cane giving the recognition signal *Sparrow sent me*. You are to fly back to London the same way you arrived. From another secret landing site."

DOUGLAS CLARK

Neiman sighed offering her a broad smile, "Such is war. I was beginning to like it here."

Jansons looked at him then averted her gaze to mask her emotions. "Raven provided a second-hand suit for the journey and that shabby suitcase on the floor. The clothes suitably showing wear befitting your identity."

—

Raven showed up at Jansons' apartment early the next morning. When Neiman came out of the bedroom, both men looked at each other with expressions of surprise.

Raven said, "I thought you looked familiar. Now I am certain we have met."

"I thought the same but was a little foggy from the anesthesia. Once recovered, I recalled. You are Professor Rozovsky. I attended two semesters of your economics class in my first year at the Sorbonne long before the war."

"But I was told to expect an American. The student I remember was French-Russian."

Neiman replied in fluent Russian, "That would be me. I fled Russia during the civil war. Fled France to the United States after Germany invaded. Pearl Harbor left no alternative but to go to war as an American. My name is Viktor Neiman."

Professor Yuri Rozovsky said, "Yes, of course, Neiman." He enveloped Neiman in an embrace kissing both cheeks. "Did you further your education in economics?"

"Afraid not, Professor. I graduated with a degree in art history. Worked at the Louvre then in New York until the war. Right now like you, my profession is spying against the Nazis,"

Rozovsky turned to Jansons, "Inga, here is a tin of real coffee. Black market with a foreign label. How about making us a pot. Amniarix should arrive soon."

All three began making small talk in Russian. Neiman learned that the Russian expatriate community he knew growing up in Paris remained largely intact. Amazing since two-thirds of the population evacuated Paris to the unoccupied Vichy French

## MOSCOW WINTER

State puppet state or to foreign countries for the few with financial means. However, leaving Paris held the possibility of resuming some type of normal life. While many of the Russian community were educated professionals and other White Russians fleeing the Bolsheviks in the early 1920s and late 1930s, they did not represent a particularly affluent class.

An hour later, Amniarix arrived. A petite pretty brunette Jansons' age although she looked younger. Everyone reverted to his or her code names.

Once seated, Rozovsky launched into the interview. "Mr. Jones is with American intelligence working closely with the British SOE. The astounding information you provide is of the highest value to the Allied effort. Mr. Jones, I will let him explain the reasons for this face to face visit."

"Raven is correct, Mademoiselle. The coded transmissions of your material receive the highest priority and distributed to those making military and political decisions. My unusual visit to interview the source is to understand how these senior German military officers and officials can be so free with such secret information."

Amniarix smiled, "What you mean is why would they reveal such information to someone as insignificant as me." Neiman began to protest but Amniarix raised her hand demurely. "My apologies, Mr. Jones. I did not put that very well. The simple truth is I am only part of these conversations as an interpreter. After a time, I become part of the surroundings. Like speaking into a recording device. These men become caught up in the discussion complicated by the language barrier for those on both sides. I find by listening carefully I find opportunities to insert questions under the guise of clarification."

"Well you are certainly effective. Are you expected to take any notes?"

"Oh, no. I am only the interrupter. I just listen and repeat the conversation in the other language."

"How did you become so fluent in German?"

"My mother is a gifted linguist with a degree in languages."

DOUGLAS CLARK

"I have seen the coded transcripts. They include a staggering degree of detail. How do you manage remembering all that information?"

"Do you speak German, Mr. Jones?"

"Yes."

"If you recite a long passage in German I will attempt to translate it verbatim when you are done."

Surprised, Neiman thought for several moments. "Very well. I recall a letter written by Ludwig von Beethoven to his brothers reflecting on his despair because of his progressing deafness. It is called the Heiligenstadt Testament."

Neiman recalled much of the German text from memory since he wrote a paper on Beethoven's extraordinary feat in overcoming his disability. Amniarix listened and after he finished she began repeating the words verbatim in French.

Everyone listened transfixed as she repeated what he said.

Not fluent in German, Rozovsky and Jansons looked at Neiman who smiled shaking his head. "Amazing. Just amazing. How are you able to accomplish that?"

"I don't really know. Born with the ability. Something like photographic memory but with spoken words. Realized I had the gift from my earliest years at school."

"Some of your material is in technical jargon. Do you understand what you are translating?"

"Very little. I ask for an explanation in order to translate. Other than that I do not understand the subject matter."

"If you do not understand the subject, how can you ask questions to expand on the information?"

"Doing this often enough, I can sense when there is controversy or misunderstanding so I can interject a question for clarification which sometimes yields further information."

"You are possessed with remarkable talents, Amniarix," Neiman said. "That certainly explains the quality of your intelligence."

—

## MOSCOW WINTER

After making their farewells to Amniarix and Yuri Rozovsky, Neiman looked at Jansons. Both felt a sadness. He must leave early in the morning to catch a seven o'clock train from Gare Lyon. Averting her gaze, she turned and went to the kitchen. "I will prepare us something to eat. You have a long day ahead of you tomorrow. We shall share a bottle of wine I have saved for a special occasion. Now is such a time although a very sad occasion."

"Inga, please come here."

She turned toward him but remained in the kitchen. "There is nothing to say that will make the pain go away. You must leave. We may never see each other again. By the time the war ends who knows how we will feel about our short time together."

What she said was true. Trying to argue otherwise would be disingenuous.

"Let's enjoy what time we have left tonight. I have great affection for you, Inga. I cannot forget our time together. While you prepare dinner. I will take a bath. Might be days before I get to London. Everything depends on the moonlight and the pilot locating the site."

Careful to use a minimum of the hot water given the fuel shortage, he filled the tub with only a few inches of water and began washing while standing as usual because of his injured hip.

Minutes later, the bathroom door opened. Turning, he took in the sight of Inga standing there naked. She put her index finger to her lips. "Please do not say anything. Let us just enjoy our few remaining hours in intimacy. We both want to make love. I see how you look at me. I could never live with myself if I did not follow my heart before you left me."