

STEEPFALL

Part 1

As Jack struggles to put together a plan for regenerating Germany, Annabel investigates the mystery of the doctored photo. By the end of this part, she has figured out that MI6 is involved. Jack's plan is approved by Bevin, but immediately leaked to Stalin by Watchmaker.

1. It is Christmas 1947. Economics professor Annabel Woolcombe, 30 and single, arrives at Steepfall, the home of her parents, Sidney and Marthe. It is a large, comfortable house on a cliff on the south coast of England.

Sidney Woolcombe is a wealthy car manufacturer. He tells his daughter about a new, ultra-modern vehicle he is about to launch, the Woolcombe Wonder, which will bring comfortable, reliable motoring within the reach of millions of ordinary people.

Marthe Woolcombe, who is German by birth, talks worriedly about her relations in Berlin, her sister Jutta and Jutta's daughter Zusanna, who is a city assemblyman there. This is the third winter since the end of the war, and Germany is still chaotic and impoverished, economic activity minimal, people starving, the Reichsmark worthless and people reduced to barter.

The situation is reminiscent of the twenties. Annabel recalls the horror stories she heard about people collecting their wages in wheelbarrows of paper money. It is partly because of this that her studies led her to the subject of hyperinflation. She is now one of the world's leading experts on currency management, her book "Currency Degeneration" being the textbook,

The local MP drops by for a drink. He is Jack Baxter, 29, son of a doctor in a northern town. At Cambridge University, Jack was the best friend of Annabel's brother, Roger Woolcombe. Roger died at Tobruk, and Jack lost his right hand and right eye in the same battle.

Jack joins in the discussion of Germany. He is a Labour MP and an admirer of foreign secretary Ernest Bevin, a tough-talking anticommunist. Jack saw much horror

in the desert war, and his mission as an MP is to make sure there is never another world war. He believes that the Versailles Treaty, imposed on Germany after the First World War, made the German people so poor and weak that they turned in desperation to Hitler. The way to prevent the rise of another Hitler, he believes, is to turn Germany into a prosperous, democratic country.

Jack has with him the latest issue of *Chat*, a society magazine, containing an article by Peter Osborne, who was at Cambridge with Jack and Roger. It is a lost-generation piece about how many of their friends are now dead. It is illustrated by a photograph taken here at Steepfall in the summer of 1939. Roger had invited a group of friends for the weekend, and they lined up on the lawn for the camera. They include: Professor Arnold Daisy, a Marxist historian; Bill Sinjean, a languid upper-class rebel; Ronald Trumper, known as Trumps, a brilliant bridge player; Healy Jones, now the communist MP for Aberfair; and others. Four of the group died in the war.

Annabel is transfixed by this photo. It is very familiar to her—for reasons we will come to understand—but there is something wrong with it. She is certain that Bill Sinjean was in the photograph. But now he is absent. The photograph is identical in all other respects.

How can this be?

2. Jack is summoned to No10 Downing St, and Prime Minister Attlee makes him a junior minister at the foreign office, under his hero Bevin. Jack is overjoyed, not just because the promotion is an honour, but because this is his chance to do what he wants to do in politics: ensure world peace. (He wonders if Sidney Woolcombe had influence here.) But now he begins to learn that this is easier said than done.

Germany is divided into four zones, each ruled by one of the four victorious Allies in the Second World War: the USSR, the USA, Britain and France. Since the end of the war, the Soviets have vetoed every proposal for regenerating Germany and reuniting the zones. Bevin has lost patience and wants to unify the British, American and French zones, leaving the east to the Soviets. Jack's job is to draw up a plan that Bevin can present to the USA.

Jack immediately asks: What about Berlin? Germany's capital lies deep inside the Soviet zone, though it is divided into four sectors.

The answer to Jack's question is: No one knows.

3. Annabel broods over the magazine article and the photograph. She remembers that weekend vividly. Jack was obviously attracted to her, but she preferred the idealistic Ronald Trumper, and she lost her virginity to him that weekend. Afterwards he dropped her brutally, and in fact she has not seen him since. Many nights she cried over that photo—which is why she is so sure she cannot be mistaken about who else was in it. She is sure Bill Sinjean's image has been somehow removed.

She finds that the visitors' book has disappeared from Steepfall.

She tries to track Sinjean down. He is not in the phone book. His college has no address for him. None of his old friends know where he is. He seems to have disappeared.

4. Jack meets with a group of Mps of all parties opposed to aid to Germany. They are led by his college friend Healy Jones. Healy parrots the Moscow line: Marshall Aid is American economic imperialism, and Germany must be kept weak. There should be no reward for Naziism.

After the meeting, Jack and Healy converse amiably about the old days. Jack mentions the Steepfall weekend, and Healy clearly recollects that Sinjean was there.

Jack calls Annabel in. He still admires her, but winces painfully when he recalls how she rejected him, and how embarrassed he was to see her arm-in-arm with Trumps later. Putting that aside, he recognises that she is clearly the best person in the world to help him plan currency reform for west Germany, and he asks her to write that part of the plan. She agrees.

He tells her that Healy confirmed Sinjean's being in the picture.

5. Annabel sees Healy, but he has changed his tune. He now denies vehemently that Sinjean was even at Steepfall that weekend.

She figures that someone has got at him since he saw Jack.

Using SOE tradecraft, she tracks down Sinjean, although he is not at home.

She goes to see Peter Osborne. At first he denies that the picture has been doctored. Annabel then tells him that she has a duplicate. He admits that it was doctored, but says it was done by the government.

Steepfall is burgled—presumably by someone looking for the fictional duplicate photo.

6. Jack works for the foreign office, which nominally is in charge of MI6. He asks why they would do such a thing as doctor a photo. He is told he doesn't need to know.

He is angered by this response—who are the masters here?—but he decides not to fight them on ground of their choosing.

7. Annabel catches burglars at her flat. There is a fight. She injures one and captures another. She hands him over to the police. At first they are sympathetic. Then the investigation seems to close down.

8. Jack presents his (and Annabel's) plan for Germany. Bevin approves.

Osborne MI6.

9. Then Sinjean phones her. He has heard she is looking for him. Nothing sinister has happened, he's just been out of the country. He is still in the army, he says, and he moves around a lot. She tells him about the photo. He is mystified.

10. Trump explains to Jack that MI6 hate it when their people's photos are published, and they always prevent it if they can.

11. Nik Yudenich is nominally a cultural attaché at the Soviet Embassy in London. In fact he is a KGB general and Stalin's most senior advisor on British intentions.

His key source of information is a spy codenamed Watchmaker, a traitor high in the echelons of the British establishment.

Nik meets Watchmaker to discuss Jack's appointment. Watchmaker is very knowledgeable and gives an accurate summary of Jack's brief.

Nik is worried. The Soviets fought hard and sacrificed much—more than all the other allies put together—to gain a measure of security in Eastern Europe. Yet communist parties are losing ground in Italy, France and Greece. Communist rule in Eastern Europe has been maintained only by ruthlessly eliminating opposition. A western-oriented Germany, made prosperous by the Marshall Plan, is a dire threat to them. Germany has invaded Russia twice in fifty years, and could do so again, this time with American backing. The only hope for the USSR is for Germany to be either weak and impoverished, or eastward-leaning and communist-friendly—or both.

Jack's plan is therefore a profound threat to the USSR.

Part 2

Annabel tries to nail down MI6's involvement in the doctored photo. Watchmaker struggles to frustrate her investigation and discredit Jack's plan. At the end of this part, Watchmaker's great coup: he is able to tell Stalin the West will not go to war over Berlin.

12. Nik Yudenich comes up with a plan for discrediting Jack. He persuades MI6 to give Jack a misleading briefing about Czechoslovakia. Then he gets Healy to ask a question.

13. In the commons, Healy Jones asks Jack a question about Czechoslovakia. Based on an MI6 briefing, Jack replies that the social-democratic government of ? appears stable.

14. Annabel goes to Frankfurt, where the new Deutschmarks, stashed until now in the vaults of the old Reichsbank building, are now being distributed all over West Germany in US army trucks, packed in cartons marked:

15. Jack is humiliated by the Soviet coup in Czechoslovakia. He confronts MI6 and demands to know how this happened. Another junior minister, David Jains, backs him,

asking how much money and how many staff MI6 devote to Kremlin watching. MI6 try to say they don't need to know, but this time it won't wash.

16. Watchmaker blackmails David Jains, who withdraws his support for Jack over the MI6 briefing.

17. Annabel goes to Berlin and is horrified by conditions there. (Or: Someone trying to escape.) She promises her cousin Zusanna that the West will not abandon Berlin.

18. On 26 March, Pieck tells Stalin the KPD cannot win the Berlin city assembly elections in October 1948.

Stalin orders maximum pressure on the SDP to amalgamate with the KPD.

19. Annabel persuades Jack not to abandon Berlin.

20. Jack persuades Bevin to back the SDP's independence. But, Bevin warns, the West will not go to war over Berlin.

Jack tells Trumps this.

21. Watchmaker, cock-a-hoop, passes to Nik the news that Bevin has decided not to go to war over Berlin.

On 1 April, Stalin begins a campaign of harassment, stopping Allied trains from going to Berlin "for technical reasons".

On 3 April, Truman signs the Marshall Plan in to law. The battle lines are drawn.

22. Jack tells Trumps something no one else knows. Next day, he gets it back from Healy. He concludes there is a leak in Trump's office.

Part 3

23. On Friday 18 June 1948, the Allies announce the new currency for West

Germany, the Deutschemark. It will become legal tender in two days' time, on Sunday 20 June. Nothing is said about Berlin.

Secretly, Annabel flies millions of deutschemarks into west Berlin.

24. On Tuesday 22 June, the Soviets announce that the Ostmark will be the sole currency in all sectors of Berlin. Not having the power to make this rule unilaterally, they order the Berlin city assembly so to rule.

Annabel promises Zusanna that the West will back her if the council refuses to obey.

25. Annabel summons all managers of Stadkontor bank branches in Allied sectors of Berlin for a "briefing" at 3pm. They are issued with cartons of the new Deutschemarks and driven back to their offices in British army trucks.

At 4pm on 23 June, the Berlin city assembly meets to consider the Soviet demand. The assemblymen have to run the gauntlet of a violent demonstration (organised by Nik) to get to the city hall. Once inside, they are unable to hold a discussion because of the disruption from the gallery. At last, Zusanna proposes the meeting adjourn to a different venue in the Western sector; and to prevent that Nik clears the gallery.

At 6pm, the council refuses to obey the Soviet order.

At 8pm, the US radio station announces that the Deutschemark is to be legal tender in Berlin as well as West Germany.

Enraged, Stalin greenlights the blockade.

At 11pm the Soviet news agency A.D.N. announces the blockade.

26. On 24 June at 6am the Soviets close all rail, road and canal transport links from West Germany to Berlin. The city (including Zusanna) faces starvation.

Jack plans the airlift.

27. Trump tells Nik about the airlift plan. Stalin orders supply planes shot down.

28. On 25 June, Deutschemarks become legal tender in Allied sectors of Berlin. Zusanna celebrates—prematurely.

Ernest Bevin and General Brownjohn report to a crisis meeting of the British cabinet. The plain fact is that we cannot fight the Soviet Union in Europe. The Red Army is still fully staffed but the Americans have sent their boys home and the British are similarly placed. There is only one nuclear bomb and no one knows whether it will work. The cabinet decision is that if the Soviets start shooting, we will back down.

Jack realises that Trumps himself is a spy. In desperation, Jack tells Trumps a direct lie: the West will drop a nuclear bomb on Leningrad if a single plane is shot down.

29. On Saturday 26 June 1948, Jack boards a C47 transport plane loaded with eighty tons of flour, milk and medicine, the first of twenty five such planes. They take off from (?) Frankfurt and fly to Tempelhof. Jack expects at any minute to be shot down.

There is a battle between two factions on the Soviet side, some telling Stalin to shoot down the supply planes, some urging caution. The deciding vote is swung by Nik Yudenich, now in Berlin, who says (based on information from Watchmaker) that the West will drop nuclear bombs.

Soviet fighters are scrambled, but they do not approach.

Jack lands safely. Annabel is waiting.

The crisis is over. Over the next eleven months, a constant stream of planes will supply all of Berlin's needs, until the Russians finally run out of patience, and tire of the bad propaganda, and reopen the roads, railways and waterways from West Germany to Berlin.

Epilogue

On 28 June 1948, Cominform expels the Yugoslav Communist Party but, to Stalin's surprise, Tito defies him. The Soviet Union has come up against the limits of its power.

The blockade is lifted on 12 May 1949.

In August of that year, elections are held in West Germany.