RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Enigma

Robert Harris

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About the Book

March 1943, the war hangs in the balance, and at Bletchley Park Tom Jericho, a brilliant young codebreaker, is facing a double nightmare. The Germans have unaccountably changed their U-boat Enigma code, threatening a massive Allied defeat. And as suspicion grows that there may be a spy inside Bletchley, Jericho's girlfriend, the beautiful and mysterious Claire Romilly, suddenly disappears.

About the Author

Robert Harris is the author of twelve bestselling novels: the Cicero Trilogy – *Imperium, Lustrum* and *Dictator* – *Fatherland, Enigma, Archangel, Pompeii, The Ghost, The Fear Index, An Officer and a Spy*, which won four prizes including the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, *Conclave* and most recently, *Munich*. Several of his books have been filmed, including *The Ghost*, which was directed by Roman Polanski. His work has been translated into thirty-seven languages and he is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He lives in West Berkshire with his wife, Gill Hornby.

ALSO BY ROBERT HARRIS

FICTION

Fatherland
Archangel
Pompeii
Imperium
The Ghost
Lustrum
The Fear Index
An Officer and a Spy
Dictator
Conclave
Munich

NON-FICTION

Good and Faithful Servant: The Unauthorized Biography of Bernard Ingham
Selling Hitler
The Making of Neil Kinnock
Gotcha: Media, the Government and the Falklands Crisis
A Higher Form of Killing (with Jeremy Paxman)

ENIGMA

ROBERT
HARRIS

arrow books

For Gill,
and for Holly and Charlie
QXQF VFLR TXLG VLWD PRUA

Author's Note

This novel is set against the background of an actual historical event. The German naval signals quoted in the text are all authentic. The characters, however, are entirely fictional.

‘It looks as if Bletchley Park is the single greatest achievement of Britain during 1939–45, perhaps during this century as a whole.’

George Steiner

‘A mathematical proof should resemble a simple and clear-cut constellation, not a scattered cluster in the Milky Way. A chess problem also has unexpectedness, and a certain economy; it is essential that the moves should be surprising, and that every piece on the board should play its part.’

G.H. Hardy, *A Mathematician’s Apology*

ONE

WHISPERS

WHISPERS: the sounds made by an enemy wireless transmitter immediately before it begins to broadcast a coded message.

A Lexicon of Cryptography
('Most Secret', Bletchley Park, 1943)

1

CAMBRIDGE IN THE fourth winter of the war: a ghost town.

A ceaseless Siberian wind with nothing to blunt its edge for a thousand miles whipped off the North Sea and swept low across the Fens. It rattled the signs to the air-raid shelters in Trinity New Court and battered on the boarded-up windows of King's College Chapel. It prowled through the quadrangles and staircases, confining the few dons and students still in residence to their rooms. By mid-afternoon the narrow cobbled streets were deserted. By nightfall, with not a light to be seen, the university was returned to a darkness it hadn't known since the Middle Ages. A procession of monks shuffling over Magdalene Bridge on their way to Vespers would scarcely have seemed out of place.

In the wartime blackout the centuries had dissolved.

It was to this bleak spot in the flatlands of eastern England that there came, in the middle of February 1943, a young mathematician named Thomas Jericho. The authorities of his college, King's, were given less than a day's notice of his arrival – scarcely enough time to reopen his rooms, put sheets on his bed, and have more than three years' worth of dust swept from his shelves and carpets. And they would not have gone to even that much trouble, it being wartime and servants so scarce – had not the Provost himself been telephoned at the Master's Lodge by an obscure but very senior official of His Majesty's Foreign Office, with a request that 'Mr Jericho be looked after until he is well enough to return to his duties'.

‘Of course,’ replied the Provost, who couldn’t for the life of him put a face to the name of Jericho. ‘Of course. A pleasure to welcome him back.’

As he spoke, he opened the college register and flicked through it until he came to: Jericho, T. R. G.; matriculated, 1935; Senior Wrangler, Mathematics Tripos, 1938; Junior Research Fellow at two hundred pounds a year; not seen in the university since the outbreak of war.

Jericho? Jericho? To the Provost he was at best a dim memory, a fuzzy adolescent blob on a college photograph. Once, perhaps, he would have remembered the name, but the war had shattered the sonorous rhythm of intake and graduation and all was chaos – the Pitt Club was a British Restaurant, potatoes and onions were growing in the gardens of St John’s …

‘He has recently been engaged upon work of the gravest national importance,’ continued the caller. ‘We would appreciate it if he were not disturbed.’

‘Understood,’ said the Provost. ‘Understood. I shall see to it he is left alone.’

‘We are obliged to you.’

The official rang off. *‘Work of the gravest national importance’*, by God … The old man knew what that meant. He hung up and looked thoughtfully at the receiver for a few moments, then went in search of the domestic bursar.

A Cambridge college is a village, with a village’s appetite for gossip – all the keener when that village is nine-tenths empty – and the return of Jericho provoked hours of analysis among the college staff.

There was, for a start, the manner of his arrival – a few hours after the call to the Provost, late on a snowy night, swaddled in a travelling rug, in the back of a cavernous official Rover driven by a young chauffeuse in the dark blue uniform of the Women’s Royal Navy. Kite, the porter, who offered to carry the visitor’s bags to his rooms, reported

that Jericho clung to his pair of battered leather suitcases and refused to let go of either, even though he looked so pale and worn out that Kite doubted he would make it up the spiral staircase unaided.

Dorothy Saxmundham, the bedder, saw him next, when she went in the following day to tidy up. He was propped on his pillows staring out at the sleet pattering across the river, and he never turned his head, never even looked at her, didn't seem to know she was there, poor lamb. Then she went to move one of his cases and he was up in a flash – 'Please don't touch that, thank you so much, Mrs Sax, thank you' – and she was out on the landing in a quarter of a minute.

He had only one visitor: the college doctor, who saw him twice, stayed for about fifteen minutes on each occasion, and left without saying a word.

He took all his meals in his room for the first week – not that he ate very much, according to Oliver Bickerdyke, who worked in the kitchens: he took up a tray three times a day, only to take it away again an hour later, barely touched. Bickerdyke's great coup, which led to at least an hour of speculation around the coke stove in the Porter's Lodge, was to come upon the young man working at his desk, wearing a coat over his pyjamas, a scarf and a pair of mittens. Normally, Jericho 'sported his oak' – that is to say, he kept the heavy outer door to his study firmly shut – and called politely for his tray to be left outside. But on this particular morning, six days after his dramatic arrival, he had left it slightly ajar. Bickerdyke deliberately brushed the wood lightly with his knuckles, so quietly as to be inaudible to any living creature, save possibly a grazing gazelle, and then he was across the threshold and within a yard of his quarry before Jericho turned round. Bickerdyke just had time to register piles of papers ('covered in figures and circuits and Greek and suchlike') before the work was

hastily covered up and he was sent on his way. Thereafter the door remained locked.

Listening to Bickerdyke's tale the next afternoon, and not wishing to be outdone, Dorothy Saxmundham added a detail of her own. Mr Jericho had a small gas fire in his sitting room and a grate in his bedroom. In the grate, which she had cleaned that morning, he had obviously burned a quantity of paper.

There was silence while this intelligence was digested.

'Could be *The Times*,' said Kite eventually. 'I puts a copy of *The Times* under his door every morning.'

No, declared Mrs Sax. It was not *The Times*. They were still in a pile by the bed. 'He doesn't seem to read them, not as I've noticed. He just does the crosswords.'

Bickerdyke suggested he was burning letters. 'Maybe love letters,' he added, with a leer.

'Love letters? Him? Get away.' Kite took off his antique bowler hat, inspected its frayed brim, then replaced it carefully on his bald head. 'Besides, he ain't had any letters, not a single one, not since he's been here.'

And so they were forced to the conclusion that what Jericho was burning in his grate was his work – work so secret, nobody could be allowed to see even a fragment of the waste. In the absence of hard fact, fantasy was piled upon fantasy. He was a government scientist, they decided. No, he worked in Intelligence. No, no – he was a genius. He had had a nervous breakdown. His presence in Cambridge was an official secret. He had friends in high places. He had met Mr Churchill. He had met the King …

In all of which speculation, they would have been gratified to learn, they were absolutely and precisely correct.

Three days later, early on the morning of Friday 26 February, the mystery was given a fresh twist.

Kite was sorting the first delivery of mail, stuffing a small sackful of letters into the few pigeon holes whose owners were still in college, when he came across not one but three envelopes addressed to T. R. G. Jericho Esq, originally sent care of the White Hart Inn, Shenley Church End, Buckinghamshire, and subsequently forwarded to King's. For a moment, Kite was taken aback. Did the strange young man, for whom they had constructed such an exotic identity, in reality manage a *pub?* He pushed his spectacles up on to his forehead, held the envelope at arm's length, and squinted at the postmarks.

Bletchley.

There was an old Ordnance Survey map hanging at the back of the lodge, showing the dense triangle of southern England enclosed by Cambridge, Oxford and London. Bletchley sat astride a big railway junction exactly midway between the two university towns. Shenley Church End was a tiny hamlet about four miles north-west of it.

Kite studied the more interesting of the three envelopes. He raised it to his bulbous, blue-veined nose. He sniffed it. He had been sorting mail for more than forty years and he knew a woman's handwriting when he saw it: clearer and neater, more looped and less angular than a man's. A kettle was boiling on the gas ring at the back of the stove. He glanced around. It was not yet eight, and barely light outside. Within seconds he had stepped into the alcove and was holding the flap of the envelope to the steam. It was made of thin, shoddy wartime paper, sealed with cheap glue. The flap quickly moistened, curled, opened, and Kite extracted a card.

He had just about read through to the end when he heard the lodge door open. A blast of wind shook the windows. He stuffed the card back into the envelope, dipped his little finger into the glue pot kept ready by the stove, stuck down the flap, then casually poked his head

round the corner to see who had come in. He almost had a stroke.

‘Good heavens – morning – Mr Jericho – sir …’

‘Are there any letters for me, Mr Kite?’ Jericho’s voice was firm enough, but he seemed to sway slightly and held on to the counter like a sailor who had just stepped ashore after a long voyage. He was a pale young man, quite short, with dark hair and dark eyes – twin darknesses that served to emphasise the pallor of his skin.

‘Not as I’ve noticed, sir. I’ll look again.’

Kite retreated with dignity to the alcove and tried to iron out the damp envelope with his sleeve. It was only slightly crumpled. He slipped it into the middle of a handful of letters, came out to the front, and performed – even if he said so himself – a virtuoso pantomime of searching through them.

‘No, no, nothing, no. Ah, yes, here’s something. Gracious. And two more.’ Kite proffered them across the counter. ‘Your birthday, sir?’

‘Yesterday.’ Jericho stuffed the envelopes into the inside pocket of his overcoat without glancing at them.

‘Many happy returns, sir.’ Kite watched the letters disappear and gave a silent sigh of relief. He folded his arms and leaned forward on the counter. ‘Might I hazard a guess at your age, sir? Came up in ’thirty-five, as I recall. Would that make you, perhaps, twenty-six?’

‘I say, is that my newspaper, Mr Kite? Perhaps I might take it. Save you the trouble.’

Kite grunted, pushed himself back up on his feet and fetched it. He made one last attempt at conversation as he handed it over, remarking on the satisfactory progress of the war in Russia since Stalingrad and Hitler being finished if you asked him – but, of course, that he, Jericho, would surely be more up to date about such matters than he, Kite …? The younger man merely smiled.

‘I doubt if my knowledge about anything is as up to date as yours, Mr Kite, not even about myself. Knowing your methods.’

For a moment, Kite was not sure he had heard correctly. He stared sharply at Jericho, who met his gaze and held it with his dark brown eyes, which seemed suddenly to have acquired a glint of life. Then, still smiling, Jericho nodded ‘Good morning’, tucked his paper under his arm and was gone. Kite watched him through the lodge’s mullioned window – a slender figure in a college scarf of purple and white, unsteady on his feet, head bowed into the wind. ‘My methods,’ he repeated to himself. ‘*My methods?*’

That afternoon, when the trio gathered for tea as usual around the coke stove, he was able to advance a whole new explanation for Jericho’s presence in their midst. Naturally, he could not disclose how he came by his information, only that it was especially reliable (he hinted at a man-to-man chat). Forgetting his earlier scorn about love letters, Kite now asserted with confidence that the young fellow was obviously suffering from a broken heart.

2

Jericho did not open his letters immediately. Instead he squared his shoulders and tilted forwards into the wind. After a week in his room, the richness of the oxygen pummelling his face made him feel light-headed. He turned right at the Junior Combination Room and followed the flagstone path that led through the college and over the little hump-back bridge to the water meadow beyond. To his left was the college hall, to his right, across a great expanse of lawn, the massive cliff-face of the chapel. A tiny column of choirboys was bobbing through its grey lee, gowns flapping in the gale.

He stopped, and a gust of wind rocked him on his heels, forcing him half a step backwards. A stone passageway led off from one side of the path, its arch grown over with untended ivy. He glanced, by force of habit, at the set of windows on the second floor. They were dark and shuttered. Here, too, the ivy had been allowed to grow unchecked, so that several of the small, diamond-shaped panes were lost behind thick foliage.

He hesitated, then stepped off the path, under the keystone, into the shadows.

The staircase was just as he remembered it, except that now this wing of the college was closed and the wind had blown dead leaves into the well of the steps. An old newspaper curled itself around his legs like a hungry cat. He tried the light switch. It clicked uselessly. There was no bulb. But he could still make out the name, one of three painted on a wooden board in elegant white capitals, now cracked and faded.

TURING, A.M.

How nervously he had climbed these stairs for the first time – when? in the summer of 1938? a world ago – to find a man barely five years older than himself, as shy as a freshman, with a hank of dark hair falling across his eyes: the great Alan Turing, the author of *On Computable Numbers*, the progenitor of the Universal Computing Machine …

Turing had asked him what he proposed to take as his subject for his first year's research.

'Riemann's theory of prime numbers.'

'But I am researching Riemann myself.'

'I know,' Jericho had blurted out, 'that's why I chose it.'

And Turing had laughed at this outrageous display of hero worship, and had agreed to supervise Jericho's research, even though he hated teaching.

Now Jericho stood on the landing and tried Turing's door. Locked, of course. The dust smeared his hand. He

tried to remember how the room had looked. Squalor had been the overwhelming impression. Books, notes, letters, dirty clothes, empty bottles and tins of food had been strewn across the floor. There had been a teddy bear called Porgy on the mantelpiece above the gas fire, and a battered violin leaning in the corner, which Turing had picked up in a junk shop.

Turing had been too shy a man to get to know well. In any case, from the Christmas of 1938 he was hardly ever to be seen. He would cancel supervisions at the last minute saying he had to be in London. Or Jericho would climb these stairs and knock and there would be no reply, even though Jericho could sense he was behind the door. When, at last, around Easter 1939, not long after the Nazis had marched into Prague, the two men had finally met, Jericho had nerved himself to say: 'Look, sir, if you don't want to supervise me …'

'It's not that.'

'Or if you're making progress on the Riemann Hypothesis and you don't want to share it …'

Turing had smiled. 'Tom, I can assure you I am making no progress on Riemann whatsoever.'

'Then what …?'

'It's not Riemann.' And then he had added, very quietly: 'There are other things now happening in the world, you know, apart from mathematics …'

Two days later Jericho had found a note in his pigeonhole.

'Please join me for a glass of sherry in my rooms this evening. F.J. Atwood.'

Jericho turned from Turing's room. He felt faint. He gripped the worn handrail, taking each step carefully, like an old man.

Atwood. Nobody refused an invitation from Atwood, professor of ancient history, dean of the college before Jericho was even born, a man with a spider's web of

connections in Whitehall. It was tantamount to a summons from God.

‘Speak any languages?’ had been Atwood’s opening question as he poured the drinks. He was in his fifties, a bachelor, married to the college. His books were arranged prominently on the shelf behind him. *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War. Caesar as Man of Letters. Thucydides and His History*.

‘Only German.’ Jericho had learned it in adolescence to read the great nineteenth-century mathematicians – Gauss, Kummer, Hilbert.

Atwood had nodded and handed over a tiny measure of very dry sherry in a crystal glass. He followed Jericho’s gaze to the books. ‘Do you know Herodotus, by any chance? Do you know the story of Histiaeus?’

It was a rhetorical question; Atwood’s questions mostly were.

‘Histiaeus wished to send a message from the Persian court to his son-in-law, the tyrant Aristagoras, at Miletus, urging him to rise in revolt. However, he feared any such communication would he intercepted. His solution was to shave the head of his most trusted slave, tattoo the message onto his naked scalp, wait for his hair to grow, then send him to Aristagoras with a request that he be given a haircut. Unreliable but, in his case, effective. Your health.’

Jericho learned later that Atwood told the same stories to all his recruits. Histiaeus and his bald slave gave way to Polybius and his cipher square, then came Caesar’s letter to Cicero using an alphabet in which *a* was enciphered as *d, b* as *e, c* as *f*, and so forth. Finally, still circling the subject, but closer now, had come the lesson in etymology.

‘The Latin *crypta*, from the Greek root κρυπτη meaning “hidden, concealed”. Hence *crypt*, burial place of the dead, and *crypto*, secret. Crypto-communist, crypto-fascist … By the way, you’re not either, are you?’

‘I’m not a burial place of the dead, no.’

‘*Cryptogram* …’ Atwood had raised his sherry to the light and squinted at the pale liquid. ‘*Cryptanalysis* … Turing tells me he thinks you might be rather good …’

Jericho was running a fever by the time he reached his rooms. He locked the door and flopped face down on his unmade bed, still wearing his coat and scarf. Presently he heard footsteps and someone knocked.

‘Breakfast, sir.’

‘Just leave it outside. Thank you.’

‘Are you all right, sir?’

‘I’m fine.’

He heard the clatter of the tray being set down, and steps retreating. The room seemed to be lurching and swelling out of all proportion, a corner of the ceiling was suddenly huge and close enough to touch. He closed his eyes and the visions came up at him through the darkness –

– Turing, smiling his shy half smile: ‘Tom, I can assure you, I am making no progress on Riemann whatsoever …’

– Logie, pumping his hand in the Bombe Hut, shouting above the noise of the machinery, ‘The Prime Minister has just been on the telephone with his congratulations …’

– Claire, touching his cheek, whispering, ‘Poor you, I’ve really got under your skin, haven’t I, poor you …’

– ‘Stand back’ – a man’s voice, Logie’s voice – ‘Stand back, give him air …’

And then there was nothing.

When he woke, the first thing he did was look at his watch. He’d been unconscious for about an hour. He sat up and patted his overcoat pockets. Somewhere he had a notebook in which he recorded the duration of each attack, and the symptoms. It was a distressingly long list. He found instead the three envelopes.

He laid them out on the bed and considered them for a while. Then he opened two of them. One was a card from his mother, the other from his aunt, both wishing a happy birthday. Neither woman had any idea what he was doing and both, he knew, were guiltily disappointed he wasn't in uniform and being shot at, like the sons of most of their friends.

'But what do I tell people?' his mother had asked him in despair during one of his brief visits home, after he had refused yet again to tell her what he did.

'Tell them I'm in government communications,' he had replied, using the formula they had been instructed to deploy in the face of persistent enquiries.

'But perhaps they'd like to know a little more than that.'

'Then they're acting suspiciously and you should call the police.'

His mother had contemplated the social catastrophe of her bridge four being interviewed by the local inspector, and had fallen silent.

And the third letter? Like Kite before him, he turned it over and sniffed it. Was it his imagination or was there a trace of scent? Ashes of Roses by Bourjois, a minuscule bottle of which had practically bankrupted him just a month earlier. He used his slide rule as a paperknife and slit the envelope open. Inside was a cheap card, carelessly chosen – it showed a bowl of fruit, of all things – and a standard message for the circumstances, or so he guessed, never having been in this situation before. 'Dearest T … always see you as a friend … perhaps in the future … sorry to hear about … in haste … much love …' He closed his eyes.

Later, after he had filled in the crossword, after Mrs Sax had finished the cleaning, after Bickerdyke had deposited another tray of food and taken it away again untouched, Jericho got down on his hands and knees and tugged a

suitcase from beneath his bed and unlocked it. Folded into the middle of his 1930 Doubleday first edition of *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* were six sheets of foolscap covered in his tiny writing. He took them over to the rickety desk beside the window and smoothed them out.

'The cipher machine converts the input(plain language, P) into the cipher (Z) by means of a function f. Thus Z=f(P,K) where K denotes the key …'

He sharpened his pencil, blew away the shavings and bent over the sheets.

'Suppose K has N possible values. For each of the N assumptions we must see if $f^{1}(Z,K)$ *produces plain language, where* f^{1} *is the deciphering function which produces P if K is correct …'*

The wind ruffled the surface of the Cam. A flotilla of ducks rode the waves, without moving, like ships at anchor. He put down his pencil and read her card again, trying to measure the emotion, the meaning behind the flat phrases. Could one, he wondered, construct a similar formula for letters – for love letters or for letters signalling the end of love?

'The input (sentiment, S) is converted into a message (M) by the woman, by means of the function w. Thus M=w(S, V) where V denotes the vocabulary. Suppose V has N possible values …'

The mathematical symbols blurred before his eyes. He took the card into the bedroom, to the grate, knelt and struck a match. The paper flared briefly and twisted in his hand, then swiftly turned to ash.

Gradually his days acquired a shape.

He would rise early and work for two or three hours. Not at cryptanalysis – he burned all that on the day he burned her card – but at pure mathematics. Then he would take a nap. He would fill in *The Times* crossword before lunch, timing himself on his father's old pocket watch – it

never took him more than five minutes to complete it, and once he finished it in three minutes forty. He managed to solve a series of complex chess problems – 'the hymn tunes of mathematics', as G.H. Hardy called them – without using pieces or a board. All this reassured him his brain had not been permanently impaired.

After the crossword and the chess he would skim through the war news while trying to eat something at his desk. He tried to avoid the Battle of the Atlantic (DEAD MEN AT THE OARS: U-BOAT VICTIMS FROZEN IN LIFEBOATS) and concentrated instead on the Russian Front: Pavlograd, Demiansk, Rzhev … the Soviets seemed to recapture a new town every few hours and he was amused to find *The Times* reporting Red Army Day as respectfully as if it were the King's Birthday.

In the afternoon he would walk, a little further on each occasion – at first confining himself to the college grounds, then strolling through the empty town, and finally venturing into the frozen countryside – before returning as the light faded to sit by the gas fire and read his Sherlock Holmes. He began to go into Hall for dinner, although he declined politely the Provost's offer of a place at High Table. The food was as bad as at Bletchley, but the surroundings were better, the candlelight flickering on the heavy-framed portraits and gleaming on the long tables of polished oak. He learned to ignore the frankly curious stares of the college staff. Attempts at conversation he cut off with a nod. He didn't mind being solitary. Solitude had been his life. An only child, a stepchild, a 'gifted' child – always there had been something to set him apart. At one time he couldn't speak about his work because hardly anyone would understand him. Now he couldn't speak of it because it was classified. It was all the same.

By the end of his second week he had actually started to sleep through the night, a feat he hadn't managed for more than two years.

Shark, Enigma, kiss, bombe, break, pinch, drop, crib – all the weird vocabulary of his secret life he slowly succeeded in erasing from his conscious mind. To his astonishment, even Claire's image became diffuse. There were still vivid flashes of memory, especially at night – the lemony smell of newly washed hair, the wide grey eyes as pale as water, the soft voice half amused, half bored – but increasingly the parts failed to cohere. The whole was vanishing.

He wrote to his mother and persuaded her not to visit him.

'Nurse Time,' the doctor had said, snapping shut his bag of tricks, 'that's who'll cure you. Mr Jericho. Nurse Time.'

Rather to Jericho's surprise it seemed that the old boy was right. He was going to be well again. 'Nervous exhaustion' or whatever they called it was not the same as madness after all.

And then, without warning, on Friday 12 March, they came for him.

The night before it happened he had overheard an elderly don complaining about a new air base the Americans were building to the east of the city.

'I said to them, you do realise you're standing on a fossil site of the Pleistocene era? That I myself have removed from here the horncores of *Bos primigenius?* D'you know, the fellow merely *laughed* …'

Good for the Yanks, thought Jericho, and he decided there and then it would make a suitable destination for his afternoon walk. Because it would take him at least three miles further than he had attempted so far, he left earlier than usual, straight after lunch.

He strode briskly along the Backs, past the Wren Library and the icing sugar towers of St John's, past the sports field in which two dozen little boys in purple shirts were playing

football, and then turned left, trudging beside the Madingley Road. After ten minutes he was in open country.

Kite had gloomily predicted snow, but although it was still cold it was sunny and the sky was a glory – a pure blue dome above the flat landscape of East Anglia, filled for miles with the silver specks of aircraft and the white scratches of contrails. Before the war he had cycled through this quiet countryside almost every week and had barely seen a car. Now an endless succession of big American trucks lumbered past him, forcing him on to the verge – brasher, faster, more modern than British Army lorries, covered over at the back with camouflaged tarpaulins. The white faces of the US airmen peered out of the shadows. Sometimes the men shouted and waved and he waved back, feeling absurdly English and self-conscious.

Eventually he came within sight of the new base and stood beside the road watching three Flying Fortresses take off in the distance, one after the other – vast aircraft, almost too heavy, or so it seemed to Jericho, to escape the ground. They lumbered along the fresh concrete runway, roaring with frustration, clawing at the air for liberation until suddenly a crack of daylight appeared beneath them, and the crack widened, and they were aloft.

He stood there for almost half an hour, feeling the air pulse with the vibrations of their engines, smelling the faint scent of aviation spirit carried on the cold air. He had never seen such a demonstration of power. The fossils of the Pleistocene era, he reflected with grim delight, must now be so much dust. What was that line of Cicero that Atwood was so fond of quoting? *'Nervos belli, pecuniam infinitam.'* The sinews of war, unlimited money.

He looked at his watch and realised he had better turn back if he was going to reach the college before dark.

He had gone about a mile when he heard an engine behind him. A jeep overtook him, swerved and stopped. The

driver, wrapped in a heavy overcoat, stood up and beckoned to him.

‘Hey, fella! Wanna lift?’

‘That would be kind. Thank you.’

‘Jump in.’

The American didn’t want to talk, which suited Jericho. He gripped the edges of his seat and stared ahead as they bounced and rattled at speed down the darkening lanes and into the town. The driver dropped him at the back of the college, waved, gunned the engine, and was gone. Jericho watched him disappear, then turned and walked through the gate.

Before the war, this three-hundred-yard walk, at this time of day, at this time of year, had been Jericho’s favourite: the footpath running across a carpet of mauve and yellow crocuses, the worn stones lit by ornate Victorian lamps, the spires of the chapel to the left, the lights of the college to the right. But the crocuses were late, the lanterns had not been switched on since 1939, and a static water tank disfigured the famous aspect of the chapel. Only one light gleamed faintly in the college and as he walked towards it he gradually realised it was *his* window.

He stopped, frowning. Had he left his desk light on? He was sure he hadn’t. As he watched, he saw a shadow, a movement, a figure in the pale yellow square. Two seconds later the light went on in his bedroom.

It wasn’t possible, was it?

He started to run. He covered the distance to his staircase in thirty seconds and took the steps like an athlete. His boots clattered on the worn stone. ‘Claire?’ he shouted. ‘Claire?’ On the landing his door stood open.

‘Steady on, old thing,’ said a male voice from within, ‘you’ll do yourself a mischief.’

Guy Logie was a tall, cadaverous man, ten years older than Jericho. He lay on his back on the sofa facing the door, his neck on one armrest, his bony ankles dangling over the other, long hands folded neatly on his stomach. A pipe was clamped between his teeth and he was blowing smoke rings at the ceiling. Distended haloes drifted upwards, twisted, broke and melted into haze. He took his pipe from his mouth and gave an elaborate yawn which seemed to take him by surprise.

'Oh, God. Sorry.' He opened his eyes and swung himself into a sitting position. 'Hello, Tom.'

'Oh please. Please, don't get up,' said Jericho. 'Please, I insist, make yourself at home. Perhaps I could get you some tea?'

'Tea. What a grand idea.' Before the war Logie had been head of mathematics at a vast and ancient public school. He had a Blue in rugger and another in hockey and irony bounced off him like pebbles off an advancing rhinoceros. He crossed the room and grasped Jericho by the shoulders. 'Come here. Let me look at you, old thing,' he said, turning him this way and that towards the light. 'Oh dear oh dear, you do look bloody terrible.'

Jericho shrugged himself free. 'I *was* fine.'

'Sorry. We did knock. Your porter chap let us in.'

'Us?'

There was a noise from the bedroom.

'We came in the car with the flag on it. Greatly impressed your Mr Kite.' Logie followed Jericho's gaze to the bedroom door. 'Oh, that? That's Leveret! Don't mind him.' He took out his pipe and called: 'Mr Leveret! Come and meet Mr Jericho. The *famous* Mr Jericho.'

A small man with a thin face appeared at the entrance to the bedroom.

'Good afternoon, sir.' Leveret wore a raincoat and trilby. His voice had a slight northern accent.

'What the hell are you doing in there?'

‘He’s just checking you’re alone,’ said Logie sweetly.

‘Of course I’m bloody well alone!’

‘And is the whole staircase empty, sir?’ enquired Leveret. ‘Nobody in the rooms above or below?’

Jericho threw up his hands in exasperation. ‘Guy, for God’s sake!’

‘I think it’s all clear,’ said Leveret to Logie. ‘I’ve already closed the blackout curtain in there.’ He turned to Jericho. ‘Mind if I do the same here, sir?’ He didn’t wait for permission. He crossed to the small leaded window, opened it, took off his hat and thrust his head out, peering up and down, left and right. A freezing mist was off the river and a blast of chill air filled the room. Satisfied, Leveret ducked back inside, closed the window and drew the curtains.

There was a quarter of a minute’s silence. Logie broke it by rubbing his hands and saying: ‘Any chance of a fire, Tom? I’d forgotten what this place was like in winter. Worse than school. And tea? You mentioned tea? Would you like some tea, Mr Leveret?’

‘I would indeed, sir.’

‘And what about some toast? I noticed you had some bread, Tom, in the kitchen over there. Toast in front of a college fire? Wouldn’t that take us back?’

Jericho looked at him for a moment. He opened his mouth to protest then changed his mind. He took a box of matches from the mantelpiece, struck a light and held it to the gas fire. As usual the pressure was low and the match went out. He lit another and this time it caught. A worm of flame glowed blue and began to spread. He went across the landing to the little kitchen, filled the kettle and lit the gas ring. In the bread bin there was indeed a loaf – Mrs Saxmundham must have put it there earlier in the week – and he sawed off three grey slices. In the cupboard he found a pre-war pot of jam, surprisingly presentable after he had scraped the white fur of mould from its surface, and

a smear of margarine on a chipped plate. He arranged his delicacies on a tray and stared at the kettle.

Perhaps he *was* having a dream? But when he looked back into his sitting room, there was Logie stretched out again on the sofa, and Leveret perched uneasily on the edge of one of the chairs, his hat in his hands, like an unreliable witness waiting to go into court with an under-rehearsed story.

Of course they had brought bad news. What else could it be but bad news? The acting head of Hut 8 wouldn't travel fifty miles across country in the deputy director's precious bloody car just to pay a social call. They were going to sack him. *'Sorry, old thing, but we can't carry passengers …'* Jericho felt suddenly very tired. He massaged his forehead with the heel of his hand. The familiar headache was beginning to return, spreading up from his sinuses to the back of his eyes.

He had thought it was her. That was the joke. For about half a minute, running towards the lighted window, he had been happy. It was pitiful.

The kettle was beginning to boil. He prised open the tea caddy to find age had reduced the tea leaves to dust. Nevertheless he spooned them into the pot and tipped in the hot water.

Logie pronounced it nectar.

Afterwards they sat in silence in the semi-darkness. The only illumination was provided by the faint gleam of the desk lamp behind them and the blue glow of the fire at their feet. The gas jet hissed. From beyond the blackout curtains came a faint flurry of splashes and the mournful quacking of a duck. Logie sat on the floor, his long legs outstretched, fiddling with his pipe. Jericho slouched in one of the two easy chairs, prodding the carpet absent-mindedly with the toasting fork. Leveret had been told to stand guard outside: 'Would you mind closing both doors,