

‘Fesperman does “escalating peril” with brio. Turnbull has a crumpled everyman charm.’ *Guardian*

‘Fesperman is the closest thing America has to John le Carré, a writer of great elegance and sophistication whose novels are as topical as they are compelling. In a market saturated by factory-made thrillers, Fesperman stands out as a spy novelist of the highest quality.’ Charles Cumming

‘A worthy and ambitious tour of German history from 1941–2009 . . . a good intelligent book’ *The Times*

‘Fesperman focuses on Switzerland and Germany and the wartime intrigues of the White Rose student movement, which dared to speak out against Hitler, as he crafts a tale of love, war and betrayal’ *West Australian*

About the Author

Dan Fesperman is a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun Times* and worked in its Berlin bureau during the years of civil war in the former Yugoslavia, as well as in Afghanistan during the recent conflict. He lives in Baltimore with his family.

Dan Fesperman has written five previous highly acclaimed novels of international suspense, including *The Prisoner of Guantanamo*, which won the 2006 Hammett Prize, awarded by the International Association of Crime Writers. He also won the CWA John Creasey Memorial Dagger Award for best first crime novel for *Lie in the Dark*, and the CWA Ian Fleming Steel Dagger Award for best thriller for *The Small Boat of Great Sorrows*.

Also by Dan Fesperman

The Amateur Spy
The Prisoner of Guantanamo
The Warlord's Son
The Small Boat of Great Sorrows
Lie in the Dark

The
Arms Maker of
Berlin

DAN FESPERMAN



First published in Great Britain in 2009 by Hodder & Stoughton
An Hachette UK company

This paperback edition first published in 2010

1

Copyright © Dan Fesperman 2009

The right of Dan Fesperman to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 0 340 96128 5

Printed and bound by Mackays of Chatham Ltd, Chatham, Kent

Hodder & Stoughton policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Hodder & Stoughton Ltd
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

www.hodder.co.uk

*For all those people
who dig up the secrets*



My most beautiful poem?
I didn't write it.
From the deepest depths it rose.
I kept it silent.

*Mein schönstes Gedicht?
Ich schrieb es nicht.
Aus tiefsten Tiefen stieg es.
Ich schwieg es.*

—from the poem “Schweigen” (“Silence”),
by Mascha Kaléko



I

The biggest hazard of studying history,” Nat Turnbull once told his wife, “is that if you spend too much time looking backward, you’ll be facing the wrong way when the forces of the here and now roll forward to crush you.”

As if to prove the point, his wife filed for divorce the following week, catching Nat completely by surprise.

Five years later he was again facing the wrong way, so to speak, when a pair of phone calls summoned him urgently back to the dangers of the present. He was three stories underground at the time, asleep at his desk in the stacks of the university library. An unlikely location, perhaps, for the beginning of an adventure in which lives would be lost, but Nat was trained to appreciate that sort of irony.

The first call arrived just as a dark dream of another era goose-stepped across his brain. His cell phone jolted him awake, squirming in his pocket like a frog. Opening his eyes to utter darkness, Nat realized he must have slept past closing hour. It wasn’t the first time. He kept a flashlight for these emergencies, but it seemed to have disappeared. No use groping for the lamp, either. Security would have cut the power by now. Library budgets weren’t what they used to be at Wightman University.

The phone twitched again as he fumbled in his pocket. He was addled, groggy, a miner regaining consciousness after a cave-in. What time was it? What day? What *century*? Mandatory question in his line of work. Nat was a history professor. Specialty: Modern Germany. At Wightman that covered everything from the Weimar Republic of 1919 onward,

and while Nat was in love with the sweep and grandeur of the whole era, neither friend nor foe was under any illusion as to his true calling. He remained as thoroughly haunted by the long shadow of the Third Reich as those Hitler-centric folks on the History Channel. In Nat's treasure hunts, X never marked the spot. A swastika did, or some pile of old bones. Dig at risk of contamination.

He snicked open the phone, and the blue glow offered a beacon of hope until he saw the incoming number. Gordon Wolfe, his onetime master and commander, calling at 1:04 a.m., meant Nat was about to be subjected to an angry tirade or a teary confessional, and either would likely be served in a marinade of French cognac and Kentucky bourbon. He answered with a vague sense of stage fright.

"Gordon?"

"No, it's Viv. Gordon's in jail. You have to get up here."

"Jail? What's happened?"

"They took him away. Him and some archives. They took everything."

"Gordon's archives? *All* of them? Where are you, Viv?"

"Blue Kettle Lake. Our summer place."

The Adirondacks. Of course. That was where the old Minotaur always retreated when the going got tough, and lately the going had been unbearable.

"The police handcuffed him the moment we walked in the door. You'd have thought he was John Dillinger. They're saying he stole it, that he stole everything, which is nuts."

"Stole what, Viv? Slow down. Start at the beginning."

By now the phone light had switched off. Nat, sole survivor of the European Research Collection, again sat in the darkness of carrel C-19 in the basement stacks of Hartsell Library. He had often boasted he could find his way out of here blindfolded. Tonight he might have to put up or shut up.

His nose could have told him the approximate location—musty leather bindings, chilled concrete, the chemical reek of spooled microfilm—a bouquet that probably explained why he

had just been dreaming of a similar place across the Atlantic. Except there all the writing was in German and the records were haunted by so much industrialized horror that you never got comfy enough to nod off.

In his dream he had been visiting the place during wartime, a quarter century before he was born. He was descending a narrow stairway as bombs crashed overhead, and he was vaguely excited, as if on the verge of a huge discovery. Yet at each passing level the light dimmed, his dread deepened, and a grim realization took hold: The closer he got to his goal, the greater the risk that he would lose his way or be buried in rubble, forever irretrievable by family and friends.

Guilt having its say, no doubt. Work had consumed the better part of Nat's last two decades, dating back to his undergraduate years, when a dynamic professor named Gordon Wolfe had infected him with a virulent strain of historical curiosity. The affliction had now outlasted the aforementioned marriage, a procession of careless affairs, and the upbringing of a daughter who had just finished her sophomore year at Wightman. This being a party-hearty Thursday following final exams, Karen was probably seated at this very moment with her friends around a noisy table, polishing off a celebratory pitcher of beer.

Nat had canceled a dinner date to come to the library. It seemed necessary at the time. But so far the only fruits of his labor were an unscheduled nap, and now he had learned that Gordon Wolfe was in jail in upstate New York, where the old man apparently would remain until Nat could talk Gordon's wife, Vivian, down from the high ledge of hysteria. Judging from her voice, she had been perched there quite a while.

"It was some old files," Viv said. "Gordon says they were planted. That's all I could get out of him before they took him away. They bumped his head on the goddamn patrol car. We didn't even have time to take off our coats. When we turned on the light there was a pile of boxes sitting there, right on the kitchen table. Then a bunch of FBI guys came in from the living room."

“The FBI? Good Lord. What kind of files?”

“I don’t know. Something from the war. Gordon can tell you. I got the idea he’d seen them before, just never at our house.”

“Two boxes? Ten?”

“Four. They moved everything to the sunroom before I got a good look, and now I can’t even get in there. I’m a prisoner in my own house.”

“You see any labels? Any markings?”

“A few stickers. Ask Gordon. But first we’ve got to get him out. They haven’t set bail, but I can take care of that. I want you here for the arraignment. We can ride over together, tell the judge it’s all a lie.”

Unless it wasn’t. Frame-up or not, what in the hell was Gordon Wolfe doing at the age of eighty-four with a missing archive at his summer home in the hills? Especially if it was *the* archive, the one Gordon had forever mooned about to both students and colleagues in his less-guarded and more-imbibed moments. More than sixty years ago he had been one of the few wartime caretakers of that trove. Then, after the war ended, four boxes full of information had slipped through everyone’s fingers, disappearing somewhere between the Alps of Switzerland and the towers of midtown Manhattan.

Gordon had been looking for this lost treasure ever since, and during particularly acute outbreaks of gold fever he sounded like an old prospector around a campfire. He had even brought up the subject at his long-overdue retirement party, a melancholy event six years ago when everyone but Gordon had been at a loss for words, stifled by the awkward knowledge that Wightman was nudging him not so gently into the box marked “Emeritus.” What was it Gordon had said that day as he blustered on? Some bold proclamation while he waved his drink, his blocky head thrust forward like that of a reckless boxer, punch-drunk and asking for more. Now Nat remembered:

“Oh, it’s out there, all right. Nobody burned it. Nobody

bombed it. But somebody took it, and I wish I knew who, 'cause it's got secrets you can't find anywhere else. Not a dud among 'em. *Live* ammunition. Pick it up and it might go off in your hands. *Boom!*"

Whereupon he sloshed bourbon onto the tie of the assistant dean for students.

Gordon's mother lode was a trove of wartime gleanings from an American OSS station in Bern, Switzerland, which had been a listening post in a zone of tense but genteel neutrality. Right on Hitler's doorstep, as historians such as Nat liked to say. It was run by Allen Dulles, the genial, pipe-smoking Lothario who a few years later became one of the first chiefs of the CIA, making him the nation's ranking Cold Warrior. The missing boxes were only a fraction of the voluminous files Dulles collected during the war, of course. And much of his other work had been well documented, most notably in accounts of the German double agent Fritz Kolbe, who smuggled secret documents out of the Nazi Foreign Ministry by taping them around his thigh.

Gordon ended up working for the OSS literally by accident. Dulles arrived in Switzerland by train only hours before Vichy France shut its borders in late '41. Cut off from reinforcements, he cobbled together a staff from borrowed diplomats, marooned American bankers and students, disaffected expat Junkers, a Swiss financier's wife who was a former Boston debutante—who, conveniently, also became his mistress—and American airmen whose bombers crash-landed in Switzerland.

Gordon was one of the downed airmen, selected by Dulles mostly because of his fluency in German. It saved him from spending the rest of the war in a Swiss internment camp, although by his own account he was little more than a clerk, translating speeches and making sure Dulles never ran out of paper clips. Gordon compensated for this lack of espionage glamour by telling hair-raising tales of his missions as a ball turret gunner in a Flying Fortress on bombing runs over

Germany. To drive home the point, he wore a battered leather flight jacket and walked with a limp—the result, he said, of a flak burst and a bad parachute drop.

This image of dashing-flyboy-turned-spy-clerk-turned-scholar might have followed him to the grave if not for a bit of “gotcha” journalism that had appeared only a week ago in Wightman’s campus newspaper, the *Daily Wildcat*.

Gordon’s B-17, it turned out, hadn’t been shot down at all. It hadn’t even dropped a bomb during its final flight. It flew plenty of other dangerous missions, but Gordon was making his maiden voyage as a last-minute replacement. Somewhere between England and the target city of Regensburg the pilot got lost, ran low on fuel, circled into the Alps, and finally brought the plane to rest in a Swiss meadow, where the unscathed crewmen were immediately surrounded by milk maidens and lowing cattle. Gordon’s limp, the *Wildcat* said, was either the exaggerated by-product of a childhood illness—the very malady that kept him out of the infantry—or an outright affectation.

Although Gordon was retired, he was still a well-known figure around campus, not least for a series of free lectures he delivered every summer to the townsfolk, complete with colorful descriptions of his aerobatic derring-do. But there would be no speeches this summer, and a book contract that was to have been his scholarly swan song had already been canceled.

Now, if Viv was to be believed, you could add an arrest at the hand of federal agents to his roll of dishonor. And who knows, maybe the man was guilty. Because if he *had* finally tracked down the missing boxes, then Nat could well imagine him hoarding them, at least for a while. It was easy enough to guess how the old fellow would have justified it, by garrulously referring to his temporary possession as a “finder’s fee.”

“So can you come?” Viv was insistent.

Nat sighed. He wanted to tell her to call a lawyer. Then he could get a full night’s sleep and drive up tomorrow, if at all.

Let the old bastard stew away in jail, especially after everything that had happened between them. But Viv headed him off at the pass.

“Gordon won’t let me call a lawyer. He said to get you instead. It was the last thing he said as they put him in the car. ‘Get Nat. He’ll know what to do.’ ”

“Since when did Gordon make sense in this kind of situation, Viv?”

“I know. But for what it’s worth, he was sober. Mostly, anyway.”

“We haven’t spoken in years, you know. Unless you count those late-night calls he likes to make.”

“I know that, too. I’m sorry. Gordon’s sorry, if it makes any difference. And not just ’cause he’s in trouble. He’s said it a lot lately.”

Sure he had. But in spite of himself, Nat experienced a tug of old loyalties. Or maybe he was still just eager to please—student to teacher, apple in hand.

“Okay. I’ll come.”

“Thanks, Nat. I’ll never forget it. And I’m sure Gordon won’t.”

Yes, he would, probably within minutes. But Nat had endured that before. Besides, there were other motivations. If the boxes were what he suspected, he might get first crack at them.

“I’ll leave right away,” he said. “Don’t wait up.”

Viv hung up, and Nat found himself back in the dark, inhaling the stale, silent breath of all those books and ledgers. They, too, seemed to rest at night, the cells of a drowsing giant who might roll over at any moment and crush him with the weight of their lore. Nat believed there was more than just physical heft to these materials. They retained a spirit as well, some gusty breath from the souls of their creators. It wasn’t that he believed in ghosts. It was more a reflection of how thoroughly he let such materials inhabit his mind.

But more practical matters beckoned. He was already dreading the long drive. Six hours minimum, meaning he

would have to stop for breakfast, maybe a nap. Good thing he'd nodded off here. With any luck he would make it in time for the arraignment, although he realized now that Viv hadn't given him a time or place. He tapped the desktop like a blind man, groping for his things. Then the phone throbbed again. Viv with the logistics, no doubt.

"Yes?"

"Don't be alarmed."

A man's voice this time, calm and deliberate, with an odd echo as if it were bouncing off the far wall of the stacks.

"What?"

"Don't be alarmed. I'm on your floor, over by the stairwell."

So the man *was* in the stacks. Nat felt like leaping from his seat, but in what direction? For all he knew, the fellow was only a few yards away.

"Are you a campus cop?"

"No. A friend. Or that's how I hope you'll think of me."

"Me, too."

"C'mon. We need to get moving."

There was a metallic snap as the caller hung up, which made Nat flinch in his chair. Across the room, a tiny light switched on, casting a narrow white beam that scoped down the long aisle before coming to rest on Nat's right knee, where it waggled briefly.

"This way," the man said.

"Do you have a name?" Nat answered.

He was back in the role of trapped miner, only he wasn't so sure about the rescue party. His voice held steady, but he was a little scared. He considered bolting, since he probably knew these corridors better than his adversary did. But without his own light he would soon wind up facedown, or smashed against a shelf.

"We'll discuss details outside."

"Maybe I should call 9-1-1, in case a campus cop is on patrol outside. Wouldn't want him seeing us coming out of a locked door after hours and overreacting."

“It won’t work.”

“What won’t?”

“Your phone.”

He was right. Nat couldn’t get a signal. For that matter, how had he gotten one to begin with? Never before had he been able to make or take a call this deep in the stacks. Library officials were content to let the place remain a cell phone dead zone, and he had only rarely heard one ringing. How had the two calls gotten through, then? And what had become of his miraculous signal? This was beginning to feel like one of the scenes he reconstructed a bit too luridly in his books. Some doomed hero of the resistance, cornered at last by the Gestapo. Fear crept a little higher in his chest, and his voice tightened.

“What is this? What are you doing?”

“Sorry for the spook act, but we’re wasting time. I’ll explain outside.”

Assuming they made it.

“Let me get my things.”

Nat groped for a pen and a sheet of paper as he rose from his chair. He scribbled blindly: “1 a.m., 5-18-07, Am being abducted.”

Whoever found it would know who left the note because this was Nat’s assigned carrel. Then he had another idea and laid down his cell phone. “Last call on phone has his number,” he scribbled, hoping he wasn’t writing over the previous message. He then added a postscript.

“Pls tell Karen Turnbull,” he wrote, jotting her number. His daughter. Probably the only person on the planet other than his department head who would care enough to follow up. A sobering realization when you were about to walk off into the dark with a stranger, and not much of a comment on the life he had built.

“What’s taking so long?”

“I’m making sure I’ve got everything.”

It was partly true. Other than the note and his phone, Nat

believed it was important that he not leave behind a single item. For one thing, it was his usual careful way as a researcher. For another, he had a feeling he wouldn't be returning for quite a while.