

The Causeway

By

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Acknowledgement

*To my supportive family and patient readers,
thank you, with your help and encouragement, the
sequel is finally here.*

Chapter One

Munich 1972

Panic-stricken, Freddy burst through the door into a long corridor. He glanced left and right to quickly assess the fastest escape route, already the footsteps from behind were getting louder.

By no means obese he was however, overweight and being quite tall this gave him a bulky, ungainly appearance. He was now also sweating profusely. The few passersby were clearly bank employees, dressed as they were in smart, conventional attire. They stared at this intrusion into their ordered world.

To the right and opposite, a stairwell broke the long expanse of plain wall and Freddy pushed his way to it. Here he found a large marble stairway with an ornate iron banister around the centre spiral shaft that created a mirror-like effect up and down the height of the building. From this he could see just a few floors below but many more above. Leaping three steps at a time, he made for the first landing below, hearing a burst of sound from behind as he landed. They would soon be on him.

Emerging moments later into the corridor, three uniformed police officers were in hot pursuit, themselves followed by three more detectives in plain clothes. They looked quickly for their prey but he was out of sight. Seeing the

uniforms, the 'corridor workers' were keen to assist and two pointed frantically at the stairwell, shouting 'down there, he just went down there'.

Freddy was alone on the stairs but could hear the commotion clearly behind him. In seconds they would see him descend but going up would be worse as he would need to backtrack.

He felt like a trapped animal. 'It's impossible... wait, there's another door on the landing'.

The pale colours ensured the door blended inconspicuously into the wall around it, if there hadn't been a small plaque with the figure of a man; it would have been easy to miss. He almost dived through the door and pulled it closed behind him but was cool enough to prevent a final slamming noise. 'Thank god it wasn't fitted with a slow auto-closing device'.

The large marble-walled room contained a neat line of sinks on the left and toilet doors on the right. Above the sinks a row of full-length mullioned windows rose with semi-frosted glass allowing the light from outside to beam in; a horizontal shadow crossed his face. As Freddy could hear loud steps again on the stairs outside, it dawned on him; the shadow was cast by scaffolding. Sprightlier than his forty seven years would suggest, he leapt onto a sink and within seconds had opened the window above and mounted the scaffold outside.

The detectives and two of the fittest uniformed policemen had run straight past the doorway and were striding down the stairs beyond. The third clutched the banister and deftly tap-danced down the stairs peering up and down the shaft as he descended to the landing. He was the first to notice the door. He strode directly for it and entered at the precise moment Freddy reached back to close the window behind him. The officer walked slowly into the room, breath abated to hear more closely the giveaway sounds of his prey. One by one, he checked the stall doors.

Outside, Freddy dared to look back through the window; he could just make out the figure inside, attention diverted as he checked each of the doors. There were just moments before he would focus his attention onto the windows. Freddy looked around, he was balancing on the iron scaffolding pole that had cast the shadow into the room and holding a vertical pole to his left. Below, a few feet down, planks formed a walkway along the side of the building, just a few metres further was the street and the hustle-bustle of the busy city. He could see no workers on the walkway and so climbed carefully down. Taking his bearings, he realised the main entrance to the building was to his right onto the busy 'Fraunhoferstrasse'. The road below was one-way leading onto it so he decided to make his way against the flow and headed along the walkway to his left. Above him, he could now hear the

sounds of workers shouting and a radio blaring. Soon a ladder came to hand and he scrambled to make his way to the street. As he did so, a penetrating yell came back from along the walkway.

Head peering through the opened window, the police officer was now shouting instructions to Freddy to stop or he would shoot to kill. Momentarily he froze and the hairs on his neck bristled with fear.

Then a siren split the air as two police cars skidded to a halt in 'Fraunhoferstrasse' at the end of the side road. More police emerged from these cars seemingly frustrated by their inability to drive against the one-way flow in pursuit.

This distraction broke the spell and ignoring the armed officer, Freddy jumped to the street and began to run in the opposite direction until to his horror, yet another police car sped into the street, this time from the other end. A chef appeared carrying boxes on the opposite pavement through an open fire door; Freddy ran between the traffic to the sound of blasting horns and, shoving the man aside, rushed through the door.

Leaving the shouts of abuse behind, he pushed his way through the busy kitchen and out into the restaurant. Diners froze as this frantic figure charged bull-like through the tables. As he emerged onto the street he could see the commotion to his right where the police cars still blocked the side road, but the officers had now

left their cars and were out of sight. He ran to his left taking cover amongst the crowd of pedestrians on this wide Munich Boulevard. 'Walk', he told himself, 'don't run, and blend into the crowd'.

So Freddy made his escape through the busy streets leaving his pursuers standing in confusion and desperately trying to pick up the now cold trail.

Within an hour the serious crime team assembled in the third floor briefing room of Munich Central office. Chief Inspector Muller was quick to gain order and unflinching in his criticism.

'I gave the victims a personal reassurance that this man would not find refuge in our city. I still can't believe he got away from the building – how the hell can you lose someone running free in a bank?'

Three members of the team in particular averted Muller's piercing eye contact. Muller was a large man at over six feet tall, heavily built and for someone in his late forties he looked remarkably fit. But any sense of gravitas this physique may have given him was sadly undermined by what can only be described as a 'quirky' dress sense. As if the checked red trousers with a blue striped shirt and somewhat dated sports jacket weren't enough, his long jet-black bushy hair was the finishing touch.

Certainly he still had presence, but this was a consequence of his command of language and the gold plated reputation that left everyone in the room in awe of him.

‘We will re-visit this cock-up later when you have all shown me what you can do to redeem yourselves. In the meantime, I have a story to tell you about our fugitive and maybe you will then understand why I want him caught.

First let me introduce a colleague from the Police Force of Guernsey in the Channel Islands, Inspector Ogier has been involved with this case for some time and I would ask him to please correct me if any details that I give are inaccurate.’ Muller nodded to a stranger standing discretely at the side of the room who acknowledged with a polite smile.

‘To give the headline first, Freddy Stein is the top dog of Stein Pharmaceuticals, or was until today when we discovered he forged, deceived and quite possibly murdered his way into that position. Two of his accomplices are in police custody and are singing like birds. Stein is in the frame for attempting to murder the rightful heiress to the business, a gentle old man who survived the holocaust, and quite possibly his own brother. Needless to say, he left most of the dirty work to others, like the two now helping us with our enquiries. But as for the death of his brother, he is now the prime suspect.

Of course you all know about the company, it is one of Germany's most successful private businesses with exports and factories around the world. Earlier today it was due to go public and, owning most of the shares, our friend Freddy would have raked in a fortune. Not that he was exactly hard up before. Greed is a dangerous thing my friends.'

Around the room, Muller's team looked to each other for a reaction. There was a slim blond woman named Ida, Ali a shortish very dapper man of middle-eastern appearance, and the three detectives from the bank. The first of these, Raj looked like a larger, scruffier version of Ali and the two others, Pieter and Kirk, both had typically German blond hair, wore smart suits and were well built. Smart suits, that is with loosened ties since the somewhat energetic chase an hour earlier. All eyes landed on Ali who had a reputation for collecting fast cars and smart clothes, the reference to greed seemed to amuse them.

'First thing this morning, I was contacted by the financial regulator who told me that a woman had come to see him with evidence that she was the heiress to the Stein business. She held share certificates in her father's name and proof of her identity as the sole survivor after the death of both her parents. The certificates amounted to fifty-one percent, a controlling interest. So how, you might ask, did Freddy produce evidence that

he held the majority of shares? Yes, my bright eyed friends - that is where the forgery comes in. Although it was his response to being confronted that really gave him away.

Clearly, the forgeries must have been expertly done, so we will be very interested in understanding how this came about.

Inspector Ogier has a file on this case with considerably more detail and I would ask you all to read it, but for now those are the main points. Any questions?’

Raj was the first to respond.

‘Presumably Stein has no form, what about the other two?’

‘Good question but negative. An old school fascist called Reiner and slightly younger controller, Gunter Smitt. Both are unknown to us and claim to have been recruited by our man, Stein. Yes Ida.’

‘What do we know about other contacts or associates Stein may try to get to, has he family?’

‘No family left as far as we know but so far we haven’t had time to investigate further. This line of enquiry will now be a priority.’ Whilst the team thought about this answer, Muller continued.

‘Look, there is much we don’t know yet and time is slipping away rapidly so whilst you may have lots more to ask me, I’m going to ask you to hold any more questions until later and get back out onto the streets to find this man. First of all

Ali, there is an 'APB' out for Stein but I want you to sit on control to make sure you are at hand when anything comes in. Find out what car he drives and get that circulated asap. Get officers to his home, his office and anywhere else he might turn up.

Raj, get over to the offices of Stein straight away and flash your badge to get access to the company records. I want that place totally pinned down, nothing and nobody goes in or comes out without you knowing. Correction, nothing goes out full stop. Ida, do the same with his house and check for any boltholes he might have, holiday homes, apartments, that kind of thing. Also get onto his bank, I want his accounts frozen and any attempt to withdraw cash reported immediately. Kirk close the borders to this man, I don't want him leaving the country so contact Border Control and get his details to every German Airport and crossing point. OK, finally Pieter, go with Raj and find Stein's appointment diary and address book. He'll have a PA and secretary so I want you to find out who he is close to, where he has been recently, get inside his head and tell me his next move. Now everybody go to it, we'll meet again first thing tomorrow and in the meantime you can reach me through control, I'll be interrogating his accomplices but first I need to speak with the lady at the centre of all this before she leaves the country.' He paused... then. 'Go, get to it!'

With that, the room emptied and Muller turned to Inspector Ogier.

‘How much of a threat do you think this man is now he has been flushed out?’

Inspector Ogier thought for a few minutes before answering. ‘Of course, we have little firsthand information about the man himself only his manipulation of others and of course, our suspicions about his brother’s death. But it seems most likely he is ruthless and dangerous because he may think he now has nothing to lose. He knows he will be in the frame for a life sentence and I would expect him to stop at nothing to prevent capture. As for other ambitions, he may try to access his wealth and he may want revenge but this is highly speculative.’

It was Muller’s turn to reflect before replying. ‘From what you told me about Gunter, he was not exactly a sensitive soul but he was clearly terrified of Stein. We’d better play safe and treat him with extreme caution. I don’t want any more casualties. What are your plans now?’

‘I have no jurisdiction in your country and it was good of you to allow me to sit in on the ‘collar’ at the bank, but now I need to return to Guernsey with the couple I came here to protect. Rachel and Tom Le Breton are good, straightforward, people. The last thing they ever wanted was to be caught up in a deadly intrigue or power struggle for an international corporation. But like it or not, Rachel is now the majority

shareholder of a huge company and there is a lot they will both have to consider. For my part, I want to be sure they get back safely. I don't know what, if any, tricks Stein has up his sleeve and I think he would be mad to go anywhere near them but rather than second guess, I want to be there keeping an eye on them. They're waiting at the Airport in a private lounge with some of your officers I believe, shall we join them?'

With that the two men left Munich Central and headed for the airport.

A short drive later they met with Rachel and Tom and broke the news that Stein had so far eluded capture. A middle-aged couple they might have been, but both were still alert and attractive. Rachel with an hour glass figure and long black hair and Tom with the kind of rugged good looks that come from a life at sea. Tom was forthright.

'This man has been a blight on our lives and I want him caught but failing that I want him and any of his playmates kept well away from Rachel. You understand don't you that I won't be held responsible for my actions if he turns up within a country mile of my wife or family? Other than that, we are still a little shell-shocked and we're trying to take everything in. We discussed a few things on the way to the airport and Rachel doesn't want to upset the family now living in her parent's old house. It is their home now and we want them to keep it. We'll look into the legal side later. As for the business, we need to learn

about it before we decide anything. Our son is in the investment business at home and he can guide us but it would be helpful if we could take some information back with us for him to make a start. Can you help us with this?’

Muller reached for the radio microphone attached to his collar.

‘Munich Control, this is Muller, you read me?’ A response crackled that they did.

‘Patch me through to Raj would you?’ Then a few seconds later,

‘Raj, listen I want you to find the finance guy at Stein. Tell him to assemble the last few years’ accounts and senior management reports, as well as any brochures they may have that describe what Stein do and where they do it. Also go into Freddy’s office and see if you can find anything else that looks relevant. The new owners need to get up to speed quickly on any decisions that need making. Let’s not forget there are thousands of jobs depending on them as well as suppliers, shareholders and customers.’

Rachel looked apprehensively at her husband as Muller went on.

‘Take copies of everything and get them to us at the airport within....’ He turned to Tom.

‘How long before your flight leaves?’ Tom signalled two hours.

‘Get them here within the hour; understand? OK, have you anything for me?’

The conversation closed abruptly a few seconds later and Muller signalled that they should all sit down in more comfortable chairs to continue their conversation whilst they waited. Although Rachel and Tom would much rather have been left alone to wait for their flight, they understood the importance of helping Muller as much as they could.

Meanwhile, a few miles away in the city centre, Freddy Stein waited impatiently by a public telephone booth. The dark Mercedes with smoked windows pulled up at the kerb a few metres away and a back door opened. Freddy peered in for just a moment and responding to the invitation from within, he looked around and slid into the car.

As the limo sped its way through the city, the two passengers in the back seat made little eye contact as arrangements were discussed.

‘We are taking you to Max like you asked but he isn’t happy’

‘You think I am? Like it or not we both have a problem now and if you want to keep the game in play, you are going to have to help me.’

‘Save it for Max Freddy, you know he makes his own mind up so there’s no point in appealing to me. Just sit back and enjoy the ride, at least you are still free at the moment.’

With that, they turned away from each other and peered out of the window. The houses were less frequent now with long lines of trees

bordering both sides of the road. Before long the car slowed and the indicator signalled it was about to turn off into a discretely hidden driveway breaking the tree line. Just off the road a pair of large iron gates barred the entrance and the driver spoke into a small entry system to announce their arrival. The gates immediately swung open allowing the Mercedes to follow a meandering gravel driveway for a further half a mile until it pulled up outside a substantial baroque Manor house.

Freddy was escorted inside and told to wait in the hallway. A vaulted ceiling thirty feet above gave proportion to the impressive staircase that spilled onto a highly polished marble floor at his feet. The first flight culminated on a landing with two galleries leading away on either side. Above this division, a huge oil painting by Rembrandt dominated the wall. 'The Night Watch' depicted a company of civic militia guards being led by a small group believed to include the captain who originally commissioned the painting. What was especially brazen was the fact that this painting was supposed to be hanging safely in a museum in Amsterdam. No stranger himself to the trappings of wealth, Freddy was nonetheless impressed with the splendour of Max's home.

As Freddy gazed up at the painting, he was surprised by a quiet cough uncomfortably close behind him.

‘I see you appreciate fine art. Of course, some might say I should hide this away but most callers who have any knowledge of art assume it to be a copy. I’ll leave you to draw your own conclusions.’

Freddy spun around to face the diminutive figure of a man in his late fifties dressed immaculately in a pale linen suit and sporting a red polka dot tie with matching handkerchief in his breast pocket.

‘Max, it is good to see you. I am grateful for you allowing me to come here; I know how you value your privacy.’

‘Enough of the pleasantries Freddy, we both know you are only here because you have lost your grip on the business and I need to understand how that affects our little arrangement. Come through to the drawing room and tell me what has happened.’

Max led the way to an oak panelled room surrounded by shelves containing antiquarian books and more familiar oils adorning the walls. In the centre, two leather Chesterfields faced each other over a low wooden coffee table. They sat, one on each sofa, Max leaning back relaxed, Freddy leaning forward eagerly. He was rambling and this was uncharacteristic of Freddy, Max guessed the situation was as serious as he had first thought.

‘So Freddy, you are telling me that papers showing the accounts of the Bogota plant were

left in your office? That isn't good, but I'm guessing they only contain creative accounting yes?'

'Naturally, the books don't give anything away but it wouldn't take a genius to work out that the business is just a front. Lots of suppliers paid in cash and international customers who aren't exactly recognisable on the established pharmaceutical scene. I had no idea I wouldn't be back in the office later to file it all away in time for our tame and somewhat stupid auditors but now I can't risk going back there.'

The expression on Max's face was enough to silence Freddy. Agitated, he was still perched on the edge of the Chesterfield looking across into Max's expressionless face. He knew this man was now deciding if his crime empire was compromised and if it was; what he should do about it. Perhaps he was deciding whether to call in a couple of the large minders waiting outside, maybe suggest they take him somewhere for safety and then dispose of him. Max had not got to his position without a large measure of blood on his hands, or at least those of his thugs.

'Is there anything that connects Bogota with my supply chain into Europe or the US? Anything at all, think hard now. Any other documents they might find, names, meeting places, anything.'

'I don't keep anything like that written down. I only need the accounts because we have to show

the Colombians the business is legitimate or they would simply shop us to the FBI. As it is a Stein business, they think it is all OK but the board here also need fobbing off with numbers. No, nothing connects you but we have a good business and if I can just get these bloody papers, we can fake a disposal of the business by Stein and tell them locally it's a management buy-out. There is just one loose end we need to take care of, my PA has dealt with all my travel arrangements and she might give them enough to work it out. Otherwise nobody questioned what I did with the business, it was hardly high profile. We just need to get rid of Stella.'

Neither man flinched at the prospect of stubbing out the life of Freddy's PA. Max simply moved onto more practical matters.

'If it is as you say, and we can keep going with just a couple of 'adjustments' and perhaps a new owner in Bogota, we might as well. After all, the profits on this powder are still strong and growing rapidly. But you know Freddy if it isn't as you say, I will feel you have let me down very badly. You won't let me down will you Freddy?'

The eye contact was penetrating, Freddy sat back to draw in a breath and loosen his tie. He was sweating again and in no doubt what Max meant by this.

'I can't let you down; you know that. You have me in the perfect grasp, with your help I can

still get my fortune back, if I fail we both know there is no hiding place.’

‘Just so long as we both understand that.’