

MURMUR OF THE HEART

By Eric Koch

Before they served a chocolate cake for dessert I excused myself and went upstairs. The door to Alexander Garlinsky's den, next to the bathroom, was half open and, just as Wanda had told me, I found a green envelope in the top drawer of his desk. I slipped it in my pocket, returned to the table, nodded to Wanda and proceeded to enjoy my chocolate cake.

The date was August 26, 1942, a week after the attempted landing at Dieppe had disastrously failed. Garlinsky had just returned from Washington where he had spent two days on a mission from the Polish government-in-exile in London. He was Wanda's uncle. He and his wife Maria lived in a modestly furnished apartment on Albany Avenue in Toronto. Wanda had no idea why they had come from England to Canada. She was gorgeous. Both of us were studying philosophy at the University.

"You know, Quentin, we've suffered a setback but we'll bounce back," Alexander Garlinsky said to me. He was a tall, dignified, handsome man who had been a colonel in the cavalry before he was secretly recruited, as Wanda had confided to me, by the Polish Intelligence Service. "I was greatly encouraged by everything I heard in Washington. My God, it took them a long time to come around."

"Stalin must be very upset," Wanda said. "He desperately needs a second front."

"My sympathies with him are somewhat limited," Garlinsky said with a wry smile. Then he turned to me. I was afraid he was going to ask me, as so many did, why I was not in uniform. But he had too much breeding to embarrass me with such a direct question.

"It must be hard for you not being able to join the Forces, Quentin," he said. "Medical reasons, I suppose?"

"A slight murmur of the heart," I said. "No symptoms whatsoever. Fortunately there are other ways I can be useful."

"Such as?"

I was going to say, "I could work for Intelligence, like you, sir. As a matter of fact, I have just stolen a secret document from your desk."

"I have an interview with External Affairs next week," I said instead. They like philosophers."

"Do they really? How strange. Well, I wish you luck. Wanda tells me your father is well connected in Ottawa. Is that so?"

"Yes," I smiled. "He makes a point of being well-connected everywhere. Thanks to him I can take my time finding the right job."

"Your father was born in Toronto?" Maria Garlinsky asked.

"Yes, he was. And so was my mother."

"We have met very few true Canadians since we arrived. Perhaps you can explain something. Why can't we go to the movies on Sundays?"

"Because we are puritans in Toronto," I said, laughing.

“Why don’t you give them your usual lecture?” Wanda had come from Poland just before the war and had to listen to me often telling her about Toronto the Good’s profound opposition to Pleasure, about the Loyalists, the Orange Order and the Family Compact.

So I gave them my standard performance, adding that Wanda and I hardly dare to hold hands in public.

“Heaven knows what goes on behind closed doors,” Mr. Garlinksy remarked, amused.

“Sooner or later there will be a revolution against Puritanism in Toronto,” I announced. “And against the stuffy old families who are in charge generally. The returning soldiers won’t stand for it, and nor will the young people, after so many years of depression and war. We may have to wait a few years before they’re ready to act. The revolutionaries will put up a guillotine in front of City Hall and the heads of all the most prominent puritans will be cut off while the crowd roars with joy. After that, there will be love and pleasure for one and all.”

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Wanda was wrong to think that her uncle, when he fled in September 1939, had saved the only copy of the Enigma formula the Poles had devised to break the German code and kept it in a green envelope in his desk. I knew that the work the Poles had done in this area was very much in advance of the British and French efforts. She said he was not allowed to make the material available to the British until he received the signal from the Polish government-in-exile. I was too much in love with Wanda to ask her why. Of course I should have questioned her but I felt this was a sensitive area, so I refrained and just did what I was told.

Once she had the material in her hand she intended to send it directly to Mr. Churchill. This, she told me, would shorten the war by several years and save thousands of lives. Stealing it would be an infinitely greater contribution to the war effort than I would have been able to make had I been able to join the Forces.

As it happened, in August 1939 the Polish Intelligence Service, expecting a German attack at any moment, had passed all the information, drawings and perforated sheets making up the Enigma Code to the British and French.

In the green envelope was a map of Toronto streetcars.