

PART ONE

Chapter 1

When Martin Paul Linke saw the black Austin slow down by the pine trees at the cemetery corner and turn into his driveway, he knew what it was about. He continued to grub and turn the soil with his hoe: let them come to him. He heard the car's doors open and close, the chain rattle on the gate, and their boots on the hard paths between his rows of tomato seedlings. It was the fourth of September, the end of a winter of scanty rains. He straightened and turned around. He had lived in Australia for seventeen years.

The first man, a stranger, nodded. He wore his overcoat unbuttoned and held his hat in one hand. The second man said, 'Hello, Martin.' Today he had dressed in his captain's uniform and a greatcoat. Martin knew him as Frank Lucas, the mayor, owner of Lucas's Emporium in the main street. 'Martin, this is Detective Sergeant Bryant of the New South Wales Police Force.'

Martin Linke was certain that a third man had been in the car, but he could not see him anywhere, and, to his mind, that was the start of the dirty work.

'Frank, what's up?' he said.

'I'm very sorry, Martin. I've got no choice. We've got an internment order for you.'

Martin Linke put his hoe upon his shoulder, the sergeant watching expressionlessly, and said, 'I was expecting this, Frank. It is the fine British justice at work, locking me away in case I show Mr Hitler the way to Canberra.'

'We'll help you appeal, Martin. You'll be free in a year.'

Martin walked past him. The fellow's manner was false, he was enjoying himself in his VDC uniform. But put him back in his shop—in his shirtsleeves and braces, his bumpy skull catching the light as he grunted with a stick to fetch down a watering can hanging from a ceiling hook—and he was neither tall nor smart.

'You can have as much time as you like to wash and change and pack your things.'

'The great British justice,' said Martin.

The two men followed Martin Linke to the back door of his house. They waited while he took off his boots and washed his hands in the laundry trough. No one spoke. The third man was inside the house. Martin could hear him moving about.

There was a cardboard box open on the kitchen table. Martin looked into it, at his private papers, the interesting articles he had collected, his correspondence as president of the German Study Circle some years ago. He wondered how he was expected to appeal if they were going to take away all the evidence of his good character: his naturalization papers, divorce papers proving his wife's guilt, Christmas cards and letters from friends in positions high and low, even a card from Frank Lucas.

The detective sergeant left the kitchen and returned with the red, black and gold lacquered box in which Martin kept his sleeve links, studs and tie pins. Without speaking he took out a gold tie pin, held it up for Martin's inspection, and put it in an envelope in his pocket.

'We'll give you a receipt, Martin,' said Frank Lucas. 'Would you like to change your clothes now, and pack?'

This is the way it would be. Martin took his lacquered box back to his bedroom. How did they know about that particular tie pin? He had never worn it, after all. They had their information from his wife, well-known for her ways.

He took down a suitcase and folded into it a winter suit and other warm clothes, and, after some thought, lighter clothes for the approaching summer. He wrapped his slippers and shoes in newspaper and placed them, together with four books and his razor, strop, brush and lather stick, in a hollow between his suit and trousers. He took off his work clothes and dressed in his everyday suit, a clean white cotton shirt, a red and black tie, and shoes that kept a smart shine but were also sturdy. Who knew what indignities were ahead of him. An appeal hearing, a march through the streets, forced labour. He telephoned his brother-in-law, for today had not been unexpected. He fetched his overcoat and hat from the hooks by the back door and said, 'Now we can go.'

As Martin Linke stood on his back step saying goodbye to his home, Paul and Nina walked around the side of the house, eager to see who was visiting. They stopped at once, afraid to come closer, swinging their school satchels. Martin put down his case, took their hands, and walked them away from the captain and the arresting officers, the so-called gentlemen. He blinked his wet eyes. Paul was desolate, he would not accept it, and Martin left him in the charge of his brave girl. He said, 'Your Aunt Jean and your Uncle Hartley will be here soon. Now, you must be good for them.'

He was thankful for the good people in the world who had not deserted him.

The two detectives sat in the front seat of the black car. Martin sat in the back seat with Frank Lucas. The drive to the police station took five minutes. Martin said, as they passed the flower beds outside the Institute, the shrubs and shaped lawns of the children's playground on the river bank, 'I did that. And that. Seventeen years, my God.'

At the police station Sergeant Richards said to the three escorts, 'None of this is necessary, you know.' Martin saw that he still had friends.

'You're responsible now,' said the detective sergeant, and he left, taking the other man with him.

Frank Lucas took off his captain's cap. 'Will you be all right now, Martin?'

Martin Linke—sitting in an office armchair and not on a cell bunk, drinking a cup of tea—said, 'Yes, thank you, Frank. I am among friends.'

'Don't be like that, Martin. I had no choice. You must have been expecting something like this sooner or later.'

'These are confusing times,' said Martin, leaning back in comfort. 'You had your orders to carry out. I understand.'

Mayor Lucas put on his cap and left, swearing.

'It's not right, Martin, it's just not right,' said Sergeant Richards. 'But let us at least get your affairs in order.'

The train that was to take Martin to Sydney was due at seven o'clock. Sergeant Richards left a constable in charge and drove Martin to visit the bank manager, the pastor, two friends and his solicitor. They promised not to let the government take away his children or his house, or give the children into their mother's care.

At a quarter past six Sergeant Richards drove Martin home to say goodbye to the children. Martin knocked, but took his knuckles away from his door and said, 'Fancy that.' Jean opened the door and kissed his cheek. She was his wife's sister, proof that good and bad can come of the same stock. The children's clothes were packed. Nina was loading a box with toys and books, and Paul sulked about. The curtains and blinds were drawn. Then Hartley entered from somewhere, holding a broom, and asked Jean if anything else needed to be done. Is it no longer my house? Martin wondered. What more must I endure.

Sergeant Richards drove him to the station at ten minutes to seven. The dark night was very cold but there was no rain in it, only a wind that eddied the coal smoke when the express from Brisbane pulled into the station at seven o'clock.