

R I D E T H E S U N

by Daryl Henry

From the novel *SCHALLMAUER* by Hardy Kruger

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY OF HAMBURG - DAY

We are viewing the misted city through a streaked window on the eighth floor of a 22-story apartment block. Outside, cold rain is hurled against the dark skyline by a moaning wind sweeping south across the Elbe.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

PULL BACK to reveal a MAN staring out the window. We've been seeing the day through his eyes. From behind he is hard to pin down-- taller than average, brown hair, wearing a gray leather flight jacket and a scarf made from a knotted chunk of white parachute nylon. We will come to know him as ALEXANDER WESCOTT, an American jet-fighter pilot.

ALEXANDER'S VOICE

Sure, it's possible the pain won't last forever. But the doubt remains, Mylene. What really happened up there, and why?

(beat)

It isn't fair. It's always tougher on the ones left behind.

(beat)

But then nobody ever said he was fair.

Alexander turns to look back over his shoulder at the door. We catch a glimpse of his face-- gray eyes, subdued.

ALEXANDER'S VOICE (CONT'D)

All he has to do is walk in through that door and everything would be back to normal. But it's impossible. He's gone. He's already past tense, a memory.

(beat)

He's made way... for me.

He turns again. The rain outside the window continues to darken the afternoon sky.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WILSTENSEN AIR BASE NEAR HAMBURG - PRE-DAWN

Still dark. Lights burn in only one hangar, throwing a band of pale yellow across the glistening apron at a row of parked Starfighters. Beside the hangar, the red-brick Bachelor

(CONTINUED)

Officers' Quarters. All but one of its windows are dark. Now that window, too, goes black. Then, slowly, it opens and a man climbs out.

Alexander Wescott is dressed for flying-- orange flight suit under his leather jacket, carrying a battered white helmet bearing the insignia of the 91st Fighter Squadron. He walks head-bent through the rain, climbs into a green Volkswagen jeep.

OPENING TITLES BEGIN

We follow the jeep off the base and onto the main road leading into the city.

EXT. HIGHWAY: WILSTENSEN TO HAMBURG - PRE-DAWN

Like the North Sea in winter, scattered puddles are whipped into miniature storms, throwing off clouds of gray mist, throwing them into the path of the jeep.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN JEEP - PRE-DAWN

Alexander, a Captain in the US Air Force, liaison officer to the 91st, wears his silver bars on an otherwise German uniform. The boyish grin crinkling the corner of his eyes contracts with the mature precision of his movements, as though he's being reluctantly pushed over the threshold from boy to man.

EXT. REEPERBAHN - PRE-DAWN

The slap of the windshield wipers drowns the sound of the rain as the jeep turns onto the broad Reeperbahn. On both sides of the street a rainbow of neon lights closes one eye after another, bidding farewell to the night. Street life abounds.

An old PENSIONER waits, shivering, while his ancient Dachshund lifts his leg against a shop wall. Nearly unseen in the shadows of the doorway, a young COUPLE necking.

Against the damp boards of a sausage stall a WOMAN props up a DRUNK with her left hand while her right pushes a curried sausage into his protesting mouth.

At a bus stop, an uneven row of somber OFFICE WORKERS on their way downtown-- cold, sleepy, gray faces under dripping umbrellas.

EXT. CITY CENTER - PRE-DAWN

Under the tall dome of St. Michael's Church, close by the dark tower of St. Nicholas, the jeep heads upriver, winding past the Rathaus and the Stock Exchange.

EXT. HIGHRISE APARTMENT - PRE-DAWN

The jeep slides to a stop at the edge of the fish market between the 22-story apartment block and the river. Alexander rolls his window down six inches, peers out and up. As he does so, he flicks the jeep's headlights on and off three times.

HIGHRISE FROM ALEXANDER'S POV

Only one apartment shows a light. An eighth-floor window. As we watch, the light goes on and off three times.

OPENING TITLES PAUSE

ALEXANDER AGAIN

He smiles briefly, then grows reflective.

ALEXANDER'S VOICE

I went to pick him up, like I'd done many times before. Typically miserable weather. Nothing between Hamburg and the Arctic except a thousand miles of rain. A fitting day for what was about to happen...

(beat)

But who the hell could have predicted that?

(beat)

How was I supposed to know he had less than three hours left?

Alexander looks toward the entrance courtyard, waiting.

HIGHRISE ENTRANCE

Twin glass doors swing open. A MAN emerges, gliding into the pale light as though walking on water, which he practically is. This is FRANK TONDERN, hungover. Unruly blond mane, in need of brushing. An engaging if infrequent smile. He is 45, a Berliner, moody and mercurial, yet one of Germany's top test pilots. A flying poet who, rather than merely steer jet fighters at twice the speed of sound, prefers to dance them across the sky.

He wears a tan flight suit under a German Air Force leather jacket. The tattered jacket is covered with insignia of the various squadrons he once flew with. His helmet is chipped white, bearing the orange emblem of the City of Memmingen.

Without acknowledging Alexander he crosses in front of the jeep and climbs into the passenger seat.