

1A

My Dear Charles,

I have decyphered the first section of my Uncle's will and I am deeply saddened and perplexed by it. I had hoped that it would explain the sad circumstances of his death and allow me to remember him with the affection I recall from my childhood. Of course I knew that Tiberius had been engaged in secret government work prior to the War, but I had refused to believe that he could have had anything to do with those foul new weapons that so scarred my generation. I am not sure that I want to read the rest of his letter to me. Before I read it I could not have accepted that he had collaborated with the enemy, but I had not realized that he was acquainted with Hahn, a fact I read with distaste, and his claim to have maintained that relationship at the request of the government is the worst sort of self-justification.

I am puzzled by Tiberius's strange instruction that I should decypher the document. It seems a trivializing, if not to say frivolous, request. It is hard to square this with the suicide note of a traitor, but perhaps I have been here on Malta for too long. It is many years since I spent time in the company of friends or relatives and, though I find the solitude consoling, it makes me a poor judge of character.

I am sorry to say that I am ashamed of my Uncle and I have decided not to continue with this unpleasant game. I will have nothing more to do with him, but I see no need to add to the embarrassment of his friends and family and I would ask you to maintain the greatest discretion in your communications concerning this disappointing document, as I have done in encrypting this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas

1B

I, Tiberius Hawksmoor, being of sound mind, hereby revoke all other wills and codicils I may previously have executed. This document is my final declaration of intent for the disposal of any assets that remain under my ownership and control, and is my final opportunity to set the record straight concerning the awful events of the last fifteen years. It is also my final letter to you, dear Nicholas.

I could begin in any number of ways, but perhaps I should start back in Nineteen Thirteen, when I received an invitation from Prof. Otto Hahn to attend a meeting of the Deutschen chemischen Gesellschaft zu Berlin. The society was to be addressed by Prof. Emile Fischer on his work concerning corrosive gases and their effects on the human body. This was a subject that I found personally distasteful but professionally of profound importance, since I owned and operated a number of factories manufacturing chemical products, and I took the safety of those plants and my employees very seriously. The visit was productive and I learned a lot, perhaps more than was good for me.

On my return I was met from the boat in Southampton by two gentlemen from an organization they called VERONA - Volunteer Enterprises, Royal Ordnance Association. This top-secret government agency was responsible for recruiting leaders of the manufacturing industries to support the diplomatic and military efforts of the Foreign Office, and they asked me to provide them with a report on Fischer's work.

I had deep reservations, but I recognised the growing threat of war and I was increasingly afraid that chemical weapons might be used. In any case the two gentlemen, who, for obvious reasons, I nicknamed Valentine and Proteus, were very persuasive. I learned later that they belonged to a group within VERONA known as the Fabulists, dedicated to what we would now call information warfare. They were skilled proponents of propaganda and misinformation, and masters of a whole panoply of methods of persuasion. Knowing of your own dreadful experiences I am ashamed to admit that I found myself attracted by the new challenges of work with the agency. At that stage I was almost entirely concerned with investigating methods of protection against the ravages of Chlorine and Mustard Gas attacks and I was convinced that my work could save lives. I rediscovered a love for the daily rituals of the laboratory and enjoyed the close collegial atmosphere in the secret world of VERONA. At their request I maintained my contacts with the German scientists, convinced that dialog might prevent the full horrors of the coming war, but in June Nineteen Fourteen a conversation with V and P led to me to realise that, by providing our army with protection from the effects of these terrible weapons, my research could precipitate their use by our own side. Frightened by this and by the growing political instability in Europe I resigned immediately from the agency and returned to the laboratories of the company I had founded. The two gentleman of VERONA were, to say the least, unhappy, but I convinced them that my factories were still vital to British economic interests and for a while they left me alone. This story might have ended there if I had not received the telegram from your mother on January Fifth, Nineteen Fifteen.