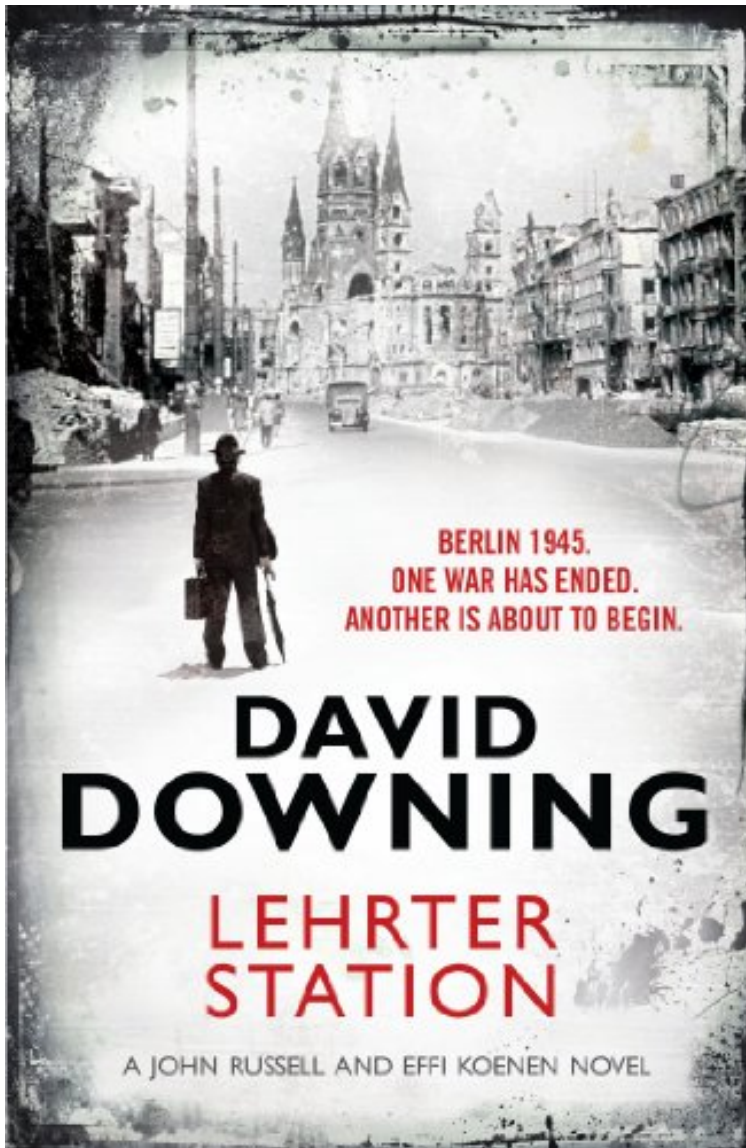


(Ebook free) File size: 19.Mb

Lehrter Station



*Par David Downing
DOC | *audiobook | ebooks |
Download PDF | ePub*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #62634 dans eBooksPubli le: 2012-05-01Sorti le: 2012-05-01Format: Ebook Kindle

(Ebook free) Lehrter Station

Par David Downing : Lehrter Station before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lehrter Station:

Download

Read Online

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNovember 1945. John Russell is walking home through the grey streets of postwar London when his old accomplice, Soviet agent Yevgeny Shchepkin, falls into step beside him. Shchepkin informs Russell that his masters in Moscow have decided it's time to pay them back for securing his safe exit from Russia in the last days of the war. Russell must return to Berlin to spy on his former colleagues in the German Communist Party, reporting on any deviation from the Stalinist line. Worse, he is ordered to offer his services to the Americans - in short, to become a double agent on Stalin's payroll. But Russell knows too well how short the life expectancy of a double agent is. Together, he and Shchepkin - who has finally lost his faith in the Soviet utopia - hatch a plan to gain their freedom. The stakes are high, both for Russell and his

girlfriend Effi, who has accompanied him to Berlin. In a world fuelled by paranoia and on the edge of a new, 'cold' war, they will need all their wits - and some luck - to survive. Extrait 14 December 1943 This night train was not like the one that had brought her to Berlin all those years ago. You could walk down that train, stare out of the wide corridor windows, move from carriage to carriage, eat dinner in one set up as a restaurant.

This train was just a series of self-contained rooms, each with a pair of long seats and two doors to the outside world. Their room had been full when they left Berlin. There were herself and Leon, two elderly men wearing old-fashioned collars, a woman and her almost grown-up daughter, and two Hitlerjugend on their way home from their annual convention. Baldur von Schirach himself had presented the medals theyd won in a Reich-wide orienteering contest. So far their papers had only been checked the once, during the long stop at Frankfurt an der Oder. Two drenched officials had come in from the pelting rain, dripped on all the proffered documents, and grumbled their way back again. Hers had survived a dozen inspections in Berlin, but she had still been worried that her face would betray her, that these people really did have a sixth sense when it came to Jews. Sitting back relieved, as the train pulled away, she told herself that she was simply falling for their propaganda, for the lie that Jews were somehow intrinsically different. Her father had always denied this human beings were human beings, he had always claimed, no matter what faith they chose. The trouble was, he would usually add, some of them didnt know it. The two Hitlerjugend had seemed like nice enough boys. They had admired Leons tinplate engine, and tried to teach him noughts and crosses. The boy had certainly enjoyed the attention, his eyes wistfully following them when they disappeared down the darkened platform at Glogau. The mother and daughter had also got off there, leaving the two old men to sit behind their newspapers and smoke their foul-smelling cigarettes. Victory at Vitebsk! ran the headline on one, just three words for the whole front page. She wondered how Breslau had fared would it be as bad as Berlin? She read to Leon as quietly as she could, aware that even this was irritating the two old men, but reminding herself of Sophie Wildens oft-repeated advice the more submissive you are, the more theyll wonder why. When the old men got off at Liegnitz she breathed a sigh of relief now perhaps she and Leon could lie down and get some sleep. But then, with the whistle already blowing, the door jerked open and a man climbed in. He was in his forties, she guessed. Quite burly, with a weak chin and gold-rimmed glasses.

He was wearing a black uniform, but not that one there were no lightning flashes, only a number on the epaulettes and two stripes on the arms. She could smell the alcohol on his breath and see the animal in his eyes. He was affable enough at first. He tried to talk to Leon, in much the same way the Hitlerjugend had done. But there was nothing genuine in it. Leon was only three, but even he could tell something was wrong, and soon his face was creased with anxiety, the way it had been after the Wildens house was bombed. And the man kept looking up at her, as if for approval, the glances soon slipping from her face to her breasts. I think he should get some sleep, she said, trying to sound firm but not aggressive. Of course, the man said, leaning back in his corner seat. He took out a silver flask and took a swig. She could feel his eyes on her as she covered Leon with the small blanket shed brought for that purpose. Are you all right, Mama? the boy asked. He was having trouble keeping his eyes open. Of course I am. Now you get some sleep, and I will too. She kissed him on the head and went back to her corner seat. It was furthest she could get from the man, but perhaps she should have taken Leons head in her lap she couldnt decide. Where is the boys father? the man asked. He was killed at Stalingrad, she said automatically. It was the story she always told, and true as far as Leon knew. But telling it this time had been a mistake Leon was asleep, and she could have claimed a living protector, one who was waiting on the platform at Breslau. Someone powerful like an SS officer, someone to make this man think twice. Im sorry, he said, with a palpable lack of sincerity. He took another swig, then offered her the flask. She politely declined. This belonged to a Russian once, he went on, waving the flask. One I killed. Perhaps I avenged your husband who knows? Are you still in the Army? she asked.

No, I work for the General Government in Galicia. We are clearing lands for German settlement, he explained peevishly, as if someone had challenged his usefulness. Your husband, what was his occupation? He was the manager of a department store, she decided, thinking of Torsten. You must miss him, he said abruptly. My husband? Of course. The closeness. The human touch. I have my son, she said shortly. Its been nice talking to you, but now I think I must get some sleep. We have much to do in Breslau tomorrow. He nodded but said nothing, just took another swig and stared out into the darkness. Perhaps he would let her be, she thought; perhaps hed drink himself to sleep. She closed her eyes, ears alert for any sound of movement. She thought she could feel his stare, but maybe it was just imagination. It wasnt as if she was a great beauty. She felt weary to the bone herself. It would be so wonderful to fall asleep and wake up in Breslau... She didnt know how long she was out, but she woke with a start to feel an arm around her neck, a

hand roughly squeezing her breast, and waves of schnapps-heavy breath gusting over her face. Don't make a fuss, he said, his arm tightening its grip around her neck. The bulge of an erection was straining at his trousers. Most of her wanted to scream, to twist and writhe and bite and claw, but she had six years to steel herself against this moment, to carve out the composure she would need to thwart the next rapist. I won't make a fuss, she whispered, and was amazed at the steadiness of her own voice. She brushed a finger along the bulge, fighting back nausea. If you let me up, I'll take off my blouse. He pulled out his arm from behind her neck, and started undoing his belt. She got to her feet and, standing with her back to him, began unbuttoning the blouse. Leon was fast asleep, his tinplate engine wedged between him and the back of the seat. She had just one chance, she thought, and her knees felt weak at the thought. She reached forward to rearrange the boy's blanket, picked up the engine as if moving it out of his way, then turned and crashed it into the man's face, shattering his glasses and drawing a spurt of blood from his forehead. A gasp of agony came out of his throat as his hands reached up to his eyes. She stood there for a second, suddenly uncertain, but the moment he tried to rise she hit him again, this time on the side of the head, and down he went between the seats, his head and shoulders against the door. He was unconscious, maybe even dead. And Leon, she saw, had slept through it all. Steeling herself, she stood astride the man's legs and tugged at his armpits until his upper back was also against the door. Then, kneeling on the corner seat, she depressed the door handle until the door sprang open. Head and shoulders dropped into a curtain of rain, but the rest showed no sign of following them out, until she crawled back along the seat, got behind his feet, and started pushing with all her might. For several long moments nothing seemed to move, and then with a rush the body was gone. It took her longer still to pull the door shut, and the bang when she did was loud enough to wake the boy. Mama? he said anxiously. It's nothing, she said quickly, sitting beside him and stroking his hair. Go back to sleep. He reached up an arm but obediently closed his eyes. Tomorrow she would need an explanation, she realised. Not for the man, who might have got off, but for the damage to his favourite toy. The Men From Moscow John Russell reached across and rubbed the tea shop window with his sleeve to get a better view of what was happening on the pavement outside. A middle-aged man in uniform was hectoring two boys of around twelve, jabbing his finger at first one and then the other to emphasise his indignation. The boys wore suitably downcast expressions, but one was still clutching a fearsome-looking catapult behind his back. Once the adult had run out of useful advice and stalked haughtily away, the two youngsters raced off in the opposite direction, giggling fit to bust. Russell somehow doubted that they had seen the error of their ways. He took another sip of the still-scalding tea, and went back to his News Chronicle. Like most of the newspapers, it was filled with evidence of Britain's newly split personality. While half the writers explored, with varying degrees of eagerness, the socialist future promised by the new Labour government, the other half was busily lamenting those myriad challenges to Empire that the war's end had conjured into being. Palestine, Java, India, Egypt... the outbreaks of violent disaffection seemed never-ending, and thoroughly inconvenient. The British press, like the British public, might want a new world at home, but they were in no mood to relinquish the old one abroad. The sports page was still full of the Moscow Dynamo tour, which had begun so inauspiciously the previous weekend. A fellow-journalist had told Russell the story of the Football Association reception committee's dash to Croydon Airport, and the subsequent rush back across London when it transpired that the Russians' plane was about to land at Northolt. The FA's choice of Wellington Barracks as a hotel had gone down badly with the tourists, particularly when their arrival coincided with the drilling of a punishment detail. Several of the Soviet players had concluded that they were being imprisoned, and had refused to leave their bus. It seemed as if things had improved since yesterday the visitors had been taken to the White City dog-track, where only the Magic Eye photomachine had denied them a rouble-earning win. Russell looked at his watch as usual, Effi was late. Clearing a new patch in the condensation he could see the queue outside the cinema already receding up Park Street. He gulped down the rest of his tea and went to join it, hurrying to beat the crowd pouring off a pair of trolleybuses. The visibility on Camden High Street was worse than it had been twenty minutes earlier, and the air seemed twice as cold and damp. Several people in the queue were stamping their feet and clapping their hands, but most seemed in surprisingly high spirits. Only six months had passed since the end of the war in Europe, and perhaps the novelty of peace had not quite worn off. Or maybe they were just happy to be out of their overcrowded houses. Russell hoped they weren't expecting an uplift from the film they were about to see, which the same journalist friend had warned him was a sure-fire wrist-slitter. But then Effi had chosen it, and it was her turn. She still hadn't forgiven him for West of the Pecos. The queue was beginning to move. He looked at his watch again, and felt the first stirrings of anxiety. Effi's English was

improving, but still a long way from fluent, and frustration always seemed to render her German accent even more pronounced. Locals with grudges had no way of knowing that she was a heroine of the anti-Nazi resistance. He was almost at the door when she appeared at his side. The trolleybus broke down, she explained in German, leaving Russell conscious of the sudden silence around them. She noticed it too. I have to walk half way, she added in English. How is your day? she asked, taking his arm. Not so bad, he said, with what had lately become his usual lack of candour. Was she just as reluctant to share her worries with him, he wondered. When they had found each other again in April, after more than three years apart, everything had seemed just like before, but slowly, over the succeeding weeks and months, a gap had opened up. Not a large one, but a gap all the same. He was often aware of it, and knew that she was too. But try to talk about it, as they had on several occasions, and all they ended up doing was re-state the problem. Solly has a couple of ideas hes looking into, he told her, forbearing to add that his agent had seemed even less hopeful than usual. Since the San Francisco Chronicle had dispensed with his services in May, Russell had returned to freelancing, but pieces sold had been few and far between, and he sometimes wondered whether he was on some unknown blacklist. He had done enough to warrant inclusion on such a list, but as far as he knew no one else was aware of that fact. And money was decidedly short, he thought, counting out the three shillings and sixpence for their tickets. Effi and her sister Zarah were earning a little from their needlework, but Pauls job with Solly was their only regular source of income. It was all a far cry from their affluent life in pre-war Germany. They found two seats in the centre of the back stalls and watched the auditorium slowly fill. For Effi, such moments always brought back memories of her years alone in Berlin, when a darkened cinema was the only place she could meet with her sister. And she was also reminded of evenings with Russell, watching herself up there on the screen, back when shed been a famous actress. It seemed several lifetimes ago, but lately shed found herself missing the stage, and wondering if she would ever act again. Not here, of course, not with her English, but back in Germany? Several theatres had already re-opened in Berlin, and sooner or later her country would start making films again. It would probably be later, she thought, as the Path News camera panned across the ruins of her home town. The streets seemed clearer than they had in April, but nothing much else seemed changed. There were no signs of new construction, only military jeeps and haggard-looking women weaving their way through a maze of perforated masonry. British servicemen looked up from their lunches to grin at the camera, but she doubted whether the locals were eating so well. The B movie had London policemen successfully rounding up a gang of black market spivs, something they seemed incapable of doing in real life. Russell missed the name of the film being trailed, but it involved a man and a woman sharing meaningful expressions in a railway station buffet, and looked likely to end in tears. Another wrist-slitter. Effis choice of main feature proved a good one, well-written, wellacted and very atmospheric. Russell found the masculinity of the leading actress somewhat off-putting, but the California-by-night setting was wonderfully evocative, the storyline taut and involving. And something was definitely being said between the lines about a womans place in the post-war world. When they finally emerged from the cinema the fog had grown much thicker. They crossed Camden High Street and walked arm in arm past a crowded pubthe beer shortage was clearly less severe than advertised. The interior looked as murky as the streets, blue cigarette smoke merging with greyish fog in the light from the nearest lamp post. So how was your day? Russell asked. Good. Rosa had a good day at school. And Zarah had another flirt with the man downstairs. They were speaking German now, which won them curious looks from a couple walking in the other direction. And you? Russell asked. Oh, I queued for bread, made dinner for everyone. I read this afternoon three whole pages of Great Expectations. But Im still looking up one word in three, or thats what it seems like. I was never any good at languages. Itll come. I doubt it. But... Her voice trailed away... So what did you think of Mildred Pierce? I liked it, I think. You think? I was never bored. It looked good. Though the daughter did seem a bit over the top would any mother be that blind? Of course. Ive known mothers whove put up with much worse. No, it wasnt that... She paused. They had reached the bus stop on College Street, and a trolleybus was already looming out of the fog. It was crowded with over-exuberant West End revellers, and continuing their conversation in German seemed ill-advised. Effi spent the five-minute bus journey trying to sort out her reaction to the film. The dominant emotion, she decided, was anger, but she wasnt at all sure why. After alighting on Highgate Road she said as much to Russell. The portrayal of women, he guessed. Though the men were just as appalling. The only sympathetic character was the younger sister, and they killed her off. There was also the friend, but she was too smart to attract a good man. True. The fog seemed thicker than ever, but perhaps it was the added smoke from the nearby engine sheds. But youre right, Effi went on, as they turned into Lady Somerset Road, it was

the way the women were written. When the Nazis were portraying them as submissive idiots, it was so wonderful to see someone like Katherine Hepburn show how happy and sexy independent women could be. And now the Nazis are gone, and Hollywood gives us Mildred, who can only have a successful career if she fails as a mother and husband. Goebbels would have loved it. A bit harsh, Russell murmured. Not at all, she rounded on him. You just... Two figures suddenly emerged in front of them, silhouettes in the mist. Stick em up, one of the two said, in a tone that seemed borrowed from an American gangster movie. What? was Russells first reaction. The voice sounded young, and both potential robbers seemed unusually short. But it did look like a real gun pointing at them. A Luger, if Russell was not mistaken. Stick em up, the voice repeated petulantly. The faces were becoming clearer now and they belonged to boys, not men. Fourteen perhaps, maybe even younger. The one on the left was wearing trousers too long for his legs. A relation who hadnt come home. What do you want? Russell asked, with what felt like remarkable good humour, given the situation. Only that morning hed read about two thirteen year-olds holding up a woman in Highgate. Far too many boys had lost their fathers. Your money of course, the second boy said, almost apologetically. We only have a couple of shillings. You Germans are all liars, the first boy said angrily. In English, Russell patiently explained, as he reached inside his coat pocket for the coins in question. He doubted the gun was even loaded, but it didnt seem worth the risk to find out. Effi had other ideas. This is ridiculous, she muttered in German, as she stepped forward and twisted the gun out of the surprised youths hand. Now go home, she told them in English. They glanced at each other, and bolted off into the fog. Effi just stood there, amazed at what shed done. She was, she realised, shaking like a leaf. What mad instinct had made her do such a thing?

Christ almighty, Russell exclaimed, reaching out for her. For a moment there... I didnt think, she said stupidly. She started to laugh, but there was no humour in the sound, and Russell cradled her head against his shoulder. They stood there for a while, until Effi disentangled herself and offered him the gun. He put it in his coat pocket. Ill hand it in at the police station tomorrow morning. They walked the short distance home, and let themselves in to the ground floor flat that Russell had rented. It had two large rooms, a small kitchen and an outside toilet. Russell, Effi and Rosa shared the back room, Paul, Lothar and Zarah the curtain-divided room at the front. Other families of four and five lived above and below them. Paul was reading a book on architecture in the kitchen, his English dictionary propped up beside him. Theyre all asleep, he told them quietly. Effi went to check on Rosa, the young Jewish orphan who had been her ward since April. Though perhaps not an orphan, as Effi reminded herself. The father Otto had disappeared around 1941, and not been seen or heard of since. He was probably dead, but there was no way of knowing for sure.

Effi thought the uncertainty worried Rosait certainly worried her. Sitting down on the side of the bed, she could smell the Vicks VapoRub which Zarah had put on the girls chest. Effi pulled the blanket up around her neck, and told herself that Rosa was coping better than most with the post-war world. She was doing well at the school which Solly had found for them. Despite there being many other refugee pupils, the instruction was wholly in English, and Rosas command of that language was already better than Effis own. And Solly seemed more excited by her Berlin drawings than by any of Johns ideas. The girl would end up supporting them both. In the kitchen, Russell was telling his son about the attempted hold-up. Pauls smile vanished when he realised his father wasnt having him on. Was the gun loaded? he asked. I havent looked, Russell admitted, and pulled it from his pocket. It was, he discovered. Ill put it out of harms way, he added, reaching up to place it on the highest shelf. Anything interesting happen at work? Not really, Paul said, getting up. Its time I went to bed, he explained. Another early start. Of course, Russell said automatically. His son didnt want to talk to him, which was neither unusual nor intended personally: Paul didnt want to talk to anybody.

But he seemed to be functioning like a normal human being only that lunchtime Solly had confided how pleased he was with the boy and Russell knew from experience what havoc war could wreak on minds of any age. Sleep well, he said. I hope so, Paul said. For everyones sake, he added wryly his nightmares sometimes woke the whole house. Oh, I forgot, he added, stopping in the doorway. There was a letter for you. Its on your bed. Ive got it, Effi said, squeezing past him. She gave Paul a goodnight hug before handing the envelope over to Russell. He tore it open, and extracted the contents a short handwritten note and a grandstand ticket for the following Tuesdays match between Chelsea and the Moscow Dynamo tourists.

Your attendance is expected, the note informed him. It was signed by Yevgeny Shchepkin, his erstwhile guardian angel in Stalins NKVD. So the bill has finally arrived, Effi said, reading it over his shoulder. Lying beside her half an hour later, Russell felt strangely pleased that it had. In May he had bought his familys safety from the Soviets with atomic secrets and vague promises of future service, and he had always known that one day they would demand payment on the Faustian bargain. For months he had dreaded that day, but

now that it was here, he felt almost relieved. It wasn't just an end to the suspense. The war in Europe had been over for six months, and the Nazis, who had dominated their lives for a dozen years, were passing into history, but all their lives his and Effis in particular had still seemed stuck in some sort of postwar limbo, the door to their future still locked by their particular past. And Shchepkin's invitation might be the key that would open it.

Revue de presse 'Remarkable ... Downing is one of the brightest lights in the shadowy world of historical spy fiction' Birmingham Post 'Excellent ... Downing's strength is his fleshing out of the tense and often dangerous nature of everyday life in a totalitarian state' The Times 'An extraordinary evocation of Nazi Germany' C.J. SANSOM on Zoo Station 'Stands with Alan Furst for detail and atmosphere' DONALD JAMES 'Outstanding' Publishers Weekly on Lehrter Station 'Think Robert Harris and Fatherland mixed with a dash of Le Carré Sue Baker, Publishing News 'A wonderfully drawn spy novel . . . A very auspicious debut, with more to come' The Bookseller on Zoo Station 'Exciting and frightening all at once . . . It's got everything going for it' Julie Walters 'An outstanding thriller . . . This series is a quite remarkable achievement' Shots magazine --...