

MOTORBIKE MEN

**by
Duncan James**

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PREFACE

JOINT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE (JIC)
ITS STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP.

CHAIRMAN - Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service – Sir Robin Algar
MEMBERS

Foreign and Commonwealth Office. - Permanent Secretary – Sir Wilfred Forsyth
Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). - Director General ('C')
Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) - Director
Home Office. - Permanent Secretary – James Burgess
Security Service (MI5) –Director General('M')
Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre
Ministry of Defence. - Permanent Secretary – Sir Len Watkins
Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS). - Chief – General Pearson-Jones (PJ)
Treasury. - Permanent Secretary – Brian Hooper
Department for Trade and Industry. - Permanent Secretary
Department for International Development. - Permanent Secretary
Chief of the Assessments Staff.
Other Departments. - attend as necessary.

CHAPTER ONE - UNLIMITED POWER

Jack Barclay had never been a very good-looking man, which was probably why marriage had passed him by. His lively personality wasn't enough for most women looking to the future, although he had enjoyed his share of girl friends in the past. But nothing approaching a lasting relationship had ever materialised.

Some women had felt sorry for him, probably because he appealed to their mothering instinct in some peculiar way. He had not been blessed with good looks at birth, and life had done nothing to improve things for the poor man. He had a horrendous scar across his forehead and through one eyebrow, the result of 'something-or-other in the Army' – nobody was quite sure, because he had never said. It was *actually* an accident at school, when he and his twin brother both fell off the same bicycle they were riding while going too fast down hill. His brother had collected a very similar scar, oddly enough. There wasn't a lot of Jack's nose left, either, thanks to many an opposition boot on the rugby field. Neither had his two front teeth ever really straightened out after his head-on smash on the ice with a fellow who could skate rather well, while Jack was still trying to stay upright. In time, though, he became an excellent skier.

And he was on the short side of being tall. Vertically deprived, he called it. For some, five foot seven would have been enough, but although he never actually complained about it, the fact was that most women, and almost all other men, made him feel as if he was standing in a hole.

So, as an up-shot of all this, he lived on his own, most recently in a second-floor flat in Battersea, which he had bought as a London bolt-hole when he felt he

really had to get away from the pressures of his research work in Oxfordshire, where he lived in digs. The Battersea flat did not have a bad outlook across the park, and he could see the bridge if he leant over his balcony. That, in turn, provided him with more than enough gardening, all of it in pots. He kept the apartment clean and tidy, and mostly cooked for himself when he was there. He enjoyed that, and didn't often eat out anywhere unless he was abroad on business or away from home for some other reason. He was no bother to his neighbours, so they said, but this was not altogether surprising as he was rarely there.

He had never got on with his brother. Even though they were identical twins, they were as different as chalk from cheese. Jack had done well at school, and his brother Roger hadn't. Roger appeared not to care about learning anything worthwhile, and never made the slightest effort. Which was why, quite early on at Grammar School, they had been separated into different classes. Brother Roger was not the least impressed by the efforts and achievements of his twin, although the school's teachers had thought that a bit of peer pressure, especially from a twin brother, might spur him into making something of an effort, if only for the sake of appearances. But that theory didn't work, and he hadn't even tried to do well – at anything. He had never shown the slightest interest in sport, although he was required, unless he really *was* ill, to play 'rough and muddy rugby' during the winter, and 'boring cricket' in the summer. Roger's scholarly brother, Jack, on the other hand, had represented the school at cricket, rugby and, later badminton, too. A fellow classmate had once managed to break Roger's nose during a particularly awful game of rugby, and an opposition batsman had square-cut a ball at cricket one Wednesday afternoon and loosened two of Roger's front teeth for him while he had been thinking of something else. All of which resulted in he and his brother continuing to look like two peas in a pod.

The plain fact of the matter was that Roger had simply idled his way through every aspect of school life, and couldn't leave soon enough – a view eventually shared by his headmaster. The brothers were certainly not identical twins, except in appearance. Had they been closer, they could have played havoc everywhere they went. But they chose to keep their distance from one another, and the older they got, the greater became the distance between them.

So, it was no great surprise to their parents, although an ongoing disappointment until the day they died, when Roger Barclay had joined the local bank as a junior clerk, without even waiting for his 'O' level results. In the event, they were as disappointing as everyone expected, and not worth waiting for anyway.

Brother Jack, meanwhile, had gone up to Oxford, done remarkably well, and continued to succeed in his chosen career as a mathematician and research scientist in particle physics. His reputation went before him, and his services were soon in demand. Oxford wanted him to stay on to tutor after he had achieved his doctorate, and the Americans were even now trying to entice him to work for them. But he had elected to stay in the UK, and to work for the Atomic Energy Authority, although he had rejected approaches to help develop new and ever more devastating weapons. He was convinced that the power of the atom should be put to the future good of

mankind, and harnessed to generate the energy that the world's fast-growing population would need in order to survive.

Which is how Professor Jack Barclay came to be a key figure in the development of nuclear energy as a replacement for fossil fuels. His research efforts were closely watched around the world – sometimes too closely for his own comfort. He preferred not to be in the limelight, but to work quietly with a few chosen colleagues at the purpose-built research laboratory at Culham, towards their ultimate goal of achieving sustainable nuclear fusion.

Fusion power offered an almost limitless source of energy for the future once the formidable scientific and engineering problems surrounding its development were overcome. Because of this potential, every major nation in the world pursued its own research programme to some extent, in a commercially competitive effort to achieve the Holy Grail of meeting the fast-growing universal demand for energy. But in spite of this, there was also a great deal of international co-operation, particularly among scientists, even if this was not shared between politicians. Harnessing nuclear fusion would answer the world's insatiable demand for energy without contributing to global warming, and without producing massive amounts of radioactive waste. What waste there was, quickly decayed. Hydrogen was its main fuel – the most commonly available natural gas in the universe.

To make this dream of endless power a commercial reality meant engineering the fusion together of such nuclei as hydrogen isotopes so as to release energy, rather than the easier technique of splitting atoms in nuclear fission, the process used for weapons. The fusion process is similar to that which takes place in the sun and other stars, and requires similar exceptionally high temperatures. Energy-producing fusions need gas from a combination of the hydrogen isotopes deuterium and tritium to be heated to some one hundred million degrees centigrade and to be confined for about a second. During this time, the plasma of electrons and hydrogen interact to fuse into helium, and some of their mass is destroyed, releasing huge amounts of energy in the form of heat, light and radiation. Such fusions had been carried out in laboratories for many years, but only of very short durations. Confinement for longer periods would result in a controllable, continuous reaction, which generated more energy than it used.

Professor Jack Barclay had set that as his goal.

Previous work had suggested that the use of magnetic confinement of the gas was the most promising in achieving a continuous 'burn', although, thanks largely to Barclay's work, research to achieve the same objective using lasers was now well advanced. Although he was one of a team, his incisive brain and sound theoretical approach gave him prominence among his peer group. Barclay reasoned that using lasers would provide the ability to maintain a steady flow of fusion blasts, taking research closer to the continuous system needed for commercial power generation. It was his work that led to the formation of the High Power Laser Programme at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory at Harwell, in which he now played a leading role. This aspect of his research was considered so important that very little of it was made public knowledge, even within the scientific communities of cooperating countries.

Although limited and lacking in detail, news of his new research work had somehow got out, and had caught the public imagination through the popular press, as well as exciting fellow researchers round the world. They constantly demanded the publication of learned papers and his presence at conferences to expand on his new theories, but he was a diminutive man, who, probably because of his stature, disliked the attention of others and certainly hated speaking in public, even at seminars about his chosen subject. But the media had more than once given him and his work unwanted and unwelcome publicity, so that he was now quite well known generally as well as in the very specialised world of nuclear physics. It was his most recent work in developing the theory of laser confinement of the hydrogen plasma that was exciting most interest, particularly in America, the Middle East and Russia. It soon became evident from the level of their interest that Barclay's work had put the UK well ahead of other countries in this most-promising aspect of the nuclear fusion race.

And that brought with it particular dangers. Not just for him, either. Neither of them knew it at the time, but Jack's success was to prove to be the death of his brother Roger.

Like his brother, Roger Barclay had never been a very good-looking man either. They were, after all, identical twins. He had even collected a similar looking scar on his face when they crashed off their bike when kids at school, not to mention similar damage reluctantly gained on the sports field.

Roger Barclay led a quiet but contented life. Contented because it was uncomplicated. Like his brother Jack, he had never married, so only had himself to bother about. He cared little enough for his twin brother, who seemed to be forever rushing about all over the world like the mad scientist Roger believed him to be, and the two rarely met. Unlike his brother in almost every way, he couldn't wait to get away from school, with all the pressure that went with it, some of which he admitted was created by his brother's superior intellect and achievements. This was why he had left school early, and taken a behind-the-scenes clerical job in the local bank. He could handle the demands of that job, such as they were, with minimum effort, while earning sufficient for his modest needs. He did a bit of overtime now and then, usually at the end of the month when the bank was at its busiest, and was able to put a little aside for a rainy day. It enabled him to do a bit of travelling, too, which was about the only thing he really enjoyed and looked forward to. Not that he went far, ever. He had a small but very old car that he seldom used for fear it would let him down, so he mostly travelled by public transport. He enjoyed buses for short trips, because you could see more, but used the train when he was travelling any distance, and got the tickets from his local travel agent. He could pick up all the leaflets at the same time, and dream of visiting all those far away places if ever he could afford it – or be bothered. He could just about afford a small flat in a backwater of Blackheath, where he lived. His address sounded much grander than the flat warranted, because it wasn't in the most sought-after part of that once-smart London 'village'. But it suited him well. Out of the way as it was, he was able to keep himself to himself and come and go as he pleased, eating in when he chose, or grabbing a cheap takeaway meal

somewhere on his was home from the bank. He rarely saw or heard anything of his neighbours, and only knew a couple of them well enough by sight to nod a greeting on the rare occasions they passed on the stairs. It was rare, too, for him ever to meet or talk to his brother, although he knew quite a bit about his work because of the publicity he received from time to time in the press and on TV. The more he saw and heard, the gladder he was that he was so unlike his brilliant brother. Roger was a loner, let's be honest. He enjoyed his own company better than other people's and didn't want to be bothered by other people. No wife, no close friends, and no family apart from his almost-estranged brother. Their parents had died a year or so ago, killed in a coach crash while on holiday in the French Alps. In fact, that was about the last time he and Jack had met, at the funeral. They had been in touch a bit since – Christmas cards and so on – but hadn't actually met again since that cold, wet day at the crematorium. They had both decided that they should make an effort to keep in touch more often than they had in past and indeed had phoned one another a couple of times since then. But they had not been long chats. They had too little in common to find much to chat about.

This was why their last phone call had been so unusual.

Work on the laser containment of plasma for the nuclear fusion process was gathering pace, and Professor Barclay found that he had less and less time to himself. Apart from frequent visits to the Atomic Energy Establishment at Harwell, and sometimes even Aldermaston, he also travelled abroad more and more often these days to work with European colleagues within Euratom, and those involved in the new International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor at Cadarache, in France. He and his small team of research scientists and mathematicians felt impelled to keep up the momentum of their work, fearing that any lengthy break would disrupt their train of thought and further delay the academic progress that they appeared to be making. Much of their time was spent at the blackboard, fretting over complex theoretical equations in an effort to fathom solutions to seemingly intractable problems. But slowly, solutions seemed to present themselves, at which point the team needed urgent consultations with their more practical colleagues in the engineering field to discuss the feasibility of putting their new-found propositions into some form of working framework. Barclay was beginning to believe that they might at last be on the right track, and that their research effort could soon point them towards the form and structure of an operational prototype.

Naturally, news of this activity spread throughout the world of science, creating considerable excitement and discussion. In some quarters, however, it was also a cause for some concern.

Not all the players in the energy field were anxious to see nuclear fusion developed to the point where it could become a commercially viable alternative source of power. At least, not yet. Although such an outcome was in any event at least some ten or perhaps even twenty years away, there were a few countries around the world, including some of those involved in joint research projects, that still had almost unlimited resources of fossil fuels at their disposal, and who could see the

value of their oil and gas reserves begin to decline. On the other hand, there were countries that were similarly striving to make the breakthrough in nuclear fusion before any other nation, so as to command the commercial benefits to be had.

The focus of these competing interests was Jack Barclay's small team at their secret laboratory at Culham, but particularly the Professor himself. They were all unaware of this unwelcome attention, but some of Britain's commercial attachés and elements of the intelligence fraternity had already begun to pick up the unhealthy interest that was being shown in some quarters in Barclay's work. Slowly, news of this focus of interest on Barclay filtered upwards through the diplomatic and intelligence networks until it reached the higher echelons of the establishment in Whitehall.

It was at a meeting of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) that the issue was first discussed, albeit briefly. In answer to his probing, Sir Robin Algar, the Cabinet Secretary and Chairman of JIC, discovered that none of his colleagues could recall hearing anything at all disturbing about the natural interest being shown around the world in Barclay's work.

"What have *you* heard, then?" asked Sir William Forsyth of the Foreign Office.

"Like you, nothing specific," replied Algar, "but some leading questions are being asked in some quarters which could indicate more than a natural curiosity in the work of Barclay and his team, and I wondered if anyone else was getting the same vibes."

"Since you mention it," said Forsyth, "recent telegrams have suggested that a couple of governments overseas are taking rather more than a scientific interest in the work being pioneered in this country. Russia and Saudi Arabia spring to mind, but I'd need to check."

"I also seem to recall that a few recent intelligence updates have suggested a whiff of unusual interest being shown," added the Home Office man, James Burgess. "But like you, William, I'd need to check to be sure."

"Then please do – all of you," commanded Algar. "I'd like to know at our next meeting if anything suggesting a threat is developing, so that we can react accordingly. Get the usual checks done by the Security Services, and I'd like your people, Len, to report anything they may have picked up." This was to both Sir Len Watkins at Defence and the Chief of Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS). "We will discuss it again when next we meet," he said, and adjourned the meeting.

Like everyone else when they next met, each member of the JIC had been given a special brief prepared by the officials in their own Department. Similarly, the brief that had been prepared for the Chairman rehearsed the background to the work that had been going on for decades into the possibility of providing for future energy needs by harnessing nuclear fusion. They all knew that fusion reactions had been an almost daily event at Culham for some decades, but that a self-sustaining reaction was yet to be developed. This was the next big step – to develop a reactor that would emit more energy than it consumed and was able to generate the extreme temperatures

needed to maintain a self-sustaining reaction. The development of such a machine was an international effort. Indeed, the Joint European Torus, the largest fusion reactor then built, was housed at Culham, while the newer and more powerful International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, had been built in France. In spite of this huge and expensive international effort, many countries were also pursuing their own development work. It soon became evident to the JIC that some countries believed that the results of the UK's research at Culham were not being fully shared with them.

"Up to a point, they're right," said Algar. "There are aspects of Barclay's work which we are keeping to ourselves for the time being. Not just Barclay's work, either. The research into new materials, such as niobium tin and niobium titanium, capable of withstanding the enormous temperatures developed in the reactors, is also something we are reluctant to share at the moment, although we know that others are following the same lines of development. But for various reasons, Barclay's work is attracting undue and unwelcome attention, and we need to discuss what to do about it."

"It seems," said Sir Wilfred Forsyth of the Foreign office, "that it is Barclay's work on using laser containment that is exciting the greatest interest at the moment."

"I agree," said the Defence man, Len Watkins. "There appears to be a generally held view that his work is far ahead of that being carried out elsewhere, and rivals are keen to catch up."

"Or slow his progress," suggested Forsyth.

"What is that supposed to mean?" asked Burgess of the Home Office.

"It means," said Algar, "that there are two factions at play here, if I understand the briefings correctly. One wants Barclay to share his research findings with them now rather than later, while the other wants to stop him making further progress while they catch up."

"How would they do that?" asked Hooper from the Treasury.

"By removing him from the scene, I guess," replied Watkins.

"Do you mean kidnapping the man?"

"Or worse."

"That is scandalous. Who are we talking about here?"

"There are two rival camps here, so I believe," said Forsyth. "My Int. people are indicating that there are those who are desperately head-hunting Professor Barclay, to get him to work for them rather than us, and there are others – or at least one other, I should say, but perhaps more – who simply want him removed from the scene. Perhaps permanently."

"I agree," said Algar. "I know for a fact that the Americans have offered Barclay very attractive terms indeed to work for them at the National Ignition Facility based at the Lawrence Livermore laboratory in California, where they are already studying the use of lasers in the nuclear fusion field. This is an approach made by academics to another academic rather than by the Government, although of course the laboratory is backed by the US Government, so the administration must know about the approach and approve of it."

"What about Barclay's reaction?" asked Burgess.

“Interested, I’m told, but so far has decided to stay put,” replied Algar. “There is another player, though, who has yet to show their hand, but who may eventually manage to turn him.”

“You mean Abu Dhabi?” asked Forsyth, rhetorically.

“Abu Dhabi?” asked Hooper disbelievingly.

“Exactly,” said Forsyth. “It sounds incredible, but the United Arab Emirates are actively considering entering the field themselves, even at this late stage. They have invested countless billions of their oil revenue into their infrastructure, - roads, hospitals, education, tourism and so on, - and now realise that when Abu Dhabi’s oil reserves run out, which they will eventually, they will have nothing with which to service this huge investment. Developing an alternative energy source, which they can sell to their neighbours when they, too, run out of oil, is being seriously studied.”

“So how does Barclay fit into this grand scheme?” asked Watkins.

“They are talking about approaching him to start up the project,” said Algar, “and to run it. They could afford to pay him whatever he asked, and provide him with the sort of research facilities that at present he can only dream of. They have yet to approach him, although we suspect he has heard of their interest through his academic connections.”

“That could explain why he has resisted the American so far.”

“Whatever happens, we need to keep him here if we possibly can, although there is no way we could compete financially,” said Hooper.

“In the end, it’s his choice anyway,” pointed out Burgess.

“What about this apparent threat to remove him from the scene?” asked Watkins.

“According to our information,” said the Head of SIS, “the Russians at least want him out of the way. There seem to be two reasons for this, but the main one is to slow down the development of an alternative energy source until their own vast reserves of oil and gas are nearing depletion, and then to capture the new market to themselves. In particular, they are keen that he doesn’t work for the Americans.”

“So are we,” agreed Algar, “but for different reasons. I also believe that, if he goes to Abu Dhabi, the Iranians and the Saudis may also then be tempted to put an end to his work.”

“So how do we assess the threat?” asked Watkins.

“Ignoring the threat to our own national interests for the moment, Barclay himself seems to face a real threat of either kidnap or assassination,” said Algar. “My view is that Section 11 should be tasked to keep a close eye on the man. We shall need to decide later whether Barclay should be briefed, or whether we just get on with it without his knowledge. I also think we should double-check the security clearances of all those who are working closely with Barclay, especially his small teams at Culham and Harwell. Perhaps you could set that in motion as soon as possible,” he said to the Home Office Permanent Secretary.

They all nodded their agreement.

“Good,” said Sir Robin Algar. “I suppose I’d also be well advised to tell the Prime Minister, about this.”

Again, they all nodded.

CHAPTER TWO – SECTION ELEVEN

Many people who were involved in the security and intelligence business had often thought that there were too many different organisations involved, in one way or another. For instance, one organisation looked after overseas threats, while another gathered intelligence about threats on the mainland, and yet a third was responsible for organised crime. These responsibilities frequently overlapped, which was why there were the ‘joint’ organisations. Bits and pieces of the other three, put together in an effort to avoid duplication and to ‘co-ordinate’. The Government appeared to think that the answer to every new threat was to add a bit more bureaucracy to the system. But inevitably, they all tended to trip over one another from time to time, while the constituent parts owed allegiance to their own parent body, so rivalry was never completely eliminated, and individuals were always looking over their shoulder to make sure that nothing was done to prejudice their future career prospects. Reporting chains became a nightmare, and budgets were a permanent source of conflict.

The tasks of these various bodies became increasingly complex as time went on. The Chinese clans for example, operated both abroad and in UK. At the same time, the clans were organised crime (Special Branch), a threat to mainland UK (MI5) and were often based overseas (MI6). There were others, too, like the Mafia, both the Italian and the Russian versions, and the drug barons of Columbia and Afghanistan. Add a dash of international terrorism, and management became virtually impossible, not least because the Military inevitably became involved on top of everyone else. Look at the al-Qa’Aeda situation, for instance, and the Taliban, with its international drugs trade. So other countries were added to the pot, to represent their national interests as a threat developed. The reporting chain upwards was complex, too. Some organisations reported to the Home Office, others to the Foreign Office, and yet more to the Ministry of Defence. A few, rather special agencies, reported direct to the Prime Minister’s office.

The United States played a trump card, or so it thought, in safeguarding its national interests, when it formed the new, huge and vastly expensive organisation that it called the Homeland Security Department. The outcome, in reality, was to slam the door on the outside world, friends and foes alike, making life difficult if not impossible for visitors to the US, whether they were business or pleasure travellers. But the Americans felt more secure because of it, so that was all right.

Then the UK Government created yet another ‘secret’ organisation, which immediately received widespread publicity, especially in the tabloids. It was grandly called The Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, run by a mixture of the police, doctors and health officials, whose remit it was to identify and target individuals whose obsessive behaviour could pose a threat to people in public life. Those individuals posing the threat could be ‘sectioned’ under mental health legislation, and locked up, without trial, on medical grounds. And it was a real enough threat. BBC personality Gill Dando had been murdered by a stalker, and so, overseas, had the Swedish

Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh. But the human rights lobby immediately saw this as a draconian measure for dealing with terror suspects without putting the accused before a judge and jury.

It was just as well they didn't know about Section 11.

Run jointly by MI5 and MI6, Section 11 (5+6) was a small, very top-secret unit, which had so far managed to remain top secret. It was one of those organisations that reported direct to Downing Street, through the Cabinet Secretary, who was also Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). S.11 had a worldwide remit to guard high value UK citizens when they were at maximum risk, and, if necessary, to 'eliminate' any serious threat to their safety. It wasn't concerned with royalty or senior ministers or foreign dignitaries – there was already a separate organisation to look after them, in the form of the Royalty and Diplomatic Protection Unit, run by the Metropolitan Police from Scotland Yard. Section 11 looked after other, less obvious but none the less high value targets, some of whom never realised they were the objects of special attention. But they were all individuals who, because of their exceptional value to the country, were naturally also of interest to the country's enemies.

Section 11 had managed to remain undetected by the media and others simply by virtue of the way it was organised and operated. It had a discrete budget provided by its parent organisations, which each made a contribution towards the cost of its operations. Although S.11 did not have its own budget voted by Parliament, it was understood that whatever it wanted, it got. Not for them, however, a smart Headquarters building in Whitehall, or fast cars, or odd-looking uniforms, or any of the trappings which the public, and the media, come to expect of Government Quangos of this sort. They went out of their way to remain – well, out of the way.

Their HQ was in a rather down-at-heel terrace of offices over an also rather down-at-heel row of commercial properties - shops, cafés, pizza bars, solicitor's offices, a laundrette, a travel agent, fish and chip shop, and so on. It was in Clerkenwell, not far from the Mount Pleasant Post Office sorting office and Saddlers Wells opera house. The street was so ordinary that nobody took any real notice of it, and certainly never went there unless they lived or worked nearby and wanted a newspaper, or a quick coffee, or a sandwich for lunch. The frontage of the terrace had been turned into a pedestrian precinct, which kept it quiet, but there was road access from the back, and the 19 and 38 busses stopped nearby on their way to Victoria and Battersea, from Hackney Marshes and Islington and other places out that way.

Being close to the Mount Pleasant sorting office had presented Section 11 with a unique advantage, since, until 2003, the Post Office used to run its own automatic underground railway to speed the mail across London. Mount Pleasant was in the middle of it, and part of the old station and tunnel now provided the Clerkenwell office with a cavernous garage beneath the building, with easy access from the street.

Easy, that is, apart from the security system.

One of the businesses on this Clerkenwell back street was a newsagent-cum-tobacconist, which had a gent's hairdressers at the back. That's how you got to S.11. Through the hairdressers, which was run by a certain Mr. Lawrence. Nobody knew

his first name. In fact, he didn't often do much hairdressing, either. He was 'by appointment only', and most casual customers soon got to learn how difficult it was to get an appointment. What he did best was to check and monitor everyone who went into the S.11 offices. At the back of his salon was an elaborate, gated security system. You needed a special pass, and the system had to recognise your thumbprint and iris pattern before it would even think of letting you go upstairs. Once you got upstairs, either from Mr. Lawrence's salon or from the underground garage, there were more checks – a second tier security system, with more biometric tests, TV monitors and coded keypads. Only then did you get through the chipped brown-painted door marked 'Ajax Recruitment – office staff and call centre operators always wanted.' Pinned to the door though, at a rakish angle, was a hand written sign saying 'No Vacancies.' There never were. You only ever got through that door if you worked there – or if you had been invited.

Nothing changed a great deal to the appearance of the place when you were inside, either, but you would never know that the old triple-glazed window frames had bullet-proof glass in them. They were dingy corridors with Magnolia emulsion on the grubby walls, and old brown painted Victorian doors leading to offices which all looked much the same. One or two had plaques on the door, meaningless acronyms to everyone except those to whom they meant something. Things like, 'SO to G3(M)'; 'OIC T.12a'; 'PA to S', and so on. As a matter of fact, the Personal Assistant to the Head of Section (PA to S) was quite an important lady. She wasn't just his Secretary. She actually did things on her own initiative if she thought it would save her boss a bit of time. She fixed meetings, made sure the notes, if there were any, were properly encrypted and stored securely, and, according to those who knew, made excellent coffee. She also made it her business to keep up to speed with everything that was going on, including a few things Head of Section didn't know about, because he didn't need to, yet. Like everyone else in S.11, she had been specially selected, and had a very high security clearance.

The people who worked in that rather gloomy Headquarters did all the things that get done in any other head office, as well as quite a few things that don't. But it was a small and tightly knit community, which had at its disposal all the most modern electronic, computing and communications equipment available. The people who planned the various operations going on at any one time also monitored their progress and kept in touch with the operatives in the field. They, in turn had been trained to be largely self supporting, so when they did get on to HQ, it was usually important enough for people to take notice and do something – in a hurry. There were always people there. At night and at weekends, there would be a duty officer, a couple of people looking after communications in what was jokingly called the 'wireless room', and probably one or two others monitoring the progress of their particular operation. Any one of them could summon help from on-call staff at home, who reacted immediately when called upon, whatever they were doing. The newsagent was always open, too, either waiting delivery of the first editions or catching a few of the late-night visitors to Saddlers Wells. The Pakistani family who ran it didn't mind the hours. Section 11 paid them well.

The sharp end of Section 11 was a flexible force of specially trained field officers, mostly drawn from military special forces and police special branch, but with a few from the security services. There was no telling how many might be needed at any one time, or where they might be deployed, so there was an 'on call' reserve pool available at 'no notice' if required. Reserves or not, they were very highly trained. Although when out in the field they normally worked in pairs, they were otherwise on their own with little or no immediate back up or support. They had received special training in how to blend in anonymously with the community in which they worked, wherever they were. Their first priority was to remain invisible, un-noticed. They wore casual civilian clothing, appropriate to their location, although they could dress the part of a busy stockbroker in the City if they had to. They used ordinary vehicles for getting about, although many of these had been specially modified in S.11's own garage, conveniently housed under the Clerkenwell offices. If they needed to use public transport, they, or head office, used High Street travel agents, bought rail tickets from the station booking office, and flew tourist class. Just like anyone else. But there the similarity ended. These were very special men and women. They were fluent in at least two languages other than their native tongue. They were parachute trained, survival specialists and sniper marksmen. And they were mostly armed. They were also experts in pursuit driving, a skill often put to the test either when following a high-speed car, or when trying to shake off one behind them. The Met. Police provided that training at their Hendon driving school.

S.11 had quite an extensive fleet of vehicles. Ordinary vehicles, not polished staff cars. Apart from a few old saloon cars, as well as more modern vehicles like the Vauxhall Vector and Honda Jazz, there were a few vans, even a milk float, bicycles and a range of motorbikes from 50cc Vespa scooters to BMW R1159s and Honda CBR 900s. Some of the old Post Office vans had been fitted out with extensive satellite communications equipment or surveillance gear, including listening devices and video monitors. Most of the vehicles had been modified in some way, and the mechanics that worked in the garage were particularly proud of an old Morris Minor, which sounded as if it needed a new exhaust, but which could actually do nearly a ton and had been known to get up to 60mph in just under ten seconds. But the motorbikes were the most popular. Easy to use in traffic, not normally out of place anywhere, and ideal for two people; the Section 11 agents who operated in the field usually worked in pairs. When they weren't out on ops., the field officers spent a good deal of their spare time training, or in the HQ at Clerkenwell. At the back of the underground garage was an armoury and a rifle range, run by a retired Royal Navy Petty Officer gunner, Phil Langdon, who had introduced himself on arrival as their new 'top gun'. Immediately, one of the comedians in the team had christened him 'bottom gun,' and from thenceforward he had been known as 'Bottom' for short. He hated that. But he knew about weapons, and was a crack short.

There were other rather odd bits of Section 11, too, which you wouldn't expect to find in any normal organisation, even if it was, strictly speaking, a part of the civil service. 'Aunty' for instance, ran the clothing store. He was a rather precious retired actor – nobody could remember his real name – but he was able to provide

appropriate kit for you wherever in the world you were going. He had wigs and dark glasses and false moustaches too, if it was felt that you needed to change your appearance from time to time, rather than become too familiar and run the risk of being recognised.

The admin section was run by an elderly civil servant called Gladys Something-or-other, who smoked like a chimney in spite of the law about smoking at work. She maintained that there was so little work done in Clerkenwell that the law didn't apply, and she was too valuable to get rid of, so people put up with it. She had a form for you to fill in for your every need, and made sure you did it properly and got it counter-signed, and all that. It was a waste of time going to Bottom or Aunty for anything unless you'd been to Gladys first for the right bit of paper. She didn't have an acronym on her door – it simply said 'Admin', and that was that. Aunty had two – 'Stage Door' and 'Props', neither of which was official, and both of which were therefore frowned upon by Gladys. The rifle range and armoury, from which one drew weapons and ammunition if you had the necessary forms from Gladys, was labelled 'Arms.' on the armour-plated door. Underneath, in indelible ink, someone had scribbled 'Legs and Bottom'.

At the top of this rather shabby looking but extremely efficient organisation, was the Head of Section. He was known simply as 'S', in the same way that the Director General of the Secret Intelligence Service, or MI6 as most people called it, was known as 'C', and the head of MI5 was known as 'M'. 'S' had a deputy, and one or other of them was always available – and that meant 'always' – 24/7, as the idiom had it. The hierarchy was really quite small for an organisation that had a worldwide remit, and they were all widely experienced members of the intelligence community. Their job now was not so much to gather intelligence, or even interpret it, but rather to act upon it. The Head of Section 11 reported direct to the Cabinet Secretary, and thus to the JIC from whom the Section got most of its work. Any of the constituent members of the committee could put forward suitable targets for S.11 to look after, but the final tasking decision was always taken by the JIC or by its chairman.

Except, that is, in the recent unlikely case of the captain of the England football squad.

It was at about the quarterfinal stage of the world cup when the Football Association first got wind of a possible plot to kidnap the team captain, and perhaps also his family, in some sort of effort to fix a few results. At the time, England were favourites to win the cup, much to annoyance of the Germans, whose supporters were reported to be developing the plot. This is not the sort of thing that the intelligence community would normally take much notice of, although the press were having a field day. Excellent footballer though the man was, he did not begin to take on the national importance of, say, some of the country's leading industrialists, and therefore nobody in Clerkenwell was taking the slightest professional interest in the story.

Until, that is, 'S' thought it might make quite a good training exercise for a few of the newer members of the operational field force, especially as life had been a bit on the quiet side recently.

“How many of our people speak German?” he asked at ‘prayers’ one morning. One of the Ops people thought about a dozen.

“Right,” said ‘S’. “Three teams of two will do,” he pronounced. “The most inexperienced you can find.”

“*IN*experienced?”

“That’s right – this will be good training for them, and it won’t be a national disaster if they fail. Except for them, of course.”

The Head of Section at that time was Alan Jarvis, himself not a great football enthusiast, although he could understand that national pride would take a bit of a bashing if the England XI lost after all the build-up and high expectations.

“Are you looking for any other particular qualities, apart from lack of experience?” enquired one of his team sarcastically.

“Football supporters would help,” replied ‘S’, “and an ability to hold a few litres of lager without falling over might also be an advantage. Perhaps I’d better explain.”

When he had done so, the Section’s Head of Finance looked distinctly uneasy.

“How do you propose justifying the expenditure of taxpayers’ money to look after a footballer?” he asked.

“Training,” came the reply. “Put it down to ‘training’. Although if we are lucky, it won’t cost us a bean. I’ll talk to the Chairman of the Football Association, and see what he can offer.”

In the end, he offered quite a lot, including installing one of the S.11 team in the official party as a member of the press office. The others were out on their own. Aunty managed to find them, from somewhere in the theatrical underworld of wardrobe mistresses, official German football shirts, together with woolly hats and scarves which they would need, as Munich in the winter can be a bit cold.

They had three weeks to establish themselves in Germany. Two of them quickly managed to infiltrate the supporters’ club, and were soon involved, with the handful of yobs that thought it would be a good idea, in helping to plan the kidnap of the England Captain. Others were liaising closely with the Scotland Yard officers who had gone to Munich to work with the local Polizei to keep hooligans and lager louts under control. It was not a difficult exercise, in all honesty. They knew where the threat was coming from, so concentrated on them rather than on the target of the threat.

On the big day, the S.11 team had managed to persuade the local constabulary to provide them with a police van and driver, thanks largely to the Scotland Yard liaison officers. By the time the kidnapers set off to hijack the England team bus, they had all taken on board copious quantities of local lager, so offered no real resistance when four of their number turned out to be quite good English speakers. There was not much of a struggle to get them into the polizei van, which set off on its journey into the Bavarian Alps, where the miscreants were eventually left to find their own way home.

The Clerkenwell team had quite enjoyed their little training exercise, not least because one of their number produced half a dozen tickets for the game, which, he assured his chums, the Germans would no longer be needing.

Their biggest problem was remembering to cheer for the opposition, in German.

In Downing Street, the Cabinet Secretary was coming to the end of a meeting with colleagues in the JIC. It was their job to review the strategic planning assumptions of the intelligence agencies, to set priorities for the collection and assessment of intelligence material, and generally to keep an eye on their programmes and expenditure.

In conclusion, Sir Robin Algar summed up the present operations being undertaken by Section 11, including Operation Cashback, which was nearing its end. (*read 'Cashback', by Duncan James*)

“Operation Cashback only worked because of the efforts of our Defence Attaché in Harare, Group Captain Bowman,” Forsyth reminded them.

Watkins nodded. “Good man, Bowman,” he said. “Held the whole thing together. Are all the Section 11 team back now, by the way?”

“The last two will be home any time,” replied Algar.

“Remind me how we ever got involved in that,” asked the Home Office man. “Not another hare set up by the Head of Section, Jarvis, I hope?”

“No, not at all,” replied Algar. “It was you who thought it would be a good idea, Wilfred,” he said, turning to the Foreign Office man, “although I must say that, from the start, this has been an unusual operation. At first, Section 11 wasn’t actually involved at all, as it had been rather more of a criminal investigation, except that nobody knew for sure that any crime had been committed or by whom,” he reminded them.

“The banking community picked up the first sign of anything being wrong. It was the London Office of a Dutch Bank, as a matter of fact. One of their customers, a wealthy but elderly lady, suddenly had two million pounds credited to her account, and the bank could not discover its source. It had appeared via the computer system which banks use to move money around, but nobody could discover where it came from, which was not just puzzling, but worrying. But what really stirred things up was when a million pounds of the original two million was withdrawn again very soon after it had been deposited. The bank was quite unable to find out who had withdrawn it or where it had gone. This sort of thing was just not supposed to happen – it should have been impossible.”

“Absolutely impossible,” agreed Hooper from the Treasury. “The international banking security system was reckoned to be totally foolproof, and certainly had been until this happened.”

“Apparently, other banks were having similar problems, although we didn’t know it at the time,” continued Algar. “Whoever was behind the Dutch bank’s difficulties was also playing ducks and drakes with cash deposited in banks in Switzerland, in the Cayman Islands, in Singapore, Bermuda, and the United States,

and so on. Naturally, the banks concerned were not about to broadcast the fact that they appeared to be having severe problems with their security systems, and that very large sums of money were appearing and disappearing as if by magic.”

“I could never understand why their customers didn’t kick up about it,” remarked Watkins. “I certainly would have.”

“Probably because in some, if not all cases, the cash they were now short of was ill gotten in the first place,” suggested Hooper.

“It was the corrupt regime in Zimbabwe that reacted first,” said Algar. “From the President downwards, they were all being milked dry. Equally mysteriously, white farmers who had been evicted from their land started receiving quite large sums of cash, apparently accompanied by the promise of a pension. It was as if someone had decided, rather late in the day, to pay them compensation. But it certainly wasn’t the Government.”

“And then that fool of a President raided Zimbabwe’s Central Bank to replace his lost personal funds. That’s what really started trouble in the country, and we saw the first signs of a possible coup or an uprising or some such event designed to get rid of the man,” said the Foreign Office man.

“It was about that time, too, that we got our first clue as to who was behind it,” said Burgess.

“Ah, yes. I remember now,” said the Home Office man. “And the PM was quite adamant that we should let him and his team run with whatever he was doing, rather than pull him in, just in case he and his fellow operatives became the catalyst which rid Zimbabwe of the President and his rotten regime.”

“And Section 11 was tasked to keep an eye on them,” concluded Algar. “The UK side of the operation was quite straightforward, really. We were looking after the interests of a brilliant young mathematician who had studied computer science at Oxford, and his partner. They travelled a bit – Switzerland and Kenya mostly, but we had plenty of notice through the phone-taps we were using. His two associates in Africa were a bit more difficult, though. They were Zimbabweans, one black, one white, and they dodged about all over the place – Nairobi, Harare, Bulawayo, Lusaka, even Livingstone, as well as their home village of Chasimu. Our teams out there had the devil’s own job keeping in contact with them, but the two of them were at the greatest risk as they were at the sharp end, so to speak. In the end, it was their plan to hijack illicit diamonds belonging to the President and his ministers that finally brought the Government down.”

“How did they ever think they could hijack a load of diamonds?” asked Hooper.

“The President had planned to move them by light aircraft to the Botswana border, and then by road to South Africa. The two Zimbabweans contacted our Defence Attaché in Harare, who was already monitoring things for us, to see if he could organise a team of SAS to do it for them.”

“And of course, we obliged, through Section 11,” said Watkins, proudly.

“So it was our chaps who actually carried out the hijack, was it?” queried Hooper.

“Everybody thinks it was a bunch of mercenaries who happened to be around at the time, but it was a very successful, if top secret little operation,” said Algar.

“Did you say we still had a small team over there?” enquired Watkins.

“A team of two,” replied Sir Robin Algar. “As a matter of fact, they’re in South Africa, but returning to the UK in a few days. The two Zimbabwean chaps eventually went there to join the father of one of them, an evicted white farmer who has set up a new business running a vineyard. Current assessment is that they are now at no further risk, so as soon as our chaps have returned their hired motorbike and paid a few bills, they can book a flight home.”

“While we’re on the subject of Section 11,” said Sir Wilfred Forsyth, “I heard a rather worrying piece of gossip the other day from the Ambassador in Berlin about a team of people, apparently from Section 11, running a bit loose in Germany, and wondered if anyone else had heard anything.”

Given that both ‘C’ and the Director of GCHQ reported to Forsyth, it was a pretty fair bet that he knew what he was talking about.

“I knew there was a team in Germany for a short while,” replied Sir Robin Algar, “but I would hardly describe them as having ‘run a bit loose’, as you put it. What have you heard?”

“According to my sources,” replied Forsyth, “the team virtually kidnapped a handful of German football supporters, robbed them of their world cup tickets, and then dumped them in the Bavarian Alps to find their own way home. Fortunately, there’s been no official complaint from the German Government yet, but it could be highly embarrassing if there was.”

“What makes you think they were from S.11?”

“Off the record briefings by the FA press office, as a matter of fact, although fortunately nothing seems to have appeared in print – yet.”

Sir Robin Algar grinned, and briefed his colleagues on the background to the operation. “It seems to me that it went rather well, and certainly succeeded in foiling a rather stupid plot.”

“How did the Head of Section 11 – Jarvis is his name, isn’t it? – how did Jarvis justify using taxpayers’ money to look after a footballer?” asked the man from the Treasury. “Surely the FA could have found a couple of nightclub bouncers to do the job?”

“He thought it would be a good training exercise, apparently,” replied Algar. “And in the end, the FA agreed to meet all the costs, so there was no great call on public funds.”

“I wonder if he ever stopped to consider the consequences of failure,” pondered James Burgess of the Home Office.

“I agree that it was a rather stupid operation to mount,” said Algar, anticipating a growing hostility. “We spend more than enough training his people as it is, and we hold regular exercises to make sure his teams are up to the job without this sort of stunt being in the least bit necessary.”

“I have to say,” ventured Forsyth, “that I sometimes ask myself if Jarvis is altogether suitable for that job. He seems to me to be a bit of a wild card – a cowboy.”

“Oddly enough,” replied Sir Robin, “I have had the same sneaking doubts myself from time to time. He has come forward with some pretty hare-brained schemes in the past, and yet at other times has done a very professional job. As you know, he reports directly to me, so I see both sides of the man.”

“How long has he been there?” asked Sir Len Watkins from the Defence Ministry.

“Nearly five years now, I think.”

“Time for a change then, perhaps,” suggested Watkins.

“We could certainly move him back into SIS if you’d be happy to have him, Wilfred,” replied Algar.

“I suppose so. We could find something useful for him to do, I’m sure.”

“And he’s by no means been a failure at Section 11,” Algar reminded his colleagues. “He made a good job of the Northern Ireland operation, with all its twists and turns, and was very successful in the recent African job, which we’ve just been talking about.”

“Our man in Harare, Group Captain Bowman, did more than Jarvis ever did, as I’ve said before,” grumbled Watkins.

“I tend to agree,” said the Foreign Office man. “If we are going to move Jarvis, it might be a good idea to do it sooner rather than later, in case that nuclear job suddenly needs their attention.”

“Yes, that would certainly be a major operation, and could be tricky, as we discussed earlier,” said Algar.

“Is this the nuclear physicist?” queried Burgess of the Home Office.

“That’s the case,” confirmed Algar. “We will get an update on that when we meet next week, but it does seem as if the threat is real and growing.”

“If it does need some kind of action by Section 11, it will be a big operation needing very careful planning and co-ordination, probably over a long period of time. It might just be beyond Jarvis. It’s probably time he had a change of scenery, anyway” continued Forsyth, “so if there’s anyone better than him, I would recommend getting him in place as soon as possible.”

“Anyone in mind, Robin?” asked Watkins, from Defence.

“One of your chaps, as a matter of fact,” replied the Cabinet Secretary. “The only man I know of who could handle that sort of organisation is Major Bill Clayton.”

“Of Northern Ireland fame, you mean?” (*read ‘Their Own Game’ by Duncan James*)

“That’s the fellow. In Cyprus now, but not far short of finishing his tour, I should think.”

“Won’t he be a bit out of touch, after three years abroad?” queried Burgess.

“People like Clayton, doing that sort of work, make sure they don’t get out of touch,” replied Watkins huffily.

The whole committee knew exactly whom Sir Robin Algar was talking about, and his background. They talked for some time about his suitability, and how he might be persuaded to take on the role of Head of Section. The debate about whether or not Jarvis should be replaced appeared to be over almost before it had begun.

CHAPTER THREE – WHO KILLED UNCLE EDWARD?

The evening sun was dropping below the sparkling Mediterranean horizon as the couple finished their meal.

It was their favourite place. A table on the harbour wall, across the dusty road from the small bar run by Davros and Athena.

It reminded Major Bill Clayton very much of the Old Harbour in Paphos, before it had been ruined by tourists. This tiny fishing village of Kopufano was not that far from Paphos, but far enough away to have escaped the attentions of most visitors, and to remain unspoilt and undiscovered by the holiday trade. There weren't many places like Kopufano left in Cyprus these days. But because they lived on the island, Bill and his wife Catherine were able to explore the dusty tracks and rugged coastline away from the towering hotels with their sun beds and swimming pools.

Bill's work at the Joint Services Signals Unit at Ayios Nikolaos in the Troodos Mountains was altogether different from his work in Northern Ireland. Intelligence work still, but altogether different. Here, he helped to run what was effectively a listening post on the Middle East. He knew, or could find out, everything that was going on in the region, much as he had known everything that was going on in Northern Ireland while he was there. Exhausted, he had left the province to sort itself out politically, having almost single handedly resolved the security situation. With top-level support from Downing Street and Washington, he had managed to rid the island of its arsenals of terrorist weapons, empty the terrorists' bank accounts, and, finally, get rid of the terrorists themselves.

It had not been without its risks. His first wife of only a few months had been killed by a car bomb undoubtedly meant for him, after only a few weeks at the Army Headquarters outside Belfast. His Uncle had been assassinated in a quiet Sussex village, and a close colleague and trusted agent had been murdered – a murder he could perhaps have prevented if he had been a bit quicker off the mark. Not only was his own life under constant threat while he was there, but so was that of his new wife, Catherine. They had not been married then. She was a member of the SAS at the time they met, and a pivotal part of his intelligence team. Before being sent to Northern Ireland, she had served in Iraq, where she had been captured and tortured before escaping and somehow making her way back across the desert. Still traumatised, she had not hesitated to get involved again in active operations.

Catherine had eventually resigned from the Army, and she and Bill Clayton had married and moved to Cyprus, to get away from further danger, while the politicians got on with the long job of reconciling and uniting a previously divided but now peaceful island.

And today was a special day in that process. A day when the two sides of the political divide came together at a grand ceremony in Belfast to mark the island's unification under the United States flag.

Busy though Bill was in Cyprus, there was now no immediate threat to his life as there had been in the past, and the couple had begun to relax and enjoy their return

to civilised life. It was a life which allowed them time together, time to relax, and time to eat out at charming local restaurants like that run by Davros and Athena.

Davros still went fishing from time to time in his battered launch, but no longer made his living from the sea. He caught enough to supply his small café bar across the road from the tiny harbour, and friends and neighbours in the village eagerly bought anything left. Davros spoke very little English, but his wife, Athena, had attended university in Cambridge many years ago, and still had a love of the place and of the English people. The couple at their table on the harbour wall were always welcome, as it gave her the chance to practice the language. They also contributed more to the bar's meagre income than the villagers could who chose to eat there. They were a nice couple, and Athena knew he worked for the British military somewhere high in the Troodos Mountains, where all the big dish aerals were sited, but she could only guess what he did.

Bill and Catherine had finished their early supper. A simple meal of local fish caught by Davros, with a green salad and boiled potatoes. They were enjoying a glass of Keo brandy as the air cooled and the sun set. The brandy was by way of celebration of the events in Belfast. But the tranquillity was broken by Athena, rushing from the café.

"Come quickly, come quickly," she shouted waving her arms wildly. "Come quickly, and listen. Bad news from England."

They rushed across the road and into the tiny kitchen at the back of the bar, in time to hear the end of the BBC World Service news.

By all accounts, the Belfast explosion, or possibly a series of explosions, had been bigger than anything ever seen before in Northern Ireland, or on the mainland.

It was certain that many people had been killed from among the VIPs and dignitaries attending the independence celebrations, and countless others injured, many seriously. It was too early to say who had died, but the news broadcast was immediately followed by solemn music.

The couple slowly retraced their steps to their table, and sat in silence for a few moments.

"Who the hell could have done that?" Bill asked, talking almost to himself as he looked out across the sea.

The girl shook her head.

"I doubt it was the Irish," he said.

Catherine shook her head again. "I suppose that's a problem for the Americans, now," she said.

"We'll have to help them," he said. "It could just be al-Qa'Aeda, getting at us and the Americans at the same time. They've wanted to do that for years. We may even be able to pick something up from here."

"I suppose you might," she replied.

"We should have been there, you know," he said to her, quietly. "Today. We were invited."

"I know," she replied.

“If it hadn’t been for you, we would probably have gone, too.” he said. “In a strange sort of way, I quite wanted to go, really, although I wasn’t entirely sure.”

“I had a feeling we shouldn’t,” she replied.

“You always were a canny chap,” he said.

“I just didn’t want to go back, after all this time.”

“Why?” he asked.

“We’re so happy here,” she said. “I didn’t want to break the spell.”

“You’re right, of course,” he said. “I had mixed feelings about it myself, to be honest. About meeting the old crowd again.”

“We may never meet some of them again, after today.”

They reached across the table, and held hands.

“Take me home,” she said.

They crossed the road to pay for their supper. Athena and Davros were in animated conversation.

“I’m so sorry,” Athena said to the couple. “Terrible, terrible.”

They nodded, and walked to the car, arm in arm.

Neither of them had noticed the two men on a motorbike, who followed them discretely to their home at Mercury Barracks.

But the men had gone out of their way to avoid attracting attention. Not for them the usual 1,000cc Honda or BMW or Kawasaki that they might have used in London, or Washington or Moscow. Instead, they had picked up a 50cc Vespa motor scooter, typical of the sort used by all the local Cypriots for carrying their produce to and from market, complete with wicker basket. Except that this one, although it had been specially adapted to sound like all the others, had a supercharged engine in case of need. An RAF Hercules had delivered it, together with a very dilapidated Citroën 2CV van – also with a suped-up engine – that they and the other members of their small team also used from time to time, just for a change.

It was some three weeks after the Belfast tragedy that a young, tanned local man rang the doorbell at the Claytons’ home. It was a Saturday afternoon, and Bill was inside watching football on satellite TV, while Catherine potted about in the small but neat garden. She heard the doorbell, and went to answer it so as not disturb Bill.

The young man politely touched the brim of his battered straw hat.

“Feesh?” he said. “You want fresh feesh?”

He thumbed towards the old Citroën van outside.

“I haff plenty feesh, fresh today,” he announced with a heavy accent. “You look?” he invited Catherine, taking a step towards the van.

“Cheap,” he added

She nodded, and followed the youth down the short path to the road.

“See!” he said proudly, waving towards the trays of fish laid out in the back of the van.

“See! This red snapper; awful tasty!” He proudly held up a plump fish by its tail.

“What are those?” asked Catherine, pointing.

“Ah!” said the young man, stooping to pick up a handful of smaller silver fish from the tray.

“Ah!” he said again. “Dees – I not know for sure how you call them.”

Obviously his English was poor.

He looked hard at Catherine with his bright blue eyes, as if summing her up.

“Dees,” he said again, fumbling for words, and shaking his head.

He paused for a moment, still looking intently at her.

Eventually he said, in perfect English. “Actually, I think the bloody things are sardines. But I need to see the Major urgently. Is he in?” he asked, knowing very well that he was.

Catherine was taken aback, but only for a moment.

“Wait,” she said. “I’ll get him to come and look at the fish.”

She turned towards the house.

“Incidentally, they are sardines,” she said with a grin.

The young man, whoever he was, politely touched the frayed brim of his hat, keeping up the pretence, and carefully replaced the fish on to their tray.

Catherine returned with Bill, now equally mystified.

They all peered into the back of the van.

“I have a message for you,” said the young man quietly. “I’m told you will remember from Northern Ireland days that nothing was to be put on paper about your particular operation. ‘No paper, no leaks’, I believe was the theory. Which is why I’m here, trying to sell this stinking stuff,” he explained.

“Go on,” said Bill.

“There’s a chap coming over from London, due later today, who wants an urgent but private meeting with you,” the man continued. “Both of you.”

“Who?” asked Bill.

“Sir Robin Algar, Cabinet Secretary. Says you know him.”

Bill frowned. *What on earth could he want?* he wondered.

“Over here for a private long weekend break, with his wife,” explained the man. “That’s the cover story. Would like to join you for lunch tomorrow at your favourite place in Kopufano. He thought about 1230 hours would be nice for a drink first. OK?”

“OK,” replied Bill. “We’ll be there.”

“So shall I,” said the man. “But you won’t see me. Now what about these damned fish?”

“I’ll have half a dozen sardines,” said Bill, reaching for his wallet. “I’m rather partial to those on a barbeque.”

“And I think the Captain next door might like the snapper,” said Catherine. “Try him.”

“I’ve got to try the whole damned road, now I’ve started,” said the man, “or someone will smell a rat.”

“Rotten fish, more like it,” said Bill.

The man wrapped the sardines in a piece of old newspaper, counted out the change and said “Sank you” before walking round to the house next door.

Robin Algar was there when they arrived. But no longer the Sir Robin Algar that Bill had dealt with before. No smart striped suit, with white shirt and gold cuff links. No neatly knotted silk tie, or polished black shoes. This time, the country’s most senior public servant, Head of the Civil Service and Cabinet Secretary, was in faded beige Chinos, open-necked floral short-sleeved shirt and sandals, wearing a straw hat as protection from the mid-day sun, sitting on a green plastic chair and sipping cheap local wine.

He was alone.

He greeted Bill warmly as he was introduced to Catherine, whom he had not met before.

“It’s so nice to see you,” he began. “I hope you don’t mind, but I’ve left Betty, my wife, sunning herself by one of the pools at the Coral Beach Hotel in Paphos. I didn’t think she’d be too interested in our little chat.”

Athena bustled over to get more drinks. The menu was the same as always.

“There are live fish in the tank, caught by Davros only this morning, if you want to choose something really fresh,” she explained, pointing to the large glass container at the front of the shop, with fish of all shapes, sizes and colours, as well as lobsters, swimming about, awaiting their fate.

“I don’t think I could!” said Algar. “I shall let my friends here choose, as they come here often.”

“We usually go for baked fish, with boiled potatoes and salad,” explained Catherine. “Simple but good.”

“How about some fresh prawns to start?” suggested Athena.

“Sounds perfect,” said Robin Algar. “And perhaps a bottle of your best white wine, to go with it. This is my treat today.”

Athena wasn’t at all sure they had a ‘best’ wine, but nodded and gave Bill and Catherine a sideways glance. They knew what she meant!

As soon as she had gone, Robin Algar said, “You probably know, Bill, that the structure of our intelligence services has been changed somewhat, and that I now play a bigger role than I did. The old post of Permanent Secretary, Intelligence, Security and Resilience has been abolished, and the responsibilities passed to me. That means that I now chair the Joint Intelligence Committee. But I’m sure you must be dying to know the reason for this clandestine meeting. I’m not used to this sort of thing, y’know,” he added, rather embarrassed.

“Neither are we, as a matter of fact,” replied Bill, “not any more. But you’re right about our curiosity – it’s killing us, although we guessed it must have something to do with that terrible incident in Belfast.”

“In a way, it has,” replied Algar. “That really was an appalling climax to years of hard work and patient diplomacy, not to mention your own very personal role in the run up to it. But I’m pleased to say that the Americans have settled in very well,

and that progress is being made as planned under their leadership. Ireland is still basically peaceful, for the first time in decades.”

“Well, that’s good news at least,” replied Catherine.

“I’ve been giving a good deal of thought – and time – to who could have been behind the atrocity that day,” said Bill. “As you probably know, my role here is to monitor what’s going on in the region, and we work closely with the Americans and other allies, as well as with GCHQ and the security services. I’ve made a start checking through all the transcripts and intercepts, going back several months, to see if I can find any clue as to who might have been responsible, but so far I’ve drawn a blank. Even mobile phone chat between people we have a special interest in has not given us any sort of lead, using a key-word search and everything. It could be anyone, and not necessarily from this part of the world - al-Qa’Aeda, the Taliban, Iran, anyone.”

“It’s good of you to go to that trouble,” said Algar, “but like you, no-one seems to have anything like a clear idea of who could have been the perpetrators. The Americans are still in a dreadful state of shock over the event, as they had been responsible for the security arrangements for the celebrations, and thought they had covered everything.”

“We should have been there, you know,” said Catherine. “We were invited, but decided not to go.”

“Me too,” said Robin Algar. “I also decided not to go, although I really should have gone, to support the Prime Minister. But I honestly felt I’d had enough by then.”

“That was partly why we didn’t go, as well,” agreed Catherine. “It was tempting, but we were so happily settled here, we really didn’t want to go back.”

“How long have you been here now?” asked Algar.

“Getting on for two years,” replied Bill Clayton. “It took you officials and politicians such a long time to sort out your part of the plan, didn’t it, but the time has gone quickly, really.”

“You’ll be looking for a new posting soon, I suppose?” suggested Algar.

“I’d rather not think about it!” said Clayton. “We’ll stay here as long as you like, thanks.”

“I can understand that,” agreed Robin Algar, looking out over sparkling Mediterranean.

“But I’m up for promotion again soon – I turned it down once, to come here instead, you know,” said the Major.

“I had heard,” replied Algar. “And that’s one of the reasons why I’m here,” he added, mysteriously. “But there’s something I need to tell you first – something you need to know after all this time about an incident which happened while you were in Northern Ireland.”

“Which incident?” asked Bill, curiously. “There were so many.”

“Personal, really,” replied Algar, “and one which I remember you took very hard and did your best to resolve.”

“Not the death of my first wife?” asked Bill, casting a glance at Catherine.

“No, no, not that,” responded Sir Robin. “The murder of your uncle, Edward Benbow.”

“Surely not a new development after all this time?” asked Bill.

“Not that, either,” said Algar. “Rather, an old development you didn’t know about at the time, but which I must now tell you about.”

“This sounds interesting,” remarked Catherine. “I remember the time well, since Bill and I actually went to the scene of the murder. A pretty village in Sussex, it was.”

“Fittleworth,” Bill reminded her. “That’s where Uncle Edward lived. Not that he was a blood relation as such. He married my aunt, but he was a nice enough chap, and did well in the Army – Royal Artillery.”

“Did well afterwards, too,” Catherine reminded him. “Worked for the Foreign Office I seem to remember.”

“Let me briefly remind you of what happened,” said Sir Robin, “and please correct me if I get anything wrong. You will recall that Benbow was shot by two men who drove passed him on a motorbike. A man fishing on the river nearby saw the incident, but was not close enough to be a witness of any value. Sussex police got nowhere with their investigation, and it was eventually you, Bill, who stumbled across the fact that it was an IRA weapon that had been used.”

“The forensic people eventually managed to link the murder weapon to three crimes in Northern Ireland,” said Bill, frowning, “but only because I rescued the bullets from the Sussex police.”

“Quite,” agreed Algar. “And before that, you went off on a wild goose chase because of an envelope with your uncle’s name and address on it.”

“I remember,” said Bill. “That damned envelope caused me no end of trouble.”

“At one time, it even led you to believe that Alistair Vaughan, the Head of Security at the Bank of England, had arranged for your uncle to be killed,” Algar reminded him with a smile.

“That was because you passed the envelope to him, Sir Robin – it contained the list of terrorist bank accounts which he was supposed to deal with,” Bill said. “And our double agent friend had also set us off on a wild goose chase by suggesting that Vaughan was an IRA fund raiser, with links to a Libyan arms dealer.”

“And your uncle was an arms inspector at the time, checking up on Libya’s promise to give up their weapons of mass destruction. So it was a perfectly plausible conclusion to reach, given what you knew, that Benbow’s murder was somehow linked to our own operation in Northern Ireland.”

“Exactly,” agreed Bill.

“Which it was,” confirmed the Cabinet Secretary. “But not quite in the way you suspected, I fear.”

“How do you mean?” asked Catherine.

“Let me explain,” said Algar. “Your uncle, Bill, was a clever man. Retired as a major in the gunners, got a degree in nuclear physics afterwards and worked for the

Foreign Office as an arms inspector, much of the time in Iraq until he retired again. He was recruited later on a special contract for his work in Libya.”

“Agreed,” said Bill.

“And this is where I have to tell you things you didn’t know,” said Robin Algar, taking a sip of his wine. “Edward Benbow was actually an arms dealer. He was helping Libya to sell illegal arms to terrorist groups and others, in spite of their declared policy of giving that up. He was also negotiating to sell nuclear secrets to Iran, as a matter of interest.”

Bill and Catherine sat back, aghast.

“I find that impossible to believe,” said Bill. “My uncle was always a pillar of society.”

“So he appeared,” responded Algar. “But he had been under surveillance for some time. The fact was, though, that he was far too useful for us to have pulled him out immediately. We needed to let him continue trading, so to speak, to identify his network of contacts and gather sufficient evidence to be able to take political action at some time in the future.”

“I’ll be damned!” muttered Bill. “I had no idea.”

“And you were supposed to know everything,” Catherine reminded him, with a grin.

“Don’t be hard on Bill,” Robin said. “The last people you ever suspect of any wrong doing are your own relatives.”

“That’s true enough,” Bill agreed. “But it still doesn’t explain why he was murdered or by whom, does it? We know it was an IRA weapon, and that the gun was eventually discovered in the flat of Father Sean Doyle, our double agent friend.”

“This gets even more difficult for me to have to explain,” said Sir Robin. “Edward Benbow had made a lot of money shipping arms to the IRA, and was about to make a lot more until you and your colleagues arranged for the good ship ‘Hercules’ to be blown out of the water. That was stuffed full of a new consignment for them, and your uncle had several hundred thousand pounds riding on their safe delivery. He was furious. He could see his very lucrative business coming swiftly to an end unless he managed to get you out of the way.”

“How did he intend to do that?” asked an increasingly incredulous Clayton.

“Simple,” replied Algar. “He had a contract out on you.”

“You mean he wanted Bill killed?” stuttered Catherine. “His own nephew? His own flesh and blood?”

“That’s exactly what I do mean, I’m afraid,” admitted Sir Robin.

“But somebody got him first, thank the Lord,” said Catherine. “But why would the IRA do that, when he was supplying them with weapons? It just doesn’t make sense.”

“It wasn’t the IRA,” replied Algar. “He was taken out to protect you, Bill. You were deemed to be infinitely more valuable than he was, so we had to get rid of him before he harmed you in anyway.”

Bill and Catherine sat in disbelieving silence.

“But the murder weapon?” asked Bill. “It was an old IRA hand gun. I checked that out myself.”

“Planted deliberately,” said Algar. “A red herring, specially for your benefit, I’m afraid.”

“I’ll be damned!” exclaimed Bill again, lapsing into further silence.

“Do you mean that the Government actually sanctioned the murder of my uncle?” he eventually asked.

“Yes. That’s the way it was, Bill,” replied Algar. “It was you or him, and we wanted you to keep on with what you were doing. We got to him first, thank goodness.”

“Who exactly is ‘we’?” asked Bill. “The two men on a motorbike? Were they part of it?”

“They were ours,” replied Sir Robin simply. “And that brings me to the most difficult part of my visit. I have to tell you about the organisation they worked for.”

He paused. “I could do with some more coffee, could you?”

“And a Brandy,” said Bill, attracting Athena’s attention. “But why do you need to tell me now, after all this time?”

Algar looked at him closely.

“Because we want you to take over the organisation, that’s why. We want you to run it.”

Bill and Catherine looked at him in stunned silence.

“But why me?” asked Bill eventually.

“Because Cabinet colleagues agree with me that there is no one better,” said the Cabinet Secretary simply. “The man currently in charge – you may know of Alan Jarvis – has proved himself not to be entirely satisfactory, judging by recent events, and we have agreed that he should be replaced quickly. That’s strictly confidential at the moment, of course. Jarvis knows nothing, yet.”

“I’ve heard of Jarvis,” said Bill. “He was a Section head in SIS, wasn’t he?”

“He’ll go back there,” replied Algar.

“But he is a Civil Servant, and I’m not,” said Clayton, almost looking for an excuse to refuse the post.

“You would become one if you accepted my offer.”

Clayton shook his head.

“Let me tell you briefly about the terms that have been agreed if you should decide to take over Section 11,” offered Sir Robin. “You will be given immediate and substantive promotion to full Colonel, and your retirement from the Army would carry with it a full pension in that rank. MOD will sort out all the details. Your new appointment would be in an equivalent Civil Service rank, on maximum salary, with a further pension in that rank when you eventually retire. I shall make all those arrangements. A flat in London goes with the job too, by the way. Section 11 is a top-secret organisation, and you would report direct to me.”

“I have heard about Section 11, of course,” said Bill, “but I really know nothing about it.”

“That’s good news, in a way,” said Algar with a smile. “At least it means that the security surrounding it is tight. If you don’t know, then no one else will. Let me tell you in a few words about its role. You will obviously be given a full briefing before you join, if you should so decide.”

When the Cabinet Secretary had finished, Clayton said, “Sounds interesting enough, but I hope you don’t expect me to decide now. If you do, the answer’s ‘No’.”

“Of course you must discuss all this with Catherine,” agreed Algar, “but the sooner you can make a decision, one way or the other, the better from everyone’s point of view. We have a particularly difficult and sensitive operation coming up, and I’d like the new Head of Section to be in on it from the start.”

“I’ll get word to you as soon as possible,” agreed Bill.

“A simple yes or no will do,” said Algar. “But now I must get back, or my wife will wonder what has happened to me.”

He stood to leave.

“Shall I ring for a taxi for you?” offered Catherine.

“Kind of you, but my transport is already here.”

They looked around, but there was no vehicle in sight. Only an old Citroën 2CV, which clattered along the quayside. It stopped near them, and the young man in a tattered straw hat struggled out of the drivers seat.

“I remember now,” said Bill. “He called yesterday selling fish, and said he would be around today.”

“We’ve been keeping a watchful eye on you again, ever since the Belfast incident. Just in case.”

He shook hands with Bill and Catherine, and walked across to the van.

“Hardly a staff car,” grinned the Cabinet Secretary, as he climbed awkwardly into the passenger seat, “but it will do to get me back to the hotel. By the way, it will be on your inventory if you take over!”

“And so shall I,” said the man in the straw hat. “I never did sell that red snapper, either.”

CHAPTER FOUR - YOU’RE FIRED!

Major Bill Clayton and his wife Catherine watched in disbelief as Britain’s most senior civil servant squeezed himself into the battered and ancient Citroën 2CV van. He waved cheerily as the vehicle clattered away from the harbour at Kopufano, and headed down the dusty road towards Paphos and his five-star hotel.

“Well!” exclaimed Catherine. “What on earth do you make of all that?”

“Not a lot at the moment,” replied Bill. “My mind’s in a whirl, what with the news about Uncle Edward, and the offer of a new job all at once.”

“And instant double promotion.”

“I’m not so sure I want to leave the Army, how ever attractive the new job sounds.”

“There’s a lot to talk about, suddenly,” said Catherine. “Let’s get back to the house, and I’ll do some eggs and bacon for supper.”

“We don’t need to make any decisions tonight, thank goodness,” said Bill.

“Quite right,” replied his wife. “You can sleep on it and we’ll talk it over again tomorrow.”

“I’m not sure I’ll get much sleep tonight,” sighed Bill. “And I’ve got a busy day ahead of me – Monday always is, catching up with everything that’s happened over the weekend.”

“It’ll help to take your mind off things if you’re occupied,” said Catherine sagely.

They drove back to their Army married quarter in silence.

Eventually, Bill said, “It’s very flattering, really, to be asked to take on a job like this.”

“When you think of all the people they could have selected,” said Catherine. “I’m proud of you.”

“It sounds a very high profile job. I just wish I knew more about the organisation and what it does, but there are a couple of people I could ask.”

“Sir Robin said you’d be given a full briefing.”

“But only after I’ve said ‘yes’, - if I do. I need to know more now, really, before I decide. I think I’ll get on the phone this evening after supper.”

“Your friend PJ would help, I’m sure,” suggested Catherine. “He’s quite high up in the Defence Ministry.”

“Just what I was thinking. He runs the Intelligence outfit, so should know what’s going on.”

“From what Sir Robin said, Section 11 seems to be responsible for looking after people who are under threat in some way or another, but who are judged to be a valuable national asset and who should be guarded. It sounds to be rather like the Royalty and Diplomatic Protection squad of the Met. Police, but with rather less high profile customers.”

“I remember he mentioned the head of a large drugs company, who had been targeted by animal rights people. I suppose someone has to look after national assets of that sort, even if it is done secretly and without their knowledge. Could be interesting, I suppose,” said Bill

“They seem to have looked after you well enough in Northern Ireland,” said Catherine. “And you knew nothing about their operation until just now.”

“True enough. I still find it hard to believe what he said about Uncle Edward, though.”

They lapsed into silence again, each lost in their own thoughts about the future and what it may hold. As they pulled into the drive of their house, Catherine noticed a man on an old Vesper motor scooter parked at the end of their road. She said nothing to Bill at the time.

Bill had enjoyed his egg and bacon supper that Catherine had prepared, but he couldn’t wait to get on the phone. He excused himself from washing up after their meal and retired to the study.

Soon to be Colonel and almost as soon to be retired from the Army, he needed to know more about the job he had been asked to take on, and he needed to know quickly. He had told Catherine that he knew a couple of people he could talk to, and he was keen to get hold of one of them straight away. She had herself suggested General Pearson-Jones, who was not only an old friend, but was also Chief of Defence Intelligence Staff in the Ministry of Defence. And that made him a member of the Joint Intelligence Committee, chaired by Bill's recent visitor. If PJ, as the General was known, didn't know about Section 11 and what it did, then nobody would.

"I've just won a fiver, thanks to you," said PJ brightly, when he answered the phone.

"How come?" asked Bill

"I knew you'd be on the blower, but you're even quicker than Robin Algar thought you would be! Congratulations on your promotion, by the way."

"Thank you, Sir. If you were expecting me to ring, then you also know why I'm ringing, and what I need to know," replied Bill.

"Of course I do," replied the General. "And don't call me sir, either. You're a civilian now, near as damn it. How was Robin Algar? On good form I hope. He was looking forward to a quick trip to Cyprus."

"We had a very interesting afternoon," replied Bill.

"I bet you did! And a good lunch, I gather."

"Has he been on the phone already?"

"Beat you to it, Bill, but only just. He sounded very hopeful that you'd accept his offer, but guessed you'd be on to me for an informal chat."

"I need to know more before I can make a decision, PJ."

"Of course you do, old boy. Why don't I drift over to see you for a day or so? Get Catherine to make up a bed for me – I don't like the Mess at Ayios Nikolaos, although it's some time since I made a visit. Robin has authorised my trip and has squared it with the powers that be here."

"When can you come?" asked Bill.

"There's a flight out of Brize Norton early tomorrow morning which the RAF says gets to Akrotiri just before lunch."

"I'll be there to meet you," promised Bill.

"I shall expect a meal at your favourite eating place, which Robin says is excellent. Food and wine good, the scenery stunning, and quiet enough for a proper chat without being overheard."

"I'm glad he enjoyed it."

"Anything special you need to know?" asked PJ.

"No doubt, if I took the job, my formal briefing on arrival would cover current activities and how the section is structured, and so on, but I'd be interested to know now about the people I would be working with as much as anything."

"Not a bad bunch, on the whole. I know most of the top people there, and you've got a very good number two."

"Anyone I know?" asked Bill.

“Of course it’s someone you know – you know everybody in this business, just about. As this is an open line, I’ll tell you when I get there. See you tomorrow.”

With that, the line went dead.

Bill got on to Air Movements at RAF Akrotiri to get the arrival time of the next day’s Tri-Star from Brize Norton.

“We’ve got a visitor for a couple of days,” Bill told Catherine. “PJ’s coming over for a chat.”

“How nice!”

“Apparently, Robin Algar has already had a word with him. PJ should know all about Section 11, since he’s a full member of the Joint Intelligence Committee. We’ll have a chat over a quiet lunch at Athena’s place – again. Robin has recommended it! But he’d like to stay with us rather than in the Mess. Is that OK?”

“Of course it is. This could be a very useful visit. I’m glad you invited him.”

“I didn’t,” said Bill. “He invited himself before I had the chance. He says the number two at the Section is an excellent chap, who I know, but he wouldn’t say who it was.”

It was very late in the evening when Bill got back from Akrotiri having seen PJ on his plane home. The phone rang. Bill took the call in the study.

“This could be quite like old times,” said Bill with a grin when he returned. “You’ll never guess who that was.”

“Tell me.”

“None other than Commander Nick Marsden. Like us, he didn’t go to the ceremonies in Belfast, so he escaped as we did, thank God. He sends his love, by the way.”

“I’m so glad he’s all right. Such a nice man, but what on earth did he want suddenly?” asked Catherine. “We haven’t been in touch for simply ages.”

“As you say, a really nice chap, and professionally, we got on like a house on fire together,” Bill said. “In fact, I think he was probably one of the best deputies I’ve ever had.”

“So why did he ring?” asked Catherine again.

“He’s heard I’ve been offered a new job, and wants me to take it.”

“Why, particularly?”

“Because he’s Deputy Head of Section 11, that’s why.”

After endless hours of discussion and debate between him and Catherine following PJ’s visit, it was eventually late on Wednesday afternoon before Bill got on the secure telephone line from his office to the Cabinet Office, and spoke to Sir Robin Algar. At the end of that conversation, the Cabinet Secretary got on to his opposite number in the Ministry of Defence.

“Clayton has agreed to take on Section 11,” he announced to Sir Len Watkins. “We now need to move fast. He says he will need at least a week for a hand over in Cyprus, so I hope you can find a replacement and get him out there as soon as possible. Then, once I have a date, I shall have the unenviable job of telling Jarvis that

he's being moved back into his old Department. Meanwhile, your people will need to arrange for Clayton's promotion, his retirement and his pension, and so on, all at once."

"Leave it to me," replied Watkins. "Hopefully, I shall be able to let you have a date for the change-over later this afternoon."

"Excellent," replied Algar.

"Is Clayton prepared to move fast?"

"So he says, although as I've mentioned already, he wants a week for a handover. We shall do all we can to make the transition as easy as possible for him, and his wife, and no doubt you will do the same."

"Of course," said Watkins. "I shall make sure my people keep the red-tape and bullshit down to an absolute minimum. We'll get him moved, and sweep up the paperwork later if necessary. I've already put the Army on notice to get cracking as soon as I say so, if the decision goes the way we wanted – which it has."

"How long do you reckon, then?"

"With any luck, Clayton should be yours within a fortnight."

"Good. Keep in touch, and let's tell colleagues at next week's JIC meeting."

It was Thursday morning when Bill Clayton got the first of many phone calls from the Military Secretary's office in London. Things had moved fast.

"Congratulations on your promotion, Colonel," said the official. "We're sorry that, at the same time, you will be leaving the Army, but that's the way the powers-that-be want it, so that's the way it's going to be. I rather gather that they want you in your new post in double-quick time."

"So I believe," said Bill.

"We've identified a replacement for you over there. I'm sure you know Major Julian Evans of the Royal Signals?"

"Yes," replied Bill. "I know him well. We were at Sandhurst together."

"That helps. He's keen to come, and with a bit of shoving we should be able to get him to Cyprus by the weekend for a hand-over. He may need to take a bit of leave later to sort out things here, but I'm sure your number two can cope for a week while he's away."

"No problem at all there," replied Clayton.

"You may need to do the same yourself," said the man from MOD. "As they need you here and in post ASAP, any leave you need will have to come later. We'll give you all the help we can with your domestic arrangements – packing, moving, shoving things into storage if necessary, moving in to your official flat in London and so on. Just let us know."

"Thanks," said Bill.

"Just get cracking, and start preparing your hand-over brief, while Catherine starts packing."

"We've already started both."

"I might have guessed!"

Alan Jarvis hadn't been best pleased to be summoned to the Cabinet Office at short notice. For the life of him, he couldn't guess what this unexpected visit was about. So far as he was aware, things were going well within his command, as Head of Section 11. Perhaps it was a new task his outfit was to be given, which needed the personal attention of the Cabinet Secretary, as Head of the Joint Intelligence Committee. He'd been called to briefings like that before. Or perhaps he had at last been put forward for a CBE or something equally grand. He could only guess, not least because Sir Robin's PA, who he had telephoned, had been totally unforthcoming about the purpose of his visit.

He did not have long to wait after his arrival.

"Come in, Alan," Sir Robin greeted him. "Tea or coffee?"

"Tea please."

The Cabinet Secretary nodded towards his secretary, who disappeared and closed the door behind her.

"I'm sure you're wondering why I've asked you to come and see me at such short notice," began Algar.

"As you'd expect," replied Jarvis, "although I'd guess it is to brief me about a new task."

"Well, in a way it is, so I won't beat about the bush. The fact is that I plan to move you back to your old department, within SIS."

Jarvis frowned. This was not at all what he had been expecting. He was shocked.

"Why on earth?" he exclaimed.

"Several reasons come together all at once," replied Algar. "First of all, you've been heading up Section 11 for nearly six years now, so you're about due for a change, and your old Department is keen to have you back." Algar almost blushed, as he realised this was a bit of an exaggeration. "We also have an ideal candidate available as your replacement, who we will lose if we don't move quickly."

"And who's that, may I ask," asked Jarvis frostily.

"Colonel Bill Clayton."

"The name's familiar. Remind me," asked Jarvis.

"Army Int., currently in Cyprus," replied Algar.

"Is he the chap who made a name for himself in Northern Ireland?"

"The same."

"But he's only a Major, surely. And in any case, Head of Section 11 is traditionally a civil service post, not one for the military."

"Clayton is retiring as a full Colonel, and will be taking over from you as a civil servant in the same rank as yourself."

"It sounds as if I have no choice in this," complained Jarvis.

"I'm afraid you don't, Alan"

"Do I get promotion as well?"

"I'm afraid you don't," said Sir Robin again.

"And when's all this supposed to happen?"

“I must ask you to clear your desk by the end of next week, ready to hand over to Clayton the following Monday.”

“You suddenly seem to be in a great rush to get rid of me.” Jarvis was getting more and more angry.

“That’s the way it is,” said Algar.

“I had always thought I was doing a good job as Head of Section, and that everyone was pleased with the way things had been going. Now it seems you can’t get rid of me quick enough.”

“Since you ask,” said Algar, leaning forward, “there has been some disquiet voiced of late about your recent performance, and some colleagues have suggested that it is time you had a change.”

“What brought that about in particular?” demanded Jarvis.

“The German football affair, if you must know,” responded the Cabinet Secretary, equally crossly. “It was a bloody stupid thing to do, and the consequences of failure would have been little short of a disaster in terms of our relationships with the German government, not to mention the embarrassment this Government would have had to face in explaining the use of public funds on such an escapade.”

“Nobody said anything at the time,” protested Jarvis.

“Nobody knew much about it at the time. If we had, we’d have stopped it. As it is, colleagues now believe you are beginning to lose your grip on the job, and should be moved before you are responsible for any more serious mis-judgements of that sort.”

“So that’s it, then.”

“That’s it,” confirmed Algar, sitting back. “I shall expect you to conduct a thorough and professional hand-over to Clayton on Monday week. Colleagues from SIS will be in touch to arrange for your move back to your old desk.”

Jarvis was so furious that he could not bring himself to wait to be asked to leave. He stormed out of the Cabinet Secretary’s office, knocking a tray of tea and chocolate biscuits out of the hands of an approaching secretary as he did so.

Roger Barclay had worked in the same branch of the bank since he left school. Not much of a job, it had to be admitted, even by the standards of a local branch. His manager soon determined to keep him away from account holders, which suited Roger well as he wasn’t very keen on meeting new people. And what would he do anyway, up front behind the bullet-proof glass screen? He was not much good at Maths, so didn’t want to be involved in handing out cash to customers or counting it when local builders and other tradesmen brought in wads of dirty notes at the end of the week to be paid in. So he did mostly clerical work, behind the scenes, although occasionally he got involved in handling real money rather than just receipts and invoices and so on. Sometimes he supervised while others stacked notes into the cash machines, other times he would help securing cash into the safe or taking it out of the safe for the tills. Sometimes, he had to count out coins, too, which he didn’t much care for, but he supposed someone had to do it. Some bigger branches had a machine that did it for them, but not where he worked. Otherwise, it was clerical work. Filing,

making the coffee, getting the manager's sandwich for his lunch – that sort of thing. He did have his own desk, with a computer terminal and screen and everything, although he didn't have complete access to the system; not all the passwords. Which was just as well, really, as he wasn't very good at computing. But the job suited him well. No great pressure, no great hassle, and some nice people around – every now and then, he had a beer with a few of them on the way home. It had become a nice, cosy little rut, with enough of an income to pay for his meagre lodgings and general upkeep.

So he was a bit unhappy when his section head called him over one day, and told him that they were going to have to make some changes around the place.

“We have to make a few economies,” he was told, “and it's just a bit difficult to justify any longer all the work you do here. We thought we could perhaps share it out among some of the others.”

“So how would that save money?” asked Roger.

“Well,” explained his supervisor, “we would then be in a position to let you go, to another branch perhaps, where they had greater need of your services and experience.”

“But I don't want to move. I like it here, and I've always worked here.”

“Don't think we hadn't all noticed, and don't think we don't all appreciate everything you've done, but, to be quite honest, you seem to have got into a sort of a rut. And that's not good for you in the long term,” said the man.

“But I don't mind my rut. I quite like being in a rut. You know where you are, in a rut.”

“But the more you stay in a rut, the deeper the rut gets, and eventually it falls in on you and becomes your grave. We're keen to help you avoid that,” said the supervisor, who was now struggling a bit. Getting rid of Roger Barclay wasn't proving to be as easy as they thought it would be.

“So you would like me to move, would you?” asked Roger.

“Yes, please,” said his supervisor with a sigh. The message at last seemed to be getting across.

“Where to?”

“Well, as it happens and as luck would have it, there's a post which is just up your street at our Branch in Sloane Square. Same pay, and everything, and a very posh part of London.”

“But how would I get there, from here?”

“I'm afraid I haven't looked at the map and worked out the buses and trains,” said the supervisor, now getting a bit irritated. “But we'd pay your immediate expenses, if that helps. Removal costs and so on.”

“What happens if I decide I don't want to move?”

“In that case,” replied the supervisor, “if you should decide to reject our offer, then we shall have to let you go.”

“Let me go?”

“Free you from the shackles of this awful bank, so that you can find something better.”

“I’m really quite happy here, you know.”

“I’m sure you are, and I’m sorry it’s come to this, but times change, and we have to move with the times. But you don’t have to decide now. Tomorrow will do.”

Roger Barclay was not a happy man when he left work that afternoon. He didn’t want to start looking for a new job, but Sloane Square was miles away. And he didn’t know anyone there. He was quite sure his luck had at last run out, when the phone rang. That, in itself, was an unusual event. Doubly unusual, as it turned out.

It was his brother.

Professor Jack Barclay was working at a frenzied pace. He and his small team seemed to be on the verge of a breakthrough, and yet they simply could not quite jump the final hurdle in their efforts to develop the laser containment of plasma for nuclear fusion. Barclay was becoming increasingly concerned about their sudden lack of progress, particularly as no amount of retracing their steps would reveal any flaw in their earlier work that could explain why progress had suddenly stalled. They obviously had much to do, both at Culham and at the new Rutherford laboratory at Harwell. As leader of his group of physicists, he was responsible for directing their work, as well as making an input into, and monitoring, the continuing and equally important research into nuclear fusion that had been taking place at Culham for so long.

In spite of the fact that requests were carefully vetted and many refused, he still had to contend with a seemingly never-ending stream of fellow scientists, many from overseas, who were keen to visit the facilities and enquire about his research. Even with those visitors who had been formally approved, he still had to take great care in how he briefed them and what he told them, because of the Top Secret nature of his work. As if that was not enough, he also had to prepare a major paper on the general subject of nuclear fusion, to be given at a forthcoming meeting of the Royal Society, the date of which approached with alarming speed.

What with one thing and another Barclay was under considerable stress. He had little time to himself, was only able to snatch a bite to eat now and then, and was sleeping badly. Other members of his team, including his Director, were all becoming increasingly concerned about his well-being. Jack himself was conscious of the strain. He was getting headaches, and even noticed that sometimes he had a slight shake. He knew that he needed a break, but simply felt unable to get away from it all, even for a weekend. He now spent so little time at his flat in Battersea, that he was seriously considering selling the place. He had bought it so that he had somewhere to go, to get off the Culham treadmill and away from his digs, and he had initially been able to stay there quite often, visiting art galleries, museums and even taking in the odd concert while in London. It had done him good, but now the flat was standing empty for long periods. He knew nobody in the area who could drop in to make sure things were OK, and that in itself was beginning to add to his worries. He thought he had emptied the fridge and switched it off before he left the last time, but he couldn’t really be sure. There was so much else occupying his mind at the time, as there was

now. But there was no one to ask. Nobody to pop in to check for him, and to look at any mail there might be.

There was no doubt about it – it had to go. Whenever he could find the time, he would get on to an agent and put it on the market. He decided that selling it would be the easiest thing. He didn't want the extra worry of letting it, bothering about tenants, repairs and maintenance and all that.

For some unexplained reason, he was also beginning to worry about how his brother was getting on. He really ought to ring to find out, although he never usually bothered. Perhaps it was just his state of mind. That was it. All the pressures of work were getting him down.

But he would ring Roger, whenever he could find the time.

CHAPTER FIVE - OLD FRIENDS, NEW ENEMIES

As Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Sir Robin Algar briefed the members at their next meeting, which, as usual, was attended by the Heads of the three Intelligence agencies.

"I was, frankly, disappointed at Jarvis's attitude," admitted Algar. "I had not for a moment expected such a reaction."

"Sounds to me as if it's a good thing he's gone," said Sir Wilfred Forsyth. "I just hope he doesn't prove to be troublesome when he gets back into SIS."

"We could have a problem, you know," said Watkins. "We now have the ex-Head of one of our most secret sections with an enormous chip on his shoulder."

"I agree," said Algar. "We shall need to keep an eye on him and his behaviour."

"Hardly a job for Section 11, though," joked Brian Hooper, from the Treasury.

"I wonder?" pondered Watkins. "If he is now a bit – how shall I put this – mentally unstable, I wonder if perhaps we should consider down-grading his security clearance?"

"If we did, he would have to be moved from the post we have in mind for him, and that would only make matters worse," said Forsyth, from the Foreign Office. "I think we should leave things as they are for the time being, but I will try to arrange for a specially close watch to be kept on him."

"Is there any way, from his new desk in SIS, that he could interfere with Colonel Clayton and the work of his old section?" asked Burgess from the Home Office.

"Most unlikely," said Forsyth.

"But I agree that we should keep a careful eye on the man for the foreseeable future," said Algar. "Now let's move on; what about Professor Barclay? Anything to report?"

"We've double-checked the security clearance of all his closest colleagues," announced Watkins. "There are only six of them working with him on this particular line of theoretical research, and they are confirmed as being beyond reproach or

suspicion. Like Barclay, they have all been positively vetted and cleared for Atomic Top Secret work, and that has now been confirmed to my satisfaction.”

“And what about the threat assessment in relation to the Professor himself?”

“I’ve been asked to summarise the views of colleagues round this table, and to outline the report by the Assessments Staff, a copy of which you all have.” said Forsyth. “And as you suspected, Robin, there do seem to be suggestions of a growing threat to Barclay from various quarters. In fact, judging by all the reports we’ve received from our people around the world, two threats. First of all, there are those who are seeking to persuade him to work for them rather than for us, and this includes the American’s Lawrence Livermore University, and the Government in Abu Dhabi, acting on behalf of the United Arab Emirates. Both parties are seeking to tempt the man to go over, with increasingly attractive offers of cash and fringe benefits. It has to be said, of course, that ultimately, it will be for Barclay to decide. In this country, he is quite free to do so. It also has to be said that there is no way we could seek to match or better the offers being made to him, so it will have to be left to his own judgement, subject only to a bit of gentle persuasion from us, reminding him perhaps that he has signed the Official Secrets Act apart from anything else. As we know, this effort to turn Barclay to work for them rather than for the UK is based on two different requirements. In the case of the American University, which incidentally Barclay has visited many times, they believe that his research into the field of nuclear fusion, as a future energy source, is way ahead of their own. In the case of the UAE, it is the Government that is seeking to join the field, so to speak, and to take the lead in the Arab world in planning for the day when their oil resources run out. They simply have to find a way of sustaining their colossal investments when their oil revenues dwindle. So we have, on the one hand, a university and a Government both interested in buying Barclay, although we must also bear in mind that the Lawrence Livermore University is heavily subsidised by the US Government, as we subsidise much of the research carried out in our own universities.

“The second threat I mentioned is more menacing in a way,” continued Forsyth. “It comes from Russia, which is keen to protect its own long-term oil interests by slowing down as much as possible the development of an alternative energy source. Although nuclear fusion is some ten, perhaps twenty, years away from being a viable commercial option, the vast oil and gas reserves of Russia and its allies will last long after that. Of course, they have their own programme of research into the fusion processes, but are far behind the West in the progress they have made so far, according to our sources. Our judgement is that they will seek to maintain their monopoly of energy resources that they will enjoy once supplies from the Middle East have decreased. They have already demonstrated their willingness to use energy supply as a political weapon, most recently when they turned off the gas pipelines to the Ukraine, and we are convinced they will not hesitate to use it again.”

“So we have possible threats to Barclay from an academic source and a political one,” said Burgess.

“Up to a point that’s right,” confirmed Forsyth, “but let us not forget that a year or so ago, the President of the United States promised that within ten years America would cease to be dependent on the Middle East for its energy needs.”

“That was during the Presidential election campaign, don’t forget,” Hooper reminded them, “and he didn’t say how that was to be achieved.”

“They certainly won’t get a commercial fusion programme up and running by then, even with Barclay’s help,” said Algar.

“But I’ll bet they are behind the Californian university’s attempts to win him over,” said the Foreign Office man.

“Possibly so,” agreed Algar. “But what about the Russian intentions? How do they propose to ‘slow down progress’, as I think you said?”

“There’s no real information on that,” replied Forsyth, “which could mean they haven’t yet decided what to do for the best. They may join the field and attempt to headhunt Barclay, although they must know that would be virtually impossible to achieve. They could try sabotage in some way, perhaps staging some form of terrorist attack on the facilities at Culham and/or Harwell, but again that may not prove to be much use bearing in mind the huge international effort which is going into this research.”

“But not into the work that Barclay and his small team are doing,” Watkins reminded them.

“True. On the other hand, they may go directly for Barclay himself, and try to remove him from the scene altogether.”

“Kidnapping, you mean?” asked Hooper.

“Or even assassination,” suggested Forsyth. “They’ve done it before to get rid of people who were proving to be an embarrassment to them, most recently Alexander Litvinenko on our own doorstep.”

“I remember that,” said Algar. “A particularly nasty death he suffered – some form of radiation poisoning, wasn’t it?”

“That’s right. The man suddenly fell ill, and died three weeks later in hospital from acute radiation syndrome, induced by a dose of polonium-210.”

“Radiation!” exclaimed Hooper. “Nobody would take much notice if a nuclear physicist like Barclay suddenly died of radiation poisoning, would they?”

“You surely don’t think they were rehearsing on Litvinenko, do you?” asked Algar. “Does anyone?”

Forsyth shrugged. “Who knows how the Russian mind works,” he said. “But they may be particularly tempted if they thought Barclay was going to work in Abu Dhabi, or, even worse, if the Americans looked like winning him over.”

“Even if they were not. Just to remove the risk of that happening,” concluded Burgess.

“Good point,” said Sir Robin Algar. “One way or the other, then, it begins to look as if there is a real and present threat to Professor Barclay, which we probably need to address.”

“But I must emphasise that we have no real intelligence at the moment about Russian intentions,” said Forsyth.

“Let’s not wait until we have,” said Burgess. “By then it may be too late.”

The committee nodded their agreement.

“A tricky task for Section 11, then,” said Algar. “Since he’s new to the job, I’ll brief Colonel Clayton personally about the background to this operation, as he will report directly to me. I just hope Jarvis gives him a proper and thorough handover briefing, in spite of his own disaffection.”

“I think we shall soon know if he doesn’t,” said General Pearson-Jones of Defence Intelligence. “I’ve been to Cyprus myself to give Clayton a bit of background to help him make up his mind, and he is very keen on the number two at the Section, who he worked with in Northern Ireland. If Jarvis doesn’t brief Clayton fully, then Commander Marsden will.”

“What about Professor Barclay?” asked Hooper. “Should he be told about our fears for his safety?”

“I recommend not at the moment,” replied Forsyth. “I would rather see Section 11 operationally involved first.”

“Personally, I think Barclay should be told sooner rather than later,” said Algar. “It would be easier to keep tabs on Barclay if he did know he was under our protection. For one thing, we need access to his diary, to be able to plan ahead for any visits he may have in mind. If he suddenly decides to go the California again, it would be handy to know in advance so that we can go with him, rather than risk losing him while we try to catch up. But we’ll get Section 11 organised first, if you wish.”

“Strictly speaking, Barclay should notify his Director of his plans,” said Burgess. “I’ll get the Chief Scientist to check with the Atomic Energy Authority to see if Barclay copies his weekly diary to anyone there.”

“That would be helpful,” said Algar. He turned to the Heads of the Intelligence Agencies. “Perhaps you would all keep a close watch on this one, and report to your colleagues on this committee if anything new comes up. Look out for any Russian embassy staff straying anywhere near Culham, or for any other unusual activity that could be connected. When the time comes, I’ll have a quiet word with the good Professor myself,” concluded Algar. “As Head of the Civil Service, I am ultimately responsible for him after all. I should hate anything to happen to the poor man.”

Bill and Catherine Clayton, having spent so long in the military environment, were quite used to moving fast when necessary, even if the move was a permanent one rather than just on operations. But the few days that followed Bill’s acceptance of his new role as ‘S’ in London were hectic even by their standards. The two of them had carefully planned their move and divided responsibility for everything that needed to be done. Catherine took charge of all the domestic arrangements, helped more than usually by the military authorities, while Bill got on with clearing up his job in Cyprus, preparing written briefs and eventually – after only three day’s notice – handing over to his successor, Major Julian Evans. Their house in Cyprus was full of packing cases, some of which were to return to the UK by sea, the others by airfreight. A major problem was where to send them. They had no home of their own

– they only married a short time before going to Cyprus – but they had been allocated a small flat in London, which went with Bill’s new job. Catherine paid a flying visit to it. Fortunately it was partly furnished, but only with the barest minimum of essentials. They could live in it as it was if they had to, but it would hardly be ‘home’. So, much of their stuff would need to be put into store, and packed accordingly.

On present plans, they would have three days in the London flat before Bill formally took charge of Section 11. They had briefly discussed where they might look for a home of their own, and had thought Sussex might be nice, as Bill was born and bred there and knew the county well. Certainly, Catherine had been impressed when they had visited part of it while investigating Uncle Edward’s murder. Anywhere would do, so long as she and Bill were together.

By the time they got their flight to RAF Brize Norton, they were nearing exhaustion, and knew that there would be no time yet to rest and relax. Catherine had to set up a new home in the London flat, while Bill had to take on a new job – perhaps the most challenging of his career.

They were surprised not to be met at Brize Norton by Alan Jarvis, from whom Bill was taking over, but delighted to see Nick Marsden, who greeted them, airside rather than in the arrivals hall, like the long-lost friends they were.

“Sorry about Jarvis,” said Marsden. “You seem to have put his nose out of joint a bit.”

“I’ve never met the man,” protested Bill.

“Perhaps not, but you’ve pinched his job, and he’s a bit sore about that.”

“Tough,” said Bill, “but hardly my fault.”

“Time he went anyway, if you ask me,” proffered Nick.

“I shall be asking you a lot, I think.”

“Only too delighted to help, old chum. Now – anywhere else, and I would offer you a cup of tea each while we wait for your luggage, but frankly RAF tea isn’t worth drinking. If ever you stay in the Mess, they bring you a cup as a wake-up call in the morning. It’s not for drinking, though. Shove your finger in it, and when it’s cold, it’s time to get up!”

They all laughed, and for the first time in days, Bill and Catherine felt relaxed. Maybe this was going to be like old times in Northern Ireland, after all.

Eventually, they all piled into a Landrover, and set off for London.

“This belongs to the firm, by the way,” announced Nick. “We have quite a collection of old bangers, as you’ll discover, and as I tend to look after the operations side of things, I felt free to borrow it.”

“What do I look after, then?” asked Bill.

“Oh, fascinating stuff like politics and paper work, although knowing you, you’re bound to get involved in ops. as well. Jarvis never did much, and when he did, things never quite went well, as you’ll discover. So I shan’t mind sharing with you!”

“So what’s the plan now?”

“I’ll drop you off at your flat and help you settle in as best I can. I’ve got basic supplies in, like gin and suchlike, and there’s a corner shop nearby if you need anything special like food. I’m sure you found it, Catherine, on your quick visit. Then

you are on your own unless I'm summoned, until Monday morning. I'll pick you up around 0800 and take you to HQ, where the lovely Jarvis should be waiting to start the hand-over. I have to warn you that it probably won't amount to much, as he has a monumental chip on his shoulder, but he's bound to hand you over to me as soon as he can, for me to fill in the details, so you'll be all right. I'll arrange for you to meet people, and to be briefed on all the current operations. By the way, you're known as 'S', much the same as the D.G. of MI6 in known as 'C' for some reason."

"That all sounds good," said Clayton. "You'll have time to stop over for a gin, I hope, before you disappear this evening."

"Delighted to, I'm sure, but I don't want to get in your way while you try to settle in."

"Where do you live, as a matter of interest?" asked Catherine.

"I rent a couple of rooms near the office during the week, but I have a small house in the country near Portsmouth, where I still have a few Navy chums. You must come down and stay one weekend."

"Still not married then?" asked Bill.

"Lost interest, once you pinched Catherine!" he joked.

On Monday morning, Nick collected Bill Clayton early, and drove him to Clerkenwell. Bill found it hard to believe that he was being taken to his new 'command' as they headed for the less-than-smart terrace of offices above a shopping precinct. He had been told, by both Sir Robin and by PJ, that Section 11 liked to keep a low profile, but this was ridiculous. It became more so as Nick Marsden led him through a newsagents and into the hairdressing salon run by Mr. Lawrence at the back of the shop. But suddenly, things changed. Nick had to negotiate an elaborate procedure to pass through the gated security system before even gaining access to the stairs, at the top of which there were even more security checks to allow them through the door marked 'Ajax Recruitment'. Bill noticed that there was a piece of paper pinned to the door saying 'No Vacancies'.

"You'll get your own passes and so on later this morning," promised Nick. "Always providing, of course, that you fill in all the forms to the satisfaction of Gladys."

"Who the hell is she?" asked Bill.

"Admin," replied Nick. "Nothing gets done unless Gladys says it can be done, and you've got the right piece of paper from her. She's a wonderful old love, who keeps us all on our toes - you'll see."

They eventually arrived at a door simply marked 'S'. Nick banged on it and went in. He solemnly introduced Bill to Alan Jarvis.

It was immediately obvious that Jarvis was hostile.

"I wish I could offer you a whole-hearted welcome," he said, without bothering to shake Bill's proffered hand, "but since you're doing me out of my job here and I've been told to get out in a hurry, you'll understand if I keep the formalities of the handover to a minimum."

“I’d probably feel the same,” replied Bill, “although I was equally reluctant to leave my job in Cyprus at short notice to take over from you.” He looked around him. “I had a half decent office there, and it was mostly hot and sunny, unlike this.” He waved his hand towards the window, and the driving rain. “So I don’t particularly want to be here either, any more than you want me to be here.”

“*One all!*” thought Nick.

“I’ve prepared a written brief for you,” said Jarvis, ignoring Bill’s protest, “and Nick will show you round and introduce you to people. I gather you already know one another, so that’s handy.”

“We’ve worked together before,” agreed Clayton.

“You military people always stick together,” commented Jarvis, bitterly.

“*Like shit to a blanket,*” muttered Nick.

“If you have any questions about my brief, I suggest we deal with them tomorrow. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to finish clearing my desk.”

“Incidentally,” said Marsden to Jarvis, “don’t bother trying to log on to the computer. Someone came round at the weekend and removed your hard drive.”

The two beat a hasty retreat as Jarvis slumped into his seat, swearing.

As he shut the door behind him, Marsden said, “I had a feeling it was going to be like this. Doesn’t make it at all easy for you, I know, and I’m sorry, but at least I can help you into your new seat.”

“Whatever made the man so bitter?” Bill felt quite dejected, and wondered what he’d let himself in for.

“He was effectively fired by the Cabinet Secretary, no less, and told he was losing his grip, as I understand it. Which he was, up to a point, but you never like to be told these things. He came back from being summoned like a bear with a sore head, and hasn’t been the same since.”

Marsden opened the door of the office next but one to the one marked ‘S’.

“This is where I live,” he announced. “Come on in.”

“What effect has Jarvis being fired had on the team?”

“He hasn’t made many friends around here, to be honest, and most people are glad to see the back of him. Your reputation came before you, too, so there’s an air almost of excitement at getting a chap in charge who knows what he’s doing.”

“That’s something I suppose. Let’s hope I don’t let them down.”

“You won’t. They’re a good bunch here really, and there’s a nice relaxed atmosphere about the place – normally, that is. And a blessed sense of humour blossoms forth now and then, too, which helps relieve the tension of the job. But there are lots of ex-military here, so a sense of humour won’t surprise you.”

Marsden unlocked his safe, and took out an envelope.

“This is your written brief,” he said. “I’ve been through it, and it’s OK, if a little short on detail. But I can fill in the gaps. I suggest we meet people this morning, so they know what you look like at least, and I can brief you on current operations later. We have a small Ops. Room down the corridor. Guys running an op. will move in there, so that they’re all together and don’t start tripping over one another.”

“Sounds good. I’m looking forward to meeting the team. I’m looking forward to seeing my office, too! I’ve hardly set foot in it, yet.”

“It’s bigger and better than this, but not much of a view from anywhere in this building. Still, we are in Clerkenwell and not Mayfair!”

There was a knock on the door, and a petite, fair-haired girl looked in.

“Oh, there you are,” she said. “I thought you might both be in with Mr. Jarvis!”

“Got kicked out,” said Marsden. “Bill, let me introduce you to Barbara, your P.A. and the most important person in your life here – apart from me, of course.”

They shook hands, and the girl smiled warmly.

“What a welcome!” she said. “Sorry I wasn’t here to greet you myself, but I got sent out on an errand. I have a little office between this one and yours. Let me know when you’re ready for a chat.”

“Or a coffee,” said Marsden. “Barbara makes very good coffee.”

“I suppose that’s a hint,” she said. “I’ve got the machine on already, so it won’t be long. I’ll bring it in.”

“That girl,” said Commander Marsden seriously, “may only have ‘PA to S’ on her door, but as you will soon find, she is quite an important lady. She doesn’t just run your office, she actually does things on her own initiative if she thinks it will save you or me a bit of time. She fixes meetings, makes sure the notes are properly encrypted and makes it her business to keep up to speed with everything that’s going on. Probably including a few things we don’t know about, because we don’t need to know for the time being.”

“Does she work for you, too?”

“Only informally and as long as you don’t object. But you and I have to work closely together, so it makes sense. You come first, though.”

“I know about her background,” said Bill.

“Do you, now?” said Nick in astonishment. “Doesn’t take you long, does it?”

“It was important for me to know about the people I might be working with before I decided to take this on,” said Bill. “So I did a bit of homework.”

“Like everyone else in S.11, she was specially selected, and has a very high security clearance,” said Nick.

Barbara reappeared with steaming mugs of coffee.

“I hope you don’t mind a mug,” she said. “I’ve got posh cups for visitors.”

Somehow, the girl reminded him of Catherine, when they had first met in the office in Northern Ireland.

“Bring yours in, if you’re having one,” invited Bill. “The three of us can chat, then. You’re part of my handover, after all.”

“I can if you like,” she replied. “Mr Jarvis has gone.”

“Gone!” exclaimed Nick.

“So far as I can see, he’s cleared his desk, and left the safe door open, so the office is yours when you want it, Colonel.”

“I’d rather meet people first,” replied Bill. “And please only call me Colonel on the most formal of occasions; otherwise, Bill is fine, for you and everyone else here.”

“I’ll pass the word. Mr Jarvis said he’d drop in tomorrow sometime, to see if you had any problems.”

“Sounds to me as if you’re in charge then, Bill,” said Marsden. “That didn’t take long! Congratulations!”

CHAPTER SIX - MOVING TIMES

In spite of everything else that was going on, Professor Jack Barclay had suddenly become concerned about his twin brother, Roger. He had no idea why. In the past, he had rarely given the man a passing thought, they had become so distant, but now he felt unusually uneasy about the fellow. Professor Barclay didn’t often ring his brother. Come to that, his brother didn’t often ring him, either, but they had resolved to keep in closer touch than they used, so Jack decided to ring Roger. He had a feeling that he should, the way identical twins do, sometimes, appear to have a sixth sense. And in any case, he wanted to tell Roger about his own future, which had recently become even more hectic than usual, and showed little sign of becoming any easier. He felt he needed to talk to someone, perhaps to relieve the unbearable stress he was suffering.

They contacted one another so rarely that he even had to look up his brother’s phone number.

Although Jack knew that Roger should be home from work by now, his brother took some time to answer the phone.

“Roger? Hello, it’s Jack.”

“Good heavens, fancy hearing from you after all this time.”

“I know it’s been a long time, but I’ve been simply rushed off my feet lately. Sorry about that.”

“I’ve tried to get you a couple of times in the past month or so, but never seem to get an answer. In fact, I began to wonder if you’d changed your phone number, or moved or something.”

“No. Still in the same old digs, although I spend little time there now, I’m so busy. I seem to be working all hours and travelling a lot. In fact, I feel quite exhausted. But how are you?”

“Well, since you ask, not really very good at the moment.”

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“I’m OK really I suppose, physically. I’m not under the doctor or anything. It’s work, that’s all.”

“Don’t tell me about work! I’ve got more than I can shake a stick at, at the moment. So what’s the problem with your job? I thought you were quite happy at the bank.”

“That’s the problem. I am – or was. They want me to move.”

“After all this time?”

“After all this time. It seems they have to make some savings, so my job is being merged with someone else’s.”

“That’s bad news. What happens to you after this merger?”

“They said I would be ‘let go’, which is a nice way of saying I would be sacked. Or they offered me a job in another branch, doing much the same thing.”

“What’s wrong with that then? Take it.”

“What’s wrong, is that I don’t want to move, that’s what. You know me – a proper stick-in-the-mud. I’m quite happy with where I am, doing what I’m doing, and I don’t want to move. I simply hate change. It would mean meeting new people, which I don’t like, getting used to a new routine and all that.”

“I know you may not like it, but you really should take the new job. It would save you all the trouble of looking for one, if there’s one on offer.”

“I know you’re right, and I suppose it would be the sensible thing to do. But I would have to move home as well, as if taking on a new job isn’t bad enough. I couldn’t commute from here to the new place.”

“Where is the new place?”

“At their Sloane Square branch, in London. I don’t like London much, and I’d never be able to afford to live there. The more I think about it, the more I think I shall have to tell them to ‘let me go’, as they put it.”

“Well, this is extraordinary,” Roger. “You’ll not believe this, but I had a feeling I should ring you for some reason, but really had no idea why. Now I know.”

“Why’s that then?”

“Because I can help, that’s why. If you’ll let me.”

“You’re not going to offer me a job, are you, because you know I don’t understand the first thing about science or whatever it is you do all day?”

“No, no. I can’t offer you a job. But I can offer you accommodation so that you can take the job the bank has offered you. I’ve been thinking of selling my flat in London because I never use it now, so you can have that.”

“I could never afford to buy anything in London. I’m only a bank clerk, after all.”

“But I’m not suggesting you buy it. If I don’t sell it after all, you can live there.”

“I’d never afford the rent on my wages.”

“Now listen to me,” scolded Jack. “My flat is in Battersea, almost walking distance from Sloane Square. And if you don’t fancy the walk, I’m sure there’s a bus of some sort – No.319 I think. You can have the flat rent free, too, if that helps.”

“I really don’t want charity of any sort, even from you, although it’s very kind of you to offer. But I simply couldn’t afford to live there, however ideal it may sound,” replied Roger.

“You manage to rent a place at the moment, don’t you?” enquired Jack. “Where you are now?”

“Yes.”

“Then if you’ll feel better about it, just pay me what you pay now if you want to pay something. The bills will be about the same, and I’ll pay the maintenance charge, as the flat will still be mine. How about it?”

“I hardly know what to say.”

“Think about it, then. How long have you got, before you need to decide about the job?”

“A month, all but a day or so. They only told me a couple of days ago.”

“Well, there you are then,” said Jack. “I’ll put a key in the post to you, and you can go and look at the place before you decide. Just let me know. But if you want my advice, I’d take the job the bank has offered you, as it’s much the same as you’re doing now, and live in my flat. I’ll clear all my stuff out, such as it is, although there’s not much there, as I’ve hardly used the place since I bought it. It’s only small, but should be just right for you. And Sloane Square is a very posh part of London – you could almost regard the job as promotion.”

“I hardly know what to say,” said Roger again. “Except ‘thank you’. I’ll have a look at the flat when I get the key, and let you know. Thank you.”

“No problem at all,” replied the Professor. “I had a funny feeling I should get in touch with you.”

“So did I,” replied Roger. “Funny, that.”

Bill Clayton had been in his new job as ‘S’ for almost three weeks, when he was summoned to a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary, his boss.

Barbara had taken the call, and fixed the time and day with Robin Algar’s P.A., Isabelle Paton. She established that Bill would not need any special briefing for the meeting.

“I’ve no idea what it’s about,” she told Bill, “and I got the impression from my opposite number in the Cabinet Office that Isabelle didn’t have much idea either.”

“I know Sir Robin quite well, so perhaps it’s just a social chat.”

“Probably just wants to know how you’re getting on.”

As it happened, Bill was getting on quite well. Everyone he had met had been very friendly and helpful – with the exception of his predecessor - and for their part, all the people in Section 11 seemed very pleased to have Bill as their new commander. It was only a very small organisation, at least so far as the Headquarters was concerned, so it hadn’t taken Bill long to get to know them all, and to get up to speed with everything that was going on. Working with Nick Marsden again was a real joy, and they had already been able to make a few changes to the way things had been done previously, thanks largely to Bill’s extensive network of what he called, ‘useful contacts’.

Bill’s P.A., Barbara, was proving to be the gem that Nick said she was. On their first morning together, he had told her that, so far as he was concerned, how she ran her part of the organisation was entirely up to her.

“Just make sure my diary is kept up to date, that I have the right papers for the right meeting, and that you get me to the right place at the right time, and we’ll get on like a house on fire,” he had said. “And don’t hesitate to tell me if you think things are going wrong, or could be done better.”

“Leave that to me, then,” she had replied. “I keep my ear close to the ground here and around the place generally, so I usually know what’s going on. I’ll tell you if there’s anything you need to know.”

“And do help Commander Marsden as best you can,” he asked. “I know I have first call on your time, but Nick and I work so closely together that it makes sense to have you helping us both.”

“I’ll certainly do that,” she replied. “I know that one of you is always on duty or on call, and I really don’t mind staying late or coming in early if it helps.”

“Good of you, but you have your own life to lead.”

Bill paused.

“How is Donald, by the way?”

Barbara sat silent for a moment.

“You know about Donald?” she almost whispered.

“Yes, I do. It’s not that I’ve been prying, but I’m paid to know what’s going on, that’s all.”

Barbara was silent again, collecting her thoughts.

“Nobody else here knows about Donald,” she said quietly.

“I shan’t say a word, I promise.”

“I love my little boy dearly,” she said, almost tearfully. “My Mother, bless her, looks after him wonderfully well, and he adores her, but whatever time of the day or night I get home, Donald and I always have a little cuddle and a chat. He insists on it, even if it’s the early hours of the morning. He gets very cross if he discovers I haven’t woken him for a hug.”

“He’s four now, isn’t he?”

“You know everything.”

“It’s my job,” replied Bill. “Just make sure my job doesn’t get in the way of your relationship with your son, that’s all.”

Barbara nodded. “Thank you for that.”

“It’s probably already occurred to you,” said Bill, “that Donald puts you into a very vulnerable position. You’re in a top secret post, working for a top secret organisation. If anyone really wanted to know anything about us or what we are doing, it might be only too easy to blackmail you, through Donald.”

“By kidnapping him, you mean?”

“Something like that,” replied Bill.

The girl nodded. “That’s why nobody here knows about him. I keep him very much to myself.”

“Good,” said Bill. “If ever we get involved in anything which I judge could put you at risk, I shall make sure the Section keeps an eye on Donald, the way it would on anyone else we are asked to protect.”

Barbara got up, crossed behind the desk, kissed Bill lightly on the forehead, and left.

Bill had always liked children, although he had never had any of his own. He even used to mend toys, for an orphanage, when he was in Northern Ireland. When he got home that evening, he told Catherine.

Although there was no agenda for his meeting in the Cabinet Office, Barbara nevertheless presented him with a folder containing a brief up-date on all their present operations, a note about the Section's financial situation, and summaries of the two most recent papers from SIS about the current terrorist threat.

"Just in case," she said.

At the last minute, Isabelle rang to ask if Commander Marsden was possibly free to accompany 'S'.

He was, so did.

"Sounds to me," said Nick, "as if we are to be briefed about a new piece of action coming our way. Could be important, too, with both of us going."

"Makes sense anyway, since you're in charge of Ops.," said Bill.

"The man probably doesn't trust you to get it right when you pass it on, as you're new!" joked Nick.

Since they had no staff car, they decided to share one of the BMW motorbikes from the garage under their offices. They arrived in Whitehall, looking like a couple of couriers, and chained the bike to railings, in spite of two duty policemen, who ran towards them. They backed off, and promised to keep a close eye on it, when they saw their I.D. cards. Once inside, Isabelle ushered them into the Cabinet Secretary's office, and immediately brought in a tray of tea.

"Good to see you both again," Robin Algar greeted them, shaking hands. "There's no agenda, but I see Barbara has nevertheless provided you with a brief. I knew she would – she once worked here you know. Excellent girl!"

Bill agreed. "She looks after both of us very well."

"I really wanted to know how you were getting on, Bill, since I moved you in such a rush, but I have a new task to tell you about later, which is why I asked Nick to come along as well. So how are things?"

"Going well, thanks," replied Bill. "I'm sure I shall like my time there once I've settled in properly."

"He's being modest," chipped in Nick. "He settled in remarkably quickly, and is getting on well with everyone already."

"I'm keen to know about your handover," said Algar. "How was that?"

"I must admit I've had better," replied Clayton, "although the written brief was adequate enough I suppose."

"But.....?"

"I'll tell you 'but', Sir Robin," said Nick, chipping in. "Friend Jarvis more or less kicked Bill out of his office in five minutes, and left me to do all the briefing. Jarvis himself disappeared about an hour after Bill arrived in the place."

"Good grief."

"I would have been a bit lost without Nick, I must admit, in spite of my useful chat with P.J. before I left Cyprus," said Clayton. "It was good job Nick and I knew one another, although even that seemed to rankle with Jarvis."

“I was rather afraid something like that would happen,” said the Cabinet Secretary. “My interview with your predecessor, when I told him he was being moved, was most unpleasant.”

“He has a chip on his shoulder the size of Everest,” said Marsden.

“It’s a pity he took it so badly,” said Algar. “He did a good job at first, but seemed to be loosing his touch towards the end, which is why we looked for him to be replaced.”

“Couldn’t have picked a better chap, in my view,” volunteered Marsden. “Bill has been warmly welcomed by everyone in the Section, and is like a breath of fresh air about the place.”

“If I may say so,” said Clayton, “Alan Jarvis’s attitude worries me a bit. It could be dangerous for the ex-Head of a top secret organisation to be wandering about with a grudge, even within SIS.”

“My thought precisely,” agree Algar. “I’ve asked them to keep a close watch on the man. Any problems with your current operations?”

“None that I know of,” replied Clayton. “As you know, we have a few small, low key jobs going on, but our team in Africa which did the Zimbabwe job is back, we have a small team on the animal rights threat to the drugs company man, and a slightly bigger team in Moscow keeping an eye on the BP man. Any developments on that front from your point of view?”

“The Foreign Office hasn’t reported any change. The Russians still want to control the joint company, and are making life difficult for our top man there. It would never surprise me if they don’t just cancel his visa and kick him out.”

“I hope that’s all,” said Marsden. “Our chaps have reported that the Russian’s are quite openly following him around, but he doesn’t know we’re there.”

“Of course, we’re also looking after two Russian dissidents, as you know,” added Clayton. “One’s actually come over, and is running scared, while the other is still dithering about whether to turn or not. He’s also running scared of his KGB comrades, so we’re having to keep close tabs on them both, and the opposition.”

“We definitely need the other KGB man to come over,” said Algar, “but he certainly won’t if anything happens to his colleague.”

“So far as we can tell, the people in Moscow don’t know we’ve got a double on our books, or that we may soon have another.”

Clayton shook his head. “Jarvis knows,” he said quietly. “That man worries me.”

“There’s another case I want you to take on,” said Algar, “which also has a Russian element, but this is even more complex. That’s why I called you in.”

He briefed them quickly on the background to the perceived threats facing Professor Jack Barclay, and handed them a written brief about the work Barclay was doing.

“I need you to keep a close watch on the man,” Algar concluded.

“Does he know?” asked Clayton.

“The American and Arab offers have been made quite openly, so he obviously knows of their interest, but he knows nothing about the Russian’s apparent intention

to disrupt his work. Neither does he know that I am asking you to act as guardian angels.”

“We shall need to consider whether perhaps he should be told,” said Nick Marsden. “It might be easier with his active co-operation.”

“One of your problems is that Barclay moves around a great deal, and works very long hours. Not just at Culham, but also at the new laboratory at Harwell. On top of that, he frequently attends learned seminars, sometimes as a participant, delivering papers and so on, occasionally abroad. We do, though, have access to his weekly diary, and I have arranged for this to be emailed directly to you, starting next week. Here’s a copy of this week’s.”

The two men from Section 11 peered at the document.

“I begin to wonder,” said Clayton, “if we may not need additional full time resources for this one.”

“My thoughts precisely,” agreed Marsden. “This looks complicated to me, and it could prove most difficult to keep up with the man.”

“Call up some of your reserve staff, then, and let me know how many you decide on, so that I can authorise the necessary expenditure.”

“We’ve got six just finishing refresher training – they should be enough reinforcements, to start with at least.”

“I still think it would be helpful to tell the man that we are on the case,” said ‘S’.

“You could be right,” said the Cabinet Secretary, “but according to his Director, the professor is already showing signs of considerable stress because his research is not going as well as it was, and I would not want to add to his worries if we can avoid it.”

“We’ll manage without him knowing for the time being then, but I’ll come back to you if I think it would help for him to be told.”

“What about photos and that sort of thing?” asked Marsden.

“Before you leave, I’ll give you a package containing still photos and video footage of the man, recordings of his voice, and brief biological and biographical details. MI5 managed to gain entry to his digs near Culham, and has taken film of the inside so you can see something of his lifestyle when he’s at home – which isn’t often these days. It will also give you a clue as to how he normally dresses and so on. I leave it to you how you use this material to brief your team, but, as usual, keep copies to the minimum.”

“I’d like to see his personal file, with his security clearance, if that can be arranged, and the files relating to his immediate team,” said Clayton.

Algar nodded.

“And for good measure,” said Marsden, “I’d like to see the same relating to Alan Jarvis; especially his security clearance. When was that last checked, do you know?”

“Good thinking, Nick. I’ll find out, and if it’s old, I’ll run the rule over him again,” promised the Cabinet Secretary.

“Can you also make sure that we’re kept briefed about Russian activity, especially any within a few miles of Barclay, wherever he is?”

“I’ve already laid that on.”

“If the American’s are interested in the Professor, I guess the CIA will be close by as well,” said Clayton.

“We both know a few people there, but I’ll check that out, if you like,” said Marsden.

“Thanks Nick.”

“Thank you both for coming,” concluded Sir Robin. “This is quite an important task for you, so give it your best shot, as I’m sure you will. Barclay is quite free to choose to go to America or Abu Dhabi or anywhere else for that matter if that’s what he wants, although we all hope he doesn’t. His work is too important to this country. Your job is to make sure he isn’t forced into doing anything against his will.”

As they left Algar’s office, Nick looked at his watch.

“I had rather hoped the old man might have offered us lunch,” he said, “but not even so much as a sandwich, never mind roast beef at his club.”

“Looks like the Red Lion, then, across the road. We’ll pick up the package after we’ve had a little something or other. The bike can stay chained to the railings.”

They nodded to the policemen as they crossed Whitehall.

“Shan’t be long,” said Nick, cheerily.

It wasn’t until they got back to Clerkenwell that they were able to study the dossier they had been given.

Nick started getting together his team, and prepared to brief them. Other members of the Section 11 headquarters team were looking after the logistics, like preparing vehicles, getting train tickets from the travel agent’s across the road, arranging accommodation, copying photographs and so on. Gladys was having a field day, preparing forms for them all to complete and sign, while ‘Bottom’, the retired Petty Officer who ran the armoury, prepared suitable weapons for them. The planning of the operation went like clockwork, as it had been done so many times before, although it was Bill Clayton’s first. Nick bustled about making sure everything happened as it should, and eventually appointed one of his most senior staff to run the operation. An ex-member of Special Branch, Clive Newell was under the strictest instructions to keep Bill informed of any significant development, in view of the personal interest being taken at the highest levels in Whitehall.

“There are two things I don’t like about this little operation,” said Clayton to Marsden. “One is the Russian connection and the other is the fact that our target, Barclay, is apparently already under stress. The last thing we want is for him to have a nervous breakdown.”

“We could perhaps do with some medical advice,” suggested Nick. “Know anybody?”

“As it happens, I do,” replied ‘S’. “A retired RAF Air Commodore who used to head up the Institute of Aviation Medicine.”

“Could be a useful addition to the Section 11 team, anyway. I’ve often thought that a bit of psychological profiling of some of our customers could be useful.”

“Doc. Perkins has done some of that,” said Clayton. “He could also cast his eye over friend Jarvis,” he suggested. “I’m not too happy about him, either. But it would mean adding yet another member to the Section 11 team, which nobody is supposed to know about, even if only part-time.”

“Should be secure enough, coming from that background.”

“Perhaps I’ll give him a bell and see if he’s doing anything special at the moment,” said Clayton. “Then I can have a word with Algar.”

Clive Newell knocked, and stuck his head round the door. “I’m going to brief my guys in five minutes,” he announced. “Department heads are there; do either of you want to sit in?”

They all made their way to the briefing room, where the assembled team was shown photos and videos of their ‘target’ and told about Barclay’s work and its national importance. Newell emphasised that, since he was already under considerable stress, Barclay knew nothing about the fact that he was to be watched over by S. 11, which made it imperative that the teams of watchers stayed well in the background, as they had been trained. It was a thorough and detailed briefing, at the end of which Newell’s squad organised themselves into pairs who would work together throughout the operation.

Finally, Newell turned to Clayton. “Anything you want to add, boss?”

“Two things,” replied ‘S’. “First, I have arranged for GCHQ to mount a keyword intercept operation on Barclay’s phones, in his laboratory, at home and on his mobile, so we should get an early warning of any new attempt to coerce him away from his work at Culham. You will be briefed if anything turns up. Secondly, I am also arranging for some medical expertise to monitor the professor’s behaviour, bearing in mind the considerable stress he’s working under at the moment. Not only is he being headhunted by two separate countries to work for them, but also his own research has unexpectedly hit the buffers, although probably only temporarily. But he is getting increasingly frustrated, what with one thing and another, so I want you all to look for any signs of this surfacing. If he knew about the Russian interest, which is menacing, and our own involvement, that could well drive him to breaking point, so we need to tread carefully. Finally, perhaps some of you technical chaps could arrange for suitable tracking devices to be installed – briefcase, car, that sort of thing. They will help us to keep tabs on the man.”

Newell drew the briefing to a close. “Usual reporting procedures by encrypted satellite mobiles to the 24 hour desk here, and between yourselves when necessary. No need at this stage for anything more than personal protection weapons – draw those from the armoury, but don’t forget the paperwork from Gladys first. I suggest two teams use a car or van of some sort for static observation, the rest of you on motorbikes. The latest SatNav maps of Culham, Harwell and the Oxford area have been downloaded onto your mobiles. Gladys has drawn up a list of suitable B&B accommodation in the area.”

“And don’t forget to keep the receipts,” interrupted Gladys.

“Barclay also has a flat in Battersea, but seldom uses it,” continued Newell. “Some of you may need to travel abroad at short notice, although we should have a few days’ warning as we shall have access to Barclay’s diary, but make sure you have your passports with you. Any questions?”

There were none.

“Very well, then,” concluded Newell. “Remember that this is a high profile operation being monitored closely by very senior people in Whitehall. Keep on your toes, report anything you think is in the least unusual, especially if you should suspect that other people are keeping a watch on the man. Whatever you do, don’t lose Barclay.”

After the briefing, Nick and Bill went back to ‘S’’s office.

“Newell seems to have picked a good team, so I hope it all goes well,” commented Commander Marsden. “No reason why it shouldn’t, of course, but the Russian angle worries me a bit.”

“Me too,” agreed Clayton. “The Russians are a bit jumpy at present, what with closing our British Council offices, and now starting to fly their bombers through the Iceland/Faroes gap again. We’re already running the BP operation in Moscow, too, not to mention our defector friends here.”

“You never know when they’ll do something really daft,” said Marsden. “Their agents are pretty thick on the ground over here, at the moment, so they are difficult to monitor.”

“There’s something else you should know,” said ‘S’. “So far, I have deliberately not told Newell and his team in case it makes their job even more complicated. I’m not even sure that Sir Robin Algar knows, either. But Professor Barclay has a twin brother – an identical twin, too.”

“I’ll be damned,” exclaimed Nick. “Not in the same line of business, I hope.”

“No, thank goodness. He’s a bank clerk, somewhere or other. Apart from looks, he’s as different as chalk from cheese from his brother, and they rarely meet. But if he does turn up, then our guys will get thoroughly confused if they’re not careful. Which is why getting tracking devices in place is so important.”

Marsden thought for a moment. “I think I’ll spend the night in the Ops. Room, until our teams are properly organised,” he said.

“I’ll join you,” said Clayton.

When she learnt that the two men in her life were planning to stay in the office overnight, ‘S’’s P.A., Barbara, decided she would stay late as well to get them settled. She organised a camp bed for each of them in their respective offices, and drew bedding from the store run by ‘Aunty’. She knew they would get all the coffee they needed while in the Ops Room, but hurried into the Clerkenwell precinct below their offices to collect a bottle of white wine from the off licence, to have with the fish and chips she bought for their supper. She made sure she kept the receipts for Gladys, but declined to join them. With nothing else she could usefully do until the morning, she went home to Donald.

It was quiet in the Ops Room. Apart from the Duty Officer, there was only one other Section 11 man actively running his specified operation. He was looking after the potential KGB defector, a tricky and sensitive undertaking that was keeping everybody on their toes. Everything else appeared to be running quite normally, although Clive Newell was there to keep in touch with his recently deployed teams, as Operation Fusion got under way.

It was nearly midnight when one of the teams reported in.

“This is Fusion Team ‘Bravo’,” said the voice. “We have identified our target, and are keeping in contact.”

That was all, but it was enough to tell ‘S’ and his two colleagues that the operation was now under way. Newell acknowledged the message, and that was that.

The three men looked at one another. “So far so good,” said Marsden. “Now the work really starts.”

Bill Clayton nodded. “I wish I was out there with them,” he said, wistfully.

“You’re getting too old for that sort of thing!” replied Marsden.

There were a couple of other reports during the night. The technical support team reported that a tracking device had been fitted to Barclay’s car, parked outside his lodgings. And a member of team ‘Echo’ had managed to talk his way on to the staff at Culham – ‘a sort of cleaning job’, he had said – but it meant that they now had a man on the inside, more or less free to roam at will. Gladys said later that if he was being paid for it, she would knock it off his allowances. But it also meant that ‘Echo’ now needed a replacement. Within an hour, a new man was in the ops room being briefed, before drawing a Browning from the armoury, grabbing a Kawasaki bike from the garage, and heading for the A40 at high speed.

“I’ll have to do the paperwork in the morning,” sighed Newell.

“Any of that wine left?” asked Marsden.

“I don’t think there is. I remember you emptying the bottle!” replied Clayton. “But there’s a spare in my cupboard. I’ll get it.”

“Your Barbara thinks of everything.”

CHAPTER SEVEN - THE RUSSIAN INTERVENTION

It seemed to Professor Jack Barclay that ‘good days’ were almost a thing of the past, the way work was going at the moment. In fact, he couldn’t remember when he had last had a good day, by any definition. He and his small team suddenly appeared to be getting nowhere, and they had concluded that they really needed to go back over some of their earlier work in an effort to find out where they were going wrong. They had decided to have a brain storming session.

It had started at eight o’clock that morning, and they had really made very little progress by the time Barclay’s undergraduate assistant had appeared with sandwiches and hot coffee for lunch. Except that it wasn’t lunch. It was getting on for dinner time, but they hadn’t noticed. In spite of the time, they decided to work on for a bit longer in an effort to complete their revision in a single working day.

It probably wasn't the sandwiches, and they couldn't agree whether or not it was the coffee, although that was the more likely, but quite suddenly afterwards, a piece of inspired mathematics by Barclay suggested that they may, after all, be on the verge of their first step forward for some time. And the more they looked at it, the more they studied it, the more they refined it, the more excited they became that this could be the solution they had all been looking for. There was much more to be done, not just to test the theory again and again to ensure that there were no flaws in it, but then to transfer it into the possibly more difficult practical world of the laboratory.

They were all nearing exhaustion as they parted that night, none more so than Barclay, but he did actually feel that perhaps today hadn't been such a bad day after all. Not a good day, but, if they really had made some progress, perhaps not as bad as most had been recently. Leading his team through this morass of theoretical quantum mechanics for a glimpse of the future was stressful enough, but he had the added pressure being put upon him by those trying to persuade him to work for them instead of Britain's Atomic Energy Authority. Last week, it had been the vastly rich Gulf States, at last officially offering him undreamed of resources to continue his work in an organisation of his own, which they would help him to establish and finance with seemingly unlimited funds. And there was no denying the fact that he could make quicker progress with greater financial backing, even in the UK if only the Government would allocate more money for research projects like his. He knew that his was not the only work to suffer because of public expenditure constraints, but that did not make it any easier to resist the temptation of moving to the Middle East with its untold riches.

And then, only yesterday, he had received yet another call from his friend and close associate at the Lawrence Livermore University in California, pleading again for him to work jointly with them in the interests of progressing more speedily for their mutual benefit. He knew it would make sense to do so, and certainly he would find California more congenial than the Arab world. We were, after all, allies who enjoyed a special relationship, so what would be the harm? And yet, he felt it would not be the right thing to do. But he could well do without these additional pressures, especially now. He was so busy, indeed, that he had been almost curt to his long-time friend in America. He would simply have to find time to ring him back. Not tonight though. He was far too tired, and yet at the same time eager to press on after the apparent turning point he and his team had possibly reached today. He was still mulling over in his mind today's events as he left the laboratory, and he was sure he would never sleep tonight.

Certainly, he never noticed the two men in an old VW Beetle who followed him as he left the car park and began his short drive home.

Jack Barclay was right about not sleeping, and in the end he gave up trying. He convinced himself that the rest would be enough to refresh him for tomorrow's work. He tried hard, as he lay in the dark, to order the various pressures he was facing, and to prioritise what he should do. He and his team of fellow nuclear physicists were working towards achieving the apparently impossible goal of destroying matter to create energy. It was Einstein who first postulated the theory,

with his famous $E=MC^2$ equation. If only it was as simple to achieve as that theory suggested. And yet, it had been done. Not just in his own laboratory at Culham, but in France and America. The great problem was to develop a system that could control and sustain the fusion process so as to offer a new source of usable energy. Short bursts of nuclear fusion were regularly being achieved, but were not enough. Success by him and his team would put Britain firmly at the forefront of the research designed to re-create the power of the sun and the stars, using the same processes. In the sun, it is gravity that fuses hydrogen atoms together to generate helium, and produce pure energy. In his laboratory, Barclay used the power of magnetism to control the hydrogen plasma, while his new venture at the Rutherford laboratory would use the power of laser beams to focus energy onto the hydrogen fuel. And this was where he had been struggling in recent weeks.

He knew that similar work was taking place in America, where his fellow scientists at the National Ignition Facility were confident of achieving a limited form of controllable nuclear fusion using the same laser technology. But his work was ahead of theirs. Nevertheless, it made their pleas for him to join them very tempting, not least because they enjoyed more generous research funding. Perhaps he should visit the facility again soon, to see how they were progressing, and to swap notes. On the other hand, scientists in France were developing and constructing a new fusion project using magnetic fields, as they were used at Culham, to create the conditions for fusion. Barclay, however, was convinced that future progress rested with the use of ever more powerful lasers. He was leading the development of those powerful energy pulses, and working to determine how many laser arrays would be required to generate sufficient energy within the fusion chamber. He knew that in America, they had estimated that 192 would be sufficient, but Barclay believed that, with a modified fusion chamber design, the same effect could be achieved with fewer lasers. Today his team had, for the first time in weeks, made real progress in solving that particular problem.

Jack Barclay really could do without the added pressure coming from the Arab states to help them develop this alternative energy source. He had known for some time that he was likely to be approached, but the formal offer had put things on to a rather different footing. He would certainly need to inform his Director, and although he had no real interest in accepting the offer, he knew that outright and immediate rejection might not be the best thing to do from a diplomatic point of view. With any luck, he would be able to shuffle off responsibility for turning down the proposal onto the politicians for them to handle. He would brief his Director tomorrow, if he could find the time.

Time, though, was in short supply. Apart from the pressures of his own research, both at Culham and now at Harwell, he wanted to visit colleagues at the National Ignition Facility in California again soon, and the Director of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor at Cadarache, in France had invited him to pay yet another visit. He could hardly refuse, since their work on electro-magnetic plasma containment was similar to that being undertaken in his own laboratory at Culham. He also had a long-standing invitation to visit the CERN Large

Hadron Collider facility in Switzerland, which was also being used to destroy particles at enormous temperatures and pressures, although not to create fusion but rather to discover the conditions which existed immediately after the big bang. Barclay had been there before, more than once, and very much wanted to accept this invitation, although he was not so sure he wanted to present yet another paper about his work at the same time. He would say 'no' to that, not least because he was already behind in preparing his paper for the Royal Society. But the work at CERN fascinated him, and he often wondered if there could be some direct correlation between his work and that being done in Switzerland.

He also needed to clear his London flat, having decided he could no longer justify hanging on to it – he simply never had the time these days to get there for even a short break. He was glad he had offered it to his brother, but he, of course, was something else to worry about.

Dawn was breaking when Barclay finally gave up any thoughts of a decent sleep, and decided instead to make himself a good breakfast. He was hungry as well as tired. He immediately realised that it was some days since he had done any shopping. There was no breakfast. Instead, he went to the laboratory early, knowing that the canteen would be open before too long.

Breakfast was also on the mind of Op. Fusion Team 'Foxtrot' - the two men on a motorbike who followed him at a discrete distance.

From his desk in the Cabinet Office, Sir Robin Algar got hold of 'S' on the red phone to ask about the Barclay operation.

"How are things going?" he asked.

"No problems," came the reply. "Except that the man works extraordinary hours, and my chaps are finding it very tiring keeping tabs on him. But we seem to be the only people taking an interest at the moment."

"That could be about to change, which is why I'm ringing. Barclay has made something of a breakthrough in recent days, and has also had a formal bid from the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi, which plenty of people now know about. We are dealing with their request on a diplomatic level, although we haven't yet quite decided how to handle it. But we'll probably get him to pay a visit soon to discuss it, just to play for time. The other thing is that he's going to the States next week, to see the people out there who want him to work for them."

"Lawrence Livermore University, is that?"

"Correct."

"I think I'll pre-position a couple of teams out there, so that we're ahead of the man. Let me know about Abu Dhabi, and I'll do the same if there's time."

"Do that."

"I suppose the Russians know about this?"

"Bound to by now."

"I'll alert my teams to be on the lookout for strangers. Do we know who's running our newly turned double from the KGB – or FSB as it now is?"

"I'll have a word, and see if we can pick anything up from that source."

“That would be useful.”

Algar hung up.

Clayton buzzed Barbara, to get Newell and Marsden in for a chat as soon as possible.

“This is beginning to look interesting,” said Clayton after he had briefed them.

“We always thought it would,” replied Newell. “But I’ll need reinforcements if I’m to deploy teams to California and Abu Dhabi at the same time. I can’t afford to send everyone away from this side of things.”

“Agreed,” said ‘S’.

Barbara knocked on the door.

“Sir Robin on the red phone again,” she announced.

“Now what?” mumbled Clayton, as he took the call.

“I thought you should know immediately,” announced Algar, “that the Russians have been on to your predecessor, Alan Jarvis.”

“What the hell are they up to?” exclaimed Clayton.

“Intelligence from our double, that’s all, that one of their agents has made contact with him. No idea why, at this stage.”

“Perhaps they’re trying to get at us, through Jarvis.”

“Could be. We’re getting taps on his phones, email, and all that as soon as possible, so we may soon know more.”

“We need to keep a watch on the man,” said Clayton.

“Get someone there as quickly as possible,” demanded Algar.

“One small problem,” said ‘S’, “is that he knows all my people. He’s bound to spot anyone from here taking an interest.”

“Damn! That hadn’t occurred to me.”

“I’ll have to get someone new on the job, but that could take a bit of time. We’ll do what we can meanwhile, but we’ll have to be hellish careful. If he gets the slightest hint that we’re looking at him, anything could happen.”

“We could try someone from Special Branch, perhaps.”

“I’d rather keep this to myself if we can. But I’ll let you know if we can’t.”

“I must leave that to you,” said Algar. “But we do need to know what the Russians are up to as soon as possible.”

“You may hear first, once you’ve got the phone taps in place.”

“I’ll let you know.”

Clayton briefed the two men still in his office.

“That’s not good news,” said Newell.

“I never did trust that man Jarvis,” volunteered Marsden.

“Let’s try to think this through,” suggested Clayton. “The Russians obviously contacted Jarvis because he used to be here, rather than because of where he is now. He hasn’t been in his new job long enough to be of any use to them yet. They probably know he left under a cloud and has a chip on shoulder, so they may think they could use him to do something for them and get revenge on us at the same time. But what?”

“Maybe it’s one of our targets they’re after.”

“Barclay!” they all said at once.

“Of course – Barclay. They must know about the Abu Dhabi and American interest in the man.”

“And if they know he’s planning another trip to California, they may suspect that he’s going to work for them,” suggested Marsden.

“Whatever they suspect, they will want the man out of the way.”

“Using Jarvis? Surely not!” said Newell.

“We don’t actually know yet why they approached Jarvis. We’re only guessing that it has something to do with Barclay, and we certainly don’t know how Jarvis reacted,” Clayton reminded them. “But we can’t afford to ignore the possibility that it is related to our man, so we must plan accordingly.”

“We need to deploy someone to keep an eye on Jarvis immediately. Trouble is, he knows all our people, so we need someone new.”

“I’ll get a couple of reserves in for the time being,” suggested Marsden. “Aunty can get one of his make-up artist friends to work on them a bit – different hair colour, spectacles and so on, so they might stand a chance until we get someone he doesn’t know. They will know Jarvis, but he might not recognise them.”

“Give it a try,” said Clayton. “I’ll try to get a new man in quickly, but if I can’t, we may need to fall back on Special Branch for one of their top men. Give it some thought if you will, Clive, since that’s where you’re from.”

The meeting broke up, and Bill Clayton buzzed for Barbara.

“Something wrong?” she asked, seeing his worried expression.

“Could be very wrong. Your old boss Alan Jarvis has been contacted by a KGB man working over here.”

“Whatever for?”

“That’s what we have to find out. But we need to keep a watch on the man now, and we need someone to do it who he doesn’t know. Try to get hold of General Pearson-Jones for me. He’s at the Ministry of Defence, so use the red phone. He may just know someone.”

He did, of course.

Head of Section 11 briefly explained his problem, and why he needed someone quickly who Jarvis didn’t know.

The General whistled quietly and was silent for a moment.

“You could be in deep shit old man, d’you know that?”

“I know. Any ideas where I might find a new recruit in double quick time?”

Silence again.

“Since it’s you, Bill, I’ll make a supreme sacrifice. You can have my best chap here. He’s due a move soon, but you can borrow him on secondment for as long as you need.”

“Tell me about him.”

“Special Services, Staff Sergeant, tough as old boots and more secure than the Bank of England’s vault. No family ties, happy to work all hours, and itching to get back into the field. I think he’s just the man you want.”

“Sounds excellent. When can I have him?”

“I’ll tell him about you straight away – he’s already aware of Section 11 – and he can be with you later this afternoon. I’ll send his personal record file over by messenger immediately, and send him over on the bus a bit later.”

“Why can’t he bring his Service record with him?”

“Because he’d read the bloody thing, that’s why! He’s like that.”

“What’s his name, by the way?”

“Miller. ‘Dusty’ Miller. Your good lady wife Catherine is bound to know him; they were in Iraq at about the same time.”

“Thanks, PJ.”

“Don’t mention it. And good luck – you’re probably going to need it.”

Clayton called in his P.A., Marsden and Newell.

“There’s going to be a new man in the Section,” he told them, “arriving later this afternoon. Staff Sergeant ‘Dusty’ Miller of the Int. Corps, currently serving in the Special Forces, on posting to MOD and coming over here on loan for as long as we need him. His job will be to keep an eye on Jarvis, if I decide he’s the right man for it. Make sure Mr. Lawrence and the others in building security are warned to expect him. He will have his military I.D. card with him, and he’s to be shown straight up here to my office. Warn the section heads that he will be around, and will need briefing as a matter of urgency. Tell Gladys, too. I expect she’ll find some forms for him to fill in! Barbara, I shall want to show him photos and videos of Jarvis, so see what you can find in a hurry. And I’d like to see Jarvis’s file again, while you’re about it. Miller’s Army Staff Record folder will be arriving by messenger – make sure I get it immediately. With any luck, we should be able to deploy him late tomorrow or the day after.”

“I’ve got two chaps on their way in who can cover the job until Miller’s up to speed,” said Marsden. “They’ll need photos of Jarvis, too,” he said, turning to Barbara.

“Be careful what vehicle we give them,” said Clayton. “Remember that Jarvis will be as familiar with our fleet as he is with our people.”

“I’ve already got two cars organised, which I’m borrowing from a second hand dealer I know. Nothing fast or very posh, but they will work.”

“Make sure the Tech Support chaps get communications kit organised for our new man, and find him a password and call-sign. Any problems let me know. There’s a lot to do, so get cracking.”

Miller’s file arrived less than an hour after Clayton had phoned the General. It made interesting reading, and the more he thumbed through it, the more ‘S’ became convinced that Miller was exactly what they were looking for. The only adverse comments were about his occasional tendency towards insubordination – one reporting officer had described him as ‘cheeky’. Clayton could handle that. It was almost certain, too, that Catherine would have come across him during their time with the SAS in Iraq. The dates were about the same. Clayton rang Catherine at home.

He showed Miller’s photograph on his file to Barbara.

“That’s the chap we are expecting,” he said. “Make sure you’re told when he enters the building, and show him straight in to my office. I’ll introduce him to everyone else after we’ve had a little chat.”

It was quite a bit later when Miller arrived. Barbara met him upstairs, and escorted him through the door into ‘Ajax Recruitment.’

“No vacancies, eh?” said Miller, seeing the notice pinned to the door. “What am I doing here then?”

“You’ll soon find out.” They got to the door marked ‘S’. “Go straight in,” she said.

Miller knocked politely on the open door, and went straight in. Clayton had his back to the door, and was gazing out of the window.

“Come in, Miller.”

Miller hesitated. He was already in. “Thank you Colonel,” he said, and went up to the desk.

“Shut the door, Miller.”

The man retraced his steps, shut the door, went up to the desk again and sat down on the chair in front of it.

“Sit down, Miller,” said Clayton, still gazing out of the window.

Miller stood up, said ‘Thank you Colonel’ again, and sat down. This wasn’t going quite the way ‘Dusty’ Miller had hoped. He noticed his personal record file among the clutter of other papers on the desk in front of him, but it was closed. Not that he could read upside-down, anyway.

Barbara knocked and put her head round the door.

“Coffee?” she asked.

“Yes please,” replied Clayton. “Sergeant Miller has his black with one sugar.”

“Does it say that on my staff file, Colonel?” asked Miller.

Clayton turned round to face the man who he had been watching in the reflection on the window.

“No it doesn’t, Miller. Sergeant Catherine Wilson told me. You probably remember her better as ‘The Cat’, from your days in Iraq.”

“Of course I remember her. A brave and tough kid, she was. Does she work here, too?”

“No. She’s was my Chief Clerk once.”

“Bloody hell!” exclaimed Miller. “Small world, innit!”

“Very. She’s left the Army now, and we’re married.”

“Well I’m damned! You certainly picked a good ‘un there, Colonel, if I may say so.”

“She remembers you, Miller.” He picked up Miller’s staff file. “This only tells half of it,” he said, waving it towards the man.

Unusually, Miller was lost for words. He certainly had not been expecting this, and was hurriedly trying to remember what else Catherine Wilson, as was, could have said about him.

Clayton grinned at the man, and sat down behind his desk. “Welcome aboard,” he said. “The Cat is looking forward to meeting you again.”

“Thank you, Colonel,” replied Miller, much relieved.

“I gather that you led the party that went out into the desert looking for her.”

“That’s right, Colonel. We got word that she had escaped, and knew she would try to make her way back to base. Frankly, we had given up hope of ever finding her or ever seeing her again, but eventually she got home first, before we found her. I never cease to be amazed how she survived, after what they’d done to her, let alone make her way back. As I said, brave and tough.”

Clayton nodded. “I’m a lucky man.”

“You weren’t out there too, were you Colonel?”

“No. We met afterwards, in Northern Ireland.”

“I know about what you did out there,” said Miller. “Rule 1 – ‘always find out what you’re getting into before you get into it’. I looked you up before I left the office.”

“Did you now? Well, now we know a bit about one another, let’s get down to the business of the day. If I assess that you’re the sort of chap I’m looking for, you’ll be out in the field again, if you can call London that, and won’t see much of the inside of this place at all.”

“That’s good,” replied Miller. “I was getting bored in MOD.”

“You won’t get bored on this job, if it develops the way I think it will. And it could be quite dangerous.”

“Even better.”

“You’ll be operating on your own, and the hours will be long and sometimes tedious. You’ll be on the tail of a man who works pretty normal office hours, but you’ll be on him out of hours as well. All hours, in fact. I want to know what he does, where he goes and especially who he meets. There are phone taps and all the rest of it in place, but you will be the guy on the ground.”

“Why me, Colonel?”

“Because he doesn’t know you, that’s why. And please don’t call me ‘Colonel’. There’s no need in this organisation”

“Who are we talking about then?”

“The chap who used to sit here. The chap who, until I took over, was Head of Section 11. He was effectively sacked, and has a chip on his shoulder and a grudge against us.”

“So what?”

“So the Russians have been in touch with him, that’s what. We think they want to use him to do a job for them, which will also let him get his own back at the same time.”

“What sort of thing.”

“We’re only guessing at the moment, but we can’t afford to be proved right when it’s too late.” Clayton briefed Miller about the Barclay case, Op Fusion, and Alan Jarvis. “Your job will be to stick to Jarvis like glue, report everything he does, and watch everyone he meets.”

“Sounds right up my street, Colonel.”

“Good. Your briefing will take a day or so, depending on how bright you are, and you’ll be kitted out with all the latest communications gear there is. Your mobile phone, for example, will be linked to a secure satellite and fitted out with a high resolution camera – something like ten mega pixels, I think – with a side view finder so that you can talk on the phone quite normally and still take pictures of things ahead of you. You’ll have a Browning side arm for personal protection, but you can use it at will against any threat if you have to.”

“I’d prefer a Smith and Wesson,” he said.

“Browning. Standard issue.”

“Very good, Colonel. But I’m better with a Smith and Wesson.”

“Browning, and only then if I’m told you’re good enough to be trusted with one.”

“I’m good enough.”

“We’ll soon see,” replied Clayton. “Let me introduce you to Commander Marsden, who’s in charge of operations, and my Deputy. He’s ex-Special Boat Service, so you will have something in common.”

Nick had been leaning for sometime against the door he had quietly opened.

“He will show you around, get you kitted out and put you through your paces. You’ll also be given a very detailed briefing. When the Commander thinks you’re ready, we’ll meet again and you’ll either be sent out on the road on your own, or back to General Pearson-Jones’s outfit.”

“I’ll be staying with you,” said Miller, finishing off his now-cold coffee. “Tell your Barbara she makes good coffee, and tell Gladys I’m not signing any of her forms until I know I’m staying, and tell your Petty Officer in the armoury – ‘Bottom’ I think you call him, - that a tenner says I’m a better shot than he is. Even with a Browning.”

“How do you know about these people?” asked Nick.

Miller grinned.

“Let’s just call it research,” he replied, “before I left MOD. Rule 2 – ‘find out who you’ll be working with.’”

As he left with Marsden, Miller turned and said, “If I can’t have a Smith and Wesson, can I use one of your BMW bikes? I rather fancy one of those.”

“No” said Clayton. “You’ll get a bus pass from Gladys if you’re lucky. And only then if you sign one of her forms.”

“Thank you, Colonel.”

“Stop calling me that.”

Departmental heads met in ‘S’s office late the next day.

“Where’s Miller now?” asked ‘S’.

“Next door, drinking coffee with Barbara.”

“How’s he got on, then,” asked Clayton.

“First class, I’d say,” reported Marsden. “Your new Doc Perkins put him through his paces, mentally and physically, and says he’s still very fit – almost combat ready, in fact – and mentally very stable. He seems to have soaked up his briefing like blotting paper, too.”

“Since he’ll be on his own, we gave him a rogues gallery test,” said Newell, “and he picked out Jarvis first time every time, blurred photos, in the dark, everything.”

“He slept on the premises last night,” said Marsden, “and we woke him several times for snap tests, and he was as sharp as a needle immediately. Doc Perkins supervised, and was very impressed.”

“How about your side?” Clayton asked the Petty Officer.

“No problems with weapons at all. Stripped everything down and got it back together in double quick time, even in the dark. He’s a good shot, too. Dead centre almost every time, even with moving targets. Nearly as good as me, in fact.”

“That’s exactly what he said about you, as a matter of interest!” said Newell.

“How about driving, Nick?”

“Good pursuit driver; skilled at evasion; seems to have an excellent sense of direction and spatial awareness, so navigation is OK, and he seems safe and confident with almost everything we’ve got.”

“How about personal skills?”

“Got on well with everybody, although he did tell Gladys she was breaking the law by smoking at work. She soon sorted that out, as always, and gave him an extra form to fill in – something about third party motor insurance. Now he’s next door chatting up Barbara.”

“Do we take him on then, bearing in mind this is a special mission we want him for?” asked Clayton.

They all nodded enthusiastically.

“I think we should try to keep him on afterwards, too,” said Marsden.

“If he survives. OK, gentlemen, thank you for that. Send him in on your way out.”

Clayton stood as Miller arrived, and shook hands. “You’ve just got yourself a new job, Miller. Sit down while I give you a final briefing, then you can visit Gladys to sign for your kit, and hit the road.”

“I’m not sure about your Gladys, Colonel,” he said.

“She holds this organisation together,” responded Clayton.

“Mostly with bent paperclips and red tape, I should think.”

Clayton grinned.

“Don’t be cheeky, Miller. And stop calling me Colonel.”

CHAPTER EIGHT - A FUSION OF INTERESTS

Officials from the Department for International Development had held a series of meetings with the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry in an effort to decide how Professor Barclay should respond to the Arab States’ request for him to set up and run their nuclear fusion research programme for them. The Civil Servants were beginning to draw up plans for some form of technology transfer agreement, which would allow Barclay to be involved in the Gulf’s own development work, while keeping him firmly based in the UK. Barclay’s place was at Harwell.

They could see such a programme developing into the same sort of huge and very lucrative contract as the defence agreement with Saudi Arabia. They were suggesting that Barclay, with a couple of senior UK officials, should visit Abu Dhabi for initial talks with Emirate people, and this proposal was now before the Cabinet for formal approval. It had been established, unofficially, that such a scheme might find favour in the Middle East, provided only that Barclay himself was made available as part of the deal.

After much discussion, it had been decided after all to send a Ministerial team to Abu Dhabi, to meet Ministers and senior officials from throughout the United Arab Emirates as a first step. The Emirates were insisting that Professor Jack Barclay should be part of the UK delegation, as they were equally keen to include some of their top scientists at the plenary sessions. The UK held out, however, and insisted on preliminary technical meetings to draw up draft agreements before detailed negotiations took place.

Reluctant though he was to leave his research, Barclay eventually agreed, after a series of meetings in Whitehall, to attend meetings in the Gulf when the Government decided that the time was right.

Barclay did what was for him some rather unusual research, and ended up being pleasantly surprised to discover how much his fellow Gulf scientists knew about the work he had been undertaking, and about nuclear fusion in general. It soon became obvious that, with his help and with the vast financial resources available to them, they could quite easily and quickly develop similar facilities to his own, and eventually carry on the work largely un-aided. Barclay was relieved at this, since the last thing he wanted was to spend any undue amount of time in that hot, dusty place. It was the last thing the UK Government wanted, as well.

What with that and everything else that was going on, it had been a busy few weeks for Jack Barclay, and, as a result, for Section 11 as well. For a start, he was now making considerable and quite rapid progress in his research after the recent hiatus, and there was now no doubt the he and his team had repositioned the UK at the very forefront of the work being done internationally into the future development of nuclear fusion. The technical team attached to his project was now working furiously to translate his new theoretical hypotheses into the redesigned equipment needed, and to install it at the Harwell laboratory, in order to put his ideas into practice. Such was the progress they were making that they had already achieved a continuous 'burn' of several minutes, almost to the point where sufficient heat was generated in the process for the fusion to become self-sustaining.

He had somehow also found time to visit the French facility at Cadarache. Both there and at Culham, work was proceeding on the electro-magnetic containment of hydrogen plasma so there was much to discuss, not least because the proposed development of laser containment was so novel. Only Barclay realised that this was probably going to prove the best option for future development, but he wasn't about to share his enthusiasm with the French. Nevertheless, they showed a keen interest, as one would expect.

So did his colleagues in California. Barclay had flown there direct from Paris, to save a double journey, a last minute change to his diary that caused no little trouble for Section 11. However, they somehow managed to keep up with the man, and had already positioned two of the Op. Fusion team at the University in advance of his arrival. Unlike in France, the American work that was being carried out at the National Ignition Facility within the Lawrence Livermore University was very similar to his own research into the use of lasers, being carried out at his new Rutherford laboratory at Harwell. Jack Barclay knew that he was well ahead of the Americans in his own work, especially after the efforts of the past few weeks, but was keen not to give too much away.

The Section 11 team, on arrival, had discovered that, although Barclay had declined to give a lecture, a major reception was to be held in his honour before he left after two days of discussion with his fellow American researchers. The Op. Fusion team had somehow managed to get themselves invited to it as part of the UK delegation. The object of this seemingly generous hospitality was simply to bring even more pressure on Barclay to join the Californian team. The US was obviously mounting a very serious attempt to achieve this. During the reception, a member of the Op. Fusion team recognised one of their opposite number, a member of the CIA, among the crowd of delegates, ‘keeping an eye a guy we hope will soon be working for us,’ the man had said. ‘And we’re keeping an eye on him to make sure he doesn’t!’ came the reply from Jo Killick. They each knew where the other was coming from – it was that sort of game – and helped themselves to another Jack Daniels as a girl with the drinks tray walked past.

Clerkenwell would have to be told about the CIA presence, decided Jo.

“I hear the Arabs are taking an interest in your Professor, too,” queried the CIA man.

“So I hear.”

“We wouldn’t want him going over to them, would we?”

“Or to you,” said Killick with a grin.

“Any time at all, the Russians will show up, I guess.”

“I think they already have,” replied the S.11 man, nodding towards the other side of the room. “Two of them, by the look of it.”

“Smart of you – I hadn’t spotted them. But one, I recognise. He works over here in the Embassy. How did you know?”

“I didn’t, but I do now. Why do all Russians look the same?”

That’s two things to tell HQ.

“Does the Prof know you’re looking after him?”

“Not yet, but it begins to look as if we’ll have to tell him soon.”

Barclay was in deep conversation with a couple of US scientists, who both suddenly clapped him on the shoulder, and, with broad grins, shook his hand. They were out of earshot, but Killick guessed that the Professor had let slip news of his recent major progress. If that was true, then he had just ensured that even greater pressure was put on him to join the Californian team.

Three things to tell ‘S’ about, now.

As the party broke up, there was quite an excited queue of scientists and other dignitaries wanting to shake Jack Barclay by the hand, many grinning broadly, others patting him on the back. News of Barclay's work had spread fast among those present, and it looked almost as if the Professor had actually agreed to join the team at Livermore. Perhaps he had. Jo Killick looked across the room to the Russians. One was on his mobile phone, looking at what was going on. Killick thought that if their phones were anything like his, he could well be photographing the whole thing.

Four.

News of Barclay's obviously successful visit to California was transmitted to Moscow almost immediately. It did not take them long to conclude that the Harwell team had achieved a major breakthrough, which had apparently now been shared with the Americans. It was obvious to Moscow, however, that Barclay could not have passed on any great detail in the time he was there. Indeed, they also knew that his work was Top Secret, and that he would never have briefed his American fellow-scientists in any detail, especially not at what was, after all, a largely social event.

But it was nevertheless extremely worrying for the Russian authorities. They knew that the USA was keen to recruit Barclay, and that they had sufficient incentives to be able to achieve that aim, both in terms of research facilities at Lawrence Livermore and in terms of seemingly unlimited funding. It was bad enough that the UK appeared to be well ahead of everyone else in their attempt to harness nuclear fusion as an alternative to carbon fuels for energy generation, but the thought that their top man might now be prepared to share his secret development work with the Americans was perceived as a real threat by the Russians. Their own work in this field had not been pursued with any great sense of urgency, since they had vast untapped stocks of oil and gas – sufficient to last them well into the next century, and enough to export to give them a real economic weapon to be used when the political situation so demanded. Indeed, they had already used it in a small way from time to time, and very effective it had been as well.

But now it began to look as if that weapon was to be denied them. Perhaps not yet, but certainly in the next ten or twenty years. Maybe even sooner, if America and the UK pooled their resources. And all because of Professor Jack Barclay. The Kremlin decided that something had to be done.

News had also reached the Kremlin of the interest being shown in Barclay's work by the Arab states. Like Russia, they had apparent endless resources of oil and gas, so their interest in the nuclear fusion process was perhaps less obvious. It was assumed that, like America, they simply wanted to get ahead of the game. Also like America, they were prepared to pour money into the research effort in an attempt to lure Professor Barclay into leading their work in this particular field. But the difference was that the UK Government were playing a slightly devious diplomatic game, and working to cash-in on the Middle Eastern interest by setting up a trade agreement in which Barclay would play a key role. If successful, Arab money would pour into the UK as well as Arab oil. Either way, Russian interests would suffer, whether Barclay went over to the Americans or whether he helped the wealthy Arab

Emirates to join the race to develop commercially viable nuclear fusion. They would also suffer if Barclay did neither of those things, but remained where he was and kept the UK ahead of other countries.

There was no question about it – something had to be done.

The more the problem was discussed, the more it became clear that there were really very few options. Some members of the Politburo had argued that the Harwell project should be sabotaged – and the project at Culham for good measure – but that would in no way neutralise the brilliance of Professor Barclay, who would simply redouble his efforts. Such action would delay the UK's commercial effort, but that's all, and it would therefore be of no direct or immediate benefit to Russia. So that left the man himself. There was no question of enticing Barclay to work in Russia. It simply was not worth trying, as any attempt would only serve to heighten the perception of Russia's own weak position. Perhaps if he were kidnapped, he could be enticed to share his knowledge, although it was not thought that the man had any weaknesses that would enable him to be blackmailed. Removing him from the UK would certainly slow down that country's development work, but keeping him alive in Russia would in itself be dangerous, as news of his whereabouts would almost certainly leak out. It was eventually agreed that it was only possible to slow down the UK effort rather than halt it, and that the removal of Barclay would also deny both America and the Gulf states of any possible assistance from him in the future.

So that was the conclusion.

Barclay had to be stopped from making any further contribution anywhere, by permanently removing him.

Alan Jarvis had been quite astonished, and not a little alarmed, to receive the phone call at home from a Russian agent. He had gone over their brief conversation time after time, but could still not quite make sense of it. At first, he had been inclined to tell his Director at the office immediately, but had eventually decided to wait for a bit, to let things develop. *'Plenty of time then to tell others'*, he had thought.

It was quite late on a Friday evening when the call had come through.

"Mr. Alan Jarvis?" asked the man, with only the hint of an accent.

"Speaking," replied Jarvis.

"Good evening," said the man politely. "I'm sorry to bother you at home, but we thought it best not to contact you at your office."

"If you're trying to sell me something, I'm not interested," said Jarvis crossly.

"I am not selling anything, Mr. Jarvis."

"Who are you then, and what do you want?"

"You will not know me," came the reply, "although I know almost everything about you. For example, I know how furious you are to have been sacked from your previous job, and how you would be only too happy in some way to seek revenge for the way you have been treated."

"Who are you?" demanded Jarvis again.

"For the moment, that doesn't matter," replied the man. "Let me just say that I have been asked by my superiors in Moscow to contact you, and to tell you that we

may be able to suggest a scheme which will allow you get your own back on the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and your successor at Section 11 at the same time.”

“What sort of scheme?”

“Let us just say that it would also do us a favour, as well as allowing you to vent your quite justified anger.”

“What makes you think I should do you any favours, whoever you are?”

“When you hear details of what we propose, we are quite sure you will wish to co-operate,” said the Russian, and hung up.

If he was honest about it, Jarvis was a bit scared. Not only that, he couldn't make up his mind what to do for the best. In the end, he decided to do nothing. There was nothing he would like more than to get even with Clayton and the people who had put Clayton into his old job, but he wasn't sure he wanted the Russians to help him do it. Neither was he at all sure what the man had meant when he had inferred that he, Jarvis, would want to co-operate with them. This sounded like a threat to him, almost blackmail in fact, and he could not begin to think of anything that he could be blackmailed about. However much he hated his present job, where everybody knew that he had been more or less sacked from Head of Section 11, he still had a good few years to go before he retired, and he didn't want to get caught up working for the Russians. There was really nothing he could do, anyway, except wait for a further contact to be made. It was a great temptation to go to his Director now to tell him of the approach he had received, but he concluded that he should wait until he knew more about the Russian's demands.

As it happened, his Director knew of the phone call the next day. Which was why 'Dusty' Miller was now sitting patiently down the end of the road, watching and waiting. Although even he did not know what he was watching and waiting for.

In fact, Miller was beginning to wish he had never taken on this particular assignment. He was getting thoroughly bored by the inaction. He had managed to fix a tracking device to Jarvis's car, which could be useful sometime, and had been in for a quick look round the house one evening when Jarvis and his wife were entertaining friends. That was quite exciting – they hadn't heard him, but on the other hand he had found nothing of the remotest interest either. He hadn't even needed to fix bugs to the phone, as he knew it was already being remotely monitored. So he was stuck, following Jarvis to his Lambeth office every morning, watching where he went for lunch and whom he met, and then following him home again. At least he had been able to establish a pretty good behaviour pattern, so any activity out of the usual should be easier to spot. So far, there hadn't been any.

In his Clerkenwell office, 'S' was also beginning to wonder if Miller was wasting his time, and had said so at one of his regular briefing meetings with Sir Robin Algar. However, the Cabinet Secretary had been adamant – the tip-off from their Soviet agent had been positive enough, and there had been the phone call to Jarvis since then. We could not afford to drop our guard until we had positive intelligence that it was safe to do so.

Not long after that, however, reports reached London from the Moscow Embassy that they had picked up conversations with ‘Barclay’ and ‘Jarvis’ both mentioned in the same sentence. Nobody could be sure why, or in what context, but it was enough for ‘S’ to call in Miller for a chat, as Clayton put it.

“Something’s going on,” he told Miller, “although we can’t be sure what. Just to be on the safe side, I’m allocating you some support so we can keep a 24-hour watch on Jarvis from now on. We shall be briefing your new team-mates tomorrow, specially selected like you and everyone else in this outfit, but I want you here to give them a detailed run-down on Jarvis – life-style, movements, routine, who he meets and all that.”

“A bit of action at last, perhaps,” said Miller. “I must admit, Colonel, I was getting quite bored.”

“Well, don’t be,” replied Clayton. “Keep on your toes, and make sure you report the slightest thing that’s out of the ordinary. In particular, we’re looking for any sign of possible further Russian contact with Jarvis. We’ve got a tap on his phones, but look out for him starting to use dead letter boxes, and that sort of thing. And stop calling me Colonel.”

“Leave it to me, Colonel,” replied ‘Dusty’, cheekily.

“I’ve no option at the moment. I’ll let you know if we pick up anything useful.”

A few days later, they did. It was shortly after Barclay’s acclaimed visit to America when, at about the same time, MI6’s Moscow station and GCHQ in Cheltenham both reported that instructions had been issued to ‘activate Jarvis.’

‘S’ immediately alerted the Fusion team and Miller, before going to an emergency meeting in the Cabinet Office.

“It would help if we knew what Jarvis was being activated to do,” grumbled Clayton.

“Well, we don’t,” replied the Joint Intelligence Committee chief.

“I suspect that Jarvis doesn’t, either, at the moment,” said Clayton. “We know he’s been offered some sort of opportunity to get even with us, but that’s all.”

“Barclay has to be the best bet,” agreed Sir Robin, “especially as we now have reports of Russian conversations mentioning both Barclay and Jarvis together.”

“What bothers me is whether or not we should tell Barclay of the various threats against him.”

“We only think he’s under threat – we still don’t know for certain.”

“It might help him to keep vigilant if he did know of what we suspect,” said Clayton. “On the other hand, it could be the last straw for the man, who we know is already under great stress.”

“If we did tell him, we could reassure him up to a point by telling him of the protection you are offering – and have been for several months. But frankly,” said Sir Robin, “I can’t see how telling him of our suspicions will help either him or us. There’s no doubt, though, that we must stay close to the man, wherever he is.”

“What puzzles me is the role Jarvis might be playing in all this,” said Clayton. “His conversation the other week with the Russian, who we have not yet identified,

almost carried with it a threat. Saying that Jarvis would want to cooperate with them suggested blackmail, but I've been through his file again and again, and can't turn up anything at all."

"Neither can I," admitted Algar. "Seems happily married, no evidence or suggestion of any affairs anywhere, no financial problems, no dubious political interests – nothing."

The two men sat in silence for a moment.

"I think I'll have a quiet word with my Barbara," said Clayton. "You know how women have a nose for these things, and she's not only very bright, but worked with the man for four or more years before I arrived. She may have a clue."

The Cabinet Secretary nodded his agreement.

Before 'S' had a quiet word with his PS, Barbara, he thought it prudent to talk first to Nick Marsden about Jarvis. But Nick had nothing concrete to offer, and had himself been mystified by the apparent threat contained in the Russian's phone call.

"Could be something from the man's private life, I suppose," he suggested. "Jarvis had a reputation for being a bit of a snake in the grass and something of a womaniser, but he always seemed happily enough married. It was probably all bravado, but he did once try chatting up Barbara, I remember."

"I was thinking I would have a word with her, to see if she could throw any light on what the Russians might have on him. You wouldn't object, would you?"

"Not at all," replied Marsden.

"I know you've been seeing her from time to time lately, that's all."

"It's no secret," replied Nick. "We are getting on quite well, as it happens – dinner out, a couple of visits to the theatre, that sort of thing. She's very loyal to the Section and to you, so I'm sure she'll help if she can."

"Good. I'll let you know if anything comes of our chat."

They had their chat the next morning. Barbara always attended the informal meeting Clayton had with his departmental heads every day, to keep a note of anything worth noting.

"I hope you don't mind staying behind after 'prayers', but I wanted a quiet word with you about my predecessor. You know the background, of course – mysterious phone call from the Russians offering him the chance to get his own back on us, then the apparent link to Barclay. What we can't work out is why they should think he would want to help them in any way, but during their phone call to him, they said – hang on a minute." Clayton thumbed through the papers of his desk. "Ah, yes. Here it is. They said, and I quote, 'When you hear details of what we propose, we are quite sure you will wish to co-operate.' We simply can't work out what makes them so sure. It sounds like a threat to blackmail the man about something or other, but what?"

Barbara shrugged.

"You worked with the man for years, so I wondered if you might have the slightest idea."

"Not really," she offered.

“He had a bit of a reputation as a womaniser, as I hear. Anything in that, I wonder?”

Barbara looked uncomfortable, and, Bill thought, almost blushed.

“He did have one or two shall we say, ‘flirtations’, as I recall, but I don’t know of any serious or long lasting affair.”

“Did he ever try to flirt with you?” asked Bill. “I don’t want to pry, of course, but I do need to find some sort of clue to what’s going on.”

“Of course you do,” agreed Barbara, “and as it happens he did chat me up a bit in the very early days after he arrived here.”

“Did you go out together?”

“Yes, we did few times. I was much younger then, of course,” she added, almost as an excuse.

Bill nodded, and looked closely at the girl. She was certainly attractive, no doubt about it.

“I hope you don’t mind me asking,” said Bill awkwardly, “but do you still find the man attractive?”

“No I don’t,” she replied emphatically. “Quite honestly, I can’t stand the man.”

“And yet you didn’t leave, or apply for a transfer or anything. Why did you stay on working for him?”

“Because I like the job so much, and I knew he wouldn’t be here for ever. So I put up with him.”

“And he never caused you any more trouble – nothing to make you regret your decision to stay?”

She shook her head. “And now you’re here, I’m even more glad I stayed on.”

“And Nick was a bit of an incentive as well, I suppose,” guessed Clayton.

“Yes, he was. I like him a lot. You know we go out together sometimes?”

“Yes, I do know.”

“I remember you saying when you first arrived that it was your job to know things,” she reminded him.

“Ah, yes! And how is Donald?”

“As wonderful as ever,” she replied.

“Well, I’m sorry to have quizzed you like that, but I really have learnt a little bit more about Alan Jarvis, thanks to your honesty. Although I still have no idea what the Russian meant.”

“Neither have I,” replied Barbara. “But if anything should occur to me, then I’ll tell you immediately.”

“I’m sure you will – and thanks.”

As Barbara stood to leave, Bill said, “By the way, does Jarvis know about Donald by any chance?”

The girl sat down again. After a pause, she almost whispered, “Yes, he does.”

Bill leant forward. “Did you tell him?”

“No,” she replied, quietly. “I didn’t need to. Alan Jarvis is Donald’s father.”

There was a stunned silence.

“That’s something I did *not* know,” said Bill. “I did not have the slightest idea, I promise you.”

The girl sighed.

“Mrs Jarvis has no idea, either,” she said, “and I’m not about to tell her. Alan is actually very fond of my little boy, and sees him when he can get away from home for long enough. But that’s not often.”

“He certainly hasn’t since we’ve been keeping an eye on him,” said Clayton. “We would have thought it odd, and a bit suspicious, if he had called at your home.”

“I have to let him see the boy of course, although I wish I didn’t. Donald really doesn’t like him at all. The child can’t understand who this strange man is.”

“Does Jarvis pay you any sort of allowance, may I ask?”

“Not a penny. His wife would find out if he did.”

“I asked you once before if anyone else here knew about Donald. Does anyone?”

“Nobody did when you asked, but Nick does now. The two have actually met, and get on together like a house on fire.” She smiled.

Bill Clayton thought for a moment.

“Does Nick know that Alan Jarvis is Donald’s father?”

“No.”

“I shan’t tell him,” promised Clayton. “But perhaps you should, in view of what’s going on.”

Barbara thought for a moment. “I suppose you’re right. I’ll tell him, at the right moment.”

“Barbara, would you prefer from now on to be kept out of the loop of people who know about what’s going on with Jarvis?”

“Not at all – it’s part of my job to know what’s going on, and I have no loyalty towards the man whatsoever. Only to you and the Section. Frankly, I couldn’t give a damn what happens to him,” she said angrily.

“Nor me, come to that,” replied ‘S’. “My job is simply to keep him away from Barclay.”

CHAPTER NINE - THE BRIDGE IN THE PARK

It seemed to ‘S’, and to ‘C’, and to the Cabinet Secretary, and to everyone else with any interest in the well-being of Professor Jack Barclay, that the Russians were being particularly slow to respond to the instruction from Moscow to ‘activate Jarvis’.

Two days had passed now, and nothing had happened. At least, nothing they were aware of. The truth was that they were all getting a bit jittery and worried in case they had missed something. But, according to ‘Dusty’ Miller, Jarvis was behaving absolutely normally. He had certainly not met anyone that Miller had not seen him meet before, and nothing of any relevance had been noted from the telephone and email intercepts. The only thing that GCHQ had been able to report was that they thought they had identified the earlier caller. From his voiceprint, it seemed likely that he was a second secretary in the cultural department of the Russian Embassy. Since

that was the home of many KGB members, it did not surprise anyone too much, although this man had not been used in such a prominent role before. Perhaps he'd had promotion.

It was a bit of a shock, then, not least to Jarvis himself, when he received a late night call to his home from the same man. It certainly had the immediate effect of galvanising everyone who was told about the call.

"Meet me on the bridge over the lake in St. James's Park at half past twelve tomorrow afternoon. I shall be reading the Daily Mail, and have a copy of the Financial Times under my arm. I told you that you would be only too pleased to help us. By the time we meet, we shall have Donald."

That was all. The man hung up. A second secretary in the cultural department he might be, but what he had said had the same effect on Jarvis as if the Russian President himself had made the call.

Bill Clayton was at home, too, like everyone else except a few duty officers at Section 11. Sir Robin Algar rang him.

"Get into the office as quickly as possible, and ring me in my office on the red phone. I suggest you get Nick in as well."

Clayton rang Barbara first, then Nick Marsden, both with the same message.

"Get into the office as quickly as possible. Looks like a major panic on."

Nick got there first – just – and had the kettle on by the time 'S' arrived. Barbara was busy turning the boiling water into coffee, as Clayton got through to Sir Robin Algar.

"What's going on?" asked Clayton without beating about the bush. Nick Marsden was listening in on the extension.

"Jarvis has been 'activated'," was the reply. "We intercepted a call to him an hour or so ago, giving him instructions to meet his contact at lunchtime tomorrow. Of course, we shall have plenty of people around to watch what goes on, but we may not be able to monitor what's said."

"Why?"

"The rendezvous is on the bridge across the lake in St. James's Park, which is notoriously busy at lunchtime, particularly on a fine day. And the forecast for tomorrow is for it to be a fine day."

"Who is Jarvis meeting, do we know?"

"Probably the man who's now made two phone calls to him. This call is certainly from the same chap – the voice signature matches. We are only assuming that it will be him at the meeting."

"I'll tip off my chaps," said Clayton. "We'll have to make sure we don't trip over one another. Is MI5 or Special Branch being activated?"

"Special Branch. We have arranged for their technical chaps to be working on the bridge tomorrow – minor repairs and a bit of painting, that sort of thing – trying to bug the thing to pick up what's said."

"Good," said Clayton. "I wouldn't mind a live feed from that if you could arrange it."

“Of course,” agreed Algar. “Shall I have it patched through into your Ops. Room?”

“Yes. If Jarvis is being targeted against Barclay, we need to know about it.”

“Consider it done.”

“Anything else I need to know?” asked Clayton.

“Not really,” replied the Cabinet Secretary. “Just one thing we couldn’t really understand. Something about ‘by the time we meet we’ll have Donald’, but it really meant nothing.....”

“WHAT?” yelled Clayton, and hung up, Cabinet Secretary or not.

Nick rushed into Bill’s office.

“Hear that?” he said. “Donald, for God’s sake. Now we know what their hold is over Jarvis. We’re idiots not to have worked that out.”

“Barbara told you?”

“Yesterday.”

“Grab her, take our para-medical ambulance with bells, sirens, flashing lights and whatever else it’s got, and go like hell for her place in Dulwich. If he’s still there when you get there, bring Donald back here.”

Nick didn’t need to be told twice. He shot out of Bill’s office, yelled at Barbara to drop everything and run, and made straight for the underground garage. She looked quizzically at Bill, who was at the door, on her way out.

“GO,” he shouted. “Don’t hang about – Nick will explain.”

Bill shot back into his office, and got on the phone to the garage. By the time Nick and Barbara got there, the engine of the yellow and blue-hatched Mercedes was running and the garage security door was open. There was a squeal of tyres as the vehicle plunged out into the darkness, and headed south at breakneck speed.

There was little ‘S’ could do now, except wait and hope.

He poured himself a cup of the freshly brewed coffee. He really should phone the Cabinet Secretary to apologise. But what could he say? That Donald was the illegitimate son of Jarvis, and Barbara was his mother? Barbara might not be very pleased about that news getting about in Whitehall. It was a closely kept secret. Nobody knew. And yet, somehow, the Russians had found out. Who could possibly have told them? What the devil’s going on here ?

He picked up the red phone.

“Sorry to hang up so abruptly like that,” he said when Robin Algar answered, “but I had to act fast and explain afterwards. You need to know that Donald is Jarvis’s son. The Russians obviously planned to kidnap the boy so as to blackmail Jarvis into doing whatever it is they want him to do.”

“I had no idea,” exclaimed Algar. “What can we do?”

“We are already doing it. A couple of my people are on their way to kidnap Donald ourselves, as fast as we can get there. I just hope we aren’t too late, that’s all.”

“So what happens if you do get the boy?”

“I’m only just beginning to think this through,” replied Clayton. “But we could get word to Jarvis that the boy has been taken, and lead him to believe that

Russians have got him. That way, Jarvis will co-operate with them, and we should then be able to find out what it is they're after."

"Sounds a good idea, but it could be dangerous."

"This is a dangerous business. We'll need to stick to Jarvis like glue from now on. I'll get a couple of Special Branch people, who he won't know, to help us out."

"Agreed. Let me know if there's any help you need. And I'm sorry I didn't mention Donald sooner, but it meant nothing to anyone here."

"Let's just hope we're quick enough, that's all, and get to him before they do."

As best he could, Nick told Barbara what was happening, while trying to reassure her that Donald was going to be OK and that they would be there well before the Russians could lay a finger on him.

"Since he's at home and in bed now anyway, with your Mother there to look after him, they were probably planning on grabbing the boy sometime tomorrow morning, perhaps on his way to nursery school."

"I do hope you're right," she said. "Please hurry, Nick. Please!"

"I'm doing my best, old love. I think we'll go the usual way, over Waterloo Bridge and down through Elephant and Castle. At least the traffic won't be so bad at this time of night, and with the siren and lights going, we should cut through what there is."

Barbara rang her mother on the mobile. Donald was still there and OK.

"Get him awake, Ma. Tell him we're going for a ride in a really fast car as a special treat. Shove a few clothes in a bag, and some of his favourite toys. We'll be away for a couple of days, but there's no need to worry. We got wind of a possible kidnap attempt, so don't open the door to anyone until we get there."

"Where are you now?" asked her Mother anxiously.

"I'm not really sure, but Nick's driving and seems to know where he is."

"Fifteen minutes," shouted Nick. "We'll be there in fifteen minutes or less if we're lucky."

Barbara had noticed that Nick got the car up to nearly 80 on one short stretch of road, even though he was driving down the wrong side. Other vehicles sensibly stopped or got out of the way. Nick was certainly a very good driver, but she shut her eyes just the same, and hung on tight.

"This would have been quicker if our HQ was in Camberwell and not Clerkenwell," he observed, as they swung south into Denmark Hill at nearly 90.

If he was honest, Nick was quite enjoying himself. He hadn't needed to drive like this for a long time, especially at night. It was good to keep his hand in, but he was nevertheless desperately worried that they would not get to Donald in time.

"Nearly there," he announced. "You dive in and grab Donald while I turn the car round."

"Will you come in with me?"

"No. I'd rather scout round to make sure we're not being watched by the opposition, if you don't mind."

Nick turned off the flashing lights and the siren a few streets away, so as not to arouse undue attention when they arrived at the house.

Barbara dashed into the house as Nick turned the car and had a careful look round to make sure the place wasn't being watched. As he was in the surveillance business himself, he knew what to look for. Although it was dark, he was pretty sure there were no strangers about – not outside, anyway. Except that, just as Barbara reappeared with Donald in her arms, a British Telecom van pulled slowly into the road and stopped a few houses away. Nick recognised it as one of theirs. '*Good old Bill,*' he thought.

"Hello, young man," he said. "Isn't this a surprise, then! I bet you've always wanted a drive in one of these, with the siren going."

A rather sleepy Donald nodded and grinned. "Will you drive fast, Uncle Nick?"

"As fast as I can, you watch!"

He turned to Barbara. "I think the coast is clear, so we can risk a quick call to the Boss, if you would. Just say 'mission accomplished, and thanks for sending BT.'"

"BT?" she queried.

"There's one of our BT vans in your road – arrived just as we left. They'll be able to keep an eye on your mother from inside their little tent thing, while they fix the phones!"

"What a relief!"

"Your Bill thinks of everything," said Nick, turning on the siren and putting his foot down again.

When they got back to Clerkenwell, the garage door was already open for them, and they drove straight in. Bill Clayton was there to meet them.

"Come up to my office."

They followed him through the security checks and upstairs.

"Am I glad to see you, young man," Bill said to Donald. "Did you have a nice ride in the ambulance?"

"Uncle Nick drove very fast, and had the hooters going all the way," he replied excitedly.

"Great fun, wasn't it," said Barbara to her young son. "And thank you Bill for all you've done. I take it the threat was a real one?"

"Very real, I'm afraid, and we still need to take care. But I think the immediate danger is over. At least we have Donald. I've arranged for you both to stay in our flat for the time being, if that's all right."

"I was wondering what we should do next."

"I've sent someone over with one of our camp beds from the store here, and Catherine is making that up, and a proper bed for you, in our spare room. Gladys made me sign for the bed, by the way!"

"Something else to thank you for," grinned Barbara, the tension lifted.

"I've a favour to ask you, though," said Bill Clayton. "I want you to do a bit of acting for me, and to ring Alan Jarvis to tell him hysterically that Donald has been taken from his bed. I want him to think that the Russians have done it, so that he

keeps his rendezvous with them tomorrow – or later today, I should say. Unless he does that, we shall never find out what it is they want from him. Can you do that, do you think?”

“I think so. I’ll do my best to sound convincing.”

“He’s expecting them to take Donald, so he shouldn’t be too surprised.”

Nick chipped in. “He might just tell you not to phone the police under any circumstances. If he does, try to find out why not, and then eventually agree. He won’t ring them, as he will be as keen as you are to ensure Donald’s safety, and to play his part in order to get Donald released.”

“Good point Nick. Why not use your office, Barbara, and we’ll listen in. Leave Donald here to enjoy his coke.”

“And when your Mama has finished on the phone,” said Nick to him, “I’ll show you around the garage and all the cars we’ve got. Then you must get to bed at Uncle Bill’s.”

Jarvis was shocked to get Barbara’s phone call, especially at such an ungodly hour of the night, but not altogether surprised by her news. She was as hysterical as she could be, and Jarvis had a job to calm her down. As predicted, he was insistent that she did not call the Police.

“Just leave this to me,” he told her. “I’m sure I know what’s happened, and that I can get Donald back safe and sound within a day or so.”

“How can you be so sure,” she demanded.

“Because of information I’ve received at the office.”

“If you knew Donald was going to be kidnapped, why didn’t you stop it, you bastard?” she screamed at him.

“There was no way of stopping it, and I wasn’t at all sure that he was at risk anyway. But now it’s happened, you can trust me to get him back safely.”

“Why should I ever trust you?” she yelled.

“Because there’s nobody else.”

“There is. I’ll ring the police this very minute,” she shouted.

“For God’s sake, don’t do that. You will only put the boy at greater risk, and prejudice my chances of getting him released quickly and safely.”

“I don’t trust you, Alan.”

“I know that, and I can understand why. But I promise I’ll do whatever I have to, to get Donald back to you soon.”

“I’ll give you a few hours, if you really insist,” she said, “but if I don’t hear something positive from you by mid-morning, I’m ringing the police.”

“I need a bit longer than that,” pleaded Jarvis. “But I should know something after lunch, and I’ll ring you then.”

“Why not before?”

“Because I’m meeting someone, that’s why.”

“Already arranged, is it? You knew all along this was going to happen and who’s behind it, and you did nothing to stop it, you bastard,” she shouted. “The police are going to love this when I tell them that you were behind the kidnapping of your own son.”

“Barbara, don’t make things worse,” he pleaded. “I’ll ring you at the office as soon as I can after lunch. I promise. Please trust me just for once.”

“If you don’t, you’ll have the police knocking on your door with an arrest warrant in the afternoon. I suggest you take a toothbrush with you to the office tomorrow.”

And she put the phone down with a bang.

“You’re wasted here, you know,” said Nick, putting an arm round her. “You should be on the stage.”

“That was brilliant,” agreed Bill. “You really put the man on the spot, and he must be sweating now. But he said he would do whatever he had to, to get Donald back, so the Russians have him over a barrel. With any luck, we’ll soon find out what they want.”

“One thing bothers me,” said Nick.

“What?”

“They will know that they haven’t kidnapped Donald, and that someone else has taken the boy.”

“My guess is that they planned to take him either when he arrived at his Nursery school later this morning, or while he was there,” conjectured Clayton. “If he doesn’t turn up for school, they can’t do that, but there could be a hundred reasons for Donald missing a day. I think they will certainly keep the appointment with Jarvis at lunchtime. The fact is that Jarvis will think they have taken Donald so it doesn’t really matter to them what’s happened to him – Jarvis will just do what they want anyway.”

“I hope you’re right,” said Nick.

“We’ll soon find out. Now let’s all go home and get some sleep while we can. Today already looks like being a long day.”

Special Branch had permission from the Royal Parks Police to take their van close to the St. James’s Park bridge. They were there mid-morning, and were soon clambering all over it with spanners and paintbrushes, some in the lake in waders. Nick was in the Ops. Room early, although Bill Clayton and Barbara were a bit later in than usual, having needed to make sure that Donald was settled first. When they left for Clerkenwell, he was happily playing with some of Bill’s old toys, which Catherine had dug out of an equally aged tin trunk. He seemed quite pleased to be missing a day at school, not least because Nick had promised him a ride in something else out of the garage later, if he was good.

Barbara had phoned her Mother earlier to reassure her that all was well, but advised her to stay indoors if possible until further notice, and not to answer the door to anyone. As she and Bill left his flat, she noticed two men on a motorbike parked a little way down the road.

Donald would be safe now.

To say that Alan Jarvis had slept badly would be an exaggeration. He hadn’t slept at all. The Russians certainly had him over a barrel now, but he couldn’t for the life of him work out how the Russians had discovered that Donald was his son.

Nobody knew – only Barbara, of course, and he couldn't imagine that she had told them, or even had any contact with them, in spite of working where she did. He had no idea yet, either, what it was they were going to ask him to do to secure Donald's release, but hadn't long to wait, now, and lunchtime couldn't come soon enough. That was the imperative, securing Donald's safety, although getting even with the Cabinet Secretary and Section 11 would be a bonus.

His wife had rung in to the office to say he was unwell, and wouldn't be at his desk today. She certainly thought he looked dreadful when he left the house 'to get some fresh air.' He got to the park early, but the man was already there, leaning over the railings of the bridge, Financial Times under his arm, reading the Mail. As usual, there were lots of people about. Some were feeding the ducks, others eating their sandwiches, while even more were simply enjoying the sun in deckchairs and listening to the band playing on the bandstand. Tourists thronged the bridge as well, taking photos of one another, or just the view, either of the Foreign Office or Buckingham Palace, or both. 'Dusty' Miller was also there, taking photographs, although you would have been forgiven for thinking he was simply chatting on his mobile phone.

Jarvis lent over the railings next to the man. They admired the view together in silence for a few moments.

Eventually, the man said, "Kind of you to meet me here, Mr. Jarvis."

"Did I have a choice?"

"Not really."

"I want my son released unharmed immediately," said Jarvis.

The man was surprised, but tried not to show it. He knew by then that they had not, after all, kidnapped the boy.

"Your son?" he queried. "I'm not sure I know what you're talking about."

"You know bloody well what I'm talking about," replied Jarvis. "You said you'd have Donald by the time we met, and you know he was taken from his bed late last night. I want him back."

The man looked over the railings at a passing duck, and a few workmen busy under the bridge.

"You have to earn his release, Mr Jarvis," said the man.

"What do you want me to do?"

The man stood and folded both his two newspapers together.

"This place is a bit crowded, don't you think? Let's take a stroll round the lake while we talk."

"Shit!" shouted Nick from the Ops. Room. "We were picking all that up quite nicely, and now they've wandered off and we shall never know what's going on."

"There's no way Miller or anyone else, will ever be able to hear what they say," said Clayton. "Bugger it!"

He thought for a minute.

"We'll have to double up the watch on Jarvis now," he concluded. "We simply can't afford to lose track of him."

“I’ll get that organised,” said Nick. “We’ll have to use chaps he might recognise, but we can’t help that. Let’s hope he will be too pre-occupied to notice.”

“Tell Miller when you get a chance,” said ‘S’. “But I want him in charge.”

Miller knew that the office would have lost touch with Jarvis and his contact as soon as they moved away from the bridge. He also realised that it was now more important than ever to keep close to Jarvis, a job not made any easier by the fact that he was operating on his own.

He called the Ops. Room to let them know that he was still in visual contact. He followed the pair at a safe distance, and could tell that Jarvis was listening intently to whatever it was the Russian was saying. At one point, the Russian handed something to Jarvis. Something small. Not a package, but small, like a coin. A key, perhaps? Miller couldn’t think what else it might be, so called Clerkenwell again. He had managed to get a photo of the hand-over, but only from behind them, and not close enough to be able to tell what it was. Eventually, having circled the top half of the lake and crossed the bridge again, they parted company at the tea-room. The Russian went inside, and Jarvis walked on, quickening his pace.

‘Now what?’ wondered Miller.

He did not have long to wonder. Jarvis headed straight for St. James’s Park underground station. Miller knew his mobile phone, however sophisticated, would not work underground on the Tube, so he quickly got through to the Ops. Room before he went in to the station entrance. “Jarvis is buying a ticket,” he reported. “Now going down to the westbound platform. Keep the line open.”

He dashed to the ticket office, barged in at the head of the queue, and flashed his pass to the bewildered booking clerk.

“Where did that man book to?” he demanded urgently, hearing a train approaching.

“Heathrow,” replied the man. “Terminal three.”

Jarvis repeated this over the phone, as he dashed down the steps two at a time, and dived on to the train just as the doors closed. He watched Jarvis board the train three carriages further up. He would have to work his way forward at the next two stations to make sure he ended up in the same part of the train. He looked at the map above the train window. *‘Change at Earls’ Court’*, he thought, *‘then Piccadilly Line straight through.’* Earls’ Court was a difficult interchange – down escalators, along corridors, down stairs – but somehow Miller managed to keep Jarvis in sight until he got on the train to Heathrow. This time, Miller was in the same carriage.

He had no idea whether his message had got through to Clerkenwell or not, but there was nothing Miller could do now until he came out into the open again – probably at the airport.

Nick was still in the Ops. Room, and just caught part of Miller’s last message – the part that said ‘Heathrow’ was clear enough, and they all thought they just heard ‘terminal three’, before the signal faded and finally disappeared.

Soon, everyone who needed to know did know.

Jarvis was heading for the airport.

“What the hell has he been sent there for?” Bill demanded.

“He surely can’t be going anywhere, can he?” said Nick. “He has no luggage, not even a cabin bag, and probably hasn’t got his passport either, unless we missed a phone call or something.”

“Perhaps he’s meeting someone.”

“But who? We know Barclay is at Harwell, so it’s not him.”

“Just suppose,” said Head of Section, “that it *was* a key he was given. He could be going to collect something.”

“I thought they did away with left luggage facilities ages ago for security reasons,” said Nick.

“Let’s get on the internet to find out,” said Clayton. He typed in ‘Left Luggage – London’, and immediately got the British Tourist Authority website.

“There it is,” he exclaimed. “A company called Excess Baggage has facilities at main line stations and the two airports. See – ‘London Heathrow terminal three arrivals (0530-2230) near car hire desks’, it says. I bet that’s it.”

“We can get someone there by bike quicker than by tube, too,” said Marsden. “William Gordon’s in the rest room – I’ll send him on a BMW. BARBARA,” he shouted. “Photos of Jarvis please, and quick.”

Gordon was there at least fifteen minutes before Jarvis turned up, hotly pursued up the escalator by Miller. Jarvis withdrew a small brief case, closely watched, Gordon noticed, by a man who was very Russian-looking, chatting on a mobile phone. Being the good man that he was, Gordon also reported that the briefcase looked too heavy to have just papers in it.

“Something like a gun, perhaps,” he said.

Jarvis headed back towards the Underground, but rang Barbara first. It was the briefest of calls.

“I now know what I have to do to secure the release of Donald,” he told her, “and he should be back with, you safe and sound, either tomorrow night or early the next morning.”

Miller quickly scribbled down Jarvis’s home address and gave it to Gordon before setting off in chase. “Get there quick in case he goes straight home. I could just lose him in the rush hour.”

“So sorry I can’t give you a lift back to base,” grinned William.

“Piss off!” ‘Dusty’ Miller hurried after the disappearing Jarvis who now, thought Miller, looked distinctly ill.

CHAPTER TEN - A SHOT IN THE DARK

“So what with one thing and another, we’ve had quite a busy couple of days,” concluded the Head of Section 11 at a hurriedly arranged, and very late-night briefing meeting with the Cabinet Secretary. “But we are still in a very confused situation.”

“I must say, though,” said Sir Robin, “that you and your team seem to have done remarkably well to keep up with events.”

“As a matter of fact, we have kept ahead of some of them,” corrected Bill Clayton, “as well as keeping in close contact with Professor Barclay. Let me summarise. First of all, we have managed to ‘kidnap’ Jarvis’s son before the Russians could. And that must be causing them no end of a problem, because although they know he’s been taken, they also know that they didn’t do it. Jarvis, however, thinks they did, so is going along with their demands. From a brief conversation we overheard, it seems likely that he will be taking action tomorrow, probably tomorrow evening, although we still don’t know what it is he’s expected to do. Somehow, we also managed to keep up with Jarvis at his rendezvous with the Russian, and actually got to the airport before him in the end, although that was a bit of luck.”

“Your man keeping an eye on Jarvis has done well.”

“He’s worked very hard and done an excellent job so far. But he’s been operating on his own for some time, and is really quite exhausted, so I’ve sent him home for some rest while a couple of others keep watch now that Jarvis is home again.”

“There are still quite a lot of loose ends, aren’t there?” queried Algar.

“There are certainly a couple of things I’d dearly love to know right now,” agreed Clayton, “not least how the Russians discovered that Jarvis had a son. But more importantly, we have no idea what Jarvis’s next move will be, or when he will make it, although we think it will be late tomorrow. We’ve doubled up on our surveillance of Barclay, just to be on the safe side, and I’m still tempted to let him know what’s going on so that he too can be on his guard. The other thing is that we have no idea what was in the briefcase Jarvis collected, and no way of finding out.”

Just for once, ‘S’ was quite wrong.

In spite of being at the end of his tether, ‘Dusty’ Miller had not, in fact, gone home to rest as instructed. He was as keen as anyone to know what was in the briefcase, and so had decided to find out. He was in charge, after all, wasn’t he? Told to take care of Jarvis? OK then. He’d been into the house once before, so he would get in again.

He had a low-level night vision infra-red torch and special night vision goggles, so he could see his way around quite well, and no-one else would see a thing. He waited until all the lights had gone out before he carefully picked the rather simple lock on the back door, and went into the kitchen. He rather hoped the briefcase would be downstairs somewhere – in the hall, perhaps. He would prefer not have to go into the bedroom, where Jarvis and his wife were asleep, although he was pretty sure he would not disturb them if he did. He’d been trained for this sort of thing, after all. He moved about the house like a ghost on Halloween, silently and methodically searching one room after another.

The briefcase was not in the hall as he had hoped, but he eventually found it in the study, leaning against the desk. He just prayed that the thing was not bugged or booby-trapped in any way, as he carefully picked the lock – not even a combination. One quick look inside was enough.

He locked the case again, and only for a moment wondered if he should take it with him, bearing in mind its contents, before he retraced his steps.

Once outside, he nodded to the two colleagues who were positioned nearby, walked to his car, and drove off. But not far. A few streets away, he stopped, and got on to the Section 11 Ops. Room.

“No, ‘S’ wasn’t there. He wasn’t at home either. He was at a meeting in the Cabinet Office.”

Eventually, they managed to patch him through to the red phone in the Cabinet Secretary’s office.

“Sorry to bother you Colonel,” said ‘Dusty’.

“Why aren’t you at home, taking a break?” demanded Clayton.

“Curiosity, really,” he replied.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean I know what’s in the briefcase Jarvis collected.”

Clayton sat forward in his chair.

“How the hell can you possibly know that, Miller?”

“Because I’ve just had a look inside, that’s how.”

“You’ve done what!”

“I’ve broken in to Jarvis’s house before, just for a quick look round one evening, so I went in again tonight. No security at all, Colonel. For a chap in his position, he should be more careful. You should warn him.”

“Get to the point, man. What’s in that case?”

“A very sophisticated Kalashnikov. Not many about. High powered, silencer, telescopic sight, the lot. And a couple of clips of ammo. Purpose built case. Very nice, Colonel.”

“What did you do with it?”

“Left it where it was, Colonel. Although I was very tempted to nick it. But I thought it would cause more problems than it solved.”

“You’re probably right,” agreed Clayton after a moment’s thought. “And I do wish you’d stop calling me ‘Colonel’.”

“OK, sir. But if you want the briefcase, Colonel, I can easily go back for it, now I know where it is.”

“No, no. Leave it. But you need to be very careful, you know Miller. We have no special warrant or anything like that, so if you get caught breaking and entering, there’s very little we shall be able to do about it.”

“Rule 3, Colonel.”

“What’s that?”

“Never get caught.”

“Don’t be cheeky, Miller. But you’ve done well, so now go and get some rest.”

“Thank you, Colonel. I think I’ll doss down in the car. I’m back on duty in a couple of hours.”

Clayton told Algar what had happened.

“So now we know that Jarvis has a high-powered rifle, but we can still only guess that Barclay is the target.”

“I now think we should tell the Professor, and get him to a place of safety,” said Algar.

“He’s already in one,” replied Clayton. “Jarvis will never get into Harwell.”

“But he could have a crack at Barclay outside the wire, so to speak.”

‘S’ thought for a moment.

“You could be right. On the other hand, we could pull Jarvis in.”

Now it was the Cabinet Secretary’s turn to ponder.

“Frankly, I’d rather leave Jarvis on the loose to find out what he does next. He’s now an obvious danger, and unfit for further employment in the Security Services, but I need more evidence to get rid of him.”

“And I need to get back to the office, if you’ll excuse me,” said Clayton. “I’ll think about what you said, and consult with a few colleagues. I’ll let you know what we recommend, and keep you in touch with developments.”

Although it was gone midnight, he summonsed Nick, Barbara, Clive Newell, and Phil Langdon, the retired Petty Officer who ran their armoury.

“We need to do a bit of quick planning for tomorrow – or today, as it now is,” he told them when they were all assembled in the briefing room. “We know that Jarvis now has a gun, and we assume Barclay is his target. We also think Jarvis will make his move sometime later today. The debate is whether or not we get Barclay to a safer place than Harwell, or whether we pull in Jarvis before he acts, or whether we let events run their course. If we do that, we shall need to keep well ahead of the game. I’ve already arranged to double up the watch on Barclay with immediate effect, and we should do the same in relation to Jarvis. How good a shot is Jarvis?” he asked Langdon.

“Excellent. Nearly as good as I am.”

“Why would he want a rifle with a silencer and telescopic sight?”

“What sort of rifle, do we know?”

“Some sort of Kalashnikov, according to Miller. Says there aren’t many about.”

“I know the one he means. It’s a sniper’s rifle, accurate from long range.”

“That seems to suggest that he knows he won’t get close to Barclay, so where would be the best place for him to be to stand any chance of getting the man?”

“His routine is pretty much the same every day,” said Newell, who was running Op. Fusion. “We know from his diary that he will be in Harwell all day. He will leave his digs at about 7.30 am, drive in his car to work, and stay there until he decides to go home. That’s a movable feast, as we know to our cost – anything from 4.30 pm to 11.30 pm, or even later occasionally. He works very long hours, but somewhere around 6.30 pm is more common.”

“What about his drive to and from work?” asked Nick Marsden.

“It takes him about fifteen minutes, no more,” replied Newell. “Mostly through open countryside, once he leaves the village.”

“The indications are that Jarvis will strike in the evening, rather than early on. That means it will probably be dark.”

“If you ask me,” said Langdon, “the silencer suggests that he will be using the weapon from inside a building, rather from open countryside. He probably won’t risk a shot while Barclay is too close to the Atomic Energy Establishment, so he may intend to wait until he’s got home.”

Clayton thought for a moment.

“Here’s what I propose then. Starting with Jarvis, work out his most likely route to both Barclay’s digs and to Harwell, and stake it out, so that when he leaves home, we get regular reports on where he is and which way he is heading. We need concentrated effort in both areas, so that we know where Jarvis eventually goes. I’ll get Barclay’s Director to make sure the Professor stays at work until as late as possible. That will give us plenty of time to move in on Jarvis and catch him red-handed with the gun, in a position to shoot and kill Barclay if that’s what he plans. Once Jarvis is under arrest, we’ll remove Barclay to a place of safety, since the Russians will still want him out of the way, and will try something else once they know Jarvis has failed. Any problems with that?”

They all agreed.

“Let’s get things organised then,” concluded Clayton. “Nick, I want Miller to follow Jarvis from his house to our first rendezvous along the route. If he deviates from the route we think he will take, Miller can keep after him, and report in. Let’s go.”

The rest of the night was spent setting up the operation for later that day. As Miller was already out keeping an eye on Jarvis, Clayton briefed him on the secure mobile phone.

“Let us know the minute Jarvis leaves home,” instructed Clayton. “We think he’ll make for Reading and then the A417, so you can start thinking about how he might get to Reading from there. Our guess is that he’ll probably leave after lunch, to give himself time to get into position before Barclay leaves Harwell. Once you’ve made contact with our first relay team, peel off and get home for some well-earned rest.”

“Thank you. Colonel.”

Clayton turned to Barbara.

“I *do* wish he’d stop calling me Colonel!”

Professor Jack Barclay was sublimely oblivious to all that was happening on his behalf. In fact, if you’d asked him, he probably wouldn’t have been able to tell you what day it was. His mind had been on other things, and for the first time in many months, he actually felt reasonably happy with the way things had been going. And things had been going well – very well.

Under his supervision, his technical support team at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory at Harwell, in Oxford, had achieved a major breakthrough in the development of nuclear fusion. Not only had they been able to show that the laser containment of hydrogen plasma was far more efficient than the electro-magnetic system which had been used for years at Culham, but they had also managed to

achieve a net energy gain through the fusion of the deuterium and tritium hydrogen isotopes.

Only yesterday, a self-sustaining reaction had been achieved which had generated enough heat to produce over 500 megawatts of fusion power, sufficient to prove without doubt that a commercial nuclear fusion power station was now feasible and achievable. This was a remarkable breakthrough; an achievement that, a few weeks earlier, had appeared impossible until Barclay himself had proposed a solution to the seemingly intractable problem which they had encountered during their research.

Barclay was not only elated, but drained to the point of near exhaustion. He knew that what they had achieved would need to be repeated, again and again, before it could be regarded as genuine progress. He began to wonder if he had the stamina to see this through to its conclusion, but there was no option other than to proceed. His Director had been hugely supportive, but at the same time was being very cautious.

“Whatever you do, Jack,” he had said, “make sure word of this does not get out. We need to be quite certain that this is the breakthrough we believe it to be before anyone outside this establishment learns of it. You have probably put this country at the very forefront of experimental and practical work in this field, and we must be sure we stay there.”

As his team prepared to run the trials again, and again and again, Professor Jack Barclay had time to reflect on his own position. Subject to further trials and tests producing the same results, he had actually achieved all that he had set out to do all those years ago. But somehow, instead of feeling elated, he felt almost depressed.

He began to wonder what there was to do next. Perhaps he should turn his hand to some new area of research in the field of particle physics, and quit this project while he was ahead. He had been thinking about it for some time, actually, especially when things had started to get on top of him. In fact, he thought he knew where he would like to go, if ever it could be arranged. It was overseas, too.

‘Dusty’ Miller was knackered, as well. No doubt about it. He was quite used to facing the extremes of fatigue and tiredness, and had been trained to withstand the physical and mental pressures which sleep deprivation under difficult conditions could bring. He was, he admitted, surprised at his present state. He had somehow never expected to experience it in London, of all places. The jungles of Indonesia or the deserts of Iraq – perhaps. But the back streets of West London – never.

Yet, there it was. He was knackered, and not finished yet, either. It was his job to wait for Jarvis to leave his home, and to follow him as he headed westward towards Oxford. Somewhere en route, Miller would meet up with colleagues who would then continue shadowing Jarvis until he finally arrived at the place from where he hoped to have a clear shot at Professor Barclay.

Jarvis finally left his house just before 2.0pm, complete with the briefcase. He looked, and felt, distinctly ill. He did not seem to be in any great hurry as he started his car, and headed off up the road.

Miller reported that Jarvis was 'on the move'. He pulled out of the side turning, and followed at a discrete distance on his motorbike. It was not long, however, before 'Dusty' Miller became concerned and confused. Jarvis was not going the way they had thought.

Like others in Section 11 who used the pool of bikes, Miller had a 'hard hat' with a built-in mobile phone. He activated it using the hidden keypad on the bike's fuel tank, and called the Ops. Room.

"Jarvis is not, repeat 'not' heading west," he told them. "He started off going east and has now turned south, heading for central London."

Clayton and Marsden were immediately alerted.

"Where the hell can he be going?"

Miller was instructed to discretely keep on his tail at all costs, and to keep the line open.

"Tell Gladys to look out for a summons for the congestion charge," he replied. "It looks as if I'll be going straight through the middle, and I don't propose to stop at a newsagents to buy a ticket."

"Traffic's getting very heavy," reported Miller a bit later. "Are you monitoring the tracking device I fitted?"

They were.

"Driving down Kilburn High Road," reported Miller. "Still heading south."

"Edgware Road, heading for Marble Arch."

"This traffic's awful," complained Miller. "He's got ahead of me at traffic lights – jumped the red."

Clayton and Marsden were totally confused, and quite unable to work out where Jarvis might be going. They had large scale maps of London spread out all over the Ops Room, and it began to look increasingly as if Barclay was not Jarvis's target after all.

"I've lost him!" shouted Miller. "I think he went for Park Lane, still going south, but I can't be sure. He's twice nipped across red lights, but I dare not give chase – too risky and I'd be spotted. I'll do my best to catch up with him. I'll wind this thing up down Park Lane, and hope for the best."

There was a long silence from the man on the motorbike.

"Got him again," shouted Miller. "Going like a bat out of hell down Buckingham Palace Road, towards the Embankment. He's a long way ahead of me though."

Moments later – "He's gone again. Saw him turn right along the Embankment towards Battersea, but he's out of view now."

"Battersea!" shouted Clayton. "Barclay's got a flat in Battersea somewhere!"

Clayton was desperately searching his computer for the address.

"Here it is!"

He got on the radio to Miller.

"Barclay's got a flat in Battersea – Albert Bridge Mansions. Get there!"

"Yes Colonel!"

Miller got there as fast as he could through the late afternoon traffic, but never saw Jarvis's car again.

"I don't like this, Bill," said Nick Marsden.

"Neither do I."

"Why would Jarvis be going to Barclay's flat in London, when we know he's in Harwell."

"Perhaps the Russians don't know that."

"We're guessing again, Bill. I suppose Jarvis couldn't be on his way to Dulwich, could he?"

"Barbara's place, d'you mean?"

"He's heading that way."

"But why, on earth?"

"Can't imagine. But I don't like the smell of this."

"Let's get someone down there, then, smartish."

"I'll go," said Marsden.

"I'd rather you stayed here, Nick running the Ops. Room. Send someone else if you like, but you stay here."

"OK," said Nick. "But let's not tell Barbara."

"At least she's here and Donald's with Catherine."

"I'll get it organised, just in case."

Miller found Albert Bridge Mansions all right, but there was no trace of Jarvis's car in the car park. He walked round the side roads, but found nothing. Eventually, he went into the building, and up to Barclay's flat. The door was firmly locked shut, and there was no sign of Jarvis, and not a sound coming from the flat.

As he left the flats twenty minutes or so later, he saw Jarvis hurrying away from a neighbouring block, carrying the briefcase. Miller managed to get a couple of quick photos using his mobile phone, and called the Ops. Room as Jarvis set off in his car heading back down the Embankment.

"Let Jarvis go," said Clayton, "and see if you can find anything at Barclay's flat."

Miller managed to pick the lock quite easily, and went inside quietly, closing the door behind him. He had taken the precaution of wearing latex gloves so as not to leave fingerprints. It was almost dark by now, but still light enough for Miller to see a prone figure sprawled on the kitchen floor, in an ever-increasing pool of blood. He took a couple of pictures, and left the way he had got in.

"I'm afraid your Professor Barclay is dead," he reported to Clayton.

"Not possible!" exclaimed 'S'.

"I recognised the man," retorted Miller. "I'll email the pictures I took right away."

"Do that," demanded Clayton, "and then get back here."

"Yes Colonel."

Nick downloaded the photos.

"He's right, damn it! No doubt about it, Bill. That's Barclay all right. Take a look."

“How the devil could Barclay get away from Harwell without us seeing him?”

“I’ll check with the team over there, and see what they have to say.”

“I tell you what!” exclaimed Clayton. “I’ll bet Barclay is still at Harwell after all. The man in the Battersea flat is probably his twin brother.”

“Dammit, I’d quite forgotten he had a twin!”

“Identical, apparently. The Russians have cocked-up, big time!”

After a couple of quick calls, Nick confirmed that Barclay was still at the laboratory, at a meeting with the Director.

“Now let’s think this through,” said Clayton. “Unless we can convince the Russians that they’ve got their man, the Professor is still very much in danger. But if we let Jack Barclay carry on as usual, they will soon find out, and have another go at him.”

“What are you suggesting?” asked Marsden.

“I’m not quite sure myself, yet. But we need to talk to our Barclay, and quickly.”

“And secretly.”

“That means going to Harwell, in case he’s spotted leaving the place. Unless we get him brought here in a van, or something.”

“Let’s do that.”

“I’ll get on to Robin Algar immediately,” said Clayton grabbing the red phone. Miller walked in.

“Sorry about the Professor, Colonel,” he said. “All my fault, I’m afraid.”

“Nothing’s your fault, Miller. We think the man you saw could be Barclay’s twin brother. It’s the Russians who have screwed things up, not you.”

“Time you took a break,” said Marsden. “Before you disappear, get on to your chums and make sure we are told the minute Jarvis gets home. And I want to know if he’s still got the briefcase.”

“Aye, aye, Commander.”

“Don’t be cheeky, Miller.”

Clayton called Nick into his office.

“I’m going over to the Cabinet Office for a meeting with Sir Robin Algar. He agrees we should pull in Barclay quickly and quietly, and he’s arranging for the Yard to collect him. By the time he gets to Algar’s office, we shall have agreed a strategy, I hope. Do you mind staying here?”

“Not at all. We’ve got bodies scattered all over the place, so I shall recall them.”

“By the way, I think we need to keep an eye on Jarvis, still. At least until he gets rid of that gun.”

“Agreed. I’ll get Miller out there again in the morning, but there are other chaps out there now, anyway.”

Clayton decided to go by bus and underground to Westminster. It gave him time to think.

“Barclay should be here within an hour,” announced the Cabinet Secretary as Clayton was shown into his office. “Scotland Yard have arranged to collect him in an unmarked car, so with any luck no-one will notice, even if he is being watched.”

Clayton’s mobile phone rang. He listened for a moment, and then said, “I know about it.”

He turned to Algar.

“My people noticed,” he said, “and they are at this moment in hot pursuit of the police car!”

“That’s a pretty smart outfit you run, Bill, and no mistake.”

“There are some pretty smart people in it, that’s what counts.”

Clayton rang Marsden at the office.

“While you’re recalling our deployed troops,” he said, “there are a couple of our blokes somewhere between Didcot and London, chasing an un-marked police car. Call them off, if you would – the car’s bringing Barclay here, but they obviously think Barclay’s been taken by the opposition.”

“I’ll do that, before there’s an accident!”

“Any news from Miller?”

“Yes; he’s just rung in to say that Jarvis has arrived home, complete with briefcase.”

Head of Section 11 and the Cabinet Secretary at last got down to discussing what to do next.

“My guess is,” said Clayton, “that Jarvis will be summoned to another meeting with our Russian friend, to get rid of the weapon. They’re not going to want him wandering around with that for long. Unless, of course, they discover that Jarvis has killed the wrong man, and task him to have another go.”

“Somehow, we have to convince the Russians that their mission was a success,” said Algar. “Otherwise, Barclay will be in even greater mortal danger, especially if they discover that his research work is at last proving to be something of a scientific triumph.”

“What do you suggest?”

“We could perhaps use our newly defected KGB man to spread the word.”

“No. There’s only one way the threat to Barclay will be removed, and that is to convince the Russians that he really is dead. Then they’ll give up, but not unless or until.”

Sir Robin Algar frowned.

“What ever are you suggesting now.”

Clayton outlined his audacious plan, to an increasingly incredulous Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

“You know,” he said eventually, “that could just work.”

“But only if we get the total agreement and co-operation of Barclay himself.”

“We simply must. After all, it’s for his own good as well as being of immense long-term benefit to this country.”

“You will have to use every diplomatic skill at your disposal, Sir Robin.”

“We might just do it between us. After all, the man has very few options.”

“Neither have we,” said Clayton. “There’s no plan ‘B’ that I can think of.”

The red secure phone rang. Algar answered it, and passed it to Clayton. “It’s for you. I might have guessed!”

Clayton listened for a moment. “Get Miller on to it. I want photos of the switch, and both men. Tell him to use the mobile phone camera, from outside. Let Jarvis go – we can pick him up when we want to.”

He hung up. “Jarvis has been told to meet our Russian friend tomorrow morning to hand back the briefcase. St. James’ coffee bar in Piccadilly. With a few pictures, we’ll have all the evidence we need to get rid of Jarvis.”

“He can rot in jail,” said Algar.

“No he can’t,” said Clayton. “If we get the police on to him, he’ll blow Section 11 clear out of the water. He’ll have to be handled very carefully, I’m afraid.”

The Cabinet Secretary’s intercom rang.

“Professor Barclay is here to see you, Sir Robin.”

“Good. Show him in. And bring the drinks tray.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN - DYING TO LIVE

Professor Jack Barclay looked very tired when he was shown in to the Cabinet Secretary’s office. He was a short man, not very smartly dressed, and with long, rather unkempt hair. He looked what he was – a scientist, who had better things to do than look after himself.

As well as being tired, he was also very puzzled, and not a little worried. He could not work out why he had suddenly been whisked away from his laboratory in such secrecy, and brought to the very centre of Government at break-neck speed. He lost no time in saying so.

Sir Robin Algar did his best to put the man at his ease, having introduced him to Colonel Bill Clayton, and offered him a drink.

“I can quite understand how you must feel, Professor, and I can assure you that we would not have brought you here late in the evening after such a busy day if we hadn’t concluded that it was not only absolutely essential, but because it is also, we judge, to be in your own best interests.

“First of all, though, I must congratulate you wholeheartedly on your recent successes. You will know that I am no scientist, but I am told that what you have achieved is of the utmost significance and importance to the future development of sustainable nuclear fusion as an energy source, and is therefore of inestimable value to this country.”

“That’s kind of you,” replied Jack Barclay, taking a sip from his large tumbler of whisky. “I take it my Director must have told you, as very few people outside my immediate team know of - well, our triumph if I may be bold enough to say so. I must confess to being absolutely euphoric at what has been achieved, although I could never claim to have been solely responsible. I have an excellent team working with me. Nevertheless, it is personally very satisfying to have achieved something that I have been working towards all these years. I feel both extremely excited and

extremely tired,” he added, “so this is most welcome, and really my first chance of anything like a celebratory drink.” He raised his glass. “I am quite sure, though, that you didn’t bring me all this way just to give me a glass of Scotch.”

“I have arranged for some coffee and sandwiches a little later, but you are right, of course,” said Algar. “There is a far more serious subject we need to discuss with you, and I can assure you that if we could have done so over the phone, then we would not have troubled you with such a journey this evening.”

“I have never travelled so fast in my life,” said Barclay with a grin. “The driver, I believe, was a policeman?”

“Yes he was, but you are by no means under arrest! Let me ask Colonel Clayton to explain. But I must tell you first that he is in charge of one of this country’s most secret organisations, which you will not have heard of before.”

“I am sorry to tell you, Professor,” said ‘S’, “that your work, and in particular your recent success, has placed you in grave personal danger. It may surprise you to know that my organisation has kept you under very close supervision and protection for several months now.”

“Supervision?” said Barclay disbelievingly. He took another sip of his drink. “What exactly do you mean by supervision?”

“I mean that one or more of my people has been with you every hour of the day and night, whether you have been at home, in the laboratory or abroad.”

“I find that quite impossible to believe,” protested the Professor. “I have seen or noticed no-one unknown to me – not at all, anywhere. And protection from what, may I ask?”

“From my point of view, it’s excellent news that you spotted nothing out of the ordinary. We are specially trained to be, if you like, invisible, by blending seamlessly into the background. Our task is to protect those UK citizens such as yourself who we know to be at risk in some way, but whose value to the nation is such that we wish them to continue their work unharmed. It is your success that has put you at such risk.”

“Why on earth wasn’t I told?” demanded Barclay.

“We judged,” replied Sir Robin, “that you were already under such stress with your demanding work and the problems you were seeking to overcome, not to mention the other demands being made on your time both at home and abroad, that to warn you of your imminent danger would have added an unbearable additional strain.”

“Perhaps I could chip in and explain,” said Clayton, “that apart from being Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service, Sir Robin here is also Chairman of the Joint Intelligent Committee. I report directly to him, and to nobody else. This may help to assure you that we know what we are talking about, and that the threat to your safety was, and continues to be I fear, immediate and very real.”

“We initially chose not to tell you before, as I have explained,” said Algar, “but recent events have persuaded us that you should now be told, and told immediately.”

“What recent events? And how recent?”

“Earlier this afternoon.”

“What happened this afternoon, then?” demanded Barclay.

“Before I tell you that, let me first of all give you some background,” said Clayton. He took a sip from his own glass, and topped up Barclay’s.

“You will know better than we do that your pioneering work has caused worldwide interest, particularly in America where they have been trying to tempt you into working with them at the Lawrence Livermore University, and similarly in the Gulf region. It is not our business to prevent you from following either option if you should so decide – in this country, you are free to choose.”

“Although we would prefer that you stayed here, of course,” added Algar.

“There are two players in this drama that you are aware of, Professor,” continued Clayton. “The United Arab Emirates want you to take the lead in helping them to develop nuclear fusion so that they have a source of wealth once their stocks of natural gas and oil run out. The Americans, on the other hand, are already developing such an energy source as I understand it, but want to tap into your mathematical genius in order to progress that development faster than they otherwise might. Their reason is simply that they need to reduce their dependence on energy supplies from the Middle East. Indeed, in the recent Presidential election campaign, they pledged to rid themselves of that dependence within ten years.”

Sir Robin Algar leant forward. “There is, however, a third power involved.” He paused, for effect. “Russia,” he continued. “And it is from them that the threat to you personally emanates.”

“I have never heard of any direct interest being taken in my work by them,” said Barclay.

“That is because they are not interested in you working with them in any way,” said Clayton. “They want your work stopped.”

“Stopped? But why?”

“Simply because they have huge stocks of oil and gas, which they are able to export to many countries around the world,” explained Sir Robin. “This gives them considerable political and economic power, and you will know that they have in the recent past used their gas and oil supply lines as a political weapon. They simply turn off the tap to get their own way on the international stage, as they did recently in the Ukraine.”

“So?”

“So your work in developing an alternative energy source was seen as a threat to that power base. For that reason, they are not interested in speeding up the work you are doing, but in delaying by as much as possible the commercial introduction of nuclear fusion as an energy source. And they have concluded that the only way that can be achieved is by bringing a halt to your development work.”

There was a gentle knock on the door. The coffee and sandwiches were delivered, and placed on the table in front of them.

“I can tell you,” said Algar, waving his hand to invite his colleagues to help themselves, “that our intelligence sources know for a fact they have considered all means of achieving that, either through some form of sabotage at Culham and

Harwell, or even by kidnapping you. In the end, however, they concluded that the only solution to their problem was to be achieved through your assassination.”

“Assassination?” Barclay was incredulous.

“I am afraid so,” confirmed Clayton.

“I am finding all this very difficult to believe,” said Jack Barclay.

“We are, I fear, deadly serious. Your life is in the gravest possible danger.”

“But how can you be so sure?” Barclay put down his untouched sandwiches.

“Let me just give you one example,” offered Clayton. “I told you that you have been under our protective umbrella for some months now. That includes both at Culham and Harwell, where members of my organisation have been employed as cleaners and on the catering staff so that we could watch over you while you were in the laboratories, while others were also on constant watch outside, on motorcycles, in vans, cars, whatever, both there and while you were at home or travelling between the two. My field officers, I should tell you, are all armed and expert marksmen, and they are all fluent in at least two languages apart from their native tongue. They were with you in France, at Cadarache, and while you were in California. My agents attended the reception that was held in your honour at the end of your last US visit – we have photographs if you wish to see them – and while they were there they recognised and spoke to US agents from the CIA who were also among the guests. In addition, and to the surprise even of the American authorities, there were two members of the Russian secret service, the KGB, in attendance. Such was the warmth of your reception by the people at the Lawrence Livermore facilities, that the Russians were convinced afterwards that you had agreed to work with the Americans. From the Russian point of view, this was the worst possible scenario, and it was immediately after that, that they decided that you should be assassinated so as to put an end to your work.”

“By then it was too late,” exclaimed the Professor. “We had already made the breakthrough we had been seeking .”

“The Russians didn’t know that, and pressed ahead with their plan.”

“And you knew what their plan was?”

“Yes, we did,” said ‘S’.

“So why are you telling me all this now?”

“Well, the real reason for your visit is that we must now tell you what happened this afternoon,” said Sir Robin. “Now you know the background, we hope you will understand that we have taken the Russian threat extremely seriously, and that we continue to do so. You need to realise how grave a danger you are in, Professor, and I can’t emphasise that enough. Your life is at real and immediate risk. We called you here today because, as we said just now, events of this afternoon meant that we can no longer act on our own on your behalf. We now need your help and co-operation if you are to survive the Russian threat.”

“This all sounds appalling,” said Barclay quietly, “and I find what you have told me quite impossible to comprehend. I am not used to this sort of thing, you must understand. Difficult though my life has been in recent months, it has been problems in my own field of work which have caused those difficulties, and therefore I could

understand them. But this – all this is so different and foreign to me. I find it impossible to comprehend that I am the subject of attention by the highest levels of Government in this country, by spies, and by foreign countries.”

He put down his coffee cup on the table around which they sat in Algar’s office, and reached for his glass. The glass was empty.

“May I please?” he asked, holding it out.

The Cabinet Secretary poured him another.

“So what happened this afternoon to make my visit here so urgent,” asked Barclay.

“I know that what we have told you so far has been deeply disturbing for you, Professor,” said Clayton, “but I am afraid we have to give you further bad news as well. We learnt yesterday that an attempt was to be made on your life today – this afternoon, in fact. We knew the identity of the killer, and took immediate precautions to reinforce our protection of you at Harwell. We had deployed armed men along the route we thought the assassin would take to get there, and were ready to arrest him the moment he got anywhere near you. However, he took us all by surprise, when, instead of heading west towards Didcot, he headed east and then south. We could not understand this at all, and although one of our top men set off in hot pursuit, he lost the man temporarily in heavy traffic in central London. I won’t beat about the bush, Professor. Your assailant went to Battersea, obviously believing you were in your flat.”

“My brother!” exclaimed Barclay.

“Exactly,” confirmed Sir Robin. “I’m sorry to have to say that your brother was shot and killed before we could reach him.”

“My twin brother, Roger,” said the distressed Professor.

The men left Barclay in silence for a few moments, to come to terms with the news.

Eventually, he said quietly, “Now I think I have some explaining to do, gentlemen.”

“When you feel ready,” said Algar.

Barclay took a gulp from his glass.

“Roger and I have never been close, and indeed rarely contacted one another. The last time we spoke, he told me that the bank where he had worked since he left school, as a junior clerk of some sort I believe, had told him that they wanted him to move to a different branch, or face the sack. Roger hated change, and dreaded the thought either of being fired or moving to the Sloane Square branch where he would know nobody and have nowhere to live. I offered him my flat, which I used so rarely that I had already decided to sell it. He was due to move in sometime in the next week or so, and was there today for a look round to see if it suited him. I haven’t even moved my stuff out of the place yet, although there’s little enough of it there. We are identical twins, and he must have been spotted there by your Russian friends. Now he is dead, and it’s my fault.”

“Nonsense! You must certainly not blame yourself in the least for your brother’s death,” insisted Clayton. “If anyone could be said to be at fault it is us.”

“I won’t hear of that, either,” protested Barclay. “You have saved my life through all your recent and secret efforts, and I owe you a huge debt of gratitude for that. If anything, I suppose, it is a case of mistaken identity on the part of the Russian authorities. But tell me. Where is my brother now?”

“Your brother remains in your flat, Professor,” said Clayton. “One of my men has managed to gain entry, and has seen him. He says your brother would have died instantly, and known nothing of it, which may be of some quantum of solace to you.”

“Thank you for that, at least. I suppose now I shall have to make arrangements for his removal, and for the funeral and so on,” sighed Barclay.

Clayton held up his hand.

“Before we discuss that, would you mind if we first told you in what way we now need your urgent help and support?”

“After all you’ve done for me, the least I can do is to agree to that.”

“First of all, we need positive identification that it is your brother who has been murdered,” said Clayton. “My agent took a couple of photographs, so perhaps when you are ready and feel up to it, you could look at them just to confirm that it is Roger.”

“Show me now.”

Clayton handed him the photographs, and Barclay nodded.

“Not a pretty sight, is it,” he said. “But there’s no mistaking that it is my brother.”

“At first my man was sure it was you, there is such a likeness. But thank you for confirming his identity.”

“We must now touch upon our need for your help,” said the Cabinet Secretary. “At this point in time, the Russians believe that you have been killed. Until they discover that you are still alive, therefore, you are no longer in any danger. Actually, it would have been more to the point if I had said ‘*Unless* they discover you are still alive.’ Your future safety depends entirely on them continuing to believe that their hired assassin has been successful, and that you will no longer be able to carry out further research into nuclear fusion. In other words, to put it bluntly, you will only be safe if you are officially pronounced dead, and the Russians believe you are dead.”

Professor Barclay looked ashen; the added strain was beginning to take its toll. He shook his head. “I am finding it difficult to take all this in,” he said.

Algar leant forward.

“Understandably, professor, you look very tired and distressed, so let me suggest we continue this discussion tomorrow after you have had some rest.”

“But where would I go?” he asked. “Surely not back to my digs. I would be spotted and killed!”

“Precisely the point I was about to make,” said Clayton. “You are now in a place of safety, and arrangements have been made for you to stay here tonight if you wish. I should say that to do otherwise would, as you guessed, expose you to immediate risk.”

“This is the very heart of Government,” added Sir Robin. “From here, all contingency planning is done, and disasters and wars dealt with. This is the home of

the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms – room ‘A’ is popularly known in the media as COBRA. This is the centre of national and international crisis management, and we have several Emergency Rooms for dealing with these issues, with every form of top security modern communications, video conferencing facilities and so on. With these exceptional facilities available to us, we also have adequate facilities for the staff who man these emergency centres. For instance, I have a fully furnished flat here, and you are more than welcome to stay in it. It is by no means luxurious, but it has all the basic essentials like a shower, a bed, cooking facilities and so on. Everything will be provided for you by my staff – I have already arranged for a cold supper to be available if you should agree to stay.”

“This is terribly kind of you, but then what? No doubt I shall be given an excellent breakfast tomorrow, but what happens to me after that?”

“We can continue to provide you with a place of safety, although not here necessarily, for as long as is necessary. But that will mean that, for the time being at least, you must avoid your present haunts – your digs, your laboratories, everything. To be blunt, you will have to take on a fresh identity, if we are to ensure that the threat to you is completely removed. You will have to disappear from circulation totally for the time being, while a new identity is established for you. Professor Jack Barclay will have been murdered, never to be seen again.”

“Keep talking,” said Barclay. “Exhausted and confused though I am, I want to hear all you have to say, to its conclusion.”

“So be it,” said Algar. “Let me summarise, then, without any further beating about the bush. If you agree, we will let it be known that your brother was in fact yourself, and that Professor Jack Barclay has been murdered in his Battersea flat. We will take you to a place of safety, probably in the Cotswolds, where you will be given a completely new identity. That means a new name and personality, new looks, new papers, and in the end, a new life. Once that process is complete, you will be free to take up your life again, wherever you wish, in complete safety, providing that your adversaries are by then convinced that you have been killed.”

Barclay sat in silence as he digested what was being suggested.

“And my brother?”

“We shall need to leave your brother where he is for the time being, until the police discover his body during the normal course of events. We cannot afford to tell them of his death, as that would put this whole operation at risk of failure. Once he is discovered, of course, the police will mount a full murder investigation, there will be a coroner’s inquest, and a full and dignified funeral. Should your transformation be complete by then, you will of course be able to decide where and when you wish the funeral to take place, and to attend.”

“I shall read my own obituary and attend my own funeral, you mean?”

“That will be the effect, yes.”

“I should say,” added Clayton, “that if you should wish to visit your brother while he is in your flat, we can arrange that, although it will not be without risk. We can assure you however, that whatever you decide, your brother will be treated with the utmost dignity and respect.”

Barclay sat back in his chair, deep in thought.

“It is odd, you know,” he said eventually, “that I have been wondering for some time what I might do if and when my work at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory came to its natural conclusion. I think it now has. There is much development work still to be done, of course, but mostly of a technical nature, putting into effect the theories which we have recently demonstrated to be practical. Interesting though it would be to see this through to a commercial conclusion, I can see little further pure science which I need to work on in this field. There is however, another area of research in which I have always aspired to contribute, also in the field of particle physics. Gentlemen, you may just have offered me the chance to start a new career, so to speak.”

He smiled.

“Tell me more though about my reincarnation. Where shall I go and what will happen?”

“We have several ‘safe houses’ as we call them, in remote areas of the country, and we would propose that you live temporarily in one of them, in the Cotswolds,” said Algar. “Buscot Park lies between Swindon and Burford, near Lechlade. It is the home of Lord Faringdon, who lives there with his family, although the property is now owned and managed by the National Trust. Part of it, however, is run by MI5, for various purposes including training. I can tell you that you will be very comfortable there, with your own apartment, and that you will be free to wander in the extensive grounds as you wish.”

“While you are there,” Clayton explained, “we will provide you with a completely new identity. One of my team is a retired RAF Air Commodore who ran the Institute of Aviation Medicine for some years, and is an expert in the field of plastic surgery. You will recall that this was pioneered by the RAF during the war.”

“I hope I’m not to be carved about,” said Barclay, alarmed.

“Certainly not – nothing will be done without your full agreement. But I suggest that it may be possible to rid you of that ugly scar across your forehead which immediately identifies you to those who know you. There are other things that can be done without surgery – raising the cheekbones, flaring the nose, changing your hairline and so on – all of which will adequately disguise you. A neatly trimmed set of whiskers would suit you, and a pair of spectacles is always a good idea. We can also make you a bit taller, by giving you slightly built-up shoes, and you can be taught to limp quite convincingly and use a walking stick. Once that process is complete, you will be given a new name, new papers, a new wardrobe and so on. In the end, you will be able safely to attend your brother’s funeral, visit your flat and your old laboratory to clear them both of your possessions, and nobody, hopefully, will recognise you, not least because they will think you are dead. Once that test has been passed, you will be free to rebuild your life however and wherever you wish.”

“How long will all this take?”

“Probably weeks rather than months,” replied Clayton. “Much will depend on how long it takes for the police to discover your brother, although their investigation will not make much progress until he – you – is positively identified. There will

probably still be sufficient likeness for you to be able to pass as, say, a cousin, so up to a point the identification process will be in our hands, and you will not be exposed to the public gaze until we all judge that you are ready.”

“The decision as to whether we proceed with all this is entirely yours, of course,” added Algar.

“I am inclined to agree now,” replied Barclay, “but perhaps I should sleep on it first, to be sure.”

“If you have any further questions, I can be here tomorrow to deal with them if you wish,” offered Clayton.

“I shall be around as well,” said Algar, “although there is a Cabinet meeting in the morning, and one or two other things I must attend to, but otherwise I, too, shall be at your disposal.”

“Thank you both. I think I’ll turn in now, though, if you don’t mind. It’s been quite a day.”

“My Secretary will show you to your temporary accommodation,” said Sir Robin. “It’s not far, although quite a way down, if you see what I mean, in the Whitehall bunker. You only have to say if there’s the slightest thing you want. Supper will be there when you get there, and there is wine in the fridge – please help yourself to whatever you want.”

“You have both been most kind and considerate,” said a grateful Professor Barclay, “not least in preventing my untimely death at the hands of the Russians.”

“If you should decide to proceed as we recommend,” said ‘S’, “I will arrange for you to meet with the Air Commodore tomorrow for a preliminary chat. His name is Mark Perkins, by the way, but he answers to ‘Doc’! We can then arrange for you to be moved, probably by helicopter, to the Cotswolds, so that your transformation can begin.”

“We shall then have to let it be known among your peer group that you have disappeared,” continued Algar. “You will obviously be missed from your laboratory, but we shall suggest that you could well have suffered a nervous breakdown after the recent stress you have been working under. Indeed your Director has already let it be known that he was becoming concerned about your health.”

“Somebody may have seen me leave in your Police car,” suggested Barclay.

“We don’t think so,” said Algar. “Your Director knows, and that only because you were at a meeting with him in his office. We arranged that, by the way.”

“A couple of my agents saw you go, and actually gave chase for a short while until they were told, but they reported nothing else in the least suspicious.”

“You seem to have thought of everything,” said Barclay.

He pondered for a moment, and then smiled,

“I must say that I begin to feel like a new man already!”

CHAPTER TWELVE - DEATH OF A KILLER

Dusty Miller was in something of a dilemma.

His instructions were clear enough - get photos of the switch, and both men. Use the mobile phone camera, from outside. Let Jarvis go - he can be picked up later. Or words to that effect. Sounded easy enough. The switch was to take place at St. James' coffee bar in Piccadilly, about eleven this morning, so they said.

But he was working on his own. Not that he minded that. It was just that he wasn't quite used to working in this urban environment. Belfast and Basra were one thing, but somehow London was different. And anyway, the last time they said where Jarvis was going, he went off in exactly the opposite direction. Suppose they were wrong this time, too? The only way to be sure would be to follow Jarvis from his home, but if he did that, Miller couldn't be at St. James' coffee bar before Jarvis got there. Jarvis was sure to go by Underground, but there was no way Miller could watch him get on the train, and then get on the one ahead of him, to arrive first.

No way.

The nearest station was Green Park. Leave by the Piccadilly north side exit, turn left, and there was St. James' coffee bar. There were lots of places like that near there. Costa Coffee, Prêt à Manger, and Starbucks. If you wanted real coffee, try the Ritz or Fortnum and Masons further on, but the Russians had picked St. James' for some reason. Only Americans and people who didn't care about coffee went there. That obviously included Russians. It was a sort of upper-class greasy spoon, Miller said later.

Miller's problem, though, wasn't about whether he would like the coffee when he got there - he knew he wouldn't - but how he was to get there before Jarvis.

So he rang Clayton.

"Morning, Colonel."

"Morning, Miller."

"How did you know it was me, Colonel?"

"Never mind, Miller. What's your problem?"

"I just wanted to be sure that Jarvis wasn't really important this morning," he said, "and that you were more interested in the handover, and who takes the briefcase from him."

"Correct."

"In that case, I need to get to the RV before Jarvis, rather than follow him to it. So I wanted to be sure it was still the Piccadilly St. James' coffee bar at 1100 hours."

"Right again."

"In that case, I'll slip back to your place and swap my bike for one with all the despatch rider's kit. I can park that in Piccadilly without attracting too much attention."

"Get on with it then, Miller. Just get pictures of the switch, and leave Jarvis to me."

"Thank you, Colonel."

So Miller was there well before Jarvis arrived. He had left his replacement bike, complete with panniers and chattering radio with its loudspeaker between the handlebars, on the double yellow lines, almost outside the coffee shop, and was

standing next to it pretending to be in earnest conversation with his despatch-rider control room. In fact he was taking photos of a very Russian-looking customer inside.

Miller decided he would get better pictures without the reflections on the window, so went in for a take-away Cappuccino. He had rather expected the Russian to be the same chap that gave Jarvis the gun in St. James's Park, but it wasn't. They all seemed to look alike anyway, Russians, but Miller was sure this was a different bloke, sitting there with his coffee. Miller got a couple of good shots of the man, and went back outside with his cardboard mug. The cardboard added nothing to the taste of the coffee, either.

It wasn't long before he spotted Jarvis, complete with briefcase, walking towards him along the crowded pavement from the Underground station. Miller had removed his crash helmet to go into the coffee shop, but put it back on now – he needed both hands, and the built-in phone in case of an emergency.

Jarvis had not been looking forward to this.

Yesterday had been an absolute nightmare, and he couldn't believe what he had done, or even, really, why he had done it. What an idiot he had been. At the time there hadn't seemed to be any other option open to him. In all honesty, there really wasn't one. He was being blackmailed, and that was that. He had given in, and now would have to live with the consequences for the rest of his life. His mind had been in absolute turmoil and he simply hadn't been able to think clearly.

He was pretty sure that the murder of Jack Barclay in his Battersea flat could not be traced back to him. Certainly not once he had got rid of the weapon and its wretched briefcase. He had taken exceptional care to leave no clues behind, had worn latex gloves, wiped the area clean so that no powder marks from the gun would be found, and so on. He had also taken special precautions to ensure that, first of all, he hadn't been followed to Battersea, and then that nobody had seen him enter or leave the flat across the car park from Barclay's block. His main concern now was that the Russians might attempt to use him again for some other job they wanted done, but once Donald was safe, they would have nothing on him. He had meant to phone Barbara last night to ask about the boy, but had been in such a state he had completely forgotten. He was sure she would have rung him quickly enough if Donald had not been returned safe and sound as promised. He would give her a ring later.

At least his wife knew nothing about it. She believed that, after a couple of 'sick' days off, he had been back at work. She knew the sort of work he did, and also knew better than to ask questions. He kept odd hours – always had – so it wasn't too unusual for him to leave home a bit later than normal this morning. He had walked to the station as usual, with his new briefcase, and she had no idea that he had gone to Green Park instead of Vauxhall.

It was a busy station, Green Park. Popular with tourists, and a major interchange, but Jarvis had made his way to the Piccadilly north side exit, and turned left. He soon found St. James' coffee bar, and went up to the counter to order his coffee. Nothing fancy. Just a straight filter, please, black. Sugar was on the table, they said.

He found a seat, leant the briefcase against the chair, tipped a file of sugar into his mug and opened his newspaper. He knew it would be a different Russian embassy man – he had been given a coded message, which would have been unnecessary if it was to be the same fellow who had given him the briefcase in the park.

Almost at once, a man from a nearby table pushed his coffee to one side and walked across to where Jarvis was sitting.

He leant across Jarvis, and pointed to an article in his paper.

“Interesting story, that,” said the man.

“It’s old news,” replied Jarvis, as he had been instructed.

“The old stories are always the best,” said the man, completing the message as he walked away. Jarvis noticed that he had picked up the briefcase.

Miller had noticed as well, and had photographed the whole thing from outside. The man with the briefcase hurried into the road, hailed a taxi and was gone.

Jarvis stirred his coffee as he also watched the man disappear into the traffic. An immense sense of relief flooded over him. Getting rid of that briefcase, and in particular its contents, was like getting rid of a rotten tooth. He felt quite euphoric. Now, perhaps, he could get back to something approaching a normal life, in spite of having to live with the memory of what he had done. He folded his paper and finished his coffee, deciding to wait for a moment before he, too, would leave the coffee bar.

In the end, it was half an hour or so before Jarvis left, and that was in the back of an ambulance.

It had never occurred to Jarvis that he was going to die.

At least, not yet anyway.

It was all so totally unexpected, although he should have known, really. He should have realised that the Russians would not let him survive to tell the tale. The man must have slipped something into his coffee as he leant across to point to the newspaper article. That was it. The coffee. He should never have drunk it, but how was he to know? Too late, now. It had tasted funny, somehow, even by St. James’ standards.

But now he knew he was going to die.

It was all happening so quickly.

He suddenly felt very ill indeed, and was already breaking out into a hot sweat, so at least it would be quick. Not like Alexander Litvinenko. When they killed him, it took 3 weeks for him to die from radiation sickness. They had given him a dose of polonium-210. No. Jarvis knew this would be quick, but also knew he could do nothing about it.

He wondered what it was the man had slipped into his coffee. But he couldn’t think of anything much, least of all the name of any poison. Like instant Alzheimer’s, it was. He was feeling quite light headed, and he wasn’t quite sure where he was any more, but thought he ought to try to get home. God, he was hot – the sweat was pouring off him. He felt very dizzy, and a bit out of breath, although he knew he hadn’t been running or doing anything much except drinking coffee. Bloody coffee. He thought he should try to stand up, ready to head for home, but somehow his legs

didn't seem to work properly. His mouth was dry, and he couldn't really see the door any more either. For some reason, his eyes wouldn't focus. He was very perplexed and bemused. His head was spinning, and he felt tired and somehow weak, as if his strength was ebbing from him. He decided he'd leave the briefcase where it was and come back for it tomorrow when he was feeling better. He didn't want the newspaper, anyway. But he couldn't remember where he'd put the briefcase, or even where he was. In spite of his confused state and the most awful raging headache he'd ever had in his life, he somehow realised that there wasn't going to be a tomorrow. He was dying. No doubt about it. He made a huge effort to stand up, determined to get a taxi. His head rolled back with the effort and he toppled into the table next to him, tipping it over and everything on it. The two girls sitting there screamed as he slumped to the floor.

Not that Jarvis heard them.

Miller did, though.

He was just about to get on his bike, ready to head for Clerkenwell with his camera. He glanced sideways into the coffee shop for the last time, just as Jarvis fell headlong into the table next to him. Miller dashed back inside and knelt over the sprawling body. He felt for a pulse, but there wasn't one. Jarvis was dead.

One of the staff rushed over.

"Get a plastic bag, quick," commanded Miller. "One that you can seal, if you've got one."

Miller carefully picked up what was left of Jarvis's mug of coffee. He could see crystalline grains still in the bottom of it. Could be sugar, could be something else. Forensic would find out.

While the girl hurried away, Miller first rang 999, and then Clayton, who thankfully replied immediately. Miller didn't beat about the bush.

"Jarvis is dead," he announced, "probably poisoned with something that acts very fast. I've got his coffee cup and will make sure it's given to the police when they arrive, unless you want it. I've rung for an ambulance, so I'll head straight back to your place with the camera. I didn't see his drink being spiked, but it might just be in one of the shots I took. Tell the garage my bike will need new number plates when I get back." He rang off.

The waitress arrived with the plastic bag.

"The man's probably been poisoned," said Miller to the astonished girl, as he put the mug into the bag and sealed it. "Make sure you give this to the Police when they arrive, and no-one else. Understand?"

The girl nodded, with her hand over her mouth.

Miller dashed out, and swung his leg over the bike. He switched on the headlights and the previously hidden flashing blue lights, and with the siren going full blast, made off at high speed, leaving Jarvis for the police to sort out. Nobody thought to try and stop him. He drove far too fast down Piccadilly, swerved round the Circus and into Shaftsbury Avenue. He wasn't altogether sure, thinking about it afterwards, how he got across the traffic at the Charing Cross Road junction, but eventually made

his way into Theobalds Road and then Clerkenwell Road. Left into Farringdon Road, and he was nearly there. He swerved right into Bowling Green lane, switched off his lights and siren, and spent a useful couple of minutes pottering about the back streets to make sure he wasn't being followed, before making his way into Clerkenwell Green and the Section 11 garage. They were expecting him.

Clayton took Miller's mobile phone, slipped out the memory stick, and inserted it into his computer.

"That's the bloke," said Miller. "I took that shot before Jarvis arrived. There's Jarvis, with the briefcase. And that's him with the Russian leaning over him, pointing at something in the newspaper. That must have been when he slipped something into Jarvis's coffee."

"Let's blow it up a bit," said Clayton, manipulating the computer programme to enlarge the image.

"Hey, look at that," said Miller. "There's something in his other hand, near the mug. Looks like glass or plastic – a tube of some sort."

"Very small, whatever it is."

They looked at the next photo Miller had taken.

"Gone!" said Clayton. "Looks as if he's just put it back into his pocket, judging by where his hand is."

"Pity this isn't a video."

They flicked to the next shot.

"And there he is, picking up the briefcase."

The next frame showed the man walking towards the door, briefcase in hand.

"Well done, Miller," said Clayton. "We'll get the experts to work on these photos to see if they can intensify the images a bit, but it looks almost certain that he fixed Jarvis's coffee with something or other, and put the empty phial or packet into his pocket before grabbing the briefcase and leaving."

"I made sure his empty coffee mug was secured and told one of the waitresses to give it to the police when they arrived. Forensic people should be able to find out what killed him."

"Pretty damned quick, whatever it was. I think I'll have a word with the Secretary of the Joint Intelligence Committee, and e-mail these photos to him straight away. Hang around if you will, Miller, in case something else crops up."

"OK, Colonel. I'll nip down to the mess room for a coffee."

He paused.

"On second thoughts, perhaps I'll have tea, just for a change."

Head of 'S' got through to Sir Robin Algar quickly, on the secure phone.

"I have news," said Clayton. "You must decide whether it's good or bad, but Alan Jarvis is dead."

"What? An accident or something?"

"No. He has been murdered. He met a Russian agent, as arranged, to hand back the gun he used last night, and the man spiked his coffee with something or other. Very quick acting, whatever it was. Jarvis was dead within a minute or so."

“How do you know all this?” demanded Algar.

“One of my chaps was there and witnessed the whole thing. Nothing he could do – it was all too quick, and he didn’t actually see the substance being put into Jarvis’s coffee. But he’s got photographs.”

“Has he, by God!”

“I’ve emailed them to you just this minute. Have a look, and get your technical chaps to enhance a couple if you can. They were taken from outside the coffee bar, so they’re not that brilliant.”

“Can we recognise the Russian?”

“Almost a portrait of the man.”

“In that case, I might suggest the Foreign Secretary has the Ambassador in for a word.”

“Don’t let’s start expelling diplomats, for heaven’s sake, or my cover will be blown,” pleaded ‘S’.

“Don’t worry – we’ll handle it with care. But we can’t have Foreign nationals murdering our people in our own back yard, and then expect to get away with it. I suppose the police are on the case now, are they?”

“They should be. My man rang 999 as soon as he knew Jarvis was dead. He also had the presence of mind to secure the coffee cup, so the Met’s forensic lab in Lambeth should be able to identify what was used.”

“Sounds as if your chap was on the ball,” commented Algar. “I’ll check with the Yard, to see how they’re getting on. It might be helpful if we let the press know that one of our top “spies” has been murdered, and let them work out who did it.”

“Give me a couple of hours first, will you Robin. I’ve one or two loose ends to tie up here still, if you don’t mind. Incidentally, while you’re on to the media, you might let them know too that one of our top scientists has disappeared – nervous breakdown suspected because of over-work or something like that. We want the Russians to think that Jarvis has got the right man.”

“Good idea, that,” replied Algar. “By the way, I should have asked, but is Jarvis’s boy OK – I forget his name?”

“Donald. And he’s OK. We got to him first.”

“Jarvis didn’t know that?”

“No. We let him think the Russians had taken the boy, otherwise the whole operation would have been abandoned. We needed Jarvis in the loop, to confirm who their target really was.”

“The Russians must have wondered what the hell was going on, knowing they hadn’t taken him, but Jarvis continuing to react in spite of that, as if they had.”

“They must have guessed, but didn’t care so long as Jarvis was still prepared to do their dirty work for them.”

“Interesting! I’ve pulled up your photographs on my email now, by the way. Good, aren’t they? I’ll get my chaps working on them, and then I think I’ll get Wilfred Forsyth to pull in the Ambassador Yuri Nevsky, to see what he has to say for himself. Tomorrow give you enough time for your ‘loose ends’?”

“Plenty, thanks, but make sure the Foreign Office demands the return of the briefcase and its contents. They’re not supposed to know that we discovered it was theirs in the first place and that it contained a Kalashnikov. We need to let them think that we believe it belonged to Jarvis, and that it contained documents stolen by him at their request.”

“Good point, Bill. Anything else I should brief the F.O. about?”

“Not so long as they remember that officially we don’t know that Jarvis killed Barclay, or that he’s even dead. Even though he isn’t, if you see what I mean. Let me know what happens.”

“Any idea where Nick is?” Bill Clayton asked Barbara.

“Not really,” she replied. “Said he was going out on a case, but would be back later this afternoon.”

“Let me know when he’s back. I need to see him for a chat, but don’t bother getting him specially. It will keep for an hour or so.”

“Coffee?” she asked.

“Please. And see if you can get Doc. Perkins on the phone. He’s at Buscot Park with Professor Barclay. I’d like to know how that’s going.”

Head of ‘S’ spent the rest of the afternoon catching up on things like that, tying up loose ends, clearing paper work, and so on, but all the time he was conscious of a tricky personnel issue he had to deal with later. But he needed to talk to Nick about it first. Nick eventually got back to HQ just after five, and went straight in to see Clayton.

“The little lady next door said you wanted a word,” he said cheerily.

“Close the door, Nick.”

“Sounds serious,” said Nick.

“In a way it is, in that it affects Barbara, but I wanted to talk to you about it before I spoke to her.”

“What’s happened?”

“Alan Jarvis is dead. Murdered by the Russians.”

“Holy smoke!”

“Quite!”

Clayton showed Marsden the photos, and told him what had happened earlier.

“Miller can’t be blamed for Jarvis’s death in any way. He’s done remarkably well, really,” said Marsden.

“I couldn’t agree more,” said Clayton. “The point is though, that apart from the diplomatic hoo-hah, which is not for us to sort out, it means that Barbara’s young son Donald no longer has a father. She needs to be told.”

“Quite,” said Marsden. “Of course she does.”

He paused for thought.

“Tricky one, this.”

“Quite,” agreed Clayton. “Shall I tell her, or will you, or shall we have her in and tell her together.”

“Together might be best,” suggested Marsden.

“Why?”

“Well, we both know that Jarvis is Donald’s father.”

“Was.”

“Pardon?”

“Was Donald’s father. He’s dead now.”

“Quite.”

“I don’t much fancy telling her on my own, to be honest,” said Clayton.

“Quite. Neither do I, to be honest,” agreed Marsden.

“Together, then.”

The two men sat looking at one another.

“How do you think she’ll react, then?” asked Clayton. “You probably know her better than I do, what with having been here longer, and going out with her now and then.”

“Well,” began Marsden. “Well. She may not be too upset, since she didn’t really like the man, after the way he’s treated her recently. On the other hand, she may feel upset that Donald no longer has a father. Not that Donald liked him much either,” he added.

“Never quite understood who he was, as I understand it,” said Bill Clayton.

“Quite. He never seemed very happy in the man’s company, somehow.”

There was another pause.

“Well. Let’s get this over then.”

“Should we have a bottle of wine open or something?” asked Nick Marsden.

“She might not feel like celebrating,” Bill reminded him. “But I think there’s one in the fridge if necessary.”

“I’ll ask her to come in, then,” said Nick.

Nick fetched her from the office next door.

“Come in Barbara, and take a seat,” invited Bill. “We have something to tell you.”

“I’m not getting the sack, am I?” She looked worried.

“No, no. nothing like that at all.”

“That’s a relief, I must say. It’s getting more and more expensive looking after Donald these days, as he grows older.”

“How is the boy, by the way,” asked Bill.

“Pleased to be home again and back in his old routine, but he really did enjoy his few days with you and Catherine, Bill. I can’t thank you enough for that.”

“No problem at all,” replied Bill.

“In fact, he rang only a short time ago, wanting to come in to show you both his latest drawing, which apparently got first prize at school today. Very proud of it, he is, and very disappointed I wouldn’t let him bring it round.”

“I could drop by later to see it, if that would help,” suggested Nick.

“I’d like that, too,” said Barbara. “But what did you want to see me about?”

“Well, I won’t beat about the bush, Barbara, but we thought you should know straight away. It’s about Alan Jarvis. I’m afraid he died earlier today.”

“Oh dear,” said Barbara. “An accident or something.”

“Not quite. He was murdered. Poisoned. By the Russians we think.”

The girl looked shocked.

“Why would they do a thing like that?”

“They had blackmailed him into doing some work for them, and then wanted him out of the way.”

“Oh dear,” she said again.

“I hope you’re not too upset,” said Nick, even though she didn’t seem to be in the least.

“I suppose I should be,” she replied, “but I’m afraid I’m not. I never really cared for the man. In fact, if I’m honest, I hated him lately.”

“Would you like a glass of wine?” asked Bill clumsily, feeling rather as though he could do with a glass himself. “To settle the nerves.”

“There’s a bottle in the fridge – I’ll get it.”

When she had poured them each a glass she said, “You know, I really feel more sorry for Donald than anyone at the moment.”

“Why’s that?” asked Bill.

“Well, he’s never really had a father, and now he never will. And he’s getting to the age when he could really do with one.”

“Well,” said Nick. “Perhaps I could help a bit there. From time to time.”

She looked at him quizzically.

“What I mean is,” Nick blundered on, “we do seem to get on quite well together, and I’m quite good at train sets and that sort of thing. I can punt a rugby ball about and we could play cricket if he likes.” Nick was getting ever more enthusiastic. “And I’ve got a small boat at my place near Portsmouth – I could teach him to sail, and even go fishing off the beach, and catch crabs in the rock pools, and ...”

“Hang on, Nick!” said Barbara. “Don’t get too carried away! But if that’s the craziest proposal of marriage I’m ever likely to get, then I accept, on Donald’s behalf of course.”

“Good grief, Barbara. Really?” Nick looked stunned. “If only I’d known, I’d have asked long ago.”

Bill Clayton saw his chance, and took it.

“Look here, you two. Finish off that bottle of wine, but I must get home if you’ll excuse me.”

He made for the door and left.

Nick took Barbara’s arm. “Come on, old thing,” he said. “Let’s get a bottle of bubbly on the way back to your place, and have a look at Donald’s drawing.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN - DIPLOMATIC MOVES

His Excellency, Yuri Nevsky, Ambassador to the Court of St. James’s of the Russian Federation, wasn’t best pleased to be summoned to the Foreign Office. He had only presented his credentials to Her Majesty in June. A quaint little ceremony, full of pomp and tradition, the sort of event which could only be staged in London.

But he and his wife had enjoyed it nevertheless, and had felt quite grand, even honoured, to be presented to Her Majesty.

This was going to be rather different, however. He had hoped never to be 'summoned' during his tenure of office, and certainly not quite so soon. Although he had met the Foreign Secretary, his meeting this time would be with some underling-or-other, probably the Permanent Secretary, Sir Wilfred Forsyth – a nice enough chap, although rather fierce when he wanted to be. As a general rule, Ambassadors were dealt with by civil servants, on a day-to-day basis. Government Ministers were dealt with by Government Ministers.

Nevsky knew what it was all about. The UK had lost one of its top spies, a man from MI5 called Jarvis, who had died in mysterious circumstances in a Piccadilly coffee shop. The newspapers were running the story, and speculating that the man had been murdered by a Russian KGB agent. Of course, there was not a shred of evidence to support this outrageous suggestion, but nevertheless Her Majesty's Government, through the Foreign Office, had to be seen to be 'doing' something. Nevsky understood that. Nevsky had also been fully briefed. He knew the background, and knew the facts. He also knew that, even if the UK Government believed it could prove Russian involvement in the man's death, they would take no action whatsoever, because if they did, one of their own Top Secret organisations would be blown wide open.

There were, however, a few worrying issues surrounding this case which did not entirely put the Ambassador at his ease as he drove to Whitehall.

He knew that the dead spy had been blackmailed into carrying out an assassination for them, which the man had done in spite of the fact that the blackmail weapon had not, in the end, existed as the Russians had hoped and planned. The man had been told that his son was to be abducted by Russian agents, which had certainly been the intention, but when it came to it, they had not been able to carry out their plan. At the time they had intended to take the boy from his school, he had already disappeared. Indeed, he did not turn up to school that morning at all.

So the kidnap could not take place.

Nevertheless, Jarvis had carried out their mission for them, obviously believing that his son was being held by the Russians, as threatened. To this day, the Ambassador and his staff had not been able to explain where the boy had been instead of being at school, or why he had disappeared. There had been no apparent trace of him at home, either, so perhaps he was ill. If he was ill, the British agent seemed to be unaware of the fact, and had assumed that his son had been kidnapped, as he had been told. That in itself was extremely odd, to say the least.

And another thing. The man whom Jarvis had so neatly assassinated for them, Professor Jack Barclay, had still not been confirmed as being dead. He had been reported missing, certainly, in a low-key sort of way, and the theory was that the Professor, having suffered a nervous breakdown of some sort due to pressure of work, had simply disappeared for a few days. Rubbish! He was dead! At least, their best information was that he was dead, but the Ambassador had a funny feeling that he

may not be. For some reason yet to be explained, the British authorities had not yet found his body, or, if they had, were keeping the fact quiet.

None of his advisors had been able to offer the Ambassador a satisfactory explanation for either of these two, rather odd, circumstances. The hope and expectation was that he, the Ambassador, would be able to discover more during the course of his interview at the Foreign Office.

In the end, he didn't.

At the appointed hour, Yuri Nevsky, accompanied by his interpreter and a secretary, was escorted with due dignity into the office of Sir Wilfred Forsyth. Nevsky, of course, spoke perfect English, but the interpreter was there – well, shall we say, just in case, and to take notes and so on. Forsyth was similarly accompanied, it has to be said.

Nevsky could not but admire Forsyth's office. It was, to say the least, very grand, totally in keeping with the old Foreign Office building itself, with its high ceilings and sweeping, carpeted staircases, lined with magnificent portraits. Forsyth rose from behind a huge oak desk to greet Nevsky as he was ushered in to the office, formally but cordially. He motioned the Ambassador towards one of several leather armchairs around a circular Victorian inlaid coffee table, in front of an open fireplace, laid with coal and logs. Officials from both parties sat at the conference table on the other side of the room.

The Ambassador looked around him.

"I envy you your splendid office," he said to Forsyth. "Compared with this, mine is humble accommodation, although by Russian standards, still rather grand. But this ..." He waived his hand as he looked around him.

"Thank you, Ambassador," responded Forsyth. "As I am sure you will realise, this building and its interior is steeped in history. I am lucky to be able to benefit from that."

Nevsky was offered a sherry, in a crystal glass, poured from a finely cut crystal decanter. Or tea or coffee, if he preferred.

He could well imagine Forsyth's predecessors, sitting in this very chair, sipping sherry poured from the same decanter before an open fire, ruling a third of the world at the height of Britain's empirical and colonial days.

"You may know, Mr. Ambassador, why I have asked you here today," began Forsyth when they had settled.

"I was not so much asked," Nevsky reminded Forsyth, "as summoned,"

"Quite so," replied Forsyth, "but that is the way of things in the diplomatic world, is it not? As I was saying, I am sure you will know that you have been *summoned* here today, if that is how you would prefer to put it, because of the distressing murder of one of our senior civil servants. I am equally sure you will have read reports in the newspapers alleging that, in some way or other, your own civil servants were responsible for the man's death. I would be glad to hear what you have to say about these allegations."

"As you would expect, Sir Wilfred, I emphatically deny that we had any knowledge of, or involvement in this murder, if that's what it was. However, since

you raise the matter, which, as you suggest, I have seen reported in your rather hysterical media, the least I can do on behalf of the people of the Russian Federation, is to ask you to pass on our sympathy to the family of the man concerned.”

“Thank you Ambassador. I shall be pleased to do so. But, I fear that, from what you say, you may not have been fully briefed about the facts surrounding this tragic incident.”

“It should not surprise you, Sir Wilfred, when I tell you that I have received no briefing at all, since we know nothing about the case to which you refer, other than what we have read in your newspapers.”

“Well, I’m sorry to say that it *does* surprise me to hear that. It is only fair that I tell you that your officials have let you down, Ambassador, by not keeping you fully informed, as I suspected earlier.”

Forsyth refilled the ambassador’s glass from the decanter, and reached for an envelope on the coffee table. He removed a photograph from the envelope, and passed it to Ambassador Nevsky.

“You will probably recognise this as Dmitry Makienko, second secretary in your commercial department. This photograph was taken yesterday, as you will see from the date and time at the foot of the print.”

Nevsky removed his spectacles and polished them on a clean ‘kerchief from his top pocket.

He replaced his glasses, and looked closely at the photograph.

“The man looks vaguely familiar, I must admit, but I cannot claim to know every official in our large Embassy.”

He motioned to his secretary, who bustled across the room.

“Do you know this man?” he demanded.

“Indeed I do, Ambassador,” said the man. “It is comrade Makienko. I know him well, and, as a matter of fact, we frequently lunch together at the St. James’ coffee house. I recognise that, also.”

“That will do, thank you,” said the Ambassador, waving his clerk away angrily. The man was a fool. Fancy agreeing that the photograph had been taken in the very coffee house where Jarvis was murdered.

“So, Mr. Permanent Secretary,” said Nevsky tetchily to Sir Wilfred Forsyth, “You appear to have a photograph of one of our officials having luncheon. Have I been summoned here just to confirm that?”

“Up to a point, yes,” said Forsyth. “Your official happens to have been lunching, if that is what he *was* doing, in the very establishment in which our man was murdered, on the same day and at about the same time.”

“A pure coincidence,” claimed Nevsky, haughtily. “It can be nothing else.”

“Perhaps I could ask you to look closer at the photograph, Your Excellency,” invited Forsyth, “since there appears to be little or no evidence that your official was having lunch at all. It is, as I understand it, a self service coffee shop, and your man has nothing on his table apart from a coffee mug. It would not appear that the man went there for lunch at all.”

“I am not familiar, Sir Wilfred, with the man’s dietary habits.”

“I put it to you, Ambassador, that your official did not go there yesterday to have lunch, but to meet our man Jarvis.”

“Rubbish!” exclaimed Nevsky. “I really must protest that you should waste so much of my time on this trivia and wild speculation. I shall regard it as my duty on returning to the Embassy, to write a full and detailed report to my superiors in Moscow, who will no doubt deliver an official and formal protest at your action in summoning me here today.”

“As you wish, Mr. Nevsky.”

“If you have a shred of evidence that my man Makienko knew your man at all, I should be pleased to hear it.”

His secretary shuddered. The Ambassador was getting carried away.

“Certainly, Ambassador. If it’s evidence you want, look at this.”

The ambassador’s secretary raised his eyes to the heavens.

“Here is another photograph,” said Forsyth, reaching in to the envelope. “This shows Makienko leaning over Jarvis, apparently in conversation with him. You will note the date and time printed at the foot of the picture. A little later on that day and in the same place, Jarvis died.”

Forsyth waited for a reaction, but there was none.

“Your excellent and efficient secretary has already confirmed that the photographs of Makienko were taken in the St. James’ coffee bar, and that he frequented the place often. No doubt that is why he suggested it as a rendezvous, don’t you think?”

At the moment, the Ambassador was not thinking at all. This interview was not going at all as he had hoped and planned.

Nevsky removed his glasses, polished them again, and picked up both pictures.

“You will also notice, in the second photograph I have handed to you, what appears to be a phial in Makienko’s right hand, near Jarvis’s coffee cup,”

Nevsky said nothing.

“And here is another,” said Forsyth, adding to the man’s discomfort, “which shows your agent – sorry, second secretary in your commercial department - having just replaced the phial in his pocket.”

Forsyth almost felt sorry for the man across the table, who remained silent, studying the pictures intently through misted spectacles.

“Finally,” said Sir Wilfred, twisting the knife, “I will show you a photograph of Makienko picking up Jarvis’s briefcase, and then yet another,” he produced it from the envelope with a flourish, “of him leaving the coffee bar with the briefcase. A few moments after that, Jarvis died.”

Sir Wilfred Forsyth sat back in his chair, as he watched the Ambassador wrestle with the evidence he had been shown. Nevsky mopped his brow, and then, similarly, sat back in his leather armchair with a resigned air. He removed his spectacles once again.

“What do you expect of me, Wilfred,” he asked with a sigh, casting formality aside.

“First of all, Yuri,” replied Forsyth, “I hope we can avoid any major diplomatic incident over this matter. Her Majesty’s Government does not wish to see a repeat of the aggravation and tension which followed the murder of Alexander Litvinenko. In that incident, your Government refused, and indeed still refuses for that matter, to extradite the killer. The circumstances here, however, are somewhat different. Litvinenko was a Russian citizen, murdered by another Russian citizen, but on British sovereign territory. In this case, we believe one of your fellow Russians has murdered a British citizen, and we regard that as altogether more serious, as you can imagine.”

The Ambassador nodded.

“I am sure my Government would also wish to avoid a major dispute arising out of this case, always assuming, of course, that you are able to prove your allegations in the first place.”

“I must admit that, apart from the photographs, the evidence we have is so far largely circumstantial. The poison administered to Jarvis was one of the fastest acting there is, based on nicotine, but without access to Makienko’s clothing or the phial he carried, we cannot directly prove that it was he who administered the poison. I have no doubt, however, that given half a chance, a British jury would not hesitate to conclude that Jarvis was murdered by Makienko, and bring in a guilty verdict.”

“I have to agree with you,” admitted Nevsky. “In spite of what I claimed earlier, I was given a detailed briefing about this incident, and we have also concluded that you would have difficulty in bringing a satisfactory case to court. We were then, of course, unaware of the existence of the photographs that you have shown me.”

Nevsky sipped his sherry, thoughtfully.

“May I keep the photographs?”

“No, sir. You may not.”

Nevsky nodded.

“So I ask again, Wilfred, what it is you expect of me.”

“First of all and perhaps most importantly, I must demand the return of Jarvis’s briefcase and its contents. We have, of course, mounted an urgent and detailed search in an effort to ascertain what papers Jarvis may have passed to you, but they must be returned immediately. I also need your assurance that Makienko will leave this country at the earliest possible opportunity.”

“Would you propose to expel him? That would result inevitably in tit-for-tat expulsions, and who knows where that might end.”

“If I must expel him, then I shall, but I hope you will see to it that expulsion will not be necessary. I also hope it will not be necessary for us to recall our Ambassador for consultations, with all that implies in the public mind.”

“So be it,” replied the Russian. “As it happens,” he added, grasping for some sort of face-saving device, “Makienko is about at the end of his tour, and due to leave anyway.”

Forsyth knew this was not true, but said nothing.

“If it would help to speed up his repatriation, I can arrange tickets for him and his family on the first British Airways flight to Moscow in the morning. Her Majesty’s Government would be only too happy to meet the cost.”

“Thank you, Sir Wilfred, but that will not be necessary. Similar arrangements are already in hand. As to the briefcase,” added the Ambassador, recovering his composure, “I fear its return will not be possible. It belonged to us in the first place, and I can assure you that, when it was returned to us at the meeting between Makienko and Jarvis, it contained no papers or copies of papers relating to any business of the British Government.”

Forsyth smiled. At least Nevsky was telling the truth about the contents of the briefcase.

“Your Excellency,” he said formally, after a pause for thought, “I accept your assurances about the contents of the briefcase, and that Makienko will be leaving this country tomorrow on the first available flight to Moscow. For my part, I shall take steps to ensure that there is no public or official comment made on the press speculation about Russian involvement in the Jarvis case, and no doubt, in the absence of any direct evidence at the present time, Scotland Yard will similarly refrain from official comment.”

Nevsky stood to leave.

“Thank you Sir Wilfred. I am glad that you and I understand one another.”

They shook hands.

“By the way,” said the Ambassador as he reached the door, “as an ex-member of the KGB myself, I must congratulate your people on the technically excellent fake photographs you have shown me. Very convincing!”

He grinned and left.

Forsyth immediately emailed a full video recording of the entire meeting to Sir Robin Algar, at the Cabinet Office.

The Ambassador was not a happy man. He had learnt nothing from his meeting at the Foreign Office, except that the Permanent Secretary was a very clever and astute public servant, who had got the better of him throughout. For one thing, he, Yuri Nevsky, had missed the chance to probe about Professor Barclay. All his staff at the embassy were quite sure that Barclay had been shot as planned, but there was now an ominous silence from the British about the whole affair, both from official sources and in the media, which he and his colleagues could not understand. Surely, the shooting of an eminent scientist like that would have provoked a good deal of interest, but there was, as yet, simply no confirmation of his death. Barclay certainly seemed to have disappeared suddenly, and that had been officially admitted, but there were only the unsubstantiated rumours circulating that he might have had some sort of nervous breakdown. It would have been a tricky subject for him to raise with Forsyth, but he could have engineered it given time. The fact was, though, that he had been wrong-footed almost from the start.

Those damned photographs.

It had been stupid of him, as well, to make that rather cheap remark about them being fakes. He wished he hadn't said that. Altogether, a bad afternoon. He concluded that, in spite of Putin making it to President, ex-KGB men were not really cut out to be diplomats. Certainly Dmitry Makienko did not even appear to be a good KGB officer. He had been sent to England with the specific responsibility for getting rid of Barclay, but on the present evidence, he should never even have been allowed out of the Russian Federation.

As Yuri Nevsky got into his car and drove off, he turned to his secretary and fixed his forearm in a vice-like grip.

"If that incompetent buffoon Makienko is not on the first aeroplane out of here tomorrow morning," he hissed, "then you will be on the next."

The bruises showed for a week.

The first flight out of London the following morning was a British Airways departure from Heathrow at 8.40, so Dmitry Makienko did not have a lot of time to get himself ready to leave. At least his special pleading had been partially successful, in that his family had been granted an extra two days before they were required to follow him. Flight BA0872 was always popular, as its arrival at Domodedovo after a seven hour non-stop flight gave businessmen time for a good dinner and a whole day's work in Moscow the next day. Makienko was booked tourist class, and there was no chance of an up-grade. Neither could he plead diplomatic status, as this had been withdrawn, and he was travelling on his personal passport. So he was treated just like anyone else, except that the Embassy had at least provided him with a car and a driver to get him to Heathrow.

This was probably just to make sure he actually got on the aircraft.

Dusty Miller was there for exactly the same reason.

The only difference was that the driver left the airport after he had seen Makienko check in. Miller, on the other hand, followed him through passport control and the security checks, into the departure lounge. But then Miller had a special pass which allowed him to do so. He also had a small case with him – cabin baggage – so he looked just like any other passenger. Not that Makienko knew what he looked like, anyway, so there was no way he would be recognised or arouse any suspicion.

Miller was sitting near the Russian in the departure lounge, and noticed that he was wearing the same overcoat that he had on in St. James' coffee bar. The man left it on his seat, with his hand baggage, to visit the toilets, and Miller generously offered to keep an eye on it for him while he was away. It was too good a chance to miss.

Miller risked all, picked up the coat, and hurriedly followed Makienko into the gent's toilets, where he found an empty cubicle. It took him no time at all to cut the right hand pocket out of the coat with his knife, and be back in his seat before the Russian reappeared, still casually wiping his hands on the seat of his trousers. The man nodded his thanks to Miller.

Dusty knew that if there were to be traces of that poison anywhere, they would be in that pocket. Then the authorities would have all the evidence they ever needed to prove that Makienko had killed Jarvis. They already knew the poison that had been

used. It was nicotine based, made from soaking tobacco leaves in extreme heat, and then crystallising the resulting tar. It took only a tiny amount to cause death, often in as little as a minute, and coffee was the ideal drink in which to disguise the poison's strong taste.

When the flight was called, Miller followed the Russian along the extended footbridge pier to the aircraft door, watched the man board the aircraft, and then waited with the ground staff until the engines started and the aircraft was cleared for 'push back'. Only then, when he was sure there was no way the Russian could avoid being taken back to Moscow, did he return to the terminal building and report to the Clerkenwell Ops. Room that Makienko was on his way home.

Later that day, MI6's Moscow station confirmed that he had arrived. He had been met, and whisked away in a large Zlin with blacked out windows. Moscow station could only guess where he had gone.

Actually, the people in London were more excited about the coat pocket Miller had brought them, than the whereabouts of the ex-second secretary in the commercial department of the Russian Embassy.

Dmitry Makienko was taken from Domodedovo airport direct to the Lubyanka Building in central Moscow, now Headquarters of the FSB, the successor organisation to the KGB. The KGB was too well known for its new title to have gained popular currency yet, and in any case there was still a KGB museum in the building. But the notorious Lubyanka prison was also still there, and for one terrifying moment, Makienko wondered if that was to be his final destination.

Instead, he was taken to the office of one of the FSB Directors, who asked him for 'an explanation'.

There wasn't one.

He, Dmitry Makienko, had thought it a good idea to use an Englishman to murder Barclay, so as to remove any shadow of suspicion from the Russian Federation, and then to eliminate the perpetrator after the deed had been done. That had the additional benefit of getting rid of one of Britain's top spies, as part of the same operation. So far as he knew, the whole operation which he had meticulously planned and executed, had gone exactly to plan.

The mystery now, though, was why the British authorities had not yet announced the death of one of their most eminent nuclear physicists. It was only this that was now casting some doubt, in certain circles, about Makienko's professional abilities. He explained to his Director that he had *personally* been to the block of flats in London used by Jarvis, across the car park from where Barclay lived. With high powered night vision binoculars, the prone body of Professor Barclay was clearly visible on the floor of his apartment. There was no question about the fact that he was dead.

The fact also was, though, that the British authorities appeared not yet to have discovered the body. That was why there had been no announcement. Makienko had considered tipping off the police, but had decided against it. His target was dead, and that was good enough. The body would be discovered in due course, without doubt.

As to the so-called photographs of his involvement in the subsequent death of Jarvis, these were obviously fakes. His Excellency the Ambassador had said so himself. No British agent could possibly have known that he was to meet Jarvis at that awful coffee bar, and he, Dmitry Makienko, had most definitely seen no evidence at all of anyone acting suspiciously, agent or not, with or without a camera, and of course had been there some time before Jarvis arrived. Naturally, he hadn't seen the photographs himself, and his colleague the Ambassador had been denied copies, so they were obviously clever forgeries, used by the British to get him out of the country.

"Perhaps," suggested the Director, "the British were listening in to your telephone calls, or even to Jarvis's. As we would have done. Perhaps that's how they knew where and when you were to meet."

Dmitry Makienko shrugged.

"Perhaps the photographs were not fakes after all, and that you were stupidly caught red-handed."

Makienko shrugged again.

"But the body in Barclay's flat is real enough," he said. "I have been there and seen it. And there is no question either that Barclay has disappeared – the British have admitted as much."

"How can you be sure it is Barclay in the flat? How did you positively identify the man? Had you ever met him? Had Jarvis?"

Dmitry Makienko was feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

"I conclude that you have been less than thorough on your handling of this case, comrade Makienko," said the Director. "You have taken too many risks and left too many loose ends. That is not how you have been trained."

The man wondered what was coming next.

"You have, through your stupidity, caused considerable embarrassment to the Russian Federation, without in the end being able to show us a shred of evidence that your original mission has been successfully completed. I would have every right to throw you into the cells below, don't you agree?"

He nodded, fearing the worst.

"However," concluded the Director, after a pause, "in view of your previous experience and seniority, and in view of the fact that I can no more prove that you have failed in your mission than you can prove that you have succeeded, I have decided that you should undergo an immediate and intensive period of re-training. This will last a week or so, after which you will be returned to London to collect evidence which will convince us that your clumsy plan did indeed result in the death of Professor Barclay."

"Thank you, comrade Director," said Makienko.

He made his way out of the building to a waiting car. It was a chilly evening, and he put on his overcoat as he crossed the pavement, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets.

His blood ran cold.

The right hand pocket was missing.

The pocket in which the phial of poison had been kept, and to which it been returned almost empty, had been neatly cut out and removed.

Ten days later, he returned to London on the evening Aeroflot flight, SU240. Dusty Miller was not at the foot of the Airbus A320 steps to meet him, or in the arrivals hall, as he mingled with the airport crowds. The man on the immigration desk let him through without question. Once again, he was travelling on his own, rather than a diplomatic passport, as a visiting businessman. He made his own way to the Russian Consulate trade delegation offices in Highgate, where he was to be based for as long as it took him to complete his new assignment.

It was their double agent in London who tipped off MI5 that Dmitry Makienko was back in town.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN - THE GOLDFISH BOWL

Bill Clayton had already been to visit the professor a couple of times. His first visit was a few days after Barclay had been spirited away from Buscot to Harley Street for some plastic surgery on his scar. Doc. Perkins had arranged it, and one of the country's top people had done a pretty good job with a small skin graft. Mark Perkins and the surgeon were both convinced that, in a week or so, you would only be able to see the scar if you knew where to look. That was just what Clayton needed to know. If the surgery was a success, then Barclay could start to assume his new personality. Barclay was as relieved as anyone.

"Apart from the physical and psychological side of this little exercise," Clayton had told Barclay, "there's quite a bit of paper work to be done, so we may as well get started."

"There's always paper work to be done," grumbled Barclay.

"There are two really important things for you to decide. First of all, there are bound to be a few people who need to know you are still around – people you would want to know that Professor Jack Barclay is still alive, after you are officially declared dead. People like your Director at Culham, your immediate deputy on the fusion team, other close colleagues and perhaps a few friends. People you can really trust and who really *need* to know. I want a list from you as soon as possible, so that we can thoroughly double check them for security and reliability. Keep the list as short as you can, please – no more than six if possible.

"Secondly, we need you to pick a new name for yourself, so that we can start preparing all the new documents you need. And there's lots of them, not just a new passport and driving licence, but things like a birth certificate and everything from there on in, like graduation certificates, the electoral register and so on. But we need a name."

"I've already been thinking about a new name," said Barclay. "I would like to take on my brother's Christian name, Roger, and thought that Lloyd might be a good surname. I'm already named after a bank, after all!"

"Better than Nat West, I suppose," joked Clayton, "but if that's your decision, we'll get on with it straight away."

“Decided, then! Oh, and I think Doctor rather than Professor.”

“Dr. Roger Lloyd it is then.”

“By the way,” Lloyd frowned, “any news about my brother?”

“You’ll be the first to hear when there is, Jack – I mean Roger. It can’t be too long now before his body is discovered, and the hope is that, by then, you will be fully confident in your new personality. I suggest that you take on the role of Jack Barclay’s only relation – a cousin, and son of Jack Barclay’s aunt. That way you can have any surname you like, and a family resemblance will be only natural. You will also then be able to formally identify him, make the funeral arrangements, collect your old belongings from the flat, and visit the laboratory to collect his – your – old papers. But you must be fully confident by then, as you will be very much in the public gaze and we can’t afford any slips.”

Lloyd looked concerned. “I obviously have a lot of work to do before I can really start a new life, but that’s what I want to do. I know what I want to do for a living as well, and I wondered if Sir Robin Algar might be able to help me with that.”

“I’m sure he will,” replied Clayton. “We will all do everything we possibly can to help you on your way. I’ll get Sir Robin to ring you on the secure phone in a day or so.”

Bill Clayton and Dusty Miller were getting on quite well. Miller had eventually stopped calling him Colonel, and had been to dinner with them a couple of times since he had first renewed acquaintances with Clayton’s wife, Catherine. He’d also been persuaded to stop calling her ‘The Cat’, as she had been known when they had served together in the SAS.

But the fact was that Miller was getting bored. The more he talked about the old days, the more he yearned to get back on active operations. Not that he hadn’t enjoyed his time with Section 11, short though it had been so far. He’d learned a lot about operations in an urban environment. Most of his experience of Close Combat Surveillance, as the military liked to call it, had been hidden in a ditch or from behind a sand-dune, which he judged to be much easier than from a motorbike or van parked in Acacia Avenue or wherever. But after Jarvis had been killed, there had been little left for him to do that he had considered worthwhile.

For his part, Head of Section 11 was very keen to keep him in the team. Clayton had done his best to find things for him to do, but with Dmitry Makienko assumed to be back home in Moscow, there hadn’t been a lot on offer apart from a few bits of low-level support on other operations. Bill Clayton knew Miller was keen to get a new posting abroad, if possible to Afghanistan, where he could start doing some ‘real’ work again.

In an effort as much as anything to keep Miller occupied, Clayton had taken him with him on a couple of visits to Buscot Park, to see how Barclay was getting on.

“You don’t mean Buscot Park down in the Cotswolds somewhere?” asked an incredulous Miller when the first visit was suggested.

“That’s the place. Do you know it?”

“Know it? I should say I do. But what’s Professor Barclay doing there?”

“We use it as a safe house when we need to, and for all sorts of activities like specialist language training and so on. But he’s there because it’s a secret location, not listed as a military or civil service building, so he can be given his new identity there, well out of harm’s way.”

“I’ll be damned!” exclaimed Miller, shaking his head. “You won’t believe this, but that’s where I first met the ‘Cat’ – I mean, Catherine.”

“I didn’t know she’d been there!” Now it was Clayton’s turn to be surprised. “Why were you there?”

“We were doing a course together.”

“What sort of course?”

Miller looked embarrassed.

“If you must know, it was a Joint Services course on Interrogation and Resistance Techniques. Not just how to interrogate captured enemy, either, but more especially about how to resist their attempts to get you to talk if you were caught. Not at all pleasant, to be honest. But it’s how your wife survived Iraq, and got home. I told you she was tough. The training course itself nearly broke me, I don’t mind telling you.”

“I had no idea,” said Clayton.

“Rule 6,” mused Miller. “Never forget what a small world it is.”

“Would you rather not come with me?”

There was only the slightest hesitation.

“Of course I’ll come with you. But not all the memories it will bring back will be happy ones, by any means.”

Miller was very quiet when they first went down to visit. He had looked around, almost nervously, on arrival.

“They wanted me to come back here as an instructor, you know, but at the time, I couldn’t do it.”

Clayton understood.

“And now?”

“Perhaps. I rather fancy going abroad again, but if that doesn’t come up – well, perhaps here, then.”

“And I’d rather you stayed with my Section,” said Clayton. “If you worked here, though, I could call you up now and then. I have a bunch of chaps who act as reserves for emergencies, as you know. You could be on my reserve list. It would give you a break now and then.”

“I’d certainly welcome that. Most of the instructors only did a short tour, anyway.”

“I’ll have a word with General Pearson-Jones, if you like.”

“About me going to Afghanistan?”

“If that’s what you want.”

“Thank you, Colonel. I’ll have to think about all this.”

“Rule 99, Miller.”

“What’s that?”

“Don’t call me Colonel!”

Mr. Barclay had been no bother to his Battersea neighbours, so they said. Not noisy or anything, with the TV turned up like some. He kept himself to himself, and many people in the block had no real idea whether he was in or out, and even less of an idea what he did for a living. He hadn't really been there often enough for them to get to know him, anyway.

But a couple of the neighbours had complained recently. The people across the landing and the woman downstairs had all thought that there was something wrong with his drains, but couldn't get any reply from the door when they rang the bell. There was no reply from his phone, either, but that could have been because they were dialling the wrong number. The only number they had was that of the previous owner of the flat. One of the neighbours had been to the newspaper shop on the corner to check, but it seemed that he didn't have a newspaper. Funnily enough, the newspaper boy, who delivered to the flat opposite, had also mentioned that there was a bit of a pong on the landing, but the man in the shop had thought no more about it until someone from the police had called to see if he knew anything about Mr. Barclay.

That was after they had broken down the front door to get in. They soon discovered that it wasn't the drains, either.

Police Constable Jimmy Cartwright did not have a strong stomach at the best of times, and it nearly gave up on him completely as he ventured in to the hallway. The stench was overpowering, and it didn't need a degree in nuclear physics to work out that it was coming from the body stretched out on the kitchen floor.

Cartwright and his colleague decided not to go any further into the flat, in case they disturbed vital evidence or something, and backed off to the front door to use their radio to summon the murder squad. While they waited, they closed what was left of the door, thus depriving inquisitive neighbours of a view of the scene inside.

The boys from the murder squad didn't take long to turn up, and arrived with a team of forensic scientists in white coats and masks, which they really needed, and rolls of blue and white striped tape to seal off the area.

Two men in a British Telecom van parked down the road noticed the activity, and within minutes, Bill Clayton knew that Roger Barclay's body had been found.

Detective Sergeant Stan Wilberforce was in charge, and one glance was enough to tell him how Barclay had died. A man who apparently had never been good looking, now looked even worse. Mouth agape, open eyes staring at the ceiling, his head in a pool of now very congealed blood, he had a neat bullet hole drilled through his right temple. The exit hole near the other temple turned out not to be nearly so neat.

Those not so fortunate as to have been issued with masks, clamped handkerchiefs over their faces to cover their nose and mouth, but it didn't make a lot of difference. There was no real way of telling how long Barclay had been lying there, especially as it had been so damned hot in the last week or so, but no doubt the pathologist would be able to work that out. They stood around waiting, while the

Scenes of Crime Officer took photos from every conceivable angle. Wilberforce beckoned to one of his assistants, Detective Constable Al Smyth.

“Yes, Serg?”

“Get hold of a vet, will you,” commanded Sergeant Wilberforce.

“Pardon?”

“A vet, man. Get hold of a vet.”

“Where will I find a vet?” queried Smyth.

“Try Yellow Pages,” suggested the Sergeant. “There’s one over there under the phone.” He pointed to a small table in the hall near where the front door had been.

“And when I get hold of a vet?” asked the Constable.

“Ask him about goldfish,” demanded Wilberforce.

“Goldfish?”

Smyth was now quite sure the stench had got the better of his boss.

“Yes, bloody goldfish,” said the Sergeant, nodding towards the kitchen windowsill. “There’s a dead one floating in that bowl over there, and I want to know how long they can last in this heat without being fed.”

The penny dropped. There could be a clue there somewhere. Eventually Smyth got hold of an expert on the phone.

“About two weeks, the man says, perhaps three, depending on the water,” Smyth announced.

“Water?”

“Yes water,” replied Smyth. “It’s what they live in.”

“Don’t try and be smart with me, lad,” said the Sergeant crossly. “What about the water?”

“They need it for oxygen, so the man said,” reported Al Smyth, “and the warmer the water, the less oxygen there is in it. So it depends on the water, how much there is of it, how many other goldfish are sharing it and how warm it is. In the sort of summer we’re having, he reckons two weeks if they’re lucky, perhaps three.”

“Right,” said Wilberforce. “That’ll have to do until the pathologist gets hold of this bloke. I wonder who he is?”

“You boys can start looking around now if you like,” said the SOCO. “I’ve got all the pictures I need of the body, but I’ll hang around in case you want something else.”

“Good,” said Wilberforce. “Start with that goldfish-bowl.”

Detective Sergeant Stan Wilberforce had been with the murder squad twelve years or more now, and generally speaking was highly regarded by his superiors. He usually managed to come up with a solution to most of the crimes he tackled, and was sharp enough to know what to follow up and what to ignore, so he didn’t waste much time, either. It was usually the case that the more you discovered about the victim, the more likely it was that a motive for his or her untimely departure would become evident. He worked on the principle that if you could find a motive, then you could find the villain. Finding enough evidence to put the villain away was often not so easy, but at least you knew who you were after.

But the Barclay case was somehow not going the way it should. Wilberforce had been on the case three days now, and he was getting nowhere, fast.

He had decided to consult his governor, Detective Chief Inspector Harry Flower. He was another good detective, and Stan Wilberforce was sure that, between them, they could find a way through the apparent dead-end his team appeared to have reached.

It was quite late in the evening, and they were in the DCI's office, with a glass of Famous Grouse, and the bottle on the desk.

"I'm getting nowhere," admitted Wilberforce. "We've found the bullet, and forensic have run a quick check on it for matches, but have come up with nothing."

"So it could be a new weapon on the patch," suggested Flower.

"Looks that way at the moment," agreed the Sergeant, "although we're still checking, and Special Branch is getting help from Northern Ireland, just in case. It also looks as if it could be a weapon not often seen in this country, judging by the calibre."

"What about the crime scene," asked the DCI.

"Very odd, that is," replied Wilberforce, getting the photographs out of his folder and spreading them on the desk in front of him. "Been over it with a toothcomb twice now, and not a trace of anything – no fingerprints other than a few from the victim and what I believe to be those of the previous owner, no sign of a struggle, and even more strange, no sign of how the murderer got in to the flat in the first place."

"Breaking the door down may not have helped your search for clues," said Flower.

"If he did get in through the front door, he was either let in or had a key, that's certain. And at the moment that seems the only solution."

"If Barclay knew the assassin, then that would explain why there was no struggle."

"Agreed," said Wilberforce.

"So what do we know about Barclay?" asked Harry Flower.

"Not a lot, to be honest," admitted the Sergeant, "although I'd guess he was some kind of scientist. The first thing we did was look for his diary, and go through the phone book and all that. No sign of any family, and there were only four names in his phone book. We're paying them a visit. One's in California. But that was all – no home phone number, no brothers or sisters, no old Christmas cards or letters in the desk, - nothing. And only junk mail on the mat, plus a couple of science magazines."

"What about phone bills?"

"Nothing found – we're checking with BT."

"Mobile? Surely he must have a mobile – everyone has a mobile these days."

"No sign of one," said Wilberforce. "And no computer, either. Not even a laptop."

"Where did he work?" asked Flower.

"Not a clue," admitted Wilberforce. "We've found no pay slips, no tax returns, no business papers, - nothing. Not even a briefcase."

"It's almost as if the man didn't exist," pondered Flower, sipping his scotch.

“He doesn’t, now,” said the detective. “And nobody’s come looking for him either.”

“Early days?” queried Flower. “You only found him three days ago, after all.”

“But he’s been dead just over three weeks,” protested Wilberforce. “Someone somewhere must have noticed he’s not around any more.”

“What about behaviour patterns?” asked his boss.

“Haven’t been able to establish any, yet. None of the neighbours really knew him. Kept himself to himself, anyway, so they haven’t been a lot of help, but he didn’t seem to leave the flat or return at any regular times – not a nine-till-five job, so it seems. Seemed to be away quite a lot. We’re checking with the local travel agency, but they’re only a small outfit, and it’s taking them time to go through their records.”

“Be useful to know where he went,” commented the DCI.

“Be useful to know anything about the man, frankly,” admitted Wilberforce. “He doesn’t seem to have a criminal record, and we haven’t found any credit cards either.”

“What about the postman?”

“Checked. So far as he can remember, mainly junk mail, and not a lot of that.”

Flower sat thoughtfully. “Have you checked the missing persons register?”

“Being checked.”

“It’s almost as if the man deliberately wanted to remain invisible from prying eyes,” he said eventually.

“He certainly didn’t live in a goldfish bowl,” agreed the Sergeant. “It looks as if he went out of his way to remain anonymous.”

“What sort of man would want to do that?”

“Probably up to no good,” suggested the detective.

“Or perhaps he shouldn’t be here at all.”

“You mean an illegal immigrant or something?”

Flower nodded, frowning. “It would be useful to know where he came from.”

“He doesn’t look foreign,” observed Wilberforce. “What there was left of him, that is. And Barclay isn’t exactly a foreign name, either.”

“Could be a spy,” said Flower, quietly. “Perhaps he was a spy. Maybe I’ll have a word with Special Branch.”

“I suppose spies have to live somewhere,” commented Wilberforce. “Special Branch will have contacts in the Security Services, so it might be worth checking.”

“If Barclay was a spook of some sort, we could be looking for a foreigner, with a key to Barclay’s flat,” said Flower.

“And a gun we haven’t seen before.” Wilberforce sighed. “As if this case wasn’t difficult enough already.”

“We’re only guessing,” Flower reminded him.

“We’re not guessing at the fact that there are simply no clues, or that it wasn’t an opportunist murder, or a family feud, or that Barclay was almost an invisible man, or that the villain had a key and a gun with no previous record, and that he probably knew Barclay because there was no struggle.” Wilberforce sighed again, and topped

up his glass. "I'm only guessing, too, that he was some kind of scientist, judging from the magazines."

"Where do you look for missing scientists?"

"Pass!"

"I suppose somebody did actually live there," queried Flower.

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps it had been bought to let. The flat. Or perhaps it was some kind of holiday retreat, not lived in regularly."

"That's a very expensive part of London, squire," said Wilberforce. "You'd need quite a bankroll to buy a place like that and not live in it."

Although it was late, Flower's phone rang.

"DCI Flower," he said, as he picked it up. As he listened, he frowned. After a time, he said 'thank you' and hung up.

Wilberforce could sense something was wrong.

"What's up?" he asked.

"You're not going to like this, Stan," replied his boss. "That was the pathologist. He says there are no powder marks on Barclay's temple where the bullet entered. That means that he wasn't shot at close range after all."

"Shit," exclaimed the detective. "I never noticed that. In fact, it never even occurred to me to look."

The two men sat in silence for a few moments.

"But it just has to be close range, dammit," protested Wilberforce at last. "The flat's too small for it to be anything else."

He thumbed through the set of photographs.

"Look at the body," he said pointing. "It's in the kitchen – just about the smallest room in the house. From the angle of the body, whoever shot Barclay was also in the kitchen. He couldn't have been targeted from the hall or the adjoining living room."

His boss studied the picture.

"What if the force of the bullet hitting him spun him round?" he asked. "He could have been sideways on to the living room, and spun round to fall where he was."

"No way," protested the detective. "It was a small calibre bullet and not heavy enough to do that."

"High velocity? That could have done it, surely."

"If it had been a high velocity shot, the bullet wouldn't have been on the floor where I picked it up, it would have been buried in the wall behind him," said Wilberforce. "It just has to be close range."

"So why no powder round the entry point?"

Wilberforce shook his head.

"Looking at these photographs," said DCI Flower, "I'd say that the assassin was between Barclay and the window over the sink, wouldn't you?"

"More than likely, judging by where the body fell," agreed the detective.

"Was the window open?" asked Flower.

“Not that I noticed,” replied Wilberforce. “It was as hot as hell in that flat, and there was even a dead fish in the goldfish bowl on the windowsill.”

“Why did you get the SOCO to take a picture of the bloody goldfish bowl anyway?” asked his boss. “Keen on fish or something, are you?”

“I’d noticed the dead one floating in it,” replied Wilberforce, “and wondered how long it might have been dead.”

“Ah,” said the DCI. “And how did you find out?”

“Phoned a vet, who knew about goldfish,” replied Wilberforce.

“And what did he say?”

“It all depended on the water, apparently,” said the detective.

“Water?”

“That’s right. It’s what they live in,” said Wilberforce, immediately wishing he hadn’t. “It seems that they get their oxygen from the water, and the warmer the water the less oxygen there is. He reckoned about two to three weeks in that heat without being fed, so that gave me a clue as to how long Barclay might have been dead.”

Harry Flower idly looked at the photo of the goldfish bowl again, thinking that Wilberforce wasn’t so stupid after all.

“It looks to me as if that sash window was open a bit,” said Flower, squinting. “You can just see the top sash behind the goldfish bowl.”

Wilberforce looked at the picture.

“Could be open an inch or so,” he agreed. “Why do you ask?”

“I was just thinking,” mused the Chief Inspector. “I was just wondering if perhaps the villain might not have been in the flat at all. No evidence of a struggle, no fingerprints, no signs of forced entry, no powder marks on the wound. Perhaps he wasn’t even in the flat. Perhaps he wasn’t even in the building. Perhaps he was a sniper.”

Wilberforce sucked his teeth. “From the block of flats across the car park,” he almost whispered. “Shot through the open window.”

“Bloody good shot if that’s what did happen.”

“Telescopic sight and a tripod? All he had to do was wait until Barclay walked into view. I’m going back to the flat.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Flower, finishing his whisky.

His driver was in the outer office, patiently waiting as he often did, and reading the Evening Standard for the third time.

“Where to, Governor?” he asked.

“Battersea,” replied Flower. “Block of flats called Alberta Mansions, off Albert Bridge Road. Quick as you like, Bob.”

They were there in fifteen minutes, even without the blue lights on and the siren going. Bob was a Londoner, had been a driver at Scotland Yard most of his working life, and knew every London back road there was.

The two detectives climbed the stairs to the second floor, where the duty Constable saluted smartly and let them into the flat.

“Place hasn’t been touched,” said Wilberforce. “Apart from getting the body to the morgue, it’s just as we found it, more or less. The agent’s getting a bit fidgety, but we can’t find a next-of-kin to clear out Barclay’s stuff, so he’ll just have to wait.”

They went straight into the kitchen, dried blood still on the tiled floor.

“There you are,” said Flower, pointing. “Sash window over the sink open at the top.”

“Only a couple of inches,” observed Wilberforce. “Not enough fresh air to keep the fish alive.” He nodded towards the dead goldfish still floating in its watery grave.

“Bugger the fish,” said Flower. “Let’s have a look at that block of flats opposite.”

“Not a difficult shot from there,” commented Wilberforce. “A bit of an angle, range about - what - seventy five meters across the car park between the two blocks?”

“About that,” agreed Flower. “We should find out who lives in the flat immediately opposite.”

“Not opposite, boss,” said Wilberforce. “One floor up – third not second.”

“Why’s that?” queried the DCI.

“Let me show you,” said the detective. “I’ll stand here, where Barclay would have been standing, and you stand behind me. Barclay was a short chap – about up to my shoulder, so you bend down and look at the flats opposite through the open window from my shoulder height.”

“I see what you mean,” said Flower, stooping to look over Wilberforce’s shoulder. “The sniper, if that’s what it was, would need to have been on the third floor, and aimed down to get Barclay through this open window. And I remember the pathologist said on the phone that the bullet entered at a slight angle.”

“Now you tell me,” grumbled Stan Wilberforce.

“We need to get into that flat,” said Flower.

“And quick,” agreed the detective. “The one directly opposite has got the lights on, but the one we want seems to be in darkness.”

“I’ll use the car radio to get this organised,” offered Flower. “You’re in charge of this case, so any suggestions?”

“I want that block sealed off, but as quietly and covertly as possible. Don’t mind people entering the block, but nobody leaves. We’ll need some heavies to take the flat door down, and an Armed Response Unit to be first in, just in case. After that, forensics into that room opposite – looks like the kitchen – in particular looking for traces of powder near the window. I doubt they’ll find the cartridge. And plenty of plods to keep the neighbours out, and the area press officer in case the media turns up. O.K.?”

“Sounds about right,” said the DCI. “I’ll get it organised. Do you mind if I hang around and watch?”

“Be my guest,” said Wilberforce. “If you’re right about the sniper, then this could be a contract killing of some sort, and we don’t often get those.”

“And forensics haven’t identified the weapon, yet, either,” added Flower.

“Let’s go!”

It didn't take long for reinforcements to arrive. Nobody much seemed to be aware that the building was being sealed off – the police vans parked down side streets, and it was dark anyway. No sirens, no flashing lights – “as quick and as quiet as you can,” Wilberforce had said. It was a well-rehearsed operation, as the men from the two Armed Response Units sprinted up the stairs, broke down the door and spread out into every room almost without a pause. The neighbours heard the noise of splintering wood, but soon beat a hasty retreat back into their flats when ordered to do so by the policemen with Heckler and Koch automatic carbines.

The flat was empty, as expected, and most of the armed men were able to leave the scene quickly, leaving the white-clad forensic science team to start their painstaking work in the kitchen. It looked like being a long job. There were no immediate signs of anything suspicious – just an empty flat, that's all. No powder marks near the window, no cartridge case on the floor, and no obvious signs of a forced entry. They soon discovered that there were no fresh fingerprints, either, and no footprints worth talking about on the dusty floor.

The two detectives were no nearer than they ever had been to solving the mystery, but they remained convinced that the murderer had struck from that kitchen in the opposite block of flats. There could be no other explanation. They also concluded that whoever had carried out the killing had been no amateur. He had not only been an excellent marksman, but had known how to cover his tracks after the event. Their only hope now was that the forensic team would turn up something useful.

None the wiser for their night's work, Wilberforce and Flower went home.

So did the two men on a motorbike, who had seen the whole thing from across the road. As they drove quietly away, another biker arrived to take their place, this time keeping watch from a side street at the back of the flats. They, and their colleagues, had been hanging around the block of flats for a few days now, watching what was going on. Not that anyone had noticed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN - NEW FRIENDS, OLD ENEMIES

Retired Air Commodore Mark Perkins was a frequent visitor to Buscot Park now that he had been given the responsibility for overseeing the transformation of Professor Jack Barclay into Dr. Roger Lloyd. The skin graft over Barclay's scar was healing quickly after his surgery in Harley Street, and it seemed almost certain that the scar would be invisible to all but the closest scrutiny in the future.

Dr. Roger Lloyd, as he was now known, was making good progress in other aspects of his makeover, too. He certainly seemed happy with the way things were going, and had thrown himself into the task with great enthusiasm, not least because he was still alive, and wanted to stay that way. He was also quite enjoying the break from the recent pressures he had been suffering, and certainly regarded his stay at Buscot as something of a holiday. He had comfortable accommodation, good food, and excellent tutors, all in a delightful rural setting.

Apart from Doc Perkins, he had several other visitors as well, and was always particularly pleased to see Clayton, who he regarded as something of a saviour. He

had immediately got on well with Miller, too, and on their first meeting they quickly struck up a firm friendship. Lloyd had been surprised when he learned that Miller had been to Buscot himself, since it had never occurred to him to wonder what else went on at the discreet, if not secret, government establishment. He had been intrigued to learn of the vastly different experience that Miller had undergone at Buscot, in another part of that rural 'safe house', and they frequently went on long walks together in the extensive grounds of the house.

Miller himself found it therapeutic to discuss his stay there and the rigours of the course he had attended, while Lloyd needed the exercise, to practice walking in his built up shoes, and to get used to his walking stick. One shoe was slightly more built up than the other, and although neither of them added much to his height, they were enough to make a difference to his appearance and to give him a slight limp. At first, the shoes gave him cramp, but he had got over that now. Although he was getting used to his slightly ungainly gait, he secretly wondered if he would ever be brave enough to run for a bus. But he had quite quickly got used to the shoes, and a cobbler, who seemed to have appeared from nowhere, was now busy making him several pairs in different styles. He had even turned up one day with a pair of special Wellington boots, and some carpet slippers. He didn't think he would ever wear the trainers, but you never know.

Lloyd was now starting to grow a decent set of whiskers, which was quickly beginning to look rather better than just a bit of stubble. There was already enough for the hairdresser to start grooming it into something quite smart, including a goatee beard. Roger Lloyd quite liked his new look. His hair had been tidied up a bit too, and the parting shifted to the other side. It was a nice grey, and he was having it shorter than before. In truth, he hadn't often had time to get it cut on a regular basis at all recently, but the barber who came in to see Lloyd from time to time was taking infinite care to ensure that he no longer looked like the old Professor Barclay. It had been decided that there was probably no need to flare his nostrils or build up his cheek bones after all. His spectacles were sufficient to give his nose a new look, and the beard took care of the rest.

Buscot Park was owned and run by the National Trust, and although still the home of Lord Faringdon and his family, the grounds and parts of the house were occasionally opened to the public. Dr. Lloyd was therefore getting used to meeting people, none of whom ever gave him a second glance except to wish him 'good-day' as they passed. After a while, he went out of his way to get into conversation with visitors, rather than avoid them as he had in his early days there. This was doing his confidence a power of good, although he had to admit that on his first real outing, to Burford, he felt as if he was in a goldfish bowl, with everyone looking at him. Not that anybody was, of course. But he felt very self-conscious, nevertheless. It was quite a nerve-racking experience, going into a shop for the first time with his stick and glasses. But he easily bought a bottle of sherry from the off-licence to have in his room at Buscot, and, a bit further down the main street, a packet of nuts and some crisps from the small supermarket to go with his evening aperitif. His confidence was growing all the time.

It was immediately after this outing that the police found his brother, Roger Barclay, in the Battersea flat where he had lain for over three weeks.

Clayton and Miller both went immediately to Buscot, by helicopter, to break the news to Lloyd.

“We now come to a crucial part of this whole exercise,” said Clayton. “It will mean a difficult few days for you, Roger, but we have to announce your death later today.”

“What will you say?”

“Something to the effect that a world-famous nuclear physicist has been found murdered in his London flat. They may have noticed that your lecture to the Royal Society was cancelled, but we have to make quite sure that the Russians know that their mission was a success, so as to ensure your future safety. Once that’s been established, you will be free to start your new life.”

“And when shall I read my own obituary?” Lloyd almost joked.

“We shall have to make the announcement tonight – or rather, the police will, in time for the late news bulletins and tomorrow’s papers.” replied Clayton. “In a day or so, we shall have to persuade the Police to call off their investigation, since we know who did it. It will then be necessary for you to come forward as Professor Jack Barclay’s cousin – we’ll tell you when, if we may – for formal identification. If there is any family likeness in spite of your ‘new look’, it won’t matter as you are supposed to be related. After that, we shall arrange a coroner’s inquest. That will probably be held at the Westminster Coroner’s Court in Horseferry Road, at the top end of Marsham Street, near Victoria. You may need to attend, but hopefully not. We shall be able to brief the coroner privately before the hearing, so I would expect him to bring in a verdict of unlawful killing by a person or persons unknown. With any luck, he may also agree to hold the inquest ‘in camera’. Once those formalities have been completed, the body can be released to you and there can be an immediate funeral, which again we can help you to arrange if you wish.”

“I hope it all turns out as easy as you make it sound,” said Roger Lloyd.

“It will be easy,” said Clayton, reassuringly, “except that you have to remember that you will be identifying yourself, attending your own inquest if you do need to go, and then going to your own funeral. You must, by then, have completely taken on the identity of Dr. Roger Lloyd.”

“I honestly think I have, already. I feel quite happy with my new ‘self’ now.”

“There is one other thing we need to do before we formally announce your death, and that is to tell a chosen few that you are, in fact, alive and well. We have been through your list and agree to everyone on it except your friend at the Lawrence Livermore University in California. I’m afraid he must not be told, otherwise your cover could well be blown.”

“Why?”

“Let me just remind you that the last time you were at the University, you had two KGB agents for company. I’m not saying your friend was responsible, but somebody there told them, and we have been unable to positively establish his trustworthiness with any absolute degree of certainty. The Americans have helped,

but there remains an element of doubt, so we must err on the side of caution. It's in your own interest that we do so, of course."

"So be it then."

"We are arranging for all the others to be briefed personally later this afternoon."

"What about the two colleagues who I hope to be working with overseas?"

"They will be told later today as well. One of our team has been specially briefed, and is even now flying out to meet them."

It had taken some days for the news of Dmitry Makienko's return to filter through the system to the Cabinet Office, and then Bill Clayton.

Sir Robin Algar rang Clayton to tell him.

"What the hell's he doing back here?" said Clayton. "He's only been away a week or two!"

"Odd, isn't it," replied Algar. "Even odder, is the fact that he's gone to the Trade Delegation offices at the Consulate in Highgate, and not to the Embassy in Kensington."

"How do you explain that?"

"I can't. My only conclusion is that he might think he will be less conspicuous there than in the Embassy, but don't ask me why he needs to be. The fact is that he was not expelled by the UK Government, or designated a prohibited immigrant, so there was no way of preventing him from returning. And they haven't claimed diplomatic status for him again, either, probably because they know it would have been refused."

"But he's one of their top FSB men. They don't usually hide them away."

"True, but there are others in Highgate. It's a good front for them, especially if they are involved in industrial espionage."

"That's not his trade," said Clayton.

"I understand from MI5's Moscow station that he was given a bit of a bollocking when he got back, and sent for some pretty intensive re-training, probably more as a punishment than as a necessity."

"But that doesn't explain why he was sent back here so quickly. Why here, and not some other place?"

"They're trying to check, and our man here also has his ear to the ground for us. I've asked Wilfred Forsyth to have a word with the Ambassador, to express our displeasure. I doubt whether we shall learn anything, though."

There was a moment's silence.

"How's this for a theory, then," said 'S'. "If you ask me, Makienko's back here because either he or his people in Moscow don't believe Barclay is dead. He's been sent back to check, and if he finds that the Professor is still alive and well, to finish the job he started."

There was another pause.

"You could just be right, y'know."

"I'll have a bit of a brainstorming here, and put Dusty Miller back on to Dr. Roger Lloyd, I think. Just to be on the safe side."

"That's probably sensible."

"Can you have a word with 'M', and get him to arrange for his people to keep an eye on Makienko for us?"

"Of course."

"I'll have people at the inquest tomorrow as well, just to see who turns up. And in force at the cremation on Thursday."

"If Makienko is at either event, then at least we'll know why he's back."

"Yes. But then what do we do? We can't shield Lloyd for the rest of his life."

"Let's cross that bridge when we come to it, if we do," said the Cabinet Secretary, ending the red phone conversation.

Forsyth rang the Russian Ambassador.

"I thought I would speak to you on the phone, Mr. Nevsky, rather than put you to the trouble of asking you call here again."

"That is considerate of you, Sir William. How may I help this time?"

"We are most concerned, Mr. Ambassador, to discover that Dmitry Makienko has returned to this country."

"Has he really?" asked Nevsky, feigning surprise. "You mean the man who used to be our second secretary in the commercial department? That Makienko?"

"The very same," confirmed Forsyth.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Well! You do surprise me. I have certainly not been told, and neither have I seen him about the Embassy. I shall have to make enquiries and get back to you."

"You will not have seen him about the Embassy, Yuri, because he appears to be based at the Trade Delegation."

"In Highgate? Really!"

"Let's not play games, Ambassador. You will recall that Her Majesty's Government only pulled back from expelling the man on the strength of your assurances that he would leave this country the day after our meeting."

"Which he did."

"Exactly. But we did not expect that your government would see fit to send him back here almost immediately."

"I am not sure that my government has done so. As I said, I shall need to make enquires."

"Please do so, then, with all speed. Let me remind you that, when we last spoke about this, I was able to show you evidence which linked him with the murder of one of our public servants."

"Ah, yes. The faked photographs."

"You know very well they were not fakes, Ambassador, and I can now tell you that we have direct and positive forensic evidence that Makienko did indeed carry out the crime."

“And what might that be, can I ask?”

“You may ask, but I shall not tell you. That will be revealed in a court of law, probably at the Old Bailey, when your man is charged with murder.”

“Come, come, Sir Wilfred. Surely it will not come to that?”

“That depends on you, Mr. Nevsky. You said you needed to make enquiries because once again, it seems, your officials have been less than honest with you, and have failed to brief you. I must ask you formally to contact me within the hour with an explanation of this totally unacceptable behaviour on the part of your government. If you are unable to provide a satisfactory explanation for the man’s continuing presence in this country, then you will leave me with only two possible courses of action. One would be to demand his immediate expulsion, and the other to arrange his immediate arrest. I shall make sure that whichever I decide gets the maximum possible publicity, and that your own role in this unsavoury affair is left in no doubt.”

There was a moment’s silence from the Ambassador.

“I shall ring you within the hour,” said Nevsky quietly.

When he did so it was to explain that Makienko was in London in a private capacity, no doubt as a tourist, that he had travelled on his personal passport, that he had no diplomatic status whatsoever, and that he was not working at the Trade Delegation, but staying nearby with friends in Highgate.

“I have, however,” continued the Ambassador, “in the interests of furthering the good relations which currently exist between our two countries, issued instructions that Makienko is to be contacted immediately and instructed to leave the country forthwith. Again.”

“And not to return,” insisted Forsyth.

“And not to return,” confirmed Nevsky.

“We shall watch developments with interest, Mr. Ambassador, and I shall seek a further meeting with you in this office if there is any evidence that your instructions are not being carried out with all haste.”

“Thank you, Sir Wilfred. I understand perfectly.”

Once again, Yuri Nevsky had come off second best in a confrontation with the man from the Foreign Office.

Nevsky had always been one of those who subscribed to the view that, in these days, Ambassadors were more social than crucial.

He was fast beginning to change his mind.

Clayton called together his top team, and asked Barbara to get Miller along as well.

“There’s an old friend of yours back in town, Miller,” said ‘S’

“Makienko?” he asked immediately.

“What made you think that?”

“Just a hunch, that’s all.”

“Well, I wish you’d shared it with us. He’s back at the Trade Delegation in Highgate. Arrived a few days ago, apparently, travelling as a tourist on his own passport, not as a diplomat.”

“It doesn’t really surprise me,” said Miller. “We were too quiet for too long about Barclay’s murder. They must have smelt a rat.”

“In all honesty, we couldn’t do anything else until the police found his body, and we needed all the time we could get as well to make sure Dr. Roger Lloyd was ready to face his public. Barclay’s nervous breakdown was the best we could do.”

“There shouldn’t be any doubt about his death now,” said Nick Marsden. “It’s a big story in all the papers, especially the tabloids, with photographs.”

“OK,” said Clayton. “Now let’s think about this. Makienko is back, for one reason or another, either officially or as a tourist, which is what he claims. Nobody will believe that, though. The fact is that Makienko must be back in London because he, or someone in Moscow, believes Professor Barclay is still alive. And I agree with you, Miller, that they would be quite justified in reaching that conclusion until now. So the question is, if Makienko is still after Barclay, or Lloyd as he now is, who should we keep an eye on? One, or the other, or both?”

“Makienko doesn’t know me, but I know him,” said Miller. “I also know Lloyd, so I could keep a close watch on him, and spot the Russian if he should show up.”

“If Makienko does think Lloyd is Barclay, he’s going to have another go at getting rid of him,” said Newell. “I can’t see him doing that at the coroner’s court, but I suppose the crematorium might present an opportunity.”

“The Russians will need to be sure Barclay is still alive before they risk doing anything,” said Doc Perkins. “Lloyd is not at all like Barclay now, and in any case we don’t think Makienko ever met the Professor anyway. He will have photos of Barclay of course, but they won’t be enough. So he will have to rely on inside information.”

“If you mean someone telling him, that will mean we have an informer in our camp,” said ‘S’. “And Jarvis is dead, so it can’t be him.”

“Someone told them Barclay was going to California,” Newell reminded the meeting, “otherwise there would not have been KGB men at the reception in the university,”

“I must say, I had always assumed an American source for that, and we’ve been careful to make sure they all believe Barclay has been killed,” said Clayton.

“If the Russians can turn Jarvis, though, they can turn anyone, even if Jarvis was blackmailed,” said Marsden. “I think we need to get MI5 to mount a ‘mole’ hunt, and pretty quickly. Meanwhile, we have to assume that the Russians know what’s going on, and that they know Lloyd is Barclay under another name. For us to do otherwise would be plain stupid.”

“I agree,” said Clayton. “The possibility of an informer in our midst has worried me for some time, I must be honest. Stay behind afterwards Nick, and we’ll talk about it.”

“As a matter of interest,” asked Miller, “what’s Lloyd going to do for a living when the dust settles?”

“He’s said he wants a change, and has asked to join the UK team at the CERN project in Switzerland. He knows of a couple of people there – fellow particle physicists – and Sir Robin Algar has arranged for him to go out there immediately

after the cremation, which in turn will be immediately after the inquest. He obviously can't go back to his old job in the nuclear fusion research field at Culham, although he can continue to help as a consultant while he's abroad. A few people on his old project will know of his new 'alias', and know too that they can call on him from time to time if they must. Once the heat is off, there is no reason why Lloyd shouldn't even visit Harwell now and then, if he needs to."

"I'll go with him to Switzerland," said Miller, without being asked. "I shall also need to be in the coroner's court and at the cremation, since I know what Dmitry Makienko looks like, and everyone else has only seen the photos I took of him. I'll bet he turns up at one or the other."

"I think we should deploy quite a few people at the crematorium. I can't imagine that Makienko will attend the service or anything that brazen, but he could well be in the grounds somewhere with a pair of field glasses, and we need to be able to spot him if he does turn up," said Newell. "I'll organise that if you like."

Clayton nodded, and the meeting broke up. Commander Nick Marsden stayed behind.

"Close the door Nick, and grab a seat."

There was an awkward silence for a moment,

"This is about Barbara, isn't it." It was a statement rather than a question from Marsden.

"It could be, Nick," agreed Clayton. "Or it could be about you, or me or even Barbara's mother."

"I suppose so," agreed Marsden. "It's probably the same thing that's worried the life out of me in the last few days that's worrying you."

"How did the Russians know that Jarvis was Donald's father?"

"Exactly," agreed Marsden. "How the hell did they know? Who can possibly have told them?"

"There aren't that many possibilities, are there?" postured Clayton.

"Agreed," said Marsden. "Barbara and Alan Jarvis obviously knew, but Jarvis was hardly likely to tell anyone, let alone the Russians, for exactly the reason that it would lay him open to blackmail, and put his career at risk."

"And Barbara?" probed Clayton. "You are closer to her than anyone. What do you think?"

"I don't know what to think, to be honest, Bill. In spite of the fact that we are supposed to be getting married at some time, I have done my honest best to be objective about this, to put the job first and all that jazz, but I simply cannot see any motive on Barbara's part. What would she possibly gain by telling the Russians something that nobody else knew about? Revenge on Jarvis? If she'd wanted that, she would have bugged his career sooner by telling me, or Sir Robin Algar or someone. Telling the Russians makes no sense to me. The fact is she told nobody until you stumbled across the possibility and forced her into admitting the fact."

"So that puts me in the frame. I could have told the Russians," said Clayton. "And so could you, and so, possibly, could her mother, if in fact she knew Jarvis was Donald's father. Do you think she did?"

“I have no idea, Bill. I’m sure Barbara would tell us if we asked, but again we come back to the question of motive. Unless there’s a vital piece of information we’re missing, nobody on that list of five people seems to have the slightest motive for telling anyone, let alone the Russians.”

“I tend to agree,” said Clayton. “So how else could they have found out?”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said Marsden. “Just suppose – only suppose for a minute - that the Russians had been tailing Jarvis for some time. They would have seen him visit Barbara’s place and seen him with the boy.”

“So what?” queried Clayton.

“So if they were trying to get something on the man, perhaps with a view to blackmail, they would naturally have been suspicious, wouldn’t they?”

“Keep going.”

“So they would wonder, as you or I would wonder, why Jarvis had an interest in Donald. They would also know, or soon find out, that the identity of Donald’s father was not common knowledge – in fact a carefully guarded secret.”

“So?”

“So they might just put two and two together, and set about trying to find a connection.”

Clayton nodded thoughtfully. “If they suspected that Jarvis could have been Donald’s father, they would need to prove it one way or the other. That means they would either need someone to admit to the fact, or they would need documentary evidence.”

“Keep going.” It was Marsden who challenged Clayton this time.

“Documents,” said Clayton quietly. “What documents could there be, apart from a birth certificate, perhaps?”

“Bloody hell, Bill! That’s it! The boy’s birth certificate is almost bound to show the father’s name!”

“Tell you what, Nick. The Family Research Centre or something like that – the old Public Record Office, - is just round the corner from here. Why don’t you nip over and see what you can find.”

“I know the place! I’ve walked past it a hundred times. I’m off!”

“Wait!” commanded Clayton.

Nick Marsden sat down again.

“The other option is just to ask Barbara,” said Clayton simply. “Why don’t you do that instead?”

Marsden thought for a moment.

“That would alert her to the fact that we suspect she could be a spy of some sort,” said Marsden. “God forbid that she is, but let’s not put her on notice and on her guard, just in case.”

“Off you go then,” said Clayton with a grin. “And thanks for your loyalty, Nick.”

Marsden was back in under an hour.

“It seems that in the case of an illegitimate child,” he reported, “the child can take either the mother’s or father’s surname. Donald was christened using Barbara’s

maiden name, so it is not necessary to include the father's name on a birth certificate. Either the mother's or the father's will do, but it doesn't have to show both."

"Bugger!" said Clayton.

"Furthermore," continued Marsden, almost too cheerfully, "it takes up to five days to get a certified copy of a birth certificate, even by the urgent route, which also costs a fortune."

"For heaven's sake," exclaimed an exasperated Clayton.

"Gladys would be proud of them," said Marsden with a broad grin. "However, I was able to show them all the ID cards and warrant cards in the world, and successfully demanded to see the chap in charge. Under threat of an immediate phone call to the Cabinet Secretary who, as head of the Civil Service is also his boss, the man was kind enough, under the additional threat of spending the rest of his life in the Tower of London, to make a few quick phone calls to somewhere in Liverpool where all the originals are kept."

"And?"

"And Alan Jarvis is named as the father," announced Marsden triumphantly. "Not only that, but a copy of Donald's birth certificate was ordered – and paid for – some four weeks ago, and sent to an address in Highgate."

"The Russian Consulate, I bet," said Clayton. "Well done Nick."

"Don't let's forget that there's still a mole about somewhere."

"Could be anywhere – Cabinet Office, Foreign Office, even the laboratories at Harwell and Culham. Let's hope MI5 track him down before too much more damage is done."

"At least Barbara seems to be off the hook," said Nick. "I think I'll take the lady out to dinner somewhere special tonight."

Nobody saw the Russian, Dmitry Makienko, at the coroners court, although that didn't mean he wasn't there. He could have been anywhere, even across the road in the White Horse and Bower, watching who came and went from inside the pub. According to their informant, he certainly wasn't at the Trade Mission that afternoon, but he would not have spotted Roger Lloyd even if he had been there. Lloyd wasn't required to attend the court, as it happened.

Not many people attended the service in the Chapel of Rest at the Crematorium, either, although there were several people in the Garden of Remembrance. From the photographs they had been given, one or two of them thought that they might have seen Makienko, but weren't sure.

Dusty Miller recognised him there, though. No doubt about it.

Detective Chief Inspector Harry Flower wasn't often summoned to the office of Deputy Assistant Commissioner Ian Jenkins. For that matter, Head of Special Branch wasn't often summoned to the office of the Director General of M15, either. But he had been, and now had a rather difficult message to pass on to DCI Flower.

"Come in Harry – grab a seat," Jenkins welcomed Flower cheerily.

"Thanks. How can I help?"

“I might actually be able to help you, as it happens,” replied Jenkins.

“That’ll be nice,” said Flower, suspiciously.

“Tell me,” enquired the DAC. “How are you getting on with the Barclay case? The murder in Battersea.”

“It’s a bit slow, as it happens. Taking its time. We know who it is and what he does – did – for a living. We know how he was killed and roughly when, and there’s been an inquest and a cremation. But we’ve no real idea about the weapon used, although we think it was foreign. And even less of an idea about a motive or who did it. What’s your interest?”

“I don’t have one directly,” came the reply. “But I was summoned to Lambeth this morning for a personal meeting with ‘M’. We’re under orders to back off.”

“Back off? You mean drop the case?”

“That’s the message,” replied the special branch chief.

“But you can’t just drop a murder enquiry,” protested Flower, “even if there has been an inquest. And that was a funny business, too, since you mention it.”

“I didn’t,” said Jenkins. “You did.”

“Well, a right funny business that inquest was. If you ask me, the coroner had been fixed, and told what to do.”

“You’re right. He had. And now we’re being told what to do.”

Flower scratched his head.

“This has been an odd case from the start, if you ask me. Any idea at all what’s going on?”

“Political,” replied Jenkins. “Security services and all that.”

“So what? Murder’s murder in this country, and needs to be got to the bottom of – if you see what I mean.”

“They have got to the bottom of it,” replied Jenkins. “They know who did it, and why.”

“Well, that’s something at least. Have they shared their little secret with you, by any chance?”

“No, not exactly.”

“Either they know who did it or they don’t. And if they have the evidence, then we can make an arrest and bring charges.”

“It’s not that easy, Harry. The bloke who did it has also been murdered, so they say.”

“And I suppose they know who did *that*!?”

“Yes, they do.”

“Wonderful!”

“Not really. It was a Russian spy, who’s been kicked out.”

“Jesus!”

“Hence the message to drop it.”

DCI Flower sat back in disbelief.

“Glass of scotch, Harry?”

“I need something.”

Jenkins got the bottle and two glasses out of the bottom drawer of his desk.

“The other thing you’ll need is paperwork, so that you can close the case and put the file away. Tomorrow be all right?”

“Cheers.”

Dmitry Makienko had obviously returned to London at exactly the right time. He had been humiliated in Moscow by his Director at the Lubyanka Building, who had sent him for an intensive course of retraining. It was not that he needed retraining, of course. It was a punishment. A crude attempt to make him lose face among his peer group, all of whom still respected him in spite of everything. They agreed that it was the Director who was a fool, not he, Makienko. He had fought his way to the top of the KGB, now the FSB, and was not about to be pushed down by some idiot bureaucrat in the organisation who would probably not even know how to handle a gun, let alone kill a man at fifty metres. The Director had authority, certainly, but no skills whatsoever. Collecting secret information, surveillance, unarmed combat, shooting, blackmail, sabotage, skiing, jungle survival – bah! The man, for all his splendid pin-stripe suit, white shirt and silk tie, could do none of these things. So who was he to dare belittle Makienko? His scheme to eliminate the British scientist, Barclay, had been brilliantly conceived and executed. Not only had the scientist been murdered, but so too had one of Britain’s top agents who he, Dmitry Makienko, had so skilfully blackmailed into committing the murder and who had then himself been killed, personally by Makienko, with his own hands.

The faked photographs of him adding the poison to Jarvis’s coffee had been unfortunate, not least because the idiot Ambassador and then the even more stupid Director at the Lubyanka Building had been fooled by them. Clever, but unfortunate. And if Barclay’s body had been discovered sooner by that incompetent police force they had in London, then none of this would have happened. As it was, the dimwits in the Kremlin had not believed that the man was actually dead, and had accepted the story that the professor had simply gone missing because he had suffered a nervous breakdown. If that’s what it was, then he was still alive, they had said, and so you, Comrade Makienko, have failed.

“Failed?!” said Makienko to himself. “*Makienko never fails.*”

He had, after all, just been to the man’s cremation, had he not? Not even the British could fake an event like that. He had looked carefully at all the people who had been there, and recognised no-one. There was a cousin, so they said. He certainly looked like a member of the family, but had a limp and a beard and glasses. Of course, that could all have been faked, like the photographs, but then who had they cremated?

‘No,’ decided Makienko. ‘*Barclay was dead after all.*’

He was *almost* sure, anyway.

But then, there was the question of the pocket from his overcoat. Who could possibly have taken that? And when? Perhaps the British were not all as stupid as he had thought. Perhaps they had somehow taken it. Perhaps it also contained evidence of his involvement in Jarvis’s murder. Perhaps he needed to be specially careful now he was back in London. Leaving London at such short notice had done his career no

good, he admitted, but if, now he was back, he was to be expelled.... Makienko shuddered at the thought of what might happen.

He had to be quite sure that Barclay was dead. No doubt about that. And he had to be able to convince his Director at the Lubyanka that Barclay was dead. He had already ordered a copy of the death certificate, but, like the photographs, that could be faked as well.

But if Barclay was still alive, unlikely as that was since he, Dmitry Makienko had arranged his death, where was he? The Russian thought long and hard. Perhaps a better question was *'Who was he?'* One of the world's leading scientists, who had been posing such a threat to the future economy of the Russian Federation, was hardly likely to retire and take up chicken farming. He would still be working somewhere. Not at Culham or Harwell, he was sure. He had checked there, and all Barclay's old colleagues were in deep shock and mourning. Not even the Brits could fake that.

But what about the cousin, perhaps?

There was a likeness. He had noticed it himself. The hair, the spectacles, the limp – they could all be faked. So who was the cousin? A few phone calls, and he knew it was Doctor Roger Lloyd.

So?

A 'doctor' of what? Particle physics, eh?! Not medicine or philosophy, but physics. The same as Barclay!

It was a long shot, but if Barclay was still alive, then Dr. Roger Lloyd could well be the same man.

He, too, would have to go. Just in case. Another death would perhaps convince his stupid Director that Makienko's mission had after all been successfully completed, without this time any shadow of doubt. He had to cover all possibilities, all eventualities. There was no room for mistakes, for errors of omission. There was no doubt about it. Lloyd would have to go. Just to be sure.

Having been clever enough to work all this out, he, Makienko, would see to the execution himself this time.

It was not a pleasant surprise for Makienko to discover that Lloyd was due to take up a new post in Switzerland, almost immediately. Switzerland had funny rules about neutrality, and diplomatic immunity and that sort of thing. He would not feel safe there, but there was no time to act before Lloyd departed for Geneva. It was a city he had not visited before, and since he was travelling privately, he could expect little help from his Consulate, if any.

So be it. He, Dmitry Makienko who never failed, would handle this on his own. He had been told once again to leave the country, so that's what he would do. But to go directly to Geneva might be too obvious, in the unlikely event that the British authorities were keeping a check on him. So to be on the safe side, he flew to Zurich. He had planned then to get the train from there to Geneva, changing at Lausanne.

At the last minute, though, he caught a different train from Lausanne, and went through to Montreux instead. According to his source, Lloyd had gone skiing for the weekend, with a friend.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN - THE BEST MAN WINS

For Lloyd, it had been a busy few days, and not a little stressful as well. He had not enjoyed the quiet ceremony at the crematorium. It was odd, and distressing, to see so many of his old colleagues in the congregation, paying him a respectful farewell.

At least none of them had recognised him in his new guise. He did his best to ignore them, and to concentrate on his own need to say farewell to his estranged brother. It was too late to wish that they had been closer in life. That was all in the past now. It was embarrassing listening to his own eulogy. He wondered who had written it. But he had no time to dwell on it. Within hours, he was off to Heathrow.

It had been decided not to tell Lloyd that Makienko had been at the crematorium, but Miller was now ever more alert and vigilant – just in case. If there had ever been any doubt in the Russian’s mind, then the funeral service should have been enough to convince him that Barclay was dead. But you could never tell. The man was a professional and, it seemed, a bit of a fanatic, looking after his future career. Another cock-up, and he wouldn’t have one.

So far as they were aware, Makienko had gone back to the Trade Mission in Highgate, where the Security Service people were keeping an eye on him. Miller knew he would be told of the Russian’s movements, and that he had in any case been told to leave the country again, so he should soon be out of harms’ way once and for all. As soon as he was back in Moscow, this time for good it was hoped, the pressure would be off, and Lloyd could be left on his own to get on with his life.

Miller and Lloyd flew out on the same aircraft. Dusty had managed to check the passenger manifest before they boarded their flight, and had taken the time to stroll up and down the aircraft while they were airborne, but so far as he could tell, the Russian FSB man was not on board.

They put their seats into the upright position and fastened their seatbelts as instructed, ready for landing.

“Just look at those mountains,” exclaimed Miller. “I’ve not been to Switzerland before.”

“There’s some good skiing to be had here, although there won’t be all that much snow around at this time of the year – it’s too early in the season.”

“Do you ski?” asked Dusty.

“Love it! I played rugby and everything else at school, but from the first time I took to the snow it has been my favourite sport. I will confess that part of the reason – and a big part if I’m honest – for electing to come here to work was the thought of unlimited skiing. What about you?”

“Absolutely! I’ve even done some Arctic Warfare winter training with the Marines in Norway. Apart from you being a nice chap and all that, the thought that we might get a bit of time on the slopes did pass through my mind when I volunteered to come out here with you! Any chance while we’re here, do you think?”

“I’m sure I could get a day or so off and find some decent snow somewhere near here. In fact, it might be a good idea to go soon, before I get too committed and settled. Perhaps even this weekend. Leave it to me.”

“That would be great, not least because I hope I shan’t have to be here for too long.”

The European Organisation for Nuclear Research, CERN, was not far from Geneva’s airport at Cointrin. The complex was centred around a huge 17-mile long circular tunnel buried 300 feet under the Swiss-French border. Miller and Lloyd planned to stay at a small Holiday Inn near the French village of St. Genis about a 20 minute walk away. Lloyd would stay there until he found something more permanent.

They took a taxi from the airport.

Lloyd had visited the establishment before, in his previous existence as he was beginning to regard it, and knew a couple of the hundred or so British scientists working on the project. To their surprise, delight and amazement, they had been told that Lloyd was Jack Barclay, and, having been sworn to secrecy, were looking forward to working with him as part of the team.

“What actually goes on here?” Miller had asked.

“You’ve probably heard of the Large Hadron Collider? It’s had a lot of publicity. Well, that’s here at CERN. When it’s working fully, we hope it will create the conditions that existed immediately after the big bang.”

“Is that the thing that broke soon after it was switched on?”

“That’s the thing,” agreed Lloyd.

“I remember the publicity! Are you hoping to mend it, or something?”

“As a matter of fact, it’s already being mended, as you put it, but I’m not actually going to work on that project, anyway.”

“So what are we doing here?”

“There are already plans being drawn up for a newer and better machine, and I’ll be helping with that development work as part of the UK contribution. One of the problems with the LHC is that it’s circular, and it’s very difficult to control the two streams of particles which are fired at one another at such enormous speed. So we’re planning a new collider which is straight, called the International Linear Collider.”

“How is that better, then?” asked Miller, beginning to get lost.

“You fire the two beams from each end and they smash together head-on in the middle.”

“Ah,” said Miller. “No corners to go round.”

“Well, not so many.”

“I see,” said Miller, who didn’t at all.

“It will be a much bigger machine – huge, in fact – with two accelerators each about 11 miles long, pointing at each other. In time, each accelerator might be extended to 15½ miles, making the whole thing over 30 miles long. That should result in us finding all sorts of exotic new particles which we are sure must be there, but which we have never seen and have never been able to prove exist. On top of that, it might also prove the existence of such things as dark matter and dark energy, and perhaps even extra dimensions. We’re calling it ‘Einstein’s telescope’, because it will

look into the problems which his relativity theories raised and which have never been resolved.”

Miller was totally lost, and said so.

“Let’s just go skiing,” he said.

Miller was waiting for breakfast at the Holiday Inn the next day when his mobile phone rang.

Maybe he was going to be with Lloyd longer than he had hoped after all. Makienko had disappeared from the Trade Mission, and hadn’t been seen since yesterday morning. Although he had been told to leave the country, somehow the MI5 blokes had lost touch with him, and were desperately trying to find out what had happened to him and where he had gone. The only thing they were sure of was that he hadn’t been on any of the recent flights to Moscow, or to anywhere else in Russia for that matter

As Clayton had said, “If they had been any damned good at all, they would have been working for Section 11, and not MI5”.

Miller was taking care to keep in touch with the Ops Room in Clerkenwell, so that they knew what was happening and what his plans were in relation to Lloyd. There had been no further news about Makienko or his whereabouts, although MI5 thought they had identified the ‘mole’. A junior clerical assistant in the Cabinet Office had been trying to make a few extra bob selling low-level information. The problem was that he didn’t know what was ‘low-level’ and what wasn’t. The other problem was that the man was still there. They didn’t have enough direct evidence yet to arrest him or sack him, or even suspend him. They were working on it.

Miller let them know, in no uncertain terms, that he was not happy about Makienko being on the loose, not least because he was in Switzerland on his own. Bill Clayton tried to reassure him.

“We have no idea whether he’s heading your way or not, so relax. He’s probably going to Russia the long way round.”

“But I thought MI5 was keeping tracks on him?”

“Frankly, we did too, but they seem to have lost him for the time being.”

“It’s OK for them – they’re in London in the warm, and I’m out here freezing to death on my own.”

“I know, Dusty. They should never have taken their eyes off the man. Frankly, if they had been any damned good at all, they would have been working for Section 11, and not MI5.”

“That’s all very well, but until we’re sure, a bit of support would be useful out here, even just to give me a meal break.”

“We’ll do what we can,” said Clayton. “But you’re well armed, if you need to be,” Head of ‘S’ reminded him. “Gladys was apoplectic when you demanded the HK53 Heckler and Koch assault carbide with two magazines of ammo. And as for taking it abroad ...”

They both laughed.

“I shall never forget the paperwork,” said Miller, “but she worked things OK and I got through customs at both ends without a murmur from anyone. If all goes well, I shall be home with it in a few days, once Lloyd has settled in, but I feel a bit exposed at the moment.”

“Until we know where Makienko is for sure, just keep on your toes, and look out for strangers.”

“They’re all bloody strangers here, Colonel!”

Having checked all the snow reports and weather forecasts, Dusty Miller and Roger Lloyd decided to head for Rochers-de-Naye that weekend, where, at 2,045 meters, there was already enough snow for some decent skiing, and more was forecast during the next few days. They booked overnight bed and breakfast in Montreux, near the station, and caught the first train in the morning up to the summit. After that, they would spend a couple of nights at the tiny resort of Paccots, which boasted a station on the same rack-and-pinion rail line, but not much else.

It was about that time that Clerkenwell heard that Makienko had booked a flight to Zurich.

They immediately told Miller, who swore.

“That’s a long way from where we are,” Miller said, “but I don’t like the smell of this.”

“Neither do I, to be honest,” admitted Clayton. “And,” he continued, “I’m sorry to say that Zurich is *not really* all that far from where you are. If he changes trains at Lausanne, he can be in Montreux in just over three hours. And he bought a Swiss Railways travel card before he left, when he got his airline ticket.”

Miller swore again.

“Is he looking for us, do you think?”

“Who knows. He was at the funeral, but if he wasn’t convinced, he might just be taking an interest in Lloyd, to be doubly sure.”

“He might just be even better than we thought, too.”

“Give me co-ordinates of where you are,” commanded Clayton. “Make sure you keep in touch, and tell us your every move. I’ll do my best to get some back-up to you as soon as I can.”

Miller had enough problems already, without HQ adding to them, but the S.11 organisation went into overdrive to get immediate support out to him.

Even the standby RAF Hercules crew thought a weekend in Switzerland might be a better idea than some sort of emergency relief flight to Afghanistan. The weather didn’t look too brilliant, though, especially not for a low-level drop of special forces paratroops in those mountains. Snow was forecast, and there was nearly always mist or fog at about 2000 meters at this time of the year. Could be a bit dodgy.

“Channel 19 on your radio,” Clayton told Miller, “for direct contact with your support. The Swiss Army will be listening out, so don’t hesitate to use it as an emergency frequency. They’re used to working in that terrain.”

“So I should hope,” said Miller. “They bloody well live here.”

Miller and Lloyd had enjoyed a good morning on the slopes, in spite of the fact that Miller was a bit edgy. He had told Lloyd that he was using his binoculars looking for wild life and birds. Wild Russians, actually, although he didn't say so. They had an excellent schnapps, and an even better lunch with yet another warming schnapps, at the Restaurant Alpin on the summit. They had decided to try some cross-country skiing that afternoon. Miller could not make up his mind whether they were safer among the crowds on the piste, or whether heading off on their own might be a better bet. He certainly stood a better chance of spotting Makienko out in the country, but on the other hand, the Russian would have a clearer shot out in the open - if he was there. What the hell!

There was a well laid out cross-country trail starting from near the restaurant. By now, it was snowing hard, but they had nevertheless decided to turn off the *loipe* for some real cross-country on virgin snow. Miller had been impressed by Lloyd's skill on skis, so he had no concerns about his ability to cope. This was what cross-country skiing was all about! Away from the busy downhill slope, enjoying the tranquillity of the mountains, cutting a swathe through fresh snow. They had decided to make their way along the top of a ledge once they had crossed the ridge, to a narrow valley which would lead them through the woods to more open snow, and a clear run back to Paccots. They crested the ridge near La Perche, where the rail line cut through yet another tunnel under the mountains on its way to Rochers de Naye. It was a good run on fresh snow, although it was now falling harder than it had been when they had set out. They had a couple of hours before it started getting dark, but once over the ridge, it was more or less downhill all the way.

Since he didn't fancy skiing in them, Lloyd had decided to leave his built-up shoes in St. Genis.

Makienko had noticed. No stick, no limp, and no spectacles, either. He lowered his binoculars, fastened his skis, and took the Kalashnikov from his back-pack.

Miller and Lloyd were making good progress, in spite of not wearing special cross-country skis, and were now well away from the main pistes. Miller had been keeping a good look out for other skiers, so was taken quite by surprise when a single shot rang out.

Lloyd fell with a shout of pain, and clasped his left shoulder. Miller threw himself on top of the sprawling figure, turning his head in time to see the gunman fire another round, before setting off at speed along the ridge. The bullet grazed Miller's leg, before splintering bark from the pine tree behind him.

There was blood oozing through Lloyd's fingers. Miller tore off his scarf, stuffed it with snow, and clamped it to Lloyd's shoulder.

"Hold that there, and don't move, whatever you do," said Miller. "I'll be back."

With that, he took off after the disappearing man, while desperately trying to extricate his Heckler and Koch automatic from his back-pack. It was only a flesh wound to his leg, thank heaven, but painful just the same.

The man had taken the open snow across the ridge, but he would soon have to turn downhill into the longer valley towards Paccots. Miller decided to risk all, and cut him off by heading diagonally through the trees. He judged that there was just enough snow under the tree canopy, but it was a risky technique which he hadn't practiced since Norway.

He threaded his way through the trees, doing his best to avoid the lower branches. Thank the Lord he was not wearing cross-country skis. He was gaining ground on the gunman, no doubt about it, but he had been spotted. In spite of the speed at which they were now both travelling, the man loosed off a shot at Miller, splintering a tree nearby as he swerved passed. He knew what he was doing, all right, thought Miller. It had to be Makienko. Miller was gaining ground, and risked a shot himself. He missed, and the man returned fire. He missed, as well. Miller could see there was open ground ahead, which meant he would lose the advantage of cover, although he had the benefit of being behind his assailant.

He took aim as carefully as he could at that speed and fired again, a short burst this time. The gunman fell, wounded, sending up a cloud of snow as he slithered across the slope. He came to a halt at the foot of a tree, and as Miller closed in on him, Makienko somehow managed to let off another round from his sniper's rifle. Miller felt the bullet tear the flesh from his right arm. He dropped the HK53 as he skidded towards the prone figure, slamming in to a tree and coming to a shattering halt some fifty meters from the man.

Now Miller was in real trouble. He took stock of his situation as best he could, in spite of his great pain.

He had felt, and heard, his left leg shatter as he hit the tree, which had shed its load of snow from its upper branches on top of him. As he fell back, gasping for breath, there was a sharp and excruciating stab of pain from his ribs. His right arm was hanging virtually useless. He could not move it.

Miller struggled to reach his Browning pistol, but the weapon was at his left side, ready to be easily drawn and used by his right hand. Not now. There was blood everywhere, an ever-increasing red patch in the freshly fallen snow, and Miller could already feel himself getting weaker.

"Comrade Makienko," he shouted. It was a huge effort to do anything.

"Who are you?"

Makienko was also losing strength, and Miller was gratified to notice that he had hit the Russian in the chest.

Makienko coughed, and spat blood.

"We've met before, Dmitry."

Miller was fast losing blood and consciousness. It was a huge effort to focus on the Russian.

Makienko also struggled to see his adversary, wiping blood from his mouth.

"I took those photos of you in the coffee bar," bellowed Miller as best he could. "And I took the pocket from your coat."

"Bastard!" yelled the Russian, struggling to take aim for one last shot at Miller.

Miller fell back exhausted by his effort, and noticed the ever-widening stain of blood in the snow around him. He knew he was going to die. He did not have the strength to reach his pistol, or to struggle to safety in the trees. He was a sitting duck for Makienko, if the man lived long enough.

He shouted once more at the Russian, defiantly.

“You know rule twenty, Makienko?” This time, it was Miller who had to wipe blood from his mouth.

“What’s that?”

Miller was finding it difficult to breathe, let alone shout, and waves of pain and dizziness swept over him.

“Failure isn’t an option in our business. And you’re a failure. You’re going to die.”

Miller sank back into the snow, which was now beginning to blanket him as it fell ever more heavily and thickly. Through the red mist of pain, saw the furious FSB man let fly another round without taking proper aim. Miller felt it hit, but it was only a flesh wound this time he thought. Not that it made any real difference. He was a goner anyway. A wave of excruciating pain swept over Miller again, and he mercifully began to lose consciousness as he watched the Russian, through unfocussed eyes, unsteadily but deliberately take aim again, perhaps for the last time.

“You will die first,” shouted Makienko.

Miller heard a volley of shots ring out, but felt nothing this time. Instead, he vaguely saw Makienko thrown back into the snow, no doubt by the recoil.

Miller was light headed and barely aware of what was going on around him anymore. He was hallucinating, he was sure. He imagined he could vaguely see, through the pain, what he thought were three shadowy figures, dressed in white combat overalls and headgear, and carrying HK53s. They swept down the slope, showering powdery snow from their skis in their wake.

One made straight for Miller and bent over him.

Miller struggled to remain awake.

“What the hell are you doing here?” asked Dusty weakly.

“Fancied a bit of skiing, that’s all, so me and few chums from the Special Boat Service thought we’d drop in on your weekend off,” replied Nick Marsden, as he leant over Miller to assess his condition, “Hope you don’t mind.”

“Terrible pain,” mumbled Dusty, barely awake.

Marsden ripped open the first aid kit from his back pack, tore out a syringe, and plunged the morphine deep into Miller’s forearm, exposed by a huge and bloody rip in his parka.

“You’re in a bad way, sport,” he said. It was immediately obvious that Miller was seriously hurt. He used his hand-held radio.

“It seems I got here just in the nick of time.”

The joke was lost on Miller, who had drifted into another coma.

“Wake up, Miller. Talk to me.”

“Where’s Lloyd?” whispered Miller

“He’s OK. Our medics are with him. Your dead friend here,” he nodded towards Makienko, “has given him a dodgy shoulder, but he’ll live.”

Miller drifted into oblivion again.

“Stay awake Miller,” Marsden shouted.

Miller stirred. Already the morphine was having some effect.

“Get my gun,” he breathed.

“Got it already,” Marsden assured him.

“Gladys will kill me if I go back without it.” He passed out again.

“Wake up Miller. Keep talking to me, man.”

Miller stirred.

“The medics are coming down here to look at you next. Any minute now and you’ll be sorted.”

Miller thought he heard the sound of Yamaha snow-mobiles. Two appeared through the trees and the heavy snow, headlights piercing the blizzard.

Marsden stepped back to give the medic all the room he needed.

Roger Lloyd was gingerly helped off the second machine, arm in a sling.

Looking pale and shocked, he knelt over the prostrate Miller.

“You saved my life, my friend,” he said.

“Only just,” whispered Miller, drifting again.

The Royal Navy Petty Officer medical orderly, dressed in Arctic survival kit like the rest of the team, was quick and efficient. After he had wrapped the prone figure in a thermal blanket as gently as he could, he applied a tourniquet to stop the flow of blood from Miller’s arm, applied a local anaesthetic to his leg, which he expertly straightened out and strapped to his good leg, and examined his chest.

“Broken ribs and a punctured lung, I think,” he pronounced, wiping more blood from Dusty’s mouth. “You’ll live.”

“No chance of a helicopter, I suppose?” the orderly asked Marsden.

“Not in this,” replied Nick, motioning towards the heavy snow. “Even if there was a decent landing site, which there isn’t, it’s almost white-out conditions already, and the rotors would whip up the fresh snow and make it even worse.”

“This man won’t take too much shaking about, that’s all,” said the medic. “He needs to be handled with care.”

“We’ll just have to take our time, then. At least the new snow will be reasonably smooth, if we can see our way through this weather. I just hope we make it before dark.”

The team gently lifted Miller onto a ski-fitted stretcher, which could be pulled behind one of the snow-mobiles.

Marsden issued instructions.

“Armstrong,” he shouted to his second-in-command, “take the troop along the ledge and down the valley to Caux. There’s a Swiss Army recovery team waiting there for us. I’ll follow with the Yamahas and the casualties. If this blizzard worsens into a real white-out, hole up for the night. We’ll do the same, except that this chap needs specialist attention quickly. Channel 19 is the one to use. Don’t be afraid to ask for help – we’re not behind enemy lines this time.”

“Aye aye, Commander,” responded Armstrong. “What do we do with him, by the way?” he thumbed towards Makienko.

“He can rot for a bit,” replied Marsden. “We’ve got enough problems of our own at the moment. The Swiss Army can come and get him tomorrow, if they can find him.”

One of the team threw a blanket over the dead Russian, although later they all wondered why.

“When you get half a chance, Armstrong, get on to that RAF Hercules, tell the bird-man in charge we’re going to be a touch late for our rendezvous, but make sure he doesn’t go without us. I don’t want to leave this man behind in a Montreux hospital.”

Marsden turned to Miller, who already looked a bit more comfortable.

“Not that there’s anything much wrong with Swiss hospitals, I’m sure,” he said. “It’s just that I want you back home fit and well in time for my wedding. You’re the best man.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Duncan James was an RAF pilot before eventually reaching the higher levels of the British Civil Service, in a career that included top-level posts at home and abroad with the Defence Ministry, and work with the Metropolitan Police at Scotland Yard.

A life-long and compulsive writer, he has produced everything from Government statements, Ministerial briefing papers, media announcements and reference books. As a public affairs consultant and freelance author, he was a prolific writer of magazine articles on a wide variety of subjects, as well as short stories and three novels. This is the third of a trilogy. The first, “Cashback”, and the second, “Their Own Game”, are also published by Smashwords.
