

SPY PEOPLE

by

Duncan James

Published by Duncan James

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CHAPTER 1

DMITRI MAKIENKO - MISSING, PRESUMED ALIVE

Professor Jack Barclay had been wanted for years, but mostly by fellow scientists who sought to work with him in his increasingly successful research into a controllable form of nuclear fusion, seen as the ultimate solution to the world's energy crisis. He was leading the research work, with a small team, at their secret laboratory at Culham, in Oxfordshire.

The Russians, however, wanted Jack Barclay dead.

They had worked out that if he succeeded, as was becoming increasingly likely, the political power they wielded through their vast reserves of fossil fuels would be put at risk. They wanted the work stopped, and judged that the only way of achieving that was to kill

him. The professor and his team were all unaware of this unwelcome attention, but some of Britain's commercial attachés overseas, and elements of the intelligence fraternity, had already begun to pick up the unhealthy interest being shown in his work. Slowly, news of this focus 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. Sir Robin Algar, the Cabinet Secretary and Chairman of JIC, told the meeting that some leading questions were being asked in some quarters which could indicate more than a natural curiosity in the work of Barclay and his team

Sir Frederick Forsyth, Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, agreed that recent telegrams had suggested that a couple of governments overseas, including Russia, were taking rather more than a scientific interest in the work being pioneered in this country. The Home Office man, James Burgess, agreed. That meant that both MI6 and MI5 were hearing the same thing.

Algar told them all to check.

"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 not only to Sir Len Watkins, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence but also to the Chief of Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS). "We will discuss it again when next we meet," he said, and adjourned the meeting.

The next meeting turned out to be quite interesting.

Forsyth, the Foreign Office man, summed up.

"There are two rival camps here, so I believe. My Intelligence 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 – 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. Barclay seems interested, I'm told, but so far has decided to stay put."

"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."

"So how do we assess the threat?" asked Watkins.

"Ignoring the danger to our own national interests for the moment, Barclay himself seems to face a real risk of either kidnap or assassination," said Algar. "My view is that Section 11 should be tasked to keep a close eye on the man."

Which was why Section 11 had been charged with providing protection for Barclay.

It's what they did.

From their unobtrusive and rather down-at-heel Headquarters above a row of shops in the Clerkenwell area of London, quietly and secretly 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. They were all individuals who, because of their exceptional importance to the country, were naturally also of interest to the country's enemies.

The subjects of Section 11's attention rarely knew anything about it, or even noticed the constant surveillance and protection that was being devoted to them.

Barclay certainly had no idea.

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. They went out of their way to remain - well, out of the way. It was one of those organisations that reported directly to Downing Street. It wasn't concerned with royalty or senior ministers or foreign dignitaries. The Royalty and Diplomatic Protection Unit, run by the Metropolitan Police from Scotland Yard, looked after them. Section 11 looked after other, less obvious but none the less high value targets.

At 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. 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. Their first priority, for which they were specially trained, was to remain invisible, un-noticed.

They were very special men and women. Most were fluent in at least two languages other than their native tongue; they were all parachute trained, survival specialists and sniper marksmen. And they were mostly armed. They were also experts in pursuit driving, and had available a range of vehicles in the garage immediately below the headquarters building, including a selection of motorbikes from 50cc Vespa scooters to BMW R1159s and Honda CBR 900s. Most of the vehicles had been modified in some way. The mechanics that worked on them were particularly proud of an old Morris Minor, which although sounding as if it needed a new exhaust, could actually do nearly a ton. But the motorbikes were the most popular with the agents. Easy to use in traffic, not normally out of place anywhere, and ideal for two people.

The staff who were based in the rather gloomy Headquarters did all the things that get done in any other head office, as well as quite a few other things that don't. But it was a small and tightly knit community, and the operatives in the field 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, and any one of them could summon help from on-call staff at home, who reacted immediately, whatever they were doing.

At the top of this shabby looking but extremely efficient organisation, was the Head of Section, retired Colonel Bill Clayton. 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, Commander Nick Marsden of the Special Boat Service, 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 fact was that Bill Clayton and his small but highly professional team were finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with Barclay, who worked excessively long hours and travelled a lot. He had a flat in London, as well as one at Harwell, near the Culham laboratory, he often visited colleagues in France and America, gave lectures and delivered learned papers, and, more recently, had even visited The Gulf for talks with the UAE Government. Looking after Barclay was proving very labour intensive. Even the people in Section 11 had trouble keeping up, and they were the best you could find in the intelligence world.

To make things worse, the Top Secret agency was itself responsible for creating some of the extra workload, as they also had to keep an eye on the ex-Head of Section, Alan Jarvis. The Russians had contacted him for some reason, and until they knew the reason, he also had to be watched, like a hawk.

Jarvis had virtually been sacked from leading Section 11, and had a chip on his shoulder. He also had an illegitimate son, who the Russians had threatened to kidnap. All this meant that S.11 needed new recruits who Jarvis wouldn't recognise from his time as 'S'.

Bill Clayton was lucky enough to be on good terms with the Head of Defence Intelligence at the Defence Ministry, who immediately recognised the problem.

As he put it, "You could be in deep shit old man, d'you know that?"

But he had just the man to help out.

"My best chap", he said, "Special Forces, 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."

That's how General Pearson-Jones had described him to Bill Clayton.

"I'll tell him about you straight away. He's already aware of Section 11, of course. 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 served together in Iraq."

"Thanks, PJ."

"Don't mention it. And good luck. You're probably going to need it."

Dusty Miller did a few checks of his own before he went to Clerkenwell that afternoon. He believed in knowing as much as possible about what he was getting involved in and the people he would be working with before he got involved. 'Rule one', he called it.

Miller proved to be a great asset to the Section, and immediately settled in to the task of shadowing Jarvis. He was good – no doubt about it.

He was tasked to keep an eye on the first meeting between Jarvis and a Russian agent, Dmitri Makienko. This had been arranged to take place on the bridge over the lake in St. James's Park. The elaborate plans which had been laid on to monitor the meeting broke down when the two men strolled off to walk round the lake, but Miller managed to keep track of them. 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, but by then, those monitoring the pair had lost radio contact with them as they moved out of range, so nobody knew for sure.

Eventually, Miller gave chase as Jarvis dived into London's Underground system to get the tube to Heathrow Airport. He followed Jarvis, and watched as he unlocked a left luggage locker in the Terminal Three arrivals hall with the key he had been given, and removed a large briefcase.

Later that night, on his own initiative, Miller broke in to Jarvis's house.

He discovered that the custom-built case contained a powerful Russian sniper rifle.

Through various telephone intercepts, the security services discovered that Jarvis was being blackmailed, and guessed that the rifle was to be used against Barclay. Miller was charged with following Jarvis as he left for the planned assassination attempt, but instead of heading for the Oxfordshire laboratory where Barclay worked, Jarvis headed across London to the Battersea flat where Barclay's twin brother was staying.

The man Jarvis shot and killed turned out not to be Professor Barclay at all, but the Russians, who gave Jarvis the Kalashnikov sniper's rifle, all thought Jarvis had succeeded in killing the prime target. They had no idea that Jack Barclay had an identical twin brother, so Makienko never realised that Jarvis had killed the wrong man. At the time, Dusty Miller was equally ignorant of the true facts.

The day after the killing, Miller was at the Russian agent's final and fatal meeting with Jarvis in a Piccadilly coffee bar, arranged so that the murder weapon could be returned. Once he had retrieved the weapon, Makienko planned to kill Jarvis, to stop him talking. Miller saw Jarvis poisoned by Makienko and he had photographs to prove it. They showed Makienko emptying a sachet into Jarvis's coffee.

That's how good Miller was. And even better, a bit later on, as Makienko was in the airport loo at Heathrow on his way back to Moscow having been kicked out of London, Miller managed to cut out the pocket from the man's raincoat which he had been wearing in the coffee bar, and in which the sachet of poison had been kept. The pocket still contained traces of the poison. So now they had positive evidence, and not just what the Ambassador had called 'fake' photographs.

It was immediately obvious to the London intelligence community that Barclay remained in mortal danger unless the Russians could be convinced that he was in fact dead. They concluded that the only way to do that was to take him out of circulation; for ever. That's what the Russians wanted, after all.

With his permission, his twin's body was left in the flat for the police to find in due course, while Jack Barclay himself was given a new identity, a new name, a new job, and a new nationality and a new passport.

But it had been about the time of the inquest into Barclay that things started to go wrong in London.

Really wrong, that is. Nothing had been going really right in this case for some time, if they were honest. Things were about to get even worse, too, and there was nothing they could do about it.

The wheel came off with a vengeance when they suddenly discovered that Makienko had turned up again. That caught them all by surprise, and they could only guess why he had returned to London. Certainly the Ambassador had been no help, pretending as he did that he knew nothing about it. He certainly wasn't a very good Ambassador. The Foreign Office had discovered that some time ago, but he wasn't a very good liar either.

Makienko was one of Moscow's top agents, and had been kicked out of London only a few weeks before. And so he should have been. After all, he'd killed Alan Jarvis, one of MI5's most senior agents. Poisoned him in broad daylight in a Piccadilly coffee bar; you can't expect to get away with that sort of thing. So the Ambassador was politely asked to make sure he was on the next plane home. Makienko's Director at the old KGB Headquarters in Moscow was not at all pleased to see him back, and told him so. Everyone in London thought that was that, and certainly didn't expect that he would turn up again. Especially not that soon.

But Makienko had come back. He arrived as a tourist, on his own passport. MI5 were tipped off by a double agent at the Russian Trade Mission.

Just before the inquest, it was. The inquest into Professor Jack Barclay. Except that it wasn't Jack Barclay's inquest at all, really. It was his twin brother, Roger. Not a lot of people knew that. Makienko certainly didn't, although he suspected that Jack Barclay could still be alive. That's why he had come back.

Nobody was sure why Makienko thought the professor was still alive, but he had begun to wonder if he might be, as there had been no announcement of his death, and nothing in the newspapers. He came back to find out, and to finish the job if necessary. He needed to convince his 'Director' in Moscow that he was as good as he claimed.

But he wasn't. He was spotted again, and got sent home again.

Makienko had gone to the crematorium for Barclay's funeral, and been seen. Once again, the Ambassador was politely asked to arrange Makienko's immediate return to Moscow. Once again, that's what he did.

It was as Dr. Roger Lloyd, a Swiss scientist working at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) near Geneva, that Barclay eventually attended his own funeral. All but a very select few now knew that Professor Barclay had not, after all, had a nervous breakdown, but had been murdered. As planned Lloyd went to Switzerland, to start his new life, immediately after the service for his brother at the crematorium.

Miller, though, went with him. As Makienko was obviously still showing an interest, it had been decided to extend Section 11's protection operation for a bit longer. It was just as well.

Makienko had never arrived in Moscow. He had a sneaking suspicion that the Doctor and the Professor could just be one and the same person. It was not beyond the bounds of possibility, after all, and there was a likeness. So, without telling anyone, he gave chase. Following a tip off by another Russian agent in London, he went to Zurich instead of Moscow, and nobody knew.

There was confusion in Moscow, and Moscow did not like confusion.

Moscow, especially in the Lubyanka building, liked order rather than disorder, certainty rather than uncertainty, fact rather than theory, knowledge rather than ignorance, discipline rather than indiscipline, and above all, live spies rather than dead ones.

Amidst all the confusion, there was only one fact. Fellow FSB agent Dmitry Makienko was missing. He should have been there – NOW – standing before his Director, as he had done only recently. But he was not there. Secretly, Comrade Director Egor Ivanovic was not altogether surprised, he had to confess. Their last “meeting” had been less than comfortable for Makienko, who, it seemed at the time, had made a colossal error and caused considerable embarrassment to the Russian Federation on a diplomatic level, and to him, Director Ivanovic, on a professional level.

But that had been some weeks ago. Makienko had been given another chance. Indeed he should have been eternally thankful that he had not been thrown into the infamous Lubyanka prison, deep below the FSB offices and the old KGB museum. Instead, he had been sent on a humiliating few weeks’ of intensive refresher retraining, which he did not need. But it was better than incarceration, and, in the Director’s view, just punishment for what appeared to be a thoroughly botched piece of work. Makienko had claimed that Barclay had been assassinated, but there was no proof; not even so much as an obituary in the British press.

So, in a way, Ivanovic was not altogether surprised.

On the other hand, he was very surprised. Makienko was a true professional, had served his country well, and knew better than to be absent. He had some explaining to do, that was certain, but nothing to fear. Makienko must know that. Whatever had happened in the past few months, whatever mistakes he might have made, whether or not his last mission had been a success or a failure, Makienko knew that he was secure. Ivanovic would see to that. Whatever others might suggest about Dmitri Makienko, he, Egor Ivanovic, would defend the reputation of his old friend and pupil in the face of any allegations that might be made.

It was true, of course, that Dmitri had become something of a loose cannon recently, no doubt buoyed by his earlier successes and his senior position within the FSB. If anything, he had become overly self-confident.

He had, after all, returned to London, after his ‘refresher training’, without proper authority. At his request, he had been granted leave of absence while awaiting a fresh assignment. He had mentioned in passing to a colleague that he planned to return to London to collect a few personal items which he and his wife had left behind at the time of their first rather ‘hurried’ departure – “on the next plane or else”, more or less summed it up. Nobody had thought anything of it at the time. But he had returned discretely it was true, almost secretly in fact, using his own passport and travelling as a tourist, probably to avoid any further embarrassment to the Ambassador or to his country. He had, so it was said, chosen to stay with colleagues at the Trade Mission, rather than travel on his diplomatic passport and return to the Embassy.

But the British Foreign Office had quickly discovered that he was back in London, and once again, just as quickly, demanded that he should leave the country on the next available flight. Once again, not a formal expulsion, with all the diplomatic ramifications that

went with it, but the message was clear enough. The UK wanted Makienko out, and wanted him to stay out. According to London Ambassador Yuri Nevski, he had departed for Moscow immediately, in order to avoid further diplomatic embarrassment between the two countries.

But Makienko was not there, in his Director's office, as he should have been. Furthermore, it seemed he was not even in the building, or, it transpired later, possibly not even in the country. The idiots at the London embassy had only followed him as far as the Heathrow airport terminal. They had not watched him pass through the check-in desks or passport control, so had only assumed that he had caught the flight to Moscow. But there was no record of him arriving at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport, or for that matter, at any of the others which served the City.

They were the facts. Makienko could be anywhere. Still in London perhaps, or anywhere else. The only certainty was that he was not in Moscow. At least, he had not been seen arriving, or been checked in at passport control. So where could he be? And why had he chosen not to return to Moscow and to his wife and friends?

It would have been little comfort to Ivanovic to know that the authorities in London had also failed to check Makienko's progress through Heathrow. They, too, had assumed that he had returned to Moscow. They quickly discovered that he had not, however, and almost as quickly discovered where he was. The UK Border Agency people at Terminal 5 had a record of him leaving for Zurich.

London thought they knew why, as well.

Ivanovic was ignorant of all this.

As news got out of Makienko's disappearance, there was an inevitable fuss. Missing spies were always bad news, although, given his previous record, it was impossible to imagine that Dmitri Makienko could have defected. But you never knew. There were already fears that another of their agents in London had been turned, although there was no direct evidence to support the suspicion. Eventually, the Foreign Ministry demanded a full but secret inquiry. Makienko must be traced. Every record at every airport and sea port and border crossing was to be checked and checked again. While that was going on, the agents based in London and elsewhere in the UK were told to do everything possible to prove as best they could that he was not still there, and to show to everyone's satisfaction that he had indeed left that country.

One obvious starting point for their enquiries in Moscow was to question Makienko's wife, but before they could speak to her, she got in touch with them. Even as they were trying to ring her, and while others were visiting the new Makienko apartment they had been given when they were first expelled from London, she arrived in a great state of agitation at the Lubyanka Building.

She stood at the reception desk, insisting on seeing Director Ivanovic himself, and demanding to know where her husband was.

Egor Ivanovic knew Sasha Makienko quite well. He had always regarded himself as a friend of her husband as well as his superior. He immediately ordered the staff at the reception desk to escort her to his office.

"My dear Sasha," he said, extending his hand, which was ignored, "we have been trying to contact you."

“To tell me what you have done to my husband, I hope. Where is he?” she demanded to know.

“I was rather hoping you might tell us,” he replied. “That is why we have been trying to get in touch with you so urgently, in case he had been in contact with you by some means.”

“Do you mean to tell me you have no idea where he is?”

“At the moment, we do not know, that is true,” Egor admitted.

“What kind of organisation do you run here when you can lose one of your top men?” She was becoming hysterical. “You must know where he is, and I demand that you tell me.”

“Do sit down and try to keep calm,” pleaded Ivanovic. “Let me get you something to calm your nerves. A coffee or even something a little stronger perhaps.”

“All I want from you is my husband,” came the angry response.

“And all I want is to be able to return him to you,” responded the Director. “I take it that you have not heard from him, any more than we have?”

“The last thing he told me was that you had treated him like a traitor, sent him on some useless training course, and given him indefinite leave.”

“Which he seems to have chosen to take in London, from which you had both only recently been expelled,” countered Ivanovic, crossly. “Hardly sensible, in my view.”

“He returned to collect some personal items which we were unable to bring with us, such was the rush to leave.” She sipped the strong black coffee which had been brought.

“When did you last hear from him?”

“After he arrived in London, he rang me.”

“It will not surprise you to know that we have a recording of that telephone call,” responded Ivanovic. “But since then, nothing? No word at all?”

“You tell me. You are the one spying on us for some reason.”

“He has not contacted us at all since he left, on an unauthorised visit to London, so it happens.”

“Never mind whether he signed your wretched piece of paper, or whether or not you gave him permission to visit London. We both know that’s what he did, and why he went. I want to know where he is now.”

“And I can’t tell you, because I don’t know. He could be anywhere, which is why we were anxious to speak to you as part of our extensive search for him.”

“Do you know he is not still in London?”

“I don’t know where he is. I have said that. We know the British discovered that he had returned there, and once again demanded his immediate departure. We know he went to Heathrow airport in London, and we had assumed that he had caught the flight to Domodedovo, but he never arrived.”

“So where did he go?”

“I keep telling you, *‘I don’t know’*. He could still be in London; he could be anywhere, including in this country. We are checking all the borders, and our people in London are doing their best to establish whether he did in fact leave.”

“But they should already *know*,” she almost shouted. “Surely they watched him on to the aircraft, through the airport controls?”

“I’m afraid not. A major oversight, which will be the subject of disciplinary action, of course.”

“Never mind the idiots in London, I want my husband back. I want to know where he is!”

“You will know as soon as I do,” he promised. “And I insist that you tell me the moment he contacts you again, as I am sure he will, soon.”

“Since you are obviously listening in on my phone calls, you will know as soon as he rings me, if he does.”

There was a slight pause.

“I suspect,” she said, looking at Ivanovic through narrowed eyes, “I suspect that you have sent him on some secret and dangerous mission which you are trying to hide from me.”

“I can assure you, on my word, Sasha, that I have not done so. We are as mystified and baffled as you are, and share your urgent need to find Dmitri.”

She shook her head, in tears now.

“Tell me,” asked Ivanovic, “has he ever said anything to you about wanting to visit some other place, perhaps to live or for a holiday?”

“Never,” she replied after a moment’s thought. “He was always happy here, and we always spent our holidays in this country except when we were serving abroad. He had no wish to go anywhere else, for any reason.”

The Director shook his head. “Such a puzzle,” he said.

He crossed to his low bookcase, and poured two small glasses of Vodka from the decanter.

“You look as if you need something stronger than that coffee,” he said, proffering a glass.

She looked at the man standing above her.

“From all that you have said,” she almost whispered, “I conclude that you believe Dmitri could just as likely be dead, rather than simply missing.”

He shook his head. “We know nothing for certain yet. However, I am sure in myself that he is still alive. Somewhere.”

But he wasn’t.

Professor Jack Barclay was definitely still alive, though, but only just.

Now known as Dr. Roger Lloyd, he had just escaped death for the second time in recent weeks, this time skiing in Switzerland. Thinking about it, he had not had a very good year.

CHAPTER 2

COMMANDER NICK MARSDEN – GONE SKIING

“The Russians will need to be sure Barclay is still alive before they risk doing anything,” retired Air Commodore ‘Doc’ Perkins had said. Within Section 11, he had taken the lead in transforming Barclay’s appearance. “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 Clayton, who was chairing the meeting. “And Jarvis is dead, so it can’t be him.”

“Someone told them Barclay was going to California, otherwise there would not have been KGB men at the reception in the university,” Marsden reminded him.

“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.

“Sounds like a mole to me,” said Dusty Miller. “Someone on the inside, who knows the score and what’s really going on.”

“If the Russians can turn Jarvis, they can turn anyone, even if Jarvis was being 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 the facts, and that they know Lloyd is Barclay under another name. For us to do otherwise would be plain stupid.”

“I agree,” Clayton nodded. “The possibility of an informer in our midst has worried me for some time, I must be honest.”

“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.”

It had been a busy few weeks for quite a lot of people in high places. Providing a prominent scientist with a new identity is no easy matter. His disappearance had to be arranged for a start. A nervous breakdown due to overwork was the preferred option, and should be enough until the body of his twin brother was found, then everyone would know that the professor had been murdered. Until then, the breakdown would explain his absence from the laboratory where he worked. Only the Director in charge would know the truth.

A new identity was not just a question of changing the man’s appearance, although that was difficult enough. His whole background had to be changed, documented and then committed to memory by Barclay, who had already decided to change his name and title to Dr. Roger Lloyd. Lloyd needed to remember such details as how many ‘O’ level exams he had passed and when, and at what school. He needed to be added to the school’s historic records, and his exam results registered and documented. Similarly, at University. He needed a new birth certificate, and new medical records had to be prepared, so who was his GP? Where did he start work, and what did he do? Where did he live? Where did he go on holiday? For those involved, it was a familiar, if difficult, process, but for Lloyd it was a nightmare. Disappearing from the face of the earth is no easy business, he discovered, but it was worth the effort to avoid being assassinated by the Russians.

Creating Lloyd's background was not the end of it. Once his past had been established, his present and his future had to be planned, perhaps in even more detail.

As he was fluent in French, Lloyd had decided to live and work in Switzerland, at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) near Geneva. He had visited the place many times before, and aspects of the work there were not dissimilar to the work he had recently been doing. Indeed, it would be possible for him to continue his pioneering work into nuclear fusion, if only in an advisory capacity. But the fact that people there knew him, as Professor Barclay, itself presented a nightmare for the man. One wrong word and his cover would be blown. One small slip-up with his new identity, and he would be recognised for who he really was. There were a couple of senior scientists there who had to know, of course, but they were only the most trustworthy, with the highest possible security clearance.

But he couldn't simply move into Switzerland, just like that. For a start, the country was not a member of the EU, and therefore not a signatory to the treaty which allowed free movement of labour. So there followed a great deal of diplomatic activity, to provide Lloyd with dual nationality and a Swiss Passport, to establish him as a taxpayer, and to take care of all the other aspects of a bureaucracy which were necessary to confirm Lloyd as a Swiss citizen. The administration at CERN had found him a nearby apartment, into which he could move, but he needed such things as a bank account and credit cards, a driving licence, a doctor – the list was endless. And the longer the list, the greater the risk that some of it would leak out to the Russians, to confirm their suspicions that their target was still alive. The need to eliminate the suspected informer in Whitehall had become an even more urgent priority.

Eventually everything was in place, and Lloyd flew to Geneva to start his new life immediately after the cremation, which had been arranged to take place immediately after the inquest. As a precaution, his 'minder' Dusty Miller went with him, since he was the only member of Section 11 who knew what Makienko looked like, and would therefore be able to recognise him in the unlikely event that he should turn up. Miller and Lloyd had become good friends in recent weeks, and they had agreed that they would go skiing in the mountains above Montreux on their first weekend in Switzerland for a well-earned break.

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.

There was one thing they all agreed about. The Cabinet office 'mole' had to be silenced and in double quick time. Never mind collecting enough evidence to sack the man. By then it would be too late. He must be moved before he could be of any further use to the Russians; before he learned about Professor Barclay's new identity as Dr. Lloyd; before he knew that Lloyd was going to Switzerland; before he could learn anything new or potentially damaging to the operation to save Barclay's life.

As luck would have it, the poor fellow was involved in a nasty road accident on his way home from work, seemingly run down by an old Morris Minor, which didn't stop, and made off at surprisingly high speed for such an old car. Nobody got the car's number, and the Cabinet Office clerk died in Hospital later that night.

Miller was waiting for breakfast the next day at the Holiday Inn where he was staying, near the Swiss village of Meyrin where the CERN facility was based, 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.

"We have no idea whether he's heading your way or not, so relax," said Clayton. "He's probably going to Russia the long way round. Frankly, we thought MI5 was keeping tracks on him 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. But until we're sure where he is, 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,"

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 metres, 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 planned to 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 too that the people in Clerkenwell heard that Makienko had booked a flight to Zurich.

It was the duty officer who had taken the call from the Head of Section 11. There were a couple of other men in the Ops. Room at the time, busy running or monitoring their own operations, but the Duty Officer was the one who had to react to emergencies.

This was an emergency. No doubt about it.

Two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon was not the best of times to start some sort of rescue operation, especially abroad, but that's what this was. Albert Piper, known by colleagues as 'Whistler' Piper, knew exactly what to do, so got on and did it without a moment's thought. He knew all about the 'Barclay' case. It had been part of his briefing. He knew that Dr. Roger Lloyd had gone to Switzerland only yesterday, escorted by Dusty Miller 'just in case'. He knew about the Russian agent Makienko, too, and that he had returned to Moscow earlier.

What he didn't know, and hadn't expected, was that MI5 had lost track of Makienko at Heathrow, and that he hadn't gone to Moscow after all. Apparently, he was on his way to Switzerland even now. That's what 'S' had said. Having made a right mess of things, MI5 now passed the buck to Section 11 to sort out. Thanks very much!

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. Keep your ‘Delta 7’ tracking device activated and with you at all times, and 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 metres 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.”

Everything moved very fast, but very efficiently. It had all been well rehearsed before, in training exercises, but this time it was for real.

Clayton rang his Deputy, Nick Marsden.

“Makienko is on his way to Switzerland. Miller is on his own with Lloyd, skiing above Montreux, and totally isolated. Can you get your Arctic team together?”

“Consider it done,” replied the Special Boat Service Commander.

“We’ve already alerted the standby RAF Hercules, and the duty pilot is doing a flight plan. The Military will do all the overflying clearances.”

“Good. We keep all our kit at Brize Norton, ready to move. With any luck, we can be airborne in about four hours or so.”

“I’ll get my chums at the Ministry of Defence to sort out the Swiss military to give you support once you get there, and get the Foreign Office to organise the diplomatic side of things. Keep in touch. Full briefing when you’re airborne.”

Clayton rang the Cabinet Secretary, chairman of the JIC, and quickly briefed him.

Sir Robin Algar shared Clayton’s concern. “Diplomatically, this is very tricky,” he announced. “Sending armed troops into a foreign country is never the easiest thing to arrange, especially at short notice, and this is even more complicated because of Switzerland’s cherished ‘neutrality’.”

He thought for a minute. “I’ll get the Foreign Secretary to have a word with his opposite number in Bern, and I’ll have a word with the Ambassador, who I know quite well, fortunately.”

“Don’t forget that Lloyd has taken Swiss nationality. At least we shall be protecting one of their own citizens, as it happens.”

“Good point. Let’s just hope they don’t decide they would rather protect him themselves.”

“I’m organising military back-up for our team when they arrive,” said Clayton, “and the RAF is doing all the flight planning, sorting out overflying rights, and whatever else they need in order to get there.”

“When will they get there, as a matter of interest?”

“With any luck, in about six hours or so.”

“They don’t hang about, do they! I must get a move on. Diplomatic channels are not known for moving that fast. Six days would be more like it!”

For Lloyd, it had been a hectic few days, and not a little stressful as well at the end of a horrendous few weeks. 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, to start a new life under a new name. He had so much to remember. At least his new friend Dusty Miller would be with him for a few days. That was a comfort. But after that he would be on his own, in a new country, a new research post to tackle and few friends around him for support. He knew he could always contact the good people in Clerkenwell who had looked after him so well, or even one or two people at Culham, but he would need to be exceptionally careful; if the Russians had the slightest suspicion that he was still alive and that it was his brother who had been shot, he could still be in mortal danger.

Nobody had told Lloyd that his would-be Russian assassin had been at the crematorium.

Now a Swiss citizen, Lloyd had to settle to his new life in Switzerland. No time for a holiday, to catch his breath after the events of the past twelve months: the highs and lows of his nuclear fusion research project, the seemingly endless travel, the papers and lectures he had been required to prepare and deliver. It was as well that he had no idea then that his life was under threat at the end of it all, and that dedicated men and women were facing danger night and day to protect him. How could he ever thank them?

One of them was with him still, for a few days, as a precaution. To be honest, they were both in need of a break, so they had decided to spend at least a couple of days on the slopes skiing. Delightful scenery, good snow, excellent food and the odd drop of Jägermeister schnapps, in good company. He was beginning to relax for the first time in months. At Miller’s suggestion, they decided, after lunch at the Restaurant Alpin on the summit, to get away from the regular slopes and ski cross country. Lloyd had no idea, of course, that Miller was worried that Makienko might find them, and 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. Miller 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.

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. They planned 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.

Makienko saw them from across the valley, and noticed that Lloyd had no stick, no limp, and no spectacles, either, all of which were supposed to be part of his new identity. He lowered his binoculars, fastened his skis, and took the Kalashnikov from his back-pack.

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," commanded his friend. "I'll be back."

For the first time, he noticed that Miller was armed – some sort of machine gun that he had pulled from his back-pack.

Miller sped off into the snow, gun at the ready. Lloyd was in pain, and losing blood. He could see it staining the snow. He felt dizzy and faint, and wondered how long he would be left there. After a short time, he heard shots ring out from further down the valley, and then silence. He had no idea how long he had laid there on his own, as he kept losing consciousness, probably because of the shock and the cold, but eventually he was aware of a flurry of activity around him, as strange figures in white bent over him.

"Dr. Lloyd?" asked one.

"Yes".

"Good. Let's have a look at that shoulder."

Two of them were quick and professional at tending his wound, while others looked on. Roger Lloyd noticed that there were two ski-scooter things that they had arrived on, and that one of the others was talking on a hand-held radio. They were all in white uniforms, with crash helmets on.

Lloyd had no idea what was happening or who they were. This was yet another experience to add to all those others which had thrown him into such confusion in recent weeks, and made life such a living nightmare.

"Who are you?" he asked the female who had dressed his wound. He tried to sit up.

"Don't move! You're going to be OK. We're a unit of the British Special Forces. We heard you were in trouble so came to help."

"How did you get here?"

"By parachute. We'll tell you later. But where's the man you were with? We're looking for a colleague, Staff Sergeant Dusty Miller."

“He went after the gunman, I think.” Lloyd pointed. “That way.”

The man on the radio shouted.

“The boss has found Miller. He’s in a bad way. We’re to get there ASAP.”

“We’re on the move then,” the girl with the Red Cross on her arm told Lloyd. “We’ll take you with us.”

She shouted across to her colleagues. “Give me a hand will you. Lift this man carefully onto a snowmobile and strap him in. He’s coming with us.”

They were soon speeding through the snow, which Lloyd noticed was now falling fast. In no time, it seemed, they found the rest of the party, and the medical orderly dashed over to a prone figure lying in the blood-stained snow. The centre of such a great deal of frenzied activity must be Dusty, thought Lloyd. Eventually, one of the others came over to Lloyd.

“Hello, Dr. Lloyd. How are you feeling?”

Lloyd thought he recognised the man, but couldn’t believe this was really happening.

“Commander Marsden! What on earth are you doing here?”

“We heard you and Dusty might be needing a hand, so dropped in to help. I’m told by my Petty Officer medical lady that you’ve nothing to worry about. Your wound will soon heal.”

“I’m feeling much better now, thanks to her. But what about Dusty?”

“Not looking good, I’m afraid. We’ll get him home to UK as soon as we can, and make sure the Swiss military look after you until you’re fit enough to get to your new flat. It looks as if Dusty is going to need a lot of specialist treatment.”

“My poor friend Dusty; it’s all my fault. I can’t believe all this. It’s like a dream, or perhaps a nightmare.”

“I’d better get back to him. I’ll fill you in on all the details later,” promised Marsden. “By the way, you won’t be having any more trouble from your Russian friend. He’s over there. Quite dead.”

“Did Dusty kill him?”

“No. I did.”

It was obvious from the way they were handling poor old Dusty that he really was seriously hurt. Marsden was very much in charge of things, and appeared to be in almost constant communication with people on his radio. Others in the small team, all of them armed, gave support where they could or when they were told, but not everyone could tend to Miller’s needs. Lloyd slowly managed to piece together what had happened, and how these brave men had got to him. This was the stuff of spy thrillers on television, and yet here he was, in the middle of it all, happening for real. He was way out of his depth, as he had been for some weeks now since he had been whisked away from his laboratory and out of his comfort zone, into this other world of dreams and nightmares.

All this was because of him. Because somebody, somewhere, thought he was of such value to the country that he had to be protected, almost, it seemed, at any cost. Through the pain of his shattered shoulder, he felt quite guilty. Perhaps it would have been better if his brother had lived and he had fallen instead to that fatal bullet in his Battersea flat. At least then, they would all have been spared the tremendous effort that had gone in to transforming

his personality and transporting him to Switzerland. Even here, they had come to protect him. And his poor friend Dusty would not now be lying, close to death, in the snow halfway up an unheard-of mountain in a foreign land.

They had said that they would be taking Dusty back to England, while he would be left here, to be looked after by the Swiss military. He could understand why he had to stay behind, but wished it was not so. Here, he knew nobody, but, by the same token, in England nobody knew Dr. Roger Lloyd. He had only recently been created. And to go home would probably be dangerous, and cause the authorities even more problems. He had caused them enough already. He was now a Swiss citizen, so he supposed it was right for him to be left behind, but it would not be easy. How would he keep in touch with Dusty? Who would be able to tell him how Dusty was getting on?

It looked as if the party was getting ready to leave. A man called Armstrong, who was second in command, came across to him.

"I shall be leaving soon with my section of the team, to lead the way back to civilisation," he announced. "The Commander will follow with you and Mr Miller and the rest of the team. We shall do our best not to split up, but Miller is in poor shape and must be treated with great care. It's snowing hard and will soon get dark, so if Miller finds the going too much, your party will hole up for night while we press on to our rendezvous with the Swiss Army recovery team. They have helicopters to take us to their Air Force base at Payerne. When we all get there, we shall transfer to our waiting RAF Hercules, and you will be transferred to the base sick quarters for proper medical attention. You can stay there until you are completely fit. Any questions?"

"How on earth have you managed to organise all this, and so quickly?" asked Lloyd in disbelief.

"It's our job – it's what we do," said Armstrong.

Albert 'Whistler' Piper had been on duty in the Ops. Room running the London end of the rescue mission since it was first learnt that Makienko had flown to Zurich instead of Moscow. Weekend duty officers often have a quiet time on their eight-hour shift, but not today. He'd taken over at lunchtime, the balloon went up around 2 o'clock, and he had already handed over to the night watch-keeper. But he had decided not to hand over this particular operation; he would continue running it from one of the other desks. Every operation being run from the Ops. Room had a code name, but nobody had thought to give him one yet. So he scribbled on the board above the TV monitors "Get Lloyd", and from then on, that's what the operation was called.

Bill Clayton, had joined him earlier.

"I've been trying to get hold of Barbara, my PA, but she doesn't seem to be at home, which is odd, so I may as well work from here as from my office," he announced, sliding into one of the chairs next to Piper in front of the bank of TV screens and telephones. "Shan't be in your way, shall I Whistler?"

"Of course not. You're the boss, after all."

"Do we have direct contact with the team in Switzerland?"

“Not quite direct, but as near as we can get. I have set up an open line to the Ops. Room at RAF Brize Norton, and they are relaying messages to and from the team in the field via their Hercules.”

“So what’s the current state of play out there?” asked Clayton.

“They’ve recovered both Miller and Dr. Lloyd. There’re both injured, but Lloyd is not bad. Miller sounds very dodgy, though, and they are obviously worried about him.”

“What about the Russian?”

“Dead.”

“Where are they all now?”

“Still at the recovery point, but preparing to move out. The weather is closing in, so the Swiss can’t get a chopper to them. They’re worried about the effect on Miller of a cross-country journey to the location of the Swiss recovery team, but there is no choice. Miller may not last the night out in the open.”

“That bad, eh?”

“There’s a decent medical evacuation kit on the aircraft, so their aim is to get Miller to that ASAP. The plan is to leave Lloyd in the medical centre at the Swiss Air Force base.”

The radio link to Brize Norton burst into life.

“We’ve just heard from the aircraft that your team is moving out. If the weather holds, they should get to the recovery point in a couple of hours,” said the distant voice.

“The Swiss Army team has two helicopters with them, about 20 minutes flying time from our aircraft on the ground at Payerne,” said Piper.

“What do they plan to do with the dead Russian,” asked ‘S’.

“I’ll find out.”

He got on to Brize Ops.

“Pass the message, will you please, that London wants to know what they plan to do with the gunman.” Piper turned to Clayton. “They don’t know he’s Russian. I thought it best not to tell too many people.”

“Good thinking, Whistler. How long have you been on duty, by the way?”

“About twelve hours now,” he replied, glancing at the clock on the wall which showed UK time.

“If only I could raise Barbara, she could rustle up some bacon sandwiches.”

Whistler looked around the room.

“Alex,” he called across to a colleague. “If you’re spare for a few minutes, me and the boss could murder a bacon sandwich and a coffee from the kitchen.”

“So could I,” came the reply. “Ten minutes!”

One of the red telephones in the Ops. Room rang. The Duty Officer answered it, and called across, “It’s for you, boss – Downing Street.”

Clayton took the call from Sir Robin Algar. “Why are you in the office?” he asked.

“We’ve been a bit busy, as I guess you have,” replied the Cabinet Secretary. “Lots of diplomatic bits and pieces to sort out, thanks to you! How’s it going?”

“We’ve recovered Lloyd, you’ll be pleased to know. He’s been injured, but apparently not seriously.”

“How was he injured?”

“The Russian had another go at assassinating him, that’s how.”

“How the hell did they know where he was?”

“A question I’ve been asking myself, as you can imagine. I thought we’d taken care of your mole.”

“There’s obviously another somewhere. Better informed, too. Something to ponder tomorrow, perhaps, once we’ve got today out of the way. What happened to the gunman?”

“Dead. It was Makienko. Hang on a minute.”

It was Brize Norton Ops. “Your man says they will leave the gunman for the Swiss Army to find tomorrow if they can. It’s snowing hard, so he may not be recovered until the Spring when it all thaws. Your man says it could look like a shooting accident. Plenty of hunting in the area away from the ski slopes.”

“I heard that,” said Algar. “I was just going to ask.”

“So far as we know, Moscow has no idea he went to Switzerland in the first place. They don’t know where he went, which is interesting, since it means our new mole was communicating with Makienko rather than Moscow. My point is, though, that if the Swiss Army can’t find him, the Russians certainly won’t.”

“Well, much to discuss later, but I’m relieved Lloyd is safe. Your chaps on the way home now?”

“It’s not quite that easy, Sir Robin.” Clayton was not usually that formal. “One of my men is very seriously injured, and may not survive the journey.”

“I’m so sorry. I should have asked,” replied Algar, who had noticed the change of tone. “Who is it?”

“Someone you know well, I’m sorry to say. Dusty Miller.”

There was a pause.

“That’s really bad news. I’m so sorry. Please let me know how he gets on as soon as you hear. Such a nice man.”

“One of my best, but he’s not dead yet, and he’ll fight like hell to come through this, if I know him.”

“Let’s hope he wins. But we should meet tomorrow – or later today, as it is now. We need to think about future protection for Lloyd and who takes responsibility for it, how we handle the Russians if we need to, what the Swiss role should be in all this, and, perhaps most importantly, whether we really do have another mole in our midst, and who it might be. I’ll get my girl to ring Barbara to fix it up. Meanwhile, keep me in touch with developments if you will.”

The red phone went dead, and the bacon sandwiches arrived.

CHAPTER 3

DUSTY’ MILLER - THE RED MIST

There was a red mist. Nothing else. Just pain and a red, swirling mist. Then nothing. From time to time, even the mist drifted away. Then there was nothing at all. Just the agony – the pain. Otherwise, absolutely nothing. No sight, no sound. Nothing. But the red mist would return. It stayed for longer, now, but when it melted away again, there was nothing. Just nothing. Only the pain. He wished he could scream, but he couldn’t. He could do nothing. There was nothing. Only the excruciating pain and the red mist.

This time, though, it was perhaps different. There was something new. Not just the red mist and the pain, but a noise. A dull, throbbing, roaring noise filling his head. But that was all. Mist and noise and pain. But they drifted away. And then there was nothing again. Nothing until they came back. Every time, the mist was getting darker, and the noise was getting louder, and the pain was getting worse, but that's all there was. Otherwise, nothing. Just mist and pain and noise - or nothing.

The roaring, drumming, throbbing noise was getting so loud now that it hurt. Hurt. Everything hurt. His eyes hurt, his head hurt. Everything hurt. But there was no relief when the mist and the sound drifted away. No sensation of anything at all. Just nothing. If only he could scream out. But he could do nothing. His training, perhaps. Suffer the pain of torture. Don't let them know.

He tried to open his eyes, to see through the red mist of pain and unconsciousness. Nothing happened. He tried to move – anything. Legs, arms, head, fingers, toes. Nothing worked. His ears perhaps. Maybe that dreadful noise wasn't just in his head after all. He began to think that there was something else, apart from the thundering, roaring noise in his head. Something vaguely familiar. A deafening drone. Still a dreadful noise, but different. Two noises coming together.

But still he drifted in and out of the red mist of pain. If only he could open his eyes. Or move. Or scream. Or get rid of that dreadful penetrating throbbing noise. Or noises. He was sure now there was more than one source. His splitting headache and something else which he almost recognised.

And now another. More sound, making itself heard over everything else. He recognised that, too. He was sure. A voice over everything else. And a message he recognised, too. He had heard it before. The noise, and the voice, and the message. He had heard it all before.

The mist was thinning, but he drifted away into it again. This time, he fought against it as best he could, but it still enveloped him. Now nothing again. No mist, no noise, no voice. Nothing. But still the pain.

As the mist cleared once again and he drifted back into some sort of consciousness, he felt a hand on his shoulder, and another wiping his lips, gently trying to wake him. Still the noise, and still the voice he knew. And still the same, familiar message.

“Wake up, Miller. Talk to me.”

He struggled to open his eyes, to see through the fog of agony. He peered unseeingly into a dark abyss. There were hazy silhouettes of people bending over him in a dark, foreboding place. A familiar place? He drifted away again, before he could begin to work out where he was or who was with him. Still the same excruciating pain, still the same deafening, throbbing noises in his head, and still, in the background as if in a nightmarish dream, the voice, “Talk to me talk to me talk to me.” He forced his eyes open. The hazy figures were wearing hard hats and uniforms. Some dressed in white, others in camouflaged uniforms. Military uniforms.

If only he could move. The very thought of it made the pain worse – unbearable. He had the impression he was constrained in some way. Strapped down. To a stretcher perhaps? He simply could not move, and gave up trying. At least his brain was beginning to work, even if nothing else was. His eyes flickered shut again. No red mist this time. Just the noise

and the voice. He thought he recognised both in some way, but it was too much effort to try to work things out. He wondered where he was, but really couldn't care less. He could do nothing about it. Or anything else. Nothing. Wherever he was, he had to stay there. He couldn't move. But where had he been? Where was he going? How did he get here? Who was with him? Whose was that voice, constantly pleading with him to talk? In uniform – military. At least he was among his own kind. That was something of a comfort.

His eyes flickered open again, and he looked beyond the figures bending over him. Now he was sure he recognised the dark, foreboding place he was in. An aircraft. That was it. He was in an aircraft. That was the noise, too. A military aircraft. He knew he had been in one before. Several times. An RAF Hercules. That's what it was. He tried to focus on the two uniformed figures bending over him. One could have been a female. A Red Cross arm band on her uniform. It was the other, a man in white, who was pleading with him, trying to make himself heard over the noise of the aircraft. "Talk to me. Wake up, Miller and talk to me."

By some super-human effort, he managed to whisper huskily, "Pain". The arm with the Red Cross gently wiped his mouth. Through the thinning mist, he saw them say something, and watched as the Red Cross emblazoned arm plunged a needle into him. He drifted off into unconsciousness again, and this time, stayed there. No red mist, no noise, no voice, no pain. Nothing.

Commander Nick Marsden was the first to admit that the mission had not turned out quite as he had expected. Not that he ever really knew what to expect, as he hastily gathered together his team of Special Services personnel for their urgent dash to the mountains of Switzerland.

Their aim had been to provide immediate support for Dusty Miller, a Staff Sergeant SAS colleague, who was in the mountains above Montreux to provide protection for one of Britain's top nuclear physicists, now working at CERN. What nobody knew when Miller left London with Dr. Roger Lloyd, was that one of Russia's top agents was also on his way to Montreux, on a mission to kill Lloyd. Everyone had thought that the Russian, Dmitry Makienko, was heading for Moscow, but MI5 had lost track of him at the critical time as he left London.

He had nearly managed to kill both Lloyd and Miller.

It had been a mad scramble from the start, but events proved that it had all been vital. Marsden was a Special Boat Service man from way back, and although he was now doing something of a desk job – top secret work, but behind a desk most of the time just the same – it was not difficult to get his team together, even at such short notice. They were all on standby, anyway, ready for an immediate emergency, and that's what this was.

It was the 'Arctic' team he got together, a specially trained group dedicated to Arctic Warfare, and fully equipped ready for action. All their gear was stored at RAF Brize Norton, where the standby RAF Hercules of the Special Forces Flight was also ready to go at a moment's notice. By the time Marsden and his team got there, their Snowmobiles, skis, winter clothing and other specialist items had already been loaded, and the aircraft was ready for immediate take-off. The standby crew had been briefed to prepare a flight plan to get them to the Swiss Alps north of Montreux. The plan was for the task force to be parachuted

in, to land as near as they could get to Miller, and for the aircraft then to head for the Swiss Air Force base at Payerne, south of Lake Neuchatel and about 30kms north of Montreux, to wait for them.

“It should be easy to locate Miller once we get there,” said Marsden during the in-flight briefing. “He is carrying a tracking device – one of the new Delta 7s. Here’s a receiver for each of you, in case we get split up when we get on the ground.”

While all this was going on, the Special Forces Support Group at Hereford was busy organising their opposite numbers in Switzerland to provide a recovery team. There was a squadron of Super Puma helicopters based at Payerne, and two of these would be deployed, with a small section of ground troops to assist with the UK teams’ recovery from the mountains.

By the time the Hercules captain found a half-decent dropping zone for his passengers, the planned rescue had to be changed. Miller had managed to get a message to his control room that Dr Lloyd had been shot and injured, and that he, Miller, was off in pursuit of the Russian. Marsden’s team split in two, one to rescue the injured scientist, and the other to track down Miller.

Miller had left his backup tracking device with the injured Dr. Lloyd, before setting off cross country in pursuit of the would-be assassin. Miller was a good skier, but so was the Russian, who was getting away from him. Miller decided to cut off a corner by heading through the woods as they sped downhill, a dangerous tactic through trees in a gathering snow storm. But Miller gained ground, and managed to get off a few rounds from his HK53. Makienko was hit, but not badly enough to prevent the Russian from returning fire with his sniper’s rifle. Miller 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, in the freshly fallen snow, and Miller could already feel himself getting weaker.

Makienko was also losing strength, and Miller was gratified to notice that he had hit the Russian in the chest.

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.

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.

This time, it was Miller who had to wipe blood from his mouth. He was finding it difficult to breathe, and waves of pain and dizziness swept over him.

The snow was now beginning to blanket him as it fell ever more heavily and thickly. Through the red mist of pain, he 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 him 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.

Miller heard a volley of shots ring out, but felt nothing. Instead, he vaguely saw Makienko thrown back into the snow, no doubt by the recoil from his gun.

Miller was light-headed now, and barely aware of what was going on around him anymore. He was hallucinating, he was sure of that. 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. It was Nick Marsden.

Miller struggled to remain awake.

“Terrible pain,” mumbled Dusty, barely conscious.

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 to him that Miller was seriously hurt. He used his hand-held radio.

Miller 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. Bright of you to give him your spare Delta 7 – we went straight to him.”

Miller drifted into oblivion again.

“Stay awake, Miller,” Marsden shouted.

Miller stirred. Already the morphine was having some effect.

“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 near-blizzard.

Marsden stepped back to give the medic all the room she needed.

A Royal Navy medical orderly, Petty Officer Annie Mackie, dressed in Arctic survival kit like the rest of the team, was quick and efficient. After she had wrapped the prone figure in a thermal blanket as gently as she could, she applied a tourniquet to stop the flow of blood from Miller’s arm, applied a local anaesthetic to his leg, which she expertly straightened out and strapped to his good leg, before examining his chest.

“Broken ribs and a punctured lung, I think,” she pronounced, wiping more blood from Dusty’s mouth. “You’ll live.” She turned to Marsden. “If we’re lucky.”

Miller was losing a lot of blood, and starting to shiver. The morphine helped with the pain, but they still had to get back to the village lower down the mountain to meet up with a Swiss Army recovery team, and then on to the waiting RAF Hercules waiting for them at Payerne. Miller was in for a rough ride on a ski-fitted stretcher towed behind a Yamaha snowmobile through what was quickly developing into a real blizzard. Rescue by helicopter was out of the question until they reached the village of Caux, where the Swiss recovery team would be waiting for them.

“This man won’t take too much shaking about,” 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. The shivering was worse now, and they wrapped him in more blankets.

Marsden issued instructions.

“Armstrong,” he shouted to his second-in-command, “take the troop along the ledge and down the valley to Caux. The Swiss Army recovery team will be 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.”

Miller’s condition worsened on the journey, and only morphine had kept the pain under some sort of control. Marsden had decided that Miller would not survive a night in the open in those conditions, and elected to press on as best they could through the growing darkness. After what seemed a lifetime – it was certainly a nightmare for Miller – they reached the village. The Recovery Team was in the small station yard, with one of the Super Puma helicopters. Another was parked in a reasonably flat field some distance away.

“Can you guys fly in this weather?” asked Marsden.

“We’re used to it,” replied one of the pilots. “Doing Search and Rescue all the time in the mountains. Usually damn-fool tourists getting into trouble.”

They carefully loaded Dusty Miller into the nearest of the two large helicopters, with Dr. Lloyd, while the rest of the team packed their Yamahas and equipment onto the other. Marsden and the medic went as soon as they were ready, followed by Armstrong and the rest of the troop in the second chopper. The Swiss Army team were left to be picked up later.

It was only about fifteen minutes flying time to Payerne, and it was a huge relief not only to fly into better weather, but also to see the RAF Hercules parked at the end of the runway. The helicopters landed alongside, and the snowmobiles were loaded into the capacious hold first. Miller was last in, so that he could be first out when they got back to their UK base. Dr Roger Lloyd was staying in Switzerland. The Swiss Army would make sure his wound was properly dressed before returning him home.

The RAF Hercules was one specially equipped for Special Service’s operations, but only had limited medical facilities on board. One of the Medical Evacuation versions would

have been ten times better, but at least there was some extra medical kit on board which Mackie could use. Even before the aircraft took off, Miller was being given blood, and other intra-venous medication, but he finally lost consciousness as he lay strapped into his stretcher on the aircraft floor.

Marsden and Mackie bent over the prone figure, and the orderly wiped more blood dribbling from Miller's mouth.

"He's not looking good," said Mackie over the intercom to Marsden.

"How bad is *'not looking good'*?" asked Marsden.

"He's lost a lot of blood, so he's very weak. And he's obviously in shock and suffering great pain. Probably suffering from hypothermia, too. We must keep him warm."

"At least you can stop the pain, can't you?"

"No."

"Give him more morphine," commanded Marsden.

"He's had more than enough already. I dare not give him any more."

"Is there nothing else that could help?"

"Nothing. He's deeply unconscious, and I'm actually wondering if he might be better off awake."

"Why?"

"It might prevent him slipping away for good."

"That bad?" asked Marsden.

"I'm afraid so. I think he's worse than we thought. Severe internal injuries as well as his smashed up limbs. More than just a punctured lung, I think." Mackie wiped more blood from Miller's mouth.

"Let's try to rouse him then, if that's what you think."

"It might help him to stay conscious if he hears you talking to him, although the pain will get worse as the morphine wears off."

"It sounds as if we need to get him straight to the military ward at Selly Oak when we get back to UK."

"I agree. They're used to this sort of case, out of Afghanistan."

Marsden got on the intercom to the pilot.

"Any chance of you diverting to Birmingham rather than going back to Brize Norton?" he asked.

"Why Birmingham?"

"Our man needs specialist care and the sooner we can get him to Selly Oak Hospital the better. Even then, he may not make it."

"Leave everything to me," said the pilot. "I'm used to this routine, unfortunately. Get your medical chap to scribble down the symptoms, and bring them up to the front. I'll radio them ahead, although with any luck I may even be able to put him in direct contact with the Military team. I'll organise an Air Ambulance chopper from Birmingham International Airport. They should give me permission for a straight in approach and landing as an emergency."

"Brilliant," replied Marsden. "How long do you reckon?"

"About ninety minutes," came back to the reply. "I'll give you a firm ETA when I have one."

“By the way, ‘he’ is a ‘her’”.

Mackie had been listening in, and was already making notes about her patient.

“You get that to the man at the front, while I try to wake Miller,” commanded Marsden.

Mackie was longer than Marsden had expected.

“One of the crew up front patched me through on the radio to Selly Oak, and I spoke to a member of our medical team. They are setting up an intensive care unit ready for Miller.”

“That’s good news,” said Marsden.

“It’s not all good,” replied Mackie. “They’re also prepping a theatre ready for a possible amputation.”

“I hope to God that’s not necessary.”

“May not be,” replied Mackie. “Just a precaution, in case. Any sign of him coming round?”

“I think he’s beginning to show signs of life,” replied Marsden. “But he looks terrible.”

“The pain won’t help. Keep talking to him. He knows your voice, since you work together.”

Eventually, Dusty Miller stirred, but drifted away into unconsciousness several times before he was eventually able to summon enough breath to whisper ‘*Pain*’, and then immediately slipped into a further coma.

Marsden turned to Mackie.

“I don’t like the look of this.”

“Neither do I.”

“There seems no way we can keep him conscious.”

“There are drugs, but it would be dangerous to use them, especially as we don’t have a proper diagnosis of his condition.”

“But the more pain he suffers, the worse he will get.”

“I agree,” said Mackie. “I discussed this with the man at Selly Oak. A Colonel, trauma specialist. He told me that one more shot of morphine might be OK if we really thought it essential”

“Do we?”

They looked at Miller, suffering horrendously.

“I think we do,” replied Mackie. “If you agree, Commander, I’ll administer one more dose. It might just keep him going until we get to Selly Oak.”

“Or it might do the opposite,” replied Marsden.

Mackie nodded.

They bent over Miller again, clinging to life.

“Do it,” ordered Marsden.

It was snowing.

Again. Still?

Large flakes of white powdery stuff, sticking to everything in view.

Not that much was.

It was only a small window.

Window?

Trees, surely, but not a window.

There were no windows in the mountains.

So where were the trees? And where was the pain?

More important, where was his gun? He couldn't find it and must have it. That bastard Russian was still out there, trying to kill him and Lloyd. Where was Roger Lloyd? Miller shouted out.

Where the hell was he?

He tried to move. He was comfortable, but not much seemed to work. His head was spinning, and he had trouble focussing on anything. But there were no trees, he was sure. And he wasn't lying in the snow. That was outside. He was warm, and comfortable.

He heard a voice. A familiar voice, with a familiar message.

"Wake up Mr Miller. You're OK now. Talk to me, Mr Miller."

He tried to focus. A hand, in a uniform, wiped his mouth with a damp swab.

"You're OK now, Dusty. There's nothing to worry about." Not 'Mr Miller' this time. Dusty. That's who he was.

"I want my gun," he almost shouted.

"You don't need a gun anymore. You're going to be all right now." A female voice, which he recognised. The voice, but not the face. A pretty face, he thought, and a nice smile.

"Where's Lloyd. Dr. Lloyd? I'm supposed to be looking after him. I need my gun."

"Dr. Lloyd's OK too. You saved his life. You don't need to worry about him anymore. He's quite safe."

"Who are you, and where am I?" he croaked.

"You're in hospital. In England. I was on the RAF Hercules that brought you here."

A vague memory stirred in Dusty's spinning head.

"I'm Annie. Annie Mackie. We found you in Switzerland, and brought you home."

Dusty frowned.

"I was with Commander Nick Marsden, but don't try to remember everything now," said Annie. "It will all come back to you soon enough. Just relax."

The familiar, soothing hand, wiping his brow this time. A lovely smile. Annie held his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. Dusty was aware of pipes and tubes everywhere. He drifted off into unconsciousness again.

When he came round, Annie had gone, and there was a civilian nurse standing by his bed.

"So what's been happening? Where am I: what hospital?"

"The Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham," she replied. "The Military wing at Selly Oak."

Dusty nodded. He knew about it. Chaps were sent here from Afghanistan.

"You've been in intensive care for a few days, in an induced coma while we patched you up. But you're going to be OK now."

Another uniform appeared. A man. Colonel, judging by the badge.

"How's he doing?" he asked the nurse, who stood back.

"Coming round nicely," she replied. "Confused, obviously, and still drifting in and out of consciousness, but asking all the right questions."

“Good.”

The man bent over him, glancing first at an array of instruments surrounding him, and the clip-board at the foot of his bed.

“Colonel Graham,” the man introduced himself. “I’m a trauma specialist, and I’ve been in charge of the team looking after you for the last few days.”

“I should stand up and salute,” mumbled Dusty, amazed that he has able to muster some sort of sense of humour.

The man grinned. “I’m a surgeon first, and an Army officer last, so relax.”

“Thank you Colonel.” That reminded Dusty of something in the past, but he couldn’t be bothered to remember what.

“Don’t call me Colonel.” Then Dusty remembered. Colonel Clayton. Bill Clayton, Head of Section 11. He used to say that.

“But now you must relax. Try to sleep, this time without too many drugs. And don’t worry about a thing. You are going to be OK, and we’ll fill you in on all the details when you’re fit enough. We’ve even kept a log book for you, a sort of diary since you been here, including all your friends who have rung up asking about you. You’ve had quite a few.”

The Colonel left, and the nurse stepped forward again.

She mopped his brow gently. Annie had done that, too

“Now try to sleep,” she said with a smile.

Nice smile, like Annie’s. Dusty drifted off. Good to be in military surroundings. Familiar and comforting. Like Annie’s smile.

CHAPTER 4

DR. ROGER LLOYD - BETTER THAN DEAD

Roger Lloyd’s journey from the mountainside where he had been found was far from being the most comfortable he had ever endured. He dared not think what it was like for Dusty Miller, who was obviously seriously injured and in great pain. Both Marsden and Armstrong had said so, and Lloyd could tell from the way they had been handling him. They had to go carefully in these appalling conditions for fear of making Miller worse, and yet they were in a hurry to get him to their waiting aircraft and home for proper treatment. If they weren’t careful, he may not make it. Not that the Petty Officer Medical Assistant could be blamed for that, if the worst did happen. She had been brilliant, and done everything she could for both of them, especially Dusty. But Lloyd knew that the Special Forces team had not been fully prepared for what they found on arrival. Things had got much worse for him and Dusty while the team had been airborne, on their way to find them.

Lloyd was shivering quite violently. He was swaddled in warm blankets, but it wasn’t enough. They had given him a warm drink, though God knows how they managed that – they had only just arrived by parachute. But nothing stopped the shivering.

It was so damned cold.

He was confused and tired. He could do nothing to help himself or Dusty. He was in professional and expert hands that were used to this sort of thing, so his only option was to let them get on with it and hope for the best.

As he understood it, they were heading for a Swiss Army recovery team, at a nearby village somewhere down the mountain, where there were helicopters waiting to take them to an air base of some sort. Dusty was to be taken home to the UK, but he was to be left there. The thought did not appeal to him. He wanted to stay with Dusty, and with Nick Marsden, and to go home.

But home was in Switzerland now, and he had to get used to the fact. It would be a long time before he could go back to England, he realised. But it didn't make it any easier.

The journey to the recovery team with their helicopters was slow and uncomfortable, but in spite of his own injuries, Lloyd was pleased they were paying so much attention to Dusty. They were all covered with snow now – it was still falling hard, in large, soft flakes which stuck to everything. But they managed to keep going somehow, and didn't have to 'hole up for the night' as they had feared. The very thought of staying out in this weather appalled Lloyd, but he knew that if it was the best thing for Miller, then that's what they would do. These people were survival experts, so they would be all right. But the team was obviously having a hard time making progress with their injured passengers, and it was getting dark, too.

They had been making their way down the mountain for some time, when ghostly figures appeared out of the gloom, making their way towards them on skis. They were in uniform of some sort, but different. Some of them were in bright red tunics – the mountain rescue team, coming to guide them over the last half mile or so. They paused only to give Lloyd and Miller extra blankets against the penetrating cold. Roger Lloyd was also offered a warm drink from a flask, but Miller was in no state to drink anything. Lloyd heard the Royal Navy medical orderly tell the rescue party that it was intra-venous or nothing from now on - nil by mouth. So Miller had nothing.

It was beginning to get dark when they reached the rest of the recovery team, mostly encamped in the small car park of an even smaller mountain railway station in the remote village of Caux. It was on the railway line from the bustling lake-side city of Montreux, which might as well have been a million miles away. They were remote, up the mountainside in the ever-thickening snow.

He and Dusty, far removed from civilisation, were gently loaded into one of the waiting Swiss helicopters.

Within minutes, they were airborne, and shortly landed at the base at Payerne, taxiing to a halt to park alongside the RAF Hercules on the tarmac, which already had the two outboard of its four engines running, on the far side from where their helicopter had stopped. In double quick time they loaded Dusty into the aircraft, but only after they had put all their equipment on, so that he would be first off when they got back to England.

Lloyd had no time to say 'goodbye' or 'thank you' or anything to anybody; they were all in such a well organised and well-rehearsed rush to get airborne with their precious cargo. But Commander Nick Marsden did give a sort of salute-type wave, and shouted "be in touch" above the noise of the aircraft engines, before the ramp at the rear of the aircraft was closed. The other engines were already being started, and they were on their way almost before the ramp shut.

Roger Lloyd was transferred to a waiting ambulance and driven off, as his friends and rescuers taxied towards the end of the runway in the gathering gloom. The engines revved almost before they had turned on to the runway, and the aircraft sped off through the snow.

On their way home.

And that was that.

Dr. Roger Lloyd was feeling exceptionally depressed. More than that. Totally bewildered and depressed. Vulnerable and alone, too, not just bewildered and depressed.

His shoulder was hurting like hell, but that was the least of his worries.

Somehow, he felt that his life was no longer his own.

For good reason.

It wasn't.

He was no longer Professor Jack Barclay, for a start. The British Government had taken that away from him, and re-created him as Dr. Roger Lloyd. It had sounded like a good idea at the time. He was rather keen to stay alive, so that he could keep working on his special nuclear fusion project, developing a sustainable energy source which was not dependent on fossil fuels. Even if he had to live abroad, in a 'neutral' country, they - the UK - also wanted to keep him alive for the long-term benefit of the country.

So that sounded like a good idea too.

But others had to be convinced that he was dead, so now he didn't even look like his old self, or even his identical twin brother. He had mistakenly been assassinated by a British secret agent. Under orders from the Russians, perhaps, but it was still Alan Jarvis, a top MI5 spy, who had killed his brother. It might have felt a bit better and easier to come to terms with if the Russians had actually pulled the trigger themselves, but they hadn't. They had blackmailed someone else to do it for them. Jarvis thought he had done what he had been told to do, but had killed Barclay's identical twin brother instead. Jarvis wasn't to know. Nobody knew. But they all thought it had been Jack who had been killed. Professor Jack Barclay. That's who the Russians had wanted dead. Him, not his brother.

In effect, though, that's what they'd done. The Russians had succeeded. Jack Barclay no longer existed as Jack Barclay. He was now Roger Lloyd, thanks to the British Government. It was a name he had chosen. And he was now Doctor, not Professor. That was his choice too. He had a new face, new hair style, a limp, new name, new nationality and a new job in a foreign country.

So just don't ask why he was depressed, that's all.

He thought he had every reason to feel sorry for himself.

And still they were after him. Someone, somewhere, probably in Russia, had believed that Professor Jack Barclay was still alive. Not even Jack Barclay believed that any more. But he had just been shot and wounded by a Russian agent in Switzerland who had attempted to kill him, and who obviously believed that Jack Barclay was not dead and remained a threat to his mother country. Once again, the British Government had somehow managed to save his life, although how they did it Lloyd would never properly understand. Even more of a mystery was why the Russians should have thought that Jack Barclay was still alive. After all, there had been an inquest into his death, and a service at the crematorium, but still they had not been convinced.

Was somebody telling them?

At least, this time, his friends in Whitehall had managed to save his life without having to give him yet another new name and identity.

But he had been left behind when the rescue team had gone back to England. Alone, isolated, bewildered and depressed.

His best - only - real friend had saved his life, and been taken home severely injured. How would he be able to keep in touch, to find out how he was? How could he ever thank him? He couldn't just pick up the phone. Lloyd realized he could still be in some danger, but now he was far from home and from the people who had been taking care of him – keeping him alive. Who would do that now? Would anyone? There was nobody to ask anymore. Nobody around him he knew and trusted.

He was in the sick bay of the Swiss Air Force base at Payerne, near Lake Neuchatel, where he had been taken when his rescuers had left to return home to the UK with Dusty Miller. He wasn't sure, but he thought he'd been there a couple of days now. He was tired and confused and in pain, but still alive at least. The medical team had looked after him well, and the military doctors and nurses had been more than attentive. Apart from the bullet wound to his shoulder which hurt like hell and had yet to be properly treated, he was comfortable. They had sorted out the flesh wound as best they could, but the X-ray had shown a splintered bone which would need surgery to remove or repair – he wasn't sure which. But he was warmer now, thanks to all the warm drinks and heated blankets he had been given, and he had stopped shivering. Hypothermia, they had said, but not severe.

He had been found just in time.

He was still bemused and weary, and was still in shock and felt weak, so he was glad to be in bed. They had started to sort out the effects of hypothermia the minute he arrived. Once he had recovered from the cold, they would sort out his shoulder. Until then, it was pain killers. In a couple of days, he would have an operation of his shoulder, and they had told him he would be OK in a week or so. They thought he would be able to go home, wherever that was, 'soon'.

So here he was in a mini-hospital on a military base in a foreign country. What next? There was nobody to ask. For all he knew, there was nobody within a few hundred miles who had the slightest idea who he was or why he was there, or even where he was. Or cared, probably.

Lloyd decided there was nothing he could do about it. He could do nothing about anything else, come to that. Nothing he could do until he was fit enough to get back to his new flat near the CERN research centre where he now worked. At least there, he knew a couple of people who understood. He had to be patient until he could get out of here. Wherever he was.

He was dozing off again, in spite of the noise outside from the jet fighters and helicopters based there, when there was a sudden bustle of activity in the small ward. As he stirred, men in uniform appeared who he hadn't seen before; not the usual team of military doctors and nurses who had been looking after him. One was obviously quite senior judging from the badges of rank and medal ribbons on his tunic, and the others looked like more senior doctors and medical orderlies. He recognised some of them, but not all the usual ones.

“Dr. Lloyd, good afternoon,” said the man with the badges. “I am Colonel Schilling, Commandant of the Swiss Air Force base here at Payerne. I must apologise for not having come before, but you have not been well, and the British team who brought you here have been causing us some unusual and important work. Now; I hope you are comfortable?”

“Thank you Colonel. My shoulder is painful of course, but otherwise, I have been well looked after by your people.”

“Good. I hope you are well enough to be moved temporarily, because I have just had a call from London, and they want to speak to you urgently on a secure telephone. There is not one here in Sick Quarters, so we shall take you to my office.”

“I was wondering when I might hear something,” replied Roger Lloyd, struggling to sit up.

A nurse appeared with a wheel chair.

“I can walk,” protested Lloyd.

“But you *will* not,” said one of the medical team. “You are not yet well enough, and we need to keep you as warm as possible.”

“Fortunately, my office is near this building,” said the Colonel, helping him out of bed. “I gather from what I have just been told that you are something of a VIP,” he added with a smile, “and that I have to take good care of you.”

Lloyd was wrapped in blankets, and wheeled across a snow-covered courtyard into another building, which was obviously the base Headquarters.

“This is my office,” Schilling eventually announced. “My PA will connect you to London on this red phone, and we will then leave you for as long as you need. I will arrange for a coffee to be brought to you while the connection is made.”

“Thank you, Colonel. That would be welcome. May I ask who it is who has been trying to contact me?”

Schilling reached for a notepad on his desk.

“A senior British Government official, Sir Robin Algar, Secretary of your Cabinet in Whitehall, according to my notes. You know him?”

“Yes, very well. He may be able to tell me what is going on and what is to happen to me.”

“Nothing will happen to you until we decide you are well enough to leave here,” said the Commanding Officer. “You must have surgery on that shoulder of yours, after which you will return here. When you are eventually fit enough to leave, I will help as much as I can to do whatever your people in London decide is best for you.”

A steaming mug of coffee arrived, and almost at once the call came through on the red phone. Lloyd was left on his own.

“Roger? This is Robin Algar. How are you getting on?”

“Physically, not too bad apart from a shoulder injury, but I confess to feeling a bit abandoned and depressed,” he replied.

“Our fault entirely,” responded Algar. “I gather you’re on a secure line, so I can tell you that we’ve had a major crisis on here since our rescue effort, otherwise I can assure you I would have made contact with you sooner.”

“Well it’s good to be in touch again,” confessed Lloyd. “And I can’t thank you enough for all you’ve done to save my skin. I was beginning to wonder, though, if it was worth it from my point of view, especially being so unsure of the future.”

“I can understand that,” replied Algar. “But you remain a most valuable asset to this country, so the effort was worth it from our standpoint.”

“Tell me first, how is my friend Dusty Miller?” demanded Lloyd.

“My latest information is that he is in intensive care in the Military wing of the hospital in Selly Oak, where all our casualties go from Afghanistan and elsewhere. He has only recently arrived of course, and he is in pretty bad shape apparently, but I’m told he will survive.”

“I very much want to keep in touch, and speak to him when he’s well enough.”

“I’ll arrange all that don’t worry. He’s in good hands – the best. And you are in good hands too, I am assured of that. I will be in touch with you again, and make arrangements as quickly as possible for you to contact your trusted friends and professional colleagues whenever you want, but that will take a day or so. From now on we will keep in touch with you, I promise. But now I’d like to speak to Colonel Schilling while I’m on the line. Meanwhile, you take care.”

Lloyd somehow managed to negotiate the wheelchair to the door, and Schilling returned to his office. He listened intently to what Algar was saying, with hardly a comment. Occasionally, he looked across at Lloyd, and a couple of times raised his eyebrows. Eventually the call ended, and he sat back in his chair.

“I have a better idea now of who you are and what has happened to you in the recent past,” he said. “I wish I could have been told sooner, but I now understand why that was not possible. I am told that your continued survival is essential, although the immediate threat to your life has probably passed. However, London has arranged for our Special Forces to keep you under constant guard while you are here, and a detachment will be arriving later today. I shall arrange for you to have a separate room, in the medical wing, with a telephone so that you can keep in touch with friends and colleagues. A secure phone will be specially installed so that you and your people in London can freely keep in contact whenever you wish. Once you leave here, a special unit of our police will look after you. Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“This is all very kind, I’m sure, and I am most grateful to you, Colonel,” replied Roger Lloyd. “But don’t make me too comfortable, or I shall not want to leave!”

Schilling grinned. “I gather you have a flat near the CERN facility, at Meyrin. If there is anything you want from it, I shall arrange for it to be collected.”

“Thank you, but hopefully, I shall be fit enough to get back there soon and out of your way. But I have no clothes or anything else with me apart from what I am standing up in. I also have a few belongings at the small guesthouse in Paccods, where I was staying with my colleague who has been taken back to England,” added Lloyd. “It would help if that could somehow be recovered.”

“I shall do what I can as soon as possible,” promised the Commandant. “I assume we shall find there your built-up shoes and stick?”

“That’s where they are,” agreed Lloyd, “and I shall certainly need them to keep up the appearance of my new identity.”

“And from your flat?”

“I have only lived there a few days, so there is nothing I need from it, apart, perhaps, for my mobile phone. However my friend was staying at the Holiday Inn at Meyrin, so he will have things in his room there, which ought to be collected if that is possible.”

The Colonel grinned, and stood to leave.

“In a short time, you seem to have scattered your belongings quite widely around this part of Switzerland! Leave everything to me, and let me know if there is anything else I can do for you.”

Colonel Schilling looked down at him.

“I wish I had given all this information about you before you arrived, but your man in Whitehall was not able to make contact with either of us any sooner. I gather they had another major crisis, apart from your own, which they are still trying to deal with. Something to do with uncovering a spy who has been causing them, and you, a good deal of trouble, so he said.”

“I have caused everyone so much trouble,” answered Lloyd. “But I know they were concerned that there was a mole somewhere who could be passing on information about me and my whereabouts.”

“I know no more than I have said.”

“I will ask them on the red phone,” determined Lloyd, perplexed. “But my colleagues at the CERN facility will also need to know where I am and what has happened.”

“Someone from CERN has already been in touch with me. Your Director I think. London must have briefed him, I suppose. Anyway, I told him you were doing well and that you would contact him when you were fit enough. I have his phone number. I also told him it would be some time before you could return to work, but you will be able to contact him, and anyone else you wish, from your new room.”

“Thank you - that is encouraging, I must say. I had begun to think nobody was bothered about me.”

“Depression and confusion are symptoms of hypothermia,” said one of the doctors.

“However, I recommend that we explain things to anyone who may ask or be curious by saying that you have been injured in a hunting accident,” suggested Schilling. “A stray bullet from an unseen gunman. Hunters are always active in the area where you were found, after the wild boar. We shall need to move you temporarily to the local hospital for surgery on your shoulder, as soon as you are well enough in the next day or so, and questions are bound to be asked.”

“Agreed,” said Lloyd.

“I shall tell them, and your people in London, so that we all speak with the same voice. It can be used as a cover story for your colleague as well, and also, if he should ever be discovered in the snow, the man who attempted to assassinate you. A Russian agent, I gather. We shall start looking for him when the weather improves, possibly in the spring. There seems to be no hurry. But there are wolves in the forest as well as wild boar, so, who knows, we may never recover his body.”

Lloyd shuddered, but it was not hypothermia this time.

News that Dr. Roger Lloyd had been injured in a hunting accident got around quite quickly, and he had a call only the next day from a fellow research scientist and Director on the ATLAS team at CERN. Lloyd was to work with that team of analysts, probing the mysteries revealed by the latest proton beam particle collision to have been carried out.

“We have hardly met, I know,” said his Director, “but I had to ring you to wish you well.”

“How kind of you.”

“I wanted to visit you, but the security where you are prohibits that, so they gave me this phone number. Tell me what is happening?”

“Well,” replied Lloyd, “I am due to have minor surgery on my injured shoulder tomorrow, as it happens, but I should only be away for a day or so. Then I come back here and stay until I’m fit enough to be discharged. I am feeling so much better already, so the sooner this is fixed, the better.”

“I agree,” said his colleague. “And we need you here as soon as possible, really. I realise there are nearly three thousand scientists working here just at the ATLAS detector, never mind other parts of CERN, but we specially need your particular diagnostic and mathematical skills. We have so much data after the last run that we cannot cope with it all, and we need your expert knowledge to help us sort through the results. Our data acquisition system seems to have worked overtime! As you know, we have just shut down for winter maintenance, so we have a bit of time, but until we see clearly what this latest particle collision has revealed, we cannot start planning for the next.”

“I am very keen to get there to help, as you can imagine,” said Lloyd. “As luck would have it, my right shoulder is the one which has been injured, and I am right-handed, so I may not be able to write well for some time. I shall need assistance at the board to write out the maths, but I should be OK on the computer. Perhaps there is a PhD student who could help?”

“No problem with that,” came the reply. “As you can imagine, we are still excited after confirming the existence of the Higgs boson, so we are all keen to probe further in the hope of finding other particles, perhaps leading us into the mysteries of dark matter.”

Lloyd’s curiosity was getting the better of him. “Have you come across any evidence yet of more than one Higgs boson?” he asked. “The supersymmetry theories predict at least five bosons similar to the Higgs, three neutral and two charged, as I am sure you know.”

His director laughed. “Not yet, but now I understand why you are going to be so valuable here. You are inventing new physics, and ahead of us and our current analysis of what we have discovered. You will be asking next if we have found any evidence of possible new dimensions!”

“I am very excited to think that I shall be part of this ground-breaking research, and can assure you that I shall join you again just as soon as my health allows.”

“You are in demand elsewhere, by the way. I took a call only yesterday from a Professor Williams at the UK nuclear research facility at Cullum. He seems keen to talk to you about a problem they have encountered and which they hoped your particular mathematical prowess may help them to resolve. It has something to do with nuclear fusion apparently, and we all know how successful they have been in researching that new energy field. I have his number.”

Lloyd took it down, although he didn’t need to. It was where he used to work.

It was encouraging to know that fellow scientists both here and in England needed his knowledge and expertise. He would get on to Cullum straight away. Williams was his old Director, and one of the few people in the world who knew his real identity. He wondered what exactly the problem was that they had found, and whether he would be able to help. Perhaps once he was at his computer in his new laboratory, he could establish a link with them via the internet. After all, the internet was first developed to allow scientists to communicate with one another easily and freely.

To be involved again with his old work at Cullum would be wonderful, never mind facing the obvious challenges facing him in Switzerland. Would there be enough hours in the day?

Within days of successful surgery to remove bits and pieces of bone from his shoulder, and to repair the flesh wound properly, he was back in his flat at Meyrin. It was nice to be 'home' again, and to have a change of clothes and some privacy when he wanted it.

But Colonel Schilling, whose staff at the Payerne air base had looked after him so well, had not let him go without marking his departure with a special lunch in the officer's mess, when he was presented with a mounted plaque of the air base coat of arms as a memento.

"You leave here more like a normal human being than you were when you arrived," he announced. "I have rarely seen a man so disheartened and depressed as you were when you got here. For very good reason as I understand. But now, thanks to the efforts of all your colleagues who have been so keen to keep in touch, you have happily re-joined the human race!"

He suddenly felt a good deal more cheerful, and for the first time in recent days it felt good to be alive again.

Certainly better than dead.

CHAPTER 5 GLADYS - ENQUIRY TEAM

On the red phone to Bill Clayton, at the end of the attempt to rescue Dr. Roger Lloyd, Sir Robin Algar, Cabinet Secretary, had said, "... we should meet tomorrow – or later today, as it is now. We need to think about future protection for Lloyd and who takes responsibility for it, how we handle the Russians if we need to, what the Swiss role should be in all this, and, perhaps most importantly, whether we really do have another mole in our midst, and who it might be. I'll get my girl to ring Barbara to fix it up."

'His girl' never did ring Barbara, because she wasn't in the office to be rung. To be honest, she didn't seem to be anywhere else either.

His feet had barely touched the ground at RAF Brize Norton when Nick Marsden's mobile phone rang. He was exhausted, and very tempted to let it ring, but noticed it was from his boss Bill Clayton, Head of Section 11.

"Yes Bill?"

"Sorry to get on to you so soon after your return, but I wanted a quick word before you got your head down."

"What's going on now, then?"

"It's Barbara. She doesn't seem to be at home, and I wondered if you might know where she could be."

Suddenly, Nick sat up and took notice. This was the little lady he was supposed to be marrying. She was Bill's PA, but actually worked for both of them at the office.

"How do you know she's not at home?" enquired Nick anxiously.

"I've been trying to get her on the phone since just after you left, but there's been no reply. She would have been useful here in the Ops Room, even if only to keep us supplied with coffee and bacon butties."

"I was with her until you called me away on this little holiday," said Nick. "She said nothing about going out."

"Odd," said Bill. "I've tried her mobile as well as her home phone, and there's no reply to either."

"At least her mother should be at home," said Nick getting more worried. "When did you last try to get hold of her?"

"I tried a couple of times before about eleven o'clock last night, and I tried again about six this morning. When there was still no reply, I sent one of our chaps round to her place, but he said there was no reply from the door and no lights on, but no sign of burglars or a break-in, thank goodness."

"This gets more and more worrying," said Nick. "Somebody should have been there, and she certainly said nothing to me about them all going away."

"We should perhaps have a look inside, but that's a job for the police, really."

"Absolutely. But can we wait until I'm there? I've got a key"

"When do you think you will be back?" asked Clayton.

"I was hoping in about three days, after what I've been through, but I suppose as soon as possible, now," replied a weary Marsden. "But I had hoped to rest up a bit first. To be honest, I'm all in, and if you've been following recent events, you'll know why."

"Of course I know why. I've been in the Ops Room here since your left, so I have a pretty good idea of what you've been through."

"It doesn't seem possible that all this has happened in less than two days. It feels more like two weeks, without sleep or food or anything."

"I agree, and I've only been sitting here chewing my finger nails in the warm."

"Well, let's think about this," said Marsden. "I had hoped to get a shower and a change of clothes and a good meal and a couple of shots of rum to warm me up before I even thought about getting back to lovely Clerkenwell. I went with the aircraft to Birmingham, by the way, to see Dusty properly settled in to the Selly Oak hospital, and my medical orderly is still there with him helping with clinical notes and all that. She's the one person who has so far kept him alive. A really superb performance. So I've actually only set foot back here at

Brize within the last half hour. The first thing I must do is a full de-brief of my team before they disperse. They have already been hanging around too long. But once that's done, I suppose I could head for home somehow."

"I'll send a car for you from here," said Clayton.

"Make it a decent size then, so I can sleep in the back."

"I'll send the Jag with the blue flashing lights, and make sure there's a bottle of rum in it."

"Done," said Nick. "While that's on the way, I can freshen up a bit and grab a meal. Get the car to pick me up at the officer's mess. They will be impressed! With any luck, I should be with you in about four hours from now, depending on who's driving. Will that do?"

"Excellent. I'll get Archie to drive. I think I've seen him in the crew room, and he won't hang about bothering too much with traffic lights."

"Four hours, then! But tell him I'll be trying to sleep on the back seat!"

"I know you must be knackered, Nick, but we must sort this out about Barbara. I'll get the police standing by so you can let them in to her place when you get here."

"I can't think where the hell she can be," said Nick. "You'd have thought she would have said something if she was planning a quick flit somewhere, even with her mother. We are supposed to be getting married, after all."

"I'm sure there's nothing to worry about," said Clayton, trying to reassure his deputy. "Meanwhile, I've got an urgent meeting at the Cabinet Office early on, so I may not be here when you get back. One of the things on the agenda, by the way, is the possibility of another mole in our presence, more serious than the Foreign Office clerk. Someone told Makienko where to find Lloyd, after the Cabinet Office clerk had gone. Let's just hope that Barbara turns up. If she does, I'll let you know. If not, I've asked Gladys to come in early to act as stand-in, as she does when Barbara's on leave."

"See you later then," said Commander Marsden, turning to his assembled team in the RAF Brize Norton Briefing Room. But his mind was no longer on a detailed de-brief of their recent operation.

He was desperately worried about Barbara.

Bill had mentioned her and the possibility of another spy in their midst in the same breath. That was not an accident. He remembered that they had considered whether she could be a traitor once before, but dismissed the idea at the time, not least because they uncovered the Cabinet Office clerk who was selling information to the Russians. But surely not Barbara? His future wife? Surely not her. But where was she?

Gladys always liked standing in for Barbara when she was away. It made a change. She got to know a bit more about what was going on, too. It was always busy, working directly for both Mr Clayton and Mr Marsden, but she never let that stand in her way of looking after the Admin at the same time. Once you lost control of the paper work, you lost control of everything and never caught up. She knew there had been a bit of a flap on that weekend, but they seemed surprised that Barbara had not turned up. Nothing to do with the emergency they had been dealing with, so they said, but it wasn't making things any easier, her not being there.

Gladys Something-or-other (no one could ever remember), who smoked like a chimney in spite of the law about smoking at work, normally ran the Admin section. She maintained that there was so little work done in Clerkenwell that the law about smoking 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 countersigned, and all that. It was a waste of time going to anybody for anything unless you'd been to Gladys first for the right bit of paper.

Gladys decided she needed to know more about what had been happening that weekend, and managed to get hold of 'Whistler' Piper before he finally went off duty after a very long shift.

"If you want me to counters-sign your overtime claim form," she had said, "you'd better tell me what's been going on."

He did, and she was horrified.

She quite liked Dusty Miller, cheeky though he was.

"You've been here far too long," she told Whistler, who really didn't need telling. "So push off, and I'll square it with the boss. Barbara's not in today, apparently, so I'm sitting in for her and looking after Mr Clayton and the Commander."

"God help them," muttered Whistler.

"Where are they both, by the way?" she asked. "Here I am, in early specially to work for them, and they are not here."

"Head of Section was in the Ops Room all night, so he's nipped home for breakfast, as I understand it, and will be going straight from there to a meeting in Whitehall. The Commander is being collected from RAF Brize Norton and will be coming straight here. He's been in Switzerland, looking after Dr Lloyd, as I told you."

"I thought Dusty was supposed to be doing that," Gladys said, and immediately wished she hadn't.

Piper went home, and Gladys wondered what to do next.

She put the coffee on while she thought about it. 'S' had said he had an important meeting in the Cabinet Office first thing, but hadn't left an agenda or anything, so she didn't know what papers he might need. She guessed it was about the Swiss operation, but he knew all about that anyway. She wished she could find out how poor old Dusty was getting on. Piper had said he was 'in pretty poor shape', which didn't sound too good.

It was odd Barbara not turning up. She hadn't done that before, not without telling anyone first.

Gladys lit another fag. She knew Bill Clayton and Nick Marsden both disapproved, so she would have to cut down today. It wasn't easy, just to nip out for a quick drag. Actually, it was easy enough to get out, but with the security and everything, a pain to get back in again. She really ought to give it up. She kept saying that.

But it was odd about Barbara. Gladys had never been quite sure about that girl. Had a top job in the Cabinet Office before she came here, and then ended up sleeping with the boss and having an illegitimate child! Not so posh after all, Gladys had thought at the time. Not that she would have wanted to sleep with Mr Jarvis, of course. But Donald was a lovely little boy, and obviously he and his Mum were very fond of each other.

Bill Clayton had said there was no reply when he rang, so where was her mother then? She lived with her mother, in Battersea somewhere. They'd been to have a look, but there were no lights on apparently, and no sign of a break-in either. They would have to look inside soon, she supposed. When the Commander got back, because he had a key. It wasn't common knowledge about the place, but she, Gladys, knew for a fact that the Commander and Barbara were going to get married. He had secretly told her so, and said she would be invited. She might even help to arrange things. She was good at that sort of thing. She kept Section 11 going with her administrative skills, so it was said. Dusty thought she held the place together with rubber bands and paper clips, but she didn't mind. She rather liked Dusty, and hoped he'd be all right.

In fact, she rather liked everyone in Section 11. From the boss, 'S', downwards, they were all nice people. Some were a bit odd, perhaps, like that theatrical bloke they called Auntie, who looked after 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.

Then there was 'Bottom'. She felt a bit sorry for him, having to live with a nick-name like that. But it was his fault. At the back of the underground garage there was an armoury and a rifle range, run by 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 shot.

Gladys thought they were all OK really, and she wouldn't want to work anywhere else.

But she wasn't so sure about that Barbara.

She poured herself a cup of coffee, and switched on the computer at Barbara's desk, as she had always done when standing in. She knew the password and the user ID, but nothing happened until a message appeared on the screen in red – "ACCESS DENIED".

Now that really was odd.

The office system was set up so that they all had access to common files and folders, but each also had their own personal sites using separate log-in codes, not accessible to others. Gladys had tried to access the common system. She knew the codes, so tried again. "ACCESS DENIED" again. Was it just Barbara's computer site, or the whole office system? Perhaps they'd changed the codes or something. But you'd have thought they would have said something. Needless to say, the bloke in the Communications Centre who dealt with computers and things wasn't in yet, so she couldn't ask. Gladys wasn't much good at stuff like this. She was OK with paper, but not this sort of thing. It was all she could do to get the TV working properly in her flat.

Perhaps it was just these three offices, she wondered, so she went to her own desk and tried that. It worked all right. That was something. At least the whole of Section 11 wasn't of the air, or whatever they called it. Probably just the Head of Section, his Deputy and their PA. She didn't like to go into their offices to check.

Funny, that. No Barbara and no computer. Perhaps she'd accidentally mucked it up. Was that why she wasn't in this morning?

Nothing she could do about it, though, but wait for the computer chappy to turn up.

Her phone rang. Mr Clayton, Head of Section.

"I'm at the Cabinet Office, just going in to my meeting. Has Barbara turned up yet, Gladys?"

"No she hasn't. And the computers in the office don't work, either." Gladys announced.

"Funny. Are they all down?"

"I don't know about the ones in your office and Mr Marsden's, but Barbara's certainly doesn't. Have you changed to the passwords?"

"No, we haven't. Get IT on to it will you please?"

"Not in yet, but I will when he gets here. I've left a message on his desk."

"Funny, that," said Clayton, thinking aloud. "No Barbara and no computers. They must be got back on line immediately. It's essential"

Something odd about that Barbara, Gladys had always thought.

She poured another coffee and lit another fag.

Bill Clayton was surprised to find, when he got there, that the whole of the Joint Intelligence Committee had been summoned to the meeting in the Cabinet Office.

Committee Chairman and Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Algar, wasted no time.

"I've invited Bill Clayton to join us as Section 11 has been playing such a major role on the ground in the events of this past weekend, which are what we are here to discuss," he said. "I am sure most of you, who's Departments have been involved in one way or another, have already been briefed, but is anyone unfamiliar with what's been happening?"

No one was.

"Good. We have diplomatic problems to discuss as well as intelligence and security issues, but I would like to start with the intelligence aspects of what's happened.

"You will all know that Dr Roger Lloyd, aka Professor Jack Barclay of nuclear fusion fame, moved to CERN last week as a Swiss citizen. Very few people indeed knew of this, and I had anticipated that his transfer would go un-noticed, especially as we had been able to identify and remove the informant in this very office who had hitherto been passing information to the Russians.

"Lloyd's move should therefore have gone without them having any knowledge of it whatsoever. And yet, someone who seems to have known every detail managed to forewarn them, and to do so in such good time as to enable them to plan and execute an operation which almost succeeded in taking the life of both Lloyd and his Section 11 escort. I am sorry to say that our man may yet not survive.

"However, when I say 'them', I mean the FSB agent Dmitri Makienko, who had already made one unsuccessful attempt on the life of Dr Lloyd by blackmailing Alan Jarvis, ex-Head of Section 11, and who had then personally been responsible for Jarvis's murder. Information was obviously being passed directly to Makienko, rather than via Moscow, since Makienko went straight to Switzerland from here when he was once again expelled, obviously having been briefed that Lloyd was at CERN and that Lloyd and Barclay were one

in the same person. He also went straight to where Lloyd was spending a weekend skiing, and very nearly succeeded in yet another assassination attempt.

“Our information is, incidentally, that the Russians themselves have absolutely no idea what happened to Makienko when he left London, only that he never arrived in Moscow as expected. Among other things, this is what leads us to believe that our new agent was dealing directly with him, rather than through his controller in the Lubyanka building.

“You know the details of how Section 11 mounted a very rapid reaction, and ultimately very successful, rescue attempt, which would not have been possible without the active agreement and participation of the Swiss Government. I am extremely grateful to all of you who had any part to play in the diplomatic manoeuvres which allowed this operation to be mounted. UK forces attempting to rescue a Swiss citizen in Switzerland is not an everyday occurrence.

“What this all means, Gentlemen, is that the clerk in the Cabinet Office was not the only mole passing information to the Russians. As a matter of the utmost urgency, we must identify the other agent operating within our midst.”

They all nodded gravely.

“It could even be you, Sir Robin, or almost any one of us who has had any knowledge of this affair” said Sir William Forsyth from the Foreign Office. “Where on earth do we start?”

“With your agreement, gentlemen, I suggest we start by asking Bill Clayton to head an enquiry and to report to us, with the utmost urgency and in the greatest secrecy. He will need to work closely with MI5 and MI6 and with the police, and I propose to detach to his office a small team drawn from those organisations.”

There was a general murmur of agreement and a vigorous nodding of wise heads.

“Is that all right with you Bill?” asked Algar. “Will you take that on for us, since you know more of the background than anyone else here present?”

“Of course,” agreed Clayton. “I was wondering what to do today!”

“Will you base yourself in Clerkenwell, or would you rather move to some other location?”

“Clerkenwell. I know and can trust the people there, and we have first class secure communications as well as an excellent physical security system already in place. That’s not to say that one of my people may not be the spy we are looking for, in the same way that it could be any one of us here today, but we shall discover whoever it is, rest assured.”

“Any first thoughts, Bill?”

“Not really, although I have been concerned for some time that we might be harbouring a viper to our breast somewhere. Indeed, my deputy, Commander Marsden and I have already discussed the likelihood, but took it no further when you told us that one of your clerks was selling information. What is now obvious is that sensitive information has been passed to Makienko since your man was removed from the scene. My first task will be to assess what information was passed to him after your clerk left, and who had access to it in the first place to be able to pass it on. We shall then need to discover how this was done, and whether more than one individual has been involved. No doubt I shall need to ask for discrete phone taps and intercepts, and perhaps a monitoring of e-mail and other internet traffic, all of which no doubt GCHQ will be able to organise. A representative from Cheltenham to work

alongside me would be a valuable addition to my enquiry team, if you could arrange that Sir Robin.”

“Of course. I cannot emphasise how urgent and important this. We obviously have a top level foreign spy working at the highest levels of Government, and whoever it is must be rooted out with all speed. Bill, if there is nothing else for the time being, you can get back to your HQ and make a start if you wish. The rest of us will be discussing diplomatic issues, and the question of future protection for Dr Lloyd if that is deemed necessary. Is there anything you wish to add before you leave?”

“Two things, since you ask. My own view is that, if Lloyd’s value to this country remains as it was, then protection should continue to be provided. We know that Makienko is dead, but the Russians may not know this, since they do not yet know that he left London for Zurich instead of Moscow. For our part, we do not know if he was able to pass on any valuable information to his FSB Headquarters before he died, or whether the agent we shall now be trying to identify has done so, or will do so. I gather that you have arranged special protection for Lloyd to be provided by the Swiss – a unit of their special forces while he is at the Air Base and the police when he returns home and to work – and I recommend that this arrangement remains in force until we know more. Secondly, it has been suggested that the injuries to Lloyd and my man Miller were caused by stray bullets from a hunting party in the area who may also have been responsible for Makienko’s death. This seems to me to be an excellent cover story, which will need to be passed to the Russian authorities if his body is ever recovered.”

“Thank you for that, Bill. As you may know, I have been in touch with the Commandant at the Swiss Air base, so he is fully briefed. I gather the cover story was his idea, so he is obviously on the ball and to be trusted.”

“One further thing, if I may, Sir Robin. If I am to concentrate full time on this,” said Bill Clayton, “even with people from MI5 and MI6 working alongside, then Commander Marsden will have to more or less take over running Section 11 for a time, so we shall need extra support at the top. If you agree, I would especially like Major Peter Northcot to join the enquiry as part of the MI5 team. He is well known and well respected in the intelligence field, and recently left the Army after two very successful tours in Hong Kong. His father, who has just retired from MI6, was a legendary and fearless agent who served abroad until the very end of his career. I have no hesitation in recommending him, especially as he has just completed the MI5 training course. He will be a valuable member of the enquiry, and will also be able to help out Nick from time to time when necessary.”

“I agree entirely,” said Sir Robin, while others nodded their approval. “You are certainly going to need some help, and if this is the man you want and recommend, then I have no hesitation in endorsing your choice. Good luck with your search.”

“I shall need it. This isn’t what we normally do in Section 11.”

Bill Clayton left the Cabinet Office meeting with a good deal of extra and urgent work to do. He was looking forward to seeing Nick Marsden back in the office, but wondered where Barbara was. It would not be easy for Marsden dealing with this if she did not soon turn up, and Clayton was not altogether looking forward to discussing her absence with Nick.

He used the phone in the car to ring the office.

Gladys answered.

“Any sign of Barbara yet?” he asked.

“Not a word,” said Gladys. “It’s me or nothing at the moment.”

“Is Nick Marsden there yet?”

“No. Last I heard, he was sound asleep.”

“At home?”

“No. On the back seat of your Jag, according to Archie.”

“Did Archie say when they might get there?”

“Ten minutes ago, he thought about an hour,” replied Gladys, entering into the spirit of the thing. “Knowing Archie, they’ll be here in about half an hour.”

“Good. I’ll be back by then.”

“The Yard has been on,” announced Gladys. “They have a team ready to go in to Barbara’s place when you say so.”

“I want Nick to go with them. He’s got a key.”

“We only have to say the word, whenever we’re ready.”

This was going quite well, thought Gladys. She lit a fag, probably her last for some time she thought, and poured another coffee before making a fresh pot for the boss.

Nigel Mynott turned up, the IT man from the Coms Centre downstairs.

“Nothing works,” she announced when he asked what was wrong.

Gladys didn’t have a clue what he was doing, switching things on and off and fiddling with his mouse. Eventually he got out a screw-driver, and undid the case of the computer in her office.

“There!” he said, sitting back. “I knew it all along. The hard drive has been removed.”

“We’ll need a spare, then,”

He looked at her as if she had just landed from Mars.

“It’s not that easy, love,” he announced. “The hard drive contains almost all the information ever put on the computer, and I mean all of it. A new hard disk will make the thing work again, but you won’t be able to access anything, not even your own name. Someone has bugged this thing, and meant to.”

“What about the ones in the other two offices; the boss and his deputy?”

“My next job,” Mynott said. “I’ll check them right away.”

He was in Head of Section’s office when Bill Clayton returned.

“Your computer looks all right, Mr Clayton,” said Nigel Mynott. “But someone’s taken the hard disk from your PA’s, next door, so nothing works, and there are no files or folders or any other sort of information left on it.”

“We should have a back-up,” announced Clayton, “in the safe.”

“Good. But I’ll need to fit a new drive first.”

“Don’t do anything else just yet, if you don’t mind,” commanded Clayton, thinking fast. “We may need to check the thing for finger prints first. Whoever did this was not authorised to tamper with it.”

“Understood,” said Mynott. “Just give me a shout when you’re ready, and I’ll sort it all out for you.”

“Your section is going to have quite a lot of work to do shortly, in a hurry. Have a word with Brian Drake, if you would, and get him standing by for a briefing, and you and the rest of his team ready for some top priority work.”

As Mynott left, Gladys appeared with a steaming mug of fresh coffee.

"Probably not up to Barbara's standard," she said. "I gather she made a good brew."

"This is exactly what I need Gladys. Thanks. Keep away from your computer, by the way ..."

"What's left of it," she interrupted.

"OK, so keep away from what's left of it then. We may need to check it for finger prints as it's been disabled by someone.

"Now, Gladys," he continued, "we are going to be very busy, so there's a lot I would like you to do. I've got to mount a major spy hunt, so I shall want a small Ops Room of my own, fully equipped. Perhaps we can partition off part of the one downstairs. It's not often fully manned. If not, find me another room somewhere, perhaps the briefing room, but big enough to house up to nine people, and complete with all the normal computer and other secure communications kit. While I'm doing that inquiry, Commander Marsden will have to more or less take charge of Section 11, and a Major Peter Northcot will be moving in as part of my enquiry team but also to help out up here. Warn the security people that he will be coming on board, and tell them that there will be half a dozen or so others working here helping me with my enquiry. Most of them will already have high level security clearances, but they will need passes and so on. Any problems let me know."

"Do you want me to do all this even if Barbara turns up?"

"Yes I do," replied Clayton. "From now on and until further notice, you work for me."

"Good – thank you," said Gladys, thinking the coffee couldn't have been that bad.

"I'd rather you didn't smoke, though," added 'S'.

Not all good, after all, but she nodded just the same. Time she gave up, anyway.

She was just leaving Clayton's office, when Nick Marsden appeared. He looked awful.

"Barbara not in yet then?" he asked.

"Not yet. Gladys is helping out until she turns up."

"Can't think where the girl can be," he said, puzzled and worried.

"Come in Nick, and sit down for a minute. It's good to see you, even if you do look dreadful. How are you feeling?"

"Physically and mentally, just about all in," he replied.

"You need a cup of good coffee," said Gladys, and disappeared to get one.

Nick slumped into a chair.

"I gather there's a bit of a flap on," he said.

"Not half," replied Bill Clayton. "For a start, Barbara seems to have disappeared, as you know, but the hard drive of her computer next door has also been stripped out. IT is on to it, but I shall want Special Branch in to go over it for finger prints before they do anything. We need to know who did it. And I shall also want the office gone over with a tooth-comb to see what else is missing – mobile phones, files, anything like that."

"Can't turn my back for five minutes, can I?" Nick half joked.

"There's more. You're effectively in charge from now on. I shall be heading a major mole hunt, although hopefully not for too long. I shall be in the building, though, so you can

get at me. But from now on, Gladys is working for us, and one of her girls will stand in as well until Barbara turns up.”

“We’re all going to be a bit busy, then.”

“Just a bit, Nick. I’m sorry to land you with this, when I can see you need a proper rest, but there’s no option. I shall be getting Major Peter Northcot in to help out – you know him, I think.”

“Very good bloke. It will be great to have him around.”

“I’m afraid there are two things I must ask you to do straight away. First of all, get over to Barbara’s place to let the police in, and give the place a thorough going over if there is no trace there of her or her mother or Donald. Look for passports, mobile phones, missing cash, any signs that they left in a hurry or if they had time to organise themselves. You know what to look for, and the police wont. There’s a team from the Yard, forensics, scene-of-crime officers and all that, waiting to get over there when you give the word. As soon as you can get away, do so, and come back here. Leave the police to question neighbours and so on if they think they need to, but I shall need your view as to why she has not turned up as soon as possible. After that, give her office a quick going over as well when you get back. Special Branch will be looking for finger prints and so on to see if we can get a clue as to who might have stripped down her computer in view of where it is and what might be – or was – on it. After that, we shall need to talk. I particularly want you to help me plan my little exercise.”

“OK, I’ll get on with it as quickly as I can. If there’s two minutes spare during the day, though, I’d like to ring Selly Oak to find out how Dusty is getting on.”

“We must certainly do that, but I think Roger Lloyd is in good hands and doing well, which is something. At least we don’t have to keep an eye on him anymore. The Swiss are doing that.”

“See you later, then,” said a weary Nick Marsden.

Clayton slumped into his chair, a worried man.

Marsden headed straight off to Barbara’s place in Battersea, having arranged to meet the police team there. A quick look round the outside seemed to confirm that there had been no forced entry, which was something.

He let himself in, fearful of what he might find.

He quickly went into every room in the small detached house, but found no sign of anything having been disturbed, and to his enormous relief, no bodies either. At least his worse fears had been allayed.

By then, the police search team had arrived.

“I know this house well, and I know where everything should be,” he told the Superintendent in charge. “I shall go through every room, being careful not to disturb anything, and perhaps one of your chaps could come round with me. Let me have a pair of vinyl gloves, will you please. I shall collect a few things of my own, but if I spot anything odd, I can point it out to him, and leave the rest to you. There doesn’t appear to be any sign of a forced entry, and apart from the normal residents here, a woman and her mother, I think I’m the only other one with a key. Her six-year-old son didn’t have one so far as I know. There should have been three people here who have disappeared from the face of the earth without any warning or notice, so far as I can tell, so we are looking for clues as to why they may

have gone and where they may have gone to. I'm sure you're more used to this than I am, so shout if I can help while I'm here. Is that OK?"

"That's fine, Commander," the Superintendent agreed. "I'll leave one of my chaps here with you, ..." he beckoned to an enthusiastic looking young man in plain clothes "... while the rest of us look around outside."

"There should be a car in the garage, but that seems to be missing," said Marsden. "Perhaps they used it to go away in, or it's been nicked if they left under duress."

"Leave it to us."

"I shall be leaving everything to you, I guess. I shan't be staying here a minute longer than I need."

Marsden and his police 'minder' quickly went from room to room. The more they searched, the more Nick felt sick. This was all too familiar. The tidily made bed, with Nick's pyjamas under the pillow. He gathered them up to take away with him. The toys in the lounge and in Donald's bedroom. Were there any missing? Yes, there were. A couple of his favourites weren't there. The washing up had been done in the kitchen. The gas had been turned off – everything neat and tidy and organised as he would have expected the house to be if Barbara and her mother had left of their own choice.

It was almost a relief to know that they appeared not to have been forced to leave.

But he felt just as sick and ill at ease.

It was about an hour later that Marsden rang his Head of Section in Clerkenwell.

"I'm on my way back, but thought I'd give you a bell first in case you can think of something I've forgotten. My brain's not entirely in gear at the moment. But there is no sign of anyone here at all - no bodies, so that's good. On the other hand, it looks as if they planned to leave. No signs of a rush, no passports, no spare cash, no keys, and no mobile phones – all gone. What's more, it looks as if the hard drive has been removed from Barbara's computer, just like hers in the office, and her lap-top seems to have gone as well. There are no notes left lying around, so no clues at all as to where they've all gone or why, or even when. The police chappies are taking finger prints and all that – the place is crawling with them."

"It's a bit like that here, too. Anything else?"

"Only that it looks as if they've also planned to be away for some time. The water, central heating, gas and electricity have all been turned off, and both the fridge and the freezer have been emptied. It's in the wheelie bin. Stuff missing from the wardrobes, too, and some of Donald's best toys are missing. I had a few bits lying around – razor, toothbrush, shirts – that sort of thing, and most of that's gone. I'm obviously not expected back here, so perhaps they don't expect to be back, either."

"Any messages on the answerphone?" asked Bill.

"Hang on. I'll go back in to check."

Over the mobile phone, Bill heard Nick go back in to the house, to check the phone and dial 1471.

"No messages, but someone tried to get hold of them yesterday about half past two. I've got the number."

"Get back here, then, if there's nothing else you want to check."

"On my way, then. Incidentally, Barbara's car isn't in the garage."

“I’ll put out an ‘All Forces’ alert to trace it,” said Bill. “I’ve got the registration number.”

Clayton sat back, deep in thought. No Barbara and no computer again. Perhaps his search wasn’t going to take so long after all.

CHAPTER 6

BILL CLAYTON - HUNT THE TRAITOR

“When Nick Marsden gets back,” said Clayton to Gladys, “get him to come straight in to see me, please.”

Gladys was enjoying this, but she could tell that not many other people were having a good day. She never saw activity like this in the Admin section. Or anywhere else in Section 11, come to that.

“I expect he could do with a coffee,” she said.

“So could I. And a bacon sandwich would be welcome, too. Breakfast was a long time ago.”

“And Mr Marsden doesn’t look as if he’s eaten for days. I’ll get two.”

Gladys hurried off. She had already been kicked out of what should have been her new office, as people were thoroughly and carefully going through everything in it. There were detectives taking finger prints, while others were going through Barbara’s desk and filing cabinets, trying to find what else might be missing, she assumed. It’s not every day of the week that computers get un-screwed and bits removed without authority, ‘specially not in a top security place like this. If Barbara was here, she could tell them what else was missing of course, but she wasn’t.

She’d never been quite sure about that Barbara

“Come in, Nick,” said Clayton when Marsden returned. “And shut the door.”

“Lots going on out there,” said Nick, waving a thumb. “Who are they all?”

“Special Branch is going through Barbara’s office looking for clues as to who might have tampered with her computer, and to see if anything else obvious is missing. Clive Newell organised them since he used to work there and knows people. Our own IT people are helping until someone gets here from GCHQ. Otherwise, I’ve got extra computers and communications kit being installed at one end of the Ops Room, which is where I shall be operating from.”

“I have a nasty feeling about all this,” said Nick. “Frankly, I don’t think you need to look far to find who dismantled the computer in the next office, not least because the same thing has been removed from Barbara’s computer at home.”

“You suspect her of this, Nick?”

“I’m sad to say I do. Having been to her home, there is no question that they carefully planned their departure. They may have been gone in a hurry, but it was deliberate and carefully planned, no doubt about it. I almost think planned well in advance, too, ready to go at a moment’s notice when they needed to.”

“Why do you think that?”

“No sign of panic or hurry.”

“What I meant was, why do you think they needed to plan to leave in a hurry in the first place? What could have been the trigger that made them believe they should go?”

“No idea.”

“It could have been Barbara’s mother who decided to go, of course, and not Barbara.”

“Possible. The question is, where did they go and why, suddenly.”

“And why did someone take the hard drives from both of Barbara’s computers?”

“That must have been Barbara herself, surely. Who else would have access to both her house and her office?”

“You don’t think Barbara will be back?”

“I don’t, to be honest. After all I’ve been through in the last two days, the last thing I wanted was to get back to find my wedding cancelled, but that’s the way it looks.”

“We’ve checked the 1471 phone number, by the way. It seems to have been a friend of Donald’s, trying to get in touch. That also seems to suggest that Donald didn’t know he was going to be whisked off.”

“It certainly looks as if they left in a well-planned hurry.”

“From what you know of her, do you think she’ll make contact?”

“I very much hope so, but who can tell. It depends why she’s disappeared. It could be because of her mother, but then I think she would have left a note or something. If she’s gone because she wanted to for some other reason, then we may not hear anything, at least for some time. I like to think, though, that she was fond enough of me to want to get in touch again. We shall see,”

“Another man, do you think?”

“Somehow I doubt it,” replied Nick after a pause. “But you never know, I suppose. There was never any sign that there was anyone else, but there was Jarvis in the past, so perhaps there was, and she managed to keep it away from me. Perhaps she was that sort of girl after all.”

“Nick, if you agree, I’ll get GCHQ to put taps on your phones, here and at home, including your mobile, and on your internet links. If she does try to make contact, we need to be able trace where she is and where the call comes from. I’ll do the same for my phones, and hers, including those in her office next door.”

“Agreed – absolutely essential. It’s always possible, too,” added Marsden, “that if she doesn’t get in touch, then Donald may try to. We got on like a house on fire, and he was getting very excited about having me as his Dad. He probably won’t be very happy about being dragged away like this, wherever they are. In fact, let’s get GCHQ to tap his school’s phones as well, since his school chum obviously didn’t know he was going away either.”

“Good idea. I’ve got a chap coming up from Cheltenham to join my team and take care of just this sort of thing. Name of Stuart Carrington; should be here around lunch time.”

“Who else is joining your team?”

“David Poulson from MI5, and Fred Browne from MI6, both section heads. I’ll co-opt Clive Newell as well, for his links with Special Branch, otherwise I’ll leave our team here intact. Peter Northcot should arrive tomorrow, by the way, as part of the MI5 team but also to help you out up here. You could be extra busy while I’m running this show.”

“I have a nasty feeling that your enquiry may not last too long. I’m sure you haven’t forgotten that we have wondered before if Barbara could have been leaking stuff, but dismissed the idea when they found that bloke in the Cabinet Office.”

“Of course I remember. But it could still be any one of us, and not necessarily her. One thing we must do, and this is where you can be an enormous help, is decide what information was passed to Makienko after the Cabinet Office clerk left the scene, and who had access to it and knew enough to be able to pass it on. That should narrow the field a bit. After that, if we suspect someone, MI5 can check on them and try to discover what else they may have passed on.”

“We can be methodical about that, too. Make a list of all the facts that must have been leaked, and then make a list of the people who had access to those facts.”

“We should perhaps deal with Barbara’s disappearance as a separate issue, until we see the two problems converge. Making a list of people - suspects, if you like, - won’t be enough. We then have to discover a motive, and how they did it.”

“Starting with security checks.”

“Exactly. The MI5 and 6 chaps are going to be really busy. This sort of thing is not what I’m used to or normally do, so they will have to get on with the real work, while I just pull the strings, so to speak.”

“You’ve been given the sticky end of the stick by Algar because of the Barclay case – that’s where it all started.”

“Whoever has been making life difficult for us over the Barclay case may well have been active for years, of course, and leaking almost anything from anywhere for ages.”

“Let’s see if we can point the finger at someone over our case. Then others can look back into history while we get on with our normal role in life. Not that life here is ever going to be normal again, it seems to me.”

Clayton grinned, for the first time in ages, it seemed.

“I never thought we’d be parachuting you into Switzerland, I must say.”

“Who knew about that, then? Who nearly got me killed?”

“You and Dusty and Lloyd all knew, for a start. But let’s start at the beginning, shall we, then you can get off for some rest.”

Gladys arrived with a whole pot of steaming coffee and bacon rolls for both of them, complete with mustard and tomato sauce.

“Will this do ‘til lunch?” she asked.

“Wonderful,” said Bill. “Thanks for this. We were just going to get down to some serious work. Why don’t you sneak off for a quick break and a crafty fag?”

“I’m trying to give up,” she replied. “But I will nip out for a few minutes, since I was in early. I’ll switch the phones through to you here. People are beginning to arrive to join your new team, by the way. I’m shunting them into the Ops Room and Clive Newell is looking after them, but I can’t get anywhere near to my office, for people. They’ve said they want to come in here next,” she said, “and then in to your office, Mr Marsden.”

“While you’re in charge, Gladys, call me Nick like everyone else does.” He waived a thumb towards Clayton. “And although he’s the boss, he responds better to Bill!”

‘S’ grinned and nodded.

“When all the enquiry team has arrived, I’ll get down there to brief them; half an hour, probably.”

Gladys left, and closed the door.

“This is not really our scene, Nick. But I thought I’d start off by giving the team a detailed briefing about what started all this. The threat to Professor Barclay, the decision for us to give him protection, the assassination attempt and the mistaken shooting of his twin brother by the ex-Head of this section, his own death at the hands of Makienko, Barclay’s re-incarnation as Lloyd, his move to Switzerland, and all that.”

“Don’t forget to mention Barbara’s relationship with Jarvis, and how he was blackmailed by a threat to kidnap Donald.”

“Of course. They’ll certainly need a good briefing and plenty of detail before they can do anything,” agreed Clayton. “They will obviously want to talk to you at some stage, but do you think you can stay awake for long enough to sit through my briefing and help with questions afterwards?”

“No problem.”

“The guys coming down are top level, mostly Directors. They will be taking the lead and my job will simply be to pull the strings and fill in gaps when necessary. They will all know more about tracking spies than I do, but Robin Algar wanted us to take the lead as we know everything there is to know about the Barclay affair.”

“And we are obviously suspected by Algar as being the source of the leaks,” said Marsden.

“I don’t think we are, actually. It could be anyone from anywhere, or even nobody at all.”

“How do you mean, ‘nobody’?”

“Phone taps, internet malware, cyber warfare?”

“Never thought of that,” admitted Marsden.

“The professional security people will sort it, one way or the other.”

Nick Marsden sat back, tired and bewildered.

“I hope to God it’s not someone we know and trust,” he said. “I simply loath and detest traitors. I’ve risked my life for this country enough times in my career, not least a couple of days ago, and I didn’t do that just for some two-bit agent from somewhere, pretending to be on our side, to turn against us. If ever I come across anyone like that, they’re as good as dead, whoever it is.”

“I can understand where you’re coming from Nick. I feel the same, having had a similar career, even if not so life threatening. But take it easy, and let’s allow the experts to find out what’s been going on. And let’s agree to keep Barbara a separate issue until someone tells us it isn’t.”

“OK. Let’s do that.”

“I’ve quickly sketched out a list of what seems to be the most important information to find its way to Makienko in the run up to your sudden trip to Switzerland, and also a list of people who could have known about it. Have a quick look, if you will. The pivotal facts seem to me to be that Barclay was still alive under the new guise as Lloyd, and that he was going skiing in Switzerland having just moved there. Lloyd’s real identity is the crucial fact, but that was known about before the junior mole in the Cabinet Office was uncovered. So too was the plan for him to move to Switzerland to work, but not the date.”

“And so far as I can recall,” added Marsden, “he only decided to go skiing after he arrived in Geneva.”

“But we did know about it here – Dusty Miller told us.”

“So let’s have a quick look at your two lists,” said Nick.

“Once we are more or less agreed, I shall pass them to the enquiry team members,” said Clayton. “At least then they will all have something to work on.”

Gladys knocked, and came in.

“I’ve come for the empties,” she announced. “And all the guys you invited have now arrived, and are in the briefing room. The bloke from Cheltenham got here before one of the blokes from Whitehall, would you believe! Just thought I’d mention it,” she added, wishing she hadn’t.

“Thanks Gladys. We’ll get down there. Are you ready for this?” Clayton asked Nick.

“No choice, really! I’ll bet the ‘bloke from Whitehall’ was late because he was getting fully briefed.”

“We’ll soon see. Let’s go.”

Having welcomed the team members, Clayton made it quite clear about his future role.

“I am only here because a recent operation of ours seems to have revealed the existence of an active and dangerous agent working for the Russians. It is not my job to unearth him; that’s why you are here. My job is simply to help in any way I can to provide you with the information you think you need to unmask this man, or woman, whoever it turns out to be.”

“Let me start by outlining the operation in question from the very beginning. Most of you will already know something about it.”

Clayton’s summary of events was precise and, so far as Marsden could tell, complete in every important detail.

“Some of you will be aware,” Clayton concluded, “that for some time it was suspected that a junior clerk in the Cabinet Office was responsible for leaking some of the information which fell into the wrong hands. However, information continued to flow even after he was removed from the scene. I have listed that information, as best I can in the time I’ve had available, and attempted also to list alongside it those people, in this office and in others, who had knowledge of it. There are copies here for you. You will see that some people, including the Cabinet Secretary and the Heads of MI5 and MI6, are common to most lists, but only three of us appear on every one of them; myself, my Deputy here, Commander Marsden, and the Cabinet Secretary, although our joint PA, Barbara Wilkinson was also privy to most of the relevant information. I will also try to list other information which leaked while the Cabinet Office man was still operating, and who had direct access to that. I will supply copies of those lists when they are complete, hopefully later today.

“Finally, I must also tell you of what I consider at the moment at least, to be a side issue, so to speak, which may or may not be linked to your present investigation.”

He told them in detail about Barbara’s disappearance.

“My view is that the investigation into this should be kept at arm’s length from the main enquiry, unless the two investigations merge. From now on, I shall be giving this enquiry my full-time attention so as to help you in any way I can, but the rest of Section 11 will also be at your disposal to help if necessary, while they continue to run the Section’s on-

going operations. Although I shall be here all the time, I suggest we meet together regularly, perhaps twice a day, to swap notes and monitor progress, but let me now deal with any immediate questions you may have.”

“Why do you suggest the ‘missing persons’ enquiry, if I may call it that, should be dealt with as a separate investigation?” asked David Poulson, from MI5.

“Not least because we don’t have the slightest idea why they have moved away, or whether it was at the instigation of my PA or her mother. Furthermore, that investigation is already underway, and is being led by Special Branch. Of course, if any of you want to join in the house search, which is presently the main activity, I see no reason why not,” replied Clayton.

“But she removed the hard disk from her computer here and at home. Why would she have done that do you suppose.”

“No idea, at the moment,” said Clayton, “and neither do we know for sure yet that she was responsible. My own view would be that she was, but the reason is by far from clear. If it was her, then there was obviously information on both machines that she wanted to keep from us, but that could have been anything, including a clandestine affair.”

“There’s no evidence of that,” said Marsden defensively.

“But she had an affair before, with Jarvis, so we have just been told.”

Stuart Carrington, from GCHQ chipped in. “It’s imperative that we get hold of both those machines as soon as possible,” he said. “My people in Cheltenham may well be able to uncover information on what’s left of them. It’s amazing how much is hidden away if you know where to look.”

“The computer here is secure,” Clayton assured him.

“Then let’s get over to the house to rescue that one. I’ll take one of your IT chaps with me, but please make sure the machine here is not touched until I get back. One further thing, though. Let’s not forget that this may not be human intelligence gathering at all. I’m sure you’ve all heard of cyber warfare, and I shall want to go through all your communications and data storage facilities here as a matter of urgency to check its security, including mobile phones. I shall be sending for re-enforcements.”

“It looks to me,” said Marsden, “as if you have already decided to link the search for our PA with the hunt for a foreign agent.”

“Much of this investigation,” said Frank Browne from MI6, “will be a process of elimination. We in the Secret Intelligence Service have much experience of this sort of thing – too much, really – so my colleague from GCHQ is absolutely right to see what, if anything, can be learnt from the girl’s computers.”

“I agree,” said Poulson from MI5. “And since my department is supposed to be responsible for catching spies, I wouldn’t mind coming with you, Stuart, to the Wilkinson’s house, if only to make my name with the Special Branch chaps. I shall need some help too. One thing I will get my people to do is double check the security clearances of all the people on your lists. Could I possibly borrow the files of those who work here?” he asked Clayton. “It will be easier and quicker to get that done at HQ rather than here.”

The briefing meeting broke up, and members went their different ways.

“They don’t waste much time, do they,” commented Nick.

“There may not be much time to waste, if they are to stop more secrets from leaking. I think I should wiz round our section heads here to tell them what’s going on and to get them to stand by to help in any way they can.”

“Of course,” said Nick, “there’s one bloke they will want to talk to who they won’t be able to.”

“Who?”

“Dusty Miller. If you don’t mind, I’ll give the hospital a ring and see how he’s getting on.”

“Yes, we must keep in touch. They may also want to talk to Lloyd, of course, in case he’s been chattering to people. But let me know what they say about Dusty, and then nip off for some rest.”

A bit later, Nick went into the Ops Room, with his coat on. This time, he really was going home.

“They say Dusty is as well as can be expected,” he told Bill Clayton. “And we all know what that means. He’s still in intensive care and on the VSI list, but just about able to breath for himself again, so they’ve taken him off the ventilator for the time being, but watching him carefully. He’s had a couple of scans, and apparently there’s a lot to do to his plumbing to sort out his internal injuries, as well as mending his left leg and right arm, not to mention his rib cage. So he’ll be there for some time. They can’t rush things while he’s so ill, but they are confident he’ll pull through it all.”

“We must try to ring them again, perhaps on a daily basis if we can. We could put a sit-rep on the notice board; several people here have been asking about him.”

“Roger Lloyd had also been on the phone asking, so they said, and the medic member of my team, Annie Mackie. They’re keeping details like that in a diary for him – a sort of log book, with all his treatment and everything in it as well, so that he can catch up when he’s fit enough.”

“That sounds a good idea. Now you push off and have a good rest. If you feel like it, come in tomorrow.”

“I’d better be here to help brief Peter Northcot. But I’ll be OK after a good meal and a night’s rest. I’ll go down to my flat in Portsmouth, I think, to really get away from things.”

“Drive carefully then.”

As Marsden left, Clayton’s phone rang. Gladys answered it.

“This is Catherine, Bill Clayton’s wife,” she announced.

“Hello, Mrs Clayton. I’m Gladys.”

“We’ve never met, but I know you stand in for Barbara when she’s away.”

“Barbara’s away,” said Gladys.

“And what about my husband. Is he there?”

“Hang on; I’ll find him for you. There’s a bit of chaos going on here today.”

Eventually, Bill got to the phone.

“Hello, my darling. How are things?”

“Well, things are all right here, but I wondered about you. I gather from Gladys that there’s what she calls “a bit of a chaos going on!””

“Just a bit frantic, actually. The place is full of people checking on things.”

“I wondered if there was any chance of you coming home,” said Catherine.

“Any special reason?” asked Bill.

“Only that it’s been over two days since you did, and I haven’t heard from you, that’s all!”

There was a pause. Bill looked at his watch.

“Have I really been here two days, and not been in touch?”

“It’s not the first time in our life,” said Catherine, “and knowing your job, it probably won’t be the last! But I did just want to make sure you were all right.”

“I’m fine, really. I just hadn’t realised how time had gone. I’m so sorry.”

“Just as long as you’re OK. I hadn’t realised that Barbara was going to be away.”

“Nobody did. She seems to have disappeared, complete with her mother and Donald. That’s part of Gladys’s ‘chaos’.”

“That’s odd. I wonder what can have happened.”

“One of the things we’re trying to find out. Her house is crawling with people, like this office. I’ll tell you all about it when I get there.”

“When will you be home, then, do you think?”

“Nick has just left. He hasn’t been home since he was parachuted into Switzerland.”

“Neither have you,” Catherine reminded him.

“I’ll do my best to get back within an hour. If not, I’ll ring you, and I’ll tell Gladys to ring you if I don’t for some reason. But I should be able to leave things for a bit. There are enough people here to run a war!”

“I’ll get a meal on then.”

Peter Northcot arrived early, the next morning. He had a flat in town which he used during the week. Nothing special, but it did. In Brixton. On the Underground and not many riots lately, so it did. When he wasn’t there, he was down in Hampshire, which is where he much preferred to be. He had moved in to a cottage in the country, with his father. It was his father’s cottage, really, but he shared it with Peter and Peter’s Chinese partner, Suzy, who looked after both of them. Looked after them very well, in fact. But she wasn’t too keen on fishing for wild trout in the nearby stream, like Peter and his father. That’s really why they had got hold of the cottage. Peace and quiet and fishing. And Suzy.

Suzy had been Peter’s contact at the Embassy in Hong Kong. They had always got on well, although for obvious reason, they rarely met. She was a skilled operator, too. She had managed to organise his father’s escape to UK, when he had fetched up in Hong Kong after a particularly hazardous operation in North Korea. Known as Dr. Penny, he had gone there to collect information from fellow agents about their nuclear programme, but for some reason his escape route collapsed, and he was left to make his own way home. He got to Hong Kong, and Peter and Suzy arranged for his secret return to London from there, but almost immediately, Peter also had to get out in a hurry. Suzy fixed that, too.¹

He had left the Army – a Defence cut, he called himself – and taken on a similar role in MI5 to his father’s before he had retired from MI6. Section 11 was to be his first real posting, although he had told them he would have preferred to be abroad again in MI6.

¹ See ‘A Bridge of Letters’ in “JUNK and other short stories”, by Duncan James.

Perhaps he would end up 'travelling', like his father had. Until then, helping the Deputy Head of Section 11 looked a good number, and he knew there was also a bit of a flap on. Frank Browne had told him so before he had been sent in to help sort things.

So, here he was, early.

It looked as if lots of other people were early, too. Obviously not a nine to five operation, this one. Gladys met him as he got through the last of the security checks.

"As of yesterday," she explained, a bit out of breath, "I'm your PA. The girl who should be doing it has disappeared, which is part of the panic."

"What's the other part?" asked Peter.

"Some sort of spy hunt, so far as I can gather. Secret information leaked about one of our recent operations, which is why the place is crawling with people looking for clues."

"I know a couple of the people."

"That's a good start. The real 'S' is Bill Clayton, but he's heading the hunt, so the new Head of Section is the old Deputy, Commander Nick Marsden, again as of yesterday, but he's not in yet. He was parachuted in to Switzerland on Saturday, and only got home for some rest last night after spending all day yesterday in here. But he'll be here in a minute, I shouldn't wonder. He'll give you a proper briefing."

"Yours wasn't bad, Gladys," he said, thinking that this might not be a bad posting after all.

"This is your office, and mine's next door. Couldn't get in to either of them yesterday, but they seem to have finished. The computers are new. Someone nicked a vital part of one of them. Pity they didn't nick the coffee machine as well. How do you like it?"

"Black, please."

"Coming up."

Peter thought this gloomy place may not be so gloomy after all, although he was used to a better view than the back-streets of Clerkenwell. Not much beat the back-streets of Kowloon, or the water meadows of the Test valley. Good cover though, and pretty tough security to get in, through a newsagents and the barbers shop at the back. You'd never guess it. But someone had, if the computer theft was not an inside job. The missing PA, no doubt. He was looking forward to a briefing. He needed two really. One about the day-to-day operation of Section 11, which was really his business, and the other about what Gladys had called 'some sort of spy hunt', which had aroused his curiosity. No doubt Frank Browne would fill him in when they met.

Gladys appeared.

"Coffee," she announced. "I hope a mug's OK. We keep the cups and saucers for posh visitors."

"You get more in a mug," said Peter.

"Mr Clayton's in, but has gone straight to the Ops Room to see what's happened overnight. Mr Marsden is on his way. Half an hour, he reckons, but knowing the way he drives that BMW bike, I'd put a fiver on 15 minutes. They both know you're here, and have both promised you full briefings. Bill Clayton told me to give you this, out of the safe. It's the written brief they gave him when he took over."

He had only just opened the envelope when Frank Browne appeared. They shook hands.

“Nice to see you again, but I didn’t expect our paths to cross quite so soon,” said Frank.

“Good to see you, too. I gather this is something of a mad-house at the moment, and not normally like this.”

“For your sake, I hope you’re right. But we’ve certainly got a major problem on our hands. Bill said he will fill you in personally about the background to it before we have our morning meeting to up-date ourselves. You and Nick should both be there. This panic is a stand-alone issue at the moment, so the briefing about the role of Section 11 can wait. Nick Marsden will do that later, so Bill said.”

“I’ve got an old written brief here, but haven’t started to read it yet.”

“I’ll leave you to it, then, and get back to work. There has been an interesting and perhaps significant discovery overnight.”

Peter Northcot took the paper briefing back to Gladys.

“I don’t think I shall need this after all. And I’m glad your coffee machine wasn’t nicked – it was a good brew.”

“I haven’t killed anyone yet. By the way, you own me a fiver.”

“That’s expensive coffee!”

“Not for the coffee. Nick Marsden has arrived, and is in the garage booking in the BMW motorbike. Fifteen minutes, like I said.”

CHAPTER 7

DONALD WILKINSON – THE PHONE CALL

Peter Northcot already knew something about the role of Section 11, and how it fitted in to the rest of the work carried out by the Government’s intelligence community, but knew nothing about the present crisis, apart from what Gladys had told him. ‘Some sort of spy hunt,’ she had said, plus the fact that the girl who should have been there instead of Gladys had gone missing. Same thing, he wondered? It seemed they were dealing with the two issues separately for the time being, but perhaps he’d learn more when he had a proper briefing.

Two briefings, apparently; one on his role in the organisation he had just joined, and another about the present crisis.

Bill Clayton – ‘S’ – arrived, and introduced himself.

“Sorry not to have been here to welcome you,” he said.

“Not a problem”, replied Northcot. “I was early anyway, and I gather there’s a flap on.”

“Just a bit,” said Clayton. “I’ll tell you all about it before we go down to the Ops Room for an up-date briefing to catch up on what’s been happening overnight.”

“I was told that I’m to be part of the enquiry you’re heading, as well as helping you out running the section when you need me to.”

“That’s right; I hope you don’t mind wearing two hats for the time being. The first briefing we shall be going to is about the enquiry, and then either I or my Deputy, Commander Nick Marsden, will brief you about the general role of Section 11. He should be here soon, and will come with us to the briefing downstairs.”

“He’s in the garage,” said Peter knowledgeably, “wherever that is. And we’ve met a few times already.”

“Good. Let’s get started, then.”

Clayton quickly and precisely went over the events leading to the discovery that Barbara Wilkinson had disappeared, together with her mother and young son, Donald. He sketched in the background to the Barclay affair, and the attempts made on his life by the Russians.

It was at this point that Marsden arrived. He and Northcot greeted one another warmly.

“Long time, no see,” said Northcot. “I gather you’re just back from a skiing holiday in Switzerland!”

“Some holiday! But I’m glad to have you alongside while I’m helping to run this show on a day-to-day basis. Bill has been detached to get on with our spy hunt.”

“Not the sort of thing we usually get involved in,” said Bill, “but the Joint Intelligence Committee decided I should co-ordinate the enquiry as we have been so heavily involved. It was our most recent operation that led to the discovery that there was an agent somewhere close at hand. Working for the Russians, it seems. It’s really MI5 who are the spy catchers, as you know, and not part of this Section’s normal role at all.”

He turned to Nick.

“I’ll just finish telling Peter about the background to this affair, and then we must get down to the morning briefing.”

“I gather there’s been an interesting development overnight,” said Nick Marsden.

“So I hear, but I’ve not been told what it is, except that it could be significant. No doubt we shall find out soon enough.”

They did.

The leader of each element of the enquiry outlined in turn what he and his support team had done since the investigation had been launched. Much of it was simply an update on the progress that had been made in getting things and people in place as had been agreed earlier, and there was nothing much of any significance to report until it came to Clive Newell.

“As you know, Special Branch and a team of experts in various fields have been going through the Battersea home of the Wilkinson family. Now, I know we agreed that their disappearance and the probability of there being a Soviet agent in our midst were to be treated as two separate issues, but I thought I should just mention that there is something very odd about the Wilkinson case.”

“Enough to make you think the two issues may in some way be linked?” asked Clayton.

“It has always seemed to me, if I may say so, that they are obviously linked anyway,” replied Newell, “not least because of the fact that Barbara worked here and would have known everything that was going on in relation to the Barclay/Lloyd affair. And I’m not convinced, either, that their disappearance was entirely coincidental or unconnected.

“However,” he continued, “what we have found in the house is beginning to look decidedly odd. Actually, I mean what we haven’t found. For a start, there are no passports or driving licences, and no bank cards or money in the place, but one might expect those to be

missing if the family was, for instance, going abroad on holiday. What is odd, however, is that there are absolutely no documents either that could be used in any way to identify any of them; no school reports for the boy Donald, no library cards, no birth certificates, no bank statements, and so on. One would hardly want to take any of these away on holiday. Not only that, but there are no papers relating to the property. Nothing to show whether it was owned or rented, nor any utility bills, phone bills, Council tax bills, no TV licence, no mortgage papers; absolutely nothing at all. So at the moment, not only do we not know why they left or where they went, but we have discovered nothing about their home or the background to the family themselves. There aren't even any old Christmas cards at the back of the desk, or Birthday cards in Donald's room, or even an address book, so apart from talking to the neighbours to see if they know anything that might be helpful, there is nobody – repeat nobody, to ask about them.

“So as I said, decidedly odd.”

Throughout all this, Nick Marsden was looking more and more concerned and ashen faced.

“You could, and perhaps should, ask me, as I was supposed to be marrying Barbara at some time. But now I begin to think about it, I really know precious little about them, either. I took them at face value, and never really thought to ask whether or not it was their house or whether they rented it, or anything else like that. They say love is blind. Perhaps it is, but I've only known Barbara socially for a short time, so the relationship hadn't got down to the nitty-gritty of personal backgrounds.”

He paused puzzled. “I have a vague notion that Mrs Wilkinson said, or indicated at least, that they came from up North somewhere – near York, I think – but neither of them had any hint of a north country accent.”

“If I may, I'll get someone to ask you a few questions, to see if he can jog your memory. Perhaps Peter Northcot could take that on, since you know one another? I'll also get some checks done on people named 'Wilkinson' from the York area – births, marriages etc. How old is Barbara, if I may ask?”

“Thirty four; birthday in April.”

“That's helpful. At least we have a date now to start looking. Anyway, at the moment it looks as if they have gone away and deliberately tried to hide all trace of themselves,” said Newell.

“Is that the interesting development you mentioned?” asked Clayton.

“No, it isn't. I'll come to that now. Not only interesting, but probably very significant and important. We found a message on the answerphone in the house, recorded at about 10.30pm on Saturday. I say about, because the time setting on the machine is way out, and plainly has not been corrected for ages. However, it is from a young boy who we assume to be Donald, and I'll get you, Nick to listen to it to confirm that at some time as soon as possible.

“The message is a bit panicked, but is meant for you, Nick.” Clive looked at his notes. “It says *'Uncle Nick, I don't want to be taken away, please come and ... yeeeeooooow.'* That's all, except there is the sound of a woman's voice in the background, obviously shouting at him. The phone seems to have been grabbed from him, as the boy can be heard crying out.

“This is a bit upsetting for all of us, but must be especially so for you, Nick. I can’t think how we missed the call, but we must have been somewhere else when the phone rang.”

“So where was it from?” demanded a frantic Nick Marsden.

“We’re checking on that,” said Stuart Carrington, from GCHQ. “My chaps are on to it.”

“But you should know by now. You’re supposed to have intercepts, phone taps and traces in place on all our phones and internet connections, including that one.”

“I know,” said Carrington. “I’m sure we shall be able to trace it eventually.”

“Do you mean to tell me that it wasn’t being monitored at all?” demanded Marsden. “That poor little bastard risked everything late at night to get word to me from somewhere. He is plainly being taken away against his wishes. He needs help, and risked everything to try to get it. And you missed the phone call and didn’t even manage to log it or record it.”

“I’m sorry about that.”

“Sorry is no damned good. That boy is only six, and his writing isn’t up to much yet, so he probably couldn’t have left a note behind when he was taken away even if he had the opportunity. But he has always been taught to use the phone in case of an emergency. His home number is the only one he was made to remember.”

Marsden stood up.

“Let’s get over there now. I need to listen to that call. Come with me, Carrington.”

As he stormed out of the room, Marsden turned to Northcot.

“I’ll do our briefing when I get back. Hope you understand, Peter.”

Northcot nodded. “Of course.”

He turned to Clayton. “I’ll get back to the office and make sure there’s nothing urgent going on, then come back here, if I may.”

“Do that,” agreed Bill. “We’ll have time for a chat, I’m sure. Other people are busier on this operation than I am at the moment. Make sure Gladys knows where you are.”

The meeting broke up, and Northcot went back to his office upstairs.

“Interesting?” asked Gladys.

“Very. I think I need one of your coffees, please. And that written briefing from the safe, after all.”

‘S’ was still in the briefing room when the red phone rang. It was the Cabinet Secretary from Downing Street.

“Just checking in, Bill, to see how things are going. Anything to report yet?”

“Not really, Sir Robin,” he replied. “We seem to be settling down nicely as a team, but this is the very early stages as I’m sure you realise. We are getting systems in place, and have drawn up tentative lists of what information was obviously passed to Dmitri Makienko, and who here would have had access to it and been able to pass it on. You’re on the list as you can imagine, but there aren’t all that many who had access to everything.”

“What about Barbara? Any news of her?”

“As a matter of fact, there is. The whole family has left home in what appears to have been a well planned and executed get-away, but we have no idea yet why they went or where they went to. We think they may have come from Yorkshire somewhere originally, so we are checking records up there.”

“Very odd, that they should just disappear like that.”

“Also very annoying, Robin, in that the boy, Donald, tried to get a phone call through to Nick Marsden asking for help, but for some reason GCHQ had not put the intercepts in place, so we have no idea where the call came from. This sort of thing is just not good enough.”

“But they should have been in place as a matter of urgency. When was the call?”

“Saturday night.”

“That really is not good enough,” said the Chairman of the JIC. “I’ll get on to my opposite number at the Foreign Office straight away, and get him to sort it out immediately. This really is not good enough.”

Sir Wilfred Forsyth was Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office, and the Director of GCHQ reported directly to him. He was shocked when he heard about the missed intercepts.

“This is certainly not what I’d expect,” Sir Wilfred agreed. “I’ll get on to the Director immediately.”

The Director also agreed. “Plainly something wrong somewhere.”

The Director got on to his GCHQ man in the Section 11 Ops Room, Stuart Carrington, who happened to be out at the Wilkinsons’ place at the time, so he eventually made contact on Carrington’s mobile phone, via a secure satellite link.

“This is a bloody shambles, and simply not up to the standard I expect,” was the message. “Furthermore, I don’t like being told by the Cabinet Secretary that my organisation is falling down on the job.”

Carrington agreed. “We’re working on it with all urgency, of course, but I agree that so far what we’ve done has been far from good enough.”

Carrington looked across to Nick Marsden.

“Bollocking from on high,” he said. “We’ve been let down somewhere down the chain, and that’s appalling. What I’ll do is get this machine to Cheltenham as soon as possible. We should be able to analyse the background noise at least, and perhaps catch something of what the lady says when she grabs the phone from the boy.”

“I’ll organise a messenger if you like,” offered Nick. “We have some good drivers and very fast motorbikes. But we’ll need to replace this answerphone before it leaves here, in case the boy tries to get through again.”

Carrington’s phone rang again.

“About bloody time,” he said, after a pause. “We’ve already missed one vital call, and that is patently not on.”

“All the intercepts are in place now,” he told Marsden, “and with any luck at all, we should still be able to find out the general area where this call came from, if not the actual number of the phone that was used.”

“Anything at all will help,” said Marsden, stating the obvious, “and the quicker the better. Let’s get back to Clerkenwell. There are things to do.”

By the time they got back, Clayton had already decided that meetings twice a day were no good. Things were moving too fast now, and they couldn’t afford to wait to exchange information. He decreed that a representative from each of the constituent

organisations would always be present in the Ops Room on a 24 hour basis, so that any incoming information could be passed on immediately. They all knew the form.

He told Gladys.

“That means that either I or Nick or Peter Northcot should be with you in the office, while the other two of us are down here,” he told her. “But it does mean that you’re going to be busy guarding all the phones, and you must make sure you keep us all briefed about our day-to-day operations in case we miss something.”

“I’ll do my best,” said Gladys, who was quite enjoying things. “I’ll also look after the Admin side of things, and try to make sure you’re kept fed and watered. If I can’t do it myself, I’ll get one of my girls to make sure the kitchen is kept stocked up, so that you won’t starve. Can’t have you not going home for two days again, and not noticing,” she said.

“That’s great – thanks! Anything to report yet, while I’m on?”

“I’ve got the new computer up and running and I’ve loaded on the back-up file, too. A chap from GCHQ took a copy of it as well, and that’s gone to Cheltenham with the old computer. I get the impression they’ve just about finished going through these three offices, taking finger prints and everything, so I’ll try to get things as near to normal for you as I can ready for when you do manage to get up here. In case you want them, I’ve drawn a few camp beds from the store, and I’ll get a couple of them down to the Ops Room in case you need them overnight, and I’ll keep a couple up here. You can sign for them later.”

Clayton knew she wasn’t joking, either.

“I’ve also made sure there’s a drop or two of wine in the fridge up here, if you need to get away from it all. I’ve kept the receipts.”

“Wonderful, Gladys – thanks again. Look after Peter as best you can, but don’t hesitate to ring any of us if you need to.”

“Mr Northcot is busy reading the briefing you had when you first arrived, so he’s occupied for the time being. Since you always want someone up here, I’ll tell him to hang about until he’s relieved, shall I?”

Gladys was clearly in charge.

“You could also do us all a favour.”

“Anything.”

“We need to know who the owners are of the Wilkinson property in Battersea. Get on to the Land Registry and look up their title register. You know Barbara’s address; it’s on the file somewhere. There is a fee to pay, so I’ll let you sort that out. Only a few quid, I think, so either pay it yourself and claim it back or something. I’m sure you’ll get round it somehow. The title registry will tell you the registered owner of the property. That’s what we need to know. I think you can do it all on the internet.”

“Consider it done.”

Marsden went straight to the Ops Room when he got back.

“There’s no doubt it was Donald who made that phone call, but I didn’t recognise the voice in the background.”

“Anything else?” asked Clayton.

“The phone is going to Cheltenham for GCHQ to analyse it and see if they can pick up anything from the background. Tracing the source would be helpful, but I have my doubts.

One of our blokes is taking it down by bike, but we've replaced it with another answerphone in case Donald tries to ring again."

"My call to Robin Algar seems to have worked. I gather all the intercepts are in place now."

"So I'm told. My guess would be that Donald made his call from somewhere in the UK. He would probably not be able work one from abroad, and wouldn't know the UK dialling code anyway."

"They would hardly have had the time to get out of the country if the answerphone timer was anything like accurate."

"True. I had only jumped into the Alps a few hours before that. But they didn't waste much time leaving home, did they? They must have left almost at the time I set off, as I went to Brize Norton straight from Battersea. We don't know, of course, if they did leave the country. They may still be somewhere in the UK."

"A hasty departure must have been on the books for simply ages. They couldn't have cleared out the house of absolutely everything in the time between you leaving them and Donald's call."

"We need to find Barbara's car urgently," said Nick.

"They're looking. By the way, I've got Gladys looking up the Land Registry files to find out who actually owns the place where the Wilkinsons lived."

"Where's Peter?"

"Upstairs in the office, reading the written brief you handed me when I arrived. Poor fellow has been thrown in a bit at the deep end."

"He'll survive."

"If neither of us can get round to it soon, I'll get Gladys to show him around and introduce him to people."

"As a matter of interest, Nick, did Barbara know you were going to parachute into Switzerland to help out Dusty?"

"She must have done," he replied. "I was at her place when you scrambled me to get the Arctic team together."

"I was afraid of that," said Clayton.

"Do you think it was her who told Makienko I was on my way?"

"Somebody did. It could have been her mother, of course. I don't know what to think yet, but I am fast coming to the conclusion that we can stop treating these two issues as separate."

"I agree. She's on our list of suspects anyway, and one of the few who knew just about everything that was going on to protect Jack Barclay, as he then was."

"We should soon be able to start a process of elimination, and whittle that list down a bit. The MI5 chaps are taking the lead in that."

"I'm not too impressed with them. They let Makienko slip through their fingers at Heathrow, when they assumed he was going to Moscow rather than watch him board the aircraft. That cost us valuable hours tracking down the fact that he actually went to Zurich."

"That means he must have known that Lloyd was in Switzerland. But why did he go to Zurich and not direct to Geneva, which was nearer to where they were?"

"Perhaps there wasn't a flight."

“But perhaps he didn’t know Dusty was with him, either.”

“I really must get on to Selly Oak again to check on how he is.”

“One of us.”

Clive Newell came over to them.

“News from forensic, boss. There are no unexpected finger prints either in your offices here or at the Wilkinsons’. As you would expect, plenty of Barbara’s around both the computers, but nobody else’s.”

“So it looks as if it was her who took out both hard drives.”

“Right. No evidence of anyone else tampering with them.”

“Pass that on to the MI5 & 6 teams, will you?”

“It begins to look as if the Wilkinsons are not away on holiday after all, then. Seems we are dealing with one enquiry and not two after all.”

Nick Marsden looked quite upset.

“If she’s made a fool of me all this time, I’ll never forgive her.”

“You may never see her again, of course.”

“I can hardly believe all this,” said a distressed Marsden. “But I shall see her again, make no mistake. I shall seek her out, wherever she is.”

“Do you think she will ever try to get in touch with you again?”

“Yes, I do. And I’m quite sure Donald will, even if she doesn’t.”

He paused.

“Remind me of the time once before when we discussed the possibility of her being a mole. That was something to do with Donald, wasn’t it?”

“Right. It was at the time the Russians were blackmailing Jarvis, and we were trying to work out how the Russians knew that Jarvis was Donald’s father. Again, a question of who knew, and who could have told them.”

“I remember now. We eventually ruled Barbara out because we couldn’t think of a motive, and discovered that the Russians had got hold of a copy of the boy’s birth certificate, with Jarvis named as his father. There weren’t many other possibilities, though. Only Barbara’s mother, apart from the two of us. 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 we simply couldn’t see any motive on Barbara’s part, or what she could possibly gain by telling the Russians something that nobody else knew about,” Clayton reminded him. “If she’d wanted, she could have screwed up Jarvis’s career sooner by telling you, or Sir Robin Algar or someone. Telling the Russians made no sense. The fact was she told nobody until I stumbled across the possibility and forced her into admitting the fact. So that put me in the frame. I could have told the Russians,” continued Clayton. “But nobody on that list of five people seemed to have the slightest motive for telling anyone, let alone the Russians.”

“We could have just asked Barbara, of course, but that would have alerted her to the fact that we suspected she could be a spy of some sort,” said Marsden, “but we chose not put her on notice and on her guard, just in case.”

“Suppose we were wrong, after all,” postured Clayton.

“You mean Barbara did tell them?” said an incredulous Marsden.

“It could have been an elaborate, and rather clever, diversion, getting the birth certificate.”

“A double bluff, by a double agent?”

“It certainly put us off her trail, if she does turn out to be some kind of agent. And of course it could still be her Mother, Mrs Wilkinson. We know virtually nothing about her.”

“This gets worse and worse,” said a weary Nick Marsden.

“There’s nothing we can do about it at the moment,” said Clayton, “except register the fact. We’ve uncovered nothing new, but I’ll get some special checks done on Mrs W’s background. Since they’ve both disappeared, we need to know more about the woman.”

“I think I’ll get upstairs to the office and relieve Peter. Do you want him down here?”

“Not yet. Why don’t you try to finish his briefing and take him round the place? You know the man, after all, and it might help to get your mind off things for a bit. If it’s quiet for a minute, I’ll ring up and find out how Dusty is getting on.”

“Let me know. It would be nice to go up to see him again, when he’s fit enough.”

When Marsden got back to his office, he found Peter Northcot there, with his feet up on the desk.

“Making yourself at home, then!”

“I’ve been reading this old brief. Gladys found it for me. This is some organisation you’ve got here by the sound of it. I think I’m looking forward to my time with you.”

“I wrote that brief, although some time ago now. Not much has changed since then, except the operations currently under way, but I can update you about those easily enough. Bill has suggested I show you around the place, for you to meet people.”

“I’ve already met some of them; Gladys took me to a few. But there are plenty I haven’t met.”

On their way round the building, Nick was able to fill in a bit more of the background to the Barclay/Lloyd case, and told Peter about the rescue mission he had mounted in Switzerland to help out Dusty Miller.

“There aren’t many parts of the world where you could mount an operation like that at such short notice,” remarked Peter, “although I did have to get out of Hong Kong pretty damned quickly.”

“And your father, too, I gather.”

“God bless Suzy for fixing both,” said Peter. “She was my contact at the Embassy – Chinese working for us, but utterly reliable and really on the ball.”

“It does help to have top level support,” agreed Nick, “and to have people around who are on permanent standby to go anywhere at any time. Section 11 works like that – wherever we are, we are on call at no-notice to do anything or go anywhere at any time. It’s what we do.”

“It can be a bit lonely at times, don’t you think?”

“It is really. You never know who you can trust.”

“And you can’t really tell people what you do. Immediate family perhaps, but even they can talk out of turn. So you end up inventing a job, a role in life. Maintaining your cover is the difficult bit. You are forever living a lie.”

“Which is probably why not many of us are married. I was supposed to be marrying Barbara, as you know. I thought she would be safe enough, in the same business, and all that.”

“Maybe she is, but perhaps not on the same side,” said Peter.

“Begins to look like it,” admitted Nick.

“Suzy’s come over here now, too, and we are living together, with my father in his cottage in Hampshire. When I get home, that is.”

“Why did you have to leave in such a hurry, as a matter of interest?”

“I’d just got my father onto one of our escape routes. He’d had a bad time getting out of North Korea, and when I got back to my Kowloon flat, I found a body lying across the bed. British Airways chap, as it happened. I wasn’t sure if the bullet was meant for me or my father, so I bolted to be on the safe side. Suzy fixed that, too.”

“Funny old life isn’t it,” said Nick with a grin. “This, by the way, is where ‘Bottom’ lives, who runs our armoury. If ever you need a weapon of some sort, he’s the man to see.”

“But only if I’ve got a piece of paper from Gladys, I believe!” The two men chuckled.

They completed their tour, during which Peter met most of the people he would need to deal with.

“I think we should get back to the Ops Room,” said Nick. “Poor old Bill has already had one ticking off from his wife, Catherine, for forgetting to go home for two days!”

“I gather she has an interesting background, too,” queried Peter.

“Very,” agreed Nick. “Retired SAS sergeant, who was our Chief Clerk when Bill and I worked in Northern Ireland.² She left the Army so they could get married. She had a very tough time behind the lines in Iraq, by the way, where she and Dusty Miller served together. She was caught and roughed up, but managed to escape and somehow made her way back to base across the desert.”

“Someone else marrying into the job, if you see what I mean. Any children?”

“No. Bill’s first wife was killed by a terrorist car bomb shortly after they arrived in Northern Ireland. They hadn’t been married long, and Bill has always believed the bomb was meant for him – she was in his car.”

“How awful.”

“I think Bill always wanted children of his own. He’s always made a big fuss of Donald when they’ve met, and when he was in Northern Ireland he spent all of his spare time mending old toys which the Army sent to a children’s home every Christmas. Are you and Suzy hoping for a family?”

“No. We’re not married even, and it might not be a good idea, knowing the sort of life I lead, and her background with a Chinese family still out there. Not quite marrying into the job!”

“That’s what I hoped I was going to do, but it looks very unlikely now.” said Nick. “I wonder if Bill wants one of us to man the shop overnight while this current flap is on,” he said, changing the subject.

“I’ll take on tonight, if he does. You look like you still need a bit of recovery time.”

² Read ‘Their Own Game’, by Duncan James

On their way past, Nick stuck his head round the door of Gladys's office.

"You OK?" he asked.

"Getting on fine, thanks. Bill asked me to find out who owned the Battersea place. I've just about done that, but I thought I'd find out more about the owners, so I'm on to Companies House and waiting for them to ring me back."

"So who does it belong to?" asked Nick.

"A property development and management company, based in Belgravia. Sounds very posh, with an address like that. I might look them up on the internet to see if they've got a web site, if I get a minute. I've filled in the claim for Bill to sign."

"What claim form, for heaven's sake?"

"I had to pay the Land Registry people, so I used my debit card; I think Companies House charge as well, so I'll put it all on the same form. Tomorrow will do, if he's busy."

The two men laughed as they moved on.

"That woman gets worse and worse, but she's efficient," said Nick "And the more we find, the more bewildering this case gets, as well."

Gladys called after them. "If you're going near the Mess on your walkabout, I could do with a sandwich or something if you wouldn't mind. I haven't had lunch yet, and I'm waiting for a phone call!"

"I'll keep the receipt," replied Peter!

CHAPTER 8

DUSTY MILLER – WHERE'S ANNIE?

Bill Clayton was having a busy time, running this operation, even though lots of other specialists were doing most of the leg work. He was nevertheless directing their efforts to make sure they covered all the ground that needed to be covered, and that no time was wasted in going down blind alleys.

There were several important aspects of this case that needed to be covered, and answers found to crucial questions. He was now convinced, as Nick was, he believed, that one of the Wilkinsons had been supplying information to the Russians. To be quite sure, though, they needed to go through the lists they had prepared to eliminate other possible suspects. Not everyone had access to everything. When they had a short list, it would be up to the MI5 chaps to go through the names to double-check their security clearances and so on, and try to establish if and how they could have been passing on information. He knew they had already started on some of the prime suspects, and he had just briefed David Coulson to make sure that the Wilkinsons were now part of that exercise.

What Bill had difficulty working out, though, was why, if they were the people responsible, they had suddenly decided to leave in such a great hurry. Had they perhaps believed that they were about to be uncovered? Whatever the reason, they were obviously well prepared to get out in a rush at short notice, which added to the belief that they were in some way responsible.

There were several questions about the Wilkinsons which needed to be answered as soon as possible before anyone could begin to establish the truth. The most important was to discover where they had gone, and this meant finding Barbara's car, for a start. Bill also

wanted to see the analysis of the phone call poor little Donald had bravely tried to make, in case there was some clue there as to the origin of the call. The background could also reveal something. Were they in another house somewhere, or a restaurant, or where? And who was the woman who had snatched the phone from the boy? Was there enough to identify her? It surely must have been Barbara or her Mother, but where were they? If only the call had been properly monitored, so that they knew where it had been made from.

Clayton was also keen to know what, if anything, the two computers would reveal. He knew nothing about these things, but the GCHQ people had thought there could still be some useful information on them somewhere, even without the hard drive. If anyone could find out, they could, he was sure. But he was also impatient.

The Wilkinson's background was also something of a mystery. Did they come from York, as Nick thought possible? People were checking. And what about the house they lived in, apparently for free? Gladys was checking on that.

He looked again at their list of people who knew enough to have been of use to the Russians, either directly to Makienko or via the Embassy or some other route. Dusty was on the list, but he was sure he would soon be removed from it, if only because he and Makienko had nearly killed one another.

On an impulse, and as it was reasonably quiet, he picked up the phone and got through to the military wing at Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham. He spoke to an orderly in the trauma unit, Corporal Phil Saunders, and introduced himself as 'Colonel' Clayton. He rarely did that, and disliked being addressed as Colonel, since he was now out of the Army and a civil servant, but he thought he might be told more if the military knew him by rank.

"I'd like to know how one of my chaps is getting on," he said to the orderly. "Staff Sergeant Dusty Miller."

"Hold on, Sir; I'll look at his chart," said Saunders. "I haven't been on duty for 12 hours, but when I last saw him, he was doing remarkably well, all things considered."

"What do you mean by 'all things considered'?" Clayton asked.

"I mean considering the state he was in when he arrived, he has made amazing progress in very short time. He's plainly as tough as old boots, your man."

"Tell me more."

"Well, he was all-but dead when we got hold of him, and although he's still in intensive care, the Colonel is hoping we may be able to get him into a proper ward tomorrow. He's off the ventilator, and we hope his internal injuries will have healed enough for him to be able to take a little food and drink by mouth. He's undergone lots of surgery, both to his smashed up limbs and to his internal organs, and come through all that quite remarkably well."

"I'm naturally delighted to hear that. Is he fit enough to have a word?"

"He's sleeping at the moment, so I won't disturb him, but I'll make sure your name goes into the log book we are keeping for him. We do that for all our patients, so that when they're well enough they can catch up on the treatment they've had, visitors and phone calls, and so on."

"Make sure you pass on my best wishes, and from everyone else in the team here."

"Of course I shall. Commander Marsden has been on a couple of times."

"He's my second-in-command," said Clayton.

“He also brought him in off the aircraft, according to our notes.”

“Is there any way you can let me know when he’s fit enough to be visited, or to speak to on the phone?”

“I can’t make that decision, Sir, but I’ll get one of the officers here to give you a ring. Same number as Commander Marsden?”

“That’ll find me, and thanks for your help.”

He had just ended the call and was replacing the chart, when Miller stirred.

“How are you feeling?” asked the Saunders.

“In a bit of pain, to be honest,” he said weakly. Somehow, he seemed to have no strength in his voice. In fact he felt like that all over. No strength anymore.

“Would you like a pain killer?”

“It’s worse than that, but not as bad as it has been. Where’s Annie?”

“You’ve asked before, but there’s nobody here of that name that I know. Your boss has just been on the phone, by the way. He wants a chat when you’re fit enough and feel like it.”

“There was somebody here called Annie when I got here, I’m sure. I don’t remember much, but I remember her. She was in uniform.” Miller winced from the pain.

“Stop chattering and relax,” commanded Saunders. “I’ll get the duty doctor, and sort out your pain. A shot of morphine sounds like the answer.”

An RAF doctor arrived. Miller thought he was a Squadron Leader. Nice to be among military people, Miller thought; made him feel at home. He’d seen him around before, too. According to his name tag, he was Drew Wilson.

“When can I get rid of all these damned pipes and tubes?” Miller asked him.

“Some of them tomorrow, we hope. You’re almost well enough now to move out of intensive care and into a small ward. Then we must get you on your feet again, and get you moving about. Where’s the pain?”

“Leg and chest, mostly, and my arm a bit.”

“Stomach?”

Dusty thought for a second.

“Sore, but feels OK I suppose.”

“That’s good. That means some of your injuries are healing well. We may try you on some liquid by mouth tomorrow, to see how you get on with that, and perhaps even a little real food.”

“I could murder a beer and a bacon sandwich,” said Dusty, with no real conviction.

“Not quite ready for that yet, but at the rate you’re going, it won’t be long.”

The doctor plugged a tube into a needle already strapped in to his wrist.

“Hold this,” he said, giving him what seemed like a rubber ball. “This is morphine. Next time you’re in pain, give this a gentle squeeze and you can inject it yourself. Don’t use too much of it at a time, although there isn’t enough here for you to overdose. From now on, you’re in charge of your own pain management, but don’t hesitate to give us a shout if it gets too bad. Hopefully, from now on it will only get better.”

“I’d like to know what’s wrong with me,” said Dusty.

“We’ll give you a full briefing a bit later, don’t worry, although it will be difficult to know where to start.”

“I can’t feel much of my leg,” said Dusty. “You haven’t taken it off have you?”

“No, it’s all there, but we did think we’d have to amputate when you first got here. It was a shocking mess. You’ve had lots of surgery, and there’s more to come I’m afraid, but you seem to be over the worst of it now. It was touch and go at one time, though, when you first got here, but you’re obviously very fit, or you would never have pulled through.”

“I want to know what’s wrong with me,” said Miller again.

“Full briefing later when you’re a bit better,” promised the Squadron Leader. “Just relax. You’re going to be all right now, believe me.”

“Do you know where Annie is?” asked Dusty, changing the subject. “She was here when I came in, but I haven’t seen her since.”

“There’s nobody here of that name, so far as I know,” said the Officer, frowning. “Perhaps you were dreaming or hallucinating. You were drifting in and out of consciousness for a few days, and we eventually had to induce a coma so that we could get on with some essential surgery.”

“I’m not dreaming, I’m sure. I remember her being here. One of the few things I do remember of recent days. I’d like to meet her again, that’s all.”

“How’s the pain?” asked the doctor, getting back to business and changing the subject.

“Going off, thanks. This is a useful piece of kit. I feel drowsy.”

“Doze off then, and leave everything to us. You’ve nothing to worry about. Anything else before I get on?”

“Find Annie, that’s all.”

One day was much like any other for Dusty at the moment. He was pretty helpless when it came to doing anything for himself, but he was at last beginning to be a bit more aware of his surroundings. They were looking after him well enough, no mistake. He was washed and shaved promptly every morning, and everything was kept clean and tidy and in its place. Quite a military routine, in fact. But he wanted to know what had happened to him, and more important, what was going to happen to him next. He could remember very little indeed about the recent past. Skiing with Lloyd in the Swiss Alps, then not much else until now.

His only clear memory was of the girl called Annie. He had a vision of her wiping blood from his lips and mopping his brow, like some guardian angel in uniform. Where was that, he wondered. He recollected the excruciating pain. He could visualise her face – she had a nice smile he remembered. He was quite sure she was with him in this hospital, but nobody seemed to know anything about her. For some reason he couldn’t explain, he just knew he wanted to meet her again. To say ‘thanks’, perhaps. She was part of his recent past, he was sure of that, and could perhaps fill in the detail of what had happened to him.

The Squadron leader doctor chap – what was his name? – had promised him a full briefing when he was better. When would that be? Tomorrow? What day was tomorrow? They said they might move him tomorrow, and get rid of some of these damned pipes. And get him on his feet again soon. That would be something. At least he still had them both, apparently, although he could not feel or move one of them. Or could he? A great effort, but perhaps he could after all, just a bit. But it hurt like hell just making the effort. He squeezed

the ball thing in his hand, and eventually the pain went again, and he drifted off into another fitful doze.

He wished Annie was here with her smile, to lean over him and mop his brow.

He stirred, after a time.

So the boss had been on asking about him, had he? The Colonel. He hated being called that, but it didn't seem right somehow for a mere Staff Sergeant to call a colonel 'Bill'. Good bloke, he was. Interesting outfit he ran, as well.³

Dusty wondered if he would ever be fit enough to get back to active service again. If not, he wouldn't mind a job in the Colonel's organisation. Nice people, too. He recalled them all, which he suddenly realised was an improvement on recent days – his brain was starting to work again. He checked them off, one by one as he lay in bed, wired up to God knows what sort of machinery.

The guy who ran the armoury, ex-RN Petty Officer. They called him 'Bottom', because he once boasted of being a top-gun. Poor sod, having to live with that. But he was a bloody good shot, with almost any weapon you could give him. Dusty had only just scored higher than him when he was being put through his paces when he joined.

Dusty frowned. The thought of a Royal Navy Petty Officer stirred another distant memory, but he couldn't place it. It'll come, no doubt.

And dear old 'Aunty', who ran the clothing store. An ex-actor, or something to do with the theatre, and a bit precious, but he knew his job OK. Dress you up in anything you wanted, and did the make up as well, complete with false moustache if you felt inclined for a complete disguise. So far, Dusty hadn't had to use his services, he was pleased to say.

Then there was Gladys, who did all the Admin. He rather liked her. Knew where you were with Gladys, you did. A bit of a rough diamond, who smoked like a chimney in spite of the law, but as straight as a die. You couldn't do much in that place unless she knew about it and you had signed one of her blasted forms. Dusty grinned. The fuss to draw an HK53 from the armoury, and take it abroad, too! But she fixed it, bless her. Try as he might, though, he couldn't clearly remember why he had wanted it in the first place. Someone would tell him if he asked, he supposed, but it didn't matter now.

Commander Nick Marsden was deputy to the Colonel, and a really good guy. Special Services, like himself. Royal Marines. He had a vague recollection of meeting him somewhere unexpectedly recently, but couldn't put his finger on it. Dreaming again, perhaps.

Now he remembered something, though. Marsden was planning to marry the PA, Barbara. She worked for both of them. Him and the Colonel. Dusty had a vague idea that he was supposed to be the best man, but couldn't think why or when it was or anything. He hoped he would be well enough by then. He also hoped the Commander was doing the right thing. Nice enough girl and all that, and made good coffee in the office, but Dusty wasn't all that sure about her for some reason. Had an illegitimate son by the Colonel's predecessor, for one thing. Not the sort of thing a nice girl does. Jarvis, that was the chap's name. He remembered now. It had been his job to keep an eye on Jarvis. Hadn't he eventually been

³ Read 'Motorbike Men' by Duncan James.

killed by a Russian agent? Poisoned in a coffee bar? Yes, he damned well had! He had been there when it happened. It was all coming back to him now.

But his leg was hurting again. And his arm. And now he had a headache as well. Too much thinking; trying to remember things. He had to, though. He couldn't just lay there doing nothing. He needed to get everything working again, back to normal. He was doing his best. If he tried hard, he thought he could just about move his foot, or at least a couple of toes. Not long ago, he couldn't even feel the damn thing. Perhaps he should tell someone. But the effort brought the pain back. Not a lot, like before, but enough.

He wondered if this ball thing worked on headaches as well. He squeezed it gently and drifted off again. Where's Annie, he wondered. Did she really exist, even?

He wanted to think so.

A couple of days later, and Dusty was beginning to feel more like his old self again. They had moved him, for a start, and he'd got rid of some of the bits of kit he had been wired up to for so long. He was now in a small ward with other blokes, in a proper bed, and they were beginning to give him things to eat and drink. Real food, not stuff poured down a pipe.

What's more, they were getting him on his feet a bit. He needed a lot of help, but it made a change just to be able to get out of bed and in to the chair next to it. They said it would be a long time before he went solo on his own feet, and then he would need a stick, but at least he still had his leg, not like some of the other poor chaps around him. They had lost arms, hands, feet, legs – you name it – and yet they were all mostly cheerful in spite of everything.

The medical people had told Dusty that he was very lucky not to have had his left leg amputated below the knee. They said they had the operating theatre all ready to do it, but when they got there, they had decided to have a go at saving it. From now on, though, he would set off all the alarms at every airport in the world. His leg was held together with metal plates and pins. So was his right arm, too, although that had not been so badly damaged. Just as well, since he was right handed. They were as pleased as punch when he told them that he could move his toes a bit, in spite of the pain. But he had control over that himself, now, and found he needed to pump morphine in less and less often.

They had eventually got round to telling him everything that had been wrong with him, and give him some sort of prognosis for the future. He agreed with them. He was lucky to be alive, but then so were most of the others in the trauma unit. Almost without exception, they had been blown up in Afghanistan.

Shortly after they had moved him out of intensive care, one of them, a Corporal in the 1st Rifles, had made his way over to Dusty on a Zimmer frame sort of thing. He had only one leg, and one hand. The rest had been blown away by a roadside IED.

"I owe you an apology," he had said.

"Why's that then?" asked Dusty. "I don't remember meeting you before."

"You haven't," he replied. "I'm Stan Archer; Corporal, 1st Rifles. But I blew my top the other day, out loud and in public, and I'm sorry. You can see I've lost a few bits and pieces in Afghanistan, but four of the other guys on my patrol were killed in the same explosion, so I'm the lucky one. I'm gutted, as you can imagine, so I lost my rag when I thought you'd just been skiing."

“Terrible about your blokes. I know how you feel. You’ll take years to get over the fact that you survived and they didn’t. But why apologise to me?”

“Because I took it for granted that you had been hurt out there too, but when they told me you’d been skiing in Switzerland, I’m afraid I hit the roof. Totally blew my top. When he heard, the Colonel took me to one side, and explained that you were Special Forces, and why you were in Switzerland, and that you had a gallantry award for what you did behind the lines in Iraq, and all that. So I’m sorry.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Dusty. “I’d have done the same, I expect.”

“You badly hurt?” asked the man.

“Nearly lost a leg, but they managed to stitch it back on, somehow. And I’ve got a dodgy arm and lots wrong with my plumbing – lungs, stomach, that sort of thing. Hypothermia was a big problem, seemingly, but luckily they got me out of the mountains before I got frostbite.”

“Frostbite isn’t much of a problem in the desert. Who got you out, as a matter of interest?”

“Special Forces team parachuted in.”

“You must be quite important, then.”

“Somebody thought so.”

“Well, I’m really sorry, anyway. I just didn’t know. I’ll buy you a beer when you’re fit,” said Stan.

The two men shook hands. Left handed.

“You’ve got time to save up,” said Dusty. “I’m off alcohol for a bit, since they’ve taken out one of my kidneys. They say I’ll manage all right with just one, but no beer yet.”

“What was wrong with the kidney?”

“Nothing, actually. It was in perfectly good working order, so they said, except it had a bullet hole straight through it, so they took it out.” Dusty reached for his bed-side locker. “I’ve got the bullet, if you’d like to see it.”

“No thanks,” said Stan. “Anyway, I’m sorry, and I’ve told everyone else who heard me loose off.”

“Say no more about it,” said Dusty. “I must say, it’s nice to be among military chaps in here, rather than be stuck in some civilian hospital with coughs and in-growing toenails. At least we all have something in common.”

“And the staff are totally brilliant, too, although not all of them are military. There are civilian surgeons and nurses here as well.”

“Talking of staff,” said Dusty, “have you come across a girl called Annie since you’ve been here?”

“Can’t say I have. Why.”

“I’ll swear she was here when I came in, but nobody seems to have heard of her. I suppose I must have been dreaming. Pity, that. I would have liked to meet her again.”

“Dream on! If you ever want anything to read, by the way, just shout. I’ve got loads of books, and when you’re properly up and about, there’s a decent common room where we can all sit and feel sorry for ourselves.”

“Can’t wait,” said Dusty.

After that, several other chaps came across for a chat. Dusty quite liked having visitors. It perked him up, and took his mind off things. But he found he got very tired, quite quickly. One day he would be able to get out of his chair and visit others, but he had more surgery to go through first.

He wondered if anyone from the office would come down.

Colonel Graham knew about Miller's background because Bill Clayton had told him.

"One of my orderlies, Corporal Phil Saunders told me you wanted a word, and I was quite keen to talk to you, too," Graham had said.

"Well, thanks for ringing. I really wanted a first-hand account from you of Miller's condition. I feel directly responsible, since I sent him out to Switzerland in the first place."

"And I want to know why you did that," said Graham, "and a bit of background about the man himself. Just who have I got here?"

By the end of the conversation, both men were a lot wiser.

"I shall need to talk to you again," concluded Graham. "The more Miller gets his brain into gear again and remembers the past, the more he wants to know about his future. At the moment, my view is that he will not be able to return to active service, certainly not as he has known it in the past, but that he will be perfectly capable of light duties and what the RAF people here call 'flying a mahogany bomber'. In a few weeks, Miller will be going to the Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court, but before he goes there, I shall need to know what the future holds for him and what additional or new training he will need if you should decide to take him back, always assuming, of course, that he wants to return to your unit rather than go somewhere else."

"I will take him back here without hesitation, so long as he is as mentally alert as he always was, but he must be able to accept that his daring-do days in the SAS are over," said Clayton.

"I'll have a better assessment for you in a week or so," promised Graham, "but he'll be keen to know that there's a place for him within your organisation when he's fit enough. It would be good for him if you or someone senior could get up here to pay him a short visit. He's fit enough now."

"I'll see if my deputy, Commander Marsden, can get over. I'm a bit tied down at the moment, but he could get away if he wants. He led the team that got Miller out of Switzerland."

"And brought him here from the aircraft. I remember meeting him briefly when Miller arrived. Get him to give me a ring if he can spare a few hours. I'm sure it would do Miller good, and he can chat about the future at the same time," said Graham. "Talking about the future, what about training for Miller. Can you fix that?"

"I can arrange whatever training he needs for whatever job I think he'll be fit for. At the moment, it's going through my mind to send him on an MI5 course. Intelligence Officer or something like that. I have plenty of those people on detachment here, so he would fit in nicely."

"Which reminds me," said Graham. "Do you by any chance have anyone on your staff called Annie?"

"No, I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

“It’s just that Miller keeps asking about someone of that name. He seems convinced that she was here when he arrived, but nobody knows who he’s talking about. Hallucinating I expect – it often happens.”

“If he’s going off his head,” replied Clayton, “you can keep him!”

Nick Marsden was not having the happiest time of his life.

He was really out of training for the sort of operation he had recently led into Switzerland, and the exertion of it had taken a lot out of him. He had also shot and killed a man, something which he had never enjoyed. But it had to be done. In doing so, he had also saved at least one life, so he supposed it had been worth it. Otherwise, Dusty Miller would certainly not have been alive now, and perhaps not Roger Lloyd either.

To make matters ten times worse, if that was possible, he got back to base to find that the woman he was supposed to be marrying had not simply disappeared, but was also most probably an enemy agent.

Nick had known better days, no doubt about it. But he wanted to see Miller again, and apparently Miller was keen to see him, too, now that he was on the road to recovery. Miller didn’t get many visitors. In fact, not any. He had no family apart from a distant cousin somewhere, and they were rarely in touch. But that’s the only next of kin he had ever declared on his records, and everyone else he knew were all working colleagues, mostly in London.

This was why Marsden was keen to make a visit, although he had been told it would only be a short one, as Miller got very tired quite quickly.

Before he went, they decided to make a few changes in the office. The search for the informer had been narrowed down quite significantly, and many of the people who could have been passing information to the Russians had been deleted from the list of suspects, mostly because they didn’t have access to all the information that had obviously been leaked.

In fact, it began to look like a shortlist of one. His future wife, Barbara; or perhaps her Mother was an unlikely second bet. But they still had no idea what had happened to the Wilkinson family, and this was the key to their enquiries. So it was decided that Bill Clayton could return to his proper role as Head of Section 11, while still monitoring the ‘spy hunt’, with Nick as his deputy. That left Peter Northcot free to concentrate full time on trying to trace the Wilkinsons.

So Nick was able to get away for a few hours to travel to Birmingham for a visit to Dusty Miller. Bill had briefed him in full about his conversation with the Head of the trauma unit at Selly Oak, so he knew what to expect. After much debate, it was decided that he would go in uniform, since it was a military unit he was visiting. The staff would respect his rank, and Miller would be just as relaxed whatever he wore, not least because Marsden had been in uniform, of sorts, when they last met. Not that he expected Miller to remember.

He drove himself in one of the cars from the Clerkenwell garage. Gladys had made him sign for it, of course.

He was shocked at what he saw when he arrived in Dusty’s ward. He was sitting, dozing, in a chair beside his bed, with his leg swathed in plaster and heavily bandaged, propped up so as to be horizontal. His right arm was similarly plastered, and he looked dreadful.

He stirred when Nick appeared accompanied by Colonel Graham, and managed a broad grin.

“You’ve no idea how nice it is to see you again,” said Miller. “I haven’t really been well enough for visitors, even if there was anybody who could have come.”

“Great to see you, too. You’re looking a million times better than when I last saw you.”

“I feel it, too. I was pretty badly damaged, so they say, but I can’t remember much of the detail about what happened.”

“I’ve heard. We had a good briefing from your Colonel here.”

“I’ll leave you two to chat, but don’t get him too tired,” said Graham. “Check in with me on your way out, if you would,” he said to Marsden.

“Of course.”

“So tell me what’s going on back at the office,” demanded Miller.

“For a start, I’m sad to say that you will not, after all, be best man at my wedding.”

“Why? What have I done?”

“Not you, Dusty. Barbara. She’s completely disappeared, with her Mother and Donald, and we haven’t a clue why or where to.”

“I’ll tell you why,” said Dusty. “She’s your informer, I’ll bet anything.”

“What makes you so sure? If you know anything, let’s have it.”

“Nothing in the way of what you might call evidence, but there’s always been something odd about that girl, if you ask me. I don’t want to cause offence, but ... well, devious, almost.”

Dusty shifted awkwardly.

“I used to drop in to her office quite often for a coffee – she made good coffee – and now and then I seemed to catch her by surprise, almost. She would hurriedly shove something in a drawer or shut down the computer, or hang up if she was on the phone. Know what I mean? I wondered a couple of times, too, if she might have been speaking in a foreign language of some sort on the phone, but I’m no linguist. A bit of Arabic and that’s all.”

“That’s very interesting, Dusty. Thanks for that.”

“Hope I haven’t spoken out of turn, or upset you at all.”

“Of course not. I was very upset at first, of course, to think the girl might have been two-timing me in some way, but all the circumstantial evidence seems to be pointing her way. Not only has she disappeared, but seems to have been planning it for some time. No papers or anything left behind, and she even took the hard drive out of her computers in the office and at home.”

“There you are, then.”

“Well, we shall see. There’s a new bloke in the office concentrating on trying to find out what happened to them. Chap called Peter Northcot, retired major in Intelligence, who did a couple of under-cover tours in Hong Kong. Good bloke. You’ll like him.”

“I’m coming back then?”

“If you want to and when you’re fit enough. We’ll sort that out later, but there’ll always be a place there for you.”

“Thanks for that. I’ve been a bit worried about the future.”

“Don’t be; just relax. Is there anything you want now? I didn’t bring anything. I didn’t think you’d want flowers, and chocolates could just as well kill you, the state your guts are in.”

They both laughed.

“It’s just good to see you again and there’s really nothing I want. Somehow, they managed to get all the kit back here that I left behind in Switzerland,” he pointed to his locker, “although don’t ask me how. Talking of Switzerland how’s Dr. Lloyd?”

“He’s OK, and back at work. He’s been on the phone to us asking about you.”

“He’s been on here, so I’m told, but I don’t know if anyone else has.”

“They are supposed to be keeping a diary or log book or something for you – all your treatment every day, progress you’re making, visitors, phone calls and everything, so that you can catch up when you’re well enough. Have you seen it yet?”

“I haven’t, but I’d like to.”

“I’ll see if I can get it,” said Marsden, and went off to the Colonel’s office.

“Here it is,” he announced when he returned, “bang up to date, even with my visit today in it.”

“It would be nice to see Colonel Bill and Catherine sometime soon,” said Dusty, leafing through the notebook.

“I’ll make sure they pay a visit,” said Marsden. “It shouldn’t be too difficult now we’ve an extra man on board, and the”

Miller gave a shout.

“She’s here! She’s in here!” pointing to a page. “I knew I wasn’t dreaming. She’s been on the phone a couple of times asking about me.”

“Who are we talking about, Dusty?”

“Annie. I’ve asked everyone about Annie, and they all said she didn’t exist and I’d been dreaming. But here she is actually phoning up to ask how I was. I really would like to meet her again. She’s got a lovely smile.”

“But who is she exactly?” asked Nick.

“I wish I knew. She hasn’t left a phone number. I don’t remember anything much about it, but I’m sure she was here when I arrived.”

“In that case, I know who you mean.”

“You do?”

“Certainly, and she *was* here when you arrived. She’s Annie Mackie, a Royal Navy Petty Officer Medical Assistant.”

“How the hell do you know her?”

“She was part of my team, that’s how.”

“Do you mean she was in Switzerland?”

“We parachuted in together, and got you out. I’d go so far as to say that she kept you alive, and that if it wasn’t for her you wouldn’t be here now.”

“She parachuted in to get me? What sort of girl is that, for God’s sake?”

“She’s in the Special Forces, like us. Arctic trained, like me, which is why I got her into my team. We both brought you in here from the Hercules – that’s why you think she was here when you arrived. She brought you here.”

“I can’t believe this,” said an incredulous Miller. He looked again at his log book.

“It’s three days since she phoned,” he said. “Where is she based? I really want to talk to her again, and see her again if possible. I began to think I was going off my trolley, when nobody knew who I was talking about.”

“She’s based at RAF Brize Norton on the Tactical Medical Wing. Give me a minute and I’ll see if I can track her down.”

Miller sat back, exhausted but excited.

Marsden went to Col. Graham’s office again.

“Sorry to be a bore, but could I use your phone do you think?”

“Of course, who do you want?”

“The TMW at Brize Norton. I want to track down the RN Petty Officer who came with me when we brought Miller in. He seems very keen to see her again.”

“Her name’s not Annie something-or-other is it?” asked Graham.

“Annie Mackie. Why?”

“Thank heaven you’ve solved that mystery at last. Miller has been asking everyone about this girl Annie, and of course we had no idea who he was talking about.”

“Well, she’s in his log book as having rung a couple of times asking after him.”

“How silly of us! Somebody should have thought to look in his diary.” said Mark Graham

“He’s very excited that we have found her, I can tell you, but wonders why she hasn’t been in touch for a few days. She’s probably in Afghanistan or somewhere collecting more casualties. She works a lot, I seem to remember, on the Deployable Aeromedical Response Team on six hours’ notice to fly anywhere.”

“We’re due to receive more customers from Bastion tomorrow, so that’s probably what’s happened to the girl.”

He left Marsden to make his call.

“I’ve spoken to the people at Brize Norton,” he told Graham shortly afterwards, “and left a message for her to ring Miller when she can. As you guessed, she’s on a C17 casualty evacuation flight to Afghanistan, due back late tomorrow with a few more for you to deal with. I’ll tell him.”

“Don’t get Miller too excited. I don’t want him to have a relapse or need any more sedation.”

“He’s already overjoyed that we have traced his Annie.”

“So am I! He’s been a proper bore about the girl!”

When Marsden got back to Miller’s bedside, he was sound asleep.

“I’ll tell him when he wakes,” said Graham. “And thanks for coming down. It’s obviously done him good.”

“I hope so. Apart from finding Annie for him, I’ve also told him that we’ll find a job for him if he wants it when he’s recovered. That seemed to cheer him up, as well. And he’s asked if Col. Bill Clayton and his wife can visit, so I’ll fix that when I get back.”

“The boss *and* his wife?” queried Graham.

“Clayton’s wife was in the SAS, and she and Miller served together in Iraq.”

Graham shook his head.

“It really is a small world in the military, isn’t it?”

CHAPTER 9
PETER NORTHCOT – A SHORT LIST OF ONE

Clayton wasn't used to this sort of thing; there was no doubt about it. He was the sort who got on with things. Found out what he needed to know, and then sorted it. Talked to people who might be able to help, gathered information from them, and then decided what to do about it.

But this was different.

This was a major inquiry, which could have ramifications throughout the UK Government. He was trying to find information and facts and eliminate people and clues and find false trails and all that – nothing new. But he wasn't then supposed to do anything much about it. That made a difference. He couldn't afford to cut corners, or act on his usually reliable hunches. This wasn't just him working within his own organisation. This was a lot bigger, and he didn't like it. He somehow felt cramped, knowing that whatever he discovered, he couldn't immediately do anything about it. He had to report what he found to others, higher up the chain, who would then decide what to do.

What made it worse was that he felt that the end result was going to end up on his doorstep, like it or not. And like it or not, he wouldn't be able to do anything about it. He was now quite sure that he knew who the spy was. He was sure he knew who had been tipping off the Russians about what Section 11 was doing. His Section 11. He, Clayton, was 'S' after all. And there it was. On his own doorstep.

And if he was right, there was nothing much he could do about it anyway. The spy had flown. Gone. A member of his staff, that's what hurt. A most trusted member, too. It was of little comfort that the informer had joined Section 11 before his time, moving from the Cabinet Office. It had been their lack of judgement, their failure to complete a thorough and detailed security clearance. It beggared belief that they could have recruited an agent to work at the very top of the Government machine.

And then recommend her move to the most secret of intelligence organisations, Section 11.

Now they were breathing down his neck, expecting him to identify the traitor they had recruited and employed for years.

This simply wasn't good enough.

He had a good enough team, no doubt about that. But eventually, the buck was going to stop with him. The Cabinet Office had washed its hands of its earlier catastrophic errors, and left it to him to sort out the mess.

OK. So that's what he'd do.

But he'd make sure he had words with the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Algar – strong words. This present operation was tearing the guts out of Section 11, and that wasn't good enough, either. He had already been forced into changing roles, offices, people and everything, but now he was sure he could start getting things back in order. One more change, and that would see the end of the affair. Then, back to normal.

But not until he'd sorted out Sir Robin Algar.

Clayton had been put in charge of the spy hunt for some reason, when it was really MI5's role in life. That's what they did. Had they been behind having the buck passed to him,

he wondered? They had shown themselves to be less than efficient recently. Something else to take up with the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

What the hell.

He had some good guys from MI5 and MI6 attached to his team, including Peter Northcot, who had only recently joined MI5 from the Army. He knew about Northcot, and his reputation. He wasn't strictly speaking part of the spy hunt team, but had been posted in to Section 11 as a member of staff at his own request. He wondered if Northcot was as good as his reputation.

We'll soon see.

Clayton called him in.

Gladys brought them both a coffee, and shut the door behind her on the way out.

"I've got a short straw for you, Peter," announced Bill.

"Tell me."

"Find the Wilkinsons, and find out why they left in such a hurry."

"Is that all?"

"Absolutely all. You are not to get involved in anything else in this outfit until you've done that. Use whatever resources you like, and work with any other members of this enquiry team if you think you can trust them, or with anyone else you think might be able to help. But from now on, that's all you will do."

"Why me? Why not Nick Marsden who's been here longer? Or you?" he asked.

"Nick and I are too close to this, for one thing. Especially Nick. I shall stay in overall charge of the operation, but from now on you will be in the lead. I've been through your service record again, and I'm sure you'll succeed and that I can trust you. Find the Wilkinsons, and you will have found the source of the leaks."

"My view entirely," agreed Northcot, "although I've hardly dared say so before now."

"Why?"

"As you said, you and Nick are too close to this, that's why."

"Especially Nick."

"So I shall deal through you, but, subject to your approval, I can have free reign to do what I want and talk to anyone I need?" asked Peter

"Absolutely. Finding the Wilkinsons is the very top priority now in my view, and you must deal with whoever you think best to help you do that. I want to know what you're doing, of course, but I shall be happy to agree to whatever you want. And you're to talk to whoever you like. Find the Wilkinsons, and you've got a job for life here if you want it. Fail, and you'll spend the rest of your life fishing in Hampshire with your father."

Northcot grinned, stood up, and went to the office door.

"Gladys!" he shouted. "Two more coffees please."

"Comin' up!"

"Logistics first," said Northcot. "Where shall I sit?"

"In this office," replied Clayton. "Nick can keep his old office next door to Gladys the other side, and I'll base myself in the Ops Room. That way, you shouldn't be bothered by odd calls from people like Sir Robin Algar."

"Good. But I shall need to ask guys here and elsewhere to do things in pursuit of these people. Do I ask you first every time?"

“What sort of things?”

“Apart from cups of coffee” Gladys had just appeared with two steaming mugs for them, and biscuits. “For a start I shall want to hire the services of a genealogist to check on the Wilkinson’s backgrounds.”

“Your colleagues in MI5 are already doing that,” protested Clayton.

“They wouldn’t know where to start. A professional will know where to go, what to search, which records to look up, and get the job done in double quick time.”

“Agreed then, but any special reason?”

“Just a hunch that they may not actually come from Yorkshire, or perhaps even be British subjects, so let’s check that out in double quick time. We need to know where they come from, so when I find an expert, I’ll call off my chums in MI5.”

“Next.”

“We must find their car. I want to get the police, through Clive Newell, to start their checks again, and to include all ports and airports – by ‘all’, I mean minor airfields and isolated ports around the coast, as well as the main entry and exit points, and to do so quickly.”

“Agreed.”

“I’ll work with Gladys to find exactly who owns the house they were living in, and why they never seem to have paid any rent for it.”

“Agreed.”

“I need to know more about that phone call from Donald, so I propose to light a fuse under GCHQ. They should have cracked it by now, and the two computer hard drives as well. There could be vital clues there that we are missing. Apart from anything else, that little boy plainly didn’t want to be taken to wherever he was being taken, so he is bound to be kicking up somewhere. Somebody might just notice, and report it. After all, it’s probably a criminal offence taking the boy like that; abduction or kidnapping or something. But wherever he is, he will probably want to come home, and I hope you realise what that means.”

“What?”

“It means you or Nick will have to take him on board, at least initially, as he seems not to have a home here anymore, and no father either since the Russians murdered him.”

“That had *not* occurred to me, I must admit.”

“It might be a good idea if you and Catherine gave it some thought. We will also need to work out how we get him home if he is abroad, as I suspect.”

“You’re right. I suppose we’d better start thinking about that. If he is abroad and does need to be got home, the Embassy will need to get involved, and that means the Foreign Office. Anything else you will be wanting?”

“I shall want to get on to MI6 Moscow station. We need to know what’s going on over there. For instance, what’s Mrs Makienko doing if anything, have they the slightest idea what’s happened to her husband, and have they, by the slightest chance, ever heard of the Wilkinsons.”

“You’re going to be busy, but I’m impressed. You’re even more up to speed than I thought you were. Anything else?”

“I need to talk to your Dusty Miller when he’s well enough, or even before he is, if I can.”

“Nick saw him yesterday, and he mentioned that he had always had a nagging doubt about Barbara for some reason. Described her as ‘shifty’, so Nick said.

“Sooner the better, then.”

“Catherine and I are going to see him tomorrow, so I’ll find out what the score is.”

“Why Catherine as well as you?”

“Catherine was in the SAS and served with Dusty in Iraq, although I didn’t know that myself until quite recently.”

Northcot shook his head.

“It really is a small world in the military, isn’t it?”

‘S’ went back to the Ops Room, and Peter called in Gladys.

“More turmoil,” he announced. “From now on, I sit here, Nick will be in his usual office running the show, and you stay as the ham in the sandwich. The boss is taking root in the Ops Room until we can get things back to something like normal.”

“Normal? What’s normal?”

“When we’ve found what’s happened to Barbara and Mrs Wilkinson and Donald, then we can get back to normal. Not that I know what that really looks like either, since I’m the new boy here.”

“Doing Barbara’s job isn’t normal for me either,” Gladys pointed out, “so we’re in this together.”

“My immediate job is to trace the Wilkinsons.” said Northcot. “Tell me what you’ve found out about their house in Battersea. Who owns it and why haven’t they been paying rent for it?”

“Don’t know about the rent, but I can tell you that the property is registered in the name of Kensington Property Management, based in Belgravia. But I’ve discovered they have several other subsidiary companies registered under their name, and the Battersea house is actually owned and managed by a company called Zenit Estates, based in Highgate.”

“Good work. We need to run a check on Zenit, I think. I’ll get Clive Newell to organise that through his contacts at the Yard.”

“He’s in the Ops Room. I’ll get him on the phone.”

“Better than that. Get him up here if he can spare a few minutes.”

“That’s a nuisance,” announced Gladys. “He drinks tea, and I’m better at coffee!”

Peter told Clive that he had been put in charge of finding the Wilkinsons.

“We’re on track in terms of solving the mystery of who owns the house they lived in, but still have no idea why they never appeared to pay rent. One can only guess. Meanwhile, we need to check out the property company who seems to be managing it. A firm called Zenit, based in Highgate. And we also desperately need to find their car. Until that is traced, we cannot begin to work out where they might be. Can you get your chums to renew their efforts to get on to those two issues as a matter of urgency? In terms of the car, we want every airport and sea port car park checked, including small airfields, and secluded harbours round the coast. That’s a bit manpower intensive, I know, but it has to be done, and smartly.”

“I’ll get on to it right away,” promised Clive. “Has it occurred to you, by the way, that the property company is based in the same area as the Russian Consulate and Trade Delegation? Could be a coincidence, but you never know.”

“As you say, you never know. We had better not ignore the coincidence, so perhaps you’d ask David Poulson to check for any connection, would you. It’s about time colleagues in MI5 did something useful; they seem slow at everything.”

“Something else rings a bell too. Do you ever watch football on TV?”

“Rarely. Why?”

“I’m sure there is a football team called Zenit, or something like that. Been in the Euro League or one of those international championships. I’ll check on them. Could be another coincidence, but they could be Russian, too. I’ll look them up on the internet.”

“Good thinking.”

“Next time I come up, I’ll have coffee, I think,” said Clive, taking his still-full mug.

“When you’ve told Gladys, ask her to come in will you please,” laughed Peter.

When she appeared, Gladys said, “I told you about my tea, didn’t I?”

“Stick at what you do best, Gladys.”

She grinned.

“I’m not sure where you’re going to start on this one, but can you find me a top-quality professional genealogist?”

“A what?”

“Someone who traces your ancestors. I need to hire one, and quickly.”

“To see if the Wilkinsons really do come from Yorkshire?” guessed Gladys.

“Spot on.”

“I’ll tell you what. There’s a sort of Family History place down the road. A family Record Office, I think they call it, run by the Government. I’ll pay them a visit for a start. I seem to remember that Nick managed to find Donald’s birth certificate there. I’ll ask him, and go there right away. What do you want me to do if I find one?”

“Hire him. I need him to work full time for as long as it takes.”

“OK,” said Gladys. “But I’m not sure I’ve got a form for that.”

“Before you go, could you ask Frank Browne to come up? I need to ask a favour of MI6, and I want him to light a fire under GCHQ. They’re being far too slow for my liking.”

“Shall I tell him he’s in for a bollocking?”

“No thanks, Gladys.”

Clive Newell rang.

“I’ve checked on Zenit,” he announced. “They’re a Russian football side, based in St. Petersburg.”

“I’ll be damned,” said Northcot.

“Probably a coincidence. They are third from the top of their league, by the way.”

“Tell David Poulson, in case someone in his organisation knows about the property company.”

“I’ve got the Yard, by the way, to regard the Battersea house as a possible crime scene, and to keep it under guard until we say different. It occurred to me that if the Zenit people hear that their property is unoccupied, they may try to re-possess it and empty it. We wouldn’t want that, would we?”

“Too bloody right we wouldn’t.”

Frank Browne appeared.

“Come in, and grab a seat,” invited Northcot.

“Bill told me you’re in charge of finding Barbara and family.”

“Right; and I need your help. Urgent help, in fact. The longer we are finding them, the more damage they may do if they do turn out to be the informers we are looking for.”

“Can’t argue with that.”

“Want a coffee while you’re here?” asked Peter.

“Rather than tea,” said Frank. “I’m told Gladys isn’t that good at tea.”

Peter hit the buzzer, and somehow got through to Gladys’s answerphone.

‘Barbara has left, I’m in charge, and I’m out. Leave your number.’

Short and to the point, thought Peter.

“You’ll have to wait. She’s up the road somewhere looking for a genealogist. The point is, Frank, I need things done quickly as well as thoroughly. With all due respect, your lot at GCHQ, who forgot to monitor the phone in the first place, should by now have done some sort of analysis on the call from Donald. And they should also have managed to come up with something from the two computer hard drives they took away. I need results and I need them soon. Like now, in fact.”

“I’m surprised myself that they haven’t been back to us yet, to be honest. Leave it with me, and I’ll kick a few arses.”

“If you’d be so kind, perhaps you could let me know – shall we say, within an hour? – when I might expect to hear something useful. I also want a contact I can talk to at your Moscow station.”

“I’ll get that for you right away, unless you want me to talk to them?”

“No, I don’t.”

Browne had got the message by then, and left.

“Sorry about the coffee,” said Peter, as Frank reached the door, “but we’re in a hurry. This is urgent, tell your people.”

Peter Northcot sat back to gather his thoughts. Was there anything else he could do to speed things up? He had set everything in motion, so far as he could tell, and apart from talking to Moscow, had asked all the questions he needed to ask.

He guessed it would be some time before they found the car. It could be anywhere, still in this country – Yorkshire perhaps – or even abroad, if they had taken it somewhere on the ferry. But if it was stuck in a supermarket car park somewhere, it could be weeks before it was found.

He could think of no shortcuts. If only they had information about the Wilkinsons’ bank or a debit card or something, they could trace their movements by tracking use of that. But they didn’t, so that was that.

Clive Newell rang again.

“I’ve been on to the police looking after the Battersea house, and they say that someone from the agents turned up this morning, demanding access so that they could clear the place and re-let it.”

“Now that’s very interesting,” said Northcot.

“That’s what I thought. It means they know the Wilkinsons have left, and that they’re not coming back.”

“Who the hell would have told them that? Who knows they’re not coming back?”

“Exactly my thought.”

“I hope the police on duty didn’t give them access.”

“No, they didn’t, thank goodness. And now they’ve doubled the police presence until we say they can let the agents in to the place.”

“Excellent. But I’d give good money to know who told Zenit.”

“Nobody from here, that’s for sure.”

“Since they’re based near the Russian Trade Delegation, I’ll get Poulson to see if MI5 have ever heard of them.”

“They could even ring them up to find out why they never charged any rent.”

“Let’s not. We may soon find out for ourselves.”

When Gladys got back, she went straight in to see Peter Northcot.

“I’ve found a family history bloke already, and told him to get on with it. He charges £50 an hour, would you believe, but reckons he can do everything from the place down the road, so we won’t have to pay train fares or expenses.”

“How do you know he’s any good?” asked Peter.

“The manager chap recommended him to me. Apparently he is well known there, and works for lots of people who think they’re related to Napoleon or the Queen or someone important; that sort of client. I’ve told him we’re different, and it’s a matter of National importance and very urgent. That’s why we’re paying £50 an hour and not £30.”

“How long will this take?”

“I told him that if he hadn’t been in touch by close of play today with some really useful information, he could regard himself as having been fired.”

“Did he mind?”

“No. Quite confident it won’t take him long.”

“Good! Tell David Poulson to call off his people, who’ve already taken nearly two days to find nothing. The MI6 guy, Frank Browne is going to give me a contact at their Moscow station. When he does, get hold of them for me, please.”

“OK. Anything else?”

“Word has got round about your tea, by the way. Any coffee on the go?”

“Comin’ up.”

There was a chap at MI5 who Peter thought could be a help, but he didn’t want to go through Poulson. It was a chap he had met during his training, who had quite impressed him. He wasn’t that sure that his new parent organisation had managed to earn all the respect it deserved within Section 11, but he could understand why. They had been a bit slow off the mark in a couple of instances, but then so had SIS.

He eventually got through to Richard Evans, who remembered him.

“How you getting on at Section 11?” he asked.

“I’ve been given a short straw already, and I need your help.”

“What can I do?”

“There is a property management company of some sort called ‘Zenit’, based in Highgate not far from the Russian Trade delegation. Know anything about them?”

“Just a bit. What’s the problem?”

“Do they ever do any work for the Russians?”

“Now and then; bound to, as they are so close.”

“What sort of thing would they do?”

“Mostly finding flats and so on for delegation staff, and acting as agents for them.”

“That’s interesting. We’ve come across a place they are managing, in Battersea, which is now empty. The people living there never seem to have paid any rent to anyone, and left in a huge hurry at no notice. Somehow Zenit knew they had gone, and have either assumed or been told that they were not going back, as they turned up to empty the place. How would they know that?”

“Without a doubt, the people who did a runner were either Russians or working for them. Give me their name and the address you’re talking about, and I’ll do some checking.”

Peter Northcot sat back to think what to do next.

He was now in no doubt that either Barbara Wilkinson or her mother or both were enemy agents. Everything pointed to that fact at the moment. They had access to almost all the information that had been passed to Makienko, but the fact also was that Makienko had not known everything.

Nobody had actually considered that, so far as he knew. They had been too concerned about who had told him what, but there were gaps in the man’s knowledge. Nobody had told him, or the Russians, that Lloyd was actually Barclay under another name. So far as he could gather, the people in Moscow weren’t at all sure that Barclay was still alive, and even Makienko had only guessed at it.

So the Wilkinsons hadn’t told him.

Why?

Makienko had certainly known that Lloyd was going to Geneva, and followed him on a hunch. But neither he nor anybody else had told Moscow that that’s where he was going. Moscow still hadn’t a clue what had happened to Makienko, or where he had gone when he left London.

Why?

Did the Wilkinsons know? If they had known, did they leave before they could get word to Moscow, or simply choose not to tell them?

The fact was that Barbara Wilkinson was not in her office 24/7. Things happened while she was at home, in the evening or at weekends. Including, perhaps, some of the things she had subsequently learnt about.

It began to explain why she had cultivated her relationship with poor old Nick, who had inadvertently and in all innocence and good faith, been passing on information to an enemy agent. Pillow talk, they call it. Love is blind.

Did that explain, perhaps, why the Wilkinsons had left so suddenly? Had Barbara become fond enough of Nick not to want to cause him any harm? Only she could answer that. So where was she?

His thoughts were interrupted when Stuart Carrington knocked on the door.

“I’ve heard from GCHQ at last,” he announced.

“Tell me.”

“First of all, the phone call from Donald. They reckon it could possibly have been made from an airfield somewhere. Not Heathrow or anywhere like that. Somewhere small.”

“Why do they think that?”

“Background noise. Faint, but could just be a small aircraft – piston engine possibly. There are also voices in the background. Again, too faint to interpret, but they think the predominant voices are female. Certainly, it is a woman who grabs the phone from Donald, but they can’t interpret what she says. They think, though, that it could be a foreign language of some sort, or at least a heavy dialect, but more likely foreign than British.”

“Russian?”

“They didn’t say.”

“Do they have any idea where the call came from?”

“None at all; not even a general area.”

“Well, get them to find a Russian speaker and have him listen to it, carefully.”

“OK. As to the computer discs, though, they’ve found nothing worth mentioning, so they say. Just mush, but no readable information. Anything worth having would have been on the discs, which have gone.”

“Thanks for that. Let me know about the voices on the phone, one way or the other, and as quickly as possible.”

He got on the phone to Clive Newell.

“Tell your guys to forget looking for the Wilkinson’s car at airports or sea ports. Concentrate instead on small airfields only, and especially those accessible from London within a four hour drive.”

“How do you work out the four hours bit?”

“It’s about the time between Nick leaving Barbara’s place after being scrambled to go to Switzerland and the phone call from her son.”

Things were beginning to happen at last. Peter thought he should up-date Bill, and perhaps let Nick know what was going on as well.

He got Gladys to see if they could both join him. He didn’t want to disappear from his own office and the phone by going down to the Ops Room. To be honest, there wasn’t much point anymore in having a special Ops desk for this. There were only a few pieces of the jigsaw to find and put in place.

“I’ve just been telling Sir Robin Algar who rang up that not much had happened since we were last in touch,” said Bill when he arrived.

“You’ll need to ring him back, then, when you hear what I have to say,” said Peter. “Unless you decide not to tell him, that is.”

“Why should I decide that?” asked Bill.

“As I understand it, he was responsible for recruiting Barbara Wilkinson in the first place. If she does turn out to be an enemy agent, we may need to look at how she managed, shall we say, to evade the security checks.”

“You’re not surely suggesting that Robin Algar is working for the Russians are you?” asked an incredulous Clayton.

"I'm not suggesting anything. But you've been handed a rotten job to do by that man, which he should really have given to MI5 to sort out. I just think we need to be sure of our facts before we leap about briefing the Cabinet Secretary again, that's all."

Clayton looked at Northcot quizzically for a moment.

"What he doesn't know," added Peter, "he can't pass on."

"And possibly forewarn others."

"Exactly."

"Tell me what you've found, then," after a further pause.

The briefing was short but succinct.

"How very interesting," commented 'S'.

"We're still short of a few facts, but I'm sure when we have them that they'll only confirm our worst fears."

Gladys interrupted.

"Sorry to interrupt, but I've got Moscow station on the red phone for you Peter."

"Good. Excuse me a minute," he said to Bill.

People in overseas stations knew all about Section 11, as he had done when he was serving in Hong Kong, so Northcot did not need to explain who he was, or plead for co-operation. They would do what he asked. First, he asked them about Makienko.

"I need to know," he said, "if you've detected any sign of Mrs Makienko doing anything she wouldn't normally be expected to do."

"Since you ask, she has been spotted a couple of times visiting the Lubyanka Building. As you know that's where the FSB has its Headquarters."

"Would you think that unusual?"

"It may not be, considering her husband is missing. She may simply be seeking information about him, to see if they have a clue what's happened to him."

"And do they have?"

"Frankly, no. They still don't know where he went after he left London, and haven't the slightest idea whether he's dead or alive. I'm told that the current thinking by his Director, Egor Ivanovic, is that he has probably defected, but he's just guessing and not saying anything publicly."

"Don't let's tell him then!"

"Sasha Makienko is said to be furious, and according to reports has had a flaming row with Ivanovic. They were housed in a new flat when they first got kicked out of London, but she's hardly seen Dmitri since then, so she's very much on her own."

"Keep an eye on her for me if you would, and let me know if you pick up any clue as to what she might think has happened, or what she might plan for the future. It's just possible that she may decide to finish what her husband started. Meanwhile, we've lost a couple of possible agents from here, so the Russians aren't alone in losing people."

"Who are they?"

"One Barbara Wilkinson and her Mother, accompanied by a youngster, aged about six, name of Donald. We picked up half a phone call from him, kicking up about being taken away from here. Keep an eye open for them, if you would. The kid could well give the ir presence away, if he gets too stropky."

"Do you know for sure that they headed our way?"

“Not a clue where they are at present. Just keep a look out if you would, and I’ll let you know if we pick up any further clues from here.”

The call ended.

“That’s a very good piece of thinking, if I may say so,” said Bill. “You should work for MI5!”

“We’ll know more when we find their car. I would bet it’s on a small airfield somewhere south of London, for a quick hop across the Channel.”

“Well, keep up the good work, and keep me informed.” Bill made for the door. “By the way, I’ve decided not to call Sir Robin. He can sweat for a bit.”

“That’s if he really is worried. If he isn’t, he should be.”

“One other thing. Catherine and I have agreed to look after Donald for a while if he should come back here. I’ve told ‘Uncle’ Nick. And we’ve put off tomorrow’s visit to Dusty for the time being.”

“It begins to look now as if my own visit will be a purely social one after all. I had thought I would need to pump him for information, but that may not be necessary the way things are turning out. But I would very much like to meet the guy, all the same, when I can be spared.”

“He wants visitors, he told Nick, and wants to get back in touch, so you go whenever you think you can, but not tomorrow.”

As Bill returned to the Ops Room, Gladys came in.

“My family history man has been on the phone. Very interesting, although I don’t understand what he means.”

“What did he say, then.”

“It seems their name isn’t Wilkinson at all.”

“What!? How does he work that out?”

“He says they’ve used somebody else’s name.”

“Explain, please Gladys.”

“Well,” she looked at her notes, “according to him, there were two people called Wilkinson who came from near York, a mother and a baby girl, who were killed in a car accident about 30 years ago. As I understand it, the Wilkinsons who we know have used their identity to get documents like birth certificates and so on.”

“So who the hell are the Wilkinsons, then? What’s their real name?”

“The man says there’s no way of telling or finding out.”

Peter sat back, dismayed.

“Now what?” he asked himself.

“According to Nick, Barbara claims to be 34, so the dates would more or less fit,” suggested Gladys.

“Fit what?”

“If Barbara and her mother are someone else, if you see what I mean, and are pretending to be the Wilkinsons from York, then they could have been doing it for about 30 years. That’s what fits.”

Peter sat, deep in thought.

‘They’re sleepers,’ he pondered.

Surely not. After all this time. 30 years, sitting there, while Barbara works her way to the top of the civil service. Not mother and daughter after all? A couple paired during training? Living abroad under cover for all these years? No wonder no-one discovered them.

“Are you all right?” asked Gladys, after a time.

“Yes. Thanks. But what you have just said is absolutely shattering, if I am right in how I interpret it.”

“Sorry,” she said.

“Don’t be. You’ve probably just solved one of the great mysteries of this case for us.”

“Oh, good!” She looked pleased.

“Ask your family history man if he can possibly provide us with any paper work, will you – copies of death certificates, birth certificates and that sort of thing, and then pay him off. I don’t think we shall need him anymore. And see if you can get hold of Frank Browne – I’d like to see him if he can spare a minute.”

He told Frank what Gladys had reported about the Wilkinsons.

“I heard about sleeper cells during my recent training,” said Peter, “but I didn’t think I’d come across one this quickly. What do you think?”

“I think you’re right. They could well be what we call ‘dead doubles’. They’ve adopted a false identity, and have been living under aliases, probably, as you guessed, for up to 30 years. They’ve used the identities of real people to get all the documents they would ever need. Anybody checking on them, say for security clearance, would look for birth certificates, which they would find. They would never think of looking for death certificates as well, because they wouldn’t need to. They would be checking on live people, not dead ones.”

“No wonder they weren’t spotted.”

“Sleepers are usually paired up during training, but this is an odd couple in my experience, I have to admit. Normally, they are discovered as man and wife, and frequently have children to add to their cover.”

“Barbara did, but with the previous Head of Section 11.”

“That gave her a terrific power base, and unprecedented access to classified information.”

“It also explains why they never paid rent for their Battersea house. The Russians provided it through the Zenit agency.”

“The Russians actually owned the property, and let it through Zenit.”

“Of course.”

As if prompted, Richard Evans came of the phone.

“He was checking out the Zenit angle for me,” explained Peter to Frank. “We can tell him, now.”

Peter did so.

“There’s now no doubt that the Wilkinsons were both working for the Russians; indeed they sent them over in the first place some years ago. What we now need to discover is who was controlling them, which means that the so-called ‘spy-hunt’ is not over yet.”

“I agree,” said Richard from MI6. “I would also like to know, from colleagues in MI5, how the hell they were allowed to operate undetected for so long. If and when they find who was controlling the Wilkinsons, perhaps they might stumble across that fact as well.”

“Being, as I am, an ex-MI5 man now working for ‘S’, I hate to say that my people don’t seem to have been very efficient, on recent evidence. I feel quite relieved that I haven’t been working for them for very long.”

“It’s not really that easy, especially these days. There is no longer any need for direct contact between agents and their controllers. The Wilkinsons’ handler could well have been based in Russia, rather than down the road here somewhere. With modern equipment and satellite communications, they can use wireless technology to pass information and encrypted messages to, say, a laptop computer, which is entirely portable and difficult to track down.”

“I thought GCHQ was supposed to do that sort of thing.”

“So they are, but they need to know first that they have something to look for. In this case, and after 30 years, they obviously had no idea. But now it’s their job to find out who has been controlling the Wilkinsons, and why they have had free reign for 30 years or so.”

“Don’t hold your breath,” said Northcot. “On recent experience, that task could well be passed to us.”

Stuart Carrington, the man from GCHQ, knocked on Peter’s office door.

“Come in!”

He did, hotly pursued by Gladys.

“People are supposed to tell me if they want either Peter or Nick,” she protested. “How am I supposed to keep things under control if people just wander in and out without a by-your-leave? Tea or coffee?”

“Coffee – no question.”

Peter grinned.

“What have you got for me?”

“GCHQ have had another go at the phone call – not a Russian speaker, but a real Russian listened to it, and he’s sure that’s the language used by one of the people in the background; a woman’s voice. He eventually managed to interpret a couple of words after several attempts.”

“What words?”

Stuart looked at his notes.

“One was ‘*aeroplane*’, or ‘*aircraft*’, and the other – he is almost sure – was ‘*phone*’, just before the boy shouted out. Everything else was too distorted, even played back ultra-slow.”

“That’ll do; thanks. Very helpful.”

“Sorry it took so long.”

“Don’t mention it. Everything has taken too long so far, but suddenly, everything is coming together at once. All we need now is to find their bloody car.”

CHAPTER 10

ANNIE MACKIE – THE VISIT

It had so far been a long and, if he was honest, a rather depressing day for Dusty Miller.

Medically, he was making good progress. Very good. Even he could tell. He was now able to bend his leg and no longer needed it supported horizontally. He had almost full

movement in his foot, and he could again move the fingers of his broken arm. His internal wounds appeared to be healing quickly, as well. He was almost always now out of pain, and he no longer needed a near-constant supply of morphine. The occasional pain killer did the trick. He was eating better, too, and taking regular meals again. It helped that the food was good, but they still prepared a special diet for him; no beer and bacon sandwiches yet. Pretty rapid progress, the medics thought, but not quick enough for him. He was putting a lot of effort into it though, and it was paying dividends even if he found it very tiring.

But he had rather been hoping, almost expecting, a phone call from Annie sometime during the morning, after she had been left a message by Nick. Just fancy her having gone to Switzerland with Nick, and on the aircraft that brought him home. He still couldn't believe it, but he still very much wanted to talk to her again.

The last time she rang to see how he was getting on, he wasn't fit enough to even say 'hello' on the phone, but now he was fit enough for a chat. He knew it would make him tired, though. He still didn't have a lot of energy, and got tired quite quickly. So he was a bit fed up that she hadn't got in touch again.

Instead, he had an early call from Bill Clayton to say that he and Catherine would not, after all, be able to visit him later today as planned. Things were hotting up in Clerkenwell, and he really ought not to leave the place at the moment, but they would do their best to get up to see him tomorrow. The new chap, Peter Northcot, was doing well and settling in fast, so Bill had said, and was also keen to pay Dusty a visit. Between them, he and Nick could look after the shop for a time, so tomorrow looked hopeful.

Dusty didn't have enough visitors, so he was disappointed that the boss couldn't make it. But he understood the pressures he was under, and he was sure they would get up to see him whenever they could. The new bloke, too. That would be nice. The more the merrier.

But he had a long morning in front of him, even without the planned visitors.

After breakfast, they helped him in to his wheelchair, and shunted him off for yet more X-rays. He found it awkward trying to get about, since he could only use one stick. His broken arm – shattered, they had described it at first – was still not strong enough to allow him to use two. But he could get about a bit, difficult though it was. He found he could almost use a Zimmer more effectively. He could work that with one hand. And he was due some physiotherapy later this morning, which would help to build up the strength in legs and arms, as well as help his stomach muscles which they had fiddled about with to get at his internal injuries. They had said that if he kept up present progress, he could be moved to the Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court in a few days for proper, full-time physio to really get him going again. The sooner the better, although they didn't think he'd need to be there for long.

But he was disappointed that Annie hadn't rung up by now. Nick had said she had been on yet another visit to Camp Bastion to collect more casualties, so perhaps she was just recovering from that. It must be shattering, those long flights, and then having to work on the aircraft as well. A couple more guys had arrived from there early this morning, but he hadn't had a chance to talk to them yet. They weren't in a fit state anyway, but when they were, he was going to ask them if they had noticed Annie on the aircraft.

Of course, it was always possible that she had a regular boyfriend, maybe even married with kids. That could explain it. But she had rung up to ask about him a couple of

times after he first arrived. He had thought that was ‘personal’, shall we say, but perhaps it was just professional, medical interest. That could explain it as well.

Perhaps he was hoping for too much. Although they had met, in a funny sort of way, they hadn’t actually spoken to one another yet. But he would just like to say ‘thank you’ for all she had done to help him, even if nothing else. They said she had kept him alive, more or less. It deserved a big thank you, and a bunch of flowers and some chocolates at least.

Yes! That’s what he’d do. If she didn’t get in touch again, he would somehow organise some flowers and chocolates to be sent to her. Maybe even a bottle of fizz as well. His life was at least worth that. The SSAFA lady could organise that for him, he was sure. That’s what he’d do, if she didn’t get in touch for some reason. He felt better having decided what to do. He’d ask the SSAFA lady next time she came round.

By the time he had worked all this out, they had done the X-rays. They seemed very pleased with the way things were going, which cheered him up a bit. He certainly felt better. Not quite his old self yet, but certainly better than he did.

They were having some sort of conference about him, while he sat in his wheelchair outside X-ray. Eventually, the Squadron Leader chap came over – he could never remember the bloke’s name. Thank the lord for name tags. Drew Wilson, that was it.

“Big day for you today, Miller,” he said.

“Now what?” said Dusty.

“You’re mending so well, we think you’d make even quicker progress if we put on lighter plaster. It would give you more room for movement, and help to get your muscles going again. You can already move your toes and fingers, so this will help get more movement and strength in your arm and leg.”

“Less weight to carry around, too,” said Dusty.

“Exactly,” said Wilson. “So we’ll shove you off to the fracture unit for the new dressings and plaster, and then give you a taste of physiotherapy. With any luck, you’ll be back on the ward in time for lunch and a kip afterwards. You’ll probably be glad of a snooze after all this. Your busiest day so far.”

“Any chance of a beer with lunch, Sir? Purely medicinal, you understand – to help me sleep.”

“Not yet,” grinned Wilson. “Your guts aren’t quite up to that at the moment, but not long now.”

He had a good deal of pulling about after that, especially in the Physiotherapy department. They were as gentle as they needed to be, but he could feel they were much stronger than he was. Physical Training Instructors most of them were. They looked as if they did Judo or played Rugby for England in their spare time. After they had finished with him, he certainly felt muscles aching that he hadn’t felt for a long time, even though he had recently been skiing. But he felt it had done him good, and not just physically. It was mentally stimulating to know that he was rapidly getting better.

Nevertheless, he didn’t feel like Zimmering back to his ward, so they pushed him.

Lunch and a doze suddenly sounded like a good idea, even without a beer.

There were no messages for him, though. He got into his bed-side chair after lunch, and started to read the paper. He dozed.

He didn't quite notice at first, when he eventually stirred, but there, perched on the end of his bed, in uniform, was Annie. Complete with lovely smile.

"Am I dreaming?" he asked.

"No. I'm really here!"

She walked over, and kissed him gently on the forehead.

"I was hoping you'd phone," said Dusty. "I never dared hope you'd pay a visit."

"Well, I got the message from Commander Marsden, but I've been away on Ops again, and was really shattered when I got back late yesterday. So I decided I'd come and see how you were, instead of ringing."

"I can't believe you're actually here," said Dusty. "And I was asleep when you arrived – hardly any kind of welcome."

"It's just great to see you again. You're looking so much better than when I first saw you. I simply wanted to see how you were getting on."

"I nearly didn't make it, they say."

"You didn't look as if you would, either."

"But I'm going to be OK, and I've have just had my first session of Physio, so I'm well on the way, and can actually get around a bit now, using this machine." He kicked the Zimmer with his good foot.

Annie switched on her smile.

"I don't remember much about you if I'm honest," said Dusty, "but I'll never forget your smile. Or the way you wiped blood from my mouth, and dealt with the pain. I can't bear to think about the pain," he grimaced.

"You were in a bad way, no doubt," she agreed.

Colonel Mark Graham strode over. Annie stood to attention.

"This is Annie," said Dusty proudly. "I've been asking about her ever since I got here. You see, she does exist after all!"

"At ease," said the Colonel to Annie. "He's made himself quite a nuisance, asking about you! But they told me you were here, and I wanted to meet you. We've spoken before, you know."

"Really?"

"The RAF Hercules crew patched you through to me on the inter-com from the aircraft to talk about this chap while you were airborne. You were worried about how much more morphine he could take."

"It was you, was it? I was very glad of your advice, Sir, I must say," replied Annie. "I wasn't sure he could take any more."

"Well he did, and now look at him. I'm sorry I wasn't here when you brought him in, but my chaps were glad to have a hot de-briefing from you."

"You're one up on me, Colonel," said Miller. "You've spoken to Annie before, but this is the first time we've met properly, and I certainly haven't been able to say 'thank you' until now, or anything else."

"I'll leave you to it, then. But you owe your life to this young Petty Officer in my view, so say 'thank you' nicely!"

He turned on his heel, and left.

“Help me get into this wheelchair, will you Annie, then you can sit here next to me. How long can you stay, by the way?”

“As long as you like, really. I’m on call, but its six hours’ notice, so I can be back to Brize in that time.”

“How did you get here then?”

“I’ve got a Mini Cooper.”

“Nice! But what about when they move me to Headley Court? Is that still within your range? If not, I shall refuse to go!”

“I’ll come to see you there, or anywhere else,” she promised. “I can always take a day’s leave.”

He reached out from his wheelchair, and took her hand.

“It really is so good to see you, Annie. At one time, I began to think I’d been dreaming, and that you didn’t really exist. And then when you didn’t ring, I didn’t know what to think, or how to thank you for all you did for me. I was actually planning to send you a note with some flowers and chocolates and a bottle of Champagne.”

“That’s the second time I’ve saved you an arm and a leg then!”

They laughed together. Dusty hadn’t laughed for a long time.

“But you’re not getting away with the Champers,” said Annie. “We’ll both share that one day.”

Annie stayed a long time.

She managed to persuade the kitchen to give her a meal with Dusty, who she could see was getting tired. She let him nod off in his wheelchair, and stayed until he woke.

She couldn’t really explain why she had wanted to see the man again. It was difficult to tell why. It wasn’t something she could properly explain, but she knew she wanted to keep in touch with him, and see him again. Of all the people she had helped, most of them out of Afghanistan, he had made the biggest impression on her for some reason. She had seen bravery before, and suffering, but they had always just been patients. People she had to help, because that was her job. Somehow, she felt differently about Dusty Miller. He was quite good looking, although you’d never have known to see him lying in the snow close to death. He was a smashed-up mess. It wasn’t even Dusty she had been parachuted in to Switzerland to help. It was another chap, a nuclear physicist of some sort, apparently of great importance, who the Russians were trying to assassinate. They had nearly succeeded, too, except that her Dusty, who was on the ground to look after him, had saved his life, and then come off worse chasing after the Russian.

She had got to the scientist first, but he wasn’t too badly hurt, so it didn’t take long to sort out his injuries. But then others in the team, including Commander Marsden, had found Miller. Her Dusty. The Commander had got to him just in time to save him from another, possibly fatal bullet from the Russian agent. She wasn’t used to this spy business. In fact, she had never got involved in it before. She didn’t know, until afterwards, that there were now more Soviet agents in the UK than there were during the height of the cold war. She had thought there would be fewer, but it seemed that the more relaxed immigration controls had made it easier for them to get in.

There was one less now, thanks to the Commander. But it could have been Dusty. Her Dusty.

She wondered about the man dozing in his wheelchair. Did he have a family? A regular girlfriend, or even a wife perhaps, or was he unattached like her? She'd never had a proper boyfriend, really. Her job didn't give her enough time to develop any special relationships. The odd chap sniffing around from time to time, but they mostly got fed up with her long absences, even if she had shown any interest herself. Perhaps it was the same with Dusty. Her Dusty. He obviously lived much the same sort of life. People in the Special Forces were like that. Restless souls who never settled anywhere for long.

But, for some reason which she couldn't explain, Dusty was somehow different. She felt she wanted to get to know him, to see him again and, well, be with him. She hadn't felt that before about anybody. It was extraordinary, really, considering they hadn't even spoken to one another until a couple of hours ago. Perhaps he felt the same. He had said he had wanted her to ring him; wanted to speak to her. He was even planning to write to her, and send her flowers. Nobody had ever done that.

She looked down at him. Not the best looking man in the world perhaps, but acres of courage and bravery. She smiled, and smoothed his ruffled hair.

"Sorry I drifted," he said, as he stirred. "I'm not used to all this excitement. But at least you're still here."

"Of course I am," she replied. "But I can't stay for ever. I still have work to do, and we have a major training exercise tomorrow, providing no real emergency crops up, so I must get back soon."

"That means I shan't see you tomorrow, then?"

"Probably not, but I'll give you a ring. Your boss rang, too, just now, to say that he and his wife could get here later after all. I'm to ring them if I judge you're too tired."

"Well I'm not! Stay on if you can, at least to meet them. They will have heard about you from Nick Marsden."

"I'd like to meet them," she said. "I don't often meet real spies!"

"I don't think they are, really," said Dusty. "Bill Clayton is an ex-Army intelligence man, and his wife, Catherine, was Special Forces, like us. She was always known as 'The Cat', and we served together in Iraq for a time. I rather fancied her, if I'm honest, but she got sent to Northern Ireland where she met Bill."

"Good!" said Annie. "But how did you come to get involved?"

"One day, I'll give you all the background, but first I want to hear all about you."

When they arrived, Bill and Catherine seemed genuinely pleased to meet Annie.

"We've heard all about you and your exploits from Nick Marsden," said Catherine. "I gather you were responsible for keeping this man going, in spite of everything."

"I'm so glad you did," said Bill. "He's one of my best."

"I'm dying to know what's been going on," said Dusty.

"I'll get off then," said Annie.

"You're more than welcome to stay if you want to," said Bill. "You might find it interesting, and I'm sure you've got a good security clearance, so you being here won't stop me telling Dusty what's been going on."

Annie sat listening, enthralled as Bill gave Dusty a detailed briefing about what had been happening. Even Dusty found it difficult to believe all they told him, especially about Barbara.

"I always thought there was something not quite right about her," he said. "Nothing I could put my finger on, but she just didn't quite seem to fit, somehow. Now we know why. She was a foreigner."

"I still can't adjust to the fact myself, I must say," admitted Bill. "And I haven't told Downing Street, yet, either. That will be fun, but not for them. They recruited the girl, and recommended her move to Section 11, on promotion."

"Heaven knows what damage she's inflicted on us in all this time," said Dusty, "but even since I've been around, she's been responsible for the death of her son's father and Professor Barclay's twin brother, as well as the Professor himself nearly."

"And you," Bill reminded him.

"She'll be made to pay for this, if ever I meet up with her again," threatened Dusty.

"Nick Marsden made a similar promise, if I remember, but I doubt your paths will ever cross again. If I'm right, she's well out of the country by now, although we have no idea where she went. MI6's Moscow station is keeping a look out for her, but until we find her car, we really shan't have a clue where to look."

"I feel sorry for the little boy. He obviously didn't want to go away, even if he didn't know where they were taking him."

"We have a feeling that he might well come back, some time," said Catherine. "Goodness knows what will happen to him, but in case he does, Bill and I can look after him for a bit if necessary. We've already arranged to collect his belongings; clothes, toys and stuff like that, so we can make him feel at home."

"One way or another, that girl has made a proper mess of things for lots of people, not least Nick," said Bill.

"I was supposed to be best man at his wedding too. At least she disappeared before they got married, which is something I suppose. By the way, have you heard from Roger Lloyd?" asked Dusty. "He rang me here once, early on, but I wasn't in a fit state to speak to him."

"He rang me too," said Bill. "He seems to have settled in to his new job OK, but said he hadn't been feeling well lately. Probably a reaction to his adventure in the Alps, and he must be feeling a bit isolated until he really gets his feet and finds friends and so on. He'd been leading a very sheltered life over here until we got involved. But he specially asked about you, though, and sends his best wishes and all that."

One of the orderlies appeared.

"Sorry to interrupt Colonel, but there's a phone call for you, in the Colonel's office."

Bill left with the man, and was away for some time.

"Another piece of the jigsaw falls into place," he announced on his return. "They've found the car."

It had been a quiet afternoon compared with all the hectic activity earlier in the day, which was why Bill had decided to change his mind, and to visit Dusty while there was a lull. Nick and Peter had been left in charge during something of an anti-climax. Nothing much

was happening, and nothing much was expected to happen that afternoon. And nothing much did, until Clive Newell received a call from one of his Special Branch colleagues.

He put his hand over the phone, and excitedly called across to Nick and Peter, in the Ops Room.

“They’ve found the car!”

Newell listened intently for a few moments. It seemed like hours, before he eventually ended the call.

“Where is it?” Nick and Peter both asked at once.

“Blackbushe Airport, on the Hampshire/Surrey border. On the A30, about an hour’s drive from Battersea.”

“What are they doing with the car?”

“And how long’s it been there?”

Suddenly, there were so many questions to be asked and answered.

“According to the Yard, they don’t yet know how long it’s been there. They only found it less than an hour ago, so they are still quizzing the airport staff. The car is already under wraps though, and they are putting it on to a low-loader ready to move it to the Met Police forensic science place at Lambeth for a thorough going over.”

“Any immediate clues?” asked Nick.

“There’s an envelope addressed to you on the dashboard, so I’m told. They’ve left it where it is, and it will come with the car to Lambeth.”

“When?”

“No idea, but it will take a bit of time to organise,” replied Clive.

“Tell them not to move it until I’ve had a look at it, and rescued my letter. I’ll get down there right away,” said Nick. “Can you hold the fort here, Peter?”

“Of course. I’ll ring Bill straight away, too. He’ll probably want to get back here to monitor things.”

“My immediate thoughts are that they’ve skipped across the Channel, and that Donald made his phone call from Blackbushe,” said Nick. “That would fit in with what the GCHQ experts made of the background sounds. Ask your people who are down there, Clive, to talk to the staff at the airport who were on duty the night I flew to Switzerland. I’m off!”

Marsden disappeared to grab one of the BMW motorbikes from the garage. “I’ll be there within an hour, with any luck. I need to look at this place and in particular get my hands on that letter.”

As he rushed out, Peter was staring at his computer screen.

“It doesn’t look much of an airfield to me,” said Northcot. “I’ve got the Blackbushe website up on the internet. Private flying, a bit of charter work, and a couple of flying schools, is about all. It used to be an old RAF airfield during the war, so it says.”

They peered at the screen.

“That’s interesting,” pointed Clive. “It shuts at six o’clock on a normal operating day, but can stay open until eight ‘by prior arrangement’. The Wilkinsons can’t have got there until ten or after.”

“Very interesting,” agreed Peter.

“I’ll tell my chaps down there. We could be looking for an un-authorised flight after the airfield closed, in which case we shall need to quiz local residents in case they saw or heard anything.”

“And unless there’s a flight plan, there’s no way of telling where the aircraft went to from there.”

“We need to know the type of aircraft then, to guess at the range and how far they could have gone.”

“From what GCHQ could make out from the background to Donald’s phone call, it sounded like a piston engine aircraft, rather than a longer range commuter jet.”

“That probably means just a short hop across the Channel, then. We need to check with Air Traffic radar somehow.”

“They may not have headed south, of course. They could have gone to Yorkshire, for instance.”

“They would have used an airfield north of London in that case – somewhere like Elstree. No - my bet is they went to the Continent.”

“And then on to Russia?”

Clive shrugged his shoulders.

“Finding the car seems to be only the start, rather than the end.”

“I’d love to know what’s in that letter to Nick,” said Clive.

“I guess we will soon enough, unless it’s entirely personal. But there’s bound to be something useful in it.”

Nick Marsden arrived at Blackbushe at about the same time as the Police low-loader which had gone to collect the Wilkinson’s car. It didn’t take him long to convince the Superintendent in charge that he was the intended recipient of the letter, still on the dashboard inside. It helped that Nick had a key to the car. It saved them breaking a window to get it open.

“If there’s anything in this letter,” he said, “that could be of the slightest value to you, I will let you know immediately. But we think this could be a vital clue in the hunt we’ve been mounting for a missing Russian agent,” he told the policeman, “so I’ll hang on to it, if I may. This is probably their car.”

The policemen made him sign for it; Gladys would have been proud of him. Nick declined to give them the car key, however, and they agreed to leave it unlocked. He had a quick look round the interior of the car and the boot, but spotted nothing else of immediate interest. He told the superintendent in charge the date and time they thought the car could have arrived.

“This place is closed for flying long before that,” said the policemen. “We’ll have to find the security chap who was on duty that night, to see if he noticed anything.”

“He should have noticed someone breaking the gate down to get in, and an unauthorised aircraft of some sort making a landing in the dark, loading up three passengers, and taking off again,” said Nick helpfully.

“There is no runway lighting here, either,” said the Policeman. “I haven’t come across this sort of thing before, but vandals often break the gate down to get in.”

“What sort of security is there when the airfield is closed,” asked Nick.

The policeman grimaced. "Pretty awful, if I'm honest. Private firm under contract to the airfield owner. Usually a couple of blokes with a dog in a Land Rover, and not much else."

Nick looked around. "That's pathetic if that is all," he said. "There's a few million quid's worth of light aircraft parked here for a start,"

"I know. We do our best to check on the place from time to time, but mostly have to leave it to the contractors."

"Well, we certainly need to get in touch urgently with the duty guys that night, in case they saw anything. We need to know what sort of aircraft it was for a start. And you will need to question local residents, too," suggested Nick. "Someone should have noticed an aircraft landing and taking off after dark."

"I'm already trying to organise a house to house enquiry, but this is a bit rural out here, so it may take some time. There are already a couple of my chaps at the Ely down the road. It's quite a popular pub, and takes in residents as well."

"I must get back," said Nick, stuffing the letter into his pocket.

"How will I get in touch?" asked the policeman.

"Don't bother. Special Branch will let us know how you get on."

"A couple of their chaps are in the Control Tower now, and they're taking the lead for obvious reasons."

Marsden kick-started the BMW, and headed east down the A30 back towards London. He was very tempted to open the letter and read it there and then, but decided that as it was probably a vital part of their enquiries, he should wait until he got back to their Clerkenwell office, in spite of the fact that it was addressed to him by name.

He had noticed, though, that it was not marked 'personal'.

By the time Nick got back, Bill Clayton had returned to the office from his visit to Dusty in the Birmingham Hospital, and was in the Ops Room with Northcot and Newell. Nick briefed them as quickly as he could about the airfield at Blackbushe, and produced the un-opened letter from his pocket.

"I admire you for not having opened that," said Bill.

"It was a hell of a temptation," replied Nick, "but let's have a look at it now."

He tore the envelope open. There was only a single sheet of hand written paper inside.

My Dear Nick,

By now you will know that I have been deceiving you and many others for some years, but since I am not British I am not a traitor. My "mother" and I have served our fatherland well, but can no longer do so, not least because of my own close relationship with you, which has made my future here impossible and posed a risk to your own life.

I want you to know, Nick, that I really love you, and wanted to marry you as we had planned, but that would have put us both at real risk. I have already been a

threat to you, and could not face the prospect of putting you in further danger as I did when you went to Switzerland. So my people have decided that we should be withdrawn, and when you find this note, you will know that we are now well away.

As I do, Donald loves you dearly. I am not sure how I will manage with him, as he is British and I am not. Neither am I sure of my own future, or even if I have one. We shall never meet again, and I will make no further attempt to get in touch.

Please forgive me,

Barbara.

Nick sat back in disbelief, looking on as the others read the note.

"I'll need to copy this," said Bill. "Is that OK?"

Nick nodded.

"At least we now have all the evidence we ever needed that she and her mother were Soviet agents," he said. "It's almost a relief to be certain at last, although of little comfort to me personally."

"We must assume, too, that they were heading towards Russia when they left, although I can think of better ways of getting there," said Peter.

"They were buying time for themselves."

"Successfully, too."

"We still have no evidence of where they went," Peter pointed out. "All this fuss at a small airfield in the south could be a huge double-bluff."

"We need to know about the aircraft they used," said Clive. "I'll get people checking airfields on the other side of the Channel to see if they can turn up something. We're already checking with our own Air Traffic people."

"I'll have another word, too, with our Moscow station," said Peter.

"That's all very good," said Bill, "but let's look in detail at this letter from Barbara. What does she really say, and what does she not say?"

"For a start," said Nick, "she says she's not British, but doesn't say what she is, so that takes us no further forward. She also refers to her mother in quotes, which means they were not related."

"Sleepers, as we suspected," said Clive.

"It sounds as if they were withdrawn as much because she wanted to protect you, Nick, as for her own future safety. She seems very bothered that she had already put you at risk."

"That's of little comfort, if I may say so," said Nick.

"As we also suspected some time ago, this seems to confirm that she told Makienko you were going to Switzerland, but that neither she nor he passed that information on to Moscow or anyone else."

"Which is why they still have no idea what happened to the man."

“And Barbara won’t know what happened to him, either, since she had long gone before the action in the Alps, so she won’t be able to throw any light on his disappearance if and when she gets to Moscow.”

“Except that she knows Lloyd is in Geneva, so they could put two-and-two together.”

“As Makienko did at the crematorium. He assumed that Lloyd was Barclay, and took it from there.”

“He may not have assumed anything, of course. Barbara may have told him. But again, it seems not to have been passed on up the chain.”

“If it had, Lloyd would still be in danger, but I think we can assume that they believe him to be dead.”

“And cremated.”

“Anything else worth noting from the letter to Nick?” asked Bill.

“She’s obviously worried about the boy”, said Nick.

“So she should be. He’s already proved himself a nuisance, trying to ring Nick from Blackbushe,” Clive reminded them.

“He’s going to stick out like a sore thumb in Moscow, or wherever they fetch up,” said Peter. “He was kicking up before he left this country, and when he gets abroad, shall we say, in a strange country, probably not speaking the language, away from his friends and his school, he’s going to take some handling. When I get through to Moscow, I’ll get them to keep a special look out for a stropky little six-year old English boy.”

“What strikes me as odd,” said Nick, “is that she is not sure of her own future. I would have thought that, after all this time over here, she would get a hero’s welcome back home.”

“She may believe she’s blown her own future because of her relationship with you, Nick,” said Bill. “You’re not just any old clerk somewhere in the depths of Whitehall. It’s possible they may believe that you have somehow managed to turn her, and that she’s now a double. The girl could be in for a rough time when she gets back.”

“I almost hope so,” said Nick. “She would certainly have been in for a rough time here if she had been unmasked as a spy, and that could have been a further reason for her running off. And as for saying that we will never meet again, I wouldn’t bet on that either. I’ve a mind to hunt her down, if only for Donald’s sake.”

“From what little I know of the boy and your relationship with him, Nick, I would guess that he would prefer to be here with you, rather than there with Barbara, not least since he obviously no longer has a grandmother either.”

“You could be right, Peter,” said Nick. “Perhaps I’ll hunt him down as well, and bring him back here where he belongs.”

There was a phone call for Nick. It was the Hampshire Police Superintendent at Blackbushe airport.

“I have information for you,” he said. “Whether it’s of any use, I don’t know, but we’ve checked with the duty security chaps who were here on the night in question.”

This sounded to Nick very ‘police’ talk.

“So what did they say?”

“Well, the western end of the airfield is now used by British Car Auctions – they have a big Sunday Market there, too. On Sundays. But the Security Company covers the whole area, and at the time in question” – Police talk again – “they were at the other end of the airfield, where all the cars are parked.”

“So did they see anything,” asked Nick, “at the time in question?”

He couldn’t resist it.

“Yes, they did. On the evening in question, they observed a light aircraft approach the airfield from a westerly direction. It made a quick landing, downwind as it happens, turned round, and immediately took off again. They thought the time was about 2230 hours, but can’t be sure.”

The Superintendent sounded quite pleased with his report so far, and Nick could almost see him thumbing over the pages of his note book.

“Anything else?”

“It so happens,” continued the policeman, “that part of the airfield is floodlit at night when it’s closed. The apron,” he added, displaying his new-found knowledge. “That’s where the aircraft are parked. Not the whole of the airfield, but just the apron.”

“So they saw everything that happened, then, did they?” said Nick hopefully.

“No, they didn’t see anything, apart from the aircraft coming and going again. As I’ve said, they were at the other end of the airfield at the time.”

“Did they take a note of the time?”

“No,” said the policemen. “They didn’t actually need to, since the apron, where the aircraft are parked, is covered by closed circuit television.”

“Why the hell didn’t you tell me about the CCTV coverage when I was down there?”

“It hadn’t occurred to me, to be honest,” admitted the policeman. “But I have now looked at it in the control tower, and it clearly shows an aircraft arriving, taxiing in, four people boarding, and taxiing out again for take-off, in to wind this time. The whole thing took less than two minutes.”

“Can the aircraft be identified?” demanded Marsden.

“Probably, but I don’t know about aircraft.”

“Then I need to talk to someone who does,” demanded Nick again. “Can you put me through to the control tower?”

“I’m in the control tower. Hang on.” The duty air traffic controller came on.

“Have you seen this bit of CCTV footage?” asked Nick.

“Just. Until Mr Plod here asked, I had no idea that there had been an unauthorised air traffic movement that night,” said the ATC man.

“So what does it show?” asked Marsden.

“Quite clearly a carefully planned and well executed operation,” replied the man. “I’m ex-RAF myself, but haven’t come across anything quite like this before.”

“Give me the detail,” said Nick.

“The aircraft is a PA-34 Piper Seneca, registered in France. You can see the registration number quite clearly for a time. It lands downwind from the West, turns on to the apron and four people clamber on board. Looks like two women, a man and a child, with minimum luggage. Almost before the door is closed, it taxis out to the end of the runway,

and takes off again, into wind, heading west. The whole thing took less than three minutes. CCTV shows the time at 22.10 hours.”

“Tell me about the aircraft.”

“It’s an American twin engine light aircraft; plenty of them about round the world. Top speed about 200 knots, range about 800 nautical miles, depending on fuel, payload, altitude and all that. Probably only one crew member, a pilot, and takes a maximum of five passengers.”

“Anything else?”

“I’ve checked the radar logs, thinking you’d ask,” said the controller. “No trace.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means the pilot flew at very low level, under the radar. Her Majesty’s Revenue & Customs will shit themselves when they see this. Could have been drugs or anything, but it looks like people smuggling of some sort to me. No packages changed hands so far as I can tell.”

“Brilliant work,” said Marsden. “I urgently need to get my hands on that CCTV footage, if you can arrange that. Is there any way of finding the destination of the aircraft?”

“Difficult without a radar trace. Probably one of the French or Belgian airfields just across the channel. At low level, his range would be much reduced, and he didn’t stop for fuel. We were shut anyway! So he was going for maximum speed at low level, which means minimum range.”

“We’re already checking cross-channel airfields, as it happens,” said Nick. “It helps having the registration number.”

“I’ll do some checking of my own with my opposite numbers in France. I’ll let you know if I find anything useful.”

An hour later, he had.

Peter Northcot took the call.

“Blackbushe has been on the phone for you,” he told Nick eventually. “The get-away aircraft took off from and returned to Calais/Dunkerque airport at Marek, Pas-de-Calais, about 4 miles NE of Calais itself. They’re an hour ahead of us, but they close at seven o’clock local. They have the aircraft on CCTV as well, but had no idea where it went from there when it left.”

“Do they know who owns the aircraft?”

“They do, but it was apparently chartered the previous day.”

“That proves the Wilkinsons’ departure was well planned, at least.”

“Yeah!” said Peter, “but just listen to this! It was chartered by some Russian organisation they’d never heard of, who paid cash over the odds for the pilot to make an unauthorised flight, and there was a second crew member on board – listen! – from the Russian consulate!”

By now, Bill had joined them.

“More proof, if we ever needed it,” he said. “But I wonder why they only went as far as Calais?”

“There were no other aircraft movements that night, so they say.”

“But a twin jet could have taken them directly to Moscow – something like a Lear Jet would have had the range and the speed, even at low level.”

“Perhaps they decided to rest overnight. There are plenty of hotels around Calais, from expensive to cheap B&B. I’ll get the consulate to check them out.”

“But then where, that’s the question. Did they go on by road, or rail, or air, and where to?”

“It seems to me that the more questions we answer, the more there are to answer,” opined Nick.

“Louis Blériot never had these problems,” said Peter.

“What’s he got to do with it?”

“It’s where he landed. Calias/Dunkerque is named after him. ‘Aerogare Louis Blériot’.

Not many of the Section 11 people in Clerkenwell wanted to know that.

Annie rang Dusty Miller quite late the next day, after her training exercise.

“I really can’t get down to see you today,” she said. “I need some rest, especially as I’m on the C17 flight to Camp Bastion tomorrow, and it’s an early take-off.”

“That’s disappointing,” admitted Miller, “but their need is greater than mine. I must say the guys out of Afghanistan who are here have been an inspiration to me.”

“They’re amazing, aren’t they?”

“They have made me realise how lucky I am, really. At least I haven’t lost any limbs, and I really am working my arse off to get fit again. My target is to get well enough to take you out somewhere nice, but it won’t be in sunny Birmingham.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because they’re sending me down to Headley Court in two days, that’s why. They say my efforts will get better results there, with the hydro-therapy pool and everything.”

“That really is great news, Dusty. You’ll make even faster progress there.”

“And you will come and see me? You said you would.”

“I promise. I’ve been there before, and there’s quite a good pub not far away. Good curries, but you’ve got to get your innards sorted before that!”

“Beer and bacon sandwiches first, but after that, it’s a date!”

CHAPTER 11

БАРБАРА⁴ - THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

By the time they got to Calais, Barbara was at the end of her tether. It had been bad enough being told to get out of the UK at such short notice, and being made to believe it was her fault, but the journey itself had been a nightmare.

She had been made to rush to a small airfield in Hampshire with a hysterical ‘mother’ and a demented Donald who was proving more difficult than she would ever have imagined

⁴ **БАРБАРА** - Russian, from the ancient Greek **μπαρμπαρα**, meaning Barbara, as in Barbarian; the foreigner; stranger; traveller from a foreign land.

possible. The Russian official who went with them to Blackbushe had been helpful enough, although he seemed to be in a bit of a panic himself, and obviously didn't want any trouble either from her or from any UK 'authorities'.

Donald plainly did not want to go, wherever they were going, and was doing his best to make sure that he didn't, and that everyone who cared to listen knew about it. For a start, he had run off when they got to Blackbushe. Then he had grabbed a phone and tried to get through to Nick. He wanted to be with Nick. He did not want to go away, and that was that. Explaining that they were going to Moscow only made things worse.

"I don't like Moscow," he had shouted, "and I'm not going."

Her 'mother' was no help, either. She believed that it was entirely Barbara's fault that they were being recalled at such short notice, and was in a thoroughly bad mood. She even hit Donald to try to keep him quiet. He yelled even louder.

Eventually they managed to scramble aboard the aircraft which had landed in the dark, and which immediately turned to take off again.

Once they were airborne, there was no going back, not even for Donald, who kicked and screamed as they tried to do up his seat belt.

The flight had been terrible. At low level across the English Channel in pitched darkness was no joke, although it had to be said that the pilot, who had shut himself securely into the cockpit to avoid Donald, was excellent and knew what he was doing and how to do it. But it was a very rough flight, and her 'mother' had been very sick. Even Donald said he felt ill and was reasonably quiet for a short time.

There was a people-mover sort of car waiting for them at the darkened airfield in France. They were hustled aboard, with their bags, but not before Donald had managed to grab the pilot and demand to be taken home. When the pilot refused, he was quite savagely kicked, until Barbara dragged the boy away.

There are hundreds of Hotels in Calais, large and small, expensive and cheap. Barbara didn't notice, or even care, what sort they had been booked into. She was just glad to get there. She and Donald shared a room. Her 'mother' had one to herself.

By now, Donald was not just bad tempered, but tired and hungry.

"I'm not staying here. I want to go home. I want to see Uncle Nick. He will look after me. I want a hamburger," he shouted, almost in one breath.

Barbara tried to get him into bed.

"I'm not sleeping here. I want my bed at home. Why can't we go home now?"

He was making so much noise that the occupants of the next room banged on the wall, and shouted back.

Eventually, Barbara managed to get a burger and a coke delivered, and Donald settled down exhausted to a spell of fitful sleep. He woke at about three in the morning, and made for the door. He was halfway down the corridor when Barbara caught up with him, and managed to drag him back to their room, fighting and shouting. A couple of other residents looked out to see what was going on. If they had spoken English, they would have been left in no doubt that Donald wanted to go home.

By the time they reached Moscow, Donald wasn't the only one who wished they were still at home in London.

Forget the journey!

Even when they travelled at civilised times on proper scheduled transport, it was still appalling, thanks to the boy. It should have been easy enough. A train from Frethun, just outside Calais to Paris changing at Lille, then a 4 hour flight to Domodedovo. Plenty to interest a six year old, one would have thought. But not Donald.

Everything was going the wrong way, for a start. He had decided he didn't like Paris, and certainly hated Moscow, and wasn't going to either of them and that was that. He wanted to go home, and home was not via Paris or Moscow. Where was Uncle Nick? Why hadn't he come to take him home? He had left a message on the phone, after all.

Donald had managed to lock himself in to the lavatory on the train to Paris, and had run away from the departure lounge after they had been through Customs at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport. That caused a terrible fuss, getting him back again, since he didn't have a ticket or a boarding card and didn't speak French. He was quite adamant, as well, that he didn't want to go back. He wanted to go home, and this was not the way to get there. No-one had heard of Uncle Nick, either, so nobody was any help at all.

By now, Barbara's 'mother' had had enough, and made her own way to the aircraft. She made sure her seat was well away from the other two, as well. If she was honest, Barbara had also endured enough. She would never have believed that Donald could behave so badly, but had a decent sized bite on her forearm and several bruises to her shins to prove that her son was, after all, strong willed and determined. Somehow, she survived the rest of the journey and the constant embarrassment she suffered because of his rowdy behaviour. She dared not think what it would be like in Moscow.

It was already going through her mind that she would somehow have to get the boy back to England, and his beloved Uncle Nick.

They were met by officials of some sort on arrival at Domodedovo, and her 'mother' was whisked off in a separate car.

They never met again.

She and Donald were bundled in to another waiting vehicle and headed north to the centre of Moscow, where they were taken to an apartment in a new-ish block of flats.

By now, she was speaking her native Russian, so Donald had even less of an idea what was going on. The official, apparently from the FSB Headquarters at the Lubyanka Building, explained to Barbara that she would be kept under virtual house arrest until they had examined in detail the reasons for her sudden return, and established to their own satisfaction that she hadn't been sent to Moscow by the British authorities as a double agent. That could all take some time.

This was the last straw for Barbara, who dissolved into tears. Even this brought forth no sympathy from son Donald.

"If we had stayed at home, then you wouldn't be crying. Uncle Nick would have made sure you were all right. Let's go home now."

He aimed a punch at the official in the front of the car. "Take us home now," he shouted. "We want to go home."

The Russian spoke no English, but delivered a smart clip round the ear to Donald, who also burst into tears.

The man was glad to get rid of them at their flat, which was an official Government residence.

He handed Barbara the key, and told her the place would be kept under surveillance until further notice. She was free to leave the flat for short periods, but would probably be escorted by an official. Hopefully, not him.

“There is food in the fridge,” he announced, “and you will find everything else you need. You may visit the local shopping arcade, but do not use the phone. It is straight through to our administrative office. You cannot make external calls from it. Tomorrow, you will be taken to Lubyanka for questioning by one of the Directors. We have appointed one of the other residents in this block to act as your mentor, to help you settle in, and show you around. I am told you know her husband. She will call on you tomorrow.”

He left, dodging a well-aimed boot from Donald, who was shouting at the top of his voice demanding to be taken home to Uncle Nick.

Barbara could not believe how her life had changed so dramatically in such a short space of time. Within days of living comfortably in London, with a secure job at the top of the British civil service, working diligently for her country, she was now back in Moscow in a small apartment and no future that she could foresee.

And Donald, of whom she had been very fond, was now making life even more difficult. She was sorry for him. He was too young to understand, and had been rushed away from his comfortable home, his friends, his school and everything that was familiar to him, into a totally alien environment. He had turned against her so very quickly and violently and unexpectedly. She could understand it, of course. But the depth of his anger was such that she feared she would never regain his confidence or love. That hurt.

She would miss the love of Nick, too, but in a way that had been her downfall. Her affair with Alan Jarvis had been a great mistake, but it had happened, and that was the end of it. Her controllers at the time had expressed concern, but this time her relationship with Nick, and their planned marriage, had been her undoing. She was living too close to the enemy, she had been told. She accepted that. Although it had considerably increased her access to classified information, it had also exposed her to greater risk of detection. And that was the turning point. She was close to being uncovered as an agent when she was pulled out in such a hurry a few days ago. She did not in any way want to leave London, but at the same time she did not wish to be caught and tried and spend the rest of her life in a British prison. She also knew that she was putting Nick at great risk, both to his life and his career, and she genuinely wanted to avoid that. So there was no option. She had to leave. But she also had to take Donald with her. She could not simply abandon him, although his behaviour now almost made her wish that she had.

She had grave doubts that he would ever settle in his new country and a strange city with people who he could not understand or speak to. There were several good English schools in Moscow, she knew that, but it would take years for him to adjust and speak the language sufficiently well for him to be accepted. On present form, he would not even begin to try to make the changes needed. Even in the short term, he would stand out among a crowd, and draw unwanted attention to her at a time when she, too, needed to adjust and become part of the Moscow scene again. She was sure she would be found work at the

Lubyanka headquarters of the FSB, but the thought of being 'questioned' disturbed her. She had no more useful information to pass on, she was sure, at least not much of any value which would not also put Nick into danger. And that she would avoid at all costs.

But Donald was a big problem now. Unless his disruptive behaviour subsided in a day or two, she could see that she would be asked officially to do something about it. But what could be done? They could take him from her, and put him into some kind of institution perhaps. But that would never work, as he spoke not a word of Russian.

The more she thought about it, the more she came to the conclusion that returning him to England was the only solution. Not just the only solution, but the best one. He was, after all, British by birth, and although they had provided him a forged Russian passport, he retained his British one as well. So had she, although the authorities did not know that.

By now, Donald was both hungry and tired. She quickly put together a meal for them both from what had been left for them in the kitchen and discovered immediately that Donald did not like the rough brown bread from the local supermarket, and liked the borsch soup even less. But he was too tired to argue much, and was glad to get into the bed they had left for him in the single bedroom. Barbara went through the back-pack he had brought with him, and found his favourite soft toy. Soon they were both tucked up in bed.

By the morning, Donald had found his voice again. He also managed to open the front door, and was half way to the road when he was caught and stopped. With the help of the security guard, Barbara managed to get him back to the flat, kicking and screaming.

Shortly afterwards, her phone rang.

"That'll be Uncle Nick," shouted Donald, grabbing the phone.

It wasn't, so he hung up before his mother could get to it.

It rang again, and this time Barbara managed to get there first.

She was instructed to either get a taxi or walk to the Lubyanka Building.

"Comrade Director Egor Ivanovic will meet you at 11 o'clock. Don't be late."

They walked.

Barbara was fearful that Donald would wrench himself free of her hand and run off, but she had told him that the man they were going to see might be able to help arrange for him to return home, if that's what he really wanted.

"That's what I really want," he said without hesitation. "Now!"

"I shan't be able to come with you, Donald. It means that we may never meet again – ever."

The boy was quiet for a moment.

"But if I'm with Uncle Nick, he will arrange for you come over to visit us if he wants you too."

Not '*If I want you to*,' she noted sadly.

"And you won't be alone," the boy added. "Grandma is here somewhere, so she will look after you. You don't want me," he added, "or we would have stayed at home in the first place."

He plainly did not want her, either. She was tearful when ushered into Ivanovic's office.

He made them welcome, offered the boy a coke and Barbara a coffee. The two adults spoke in Russian.

“There are many administrative details to be attended to now you are home after so long,” he said, “and my people will take care of them with all speed. For example, you will need a bank account, driving licence and so on, and eventually a job of work. All this will be taken care of. But first we also need to interrogate you in some depth. We need to be sure that you have no information which will be of value to us, as well as to make sure that your close relationships with people in your London office - far too close if I may say so, - have not resulted in you being turned by them. We do not welcome double agents.”

He looked at her fiercely.

“I must also tell you that we have already received complaints from other residents in your apartment block about your boy’s behaviour.” He nodded towards Donald. “We will not tolerate rowdiness and aggressive behaviour, and he will be taken from you if you are unable to control him,” he said.

“He is very young,” said Barbara defensively, “and does not understand at all what is going on or what is happening to him. I am doing my best to reassure him and quieten him, but I may have to consider sending him back to England if it becomes evident that he will not settle here.”

“That would be the best,” agreed Ivanovic. “Get rid of him. From what I am hearing, he would prefer to be with your Commander friend than here with you.”

“I am afraid you are right at the moment, but I hope to be able to change his mind.”

In fact, she was not at all hopeful.

“I also don’t believe I have any further useful information for you,” she added. “I have meticulously passed on everything I have discovered either to my controller or, more recently, to Makienko.”

“Ah, yes. Dmitri Makienko. The man seems to have disappeared off the face of the earth. Perhaps you have an idea of where he might be?”

“None at all.”

“Well, we shall have to judge after detailed questioning whether you have anything further to tell us which is of value. Meanwhile, I can tell you that Makienko’s wife, Sasha, lives in your apartment building. We have arranged for her to be your mentor, which we thought would be amusing. She will be in touch later today, I have no doubt.”

He waved them away, and the two were escorted out of the building.

Barbara had not been looking forward to meeting Makienko’s wife, but in the end, she proved to be both kind and helpful.

Barbara chose not to mention the fact that she had met Dmitri in London, and knew the background not only to their original expulsion from the Russian Embassy, but also the reasons behind Dmitri’s second departure after his swift return. Inevitably, the subject eventually came up.

“I gather you know my husband?” asked Sasha.

“Yes I do. He became one of my main contacts, even during the time you were both in London.”

“His return so quickly after we had left is claimed by Ivanovic to be unauthorised and they pretend not to know why he went back. He told the Director it was to collect personal items which we had left behind, but I am sure there was more to it than that.”

“He did not confide in me at all,” said Barbara, “although I did make contact with him after he returned, to give him information.”

“And now he seems to have disappeared.”

“So I am told.”

“Do you have the slightest idea where he might be?” Sasha was obviously anxious.

“I was asked the same thing this morning by Ivanovic, but Dmitri did not tell me.”

“Ivanovic thinks he has probably defected, but I know the man better than that,” said his wife. “If he had, we would have gone together. They have no idea either why he returned to London, never mind where he is now. The idiots at the Embassy followed him to the airport, but did not watch him board a plane, so they are only assuming he caught the Moscow flight. All they know is that he never arrived here, and hasn’t been seen or heard of since.”

“Very distressing for you,” sympathised Barbara, who could have told her more, but chose not to, for the time being, anyway. “I gather I am in for some in-depth questioning now I have returned, and I’m not looking forward to that one little bit.”

“That will not be pleasant,” said Sasha.

“Ivanovic also thinks I should *‘get rid of’* Donald, as he put it. I think I had already decided, even after such a short time, that he would be much better off back at home in London. It is unfair to expect him to settle here at his age. He has no idea what has happened, or where he is, and only talks about going home.”

“He certainly seems to have quietened down a bit this afternoon,” said Sasha.

“Only because he thinks there is a chance of him going home. That’s all he wants.”

“I will help if I can,” promised Sasha, “even if only to get some peace and quiet in this apartment block! Now, let me show you the local shops.”

Peter Northcot and Nick Marsden were looking at the CCTV footage taken at the Blackbushe airfield on the night of the Wilkinson’s departure. There was no doubt who it was. They saw the car arrive, a man force open the gate, the car drive in to the floodlit car park by the flying school, where all the light aircraft were parked. Three other people got out. While the bags were being taken out of the boot, the small figure of Donald ran in to the terminal building, no doubt to make his now famous phone call to Nick, hotly perused by one of the other figures. They could not tell if it was Barbara, or her mother. By this time, the aircraft had landed and taxied to a halt. The four people clambered aboard. Almost at once, the twin-engine aircraft took off again, into the darkness. A trained eye would have had no difficulty in reading the registration number of the aircraft as it moved away under the floodlights.

The two men had looked at the video several times, but could glean nothing new from it.

“Has it occurred to you, Nick, that we should have seen something of the security patrol on this video?”

"I suppose we should, thinking about it. It's not a huge place, and even if they were at the other end of the airfield, where they have the Sunday Market, they should have been able to get back when they heard the aircraft approach and land."

"Let's have a look at the whole tape again, not just the bit we are interested in."

"It covers just over two hours, I think."

They wound it back to the beginning, and watched it through to the end.

"Now that's very odd," said Peter. "Not a sign of them in all that time, either before the aircraft arrived or after it left."

"If they'd had their wits about them, they could at least have driven their Land Rover across the runway to block the aircraft's take off. They must have heard the thing arrive, surely."

"Didn't exactly rush to find out what was going on, did they?"

"They need to be asked why, in that case. I'll get on to the Superintendent in charge down there."

A bit later on, they took a call on the red phone from the MI6 people in Moscow.

"Two of your people seem to have arrived," Moscow station reported. "A middle aged girl and a young boy who is creating havoc. We'll keep a watch on them for you."

"Barbara and Donald," concluded Nick. "Poor little sod."

"Talking of the red phone," said Peter, "we haven't heard from Downing Street lately, have we?"

"Sir Robin Algar seems to have lost interest, all of a sudden."

"And Bill doesn't seem in the mood to offer him a briefing, either."

Nick rang Bill in the Ops Room.

"Two of our birds have turned up in Moscow," he announced. "Barbara and Donald, by the sound of it."

"If the Cabinet Secretary rings, tell him we still have nothing much to report yet, but that we think they've probably all gone to Yorkshire somewhere. Say that I'll get in touch with him when we know more."

Nick looked across to Peter.

"We were right," he announced. "The Cabinet Secretary is definitely being kept out of the loop for some reason."

"What's Bill up to now, I wonder?"

"Perhaps he knows something we don't know."

"It's not every day you deliberately mislead the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee."

"And hope for a future career!"

Suddenly, a rarely used machine in the corner of Bill's office burst into life.

"I'd forgotten that was there" said Peter, who was using the office while Bill was in the Ops Room. "What does it do?"

"It's a secure teletext; sends and receives encrypted text," said Nick crossing to it. "Moscow station," he announced. "Message reads,

"Sasha Makienko and Barbara Wilkinson have met stop they live in the same apartment block stop so do we exclam."

Well, if they've got someone that close, they should be able to keep an eye on things," said Nick. "Good for them!"

The machine chattered away again.

"The boy Donald is tearing the place apart stop who is Nick query"

"How do I reply?" asked Nick, staring at the now lifeless machine.

"Don't ask me," replied Peter. "I'm new here."

"Barbara would know."

"Gladys!" they both shouted.

Barbara was not enjoying her sessions of being quizzed at the FSB headquarters. They had obviously concluded that she had also been working for British Intelligence as a double agent, and she was having trouble convincing them otherwise.

"You were seen only this morning at the British Embassy," her inquisitor told her. "You were admitted to the Smolenskay building without question. How do you explain that?"

"I am trying to arrange for my son to be returned to England, as requested – told, rather – by Director Ivanovic."

"And what information did you pass to them while you were there?"

"None at all. I have nothing to tell them, or to tell you that you have not already been told."

"So why did they let you in without question? They knew you had information for them, that's my conclusion."

"Well your conclusion is far from being accurate. The fact is that my son has a British passport, since he is British, and that's why I was admitted without question."

"Ah!" said the man.

She did not tell him that she still had her British passport as well.

Donald was sitting in the room, quietly for a change, not knowing what was going on. But he had promised to behave on the understanding that if he did, he could well be sent back home to his beloved Nick. That was the only thing keeping him quiet; that, and a can of Coke and his favourite book which he had brought from home.

They kept asking her about Makienko and where she thought he was, but she could not help them at all. She had concluded, though, that she might one day tell Sasha about her husband, and where he had gone. She would have to tell her about Lloyd as well, but could not see that it would in any way put Nick at risk if she did. She had no idea, of course, what had happened to Dmitri, only that he had gone to Switzerland where he was believed to be a threat to Lloyd, and that Nick had flown out to try to prevent a further assassination attempt. Once Nick had left her Battersea home, of course, she lost touch with events, and was herself rushed out of the country soon afterwards.

She had one further piece of information which she could also pass on to Sasha at some time, but had not yet worked out if it was a good idea to tell her or not.

Perhaps when Barbara knew the girl better. Then she could expose her husband, Dmitri, as the murderer of Donald's father. On the other hand, why wait? No, she decided. She would tell her now. Once arrangements had been made for Donald to return to London, then she would tell Sasha.

Things were getting busy again in Clerkenwell. Later that night, the machine in the corner burst into life again.

"Wilkinson has been to embassy wanting to arrange repatriation of the boy stop official will ring Marsden to fix stop"

Nick immediately told Bill Clayton.

"With your approval, I shall go over there to collect him. As you know, I speak a bit of Russian, and I've been there before, so we have people on the ground to help. One day out, and one back should be enough."

"If you're quite sure that's what you want to do, then I guess we could spare you for a couple of days."

"Good. Thanks. Donald can be looked after at the Embassy until I get there. He will feel more at home there among English people than in a strange flat in a strange City, and the sooner he gets away from Barbara the better."

"All we want now is for the Embassy to ring. If only Gladys could find out how to send messages on that machine."

"Ask Nigel Mynott, the IT man downstairs. He should know."

"Never thought of him. I'll get him back in as soon as possible. He'll have gone home by now."

Shortly afterwards, the man from the Moscow Embassy rang Bill.

"Am I speaking to 'S'", he asked.

"You are."

"It's about Donald Wilkinson."

"I know. We were told you would ring."

The man was puzzled.

"How the hell did you know that?"

"We have our sources, even in Moscow," replied Bill. "We are happy to take the boy back if you can look after him for a day or so. Commander Marsden will fly over to collect him."

"Is that the famous 'Nick'?" asked the official.

"It is. He speaks Russian, and knows Moscow, as well as the boy. He will travel as a tourist under his own name as plain 'Mister'. Let us know when you have the boy within the Embassy, and Marsden will catch the next available plane. Don't meet him or make any special arrangements. He can look after himself, and will just turn up. Make sure he is expected at the gate, that's all."

Embassy officials aren't that used to being told what to do and how to do it, but he meekly said, "Very well. There will be no problem looking after the boy for a day or so. I'll be in touch when he is here, probably early tomorrow," and ended the call.

Gladys was already on the phone booking Marsden on the next available British Airways plane to Moscow's Domodedovo airport. It was a four hour flight, or thereabouts, but Nick wanted plenty of time before the pick-up. He withdrew street maps of Moscow from the store downstairs, and Gladys made him sign for them. He decided he did not want to go armed, even with a personal protection Smith and Wesson.

He caught BA0233, which left Heathrow at 0835 the following morning. It didn't arrive at Domodedovo until just after four that afternoon, Moscow time, but that would give him all the time he needed.

Gladys booked the two of them to return on the afternoon flight the next day, business class, of course. The first flight out left at about six in the morning, and Nick judged that this was just too early for a young lad who would be both tired and excited, whereas BA0232 left Moscow just after five in the evening Moscow time. That would give Nick plenty of time to make sure he was not being followed before collecting Donald, and they would then have plenty of time to book in, look at the aircraft coming and going, and have a bit of lunch. Nick was keen to get 'air side' and through passport control and immigration as quickly as possible. Because of the time difference, they would be in London only an hour later.

"Keep all your receipts," instructed Gladys.

"I'll get a car to meet you both on your return," Bill had said. "Come back to our place. We'll look after the boy until we can formalise things, or even afterwards, if he likes, and I suggest we put a bed up for you in his room for the first night or so until he's settled. We've already retrieved all his clothes and toys and books and things from Battersea, so he should feel at home more or less immediately."

"Certainly more at home than he does now."

"You bet. Catherine has also been on to his old school, which is more than happy to have him back. She told them he had been for a short last-minute holiday to Moscow, where he had a relative."

"Nothing more to do, then, by the sound of it," said Nick with a grin.

"Just go get him, that's all! Do you plan to see Barbara while you're there as a matter of interest?"

Nick looked at Bill quizzically. "I haven't decided, and I may not tell you anyway."

"Understood," said Bill, knowingly. "Just be very careful, that's all."

"Leave everything to me."

Before he left, Nick had another word with Moscow station to finalise arrangements.

He wasted no time after he landed, apart from remembering he was there as a tourist. He collected maps and guides from the kiosk before he ambled out of arrivals.

He checked his secure mobile phone. There was a text message.

"The chick is in the nest."

So far, so good.

He had spotted a man among the 'meeters and greeters' holding a sign above his head, reading **"NIKOLAI NYKTIN"**. Common enough Russian names, but today that was him.

He nodded to the man, who headed towards the taxi rank. Nick followed.

When they reached the cab, the man said, in Russian, "You Steve?"

"No. Paul."

"Silly of me. Steve's my next pick up."

The agreed formula; theatrical perhaps, but in this town you can never be too sure.

Nick threw his backpack on to the back seat, and got into the cab.

He picked up the package waiting for him on the seat, swiftly unwrapped it, and shoved the contents up his sleeve, the wrapping in his backpack.

“Do you know where to go,” he asked the man in Russian.

“English will do, if you prefer,” said the driver. “Yes, I know where the lady lives.”

“That’s more than I do,” replied Nick. “How far?”

“Half an hour, depending on traffic.”

The driver told him the flat number when he dropped him off.

“I’ll be around,” he said. “See you later.”

“I’ll only be a minute,” replied Nick.

“Give me time to go round the block,” said the driver. “In case we’ve been followed.”

Barbara answered the door, and was plainly shocked to see Nick standing there. He pushed her roughly inside before she could say a word.

As she fell back, wide eyed and mouth agape, she managed to whisper, “Donald’s at the Embassy.”

“I know that,” Nick said in Russian, “I just wanted to say good bye.”

He immediately turned on his heel and left, closing the door firmly behind him.

He looked carefully to his left and right, and then walked at a leisurely pace to the road.

He had decided to leave the knife where it was.

As luck would have it, there was a passing taxi, which he waved down.

“Where to Guv’?” asked the driver cheekily, in English.

“You booked the Hotel,” replied Nick.

Nothing smart, but full of tourists, and not far from the Embassy.

“Would you mind ditching these when you get back to your garage,” Nick asked the driver, handing him his vinyl gloves.

“No problem,” said the man. “Pick you up in the morning?”

“No thanks. I’ll walk.”

Nick needed time to think and relax a bit. There was no need to pass messages to anyone. The taxi driver would do that.

He booked in, and mingled with the tourists to make sure he was not being followed.

He had a quick meal before turning in.

He quite enjoyed the rough brown bread and bowl of borsch.

Donald had spent a happy night with one of the Embassy staff families, the first time he had been able to talk to anyone properly for some days.

They had told him that there was a big surprise for him the next day. He was already tired out by the excitement of everything that had happened over the last few days, so needed no persuading to get to bed early.

When Nick got there the next morning, he went in by the side entrance, and made straight for the office where diplomatic passports were waiting for him. The Embassy had prepared one for each of them, which would save time at both ends of their journey.

He made his way to reception, where Donald was waiting for him.

“Uncle Nick, Uncle Nick, Uncle Nick!” he shouted as he rushed over and threw himself into Nick’s outstretched arms.

"I knew you'd come to take me home," he declared.

"Come on then! Let's go home," he said, picking up the boy and his backpack.

The couple who had looked after Donald were obviously amused to see their temporary lodger in such excitement.

"Thanks for all you've done," said Nick.

"Yes, thank you," said Donald, politely, kissing them both.

"It's been a pleasure having you," said the girl. "I haven't seen anyone so happy for a long time!"

"I had quite a fight, I can tell you Uncle Nick," said Donald, as he was bundled into the waiting cab. "I know you fight for what you want, being in the Army and everything, so I fought for what I wanted."

"And you won!"

"I knew I would in the end," said the boy. "I just knew you'd come to take me home again. I knew it. Don't ever let them take me away again. I don't want another fight like that."

"You'll be OK now, soldier," said Nick, who explained they were both going to stay with Catherine and Bill for a bit. Until things got sorted out properly.

"My mum won't be there, will she?" he pleaded. "I don't want to see her again. They said my Mum was a foreigner and a spy."

"Who told you that?"

"A friend of hers who lives in the flats – satchel or something her name was."

"Sasha," suggested Nick.

"That's right, Sasha. That's her. Do you know her?"

"We've never met," said Nick. "Did she speak English, then?"

"No, but I kept asking what people were saying, and that's what Mum said she was saying. We had long meetings in an office, too, but they never told me what they were talking about."

"What else did your Mum say about the lady in the flat?"

"She told 'satchel' that you went to Switzerland, to save a professor. Is that really why you went?"

"Something like that," admitted Nick.

"Satchel, or whatever you called her, said she would go there too, soon, to try to find somebody. Does that mean you will have to go again? Please don't go again, now you're taking me home. Stay at home with me for a bit."

"I won't go again," he promised.

But somebody might have to, he thought. Certainly Lloyd should be warned. Damn that woman!

Marsden used his mobile at the airport, to send an encrypted message to Section 11. It looked just like any other mobile phone, but had been modified to operate at a high level of encryption.

So they had told him. He hoped they were right.

"The chick is flying. Mrs Mak heading for Geneva to find Lloyd or Dmitri or both. B is OK."

It caused quite a stir in Clerkenwell. They debated whether someone should get over to Geneva to look after Lloyd, like they always had.

“That responsibility has been passed to the Swiss police, but we’d better tip them off if nothing else,” said Clayton. “I can’t imagine that Lloyd is as important to this country or such a threat to Russia as he used to be, now that he’s given up the research he was doing.”

“We could always ask Sir Robin Algar,” suggested Northcot.

“Let’s not. We’ll make up our own mind this time. If he was still of value, we’d be over there already.”

“If Dusty was still on active service, he could go.”

“Well, he isn’t. He’s only just got to Headley Court,” said Bill. “I think I’d better ring Catherine, to make sure she’s ready for our new lodger.”

“I’ll ring Switzerland, then.”

CHAPTER 12

SASHA MAKIENKO – TIME TO KILL

It had been something of a shock when Barbara Wilkinson arrived in the previously quiet, and quite exclusive, apartment block near the Lubyanka building.

It was an official residence provided by the authorities for their senior employees and families. Most were employed by the KGB, or FSB as it was now known, and many of the families living there had husbands who, for one reason or another, were away ‘on business.’

There was a certain dignity about the place, and there were certain standards which the residents were expected to maintain.

As Sasha Makienko often explained to neighbours afterwards, Barbara herself was a model of what one would expect. It was her son who had been the problem.

One could perhaps understand the boy’s behaviour. His mother had been an undercover agent in London for some time, but her sudden recall had meant that her young son, British by birth, had been torn away from his home and familiar surroundings at short notice. He had pitched up in a foreign country, surrounded by people who did not speak his language, and so one could hardly expect him to behave normally.

In the short time that they had known one another, however, Sasha had got on well with Barbara. Sasha herself was lonely and worried by the disappearance of her husband while abroad on duty. Nobody seemed to know where he was, or even if he was still alive. So Barbara, who knew him while he had been in London, was an unexpected and welcome contact, and she had been looking forward to getting to know her even better.

What she had said about husband Dmitri’s disappearance had been truly shocking, but at least she now had a clue as to where he might have gone when left London. It was good of her to confide in her new friend and mentor, when she had resisted attempts by Director Ivanovic to glean the information. It was even more of a shock to learn about Alan Jarvis. Dmitri had told her about the facts surrounding the blackmail, and the eventual death of the man who had acted as assassin on his behalf, but now to learn that Jarvis had been Donald’s father was a real bolt from the blue.

She and Barbara agreed that it was a cruel twist by the people in the FSB to bring them together in this way. They had a sadistic turn of mind, reminiscent of the bad old days.

But then, as Sasha reminded Barbara, Putin, the ex-Director of the KGB, was now President, and things were again changing for the worse, with signs that the State machine was reverting slowly to its old ways.

But there was no animosity between them, in spite of everything. They were both victims of the system, after all, and had no real control over events where the Politburo was concerned.

Barbara herself was a pleasant and likeable person, she found. She was distraught at the prospect of having to send her son Donald back to London, although she knew he would be well looked after and loved as she had loved him. But a mother is not easily parted from her son, whatever the circumstances.

Sasha had offered to go with her to the Embassy, where Donald was to be left while arrangements were made for his return home, but Barbara had chosen to go alone. She could understand that. One does not want virtual strangers hanging around at tearful farewells, and Barbara realised that, once the doors closed behind her, she would never see Donald again.

So she had not seen her new neighbour since the previous morning, and was surprised to find two uniformed policemen at her door when she answered it.

"Comrade Makienko, I gather you were appointed as the mentor to the apartment's latest resident, Barbara 'Wilkinson'?" asked one of them, needlessly.

"Quite correct," replied Sasha.

"Can you tell me when you last saw her?"

"Yesterday morning."

"How did she seem?"

"Very distressed, since you ask," replied Sasha.

"Why?"

"Because her son was to be sent back to England, and she was preparing to take him to the British Embassy, where she would see him for the last time. In similar circumstances, you would probably have felt the same," she added.

"Quite so," said the man. His colleague was taking notes. "Did you see her or hear her return?"

"No."

"And you have heard nothing of her since?"

"Nothing. But tell me why you are asking. What has happened? Has she not returned from the Embassy? Perhaps she chose to stay there for one last evening with her son."

"No, she returned to her flat," replied the policeman.

"So what is the problem?" asked Sasha.

"The problem is that, since she returned to her apartment, she has been murdered," said the man dramatically. "We need to ask you whether you have seen or heard anything at all suspicious. That is why we are here."

"Murdered?" asked a disbelieving Sasha. "That is not possible. She has not been here long enough to make any enemies. Who would want to kill her? Was it a robbery?"

"That is what we are trying to find out," said the man. "You will accompany us, please, to the office of Director Egor Ivanovic, who will ask you further questions."

Sasha knew Ivanovic well. He was the idiot whose organisation had lost all track of her husband, Dmitri. At least, thanks to Barbara, she now had a clue as to where he might have gone. That would be something she could tell the man at least.

But that did not lessen the total shock of hearing that her newly found friend had been killed.

There could be only two possible explanations.

If she had been a double agent after all, then the FSB itself could have done it, to keep her quiet after she had 'got rid' of her son, as she had been instructed.

Or it could have been the British, to protect what secrets she may have brought with her after her sudden withdrawal.

Would anyone ever know who had done it or why?

Director Ivanovic was waiting when she arrived.

"I suppose it is too much to hope that you have brought me here tell me news about my husband?" she said, immediately going on to the offensive.

"I have brought you here, Sasha, as we are enquiring into the murder of the woman you were supposed to be looking after."

"Her death is appalling news," she responded, "and yet another example of the total ineptitude of the organisation you are supposed to be running."

"Please be calm," appealed Ivanovic.

"Be calm," she repeated. "Be calm! How can you expect me to be calm? You have no idea where my husband went when he left London after you sent him there, you have no idea where he is now, or even whether he is dead or alive. And now, a matter of days after she was instructed by you to return to her fatherland after years of exemplary service abroad, you have murdered another of your top agents. I suppose that it what happened to my husband. I suppose you murdered him as well."

She was quite enjoying this.

"We had nothing to do with the murder of Barbara Wilkinson, and neither do we know yet what has happened to your husband," insisted the Director. "You have been brought here in case you can help our inquiries into this murder, which happened virtually on your own doorstep."

"I had no idea you were a common-or-garden policeman," countered Sasha. "I had always believed that, useless though you appear to be, you were in charge of an important part of our espionage organisation. Now you tell me you are trying to act as a detective, investigating a murder which you should have prevented in the first place."

Ivanovic sighed. Further argument would plainly be a waste of time and breath.

"You have already told our colleagues here that you know nothing about the death of your friend Barbara, and that you heard and saw nothing suspicious. So let us move on."

He ruffled through the papers on his desk.

"It will not surprise you to learn," he continued, "that Barbara's flat had been fitted with listening devices. From our monitoring of these, it is obvious that she has confided in you, when she had refused to confide in us."

"What, for instance?"

“For instance, she told you that your husband had gone to Switzerland rather than returning here to Moscow. For instance, she told you that Professor Jack Barclay was still alive, and that he was in Geneva with a new identity as Dr Roger Lloyd. Is this true?”

“Quite true, as you know. You have been spying on her, and have the tapes.”

“Why do you think she chose to tell you, a complete stranger, and not us, her employer for many years?”

“Probably because, after all those years, she knew as I know how utterly useless you all are.”

Ivanovic wished he had never asked.

“We were never convinced,” he said, changing the subject, “that your husband had succeeded in his mission to kill Barclay, and now we know for sure that he had failed.”

“You will also know that he was a dedicated servant of the State, and that in spite of your own failings, he chose to follow the man in order to finish the task you had set him.”

Ivanovic was not sure he was on top of this interview.

“As it happens,” he said, “we are no longer interested in the removal of Barclay. Because of the efforts of others in England, he has successfully been removed from the threatening research he was involved in, and is therefore no longer a danger to us. However, I gather that you intend travelling to Geneva in an effort to trace Barclay and finish off what your husband so conspicuously failed to achieve. Is that true?”

“You have the tapes,” repeated Sasha. “What I also hope to do more than anything is to trace my husband, which you have so far completely failed to do. I shall be leaving soon, with that as my main objective.”

“We shall also be renewing our efforts to trace your husband, in the light of the new information we have at our disposal. This has already been passed to our agents in Bern, for their attention.”

“A lot of use that will be!”

“Whatever you do, Mrs Makienko is up to you, but do not expect any help or support from us. We shall keep a watch on your movements, as you would expect, and as I have said, will continue our own enquiries.”

“If you watch my movements as well as you watched those of Dmitri, you will have no idea of where I am or what I am doing,” she countered fiercely, and stood to leave.

Director Egor Ivanovic turned to his secretary, as she stormed out of his office.

“We should have employed her and not her husband,” he said ruefully.

Nick Marsden was not in the most relaxed of moods when he got back into the office.

“How’s Russia?” asked Peter chirpily.

“As bloody as ever! At least I’ve got the boy back home, so he is going to be all right.”

“Quite a trauma for him, though.”

“He’s young enough to get over it. I’m not so sure I shall, though. I think I’m getting a bit old for this sort of work.”

“If you don’t have a sense of humour, you should never have joined,” said Peter.

“When I was posted here, I thought I was in for a quieter life behind a desk, planning things, and that unarmed combat and being parachuted in to icy wastes up mountains, and stuff like that, was all behind me,”

“You need a break,” said Peter.

“I think you’re right,” Nick agreed. “Perhaps I’ll have a word with Bill when he gets in. He’s helping out at home getting Donald organised. Anything much been happening since I’ve been away?”

“No. All our Ops seem to be running smoothly, apart from yours! I’ve a funny feeling that Bill is on to something we don’t know about. If you ask me, he has spent far more time than he need closeted in the Ops Room. He seems to have been busy enough, but don’t ask me what he’s been doing. We’ve alerted Switzerland to be on the look-out for Sasha Makienko, by the way, and the Swiss police are going to warn Lloyd as well.”

“That’s good. Have we heard from Lloyd lately?”

“Not feeling well was the last we heard, but the Swiss didn’t comment on him when I rang.”

“I wonder what the Makienko woman plans to do if she ever finds Lloyd. Not finish him off, I hope.”

“She probably thinks he might know what happened to husband Dmitri.”

“Which he does, of course. If he tells her anything, she’ll have a hell of a lot of digging to do after all this time. It never stops snowing over there.”

“Perhaps he should be told not to say anything. Maybe we should get Bill to give him a ring. He knows the man better than anyone. It’s a pity Dusty can’t get over there. He and Lloyd were quite close in the end, so you said.”

“I think I’ll take a day off and visit the bloke, since you mention him. It’ll do me good. It’s quite remarkable how he’s survived everything, you know. Nearly died from the cold, nearly got killed by Makienko, and then nearly died of his injuries on the aircraft getting him home.”

“Tough bugger, obviously.”

“And highly motivated. But if it wasn’t for the little Royal Navy Petty Officer medical lady I had in my team, he would probably not have made it.”

“You took care of Makienko first,” Peter reminded him.

“It was lucky we arrived when we did,” said Nick. “Otherwise it would have been a different story.”

“I gather he’s lucky he didn’t need an amputation.”

“Very lucky. But Dusty has been working pretty hard to get fit again, so it means that he’ll only be on the three week rehabilitation course at Headley, while they get him well enough to return to work. The guys there will put the finishing touches to his recovery. I’ve heard a lot about the place, so it will be good to see at first-hand what they do. And I quite like the Surrey countryside, too. Some good pubs as well.”

“It would be good if I could come with you. I’d like to meet this guy.”

“Speak to Bill. I’m sure he’ll agree if things are reasonably quiet. Apart from anything else, we need to be sure that Dusty wants to come back here, and what training he might need.”

“And check out the pubs!”

Bill Clayton spoke to Lloyd, who seemed glad to make contact again. But it was not a happy call, so Bill said.

“He’s agreed to say nothing about Makienko if his wife should turn up, but she’ll need to be quick. He’s planning to return to England in a week or so. He needs to catch up with some old colleagues he said, but he’s plainly not at all well. He’s been enjoying life at CERN, but they’ve shut down the Hadron Collider for maintenance for a few months, so it’s only analytical work to be done, going over the material they’ve already collected. I think he’s finding that a bit boring.”

“What’s the latest risk assessment so far as he’s concerned?”

“I don’t think there is one. He’s far removed from the work he was doing at Cullum, so I think he no longer poses a threat to anyone, and neither will he be head-hunted to the extent he was. Others have now taken over his role. But I don’t propose to ask Robin Algar.”

“It’s odd he hasn’t been on lately asking about Barbara and our spy hunt,” commented Nick. “I wonder why?”

“I think he already knows,” said Bill mysteriously.

“Who can have told him, then? He certainly hasn’t asked us what’s going on.”

Bill shrugged, and went back to the Ops Room.

“The plot thickens,” commented Peter. “I wonder what he’s up to.”

Nick shrugged, and went back to his office.

Not long after that, the policeman in charge of things down at Blackbushe Airport got on the phone. He spoke to Peter.

“We’ve spent quite a time quizzing the security people who were supposed to be on duty the night your people left the country illegally,” he announced.

“And?”

“And what they say is very odd indeed.”

“What then?”

“They claim that they were paid and paid handsomely, to keep out of the way for a couple of hours,” said the Superintendent.

“Bribed, you mean.”

“Quite. Two and a half grand each, to be precise. In cash.”

“Not bad! Who paid them?”

“Well, this is the odd part. They say it was the Prime Minister. At least, one says that’s who he thought it was, while the other bloke says it was Downing Street, and not the PM himself. Either way, it’s very odd, and they can’t be shaken from their story, whether questioned together or on their own.”

“They must have made it up,” claimed Peter.

“Somehow, I don’t think so,” said the policeman. “They were paid a grand up front, in cash, and the other one-and-a-half next day. Again, in cash. Foreign sounding bloke in a smart car delivered it, so they say, but of course they didn’t get the number, did they! We’ve also managed to recover most of the money.”

“Are the notes traceable, do you think?”

“We’re checking.”

“Where are they now, these two?”

“Under arrest, for further questioning. All sorts of charges are being suggested, from aiding and abetting, perverting the course of justice, and upwards.”

“Keep at it then, and keep me informed. I must tell my guvnor straight away.”

For some reason, Bill didn't seem all that surprised.

Sasha Makienko was not at all sure she wanted to go to Geneva, or what she would do when she got there. She was quite sure, however, that she needed to get away from Moscow. She'd had enough of the place lately.

It almost seemed as if things had taken a turn for the better when her new neighbour arrived, and now she was gone as well. Not just her husband, but Barbara as well.

She was sick with worry about Dmitri. If she knew he was dead, she could at least grieve, but nobody could tell her anything. Nobody knew whether he was dead or alive, or where he was or what had happened to him. Only Barbara had known that he had gone to Switzerland, probably to Geneva, and why he had gone.

But would she, Sasha, be able to discover anything new if she went? Probably not. But she would no doubt feel better for having at least tried to find out. The Professor might have some idea, if, indeed, he had survived Dmitri's attempt to kill him. Barbara thought he had. Her first task, she decided, would be to find him, and that meant finding the science place where he worked. A nuclear research place called CERN; she'd heard of it, but knew nothing about it. She looked it up on the internet, as much as anything to find out where it was exactly.

The next thing she did was to get a guide book and a map of Geneva. She knew there was a good bookshop near the GUM Department Store, and they had everything she needed.

She somehow felt a bit better now she was doing something. While she was in that part of the City, she also checked at a travel agency about flights and fares to Geneva. Quite expensive, but then Dmitri's pay was still going into the bank, so that would not be a problem.

The interesting and distressing thing was, though, that he had not withdrawn any money from the account for some weeks. She wondered if that could possibly mean that he was dead, after all. The Government had to keep paying him, of course, until they were sure that he was no longer alive, and then she would get half his salary as a pension. But so far, it was all being paid in to their account. There was plenty there for the ticket.

Having got so far, she pressed on, never quite sure what would happen if and when she got to Switzerland. She decided to stay in Geneva itself, at least for the time being, rather than in one of the smaller villages nearer to CERN. And why not? She needed a break. Her life had been in turmoil recently, what with their hasty expulsion from London, then her husband disappearing and now her new flat-mate being murdered. She needed a break, and time to work out what to do next. She was only a housewife, after all, and not really used to all this sort of thing, as her husband was. Or had been. Which was why she was not really sure if she was doing the best thing, or what to do first when she got there.

Fortunately, she spoke a bit of French, so she was able to get about all right. She decided that she rather liked Geneva. Good shops and good restaurants as well, although it was more expensive than she had thought. So she relaxed for a few days, and did a bit of sightseeing, a bit of shopping, and had a trip up the lake on one of the steamers.

Eventually, she decided to find CERN. From the main station in Geneva, at Cornavin, she could catch a number 18 tram, which took her right to the main entrance, where it terminated. Only 3.50 Swiss francs, too.

But when she got there, she did not go in. It was all rather intimidating. There was a huge exhibition Globe on the opposite side of the road, but she was no scientist, so what really went on at CERN was not of great interest to her. The main site was a vast complex of buildings, but she noticed that nearly everyone from the tram went up the steps into the main reception area. The returning tram was equally full of people who came from the main reception area.

So she got back on it, and returned to central Geneva.

What to do next was the real problem.

In Director Ivanovic's office, she had been full of steely resolve. If Dmitri had failed, she would finish the job for him. She would also find out what had happened to her beloved Dmitri.

But if Dmitri had failed to 'eliminate' the Professor that meant she had to, if she was to finish the job on his behalf. And that meant killing the man. Murder. Now, she suddenly wasn't at all sure. She wasn't that sort of person. Murder? Thinking about it, she didn't think she could bring herself to do it, in spite of all her bravado in the Director's office. After all, the Director himself had said that the Professor was no longer a threat. So perhaps, after all, she wouldn't have to do what she had set out to do.

But she *would* like to know where Dmitri was, and what had happened to him. Only the Professor could tell her that, it seemed, so she had to meet him at least. Then she could judge whether he was still a threat, or a nasty piece of work who should be removed, or whatever. That would be the time to decide whether or not she had the courage to finish off what her husband had failed to do. If she had the courage.

Most of all, she wanted to know about Dmitri.

This was not, she decided, the sort of problem that normal, ordinary Muscovite housewives have to face. And, after all, that's what she was. Wife of a brave husband, who was a bit of a loose cannon perhaps and of independent mind and spirit maybe, but nevertheless she was only his wife. Not in the same profession, or of the same rather wild-cat character, or with the same training or anything. Just a housewife, that's all.

Yet here she was, in a hotel in Geneva, trying to pluck up the courage to meet a nuclear scientist she knew nothing about, with a view to killing him. Perhaps.

Or perhaps not.

He might be quite a nice man, perhaps with a wife of his own somewhere. And children. But he might also know something about her husband, and what had happened to him. That's the important bit. Find out about Dmitri.

But could she really just turn up, ask to meet him, and announce herself as the wife of the man who had tried to kill him? What would his reaction be to that? Perhaps he would want to kill her, rather than the other way round.

She really did wonder why she was here, and what she was going to do.

But having got that far, she really had to press on, and find out about Dmitri if she could.

So she would go back to the place, and ring the bell, and ask to speak to a Professor Lloyd.

Tomorrow.

Gladys was getting a bit fed up with her boss working from the Ops Room instead of from his own office upstairs. She would have been glad of a quid for every time she had rushed up and down the stairs, from her office next to his proper one, to his temporary desk downstairs.

Giving up smoking had been bad enough, but now she was losing weight because of exercise she was not used to. It looked as if Barbara was never going to come back to her old job, so Gladys was not about to complain. She was enjoying life, if she was honest, and did not relish the thought of returning to her old post in charge of Section 11's administration.

What was nice, she thought, was the way Bill Clayton had without question trusted her from the start. Sure, she had a good security clearance, but so did Barbara. So she was pleased that he had shown such confidence in her.

He was about to show it again.

"Gladys," he said, "nobody else needs to know about this, but I want you to find a chap I used to know when I was in Northern Ireland. In a roundabout way, he worked for me, and was a wizard at getting round banking security systems. I need him to do that again. He runs his own computer company, or did, at least. Name of Jonathan Hood, known as Robin for obvious reasons. Partner called Marian. Ex-Oxford. Brilliant mathematician."⁵

"Not the sort of circles I usually move in," observed Gladys, "but I'll find him. Urgent?"

"Yes. Drop everything else, if you can."

"And when I find him?"

"I need to meet him, but not here. And don't tell Peter or Nick – or anyone."

"I was wondering what to do tomorrow," she said.

Sasha Makienko was also worried about tomorrow.

Would she have the guts to wander into that vast science place at CERN, and ask to see Professor Lloyd?

Yes, she would, she decided. Forget whether Dmitri had tried to kill him. She needed his help now to try to find Dmitri himself, the failed assassin who had disappeared.

So she caught the number 18 tram again, and when it eventually arrived, walked up the steps with the other tourists into the reception area.

She wasn't quite sure what she had expected to find behind the glass doors of building 33. It was full of photographs and diagrams and video clips and displays of all sorts, as well as people. There were plenty of officials about, offering help and tours and leaflets and so on, but there was also a reception desk with smiling girls waiting to be of further help. Sasha headed for that, and hoped her French was up to the challenge ahead.

⁵ Read 'Cashback' and 'Their Own Game', both by Duncan James.

"I would like to meet a Professor Lloyd please, if he works here," she told the girl.

"Do you know where he works?"

"Here, at CERN."

"Is he expecting you?"

"No."

"But this is a huge establishment," the girl protested. "Do you know what area he works in, or what he does in particular?"

"I'm afraid not. He hasn't been here very long."

"Well," said the girl, "I'll try to find him, but we have over 3,000 scientists working here from 38 different countries."

"I know he is English, and a nuclear scientist, if that helps."

"Why don't you take a seat over there while I try our personnel people to see if they can trace him. Please make yourself at home, look round the exhibition, and help yourself to tea or coffee from the machine."

After what seemed like ages, and two mugs of coffee later, the girl came over to her.

"I think I may have found the man you are looking for," she announced. "We have a Doctor, not Professor, Roger Lloyd working here, who has recently joined us from England."

"That sounds like him."

"Who shall I say wants to meet him?"

"Sasha Makienko. From Russia. We have not met before, but I believe he will know of my husband."

"I will try to get hold of him, and see if he is free to meet you. Come with me to the desk, in case he wishes to speak to you."

Sasha was now getting even more nervous. Whatever would she say to the man?

Eventually, the girl handed her the phone.

"He will talk to you," she said, "but is a bit busy at the moment so cannot immediately get over here from his laboratory."

Sasha took the phone, her hand shaking.

"Hello," she said. "Is that Professor Lloyd?"

"Doctor Lloyd," he corrected her. "And you are Sasha Makienko, I believe."

"I am."

"I have been expecting to hear from you," said the softly spoken man.

Sasha was disbelieving.

"How could you possibly be expecting to hear from me?" she asked.

"Just let's say that I was told to expect you," he replied mysteriously.

"I need to talk to you," she said bravely.

"Of course you do," he replied. "You have come all this way specially. But I am a bit tied up at the moment, so I cannot get over to the reception area to meet you right now. So perhaps later?"

"That would be kind. Shall I wait here?"

"No need for that," he said. "Tell me where you are staying."

She told him.

"I know it. Why don't I buy you dinner there later this evening? Shall we say at seven o'clock?"

“That would be kind,” she said again. “How shall I know you?”

“Book a table in your name, and they will take me to you when I arrive. I shall catch the tram.”

“So shall I,” replied Sasha, totally confused. “And thank you.”

Now she’d done it. There was no going back now.

She looked at her watch. Three hours.

Time to kill.

Roger Lloyd wasn’t at all what she had been expecting. For a nuclear scientist, she guessed he was smartly dressed, in a scruffy sort of way. What was left of his hair, though, was carefully combed - you couldn’t call it ‘groomed’ - and his beard was neatly cut, although not as trim perhaps as it should have been. He was of medium height and build, but walked with a slight stoop. His face was pale, and his sunken eyes had dark rings beneath them.

She concluded, all in a few seconds as he approached her table, that he had seen better days, and that he looked ill.

He extended his hand as he arrived, and kissed hers in greeting.

“Sasha! I do hope I have not kept you waiting.”

“Not at all. I was here early, to make sure you found me as arranged.”

“Shall we order first and talk later?”

He handed her a menu.

“If you’ve eaten here before, you may know what’s good and what isn’t, so you can recommend something perhaps.”

Eventually, they chose their meal and a modest bottle of wine, which they both enjoyed.

Sasha was finding this difficult to cope with. They had been behaving towards one another like old friends, rather than new enemies, and he was proving to be quite charming. In spite of everything, he was really quite good looking as well.

“For a Russian,” he said, “your French is surprisingly good, thank heaven. At least we can chat!”

“I only did French at school,” she admitted. “We have never been stationed there.”

“But you were in London.” A statement, rather than a question. “So let’s now talk about why you are here, and why I am with you, while we wait for our coffee.”

“Very well,” replied Sasha. “First of all, though, I am mystified how you seemed to be expecting me when I spoke to you on the phone this afternoon. Nobody outside Moscow knew of my plans.”

“You are plainly too nice a lady to be involved in the dark arts of espionage,” replied Lloyd, “but I know your husband is. To be honest, I am not directly involved either, although it has been my misfortune to become involved, on the fringes, shall we say, in recent months. But it is a world with which I am not familiar as your husband is. For all that, I was told that you were coming to Geneva to search me out. Don’t ask me who told me or how they knew, but obviously they were right.”

Sasha shook her head in disbelief. A pretty head, Lloyd noted. Nice hair, a pert nose and an attractive smile when she allowed herself to smile.

“I also know,” continued Lloyd, “that you are here to kill me because your husband failed to do so.”

Sasha was plainly shocked by this rather flippant statement.

“How can you possibly believe that, and then calmly buy me dinner?”

“The last supper, perhaps.”

Coffee arrived, and Sasha looked glum faced as she stirred her cup.

“This is as good a time as any, if you have poison,” said Lloyd.

“For God’s sake don’t,” she almost shouted.

“So tell me why you are really here, then.”

She looked at him with tears in her eyes.

“Such an idea may have crossed my mind at one time,” she admitted, “but even if I hated you, I do not have the courage to do such a thing. And I do not hate you. Neither did my husband, I dare say. He attempted to kill you because he was under orders to do so.”

“He arranged for my twin brother to die instead.”

“I know.”

She looked across at him. “There is no point in saying ‘sorry’ on his behalf. It’s all too late for that.”

Lloyd nodded, sadly.

“But I am really here in case you can help me find my husband. He has disappeared. Nobody knows what has happened to him, and I need to know. I need either to find him, or to grieve for him.”

“How do you think I can help you in your search, even if I felt inclined to do so?”

“I am told he followed you here. I am told you are not Dr. Roger Lloyd, but that your real name is Professor Jack Barclay. I am told he made one final attempt to kill you, in the Alps. He has not been seen or heard of since.”

Lloyd looked at her closely.

“I can understand your sadness at having lost your husband. I have lost my twin brother, my only relative. I now have no-one, like you. But I think you may have been misinformed about recent events. I cannot tell you whether your husband followed me here or not. I was certainly shot and injured while skiing cross-country in the mountains, but the authorities believe it to have been a stray bullet from a hunting party. It has happened before I am told. Plenty of hunters go after the wild boar in the mountains, so they say.”

“So you cannot tell me what has happened to Dmitri?”

“Sadly, I am unable to help you in your search. I have no idea where he might be.”

The pretty young Russian looked crestfallen.

“As to the second part of your mission, I shall not be too sorry if you go ahead as you had planned. I had hoped to return to England in a few weeks, to visit a few old friends and colleagues, but I have made no positive plans as yet.”

He sighed.

“Your husband killed my only living relative, my twin brother, and your Government hounded me out of my own country, to live in exile here, doing work I do not really want to do. So I have little to lose if you go ahead. Indeed, I would have much to gain. You see, dear Sasha, I have terminal cancer, and only a few weeks left to live. It would be a happy release from the pain if you were to proceed as you had planned.”

She leant across the table and grasped his hand, her eyes full of tears.

“You poor man. You poor, poor man. What have we done to you?”

They sat in silence for a few moments.

The waiter poured more coffee.

“I should go,” said Lloyd. “I am sorry about your husband. All I can tell you is that I am told that he is dead. I know no more.”

Sasha stirred her coffee.

She drank slowly as she watched Lloyd leave the hotel.

It was the poison her husband had used to kill Jarvis.

CHAPTER 13

SIR ROBIN ALGAR – THE FINAL BRIEFING.

When Dusty Miller arrived at Headley Court, he immediately felt at home. It used to be an RAF Rehabilitation Centre, but now it was Joint Service, officially the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre. It didn't matter. It felt like being back in the Army from the moment he arrived. Like the first day back at the office.

There was a military atmosphere about the place, and it was run on strict military lines. Discipline mattered, since it was assumed that, once you got there, you were fit for duty of some sort. All the staff had to do was to work with you to achieve your maximum physical fitness as quickly as they reasonably could. Fit enough to get back on active service, if that was going to be possible, or to be re-trained for something else.

Dusty knew that his days in the Special Air Service were over, and that he would no longer be able to take part in undercover operations as he had done in Iraq and elsewhere. So he would need to be trained for some other role in the Army. On his first day, they talked to him about that, helping him to decide what he would do when he was fit enough, so they could train him properly to do it.

He knew what he wanted. Back to Section 11, if they'd have him.

It was immediately obvious to Dusty that he would be expected to stick to the Army code of conduct, adhere to its disciplinary rules, and generally toe the line. Selly Oak had been good, but not this strict. Everyone at Headley Court, whatever their disabilities, had to wash, shave and dress as best they could before breakfast.

He found his day tightly organised. It started at 8.30 am and ended at 4.30 pm., with hardly time to draw breath in between. He had one-to-one therapy sessions, physiotherapy, exercise in one of the four fully equipped gyms, more exercise in the hydrotherapy pool, and what he called 'proper' swimming in the other pool.

He just hoped he would be allowed visitors. Some of the guys there had visitors, he already knew – one or two even dropped in by helicopter, landing on the lawns in the 85 acres of landscaped gardens.

He needed to talk to Bill Clayton or someone to make sure they would take him back, and he was desperately keen to see Annie again. She said she would visit him. Perhaps she would ring up first.

One of the occupational therapists had rung Bill Clayton.

“We need you or someone to come down here to talk to Mr Miller, and to us, about what he’s to do next, so that we can adapt his training.”

“Of course we want Miller back here as soon as he’s fit enough, if that’s what he wants,” replied Bill. “I’ll get my number two to come down. Commander Marsden was the chap who pulled Miller off the mountain and got him to Selly Oak. He’s just the chap to talk about his future training needs.”

Bill got Nick on the phone.

“Fancy a trip to darkest Surrey?” he asked.

“Funnily enough, I was going to ask if Peter and I could be spared for a day to visit Dusty.”

“Go, then. They want to talk to you about future training for him, if he decides he wants to come back here.”

“I’ll make sure that’s what he does decide!”

Nick arranged to meet the Headley Court staff after lunch the next day, so they would then have the rest of the afternoon with Dusty.

“You know, if Dusty is coming back, then one of the MI5 training courses wouldn’t be a bad idea. I’ve recently done a couple myself, as you know. Just right for Section 11. Something like training as an Intelligence Officer in a counter terrorism speciality, perhaps. The work is largely deskbound these days, checking and re-checking ‘facts’ and sifting information.”

“Sounds good. Could you fix that, if he decides that’s what he’d like to do?”

“I can certainly put him in touch with the right people. Someone there might decide he’d be better in a different field, but any training would be very useful to us, and he could always go into SIS later if he gets fed up with us.”

Dusty was delighted to see them both next afternoon. He hadn’t met Peter Northcot before, but they immediately got on well. They talked for ages with the staff, and later among themselves. Dusty was fired with a new enthusiasm to get back to Section 11, and to get some proper training for the job. He could also, Northcot told him, brush up his Arabic while he was training.

It was getting quite late when they decided that a visit to a pub might not be a bad idea.

The idea got even better when Annie turned up unexpectedly.

She knew just the place to go. The Volunteer, at Holmbury St. Mary. Good beer and good curry.

So that’s where they went.

Gladys was never quite sure how she had managed it, but somehow she traced Jonathon Hood. Still running his own computer business, he was, which he had based in Oxford as he was also a lecturer of some sort at one of the Colleges in the University. She had asked him if that meant he was a Professor or something, and he had said ‘*sort of*’ which really wasn’t much help at all.

Anyway, he remembered Bill Clayton, and Bill was very pleased to be back in touch.

She had arranged for them to meet for lunch at Simpson’s in the Strand. Very much a restaurant for business people, so she was told, with huge joints of meat carved at the table

from a trolley and tables set in alcoves so that people could talk quietly and privately. She had booked one of those.

It was a perfect opportunity, as both Nick and Peter were away. The fewer who knew about this meeting, the better.

“Make sure you keep the receipt,” she had instructed. “It sounds expensive.”

“It is.”

And it was.

They enjoyed a good lunch and sat afterwards with a glass of port before Bill broached the object of their meeting.

“I have a special and very delicate job for you, if you think you can take it on. I remember all you did before to tap into people’s bank accounts and shift money around on behalf of the Government a year or so back.”

“Mostly in Africa and Northern Ireland,” Jonathon reminded him.

“Quite. This time it’s even closer to home, and no cash will need to be moved. It already has been, but I desperately need a discreet look at a bank account of one of our top civil servants to confirm my suspicions that he is up to no good.”

“Do you have the bank’s name and account number?”

“Nothing like that – only the man’s name.”

He briefly gave Jonathon the background to the request.

“The airfield security men concerned are still ‘helping the police with their enquiries’, and one of them has changed his tune slightly. Initially, he claimed that the cash they were paid came as a direct result of a request from the Prime Minister. The other man was equally convinced that the PM had never been mentioned, but just as sure the payment had been authorised by Downing Street. The first man now agrees – he had just assumed that Downing Street meant the Prime Minister. I believe that the payment was authorised by someone in Downing Street somewhere, and that the cash must have come from his personal account rather than a Government budget.”

“A man with that sort of job will probably have more than one account in more than one bank,” mused Jonathon.

“I know it won’t be easy, but can you possibly try to trace it for me? Actually, not for me personally, as I’m sure you understand. But we need to know who arranged for one of Russia’s top agents to get away in such a hurry, which they could only have done with help from the top. If the security patrol had not been silenced, they could never have got away.”

“How much are we talking about?”

“Not a lot by our standards, but if you work for a small security company in rural Hampshire, quite a lot. Certainly it proved to be enough. Each man was paid £2,500 - £1,000 up front and the remainder after the successful conclusion of the operation. So you will be looking for one or two cash withdrawals, totalling £5,000, within the last couple of weeks probably. If you can trace it, then a copy of the relevant bank account statement would be like gold dust. We shall need all the evidence we can get.”

“I hope you realise, Bill, that what you are asking of me is totally illegal. My future and the future of my business would be ruined for ever if this went wrong.”

“Of course I realise that. But if you want a formal contract in writing and a certificate of indemnity, then I can arrange for you to have them. However, in my experience, papers

can leak, so I don't recommend it. At the moment, only one other person knows that we have made contact again and are meeting."

"Gladys?"

"Right. She's my PA."

"She told me that if you did 'take me on', as she put it, I was to be sure to keep all the receipts."

"I'm under the same instructions," laughed Bill. "There will be a fee, of course. Cash if you prefer. Just tell me how much."

"Shall we say £5,000 if I'm successful?"

"Done. Will you be?"

"Probably."

Bill took the opportunity to arrange a quick and private meeting with the Director General of MI5 later that afternoon. It was the third they'd had in as many days. They concluded that they should now bring MI6 into play as well. They urgently needed GCHQ to do more work on their behalf, so who better to organise it than their Director.

"Still no word from Algar?" asked 'M', Robert Neil.

"Nothing", replied Clayton.

"Displaying a positive lack of curiosity, isn't he?"

"Let's keep it that way for a few more days. He's busy anyway – a bit of a Cabinet reshuffle to deal with and a couple of VIP visits from abroad."

"He's still Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, though. You'd think he would show more interest in what you're doing to find a couple of Russian agents on the run."

"So far as I know, he still thinks we're looking for them in Yorkshire."

The MI5 man grinned.

"I could arrange to send him a postcard, if you like!"

Their meeting early next morning with 'C', Sir Michael Richard, the Director General of MI6, was very interesting.

"Moscow station reports that the murder of your Barbara is causing quite a stir," he said. "Added to which there are suggestions from their people in Switzerland that Sasha Makienko has committed suicide in Geneva. Moscow is beginning to feel it's no longer in control, and they don't like that."

"Does the Ambassador here know about this?" asked Bill.

"Probably, by now. GCHQ is keeping an ear open."

"I have to say," said Neil, "that if your theory is anything like accurate, Bill, then a lot of things begin to make more sense now than they have in the past."

"I agree," said Sir Michael. "There are bits of jig-saw slotting into place quite neatly if we are to believe your hypothesis, and many things can be explained which have hitherto escaped us."

"We might even be starting to find some evidence to support your theory in one or two other cases. We've known for some time that there was a 'sleeper' unit operating in London, but not where or who."

“Anna Chapman was probably the best known. Lived and worked in Manhattan for ten years before she was finally discovered.”

“But we can’t do much without evidence.”

“Well,” said Bill, “I’m very hopeful of being able to provide firm proof in one case I’m following up. I should know very soon.”

“How soon is ‘very’” asked ‘M’.

“In the next day or so, with luck.”

“Perhaps what we should be doing now, while others beaver away, is plan what to do next.”

“Without a doubt,” said Bill Clayton, “we shall have to tell Sir Robin Algar what we know and or suspect.”

“And not the whole Intelligence Committee?”

“I agree,” said ‘C’, “Just him and we three.”

“Special Branch?”

“Perhaps we should have the police hovering in the wings in case we need them. I’ll get Brian Newman organised. His people have played a large part in this operation, and he can have some of his chaps standing by in case they are wanted.”

“The whole thing will need to be carefully choreographed.”

“But we’ll get nowhere if the whole JIC is at our briefing,” said the MI6 man. “Apart from us, they are mostly Permanent Secretaries and top civil servants from Departments who won’t have a clue what we’re talking about.”

“Agreed. They can be briefed later if necessary.”

“It’s down to you then, Bill. Just come up with the evidence we all need, and we can launch forth.”

“Sooner the better, too. If Moscow is getting fidgety, word could get back and ruin everything.”

“I’ll let you know the minute I know,” promised Bill.

“Meanwhile,” said Robert Neil, Director General of MI5, “why don’t we have a glass of lunch. We could go to The Tapster wine bar in Brewer Street, just off Buckingham Gate. It’s a basement bolthole, and about the nearest decent place to Scotland Yard. Usually full of guys from Special Branch, so quite discreet. We might even meet Brian there. It should be safe enough.”

It goes without saying that Dusty was as pleased as Punch to see Annie again, especially as it was so unexpected.

“You didn’t tell me you were coming,” he said. “I would have kept these two away until tomorrow if I’d known.”

Nick and Peter grinned.

“This is the young lady I was telling you about, Peter,” said Nick, who introduced them.

“I feel a bit out of place already,” said Peter, “since I’m the only one here who hasn’t saved your life in one way or the other, Dusty.”

“You’re looking after my future,” countered Dusty. He turned to Annie. “I probably should not be telling you this, as it’s all top secret, but” – he looked around him – “I’m going to join MI5, and Peter’s fixing the training for me before I go back to Section 11.”

They all laughed.

“I’m not at all sure I want a spy as a boyfriend,” said Annie, “and certainly not as a husband.”

“That’s that, then,” said Dusty. “I’m not joining! Did I mention, by the way, that Annie has agreed to take on the life she helped to save on a permanent basis?”

“Congratulations, you two,” said Nick.

The two men shook Dusty warmly by the hand, and gave Annie a hug.

“It’s nice to see you again, Annie. Dusty has hardly stopped talking about you lately, and now I’ve met you out of uniform, I can see why!”

Annie blushed.

“By the way,” he added, “Christian names only, if we’re going to the pub.”

“In that case, Nick,” said Dusty, “perhaps you’d be our best man. We both thought it would be a wonderful idea, but were worried about asking. I was supposed to be yours, I know, but it would be super if you could. It won’t be anything elaborate, and only a few people probably, once I’ve fully recovered.”

“I’d really be pleased to do that,” replied Nick. “Thanks for asking. Now, just where is this pub? There’s a lot to celebrate.”

“I’ll lead the way in my car, if you like,” offered Annie. “But it’s only a Mini, so it’ll be a tight fit for us all.”

“Come in ours, then, and you navigate,” said Nick. “We’ve brought the office BMW.”

“And I’m buying the first round,” announced Dusty. “I can’t remember when I last went to a decent pub.”

“At one time, not so long ago, I didn’t think you were ever going anywhere again,” said Nick.

“When we get there, let’s drink to the future, and forget the past,” said Dusty. “I’d better tell them where I’m going, I suppose.”

“Don’t say who with,” said Peter. “They may not let you out.”

They soon settled into a cosy corner of the 16th century Inn, and Dusty headed to the bar – three pints and a glass of Pinot.

“And don’t forget the crisps,” said Nick.

“He’s left his stick behind,” noticed Peter. “I’ll go and give him a hand.”

Annie put her hand firmly on his arm to stop him.

“Please don’t. Let him do it on his own. It’s his first solo.”

They watched as he carefully navigated across the room, clutching his tray of drinks. The crisps slid off the tray, and they heard him mutter ‘bugger’. Another customer picked them up, but Dusty kept going, concentrating hard. At last he got the tray to their table.

“Look at that,” he said triumphantly. “Hardly spilt a bloody drop.”

They all cheered, and some of the other customers who had been watching joined in.

“Do you know,” he said, “that’s done me a power of good. I feel normal again. Now, where’s that curry? Let’s see if my guts can take it!”

Bill Clayton had been on the phone to Sir Robin Algar for the first time in what seemed like ages.

"I thought I should up-date you on the project you gave me a week or so ago," he said.

"That would be welcome. I'm sorry I've rather left you to it, but my life has not been my own lately, what with one thing and another. Have you made any progress?"

"Yes, I think we have. That's why I thought I should brief you, so that you know how far we've got."

"Over the phone?"

"No. Why don't you come over to these offices in Clerkenwell? It's a long time since you paid us a visit, anyway, and we have various things here which we can show you – videos and so on – relevant to our hunt for the informer."

"It would be good to get away from here, I must confess," said Sir Robin.

They agreed on the following afternoon.

"I'll have Robert Neil and Sir Michael Richard here to help with the briefing as they've played a big part in this investigation, and probably the head of Special Branch too, if he can make it," said Clayton.

"Just the four of you, then. I shall look forward to catching up," said Algar.

Clayton decided not to drive home that evening, as he usually did, but to go by bus and tube.

It was just as well.

Archie brought his car home for him later, and collected a bullet hole through the passenger door on his way. The two men on a motorbike who were shadowing him saw nothing.

They had decided to hold the meeting in the Briefing Room.

Gladys brought them coffee, with proper cups and saucers rather than mugs.

"I'm not much good at tea," she announced, "but if anyone would rather, I'll have a go."

There were no volunteers.

They sat in a semi-circle, at a table near one of the computer monitors. The Briefing Room had others sitting at the back, as Sir Robin noticed.

"People who have been involved," Clayton nodded towards them, "in case they can help with any questions you may have afterwards."

"Good idea," said Algar.

"It's probably best to start at the beginning," said Bill when they had settled, "as much as anything to remind ourselves how this all began."

Algar nodded in agreement.

"As you will know, Sir Robin," Clayton continued, "at the start, we actually had two mysteries to solve. Our main task was to find the source of leaks surrounding the Barclay case, but on top of that we had the sudden and unexpected disappearance of my PA, Barbara Wilkinson. We decided at the outset that the two cases were probably unconnected, so concentrated on trying to track down the source of the security leaks, as you had tasked us.

“But it was very tempting to believe that Barbara herself was the source of the leaks, and that the case had been solved almost before we had started. After all, she had access to almost all of the information which appeared to have been passed to the Russians, but she was not alone in that. You and I and others had similar access. We also had in mind the fact that you had recruited her in the first place, Sir Robin, and that she had joined Section 11 on your recommendation and with a good security clearance.

“So we decided to start at the beginning and treat the two cases separately.

“I won’t bore you by rehearsing all the facets of the case, as you are familiar with the facts surrounding Professor Barclay, and the reasons that you tasked Section 11 to look after his security.

“Our approach to the task you gave us was quite methodical, as you would expect, Sir Robin. My own job was to co-ordinate the activities of those who had the ultimate responsibility for counter-espionage, for national security and for criminal investigation, which is why the Heads of those organisations are here now,

“We started by drawing up a list of the information which had been passed to the Russians, in some cases directly to their agent Dmitri Makienko. We then drew up a parallel list of all those who had access to that information, and that was where the case started to get very interesting. Near the top of that list was Barbara; so near the top, indeed, that we were then able to put the two cases together and run a single enquiry.”

“So who were the others at the top of your list?” asked Algar.

“I was,” replied Clayton. “In fact, I was the only one who knew everything that was passed on, apart of course, from yourself. Naturally, I discounted myself, and colleagues here this afternoon have agreed that this was appropriate.”

“I hope you’re not saying that I was alone at the top of your list of suspects?”

“I am suggesting exactly that,” replied Clayton. “You, Sir Robin, are the only one who could possibly have been responsible for all the leaks.”

“But that is preposterous, of course,” he almost laughed. “So where have your investigations led, in all seriousness, and who do you regard as the prime suspect?”

“You are our only suspect.”

“This is ridiculous.” Algar stood in protest. “I did not come here to be insulted in this way. I had hoped that the top security experts in the country would have done better than this.”

Two of the men at the Briefing Room monitors stood, and walked across to the group.

“Please sit down, Sir Robin, and hear me out. You will have a chance to speak later.”

Sir Robin Algar looked about him, but saw no option but to take his seat and listen to what was being said.

“First of all, we have looked at the recruitment of Barbara Wilkinson, in which you played a major role,” continued Clayton. “Her security clearance seems to have been less than thorough, shall we say, and it appears that corners were cut at your insistence. For example, you took it for granted that she, and her mother, had come from Yorkshire, not least because they were able to produce documents which appeared to prove that. In fact, as I believe you know, the documents were fakes. They proved to be the identity of a couple who had died many years before. As you will also know, the pair was from Russia and was what

are known as 'dead doubles'. They had come over here as agents, in an unusual form of sleeper cell. You recruited them, and eventually recommended Barbara to Section 11.

"My predecessor, Alan Jarvis, became suspicious, so you had to get rid of him. It was an ingenious but devious plot, which Makienko very nearly totally messed up, when he mistakenly arranged for Jarvis to kill Barclay's brother instead of Professor Barclay himself.

"You had recruited me to run this section to replace Jarvis, no doubt believing that an Army major, as I then was, would be a safer bet than anyone from the highly professional security services. But it wasn't long before I, too, became suspicious that information was leaking from Section 11. For example, you will recall that Barclay went to America to address fellow scientists at the Lawrence Livermore University, and that I sent a couple of my people over with him to keep watch. There were two KGB people in the audience, as well as FBI agents. Apart from myself, you were the only person who could possibly have tipped off the Russians. Barbara did not know he was going.

"When I told you of my suspicions about a possible informer, you managed eventually to blame it on a junior clerk of some sort in the Cabinet Office, who very soon afterwards had a fatal road accident before he could be questioned. But even this did not stop the leaks, as you know."

By now, Sir Robin Algar was looking increasingly uncomfortable, but sat in stunned silence.

"You will know, because I mentioned it to you, that we were now becoming increasingly suspicious of Barbara as being the source of these and other leaks. And she certainly was the source of some of them, and had obviously been passing information directly to Makienko. But by now, it was becoming equally obvious to you that, unless she was removed quickly, she would be at risk of discovery, and that your role as her field commander would then be uncovered. So you planned for her hasty return to Russia, with her 'mother', and her son Donald. It was eventually Donald who proved to be your undoing."

Algar stood, red in the face.

"This is utterly preposterous," he fumed. "I refuse to sit here any longer listening to this insulting fiction of lies."

"You will leave here when I have finished," said Clayton, "and not before. So please sit down."

He did so.

"It was about this time that you started making stupid mistakes, probably because you were becoming increasingly concerned that you may yourself be uncovered," claimed Clayton. "You not only had to get rid of Barbara before you were exposed, you had in some way to try to cover up your own involvement. As one would expect from a top civil servant, some of the events you had planned were masterful. For example, getting Barclay out of his research project, which was seen as such a threat to the Russian economy, and out of the country as well after Makienko's bungled attempt to assassinate him, was very clever indeed. But you had not bargained on Makienko's free-lance attempt to go after him. Only you knew that Barclay had gone skiing, and where, so it must have been you who told Makienko. It was clumsy of you to tell me on the phone later that you would convene a meeting of the JIC, and get your girl to ring Barbara to fix it, when you knew that Barbara had already left the country.

“I led you to believe that we were looking for her in Yorkshire, and indeed you seemed to lower your guard because of this. However, we have CCTV film of her escape from Blackbushe airfield, which clearly shows the French registered aircraft which was chartered for the job. Chartered by the Russian embassy, as it happens. We discovered that the security guards at the airfield had been bribed to keep well clear that evening, but you forgot the security cameras. The boy, Donald, tried to make a phone call from the airfield, which we were eventually able to trace, and also found the Wilkinson’s car in the car park. You forgot to arrange for its removal. You also forgot about the banking system. The man from the Russian embassy you sent to collect the cash you had arranged to be paid to the airport security guards, actually signed for the money on your behalf. He was given new £50 notes, and the bank kept a record of their numbers. We have recovered most of the cash.”

“This gets more and more ridiculous,” protested Algar. “You are weaving an ingenious web of fiction, but you cannot have a shred of evidence to link me to any of your wild theories. I demand that you let me return immediately to the Cabinet Office.”

“You will be leaving here shortly,” promised Clayton. “As to evidence, we know that the cash to pay the security guards at Blackbushe was taken from your account. I have been able to obtain a copy of your bank statement, which you are at liberty to study if you wish. And before you ring your bank manager at the Butler Place branch of Lloyds, I can tell you that we did not obtain it from any official source within the bank.”

For the first time, the Director General of MI6 spoke.

“We have been aware for some time of the existence of a Russian sleeper cell operating at a high level in Whitehall,” said Sir Michael Richard, “and if our assumptions are proved to be correct, then your role in running it will eventually help to explain many outstanding issues which have been puzzling us in the past.”

Brian Newman, Head of Special Branch stood up, and two of his colleagues who had been watching moved across to stand behind Sir Robin Algar.

“There are a few further questions we would like to ask you under caution,” said Newman. “Perhaps you would be good enough to accompany us now to Paddington Green police station, where we shall formally place you under arrest.”

“On what possible charge?” demanded Algar.

“Perverting the course of justice for a start, apart from aiding and abetting foreign agents.” replied Newman. “We shall also have in mind your involvement in two murders – Jarvis and Professor Barclay’s brother – and one or two other issues which will become more obvious to you as our questioning continues. There was also an attempt made on Bill Clayton’s life last night, which if successful, would have avoided your presence here today. We shall need to enquire into that. If you wish, I can formally arrest you here and now, and lead you away in handcuffs, but I hope that won’t be necessary.”

“We have at least saved you the indignity of carrying out this briefing in your own office, and having you driven away from there in a police car,” Clayton pointed out. “The Prime Minister is being briefed as we speak, by the way, so word will soon get out.”

“How dare you do this, Clayton, after all I’ve done for you and your career in the past.”

“It’s entirely your fault,” he replied. “You should never have asked me to run this enquiry instead of the people whose proper role it should have been.” He nodded toward the

two security chiefs. "It should have been their job, not mine. That's what first made me suspicious."

"I demand to see my solicitor," Algar almost shouted.

"We shall arrange for him to be present at our formal interview at Paddington Green," said Newman.

"You will be very lucky to make any of this stand up in a court of law," threatened Algar. "I've no doubt the bank statement is a fake, and you have no witnesses to anything at all."

"We have in mind, since you mentioned witnesses," countered Clayton, "applying for the extradition of Barbara Wilkinson, to stand trial herself and hopefully confirm your role as her field commander."

"Huh!" sneered Algar. "Not a hope. She's already dead – murdered in Moscow."

"Now that *is* interesting," countered Clayton. "How could you possibly know that?"

"You must have told me."

"Certainly not. Four of us here knew, but we have made sure you were not told. Only your people in Moscow could possibly have told you. And as a matter of interest, Sasha Makienko is also dead. She committed suicide."

Algar slumped back in his chair, a defeated man, all his dignity and authority gone.

"Whatever will happen to me next?" Algar almost whimpered.

"If we eventually decide to bring charges, you will be given a fair trial, mostly in a closed court in view of the severity of the case, but as you would expect, you will be given a fair trial. If you are found guilty," said Newman, "you will probably be handed down a long prison sentence. However, as an alternative, we are actively considering the very real possibility of exchanging you for some of our own agents currently being held in Russia. The Foreign Secretary will be in touch with his opposite number in Moscow later this afternoon to begin negotiations."

"Exchange?"

"That's right. A spy swap. It will save us a good deal of time, effort and expense, and you will then be able to spend the rest of your life in Russia, the country you appear to be so fond of."

"Whatever you do, don't send me there," pleaded Algar almost hysterically. "It was their ideology and political system that appealed to me, not the people or the country itself. The very thought of spending the rest of my life in a foreign country like that is appalling."

"Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean managed. And you had no hesitation in sending Professor Barclay into exile to spend the rest of his life in a foreign country. So perhaps you should have thought of that earlier. But since you were arrogant enough to believe you would never be discovered, you must now pay the price and face the consequences."

"One of which," Sir Michael Richard could not resist saying, "is that you will be stripped of your Knighthood, Robin."

"Let's go," said Head of Special Branch, as two of his officers took Algar by the arms. Ashen faced he was escorted away from the Briefing Room, and taken to a waiting police van in the underground Clerkenwell car park.

As he left the room, Algar turned.

"Damn you, Clayton," he hissed.

APPENDIX - Characters.

RUSSIAN

Yuri Nevski - London Ambassador

Dmitri Makienko - Secret agent

Sasha Makienko – Dmitri’s wife

Egor Ivanovic - Director, FSB

SWISS

Colonel Schilling – Swiss Air Force Base Commander, Payerne

ENGLISH

Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) members

Sir Robin Algar – Chairman and Cabinet Secretary

Sir Fredrick Forsythe – Permanent Secretary, Foreign Office

James Burgess - Permanent Secretary, Home Office

Sir Len Watkins – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence

General Pearson-Jones - Chief of Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS)

Sir Michael Richards - Head of MI6 (C)

Robert Neil - Head of MI5 (M)

Head of Special Branch

Brian Newman

SECTION 11

Bill Clayton (S) – Head of Section (Col. retired)

Barbara Wilkinson - PA to ‘S’

Commander Nick Marsden – Deputy Head (Special Boat Service)

Maj. Peter Northcot – new recruit (MI5)

Dusty Miller – Staff Sergeant, SAS

Albert ‘Whistler’ Piper – Duty Officer

Archie – driver

Clive Newell - ex-Special Branch

Brian Drake – Head of Communications

Nigel Mynott - IT specialist

‘Spy’ Committee

David Poulson - MI5

Frank Browne - MI6

Stuart Carrington - GCHQ

MEDICAL PERSONNEL

RAF Brize Norton – Tactical Medical Wing
Annie MacKie – RN Petty Officer Medical Assistant (Arctic team)

Military Wing, Selly Oak Hospital., Birmingham

Col Mark Graham - i/c Trauma Unit.
Squadron Leader Drew Wilson
Cpl Phil Saunders - Orderly
Cpl Stan Archer; 1st Rifles - Patient

Others

Alan Jarvis – MI5 (ex-Head of Section 11)
Richard Evans – MI5
Prof Jack Barclay/aka Dr. Roger Lloyd - CERN
Professor Williams – Director, Cullum Nuclear Research Laboratory

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 a trilogy of novels. This is a sequel to the third of the trilogy. The first, “Cashback”, the second, “Their Own Game”, and the third, “Motorbike Men”, are all published by Smashwords, together with Duncan James’ book of short stories, “Junk”.
