

# **The CATSKINNER**

**By rcheydn**

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## **Introduction**

In the middle part of the 1980s the political future of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong was outlined in a document agreed between the People's Republic of China and Her Majesty's Government that would herald the transfer of sovereignty after a century and a half of British rule. It was hailed as a triumph of international diplomacy.

It was decreed in this *Joint Declaration* that in 1997 Hong Kong would revert to Chinese sovereignty but remain largely autonomous; the famous "One Country, Two Systems" concept of the all-powerful Communist Party Chairman, Deng Xiaoping.

This decision-making process that involved the government of Hong Kong on the periphery was often referred to as the *Three Legged Stool*. But serious doubts were expressed about the ability of such a stool to stand for long.

In 1987, with only a decade remaining before the world as Hong Kong people knew it was to change, a fourth leg appeared.

Instead of ensuring stability it posed a unique danger to the lives of five and a half million local inhabitants, and set in train a series of devastating events which threatened to shift the path of Hong Kong history forever, challenging regional and world security – and awakening the beast in the dragon.

## **About the Author**

rcheydn worked as a journalist for newspapers and magazines throughout Europe, Australia and the Far East for a decade before entering the world of public relations.

For the next twenty-five years he was a senior PRO in the United Kingdom, Australia and, for almost 20 of those years, in Hong Kong.

Then he established his own public relations company in London which is regarded as one of the most dynamic and innovative agencies of its kind.

*The Catskinner* is his first foray into the political thriller genre.

His next book, a crime novel set in the United Kingdom, *The Feathers*, will be published soon.

Crime or political thriller writing are not his exclusive interests. He is also the author of a children's book *Keepers of the Deep*.

## **Cover Image**

Cover image by "Tony A. Tan ([ketanbakar.com](http://ketanbakar.com))".

## Disclaimer

In the dying years of the 1980s the political system of Hong Kong was undergoing changes as outlined in a *Joint Declaration*, that crucial document based on an agreement between the governments of the People's Republic of China and Her Majesty's Government in London that would return sovereignty over the territory after 150 years of British rule.

At the same time, aggravating an already tense situation, there was a huge influx of Vietnamese boat people that was taxing the Administration and legislators alike. A financial crisis did erupt as described.

There was at the pertinent time an Office of Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils (Omelco) and there is an excellent English language newspaper the South China Morning Post.

Hong Kong did at the time have all the relevant government officials referred to, though not those mentioned by name here, and since the reversion to Chinese sovereignty the territory's civil service has undergone changes to its structure.

The author has invented all the officials in this work; they bear no resemblance to real people, and if they do it is mere coincidence.

Martin Lee is, however, very real. He did make the statements attributed to him in these pages – but only those attributed to him directly. His supporters mentioned by name also are real.

Hong Kong is a vibrant city that is rightly the envy of much of the world. Its people are honest, hardworking. If there is anything, therefore, in this work that denigrates them in any way it is sincerely regretted. They deserve only admiration.

The same applies to the territory's Administration. It would be disappointing if the reader was to draw any unfair conclusions. Like the everyday people of Hong Kong they do their utmost for the wellbeing of the territory and its inhabitants.

And as everyone knows Hong Kong is a successful Special Administrative Region of China, has an enviable rule of law record, and remains a major economic power.

Yet, the reader is reminded, the *Catskinner* is a work of fiction.

## **Dedication**

For Gabrysia and Nikk

## Epilogue

The aircraft appeared to hover above the clouds, the giant hulk seemingly defying the laws of nature. Over the internal communications system the chief steward's voice drew everyone's attention: "Ladies and gentlemen, we will soon be arriving in Hong Kong Kaitak International Airport."

Jason Teller squeezed his wife's hand and turned to smile at her. She did not smile back. Their young son Alexander slept drugged in the window seat wrapped in the beige Qantas blanket as his wife continued to stare through the double glass at the emptiness outside.

"Come on love," he said. "It's not so bad. We'll be alright."

"I'm alright," she replied impatiently. "Just leave me be please."

Through a break in the cloud cover a handful of lights flickered. Then they were gone again. Teller knew from experience they were not yet from buildings on land. They were from container ships anchored outside the western approach to Hong Kong's fragrant harbour, awaiting their turn to enter and disgorge their contents at the massive Kwai Chung terminal, the world's largest. Some were also fishing junks.

The aircraft was approaching from the eastern end of the territory and would fly well south of the island before turning north. The lumbering giant bird would float high above the Po Toi Islands and the larger Lamma Island and then cross the south western tip of Lantau Island. From there it would veer to the east and point its nose to the Kowloon mainland, dropping height rapidly and giving passengers the impression it was gathering speed. It would be at this point that it would shed itself of the clouds and break free into the open, revealing the myriad lights for which Hong Kong was famous.

Teller was excited, and worried, at the prospect of beginning life again in the territory, not because of the tense political situation but for entirely personal reasons. He and his new wife had flown out in late 1988 and vowed never to return. Now here they were, ten minutes away from touching down. Ten minutes from starting their life over again.

Below them it was crowded, dirty, smelly, rude, exciting, invigorating, challenging. It was frightening in the sense that while he did not fear his own ability to adapt, he worried about his wife and child. Would they ever be happy in their new home? Could they?

His thoughts were much the same as when they had departed for New Zealand. That too was their new life. It was the unknown and at a trying time for them. They had gone because they considered it an ideal place to raise the child they adored and because they had friends there who were prepared to help out with employment and care. And it had worked.

He had been hired by a newspaper as a senior reporter where the job was not too demanding, allowing time for the family. The way of life, the standard of living, the friendliness of the people and the climate combined to reinforce their decision.

But then had come the offer of a job back in Hong Kong. No, they had replied without hesitation; they were settled with the peace and pace of New Zealand and had no intention of giving it up for the pressure cooker, impersonal and materialistic world of Hong Kong.

But the offer was repeated and increased until finally they agreed on the understanding it would be for a limited period. Three years. No more. Their shipment was crated, the house was rented, and here they were coming in to land in Hong

Kong. Their time away in New Zealand seemed an age and his previous years in Hong Kong seemed but a month as the adrenalin pumped and the anticipation rose. The jumbo jet dropped and turned sharply eastward and the twinkling lights of Victoria filled the window.

It is still beautiful, he said to himself, never doubting it would have been different. Despite the upheavals that had occurred during the last half of the decade the excitement appeal of the territory from a height of three thousand meters at night would remain forever unchanged. With the South China Sea at its tail the aircraft descended lower and Teller recalled the oft claimed story of skid marks on the rooftops of housing estates in Shekkipmei and Mongkok.

They dropped into the flight path to the landing strip stretching into the harbour like an extended finger and a million lights flashed past the windows on both sides. Hazy fairyland communities filled the outside and there was a thump as the wheels made contact and the engines roared in reverse. The young child woke and began to cry.

“Sssh,” soothed his mother. “There, there. It’s alright. Everything is alright.”

“Of course it is,” joined Teller. “There’s nothing to worry about. We’ve just arrived at our new home that’s all.” He patted his son’s head and stroked his warm cheeks. Nothing would go wrong, he repeated to himself. Not this time. What was past was past. He must not look back. He must look to the future.

As he peered through the window a drop of water splashed on the glass, followed by another, and then many more.

“It’s raining,” said his wife and turned anxious eyes on him. “It was raining then, and it was raining when we left.”

Teller gripped her tiny hand firmly and kissed her lightly on unresponsive lips. “It’s not the same rain my darling,” he murmured. “This is fresh, clean rain. The other has gone. Forever.”

## Chapter One

“Christ, look at that lightning.” The man gazed out over the harbour from his balcony. His wife sat quietly inside the flat, hunched near a standing lamp reading a newspaper from the previous day. She did not hear him, and in any event he had been speaking more to himself than to her. If she had caught the comment she would in all probability have had a ready remark for she was at that moment reading how the temperature two days ago had been above thirty-two degrees Celsius with humidity an energy sapping eight-four per cent. Just the conditions necessary for a typical torrential downpour.

Not a typhoon, though one had ripped through Taiwan and South Korea earlier in the week, and another was building up out at sea, threatening to launch itself. More than a hundred had perished in the southern cities of Korea. Eight had died in Taiwan. It was early in the season, being only mid-July, so the big wind had ignored Hong Kong this time. But all the same, the British territory was now being drenched in a fierce downpour that flattened crops in the patchy rural areas of the new Territories and sent drains and sewers spewing in the crowded residential suburbs of Kowloon and on the island.

The lightning snapped like a sheet, lighting the harbour from the distant anchorage for container vessels in the west to the narrower outlet to the open sea in the east. Buildings on both sides of the murky waterway, whose lights were dimmed by the slanting rain, were momentarily caught in a silvery glow, giving them a deathly appearance, like monolithic tombstones. Then they dimmed again leaving only their grey outlines imprinted in the memory.

Ten seconds lapsed and there was a shattering clap of thunder. It did not start in one corner of the sky and roll across, but rather split the entire heavens at once and the man jumped involuntarily, making it seem that the tall skyscrapers on the Wanchai waterfront of the island had been the ones to move.

“Christ,” he repeated in a whisper, and turned back inside through the glass sliding doors. As he entered and pulled the doors together behind him he added: “We’ve got a real storm out there. The rain is pelting down and the wind is blowing like crazy.”

His wife answered with some distracted comment, deeply involved as she was in a news article which to the writer was long dead. The wind whistled into the room through a gap beside a recently installed air-conditioner and there was another flash of sheet lightning that raised the spectre of the tombstones once more.

Two miles away in Wanchai many were unaware of the real power of the storm as they dined behind sturdy doors in upper floor restaurants, or drank shielded from the angry elements in basement bars where they received the close attention of bare breasted young women, ever ready to listen to a tale of a misunderstanding wife or absent girlfriend, so long as their tumbler of expensive cold tea remained at least half way to the brim.

The old world of Suzie Wong had long disappeared. It put its first foot in the grave with the end of the Vietnam war and the demise of Hong Kong as a rest and recreation port for American and Australian soldiers hungry for sex and alcohol to escape the horrors and boredom of being part of the most fruitless and divisive conflict of the century. Inviting bars with their cheerful and cheap girls had been replaced by seedy and expensive topless nightclubs interspersed with upmarket businesses of all kinds.

An old timer who remembered the sixties would blink in disbelief at the plethora of banks, offices and exclusive shopping outlets that now lined both sides of the once notoriously lively Lockhart Road. An era had passed, and a new more profitable and durable one had already grown to maturity.

But a block nearer the harbour life appeared to never change. The narrow Jaffe Road cut its way along the length of the waterfront to Causeway Bay, a squalid manmade canyon hemmed in by crumbling tenements where dirty curtains hid furtive low lights and on top of which squatted thousands of families who lived their lives in shacks made from discarded timber, cardboard and corrugated iron. When the typhoons struck the squatters barricaded themselves in their flimsy shelters and rode out the winds and the rain. Or most of them did. Some lost their roofs and part of the meagre possessions, but for a few it would inevitably be the end of their world too.

However, a storm such as the one this night, though unexpectedly wild, was not the sort to cause undue concern. It was a sudden inconvenience, nothing more. In the morning it would have passed and the cleanup would be only a brief interlude before the families set out in their pursuit of more dollars.

There was yet another crack of lightning and a cat froze on the tin roof of a hut, trapped in the silvery flash. Its paws had selected the corrugated ridges avoiding the rivulets of water and the occasional sharp rusty nail, and its fur in parts looked to have been eaten in rings by mange though actually it was heavy drops of rain that mostly mottled its tabby coat. With the flash of light the cat whipped its head to the side and blazing eyes searched the mishmash of rustic structures behind it. In the dark of the night the cat knew every square meter of tenement rooftop. It had prowled the territory countless times in its hunt for food, and the expansive flashes of light only increased its senses rather than aiding it in its foraging. Shapes look on more imposing dimensions and noises were louder warnings. The animal was at its peak alertness, tensed more by the gnawing hunger deep in its belly.

The rooftop was generally a larder of rodents and cockroaches and scraps of rotting food. Because of this the cat, and numerous others like it, kept within its own declared boundaries and saw out its years on the horizon and not on the ground. But since early morning it had been raining on and off and since late afternoon Hong Kong had been on the receiving end of a thorough drenching. So the usual food supply had been washed away or had sensibly gone indoors, leaving the cat without a meal since the night before when a slow rat and assorted piles of hardened yellow rice had provided an essential repast.

Now the animal was hungry and becoming agitated as its sides pressed in on it hollow, shrunken gut. In the darkness once more it growled low and cautiously continued its stalking. It crossed from one roof to the next, head swivelling from side to side, peering into cracks and crevices, and then moved onto the next roof, and the next.

The lightning flickered and flashed and the crackling thunder shook the night skies. Each time the cat froze. Another half an hour and it had reached a broken wooden door that swung back and forth and led to a dank and unlit stairway down five flights.

The animal was reluctant to enter as it was unfamiliar and spilled onto the lane which was far beyond its own boundaries. Also, it knew instinctively there was little likelihood of any food being found on the staircase itself. It was the only access in and out of the building and creatures that might have been suitable as morsels would be aware also it was not a place to dally.

Added to that was the worry that it might confront a street sleeper who on nights such as this moved indoors to comparative comfort. They were not usually killers but they were human and humans could not be trusted.

Despite these innate fears the cat warily stepped in through the door and very slowly began the downward climb. The steps were littered with pieces of sticky toilet paper, empty drink cartons and bottles, and large and small indiscriminate coils of faeces. In the light the walls would have been seen to be covered in mould and peeling paint. On each small landing a bucket of sand stood in a corner with an overflowing refuse bin beside it. Lining the corridors grimy wooden doors were protected by strong metal grilles and shutters. From behind them came disjointed snatches of television programmes.

On the first landing the cat stopped, sniffed the rubbish and listened carefully to the distant sounds from inside rooms, before moving off and venturing down the second flight of fourteen concrete steps. On the next landing it did the same and repeated it each time until it came to a stop at the top of the last set of steps. There it stood its ground and stared straight ahead, its eyes unblinking and its ears twitching nervously. Its tail snaked out behind in sharp impatient swishes and once more it growled from deep within its gut. Finally, confident of its next move the cat almost gracefully descended to the bottom where it again paused, motionless, listening for warning noises. Sensing there was none, other than the heavy rain beating down and the wind blowing a torn awning across the street, the cat slowly padded to the doorway and looked outside.

The lane was strewn with rubbish, lying scattered in windswept piles or floating soaked in puddles of filthy water. A crate of broken slabs of concrete with protruding wires stood against the wall of the building next door, and adjacent to that an old refrigerator had been blown onto its side. The lane was deserted though there were a number of cars, a van and lorries parked at various intervals, abandoned by some owners who were no doubt waiting out the storm in the colourful interiors of nearby night spots.

The cat gingerly stepped out of the doorway and, after a moment, bounded across the lane and under the van. When it emerged on the other side it headed straight for a heap of plastic garbage bags, all tied at the top but at least one which had burst its sides and spewed its reeking contents against the wall of a tenement almost identical to the one it had just left.

It had gone barely three meters and had just passed the rear of the van when it instinctively stopped, wheeled and hissed into the darkness, its teeth bared and its fur bristling on its arched back. But its defensive manoeuvre was to no avail as a club was brought down swiftly, cracking the cat's skull open and killing it instantly.

As blood ran into the puddles of rain water two hands reached down and the one holding a short curved skinning blade began slicing the animal from under its chin the length of its belly.

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To the casual observer there is nothing in Caine Road in the island's Mid-levels district which would excite interest. Unless one lives in one of the flats there, works in one of the few struggling corner shops, or attends the Hong Kong University, the road is just a means of passing between the Central area and points to the west or around to the south.

Unlike so many of the streets in Hong Kong one heads to for a purpose, Caine Road is a long, winding transport route one proceeds along to get somewhere else. You either live there or work there or you generally don't stop there. Amelia Tse lived there. In a sixty-five square meter fourth floor flat that had one bedroom, a small bathroom, a functional kitchen and a step-up lounge-dining room that featured large windows looking out on to the buildings opposite and through a gap in the high-rises to a postage stamp stretch of harbour in the distance. It was the uncharacteristically large windows that had attracted her to the place and which kept her there though she would have preferred somewhere higher up the mountain with a better view of the harbour. But she would never be able to afford what she wanted so she made do with what she had.

It was tastefully decorated in rattan, with pink covers on the sofa and chairs, a glass-topped table that seated six at a pinch and dozens of pot plants which brought the life and freshness of the outdoors inside. A tall bookcase in one corner was crammed with publications, including two dictionaries one English the other Chinese, photographic magazines, journals and periodicals and political essays by local and foreign writers. There was only the occasional novel, and a pile of untidy newspapers was dumped on the floor to the side. There was also a wine rack perched under the window sill with four bottles in it. In the morning there had been six, but one was empty and protruded upended from the bin in the kitchen. The other stood half empty on the table between Amelia and Michael Wong.

Wong did not live or work in Caine Road, but he did go there frequently. He was a successful surgeon, and with his wife and two children shared a luxurious four-bedroom apartment in Kowloon. Like most other people he usually used Caine Road to get from one place to another. But every week, or whenever he could, Wong went to Amelia's flat. They were political allies. They were also lovers.

"Is it becoming too difficult?" asked Wong, leaning back in his chair and sipping the dry Golden Hill from his glass. Californian wine was too sweet, and for some reason the French, German and Italian whites also were not to his liking, whereas Australia's climate produced grapes of just the right quality for his palate. He was a thin man, tall for a Chinese, with grey in his hair, adding to his distinction but also betraying his forty-seven years. His jacket hung on the back of the chair next to him with his tie tucked into the top pocket. Only two buttons of his shirt were fastened and he wore leather slippers on his feet.

"Not really," Amelia replied. "Not yet anyway. He knows of course, but so far he's allowed me to get on with it."

She was sitting with her elbows on the table, rolling her empty glass between her fingers. Her black silk gown was open to the waist revealing her tanned skin. She was short with a plump, sober figure and she wore her hair teased. Her features were smooth and unlined as was common for an Oriental in her thirties, but her forehead creased as she raised her eyebrows. "I don't think we have anything to worry about just yet."

"Good," said Wong, pushing his spectacles back up onto the bridge of his nose. "Good. We need a little more time. Then we'll be able to make the move."

The target of his enquiry and the subject of her answer was the Chief Editor of the newspaper she worked on. She was a senior writer for the South China Morning Post, the leading English-language newspaper, and her specific beat was as special correspondent on Hong Kong's political affairs.

Ten years ago such a position would have merely taken her to meetings of the Urban and Legislative Councils once a fortnight where she would have been asked to

collect speeches and then turn them into reasonable news items for the inside pages. Even five years ago she would not have been expected to do much more. But not today. That attitude was a generation in the past.

Already in its last decade of colonial rule Hong Kong was going through a political revolution at least equally significant to the move from being the world's largest producer of cheap and shoddy products to being an international leader in finance, fashion and high-tech, among other things. Amelia's position was now far more arduous and certainly more exciting. Her readers expected exclusives, political analyses and hard-hitting commentaries which took the Administration to task or forced it to justify its actions.

Leadership was demanded by the people. She saw her job as ensuring the government lived up to its promises of 1984 when the *Sino-British Joint Declaration* was signed, handing the territory back to China in 1997 "lock stock and barrel". In that historic document Hong Kong had been assured of a continuation of its capitalistic lifestyle, or as was stated time and time again the maintenance of its prosperity and stability. Britain had guaranteed it, the People Republic of China agreed not to change it for 50 years or until at least 2047, and the people of Hong Kong expected nothing less.

Another clause in the Declaration stipulated that the political system would not be interfered with by the new Communist masters, and that the legislature on the date of the handover would be – at least partially – constituted by election.

"Have you actually set a date?" asked Amelia.

"Not the day," answered Wong as he leaned forward to the table and refilled his glass. Slowly he stood and walked to the window. It was still raining and dark heavy clouds over the peninsula were growing more ominous. Without turning he added: "Probably the second week in October."

"That soon? Are you sure we can do it all by then?" She was as anxious and as determined as he was to ensure the plan was a success, but the journalist in her was not convinced such a rapid timetable was right. Their vision of Hong Kong's future depended on the right move at precisely the right time. If they were wrong, if they miscalculated, all hell could break loose and there would be little anyone could do to prevent the consequences that might shatter the illusions of all those who had worked so painstakingly for so long to protect the wellbeing of the small overcrowded territory's people.

The surgeon sipped at his wine as he watched the worsening weather. Amelia knew better than to press the point and instead filled her own glass with the last of the contents from the bottle and joined him at the window. She put her arm around his waist, the silk gown parting. Resting her cheek against his shoulder she whispered: "It's miserable out there. What time do you have to go?"

"I think it's going to come down very heavy indeed," said Wong, putting his glass on the sill. "I also think it's going to set in for quite a while so we have a choice to make. We can either open another bottle and listen to the patter of the rain on the glass, we can think of ways to make your bloated Australian boss lust after you more, or you can take me next door and show me again why it is I find you the most sensuous woman I have ever known."

Amelia lifted her face to him and smiled, her head on one side. "No problem doctor. I diagnose a severe case of sexual starvation. If you will follow me to my consulting room I am sure I can prescribe a remedy."

He bent and kissed her gently, and gathering her in his arms he carried her to the bedroom. As he said, it looked like they were in for a storm and he would have to

telephone his home and leave a message for his wife that he had an urgent and probably lengthy conference to attend. It was only six o'clock and he would not leave for hours.

"In this case," he said unbuttoning his shirt, "the patient is right. Administer away as you will."

Later, after the appetites of both had been sated, Amelia slept on his arm as he lay on his back staring at the ceiling. A loud roll of thunder sounded above, interrupting his thoughts. He glanced at his sleeping mistress and carefully eased himself off the bed without disturbing her. He gathered his clothes and walked silently into the sitting room, closing the door after him. Bending down beside the pile of newspapers on the floor he picked up the telephone and punched a Kowloon number. When it answered he spoke softly but clearly into the instrument just six words: "The three of them October seven."

Wong put the telephone back on the floor and slipped into the bathroom where he washed and dressed. He had one more instruction to relay but he would do that in person. He had not been to Wanchai for some time and the storm now raging outside would provide the cover he sought.

Without looking in on Amelia he let himself out of the flat and took the lift to the deserted street level. His car was parked around the corner and he would have to sprint if he was to avoid being soaked through. As he ran with his head lowered and his coat pulled up over his ears he did not see the figure standing in the darkened doorway across the street. Nor did he notice as the shape stepped out of the shadows into a nondescript black sedan which pulled into the curb and then followed the surgeon's car as it headed east along Caine Road.

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Seated at the table were three men and one woman.

At the head was Robert McNamara, Chief Secretary and for the past week and another two days Acting Governor while the Queen's official representative was in London on a duty visit. It was one of the peculiarities of the British Foreign Service that colonial governors returned to be debriefed only months after assuming office. Sir Hubert Morris had been sent to Hong Kong in April. Three months later he was back in Whitehall reporting to his masters and receiving further instructions.

"What are the latest figures?" McNamara asked the man on his left.

"Up to nine this morning the Survey Office has received two thousand five hundred and thirteen submissions," replied James Wong. "Most of them from groups, but there have been quite a few individuals writing in as well."

Wong held the relatively new post of Personal Assistant to the Chief Secretary, but he had been a civil servant for many years, the last five envied by colleagues as a handpicked highflyer. His present job called on him to be expert in preparing for, and evaluating, developments affecting the run-up to the 1997 handover.

"What's your forecast?" McNamara kept his eyes on Wong.

The Chinese sat leaning back in his chair rather than hunched over his files on the table, which were so bulky they almost concealed him at times. The information incorporated in the hundreds of pages had been devoured and Wong was thoroughly prepared as usual.

"At the present rate, and making allowances for a late rush, I'd estimate around fifty thousand. Maybe more." Educated in Hong Kong but with an Oxford

degree as well, Wong spoke impeccable English. "Offer me an encouraging reward," he added, "and I'll try putting a precise figure on it."

McNamara did not smile. "Fifty thousand's near enough. Anyway that's not the real point as we know."

The man on the other side of table put down his coffee cup. "Just the same, how does it compare with 1984? Higher, or around the same?"

Wong glanced at the Political Adviser who had been in office just a year. Everyone seemed to be new, he thought.

Immediately after the signing of the *Joint Declaration* some of the top officials had retired. Immense pressures were building up, and when decisions had to be made that would shape the future of nearly six million people, all the faces seemed unfamiliar.

"For the 1984 *Green Paper*," he said, still not referring to his files, "we had under three thousand. At the time we considered that quite good."

Gail Jones opened a loose folder in front of her and removed a sheaf of stapled papers. She handed them to Roger Gould. "This is the summary of the report on 1984," she said with a smile. "It covers the lead up to it, the survey itself and the conclusions drawn. Detailed statistics are in appendix three."

McNamara nodded to her. She had been his secretary in a number of previous posts and when he had been appointed Chief Secretary he had had no hesitation in asking her to follow him. She had no hesitation in accepting.

Once more she had stepped in at the right moment. Gould should not have had to ask about the result of the survey carried out three years before. Even though he was not in the territory at the time, he had been close to the Hong Kong Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in King Charles Street in London and should have recalled the numbers. It showed a weakness and McNamara noticed that Wong also picked up on it.

"Right," said the Chief Secretary. "So far our PR efforts seem to be working. But don't let it slip James. I don't want fifty thousand, I want a hundred."

He let it sink in. When there was no response from around the table he asked: "No comment?"

"What can I say?" said the Chinese. "I reckon we'll receive about fifty thousand. And that's good, excellent, to be quite honest."

He pushed himself up to the table and the pile of files reached almost to his chin. Carefully he brushed them to one side. "We'll step up the APIs and double the press adverts. GIS will have to put their thinking caps on. If we can get the Financial Secretary to approve more funds maybe we can boost the final number by five thousand or so."

"Forget the FS. I'll see to it there's no trouble from that quarter. Just get the written submissions up."

"Are they still running about equal" enquired Gould, "or have the radicals been drumming up more support lately?"

This time Wong opened the top file. "Marginal," he said. "At close of play yesterday it was one thousand two hundred and seventy-three for, and one thousand two hundred and forty against. Of the twelve hundred and forty only forty were against elections altogether. The other twelve hundred wanted them, but not in 1988. Most favoured 1991 or 1992."

That was what the *Green Paper on Representative Government* had boiled down to. While there had been nearly four dozen options outlined, not unexpectedly the one to draw almost exclusive interest was whether there should be direct elections

to the Legislative Council in 1988 or later. The Administration had continued to exhort people that they should speak out on all aspects, but while some other views were expressed there was no doubt the real question was the one being pushed by the so-called radicals who wanted elections to the colony's parliament in 1988 and no later.

And that was where the real dilemma lay. On the surface the people of Hong Kong were generally saying they wanted direct elections and it seemed a good number of them were saying they wanted them in 1988. And the government had stated many times they had no preconceived intentions, thereby intimating that if sufficient numbers favoured the quick move to greater democracy then they would support it. But since the election bandwagon had begun to roll and gather momentum, the Chinese authorities had been putting their interpretation on the salient clauses of the *Declaration*, interpretations that did not accord with those perceived in more liberal quarters. No one believed they were correct, but many realised that right or not, the communist leaders in the north were not about to sit by quietly while a political system was established in Hong Kong that might in ten years prevent them from interfering as they wished. Cadres had been hard at work rallying action on the left and if reports were to be believed they were using frightening tactics against some of those of those on the right. By the end of September the public consultation period would be over and recommendations would have to be relayed to London. The numbers game was therefore of paramount importance.

"The two significant polls will be finished in September," McNamara was saying. The other two men silently agreed. "So get those written figures up James. We're going to need them when we go public."

"Of course," said the assistant. He knew as well as anybody the point his boss was making. He also well knew it was going to be easier said than done.

"What about the Lees and their followers?" he pressed.

Gail Jones put down her pencil. Notes were not required on the comments being voiced at the moment. She topped up her own coffee and blew on it before raising the blue and white china cup to her lips and sipped tentatively.

The Lees, as they were often called, were certainly seen by some to have had a serious influence on the Legislative Council. Martin Lee was their leader. A successful lawyer and therefore a most eloquent and effective advocate, he delivered speeches at public forums much as he might address a jury in a courtroom trial of a little old widow facing a shoplifting charge. He used reason and legal precedent as the backbone of his arguments, but his strength lay in his ability to bare the passion in his heart and make the listener believe it burned in his own just as fiercely whereas minutes earlier he had been merely inquisitive. Cynics doubted the depth of his true feelings and some openly accused him of playing to the gallery to achieve his ends, ends that were his own personal goals and which had little to do with the future of those he constantly claimed to be fighting for.

Be that as it may, when Martin Lee rose to speak, people listened. He had fought the Administration on a number of issues since his elevation to the legislative body in 1985. Some he had won. Others he had badly lost. But he was never entirely defeated. Even when outvoted he managed to salvage some of the wreckage and perhaps even a few new admirers of his courage and sympathisers to his cause.

Martin Lee was the unchallenged leader of the unofficial opposition and, as with all underdogs, he had ranks of followers cheering him on. This extended to the council chamber itself. Hence the reference to the Lees as though they were one big family. In reality they were not and two groupings had emerged. One was led by

Desmond Lee Yu-tai and Doctor Conrad Lam. Desmond Lee was unfairly characterised as the mouthpiece of his namesake. He spoke in the shadow of his more respected mentor, yet had the satisfaction of obtaining as much newspaper space as anyone else. Doctor Lam was not so verbose in espousing views. The result was that this disciple of the lawyer gained less exposure but was nevertheless inextricably tied to the group.

The second tier was those who on many occasions agreed with the radical sentiments expressed so strenuously, and were therefore by association rightly or wrongly tarred with the same brush. They numbered another five or six. It was said that if some of the conservatives were to have their way the Lees and their followers would not only be tarred and feathered and filed under the heading "case closed". That was fanciful thinking though, especially on the issue of direct elections. It was an emotive subject and in the expert hands of Martin Lee and a bevy of dedicated supporters, including influential journalists, quite a few thousand people had joined their ranks. They crowded seminars and media-organised meetings, they undertook a transparent but nonetheless noticeable letter writing campaign to the press, they raised banners in parks and public housing estates, and on one occasion staged an impressive candle-light vigil outside the council chamber when the *Green Paper* was being debated inside.

Nothing like it has been seen in apathetic Hong Kong before. Two months into the consultation period the supporters of direct elections in 1988 were taking on all the appearances of being a real force to be reckoned with.

Robert McNamara pulled a manila envelop from the plain unmarked file before him. Extracting twenty-two closely typed pages on unheaded paper he turned to his assistant.

"This report from Special Branch on the respondents has found a few gaps."

"I know," answered Wong. "And I've been onto them to clarify it."

There was a pause. "And?"

"And they say the error is minor. One per cent, no more. Acceptable in their words."

"Not in mine," stated the Chief Secretary. "One per cent means sixty of those people could be influenced in any direction."

"They couldn't be any more precise."

"They have to. We must be able to work from something more exact. At the end of the day the margin of difference is going to make the difference. Reduce it by even one per cent and we increase the risk unacceptably. This exercise must be straight up and down. No room for manipulation."

The Chinese lit his tenth cigarette of the morning. He inhaled deeply and then spoke again as he breathed out the smoke. "There is the risk of it becoming obvious. If anyone finds out the fallout will be ... well, not to be imagined."

"I realise that very well, James" Chief Secretary McNamara said. "That's my second instruction. Do it, but don't be found out."

## Chapter Two

When Jason Teller walked into the compound of the South China Morning Post at nine thirty in the morning he was still suffering. He had had a dreadful night and the start of the day had not gone well either. The storm had been fierce but he had not realised at the time, which was surprising given his experience of typhoons, just how bad. He had worked late editing an in-depth feature on the nuclear power plant being built at Daya Bay, about thirty-five kilometres north east of the border crossing between Hong Kong and Guangdong.

It had taken him weeks to put it all together, his main difficulties correlating what the local officials were saying with regard to a study carried out by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. There were discrepancies, principally relating to the need for an evacuation plan in the event of another Chernobyl. He had obtained as much information as he felt he could. He had then spent six hours at his terminal laying it all out in a sensible easily digestible order. When he had read it in the early edition of the paper he realised just how hard hitting he had been. Those directly involved would not be happy. But then, nor was he at the moment.

He had arrived back at his Happy View Terrace flat in Happy Valley late to find the windows in the sitting room and his bedroom open. The gale force wind had blown the rain straight in. His bed was soaked as was the desk, his typewriter and the carpet. The television set in the adjacent room was probably wet inside, his prized Tientsin rug was dripping, and his collection of replica classic cars was scattered around the floor. One of the windows in the sitting room had been buffeted against the outside wall and was hanging by the lower hinge only, one pane of glass smashed, another cracked.

Teller had cursed the storm and his own stupidity a thousand times during the following few hours as he made frustrated attempts to clean up the mess. He discovered two of his cars were broken beyond repair, and when he flicked on the television there was a *phutt*, followed by a blank and silent screen. It took him until one o'clock in the morning to strip his bed and stand the mattress against the wall in the short corridor beside the landing door, to hang his rug and the rest of the soaked things in the tiny bedroom and kitchen, clean up the debris and then to try to mop up a quarter of an inch of rainwater on the floor of the two rooms. The bathroom mat served as an immediate temporary replacement for the broken window.

Then he relaxed with a tasteless can of beer and two cigarettes before curling up on a chair in the far corner of the room where he slept fitfully for five hours. When he awoke stiff and still angry he surveyed the damage and his remedial work of the night before.

"To hell with it," he said simply. He pulled on a tracksuit and escaped for his usual four circuits of the racecourse. On his return he shaved, showered and dressed, ignoring any thought of a breakfast heartier than a glass of orange juice and the first cigarette of the new day.

At eight thirty he pulled the door to his flat shut and walked down the steep terrace into Link Road. He dodged across Wongneichong Road, between blaring taxis and clanking trams and turned the corner into Sports Road, a narrow one-way lane separating the race track and the Hong Kong Football Club.

At the other end he rejoined the circular Wongneichong Road opposite the Caravelle Hotel and continued down to Hennessy Road where he sidestepped his way into the underground station. He bought a copy of his paper as well as the Hong Kong

Standard and started to read his story as he descended the long escalators and then waited for his train to Quarry Bay. The carriage was packed as usual so the Standard would have to wait until he got to his office.

As he entered the compound a Chinese security guard offered a salute of sorts and muttered "*tsosan*." Teller repeated the greeting, but once out of earshot he added "good morning my ass" and prayed nobody else would tempt him into explaining why it was a bad morning and why there was every indication for it to remain bad for the rest of day.

He reckoned the other security guards in the lobby must have heard because they ignored him as he stepped into the lift and pressed the button for the fifth floor. The cab rattled slowly up stopping at each floor to admit various staff and the photographic and printing, advertising and promotions departments.

As the doors ground apart a squat Australian reporter pushed in with a curt "*G'day*". Teller said nothing. He bit off the "good bloody day yourself" that was on the tip of his tongue and walked straight to the counter where he collected his badge and strode into the editorial department.

The South China Morning Post building used to be a sugar refinery depot in another incarnation. The editorial department was an open plan office, desks pushed close together with paper spread everywhere and the clicking of terminals as dozens of reporters and secretaries hammered out their messages to the news hungry world.

An Indian reporter named Sharma approached, coffee cup in hand and asked pleasantly: "How did you make out last night?"

"Don't ask again," snapped Teller and brushed by, throwing his newspapers onto a desk.

He looked quickly around the office. Some were reading newspapers, others chatting noisily, many more hard at work banging away on their keyboards. He glanced at the glassed office of the editor in the corner and saw that his arrival had been noticed. Davidson sat puffing on his pipe and beckoning with his index finger.

"Oh shit," muttered Teller under his breath.

Before answering the summons he helped himself to a mug of strong black coffee from the machine, lit his second Dunhill and strolled over to the office. On the way a female reporter smiled up at him: "Liked your piece on Daya Bay," she said.

"Thanks," he replied and pushed open the door.

Davidson had watched him as he crossed the floor and as he entered he said nothing. He took another deep draw on his pipe as Teller shut the door and slumped into one of the chairs in front of the desk, resting his mug on the edge.

"So," said Teller, fixing his eyes on the man before him. He respected the editor as a newspaperman of the old school and seldom joined others who, because of the own inadequacies usually, tried to run him down. He was a solid journalist who had proved himself in Sydney, Singapore and London and was a hard but good manager of the news, and of people it had to be admitted. That didn't mean he liked him though. To the contrary, as a man he considered Davidson obnoxious. He was large, oily in appearance and dirty in his habits. He drank far too much and he was known to have tried it on with virtually every female member of his staff. His success rate on that score was low but it did not seem to bother him.

The most recent object of his intentions was Amelia Tse and he seemed unconcerned how painfully obvious those intentions were. It was even said that his attitude to her biased column was tempered by the thought of a single night in her bed. Teller doubted it. A slob he might be, but first and foremost Davidson was an old

hack who knew the rules of professional journalism and lived by them. The news in his paper would not be compromised by a desire for a quick romp in the sack.

“So,” replied the editor.

Teller sipped from his mug and stubbed his cigarette out in the ashtray. He waited. He had had meetings which started out like this before and he knew if he was patient enough he would hear what they were supposed to be about.

“So,” reiterated Davidson. “Your Daya Bay story.”

“What about it?” At least he came to the subject pretty quickly, thought Teller. No need for beating unpleasantries about the bush.

“Is it accurate?”

“Of course it is. It would not have run if it was bullshit. Why? Who says it’s not?”

“No-one of any consequence,” Davidson said, heaving his body forward and tapping the contents of his Petersons into the ashtray. “Just Hiller of Economic Services, Doctor Henry Wu of the joint nuclear consortium, Leung of Omelco and the Director of the Government Information Services. Unless you’ve heard something from someone else I think that’s about it.”

Teller was familiar with the sarcasm. “What are they complaining about?”

The editor began refilling his pipe from the bright red and gold packet of tobacco. He finished and was tamping it tight before he replied. “Those parts about evacuation,” he said. “They say it’s all bullshit.”

“Bullshit,” said Teller.

“Are you repeating their view, asking me a question or describing their opinion?”

“Describing their opinion. It’s a fact.”

“Tell me,” said Davidson, striking the first of three matches. He puffed, drawing the smoke deep into his lungs, and studied his reporter through the pall. Teller lit a Dunhill. “It’s in the AEA report, it was discussed by the Legco Ad Hoc Group at least three times, the British experts made a presentation when they were here, and the Ad Hoc Group rejected the lot. It’s a fact.”

“Is it?”

“Yes.”

“Can you prove it?”

“If I have to, yes. I’ve got copies of the minutes. But I don’t want to do that unless there is no other way. For obvious reasons.”

The editor continued to study him. Then he said: “So, how did you weather the storm?”

Teller was not prepared for the sudden abandonment of the subject. “Is that it? That’s all?”

“Is there more?” asked Davidson.

“No,” said Teller.

“Alright then.” Davidson leaned back in his chair. “That twit of a high-rise gardener upstairs left a pot plant on the window sill and it ended up on the hood of my car. No, not true. It hit the hood, but I gave it back. He’ll find it embedded in the bonnet of his own car.”

Teller could not help but smile. “Are you sure it was his pot plant and his car?”

“Yes,” said Davidson. “Shit, I hope so.”

As Teller was leaving the office Davidson called: “What are you on today?”

“I’m going into the Secretariat,” he called back, referring to the government offices in Lower Albert Road, below Government House. “I want to check up on a few things, and then down to Legco where I’ll probably be cross examined by sundry bullshitters. Though maybe I should skip that now and just ride out of town for a while.”

Davidson looked almost apologetic for a moment. “Look in on the police on your way will you. Johnson is off sick and some guy didn’t make it home last night in the storm. Report says he was found in Wanchai. Probably some drunk. Just a few pars. OK?”

“OK.” Teller closed the door behind him. Now he was on police rounds. He had not covered the beat for years and it might be fun to do a short piece. Make a change from the investigative features that required so much time and wearying legwork. A nice little story about a poor hawkker with six children and a pregnant wife to feed who got bashed while trying to make an extra buck in the middle of a near typhoon. Teller the cynic. He would drop in on the police public relations guys on the way to Central.

One the way back to his desk a brash young American journalist called across the room: “Hey Teller. Your story on the nuke sucks.”

“Good,” he called back. “Take it with you to the can. You should have fun.”

The American sat with his jaw hanging and his wide grin rapidly disappearing. He made no response. He had been especially brought out by the newspaper’s American-based owner in New York where he was apparently highly regarded. Teller was not alone in his dislike for the man who had a penchant for green flecked suits and pink slacks with pastel blue shirts. How it was thought he would be able to contribute anything to the Post was lost on Teller. Of course, it could have been because he was a brilliant writer who possessed a sharp, incisive mind. Teller the slightly envious.

Teller snatched his shoulder bag from the drawer, threw in his notebook and headed for the lift. He decided against the underground, preferring the tram. The trip would take much longer but he needed the fresh air to clear his head. The run in the morning, followed by the sharp cold shower, had worked wonders but a few cobwebs remained and an hour on the upper deck of the rattling dinosaurs would blow them away altogether.

As he sat on the narrow slatted seat and gazed out of the window he was still enthralled at how much some sections of the city had not changed. King’s Road and Hennessy Road from Quarry Bay through North Point and Causeway Bay were flanked by a hoard of small shop fronts touting leather bags, dresses and jeans, air-conditioners, rhinoceros horn panaceas, cameras and more leather bags, air-conditioners and dehumidifiers. How they all survived he did not know. The trading names all looked similar and gave every indication of being family concerns which had been in business for generations. One of the most interesting, as the tram trundled into the Wanchai district, was a green and white four-storey building which bore the weathered name of the Tung Tak Pawn Shop. Teller had stared at the building and the name a hundred times and tried to conjure in his mind the business that was transacted behind the peeling doors. Somehow it was out of character; it just did not fit.

Everywhere else people were in the bustling business of making money, selling for a profit, whether from hand-pulled carts or from behind counters stacked high with materials, pots and jars, jewellery or electronic gadgets. Yet here were premises which must have been the scene of fascinating, sad and foreboding examples

of failure. If only he could be a Chinese, or invisible, and spend a week privy to the comings and goings of those forced to take their custom to the Tung Tak Pawn Shop.

Teller was still imagining as the tram screeched to a stop under the new pedestrian walkway outside the jaded Sailors' and Soldiers' Association building diagonally across from the police headquarters. He quickly dropped down the spiral staircase and flung his sixty cents into the collection slot, reaching the safety zone as the metal doors clanked shut. Time and Hong Kong trams wait for no-one, he reminded himself, and headed up the footbridge to the northern side of Queensway. A hundred meters back the way he had come was the Tai Sang Building with the China Travel Service on the ground level and the police public relations branch on the third, fourth and fifth floors.

The third and fourth floors housed the administration section and the library along with the publicity and promotions sections, the Junior Police Call staff and Studio 4, the private bar where staff gathered most Fridays after work. The information section and the branch heads occupied the fifth floor where Teller saw a pretty girl standing against a metal filing cabinet, engrossed in her search for some papers apparently proving to be annoyingly elusive.

"Can you see if there's a balding bearded Yorkshireman in there while you're at it please," said Teller startling her.

"Sorry," said the girl automatically. When she saw the stranger, she pushed the drawer closed. "Can I help you?"

"I said, is there a bearded....is Mr Frank in please?" Teller should have known better. After nearly twenty years in the place he thought he was beyond expecting a sense of humour from a government secretary. They were programmed to say only "Who do you want, who's calling, how do you spell please, he's in a meeting."

"Who's calling," asked the girl.

"My name is Teller," he answered patiently.

"How do you spell please?"

Teller enunciated the letters slowly.

"One moment please." When she returned from the adjoining office she smiled. "Go in please."

Teller smiled back and walked through.

"Jason Teller," David Frank all but shouted, crossing the floor to greet him with an outstretched hand. "What are you doing down here?"

He gripped the hand and shook it firmly. Frank was an old friend, but they had drifted along their separate paths for some years and their meetings were infrequent. "Thought I'd check up on you people," he said. "See that you're still working."

"Not planning an expose I hope," said Frank.

"Should I be?" Teller asked.

"You'd be wasting your time here. All the skeletons are over in CIB. Try Caine House."

"They're not my type. All bone. No meat."

They laughed together.

"Why are you here?" Frank repeated "It's good to see you, but you weren't just passing through. It's a bit off your usual track isn't it?"

Teller took a packet from his pocket and held it up. Frank shook his head and Teller lit a Dunhill for himself.

"Actually, I'm looking for a few details about some guy who died in the storm last night. You had a line on it on the printer I think. Here is Wanchai."

Frank perched on the edge of his desk. "That's right. A bit out of your line though isn't it?"

"Johnson is home in bed so Davidson asked me to do it on my way into town." Teller looked around for an ashtray and the public relations man handed him one with an RHKP crest on it. "I haven't done police rounds for years. This is the best he could trust me with."

Frank looked at him momentarily and then asked: "What do you want to know? We don't know much more than we put out over the printer."

"The usual," he said. "Who, where, where, how and why. Anything about him or the accident that can give me an intro and a few pars."

"It's a bit sketchy at the moment, as I say." Frank seemed vague which struck Teller as a little strange given the simple nature of the incident. "There were a few incidents in the wind and the rain. You know what it's like."

There was a pause. Teller didn't interrupt but sat with his pad open on his knee.

"Anyway," Frank continued, "his name is Wong, it probably happened late in the evening, in Jaffe Road, and to be honest we're not quite sure how it happened."

"What's the problem?" Teller's interest was piqued. For some reason Frank was holding back.

"Oh Jesus alright," blurted the information officer. "You didn't get it from me. It'll come out sooner or later anyway and it might as well be yours. He's Michael Wong. And it doesn't look like it was an accident. But we're keeping it under wraps for the moment."

Teller noted the details. He stubbed out his cigarette. "Why the secrecy?" he asked. "Has his family been told?"

He knew of Michael Wong of course. Prominent surgeon. Millionaire. Wife well known in charity circles. He was often a guest speaker at civic organisation dinners, and while it was said he had definite views on Hong Kong's politics, he had apparently not expressed them strongly in public. He was chairman of the medical association and it was in that capacity only that he had once spoken in favour of direct elections. Otherwise he confined his interest to medicine.

"She was obviously told early this morning," Frank was saying. "Took it badly as you would expect. The kids don't know yet I don't think."

"That can't be it though," said Teller. "What is it? Murder? Suicide?"

Frank fidgeted on the desk uncomfortably. He glanced out the window at the colourless Asiana Restaurant sign hanging across the street.

"Come on Dave," Teller urged. "Something's put shit on your liver. You might as well make sure that when it breaks it is accurate. Otherwise you'll have to go around with a bucket and spade afterwards and try to clean up the mess. Save yourself the trouble."

The restaurant held the public relations man's attention for a full minute. Teller held his tongue. When Frank turned back he spoke clearly and evenly.

"Someone else told you, right? He was murdered. Head smashed in by a baseball bat or something. Face sliced up terribly. Took us all night to make an ID. Funny how some things happen. The bastard was a millionaire but he had little tags on the inside of his socks with his name on them. But who looks there for Chrissakes?" He took a breath. "No other ID on him but..."

"What?" Teller prompted. "But what?"

The man from York heaved himself up and walked around the end of the table and sat down. He cleared his throat. "Also," he said, "he had a skin wrapped around his face."

“A skin? What do you mean a skin?”

“Jesus Jason. Someone, whoever did it, killed a cat, skinned it and then tied it around his head after mutilating his face. Can you imagine that? Jesus.”

Teller stayed with David Frank for no more than five minutes longer. That was all it took for him to learn all he was going to get from his friend, who after his initial reticence let it come out in a rush of words. It was clearly something which Frank found unsettling and which had bothered him since he had been called out around two o'clock in the morning. He had seen bodies before but not like this one. Speaking quickly he described the events to Teller while pacing around his office.

The surgeon's body had been found by a patrolling constable, a foot protruding from a pile of rubbish bags. He'd reported in on his portable beat radio and within minutes reinforcements were on the scene. The Forensic Scientist got there half an hour before Frank who had been alerted by the senior criminal investigation officer, an English superintendent who had recognised the likely media sideshow once the story broke.

Fortunately, the press were not immediately on to it because communication had been by beat radio. Police headquarters was only two blocks away. Reporters monitoring the police communications band did not hear anything out of the ordinary in the storm calls for assistance. Frank told how he had looked down on the body and felt a cold shiver edge up his spine from his bowels which had nothing to do with the wind and rain sweeping along the narrow alley.

Hong Kong was not a city where brutality was so uncommon that a body would stun the populace. But there were isolated cases which shook even the Chinese society. Some years before two English school children had been battered, raped and murdered on a deserted hillside in a frenzied attack. Long before that a young Chinese had been viciously assaulted and mutilated, her body dumped in a cardboard box on the sidewalk. Frank had no doubt that when the full details of the Wong killing became known, irrespective of who was responsible, it would be regarded with horror as well.

So far the police knew the who, the how, the when within a few hours, the where. They did not know the why or by whom. Possibilities included triad involvement. Another question was what was the respected surgeon doing in Jaffe Road late at night in the middle of a storm? His car was nowhere nearby, yet initial investigations led the police to believe the killing took place where, or near to where, the body was found.

Unlike Frank, Teller had not witnessed the horrors described. So, unlike the public relations man, he did not feel physically ill. He was certainly intrigued though. It was a good story, yet it was one he had given his word that he would treat with a great deal of care. He could not tell it all. However, he had enough for more than the few paragraphs Davidson had demanded. Teller thanked his friend and they agreed to get together again soon.

“Say hello to Joan for me,” he said. “And don't worry. I won't drop you in it.”

He left and walked to Central, composing the article in his head as he dodged fellow pedestrians and breathed in the dust and petrol fumes of the traffic. When he reached Chater Garden opposite the Hilton Hotel he decided to go into the Legislative Council first, and then climb the hill to the government secretariat.

The council headquarters used to be the Supreme Court and was one of the oldest structures still standing in the ever changing Hong Kong. Built from solid sandstone it was two-storied, and domed with pillars surrounding its supporting

arched precincts. It had been refitted two years earlier and the architects had wisely retained many of the original features and much of the character.

Oak panelled doorways and beams combined well with the liberal use of highly polished brass fittings and clear sheets of thick glass. All furniture was teak, again trimmed with brass, in keeping with the stature of the council and those who deliberated the territory's policies within its walls.

Teller liked the building enormously and mourned the loss of the old Hong Kong Club a minute's walk away which had been reduced to rubble and replaced by an uninspiring concrete tower. The Hong Kong Cricket Club's decease was even more lamentable, but he had hardly given it a thought as he walked on its grave through Chater Garden and into the council building.

As he entered he was confronted by one of the retired policemen who acted as security guards, signed in, was given a media identification badge and released to roam the ground and first floors. The second floor was off limits. That did not bother him. He just wanted to sound out the press unit people on the ground floor with respect to moves by council members on the question of direct elections and the drafting of the *Basic Law*. It was a subject that was rapidly risking boredom setting in, but it was one he could not afford to ignore. And anyway, there was always something being said or done that kept the pot boiling.

Martin Lee was again in the news. He had apparently levelled an accusation that the Drafting Committee were dodging the issue of the relationship between the Executive and the Legislature after the 1997 handover. Members were afraid of China and were therefore playing it safe by postponing any definite decision or detailed discussion. Surprisingly the rest of the committee reacted sharply and immediately called a meeting and publically stated an agreed stance on the issue. It was a rebuttal totally unexpected and accused the brash Queen's Counsel of being what increasing numbers of commentators were calling a troublemaker. His image as people's representative was showing signs of tarnish and unless he was careful his successes could be overshadowed by his impulsive outspokenness. This opinion was being reinforced by Teller's contacts. "The sooner he calms down a bit, the better for everybody, including himself," said one, summing up the views of many others.

Teller spent about thirty minutes in the building, calling briefly on four contacts, and then slogged his way in the heat to Lower Albert Road where the Central Government Offices housed all policy branches. There he paid his respects to the Secretariat Press Officer, dropped in for chats in the Finance Branch and Administrative Services before ending up sitting across the desk in the office of a particular friend. They had shared opinions on many subjects over the years and his friend had passed him important information on a number of occasions. He had never printed it, but it had always been vital in providing him with a solid understanding of relevant situations. On this occasion though there was nothing significant to learn.

As he was leaving the office he tossed back: "Heard about the Wong killing?"

"Yes," replied his friend quickly. "Are you involved in it?"

"I'm writing it up," said Teller. "Anything I should know?"

His friend examined his face, unsmiling. "Be careful Jason."

"Why? What about it should I be careful of?"

"Just be careful. If you can, stay out of it."

Teller hovered in the doorway and was about to follow up on the unusual advice when his friend began shuffling the files on his table.

"Interesting times," he said distractedly "Very interesting times. Let's hope the interest doesn't get out of control."

Teller went back outside into the street and headed down the hill in the direction of the Hilton Hotel. There was time for a quick drink before he returned to his Quarry Bay office and it would give him time to think about the murder. Instinctively he knew there was more to it than he knew at the moment. He was hooked.

Questions buzzed around inside his head. Above all, why should his friend try to warn him off the story? He had a sometimes unusual sense of humour but there was no sign of amusement in the caution. Why should a branch in the CGO be taking an interest in the case in any event? Was there more to Michael Wong than met the eye?

Teller resolved to find answers to these and other puzzles.

## Chapter Three

Fifty-four.

Fifty-five.

Fifty-six.

Fifty-seven.

Fifty-eight.

Fifty-nine.

Sixty.

He lowered himself slowly to the floor. Perspiration trickled from the end of his nose and glistened on his bare torso as he lay breathing evenly with his arms fully extended by his sides, palms up. The press-ups had been easy as usual and he knew that a hundred would not have been too much of a strain. But he had a strict routine and although he was still keyed up he had no intention of departing from it. In three weeks he would build it up to seventy. For now the figure would remain at sixty.

For two minutes he lay on the wooden floor. Then he carefully rose and walked to the mirror in the corner of the room. Flexing his biceps and then moving up his stomach and arms he tensed and relaxed, studying closely the muscular reaction. He was satisfied with the reflection. He looked good. No fat. His penis hung limp between his legs and he touched himself lightly. He shuddered briefly as the sensation rippled his body. Quickly he turned away. Pulling on a pair of grey shorts and well worn trainers he left the flat and went out into the street. It was already warm and clammy and vehicles were on the move, heading for Tsimshatsui or the tunnel which would deliver occupants to the island. There were a few pedestrians walking briskly in the direction of the mass transit railway station.

He set off at an easy pace, jogging on the road rather than the pavement, out of the way of those on their way to work. The surface of Broadcast Drive was even, spongy almost even at this early hour. Every morning he followed the same route over three kilometres or just under three miles. To describe it sounded much longer than to actually run it. He began circling Broadcast Drive in a clockwise direction with the sun at his back. He turned left in to Junction Road and then Fu Mei Street, again left into Fung Mo Street to the flyover and the heavy vehicle fumes at the junction of busy Lung Cheung Road. For the length of Lung Cheung Road the sun was ahead of him until he reached the second flyover network which carried traffic out of the Lion Rock Tunnel from the New Territories. Here he turned left once more into the arterial Waterloo Road for the final downhill leg to the Junction Road corner. The stretch home took him along Junction Road, left into Broadcast Drive and up the incline to his building at the top. He kept a controlled pace throughout. There was no attempt at racing a clock; it took him a fraction over twenty minutes to complete. Not a marathon run but a healthy effort.

Stepping back into his fourth floor flat he went straight to the shower, stripped off his clothing and stood under piercing jets of cold water. Invigorating. He snapped off the water, stepped out of the cubicle and towelled off. Naked, he walked into the kitchenette, quickly downed two bottles of Vitasoy and then returned to the bedroom where he dressed in faded jeans, T-shirt and his second pair of trainers. At eight o'clock he left the building and walked to the bus stop at the bottom of the street. He alighted just before the Hung Hom terminus and strolled over to the Hong Kong Polytechnic.

Outside, he bought a copy of the Chinese language Sing Tao and was about to continue on when he caught sight of a headline on the front page of the South China Morning Post that was almost hidden on the newsstand. With a copy of that newspaper as well he moved into the compound of the red brick building. He sat casually on a bench a little inside the entrance and glanced through the Chinese newspaper. Then he unfolded the English newspaper and read the story which appeared under the bold heading TOP SURGEON MURDERED IN STORM.

*A massive manhunt is on for the killer of prominent surgeon Michael Wong whose brutalised body was found in Wanchai at the height of Thursday's wild storm.*

*Police are baffled by the apparently senseless murder but suspect it could have been carried out by triads or a sadistic killer who chose his victim at random*

The man's brow furrowed.

*Wong's skull had been smashed and injuries described by sources close to the investigation as "horrific" were found on his face.*

*A patrolling constable discovered the body stuffed among a pile of rubbish bags in Jaffe Road around midnight.*

*The police are saying little about the killing, and the SCMPost understands this is largely because they have little to go on.*

*A spokesman would only say that Mr Wong was apparently killed in the Wanchai backstreet, or close by, and that a special team has been formed to try to apprehend the killer. The surgeon's murder is one of the most brutal in years, said one detective.*

The story went on to describe Wong's professional background and personal details. It mentioned nothing about the cat skin that was found covering his face, nor did it mention the police puzzlement at what the surgeon was doing in the area late at night in the middle of a storm. However, it was an obvious question readers would ask. Beside the story was a photograph of the rubbish bags with plain clothed detectives searching the ground and two uniformed constables standing nearby.

Folding the paper, the man stood and stared out over the toll booths of the Cross Harbour Tunnel. Then he opened the paper again and read the byline above the story. It meant nothing to him but he memorised it nevertheless. As he turned and walked into the courtyard of the Polytechnic the man started to whistle softly. He dropped both newspapers into a refuse bin and continued across the open expanse of tarmac.

## Chapter Four

“I don’t know what it is about you, but you seem to be creating a bit of interest in yourself these days.” Davidson was lounging back in his leather chair, puffing away on his pipe. It seemed to be constantly in the editor’s mouth, withdrawn only to have its burnt contents knocked out and to be refilled for yet another hour of sweet-smelling incineration.

Teller noted how the corner of the editor’s mouth drooped even when the pipe was removed. He stubbed out his cigarette. He might end up with cancer but at least it would be invisible and he’d keep his lips. They wouldn’t have to be hacked off or half his jaw removed.

“What is it this time?” he asked. “Are they still denying the evacuation plan? Or rather the fact they have totally ignored one?”

“No,” said Davidson with a note of sarcasm. “You’ve extended your fan club. You’ve still got the boss of Information services calling me, but you’ve added our boys in khaki to the list.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our loyal guardians of law and order. Nothing less than the chief of the PR bureau who, incidentally, made a point of saying he was speaking on behalf of the Commissioner himself.” Davidson had not moved. “You’re doing well you have to admit.”

Teller shook his head. “I don’t understand. What have they got to do with Daya Bay?”

The editor heaved himself forward. “This time it’s your story on Michael Wong. They’re telling me it’s wrong. So pretend this is a rerun of our conversation only twenty-four hours ago.”

Hesitating, and recalling every salient point in his story, Teller did not answer immediately, but when he did his answer was firm. “There is nothing wrong in it. They can’t complain about anything in it.”

“Is that so?” challenged Davidson and pulled the day’s edition from a shelf behind him. Speaking slowly he read aloud: “*Police are baffled....a sadistic killer who chose his victim at random.*” He looked up.

Teller held his gaze. “Yes. So?”

“So,” said Davidson, “there could be some maniac out there, lurking in the shadows ready to pounce on any unsuspecting citizen he chooses. No reason. Just a madman on the loose looking to kill for a thrill.”

“Well, I wouldn’t go that far,” said Teller. “But whoever did it is sadistic, and there was no apparent reason, and the police don’t have any concrete ideas to go on.”

“You wouldn’t go that far. You mightn’t. Well, let me tell you. The Commissioner goes that far, and at the moment I am prepared to sympathise with him.” Davidson tossed the newspaper back on the shelf. “You created a panic out there Teller. You put a nutter on the streets and scared the hell out of people.”

“Listen,” Teller said defensively. “That information is correct. You did not question it before it went to print. And I can tell you something else too. If I told you the whole story you’d really have something to worry about. There’s more to it than just a senseless killing.” He took a cigarette from his pack and waited.

“You’re missing the point Teller,” came the reply. “I’m saying you’re wrong. Because you created unnecessary concern, worry, and fear out there. You went off

half cocked. Back to your cub reporter days building blazes out of tiny kitchen fires. The story was a beat-up damnit...and I should have realised it.”

Teller was taken aback. Before he could say anything the editor went on. “Bloody stupid. I should have put someone else on it. Go on. Stick to your features and for godsakes don’t get them wrong too. And I want to see those minutes on Daya Bay. I want to make doubly, triply, sure myself we’re at least on sound ground with that one.”

Teller was about to retaliate but Davidson’s expression was a warning. He stood and opened the door. Before closing it behind him he said quietly: “The story’s accurate.”

When he sat down at his own desk and looked back at the editor’s office, Davidson was on the telephone talking earnestly. No doubt the next kneecapping would be for the story’s sub-editor.

“Got something wrong, did you Teller?” said the American. He was standing on the other side of the desk smiling. “Got our cops off side have we?”

“Piss of will you,” said Teller. “What would you know?”

The American’s face widened. “Well,” he said, “for starters, I know they arrested two guys from the 14K earlier this morning. And for seconds, I know they have admitted bumping off our good doctor. How do like them apples buddy?” As he turned to walk away he looked back and grinned. “Have a nice day Clark Kent.”

Teller sat very still. The words rang in his ears. Two arrested? Statements or admissions obtained? He did not understand. Less than twenty-four hours ago he had been told the police had not a single clue in the case. David Frank was quite explicit they knew nothing. Now, out of the blue, the police had arrested two triads who had even confessed to the murder. All in less than a day. Also his friend’s advice in the Secretariat bothered him. Why would he tell him to be wary and stay away from the story? He had not been able to get a fix on that. If he had meant not to use it he would simply have said so. If he knew arrests were likely he would have given some hint at least. Instead he had warned him off the story altogether. Why?

Teller checked the government telephone directory and dialled the Wanchai number of the police public relations branch. When the call was answered he did not wait for anything more than the greeting. “David Frank please,” he said. “The name’s Teller.”

“How do you spell please?”

Oh Christ. “T-E-L-L-E-R.”

“One moment please.”

Shortly a voice came on the phone. “Hello.”

“Dave,” said Teller. “Jason.”

“I know. Hello Jason. What can I do for you?” The public relations man sounded calm.

“Dave,” said Teller evenly. “How did you like my piece this morning?”

“How do you mean?” Frank asked.

“Come off it Dave. What’s going on down there?”

“What do you mean?”

Teller gripped the handset tightly. “You know damn well what I mean. Yesterday you told me you had nothing to go on with the Wong thing. Within hours you’ve got a couple of petty thugs in a cell, signed, sealed and ready for delivery to Stanley Prison.”

There as silence at the other end of the line.

“Well,” said Teller. “How come? And how come you didn’t bother to let me in on it?”

When he did speak Frank sounded calm, but distant, evasive. “Look Jason. I can’t talk now. We just got lucky I guess. These things sometimes happen that way. Not very often, but sometimes. Anyway, it’s all tied up.”

“That’s a load of crap Dave,” Teller almost shouted. “It just does not happen that way. Not in a case like this. I’m left dangling here on a thin line with jaws snapping at me from all directions. What’s the real story?”

“That’s it,” Frank answered. “We got a tipoff and picked up two guys. They talked. End of story.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it. It’ll all be on the printer shortly, or maybe it is already on its way,” said the public relations man. “Look, I’ve got to go. Give me a call soon. We’ll have a beer.”

Teller started to say something but the line clicked and went dead. Slowly he replaced the receiver on its cradle. He wanted to smash the instrument down but he controlled his anger. He was angry at Frank who had either fed him incorrect information or failed to update him with developments. He was angry at himself and he was angry at Davidson. The editor had spoken to him like a raw cadet. Chastised was the word. And it was something he resented. He had been in the business long enough to know the ropes, and certainly long enough to be able to smell something rotten when it was upturned over him. At this particular moment the stench was overpowering.

He pulled his keyboard towards him and carefully typed onto the screen:

- \* The surgeon was killed on Tuesday night
- \* On Wednesday around midday the police had no clues
- \* On Thursday morning the police arrested two suspects
- \* Within hours of their arrest they had confessed
- \* Therefore within about 36 hours of Wong’s body being found the police had been tipped off, had picked up the suspects and obtained statements

“Bullshit,” said Teller aloud. The girl at the desk next to his turned from her Terminal and looked at him quizzically, but he ignored her. He began listing his own notes:

- \* On Wednesday afternoon the police had no clues
- \* Frank had told the truth then, why not now?
- \* His friend warned him off the story. Why?
- \* Who tipped off the police?
- \* Why didn’t Frank update him?
- \* Why was Frank avoiding him now?

Supposition – something was simply not right.

He had been the first with a story of any substance. All the other major newspapers had merely reported a man named Wong had died in the storm. He was the only one to identify the surgeon, the only one to know the gruesome details of the killing, the only one to report that a special police team had been formed.

His thoughts were interrupted by a cup of coffee being placed before him and a voice saying: “Sorry about yesterday. How it turned out I mean.”

Teller looked up and saw the crime reporter standing in front of the desk, apparently fully recovered from his bout of illness.

“What?” Teller asked.

The reporter sipped his coffee noisily. “I said I’m sorry you got stuck with the Wong story. It looks like you got landed in a mess. They got the guys I’m told.”

“Yes,” said Teller. “So I am told.”

“Chopped pretty bad,” said the reporter Johnson.

“You could say that.”

“Bastards. They should ban choppers. They are the staple weapon of the triads and any other thug who wants to go around hacking people up.”

“What?” Teller asked. “What did you say?”

“Choppers. They should be banned or sold under licence or something. Bloody things lop off arms and open up shoulders like watermelons. Mind you, every housewife would kick up a stink if they did ban them.”

“Is that what happened? Wong was hacked with choppers?” Teller stared at the police roundsman.

“So I’m told. His whole neck, arms and shoulders were gashed open.” The reporter paused. “But you knew that.”

“Sure,” said Teller. “With all those injuries it must have been pretty hard to make an ID.”

“No problem,” Johnson answered, gulping a mouthful of cooler coffee. “He’s pretty well known. Or was. Picture in all the papers at social functions. That’s why they kept it quiet so long. Standard practice.”

“Recognised straight off then,” said Teller casually.

“Of course. He’s a pretty big wig you know. Good story.”

“Not for me it’s not.”

“Yeah well...” The reporter dropped his cup in Teller’s wastepaper basket. “Anyway I’m sorry I was partly responsible for getting you into it. I’ve got to go. See you later.”

“Cheers,” mumbled Teller, and then clearly, “Thanks for the coffee.”

He was now clear in his own mind that something about the murder was being covered up. He had no idea what it could be, or why, but he did know that he was going to find out. Wong had not been chopped. His face had been sliced with a knife so badly he could not be readily recognised. It had been his socks. Also, no-one had mentioned anything about the cat skin.

“One more thing,” he called after the crime report. “The arrest was pretty quick wouldn’t you say?”

“Sometimes it happens that way. When the trail goes cold it takes much longer. Of course, in Wong’s case they got a tip off so it was quicker.”

“Who from?”

The reporter shook his head. “Don’t know. My friends can’t tell me. All enquiries have to go through the PPRB and Frank’s not saying. Doesn’t know himself, I don’t think.”

“Unusual isn’t it?”

“Well, a bit. I can usually get something extra...from him or one of his uniforms. My guess is they’re trying to protect someone. Whoever tipped them maybe. But I’ll keep trying and let you know what I find out if you like.”

“Thanks,” said Teller. “I am curious.”

“Sure,” said Johnson. “I understand. I’ll keep you posted.”

Teller picked up the telephone and dialled. The double engaged tone sounded but he allowed it to be repeated twenty times before he hung up. His Secretariat friend

was out at a meeting or was ignoring the ringing on his desk. Maybe early paranoia was setting in. Teller would try again in the afternoon.

For the rest of the morning he read his newspapers slowly and deliberately, checked some notes on stories he was working on, and handed into Davidson the minutes of the meetings on the planned Daya Bay nuclear plant. There was to be an official reception at the site in China in a week and he intended writing a short news piece on it. He called the Omelco press unit and was told five ad hoc group members had been invited, along with an assistant secretary and an interpreter. It was not very exciting but he would build a short story around that and justify his existence for another day.

But all the time at the back of his mind was the Wong case. It nagged him. He could not shake it. Maybe it was because he had been carpeted by Davidson. Maybe it was because something was wrong but not in the sense that he had been responsible for the error. At half past three he dialled his friend again. Still there was no response. On his way to the toilet he saw the copy boy place an envelope on his desk and when he returned a few minutes later he tore it open. The note inside had been badly typed. Flipping to the second page he read the signature at the bottom. Amelia. Puzzled, he began to read from the start:

*Jason, you are probably asking yourself why I should be writing to you. It is really quite simple. I need help and to be honest I don't know where to turn.*

Teller drained his cup and once more read the signature to be certain he was not mistaken the first time. She was right though, he thought. He could think of no reason under the sun why Amelia Tse should write to him of all people. Of course, he knew the political affairs writer and had even shared a drink with her and others in the office on a few occasions. They had as one would expect discussed the political developments taking place and he had noted how involved she seemed to be. Too involved for his liking, but that was her problem as a journalist, not his.

She was not unattractive and was certainly intelligent, but she was too intense. He was downright apathetic by comparison so it was not surprising that their acquaintanceship was shallow. Now he was being asked to help her at a time, and in circumstances, when she implied she felt totally alone. She had not even approached him in person, but had typed him a note.

He read on:

*I am writing to you because you have become involved already, whether you like it or not. You see, when you ran the story on Michael Wong's murder you left me no choice. We were close. Very close. That is why I have not been into the office.*

He had not been aware of her absence.

*I could not face it.*

Bloody Wong, thought Teller. When he had been alive he had not given him a thought. Now that he was dead he was being dragged into some painful love affair. What was he supposed to do? Provide comfort to the grieving mistress? He doubted it. He had a feeling Amelia Tse was asking him for more than that.

*You wrote the story so I am sure you suspect it was not an ordinary murder. I know it wasn't. And I dread the thought that more people are going to suffer. These are not things I can write about here. I have to talk to you.*

*I am frightened. It would be no exaggeration to say that if my suspicions are correct – and I am certain they are – we all have a great deal to fear.*

*Please you must help me. I am afraid to ask anyone else. Come to my flat at 7.30 this evening and I will explain everything to you. If you do not want to help I promise I will not force you. You can leave and forget we spoke. But please listen to me before you decide. The Legco session will be open soon, so we don't have much time. Please help me.*  
*Amelia*

What on earth was she talking about, Teller wondered. It made no sense. He placed the note back in the envelope and turned it over in his hands. There was no stamp so it must have been delivered by hand and not to personally but to the front desk. He pulled the sheets of paper out again and read the note slowly a second time. It gave him a strange, uneasy feeling. Searching for the copy boy Teller found him standing in the reception area chatting to the girl behind the counter. He asked who had given him the note. Nobody, said the copy boy, he had found it on the counter in the absence of the girl and so had taken it to him in case it was urgent.

He checked Amelia Tse's home address and telephone number and returned to his desk. He tried calling her but the line was engaged. He tried five more times before half past five, but each time he was unsuccessful. Damn it, he cursed. Why should he? If she was having an affair with the good doctor that was her problem. The extra-marital antics of a colleague and a celebrity murder victim were none of his business. He wanted no part of it. Shouldering his bag, Teller switched off his terminal and left the office.

Teller rode the underground to Central and elbowed his way up the escalators into the cavernous station and through the Swire House exit. One more internal flight of moving stairs and he was at the Jockey Bar. When he arrived it was already crowded. One of the better pseudo-English pubs, it was popular with expatriate businessmen and young professional Chinese on most week nights. After eight thirty though only the determined regulars or the odd passing tourist stayed on.

Teller ordered a Tsing Tao from the waitress in red and black silks and lit a Dunhill. The bottle of beer emptied more quickly than usual. He ordered another and sipped it slowly, observing the different groups at the bar and seated around the tables. He could see through the frosted windows that outside it was dull. By seven he had finished the second bottle also and had run into nobody he knew. He was at a loose end for the night. It would be the first night since the storm he realised that he would be able to sleep on his mattress again. The idea had appeal.

As he pulled cash from his shirt pocket the folded envelop fell to the floor. He picked it up and studied it. The hell with it he sighed. He might as well go and listen to the story, let her cry on his shoulder and see what all the fuss and fear was about. He could spare an hour and still be home in bed by nine thirty. He paid for his drinks, giving the girl a two dollar tip, and left. Picking up a taxi outside the Mandarin Hotel in the next block he directed the driver in his impeccable Chinglish to Caine Road and proceeded along Chater Road past Statue Square, down the slip road by the Bull and Bear, another prefabricated pub, where it did a U-turn, headed up Garden Road with the new Bank of China under construction on his right.

Teller missed the diesel Mercedes sedans that in the good old days accounted for virtually the entire taxi fleet in the territory. But like so many other things the Japanese had out shopped the Germans and the familiar three pointed star had been replaced by growling red and silver Nissan Datsuns.

Almost at the top of Garden Road, outside St Joseph's Cathedral, the vehicle turned off to the right into Upper Albert Road and passed by Government House. Around the next bend the road dipped. When it rose it had become Caine Road and the character of the neighbourhood changed. Teller closed his eyes and rested his head on the back of the seat.

It was only minutes before the taxi drew to a stop outside a sixteen story building a hundred meters from the junction of Seymour Road and opposite Ladder Street. In the daylight he would have been able to see as far as Hollywood Road which was lined with antique and junk shops and which led tourists into the famous Cat Street market area where it used to be able to pick up valuables for a song. But it was dark now and Teller could not see more than a short distance into the steep, stepped street so aptly named on the other side of the road.

He turned and checked the number on the building. Then he walked in, nodded to the dozing watchman and pressed for the lift. It crunched open and he stepped inside and thumbed the floor where Amelia Tse's flat was located. The lift doors crept together, shuddered open and closed again. The car rose at a geriatric pace that made Teller doubt he would even ride up and down by the deadline he had set himself. Finally, the lift jerked to a stop and once more the doors clanked open.

Amelia's flat was to his left and he depressed the doorbell button. There was no response so he rang again. He waited but nothing happened so he pressed the button a third time. He was about to leave but then rapped his fist on the wooden door. It opened a few inches.

"Amelia?" he called through the gap. "Amelia, are you there?"

There was only silence.

"It's Jason Teller, Amelia,. Can you hear me?"

There was no reply.

Teller looked about him and pushed the door open wider and looked inside. The light was on in the sitting room and he could see it was neat and tidy with a vase of flowers on the rattan table near the window.

"Amelia, are you home? It's me, Jason."

Teller stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. The flat was silent. He noted how much more imaginative and expensive the décor was to his own flat. At the end of a short hallway was a bathroom. He knocked on the door and immediately felt foolish for doing so, but he spoke: "Amelia." There was obviously nobody in the bathroom.

Ahead of him the kitchen was empty too. The light was on and unlike his place dirty dishes did not fill the sink and everything appeared to be in place.

"Amelia!" he called out more sharply, growing anxious. "Amelia. Are you home? Hello?"

A closed door was to his left and Teller knew it could only be a bedroom. He put his ear to it and listened. There was no sound from inside. Carefully he gripped the handle and turned it, easing the door open. By now he was pretty sure Amelia was not at home but he entered to look around nevertheless.

The room was in darkness with the curtains closed and he could just discern the shape of a double bed against the far wall. "Are you here Amelia?" he tried a last time but without really expecting a reply. His eyes were adjusting to the gloom and he felt for the light switch on the wall beside the door. He flicked it on.

Amelia Tse lay naked on the bed. Her black hair was combed out and spread behind her head. A dark line ran below her chin and blood soaked the pillow and

sheet around her shoulders. Teller could not see her face. It was hidden by the skin of a cat, the raw pink edge reaching half way down her left ear.

\*

Teller did not keep the appointment with his mattress.

When he saw Amelia Tse's body lying on her bed he stared at it a long time. He then switched off the ceiling light, closed the door and returned to the sitting room. Seated at the table he tried desperately to control his breathing. It surprised him that he was so unemotional, not that the girl's death could be expected to greatly upset him considering their distant relationship, but even the sight of the mutilated body had not repelled him. Fascinated was nearer the truth. His first thoughts were how peaceful she looked with her hair fanned out on the pillow like a dark halo, her torso relaxed with her legs decorously together and her arms by her sides. It was as if she was merely asleep. She wasn't of course. The thin line across her throat, the blood covered bed clothes, the skin on her face made that horribly obvious.

Teller rested his forehead in his hands and tried to think. The police had to be called and he considered going down into the street and using a public phone in case the one in the flat had vital finger prints on it. However he elected to use it nevertheless on the basis that it was unlikely the killer would have been foolish enough to either use it or to do so without wiping it clean afterwards. He was convinced the murderer was not a maniac who had chosen his victim at random. He was certain it was the same person or persons who were responsible for the slaying of Michael Wong. Amelia's murder had been committed with no signs of a struggle, the body had been arranged on the bed almost with care, and the cat skin blew away any doubts that may have lingered.

Teller picked up the telephone and pressed the nine digit three times. Slowly and clearly he requested the police and an ambulance, explaining quite simply there had been a murder. Finally he gave the address and his surname to the operator. Then he walked back to the bedroom and switched on the light. He was still staring at the body when the buzzer sounded from the other room. Three Chinese policemen in uniform faced him, one with a red flash under his shoulder badge indicating he spoke English. After scanning the bedroom and exchanging comments in Cantonese they escorted him back into the sitting room and instructed him to sit and wait.

Seeing their expressions, Teller said: "I didn't do it. I came to see her and found her like that. The door was open."

The constable with the red flash simply said: "No more please. Just wait."

Teller would learn later they had rushed from the local sub-station in the lane across the road as an advance party and had only to run two hundred meters. Their instructions were to guard the scene and to make sure he did not leave.

Detectives and other uniformed police arrived fifteen minutes later having been sent from Central headquarters in Hollywood Road, and for the next hour Teller told his story separately to a Scottish Chief Inspector, an English Inspector and a Chinese Senior Superintendent. He did not mention the note Amelia had sent him. He did not know why exactly.

He maintained he had come to see her because he wanted to talk to her about a story he was writing, and as she was the senior political affairs correspondent he thought she might be able to help him with some background material. The officers accepted his explanation and together asked him once more to repeat the details. At a quarter to ten David Frank walked through the door.

He nodded. "Jason. Hang on a minute. I'll be with you shortly."

He spoke quickly to the Chinese detective in charge and then walked down the hall to the bedroom. When he reappeared his expression was severe.

Speaking again to the Senior Superintendent he said: "There are already a couple of press outside but I have some of my people looking after them. Later on you might give them a basic statement. By eleven if you can, because they'll miss their deadlines otherwise and cause you all sorts of agro."

The officer agreed and approached Teller. "I won't mention you by name when I talk downstairs. I'll say she was found by a friend. OK? You'll have to come back to the station for a while. You can go later after the deceased has been removed.

"The press should have left by then," interrupted Frank.

Teller was about to say he understood the routine.

"Yes," said the detective. "Also, you realise you will probably have to appear in court at some stage. So I would suggest you should not say anything at the moment to anyone. And don't write anything either. Is that understood?"

Teller nodded. It would be difficult he knew as it would not be long before his involvement was discovered. But he understood very clearly the policeman's reasons for cautioning him. He also had his own reasons for not wanting to say anything.

For the next hour and a half Teller sat at Amelia's dining table and watched police check the flat room by room. Doors, knobs and panels were dusted for fingerprints. Drawers, shelves, cupboards and clothes closets were searched meticulously. The government pathologist arrived, and Amelia's body was soon hefted and laid in a steel coffin-like box and hauled to the lift.

Frank stayed with the police most of the time, but periodically left to see if everything was under control down on the street where a crowd of newspaper and television reporters had gathered. He glanced in Teller's direction a number of times but did not speak to him.

By one o'clock everyone had left the flat except Teller, Frank, the Chinese detective and two uniformed constables who would guard the premises for the remainder of the night. On the way to the police station nobody spoke, and when they pulled into the courtyard Teller was ushered into a sparsely furnished office where for the last time he repeated his story. When he finished the Senior Superintendent stood up. "Thank you," he said. "You can go now. I'll have a car take you home. Please, don't say anything to anyone. We might want to talk to you again."

Outside there was no sign of Frank. Teller was driven to Happy Valley in a patrol car by two uniformed officers who offered not a single word of conversation during the entire journey. Back in his own rooms he undressed, drank a pint of milk straight from the carton and lit a cigarette. By the time the butt burned his fingers he had decided what he had to do.

He slipped into bed, his brain racing, and closed his eyes. It was four o'clock before weariness finally overcame him and he dropped off into a fitful sleep.

The screaming of the radio alarm shocked him awake. He hammered the clock into silence and slumped onto the pillow the previous night's events flooding back. It was seven thirty and he was exhausted. Slowly he crawled out of bed, cleaned his teeth and tugged on his tracksuit. The morning's exercise was painful and by the time he got back to the flat all he wanted to do was collapse back onto the bed and sleep for the entire day.

Instead, he showered, shaved and dressed in a light beige suit, intermittently dragging on his first Dunhill of the day. He watched it smoulder in the crystal ashtray on the dressing table. At nine o'clock he sat in the arm chair and cradled the telephone

on his lap. Picking up the receiver he dialled. It rang at the other end just twice before it was answered.

“Hello,” said a man’s voice.

“Jason,” said Teller. “Can I come and see you?”

There was a brief pause. “What time?”

“In half an hour. It’s important.”

“Nine forty- five. Come straight here.”

The phone clicked and the connection was severed.

Thirty seconds later it rang. Teller picked it up.

“Have you read the papers?” asked the man.

“Not yet.”

“Read it before you come,” said the caller and hung up.

Teller wandered down to Wongneichong Road and bought a South China Morning Post, hailing a taxi as he emerged from the local provisions store. He read the lead story in the back seat as it weaved its way around the racecourse and then into the long winding Kennedy Road. The heading ran the width of the page in large bold type.

#### POST REPORTER SLAIN IN MID-LEVELS

*South China Morning post senior political writer Amelia Tse was found brutally murdered in her Mid-levels flat last night.*

*Her throat had been slashed and she was lying naked in a pool of blood on her bed.*

*Police at the scene said there were no other wounds, and there was no sign she had been sexually assaulted.*

*Miss Tse, 34 was discovered by a friend who went to visit her at her 6<sup>th</sup> floor flat in Caine Road about 7.30pm. When there was no answer to his knock on the door he entered and found her sprawled on the bed. Detective Senior Superintendent Y.P.Chan of Central Homicide said Miss Tse may have been asleep when she was attacked.*

*“There were no signs of a struggle in the flat and the deceased appeared to have been on the bed when she was killed,” he said. The pillow and mattress were covered in blood but no blood was found anywhere else.*

*Police, although classifying the case as homicide, are uncertain as to the reason for the killing. No valuables appeared to have been taken.*

*Miss Tse was one of Hong Kong’s most respected political commentators and had been employed by the South China Morning Post for the last six years.*

*Her career also included some years as a reporter with the Standard and the now-defunct tabloid newspaper, The Star. A graduate of Baptist College, Miss Tse wrote the popular “Inside Story” column for the past three years.*

*Editor in Chief Harvey Davidson described Miss Tse as “a fine journalist.”*

*“She was dedicated and was prepared to write what the people really thought about Hong Kong,” he said. “She will be missed greatly by her colleagues and by the thousands of readers who followed her thought-provoking reports.”*

There were further comments by fellow reporters and senior government officials, all of whom spoke highly of her ability.

Teller read the article closely, for the first time feeling sympathy for Amelia. Since he saw her body on the bed more than twelve hours before, she had been only that; a body. Somehow the printed words had transformed her into a person he knew and could relate to.

He folded the paper and gazed in silence out of the window as the taxi drove into Garden Road outside the American Consulate and then into Lower Albert Road and the Central Government Offices car park. He nodded to the friendly commissionaire and entered the nearest lift. At nine fifty he knocked on the door of an office that, unlike most others in the building, bore no name or title on the door.

There was a "Yes" from inside and Teller pushed the door open and walked in. The office was bare except for a standard government-issue desk and two plain brown wooden chairs. The walls were painted cream and were not brightened with the usual enlarged home colour photographs or framed prints of sketches depicting Hong Kong landmarks from the 1860s. Even the black telephone on the table top with its circular finger dial seemed temporary and sort of out of place. Teller had noted before there was no number printed on it, and that there was a screw visible where the grey and orange Telecom logo should have been. It looked for all the world more like a storeroom than an office.

"How are you, Jason?" asked the man on the far side of the desk.

"Tired," he answered. He sat in the chair with his back to the door. "I was up all night."

The man had a half smile on his lips as he watched Teller drape his shoulder bag over the back of the chair. Teller had known him for many years, and while they might not have been close friends they were trusted acquaintances. He looked in his fifties and had fine, wispy white hair that seemed to grow thinner between meetings. His skin was well cared for, but he had two deep lines that ran from under his soft, pale blue eyes which sparkled and gave him a bright, more youthful appearance, straight down his cheeks to his jaw. Teller was a long way off judging his real age. He was in fact well into his sixties.

His official title was that of an advisor, special duties, but outsiders took little notice of him as he seldom attended public functions and never made public statements. For some time he had been regarded, even by senior officers in the branches, as simply Old Jack who was being looked after because of past services rendered, particularly during the 1967 Cultural Revolution that rocked China and overflowed into the territory.

He drifted around the building, wandering into offices for chats and patting messenger girls on the head. Sometimes he sat quietly at policy conferences but never said anything and so was hardly noticed, after a time becoming almost invisible, certainly of no consequence.

Teller did not regard him as inconsequential. He had steered him straight a number of times after he had confided in him on stories he was pursuing. The man was a source for checking especially confidential or suspect information. He provided the checks and balances which Teller regarded as essential in his profession. At least on many occasions he had received such wise advice, if not every time he made an approach and sought guidance. It was for that reason he dubbed him the accountant. Sitting with his hands folded in his lap Old Jack, the accountant, said evenly: "You were working late."

“Late, yes,” replied Teller. “But not really working.” He cleared his throat. “I think you might know where I was.”

“Yes.”

“Do you know all the details?”

“Such as?”

“The cat skin,” Teller answered, his gaze not wavering. “Do you know about the cat skin?”

The accountant did not blink. “What are you thinking, Jason?”

“I don’t know what to think,” said Teller. “But I do know there’s a connection between Amelia and Michael Wong’s murder.”

“What kind of connection?”

“They knew each other,” began Teller. “And now they’re both dead. Murdered. And the killer covered each of them with the skin of a dead cat.”

“Yes,” said the accountant.

Teller felt his way gingerly further. “I also believe the police are covering something up and I think it might be for political reasons.”

“What makes you think that? What political reasons?”

“I don’t know, but I think it has something to do with Legco.”

The older man took a pencil from his breast pocket, tapped it on the table. “Why do you think it might concern the Legislative Council?”

Teller hesitated. Then he reached around and lifted his bag off the back of the chair. He took out his wallet and withdrew the envelope containing Amelia Tse’s typed note to him. He handed it across the desk. “Read this,” he said.

“Has anyone handled it?” The accountant enquired.

“No,” replied Teller. “Well, no-one but me and a copy boy. And Amelia as you will see.”

The accountant opened the envelope carefully and with his forefinger and thumb slid out the note. Using the same fingers he laid the paper on the desk, unfolded it and read it slowly.

“What time did you get this?” he asked.

“About four, five o’clock yesterday. I’m not exactly sure when. I can’t remember now.”

“May I keep it please?”

Teller considered. “Yes. But I haven’t told the police about it.”

“Nor will I,” the accountant replied. “Don’t worry, you will not be in any trouble.”

“Are you going to tell me what this is all about?” Teller asked. “I am involved, you know. I think I have the right.”

For the first time the white haired man frowned. Then: “No. Not yet. Stay away from it altogether. Don’t become any more involved. Write your features on Daya Bay.”

“But I can’t just forget the whole thing. I saw Amelia dead. I found her body. She wrote to me just hours before asking for help.”

“Jason,” the accountant cautioned solemnly. “Please do as I say. I know you cannot forget it. But stay out of it. When the time is right I’ll see to it you get a story.”

Teller retorted: “I’ve already got a story.”

The accountant did not respond. Teller continued: “The police have arrested two innocent men and charged them with Wong’s murder. The same killer killed Amelia last night, or yesterday at least, while the two arrested were in jail. The police, I think, knew they had the wrong guys from the start. Amelia and Wong knew each

other. Amelia said she knew why he was killed. She said it concerned Legco. Or hinted anyway. She was frightened. She knew something else was going to happen. Now she's dead."

The accountant still said nothing.

"These are facts," said Teller. "And I am personally involved. How can I ignore that? Just walk away from it all?"

The accountant inhaled slightly. "I'll give you one more fact Jason. And I hope you will take my advice." His pale eyes hardened. "There is much at stake here. If you get in the way a lot of people may well suffer. So I will ask you again. Will you please leave it alone?"

Teller knew the request was not being made lightly. Of course, he realised his hands were somewhat tied already in that he could be a star witness in any court hearing concerning the death of Amelia Tse and he recalled the police warning not to say anything at this stage.

After a pause he spoke. "Alright," he said. "I'll do nothing. For now."

"Thank you," said the accountant. He made no further comment and sat facing Teller, his hands flat on the table in front of him.

Later, as he left the building and stood under the large tree at the entrance, Teller thought about what his contact had revealed. Of one thing he was certain. He was not merely serving out his time as many thought. Teller had no doubts that he was very much involved in the more covert workings of the administration of Hong Kong. To be sure he had always imagined as much. But he now knew there was a lot more to Old Jack than met the eye, trained or otherwise, and he determined to find out just how far his influence extended.

As Teller stood in the shade the accountant observed him through the barred window of another office above. A voice behind him asked: "How much does he know?"

Without turning the accountant replied: "Nothing really. He has put Tse and Wong together, that's all."

"Do we have to do anything about it?"

"No. Not yet." He looked over his shoulder. "He suspects. Nothing more."

There was a pause. "And the girl's note? What do you make of it?"

The accountant walked to the centre of the room and eased himself into a reclining chair. "Interesting," he said. "But I am not convinced she knew as much as she intimidated."

"Unfortunately that's still more than we are sure of."

"Yes, more than we know," said the accountant with emphasis on the *know*.

"Journalists," said the other man in the room. "They're becoming more and more difficult to handle. If they're not hassling about the press being gagged and political films being censored, they're devising their own plots to undermine us. The exasperation in his voice was plain.

The accountant drummed his fingers on the arm of the chair and resting his head back closed his eyes. He spoke almost inaudibly: "Don't forget our dealings with the media are a two-way street. We can use them too."

Half an hour later he returned to his own bare office. He had to carefully plan the next step in the drama that was being played out, but the problem was he did not know who all the players were.

What he did know was that unless he found out soon he had little chance of preventing an incident that could plunge Hong Kong into a period of violent turmoil,

the consequences of which would be devastating. And if his guess was correct, the fuse would be lit on October the seventh – just fifty-six days away.

## Chapter Five

The old man bent and peered into the refuse bin. He carried a large plastic bag stuffed with newspapers and empty soft drink cans. The flimsy aluminium containers with the red, white and green brand names stylised on the side were no match for the man's filthy trainer clad feet. They had been stomped flat and meticulously positioned in the bag, safely distant from the torn holes and flush against one another to allow for maximum space utilisation.

As he leaned into the bin his trousers parted and bared sooty flesh, uncovered by undergarments. The trousers themselves were black, stained with oil and what passersby could only imagine, and they came to his calves, the ends in tatters, almost the same colour as the skin they were too short to cover. The pockets had been ripped out and there looked to be more tears and holes than actual material.

The tramp withdrew a Diet Coke can and triumphantly wiped it on his jacket in a gesture totally out of character with his dirty appearance. The motion stripped another few square inches of brittle material and it fell to the sidewalk. The can was then immediately squashed and placed in the bag.

With a final ransacking of the bin, the beggar straightened and looked across Statue Square for the next stop on his search. His face was lined and deeply encrusted with grime, his matted hair falling over his ears and forehead, and his greying beard a tangled mess. The eyes squinted into the morning sun as he paid no attention to the groups of Filipino maids who had adopted the Central precinct as their own personal meeting place. Hoisting the bag, the old man moved into the middle of the square and resumed his bin searching.

He looked like any one of the hundreds of street sleepers who infested the crowded urban areas, and whose makeshift beds could be found under flyovers and on street benches. An eyesore, and a glowing example of the side of Hong Kong the tourist association had no intention of promoting, these derelicts were periodically rounded up, washed, shaved, shorn and deloused. Then, because the law gave the authorities no alternative, they were dropped back on the streets to continue the life of their choice.

The beggar shuffled to the granite steps and descended them eagerly, another bright yellow bin ahead of him. Plucking a crumpled newspaper from inside he folded and laid it in his bag. Glancing to his left he caught sight of a security guard outside the entrance to the Legislative Council building. He appeared to glare at the uniformed guard for a few seconds and then walked straight towards him.

"Shit," said the beggar in harsh Cantonese.

"Get out of here, old man." The guard motioned him on.

"Shit," repeated the beggar and pointed at the entrance doors.

The guard turned his face away to avoid having to look at him. "You can't go in there," he said. "Go on. Get away."

"Shit. Want." Repeated the bedraggled man and pointedly dropped his bag on the concrete.

"Listen," the guard said in a stern voice, now looking him in the eye. "You are not allowed in there. So get away from here or you'll be in trouble."

A small group of labourers from a nearby construction site had seen the brief confrontation and stopped to watch. One of them with a sneer pointed at the guard. "What's wrong?" he called out. "Is this only for the rich people? Too good for the likes of us or him?"

The guard tried to ignore the group and again motioned the beggar on.

“Why won’t you let him in?” said another of the workers, enjoying the opportunity to tackle authority, especially at no risk to himself. “All the old man wants is a shit.”

“Let him empty his bowels in luxury for once,” said the worker who had spoken first. “It’s a public place.”

The guard was about to step back inside the building when the doors opened outwards and an expensively dressed Chinese man emerged.

“What’s the matter” he asked the guard, who without hesitation began to explain. A small crowd had gathered and was watching with interest the exchange. The man looked in their direction and then spoke to the guard. “Let him in,” he said. “But be careful. I’ll explain to the people why we must have security. Be quick.”

The guard pulled wide the door and called to the beggar: “Come on! Hurry!” He led the old man in and directed him twenty paces to the right. Inside the toilet he motioned to the far cubicle and when the old man was inside he stood to attention outside, prepared to warn anyone who entered that they would be well advised to wait for a while.

After some minutes the old man tugged open the door and glared at the guard who in turn peered over his shoulder: “*Diu nei*,” he exclaimed, and pulled the beggar out into the corridor. At the main entrance he stood patiently by the door and beckoned the beggar out into the square.

The crowd outside watched as he picked up his bag and hurried off. The well dressed man was still explaining the security measures necessary for the building as the guard returned inside and met a colleague.

“The dirty bastard shit on the seat,” he cursed. “Get the cleaner.”

An hour later the beggar could be seen shuffling through the Botanic Gardens. But he was not observed as he entered a shed behind a tall clump of bamboo. There he stripped off the rags and washed himself clean from a pail of cold water. He removed the false beard and wig and pulled a bundle from under the newspapers in the bag. He shook out a pair of shorts and a checked shirt along with a pair of brown leather sandals. Once dressed he packed the old clothes in the bag and left the shed. As he passed a rubbish bin he dropped the bundle in. Anyone who saw him would never imagine him as a dirty beggar who had been rummaging in refuse bins in Statue Square shortly before.

He walked back towards Central whistling softly to himself.

## Chapter Six

“James, where are we at now?”

Detailed examination of the situation was required to ascertain just what sort of political future Hong Kong was likely to enjoy in the years ahead. To the outside world, much of what occupied the concerns of those deeply involved in trying to ensure how that future unfolded, talk of District Boards, Omelco, the public’s written response to the question of direct elections or not direct elections, and so many other allied subjects seemed of little, or at best, confusing interest.

But in reality the apparently mundane, boring, distracted, globally inconsequential considerations could have a surprisingly unpleasant impact.

The Chief Secretary again sat at the head of the table, relaxed in the chair with his long legs casually crossed, the toe of his left shoe bobbing to some silent tune. He had an accurate picture already but formalities had to be adhered to, so the three men would go over the situation as if they were all receiving the new information for the first time.

The assistant flipped open the pink, hard-backed file on his lap. “As of close of play yesterday we had received four thousand three hundred and twenty-eight,” he answered. Running his finger down the column of figures on the right hand side of the page, he added: “Yes, they’re coming in at over a thousand a day.”

“We’ll get fifty thousand then,” said Roger Gould. “With just under seven weeks to go, around forty days, we’ll top it easily.”

“Perhaps,” said Wong.

“Why not?” asked the Political Advisor. “Are you thinking the numbers will fall off? To such an extent that even fifty thousands will be in doubt?”

“Not necessarily,” replied Wong. “The new APIs and other publicity have revived the interest somewhat. The “Green Paper Made Easy” advert seems to have brought them in.” The assistant flattened the file on the desk. “Even the Omelco post boxes outside their building have taken nearly four hundred.”

Gould smirked. “Probably all from staff to justify the public relations effort.”

Wong looked hard at the Englishman whom he would find it hard to like no matter how long he knew him. “Actually they are genuine. It might have been a bit cosmetic and gimmicky but the green boxes have attracted comments. Let’s face it, four hundred is almost ten per cent of the total so we can’t dismiss it lightly.”

“You’re right of course James,” said McNamara. “The number is significant. But what is your worry?”

The Chinese lit a cigarette. Even though neither the Political Advisor nor the Chief Secretary smoked, and hated the stale smell that seemed to cling to the walls after each meeting, they waited while Wong shook the match dead and exhaled a cloud towards the ceiling. “The overall stats are good,” he said. “Personally, I am now confident we can pass fifty thousand. But I think eighty thousand is asking too much. We’re going to be in recess until the end of the consultation period and I think the surge we are now seeing, or have until recently, will continue to slow down. My estimate has to be revised to around sixty.”

He stopped and drew on the cigarette again. He could see through the windows that outside was still as gloomy as it was when he left his home to travel into to his office, his daily route taking him past the silent Legislative Council building. The council had been in recess since the middle of July when its forty-five members had ended their session with a two-day display of opinion on the Green Paper.

Speaking to a motion, they had individually given their views on the options proposed for overall political development.

While many had spoken on the role of the District Boards, the importance of Functional and Electoral College constituencies, and topics such as voting age and presidency of the council itself, the major subject had been direct elections, universal suffrage, one-man-one-vote. There had been no real surprises yet the debate had been hailed as a most thought-provoking, mature exercise in fledgling democracy. Legislative councillors had marked out vital credibility ground.

They had then packed their bags and headed for more pleasant, less pressurised climes. The summer holidays were on in earnest as places as divergent as Bali and San Francisco, New York, London, Geneva and Australia's Gold Coast opened their hotel doors to the rich Chinese politicians. A few remained behind, determined to keep the issues alive, but the fires became embers and on the whole public interest waned. Other matters, far more immediate, such as the plight of Vietnamese refugees on the one hand and the rising road toll on the other grabbed the headlines, along with more and more overseas news.

This was the other recess James Wong had in mind. The media, which had devoted itself to the local political question for so long, was showing its limited attention span and growing lack of interest. The entire question had become repetitive and the temporary break was welcomed. If not across the board then by many nonetheless.

"Interest will pick up again around September," he said. "However, I don't think that is the real problem."

"Go ahead James," the Chief Secretary urged. "What's the problem?"

Wong leaned forward, stubbed out the cigarette in the brown glass ashtray and opened the confidential file again. Turning to the second page he began to recite a tally of facts and figures. After two minutes he looked at the others around the table in turn. "This is the bottom line. We are running around seventy to seventy-four per cent in favour. Right from the start it had that sort of support. Something has happened though. We're well down on that now."

McNamara wanted to know how far down the figure was, and there was a chill in his voice.

"In some areas, the DBs, groups and unions we go as low as forty-two per cent. Overall, we stand at fifty-four per cent." The assistant kept the file open before him but said nothing more.

There was a lull when none of the men spoke. The Chief Secretary uncrossed his legs and leaned his elbows on the table. "Well," he said. "Over the last ten days or so we've gone from an expected target of fifty thousand to more than sixty thousand. The publicity machine clearly has been working well." He steepled his fingers and went on. "We've also gone from over seventy per cent to just over fifty per cent. So something plainly is happening. Two steps forward, one step back. Or rather, one step forward and two backwards."

McNamara dropped his gaze and studied his hands as if searching for some hieroglyphic explanation impressed in the skin. "We have a problem gentlemen," he said quietly. "What do you suggest we do to solve it?"

"Actually two," said Wong. "We've still got the problem with Special Branch. They're continuing to hold that one per cent is all they can guarantee for the polls."

"And that's still unacceptable," answered McNamara quickly. "Sixty is far too many. Far too many now we have this other hiccup."

His assistant sat impassively. When he spoke he did so in a reasoned, soft tone. "Under normal circumstances we would have no difficulties. It's been done a number of times. But this is different. It has to be quiet and camouflaged."

The Chief Secretary was plainly impatient. "I am still well aware of that. I spoke to the Director myself. I impressed on him the importance of precise information. Fair and honest."

Wong reached for the gold packet next to the ashtray.

"Got god's sake James," blurted McNamara. "Let's breathe some air for a change."

The Chinese withdrew his hand. "I called him this morning. He's worried he can't keep the cover up. His researchers are starting to wonder aloud what the data is for."

"Well, why doesn't he switch them around?"

"He has. Twice already."

Well then?"

"That in itself is raising questions. Itchy, is the word he used with me. They're a close lot as you know."

McNamara stood up abruptly. He stalked to the door and asked Gail Jones to call for more coffee. Closing the door he sat down heavily. Rubbing his chin with the back of his hand he said: "We're going to lose our grip on this if we're not careful. It's going to get away from us."

Roger Gould had remained silent since early in the meeting as he followed the exchange with keen interest and had to admit he sympathised with both men. Certainly he understood the Chief Secretary's wish for reliable results. If the final outcome was questionable, hard and troubled times lay ahead. At the same time he had to accept Wong's dilemma; only so much pressure could be brought on those in the field to produce. Experience taught him that only too personally. Too much pressure and the plan could backfire with potentially more devastating effect. The line separating the two was excruciatingly fine and it had to be handled with extreme caution and balance. If one side was played with too heavy a hand it could all come crashing down around their heads.

Gould did not have great liking for either of the men. One was a Chinese and that in itself put him outside the perimeter of people with whom he chose to be close. A visit to China just months before the onslaught of the bloody and mindless Cultural Revolution had allowed him to see the Chinese people as they really were. A guest of the Shell multinational, he had spent four days in Shanghai and had seen the populace's total disregard for human rights and their almost pathological hatred for anything foreign. Since then he had learned a great deal more which hardened his feelings towards the Chinese. The stories he had been told, some by people who had suffered personally, of the years between then and Mao's death and the elimination of the notorious Gang of Four led by his venomous widow Chiang Ching, had confirmed his view that they should be left to their own devices.

Naturally, he had not voiced these feelings openly but he had found it increasingly difficult to conceal them. The last year in Hong Kong, actually living and working with Chinese people, albeit Hong Kong Chinese, had made it almost impossible. And James Wong had the added unfortunate attribute of being extremely intelligent and educated. Gould resented the fact.

McNamara was British, but he too did not fall into Gould's definition of acceptable, in spite of his seniority. He was not of the old school, had clawed his way up the civil service ladder by sheer ability and determination, and was now in charge

of an administration of nearly two hundred thousand at a time when history was being made. Gould resented this too. Nevertheless, he had a certain role to play in the historical drama unfolding and he knew that if the end was a happy one he also would be able to enjoy the applause. If not, he would be despatched to the wings and anonymity. So he sympathised with the problems being aired by the Chief Secretary and his assistant and for the moment his personal feelings were discarded. In their place was real concern.

“Can we deal with the second first,” he suggested. “That seems to me to be the one we can overcome in the shortest time. Then we can address the wider critical issue.”

There followed an hour-long discussion interrupted only by the young boy in dark trousers and light blue shirt who delivered fresh coffee to the office. He was chaperoned by Gail Jones who efficiently ushered him into the office and out again in seconds. At the end McNamara leaned back in his chair, balancing his cup precariously on finger tips. “We agree then,” he stated. The others nodded and it was Gould who said: “It’s a risk but we have no choice any longer.”

“OK,” said McNamara. “If there are doubts and risks of interference drop the doubtful ones.” He paused. “I still hope it will clear itself in time though. Keep trying James.”

As to the problem of written submissions being received, another two hours of discussion did not help. At the end of the day it was up to the advocates and their supporters.

“I’ll try dangling the bait at the Friday Omelco lunch,” said the Chief Secretary. “Recess or no recess I hope they take it and run with it. It’s the best we can do for now. We’ll meet and first thing Monday.”

When the Political Advisor and the assistant had left the room Gail Jones came in and smiled at McNamara. “A long one,” she said. “Do you want another coffee or a Perrier?”

“No more caffeine please. A water sounds great though, What’s been happening in the so-called real world outside?”

“Nothing special. Joan called to say she’ll collect on the way home in half an hour.”

“Thank god I’ve got nothing on. With HE back in town I can actually lunch with my wife for a change. Any other messages Gail?”

“Just one,” she replied, steadying her gaze. “Jason Teller rang at eleven. Asked if he could see you when you are free. I made no promises.”

“Did he say what it was about?”

“No. But I think it might be personal. He seemed anxious.”

“Leave it with me. Don’t do anything yet. I’ll let you know after lunch.”

The Chief Secretary turned to the personal computer on the shelf behind his desk and punched a few keys. As Gail Jones was closing the door he said over his shoulder: “Oh, ask Jack if could drop in for a few minutes would you please. I’ve got something I want him to do.”

\*

Jason Teller had called McNamara’s office and had been transferred to Gail Jones’s extension as he had expected. One of her many duties was to screen the media. He knew her quite well, as Mrs J, not by her Christian name. When he spoke to her he divulged little. It was a private matter he wished to raise with Robert

McNamara, and not one he wished to mention to anyone else at this stage. All the previous afternoon he had spent reading. In the morning he had made a few telephone calls and had not left his flat until after ten. When he did, instead of taking his usual route to the train station in Hennessy Road in Causeway Bay, he walked in the opposite direction down Link Road. At the corner where the Po Leung Kuk cared for neglected children he turned left and skipped across the busy intersection when the traffic congealed to a temporary standstill, and entered Sunning Road. At the far end of the street was the Lee Gardens Hotel, the gathering point for busloads of flag-waving, camera-toting, plastic-hat-wearing Japanese tourists. It was not a five star hotel but it was in the heart of bustling Causeway Bay with an excellent array of restaurants nearby and a number of large department stores, mostly Japanese, within a tight radius.

Teller crossed Hysan Avenue and passed through a doorway next to the hotel's entrance. He rode the lift to the fifth floor and found the office he was looking for. The Chief Information Officer of the Medical and Health Department greeted him warmly and handed over a photocopied sheet of paper. It was the official biography of Michael Wong, showing his personal antecedents and his professional qualifications and experience. Teller stayed chatting with the woman for about fifteen minutes and thanked her for preparing the information at such short notice. He had called only an hour before. Then he left and walked down to Hennessy Road, cutting through the elaborate Mitsukoshi store.

It was hot, as usual, the humidity level high, perhaps due once again to two typhoons that were standing off the Philippines in the south. There had been a light morning shower which had been insufficient to cool and clear the air. The stroll through the air-conditioned Japanese store had refreshed him and he enjoyed looking at the quality products he could not afford on a journalist's salary. Even if he could not buy anything he could dream of the day he might write a best seller and be able to wear the exclusive-label clothes.

Back in the heat he waited for a tram and boarded it along with twenty or so others. At that time of the day it was packed with housewives, office messengers on errands from one end of town to the other, and workers whom Teller was convinced were salespeople as they all carried what looked like sample cases. But in Hong Kong you could never be sure what people did for a living, despite appearances.

He stood. Being tall, he always found the best place was right at the back where he did not have to duck his head and peer at trouser cuffs and scuffed shoes. Instead he could look out the open side and watch life on the sidewalks. The main drawbacks were the heat from the engine and the final fight through the length of the tram when he had to alight.

For once everyone seemed to be getting off at the stop near the giant Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in Des Voeux Road, and he merely followed the mass with little jostling. From there he proceeded through the open ground floor of the bank to the Queen's Road side and sidestepped his way through congested traffic to Beaconsfield House, headquarters of the Government Information Service.

The GIS had a staff of hundreds of information officers scattered throughout practically every government department in the territory. They all answered to the Director and her three Assistant Directors on the sixth floor. Administration staff, design and photographic and research sections were on the lower levels. The library, where Teller was heading, was also on the top floor, next to the main news room from where all official press releases were telexed.

Walking out of the lift he approached the receptionist and informed her of his name, the newspaper he represented and that he wanted to research some material in the library. When he was introduced to the librarian a few minutes later he told her he wanted to see the biographies and profiles of all legislative councillors and the directorate of any professional media bodies. Also the latest copy of the Hong Kong Who's Who.

Seated at a long table with three school children huddled over an atlas turned to a detailed map of Canada, Teller sorted the papers the girl had brought him. He began with the red booklet titled "Legislative Council, Hong Kong – Members Directory". Flipping the pages he came to those he sought. Each covered a councillor with a black and white picture in the left corner and details succinctly outlined in English and Chinese below.

The first entry he read, and noted in his notebook, was headed on bold type and underlined, LAM, Conrad Kiu-shing. Under the bespectacled mug shot were the professional details: Born in 1935 in Hong Kong, a catholic with six children, and with the initials MBBS he was entitled to append after his signature. A general practitioner. Chairman and member of various boards and committees. Teller turned the page.

LEE, Martin Chu-ming QC JP. Date of birth 8th June 1938. Place of birth Hong Kong. Another catholic, with one child only. Educated solely in Hong Kong. His principal occupation was given as barrister-at-law.

Teller smiled as he copied the last words. Hardly, he thought. Lee only handled a few high paying cases a year nowadays. His principal occupation was as a civil rights advocate, seeker of truth, promoter of direct elections in 1988 and freedom of expression. Under public service there was a lengthy list of boards, committees, tribunals and associations he belonged to.

Turning the page again Teller came to LEE Yu-tai, or Desmond as he was commonly known, though in the directory the English Christian name was absent. The entry showed him to be forty-three years old, born in Canton, married and father to three children, the holder of a BA and MA from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His public service record was somewhat shorter than his more illustrious colleague.

Rereading his notes, Teller then turned his attention to a separate crisp sheet of paper headed with Michael Wong's name. The page was unmarked and had obviously not been referred to by many, if any, researchers in the past. Either that or it was a new copy. Teller believed it was probably the original and had not been removed from the files by visitors to the GIS library. This was confirmed by the date at the bottom: 8/86(1).

He began copying the salient points in his untidy handwriting. Age forty seven. Married, two children. Wife's name Vivian. Education/profession: Hong Kong University, Royal Free Hospital, London, specialist Queen Mary Hospital Hong Kong. He was advisor to a number of boards and committees but there was no mention of his chairmanship of the medical board. The information on the page was brief. Too brief. Michael Wong seemed to be a man who kept his life private. Hardly the target for a political murder.

Teller picked up the Who's Who, newly reprinted at the beginning of the year. The publication had been launched about a decade earlier by a former South China Morning Post writer, and contained many entries which normally would not be found under such a prestigious title. Even junior ranking personages, provided they were well known in the territory if nowhere outside, were listed. Michael Wong was

mentioned. The details were again scant but they did answer the question as to why his most prominent medical position was not included in the previous biography. He had been elected chairman of the board in November 1986. Teller thought of telling the librarian of the omission but decided against it. What would be the point. Wong was now dead. Poor bastard, he said under his breath. His life was cut short and even his written history was incomplete.

He closed the book and turned his attention to the first of two off-white files crammed with newspaper cuttings. He read them all, some only scanning quickly, and by the time he was finished his neck and shoulders ached and his eyes hurt. Again he studied the last entry in the file. It was a full page article from the Hong Kong Standard reporting interviews with a cross section of people on political changes necessary for Hong Kong. He noticed Michael Wong's name in the penultimate column. He had missed it before probably because he was tired and had been anxious to be done with the file. Now he read the two-line quote beside Wong's name:

*"We must have freedom.*

*By whatever method is necessary to ensure it."*

It was the only political statement Teller had been able to attribute to the surgeon. Yet it was unusually strong for a man who did not make public statements on the matter. The purple date stamp on the top of the page read Monday, September 1, 1986.

Teller closed the file and replaced it with the second one boldly marked Part II on the front. It was very bulky and contained hundreds of newspaper cuttings of reports and statements by legislative councillors since May when the *Green Paper* had been published. All of them had personal details of the commentators which was why the librarian had given the file to him. But there was no further reference to Michael Wong. It seemed there was just the single published statement on record.

Teller returned to the Who's Who and let the pages flip casually as he leaned back in the chair and stretched his legs. Suddenly the animated face of Amelia Tse leapt out at him. Her eyes glistened and she was hunched forward as though on the verge of leaping out of the page. Teller skipped through the sketchy personal details and saw the reporter had worked in London for a time before joining the afternoon tabloid, *The Star*. The entry which caught his attention was under religion. It read simply: "Freedom from oppression." Religion? He reached for his pen and a voice behind him said: "She looks bright doesn't she? A lot of the excitement in the Post died with her unfortunately."

Teller turned to see Julius Owen standing at his shoulder. He had not seen or heard the officer in charge of the news room approach.

"Hi Julius," he said, and stretched his arms, raising himself upright in the chair at the same time. "Are you insinuating the great paper has gone down hill?"

Owen remained standing. "Sure. No question. There's no meat to it. Nothing behind the scenes. All it is is coverage of what people are saying at open forums with no attempt to get into a subject and analyse it. Any subject. But don't tell me you of all people disagree."

"No," replied Teller. "You're right. It's pretty flat."

"I think you're being generous." Owen's smile was broad. "It's very ordinary. That's what it is. Ordinary. There is no direction and the management is preoccupied with the financial side. Not enough attention is paid to the editorial content."

"You can blame the Australians for that. They want to make a decent profit on their investment."

“Naturally. But what has happened to journalism along the way? Where’s the inquisitive, in-depth probing that is such an integral and fundamental part of news in other countries?”

Teller agreed with the information officer. He had said as much himself a number of times. “Well, some of us are trying,” he said. “But it’s hard to argue with a hundred and fifty pages of classified each Saturday.”

“So what are you doing to compete with them this week,” asked Owen.

“Nothing special,” Teller replied. “Sort of scouting really. Any ideas?”

“I’m not on the Post payroll. I dispense government news. I don’t pull it to pieces you know.” Owen pulled out the chair next to Teller and lowered himself into it. “Why the interest in Amelia?”

“Oh, nothing.” Teller repeated. It was the second time he had chosen not to tell the whole truth. “I just came across the entry accidentally. She certainly was a radical in some ways.”

“You could say that.”

“Look at this bit here.” Teller pointed to the description under religion. “‘Freedom from oppression’. Not catholic, Buddhist or callothumpian. Instead, she gives a political statement. Or did rather.”

“Yes,” said Owen. “She had definite views did our Amelia. I don’t think she would have been out of place in combat fatigues and a rifle slung across the shoulders.”

Teller raised his eyebrows. “I wouldn’t go that far. Biased somewhat, but not a revolutionary.”

“Don’t you believe it. When she got worked up she was pretty feisty. Amelia was not averse to using whatever methods at her disposal to get what she believed she had a right to.”

“Yes,” said Teller. “Well, I think she saw a difference between Hong Kong and Seoul. Taking to the streets would not go down too well here, I think.”

“Maybe not,” Owen said. “Though, I reckon if she thought it would motivate enough people she’s have done it.”

Teller offered a cigarette to Owen who shook his head and pointed to the No Smoking sticker on the wall. Teller replaced the packet in his bag. “Anyway,” he went on, “she’s gone now. So I guess we don’t have to worry about a civil war breaking out.”

“Unless she has left a flock of fools behind who are just as radical, or even crazier,” said Owen. He pushed the chair back and stood. “I hear a rumour you found her body.”

“Where did you hear that?”

“Around.” Owen paused. “True?”

“No comment” said Teller and held the information officer’s gaze.

“Touché,” said Owen. “Gotta go. Why don’t you try to find out if Amelia was a member of some group bent on revolution. Make a good story. I can see it now. Revolutionaries planning civil war in Hong Kong. Armed freedom fighters ready to take to the streets. Exclusive, by Jason Teller.” He smiled. “Like it?”

“I don’t think so Julius. Too beat up. Why not something simple like ‘Plot to force direct elections’. More credible don’t you agree?”

Owen eyed Teller with a serious expression. “Yes,” he answered. “That I would not discount at all.” He paused in thought for a moment. “Gotta go. See you soon.”

Teller put his notebook back into his shoulder bag and stacked the files neatly on the table. A thought was taking form in his mind. What had been a joke began to take root and would not let go. It tenaciously clung and the more he tried to dislodge it, the more it grew until in a matter of seconds he became suddenly worried.

He approached the librarian and indicating he was finished with the material asked if he could use the telephone. She pointed to the grey instrument in a corner and Teller called his office to say he would not be back for the day. Then he went home and watched television distractedly until late. Throughout the evening he could not shake the thoughts racing around in his head.

In the morning when he arrived at the Tong Chong Street newspaper building, the thoughts were still with him. At eleven o'clock he picked up the phone and called the Chief Secretary's office.

At noon the telephone on his own desk rang. Teller picked it up hurriedly. "Jason?" The voice on the other end was soft but familiar,

"Yes. Good afternoon."

"Jason, can we have a chat?"

"Sure. But I'm waiting on a call. I'm hoping to see someone this afternoon."

"I know. That's why I'm calling you now. Can we meet? After lunch?"

"You know?" Teller asked.

"Yes."

"You mean we should meet instead of the CS?" He was puzzled why the accountant should be contacting him on behalf of Robert McNamara.

"I think it would be a good idea ... for both of us ... if we talked first. Then we will see where we need to go from there."

"I don't know," Teller hesitated. "I was hoping to see the CS on a rather important personal matter."

The accountant did not respond immediately. When he did he said: "I know. But the CS is tied up. That's why I'm suggesting we should have a chat in the meantime."

"Well...."

"Three o'clock," said the accountant. "Let's say three. Is that OK? We can have a coffee at the Hilton."

"OK," Teller agreed. "Three o'clock in the ground floor coffee shop. I can call Mrs J from there."

"Of course. That's a good idea. See you then."

Teller replaced the receiver. He stared at the instrument trying to put the pieces together. It was certainly odd that the accountant should call him so soon after he had placed the request to see the Chief Secretary. It suggested he knew of his request and that he had been delegated to respond to it. Why? Why of all people should he be asked to get in touch with a reporter asking to see the Chief Secretary, particularly as Teller had clearly indicated to Mrs Jones that the matter he wished to discuss was private? It did not fit. Did it mean that the accountant had the very private ear of Robert McNamara? Did it mean that the Chief Secretary was happy to tell him to take his place, to represent him in a discussion that he, Teller, considered private? Not that anyone other than he knew what he wanted to raise. But that aside, it was still most usual and in his experience had never happened before.

The accountant was known to have good contacts and be highly regarded among the ranks of government, but not that highly. Something very strange was going on and he did not understand what it was. But he had no choice. The accountant

had made it clear that the Chief Secretary was unavailable to see him. So he might as well go along to see where it led.

Some two hours after the call Teller entered the Cat Street Coffee Shop of the hotel which fronted onto Queen's Road. It was almost empty, the bulk of trade having been serviced between the normal lunch hours. A few tables were occupied by tourists and one or two European women whom Teller mentally classified as wives of civil servants or lawyers or bank employees. At a table in the lower section, near the glass windows looking out onto the sidewalk and the back door of the Bank of China, the accountant sat alone with a cup of cappuccino poised at his lips.

"Hello Jason," said the accountant smiling. "What would you like? A coffee? Or a beer perhaps?"

"Coffee's fine thanks," said Teller and gave the waitress a smile. "Another cappuccino please."

When the girl had left Teller examined the while haired man across the table from him. He said nothing and waited for his host to make the first move.

"Busy?" asked the accountant.

"No." Teller replied.

"The recess I suppose."

"Yes. I guess everyone is mentally on leave."

The accountant offered no other comment and Teller sat silent too. The girl returned with the white coffee cup and a silver pot of steaming water. Even with the cappuccino there was inevitably the pot of water. When she left Teller looked squarely at the accountant and enquired: "What's up? What's going on?"

"Jason," said the accountant, "I thought we'd agreed you would forget the story."

"I have," he answered. "I've written nothing."

"Jason, I thought I made it clear to you that if you got in the way other people would suffer."

"I'm not in the way. What I am doing that is dangerous to anyone?"

The accountant stared out the window and the two lines running down his cheeks cut deep into the shiny smooth skin. When he turned his attention back his eyes settled on Teller's. "What did you want to talk to McNamara about?" he asked bluntly.

"I think that's between the CS and me," Teller responded equally shortly. "I don't see that it was anything to do with someone else. It is a private matter."

The accountant did not shift his gaze. "Has it anything to do with Amelia Tse or Michael Wong?"

"What if it has? Even if it does, what is your interest in it?"

"You came to me, remember," said the accountant. "You asked my advice. You showed me the note from Tse. I told you what I considered the wisest thing would be for you to do. You approached me. I did not approach you."

Teller held his stare. "And I have taken your advice. I have written nothing and said nothing."

"So why have you asked to see McNamara to discuss it?"

"I think that's my business."

"It is not your business," snapped the accountant. He placed his hands flat on the table top and appeared to study them for some time. When he looked up the sparkle had gone from his blue eyes. In its place was a cold look of steel. "Listen," he said. "You are getting into something you don't want to get into. Please, just leave it

alone before you get hurt, and before you do something that will result in others getting hurt also.”

“What could I do that would harm other people?” Teller asked. I’m just a reporter who asks questions. Just doing my job. But I repeat, I have done nothing since we last met.”

The accountant studied the heavy dark bronze doors at the back of the communist bank across the street. A full minute lapsed.

“You know Amelia Tse and Michael Wong were, shall we say, good friends,” he offered. He had made the assumption that Teller had worked that out. “You also know they were murdered by the same people. You have probably guessed from the note she sent you that they were involved in a political movement and that they had either planned, or knew something was planned. Something special. What else do you know?”

“Before I answer that, you tell me something. Did the CS tell you to see me? Is this instead of my meeting with him?”

The accountant’s expression did not change. “Let’s just say he’s busy and I’m not. I don’t think he’d mind if you told me whatever it was you planned to tell him. Alright?”

Teller took a Dunhill from his packet and lit it with one of the colourful hotel matches from the container on the table. Tossing the packet back into his bag he drew deeply, holding the smoke in while he considered his reply. Letting it drift out he said firmly: “What would be your reaction if I said someone was planning to do something, something really big, to force the British Government to directly oppose China and sanction much more than a fair degree of autonomy for Hong Kong?”

“Go on,” said the accountant.

“Suppose also that the plan had already been put in motion,” continued Teller. “That it had already been triggered and set to go off when the Legislative Council resumes?”

The accountant picked up a silver spoon and slowly stirred the remaining liquid in the bottom of his cup. “What sort of thing are you hypothesising? Where did all this come from?”

“Merely hypothesising as you say. It could be anything. But whatever it was it would have to be more than a simple demonstration.”

The waitress in the cream and maroon uniform approached and asked if they would like more coffee. “Please,” said the accountant. Without asking Teller he added: “The same again. Two.” As she moved off towards the service counter at the top of the steps he said quietly: “And just who would you have in league with Tse and Wong to be able to carry out such a thing?”

“Maybe just Amelia and Michael Wong.”

“They’re dead.”

“That’s right. They’re both dead. But I think the plan is still alive because someone killed them. For a reason.”

“It’s impossible,” said the accountant suddenly. “We’d know about it. Anyway, they were lovers, not revolutionaries. A doctor and a journalist, that’s all.”

“Funny you should say that,” said Teller. “The same thought occurred to me last night.”

“What, that they were lovers? I thought you put that together long ago.”

“No. Revolutionaries.”

“Oh come on Jason. I repeat, she was a journalist and he was a well respected surgeon. Hardly the stuff of revolutionaries. And in Hong of all places.”

“Not in the commonly accepted categorisation maybe, but I reckon there was a lot more to both of them than they would have people believe.” Teller was warming to his argument and the more he talked the more he convinced himself.

“And what makes you say that?”

“They both had very definite beliefs. They didn’t express them in detail but they were passionate. And they were working together. On top of that they were actively planning some action, or knew someone was. Amelia’s note confirms as much.”

“What sort of action?”

“I don’t know. I am not sure exactly, but I am convinced it had something to do with Legco.”

When the accountant offered no comment Teller said: “If I’m wrong tell me. Where am I wrong and what is your conclusion about all this?”

“I think you’re over-reaching Jason. I accept the girl and Wong believed what they were doing. But I don’t think it was anything like what you’re getting at. More likely they were behind some demo or something.”

“Alright then,” posed Teller. “Let me ask you this then. Why are they both dead now if was only that? Why did the police arrest a pair of triads who obviously were not responsible for Wong’s murder? Why did Amelia say she was afraid of what might happen? And why did you tell me to stay out of it, referring to other people getting hurt if I didn’t? And why are you taking the trouble to warn me off it again? With the CS’s blessing, or perhaps even on his orders.”

The accountant remained silent and continued to look down at the table. When he did speak he looked squarely at Teller. “I’ll ask you one final time Jason. And I’ll admit it is not just me asking. Will you please let it go?”

Teller returned the look. “I don’t think I can any longer. I’m too involved already. Why won’t you help me instead of trying to gag me?”

There was a period bordering on an embarrassing silence, felt Teller, and then the accountant gently nudged his coffee cup away from him. “Well,” he said, “we seem to have gone as far as we can for now. I hope you’ll think about what I’ve said. I’d better be off.” He stood and smiled. “Look after yourself Jason.”

Teller watched him as he walked to the cashier, hand over a fifty dollar note and then leave the coffee shop without waiting for his change.

To say the meeting had disappointed him would be an understatement. He had made little progress and felt he may have lost a reliable source in an unbalanced trade-off. He questioned whether it had been worth it. His doubts increased as he sat finishing his drink. Reviewing the conversation he had realised he had divulged much more than he had learned. The only things he was sure he had added to his knowledge were that the administration was also concerned about Amelia Tse and Michael Wong’s activities, and that the accountant was clearly an emissary from higher up in the corridors of power. How high was uncertain, but the Chief Secretary was included in putting his trust in him. That obviously meant the story was important, and to Teller, told him the two murders were politically motivated. That was where his knowledge stopped and beyond was only confusion and conjecture.

Forty-five minutes later when Teller was standing in the subway carriage, heading back to Quarry Bay and the offices of the newspaper, the accountant sat at his own desk facing the Chief Secretary.

“His calculations are pretty sharp,” said the accountant. “Not much short of our own.”

Robert McNamara was leaning against the wall. “But he’s still poking sticks in the dark. He doesn’t have anything concrete.” It was both a statement and a question.

“No. Not yet. But if he’s not careful he’ll get well out of his depth and that could cause real problems.”

The Chief Secretary pondered. “Guesses. Exaggerations. Feeling in the dark. Getting into deep water.” He walked over to the desk and wrapped his knuckles on the edge lightly a few times. “It’s gone far enough. Put an end to it Jack. I want Teller out of the way.” He turned and strode to the door, and with his hand on the knob turned. “I mean it Jack” he said. “Stop him. Now.”

\*

Arriving back at his own office Teller had decided what course of action he would take. He would not approach Davidson full of voice but empty handed. His popularity with the editor was at such a low ebb that verbal argument alone was bound to fail. So he would use a weapon that he understood. The printed word. He would draft the story and drop it on the editor’s desk. Then they could talk. But he had to work fast. He had only a few hours before the editorial meeting which decided what stories would be used and where they would be displayed or buried. With his notebook open on the desk beside him, but seldom reading from it, Teller began typing into the luminous green screen in front of him.

*Who killed the journalist and her modestly prominent surgeon companion?*

*Why is there an apparent attempt by the highest authorities to cloud the mystery rather than be open about it?*

*What were the two victims of the crime, the gruesome details of which have so far gone unreported, planning which would have a bearing on the very future of Hong Kong?*

*And why is the media being gagged, by heavy handed cloak and dagger tactics, from telling the story?*

He took a deep breath and continued.

*Just under a month ago, on July 29, the body of well known surgeon Michael Wong was discovered brutally mutilated in Jaffe Road, Wanchai. Wong, Chairman of the territory’s Medical Board, had apparently been attacked during a raging storm which drove residents indoors off the streets as rain and wind swept across the city.*

*His body was found by a patrolling police constable stuffed behind a pile of rubbish bags. His throat had been slashed and the murderer had then expertly used a sharp instrument to mutilate the surgeon.*

*Within twenty-four hours however, acting on a supposed tipoff, the police arrested two members of the powerful 14K triad society and charged them the killing after obtaining hasty confessions from both.*

Now the follow-up.

*On July 30, the day after Michael Wong's murder, South China Morning Post political correspondent Amelia Tse was discovered slain in her Mid-levels flat. She had not been sexually assaulted, she had not been mutilated, but her throat had also been slashed. Police ruled out robbery and began investigations on the assumption that the murder was premeditated.*

*Both stories were factually reported in the South China Morning Post based on information given by an authoritative spokesman at the time. However, not all the known details were published.*

*One fact that the paper withheld in the public interest, and which has not been uncovered by other media was that the killer or killers of Wong and Tse had left a bloody clue behind*

*The skin of a dead cat covered the faces of both victims.*

Teller read the line again. He left it in.

*Another link is that Amelia Tse and Michael Wong knew each other well. They were close friends.*

*On the day of her death, Tse had written a note to a journalist colleague in which she admitted her personal relationship with the Medical Board chairman. This note is now with the authorities. In it she referred to the death of her close friend. She described it as 'not an ordinary killing' and intimated that other deaths would follow, or what she termed 'more people are going to suffer'.*

*Tse was 'frightened' and wrote to her colleague that 'We all have a great deal to fear'.*

*In a final plea for help – and within hours Amelia Tse would herself be dead – she wrote: 'The Legislative Council session will be opened soon, so we don't have much time'.*

*Somehow, the death of Michael Wong and death of Amelia Tse are connected with the politics of Hong Kong.*

There was no doubt in Teller's mind that he had already placed his head firmly on the block. The axe was already descending. He continued:

*Nevertheless, the police and other authorities, while they are in possession of these facts, have remained tight-lipped. And the two triad members originally arrested for Wong's murder remain charged and in custody following an initial court appearance.*

*This newspaper, still in the public interest, claims those arrests are suspect. There is enough evidence to indicate that the murder of Wong was the work of the same person or persons who subsequently took the life of political writer Amelia Tse.*

*It gains support for this assertion in the knowledge that concerted efforts have been made, and continue to be made, to gag this newspaper from publishing these details. At least one member of the staff has been advised to drop his line of questioning. He is said to be 'in the way' and jeopardising the safety of others.*

*What others? Are the lives of more people threatened? Why?*

*Michael Wong was a well-known, if somewhat reluctant, personality in Hong Kong because of his prominent position in the medical world. Aged just 47 he was married with two children. His wife Vivian is respected in her own right, being in the forefront of a number of charitable organisations, and popular on the social scene.*

*Wong earned his qualifications at the Hong Kong University and later trained at the renowned Royal Free Hospital in London before returning to Hong Kong where he opened his own surgery and operated as a specialist at the Queen Mary Hospital.*

*He served as advisor to a number of medical boards and committees and was elected Chairman of the Hong Kong Medical Board in November last year. His interests, it would appear, were in his profession alone.*

That was enough on Wong. Now Amelia.

*Amelia Tse did have interests outside her profession. It is well known that she sympathised with a few groupings that today actively take part in the political development of the territory.*

*With a background in journalism in both the United Kingdom and Hong Kong before joining the South China Morning Post, Tse's column 'Inside Story' was a no-holds barred look at the news behind the political news of the day. It was also widely known that she sympathised with those factions favouring a rapid movement towards a more truly representative government before the 1997 handover of the territory to the Beijing government. It has to be said though that she did not overtly impose her views through her column.*

*All these details are facts. All are known to the authorities.*

*When the Post attempted to discuss them with officials it was greeted with silence, stalling and finally warnings.*

*Once again, the question must be asked: Why?*

*At the beginning of this article a number of questions were put. There are others which to now have remained unuttered. Mystery surrounds the untimely deaths of Amelia Tse and Michael Wong. Suspicions surround those responsible for investigating and bringing to justice those responsible for the horrible crimes.*

*The definitive answers are not known to the South China Morning Post yet.*

*However, tomorrow some possible conclusions will be drawn on what is known.*

*Is there a political cover-up?*

*Is there a political time bomb set to explode?*

*Who and where is the real killer or killers?*

Teller sat back and rolled his shoulders to relax them. It had taken him an hour and a half to write the story. He lit a cigarette and without any attempt to reread it from the beginning, he programmed his machine to print, punched the final key, and listened to the muted chatter as he drew in the nicotine.

When he had finished, he gathered the sheets together and pinned them with a clip. Then he walked over to the editor's cubicle and, even though Davidson was

talking on the telephone, he pushed open the door and lay the pages on his desk. Without looking back he returned to his desk and sat quietly.

The piece was what any newspaperman worth his salt would call boney. The skeleton was there, outlined in maybe a thousand words but there was very little meat. Provable substance. There were questions but no answers. Just the same, he had been content writing it and it had allowed him to get the poison out of his system, to put his doubts and thoughts on paper, to make a statement of his own position. Now he would have to wait for the verdict. With difficulty he sat with his back to the editor's office, forcing himself not to turn around for ten minutes. When he did finally glance over his shoulder Davidson was reading.

Another thirty minutes passed. When he again looked towards the editor's office the full editorial conference was in progress with the chief sub-editor gesticulating at a large sheet of paper held high to his side, presumably indicating how he visualised a page layout. Even in this age of advanced technology dummy layouts could not be avoided. Hot metal was a thing of the past and when the conference broke up, the buttons would be pushed and technology would take over. But at the initial stage the editors and their paper outlines drawn in biro ink were the order of the day.

Teller was on edge, and growing edgier. He stood up and walked to the toilet where he relieved himself. When he re-entered the offices Davidson called him with a silent jerk of the head. As he opened the door to the cubicle the others present faced him.

"What do you suggest we do with this?" Davidson held up the typed pages. He did not ask Teller to sit.

"Print it," answered Teller.

"Where would you have us put it?" Davidson asked. "It is not a story. It is more of a comment. You don't write columns."

"I don't know." Teller had given this no thought at all actually. He had merely written the words, put his thoughts down. "Put it inside."

The editor continued to stare at him, his pipe swivelling from one side of his mouth to the other, guided by the index fingers of his two hands. "It's pretty tough stuff," he said.

"Too tough," said the chief sub-editor. "We can't run it. We'd have the bailiffs at the door before the ink was dry on the page."

Before Teller could respond there was a knock at the door and a tall lanky man dressed in a dark suit entered. He was the company's legal eagle, paid to examine articles for writs hidden between the lines.

"Thanks for dropping in John," said Davidson. "Read this will you and tell us what you think."

The lawyer sat on the edge of the desk and carefully read what Teller had written while the whole room sat in silence. He then read it second and third time.

"Who wrote it?" he asked.

"I did," Teller answered.

"Are your facts correct?"

"Yes."

"You are the one who found Amelia Tse's body I take it." Teller was not surprised the lawyer should know that. He had of course told Davidson and he assumed the information had been passed to others in the company on a need to know basis.

Teller nodded.

“Did she also write the note to you?”

“Yes.”

“And you have that note still?”

“Not the original,” said Teller. “I have a copy. Or rather I took down in my notebook what she wrote.”

There was an audible sigh from the chief sub-editor. Before Teller could continue the lawyer asked: “What did you do with the original?”

“I gave it to someone in the Secretariat. A contact.”

The lawyer turned to Davidson. “That’s one problem,” he said.

Turning back to Teller he asked: “Who has been pressuring you?”

“I can’t tell you his name. He’s my contact. Very senior.”

Again the lawyer turned to the editor. “He’ll deny it of course. That’s a second problem.”

“I taped it,” interrupted Teller. He was lying but tried his best to keep his voice even. “I had a tape recorder in my bag at the time. I’ve put it in a safe place.”

“Sneaky little sod aren’t you,” said the chief sub-editor.

Teller looked at him with no expression. The lawyer studied Teller’s face and then said: “It doesn’t matter. It could work. Though I have my doubts you are telling the truth.”

Teller returned the look and shrugged his shoulders.

There was a moment of silence. Finally the lawyer stood up and said to Davidson: “You could get away with it. I don’t think it’s actionable. But I can guarantee it will cause you some headaches. If this appears in print you had better be prepared to have your ears blasted as never before. And you also better be prepared to stand by it.”

Suddenly he turned to Teller again. “Where’s the second instalment? Can I see it?”

“I haven’t written it yet,” he answered.

“When you do,” said the lawyer seriously, “I want to see it. Your trail at the bottom of this one suggests the follow-up will not be facts but suppositions. That’s dangerous indeed. And if you create alarm, shall we put it like that, you could be the first target of the government’s new false news laws.”

“We will,” said Davidson. “If there is to be a second part, I’ll call you for sure.”

If, thought Teller. If there was to be no second part, there would be no first either.

When the lawyer had left the office the chief sub-editor again spoke out against it. “It’s too high risk,” he said. “And in my view it doesn’t say a great deal anyway. Certainly it shouldn’t be used on the feature pages.”

“I agree,” said Davidson. Teller’s heart sank. “Put it on the front. Strap it across the top and run it over on to page two. I also want a pointer to the editorial which I’ll give you shortly.” He paused. “Anything else?”

The chief sub-editor was not about to give up easily. He shook his head: “I still say....”

“I know,” said Davidson. “I heard you already. Is there anything else?”

There wasn’t, and they began to leave the office. Teller waited until the others had all left and looked at the editor.

“What do you want?” asked Davidson.

“Nothing,” said Teller. “Just thought you might like to....”

“You thought wrong then. Get out and leave me alone. I’ve got a blasted editorial to write now thanks to you.”

As he was closing the door Davidson called after him: “When you’ve finished the second part leave it on my desk. Do it tonight. I want to see it when I come in at eight tomorrow. By then I will probably have a mountain of telephone messages from your cloak and dagger controllers, so make sure you do it.”

Teller closed the door and took a long deep breath.

## Chapter Seven

When the article appeared in the paper on the morning of Wednesday August 26 outspoken Legislative Councillor Martin Lee had again stolen the limelight. It was on the third day of the fifth plenary session of the Basic Law Drafting Committee in Beijing that Lee had once more caused an uproar which resulted in headings in the media such as “Strong opposition to a more powerful legislature.”

The Post article began with the now expected tone of “*the idea of a legislature-led political system for Hong Kong after 1997 was attacked by several Basic Law drafters yesterday.*” It went on to say that “*harsh criticism was levelled at a system which provides for a powerful legislature and a high degree of supervision over the executive branch.*”

Lee had put the cat among the pigeons by criticising the Basic Law proposals as lacking checks and balances between the two authorities. From there the situation had deteriorated to the point where it became a battleground for drafters commenting on whether the sub-group had deliberately ducked key political discussions on the selection of the Chief Executive to replace the Governor who now was president of the council, and legislators.

These items were not included on the agenda for the meeting even though Martin Lee had suggested at the previous meeting in Guangzhou that they should be. He reiterated his point by yet again demanding that the two key selection issues be speeded up, and in doing so drew up battle lines. The result was as expected, and the day’s deliberations began in a hot climate.

The temperature had also risen in Hong Kong by early morning. Teller’s article was noticed and read. It was probably read by most before Martin Lee’s outburst. And maybe even before the sad story of two children being burned to death in their flat after being locked in by their parents who went off to work in the incense shop down the street.

It was spread across eight columns, each five centimetres in length, and then onto page two in the third column. The heading splashed: “POST THREATENED IN POLITICAL MURDER COVERUP.” Below it in bold type was Teller’s byline.

When the telephone in his sitting room rang at eight that morning it woke Teller from a deep sleep. But when he answered it the line went dead. When it rang at eight thirty he had just emerged from the shower having decided to skip his usual morning exercise regime. This time there was a voice on the other end. A rasping one trying to keep it low but at the same time doing all he could to convey the agitated message.

“What the fuck have you done?” it demanded.

Before he could respond the man continued: “Do you have any idea the damage you’ve caused? You’ve hung me out to dry, and you’ve screwed up everyone else as well.”

“Is that you Dave?” said Teller. He thought he recognised Frank’s voice despite the attempt to muffle it so that presumably the secretary in the adjoining room would not hear him, or perhaps any other staff member of the police PR unit who might be passing his door.

“Yes, it is me you bastard,” railed Frank. “You gave me your word and now you’ve gone and broken it for the sake of a front page byline. You shit.”

“Now you listen to me,” countered Teller. It didn’t take long to annoy him early in the morning, certainly not when the accusation was directed at his integrity. “Just listen for a minute. You fed me a load of crap and you know it. Then you went and consciously decided to leave me out to dry. Don’t you accuse me. I gave you an opportunity to set the record straight and you simply ignored me. Even at Amelia’s place and later at the police station you avoided me. So don’t you talk to me about promises Dave. You turned away when I needed something to hold on to.”

“Jesus wept,” sighed Frank

“Jesus wept nothing. I’ve been pushed into this. I’ve got enough people telling me to shove off and shove it. I’ve been lied to, threatened, bounced around and then when someone asked for help I find her lying naked in her bed with her throat slit and the bloody skin of a cat draped across her face. How do you expect me to feel? What the hell do you expect me to do? Forget it?”

Frank’s voice was returning to normal. “Well,” he said, “you needn’t have gone as far as you have damnit.”

“I haven’t finished yet Dave. There’s more to come. This whole think stinks and you know it. If you don’t you’re bloody blind.”

“Jesus Jason. I don’t know. We’ve got people running around down here like chickens with their heads chopped off.”

“What are they doing?”

“I don’t know. They don’t know. They’re just buzzing around like crazy. Someone’s been pushing buttons and they’re reacting on impulse. Fingers are being pointed and I won’t give you three guesses as to who is one being singled out. They probably already know you got the details on the Wong killing from me.”

Teller could understand why the public relations officer was concerned but he did not agree with his overreaction. “Deny it,” he said. “I’m not going to name you for god’s sake. I’ve been talking to lots of people and any one of them could have told me about it. It doesn’t have to be you you know.”

“Don’t you worry about that. We have definitely not spoken,” said Frank firmly.

“OK then,” said Teller “Let’s forget it. That’s agreed. But do me a favour and keep me posted on developments this time.”

“Fuck you,” said Frank. “I’m going to stay well away from you. Let’s get together .....around Christmas.” And he hung up.

It was the same when he arrived at his office. No sooner had he walked in when another journalist called across the room. “Teller, line three.”

It was the Chief Information Officer from the Medical and Health Department. She too was worried she might be dragged into a mess even though all she had done was provide him with Michael Wong’s biography. She sensed trouble but Teller pacified her by assuring her he would not mention her name in any way whatever.

Who next, he wondered?. It was Julius Owen, who merely said: “Well, at least you’ve breathed some life into things – even it is with a bad breath.”

Teller had the eerie feeling that he could predict exactly who would call next. The accountant. All those he had talked to recently in connection with the murders were lining up to have their say. No doubt the accountant would warn him yet again and then give him a dressing down in no uncertain terms.

He was wrong though. The accountant did not contact him. No-one else did. Despite the activity going on around him he felt as if he was sitting in a cocoon, isolated. His telephone did not ring and none of his colleagues said anything other than the perfunctory greeting. In other words, normal morning conversation.

At eleven o'clock Davidson called him into his office and instructed him to stand by at half past two for a meeting with the company lawyer to go over the follow up story Teller had completed the night before.

\*

Within the Administration itself there was still the calm that had characterised it since the Legislative Council had gone into recess. Staff in the various branches went about their routine work and there was none of the obvious panic that David Frank had described in the police headquarters. Not that it could have been expected anyway. If there was to be any knee-jerking it would be manifested elsewhere, and in this case it was on the sixth floor of Beaconsfield House, the headquarters of the GIS.

The Director had been contacted on his car telephone as he crossed the harbour from Shatin New Town where he lived. The Chief Secretary had spoken sharply and instructed him to attend a meeting in his office at a quarter past eight. He should just make it. After he rang off he called his secretary and arranged for all his assistant directors to be ready to attend a meeting in his own office at immediate notice.

Then he had gone straight to the Central Government Offices, to Robert McNamara's office, where he joined him, the Secretary for Administrative Services and Information, McNamara's assistant, the Director of the Police Public Relations Bureau, and Gail Jones who took notes. The meeting lasted half an hour and the attendees left hurriedly to return to their respective offices.

The Director walked down the tree-lined steps at the rear of the Central Government Offices, next to the old St John's Cathedral, to the back entrance of Beaconsfield House where it opened onto Battery Path. The assistant directors were waiting for him at the conference table, having been alerted by his secretary who had been watching out for him. The Director seated himself and dispensed with the normal informalities which usually began the daily directorate briefing.

"You've all read the Post story I take it," he said. They nodded. "Then we have some work to do."

Facing him were the assistant directors of news, public relations and publicity along with the deputy director, an administrative officer seconded to the department. He went on: "I've been with the CS. Also SASI and the Director of PPRB. We're going to put out a statement killing the story. It's our job to co-ordinate it effectively. Once we have a draft I'll discuss it with the CS personally."

Nobody said anything.

"What we do is this," said the Director. "PPRB is setting out the facts of both cases from their side. Just the factual details with the sequence of events and nothing more. No comments or embellishments. It's being faxed here and we should have it by ten or ten thirty. When we get it I want News and PR to go over it and fill it out as a denial."

The assistant director of news spoke up. "How do we do that? We've got nothing to work from. I mean no backup material."

"You'll have the police report," said the Director. "And also the Post story on the murders themselves is essentially correct. It's the innuendoes we have to counter. Use your imagination as a start."

The news man chipped in again. "That's terribly dangerous don't you think? We could end up making a bad situation worse if we are not careful."

“So be careful. But we probably will nonetheless. But that’s it. We do a draft and I take it to the CS. It’s the style he looking for. He puts the red pencil through it. What we’re doing is giving him a draft to think about and tear to pieces.” He paused. “And he wants it by noon.”

\*

Along Canton Road, just up from the Salisbury Road corner where the huge China Products store dominated the Star Ferry concourse precincts in Tsimshatsui, there used to be a little village of tea houses, or *dai pai dongs* as the locals called them. They were all under the one roof, perhaps two dozen of them and the roof itself was probably a combination of a number of makeshift shelters but it did protect the customers from the rain and the searing heat.

When it rained, it came down often with such force that the drains and gutters would back up and the water would sneak along the cracked concrete floor until those at the tables seemed to be sitting on a mirror. The tea houses used to be popular with dockyard workers, bird fanciers with their simple and fantastically ornate cages made from bamboo, and some regulars who dropped in for an ice cold San Miguel or a barbecued piece of squid on the way somewhere else. Even a few trusting tourists ignored the amused glances of the local patrons as they dared to savour what they considered the real Orient. But that was long ago, and the tea houses were gone. No longer could passersby watch chickens slaughtered in the gutter or fish gutted and cleaned in the same trough before being quickly fried and served up. The whole area had been pulled down, cleaned up and redeveloped, in keeping with the upmarket Hong Kong Hotel directly across the road and the newer Marco Polo and Prince hotels further up.

Many of the older tea house customers sought similar atmospheres in Yaumati or Mongkok, but a lot of the younger ones simply crossed the road or went deeper into Tsimshatsui to such places as the Hyatt Hotel.

One of the most popular attractions of the Hong Kong Hotel was its pub which serves drinks from virtually any part of the world. And it was in this pub that the Chinese man sat, reading the newspaper and with a barely touched bloody Mary which he had ordered half an hour before in an attempt to rid himself of the dullness behind his left eye, the painful legacy of a lack of sleep the night before. He too had read Teller’s article. He was now going back over a few of the paragraphs, rereading the words carefully. His eyes were fixed on the page and his forehead was smooth and unwrinkled though there were two little ruts between his eyebrows. When he had finished the article for the second time the man turned his attention to the other main story on the front page and read the report of the Basic Law plenary session in the Chinese capital.

He folded the paper neatly and lay it on the chair to his side. He took a sip from his glass and swilled the liquid around his mouth and then let it trickle slowly down his throat as he stared out through the doorway into the hotel lobby.

Motioning to the hostess he asked for a sheet of writing paper and a pen, as well as the check. When the girl returned he paid the bill, adding a small tip, and placed the paper on the glass topped table with the pen held poised above it. He thought for a few minutes and wrote quickly and fluently.

At the mail desk he asked for, and was handed a hotel envelope and again, using a borrowed pen a second time wrote two words on the front. From the lobby he went to the gentlemen’s toilet and using sheets of tissue he wiped the paper he had

written on and slotted it into the envelope, sealing it firmly. He then applied the same cleaning process to the envelope and tucked it into the folded newspaper.

Ten minutes after Teller had left his desk in the editorial section and gone to the canteen for a sandwich and beer lunch, the Chinese man approached the security guard at the main entrance. As he explained his errand the envelope slid from the folded newspaper and fell to the floor. The guard instinctively picked it up and the man said: "*Dojeh. Dojeh.* Jason Teller, OK?"

The guard peered at the envelope and mouthed the name written on the front. "OK," he replied

"*Mgoi*," the man said and sauntered off.

\*

"If we hadn't lost the damn doctor none of this would have happened." Robert McNamara was not a happy man. "I would have thought that with the storm keeping traffic to a minimum and the people off the streets it would have been easy to keep tabs on him."

"Yes," said the accountant, noncommittal.

"Instead, it was a damn shambles," continued McNamara. "In the front door of the club and out the back door. What were the two SB men doing? Dreaming?"

"They're back on beat duty now," said the accountant.

"And Wong is dead. So is the girl. Now we have that damn journalist Teller digging into the laundry."

The accountant watched the Chief Secretary. "We have to rethink our plan. Now that he has published the story we must be careful. Watch and wait."

"Damn it Jack," said McNamara. "We can't just wait. We've got only six weeks."

The accountant remained silent.

"Alright," said McNamara after a while. "We'll wait. One more day. We'll have to see what happens tomorrow. But if today's efforts are unsuccessful we move. We have no choice."

"Agreed," said the accountant. He knew time was running out. He knew too that like Jason Teller they were doing a lot of guesswork. The journalist had also not only tied his hands for the moment, he was taking up a lot of his resources. He hoped he would not aggravate the volatile situation any further.

\*

At two thirty Teller re-entered the editorial office and saw that the conference was already under way between Davidson and others. He caught his eye but Davidson paid him no regard and continued talking, so Teller sat at his desk and lit a cigarette while he waited to be summoned. Twenty minutes and two Dunhills later his phone rang. He snatched it off its cradle and heard Davidson command: "Come in."

As he closed the door behind him Davidson said: "We've all read your piece. It's well put together and would be considered thought-provoking by the intelligent reader."

That's the term, he used for Amelia Tse's copy, thought Teller.

"Provocative I'd call it," interrupted the chief sub-editor. Teller quickly looked at the little man sitting in the corner of the room. Another thought crossed his mind: I wonder why it is that sub-editors are so often small men.

Davidson brushed aside the remark and went on: "Your reasoning seems solid, or convincing at least. Your suppositions are serious."

The tall lawyer coughed. "May I," he said and picked up the article from the desk. "As Harvey says, all this makes good, fascinating reading. But as he also points out it is all supposition. There are no facts in it."

"I don't have any more at the moment," said Teller. "If I did I would have used them. But that doesn't change things. Something serious is going on and it is being covered up."

"If what you say here is correct," said the lawyer, "it is a matter for the appropriate authorities to deal with. If we go ahead and publish it we could, could not would, be helping those who might be planning an incident."

"I don't see how you can say that. We'll be exposing it."

"We could be hindering the authorities and their investigations."

Teller did not answer straight away. He was familiar with the lawyer's point. He had heard it many times before. Sometimes it was valid, but on others it seemed to him that the person who asked for something not to be published usually had something to hide. In this case he was not convinced by any means that the argument was justified.

"Well," he said, "let me ask you a question. If what you say is right, why did we go ahead and run the first story? Surely it's worse to let things hang unfinished than to propose possible answers to the questions. After all, I'm not saying the suppositions are absolutely right. They're only possibilities. If they're wrong let the powers that be say so. The public has a right to know. They're the ones who are going to be affected. More than you and me."

"On the other hand," Davidson said in his devil's advocate role. "We might be stirring things up a bit too much. This is bloody serious stuff."

"It's inciting trouble," said the chief sub-editor. "The government in my view would have every right to slap a writ on us. It is precisely the sort of story that the AG warned would attract the attention of the law under the Public Order Ordinance. It's false news calculated to cause alarm."

Teller bristled. "It is not false news until it is proved wrong. And it is not calculated to incite fear in the public. The intention is to inform the public of a matter of great concern to them, something they have a right to know, instead of being kept in the dark, or misled by people who are at the same time threatening me."

"Can you prove it's true?"

"No. But can you prove it's not? Until you can it's not false news."

"OK OK OK," broke in Davidson. "This isn't getting us anywhere. We have two questions we have to answer. First, is it in breach of the law if we run with it? Second, if not should we?"

The lawyer dropped his papers back onto the table. "My opinion at this stage is you could argue your case from a legal standpoint. But other legal opinion would probably say the same to the administration. Unfortunately, the law is not always strictly black and white."

"We're asking or trouble," said the chief sub-editor.

The young news editor who had said nothing during the exchanges now spoke. "It's a good story. I say if it is not illegal we should go with it."

Davidson looked at Teller. Teller shrugged his shoulders as if to say *I wrote it, the decision to publish is yours.*

"Yes," said Davidson slowly as if he had read Teller's mind. "It's my decision." He picked up a copy and glanced through it again, his eyes selecting

specific words and sentences, but his mind not really digesting them as it weighed instead potential consequences. "I'll think on it," he said finally and the meeting ended.

When Teller returned to his desk there was an envelope waiting for him. It bore the logo of the Hong Kong Hotel in the corner but had no stamp affixed. Quickly he tore it open and read the handwritten note inside. Teller leapt out of his chair and bounded across the room, rushing into the editor's office without knocking.

"Now what?" demanded Davidson.

Teller thrust the sheet of paper at him. "Read this."

Davidson took the note and read it. Then he read it again.

*Mr Jason Teller," it began.*

*Stop now before you get yourself into more trouble.*

*The doctor and the girl were necessary.*

*So far you are not.*

*Do not write any more stories or you will lose your face.*

There was no signature.

"This is from some crank," Davidson said after a time. But there was a doubt in his tone.

"I don't know," replied Teller. "It might be from the killer."

"Who goes around knocking people off and then breaks cover by warning a journo off who simply writes up the story? Anyway, if it was from your friend it destroys your theory of a secret political plot. There's nothing intelligent about this note. To the contrary, whoever sent it is plain dumb."

To Teller there was something about the crude note which did not rest easily with him. It was not the threat implied. There was something else he could not put his finger on.

"Forget it," Davidson was saying. "There are a lot of nutters out there and they probably say at least once a day that they will kill someone or other. This guy read about the murders, read your story and saw your byline. It's the shot you don't hear that you have to worry about."

Still Teller made no comment.

"Right," said Davidson. "Let's get on with it then. We're running your follow-up tomorrow by the way. I've decided to put it on the op-ed page. But even if we didn't it would be no reflection on you. It's a food piece."

Teller left and sat at his desk and read the note again. He read it over and over until he knew it by heart and the words were imprinted on his brain. But he still could not decipher what it was about it that bothered him. Finally, he reluctantly agreed that his editor was most likely correct. He would not be the first reporter to receive crank mail from a reader, and as Davidson had rightly pointed out there were a lot of mentally disturbed people walking the streets of Hong Kong. It could even be a prank of some sort.

He crumpled the paper and was about to drop it in the tin bin by his desk when he changed his mind. Instead he smoothed it out and slipped it into his bottom left hand drawer. It was his 'rubbish draw' or 'too hard basket' where he kept papers and notes he thought he might need in the future. He cleared the drawer about once every six weeks and generally ended up throwing the entire contents away. But he kept on filling it anyway.

It was getting late and Teller intended leaving for the day no later than five. He had a six forty-five film to see and he wanted to shower and change his clothes first. He had an hour or so to fill so he decided to read over his story for the next day's

paper. Punching in his code he called up the story, and rolling from frame to frame he checked what he had written. It began by repeating the three questions posed in the first part. Was there a political cover-up of the Wong and Tse murders, was a political time-bomb primed to go off, and who and where was the killer now?

He had written:

*The certain answers to these queries remain a mystery. But in the following paragraphs the South China Morning Post proposes possibilities that, if correct, would have far-reaching consequences for each and every person living in Hong Kong.*

*Michael Wong and Amelia Tse were members of a political group that fervently favoured the introduction of direct elections next year. Indeed, it is believed that at least they, with or without the support of others of the same view, were determined to bring about a political system that flew directly in the face of the Beijing Politburo and Whitehall in London.*

*Wong, who on the face of it appeared a dedicated medical specialist with little to no interest outside his profession, was a firm believer in what could almost be called independence.*

*While such a concept would be dismissed as preposterous by virtually every thinking person, the quietly spoken surgeon possibly harboured such thoughts. The plain fact is of course that full independence could never be.*

*Hong Kong Island and a small area of Kowloon peninsula may, under international law have been ceded to Britain in perpetuity. But the vast New Territories was leased from the People's Republic and that lease expires in less than ten years.*

*It has always been an accepted fact that in dealing with that lease the entire territory would be identified and treated as a single package. The best one could have expected, and highly unlikely, would have been a renewal of the lease. But the Joint Declaration of 1984 ended even those forlorn hopes. Hong Kong would always be ruled by others. Yet as late as last year Michael Wong, an intelligent man without doubt, apparently believed something might be done to 'free' the people of this territory. He is on record as having stated categorically: 'We must have freedom, by whatever method is necessary to achieve it'.*

*Such a stated position cannot be taken lightly.*

*Nor can the avowed stance of Amelia Tse, this paper's own political correspondent and intimate confidante of Wong.*

*There is no question as to her views. She openly and publicly supported at least direct elections to the Legislative Council in 1988. But even she might also have had plans to pursue the political battle further. Consider what she herself wrote under the heading RELIGION in the publication Who's Who in Hong Kong: 'Freedom from oppression.'*

*That was her stated belief.*

*If one were to have Michael Wong – 'freedom at any cost' – and Amelia Tse – 'freedom from oppression' – forming a pact, the consequences would not be hard to imagine.*

*The SCMPost believes such a pact was formed. It also believes a plan was not only formulated but actually instigated to make sure that direct elections were introduced next year. Possibly even more far reaching goals were envisaged that would create unrest in Beijing and London and potential havoc here in Hong Kong.*

*Amelia Tse suggested as much in her death note which expressed great fear that many people would be seriously harmed unless something was done to stop whatever action had begun.*

*The death of her close friend had either brought her to her senses or worse told her that their plans had gone badly wrong.*

*What were those plans? We don't know.*

*But there can be do doubt they are now out of control. The apparent masterminds are both dead. Viciously, callously, premeditatedly murdered. With Wong and Tse no longer in charge, a time-bomb has been set to explode and their killer may well be the only person who is able to defuse it.*

*That person is not known to the authorities it seems. Developments since the murders suggest they too do not have the answers to these questions.*

*They have, in the view of this newspaper probably for the best reasons, been trying to cover the situation up.*

*The two alleged triads arrested for Wong's murder could not possibly have been responsible. Tse was killed while they were in custody.*

*Efforts to obtain information have been actively thwarted. Newspaper employees have been threatened and this newspaper is convinced those responsible for investigating the deaths, and the reasons for them, already know that something dire could be about to happen.*

*Why else would they warn this newspaper to "drop" its line of enquiry because many other people would suffer? Why would they express the same fears Amelia Tse expressed in her death note?*

*As already stated they may well have the best of reasons for not wishing to have the facts made known. However, when faced with a threat instead of a request for help, we feel obliged in the public interest to raise pertinent questions and seek acceptable answers. So far we have not received any explanations.*

*Amelia Tse referred to the opening of the Legislative Council session in October. Did she mean that whatever was programmed to happen would happen then?*

*The Legislative Council session will begin on October 7. That is forty-two days away.*

*In the meantime there is a killer on the streets of Hong Kong who will it seems stop at nothing to achieve his ends. Already he has brutally taken the lives of Michael Wong and Amelia Tse. Will there be more?*

*And importantly, what is the objective? Presumably not identical to that of his victims, else why kill them? Presumably also, not directly opposed to them, why else would he not simply expose them and why would Amelia Tse fear what was to happen?*

*We believe a plot has been set in motion to cause upheaval in the political life of Hong Kong and which could seriously affect the future of the territory.*

*We believe the authorities know as much – or more than we do or think  
– and are covering it up.  
We believe there is a killer loose in our midst bent on causing a  
possible catastrophe and that perhaps only he can stop it.  
Finally, we believe the people of Hong Kong have a right to know the  
facts.*

Teller read the last ten lines again. They really did sum up his own convictions. And by writing the story he was forcing the newspaper to accept what were not facts, but only feelings. If he was wrong he would be the one to suffer dire consequences. His journalistic career in Hong Kong would be finished and he would be forced to leave, the laughing stock of his colleagues. To his Chinese friends he would have lost face. The very thought sent a shiver down his back and he physically shuddered. Quickly he switched off the machine.

He opened his rubbish drawer and took the note out and read it again. Then it struck him. What had bothered him was the last line: “Do not write any more stories or you will lose your face.” It was the use of the word ‘your’. The writer had not said he would “lose face.” He had written “your face.”

Teller switched the terminal back on and searched its memory for the original stories he had written on the Michael Wong murder. He read it carefully and then slumped back in his chair. Nowhere had he mentioned that the surgeon’s face had been cut so badly that he was unrecognisable. He had merely said he had been mutilated after his throat had been slashed. The writer of the note could have used poor English. But Teller doubted it. He believed the writer knew the surgeon’s face had been sliced with a knife and, therefore, he was the same person who had actually killed Wong. And Tse.

If so, the conclusion was inescapable. When his article appeared the following day he would become a target of the murderer.

## Chapter Eight

The kick caught Teller in the stomach and with a groan he doubled over and fell to his knees, the concrete floor jarring his whole spine. He gripped his belly and tried to suck in air but there wasn't any. All he had had in his lungs was forced out and it was as if the organs had collapsed and refused to open like bellows again to pump more in. Teller toppled forward onto his left hand and awkwardly reached behind with his right to beat his own back. At the same time he lifted his head and grunted at the figure standing over him.

The man, dressed in white, thumped his back a few times and then grabbed him under the armpits and hauled him to his feet. Turning his back he pinned him under the shoulders and heaved him onto his own back, leaned forward and bounced up and down, stretching Teller's body backwards as far as it would bend.

Teller groaned, his face having darkened from ashen to crimson, until finally he gasped deeply and gulped in air. As the man continued the rocking motion Teller moaned again and drew in more mouthfuls of air. At last he was back breathing more easily and he rolled slowly off the man's back.

"You OK?" asked his friend.

"Yeah," said Teller with some difficulty. He paced around the floor, his hands on his hips, and regulated his breathing. "Bloody stupid. My fault. It was a good *maigiri*. I just didn't block quickly enough."

His friend smiled. "You were coming in at the same time. A bit slower. You should train more often."

"I know," Teller replied. "I'm getting too old for this sort of thing. I think I'll take up lawn bowls."

"You want to finish up?"

"No. We can continue for a while longer, but let's just make it light. It's alright for you youngsters, but we old men aren't quite what we used to be."

The other man looked serious. "You used to be very fit. Fast too. If you trained more often you would get that fitness and speed back. Strength isn't enough. Smoking doesn't help either."

"I know. I know. You're right, but these days I need someone to push me into it. I tell you, it's age old mate. I'm simply getting older."

His friend was right though. A few years back he was fit. And he was one of the club's most dedicated karatekas. Then karate had been almost a love for him and the weeks and months were measured by training sessions, camps in the New territories and the occasional tournament locally or in Macao.

Over the last few years, however, he had developed other interests, primarily his work, and his enthusiasm had waned. Also, all the other students seemed to be youths who possessed much greater speed, strength and drive. It was true that karate could be a sport for all ages, but the *kumite* fighting aspect was for the younger generation. It was also a sport in which the loser often was hurt, not simply had the wind knocked out of him as Teller had at this, one of his infrequent sessions with his friend.

"Right then," he said to his friend. "Come on. Another three minutes. But please treat me gently."

His friend laughed and jabbed a *kizami* at Teller's face. The short blow was deflected and for his too casual approach Teller hit him with a solid *kyakazuki* punch under the heart.

As the other man in the traditional white *dogi* winced Teller grinned: “There’s still some fight in the old dog yet you know.” The remaining few minutes ended in a flurry of blows and kicks, some of which landed but all were controlled so neither Teller nor his opponent was hurt, though abrasions would show the next day and Teller would walk with a tight gait for the rest of the week.

As they were dressing Teller asked his friend how his business was progressing. The tax consultant replied that it was buoyant. Most of his clients were Australian businessmen with interests offshore and with the new fiscal year just underway he still had a good deal of work to occupy his time.

“You’ve been busy I see,” he added. “Getting into the murky side of the place these days. Are you serious about some diabolical plan to overthrow the government? A bit far-fetched I would have thought.”

Teller pulled on his shirt, the sweat bunching it uncomfortably at the back despite his having towelled himself off just minutes before. “I don’t think I suggested there was a coup in the offing,” he said. “But something’s going on.”

“Keep it to a minimum then will you. I don’t want my clients to shift their base.” His friend switched off the two overhead fans in the *dojo* and moved to the door. “I’ll drop you off on the way.”

Twenty minutes later Teller thanked his friend for the lift, waved goodbye and pushed open the heavy iron gate to the entrance of the building in Happy View Terrace where he lived. His friend had been right. He was certainly getting involved in the seamy side of Hong Kong. His follow-up story had appeared that morning and he had spent much of the day fending off comments from colleagues and acquaintances who called him to either probe further or to criticise his fertile imagination. It seemed to many people that while such political intrigue may be commonplace in other Asian countries, Hong Kong was above it all and his suppositions were dramatic pie in the sky.

The government machine had voiced its reaction to the story very clearly. Both the Director of the GIS and the Secretary for Administrative Services and Information had called Davidson to describe the claims as having no basis in fact, adding the rider that they would expect a retraction.

The editor had told Teller of the calls. He had also informed the two officials that if they wished to issue a formal denial he would be pleased to publish it. Both had blustered about sensationalist journalism and later in the afternoon the teleprinter had stuttered out a brief statement to the effect that the authorities had “no evidence at this point in time to support the allegations” made by the South China Morning Post.

“They’ll have to do better than that,” Davidson had said. But he had also warned Teller: “So will you. Get me something solid. We can’t survive on your gut feelings. Facts Teller. Get me facts.”

It was easy to say, not easy to do. He had nowhere to go. His sources had dried up, shied away and all he had were tenuous threads that suggested directions but which bore no definite signs.

Teller slammed the gate behind him and started the climb up to the third floor to his flat. He was exhausted and all he wanted to do was take a cold shower, make a salad sandwich and sit in front of the television with a can of iced beer. Everything else could wait until tomorrow.

At his landing he dropped the bag containing his training kit and fumbled with the side pocket for the key to the front door. Once he found it he straightened up and inserted into the lock and turned it anticlockwise. The key turned freely all the way, indicating the door was not locked, only on the latch. It was odd. He always made a

point to lock the door and he was sure he had done so when he left for the office in the morning.

Burglaries were one of the most prevalent crimes of Hong Kong, particularly in low level buildings which had no lifts and dark staircases where thieves could work their picks without too much fear of being accosted by tenants frequently coming and going. Teller feared he could be the latest statistic on a police report sheet. In the seconds before he turned the handle and opened the door he tried to recall his actions in the morning of turning the key in the lock. The more he tried to visualise it the more uncertain he became. The door swung in and Teller walked into the short corridor. He pushed the swing door to the dining room and walked in switching on the light as he did. Everything was in its place. He walked through to the sitting room, switched on the light there too and noted again that all was in order. Nothing had been touched. Finally he entered the bedroom. Once more there was no sign anything had been interfered with. He had no valuables or cash lying about so he didn't have to minutely search to see if anything or worth was missing.

Burglars concentrated on easily disposable items such as cash, jewellery and electrical appliances, but Teller had seen that his television set, stereo and typewriter were still where they should be. Tossing his bag into the adjoining bathroom he cursed his forgetfulness and reminded himself for the hundredth time to be more careful in securing the flat whenever he left it.

Quickly undressing he stepped under the shower and turned on the water as full as it would go. The stream hit him on the chest and he gasped at its force and coldness turning in a circular motion to spread the chill. He lathered briskly and shampooed his hair and then stood still and scraped the suds from his body with his hands, no longer bothered by the cold water.

Afterwards in pyjama shorts only he moved back to the sitting room and switched on the television. He stood smoking a cigarette and watched the last ten minutes of the news bulletin, but when Freddie the TVB weather cartoon character looked up at the dark cloud and great blobs of rain fell on his head, Teller sighed and walked to the kitchen. It was going to be another wet day tomorrow and he reminded himself to lock every window and door this time as he did not want a repeat of the flooding he suffered with the storm.

He was about to open the refrigerator when the telephone rang. He moved back to the sitting room but when he picked it up there was no sound on the other end.

"Hello," he said. "Hello?" There was a click followed by a buzz.

Dropping the receiver back on the cradle he swore. "Bloody idiot." It was one of the thoughtless habits of local people, that when they dialled a wrong number they offered no apology. They simply hung up and often rang the same number again.

Teller stayed beside the phone and waited. Nothing happened.

He had reached the doorway to the kitchen when the phone rang again. He crossed the floor and snatched up the receiver. "Hello," said impatiently. "Wei?Wei?"

"Mr Teller?" the voice, a man's, was low.

"Yes."

"Is that Jason Teller?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

There was a period of silence and Teller said again: "Hello? Who is it?"

There was a click and phone went dead.

Teller angrily crashed the phone down. What the hell is going on, he said under his breath. First his phone rings and no-one speaks. Then it rings again and a man asks his name before hanging up. His initial reaction was that somebody was

playing a joke, but he changed his mind quickly. His second thought was worrying. Somebody was checking his address, or more likely to see if he was at home. Why? Could he now expect a visitor? Who and for what? He was uneasy, and remained near the telephone almost hoping it would ring a third time so he could ask these questions directly. But the phone sat on the table silent and finally he left it to go into the kitchen and prepare himself some food and a drink.

As he sat watching the television later he was distracted and had one ear tuned to the next room expecting to be interrupted by the mysterious caller again. He wasn't though, and at ten thirty he dozed off in the middle of a rerun film.

Half way down Happy View Terrace a number of vehicles were parked on the narrow sidewalk. Snug behind a gleaming yellow Datsun 280Z, at the rear of the queue, was a dull green van. The off side front tyre was deflated and one of the headlights was smashed, the broken shards of glass swept against the stone wall. There were no markings on the side and it stood in darkness, yet in the gloom lit faintly by a street lamp further up the road, passersby would be able to see its colour. It had obviously been abandoned as unsafe to drive at night.

The back of the van was not empty though. Along a shelf welded to the side, resting on thick rubber padding, was an array of instruments that would have been familiar to any experienced telephone technician. In the middle was a large open reel tape recorder, the reels still. Sitting on a box, again encased in rubber and welded to the floor of the van, a single Chinese man was speaking softly into a cordless instrument held to the side of his face.

"Nothing more," he whispered in clear, precisely pronounced English. "No." A pause. "Only the call at eight twenty-five when there was no conversation. Then at eight twenty-seven when the caller asked his name." Again there was a pause. "Yes. It was a CM. Well educated, but Chinese. No, I couldn't. Yes, twenty-four hours. Yes."

The man placed the high voltage portable telephone on the padded shelf in front of him and adjusted the grey plug in his left ear. He checked a knob on the recorder and picked up the novel he had been reading. Two windows at the rear of the van were sealed with thick black rubber and light inside was dim, but it was enough for the listener to read by.

Outside the street was quiet, the only noise being the steady hum of traffic passing along Link Road and the distant clatter of mahjong pieces being shuffled around a board in one of the high-rise apartments where Broadwood Road and Link Road met.

At eleven thirty Teller stirred in his chair and opened his eyes to see blurry white film credits rolling up the screen as the soundtrack, full of base notes and rolling drums told him that the old drama had ended with some of the mystery unexplained.

After drowsily carrying out his ablutions he checked the windows were locked, switched on the air-conditioner in the bedroom and slumped onto the bed. He lay motionless feeling the muscles in his thighs tense and relax in slight spasms, and listening to the methodical whirring of the machine in the wall above the windows. He was a heavy sleeper and the air-conditioner would not disturb him. The only thing that would wake him would be a sudden sharp noise, a break in the regular monotonous humming.

The karate training had tired him and the awkward sleep on the chair had left him with a crick in his neck. Rolling onto his side he bent his knees and tucked them under the sheet, pulling it up over his shoulders. As he then straightened his legs they brushed against something bulky at the foot of the bed and he tried to push it onto one

side. It was soft and smooth but for some reason it seemed to stick to his foot and even though he kicked with his heel it refused to budge.

“Damn,” he cursed and flicked on the bedside lamp, throwing the sheet back as he did so. What he saw made him leap out of bed with a stifled scream.

On the under-sheet, partly covered by the sheet above, was a dead cat, its paws extended straight out with rigamortis setting in, the head limp on the neck but thrust back so that the teeth were bared beneath the closed eyes, and with congealed blood stuck to its nostrils and jaw.

As he stared at the animal the telephone in the dining room sounded shrilly and Teller rushed in and grabbed it, almost shouting. “Hello, yes?”

The voice at the other end, a man’s, whispered: “Mr Jason Teller?”

“Yes,” he said loudly, still in shock. “Who is this?”

“You were warned Mr Teller,” said the voice. “Now you must pay the price of failing to heed that warning.”

“What? Who are you? What are you talking about?” Teller looked around the room as though he expected to see his caller standing by the table or crouching in a corner. His mind was still riveted on the dead animal in his bed.

The voice continued low but the words were clear. “You have become a necessity Mr Teller. Do you understand? It is now necessary to deal with you also.”

Teller’s brain was almost exploding. He was totally alert and he comprehended immediately what the caller was saying. There was a silence and as he was about to speak the man’s voice said quietly: “Goodbye Mr Teller. Enjoy your sleeping partner.”

Teller stood holding the phone in his hand as a buzzing sound emitted from it. Terror crept upon him, an alien threatening feeling that brought a solid lump to the pit of his stomach and a narrowing of the throat as if a pair of strong hands was already squeezing the passage closed. His heart pumped and he could feel the blood coursing upwards and gushing into his brain, flooding it temporarily and creating a momentary dizziness. His breathing became harsh and for more than a minute he stood without moving, the telephone still clasped firmly in his fist.

As Teller stood alone in the darkness the man in the back of the unmarked van two hundred meters down the street picked up the portable telephone from the shelf and carefully punched in five numbers. When the voice answered at the other end, almost immediately, he spoke softly into the rate at his mouth. “The subject has made contact. At eleven thirty-three. The message is terminal.”

He listened intently and then replied: “Understood. Right.” He returned the instrument to the shelf and returned to his novel, but his eyes lifted every thirty seconds or so to glance at the recorder and the light in the bottom left hand corner which was once more unblinking.

While he would not observe it, he knew that shortly there would be activity in the area as operatives quietly moved into place to watch the flat of Jason Teller, keenly alert to any and everyone who approached. He knew, like the British journalist undoubtedly did, that death was in the air.

## Chapter Nine

Martin Lee had been attacked.

It was at another public forum that the outspoken Legislative Councillor was expounding on the need for a directly elected representative government, starting in 1988. At one point in his speech he referred to the Beijing-run New China News Agency. A heckler took umbrage at some perceived slur and began shouting loudly at the councillor, at the same time advancing in the stage in a threatening manner. He had to be hauled away by workers and police, screaming abuse and waving his fist angrily in the air.

Fortunately it was an attempted assault that caused Lee no physical injury, though he was lucky to escape unscathed. So the result was that the councillor was not bodily harmed in spite of the impression given by the next morning's misleading newspaper headlines which took considerable journalistic licence and after the forum he was smiling. The widely reported outburst would actually benefit those who supported Lee's stance; the democrats would not bow to violence but would continue to voice rational arguments and let the public judge for themselves.

The lawyer had been very busy on the Sunday and the forum was not his only public appearance. He had also spent long hours visiting mass transit railway stations, actively backing a coalition of pressure groups seeking the same political reforms by carrying out a territory-wide signature campaign. Their target was one hundred thousand signatures which they hoped to collect over two consecutive Sundays. But their sights had clearly been set too short. On the first day alone, the exact number they recorded was a stunning one hundred and twenty-eight thousand, eight hundred and twenty-four. The response was indicative of how the pendulum of public interest had once again swung back from the momentarily stationary position. For a week or more the situation had been static in that repetition, boredom and the feeling that everything that could be said on the issue had been said, had set in. But suddenly the matter was back in the news and the speakers for both sides were once again out in force. The recess was apparently over and with three weeks to go in the consultation period the pace was picking up.

Martin Lee and his colleagues, principally Desmond Lee and Conrad Lam, were still repeating their points with gusto, while the spokesmen for the communists were coming out too, ably led by Beijing's chief local representative. The latest, but unsubstantiated, reports of their activities maintained that employees of the Bank of China and the numerous China Products department stores had all been advised to oppose direct elections, or face dismissal at least.

Although the verbal battles in the public arena were creating a scene of heated debate, for its part the government refused to involve itself. The constant response to agile reporters trying to draw their colours was that it would honestly, fairly and dispassionately evaluate the written views passed to the Survey Office before the first of October. Quietly, while senior officials were somewhat anxiously watching the embers rekindled into flames, they were also delighted at the extent of the comment. With the resurgence of interest the figures had swollen surprisingly. The Survey Office was able to issue a routine statement to the effect that more than nineteen thousand submissions had so far been received.

"It's fantastic," enthused Roger Gould. "Our estimates were way off for this point in time." This had drawn a frown from James Wong who did not like being

proved wrong, and certainly did not welcome being told so bluntly and in front of the Chief Secretary.

“Yes,” he said coldly.

“How could we have misjudged the situation so badly?” persisted the Political Advisor. “We weren’t just out, we were out of the ballpark.”

When there was no immediate answer he unwisely went on: “What do we telegramme HMG now? We got it wrong? We cocked it up? What else have we missed?” Gould was enjoying his role.

“Look,” said Wong suddenly. “The problem with gazing into a crystal ball is that you run the risk of eating ground glass at the end of the day.” His eyes cut into Gould, cold, hard. “Right now I’m choking on it. Let’s leave it at that shall we and put our twenty-twenty hindsight behind us? We should now be re-evaluating our position to see where we go from here.”

Gould returned the Chinese assistant’s gaze. “Of course,” he said. “You’re absolutely right of course James. We must not dwell on our mistakes. We must forge ahead. Where *do* we go from here?”

His face showed concern, even something akin to sympathy, but his words pierced deep as they were intended, and he concealed the pleasure he derived from witnessing the suppressed anger well in the Chinese sitting across the table. Seemingly reluctant, he turned away from James Wong and looked at Robert McNamara, his brow knitted and his jaw set.

The Chief Secretary was furious. He had not intervened in the exchange for a number of reasons, though he was saddened that it had taken place. He wanted to see Gould in his true colours and he was interested to see how James Wong would acquit himself. He had not expected however the depth of feelings the two men harboured. He had misjudged the incident and it angered it.

Another reason he had not halted the exchange was because he had been pondering the radically changing situation concerning the Green Paper. It was still severely criticised as being either too verbose or not specific enough in its proposals, biased or evasive, or simply a useless document that said nothing worthwhile because the administrations in London and Hong Kong had no intention of doing anything whatever the outcome of the consultation.

Simultaneously, the cadres representing those to the north referred to a conspiracy between Her Majesty’s Government and the Hong Kong Government, explicitly reasoning that the intention was to grant direct elections and therefore manoeuvres were being carried out to ensure the desired results. No wonder the community generally were confused and that the polls commissioned privately fluctuated wildly. The results were stupefying. Only the last week one poll ordered by five newspapers returned the verdict that more than sixty-two per cent of the people it asked supported universal suffrage the following year. The day before another similar professional sampling had suggested only forty-nine per cent of the respondents favoured direct elections in 1988.

What was one to believe? As McNamara told himself – a sensible politician only believes the final poll. Nevertheless, he was concerned and feared that the confusion might inflame the already unsettled climate.

There had been a few controlled calls for caution and commonsense. The Omelco in-house meeting had issued a statement asking the public not to become too heated in the debate following a previous incident in Victoria Park, and the government had followed this up with a one sentence comment affirming its hope for

reasoned discourse. But the Martin Lee incident had raised concern once more. The situation must not be allowed to degenerate further.

Robert McNamara was considering these thoughts when he heard his name being spoken.

“Robert,” Gould was saying. “What do we do now?”

The Chief Secretary looked at the two men seated on either side of him. “We forget our personal feelings right now,” he said. “We all have them, but we are not in this for ourselves. We have a larger constituency than that and we must put our minds to meeting that larger responsibility. So we come back to the question you raised - where do we go from here?” McNamara continued rhetorically: “We continue to count the letters. We continue to monitor events closely.”

The others remained silent. He added: “We have the numbers already. The ratio looks good. And we have until the end of the month. That’s what we tell London. The signs are positive.”

“Absolutely,” nodded the Political Advisor. “They’re definitely encouraging.”

Without acknowledging the remark McNamara turned to his assistant. “What about the names for our poll? Is everything alright there?”

“It would seem so,” replied Wong. “I think the original problem has been sorted out. There will be no manipulation either way.”

Gould’s mouth opened but a harsh look from the Chief Secretary and he closed it without uttering a word.

“Thank you,” McNamara said. “That’s all for now.”

After the others had left the Chief Secretary walked down the corridor’s beige carpet and up the two flights of bare concrete steps to the sixth floor where he knocked lightly on the door of an office and hesitated for a moment before entering. Inside, behind his usual cleared desk, Old Jack sat staring straight ahead. He nodded to the older man and seated himself in the empty chair with his back to the door, ready to be brought up to date on developments, if there were any. He was particularly interested to hear if there had been further contact.

The accountant recounted once again the sequence of events since the publication of the second article. Immediately an operative had been assigned to Teller reporting to him personally every four hours, or as and when necessary. So far the four-hourly intervals had been all that was required as the journalist had not departed greatly from his usual routine. However, it had been a little different when Teller visited the South China Athletic Association for his karate training. The dojo was secluded down in the basement but exposed for the operative who had to spend two hours seemingly engrossed in the practice sessions of the young ping-pong players in the hall next door, and then again when Teller’s friend drove him home.

While this watch was doing his covert job a technician had been dispatched to the Happy View Terrace flat. Once inside Teller’s flat he inserted the device, not touching anything else as instructed, and left. He had taken only four minutes to complete the task.

On the way down the steep and rather narrow street the technician stopped near the dull green van and cupped his hands to light a cigarette. As he flicked the match away his knuckles rapped the metal side, and he paused before continuing onto the corner where he hailed a passing taxi. Anyone who might have observed the man would not have thought his manner or actions warranted undue attention.

Inside the van the third operative had already verified that the bug was in place. He settled himself as comfortably as he could, long experience teaching him

not to sit hunched with his weight on his spine, and waited for the yellow light to flicker and the reels to automatically silently roll.

“And the others,” asked the Chief Secretary.

“They’ve been in place since the initial contact,” the white haired man replied. “It was sufficient to move, in my judgement.”

“Quite,” said McNamara.

“Front and back,” the accountant explained. “Our man at front is a replacement guard for the block opposite. The regular had a sudden windfall and is in Macao trying his luck at the tables. Our rear man is not so comfortable. He shares the hillside with the dogs and the mosquitoes above the cottage industry huts. But he has a good view of the back of the building.”

“Is two enough?” asked McNamara.

“Yes. Others would be wasted.” The accountant’s eyes narrowed and he wiped them with his fingers roughly. He was tired. “Also, I don’t want to bring in more than necessary. There are already more than I would have liked.”

The Chief Secretary repeated his brief response. “Quite.” Then: “And there’s no indication as to what our suspect meant with his remark?”

The accountant stood up but did not move away from the table. He stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his grey trousers. After a moment’s thought he said: “None at all. It could mean anything. Or nothing. Until we get more we could only guess and I don’t think guesswork would lead us anywhere at this critical point in time.”

“You’re probably right,” McNamara watched his friend closely. He was showing his age and while the Chief Secretary did not doubt his wisdom or his energy the thought crossed his mind that when this was all over he should raise the question of retirement again. He was almost certain what the response would be and he dreaded the possibility that he may well have to over-rule the older man’s objections to finally bowing out. Where did old colonial civil servants of his ilk go? Wherever it was they often went there to die. Devon, the Algarve and diverse but closely knit areas of Spain were some of the common graveyards for retired officers, and McNamara could almost visualise the accountant sitting out his last days in the sun or making his daily pilgrimage to the local pub. It saddened him to imagine Old Jack ending his days in such remote idleness. The climate would not kill him. He, like so many others, would simply waste away, the fire would burn itself out, the gleam would become a cloud in the eyes, the brain would propel itself in constant fury against the immovable wall of inactivity, until finally, the body and the heart of the man would sigh and pass on.

It was the lack of purpose that killed so many. The quiet, peace and unburdened tranquillity of retirement that was supposed to be the ultimate aim was the medicinal dose that however well intentionally meted out proved fatal.

The Chief Secretary had seen it many times. Police officers, administrative officers, judges and others spent much of their lives in the hub of hectic Hong Kong life. They were in the forefront of the human force that went into making the vibrant and complex society what it was. Clichés describing the territory abounded – the city that never sleeps, the city that would be wonderful when it was finished, the largest construction site in the world, the sprinter in the marathon, the only society where the work ethic is a way of life. They were all accurate. If, as someone once said, Australia was the Brisbane of the world, then Hong Kong was a place where one might get tired and frustrated and bruised by the never ending pace. It was the future metropolis of

the world. But one never got bored. The boredom set in only when one left Hong Kong. That was the killer.

Long-time resident expatriates knew it too. Visitors came, played and went with their souvenirs telling friends back home what an exciting holiday it had been, though they could never live there. Locals saw them off and then looked forward to their own vacations. When they returned they anxiously searched for the lights of Hong Kong as they sat in the crowded aircrafts arriving back from Disneyland or Paris or Toronto or London. Unlike the tourists their memories were short and life picked up almost immediately where it had left off weeks before. The next tour of duty began seldom with thoughts of retirement or the home country.

That is what Hong Kong did to a person. It drove one to madness for the first six months, fastened its grip after two years, and steadfastly refused to let go after five. You either got out at about forty so you could start over somewhere else, or you stayed the duration. In that sense the colonial attitude persisted even if the reasons were not exactly the same.

Old Jack was one who had decided early in his career that Hong Kong was where he wanted to spend his life and if he had ever considered discussing it in detail with the Chief Secretary, which he had not, he would have told how the thought of retiring to Portugal or Lancashire or anywhere else filled him with horror. Robert McNamara had formed this opinion nevertheless and did not need to hear it from the older man's lips. His lifestyle was enough of an explanation.

So, as he observed him now, he could not escape the self criticism that when the time came, in the not too distant future, he would be putting his signature to a document that would in all probability assign a date with death that was for now being held at bay.

Yet more immediate was the fact that death was stalking other prey and that those charged with preventing it were at present hobbled by ignorance. Lack of information had placed them in the position of observers rather than active players and the inability to control developments was galling to say the least, particularly as the stakes were so high.

Without moving from his chair and still with his eyes fixed on the accountant standing before him, the Chief Secretary mused resignedly: "We're still waiting for someone else to move. And we can't do a damn thing about it."

The accountant averted his gaze and resumed his seat. Looking up he said quietly: "Perhaps we should bait a trap to bring the killer out of the bushes."

"What do you mean?" asked McNamara sitting upright.

"We might be able to set something in motion that might draw our man out." The accountant was not so much putting forward a definite proposal as thinking aloud.

"Go on," said McNamara, now leaning his elbows on the edge of the table.

"I don't know," the accountant said, retreating a little. "I am just thinking it through now, but we may be able to stir him into action."

"What sort of bait do you suggest?"

"Human." The accountant's features were fixed and the Chief Secretary could almost see his brain switch into a higher gear as the idea began to crystallise.

"You're thinking of Jason Teller, aren't you?" he said. "There is no-one else. It would have to be him."

The accountant once more stood up and moved away from the desk in ponderous strides. He leaned against the wall, chewing at a knuckle and when he spoke his voice carried a tone of anticipation tainted by apprehension. "It would have

to be good,” he said. “It would have to be something that would push him into doing something.”

McNamara sounded calm, measured, when he spoke. “Something like ....” The words trailed off and the sentence was unfinished. When he spoke again his voice was low, almost a whisper. “You know of course if it succeeded and we failed .... you know it would go very badly for us. Christ, what am I saying? It would be immeasurably worse for Teller.”

“If we failed from our side,” said the accountant, “we would be in an even more dangerous situation than we are now. Our only link, one that is already so tenuous it could snap at any moment, would disappear. I doubt our chances if that happened.”

The Chief Secretary laughed without humour. “Ironic isn’t it.” He said. “The one person who screwed us up at the beginning is now the one person we might have to rely on.”

The two men sat in silence, their individual brains weighing and discounting moves and counter moves like pieces on a chessboard. The difference was that the pieces in play were men of flesh and blood and if they made a wrong move the blood that would flow would be real. The potential risks were very high indeed.

“I’d like to think on if you don’t mind,” broke in the accountant.

“Do that,” said McNamara. “I will too. We can get together shortly to see if we can come up with something feasible.”

At the door he stopped and faced the accountant. “Of course,” he said, “if it is decided to go ahead, along this path, Teller would not be told would he?”

“No,” replied the accountant evenly. “No, he would be blind bait.”

As the door closed, locking him once more in his solitary confinement, the vertical cracks on the accountant’s face deepened and he pictured a scene from an old movie where a village calf was tethered to a tree in the jungle to bring out the leopard. The scene that disturbed him was not where the leopard was shot dead by the white hunter. Rather it was the calf lying still on the ground, the price paid for the trophy.

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Jason Teller had no doubts he was a marked man. The caller was the killer and his reference to his becoming a “necessity” was crystal clear in its meaning. Amelia Tse and Michael Wong had both been necessities, their murders something that had to be carried out if his intentions were to be realised. Apparently Teller had gone too far with his exposes and the murderer now planned his death also.

At first the idea left him chilled and numb, not filled with a fear that brought on panic. He had stood holding the telephone by his side for more than a minute and a half after the caller had rung off, alone in his flat with the dim glow from his bedroom illuminated only by the single bedside lamp. The furniture and the other items in the dining room were distant black shapes standing like sentries silently observing his reaction, and through the window he could see across the roof-garden of the building next door to the Jardines Lookout hills on the other side of the overgrown valley. The moonlight picked out the trees, the taller one swaying in the breeze that had already picked up in anticipation of the rains which were forecast to arrive the next day.

It was some time before the utter silence was interrupted by his heart’s accelerated pounding and the humming that began in his temples. It was then that panic introduced itself and Teller expressed his thoughts. No sound came, but his lips

pronounced the words: "He's going to kill me," he mouthed. "He's really going to kill me."

It was a conclusion that came instantly with no question mark, no wavering, no possible doubt. It could have been no more specific if the man had told him: "Jason Teller, I am going to plan your death and then I am going to let nothing prevent me from carrying it out. I am going to murder you Jason Teller, and I want you to know I am going to do it."

He had made it his business to find out his telephone number and where he lived. God, he had even been inside the flat and left a macabre sign as proof of his own identity and intention.

Teller's eyes darted around the room. He dropped the receiver back on its stand and went from room to room switching on every light as if by banishing the darkness he would be banishing the horrific certainty of his slaughter. The word seemed the most appropriate when he thought of Wong and Tse and the dead animal in his bed. They were to him, so senseless and premeditated and methodical that other descriptions were inadequate. He was going to die at the hands of some maniac for something he did not even understand.

What the hell was going on? What could be so serious to warrant the killing of the journalist and the surgeon? Were they really so radical in their philosophies and were they really planning something so dreadful, so politically catastrophic that they had to be slain? What, too, had he done that was so awful as to necessitate his death? He was not part of any mysterious plot. He did not know what the plot was. His articles had been anything but definitive. They were quizzical. Particularly the last one, and yet it appears the second story was the one that had sealed his death warrant. What had he written that he must die for?

Of course deep down inside he knew. He had drawn attention to something he should have left alone. Now it was out in the open. Now the killer had new problems. Now he had to make sure no more problems were put in his path. Now Teller had to be removed.

He found the copy of the newspaper in the kitchen. But before he turned to the pages he removed the dead animal from the bed and dropped it into the rubbish bin under the sink. Later he would take it outside and dispose of it. He turned the pages to where his article was prominently displayed. He read it through carefully, noting in a pad the points which could, just could, be significant. Significant enough to justify his murder by a madman.

There were few he could ascertain as having some remote bearing or reason for the man to be now hunting him. The fact Wong and Tse believed passionately in Hong Kong people's freedom. But that demanded the killer be passionately anti-political advancement. The fact they wanted directly elected seats in the Legislative Council next year. Ditto. Assuming the killer opposed that wish, was it of sufficient importance to justify murder? Also, if it was the reason the killer would have to murder many others of far greater public significance. In that sense, he Teller, was insignificant.

If the murderer held the same views as his victims there was no reason to kill. So perhaps the murders were indeed actually the acts of an ordinary criminal, albeit mentally deranged as the authorities now maintained. But that did not wash with Teller either. Why the fear expressed by Amelia Tse that something had gone terribly wrong, why the threats of the government, why the pronouncement on his own life? Why, why, why?

“Why should I die?” Teller asked aloud and slumped into a chair exhausted. He covered his eyes with his hands and tried to blot everything from his mind, knowing as he did so the futility of the attempt.

He was still sitting in the chair, his thoughts racing in many different directions, when the first morning light brushed against the window. During the hours he sat pondering the questions that plagued him, Teller had formulated a tentative plan. His first decision was that if the madman was going to try to kill him, he was going to make very sure that act was as difficult as possible to execute. Even though he was frightened he was going to fight back. Or perhaps it was because he was frightened. He quickly realised that any arsenal he might draw from was very limited, and that realistically he could depend on no-one but himself. His intention, therefore, was to use the only weapon he could rely on and exert some control over. The printed word. Effectively used, he figured, he might be able to do something which could end up with the killer being caught. This of course depended on others being in a position to do the catching.

Teller had no doubt his actions were being monitored and it would not surprise him if he was even being watched. If not, he would have to make sure he was. But while he planned to fight, he did not intend exposing himself stupidly, making a target of himself that could be hit easily. Not yet anyway. This required the co-operation of a number of people, and he had no idea whether all, or any, would go along with him. He only knew he had to try, otherwise he would very likely end up dead.

At eight thirty he called the South China Morning Post main office number. Harvey Davidson would be in the office already he knew, and he was a key player in the dangerous game he wanted played out.

Davidson took his call when it was put through and with his usual morning bad temper began his sarcastic comments. He did not even ask the purpose of the call. Teller let him continue until he either drew breath or paused to put flame to the pipe which Teller knew would be already warm with its first bowl of sweet cherry Cavendish mixture smouldering. Without regard to any interruptions from the editor he explained his purpose. Davidson listened on the other end of the telephone and when Teller had finished talking there was a moment of silence.

Then he said: “You are a fucking nuisance Teller, you know that? Why can’t you just settle for ordinary stories that earn ordinary denials. Why do you have to go and excite some maniac into wanting to kill you? Did you really find a dead cat in your bed last night? Or are you trying to piss me off with some Godfather crap?”

“Yes,” said Teller. “And he really did tell me he’s going to kill me. So are you going to help or not?”

Davidson’s laugh was loud. “Don’t be an ass Teller. Of course I’ll take your copy. And if it’s OK I’ll run with it. Christ, it’s got to be better than excerpts from *Spycatcher*, even if we could use that too, which we can’t. We’ll get up over the one hundred thousand if we play it right.”

In spite of himself, Teller smiled. His prediction had been correct. “You’re a genuine bastard,” he said. “It’s the circulation that interests you. You don’t give a damn that I could end up with my throat slit. So long as you sell papers. Jesus, if I get bumped off it will probably make your day.”

“It would be good,” said Davidson. “But please, stay alive for a while. The longer we can run with it the better.”

“I believe you’re serious,” said Teller. He did, but he knew too that the editor was morbidly toying with him. “Well, just out of spite I might survive, and might just succeed in preventing this whole mess from getting any worse.”

“Yes,” said Davidson. “That wouldn’t be too bad either. It would make the paper look really good actually, and wouldn’t do you and me any harm along the way.”

“Bastard,” repeated Teller.

Fifteen minutes later, with arrangements made, he rang off, satisfied the first step in his plan had been accomplished. The next step was vital, but he was confident it would not be too difficult to fix. Just before ten o’clock he dialled the number of the accountant. The phone gave only a single ring before it was picked up and Teller recognised the rather urgent “Hello.”

“It’s me, Jason,” said Teller and hurried on, not allowing the accountant to say anything more. “You may know. or you might not, it doesn’t matter, but the killer has contacted me and I am to be his next victim. He has been in my flat and left a calling card that confirms he is who he says. There was a dead cat in my bed last night. So let’s have no more games shall we? And please, no Godfather references.”

“Are you alright Jason?” was all the accountant asked.

“Yes, I’m alright, no thanks to you or anyone else.” Teller did not want to lose the initiative. He quickly continued. “And I am not going to take this lying down. From now on, every day, the Post is going to publish a front page piece, by me, reporting on this thing. I’m going to tell readers everything that happens. I am going to keep up a running commentary. I’m going to force you people to do something to put a stop to whatever is supposed to happen. Every day for the next three or four weeks, or however long it takes, we’re going to play this thing up.”

“Jason...”the accountant interrupted.

“No more,” cut in Teller abruptly. “I’m not going to drop the story and I’m not going to offer myself on a plate. I’m going to do something. I’m just warning you. So you and your high-powered friends had better do something too, or you’ll have another dead journalist to answer for.” He didn’t wait for a response before cutting the connection with his finger. Slowly he put the phone down and took a deep breath.

If his assumption was right, and his remaining faith was justified, the accountant would act. However, he did not expect it to progress with such pace that he would be shadowed or taken into safe custody, with or without his agreement which was entirely possible, just yet.

His early fear had turned to anger and determination and he now wanted to be part of whatever was to happen. He had been forced into the role and did not intend allowing himself to be shunted aside. Despite the risks he was going to see it through as far as he was capable, so for a while he least he had to stay free.

Hong Kong might be a bustling, overcrowded metropolis but for a fair haired Caucasian it is not an easy city to disappear into. Teller had given this aspect a great deal of thought and his decision was the most difficult he had had to make during the night. It meant he had to involve someone else and possibly put their life at risk also. But he had no choice.

A third time he picked up the telephone and dialled. Ten minutes later he hung up and went into the bedroom where he stuffed a few casual shirts, trousers and underclothes into his training bag. Collecting his portable typewriter and shoulder bag into which he tossed his cheque book and nine hundred dollars in cash, he checked the windows were locked in all the rooms before leaving by the front door.

Luckily a taxi outside the building was letting off two passengers. Teller jumped into the back seat and told the driver to take him to the Excelsior Hotel in Causeway Bay. Settling back he looked out the window but saw no-one else on the street,. It was eleven thirty and it started to rain.

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It is debatable whether the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong Island is the most crowded shopping area in the world. But if you are one of the tens of thousands who throng to the two block square on the northern side of arterial Hennessy Road on any day of the week you could be forgiven for thinking it was.

The sidewalks, street level stores and off street shops team with residents and tourists well into the night. Windows gleam with gold and silver and the very latest in electrical appliances, the roads roar with bumper to bumper traffic and the sights and smells of the people overwhelm to the point of exhaustion. The Excelsior Hotel backs onto the main shopping precinct and is linked to it by an overhead walkway as well as a pedestrian-only alley.

Jason Teller alighted from the taxi as it drew up to the entrance, bounding up the steps and through the brass edged revolving door into the noisy lobby. Without pausing he rode the escalator to the first floor where the coffee shops were full, and then headed down the arcade lined with expensive shops where only the tourists paid at least twenty per cent more for items that could easily be purchased around the corner.

Glancing over his shoulder only once, he walked briskly along the passageway that veered left, then right, right again and then left once more until he came to a second set of escalators. At the bottom he turned left and ran to the corner where the crowd was thickest. There he turned left again and hustled his way to the front entrance of the big Diamaru department store. The Japanese store is always packed and he had to rudely push his way through to the middle where the men's section was located, and then up a single flight of stairs to the women's fashions. He slowed and walked into the display area, carefully but not conspicuously positioning himself behind a raised platform on which stood three headless models sporting the latest in black and white separates. He examined the outfits and the price tags, showing no sign of paying any attention to the young Chinese man in jeans and matching jacket who hurried through, craning his neck as he tried to peer over the heads of those moving towards the rear of the store.

Teller stepped away from the models and retraced his path to the crowded corner outside where he disappeared down the stairs into the underground station. Tugging some change from his pocket he purchased a two dollar ticket and passed through the turnstiles, down two flights of steps to the platform. The train going in the direction of Chai Wan was about to close its doors when he leapt in. As it pulled away silently Teller looked through the glass doors examining the faces of those who had been left behind. No-one showed the slightest interest in him.

When the train stopped at the North Point station he left it and made his way to the street above. A short walk away he waited in the doorway of the Alliance Francaise building until a taxi appeared with its red dashboard disk alight. The driver was confused and amused when Teller directed him to Robinson Road in the Mid-levels but insisted he go via the longest possible route which would take him through Shaukiwan, past the Tai Tam Reservoir and Stanley, Repulse Bay and Aberdeen and finally along Caine Road.

The section of Robinson Road he sought was a short appendix that extended another two hundred meters beyond the point where it crossed Kotewall Road. In fact, most people did not know it was still Robinson Road and Teller had to direct the doubtful driver. Outside a twelve story white building he paid the exorbitant fare and

slammed the door behind him. He had used the circuitous route to make sure he was not being followed though he was confident he had shaken his earlier tail before he boarded the subway. As he had decided some hours earlier he would need others to know his movements intimately, but that time had not arrived and for now he intended to vanish. Also he did not wish the owner of the flat on the ninth floor of the building he was entering to be compromised.

Almost simultaneously with his pressing the buzzer the door opened and the smiling face of Brigit Rolanne welcomed him. "About time Jason," she said beaming. "I thought you weren't coming. What happened to you? I expected you an hour ago."

Teller stepped inside and pulled the door shut behind him. "It's a long unhappy story Brigit. I'll tell you all about it."

"Before you start," the attractive woman said, reaching for his carryall, "you had better get out of those damp clothes and into something dry. I'm being plain selfish. I just managed to get rid of a horrendous cold and I don't fancy catching another one from you. Yes?"

As she led Teller towards the bedroom she added: "While you're changing I'll get us some tea. Maybe a little nip to go with it. A bit early I know but it won't hurt." He heard cups and saucers clatter in the kitchenette as he undressed and put on a pair of baggy white boating trousers and a short sleeved T shirt. Noting the air-conditioning was switched on he sensibly elected to add his lightweight cotton jerkin. He also did not want his health to suffer in anyway and was well aware that moving from the humid heat of outdoors to the dry cool inside, after being wet in the rain particularly, would do him no good.

"Give me those wet things," said Brigit Rolanne as he came out of the room carrying his discarded clothes. "I'll hang them in the bathroom. They should dry out there pretty quickly with the aircon on. My, don't you look fine. White suits you Jason."

"They're comfortable," he said as he examined the trousers that looked as if they were two sizes too big. "I bought them a long time ago when I thought I was looking a bit old. Searching for my lost youth." He smiled easily. "I wouldn't wear them in public for nearly a year. Now I don't care. They're comfortable, as I say. So what the hell."

Disappearing into the bathroom Brigit called back: "The tea's on the table. Help yourself to the cognac. I'll be with you in a minute, then you can tell me what this is all about."

Pouring the steaming water into the delicate cup Teller felt warm and, like the trousers, comfortable. The flat was small, sparsely decorated but with enough furniture and personal knick-knacks to make it cosy and inviting. It told visitors that the occupant had good taste and was not like so many of the Europeans in the territory who crammed their homes with as many material examples of success as they could. In fact, that was one of the first things about Brigit that had attracted him to her three years before. Class, and her looks and humour. It had been in a London pub of all places where he had gone with a couple of friends. His two years in the United Kingdom as correspondent for the South China Morning Post was drawing to a close and he was spending the last month doing a lot of farewell socialising. Too much.

By half past eight that night he had already had too much to drink and was left with a young punter, an acquaintance of the acquaintance. When Brigit and a girlfriend had dropped in for a nightcap after a West End show his drinking partner had brashly sidled up to them and begun a conversation. Before he realised it, he had

joined them, and was explaining the ins and outs of life as an expatriate in Hong Kong, now working temporarily from London.

The two French girls seemed to be interested and stayed until just before closing. At least that is what he thought had happened. When he awoke the next morning he was not sure what he had said, how he had behaved, or even how he had made it back to his Putney flat. However, he obviously had and there was also a scrap of paper on the mantelpiece with the name Brigit Rolanne and a telephone number scribbled on it.

Later that day he had called the number and was rather surprised to find the French girl at home. Also surprising was her agreement to have dinner with him the next night. Over that dinner, which he approached full of apprehension, the reason became apparent. She was to fly to Hong Kong in two months to spend a six-month working holiday there, teaching in a language school. She was a qualified speech therapist and was not quite a girl as he had vaguely remembered. She was in her early thirties. A mature and attractive woman with a humorous outlook on life. Teller also discovered he liked her a lot and that it had been a long time since he had enjoyed female company as much.

He saw her many times during the next fortnight and when he left from Heathrow she saw him off with a more than friendly kiss full on the mouth. He responded in kind when she arrived at Kaitak seven weeks later and for six months they enjoyed a passionate affair.

Then she had met someone else and their relationship cooled until it became nothing more than platonic, though they remained firm friends. There had been once or twice since when the flame was almost rekindled but both had sensed it was possibly because either was going through a tense emotional time. The rebound was not sufficient for Brigit or Teller and both let commonsense prevail. And so it had continued until Teller had called this morning and asked if she could put him up for a short while. Her answer had been instant and positive, almost sounding offended that he might have considered she would refuse.

The hot tea was working and the taste of the strong liquor tingled his lips. "Pour me one please," said Brigit, entering the room and kicking off her slippers so she could fold her legs beneath her as she settled into the old armchair under the window.

"Now, what's this all about Jason? I hope I can have the pleasure of your company for a few days. I'd like a man about the house for a while. It does a girl good."

Teller looked at his friend's dainty hand as it lifted the cup to her lips and something began to stir inside him. Brushing the embryonic thought aside he quickly said: "I'm not sure you will feel the same way once you've heard what I have to say. And I won't blame you in the least Brigit. If you want me to go I will. Just say the word."

"Don't be foolish," she replied. "It can't be that awful. Let me be the judge." She put her cup back on the table and wriggled in the chair as only a woman can do, and her gaze settled on his face expectantly, waiting for him to speak.

"OK then," he said. "From the beginning." For the next hour Teller talked. He began somewhat hesitantly but he became more animated and his mood was heightened by the frequent interjections by Brigit who had a habit of breaking into sentences to seek clarification on points being made. Her brain worked that way. She didn't like to move on to another subject until she was satisfied she understood last.

When he finished his mouth was dry and he had smoked four cigarettes and consumed more than the single nip originally proposed. She had also had two cognacs and two of the infrequent cigarettes she occasionally smoked. Her eyebrows were knitted and she sat very still in the chair, balancing her empty brandy glass between her feet.

“And now here I am,” concluded Teller. “As I said before, if you feel you don’t want me around I will understand. I should not have involved you Brigit. I’m beginning to realise how stupid this is now.”

“That’s quite a story,” she responded earnestly. “You must be terrified.”

“Actually I’m not,” he answered. “I guess I was, but now I suppose I’m more angry. No, exhilarated might be nearer to it. I want an end to be put to it, yet I don’t want to be left out altogether. That’s why I’m doing what I am now. That’s where the anger comes in.”

“And you need somewhere where you can’t be found. That’s why you called me.”

“Yes.”

“If you stayed at your place you might...” she did not say the words. “Like your reporter friend and the doctor.”

“It is possible, but I think I might have some minders looking over me. Or did have. It was more likely that I would have been moved out of the way I think. At the moment they consider me to be a problem.”

“It seems to me you’re the only one doing anything about it,” offered Brigit. “You’re certainly the only one risking his neck.”

Teller sighed. “And I fear I might be risking yours too. I’m sorry, but I’ll leave straight away.”

“You certainly will not,” she answered. “You’re not going to leave me dangling. I am part of this now and I’m going to help you all I can. So let’s start by putting our heads together to try to sort out your next move.”

“Well, if you’re sure, absolutely sure, I appreciate it.” Teller was relieved but did not show it. “But I don’t want you getting into any danger at all.”

“What could happen to me?” she asked. “No-one knows you’re here even. You could stay a month, two months, and no-one would ever find out, so long as you’re careful.”

Teller lit another cigarette. “It won’t be that long. It can’t be. You see, whatever is planned is scheduled I am sure for the opening of Legco on October 7. That’s just a few weeks away.”

## Chapter Ten

“He’s cleared out of his flat,” said the accountant. “And I don’t think he’s coming back.”

“Jesus,” exclaimed McNamara.

“We lost the trail in Daimaru. And we haven’t seen him since.”

“Oh good Jesus,” said the Chief Secretary.

“But,” said the accountant and his creased face creased even more as a controlled smile began at the corners of his mouth. “But we think we know precisely where he was going.”

McNamara said nothing but stared hard at the man seated on the other side of the table from him. When he did speak his eyes narrowed and misnamed laughter lines spread across his temples to where grey strands of hair flicked the tops of his ears. “It is probably that sense of the absurd, the peculiar black humour, and delight in seizing the opportunity to scare the hell out of people like me that keeps men like you going.”

“All going well, we’ll know in no more than an hour. If he’s there already,” continued the accountant.

“If it wasn’t for your advancing years and the fact that for the moment you are utterly indispensable, I’d personally knock your head off,” said McNamara with exaggerated annoyance.

The accountant’s chin set firm again and he pushed himself out of the chair and began pacing about the room in a manner that was not very familiar to the Chief Secretary.

“Her name is Brigit Rolanne,” he recited, “Thirty-six years of age, French but with a British passport, been here for a little over two years and a teacher. More than that I can’t tell you, but the tape tells us she and Teller are close.”

“Never mind,” said McNamara. “You’ve obviously got sufficient to go on. But how did he slip away in Daimaru? Did he know he had a tail?”

“Of course he knew it was possible,” the accountant’s reply was sharp but not disrespectful. It was a statement of fact. “His manoeuvres were designed to shake anyone following. However, I am not convinced he knew for certain the operative was ours.”

“You mean he might have believed he was being followed by our killer? The Catskinner himself?”

“Perhaps. But unlikely I think.”

Teller had spoken quite freely on the telephone which suggested he did not know it was being taped. If he had he would have at least taken precautions with his call to Brigit Rolanne. Just the same, he could still have believed a government tail had been put on him, which accounted for this diversionary and successful movements. Had it been the Catskinner, as McNamara had dubbed the murderer, Teller might have behaved differently.

“You’re probably right,” said the Chief Secretary.

The black telephone on the desk rang twice and stopped. It rang again after a few seconds and the accountant snatched it up. “Yes,” he said curtly.

After listening for less than a minute he replaced the receiver and smiled at McNamara for the first time. “The girl’s flat is in Robinson Road. He’s inside.”

“Are you going to pick him up then?”

“No. Not yet. Not unless we have to. As long as he thinks he’s given us the slip we might be able to still use him.”

McNamara heaved a sigh. “Good,” he said. “Let’s hope so. We need all the help we can get. We don’t know for certain when or where, or even what is going to happen.”

The accountant resumed his pacing. “It’ll be at the Legco building, at the opening of the session on the seventh. That’s what I’m working to.”

“Can we secure the building entirely? If that is the plan there’ll be a lot of people we have to look after and a lot of people we’ll have to guard against. It’ll be packed on that day.”

“I know,” said the accountant. “From a security standpoint it will be a madhouse. That’s what your Catskinner is counting on. We have to find out what he intends. That’s where Teller comes in.”

The Chief Secretary’s brow wrinkled when he spoke. “But if Teller doesn’t know the Catskinner, and the Catskinner doesn’t know where Teller is, how can he be flushed out.”

The accountant stopped his pacing. “By scaring Teller away from his own flat, the killer has made it impossible for us to do anything. I have to rely on his re-establishing contact. And for that to happen I have to rely on Teller.”

“Jesus,” said McNamara. “What a god-awful mess. Now we have no alternative but to depend on a meddling journalist.”

“We have no choice,” the accountant remarked with finality. “There is nothing else we can do. Absolutely nothing.”

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One level below where Robert McNamara and Old Jack were discussing the problems they faced with Jason Teller and the so-called Catskinner, another problem had surfaced. When the Chief Secretary entered his own office shortly he would be handed a note by Gail Jones informing him that the Acting Secretary for Security wished to see him as a matter of some urgency.

John Downe was a young and rising administrative officer in the territorial government and had distinguished himself in a number of middle level positions before being posted to the Security Branch as the Deputy Secretary. In the absence of his immediate superior on holidays for the past month he had been filling the top post. It was a time when the workload should not, under normal circumstances, have been too demanding, but as fate would have it he soon found himself immersed in a wrangle over the question of Vietnamese refugees. The problem was a double barreled one.

First, there was the situation in which Vietnamese refugees who had fled their country after the 1975 fall of Saigon and settled in China, working mainly on sugar plantations in the southern provinces. For the last three months they had been leaving the farms and entering Hong Kong as illegal immigrants. More than seven thousand had come and the local population, piloted by the Legislative Council ad hoc group on refugees, had been calling for something to be done. Finally something was done and two weeks earlier China had started accepting the ex-China Vietnamese illegal immigrants from Hong Kong at the rate of around five hundred and fifty a week.

It was a difficult matter well handled and satisfactorily concluded, much to the credit going to the Legislative Council group who had taken a stand and demanded

speedy action. Downe had acquitted himself well and could have been forgiven if he thought he might be able to rest a while before any other serious difficulty arose.

His breathing space lasted less than the fortnight. The Legislative Council group was again on his back. It was a matter which worried him greatly, though this time it concerned genuine Vietnamese refugees fleeing their own country. There were more than nine thousand in open and closed camps scattered throughout the territory and the number of new arrivals averaged about three hundred and fifty-five a month. Unfortunately, while this increase was over forty per cent a year the number being resettled in third countries was down more than thirty-five per cent. The net result was the number of refugees in the camps was growing and there seemed little hope in sight the trend would be reversed.

Then came a serious of bombs. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees paid a visit after seeing for himself what the situation was in Vietnam. Legislative Councillors had not been told he was coming and read about it in the press. They complained and secured an hour's meeting with the High Commissioner which produced little new information. A few days later the press announced the British Ambassador to Hanoi was to come to Hong Kong for talks with the Governor and Security Branch officials while Lord Glenarthur, the newly appointed Minister with Special Responsibility for Hong Kong, was paying a visit. Vietnamese refugees were high on the agenda for talks, but the Legislative Council group had once more not been informed.

They complained a second time and Downe thought the furore would die down after they were assured of a meeting with Ambassador Emrys Davies. That was not the end of it however. The convenor of the group had additional, more damaging points to make.

On March 30 the Hong Kong Government had stated that during the last two years the British Government "had not thought it appropriate" to raise the question of repatriation of refugees, something councillors had been calling for, with the Vietnamese authorities. The next day a British Foreign Office spokesman had added that the UK Government "had no intention" of discussing repatriation with Hanoi. Then in April the Legislative Council had been informed the British Government attitude of non-action on repatriation "is a thoroughly reasonable attitude."

But when Ambassador Davies had arrived in Hong Kong two days before he had said to waiting reporters that in relation to repatriation "the approaches we have made to the Vietnamese Government over a considerable period of time since early last year, have produced pretty negative results."

The cat was among the pigeons and Downe knew it.

The Legislative Council ad hoc group maintained "the two statements do not reconcile with each other", and that without a clear explanation of the discrepancies there was every possibility for members and the public to "cast doubts on the intentions of those involved". Someone, it appeared, was not telling the whole truth and they had been found out.

What had not been said, but which Downe foresaw, was that if a satisfactory answer was not given, the matter would escalate and there would be very pointed questions asked. For now, the queries were being raised relatively quietly and formally, but he feared it would be brought into the open. And what better way than to launch that attack on the opening day of the new Legislative Council session.

"That would bring in the masses," he muttered unhappily. "The galleries would be packed to the gills."

## Chapter Eleven

Just before lunch hour on Tuesday September 22 the Secretary General of Omelco received his copy of a confidential telegram from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. He read it quickly, distractedly and initialled it before tossing it into the brown plastic tray on the corner of his rather elaborate desk. Then he bent his head again and listened intently to the transistor radio in front of him which blurted out a flurry of Cantonese. As he listened, a frown deepening and clouding his features, he knew the issue of political reform would be the furthest thing from people's minds for that day at least, and most likely for some time after.

The one o'clock news bulletin was almost entirely devoted to a single item. The stock market was crashing. A massive two hundred and twenty-one points, almost ten per cent, had been swept from the financial counter board. The Hang Seng Index had plunged and was continuing down as gamblers bailed out in panic reaction to the dramatic early fall.

Like many others the Secretary General had predicted that when the markets opened on the morning the bears would outnumber the bulls and the soaring graph would halt and dip. After all, the trend had begun in New York on the Friday before and there was little doubt it would be mirrored in other financial centres. Added to this was the weekend news from the Gulf that United States warships had attacked and destroyed an Iranian oil platform resulting in an outburst from Iran that America was now involved in a full scale war. Analysts, professional and otherwise, knew immediately that western stock markets would react sharply while gold prices would shoot up. But they had not been prepared for the magnitude of the fall, and early in the day the frenzy of selling started.

Sydney was the first. Brokers were hit by a record fall of more than eight points on the All Ordinaries Index that had been perched at just over two thousand. Tokyo followed as small and large investor alike pulled out their cash, sending the Stock Exchange index down as an estimated six hundred million shares changed hands. Then it was Hong Kong's turn as within seconds of the market opening its doors for business the scream went up to sell everything. By the time the Secretary General sat listening to the radio news more than thirty billion Hong Kong dollars had been wiped off the value of the territory's shares. If it continued for the rest of the day the crash would be the biggest on record.

In London, those officials who had dictated the political telegram to Hong Kong would still be ignorant of the full extent of the catastrophe that was about to strike them. When they awoke they would find British brokers bracing themselves.

Wall Street would then, ironically, reel under the effects of the decline of the other European and Asian markets. The action they had triggered would come rushing back at them. For the rest of Tuesday September 22 moneymen around the world shook as the tremors grew into a monumental earthquake.

By the morning of Wednesday the devastation was clear. Sydney had lost twenty-five per cent or a whopping five hundred and fifteen points. Tokyo was continuing down, having already lost an incredible fifteen per cent of its share value. Hong Kong markets failed to open after an emergency early morning meeting, a decision fully backed by the cautious government administration. London had had nearly forty-five billion pounds knocked off share values, more than ten per cent of the market. Three hundred points had been wiped off the Dow Jones Industrial Average on Wall Street sending it below the key level of two thousands.

The sell off was equal to more than thirteen per cent. worse than the percentage drop on October 28 1929 in the Great Depression.

It had been twenty-four hours of chaos in all the western world's financial centres. When Jason Teller managed to reach his editor in the middle of the morning, he was put in his rightful place in no uncertain terms.

"Get off the line Teller," bawled Davidson. "I do not give a damn about you or your conspiracy at the moment. Nobody does. Don't you listen to the news any more? There's trouble in the real world."

Teller was about to put down the receiver without arguing as he fully understood Davidson's position when the editor continued: "I've lost my bonuses for the next three years because of this fiasco. Bloody stock markets. You must be the only one in Hong Kong not to care. You and your killer. He doesn't care either. Rang yesterday. Claimed he wanted you to call him. Can you believe that? With the world crashing around our heads he wants to have a chat. Shit."

Teller actually laughed. "Right. I can believe that. Glad you are keeping your sense of humour amid the turmoil."

"Listen Teller. That guy did call. Or at least someone pretending to be him did. Naturally it could very well have been some fucking loony getting his kicks. Probably was."

"Did he actually give you a number?"

Davidson fumbled papers on his desk and then read it out. Teller said: "Doesn't he know we could give this to the police?"

"Christ Teller," Davidson shouted. "Ask him. I don't know anything any more." He rang off. Teller sat quietly and stared at the telephone before him. He picked up the half eaten piece of toast on the plate to one side and nibbled at it pensively. The idea of passing the information to the authorities appealed to him. It could help put an end to the whole business and he would be able to get back to some sort of normal life, no longer having to hide away like a fugitive. It made sense. It was the right thing to do. For the past three days he had been confined to Brigit's flat, not venturing outside. The days were long and while he continued to write his daily column it had rapidly gone stale as he had nothing new to say. Consequently it had, not surprisingly, been pushed inside and this was something he readily accepted. Another few days and he knew he would have very little argument against it being dropped altogether.

If he was honest with himself he would have to admit that such a move would not entirely displease him. He was becoming bored and was anxious to gain his release from the temporary imprisonment.

He had begun to find some enjoyment in the daily children's programmes and soap operas on television, and looked forward to the middle of the afternoon when he could begin preparing his ever more daring meals. He was becoming a house husband without the official commitment, and it bothered him that he seemed to be enjoying the role so much.

Dropping the crust back on the plate Teller dialled the number of the accountant and listened as the pips sounded, followed by the buzzing pulses as the instrument waited to be picked up at the other end. He let it ring for thirty seconds and then replaced the receiver. Checking his notebook he dialled the Central police station and asked the officer who answered to put him through to the Chinese superintendent handling the murder enquiry. He was not in, he was told. Would he like to leave a message or speak to another officer? Never mind, he said, and hung up.

Another minute passed and Teller picked up the phone again. Slowly he dialled the Kowloon number he had scribbled down from Davidson. Almost immediately it was answered and a harsh Chinese female voice demanded: “*Wei? Wei bin wei?*”

“Hello,” he said. “*Wei*. My name is Teller. Is there someone who.....”

“*Wei? Wei? Wei?*” the woman’s voice was louder and more impatient.

“Teller,! he repeated, also louder and very slowly. “Teller. I think there might be.....”

He stopped talking as the woman babbled in the background and he caught the words “*gwai lo*” and “*din wah*”. She was calling out that a European was on the telephone. Calmly he waited to see if someone else would come on the line.

He did not have to wait long. A familiar man’s voice spoke. “Yes,” he said. “Who’s calling?”

“It’s Teller,” he replied, involuntarily catching his breath. “Jason Teller.”

“Hello Mr Teller.” The man sounded relaxed, confident, pleased. “You received my message. That’s good.”

Teller paused. “What do you want,” he asked. “How do you know I haven’t given the police this number and that they’re outside now?”

“Come now Mr Teller,” the man snickered. “I am not a fool. Even if you had it would be to no avail. As you can probably tell from the noisy background I am not in my own home. Besides, you have not done so. And that is something you can tell me. Why not?”

Teller switched the telephone to his left ear and picked up his pen with his right hand. He did not write on the pad but tapped the page with the point. “What do you want?” he asked simply.

“To talk Mr Teller,” said the man. “I want to talk to you about the things you are saying in your newspaper. You have become very uninteresting you know.”

“I thought you wanted to kill me,” Teller said. “But of course you can’t do that now can you?”

“When I am ready Mr Teller. Be sure of that. It will be in my time. But there is plenty of time. You can’t hide forever. And when you do come out I’ll be waiting.”

“Bullshit,” said Teller. “You’re lying. There is very little time left. You know it and I know it. I think you’re worried.”

There was a light laugh. “I have nothing to be scared of Mr Teller. Certainly not you. Everything is under control.”

Teller gambled: “I would not be too sure if I were you. Your plan for the seventh is already known. They’re closing in on you. And you know it too. So what do you want?”

The line between the two men was silent. Then the man said: “As I say, I want to talk to you Mr Teller.”

“You are.”

“Not on the telephone Mr Teller. This is so unsatisfactory. Let us meet.”

This time Teller laughed. It was a hollow sound, as he intended, more of a snicker. “You are a fool,” he said. “Do you expect me to believe you really want to sit down and talk? To let me actually see you? In a situation where I can arrange police to be watching?”

“You are right Mr Teller,” the reply was even, controlled. “It would be foolish of me wouldn’t it. We shall forget it. You stay in hiding. I’ll do what I have to do and we’ll see what happens. In the meantime Mr Teller I will enjoy my drinks with my friends.” The man continued: “Perhaps I will even tell them about you. Perhaps I will

tell them of this *gwai lo* who is terrified because he knows he is soon to die. They would appreciate that I think. The ladies have been abused by foreigners for many years, some I daresay have been hostesses here since long before you came to Hong Kong. It will amuse them to know that one foreigner is going to be punished. It is our turn now Mr Teller and there is nothing you or anyone else can do about it. Think of your death Mr Teller. Let the fear eat at your insides. And be sure, you are going to die.”

The connection suddenly clicked and began to hum continuously in Teller’s ear. He listened to it and also became aware of his own heavy breathing. There was no other sound, nothing to distract his racing thoughts. The man’s words were relaying back and forth in his brain and he had to shake his head to bring them to a stop.

“Damn,” he said under his breath. And then aloud: “Damn.”

He had indeed been foolish. Too smart by half. Why hadn’t he simply agreed to a meeting and then reported it to the police. He might, just might, have been able to stop this whole awful thing. Instead he had tried to outwit, or at least impress, the killer with his own powers of reasoning with the result that now the chance was gone. Not that he believed it had been a genuine chance. No meeting would ever have taken place. It was game that was being played. But that didn’t counter his own stupidity.

He brooded for five minutes and pictures formed in his mind as though on a split screen. In one half he sat alone waiting to be executed, defenceless, certain, while in the other a faceless assassin sat laughing and drinking surrounded by women smiling at the thought of his impending death. The women were all old and haggard. Then their features became clearer and he saw a dozen aging bar girls bearing the unmistakable scars of too many nights entertaining sailors, soldiers and foreign businessmen.

The images lingered. Then Teller began searching the shelves along the wall and the drawers in the table with urgent eyes and hands. He got up and went into the kitchen and switched on the light in the small storeroom in the corner. What he wanted lay on a shelf and he carried the bulky telephone directory back to the table in the sitting room. Flicking the pages he held the book open at the page headed RAE-REF and ran his finger down the list of business names.

Almost at the bottom of the column he found the address he sought. Between the Red Lion Inn and the Red Onion Restaurant was the Red Lips Bar. The address was 1A Lock Road and Teller read aloud the telephone number “3-684511”.

At the same time he checked off the number scrawled in black ink on his blue lined note pad. They were the same. The killer had been talking to him from the Red Lips Bar in Tsimshatsui just behind the Hyatt Regency Hotel, a block away from Nathan Road. He knew precisely where he was. His adrenalin spurred imagination which rekindled images of older ladies of the night and a wild shot in the dark had paid off.

Teller slammed the directory shut and smiled for the first time in days. “Not smart enough,” he whispered. “You said too much also Catskinner. Just a little too much.”

\*

The accountant was handed a message slip as he strolled through the Finance Branch of the Secretariat. He read it and quickly ascended the two flights of steps to the floor where his own bare office was situated. There he had a telephone call which lasted two minutes after which he called Gail Jones and sought an urgent meeting

with the Chief Secretary. Robert McNamara was deeply involved in seeking ways of minimising, or least bringing some level of control to the financial crisis, and as Gail Jones explained, the chances of a meeting on any other matter were remote. However, she knew Old Jack would not have made his request unless the matter was vital.

“He’s due back any minute,” she said. “It if can’t wait you can come down and have a coffee with me here.”

“Black,” the accountant replied. “No sugar. I’m sweet enough as you know lassie.” Ten minutes later they were laughing together when Robert McNamara rushed in.

“Jack,” he greeted the accountant and barked a string of instructions to his assistant. “You have one minute,” he added, “Sorry, but that’s all I have right now.”

The accountant followed him into his office and spoke quickly as the Chief Secretary perused papers bearing red, green or yellow flagged markers.

“He’s made contact. Asked in fact for a meeting. Teller refused. No more.” He paused briefly. “We had a trace but only managed the area. Tsimshatsui.”

Robert McNamara kept reading but said: “Not much.”

“No,. Not yet. But we’ll have the location soon.”

“How?”

“The phone number,” said the accountant. “We are checking the telephone company. Unfortunately it is taking longer than it should.”

“OK,” McNamara continued reading and picked up the grey phone on the shelf behind his desk. “Keep on it Jack. Despite all that is happening now this is important too. It’s just that this thing is more critical at this point.” Sharply he broke off and spoke into the phone. “Sir, the Financial Secretary will make his statement at four o’clock.”

The accountant closed the door quietly and smiled at Gail Jones as she listened to a report from her own junior secretary. “Thanks Gail,” he winked. “Buy on a falling market. But not on a plummeting one.”

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Teller had been sure some days before that he had not been followed as he made his way circuitously to Brigit’s flat. Nevertheless, he told himself he must not be complacent. If he was to chance his luck and venture out he would be wise to take precautions. Assuming he was being observed he could draw a number of conclusions.

First, the front of the building would be watched and no doubt there would be a fast unmarked car available to the persons or persons stationed outside. The rear exit would also be under surveillance, again with access to suitable transport. Third, and at the moment of most significance, if he was known to be inside the flat the telephone would have been tapped. Given that, the listeners would know where he had placed the call to the Catskinner. Or if not, they very soon would, so if he was going to move he would have to do it swiftly.

Disguise out of the question, Teller merely grabbed a fawn jacket and an umbrella and left the flat. The weather outside was uncertain and the promised cold front from the north had finally arrived. He rode the lift to the first floor where he alighted and walked the remaining flight to the street level. Peering around the corner he surveyed the lobby and the open outside area through the iron grille. There was no-one in sight. Across the passage was the watchman’s room where, in circumstances

like now when no guard was actually on duty, a watchman sat and was supposed to monitor a closed circuit television screen.

Teller stepped across the opening and pushed open the door. The watchman was absent, the room empty, with a grey screen perched on the far wall showing an equally empty lobby. For a minute he concentrated on the screen but it remained unchanged with nobody entering. The room had two other doors in addition to the one he had entered through. One led to the back of the building and a narrow alley which fed into Caine Road. The second, unusually, joined an identical room at the rear of the building next door. Both buildings had been purchased by a local shipping company that planned to redevelop them into a single luxury residential block. Until then the management had decided they could share security and the extra door had been put in. When Teller opened it and walked in he disturbed the watchman making himself a cup of tea over a small burner in one corner.

“*Tsosan,*” he said expansively. “Ahh. Cha. *Ho yum ahh?*”

The watchman grinned in reply and babbled a string of Cantonese, concluding that Teller must be fluent in the language if he could use a few words.

Teller smiled and responded with the common “*ah, ah*” grunts and nodded as though he understood the remarks. He followed this with a clear mention of Caine Road in English and headed for the door which led to what he believed would be another narrow lane at the rear of the building.

“No, no,” the watchman shook his head. Opening the door he pointed outside. There was no lane. Instead was a barren construction site fenced in by high hoardings. “No, no,” he repeated and began closing the door. Teller quickly stepped through and scanned the site, noticing a latched gate on the far side in the hoarding.

Tapping his wristwatch and saying “*faidee, faidee*” to indicate in basic Cantonese that he was in a great hurry he stepped further into the open.

“No. No, no.” called the watchman but Teller backed across the rocky earth calling “No worry. *Mgoi nei. Faidee.*”

The watchman scowled but watched as Teller ran to the hoarding and unlatched the gate. As he did so he smiled and waved at the watchman who dismissed him with a curt wave of his hand and disappeared back into his room. Teller pulled up the collar of his jacket and opened the umbrella. Holding it in front of him to conceal his face he pulled open the gate and stepped through into Caine Road. He closed it behind him and walked casually away with his head bent. He hoped that from behind or in front he would look like a construction worker or supervisor leaving the site. With his head down and his shoulders hunched his face would not be seen by anyone who may be watching.

A hundred meters further the road veered left and Teller rounded the corner with no haste. There he slipped into a little shop and bought a packet of cigarettes, watching in the direction from which he had just come for any followers. The only people who approached were an amah dressed in a black *samfu* and a schoolboy kicking an empty coco cola can on the sidewalk. Satisfied he had not been followed Teller hailed a taxi and ordered the driver “Holiday Inn, Nathan Road, Tsimshatsui.”

Settling low in the seat he took no notice as the diesel Datsun sped past the green and red hoarding at the rear of the building adjacent to the one where he had spent the last three days in self imposed captivity. The feeling of freedom was exhilarating and adrenalin began pumping through his veins with renewed vigour.

Behind him a young Chinese, casually dressed in faded denims and plain T shirt slouched in the front of a nondescript cream van with his feet on the dashboard, apparently listening closely to a pocket transistor with the plug in his left ear. He

ignored the passing taxi which continued east, threaded its way to the waterfront and settled into the flow of traffic entering the tunnel under the harbour. Once on the mainland the vehicle jostled with other cars, cyclists and lorries for four kilometres before nosing from a side street into busy Nathan Road, the artery of Kowloon's Tsimshatsui district.

Teller alighted in front of the Holiday Inn Hotel and wound his way through the crowds to the corner in front of the gleaming pillared Sikh mosque. A short block away was Lock Road and Teller rounded the corner and strolled past the shop fronts taking no interest in the products displayed or the Indian touts who tried to tempt him inside with promises of unbeatable bargains.

The Hyatt Regency occupied the left corner at the end of Lock Road. Opposite was a camera shop, a huge book depot, the entrance to the professional Club which, like many other journalists, he had haunted in its heyday as a cheap drinking hole staying open until the early morning hours, and a short narrow lane with an old sign hanging precariously outside which advertised in chipped red lettering "Red Lips Bar".

Teller spied it from some distance but did not cross the road. Instead he leaned casually with his back against the marble wall of an exclusive jade and gold jewellery shop and lit a cigarette. Drawing in the smoke he crossed his arms and concentrated on the human traffic passing the entrance to the lane. Most of the people were tourists and he was fascinated with their eager awareness of their surroundings in an atmosphere he was sure they, on their return home, would describe as Oriental mystique but which he now considered absolutely normal. Some were drawn into doorways to emerge minutely examining and discussing their purchases, more were content to merely watch others spending their dollars or to stare at the pretty girls who seemed to constantly parade along the sidewalk.

Teller knew the girls inside the Red Lips Bar would not attract the same admiring looks. To be precise none of them were girls at all. They were mature women, a number of them very mature indeed. There were literally hundreds of bars in Hong Kong and Kowloon where the hostesses were glamorous and exuded sex appeal. And once the Red Lips Bar had had its share of them. But no longer, because the same girls still graced the interior of the establishment even though they had years ago lost their looks. Now these plain and worn women sat playing cards, watching television or chatting noisily, ignoring the few regular customers who entered to buy beer rather than sexual favours. If a stranger wandered in there would be moment of activity, including the mandatory approach with a proposal, but there was no obvious disappointment at the inevitable rejection. They could easily be bribed to return to their cards with a cigarette each or the occasional bottle of San Miguel beer.

Teller had not been inside the bar for a long time but he could picture the scene. Perhaps the man he sought, the one who had murdered at least two people already so brutally and who had promised to kill him too, was sitting at a table or at the stained bar. He would not go into find out, but he could stand outside and scrutinise anyone who entered or left.

He did not know exactly what he hoped to find out. If the man was there and if he did emerge he would not be wearing a sign saying he was the Catskiner. Even if somehow Teller did suspect anyone, he had not thought about what he would do. He had acted on impulse when he had crossed harbour.

Half an hour later Teller had analysed this impulse and realised he had been foolish. There was nothing he could achieve.

Crushing his fourth cigarette with the toe of his shoe, he straightened and prepared to walk back along the route he had come towards the underground railway station. As he glanced across the road a Chinese man came out of the lane and their eyes met for a second. The man appeared in his thirties and was dressed neatly in slacks and open necked shirt with a light blue jacket reaching below his waist.

Teller blinked and the man stopped. He had a surprised expression on his face but this quickly became a grin and Teller knew instinctively he was recognised and that the Chinese was the killer.

At first Teller did not move. He stared at the man on the opposite sidewalk, seeing nothing but his face, the features clear despite the gap between them. The head was round, almost like a dish, with no blemishes. The forehead was high, the short cropped hair forming a shadowy border, and the small ears pinned back at the sides so that the oval outline remained unbroken. The skin was tight with no jowls on the sides of a hairless chin. The man's nose was undistinguished as was his mouth with rows of even teeth and the eyes were clear and shone. Teller took all this information in literally in the blink of an eye.

The man stood grinning back, but then the teeth vanished and the shutter closed over the eyes. He turned away and moved off in the direction Teller had intended walking. For five seconds Teller remained motionless, but when the man turned and looked at him again he stepped into the roadway.

Ahead of him the Chinese stopped and stared back. Teller slowed but continued following. Again the Chinese moved on so that he kept twenty-five paces in front. Teller broke into a run, brushing by pedestrians who cursed as he pushed them aside roughly.

Twenty meters from the intersection at the end of the road, when the distance between the two of them was no more than ten paces, the Chinese man wheeled around. Teller called out, foolishly he knew; "Stop!" and kept going, covering the gap quickly. Just as he was about to reach out and grab the man's shoulders the Chinese moved to the side and Teller crashed into a trolley being pushed by a hawker. He managed to regain his balance somewhat and spun around, automatically with his arms high protecting his head. The blue jacketed was in front of him and he felt a pain in his left forearm as something struck him with force. He twisted sideways and rolled with the blow, clawing with his hands at the flaying arms of the attacker. Another shock of pain burned into his arm but he thrust forward and closed his arms around the man's shoulders. They fell to the concrete and as he landed pain shot through his whole arm and Teller cried out.

The two men grappled on the sidewalk with the Chinese on top and Teller felt a second pain, not as sharp as the first, strike him on the left side. At the same time his head struck the iron wheel of the trolley and his senses dulled, the shapes around him flickering and fading. His limbs failed to respond to mental commands and he could just make out the blue jacket above him before blackness engulfed him.

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The man closed the door behind him as he entered the dark hallway of his Broadcast Drive flat and threaded the security chain through the steel ring in the plaster to the side. He walked into the bathroom beyond the sitting room, switched on the light and removed his jacket. It was torn on one elbow and he tossed it onto the seat of the toilet. He bent and cupped handfuls of cold water from the tap in the bath and sloshed it over his face. Towelling the water away with rapid light dabs he moved

to the side and looked into the mirror above the sink. Drops of water clung to his ear lobes and trickled from his chin as he studied his reflected face. Finding no marks he stared at the image. Then he quickly undressed and stepped into the bath. Under strong jets of cold water he lathered himself thoroughly, raking the cake of soap across and under his fingernails, and rubbed himself hard all over with a coarse hand towel. He repeated the cleansing and after the suds had been rinsed free he turned the shower off and stepped from the plastic tub to the tiles on the floor.

When he was dry he walked into the bedroom next door and examined his body in the full length mirror of the dresser. Despite the cold shower his skin was pink from the strong rubbing and it shone as if lightly sunburned. He ran his palm down his smooth chest and across the rippled muscles of his belly. At his navel he stayed his hand.

Turning away he dressed in a fresh set of clothes and returned to the bathroom where he picked up his soiled slacks, shirt and jacket. With his discarded undershorts he walked to the laundry where he dropped all but the trousers into a tall basket. Holding the slacks high in his left hand he searched the pockets with his right. He removed a handkerchief, some coins and two one hundred dollar notes, and a six inch black handled knife the type that a button on the side triggered the stiletto blade, tense against the spring embedded within. Placing the items on the shelf behind the basket he went through the pockets again, turning them inside out. Impatiently he retrieved the other items from the basket and searched their pockets also. They were empty.

Holding the shirt and jacket by his sides he stood and peered unblinking through the small bathroom window at the scarred hillside behind the building. Just before the clothing slipped from his fingers to the floor a shiver rippled his body.

\*

Teller succeeded in opening his eye lids at the second attempt. They were extremely heavy and felt bruised as the muscles behind them reacted to the message from the brain and cranked them up with difficulty. He uttered a low moan and closed them again hoping and waiting for the ache to go away. As he did so he heard voices. He initially thought they were distant as the words were faint and sounded muffled, but then he heard the voices again and they seemed nearer, close by. Once more he struggled to open his eyes. Looking down at him was a black face above a white shirt with a bright blue and red striped tie knotted tightly at the top. "Mister Teller," said the Indian in near impeccable English, no hint of a lift. "How do you feel Mister Teller? Can you hear me?"

"Yes," Teller heard himself say thickly. He looked from the dusky face to the foot of the bed and saw a second man. He had his back to him and appeared to be motioning to someone else Teller could not see.

The man slowly turned around. "You are not as intelligent as I thought," said the accountant. "In fact, you have been very foolish indeed. I should wash my hands of you and let you self destruct." He paused and a frown swelled the bags that had gathered above his cheeks. "Unfortunately I can't do that."

"What happened," mumbled Teller. "Where am I."

The accountant walked around the side of the bed and touched the Indian doctor on the shoulder who nodded and walked out of Teller's sight. The sound of a door closing preceded the accountant speaking again. "You are safe and in good hands," he said. "That's all you need to know for now though. You'll learn more soon

enough. But right now I want you to answer a few questions for me. Do that and I'll answer all yours. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough," replied Teller. He closed his eyes again and licked his dry lips. His mouth tasted awful and he tried focusing on the low table beside the bed.

The accountant picked up the beaker of water and handed it to him. When Teller handed it back empty the white haired man pulled up a chair, sat down and leaned close to the pillow. "What happened?" he asked. "Tell me everything. Everything since you left Miss Rolanne's flat."

"You know," said Teller. It was a statement, not a question. "You had me followed to Brigit's."

"That doesn't matter now," said the accountant. "Tell me about yesterday morning. You went to Tsimshatsui. Why?"

"I think you already know that," Teller said. "You probably had me followed there. But you should have a good talk to your minders. They're a bit slow off the mark in a crisis."

The accountant's expression hardened. "So tell me Jason. What exactly happened?"

Teller returned what he hoped was a look just as serious. "I was bloody nearly killed. I was mugged and by the way I feel I reckon I was either hacked or stabbed."

"Stabbed," said the accountant matter of factly. "Who did it?"

Teller did not answer right away. He was still groggy but his thinking was becoming clearer. "How should I know." He said. "I was hit from behind. Some thug who must have thought I was a tourist with a wallet stuffed with dollars. Or maybe some broker who's been hit himself by the market crash. Is that still on by the way?"

"Worse. But it wasn't a mugger. You know that. How did it happen?"

"I told you. I don't know."

"Listen Jason," The accountant said carefully. "Please. This is very serious. Much more so than before. You are in real danger."

"From a mugger?"

"He's not a mugger and you know it. He's the killer. A cold-blooded murderer who plans to kill again. You included."

Jason shifted in bed to ease the dull ache in his side. "Who else?"

The accountant leaned back in the chair, his expression still concerned, anxious. "Are you going to tell me what you know?"

"I've already told you," said Teller. "Now you tell me what I asked."

The accountant got up from the chair and walked to the end of the bed where he leaned his elbows on the iron rail and looked straight at the journalist. "During the mugging as you put it," he said, "you were stabbed with a knife or a thin sharp instrument. In the arm and in the rib cage."

"I thought he'd killed me."

"He would have if a civic minded American on holiday hadn't intervened. Your attacker apparently is smart enough to know when to hit and when to run. We missed him by minutes."

"And here?"

"Queen Mary Hospital," said the accountant. "We brought you in and they sewed up your arm and side. You'll be fine in a little while according to Dr Rao. In the meantime sleep some more. I'll be back later and we can talk again. I hope you change your mind. We've already lost another day and he's probably disappeared by now."

Teller struggled upright. "What do you mean we've lost a day? How long have I been here?"

"Twenty-four hours. You came in yesterday morning.

"Jesus," said Teller.

"Yes," said the accountant. "Well, think hard Jason. We don't have much time left. The longer you take the less we have."

When he was alone Teller lay back on the pillow and retraced the events as he could remember them. Everything was crystal clear in his mind up to the time he blacked out, above all the face of the killer, the man who had so very nearly snuffed out his life and who was arranging the death of other people also. Why and how many and who he didn't know. But that was not all he did not know. He also had no idea what to do. Perhaps the best thing was to tell the accountant all he knew and then go away for a long break until everything was sorted out one way or the other.

Teller pushed himself up to a sitting position and opened the top drawer of the bedside table. What he really wanted was a cigarette and with luck a packet might have been left. It wasn't. All he found was his wallet, his lighter, his bag and his folding umbrella lying diagonally across the drawer.

God how we craved a smoke. Just one and I'll quite for good, he said to himself. He had money so perhaps he could pay one of the staff to buy him a packet. He took the wallet and flipped it open. A piece of paper fell out and he picked it up and looked at it. It was a receipt for a deposit on a video recorder. Teller read it over a second time and folded it neatly, putting it back in one of the pockets of the wallet, and then called a cleaner and paid him a hundred dollars to get some cigarettes. When he had secretly finished one he telephoned the accountant.

"Do you know where that tourist is staying?" asked Teller. "I want to call him and thank him. He deserves that at least for his troubles."

The accountant hesitated. Teller added: "I'm pretty drowsy at the moment, but come and see me around seven o'clock and I'll tell you all I know."

Half an hour later he was connected to room 2615 at the Hilton Hotel and introduced himself to John Knuther Junior from Omaha, Nebraska. During the friendly conversation he thanked the American for being thoughtful enough to recover his belongings.

"No problem," said Knuther. "I'm just glad you're OK. The son of a bitch did enough to you. I wasn't going to let him cheat you out of your purchases to boot."

Teller said he was grateful and wished him a happy time for the remainder of his holiday.

"Don't you worry yourself son," said the Nebraskan. "Mary-Jo and I just love this wonderful city of yours You just make sure you get yourself well, you hear."

Teller rang off.

The American had most likely saved his life, but what he was not aware of was that he may also have saved the lives of others. The deposit receipt was not Teller's. It belonged to the killer. And at the top of the square sheet of paper was his name and address.

Teller next telephoned Brigit Rolanne. As soon as she heard his voice she began: "Where are you? What on earth happened? I have been worried sick. I come home and you're gone. No note or anything. Just gone."

"There was no time to ...." Teller tried.

"You could have left me a note. I didn't know what to think. You could have been dead for all I knew. You were gone all night."

“OK, OK,” said Teller. “I’m sorry. But something urgent came up and I had to move fast.”

“What? Where are you now?”

“I’ll explain everything later,” he said. “First, your phone is bugged. So just say yes or no to whatever I ask. Please.”

“My phone is what?”

“Bugged. Tapped. Someone is listening in. So please do what I say. Understand?”

“Yes,” said Brigit.

Teller sighed and took another cigarette from the packet on the table. “You know where Don goes for his midnight cup of tea all the time?”

“Yes.”

“If you had to get there could you do it without being followed? There are people watching your flat. You would have to lose them. Could you do that?”

“Heavens, I don’t know Jason. Let me think a while.”

“Take your time,” said Teller, well aware that his words were being listened to by someone other than Brigit. “You must be sure. Remember this conversation is being monitored.”

Three minutes passed before she spoke again. “Yes,” she said. “I can do it, but...”

“Alright then” said Teller, cutting her short. “I’ll let you know when. Probably not until tomorrow. I’ll talk to you again when I know more. I’ve got to go now, but I’ll call again in an hour.”

“Alright Jason,” said Brigit. “Are you sure you’re alright? I worry for you.”

“Don’t,” he said. “Everything is fine. I’ll phone in an hour.”

When he had hung up Teller eased himself into a sitting position on the side of the bed. He caught his breath at the pain in his side, but it was better than when he first woke. It was an ache and no longer stabbed at him. Cautiously he stood and walked to the cupboard in the corner of the room. He had made up his mind what to do. The accountant would be coming to see him expecting to find out all he knew. Taking his time Teller removed his gown and dressed in his clothes that had been placed in the cupboard. He rinsed his face in the sink, gathered his things from the drawer in the bedside table and picked up the phone again. Only twenty minutes had passed.

When Brigit answered he said sharply. “Now. Go right now. Wait for me there. No matter how long, wait for me.” Teller dropped the receiver and moved to the door of the hospital room. All he had to do now was to evade those he knew would be stationed outside the building.

## Chapter Twelve

When Teller walked into the coffee shop of the Lee Gardens Hotel three hours later Brigit waved urgently to him from an alcove in the far corner, facing the entrance. And when he approached she rose and put her arms around his neck and gave him a warm kiss on the mouth. Teller winced and pulled away.

"I'm sorry," she said defensively. "I should not have done that." She turned abruptly and slid back onto the seat.

He eased himself beside her. "Don't be," he said. "It's been a long time. I missed it."

"You have a strange way of showing it," Brigit's gaze was fixed on his face, but when she noticed the bandage on his arm she exclaimed: "What is that Jason. What happened to you?"

"It's not serious," Teller responded. "I ran into our friend and he proved to be more agile than I was."

He went on to explain the events over the past twenty-four hours, stopping for her numerous interruptions, and when he finished she put her hand lightly on his. "Jason, I'm scared. I am really frightened for you. Please, let's go to the police and let them look after it. It's far too dangerous."

"I've already arranged to talk to someone," he said. "Not the police, the accountant. He's in a higher, or a better, position to do something."

"Good," Brigit said, then: "When?"

"Tonight." Teller looked into her face and saw lines at the corner of her eyes. To him they were no more than traces of frequent laughter, though he knew she would regard them with loathing and would magnify them more in her own mind than they would be in a mirror. He had to admit, however, that recent incidents had deepened them. Without taking his eyes from her he went on: "When I saw the accountant in the hospital this morning I was in two minds. I was angry at being nearly killed for something I am just trying to report on, and I wanted to get out of the whole thing also because it has nothing directly to do with me."

"It's something the police should be handling," interrupted Brigit. "Not you."

"You're right I know," Teller answered. "But now I can't just drop it. I am personally involved. The bastard tried to kill me. It's become a personal thing almost. Him against me. Me against him."

"For god's sake Jason. No-one's playing a game. That man is a murderer and he's out to make you his victim. Tell the police. See your friend tonight and give him everything You can and then go on a holiday somewhere. Anywhere but don't stay here. Don't do something stupid."

Teller held her look. "I can't" he said quietly. "I can't let it go. I am partly responsible. I have to do something."

"You've done enough. More than enough. You uncovered and revealed this animal for what he is." Her reasoning was intense and he could see the fear and anger in the pink rash discolouring her neck. "You even found him, saw what he looked like, and almost died because of your involvement. Don't you think that is more than anyone can expect?"

When Teller remained silent and fingered the stainless steel knife on the paper place mat in front of him, she added: "You can do no more Jason. Give it up. Let the authorities do it. Let them find out who he is and arrest him."

Teller looked up. He stopped toying with the utensil and looked squarely at her. "I know who he is," he said. "I know his name. I know where he lives. I even know he put a deposit on a video machine at a store in Humphreys Avenue the day before yesterday."

"What?" Brigit almost shouted the question. She noted the couple at the table opposite and then leaned forward and repeated in a whisper: "How could you know that?"

He told her about the receipt and removed it from his wallet, placing it on the table before her. "You see," he said. "I can't forget it now."

"What are you thinking Jason? You're not going to do something foolhardy are you?"

The word was perfectly in keeping with her accent somehow. While most people would use the appendix *ish* Brigit, who had largely taught herself to speak English on native soil, used the correct noun with the contraction at the back of her throat. He smiled wanly and the corners of his mouth rose, but his eyes were cold, tired. "I'm going to check in here for a while. And I'm going to think things over very clearly. What I am not going to do is involve you any further. I want you out of this mess."

"Yes," she said. "Well, you can't get rid of me that easily. You have involved me whether you like it not. I'm in and I'll stay in so long as I can help you."

Teller was about to protest but she help up her hand to silence him. "Anyway, you said yourself my flat is being watched and my telephone has been tampered with. So I think I should stay away from there also. I'll move here."

"Now you're the one being foolish," said Teller. "Why on earth would you want to do that?"

Brigit smiled. "For an intelligent journalist you are not very perceptive."

"Brigit," he began "I..."

"No more, yes?" she said quickly. "That is agreed." She bent and picked up a large shoulder bag from under the table. "You see, I too can plan ahead. I have brought my things. Now we should go and see if this hotel has any qualms about an unwed couple checking in together." Again the smile lit up her face. "You did not mind in London. Do you mind here?"

He rose with her. "No," he answered. "I don't mind. I don't mind at all."

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While Teller and Brigit were discussing their particular and immediate futures, the rest of Hong Kong was continuing to reel from the devastating effects of the financial crisis that had shaken the western world's stock and futures markets.

Billions of dollars had been wiped from accounts and in an act of desperation the Board of Directors of the Hong Kong market had closed the doors to the floor for the remainder of the week.

Markets in Australia, Japan, London and on Wall Street struggled through the second shock waves but the territory's marker boards were clear. The effect of this unprecedented move added to the local consternation and foreign suspicion. The reason for the closure, that it was ordered so that brokers could clear the backlog of paper transactions, was generally disbelieved and a volley of accusations were hurled at the Stock Exchange Board and the administration which had quickly supported the decision.

One of the most vocal critics was again the Legislative Councillor Martin Lee. His opening salvo was not unexpectedly aimed at the legality of the action. In a minute examination of the conditions controlling the operation of the market, he maintained the closure was unconstitutional. He followed this with a resounding call for the Exchange Chairman to resign. A barrage of acrimonious words were exchanged as Lee gathered supporters, most, if not all of them, victims of the crash. The torrent of injured cries rose by the hour and between Tuesday, September 22 and Thursday, September 24 Hong Kong seemed almost to be suspended in time. Paradoxically, the interest in the financial situation was greater during the time of Exchange inactivity than it had ever been during the most bullish of periods.

But for all else in the territory there was little interest. The anxiety was exemplified by two incidents which took place on Wednesday September 23. In the Legislative Council that afternoon a councillor was granted permission to ask a late question on the crisis. The Financial Secretary answered it in predictable administrative jargon. But if he had expected the matter to rest there he would have been sorely disappointed. A series of searing supplementaries followed and at the end of the session there was no doubt the protagonists had reached for their big guns. Lines had been drawn.

As that confrontation was taking place, the Chairman of the Stock Exchange was giving a press conference to express his pre-emptive action to the financial media. From the outset he was unsettled and the wear of four days of long, wearying manoeuvring showed clearly on his face. The press conference opened sharply and was honed with each stabbing question.

The climax surprised everyone. A foreign journalist asked the Chairman to explain how he could close the market without being in breach of the law. Perhaps the question could have been more diplomatically framed. But the direct words and indirect implication had been uttered and the Chairman reacted. As an astonished press corps watched and recorded, the Chairman erupted and threatened to have the offending journalist arrested and prosecuted for slander. It was an outburst which did nothing to ease the minds of those who had already suffered in the crash. Television screens that night removed any lingering doubts that Hong Kong was in the grip of destructive panic. And the newspapers the next morning replayed in slow motion the events of the previous twenty-four hours, second guessing more devastation on the horizon. They were not to be proved wrong.

As bundles of newsprint landed on the streets to be gobbled up by workers heading for their offices, the Financial Secretary who had taken a battering in the Legislative Council the previous afternoon sat at a table with his head on his hand, cocked to one side in a weary resigned pose. He knew the action he was about to take was fraught with risks.

But he had been left with no alternative. With the closure of the Futures Exchange, or Hong Kong's legal casino as detractors called it, a large number of brokers were backed up against a wall. There was no way commitments could be met. It was therefore agreed that the government would have to step in with a rescue package if total collapse of the markets was to be avoided. The size of that package was set at two billion Hong Kong dollars – with another two billion kept in reserve in case the first injection was insufficient. An emergency Executive Council meeting had sanctioned the bale-out and all Legislative Councillors were urged to publicly support it.

At midday on Thursday September 24 Omelco issued a statement backing the bale-out. Also at midday the Chief Secretary walked into the office of the accountant and slumped down heavily in a vacant chair.

“God I’m tired,” he sighed.

The accountant said nothing.

“So talk to me about something that has nothing to do with dollars and cents or stocks and shares please,” said McNamara. He lifted his lined face and tried to smile. “How is your problem Jack? Have we made any progress there?”

“Yes and no,” said the accountant, and described in succinct detail the Lock Road incident and its aftermath.

“And he’s going to tell all and then get out of it tonight, eh?” The Chief Secretary ran a hand across his forehead and roughly down over one eye. “That’s good Jack. Good.”

“I’m afraid not,” said the accountant. “He said that yesterday. Then he left the hospital. We’ve lost him again.”

The Chief Secretary sat still and stared at the man on the other side of the table for a long thirty seconds. Slowly he heaved himself out of the chair and left the office without saying a word.

The accountant knew no words were necessary. He knew what had to be done, and there was no need to be told what it was. Teller had to be found, squeezed and then made to remain silent. Then, maybe then with luck, the real quarry could be tracked down and silenced too. But the accountant was only too well aware that if they were right in their timetable they had less than two weeks to do what had to be done.

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“I thought they weren’t going to do it,” laughed Brigit. “The girl behind the counter gave us a terrible look. I think I am supposed to feel like some harridan.” She stopped and thought, holding her smile. “Harridan. That is the word. Yes?”

“You’re right with the word,” answered Teller, “but wrong in the interpretation. I think that girl was jealous of you. Not because you were with me, but because you had the courage to do what she has probably longed to do for years but has not had the courage.”

Brigit raised her eyebrows and Teller continued: “Sure, there is as much illicit sex here as there is in London or anywhere else. And she most likely has seen it pass before her a thousand times. But she is Chinese and in spite of what you may think, in spite of the reputation of this place, the local people are very proper generally. She might like to spend a night with her boyfriend in a hotel room but she wouldn’t do it. For girls like her, sex comes much later. But you know that surely.”

“We’re not here for sex,” said Brigit.

“Don’t tell me. Tell her,” Teller laughed.

He was standing by the window, holding the white lace curtain to one side and looking down into the street eleven floors below. The throb in his arm had disappeared but his side still ached and as he let the curtain fall he felt the bandage wrapped around his waist with the tips of his fingers.

“Does it hurt?” Brigit asked from the bed where she was sitting. He turned and faced her. “A little,” he answered. “Not much. Though I think I might have overdone it a little today. A bit too soon I mean.”

“You should not have left the hospital. You could have made it worse running around like this.” Suddenly she stood up and pulled the cover of the doubt bed down. “Come on,” she said. “Get in here and rest for a while. It will do you no harm.”

Teller was about to protest but he could see she was standing her ground, hands on her hips. “Don’t argue Jason. There is no reason why you cannot. I can wake you up in a few hours if you like and we can decide then what to do.”

“What are you going to do while I’m sleeping away here?” he asked. “Sit and watch over me like Florence Nightingale?”

“No thank you. I’ll go and have my hair done next door at Rever. I was planning to do it myself today but now I have the perfect excuse to pamper myself. I might then drop into the coffee shop for a cup of tea and a croissant.”

“Be careful about that Brigit,” warned Teller. “I don’t think anyone should see you and put two and two together.”

“Alright,” she said. “I’ll skip the tea and whatever. You’re probably right. Don might decide to drop in on his way home from work. When I come back I’ll wake you if you’re still asleep and we can have something sent up. Yes?”

Teller stripped down to his undershorts and slipped into the bed. “Thank you,” he said. “I’m sorry to cause you all this trouble. You can leave, you know. Any time you like.”

“I am now,” she smiled and bent quickly and brushed her lips against his. “But I’ll be back.” Picking up her handbag she left the room with the instruction. “You rest, yes.”

Teller pulled the cover up against the brisk air conditioning of the hotel and stared at the cream ceiling. His limbs relaxed and his eyes felt suddenly heavy, but his mind was active as he concentrated on what he had made up his mind to do. Not that there were many details he had to memorise. In fact his plan, if it could be called that, was very simple. In the morning he intended checking out of the hotel and crossing to the other side of the harbour. While the Lee Gardens was good for now he was not confident it would remain secret. It was too close to his home and somehow the physical removal from the island would put him further out of reach of those who might be looking for him.

As soon as he had done that he planned to visit the address at the top of the video purchase receipt. He would pay a surprise call on the Catskiner. It was dangerous but that was as far as his planning went. He knew he should in theory have it all worked out in the minutest detail, but that was not possible. He would have to play it by ear, depending on what he found.

His eyes closed but he forced them open again and stared blankly at the ceiling. They closed again and he did not fight it this time. His breathing slowed and he could hear the air whistling through his nostrils in deeper and deeper breaths until finally even that faded and he was immersed in a blanket of warm cloud which carried him into a deep sleep.

He awoke to a warmth pressed against his ribs and a slight pressure on his chest. It was not unpleasant or uncomfortable, soothing in fact and he fluttered his lids open and turned his head. Brigit lay beside him under the covers, her face close to his, her eyes shut and her short auburn hair arranged in a spiked fringe across her forehead. Her left arm rested on his chest, her open hand lightly touching the bandage on his ribs. He could feel her right arm stretched beside the length of his body, strong, somehow reassuring.

Without intending to he contracted his breast muscles and tensed his stomach turning away to once more look up at the ceiling. The overhead fluorescent lighting

had been dimmed but the sliding cupboard doors in the corner were open and the interior light cast a soft ghostly glow into the room. His movement was not sudden but it was registered by Brigit who inhaled a sharp breath and stretched languidly, sensuously in slow motion.

Her right hand clenched and her left arm slid down his chest onto his stomach, flat and open on his crotch. He twitched, relaxed and twitched again. Fully awake he felt her hand react slightly but it did not move away. Again, he shuddered and his scrotum tensed. At the same time he brought his left arm up behind her back and put his hand on her shoulder, gently pressing her closer. Slowly her hand moved back and forth and his own breathing quickened. He slid his hand across the bra strap and down her naked side to her hip where her panties elastic cut into the skin.

As he slipped his fingers under the band her left hand glided up to the end of his undershorts and her little and third fingers dipped beneath. For half a minute he lay motionless feeling his arousal grow and sensing her steady but quickening breath. He closed his eyes too and pushed his hand under the cotton garment gently but firmly caressing the smooth rounded flesh. He turned to her and kissed her lightly on the lips and screamed inside when she responded moistly and took him full in her hand.

She buried her face into his neck. "Jason," she murmured.

They clung together and when they came ten minutes later, sweaty and impulsively she arched her head back into the pillow and sighed a low sad-sounding moan. Side by side they lay naked on the top of the bed, the glow from the single bulb in the cupboard throwing a silver glint on their damp bodies. In silence they drifted until once more, tenderly they joined and made love slowly, carefully but passionately, their lips exploring and their hearts pounding.

When again they separated he looked across at her and touching her lips with his forefinger he said: "I've missed you. More than I realised."

"Don't Jason," she whispered. "Please don't say any more."

Outside it had been dark for some time and had they been aware of it they would have noted the rain had returned, beating the dust and dirt from the buildings and washing it along the gutters into the underground drains. On a normal Thursday evening Hysan Avenue where the Lee Gardens Hotel was situated would be alive and bustling with taxis and private sedans cruising in busy continuity while pedestrians came and went from the crowded shopping precincts and the nearby cinema.

But at eight o'clock on this night the traffic on the road was lighter and the sidewalks were almost deserted, save for a few brave souls not prepared to give up their sightseeing or not yet ready to go indoors to the dry but noise of the bars and discos that would in another two to three hours fill to overflowing.

Neither Teller nor Brigit were attracted often to the strobe lights of the entertainment establishments that had proliferated in the late seventies and then blossomed into huge drink and hostess palaces by the mid-eighties, preferring separately the sedate relaxation and enjoyment of pursuits such as films and friendly home gatherings and dinner parties.

With their own companions of the time they had experienced a few occasions of high octane nightlife, once even joining tables and dancing until the early hours of the morning, but they were not regular customers as so many of the younger set were.

And Hong Kong had a very large young generation. Well over half the population was in the age group that revelled to the music of Wham!, Duran Duran, Bob Marley, KC and the Sunshine Band, Prince and the electric Michael Jackson.

But like everything else that was changing. Population growth was decreasing and in a few years would be well below one per cent. At the same time emigration was increasing. And people were living longer in a territory which itself was thought to have a shorter and shorter life expectancy. By 1997 the demise of the ballrooms, hardly helped by the new communist masters of Hong Kong's destiny, would be unstoppable. Life would certainly never be the same again and it was the young professionals who would suffer most.

At least that was a growing belief.

The vast majority of low and even lower income earners who were most concerned with making enough to survive, would be able to adapt to the changes foreseen without their existences being turned upside down. Life would continue for them. Life would also continue for the wealthy who would be able to settle elsewhere and see to their families' wellbeing in societies not threatened by a political time-bomb that could be triggered by events outside their direct control or influence. They either had passports to freedom or contacts or sheer cash to rent that freedom. It was the growing sandwich class that stood to lose the most. The professionals who were raised in the belief of Westminster freedoms, but who possessed neither the travel document nor the influence to guarantee the pursuit of those beliefs. They were the ones who had nowhere to go, no control over their futures, no choice but to accept and try to cope with whatever changes came their way. It was they who the so-called democrats claimed had been sold out by the British when deciding on the form of post 1997 Hong Kong.

Yet it was these same people on which so much depended to see Hong Kong through the next decade. Some of the most influential served in the Legislative Council and it was once more to that arena which Teller and Brigit had turned as they lay drawing on cigarettes in the pale light which illuminated the room and blotted out the wet gloom of the outside world.

"Your security friend will be angry that you deceived him," Brigit said. "Will he come looking for you?"

"I'm sure of it," Teller replied. "He knows I know more than he does, and he considers I'm in the way. He has to get me out of the way."

Brigit reached across him and stubbed out her cigarette in the ashtray. "Do you think he'll come here then?"

"Soon enough he'll start on the hotels and this one won't be too far from the top of the list."

"What can we do then? Where can we go?"

Teller told her of his plan to check into the Hongkong Hotel in Kowloon in the morning.

"What good will that do?" she asked. "You said yourself he'll be checking them all. He won't miss that one."

"I've thought of that," he replied. He had also considered out of the way motels, dingy guest houses and other less obvious haunts. However, he had rejected all. The accountant would have them checked as well and a *gwai lo*, now two *gwai los*, would stand out like the proverbial tree in the desert. "The only way is to move in their without the hotel staff knowing it."

"How on earth can we do that," Brigit enquired doubtfully. "We have to register."

"Someone has to," he corrected. "But it needn't be us in person. We have to find someone who can register as the paying guest but then pass the keys on. We'll be there, but according to the records we won't be. The guest will look nothing like us.

Those who come looking will not find anyone who resembles me or you staying there.”

“Who do you have in mind?”

He put his own cigarette out and sat hunched on the side of the bed. “I don’t know yet. But it has to be tomorrow. For all intents and purposes we have to vanish.”

It was left in this state of indecision while Brigit luxuriated in a long warm bath topped with green bubbles courtesy of the hotel. When she emerged half an hour later she looked radiant, her skin shining and loosely draped in a white woollen robe, and her hair brushed back.

She smiled and said: “I think I can solve our problem with the hotel. I know someone who can do exactly what we want.”

However, when he pressed her for details she just laughed. “No. I’m not going to tell you. This is my contribution. But you can trust me completely,. There is no way we’ll be linked.”

She came to him and linked her arms around his neck and looked into his eyes. “I’m awful I know, but that bath has left me tingly all over. I feel sexy.”

“And you look sexy too, and gorgeous,” said Teller, easing the robe from her shoulders. As it fell to the floor he picked her up in his arms and carried her to the bed. “We can worry about tomorrow later,” he said. “Right now I want you. I want to make love to you over and over and over. I lost you once before. I’m not going to let you go again.”

She hungrily pulled him down to her, filling his senses with her scent, and pressed her nakedness to him.

“You won’t have to my darling,” she said. “Nothing will separate us now.”

## Chapter Thirteen

The Editor in Chief of the South China Morning Post was not pleased with his secretary interrupting his reading of the papers at eight thirty on Friday morning. She knew, as he frequently felt he had to remind her, that until an hour later he was not to be disturbed. Of course he was aware of the general content of the Post before he and it had gone to bed, but as a matter of practice he read it thoroughly each day before he did anything else. Then he spent time going through the Standard and over the summary of the news in the thirteen Chinese newspapers he classed as real newspapers. The other sixty which appeared on any given day, not always the same ones, he dismissed as “dunny rags”. Davidson had roared his anger at the girl but she was firm and told him the caller was waiting outside in reception, and said was a matter of extreme urgency that he see the editor. She added necessarily that he was a European and from the government.

“Goddamit,” he blurted. “Civil servants don’t start work until midday. What is he doing here at this time of the morning? Is he some sort of queer new foreign import who doesn’t yet understand how things go in this village?”

The girl didn’t move. She hated the editor’s bluster and uncouth manners, but she was used to them and knew he would relent after he had vented his spleen.

“Go on then,” said Davidson. “Get him in here. I suppose I’ve got to see for myself such a civil servant. I don’t think I’ve ever seen one awake and moving this early before.”

A few minutes later the secretary steered the visitor between the desks and past computer terminals to the glass cubicle in the middle of the cavernous room. Davidson pushed himself out of his chair and extended his hand, offering a seat with the other. “Coffee?” he asked perfunctorily.

When the girl left with two orders the editor dropped back into his chair and began emptying his pipe into an untidy ashtray on the desk. “What can I do for you?” he asked. “Any problems?”

The man across from him smiled and crossed his legs. “Thank you for seeing me without an appointment,” he said. “I know you must be busy.”

“Yes,” said Davidson. “We get moving pretty early as you can see.” He waved a hand in the direction of the occupied desks outside and pointedly at his own cluttered table with an open copy of the opposition paper, and repeated: “Any problems?”

“Not really,” the man answered. “I’m looking for one of your reporters. Nothing serious. Personal. I would just like to see him about a story he’s working on. Jason Teller. Do you know where I might reach him?”

Davidson began refilling the bowl of his Petersen’s. He paused before answering. “He’s taking a bit of leave actually. But if he calls in I can let him know you were asking after him. You came in personally to ask that? Any particular message I can give him?”

“That would be helpful, thank you. But do you have any idea where he is at the moment?”

“No.”

“It’s rather urgent” persisted the visitor. “We would appreciate any assistance you might be able to give us. Has he called you recently? Last night? This morning?”

Davidson put a match to the tobacco and sucked. "I've not spoken to him for a few days. As I say, he's taking a bit of time off. And we've been rather preoccupied with the stock market crash and the fallout from that."

"Of course. I see his daily column was stopped."

"For the moment, yes. We don't have the space."

The editor studied the government man through the pall of thickening smoke. He was certainly no newcomer to the service. In fact, he knew of him by reputation and although the business card simply gave his name and his employer as the Hong Kong Government, he knew there was much more to the casual approach than seemed on the surface.

"Is it about his stories that you want to see Teller?" he asked.

"In a way," the man answered. "I'm sure you know as well as anyone he can't substantiate his hypothesis. Unfortunately until the proper authorities affect an arrest they can't say more than they already have. So we have an awkward situation of sorts. That's why we would like to talk to him. To clear up any misunderstanding."

"Not personal then," said Davidson. "Well, if he calls in, which I doubt, I'll let him know. Anything else I can help you with?"

"I don't think so. That was it. As I say, it is fairly urgent we get together as soon as we can."

"Right. Well, thank you for dropping in."

The man stood up and they shook hands again.

As the door to his office closed Davidson cursed. "Bloody hell! Who do they think they're kidding?" He watched the man walk back through the office, occasionally smiling at reporters, and disappear into the reception area.

Outside the accountant turned up his coat against the light drizzle and headed for the underground railway station in King's Road. There was no doubt in his mind that the editor, and the paper as a whole, would not help him locate Teller. Not that he had really expected they would. But he had to make sure, and had to make it clear by turning up in person, that the matter was serious. At least he now knew for certain that he could discount Teller's employers as a possible source of assistance. When he got back to Central he would follow up on how other enquiries were proceeding. Checks through the night had turned up nothing either at the journalist's flat or that of his girlfriend.

He'd leave two men on the list of acquaintances who could be helpers and detail three more – the number of backup support had already grown too large for his liking but they had become essential – to start on the hotels.

Just as the editor had done he cursed. "Damn," he muttered against the rain. October seven was only thirteen days away and he still did not seem to be making any meaningful headway. To the contrary he had now lost track of one of the key players in the drama.

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The taxi sped through the cross harbour tunnel towards Kowloon, having slowly negotiated the congestion at the Hong Kong Island entrance where four lanes of traffic were required to converge into half that number. The two lines of vehicles noisily belched carbon gas into the confined space and, as he always did, Teller looked out the window to see if any cracks had appeared in the walls which might forecast a sudden tidal wave of water that would drown out all those trapped inside.

The tunnel was fourteen years old and there had never been any suggestion of inferior workmanship or inaccurate calculations in its design, but Teller had invariably made his inspection on every harbour crossing. He had never even detected a suspect mark on a wall which for some peculiar reason seemed to disappoint him. Perhaps it was the journalist in him that made him almost wish for such a disaster. It would be a huge story.

He had often heard the anecdote about one of his former news editors who on a particularly quiet day had jokingly called to a copy boy who was proud of the fact that he was recently converted to Christianity and ordered him to pray for news. The story had it that almost immediately the lad complied the police radio crackled a report that a passenger *walla walla* had capsized and sunk in the harbour, drowning some of those onboard. Ever since then, when news was scarce, the news editor shouted for the copy boy, demanding a jumbo jet crash in Kowloon City, the collapse of a high-rise apartment block or something at least as worthy of a front page lead.

Teller could not swear to the story's accuracy but he would not be surprised at the news editor's irreverent demands. There were stranger stories told of editorial department goings on. After all, he himself scrutinised the sides of the cross harbour tunnel on each journey, and it was the possibility of a big story, accompanied by a by-line, that motivated him, not fear.

Fear was tangible. Like the fear he had felt when he found the dead cat in his bed. Or when he found Amelia Tse's body in her bed. But he was not afraid now. He was exhilarated. Here he was sitting next to the woman he desired and now knew he loved, heading off with a view to continuing a deadly game that common sense told him he should not be party to, but which he could not reject.

He squeezed Brigit's hand and recalled their love-making hours earlier. It was just before she made a telephone call and confirmed the arrangement of the previous night that at eleven-thirty they would meet their mysterious helper at the Hongkong Hotel. They spent those hours talking over old times and making undefined plans for the future. And making love once more.

At ten thirty they paid the hotel bill and caught the taxi at the rank outside. They were content now to sit in silence as the red and silver sedan stopped to pay the ten dollar toll and then continue along the crowded labyrinth of Tsimshatsui streets to Canton Road where it drew up outside the Hongkong Hotel. As soon as they sighted Brigit led them away from the main doors to an array of escalators at an entrance back along the way they had come.

"Where are we going?" asked Teller.

"Don't argue," she replied sternly. "Just come with me."

At the top of the escalators they wound their way into the maze of Ocean Centre, the confusing addition to the massive Ocean Terminal which was billed as the largest single shopping complex in Asia when it opened twenty years before. The dazzling range of shops sold virtually everything from a packet of wood toothpick splinters to the ultimate in luxury limousines. Liners from around the world berthed alongside and tourists lost themselves for days, filling bags with intricately embroidered jackets, antiques, I-Love-HK T-shirts, ivory carvings, wooden and soapstone statues, and hi-fis and cameras that they would learn on their return home were really no cheaper and in some cases were more expensive than elsewhere in Hong Kong.

Brigit took Teller down another two flights of escalators into a tropical coffee shop where she halted a moment and then walked directly towards a table under a

canopy of ferns which almost obscured it. As she approached a man stood up, brushed the fronds away and clasped her in a tight bear-hug.

“Brigit,” he beamed. “How are you my darling? You look ravishing. Casual, but stunning.”

Brigit lingered and then broke away from him. “But you look a little tired. You have been playing too much and not resting.”

“My dear I have been in bed by ten every night since I arrived.” His smile was broad and mischievous. “Though I must admit I didn’t leave it until much later and return to my own room.”

She feigned distaste. “You’re a cad. If you’re not careful you’ll be caught one day and cut off in your prime.”

“Oh god,” he gasped, hurt. “Don’t say cut off.” Then he smiled again and addressed Teller. “Forgive this unpleasant talk. I am Ajit Khan. I believe I might be of some assistance to you. If Brigit says I can help you I will try. No further justification is necessary.”

Teller returned the strong handshake and took an instant liking to the burly Sri Lankan. He nodded to Brigit. Khan was warm, welcoming. Black as soot, he was also the complete opposite of what their hunters would be looking for.

“Jason Teller,” he said. “I hope we are not inconveniencing you too much.”

“Not at all, not at all,” said the Sri Lankan. “It is my pleasure, as I said. Now tell me, what do I do with this?” he asked producing a key from his pocket with a large metal plate attached on which was engraved the name of the hotel. They sat at the table and talked over a glass of beer while Brigit had a cup of her favourite tea and a generous slice of cheese cake.

Teller learned that Khan was a close friend of Brigit’s from their London days. He had been in Hong Kong on a mixture of business and pleasure for the past ten days. He had been staying at the Regent on the Tsimshatsui East waterfront and was due to fly out later that night. But when he received Brigit’s telephone call he had booked into the Hongkong Hotel first thing that morning in his own name. The plan was to give the keys to Brigit and Teller, and for them to take over the room. When it came to paying the bill at the end of the stay – two weeks in total had been reserved but could be shortened if necessary – Teller would pay on Khan’s behalf. Company payments were made as a matter of routine and no-one would query it.

After half an hour they walked into the main lobby of the hotel and entered the lifts to the right of the row of reception desks. On the twenty-third floor they turned left into the carpeted corridor and located room 2307. As a pair of cleaning ladies approached, followed by a floor attendant in bright livery, Teller took the key from his pocket and opened the door. The three of them entered. The floor attendant who was responsible for level 23 would have no reason to suspect Teller was not the rightful occupant of the room. Downstairs at the reservation desk the computer, if asked, would list Mr Ajit Khan from London as the guest who had checked in. Any enquirer would be told that the guest in room 2307 was not a Caucasian man and woman. He was a large coloured gentleman who was happy to pay the extra tariff for the comfort of a double suite. They were in.

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As soon as Brigit, Teller and Khan had entered the lift, a man sitting at a table in the middle of the lobby folded the newspaper he was reading, placed a twenty dollar

note under the empty glass and stepped down from the raised area. Unobtrusively he walked into the Gun Bar some twenty paces away, next to the step up entrance, and selected a table in the corner. He ordered a cup of coffee and reopened the newspaper. But he did not read it. Though he gave the impression he was concentrating on the articles he was in fact closely watching everyone who emerged from the lift area to his right, as well at the far end of the lobby.

What he had seen stunned him. The black man had actually looked straight at him and smiled. The couple he was with had had their heads together like two lovers, arms locked, and had shown no interest in the dozens of people milling around the floor. But he had recognised Teller. After all, the last time he had seen him he had tried to kill him. The Catskiner turned a page of the newspaper but kept his eyes firmly glued on the lifts.

Had the Catskiner actually been reading the September 25 edition of the newspaper he held, the highly respected Ming Po, he would have been interested in a warning sounded by an academic writer on political reforms. In the fourth and concluding feature instalment on the Green Paper, the writer had analysed the pros and cons of political parties. As advocate of direct elections, the writer had argued that a Westminster-style of government had a number of prized benefits. The system under which a majority party assumed power would no doubt be representative and as a direct consequence the authority of the government would be firmly established. Political parties, rather than causing confrontation, would bring the government and the people closer together and would facilitate the grooming of political talent, talent that was sadly lacking in a territory that was a babe in terms of political experience and acumen.

However she also warned party politics might, if not controlled, undermine the community's solidarity. A highly representative government might attempt to "take on the Chinese Government and resist unreasonable intervention". This could have serious consequences and might give rise to political upheavals. The author of the series of articles was not alone in expressing these concerns, but her standing in the community added extra weight to her words. The views were echoed elsewhere in the media that day. Indeed, the papers of September 25 were full of political arguments and warnings.

A column in the New Evening Post called on the people not to do anything that would lead to bitter confrontation, and the Tin Tin Daily called on the Hong Kong administration to make small concessions and put off the introduction of direct elections for a few years. Beijing had so far not interfered directly, it cautioned, but it could have exerted pressure if it wished. The implication was clear. In other Chinese newspapers the Director of the Hong Kong Branch of the New China News Agency (NCNA) declined to comment on the question of whether there should be universal suffrage in 1998. He added that at the moment he did not think there would be instability in Hong Kong the following year.

There were also a number of full-page advertisements supporting both sides and news stories on recent statements from all camps. One referred to a seminar the previous day at which two protagonists had exchanged heated accusations. They were Martin Lee and Doctor Helmet Sohmen the son-in-law of business tycoon Sir Y.K.Pao. Sohmen, an Austrian, was also a Legislative Councillor and a strong advocate of no direct elections – not in 1997, not at all.

He claimed it was only a myth to suppose that the introduction of direct elections would be in the interests of democracy. Lee retaliated in precise advocate's language and argument, and concluded by whipping up his followers with the

assertion that he would not live in Hong after 1997 unless there was in place a democratic government. At another seminar his disciple Desmond Lee Yu-Tai repeated his call for elections in 1988.

On that Friday too the results of no fewer than seven surveys were published. One of them said more than 91 per cent of the respondents favoured the stand taken by the democrats. Two others had 70 per cent for, one 60 per cent, two 40 per cent and one 25 per cent.

A press conference called by the Joint Committee on the Promotion of Democratic Government was also widely covered, giving details of a mass rally to be held at Victoria Park on the coming Sunday, September 27. It was generally reported that this would be the last ditch attempt by the direct election lobby to fight for one-man-one-vote in 1988. And among the principal speakers would be Martin Lee, or Martyr Lee as the Austrian doctor had called him. Clearly the respective groups were taking fighting postures.

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Teller and Brigit did not leave room 2307. For the remainder of the afternoon they sat with Khan and for the first time in many days they relaxed and almost forgot about their troubles. They did not explain to Khan why the need for subterfuge. But did not disagree when he concluded they were somehow carrying on an illicit love affair. That was something he apparently understood even encouraged, and during the reminiscences he slipped into the conversation allusions to the excitement of going against community mores. Indeed, Teller was left in little doubt that the Sri Lankan's trip to Hong Kong had been planned and executed with the business element the second attraction.

Finally, when the mini-bar in the hotel room was emptied of its mini alcoholic beverages, the small bottles lined up on the ledge above, the happy talk of old times and often people Teller did not know came to an end. Khan lifted Brigit off the floor in another of his hugs, gave Teller a suggestive wink as he pummelled his hand, and took his leave to hurry to Kai Tak Airport to catch his flight back to London.

Teller and Brigit spent the night lying in bed watching television. They made love, talked and made love again, dropping off to sleep in each other's arms at a time when many were beginning their rounds of the clubs outside.

Teller woke early on the Saturday morning. He left the bed quietly, not disturbing Brigit and went to the bathroom where he showered, shaved and dressed. When he emerged she was awake and smiled at him. "Why are you up so early?" she asked. "Come back to bed."

Teller stretched out beside her and ran his hand slowly over her curves. "I have to go out for a while, my love," he told her. "But I'll be back soon. You sleep in or read the papers. I won't be long."

"Where are you going?"

"I have to go over to Broadcast Drive. I want to check out this address." He took the video shop receipt from the bedside table and studied it again.

Brigit sat up. "Jason, what are you thinking of doing there?"

"Don't worry," he repeated. "I'm not going to do anything silly. I just want to see the place that's all. Before I decide what step to take, I want to... what do they say in the movies? I want to case the joint."

"I'll come with you."

“No. You stay here. I’m just going to look at the area. Nothing more. I promise you I’ll be back within a few hours.”

He stood up, put the slip of paper in his shirt pocket and collected his bag, checking the contents. He had four hundred dollars in cash. Before he caught the taxi that would take him to Broadcast Drive he would cash a cheque at the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank outlet next to the hotel.

He kissed Brigit lightly. “Don’t worry love. I’ll be back before you finish reading the papers.”

It did not take him long to get to Broadcast Drive and to identify the address on the receipt which he took from his pocket and examined three times during the journey. Being one of the arterial routes in Kowloon, it was seldom anything but jammed with vehicles heading for the large estates on the fringe of Tsimshatsui or further out to Shatin in the countryside, connecting through the busy Lion Rock Tunnel which officially separated urban Kowloon from the once rural New Territories. The most congested and slowest section was Waterloo Road, just beyond the Princess Margaret Flyover, but even there the sensible placement and operation of traffic lights kept vehicles moving reasonably freely.

When the taxi turned off Waterloo Road Teller slumped lower in the back seat and once more read the address on the square of paper. In bad Cantonese he instructed the driver to proceed very slowly as he read the numbers on the high concrete fences separating the residential high-rises from the roadway. Inconsistently, he reminded himself to have a look at one of the television stations on his return journey which had recently had one of its large studios party destroyed by fire. It was just around the other side of the horseshoe-shaped road, and he would have to pass it on his way back. The taxi crept up to the curve and from his slouched position Teller identified the building he sought. It was a nondescript concrete block with a wide entrance gate. Car-parking spaces were directly beneath and in the surrounds with the main entrance doorway taking up a large area in the middle. The flats had no balconies and windows were mostly closed, probably with air-conditioners blowing stale air inside, but also to block out the noise from outside.

He could see piles of litter on the first floor awning but the courtyard and precincts were tidy and clean. A security guard stood to one side of the entrance talking animatedly to a middle aged Chinese woman carrying a large shopping bag in one hand, a baby strapped to her back, and a toddler holding the other hand.

Counting floors, Teller stopped at four and quickly consulted the receipt to verify the 4B on the second line of the address.

Each floor appeared to have two flats. Each flat, he guessed, most likely had two bedrooms. He could see eight windows along the front, and rightly concluded four opened from a sitting/dining room and another four from a bedroom. There might even be another smaller bedroom at the rear of the building along with a kitchen, bathroom and utility room.

There was no movement within that he could discern as the taxi continued past in low gear, the driver glancing at his reflection on and off in the mirror above the dashboard. When he had gone three apartment blocks past Teller told the driver to stop. For five minutes he watched through the rear window but recognised no-one who came and went through the gate to the building.

Finally, he instructed the driver on and in a pensive mood returned to Tsimshatsui and the Hongkong Hotel where he found Brigit sitting at the desk writing a letter to her parents in Lyon. She kissed him as he came in and asked if everything was alright.

“Sure,” he answered. “No problem. I just saw the building. Nothing else.”

He flicked the television set on and dropped onto the bed as an announcer appeared on the screen and began talking about the horse races that would take place in Shatin later that afternoon.

“I’ll have to have another look tomorrow,” said Teller. “Then I’ll make up my mind exactly what to do.”

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At four o’clock that afternoon another journalist was cursing his luck and attempting to drown his sorrows in cold amber liquid being served by a white-coated attendant on the ground level of Shatin race course. The fourth race had just been run and for the fourth time his selection had failed to place. The Shatin course may be one of the finest in the world, but the journalist was hardly impressed. He was not a regular race-goer and had agreed to accompany a friend only because of a debt he owed, and could not see how he could pay, to the insatiable head of the Inland Revenue Department.

The week before he had received the unwelcome envelope with the window which reminded him that he would be required to start the new year in poor financial shape.

Taxation in Hong Kong has a minimum threshold of only seventeen per cent but requiring payment once a year it seemed to be far higher. As there is no pay-as-you-earn system in the territory its taxpayers are billed annually and must pay in two instalments only two months apart. The first and largest portion is demanded in January.

On the same day the journalist received his notification, a friend in the government had been buying drinks all round in a pub late into the evening. The reason for his generosity was a win on the six-up at Happy Valley racecourse three nights earlier. By eight o’clock that night the journalist was not only seriously envious and drunk, he had been convinced to try his own luck the following Saturday at Shatin where there were certain to be at least two sure things. To offer all necessary advice to the novice punter his government friend had invited him along and promised him the benefit of his inside knowledge.

Four races into the seven race card the journalist was three thousand five hundred dollars poorer and his pockets were almost empty. As he gulped his drink his friend clapped him on the shoulder. “Funny game this,” he slurred. “Up one week, down the next. Maybe next Saturday we’ll get it back, and more.”

“You can come if you like,” grunted the journalist. “But not me. I’m in a hole and I’m going to take the first lesson.”

“What’s that?”

”When you’re in a hole, stop digging.”

His friend turned away and called for their glasses to be refilled.

“Talking about digging, I almost forgot,” he said. “I’ve got something here you can dig into.” He handed the journalist a brown envelope. “Don’t open it here. Wait until you get home. Maybe it will help make up for today’s losses.”

The journalist glanced at the packet and put it away in his inside coat pocket. “What is it?” he asked.

“A copy of the questions asked by the official survey company on the options in the Green Paper.” His friend paid the attendant. “The part I’d recommend you read

carefully is the question of whether there should be direct elections in 1988. It makes interesting and illuminating reading. Just remember where you didn't get it though."

Illuminating it might be, thought the journalist, but he doubted it would throw any light on the problem he now knew he would have to face with the tax man. But he would read it. There could be a story in it.

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By the time the thousands of winners and losers were jockeying for positions on the highway leading back from Shatin to Kowloon and island, the accountant's anxiety was growing and his family could plainly see he was unusually worried about something. Of course, he would not volunteer any explanation and his wife of thirty years knew when not to pry.

He sat reading in the lounge of their comfortable Peak flat, frequently rising to pace out onto the balcony, only to shortly return and sit down with his book. Twice he had taken telephone calls that, while brief, seemed to worry him more deeply each time. All he told his wife was that it had been the office on both occasions. He did not tell her that his operatives had called in with negative reports. Two days had passed and still no trace had been found of Teller or the girl. Checks of hotels and boarding houses on both sides of the harbour had turned up nothing. They had for all intents and purposes vanished.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

If Sunday September 27 was unusually quiet in Hong Kong, Monday the 28<sup>th</sup> made up for it. The financial markets opened after their unprecedented and highly acrimonious closure, and promptly fell. And continued falling all through the morning. There was not the slightest sign of any rallying, and depression on the floor and in the streets mounted in unison with losses. Immediately the critics of the closure renewed their accusations and the electronic news media succeeded in garnering support for them from various quarters around the world. Spokesmen in New York and London again expressed surprised doubt over the wisdom of the unusual initial action and even though Japan and Australia had been non-committal publicly, it was clear brokers there had also been taken by surprise.

The criticism had been three-fold.

First, the closure was said to be too hasty and was a knee-jerk reaction in a situation where calm and a steadfast stand was needed.

This led to the claims that Hong Kong's reputation as a world financial centre, carefully built up over the years and repeatedly vaunted, had been seriously tarnished. How could the territory claim to be a leader when it buckled at the knees in the face of trouble?

Third, the closing of the exchange doors prevented investors taking their own independent decisions, and were instead compelled to wait almost a week during which time prices were bound to open even lower and continue their downward slide.

Within two minutes of the Monday opening these accusations and predictions were borne out. The hectic trading was all in one direction. The knock-on effect would undoubtedly be that London and Wall Street would suffer as well. Sydney had already begun trading and in anticipation of the Hong Kong slump the All Ordinaries Index drifted lower.

The crisis meetings in the government continued with the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the Secretary for Monetary Affairs in almost continuous deliberations. The Chairman of the Stock Exchange again attempted to explain the Board's action, and rumours started to circulate that the chopping block was being prepared for a number of public heads. One of the first was said to be the Chairman of the Board of the Hong Kong Futures Exchange, a Legislative Councillor.

Government spokesmen reiterated that despite the crisis the territory's finances and overall economic base were solid and there was no cause for undue concern. Given this soundness, the public was told there was reason for investors to turn bullish and capitalise on the falling market rather than panic.

Coming at a time when fortunes had been lost and were continuing to be lost, this message of confidence was well wide of the mark. Selling was the order of the day, carried out with a vengeance, and more attention was paid to the administration's credibility than to its advice to buy.

Its credibility took another serious knock with a front page story which appeared in the Hongkong Standard. The paper had obtained details of the survey company's questionnaire on the Green Paper, and an analysis cast doubts on its objectivity. The matter in question was that considered to be the most significant in the entire review of political development: Whether there should be direct elections and if so, whether they should be held in 1988.

All questions put to the six thousand respondents in the two separate surveys carried out were clear referendum type questions. Are you in favour of this? Are you

against this? Do you agree that that should be done? Are you against it? There was one, and only one, notable exception. The six thousands respondents were not directly asked if they wanted direct elections the following year. Those against were asked directly. But when it came to the positive question it was couched in cumbersome terminology, so the democrats claimed, that was either the result of ineptitude on the part of the professional company contracted by the survey office, or intentionally designed to confuse in order to arrive at an answer that suited those not in favour of an early introduction of direct elections.

The question, which Councillor Martin Lee and others pointed out was not a question at all, read: "If changes are desirable in 1988 it will be possible to make one or more of the following changes: eg, increase slightly the number of official Members, reduce the number of Appointed Members, increase the number of directly elected Members or have directly elected Members."

This even led to the claim, boxed in the Hongkong Standard in bold type, that there were indications of collusion between the company and the government to manipulate the outcome of the whole survey exercise. Naturally the company, the survey office and the government strongly denied those claims, but the mud could not easily be washed away.

The article in the newspaper also pointed out that no fewer than between twenty-five and twenty-seven per cent of the respondents maintained they did not understand the options, or were not clear about the respective concepts and therefore were not asked to choose any of them. Another fifteen to eighteen per cent gave the answer "Don't know/No opinion". These answers, said the critics, reinforced the belief that the company survey was poorly designed, badly conducted, unprofessionally approached and should be totally discounted.

By noon that Monday the public of Hong Kong was reeling. The continuation of the financial crisis and the bombardment against the honesty and integrity of the administration had combined to add further doubts about the immediate future.

The most damaging attacks were those which said the events showed Hong Kong's financial status was in ruin, local confidence was all but gone, and the administration was at best a lame duck and at worst was in collusion with the future communist masters.

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An emergency meeting was called by the Secretary General of Omelco just before lunch the same day. It was reported that six councillors had questions they wanted to raise at the opening session on October 7.

The Financial secretary would be asked to justify his support for the market closure, and the barrage of supplementary questions would range across the whole gamut of accusations levelled outside the chamber so far. It was also understood the Chairman of the Stock Exchange Board would be called on to resign. Added to that it would not be surprising if the survey office activities and motives were challenged.

After the meeting the Secretary General left his office on the second floor of the Legislative Council Building and went down one flight of stone steps to where the Clerk of the Council had his suite of offices. Over a cup of steaming jasmine tea he told the Clerk: "The opening session is going to be hell."

"I know," said the Clerk, a stout Chinese with a completely bald head. "It's going to be a sideshow if we are not careful. I think some of your people are going to

have to give up their seats in the gallery to members of the public who will come to watch.”

“We can work that out,” the Secretary General said. “But it is worse than you think. If you haven’t heard already, a group of Members are going to take on the FS over the market closure.”

The Clerk leafed through a pink file in his tray. “I haven’t received any draft questions yet.”

“You won’t have,” went on the Secretary General. “That’s why I came down myself. They only decided this morning. And you might get a few on this morning’s Hongkong Standard story too.”

The Clerk reclined in his high backed leather chair. “If they reach me by close of play on Friday I’ll have to accept them. But god, what a day it’s going to be. With this sort of agenda, with so many already bruised and hurting, it could really be a fired-up meeting.”

The Secretary General looked into the distance. “It will be,” he said in a flat tone. “This session is going to open with a bang. I only hope some people do not go too far. All the elements are in place for ignition. It won’t take much more for something to turn the key.”

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At 12.03 the Political Advisor Roger Gould walked into Gail Jones’s office on the fifth floor of the Government Secretariat.

“Is he in Gail?” he asked brusquely.

The Chief Secretary’s secretary did not like the Political Adviser, and though she had tried hard not to show it for a long time, that time had passed long ago. Equally businesslike she replied: “Yes. But he’s just here for a few minutes. He has to go up to GH at 12.30.”

“I have more than twenty-five minutes then,” countered Gould. “Can you tell him I’m here please? It’s important.”

When he entered Robert McNamara’s office five minutes later, having spent the time glaring at his secretary for making him wait so long, a blame she did not deserve as it was McNamara himself who had suggested he “cool his heels outside for a while,” Gould pointedly closed the door behind him before being directed to the chair across the black ironwood desk.

This too he considered a slight as McNamara was known to encourage all visitors to relax in his office by seating them in the comfortable pink and green lounge chairs arranged around the coffee table. Then he would invariably smile and as his secretary brought in the blue and white china he would swing one long leg over the other and enquire what he might be able to do.

Not this afternoon though. Continuing his rifling through papers and reading and signing off others, the Chief Secretary simply said: “Yes Roger. What do you want?”

“I’ll come right to it,” said Gould, feeling decidedly out in the cold and not at all at ease in the straight-backed chair, “I’d like to know what’s going on.”

“What do you mean?” asked McNamara without looking up. “In what respect?”

“Three days ago I was down at the branch in Happy Valley,” he said, referring to the Hong Kong branch of the New China News Agency which was ironically situated directly across Wongneichong Road from the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club

headquarters. Gould for some reason always called it the branch though no-one else did. To everyone else it was called by its initials, NCNA, or the Mandarin name *Hsinhwa*. It was never called the branch or the agency or anything else.

“You mean the NCNA?” said McNamara, still not looking up. “How are they down there? Not too unhappy I hope. I hear they didn’t lose too much in the crash.”

“Apparently not,” said the Political Adviser. “But they did lose quite a bit just the same. Far less than they’re prepared to put back in to boost it back up though.”

The Chief Secretary looked up. “Yes?”

“They wanted to know what the latest was on this murder business. The doctor and the journalist.”

McNamara returned to his files. “Why are they interested in that? It’s local and we have it under control.”

“Do we? Do we really? Or is there something I should know about?”

“What do you mean?”

“That other journalist, Jason Teller, is no longer writing his column and he’s no longer at the Post. Is there anything going on that I should be cabling HMG about?”

“Not that I know of,” said McNamara. “My understanding is the police know the identity of the crackpot and expect to make an arrest pretty soon. It’s purely security, not political. Anyway, how do you know Teller is not at the Post any longer?”

“I made a few enquiries, discreetly of course,” Gould answered. “He’s not been sacked or resigned. He’s just not been around the office for some days. Now I have the branch, the NCNA people, asking me oblique questions about the murders.”

Robert McNamara began putting papers into the large black leather briefcase. “Well, there is no need for you to worry,” he said. “And if you want to you can tell them that. In fact, why don’t you. I suppose they can do with a little good news these days too.” He heaved the case off his desk. “Now, if that’s all Roger, I have a meeting with HE and a quick word upstairs before I leave.”

Gould said nothing but opened the door and the two men walked out hurriedly.

McNamara took another file from Gail Jones and as he stuffed it in the briefcase enquired: “Is Jack in Gail?” Without waiting for her to answer he added: “Never mind, I’ll go up. Hold the car five minutes.”

As he rushed out he said to the Political Adviser: “I’m sorry Roger, but I must hurry. I’ll come and see you later this afternoon or tomorrow. Alright?” and he was gone, stepping briskly down the carpeted corridor.

On the floor above, with the door closed and the accountant seated behind the empty desk with only the black telephone on it, Robert McNamara spoke quickly.

“Roger Gould says *Hsinhwa* are asking about the murders. Gould himself has made enquiries about Teller’s whereabouts and knows he’s gone to ground. I’ve told him the police had it under control and should make an arrest shortly. I’ve also told him he can reassure our friends the killings were a matter for internal security and not political. But I think we should have the CP leak an optimistic story. I don’t want it to go any further Jack. I don’t want Whitehall in on it yet and I certainly don’t want Beijing to suspect what’s going on. We’ve got enough problems at the moment without them saying our security forces can’t protect the public. With the garrison going that’s all we’d need to cause an almighty stir.”

He paused for breath. “Dammit,” he swore looking at his wristwatch. “I’ve got to go. I’ll be free around six thirty. Drop in then and give me an update.”

Alone in his office the accountant sat very still. He was not confident he could control Roger Gould's inquisitiveness or his sense of duty to Her Majesty's Government in London. If he had to put money on it he would guess the Political Adviser was drafting a report to London right then to brief them on his meeting with NCNA officials and the information given him by the Chief Secretary. He picked up the telephone and dialled the private number of the Commissioner of Police.

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Teller finished reading the newspapers that had been slipped under the door of the hotel room while he and Brigit still slept cradled in each other's arms. He was alarmed at the pace at which events were progressing.

Hong Kong had never been a society where developments occurred by way of natural consequence, and therefore at a steady pace, allowing for breathing spaces between peaks and troughs. Everything had always gone at breakneck speed as though there really was no tomorrow and everything had to be completed today or it never would be. It was the sense of living on borrowed time in a borrowed place, as the doyen of the journalistic world Richard Hughes had so ably written, that made people rush into each day and be so reluctant to leave.

But even the heady pace of the past now seemed almost lethargic by comparison. There was a feeling among some, Teller certainly, that if brakes were not applied control could, would be lost. And if that happened then literally anything could erupt.

Teller put the newspaper down and walked to the window. The scene outside viewed through the lace curtains was veiled, fractured by the intricate machine woven patterns as though actual life and daily living was being broken apart by the material gently swaying on the artificial zephyrs circulated silently around the room by the internal air-conditioning.

He turned away. He appreciated the dangers involved but he had made up his mind. In the bathroom where Brigit was towelling off he sat on the ends of the tub. "I am going to go to the flat to pick up some fresh clothes," he said. "I can't go on wearing these. The jacket and trousers are torn. And anyway, I feel dirty."

"Is that wise?" she posed. "You might be seen. Why don't I go? Tell me what you want. Or why not just buy some new clothes.?"

"No. I don't think anyone will be watching the pace. They know I've gone and they'll probably not be expecting me to go back." He put his hands around her waist. "I'll be careful. If I'm not sure I'll not go in." He would not tell her yet what he proposed doing next. If she knew she would fight to stop him. When he came back would be soon enough.

An hour later the taxi drove up Happy View Terrace as far as it could. To turn around it backed under a building and temporarily disappeared. Thirty second later it drove out and back down the street empty. Anyone watching would not have seen anyone in it on its upwards journey. There was no-one inside with the driver on its return either.

Underneath the building where the taxi had reversed, Teller stood behind a parked BMW 720i sedan. There was nobody around. Carefully he slipped out through the back of the building and over a low concrete wall into the bushes at the side of a cracked and disused bitumen road that led to an old structure that while now derelict still possessed some of the façade that had once ranked it one of the mansions of the colony. Next to it was a huge residential complex under construction.

Staying close to the wall he moved cautiously towards the back of the building eighty meters away. When he reached it he climbed the wall and moved to the side of an extension that had been added to permit the owner of the ground floor flat to park his second car undercover. Embedded into the side was a rusty steel ladder which led to the roof of the garage and a second similar ladder that rose to a patio which had been used sparingly by the tenants of the second and third floors. Empty dragon pots stood scattered around the tiled floor. A door led from the patio into his sitting room. It was locked with a barred bolt on the inside but this was not a problem for Teller. He removed his jacket, folded it and held it against the pane of glass just adjacent to and above the bolt. With a sharp stab of his fist the glass shattered and fell noisily into the room.

Hurriedly Teller reached in, slid the bolt back and stepped in. Pulling the curtain across the door he knew none of the residents would take any notice of the noise and he hoped no-one had been watching out for him at the rear of the building. But he could not worry about that now. He had to collect some clothes and a few other items he had decided he would need. It was then he noticed the putrid smell that permeated the room.

\*

Brigit had left the hotel room and was in the lift descending to the lobby. She knew she was taking a risk but calculated that those searching for them would have been to the Hongkong Hotel during the last three days. It was unlikely, in her view, they would be back and keep returning. It was just not possible to do that with each potential hideout. And why would they settle on the Hongkong Hotel to stake a permanent watch?

She had been in the room for seventy-two hours. She had read every piece of tourist literature, skipped through the two English language newspapers and had even tuned into the Chinese Jade channel on television for a few minutes. The English channel did not air in the mornings. Finally, she had decided. She would go down to the lobby, buy a number of magazines and perhaps a novel from the bookshop, and be among other people while she enjoyed a pot of tea. She needed just for a while to get away from the room and to be part of everyday life again.

As the lift doors opened she held back to allow an aged lady tourist with a walking stick to leave first and then stepped out. Directly opposite, on the other side of the lobby, was a florist and next to that a newsagent that had a rack of magazines from around the world, two stands of local and foreign newspapers, and a long wall of paperback books. She browsed in the shop and collected a Woman's Own from Britain, an Australian Women's Weekly, a Far Eastern Economic Review, and finally a copy of Frederick Forsyth's 1979 thriller *The Devil's Alternative*.

Armed with her bag of reading materials she went into the coffee shop, sat facing the lobby and called for a green and white uniformed waitress to take her order. She requested the tea she had promised herself and then belatedly added some cinnamon roast and jam.

While she waited patiently she glanced through the Woman's Weekly, mainly looking at the pictures, and occasionally studying people coming and going. The lobby was busy as it always was. With aircraft landing and taking off in Hong Kong every eight minutes or so, lobbies of all major hotels were crowded no matter what time of day. On the other hand the expansive coffee shop was virtually deserted, with

only about six or seven other customers. It was only ten o'clock so she knew it would begin to fill in another hour and a half nearer lunch time.

She enjoyed the time by herself, yet among the crowd, and continued to scan the pages of the magazine as she sipped her tea and ate the warm toast. It was like she was on holiday and she was beginning to wish she could be when a group of Japanese tourists entered through the main doors at the far end. All wore red and white lapel discs identifying them as members of a single tour group. Though she could not read the lettering Brigit imagined they were travelling under some factory's annual holiday plan. She was sure they would all in three days be again crowding the lobby readying for their departure back to Narita carrying bags of purchases.

As she studied them with a smile four other customers walked into the coffee shop. A young couple and two single Chinese or Korean gentlemen she did not know which. Japanese were easily distinguishable but Chinese and Korean were to her very similar. She paid them only passing attention and continued turning the magazine pages while the group of Japanese waited patiently to be processed and ushered to their rooms by their guide. Five minutes passed and then one of the Oriental men came from the back of the group, and walked towards her. When he reached her table he stopped and smiled.

"Excuse," he said. "You holiday?"

"No, I live here," answered Brigit. She was suddenly alert. Her first reaction was one of surprise. He's going to try to pick me up, she thought. Then she remembered who she was and why she was sitting in the hotel lobby at ten thirty on a Monday morning by herself.

"Sorry," the man said. "I not know Hong Kong. Can you help please?" He took a piece of paper from his pocket and held it out to her. On it was printed an address somewhere in Carnarvon Road, Tsimshatsui.

"Please," he said. "You know?"

"Yes," replied Brigit with a smile. She did not recognise the name of the shop that had been scrawled in big letters but she did recognise the name of the street. It was well known to shoppers, particularly visitors.

"It's on the other side of Nathan Road," she said. "Parallel."

"Please?"

"Go out there and go straight ahead to Nathan Road. Cross over and go one block. You will see it easily."

"Please?"

"Look, wait a minute," said Brigit. "I'll show you from outside." She finished the last of her tea, put the magazine back in the plastic bag and checked the bill. Leaving four ten dollar notes on the place mat she rose and said. "Follow me. I'll show you."

The man bowed. "Thank you," he said. "Thank you very much."

Brigit led the way across the lobby and up the steps outside onto the sidewalk. She pointed to the street opposite. "Go down there to the main road. Three blocks. That's Nathan Road. Cross over it and go one more block. The intersection should be Carnarvon Road on your left." It was quite a lot for the man to absorb.

He came closer, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of the fawn jacket he was wearing, and Brigit held up four fingers and pointed ahead of her. "Carnarvon Road. Over that way. Four blocks."

"Thank you," said the man. He was standing very close. Still smiling he said. "There is a gun pointing at you. Do what I tell you, quietly without fuss. Or I will pull the trigger. You will die. And then I will kill Jason Teller. He is not where you think

he is. He is at this moment resting immobilised in a place you and the authorities will never find.”

Aghast, Brigit stared at the man. “Do nothing foolish,” he repeated. “Be very sure I will not hesitate. Now, do exactly what I tell you.”

Less than a minute lapsed during which time Brigit could not take her eyes off the man by her side. He kept smiling and mouthing inanities she did not take in. He had laid a hand lightly on her shoulder and at the mention of the gun she had looked down and seen a bulge at the front of his jacket near to where his other hand remained in the pocket. She could not be sure, but nor could she take the chance the man was bluffing. After all he knew who she was, he knew Jason had left the hotel, and he had intimated he knew the authorities were combing Hong Kong for them. That left only one conclusion. The man threatening her was the Catskinner, the maniac who had already murdered two people and who intended killing more. And as he had said, he had already taken Jason.

Suddenly the day turned cold and she shivered as the overcast sky opened and a few drops of rain mottled the sidewalk and spattered on the windscreen of a car that pulled up in front of them.

\*

The Commissioner of Police had agreed, though somewhat reluctantly, to do as the accountant asked. He believed if the man in the Secretariat made a request it was not without the knowledge at least of higher sources. He did not know precisely the accountant's role in the administration of Hong Kong but he had had similar experiences on two previous occasions. Both times he had not been given completely satisfactory explanations for the requests, and both times he had refused on matters of principle. Within hours he had been contacted by the Chief Secretary and while a direct order had not been given, or the subjects themselves actually referred to, Robert McNamara had mentioned the accountant by name and in phrases which left him in little doubt he had the ear of the man who was at the head of the civil service.

When sometime in the future the Commissioner had sought difficult benefits for the police force which he was prepared to fight hard for, he found the Chief Secretary to be surprisingly sympathetic and the benefits agreed to with surprising haste.

Once again he had been reluctant to act as asked for fear it could rebound adversely against the force he had served for more than thirty-five years and was so proud of. Nevertheless, he had risen through the ranks and was one of the first Chinese Commissioners of Police in the territory's history. One of the lessons he had learned well along the rocky path was loyalty. Another was how to take orders. The difficulty was that sometimes it was extremely hard to marry the two. This was such a time.

At 12.46 the Commissioner asked his secretary to summon the Chief Staff Officer, Public Relations to his office immediately.

At 1.05 the Chief Staff Officer in turn called the Chief Police information Officer to his office.

David Frank was even less happy than either his immediate superior or the Commissioner of Police about what he was told to do. First, he had had to cancel a long standing and important lunch appointment with his wife which would make his arrival home at the end of the day an event he did not look forward to. Second, he did not believe the instruction that he was given.

“Are you sure this is wise at this time?” he probed diplomatically. He felt like describing it as plain stupid but he knew not to be that foolish.

“Of course,” said the Chief Staff Officer. “It’s positive. It has to be good.”

Frank paused. “Well, normally I would have no argument with that. You know my views on being as open and as helpful to the media as possible. It’s just that this is a bit different.”

“How?” The Chief Staff Officer was bright, but he was a trained professional police officer. He was not a journalist or a public relations expert.

“The story’s been dead for some time now,” explained the information officer. “Why resurrect it? Let them forget it until we really have something to offer. Or when we’re pressed. It’ll only open the whole can of worms again if we suddenly come out with this.”

“I don’t agree.” The Chief Staff Officer privately did agree, but he had an obstinate role to play. “It shows how open we can be, even if it is potentially bad public relations as you suggest, which I doubt in any case.”

Frank could not forget his last experience with this murder incident. He had been shown to be something less than honest with Jason Teller and it rested poorly with him. He did not want to find himself in a similar position this time.

“Who’s on it anyway?” he persisted. “I haven’t heard anything about this in Homicide, or Special crimes for that matter.”

Homicide Squad in the force was the body of detectives which was specifically tasked with investigating murders anywhere in the territory. It was a large group of specially selected policemen who had wide experience of violent crime. Special Crimes Division was another group which was charged with investigating organised crime of a particularly violent or complicated nature. If neither of these two groups were looking into the Wong-Tse murders who was?

“It comes from higher than that David,” said his boss. “Much higher. I can’t go into any details, I’m sorry, but let’s just say we’re not here to ask questions. Remember we are here to serve, not be served.”

Jesus, Frank said under his breath, that sort of attitude makes me sick. “But who?” he said aloud. “And what are we basing this on? How do I handle the media when they call for more information? I have to have more than this at least.”

“Just tell them it’s operational.” The Chief Staff Officer cast a steadfast look at his information man. “Now Dave, I want it in the afternoons so you’d better get moving with it.”

Frank rose and walked without another word down the corridor to the bureau’s news room. To the Principal Information Officer in charge he handed a piece of paper and ordered: “Get this out straight away. Any follow-ups put them through to me personally.”

At 1.30 teleprinters and facsimile machines in newspapers on both sides of the harbour churned out the press release from the police:

*A police spokesman said today (Monday) that the task force especially set up to investigate the murder of well-known surgeon Michael Wong and prominent journalist Amelia Tse were hopeful of making arrests soon.*

*The spokesman said new information recently obtained had provided important clues as to the identity of those responsible.*

*“Based on this information the investigating officers are confident the person or persons responsible for these crimes will not be remaining out of custody long,” he said.*

The statement was brief and left many questions hanging, ripe for asking. David Frank knew this, and was also convinced it was not the whole truth, and he could not understand why such a step was being taken. The case was clearly more important than he had at first thought, but for the life of him he could not rationalise the moves being made. He just hoped no-one got hurt along the way. Unfortunately, he had no way of knowing it but the crisis was already worsening.

\*

The smell hit Teller like a wave. He could almost feel it, like a gust of sour wind, and instinctively he tried to see what it was in the air. But it wasn't in the air. Holding his bunched jacket over his nose and mouth he searched the flat, starting with the kitchen where he thought the electricity might have gone off and food turned rancid. Then the answer came to him in a rush.

It was the cat. It was still there in his bed.

Teller grabbed a pile of discarded newspapers and headed for the bedroom which he had fled so hastily. There he wrapped up the disgusting creature and then hurried out onto the patio and hurled the bundle into the bushes behind the building.

Though the carcass had been removed the smell remained. It clung to every single object in the flat. He opened all the windows hoping it would gradually drift out and away.

Then unable to do anything else to purify the flat he set about quickly gathering together the items he had come for. First, he collected a pair of fresh trousers and shirt, two sets of underclothes, and a cream windcheater that was warm enough in mild temperatures and treated to guard against light rain. From a drawer in the kitchen he removed a sailor's torch, checking to see the batteries were still strong. From the cupboard next to the stainless steel sink he took out a slightly rusty Ghurkha kukri. He had intended hanging it on a wall but had never got around to it, the curved blade discolouring slowly in its leather sheath on the shelf next to tins of soup and paper rolls. He was not clear why he had grabbed the knife, but just had. It was the only weapon of sorts he owned.

Back in the sitting room he put all the items in a long black nylon carrying bag. He looked around the flat once more, decided to leave the windows open and risk intruders, and left the way he had entered, making sure the curtain was pulled across the door with the broken pane of glass.

He climbed down the ladders, over the wall and into the bushes. Instead of going back into the garage that would take him to Happy View Terrace he moved off to his left, down the disused bitumen road. It wound around the hillside and met up at the bottom of Broadwood Road where it intersected with Link Road.

There he hailed a taxi, lurched into the back seat and watched through the rear window as the vehicle sped towards the cross harbour tunnel and the Hongkong Hotel on the other side.

When he got back to the room he would have to tell Brigit of his plans. She would do all she could to talk him out of it, he acknowledged, but no matter what she said he was going after the killer.

## Chapter Fifteen

When Tuesday September 29 dawned it signalled two full days remained for the public consultation on the Green Paper on political reform in Hong Kong.

Over the following forty-eight hours the residents of the territory would be able to freely express their views on how they would like to see their home city-state develop. After that they would be given no additional opportunities. No further green papers or surveys were proposed by the government.

In November a detailed report by the Survey Office would be tabled in the Legislative Council and made available to the public. Three months later in early February 1988 the administration would publish a white paper outlining its considered opinions on that report.

In other words, it would tell the people of Hong Kong what its policy was actually going to be, and how rapid, or slow, the democratisation of the territory was going to be.

While this consultation was taking place vital discussions were also going on in another forum. Members of the Basic Law Consultative Committee, and the Basic Law Drafting Committee, were meeting frequently in Guangzhou and Beijing to arrive at a consensus on the shape of the basic law, or constitution, of the future Special Administrative Region of China.

There was generally an atmosphere of concern and common objective-seeking at the meetings but this did not mean that all was going well. Differences were aired and Martin Lee frequently expressed his opposition to some moves. On more than one occasion he walked out of the China meetings and returned to Hong Kong to involve himself in "more important things".

Faction fighting was also beginning to become very obvious within the Legislative Council membership itself. For a long time two clear camps had been identified which separated the government appointed councillors from those who had gained their seats in the council through indirect electoral collage or functional constituency selection. Since their introduction in 1985 Legislative Council proceedings had become more animated, contentious and at times divisive in character.

Outside the Legislative Council too were many other groups who proposed a variety of political options for the future. The result of this multiplicity of effort, and the bickering within the Council, as well as the perceived weakness being shown by the administration, was that the public did not know which way to turn. In their search for demonstrated leadership they were frustrated. The government was constantly labelled a lame duck and the Legislative Council was often seen to be ineffectual and internally divided. Criticism from outside was persistent.

And all the while, in the wings, the United Kingdom Government was considered to have abandoned the people of Hong Kong, and China was feared to be forcing systems through which would bode no good for the territory after, or perhaps even by, 1997. The situation in Hong Kong on September 29 was not volatile, but it did exhibit many of the necessary ingredients for a flash point that could manifest itself in a breakdown of authority.

The British Government may well have relegated the question of the future of their richest colonial possession, but the problem would just not disappear as many had hoped with the signing of the Joint Declaration three years before. What should have initiated a new beginning had merely ushered in a new set of anxieties.

Whitehall and Downing Street were getting repeated reports of unease from the colony, and it was said the British Prime Minister was rapidly tiring of them and was herself becoming increasingly short tempered with those she felt were rocking the boat.

For its part the Chinese politburo were also not entirely pleased with either the pace of change being sought and wrought, or the direction that change was taking. In the face of constant hard-line reins being put on him, the octogenarian leader of the largest communist country in the world was having to tread a very careful path.

On the other hand the future masters of Hong Kong had to appear understanding and willing to concede on some issues, yet there was no way they could go too far and risk displeasure at best or disorder at worst in their own front yard. The chess game being played out with Hong Kong people as pawns was a high risk game indeed and the risks were growing daily.

Moves from Beijing were winning the day but the trouble was that despite this their track record in the past did little to give those who would be most affected by the outcome cause for peace of mind. Hong Kong officials appreciated this and did their best to allay fears. British officials could not, or would not, understand. Chinese officials learned from the mistakes of the *gwai los* and stepped up their propaganda.

The political battle so far had been a war of words. Warning salvos had been fired but as yet there were no obvious casualties. But if any one of the protagonists lost control, or felt compelled to directly demonstrate unacceptable strength, the battle ground could run with blood.

Neither the powers in London nor the powers in Beijing were aware that political blood had been shed. If it did become known, those few men and women in Hong Kong who were aware of it would be powerless to prevent the inescapable consequences. But what even they did not know was that more blood had already been spilled.

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Teller was woken by the telephone ringing in his ear. It was muffled as all hotel telephones are so they do not disturb guests in adjoining rooms, but it must have been ringing for some time because Teller was a sound sleeper and usually needed an explosion to wake him. He bolted upright on the bed and his arm stung him. He had slept on it during the night and it now pained him.

Around midnight he had fallen asleep involuntarily, fully clothed on the top of the covers. For many hours he had paced the room, peered through the curtains hoping to see Brigit outside in the street.

When he had arrived back at the hotel he had found the door to the room locked automatically from the inside. He had knocked loudly and called but there was no answer. The floor attendant had looked at him curiously but he had shrugged, hiding his concern, and went down to the ground floor again to look for her. She was not there and Teller reckoned she had, for some reason, gone out. Perhaps to buy food. Perhaps to get some fresh air.

But the rain that was falling quite heavily caused him to wrinkle his brow and look about anxiously. He had approached the reception counter and explained his predicament. At first he was told he would have to wait for Brigit to return as when she had obviously left she had taken the key with her. And their policy was not to hand out more than a single room key. However finally the assistant manager on duty had relented and Teller had been personally accompanied to the room where a

duplicate key opened the door. The assistant manager had lingered until satisfied Teller was indeed the occupant and left with a generous tip for his trouble.

Teller then began his long vigil, growing more worried by each passing hour. By mid afternoon he was certain something had gone terribly wrong. He had tried calling Brigit's flat but there was no answer. He was unsure what he should do. He could run but Brigit might return. He could stay, but if Brigit had been seen and picked up by the police who must still be looking for him then his capture would be inevitable.

Then again, if she had been taken by the police why weren't they waiting for him at the hotel? No, something bad had happened and he must stay put in case she called. Throughout the afternoon and night he waited. He paced, and read, and paced, and watched impassively the television screen, listening distractedly to the sounds and not really absorbing the moving action. And he paced some more.

As Monday ended so did Teller's ability to remain awake. He lay on the bed, staring into the distance, his senses alert to the sounds from the street outside his window and the footsteps passing his door in the corridor. Then his eyes closed and he dozed lightly. It was meant to last only a few minutes but he drifted into a deep sleep from which he didn't wake until the telephone's relentless tinkle roused him.

He hugged his sore arm and snatched the instrument from its cradle with the other hand. "Yes," he demanded, short, impatient, angry.

There was no response. "Yes," he repeated. "Hello."

"Listen carefully Mr Teller," a voice said. "If you want to see Miss Rolanne again listen very closely to what I have to say."

Teller was wide awake. He did not notice the pain in his arm and the drowsiness had been swept from his head. The voice was unmistakable, the stated threat and the further threats he knew would follow loud and clear. He remained silent.

"That is good Mr Teller," said the voice. There was a hint of mirth in the words though it passed unnoticed. "You do not even bother to ask how I know you are staying in that hotel or why I mention your lady friend."

"Go on your bastard," hissed Teller.

"Of course," the man said shortly. "You have no need to ask those questions. It is obvious. Miss Rolanne did not return yesterday and I now call you direct. There can be only one conclusion."

"If you have hurt her in any way I'll kill you," said Teller. He was boiling inside but kept his words measured, controlled.

The man feigned shock. "Why Mr Teller, I would never think of hurting Miss Rolanne. She is delicate, though her tongue is sharp, and after all she has done me no injury. Now you, on the other hand, you are something I must do something about."

"What do you want?" asked Teller, his voice rising. "Let her go and I'll do whatever you want."

"That is precisely what I have in mind Mr Teller. You see, we do think alike."

The line was quiet for a time and then the man continued. "Now this is what you'll do." For the next two minutes the man issued instructions and Teller held his comments and did not interrupt. "You understand Mr Teller?" the man concluded.

"First, let me speak to Brigit," said Teller. "I have to know she's alright."

"No. Miss Rolanne is rather tied up at the moment." There was the hint of humour again in his words. "You will have to take my word for it. She is unharmed and quite safe. For now."

"Bullshit," Teller shouted. "Let me speak to her."

“You are in no position to make demands Mr Teller. You do what I say. You do not tell me what to do. Miss Rolanne will not speak to you. I do have her. She is safe. But if you do not carry out my instructions you will be solely responsible for any suffering she does experience. Do I make myself clear Mr Teller?”

“You’re a bastard,” said Teller. “You’ll pay. One way or another you will pay.”

“That we shall have to wait and see. But for now I am in charge. And for now you do what I say.” The man paused. “You have your instructions Mr Teller. You know what you must do.”

The line went dead. Cold. Mute. Final

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Wan Lung let his heavy black bicycle drop on the grass near a gnarled old white barked tree and straightened, stretching his back and neck as he rolled his dirty vest in on itself so it would stay hitched around his nipples.

Though it was raining and there was a breeze coming off the water, he was hot from the hard ride on the machine that was almost a quarter of a century old, a third his own age. He would have none of the new fangled cycles that gleamed silver and blue and clicked along the roads with their riders flicking gears up and down at the slightest suggestion of an incline. For more years than most of the holiday cyclists had been alive he had pushed the heavy black two-wheeler the eight kilometres from Ho Chung village near Hebe Haven where he lived alone in a hut decreed by officials to be the home of indigenous New Territories residents. To them he was an indigenous villager, but as far as he was concerned he was just a farmer who eked out a living from the poor earth, and added a few nutrients to his system and fewer dollars to his pockets by fishing with his rod and net in Three Fathoms Cove to the north of where the secondary road ended at Yung Shue. Three fathoms Cove, with its two tiny verdant islands, was a cutaway of Tolo Harbour, right at the end of the channel of the same name that was the marine highway for vessels coming from Mirs Bay to Tai Po.

From where he stood, rain dripping from the brim of his straw hat, Plover Cove Reservoir abutted the other side of the channel at eleven o’clock. Mirs Bay was at the first hour, and behind him, at four o’clock was the High Island reservoir. Wan Lung had been casting his line and hand net in Three Fathoms Cove almost daily for much of his long life. It was a poor day when he did not peddle back to his hut without at least half a dozen twenty-five centimetre fish, unsuitable for filleting but adequate for pounding and kneading into balls, resting at the bottom of the basket tethered between the handle bars of the cycle.

The rubbish tossed overboard by the junks entering and leaving through the channel was washed up by their wake into the cove where it eventually sank to become food for the creatures of the dirty brown water. Occasionally Wan Lung met other ancient villagers in the vicinity, sucking on their long bamboo pipes and gazing across the water as if longingly searching for something that would change the pattern on their mundane lives, but that was not too often and on this uninviting day he could see no others.

But he was not entirely alone.

Protruding from the murky water was the trail end of a car. It too was dull brown, the chrome bumper rusted almost to the point of hanging off, and with patches of lighter colour on the trunk which indicated efforts had been made to halt the progress of the insatiable metal eater. Shoals of small fry swarmed around the hulk

and as Wan Lung approached he could see that some skittered urgently through the water inside the vehicle as well, having swum in through the windows that were open, or at least those he could see that were not closed.

As he stood on the verge and wiped the rain from his eyes and peered through the stained rear glass he could see, or he thought he could make out, a large unmoving shape under the surface, inside the vehicle, up at the front. The weathered face showed no expression other than curiosity and this was heightened only marginally as he studied the muddy tracks that led from the end of the road across the grass and into the water of the cove. He didn't read anything beyond the obvious into the marks, but the experts who prowled the scene four hours later concluded from the depth of the water in them and no doubt other more scientific evidence that they had been there for no more than twelve hours.

Wan Lung squatted under the tree and watched as the uniformed police in their black rain coats drove pegs into the sodden ground and strung pink and white tape between them. A group of plain clothed police stood to one side and talked animatedly to a pair of men clad in black and red diving suits who had just returned from examining the partly submerged car. A third diver, his hand resting on the trunk of the vehicle, waved his other arm in the air and called back to the driver of a police lorry which immediately took the strain on the cable trailing behind and began hauling the car from the water in a roaring, wheel slipping crunching of gears.

Wan Lung watched without moving as slowly the vehicle emerged through the surface, water gushing from the windows and out through the cracks around the doors. Finally it stood nose pointing to a sampan in the distant channel, dripping like some dead monster dredged up from the sea depths. For a few minutes nobody approached but then an officer picked his way to the passenger side window and peered in. He quickly returned to the group of detectives and there was an exchange of words, and then they went and all sat in the back of the lorry, out of the rain. They did not come out until half an hour later when an ambulance drove up and four men got out. Wan Lung observed as they conversed with the detectives and then walked back to the ambulance where they took out a stretcher.

He stood and watched as they opened the driver's door of the car and noisily struggled to remove a body. Then, rather reluctantly, he was led by detectives to the rear of the ambulance where the stretcher had been loaded. The damp sheet outlining the form of the body beneath was pulled back and Wan Lung was made to look into the face of a young Chinese man, the skin taut but still slightly rubbery, pulling the closed eyes into long slits and dragging the corners of the mouth down..

Wan Lung was led away again and the detective began asking questions that the old man replied to in short grunts, the answers throwing no light on the dead man's identity or how he ended up in the waters of Three fathoms Cove. All the old man knew, and repeated to the police officer more than once, was the man had obviously been murdered. Even he could tell an accident would not have left the flesh gaping, pale, bloodless, like he had just witnessed.

The officer knew it too. The thin, neat line running from one ear to the other clearly showed the man's throat had been cut with a sharp instrument. It was a murder alright. The detective had seen similar injuries a number of times, twice not long ago. He wondered who this latest victim was and why the killer had struck again. What possible connection could there be between a well known doctor, a female reporter, and an ordinary-looking Chinese man found in a battered sedan driven into Three Fathoms Cove?

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The accountant was mystified also. And worried. And angry. But not as angry as the Police Commissioner who was the reason for the ringing telephone as he unlocked the door to his flat and tossed the magazine on the sofa before picking it up.

“Alright Jack,” the Commissioner started. No preamble. And the unusual use of the Christian name. “What do I do now?”

“What you do first Commissioner is tell me what’s wrong.” The accountant gathered up the black instrument off the wall shelf and slumped in the old armchair, the telephone perched in his lap. “What happened?”

The Police Commissioner began recounting the July murders of Wong and Tse and the following debacle as he termed it relating to the arrest of the triads for the crime. Of course, they were out extorting money from nightclubs and selling drugs to eager teenagers now. The South China Morning Post had played up no end and even though the Teller column had died the stink it had caused would not go away as far as he was concerned. Then, because he was ordered to do so, he had issued a press statement, completely out of the blue that arrests were imminent.

“No-one ordered you Commissioner,” the accountant countered. He had been requested to do it and had fully accepted the explanation thereby accepting the responsibility to.

“Not exactly,” came the thin reply. “You know as well as I do it was a bloody instruction. And as for an explanation it was nothing short of fluff.”

“Whatever,” said the accountant off hand, but in mild tones. “We are extremely grateful and I am sure you can deal with all the queries it might give rise to.”

The police chief lapsed into a crisp, brief stream of Cantonese and the accountant recognised a reference to his mother and a part of her anatomy that he hoped she was no longer having trouble with in the cold Brighton nursing home.

“Evidently,” the Commissioner said, “you have not heard.”

“Heard what?” The accountant changed the receiver from one side of his face to the other and leaned forward in the chair,

“He has struck again. Your maniac, the one we are on the verge of picking up, has killed again. Another slit throat. All the same. Only no cat skin this time. But believe me it’s the same man. Expert, clean, no sign of a struggle. Same weapon by the look of it.”

There followed a string of questions and answers. Who, when, where, what happened? But no why. The Commissioner of Police would not have been able to answer that one any better than he knew the reason for the other murders. When he had all the available information the accountant said: “Commissioner, you must hold the line on this. It is of great importance. Am I correct in assuming you are doing everything possible to keep it quiet?”

“Of course I am,” same the irritable reply.

“Good. Then please continue whatever you are doing. I must discuss and then I will get back to you personally. It must not get to the press. Not Yet.”

“It will,” stated the Commissioner. “Probably not tonight as it was an NT call and we’ve kept it close. But after that I am not so confident. Tomorrow it’ll likely break. When the shifts change and the rank and file call their reporter friends – as we both know happens – it’ll be all over the place. And that’s when I’ll be pressed to explain how a wanted murderer whose arrest was imminent by our own admission in an official statement could go out into the streets and kill again. You tell me.”

“I understand,” said the accountant. He did. “And believe me I am sorry. I can only repeat the statement was considered very important. It’s even more important now that you keep this latest incident as quiet as you can for as long as you can.” The word was wholly unsatisfactory in the circumstances. He wanted to say atrocity, or blunder, or calamity. But *incident* was all he could say. He had to leave it at that, “And Commissioner, I will get back to you as quickly as I can. Now I must make a few calls.”

The accountant placed his finger over the buttons on the telephone, cutting the line and sat staring at the opposite wall. His brain was racing, examining pieces, discarding them, picking them up and scrutinising them again, searching for others. They were not all in reach and those that were would not fit together. What the hell was going on?

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Twelve thousands miles away in an office off one of the labyrinthine corridors of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office the administrative head of the department with responsibility for Hong Kong casually dropped a folder on the desk of one of his staff.

“Read that,” he commanded and stood erect with his hands pushed deep into his pockets tinkling coins with his fingers.

When he had finished the junior officer looked up, questioningly.

“Well?” said Lord Benning.

“Sir?” asked the junior officer.

“Well, what do you make of it?”

The officer flipped the pages over again, giving the impression he had completed a super speed reading course and was taking in the details of the cable once again. In fact, he was biding his time, trying to collect his thoughts. Get inside the other’s head so he could frame the correct, or expected, answer.

“Well sir,” he said finally, though not confidently. “It’s interesting. The PA has set it out fairly clearly I must say.”

“Interesting,” mimicked Lord Benning, and sniffed at some undetectable aroma in the room. “It seems Gould-i-locks is still looking for reds under beds.”

He sniffed again, picked up the folder and repeated: “Interesting.”

When he left the office the junior officer glanced across at the assistant at a desk in the corner and raised his eyebrows. “Interesting?” he said.

\*

Roger Gould did not see himself as someone who went looking for conspiracies. He did not have to. They were just there and more often than not they revealed themselves. That was one of the paradoxes. Political conspiracies, to the trained eye at least, could be seen a mile off. The fact that they existed, that was. The real difficulty lay in identifying the conspirators, unravelling the mechanics of the plot, and finding out all the reasons for perpetrating it.

So far he had succeeded only partially in the first stage, which was why his cable to London the previous day had only hinted at his suspicions. Of course, he knew the spaces between the lines would be filled in to a certain degree, but the probing questions would not be posed until he initiated the next move.

The actual confirmation that a conspiracy did exist had not come until that morning but he had been certain of it before that. When the story appeared in the daily press it merely underlined his already acute suspicions. It also added to the list of conspirators he had drawn up in his mind. First the Chief Secretary had been off hand in the matter. Too off hand. Too unconcerned even given his worries over the financial crisis. That meant his assistant had to know as well, though when he had indirectly mentioned the matter to him, the inscrutability of the Chinese had given way to apparent confusion. Camouflage no doubt.

The Security Secretary had to be included. After all he had to maintain control over the operational arm, and this was now confirmed by the ludicrously obvious police statement. He had always believed that when the British left Hong Kong, as when they voluntarily departed from India, the locals would cock-up the intricately woven successes of the past century and a half.

The present Commissioner of Police might be an experienced policeman but was a Chinese with a cadre's elementary forethought.

Unpleasant as it was though, he had to admit those in charge of the Hong Kong and Macau Office of the New China News Agency seemed to be not too out of touch with the way things were progressing, or regressing, in the territory. They seemed to know when to capitalise on a western failure and when to act in order to garner cautious nods of understanding. The intention being to build those nods into robust support at a later date.

They also appreciated when to ask questions. Usually when they already had the answers. However, there were a few occasions when they had done so without knowing what the response would be, but with genuine concern. The recent political killings had been such a time. When he had shaken his head and categorised them as violent crimes embellished by a journalist's fertile imagination the subject had been quickly dropped. Not what he had expected. They had not come back at him with some indirect metaphor or a strong demand for action. Surprisingly there had been none of that.

Now there was this amateurish police statement that left so many questions unanswered. It was the confirmation he needed. Something was going on that he was being kept out of. But he would find out and he would do whatever was necessary to protect the reputation of Her Majesty's Government.

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It is said the lights of Hong Kong never go out. That they light up the most magnificent harbour and skyline in the world twenty-four hours a day the year round. That while they may not flicker and move the way they do in Tokyo for instance, they nevertheless paint the city in a state of constant activity.

That is not true. Hong Kong does sleep. The neon colours are extinguished. Great black, empty gulfs do form, obliterating vast areas. Many signs and working lights remain on to be sure, but where on earth does an entire city switch off?

It is a myth, a promotional ploy, a play of the mind created by those who love Hong Kong and who have been so swallowed up by its daily vitality and challenges, they dread the thought that even a minute might pass when something exciting does not happen in the city. Their city. Never mind the onslaught of New York, the sagging sad reluctance to let go in London, the gaiety of Paris, or the revelling of other great metropolises. Hong Kong is special and therefore its uniqueness must be shouted loud

and long. Because if it is not it will die. The lights will go out and it will fade into oblivion.

As the reds, yellows, greens and blues blinked off and as millions crept into their beds or forced themselves to savour the last few minutes in front of fast changing television pictures, Tuesday September 29 came to a close. When the people awoke, and the city's hum began anew, one week would remain before they were to feel the first shock waves of a tremor that, if not stopped, could alter their lives forever.

## Chapter Sixteen

In the past, hours and days, even weeks had gone by so quickly or so slowly as to make Teller wonder if he alone was being punished for something he had unwittingly done to annoy the master clock maker.

He could remember days vanishing so quickly that he could not recall them at all. He had lost time, and the events that had gone with it were generally not significant enough to ponder for long.

But now time was of the very essence and he had wasted another whole day. Before he realised it, it was past. Tuesday had become Wednesday. And once again Teller was angry with himself that he had let it happen. No, more than that. It was not a passive failure. It was an active dereliction of responsibility and the one who would suffer most by it would not be himself but someone he had told himself he cared for very much. Not to mention others unknown whom he was certain were also targets.

After he had put the telephone down and reviewed the threatening conversation with the Catskinner, he had done nothing. Nothing but play the words over and over in his head while moving aimlessly around the hotel room. He could not even visualise or recall his thought processes at the time. It was just a jumble of repetitive words. Brigit was in danger. He could do nothing to save her, nor the others. It seemed that for twenty-four hours he wallowed in a place and time where time meant nothing. Brigit was gone. He was powerless. And now Tuesday had gone too.

“No,” he called loudly and then to himself “no, no.” He was shaking and he could see bumps rise on his forearm. He rubbed them away and almost ran to the bathroom where he splashed his face with icy water. He critically studied his reflection in the mirror. The water dripped from his chin and fell onto the marble sink surround. He cupped his hands and again tossed water into his face. “Enough,” he said. He would not give in. He would not merely co-operate. He would do something.

The killer had told him what to do, and he had complied, but no longer. He would not go along with the instruction to stay in the room until Friday, two days away, when he would receive further instructions. He realised that to do so would play into the killer’s hands. By the time the second call came he would be in no state to do anything but agree to whatever he was told. He would not let that happen. He would try to regain the initiative. He understood the killer’s motive. Keep him in seclusion in strange surroundings. Under constant threat that the one he loved would be harmed if he disobeyed. In a state of helplessness. Fearful. Self critical. Finally a feeling of utter guilt and uselessness. Then he would only obey. Then he would have succumbed totally. But he would not let that happen. He would not permit the Catskinner to win.

Teller showered and dressed, not bothering to shave. Purposefully, he unnecessarily tidied the room, tucked the key in the pocket of his jeans and with a brief look about him he left. Outside the hotel he hailed a taxi and sat upright in the rear as it fought its way through the busy rush hour traffic. Twenty-five minutes later Teller paid the driver, opened the door and stepped out. As the door automatically slammed shut and the car groaned away he stood on the sidewalk and looked at the building in front of him. It was still early in the day and people were emerging from other high-rises, striding down the hill as cars passed them, or waited impatiently at entrances for free exit.

Teller had to step to one side to allow a heavy blue Volvo to crawl from the compound. As he did so he examined the occupants and was particularly struck by the beauty of the young woman at the window nearest him. She stared at him but turned quickly away, apparently without interest. He watched the car join the irregular queue in the street and then turned his attention back to the building. Squaring his shoulders he walked in and uninterrupted made his way to the door of the flat he sought. The number was in unpolished brass at the side, next to an illuminated bell button, a letter "B" hanging slightly off centre.

Without hesitation he pressed the button and faced the door. A minute passed. He pressed the bell again. Another minute. He stooped to look through the small glass spy-hole in the door. He did not expect to see into the flat but there was a light background signifying there was no obstruction, no object on the other side of the tiny opaque window. He pressed the bell a third time. Still no answer.

He crossed the corridor and pressed the bell to the flat opposite. When there was no answer there either he tried a second time. Then he moved back to the first door. From his bag he removed a thin rectangle of metal the size of a normal visiting card. In fact it was from the case of a pocket calculator, inserted by the manufacturer and covered by synthetic leather, to make the case firm. He had torn the covering from it, and had carried it with him for years, ever since he had locked himself out of his own flat for the second time. It had cost him one hundred and fifty dollars to have a locksmith open on the first occasion, using a battery powered wonder lock pick that seemed to shake the door open. The second time it had cost one hundred and eighty dollars. But then the young expert had simply used a similar sheet of metal to slip beside the door and its frame and press the tongue of the lock back into its mouth. Single lock doors in old buildings could often be opened that way, he was informed. The one hundred and eighty dollars was for knowledge, experience, not time and sweat he was told. He had since let himself in more than once in this manner.

The building he was not in was almost as old as his own and the door had a single tongue lock. Teller checked the lift. The light above showed the carriage was on the top floor. He slid the metal sheet in, felt it make contact, pushed it and leaned against the door with his right shoulder. It opened inwards with a loud click as the tongue of the lock shot back out. Teller did not move. Then he stepped in and closed the door gently behind him.

He was standing in a hallway, short, empty, uninviting. Four steps in and Teller was in the sitting room, also dull with little light entering through the windows to his left which faced, he guessed, direct north. The room was a rectangle and he cast his eyes around the contents, trying to read the story they might tell about their owner. Along the wall between where he stood and the windows there was a single bench much like an extended school form he remembered from his primary days. Or a rough pew from a stately mansion that had seated noblemen of old as they gnawed on calf bones, a crackling open fire warming the air, and sleepy dogs under the table. But this was certainly no antique long table's seat. More likely a ten pound offering in an Islington Mall junk shop. Teller could almost see it outside on the sidewalk with the white cardboard sale notice stuck with adhesive tape to the edge. Christ, how his mind was wandering.

Layers of paint, the last poor imitation of walnut, destroyed its value or any it might have once had, even more than the metal supports that had replaced the original wooden legs at both ends and in the middle. On it were a lonely pot plant, an unused video tape still in its cellophane wrapping, a sixteen inch television set, and at the far end a number of books in a neat pile.

Teller walked to them and lifted one at a time, reading the titles. They were all engineering and architectural works, the covers hard and predominantly in black and white with an occasional splash of relieving sky blue. He left them there and backed away from the windows, out of sight of anyone who might look up from below. On the sills there was nothing. Nor were there any curtains. In front of the windows was a sofa, the pattern a cheap yellow and brown portrait of cut flowers, the blunt stems beginning in patches of off white cotton. As he turned, Teller's trainers squished on the sealed parquet floor.

The wall he now faced had two paintings hung side by side behind and above a new armchair which was the only other furniture this end of the room. The paintings were attractive, well executed scenes of hills and lakes as seen so often through traditional Chinese artists' eyes. He had frequently considered buying such a painting himself but had rejected the urge. They suited the homes of locals, but for some reason always seemed pretentious, out of place, in the home of a *gwai lo*. Chinese sculpture, screens, even pictures of junks in full sail were tolerable, but delicately done rocks and waters of China's remote mountains were not. In his flat they would seem uneasy, suffering. The other half of the room was no doubt intended to be a dining section, but instead it had two weathered sofas at right angles to each other and a low glass and steel coffee table.

Teller moved to the centre of the room. Directly opposite the hall that led into the sitting room another darker, longer hallway led away from him, ending in a black wall but with obvious openings on both sides, one of them very bright. He quickly investigated and discovered a main bedroom, a second bedroom that had been made into a study of sorts, a bathroom, kitchenette and a passage, well lit by the natural light from outside, which took him to an open area at the rear of the building that was a laundry, tiny amah's room and toilet and shower combined. The amah's room was bare. The laundry was empty except for a wicker basket in one corner that had a dirty shirt at the bottom. On the shelf above was a bent kitchen fork.

Teller returned to the kitchenette, opening and closing drawers and cupboards. Then to the bathroom where he opened the cabinet, noted the toiletries inside, and closed it. The bedroom had a single bed, a dressing table and a wardrobe which held clothes and nothing more. Teller felt it was largely an unhappy flat, and without reluctance walked into the study next door. It was the only room in the flat that appeared lived in.

The other rooms were necessities, but the study was a creation. It was not luxurious but it was by comparison a luxury. Teller took in the furnishings, confused by the striking contrast. A pale green sofa was against one wall, three covered cushions neatly positioned so their bright corner designs were displayed to their best advantage, and with a brass standing lamp at the far end, obviously carefully placed to give the reader the best possible light. Next to it, facing out through the clear glass windows, was a desk.

On it was a red lamp, two glass paper weights with flowers embedded inside, a photograph of a group of young people, more architectural and engineering manuals, and a brown tea holder, the type that was so commonly found on office desks. A chair with leather back was pushed into the desk, out of the way, snug between the legs at one end and the three drawers at the other.

Along the wall on the other side, opposite the sofa, was a long two-shelf book case, lined on both sides with novels, or at least English language novels he recognised and works disporting large black Chinese characters on their covers which Teller presumed were novels.

Curiously he noted the owner's taste ranged through local, British, American, South African and even Australian authors. They were neat, tidy, well cared for. And read. Slips of paper stuck out of the top, marking chapters completed or more likely simply left between the pages once the story had been finished. Teller did this himself and his own books were littered with visiting cards, pocket calendars, utility invoices and in one case he could point to, a metal comb. But whereas his shelves were disorderly, those he now scanned were protected in a way. The owner cared for the books as though he intended to return to them often and when he did, he expected them to be in the same condition as when he first obtained them.

No folded pages that he could see, no torn covers, in their place. Orderly. The same applied to the rattan display case that leaned against the wall to Teller's right. More books, Chinese fans and plates on dark wooden stands and soapstone ornaments of ancient sages holding staffs and scrolls, horses with their manes flying, and a fat smiling Buddha, his large belly shining in satisfaction. In the middle of the floor a green and rust rug edged in square and curl patterns. The room was pleasant, comfortable, used. On the walls hung a Chinese scroll, three framed Japanese postcards bordered in dark green, and another of the fine Chinese brush works, a bat wing junk moving down a muddy river lined on both sides with cultivated fields, in turn bordered by trees and with sharp mountain peaks slicing pastel skies in the background.

Teller absorbed all of these things from the doorway, then walked in and pulled open the top drawer of the desk. It was crammed with pencils, matchboxes, a ruler, tea spoon, letter opener, rubber bands and a pair of long bladed scissors. The second drawer held a pile of typing paper, a thick foolscap book of lined sheets, a small notepad and a folder of envelopes. The last drawer was empty altogether.

He straightened and tried to create in his mind the personality of the occupant of the flat. His first conclusion was he was spartan in his basic needs. The rest of the flat showed no trimmings, no trappings of invitation or even more than essential comfort. Needs not wants. However the study where he now stood was the exception. Everything he saw was wanted, chosen, tended. Two people. Or one person, two lives. Teller reminded himself that the resident, the occupier of the space he was standing in was a cold blooded killer. The sitting room, the main bedroom, all the other rooms were not inconsistent with that. They retreated, gave nothing, absorbed. The study on the other hand spoke, reached out, accepted. One part transient, the other permanent. Inconsistent, complicated, incongruous.

He looked around the room again and his eyes settled on the group photograph on the desk top. Maybe twenty young men and women stood in a garden smiling broadly at the camera. Fourth from the left in the back row was the face. The smile was wide, but the eyes stared back expressionless. Teller studied it. Two parts. One warm, the other cold. Like the flat. Contradictions. He held up the photograph, fixing the face in his memory, underlining it, filing away every individual feature. Then he put it back on the desk, exactly where it had been before and left the room. He did not return to the other rooms, he had seen all he wanted, gathered what information he could. To tarry would be a waste of time, and time was not something he could afford to waste. Also he knew where he had to visit next. The photograph told him that. Carefully, Teller let himself out of the flat, pulling the door firmly behind him, listening to the click as the tongue of the lock shot into its metal mouth. Outside on the sidewalk he glanced up at the fourth floor and for a brief moment imagined he saw someone watching him from the study window. But the figment vanished and he gulped in a lung of air, setting off down the drive to the main road and the subway.

The flat had disturbed him greatly and he wanted to be far away from it as speedily as possible. What he sought now was its absent resident and when he found him he would have to be extremely careful indeed.

The killer was clever, very clever. He was also determined, driven, and would stop at nothing to see his aims carried out. Teller knew that now. He knew that no matter what he had to stop him. He had to put an end to the murderer's mad plans. For he was certain too, that if he did not get Brigit away from him, she would be killed. So would he and so would many others.

The next piece of the puzzle was the large brick building opposite the Hung Hom railway station at the entrance to the Cross Harbour Tunnel. The desk photograph was taken in a garden with a portion of the building as a backdrop. In a jungle of grey concrete the burnt orange of bricks was a beacon. The Hong Kong Polytechnic stood out, easily recognisable to all travellers passing from one side of the harbour to the other, just as it had announced itself to Teller in the vivid colour snapshot. It was there he hoped to find his next answer.

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"First, thank you all for coming to this meeting," said the assistant to the Chief Secretary. "I know you are very busy. But despite your respective individual responsibilities you will agree I am sure that the Survey Office is paramount."

James Wong glanced around the table. He did not wait for acknowledgement and plunged on. "The day's not over so technically the consultation period has a few hours to run. However, we have to move and move fast as the schedule is the Commissioner to meet the press later in the day. That is, after the Chief Secretary has spoken in Legco, probably around a quarter to three or three."

The Commissioner of the Survey Office nodded. "I do public at four," he said. "Time for the main television news. Later, and we'd miss them."

"Quite" said Wong. "Any comments on that?"

The others shook their heads. The Director of Information Services knew only too well the importance of catching the stations' broadcasts. If the press conference was proposed any later he would have objected strenuously. Not only did they need time for questioning the Commissioner, they had all lined up individual commentators and would be door-stepping Legislative Councillors and other interested parties right up to the last minute.

The Commissioner's own Chief Information Officer remained silent. He was at the meeting more by convention and only in case his superior needed him. He would speak only when the Commissioner spoke to him.

Roger Gould was unconcerned about the timing.

"Right then," said Wong. "That's agreed. Obviously the Chief Secretary has been kept closely informed of things and I understand he has decided on the framework of his speech. As soon as the Commissioner can give him a draft outline of the report he will start polishing and finalising it. Any idea on timing of that?"

The Commissioner coughed. "I should be able to hand it over by next Monday. That will give him two clear days."

Wong struck a match. "Good. That should be alright. Keep to that please. If you can get it back by the Friday, or even Saturday, so much the better." He inhaled deeply and leaned back in his chair. "So, over to you Commissioner. Tell us what the people of Hong Kong say they want us to do in the time we have left."

As the Commissioner began unstacking files, opening pages and pushing his cup of coffee out of the way, the others followed the assistant's example and leaned back waiting for the stream of statistics and analyses to come. There was an automatic glancing at wrist watches as the Commissioner started his briefing.

As had been pointed out the official four-month consultation time would not officially end until later in the day, and more comments could be expected in the remaining hours. However, up to close of play on the Tuesday just over one hundred and thirty thousand valid submissions had been received. Another two thousand odd had been rejected as irrelevant, duplicates, or of doubtful origin. The vast majority had been from individuals, more than one hundred and twenty-five thousand in fact, with in excess of four thousand from groups of people and one thousand from associations and similar bodies.

"I think it is fair to say the exercise has been a huge success," remarked the Commissioner. "I for one had not expected such numbers. To be honest it has been a real headache."

"You've done well, very well, under the strained circumstances," congratulated James Wong.

The Survey Office had also to take into consideration other forms of expression. Apart from the two public surveys commissioned by the office there was a huge number of surveys conducted by outside organisations. In addition, there had been more than twenty signature campaigns and sets of similar documents. Of course, there was the media comment too, and the Legislative Council, Municipal Councils and all nineteen District Boards had debated the Green Paper. Their opinions had to be taken account of.

The Green Paper had been published on May 27 and the response had been as anticipated gradual right up to the beginning of September. But then the unexpected had happened. While a late rush was not case for surprise the magnitude of the rush had been astounding.

"Between September 2 and September 9," explained the Commissioner, "the numbers went from around three thousand five hundred to ten thousand. Another five thousand came in the next week. Then over the following seven days the total jumped right up to around twenty-eight thousand." He held up a rough chart showing a thin line creeping horizontally along the bottom of the page, rising steadily and then shooting to the top of the page in a sheer perpendicular thrust. "I think it would not be overstating it if I described the last week as unbelievable. Totally exhausting." The Commissioner looked at his Chief Information Officer who nodded but still said nothing.

"What's the breakdown?" asked Roger Gould. "How many in favour?"

The Commissioner opened another file. "Before dealing specifically with the direct election issue let me give you, if you agree, a breakdown by opinion." It went without labouring the point that virtually all the signature campaigns dealt with direct elections in 1988. About fifty eight per cent of the submissions commented on the role of District Boards. Over sixty per cent dealt with the overall composition of the Legislative Council. More than seventy-five per cent expressed an opinion on the presidency of the council. Just over sixty per cent commented on the voting age. Whether to lower it to 18 years. But less than forty per cent took the time and effort to express an opinion on the general question of the pace of political development in the territory.

"OK," said Gould impatiently. "That's interesting. We know direct elections is the burning issue. So what's the answer?"

The Commissioner extracted a number of charts and tables from a third file. First he concluded that based on debates in the Legislative Council, the Municipal Councils and at District Boards, the submissions from associations and bodies, just under half wanted direct elections, but not in 1988. Twenty per cent did not think direct elections were at all desirable. About twenty-seven per cent firmly favoured 1988 as the year to introduce them, and the rest or around three per cent had no definite opinion on the timing, though they supported direct elections in principle.

“As to the McNair surveys you know the results,” he said. “Unfortunately they’ve already been accurately reported in the press. But to repeat a significant point, the pro-1988 lobby heads the anti-1988 lobby by about four points.”

The Director of Information Services shook his head. “I am not suggesting we do it here and now, but we are going to have to address the McNair problem soon.” He turned to the Commissioner. “I understand their results – not to mention the phrasing of the questions – are not consistent with the other surveys done.”

“That’s right,” he replied sullenly. “And I do agree we have a problem there.”

In fact, all but one of the other surveys were heavily in favour of direct elections in 1988. The inconsistency was glaringly evident. But that was not the only difficulty the administration would have to content with. Another related to the street corner campaigns conducted, such as those initiated by or which involved the outspoken Martin Lee. In all, twenty such campaigns pushed for direct elections in 1988. No fewer than two hundred and thirty-three thousand names were collected. Even given ten thousand invalidations the expression of support was overwhelming.

“That’s it then,” wheezed Gould. “That’s the bottom line.”

The Commissioner shuffled files around the desk. His Chief information Officer sat impassive. The Director of Information Services smiled. Nobody spoke for almost half a minute.

It was James Wong who broke the silence. “It needn’t be so cut and dry,” he said, putting out his cigarette. “Indeed, it is far from it. The statistics are not the full story.”

“What do you mean?” asked Gould. “How do you get around the fact that two hundred and thirty thousand people say they want direct elections next year?”

James Wong lit another cigarette and breathed nicotine into his lungs before answering. “What I mean is,” he said finally, “it can be argued they are not two hundred and thirty thousand individual comments, but are part of twenty individual submissions.”

There was another silence while the dollar dropped. “Risky,” said the Director of Information services. “Arguable, but risky.”

“Risky?” blurted the Political Adviser. “Risky? That would be dynamite. Christ, you do that and Lee and who knows who else will be all over us.”

The assistant drew again on his cigarette.

Gould went on animatedly. “First, you have that pathetic McNair survey which did more harm than good, and now you’re suggesting we disregard two hundred and thirty thousand vocal supporters of direct elections. You do that in a clumsy way, any way, and you will have a crisis in the streets. It’s bloody dynamite. And I think you all know that.”

James Wong did. “I am fully cognisant of that,” he said. “We all are. Here and elsewhere. As you say if we are clumsy we fail badly. However, if we are careful, extremely careful....” He left the sentence unfinished. The words were unspoken but the intimation was clear.

As they all leaned forward and took urgent sips from their cups the Political Adviser shook his head. "Jesus. Get this wrong and you will have riots on your hands. Blood on them too probably. And they will start next Wednesday."

The assistant kept his gaze on the Political Adviser and began outlining a plan of action that he hoped, prayed, would succeed. The consequences of failure were unthinkable.

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Teller had decided against the mass transit railway and rode a Kowloon Motor Bus instead, all the way to the Kowloon Canton Railway depot at Hung Hom. As the red and beige double-decker pulled away from the traffic island and unceremoniously forced its way in the lane entering the tunnel, Teller stood and looked at the brick turrets and sheer wall over the tops of the belching motorised monsters that battled in front of him.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic was partly obscured also by an elevated walkway that took students from the building to the rail terminus and the Coliseum next door. It was the route he had to walk to seek the answers he needed. It was probably the longest way in but he had not been to the Polytechnic other than by car, so he walked into the station, laboriously located staircases which took him levels above the ground and ultimately onto the pedestrian bridge. He strode across, above the crawling cars, buses, trucks and daredevil motorcyclists below.

Like lemmings they followed one another into the black gaping jaws of the tunnel and were swallowed up. He knew they would safely spurt out at the other end, a short mile away, but from where he stood they appeared to be voluntarily submitting themselves to a crunching, indigestible doom.

The sun had come out with a vengeance, completely baffling everyone judging by the number of discarded raincoats and furled umbrellas that were in evidence, and the few clouds that were in the sky were shredded remnants only. Teller removed his own light jacket, tossed it over his shoulder and left the endless battle below to vainly try to sort itself out. Once on the other side of the road he skipped across the double lane side street and up the steps leading into the main entrance of the institution. There were few students about and those that were paid him no regard, accepting him no doubt as one of their own.

To his left inside the hall was a large billboard, filled with notices, and next to it a reception-cum-information counter with a young girl and a woman the age he expected her mother to be, talking in serious low tones. Teller approached the notices and stood as if reading them carefully. The females ignored him and continued their discussion, or more a lecture of the young one by the elder woman. The senior did the talking and the junior the listening and nodding in understanding. It lasted another three minutes and then there was a stern "*ho ma*" from the older woman. She waited for the soft response, and with a toss of her head stepped from behind the counter and paced across the stone floor and out through the rear exit.

Teller waited until he was sure she was not returning immediately and approached the young woman who was busily sorting through filing cards in a carousel holder, nimbly clicking them one after another with her long nails.

"Excuse me," he said politely, smiling "I wonder if you could help me please."

"Yes?" she said, her fingers momentarily ceasing their sorting.

He had waited for this moment, timing it carefully. The girl had plainly been roundly criticised by her superior for some indiscretion and was now in a weakened

state of mind. She was visibly upset. Her fingers were nimble but while her guard would be up Teller knew she would be vulnerable.

"I'm looking for a friend of mine, and to be honest I don't know where to start," he said.

"What course?" asked the girl.

A quick look over his shoulder told Teller she was more concerned with the possible return of the older woman than she was with his query. He shook his head. "That's the real problem," he said still smiling. "I don't know. I was hoping you could look up his card and tell me where I could find him."

"You have to go to records," she answered. "That way, through there." She pointed to a doorway to their right.

Teller looked at his wristwatch. "Please, can't you check for me? I'm in a hurry."

"No, you have to go over through there."

"Look, if I ask that lady who was here before, and say you can't help, do you think she might do it for me? This is the information counter isn't it?" Teller dropped the smile and locked his eyes on hers. "Is she your boss?"

The girl blinked twice but did not look at him. She kept her attention on the distant doorway. "You have to use records and research," she said crisply.

"Thank you," said Teller firmly. "Well, I'll try that other lady anyway. Maybe she'll be more helpful than you." He began to walk away across the open floor.

"Wait," the girl called after him. "Maybe I can help. What is his name?"

Teller walked back to the counter. "Thank you," he said. "I appreciate your assistance." He gave the name from the video receipt docket.

The girl crouched behind the counter and Teller could see her checking other carousels in the cupboard, each with a letter of the alphabet emblazoned on the side in bright yellow. Six had to be checked before she stood up and repeated the name.

"That's it," Teller said brightly.

"Architectural design," said the girl.

"Really?" Teller arched his eyebrows. "That's surprising. Can I just check the details please? Maybe there's another student with the same name in English but different in Chinese. Maybe I have the pronunciation wrong."

He reached for the card. The girl held it back and was about to say something but with another glance in the direction her supervisor had gone she quickly passed him the faded card. Teller read the entries printed on it. He screwed up his mouth and handed it back to her. "No," he said. "My friend is much different. Quite different in all respects. Do you have any others by that name?"

The girl looked at the carousel again. "No. That's the only one."

"Well in that case, I seem to have been the one to make a terrible mistake. I'll have to call him tonight to find out how." He drummed his knuckles on the counter. "I don't understand. But thank you for your help. I really appreciate it. I had better hurry or I'll be late."

Outside on the steps at the front of the building Teller removed a notebook from his shoulder bag and wrote in it. There had been two addresses on the Polytechnic registration card. One was the Broadcast Drive flat he had been in a few hours before.

The other was an area in Sai Kung that he was not familiar with. It was obviously not in the new urban area of the New Territories region. It was more remote, probably near an ancient village community, which accounted for the fact that it was described as Lot 37 rather than an ordinary street number. He would investigate

it. But not before he was fully prepared for what he hoped to find there. If his hunch was correct that was where Brigit was being held.

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“If our economy is the heart of this territory, then we have just had a heart attack. Or if a sound economy is the essential foundation on which all our other endeavours and achievements must be based, then we have just had a terrible earthquake.”

An eloquent legislative councillor began his inquisition with words of deadly prognosis, words that were bound, no doubt calculated, to without fear portray the anxious heartbeats of the tens of thousands of recently much poorer people pounding the sidewalks of Hong Kong. But it was the sting in the tail that struck the loudest note.

His direct attack on the moral fortitude of the British Government resounded not only throughout the territory but thousands of miles across the seas. There was a time, he orated, when he thought that the British administration in Hong Kong was made of sterner stuff. “But was I wrong?” he asked. “Or has the Iron Lady become the Rusty Lady?” In between he left no stones unturned. With careful and cool aim he fired strong and, in the view of many, with deadly accuracy.

The story had been passed to the Editor in Chief of the South China Morning Post and he now read it with a degree of satisfaction. Not that he necessarily agreed with every sentiment expressed, but the fact they were being said, so robustly, pleased the Australian. It reminded him of the parliamentary battles he had covered in Canberra and he was glad the political scene in his new home was becoming more lively, though thankfully not quite so abusively rowdy.

The reporter had done a good job and the criticisms of the government, using emotive words such as “fiasco” and “debacle” were high up in the story. It was obvious, the councillor claimed, that the government was unable to feel the pulse of the financial sector because those at the top had not realised the seriousness or the full extent of the problems. It was also to blame for having turned a blind eye to the obvious evils which were known to exist for a long time. There was clear distinction, he pointed out, between laissez faire policy and the adoption of an I-don’t-want-to-know attitude. That line particularly would register with the powers-that-be who would feel compelled to answer it, thought Davidson. The article went on, attributing all remarks to the Legislative Councillor, to point accusing fingers at the Financial Secretary personally for his inactivity over handling of the recent financial crisis. That was good too, as it must lead to a follow-up story, a second bite at the enticing cherry.

On the general issue of the political system the councillor had been most pointed. He started by claiming there was a complete lack of trust of Legislative Council members by both the government and some members of the Executive Council, in effect the cabinet of the government. The relationship was breaking down. Again he too pushed for a fully elected legislature as promised in the 1984 Joint Declaration signed by China and Britain.

However, it seemed at present the administration was trying to copy the existing colonial setup of government, which was singularly unsuitable for a government of a Special Administrative Region within China which Hong Kong would become after 1997.

Davidson nodded in agreement with the reporter who had highlighted the claim that if this was pursued the system would soon disintegrate and the ambitious

policy of “One Country, Two Systems” would fail. The editor reminded himself to commend the reporter for a good piece of work. It was something he was always loath to do but so far he had been impressed and if the remainder of the story was as good he would break his own rule.

The councillor had gone on to attack the leaked Survey Office report, primarily the AGB McNair polls, as clumsy at best. Indeed, anybody who had completed primary education would have been able to do a better job, he sniped. An imputation was that the company had acted under government pressure, to attempt to direct the outcome to favour the stand voiced so strongly by China, and no doubt sought by Britain as well who were afraid of upsetting the awakened giant. People felt let down perhaps because they had been too trusting of the Hong Kong Government.

The reporter moved towards the conclusion with the now familiar assault by the councillor on the subject. “The Survey Office report has woken us up from our day dream that the British Administration here in Hong Kong has our interests at heart, that it will take a stand at some point and refuse to kowtow to China, that the Iron Lady will keep her promise to us that Britain has a moral obligation towards Hong Kong.”

He then levelled his gun at the very heart of the local administration and fired at the Governor himself. In his recent policy speech, he stated, the Queen’s representative had sounded like the Chief Executive of the SAR Government. The article ended with a repeat of the Iron Lady-Rusty Lady jibe.

Davidson dropped the print out on the desk and relit his Petersen’s. He mused for fully three minutes before rising quickly and striding across the floor to the sub-editors’ desk.

“Run it across the top of the front page with a pointer to page two,” he instructed. “A strap heading.”

“Not the lead?” questioned the chief sub-editor.

“No. That’s for later when we get the response. There’s fireworks here. The Chief Secretary has to answer the accusations. If he doesn’t the lame duck will hobble through the entire civil service. McNamara knows that. He knows there won’t be loud squawks but there will be an exodus of ducklings. This government can’t afford that now. If its own people lose any more heart, it’s lost. There’ll be collapse. A giant vacuum that would have to be filled by others who feel they can’t afford to wait.”

He paused briefly. “Believe me, it’ll come. We may have to wait until next week, but when it comes you can bet your ass it’ll be a cracker.” The editor walked away. He stopped, and looked around the editorial office remembering his promise to commend the young reporter who wrote the story. “To hell with it,” he said to himself. “He’s paid to produce good copy. Anyway, the kudos should go to the councillor not the minion who merely put the hooks around the words.”

The councillor was the one who earned the bouquets or the brickbats. He was the one who would go down in history as a hero of the people or a mere self-seeking thorn in the side of Hong Kong. Time was the real manipulator though. And time was running out. Whatever was going to happen must happen soon.

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Jason Teller was no longer simply a journalist, a reporter chasing leads or seeking out hidden facts that when put together would tell the world things they felt they should know, whether or not the possessors of those facts wanted them released. He was now a hunter of one man. Years of training to delve and sort were working to

his advantage. Instinct too. But these were not enough. The time had come when he required more backup. More power.

Once he left the Polytechnic he retraced his steps to the Kowloon Canton Railway where he located a public telephone. He did not wish to use a free phone and was prepared to pay the single dollar, a low price for the added privacy he needed. He waited for the connection tone to hum in his ear and then dialled a number on the island. It rang only twice before it was answered by the switchboard operator.

“Can you put me through to Fu Ko-bin,” he said.

There was a click and the operator immediately connected Teller to the phone of Alex Fu. Thirty seconds lapsed and then he heard his friend’s voice. “Hello. Alex Fu.”

“So how’s the British garrison holding out?” said Teller. “Still denying the pullout are we?”

“There is no basis for the claim HMG is withdrawing the garrison. The Joint Declaration specifically states that Britain is responsible for the running of Hong Kong until 1997. The British garrison is part of that responsibility. Next question please.”

“How many toy boats do you have left now?”

“The sale of the two new patrol craft to the Sultan of Brunei results from an increased capacity of the Royal Hong Kong Police marine fleet. Under the terms of the Defence Costs Agreement seventy-five per cent of the sale price will be passed to the Hong Kong Government. Next.”

“When do you expect the Ghurkhas to move out? When to the PLA move into HMS Tamar? When does the second battalion take up its new posting in Northern Ireland? How did they manage to get to you you traitor?”

“And may a giant panda piddle on you from a great height,” answered Alex Fu. “And when are we going to share a pint you elusive bugger? I have been trying to reach you for days.”

Teller smiled into the phone. “Soon old mate. Soon. But right now I need a favour.”

“Sure. What is it?” came the instant reply.

Alex Fu and Teller had met years before, soon after Teller had come to the territory, and they had remained friends ever since. Fu had graduated from the Hong Kong University with an arts degree, tried teaching for a year, and decided it was not a profession he wanted to spend any more time on. So he joined the Armed Services as a Lieutenant in the information and liaison wing.

The job was interesting to begin with but he rapidly learned that the best way he could serve the Major-General was to follow a no-comment line. That was not his own policy but he also came to the early realisation that the military system was not one an information staff could fight. Boredom set in and would have made life unbearably frustrating had it not been for a friendly major in the administration section who invited him to join the services gun club. Within a year Fu was a member of the representative team and had competed in the Philippines, Thailand and the neighbouring Portuguese enclave of Macao.

He had no trophies as yet but he did have a .38 calibre pistol similar to those the police had used for years before they Americanised their arsenal and switched to Colt. It was the .38 Teller wanted.

“That’s difficult Jason,” said Alex Fu. “It’s only for use on the ranges. By me.”

“I know that Alex,” said Teller.

“It’s licensed in my name.”

“I know that too.”

“If anyone found out I’d lose it. Club membership and all.”

“Alex, I understand all that. I know what I’m asking. But it’s very important.”

“You haven’t told me why you want to borrow it.”

“No I haven’t. And I can’t either. But again, it is important Alex. If it wasn’t I wouldn’t dream of asking.”

The telephone line was silent for half a minute. Then Fu spoke. “Jason, if I agree will you promise me something? I have to set a condition.”

“What is it? If I can’t I’ll tell you. I’ll be honest about that at least.”

Alex Fu paused and Teller could hear the long intake of breath. “Promise me you won’t use it for anything illegal. I mean don’t go flashing it about in bars or robbing any banks or shooting the editor of the Standard.”

Teller permitted himself a laugh. “There’s no need to shoot anyone on the Standard.” Then seriously. “I promise not to do anything with it that is not in the very best interests of the stability and security of the community. You have my word on that.”

“Fair enough,” said Fu. “And also promise me you won’t shoot yourself in the foot with it. They leave a rather nasty hole you know.”

“Done,” said Teller “I’ll leave that to you soldier types.”

Over the next few minutes it was agreed Fu would meet Teller in the Friar Tuck, an English pub in Canton Road. He did not press any more on the need for the apparent secrecy, nor did he repeat his request for assurances. Their friendship was enough and if anything needed to be said then it was up to Teller to volunteer it. If more information was to be forthcoming, Fu would hear it at seven o’clock that night when he was to hand over the weapon. If not, he would rely on his trust.

Teller hung up the telephone. The last piece of his plan was in place. On the Wednesday morning when he implemented it he would find out if he had the right pieces.

## Chapter Seventeen

Brigit began her fourth day of captivity in the hands of a cold blooded killer bent on preventing anyone from standing in his way of changing the history of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong, and by doing so, no doubt the face of the entire Far East. She was terrified, bewildered, impatient. And very angry.

The terror was deep rooted and while she was successful at times in not allowing it to seep out too obviously she could not conceal it totally. She acted, she lied, she cried and she fought to suppress it. But there were many moments when with her guard low, it bubbled to the surface and manifested itself in throbbing headaches and a palpitating heart, shivering and silent racking sobs, her face buried in cloth to mute the acknowledged fear.

It was a feeling she had never really experienced before and it was not until the second day that she recognised it for what it was. What had seemed hostility and repugnance to her at first finally discarded its mask and revealed its real face. For Brigit it was an ugly and unfamiliar countenance. One that shocked her. The realisation she was very afraid was a fear itself.

When she was first threatened and forcibly abducted from the Hongkong Hotel Brigit's reaction had been absolutely predictable to anyone who knew her well. She was hostile. On the sidewalk in Canton Road with a gun pointed at her, and the threat over her head that she could directly contribute to the death of her lover if she did not do as told, she had obeyed the explicit instructions delivered by the smiling man by her side. But once inside the vehicle which drew up before them, and into which she was, from an onlooker's viewpoint carefully helped, Brigit shook off the façade. Bile rose in her and she proceeded to loudly and roundly abuse her kidnapper. He did not try to silence her but made certain the windows were not open and that she approached no nearer than he considered prudent. As the brown sedan carved its way through the traffic frequently stopping for traffic lights, when not to arouse the curiosity of passengers in vehicles nearby the armed man nodded and smiled condescendingly, Brigit continued her tirade in a mixture of French and English that would in any circumstances bruise the eardrums and sensibilities of a normal cultured person.

The driver of the car who Brigit neither saw nor took any notice of, manoeuvred in and out of lanes when not watching the gesticulating antics of his unwilling passenger in the rear view mirror. He grinned at the single Cantonese phrase spat at the killer in which his sexual relationship with his mother was described, but quickly wiped it from his lips with the back of his hand when he caught the look in the black eyes that focused on him from the back seat.

For her part Brigit was not aware of nor did she really care about the effect her constant outburst was having. Her actions were animal. Instinctively reactionary her purpose was to vent her feelings as audibly as she was able. She continued for the hour-long journey through Tsimshatsui, Hung Hom, past the international airport where an incoming Lufthansa jet buzzed them from what seemed a few feet, and away from the congestion of the Kowloon peninsula to the rural New Territories.

The driver pressed the accelerator harder and the aging sedan raced along the wide highway, paying scant attention to the few other cars and lorries, as it passed through the village of Tseng Lan Shue to the T junction which either went right to Clear water Bay or left to Sai Kung and the restricted High Island reservoir and Mount Hallows, west of Long Harbour and east of the Tolo Channel.

The driver turned left, wound his way by Ho Chung, Hebe Haven and Tai Wan to Tai Mong Tsai and Pak Tam Chung. There he stopped again at another junction. One kilometre straight ahead he knew he would come to the barrier at the start of the huge man-made reservoir. Immediately to his right was a slip road which according to the red and white sign led only to the Outward Bound School where civil servants and young executives from the commercial sector, and students, spent weeks learning such skills as team building and self discovery.

The Catskiner in the back seat of the car curtly instructed "*jun jor*" and the driver wrenched the gear lever upward and heaved the steering wheel anticlockwise. With Brigit by now dry and exhausted and thankfully quiet they drove two kilometres north to a point in the road where it crossed a concrete weir to the side of which about two hundred meters into the hills nestled an old village of twelve houses and a church. The car stopped and the man said softly to Brigit: "Remember, do not do anything other what I tell you. Anything foolish and you know what will happen to your friend Jason Teller. He will die. After you do of course."

She was led to the church, an incongruous pink and white structure at the back of a small tight compound. Behind it at the foot of the hills was a grey concrete extension and it was into that she was firmly ushered. The driver remained seated in the car and Brigit did not see or hear any other people, though a pack of dogs barked and yapped her arrival.

The extension comprised three rooms, empty shells housing nothing but debris and dust. The apertures that would have been windows were securely boarded and barred allowing no light to enter. It took a while to adjust to the gloom and by the time she had, Brigit had been directed to the furthest room. She was made to sit on the filthy floor while the Catskiner tied her legs and hands with thick rope she had noticed in one of the corners.

She did not protest but glared in hatred as the bonds were knotted and she breathed a guttural: "You bastard. You'll be sorry."

The man said nothing. Finally he drew a dark blue large handkerchief from a pocket of his jacket and fastened it tightly around her head, pulling her mouth into a grimace and preventing her from uttering anything more than a grunt. When he had done this he pushed her onto her side, bent her legs up behind her and looped a rope between the hand and leg bonds, completely immobilising her. "Don't bother to try to free yourself," he told her. "I can promise you it will only make it more painful. The knots tighten with movement."

He had then gone outside and did not return for at least an hour. During that time, as she lay breathing in the dust from the floor. Brigit heard the car drive off as the dogs continued their din. But there were no other sounds. Eventually the dogs stopped their barking and she could hear in the silence her own heartbeat and the heavy intake of choking air.

For the rest of the day the Chinese came and went for varying periods of time, never giving an explanation, always warning her not to try to escape, and refusing to make her more comfortable. She was left to push herself into a sideways sitting position, her back against the cool wall, her legs doubled up at the sides. She had to repeatedly shift her weight from one side to the other to prevent numbness or the possibility of cramp. Her jaw ached, her arms felt sore and heavy and at times she thought the blood flow to her legs was cut off. Late in the evening the Catskiner returned and removed the handkerchief and the rope joining the bonds around her hands and legs. She was able to stretch out on the floor and relax her face muscles.

Brigit tried to entice her captor into discussion but he steadfastly refused, either content to stare at the floor in front of him or to pace around the dark rooms, softly, careful not to shatter the night by inadvertently kicking an empty can or piece of timber. At around midnight, after hours of on and off pleading and brooding Brigit lay on the floor and helplessly drifted into a light, many times interrupted, sleep. Every time she awoke the man was in the room with her and even if sitting perfectly still in the corner she could see the shine in his open eyes. When she awoke in the morning he was still there, squatting, silent, without expression. A question about her future was greeted by his refixing the handkerchief and the restricting rope behind her. There was the familiar admonition and he walked out of the room. He was gone for well over an hour and when he came back he was smiling.

“Your friend is concerned about you,” he said. “Very concerned. That pleases me very much. If he is worried he will be concentrating on that worry and not on other things.”

Brigit was also worried. Quite simply she had to go to the toilet. It amazed her she had not thought of it before, but after nearly twenty-four hours of uncomfortable captivity the urge to urinate was inescapable. The more she acknowledged it the more pressing the need became. Violently shaking her head and writhing her body she succeeded in alerting him to her desperate situation.

He untied her hands and legs and took her into one of the other rooms where he pointed to a corner and said simply: “There.” He would stand on the other side of the entrance and he would allow her just a few minutes.

Humiliated and disgusted, her eyes never left the opening and for the first time she was glad the filthy extension to the church had no light. The bleakness did not conceal her but it was a veil behind which she crouched. When she was taken back to her room she begged the ropes not be refastened, promising to stay unmoving against the wall opposite where he sat, legs crossed staring at her.

He agreed and for the time seemed prepared to talk. He had kidnapped her, he said, because it had been necessary.

“And just why was it necessary?” Brigit wanted to know. “What on earth have I done? What do you hope to get in return for me? If it’s money, ransom, you can forget it. I don’t have it. And my friends could hardly come up with anything worthwhile.”

“Please Miss Rolanne,” he replied evenly. “Do not patronise me. You are in no position to question with infantile remarks.”

Chided she was, repentant she was not. “Then suppose you tell me exactly why I am here. And that you intend doing with me, yes? I would like to know.”

Without taking his eyes off her he said: “You are an intelligent woman Miss Rolanne and I am sure you have put two and two together quite easily. However, if you choose to play this silly game I will join you. For a while. It will help pass the time if nothing else. Quite simply you have your friend Jason Teller to thank for your present, shall we call it, detention. The inconvenience you experience is due entirely to him.”

“And what has he done then?” she spat out.

“It is more what he has not done,” said the Catskiner. “He is a foolish man, playing a dangerous game. His actions have placed both your lives at serious risk.”

“So you plan to kill us too? Like you did the others?”

“I did not wish to. But I am left with little choice. If Mr Teller continues to defy me, that little choice remaining will also be forfeited.”

“You can’t get away with it. You will be caught. If Jason can track you down, those trained to do that sort of thing certainly will.”

“Perhaps. But not just yet.”

“How do you know Jason hasn’t told them what he knows about you already? They could be on their way here now.”

The man shook his head slowly. “He has not. You know that as well as I do.”

“Who do you think you are that you know everything?”

“Who I am does not matter. And I do not know everything. But what I do know is that you can do nothing and that Jason Teller must do what I say or else he knows what will happen to you.”

“For an educated person you are really stupid,” said Brigit.

“Take care Miss Rolanne. I might remind you that you are in my charge and there are others out there who would wish that I really was stupid.” The man allowed himself a slight smile and a brief nod of his head. “Indeed, even the journalist considers me anything but stupid. He has said as much in the articles published in his newspaper.”

“Is that why you want him?” asked Brigit. “Because he wrote about you in the paper? Because he described you as a maniac, which you are, not as an intelligent person, but that you have some grand political plan to bring this place down?”

The Catskiner hesitated. Then: “His description of me is inconsequential. He is wrong of course, but it does not matter. To him and his kind I may be thought of as a maniac. As a crazy person. If so, there are many crazy people who are proud to be so. Time will vindicate them. History will be the judge. I know what I do is right. As to what it is, I fear you would not understand.”

“Try me,” tempted Brigit. “Or do you consider a poor French girl is not bright enough to recognise right from wrong?”

Some seconds lapsed before the man spoke again. When he did it was in a low voice and his words were carefully chosen, if they did somewhat resemble a rehearsed script. “Perhaps as a French national you would be better placed than many others here,” he began “The history of your people has been tarnished sufficiently for you to have learned over generations. Algiers and Vietnam are worlds apart but the mistakes are the same, the causes of the errors identical. You can separate the countries but you can’t separate the reasons. There is dubious comfort for you in knowing that you are not alone in your deadly mistakes. Others have made just as many, some many more, and many much worse.”

He stopped. His mouth was a slit and doubt shone in his eyes. Not doubt in what he was saying, what he believed thought Brigit, but doubt as to the effect he was having on her. He was right. She had no idea what he was driving at.

“I don’t follow you,” she said. “You talk about those other places as though what happened there is responsible for what you are doing here. You sound as though I am at fault. It makes no sense.”

“Not you personally,” he said, “but people like you.”

“And just what sort of person am I?” she asked. “What sort of category would a mentally retarded murderer slot me into?”

He stared at her and then suddenly stood up and walked towards her. “The game is over,” he said, roughly pushing her on to her side on the dirty floor. Despite her protestations he began retying the ropes behind her. As her voice rose he pulled the handkerchief from his pocket and tied it tightly across her mouth, and then finished the knots at her back. When he was done he straightened. “Do not move. I’ll be right outside.” He left the room.

He was gone for about half an hour but when he returned he poked his head through the door, noted she was still against the wall, and withdrew. He stayed out of sight until she guessed early afternoon. As he re-entered the room she saw he was carrying a brown paper bag and two newspapers, one English the other Chinese. He squatted opposite her and removed three chocolate bars, three cartons of iced lemon tea and some dried beef in a packet. Placing them on the newspapers to his right he looked across the room. "You must eat," he said, "I will remove the gag and the ropes. If you try anything foolish I will tie them again and you will go hungry and thirsty. It is up to you."

The first bar of chocolate she consumed in quick, eager, large mouthfuls, washed down with the refreshing iced tea. It would do her figure little good, she mused, but it was essential she try to maintain her strength and her captor clearly had chosen the rich chocolates with this in mind too. She took her time with the second bar, sucking the brown mass from between her teeth and swishing it around her cheeks to savour the taste as much as she could.

He did not eat, but sat quietly watching her closely. When she had finished the second bar, she nodded at the newspaper on the floor. "Obviously you're not going to kill me just yet," she said, "so can I read the newspaper?" In answer he picked up the copy of the South China Morning Post and the Oriental Daily News and threw them across the room.

"I doubt I can read this," she said, holding up the Chinese daily.

"Look at the pretty pictures," he said, and moved to the corner where he rested his back between the adjoining walls, his legs crossed in front of him.

She began turning the sheets of paper rapidly. Suddenly she stopped and stared at a photograph on a page, four from the back. Then she dropped the newspaper and picked up the news section of the South China Morning Post, casting anxious glances at the man who seemed to be ignoring her from twenty feet away. Turning the pages she found what she was looking for, but hoping not to find. On page five there was a short story which she carefully read, her fear growing with every sentence.

*Police divers have recovered the body of a man, trapped inside a car, from Three Fathoms Cove in Sai Kung.*

*Although details of the gruesome discovery were announced only yesterday, it is believed the dead man was found on Tuesday. The death has not been classified and a police spokesman would give no reason for the two days of secrecy surrounding the case.*

*The dead man was Chinese, aged in his mid to late twenties. His identity has not been released.*

*The police spokesman said the discovery was made by a villager who had gone to fish in the cove, off the Tolo Channel. The villager had seen the rear of the car protruding from the waters and had called the police. When an Emergency Unit team arrived they called in divers to inspect the vehicle. The dead man was slumped behind the steering wheel. The spokesman admitted there were possibly suspicious circumstances but said at this stage no definite classification had been made.*

*The vehicle, a brown Datsun Bluebird, registration number BM8426, had been reported stolen in Mongkok on Monday. The police are investigating whether the car plunged into the cove accidentally when*

*it ran out of control, or whether it could have been deliberately driven into the water.*

Beside the article was a three column black and white picture of the car, held in a police compound.

Brigit's eyes widened as she looked at the sedan, the patches of lighter work on the rear door where rust cutting had been carried out. Her breathing quickened and she could feel her face flush red.

"You," she said finally, looking at the Catskinner. "You did it. That was the car that brought me here. You murdered the driver. You brought me here and then drove off and killed him, pushing the car into the water to sink it. But it didn't. You're mad. You're a cold blooded murderer. Demented. A maniac." She would have continued her outburst but he had crossed the room and was tying the handkerchief around her head again. As she mumbled incoherently he retied the ropes and left her lying on the floor breathing loudly through her nostrils and staring in disbelief at the person who could kill for no comprehensible reason. And in whose control she was herself defenceless.

\*

For the rest of the day and night Brigit remained bound and, with the exception of a few brief periods, gagged. There was no further discussion and the Catskinner stayed in the room with her at all times. She did not sleep until shortly before dawn and then it was fitful, painful. When she opened her eyes for the last time the man was gone. She was exhausted, sore all over her body and again hungry and thirsty. Though she did not know it, it was nine thirty when he reappeared at the entrance to the room. He stood framed in the doorway and Brigit could see clearly the wildness in his eyes. Something had gone wrong. Before she could try to guess what it was, he crossed the room and began untying her. Then as she rubbed her wrists and calf muscles, massaging the blood flow, he roughly wrenched the handkerchief from her mouth.

"Where is he?" he demanded, standing over her threateningly.

"Where's who?" she retaliated equally harshly.

"Teller," he shouted. "Where has he gone?"

Brigit ceased her rubbing. "I don't know what you mean. Isn't he at the hotel?"

"No."

"Well, he must have moved to somewhere else. How would I know? What does it..."

The Catskinner stormed to his corner of the room. "He can't" he ranted. "He must stay there. I insisted. It was a direct instruction. I warned him what would happen if he didn't do exactly as I said."

"Don't be stupid," sneered Brigit. "Do you think he's going to sit around doing nothing just because you said he had to? You don't know Jason if you think he's going to merely sit and wait for you to tell him what to do next. He'll find you and when he does..."

Again her sentence was unfinished before he roared at her. "He knew if he disobeyed you would suffer the consequences, He knew, yet he has gone."

"So," she said defiantly. "Are you going to kill me? Is that your next move? Brilliant, yes?"

He stood clenching and unclenching his fists, taking deep breaths, staring at Brigit.

“Come on,” she added. “He’s probably gone for a walk. You didn’t really expect him to stay sitting next to the telephone twenty-four hours a day. I suppose that is what you have been doing during your absences. Calling the hotel to check on him.”

Still he said nothing, even though her supposition was wrong.

“Look,” she said. “So maybe Jason has gone against your instructions. What are you going to do? Kill me? That’s not very smart and you know it.” Brigit was talking for her life. She knew the Catskiner was a cold blooded killer. She knew of three victims, the last for no reason other than he had driven the car that brought her to the village. She could easily be the fourth, for a reason no more logical. She had to use reason. She had no other choice, no weapon. “As long as you have me you have him,” she said. “Remove me and you give away your, what do they call it, your trump card. I am your hostage, Jason realises that. Once you don’t have me, you don’t have anything to bargain with. You can’t bring pressure without a lever. You understand that. You must. Don’t you?”

He heaved a heavy sigh. “He should not have left. I told him to stay in the room. If he has moved out of the hotel...”

“If he did that I would not be able to make contact with him,” Brigit finished. “No. He would not isolate us.”

The Catskiner had calmed down. The fires continued to burn in his black eyes, but a steadiness had returned. Suddenly he smiled. “He can do nothing to stop me. He knows nothing about me. I know all about him, but of me he is completely ignorant. And I have you. You are correct. I cannot be stopped.”

Brigit seized the opportunity. “What is your plan? Tell me about it.”

He held the smile and began walking slowly around the room. “Miss Rolanne, you are so predictable,” he said. “That is the trouble with all foreigners. You can be so easily read. You have no control over your emotions, even your thoughts show themselves.” With his head bent he paced the small room in measured steps as he spoke. “You build your ships and your aeroplanes and navigate them through incredible perils to land a great distance away. And when you arrive you set about constructing great cities. There is no doubt you do it well. Hong Kong is testimony to your abilities. But it is also a classic example of how you succeed so well in failing.”

“And what’s wrong with Hong Kong?” Brigit asked, desperate to keep him talking. “It’s come a long way from the barren rock, disregarded by you Chinese for thousands of years. In little more than a hundred years we, or the British, transformed it into a world economic power. You have to admit that.”

“Of course. We are the envy of many. Despite our comparative shortcomings we have achieved much to be proud of. Though I would disagree it was the British who were responsible. We have done it. We Chinese. We workers.”

“With a little help, yes,” Brigit put in.

“With help yes. The initial money. The initial opportunity. However the foreigner went too far and is asking too much. It is we who have earned the riches that have been torn from the earth with our bare hands.”

“By the look of your hands I would say you never spent a day getting them dirty at manual labour,” she interrupted. “What rights do you have?”

The Catskiner stopped his pacing and sat in the middle of the room. “Then allow me to explain Miss Rolanne. Perhaps you can learn something about we Chinese. There is a book called ‘When the Dragon Wakes’. It is not a new book. It

was written by a British historian and covers the period of British corruption in China to the turn of the century. Imagine. An Englishman telling the truth, the sordid truth about his own country's sordid activities. They came and saw our silk. They wanted it. But we had no use for their trade so they brought us opium instead. Against our will they infected our people. So they could get our silk. Then they built their own city on our land, in Shanghai as you surely know, setting themselves up as masters, our overlords from over the sea. Even that was not enough though because they wanted more. Much more. So we come to Hong Kong. They came to Hong Kong and at the point of a gun forced us to sign the uneven treaties for which our own traitors still suffer in hell."

He paused for breath. "You are right. They built a great city. But they did it with the blood and the toil of we Chinese. And as in China two hundred years ago they erected their castles on the hilltop from which to deliver their laws. A master race in position, if not openly claimed in name. More corruption. The corruption of opium has been replaced by the corruption of pompous power, of unequal authority, of overbearing arrogance. The sadness is this story takes too little time to tell. Like the time it took to carry it out. So quickly the crime was committed."

He stopped but his gaze remained fixed on Brigit. She held it and when it seemed he was not about to continue she did: "Well, you're going to get it all back soon aren't you? In ten years you'll get back a thousand times more than you say you lost. That should make you happy, yes?"

"Ten years is a long time."

"If you've waited nearly a century and a half, a decade is hardly anything."

"When you are starving a mouthful of rice is a feast. But when it is your last mouthful it seems so little."

"There you are then. Hong Kong and its billions will all be yours, it will all belong to China, in just a few years."

"You misunderstand me," he said. "To the contrary. Having fought for so long and so hard, another ten years is an eternity."

"Well, you'll just have to get used to it," said Brigit. "You have no say in the matter. The Joint Declaration has been agreed. Hong Kong is in transition until 1997. You'll have your turn then."

The man smiled. An awkward, lopsided smile that caused one side of his face to rise and the other to droop.

"What are you suggesting," said Brigit. "That maybe it won't take ten years? That Beijing might be impatient enough to take over sooner? That's impossible. Their word on international treaties has never been broken or questioned. Even I know that."

"In normal circumstances," he said, "that is absolutely true."

"It would have to be something dramatic, something exceptionally threatening, for them to even consider breaking the terms of the Joint Declaration," she said. "Let alone fly in the face of international opinion and disregard their sworn promises."

Looking away the Catskinner appeared disinterested for a moment. "Something dramatic. Something exceptional. Yes, it would take that."

Brigit could feel a cold panic seize her. "And that is something no-one can directly control," she said softly. "It is an act of god only that can do that."

He faced her. "Sometimes such events are man made. Sometimes a single man can change the course of history, can move fate."

"Not me," said Brigit. She held her breath.

“No. Not you,” he whispered.

“You?”

“I can. I will.”

For three nights Brigit had been the captive of a man who had murdered three people. Half way through the fourth day, the fear she felt suddenly seemed so minor. The anger at her own inconvenience and discomfort. Her bewilderment over her situation and how it might end. The fear for her own safety and that of the man she loved, Jason Teller. All seemed to diminish with the jolting realisation of what was forming in her mind as she huddled lonely, but not alone, in the dingy concrete structure in the remote hills of the New Territories.

The man who controlled her destiny was no longer just a maniac who killed for a thrill or for personal gain. He was undoubtedly a man with a goal who was not prepared to permit anything to blur that vision. He was a madman bent on destroying not individuals but dreams, the lives of whole communities. The very concept terrified her.

She was at the edge. She could see the precipice, sense its depth and sheerness. But still she was a step away from actually looking over the side into the vast horrifying expanse of sure oblivion before her. She had to take that step. She had to actually see the emptiness that awaited.

“You have the passion,” she said to the Catskiner. “And you have achieved your aim so far. But can you truly carry out something on such a huge scale without bringing it all down on yourself?”

“I do not matter,” he replied matter-of-factly. “The single cog is merely responsible for ensuring the whole machine operates.”

“Was the doctor? A small cog also?” she probed gently.

“He was a fool,” came the sharp reply. “A myopic child who was content with games, but who could not even visualise the future.”

“Is that why he had to die? Is that why you killed him?”

“He died because he could not see. He was blinded by the fat cats who walk on both sides of the wall.”

“Fat cats,” said Brigit. “The cat’s skin. So it was symbolic then? Yet wasn’t he on your side? I don’t understand.”

He spat onto the floor. “He was on the other side. He was a *gwai lo* in all but name and face. He sought continued domination. Freedom for the people. Democracy, Elections. Trappings of imperialistic rule. He was a disgrace to the Chinese.”

“And the girl,” said Brigit softly. “She was his lover.”

“Ah, the girl,” the Catskiner repeated. “So beautiful. Her flesh was unmarked. But in her heart she was evil. She drove him with her sex. She defiled herself for her own gain. Again in the name of the people she claimed freedom, but in fact she desired glory for herself. She died pleading for her life, offering herself to me.”

Brigit was cold. The words echoed in her brain. “Why the driver of the car? What did he do?”

“He was of no consequence. His death affects nobody. It was a necessary precaution. No more.”

The small dark room was silent except for the rattle of the door leading to the quadrangle outside as it shook in a freshening breeze.

It was Brigit who broke the silence. “So you have killed three people simply because they did not agree with your beliefs. One whose beliefs you probably did not even know. All innocent. And you intend murdering others.”

“Innocent?” said the Catskinner. “You think the doctor and the girl were innocent? Harmless idealists? I will tell you how innocent they were. They paid me to kill.”

“They what?” Brigit looked at the man incredulously. “They paid you to murder them? That’s preposterous. You must think I’m an idiot.”

“Not them,” he said. “The doctor paid the money. A great deal of money. The girl handed it to me. It was she who came to me first. It was she who proposed it. The doctor was the banker who was corrupted by her. Your innocent lovers were traitors who paid to have their crimes committed for them.”

Brigit was stunned. “Who did they want you to kill?” In disbelief she listened as he told her the names. “But that doesn’t make sense,” she said. “They are the democrats in Hong Kong. They are the very people the doctor and the girl maintained they wanted. Why would they want you to murder them? It doesn’t fit at all.”

“It is precisely because they want elections and all the other dangerous relaxations of essential authority that they proposed they be killed.”

“What would they hope to achieve? I still don’t understand.”

“In their mistaken belief they thought they would be making martyrs of them. By putting the blame on others, and therefore gaining more support. But of course that could never happen. It was doomed from the outset. The fools were misguided.”

“So you killed them instead.”

“Naturally. They were in my way.”

”But what do you plan to do? If you disagreed with them what is your intention?”

The Catskinner did not answer right away. He seemed distant, distracted, for a moment unsure of what to say, or how much he should say.

Then he faced her squarely and carefully choosing his words he stated: “I am going to begin a process that will remove lingering doubts. Doubts that should never have arisen in the first place but which have been allowed to fester to a point where the wound is so deep and so rotten that it must be cut out altogether. Once and for all. I am going to bring about a restoration of Hong Kong.”

“But what?” asked Brigit, still perplexed.

For the next five minutes she sat and listened to the man as he laid out before her his plan of restoration as he called it. To her it was anything but rebuilding. It was violent destruction on such a scale as to torment the mind. In less than a week, if she was still alive, she would be witness to a political act of devastation unparalleled in the free world.

“My god,” she exclaimed when he had finished speaking. “It’s unthinkable. What you will do is plunge Hong Kong into turmoil and ruin. It’s madness. You are crazy. The outcome will be utter madness.”

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For the past week the accountant had heard nothing. His operatives had combed the territory but had turned up nothing. After two days he had reluctantly decided more manpower was needed.

He went to the Commissioner of Police and asked for six men. The Commissioner refused point-blank. He was still smarting from the last time they had had dealings and while the force had escaped the media criticism he had dreaded, once again it was a case of a bigger story developing which reduced the body in Three Fathoms Cove to but another possible murder, he was not prepared to meet further

requests without a full detailed explanation, and if possible a direct instruction, from at the very lowest the Secretary for Security who was his policy secretary. The accountant did better than that. Within an hour of the refusal the Commissioner received a call on his direct line from Robert McNamara.

Calmly the Chief Secretary enquired about the latest statistics on crime in housing estates and new towns. Then he had asked about force morale and association demands for annual salary increases. After paying his respects to his wife and two young children who were holidaying in Toronto, and before ringing off the Chief Secretary casually informed him that the accountant might be soon contacting him with a personal and confidential request.

"He has already," broke in the Commissioner. "Good," said Robert McNamara. "I am glad to hear you have it in hand."

"Yes sir," said the Commissioner, and went on to venture. "I trust the reason for all this will be forthcoming sir. It is rather unusual."

"Don't worry," the Chief Secretary advised him. "I'll personally fill you in on the background just as soon as I can."

Half an hour later the accountant picked up the telephone on his desk.

"You've got your task force," said the Commissioner of Police impassively.

"Thank you very much. I do appreciate it, and I'll get them back to you as quickly as possible."

The accountant sympathised with the senior professional lawman. It must have been hard to learn to accept he was not only on the receiving end of orders from a junior civil servant, but also being kept in the dark as to the reasons for the demands being placed on him. "Could you ask them to report to the CCC please?"

"They'll be there in two hours," the Commissioner confirmed. "Is that all?"

"Yes. And thanks again." The connection was broken.

The sixth floor of the Central Government Offices in Lower Albert Road are occupied by the various policy branches of the Hong Kong Government. Among them are Administrative Services and Information, Finance, Economic Services, Security, Transport, Education and Manpower, Civil Service, Trade and Industry, Health and Welfare, Housing, Monetary Affairs, Municipal Services. Also there are the Political Adviser's Office and a number of Commission offices.

On entering the building one is struck by the cleanliness of the marbled foyer, the hospitable greeting by the two commissionaires and the constant comings and goings of eager looking young officials and their aides. What is not seen or paid any attention is an unobtrusive door to the left which could lead to storerooms or rest rooms for drivers and the like. In fact it leads to the nerve centre of the government. It is there that notional wars are waged and real troubles are confronted.

For an average of three hundred days a year the Central Control Centre is virtually empty except for the cleaners and occasional top level visitors. Down two flights of steps there is a lengthy corridor with ordinary rooms lined down both sides. They are not meant to be comfortable.

Most are fitted out for functional operation in times of emergency. They have been seldom used in real situations though there were major disturbances in 1967, the year of the Cultural Revolution, and the many occasions when they were activated during typhoons and other natural disasters. Also each year there are a number of territory-wide exercises when notional enemies are dealt with, tactics devised, and carried out. Huge maps adorn walls, electronic equipment is the most up to date, and at the flick of a dozen switches the CCC is linked to all emergency communications systems on both sides of the harbour.

Not all the rooms though are fitted out to deal with street level upheavals. There are one or two which serve principally as meeting rooms where extremely sensitive issues are discussed.

One of the rooms was used by the accountant to brief the six new Special Branch officers who sat around the light brown conference room table. They were all young, fresh faced, solemn. Five were Chinese. Their leader was Scottish but he spoke fluent Cantonese, passable Putonghua and a smattering of Shanghainese.

The accountant knew they were all very capable, well experienced in protecting visiting dignitaries from kings and queens to prime ministers, and personages who conceivably could be the target of radicals, local or imported. They were also very experienced in locating missing people. Not the husband and wife who disappeared to escape the trauma of cramped home life, the teenager in search and glitter, glamour and excitement of bubbly night life, or the illegal immigrant who wanted to start life anew in booming Hong Kong. Those people sought permanent disappearance.

The speciality of the six young Special Branch officers was the person who wanted to hide temporarily. There was a difference. Vast files indicated that the *raison d'être* for a person's disappearance dictated the methods he or she adopted to contrive it.

The reason was simple enough. Their targets sought seclusion, isolation, not camouflaged integration into the society. It was a subtle distinction. A problem the accountant faced was how to paint this distinction for the team. He could divulge only basic details and put his faith in their abilities and a good measure of luck. Or he could tell them everything and risk the story spreading. Even the Special Branch was not completely airtight. But the risk of others hearing of the background was less than the risk of not finding Jason Teller. And most importantly not putting an end to the ambitions of the Catskiner. Whatever those ambitions were and the accountant was still only guessing.

For months he had known the surgeon and the newspaper women were up to something. That was why they were being tailed at the time of their murders. It was feared they would do something which would embarrass the Chinese and the British governments and damage Sino-British relations, certainly dangerous at such a delicate time when the Basic Law was being drafted and political development in Hong Kong itself was being so hotly debated.

Teller had fanned the flames with his guesswork. He had also pointed out that the situation had deteriorated drastically. Somewhere it had gone off the rails. The plotters had become the victims and it was unclear why. All the accountant could hope for was that Teller could be found and that he could lead them to the Catskiner. So he elected to tell the six young experts at covert operations most of the story as he understood it. He did not expect questions on the political motives of the players in the drama. He did not get them. He was probed on details of fact only, the answers entered in six hand sized notebooks.

After an hour, the Scottish chief inspector glanced briefly at his colleagues and asked: "How do we reach you?"

The accountant gave them his office and home telephone numbers. "You don't report to the CP or anyone else. You report to me. Understand?"

"Of course sir," said the Scot. "I'll contact you as soon as I can. But from what you've told us it's not going to be easy. There's a lot of cold ground to cover and if what you say is correct we don't have much time. I'll give you a report in twenty-four hours."

The accountant returned to his office and ten minutes later the six officers walked out through the Central Government Offices lobby. They left the compound in two sedans unmarked but each with a stubby aerial mounted on the trunk at the rear. As the second car stopped at the red traffic lights opposite the Peak Tram station on Garden Road, the chief inspector turned to the inspector beside him. "This is either to be quick or it's not going to happen in time. I've got a bad feeling about this one. Not good at all."

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Jason Teller was playing a waiting game.

He hoped that as he did the waiting the hunter would grow anxious, edgy, careless. When that happened he could act, reversing the roles, becoming the hunter.

He had been in the hotel room when the telephone jarred the quiet. He had known what he would do. He had thought it through. He would let it ring. Only two people were aware of who occupied the room. The Catskinner and Brigit. As far as the hotel was concerned the registered guest was a Sri Lankan gentleman named Khan and no-one else in Hong Kong knew Khan had checked into the Hongkong Hotel. So there would be no calls coming in for him. Brigit he reasoned would not telephone him for two reasons. If she was still being held, which was what he feared but believed to be the most likely, she would of course be prevented from using the telephone.

On the other hand if she was free, if she had escaped, she might try to call him but it was more probable that she would come straight to the hotel. Or perhaps even go to the authorities. She would not stop to telephone, wasting time and risking recapture. At least he hoped his hunch was correct. If he was wrong he might be further jeopardising her safety. However, he had decided after carefully weighing the chances to ignore the incoming call. If it was the Catskinner he wanted him confused. He wanted the initiative, the high ground. So he let it ring. And ring.

Finally it stopped and he could imagine the hotel operator politely reporting that "I am sorry there is no answer". He could also imagine the Catskinner slamming the phone down at the other end, angry his explicit instructions had been ignored. The anger would grow to confusion and that would lead to impatience and carelessness. Hopefully.

Teller seemed to be transfixed to the instrument for a full minute, then he picked it up and pressed the seven digits, the first one being the Hong Kong Island area code five, for the South China Morning Post. Immediately it was answered he asked to speak to the Editor in Chief. The second he repeated his request to Davidson's secretary and a minute later the editor himself came on the line. "Where the hell are you?"

"I can't tell you that," replied Teller.

"Oh sure," said Davidson. "It doesn't matter. On Wednesday we put your salary in the bank along with all the other drones, but don't feel obliged in any way, We'll just go on handing out the big red notes while you have a good rest. Maybe I should recommend a raise even. How much? Twenty, thirty, fifty per cent?"

Teller was slow in reply to the facetious tone and the editor's voice boomed into his ear: "Jesus you amaze me. You go stirring up a hornet's nest with your cock and bull stories and then vanish when the world starts falling about your ears. Don't you think you're carrying this lark a bit far Teller? You're on the staff here. That means you turn in reasonable copy once in a while and for that we pay you a

reasonable salary. So if you want to continue earning a living at the Post I suggest you get off your ass and get in here.”

“Listen,” broke in Teller. “I can’t. Not yet anyway.”

“OK,” said Davidson. “I’ll make it plainer for you. If you’re not in here tomorrow morning when I come through the door don’t come in the next day or any day after that. I’ll mail you the sack. Now have you got it clear?” There was silence on the line. “Shit Teller, are you fucking there?”

“Yes,” he replied crisply. “Now let me make something plain to you. If I show my face there, and if I don’t do what I have to do by next Wednesday, someone very dear to me will die. And so might I and a lot of other people. If you think I’m cracking up let me tell you this. I know who the killer is. I think I know where he is. He has kidnapped a friend of mine and has threatened to kill her if I don’t do what he wants. He is planning more murders in five or six days time and I am going to do all in my power to stop him. So if it comes down to it you can shove your job and sit around and wait for the shit to hit the fan if you like.”

Davidson did not interrupt so Teller continued: “Now you can either take everything I’ve said to be the ravings of a lunatic. Or you can give me a little credit for intelligence and responsibility and at least accept that tolerance for another five or six days may be in the best interests of a lot of people. Then you can fire me if you want to.”

There was a pause and Davidson said: “Until next Wednesday. No more. You’re on the payroll until then. After that if you’re not in here doing what you’re paid to do, you’re fired.”

“Agreed,” sighed Teller. “You’ll either see me Thursday or not at all. In the meantime I’ll be keeping my head down.”

“You’re doing a pretty good job of that it seems. Others have been looking for you.”

“Who?”

“Some old beaurocrat who thinks anyone who is not a civil servant is stupid.”

“You didn’t tell him anything?”

“What could I tell him? I don’t bloody well know anything.”

Teller didn’t smile. Grim faced he told himself that the editor was not the only one who did not know what was going on. He was in a big crowd. The storm clouds were black and billowing ominously but the force of what they hid was still unknown. And even if it was, could he do anything about it. Tomorrow he would be closer to the answer.

## **Chapter Eighteen**

Although he woke well before dawn Teller felt fresh and alert, and the adrenalin racing through his body sent messages resulting in a tingling sensation. It was a pleasant feeling except the muscles in his legs also reacted by trembling, on occasion uncontrolled almost, which resembled the slight visible affliction of a degenerative disease. He had to tense and grasp his thighs with strong fingers to quell the urgency.

As it subsided he lay on the top of the bed while the air-conditioning silently broke in waves over his body and the downpour outside drummed like the whir of a fan. The recycled air in the room was dry, too dry. And he wished he could switch the artificial acclimatiser off. Already he had rotated the control to the low position and flicked the adjacent switch off but there was no change and light breeze from the vents in the ceiling continued.

He had always hated air-conditioning that could not be turned off. Hotel rooms soon became health hazards for him. The first sign was in his nose which became arid and itchy. Then his eyes became gritty which was a prelude to a persistent dry cough and rasping throat. It happened every time. Within forty-eight hours of staying in a hotel room he caught an unpleasant cold. He had read somewhere that there were only one hundred or so cold viruses and that they attacked only once each in a lifetime. If that was so he was a suitable subject for test tube examination. Certainly he had temporarily resided in more than that number of hotels over the years of his travelling and invariably they had provided him with the itch, cough and throat tickle that soon culminated in a full blown bout of sneezing and nasal embarrassment.

Oddly enough though, he could romp freely in a storm in any climate and escape with little more than a drenching. As a lad he had done that often on a friend's farm. He had come down with ringworms in the hair but never a cold. Put him in a luxury hotel room however, and with every warm dry modern convenience and a dreadful virus would strike without mercy. So far he had warned off the attack so maybe the medical experts were right. There might after all be a finite number of cold viruses and he just might have caught them all. Suddenly he sneezed. Then again, maybe not.

Teller pushed himself off the bed and moved to the bathroom. He shaved slowly and then stood in the bath while the hot water pummelled his body and the steam fogged the mirror. His muscles relaxed, his head cleared. He snapped off the water and brushed the droplets from his skin, noting his stomach was flat and there was a co-ordinated response from his calves to his shoulders as he stepped onto the beige mat and began briskly drying himself. He again went over his plan of action for the morning, running the stages through his mind and pausing to question each before moving to the next. He could not afford to make a mistake.

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Brigit was standing by the side of the road, part of an excited expectant crowd. Hundreds, or thousands, of people had gathered to watch the procession and they had dressed for the occasion.

The men all seemed to be wearing mourning suits and outsized top hats. The women were resplendent in period gowns, colourful but shapeless and out of place. Many had brought their children who had also been painstakingly dressed in their best. Her own mother stood silent, unmoving as she stared into the distance, her head craning to see over and past those pressing beside her. Between them was her brother, nearly six years her elder. He was smiling at the lines of people on the opposite side of the road and occasionally jostling with those who pushed from behind.

The noise was already painful to her ears but as she observed the wildly gesticulating throng it seemed suddenly to rise in a crescendo and she leaned forward to peer down the highway in the direction the shouts were being aimed. Coming towards them was a prancing grey horse, its forelegs high kicking and its maned head thrust high and snorting defiantly. As it brought each hoof down onto the cobbles it clacked and signalled a shower of flowers and a roaring cheer from the onlookers. All there was was the beautiful performing beast dancing its way through the weaving hoards of watchers, but as it neared Brigit could see the garlands were not hurled at the horse but at the rider.

He was attired completely in white and seemed to be part of the animal rather than an addition to it. He sat erect, his back straight as a rod, his boots fixed into the stirrups and his knees hugging the rippling flanks of the beast beneath him.

The roar rose and Brigit looked at her mother. She was still silent but her cheeks were pink, glistening from the tears that rolled down them. There was a radiance in her face. Her brother ignored the passing procession and continued to watch the crowds, his broad smile beaming. Brigit turned to look at the horse and the man. The animal's head nodded sharply and a cloud of moisture shot out from its nostrils. Its hoofs clacked on the stones. The rider was striking in his white regalia, glued to the shiny leather saddle which was also white. His legs were strong, the hands firm in their control of the reins, the back ramrod straight, the shoulders broad and at perfect right angles to his torso.

Brigit lifted her gaze and started in horror. The horse turned its head to her and the huge watery eyes glared with fire. Its front legs struck the road surface with a thunderous whack and Brigit shrieked as the rider dressed in white turned towards her and she saw he was without a head.

Brigit went on screaming until the Chinese man sprang across the dark room and clamped his hand over her mouth.

"Quiet," he hissed, then as she continued her muffled scream, "Enough. Be quiet. What's wrong with you?"

Brigit ceased her screaming as suddenly as she had started and sat awkwardly, her hands behind her back and her streaming eyes wide as she stared at her captor. Then she bent her head and was racked with sobs.

She slumped to the floor and pulled herself as best she could into a foetal position as the man repeated: "No noise. Be quiet." He stood up. "No-one can hear you," he said sternly. "There's no-one here. And with that rain and wind they wouldn't hear you anyway."

The Catskinner looked away from her to the doorway of the building. The old wooden door was being blown in and out, slamming against the doorframe, the useless rusty bolt at the bottom rattling against the concrete floor. He turned back to Brigit lying huddled, crying silently at his feet. Without another word he returned to the corner where he squatted and listened to the beating rain and the flapping door.

Hong Kong slept at this hour.

The rural areas of the New Territories did not stir as the downpour swept across the fields and filled irrigation troughs to overflowing. Low crops wilted under the onslaught and trees swayed in the wind, smaller branches cracking, tearing loose and spearing to the ground.

In the suburbs and inner city every building was grey, giant drab monoliths withstanding the storm but shedding the attractions they held in sunlight. Victoria Peak on the island was invisible to the mainland, and from the island only the outline of the Ocean Terminal and the Star Ferry piers sticking into the flattened harbour water like two floating pontoons, could be seen. The sky too was a ghostly grey which had unfolded a waving silver shroud over the territory.

The rain had begun around midnight, fierce and unpredicted. For five hours it pelted down accompanied by strong north-easterly winds which drove the sterns of waiting cargo ships away from the Kowloon coastline. Between five and seven o'clock the storm had eased slightly and when workers emerged onto the streets they found them littered and the gutters choked. In some of the low lying areas flooding had occurred and residents in squatter areas were already sweeping out the muddy smelly waters. Taxis and buses swished and squelched their way along the black road surfaces and lights began to appear behind windows, returning the drenched city to life. By eight o'clock the wind had dropped altogether and the driving rain had settled into an annoying constant drizzle.

Jason Teller would normally have felt depressed looking at the bleak world outside, the unyielding low clouds, the monotonous rain, the somehow dirty cloak that wrapped itself around everything. Only when it cleared would the crisp sparkle and cleanliness return. This morning though he welcomed the inclement weather and he was impatient to plunge into it.

So for the last three hours he had busied himself with his preparations. He had dressed in a brown corduroy slacks and brown T-shirt over which he wore a fawn windcheater. Like the scene on the other side of his room window he looked dull, flat. Shoved down into trousers was the unsheathed kukri, snug against his thigh with the handle angled but hidden by the windcheater zipped right around his hips. He had tried a number of ways of concealing the Ghurkha knife, watching himself in the mirror as he walked around the room, until finally choosing the method he now did. Inside the inner breast pocket of the jacket were six .38 calibre bullets wrapped in a handkerchief to prevent their rattling or more importantly jogging loose.

Another six were in the chamber of the revolver which Teller had toyed with almost constantly. It felt alien to him at first but gradually it had become more familiar with handling, and he now could feel the warmth of the handgrip, and a confidence in the power and danger he possessed. He checked the magazine again and thrust the hand with the gun into his jacket pocket. It was not bulky enough to draw curious looks. Picking up the room key from the dressing table he let himself into the corridor and along to the lift lobby. He shared the lift to the ground floor with a talkative American woman and her agreeable companion and four unsmiling Japanese who had probably come to Hong Kong to escape the damp September and October weather in their homeland. Teller felt momentary pity for them but he did not wish for sunshine for their sake. For his own sake he hoped the uninviting rain and cloud cover would persist a while longer.

Dropping his room key into the brass slot at the reception desk he strode to the hotel entrance where a dozen vehicles fought with pedestrians for the limited road space. A pinstriped suit, a hand clutching an overcoat and a briefcase, leapt from a

taxi by the curb and before anyone else reacted Teller ducked in and pulled the door closed behind him.

The driver moved off before he knew the destination. At the bottom of Canton Road where the traffic lights beamed red, Teller handed him a piece of paper with the address written on it in Chinese characters. The driver nodded, passed the slip back over his shoulder and inserted a new cassette into the dashboard of the diesel powered Datsun Bluebird. As the voice of local pop idol Roman Tam burst into the cabin, the driver spun the wheels and spurred into Salisbury Road anxious to drop his fare in the New Territories as quickly as possible so he could return to the busy short hires of Tsimshatsui.

The ride away from the high-rises was quicker than Teller would have wished. Despite his eagerness to carry out his plan there was a natural human reluctance made more anxious by the sweeping splashes of rain on the windows of the sedan which seemed to presage an ill omen. Buildings and people appeared and passed out of sight quickly as indistinct flashes of unreality. The interior of the car with the loud music booming from the front was real but the world outside was like a film played fast forward.

Ninety minutes later Teller recognised the Outward Bound School sign as the taxi slowed to take the corner and head off the main road into the hills. He leaned forward and asked: "How much further?"

The driver slowed even more. "Ah?"

"How much longer?" repeated Teller stabbing a finger at the piece of paper with the address on it. "Long way?"

"Not far," the driver answered. "Three kilometres."

"OK," Teller instructed. "Keep going. Go past and I will tell you when to stop."

The taxi picked up speed until it approached a concrete weir on the road. "Here. You want stop here?"

"No," Teller ordered. "*Check hoi.*"

A further five hundred meters straight ahead he called out: "*Ni do. Ting che hai ni do, m'goi.*"

The taxi pulled off the side of the bitumen and the driver flipped up the red meter disc. Teller paid him off and stepped out. As the silver and red sedan did a U turn and sped back down the road Teller hunched his shoulders and began the walk back to the dip in the road where the village was set off to the side. His hand gripped the gun in his pocket and the knife down the side of his trousers pricked his leg but he ignored it. The road was fringed on both sides by thick scrub which extended a good distance to the foot of hills which rose perhaps two hundred meters. Behind them higher peaks could just be discerned.

The road was almost a boundary for one of the twenty-one country parks that had been designated throughout the territory. Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated communities in the world, but what is not generally recognised is that forty per cent of its eleven hundred square kilometres of land area is country park. The verdant unspoiled parkland protects a host of mammals, reptiles and birds, though few larger animals.

Literally hundreds of thousands of residents launch themselves on the reserves on weekends and public holidays and it is remarkable that despite their fires which ravage so much each year through carelessness, the growth is so thick and green. Too frequently groups of hikers are lost in the wilderness and have to be airlifted off hilltops by helicopters after severe exposure to the elements.

During his many years in Hong Kong Teller had not once ventured into the bush with a pack on his back. The nearest he had come was a picnic by a rock pool easily accessible by car. He now studied the terrain with care. His actions he hoped would necessitate his going no further into the scrub than the village which was hidden by the roadside bush, but which he guessed to be no more than a hundred meters or so.

He had to stand on the edge of the weir before he could see the huts and the incongruous pink church at the end of the narrow dirt track that led off to his right. Through the drizzle he counted the low structures as he watched for any movement. There was none. He waited another two minutes and then gingerly stepped down to the verge of the still stream and carefully made his way twenty meters into the bushes where they began to thin out. Again he halted and watched. A further twenty-five meters the scrub cleared and he waded knee deep across the pebble strewn bed of the stream to the other side where the cover was thicker. He crouched behind a clump of thorny bushes and wiped the water from his brow. He was soaked and his windcheater clung to him, his trousers pinching his crotch uncomfortably. The point of the large knife cut into the material. Pulling it free he gripped it in his left hand as he stood and pressed on further up the side of the stream.

Another twenty meters and he stopped a third time checking the terrain and the layout of the settlement. The twelve huts were in rows on either side of a concrete courtyard. Nearest him were four terraced with a gap and then two more. Opposite were six more in the same configuration and abutting the furthest two was the church. Beyond that he could see nothing. Everything appeared shut and the entire village uninhabited. There was a stillness about it, lifeless, rejected, abandoned. Teller grew concerned that he had been mistaken and had wasted valuable time. Possibly much more.

Out of the corner of his eyes he caught sight of movement and he dropped to the soggy ground. As he peered through the foliage a yellow dog stood up in the doorway of one of the huts and sniffed the air. It twitched its ears and flicked his tail and sauntered slowly into the square where it stood again sniffing in jerky movements. Then it turned its head to the far end of the compound and bounded out of sight, hopping rather than running as it hitched an injured back leg off the ground. Teller waited until he was sure the dog had not sensed him and then stood and readied to head further into the bushes behind the nearest row of huts.

But after a step he stopped suddenly and dropped again to the ground. Something was wrong. Something was missing. Laying the kukri on the grass he tugged the piece of paper from his pocket and studied it closely. He could not read all the characters but he had learned to write the numbers one to ninety-nine so he could recognise two figures written. The first was the address of the village and the second was the house or hut number thirteen. But he had counted only twelve structures and the church and he doubted the church had been allocated an official number. Carefully he counted the buildings once more to make sure he had not been mistaken. He craned to see if he had overlooked anything and satisfied himself he had not. The possibility, looking as a probability, was that he was wasting his time, that he had indeed made some mistake.

However, he had come this far and he would continue his checking until he had examined the whole immediate area. If that proved fruitless he would start over again. If he had the time. If Brigit had any time left.

His head throbbed at the thought and he began to move quickly through the scrub behind the buildings. Where the stream coursed to the north away from the

settlement he paused. He knelt in the grass concealed by the trunk of a tree and listened. He could hear the low growls of the dog, or two dogs, not far to his right and he supposed they were just on the other side of the end of the two huts.

Crawling up the bank, avoiding fallen branches which might crack loudly he came to a cleared border about a meter and a half wide. He paused, then stepped briskly across and flattened his back against the wall of one of the houses, the knife dangling by his side, the other hand gripping the gun in the pocket of his jacket. The growls continued, low but not urgent.

Between the first four huts and the last two in the row there was a gap of two meters which opened onto the concrete square at the front of the houses. Once there, he would be able to see clearly the compound and anything that he may have missed from the angled distance where he was ten minutes before. Teller stepped sideways through the space and slowly peered around the corner. Two dogs, one the lame yellow one he had seen earlier, were rolling around on the concrete in a playful fight. Quietly he pulled back. Returning to the rear of the buildings he crept along to the end of the last hut and stopped. Without warning there was an uproar as a tumultuous barking clamour erupted and the yellow dog raced into the bushes a few meters from him. As it did so, it caught sight of him and in wheeling to face him it toppled over on to its side. Teller thrust his fist holding the knife into the air and gave a shout, at the same time jumping into the open past the house.

He spun to face the other dog he reckoned was behind him ready to slash with the kukri if necessary, but stopped with the shout still in his throat.

Fifteen meters from him walking past the corner of the church and looking directly at him was the Catskinner. As their eyes met the killer froze. He shot a glance back the way he had come but before he could move Teller leapt forward two steps, unconsciously but effectively cutting off his retreat. The Catskinner hesitated. He looked at the brandished weapon in Teller's upraised hand and then dived into the gap between the huts on the opposite side of the open square. Teller instinctively sprinted after him.

As the Catskinner disappeared Teller tightened his grip on the revolver and followed him between the houses. Halfway through the gap he stopped and edged his way along carefully. At the end where the scrub on the surrounding hillside brushed almost flush with the buildings he peered around the corner. There was nobody. The killer could have fled towards the main road or around the back of the church where an extension protruded with the one window he could make out boarded up.

Teller retraced his steps to the open square. The two dogs had been joined by three more smaller ones, all of them barking furiously. He waved his arms and the animals backed away but continued their ear shattering noise. Cautiously, with the revolver and the knife held straight in front of him, he moved to the corner of the church and looked around.

The Catskinner was standing in the doorway of the low structure at the rear. His left arm was around the shoulders of Brigit whose hands were behind her back and her ankles bound. The handkerchief was stretched across her mouth and the killer had a small curved blade pressed against her throat, the pale flesh bared as she tilted her head backwards.

"That's far enough," called the killer. "You will drop those or I will have no hesitation in killing Miss Rolanne."

Teller did not move.

"Do not be stupid Mr Teller," hissed the Chinese. "You know I will do it."

Teller's hands trembled and anger and hatred and fear boiled up in him, but when he noticed the trickle of dark liquid appear on Brigit's throat and the tears spill onto her cheeks as she screwed her eyes shut, his fingers relaxed and the knife and the revolver fell to the concrete with a clatter.

"Alright! Alright!" he shouted and reached forward. "Please. Don't hurt her." For what seemed an age the killer held Brigit with the blade across her exposed and terribly vulnerable throat. A single stroke and the aorta would be severed and she would choke on her own blood and die an agonising death. Then the blade was lifted and she opened her eyes and her head sagged forward onto her chest.

"You are very sensible Mr Teller" the Catskiner said calmly. "Believe me, I would have killed her. You would have been responsible."

"You bastard," Teller croaked. He glared at the man. "Hurt her and I promise you I will tear you apart. It's me you want. Let her go."

A grin creased the man's face and he drew his hand slowly under Brigit's chin and stared at the blood smeared thumb. "You continue to amaze me. Here we are. I have your lover an inch from death – see how the blood is a bright healthy red – in a second I can end her life. And you threaten me." He glared across the space at Teller. "Do not threaten me. I do not like being threatened."

"Let her go," Teller repeated.

"First Mr Teller I think we should be sensible about this. You move to that tree over there. Then I will release Miss Rolanne. Of course, you will leave the gun and the knife where they are. Now move."

He had no alternative. Teller strode across to the tree on the rim of the bushland at the very edge of the compound perimeter. He stood with clenched fists as the Catskiner slashed the ankle bonds on Brigit and with her still in his grip they crab walked to where the weapons lay. He bent and picked up the gun. He put his own knife in the pocket of his trousers and picked up the kukri, hefting it in his hand.

"Please Miss Rolanne," he said, "you will also move away," and he took a step back. Brigit stumbled across the square where Teller caught her in his arms. He held her close without saying a word, and then he gently removed the handkerchief and untied her hands. He tossed the gag to one side and using his own handkerchief dabbed the blood from the small nick in her throat. "It's OK," he soothed. "It's not serious. Are you alright? Did he do anything...did he hurt you?"

"No," she answered. "I've been tied up for days but he didn't do anything to harm me." She looked back at her captor. "He's been the perfect gentleman murderer." Brigit averted her gaze and went on in a whisper. "Jason, he's going to kill us. I know it."

"Shh," was all he said before the Catskiner spoke.

"Now," he ordered sharply. "You will both come over here and we'll go inside out of this rain. We don't want to die of pneumonia do we?"

Teller sneered. "Very funny. That would ruin the pleasure of your murdering us yourself I suppose."

The Chinese stepped to the side and motioned them towards the dark interior of the hut with the barrel of the revolver.

Teller kissed Brigit lightly on the lips and putting his arm around her shoulder said: "Don't be frightened. Just do exactly as I say." Together they walked towards the church extension.

When they were a few meters from the man and the doorway one of the dogs that had continued barking made a lunge. The Catskiner glanced towards it and Teller lashed out with his left leg. The kick was an upward manoeuvre that caught the

man's wrist. The force of the snap kick sent the gun flying and it bounced across the concrete towards the startled animals.

"Run," shouted Teller and pushed Brigit towards the bushy hillside. He wheeled to face the killer but he was running towards the revolver. The three legged yellow dog tried to get out of his way but again toppled onto its side. As it struggled to stand, it snarled and in self defence buried its teeth into the killer's calf. He let out a scream and tried to shake the terrified animal free. Then Teller watched the Catskinner raise the kukri over his head and bring it down in a hacking curve. As blood spurted from the dog's almost severed neck, he turned and ran after Brigit.

Grabbing her roughly by the hand he tugged her behind him and plunged into the scrub. There was a nearly hidden path and they crashed their way through the vines and branches, Teller shouldering his way with his head down.

The thick growth stung their faces and Brigit winced and cried out but heeded Teller's urgent warning: "Run. Run for your life."

They raced on, welts rising on their cheeks and forearms, until they came to a small clearing where three paths led in different directions. Without thinking Teller dived to his left and pulled Brigit behind him up the path which steadily climbed the hill in a random zigzagging fashion.

"Jason..." she exclaimed.

"Don't talk," he snapped. "Keep running as fast as you can. Don't look back. Just run."

They could not hear if the killer was following or if he had taken one of the other two paths. And even if he had they had no way of knowing whether all three again met further up the hillside, or if the wooded area would clear and their own position be clearly observed. All they did know was they had to keep running if they wanted to stay alive.

Soon Teller had to release Brigit's hand to scramble his way through the bushes and prevent himself slipping on the wet and rutted clay path. Many times she lost her footing and had difficulty keeping up, so they reversed positions and Teller tried pushing her from behind. Fifty meters along the path they came to another fork and again they chose the left, this time in the belief, or with the hope that it would take them further away from the others they had passed earlier. They pressed on, battering the branches out of their way, Brigit accepting the worst of it for the sake of haste until she had to stop.

"I can't," she gasped. Sinking to her knees, her hands limp in her lap and with sweat, rain and tears of frustration mingling in rivulets running down her cheeks, she sobbed. "I can't go on. Jason please. Please."

"No," he said firmly. "We must keep going. I don't know where he is. We can't rest yet." He grasped her shoulders to lift her but she was a dead weight.

"Please Jason," she pleaded. "Five minutes. Please."

He let her arms drop. "Alright. But two minutes. No more. We have to keep moving. If he catches us he'll kill us."

He sank down beside her and all sounds were blotted out by their exhausted breathing and the heavy silence of the saturated bush. He tried listening for the cracking of branches or the dull disturbance of rocks but there was nothing. Behind them was the scarred path, easy to follow signs of their mad flight, and the dripping leaves and vines which had closed behind them leaving only a tunnel through which was visible no more than ten meters of covered hillside.

Teller strained his ears and a host of bush sounds interrupted the close beating of his own heart and their joint sharp breaths. "Brigit," he insisted. "We have to go on."

We have to get further away. If we stay here we're dead. We must keep moving. It's our only chance.

"You go first," she begged. "I can't. Please. I'll follow."

He pushed himself up into a crouch and began crawling. Behind him Brigit did the same and they slowly made their way up the hillside. Another forty meters on the terrain levelled out as the path veered away to the left and they were able to stand and stumble ahead as the scrub gave way to woods. Suddenly they found themselves in a cleared picnic area where there were two barbecue pits and half a dozen log benches. A carved sign in Chinese indicated two directions which pointed to destinations which meant nothing to either Brigit or Teller, though the information they were somewhere on the Maclehoose Trail in the Sai Kung Country Park was at least familiar. Teller reached out to take Brigit's arm. As he did there was a crack and a thunk sound a few paces in front of them. Teller jerked his head in the direction of the crack, to his right. Standing chest high in bushes about fifty meters away was the killer pointing the gun at them.

"Down," he screamed and pushed her backwards so that she fell awkwardly to the ground. "It's him," he said. "Over that way. He's shooting at us. Keep your head down and crawl ahead to where the clearing ends," and he pushed her ahead of him. Another shot rang out and Brigit exclaimed: "God, oh my god. What are we going to do?"

"Just go. Quick...now run." They stood and as they again disappeared into the thick bush Teller saw the Catskiner trying to fight his way through the tangled growth to the cleared area. In a moment he would be swallowed by the scrub, unsuspected.

"This way," he called and took a narrow rocky opening slightly to the right side of the more obviously used main track leading straight ahead. Brigit mentally quizzed the decision but said nothing and followed as fast as she could. The path ran parallel with a trickling stream of water and was more the rocky fringe of the waterway than an actual path. But it was reasonably clear and easy going. Teller hoped it would lead to another path. He had not been in the area before, but he had heard of the Maclehoose Trail and knew that rather than a single path over the hills it was a vast network of tracks, some easier and more popular than others, that laced the country parks of the New Territories. If luck was on their side they would meet up with one of the paths well distant from where the killer would have expected them to be heading. If their luck had run out, then....he would not consider the consequences. He turned and heard Brigit whimpering as she leapt uncoordinated from one smooth rock to the next.

"Keep coming," he encouraged. "You're doing well. Just a bit further."

For another fifty meters they followed the waterway, climbing gradually, hidden by the tall trees and thick tangle of undergrowth along the edges. Then their way was barred as a rock pool of deep green water marked the beginning of the stream. They stopped and Brigit sat on the rocks as Teller watched back the way they had come and listened intently for anything that would indicate they were being followed. He detected nothing. He also examined the surrounds of the rock pool and his heart sank as he noted the clear rocky perimeter was rimmed by seemingly impenetrable foliage. There appeared to be no way on. It looked as if they were trapped. To go back would take them straight in to the arms of the Catskiner and certain death. To remain where they were risked discovery and again sure murder. They had no choice but to go on. Teller began circling the rock pool searching the scrub for a way out.

As he circled in a clockwise direction Brigit watched and asked: “What are we going to do Jason?”

He ignored her question and continued poking the scrub, trying to peer through to see if there was any path on the other side.

She stood up. “Jason?” she said urgently. “How are we going to get away? I don’t see any path.”

Still he remained silent and moved slowly around the pool. The bush was dense with vines and thorny scrub fighting with tough thin tree trunks for survival space. At almost the end of his circuit he stopped and probed the bushes. Branches scraped his face and arms as he breasted his way in and stood motionless for ten seconds. Then he stepped back and called to Brigit. “Over here. This way. I think I’ve found it.”

Quickly she rounded the rock pool and stared into the bushes. “I don’t see anything,” she said.

“Follow close behind me,” he said. “It’s thick but I think there’s a track or an animal path about ten paces in front.”

“Are you sure? What if there’s not? What will we do?”

“We have no choice. It’s the only chance.”

Teller raised his arms in front of his face for protection and leaned into the scrub. Brigit followed closely behind as bidden, holding on to Teller’s belt with one hand and shielding her face with the other. Thorns tore at their clothes and bared arms and vines wrapped themselves over their shoulders and whipped their cheeks. The wet and dripping leaves emptied their contents so that only three steps forward and Teller and Brigit were soaked through. It was the least of their concerns as Teller sniffed and wipes his eyes. Another few steps and he broke out of the dense growth to find himself standing on an almost nonexistent track. But a path it was and he sighed in relief as he saw that it led on up the hill, clearing more as it went.

“We’re in luck,” he said to Brigit. “It looks like we might have to climb a bit but at least we’re not stuck with nowhere to go.”

Without waiting for a response he took a deep breath and lurched forward up the incline, glad to be able to see ahead once more. For the next twenty minutes they ascended the side of the hill without too much obstruction, the path widening as they progressed. The ground was strewn with dead soggy leaves and while they had to be careful of their slippery footing they were also glad the rain had stopped. They didn’t talk but Teller frequently glanced around to see that Brigit was alright. She was breathing heavily but was keeping up well, pushing herself forward by pressing her hands on her knees to relieve some of the strain on her legs. She paused often but only momentarily and then continued up the track.

Finally they walked free of the bushes and broke onto the grassy knoll of the hill. Teller stopped and Brigit came up to him and bent forward inhaling deep, sharp intakes of air. Her chest rose and fell and the fingers on her hands on her hips twitched irritably. Then she straightened and with Teller looked about her. Ahead there was no further bush, only meter high grass and another slightly higher peak. Behind it was a peak higher still and beyond that the waters of Port Shelter. To the north, well in the distance, was Mirs Bay. Turning around she looked back the way they had come and over the tops of the trees and bush she saw the village and the pink and white church. It was silent, deserted as was the blue bitumen road running past it. There were no other signs of civilization and Brigit shuddered in the loneliness of the top of the hill.

“We made it,” she heaved and turned her eyes to Teller standing beside and just behind her.

“Not quite,” he said huskily. He raised his arm and pointed down the slope to their right. About two hundred meters away heading up the hill on a wide track was the Catskiner. He was practically running and often looking in their direction.

“He’s seen us,” Teller said matter of factly. Then: “The bastard has found the main trail up and it won’t take him long to reach us.”

Brigit watched the hunter course the contours of the hill in a steady crouching jog. “Can we stop him? What are we going to do?”

“Run,” answered Teller simply and tugged her by the hand.

“Jason,” she repeated urgently, “what are we going to do?”

“Run,” he called back. “As fast as you can. Just run for your life.”

They covered the three hundred meters down through the gully and up the side of the other peak in a shorter time than Teller imagined. Then down another gully and to the top of the second hill. It was the highest peak in the immediate area and the top a large plateau about the size of a tennis court. In the middle was a flat concrete cylindrical marker with the figure 240 embedded in a round metal disk. There was a crack and they spun around together to see the Catskiner less than thirty meters from the apex of the hill he was climbing, pointing the gun at them. Without a word Teller and Brigit turned and ran for the edge of hill 240.

Before them was Port Shelter, now clearly seen with its Shelter Island in the middle distance, Sai Kung town to their right and Tai Wan village to their left. Below them was a gleaming white cluster of village style town houses with the main highway passing directly in front. The only way down was a narrow, steep path which dropped in virtually a straight line down the side of the hill. The eastern side of hill 240 was covered in grass with low bushes clumped at various intervals, but there as no high scrub, no trees. No cover. The descent was exposed and dangerous.

Near the bottom at the rear of the town houses the path levelled out and joined up with a graded road which when completed would be two lanes wide. For now it was merely damp brown compacted earth. If they could reach it, they might be able to raise the alarm and get sanctuary in one of the houses. Teller quickly explained this to Brigit and looked over his shoulder. The Catskiner had reached the top of the far hill and was about to run in their direction. Teller knew he would cover the distance between them quicker than they had.

“Go,” he shouted and pushed Brigit towards the edge. “He’s coming after us, so don’t stop. I’ll be right behind you.”

Something inside snapped and she screamed at the top of her lungs. The thought of going down the steep incline terrified her. But the thought of what would happen to her if she did not horrified her more. With the scream shattering the silence of the hills she half jumped down the path. Five seconds later Teller followed as he saw the Catskiner disappear into the gully between the hills. They covered the initial hundred meters or so fast. The path was hard, solid earth with jagged shale and pebbles still loose despite the prolonged rainfall over the last day and night. The verges were wet and slippery and the blades of grass deceptively strong and razor sharp. They ran, slipped, bumped and slid and each time they grabbed at bunches of grass to break their fall or slow their too rapid descent their palms and fingers were sliced with stinging cuts that quickly oozed blood.

Another fifty meters down and Brigit stumbled and fell heavily on the small of her back. She groaned, toppled sideways and rolled a further twenty meters before being stopped abruptly by a sturdy bush. Teller literally leapt after her and used the

same bush to stop himself, sending an avalanche of rocks cascading ahead of him. Brigit sat up slowly and painfully massaged her back and buttocks. Her left shoulder hurt too and both knees had been skinned. Miraculously she had not lost her shoes though she feared she may have twisted her left ankle as she fell.

“Are you alright?” asked Teller. He put his hand to her face. “Have you broken anything?”

Before she could reply two shots rang out separated by little more than a second, and a single thud sounded not far to their right. Teller looked to the top of the hill and saw the Catskiner standing feet apart, both arms thrust out in front of his body, the .38 revolver held steady in his clenched hands. Against the blue sky with few clouds the figure looked larger than life and incredibly near.

“Oh god,” Brigit cried and tore herself away from Teller. She jumped back onto the precarious path and bounded carelessly away from him, ignoring her injuries with a greater fright overcoming her fear of the jagged rocks and shifting stones under her feet. Teller leapt after her and together they managed to complete the remainder of the sheer part of the path.

Teller took the opportunity to look behind him. The Catskiner in pursuit had made up ground. He had not tried scrambling down the path as Brigit and Teller had painfully done. Instead he kept to the grassy verge. He simply sat and tobogganed his way down, minus the toboggan. He used his feet as brakes and shock absorbers and his hands as rudder and for balance. By the time Brigit and Teller came to the end of the partially completed road the Catskiner was only a hundred meters or so behind them. Brigit started to run down the centre of the wide road but Teller caught her by the upper arm and steered her into the bush, along a path beside the high fence surrounding the town houses.

Alarmed, she began: “Where....what are you doing?”

“This way,” he replied curtly. “He’s too close. We’d be sitting ducks down the road,” and they plunged into high bamboo and grass.

Teller’s guess had been correct. The path led through the tall shafts and they came to a set of steps which ended at the main arterial road. There was no traffic and without halting Teller pulled Brigit to his left and they raced along the sidewalk opposite a small bay with craggy shore lines forming a pincer. As they ran Teller shot glances over his shoulder but he could not see their pursuer.

“Jason,” Brigit suddenly cried. She stopped and pointed across the road to where the big Outward Bound School sign was suspended between two upright posts.

“Yes,” he said and they ran across the road and down the dual driveway towards the school dormitories and safety.

Behind them the Catskiner was nowhere to be seen.

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The administrator of the Outward Bound School, a barrel-chested Englishman about fifty years old, had a calm and almost laconic manner that was not immediately reassuring and belied the total control he exerted over his staff and students. In their first meeting Teller thought of him as a former fitness fanatic who had what must be one of the best jobs in Hong Kong. He imagined him spending his days sailing in the harbour and his nights tucked up comfortably in his brick bungalow in front of the colour television, an ice cold San Miguel in his hand as everyone else in a quarter mile radius dropped exhausted into rudimentary bunks after a day of hill marching and a meal of rice, questionable vegetables and no tobacco or alcohol.. The Outward

Bound School was renowned for its hardship courses but Teller doubted the administrator suffered along with his charges. However, after being with him for less than an hour he revised his appraisal and substituted the adjectives strong, sympathetic, intelligent and a good people manager. Obviously he had been well selected for the position.

But Teller and Brigit did not meet him until a good half hour after their entering the school grounds. The first person they saw was one of the young Chinese instructors whose team were negotiating a series of rope and beam obstacles in the trees to the side of the driveway. He came running up the slope to them and in good English asked if they needed help. From their appearance he must have thought they had been in a road accident. Then he took them to the main dining hall, telling one of the students to get the chief instructor and first aid equipment. The chief instructor was quickly on the scene and immediately considered the first priority was to treat Brigit's wounds. A mass of cuts and bruises, swellings and abrasions covered her body from her feet to the back of her neck.

As she lay on a table and silently winced at the Administrations of warm cloths, ointments and bandages, Teller asked to use the telephone and was taken by the young junior instructor down the stairs to an office on the ground floor. It took six attempts but finally he succeeded in speaking to the accountant. The conversation was brief, terse and Teller did all the talking.

When he returned to the dining hall Brigit was still lying on the table looking battered and only a little cleaner but with her legs and arms bandaged their full length. She was being watched closely by the administrator who on seeing Teller stood up and introduced himself.

"What have you two been up to then?" he asked quietly with a smile. "It seems your lady friend has left explanations to you."

Teller lied.

They had been walking in the hills and had got lost, he said, and he then went on at the administrator's urging to describe their route. On that score he had told the truth, though he had omitted all references to the Catskiner who had kidnapped Brigit and then hunted them after her escape. He could sense the man suspected his story, but it did not matter. Nothing would be gained by telling all the details of their ordeal. Anyway, it would only lead to more questions and even graver doubts. They would probably be regarded as lunatics or drug addicts.

The administrator was not the man to be confided in. That person was the accountant and he was on his way to pick them up.

For the next hour Teller and Brigit sat in the dining hall and parried polite queries as they drank copious quantities of ice cold water and nursed their injuries. The chief instructor of the school sat immobile next to his superior and continually sucked his teeth. He stared at them the whole time without blinking and Teller wondered if it was the long hours in the sun that gave him the ability.

When the dark blue Honda Accord rolled into the parking bay and the white haired accountant alighted, the administrator turned to Teller. "Well, your friend is here. Are you sure there is nothing further we can do for you?"

"Positive, thank you," replied Teller and extended his hand.

The Englishman gripped it firmly. "I really think you, and Miss Rolanne particularly, should see a doctor. Some of those cuts are pretty nasty."

"We'll be fine thanks. You and your staff have been extremely courteous and helpful."

The administrator nodded and when he helped them into the car he faced the accountant. "They are pretty shaken," he said quietly. "I think there's more to this than a couple who lost their way. I'd see they get treatment, professional treatment, if I were you."

"Thanks to you they'll be fine I'm sure," acknowledged the accountant. "I'll see they get what they need."

The accountant slipped behind the wheel with Teller beside him in the front seat. Brigit sat silent in the back behind Teller, watching the accountant's worried profile as he put the sedan into drive and began to glide towards the gate and the main road.

"I'm glad you're both alright," he said and glanced in the rear view mirror. "Are you sure you're OK?"

"We're fine," answered Teller. "Just get us the hell out of here."

Once past the front gate the accountant stopped and turned to Teller. "Where is he? Did you find out what he's up to?"

Teller turned away and looked out over the small bay where labourers were putting the finishing touches to a needle thin jetty jutting out from the shore.

"It's incredible," Brigit said almost inaudibly. "Something off the pages of a thriller."

Just then there was a high pitched roar and a loud rasping as if sandpaper was being scraped along the windows of the car. They turned and saw a van hurtling towards them, the engine racing and a cloud of flying gravel as the spinning tyres fought to combine speed and grip on the unsurfaced verge of the road.

"Watch out," screamed Teller. Brigit's eyes grew wide but no sounds uttered. The accountant slammed the car into low and pushed the accelerator to the floor. The car jerked forward, coughed and hopped to a halt. In horrified silence they sat defenceless as the van steered straight at them and rammed into the side. A fraction of a second before the impact Teller saw the face of the Catskiner glaring through the windshield, his teeth bared in a facial grimace as he braced himself for the crash.

There was a loud bang and a terrible jolt as the force of the collision pushed the smaller sedan sideways in a sickening crunching of metal. The rear door was flung open and Brigit tumbled out onto the concrete sidewalk. Teller was knocked painfully into his door, the narrow armrest striking a vicious blow to his kidneys. His head thumped on the window and he ended up lying sprawled half on the console between the bucket seats and half on the floor.

Frantically he reached for the door latch and wrenched it open. Before he scrambled out he saw the accountant slumped over the steering wheel. His neck was at an impossible angle and the right side of his face was a mass of raw flesh, the eye dangling from its socket. Hauling Brigit to her feet he issued the now automatic warning. "Run, Don't stop. Run."

As they started down the road he looked over his shoulder at the tangled pile of metal. Steam was rising from the front of the van and through it he could see the Catskiner in the front seat. His head was bent, there was a dark smudge on his forehead and he seemed dazed. Then Teller turned and raced after Brigit towards Sai Kung town.

They ran until they thought their lungs would burst and their knees turned to jelly. He had seen the killer clearly enough. He was almost certainly injured but he was not dead as the accountant was. Which meant he would be looking for them soon. The vision of the dead civil servant again appeared before his mind's eye and he clamped his eyes shut to block it out. At the time he had merely concluded the white

haired man could not possibly have survived his wounds. The shattered glass from the window had sliced half his face terribly and he had clearly died almost immediately. Now the horror and reality of the bloody apparition hit him and he had to sop and retch in the grass beside the road.

As he doubled over Brigit came up to him and panting asked: "Was he killed?"

Teller spluttered. "Old Jack was. It was awful. Christ his face was torn to ribbons." He spat. "The Chinese was only shaken up. We have to get away from here."

He straightened to catch his breath and looked back along the road. He could not see the killer or the damaged van, but a grey sedan was coming towards them and it was slowing down as it neared. The sun was high but the trees by the side of the road shielded the rays and the driver of the car was not hidden by reflecting light. It was a European and as he drew slowly along side he leaned across and wound down the passenger window.

"Are you alright?" he queried. "Is that your car back there?"

Brigit and Teller answered together. "Thank god," and then: "We were there."

"Sorry?" said the man with a puzzled expression. He was dressed in a white shirt and tie, his suit coat lying neatly on the back seat on top of what looked like large black leather folders.

Teller opened both side doors and began helping Brigit into the rear. "We need your help," he said. "A lift. Can you give us a lift?"

The man had little choice as they were already in the car. "Where are you going? Do you want me to drop you at a police station?"

"No," said Teller quickly. "Just drive on please. We have to get away from here."

"Just a minute," said the man cautiously. "I'm not going to be...."

"Look, we've done nothing wrong. Did you see the cream van back there?"

"I saw the accident as I was approaching. I was coming from High Island, but the van backed out and passed me going the other way. I figured it was going for help or something."

Teller and Brigit exchanged looks. "There were a few guys, from the Outward Bound School I guess, around the car and I think there was someone still in it. Hurt badly too by the look of the blood." The driver looked at them quizzically. "You were in the car, right?"

"Please, if you start moving I'll explain it all to you," Teller pleaded and watched anxiously as the man put the car into gear and it steadily gathered speed.

"Well," said the man finally. "What happened?"

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As the sedan rounded the next curve the Catskinner was doing a U turn in the van, cursing the groaning vehicle that was no longer billowing steam but which rattled and whined loudly. He had travelled half a kilometre without seeing any sign of the reporter and the woman. So they must have either gone back to the school or along the road in the other direction.

"*Diu nei*," he swore and wiped his forehead with the damp sleeve of his shirt. Gnashing the gears he forced the van into second and pressed his foot hard on the accelerator, trying to push it through the floor. In the distance he saw a crowd of people around the blue Honda but he could not see Teller or the woman. As he sped

past the scene a number of those by the mangled car stared at him and he saw one man speak quickly to a youth in blue shorts and T-shirt who ran back towards the school grounds.

“*Diu*,” he repeated and hammered the steering wheel with his fists. He did not spot the sedan until he entered fairly heavy traffic approaching Sai Kung. He was closely examining every vehicle he saw, studying the occupants while trying not to get too near until he was sure who they were. Then he would race past on their left and move ahead to the next. As soon as he saw the sedan he recognised Teller and Brigit. The fact that it was the only vehicle carrying Europeans made them easier to spot. A grin creased his face and he manoeuvred the labouring van behind a utility loaded with crates of chickens, three vehicles behind. He prayed the van would last until he saw where his victims were dropped. And victims they would be. Nothing, absolutely nothing would stop him killing them.

## Chapter Nineteen

“When?” demanded Robert McNamara, and listened intently for nearly two minutes while over the telephone the Commissioner of Police explained how his special assistant, and friend, had met his death. His expression was grave and he could taste the vomit rising in his throat. When the Commissioner finished there was a long period when he had to sit on the other end waiting for a response.

“Commissioner,” the Chief Secretary said finally, “you had better come to my office as soon as you can. I think it’s time I explained the situation to you in full. I am going to need you and your men to help avert a crisis that is alarming in its consequences.”

“Yes sir,” answered the Commissioner flatly. “I can be there in thirty minutes. Is that convenient?”

It was, and Robert McNamara was already digesting the incredible developments that had taken place. He also had already admitted to himself that the chances of preventing those he feared were still to come over the next five days were getting slimmer almost by the hour.

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The chances of Legislative Councillor Martin Lee securing direct elections for the people of Hong Kong in 1988 had all but gone.

However, that did not mean he intended abandoning the fight. That was not his style and if anyone expected him to meekly accept the conclusions drawn by the administration, and to move to new arenas to fight new issues, then they did not know Martin Lee.

For him a war was made up of a series of battles. If he lost one, he hardly paused for breath before launching wholeheartedly into the next phase. He was committed as well as being consistent, and his band of supporters, swelled over the recent months of activity, would join him in their sideline sorties and frontal attacks. A storm was building. Political weathermen could see the signs and there was an air of expectancy. The temperature was rising, the clouds were rolling and growing larger and darker like replicating cells, and a breeze was gathering that exhibited the characteristics of a prelude for a gale force wind.

The agitators were agitating and garnering their forces. The liberals were finalising their tactics. The administration was going over its plans, confirming, revising, lobbying as events unfolded. In five days these forces would meet head on.

The clash was going to be a mighty one and a watershed in Hong Kong politics.

\*

Jason Teller and Brigit Rolanne had an outsider’s understanding of the stakes being played for in the tiny territory that was a prize of untold wealth for all those taking part.

But for days their views had been purely selfish, especially for the last thirty-six hours. They just wanted to stay alive. Now it looked like they were free, out of danger, and unless they did something very foolish they would be able to end the nightmare once and for all.

The European who had picked them up turned out to be advertising executive who accepted their story, if not completely, sufficiently not to harass them unduly. To the contrary he had sympathised with their plight and offered to help them further. Their story had been plausible. They had arrived, they told him, in Hong Kong as tourists only two days previously and had been staying at the Hongkong Hotel, spending the morning of their first day sightseeing on the island and in Kowloon. But they had elected to take the hydrofoil to Macao on the Thursday afternoon and had not so far been able to tour the New Territories. That morning their problems had been solved it seemed. Over breakfast a Chinese man had approached them and asked if they would like a tour of the rural countryside, with him as a personal guide. At only two hundred dollars the proposal was enticing and they had boarded the van and set out. As they were due to fly out that night, the man had suggested they take all their belongings with them in case they were delayed. He could then drop them at Kaitak instead of their having to return to the hotel first. As they had to check out by noon in any case they readily agreed.

At first all had gone well. They had driven through Kwai Chung and Tsuen Wan, on out to Tuen Mun in the east, up to Yuen Long and Fanling and back to Kowloon via Shatin. Then the man had recommended they complete the circuit of the New Territories by taking in the Sai Kung area before returning once more to Tsimshatsui. All going well, instead of the original plan for him to take them to the airport, they would have a few hours to browse in the shops of Nathan Road for a last time before catching the airport bus to Kaitak and their late night flight. The holdup was in Sai Kung. Literally.

The man had brandished a knife, taken Teller's wallet and Brigit's jewellery, and pushed them roughly out of the vehicle. They had made their way to the nearby Outward Bound School where they were treated for cuts and bruises and were being taken to the police when the robber, obviously in a mad rage had tried to run their vehicle off the road. However, he had lost control of the van and rammed into their car. In fear they had fled and that was when the advertising executive had come to their aid.

No, said Teller, they would go to the police in the morning as well as the British High Commission to try to get temporary travel papers. They were too scared to do anything but hide and rest until then. They were afraid the Chinese would see them and do something dreadful.

The advertising man argued against the delay in seeking help but understood the worry for their safety. So he had offered help. They could stay with him overnight and he would accompany them the next morning, personally driving them to Wanchai and the British High Commission where he might be able to lend some assistance.

Anyway, added Teller, the staff of the Outward Bound School would report the incident to the police, so it was not as if nothing was being done in the interval. In truth Teller planned to give Brigit time to rest and recover from her ordeal. In the morning he would call the Chief Secretary directly and make arrangements for protection and to tell the authorities everything he knew. It would be up to them to find and arrest the Catskiner whose identify he could give them.

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“So, now you can understand why we had to play this close and with utmost discretion,” said Robert McNamara. “We could not allow it to get out. It would cause untold trouble. Just imagine what the reaction would be.”

The Commissioner had been stunned by what he had been told. He agreed that the repercussions of the details becoming generally known would be serious indeed. There could well be turmoil, and that turmoil could get out of control. But he was equally troubled that he, as the senior law enforcement officer in the territory, had been disregarded, or in his view not trusted. In fact, the entire handling of the matter had been a fiasco. He failed to understand why the matter had been placed in the hands of the Chief Secretary's special assistant.

It was not a political issue in its entirety. It was a law and order problem with political dimensions. Not a political issue that had law and order as a side issue. Added to this was the insult and ineptitude by the assistant in using Special Branch officers and ignoring him personally. This failure to take him into his confidence was unforgivable.

"As a matter of principle sir," he told McNamara, "I must register my objections at your failure to consult me on this. I consider it a slight on my ability, the ability and integrity of the force as a whole."

"No slight was intended," said McNamara. "The circle of participants was, still is, extremely small."

"I do not accept that as a valid argument, if you don't mind my saying. You involved my people, but not me."

"Commissioner, you have no choice but to accept it. You might disagree, but it was my decision to keep this to a minimum, on a strictly need to know basis."

"I should have been informed."

"You did not need to know at the time."

"That is rubbish. And I do now."

"Yes," said McNamara. "You do now."

An uneasy silence settled between the two men. On the one hand one had been affronted, while on the other the Chief Secretary now realised he had erred in his judgement. He decided to mend fences as best he could given the dire circumstances.

"I am not the Pope," he said. "Therefore, I am not infallible. It was my honest opinion at the time that this business could have been resolved before it went too far. Unfortunately things went stray. First, the doctor which was a ridiculously stupid mistake. Then Tse, whom we should have foreseen but for whatever reason we did not. The business with Teller and his girlfriend I think you would agree we could not have anticipated. We still do not know what has happened to them. From what you have told me it seems they are on the run. But I don't understand why they haven't simply come to us for help."

"Once I pick them up you can ask them yourself." The Commissioner did not mean the words to sound impudent. The Chief Secretary thought they did, but he overlooked it.

"What do you suggest?" He asked.

Without hesitation the Commissioner replied: "We have no idea who the murderer is. We know he is a psychopath but we have no identity or even a vague idea of what he looks like. So until we do we are wasting our time trying to track him down. We must concentrate on the reporter and the woman. Teller has been him. Once we have Teller we have a description. Maybe more."

"I don't want this to go too far," McNamara cautioned. "You must use discretion."

The Commissioner of Police's gaze did not waver. "Sir, it has already gone too far. We have insufficient time to be discreet. Teller and the woman are our only

hope at this juncture. I intend putting every available man on it. We must pick them up and quickly.”

The Chief Secretary shook his head in resignation. “God, what a mess. The only small consolation is it probably can’t get any worse. Sadly that’s no consolation to Jack though. Whatever happens he can’t be brought back.”

“It can get worse,” stated the Commissioner of Police blandly. “As you say, Teller and his friend have failed to make contact. You can’t understand why. One reason might be that they are already dead too. If so, I have no idea what can be done. We will be powerless.”

Robert McNamara knew that. He had considered the possibility. But he had no option. He had to believe that Teller and Brigit Rolanne were still out there somewhere, still alive, still fighting. They were the only link that could complete the baffling chain that would result in the trapping of the killer before he carried out his threats.

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The advertising man parked his car at the rear of the building, slammed the door and locked it with his key, and then slowly walked towards the front of the block taking in the cool clean air.

He was pleased with himself. It had been a good day. His ideas for the television campaign had been well received by the client and he expected it to lead to even bigger projects in the not too distant future. If it went over as well as he expected he had no doubts the client would become one of his most prestigious accounts. His billings had slumped lately and he needed a boost because his employer, a hard headed businessman if ever there was one, had been putting the screws on the executives to produce what he called “the big bucks” or cutbacks would have to be made in the staff. This project was the one he needed to ensure his name was not put on the let-go list.

He had treated himself to a bit of a celebration at the Prince’s Tavern in Central despite his recent promises to cut down on his drinking which had become rather heavy under the constant pressure from the office. He had run into two friends and for four hours and over many more bottles of beer they had exchanged stories that for the first time in a long time made him laugh heartily.

He smiled as he rounded the corner into the courtyard surrounded by high fir trees and recalled his guests for the night. He had settled them in his flat while he returned to the office briefly and then on to the tavern on the spur of the moment. He was later than he had intended but was not too worried

The couple had seemed anxious to bathe and take a nap, clearly exhausted by the strain and physical abuse of their traumatic experience. It was ten o’clock and he guessed by now they would be awake and probably hungry, so he would fix them all a drink and some light food which would at least see them through till the morning. Then he would take them down to Wanchai and help sort out their difficulties. He congratulated himself on his Samaritan act and took some pride in the fact that he had accepted the responsibility of helping people in need. Again he smiled to himself and walked over to the fence under the trees and looked out over the Aberdeen Reservoir and the island of Ap Li Chau. It was misty after the latest rain but the lights still twinkled in the distance.

Shouson Hill was a sought after residential area and he had been fortunate to keep his flat. The building was old and both the exterior and interior could do with a

lick of paint but the advantages lay in its being only two floors and its location that afforded peace and tranquillity. The area actually was very English village in character and nothing like other Hong Kong districts. It was why he had chosen it in the first place. He loved the pace and excitement of Hong Kong but he also liked putting it behind him when he came home at night or when he relaxed on the weekends. He lifted his head drawing in the crisp air and turned to walk back across the yard.

A Chinese man was standing a short distance away pointing a gun at his chest. "What the hell..." he exclaimed.

The Chinese raised the gun in line with his head. "Don't move," he warned firmly. "Over to the fence and climb over to the other side." He waved the gun at the European and added: "Nothing silly. No noise. Just do as I say."

The European backed to the fence and did as he was ordered. He placed his hands on the rail and faced the Chinese. "What the hell do you want?"

The Chinese kept the gun pointing directly at the man's head. "Which is your flat?" he asked.

"Look, if you want money," the European began.

The Chinese cocked the revolver. "I said, which is your flat?"

The advertising man put up a hand. "OK, OK. Top floor, 2C."

"Are the man and the woman inside?"

"No. Yes. I don't know. Who are you? What do you want?"

"This is your last chance. Are they inside your flat?"

"Yes. At least I think so. I left them there this afternoon. They wouldn't have gone out."

"Good," said the Chinese. "Now turn around."

The man did as he was told and held his breath.

The Chinese walked up behind him and crashed the butt of the .38 into his temple. As the European dropped to the ground the Catskiner leapt the fence and bent over him. He pressed the nose of the revolver into the base of the man's head and pulled the trigger. The crack was loud but not too loud and the Catskiner quickly searched the man's pockets and then kicked the body down the slope into the trees and brush. He crouched, hidden, for five minutes, and then hopped over the fence and silently headed for the low building that was in almost complete darkness.

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Teller and Brigit slept soundly. After that they settled comfortably in the lounge with mugs of tea steaming in their hands. They were both still groggy having risen only half an hour earlier.

They had showered quickly, slumped onto the single bed in the spare room and fallen asleep in each other's arms immediately. Brigit had been the first to wake. Leaving Teller snoring she tip toed into the kitchen and searched the shelves for tea. By the time it had brewed and she was dampening her hair to lay flat unattractive spikes, Teller had roused himself. He joined her and they poured their mugs of Earl Grey and settled at either end of the large sofa, sipping pensively.

They certainly looked like they had lost a rough encounter. Brigit had kept on some of her bandages, but others she had removed and replaced with plasters she had found in the bathroom, or left scratches and cuts open to the air.

Teller had also applied patches of plaster but he looked by far the healthier, despite having suffered a number of ugly looking scrapes on his elbows and hands. He looked across at Brigit and smiled.

“What are you thinking?” she asked.

“You look bloody awful,” he replied in mock seriousness. “I don’t think I want you after all.”

“Well, you had better get used to it,” she retorted. “I didn’t put myself through all of this for fun, yes?”

Behind her challenging eyes was a well of warmth for the man opposite. The years of distance between them had been swept away and she realised she loved him deeply. It is strange, she thought, how out of adversity comes triumph. In this case the triumph of feelings over indecision. In a few days she had come to understand how important he was to her. She saw the strength in him, but it was his softness that captivated and held her. Under a seemingly bluff exterior there was a tenderness that bordered on femininity almost. It was not a weakness. She knew his determination of character and had no doubts as to his convictions. It was the side of him others would not see. It was something between just them. He had revealed himself to her. And she loved him for it.

“I expect compensation and I will hold you to your promises Jason Teller. So don’t go trying to get out of it, yes? It won’t work.”

“Thank god for that,” he sighed. “I was afraid I might have put you off with my dull life.”

Brigit laughed and rolled her eyes. “I think if you don’t mind we can slow down a bit. A dull life looks more and more attractive all the time. A farm, yes? What about a farm in the middle of some huge place where we don’t come into contact with other people more often than once a week. And we never meet any strangers who want to change the world because it is not to their liking.”

“Sounds good,” Teller said. He sipped the tea, momentarily distracted. “I think it’s time,” he said shortly, “that you tell me. Everything.”

“Yes,” said Brigit and leaned forward balancing her mug on the small coffee table before her. “You’re not going to believe it. It’s madness. Sheer madness, and the sooner we can tell someone and get away ourselves the better.”

Teller rested back into the sofa’s cushions, folded his arms and crossed his legs. He would not interrupt. He would just let Brigit tell it in her own way, as it happened.

Brigit focussed on the carpeted floor for a while and then turned her gaze on him. “It’s as you predicted. He’s planning it for the opening of the Legislative Council on the seventh. Next Wednesday. God that’s only days from now. Only it’s much worse than even you imagined. Anyone for that matter. The doctor and Amelia Tse hired him to kill some Legislative Councillors. I can’t remember their exact names but they are very well known. Their plan was to make them martyrs. Have them assassinated, yes, so the place would be thrown into disorder. In very simple terms the idea was to use their deaths to gain sympathy for greater democracy more quickly than the government and the United Kingdom want to. They would do this by putting the blame for the murders on the communists. They would say the councillors were killed because they were too much trouble and as a warning to others and the general public that they had to toe their line.”

Brigit took a breath. “Even if they did not succeed entirely they reckoned it would in any case stir up the people to such an extent that the Chinese would be terribly discredited and more safeguards would be forced through to protect the

population after 1997. They may have been crazy to think plan would work, but that doesn't matter now of course. They made a big mistake in picking the man to carry out the murders. I don't know how they found him but apparently Tse made the approach and the doctor paid the money. I don't know how much that was either but he said it was a lot. Anyway, as I said, he was the wrong man because he then used them for his own purposes which are just the opposite to theirs. He hates the British. No he hates us all. You see he's a communist. As soon as he heard the proposal he took the money and then began his own plan. He started by killing them first."

Brigit took a long sip from her mug. Cradling it in her hands she continued. "Jason, he's not going to kill just the councillors. He's going to blow up the whole Legislative Council. On Wednesday. When everyone is there he's going to let off a bomb or something. I don't know precisely how but that's his plan. He reckons it won't matter who is blamed. The end will justify the means. You see, he says with everyone dead and with such uproar that results there is only one thing that can happen. The Chinese army will be sent in to quell disturbances and he mentioned something about that being allowed under the conditions of the Joint Declaration or something, and Chinese officials or people backed by Beijing will take over the administration. China will be in control. Everything will be run as they want it and they won't have to wait until 1997. He's mad I know. And the whole scheme is crazy, but it scares me that it might work. And scores of people will be killed too in the bombing. The Governor, the Chief Secretary, all the top people, the councillors, even the public and the reporters who will be there. It's incredible."

She stopped and stared at Teller. There were tears in her eyes and her voice faltered. The mug in her hands shook as she pleaded: "Jason, what are we going to do? Someone has to stop him."

Teller had listened with growing disbelief. He did not doubt Brigit's version of the plan. He simply could not believe anyone would seriously conceive of such a plot and then set out to carry it through. Nor could he accept anyone expecting it to succeed. It was senseless, illogical, idiotic, fanciful. It was demented.

"The man's a lunatic," he said, the pitch of his voice rising. "He can't possibly mean it."

"He does Jason. He really does." Brigit was obviously frightened.

"But how can he? How can he get into the place carrying a bomb? No, he must be a madman. It's just not possible."

"He's not fooling Jason. He is going to do it. He's mad alright, but he's intelligent and even if he would not say how he is going to do it, I believe he is going to try. Somehow he's thought of a way. And he's already killed two people and tried to kill us."

"What if it's all just, I don't know, a sort of fantasy in his twisted mind?"

"That doctor and Amelia Tse are not fantasies. He really murdered them." Brigit did not shift her eyes. "Jason, he's also killed that government man and even the man who drove the car when he kidnapped me. Murder does not bother him. He killed the driver just because he wanted to. It was in the newspaper. He didn't have to. He just did it."

Teller knew she was right. As impossible as it seemed, he knew the Catskinner was going to try to do what he said. He knew the plan could not succeed in the end, but he admitted the man would not, could not, accept that.

He was on a course and would not be diverted from it until he had committed his heinous act and killed not scores but possibly hundreds of people, probably himself as well. He realised too why the accountant had tried so hard to keep him out

of it. If what was being planned became generally known, that in itself would be catastrophic. He could imagine the accusations, justified or not, the fears, and the political and economic consequences for Hong Kong that would follow. The accountant had been correct. He had added considerably to the problem.

“What’s wrong Jason? You look terrible.” Brigit was looking at him with a worried expression.

His throat seemed to narrow. “Oh, I’m just feeling a bit sick. Not only about what he’s planning to do, but how I’ve aggravated things by sticking my nose in it. I’ve been stupid. Dangerously stupid.”

“No, no, no.” she said and moved over next to him. Placing her hand on his knee and then caressing his cheek she said: “You mustn’t think that. You’ve done what you thought was right. More than cause trouble you’ve alerted the authorities. They can’t have known the real story. Now because of you we can tell them and they can catch the man. And even if they can’t get him right away, they can do whatever they have to to prevent him doing it. Don’t blame yourself. You can stop it all happening. You must see that my love. You can end it.”

\*

The Commissioner of Police did not intend permitting anybody to do anything that would disrupt the proceedings of the Legislative Council on October the seventh.

Radical terrorists or bloodthirsty crazy killers, it did not matter to him. The political motives for the crime were of little moment. From what Robert McNamara had told him the problem had gone beyond that consideration and it was now a straightforward case of maintaining law and order. Locating the criminal and arresting him. Let the politicians deal with the rest. He was a policeman and he knew the role he had to play without allowing other things to interfere. However, as he had told the Chief Secretary the matter had been mishandled for far too long. There was the chance it had reached a point out of his control. Or even influence.

From a law enforcement point of view it was, as he had lectured, a straightforward incident. A series of crimes had been committed by a person who reportedly was planning more and that person had to be apprehended and brought to justice. But in all other senses it was far from straightforward. Time was an adversary. It had been months since the two principal murders and his personal enquiries had shown there were few, if any, clues to help him. Even if there had been some at the time they were now gone. Any trail was long since cold and he knew from experience he stood little hope of picking it up again. He would have to start all over again, from scratch, with no pointers. His only chance lay with Jason Teller and Brigit Rolanne. They had disappeared and once again time, this time the lack of it, was of vital importance. He had only days to succeed where all the other bunglers had failed over the preceding weeks and months.

How could he hope to perform what was taking the shape of a miracle? True, both subjects were Caucasian and they had to stay under cover in a Chinese society, and a small one geographically at that. But he was also experienced enough to know that if driven sufficiently even that could be accomplished in a place like Hong Kong. When self preservation was at state even a seven foot, one armed foreign albino could vanish.

No, he had a real problem and privately he wondered if he could solve it in time. Eventually he would be able to, but he did not have eventually. He had four, five days at the outside in which to find Teller and Rolanne, find out what they knew, find

the killer and take him into custody. Maybe even dismantle some time-programmed plot or device the killer had already primed.

It was a challenge he might one day have met head on with enthusiasm but with so little time left and with the stakes so high he considered it with trepidation. And yes, he had to admit the political dimension was critical. It seemed they could only guess at what the killer intended but those guesses pointed to the Legislative Council sitting on the coming Wednesday. That must be his immediate priority. He must make sure the killer could not reach his victim or victims then. He would have the council building in Jackson Road guarded. Not only patrolled but heavily, securely screened. Everyone coming and going would be searched and anyone remotely suspicious intensively questioned and scrutinised.

The building too would have to be combed. It would create difficulties he knew but it was necessary. A cover story would have to be devised and he thought he had already found one. Three IRA terrorists had been blown up in Gibraltar the day before by their own explosives while plotting an attack on the British Administration headquarters. Other installations in other territories were put on alert and airport and communication bases were under tightened security. With the political climate in Hong Kong what it was, it might be possible to use the IRA threat as a cover for the Legislative Council security measures proposed. It had been put to Robert McNamara who seemed convinced, but it still needed the approval of the Governor and the agreement of the senior unofficial members of the Legislative Council and the Executive Council as they were legally the tenants of the building itself.

He had suggested to the Chief Secretary that those two politicians should not be told the real reason. It was not essential they be brought in on it and the fewer people who did know the better. So far only the Chief Secretary, himself, and the Governor had possession of the facts. Facts as they knew them. Of course the single Special Branch team also had some knowledge, but he could control them and he would continue to use them in the search for Teller and the woman, then the murderer. For now he needed to hear the word from the Governor. Once he had that he could execute his defences plan. They would be put in place tomorrow morning and remain for as long as needed.

Beaurocrats, he mused. Bloody paper shufflers. Why can't they let the professionals handle the professional work?

The white direct line on his desk rang.

\*

Teller heard it first. It was almost inaudible. A faint series of scraping sounds followed some ten seconds later by a click. His initial thought was that it was their host returning. But he did not hear the door close, and anyway the sound seemed to come from the front of flat, near the small balcony overlooking the courtyard. He listened but could hear nothing more. It had probably been the trees outside. The building was quite secluded, above the street traffic which was light at the busiest of time in this part of Shouson Hill, and even in light breezes the branches of the tall slim trees swayed and brushed one another.

He was getting jumpy. What Brigit had told him had left him depressed and he was anxious for the night to pass quickly. She had been right. He had to extricate himself from the mess and hand it over to the experts. There was nothing more he could reasonably do. The anger stayed with him but he had to accept that everything he had already done or might contemplate, despite her assurances, only compromised

others. Brigit especially. He had almost caused her death and he loathed himself for it. Rather than directing his efforts at catching the killer he would do all he could to protect his love. She was what mattered most. Not the Catskiner who was somewhere out there still, but who could be stopped once he gave the authorities the information he possessed. It would be a relatively simply matter for them to track him down. He and Brigit would be out of it, safe, maybe even away from Hong Kong as she had suggested. If only the morning would come.

Teller lay sprawled on the bed in the spare room. Brigit was in the bathroom. They were waiting for the advertising man to return. The hot stomach warming tea had revived them and their discussion had swept any lingering cobwebs from their heads, but they suddenly realised they were hungry. It was not surprising as neither had eaten much over the last few days, Brigit hardly anything at all, but they did not feel they should help themselves to the food they saw in the refrigerator and in the cupboards.

As Teller's stomach reminded him of its pang for the fourth time in five minutes, he heard the sound again. This time it distinctly seemed to come from the front of the building and sounded like a key unlocking a latch. Teller swung off the bed and walked quietly from the bedroom into the rectangular hallway connecting to the sitting room. He walked into the room lit by two lamps, one standing in the corner nearest him, the other much smaller and dimmer on the display cabinet against the opposite wall.

He saw the balcony door was ajar. The wind was blowing the drawn curtains slightly open and he could see between them the trees waving outside. He glanced around the room and walked up to the balcony door and reached through the gap to pull it closed. As he did he noticed a pane of glass, a twelve inch square, was missing from the French doors. He also saw the man with the gun backed against the wall at the end of the curtains.

"Pull it quietly," said the Catskiner. He held the .38 in front of him in both hands. "And then step back. Slowly."

Teller hesitated, his heart in his mouth, his hopes instantly shattered. Then he pulled the door closed and turned the key in the lock. As he stepped back the Catskiner followed him with urgent movements and stood before him pointing the gun at his chest.

"Sit," he ordered. Teller sat and the man remained with his back to the curtains, the gun held firmly before him. He surveyed the room. "Where is she?" he asked shortly. "Miss Rolanne."

"She's not here," Teller replied, his mind racing. "The owner of the flat has taken her somewhere else. It is safer if we are not together."

The killer approached purposefully to the sofa where Teller was. He held the gun only inches from his head. Suddenly he smashed the weapon into Teller's jaw. The blow knocked him sideways and he felt the skin break and blood immediately ooze from the wound.

"I am not a food," the man hissed. His eyes blazed and his cheeks reddened. "Call her. Call her in here now."

Brigit answered happily, but a few minutes later when she glided into the room and her eyes settled on the Catskiner, and then Teller with his face held in his cupped hands, her own jaw dropped.

"No," was all she said. Her shoulders slumped and Teller could see the terror and hopelessness in her expression. It was if someone had slammed a door on her, confining her to a room where there was only agony, no chance of escape or help. Her

cheerfulness of moments before had turned to dread. Before she could recover the killer moved to the side and ordered: "Sit. There. Next to him."

Slowly, as if her feet were heavy, leaving traces of her life behind, she crossed the room and fell onto the sofa. Teller clasped an arm around her and stared into her glistening eyes. "I'm sorry my love," he said. "I couldn't help it."

She said nothing. She could not shift her concentration from the man and the gun that was levelled threateningly, she believed, directly at her.

"What are you going to do?" asked Teller. He choked out the words and the tone in his voice made Brigit look at him. Instinctively she touched his face with her fingertips. The question was rhetorical she knew. "You won't get away with it you know."

The Catskinner kept silent, watching them with eyes which flickered in agitation. He stood erect, his back straight, his knees locked, both his arms still extended in front of him. Intimidatingly the gun was held in such a way that Teller thought it aimed at him while Brigit was convinced that when the trigger was pulled the bullet would strike her first.

"Our friend will be back any minute," she said. Quickly she added: "And he won't be alone."

"He is dead." The man's voice was clipped, flat. "He is not coming back."

Brigit could not stop the involuntary sharp intake of breath. She brought her hand to her mouth.

The Catskinner smiled without humour. "You have much to be sorry for. He is your responsibility. You involved him."

Brigit wanted to protest. How could he in cold blood murder an innocent person, someone he did not even know, for no reason, and then say she, they, were to blame. But she saw his look and said nothing. Instead she turned to Teller who nursed his jaw and seemed to have withdrawn into himself. He looked beaten.

"Jason?" she whispered.

"Your Mr Teller has nothing to say," broke in the Catskinner confidently. "He knows. He killed the *gwai lo*. It's his fault." He paused. "And he knows what is to come."

Teller lifted his gaze and dropped his bloody hands. The gash in his jaw gaped, but the flow of blood had slowed and the drips onto his collar were now irregular.

"You are going to kill us." It was a statement. The hatred blazed into the killer as Teller sat unblinking. "Kill me. Let her go. For god's sake she had done nothing."

The man ignored Brigit who was shaking her head from side to side. "No," he said. "I cannot. I know you know that. But it will not be here. Not now. I want you to know what you are part of. It is people like you who must accept the responsibility, not for what is to come, but for what has been."

Furrows etched themselves into Teller's brow. "You still do not understand," went on the Catskinner. "In spite of what Miss Rolanne has obviously told you, you still do not understand. You cannot see the crimes that have been committed and the need to correct them. Well you will see, along with all the others, you will learn. The corruption that has been sown so deeply must be rooted out, so thoroughly it can never take hold again. I am going to see to it."

Brigit mouthed a silent exclamation. "That's right," said the man. "I am not going to kill you right away. You are going to stay alive until I carry out my act. You will see the beauty, the clarity of it. You should be thankful. I had intended ending it here tonight, but I have changed by mind. You are part of the reason. Unfortunately

though, you will not be here to benefit in any material way. That is impossible. You must realise that I cannot allow it. The inconvenience you have caused, the dangers you have directly caused to my plans and the perils you have put me in personally justify your deaths. There is no question. You have to die.”

The Catskinner walked across the room in front of them to the wall shelves. The lamp light cast a sinister shade on his face that twisted and yellowed his features. “But please do not mistake my ....my generosity, for weakness. One wrong move and I will have no hesitation in killing you both. Instantly, without compunction. I will permit nothing to interfere with my objective. Do you understand me? No-one will get in my way.”

## Chapter Twenty

The problems facing the Political Adviser and the Commissioner of Police were quite different.

On the one hand Roger Gould had to wrestle with how to convince his superiors that something odd was taking place in the colony which his instincts told him bode no good for him or his civil service masters in Whitehall. Not that emphasis could be placed on his personal standing. He had to be careful about that. He must be seen to be concerned for HMG and her colonial representatives on the other side of the globe. Even, heaven forbid, for the five and a half million local people. Tact was what was required, along with a good measure of persuasive argument. Unfortunately for Gould though his argument had little or nothing to substantiate it. Had he been in possession of only half of the information the Commissioner of Police had he would have been happier. He didn't. He had no facts, just gut feelings and suspicions.

On the other hand the Commissioner of Police was beginning to wish he had not been brought into the mess. His problem was that he knew too much and yet not enough to do anything about it. He now knew what had been happening for months and he knew what he had to do to stop it going any further. But how? What did he have to work with? The more he considered it, the more firm the realisation that what it amounted to was locating the proverbial needle in a haystack. Worse. This needle was an extraordinarily explosive needle, primed to detonate in just days. Fail to find the needle and you lose the game. Fail to find the needle and he would have failed to save Hong Kong from a potential bloodbath. The game was not a game. It was a real life horror story and he was one of the principal characters.

The Commissioner of Police knew, or at least knew of, all the players. The Political Adviser did not. The Commissioner would play by the book. The PA had decided he could not. That was why he had taken the unusual step of writing personally to his Foreign Office superiors in London saying what he felt compelled to say. In diplomatic, cautious language of course.

Something is amiss over here, sir. Dreadfully amiss. I can't spell it out precisely but take my word for it something is going to happen that will knock our socks off. The Chief Secretary knows what it is I'm sure. And probably so do a number of others. The Secretary for Security. The Deputy Chief Secretary. The Commissioner of Police most likely. No mention of the Governor obviously. These newspaper articles about Michael Wong and Amelia Tse are most suspicious. The NCNA people even went so far as to ask what was happening. I didn't know. I wouldn't say. However, it is not merely a case of a serial killer on the loose. Not so simple. No. The journalist who has been writing the columns has also disappeared. On leave it is said, but I am not convinced. Tension out here sir, is high. The so-called politicians are gearing up for a real hullabaloo in Legco and the media is fanning the flames as they always do. Nothing like a good metaphorical decapitation to fill the billboards with. And even if the rest try to play down the suspicions, with no solid grounds I might add, they persist. Something is amiss. I know it. I would respectfully suggest you try to settle it once and for all. What is essential at this critical point in time is decisive action. Your obedient servant. Etc etc etc. That was the gist of it anyway.

He almost contemplated underlining the word *obedient*. After all he was doing what he was doing out of his concern for the Crown. He was fulfilling the obligations of his position. Even if he was wrong he could not be seriously faulted. If he was

correct, he would benefit. The trick was to call the warning but not leave himself too open to critical assault. His missive had gone by diplomatic bag three days ago and all he could do now was wait for the response.

Meanwhile, the Commissioner of Police could not wait for things to happen. He had to create them. First priority was to mobilise his force. Until late on Friday night he briefed his commanders giving them as much of the background as he felt he could. They were left in no doubt as to the seriousness of the situation and the imperativeness of acting quickly, and as he had insisted more than a dozen times “in the widest possible sweep – one-on-one if you have to”. Eyebrows were arched, heads were shaken and spontaneous expletives uttered. He ignored them all and instructed: “No matter what, stop it.”

Every district, division, station and mobile unit was given detailed descriptions of the journalist Jason Teller and the woman Brigit Rolanne with grainy, blow-up photographs of both obtained from the Immigration Department’s identity card files. They were unflattering portraits but they were the best they had. The Island Regional Commander was given a separate briefing on security measures to be taken at the Legislative Council building. And when the staff of the Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils began arriving at the imposing former Supreme Court which had stood since 1903 on the Saturday morning they found their entrance barred. Uniformed officers manning both main doors demanding ID badges and cross checking names and details of those who did not carry them on their person. Most did not and by nine o’clock the ground floor was seething with dozens of clerical officers, clerical assistants, administrative officers and specialist staff fascinated but mostly frustrated by the delay.

The Superintendent in charge of the Waterfront Station set up his command post in a small room near one of the entrances and at nine fifteen, too late to prevent the queuing and loud chatter from hindering the work of those who had already run the uniformed gauntlet, he went to the second floor to further brief the Secretary General and Clerk of Councils. They accepted the IRA explanation with some reservations about the magnitude of the police presence and by ten o’clock the building had somewhat settled into its normal quiet Saturday morning routine.

Also by ten o’clock passersby outside the Bank of America Tower which housed the British Trade Commission three hundred meters to the east could not help but notice the three police Landrovers and twelve members of the tough Blue Berets unit on patrol. In the foyer of the Commission itself another three plain clothed undercover inspectors drew scant attention as they sat reading the day’s newspapers or browsing through periodicals, or explanatory leaflets on conditions for gaining entry to, and life in, the United Kingdom.

Elsewhere throughout the colony the massive dragnet was in full swing. Literally thousand of policemen and women were asking tens of thousands of questions, stalking buildings and eyeing pedestrians and motorists, looking for a Caucasian man and a Caucasian woman, wanted for questioning in relation to the double Catskinner homicides of months earlier. What could possibly be simpler?

It was a manhunt of unprecedented proportions in the territory and by noon the local media were onto it. Three hours later the news division of the Police Public Relations Bureau had been inundated with questions. Reporters were clamouring for information, on the telephones and in the corridor leading to David Frank’s office above the China Travel Service in Wanchai. Frank was furious. All his worst fears had materialised but it was the fact that he had been compromised that irked him the most. Sitting behind his desk staring blankly out of his window he suddenly

straightened. “Dick heads,” he muttered with some vehemence. “Stupid fucking dick heads.”

In the news room on the sixth floor of the Government Information Service headquarters in Beaconsfield House two pretty young assistant information officers recoiled at the Director’s voluble “*diu!*”. The sharp Cantonese curse, which translated into a four letter favourite in English, was not unfamiliar to them, but it was unfamiliar coming from the smartly dressed Director. Startled they listened to his complaints of the number and eagerness of media probes. He had expected the media to rise to the police action but he had underestimated the strength of that interest.

In North Point the editorial department of the South China Morning Post was buzzing with the news. Between noon and one o’clock the talk was of nothing but Jason Teller and desktop screens remained blank as all other stories were downgraded or disregarded.

Again at two o’clock, as the second shift of the day began, each newly arriving reporter was informed of what had happened. As with other professions the journalists were very clubbish and quickly banded together as they felt one of their number needed to be defended in any way. The reporter was the story.

The editor in chief had watched from his office as the whispering grew into a noisy chatter. He took no action until the chief sub editor knocked on his door and complained that unless “fingers are pulled out we’re not going to have anything to put out tomorrow.” Davidson waited until he left his office. Then he rose slowly and followed him into the cavernous room.

“OK, all you glorified copy boys,” he bawled. “I can’t hear any music. If the tinkle of keyboards doesn’t waft across to my pearl like ears by the time I sit down again I’ll start reviewing the year-end bonuses I have been up until now generously considering.”

In the silence that settled there were one or two snickers and an American accent proclaimed loudly: “goddam amateurs”. Davidson’s tone was impassive as his attention fixed on the Murdoch import. “You’ve got a long way to go yet son,” he said. The rebuke hit home. The American blushed and quickly sat down, a curse on his lips but wisely held under his breath.

“Wonderful,” said Davidson. “Now let’s pick up the pace a little shall we. Let me hear those keyboard notes.”

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For his part Robert McNamara had also been listening for the sound that would confirm his worries were over. Not that he really expected it to happen so soon. He wanted it ended here and now, but that was far from a realistic hope.

More likely it would take days for the Commissioner of Police to complete his task. Most likely up to the last minute. Perhaps not then. Jesus, the situation had become intolerable. To think that some radical could threaten so many, indeed the very future of the place, was unthinkable.

Already too many had died. The surgeon. Tse. Old Jack. Maybe others they did not know of yet. Teller and the woman might also be dead. Damn nuisances. Why didn’t he just let go when he was warned? Why did he have to go putting his own ignorant head on the block? Dammit. He hadn’t achieved a thing. Why doesn’t he get in touch and tell us what he knows?

The telephone jarred him out of his thoughts and he snatched it off the cradle. But it was not the call he wanted.

McNamara returned the instrument and resumed his waiting. It was seven o'clock. The Commissioner had had more than twenty-four hours. Surely he must have learned something by now with the thousands of men and women he had thrown into it. He had to leave for an engagement in half an hour and if he did not hear in a few minutes he would call the Commissioner himself. There was not much time. What was left was racing away.

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Time was also of the essence for Martin Lee and the other Legislative Councillors who were due to go public with their views on the Survey Office Report on Wednesday. They would not be required to launch into a long detailed debate in the chamber, but the report was being tabled at the sitting by the Chief Secretary and that meant instant opinions would be demanded as they left.

It was expected to be a lengthy document but the media, and the general public, would be mainly interested in views on direct elections and the strong suspicion that it would point to 1988 not being the year for their introduction. The betting was on 1991 as the likely date and it was also widely forecast that ten to twelve seats would then be allocated. But that would have to await the actual White Paper. In the meantime councillors would be called on to yet again state their individual positions. The weight would lean towards support, there was no about that, but there would be voluble opposition from the democrats. Arguments would abound. Accusations would fly. Comments would be carefully noted and analysed and councillors could count on being hounded constantly, their every word reproduced faithfully in dozens of newspapers, on radio and television. So positions were already being formulated. Crystal balls were being looked into, statements drafted and tried out on confidants.

For days remained but it was hardly a long time to the budding Hong Kong politicians.

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For the group of five men and a woman in the Hong Kong Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in King George Street in Whitehall it could have been four weeks or four months for all they knew.

As far as they were concerned whatever happened on October the seventh was neither here nor there. There was a blueprint that was being followed and no matter how much was said in the streets or boardrooms or chamber of the small wealthy colony it would not change the history that had already been mapped out. If the policy makers in London, Beijing and Hong Kong wanted direct elections in 1988 or 1991 or 1997 then the bet was they had already decided it. The Survey Office report and the White Paper to come were steps in the programme which had no doubt been drawn up long ago.

The reality was there for anyone with a clear head to see. One just had to open one's eyes and look. No amount of opposition would alter things. After all, Hong Kong was not Korea with its demonstrations, political assassinations and turmoil. Hong Kong was British. Staid, controlled, unemotional. One could indeed get away with murder in Hong Kong.

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On Sunday morning the mist was still shrouding the territory, a cloak of claustrophobic dampness enveloping everything, seeping into buildings, settling on walls and gathering to run in rivulets to the floor.

If it had been April the weather would be accepted and put up with albeit not without complaint. However it was unique for October. The last quarter of the year was the peak tourist season and it was the low humidity and clear blue skies that drew the millions of visitors. Post card scenes were snapped then.

The gardener with the gnarled knuckles and broad brimmed straw hat seemed not to notice though. He prowled the courtyard, skewering loose papers with a deadly trident, occasionally bending to tug an errant weed from a plot or twist off some wizened bloom that had given up the fight for prolonged survival. Most of the plants were healthy and glistened. The rains had done their job well. In another two months the plants in the courtyard and the surrounding trees would turn rusty and he could divert his attentions elsewhere until the spring. But for now he still had hard work to do and he slowly moved around the area adding to his bag of unwanted rubbish.

Leaving the flower and fern beds he wandered over to the fence and dropped the plastic bag on the ground. From his trousers he took a crumpled packet of cigarettes and cupping his hands stuck a match. The exhaled smoke appeared to stick to the microscopic drops of water and hung thickly in the air. The gardener stared at the cloud and then abruptly turned away and looked out towards Aberdeen, his elbows resting on the fence rail, the hat pushed back on his head.

One of the caretakers rounded the corner of one of the blocks and was about to call out when the gardener climbed over the fence and disappeared down the slope. The caretaker stopped and watched. Less than a minute later the gardener re-emerged and scrambled back over the fence. He ran to the caretaker and breathlessly spoke quickly in Cantonese. Together they rushed to the caretaker's office at the front of the block and dialled the 999 emergency number.

Warily they then walked back to the fence. They did not climb over but following the pointing arm of the gardener the caretaker could see what appeared to be a pair legs sticking out from behind a clump of bushes at the bottom of the slope.

A death was bad enough, but the gardener had told him the victim had been shot and that it was a *gwai lo*. And that meant a great deal of trouble.

\*

The Chief Secretary had just won his seventh end when one of the staff walked from the clubhouse and stood respectfully by as Robert McNamara and his opponent discussed the fine points of the bowls they had just rolled down the green.

"Yes," said the Chief Secretary with a smile when he noticed the man.

"Telephone sir. In the office sir."

"Oh hell. Right. You start Ben. I'll be back in a minute. Make it short again if you like."

McNamara was up. The decision to escape from his Peak residence and put the affairs of state out of his mind for a few brief hours had been a correct one. He had started off poorly but with each end his concentration grew and he was now enjoying himself.

"Hello," he said into the mouthpiece, the word beginning high and finishing low, but pleasant. The following word was short and he said nothing more until finally: "I'll be at home in forty-five minutes. I'll meet you there."

Dear god in heaven, what was happening? Who was this maniac who went around killing whoever he liked? Or disliked? Not only was his latest victim a complete unknown but if the killer was indeed the Catskinner it appeared he had now taken to using a gun. The pattern had changed.

## Chapter Twenty-One

Thirst.

It was the thirst that was really troubling Jason Teller. His mouth was as dry as dust and his throat ached.

He had never been thirsty in his life before. Really thirsty. So that his mind could concentrate on little other than an unbearable craving for moisture that would wash away the dust and soothe what he imagined were deep cracks in the sensitive lining of his throat caused by constant swallowing of a depleting supply of saliva. It seemed the ducts were almost empty. Remaining droplets had to be sucked and hawked up.

With closed eyes he would gradually lower the liquid on contracting muscles, trying to prolong the salve as long as possible. But he failed each time. Uncontrollable impatience took over and the blobs of spittle plummeted down his throat in gulps that made his Adam's apple bob as though on a spring. A burning sensation followed immediately which made him screw his eyes tight as he attempted to bathe the raw flesh in all that remained. Warm gut air.

His head throbbed as well, one of the symptoms of withdrawal he suffered because he had not been permitted to smoke nor to drink his regular cups of steaming black coffee. Essential heart starters. Both were drugs and while he had told himself many times he was not addicted, that he merely chose to smoke and consume six to eight cups a day, the need had become obvious some time ago. Like a junkie going cold turkey Teller was experiencing severe mental anguish.

For Christ's sake, what he would give for a single cup and to be able to draw on just one cigarette. Fuck the brand. To taste the thick liquid rolling around his cheeks, stirring it with his tongue and then to let it rush down his throat and hit the pit of his stomach, making him tense his muscles, drawing in his rib cage to trap it, hold it there, feeling the warmth spread. And then to suck in a lungful of smoke, letting only a thin scarf trickle between his lips, taking it down the tube to where it would settle as a cap to the coffee, calming it, calming him. He knew it went straight to his lungs and added yet another black layer of deadly sediment but it felt like it went straight into his stomach. It really did. Jesus, if he could only have one. Even the condemned got a cigarette with the blind fold. And he was condemned. He was going to die. Hands tied behind him, propped up against a pitted wall, as the weapon was aimed and the finger took up the tension until there was the explosion and nothing more. Oblivion. Death. The end.

He'd lived it again and again.

The whole thing was narcotic. A dream. Hallucination. But the soreness, the tremors in his temple were real. His situation was real. The sentence that had been passed was real. His inability to do anything about it was real. The story was rewriting itself. He had started it, but invisible hands had taken it over, pushing his out of the way leaving them useless, making him impotent. It was weird. He had been telling the story of others before it went off the rails. Then he had to sit and observe himself enmeshed, the words being strung together, the characters changing, inexorably raising arms and pointing accusatory fingers at him. He was the central figure, the bystander turned into motivator. The one who had made terrible things happen, the one who caused events which killed people. Not the hero. The fact that he was on the right side no longer mattered.

The invisible hands coerced, tugged him into the plot taking over his body, insinuating into his brain, controlling him. Until finally he was the bad guy, the one hunted by everyone, the one who had to be hounded to the ground and then drained of everything he had inside him. Until now. Now he could predict the conclusion with uncanny clarity. If his hands were freed he could sit and bang out the end with utter certainty. He was going to die a useless death. Others were going to die too, many others, and the world of those who were left behind would be a living death. God, what had he done? What had he caused?

Teller snapped open his eyes and in a panic looked about him. An earthquake pounded his head, his heart pumped blood at a precarious rate and he wanted to scream until his whole body exploded, obliterating reality in a mass of splintered flesh, bone, gristle, grey matter and blood. All because he had been deprived of a drink and a cigarette. Get your act together, Teller ordered. Concentrate. Concentrate on the real thing. Deal with the demands of reality and ignore the peripheral mosquito bites. There is too much at stake to be put off. Far too much. All his suffering was selfish self introspection. The lack of his coffee and cigarette luxuries were nothing more than excuses.

For the past two days he and Brigit had been held prisoner in a place well out of reach of possible rescuers. So the Catskiner thought and Teller reluctantly had to agree.

Lantau Island is probably the most neglected part of the British colony. Almost twice the size of Hong Kong Island, it houses a fraction of the population, though there had been a number of proposals over the years to develop it. Situated barely half an hour by ferry to the west Lantau is surrounded by tiny rocky outcroppings. The southern extremity is well distant from the mainland but the northern tip reaches close to the New Territories coastline between the crowded towns of Tsuen Wan and Tun Mun. In this narrow gap are the industrial island of Tsing Yi and the deserted stepping stone of Ma Wan.

There were ambitious plans for Lantau to be linked to the mainland by a series of bridges which would bring car and rail transport to the vast potential development areas, and with it huge residential and commercial complexes. The most impressive proposition was to reclaim a tract of sea on the northwest side of the island and to build a completely new international airport. The cost was astronomical but it could be borne provided the projected revenue could be gleaned from the resultant development sources. This was what was holding up the final go-ahead, this was what was keeping Lantau the sleepy rural and holiday island it remained.

This was why there were areas where one could escape the pace of urban life. Where a handful of old stone huts dot hillsides unseen from the beaches and well off the narrow tracks used by hikers on Sundays and public holidays. There was a time many years before when one or two of the huts had actually been used as weekend getaways. Expatriates had bought them for a pittance and outfitted them in a rudimentary fashion, but it soon proved a waste of money. Their remoteness which was the initial attraction became their drawback and by the second summer they had been stripped again and left to age ungracefully in the windy elements. No-one ever went near them and only a few knew of their existence.

The Catskiner knew and that was why he had chosen one of them as the jail for Jason Teller and Brigit Rolanne. He had used the hut a number of times before, to get away by himself, clear his thinking, make his plans. As soon as he had decided not to kill Teller and the woman he had settled on the island hideaway almost instantly. It was obvious.

He could not go back to Sai Kung. That would be too risky. His own flat was out of the question, and there was nowhere else he could think of where he could guarantee security. The hut would have no visitors, there would be no inquisitive eyes, and should any noise be raised there would be no nearby ears to hear it. It was perfect.

Getting there was a relatively straightforward matter. The three of them used the dead advertising man's car to drive to Aberdeen. With the gun threatening Brigit's kidneys from his pocket the Catskiner had roused a young girl who plied one of the dozens of sampans in the congested harbour. Though it was early morning by the time they arrived she was prepared to accept the bundle of dollars offered and to turn her face away while they did whatever they wanted in the rocking little craft. Maybe even to join in herself if sufficient inducement was added. It was not the first time she had had earned more in one night than in two whole weeks. However it was the last.

Once in the West Lamma Channel the Catskiner with his arm around Brigit had called her to him. She did not even see the blow coming. She felt the man's knuckles strike her temple and her knees buckle, but that was all. She was unconscious by the time she sagged to the damp and oily bottom of the sampan. Nor did she feel herself hauled to the edge of the bobbing vessel and pushed over the side into the warm polluted waters of the channel. The girl never regained consciousness.

All the while Teller and Brigit were helpless to stop him. The killer had kept the gun pointing at them as without showing any emotion he did his dirty work. When Teller protested the Catskiner had aimed directly at Brigit again and said quietly: "I will shoot her first." Then later with Brigit again by his side and Teller at the tiller he had charted the sampan past the rock of Kau Yiu Chan to the shoreline of Lantau Island at Tai Shiu Hang and a small cove which sheltered a five meter stretch of beach littered with plastic bags and empty torn containers, some of the debris that despoiled Hong Kong's fragrant harbour.

They had to pick their way up the side of the hill from the water's edge. It was hard to imagine why anyone had built the hut there in the first place. It was virtually buried in the scrub and there were no windows to look out over the channel; just a joined pair of square concrete structures whose sides measured no more than six paces each, a cold concrete floor, flat roof and no electricity or plumbing fixtures. There were pockmarks where they had once been but now they simply ushered in wisps of breeze and dripped with dirty water when sweeping typhoons hammered away at the outside walls. A doorless opening joined the two rooms and a new sturdy wooden door had been fastened to the front, adding an incongruously modern touch to the otherwise forlorn bunker.

Teller and Brigit had been pushed unceremoniously inside. Then in dim torch light the Catskiner had watched unblinking as Brigit, as ordered, bound Teller's hands behind his back with strong nylon cords taken from the sampan. She was then tied hand and foot and the Catskiner completed the task by securely knotting the cords around Teller's ankles. By the time he had finished his prisoners were totally immobilised. Only then did he put away the .38 revolver. He squatted in the darkness and said nothing for the hours that dragged into the dawn. Both Teller and Brigit tried to make him talk but it was as if they were addressing the bare wall against which he leaned his back. Neither of them slept and by the time a thin crack of light seeped under the door their bodies ached as though they had been beaten with pick handles.

Saturday was a day unlike any other Teller had had to endure. It began in discomfort and ended in as near to agony as he had even been. If he ached from head to toe when he woke he was almost at screaming point by the end of the day. The

whole time he and Brigit remained bound and by nightfall his wrists were swollen and the smooth nylon cords had rubbed glistening bands tinged with pink which threatened to spill blood. Fortunately his socks had protected his ankles though there was a soreness that irritated maddeningly. As for the rest of his body the aching stiffness had hardened and become numbness that nevertheless itched and throbbed and finally suggested a pain he imagined an amputee might feel after a limb had been hacked off.

Brigit had fared worse though. He could see the red-stained nylon that circled her delicate wrists and those binding her legs had also harshly rubbed through the skin. Her face was drawn and while she did not complain any more than to say she was sore all over, he could see she was suffering considerably.

“For god’s sake,” he had demanded of the Catskinner. “At least loosen the knots on her.”

The killer, sitting cross legged in the unbarred doorway between the two rooms, had averted his face and stared out over the channel at the T shaped island of Peng Chau. His arms hung limp in the hollow formed by his legs and his hands toyed with a single straw of grass, the forefingers and thumbs moving backwards and forwards along the stem the colour of uncleaned teeth, warming, polishing it. At Teller’s plea the fingers increased their motion. The grass broke as Teller shouted: “Fuck you. Can’t you see the blood? Is that necessary? She has done nothing.”

The man glared at him and then peered through the doorway once more. Suddenly he leapt to his feet and stormed across the room to where Brigit huddled against the wall. Pulling her roughly towards him he bent over her shoulder and untied the cords and then retied them more loosely around her wrists. When he had done the same with her legs, checking to ensure her limbs were still securely tied, the Catskinner pounced back to his position and commanded in a hoarse low voice: “Now shut up.”

“Well, thank you,” sneered Teller. “Bloody nice of you. Most considerate I must say. It’s nice to know you’re not into torture as well as cold blooded murder.” The Catskinner seemed to ignore him. Teller went on: “It is murder you know that. Cold blooded, premeditated homicide. Or do you have a weird justifiable reason for it all?”

The man continued to stare out over the water towards the western tip of Hong Kong Island ten kilometres away. Teller wriggled awkwardly and his bonds pinched the hairs on his bare wrists and burnt further into his flesh. “Jesus,” he said. “Your brain must be really something. When you’re caught they should bring back the death penalty and then experts should spend years trying to fathom it. There are knots in there that would keep them happy for decades. You will be the envy of every assassin in the world.” When the Catskinner looked at him Teller caught the gleam in his eyes. “Oh, don’t think I mean that as a compliment. You’re a fucking idiot. There’s nothing intelligent about you or what you’re doing.”

“You don’t understand,” said the Catskinner softly. He blinked twice and again turned his attention to the outside. “You couldn’t understand. You are a *gwai lo*.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Teller retorted. “You think that says it all? Because you are Chinese it gives you the right to kill those who don’t see things your way? If that’s the case why don’t you just go and kill everyone in Hong Kong? Why stop at Legislative Councillors? And us? Blow up the tunnel, the airport, fucking Shatin racecourse on a Saturday afternoon. Hell, you might as well include Ocean Park just in case there are

some kids up there who might harbour thoughts of freedom, capitalism and all those other rights you oppose.”

In the distance a motorised junk pattered through the water seeking its favoured fishing grounds, and overhead a jet rumbled on its approach to the needle landing strip, leaving the sound far behind to draw the faces of two young boys perched dangerously on the bow of the junk.

It also attracted the Catskiner and for a moment he searched the gloomy sky for the metal body of the aircraft. Ceasing his vain search but continuing to gaze upwards he repeated: “It is impossible for you to understand the shame, the degradation we feel. You have never been subjected to mental and moral slavery.” He turned to look into the room. “You have never had to bow and accept humiliation simply because of the colour of your skin or the shape of your eyes. In your own land. You come here....”

“We came here to work. To enjoy what Hong Kong has to offer and maybe to learn something from this unique society.”

“You and those like you came to take. You don’t give. You don’t add anything.”

“We do what everyone else does dammit. We work, we earn, we pay taxes and we spend much of what we have left over. What the hell do you expect?”

“You overlook the fact that you have much more left over as you so simply put it than we do. That’s because you regard yourself as superior, so demand and get higher salaries, the best jobs, live in luxury apartments, look down on us. What gives you the right to set yourself on such pedestals? What makes you consider yourselves so high and mighty? That must change. I am going to change it.” He stood up abruptly and without another word walked from the hut.

Brigit who had remained silent during the heated exchange turned to Teller. “What are we going to do Jason? He’s going to kill us. We have to get away from him.”

“He’s mad,” Teller said excitedly. “He has actually convinced himself that his hair-brained plot can bring everything down and that a new, bright people’s proletariat can be built in its place that will bring riches to all. Equality for everyone. God, doesn’t he see what will happen? In the rubble that’s left there won’t be any people to rebuild with. Those who are skilled will have gone. Or have died at his hand.”

“Us included,” she remarked softly. “Unless we can escape from here we’ll be among the first.”

For the remainder of the day they talked and formulated their own plans but were not able to carry out any of them. The Catskiner regularly came into the hut and while he refused to be drawn into any further discussion, he carefully checked their bonds to make sure they were tightly fastened. By the time night fell Brigit had withdrawn into herself and sat sullen in the corner. Teller too had retreated into his inner being with anger and frustration building to boiling point.

Their discomfort was immense and Teller hurled abuse at the killer whether he was in the room or outside. He knew it would achieve nothing but each time he derived some satisfaction from the verbal attacks he launched. Then he would sit and brood until once again the ire would bubble to the surface.

Teller and Brigit slept little on the Saturday night. Only a few hours each, though it was more they guessed than their captor who each time they looked was sitting cross legged in the opening between the two rooms watching them. During the

night it rained lightly again and the temperature in the exposed structure dropped, the cold trapped in the concrete floor and eating its way into their already painful joints.

On the morning of the second day Teller awoke from a fitful nap to find Brigit sitting apart from him crying gently. With difficulty he wriggled over to her and kissed her hair and the back of her neck. Desperately he wanted to take her in his arms and comfort and reassure her. But he could not.

“My love, my love,” he whispered, unable to conceal the anguish in his voice. Nor could he find the words to cure the pain, to dispel the fear. “I love you. I love you so much. Remember that. I love you more than anything else in the world. No matter what happens, remember I love you.” Her sobbing deepened and she leaned her body into his. Nestling her face in his neck so the warm tears fell from her eyes onto his cold skin, searing hot stabs across his chest right into his heart.

Teller caressed her hair with his cheek as the Catskiner entered and stood framed in the doorway. “I’ll kill you,” said Teller. “Be sure. I’ll kill you with my bare hands you bastard.”

The man said nothing but took the revolver from the band of his trousers and slowly walked back through the doorway and disappeared outside into the clear crisp daylight. He squinted at a bird circling above him. The reporter would have to be closely watched. He had miscalculated. He had expected fear and some anger. However, it was hatred that had overcome the other emotions and that was something he would have to be alert to constantly. Like passion, hatred brought with it a determination to succeed. And the reporter could not be permitted to succeed in what he was undoubtedly contemplating.

The Catskiner knew about hatred. It was what motivated him. He knew its strengths. Also its weaknesses. It could be used to drive shards into the weak points of opponents, bringing them to their knees, defeating them, hurting them. It had served him well in the past and he had every intention of using it to achieve his ends again. He must not however allow it controlled by someone else to work against him. It must not prevent him from carrying out his plan. Everything was in place. Only one final act was needed. Only he was capable of carrying it out and only days remained before he did so.

There was another distant rumbling above him and this time he caught sight of the aircraft as it cleared the thin cloud cover that was rapidly being blown north, creating a bright ceiling and a hospitable welcome for the hundreds of visitors who would disgorge themselves from the belly of the plane and file into the bustle of the Pearl of the Orient. He wondered how many of them would still be there on the Wednesday. Not that it mattered. He wasn’t doing it for them. He was not doing it for himself either. He was merely the instrument.

Inside the hut Brigit had stopped sobbing and oblivious to the decent of the jet outside sat looking into the face of Teller, her eyes red, damp streaks staining her face. “I am just so sad that we wasted so much time,” she was saying. “If only we had realised before. Everything would have been so different. Yes? We would not be here. This would not be happening to us. We would be looking forward to life. To happiness. But now...now what do we have?”

“We still have each other,” Teller answered weakly. “For now we still have each other my love.”

“For how long?”

“For as long as we can. Don’t give up yet. There is still hope.”

“Hope?” she blurted and then repeated. “Hope? What can we hope for? He’s going to kill us. We have no way of escaping, and no-one knows where we are. How

can we hope to get out of this?" She paused and Teller thought she might cry again. "Oh Jason, how did we get into this mess? How did we allow it to go so far?"

A piece of his conscience snagged, unwilling to be dislodged. "You did nothing. I did it all. It is my fault. If I had not been so stupid none of this would have happened. Oh, that maniac would still be out there plotting his horror, and those people would still be dying, but we would not be involved. You would not be. It is because of me that you are here. Now. If only I had not gone to you for help. If only....I wish there was more I could do. I am sorry my darling. So dreadfully sorry."

She could not look at him. She knew if she did he would see the condemnation in her eyes. He was right. He had brought her into it. He had been responsible for embroiling them in the whole horrible series of fateful events, by his actions, his careless, foolish behaviour. Almost as instinctively she found herself flipping the coin over and examining the other side. She had accepted his plea for sanctuary at the very beginning. She had even encouraged him to continue his writing and questioning. She had gone on to aid him by actually arranging their flight to the two hotels. Khan was her idea. She could not lay all the blame at his feet.

True, she may not have rationally analysed all the potential consequences and that galled her, but for the rest she had been a willing partner. More perhaps. Perhaps she had secretly hoped that by taking him in and then giving him the help he needed so much, which she had to admit excited her to a large degree, she would win him back, that he would fill the void that had developed in her life. And her hopes had been realised. The years had dropped away like a shrugged nightgown and the unexpected intrigue had brought them together again, cementing their love, fusing their feelings. But for what? The emptiness had been filled but it would be wasted. Their love was doomed. They were doomed.

She lifted her face and was about to explain when the Catskiner came back into the adjoining room and peered at them. Teller stared back but remained silent. The man checked their bindings and again went outside. Teller looked around the room and then quietly said: "God I'd love a cigarette. And my mouth tastes like the bottom of a bird cage."

The words in her throat caught and she swallowed them away, recognising the time for uttering them had passed. She acknowledged too the time for recriminations had also gone.

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While Brigit and Teller had been deprived of their freedom others in the colony, and outside, had been keeping developments moving at a heady pace.

The public debate on the Green Paper, or more precisely the question of direct elections and their timing, continued with the various factions voicing their views unrestrained. News media also continued their stand of giving major coverage to any and all utterances. Some Legislative Councillors, in attempts to balance the demands of the democrats, offered themselves to the young ambitious reporters whose job it was to record whatever was said by the people's representatives.

Saturday's fare was that it would not be the end of the world if the administration ruled out direct elections in 988. Some councillors, they said, could seek a reconsideration of the decision but business would go on as usual. The implication was that it would be little more than a hiccup.

Even religious bodies entered the fray. The head of a local Taoist group was quoted by the China News Service, the local offshoot of the NCNA, as warning

against the hasty introduction of such radical reforms. To support his caution the despatch said the spokesman had referred to the fact that the vast majority of Hong Kong's residents were silent on the issue, indicating they were not in favour. Schools too were involved. The Heung To Middle School was reported to have attempted to mobilise its students and their parents to oppose direct elections.

However, the pro direct election fever was still high and it did not stop with the Legislative Council. A few District Board members seriously suggested it extend right down to what were titled Area Committees, bodies that listened to the wishes of residents at the suburban grass roots level. But even there the idea was unacceptable to the administration. The Regional Secretary for Hong Kong and Kowloon said this would lead to "too many elections".

On the Sunday the stories that were aired attacked the AGB McNair public opinion surveys again. At a seminar organised by a political reform group formed by staff from tertiary education institutions, a number of statisticians and political lecturers labelled the surveys as neither scientific nor representative. They urged the Survey Office to setup an assessment committee comprising professionals to determine how representative the polls results really were. The entire exercise was becoming farcical.

On the Basic Law front the comments were more serious. The Director of China's Hong Kong and Macau Office was quoted on Saturday as telling a labour union delegation that China's policy of "One country, two systems" and "Hong Kong people rule Hong Kong" would not change even after the coming 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Meaningfully, for the press he added that he did not want to see drastic changes in Hong Kong during the transition to 1997.

The Basic Law Drafting Committee special group on the political system for post-British Hong Kong was to open its next meeting the following day in Guangzhou which would last until October 6. One of the items on the agenda was that proposed by a Hong Kong drafter for a shadow government to be formed before the handover of sovereignty to participate in the work of the local administration. As an unofficial opening to the meeting four other Hong Kong members of the group openly criticised the suggestion.

When the meeting did get under way on the Sunday the Basic Law Drafting Committee Secretary General gave some temporary heart to democrats when he said China did not oppose the principle of direct elections before 1997. The proviso was that they had to be stipulated in the Basic Law.

Martin Lee's response was instant and predictable. He strongly reiterated his call for their introduction in 1988 and added his own rider that he was concerned whether the Basic Law would in fact provide for Hong Kong's future legislature to be constituted by the electoral process, despite the original promises contained in the Joint Declaration of three years earlier.

Meanwhile, there was other news that captured the headlines and added to the political confusion that was permeating Hong Kong over the weekend preceding the official opening of the council on October 7. One which concerned the civil service itself had lain dormant for some time, but it now became an issue. Senior officers were resigning or retiring early to join the private sector in growing numbers. On the surface this might under normal circumstance not be cause for concern. But in the present conditions, and at the escalating rate it was occurring, worried eyebrows were being raised. The brain drain was already alarming and the Governor personally had ordered a crack down. The outside view was that confidence was being lost from the

inside and that pointed to a most serious state of affairs. Not only was the duck lame, but an illness had struck at the bird's very heart.

Added to this was the thorny question of Vietnamese refugees. It refused to go away. Their numbers continued to grow. The Legislative Council ad hoc group continued to press for decisive action. Commentators continued to maintain the Hong Kong and British governments did not have the power, or more importantly the will, to act. On Vietnamese refugees, the basic Law, or democracy right.

As one commentator wrote:

*"This Administration has repeatedly maintained it has gone to the people on all issues of significance. In fairness it has; at the last minute and generally only under pressure to do so. Now that the livelihood of Hong Kong is at stake will the Administration listen to the people? In fairness it will. The danger, and the likelihood, is that the clock of survival will have already chimed."*

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Around five o'clock on Sunday afternoon Teller exploded.

He did not know what time it was, nor in truth did he really care. There were signs that the day was drawing to a close as the light that burst into the front room all morning had crept back out through the door as the afternoon hours lengthened. Teller had taken no notice though had he wished he could have measured the passing time by the line of shadow that inched away from him. Also the temperature dropped as if the encroaching shade was nudging the warmth out through the entrance a miniscule point at a time. By the time the interior of the double roomed hut was plunged into gloom Teller's patience too had evaporated.

The Catskiner was not present but Teller's bawl brought him into the hut, his right hand resting on the butt of the .38 revolver tucked into the waist of his trousers. He waited for Teller to speak further fixing him with a steady, blank stare.

"I've had enough of this bullshit," Teller started. "We've been locked up here like animals waiting to be slaughtered for two whole days now and it's gone far enough. I've asked for water so many times I'm sick to death of asking, but the least you could do is give us some. That's not asking too much for god's sake. Can't you see she's in a bad way?"

He nodded in the direction of Brigit who was hunched in the corner, her shoulders sagging as far forward as they could with her head resting on her knees which she had tucked up to her chest. She did not move and appeared to be sleeping. Teller went on immediately: "She has nothing to do with any of this. I keep repeating it. You know it. It's me you want. It's me you want to punish. Why take it out on her? Whatever you plan to do with us later at least show some decency towards her. Give her something to drink. Untie her hands. At least for a while." He paused. "For Christ's sake. What do I have to do? I'm bloody asking you. Begging you."

The Catskiner stood where he was for a moment and then suddenly turned and strode from the building before Teller could think of what further to say. Fifteen minutes passed before he heard a faint noise outside and the man's silhouette appeared in the doorway. He clicked on his torch, the light now dim with the power in the twin batteries rapidly approaching exhaustion. Teller could just make out the man had something in his right hand. It could be the revolver. He walked silently over to the corner and laying the torch on the floor he reached out and forced Brigit's head

back against the wall. Teller could not see whether her eyes were open but he could see her jaw was slack and her mouth hung open. The man held whatever was in his hand to her lips. She spluttered and banged her head against the concrete in two dull thuds. She coughed but leaned forward, her mouth searching for the object.

“What are you doing?” Teller demanded. “What is that?”

“Water,” said the man. He tilted the object, a container of some sort, once more briefly and then withdrew it from Brigit’s reach.

“Where did you get it?” breathed Brigit. “More. Give me more.”

“No,” said the Catskinner. “No more. There is very little. It was in the grass outside. Rainwater.” He backed away and carefully placed the tin, or whatever it was, in the opposite corner of the room, resting it in the V where the walls met at right angles. Then he returned to her and untied her hands. Quickly he moved away and crouched next to the container, shining the torch at her. Teller could see her fairly clearly, though with the light directed at her hands he could not make out her facial features.

“Thank you,” she said in a low husky voice as she straightened her legs and began massaging her wrists and rotating her shoulders. As the rubbing slowed and she began pressing her palms in wide slow movements down the length of her thighs she asked: “Can I loosen my ankles?”

“No”. The reply was firm, definite.

“Can he free his hands?” She looked at Teller three meters to her left.

“No.”

“Can I have some water then?” It was Teller who asked.

“No.”

Teller tossed his head and grimaced towards the ceiling. He expelled hot breath and turned on the man. “You’re really something you are. You know that? You’re something fucking else.”

“You are repeating yourself,” came the quick response. “Can you not come up with something intelligent, rather than simple childish taunts?”

Teller glared in his direction. “Me childish? Jesus, what do you expect me to do? Thank you and sit here rationally discussing the problems of the world? Listening to you bleat about how badly you have been treated. Waiting for you to pull that gun out and blow our heads off. You’re incredible.”

“You need not have come here. You should have left things alone when I warned you. You have yourself to blame. You have no-one else to blame for bringing Miss Rolanne into it.” Even in the already dim and fading light Teller could see the man was looking at him piercingly. He still had one hand on the handle of the revolver but he spoke calmly, as if stating a simple fact to a child who had misbehaved and was being chastised. There was no tremor in the words and they came clearly with little hint of an accent. The thought sped across Teller’s mind that if he didn’t know differently the man could have been a native English speaker, not Chinese.

“What do you expect me to do?” he asked. “When I found Amelia’s body? Turn the other way? Ignore it? Say it doesn’t concern me therefore I will stay out of it?”

The Catskinner kept his face turned to Teller. He did not answer. Teller went on: “Well, it did concern me and I couldn’t back away from it. It concerns all of us. Everyone in Hong Kong is going to suffer at your hands. Nobody’s going to be spared. It won’t stop at those you’re aiming at. They’ll probably die quickly but others won’t be so lucky. They’ll have a different kind of death. A slow, painful one. And

they'll have to watch others die to. Their children who will never understand really what, or why it all happened. You'll have their blood on your hands also. You'll never be able to wash it away. Never. It will stick to you and eat away at your own flesh like leprosy. You're diseased. A rotting, pus ridden, sore riddled excuse for humanity. And you don't even know it. Or you do but don't care."

"To the contrary," the man said. "It is the sore I am cutting out of the rotten flesh. If it is metaphors you want, you and those like you caused the wound in the first place. You then rubbed excrement into it and watched it fester and grow repulsive. When it reached a point of the affected limb becoming almost useless you did not stop. You took hold of it and squeezed and twisted it spreading the infection further, draining out the little remaining good blood. Still you won't stop. Still you twist and turn the limb so the pain has become unbearable. You think you can go on doing it for as long as you desire. But you are wrong. There comes a point when even one so disabled will no longer submit. He will fight back. He will do whatever he can to survive. It does not matter if others get hurt in the process. He will strive to survive. Because the alternative is to die in shame. That is something you ignore. And they, all of them past and present, will pay for that ignorance."

There was a brief period when there was no sound other than the breeze rustling the grass and stunted bushes on the other side of the cold concrete walls. There were no passing junks, the noise from their worn motors floating over the surface of the channel. Those that may have been in the area during the day had returned to, or would be nearing, the Kowloon peninsula and the old Western District of the island with their meagre catches. The heavier craft would be in deeper waters, their lights blinking to warn ocean going vessels they were there. They would not return until the dawn of the next day, or maybe two or three days later. It was only the smaller, single family junks that made daily forays to nearby coves and calm water. And they had left.

When Teller spoke his words interrupted the stillness. "Who are they? Just who are they, we monsters, supposed to be? What have we done that can possibly justify what you intend doing to this place?"

The Catskiner hesitated. "I tried once before," he said. "You failed to understand then. I doubt you would understand now."

"Tell us," broke in Brigit suddenly. "Tell us. We have to know why you're doing it. Why you're going to kill us."

"Alright," he said finally. "You will know." Instead of staying where he was he stood up and paced the length of the room. Then he moved to the separating doorway and stood still, looking out towards the lights of Hong Kong Island.

"I was born in Hong Kong in September 1945. In Mongkok. I went to a primary school there and later to a secondary school in Kowloon City. I wasn't sent by my parents. They died and I was left with an old aunt and uncle who had come from Guangzhou in the late thirties and who had learned the value of education. I am not going to tell you my life story but it is essential for you to know I am not some ignorant peasant with a personal gripe borne out of poverty."

"I know what you are," interrupted Teller. "You attend the polytechnic. You study how to construct things. But you are going to destroy. How do you rationalise that?"

"Often to rebuild you must first knock down," answered the man, still looking through the doorway. "As you know unspoiled land is a luxury in Hong Kong. That is why on the surface it changes so frequently. But the rot, the cancer, is beneath the surface. It is buried in the society. Even while I was at school I observed the illness.

The evil that men do lives after them, not only in tangible structures and recounts of the deeds, but also in the offspring they produce. Children learn from their fathers and adopt their ways, and they in turn pass it on through their blood and their own teachings to their descendants. It grows and thickens with each generation. That is what happened with Hong Kong. The sickness began long ago and spread deeper and deeper. As I told you before, the seeds were planted in China by the British who caused ruin and humiliation with their cargoes of opium and their belittling domination of my people.”

Teller could not let him get away with such a trite lesson in history. “I think you’ll find that if there was not a demand there could have been no addiction. Or are you simply not prepared to accept that? Anyway you booted the British out of Shanghai and everywhere else. Why go back to that now? That really is history.”

“The British left, yes, as we know. But as we also know the evil didn’t end there. It merely was transported by the same British to Hong Kong, and there they set about corrupting the people in an even more sinister way. Once again they came as overlords, masters, conquerors. Everyone else meant nothing. They were mere workers, slaves, someone to carry the bales, clean the *gwai lo*’s mansions, pull their rickshaws. Those that saw there was a chance to rise higher or at least hoped to whether there was a realistic chance or not were used as best or murdered at worst. You cannot deny that. It is a fact.”

“I’ll admit there were some pretty tough things that went on in the early days,” Teller said, “but you can’t go on bearing a grudge forever. God, everyone has skeletons. Even you Chinese.”

“You disappoint me,” sneered the Catskiner. “You are so naïve. So basic. This whole argument is less than a high school debate. You answer feelings and sentiment and shame with words. You reduce it. You demean it. What words do you use to answer for those British gentlemen who refused to allow good Chinese to join their grand clubs, to enter their homes, work in their fine buildings. In other countries it is condemned. Here it was cultivated. Oh, I know you will say things have changed and now we Chinese are equal in all spheres. We do control the business world and we are very rich. We do sit on boards, even your prestigious bank. But not every sphere.

The vast majority of my people are regarded as nothing more than statistics on a balance sheet to be moved from credit to debit at the stroke of a pen. The mentality of the foreign master persists and it is that mentality which has continued to bring Hong Kong down, to demean and belittle the people, to contaminate the society.”

When he stopped talking Teller noticed the wind outside had increased and the sound of the swishing branches on the bushes near the entrance could be heard quite clearly. As he listened for the rain he expected to follow the Catskiner unexpectedly continued: “The integrity of the British masters has been bared for all to see. Over the last decade they have proceeded to bleed Hong Kong dry. To milk the land and the people of everything, even their dignity. They pretend they are planning for a future that will protect the people they leave behind, but in fact they are already filling the barges with gold, gold earned by those same people they will be abandoning. Prosperity and stability they say. That is what they are leaving behind. That is a lie. They scheme to leave an empty shell.”

“You’ve got it back to front haven’t you?” said Teller. “The British have fought for assurances, guarantees in the Joint Declaration. It’s the communists in Beijing who have resisted.”

The Catskiner sniffed loudly. "The shrewd negotiators in Beijing saw through the intentions very easily. It was a masquerade." He afforded himself a smile but Teller did not see it. The torch had blinked out while they were talking. "On both sides. But while the British convinced themselves they had won, they had in fact lost. We got all we wanted then and now with the Basic Law we can carry through. And in the years since 1984 we have extended our interests in Hong Kong itself. We are forces in the financial sector, building and construction, the tourist industry and other service industries, shipping, transport. Many more. Soon we will also hold positions in the political arena that will be stepping stones for the next decade and beyond."

In the darkness Brigit's voice sounded harsh, magnified by her parched throat and dry, cracked lips. "If all that is true why do you have to do anything now?"

The man did not answer immediately. Instead he rose and walked over to her. Firmly he checked her ankles and then straightened. "Put your hands behind you."

"Please," she said. "Leave them undone. I won't do anything."

The man leaned over and grasped her wrists in his hands, forcing them to her back where in silence he wound the nylon cord around them and tied three tight double knots. As he returned to the corner Teller asked: "Can I have some water?"

"No."

"Bastard."

Outside the wind was strong and a sudden gust blew in through the doorway sending a gritty cloud of dust into their faces. El Nino, The Child, that freak atmospheric phenomenon from the coasts of South America was still around. It had struck earlier than the usual ten year cycle and was causing havoc with the weather around the globe, Hong Kong included. The Child had been blamed for the foggy and damp weather, the rains and the winds in this part of the world, as well as for the flash floods and devastating bush fires in Australia and the famine in Ethiopia. The thermometer was dropping sharply too and if it did start raining they could well be assured of a miserable night. Involuntarily shivering Brigit repeated: "So why is it necessary for you to do anything?"

"Because," said the Catskiner with an unpleasant fervour in his voice, "there are those who are using this time to unsettle and aggravate our endeavours."

"The democrats," stated Teller.

"It is not from the one quarter. It is the compounding of misguided efforts from a number of directions. The result is confusion and distrust. There is anxiety. They are driving people against and away. It is getting worse as each day passes and no-one does anything to stop it. The British administrators here are too busy loading their bullion. Those in Britain do not want to see it. They have washed their hands."

"So along comes a saviour," said Teller sarcastically. "Perched figuratively on top of your tank with your guns blazing you roll into Hong Kong and shoot up the town. Kill off all the top brass. Innocent people too. Leaving a vacuum surrounded by fear." The wind outside whistled. The rain began to fall in big drops that could be heard above them. "London is twelve thousand miles away. China is on the border. The PLA and the cadres only have to step through the gate to be welcomed by the shadow government in the form of the NCNA which is already in position to be a caretaker government. Caretakers until other arrangements can be made. Or until 1997."

There was a constant hum now as the storm pelted the structure and beat down on the hard earth, forming wide puddles which served to amplify the persistent drumming.

When he spoke again Teller was the only one to hear all the words. Some were snatched away by another swirling gust of wind, others were drowned out by the thumping rain. All he could hope for was that the One he had beseeched to help had heard.

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It rained until the early hours of the morning and the wind did not let up, the thin streams of mist stabbing into the hut like daggers searching for the hearts of defenceless victims. They struck cold and hard, seeped through cotton and polyester and sank below the skin to form icy crystals that set joints in frozen plaster,

Finally the rain stopped the wind died away but the concrete had stored up a reservoir of punishment that it leaked into the interior like an insidious gas. For the third day Teller and Brigit watched the gloom of dawn edge in through the doorway. Like a trapped animal Teller lifted his head and roared at the top of his burning lungs. Sandpaper ripped at the tender lining of his throat but he didn't feel it.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

It took the lumbering blue China Motor Bus double-decker twenty minutes to reach the third stop on its route from the terminus in Jardine's Lookout to the Central waterfront between the Star ferry concourse and the outlying islands ferry pier. It had another twenty-two from which to pick up passengers. It was going to be late.

From the starting point in Mount Butler Road it should have taken no more than four minutes to get to the covered awning opposite the Mobil petrol station in Tai Hang Road. When it finally did the impatient queue of workers glared at the young driver as they filed in, dropping their one dollar fifty into the slot of the metal cash container. The usual crowd of a dozen who caught the 8.10 had swollen to thirty, much the same as at the previous two stations, so their anger was heightened by the shortage of available seats. They were prepared to accept no excuses even if the driver had thought to offer one. Most had slept through the blustery downpour of the night before and anyway the point was they were all going to be late into their offices. One man in a pin striped suit pushed past the driver's seat refusing to pay his fare and grumbling to anyone who would listen. The driver paid him no mind. One here and there did not matter. Besides there was always the odd passenger who did not have the exact change and was prepared to toss in a single two dollar coin. It was still a pittance for the five kilometre ride.

The doors swished shut and the driver flipped the coughing vehicle into first gear and lurched back onto the double lane road. The heavy rains accompanied by the strong squalls of the previous night had left their mark on the roads with branches of trees blocking lanes, blocked gutters and drains overflowing, and in some areas actual road surfaces crumbling at the edges, or cracking and forming gaping pot holes which jarred vehicles, sorely testing suspension systems.

Not to be caught by another downpour during the day, many who normally relied on public transport reversed from their garages and added their own belching mechanical monsters to the already congested and frequently stalled convoys, intent on converging on the inner city, there to honk and roar and grind their way through the battle for parking spaces, stacked on top of one another as high as ten floors above pedestrian crowds jostling for sidewalk space.

The morning after a typhoon brings more headaches than a hangover following a night in the clubs of Tsimshatsui. When it is a Monday morning and there is the threat of more rain, the headache takes on the enormity of a migraine and tempers flare long before offices are reached.

Roger Gould was in a ferocious mood even before he left the comfort of his apartment in the Mid-levels. He agreed to drop his wife off in Jardine's Lookout where she was to join some other ladies in their voluntary work for the World Wildlife Fund. He would then continue down Tai Hang Road onto the waterfront highway and back up to the Central Government Offices. It was out of his way but his wife had given him no alternative. Taxis were not to be found and she was already late, so that was all there was to it. The Fund work was her one contribution to a society she laboured with ungraciously and the least he could do was get her to the meeting as quickly as possible. After all, she was in charge of the planning group so she had to be there ahead of the others to ensure everything was ready for them when they arrived.

The drive to the high class suburb was completed in near total silence in the sedan, but once Gould was on his own he grumbled and cursed with such vehemence

that he startled one or two fellow motorists also caught in the snarled traffic. When finally he stalked into his office he was, to use one of his favourite expressions, fit to fry.

“Good morning Mr Gould,” his secretary greeted him, a smile on her lips but with a questioning look in her eyes. The Political Advisor was never late and she wondered what had gone wrong this morning. Had he had to attend a meeting she had forgotten and failed to have his papers ready?

“It is not,” he shot back at her and walked into his office, pulling the heavy double security door behind him.

There was a light tap on it and the secretary cautiously stepped in. “Sir,” she began.

“For pity’s sake Jane,” Gould hissed, “let me at least take my coat off. What is it? Can’t it wait two minutes?”

She was about to back out again when Gould gave an exasperated sigh and with his coat only half off, and leaning on the edge of the desk said: “Go on then, what is it? What can’t wait?”

“The CS is looking for you,” said the girl. Quickly she added: “He has been since nine o’clock. Three times he’s called. He wants to see you as soon as you come in. Mrs Jones says it’s very urgent.”

“Did you tell him I was.....never mind. Damn, I’ll explain it myself.” He shrugged on his coat and hurried from the office.

As he entered the reception area to Robert McNamara’s office Gail Jones was seated at her desk. Without a smile or a greeting she nodded to the oak door in the corner. “Go on in. He’s waiting for you.”

The Chief Secretary was stretched out in one of the arm chairs just inside the door. When Gould had closed the door behind him McNamara stood and handed him a pink loose minute folder. “Tell me what this is please,” he said. While Gould read the contents McNamara paced in front of the black hardwood display shelves, moving odd pieces around, distractedly squaring them up.

Gould closed the folder. “Yes. Well I did send a note off. I thought Whitehall should be kept informed.” McNamara stopped and looked at him without saying anything. “I felt something was going on,” said Gould firmly. “And no-one would tell me what it was. You’ll remember I did raise it with you.”

The Chief Secretary moved to the armchair, “Sit down Roger,” he motioned. “Let me tell you now what we have here.” Gould handed the folder back and sat in the chair opposite.

Half an hour later when he left Robert McNamara’s office he looked drawn. Without a word he brushed past Gail Jones’s desk and into the carpeted corridor where his footsteps were muffled. But he could still hear the Chief Secretary’s lecture rebounding inside his head. It was like the drumming of a spinning coin on a glass desktop. As the motion slowed and the coin’s ellipse widened and lowered the noise increased. By the time he reached his own office again the sounds were deafening.

He had been roundly rebuked, his actions described as dangerously and unnecessarily inflammatory. What could have been controlled now ran the risk of getting out of control. And he had contributed significantly to the worsening state of affairs.

As a direct result of his interference -- the criticism galled him immensely -- London was now seeking a full explanation of what was going on, and worse still the Chinese were pressing for information also. All in all, the episode was becoming tangled and the potential was there for it to become an international mess.

McNamara's message had been unequivocal. There was an army of people out there trying desperately to get hold of the cause of the situation and neutralise it with as little attention as possible. In the meantime, he had been handed a bucket and broom and told "you got us into this, now you get us out of it". In other words, get Whitehall off our backs and pacify the Chinese. Great. But how? And the other question which nagged him was, at what cost to himself?

Uncharacteristically, Roger Gould cared little if the girl sitting just outside his door heard him as he cursed: "Blast and damn you Jason Teller."

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When the Chinese heard Teller scream he rushed into the hut, the gun in his hand, ready to shoot, to kill instantly if the situation demanded it. When he saw the journalist, his head back, his face screwed almost unrecognisable he thrust the revolver back into his trousers and stepped quickly across the damp concrete floor. Hard he slapped Teller across the face. "Shut up," he yelled. "Shut up or I'll shut you up. Now. And her."

Teller fell silent and sat glaring at the Chinese before him. His breathing was coming in sharp, short bursts and spittle had dribbled from one corner of his mouth and was sliding in a single large drop down the side of his chin. His eyes were red and wide. "Just shut up," repeated the Catskiner and he backed away and disappeared through the entrance.

"Jason," whispered Brigit anxiously. "Jason are you alright? Are you ill? Yes?"

Teller did not shift his eyes from the doorway of the hut. Almost inaudibly he said. "We've got to get away. I've got to get out of here."

"How?" she pleaded. "We can't. There's no way."

"There must be. We've got to try. We can't sit here waiting to die."

"You look terrible," said Brigit. "You're alright aren't you? Is there anything wrong?"

Teller looked at her then. She was still slumped in the corner and he could see the nylon cords on her arms and legs had obviously continued to burn into the soft flesh. There were vicious red wealds and scabs had formed where the blood had congealed in ridges. Her face was ashen, all colour drained away, smears marking her cheeks, the ugly residue of tears shed.

"I'm sorry," he stammered. "I'm sorry, but I can't stand this much longer. Trussed up ready to be shot. Unable to move. I'm aching all over and my lungs are ready to explode. Jesus what I'd give for a glass of water." He stopped. "You must be worse. Are you alright?"

"I feel terrible," she answered, "But what can we do? At least I had a sip from the tin."

"When?"

"Last night. Remember? The water in that tin over there."

Teller followed her look to the opposite corner. The tin, he could see only the letters AM remained on the torn paper label, was still perched against the walls.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Outside. I can't hear anything," Brigit replied. "But it'll probably do you no good. He most likely drank what was left himself. I don't think he has any intention of giving you any. He wants you to suffer."

Teller began pushing himself across the room. The awkward movement hurt but he grimaced and kept going until he sat not far from the tin. His breathing was heavy but even, no longer urgent. He listened for sounds and then eased himself around so he faced Brigit. Watching her steadily he reached behind him. As his fingers felt the empty tin there was a crack outside and he jerked upright. He waited. Then he quickly made his way over next to her. "Turn your back to me," he said. "Lean against mine."

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Just do it. Please."

When she had he grabbed her wrists with one hand. Then he carefully placed the tin in her hands. "The rim is jagged, sharp," he said softly. There was an impatience in his words. "Try to cut my ropes with it. Hack and slice. See if you can cut through."

"Jason, if he comes in..."

"Hurry. Do it. We've got nothing to lose."

It was difficult to manipulate the stubby tin. Her hands were bound tightly, allowing little manoeuvrability and even that was painful for her, the movements breaking the sensitive surface of her injuries causing them to start bleeding again. Not being able to see it was almost impossible to try to slice in the same position all the time and on numerous attempts the edge of the tin cut into Teller's hands and wrists.

It took ten minutes to cut through. Her arms ached, she was drenched in sweat and Teller's hands were sticky with blood. But finally he tugged and his hands came free. Quickly he untied his legs and stumbled across the room replacing the empty tin in the corner. He wiped the blood from his hands and arms on the seat of his trousers and sat down again.

"What are you going to do?" asked Brigit. "He's still got the gun Jason. You can't try to fight him."

Teller began folding the nylon cord from his legs in loops and retied the ends into a triple knot. Then he laid it across his ankles and arranged it carefully so that on a cursory glance from a distance it could appear as though his ankles were still tightly bound.

"Untie me," urged Brigit.

"Not yet," he said. "You're right about the gun. I have to try to take him when he's not looking. Otherwise it wouldn't work. We need to distract his attention and I think you will have to be the bait. So this is what I want you to do."

Two minutes later Teller asked: "Can you do it? Do you think you can convince him?"

"I'll have to. It's the only way."

"OK," he said, "Let's try. We've got nothing to lose."

Teller leaned against the wall. "Help!" he cried. "Hey! Hey! Help!"

The Catskiner came to the doorway and looked in. Brigit was lying on her side, moaning and mumbling incoherently.

"Quickly," said Teller. "She's fainted. She's sick. Get her some more water. Please, give her some more water."

The Catskiner looked at her closely and then picked up the tin and returned outside. When he came back a few minutes later Teller could see the tin was full of brown murky water.

"Quick," he pleaded. "Help her."

The man knelt in front of Brigit's body and tried to lift her head with one hand holding the tin in the other. She raised herself slightly and then slumped back to the

floor. As the man tensed to support her Teller sprang from his position only paces away, lunging with all his remaining strength. His right fist crunched into the Catskinners' skull behind and below his right ear. At the same time he drove his left fist into the base of his neck.

The Catskinners was propelled forward, the top of his head smashing into the concrete wall of the hut. As he toppled onto his side Teller groped for the .38 in his trousers' waistband. He pulled it free and leapt back. Thrusting it in front of him, steadying it with both hands, he screamed: "Don't move you bastard. I'll blow your fucking head off."

He need not have bothered. The Catskinners lay sprawled on the floor unconscious.

As the muddy water hit his face the Chinese spluttered and shook his head. His eyes opened and fixed on Teller standing three paces away, the revolver pointed directly at him. Brigit was standing some distance to the side, the tin still in her hand. The man put his hand to his head and looked at the pale blood stain as he withdrew it.

"Just stay where you are," Teller commanded. "Do not move. If you do I will shoot you." Teller stood aiming the weapon and Brigit moved further out of the way. Then Teller spoke again. "Now it's our turn. You are going to pay for what you've done. But that's too good for the likes of you. You should be made to suffer. Like you've made others suffer. And I'm going to see to it that you do, you animal."

The Catskinners remained silent, never shifting his eyes from Teller. From behind Teller Brigit asked: "Are you going to tie him up Jason? Or what?"

"No," said Teller. "We're going to take the bastard to the police." He kept his gaze steady on the killer. "Or, if he likes he can try something stupid and we can end it here. I don't care any more."

A smile grew on the Catskinners' face. Placing his palms flat on the floor and shifting his weight onto them he challenged: "You don't have the courage. You've never fired a gun at anyone in your life. You're not about to shoot me now."

The .38 did not waver. Teller's mouth was a slit. "You're right." He said. "I haven't. But go ahead. Try me."

The Catskinners appeared to rise slightly. But he relaxed and once more touched his head. "When I choose." His tone was no longer caustic. The words were measured. "We have quite a way to go. Quite a way. Quite some time."

"It'll be soon enough. You'll see. Your time is all but run out."

"Keep your eyes open Mr Teller. Stay awake. Keep alert. Don't let the serious lack of sleep or the unstable state of your mind hinder you. Watch out Mr Teller. Watch very closely."

"Thanks for the advice," he shot back. But he knew the killer was right. He was tired. Utterly exhausted. And his nerves were on edge. He could feel every part of his body, like a nervous tingling spreading over the entire surface of the skin, itching, irritating, distracting. He would have to concentrate hard. The tendency to allow his mind and his limbs to wander would be strong. Already he could sense his eyes were troubling him. They felt as though sand had been ground into them. They were heavy like lead, sore and focussed for lengthy periods only when he forced them to. He was not sure how long he really could last.

"Underestimate me if you dare to," he said, hoping he sounded calm. "It's your life we are talking about now. I'm giving you a chance you never gave us. It's up to you whether you want to stay alive a little longer. If not that's certainly OK by me. What's your decision? Do you want to die here?"

“Don’t be ridiculous,” smiled the Catskiner. “I have no intention of dying here in this rotten little squatter hut. We’ll go if that’s what you wish. We’ll walk out of here.”

Teller raised the revolver to shoulder height and pointed it directly at the head of the man. “First you crawl,” he ordered. “On your hands and knees. Crawl to the door and outside. As soon as you are out, lie flat on the ground, your arms and legs spread as wide as you can. If you try anything I’ll put the first bullet up your arse. Now move.”

It was as though they had climbed out of a grave. The sunlight struck them fiercely and they had to squint until the blazing stars had all shot across their vision and skittled off to some other galaxy over their shoulders. A film of stinging salt solution replaced the shooting asterisks and they had to hastily wipe it away with their hands in order to see at all. It was precisely the reason Teller had insisted the killer crawl ahead of them and lie face down on the ground. He expected the effects of unfamiliar brightness to momentarily at least render them vulnerable. It was only for seconds but that could have been sufficient for the Catskiner who would not have been similarly struck to take advantage of them.

Swallowing in the clean fresh air they looked about them. Peng Chau seemed very close in the channel with Hong Kong Island in the distance also enticingly close by. Directly behind them, although they could not see it, they knew was the fresh water reservoir which served the residential resort of Discovery Bay. The community itself lay two kilometres to their left. About four kilometres in the other direction was Silvermine Bay, the main arrival and departure point for the Lantau Island ferry service. There was a Trappist monastery only fifteen minutes walk from the bay itself. On the other hand the going would be less trouble to Silvermine Bay, though it was twice the distance.

Teller selected Discovery Bay because of the monastery. There would be a telephone there. He could call for help and have it waiting by the time they walked into Discovery Bay proper. Maybe they could even make use of a vehicle to cover the final stage. On balance, north seemed the better direction to head.

“Get up,” he told the Catskiner. Five steps behind him and with the revolver aimed at the middle of his back he added: “Discovery Bay. We’re going there and I want you to remember I have the gun pointing right at you and I couldn’t miss. It won’t take much more than just a suspicion to pull the trigger.” As if to see if Teller was telling the truth the man looked down at the gun. Without expression he turned and began walking. “Not too fast,” said Teller. “That’s it. Nice and steady. We don’t want to lose you do we?”

It should take about an hour Teller reckoned to reach the monastery. Maybe thirty minutes more, but no longer. All going well they would be handing the killer over to the authorities by midday,

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Periodically the Omelco Secretariat meets in the Secretary General’s office to analyse itself and find solutions to problems. It is a practice followed by most government departments.

At the Monday meeting the Clerk of Councils was also present. The reason for his attendance was that the main item on the agenda related to the coming Legislative Council sitting on the seventh.

“Mr Harbin,” said the Secretary General, “perhaps we can start off by you telling us what arrangements you have made or will be making for Wednesday.”

The Legislative Council building is Hong Kong’s parliament. It is a government building, therefore it is the Councils Branch which is responsible for its management, including security.

“Thank you,” said the Clerk of Councils. “First off, let me say that our principal objective is to protect your members. Whatever we have planned is to ensure that they come and go in safety. Beyond that there is not much we can do. Of course, we can’t have a body guard sitting beside each in the chamber itself. Not that for a moment do I think that would be necessary anyway.”

He smiled but the faces around him did not join him. “So,” he went on quickly, “our main efforts will be directed at controlling the points of access. Barriers will be erected on both sides of the building, that is on the Statue Square side and from Chater Garden. Also, we will be closing one of the usual entrances.”

Looks were exchanged but the Clerk of Councils was allowed to continue. “This is what will happen. Members’ and officials’ cars will come in the usual way, in front of Chater Garden. Barriers on that side will be double and manned. No-one but members and officials will be permitted access through that door. On the Statue Square side there will also be a double line of barriers. Again police will be there and there will be only one access point. Anyone trying to come in will be searched and will have to produce an ID and explain the reason for the visit.”

“Including our own staff?” broke in the Secretary General.

“Yes. All your staff will have to carry their ID badges. If they don’t they could, they will, find it hard to get back in. So that’s something for you to look into.”

The Assistant Secretary General was already writing in his notebook. He would draft a circular and have it distributed throughout the building as a matter of urgency.

“Once the visitor gets through that check he will again be checked at the doorway of the building itself. Additional police will be on duty to search bags and so on and guests will have to sign in.”

“Is that necessary?” asked the Assistant Secretary General. “Why have two checkpoints?”

“The Commissioner of Police feels it is necessary. Personally I agree one should be enough but he is insistent. And the CS I believe has agreed. So there will be two checks.”

The Press Secretary actually raised his hand to speak. “The press are going to have to use that entrance too, so we’re going to have a bit of a mess I feel. Is it intended that they be searched also?”

“Yes.” The Clerk of Councils again tried his wan smile. “Everyone coming in will be treated the same. There will be no exception. I’m afraid that means you also.”

“That’s fair enough,” he replied. “I’m just alerting you that by two fifteen we’re going to have a queue out along the concourse. In PR terms it is going to look ... well let’s just say there is a downside to this too. And if anything gets out of hand it is all going to be in full view of the public and with TV cameras rolling.”

“We’re aware of that,” said the man from the Councils Branch. “But there is no alternative. The Superintendent from waterfront Division has assured me there will be adequate police on duty.”

“What about inside the building?” asked the Secretary General. “Anything there?”

“Not overtly.”

“What does that mean?”

“There will be no uniformed police above the ground floor. However, I understand there will be Special Branch officers on the first floor. That is, around the chamber and anti-chamber, and near the Governor’s office.”

“All with their little coloured lapel pins to identify them no doubt,” the Press Secretary commented. Nobody said anything.

“What else?” asked the Secretary General.

The Clerk checked his clipboard. “That is about it. Just to stress again that all the measures being taken are designed to prevent unwanted persons gaining access to the building, rather than reacting to anything that could happen once inside.”

“And if they do get in? What then?”

“They won’t. Everyone concerned is confident that with this strict security only bona fide visitors and those who are supposed to be here will get through.”

“I hope you’re right,” the Secretary General said. He looked around the group. “Has anyone got anything else for Mr Harbin?” There was a shaking of heads. The Clerk stood up. “Besides,” he said, almost as an after thought, “this is all just in case. It will probably turn out to be unnecessary. A good training exercise though.”

“Again,” said the Secretary General, “I hope you’re right. Let’s hope that a stop is put to whatever is going on out there. Hong Kong doesn’t need any of this. Not now.”

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“I don’t care how you do it or what you have to do. But find them.” The Commissioner of Police was seated at the head of the long table in the conference room on the fifth floor of Police Headquarters in Wanchai. Six other officers, the most senior in the force, faced him from both sides.

They included the Deputy Commissioner Operations and the Deputy Commissioner Management. Next to them were the Director of Operations and the Director of Special Branch and the Police Administration Officer and the Chief Staff Officer Public Relations. Another four officers, while not present were waiting nearby to hear the outcome of the meeting. The results would be passed onto them immediately for their action.

The Deputy Directors of Support, Crime, Operations and Special Branch were standing by in a adjacent waiting room for their superiors to emerge or to be called to be quizzed on the lack on information so far. They had already had a bad morning and fully expected the heat to be turned up. As experienced officers in a highly disciplined service they accepted they were expected to produce results. So far they had not. Despite the combined efforts of thousands under their control they had failed to do what they had been assigned to do. They acknowledged that that was not acceptable. It simply would not do. But what could they do? All stops had been pulled out. Every available man and woman had been put on the case. It was the biggest manhunt ever. Every haunt had been identified and searched, every lead checked, every possible contact questioned and requestioned. Still they came to a dead end.

The journalist and the woman had disappeared without a trace and the so-called Catskiner was still no more than a shadowy fear. He remained featureless, without physical substance. It was as though none of them existed anymore.

“It began here in Wanchai,” said the Commissioner. “So close that if we we’d been watching from these windows we could have seen it happening.” He looked at the men before him. “I want it to end here also. I don’t want it to reach Central, the

Legislative Council building. I want to stop it before that. We have to. We've got two more days. Only two days. So unless anyone has anything to add we'd better all get on with it."

There was nothing more they could say.

"Right then" concluded the Commissioner. "This meeting is closed."

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The eastern side of Lantau Island gets its fair share of battering from the elements. Though typhoons seldom attack from that direction the terrain looks as if it has suffered long and often. It gives the impression of having never really been given a chance to get going. As if once it did make a start a suffocating cloak had been thrown over it until it choked. Then it was lifted so it could make another attempt only to be prevented once more. And so on through eternity. Until it now looked as though it had given up the ghost.

It seemed always to be dry. Water drained away with unnatural speed given the rocky terrain. Plant life aspired to nowhere near its full potential and was never lush, but always brown and stunted. Indeed, the ghosts were the only ones suited to it. It was not suited to life, but it was to death.

The *fung shui* was apparently good, because the hillside was dotted with grave sites. One could not walk twenty meters without coming across a half moon shaped burial site built into the earth with a high concrete backing impregnated with a plaque bearing details of the lucky soul put to rest there. Some were large, measuring easily two meters across while others were large enough to step across without disturbing the peace of the inhabitant.

None ever had flowers and all were overgrown. Maybe even the souls had given up. Loved ones left behind certainly had. Except for once a year when Chinese tradition demanded the graves be swept clean, but that was around the Christian Easter, so in October the plots and any hardy souls still in limbo were left to fend for themselves.

Teller well understood and did not expect to cross the path of anyone. At least no-one alive. He had the feeling of being in one of the most remote parts of the territory. Fishing junks and sampans and ferries and hydrofoils plied the channel and deeper waters, and in the distance the shapes of huge container ships could also be seen. However, it was the exposure of the hillside that somehow made him feel very vulnerable. If anything did happen there would be no-one to help. Later that would change as they descended into the small valleys where the monastery and farmlets nestled, but until then they were quite alone.

The Catskinner was made to walk about five paces ahead of him with Brigit close behind. He could not allow the gap to widen as they would shortly be entering that part of the island where the stubby scrub and rock strewn hillside would be replaced by a wooded area more protected from the elements. That would be the most dangerous. The killer must not be allowed to get too far in front. At the same time it would be unwise to close the gap too much.

The fresh air had cleared Teller's head initially but after only a quarter of an hour he found his concentration wavering. The monotony of the path was not helping. The same thoughts ran through his mind over and over and that too did not help. The steady one foot after the other, the images repeating themselves, they acted like a drug, slowing his reactions, lulling him.

Twice he slowed to allow Brigit to draw along side. She looked tired, washed out, mentally drained. Head hung low she plodded on paying no heed to the surroundings. In answer to his questioning both times her words were the same. To just keep going, don't stop, don't talk, keep moving, end it. Unspoken was the fear that if she stopped she would not be able to continue. She was using her last reserve of energy. Her actions were by instinct and an inner voice that prodded and egged her on. Emotionally she had nothing left. She had been drained, sapped, all of it sucked out of her. She had to keep reminding herself that she was conscious, not asleep, though the urge to simply close her eyes was almost overpowering.

As they reached the crest of a hill Teller halted and in a weak voice called to the Catskinner to stop. Realising how feeble he sounded he shouted again. "Stop." Then: "Sit. Put your hands on your head. Don't move."

Slowly, with irritating ease the man lowered himself to the ground and stared out over the water. Brigit came to Teller's side. "Why have we stopped Jason?" she asked. "Is anything wrong?"

"You need a rest," he told her. "Get your breath. Have a break."

"No," she responded sharply. "We have to keep moving. I don't need to stop. I can't. Come on, keep going." Teller looked into her eyes and read the meaning. She was right. They must not stop. Not now. Not yet.

So they moved on, their legs like sacks of sand, their arms leaden and with eye lids that could barely be kept up. At the tip of the next rise they saw Discovery Bay in the distance. The latest stage of the development was in progress and they could make out the unfinished row of terrace houses on the far promontory.

Directly before them the path dropped into the trees and Teller knew that somewhere to his left was the monastery. But before they walked into its serene safety, passing the monks' dairy on the way, they would have to pick their way through bush, down a rocky in parts steep track.

As they started the climb down Teller called to the Catskinner: "Go slowly. And don't try anything. Remember I've got the gun pointed right at you." In fact he felt anything but confident and he wondered if the threat sounded as hollow as he felt inside. With a quick glance behind he said to Brigit: "Keep close. And be careful. It will be tricky in places."

The tops of the trees rustled and from their right there were regular sounds of snapping twigs. At first Teller thought they were being followed but the sight of a black cow pushed the silly idea from his mind. Twenty minutes passed before they broke into a level clearing where a stream forded by a single plank bordered a tiny farmlet. A host of scraggy dogs barked unwelcomingly but there was no sign of human life.

Teller called out but nobody answered or appeared. The animals kept up the noise at a cautious distance as the three strangers crossed the open space and began to climb again into the trees. They were still in sight of the dogs when it happened.

They were walking on clay. Brigit slipped on the greasy incline, her ankle twisted as it snagged on a rock, and she cried in pain as she fell. Teller wheeled about to see her hit the ground heavily and half slide and half roll backwards. The dogs barked and one lunged forward, snapping menacingly. Teller looked at the animal and at Brigit slithering towards it, then at the Catskinner who had stopped and was also staring at the scene. Teller turned back to Brigit and made the choice. He fired the .38 into the air and jumped towards the dog. It leapt away and with the others raced down the track.

When Teller bent and grabbed Brigit by the shoulder he looked back up the path. The Catskinner had gone.

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Her ankle and foot and leg as high as the calf were bloated, blue, and from the expression on her face extremely painful. It was fortunate no bones had snapped or she could have been in a bad state indeed. After all, she had had to walk on it, or hobble at least, for some considerable distance over ground that was hard going at the best of times. There had been no other way.

The Catskinner had seized the fleeting opportunity to escape, leaving Teller still with the revolver but with the burden of an injured, distraught companion, alone, cut off from help. They had quickly realised they had no choice but to continue on, ever alert, and try to reach the monastery, the nearest assistance. Teller could not afford to carry her. This would not leave him free to effectively use the gun if he had to. Nor could Brigit cover the distance unassisted. She had to lean heavily on his shoulder, her arm around his neck with fingers clawing at the skin, while she hopped and limped the rest of the way. It took them almost another hour and a half before they broke from the trees and stepped exhausted onto the bitumen road leading up a hill to the monastery.

Once there they felt safe, though Teller continued looking about him anxiously. He was afraid the Catskinner might still try to stop them reaching the authorities and divulging not only his deadly plan but also his identity and the fact that he was on the island.

Two monks and three elderly staff led them to a room in the complex adjacent to the religious heart of the compound and began bathing and binding Brigit's injured leg. While they were doing this Teller made a telephone call to Hong Kong. He spoke directly to Robert McNamara for just sixty seconds and then returned to Brigit's side. She reclined on a bunk and he sat in a chair. There was no conversation with the old staff who kept their distance. All Teller said was: "It's alright. They're coming to get us. It's over. We're safe."

Half an hour later the sound of the thrashing blades of a helicopter intruded on the still of the secluded retreat and a short time after two young men in light brown suits dashed into the room. Within five minutes Teller and Brigit were escorted to the waiting aircraft, its blades spinning slowly as it perched on the road outside the milk processing building, and carefully but urgently helped inside. As the noise increased and the helicopter lifted off, the occupants in the cramped bubble looked back at the receding landscape. In the din Brigit weakly asked Teller beside her: "Is it really finished Jason?"

He did not hear her words but he mouthed a reply: "It's over my love. At last for us it's done."

## Chapter Twenty-Three

The Chief Secretary wanted them to be kept in hospital, the Matilda on the Peak rather than the massive and public Queen Mary in Pokfulam, with a tight guard around the clock. Teller and Brigit both protested. Instead they insisted on going to her flat. It was familiar, they could be together and besides, their medical requirements were not urgent. What was needed more than anything was rest, lots of it, and peace and quiet.

Robert McNamara and the Commissioner of Police reluctantly relented with the proviso that a guard was placed on the building and their flat. There was no argument and by six o'clock on the Monday evening Teller and Brigit had bathed and were lounging in the sitting room in clean clothes, sipping steaming cups of coffee laced with generous helpings of brandy.

However they were still not alone. Also with them were six police officers, including the superintendent who had interrogated Teller at the flat of Amelia Tse months before. And again he was firing questions. They had to go back to the beginning. "Tell me again," probed the superintendent. "Start from when you left us the last time. When you returned to your home from the station in Central."

Teller did. He relived the mysterious phone calls, the shock of the dead cat, the tracking down of the killer after the brawl in Tsimshatsui, his visit to the Polytechnic and the terror of being hunted in the hills of Sai Kung, culminating in the bloody murder of the accountant.

"What was his involvement in all this?" asked the policeman.

"I'm not sure," replied Teller. "I had used him before as a source, but later on he seemed to be speaking or representing the CS. You'd be better asking McNamara about that."

The superintendent moved on. "What happened after that?"

The flight to the advertising man's flat and the chilling sampan journey across the channel to Lantau Island. He kept the description of the girl's killing brief, concentrating instead on their days of captivity in the hut above the cove.

"It was like a cell," he remarked. "Something out of the dark ages. Damp, cold surprisingly, and all the time we were tied up and denied anything to drink or eat. The bastard should be slowly starved to death when he's caught."

"Don't worry Mr Teller, he'll be punished. You can count on that."

Finally there was the description of the Catskiner himself. One of the policemen in the room had been sitting quietly in the corner cradling a metal briefcase in his lap and listening intently to the exchange. The superintendent beckoned him and explained that if Teller and Brigit would describe the killer in detail a composite identi-kit picture could be put together.

As their memories unburdened themselves the policeman began sorting a number of thin transparent sheets showing noses, eyes, eyebrows, chins, foreheads, hairlines, cheeks. It took nearly an hour but they were satisfied with the result.

"That's him," said Teller. "At least as near as you'll probably get."

Brigit nodded. "It's a good likeness, yes. I'll see him forever and that's him. I'd like to kill him myself."

"Leave that to us Miss Rolanne," the superintendent said. He smiled. "You have both been most co-operative. Thank you. I think we have all we need for now. We'll get right onto it. I would suggest in the meantime that you don't leave here. If you need anything we'll arrange it for you. At least until Wednesday. Anyway, I

daresay you will sleep and rest up much of tomorrow. Just take it easy and remember we'll be on duty outside all the time. You are quite safe now."

Later that night they did sleep, but not immediately. First, Teller made a call to his office and spoke to the Editor in Chief.

Davidson's opening question was: "When are you coming in?"

Teller had expected it. "Not tomorrow. I'll be back on Wednesday, or Thursday most likely."

"Good," said Davidson. His voice had not changed. There was no indication of any sympathy or concern. Not that Teller was surprised. The editor would not have known what had taken place, but in any event Teller would not have expected any expressions of condolence. He was mildly surprised therefore when Davidson went on: "Is everything alright? Anything I can do?"

"No," he answered. "Everything's fine now."

"Anything you can write about?" There it was.

"I don't know. What do you mean exactly?"

"Can you do a piece for the paper? Is it all linked to Wednesday?"

"Yes it is. At least at the moment it is, but it could change before that."

"What about a holding story then? Could you knock out something on the basis that nothing happens in the meantime? You could also change it tense-wise to cover the prospect that the nutter is caught before that. We could have them ready to run on Wednesday."

There was a pause. "I don't know," said Teller. His thinking was still unclear. "I don't really want to be involved any more."

"It's just a story," Davidson pushed. "I'm not asking you to do any more than recount what's been happening and what could happen. You are a bloody journalist you know and our readers do have a right to know what's going on."

Before Teller could respond Davidson hastened on: "Listen Jason. You've been right so far. I can see that. And I guess you've been through quite a bit. The police won't tell us anything, but Jesus the whole place has been turned upside down looking for you. So whatever it is it's serious. It doesn't take a genius to work that much out. You uncovered it and had the guts to go with it. Don't quit now. Finish it. Think about it and if you decide to do something, or even if you don't, call me. Here or at home doesn't matter. But give it some thought and let me know. OK? Just don't give up. Give me a buzz when you can. Alright? Good."

The telephone went dead and Teller frowned. Not at the fact that Davidson had abruptly hung up but at his own indecision. He did not have long to think about it. Within seconds the instrument rang. He snatched it up.

"Hello, Jason?"

"Yes."

"Robert McNamara Jason."

Teller smiled. He found himself speaking quickly. "Oh good evening. Thank you for getting us back here. I, we, appreciate what you did. Personally I mean."

"Forget that," said the Chief Secretary. "I'm just glad you're alright now and that you and Miss Rolanne are safe and sound. What I called for was to ask if I can talk to you. Not now. Tomorrow. Say around eleven?"

"Sure. But I'm not supposed to go out."

"I know. I'll come there. If that's alright with you both."

"Yes, of course."

"Good. See you at eleven then. And again, I'm happy everything has turned out alright. Goodnight for now."

“Goodnight.”

“Who was that?” asked Brigit.

“The CS. He’s coming here tomorrow morning. He wants to talk to us.”

“What about? Why him?”

“I don’t know. He didn’t say. Probably just wants to see how we are.”

“A bit strange isn’t it? Him coming here I mean.”

“I guess so. We’ll have to wait and see I suppose.”

She stood and drained the remaining liquid from her cup. “Take the phone off the hook,” she said. “No more disturbances tonight, yes? Even if the Governor calls. We’re going to bed and sleep for twelve hours. That’s an order.”

“Yes ma’am,” Teller replied. “To bed. Certainly. To sleep. Certainly. But first, what about...?”

“No way lover boy. This girl is tired and she’s going to bed to sleep. Only sleep. And so are you, so come on.”

Teller wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. “I love you,” he said. “The one good thing to come out of all this is you. Us. I’m not going to let you go you know.”

I know that,” she said. There was a softness in her eyes. “I love you too. Yes, I do love you.”

Despite his weariness he gathered her tiny body in his arms and carried her towards the bedroom.

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The oriental gentleman in the plain grey suit approached the reception counter in the austere foyer of the new Kowloon Hotel across the road from the rear of the grander Peninsula in Tsimshatsui. He spoke politely to the young lady who handed him a card which he calmly filled in and returned to her.

“Just the two nights sir?” she smiled.

“*Hai*,” he nodded sharply. Two.”

“Certainly sir. Just a moment please.” The girl left him and began keying the information into the computer behind the counter.

The man, wearing sunglasses and with a bulging carryall slung over one shoulder looked around the lobby. It was one of the newest hotels and while understated reflected its youth in the gleaming marble walls and energetic activity of the staff.

The girl returned from the machine. “Have you any bags sir?”

“Here,” he patted the carryall. “Business. No more.”

“Certainly sir.” The smile must have been sewn onto her face. “Here’s your key sir. The lifts are to your right. Have a nice stay Mr Takahito.”

“Thank you.”

As he walked towards the lifts hidden around the corner the girl moved back to the computer and confirmed the check in. Mr Kenichi Takahito. Room 1102. Check out Wednesday 7-10-87.

Once in the eleventh floor room the man locked the door. He removed his jacket and threw it only the bed. In the bathroom he took off the glasses and examined his face in the mirror. The room would do just fine. Tomorrow he would get the things he needed.

Stripping off the rest of his clothes he lowered his naked body to the tiled floor. Breathing evenly and deeply he began. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven...

## Chapter Twenty-Four

The view from Victoria Peak on Hong Kong Island, spanning the flat roofs of the high-rise conglomeration of the Mid-levels, and over the weathered and heat-gleaming Western and Central districts to the mass of shapes on Kowloon peninsula, is one of the most affecting in the world.

At night it is uniquely brilliant, the millions of sparkling lights testifying to the untiring zest for life. There is the sensation that behind every window something interesting is happening. No street is without activity. Even when the city does sleep the impression is one of impatient slumber, urging the night to pass quickly so that it can come to life again. In the daylight one can almost see the fever of industry rising as a mist, an aura of urgency.

Yet it is the dawn that is surreal. Hong Kong itself is a phenomenon of dreams. In the minutes before sunrise it is like a shroud that conceals reality, or which applies a cosmetic transforming a tangible feature into a vision. Then when the warming rays of the sun strike the mystery evaporates and the city and its people are brought back into the world, the shroud rising to reveal truth once more.

There is more to it than meets the wide eyed admirer. In that panorama the filth of the grand harbour is unseen, the squalor of alleys and the poverty of so many, invisible. The superficial beauty and the fascination is the stuff of postcards, of celluloid backdrops, truly spectacular, dishonestly deceiving.

For Brigit and Teller the unreality of their own personal dreams came to an abrupt end as she shuddered and uttered a sharp guttural cry. Teller awoke to see her sitting upright, her knees hugged to her chest and sobbing.

“What is it?” he asked. “What’s wrong?”

“A nightmare,” she choked. The sobs continued and her whole frame convulsed as if struck by a blistering cold draught.

Teller sat up and put his arm around her shoulders, patting gently. “It’s alright,” he soothed. “It was only a dream. Don’t be afraid. It can’t harm you.”

“You don’t understand. He had a face. I saw who it was.”

“Who? Who had a face?”

“The man on the horse. The one who had no head before. I saw him. It was death.”

“So you dreamed you saw a dead man on a horse my love. It was a dream. Only a dream. Please don’t let it upset you.”

“But Jason,” she turned brimming eyes to him. With a breaking sob they overflowed and tears cascaded down her cheeks. “It was you. I saw it was you. And you were dead. You were cold and dead.”

For a moment all was still, no words spoke. Then Brigit said: “Jason I’m so frightened something is going to happen. I’m scared that it is not over for us yet.”

“Of course it is my darling,” he answered. It is over for us. We’re safe and no one can hurt us now. We’ll go away. As soon as we can we’ll get away from here. Far away so this is no more than a memory. A bad dream just like your nightmare.”

He pulled her to him and they sank down together into the soft enveloping coolness of the bed. Her tears touched his face and to his surprise he realised they joined with some of his own. The pain and hurt she was suffering, had suffered, dug at his heart. An anger rose inside him but it went as quickly as it had come, overwhelmed by a love and a sense of responsibility he had not experienced before.

Beside him, was a woman he would protect with all his power, a woman he wanted more than anything else to share his life with. He marvelled at how blind he had been in past years, how it had nearly passed him by. He had been given a second chance and nothing, nobody would take it away.

They clung together and their hands explored each other's bodies with a tenderness and sensuality that exploded in a passion which left them gasping in a desperate union. There was no need for words. None could adequately express what they felt or the depth of that feeling. Teller brushed Brigit's lips with his own and smiled down at her. He kissed her eyes and the tip of her nose and nestled his face into the softness of her neck. The world outside did not exist. The totality of everything was now. Here. This moment.

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"If I might ask sir, what was the outcome?" The young man was apprehensive about the question. He knew he had transgressed into territory generally prohibited to his station, but curiosity had been eating at him for some time and he gambled that the worst he could expect was probably a glare and a caution to restrict his attentions to matters that did concern him.

The frown slowly materialised and the cold blue eyes settled on him. "The outcome of what might I ask?" answered the department head.

The junior took a breath. "The telno from Hong Kong sir. The matter raised by the PA. I was just wondering if anything came out of it." He took one more risk. "It was interesting I thought."

"Interesting," drawled his superior. The coins rattled in his pocket, sorted by manicured fingers. "You found it interesting did you?"

"Yes sir."

"Well Johnson," the tone of the two words unmistakable. "Your interest is of little consequence. Your function in this department was clearly spelt out when you were seconded here from Hong Kong. For that three year period your job is to keep the files in order, act as a conduit for routine correspondence – and I stress routine – liaise with the Hong Kong Government Office in Grafton Street, and in all other things do as you are instructed. I do not recall anything in your job description sheet which entitles you to be kept abreast of sensitive and confidential matters that are outside your classification."

The pause for effect had an effect, though it was not the one the head of the department wished. The young administrative officer turned his back and renewed his concentration on the file that lay open on his desk.

"In this office Johnson," continued the lecture. "we have a practice of obedience, loyalty, and if you can tear yourself away from that business while I am speaking to you, respect. You understand what I am saying?"

"Yes sir," said the junior, again looking at the face peering down at him. "It was out of loyalty to Hong Kong that I asked the question. I care what happens there."

The tall man's eyes narrowed. "You care. You express loyalty. Johnson don't you realise you are an outsider there. You are not accepted. You are tolerated, that's all. I admire your so-called loyalty but don't deceive yourself. You'll be coming back here after all. And not too long from now is my guess."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that while the Joint Declaration is an excellent agreement, one that HMG can be justifiably proud of, it does somewhat limit the horizons of the British

civil servant in the colony. You can never be a branch secretary. And when the Basic Law comes out I daresay you might find that your chances of directing a department will be slim. So what do you do Johnson? Where do you decide your career lies? If I were your age I would begin making plans to secure something worthwhile back home. Here is your home. This is where you belong. You are, and always will be, a foreigner in the Far East. Hong Kong belongs to the Chinese.”

“The Hong Kong Chinese.”

“I mean the Chinese,” the head waved his hand dismissively. “It will be a Special Administrative Region. But it will be a Chinese SAR.”

The young man from the Hong Kong Government on secondment to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office kept his eyes fixed on the now smiling face above him. The lecture went on: “That is why you should start to understand, learn over again if you must, the way we do things. We do not pry into things that do not concern us Johnson. We respect our job and just get on with it. Leave Hong Kong to Hong Kong. That is the message in the JD and it will be the message reinforced in the Basic Law. The sooner you accept that the better it will be for you.”

The tall man moved to leave. He took two steps and stopped. The clinking of the coins in his pocket began again as he turned. “I will tell you this,” he said. “Gould’s information had some basis in fact. Something was afoot out there. But a stop has been put to it. It is under control and we do not expect things to change. The local police have been brought in at last and the two missing persons we needed have been located. It won’t be long now before the whole business is a thing of the past. Alright then? Now let’s leave it at that shall we. Just keep up the good work and let us worry how to handle the troublesome locals. We’ve had a good deal of experience after all.”

As the head of the department disappeared into the echoing corridor Hong Kong Administrative Officer Johnson shook his head. Audible only to himself he muttered: “Thank god he’s here and not there.”

The nagging worry that all was not well in Hong Kong remained with him

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It was after ten in the morning and Brigit and Teller were in the tiny kitchen of her flat eating yoghurt and drinking strong black coffee. Outside they could see the weather forecast had been right for once. The sun was shining and there was hardly a cloud in the sky. The change, combined with their love-making hours before, had cheered them considerably, and despite the short sleep they were fresh and in good spirits. Her fears looked to have been blown away with the mist.

“He’ll be here soon,” said Teller.

Brigit nodded. “I know. I wonder what he wants. It can’t be a courtesy call, yes?”

“I doubt it. The Chief Secretary doesn’t go around dropping in on the likes of us to just wish us the time of day. I suspect he has something specific in his mind.”

“Maybe he wants to thank you.”

“I doubt that too. I caused them trouble rather than helping.”

“If we’re honest about it I suppose we both did. Maybe even more than we realise. Though I will say that without you they would not know who to look for. So that’s something.”

“Something. But it can’t make up for the accountant and that sampan girl. If we hadn’t been involved they would still be alive today. I’ll never forgive myself for that.”

Brigit could have explained that the consequences of actions could often not be predicted and that when he did what he did he had no way of knowing others would be hurt. Besides, the killer had left them little choice. It was either act to defend himself or be murdered in cold blood. Perhaps he had acted somewhat rashly but he had done so with the best of intentions. That aside, she knew he meant what he said. The sorrow that was left behind would remain with him always. But she did not say these things. Before she could there was a knock at the door.

“It’s him,” said Teller. “We’ll soon know now what he has on his mind.”

Robert McNamara entered the flat leaving a wake behind him. Dressed in his familiar grey suit he seemed almost larger than life. It could have been his impressive size or merely the presence of a person of his position. However, he immediately put his two hosts at ease by smiling broadly and shaking Teller’s hand with a firm steady grip.

“I’m pleased you are well Jason,” he beamed. “And I am extremely glad to see you have not suffered too much Miss Rolanne. I hope your ankle is not too painful.”

“No,” she answered, a little on the defensive. “It’s sore, but otherwise I’m still in one piece.”

“I know you have experienced a terrible ordeal,” said McNamara. “I also want to thank you for what you’ve tried to do. We do acknowledge the roles you have both played.”

There was a sudden silence and Teller and Brigit were not sure whether the visit was already over. It was Teller who offered a drink and indicated the sofa.

“Yes, tea would be fine if you don’t mind,” answered the Chief Secretary. “There is something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

Brigit immediately busied herself in the kitchen and Teller and McNamara settled on the sofa. “Very nice indeed,” said McNamara casting his eyes around the room. “You gave excellent taste Miss Rolanne.”

“Thank you,” Brigit replied. The Chief Secretary was a nice man too, she thought to herself. Even if he did not mean it, the thought was appreciated.

“Sir, you said you had something to discuss with us,” said Teller.

“That’s right Jason. With you really, but I suppose it also concerns Miss Rolanne.”

Teller waited. Brigit set the tray on the table and began pouring from a blue and white china teapot.

“First of all,” opened the Chief Secretary, “is there anything about your ordeal that you have not told the police?”

“Of course not. We’ve told them everything,” Teller said.

“You haven’t overlooked anything? Nothing that you’ve recalled since you spoke to them?”

“No. Why?”

“Well, we have a problem. We have the name and the address along with an extremely good likeness of the killer thanks to you. And we have an idea of what he planned to do. You filled in all those gaps for us.”

“Yes?”

“Obviously the only piece missing is the suspect himself. We’ve not been able to track him down.”

Teller glanced at Brigit who was studying Robert McNamara closely. "I'm afraid there's nothing further that I can tell you," he said. "I wish there was more I could do, but I can't think what it is. I feel sort of responsible you know. Guilty I guess is nearer the truth."

The muscles in McNamara's jaw twitched. "It is a pity it was allowed to get so far, but I wouldn't blame yourself too much. The man is clearly a lunatic."

"You can say that again," interrupted Brigit. "He's got this fixation and is determined to carry out his absurd plan."

"And that's precisely why I wanted to talk to you Jason. As you say Miss Rolanne the killer is bent on doing what he threatens. We believe he is not going to stop even though he's lost you two."

"And?" asked Teller.

The Chief Secretary stood up. He looked out the window and then turned to face Teller on the sofa. "You are the only one who knows first hand what he looks like. Even if he altered his appearance you could probably recognise him. You were close, very close to him for a long time. I suspect you will not forget his features, his build, his mannerisms. We want your help."

"How do you mean? What can I do now?"

"We want you at Legco tomorrow. We need you there to try to spot him if he tries to get in."

"No!" Brigit had not meant it to, but the word was blurted out. Both Teller and the Chief Secretary looked at her with surprised expressions.

"I mean you can't expect Jason to do that," she hurried on. "He's been through enough surely. If he's there and that crazy sees him you don't know what he might do. And if he does set off a bomb or whatever Jason will be caught in the middle of it. You're asking too much. Jason you can't. Don't listen."

Neither said anything. She stood and faced Robert McNamara. "Why can't you all leave us alone? We didn't want any part of this. We've been almost killed because of you politicians. And journalists like Amelia Tse. Even his editor wants him to write some damn fool story that could endanger him further. It's not fair."

"What's this about an article?" asked McNamara.

"Davidson wants a wrap up piece for tomorrow what's all." Teller turned away. "To set the scene for whatever might happen."

"Are you going to do it?"

"I haven't told him yet."

"Don't do it Jason," said the Chief Secretary. "You'll only succeed in throwing fright into everyone and creating a media circus around Legco. The whole place would be turned into a mad sideshow. It could be just the cover the Catskinners needs. I'm asking you Jason. Please don't add to this serious problem."

Teller shook his head slowly. "I hadn't made up my mind but I did have my doubts. I won't do anything until after the sitting."

"Do what you like later on," McNamara said calmly. "I can't stop you. It's up to you. But at this point in time, to come out with a scare story in the morning could be disastrous."

"Fair enough. I take your point."

"Now about helping us out in the building. Will you do it?"

"Jason?" said Brigit warily.

Teller watched her face and saw the deep concern in her wide eyes and taugth skin. A pink rash had appeared on her throat, a blotching marring the opening in her blouse.

He nodded slightly. "Tell me exactly what I would have to do."

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The man known to the New Kowloon Hotel as Kenichi Takahito rounded the corner and stopped briefly, scanning the throng of people in Nathan Road. Deciding his route he crossed over in front of the infamous Chungking Mansions and began threading his way in a northerly direction.

Nathan Road drives through Kowloon from Tsimshatsui on the tip of the peninsula to Mongkok about four kilometres away. It is to the tourist the ultimate shopper's paradise. It begins with the twin hotel giants the Peninsula on one corner and the Sheraton on the other, and spears in a straight line through glitter and glamour to the incomparable agglomeration of the most densely populated area of its size on the face of the planet. The artery is lined with every imaginable attraction and enticement, orderly, planned and space at one end, to a haphazard jumble of humanity and commerce at the other.

There are only two places along the thoroughfare where a pedestrian can slow his step and derive some relief from the incessant onslaught of noise and barter. One is in front of the impressive turreted Islamic mosque and adjacent to Kowloon Park with its profusion of trees and dusty open space. The other is almost opposite. The old headquarters of the meteorological bureau sits atop a small hill overlooking the congested roadway below. Every other square meter is taken up by traders in virtually every conceivable commodity. Nowhere else is the true life blood of the territory more obvious. Side streets shoot off in both directions from Nathan Road adding additional blocks of bustle which make Tsimshatsui, Yaumati and Mongkok one giant mishmash of excitement and fascination.

The man would visit six shops, some in Nathan Road itself, more in the back streets. He carried in his head a list of nine items he intended purchasing. The first he would arrange in Mongkok, and while he could have ridden on the underground or taken other public transport he chose to walk and be one of the jostling sidewalk crowd.

The sign hanging above the counter read "Choi Shek-hon" and printed beneath were the dual trades of the proprietor – business cards printed and keys cut. The Catskiner had been there before and knew if he doubled the price asked the man could produce the required goods overnight. No questions were asked. The money was paid in advance and Choi Shek-hon promised that if the caller returned at nine thirty the next morning the items would be ready. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Next, the Catskiner retraced his steps to a stationary shop a few blocks away in Nathan Road. Within minutes he had bought a steno notepad, three pens, four Venus Velvet HB pencils and a plastic clipboard.

Across the road were a number of shops which dealt exclusively in leather and pseudo leather carrying bags. Hundreds of all sizes and shapes were stacked on the floor and shelves and hung on wire hooks dangling above the sidewalk. Again in only minutes the choice was made and the transaction completed. As the Catskiner left the shop with a somewhat flawed rectangular shoulder bag over his shoulder the assistant thanked the gods for his good fortune. The bag had been sold despite the inferior quality of the workmanship and almost unbelievably the customer had not bothered to haggle over the price. Perhaps it was an omen that it would be a profitable day.

The remaining items the Catskiner needed would all be found in Tsimshatsui and he quickened his pace as he headed back towards the harbour area. At the end of Kowloon Park in front of the mosque again he sidestepped his way across Nathan Road and headed into the back streets. At one shop behind the old Mariner's Club he bought a two hundred and fifty dollar tape recorder and three mini tapes. Next door he paid considerably more for a black Minolta camera and four rolls of Fuji film and two rolls of black and white film.

Two blocks away in Carnarvon Road he entered an optometrists and enquired about spectacles. He knew precisely what he wanted. His eyes were extremely weak, he told the white coated attendant. Unfortunately he had broken his spectacles the night before and was waiting for his regular optometrist to replace them. But they would not be ready for another twenty-four hours at least and he discovered that though he had expected to get by in the meantime his hopes had been unrealistic. He was fed up with being jostled by other pedestrians and he had, only minutes before, narrowly escaped being knocked down by a taxi. He tried on a dozen pairs and finally chose one with steel frames. The glass was clear but so thick they enlarged his eyes to make him look, as he joked, like a goldfish. They were far from perfect but at least they might save his life for another day. The attendant was amused and unconcerned at the damage that might be caused to the customer's eyes. A sale had been made and that was all that mattered. The Catskiner negotiated his way out of the shop and joined the crowds again. Around the corner he removed the spectacles and dropped them into the bag with his other purchases.

Only one more item remained. It was probably the most important and he would have to be careful in his selection. However, first he walked into the Miramar Hotel at the top of Carnarvon Road. He located the hairdresser and being the only customer was shown immediately to a chair. To the surprise of the hairdresser he requested his head be shaved.

"All of it?" asked the hairdresser.

"Yes." He said. He wanted to be completely bald.

Half an hour later he looked at himself in the mirror. His round head was pink and seemed larger than he would have imagined. When the hairdresser held the mirror to the rear he noted two folds of skin over protrusions below the crown that gave it an odd shape, like a peeled potato.

The last shop was in Wun Sha Street. The shop was oddly one of the few places in the colony where a man could buy a good wig. There were many which catered for female needs, and factories which supplied overseas markets. But the market for men's hairpieces locally was small and the quality of the product was more often than not shoddy. The Kwok Lok Hairpiece Emporium was an exception. It occupied a small front space but at the rear of the shop there was a huge cold room that was stacked with wigs of varying styles, mostly black but a few with flecks of grey showing through.

The woman who tended the shop was also the owner and she had had many years of studying the male head and features. She knew what could pass undetected as a wig and she regarded every request as a challenge. Her present customer was no exception. Indeed, what he sought was slightly unusual. It took no less than two hours, but finally when they both stood looking at the reflection in the full length mirror she could not help remarking: "It's incredible." The Catskiner said nothing but he smiled broadly.

When he left the Kwok Lok Hairpiece Emporium the Catskiner strolled slowly along the streets back to the New Kowloon Hotel, peering through the thick

spectacles at shop windows and watching the expressions on people in the lunch hour crowd. No-one seemed to take the slightest notice of him.

Back in the hotel room he emptied the contents of the shoulder bag into the bed. Carefully he ripped one corner of the bag and with one of the pens scored a long jagged mark across the front. He broke the lead in one of the pencils and tore out a number of pages from the notebook, leaving the thin remnants locked in the spiral bind. Then he inserted a black and white film in the camera and quickly snapped six pictures of the wall. Finally he slipped one of the tapes in the hand held recorder and spoke into it. "Testing. One, two, three, four, five." He rewound it and left it on the bed.

Removing the spectacles he pressed his eyes with his fingers and sank into an easy chair. Keeping his fingers to his eyes he sat motionless in the silence. He was almost ready.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Wednesday, October 7, 1987.

For that undefined entity, the-man-in-the-street, it was merely another day. He would rise from his bed – in the squatter huts spoiling hillsides and rooftops, in the architecturally contrived bee-hive cubicles unflatteringly called resettlement estates that sprawled like fungi, in flats and apartments and in luxurious townhouses partly concealed by the urban mass of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon – and dress suitably for the prevailing climate and then battle his way to his place of employment. There, he would on average work for the next ten hours at the end of which he would rejoin the public throngs to fight his way home.

Before midnight when October 7 would pass into history he would either eat in or out, settle himself in front of the colour television screen to watch the news he had personally missed, or to escape into the realm of fantasy courtesy of local and foreign artists whose calling it was to distract the viewer from the pressures of reality, or join with friends in another celebration of the joys of life.

There was no apparent reason why the-man-in-the-street should be struck by that day being vastly different from any other. Perhaps he may have been pleasantly surprised when he first looked out the window of his home. The roads were dry after a settled night, and judging by the sky it was shaping up to be one of those rare October days when parks became magnets for workers who were eager to take advantage of lunchtime sunshine.

By eight o'clock the roads had begun to fill. Buses were running at five or ten minutes intervals. The underground was operating much more efficiently every two minutes, but even that was insufficient along many sections to cope with the mad peak hour rush. The harbour was alive with ferries and assorted other floating traffic.

Offices were opening. But of course shoppers, like tourists who flocked to Hong Kong for the peak travel season, had to wait another two hours or so. Apart from the department stores the shutters on shop fronts stayed down. It was one of the anomalies of Hong Kong. One expected businesses to trade late into the evenings and on weekends and public holidays. But if one expected to be able to dash into a shop on the way to work to buy a pair of trousers, compare different brands of video recorders or washing machines, or to select a pair of new shoes, an ivory carving or have a picture framed there would be only disappointment waiting. Roller shutters were not unlocked until ten or ten thirty.

Visitors from abroad wandered the Peal of the Orient, the famous shoppers' paradise, wondering what had gone wrong. Then by the time their feet were beginning to ache from the pounding on concrete the business houses of Hong Kong would throw open their doors to emit the raucous noise of trade, which seemed to reach out and grab the casual stroller by the scruff of the neck and breathe new life into him as it dragged him inside, unselfconsciously reaching for his wallet with promises of unbelievable bargains.

Such was the routine of everyday life in Hong Kong. It was an illusion, it was panic, it was hunger, it was a society that lived for nothing but today. It was frantic normalcy for more than five million men, women and children who wanted nothing but that it should continue with its graceless pace and constantly renewed promise of opportunity.

But there were those in the community for whom Wednesday October 7 1987 was a day of reckoning, a day when their lives would be changed forever, and a few whose deeds would determine the future existence of those so many more who were oblivious to the threat that was unseen yet unerring in its fervent terror. For them the day had come too soon, offering not enough, and at the same time too much.

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“At the outset, before we get down to specifics, let me say that while we have not been able to achieve our ideal objective I am satisfied with the manner in which this investigation has been handled since it was handed over to us.” The Commissioner of Police looked at each of the faces around the table. He nodded a number of times but showed no distinct preference for any single wing of his force. His comments were meant for all equally.

“We came into it far too late and with very little to go on. But you can take pride in the knowledge that no matter how difficult the task this force has done everything in its power, and I mean everything, to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Unfortunately, despite all of those efforts that is not the case at this point in time. Quite simply we have in fact made little progress. Our suspect is still out there and there is no reason to suspect he has given up. To the contrary, there is every reason to think that he is at this moment planning his next move very carefully. We don’t know what that move is. We do know, thanks to the journalist Teller and his lady friend, what the objective of our man is. But we still have no idea how he intends carrying it out.”

The burly expatriate Deputy Commissioner on his right broke in casually. He spoke with authority and firmness nevertheless. “Our guess has to be that it is an explosive device of some sort. Guns are out. He couldn’t get one in and the damage he could cause would be limited. From what we know he is talking large scale. Not an individual symbolic assassination.”

“If he can’t be expected to smuggle in a gun how does he expect to get past the door with a bomb or whatever?” The question was from the head of Crime. It was a fair question and one that others shared.

“Maybe he doesn’t have to get inside to do the damage,” offered the Director of Operations.

“Or maybe it’s already been planted,” added the Director of Special Branch “We just don’t know.”

“No way,” said the expatriate Deputy Commissioner. Operations was his speciality. “For the last two days alone we have been over that building a dozen times. We’ve checked and rechecked every office, every storeroom, the chamber itself. I am convinced that if a time bomb or some other radio controlled device had been put there we would have found it by now. We did everything but dismantle the President’s chair. The building is clean.”

“Maybe we should take HE’s high chair to pieces,” said the Director of Crime. “You never know.”

“I know you’re not serious in that Eric,” said the Operations head. “but we actually considered it. It’s probably the only piece of furniture we don’t know whether it’s held together with glue or nails. Everything else has been gone over with hands, eyes and detectors. In addition we’ve had the architects and building supervisors down with their plans and we’ve covered everything from the roof to the old cells

below ground. Remember it was the Supreme Court. We've located a few missing items for Omelco but nothing we were looking for."

"So our man has to get inside," said the Commissioner.

The Deputy Director of Operations shifted in his seat. "Maybe not" he said. As the others turned to him he cleared his throat and continued. "Have we really exhausted the idea of an outside attack?"

"How do you mean John? What sort of attempt are you thinking of?"

"Well," the officer said, "there are a few ways, though they are far fetched I admit."

"Go on," said the Commissioner.

"An aircraft. Crash it into the building. A lorry load of explosives. They're just two."

"Christ," the Director of Special Branch exclaimed. "This is Hong Kong not Beirut. Things like that don't happen here."

"Didn't," corrected the officer in charge of the Crime Branch. "This whole business is new to us. Apart from the sixty-seven riots there is nothing that is remotely like it. All I'm saying is we should not rule out anything, no matter how outlandish it seems. John's right. He has a point."

"Jesus," said the head of Operations. "How do you stop a kamikaze pilot?"

"You begin with Kaitak and the aero club." The Commissioner of Police began ticking off outstretched fingers on his left hand. "Check all light aircraft. Ground all flights. Call the Auxiliary Air Force in for surveillance during the afternoon. Keep the air space clear for the duration. As for bombs on four wheels, have Traffic out in force. Stop and pull over any vehicle on the roads into Central that looks suspicious. Start with those with only a driver and no-one else in the cabin. Buzzer the congestion. We can live with the screams for our heads. They would role if John's idea proved accurate and we did nothing to prevent it." He turned to his deputy. "I'll leave that side of it to you. I don't care what it takes, make sure it's done. Leave the explanations later to me. I'll clear it with the CS as soon as we leave here."

With their undivided attention again on him, the Commissioner leaned back in his chair. "Right," he said. "Now let's go around the table again and go over the details for the building itself. What's done, what's being done and what have we got to do to stop this lunatic."

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"Of course it's a hair-brained idea. He'll never get away with it, and even if he did succeed his supposed intervention by Beijing is pure fantasy."

Robert McNamara was responding to a remark by the Political Advisor at his own select meeting in his office on the fifth floor of the Central Government Offices in Lower Albert Road. McNamara had for the first time recited the information as he knew it to those administrators now present. This had brought the comment by Roger Gould which the Chief Secretary had considered obvious to all.

"The problem is that irrespective of how crazy and how deadly frustrating it all is, this man has already killed a number of times and is bent on killing again. In large numbers. He is not going to stop just because we know his intentions are ridiculous. He will try. You have my word on that."

"I appreciate that," said Gould. "I was only saying it would never work. Not that we shouldn't worry about the killer's trying to bring it to fruition."

“And I accept the point you were making Roger,” McNamara sighed. “But that’s the story as we know it. I have nothing further to add. Just to say that we must now let the Commissioner of Police and his officers do whatever they have to do to prevent this insane man’s dreams of horror from being turned into a reality. We here can do no more so let’s concern ourselves with what we can do, what we have to do. This afternoon we are going to have our own responsibilities. I want to make certain that on that score nothing goes wrong.”

McNamara had had his speech to the Legislative Council ready since the afternoon before. Gail Jones had typed it in draft from his steeped handwriting and retyped it after he had made a dozen amendments. Then she had seated herself in front of the computer in an outer office and personally keyed in the final version, printing out two copies in bold capitals. After that the Chief Secretary had only made a further two changes. It was a reasoned and reasonable speech she thought, though she knew like everyone else there would be expected detractors, among them Martin Lee and his vocal followers.

But what could the Chief Secretary do? At this juncture he could only outline the fairness of the whole exercise and let the Survey Office report speak for itself. Only after the public comments had been aired would he then respond. The administration’s position, the official analysis of the statistics and views in the report, would not be made known until the White Paper was released in February of next year. In the meantime there was a great deal of background work to be done.

“I’ll be speaking in the chamber around three,” said McNamara. “You’ll all have copies by the time we finish here this morning. It’s not a long speech and I’ll be finished by about three forty-five at the latest. When is the press conference?”

“Four o’clock” said the Director of Information Services. “In our conference room in Beaconsfield House. Invitations have gone out. Obviously we’ll have all the overseas media as well.”

The Commissioner for the Survey Office added: “I’ll basically stick to your line sir, and go into the mechanics of receiving and separating all the responses. Then I’ll take questions.”

“Be careful,” said the Chief Secretary. “Don’t go further than you have to. Especially on the question of weighting. There is going to be a lot of argument on that issue. At this stage keep it as simple as you can. Facts and figures. I know it will be tricky but leave to the shading to others.”

“Yes sir.” The Commissioner knew only too well that the credence given to some responses over others was an extremely contentious issue. For example, there was a view that campaigns that resulted in thousands of signatures should be regarded as single submissions rather submissions according to the proliferation of signatures gathered. The decision could affect dramatically the outcome of the whole exercise and therefore the ultimate political decisions made.

“At the same time,” said the Secretary for District Administration, the senior office responsible for the management in general terms of matters affecting the New Territories, “my staff will be briefing all the District Officers and other Admin Officers. They will in turn be meeting with District Boards and so on to fill them in. James and I will do them together.”

The assistant nodded. “With the Commissioner of course. No doubt members will want to go into detail, particularly on the McNair surveys.”

“Count on that,” said McNamara. “What we’ve seen is only flak so far. From this afternoon on we’ll see the bullets. Martin is very determined to discredit those public surveys. If he can do that, he will no doubt consider he is on firmer ground for

direct elections in 1988. There is no need for me to point out that he's an articulate advocate so expect a hard time."

The meeting broke up at nine thirty and the Chief Secretary asked James Wong to remain behind. When the door was closed he pointed to the easy chairs and fell heavily into one.

"What's your assessment James of the situation?" he asked.

"Rough," the Chinese replied simply. "There is serious division. And we're not helped by those two McNair polls. There are too many questions left hanging."

"I know."

"I think we'll get it through."

"I hope so. There is too much happening now for us not to."

The assistant asked: "What about this other thing? Are we going to be able to stop it do you think?"

Robert McNamara dropped his eyes and studied his hands for a long time. He looked tired. "We have to," he said quietly. "We just have to. I don't dare think what would happen if we didn't"

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The order paper for the afternoon's sitting was brief, covering only three typewritten pages. But the length belied the interest to be shown both inside and outside the chamber.

Under Papers there were pieces of subsidiary legislation:

*Fugitive Offenders Act 1967*

*Fugitive Offenders (United Kingdom Dependencies) (Cancellation)*

*Order 1987*

*Fugitive Offenders Act 1967*

*Fugitive Offenders (Designated) (Commonwealth Countries) Order 1987*

*Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance*

*Public Health and Municipal Services (Public Markets) (Designation And Amendment of Tenth Schedule) (No 3) Order 1987*

*Banking Ordinance*

*Banking Ordinance (Amendment of Fifth Schedule) (No 3) Notice 1987*

*Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance*

*Declaration of Markets in the regional Council Area (No 2) 1987*

There were three sessional papers:

*Report on the Administration of the Fire Services Welfare Fund for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1986*

*Annual Report of the Director of Accounting Services and the Accounts of Hong Kong for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1987*

*Report of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Hong Kong Government for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1987 and the results of value for money audits*

The last of these sessional papers would provide very interesting reading as usual. Everyone liked to see how the government was wasting public money.

Between these two items were to be sandwiched five questions from members. Three inspired little interest. But one was related to the stock market crash and there was no doubt some questioners would try to attach blame to the Financial Secretary and the administrators of the stock and futures exchanges. Personal grudges would also be aired.

The remaining question was on Vietnamese refugees and ex-China Vietnamese illegal immigrants, and it was confidently predicted there would be a host of probing supplementary questions. Heat was certain to be applied to the Secretary for Security.

However, the major interest lay in the start to the meeting and at the end. The Governor as President of the Council would open the new session and would review the last series of sittings and postulate on the future. His every word would be faithfully reproduced in the media and dissected by analysts and commentators for days. The last item on the Order Paper was the formal motion by the senior member of the council. It read:

*“That this Council takes note of the Report of the Survey Office and Report of the Monitors: Public Response to Green Paper: The 1987 Review of Developments in Representative Government.”*

There lay the kindling wood. By the time the proponents and opponents had had their say the fire would be raging.

\*

It was eleven o'clock and the editorial office of the South China Morning Post was buzzing. There was an air of expectancy. Something of great import was going to happen, or if the wills of those present had anything to do with it, it would.

There was normally a feeling of torpor about Wednesday afternoons. It meant that some of the staff would be working well into the night on their Legislative Council reports. It also meant others could slow their pace. Usually that was, but this time there was to be no rest for anyone. The Editor in Chief had been in full cry since eight thirty. The entire staff had been mobilised. There would be no rest this Wednesday afternoon and evening. Assignments had been handed out by Davidson himself and he felt he had every significant aspect covered.

Four photographers would install themselves inside and outside the council building. Anything that moved was to be shot. Selections would take place later, but nothing must be missed. If nothing else it was to be a grand pictorial story.

Three reporters were added to the crime roundsman's team and they were to concentrate on all police activities away from the building itself; investigations still going on, interviews with the top ranking officers in Police Headquarters if possible – and everything was possible warned Davidson – backup units, raids and so on.

A further four reporters were handed copies of the names and telephone numbers of each Legislative Councillor. They must be contacted and quotes extracted. The more worried the better. Push, ordered Davidson, push until he or she says something. “A no comment is a comment and I want to see it in writing,” he said.

Two senior reporters were assigned to the administration. “Start with the Governor,” said the editor. “Work down the precedence list if you have to, but I want that side of it fully covered.”

The usual lobby of writers would cover the council business but three more would concentrate on the colour lead up to, during and after the afternoon's developments.

Davidson called the young American from New York into his office. "You seem to think this town is too small for you. Not enough to get your teeth into," he said. "Well, this is your day. Show me what Mr Murdoch apparently sees in you."

"Sure. No sweat," said the journalist smiling "What do you want?"

"I want a front page lead that will make the story of the year. I don't care if this whole thing is a fizz. I want a story. We broke it and by god we're going to finish it. So you better see to it."

"What about Jason Teller? Is he on it too?"

"Forget Teller. He's out. You just show me that all your words are not stuck in your mouth. Understand me?"

"Yeah," replied the American. "I understand you. You'll get your damn story."

\*

The Catskinner was back in the hotel room.

He had left it at nine o'clock, caught the underground to Mongkok and gone straight to the tiny shop he had visited the day before. As promised the job had been done and he pocketed the plastic container with the cards. By ten o'clock he had returned to the hotel. At twelve o'clock he checked out. When he settled his account he waited until he was able to do so with a different girl to the one who had checked him in.

The underground took him across the harbour and from the station beneath the Landmark Centre in Central he walked to the adjacent Prince's Building. On the first floor he entered the crowded Prince's Tavern and ordered a meal of fish and salad and a Tsing Tao beer. He had about two hours to kill before he crossed Statue Square and started to execute his plan.

\*

"Why are you doing this Jason?" asked Brigit.

She was sitting on the edge of the bed watching Teller get dressed in a suit that had been collected from his flat, arranged by the Chinese police superintendent who was in the sitting room on the other side of the closed door.

She was fidgeting, picking at her nails, an aspect of her appearance she was particularly conscious of. Being small she considered her hands one of her prominent features, therefore they had to be kept immaculate at all times. To peel the polish and dig at the skin signified extreme irritability or anxiety.

"I mean, what on earth do they expect you to do? If you see the murderer are you going to tackle him? I don't know why you want to be there."

Teller straightened his tie. "My love, they want me just to watch. There is no intention of my tackling anyone or doing anything else stupid like that."

"But what if...?"

"There are no what ifs. I promise you I'll not get involved."

"Then why are you going?"

“You know that. I’ve seen him. They haven’t. I know what he looks like. If I wasn’t there he might easily get into the place, and once in he could succeed in killing, or hurting, a lot of innocent people.

“But there are going to be police everywhere. Surely they will search everyone. The man couldn’t get in with anything suspicious without getting caught, yes?”

“Probably not. But there is always the chance I suppose that he might slip through.”

“If he is going to sneak in he’ll do it whether you’re there or not. You can’t watch every single person can you?”

“From the way the superintendent explained it I should be able to do precisely that. There will be only one entrance used.”

Brigit frowned. “I think it is very unwise. And very unfair on you. And me. What if something happens? You’ll be right there. You could get killed.”

“Nothing will go wrong. Beside, I have to do it. You know that. It’s not just because I know what he looks like.”

“What do you mean by that? Why have you got to do it?”

Teller put on his jacket, studied himself in the mirror and turned to face her. “Because of what has happened. What I have already caused. I could not sit back now without trying to help. I couldn’t. I owe it to the accountant. Even to the sampan girl in a way. I am partly responsible for whatever happens today. If I can do anything that will put an end to it I have to do it. This is the only way left to me. Otherwise I am not sure how I could cope with it.”

“But you will be in great danger,” protested Brigit. “He might try to kill you.”

“My love, my love,” he said and reached for her. “Please. Let me do this. For both our sakes. We have a wonderful future to look forward to, but if I don’t do this now I cannot guarantee I’d be the man you say you love.”

“That’s not true. I’ll love you just the same if you don’t go. Don’t you know that?”

Teller stepped back. “I think I do. I hope that’s true. But I have to do this for myself. I know it sounds selfish, but try to understand. I really believe that it is for both our sakes.”

Brigit sat very still, her face directed away from his. Suddenly she stood and touched the front of his shirt. “Alright,” she said. “Alright, if you must go look smart. I don’t want you to look like one of your shabby reporter friends.”

Teller could not help himself. He laughed and threw his arms around her. “You’re wonderful. Here I am walking into the jaws of death and you want me to look tidy. Don’t you want to know if I have a clean handkerchief and matching socks as well?”

She clung to him for a long time but then pushed herself away. “Go on,” she said firmly. “Go and do what you have to. But don’t you dare do anything silly. I want you to come back to me in one piece. One whole piece, yes?”

With that she flung open the bedroom door. “He’s ready,” she said to the policeman. “You make certain nothing happens to him you hear. Because if anything bad does happen you’ll have me to deal with, and I can assure you that will be much worse than your crazy Catskinner. Yes?”

2.00pm.

It was already near bedlam outside the Legislative Council building. Double rows of iron mill barriers had been placed down both sides, creating makeshift courtyards that were rapidly filling up with people and vehicles.

The area on the members' side in front of Chater Garden was the clearer but the noise was almost deafening. Inside the cordon of barriers plush sedans belonging to the councillors and official government limousines were lined up like the pit start for a race. Which was exactly the reason for their angle parking. Some months before, following a skirmish, new contingency plans had been drawn up. One was how to ensure a speedy exit by VIP vehicles. So they were all backed in sideways, drivers standing nearby chatting and exchanging gossip but always ready to leap behind the wheel and race out the Chater Road exit away from any barnstorming agitators bent on destruction or injury.

Behind the cars, at the top of the wide low steps leading to the paved precinct of the garden park itself, a group of around two hundred people had gathered and were busily erecting banners, stacking refreshments to last for the next five hours and readying their exhibits and themselves for the show they planned for onlookers and council members after the sitting. A large oil drum had been cut in half and some of the group were fixing an effigy of a lame duck into it. It had a placard tied around its neck with the words "HK GOVT" on it and one leg was a bandaged broom stick. A crutch had been fixed under one wing.

There was much giggling and shouting and a few pedestrians passing by stopped and smiled. Two obvious tourists snapped pictures and one approached a uniformed policewoman and spoke briefly pointing to the bird. He then returned to his friends and explained what it was all about. They too smiled but soon sauntered off.

At the other end of the steps a group of ragged fishermen sat impassive, nursing at least twice as many soiled looking children, the oldest no more than three. They had no placards but there was a clutch of press photographers standing in front of them clicking away eagerly. They were a real human interest story. Their wives, some de facto, had been arrested when they had tried to register their offspring during an amnesty for child illegal immigrants and now they themselves were about to be repatriated to China where they would have to join the three to twenty year queue to gain a legal one-way pass to Hong Kong. The women had been illegal immigrants themselves so the amnesty had not applied to them and the authorities had been unyielding to the clamour for exceptional leniency.

The heartbreaking sobbing the last few days had made it a touching story and the presence of the husbands was a last ditch effort to have the government change its mind and allow the women to stay. But if they hoped to get in front of the councillors and the Governor with their requests they would have to wait much longer. The members and the Governor had been inside the building since twelve thirty attending a lunch and would go straight from the dining hall to the council chamber for the opening sitting.

At the bottom of the steps, just inside the barriers, uniformed policemen and women faced the crowds at intervals of three meters. They were relaxed but alert nevertheless and when a roar went up from the other side of the building they to a man snapped to attention and glanced over their shoulders. The cause of the distant shout was the arrival of the leader of a large band of demonstrators also demanding direct elections in 1988. Though not followers of Martin Lee directly they maintained a similar political stand and had gathered in Statue Square to present petitions to the Senior Member of the Legislative Council and to the Chief Secretary. Their intention

was to stage a sit-in singing songs and handing out propaganda leaflets to passersby until the meeting inside finished.

Their leader was a slightly built young Chinese social worker and when he was loudly greeted he seemed a little embarrassed and held his hands high in a gesture of silencing the crowd. But it only succeeded in urging them to louder calls with fists punching the air in an act of defiance as if to break through the administration's refusal to accede to their impassioned demands.

At the same time they looked down over the police on duty almost challenging them to step forward to quell their behaviour. If that was indeed what they wanted they failed because the highly disciplined police had no intention of being drawn into a confrontational situation. Their orders had been very clear. Keep it as low key as possible and no physical contact unless absolutely essential. The orders for those officers on guard at the single break in the barriers where visitors were lining up to get into the compound were different though.

Staff showing their identify badges were waved through to the door where they were quickly frisked. Those not known were held at the barrier and questioned and their bags and other belongings checked. Then they were searched again at the door before signing their name and business in a large black book at the counter.

Already a long queue was developing and there were many frustrated complaints and much shaking of heads. All of it was being captured by the media who moved among them with still cameras clicking noisily and television cameras perched on shoulders, the faint hum of the film rolling.

An older Chinese police sergeant marched up to the door of the building as the European superintendent in charge of the Waterfront Division, and therefore responsible for the immediate secure arrangements, came out.

"Sir," he said briskly, his heels thumping the concrete. "They're backing up quite a bit sir. Not happy. Onlookers are building up too."

"That's too bad for them sergeant," answered the superintendent straightening his cap and dipping it over his eyes. "Stick to the order and don't ease up. They'll just have to put up with it. What about them?" He pointed to the demonstrators whose singing had tapered off and who were now directing their efforts to handing out their leaflets to the throng with their reasoned demands written in striking black calligraphy.

"So far so good sir," said the sergeant. "Noisy but no trouble. We'll keep them where they are."

"Good," said his superior. "Keep an eye on them though. I'm doing a circuit of the building." The sergeant again stamped the concrete as the superintendent walked away from him.

At the main entrance to the building half a dozen policemen and women were running their hands over visitors while another six checked hand bags and carryalls that were shrugged off shoulders by a bunch of school children who obviously were having a great time with all the excitement. Those who had been cleared were directed up the staircase to their right to the first floor. There, they were either pointed to their right again where a security guard escorted them up into the gallery, or down the corridor straight ahead of them, past the Councils Branch offices to the other end where another guard showed them to the opposite gallery.

Media personnel were allowed into the press room on the same floor or straight into the chamber to reserved seats at floor level.

2.18pm

At the top of the carpeted staircase with its polished brass handrails Jason Teller stood watching the faces rise towards him. At his side was the superintendent from the Central police station and next to him was a tall young man in a dark suit, his hands clasped in front of him, his feet slightly apart.

Teller had been there since twelve thirty and a dull ache above his eyes was beginning to spread to his temples. On his arrival he had been ushered through a crowd that was already being held outside the building and to the top of the steps. "We'll stay here," advised the policeman. "Everyone has to go through here. There is no other way. So if he's coming in he'll have to pass within three feet of you. Will you know him?"

"I hope so," Teller answered. Then he corrected himself as the policeman raised his eyebrows. "I should, I can see him now clearly enough," and he tapped the side of his head.

"OK." The superintendent was apparently satisfied. "We'll start letting them in at one thirty. If you have any doubts, the slightest, about anyone, cough and we'll take them aside. Don't worry about upsetting anyone. Err on the cautious side. Don't take any chances."

"Alright. But maybe he won't try after all. Maybe you've scared him off."

"Work on the assumption he is coming. That he will be there at the top of the stairs where you can touch him. Study everyone closely. Women too. Don't ignore a dress. It could be our killer under it."

Teller had not thought of that. He had the man's face in his mind. His clothes, his round head, his manner of walking. All masculine. Of course he could disguise himself to look completely different. What better than as a woman. The police officer was right. He could not afford to overlook anyone.

And since half past one he had stared at more than fifty people, many of them school children in uniform. But nobody looked suspicious. Two or three journalists winked and greeted him but they were firmly moved on by the security guard. By two twenty-five the string of faces coming up the stairs stopped altogether.

"What's wrong?" Teller asked.

"Nothing," answered the policeman, "The chamber's full, so they've stopped the arrivals entering. There'll be more later when the school kids leave. You can take a break."

Without a word Teller went out through the high French doors onto the balcony and lit a cigarette, looking down on the milling crowd below.

"What went wrong?" he asked. "Where is he?"

"If he's not inside he's still out there somewhere." The superintendent watched him inhale the smoke deeply. "Are you certain he didn't get by you?"

"Yes. He hasn't come up those stairs. I'm certain of it."

The demonstrators began their singing again and immediately the hungry press turned their cameras on them.

"Vultures," remarked the policeman. "They are only playing into their hands and giving them the publicity they need to thrive." When he noticed Teller smile he added quickly: "Sorry, I forgot you are a bird of the same feather."

"Not quite," said Teller.

2.36pm

The first spots of rain appeared. Not heavy, just enough to leave their dark snowflake impression on the sandstone surround of the building and to encourage the Statue Square group of demonstrators to break out their umbrellas.

Those in Chater Garden opposite had no cause for concern. They had grouped under the wide concrete awning that extended around three sides of the open air park and were therefore protected. Even the lame duck could burn later, the flames undampened, providing the spectacle the journalists anticipated. Those same photographers now gathered under the cover of the overhead balcony around the building, out of sight of Teller and the other scrutineers above. Lenses were refocused and the snaps continued unabated.

Reporters spoke to as many people as they could: Omelco press unit staff, police officers, visitors, GIS information officers sent down from Beaconsfield House as additional minders, and of course representatives of the demonstrators. One, a solid older man dressed neatly in a dark suit, stood with his back to one of the pillars speaking into a tape recorder held close to his mouth. At his feet was a black shoulder bag. The man did not look Chinese. He wore thick spectacles and had a crew cut hairstyle that was greying above the ears and at the base of his skull. He continued speaking for a few more minutes in a low tone and then switched the machine off. Humping the bag over his shoulder he moved away, past the main entrance and rounded the corner of the building beside the Des Voeux Road tram tracks and then into Chater Garden. The police on duty watched as he mingled with the crowds. Stopping occasionally to report into his tape recorder, the man moved slowly back and forth between Statue Square and Chater Garden many times. After a while the police paid him no mind and turned their attention to others.

Once more at the entrance the man took a camera from his carryall and began photographing the searches being carried out just inside the doorway. Two police constables standing nearby watched intently but made no move to stop him. The only time they protested was when the man attempted to photograph them with the crowded lobby in the background. One waved his hand and he and his colleague stepped out of the photographer's line of view. The man shrugged and returned the camera to the bag. He then walked into the Legislative Council building.

A policeman took his bag and rummaged through it as another uniformed officer ran his hands up and down the man's legs, arms and front and back. Cleared, the man in the suit and spectacles approached the counter.

"Press?" he was asked.

"*Hai*," the man replied.

"Card?"

He produced a business card from his coat pocket and then entered the details in the book opened before him as indicated. The policeman checked the details written against those on the card. Kenichi Takahito. Japan News Wire. Tokyo.

"Thank you," said the policeman, barely looking at him again. "Up the stairs to the right."

As he moved away the officer behind the counter reached for the ID card of a European man saying: "Next."

3.30pm

A gaggle of laughing school girls in their blue and white pinafores were filing along the corridor and onto the staircase, their brief introduction to the intricacies of

Hong Kong politics over. Their seats in the gallery would be taken by the new arrivals being processed below.

"I wonder what they learnt in there," Teller remarked. "Probably didn't understand what it was all about."

"Better than nothing," said the superintendent. "At least they have seen the system in action, for what that's worth. They know what the place looks like if nothing else."

A big blousy English woman pushed past the oncoming students and heaved to a stop in front of Teller.

"Where do I go?" she breathed, her oversized bosom rising and falling dangerously.

"This way," called the security guard and pointed down the corridor.

Behind the woman one of the Omelco secretaries clutching a bundle of papers paused on the steps, barring a Chinese youth in jeans and open neck shirt, the dark suited reporter and the European businessman further down. As they passed the three men at the top of the stairs the European faced Teller.

"Why all this? It's a damn shambles. Something should be done."

He was quickly moved on. As he strode away Teller watched him and the back of the reporter in front of him pick his way down the pink carpeted corridor. He had met a diplomatic correspondent in London some years before who suffered from tunnel vision. It was sad. He too wore spectacles that looked like they were made from the bottom of soft drink bottles. He had groped for his glass of wine and confided on his fourth that he had often walked carelessly into people and objects just outside his field of vision. Teller had been amazed at how he had done his job. The Oriental looked just the same. He could negotiate the corridor easily enough but he would no doubt cause a bit of a stir when he had to shuffle past others in the tightly packed gallery.

But he could not think of that now. More people were approaching up the stairs and he must watch closely to see if the Catskinner was one of them.

"Anything?" the superintendent asked into his ear.

"Still not yet," he replied.

3.45pm

"OK. We can take another break," said the superintendent.

Once more they moved onto the balcony. The rain was quite heavy and the demonstrators were sitting under a sea of broad multi-coloured umbrellas on the edge of Statue Square. They were chanting: "One man, one vote. In eight-eight. One man, one vote. In eight-eight."

One of them suddenly jumped to his feet and faced the crowd. Waving his hands up and down like an orchestra conductor he egged them on. The chant changed to Cantonese which Teller could not understand though he guessed the message was the same. This was confirmed by the Chinese superintendent. "Elections next year. That's all they want. All the other changes they don't care about. One track minds the lot of them"

Teller turned and saw the security guard on the other side of the French doors talking to the bespectacled Japanese. Teller was sure he was Japanese. Or Korean. The guard was bending his ear close to the man. He straightened and pointed to the foot of the stairs. Apparently the man wanted to go to the toilet. He bowed slightly and reached for the handrail. In his other hand he held his carryall.

3.48pm

The man slid across the bolt on the inside of the door. He sat on the lid of the pedestal and removed his spectacles. His head drummed and he massaged the corners of his eyes in a circular motion using the thumb and middle finger of his left hand.

Slipping the spectacles into the pocket of his coat he eased himself off the toilet and crouching reached around the back. His fingers felt the smooth white tape wrapped around the pipe leading from the back of the bowl into the tile wall. Carefully, without hurrying, he began unpeeling it. When he had a sticky ball the size of an orange he stood up and removed his coat hanging it on the metal hook on the door. Then he knelt on the floor and with both hands continued to unwind the tape. When he had finished he backed out of the narrow gap and stood up. In his palms he held a rectangular object about twenty centimetres long, ten centimetres deep and ten centimetres across. It was crudely made of plastic. A single switch protruded. He examined it for a moment and then bent down and placed it in the bottom of his bag covering it with the tape recorder and the camera. Putting on his coat and spectacles he flushed the toilet, picked up the ball of white tape, heaved the bag over his shoulder and opened the door. He dropped the used tape into a refuse bin and walked towards the door.

It opened outwards as he reached it and a uniformed police constable entered. The man stopped and punched the metal plunger on the hand dryer on the wall and held his hands in the stream of hot air. A minute later he walked out of the toilet and up the stairs. He moved down the corridor, nodding to the security guard, and up to the gallery and his seat in the middle of the front row. From where he sat he could clearly see the Governor, the Chief Secretary, the Attorney General, the Financial Secretary and two thirds of the unofficial members of the council. Those he could not see he knew were seated directly below him.

He crossed his legs and listened to the proceedings through the bulky headset, the foam rubber ear pieces pressing tightly. The Governor had finished his opening address, the sessional papers were almost done with. Question time would start in a few minutes and the council would probably take a short tea break. Until four thirty however the chamber would be packed. Every member of the council would remain in his or her seat.

It was almost time.

3.55pm

Robert McNamara tugged the plug from his ear, stood up, and bowed crisply towards the President's chair. He then walked hurriedly from the chamber. Hastening along the corridor he found Teller and the superintendent on the balcony.

"What's happening?" he said.

"Nothing sir," answered the police officer.

"Nothing at all? Haven't you noticed anyone suspicious Jason?"

"No-one."

"Can you be sure?"

"Absolutely. The Catskinner has not come up those stairs."

McNamara ran his hand through his thinning hair. "Well, what are we going to do? We'll be out of here in a couple of hours. If he doesn't show..."

"I think he will sir," said the superintendent. "He just hasn't tried yet. But he has to. He's chosen today because of all these people and what's going on in there. I don't think he can afford to miss the chance, if we've got him pegged right."

“I don’t know that we have,” said McNamara. “We don’t know a thing about him.”

“We know he wants a mass murder,” said the policeman. “And an audience. This is it. He has to come today.”

“Christ,” said the Chief Secretary, “I hope you’re right and I pray that you’re wrong.” He spun around and headed back the way he had come.

Teller watched him until he disappeared around the corner. “I’d hate to be in his shoes either way,” he said.

“Forget him,” the superintendent said. Then he added: “Look, the place is full for a while. Let’s walk around and you can double check the faces in there one more time. I’ll tell them downstairs to hold things until I tell them otherwise.”

4.10pm

Teller stood in the corridor with his face close to the glass in the square sealed window behind the seated press corps. He ran his eyes over those he could see to the side and then raised them to the gallery on the other side of the chamber. It was too distant to see clearly but from what he could make out nobody struck him as odd.

Next he entered the partitioned hallway near the anti-chamber. Opening the first door on the left he walked into the council chamber. Directly in front of him were the press seats. The Governor saw him enter but kept his face towards the Financial Secretary who was addressing the Director of Audit report.

Teller scrutinised every member of the press. He recognised most. Those he didn’t registered nothing.

“Let’s go upstairs,” the superintendent suggested.

At the top of the short flight of steps Teller saw the Radio Television Hong Kong team in the small booth to his right, recording the speeches and directing the two camera operators in the corners of the galleries. They were all familiar to him. One or two councillors on the floor of the far side of the chamber watched him as he faced those seated in the gallery. He stood and watched for two minutes moving from one face to the next along the three rows of seats.

“No,” he said as he turned and walked out.

“OK, let’s try the other gallery.” The superintendent led the way down the steps. “If he’s not there he’s not in the building.”

4.20pm

Robert McNamara watched as Teller appeared at the doorway to the gallery opposite. He stood still and for some moments let his eyes roam over the people listening to the proceedings in front of him. Two seats away the Financial Secretary sat down. There was a moment of silence. Then the Governor’s deep voice boomed in his ear: “Questions.” As he spoke McNamara noticed Teller turn away.

4.21pm

As Teller turned away the dark suited man in the front row leaned forward and reached into the carryall under his seat. Very deliberately he flicked the switch on the rectangular object in the bottom towards him. He fumbled for the note pad and drew it out. As he began to write in it Teller stopped and turned around.

The Governor had called Martin Lee’s name. As the outspoken councillor rose to speak Teller walked into the empty photographer’s booth to his left. He could not hear what Martin Lee was saying but he could see him below and he saw that all eyes were on him. He could also see those in the gallery from the front. In the silence he again examined their faces. When he got to the front row he saw the Japanese, or

Korean, man in the suit close the notebook in his lap and stare down on the floor below. Then the man took off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes. Before he put them on again he looked straight ahead as if searching for someone on the other side of the room. Teller gasped.

“What is it?” asked the superintendent.

Teller stood rock still. His face had gone pale. “It’s him,” he breathed. “He’s there. The Catskiner is there.”

“Where? Who?”

“The one in the front. In the suit.”

“The guy with the glasses?”

“Yes.”

“Are you certain?”

Teller’s reply was low, spat out. “It’s him. I know those eyes.”

4.22pm

The Catskiner replaced the spectacles and stood up.

Nodding curtly he picked his way past the seats. At the end he straightened and stepped from the chamber. Then he walked down the stairs to the first floor and along the corridor past the anti-chamber. He turned the corner and walked to the top of the staircase where Teller had been stationed. With one hand on the rail and the other holding the notebook he descended to the bottom. As he pushed out through the main door of the building Teller and the superintendent reached the foot of the staircase.

The Catskiner pulled his coat up, took off the spectacles and stepped from under the balcony into the rain.

“Ho,” called Teller. “Ho Sai-wan.”

The man kept walking, his shoulders hunched. When he neared the opening in the rows of mills barriers where a police constable stood guard in a shining black poncho raincoat, the superintendent shouted in Cantonese. “Ho Sai-wan. Stop where you are. This is the police.”

Instead, the Catskiner lunged at the constable, crashing his fist into the startled policeman’s face. With the other hand he reached for the falling constable’s hip, ripped open the leather holster and wrenched free the .38 revolver. He dived to the side and rolled over facing back at the entrance to the building. He fired three shots rapidly.

The superintendent reached to push Teller out of the way, but before his hands touched him Teller’s chest exploded in pain and he toppled backwards.

A fourth explosion sounded from somewhere above and the Catskiner’s crew-cut skull burst in a mass of blood and bone. His body slithered a few centimetres backwards on the wet stones and lay still.

On the balcony of the Legislative Council building the young Chinese in the suit who had mounted a guard at the top of the staircase stood with a large, long barrelled revolver clenched in his hands.

Below, the superintendent bent over Teller sprawled on the ground, the blood already spreading from under his jacket. “Don’t move,” he said urgently. “Lie still. I’ll get help.”

“The bag,” moaned Teller between clenched teeth. “Get the bag. He left it behind. In the chamber.”

The superintendent stared down at him for a split second and then rushed back into the building.

4.27pm

He pushed past the row of people. He did not apologise for the disruption. Many of the members of the council looked up at the commotion and frowned as the policeman pushed his way back along the row of seats, a large leather bag held in front of him. The Secretary for Security paused in his reply to a supplementary question on Vietnamese refugees to look up in time to see the officer run from the gallery. He then turned back to the member who had posed the query and continued.

4.28pm

The superintendent raced from the building towards Chater Road. He leapt the barrier and ran into the road causing a taxi to screech to a halt and a hissing Rolls Royce to swerve sharply to the right. The policeman reached the sidewalk and hurled the bag at the cenotaph in the middle of a grassed open space. "Down," he screamed at the top of his voice. "Get down."

Pedestrians looked bewildered, unsure what to do. "It's a bomb," he roared again. "For god's sake get down."

Some of those who were nearest managed to hit the sidewalk before the explosion. Others in a fifty meter radius were knocked off their feet. Cars careened into one another and a television broadcast van parked outside the Legislative Council building was jolted sideways as another commercial van rammed into the side. The explosion blew the concrete cenotaph to pieces. What had been a green square was now scarred by a huge ugly crater.

Teller heard the roar and the screams but as he rolled over to see what was happening the pain shot through him again and he was engulfed in a thick black cloud where there was no noise, no smell, no fear.

Nothing.

## **Chapter Twenty-Six**

On November 27, 1987 it was confirmed that Brigit was pregnant.

On February 10, 1988 at ten thirty in the morning and with just four witnesses present, Jason Teller and Brigit Rolanne were married. It rained on that day and many people said it was an omen for the future of Hong Kong.

Not because of the wedding that passed without notice, but because also on the afternoon of that day the Hong Kong Government issued the White Paper on political development for the years ahead. The brief document, which ended nine months of divisive debate and anxiety, was tabled in a solemn Legislative Council.

In prefacing its decisions the administration stressed that the present system of representative government had evolved gradually over the years, consisting of three separate but interconnected tiers at district, regional and central level. This three-tier structure had proved itself to be well suited to Hong Kong's requirements and the public response to the earlier Green Paper was strongly in favour of retaining it.

Of course, as was already widely appreciated, of all the questions raised in the Green Paper the subject of direct elections to the Legislative Council produced by far the greatest public response. And the bulk of those views favoured introducing directly elected members into the legislature.

It was plain, stated the document, that there was a strong trend in public opinion in favour of developing the system to include a directly elected element at the central level of government and doing so well before 1997. But the precise timing of such a move was not so clear. Views were sharply divided.

Also as expected the administration gave a rather detailed preamble by way of explanation before spelling out its conclusions. Stable government, it said, had always been crucial to the success of Hong Kong and it would remain crucial in the years leading up to 1997 and beyond. Stability was essential for confidence in the government and in the future of the territory, as well as for overseas business confidence in Hong Kong.

"The maintenance of stability requires that the development of Hong Kong's system of representative government should continue to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary," it said, and "that each step should be carefully considered, that changes should command wide support and confidence in the community,"

It went on: "Such evolution must also be compatible with a smooth transfer of government in 1997. There will be inevitable changes in that time. The interests of the community will be best served if there is also a high degree of continuity and the form of government is one with which the people of Hong Kong are already familiar.

"In considering the development of Hong Kong's system of representative government before 1997, account must therefore be taken of the relevant stipulations in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the deliberations of the Basic Law Drafting Committee over how those provisions should be implemented after 1997. In this connection the government has taken note of the fact that all the options in the latest draft of the Basic Law concerning the election of the future legislature include an element of direct elections."

Considering all the factors, the government concluded that the introduction of a number of directly elected members into the Legislative Council before 1997 would be a logical and desirable further step in the development of Hong Kong's system of administration. This meant that in all ten members would be voted into the council directly by the people. However, they would not be elected as representatives in 1988.

“The government has decided,” informed the White Paper, “to introduce directly elected members into the Legislative Council in 1991.”

So Martin Lee and his fellow democrats had lost the battle. The government had made its policy views clear. It remained unclear however what the relationship would be between the Legislative and Executive Councils, and the people of the territory would have to wait three more years before they were given any further indication what future administration they might expect.

One thing was certain though. The five and a half million inhabitants of the prosperous territory knew that on July 1, 1997 the world as they knew it, with all its uncertainties and upheavals and promises, would end. In its place would be a new world, an unknown world, a world which many eagerly looked forward to, yet which many feared.

They had been unaware on October 7, 1987 that they had already been pawns in a potential catastrophe that had been avoided. Would they avoid the one that some saw looming on the horizon?

Time in Hong Kong had always been the most precious and elusive possession. Now it was trickling away faster than ever. For nearly a century and a half the Chinese residents of Hong Kong had known they were living a borrowed life, that ultimately their future and the future of generations to come would not be the same. Even after one hundred and thirty of those years had passed there was little conscious concern devoted to this state of affairs. The territory was buoyant and life was lived to the full with the emphasis being on today and not tomorrow.

A decade later, in the 1980s, all this had changed. The subconscious acknowledgement of what their fate held was replaced with the certain knowledge that the life expectancy of their daily routine really did have a limit on it and that limit was clearly visible on a nearing horizon. Only a dozen years remained. Only a dozen years to plan their own lives and for the lives of their children and children's children.

In 1988 the frequent cry was that while the administrators in Hong Kong, Britain and China insisted on gradual, steady political development, the real fact of the matter was that the fundamental decisions already made had been too hasty. The claim that there was still nine years to run and that this was ample time to do what had to be done to protect and safeguard the principles of the 1984 Joint Declaration, was suspect.

The reality was that 1997 was a ceremonial year only when the Union Jack would be lowered and the emblem of the People's Republic of China, or least the flag of the Hong Kong SAR, raised. On July 1 a world event would take place that was almost inconceivable.

The ultimate free society, the most capitalistic society on the earth, would be handed over, freely, by the world's oldest democracy to the world's largest communist regime which had committed some of the most ruthless atrocities against its own people and western ideology a mere thirty years before. The act would be undoubtedly one of the historical events of the century.

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At the height of the following summer a long time expatriate resident sat in the popular Bull and Bear Pub in the busy Central district of Victoria Island. Across the table from him was a Chinese, a friend of many years. European waitresses in green skirts and white blouses served drinks and meals to customers at a hectic pace.

The Chinese sipped his beer and leaned forward. "You know," he said, "we've been sold down the river. And I feel angry."

"I agree," said the expatriate. "Political expedience has taken the place of moral considerations. Even common sense. But there is nothing you can do about it. The politicians have signed the documents."

"We needed more time," said the Chinese. "I can't understand the hurry. Everyone knows what's going to happen. The exodus is already on. People are scared and they're running away. Most of them to Canada and Australia."

The expatriate nodded. They had had similar conversations on many occasions.

"You know," his Chinese friend continued. "the British and Chinese governments have sentenced us to a premature death."

"Premature?" quizzed the expatriate. "How do you mean? Ninety-seven has always been unquestioned. I know it's earlier than everyone would like but legally you can't say it's premature."

"Let's not talk about the law or what's in the Joint Declaration or the treaties of the last century. Let's look at the facts as they are now." The Chinese took another sip from his glass. "In 1991 the Basic Law will be introduced. Everyone says we'll know then what our future will be for the promised years to 2047, for fifty years after 1997."

He reached into his pocket and removed his wallet. He took out a five hundred dollar note and carefully tore it in two, handing half to his friend. He went on solemnly: "You hold on to that. I'll tell you what Hong Kong's future will really be. Between 1991 and 1994, give or take a year, this place will falter. It will continue to boom until then, but if you own property sell it before the end of next year. If you are thinking of settling overseas eventually, start making plans now. Don't leave it any longer. 1997 is not the crucial year. 1991 to 1994 is the time." He sat back and looked around at his surroundings. "If I'm wrong I'll give you the other half of the note."

The expatriate looked at his friend. The inscrutability of the Chinese face was no longer in evidence. The skin was drawn tight and there was a redness creeping into the whites of his eyes.

He dropped his gaze. "I'm sorry," he said softly.

"I'm sad," said the Hong Kong Chinese. "And I'm hellish damn angry."