THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLER

WILLIAM BOYD



COLD SUNSET

'Storytelling genius' **MICK HERRON**



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About the Author

WILLIAM BOYD was born in 1952 in Accra, Ghana, and grew up there and in Nigeria. He is the author of seventeen highly acclaimed, bestselling novels and five collections of stories, including *Gabriel's Moon* which was the first book to feature Gabriel Dax and became an instant *Sunday Times* bestseller. His bestseller *Any Human Heart* was longlisted for the Booker Prize and adapted into a TV series with Channel 4. In 2005, Boyd was awarded the CBE. He is married and divides his time between London and south-west France.

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William Boyd

COLD SUNSET

A Novel



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For Susan

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After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What’s not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion.

T. S. Eliot, ‘Gerontion’

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Prologue

Santa Monica, California

March 1964

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Gabriel Dax stood on the narrow balcony of his room in the Sovereign hotel in Santa Monica contemplating the Pacific Ocean and its turbid, shifting momentum. The formless, boundless deep, he thought. Yet it always seemed grey, the Pacific, here on the west coast, he noted: slate-grey, mouse-grey, dirty-dishwater-grey. Zinc, ash, pewter – the synonyms tumbled into his mind. Funny that, he pondered: even though the span of morning sky above was a cloudless, slightly milky blue, the ocean was still grey …

It was the middle of March, the sun was shining, the palpitant air of the breeze on his face was warm. Highs of 80 degrees Fahrenheit were forecast today, so his bedside radio had informed him. When he'd left his cottage in East Sussex a few days ago to catch his plane at London airport there had been a thick white rime of frost on the back lawn at noon. Penetrating, bone-chillingly cold weather. He closed his eyes and breathed in deeply, feeling the slanting sun warm his face. There were some compensations to this strange double life he led, he supposed. Sunshine in March in California being one of them.

He opened his eyes and gazed out over the ocean, again registering its pale cindery hue stretching to the far horizon. Just why would that be the case? he speculated, idly. Something to do with the ocean currents? The colour of the sand under the water? One of life's minor mysteries, he decided, and not one to be solved swiftly, he added, stepping back inside and pouring himself another cup of coffee from the silver flask on his room-service trolley.

He reached unthinkingly for his cigarettes and then paused, realizing that this one would already be his second of the day. Cigarettes were now believed to be a significant, not to say the major, cause of lung cancer – so his doctor had informed him, and so he had read in many a terrifying newspaper article. Perhaps he should cut down. Maybe it was just another of these scare-stories, he thought, lighting one of his Gitanes anyway. Every day, it seemed, you read of some new risk: butter, eggs, alcohol, salt, sugar. A little of what you fancy does you good, he said to himself. Who had coined that consoling observation? Mae West? F. Scott Fitzgerald? Jean-Paul Sartre?

He drew on his cigarette and then sipped his coffee, thinking about his plan for the day ahead. Hardly a plan – he corrected himself – he was simply obeying instructions. He'd been in Los Angeles for four days now and each morning had followed the same routine. Just before 11 a.m., after a leisurely start, he left the hotel and wandered down to Santa Monica pier. There was a large café-restaurant near the entrance, called La Venta, with a good view of the pier and its approaches and he would take a seat on the covered terrace overlooking the boardwalk, drink more coffee, and pretend to read the *Los Angeles Times*. He waited only a single hour, as he'd been instructed, scanning the people coming and going, wondering if F. T. Falkner would deign to show up. So far, he hadn't and at midday Gabriel duly left.

The rest of the day was at his own disposal. He would choose a restaurant for a solitary lunch; he had seen three movies – *Zulu*, *Seven Days in May* and *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* – and he had made enquiries about trips out of town that could serve the book he was writing, *On the Beaten Path*, wondering if he might visit Yosemite national park, or the Grand Canyon, or even San Francisco and the Golden Gate bridge. Time had passed agreeably enough. He had the typescript of his book with him and after dinner in the Sovereign he spent an hour or so revising its various chapters before he settled down to sleep. *On the Beaten Path* was nearly done and it was always consoling to remind himself of his other, real, life running parallel to the covert life he had not sought but which had now thoroughly claimed him in ways he could never have imagined.

He pulled on his tawny suede jacket and tightened the knot of his tie, checking his image in a wall mirror. He needed a haircut, he thought, and was pleased to see that he was already slightly tanned as a result of his exposure to several days of Californian sun. He turned away and picked up his small soft leather briefcase containing F. T. Falkner's last collection of poetry, *Images*, and a first edition of his famous, 1939, groundbreaking first collection, *Vacant City*. The pretext was straightforward: when Falkner finally showed up at the Santa Monica pier Gabriel would pretend to recognize him and request an authorial signature in his books.

'Why would I just happen to be carrying these books with me when I spotted him?' Gabriel had asked Faith Green when he had answered her summons to the Institute of Developmental Studies. 'I mean, at random, as it were? It seems totally implausible.'

‘It isn’t meant to be plausible,’ she had said, patiently. ‘It’s a way of reassuring Falkner. He wants to know that you’re bona fide.’ She spread her hands, as if the matter were entirely obvious. ‘It was his idea, not ours. Like a password, sort of.’

‘All right, all right,’ Gabriel said. ‘I’m a genuine fan, anyway – love his poetry. So there is a tiny degree of plausibility, I suppose.’

‘He insisted on meeting a writer, for some reason. He wanted to talk to another writer, he said. No one else would do. And, hey presto, you came to mind.’

‘Ah, yes. The Institute of Developmental Studies’ resident writer,’ he said.

‘Don’t be bitter, Gabriel. It doesn’t suit you.’

Gabriel told himself to stop thinking about Faith Green, locked his room, sauntered down the stairway to the lobby and handed in his key at reception.

‘Have a most enjoyable day, Mr Strathleven,’ the desk clerk said to him with a broad and seemingly sincere smile.

‘Thank you,’ Gabriel said. What was the fellow’s name? Mortimer? Monroe? Milton? He couldn’t remember. ‘Looks like we have some more non-stop sunshine,’ Gabriel said, aimlessly.

‘This is California, sir. All the sunshine you need at no extra charge.’

Gabriel smiled back – a very smiley place, Los Angeles, he thought – and raised a hand in casual farewell.

‘See you later,’ he said and wandered out into sunlit Santa Monica. He headed down Pico Boulevard and crossed the narrow greenery of Palisades Park with its thin, teetering palm trees and turned on to the wide cement walkway that ran along the shore behind the beach heading for La Venta and the pier. His spying day had begun.

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Part One

Santa Monica, California

Indianapolis, Indiana

Cincinnati, Ohio

Claverleigh, East Sussex

London

March–April 1964

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1.

Santa Monica Pier

Faith Green had been looking extremely, almost luxuriantly, well when they had last met, Gabriel thought back, as he took his seat on the glassed-in terrace of the La Venta café. Why was he thinking about her all the time? Why did his thoughts inevitably circle back to analyse their encounters, professional and sexual? But he remembered – vividly – that last meeting in the shabby surroundings of the offices of the Institute of Developmental Studies. There she was, across her neat, wide desk, blooming – her pale beauty somehow rejuvenated as if ageing had no part to play in her earthly existence. She almost seemed younger since he'd last seen her, months before. She was wearing a pale biscuit, bloused jacket with a Quaker collar, buttoned to the neck, and a darker chocolate-coloured box-pleated skirt – somehow at once innocent yet sophisticated. A dream of cool, stylish authority. How did she manage these different looks? he wondered. How did she shape these subtle changes to her couture, day by day, and curate the responses they engendered?

Because men are stupid, he realized, easily beguiled by clever, beautiful women. And I am one of those men, he recognized. What adolescent nonsense, he then thought, rebuking himself, irritated. He sipped at his lukewarm coffee and refocused his mind, discarding his memories of Faith Green and contemplating the moderate toing and froing around the entrance to the wide pier. Of course he would think about her, he remonstrated with himself: here he was in LA, after all, doing her bidding.

She had handed him a passport during that meeting.

'What's this?' he asked, looking at the name in the narrow cardboard window of the cover. 'Who's Grant Strathleven?'

‘Open it and discover.’

He did so and was almost comically surprised to see his photograph staring out at him. There he was: the same date of birth; the same profession, ‘writer’; the same unflattering mugshot photograph. Just a different name.

‘What’s going on, Faith?’

‘We want you to travel under this identity.’

‘Why?’

‘Because we don’t want our CIA friends across the water to know that you’ve arrived in the USA. Remember – they’re very familiar with you. Very. This time we would just prefer that you slip into the States as Grant Strathleven.’

‘Why? I repeat.’

‘Because this is a very – what shall I say? – very British mission, this. Nothing at all to do with the CIA. The CIA didn’t even exist when the matters we hope you’ll uncover were significant. Discretion is the better part of intelligence.’

‘That’s not the recognized saying.’

‘I’ve just said it. It is now.’

Gabriel closed the passport.

‘But, look, come on – “Grant Strathleven” – I sound like a character in a Robert Louis Stevenson novel. Can’t we have something less strange?’

‘It may sound a bit unusual but it’s a safe name,’ Faith said. ‘Which means that if anyone investigates Mr Grant Strathleven then everything is covered. No surprises. You’re secure.’

He left it at that as she outlined what she wanted him to do. The job didn’t seem too onerous and he was to be paid £500. Money that was very welcome – he was stuck in the endgame of his new book, the advance long spent – and no sign of any more Russian subventions since his KGB handler, Varvara Suvorina, had returned suddenly to Moscow, months ago.

Faith, Faith, Faith – banish her from your mind, he urged himself, picking up his *Los Angeles Times* and turning the pages looking for something to distract him. He noted a small headline: ‘American military advisors in South Vietnam now total over 16,000,’ he read. President Johnson refuses to confirm the figure, a White House spokesman declared. ‘Advisors’, he considered, another useful euphemism. He thought about Vietnam – a country he had always wanted to visit – and what kind of

violent conflict was clearly ongoing. He wouldn't be travelling there for a while, he supposed, what with all those military advisors in the country …

He signalled to a waitress – one 'Nadine', according to the badge on her gingham uniform blouse – and asked for more coffee and a Danish pastry. He'd had a substantial breakfast – bacon and scrambled eggs, muffins, fruit – but he was, bizarrely, feeling hunger pangs. Perhaps this was an American phenomenon: food was available everywhere and so one duly consumed it.

His coffee was topped up; he ate his Danish pastry; he flicked through his newspaper. Suddenly he heard the sound of a penny-whistle and turned to see a young man with a patchy chin-beard and long hair that hung well over his ears and collar, sitting at a table with a young woman and child, as he expertly picked out a jaunty tune, like an Irish jig. The woman had about twenty strings of beads around her neck and the baby, maybe two years old, grubby in a too-large, stained T-shirt, entranced by the music, grabbed at the air with both hands as if it – was it a boy or a girl? He couldn't tell – could pluck the notes as they fell from the little tin fife. Then the manager of the café, a stout, grey-haired man in his fifties, came over to their table and politely asked the man to stop playing.

'OK, daddy-o,' the long-haired man said. 'You're the boss.' He put on a pair of sunglasses and smiled a wide, fake smile.

'Why do you hate music?' the young woman said, with surprising vehemence. 'Do you hate art? Do you hate life?'

'I'm just running a restaurant, ma'am. We don't allow music to be played in here.' The manager gestured towards the street. 'You can toot your flute outside if you want.'

'That's very kind of you,' the man said. 'Thank you, Mr Adolf Hitler.'

They sulkily gathered up their belongings and left. The manager turned to his other patrons and shrugged theatrically, with a wry smile.

'What can you do?' he said.

'What they really need, I reckon,' somebody said, 'is a long hot bath.'

'Beatniks!' someone else called out.

There was laughter.

Gabriel watched the trio make their way down towards the entry to the pier. A funny, strangely unsettling little encounter, he thought – awkward resonances. And then he saw F. T. Falkner.

Falkner was in a wheelchair being pushed by a burly blonde man. Gabriel recognized Falkner instantly – the classic image still maintained in old age:

the lean, seamed face, the wide forehead, the slack lock of hair, now white-grey, falling diagonally across the brow.

Gabriel left a couple of dollar bills on his table, grabbed his briefcase, and hurried out on to the street. He felt the familiar heart-thump of anticipation, recognizing that the long delay of the notional ‘job’ was now over – it had suddenly turned real.

The burly blonde man was pushing the wheelchair steadily along the pier – past the ballroom, past the famous carousel and on towards the end. He was heading for a vantage point that overlooked the breakwater and the yachts and motorboats sheltering behind it. Gabriel followed at a distance for a minute or so, waiting for the crowd to thin, wondering when would be the best moment to approach. Then he saw the blonde man wheel the chair up to the guard rail and apply the brakes. He offered Falkner a cigarette and lit it for him. Gabriel looked around. Very few people about. Now was as good a time as any.

‘Excuse me,’ he said, drawing near. ‘Are you F. T. Falkner, by any chance?’

Falkner looked round, stared at him, blinked, cigarette poised in bony fingers.

‘Yes. As it happens, I am.’

Yis, es it heppens, I em. The clipped vowels of the pre-war English establishment.

Gabriel noticed how unnaturally brown Falkner’s skin was and how it was not the healthy shade of a deep suntan – it was almost the colour of un-milked tea. Up close he could clearly see the extent of Falkner’s skeletal thinness. The expression ‘bag of bones’ came to mind, the progressive atrophy of his body barely disguised by a loose blue canvas windcheater and khaki chinos, with highly polished brown loafers on his feet. The skin of Falkner’s face was stretched tight over the sharp ledges of his cheekbones and his teeth seemed too large for his mouth, as if his teeth were made for another, bigger man. Terminal illness, Gabriel thought, recognizing the signs.

‘I’m a great admirer,’ Gabriel said. ‘Luckily, I happen to have a couple of your books on me. I wonder if you’d do me the favour of signing them.’

He reached into his briefcase and drew out the two volumes of poetry and handed them over. Falkner took them and placed them on his lap, staring at

them for a moment or two as if he didn't know what they were. He looked back at Gabriel.

'Are you the contact?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Are you a writer?'

Gabriel reached into his briefcase again and took out a copy of *Rivers*, his last published book, and handed it to Falkner.

'My photograph is on the back of the dust jacket.'

Falkner turned the book and glanced at the photograph, then back at Gabriel as if to confirm he was indeed the author.

'It's a travel book,' Gabriel said. 'Recently published. It's yours if you want it.'

'Gabriel Dax,' Falkner said. 'Dax is a small city in France.' His tone was somewhat severe, Gabriel thought, like a tired schoolmaster teaching a stupid child.

'We rather like to think that's where the family originated,' Gabriel said. 'Though we have no proof.'

'There's an English composer called Dax, isn't there?' Falkner said. 'Arnold Dax. Any relation?'

'It's Arnold Bax, actually.'

'Of course.'

The confusion seemed to make Falkner unbend, somewhat – as if the mistake had been deliberate and Gabriel had passed some kind of test – and he smiled, showing his huge teeth. Gabriel felt he was approved. Falkner gestured at the blonde man who had stepped back a few paces.

'Eddie will tell you where we live and how to get there. Not far away. Do come by around six p.m. – we'll have a drink.'

'Look forward to it,' Gabriel said.

Gabriel walked slowly back to the Sovereign hotel, pondering the encounter with Falkner. He was slightly irritated that Falkner had not only accepted the copy of *Rivers* but had also retained his two slim volumes of poetry. A first edition of *Vacant City* was pricey. He would invoice the Institute for his loss, he thought.

Back at the hotel he had a club sandwich and a beer in the dining room, thinking about the forthcoming meeting that evening. When Faith Green had briefed him about the job she had said only that Falkner had 'vital

information’ to impart. She had no idea what that information was other than that it had to do with security matters in the war, she had added, hence the importance of his visit. ‘See what he has to say – or reveal,’ she said. ‘It may be relevant – the war’s not even been over for twenty years, when you come to think about it.’

‘True. Casts a long shadow,’ Gabriel said, remembering Faith’s own hellishly fraught experience of the conflict. Maybe that was why she was so keen to find out what Falkner had to say.

‘Exactly,’ she went on. ‘Look at Philby, Burgess and Maclean – all our lovely traitors. All betraying us in the war. It’s all connected.’

‘What would F. T. Falkner know about security matters in the Second World War?’ he said.

‘He worked for us,’ Faith said. ‘Very top-secret stuff. He must know a thing or two. He contacted us, after all. He’s got something to say.’ She smiled. ‘And you’re the man to winkle it out.’

‘What do you mean by “top-secret stuff”?’ he asked.

‘I’m not allowed to tell you.’

‘This is 1964, Faith. We are no longer at war with Nazi Germany, in case you hadn’t noticed.’

‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘I’ve signed the Official Secrets Act. I simply can’t tell you. Though Falkner may well do so, of course.’

Gabriel had copied out Falkner’s entry in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* just to remind him of the career and the bibliography. He opened his notebook and read it again.

> **FALKNER F(rancis) T(imon) (1902–).** Poet, translator, biographer and academic. Falkner was educated at Winchester College and Merton College, Oxford. After a brief career in the Foreign Office he published his first collection of poetry, *Vacant City* (1939), to great acclaim, a success that earned him comparisons with W. H. Auden (q.v.) and Louis MacNeice (q.v.). Falkner published no more poetry until the 1950s, devoting himself instead to biography. His biography of Charles Baudelaire, *Baudelaire, Cursed Poet*, was a critical success that prompted a move to the United States in 1947 where he became Professor of Literature at the Norton J. Butler University in Santa Barbara, California. More collections of poetry appeared: *No Excuses* (1953), *Hotel Street* (1957) and *Images* (1960)

along with further biographies of Goethe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Stendhal.

What could be gleaned from that succinct summary of a life? Gabriel wondered. ‘A brief career in the Foreign Office’ – was that significant? Absolutely no mention of the war. What had Falkner been up to between 1939 and 1945? That seemed to be the key lacuna, Gabriel thought. Let’s see what this evening brings, he told himself, irritated anew by Faith’s refusal to tell him anything that might help or give him some small advantage.

After their meeting he had tried to kiss her but she had pushed him brusquely away.

‘Not in the Institute, Gabriel. Never!’

‘Then let’s have supper. Come and stay the night. I’m in town, at the studio.’

‘Sorry. I’m very busy at the moment. Crisis after crisis.’

He recalled the last time they had had sex, on the night of President Kennedy’s assassination – 22 November, last year – an awful, baleful moment partially redeemed by their passionate lovemaking. But it had led nowhere. He thought that relations between them had changed but she had left early in the morning, apologizing, and then he hadn’t seen or heard anything for weeks, months – and, anyway, he himself had been travelling for the new book, *On the Beaten Path*. Travel and writing were his only consolation and distraction. He had no word from her and, in petulant spite, deliberately refused to make contact himself. Two can play that game, he thought. Then had come the Falkner summons. ‘Hello, Gabriel, my dear. Can you stop by the Institute?’ And he had duly come running to her, as he always did, maddeningly.

He went up to his room, his mood worsening. What time was it in London? Late. He’d put a call in now – let her know that the meeting was on.

The hotel switchboard arranged the international connection. Gabriel sat on his bed, receiver to his ear, as he smoked a cigarette, an ashtray on the coverlet, listening to the ringing tone on a telephone halfway across the world in London. As much as he was used to it, sometimes he had to admit that modern technology was pretty incredible.

‘Hello?’

‘Hello. This is Mr Simpson. I’d like to speak to my wife.’

‘One moment.’

Gabriel waited. ‘Plain code’ was what it was called – how to speak to each other, openly, everything subtextual. It was a surprisingly effective cypher, he acknowledged – a pre-shared set of meanings known only to two people. A code system with perfect secrecy. He heard the clicks on the line as he was transferred.

‘Hello?’ It was Faith. He felt his chest inflate.

‘Hello, my sweetness, all well here.’ He deliberately used endearments to annoy her.

‘Good. Yes?’

‘I’m meeting Uncle Frank tonight. He seems happy.’

‘Excellent. Do let me know what he has to say, as soon as you can.’

‘I’ll call you later. Take care, my darling.’

She hung up, abruptly. Gabriel smiled. He could sense her irritation thousands of miles away.

He had a shower and shaved for the second time in twenty-four hours. Shaving was a bore but there was no doubt that, when you were cleanly shaven, you felt better about yourself, different, spruce, ready for action. Then he put on a white shirt, his lightweight navy-blue suit and chose his silk maroon tie with the small yellow boteh motif. For some reason he wanted to look smart, capable and trustworthy as he awaited the Falkner revelations, whatever they might be.

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2.

The Pacific Coast Highway

Gabriel had the hotel arrange him a taxi out to the Falkner home on the Pacific Coast Highway. The taxi driver was a slim young man with slicked-back dark hair. He was garrulous, curiosity triggered by Gabriel's English accent. There was a lot of talk about the Beatles.

'They're English, right? Like you.'

'Yes. Very much so.'

'Why can't I understand a word they say, then?'

Gabriel explained about the particularities of a strong Liverpool accent. He even gave an imitation – to much hilarity.

'That's unreal, man! That's exactly how they talk.'

Gabriel was pleased to be distracted, sensing his increasing nervousness about the forthcoming encounter with Falkner. He was a genuine admirer of the work. He could quote the opening lines of the title poem of that famous first collection:

> *Stand, citizen, in deserted square*
> *And trumpet forth your humanity!*
> *Freedom stalks these damp flagstones where*
> *Your urgent presence is a multitude …*

It was a long poem, 'Vacant City', all about the world on the verge of war. It caught the general mood of apprehension and gloom in 1939 and provided a strange rallying call to its thousands of readers, the book going through many printings and establishing Falkner's literary reputation almost instantly. And then silence. What did you do in the war, Francis Timon Falkner? Gabriel had a feeling he was about to find out.

The taxi dropped him about two miles north along the Pacific Coast Highway from the Santa Monica pier. Falkner's house was right on the beach with a high stucco barrier wall on the road. A dark cypress grew behind the wall, pointing its finger at the evening sky. Gabriel rang the bell and the blonde man, Eddie, opened the door and led him inside.

Eddie poured him a martini from a frosted jug and said he would tell Francis that he had arrived. He left Gabriel in a large high-ceilinged room with full plate-glass windows giving on to a deck; a narrow beach and the gentle surf, barely audible, of the Pacific Ocean lay beyond. The sun was low in the sky, oblique rays peeking between thin bands of lilac clouds strewn casually on the horizon.

One wall of the room was floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and the wall opposite was filled with paintings – some abstract, some figurative – all clearly the hand of a single artist, he somehow assessed. There were two large soft cream sofas facing each other across a book-stacked glass coffee table, and a loose-weave, striped Navajo rug was set on darkly stained wooden floorboards. All very comfortable and lived-in, Gabriel saw, wondering if Eddie was a carer/housekeeper or something more intimate. He must be in his forties, Gabriel calculated, a solid-looking, heavily muscled man.

Gabriel sipped at his martini, standing at the big window, gazing at the lazy plash of the small breakers on the beach, wanting to smoke but deciding to wait until Falkner arrived. He turned and wandered over to examine the paintings and noticed there were several portraits of Falkner. Gabriel looked closely at the signatures: Edward de Groot. The Eddie relationship suddenly became clear.

He turned at the sound of a door opening and saw Eddie help Falkner into the room. He was walking with a cane, Eddie gripping his free elbow. Falkner was wearing a pale blue shirt, loose over white trousers, and had a darker blue cravat at his neck – that, strangely, had the effect of making him look almost Indian in colour.

'Ah, Mr Dax. A punctual man,' Falkner said.

'I was always taught that punctuality was a virtue, not a habit,' Gabriel said, thinking he sounded a bit pompous. Was that the effect of Falkner's throw-back patrician accent? he wondered. Eddie sat Falkner down on a sofa and poured him a martini – Gabriel accepted a top-up. Falkner leant forward and took a cigarette from a silver box on the coffee table.

‘Do you smoke?’ he asked.

‘I do, indeed,’ Gabriel said. ‘I’ll stick with my own brand, thank you. French.’ He took out his pack of Gitanes from his pocket and lit a cigarette.

‘I’ll leave you good people to chat,’ Eddie said, and strode quietly out of the room.

Falkner gestured at the wall of paintings.

‘All Eddie’s work. What do you think?’

‘Very accomplished,’ Gabriel said, diplomatically. ‘I like the portraits of you, I must say.’

‘He’s very talented. A wonderful human being.’

Falkner fell silent as if contemplating Eddie de Groot’s all-round wonderfulness. Gabriel took a sizeable sip of his martini.

‘I’m a dying man, Mr Dax,’ Falkner said, suddenly, calmly. ‘Maybe two, three months left.’

What does one say in these circumstances? Gabriel asked himself, feeling a startled panic.

‘I’m very sorry to hear that. It must be—’

‘And I decided that, before I die,’ Falkner continued, ignoring him, ‘I need to get something clear in my conscience – off my chest, as it were. Hence my renewing my old connections with the Secret Intelligence Service. Hence this meeting with you.’

‘Were you MI6?’ Gabriel asked, thinking fast, clarity arriving – yes, a former spy.

‘No. GC&CS. Government Code and Cypher School. During the war. My career with them ended in 1945. And then I came to live here in California.’ He drew deeply on his cigarette. ‘Do help yourself to the martini. Eddie is an expert mixer.’

Gabriel duly topped himself up again.

‘Does the name Bletchley Park mean anything to you?’ Falkner asked.

‘No.’

‘What about an Enigma machine?’

‘Never heard of it.’

‘Ultra?’

‘Ultra what?’

‘Alan Turing?’

‘Who’s he?’

‘Extraordinary how that secret’s been kept.’ Falkner shook his head in quiet admiration. ‘All these years. Thousands of people involved. And nobody has spoken.’

‘What secret?’

‘Possibly the greatest secret of the Second World War,’ Falkner said. ‘To put it in a nutshell, we – the British – managed, in 1941, to break the secret codes that the German army, navy and air force used to communicate with each other.’

‘My God! Really?’

‘The Germans used a device called an Enigma machine to encode their communications,’ he continued. ‘An Enigma machine looks like an elaborate typewriter and it encoded messages with extraordinary complication, changing the codes used on a random daily basis. You needed another Enigma machine to decode the message. We, the British, got hold of an Enigma machine and, somehow – don’t ask me how – we managed to figure out how the thing worked. We suddenly found ourselves able to read all the radio traffic between the German armed forces.’

Falkner paused, sipped at his martini.

‘This brought about a huge code-breaking organization that was set up at a stately home north of London, in Berkshire,’ he went on. ‘Bletchley Park. Thousands of people – mostly women, actually – worked there, sifting through these many tens of thousands of communications, sometimes four thousand a day. Decrypting them, translating them, sending them on to government, to military units. We knew pretty much everything that the German armed forces were telling each other.’ He gave a small, contented smile, almost of patriotic pride, Gabriel thought. ‘It’s not too much to say that “Ultra” – that was the code name for the operation – probably won the war for us, the Allies.’

‘Jesus, absolutely incredible …’ Gabriel tried to take all this sensational information in. ‘Was this Bletchley Park where you worked?’

‘Yes. I was – and am – a fluent German speaker. I was very useful, translating.’

Falkner spoke some more about Bletchley Park – about the huge but elementary computer that had been developed by this young mathematician, Alan Turing, that was able to break the fiendishly complex codes that the Enigma machines created, and the thousands of people needed to make the

computer work and for its decryptions to be translated, analysed and passed on.

‘Of course,’ he explained further, almost as if he was giving a history lesson, ‘we had to be incredibly careful about how we used this information. It was vital that the Germans never realized that their Enigma machines and their codes had been broken and decrypted.’

‘I can see that. But how come nobody’s ever heard of it?’ Gabriel asked. ‘This is 1964, for Christ’s sake.’

‘Fair point. Perhaps when something’s a deadly secret for so many years it’s hard to bring it out into the limelight. Once a secret, always a secret. Its secrecy sort of defines its existence.’

Falkner shifted in his seat and stubbed out his cigarette. He frowned.

‘It was the Philby defection last year made me think about Bletchley again. The fact that Philby, stalwart servant of MI6 for twenty years, turned out to be a Russian agent.’

‘Why’s that?’

‘Because I met him during the war.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes. Two or three times. I was introduced to him by a friend of mine, a man called Angus Fairford. Angus and I worked at Bletchley together, in 1942 and ’43, very closely. We were both translators.’

Gabriel decided it was best to let Falkner tell his story in his own way and not press him to get to the point.

‘Philby was a charming fellow. Funny, clever. A kind of attractive style about him. It was a great shock to learn he was a Russian double agent – and had been a double agent for so long.’

‘You weren’t the only one to be shocked,’ Gabriel said. ‘And the shock is still reverberating, I can tell you.’

‘But it got me thinking, thinking about Angus Fairford.’ Falkner paused, he dabbed at his mouth with his handkerchief. ‘I now think – actually, I don’t “think”, I believe absolutely that Angus Fairford was a Russian double agent, also.’ He gave a faint smile and seemed to relax. He sat back on the sofa and reached for another cigarette and lit it. ‘There. I’ve said it. That’s what I wanted to tell you.’

‘Have you any proof? A lot of people were friends of Philby, surely.’

‘Bear with me,’ Falkner said, patiently. ‘Angus worked on something called Tunny decrypts. There was another encoding box of tricks called a

Lorenz, more complex than the Enigma machine. We named it “Tunny”, for some reason. We were able to break the Lorenz code as well, somewhat amazingly. Anyway, one day I went round – unannounced – to Angus’s flat and saw a great pile of them – Tunny decrypts. It was absolutely forbidden to leave the Bletchley grounds with any secret material.’

‘I can imagine.’

‘So what was Angus doing with all this top-secret material in his flat?’

‘Did you ask him?’

‘I did. He was completely unflustered. He said they were redundant. He’d been told to incinerate them but had forgotten.’

‘Did you believe him?’ Gabriel sipped at his martini.

‘Let’s say I wanted to believe him.’

‘Why?’

‘I think I was strangely in love with him, to be honest. The most brilliant mind. I chose to forget about it, until now.’ Falkner gestured vaguely. ‘It was the Philby betrayal that made me go back over that whole period – made me think again, made me think of other anomalies in Angus’s behaviour.’

‘Such as what?’

‘He would suffer from moments of depression – and once I think he almost confessed to me, but didn’t in the end. And then we were on a train to London together – a week’s leave – and Angus went to the lavatory. I looked in his briefcase. More Tunny decrypts. Why was he taking them to London?’

‘Didn’t you confront him?’

‘No. I’m sure he would have had a plausible answer – and anyway, I didn’t want to confront him, I’m ashamed to say.’ Falkner paused. ‘I told myself that this was probably official business that I wasn’t meant to know about. But now I’m convinced I was wrong.’

‘Who was he spying for, if that’s the case?’

‘The Russians, obviously. Like Philby. Like Burgess and Maclean. Angus was at Cambridge at the same time as all of them. It all fits.’

Gabriel took this in. Falkner was claiming that there was a fourth spy in the now notorious Cambridge ring: Angus Fairford. Ancient history? Was it important in any way, now, he wondered, so long after the war?

‘Is he still alive?’ Gabriel asked.

‘Yes, alive and well. He lives here in the USA. He’s the head of Romance Studies at a private university in Indianapolis – Carlsen University. He speaks five European languages fluently, by the way, and pretty good Mandarin.’

‘Are you in touch with him?’

‘No. We had a silly falling-out after the war, when my book on Baudelaire appeared. It was 1947. He accused me of deliberately trying to ruin his career.’

‘Why? How?’

‘He had also just finished a book on Baudelaire but his publisher declined to publish it because mine had been such a success. The market couldn’t take two biographies of Baudelaire in one year, apparently.’ Falkner looked pained and closed his eyes for a second. ‘He wrote me a series of highly abusive letters. Called me every vile name under the sun. Almost deranged – a kind of infantile fury, you know. There was a very prickly side to Angus. I ended our friendship. It was, as the French say, *impossible de le saluer*.’

Gabriel lit another cigarette.

‘He does sound a little insane.’

‘Maybe. He was enraged to a ludicrous degree, that was for sure. There was something febrile about Angus. Sometimes very clever people are like that. Their brain is always buzzing, you know, they never really relax. They may be super-intelligent but they often don’t understand simple truths, the basic elements of human relationships. Alan Turing was similar.’

‘I know what you mean,’ Gabriel said, thinking. ‘Assuming what you say is true – what do you want me to do with this information?’

‘I think it’s important that we know who our traitors were. Don’t you?’ Falkner said with some steel in his voice.

‘I suppose so. Yes.’

‘Why should Angus Fairford live his comfortable life in the USA when he betrayed our country during the war?’

‘Fair point.’

‘You tell your powers that be in MI6 what I’ve told you, Mr Dax. Let them make of it what they will. I’ve done my duty. I can now go to my swiftly approaching grave with a clear conscience.’

‘Well …’ Gabriel didn’t know what to say. ‘Thank you. I’ll do as you suggest and report back to base.’

Falkner’s relief was very evident.

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3.

The Angus Fairford Case

Eddie de Groot returned Gabriel to the Sovereign hotel in a large orange Chrysler Saratoga – Falkner having insisted that Eddie drive him home. He was a man of few words, Eddie, Gabriel decided. On the journey back to the hotel Gabriel had asked him about his painting but he seemed reluctant to discuss it. ‘Kind of a hobby,’ was all he said. Influences? ‘You know, this and that.’ They ended up talking about the weather and the mounting traffic problems in the city.

During the meal that Falkner offered at the beach house, a ‘cold collation’ as he described it (ham, salami, cheese, gherkins, sliced bread), served – oddly – with iced tea, Gabriel had followed up with more questions and Falkner, now patently relaxed, was swift with extra information. Gabriel asked if he could jot a few facts down in his notebook so he could give a more accurate version of what Falkner had told him. Falkner agreed. He gave him more details about the so-called ‘Tunny’ decrypts.

‘At the end of our eight-hour shifts,’ Falkner said, ‘the floor would be littered with paper – covered with paper – all the hundreds of transcripts of the decoded, translated messages that had been forwarded on to the various headquarters and operational commands that would benefit from them. The sheets of paper would be routinely gathered up and burnt. Obviously, Angus was quietly collecting them and passing them on. No one would notice they were missing because there were so many of them and they had served their function, as it were – now just so much litter – but whatever was included in these transcripts would be very interesting to Soviet Russia. Very.’ He shrugged. ‘I’ve no idea how much he passed on. I only saw two instances. Maybe there were hundreds. He worked at Bletchley for ten months, after

all – then he was transferred to SOE.' He looked at Gabriel. 'Do you know what that is?'

'Yes. Special Operations Executive. Winston Churchill's private army.'

'I think he was glad to leave Bletchley. It was hard, remorseless work there. He was happier training spies.'

'Did you stay on at Bletchley?'

'Yes – until the war was over.'

'Did you lose touch with Fairford?'

'No. We had become good friends. Angus and I would meet up from time to time in London during and after the war. Then I came to California and we lost touch – until the unpleasant, stupid, messy business to do with our simultaneous Baudelaire biographies.'

Gabriel let him reminisce, all the while taking notes. Once he was dropped back at the hotel by Eddie he went to the bar, ordered a large bourbon and soda and analysed what he had written, sorting out the swift scribbles into cogent points. He looked at his watch: very early morning in London – a good time to call the Institute and find out when to check in with his information.

He went up to his room and had the hotel switchboard make the international call.

'Hello, Mr Simpson here. I wonder when would be a good time to speak to my wife?'

There was the usual silence. Then clicks, pings, strange whirrings. Then a new voice came on the line and asked him to call back in two hours. 'Mrs Simpson isn't at home.'

Gabriel walked out into Santa Monica and found a small, brightly lit restaurant called Betty's Place. It seemed to serve a form of Italo-American menu and looked quite clean and cosy, though there were not many customers. He had hardly touched the cold collation and was hungry. He ate half of an enormous steak and drank most of a bottle of wine, a Californian 'burgundy'. Not bad, he considered. He thought back to his encounter with Falkner. Was it simply a dying man's wish to set the record straight or an act of personal revenge? But to what avail? What happened at Bletchley Park was almost ancient history now, surely. Had Angus Fairford secreted Tunny transcripts out of Bletchley and passed them on to the Russians? If so, what significance remained, today, in that act of betrayal, then? The man was now a distinguished academic in a Midwestern American university.

Perhaps it was a form of cleansing on Falkner's behalf, he told himself, a final reckoning-up of all those wartime and post-war betrayals by cultured, privileged, middle-class Englishmen. Maybe that was why he had been sent to meet Falkner and hear what he had to say. We – which meant the British Secret Intelligence Service – had to know the full, awful truth and recognize just how ruthlessly and successfully the SIS had been penetrated by the Russians using their entitled, clever double agents.

Back in his room at the hotel, close to midnight, he put in his second call to Mrs Simpson. After a while, Faith came on the line.

'It was a most interesting encounter,' Gabriel said, slowly, carefully. 'And it will doubtless mean more to you than me. But our friend felt, very strongly indeed, that he had been personally very let down by a colleague during the war. He described it unequivocally as a betrayal, in fact.'

'I see.' Pause. 'Did he give you a name?'

'Yes. The disappointing fellow was called Angus Fairford.'

Silence.

'Hello?' Gabriel said. 'Are you still there, darling?'

'Are you sure? Totally sure?'

'Absolutely sure. I have chapter and verse.'

'That's impossible.'

'I can only relate what our friend told me.'

'Do we know where Angus Fairford is? Is he alive?'

'Yes,' Gabriel said. 'Apparently he's a professor of Romance Studies at a private university in Indiana. Carlsen University.'

Another silence.

'Did you get that?' Gabriel asked. He sensed real consternation fizzing at Faith's end of the line.

'Yes,' she snapped. 'At least that's something.'

Then more silence. Gabriel could almost hear Faith's brain working and began to sense that this news was a very unwelcome revelation.

'Hello? Are you all right?' he asked.

'I happen to know Angus Fairford. What you're telling me is a shock. A massive, devastating shock.'

'I'm so sorry. I was only doing what you asked. I didn't have any idea—'

'You must go and see him, Angus Fairford.'

'Me?'

‘Yes. Find out exactly where he is, go and see him and confront him with what you’ve learnt. See what he says and report back to me.’

‘Are you sure, sweetheart?’

‘Yes. I’m very, very, very sure indeed. Do you understand?’ Her voice was pure ice.

This time Gabriel was silent. One, two, three.

‘I was planning to go to the Grand Canyon in the next couple of days, actually. For my book,’ he added, trying not to sound petulant.

‘To hell with your book. Go and see Fairford. As soon as possible. And then call me.’

She hung up.

Fuck you, Gabriel thought, replacing the handset on its cradle. He registered his abrupt emotional mood swing from fervent, dreamily obsessed to angry, highly irritated. She did this to him – but what in God’s name was going on here? He felt caught up in the usual mare’s nest of Faith Green’s manipulations, except that this time he sensed an unusual measure of outraged, almost destabilized, panic in her, as if her world had suddenly been rudely shaken and then turned upside down. He sighed. He was being well paid, he supposed. He would extract more money from the Institute for this side trip to Indianapolis – it shouldn’t be difficult to track Fairford down, given his official position at the university. He would book a plane ticket in the morning. It was, all the same, he considered, very curious that some wartime treachery at this Bletchley Park place twenty years ago provoked such a strong reaction in Faith Green in 1964. Once again the usual refrain, he realized, as he felt himself confronted by the blank wall of his ignorance. Perhaps things would be clearer once he met Angus Fairford and was able to hear his own explanation of events. Never a dull moment working for Faith Green, he thought, with some acidity.

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4.

Indianapolis

The next morning, just before midday, Gabriel took a TWA Lockheed Electra from Los Angeles airport to Indianapolis, via Kansas City. He landed at Weir Cook airport at the end of the afternoon and booked himself into a small hotel – the Alexandria – not far from the campus of Carlsen University in a western area of the city called Clermont. He checked in, had a shower, then asked the clerk at reception how to find Carlsen University and sauntered out into Clermont. There was a prosperous, small-town feel about this suburb of Indianapolis, he considered. He walked along streets of detached houses in varying styles – prairie, shingle, Spanish colonial revival, even some low-slung mid-century modern, here and there, with sloping ramps of lawn, tree-shaded avenues, shiny cars parked in driveways with the ubiquitous basketball hoops set high on garage walls. Midwest America – so different from California's sprawled, languid ease. He felt as if he was walking through a novel by Sherwood Anderson.

The university campus was large, over a hundred acres, also well planted with mature trees and, like the neighbourhood, dotted with buildings in various styles from classical, to gothic, to 1950s streamline moderne. There was a domed memorial hall, a huge, ugly-looking redbrick chapel, two stadiums and a library housed in a series of linked and reimagined nineteenth-century private houses. Gabriel was rather taken with this clever innovation.

The administration offices were about to close but Gabriel had arrived in time to be informed that Professor Fairford was in fact giving a lecture on Molière the next day at 11 a.m. in the Doris D. Carlsen auditorium. It was open to the public.

Gabriel wandered back to the Alexandria, feeling somewhat tired and mildly apprehensive. It was all very well for Faith to say ‘confront him’. Who knew what enmity lingered between Angus Fairford and F. T. Falkner and how Fairford would respond to his being exposed as a Soviet double agent by his former friend and GC&CS colleague.

Gabriel had a badly cooked meal – an overdone pork chop with macaroni cheese and some sort of wet cabbage-like vegetable – in the Alexandria’s near-empty dining room. He went to bed early, asking the desk clerk for a wake-up call at eight o’clock, and took a sleeping pill. He had a feeling that otherwise he’d have a disturbed night’s sleep; his brain would race, he knew, as he pondered the various potential aspects of the confrontation scheduled for the next day. Chemical oblivion was required.

The Doris D. Carlsen auditorium was a white art deco building that looked rather like a cinema, with a large wall of opaque coloured glass bricks over the entrance portico. It had been built in 1937, so a plaque outside the hall told Gabriel, and was named in honour of the late mother of Torrance Carlsen, the university’s multimillionaire founder.

Inside, the auditorium was half-empty. Gabriel took a seat at the very rear, close to the door. He wasn’t going to sit through the lecture, he just wanted to get a good look at Fairford and would then choose his moment to accost him once it was over. At the other end of the auditorium there was a raised stage with a lectern and a microphone set on a stand in its centre. At precisely eleven o’clock an elderly, tall, thin man in a dark suit and tie crossed the stage from the wings and cleared his throat into the microphone.

‘Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am Angus Fairford. The title of my lecture today is “A New Look at Molière”. I will, however, be assuming you have a level of familiarity with his play *Tartuffe*.’ His tone was dry and not a little superior and patronizing, Gabriel thought – the scholarship boy in front of an audience of near-dunces. Fairford put on a pair of spectacles and glanced down at his notes. Gabriel could sense the almost palpable worry in the room. *Tartuffe?* Familiarity? What? He chose that moment to slip outside.

Wandering around the shaved lawn that fronted the theatre, Gabriel lit a cigarette. He had been a little surprised at Fairford’s strong Scottish brogue – but, of course, he was from Scotland, after all, born in Hawick, a town in the Tweed valley, in the Borders, so Falkner had told him. Fairford had a

small, clipped moustache and an unusually long, thin neck with a prominent Adam's apple, Gabriel had noticed. He was pleased at his decision to wait until after the lecture to intercept Fairford, hoping that it would be somewhere on neutral ground, if at all possible. He was glad to have skipped the talk – better to compose himself for the confrontation, and his familiarity with *Tartuffe* was minimal, after all. The cigarette calmed him somewhat – what will be, will be, he told himself. He just had to negotiate this encounter, report back to Faith and then he would be on his way, returning to his own life, his book. And he was going to ask – no, demand – another hundred pounds from the Institute for this unforeseen diversion. So, he reassured himself, there were some positives amongst the building resentments: relax.

After just over an hour he saw Fairford emerge from a door at the side of the theatre, the lecture completed, the attendees wandering away, looking rather bemused, he thought. Fairford, wearing a blue raincoat and a pork-pie hat, strode off down a concrete path heading out of the campus. Good, Gabriel thought, following, taking care not to be conspicuous, applying what he had learnt of 'artifice', as the agents in the Institute of Developmental Studies termed their nuts-and-bolts espionage expertise. He crossed the road outside the campus further up from Fairford, keeping an eye on him through the use of reflections in car windscreens and shop windows. For at least a minute he was actually walking ahead of Fairford and then he saw him – in a reflection – duck down a side street. Gabriel turned, sped up and was lucky to catch sight of Fairford going into a small bar called Chez Jay. A few seconds later and he would have lost him.

He waited for a while, conscious that there was a risk that Fairford would be startled – not to say unnerved – by what Gabriel was about to reveal. He walked down an alleyway to see if there was a rear exit to the bar but couldn't spot one. Now was the moment, he told himself: go, Gabriel – confrontation time.

He pushed open the door of Chez Jay and stepped inside. It was a long, narrow room, dark, and the overwhelming impression was of wood, deep-brown wood. Wooden bar, floor, panelled wooden walls, barstools, chairs and tables – only the moulded pressed-tin ceiling, painted silver, abjured the common denominator.

Fairford was sitting at the bar and Gabriel saw him already ordering his second drink – some sort of whisky, bourbon or brandy, neat. He thought

that was a good sign. Maybe the long-term pressures of his double life were driving him to alcoholism – and therefore vulnerability. Gabriel came up behind him, silently.

‘Are you Angus Fairford?’

Fairford turned, clearly startled by Gabriel’s English accent.

‘Yes. Who are you?’

‘My name’s Grant Strathleven. I’m from MI6.’

‘Fuck,’ Fairford said, softly, giving a visible shudder. ‘Fuck,’ he repeated. ‘Fucking hell.’

‘I just need to speak to you – somewhere private.’

Fairford hung his head, then drained his glass.

‘I knew this would happen one day,’ he said, faintly, nodding to himself. ‘I knew it. My flat – my apartment – is round the corner. We can talk there.’

‘Fine,’ Gabriel said, wondering if that was wise. Maybe Fairford had a weapon in his flat/apartment. He had been a spy for many years, after all, and had worked for SOE. What was the correct artifice in this sort of situation? Gabriel had been stabbed once in his on-off career for the Institute – he wanted no more wounds, thank you, due caution would be required.

Fairford paid for his drinks and they left the bar.

They walked up the street in silence and took the next left. Fairford pointed to a small clapboard house, painted pale blue, with an unkempt lawn in front.

‘I have the top floor,’ he said. ‘The stairway’s round the back.’

They clattered up the stairs and Fairford unlocked the door. They entered through the kitchen: there was a smell of grease; unwashed dishes were piled on the draining board by the stone sink. They went through into a soulless sitting room and Fairford switched on the ceiling light. There was a Naugahyde sofa and two armchairs facing a TV set. The walls were empty of pictures. Only a crammed bookcase and other books piled against the walls were evidence of a human touch, of an intelligence. Fairford was in his early sixties, Gabriel calculated. It seemed an impoverished, bleak lifestyle for a late-middle-aged man. No wonder he drank.

‘I would offer you a drink,’ Fairford said, as if reading his mind, ‘but I assume you won’t accept it.’

‘You assume right,’ Gabriel said, though he would have welcomed any form of alcohol on offer. Beer, moonshine, eau de cologne.

‘Do you mind if I smoke?’ he asked.

‘Not at all,’ Fairford said. ‘I will be smoking, also.’ He waved at an armchair and Gabriel sat down. Fairford took the seat opposite him. They both searched for and lit their cigarettes. Then Fairford stood up and handed Gabriel an ashtray already well supplied with butts. Fairford went to a cupboard and found a bottle inside, poured himself a large drink – bourbon, Gabriel saw – and sat down again.

‘Do your worst, Mr Strathallan.’

‘Strathleven.’

‘I know it’s not your real name. Mr whatever-you-call-yourself.’

His tone, Gabriel noted, was once more dry and superior. The scholarship boy now facing a halfwit, on his own ground, ready for anything the halfwit could throw at him.

Gabriel took a powerful drag on his cigarette.

‘We know you were a spy for Soviet Russia and that you betrayed your country during the course of the Second World War.’

To his astonishment Fairford, after a second or two gaping at him, suddenly began to sob, shoulders heaving, making small gruff mewling noises in the back of his throat. A few moments later he calmed himself, wiped his eyes with his thumbs and drained his glass. He went to the cupboard and refilled it.

‘What evidence do you have?’ His voice was shaky.

‘The testimony of one of your colleagues at Bletchley Park, Francis Falkner.’

‘That evil bastard. Don’t believe a word he says.’

Gabriel looked intently at him, trying to be implacable, severe.

‘You stole Tunny transcripts from Hut D and passed them on to the Russians. You know that he saw you with the transcripts on at least two occasions.’

Gabriel realized instantly that the mention of Bletchley and the use of the words ‘Tunny’ and ‘Hut D’ had made an impact. Fairford began to weep again but not so histrionically. Tears wet his cheeks. He wiped them brusquely away with the heels of his hands.

‘I was fighting against Fascism, that’s all. The Russians were our allies. I just wanted to help them in any way I could.’ He took out a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes again, then blew his nose.

It was an admission. Duty done. Gabriel felt himself relax – Faith Green would be pleased. He took out his notebook and his pen from his jacket pocket. He softened his voice.

‘Why don’t you just tell me everything, Mr Fairford.’

That evening, Gabriel wrote up the account of his interrogation of Angus Fairford on Alexandria hotel notepaper. Fairford’s many acts of deception at Bletchley appeared almost comical. It seemed that, as Falkner had related, at the end of the shift in the Tunny-decrypt hut, the floor was covered with sheets of discarded translations of the decoded messages. All the information they contained had been relayed down the line to the units and commanders they were relevant to. The instructions were that they should all now be burnt. They were collected up into bundles, waiting for the incinerator. Fairford, when he was unobserved, simply helped himself, randomly, stuffing the papers into his trousers and underpants. He would then walk out of Bletchley, past the guards at the gate, and cycle to his digs in a nearby village. On his days of leave he would travel to London and deliver the papers to his Russian contact, a man he claimed to know only as ‘Henry’. He stated that, in 1942, he had handed over more than two thousand sheets of transcripts. He was moved to another hut at Bletchley in 1943 – more concerned with intercepted diplomatic traffic – where the volume of decrypts was not as significant. He reckoned he had turned over around five hundred sheets. Then he was transferred to SOE and his information-gathering days changed dramatically.

‘There was nothing in SOE that would really serve the Russian war effort,’ Fairford explained, as if it were the most reasonable turn of events imaginable. ‘I was helping train agents who were being infiltrated into Europe. I wasn’t going to betray any of them to the Germans. I was only interested in helping the Russians fight Fascism, as I told you.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ Gabriel said. ‘It seems to me that you now freely admit to the deliberate theft of top-secret documents from Bletchley Park, and passed them on to a foreign power. QED, no? Treason. You’re a traitor, Fairford. Just like Philby, Maclean and Burgess. What was it about Cambridge? Why did you all—?’

‘You’re too fucking young,’ he interrupted, some of the contempt in his voice returning, harshly. ‘You’ve no idea what it was like in the 1930s – how the world seemed to be turning Fascistic. It was terrifying – one felt

one had to do something and the only people actively fighting the Nazis and the Fascists in Italy and Spain and elsewhere were the Communists. Anyway, I really didn't know those men you mention all that well.'

'Who recruited you? Philby?'

'That is something I will not divulge. It certainly wasn't Philby.' He looked at Gabriel, searchingly. 'What's going to happen to me? Will I be extradited?'

'I don't know. Let me check back in with my people. Just continue with your academic life for the time being, I would say. By the way, if you try to run they'll pick you up immediately. And that wouldn't look good. I'd say your best bet is to be cooperative. Extremely cooperative – that's my advice.'

'Right …' Fairford seemed lost in thought. 'How is Francis Falkner, by the way?'

'Not in the best of health but mentally fully fit.'

'I suppose his informing on me was the last act of a bitter man. He was always jealous of me. Jealous of my superior mind – so he destroyed my academic career. Why do you think I've ended up in this wretched place, for God's sake?'

'I don't know anything about that. None of my business.' Gabriel wasn't going to indulge Fairford's deranged paranoia.

'Well, let's hope Francis Falkner, when he eventually shuffles off his mortal coil, burns in hell for a few eternities.'

Gabriel finished his notes, read through them and asked the hotel switchboard to place an international call to London. There was now only a five-hour time difference, he realized; it was late in London. He hoped Faith would still be in the office or at least could be reached.

He heard the phone being answered and made his usual request to speak to his wife. The predictable electronic pings and scratchings took place as he waited to be transferred.

'Hello?' Faith said.

'Ah, the delightful Mrs Simpson. How are you, my sweet one?'

'Did you make contact?' She was very abrupt, he thought, still seeming to be shaken in some way about the Fairford revelation.

'Yes, I spoke to our friend today and he confessed to his youthful indiscretion. I have all the facts and have written them up.'

There was a silence on the line.

‘Hello?’

‘Here’s what you do, now,’ Faith said, cold and efficient. ‘You go back to our friend and inform him that he’ll be visited by our colleagues – American and English – very soon, in the next few days, an official visit. He must carry on with his life as though nothing has happened. Understood?’

‘Yes, yes. I took the liberty of telling him as much. Then can I get on with *my* life, similarly?’

‘No. Come straight back here and deliver your report.’

‘That might not be convenient. I have several things I want to—’

She hung up.

Jesus Christ, what’s happening? Gabriel said to himself. Here we go again. Fairford’s treason was ancient history, surely. Why did it seem so important? By ‘colleagues’ he assumed she was talking about the FBI and MI5. They would want everything on the record, officially, to be reported up the chain of command to ‘C’, to the cabinet committee responsible for security, to the Prime Minister – and, no doubt, to other professional ‘colleagues’ who would press Fairford for more secret, salient details, more names and, above all, to try and gain some sense of how far and wide the toxic smear of unequivocal betrayal, of wholesale corruption, went.

He had taken Fairford’s telephone number before he’d left his noisome flat and now called him. Fairford answered after a while – his voice was slurred, he seemed quite drunk.

‘I’ve spoken to head office,’ Gabriel said, as calmly as possible. ‘And, as I thought, you’re going to be interrogated officially.’

‘By who? By whom, I mean.’

‘By the FBI and MI5, I suspect.’

‘FBI! Fuck! Why, for God’s sake?’

‘Because you’re an ex-Russian spy who’s living in America. Stands to reason. Think about it.’

There was a silence. Gabriel could hear a drink being glugged. Then the slurred, self-important voice.

‘I have no regrets, Mr Strathmungo, for anything I’ve done. Tell that to your apparatsniks. Apprasnatchiks.’

‘Tell them yourself,’ Gabriel said. ‘They’ll be with you any day now. Probably tomorrow.’

He hung up, wondering suddenly if Fairford might commit suicide. Faith would probably see that as the ideal outcome. Anyway, he didn't care, he had done his duty, his job was finished – and he wasn't going to run back to London at her bidding, that was for sure. He needed some release, some diversion from this tiresome, complicated American adventure she'd sent him on. She could whistle for her report.

Then he had an idea. An exciting idea, should circumstances permit. He went downstairs to reception to find the bored desk clerk reading a magazine. Gabriel apologized for interrupting him – saying he had a quick question.

'I want to go to Cincinnati – how long would it take to drive there?'

'Cincinnati? Oh … I reckon two to three hours, sir. Ohio's not far away.'

'Great. Can you tell me where I can hire a car?'

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5.

US Route 52

Gabriel drove his Chevrolet Corvair along Route 52 from Indianapolis to Cincinnati. His mood was improving fast, a corollary of the increasing distance he put in between Angus Fairford and himself, he calculated. He had done his job – the consequences of the confession he'd obtained were not his to analyse or quantify. Leave that to Faith and the Institute of Developmental Studies to cope with the evident dark reverberations. He was on the open road in the middle of America, his car AM radio playing a selection of Top 40 hits, going to see a friend in Cincinnati.

He wasn't sure what had prompted him to think about Cincinnati and its relative proximity to Indianapolis but, in any event, he had remembered it was the home town of his CIA handler in Berlin the year before, Parker Baumgarten. Parker had given him her address and telephone number when they had parted after the trauma of the near-assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy in June 1963, when the President had visited Berlin and delivered his now memorialized '*Ich bin ein Berliner*' speech. Gabriel had telephoned and an older woman answered.

'Hello. My name is Gabriel Dax – I'm an old friend of Parker, Parker Baumgarten. I'm in the USA. Can you tell me where she is, currently? I'd very much like to see her.'

'Well, she happens to be right here, sir. Hold the line.'

Pause. He heard muffled voices. A hand over the receiver.

'Gabriel! I don't believe it! Where the heck are you?'

'Indianapolis, of all places. Don't ask. You're at home – I can't believe it, also.'

‘I got pneumonia. I needed my mom and dad. You know – chicken soup, bed rest, parental over-care. But I’m well. I go back to Langley next week.’

‘Can I come and see you?’

‘Nothing would make me happier.’

He thought fondly about Parker as he approached the Cincinnati city limits and what they had been through together in Berlin last June. He wasn’t fooling himself – this was no straightforward professional reunion. Emotions had stirred between him and Parker in Berlin but nothing had ensued. He had still been in thrall, then, to Faith and her potent, complicated allure. Maybe, he thought, being honest with himself, it was Faith’s persistent coldness towards him in response to the Fairford confession that had made him look for some warmth elsewhere. And here was Cincinnati, not far away, and maybe Parker would be there and just a few hours’ drive would take him to her. Good luck, for once – sometimes it just happened.

However, thinking back to Berlin that previous summer generated its own small maelstrom of conflicted feelings. He remembered everything about that day with total clarity. JFK’s arrival in Berlin, the elaborate motorcade, the designated halts along the way to the town hall in Schöneberg where the celebrated, now almost venerated, speech was delivered and all the while, amongst the CIA and Secret Service security forces around the President, responsible for his safety, there was the building tension of the potential assassin’s strike. He swallowed, thinking back, his mouth dry with the uncomfortable memories of that day: the vast, astonishing crowd; the race to the high apartment looking on to the town hall’s square; the confrontation with the sniper, Matt Furlan, his rifle trained on the podium where Kennedy was speaking; the look in Furlan’s eye when Gabriel had opened the door and levelled his gun. Gabriel told himself to stop. He had killed Matt Furlan without thinking – a pure reflex – two shots. But how did such a lethal act become a reflex? That was what disturbed him now. What had happened to him to make the killing so unthinkingly automatic …?

Parker’s family home, she had told him, was in a central neighbourhood called Mount Adams. He found a motel, the Delmore Terrace motor hotel, not too far away, and checked himself in. He had a room at the end of a single-storey wing and a parking bay outside the door for the Corvair. There was an en-suite bathroom, a king-size bed, a TV set and a small ice-making

machine, for some reason. The desk clerk provided him with a map of the city and showed him how to drive to Parker's street – about ten minutes away, he said.

Gabriel had a shower, changed his shirt and tie and opted for his dark suit. Meeting the parents, he thought – it always made him slightly nervous. He called Parker's number to let her know he was on his way. A man answered – Mr Baumgarten, he assumed.

'Looking forward to getting to know you, Gabriel,' he said. There was a very slight trace of a German accent. 'We've heard a lot about you.'

The Baumgarten home was on a wide, sloping street lined with mature maple and dogwood trees with large, closely set, well-maintained detached family homes of varying styles, most with full windowless walls on each side. Parker's house was in Italianate mode, dark grey stucco, with pedimented windows picked out in white, three storeys, with a low-hipped roof and a small, centred gable. Prosperous middle-class America, Gabriel thought, looking at the huge gleaming automobiles parked on either side of the street as he waited in the car for a while, gathering himself.

He stepped out of the Corvair and crossed the road, feeling his mouth parched. Why was he so nervous? He rang the doorbell and checked the knot of his tie, smoothing his hair with his damp palms. Parker opened the door.

'My God, Gabriel Dax, as I live and breathe.'

They looked at each other for a second or two, Gabriel noting that her hair was longer, shoulder-length, less groomed-looking. She seemed paler, also – maybe that was the pneumonia, he supposed. She was wearing a loose black cowl-neck sweater and cerise Capri pants.

She put her arms around him and hugged him close. He kissed her cheek. He thought back instantly to Berlin, that night when he had been invited for supper in her apartment and the air was heavy with sexual promise. He had drawn back – not wanting an affair – but they had hugged as he left, Gabriel declining the unspoken offer of a kiss, and he remembered the impress of her tall, lissom body, aware of it now, his arms around her once again.

'Come and meet the folks,' she said.

'We should have done this in Berlin,' Parker said, raising herself up in the bed and reaching across Gabriel for her pack of Kools on the side table, Gabriel feeling her breasts brush his shoulder.

‘I know, I know. My fault. I still don’t know what I was thinking. Still, better late than never,’ he said, slipping out of bed to fetch his own cigarettes.

‘Wow, look at you, Gabriel. Always ready for action!’

They laughed.

‘Take responsibility,’ he said, filling up their tumblers with rye whiskey and adding more ice from the very handy ice-making machine.

‘Not too much,’ she said. ‘My mom smells booze at a hundred yards.’ She placed her cigarette in the ashtray, sliding out of the bed and coming over to him for her glass. They stood there facing each other, close, quietly revelling in their nakedness, drinking. Then she reached forward and touched his cock gently with her fingers, then held it, loose in her palm.

‘We’re here, Gabriel,’ she said softly. ‘We made it.’

‘Incredible.’

And then they kissed. She put her glass down and sauntered into the bathroom, glancing back from the doorway.

‘Up for more?’ she said.

‘Have we got time?’

‘Time for a quickie, for sure.’

Gabriel pulled up across the road from the Baumgarten house and switched off the engine. Parker turned to him. They kissed and she opened the door, then she closed it again.

‘There’s something I forgot to tell you,’ she said. ‘Dean Furlan has been arrested.’

Gabriel didn’t hide his surprise.

‘My God! For what? Assassinating Kennedy?’

‘For tax evasion. The IRS tracked him down – some scam involving non-existent coffee importation from Guatemala. He said the money he sent out of the country was for buying coffee, in bulk, wholesale. There were bills of sale, shipping manifests – but there was no coffee anywhere. He was just exporting his money to some bank in Guatemala.’

‘Sort of makes sense.’

‘Bail was denied.’

‘Good.’

‘Now we’ve got him we’ll try to build a stronger case,’ she said. ‘We’ll start digging.’

‘I wish you luck. He has friends in high places, as you know.’

Gabriel thought back again, his mood suddenly grimmer as Parker’s reference to Dean Furlan inevitably reminded him once more of the violent death of Matt Furlan. He had killed somebody he had known, a familiar, after a fashion. He had met Matt Furlan several times and they had enjoyed a drink together. Maybe that was the source of his unease: he was no anonymous victim – the potential target had a name. And, moreover, he had always thought Matt Furlan was suspicious of him, having none of his older brother’s easy sociability, always seeming a more guarded and watchful presence when they encountered each other. Gabriel closed his eyes, reliving the moment, hearing the two almost inaudible shots from his silenced weapon, taking Furlan out so easily as he stupidly, fatally, went for his gun.

He looked back at Parker – it wasn’t that long ago when all this happened, he reflected, less than a year. He was somewhat astonished that there had been no lasting, deeper trauma. Maybe the live-or-die aspects of this type of confrontation preserved you from that kind of anguish, he supposed. Or maybe something about himself was changing – a less happy reflection, this. Was something colder and harder growing in him, a carapace forming? Were unsuspected transformations in his nature occurring after all the jeopardy and violence he’d gone through since Faith Green had so suddenly and dramatically entered his life? He realized he had become experienced in ways he could never have imagined.

‘I didn’t forget to tell you,’ Parker said, putting her hand on his thigh. ‘I figured I would save it for after the fun and games.’

‘Good idea.’

She leant across and kissed him swiftly on the lips.

‘That was totally amazing, I loved it,’ she whispered. ‘Let’s do it again tomorrow.’ She stepped out of the car, strode across the road and turned and waved as she went into the house.

Gabriel sat there in something of a daze, thinking back over the last few hours. He had been introduced to her parents – Ernst Baumgarten, thickset, paunchy, with steel-grey hair cut *en brosse* and manifesting all the easy paterfamilial authority of a senior detective, retired; and Muriel, Parker’s mother, tall and lean like her daughter, alert, discreetly weighing this Englishman up, Gabriel sensed. And shrewd – he could tell, almost immediately – from just the way she was looking at him and the casual

questions she asked. They drank coffee and were also served coffee cake with a streusel topping as Gabriel and Parker chatted guardedly about how they had met in Berlin and outlined what exactly Gabriel was doing there, researching his book. This allowed him to digress, talking about travel writing, about his latest book, *Rivers*, and the new book he was currently writing, *On the Beaten Path*. Muriel Baumgarten seemed genuinely interested.

'You know, I think you're the first actual writer I've ever met,' she said. 'I'm a little ashamed to say.'

'We are a very varied, not to say variegated, species.'

'The lesser-spotted travel writer.'

'That's me.'

Then Parker suddenly said, 'Hey. We'd better get going if we're going to catch that movie.'

'What movie?' Ernst asked.

'*The Pink Panther*,' she said. 'Gabriel's dying to see it.' She stood up. 'We'll grab something to eat after the show. Don't stay up, Mom.'

Gabriel also stood.

'I love Peter Sellers,' he said, vaguely.

'Well, you both enjoy yourselves,' Muriel Baumgarten said. 'Don't overdo it, honey.'

Gabriel made his farewells, shaking hands, still aware of Muriel's ironic scrutiny. What was Parker playing at? he wondered. He soon found out as they crossed the road.

'I really liked your parents,' Gabriel said, lamely. 'What's the game with *The Pink Panther*?'

'Where are you staying?' Parker asked.

'Somewhere called the Delmore Terrace motor hotel.'

'Let's go there,' she said. 'Now.'

They had stopped on the way, again at Parker's insistence, and bought a pint of rye whiskey at a liquor store. When Gabriel climbed back into the car Parker leant towards him and they kissed with some passion.

'We already know each other, Gabriel. We've been through a lot together. We don't need to mess around, don't need to go on a "date", yeah? We both know what we want to do.'

Gabriel lay on his bed back at the motor hotel, smoking, thinking about Parker and their lovemaking and how unexpectedly fulfilling and robust it had been – an act deferred, now achieved, some missed opportunity in their lives now happily fulfilled. He relived the pleasure they had taken in each other's intimate proximity but the sudden bloom of affection and physical attraction he was feeling for Parker, the sense that what they had done was absolutely right, strangely foreseen and inevitable, was slowly replaced by a stew of more complex reflection.

He started thinking about Faith, not Parker; started recalling the last time he and Faith had made love, remembering her pale, inscrutable beauty and what he had felt for her, and slowly but surely the soft seep of guilt began to infiltrate the genial post-coital satisfaction – the pleasant ache in his balls, his semi-erection – that he had been quietly enjoying. He rebuked himself. What was wrong with him? Faith's wilfulness, the on-off nature of her sexual interest in him, meant that he owed her nothing. If their relationship was to be this style of come-and-go, something to be switched on at her behest, not his, then he needn't feel any remorse for seeking love and affection elsewhere when she chose to be absent or cold. If there was no mutual commitment – and there clearly wasn't – if she wanted him to be a free agent, then he had every right to behave as one.

But the easy rationale wouldn't stick or cohere, no matter how much he argued with himself and called himself a sentimental fool. Sophistry. Like it or not, by sleeping with Parker he felt he'd been disloyal to Faith and, in a small but significant way – even though she would never know about Parker, after all – he had somehow betrayed her. That fact disturbed him. He had to leave, he realized. His mind was a troubling puzzle of conflicted feelings. If he stayed on in Cincinnati then the relationship between him and Parker would become more intense, and more complications would ensue. If he was feeling bad now, then further contact would only exacerbate his strange and abiding guilt.

The next morning, he called the Baumgarten home.

Muriel answered.

'How was the movie?' she asked, drily.

'Very funny,' Gabriel said. 'Hilarious. Could I have a word with Parker, please? Is she there?'

Parker came to the phone.

'Can we speak?' Gabriel asked.

‘She’s not listening, don’t worry.’

Gabriel explained. He had been summoned back to London, he said – he had to leave at once. So, so sorry. Last night had been one of the great experiences of his life. He could hear Parker’s disappointment in her voice when she reassured him that it was OK – they both had demanding, convoluted jobs to do, and anyway, she said, she should be preparing herself for a return to Langley and her CIA life. They vowed to see each other again, and would stay in close touch, Parker even saying she might come to England – she wanted to see his cottage, meet the Cat. Gabriel concurred enthusiastically, again feeling the creeping self-reproach as his white lies generated a small but persistent chill inside him.

That afternoon he flew from Cincinnati to New York and then, from the newly named John Fitzgerald Kennedy international airport, caught the BOAC late flight to London.

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6.

Home Sweet Home

Gabriel unlocked the front door of Rose Cottage in Claverleigh and, as he did so, noted the instant spine-weakening, sphincter-loosening feeling of relief as he crossed his own threshold. The physical manifestation of calm, of old security re-established. He hadn't been away long but there was something about the familiarity, the smells, the pile of mail on the doormat that made him – what? – relax in a fundamental, instinctive way, he supposed. The caveman had returned to his cave.

He dumped his suitcase in the hall and swept up the surprising amount of post that had arrived through his letter box in his absence. There were three parcels – books for research that he had ordered from antiquarian booksellers, he knew – the inevitable bills and a couple of postcards and circulars.

He chucked the bundle on the sofa, switched on some lights and registered the fact that he had left the cottage in something of a rush. Ashtrays hadn't been emptied. The wastepaper bin at his desk was overflowing, the fireplace was full of half-burnt logs.

He went upstairs with his suitcase, placed it on his bed, opened it and took out his dirty shirts, socks and underwear. The laundry basket was full. The bed was unchanged, a bit rank, to be honest. An hour of housework beckoned – at least there was nothing to do in the garden at this time of year – he'd save tidying up for the following day. Procrastination – an unduly maligned minor sin, he felt. Still, it would have been nice to have returned to a clean and ordered house. What he needed was a cleaning lady, a *femme de ménage*, he suddenly decided, someone to 'do' for him and keep the

place pristine and neat in his absence. Staff, that's what was required. He laughed out loud at his presumption.

He found a tin of corned beef and a tin of baked beans in his meagre larder and made himself a lunch – some toast would have been nice but the loaf in the bread bin was green and thick with mould. A cleaning lady would have had a newly baked loaf waiting for him, he told himself – a fresh pint of milk in the fridge, some fruit and vegetables. He washed down his corned beef and baked beans with a bottle of beer. No sign of the Cat, his adopted feline, a big black tom that came and went as he pleased, easily bribed to stay by food, warmth and shelter. As always, he hoped that the foxes that lurked in the oak wood beyond the garden hedge hadn't contrived to jump the Cat. A tomcat was more than a match for a single fox, but not several foxes.

After his frugal lunch he found a large envelope in his desk and slid his Fairford report into it. He would post it to Faith – he didn't feel like a trip to London. Anyway, his job was done, there was no urgency, she knew Fairford had confessed. No doubt MI5 and FBI agents were knocking on Fairford's door in Indianapolis already. Preparing his letter reminded him of his own unopened mail. He sifted through it. A postcard from his sister-in-law, skiing in Verbier, another from an old friend, Nolan Westmacott, informing him that he had finally found a publisher for his latest slim volume of verses and inviting him to a small launch party at an independent bookshop in Hampstead. The three packages contained, first, a book about the Pyramids at Giza; the second was a Fodor guide to the Pacific states of the USA – now that might have been useful, he thought – and the third was a translation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Diaboliad*. He closed his eyes, feeling a little sick. *Diaboliad* – what did that mean? This was not a book he had ordered but he knew what it signified. A present from his Russian handlers. Fuck. He hadn't heard from them since Varvara Suvorina had announced she was being recalled to Moscow, months ago. He'd almost forgotten about this double bluff he was playing with the KGB. Thank you, Faith Green.

He opened the book and flipped through the pages, extracting fifty crisp ten-pound notes. Well, he thought, at least he was suddenly in funds, what with his fee for the Institute's job in the States … He put the book and the money in his desk drawer. He'd think about that later, and try to analyse what this new subvention might signify. Had Varvara returned, or had her

recall been postponed? Was it a signal? Probably. She would make contact soon if that were the case, he knew.

He shrugged on his old deerstalker's coat, picked up the straw basket at the door and headed out to Claverleigh with his envelope. First stop the post office, then shopping. What delicious supper could he make for himself? He felt like getting fairly drunk tonight as he was still unhappy about the way he had abruptly left Parker – he needed to obliterate that act of bad faith, as the existentialist philosophers termed it. Bad faith, not bad behaviour.

He wandered moodily down the lane heading towards the village, passing his immediate neighbour Royston Mitchell-Moore's house. Royston was waxing his gleaming Armstrong Siddeley Star Sapphire on the gravelled turning circle in front of his rather grand Queen Anne former rectory and waved as he spotted Gabriel.

'Gabriel, old chap! A word, sir.'

Gabriel wandered over. To his astonishment Royston, a man in his sixties, ex-army, was wearing denim jeans, albeit with a sharp crease ironed into the front of the legs, as if they were brand-new flannels. The top half was familiar Royston – a loudly checked tweed sports jacket, a Viyella shirt and tightly knotted tie. They shook hands.

'Glad you're back,' Royston said. 'There was a fellow looking for you while you were away.'

'Really?'

'Came by a couple of times. Foreign, blonde. Forty-something.'

'Foreign?' Gabriel managed a puzzled smile.

'Yes. I'm not good with accents. I told him you were away. Probably Timbuktu, I said.' Royston laughed his smoker's laugh – a tarry gurgle deep in his lungs – he was a sixty-a-day man. Gabriel realized this was one of the rare occasions when he'd been with Royston and he hadn't had a cigarette on the go.

'Didn't leave a name. Said he'd be back. Said he was an old friend of yours.'

'Right. Thanks, Royston. Can't think who it might be. Anyway, I'm home for a good while, now.'

They made their farewells, Royston inviting him round for a drink any time. Gabriel headed off towards the village.

Who was the blonde foreign man looking for him? Gabriel wondered, perturbed. Someone from the Institute checking on him because he had

gone quiet for a few days after Indianapolis? Maybe, maybe not. It was a little worrying all the same, he knew. There were too many undercurrents in his life, these days, too many people interested in his comings and goings.

There was a large queue in Claverleigh's post office. It doubled as a convenience store, selling sweets and biscuits, tins of soup and stews, household necessities and magazines and newspapers. On one wall was a noticeboard full of pinned advertisements for local builders, carpenters, home-carers and dog-walkers. While he waited, Gabriel scanned the motley services offered. Typical village life, he thought, almost every need catered for by some jack-of-all-trades. Then his eye was held by an advertisement scrawled in a large, unruly hand.

> I CAN CLEAN YOUR HOUSE. HONEST RELIABLE LOCAL. £1 AN HOUR. REFERENCES AVAILABLE. PHONE AFTER 6 PM. LAURA DEVINE.

There was a telephone number added. It was the name that drew his attention. Perfect. Laura Devine could be his *femme de ménage*, paid for by KGB money. Now he could afford staff. He took out his notebook and wrote her number down.

Gabriel posted his report to Faith Green at the Institute of Developmental Studies, registered mail, then went shopping, buying a sirloin steak and rashers of bacon at the butcher, a fresh loaf at the baker, potatoes, carrots and eggs at the grocer, a pint of milk, a block of mature cheddar and a pound of butter at the dairy. He had plenty of wine at home. The evening ahead was shaping up well – it was good to be home, he told himself as he strode back up the lane to Rose Cottage, banishing thoughts of the mysterious blonde foreigner who was wanting to see him. Let him come visiting if he fancies, Gabriel said to himself, and I will deal with him then.

He walked down the side of the cottage and entered through the kitchen door at the rear. There was a dead mouse on the floor by the cat-flap. Ah, he thought, the Cat is at home again. How did he know I was back? He chucked the mouse into the compost bin in the garden and unloaded his purchases. When he went through to the sitting room the Cat was curled up in his armchair, licking a paw scrupulously.

'Hello,' Gabriel said. 'Nice to see you.' He had noticed that if he didn't greet the Cat when he entered the house it took offence and went to another

room. The Cat looked up, then carried on with its ablutions. Gabriel pondered trying to give it a stroke – he always thought of the Cat as an ‘it’, although patently male – but the Cat rarely permitted any sign of affection and Gabriel didn’t feel like being scratched or hissed at so he left it alone. But he was thinking: if he had a cleaning lady then the Cat could be fed in his absence and it might consider taking up permanent residence.

At six o’clock precisely he put in a call to Laura Devine. She wasn’t home from the stables, a woman said, can she call you back? Gabriel gave her his number.

The phone rang half an hour later as Gabriel was pouring his second Scotch and soda. It was Faith Green.

‘Welcome home,’ she said.

‘How did you know I was back?’

‘I just happen to know these things, Gabriel.’

Yes, that was part of the problem, he realized.

‘Have you sent anyone down here to check on me?’

‘Certainly not,’ she said, sounding irritated. ‘I need to see you – I need the full Angus Fairford debrief.’

‘The report’s in the post – registered mail.’

‘That’s not good procedure, Gabriel.’

‘Apologies.’

They made an appointment for the following Monday at four p.m. Gabriel found himself looking forward to seeing her again, and said so.

‘Well, I suppose I’m looking forward to seeing you, as well. How’s life at the cottage?’

‘Very nice,’ he said. ‘Very cosy. You should come down for a visit, now you know it, come and stay for a weekend.’

They had spent a passionate five days together in the cottage many months before – as close as they had ever come to being proper lovers, living together as a couple, intimately, day by day. It was these memories that had provoked his guilt after being with Parker, he knew. Faith, yes – and all the complex history of their relationship – had overwhelmed him and now he felt a sudden burgeon of emotion, thinking back, thinking about her. It had been marvellous for him, those five days at the cottage, he realized, transforming – and then she had suddenly left.

‘Maybe I will pop down,’ she said. ‘Once we’ve sorted out the Fairford business. Anyway, see you on Monday.’

She hung up. Gabriel put the phone down – how she tantalized him! – and it rang again almost immediately.

'What is it, Faith?'

'It's Laura,' a voice said. 'Laura Devine.'

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7.

Ruskin Studios

Gabriel caught an early train up to London from Lewes on Monday morning, joining the preoccupied, inscrutable commuters in their navy-blue overcoats, pinstriped suits and bowler hats. It was strange being up so early, in travelling communion with the other workers of the world. He realized how – despite its persistent concerns – the writer's life spared one from deadening routine and daily schedules, other than the complicated business of putting words on the page. He didn't need to haul himself out of bed at 6 a.m., wash and shave, pull on his suit, tie his tie and, after a snatched breakfast, make his way to the station for the 7.45 to Victoria. He could stay in bed until noon, if he wished. Still, it was good to be reminded of the life he had taken care to avoid. Count your blessings, he told himself, as he walked through the arch that led to Ruskin Studios where he rented a small studio apartment, his London *pied-à-terre*, just after nine o'clock.

He hadn't been in number 3 Ruskin Studios for more than a fortnight and the Swiss cheese plant on his desk, unwatered and uncared-for, had flopped and shrivelled. There was a dark dusty layer of London pollution on the windowsill and he had left his bed unmade, he saw, a minor domestic transgression in his opinion. He remade it at once, wondering if, now he had employed Laura Devine, he could pay her to pop up to London and give number 3 a thorough going-over.

Laura Devine, when she had presented herself at Rose Cottage the day after their telephone conversation, had turned out to be a tiny, robust, moon-faced girl who was seventeen years old, so she told him, unasked. She was barely over five feet tall, Gabriel calculated. She was wearing a battered corduroy jacket over a black polo-neck sweater, beige cavalry twills and

elastic-sided boots. The look was vaguely equine, Gabriel thought. She had long dark hair and a fringe that fell to her eyelashes. She told him that she lived with her parents and twin younger sisters only ten minutes away on the east side of Claverleigh. He showed her round the cottage and they agreed that she would come on Tuesdays and Fridays at midday for three hours and would be paid at the end of the month, at her insistence.

'See, I want to buy me a horse, Mr Dax,' she said, Gabriel noticing the unmistakable Sussex twang to her voice, 'and if I have money in hand, like, I'll be tempted to spend it.'

She worked for a few hours in the mornings as a stable-girl at a riding school near Offham, she told him, starting at 6 a.m. 'So it'll be easy for me to stop in here Tuesdays and Fridays on my way home,' she said.

She inspected his rudimentary cleaning materials and utensils and gave him a list of purchases to make – bleach, dishcloths, polish, Vim, a new mop and bucket and a vacuum cleaner.

'You've got a cat, ain't you?' she said. 'I can see cat hairs everywhere. You need a Hoover to get them up. No carpet-sweeper'll do that job.'

Gabriel acceded to every demand, feeling oddly reassured, sensing that Rose Cottage was going to be taken in hand by this small young person, and he looked forward to the transformation. He wondered how the Cat would respond to Laura. Too bad if it was unhappy – Laura Devine was here to stay, Gabriel told himself.

He gave her a set of keys and four crisp KGB ten-pound notes for the various purchases she had recommended, and confirmed she'd start work the following Tuesday.

At the door when he saw her out, and as he loomed over her, she obviously sensed his vague disquiet.

'Don't you worry, Mr Dax. I may be on the small side but I'm strong. You'll see.'

Gabriel had decided to make the most of his trip to London and had booked a session at noon with his psychoanalyst, Katerina Haas, and had made another appointment with his editor, Inigo Marcher, to deliver the latest chapter of *On the Beaten Path* – then he would go to the Institute and meet Faith. Faith, yes, what would ensue? Even now he felt a quiet, thrilling trepidation at the prospect of seeing her again. He was excited. That was her effect on him and there was nothing he could do about it, he realized. There

was no logical, rational explanation that he could offer himself – he reacted to her as an animal would, he felt, all hormones, emotions and instincts – faculties not subject to suppression or control by cogent thought and analysis.

He would have to talk to Katerina Haas about this, he decided, pleased that he would be seeing her. She was the perfect sounding board, a calm source of lightly bestowed wisdom – no interpretation of his behaviour was overly didactic or prescriptive. She made suggestions, subtle indications, putative explanations and, he realized, they were worth considering because she knew him as well as, if not better than, anyone in his life these days. He had no secrets from her; he told her everything, good and bad, self-promoting and shameful, fantastical and instinctive.

He walked to her elegant house in Frognal Way from Hampstead Tube, now one of the familiar trajectories of his life, he had to say. Their analyst/analysand relationship was more than three years old. She had cured his chronic insomnia but now he used her as a kind of confessional. She was the only person in the world who knew that he had killed two people – in self-defence. He had to confront this new dark tangle of his life, somehow, with its half-secrets and total secrets. She helped him solve – or at least cope with – the problems they posed.

Katerina Haas stepped into the waiting room and Gabriel stood and kissed her on the cheek. She was wearing a grey flannel trouser suit with a long-collared white shirt and light blue tie – somehow, she made the masculine ensemble appear entirely feminine. Her steel-grey hair was longer and it flicked out at the sides over her shoulders – and she had chunky gold earrings on. Maybe that explained the paradox, Gabriel thought.

‘Like the outfit,’ he said. ‘Very chic.’

‘Thank you, kind sir. One must keep up with the times.’

‘I need to make more of an effort,’ Gabriel said, conscious of the abiding conservatism of his wardrobe. Tweed jackets, always with a tie, corduroy or flannel trousers, sensible shoes. ‘I feel I’m too old for long hair,’ he said. ‘Stuck in the 1950s.’

‘How old are you?’

‘Thirty-four. Ouch.’

‘That’s not old – *Um Gottes willen!*’

‘But I’m half a generation behind these kids today. I was born well before the war, you know. I would feel a fraud dressing up like them.’

‘Well, your style is timeless, Gabriel. Very you, as they say – don’t change a thing.’

‘Thank *you*, kind sir.’

They both laughed and then went into the consulting room.

EXTRACTS FROM THE TRANSCRIPTION OF SESSION 18

DR HAAS:	How is the insomnia?
GABRIEL DAX:	Pretty much under control, in my opinion. I seem to know when I’ll have a sleepless night and take a pill. Not very often, I must say.
DR HAAS:	So, all is well …
GABRIEL DAX:	Yes, inasmuch, you know –
DR HAAS:	What?
GABRIEL DAX:	When I feel everything is going well it makes me suspicious, a bit twitchy. I think, what can go wrong next?
DR HAAS:	That’s a very normal feeling in life, in anyone’s life. I feel exactly the same. Tell me, where have you been since we last met?
GABRIEL DAX:	I was in Rome and Paris for my book *On the Beaten Path*. And Gibraltar. Then I was in the USA, in Los Angeles and Indianapolis – one of my ‘jobs’, you know.
DR HAAS:	What a life you lead, Gabriel.
GABRIEL DAX:	Well, it may look good on the surface but there are always problems. That’s normal as well, I suppose.
DR HAAS:	How is your relationship going with Faith Green?
GABRIEL DAX:	A bit cool, I must say. I’m meeting her later. Maybe things will warm up. There are no guarantees with Faith.

DR HAAS:	Is this why you wanted to see me?
GABRIEL DAX:	Ah, no. Well, indirectly. I … [Pause] I had a moment, a sexual moment, in America – with someone I knew. A former colleague.
DR HAAS:	What exactly is a ‘sexual moment’?
GABRIEL DAX:	I had sex with this person, two times. We made love, I should say. I have strong feelings for her. In many ways she would be an ideal lover, and companion, for me. We’re the right age, we share the same values, the same sense of humour. We’ve been through difficult experiences, as colleagues. She’s a CIA agent.
DR HAAS:	Ah, right.
GABRIEL DAX:	We were in Berlin together, with Kennedy, last June.
DR HAAS:	Oh, yes. I remember. You told me. I won’t forget that night in November. My God – the shock.
GABRIEL DAX:	Yes. I could have seen more of her – she was very keen – but I was feeling guilty so I left. I felt I was betraying Faith Green. Which is stupid – I’ve made no promises to Faith and she’s made none to me. So why was I troubled, why did I leave this nice, lovely person because of obligations and pressures that I don’t actually have?
DR HAAS:	[Pause] I think, I conjecture, that it’s a measure of the strength of feeling you have for Faith Green. When it comes to your emotional life, your sex life, she is the dominant figure.
GABRIEL DAX:	Unfortunately, I think that’s true. I wonder if I could ever have a proper, fulfilled relationship with another woman. I would always be thinking of Faith. It sort of drives me mad.
DR HAAS:	When I talk to you, Gabriel, and when I think of our conversation afterwards, I always test myself with a thought experiment. I ask myself, what if you had told all this to Dr Freud? What would Sigmund Freud have to say to you? He was a great believer in thought experiments, by the way.
GABRIEL DAX:	And what do you think he would say?
DR HAAS:	I think, on reflection, on serious reflection, I think he would say that you were suffering from an Oedipus complex.

‘Are you all right, Gabriel?’ Inigo Marcher said. ‘You look a bit *distrait*.’

‘Something my psychoanalyst said to me. I feel a bit, you know, perturbed.’

‘Psychoanalyst! Good God, I’m impressed. Do you believe all that hogwash?’

‘Actually, she’s been amazingly helpful.’

‘A woman psychoanalyst! Even better. Why haven’t you told me about this, you sly bastard?’

‘Is that a new fridge?’ Gabriel asked, keen to avoid the topic. They were in Inigo’s carefully tailored office in Mulholland & Melhuish, his publishers. Inigo’s stage set, as Gabriel called it – a clever disarray of hundreds of books in floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and further piles stacked on the floor, and a wall of black-and-white photographs of eminent authors – Ernest Hemingway, Anton Chekhov, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf amongst others – authors that Inigo didn’t actually publish but somehow the collective allure of their photographic presence managed to redound on him.

‘It is a new fridge, yes. Well noticed. Some of my younger authors prefer lager – and lager does take up more fridge room.’ Inigo left his huge desk and crossed the manuscript-strewn carpet to the new fridge. There were many bottles on a tray on its top.

‘Talking of alcohol – what’ll you have?’

Gabriel asked for a very large Scotch with a dash of water. By curious happenstance his publisher’s building in Floral Street was only a five-minute walk from the Institute of Developmental Studies on Long Acre. He looked at his watch: 3.15. A powerful drink or two would set him up for the Faith encounter, his Oedipal fixation.

‘Looking forward to this new chapter,’ Inigo said, flicking through Gabriel’s typescript. ‘Eiffel Tower – what’s your angle?’

‘Fascinating interview with someone who’s employed to spot potential suicides and prevent them jumping.’

‘Are there many suicides?’

‘Not that many – because of this person and his team. He has a very sharp eye – can read the signs. Quite uncanny.’

‘Amazing. How many chapters to go?’

Gabriel lit one of his Gitanes. Inigo smoked small, foul cheroots from India.

‘Three, maybe four. I was in the States recently and had hoped to go to the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls but circumstances didn’t permit. I may have to go back,’ he said, thinking, and maybe see Parker again. He smiled.

‘I’ve done the Rock of Gibraltar, Mount Fuji – I might try to go to the Taj Mahal, Red Square, Moscow – and then we’re pretty much finished, I reckon.’

Inigo pursed his lips, pondering publishing issues.

‘Deliver by September, if you can manage that, and we’ll publish in May next year. Triumphant success, I predict. What’s the next one?’

‘*The Job*. I sent you my outline. You know – three basic jobs: hairdresser, butcher, taxi driver. The same jobs in twelve different countries.’

‘Ah, yes. Great idea. God! Superb idea! Can’t wait. You are a clever so-and-so, Gabriel Dax. Have I ever told you that?’

‘Not recently.’

‘Top up?’

‘Have you been drinking?’ Faith Green said, wafting a hand in front of her nose. ‘You reek of alcohol.’

‘I’ve just come from a meeting with my editor,’ Gabriel said. ‘Apologies. He does tend to ply one with booze.’

‘Ah, the writing life.’

‘It has its compensations. Unlike the espionage life.’

‘Don’t be bitter, Gabriel. I know I keep saying that but you’ve done very well.’ She held up his report on Fairford. ‘Good work. This will cause reverberations.’

‘Another traitor.’

‘Yes, we British seem to be very accomplished at betraying our country. It’ll be buried, however.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘We’ve offered him an amnesty for total disclosure. MI5 and the FBI are interrogating him as we speak. I hope.’

‘Isn’t that a bit lenient?’

‘It’s better than the full publicity of an embarrassing trial at the Old Bailey.’ She looked pained for an instant. ‘There are others – and Fairford may tell us who they are – people he recruited. He should tell us if he’s sensible – he doesn’t want to go to prison for the rest of his life.’

They were sitting in Faith’s office, a strange neutral cell in the Institute. There was a blackboard on one wall, a map of the world on another wall, a barred window that looked obliquely out on to Long Acre, and a row of barely filled bookshelves – telephone directories, some dictionaries, ranked

files with numbers on them – that backed her wide, neat desk with its three different-coloured telephones. No one, wandering in, would have any idea what went on in this place, Gabriel thought.

‘By the way,’ she said, ‘can we have the passport back?’

‘What passport?’

‘The Strathleven passport.’

‘Damn. Sorry. Left it at home.’

‘Well, next time when you’re up.’

‘Of course. You said you knew Angus Fairford. How come?’ he asked her.

‘He trained me – us – when I joined SOE in ’44. Various types of codes, the clever means of secret communication, decryption and so on. I think he was possibly the most intelligent human being I’d ever met. He was a brilliant teacher, inspiring.’

‘I don’t think you’d be inspired by him today, somehow.’

‘I was very young. He rather took me under his wing. We used to speak French to each other all the time, much to everyone’s annoyance.’

He could see she was thinking back to the war and the awful consequences of her SOE life as an agent in occupied France. The torture scars were still there – the white blotches of the leopard spots, as she called them, on her breasts and shoulders. Captured, imprisoned and then interrogation by the torture of burning cigarette ends.

She suddenly smiled brightly at him.

‘Actually, I didn’t get you here to talk about Angus Fairford. I wanted to talk to you about Kit Caldwell.’

‘Kit? What’s happening?’

‘He wants out of Russia – he wants to be exfiltrated – and he absolutely needs you to help him, he says.’

Gabriel felt a sudden nausea, and his back and shoulders tensing.

‘How do you know?’

She explained. Caldwell had set up a system, only to be used in emergencies, when he needed to make urgent contact. When he did, he would walk to and fro a few times, past the British embassy in Moscow wearing a beret. There was an MI6 man at the embassy, an attaché, who dealt with all things Caldwellian. He then met Caldwell secretly and the message was passed on. Get me out, now, Caldwell had said. He was

worried that the KGB were becoming suspicious. Philby's recent defection was jeopardizing his own. It was time to leave.

'He was very adamant. He has a complete plan but he needs an accomplice. You.'

'Why me?' Gabriel tried not to sound plaintive.

'Because, as far as the KGB are concerned, they think you're their man. You're Caldwell's contact in London. They meet you, they give you money, for heaven's sake. They won't suspect you.'

'Oh, sure,' Gabriel said, scornfully.

'You said your contact, what's her name, Varvara, was constantly asking you to go to Moscow.'

'True.'

'There you are. Didn't she ask you to get a drawing?'

'Yes, I have it.'

'Then bring it in and we'll add the microdot with some interesting information.'

'It's just not good timing for me, I'm afraid.'

'Well, I'm sorry about that, but this is a priority. We don't want Caldwell to panic, do something silly and get arrested. That would be a total disaster. We want him out as much as he does. He knows a lot. It's a very delicate balance.' She paused. 'Think about it, Gabriel. This is the time to remove him, cleverly and quickly. He hasn't been rumbled. He's got freedom of movement. No one suspects you – and you'll have every support from us at the embassy.'

'I'll think about it,' he said, vaguely. 'Funnily enough, I was actually going to write about the Kremlin and Red Square for my book.'

'There you are: the travel writer – always the perfect cover for you.'

He sighed, troubled. It was all very well being sent to the USA to unmask a traitor, but to go to Moscow on this kind of mission … He felt a tremor of worry in his throat and his hands. He clenched his fists.

'What're you doing this evening?' Faith asked.

'Me? Nothing special.'

'Shall we have a drink? I'm staying the night in town at a hotel. I have to catch a very early train tomorrow.'

The tremor stopped.

'Well, that would be very nice. Yes. Lovely.'

'It's in Aldwych, the Waldorf. See you in the bar at seven.'

To kill time before seven o'clock, Gabriel searched out a bookshop and looked for guidebooks to Russia. He bought one called *Your Trip to the USSR* and went to a café to flick through it. The process seemed relatively straightforward, he was glad to note. Apparently one applied for a visa at the Russian consulate and then booked a tour with Intourist, the Soviet monopoly travel agent for foreigners. There were dozens of tours on offer all over the vast country, and of various durations, but the one-week tour to Moscow seemed ideal. You could travel as an individual, moreover, no need to be in a group, and have your own Intourist guide assigned to you and stay at the best hotels Moscow offered.

He began to relax a bit – going to Russia didn't seem that daunting, after all, and he would have the perfect excuse, writing his chapter about the Kremlin and Red Square – and maybe the Intourist person would be an asset. His guidebook informed him that in 1960 there had been over 150,000 foreign visitors to the Soviet Union. It seemed he could straightforwardly, and easily, gain entry to the USSR as a tourist under his own auspices. The Intourist office in London was on Regent Street, he saw. He thought he might investigate further after he'd spoken to Faith and despite his disquiet he sensed an odd feeling that he should try to do duty by Kit Caldwell. He liked Kit, and they were colleagues, close colleagues, to be fair – and the man was taking an enormous personal risk as a triple agent in Russia. If he could manage to be part of his exfiltration then that would be a cause for good, he said to himself. He had helped him 'defect', after all; now he would help him exfiltrate. Or, the unwelcome thought came to him, was he simply delusional? What did he really know? He was entering *terra incognita*. Why did Kit Caldwell insist on *his* participation …?

He was at the bar of the Waldorf promptly at 7 p.m. He found a seat in a dark corner and ordered a Scotch and soda from a patrolling waiter. Faith arrived ten minutes later. She had changed and was wearing an ultramarine shot-silk dress that seemed to shimmer and gleam in the lights of the bar as if the material was somehow alive with iridescence. She looked stunning, he thought, standing to greet her with a kiss. She stepped back a pace, holding up a hand.

'No kissing, Gabriel, please.' She sat down. 'We're just two colleagues meeting for a drink after work.'

'Of course. Bad procedure, I apologize.'

He ordered another Scotch, and Faith had her favourite Dubonnet. She allowed him to smoke and he lit a cigarette. He was feeling strange – both excited and confused at being with her again. It was as if they were on their first date, or so he felt. Why was it that this encounter seemed to him like the new start of a relationship rather than something that was ongoing and already had a history of several years? Perhaps because it was so stop–go; she refused to allow any feeling of continuity to develop or evolve – everything between them had to be transacted anew.

'You look very beautiful,' he said, trying to sound as relaxed as a familiar lover would. He, for one, was not going to deny their history.

'Thank you. And you look very handsome – though a bit tired.'

'It's been a long day.'

'Have you had a chance to think about your potential trip abroad?'

'I have, actually. It seems surprisingly feasible. I can simply go myself – on an Intourist tour – to write a chapter of my book.'

She smiled, pleased.

'Even better,' she said. 'We'll arrange some sort of function at the embassy so you can meet Archie Pomeroy – he does all the secret liaison with Caldwell.'

'Right. Is he MI6?'

'Yes. He's a defence attaché, in theory, but in fact one of us. Very capable man.' She winced. 'It's incredibly difficult and complicated to meet Caldwell securely – that's why it happens so rarely. Only twice, I think. Having you there will change everything.'

'Why?'

'Because the KGB don't suspect you. They'll probably give you a medal.'

He sipped at his Scotch, feeling the acid-burn of anxiety return.

'When should I go?'

'Choose a date that suits you. But soon. Apply for the visa, book an Intourist tour. Caldwell has everything ready, he says. He just needs you there – in Moscow – and he needs the drawing. When he delivers that there'll be a period of grace as they analyse the stuff we've sent. He'll be in good odour. That's when you'll make a run for it.'

Gabriel exhaled.

'Should be plain sailing, then.'

'Sarcasm doesn't suit you, Gabriel.'

‘As you’ve told me on many occasions.’

They looked at each other.

‘When can I see you again, Faith? I mean properly. Just you and me, like we used to.’

‘How about in ten minutes? Room 344.’

She stood up, shook his hand and strode away across the bar heading for the lifts.

Gabriel swallowed, somewhat stunned. Right. He looked around for a waiter to call for the bill.

On the Tube back to Chelsea, Circle line to Sloane Square, Gabriel sat in the bright light of the near empty carriage, smoking, trying to come to terms with what the day had brought. A session with his psychoanalyst. A meeting with his editor. On top of that, he had somehow volunteered for a mission to exfiltrate a British agent from Russia and had made love to his MI6 handler in a central London hotel. No wonder he felt close to exhaustion.

Faith had been, he thought, unusually passionate, as if she had missed him as much as he had missed her. Missed the sex, he thought. Maybe that was it, maybe it was that simple. She liked having sex with him. So where did Oedipus fit in? he wondered. Was it because she was older, as Katerina Haas suggested, arguing that intimacy with Faith was a simulacrum of intimacy with his mother – something denied him all his life after her death in the fire at the family home when he was six? Surely not, he reasoned. He was just physically and emotionally attracted to Faith. She was a very alluring woman. He had said as much to Katerina but she had countered with the fact that not only was Faith older than him, she was also his boss – she could discipline him, rebuke him, order him to do things, as any mother might do to a child. And this was something he responded to, consciously or unconsciously.

He stepped out of the Tube at Sloane Square. That was the problem with Freudian psychoanalysis, he realized: there was always a ready answer to apparent contradictions. An absence was just as telling as a presence – a denial was as revealing as an affirmation. To Katerina Haas the fact that he wasn’t conscious of perceiving Faith as a version of his mother made no difference – he *unconsciously* perceived her as such. These Freudian theories were fundamentally unfalsifiable and therefore sacrificed any scientific, logical validity. Who had said that? Vladimir Nabokov? Karl

Popper? Agatha Christie? If it was an unconscious response, how could he know he was experiencing it?

He wandered home through Chelsea towards Ruskin Studios telling himself to stop thinking about Oedipus and concentrate on his memories of the three hours he'd spent in bed with Faith Green. After their first bout of lovemaking she had ordered a bottle of red wine from room service. They had drunk it as they talked and then she took his glass from his hand, placed it on the bedside table and said she needed an early night because of her dawn train the next morning so they had better set to again, if he was up for it. He was indeed. She had been more particular in her instructions the second time – faster, slower, just there, don't move, keep going – unhappily confirming his suspicions that it was the sex that brought her back to him. And, he realized, it was safe, in the sense that Gabriel was also her 'spy'. He could spy for her and, when she felt the need, he could be her gigolo.

That was unkind, he thought, as he let himself into his studio and switched on the light. There was something between them – something had ignited, undeniably, and spontaneously on both sides, even that first time in Southwold – a kind of fate, karma, whatever, had brought them together. It wasn't just fornication – those five bliss-filled days they had spent at the cottage last spring proved that. They did enjoy each other's company – it was easy, there was humour, they teased each other, they were intellectual equals, they shared the same tastes, by and large. Then he saw that an envelope had been pushed under his door, no doubt delivered by Corless, the studios' disagreeable concierge. What now? '*Mr Gabriel Dax*' and '*By Hand*' were jotted on the front. He ripped it open. There was a typewritten message: 'Tomorrow, Tuesday. Usual place. Midday. Varvara.' My God, he thought – Varvara? She must have returned from Moscow. She was back in his life as well.

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8.

Dovehouse Gardens Revisited

Gabriel took a seat on the bench where he and Varvara usually met. He reached in his pocket for his Gitanes but then put the pack away. He was trying to reduce his smoking, what with all the lung cancer scares. Sod it, he thought, and lit a cigarette – Varvara would smoke, anyway.

He looked around at this small shabby garden off the King's Road. He would pop into the Matisse after their meeting for a spot of lunch, he promised himself. Images of Faith kept appearing in his mind. Being with her naked was somewhat destabilizing – seeing her breasts, the dense triangle of her pubic hair, her soft buttocks, the white leopard spots that dotted her torso – there were some on her back as well – as he contrasted her nakedness with the potent, confident, chic persona she was in her non-sexual, Institute life. That was true of everyone, he supposed. Even his skinny, aroused, naked self was entirely different from this morose, tense figure sitting smoking on a bench in an unkempt public space, he realized. Fruitless mental meanderings, he told himself – stop it, waste of time.

A man had wandered into the garden, looking around. He was in his forties with fair, wiry hair brushed back in waves from his forehead and was wearing a sheepskin jacket, a grey polo neck and black trousers. He was slim, with a slightly retroussé nose that maybe made him look younger than he was, Gabriel thought. The man spotted Gabriel and strolled over. He smiled.

'Mr Dax, how are you?'

Quite a strong Russian accent, Gabriel registered.

'I'm fine.'

'I am Dmitri Grigorievich Levitin. I am replacement from Varvara.'

‘Oh. Right. I see.’

‘I signed my note to you as Varvara so you would not be surprised.’

‘Fair enough. Is she back in Moscow?’

‘Yes. I am your new contact. Same telephone numbers.’

He sat down beside Gabriel, took out a pack of cigarettes and selected one. Gabriel saw it was a stubby *papirosa* cigarette with a cardboard tube-filter. Dmitri pinched the middle of the tube flat with his fingers and lit up. None of your decadent Western brands, then. For some reason Gabriel saw this choice as significant. After Natalia and Varvara with their love of American cigarettes he suddenly felt uneasy at having to engage with this man and his *papirosy*.

Gabriel extended his hand and Levitin shook it, firmly.

‘Good to meet you,’ Gabriel said.

‘You know we are still very happy for you to go to Moscow to meet Mr Caldwell.’

‘I’m already making plans. I’m going to go as an individual. Intourist. I’ll be researching my next book.’

‘Excellent. We will make sure everything will be smoothly. Please tell me when you make your application for visa, what your dates will be.’

‘In the next few weeks, probably. I have some business to sort out, here. In May, perhaps, or early June. How is Mr Caldwell, by the way?’

‘He’s very well. Very happy, so I am hearing.’

‘Good. I will have the drawing, also.’

‘The drawing is very important.’

Levitin dropped his butt on the ground and placed a shoe on it.

‘Are you liking football, Mister Dax?’

‘Yes, I do. Sort of. I’m not obsessed.’

‘You must be supporting Chelsea.’

‘Come on, you Blue-oos.’

‘Maybe one day you could take me to a Chelsea match.’

‘With pleasure.’

‘We will stay in contact.’

Levitin stood up, smiled. It was the snub nose that was disconcerting, Gabriel realized. He couldn’t really assess the man – there was something indisputably ‘smiley’ about him, yet he wasn’t smiley – he couldn’t be in his line of work. Suddenly Gabriel missed Varvara.

In the Café Matisse, after his spaghetti *arrabbiata* and his half-litre of Chianti, he began to relax somewhat. Natalia, Varvara, Dmitri Levitin – it didn't matter: they were just go-betweens with whom he had to deal, interchangeable. Maybe once Kit Caldwell was out of Russia then this double-bluff game with the London KGB *rezidenty* would end, he thought – that would be a real compensation, even though the KGB money was very handy, he had to admit. He ordered a coffee and took out his notebook. Writing things down was always an aid to proper reflection and analysis, he considered. Lists were one of the great human inventions. He wrote:

Russian consulate – visa
Intourist – book Moscow tour
New chapter for OTBP
Return passport to Faith
See Aldous re Russia trip
Chelsea match with Levitin?
Call Faith – invite her to stay
Caldwell drawing to Institute

He looked at what he had written. Yes, all very doable. His mood improved further.

He paid his bill and wandered back to Ruskin Studios. He had decided to stay up in London one more night. Today was Laura's first day in the cottage as his housekeeper – let her have free run of the place, he thought. He'd check out her efficiency tomorrow.

Thinking about housekeeping encouraged him to spend an hour tidying up the studio – washing and drying his few dishes and glasses, pots and pans, stacking them away neatly, wiping down surfaces, sweeping up crumbs with his dustpan and brush. He had no idea when he'd be back and he could at least leave the place tidy. He threw out his desiccated Swiss cheese plant. He moved his desk closer to the big window. Maybe he should rent a TV set – or at the very least have a transistor radio – the place needed to be more domesticated, he felt, more homely. Satisfied with his work he decided to go to his favourite local pub, the Goat and Crow – have a few drinks, a packet of crisps, no need for an evening meal after his lunch in the Matisse.

As he opened the door on to the communal passageway of the studios Gabriel saw his opposite neighbour emerge from his own apartment. Roland Reed, a painter – a taciturn and solitary man but who seemed to warm to Gabriel because he was a genuine ‘artist and not some poncey poseur’, as he put it. Reed had a harsh disdain for the imposters, as he described the other tenants of the place, who had somehow inveigled their way into Ruskin Studios’ sought-for rooms and apartments.

They greeted each other and shook hands.

‘Haven’t seen you for ages,’ Reed said. He had a West Country burr to his voice.

‘Been away in the States,’ Gabriel said. ‘The new book – research, you know.’ He suddenly remembered something. ‘Have you got a moment, Roland?’

He led Roland back into his studio and took the small drawing he’d purchased from him some months ago off the mantle above his gas fire. Now the Caldwell exfiltration was under way he had need of it.

‘Could you write a title by your signature?’ Gabriel asked. ‘“Studio interior” or “Interior of the studio”, something like that.’

‘I don’t usually title my drawings,’ Reed said. ‘But seeing as it’s you …’

He took Gabriel’s proffered pen and scrawled ‘Studio interior’ at the bottom. All Gabriel needed was the letter ‘i’ so that the dot of the ‘i’ could be replaced later at the Institute with a microdot. Now he had three of them – spoilt for choice. Faith would be pleased. It was another small increment on the way to the liberation of Kit Caldwell.

Gabriel said he was very grateful and that they should try to get together for a drink soon. They parted at the studios’ entrance and Gabriel wandered up Redburn Street, past his former flat, through Tedworth Square and along St Leonard’s Terrace. He turned left. There was the Goat, lights glowing, opening time. As always, he was glad to be back in Chelsea – his country village life was only temporary; he was an urban person at root, he acknowledged, and the city would always call him back.

When he stepped inside the pub his benign mood suddenly changed. At a corner table were Lorraine and Tyrone Rogan and another man. They saw him and he gave them a friendly wave and after he’d bought his pint of bitter he found a seat as far away as possible across the room from them. He and Lorraine had enjoyed a passionate affair for a few months – and her brother, Tyrone, had been a vital part of the Berlin adventure last year. He

had forgotten that the Goat was their local as well – he should have peered through the window before he came in.

Tyrone wandered over and sat down.

‘Avoiding us, Gabe?’

‘I could see you had company. And I’m meeting someone,’ he lied.

‘Come and join us.’

‘Who’s the other fellow?’

‘Lorraine’s fiancé. Ken. You know – she was manager of his sandwich bar.’

Gabriel frowned.

‘Fiancé? I thought she detested him.’

‘They made it up. Water under the bridge.’

Gabriel picked up his pint and followed Tyrone over to their table. He kissed Lorraine on the cheek, smelling her pungent, musky perfume and feeling that instant, absurd, atavistic arousal-effect she provoked in him. She was staring at him intently as if telepathically trying to communicate.

‘Gabriel Dax,’ she said, nodding. ‘Gabriel Dax.’

‘That’s me.’

She had changed her hairstyle, cut it very short with a micro-fringe and longer, wispy strands at the side that fell in front of her ears, the ends tinted pink.

‘Like your hair,’ he said.

‘Thanks, Gabe. It’s great, isn’t it? I feel dead cool.’

‘She’s gone all Mod, hasn’t she,’ Tyrone said.

Gabriel was introduced to Ken. The last time Lorraine had spoken about her former partner, now fiancé, she had described him as ‘scum’ and a ‘perve’. Bygones were obviously bygones. Ken seemed genial – thickset and balding with a lopsided smile.

‘Heard loads about you, mate,’ Ken said. Gabriel wasn’t sure if he was winking at him or not.

‘Nothing but good,’ Lorraine added quickly.

He offered to buy them a round but they declined. They were off to see a film. When Gabriel kissed Lorraine goodbye she surreptitiously squeezed his buttocks.

‘I must pick up that vase from your flat one of these days,’ she said, with a knowing smile. Clearly, the Ken–Lorraine union was fragile. After they had left, Tyrone allowed Gabriel to buy him a Bacardi and Coke.

‘Any more jobs on the go, Gabe? I loved Berlin. Got to get back there.’

‘No. Quiet life. Writing another book.’

‘Shout if you need me. Everything considered for cash.’

‘I’ll bear it in mind.’

They reminisced about Berlin for a while, Gabriel carefully avoiding any mention of what he had really been up to. Then Tyrone looked at his watch and said he had to go and see a man about a dog – no, seriously. He was thinking of buying a greyhound, a racing greyhound. He laid his palm fraternally on Gabriel’s shoulder, then gently, affectionately, slapped his cheek and sauntered out of the pub.

Gabriel lit a cigarette, finally relaxed, and finished his pint. He went back to the bar for a refill.

‘I thought I might find you here. How amazing.’

A polite Scottish accent. Female. Gabriel turned. It was Ishbel Dunbar.

‘My God – Ishbel!’

He smiled, a thin but strident alarm suddenly ringing loudly in his head. This was the second time she had wandered into the Goat and Crow and just happened to find him there. Once might be coincidence; this second encounter told him it was no accident.

They shook hands. Ishbel looked different – he hadn’t seen her in months, a year, maybe, he realized. Her hair was cut significantly shorter and she had square tortoiseshell spectacles that made her look quite stern and serious. She was wearing a rust mohair jacket with black trousers.

‘Can I buy you a drink?’ he asked. ‘Lovely to see you again.’

‘Gin and tonic, thank you, Gabriel.’

‘Large one?’

‘Why not?’

Their drinks were served and they went back to Gabriel’s table. He was going to play this very calmly, he decided, as if it was the most natural occurrence in the world that she should turn up at his local.

‘I’ve just been round to your old flat,’ she said, ‘and was told by a neighbour you’d left. They said you’d moved to the country. Then I remembered this pub – and there you were. Meant to be.’

‘Exactly. I thought you’d been posted to Peru.’

‘I was. But I’m back now in London. Section Five. Scandinavia – my Spanish will be very useful.’

He remembered that it was Faith who had managed to have Ishbel expelled abroad. Faith was suspicious of her, thinking she was after her job, wanting to take over the Institute. She had only been temporarily successful, clearly.

Gabriel offered her a cigarette.

'I've given up,' she said. 'All these health scares, you know. I was smoking far too much.'

'I'm trying,' Gabriel said. 'But with little success.'

He lit his cigarette.

'So you *were* looking for me,' he said. 'What for?'

'Everyone's talking about the Angus Fairford revelation. The fourth man. Word has got out. You did a brilliant job – unmasked a traitor.'

'It wasn't quite so dramatic. I was tipped off.'

'But he confessed.'

'Yes. He seemed almost relieved.'

'That's why I wanted to see you.' Ishbel took a sip of her gin and tonic. 'Did he mention any names?'

'No. He was adamant. He refused. I asked him who had recruited him at Cambridge – he wouldn't say.'

'But did he mention any other names? Any contacts?'

'He said he was run by a Russian contact, code-named "Henry". But he wouldn't identify him. And, of course, he mentioned the man who shopped him, Francis Falkner, a former colleague. A lot of bad blood there.' Gabriel paused. 'The thing is that there's an official interrogation going on – right now. MI5 and the FBI. Fairford will be given an amnesty as long as he talks – so I assume more names will come out. Eventually.'

'Right, I see …' It was obvious she didn't know about the amnesty – it seemed to trouble her somewhat.

'Did he mention Faith Green, by any chance?'

Gabriel stayed impassive.

'Faith? No.'

'Fairford trained her, you know, in the war. At SOE.'

'I do know that, actually.'

'Really? How?'

'Faith told me.'

'Oh. Did she? When?'

'Yes. When I was debriefed by her. Yesterday.'

‘Mmm …’ This also seemed to be news that Ishbel didn’t want to hear.

‘Why do you mention Faith?’ Gabriel asked as innocently as he could manage.

‘No reason. Just that there was a connection with Fairford.’

‘There must be lots of people with connections to Fairford during the war. They don’t need to be sinister.’

Ishbel smiled her slightly patronizing smile.

‘That’s not for us to decide, is it, Gabriel?’

The innuendo was clear, Gabriel thought: Ishbel Dunbar was trying to make mischief, throwing Fairford mud at Faith, hoping it would stick. That’s why she had sought him out. He would have to warn Faith that Ishbel was on her trail. The war between them was not over, evidently.

‘Fancy another?’ Gabriel asked, pointing at her glass.

‘No thanks, I’d better get going,’ she said, standing up and buttoning her jacket.

Gabriel walked her to the pub door.

‘Where have you moved to?’ she said.

‘The country. A village in East Sussex. But I can’t keep away from Chelsea.’

‘Well, if you ever come to Century House, pop up to Section Five.’

‘Will do.’

They shook hands and made their farewells. Gabriel watched her walk away and went back to his unfinished pint. He took out his notebook and pen and added another task to his list: *Tell Faith about Ishbel*.

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9.

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The Book Launch

On the Shelf was a small independent bookshop down a lane off Hampstead High Street. Gabriel was on time – 6 p.m. it had said on the invitation – but as he approached he could already hear the chatter of conversation, saw the windows that gave on to the street were blurred with condensation and that there were a few people lingering outside on the pavement, smoking, avoiding the press inside. Pushing open the door and hearing the 'ting' of the brass shop-bell on the top rail, he felt oddly apprehensive, as he always did on the threshold of book-related occasions. It wasn't vanity but he knew that he would be looked at; people would be aware of who he was and would be assessing him and judging him without him knowing. So that's Gabriel Dax – didn't rate his last book. Shabby clothes. Taller than I thought. Looks a bit full of himself. That was it, he recognized – at these literary parties you lost the writer's most precious asset: anonymity. It was like being back at school, he thought, a place where everybody knew who you were – maybe that was what made him slightly queasy.

On the Shelf was a long narrow shop with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves on either side of what was effectively a wide, wood-planked corridor. At the end was a desk with a cash register in front of another window that looked out on to an alleyway. He pushed his way through the throng, picked up a glass of white wine from the tray on the desk and glanced around, as casually and as unconcerned as possible, sipping at his wine, surveying over the glass's rim the friends of Nolan Westmacott and wondering if he recognized or knew anyone. There was a plump woman novelist of some repute, he spotted, and somebody who looked familiar from the TV. There were a lot of thin men and women – fellow poets, he assumed – he might know their names but didn't recognize their faces. It was over-warm in the shop – so many bodies in coats and scarves – and almost everyone seemed to be smoking. And drinking. The bookshop owner, an extremely tall man with wispy white hair, was wandering through the crowd with a bottle of red wine in one hand and a bottle of white in the other. He topped Gabriel up. The wine, Gabriel saw, was a cheap brand of Liebfraumilch, a little on

the sweet side, unnaturally perfumed, he thought, and it could be more chilled. Still, it was alcohol and he needed it.

A young man with spectacles and a neat goatee was staring at him. He came over and stood in front of him, scrutinizing him.

'Hi,' Gabriel said, raising a hand in greeting.

'Are you Gabriel Dax?'

'Yes.'

'I've just finished reading *Rivers*. Brilliant idea.'

'Thanks. Appreciate it.'

'What's next?'

'A book called *On the Beaten Path*.' Gabriel explained the concept: how to make the over-familiar places of the world new again.

'Where do you get your ideas from?'

They chatted a while. Then the young man spotted someone else he knew, said it had been nice to meet Gabriel, and made his difficult way across the room. Gabriel felt strangely pleased by the encounter. This was his world, yes, and some of these people were his readers. This was where he belonged, not the Institute of Developmental Studies with its risky and perilous secret agendas. Then he felt the sour mood of resignation infect him. He lived in two worlds, he realized, and the secret world that had claimed him seemed to be gaining dominance. He was glad he'd come to this party – he should go to more book launches, he thought, just to remind himself that he wasn't—

He was tapped on the shoulder and turned to greet Nolan Westmacott.

'So glad you made it, Gabe.' Nolan was from Dublin and had a soft, musical brogue to his voice.

'Wouldn't have missed it.'

They shook hands, warmly, pleased to see each other. He had met Nolan years before when he, Gabriel, had worked in a bookshop after he dropped out of Cambridge University. Nolan was a regular browser and they had begun an acquaintance that then, over a few weeks, became a friendship. After the shop closed he would often meet Nolan in a nearby pub and they would talk about literature and their dreams of writing. Nolan was a squat, burly man, with a diffident, easy-going manner, slightly older than Gabriel, married with two young children and who earned his living as a primary school teacher. This party was to celebrate his third book of poetry, *The Buzzard and the Weir*. Gabriel had already bought a copy and had read the

poems. Short, bleak, spare, unrhymed, hardly any ran to more than half a dozen lines – more like terse slogans, Gabriel thought. It was the current poetic fashion, he supposed, but they hardly seemed like proper verse to him – he liked a bit of linguistic flourish in his poetry.

'Where did you get that title?' Gabriel asked.

'Auden.'

'Of course. "See frozen buzzard flipped down weir". How could I have missed that?'

'Still the main man.'

'Unchallenged.'

Both he and Gabriel had been obsessed by the early Auden and would quote lines from the poems to each other over their pints.

'Talking of Auden, I met F. T. Falkner the other day,' Gabriel said.

'Bloody hell,' Nolan said, clearly impressed. 'Falkner himself? Sure, I thought he was dead.'

'He was near death, as it happened.'

'Where was that, then?'

'Los Angeles.'

'LA? What were you doing there?'

'Ah, researching my new book.'

'Rich bastard.'

They laughed.

'Don't forget we've got supper after the show,' Nolan said. 'Dymphna's looking forward to seeing you.'

Gabriel wasn't sure about that. He suspected that Dymphna Westmacott didn't really like him – she seemed to disapprove of most of Nolan's friends. She had dark red hair and skin of unearthly, marmoreal whiteness, Gabriel thought. *La belle dame sans merci* was how he referred to her, privately. Her eyes were the palest blue, so pale she almost looked blind.

'Great, thanks,' Gabriel said.

The bookseller then called for silence and Nolan took his book of poems out of his pocket.

'Once more unto the feckin' breach.'

'Break a leg,' Gabriel said and clapped him on the shoulder.

Nolan stepped up to the dais and the tall bookseller introduced him as "one of our most acclaimed younger poets". There were shouts and jeers.

‘If you’re in your late thirties and a poet, you’re a child,’ Nolan declared. ‘Anyway, I’m going to start with a poem called “Television” – you all know what that thing is, I hope.’

He cleared his throat and read out his poem in the customary poetic monotone.

> ‘*In the corner of our room*
> *A box reveals a grey world*
> *That resembles our multicoloured one.*
> *You are weeping.*
> *I would like to live*
> *In that thin-shadowed, mouldering*
> *Monochrome world.*’

There was a silence – as if the audience wasn’t sure the poem was over – then applause, whistles and ululations. Nolan gave a little bow in gratitude.

Yes, Gabriel thought: terseness is all.

Gabriel stopped at an off-licence on the way to Nolan’s flat – Nolan had gone on ahead after the reading – and bought two bottles of Chianti with their typical straw baskets. He had hoped the supper would be just the three of them but Nolan had invited along another writer whom Gabriel had met a few times before, a novelist called Turville Stanley – a name that sounded like a Somerset village, Gabriel thought – and his current girlfriend. Too late now to drop out, Gabriel reluctantly realized, ringing the bell of Nolan’s flat, a maisonette on Heath Hurst Road not far from Keats House. Yes, John Keats had lived near here – that might explain the *belle dame sans merci* connection, he thought, as he waited to be admitted. Lines from Keats’s poem echoed in his head and then the door was opened by the *belle dame* herself.

He felt Dymphna stiffen as he kissed her cheek, as if she was somehow offended by the casual intimacy. She was wearing a blue pinafore dress with patch pockets over a pink-striped jersey, her red hair a bouffant tangle backlit by the hall light.

Gabriel proffered his gift of wine.

‘We do have our own wine, you know,’ she said. ‘We can afford it.’

‘You can never have too much wine, I say.’

‘You and your clever *bon mots*, Gabriel.’

And *fuckez-vous*, he said, under his breath at her back as he followed her into the cramped kitchen–dining room. Turville Stanley and a young woman with short white-blonde hair were already sitting at the table. Nolan was making sure the kids were tucked up in bed, Dymphna informed him and introduced him to Turville and Meredith, his girlfriend.

‘Very pleased to meet you,’ Turville said.

‘Actually we have met before,’ Gabriel said. ‘A few times.’

‘Really? Awful memory for faces. There’s a name for that condition, isn’t there? Proso-something.’

‘Prosopagnosia,’ Gabriel said.

‘Better add that to my list of ailments,’ Turville said with a barking laugh. He was in his forties and had a florid, apple-cheeked face and a dense mass of carefully arranged, unnaturally auburn curls. He looked a bit like a debauched cherub, Gabriel thought, trying to remember the person to whom that epithet had first been attached. Arthur Rimbaud? Brendan Behan? Dylan Thomas? No matter – Turville Stanley was an ageing, debauched cherub. He was wearing a mustard-coloured corduroy suit and a forest-green shirt with a red tie.

‘Gabriel Dax,’ Turville said. ‘Any relation to the composer?’

‘He’s actually Bax. Arnold Bax.’ Gabriel remembered Falkner had also made the same error.

‘I think you’ll find you’re wrong, old sport,’ Turville said. ‘You should investigate and see if there’s a family connection. I’m rather hot on my composers.’

Gabriel said nothing and shook Meredith’s hand. She had a pert, elfin face with a sharp, tiny nose.

‘Do call me Merry. Merry by name, merry by nature.’

She worked in the publicity department at Turville’s publisher, she told him. ‘But I’m off duty tonight,’ she laughed nervously.

Nolan arrived – the children were asleep – and Gabriel’s Chianti bottles were duly appreciated. The meal was soon under way, egg mayonnaise as a starter to be followed by a lamb hotpot with extra mashed potatoes. Gabriel was sitting between Merry and Dymphna. After the first course everyone lit cigarettes. Turville held the floor with a seemingly inexhaustible series of anecdotes and gossip, mainly about other writers – this one going through a financially crippling divorce; that one married with four children, who had

in fact just fathered a child with his lover. Turville helped himself to a liberal glassful of Gabriel's Chianti before launching into an attack on a fellow novelist who was basically rewriting the same book again and again, he claimed.

'One day people will eventually wake up and see. I predict – it's so obvious. Then there'll be a stock-market crash.'

Growing weary, Gabriel turned to the impassive and unsmiling Dymphna and tried to make conversation, thinking that her face was indeed like a slab of white carved stone, utterly expressionless.

'I assume you're aware of this,' he said, 'but I only just realized that Dymphna is a variation of the name Damhnait.'

'It's pronounced "Dow-nit", by the way.'

'Apologies. And it means "little poet".'

'I know.'

'And you're married to a poet.'

'And your point is?'

'Just a nice coincidence, I thought.' He flailed around. 'What's your job again? Nolan has told me – I've forgotten.'

'I used to be a picture-restorer. Now I'm a "mum".' She made the word somehow contemptible, as if she'd said 'beggar' or 'shoplifter'.

'We all need mums,' Gabriel said, lamely. Then he added, 'My mother died in a house fire when I was six.'

'That's terrible,' she said, though her expression didn't change.

'And for a long time I believed I was responsible for the fire,' he went on, wondering why he was making this confession. Was it only to goad her into some sort of visible human empathy? 'It rather messed up my life.'

'I'm not surprised.'

'But I managed to find out that, in fact, I wasn't responsible.'

'All's well that ends well. Excuse me while I see to the next course.'

Gabriel realized why he so disliked dinner parties. He turned to Merry.

'Has Turville got a new book coming out?'

Dymphna served them all plates of her hotpot and bowls of mashed potato and diced carrots were passed around. Gabriel noticed that Turville only ate a couple of mouthfuls of mashed potatoes and didn't touch the lamb – at one stage even unreflectingly tapping the ash off his cigarette into the gravy.

Gabriel interrupted the Turvillian monologue by proposing a toast to Nolan and the publication of *The Buzzard and the Weir*. More Chianti was poured into glasses and they were duly raised.

‘Gabriel here just met F. T. Falkner, himself, in Los Angeles,’ Nolan said to the table.

‘Really?’ Turville said, turning to Gabriel, as if noticing him for the first time. ‘He’s a legend, Falkner.’

Nolan began to quote, sonorously, spreading his arms:

> ‘*After you had done this,*
> *What peace of mind would be vouchsafed?*’

Gabriel realized Nolan was fairly drunk by now, but he carried on, the words slightly slurred:

> ‘*Think how your deception was over-refined.*
> *Maybe you deceived yourself.*’

Nolan paused, frowning. ‘How does it go?’

Gabriel supplied the remaining lines:

> ‘*The fact is you have to live, resigned,*
> *for the rest of your life, hogtied*
> *to remembered passion.*
> *Will the craving ever be satisfied?*’

Merry applauded. Turville nodded sagely, as if he could have supplied the quotation himself, had he been asked. Gabriel found himself thinking of Faith, all of a sudden. *Hogtied to remembered passion*. What about his own craving? He wondered how soon he could leave.

Dymphna cleared away the plates – Gabriel’s was scoured clean. Delicious, he said to her, getting no response.

Nolan held up a hand-rolled cigarette with a twist at the top.

‘Shall we have a little refreshment break before pudding?’ he asked.

‘Yes, please,’ Turville said.

‘What is it?’ Merry asked.

‘Commonly called a “reefer”,’ Nolan said. ‘Mary Jane. Marijuana.’

‘Not in the flat, Nolan,’ Dymphna said, quietly but insistently. ‘The children will smell it.’

‘To the great outdoors we go.’

Nolan, Turville and Merry stood up.

‘What about you, Dax?’ Nolan said.

‘I’ll stick to my wine and Gitanes, if you don’t mind,’ Gabriel said.

The trio left and went downstairs to the small back garden and Dymphna sat down beside him and lit a cigarette.

‘Lovely evening,’ Gabriel said, pouring them both more wine. ‘Thank you.’

‘You were in Los Angeles?’ Dymphna said, almost accusingly.

‘Yes, just the other week.’

‘Nolan told me you’d also been to Guatemala and Berlin.’

‘That was last year.’

‘How do you afford it?’

Gabriel paused.

‘I’m researching a book. I’m a travel writer. I travel.’

‘Must cost a fortune.’

‘I’m good at budgeting,’ he said, not at all liking the direction in which this discussion was going. He looked into her pale blue eyes.

‘You know, Gabriel,’ she said, ‘it wouldn’t surprise me at all if you were some kind of spy.’ She leant back in her chair and folded her arms, looking at him intently.

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ Gabriel said, snappily, and realized at once he had made a mistake. He should have said, yes, but don’t tell anyone. Of course I’m a spy, MI6, licence to kill – all delivered with heavy irony and that would have deflected the accusation. Dymphna’s slab-faced expression finally moved a minuscule amount – scepticism registered.

‘I’m a travel writer,’ he repeated.

‘Nolan said you have a house in the country.’

‘A cottage.’

‘Do you own it?’

‘Yes. It was—’

‘And you have a flat in Chelsea, he told me. And you travel the world.’

‘It’s not what it seems,’ Gabriel said. ‘I was lucky to inherit some money from—’

They were prevented from further discussion by the rapid arrival from the garden of Turville and Merry – Merry holding a handkerchief to her mouth. She had vomited in the garden, Turville said, terribly sorry. Not a girl for a reefer. Nolan came into the room. Merry was given a glass of water, drank a couple of mouthfuls and ran to the sink and vomited again.

Turville looked quietly furious and apologized once more, said they'd better go home, and ushered Merry swiftly out of the room and away. Gabriel took advantage of the upheaval and said he'd better go home, as well. Thanks for a lovely evening, he said. He didn't try to kiss Dymphna goodbye as she stood by the cooker, hands thrust in the pockets of her dress, staring at him with her glaucous pale eyes. Yes, he thought: *The sedge is withered from the lake, and no birds sing*. Nolan saw him to the front door.

'Sorry about that,' he said. 'Bit of a damp squib. Poor Merry. But Turville says he'll review my book. Something of a gobshite tosser, isn't he?'

'Absolutely. Yeah, but, you know, a review is a review.'

Nolan gave him a drunken, stoned hug and Gabriel thanked him again and wandered off up the road heading for the High Street and the Tube home. So much for his 'world', he thought. What an utterly ghastly evening.

He walked on, then paused. He thought he could hear footsteps behind him. Nolan? Had he forgotten something? He turned and saw nobody. The footsteps had also stopped. He set off again, listening hard. Yes, footsteps again. He was suddenly convinced he was being followed. He arrived at the High Street and stood in the doorway of a closed shop, watching and thinking, artifice, artifice. It was late and very quiet, not many people out and about. He crossed the road and headed for the Tube station. Then he abruptly crossed back over the road, turned and swiftly walked a hundred yards down the hill in the other direction, keeping to the shadows between the street lights as much as possible. He crouched behind a parked car, looking back. Yes, there was a dark figure, a man, standing, further up the street. The man took a few paces this way and then that way, glancing here and there. He looked like someone who had lost his target. Gabriel couldn't make out any defining features, just an unidentifiable human, male shape in the darkness. He watched him turn and walk up the street towards Hampstead Tube station.

Then Gabriel headed down the hill at a fast pace in the opposite direction towards Belsize Park station. Was he right? Had someone been following

him? Or was he just suffering from the usual spy's paranoia, spooked by Dymphna's provocative accusation? But he didn't think so – it certainly looked as if there was someone on his tail, he thought. But who would be following him? And why? Having gladly left his own world, it was troubling to discover how his other, secret world had reclaimed him again, almost immediately.

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Part Two

Claverleigh, East Sussex

London

Moscow

April–May 1964

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1.

Dean Furlan

Gabriel stood in his sitting room in the cottage taking in the subtle but unignorable changes. The cushions on his sofa were fully plumped. The fireplace was empty of ash, the logs in the log basket were stacked flush. The panes of the window that looked over the back garden gleamed with a new transparency. The hand of Laura Devine was everywhere apparent. It was the same in the kitchen and his bedroom and bathroom – order, neatness, a feeling of an absence of dust and fluff, of crumbs and smears. Fresh sheets on the bed. Aromas of astringent, perfumed bleach in the bathroom. Catfood was set out on a new pewter dish that was placed on a neatly folded newspaper. Tins and jars were militarily ranked in the larder according to size. KGB money well spent, Gabriel thought, very pleased, enjoying the feeling of being thoroughly domesticated, absurdly house-proud.

He built and lit a new fire, opened a bottle of claret, and settled down to watch the evening news on his television set, now also polished and wiped clean, looking as if fresh from the shop. He thought he would have a simple supper, some spaghetti with a tomato sauce, cheese and biscuits. Perhaps spend an hour or so revising his chapter on the Colosseum. He had found an employee there whose job was to capture and remove the monument's population of feral cats – an endless task as they bred so frequently. *Come ratti*, the man had said, disgustedly. *Veramente*. However, the thought of cats seemed, coincidentally, to encourage his own one to return. He heard the cat-flap in the kitchen door rattle and bang and, sure enough, there was the Cat suspiciously inspecting his food, ready for supper. Gabriel greeted

him; the Cat ignored him. Then he heard the phone ring in the sitting room and went to answer it.

‘Gabriel, thank God. It’s me, Parker.’

He knew instantly from the dry catch in her voice that something was wrong.

‘What is it?’

‘My mom is dead—’

‘*What?*’

‘Shot dead. I was hit, in the hand. I was lucky. I may lose a finger. But she’s dead, Gabriel. Gone—’

‘Jesus fucking Christ, Parker. What happened? How—?’ He stopped. He could hear her muffled sobs. He let her compose herself and then she told him the awful story.

The three of them – Parker, Muriel and Ernst Baumgarten – had gone to church on Sunday in Cincinnati as they always did. After the service, and after a chat with the priest, a family friend, they left and walked towards their car parked not far away.

At that moment, she said, a black Dodge Polara, driving down the street past the church, slowed and shots were fired at them from the driver’s window.

‘I was walking in front,’ Parker said. ‘They were trying to kill me. They were shooting at me. I was the target. There were four or five shots fired – from an automatic. A round hit my hand, went straight on through and caught my mom in the throat. My dad was unhurt. I had no weapon on me but was somehow alert enough to get the licence plate. My mom died on the spot. There was nothing we could do.’

‘My God! How appalling. How terrible.’

‘We traced the car. A rental. False name. But the man who hired it looks very much like Dean Furlan. That face with the pockmarks – people notice. The description we have fits.’

‘I thought Furlan was in prison.’

‘He absconded five days ago. And he came right after me.’

Gabriel fell silent.

‘Because of what happened in Berlin,’ he said.

‘Yeah. Must be.’

Gabriel thought back, grimly. Remembering that day in Berlin in June and how he had shot and killed Dean Furlan’s brother, Matt, as he reached

for his automatic. Matt Furlan – the sniper with his sights trained on President Kennedy on the podium in front of the Schöneberg town hall. Parker had insisted on taking responsibility for the kill. She was the seasoned CIA agent, his handler. Better her than Gabriel, the part-timer, she had said. She'd even been presented with a medal for her bravery. It would make everything easier, she had claimed, above board, if she took responsibility. Killing people was part of her job, not Gabriel's. And now her mother was dead.

Gabriel felt sick, remembering his short time with Muriel Baumgarten and her shrewd, tolerant manner. She'd known exactly what he and Parker were up to, he was sure.

'I'm so sorry, Parker—'

'No, listen up, Gabriel. We put out an APB on Furlan, immediately.'

'What's that?'

'An All-Points Bulletin. Railway, airports, ports, border controls. His photo was circulated. Every cop and agent in the country was looking for him.'

'Well, you'll catch the bastard.'

'Except a man responding to Furlan's description was spotted at Toronto airport boarding a plane for Paris, France. The day after the killing.'

'So he's left the country.'

'Yes – seems to. Two days ago. But …'

'But what?'

'I think he's coming for you, Gabriel. I really do. I think he knows you were the one who killed his brother.'

Gabriel did not sleep well that night – and he deliberately resisted using one of his sleeping pills. At dawn he left his bed, dressed and went down to his clean kitchen to make himself some breakfast – tea, toast and marmalade – and think.

Parker had told him that Furlan had very convincingly feigned a heart attack in prison and had been taken to a nearby hospital. He crept out in the night and must have made his way to Cincinnati and watched the Baumgarten house, saw the family leave for church.

'How did he know where you lived?' Gabriel had asked. 'How did he know where your family home was? Or the fact that you were there

convalescing? The whole thing stinks. How did he get to Toronto? I smell Frank Sartorius and his CIA colleagues.'

'That's why I think he's coming for you. I asked myself the same questions. Frank Sartorius knows absolutely that it was you who killed Matt Furlan, not me. And it was his idea to put me up for the medal.'

'Maybe Furlan thinks we both shot Matt,' Gabriel said.

'Yeah, maybe. I was in the room, after all,' Parker agreed. 'Guilt by association, I suppose.'

Gabriel remembered Frank Sartorius well. He had been CIA head of station when Gabriel was in Guatemala City – and then he turned up in Berlin. Sartorius always claimed not to know Furlan but Furlan had also been in Guatemala City and Berlin as well. The two of them hand in glove, Gabriel thought. And now the sworn Mafia revenge set ruthlessly in action …

He sipped at his tea, watching the light grow as the sun rose above the oak wood beyond his garden hedge. A narrow ray came through the kitchen window, dazzling him. He moved to another chair, thinking that he should tell Faith. A good decision. She could maybe have a watch placed on ports and airports and some description or a photograph of Furlan circulated. Paris wasn't far away. Maybe he was already in England …

Gabriel stood up, and threw away the rest of his toast, suddenly not hungry. He would be harder to find than Parker, he reasoned, but if Furlan was being helped by the disaffected elements in the CIA then there would be ways and means of tracking him down through official channels. Rose Cottage wasn't exactly a secret. Maybe the studio would be safer … But then he remembered the double 'coincidence' of Ishbel Dunbar bumping into him in the Goat and Crow. The covert surveillance was ubiquitous, he had learnt, all too alarmingly, considering his own suspicions as he left the Westmacott flat just the other night. Look at the Russians – they always seemed to know where he was.

At nine o'clock he put in one of his Mr Simpson calls and asked to speak to his wife. Faith came on the line, formal and cool. He told her about the drive-by shooting in Cincinnati – the attempted murder of Parker Baumgarten and the tragic death of her mother. Dean Furlan was the prime suspect and he had fled to Europe.

'I'm a hundred per cent sure he's coming after me.'

‘But nobody knows you were involved in that incident with his brother, surely,’ Faith said, patiently.

‘People in the CIA know.’

She was silent for a while. After Berlin, Gabriel’s report on the killing of Matt Furlan and his role in an attempted assassination of President Kennedy had been unsparing in its accusations of CIA collusion with the Mafia and in particular the Furlan brothers.

‘I can offer you one of our coops, if you like,’ she said, after a few more silent moments.

‘Coops’ were the Institute’s safe houses. He had been in a coop once before and didn’t fancy a protracted stay. Suppose he hid for two weeks – when he came home Furlan might still be waiting.

‘Let me think about it,’ he said.

‘I’ll put out a general alert about Furlan, also.’

‘Thank you.’ He paused. ‘I really enjoyed the other night, by the way,’ he said. ‘It was wonderful.’

‘Yes, I was sorry to miss that party,’ she said, and he could hear the irritation in her voice. Bad procedure. She hung up.

Gabriel weighed up his options. Maybe the safe house was sensible. Furlan was on the run, after all, a man on the ‘Most Wanted’ list – he couldn’t hang around for ever waiting for Gabriel to show up.

Then he suddenly decided on another course of action. No, he wouldn’t accept Faith’s offer – and he wouldn’t run and hide. He would take matters into his own hands. If Furlan was in Paris then he could be in Claverleigh imminently. Gabriel instinctively felt better knowing that he would have to look after himself, though in order to do that he realized he needed to be armed. He needed a weapon. He needed a gun. And he was fairly sure where one could be procured.

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2.

The Beretta 686 Silver Pigeon OU 28-gauge

Royston Mitchell-Moore offered Gabriel a sherry. It was ten o'clock in the morning but Gabriel, having been up for hours, thought that was an excellent idea. They were sitting in Royston's rather austere drawing room. There were two navy-blue armchairs and a matching velveteen sofa, set on a checkerboard carpet facing the fireplace, above which was the room's sole painting – a three-masted tea clipper in full sail on a choppy, foam-flecked ocean. There was also a grandfather clock and a glass-fronted cabinet full of delicate ceramic bowls that Royston's late wife had collected. Through the wide windows there was a good view of the lane.

They both smoked as they sipped at their sherries. Royston was wearing an olive-green tweed jacket and cherry-red corduroy trousers, a cream shirt and tie; his thick grey hair was scraped back from his forehead with a powerful and pungent Macassar oil.

'Have you seen anything of Edgar?' Royston asked.

Edgar was his name for the Cat. When Gabriel was away the Cat sought nourishment at Royston's house – and any number of other houses in the village, Gabriel supposed. How many names did the Cat have?

'Yes, he's taken up residence with me again, recently,' Gabriel said. 'Actually, that's exactly why I've popped round. Do you see any foxes in your garden?'

'No. I think I'm too far from the wood.'

'I do,' Gabriel said. 'And I saw the Cat – Edgar – fight one off. Then yesterday I saw three foxes and I suddenly realized – Edgar can fight off one fox but not three. I thought I should take a potshot at them the next time I see them – scare them off.'

‘Good idea.’

‘Do you have a shotgun I could borrow? Something light – I don’t want to blow them to smithereens.’

‘I have the perfect solution,’ Royston said, rising to his feet. ‘Follow me, Gabriel.’

Royston led Gabriel down a passageway to a small room off his study. There was a tall walnut cupboard that he unlocked to reveal six shotguns and two rifles, gleaming, oiled, set on their mounts. He reached in and selected one and held it out to Gabriel, balancing it delicately on his fingertips.

‘It’s a Beretta, 686 Silver Pigeon, so called, 28-bore – or gauge, as our American cousins would have it. A field gun. You wouldn’t shoot driven grouse with this, for example. No, something you’d take on a country walk – pot a hare, a pigeon, a squirrel.’ He handed it to Gabriel. ‘Perfect for your nasty foxes.’

Gabriel held the gun, carefully, noting that the twin barrels were set on top of each other, not side by side.

‘Ideal,’ he said, feeling a form of strange potency infect him. The effect of holding a lethal weapon. This was what he needed to answer the threat of Dean Furlan.

‘It’s the sort of gun you’d give a youngster,’ Royston said, breezily. ‘Get him used to game shooting before he graduates to a 12-bore.’

Royston gave Gabriel a quick lesson, showing him how to break the gun, how its safety catch worked, how to operate a small switch depending on which barrel, top or bottom, you wanted to fire first.

‘Pull the trigger – one barrel fires. Pull again and the other fires. Bang-bang.’

Royston opened a drawer in the cupboard beneath the ranked guns.

‘How many cartridges do you want?’

‘Two will be fine.’

‘I’ll give you four. You might miss the first time.’

He rummaged in a box and handed Gabriel four slim, blood-orange cartridges.

‘Both these barrels are full-choke, by the way,’ Royston said.

‘What does that mean?’

‘You get a tighter spread of the shot-string. You have to be more precise in your aiming.’

‘I see.’

‘The tighter pattern is more effective. No fox will survive a proper hit.’ He smiled. ‘Think of it as a bullet, not a cartridge. That’s what I do.’

Gabriel thanked Royston, fulsomely. They went back to the front door.

‘You off on your travels again, Gabriel?’ Royston asked.

‘Yes, in a couple of weeks or so. Off to Russia, believe it or not.’

‘Rather you than me, old chap,’ Royston said, and gave one of his phlegmy chuckles, the tar rattling in his lungs. It morphed into a harsh cough.

‘Anyway, good hunting,’ Royston said, punching his chest with a fist, as if to forcefully displace the bronchial mucilage. ‘Bring me back some caviar. Dirt cheap in Russia, apparently.’

‘Will do,’ Gabriel said.

They shook hands and Gabriel walked back to Rose Cottage with his shotgun and cartridges. Now he was armed it was time to initiate the rest of his plan.

‘So,’ Tom Brown said, looking around, ‘this lane is the only access to your property.’

‘Yes,’ Gabriel said, pointing. ‘Claverleigh village that way – Offham village the other way.’

Brown was wearing a creased, rather dirty-looking black raincoat and had a tweed cap on his head. He took off his spectacles and polished them with his handkerchief. Spectacleless he suddenly looked years younger, Gabriel thought. Then he replaced them and the kindly-schoolmaster look was restored.

‘And you just want to be warned of a vehicle coming down this road, one way or the other,’ Brown confirmed.

‘Exactly. From Offham or from Claverleigh.’

‘Well, it’s easily done but it’s not very scientific. Any and every vehicle passing will set off the alarm.’

‘That doesn’t matter.’

‘Is this an exercise for the Institute?’ he asked.

‘In a manner of speaking,’ Gabriel said, vaguely. ‘It’s Institute business – but I’m controlling it. Something of an experiment. I’ll pay any costs and then claim them back.’

That information seemed to make Brown relax.

‘Right. Give me a couple of hours to access the materials – I know a builders’ merchant that should have exactly what I need – and I’ll be back.’

He climbed into his car – a sand-coloured Morris Minor – gave a wave through the open window and drove off.

It had been an inspired decision to consult Tom Brown, Gabriel thought, the man who had first initiated him into the curious world of ‘artifice’, as the term had it. Brown was part of MI5 and worked for the Institute when required – the skilled expert in all the mayhem and know-how, the nuts and bolts of spying and being spied on. Brown had taught Gabriel the methods of evading surveillance, how to tell if you were being followed, how to shake off the followers. Gabriel had telephoned the number that Brown had given him and found him on his day off. He lived in Guildford, and seemed perfectly happy to be summoned to Claverleigh.

Gabriel walked back to the cottage and inspected his alterations to its one outbuilding – a brick woodshed and garage for his motorbike. He had parked the motorbike around the back of the cottage, had reconfigured his stack of logs and set up a makeshift camp bed inside – a foam-rubber mattress with a pillow, a couple of blankets – and had laid in some basic supplies: a bottle of water and some biscuits.

His reasoning was that Furlan would not attempt to try to confront and kill him during the day. Claverleigh was alien territory to him, neighbours were close by and the village was always busy. Gabriel reckoned – was convinced – that Furlan would stake out the cottage and come at the dead of night. He, meanwhile, would be waiting in the woodshed. Furlan would assume he was in the house – but what he needed was some kind of warning, hence the need for Tom Brown’s expertise.

Gabriel felt oddly calm now that his plans were under way. What more could Faith have done for him apart from her offer of temporary security in one of the Institute’s safe houses? She couldn’t provide an armed guard around the clock. No, it was the right move on his part – it was best that he took full responsibility for his own survival.

Tom Brown was back in the early afternoon. The device he proposed was simple. He was going to stretch a pneumatic road-tube across the lane on the Claverleigh side and another, fifty yards away, on the Offham side. When a car or a van or a tractor drove across the thin tube the pressure change would activate a small battery with a light pulse. It was a standard method of quantifying traffic flow on roads and streets, Brown told him, but

it was easily adapted for an alarm. Gabriel watched him hammer in the anchor pins and tightly secure the tubes across the lane. He then ran the tubes back into the woodshed and connected the ends to his two small battery devices.

‘That’s the one coming from Claverleigh and that one’s coming from Offham.’ He pointed them out.

‘Right. Understood.’

‘If you’ve got the time, Mr Dax, I could rig up a little buzzer or a bell for you.’

‘No need. I’ll be wide awake.’

‘No, with respect, you won’t, not at three o’clock in the morning. I’ll set up a little bell that will go off. It’ll wake you up if you’re dozing. You’ll thank me for this. I came prepared.’

He went off to his car to fetch the components.

When all was established they tested the basic function of the road alarm-tube. Brown stamped on the Claverleigh tube. Gabriel, in the woodshed, saw the light on the battery flash and there was a brief trill on the bell. Brown stamped on the Offham tube and the bell duly rang. Gabriel told Brown that all was working perfectly.

Brown looked thoughtful as he stood by his car, ready to leave.

‘This set-up could have all sorts of practical uses in our line of business, Mr Dax, it strikes me. A very, you know, inconspicuous and relatively cheap warning device. Imagine if you were searching a house, a building, and you wanted to be aware if the owner or occupier was returning. Ding-a-ling. Time to leave.’

‘Well, I’m glad to have been of some help in the artifice world.’

‘We’ll call it the Dax Device, in your honour.’ He laughed. ‘No, seriously.’ They shook hands. ‘I’ll send you the invoice in the next few days.’

‘Great,’ Gabriel said. The KGB could pay.

After his supper, when it grew properly dark, Gabriel switched off all but one light in the cottage, locked the back and front doors and took up his post in the woodshed. He was warmly wrapped up in his tweed overcoat and scarf and had a bottle of whisky with him for night-time sustenance. He loaded the Beretta with two cartridges, switched off the woodshed’s ceiling light and lay down on his rubber mattress-bed to wait.

There was little enough traffic on the lane during the day and even less at night. He dozed off and was awakened by the alarm bell – which always rang twice, he realized, as the car or the van encountered the two pneumatic tubes on its journey up or down the lane. Gabriel counted five cars – ten rings – before midnight and then there was absolute silence until the farm machinery started trundling by at dawn.

Gabriel felt a bit seedy. He had drunk half a bottle of whisky, smoked most of a pack of Gitanes and had barely slept, part of his mind staying relentlessly active, anticipating a bell-ring. He thought he might move an armchair into the woodshed. He could bring a book and read by the light of a torch to help the slow passage of time pass a little faster. What if Furlan never showed up? How many nights could he keep this watchful lookout going? he wondered. It struck him that Furlan might head straight back to hide in his Mafia heartland, wherever that was, rather than risk a side trip to England to wreak revenge on his brother's killer. Gabriel thought it was best to remain on guard, all the same. He'd give it a week and see how he coped. He went back into the cottage, had a long, hot bath, shaved and cooked himself some bacon and eggs.

He tried to work during the day, writing up his chapter on Big Ben for *On the Beaten Path*. He had interviewed the team responsible for ensuring the huge clock maintained proper timekeeping and preserved the tonal quality of the famous chimes. But, even as he typed, he still felt on maximum alert, every car passing in the lane having him swiftly on his feet, going to the window that overlooked the gravelled turning circle at the front of the cottage, checking that the Beretta was close at hand.

He did move a small armchair into the woodshed in the afternoon. He was a bit worried about illumination in case any light escaped and rendered the woodshed conspicuous. Maybe reading with a torch was not such a good idea either, he thought. He made himself some ham sandwiches and uncorked a bottle of red wine – he might as well make his vigil as comfortable as possible – perhaps some form of portable heater would be an asset, also, he thought, as the nights were distinctly chilly, enclosed as he was by the woodshed's cold brickwork and the concrete floor.

He nodded off in the armchair, a blanket over his knees, but it was better sitting than lying, he decided. He drank a couple of glasses of wine and ate his sandwiches as midnight approached. Seven cars had passed and if the

night before was any guide the traffic would subside now until the world and its work began early in the morning.

Laura Devine came to do her now-usual clean of the cottage – it was a Tuesday – and she noticed the missing armchair. Gabriel said the springs had collapsed in the seat and he needed to have it repaired or buy a new one. He took himself off to Claverleigh's pub, the Duke of Marlborough, for lunch to ensure he was out from under Laura's feet, ordering a couple of pork pies and a pint of cider. As he sat there, eating and drinking, he wondered if he was being foolish in the elaborate precautions he was taking. But then he reminded himself that Muriel Baumgarten had been shot dead, and her daughter wounded. Dean Furlan had tried to kill Parker. So why wouldn't he try to kill me? Gabriel reasoned … Better safe than sorry, he thought.

As the fast-fading light of evening drew in he ran an extension cable out of the house from a side window and into the woodshed and plugged in a two-bar electric heater. That would make a huge difference, he thought, as far as comfort was concerned. He made extra sandwiches – ham and tomato, and cheese and pickle – and settled down for another night of tense anticipation. He drank a bottle of red wine and ate all the sandwiches. He fell into a tipsy sleep, awakened from time to time by the short trill of the bell as a vehicle passed up or down the lane. Morning dawned and he woke stiff and cramped and, despite the interrupted sleep he'd managed to have, he felt dog-tired.

It was now Wednesday. He went into Claverleigh and shopped. He bought a large cook's knife in the ironmonger's thinking that it was a useful weapon to have in the house. To attack whom? he then wondered. He had a pint of beer and a packet of crisps in the pub. In the afternoon he did some minor domestic repairs – he strengthened the hinges on a cupboard door that was askew; he touched up some bad scuffs on skirting boards with a pot of white paint; he spent a fruitless hour trying to repair a table lamp that had the annoying habit of flickering and going out whenever anyone walked by it.

Then, after his period of good housekeeping, he tried to work at his chapter on the Rock of Gibraltar (he had interviewed the so-called 'Keeper of the Apes' – the soldier responsible for the well-being of the couple of hundred Barbary macaques that roamed the rock) but he found his mind was constantly wandering as he recalled his various encounters with Dean

Furlan in Guatemala City and Berlin, now speculating that perhaps the person following him from the Westmacott home might have been Furlan or one of his associates. It seemed unlikely – but if not Furlan, then who?

At around 8 p.m. he installed himself in the woodshed, switched on the electric heater and opened his bottle of wine. Roast beef sandwiches were on the menu. He positioned the Beretta by the door and settled down in his armchair, letting his thoughts wander randomly about his brain, thinking about his book and the completed chapters, recalling his night in the Waldorf with Faith, running back through the dire evening at the Westmacotts'. What had prompted Dymphna to accuse him of being a spy? It had been most unsettling.

And then the bell rang twice. He could see from the sequence of the flashing lights on the two batteries that it was a vehicle coming up the lane towards Claverleigh from Offham. Then about two minutes later it rang twice again, indicating a car travelling in the opposite direction. Then another two minutes or so later it rang just once on the Offham side. To Gabriel this implied that the same car had driven past the cottage twice, had turned, driven back over the Offham pneumatic tube and stopped, and parked.

He felt his heartbeat accelerate and his mouth dry, a kind of bilious anticipation in his throat. He threw off the blanket from his knees, picked up the Beretta and stood at the door, trying to breathe as shallowly as possible.

He heard footsteps crunch quietly across the gravel of the turning circle in front of the cottage. Then silence. Very carefully he opened the door an inch or so and peered out. Nothing. The house was dark apart from the one light glowing through a deliberate gap in the curtains in his sitting room. Then he heard a tinkle of glass breaking. Furlan – it must be Furlan, surely, not some hired hitman – had broken a window in the kitchen, he thought, to gain entry to the house. Gabriel picked up the Beretta and quickly walked down the grass verge by the side of the woodshed and waited. He saw the light go on in his bedroom upstairs. Now he had to move – fast. He was at the front door in a second and unlocked it, stepping into the hall. By now Furlan would be confident that the house was empty. Gabriel could hear footsteps coming from above as Furlan quickly searched the other rooms on the upper floor. Where to confront him? In the hall, he thought, as he came

down to the foot of the stairs, frustrated, no doubt, to have found that Gabriel was absent.

Gabriel remained absolutely still, in the shadows of the hall. He would have the advantage of surprise, he knew – a vital advantage. He stood in the darkness, one hand poised by the light switch, the other holding the Beretta, finger on the trigger. He was unbelievably tense; he felt he might suffer a cardiac arrest so frantic was his heartbeat.

He saw a dark figure coming slowly down the stairs.

Gabriel switched on the light.

Dean Furlan stood there, obviously shocked, suitably dressed in black – black military-style safari jacket, black trousers. Gabriel had both hands on the Beretta now, levelled at Furlan.

‘My God, Gabriel Dax, am I glad to see you.’ Furlan smiled, showing his even, perfect teeth. He looked tanned and the hall light shining above his head picked out the blemished skin of his face in noticeable relief.

‘Just stay exactly where you are,’ Gabriel said, as calmly as he could manage. ‘Get down on your knees, place your hands on the floor.’

Furlan didn’t obey his instructions.

‘Gabriel, listen to me, this is not what it seems—’

‘Please get down on your knees, place your hands on the floor.’

Furlan still ignored him and took a step forward.

‘I need your help, Gabriel, that’s why I came looking for you.’

‘Why you broke into my house.’

‘I was going to leave you a note. I assumed you were away. I don’t trust telephones any more.’

‘Forget it, Furlan—’

‘I need your help,’ Furlan repeated. ‘I have money for you. A ton of money, seriously. I’ll show you.’

He reached into his jacket.

Gabriel shot him – once, twice – very quickly. Just as he had shot his brother. Furlan dropped instantly to the ground without uttering the merest noise.

Gabriel shuddered, his ears resounding from the detonations, and put the gun down. He knew Furlan was dead – the range had been twelve feet, fifteen, the full-choke barrels concentrating the pellet spread. He walked over to Furlan’s body. Two hits in the chest, high up, and blood was already welling, two wet, red beermats soaking the torn, thick cotton of his jacket

on his chest. Fucking hell, Gabriel thought, but he didn't ignore a sudden roil of harsh, atavistic exhilaration that was coursing through him. I got you, you evil bastard. I outsmarted you. Take one for Muriel Baumgarten.

He exhaled and looked around, and walked a few paces, noticing that his legs were trembling. What now? He went and stood over Furlan again, looking down at the handsome face with its shallow, dimpled pockmarks and the grey, carefully combed hair. Gabriel flipped back Furlan's jacket and took the automatic pistol out of its shoulder holster. Neat, chunky. It looked like a Colt, a Pocket Hammerless, he thought. How come he knew so much about guns these days? he wondered. Yes, of course Furlan was going to try and shoot him before he himself was shot. And that promise of money – 'A ton of money' – was quite a good trick, actually, it would tend to make one pause, crucially. He would remember it. He pocketed the gun.

Furlan was lying on a new Persian-style rug that Gabriel had bought and positioned at the foot of the stairs on the stone flags of his hallway. Blood was beginning to well and run out of the wounds on Furlan's chest. Soon the rug would be stained. Bizarrely, he remembered that Laura Devine was due again on Friday to continue her *femme de ménage* duties. Furlan would have to be long gone before then, Gabriel thought, a sick smile on his face. But how? Of course, he could always phone Laura and postpone her visit. Still, there was the matter of the body and its disposal. What had he planned to do? he asked himself. Arrest Furlan, tie him up, call the police or the Institute? He hadn't thought it through. But now there was real incentive. He had shot and killed this man who was lying at the foot of the stairs in the front hall of his house. He didn't want the Institute involved, he knew. No, he had to keep on doing this himself. He looked at his watch – ten past midnight. He strode into his sitting room and picked up the receiver of his telephone.

He looked up the number in his diary and dialled. *Ring-ring*, *ring-ring*. It kept ringing. Please answer, Gabriel beseeched, please.

The phone was picked up.

'This is well out of order, Stella! I warned you—'

'Tyrone – it's Gabriel. Gabriel Dax.'

'Gabe? What? What's going on?'

'How would you like to earn a thousand pounds?'

‘Fuck me,’ Tyrone Rogan said in a quiet, shocked voice, looking down at Dean Furlan’s body. ‘What happened, Gabe?’

‘He came here to kill me but I killed him first.’

‘That’s the bloke from Berlin, the one you had me follow.’

Gabriel had momentarily forgotten that Tyrone had been close on Furlan’s trail for a few days in Berlin last year. Of course.

‘It’s a complicated story, Tyrone. He’s a Mafia killer. He’s mixed up in the assassination of President Kennedy. The world will not miss him.’

Tyrone turned and looked at Gabriel, his face a parody of total incomprehension.

‘You, Gabriel Dax, shot this guy dead?’

‘I had to. He would have killed me. Look.’

He took the Colt out of his pocket and showed it to Tyrone.

‘That’s his gun.’ He put it back in his pocket.

‘Jesus. But you’re a writer, mate. You write travel books. I don’t get it.’

‘I’ll tell you the whole story but not now. We have to get rid of the body.’

‘That’s the easy part. Where’s the thousand?’

‘I can give you four hundred now and the rest later.’

Gabriel went to his desk, took out the Bulgakov novella from the drawer, counted out forty ten-pound notes and handed them over. He could see Tyrone was convinced. He folded up the notes and stuffed them in his jeans pocket.

‘Right. We’re in business,’ Tyrone said, suddenly seeming very capable, Gabriel thought. ‘When I drove in I saw a car parked just down from you, on the verge, like, half-hidden.’

‘That would be Furlan’s car.’

‘We have to dump that as well, of course.’

‘Definitely.’

Tyrone took over.

He asked for rope. Gabriel brought him twenty feet of washing line.

‘Hold on a second,’ Gabriel said. ‘Let’s empty his pockets.’

‘Very smart idea, Gabe.’

They did so, finding about eighty pounds in cash in a wallet (handed over to Tyrone), car keys, and a US passport in the name of John Vivaldi.

Tyrone then rolled Furlan up in the Persian carpet and used the rope to truss him tightly, like a butcher barding a joint of meat with twine.

‘We need weight – a heavy weight,’ Tyrone said.

Gabriel went out into his back garden and returned with a small stone birdbath about two feet high. It was very heavy.

‘That’ll do nicely,’ Tyrone said. ‘Let’s get him out of here.’

They picked up Furlan’s bundled body and heaved it out to the driveway. Tyrone opened the boot of his Ford Escort and they shoved in Furlan’s well-wrapped corpse.

‘You follow me in his car,’ Tyrone said. ‘We’ll dump the motor at a railway station and then you can join me for the rest of the journey.’

‘Where are we going?’

‘Tyrone’s mystery tour, Gabe. You’ll see.’

Gabriel walked down the lane to find Furlan’s car – a maroon Vauxhall Cresta. He unlocked the door, climbed in, started the engine and switched on the headlights. Gabriel saw Tyrone pull out of the cottage’s driveway and he followed the Escort as they headed off through a dark and silent Claverleigh aiming for the A27. They drove for half an hour or so on near-empty roads until Tyrone turned into the British Railways station at Crawley. Gabriel parked the Cresta, locked it, and joined Tyrone in the Escort. There were a dozen or so cars in the badly lit car park. No one had seen them, he was sure.

‘It’ll probably sit there for a week or so until someone notices or it gets a parking ticket,’ Tyrone said, as they drove away. ‘John Vivaldi will be put on a list of undesirable clients.’

Gabriel thought of ‘John Vivaldi’ lying snug in the boot of the Escort. He looked at his watch. Nearly two o’clock.

‘Next phase,’ Tyrone said. ‘Got a ciggie on you?’

They drove on to London, smoking steadily, and turned east, motoring through the City, utterly deserted, and further on into Essex. They chatted in a desultory way with long silences in between. Gabriel asked about Lorraine and how she was getting on. Tyrone said he wished Gabriel and Lorraine had never split up – that Ken was a tosspot. Tyrone asked him what Los Angeles was like. Gabriel said it was right up Tyrone’s street. Neither of them mentioned the corpse in the boot. As they left the eastern outskirts of London, Gabriel noticed the signs for Dagenham and Rainham – they were heading deep into Essex – and then at Purfleet they turned off the main road and made for the village of South Ockendon. It was nearly four o’clock in the morning, by now. Gabriel felt fully alert, no sensation of tiredness, not a single yawn. They drove down a narrow, unpaved lane and

came to a stop in front of a large notice that read, ‘DANGER! DEEP WATER!’

Tyrone pulled up. They stepped out of the car and stretched, eased their bodies after the long drive.

‘What is this place?’ Gabriel asked.

‘Old gravel pit,’ Tyrone said, ‘now flooded.’ He opened the boot and handed Gabriel the birdbath. He hauled Furlan’s carpeted body out of the car.

‘Go down that path but be careful. There’s a steep bank above the water.’

Gabriel advanced cautiously and presently came to a large expanse of still water, approximately the size of two football pitches. The bank was about ten feet above the water surface. He placed the birdbath on the ground and went back to help Tyrone who was now dragging Furlan’s body behind him. They positioned the body on the edge of the bank and Tyrone undid some of the washing line and lashed it tightly to the birdbath.

‘How do you know about this place?’ Gabriel said.

‘I dump stuff in it.’

‘What sort of stuff?’

‘Stuff I don’t need. Stuff I don’t want in my flat.’

Gabriel knew about Tyrone’s part-time job as a burglar – a handy adjunct to his profession as locksmith.

‘You wouldn’t believe the rubbish in this lake,’ Tyrone said. ‘All the villains in the East End use it. Good few bodies as well, I’d wager. This bloke’ll have company. Shall we give him the old heave-ho?’

With a foot Tyrone rolled Furlan’s rug-wrapped body to the bank’s edge.

‘You do the honours, squire,’ he said looking at Gabriel.

Gabriel leant forward and pushed. Furlan and his birdbath dead weight dropped swiftly into the water with a splash and a loud gurgle. Gabriel watched the ripples spread across the turbid, steely surface of the flooded pit. An owl hooted somewhere – symbolically, Gabriel thought – as he and Tyrone stood in silence for a few seconds. There was a faint, chill breeze and some sort of diffused, tarnished moonshine lit the scene. It was eerie and malevolent standing there in the dead of night watching the ripples die away and the glassy stillness of the water’s surface returning to its normal placidity – or was it simply the nature of what they had just done that was adding to the atmosphere? he wondered.

‘Good riddance,’ he said, breaking the silence.

‘Yeah. That’s the spirit.’

They walked back to the car, not speaking. Tyrone did a three-point turn and they headed back to South Ockendon.

‘I can’t thank you enough, Tyrone,’ Gabriel said. ‘I’ll never forget what you’ve done for me. Never.’

‘Easiest bag I’ve ever earned.’

‘Bag?’

‘A grand. Bag-of-sand. Sand, grand. Yeah?’

‘Oh. Rhyming slang. I get it now.’

‘Well done, Gabe.’

They drove on towards London. A pearly dawn light was just beginning to emerge, filtered by the dense clouds in the sky. A few more vehicles, mainly lorries, were now motoring along the main road. The world was beginning to stir. Gabriel suddenly sensed a monstrous, unearthly tiredness invade him. He felt weak, as if he were boneless, his body a bag of jelly.

‘What do we do now, sir?’ Tyrone asked.

‘Drop me at a Tube station. I’ll catch the first train back to Lewes from Victoria. You can go home and get some sleep. I’ll be up in London in the next few days with the rest of the money. I’ll give you a call.’

Tyrone duly pulled into the side of the road by Aldgate Tube station. They both stepped out of the car. Gabriel shook Tyrone’s hand warmly and Tyrone patted him on the shoulder.

‘You’ve got to tell me what this is all about one day, Gabe. We’ll save it for later.’

‘Of course. Thanks again, Tyrone. I’m happily, enormously in your debt.’ He paused. ‘Not a word to anyone, of course, that’s understood. A massive secret.’

They smiled at each other.

‘Goes without saying, Gabe. Partners in crime, eh?’ Tyrone said and laughed.

Gabriel made a rueful face, turned and walked into the Tube station. He badly needed to pee.

Gabriel stood in his hall looking at the flagstones where the Persian rug had been. No sign of any bloodstains. He wandered into the kitchen and made himself a cup of tea, adding a splash of whisky for good measure. His head was reeling, now he was back at home, contemplating what had occurred in

the last few hours. It was almost nine o'clock, full, bright daylight outside – he went up to his bedroom, pulled the curtains together and set his alarm for 4 p.m. He needed a few hours of unconsciousness, knowing he would sleep – no pill necessary – and as he began to drift off the unwelcome thought came to him that Dean Furlan was now the third man he had shot and killed. How had this happened to him? What dark, grim swerve had his life taken?

The next day, Gabriel took stock. He burnt Furlan's 'John Vivaldi' passport and locked the Colt Hammerless in a drawer of his desk. It had a full clip of ammunition – he had checked. He returned the woodshed to its former state, re-parked his motorbike inside and placed the armchair back in the sitting room.

After lunch he went for a long walk on the Downs, hoping to calm himself and plot a future course of action.

It was a breezy, sunny day with swift clouds above and an unusual warm wind from the south. What was it about the Downs, he asked himself, this particular part of south-east England? Sometimes he was reminded of a type of Scottish landscape – substantial hills, grassy, largely bare of trees and vegetation – somehow transposed here by the coast. Was it the very soft roll of their contours that beguiled? Or was it the presence of the Channel nearby, often visible from the chalk pathways at the higher reaches, that lent a different clarity to the light, an expansiveness of horizons that more landlocked hills wouldn't possess? Whatever it was, he relished the Downs' proximity to his Claverleigh life, glad he'd been drawn to this corner of the world.

He stood on a crest of a hill on the escarpment feeling the stiff breeze wash over him, stirring his hair, tugging at his coat and scarf, vainly hoping it would waft his concerns away. The Channel was visible in the distance, its silver-foil sparkle bright in the sun that shone between the high battlements of big, hurrying clouds. John Hillcrest, Matt Furlan and now Dean Furlan – the three men he had shot and killed. He felt a sob build in his throat – a sob of self-pity and a surging burden of remorse that he did not welcome – and spat on the grass at his feet as though to expunge it. No, he said to himself, if he hadn't killed these men then they would have without any doubt killed him and thought nothing of it. He felt no guilt – more a kind of anger that he had been placed in a situation where the only

outcome was kill or be killed. How had this happened to him? He urged himself to relax, to stop this torment of self-rebuke and pointless analysis. One could not undo the past – but one might shape the future, he told himself.

He turned back and found the chalk path that would lead him home to Claverleigh. Perhaps it would be a good idea, he thought, to go to Russia as soon as was feasible and put everything behind him for a while. Paradoxically, the thought of travel raised his spirits – although God alone knew what would be waiting for him in Moscow.

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3.

Intourist

Gabriel went to the Russian consulate at 5 Kensington Palace Gardens, filled in the form that was required to apply for a visa and handed over three passport photos and his passport. He was told to return in a week. Once his application had been processed the visa would be stamped and authorized on a unique page of his passport. He had booked a seven-day Intourist tour for Moscow in early May – he had no plans to travel more widely and thought, surely, seven days would be sufficient for whatever Kit Caldwell wanted him to do. In any event, if necessary, so he had read in his guidebook, he could apply for an extension when he was in Russia and a transit visa if he wished to move around. The only stipulation was that having arrived in Moscow, that was where he should exit the country from, as well.

He was glad to be back in London and at Ruskin Studios as he found that Rose Cottage was now filled with toxic memories of Dean Furlan and his sudden violent death. Every time he crossed the hall he remembered the moment of their fatal confrontation and the sound of the shotgun firing, the double flat detonations. *Blam-blam.* It made him uncomfortable. Laura Devine had asked him what had happened to the ‘lovely rug’ in the hall – he told her he’d spilt a pot of coffee on it and had thrown it out. He also lied to Royston when he returned the Beretta, thanking him for the loan of the gun, and claiming that he’d fired at a pair of foxes in his garden and had missed them but given them a fright. Royston had offered him the use of the Beretta any time he wanted.

He had called Levitin to let him know the dates of the Russian trip. They arranged to meet in Dovehouse Gardens as usual. He was early, but Levitin

was earlier, smoking a *papirosa* and wearing sunglasses that he did not initially remove. Gabriel thought this was a little odd, not to say unfriendly.

‘There will be no problem with visa,’ Levitin said. ‘What hotel did they give you?’

‘The, ah, Metropol.’

‘Good choice. This is the best hotel in Moscow, in my opinion. First class. Many of the rooms have their own bathroom.’

‘Great.’

‘You will be met by Intourist guide. He will show you around, if you like. He is of course working for us.’

‘I understand.’

‘You have the drawing?’

‘Yes, I’m preparing it.’

‘Give it to the Intourist guide.’

‘I think I have to deliver it to Caldwell, in fact.’

‘OK. Whatever you wish.’ Levitin reflected for a moment and smiled, a little smugly, Gabriel thought. ‘We are lucky with you English.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean you who choose to work with us. Burgess, Maclean, Caldwell, Blake, Philby and now the new one.’

‘Who’s the new one?’

‘Ah,’ he seemed suddenly a bit confused. ‘Well, you, of course. You, Dax.’

Gabriel considered the litany of English traitors, the double agents. He resented being included in their number. No mention of Angus Fairford, he noticed. Still, Caldwell and Dax were playing a longer, cleverer game. Or so he hoped.

‘I’m hardly *new*,’ Gabriel said. ‘It’s been three years—’

‘For me you are new, that’s what I mean.’

Gabriel was going to ask for further explanation – how could he be ‘new’ after all this time? – but Levitin suddenly took off his sunglasses to reveal a large swollen yellow stye on his right eyelid.

He pointed at it.

‘Forgive me. This is making me insane. Itching, itching. Ten days now.’

‘We call it a stye,’ Gabriel said. ‘Nasty one.’

‘In Russian we call it “*yachmen*” – this means barley because it looks like big barley grain on your eye.’

‘Stye is from old English. It means a rising, a swelling.’

‘I thought it was for pigs. Sty.’

Gabriel spelt the word.

‘It has an “e” on the end.’

‘So I can say, “I have stye on my eye.”’ He chuckled and repeated the refrain.

‘Yes, everyone will feel sorry for you.’

‘Thank you for the English lesson, Gabriel. May I call you Gabriel?’

‘Yes, please do.’

‘And I am Dmitri.’

He smiled and replaced his sunglasses. Gabriel smiled back – yet another Russian friend. This couldn’t go on much longer, he told himself. It has to come to a safe conclusion. Maybe, he thought, Moscow and Caldwell will add the full stop.

‘May I ask you one question?’ Levitin said.

‘Of course.’

‘Do you know this person, Faith Green?’

‘Yes, she’s my …’ he paused. ‘She’s my boss, I suppose you could say.’

‘Is she important?’

‘I don’t know. She has a very specific job. She looks for traitors. MI6, MI5, Foreign Office, army, navy, air force. Why do you ask?’

‘No reason.’ He stood up. ‘I will go now. Good luck in Moscow.’

Levitin duly left and Gabriel stayed on in the small park and smoked another cigarette. Something Levitin had said was troubling him, strangely – then all that conversation about his stye had been distracting. And why that question about Faith? He couldn’t concentrate. Perhaps it would come back to him later. He looked around, trying to clear his mind. There was a lukewarm late-April sun, back-lighting the emerging leaves of the plane trees in the garden with an acid-green glow. The hum of traffic on the King’s Road was oddly soothing, he thought as he sat in the net of shade that the trees cast over his bench. He was back in his city again, that was something, negotiating the complexities of his new, unsought-for life, but at least Dean Furlan was no longer an issue, his individual pestilential presence no more. He wondered what the consequences would be, if any. In a very real sense Furlan had simply disappeared. The last trace of him was his rental car, the Vauxhall Cresta parked, bafflingly, at Crawley railway station, but rented under an assumed name. What would anyone make of

that? What would his family, friends and his dark colleagues in the CIA make of his sudden absence? *Plouf!* Dean Furlan was gone, deep under water in a flooded gravel pit in Essex. For ever.

Paradoxically, the thought made him feel better. One problem solved, thanks to Tyrone, though no doubt more problems would inevitably arrive up ahead. He rose to his feet, dropped his butt on the ground and stepped on it, then sauntered across the road to the Café Matisse anticipating a highly calorific, vinous lunch.

He met Tyrone in the Goat and Crow that evening. Tyrone was wearing denim, top to toe: a denim jacket, denim shirt, denim jeans, cowboy boots. His dyed blonde hair was blonder.

'I'm off to Los Angeles on holiday,' he said. 'You inspired me, Gabe.'

Off on holiday with his newly acquired bag-of-sand, Gabriel thought, but didn't begrudge him. He handed Tyrone his fat envelope stuffed with sixty ten-pound notes. Tyrone slipped it into his jacket's inside pocket.

'Much obliged,' he said.

'The obligation's all mine, Tyrone,' Gabriel said. 'You got me out of a very tight corner.'

Tyrone dropped his voice.

'You shot that geezer dead. What does it feel like?'

'Nothing. He was going to kill me. He'd come to the cottage to kill me. He was armed. You'd do exactly the same. Kill or be killed, you know.'

'Why did he want to kill you?'

'Because of something that happened back in Berlin.'

'What?'

'I can't tell you. Better that you don't know.'

'Right. Something to do with JFK, yeah?'

'Something.'

'Bloody hell.' He squinted at Gabriel with a look akin to respect, Gabriel thought. 'You're a dark horse, man, I get it.'

'Yes, you've said that before. Anyway it's over. Slate wiped clean and all that.'

Tyrone looked round.

'Here she is.'

Lorraine had entered the pub and was scanning the saloon bar – she spotted them and came over. She was wearing jeans and a small black

leather bomber jacket over a tight white T-shirt. She looked in American mode, also, Gabriel thought, like her brother. He stood and gave her a swift kiss.

Gabriel asked her what she'd like to drink.

'You've been leading my brother a merry old dance.' She turned to Tyrone. 'Where were you, the other night?'

'We had a few errands to run,' Tyrone said. 'Me and Gabe.'

'I needed someone with a car,' Gabriel said quickly. 'I've only got a motorbike, these days.'

'I'll have a Bacardi and Coke, please, Gabe,' she said, sitting down and fishing in her handbag for her cigarettes.

Gabriel stood at the bar, suddenly concerned about Tyrone's loquacity. He would inevitably drop hints to Lorraine, Gabriel thought, knowing Tyrone as he did. He could imagine the knowing innuendoes: 'Done a tricky little job for Gabriel'; 'He's a man of mystery, your Gabriel, oh yeah.' He'd have to remind Tyrone of their bond of silence – and not to flash the money around – the need for absolute secrecy.

He took the drinks back to their table.

'You still got your little studio, Gabriel?' Lorraine asked.

'Ah, yes, why?'

'Might pay you a visit. Got this mirror that will work a treat in the bathroom. You need a mirror there, don't you?'

'I just bought one, thanks.'

She was trying to inveigle her way back into his life, Gabriel realized.

'Have you settled on a date for the wedding yet?' he asked, deliberately reminding her of her status as fiancée.

'Might never happen,' she said, drawing on her cigarette and pluming a strong jet of smoke out of the side of her mouth. 'Going to be a long engagement, that's for sure. Very long. See how much we like each other first. No hurry.'

Gabriel smiled weakly at her. He had better keep his distance. He found it almost impossible to resist Lorraine.

'He seemed a really nice guy, Ken,' Gabriel said, with a smile.

Tyrone snorted, sceptically.

Lorraine ignored him and looked at Gabriel in that way she had – deadpan, her eyes wide with suggestion.

‘Yeah. But he’s not the only fish in the sea, is he, Gabriel?’ She turned to Tyrone. ‘By the way, your friend Eddie said he would meet you in the Cooper’s Arms. Six o’clock.’

‘Oh. Did he?’ He looked at his watch. ‘Right. I’d better run.’ He stood up. ‘See you around, Gabriel. Give me a bell if you need me.’

When he’d gone, Lorraine reached for Gabriel’s hand and rubbed her forefinger over his knuckles.

‘I’ve missed you, Gabriel. More than I thought. I think I’ve made a mistake with Ken – going back to him, I mean.’ She stubbed out her cigarette. ‘Shall we have another drink? Then we can pop back to your place.’

EXTRACTS FROM THE TRANSCRIPTION OF SESSION 19

DR HAAS:	No, I don’t think it’s a bad thing that you slept with Lorraine again. You shouldn’t feel any guilt. You’re under no obligation to Faith Green.
GABRIEL DAX:	I’m sort of ashamed of myself that I caved in so easily. I just couldn’t resist her. And now I think she’s going to break off her engagement. I think she thinks there’s a real possibility that she and I could be, you know, together.
DR HAAS:	Is that likely?
GABRIEL DAX:	No. Not at all. I mean, I really like Lorraine – we have fun, she makes me laugh – it’s not just about the sex. But I can’t live with her.
DR HAAS:	Maybe you should try. Maybe she should come and stay with you in your cottage for a few days.
GABRIEL DAX:	No! No, that would be a huge mistake. The thing about Lorraine is that if you give her an inch she’ll take several miles. She’s a strong personality, she likes to get her own way – and she knows how to manipulate me.
DR HAAS:	But you think Faith Green manipulates you also.
GABRIEL DAX:	She does. Yes. Indubitably.
DR HAAS:	Then maybe it’s good that you see Lorraine. It reminds you of your own free agency. Maybe you should tell Faith Green about Lorraine. It might make her think differently about you.

GABRIEL DAX: In fact, she has met Lorraine. Funnily enough, I don't think she – Faith – would care particularly, to be honest.

DR HAAS: You have to ask yourself, Gabriel – look into yourself – what is it about these two women? Why in their own way do they find it so easy to 'manipulate' you? What do they represent in your psyche – what part of your being are they controlling? What does Lorraine fulfil for you? What does Faith Green fulfil for you? If you know the answer to those questions you may see a way forward.

GABRIEL DAX: I don't know the answer, I admit. I think that sometimes you simply have to yield to the person you are – with all your faults and problems and neuroses. It's a mystery, unsolvable, it's just you, yourself –

DR HAAS: No, no. There is always a reason. That is why we psychoanalyse. We will get there in the end.

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4.

Leave-taking

Gabriel walked up Long Acre towards the offices of the Institute of Developmental Studies thinking about what Katerina Haas had said to him. As ever, it was to the point, provocative, cogent. What was the answer? He paused outside a newsagent's and brought to mind the image of Lorraine that morning when he woke, alone in the bed, pulled on his underpants and came down the stairs from the mezzanine bedroom. There she was, naked, standing in his kitchen rinsing out a mug to make herself some tea, the boiling kettle beside her on the cooker's gas hob, the ticking toaster a percussive beat to the breathy monotone of the kettle's whistle. She reached for a teaspoon – unaware he was watching – and he contemplated her pale, firm buttocks, her uptilted breasts. She was a picture of sexually charged domesticity, utterly unconcerned by her nudity, utterly natural. Was it that? Was it that Lorraine was uncomplicated in a way that Faith could never be? That Lorraine represented something unadulterated and natural. Faith being the complete opposite: labyrinthine and sophisticated. Were these the two poles that his emotions were destined to be swirled around, in his own Dantesque circle of hell?

He exhaled, frustrated, and walked on. So what? he thought – maybe he should just savour the different experiences they both offered and enjoy himself and stop all the fraught analysis and introspection. He was looking forward to seeing Faith again, that was undeniable, and yet, equally undeniable, was the fact that being with Lorraine had been a sort of liberation, a welcome catharsis after the trauma of killing and disposing of Dean Furlan. Lorraine had candidly and unknowingly offered him that release – something that wouldn't be the case with Faith, he was sure. Faith

was deeply implicated in his life – with its multifarious problems and its jeopardy – in a way that Lorraine wasn't. If he hadn't met Faith, if he hadn't agreed to work with her and the Institute, he wouldn't, for example, have had to kill three men.

Stop, he instructed himself, feeling that old bitterness rise in him again, that turgid weight of recrimination. He was going round and round in circles, arriving intellectually nowhere. Live in the present moment, let the future take care of itself. What were the lines in that poem by Falkner? He brought them to mind:

> *Men pass by and travel hopefully,*
> *To each a prize for their empty heads.*

What was the title of the poem? He couldn't remember. Anyway, it would work as a motto that he should aspire to live by.

He rang the bell of the Institute – hopefully – but knowing, balefully, that his immediate future lay beyond that door. The Lorraine moment was over – for the time being.

'So, when do you leave?' Faith asked. She was wearing a grey cardigan over a white pie-crust blouse. Not her best look, Gabriel thought – a touch schoolmarmy. Unusually, her hair was swept back and held in place by a tortoiseshell clip. It made her seem more severe; you could see the fine bone structure of her face – the smooth planes of her cheeks, the sharpness of her jawbone. He liked to file away these details in his mental Faith Green dossier. His bulging dossier.

'Eleventh of May,' he said. 'For a week.'

'That may not be enough time.'

'I can extend it once I'm there, apparently.'

She seemed to be in something of a sour mood, he thought, judging by her impersonal tone of voice, but it hadn't affected the usual pleasure he was taking at being in her company, sitting three feet across the desk from her. He thought back to their night in the Waldorf – it could almost be his private sexual fantasy, he considered, so different were the emotions present in this room. Fervent lust versus apparent indifference. It was amazing how she could switch from hot to cold, so unlike Lorraine. Maybe that was the

essential difference between them – reliable constancy versus fickle transfiguration. He should run that notion by Katerina Haas.

‘Hello. Are you there?’

‘Sorry, just thinking about something.’ Gabriel sat up in his chair. ‘You were saying.’

‘We’ll arrange for some sort of reception at the embassy at the end of your week in Moscow,’ she said. ‘You should have seen Caldwell by then. You can let Archie Pomeroy know what the plan is.’

‘Fine. By the way, I bumped into Ishbel Dunbar the other week.’

That held her attention, he noticed.

‘You should know that no one “bumps into” Ishbel Dunbar. What did she want?’

‘She wanted to know about Angus Fairford. About my meeting with him. Had he mentioned any names.’

‘I bet she did. She’s Angus Fairford’s niece.’

‘*What?*’

‘Fairford’s sister’s child.’

‘Is that significant?’

‘A grade-A Russian double agent’s niece is an important member of MI6. I would say that was an interesting congruency, wouldn’t you?’

‘My God. Are you implying—?’

‘I’m implying nothing. It’s just intriguing – to me at least – that she was concerned that names had been mentioned.’

‘Or simply curious.’

‘There’s nothing simple about Ishbel, I can tell you. I’ve no idea how she was transferred back to Section Five, by the way. I thought she’d be in Lima for years after her …’ she paused, searching for the correct word. ‘Her transgression.’

‘Anyway, I told her no names had been mentioned.’

‘Please do let me know every time she makes contact with you.’

‘I certainly shall.’

‘Have you the drawing?’

Gabriel reached into his briefcase and removed the small pen-and-ink drawing.

‘*Studio interior*, by my neighbour.’

‘Perfect. I’ll make sure you have it before you leave, duly tinkered with.’

She leant back in her chair and adjusted the tortoiseshell clip in her hair. Gabriel liked the way her breasts shifted under her grey cardigan as she did so. He really was obsessed with her, he realized for the hundredth time. There was nothing he could do about it, he reasoned: it was a matter of hormones, of the prehistoric brain or whatever it was called – the primeval male urge to mate with a chosen female. She was the one for him, not Lorraine, it was as simple and fundamental as that. He would have to tell that to Katerina Haas. Nothing to do with Oedipus and Jocasta.

'Do you fancy another drink in the Waldorf?' he asked.

'I have to get home tonight, I'm afraid.'

'Too bad.'

They looked at each other, the air full of unspoken messages passing to and fro. They each knew what the other was thinking. Was that perhaps a sign of an improvement in their ongoing relationship? Gabriel wondered. It seemed they could now communicate subtextually, by innuendo, by silences.

'You have to understand, Gabriel, the unique pressures of this job.'

'I do. But it might help to unwind from time to time. We don't meet that often.'

'And I do unwind, as you well know, when I can.'

'I appreciate that.'

They stared at each other.

'By the way,' she said. 'It seems that Dean Furlan has disappeared, according to the CIA. No trace of him absolutely anywhere. I think you're safe.'

'Good,' Gabriel said. 'Maybe I can relax.'

She stood up. The meeting was over.

'Where are you off to now?'

'I'm going to see my uncle, Aldous. Poor old fellow had a fall.'

'You can't be too careful. Especially when you're getting on a bit.'

'Exactly.'

She opened the door for him and as he passed through – no kissing – she squeezed his hand. It made him absurdly happy.

'You hit your head, I see,' Gabriel observed, sympathetically. 'How awful.' His uncle, Aldous, a large glass of whisky in hand, had a crêpe bandage wrapped around his cranium. He was wearing a tartan dressing gown over

his ivory silk pyjamas and black velvet slippers embroidered with his initials, AD, in scarlet, on the vamp.

‘Thank God it was my head. Imagine if I’d broken my arm or my leg or my hip. My head is a lump of rock. A gash, some blood, saw stars for a few minutes. I’ll be fine.’

‘You were probably concussed. You should rest for at least twenty-four hours, so I read somewhere.’

‘My darling boy, the fall took place forty-eight hours ago. If I was going to die I’d be dead.’

‘Fair enough, but do take it easy.’

Aldous explained what had happened.

He had popped out early in the morning to buy a pint of milk, having no milk in his fridge, making the very clear judgement that without imbibing several cups of tea first thing, the day ahead was simply not feasible.

‘Coming back, tripped over a fucking, badly laid paving stone, went arse over tit and my head struck a parking meter, breaking my fall, I suppose.’ He paused. ‘Rather a lot of blood on the ground. A charming Nigerian fellow helped me up, sat me down in a bus stop and went off to call an ambulance.’

‘A good Samaritan. How lucky.’

‘I offered him a five-pound note for his trouble but he refused. Most helpful chap. Delightful.’

He stood up and went, a little unsteadily, to the table where he kept his large array of alcoholic drinks and returned with the bottle of single malt whisky they were both drinking and topped up their glasses.

‘I am consuming far too much, probably,’ Aldous said, reasonably. ‘I confess. But I see it as entirely medicinal.’

‘Quite right.’

‘What brings you here, sweet boy?’

‘I came to see how you were, principally, and to let you know I’m off on my travels again.’

‘How exciting. Where to?’

‘Moscow.’

‘Perhaps a bit too exciting.’

‘I’m going for a week, in theory, and I’m staying in this hotel.’ Gabriel placed an index card on the coffee table between them with the Metropol

address and telephone number on it. ‘I just think it’s important that somebody outside the organization knows where I am.’

‘One of your MI6 jaunts?’

‘Yes.’

‘Bloody hell, Gabriel, Moscow’s a bit over and above the call of duty, isn’t it?’

‘I did go to Warsaw and return, so I have every reason to believe that I’ll return from Moscow. But now you know where I’ll be. I head off on the eleventh.’

Aldous picked up the card and read it.

‘I can call you there, can I?’

‘In theory.’

‘It might be quite good to get a call from England. Or several calls. Sort of legitimizes things. People will realize that you’re not alone, so to speak.’

‘Good idea.’

Aldous looked sombre.

‘Is it dangerous?’

‘I don’t know. Yet. I’m not going to take any risks, that’s for sure. And I’ll be in touch with the embassy. Constant touch.’

‘Oh, good. That’s reassuring.’ Aldous reached over and squeezed his knee. ‘You be careful, darling.’

‘Careful is my middle name.’

‘That’s what I like to hear. How’s the new book coming along?’

Gabriel flew from London airport to Helsinki in a Finnair Caravelle and checked into a large, ornate but rather shabby hotel called the Kämp. He dined in the hotel that night. He was feeling not so much tired as apprehensive. The reality of his Moscow trip – and all its unknown features – had struck him with some force now he was on his way. What did Caldwell actually want of him? What could he reasonably do – as an ostensible tourist in the city – to help him escape? No doubt answers would be forthcoming but he didn’t believe this was the moment to explore Helsinki. He had a brandy in the bar after his meal (a creamy salmon soup followed by a liver casserole served with lingonberry jam), smoked a final cigarette and then went to bed.

He lay there in the darkness, thinking back over the last few days – something was nagging at him, something he should have noticed but

hadn’t, or had only semi-registered. Maybe it was just worry, he told himself. He had, for a moment, thought of bringing Dean Furlan’s automatic pistol with him, the Colt Hammerless, but it was too risky, he decided. When he had gone to Warsaw, armed, the gun was contained in a purpose-built suitcase with a lead-lined section that would evade all electronic and X-ray surveillance. Where would he hide the Colt? His spongebag? On his person? It was perfectly possible to travel with a gun in your pocket, he realized, as there were no searches at airports, no X-ray screens or the like. Still, it was a risk, especially as he was travelling to the USSR. No, in the end he had secreted the gun in the woodshed in case Laura, with her tirelessly thorough cleaning of every nook and cranny in the cottage, should discover it. In fact, this time it was probably better to be unarmed. He reflected painfully that, every time he had a firearm on him, he seemed to end up killing someone.

He forced himself to think of something else and deliberately recalled his night with Lorraine – and duly achieved a swift, transient erection. The trademark Lorraine effect – still working in Finland, days later. Then he thought of Faith and the squeeze of his hand as he left her office and his emotional surge that followed the unexpected gesture – wondering if that were proof that maybe they were on a path together, however meandering, brambly and tussocky. He would do this last job for her then issue an ultimatum, he decided. It was time to fish or cut bait, as the Americans said; piss or get off the pot, as the British would urge. He turned over, punched his pillow and tried to fall asleep – with limited success.

He felt a bit ragged and sub-par when he checked in the next morning at the Aeroflot desk for the flight to Moscow. He handed over his passport to an impassive desk clerk. It was lengthily examined, the photograph page held up to his face to ensure the resemblance was accurate, then the visa was inspected again and stamped. Then the clerk, passport in hand, left the desk to talk to someone behind a screen. When he returned he was smiling.

‘We wish you a happy flight, Mr Dax,’ he said with a small bow of the head, returning the passport.

Gabriel went through into the departure lounge wondering if the change in mood was evidence of the long hand of Dmitri Levitin. The flight was called and he walked across the tarmac towards the Aeroflot Ilyushin II-18, a big four-engine turbo-prop plane. Inside, the decor was grey and plastic and the plane was half-empty. In the galley space was an old-fashioned

fridge with a circular condenser on the top, like something from the 1930s. For his in-flight meal he was offered an apple and a glass of orange juice. He declined and smoked several cigarettes, taking covert sips from a half-bottle of Finnish vodka that he'd bought in the small duty-free shop at the airport. The short flight, under two hours, passed agreeably enough.

He picked up his suitcase from the carousel in Sheremetyevo international airport in Moscow and headed towards customs.

'Gabriel! Wait!'

It was a woman's voice, oddly familiar. He turned to see Varvara Suvorina crossing the floor towards him. She was wearing a smart navy-blue suit with a badge on her breast that read 'INTOURIST'. In her hand she had a clipboard.

'Varvara, my God.'

She held out her hand and he shook it. There were tears in her eyes. She looked different from her London persona: still the same square, mannish face with her small, slightly hooked nose but her make-up here in Moscow was more vivid – blue eyeshadow, cherry-red lips – and her grey hair was longer and garnished with blonde streaks. She also seemed smaller and frailer than he remembered from their encounters in the Matisse and Dovehouse Gardens, for some bizarre reason.

'I am so pleased to see you, Gabriel, you can't believe it. I am to be your Intourist guide. Please to follow me. You are VIP. You don't need to going through customs.'

He followed Varvara as she briskly led him through a door, waving aside the uniformed guard, down a long corridor and out to the terminal's forecourt. There was a large black Zil limousine waiting for them. The driver took his suitcase and placed it in the boot as Gabriel slid in the back with Varvara. His brain felt agitated and worried, almost squeaking with alarm, like a small, trapped animal. The Moscow experience had begun.

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Part Three

Moscow

Leningrad

May 1964

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1.

The Hotel Metropol

Gabriel stood at the window of his room in the Metropol looking out over a view of an unusually wide street – a kind of super-boulevard, he thought, with very broad pavements. The newer buildings on either side were imposingly high but rather ugly, like vast edifices modelled on a child's building-block version of a city. Everything in Moscow, from what he'd seen on the drive into the centre from the airport, seemed designed so that the modern skyscrapers, with their extra, almost unnecessary size, dominated and diminished the individual human being, the hurrying, nondescript citizens who occupied these streets.

Varvara had accompanied him into the hotel, talking urgently to the receptionists about this VIP they were lucky to have staying with them. All the same, they insisted on retaining Gabriel's passport for forty-eight hours before it would be returned to him. Best to go through the motions, Gabriel whispered to a deeply irritated Varvara. She came with him up to his room on the third floor and had a quiet word with a woman who was sitting behind a desk by the lift. Varvara said she was the floor attendant and would provide him with anything he wanted: fresh towels, bottled water, soap. He had heard about these *babushkas*, watchful guardians of the hotel's guests.

'We call this person *dezhurnaya*,' Varvara explained. 'When you leave your room you give key to her.'

Varvara checked that he was happy with his room and waved away the Intourist coupon that he was obliged to give her – to confirm that everything was paid for. She was awed by the gleaming fitments and the marble of his bathroom – 'You see we give you five-star treatment, Gabriel' – and recommended dinner at the Metropol's vast restaurant. 'The most

beautiful in all Russia.' Gabriel admitted he was tired after his vodka-fuelled flight from Helsinki. Varvara said she would call at eleven o'clock the next morning and 'take you to our friend'.

'You have the drawing?' she added.

'Yes.'

'Very good. He is full of anticipating – is this the word? – at seeing you.'

'Me too.'

They said goodbye, with another warm handshake, and Gabriel sat down on his bed. So far, he supposed, so good. He was clearly *persona grata* and that had to bode well for whatever was planned for him. He told himself to relax, unpack, have a drink, go for a stroll, enjoy a meal. He found a tooth-glass in the bathroom and poured himself a small vodka from what was left in his duty-free bottle. When in Rome, and all that, he told himself, and, glass in hand, looked out over what he could see of the strange and daunting city.

Settled in, Gabriel decided to get his bearings. He left the hotel, giving his room key to the *babushka*, as instructed, heading for Red Square and the Kremlin, not far away. He paused and looked back at the Metropol, noting its weird mish-mash of architectural styles – art nouveau meets demotic functionalism – trying to spot the windows of his room and failing. There was a huge, coloured pediment with a mural of sorts painted on it and the projecting windows reminded him, oddly, of apartment blocks in Spain. Still, it was centrally placed and Dmitri Levitin had said it was the best hotel in Moscow. He sauntered on down Teatralny Proezd through Theatre Square and Revolution Square, turning left again to arrive at the Resurrection Gate. He passed beneath it and entered into the huge space that was Red Square.

The square was impressively large – nine hundred yards long he had read – but seemed bigger than it was because of the fact that it was on a small hill and it sloped down, affording long-distance views over the city. What he could observe of Moscow spread out before him seemed entirely populated by cranes – their thin inverted L-shapes punctuating the cityscape as far as the distant outskirts. Construction everywhere, apparently. Build, build, build.

He wandered about the square – noting the long, palatial facade of the GUM department store and the almost preposterous candy-coloured

intricacy of St Basil's cathedral. It looked like a romantic castle from a fairy story or a Walt Disney cartoon but two of its nine vivid cupolas were obscured by scaffolding, unfortunately, which rather spoilt the effect. He strolled around, smoking – the square was not busy, a few passers-by, men and women, hurrying on to their destinations, and there were a dozen empty, travel-stained buses parked close to the cathedral. Not an ideal juxtaposition, he thought. The high terracotta Kremlin walls with their ornate battlements reminded him that the Kremlin was a fortress, in fact. A fortress full of elaborate buildings – palaces, cathedrals, churches – and containing twenty towers. The pretty conical blue spruce trees planted in front of the imposing ramparts didn't really soften that forceful impact.

He turned through 360 degrees. Yes, this was a perfect locale and chapter for his book, he recognized, heading over to the squat marble ziggurat of Lenin's tomb and the long, patient queue of secular worshippers. The goose-stepping changing of the guard was being completed and he stood and watched the soldiers, like clockwork toys with their vertical rifles, jackboots and white gloves, immaculately taking up their positions. He wondered – thinking about his book – if there was any way he could interview one of those guardsmen? Could Varvara help? Then he saw an elderly man in an olive-green overall shuffling around the mausoleum with an aluminium reach-extender picking up litter, with some difficulty, using the extender's thin claw to grab cigarette butts and ice-lolly sticks and stuffing his booty in a plastic bag. Gabriel turned – across the square was another similar figure doing the same in front of the GUM store. Yes, he thought – who needs a guardsman? The Red Square litter-picker was the perfect character he required for the Kremlin chapter of *On the Beaten Path*.

He felt suddenly buoyed by this idea – as he always did when his regular, ordered, inspiring, normal life overwhelmed, for a moment, his unnerving, unwelcomed existence as Faith Green's spy. It reminded him that life was transient, everything was temporary, not set in stone. Soon he would leave Moscow and be back in Rose Cottage typing up his Russian chapter. Yes, he thought, a little sourly, one can always dream: there would be a lot to be encountered in the interim, doubtless, before tranquil, diurnal village life was restored. He turned and strolled back to the hotel.

He ate his dinner in a corner of the vast dining room in the Metropol, a salon the size of two tennis courts, with a spouting fountain in the middle

and an equally large stained-glass ceiling glowing artificially up above. He was more interested in the wine than the food, and drank most of a fruity bottle of Romanian red as he picked at his mutton *à la Novorossiysk*, followed by a few spoonfuls of some sort of condensed milk soufflé that was too sweet for his taste. His mood had changed, he recognized, as he climbed the wide staircase back to his room and retrieved his key from the unsmiling *babushka* – it was melancholic, resigned, fatalistic – not like him at all, he said to himself, trying to break free from its grip.

He lay in his bed thinking – what was he doing here? He analysed that his mild depression was caused by the sense that he had absolutely no control over his life's future direction. Perhaps that was true of everyone on the planet, essentially, he argued with himself: nobody knew what might happen to you next – in the following hours, day, or week or month. However, what one needed was an illusion of control, which is what most people feel they have, he posited to himself, however deluded they might be, but even that illusion/delusion seemed denied to him, here in Moscow. He wanted that sense that his life was on track to return to him, however rackety that life might be. He wanted to feel that his existence, his career, his future was on a course that he had prefigured, somehow, heading in a vague direction he recognized and had wished for. Maybe when he met Kit Caldwell tomorrow some form of confidence would be restored. There would be a plan of action, at the very least. Maybe that's what he needed. He reached for his bottle of sleeping pills.

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2.

Kit Caldwell

The next morning – bathed, shaved, a clean pale blue shirt, a different tie (lemon-yellow) – he went down to the dining room for breakfast. He declined the offer of buckwheat porridge with sautéed mushrooms and had two fried eggs with a crude, fatty sausage followed by fritters and jam, washed down with three cups of a strong black tea, no milk, no sugar. He smoked his first cigarette of the day. His mood was improving, he was pleased to note.

Varvara was prompt. He met her in the lobby and saw that the Intourist pretence was being maintained – she was still wearing her badge and carrying a clipboard – even though they were on KGB business today. No limousine, though there was a taxi waiting outside – a big, spacious Volga. They climbed aboard and headed for a residential district in the centre of the city. It was a grey, cloudy day with a fine drizzle falling intermittently, causing the taxi driver to switch on and switch off his windscreen-wipers every two minutes or so. Varvara was curious about London: what was happening, what was new, the latest plays, the concerts? He did his best to give her an overview.

The taxi dropped them outside a monumental, solidly neo-classical building, a block wide, on one of the more exclusive embankments, so Varvara told him, overlooking the Moskva river. He had lost all sense of direction but it hadn’t been a long journey. Above the front portico was a white marble relief-sculptured frieze of barely clad muscled men, toiling horses and headscarfed young women occupied in various tasks – ploughing, digging, building, harvesting – and, moreover, Soviet symbols (hammers and sickles, sheaves of wheat, ceremonial swords, shields and

oak wreaths) were dotted here and there on the first two floors of the facade. The building boasted a very tall central tower with a five-pointed star on top of a crowning pylon. Varvara told him that this apartment building was known as a Stalinka, purpose-built in the 1930s for the elite, the *nomenklatura*.

'Mr Caldwell is very lucky for to live in this building,' she told him, lowering her voice. She led him into the capacious lobby, all marble pillars with many glowing chandeliers, and handed him over to the concierge, giving Gabriel's name that was duly registered in a ledger.

'I will be at the Metropol at ten a.m. tomorrow, in case you have need from me. I wish you a good day, Gabriel.'

They shook hands and she left.

The concierge made a telephone call and then accompanied Gabriel into the lift and they rode up together, silently, to the sixth floor. They walked down a wide passage of gleaming parquet to a black door with a peephole, number 610. The concierge rang the bell, gave a little bow and returned to the lift. Gabriel stood there waiting, experiencing a weird moment of stasis, as if his life had arrived at a turning point; a new direction was going to be provided, and nothing would be the same again.

The door opened and Kit Caldwell stood there, beaming. Gabriel stepped inside. Caldwell closed the door and gripped both Gabriel's arms, staring at him, wordless.

'Kit,' Gabriel said. 'At last.'

Caldwell seemed very emotional, his face taut, still transfixed, as if Gabriel were some sort of apparition. Then he hugged Gabriel to him, kissed him on both cheeks.

'I don't think I've ever been happier to see someone,' he said, softly. 'I can't believe you're here. It's wonderful, nothing short of a miracle.' He pointed up at the lamp fixture hanging from the ceiling and put a finger to his lips. Ah, Gabriel realized, bugged. Gabriel thought Caldwell looked a bit rough, even though his grey hair was neatly cut and parted, his dark suit was smart, his shoes highly polished. However, his face bore the evidence of the pressures he was under – more gaunt, lines deeper, eyes shadowed. He looked considerably older than when they had last met in Warsaw two years ago.

'Come on through,' Caldwell said, and Gabriel followed him into the apartment's living room, high-ceilinged with views of the river through its

three generous windows. Leather sofas and armchairs, placed on a thick cream rug set on the same gleaming parquet as the corridor, faced a marble fireplace. The pictures on the walls were of typical Russian landscapes, romantic in nature, but very well painted, Gabriel thought. There was a TV set and an ebony cabinet crammed with books. On the coffee table was a vase of dried grasses and a copy of *The Times*. Kit Caldwell was living in some style, that was clear.

'I think we need champagne,' Caldwell said and went to press a bell set in the wall. 'Have a seat, dear boy.'

Gabriel sat down and, presently, a door opened and a young man appeared in a form of semi-military outfit – a black, high-collared jacket, black trousers piped at the side with red. He was tall and dark-haired – in his twenties, Gabriel guessed, handsome in a kind of sneery way, a weakness about his mouth.

'This is Arkady,' Caldwell said. 'My guardian angel.' He presented Gabriel. 'And this is my great friend from London, Gabriel Dax.'

Gabriel stood and shook Arkady's hand.

'A pleasure to meet you, sir,' he said, his English heavily accented.

'Likewise.'

'Arkady, we are desperate for *shampanskoye*.'

'At once.'

Arkady left the room.

'Arkady is my friend, my chauffeur, my housekeeper, my factotum, my, you know …' He didn't add the unnecessary word, just raised his eyebrows suggestively. 'I couldn't survive without him. He performs every service for me. Immaculately.' Caldwell winked.

Gabriel took in the subtext. He remembered Caldwell telling him in Warsaw how he was lusting after his chauffeur. Lust fulfilled, apparently.

Arkady brought a bottle of Russian sparkling wine and poured two large glasses, leaving the bottle on the coffee table.

Caldwell toasted Gabriel and they drank. The wine was on the sweet side, Gabriel thought, but palatable, nonetheless.

'How are you finding Moscow?' Caldwell asked, miming enthusiasm with his hands, lifting his spread palms as if shifting air upwards.

'Absolutely fascinating,' Gabriel said, playing along. 'What a great city.'

'And what about your new book?'

Gabriel sensed that bland conversation was required for whomever might be listening in. And so they duly conversed. They both lit cigarettes. Gabriel told Caldwell something of his recent trip to the USA. Caldwell said he was thinking of writing his memoirs. When the champagne was finished Caldwell suggested that they go for a walk – he could show Gabriel round the neighbourhood. Gabriel said he would welcome the opportunity.

They rode the lift down in silence. In the lobby, Caldwell raised a hand to the concierge as they exited the huge building.

'Great,' Caldwell said. 'Now we can talk properly. Thank fuck.'

'Will they follow us?'

'No. No, we're with *them*, Gabriel. We're KGB, remember? The two of us. Still, the concierge will have telephoned the Tovs in head office to say I've left the building with you. But we're in the same boat, you and I, neither of us can disembark for the moment. Don't forget.'

'Of course.'

They wandered off and crossed the river to find a small, shabby park. A section of it was a children's playground – a roundabout, a slide and three swings, one of which was broken, dangling lopsidedly from its surviving chain. Elsewhere there were weed-badged gravel paths meandering around a central bronze statue on a plinth of a young man in a hussar's pelisse and knee boots, bareheaded, gesturing at the sky. Gabriel and Caldwell found a bench, sat down, took out their cigarettes and lit up.

'I can't express my gratitude, Gabriel,' Caldwell said. 'Having you here makes me want to weep – no, seriously. Now I know I can get out.'

'What's happened?'

'Little things, you know. Changes in behaviour. Access I used to have is being denied. Have you the drawing?'

Gabriel fished the envelope out of his pocket and handed it over. Caldwell opened it.

'The "i" in "studio" is the microdot,' Gabriel said.

'This will help enormously. I haven't fed the Tovs anything for ages.'

Gabriel remembered, now – 'Tovs' was Caldwell's pet word for his KGB handlers, the *Tovarishchi*, the comrades.

'It'll take some of the heat off. And the fact that you came to Moscow and brought it to me – it'll seem that my little London network is still functioning. Then I'll be gone.'

'What's the plan?'

‘On Friday I’m opening a new wing of a naval academy in Leningrad. I want you to meet me there, in Leningrad, at the Hotel Regina.’

‘How can I travel to Leningrad? Don’t I need an internal visa?’

‘No, I’ve got you this,’ Caldwell said, taking a document out of his pocket. ‘It’s a KGB laissez-passer. If anyone asks for your papers show them this. Works like a charm.’

Gabriel looked at the sheet of paper, all in Russian, of course, except his name. There was an extravagant signature and a stamp at the bottom.

‘You get the train,’ Caldwell said. ‘Arkady will drive me there. Then he’ll take us on to the border with Finland.’

‘Arkady?’

‘He’s coming with us. I’ve grown very fond of him.’

‘Can you trust him?’

‘Completely. He’s desperate to leave.’

‘Right.’ Gabriel had another question for Caldwell. ‘What about the border?’

‘It’s open. We’ll just take a minor road. Dump the car. Walk across.’

If it’s that easy, Gabriel wondered, why does Caldwell need me?

‘Won’t it be more suspicious if I’m there?’

‘No. You’re perfect cover. If you’re with me they won’t suspect that I’m doing a runner. Helps Arkady also.’

‘Right. I see.’ In fact he didn’t ‘see’ at all – he just had to assume Caldwell knew what he was doing. It all seemed well planned.

‘How long does the train take?’ Gabriel asked.

‘About six hours, if you’re lucky. There’s this new express service – Aurora trains. Make sure you take one of them. You arrive on Friday. You’re already booked into the Regina. We’ll go over at the weekend. Probably Sunday.’

Caldwell produced a small envelope and handed it to Gabriel. There was no name on it.

‘You’ll be invited to a reception at the embassy in the next couple of days. Some sort of drinks party. Give that to Archie Pomeroy. He’s my link-man. Sound fellow – ex-SAS.’

Gabriel put the envelope and his authorization pass in his jacket pocket. He stood up and wandered over to the statue. There was a name carved into the plinth: ЛЕРМОНТОВ.

‘Who’s this?’ he asked, turning back to Caldwell.

‘Lermontov.’

‘Oh. A hero of our time.’

‘That’s the man.’

Gabriel smiled. He took that as a good omen.

‘Wonderful book,’ he said, remembering the copy that had been given to him once – by Varvara, or was it Natalia? – filled with money.

‘Shall we head back?’ Caldwell said, standing. ‘Get you a taxi?’

They made their way to the apartment block.

‘How’s your Russian?’ Gabriel asked.

‘Pretty good. Apparently, I speak with a Latvian accent – so everyone tells me. What about you?’

‘Non-existent.’

‘Anyway, we’ll have Arkady.’

They stood on the steps of the Stalinka waiting for the taxi that the concierge had summoned.

‘I don’t suppose you’ll miss all this,’ Gabriel said, gesturing at the giant building behind them.

‘I’ve been here for over two years and sometimes I find myself forgetting, you know, that I had another life.’ Caldwell looked bemused for a moment. ‘I’m sitting in my huge apartment, reading *The Times*, sipping at a gin and tonic and then I think – fuck me, I’m a spy in Moscow. It’s beginning to wear me down, to be honest. I don’t want to end up in a Russian prison – or dead. So it’s really time to leave.’

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3.

Two Invitations

The next morning when he went down to the lobby in the Metropol the receptionist handed him an envelope. It contained an invitation to a reception, the next day, at the British embassy to celebrate the arrival in Moscow of the Right Honourable Peter Moberley, MP, QC, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade. The address was 14 Sofiyskaya Naberezhnaya. Gabriel's name was inscribed on the stiff card. The receptionist told him the embassy was across the river, a famous old mansion, opposite the Kremlin.

For some reason, Gabriel felt a pang of worry. Seeing his name on the invitation confirmed the fact that there was a controlling hand in this conspiracy around the exfiltration of Kit Caldwell. Things were moving. The familiar 'pawn on a chessboard' metaphor popped into Gabriel's mind. An invisible hand had moved him a square. There was a game going on – would he be sacrificed? Stop it, he told himself. Go to the reception, hand Pomeroy his envelope and leave. He put the invitation in his pocket and turned to see Varvara Suvorina come through the front door. He had an idea.

'Good morning, Gabriel,' she said, looking pleased to see him. They shook hands.

'Can we stroll down to Red Square?' he asked. 'I need your help.'

She was happy to oblige and they wandered the short distance from the Metropol to the square. It was a breezy, sunny day, and the bright red-and-yellow stucco of the buildings almost seemed to reverberate with a form of solar intensity as if the sun striking the facades was releasing extra pigment.

'What can I help you with, Gabriel?'

‘You see that man there?’ Gabriel pointed to an overalled man picking up scraps of paper and cigarette butts with his long-arm gripper. ‘I want to ask him a few questions for my book.’

‘We must not ask anything of controversy,’ Varvara said.

‘No, of course not. I just want to ask him some basic facts, that’s all.’

Varvara proved to be an efficient interpreter. She explained to the man who Gabriel was and why he was curious. The man shrugged his acceptance – he was happy to oblige. Gabriel had his pen and notebook at the ready and jotted down the litter-picker’s replies as Varvara translated them. The man had a swart, seamed face with blunt, uneven teeth filled with silver amalgam and appeared to be older than the forty years he admitted to. Maybe an ex-soldier? Gabriel wondered. He seemed happy to talk and even expounded freely on the trials of his job. He picked up a discarded tube from a *papirosa* cigarette and flourished it at Gabriel. This is what kills me, he said, and the dog shit. I collect maybe one thousand cigarette butts in one day. People bring their dogs here and they let them shit – even in front of Lenin’s tomb.

‘Why are there no litter bins?’ Gabriel asked.

Because he is here, Varvara translated. He is a human, mobile litter bin. He was in the Soviet army, he said, 1943–45. And now I pick up dog shit in Red Square. They chatted on – he was admirably forthcoming, Gabriel thought, probably stunned to be the subject of this foreign curiosity. The man’s name was Mikhail Nikolayevich Volkov. Gabriel shook his hand and gave him a hundred-rouble note. He tried to return it but Gabriel insisted. He was feeling suddenly exhilarated – another chapter written, he thought. Red Square and the Kremlin brought alive by Mikhail Nikolayevich.

They shook hands and Gabriel and Varvara wandered over towards St Basil’s cathedral.

‘What do you wish to do today, Gabriel?’

‘Nothing much. I’ll just stroll around, get the feel of the city. Go to an art gallery or a museum. You go home, Varvara. I’m sure you’re very busy.’

She lowered her voice.

‘How was your meeting with Mr Caldwell?’

‘Very successful. He has the drawing now.’

‘This is good news.’ She frowned, as if deliberating some hard problem. ‘Please, you may say, no, thank you, no, Varvara – but I would like to invite

you to my apartment for dinner tonight. My son is staying with his grandmother. I can show you a proper Russian meal.'

'That would be lovely,' Gabriel said without thinking, then immediately wondered if it was a mistake, seeing Varvara's all too evident pleasure at his acceptance.

She scribbled down her address in his notebook and the name of the Metro station that was closest to her house.

'Shall we establish at eight o'clock? I look forward very much, Gabriel.'

They parted and, as Gabriel headed back to the hotel to write up in more detail his encounter with Mikhail Nikolayevich, the thought crossed his mind: would Varvara's husband also be present?

That evening Gabriel went to the nearest Metro station, Teatralnaya, but was somewhat daunted by its scale and bizarre opulence: fluted marble columns, elaborately moulded plaster ceilings and suspended bronze electroliers – and no advertisements, anywhere. He wasn't at all sure that he would be able to negotiate his way to Varvara's address so he returned to the hotel and asked reception to call him a taxi.

The taxi took him to a dingy residential area in the south of the city and drew up in front of a grey concrete apartment block, five storeys high. He paid off the driver, stepped out and looked around, noting that every block in the neighbourhood looked identical. A few silver birches here and there softened the austere effect. To his surprise and slight relief, Varvara was waiting on the pavement outside her block. He presented her with the small bouquet of flowers and the box of chocolates that he had asked the Service Bureau of the hotel to provide. Varvara, he noticed, was again fully made up – heavy pan-stick, blue eyeshadow and cherry-red lips – and she was wearing a short striped purple-and-blue dress with sheer white knee socks and white patent low-heeled shoes.

'I was worry that you wouldn't find my address,' she said. 'It was best to come with taxi. I should have told you.'

'Anyway, here I am.' He leant forward and gave her a kiss on the cheek. 'Thank you so much for inviting me.'

'Always a gentleman, Gabriel,' she said, holding up the bouquet and the chocolates, thanking him again and leading him to the front door. They went into a small lobby filled, floor to ceiling, with postal boxes for the residents.

‘We have no elevator, I apologize,’ she said. ‘And we are on top floor.’ As they climbed the stairs she explained that this apartment block was known as a Khrushchoby. ‘Not like Mr Caldwell’s beautiful Stalinka.’ The Khrushchobys were quickly built, she said, prefabricated, because of the housing crisis after the war. ‘Secretary Khrushchev decided that with only five floors there is no need for elevator. But we on top floor are not so happy.’ She laughed. As they ascended, Gabriel noticed that the doors to the apartments were all padded, tufted with brass buttons like a Chesterfield sofa.

On the top landing she opened the door to her apartment and showed him in. She took his coat, folded it and placed it on a chair in the narrow hallway. It was the low ceilings that first dominated his impressions of the place – some three inches above his head – provoking a powerful temptation to stoop. The rooms were small and neat with linoleum on the floor. The living room had four armchairs arranged around a circular table and a green mass of house plants completely blocking the exit to the balcony. Varvara said it didn’t matter as they only used their balcony for storage. There were two bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen-diner – she explained that two apartments had been knocked together to create this larger one, that’s why they were lucky to have so much space.

Varvara took a cigarette out of a walnut box on a cabinet and urged Gabriel to smoke if he wanted. She suggested a glass of lemon vodka as an aperitif. Gabriel lit his cigarette as Varvara went into the kitchen. He sensed an untypical nervousness about her. No sign of Colonel Suvorin, however. Varvara reappeared with the drinks on an enamel tray and a small bowl of salted almonds.

‘Is your husband not here?’

‘He is at his airbase in Siberia. He will be back in one month.’

‘Sorry not to meet him,’ Gabriel said, politely.

‘I think it’s better for us to be two, you know? No difficult questions to answer.’

She plumed smoke towards the ceiling and raised her glass.

‘Cheers,’ she said.

‘*Za vashe zdorov’ye*,’ Gabriel replied.

Varvara laughed, they drank and the mood seemed to relax.

They ate in the kitchen at a small Formica table. A beetroot and carrot salad, then chicken cutlets with a sour cream sauce with gooseberries and

boiled potatoes. They drank a sweet white wine from Ukraine. Varvara offered him a slice of poppyseed cake for dessert but Gabriel politely declined. They returned to the sitting room for a glass of honeyed vodka as a digestif. They had chatted inconsequentially, Varvara doing most of the talking, complaining about the difficult nature of her husband's distant posting; the fact that he hardly ever saw their son, Vasily, who was now thirteen years old. Gabriel asked questions about Moscow and all the construction he could see everywhere. Varvara said everyone needs a place to live. More apartments, more and more. Thousands, tens of thousands. Her parents never owned an apartment or a house, she said, telling him that they lived in some sort of communal dormitory with a kitchen shared by six families. Life was very hard for them, she said, living today is like a dream.

'She cannot believe this apartment, my mother. Every time she comes here she's crying.'

Varvara topped up their glasses and lit another cigarette. She seemed nervous again, all of a sudden, Gabriel noticed.

'There's something I wish to ask you, Gabriel.'

'Of course.'

'I want more than anything to return to London – with my son, also. I was hoping that you and maybe Mr Caldwell could help me.'

'I'd love to – but I don't see how.'

'Mr Caldwell is knowing the senior people in KGB. He could make a suggestion. And you – I suppose you know Mr Levitin – you could say to him that you prefer me as your contact in London.'

Gabriel could sense the desperation – or rather the desperate hope – in her voice. He felt a pressure mounting in his chest also, suddenly unhappy at his duplicity. What would happen to Varvara after the Caldwell exfiltration? How would she re-evaluate their relationship? Or the false self that he'd presented to her? He felt very uneasy. He liked Varvara and had enjoyed their curious, brief, shared history.

'I'd better go,' he said. 'It's late. Let me see what I can do about London,' he added, deploring his slick mendacity.

Varvara smiled widely.

'You are a true friend, Gabriel.'

He thought, maybe this is another defining aspect of being a spy – you simply let people down, continually, one way or another, in an insignificant or disastrous manner.

Varvara handed him his coat and he put it on. She told him how to find a taxi at the end of her road – and assured him there would be one or two waiting outside the metro station.

‘Every taxi driver knows the Metropol,’ she said, standing close to him. ‘Thank you for the beautiful flowers and the chocolates.’

‘My pleasure.’

They looked at each other.

‘Try to get me London posting.’

‘I promise. I’ll speak to Mr Caldwell. We’ll do our best.’

He could sense her anxiety, her need, like a kind of pulse in the atmosphere.

‘You can do it for me, Gabriel, I know …’

‘But, Varvara—’

‘This is why they took me away from London. They said my relationship with you had – what was word? – becoming “obsessive”. It was true.’

‘Really? I didn’t think it—’

‘Please, Gabriel. Please do this for me.’

‘Fingers crossed.’ He showed her his crossed fingers. ‘Goodnight – and thank you for a lovely meal.’

She was inches away from him. Her brown eyes were gleaming with unshed tears. He bent his head, carefully, and kissed her cheek, his lips instantly soured with the heavy make-up she was wearing.

‘Goodnight, Varvara, thank you. I must go.’

She opened the door, wordless, staring intently at him, and he stepped out on to the landing.

‘Gabriel, I count on you,’ she said. ‘We will see each other again. I will not forget you – you will not forget me.’

The door was quickly shut behind him. He took a few deep breaths. What the hell was going on in that exchange? He clattered down the stairs and out through the front door, inhaling the cool night air deep into his lungs. He took out his pack of Gitanes and lit a cigarette, trying to regain some sense of balance. Good God …

But where was the taxi rank? He suddenly began to panic a little, alone in a Moscow suburb. Had she said turn left? Or right? He turned right – there seemed to be a busier intersection at the end of the road that way judging by the noise of traffic. He walked on, telling himself to calm down. Suddenly he stopped and turned. Nothing. He had experienced the clear sense of

being followed – quiet footsteps behind him. But no, the street was empty. Then a car whizzed by with a slur of tyres on the road and calm was restored. Nobody was following him, of course not. Spy paranoia, he told himself – he should be used to it by now. He walked on and turned the corner, relieved to find two Volgas waiting, the drivers standing chatting and smoking. He was back at the Metropol in ten minutes.

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4.

The British Embassy

There was a note waiting for him at reception from Varvara the next morning: '*My apology, Gabriel, I have a very busy day. I will see you tomorrow. Varvara.*' Probably a wise move, he thought. How would they have resumed their Intourist/tourist roles after the previous night? What awkwardness would have ensued? No, best not to see each other for a while.

He took a taxi to the Anton Chekhov house museum – a neat, red, two-storey building that had recreated the rooms that Chekhov and his family lived in between 1886 and 1890. He contemplated the furnishings – the pistachio wallpaper, the small family portraits, the green-baize desk, the Persian rug on the parquet, the shawl-covered occasional tables – but failed to pick up any supernatural presence of one of his most revered authors.

Looking at his map of the city he realized he could walk back to the hotel from the Chekhov house and set off, thinking the exercise would do him good. After half an hour, feeling hungry, he found a restaurant near the Zoological museum that offered a day-long buffet. Caviar was on the menu so he helped himself to some copious spoonfuls that he heaped on black bread and washed down with some chilled vodka. His mood improved as he ate and drank and, thinking back, he analysed his behaviour the night before with Varvara. What was a person supposed to do in those circumstances? he asked himself. He could only make her unrealizable promises, he knew, and congratulated himself on his restraint and vague plausibility. Still, there was always the memory of the strange atmosphere of their parting. Maybe she was right – he wouldn't forget Varvara Suvorina, now: after their dinner they both had something to remember.

He wondered, thinking further, with a spasm of regret, if in fact he would ever see her again. There was the embassy reception this evening and then, the next day, Friday, he should take the train to Leningrad and begin the exfiltration process in all serious intent. He felt his nervousness quicken with alarmed anticipation at the prospect. Kit Caldwell had made it sound so straightforward. Caldwell was on official KGB business in Leningrad and, as a bona-fide hero of the Soviet Union, nobody suspected him. But nothing is easy, Gabriel reminded himself – another of his mantras – and the unforeseen presence of Arkady in the defection was a factor that troubled him, for some reason. Maybe this Archie Pomeroy would have something to say about it all.

The British embassy was a large nineteenth-century mansion – pale grey with a rusticated facade – set back from the embankment behind high railings. Gabriel showed his invitation and passport to a uniformed major-domo at the main entrance and was invited to go upstairs to the dining room on the second floor. He climbed an ornate wooden staircase towards the sound of general chatter and stepped into a long room lined with rose-pink silk damask wallpaper and, oddly, a large portrait of a young Queen Victoria above the fireplace. Through the windows there was a fine view of the Moskva river and the Kremlin walls beyond.

Gabriel helped himself to a glass of Russian champagne from a tray held by a passing waiter and moved through the throng – there must have been sixty people in the room – and went to look out at the Kremlin as dusk thickened the air. It was a striking centre to a great city, he thought, looking across the river at this ancient fortress with its many towers and its high, castellated walls set beside its cathedral-flanked square – worthy to be celebrated in a chapter of a travel book by Gabriel Dax. He turned and contemplated the other guests. The florid man surrounded by a circle of listeners was no doubt the Right Honourable Peter Moberley MP, on official business. Who was this Major Archie Pomeroy? he wondered. Perhaps he should ask an embassy official, hand over his envelope and leave. He turned to survey the gathered guests, thinking that he really hated this sort of function, it made him—

Then he saw Faith Green crossing the room towards him.

‘Good evening, Gabriel.’

He visibly jerked with astonishment and gaped stupidly at Faith, now standing in front of him, glass in hand, smiling at his confusion. She was wearing a short-jacketed, carbon-black hopsack suit with a wide Peter Pan collar and black suede square-toed shoes. She looked both businesslike and stylish, her crimson Alice band the only dash of colour in the ensemble.

'Faith, my God. What the—'

'Actually it's Imogen, here. Imogen Sykes.'

He remembered. Imogen Sykes was in fact her real name but she only used it as cover.

'Right. Imogen. Hello.' He lowered his voice. 'What're you doing in Moscow? Aren't you taking a terrible risk?'

'I'm a diplomat. I've got immunity. Of course, they know perfectly well who I am – just as we know who the KGB *rezident* is in London. But there's nothing they can do about it – except expel me. Anyway, I'm only here for a couple of days. I came to check up on you.'

'Why?'

'Because it's important. How are things going?'

Gabriel swallowed, his mouth dry – suddenly the stark reality of the task ahead of him was registering unpleasantly, forcefully.

'It starts tomorrow. We go to Leningrad – separately.' He looked around. 'And tonight I'm meant to give an envelope from our friend to a Major Pomeroy.'

'Right. Let's find him.'

She glanced around the room and as she did so Gabriel looked at her. Sometimes when you saw a person out of context, he thought, the reassessment was something of a revelation. God, she was beautiful, he said to himself: beautiful and formidable. No wonder he was in thrall. Then he changed his mind and ordered himself to grow up and not behave like some lovelorn swain.

'There he is,' she said.

He followed her across the room to a tall, lean man in a dark grey bespoke suit and a banded tie – he was as tall as Gabriel – with greying hair oiled flat. In his late forties, Gabriel estimated.

'Archie, sorry to interrupt. This is Gabriel Dax.'

Pomeroy looked at him intently, as if committing the features of Gabriel's face to memory. He was a handsome man, Gabriel saw, in the classical sense – straight nose, firm chin, the face a bit weather-beaten, deep creases

at the corners of his eyes. Central casting: military type in civilian clothes. They shook hands.

‘Very pleased to meet you,’ Pomeroy said, and winked. He had a husky, patrician voice, like Falkner’s, Gabriel noted. Vey plizd.

‘I’m to deliver you this,’ Gabriel said and handed over Caldwell’s envelope. Pomeroy pocketed it swiftly.

‘Good work,’ he said. ‘Wishing you all the luck.’

‘Thanks,’ Gabriel said, feeling his anxiety return.

‘I probably shouldn’t be seen talking to you too much,’ Pomeroy went on. ‘Thank you for the communication. See you later, Imogen.’ He turned away and went to join the circle around the Parliamentary Secretary for the Board of Trade.

Gabriel deposited his empty glass on a passing tray and helped himself to a full one.

‘Any idea what was in the envelope?’ Faith asked.

‘No.’

‘I’ll find out later. I’ll let you know if there’s anything interesting. By the way, I have a rather delicate question to put to you.’

‘Fire away.’

‘Did you have sex with Varvara Suvorina in her apartment last night?’

Gabriel felt a pure sense of shock overwhelm him, his mind like some chattering aviary of squawking birds. He almost felt affronted and took a sip of his champagne, and another, recovering his poise.

‘What? How did you know I was at her apartment?’

‘We had you followed. And had you both photographed entering. And you leaving, alone, some hours later.’

He looked at her – coldly, he hoped.

‘No. We did not have sex. We had a very enjoyable supper together.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ she said with a small shrug. ‘The photographs will probably do.’

‘Do what?’

‘Incriminate her. When Caldwell leaves we have no source in the KGB apparatus. Suvorina might be very useful.’

‘If you blackmail her, you mean.’

‘Her husband is a colonel in the Russian air force.’

‘I know.’

He closed his eyes for a second, thinking about the implications of the photographs. He realized that his mind didn't work in a proper espionage way – in the way Faith's mind worked. He was too – what? Too moral? Too decent? Innocent? Stupid?

'Would you have been hurt if I had slept with Varvara?' he said. 'As a matter of interest.'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'We're not married, Gabriel. We've made no vows of fidelity.'

'But we have a history. We have feelings for each other.'

'Of course we do,' she said. 'How would you define "feelings"?'

'I'm in room 361 at the Metropol hotel,' he said. 'We can investigate the subject there, if you like.'

'I know what feelings are, thank you. So what?'

'Why don't you come by later? We can have dinner. Beforehand. And then see what happens.'

'Not possible, Gabriel. Alas.'

'Why not? We like hotels, if you recall.'

'You've got a busy day tomorrow.'

'Not so busy. Just a train journey.'

'I'm not free, sorry.'

She smiled, apologetically. There would be no persuading her, he knew, though the idea had excited him.

'I think I might just slope off, then,' he said. 'Duty done.'

'It's always lovely to see you, Gabriel,' she said, lowering her voice. 'Don't get me wrong. I do have "feelings". But the time and the place have to be right.'

'I understand. Goodnight, Imogen.'

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5.

Leningrad

Gabriel stood on the Nevsky Prospekt in Leningrad, once again marvelling at the bravura width of Russian streets. He had checked into the Hotel Regina, an Intourist hotel, and had handed over his prepaid voucher. He registered the fact that Caldwell had booked him in for two nights. What did that mean? Was Sunday to be the day of the dash for freedom?

The train journey from Moscow to Leningrad had been on time and relatively comfortable on the new Aurora Express service. He had lunch in the restaurant car – a chunk of cold salmon with a potato salad and some crêpes with raspberry jam. After lunch he fell asleep in his seat and dreamt of Dean Furlan. He and Furlan had gone for a stroll along the Serpentine in Hyde Park, of all places, talking about the price of coffee in Guatemala. He woke with a start only as the train pulled into Moskovsky station in Leningrad, three minutes early.

He had visited the Service Bureau in the Metropol and asked the clerk on duty to book him a first-class one-way ticket to Leningrad. The clerk had politely demanded to see a copy of his internal visa and Gabriel had shown him, instead, the laissez-passer Caldwell had given him. The clerk was clearly impressed and it had been remarkably effective. The train ticket was delivered to his room by the third-floor *babushka* an hour later.

But, even though all seemed to be moving smoothly and to plan, Gabriel couldn’t keep his mounting worry and concern at bay. Faith Green/Imogen Sykes had not contacted him – was that a good sign or a bad sign? He went for a stroll through the Leningrad streets, to try and distract himself, immediately warming to this remarkably unchanged eighteenth- and nineteenth-century city with its great boulevards, squares and elegantly

bridged canals. Now Leningrad, formerly Petrograd, formerly St Petersburg. He almost felt he might bump into Dostoevsky at any moment so authentically nineteenth century did the place feel. He preferred it to Moscow, at once. The light was different – a clear, sharply focused, northern luminosity, generated by the Gulf of Finland to the west, he supposed. It felt European, with its palaces by the Neva river, its brown waterways, the shabby, high apartment buildings along the wide boulevards, but, at the same time, uniquely European as shaped by a Russian sensibility. Some of the buildings boasted pastel stucco – lemon-yellows, ochres, pistachio green – not over-decorated. He thought that maybe he should add the city to his book – perhaps write a piece on the Hermitage museum – but he sensed he wouldn't have the time to explore much further. There was more serious business at hand to be dealt with.

He went back to the Regina to find a message from Caldwell. They were to meet in the hotel bar at 7 p.m.

Gabriel was early. The bar in the Regina was gloomy, with heavy maroon velvet curtains hung at the windows, and the large ubiquitous chandelier gave off a faint, occasionally flickering light. An elderly waiter in a stained white Eton jacket with a chain fastening served him with a small carafe of vodka and some soft potato crisps. Gabriel drank vodka and read the novel he'd brought with him, *The Girls of Slender Means* by Muriel Spark. Caldwell arrived half an hour late and apologized. He seemed in a very good mood.

'Sorry, Gabriel, detained by the Tovs at the Naval Academy. It's very odd being a sort of celebrity, here, I must say.' He sat down and patted Gabriel's knee. 'Every time I see you it makes me feel better.' He grinned and ordered more vodka.

'Right,' he said. 'It all kicks off tomorrow, bright and early. Have you got an international driving licence?'

'Yes. But I thought Arkady was driving us.'

'You might share the driving.'

'Sure. Where is he, by the way?'

'He's out on the town, seeing friends. Sort of "Farewell to Mother Russia" moment, you know. He's from Leningrad, in fact.'

Caldwell gave him further instructions. Gabriel was to leave his suitcase behind and only travel in the clothes he could physically wear – coat, scarf, hat, etcetera. Anything he needed had to be carried in his pockets. They

were checked in for the whole weekend, Caldwell reminded him; no one would be expecting them to leave on the Saturday morning.

‘I’ve got to go to another dinner reception at the Admiralty tonight,’ Caldwell said. ‘All good smoke and mirrors, however, if you get my drift. We should meet in the lobby tomorrow morning at, what? Eight o’clock?’

‘Fine,’ Gabriel said. ‘I’ll be there.’

‘Have you ever driven a Russian car?’ Caldwell asked.

‘No. I have driven in Eastern Europe, however. I drove from Warsaw to Hamburg, as it happens, in a Polish car. I can’t remember what type it was.’

‘Well, the car the Tovs gave me is a Chaika. It’s a bit of a beast. But at least it’s new. My last car – it was an old Zil, actually, reliably broke down once a week.’

‘Can I ask a question?’

‘Of course,’ Caldwell said.

‘What happens when we cross over to Finland?’

‘There’ll be a welcome committee.’

‘Who?’

‘Our friends in MI6.’

‘I see.’

‘We’re expected, don’t worry.’

Caldwell looked at his watch.

‘Better get into my dinner jacket.’ He stood up and rested his hand on Gabriel’s shoulder. ‘See you in the morning, Gabriel, my dear. Off on our adventures again.’ He smiled and left the bar.

Gabriel felt a bit unnerved by the use of the word ‘adventures’. He should be relaxed, he supposed, as Caldwell seemed so at ease about this run to the Finnish border, less than a hundred miles away. If it was that easy, Gabriel thought again, why hadn’t Caldwell done this himself as soon as he felt the KGB pressure and suspicion mounting? Something wasn’t adding up. And then there was the Arkady issue to be considered.

He ate a solitary supper in a nearby restaurant that the hotel had recommended – cucumber salad, meatballs and mashed potatoes, more vodka – and went to bed early.

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Part Four

Leningrad

Murmansk

May 1964

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1.

The ZAZ-965

Gabriel left his room, locked it, wished the *babushka* good morning and handed his key to her. He was wearing his grey herringbone tweed coat, a scarf and two sweaters and had his various pockets stuffed with everything he might require, as per Caldwell's instructions – a change of socks and underwear, several packs of Gitanes, all his documentation, travellers' cheques, his notebook and his usual safety-net stash of one hundred US dollars. He was sorry to leave his old, battered suitcase behind him, along with other items of clothing and the Muriel Spark, but he understood the need for the pretence.

Now the exfiltration was almost starting, he suddenly wished he had found a way to bring Furlan's Colt Hammerless with him. He recalled driving through Eastern Europe after his 'adventures' in Warsaw and how having an automatic pistol in his pocket made a difference to the way he felt – it seemed to make the jeopardy he was in less alarming. It was the gun's lethal potential that reassured and he sensed, now, for some vague reason, owing to some persistent unsettled feeling lingering within him, that he would have been glad to have been armed, currently, just for that illusion of security that having a gun on you delivered. However, not to be. Still, the world was full of weapons, he remembered his instructor, Patrick Begg, once telling him – a set of keys, a stone, the stiff spine of a book – and, when properly deployed, these objects were capable of causing grievous bodily harm, as he had proved to himself on one occasion.

Caldwell was waiting for him in the lobby.

'Where's Arkady?' Gabriel asked.

‘Fast asleep. And will be until sometime late this afternoon with a bit of luck.’

They left the hotel and walked round to the area at the rear where the guests’ cars were parked. Gabriel was baffled.

‘What’s happened, Kit? What’s going on?’

‘Let’s get on the road first, then I’ll tell you everything.’

They walked past Caldwell’s big Chaika and kept on going. Caldwell unlocked the door of a pale green car that looked like a large Fiat 600.

‘This is a ZAZ-965,’ he said. ‘The Chaika is too conspicuous. People would notice, especially where we’re headed. The ZAZ is probably the most popular car in the Soviet Union. Just be careful going round corners – it has a tendency to tip over.’ Caldwell handed over the keys and Gabriel slid into the driver’s seat. There was an odd smell in the car, Gabriel thought, a cheap, sharp, piney scent as if designed to overwhelm some more noxious odour. He sneezed and his eyes smarted. Caldwell opened the passenger door and joined him, taking a street map out of his pocket and unfolding it.

‘Right. Let’s get out of Leningrad, first and foremost. Head south on the Nevsky Prospekt. I’ll tell you where to turn off.’

Gabriel started the engine and drove out of the small parking area, turning left and then right on to Nevsky.

‘This is our own car, by the way, not hired. Arkady bought it yesterday morning. I said it was my present for him. He was utterly thrilled. Keep straight on here.’

They motored south on Nevsky, then turned east, driving through the suburbs of Leningrad on a wide four-lane boulevard. One thing was for sure, Gabriel realized, they weren’t heading for Finland.

Caldwell explained.

‘I was less than honest with you, Gabriel. I apologize. But it was all to do with keeping Arkady sweet and uninformed. He couldn’t have the slightest idea of my other plan, Plan B.’

‘First things first. What happened to Arkady?’

‘Well, we had a nightcap last night in his room. I spiked his brandy with a large dose of chloral hydrate. He was out for the count in ten minutes. I threw a blanket over him so he wouldn’t get cold. Left his room, locked it and put the “Do Not Disturb” sign on the doorknob.’

‘Chloral hydrate?’

‘A “Mickey Finn” they call it in America. I reckon Arkady will be knocked out for at least twelve hours. When he comes round he’ll call the KGB, of course, and he – and they – will assume we’re hotfooting it for Finland.’

‘Where are we going, in fact?’

‘Murmansk.’

‘I see.’

‘And from there we’ll cross into Norway, not Finland.’

Gabriel remembered there was a Norwegian–USSR land border in the far north, some 120 miles long.

‘What about the MI6 welcome committee?’ he asked.

‘They know all about Norway. That envelope you gave to Pomeroy outlined Plan B.’

Gabriel felt his admiration growing – evidently everything was thoroughly worked out – the exfiltration of Kit Caldwell was fully and properly under way and he was relieved that Arkady was no longer participating. Gabriel glanced over at Caldwell: he seemed very relaxed. Now he understood why Caldwell had needed him.

‘We’ll drive all day, as far as we can,’ Caldwell said. ‘And then we’ll get an overnight train to Murmansk.’

‘How far is it to Murmansk from Leningrad?’

‘About nine hundred miles – approximately.’

‘They’d hardly expect you to cross the border there.’

‘That was my thinking, Gabriel, old chum.’ Caldwell grinned. ‘But I needed someone who could drive. And had an international driving licence, just in case.’

‘At your service, sir.’

As they left Leningrad’s suburbs, Caldwell directed him to the M18 highway. Caldwell had to read out the road signs as they were all in Cyrillic – Petrozavodsk, Kondopoga – and Gabriel had no real idea of where they were heading. And the further east they drove from Leningrad the worse the road surface became – the verges eroding, huge potholes that Gabriel had to swerve the ZAZ around. The only advantage was that traffic was light – a few trucks belching petrol fumes and fewer cars.

‘Most people in Russia travel by train,’ Caldwell said. ‘Which is why they don’t really bother to maintain the roads.’

‘So why didn’t we take the train?’

‘Too risky. We’d probably have been noticed in Leningrad station,’ Caldwell said. ‘We will take the train, however, tonight, at a place called Kochkoma, because – as we get closer to Murmansk – most of the road is unsurfaced, and we’d have to drive more slowly.’ He shrugged. ‘We’re on a timetable. We have to be in Murmansk tomorrow, Sunday. We have to cross the border to Norway at midnight or thereabouts. The welcome committee won’t wait for more than twenty-four hours.’

Gabriel said nothing: he was in Caldwell’s hands, Caldwell’s chauffeur – he should just keep driving and hope for the best. However, he felt his anxiety begin to mount perceptibly.

He looked at the petrol gauge.

‘What about fuel?’

‘There are hardly any petrol stations. We’ll stop at every one we see and top up.’

Gabriel glanced at his watch.

‘Do you think Arkady will be surfacing around about now?’

‘Actually …’ Caldwell paused and frowned. ‘Arkady won’t be surfacing at all.’ Caldwell’s tone was reasonable, matter-of-fact – he might as well have been talking about the weather forecast, the faint prospect of rain. ‘I should have told you. There was too much at stake. Once I’d knocked him out with the chloral hydrate I decided I was taking too much of a risk. What if he came around sooner than expected? So I held a pillow over his face for five minutes.’

‘My God!’

‘Yes, he’s dead and gone, I’m sorry to say.’ Caldwell sighed. ‘He was an ardent and compliant lover but he was a KGB agent, at the end of the day. The plus side is that we have a good few more hours, I reckon, until housekeeping grow concerned and knock on his door.’

Gabriel glanced over at Caldwell, understanding – for the first time – his ruthlessness. He was suddenly reminded of Faith and the way that they thought and acted, these professional spies. Their training told them to take no chances, so they struck first. Strike first. Maybe it was something he should learn and prepare for, he told himself – might be useful in the future.

They stopped at a petrol station outside Petrozavodsk and filled the tank to the brim. They both took the opportunity to urinate behind a small heap of rusting, wheel-less cars and assorted abandoned machinery. Gabriel was growing hungry and thirsty and they turned off the highway to find a small

village with a grocery store where they bought black bread and dry sausage, some packets of crude-looking potato crisps brightly labelled as Moskovskiy Kartofel and a pear-flavoured *limonad* called Dyushes. Caldwell also purchased a bottle of Stolichnaya vodka. Thus replenished, they set off again for Kochkoma.

Gabriel didn't feel that inclined to talk as he was still coming to terms with the disturbing news of Caldwell's killing of Arkady. Caldwell opened the vodka bottle, had a swig and handed it to Gabriel. He took a welcome gulp, relishing the burn. He exhaled. This was Caldwell's show, not his. Caldwell made the decisions, so just keep driving – so far, so good. The traffic grew ever lighter as they headed east, then north-east – according to Caldwell. After about three hours they pulled into the side of the highway and stepped out of the car to stretch their legs. It was a mild day with a faint breeze and a silent migration of clouds overhead. There wasn't much to see, Gabriel thought, looking around. On either side of the highway were forests of silver birch and pine stretching away into the distance. Caldwell produced a clasp knife from his pocket and cut some thin slices of the hard sausage which they ate with the black bread, washed down with some Dyushes and another swig or two of Stolichnaya. Gabriel ran on the spot for a couple of minutes, did a few star-jumps and felt his lungs fill with oxygen. They climbed back into the car and headed off once again.

'What made you decide now was the time to get out?' he asked. 'Was it a consequence of Philby's defection?'

'No. Philby knew nothing about me,' Caldwell said. 'Just as Philby knew nothing about George Blake. The Tovs are very good about compartmentalizing their assets, keeping them apart from each other, uninformed.' He paused. 'No, it was something else they let slip – there's another termite in MI6, apparently.'

'Really? Are you sure?'

'Yes. A new one, they told me. All I know is the code name. "Coriolanus". They like their literate classical names, the Tovs.'

'Coriolanus. Another one? Jesus …'

'They didn't mean to let me know, it was an accident, a mistake. But it was enough to give me the frighteners, you understand. Who is this person? What did this Coriolanus know about me and our operation?' Caldwell smiled, ruefully. 'One has a sixth sense about these things, in this business – a sense that time is running out, that the going is no longer good, if you

know what I mean. I didn't feel like trusting to luck. So I sent the signal to Pomeroy. Get me out. And here we are.'

Gabriel thought – a 'new' termite … And he suddenly recalled his last conversation with Dmitri Levitin in Dovehouse Gardens. The 'new one', Levitin had said – and then tried to make out he was referring to Gabriel. Was that a blunder? Was Levitin being a bit smug? It seemed to confirm Caldwell's suspicions, anyway. Gabriel supposed that Levitin, as *rezident*, was running this new traitor, this termite. Yes, Gabriel thought, the Russians were indeed lucky with their numerous turncoat Britons. However, once he and Caldwell were in Norway two names would have to be removed from that number.

Caldwell offered Gabriel the vodka bottle again but he declined and lit a cigarette instead. There was no risk of dozing off, he realized – the thrumming reverberations of the rugged road surface and the need to avoid the larger potholes kept him very alert.

'Have you any idea who this Coriolanus is?' Gabriel asked.

'I've a pretty good idea. One of two, or possibly three, people. But I can't confirm it yet. I just need some crucial information to corroborate my suspicions. As soon as I'm back in England I'll find out for sure.'

'Have you told anyone about Coriolanus?'

'Yes, I told Pomeroy when I asked to be exfiltrated. That was the reason I had to get out, I said. I wasn't secure. I told him to pass the Coriolanus information on to MI6.'

'My God,' Gabriel said. 'We are very good at betraying our country, aren't we?' He thought of Angus Fairford and the others. He wondered if it was the Coriolanus revelation that had brought Faith Green to Moscow …

'We are spies, after all,' Caldwell went on. 'Comes with the territory. You can't trust anyone, really.'

'Did you trust Arkady?'

'Oh, no. Not one iota. He was there to keep a routine eye on me, I knew that, to report back. I simply decided to take sexual advantage of the situation.' He thought for a moment. 'It was too bad about young Arkady,' he then said, musingly. 'He was a sweet boy. At least he didn't know anything about his fate – his last sentient memory was a large glass of brandy.'

Gabriel sensed that the vodka was making Caldwell maudlin, wanting to talk.

‘What about you, Gabriel? How’s your love life?’

‘Well, *comme ci, comme ça*, I’d say.’

‘I thought you told me once you had some sweetheart who worked in a Wimpy bar.’

‘I did. But she dumped me.’

‘Foolish girl.’

‘But I do have this other relationship,’ Gabriel said, spontaneously. ‘Very on and off. With an older woman.’

Gabriel knew that he was going to confess. He couldn’t quite say why – simply perhaps because Caldwell knew Faith Green and Gabriel wanted to know what his reaction would be. He was keen to see what this confession might bring him – some sort of release – perhaps some important information.

‘Oh, yes? Do tell.’

He could register Caldwell’s piqued interest.

‘She’s Faith Green.’

He glanced at Caldwell and saw his stunned, slack face, a parody of astonishment.

‘*What?*’

‘Yes. We have an affair going on, so to speak. Very much at her behest. Sometimes it’s on, sometimes it’s not on.’

‘I’m speechless, dear boy!’

‘I’m sort of obsessed with her, I realize, I admit – but I don’t think she’s obsessed with me.’

‘You mean to say you’re fucking Faith Green?’

‘From time to time. When she lets me. For some two years now.’

Caldwell reached for the vodka bottle and took a large gulp, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

‘My God, I’m stunned. Isn’t that “bad procedure”, as she would term it?’ Caldwell said, looking at him, blinking.

‘Yes. I would think so.’

Caldwell fell silent. Gabriel could practically hear his brain analysing the consequences of this revelation.

‘Good Lord. What the hell—?’

‘Nobody knows,’ Gabriel interrupted. ‘Except you and my psychoanalyst. We’re very discreet. Very.’

Gabriel glanced over at him again. Caldwell's body was hunched, leaning forward in his seat, both hands gripping the vodka bottle in a physical manifestation of his complete bafflement.

'Do you think it's dangerous?'

'Of course it's dangerous,' Caldwell said. 'Bloody dangerous for her. She's very powerful in the organization. If this ever got out, good grief …' He gestured, waving his hands about vaguely. 'She'd be sacked in one second. She's breaking every rule.'

'Rules are for breaking, someone once told me.'

'True.'

'Look at you and Arkady.'

'Not the same. That was always going to happen. I'm sure the Tovs knew we'd end up lovers – that's why they made him my general factotum.' He looked over at Gabriel. 'Did she make the first move?'

'No, I did. But she responded.'

'*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*,' Caldwell said with a faint smile, shaking his head in bemusement.

'I think that's true, actually,' Gabriel said, nodding. 'I think she can't really believe we're lovers. It goes against every professional instinct in her being.'

'So why did she do it?'

'I'm just hard to resist, I suppose.'

Caldwell let out a harsh guffaw of laughter.

'Good for you, Gabriel. Bloody hell. You've made my day. The world has changed.'

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2.

Kochkoma

They arrived at Kochkoma, with evening approaching, after almost ten hours on the road. The quality of the daylight had changed, shifting to a kind of pearly, luminous dusk. It was almost 9 p.m. but everything was still clearly visible. Gabriel realized they were heading north, close to the Arctic Circle, and at this time of year there would be no nightfall in any real sense, just an encroaching gloominess as the sun's light still illuminated the northern world even though it had dipped below the horizon. Murmansk, he remembered, was even above the Arctic Circle. He wondered if the permanent near-daylight would be a problem when they came to cross the border.

Kochkoma was a small rural settlement at an important railway junction, so Caldwell had told him. The express from Leningrad would stop here in a couple of hours and they would abandon the ZAZ and journey on to Murmansk by train. Gabriel motored down the shabby main street – past a small white church with a blue cupola, wooden and log houses with small front gardens, steeply pitched roofs and spavined picket fences – avoiding a horse and cart that was coming up the road against the oncoming traffic. He felt he could have been in a short story by Chekhov. Caldwell indicated a side street and Gabriel turned down it and parked the ZAZ.

They stepped out of the car, stretched and stamped their feet. Caldwell told him not to lock the doors and to leave the key in the ignition in the hope that the ZAZ might be stolen which would further cover their tracks. They headed back to the main street, looking for the small convenience store they had spotted as they drove into the little town, brightly lit with some racks of potatoes on either side of the door. Caldwell purchased

biscuits, more dry smoked sausage and another bottle of vodka, and, outside, they loaded the pockets of their coats and jackets with their provisions.

At Kochkoma station Caldwell bought the tickets – ‘hard’ class, as he thought they would be less conspicuous there than in ‘soft’. The massive black train puffed into the long platform just before 11 p.m. and they boarded with a few other passengers. It was a twelve-hour journey from Kochkoma to Murmansk, apparently. They took their places in a carriage that was fairly empty and found two hard maroon leather seats facing each other. Across the aisle from them was an old woman in a headscarf and two young boys about ten years old. They looked at Caldwell and Gabriel with patent, gaping, wide-eyed curiosity, as did everyone else who passed by where they were sitting.

‘We look so foreign to them,’ Caldwell explained, quietly. ‘Every single thing about us – our clothes, our shoes, our faces, our hair, our smell, even.’

‘Isn’t that a risk?’

‘No, they won’t do anything except stare. That’s why we’re better off here.’

The train pulled off and Gabriel settled down for the long journey. He was exhausted after the drive – perhaps he’d manage a few hours’ sleep as the train powered northwards. He turned up the collar of his coat and hunched into the corner by the window. The carriage was brightly lit and there was a continual traffic of people up and down the aisle – visiting the lavatory, Gabriel assumed. He closed his eyes.

He slept for half an hour before Caldwell awoke him with a gentle kick of his shoe. Gabriel sat up. A ticket collector was examining their tickets. He needed a shave and was wearing a scruffy black uniform with a military-style peaked cap pushed back on his head. He and Caldwell were talking in Russian. Caldwell reached into his pocket and presented his KGB laissez-passer. The guard was clearly impressed. Gabriel produced his and handed it over. The guard read them both slowly, handed them back and had a few more words with Caldwell. Caldwell was smiling, shaking his head, raising a hand in gratitude as he conversed further with the guard who gave a vague salute and moved on.

‘He offered to upgrade us to soft class,’ Caldwell said, keeping his voice low. ‘He couldn’t understand why we were travelling hard. I told him we’d been ordered to.’

‘Will that work?’

‘I’m pretty sure he’ll report us when we arrive in Murmansk – just as a matter of routine. Should take a while to filter back to headquarters, however.’ He seemed troubled, Gabriel saw.

‘I don’t think it’s a problem,’ Caldwell went on. ‘They’ve probably discovered Arkady’s body by now. They’ll know we’re on the run.’

‘But they’ll think we’re at the Finnish border.’

‘I’d imagine so. Anyway, we’ll cross tomorrow night. We won’t linger in Murmansk.’

He dug the vodka bottle out of his coat pocket, had a large swig and handed it to Gabriel.

‘Here’s to torpid, inefficient Russian bureaucracy,’ he said. ‘Fingers crossed.’

Gabriel did sleep on the journey, though he woke up every time the train stopped at a station. Belomorsk, Poyakonda, Imandra – Caldwell read out the names as they pulled in. Gabriel went up the carriage to find the lavatory and waited in a queue of more openly staring people, men and women, and eventually found himself in the cubicle. He locked the door and raised the wooden lid of the filthy WC. Just a ceramic hole above the track. He lowered his trousers and underpants, sat down, and had a shit. There was no toilet paper so he tore a couple of pages from his notebook to wipe himself clean. He felt all the better for it.

A weak sun appeared through ragged clouds in the early morning as they rattled northwards. Caldwell sliced them some dry sausage and they drank more vodka. The landscape through which they were travelling was unrelieved, undulating pine-covered hills. Gabriel felt a strange melancholia steadily settle on him. It seemed almost as if he was condemned to journey on this uncomfortable train for the rest of his life. Or was it, he thought, simply that the new day was bringing the inevitable jeopardy of the border crossing ever closer and his anxiety was increasing, yet again? Caldwell seemed to know absolutely what he was doing and what to expect – and was driven on by the prospect of his freedom – whereas Gabriel sensed his usual resentment at being placed in harm’s way, once more. How come he was here on this train heading for Murmansk in darkest Russia? How had fate conspired to bring this bizarre and perilous situation about? He sighed

and nibbled at his fatty, salty Russian salami. There was nothing he could do about it, he knew, he just had to hope for the best.

Murmansk station was a large building with a facade of massive columns supporting a verdigris saucer-dome above a lantern and a tall pinnacle with a red star superimposed. They bought more biscuits and some bars of chocolate in a station shop and wandered out into the midday sunshine.

‘Well, now we need to steal a vehicle of some sort,’ Caldwell said in a matter-of-fact voice and led Gabriel to the station car park. Some of the cars looked abandoned, Gabriel thought, dusty, rusted and uncared for; some even had flat tyres, he saw, recognizing the now familiar ZAZ models here and there. Caldwell was peering into a chunky pale blue sedan that looked a bit like a Ford Popular – a Moskvitch-402, Caldwell informed him. They glanced around. It was quiet – Sunday lunchtime, Gabriel realized. Caldwell picked up a large stone and quickly broke the vent-window on the driver’s side. He carefully reached in and unlocked the door.

‘Keep a lookout, old chap, will you?’ Caldwell said, stretching under the steering wheel and pulling out a handful of thin cables. He took a small pair of pliers from his pocket and proceeded to cut and strip some of the wires. He touched two wires together and the engine coughed. He touched them again and the car shuddered as its motor raced, then idled.

‘Nice artifice,’ Gabriel said. ‘You can’t drive but you can hot-wire a car. How come?’

‘Because I’m a well-trained agent in the field, that’s how come,’ Caldwell said, stepping out and allowing Gabriel to slide into the driver’s seat. Gabriel unlocked the passenger door and Caldwell climbed in, glancing at the fuel gauge.

‘Half a tank – more than enough,’ he said.

‘How far to the border?’ Gabriel asked. He had a sudden, sharp longing to set foot on Norwegian soil.

‘About a three-hour drive,’ Caldwell said, reaching into his pocket and taking out yet another street map. He studied it for a moment.

‘Turn left when you leave the station precincts and keep going until I tell you.’

Gabriel put the Moskvitch into gear and drove out of the car park, turning on to a wide boulevard lined with drab 1950s apartment blocks. Some roadside saplings in early leaf softened the unapologetic functionalism of the housing. Hello, Murmansk, he thought – and goodbye.

They drove on and turned south-west on to the M18 highway, Caldwell informing him that this was the very road they had started out on the day before in Leningrad, nine hundred miles away. After twenty minutes, Caldwell instructed him to turn off the highway on to a road designated ‘Route 12’.

‘This’ll take us all the way to the border,’ Caldwell said. ‘A place called Borisoglebsky – but we’ll be stopping before then and doing the rest on foot.’

‘Why?’

‘There’s a border zone all the way from the Kola peninsula to the Baltic. You need a permit to enter the zone – not to mention the fence.’

Gabriel said nothing. He was prepared simply to follow instructions. The road north to the Norway border was initially paved in concrete – with the usual terrifying potholes – but it soon gave way to gravel.

He glanced over. Caldwell was studying yet another map.

‘How come you have all this documentation?’ Gabriel asked. ‘All these maps, etcetera.’

Caldwell explained. He had told his handlers at the KGB that a British diplomat at the embassy in Oslo wanted to defect.

‘The Tovs got very excited and plotted out a route that avoided the only border crossing at Storskog in Norway. They gave me everything to pass on to this mythical fellow – including aerial photographs. We’re just retracing the steps he would have taken. It’s quite precise, you’ll see.’

The landscape they were driving across was now featureless tundra – brown earth with a few patches of low, leafless vegetation, as if a fire had passed through. The land looked parched and meagre and a curious smell began to fill the car, coming in through the broken vent window. Over to his left Gabriel could see tall, striped chimneys belching a dense white smoke that was drifting southwards.

‘What’s that?’

‘It’s a secret town called Nikel,’ Caldwell said. ‘Basically a vast nickel smelter. It’s not on any map but about five thousand people live there, working on the smelter.’

‘What’s that smell?’

‘Sulphur dioxide – that’s what’s coming out of the chimneys. That’s why nothing grows here.’

‘My God.’

They drove past Nikel and the landscape slowly resumed its northern sub-Arctic characteristic, freed of the pollution of the clouds of sulphur dioxide: pines and larches, spruce and firs covered the hillsides. There was very little traffic on the road, Gabriel noticed – sometimes they seemed the only car journeying north.

'Won't we stand out in this car?'

'No, don't worry. We're going to dump it soon, anyway.'

They drove on. Gabriel decided not to ask any more questions but he could sense his disquiet rising. Maybe it was the barren moonscape around Nikel that had spooked him, somehow – seeing the harshness of life up here in the furthest north-east of the USSR, with its brutal realities. What if they were caught crossing the border? There must be patrols, he reckoned. He glanced at Caldwell who was scrutinizing the road ahead, looking for some landmark. Gabriel suddenly felt like a swig of vodka but Caldwell had said that as they only had half a bottle left they should save it for when they hid up in the night – or whatever passed for night at this time of year.

'Right, here we are,' Caldwell said, abruptly, pointing. 'Turn off on to this track. To the right.'

Gabriel turned and they bumped down a narrow dirt lane into the closed-canopy gloom of the boreal forest.

'Park off the road, as far as you can go,' Caldwell said and Gabriel did so, driving the Moskvitch up to a large granite boulder. Caldwell reached under the steering wheel, did something to the electric cables and the engine shuddered to a halt.

They stepped out of the car and looked around. The silence was near-absolute, just a distant caw of some bird. The light was filtered as if projected through the finest gauze or translucent gelatine, and almost palely green in hue – or was he imagining that? Gabriel wondered. Was the overwhelming greenery affecting his eyes? Turning back, he saw that Caldwell had a compass in his hand.

'We just head north,' he said. 'We should hit the fence in about half an hour.'

They closed the doors on the Moskvitch and set off. The going was easy under the evergreen canopy with soft dense moss and lichens beneath their feet and a few small shrubs of juniper or bilberry sprouting here and there. Gabriel found himself looking forward to Norway, to a shave and a hot

bath, some decent food and plentiful alcohol. He glanced around; Caldwell had fallen behind.

‘You all right, Kit?’

‘You’re walking a bit fast for me. There’s no hurry. We should cross just before midnight – that’s the arrangement.’

‘Sorry, sorry. You set the pace.’

They plodded on and, as Caldwell had predicted, they duly came to the Russian fence – chain-link with a cranked arm of three strands of barbed-wire overhang on the Russian side. It looked old and rusty, about eight feet high.

‘What do we do?’ Gabriel asked.

‘I can cut it,’ Caldwell said. ‘But there are sensors, apparently. I’ve no idea if they’re efficient or not. Let’s walk along it – bound to be a break somewhere.’

They turned right and walked along the fence for a hundred yards or so and found a fallen larch that had crushed the chain-link, flattening it. They clambered over and headed off northwards again.

‘Any fences on the Norway side?’ Gabriel asked.

‘No. It’s open. There are lots of border markers, that’s all – just to indicate where the border is. Handy.’

Caldwell consulted his compass again and pointed ahead.

‘We just keep on going,’ he told Gabriel. ‘We’ll come to a valley with a small stream at the bottom. That’s the border. There should be an abandoned watchtower on the Norwegian side. Then we wait.’

They walked on through the pine forest – not talking, Gabriel listening to the birdsong as the night advanced, closing his mind, trying to banish the sudden image that came into his mind of Caldwell pressing a fat pillow over Arkady’s drugged and senseless, handsome face. In need of distraction, he forced himself to quietly hum a song and for a mile or so filled his head with a carol he remembered from childhood, ‘Good King Wenceslas’, inanely repeating it, again and again. It seemed strangely apt. ‘*Page and Monarch, forth they went, forth they went together.*’ After about half an hour the gradient steepened and the page and the monarch climbed a small hill. Here the vegetation changed somewhat – birches, willows and alders – and at the crest of the small hill they saw the valley below: a rare area of turfy, mossy meadow in the trees. The stream – more of a rivulet – snaked across the valley floor. Gabriel could see the wooden border poles placed on either

side: yellow with a black top for Norway, banded red-and-green for the USSR.

Caldwell pointed. Across the valley, semi-screened by spruce trees, was a wooden observation tower in evident bad repair. It was probably under a mile off, Gabriel thought. Not far to go.

'We made it!' Caldwell said, his voice cracking with exhilaration. 'We fucking made it! We just have to wait until midnight – then they'll give us the signal.'

They settled down as best they could in a small declivity ringed with bilberry bushes which had a good view of the valley. They ate some chocolate and biscuits and had a few rationed swigs of vodka. Gabriel noted an enormous fatigue descending on him – his adrenaline running out, he supposed, after the last extraordinary thirty-six hours or so they had lived through – he felt like curling up on the ground and sleeping. Instead he took off his coat and ran on the spot and did some more star-jumps in an effort to force his metabolism back into action. He did further deep breathing, filling his lungs. It made something of a difference.

The light began to change around ten o'clock as the sun sank lower in the sky. Gabriel knew that the phenomenon was known as a 'white night'. In a week or so the sun would not dip below the horizon at all and the Arctic Circle would enter its season of so-called polar day. But now they would endure a period of sustained twilight, an unchanging dusk, until the dawn arrived and the sun reappeared at around four o'clock in the morning. Gabriel glanced up. The clouds had dissipated and, above, the clear sky was a vibrant blue. Over to the west there was an orangey-red haze – as close to a sunset as they would experience, he supposed. He looked at his watch and saw that he could read it clearly – he could probably read a book in this eerie, unearthly glow, he reckoned. However, as the dusk advanced, the temperature was dropping, that was for sure, so he re-wrapped his scarf over his mouth and nose. Not long to go. He should have brought gloves, he realized, rubbing his palms together to generate some warmth.

Caldwell was sitting perched on the little declivity's rim staring at the watchtower. Gabriel wandered over to join him. He lit a cigarette.

'They'll signal from the watchtower,' Caldwell said. 'Flash a torch – three short flashes, one long. Then we move.'

'Why don't we just go over there now and wait for them?' Gabriel asked.

'Bad procedure, Gabriel. We have to wait until they arrive.'

‘Fair enough.’

Caldwell opened the vodka bottle, had a swig and passed it over. Gabriel took a large gulp, glad of the burn in his mouth and throat – he was developing quite a taste for vodka, he recognized, the quotidian fuel of the Russian population. It was growing colder, palpably, and the western sky was slowly becoming more livid – crimson shading into orange shading into yellow. A cold northern sunset, he thought.

‘I can’t thank you enough, Gabriel,’ Caldwell said, suddenly. ‘I couldn’t have done this without you.’

‘Well, full circle,’ Gabriel said. ‘I helped you get out in Cádiz, now I’m helping you get back.’ He hoped he sounded sincere.

‘It’s not just the practicalities,’ Caldwell said, seriously, unusual emotion in his voice. ‘It’s your presence, you know. I needed someone I could trust, someone I like very much, whom I can call on for anything. Someone – you – beside me.’ He swigged more vodka. ‘This is the end of my active service, I can tell you. I’m retiring.’

‘What’re you going to do, Kit? You’ll go bonkers in a week.’

‘Oh, no, I won’t. I’m going to go somewhere remote, peaceful – Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall – and read books and listen to music and slowly drink myself to death.’

‘Oddly tempting,’ Gabriel said.

‘And my last act for the British Secret Intelligence Service will be to deliver up this “Coriolanus” person. I just need some corroboration – a few facts that MI6 will be able to provide – and the puzzle will be solved.’ He shrugged. ‘Maybe that’ll be the end of our shameful sequence of traitors.’

Gabriel didn’t pursue the matter – one member of the shameful sequence had been his brother, Sefton. Poor, stupid idiot Sefton, destroyed by his own arrogance. He wondered: was that the sin of all traitors? Arrogance? He thought of Angus Fairford and his never-quite-concealed smugness. Being caught was more than just an unwelcome discovery; it was an undermining, a cancelling-out, of that overweening self-confidence, that assurance that you were smarter than everyone else around. There was a kind of glee that these traitors experienced, with their elaborate subterfuge and clever duplicity, he thought; a seductive frisson of self-importance – of self-love – even. I’m the best. They haven’t a clue, the idiots. They’ll never catch me. He wondered if ‘Coriolanus’ was basking in such idle self-esteem. Well, Kit Caldwell was coming home. The game was almost up.

Caldwell was rummaging in his pockets and drew out a packet of Russian cigarettes. He offered one to Gabriel.

‘They’re incredibly strong – Belomorkanal is the brand. You’ll be buzzing all night. Put your French ciggies to shame.’

Gabriel took one and flattened the cardboard tube of the mouthpiece as Dmitri Levitin had done. Caldwell lit his, then Gabriel’s. Gabriel took a deep drag, feeling his head reel agreeably. They finished the last of their vodka.

‘Do you ever think of the war, Kit?’

‘What war?’

‘The First World War.’

Caldwell had told him once that he had been a nineteen-year-old subaltern at the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917. To Gabriel he might as well have said Waterloo or Agincourt; it seemed almost impossible that this man in his mid-sixties had been in the trenches on the Western Front. What world was that? And then he considered their current situation, hiding out on the Soviet–Norwegian border, on the run. What world was this? He cleared his throat and spat, stubbing out his Belomorkanal. The nicotine rush was going to his head.

‘I do dream about it, from time to time,’ Caldwell said, evenly. ‘But in my waking moments I suppress all memories – usually with a stiff drink.’ He smiled. ‘You live through things, you know. One lives through things – all sorts of bad times, crises, ill-health, moments of hopelessness – and you come out the other side wondering how you ever coped, how you survived. But you don’t want to go back and relive it. Well, I don’t. Best not to. Big mistake.’

‘I know exactly what you mean,’ Gabriel said. ‘It’s unimaginable if you project, or revisit, or posit it – your recent history, I mean. No, no, inconceivable – not me, I could *never* have done that. But when you have done it, when it has happened, it just becomes experience. Something that you lived through.’ He was thinking of the three men he’d shot and killed. ‘You’re right, one should never look back.’ He paused. ‘You know, Kit, since this whole thing began – with Faith and you, Cádiz and Warsaw, there have been some really awful things I’ve had to do that have totally shaken my—’

‘Hang on,’ Caldwell said, suddenly alert. ‘Is that a light flashing?’

They both stood up to get a better view. And, sure enough, from the base of the watchtower across the valley came a series of flashes: three short, one long.

‘How bloody marvellous!’ Caldwell said. ‘Let’s go, old bean!’

The light was so strange, Gabriel thought, as he and Caldwell carefully negotiated the steep slope to the valley bed, the stream and the border markers. He could see well enough – but the world in which they were moving was almost monochrome, colours leached out, as if they were making their way through a sepia photograph – and yet, high up above, the sky was still a perfect sunlit blue.

Caldwell stumbled and fell. Gabriel helped him up.

‘Who’s the welcome party?’ Gabriel asked.

‘Norwegian border force – and no doubt some people from the Norwegian PST – their MI5. And, I hope and assume, one or two of our MI6 colleagues.’

They had arrived at the stream. It was shallow and fast, about four feet wide, rushing over small boulders. The stream ran exactly between the Norwegian yellow border post and the Russian red-and-green one. Gabriel inhaled, coughed. He and Caldwell were both panting, out of breath from the scramble down the slope from the valley crest.

‘I’m going to wade across, fuck it,’ Caldwell said, stepping into the glassy helter-skelter of the water and sloshing across the stream. He stepped up on to the opposite bank.

‘Come on,’ he said. ‘Doesn’t matter if your feet get wet. We’ll be in Oslo tomorrow.’

‘No. I can make it,’ Gabriel said, taking a few paces back, preparing to jump. He took a short run and leapt, easily reaching the other side, but the tussock of grass that his leading right foot planted on gave way and he heard the crack as he went over on his ankle. He knew instantly what had happened – a bad ankle sprain, something he’d experienced during his final year at boarding school. He had landed awkwardly in the heavy sand of a sodden long-jump pit on a rain-drenched inter-house athletics competition. The same audible crack. The anterior deltoid ligaments at his right ankle had torn – he hoped they were only small lesions.

Caldwell helped him to his feet. Gabriel tested his weight on his right foot. Agony! He sat down with a thump.

‘Fuck! You go on, Kit. They’ll be expecting you. I’ll bind this up with my scarf.’

‘You should have waded across, like me.’

‘Yes, yes, I know. I’ll be five minutes behind you. Don’t leave without me.’

‘All right. See you later, laddie.’

He stopped and turned.

‘We’re home, Gabriel, you realize. We’ve made it!’

Caldwell set off again and disappeared into the murky gloaming, heading up the gentler slope on this Norwegian side of the valley, making his way through the trees towards the abandoned observation tower. He was soon lost to sight.

Gabriel undid his shoelace and slipped off his shoe. He could already feel the swelling around his ankle bone. Then he had an idea. He whipped off his sock and plunged his foot into the rushing stream. It was very cold, extremely cold, as good as an ice-pack. He held his foot under the water for a minute or two, then, drying it off as best he could and replacing his sock and shoe, he took his scarf from around his neck and bound it as tightly as possible around his ankle, double-knotting it with full strength.

He heaved himself upright and tested his weight on his foot. Sore, just about tolerably secure – but that sudden immersion in near-freezing water appeared to have had a positive effect. He could limp along. He hobbled up the slope into the treeline. Here and there on the grass were bits of last winter’s windfall timber from the larches. He searched around and found a thin, stout branch about five feet long. He broke off its remaining twigs – it would do well as a support, taking some of the weight off the damaged ankle. Three legs better than two, he said to himself, as he limped onwards, faster now that he had the stick to help him.

Then he saw Caldwell, lying on the ground.

Gabriel almost fell over, then gathered himself, trying not to let the shock overwhelm him. He knelt by Caldwell’s body. He knew instantly that Caldwell was dead. He was lying face down, his head turned to one side, and Gabriel could see the neat entry wound of the bullet about an inch above his left eyebrow. His eyes were open and Caldwell’s habitual stray lock of hair had fallen fully across his face. Gabriel instinctively reached out and pushed it back, feeling a harsh wave of sadness consume him – followed almost immediately by a sudden heart-jig of panic about his own

safety. He had heard no shot – maybe a silencer was used – but, then again, he had been sitting by the turbulent stream with the loud slabber and spill of its wash and wavelets running.

He looked around. He was in full fight-or-flee mode, he recognized, primitive motivations causing his adrenaline to surge and his brain to work furiously. Caldwell must have been shot just moments ago, and whoever had shot him couldn't be far away. He stood up. He could see distant torch beams through the pines around the base of the watchtower. He picked up his stick and hobble-ran some fifty yards to a small, dense copse of alders, squeezed in around them and fell to the ground, trying to still his breathing, listening hard. Nothing. An owl-hoot. Then he heard voices, indistinct, approaching. He couldn't see anything from his hiding place and the voices were low – he couldn't tell what language they were speaking, either, just the mumbled sound of human discourse, though one speaker, with a distinctive, higher-pitched voice, seemed to be issuing instructions. Then there was silence. Then, minutes having passed, he thought he heard, very faintly, the noise of some vehicle starting, a motor running – and finally that faded, also, and he was back in the silence of the forest.

He curled up, hugging his coat to him. His mind was chattering almost hysterically with suppositions and interpretations of what had happened. He realized that spraining his ankle might well have saved his life. To anyone waiting in ambush for Caldwell it would have looked as if he had crossed the border alone. Ambush? Who would have ambushed him? Russian border forces on patrol? What were they doing on the Norwegian side? How did they know – somehow – that he and Caldwell were crossing the border at that very place at that very time? No – impossible, surely. As he lay there he kept thinking more and more about the welcome committee Caldwell had mentioned. Maybe it wasn't composed of the people he was expecting. Maybe Caldwell had been betrayed – Plan B intercepted and a harsher, fatal welcome bestowed instead.

Gabriel thought hard. Caldwell had said that the envelope Gabriel had delivered to Pomeroy at the embassy contained the details of their new escape route and its revised timings. Pomeroy would have passed that on to MI6 so that the welcome committee would know where and when to position themselves. How many people would know about that? Gabriel wondered. No, he told himself to stop all speculation. Now was not the time. He had his own massive problems to face at the moment. If the details

of Plan B had been intercepted then it would be clear that Caldwell was not crossing alone. So where was his accomplice, Gabriel Dax? Gabriel felt sick. He knew – he should be lying on the ground shot dead like Kit Caldwell.

One last question was still nagging away at him. Why did someone, or persons unknown, want Caldwell dead? He was an MI6 hero, someone who had penetrated the KGB apparatus in Moscow for over two years, someone who had played a dangerous and clever game pretending to be a Soviet double agent for even longer. Why would he be killed here, as he crossed the border, taking his first steps in free Europe? Gabriel couldn't think of a plausible answer.

The white night gave way to a proper sunlit morning around four o'clock. Gabriel stood up and cautiously left his hiding place. His ankle was stiff, still swollen, but he could walk, after a fashion, with the help of his staff. He slapped leaves and moss off his coat and trouser legs. The low sun angled prettily through the spruce and firs. Birds were singing. There was an almost Edenic quality to the light and the air was crisp, invigorating. He walked over to where Caldwell's body had been. Gone, of course. That was what must have happened last night, Caldwell's body had been carted away. There was a bloodstain on the grass where his head had lain – the last trace of Kit Caldwell, Gabriel thought. What to do now? he wondered. He wished suddenly that he'd had the presence of mind to take Caldwell's maps off his body.

He looked around him, still breathing deeply as if the morning's oxygen was the perfect fuel for what he had to do next. He thought it best to head for the abandoned watchtower – there must be some sort of track that led away from it, he reasoned, however overgrown. As far as he could recall they had crossed only a mile or so from the official Norwegian border post at Storskog. The road from there, the E6, he remembered, continued to a place called Kirkenes, a proper town about ten or twelve miles away. First things first.

There were many discarded cigarette butts at the foot of the watchtower and he could see fresh vehicle tracks in the muddy lane. He tried to remember how many distinct voices he had heard in the night when Caldwell's body had been removed. Three? Four? He walked slowly but steadily along the track, leaning on his larch branch. He felt hungry and thirsty and realized he must look rough and unshaven. He had his travellers'

cheques on him and his emergency wad of US dollars, at least. If he could make his way to Kirkenes he could freshen up, eat some food and then see what transport was available to travel onwards.

It took him about an hour to reach the E6, a two-lane metalled road. He turned right for Kirkenes and stuck his thumb out at the few passing vehicles. Eventually, a farmer in a grey Volvo Duett stopped for him and drove him on to Kirkenes. Gabriel's rusty German was useful as it turned out that the farmer spoke it well. He told Gabriel that this whole area of Finnmark had been occupied by the German army in the war. Most people over the age of forty spoke some German, he said, they had had to.

'*Tausend Dank*,' Gabriel said sincerely when he was dropped in Kirkenes's main square ten minutes later. There was a bus waiting at a small depot, he saw. He felt relief wash over him. Oslo was over a thousand miles away, he knew. He would have plenty of time to think and try to figure out some explanation of why Kit Caldwell had been shot dead, just a few minutes after he had reached what he assumed was safety and the welcome gateway to his new life.

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3.

Fly Away Home

Three days later, Gabriel sat in Stockholm airport waiting for his flight to London to be called. He had bought a razor and shaving cream and had shaved in an airport toilet rather self-consciously, aware of the curious looks from the other men using the facility. Still, being clean-shaven made him feel immeasurably better, even though his hair was greasy and he was conscious of his own body odour. He'd been wearing the same shirt since he'd left Leningrad several days ago.

It had taken a day and a half and three changes of bus to reach Oslo. He didn't linger and caught another bus to Stockholm – ten hours away – as soon as possible. For some reason he felt safer on buses than trains, and he further reasoned that leaving for England from Sweden rather than Norway was another worthwhile precaution. On his long journey south he realized that if anyone was looking for him then they would be doing so in Norway – hence the Stockholm departure. Good procedure, he thought.

He was still playing with various interpretations of what had happened. Caldwell had obviously been betrayed – it seemed the logical conclusion. The details of Caldwell's exfiltration from the USSR had been seen by someone in the British Secret Intelligence Service who was working for the Russians – and that same person wanted Caldwell dead and had duly brought that about, one way or another. But why? As Gabriel ruminated on his long bus journeys, thinking over everything he and Caldwell had talked about, he kept coming back to one name – 'Coriolanus', the new termite. Caldwell thought he knew who Coriolanus was – he just needed to confirm a few details on his return to London and MI6. Was that the reason Kit Caldwell had had to die? It probably was. Gabriel remembered that

Caldwell had told Archie Pomeroy about the Coriolanus discovery – and Pomeroy would have passed the alarming information on to MI6. Coriolanus, whoever that person was, would have known that Kit Caldwell was returning home with a dangerous, volatile secret. And anyone can keep a secret as long as they're dead. Who had said that? Al Capone? Dean Furlan? Genghis Khan?

And then the unwelcome thought came to Gabriel that this Coriolanus must also be wondering if Caldwell had divulged the details of his discovery of this new MI6 termite to Gabriel Dax. Best to take no chances. Gabriel felt the acid-bite of worry. He was safe at the moment; he was pretty sure that nobody knew where he was. But what would happen when he returned home?

He stood up and limped over to the bar and ordered a beer. His ankle was still slightly swollen and he had to be careful when walking not to provoke an angry twinge, but he was on the mend. He sat on a barstool, thinking hard. Once he was back he would be easy to track down – too many people knew where he lived in Claverleigh. Even Dean Furlan had found him there. Perhaps he should stay somewhere else. He had his flat in Ruskin Studios but even that wasn't secure. No, best to find somewhere anonymous for the moment – a small hotel, a boarding house – just to be safe, just until things resolved themselves. Then the realization came to him: what if things didn't resolve themselves? It was as if, he thought bitterly, this process that had begun with Faith Green asking him to do a simple 'little job' in Spain those three years ago had now reached a kind of dark, inevitable conclusion, some purulent nadir. He didn't have a double life any more – he wasn't a writer who was a reluctant part-time spy. No, he was now a spy in full-term employment, like it or not, and everything in his life would be governed by that state of affairs. It was a simple matter of survival.

He heard his flight to London being called over the tannoy and finished his beer. He would take it one day at a time, he told himself – and be very, very careful.

There was one message waiting for him at Ruskin Studios – from Dmitri Levitin. '*We must speak. Please call me on the usual number.*' It was undated, which wasn't helpful. Corless couldn't remember when he'd written it down – a 'few days ago' was his best bet. Maybe that was a good sign, Gabriel thought – he was still at liberty, so to speak, untraced. But the

one person he didn't want to see was Dmitri Levitin. Surely by now Levitin would have learnt of Caldwell's disappearance and the death of Arkady – and his own role in all this, Gabriel realized. Dmitri would know that his trusted London contact, Gabriel Dax, Caldwell's 'man in London', was equally corrupt, fully implicated in the Kit Caldwell affair, to the KGB's profound shame.

He changed his clothes and washed his hair in the kitchen sink. There was nothing else he needed in the studio but he did have to pick up a few items at Rose Cottage.

He was currently employing the full range of his artifice skills. He had lingered outside Ruskin Studios for thirty minutes, then wandered off up another street, checking to see if he was being followed, doubling back and waiting again. He was full-clear, as the saying went, and was pleased that at least he seemed to know what to do.

He did the same checks at Victoria station when he went to catch the stopper to Lewes. At Coulsdon South he left the train, hurried down the platform to watch who disembarked and where they headed and then stepped into the rear carriage as the guard's whistle blew for departure. Nothing sinister or significant, as far as he could tell. Similarly, when he arrived in Claverleigh, he walked past Rose Cottage and waited down the lane, then walked past it once more before he decided there was no surveillance. He was free to enter his own home, so he registered with resentful and sardonic indignation.

He experienced the usual sensations of relief and humbling familiarity on crossing his threshold – noting how tidy the house was and how dust free. Laura Devine, the wonder-worker. He had a bath, packed a few clothes in a holdall and gathered up the various bits and pieces he required to keep himself safe, or at least safer, long-term. He went into the woodshed and retrieved Dean Furlan's Colt Hammerless automatic from its hiding place. He took out the magazine – seven rounds. So, fully loaded. He slipped it in the inside pocket of his jacket, immediately feeling more confident. He vaguely worried about this new desire to be armed. You could be carrying a gun and be shot in the back of the head, of course – it guaranteed nothing. But he was aware of the – what? – the latent potency of having your own means of retaliation. It was, in the end, at least for him in his current situation, he decided, a sense that carrying a gun, a lethal weapon, was a sign of being less vulnerable: your victimhood was not a necessary

condition. You could draw your gun and defend yourself. He didn't particularly welcome this new feeling – another indication of how his life was spiralling out of control – but what could he do in the current circumstances?

Back inside the cottage he wrote a note for Laura and propped it against the toaster, telling her he was about to go away travelling for his new book but he would telephone her before he went abroad. He left her a month's wages. He noted the empty pewter bowl on its square of newspaper on the floor. The Cat was still in residence, he was glad to see. He quit Rose Cottage, locking the front door behind him, with real regret and a kind of anger that the enforced conditions of his spying life meant he couldn't even live in his own home. Fuck! Things had to change. He knew he had to confront Faith Green.

'Stay as long as you like, darling,' Aldous said. 'Nothing would make me happier.' He topped up Gabriel's whisky. 'Don't tell me if you don't want to – or can't – but may I ask why?'

'It's to do with the consequences of my trip to Russia.'

'Ah. I wasn't all that happy about that little jaunt, as you may recall.'

'I had no choice, Aldous. The problem, my problem, is that I believe some people think I have information – vital, very secret information. But in fact, I don't. So it's better if I remain out of sight until I can explain to them otherwise.'

'Right. I see. Actually, I don't see – but I'll take your word for it.' Aldous smiled and sat down. 'What would you like for supper? Cheese omelette? Or spag bol?'

Gabriel's room in Aldous's large flat was filled with hundreds of glossy art monographs piled on the floor, the bed just accessible through the palisade of stacked hefty volumes the size of small paving stones. No matter, he thought, he was secure: nobody knew where he was. He would keep his head down for a few days – let them get even more worried – and then, confrontation.

He lay back in his bed on the bare mattress – no sheets, just a blanket, Aldous had apologized, all a bit sudden, everything would be immaculately prepared tomorrow – five-star. Gabriel didn't care, he hadn't slept properly for days, he realized, as he ran through the difficult, unforgettable week or so that he had experienced. He had his sleeping pills, if necessary, but he

fancied he would go the full eight hours tonight, out for the count, no problem at all. The copious whisky helped, of course, but he knew that he craved rest, above everything. He would take his time, he decided. The longer he remained out of sight the stronger his position grew and the more worried his enemies, whoever they were, became, so he hoped. He was the one who could spring surprises and catch people off guard – he felt oddly pleased that the onus was returning to him.

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4.

Coriolanus

Gabriel spent the next few days in Aldous's study typing up his chapter on the Kremlin and Red Square, gratified to be reacquainted with his old life for a while. It turned out to be a long chapter – everything was fresh in his mind, after all – and the idea came to him that perhaps the book, *On the Beaten Path*, was now actually finished. He had written ten chapters out of a planned twelve but he couldn't envisage a future, at the moment, that would allow him to travel to the Taj Mahal or the Great Wall of China. He would deliver the Kremlin chapter to Inigo, he decided, and see what he thought about publication.

He was glad to have had these days of anonymous repose, although each time he left Aldous's flat and wandered up Kensington High Street, he took the proper artifice precautions. Nobody was following him, he was convinced – nobody knew where he was. Furlan's Colt was always on him when he left the flat, snug and heavy in the inside pocket of his jacket. He telephoned Inigo and booked an appointment for the next day. A plan was forming – his publishing house, Mulholland & Melhuish, was close to the Institute. If he was in the neighbourhood then that might be the perfect time to confront Faith.

He met Inigo in his office at 11 a.m. Inigo seemed stouter, if anything, the buttons of his red waistcoat straining, holding back his burgeoning pot belly. Drinks – gin and tonics – were poured. They both lit up. Inigo had the assembled chapters on his desk.

'It's slightly on the slim side, don't you think?' he said, shuffling through the typescript. 'What've we got? The Colosseum, Big Ben, Mount Fuji, Edinburgh Castle, the Pyramids – do you think the Santa Monica pier really

qualifies? – Kremlin, Red Square – can't wait to read, by the way – Rock of Gibraltar, Notre-Dame, Stonehenge.' He frowned. 'What's the word length?'

'Seventy thousand, give or take,' Gabriel said. 'And Santa Monica is a perfect stand-in for Los Angeles, you have to admit.'

'We're talking two hundred and fifty pages, thereabouts.'

'Plus illustrations – and I'll write a preface.'

'Yeah. Hmmm.'

Then Gabriel had a brainwave.

'I was thinking, Inigo, just a notion,' he said, in as throwaway a manner as he could manage, 'that this could be the first in a series. I could do *On the Beaten Path*, volume two, volume three. Four even – it could run and run. Every two or three years a new volume – cover the globe.'

Gabriel sensed Inigo's quickening enthusiasm.

'You are not a stupid fellow, Gabriel Dax. And I see a mighty omnibus down the line.' He thought, tapping a cheekbone with a forefinger. 'Yes, yes, I like it. Draw me up a list for volumes two and three and we'll sign you up.'

'Though my next book will be *The Job*.'

'Of course. But now we have a grand, overarching plan. One very happy editor.'

'And author,' Gabriel said, somewhat amazed at the way his brain had worked, feeling his own small rush of exhilaration. New contracts, more money. His old life was making a fight-back. Inigo replenished their gins.

'Spot of lunch? Celebration?'

'I've got to go to a meeting, apologies. Maybe next week.'

'Call Araminta, we'll fix a date.'

'Who's Araminta?'

'New secretary.'

Inigo walked him down to the lobby on Floral Street.

'Is everything OK, Gabriel?' he said, seemingly concerned, opening the main door.

'Yes. Couldn't be better, now I've finished my book. Why do you ask?'

'Well, you look a bit troubled, thinner than ever. Positively gaunt.'

'So says the chubby editor.'

'Bastard.'

They grinned at each other, shook hands and Gabriel headed off to Long Acre. Faith tended to leave the office at lunchtime, he knew. If he lurked outside the Institute, unseen, he might be able to approach her, assuming she was alone.

Gabriel took up a position, obliquely opposite the door to the Institute, in a boarded-up shop's doorway. He lit a cigarette and looked at his watch: 12.45. Good timing. He felt a small tremor of worry begin to build and rebuked himself – he was the wronged one in the whole farrago of the fatal, failed exfiltration of Kit Caldwell. If he hadn't had to wait behind because of his sprained ankle he would have been lying dead in a Norwegian spruce wood just like poor Kit Caldwell. There was something rotten in the state of MI6 and he was going to try and find out what was going on and who was involved. And he had the Coriolanus key, one that might unlock that door. He would play that for all its worth.

Just after one o'clock he saw Faith appear from the Institute with Sirin. They had a brief chat and went their separate ways, Faith heading up the street towards Kingsway. Gabriel followed her on the opposite side of the road. She was wearing a dark grey chalk-stripe trouser suit with ankle boots. She had a black velvet Alice band in her hair and was carrying a heavy briefcase. He enjoyed the familiar appeal of noticing what she wore, how she curated the self that she presented to the world. He crossed the road and came carefully up behind her.

'Faith?'

She froze, then turned slowly.

Gabriel smiled at her but he could instantly see how angry she was.

'Gabriel! Where the fuck have you been?'

She rarely swore, he knew, but it was always a sign of her instability, taken off guard. He was oddly pleased to have surprised her – usually it was the other way round.

'Trying not to get killed,' he said, calmly.

She took a step towards him.

'Are you all right?' she said.

'Just about.'

'You know Caldwell is dead.'

'I was fucking *there*, Faith,' he now said with some vehemence – it was his turn for profanities. 'We need to talk, I think.'

‘I was heading for the Regency,’ she said. ‘For a sandwich,’ she added, lamely. ‘I’ve got a lot of papers to read.’

The Regency was a pub on Kingsway – they had met there before. Inigo Marcher also frequented it.

‘Perfect.’

They walked on together in silence.

‘What happened? How did you get out?’ she blurted. Gabriel was pleased – was this a sign of concern?

‘I’ll tell you everything once we get settled and have a powerful drink. There’s a lot to cover.’

They sat opposite each other in an alcove with a view of the street beyond and its busy to-and-fro of cars and buses. No one was close to them and the filtered traffic noise added to the sense of discretion. Faith had asked for a large vodka and orange. Gabriel opted for a triple Scotch and soda. Permission was granted for him to smoke.

He took a sip of his Scotch, lit a cigarette and ran through, in detail, the narrative of the trip from Leningrad to Murmansk to the border.

‘So, if you hadn’t sprained your ankle …’ she said.

‘Yes. I was only about five minutes behind Kit. But the welcome committee had already done their business.’

‘The report I saw suggested that he was shot by a Russian sniper.’

‘They would have shot him on the Russian side of the border, don’t you think? Not waited until he had crossed into Norway.’

‘Yes. Fair point.’

‘Who organized the welcome committee?’

‘The Scandinavian desk – and the military attaché in Oslo.’

‘And what do they say?’

‘They turned up, as instructed, and waited and nobody appeared – so they went home.’

Gabriel thought.

‘What date were they expecting Caldwell?’

‘Ah. The eighteenth of May, I believe.’

‘That was a Monday.’

‘Yes. Monday the eighteenth.’

‘We crossed on the seventeenth. Sunday, as instructed. Just before midnight.’

They both looked at each other, minds occupied with theory and counter-theory.

‘You see what this means, Faith,’ Gabriel said, slowly. ‘Kit Caldwell had the whole thing running like clockwork. Timed to the hour. You were there in the embassy when I handed the envelope to Archie Pomeroy. Every detail was listed, Caldwell told me.’

‘I saw what was in the envelope, of course, read the instructions. They seemed quite clear.’

‘But somehow,’ Gabriel went on, ‘between Pomeroy receiving the envelope and the setting up of the welcome committee the date of our crossing was moved back by twenty-four hours.’ He felt surprisingly tearful, suddenly, seeing the easy clarity of the conspiracy, and took a big gulp of his whisky. ‘A move –’ he cleared his throat – ‘that allowed another rogue welcome committee to be in place on the Sunday and intercept us.’

‘That seems a logical explanation.’

She was wearing a white silk polo neck under her jacket and he saw her slip a finger under the neck and ease the tightness of the material away from her skin. Sweat, he registered. Faith was unhappy.

‘Who would know about the Caldwell plan? How many eyes?’ he asked.

‘Many eyes, unfortunately,’ she said. ‘It was a big deal for us. Think about it. Kit Caldwell – agent number one, asset number one – being successfully exfiltrated. It would have been a major coup. Major. Headlines in the national press, maybe. But no one person can orchestrate these operations. Had we got him out safely there would have been a massive debrief – days of debriefing. It was all set up.’ She fiddled again with the closeness of the polo neck around her throat. ‘He’d been at the heart of the KGB in Moscow for two years. What he could have told us would have been exceptional. Unparalleled.’

‘How did you know he was dead?’

‘His body was found in the Pasvik river about a mile downstream from the border crossing at Storskog. Norway side of the river.’

‘When?’

‘The eighteenth.’

‘A day later.’

Gabriel thought back, remembering the muffled conversation around the removal of the body and the high-pitched voice of the person issuing commands.

‘What’s happened to the body?’

‘It’s in a police morgue in Oslo.’ She finished her drink. ‘We’re trying to find a family member who would like it repatriated. Not easy. Kit was a solitary soul. I think there’s a cousin in Swansea who might give us the authorization, otherwise he’ll be buried in Norway. Can I have another, please?’

He went up to the bar, reordered their drinks and bought a couple of bags of potato crisps. Time to turn the screw, he thought. He went back to the table and deposited the drinks and the crisps.

‘Do you want a sandwich?’ he asked.

‘Actually, I’m not that hungry,’ she said. ‘I’ll have a few of these, though.’ She opened a bag and ate a crisp, then another. She exhaled. ‘What a miserable bloody business. I’m very sorry about Kit. He was a brave, brave man. He should get a medal.’ She reached across the table and squeezed his hand. ‘So are you, Gabriel. Brave. How did you get out, you resourceful spy, you?’

‘I’ll tell you later. Does the name “Coriolanus” mean anything?’

‘Yes, it does,’ she frowned. She looked a little confused, Gabriel thought. ‘There is an unwelcome MI6 resonance, apart from the Shakespeare play. Why?’

‘I don’t need to inform you that it’s a code name. The code name of a Russian termite in MI6.’

He sat back and watched Faith react. She was rattled, he saw.

‘Look. I know Caldwell passed the information on to Pomeroy. We took it seriously but we disregarded it as sheer KGB bluff. Disinformation. Impossible. Near-impossible. I swore – and I would still swear – that we were now termite free,’ she said, a little self-righteous prickle in her voice. ‘We’ve even got Angus Fairford from World War Two. That’s what we do at the Institute – we track them down, relentlessly. We would know if there was a termite out there – there would be indications, suspicions, tiny signs.’

‘Well, you might not know everything,’ Gabriel said. He drummed his fingers lightly on the tabletop, thinking. ‘Kit Caldwell told me, explicitly, that there was a new Russian termite in the Secret Intelligence Service. He had a pretty good idea of who Coriolanus was but needed to come back to London to pick up some details, some final giveaways that would lead to the identity being fully revealed.’ He spread his hands. ‘He seemed very confident.’

‘My God,’ she said. ‘Shit.’

She looked closely at him.

‘Did he tell you who he thought was Coriolanus?’

Gabriel took his time before answering.

‘Not in so many words. He dropped a few clues.’

He had decided to lie – it seemed to give him some power, he hoped. Or maybe it was foolhardy, he suddenly thought, made him vulnerable.

‘Such as what?’ Faith was in sudden full, fierce interrogation mode.

‘I have to do a bit of digging around myself, but all I’ll say is this – look closely at the route that the exfiltration instructions took from Archie Pomeroy in Moscow to Kit’s death at the border. The Moscow embassy to MI6 in London to the team in Oslo – who were meant to supervise the border crossing. Who saw Kit’s itinerary? Who changed the date? It was Coriolanus’s doing, wouldn’t you say? That’s why Kit Caldwell had to be killed – don’t you see? He was about to reveal Coriolanus as a termite. A crucial, unknown termite.’

He stubbed out his cigarette, feeling momentarily exhausted. He eased his shoulders, turned his head this way and that.

‘Are you all right?’ she asked, genuine concern in her voice, he thought.

‘It’s been a tough few days,’ he said. ‘I confess.’ He reached for her hand and she let him take it.

‘Maybe we could see each other,’ he said, softly.

‘Where are you staying? The studio?’

‘No. With friends.’ He took her other hand. ‘We could book a room at the Waldorf.’

‘It’s not the right time, Gabriel. Especially after what you’ve just told me.’ She frowned, pulling her hands away from his. ‘I’ll have to go over everything. Maybe it’s someone in Oslo …’ She thought further. ‘That would make sense as it was all arranged very swiftly. That crew who was waiting – the fake welcome committee – did you see any of them?’

‘No. I couldn’t even really hear their voices. They didn’t linger.’

Now she looked at him in a different way, he thought. More loving? More concerned? Respectful? He felt the old ache return – the Faith effect. He looked at her pale, beautiful face and reached out and touched her cheek with the knuckles of one hand.

‘I’ve missed you.’

‘Our time will come, Gabriel. But I have a major problem to solve, thanks to you.’

She stood up.

‘How do I contact you?’ she asked.

‘It’s better if I phone in, every day. I don’t want to drag these friends into anything they wouldn’t understand, you know.’

Her face hardened for a moment – as if she was suddenly aware that he didn’t trust her fully.

‘I’ve got the bloody Russians to worry about as well, remember?’ he said, by way of amelioration. ‘They also want to talk to me. I have to duck and dive.’

‘Of course. Be extra careful. We’ll speak tomorrow.’

She blew him a vapid, clearly insincere kiss and strode out of the pub. Gabriel turned to the window and watched her slim figure briskly crossing Kingsway, dodging the cars. He felt the old pang of love for her deep in his being, something visceral, impossible to ignore, that was quickly cancelled by a note of worry – what might now follow, now that Faith Green was on the Coriolanus case? What complicated consequences might now ensue, he suddenly intuited – his chest instantly hollow, as if the air had been blasted out of his lungs – if and when Faith Green found out who was Coriolanus?

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5.

Departures

Gabriel stood across the street from Century House in Lambeth – the new headquarters for MI6 since the move from 54 Broadway. It was a tall modern tower block of more than twenty storeys with a petrol station on the ground floor and seemed an odd choice for the HQ of a secret service. Who cares? Gabriel thought. He had been hanging around for nearly two hours now, watching the MI6 employees leave at the end of the day. Perhaps Ishbel Dunbar was working late.

He lit yet another cigarette and decided that once his pack was empty – there were two Gitanes left – he'd abandon his surveillance and go back to Aldous's flat for a late supper. He wasn't sure he'd achieved anything concrete during his conversation with Faith. Certain things she'd said were nagging at him but that might just have been exasperation on her part, her professionalism being questioned by the announcement of Coriolanus, the new termite, and her denial of its veracity. Perhaps Ishbel would provide more information. Then he saw her appear and walk briskly towards Lambeth North Tube station. She was wearing a dark blue raincoat and a curious purple pudding-bowl hat. Gabriel was also wearing a hat, a trilby that Aldous owned, part of his artifice. He intended to remove it from time to time – and to slip off his own raincoat and carry it over his arm – just in case Ishbel was watching to see if she was being followed. A man in a hat replaced by a man with no hat. He wanted to surprise her, wherever she was going.

He followed her cautiously into the station – not bothering to buy a ticket – and watched her descend in the lift. He raced down the spiral stairway and caught a glimpse of her walking on to the northern platform. She stepped

into the carriage when the train arrived and Gabriel entered at the furthest end, removing his hat. He thought he could tell that she was taking no precautions. Just another journey home at the end of the day, as far as she was concerned. She was reading a paperback book, he saw.

She changed at the next stop, Elephant & Castle, and wandered through the tunnels to the Northern line. Gabriel waited until the last minute and entered her carriage, hat on. He stood as far away from her as possible, half-turned away. He began to relax as it was clear she had no suspicions he was on her tail.

She left the train at Angel, Gabriel following her up the long escalators. The ticket collector was occupied with a bunch of schoolboys and Gabriel just walked on by. The thought crossed his mind as he left the station that London Transport Board must be losing a fortune through fare-dodging.

He removed his hat, shrugged off his raincoat and carried it over his arm as Ishbel crossed the road, turned up a side street, and entered a 1930s block of apartments, three storeys high, dark brick with curved iron balconies painted cream, and modest art deco detailing – a chevron pattern on the facade made with contrasting bricks, squat finials on the corners of the building, railings on the flat roof and a wide stainless-steel main door.

Gabriel scrutinized the row of bells and saw the name Dunbar beside the one for Flat 3. Thank God – he didn't have to bluff his way inside. He took a breath and pressed the bell. There was a buzzing sound and he pushed the heavy door open to reveal a flight of stairs. An arrow on the wall directed him to Flats 3, 4, 5 and 6. He climbed the stairs to the first floor, turned down a corridor and there was Flat 3. He suddenly wondered if there might be a Mr Dunbar present. Was she married? Or divorced? She did still call herself Mrs Dunbar, he remembered. A husband would be awkward, he thought. However, too late now. There was a peephole in the door, he noticed.

He rang the bell and took a step back. The door swung open and Ishbel stood there.

'My God, Gabriel!'

She was genuinely astonished, he saw.

'Hi, Ishbel. Can I have a word?'

'How do you know where I live?'

'I got your address from the Institute,' he lied. 'I wanted this to be discreet, you know, off the record.'

‘I thought you were in Russia.’

‘I was, but I managed to get out. May I come in?’

‘Of course, of course. So very pleased to see you, Gabriel. We thought something had gone horribly wrong. With you, I mean. I can’t bear to think about poor Kit Caldwell.’

The flat was very neat, Gabriel registered, very little clutter, as she led him through a hallway to a sitting room that had a rather Swedish feel, he thought. White walls with wooden Venetian blinds, a floor-to-ceiling wall-storage unit filled with books and pieces of pottery, pale-wood chairs with oatmeal cushions and a large weeping fig in the corner. Maybe this was Mr Dunbar’s taste – it didn’t seem very Ishbel, he thought. She was wearing a sand-coloured tweed suit with a battledress top – the effect being oddly martial, as if it were some sort of couture uniform. She took his coat and hat and offered him a drink – she was already on her gin and tonic, she said – long day at the office. She poured him a large whisky and water and they sat down facing each other, each in their armchair.

‘*Slangevar*,’ she said, and raised her glass. ‘The hunter home from the hill. Welcome back, Gabriel.’

Her voice was affectionate and sincere, he thought, as if she were truly pleased to see him.

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘So you heard what happened to Kit Caldwell.’

‘Yes. Awful. A Russian sniper, I was told.’

‘No. He was shot in the head at close range by someone, amongst others, on the Norwegian side of the border.’

He explained about his sprained ankle, and the unforeseen delay that had saved his own life. She seemed chastened as he spoke.

‘Can I ask a few questions?’ he said. ‘I’m trying to piece things together.’

‘Did Faith Green send you here?’ Ishbel asked, the tone hardening, abruptly.

‘No, I’m here on my own account. Faith Green has nothing to do with this meeting.’

‘Good. Excellent. Please continue.’

‘I assume that you, on the Scandinavian desk, had something to do with the exfiltration.’

‘Everything to do with it,’ she said, briskly. ‘The instructions were passed on to us from the higher echelons of MI6. Kit Caldwell being exfiltrated, eighteenth of May at midnight at such-and-such a location. Prepare to

receive him, transport him forthwith to the embassy in Oslo ready for repatriation.' She sipped at her drink.

'The eighteenth?'

'Yes. I went to Oslo myself,' she continued. 'The military attaché there organized the team to meet Caldwell. We didn't know about you.'

'I see. You thought he was coming over alone.'

'That was the information.'

'Except we both came over on the seventeenth. The day before. And another team was waiting. A hostile one.'

'We had been told the eighteenth. The team was ready and waiting on the eighteenth – but, obviously, no one showed up. They stayed on for an hour or two and then returned to Oslo. The next day the news broke that Caldwell's body had been discovered. I was back in London by then.'

'So somewhere between Moscow and London, and your receiving the information, the date of our crossing had been changed.'

'So it would seem,' she said, frowning. 'Now that you tell me the exfiltration was always meant for the seventeenth.'

'Who could have changed that date?'

'I've no idea,' Ishbel said, and went to her drinks table to replenish her gin and tonic. 'Do smoke if you wish.'

Gabriel lit a cigarette and waited for Ishbel to sit down again. She brought him a pottery ashtray with a thistle motif in the base. There was something about her voice, her type of Scottish accent, that reminded him of Angus Fairford. They were related, of course, both from the Borders.

'Maybe it was a simple mistake. A wrong transcription with fatal consequences,' she said. 'These things can happen when things are passed down a line, from person to person. Chinese whispers, you know.'

'I doubt it. Caldwell had the whole thing planned like a railway timetable.'

'Many people would have handled that document.'

'Who sent it on to you?' Gabriel asked.

'I believe it came from the Institute. Caldwell was their baby, after all.'

'I see.' Gabriel stubbed out his cigarette. 'Does the name "Coriolanus" mean anything to you?'

'Ah, no. Only the Shakespeare play. Why?'

'Caldwell told me it was the code name for a termite in MI6. He had a strong idea about who Coriolanus was.'

She looked at him steadily, calmly. There was a steeliness about her that emerged from time to time – this somewhat plump and homely young Scottish woman – that reminded him of Faith.

‘Coriolanus …?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did Caldwell tell you who he thought Coriolanus was?’

‘Let’s say he dropped some strong hints,’ Gabriel said, playing his dubious card and wondering if the pretence was wise. ‘I have to do a bit of research to confirm the identity. Hence this visit.’

Ishbel looked at her watch.

‘I’m booked in to make a quick phone call,’ she said. ‘Do excuse me, I’ll be two minutes.’

She left the sitting room and went into the hall, closing the door behind her. Gabriel couldn’t hear anything of her conversation. He lit another cigarette.

Ishbel came back in and refreshed his drink. She kicked off her shoes and sat down, tucking her legs underneath her.

‘Can I have one of your French cigarettes? I’ve given up, in theory, but I have a sudden craving.’

She took a cigarette from his proffered pack and Gabriel lit it for her with his lighter. The mood had changed. Official business was over.

‘Tell me about the book you’re writing,’ she said.

‘It’s finished. I handed in the last chapter yesterday.’

They talked on about his next book. Ishbel complained about Century House, how she was angling for a transfer back to the Iberia section. Gabriel told her about his visit to Edinburgh and his interview with one of the soldiers who fired the one o’clock gun from the castle esplanade. How she loved Edinburgh, she said, and reminisced about childhood visits. All very warm and friendly and chit-chatty, Gabriel thought. Nothing more about the sudden, miserable death of Kit Caldwell.

After about half an hour he said he had to go. At the door, Ishbel put her hand on his arm and said that, now he knew where she lived, they should meet again and set the world to rights. There was a lovely Italian bistro round the corner.

With pleasure, Gabriel said, and almost kissed her goodnight.

He wandered out into Islington, feeling the intoxicating effect of his large whiskies. What had he learned? It was almost a repeat of his conversation

with Faith. Nothing concrete – yet he had set hares running. Coriolanus was out there in the world and there would be troubling ripples spreading—

He paused his thoughts and looked round, hearing something. There was a car cruising slowly down the road, at walking pace, just behind him – a big black Rover 3-litre, he saw. It pulled in to the kerb in front of him and a young man stepped out. Dark suit, shirt and tie. Another young man, similarly attired, with a neat moustache, appeared from the passenger side. They were both smiling – empty smiles.

'Mr Dax?' said the first man.

'Yes.'

'We would like to take you to someone who would like to speak with you.'

The accent was slightly foreign, Gabriel thought. German? Polish?

'Who might that be?' Gabriel asked, cautiously.

'A friend. Just a conversation.'

'All right. With pleasure.'

As he stepped forward, Gabriel reached into his jacket pocket and drew out the Colt Hammerless. He pointed it directly at the first young man's face, inches away. The young man raised his hands – he was very surprised.

'You!' Gabriel said, gesturing at Moustache. 'Get back in the car.'

'Please, Mr Dax, this is—'

'Fucking shut up! Get back in the car.'

Moustache climbed back into the passenger seat and shut the door.

Gabriel now pressed the muzzle of the Colt against the first young man's forehead, shoving him back towards the car with the pressure of the gun on his brow. He could see the consternation, eyes flicking, sweat surging.

'Get back in the car, drive away fast. I have your number plate, I'm calling the police.'

'OK! Please – easy, Mr Dax! Please! Just a simple conversation. We—'

'Get back in the car.'

The young man did as he was told, eased himself back into the driver's seat, dropped his hands and slammed the door shut. The car accelerated away, Gabriel noting the number plate: WBT 646.

He turned and ran. He ran up streets and down side streets, he ran all over Islington, it seemed, until his hoarse, gasping breathing brought him to a halt. He stooped, hands on knees, and raked his throat and spat. He felt almost tearful. How had he managed to do what he had just done? What

instincts had taken over? What kind of person was he becoming? He spat again, stood up, arched his back, hands on hips, and inhaled, deeply. He took the gun out of his pocket and looked at it. Could he have pulled the trigger, shot those two men? No – because the fucking safety catch was still on. Fool – maybe a lucky fool. He pocketed the gun again. However, thank God for Dean Furlan's Colt Hammerless, he thought, as he walked down to a main road and hailed a passing taxi, giving Aldous's address.

He sat in the back of the cab, deciding not to try and analyse what had happened or who might have been responsible. He had been skilfully followed, he supposed, as simple as that, despite all his artifice precautions. Or, the thought came to him, unbidden – Ishbel had made a phone call. To whom? And she had kept him there for another half-hour chatting amiably. What was Ishbel's agenda? It was time, he realized, to leave the country – it was far too risky to stay, and only by removing himself from this arena of danger and suspicion would he find any peace of mind or security.

EXTRACTS FROM THE TRANSCRIPTION OF SESSION 20

GABRIEL DAX:	I've decided to leave the country for a while.
DR HAAS:	Research? A new book?
GABRIEL DAX:	No. I just don't feel safe here any more.
DR HAAS:	Really? What's happened?
GABRIEL DAX:	Since my trip to Russia people think I'm in possession of information – dangerous, explosive information. But in fact I'm not.
DR HAAS:	What about your connections with MI6? Your Faith Green?
GABRIEL DAX:	They would like to help but I don't think they can. They don't know who is trying to … [Pause] to get to me.
DR HAAS:	Where will you go?

GABRIEL DAX: I haven't decided yet – I've a few ideas. I just wanted to let you know that you won't be seeing much of me in the near future.

DR HAAS: You can always call me, you know, Gabriel. As a friend – if I can help in any way.

GABRIEL DAX: That's very good to know, Katerina – I may well take you up on it at some stage. I have to make sure my tracks are well covered. Very few people can know where I am – only people I can absolutely trust.

DR HAAS: I'm sorry that you feel the necessity to—

GABRIEL DAX: It now seems inevitable to me. Once you start, even in a minor way, as I did, by working for the Secret Service, one little job – then you're in a kind of trap. I look at what's happened to me in the last three years or so – the things I've done seem unbelievable. It's a downward spiral.

DR HAAS: You mean the killings.

GABRIEL DAX: Yes. And two nights ago, I was confronted in the street by two men. I pulled a gun on them, threatened them. I was lucky – they drove away.

DR HAAS: A gun? You carry a gun?

GABRIEL DAX: Yes, these days I do – since I came back from Russia. Just as well.

DR HAAS: *Mein Gott!* Who were these men?

GABRIEL DAX: I don't know. The one who spoke to me sounded foreign.

DR HAAS: Russian?

GABRIEL DAX: I don't think so. But maybe they were sent by the Russians. I won't have any more contact with the Russians, that's for sure. They must suspect me now.

DR HAAS: I see what you mean about a 'downward spiral'. Perhaps you should go to the police.

GABRIEL DAX: I don't think that's an option, alas – because of the whole MI6 connection. Too many secrets would have to be revealed.

DR HAAS: Then I would go back to your controller, your protector. I think the person who has to sort out this mess is the one who started it – Faith Green.

GABRIEL DAX: If only it were that simple.

Gabriel quickly set his affairs in order. He withdrew half the cash he had in his bank – some six hundred pounds – and set up standing orders for Laura Devine and the rent at Ruskin Studios. He wrote Laura a letter, explaining that he was researching a new book abroad and that all post should be forwarded to Aldous Dax and she should continue to go regularly to Rose Cottage as usual and not forget to feed the Cat. He told Aldous he would make contact wherever he finally settled down – only Aldous, in all the world, he was convinced, should know where he was. Aldous happily agreed – in fact, Gabriel sensed he was rather thrilled to be such an essential component in the disappearance of Gabriel Dax.

He thought of writing to Faith but decided against it – he just needed to disappear, he reckoned, and he would benefit from a good head start. If he wrote to her explaining what he was about to do she would set procedures in motion to follow or intercept him, he was sure. Best simply to be gone – she would know exactly why. Maybe in his absence she would unearth the Coriolanus termite in MI6 and he could safely return home. He sent postcards to his sister-in-law, to Inigo Marcher, to his literary agent, Mike Lockhart, to Nolan Westmacott, Roland Reed and a few other friends and acquaintances telling them he was off on his travels and would be incommunicado for a while. He didn't specify for how long. There would be nothing surprising in this, he reasoned – it had happened many times before – the difference was that this time he wasn't travelling. He was hiding.

And then suddenly the perfect destination came to mind. So perfect, he thought, that he was almost looking forward to his leave of absence, his hiatus, his sabbatical – whatever he liked to call it. With this pause, he hoped, circumstances might allow him to renew his old life. That was the crucial aspiration. Maybe he would be the one spy who finally managed to quit spying.

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6.

The Disappearance of Gabriel Dax

The ferry from Corfu pulled into the harbour at Agios Andreas, the main town of the Ionian island of Ikarios. Gabriel stood at the guard rail on an upper deck in his beige cotton-drill suit and Panama hat, sunglasses on, and looked at the stacked, jumbled buildings that rose above and around the port in a semi-amphitheatre effect. Mainly white buildings, though certain houses were painted a bright pink or blue or yellow. At a higher level he could see the tiered spire of a church. It all looked magical, alluring – a clever conspiracy of light and air and blue sea. Beyond the town was a rich screen of landscape – the tall range of the hills that bisected the island north to south was densely covered with pines. He hadn't been here for years, yet everything seemed familiar. It was a clear, sun-bright day with a cool breeze from the north. Gabriel felt his spirits lift.

Ikarios was a discovery he had made when researching his first book about the Greek archipelago, *The Wine-Dark Sea*. At the time it had seemed to him an almost perfect island. Hilly, wooded, roughly almond-shaped, ten miles long and four miles wide, with small, mainly sandy beaches in sheltered coves. Most of the population was gathered in the south in and around Agios Andreas and a few smaller villages nearby – the empty upper half given over to the near-unpopulated undulating wilderness apart from the naval base at the island's very northernmost tip. The presence of the base and its military demands made communications better than on the other small islands in the Ionian chain and explained the relative sophistication of Agios Andreas. There was a post office with telephone cabins and a telegraph connection, there were cafés and restaurants and four

hotels. Naval officers from the base on weekend furlough met their families there. Two ferries arrived each day, one from Corfu, one from Piraeus.

Ikarios was the revelatory destination that he had decided on in London, his eureka moment. He wasted no time and had taken the boat train to Paris, had flown from Paris to Athens, then boarded the ferry to Corfu – he had to set up a poste-restante facility in Corfu Town and to open a bank account – and then he caught the midday ferry to Ikarios. And here he was, leaning on a railing on the upper deck, recalling the arrival of his younger self all those years ago – so full of hope, of vague writerly ambition – in strong contrast to the weary, troubled and perplexed figure he now presented to the world, he thought. A man on the run, seeking refuge, a hiding place. Still, he thought, geeing himself up – here he was in Greece, and the sun was shining. Nobody knew where he was – nobody on earth – and a new chapter was beginning. Maybe he would recover his old zest for life once he was properly settled in.

Gabriel disembarked and lugged his heavy suitcase the fifty yards or so to the hotel on the marina – the Hotel d'Orient – where he had booked a room from Corfu. In the small whitewashed and tiled lobby area he handed his passport to the young woman receptionist sitting behind a high desk and loosened his tie as she confirmed his reservation. It was hot. Good. The receptionist returned his passport and handed him his room key with a smile.

'Welcome to Ikarios, Mr Strathleven.'

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Part Five

Ikarios, Greece

October–November 1964

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1.

The House of the Fig Tree

Gabriel sat back and read the last page he had typed, unrolling it from the machine:

> Dusk at Spíti Sykiás creeps up on the old house like a cat-burglar. I half-notice that the manic drilling of the cicadas has diminished, then ceased. A wafting chillier breeze caresses the back of my neck. Then the creek-creek, purring dial tones of the crickets begin. Shadows lengthen on the beach, darken it and then disappear. The light thickens, empurpled by the sun setting on the other side of the island. The pines release their acidulous sappy perfume. Moths flit clumsily around the oil lamp as I turn up the burner so I can read. Time for an ouzo and then supper – a chicken cooked in an earthenware casserole with onions, garlic and red wine …

Yes, he thought, he was definitely back on good familiar form. He added the sheet to the pile of typescript. Well over a hundred pages now – he'd have a perfect short book in a month or two if he kept on at this rate. Inigo would be surprised. *A Dream of an Island* was the title he was toying with and it was apt. Over these last four and a half months, Ikarios had delivered in ways he had never imagined possible.

The first purchase he made, two days after arriving, was a motorcycle – a second-hand Honda Super Cub C102. Now he was mobile he could tour the island and find a more permanent residence. He was given a list of houses and apartments to let by the small tourist office in Agios Andreas. He decided immediately that he didn't want anywhere in the town and so set off for the scattered villages around the southern coast to see if there was

anything suitable. He wanted a longish single driveway, no neighbours and real seclusion – he was going to bury himself away.

He knew at once when he saw Spíti Sykiás, the third property he visited, that it was ideal. *To Spíti tis Sykiás* meant ‘The House of the Fig Tree’. The dirt drive down from the main road was about a hundred yards long and the house itself was almost obscured by a giant fig tree, thirty feet high and wide. He met the owner – a local fisherman called Constantinos, who lived in a nearby village up the coast – with a young woman from the tourist office who could act as an interpreter, and was shown around.

The house was positioned on a steepish bluff above a narrow beach on its own small crescent bay. A substantial grove of stone-pine trees grew all around the property. It had an odd layout inside. The main living area was situated immediately on entering through the front door and consisted of a barely furnished sitting room, a dining room and a small kitchen. A substantial terrace was accessible from all three rooms. The house was clean but bare, nothing on the whitewashed walls, terracotta tiled floors with no rugs, a table with four chairs in the dining room and two armchairs facing a small fireplace in the sitting room. He didn’t care, he liked its spartan austerity. Off the kitchen was a toilet – a squatter – and a shower. There was no electricity but the house’s great advantage was a water supply. A nearby small stream fed into a concrete tank, and by switching on a diesel-fuelled pump a cistern on the roof could be filled that provided running water – drinkable – for the single tap in the kitchen and allowed the shower to work, after a fashion. As far as the WC was concerned, he was told, it fed a septic tank in the grounds. A bucket of water down the hole functioned as a flush of sorts.

Then he was led downstairs to a lower level where the two bedrooms were, directly beneath the terrace on the upper floor. The two floors of the house were stepped down the small bluff and there was a rear door between the bedrooms that gave direct access to the beach. The beach wasn’t private but nobody ever visited it, he was assured.

A short flight of stairs in the larger of the two bedrooms led to a cellar, entirely underground and noticeably chill. This was where food could be safely kept, though there was the option of a kerosene-fuelled refrigerator for a small supplement. Gabriel said he was happy to pay the supplement.

They let him prowl around on his own for a while. He saw a tin dustbin outside the kitchen door and asked what he should do about rubbish and

household waste. Constantinos led him into the pine grove and showed him a four-foot-square pit dug there with a fine-meshed wire cover. When this pit fills, he was told, you dig another, cover the rubbish with earth or sand or pine needles. Every time the pit is filled, dig another. It seemed a practical solution to the rubbish problem. He signed the tenant's agreement the next day – his rent was, approximately, a laughable £10 a month, paid in advance. He bought sheets, some basic foodstuffs and several bottles of retsina and moved in for his first night. Little by little, he thought, one step at a time: he needed to get his bearings, then he could become fully domesticated.

Spíti Sykiás was about two miles from a village called Emporio and from there it was an easy thirty-minute drive to Agios Andreas. He was isolated but not far from the modest civilization that Ikarios provided. On that first evening of his occupancy he pulled a wooden chair out on to the terrace, took a chilled bottle of retsina from his kerosene fridge and watched the light change over the sea view as the sun set. At the edge of the little bay above which the house was positioned was a small rocky islet, about fifty yards off. He would swim out to that islet tomorrow and colonize it, he told himself. The wine was rough and tangy; he had some bread and cheese for supper. For the first time since leaving England he felt a sense of ease and relaxation and the idea came to him that he should write a book about his life on Ikarios for however long he stayed – six months, a year, ten years. He laughed at himself. A dream of an island life – and there was his title, he had recognized: *A Dream of an Island* by Grant Strathleven. He laughed again.

Gabriel put the linen shopping bag into the pannier of the Super Cub, swung his right leg over the seat, released the kickstand and started the motor, giving it a good revving. It was a cool morning for October and he was glad of his suede jacket. He had slept well – his insomnia had effectively disappeared since he'd arrived at Spíti Sykiás – and he had enjoyed his routine morning swim to the rocky islet and back before he breakfasted on a melon and a mug of black tea with a spoonful of thyme-scented honey. His entire body was deeply tanned – he had sunbathed naked all through the breathless heat of summer – and his hair needed cutting and his beard was due a trimming, also. He would visit the barber after he'd

shopped and before he had lunch with Norman Helenhill at O Ipeirotikas, the Continental, the best restaurant-café in Agios Andreas.

Oddly, there was no sign of Helenhill in the restaurant. Gabriel was greeted warmly by the owner, Aristotle, and shown to his usual table. He and Helenhill lunched together once a fortnight or so and Helenhill had yet to pick up the tab, or even offer to go Dutch. There was always some ready excuse: 'My treat next time, old chum', 'I'm a bit low on funds currently', even, once, 'Damn. I seem to have left my wallet at home.' Gabriel didn't care – Helenhill was useful in that he knew the island well. He had lived on Ikarios, in Agios Andreas, for over two years and spoke passable Greek. Gabriel only knew a few basic words and phrases and Helenhill had acted as a useful interpreter for him on a couple of occasions.

Gabriel took out his notebook and jotted down his experiences at the barber shop. Barbering was one of the three professions he'd chosen for *The Job* – his next book – one of the three universal occupations or trades practised differently in almost every country in the world. And here he was in Agios Andreas doing research, somewhat amazingly, he thought. He scribbled his impressions down in his notebook remembering that this was also the catalyst of how he and Helenhill had met. He'd been sitting in the Continental waiting for his first course, writing down an idea in his notebook, when he heard a raspy, patrician English voice.

'Hello, hello. You must be a fellow scrivener.'

He looked up to see a tall, gaunt man with grey hair in a thick comb-over, in his fifties, Gabriel assumed. He was wearing a short-sleeved navy-blue shirt and stained tropical-weight grey flannel trousers. His worn sandals failed to hide claw-like toenails, the colour of old ivory.

'You see a chap writing in a notebook in a restaurant – can only be a scrivener.'

Gabriel offered his hand.

'A would-be scrivener. Grant Strathleven.'

'Norman Helenhill. May I join you?'

And so they had their first lunch together – that Gabriel duly paid for. Helenhill smoked small cheroots throughout, and talked only about himself, asking Gabriel no questions. They drank two bottles of retsina.

Helenhill was a writer, he confessed, who wrote 'erotica' under various pseudonyms, male and female. He had lived in Corfu Town for five years but had decided to move to Ikarios because he couldn't stand the expatriate

artistic community there, ‘with their heads buried far up their pretentious arseholes’. Ikarios suited him far better, he said, he was born to be solitary.

Gabriel noticed that Helenhill was wearing a gold wedding band.

‘Is there a Mrs Helenhill?’ he asked.

‘There were a couple of Mrs Helenhills in the past, in fact, but they didn’t last long. Difficult women – I couldn’t cope. Still, I kept the symbol.’ He waggled his ring finger. ‘I find that, on the whole, the ladies would rather sleep with a married man.’

‘Really? Why?’

‘Precisely because there’s no risk of marriage involved in the liaison – however brief. Very true of Greek ladies, I’ve found. They don’t like unmarried men, who are always on the lookout for a dowry, you know. Or so they – the ladies – think.’

Gabriel wondered why any woman would want to sleep with Helenhill, unless paid to do so. He noticed that the hair on Helenhill’s forearms – revealed by his short-sleeved shirt – was unusually dense. To a rebarbative degree, in fact. Gabriel found that the sight of the thick springy furze on Helenhill’s arms across the table made him lose his appetite, so he pushed away his unfinished dish of *psari plaki*, a rather tasty fish stew, and concentrated on the wine, trying to keep his gaze averted for the rest of their first meal together.

Helenhill was clearly running late today – he was usually in place before him – so Gabriel ordered a carafe of mavrodafni from Aristotle and a glass was poured. He liked the Continental for its relaxed atmosphere, its simple, tasty food and its view of the harbour. He could see that the ferry from Piraeus had docked and a few cars were rolling off on to the jetty. He wondered idly if he should buy or rent a car – no need, really. The Honda served every transportation requirement. He went to Corfu Town once a fortnight on the ferry – a two-hour journey – but didn’t linger. He would pick up whatever mail was waiting for him, go to his bank and get cash – the whole escape plan was working very smoothly, he thought.

The other advantage of Helenhill was that he would pass on his week-old copies of *The Times* and *Punch* magazine, after he’d thoroughly read them – though he always asked for them back for some reason, as if they had value, like a book. *The Times* and *Punch* were Gabriel’s sole connection with the outside world: the news, the culture, the pundits and opinion-mongers. He

had a bundle of copies of the newspaper and the magazine to return – he was expecting Helenhill to charge him for the loan one day.

Then through the window he saw his lunch companion approaching the restaurant with his odd rolling swagger, as if he were on the deck of a boat in a choppy sea. Gabriel was glad to see that the cool October day meant that Helenhill was wearing a long-sleeved cardigan, ill-fitting and moth-eaten though it was.

Helenhill sat down, lit a cheroot and poured himself a glass of wine.

‘Sorry I’m late. I know it’s meant to be my treat today, Grant, but I wonder if I could bump it along to the next time.’

‘My pleasure, Norman.’

‘And if you could see your way to lending me five hundred drachmas, I’d be eternally grateful.’

That was slightly over £5 at the current exchange rate, Gabriel quickly calculated.

‘I think I can manage that.’

Gabriel took out his wallet and removed five hundred-drachma notes and handed them over. Helenhill pocketed them without a word of thanks.

‘That cunt of a publisher in Paris owes me for three books. He says they’re too short. I’m minded to go to Paris and beat the shit out of him.’ Helenhill exhaled, loudly. ‘Anyway, here we are, Grant, dear friend. Lunch, a glass or three of wine. All troubles diminished and set aside, at least momentarily.’

They clinked glasses and ordered their food. Lamb was on the menu and they both ordered *arni kapama*, a ragout, and Gabriel asked for another carafe of mavrodafni. Helenhill was already on his second glass as he ranted on for a few moments about the perfidy of his publisher and then recounted the plot of his latest erotic volume, the story of a eunuch who was employed as a cleaner at a girls’ boarding school and who discovered that his impotency was in fact only temporary.

‘I don’t write pornography, Grant. No, no, I won’t tolerate that label. They’re sexy fun – not masturbatory aids. You’re meant to chuckle and be lightly aroused.’

‘Intriguing.’

Helenhill had never asked Gabriel what he was writing, or let alone where he lived. Gabriel recognized him as a type of pure egotist, almost solipsistic in his self-regard. The world revolved around Norman Helenhill

– its denizens interesting insofar as they could provide a listener, a meal, a drink or the occasional loan. Gabriel was untroubled by the imbalance. He spent so much solitary time at Spíti Sykiás that having the occasional lunchtime encounter with Helenhill was enough to satisfy the social being in him. He sat and listened as Helenhill rambled on, now well into the second carafe of wine, telling him some interminable anecdote about his life and travels, how he coped with the inevitable ups and downs of his chosen profession.

'I'm a Cambridge man, you see, Grant. And Cambridge University teaches you a certain *savoir-faire*, *insouciance*, *je m'enfoutisme*. Valuable lessons in the face of life's endless disappointments.'

'I was at Cambridge, as it happens,' Gabriel said. 'Briefly. What was your college?'

'Ah. St Thomas's. Wonderful years.'

Gabriel smiled. There was no St Thomas's College at Cambridge.

'I wish I'd stayed the course,' Gabriel said. 'But I had a massive nervous breakdown. Had to leave.'

'I took a third-class degree,' Helenhill said, ignoring him. 'I'm not remotely ashamed. Anyone who's anyone takes a third. Look at Waugh, Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Cyril Connolly.'

They finished off their lunch with a small glass of Metaxa. Gabriel paid the bill and they said goodbye.

'See you next Saturday, my treat, no buts,' Helenhill said. 'I might just stay on for another snifter.' He took out one of Gabriel's hundred-drachma notes and waved it at Aristotle.

Gabriel motored back to Spíti Sykiás, mildly inebriated, wondering if there was any way he could fit Norman Helenhill into *A Dream of an Island* without him recognizing the portrait. Tricky, he thought.

He turned in to the driveway and applied the brakes, suddenly very sober. Parked beside the fig tree was a sky-blue Volkswagen Beetle. Gabriel switched off the engine and pushed the Honda down the drive, not wanting to alert anyone to his arrival. He parked the motorcycle and peered into the Beetle, spotting an open map of the island on the passenger seat. An obvious sign of a person looking for him, he thought. He searched around for a weapon and picked up a small mattock that he had left by the front door.

Somebody cleared their throat behind him and he jolted with surprise, whirling round.

Faith Green stood there, smiling.

‘Well, well, well. Mr Grant Strathleven, I presume.’

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2.

Bliss

Gabriel felt a swooning sensation fill him as he stood there contemplating Faith, aware of his hands trembling, such was the total surprise. It was a defining trick of hers, he realized, turning up like this out of the blue, like magic, almost. He chucked away the mattock.

‘You might say “Hello, Faith”, at least, don’t you think?’

‘Hello, Faith,’ he said. ‘How amazing to see you.’

‘That’s more like it.’

She was wearing an aquamarine blouse and slim white trousers that stopped at the ankle, small scarlet moccasins on her feet.

She stepped towards him and kissed him lightly on each cheek.

‘You look unbelievably well. And you suit a beard.’

‘Thank you.’

‘Aren’t you going to invite me into your lovely little white house?’

He led her inside and she looked around, striding through the three rooms on the upper floor.

‘Rather minimal, Gabriel. Very few comforts of home. I wouldn’t recognize it as a Dax dwelling. Where’s the clutter, the books, the paintings?’

‘I was travelling light. I didn’t know how long I’d be here. It suits me fine. Anyway, I’m outdoors most of the time. It’s a place to sleep.’

They stepped out on to the terrace and she admired the view, spreading her arms and inhaling histrionically.

‘How wonderful. Idyllic,’ she said.

‘Where are you staying?’ he asked.

She turned and looked at him, askance, as if to say, where do you think, fool?

'Here. With you.'

'Of course. Right. Good. I'm delighted.' He felt a strange effervescence run through him, goose-pimples erupting – a physical manifestation of stupid happiness, he decided.

'What's going on, Faith?'

'I've resigned from the Institute. It's over.'

'*What?*'

Almost instantly he wondered if that was true. Why would she lie? Why would she not lie? He could hardly check up on her statement.

'Why did you resign?'

'Any chance of a drop of alcohol?'

He fetched a bottle of retsina from his refrigerator and they sat out on the terrace, now in shade, drinking the wine, as she told him what had happened.

'We found Kit Caldwell's Coriolanus,' she said.

'Oh, yes? Who?'

'Ishbel Dunbar.'

'What? My God!'

'She was recruited by Angus Fairford when she was young. Uncle suborning niece. She's been a sleeper but was obviously recently activated. Fairford named her as part of the conditions of his amnesty. She's been arrested and charged with treason.'

'She's in prison?' Gabriel was trying to come to terms with this information.

'Yes. No bail.'

'Did she confess?'

'No. She's denying everything.'

'Bloody hell.'

Gabriel thought back to his last meeting with Ishbel. He remembered the phone call she made and the way she had kept him on in her flat for another half-hour or so, chatting about nothing in particular – enough time to alert and position the two men in the Rover waiting for him when he left. What if he hadn't been armed? Where would they have taken him, what would have happened to him? If she was Coriolanus then she would have been working

with the Russian *rezident*, Dmitri Levitin. Was that the person she'd called? Were the two goons supplied by Levitin?

'You've gone very quiet,' Faith said.

'Just thinking through a few things.'

'We believe – we're convinced – she was responsible for Kit Caldwell's death.'

'She went to Oslo, she told me.'

'Yes. She doctored the instructions. Changed the date of your border crossing – moved it back by twenty-four hours. The false welcome committee you encountered was set up by her.'

Gabriel thought about that night, remembering the high register of the voice he'd heard issuing instructions. Could that have been Ishbel? Surely not? He felt he would have recognized it. No matter, he felt a bit jangled, now that he was reliving the awful moments of Caldwell's sudden death.

'But why have you resigned?'

'Because I'm being blamed for this breach of security. Another scandal. Another Soviet termite. The fact that this "Coriolanus" hadn't been spotted. The powers that be were blaming me. And I thought – to hell with it. After everything I'd done and achieved. It's a boys' town, MI6, at the end of the day. I'd always been resented. Now they had an excuse.'

'How did you find me?'

'Oh, we looked for you, all right, when you suddenly disappeared off the radar. We looked everywhere. For weeks, months,' she said. 'I'd forgotten about the Strathleven passport – that you never returned. Very smart move on your part. We were looking for a Gabriel Dax – but not a trace anywhere. Vanished.'

She smiled at him warmly, admiringly. Maybe, he thought, everything would change now that she was no longer his handler, his arch-manipulator.

'Then I remembered your uncle, Aldous,' she said. 'We tapped his phone and intercepted his mail. And there were all these letters being sent to a certain Grant Strathleven, poste restante, Corfu Town. Now we had that key information it was just a question of asking our people in this part of Greece to see where your name came up. Hotels, car rental, money transfers. And there was a Mr Strathleven, renting a house on the island of Ikarios.'

'I thought you said you'd resigned.'

'I've only *just* resigned,' she said. 'Now I knew where you were I thought I would come and visit.'

‘Well, it’s wonderful you’re here. Amazing. I can’t quite believe it.’

They looked at each other. Unspoken messages were transferred between them.

‘Are you hungry?’ Gabriel said.

‘Yes. Very hungry.’

‘I can rustle up something for supper.’

‘We can have supper afterwards, can’t we?’

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3.

One Day

Gabriel and Faith lay naked in their narrow bed, facing each other in a tangle of sheets. The morning sun squeezed through the shutters setting slowly moving bars of light across the white wall above them. Gabriel reached out and brushed a lock of her hair off her face. She smiled.

‘Morning,’ she said. ‘What shall we do today?’

Day ten, he thought, not quite believing the life they were leading in Spíti Sykiás. They had been with each other for the entirety of the ten days except for one afternoon when Faith drove the Beetle into Agios Andreas to make some phone calls. I’m just like you, she said, there’s a life going on in England that has to be managed from time to time. I own a house, I have bills to pay, I can’t ignore it. She was away for a couple of hours and he took the opportunity to type up a few pages of his book, wondering if he should introduce Faith into the story under a pseudonym. He found himself looking forward to her return and resuming the life of simple domestic intimacy they were sharing. She had spent a morning cleaning the kitchen and its few utensils while Gabriel swept the terrace free of pine needles. They took a long and leisurely time preparing their meals. They went shopping in Agios Andreas – steering clear of the Continental as Gabriel had no desire to bump into Norman Helenhill and have to introduce him to Faith.

On another day they caught the ferry to Corfu Town and purchased some second-hand paperbacks in a bookshop that had a few shelves of English novels. Kingsley Amis, Graham Greene, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Georges Simenon, P. G. Wodehouse, Elizabeth Bowen. They passed a small art gallery and Faith bought him a watercolour of a street in Corfu Town as a

housewarming present. They were, he was glad to note, beginning to furnish their new life together. A row of books on a shelf, a picture now hanging on the wall above the fireplace in the sitting room.

Gabriel gave her a swift kiss, swung himself out of bed, pulled on his trousers and went upstairs to make coffee and assemble their breakfast. He came back down with a tray containing their steaming mugs, four figs, two oranges and two hard rolls, halved and buttered, with a jar of honey on the side.

'Room service,' he announced, coming through the door.

Faith was sitting up, sheet discarded, legs crossed. He set the tray down on the bed and slipped off his trousers and sat opposite her, crossing his legs also. She picked up her mug and sipped at it.

'I do like these breakfasts-in-bed *au naturel*,' she said.

'I'm quite partial to them as well. Could be habit-forming.'

He selected a fig and bit into it.

'Is this island named after Icarus?' she asked, musingly. 'You know, the lad who flew too close to the sun. Wax on his wings melted, fell to his death. Very apt for you, I'd have thought.'

'Let's hope not.' He smiled. 'No, actually, Icarus has his own island – Ikaria – east of the Cyclades. But this island, however, is reputed to be the birthplace of one Ikarios, the vintner. The gods granted him the ability to make wine from grapes. Apparently, he gave the wine he'd made to a group of shepherds and, as they became drunk, they thought they'd been poisoned, so they turned on Ikarios and hanged him.'

'Could be even more apt.'

'I'll ignore that.'

They talked about their plans for the day. They would have their usual morning swim. Then sunbathe for a while – then go for a walk to the village and buy some fish for a late lunch.

'Sounds good to me,' he said, wondering if he'd ever been happier in his life.

She reached forward and dipped a finger in the pot of honey. She pasted the honey on the glans of his cock.

'Hello? What's this game?' he said.

'Oh. Sorry. I'd better lick it off, don't you think?'

They swam, naked as always, to the rocky islet at the head of the bay and clambered on to it. It was a clear day with a cloudless blue sky but without the sun-tormented, sledgehammer heat of summer. Gabriel stood up and shielded his eyes – to the east he could just about make out the Greek mainland on the horizon, a trammelled flint-blue mass, twenty miles off. He helped Faith up to the islet's highest point to let her see for herself.

'It's meant to be good luck when you can see the mainland,' he told her. 'So the Ikariots say.'

'I'm not sure I can cope with any more good luck,' she said, putting her arm around his shoulders and kissing his cheek. 'I'm replete.'

'Me too.'

They swam back to the beach in front of the house where they laid a blanket, half in and half out of the shade of an umbrella pine. Faith spread-eagled herself in the sun, arms extended, legs parted. She had already gained something of a tan, a fact that made her white leopard spots, as she called them, on her breasts and shoulders stand out more. My stippled beauty, Gabriel called her. Here on Ikarios she seemed to have lost her self-consciousness of these marks, branded on her with cigarettes by her torturers in the war. Don't you mind them? she had asked him, once. No, he said, they add to your uniqueness.

He suddenly felt the need to urinate, stood and wandered off into the grove of pines, leaving her to sunbathe. He found a shaded place, the pine needles springy underneath his feet, and let go. He closed his eyes. The cicadas were sawing away in their usual drilling monotone. Then he heard a different noise, a rustling from a dense stand of tall *kalamos* reeds that followed the watercourse of the little rivulet that drained from the tank up on the bluff. Suddenly tense, he shook himself dry and picked up a stone, shying it hard, full force, into the clump of ilex. Something moved. The tall strands shifted. Gabriel felt his heartbeat quicken, his mouth instantly dry. He looked around and picked up a larger stone, the size of a small melon, heavy in his hand, heavy enough to bash someone's brains out.

'Come out of there!' he shouted. 'Now!'

There was movement in the ilexes and after a few seconds a small piebald wild goat appeared, bleated forlornly and scampered off. He relaxed. Jesus.

Then he heard Faith's laughter and turned to see her sauntering through the dappled pine-shadow towards him.

‘I think this moment is the perfect tableau,’ she said, laughing hard. ‘Stone Age man hunting goats.’ At that point she lost it, Gabriel saw, her laughter convulsing her, her shoulders shaking. She leant forward, hands on her knees, trying to control her hilarity.

He threw away his small boulder, his weapon, feeling a bit foolish. He grinned – laughter like that was contagious.

‘More like an Adam-and-Eve tableau, don’t you think?’ he said, wandering towards her, taking in her lithe body. She was trying to calm down, trying to stop laughing, fanning her face with her fingers.

‘Here we are in paradise,’ he said. ‘Everything is permitted.’

‘“And they were both naked … and were not ashamed”,’ she said in a deep, dramatic voice. Then she exhaled loudly, and snorted, starting to laugh again. She calmed down. ‘Stop. My God, you should have seen yourself. Apparently uncontrolled laughter like that is very good for you. Good for the metabolism.’

‘And now you should hand me an apple. To complete the tableau.’

She smiled.

‘But I don’t have an apple, Adam, luckily for you.’

He pulled her to him and they pressed their bodies together and kissed.

‘Shall we go back to our blanket?’ she said. ‘And commit an original sin?’

At noon, they returned to the house and dressed and headed up the coast road, still laughing together about the Incident of the Goat, as they now termed it. There was another village, called Kirilo, here on the eastern side of Ikarios, with a small harbour containing a modest fishing fleet of a dozen or so wooden caiques. Gabriel’s landlord, Constantinos, lived here in the village’s largest house.

‘Let’s go a bit further on,’ Gabriel said. ‘I want to show you something.’

They strode on up the road and then turned down a track. Soon they came across wooden signs in Greek and English – ‘Private Property. No Entry’ – and Gabriel led her off into the pine wood where they climbed a small hill. Here the pines thinned and there was a wide view beyond to the tranquil blue silk carpet of the sea and the purple-grey mountains of the mainland to the west. From their position on the hill they overlooked a large white villa on one headland of the small bay with its own jetty, long enough to accommodate a large vessel.

‘Let’s go down to the beach,’ Gabriel said. ‘We’ll get a better look at the place.’

They scrambled down the slope to a small shingle beach, surrounded by rocks. From this vantage point they could now see the villa in full view. There was an ornate arched colonnade giving on to a large balustraded terrace. Green shutters at all the windows were firmly closed. Here on the beach they confronted a diamond-mesh fence with a cranked arm of three barbed-wire strands. Gabriel was reminded instantly of the Russian border fence with Norway.

‘What a beautiful house,’ Faith said.

‘It belongs to an American film star, so they claim,’ Gabriel said. ‘Either Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas or Rock Hudson – or someone else, depending on whom you speak to. Whoever owns it, they never come here, apparently. It’s always shut up like this – has been for years, summer and winter. Though there must be staff, I suppose.’

‘Maybe it’s for sale,’ Faith said. ‘Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could buy it and live here for ever?’

He took her in his arms.

‘Yes, my sweet. Do you have the money, by any chance?’

They laughed. It was an enticing fantasy.

Gabriel turned away and shook the fence, thinking back to his border crossing with Kit Caldwell. This fence was more solid and challenging. It made Gabriel pause, reliving those hours in the forest, in the bleak monochrome of the white night – memories suddenly reappearing, unbidden. Kit Caldwell lying dead, the round entry wound of the bullet above his left eyebrow. The cold night in the alder grove, the sounds of the body being removed …

They climbed back to the road and began the return journey to Kirilo.

‘You know, I’m still coming to terms with Ishbel Dunbar as Coriolanus,’ he said.

‘You’ll remember,’ Faith said, ‘how she tried to get me ousted from the Institute. Can you imagine if she was in charge of the show there? A field day for the KGB. All their termites secure – the rest of us running around on wild goose chases.’

Gabriel stopped and removed a small stone from one of his espadrilles.

‘Why did no one suspect her when she went to Oslo?’ he said, as they set off again.

‘She was part of the Scandinavian section. It didn’t seem out of the ordinary – I saw her there, in Oslo. But of course, we didn’t know the date of the crossing had been changed.’

‘You were in Oslo? My God, I didn’t know that.’

‘Yes. Kit Caldwell was my man, for heaven’s sake. You know that better than anyone after what happened in Cádiz. I wanted to welcome him back. Celebrate. And welcome you, of course. But then you did your disappearing act.’

‘So, you and Ishbel were both in Oslo.’

‘I arrived after her. She was up at the northern border, at Kirkenes. I was in Oslo waiting for news. And there was no news – because you’d crossed a day earlier than we thought. The word we had was that nobody showed up. And then Caldwell’s body was found in the river.’

Gabriel was thinking hard.

‘That’s the crucial fact, isn’t it?’ he said. ‘The way the date of our crossing was changed. So, what was the extent of the chain? Pomeroy in Moscow, you, the Institute, MI6 …’

‘Pretty much. Plus those in the know at the Oslo embassy setting up the welcome committee. Everyone was very excited. We were going to exfiltrate Kit Caldwell. A major coup.’

‘And then he was shot in the head.’ He frowned, remembering again that shocking moment when he’d come across Caldwell’s body.

‘Because he was going to expose Coriolanus,’ Faith said. ‘Simple, inevitable explanation. So, remove the risk of that ever happening. That’s why Ishbel took control. She fooled us all, I’ll give her that.’

They walked on in silence for a while. Something was troubling him, Gabriel thought, but he couldn’t put his finger on it.

‘Can I ask you a question?’ Faith said.

‘Of course.’

‘Did you ever talk to Kit Caldwell about Angus Fairford?’

‘No. I don’t think I did. Why?’

‘No reason. Just curious.’

Gabriel frowned, thinking hard.

‘It’s odd that both you and Ishbel knew Fairford, don’t you think?’

‘It’s pure coincidence. Fairford was her uncle – that’s the crucial connection.’

‘But you yourself knew him in SOE.’

‘Yes. He was very inspiring. An extraordinary mind.’

She took Gabriel’s hand.

‘But he didn’t recruit me into the KGB, my dear Gabriel. He already had Ishbel Dunbar in place.’

He put his arm around her shoulders.

‘Sorry to keep banging on about it,’ he said. ‘Seeing that fence made me think again about that awful night when we crossed. And now I can’t really believe I’m walking down this road on a Greek island with you – ready to buy some freshly caught red mullet for lunch. I should have been shot dead – just like Kit.’

She kissed his cheek.

‘Let it go, Gabriel,’ she whispered in his ear. ‘It’s all over.’

He said nothing more as they wandered down the road into Kirilo heading for the harbour.

They pan-fried the two plump *barbounia* they had bought on the quayside on the charcoal stove and then cooked sliced potatoes in the same skillet while the fish rested on a covered plate. Fishy-flavoured potatoes with fresh parsley chopped over them, all washed down with a bottle of cold assyrtiko.

They sat in a patch of shade on the terrace looking over the bay. Again, Gabriel registered the nature of his present happiness. It was something that Katerina Haas had told him to do. Our lives, our happiness, the state of our present contentment are very fragile things – they can be shattered in an instant. So, log those moments, store them in your happiness bank, she had counselled. Good advice, Gabriel thought, looking across the table at Faith, who was staring out to sea in a ‘*dwam*’ – he suddenly remembered the Scottish word for a dreamy, half-conscious state. Sex, food, wine, security, happiness – and the prospect of more of the same the following day. What could be more blissful? he thought, feeling his throat thicken with emotion as he gazed at her.

After lunch Faith went for a siesta downstairs and Gabriel took his typescript out to the terrace and read through the several pages he’d recently written. Yes, he thought, the book would benefit from the arrival of a mysterious female companion into the narrator’s solitary life. What should he call her?

That evening, as they were drinking their aperitifs, cloudy white glasses of ouzo, she picked up a dozen pages and read through them.

‘I’m thinking of putting you in the book,’ he said. ‘Under a pseudonym, of course.’

‘As long as I’m not called Marjorie or Beryl,’ she said, not looking up from the typescript.

‘I thought maybe “Circe” would be appropriate,’ he said, deadpan.

‘Ha, ha.’

‘What’s for supper?’

‘Bread, cheese, some of that ham, olives.’

‘We need to go shopping again,’ he said. ‘We’re running out of wine.’

‘Oh, God, heaven forfend!’

‘Well, we do drink a lot.’

‘Wine is good for you,’ she said. ‘Where would we be without wine?’

‘Hear, hear.’

‘I must say your prose style hasn’t exactly been pared down over the years. Talk about luscious.’

‘We’ve had this conversation before. You have to make people think they’re living this journey with you. You can’t just write, “I caught the train to Samarkand. It was a lovely day.” Boring, flat, insipid.’

‘I mean, listen to this,’ she said, selecting a page. ‘“Walking home in the elf-light of the encroaching evening in the hinterland of the island on the white dusty track that led to the bay, the quavering trillings of the crickets serenading me, I thought that all human experience was gathered into this numinous, fragrant night. Half-formulated thoughts, purged by the oncoming darkness, left me heart-whole, evaporating. And then over the crest of the hill I saw the silver-blue sea and the warm bars of yellow light from the house, bats flitting like winged messengers from the underworld …” Seriously, what exactly is “elf-light”?’

‘But you’re there, aren’t you? Physically. You feel the moment, everything.’

‘Yes, Gabriel Dax, I suppose I do. Thank you for letting me read it.’

She stood and kissed his forehead, picked up the typescript and took it back inside to his desk.

Gabriel drank his ouzo, smiling. He had a strange feeling that *A Dream of an Island* was going to be a real success. He reached for his pack of Assos and lit one. He had run out of Gitanes and had no source, not even on Corfu, so he had resorted to Greek cigarettes.

‘What in God’s name is this?’

He looked round. Faith was holding out Dean Furlan's automatic as if presenting it as evidence in court.

'It's a Colt 1908 Pocket Hammerless.'

'I was putting your pages back in the drawer of your desk and they stuck. I reached in and – there was this gun.'

'Well – what can I say? I like to be armed. You know that.'

'Where exactly did you get this?'

'I bought it off a dodgy friend of mine in London. He has underworld connections.'

She shot out the magazine.

'Fully loaded.' She clicked it back in place.

'I've had no occasion to use it – but I'm glad to have it nearby, just in case.'

She relaxed.

'I'll put it back. Any other surprises, Mr Strathleven?'

'Actually, the typescript is meant to be left by the side of the typewriter, not in the drawer.'

'So sorry, maestro. I'll be sure to put everything back in order.'

She went inside and rearranged things as they were meant to be, Gabriel assumed. He had been disturbed by her finding the gun, for some reason. It was a sudden intrusion into their idyll of the harsher reality of both their lives – a dark reminder. She had been his MI6 handler. He was a man in hiding. He reached for the ouzo bottle.

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4.

The Confrontation

Three days later Faith announced she had to go back into Agios Andreas to make some more phone calls.

‘I’ll pick up something for lunch,’ she said.

‘How about some chicken?’ he suggested. ‘I’m getting a bit tired of fish.’

‘I’ll do my best. See you later.’

They kissed.

‘Are you all right?’ Gabriel said. ‘You seem a bit – I don’t know – not quite your usual self.’

‘Bad dreams last night.’

‘They’re only dreams.’

‘I do know that, Gabriel, but dreams can shake you up. They can take a while to die down.’

‘What were you dreaming about?’

‘I’ll see you later. With chicken.’

He heard the Beetle start and make its slightly laborious way up the drive to the Agios Andreas road.

Gabriel did some chores. He remade their bed, thinking the sheets should be washed. He trimmed his beard with a pair of nail scissors that he found in Faith’s toilet bag. He tidied up in the kitchen pondering that maybe they should get someone from the village to come in and clean for them, find an Ikariot version of Laura Devine to do the washing and the essential shopping. Now that November had arrived, it was growing palpably cooler at night and they had started lighting the fire in the sitting room, using fallen wood that they gathered from the pines or that drifted up on the beach. It was all very well having a cold shower when it was hot but how

would they wash themselves when it was cold? Heat a pan of water on the stove and have a sponge-bath? In the winter they would be living like peasants – the romance of their white house on the beach subsumed in its unwelcome inconveniences. Their clothes were never ironed – how could they be? – so they looked increasingly a bit messy and crumpled, he thought, whenever they ventured out into the world. All these practical questions implied a longer sojourn on Ikarios, he realized. What would Spíti Skyriás be like in the depths of an Ionian winter? They weren't really equipped for cold or rainy weather, let alone storms.

There were other houses with more mod-cons that could be rented, he supposed. Maybe they should move into Agios Andreas for the winter period or go to Corfu Town – find a small hotel and do some sort of deal with the management, then come back to Sykiás in the spring. He realized he was postulating a life with Faith that was in fact a trouble-free continuum; that they would always be together as a couple. The idea excited him – but then he rebuked himself for not obeying his one-day-at-a-time philosophy. Today she was in Agios Andreas; they would have chicken for lunch. Tomorrow would take care of itself.

Round about two o'clock he began to wonder what was keeping her. He decided that he would ride the Honda into town and find her – there were only a few key locations where she could be. Maybe they could grab a late lunch in town and have the chicken for supper.

As he motored towards Agios Andreas he recalled Faith's troubled mood. She was perturbed about something, he realized. He knew her well by now and felt he could read her shifting emotions, not that they shifted much, day by day. What bad dreams could she have had? Was it the hangover of her resignation from the Institute? The perfidy of Ishbel Dunbar? A good meal and a bottle of wine would set things right, he reckoned.

He went first to the post office but she wasn't there – even though he saw there were long queues for the telephone cabins. Maybe she had decided to wait. He visited their favourite shops – no sign – and peered into the cafés they patronized but she wasn't in any of them, either. Strange. What had become of her? He wandered up and down the few streets where they usually parked looking for the Beetle but he didn't see it anywhere.

He was strolling down from the town's main square towards the harbour, preparing to ride back to the house, when he heard a familiar voice hail him.

‘Grant! Hello!’

He turned to see Norman Helenhill waving at him from across the street. He was wearing a smirched brown raincoat that seemed to scream ‘Dirty Old Man’ and had a crumpled trilby on his head.

‘Where the hell have you been all this time, you bastard?’ Helenhill said aggressively, as if Gabriel had somehow broken a hallowed promise. Gabriel realized he was fairly drunk.

‘I’ve been very busy,’ Gabriel said, annoyed. ‘Writing my book.’

‘I looked for you every Saturday, but you never came,’ Helenhill said, still aggrieved, like some cuckolded husband.

‘I’m sorry, Norman. But I do have a life outside the Continental, you know.’

‘Of course. Apologies. I miss our encounters, that’s all. I thought maybe you’d left the island.’

‘I’d have come to say farewell if that were the case. You’re my only friend here.’

‘That’s very white of you, Grant. Appreciate it.’

‘Not at all.’

‘You don’t happen to have a cigarette on you, by any chance, do you?’

Gabriel took out his packet of Assos and lit Helenhill’s wavering cigarette with his lighter. Helenhill inhaled and exhaled grandly.

‘Glad I bumped into you. Funnily enough, there was a chap in the Continental who was asking about you today.’

‘Oh, yes?’ Gabriel felt a tremor of worry. ‘Who might that have been?’

‘Just off the ferry, he said. Knew you well in London, apparently, wanted to look you up. Fit-looking fellow. Forties. Foreign, definitely German, I thought at first, or Russian, maybe? Polish? Couldn’t place the accent – not that I’m very good with accents. I told him you and I were firm friends but, of course, I don’t happen to know where you live, for some strange fucking reason, so I wasn’t much help. Where do you live, by the way?’

‘No matter. Thanks, Norman. See you around.’

Gabriel hurried down to the harbour where he had parked the Honda. He raced out of town, his brain in the familiar ferment of question and answer, more questions and more answers. He thought he knew exactly who had been looking for him, but he couldn’t for the life of him understand how he had been found in Ikarios and what it might portend.

He left the Honda on the roadside at the head of the drive and walked quickly and carefully down towards the house. Then he saw the Beetle parked in its usual spot by the fig tree and paused. So Faith was back. What did that mean? Was it all a mistake? Some drunken Helenhill nonsense-fantasy? He opened the front door quietly and stepped inside. He saw, through the window, that Faith was sitting at the table on the terrace beyond. He relaxed slightly. There would be some explanation – some silly misadventure that had made them lose each other in town.

He rapped on the window and then opened the door to the terrace, stepping out.

'What happened? I went into town,' he said. 'I was looking for you everywhere, I thought we could—'

He stopped abruptly. Her face was stiff, contorted; something was seriously wrong.

'What is it?' he said. 'What's going on, darling?'

'Mr Gabriel Dax. Finally.'

Gabriel turned to see Dmitri Levitin step from the shadowed corner at the far end of the terrace. He was wearing a pale blue suit with a navy-blue shirt and had a gun in his hand with a silencer attached. Gabriel felt suddenly sick; he swallowed and gagged, raking his throat. It had been Levitin in the Continental, talking to Helenhill, as he feared. He glanced at Faith who stood up and went to stand by Levitin.

'My God,' Gabriel said, looking at her with as much astonished loathing as he could muster. 'I did not see this coming. No. Not in a million years.'

She said nothing, expressionless, taking a pace back as Levitin stepped forward. Gabriel felt he had entered a form of shocked trance. Time seemed to slow, abruptly. He sensed his face burning, as if he was experiencing some kind of infernal blush, hearing the blood roaring in his ears, blotting out all extraneous sounds. He blinked rapidly, as if these vestigial twitches of his body could make him fully functioning again. He knew he was very close to his own death – every vital sense had to be summoned to his aid.

Levitin stopped in front of him, an insincere smile on his face, raising his gun so it pointed at Gabriel's belly.

'What is the English saying?' Levitin said. 'A "merry dance". Yes. You have led us a merry dance, Gabriel Dax, over these last years. You and Mr Kit Caldwell. But now Caldwell is dead and we must confirm that the dance is finally over. Orchestra is going home, packing up its instruments.' He

gave an apologetic shrug. ‘It’s time to be “paying the piper”. You see how my English has improved.’

‘I’m impressed.’

Levitin stepped forward another foot; Faith stayed two paces behind him.

‘But there is one more important price to be paid,’ Levitin said. ‘I am sure you are appreciating that.’

He raised his automatic pistol to point it squarely at Gabriel’s face.

‘I am sorry we never go to see Chelsea playing at Stamford Bridge,’ Levitin said.

‘Yes. Too bad.’

Gabriel swallowed, trying to stay as calm as he could under the appalling circumstances. He glanced at Faith – she stood there frozen, looking down. What could he do? How could he stop Levitin from shooting him? Should he just lunge at him?

‘Can I ask you one question?’ Gabriel said, playing for time. Always play for time.

‘Yes. It is my pleasure.’

‘Who is Coriolanus?’

‘You don’t know? Already? My God. She is—’

Faith shot Levitin in the back of his head and he fell abruptly to the ground.

Gabriel recoiled, his ears ringing from the detonation.

Faith had his Colt Pocket Hammerless in her hand. She leant forward and shot Levitin once more in the head. *Blam.*

Silence. Beat, beat. Suddenly he could hear again. The cicadas making their remorseless drilling noise. A bird tweeting somewhere – the world recovering its normal stasis, indifferent, undisturbed. Gabriel and Faith looked at each other, eye to eye. She tossed the gun on the ground. It clattered dully on the tiles.

‘I’m so sorry, Gabriel, that we had to go through this charade. This is the only way it would have worked.’

Her voice was surprisingly calm. They stood there facing each other over the dead body of Dmitri Levitin. Gabriel was breathing deeply, in renewed shock, sucking in air. Then Faith’s cold poise disappeared and she suddenly seemed diminished, hunched, weepy.

‘I had to do it this way,’ she repeated in a small voice. ‘I’m so sorry.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ he said and they went to each other, hugging strongly. Gabriel’s mind was in turmoil – and he forced himself to quell all second, third and fourth thoughts. Let’s just take stock, he told himself, do what we have to do, now. He felt Faith’s body in his arms, shuddering, vibrating, as the tension in her slowly released.

They stepped back from the body and went to sit down at the table, both their hands gripping each other.

‘What exactly has just happened?’ he said quietly, after a minute or so of semi-silence. He was still breathing deeply, sucking air into his lungs.

‘I’ll tell you everything,’ she said. ‘Everything will be explained. But not right at this moment.’

‘OK. But why here, now? Why me?’

‘Because you were the perfect bait in the trap. They hate you in Moscow because of what you and Kit Caldwell did. Those two years where you fooled everyone. Caldwell is dead but here you are, alive on a small Greek island. I told them, I admit. And they couldn’t resist. So Levitin came to make sure payback happened.’

‘You set me up, in other words.’

‘Well, yes. Totally. But—’

‘But what?’

‘I knew that we would outsmart them.’

‘How?’

‘We’ve just done it.’

Gabriel decided not to ask any more questions. Then he realized he had a final one to ask.

‘Did you ever resign from the Institute?’

‘No.’

He took this in, saying nothing, thinking that, in the fullness of time, he would arrive at an explanation he could live with. He needed distraction. He pointed at Levitin’s body.

‘Shall we deal with this tomorrow?’

‘No,’ Faith said, taking control. ‘We have to deal with it now. We have to bury him somewhere. We’re leaving the island tomorrow.’

‘No need to bury him. His grave is waiting.’

Gabriel dragged Levitin’s body deep into the pine grove and shoved him into the rubbish pit. Faith looked on as Gabriel pushed Levitin’s legs up

towards his chest to fit him in tightly so that he appeared to be lying on his left side in a kind of crouch, like a body in one of those Neolithic burial sites, flexed, foetal, Gabriel thought: Ikarios Man, to be unearthed by archaeologists in the future. Faith threw Levitin's gun into the pit, and Gabriel added his Colt Hammerless. Ikarios Man with his two firearms. Then they went to the beach, both carrying a bucket, and made several trips to and fro, emptying sand on the body until it was entirely covered. They searched around for stones and packed them on top of the sand, like crude cobbles. Gabriel stamped them down. Then they covered the stones with armfuls of pine needles, four inches deep, and stepped back. No one would know what lay underground in this pine grove, no scavenging beast could possibly access the decomposing body in its tomb.

Neither of them wanted food that evening – just alcohol. They drank their way through two bottles of retsina, hardly speaking, just thinking, and finished off the bacchanalia with a cold glass of tsipouro. Neither did they want to make love when they went to bed, lying there in the darkness, side by side, hand in hand, thinking. Questions bubbled into Gabriel's brain.

'Why did you tell me you'd resigned?'

'Obviously, to make everything relaxed. So it seemed I wasn't here "on business", as it were.'

'But you were on business.'

'Yes. Levitin was blackmailing a senior British politician. A cabinet minister who had been well and truly honey-trapped. Married man, three young children. Levitin had him by the short and curlies.'

'Who is he?'

'I'm not going to tell you. But from our point of view it was another disaster. After Philby, after Vassall, after Profumo – there couldn't be another scandal. And so a decision was taken, a plan was hatched in MI6.'

'And the plan was?'

'To get rid of Levitin. Cut off the head of the snake.' She paused. 'We had to somehow end it all – after Angus Fairford, the fourth man, the fourth Cambridge spy – and then Ishbel Dunbar. We looked totally penetrated. For decades.'

Gabriel inhaled and exhaled.

'Why did it have to happen here? Why not snatch him in London and disappear him there?'

‘Impossible. Remember, Levitin was an accredited diplomat. It would be a major diplomatic crisis. We had to get him when he was out of the country. Levitin had to want to be here – he made that choice himself. It had to look suspicious.’

‘But how does killing Levitin really change anything?’

‘To them, to the KGB, it’ll seem that he’s simply disappeared.’ Faith paused. ‘They’ll think – has he defected? Has he been bought? Is he being debriefed by us in some secret place? They’ll be very worried. Change of focus. The balance of power swings back. They’ll be wondering how much we now know.’

She turned in the bed to face him.

‘You’ve got to understand how things looked when Kit Caldwell was killed,’ she said. ‘The perfect exfiltration, suddenly gone disastrously wrong. We had to get our house in order. And then when I realized where you were – “Grant Strathleven” – I saw the opportunity. The perfect opportunity. Levitin knew you, claimed to be running you – he had been made to look a total fool with the whole clever Caldwell exfiltration. His KGB bosses were furious. You were the most tempting bait for him.’ She placed a hand on his shoulder. ‘I couldn’t tell you anything of this, of course. We had to play it out as we did.’

‘What if Levitin had killed me?’

‘Then he would have killed me too, no doubt. But we beat him to it.’

‘What if I hadn’t had a gun?’

‘There’s a carving knife in the kitchen. I would have killed him with that.’ She shrugged. ‘But then I discovered you had a gun – even better. I’d have got him, one way or another. He didn’t suspect me – he thought I was on his side. I’d betrayed you, after all.’

He saw her ruthless expertise. Everything thought through. Apologies if you felt you were in harm’s way and if your feelings were hurt, my dear, but needs must.

He asked her again to run through the whole plan that she had evolved.

She had put in an anonymous call to the Soviet *rezident*, three weeks ago, she said, before she left London.

‘How did you get the number?’

‘You gave it to us, remember? The same number that you used all the time – with the two women before Levitin arrived.’

‘Oh. Right. Yes …’

She said she had simply told Levitin that she knew where Gabriel Dax was living in hiding. She stipulated a date. One individual. She wanted money for the information. There would be a message waiting at a hotel in Corfu Town. Go to Agios Andreas, Ikarios, Greece, the message said. Meet the contact at 1 p.m. in front of the church in the town's main square. The contact will lead you to Gabriel Dax.

'I was watching the ferry when it arrived today. He was alone. Our people in Corfu confirmed he had arrived there alone. He went to the hotel in Corfu Town, collected the message, caught the ferry to Ikarios. When he disembarked I followed him and he went to that restaurant you like, the Continental.' She paused. 'Then he went to the square just before one. I kept him waiting for half an hour outside the church. He was about to leave when I approached. Then I drove him here, to the house.'

'Didn't he know who you were?'

'He knows who "Faith Green" is, of course, but he doesn't know what I look like. We didn't introduce ourselves.'

'What was your motive?'

'I told you – money. He gave me a thousand pounds. That's what you're worth, my dear one.'

'But he must have suspected you.'

'Of course. That's why after he'd killed you he would have killed me and taken his money back.'

'Where is the money?'

'In my handbag. Do you want to see it?'

She reached out and touched his face.

'I get this feeling that you don't believe me.'

'I do believe you,' he equivocated – he didn't know for sure, himself. 'I just want to understand the, you know, the evolution, the process.'

'Fair enough. I owe it to you.'

Gabriel hunched towards her and they kissed gently.

'Well, it was fun here while it lasted,' he said with a faint, ambiguous smile, thinking hard. As far as he was aware he had never passed on his personal telephone connections to the London KGB. So how had she known how to call Levitin? Of course, the number would be known at the Institute, he supposed. Stop searching for answers; stop posing questions. They wished each other goodnight and rolled away to their respective sides of the bed.

He turned away from Faith, facing the wall, wondering if she was similarly lying awake turned away, also, her mind equally hard at work. Maybe she was telling him the truth. Or maybe only part of the truth. He felt a weakness invade his body. He saw the price he had paid for becoming drawn into this secret world – there was no one story, there were many, conflicting stories, myriad, but which one did you believe?

The next day they packed and tidied up the house. Gabriel placed a wad of drachmas on the desk and a note for Constantinos explaining how a family emergency in England had necessitated this sudden departure. He left the Honda as a goodwill present. The mood between him and Faith had improved, though it was still cautiously tender, somewhat artificial, as it was between couples who had experienced a ferocious row the evening before and were now, the morning after, negotiating their way back to the happy status quo. Bridges were being rebuilt, but it would take a little time.

Gabriel went out to the pine grove to survey the scene of the former rubbish pit, now Levitin's lonely grave. Everything looked natural and undisturbed, the carpet of pine needles unruffled. As he walked back to the house he reflected on his recent past: thinking of the people he'd killed and the bodies he'd disposed of. At least it was Faith who had shot Levitin, not him. He had only buried his corpse – some small consolation.

They had a final glass of wine and then they left the house, placing their suitcases in the back seat of the Beetle, Gabriel locking the front door and leaving the keys in the lock. There was nothing to steal – a few paperbacks, a picture on the wall, some crockery, some sticks of furniture. Small evidence of their sojourn, their time together – wonderful and then hellishly fraught, he realized.

'I'll miss Spíti Skyriás,' Faith said, as if reading his mind. 'We had a lovely time here, didn't we?'

'Yes, we did. It was … magical.' He couldn't suppress the sudden catch in his voice.

She held out her hand for him to take and he reached for it and their fingers interlaced.

'Conspirators,' she said. 'We have our secret. Strangely, that makes me happy.'

What exactly did that mean? he thought. More enigmas. More mysteries. They walked to the Beetle, climbed aboard and drove off to Agios Andreas

to catch the ferry to Piraeus, the first leg of the journey home to England.

They parted at the car rental agency at the dockside in Piraeus, handing back the keys of the Beetle, paying what was owed and then wandering over to the taxi rank. Faith was going to the embassy, she said, to write up her report and have it encrypted and sent on. Gabriel was heading for the airport and some nearby hotel, before catching a plane to London the next morning.

'I'll be back in a couple of days,' Faith said. 'I'll be in touch very soon, don't worry. You're safe now.'

This was goodbye, Gabriel realized, and felt almost tearful. He breathed in deeply. Goodbyes always affected him, anyway – he saw them as mini-rehearsals for the final parting, when one bade farewell to life and the world – but this was different. He leant forward and kissed her cheek.

'I do love you, you know, Faith,' he whispered in her ear, his voice thick with emotion.

'And I love you too, Gabriel,' she said, smiling. 'In my way.'

He smiled as well, nodded wordlessly and opened the door of the taxi for her. She climbed in.

'See you in England,' she said. Gabriel pushed the door to and she gave him one of her throwaway blown kisses through the window. Was he also symbolically closing the door on their relationship? he wondered, standing there watching the taxi drive off to Athens.

He found a small, category C hotel, the Megas Alexandros, near the airport and booked a room for the night. He ate a solitary meal in the hotel's incredibly brightly lit restaurant – a plate of *keftethes* with a side order of baby marrows. He wasn't hungry, he realized, his mind restless with competing thoughts. He ate half the food on offer and drank his way through a carafe of coarse so-called agiorgitiko red wine, harsh with unmelted tannins. He could prefigure his morning hangover but he didn't care. He took a gulp of wine, thinking hard.

And I love you too, Gabriel, she had said, swiftly adding, 'In my way.' What did that imply? What conditions were attached to the qualified declaration? Was her 'way' inconstancy? Or was it part-time? Or less than fulsome? At least he had declared his love unequivocally, he thought, feeling sorry for himself, then sensing his anger grow at his self-pity – the most self-indulgent and shameful of human emotions, in his opinion.

He forced himself to change his line of thought, pouring himself more agiorgitiko, examining the strange and troubling doubts he had about her and her role in the sudden death of Dmitri Levitin. Surely he should believe her, he rationalized – he had to. The whole complex plot of Kit Caldwell's defection from Cádiz in 1962 had been her contrivance and doing – a master stroke of double bluff and cunning – so how could she have had any part in his brutal elimination at the Norwegian border? It made no sense and in making no sense it reassured him, somewhat. And furthermore, he argued, if Ishbel Dunbar was indeed Coriolanus then she had every motive to have Caldwell killed and thereby to ensure her own security. As ever, something was nagging at him, some inconsistency in his thinking, in his hard-won understanding of what had happened in Russia and London and Greece. Write it down, he told himself and took out his notebook and pen. The power of the list.

He thought for a while and then wrote down the key factors, the crucial questions, as they seemed to him, now, sitting in this seedy hotel in Athens.

Angus Fairford. World War II Soviet double agent.
Both Faith and Ishbel knew Angus Fairford.
Both Faith and Ishbel were in Norway.
Levitin referred to a 'new' termite. Ishbel?
Did Ishbel call those men to intercept me outside her flat?
Who did she call, if so? Levitin?
Why did Faith say she had resigned from the Institute when she hadn't?
Why would Faith want Caldwell dead – her celebrated asset? She wouldn't.
If Ishbel is Coriolanus then she would definitely want Caldwell dead.
What about Pomeroy in Moscow? Clean? Yes, obviously.
Is Faith telling the truth about Levitin blackmailing a British politician? Why would she lie? Is that the real reason Levitin had to be terminated?
Ishbel never once mentioned that Fairford was her uncle. Why? That is the crucial omission, surely.

No one answer was at all apparent to him, only a series of possible answers, but somewhere in that list he'd compiled, he sensed, was the difficult, dangerous truth. Best to let it stew, he told himself, allow his brain to quietly sift through everything that had happened to him – some sort of revelation might be forthcoming in the fullness of time.

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Epilogue

Claverleigh, East Sussex

November 1964

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Gabriel stood in his sitting room in Rose Cottage in a daze, caught in a strange confusion. To be back after these months and to find everything exactly as it should be, neat, ordered, dust-free, as if he'd merely been up to London for a couple of nights, was destabilizing after all he had gone through. He hung his head in simple gratitude to Laura Devine. Stop thinking, he told himself, unpack, have a bath, go into Claverleigh and buy some food, have a pint in the pub, do your utmost to pretend that everything in your life is back to normal.

He did much of what he had urged himself to do but decided against going out. He bathed, he shaved, he ate some corned beef with pickles – no butter – on stale Ryvita crackers. He would shop in the morning as he realized he had enough tinned food to see him through the evening and, more importantly, he had plenty of alcohol. He sat down at his desk with a glass of wine and over the afternoon, fuelled by further glasses and cigarettes, he reread his typescript of *A Dream of an Island* if only to conjure up memories of his long residence on Ikarios. He was wondering how best to introduce the 'Circe' character and found himself, inevitably, thinking again of Faith and the astonishing effect she had on him.

Perhaps this Circe should be a mysterious figure, he pondered, a woman that he met one day in the pine grove who appeared and disappeared in his island existence almost like magic – so that the reader would wonder if she were a beguiling hallucination or indeed a real person. Very like Faith Green, he said to himself, thinking of the way she had this tendency to simply turn up in his life with no notice, no warning.

Gabriel closed his eyes, feeling brain fatigue overtake him. Maybe Faith was right, what she'd told him was the simple truth – Ishbel Dunbar was the real Coriolanus, recruited by her uncle, Angus Fairford, and clandestinely run by the Russian *rezidenty* in London.

But something was still troubling him. Why had Faith lied about resigning from the Institute? Was that to put him at his ease? Was it to explain her presence, as she claimed, to make him think that her trips into Agios Andreas were merely to keep her house in order, check up on things, pay bills and not, instead, to set up the elaborate details of Levitin's arrival on the island and their eventual fraught and fatal encounter …?

He saw how tortuous and maddening his reasoning was. You couldn't trust anyone, not even the person you wanted desperately to trust, so your mind went into this spiral of speculation and futile search for certainty; of counter-speculation and then yet more absence of certainty. This was the price he paid and was paying for being Faith Green's spy. His unlooked-for destiny.

He put a glass paperweight on top of his typescript and wandered out into his garden for a breath of fresh air. As he left the kitchen he saw the untouched catfood in its pewter bowl. Had the Cat decided enough was enough? He felt that, for all its manifest disdain, the Cat needed human interaction – and Gabriel being away made Rose Cottage less appealing despite its many comforts. So what? The Cat would do as it pleased, as it always had, the most self-indulgent of creatures.

He stepped outside, shutting the kitchen door behind him, and paced about his lawn, thinking. Faith had said he was safe now. Was that true? Dmitri Levitin was gone, certainly, irrefutably, now mysteriously 'disappeared', but he would be replaced in a short time by a new *rezident*, he assumed. Would the Russians leave him alone, or simply forget about him now Kit Caldwell was dead and the stark revenge for Caldwell's near-perfect duplicity had been achieved? Gabriel Dax – who's he?

He lit a cigarette – none the wiser, he acknowledged, with no convincing answers to his forensic questionings. This was normal, he now realized. One had suspicions, potential explanations and counter-explanations and then there were other unexpected questions one had never contemplated. More questions, he thought – were these the questions that were 'too sad to insist on'? Who had said that? Robert Burton? Blaise Pascal? W. B. Yeats …? No matter, this was the Alice-in-Wonderland world he now inhabited. He sighed, not so much with frustration but with a grim and reluctant acceptance.

It was almost dusk, he noted; the clocks had gone back while he had been in Greece and the encroaching gloom of evening now began at four-thirty in the afternoon. Through the near-leafless branches of the elms on the other side of the lane that ran by the cottage he could see a horizon-wide stripe of orange-red light glowing beneath the slate-grey clouds as the sun set over the South Downs and he shivered, feeling cold, his mind still full of the usual conflicting, baffling to-and-fro of his conjectures.

He stood there immobile for a moment, bleakly thinking the many swarming possibilities through. No, stop, he told himself, for the thousandth time. This was evidence of the fundamental corruption of his spying life – the absence of trust, the absence of certainty, the presence of countervailing theory after countervailing theory. It was exhausting, like a cancer infecting him, incurable, metastasizing. He threw his cigarette away, exhaled and shook his head violently as if he could send his thoughts spinning, tumbling free from his mind into the borders of his garden. Then he turned and walked slowly back towards the cottage.

He was pouring himself an early-evening Scotch when he heard a car pull into his driveway and then the biscuit-crunch of wheels on gravel as it braked. He went to the window, parting the curtains, and saw a taxi backing out, its headlights flaring for a second against the panes, blinding him for a moment. Simultaneously, his doorbell rang. He picked up the poker from the fireplace and went into the hall, switching on the light, and opened the door cautiously, holding the poker behind him out of view.

Faith stood there on the threshold in her green Loden coat, the yellow glow from the hall falling on her, making her eyes flash brightly, magically, as if she were a phantasm that he'd conjured up.

He blinked at her in a wonderment of stupidity.

'My God. Faith …'

'Hello, Gabriel. I missed you. Couldn't stay away.'

'Come on in, please.' He managed to articulate the words, taking a pace backwards as she stepped briskly past him into the hall and he smiled, putting the poker down quietly, realizing, all of a sudden, that being part of the complex, beguiling, parlous mystery that was Faith Green made him absurdly happy.

She had sauntered ahead of him into the sitting room and had gone to stand in front of the fire to warm herself, almost as if this was her place, her house. He went over to her and they kissed, gently.

'Are you all right, my Gabriel?' she asked.

'Yes, I'm fine. I'm back at home. And here you are. All's well.'

She reached for him and they hugged strongly. He smelt the lavender perfume she used, her Circean trace, he thought. He felt her lips on his neck, his cheek. Faith was here, she had come to him. Maybe this was a sign that everything would change now. Perhaps all the doubts, the nagging questions, would be dispelled and his persistent feeling that there was a

larger game being played in which he was an unwitting, unknowing participant would finally leave him.

Then, at the same time, he registered a swift tightening clench of unwelcome tension in his throat, as an awful, evil thought slithered greasily into his mind. He felt sick – as if there was something burning and molten in the core of his being, sitting like a small, fiery pool of magma in his gut. He had a premonition that he'd never envisaged before. He found himself suddenly wondering, sadly, balefully, with the woman he loved held securely in his arms, if the dark day would inevitably arrive when, in order to save himself, he might have to strike first. Strike first and kill Faith Green before she killed him.

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Books by Gabriel Dax

The Wine-Dark Sea
Travels without Maps
Dictatorland
Rivers
On the Beaten Path
A Dream of an Island (in preparation)

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First published by Viking in 2026

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ISBN: 978-1-405-97836-1

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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