

The Summer of 75

Dan Wheatcroft



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NOTES

BMH – British Military Hospital

CD – Corps Diplomatique

Century House – HQ of SIS (MI6) - 1964 to 1994

DG – Director-General.

Clocking – noticing

DDR – *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*.

Frikadelle – Flat, pan-fried meatballs of minced meat.

FO – Foreign Office

HVA - *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung. DDR foreign intelligence*

Mit mayo- with mayonnaise.

Pommes – pommes frites (chipped potatoes).

Sangar - protected structure used for observing or firing from.

Schaschlik – Skewered grilled cubes of meat.

Schupo – Schutzpolizei – Uniformed general patrol police.

Security Service – MI5

Silber – Silver.

SIS – Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).

Stasi – *Staatssicherheitsdienst (State Security Service)*.

Streng geheim – Top secret.

Toff – British for a ‘posh’ person.

Chapter 1

Cornflakes eaten, he put the bowl in the sink and headed for the shower; an appointment with soap on a rope. Towel, hairdryer and a dab of Pierre Cardin then he brushed his unruly mop of hair back into some semblance of order that wouldn't irritate the Old Man and selected the day's apparel: dark bootcut, casual pants with a nondescript blue shirt topped off with his new black, mid-thigh, Italian leather jacket. Double-breasted in a pea coat style; Clare had thought it looked good so he'd bought another in a sort of dark tan colour. A much-loved pair of elastic-sided brown ankle boots finished it off.

Outside, he settled himself into the recently assigned vehicle. When they'd told him they were replacing the Austin Cambridge, he'd been hopeful of receiving a Ford Capri but the Old Man thought it too racy, attracting unwanted attention, so they gave him the Hillman Hunter. Even the colour was deliberately unexciting; a sort of pale grey-green that otherwise defied description. On the good side, it was solid, reliable and came with a decent radio but it was never a

‘bird puller’ so it was just as well he was with Clare now.

He climbed the stairs to the door marked ‘Statistics Office’, greeted Ralph and Winston, signed in, made himself a cup of tea and sat at his desk. The now almost threadbare nodding dachshund bid him welcome in response to the tap on its head.

“Morning, Gally.” It was Clive with a sheaf of papers which he dropped on a desk.

Gallagher returned the salutation, then, “You still doing that site visit?”

Clive nodded, “Yes, why do you ask?”

“Well, I thought you’d be looking more casual than that. Are you sure platform shoes are appropriate?”

Clive glanced down. “They’re comfortable and they’re not my best pair. Why don’t you try some out, Gally? I’m sure you’d like them. They’re all the rage these days.”

Gally smiled. “Two reasons, Clive old boy. I don’t need the extra height like you do and I’m a martyr to vertigo. I inherited it from my dad. It’s what killed him.”

Clive feigned a shocked face. “Liar! You told me a big crate fell on him.”

Gally sipped his tea. “A big crate fell on him, Clive, because if it hadn’t been for his vertigo he’d have been in the back of the truck unloading it onto someone else.”

Winston answered the phone, a few mumbled words and he replaced the handset catching Gallagher’s eye and nodding in the direction of the doorway.

“You wanted to see me, Sir?”

“Yes, Come in and take a seat, Gallagher. Where have you parked your motorcycle?”

“Motorcycle, Sir? I haven’t got a ... Oh, I see what you’ve done. It’s my jacket, isn’t it? Only, I told Clive I’d go with him on a site visit and this seems more appropriate than a suit.”

“Very good of you to volunteer yourself but you’re going somewhere else today.”

Gally took a seat.

His companion glared at him. “Well, close the door, man!”

“Sorry, Sir. I didn’t realise it was going to be one of those conversations.”

The Old Man looked back down at the file on his desk. Gally returned and sat silently expecting something to happen soon. It didn't. Eventually, he felt the need to make conversation, more to remind the other person in the room that he was still there than anything else.

“I'm sorry Ralph's leaving us, Sir. He's a good sort.”

The Old Man glanced up. “Yes, the Treasury.”

“Has he always had aspirations in that direction, Sir? He never mentioned anything before.”

Still reading: “It was a matter of need, Gallagher. Thankfully, he took up the challenge. He's always had a wonderful ability to obfuscate.”

He looked up before continuing. “Don't get me wrong, Winston's no slouch in that area but it needs an older man in order to seamlessly fit in. Our current chap there is due to retire. We're keeping him on a retainer as a consultant so you might encounter him from time to time.” He closed the file and leaned back in his chair.

“Our life here is really quite simple yet somewhat complicated. It's best illustrated by my saying that all in the world of intelligence is compartmentalised. If people don't need to know then they don't know. Even some

people who should need to know don't get to know because it's expedient that they don't know. Our little department takes advantage of that, Gallagher. But ... sometimes it's not always an obvious advantage."

Gally felt he was supposed to understand where this was leading so rearranged his facial features in an attempt to convey a comprehension he didn't possess.

"I'm sending you on an important 'errand'." Before he could finish, Gally had offered, "Your dry cleaning again, Sir?"

The Old Man sighed. "Shut up, Gallagher, and listen! I'm sending you on an important errand and I think I should tell you the two things that have brought this about. Our funding is being cut. The Treasury have taken it upon themselves to do a bit of cost-cutting and have decided that we don't need the budget we were given to produce our statistics." He took off his glasses and waved them about.

"Thankfully, our extra activities are covered by the quiet harvesting of several incidental expenses in the Treasury's vast accounting system; the beverage and biscuit fund to name but one. Quite a considerable amount of money is seemingly spent each year on these

simple delights but the unions are hugely defensive about their members' perks and disaster looms for he or she that delves too deep into that one. However, we have to lose Ralph as a result. The good news is that we've been able to slot him in to replace our man at the Treasury. A little trick we learned from the CIA many years ago, placing our own people in select positions." He saw Gally's enquiring look.

"We simply diminish any opposition's credibility or qualifications and enhance our own candidate's. Simple process, people have so many predilections and vices these days and what they don't have we invent. But I digress. Ralph's task is to maintain the status quo for us. The added problem is that the outgoing Director of the Security Service hasn't told the new incumbent about us, personal animosity apparently, so the cuts haven't been challenged which brings me to the other matter. We need to pull off a coup, an accomplishment, so to speak; something to make him aware of our true value. Fortuitously, a very recent situation has presented us with such an opportunity. It concerns an old 'friend' of ours. Herr Radler."

“Harald? Has he somehow managed to come back, Sir?”

“No, Gallagher, but in a reference to a close friend of his he indicated, we believe, that he wants to, permanently. That’s where you come in. You had a rapport with him. I’m sending you to West Berlin.”

Gally nodded real understanding. “Will Miss Johnson be coming with me, Sir?”

The Old Man smiled. “I’m afraid not.” He checked his watch. “At this moment in time, she and Sandy should be taking off on a flight to Barbados. An issue has arisen out there that requires some ‘fact finding’ before we can decide whether or not we’ll have to send in some of the Farralland chaps to resolve it.”

“She never said anything.”

“Evidently not.” He took another file from his wire tray and passed it across the desk. “Read this. You’ll be working alone without any close backup. There are a few contacts mentioned, commit them to memory then shred the file. If we can pull this off I think the future of the department will be secure.” He stood up and gazed out of the window.

“My concern is that we’ve been sucked into this sort of thing before. By we, I mean SIS and it cost them two agents. The architect of that scheme we believe was Radler. Is he now genuine or is he trying to lure us in again? The person he made the reference to just happens to be an SIS asset and that person’s case officer is one of ours.” He turned around. “Now, whilst we’ve been forewarned it won’t be too long before the facts come out and then...” He paused. “We have at the very best, if luck is with us, a two-day head start then the beans have to be spilt, well, some of them at least, so we need to get our skates on.” Gally sat passively.

The Old Man continued, “By speaking to his friend, Radler let them know he knew their connections. They in turn feel that Radler is the owner of that information and, at present, only he is privy to it. The problem is whether or not it will stay that way. Is it a ruse? Do his own people suspect him? If compromised will he keep that information to himself or dig his way out by using it to his advantage?”

Glancing through the file as he listened, Gally looked up. “Is Radler really worth it, Sir?”

“I’m afraid so. We strongly believe he’ll be keen to supply us with Stasi and Soviet agents with the West German security services and perhaps even within our own. If SIS has been compromised in this manner then we can’t guarantee that whoever turns up out there on their behalf will be friendly. It could just be a ‘cover the tracks’ exercise by someone. Whether or not, don’t expect co-operation. The successful conclusion of this matter would be a major gain for anyone and a large feather in the cap of whoever pulled it off.”

“Will I have a personal protection weapon?”

“It’ll be sent over in the diplomatic bag. Pick it up at the consulate. Your contact is in the file, over the page.”

“What’s my cover story?”

“Haulage. You and some well-qualified associates are in the process of putting together a company for international road transport. Early days but you’re trying to make relevant contacts. To make it look more realistic you’ll be flying out to Stockholm first with a couple of informal meetings which are already booked. In the meantime, get yourself across the road to the Farralland offices and speak to Cyril. He’ll give you enough background to at least appear competent. Reg

has your tickets, you leave this afternoon. Use the dedicated phone in the main office for communications; it'll be manned twenty-four hours for the duration" He put his glasses back on and opened another file. "Leave the door open on your way out."

Gallagher rose then hesitated. "Is there anything else you might think I should know, Sir?"

The Old Man looked back at him, steadily. "Be aware that the CIA may be sniffing around out there. They obviously have assets within SIS but no one seems to know who."

Gally smiled. "It's probably a tea lady, Sir. As I've said before, they're almost invisible."

The Old Man replied, "Happily, we don't have that problem," before adding, "Are you interested in amateur dramatics, Gallagher?"

"No, Sir." He looked confused. "Why do you ask?"

A slight smile wandered across the chief's lips. "You look as if you're auditioning for a part in 'Springtime for Hitler'. Don't take that coat and avoid wearing a brown shirt."

Gally nodded, a look of seriousness on his face. "I'll take a short skirt and a nice blouse instead."

“You always have to say something, don’t you Gallagher?” Gally gave him a shrug and a smile in return.

Chapter 2

Arriving at Stockholm's Arlanda Airport, he'd taken the bus into the city.

The meetings, though short, went as well as could be expected. The first company were mildly interested, the second wasn't and the man he met at the third considered the matter and then insisted on showing him the city. It had been a pleasant evening but when his companion suggested they go to a place that served the second-best pickled herring in town with free and varied sex Gally made his excuses and left. There was no way he was eating rollmops.

In Berlin, he dumped his bag in the room at his budget hotel. Clean and tidy, the room's brown, orange and yellow wallpaper didn't help the 'busy' carpet and the curtains with their brown and orange circles overlaid on a white background were possibly a step too far. He checked out the bathroom.

Lifting the toilet lid, a little snort of air escaped from his nose as he shook his head. Why the Germans had to have a 'shelf' in there was beyond him. He knew they liked to get back to nature but crapping on a platform

then watching it being flushed slowly over the edge on its way to the city sewers was a bit like watching the launch of a nuclear submarine. In his Army days, he'd had to shit in the woods like everyone else but even that had a bigger margin for error than this.

He took a walk to the consulate. Fifteen minutes later, he rang the bell, introduced himself and was shown to a small ante room. For several minutes, he stared at the framed, dreary, black and white pictures of old Berlin.

The door opened and a cheery faced 'young' man stepped in. "Ahh, Mister Baker. Sorry to have kept you." He placed a briefcase on a half table that hugged the wall beneath the mandatory picture of the Queen then flipped it open to reveal several folders, a thermos flask, cling film wrapped sandwiches and a soft cloth that enclosed something lumpy. Close up, Gally realised the man wasn't as young as he first thought, he just had one of those round faces that dispersed wrinkles and made him look almost eternally youthful. "Can I see your ID?"

Gally silently took out his false passport, opening it for easy reading. "Thank you, now the other one?"

He opened his wallet and showed his Farralland contractors business card. The man nodded and unfolded the cloth to reveal a loaded two-inch Smith and Wesson revolver and six loose rounds. He glanced at Gallagher and said, "You're disappointed, I know, but it's all about the weight of the diplomatic bags."

Gally checked the weapon, pocketing the spares. "Would another six rounds have been too much to ask for?"

The man sighed. "Probably. You see, it's all about..."

"Yeah, I know. It's the weight."

Later that afternoon, he took the U-Bahn to nowhere in particular and found himself a working telephone kiosk. Clive said his contact would be wearing a blue frog brooch. She'd respond to the name 'Greta'. He should stay in daily contact and the office would help where they could. SIS had already sent a team out. Some things were said about the package he'd picked up from the consulate and Clive retorted, "I think it's best if I don't tell him that." Gally relented and agreed. With the contact's name, the meeting place and the time, he went back to the hotel for a bite to eat and a read of their English newspaper.

He walked into the cafe and eyeballed the inmates. She was sitting next to the window. A nod to the waitress and he took the small table wedged alongside. For some reason, he'd been expecting a much younger woman but she was in her late sixties, maybe early seventies.

“Do you mind if I sit here?” he enquired.

She smiled, “Not at all.”

They sat in silence; the waitress took and then brought his order, a small coffee. He laced it with sugar and stirred. “It’s a lovely day out there.”

“Yes, it always looks better when the sun is out but it doesn’t always shine,” she replied with a wry smile.

He grinned. “Sometimes a new home makes all the difference,” he said extending his hand. “My name’s John.”

She took it and replied, “I’m Greta.”

“That’s a nice brooch, Greta.”

“Yes, it is.” She paused. “I have a friend who is looking for a new home but it’s difficult to know who to trust, don’t you think?”

He studied her face. “I know the feeling well but I’m in the business of finding people new homes so tell your

friend that Gally says he's looking forward to having a drink together soon and I'll pay."

She gathered her handbag and scarf then stood up. "I hope we can meet again, tomorrow perhaps? Earlier? I like it here, I'm an old woman and it's safe."

"How do you know I'm safe?"

She smiled again. "Do you see that girl, over there? She's my niece."

He turned and saw a dumpy, dark-haired girl who looked vaguely familiar then he remembered her from the bus at the airport. She was joined by another, slimmer, more conventionally pretty who he thought he'd seen when he left the hotel. They kissed briefly, then seeing him watching, they smiled.

They firmed up the meeting arrangements and the old woman left, the two girls following.

He finished his drink then wound his way back to the hotel, stopping occasionally for a beer in the odd bar here and there. He didn't fancy a formal meal so stopped at the little 'schnellimbiss' perched at the end of the street for a frikadelle, schaschlik and pommes mit mayo which he enjoyed at the stand with yet another beer.

In his room, he lay on the bed thinking of Clare, wondering if she would be safe. He had to conclude that Sandy would make sure she was. Norddeutscher Rundfunk was showing an old black and white film dubbed into German. He'd seen 'Arsenic and Old Lace' several times so he was able to distract himself enough until he fell asleep even though Cary Grant, as a German, sounded somewhat peculiar.

The next morning, the hotel had a problem with boiled eggs and toast. Gally wasn't sure if it was the waitress, the cook, his rudimentary German or the whole combination. He thought he'd asked for lightly boiled with the toast well done but the egg was undercooked and, well, he'd assumed they'd use the normal stuff, not rye bread which for him was virtually inedible even in its natural state but when toasted, and launched properly, it could take down fleeing burglars large or small.

He filled his time in with a visit to the Brandenburg Gate and Tiergarten then made for his meeting with Greta. He was on his second coffee when she found him.

Settling into her seat, she ordered a Franziskaner, waiting for the Kellner to lay it on the table and depart

before she quietly spoke. “My friend says your colleagues at MI6 have sent someone he cannot deal with. However, he is pleased that you, Gally, have offered to help him. He says for someone who doesn’t know him well, you know him well. He asked I tell you he has a short stay in Prague, on official business, then he will be in Budapest for a few days before leaving for Bucharest on the tenth. He said you would understand his lack of enthusiasm for air travel.”

Gally didn’t but said nothing. “How do I know I can trust you?” he said at last.

She smiled and placed her hand on his. “I work for two ideologies, as I’m sure you already know. Freedom is everything.” She sipped her coffee, “There’s nothing else I can tell you other than I will have to meet with your MI6 tomorrow afternoon. Our mutual friend does not want me to divulge to them the true facts.”

He nodded, it told him something. He surmised that Radler knew SIS *had* been infiltrated and the person sent out was known to him, possibly even ‘handled’ by him.

He told her, “I’d be grateful for whatever time you can give me.”

She wiped the cream from her mouth with the serviette then slowly re-applied her lipstick. “I’m an old hand at this,” she said, eventually. “Leave it to me. I’ll buy you both as much time as I possibly can but it probably won’t be as long as you’d wish. Oh, and I almost forgot. My friend said you are to make sure to bring a torch.”

She nodded to the dumpy girl in the corner and got up. As she searched for her purse, Gally said, “No, please. I’ll pay for these.”

Wrapping her silk scarf around her neck, she replied, “Why, thank you, Mister Gallagher. You are so kind. Good luck, young man.”

Chapter 3

Hugh Chamberlain sat at his desk and twiddled his pen. “It’s an unusual request seeing as you’re soon to take over the counter-intelligence section but I’ve spoken to the Director and he’s sanctioned it on the proviso that you take someone with you.” He laid the pen on his blotter. “I’d suggested you take Felix but the Chief said it had to be your decision.”

Rupert sat back in the chair and rubbed his chin in thought. “Not a bad idea, however, Felix has been a bit distracted of late. I’m beginning to suspect some issues at home; perhaps it would be better if I took young Tristan Lowe with me.” He saw it coming and interrupted. “I know what you’re going to say, yes, he does lack experience but he’s never going to get the right sort unless we loosen the leash a little. He’s keen and, I don’t want to blow the old trumpet, but he really couldn’t get better instruction.”

Hugh smiled. “Trumpet blown, I believe. Alright, get yourselves sorted with the usual necessities and get over to Northolt. There’s a suitable military flight leaving late afternoon. Oh, and just be aware that our American

friends may start sniffing around on this one. We've picked up some odd traffic to their Berlin station chief."

Rupert stood up. "And there's no further information at present? Just a ranking Interior Ministry official?"

Hugh shook his head. "That's right. The informant's playing it close to their chest. They're probably trying to gauge our enthusiasm for the enterprise. We've been caught out before so be careful."

"Who's the Case Officer?"

"Astrid Hopkins. I was originally thinking of sending her out there but I think it's best she remain here as a conduit. I'm sure she'll be pressing hard for the finer details."

Rupert just nodded and made to leave but Chamberlain had more. "I understand why you want to do this. Last fling at the operational stuff before you become totally deskbound and it's always nice to end on a success but it has to be the last time, Rupert. It's a younger man's game these days and you'll soon have bigger things to think about as a Section Head." He took up the pen and a file from his in-tray then looked up again. "Updates as and when."

Wilkinson's slight inclination of the head showed his understanding. "Thank you, Hugh. I appreciate it."

Firming up the details with the support personnel, he'd asked those that arranged these things to get them accommodation in two separate hotels in adjoining districts claiming it provided a safety net. The real reason was it gave him more freedom of movement. He could manage young Tristan but Felix would have been a problem; too experienced, too free-thinking. He collected their false passports including documentation which would allow his passage through the wall into the East as a representative of a British trade delegation in order for him to meet SIS assets on the other side, if he had to. He collected his Walther PPK-L, favoured because it was lighter yet the magazine held the same number of rounds as the standard. Signing out Tristan's, he'd give it to him when they reached their destination.

From Gatow, they made into the city having invisibly morphed into their passport characters, Thomas Sinclair and Michael Spicer. Rupert told his colleague it would be best if he retained the weapons until a more appropriate moment and they exchanged hotel contact numbers.

Tristan saw no problems with Rupert's suggestion; he was looking forward to a relaxing night and not having to worry about the safety of the weapon meant he could happily have a few beers and a meal out. Being alone held no trepidation for him, he spoke German fluently. His father had been in the British military and posted to Germany, he'd married a local girl. Tristan had grown up there. He had German relatives, friends and even neighbours. Initially schooled at a British military establishment, when his father left the Army they'd settled down in a local village and he'd finished his education at a German 'gymnasium' in the nearest town. Roughly the equivalent of the British grammar school it provided him with everything he needed to reach Bonn University from which he'd earned his degree. Whilst he was very much the new boy, as yet untried and untested, he was very keen and the one thing he excelled in was surveillance, especially the art of following someone and remaining unnoticed. In this respect, he was greatly aided by a nondescript face. Once described as drearily dull, it was for all intents and purposes instantly forgettable. Complimented by a sense of dress that was equally unremarkable it had resulted in

his training officers commenting that he would only ever be noticed if his face actually *had* the featureless appearance of an egg shell.

Rupert, on the other hand, had a reputation amongst fellow agents. To those who really knew him, he was a short-tempered risk-taker with a penchant for strong alcohol and loose women. Tristan was glad his companionship hadn't been sought as he really didn't feel comfortable in that sort of company.

Wilkinson was like many SIS operatives of his time; private education, university, foreign study and an interest in the works and ideals of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

He'd had home schooling provided by a nanny prior to boarding at a preparatory school near Chichester followed by more boarding at a place skilfully hidden amongst the woods on the South Downs. His parents wanted him to have the best formal education they could afford and not the sort he'd find at home. They enjoyed a busy and varied social life amongst a set that would now be known as swingers; they could just about manage his company during the school holidays. The English public school régime of the time was known to

be somewhat harsh and his housemaster was a keen fan. The saving grace for Rupert was the presence and kindness of the foreign language teachers and of all the lessons it was theirs he enjoyed the most.

Studying at Christ's, Cambridge, he acquainted himself with campus life and politics then spent a year in Switzerland honing his language skills but realising conscription was heading his way decided to volunteer so as to better find the right place for himself. The Intelligence Corps were more than happy to take him on. Working, briefly, in Allied-occupied Austria as a German language specialist he was then sent to West Berlin where one night he bumped into a charismatic, convincing and amiable man he later found to be Harald Radler.

As soon as he'd become aware there was a possibility of a defection from the DDR's Interior Ministry, Rupert Wilkinson had been a worried man. His sideline was working for the HVA, the foreign intelligence service of the Stasi which had once upon a time been controlled by the old Ministry of the Interior. In the world of espionage, such a connection could not be summarily dismissed as coincidence. If the subject

was a Stasi official, as he feared, he was worried about their depth of knowledge. He had to warn the HVA and time was short. The only man he knew he could totally trust was Harald Radler so there was only one place to go.

Chapter 4

Checkpoint Charlie, Berlin: Rupert showed his papers and proceeded on foot to the East. It was a short walk. Again, documents checked but more questions this time: purpose of visit, who was he seeing, nature of his business. The answers: Herr Arnstadt from the business section of the Interior Ministry, coffee importer. He took the U-Bahn from Stadtmitte to Alexanderplatz then changed lines for a brief trip to Magdalenenstraße.

It would have been only a short distance to the Stasi HQ complex but the preponderance of security surrounding it would be tedious and intrusive. Instead, he found the little cafe on Frankfurterallee he'd been told to use if he ever needed. Ordering coffee and a cake, he used their phone, called his contact number and waited for it to be answered. They were taking their time. He was about to put it down when the receiver was picked up but nothing said.

“This is Acrobat. I'm at the bakery. I need to speak to Radler.”

“Wait there, someone will be with you shortly.”

Twenty minutes later, a tall man entered; sports jacket, dark trousers, high forehead and a full head of almost black hair. He acknowledged the owner with a smile, revealing, for an East German, a set of teeth so white that membership of a Mormon male singing group looked a viable career. In turn, the man behind the counter nodded him to the back of the shop where a table kept the company of a wall-mounted public use telephone.

Taking a seat, he said, "I'm afraid Colonel Radler is not available at the moment. He is on official duties. I'm his deputy, Lieutenant Colonel Drexler of the Stasi and you may call me Max. I'm aware of you only by your codename and that you are a very important person to us." Without asking he turned, clicking his fingers to gain attention, and ordered two coffees. "There is obviously a problem so tell me, Acrobat?"

Rupert told him all he currently knew.

Max sipped his coffee. "You say you have a meeting set up with your SIS informant? You must push them to the limit for further details. Whilst it will not look good for us to lose a high ranking state official it will be even worse if they have another value other than mere

propaganda. I will speak to Colonel Radler when he makes his next contact call.” He looked at his watch, “Which will be very soon.”

Chapter 5

After she'd left, he lingered for a while concerned she knew his real name but concluded it could have been a lucky guess he'd confirmed when he didn't correct her, after all, she'd been at this 'game' a long time, or perhaps her SIS case officer had been authorised by the Old Man to tell her as part of establishing his bona fides. He let it go, paid the bill and applied his mind to the cryptic clues she'd given him as he found the U-Bahn again.

The train glided from the tunnel and halted gracefully next to the platform. He stepped in and took a seat then it came to him, a conversation late one night almost a decade ago in a Berlin safe house. They were handing Radler back to the East Germans the following day. Pouring what he thought would be Harald's last Asbach, the talk relaxed but the East German insisted Gally join him. A cunning old fox but somehow very likeable, he held his glass up for yet another refill. Why not?

"You know, Gally, you could always defect and enjoy the delights of communism. Now, let's pretend you wanted to. How would you do it? No! Don't tell me! I

know. You would spend years honing your body to perfection then wait until Moscow hosted the Olympics and simply run off after you'd won gold in the doggie paddle." They'd both laughed. "Or I suppose you could just go to Sweden on holiday and get train tickets to Leningrad from Folkturist. You Westerners have it so easy" Radler had given a wry smile. "It's not so easy for us. I doubt I'll ever be given foreign work again, not that it matters; I've never been a keen flyer. But, you know, I think a long train journey would be taken at the end of which I wouldn't be there. Probably, I'd get off after the last border checks and take a train somewhere else. West, always west, looking for the weakest part to cross. I think I'd need some assistance to get my portly body elegantly through the wire though." He downed the Asbach. "But, enough of this fantasy. I think I need some beauty sleep if I'm to look my best in the morning."

Gally smiled to himself. Harald was going to do a runner during his trip away. This was his chance. He'd probably waited to know he had a firm offer of help where it was needed most and knew if he could trust anyone it would be his old late-night drinking buddy.

The torch reference clearly indicated it would be a night attempt. The old goat had been planning it for years but what had triggered it now? It would be useful in assessing the honesty of the initial approach but, whether or not they could find that information, Gally had a fair idea of which frontier Radler would head for. He discounted the West German/Czechoslovak border; it was too close to his first destination and would leave no time to organise assistance and, anyway, the mention of ‘the tenth’ was a big hint. He found a phone.

“Clive, I need the Hungarian and Romanian train timetables. Oh, and maps, I need something with a bit of detail but not too much at this stage, old road maps or pages from an atlas, just so I’ve got some idea which direction the trains are heading. How long would it take you to get them from somewhere?”

Clive: “Not too long. Reg will just nip to the ‘library’”

“The local library?”

“No, Gally, the Foreign Office ‘librarian’ will hold this stuff. Reg is on friendly terms but we’ll come up with a cover story just in case. Is that all you need?”

He thought again. “No, any chance you can get me whatever we’ve got on the Hungarian border defences, reports, maps, detailed if possible?”

“Ok. We can fax most of this stuff but you’ll have to go to the consulate then call us to confirm you’re next to their machine. We have the secure line number. I doubt we’ll be able to get it to you before eleven tomorrow but we’ll try. Call in the morning, about nine. Now, the detailed map issue? We’ll sort it using the diplomatic courier. They’ve two flights a day into Gatow so once we secure copies you should have them later the same day. Speak to Aubrey at the consulate; he’s the chap you dealt with yesterday. Anything else?”

An afterthought: “Yeah, actually. See if you can delve into our boy’s background, find what may have happened in the recent past to have spurred him on?”

“Didn’t you think to ask your contact?”

“No, it’s not long occurred to me.”

Gallagher headed back to his hotel, showered then headed out to find a decent restaurant.

Reg’s FO librarian friend was curious. Why did the Stats Unit want train timetables for Eastern Bloc countries? Despite Reg’s age, he was still slick; a junior

minister had asked for some meaningful statistics to compare British Rail's intercity travel with the Warsaw Pact equivalents, punctuality, that sort of thing. They both had a decent laugh about that; meaningful statistics! The librarian was still smiling on the way home.

Chapter 6

Rupert Wilkinson had something to attend to but needed to lose his companion for the best part of the day. He gave him the task of inconspicuously sitting outside the consulate, discreetly searching for others who may be watching. For Tristan, that sort of thing was a ‘piece of cake’.

Mid-afternoon, when Rupert had finished, he returned but couldn’t see his colleague anywhere.

A tap on his shoulder made him jump. “Jesus, Tristan! Never do that again!”

“Sorry, I thought you might have seen me. What happened today? Where did you go?”

“I had some people to see, put feelers out on the ground and I needed to check out a safe house for possible use. Did anything interesting happen here?”

As Tristan reported nothing had, he decided it was time to move on to their pre-arranged meeting. Before leaving the UK, Rupert had spoken briefly with Greta’s case officer, Astrid, so knew they were looking for an elderly woman in her early seventies. A quick phone call on his way to the consulate had told him where,

when and what she'd be wearing as identification; a yellow frog brooch.

Wanting to remain anonymous, he told his colleague it would be good experience for him to conduct the conversation and gave him a briefing. "Ok, use veiled speech, the estate agent scenario and push her as far as you can. What I'm interested in is whether she's pedalling someone from the new Interior Ministry in which case we just get a propaganda benefit or someone from State Security in which case it's important we gain her confidence and find out a name. A Stasi defector is the big prize. Are you happy with what you have to do?"

His colleague nodded. "I'm fine, we did this in training."

After Tristan left for the cafe, Rupert sat on a bench under the trees in the little park opposite. It had a fine view of the shop frontage.

Inside, Tristan easily spotted her. The other occupants were a good deal younger and the only other old customer was a man. He introduced himself by sitting down and commenting on the weather. She

replied, “Yes, it always looks better when the sun is out but it doesn’t always shine.” They spoke in English.

He smiled, “Sometimes a new home makes all the difference,” he said extending his hand.” My name’s Michael.”

She took it and replied, “I’m Greta.”

“I understand you have a client who is looking for a new home?”

She knew she had to distance herself from the relationship for the sake of Radler’s security. “They’re more of an acquaintance but you are right, they are looking to find a place soon. You are the first house agent I have approached on their behalf but others may have properties of interest if you have nothing to offer.” She gave him a sweet smile.

Tristan lowered his voice. “I perfectly understand and whilst they are quite able to look elsewhere, I believe we’re the best option on the market. However, before we can make a decision, I need to have some more information regarding your client.” He waved away the waitress then blurted out, “I don’t suppose you can just tell me who they are?”

She let out a little chuckle. “That question is one of your own, isn’t it, Michael? Your colleague, whoever they are, will not have told you to ask that. Personal details I cannot give you at this time.”

Tristan looked a bit sheepish. “Yes, of course. I thought I’d just throw it in, just in case. Silly really.”

She patted his hand. “You’re doing just fine.”

A grateful smile floated across his face. “Thank you. You see the thing is that we’re not interested in what you might call the propaganda value of a ‘sale’. These things are short-lived and easily forgotten. We’re looking for a much longer and more fruitful relationship, one that lasts the years, so if your client is only interested in the interior and isn’t interested in the state and security of a whole place, well, I’m not sure we’d be interested either.”

She put the cup down and wiped her mouth with a serviette, saying quietly, “My client is very much interested in the state and security of the whole place. His income is considerable and he’s willing to spend it all.” She waved a finger at the waitress, indicating she wished to pay the bill.

Tristan offered her his hand. “Thank you, tell your client we will act on their behalf and do everything we can to locate them a new home. May we discuss the matter again soon? Perhaps you could bring us some more detailed instructions?” As she looked through her handbag for the purse, she said simply, “Das kleine Mädchen, Rosenheimer Strasse. Four pm. Tomorrow.”

On leaving, Tristan met his chaperone, described the contact and divulged the conversation confirming the defector was a state security official which, in the terms discussed, could only mean Stasi. Rupert made sure to lavish some mild praise around, said an urgent call to London was needed and told him to go back to the hotel; he'd be in touch later.

He watched the young man walk away then retreated to the park bench. Several minutes later, the old woman left the cafe with two young women in tow. He watched the old girl wave them away with kisses on the cheeks before they parted ways. Following Greta from the opposite side of the street, he realised that for an elderly woman she was quick on her feet and obviously no newcomer to distance. Eventually, he stood beneath a large linden tree watching her enter a former elegant

villa, set in its own grounds. House and owner, decaying elegance he thought. He took a seat at a nearby bus stop and kept watch for a while.

Chapter 7

Gally spent the rest of his day poring over the timetables and maps he'd collected from the consulate. Radler had specified 'leaving for Bucharest on the tenth' and if that wasn't a clue then nothing was. He'd been through all the possibilities and had come up with what seemed to him to be the only viable option. He felt certain Harald was going to get off the train in a place called Oradea, the first station in Romania after the border checkpoints. There, with just enough time to buy a ticket, he'd take the train to Arad, another border city, from where he could take a connection back to Budapest. This part troubled him for some time until he discovered if Radler got off that train at a large station midway to the Hungarian capital, he could catch another connection which circumvented the city and took him direct to two towns that lay nearest the Austrian border.

All Gallagher had to do now was get whatever detailed frontier defence maps they could send him and figure out which one was most likely to be Harald's jumping-off point based on the weakest part of the border.

He glanced at the clock. It was too late for him to travel far, and anyway, he just didn't have the inclination so he walked to the end of the street where he found the phone there in use. He waited patiently before stepping in and lifting the handset.

The conversation was short and to the point, Gally spelling out the names of areas for which he required the most detail.

Back in the hotel, he got a double from the bar and went to his room, it would help him sleep.

The following morning, Tristan was at the consulate for 9.30. Rupert told him it needed watching again as he wanted to establish if a backup team had been sent out. It was often done he said, they'd act, unknown, in parallel just in case they were required to step in and achieve the objective or affect a suitable exfiltration. Tristan bowed to experience, bought a German newspaper and plonked himself on a bench where he could see the comings and goings. With a coffee and a Berlin doughnut, he settled in and read the headlines. Some people went in and came out, others went in and didn't, some just came out. Around 1.30 pm, he was getting bored so read beyond the first three pages of his

paper which he'd previously folded and left by his side on the bench. Not much of great interest but then an article caught his eye, or rather the picture below the headline. The previous day, he hadn't gone back to his hotel when told. Feeling he was being left out of something, he'd followed Rupert and stood, carefully, at a distance, watching him sit beneath the linden tree. Maybe he was meeting someone? After nearly 30 minutes of nothing happening, Tristan left, mainly because he was hungry. The photograph he looked at now was the former elegant villa Rupert had sat opposite, watching.

The elderly owner had been discovered dead by her sister who'd returned from a trip to see a relative. The Police believed she'd been strangled during a burglary gone wrong but cautiously advised the reporter that a post mortem report was required to be absolutely sure. He was unnerved. Was it 'Greta' or simply a coincidence? He couldn't think of a reason why Rupert would be involved, they were due for another meeting this very afternoon and she seemed keen to co-operate. Perhaps he'd seen something at the house and couldn't do anything, perhaps he'd seen nothing? He knew

they'd have to speak of the matter but he wasn't able to think it over for long because he saw the man again, the one he'd not paid much attention to yesterday but who now strode purposefully up to the front door. He watched him enter and waited. After ten minutes, he came back out but this time with something he never had when he went in; a worn looking dark brown leather satchel briefcase, the sort secured by a flap and two straps through buckles. With his interest in the consulate waning, newspaper folded into his jacket pocket, he decided to follow.

Gallagher made it back to his hotel with no diversions, he was satisfied he wasn't being trailed but it was true to say his mind was a little distracted thinking of the maps and the border situation.

When he'd disappeared within, Tristan started thinking rapidly. The man was surveillance conscious, obviously believing there might be a chance he'd be followed so he was definitely up to something. Tristan needed his name so he nipped into the general store opposite and grabbed the first tourist map he could. Across at the hotel reception desk, he waved it at the girl and said, "That gentleman that just came in with the

briefcase dropped this, I was chatting to him outside. I can't remember his name."

"Oh, that would be Mister Baker. He's just gone to his room. Do you want to speak with him again?" Her hand went to the telephone.

"No, it's not necessary." A little half-wave and he made to walk away but then stopped. "I'm supposed to meet him again tomorrow. I've a terrible memory and I've forgotten his first name as well now. It was something like..." he began to feign deep thought but she was ahead of him. "It's John. I'll write it down for you."

Note stuffed in his inside pocket, he checked his watch, left her with a crooked smile and made back to reclaim his bench. On arrival, he found he'd left the map at the hotel when he picked up the note. Too late now, going back would be an even bigger faux pas. Another sudden thought came to him.

He flashed his identification at the man on the consulate door and entered. Coming out, he was met by an irritated Rupert who greeted him with, "Where the fuck have you been?" Tristan was explaining but was interrupted, "Ok, fine, good work, especially getting the

name though I doubt it's his real one but what the hell were you doing in there?"

"It's got CCTV on the entrance, look over there. They have footage with our chap on it. I spoke to our man in there and he had them whizz through the last couple of days. Our mister Baker's been here three times now."

Rupert took a deep, calming breath. "Alright, I did want this to be low key, the less the local man knows the better but too late now. Let's get in there so I can get a good look at this bloke, see if I recognise him."

He didn't but he asked who'd dealt with him. The local SIS man, not far from retirement, went off then returned with Aubrey. Rupert introduced himself and began the questions.

"What did he want the first time he came?"

"It was just consular advice, requirements for visiting the east, that sort of thing. As you know, he wasn't here long."

"And the second time?"

"He wanted to use the fax machine to receive some business documents."

"What were they?"

“I’ve no idea. I left him to it. I had things to do. There’s nothing else in that room, nothing to steal and when I last checked the fax machine was still there.”

“What about today, he came empty-handed and left with a briefcase? How do you explain that?”

“Ah, yes. Well, he’d had his briefcase stolen from his room and wanted to impress the East Germans when he crossed over so when he told me I lent him mine. It may look a little worn but it *is* Italian leather, you know.”

“What business did he say he was in?”

“I don’t remember exactly but I think he said he was a tea or coffee importer. I’m sorry I can’t be more helpful.”

“Do you know where he was staying?”

“No idea, old chap.”

“How are you getting your briefcase back?”

“He said he’d drop it by when he’d finished with it.”

“And you trust him?”

The scepticism wasn’t missed by Aubrey. “Oh, absolutely, he was an awfully nice fellow.”

Outside, they shaded under a nearby tree. Rupert was seething. “He’s fucking lying, I know he is. We need to keep an eye out for Mister John Baker. Who the fuck is

he really? Them or us? And if us then why?" He wiped a hand across his mouth and took his second deep, calming breath.

Tristan thought this might be the right time to tell him about the old woman's death, time was running on and Rupert hadn't said anything about the meeting with Greta which Tristan felt was odd. "I need to draw your attention to something," he said, pulling the newspaper from his pocket and shaking it open. He showed Rupert the article, in particular the picture. His colleague recognised it straight away but no one would have noticed.

"And?" he replied, straight-faced.

Tristan told him what he'd done the day before.

"You did what? You fucking followed me?" He grabbed the younger man by the lapels and pushed him up against the tree. "What the fuck are you playing at? I give you this chance of some important action and *all* you have to do is exactly what I tell you. People get fucking hurt out here in the real world, Tristan, you prick. For your information, I sat there for two hours to see if she had any visitors. You know, like the type a man of my experience would recognise or notice. Then I

left. I saw nothing of any interest.” He released him and straightened Tristan’s jacket. Turning his back, he paced up and down then said, “I shouldn’t have done that. I’m sorry but this is probably the biggest job of my career, I can smell it, they don’t come much bigger and now I’ve got some unknown quantity wandering into play and my only fucking reliable informant has kicked the fucking bucket. To say I’m a bit tense is an understatement.” He stared up and down the street. “She was working both sides so I don’t think her death was a simple burglary. I think they were looking for something, god knows what. I think the East Germans killed her which means we could be next.”

The comments didn’t go over Tristan’s head. From the article, it was impossible to discern if either the victim or her sister was ‘Greta’. His colleague seemed to know.

What Rupert wasn’t saying was that Greta had been ‘persuaded’ to impart she worked for several western agencies as well as the Stasi, that she knew the offer wasn’t part of a Stasi bluff operation and the route ‘out’ would be through Hungary. When he released the pressure, she’d kept asking for her heart tablets but he

knew if he gave them to her he'd lose the momentum of the moment. He needed a name, so he pushed it as far as he could, hands around her throat as he sat astride her, almost succeeding as she spluttered, "It's ..." then groaned loudly and lay still. His desperation so great, he'd tried to resuscitate her, pumping her chest and blowing into her mouth but he'd gone too far, she wasn't coming back.

Now, he patted Tristan's shoulder. "Come on, follow me and for goodness sake do as you're told in future. Initiative is a great thing but on your first live mission you need to reel it in."

It took just over 30 minutes to arrive at the safe house by taxi. Rupert briefly showed Tristan the outside of the detached property in its own grounds, not extensive or manorial, just big enough to be secluded whilst the building itself was small enough not to be easily noticeable. Inside he got a guided tour of the kitchen, bathroom and one of the living rooms before Rupert showed him the cellar.

"There are three bedrooms upstairs, camp beds in the cupboards but this cellar is important," he said as he led Tristan along a narrow subterranean corridor. A metal

door at the end opened out revealing a small room, heavy wooden chair in the middle and a dirt-smearred narrow window high on the wall behind. On the ground by the door, a metal box. Rupert opened its lid, picked up the PPK and showed it clear then he slotted in the loaded magazine, racked back the working parts and released them with the satisfying sound of a round being carried into the breach.

“Right, Tristan, the magazine’s in and there’s one up the spout. Locked and loaded as the Yanks would say. Safety’s on. Don’t mess with it unless you’re going to fire it.” He passed him a pancake holster.”Use your own belt and here’s a spare full magazine.”

Tristan nodded. Rupert handed him a small duffle bag. “Stick them in there until you get back to the hotel. If we get pulled by the Polizei before that then, if we can and if we have to, we just lash them somewhere then deny all knowledge. If the buggers do happen to find them the consulate will get them back for us afterwards.”

They took a taxi back to Tristan’s accommodation and had a beer in the bar then Rupert placed another on the counter, in front of his companion, telling him they

were done for the day, he had to report in. He left with a, “Don’t leave that duffle bag here.”

He took the U-Bahn, found a phone kiosk and called Chamberlain, giving his current knowledge of Baker and asking for enquiries to be made. Then he made another call.

Chapter 8

Gally opened the sealed envelope he'd been given by Aubrey at the consulate when he'd been handed the briefcase. Inside a note from Reg, the office master of information gathering. They'd found nothing, as yet, regarding their subject's possible motivational reasoning. He had a wife and a young son although there were no updates on the boy in the last six years and the most recent information on the wife had been the briefest of mentions four years ago when they attended a function. There was an older son from a previous marriage but apparently, following the divorce, they'd never got on. He tore the note into small strips, fed them to flames in the large crystal ashtray, powdered the remnants and dumped them in the room's waste basket.

He had more maps than he'd expected, Reg or Clive had gone for detail and also included a map of the Hungarian rail network and current intelligence on the border area itself.

As Radler hadn't bothered to supply any more clues he obviously expected Gally to work it out from the

information he'd already been given. The next hours were spent searching through the papers until he found himself focusing on two small villages. At one particular point, the road connecting them passed incredibly close to the actual border itself; in fact, it was practically on it. Although no minefields were indicated, Gally thought it impractical for any sown to continue through what amounted to no more than a 10 metre stretch of fence and road. This had to be the ultimate destination because the next best weak point, much further south, would need Radler to throw himself off a railway bridge into a possibly raging river and swim against the current for two hundred yards. He didn't think the stout 63 year old East German would be up for that sort of a challenge, especially if there was no medal at the end of it. There was another issue, there were wider border restrictions of special passes and checkpoints that would have to be negotiated but he could do nothing about that, it was Harald's problem.

Stuffing the paperwork under the bed cover, he locked the door and headed to the hotel bar for a beer. As he passed through reception, the man behind the desk called him over.

“My colleague from the earlier shift says a man brought this in for you.” He handed him the tourist map. “He said you’d been talking in the street and you dropped it when you parted.”

“Are you sure you’ve got the right person?”

“My colleague was quite certain it was for you, Herr Baker.”

Gally took it anyway, grabbed his beer and wandered out past the reception desk to return to his room. “Did your colleague have a name for this bloke or say what he looked like?”

“I’m afraid not, Herr Baker,” was the smiled reply.

Back in the room, he examined the map. Nothing obvious, brand new and he knew he hadn’t bought it. He took it to the bathroom, turned on the electric towel rail, slipped the map over then went back to immerse himself once more in the papers on the bed. After ten minutes, the map showed nothing, no secret messages. He’d thought it worth a try and tossed it on a chair.

He drank the beer whilst double-checking his earlier conclusion and found he wasn’t wavering. Finally, he needed to get something to eat. He tidied the paperwork

into the briefcase and secreted it beneath spare blankets in the cupboard which he locked, removing the key.

Outside, on the pavement, he checked his watch, it was getting late. He strode off towards the schnellimbiss but was immediately aware of a figure on the opposite side of the road moving off from a doorway in the same direction. He wondered if he was becoming paranoid but decided to test it out anyway. A few unnecessary impromptu deviations and his shadow was still there. He doubled back briefly. The man suddenly developed an interest in a women's dress shop.

It was time he confronted his stalker so he hit the nearest bar. Inside, he took a seat by the window and watched the man follow him in then sit down at a table in the far corner, opening a newspaper. Gally ordered two beers and sent one over, following it shortly after.

“I hope you don't mind but I thought I'd buy you a drink. It must be tiring following me about all over the place?”

The man stared back at him.”I'm not following you, pal.”

“We both know you are so let's not pretend. My name's John. You're American, aren't you? I can tell by

the accent. I'm clever that way. Let's be honest with one another. We're supposed to be 'friends' after all. I assume you're from the Agency so, what's your interest in me?"

The Yank tried to answer but Gally, expecting more bullshit, blocked him, "My Gran always told me that honesty was the best policy which is not always the case in my experience, but, in this situation, I think it should be. So, what did the tea lady tell you?"

A brief look of surprise flashed through the man's eyes. "What do you know about 'Tea Lady'?"

That one sentence confirmed his suspicions and told him their informant's unlikely but seemingly obvious codename. The person who allocated it must have had the imagination of a dead rocking horse.

"Nothing, mate, it was a just joke." He held his palms out in front of him, a gesture of momentary 'surrender'. "Look, you work for them and I work for us so why follow me? Let's be grown-up about this. Cheers by the way."

He lifted his glass and the American automatically responded, momentarily regretting his action. "I'm sorry

but you've got me confused with someone else," he insisted.

Gally sipped his beer then said, "And you've got me confused with a simple businessman. I'll show you mine if you'll show me yours, so to speak. Otherwise, I'll run you ragged and make you look a right idiot. Maybe, if I tell you what I think you know it might help. Your lot have picked up some information about a possible defection but you don't know who. You think I do. Hence, we sit here now. I could let you in on the action but if you're going to play dumb I'd have to tell you, quite frankly, to fuck off! It's up to you. What's your name by the way? You look like a 'Hank' or a 'Rudy' sort of guy."

The Yank smiled. "Now it's my turn to tell you to fuck off. The name's Deacon, most people call me Deek and I don't know why I'm telling you this." He took a mouthful of beer then ordered two more from the waiter as he wandered past. "You're a strange fucking man, John, but ballsy with it. I like that. I'm not the most patient of men so I like to get to the nub of things real fast. If you agree to cut me in on the action and

information coming from it, I'll be totally honest with you.”

Gally finished his beer and accepted the replacement. “I can do that. Just remember, I still have to run it by my boss but otherwise, I'm happy. It's a matter of trust, I know, but I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it.”

The American dropped the newspaper on the seat next to him. “Ok, John. We know you're here in response to an intention to defect. We want to know who, where and when.”

Gallagher laughed.”And then you'll steal it. Listen, I know who and roughly when but not exactly where. You can come along for the ride if you want, in the background. I'm here on my own and I need someone to back me up. That's the terms or I walk away.”

“On your own? You're lying already. We know you've got two colleagues shadowing you.”

Gally leant forward on the table, lowering his voice. “You know someone's following me?”

Deek felt he had the upper hand. “Yeah, they visited the consulate just after you left. We like to be on top of things so it's always good to keep an eye on our 'friends' as well.”

Gally swallowed a mouthful of beer. “That’s interesting but not unexpected. I can assure you they’re not *with* me and I’m fairly certain they’re not going to be my friends.” He saw the look on the American’s face. “Inter-departmental jealousies, Deek. I know it’s silly but it’s a fact of the job. It might even be more serious than that.”

The Yank studied him as he drank his beer. “Ok. Here’s the deal. I watch your back, you cut me in on the action and full disclosure?”

Gallagher weighed him up, suspiciously. “I’m happy to do that but it all seems a bit too easy.”

The American chuckled. “Hell, I don’t know why but I like you, John. I like to fly under the radar and if you pull this off I can sail on in on your wake. It’ll solve a few problems I’ve got with my new chief of station and maybe wipe the sanctimonious smirk off her face. She claims I’m a dinosaur. Besides, if I have to follow you around the place anymore I’m gonna pull you into a doorway and beat the shit out of you.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“Why? You think you can take me, Limey?”

Gally eyed him. The Yank was a big guy and in the right light could pass for muscular. “No. It’s just I’m not a fan of pain and I don’t think you could stand the squealing.” Deek laughed.

They finished their beers, Gally refusing another. Outside, they made arrangements for the next meeting then the American told him, “The two guys shadowing you? I’ll have pictures for you tomorrow but there’s an older guy, mid-forties, and a younger one, maybe I guess twenty-five, looks like he’s just started shaving. So long, John. You take care now.”

Still with food to think of, he resumed the walk to the ‘schnelly’ where he got a take away of ‘bratwurst mit pommes frites und mayo’ then headed back. He didn’t register the significance of the blue VW panel van pulling into the kerb. A heavy set man got out and appeared to walk into the tobacconist’s. When Gally drew alongside, he was expertly catapulted into the now opened side door of the vehicle, dragged in and overwhelmed. On the pavement, a neatly packaged evening meal was all that remained.

Chapter 9

At the safe house, the masked men pulled him roughly from the vehicle and frogmarched him through the front door, down some steps and bounced him from side to side along a narrow corridor. A high backed seat sat just before a metal door at the end. Door opened, they forced him against a wall inside and searched him, removing his wallet, passport and weapon. For some reason, they missed the six spare rounds in his handkerchief pocket. A glance through the wallet produced Deutschmarks and two business cards, one in the name of John Baker, the other from a removal firm called Farralland. They kept Baker's card, replaced everything else and stuffed the wallet back in his inside jacket pocket. If he hadn't thought it before he was now certain this wasn't a simple robbery.

They dragged him onto the heavy wooden chair, tying his feet and already bound hands to its frame. Unable to answer due to the wide gaffer tape fixed across his mouth, he simply nodded in response to the 'heavy's' accented comment of: "Someone wants to meet you. You should know this room is soundproofed

and if you scream, no one will hear. Do you understand?” The door slammed shut and he was left in semi-darkness, the light from the dirt-smearred window enough to let him know he was still surrounded by four walls. It was a long and somewhat chilly night.

He tried loosening the bonds on his hands but only succeeded in making his wrists and fingers very sore. Giving up, he thought of Clare, what she would be doing, what she'd be wearing, how much he missed her. He ran over what he'd learned during the evening and became even more convinced he'd cracked where Radler would make his final move. At various points, he fell into uncomfortable sleep, waking when his head would eventually jerk forward with unexpected force. He retried the ropes binding him but it was no good and to make matters worse, he badly needed to pee. His bladder felt as if it would burst and he regretted having the beers.

More drifting in and out of awkward sleep before the daylight permeated the grimy window leaving him hoping something would happen soon. Finally, when no hope was left, he simply wet himself. Enormous physical relief was tainted by instant regret and warm

wet legs, soon to be cold wet legs. Tears began to slowly trickle down his cheeks. He couldn't stop them. It wasn't his current situation exactly that did it, more the fact he'd began to hum Clare's favourite tune, hoping it could lift his spirits. The thought of never seeing her again caused a rupture in his mental flood gates. The light had increased and he guesstimated it had to be around 8 or 9 o'clock.

The sound of a lock being opened banished all thoughts but the 'now' from his head. The door was flung wide and fluorescent lighting flickered into life. A man stood before him and a 'heavy' closed the door, remaining outside.

Rupert Wilkinson looked down at his prisoner and sniggered. "You've pissed your pants and I haven't even started yet." He ripped the gaffer tape from Gally's mouth leaving it flushed and looking as if a drunken clown had applied the ultimate dregs of makeup.

"I'll get down to the hard questions first. Who the fuck are you?"

Gally, already filled with emotion, found it easy to play the part. "My name's John Baker. I'm just a businessman. I've got no money, only what's in my

wallet. I've got an American Express card if that's what you want."

Rupert punched him on the jaw. "Stop snivelling. Been across the wall have you? Who did you meet?"

When he'd fought off the pain, he replied, "I saw a Herr Stahnke at Röstfein. Please, I don't know what you want of me." Somehow he'd found a reservoir of tears he never knew he had.

A hard slap across the face. "I know you're lying, *Mister Baker*. How about I tell you something? You're an ex-London copper, thrown out after they discovered you were bent and being paid off by the Krays. Since then you've dabbled as a private detective and now you're a fucking freelancer selling yourself to the highest bidder. You're nothing more than a fucking prostitute." He grabbed Gallagher's hair and violently ragged his head around.

"I don't care who you're working for. I'll give you one chance. I think you spoke with the old girl and I think you know exactly who wants to defect. I had a few words with her too. She wasn't very co-operative at first, of course, but she did get round to telling me several interesting things. She was buying time, we both knew

that but I didn't have time left to waste on niceties and neither of us knew *she* had no time left at all. Now, who's the other party? It can't be the Brits, I'm here for that, so are you freelancing for the Americans? It's not the West Germans, they'd never use a London half-wit like you but the Yanks can't tell the difference." Another hard slap. "Is that why you're here, John, because otherwise, I can't think of a reason for your existence in this scenario? Save yourself a lot of pain and tell me what she told you. You're waiting on a Stasi official, aren't you?" He punched Gally hard in the stomach leaving him doubled over and moaning between gasps for air.

With as much calm as he could muster, Rupert took a deep breath then said, "I gave her ample opportunity to give me a name but the old bitch had a fucking heart attack. Unbelievable! You see, anyone could work out who the 'applicant' worked for; the 'old' Interior Ministry was the clue so that was a piece of piss for me but she never got around to the name. She told you, though, didn't she? My god, the Yanks must have put a good deal together, I'll give them that." A sudden hard

strike to the side of Gally's head left it pounding and his ear ringing.

Rupert wandered around the room, spittle in the corners of his mouth. His victim gazed down at his own wet pants knowing that unless he got a miracle he was going to die here. He'd known that from the moment Rupert walked in without hiding his identity.

His head was yanked up by his hair and Rupert leered into his face. "John. I have to know what you know, the very same things. I'm not like you, I'm not a prostitute. It's not about the money. It's about beliefs and commitment to an ideal. Now, tell me all you know then you get to walk away and we can both be friends."

Gallagher squinted back at the figure before him. "My name is John Baker. I'm a coffee importer. The only name I know is Herr Stahnke."

He was rewarded with a vicious punch to the face. "Coffee importer? Another one? Popular job?"

As blood dripped from Gallagher's nose and lip, Rupert told him, "Right, you can't say I didn't try. I did try to help you, John, and now, all that follows is your fault." He turned and went out of the door, leaving it open. Gally could see the high backed chair and, beyond,

Rupert and the heavy had picked up a car battery and a box. They brought them in and set them down near to the entrance. For the first time, Gally noticed the wall-mounted telephone.

“I hadn’t wanted to resort to this but you leave me no choice.” Rupert smiled. “I’m sure you recognise the car battery, John, but what we have here are the things to make this simple essential item very unpleasant.” The heavy returned with a small wooden table and a bucket of water. Rupert placed some sort of control box on the table then waved a cattle prod at him. He turned to his companion. “Wire them up.” The phone rang.

Rupert answered. “Yes! I thought I told you I didn’t want to be disturbed.” He paused then said, “I’ll be right up.” With a curt, “Tape his mouth and watch him carefully. I’ll be back shortly,” he left. The heavy, leather-jacketed even though it was summer, complied then stared at Gallagher, ignoring his attempts to make muffled conversation.

A few minutes, no more, and Rupert returned this time with a young man in tow. He dismissed the heavy with, “Oscar’s got your money.”

Gally watched the new arrival nervously eyeing him then the electrical goods then back again. Rupert interrupted both their thoughts, “Right, Tristan. I didn’t want you to see this side of our work just yet, too early in a career normally but seeing as you’ve once again disobeyed my instructions to remain at your fucking hotel you may as well stay. This man here is an East German Stasi agent, part of an assassination team sent to kill us. I’ve asked him nicely to co-operate but he’s chosen to do it the hard way.” As Rupert turned to speak with Tristan, Gally gave a wide-eyed shake of his head. The phone rang again. Rupert picked it up. “What now! How much! I never agreed to pay for the bloody van! Stay there, I’m coming up.” He looked at Tristan. “Get your bloody gun out and watch the bugger like a hawk. He’s a tricky fucker. I’ll be back in a minute.”

They heard him swearing his way along the corridor. Gally desperately tried to communicate with Tristan but all that came out were loud moans. The lad looked at him anxiously, uncertainty flooding his brain then he ripped the tape from Gallagher’s mouth.

“Thank fuck for that!” Gally gasped. “Listen, son. Does this look like the sort of thing you’d do? Your

mate's a nutter. I'm not a Stasi agent. I work for British Intelligence, just like you but a department you'll not know about. I was sent to get a defector. Your oppo wants to stop it because he knows his days will be numbered if I succeed. He's working for them. For God's sake, there's no time for you to fuck about. Get these ropes off me, please, or we're both dead."

Tristan holstered his weapon and began to loosen the ties.

Upstairs, Oscar, the leader of the heavy mob, wanted more money insisting he'd been very clear about the expenses involved. Rupert realised he didn't have the time or the support to push things and handed him another wad of money. Oscar counted it and told him it was still 4,000 Deutschmarks light. A dash up the stairs to the next floor and a two-minute wait brought the missing cash.

In the cellar, Tristan had managed to slacken Gally's bonds when they heard noises in the corridor.

"Leave them, leave them, I can manage now, son. The tape! Put the tape back on my mouth!"

When Rupert entered, he saw nothing amiss. “Tristan, when I tell you to throw some of that water over him don’t go bananas.” He moved nearer the table.

Gun back in hand, Tristan blurted out, “I need to speak to you! There are things I’m not happy with.”

Spinning round to face him, his colleague replied, “Come on, Tristan. Spit it out then.”

“You knew she was dead.”

“It was in the paper for God’s sake!”

“But it wasn’t. They only said it was a Frau Uhlmann. She lived with her sister who was the one who found her. But you didn’t know that because her sister wasn’t there when you were. You knew it was Greta because it was you that killed her.”

Rupert had known the kid had the potential to be a pain in the arse but he’d underestimated him. “Look, son,” he said soothingly. “Ok, I went in there, just to see if she’d be more forthcoming with an older agent. She was fine then she suddenly had a bloody heart attack and dropped like a stone. She was dead, I checked her. There was no point in getting involved so I made it look like a burglary gone wrong. It’s what we do.”

“She had strangulation marks around her neck, Rupert!”

“Ok, I may have applied a little pressure, she was being awkward. I knew she knew more than she was telling us and I wanted to know if this was a false flag operation designed to suck you and me into a position where the Stasi could...” He angrily pointed behind him at Gallagher. “He’s one of theirs, Tristan! You should be thanking me not accusing me. I’ve probably saved your life.”

He didn’t see Gally sliding the remaining rope from his legs. His concentration totally on his colleague, he knew he couldn’t fool him much longer. His hand went to his jacket.

Tristan levelled his PPK at him. “What are you doing? Don’t do anything, I’m warning you!”

“Calm down, son. I’m just getting something that will prove to you what I’m saying.”

He slid Gally’s two-inch revolver from his pocket, swiftly raising it one-handed. “Put your gun on the floor, Tristan. Do it now,” he said, calmly.

In that moment, Tristan knew there’d be no going back, he knew if he surrendered his weapon he’d be a

dead man. Flicking the safety, he pulled the trigger. Click. Unfazed, his drills were good. Working parts back, unfired round sails towards the wall, slide hits home and he pulled the trigger again. Click. It unnerved him, he knew he'd rounds in the magazine, he'd checked it before he arrived. About to repeat the process, he got no further. Rupert shot him three times.

He sagged, slumped against the wall then collapsed on the floor. Rupert stood over him, shaking his head slowly and said, "I doctored the firing pin, son. You were almost perfect just then. I was really quite impressed." Another two rounds into the boy's head before Gally managed to cover the ground and whack him across the skull with the cattle prod. Rupert sank to one knee then sagged onto the floor after Gally hit him again.

Through the door, he grabbed the chair and wedged it firmly beneath the handle. It wouldn't last long but maybe long enough for him to get out. He attempted a sprint along the passageway but having been restricted all night he felt like a fleeing baby elephant. He fell on the steps but picked himself up, hearing the metal door being violently kicked as he did so. He'd no idea what

would await him on the ground floor but knew the layout from when they'd brought him in: surprise was his best weapon. No hesitation, door open, left turn, sprint up the hall and straight out the front door. There was no one; they'd left with their wages to get rid of the van. The double wrought iron gates on the entrance pillars were closed so he leapt over the wall. A quick look up and down the street showed him he wouldn't make it before his pursuer got out so he crossed the road, entering the building site opposite. At a fast walk, pins and needles careering up and down his unsteady legs, he made it to the site hut with its open door; hard hat and reflective waist coat hanging on a peg. Suitably attired, he strode off towards the far side with a look of purpose on his face. Rupert made the street but there was nothing to see. Swearing profusely, he backtracked to the little office on the first floor and used the phone to file his report; a Stasi agent posing as businessman John Baker had found the safe house and overpowered him. His colleague had engaged but had been shot dead. Local clean up team needed urgently.

Fishing through a drawer in the desk, he recovered a firing pin then returned to the cellar to replace the one in

Tristan's gun, the one he'd deliberately shortened knowing it would almost certainly go unnoticed in normal handling routines. The unfired round placed back in the magazine, he fired two shots along the corridor at the door to the cellar then another two from inside the 'interrogation' chamber at the wall alongside the phone. It would look like Tristan had tried to repel an assault.

Gallagher walked back into the hotel having dumped the fancy dress but the desk man still gave a startled look.

"Herr Baker? What has happened to you? Should I call the Police?"

Gally sauntered past with a dismissive wave. "No need old chap, got drunk, fell over."

Chapter 10

“There’s a phone call for you in reception, Herr Baker.”

He followed him down. The receptionist pointed to the booth in the corner. “You can take it in there; the only other connected phone is this one on the desk. You’ll have complete privacy.”

The voice at the end of the line said, “Baker? Our friends in Century House are making enquiries about you. Expect some interference.” It was the Old Man.

“It’s a bit too late for that. I’ve already met one of them and Rupert has a very nasty personality.”

“Do you need anything?”

“Only a bath and I’ll run that myself. By the way, I’ve made friends with an American, it’s a genuine thing, it could even be love and he’s a handy looking chap. Is there anything else I should know?”

“Well, not really, but we prepared a little history about you just to divert attention from ourselves, Baker; Ex-police officer, discharged in disgrace, Kray twins and all that, now freelancing, that sort of thing. It should be good enough in the short term.”

“I was wondering where my new admirer got his information from.”

“Have you had a spot of bother?”

“You could say that. I very nearly gave up all hope of fathering children.” There was a mutual pause whilst the Old Man thought about it and Gally thought about how much to tell him. “They lost one by the way. Nice chap, Tristan. It wasn’t me but I’m pretty sure I’ll get the blame. It was my new admirer. He’s keen on keeping things tidy.”

“Really? In that case, just make sure you’re *very* careful.”

“I wish you’d told me that yesterday, I was only being careful then. The ‘very’ could have made all the difference.”

“Yes, quite. Well, just put it all in your report *if* you get back.” He put the phone down. The Old Man sat back with a satisfied smile. That should knock some of the flippancy out of him, he thought.

Gallagher took his bath then tossed his old clothes into the waxed canvas holdall Clare had bought him. She’d reckoned it said ‘well travelled’ but also looked chic. She also said the colour was ‘moss’ but he was

pretty certain it was really grey and he wasn't quite sure if he wanted to look 'well travelled'; vanity mixed with the needs of the job. He looked at his face in the mirror. The nose was swollen and tender and his eye was showing bruising. His left ear was sore to the touch and when he did it felt as if someone had shoved a brick in it. Running a finger around his teeth, he decided dental work was unnecessary.

A change of clothes, he collected his things and went to the check-in desk.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to move on. I need to be somewhere else, business matters. I'll pay for my room for tonight. It's only fair but please don't let it out to anyone, I may send a friend over to spend the night, if that's alright"

"Perfectly, Herr Baker, it's 'your' room after all." They exchanged smiles and the man processed the American Express.

There was no friend 'possibly spending the night'. His recent interrogator obviously knew where he was staying so a move was expedient plus he didn't want it on his conscience if the hotel let it out to someone who

could well receive an unwelcome and extremely unpleasant visit.

He took a taxi to a suitable phone box, not far from the hotel he'd seen in the tourist map he'd left in his room.

“Clive, I've moved house as a precaution but the added problem is that my aunt Greta has suddenly passed away. I forgot to mention it when I spoke to the Old Man. Anyway, I'm reasonably certain I've solved the puzzle so I'm going with it. I'm not sure when I'll be able to call again.”

“I understand. Just be aware that Century has sent a replacement part with another to follow soon. No further details. Do you need an increment to assist with unforeseen expenses?” His last remark was the offer of Farralland support.

“No, I'm best on my own otherwise it becomes a circus. Speak to you when I can, Clive.”

After settling into his new place, he checked his wrist and left for his meeting with Deacon.

“Gee, buddy, what happened to you?”

“I met a maniac who doesn’t like me. Have you got the photos? Possibly of no consequence now but I’d best make sure.” Deek showed him.

“Yeah, that’s them.” He pointed at the image of Rupert. “This one is dangerous. The other fellow doesn’t matter because he’s dead now. His friend here shot him.” He took a swig from his beer. “I need to move on to Austria. Who do you know out there you can trust?”

“Our people or theirs?”

“Theirs, if that’s possible?”

“There’s only one person there I’d trust with my life.”

Meanwhile, Rupert walked into the hotel and asked for Herr Baker. The receptionist said, “Ah, you are a friend?”

“Yes, of course.”

“I understand,” she said searching through the drawer hidden on her side of the desk. “The key is not here so he must still be in his room. It’s room six. Follow the signs up the stairs.” Rupert flashed his best smile.

In the hallway on the first floor, he took out his pistol and listened at the door. He could hear a radio. He tried

the handle, locked. Gun at the ready, he stepped back and kicked the door in.

A rapid search found him nothing but a tourist map discarded in the bin. He quickly opened it out then, re-folded, stuffed it in his pocket and turned the headboard radio off.

On exit, he saw the cleaning lady trundling a trolley towards him. She waved. "Are you Herr Baker's friend? I'm sorry but I haven't serviced the room yet. I'm going to do it now."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, I don't. I know, he's moved on but he didn't say where. If you wait in the bar I'll have it ready for you in thirty minutes." She searched through the keys on her cart, selected one then picked up a bundle of towels and let herself into the adjoining room.

By the time she discovered the damaged door, he was well gone.

Gally, after his chat with Deacon, felt the need for food. Now, wiping his lips on the cheap paper serviette, free with his frikadelle and 'senf', he threw the tray and the slice of bread he never asked for in the bin. The arrangements were in hand and he wanted to check his

maps once more to be finally sure but first, he needed to find a 'waschsalon', a laundromat; the pants in his bag were beginning to smell and he needed to speak to an unused contact.

Later that afternoon, Rupert made the crossing to the East again. He had to tell Max Drexler that his would-be defector was a ranking Stasi official.

Chapter 11

The information ‘Acrobat’ brought was disconcerting, to say the least. For some people it was good news, members of the Interior Ministry under suspicion had been saved the trauma of an investigation but now Drexler had a much more serious problem. One of their own was trying to defect and it was a big organisation.

“It is a shame this woman died before she could say more. Klara Elenora Uhlmann, you say?”

Rupert nodded. “Yes, she’d be in her early seventies.”

Drexler shook his head. “It means nothing to me but often these people are not known to us by the names they use on the other side. When I find her, I will have at least one suspect, her handler.” He bit into the slice of cake he was holding. “Mmmm, this is good, are you sure you don’t want one?” Rupert shook his head and waved the offer away. Drexler continued, “This Baker fellow? You are certain about him? We must locate him again and have him back for another chat. Do you have a photograph?”

“Yes, I went back to the consulate today and took one with their instant camera, It was the best image they had of him on video. It’s not perfect but it should do.”

Drexler studied it for a few seconds.”Yes, it is what it is. We’ll circulate this to all crossing points and police stations. If he crosses from the West, we’ll have him. I’m sure he’ll talk next time.” He slipped it into his jacket. “By the way, I have spoken to Colonel Radler and he has authorised me to act on his behalf. He sends his regards and speaks of you very highly. He told me to mention to you the time you spent together in Switzerland, he said he had fond memories.”

Rupert chuckled at the thought. “Yes, it was a very pleasant stay. The stories I could tell!”

Max smiled back, “I’m sure you could and I would be interested to hear them but I’m afraid I have limited time for such things at present. I have to speak to him again and will let him know your news.”

With a mental list of contacts that Drexler had supplied, Rupert made his way back to Checkpoint Charlie. He’d start trying to find ‘Baker’ from the convenience of a bar. The tourist map he’d found in Gally’s room had advertisements all around its edges.

Four were for hotels. Knowing what both sides of his line of business were like for thrift, he discounted the most expensive one. His last call was successful. Yes, they had a Herr Baker staying there. Did he want to leave a message?

“No, it’s fine. I’m his cousin and I want to surprise him. It’s a special occasion.”

The fool hadn’t changed his name. This was going to be easier than he’d thought.

Chapter 12

“Hello. I’m looking to speak with Herr Alois Sparfeld.”

“Speaking.”

“My name is John Baker. I was told that Dingelsdorf, am Bodensee, Mai, achtundfünfzig, would mean something to you.”

It did. He was given an address and told to meet in one hour.

An old man answered the door and invited him into an enclosed hallway. “Can I see your papers?” he enquired.

He examined the passport closely using a little jeweller’s magnifier. “Ahh, this is very good, almost as good as my own work.” He handed it back then turned to the large young man stood behind him. “Herr Baker, this is Franz. He is my nephew. He has a very violent temper so don’t upset him. He’s a wrestler you know.”

Gally eyed him up and down, “I suspected he might have a hobby.”

Sparfeld smiled. “Come through and tell me how I might help you.”

In the workshop at the back of the house, Gally said, "I need a gun."

"Are they sending you people out here without guns these days?"

"Well, the thing is I did have one but I lost it."

"That was very careless of you, Herr Baker."

"Yes, it was."

"What are you looking for?"

"A concealable semi-automatic pistol, eight-round magazine, if possible."

"Then for you, there is only one choice, Mister Bond," he chuckled. "I will leave you with Franz. Try not to touch anything, Franz wouldn't like that." He shuffled off and Gally could hear him undoing several locks on a door.

Franz wasn't a fan of conversation but he did enjoy staring. He liked it a lot. It was an awkward thirty minutes.

The old man apologised. "I'm sorry, I'm not as sprightly as I used to be and I had to go down to the second level. It's not a big cellar, just deeper than most." Two weapons were placed on the workbench with a pancake holster, boxes of ammunition and some

magazines. “PPK and PPKL, the second one is lighter but does everything the first one does. The difference is this is chambered for the 9mm short and the lighter version isn’t. Should you want slightly more stopping power, then take the PPK but you only get a six-round magazine. You want more bullets, take the lighter weapon, you get a seven-round magazine and with one in the chamber that’s eight in all.”

Gallagher inspected both. For him stopping power only applied if you hit the target. More bullets meant more chances. A fan of more bullets, he chose the lighter one. “How many magazines do you have?”

“Only three for this weapon but I think that would be sufficient.” He began counting rounds from a box. “Now, you’ll need, in that case, twenty-two. Holster it empty and fill the magazines on the table in the entrance hall on your way out; best for everyone’s safety. Anything else?”

Pancake holster on, Gally replied. “Can you get me into Austria without the usual border nonsense?”

The old man rubbed his chin and smiled, “This is not such a problem but it all costs money. Are you paying cash or card?” Gally waved his card.

“Ahh, American Express. That will do nicely, Herr Baker.

Chapter 13

Drexler had pulled out all the stops. Personal records and dossiers checked and rechecked. He had his suspects.

Radler had been in contact and was apprised of the situation. In Budapest on a three-day visit, his ‘mission’, in intelligence circle terms, was high profile and they talked about whether he should return but both concluded that it could send out the wrong message to their allies and internally cause suspicion they didn’t want to arouse. Radler expressed confidence in his protégé and they discussed would-be offenders. Harald concurred with Max’s suspicions and suggested courses of action; lay false information before several doors, look for reaction and, of course, the almost mandatory surveillance. He told Max to liaise with Haarmann in Bureau IX; the investigation people had the resources and would be able to cover more ground. They were also known to be ‘very keen’.

He’d check in before he left for Bucharest but stipulated if there were any major developments he was to be contacted immediately through their Hungarian

colleagues. Oh, and there was a file on his desk he'd forgotten to lock away, could Max sort it out for him?

Drexler obliged but couldn't resist the urge to read the file first. Nothing for immediate action, just a report concerning the activities of one of their agents and sexual proclivities that might, at some stage, become embarrassing. He was about to leave when the phone rang. Normally, he'd have just left it and allowed the switchboard to re-direct as appropriate but, and he didn't consciously know why, this time he answered.

It was a nursing sister from a hospice in Pankow. She wanted to inform Herr Radler that Karl Huber had died.

"Was Herr Huber a relative," he asked.

"No, and I don't know the exact nature of the relationship but I do know that Herr Huber was at one time in the Volkspolizei. Herr Radler visited him several times in the last few months and on the last occasion, he asked me to inform him when he passed away. It was the cancer, brought on by cirrhosis of his liver."

He told her he'd pass the message on. It intrigued him; he'd never heard Radler mention the man or his visits to the hospice. He locked the door again and went

back to his office, plenty to do, files and reports to be read, but as he sat there his curiosity slowly got the better of him. He picked up the phone. “Hans, get me any files we have on a Karl Huber. He used to be a policeman. I don’t know which department.”

He knew Harald Radler’s recent personal history. It wasn’t common knowledge but those in the right positions were of course aware that his son had died at a young age and that his wife, who doted on the boy, never recovered from his death. She’d hung herself in their garage whilst her husband had been on a mission. Radler, in turn, had buried himself in his work. It was a sad story but he was greatly admired for his strength of character and fortitude and Max Drexler was first in the queue.

Hans appeared with a bulky file, early afternoon. Max thumbed through it; a compilation from different sources. There was the Volkspolizei personnel record and two reports from different Stasi offices.

Huber had been a uniformed police officer, a member of the ‘Schupo’. There was nothing remarkable about his service until he attended the scene of a hit and run traffic accident. A young boy had been run over and

killed on the streets of Leipzig, the offending driver had callously driven off without stopping. The boy's name was Theodor Heinz Radler.

Chapter 14

Gallagher called the office. “Anything of interest to tell me, Clive? You can speak freely, I’m using a contact’s phone and he’s very meticulous about its cleanliness.”

“Ok, that’s good. The Old Man’s decided we had to disclose to the DG, today. Agent and asset deaths weren’t in the plan and we had to come clean. He reckons they’ll have to tell the DG at Century House, as well. The idea he’s pitching is they leave us to continue and if we pull this off they get all the credit. The thing is though, if you don’t succeed,” he paused, “well, then we’re all looking for new jobs at the very least. With regards to your admirer, he’s a bloke called Rupert Wilkinson. He got himself a last-minute mission before taking up a post as section or department head. He was sent to secure our defector. They still don’t know who that’s going to be but they are aware their informant is dead *and* that they’ve lost an agent. No surprise, you’re getting the blame. They’ve sent out another who’s using the name Molly Foster. The good news is she’s our asset in Century House. You’ve to meet her tomorrow at

Berlin Zoo, the lion house, eleven am. She'll be wearing a red coat. Tell her what you feel you need to."

"What should I wear?"

"Anything you like, I'm not your personal dresser. Just start the conversation with, "Lions are fine but I prefer Giraffes."

"Who thinks these things up, Clive?"

"Well, I did. I had to think on my feet! Do you have a problem?"

"No, Clive. It's fine. I was just hoping to use something like 'the geese are flying south for the winter', that's all. What's her response going to be?"

"I prefer the penguins."

"Have you heard from Clare?"

"Yes, she's fine. Sandy too. They're just waiting for our friends from the yard across the street to carry out some final 'repairs' and then they should be back in a couple of days."

"Tell her, I err, well tell her I ..."

Clive chuckled."I will. Take care out there."

Gally thanked Alois Sparfeld and nodded farewell to Franz who simply stared back at him. The journey to the hotel was uneventful and the menu there looked enticing.

He never noticed the couple in the bar across the street watching the hotel.

Chapter 15

Reg took a cup of tea into the Old Man's office and placed it on the table in front of him.

"If you don't mind me asking, Sir, how did it go?"

The Chief looked up at the older man and sighed. "I've had a worse time at boarding school but it was a very uncomfortable meeting, Reg. The DG wasn't well pleased and I was grateful that Shawcross, his deputy, came in and was able to placate him. I tried explaining the nature of our remit and how we came about but I'm afraid he was a bit too inflamed at the time to listen properly. Of course, George, a master of diplomacy, calmly re-directed his thoughts and skilfully explained why we were needed."

He sipped the tea. "I must confess I'm guilty of a miscalculation. I realised Radler didn't trust SIS when Gallagher passed on the cryptic clues. He knew they were compromised, obviously, and wanted to know who they'd send out to him. I concentrated too much on the point-scoring. I should have kept the DG informed before today and admitted such, taking it on the knuckles so to speak, but luckily I was able to feign

ignorance and convince him I wasn't aware he didn't know of our existence. Of course, the meeting with Century House's DG was another fun-packed event but suffice it to say we've survived for now. If we can bring Radler 'home' in a condition that is still useful to us we might be around for a lot longer." He looked enquiringly at his subordinate. "I don't suppose there are any biscuits at all, Reg? Two of those chocolate digestives, perhaps?"

Chapter 16

“You’re late,” she said, as she stood looking into the lions’ pen.

She was an attractive girl, auburn hair cut in a chin-length bob, brown eyes. Although Gally was interested, he wasn’t going to pursue it.

He explained everything apart from his thoughts on where Radler would eventually surface, that was his ‘ace’ and his alone.

She listened attentively then said, “I had a little cry when I was told about Greta. She was a lovely lady, my first asset and definitely my favourite.” She flashed a weak smile then continued, “So, Wilkinson’s gone rogue. No one had a clue. Chamberlain sent me here to help Rupert find you so you could be removed from play. If I wasn’t working for the Old Man I might just have done it.” She gave him a little smile, Gally thought with a hint of flirtation, and then she checked her watch. “By now, Chamberlain will know the truth.”

She delved in her handbag producing a little mirror and some lipstick then pretended to apply it as she spoke. “A colleague will be arriving soon, Felix Barber,

a good man. He and Rupert are not very keen on each other so he'll probably be pleased with the turn of events and eager to resolve it by whatever means." She hesitated. "Look, I know you'll have some thoughts on where Radler's going to turn up ..."

He tried to interrupt but she halted him. "I also know you're never going to tell me unless you have no other choices. How about you just tell me where you're pretty certain he won't surface so I can use that to misdirect the opposition. I'm quite sure Wilkinson will have told the East Germans they have a potential Stasi defector and it won't take them long to figure out which direction Radler's heading in when he doesn't turn up in Bucharest. We have to give them the impression we're waiting for him somewhere else."

He turned his back to the wall, gazing around as he spoke, "Do you think they'll buy it?"

"The misdirections? It's worth a try and at the moment Rupert won't know Chamberlain's aware of his allegiances so Hugh could feed him a false location or two."

He gave in. "Ok, Szentgotthard in the southwest of Hungary is a good place. There's a river running

through it and the part of the border that runs along that is right next to the railway bridge. In theory, someone could enter the water there and swim upstream a short distance, two hundred yards, and for a strong swimmer it wouldn't be a problem at all."

"Is Radler a strong swimmer?"

"I haven't a clue. Maybe they don't know either."

She offered, "There's also the border crossing point itself. We could generate some odd activity to focus their attention."

He smiled at her. "Sounds like a plan. I'll leave you and your mate to sort out the details."

She returned the smile. "Austria, hey!"

He tilted his head as he looked at her. "I never said that."

She laughed. "I've looked at the maps too, you know. It's the obvious choice, so now all I have to do is look again and head north."

He countered with, "And the borders three times as long. Good luck with that one. Besides, I know when he's coming."

"You're bluffing."

“We’ll see. By the way, I seem to have been followed; the woman on the right over there, short green dress and the bloke on the bench in the blue checked shirt. I think I saw them earlier. She was outside my hotel and he might have been on the U-Bahn. Anyway, I’ll let you know later, when I’m certain.”

She gave him a mocking half-smile, “Him you’re not sure of but her ... I can believe it, she’s very attractive isn’t she?”

“Really? I hadn’t noticed,” he replied affecting a scornful expression. They exchanged hotel phone numbers and parted ways.

By the time he got back to his hotel, he’d confirmed his suspicions. The bloke followed him but it wasn’t until he did the double about turns that he confirmed he’d attracted another woman. Little thing, very petite, the momentary confusion on her face made him smile but also made him feel a little sorry for her.

He called ‘Molly’. “Hello, Miss Foster. I found another one. What did you have?”

“Mister Baker, so kind of you to call. The female and a heavy set bloke, all the way to the hotel. They’re still

out there and the bloke's just used the phone box outside."

"I think we should get them all in the one place. I'm coming over, if you don't mind."

"I don't but you may have to wait in the bar as I have some things to do. Felix has arrived. You'll probably find him there as well."

Trailing his newfound 'friends' Gally made his way across town. At reception, he enquired about Molly. The girl at the desk made a quick call to the room then directed him to the bar telling him his other friend was already in there.

Walking in, he found the place empty apart from a lone black male sitting on a stool, elbows on the counter, glass of beer in hand. The receptionist followed him in and stood behind the pumps. He ordered three beers and waited until the girl returned to her desk before he passed one of them to his companion.

"Your name wouldn't happen to be Felix, would it?"

Short cut, well-trimmed hair and a physique suggesting a fitness regime that countered beer consumption, the man let a little smile dash over his lips and said, "It would and thank you very much for the

beer, John.” He took a mouthful from the new glass. “You’re surprised, I know, I saw it in your face, though you hid it well. Listen, I may stand out here but you should try clocking me in Africa. Here, people notice me but inevitably go ‘Nah!’ Cheers by the way.”

Gallagher raised his glass and took a mouthful. “You’re right, of course. I was expecting the standard toff. How did you get in under the radar?”

Felix chuckled. “Ahh, perceptions! Actually, the same way most of them do; boarding school, university that sort of thing but I had something a little bit extra, the ability to blend in.”

Gally nearly spat his beer out. Felix laughed. “I’m not only a linguist; I’m very good with accents. Somebody appreciated that. What about you? You don’t seem the university type?”

Gally raised a finger. “Perceptions again, I think.” He played with his glass. “No, you’re right. I was too thick for that sort of thing. I suppose you could say I’m on a punishment posting.”

Felix nodded as if he understood, but didn’t.

They'd almost finished their beers when the receptionist came in. Fräulein Foster would see them in her room.

On entering, Felix looked at her questioningly. She replied, "I've swept the room for bugs. We can talk freely."

Gally checked out the decor. Unusually tasteful in plain colours, he concluded you got a better class of hotel on the SIS bigger budget.

After 30 minutes or so, he left with 'girl from the Zoo' and her petite friend in tow.

Chapter 17

One afternoon almost ten months earlier, Harald Radler sat at his desk and answered the phone; not an unusual occurrence.

The muffled voice on the end of the line had said, “Colonel Radler, you should speak to Karl Huber. He is in the hospice in Pankow. He knows the truth about your son.” The line went dead.

When young Theodor had been run over and killed, he’d been walking home from a friend’s house. He was 11 years of age, an adventurous and independent boy whose escapades with friends often caused his mother to worry for his safety, as did his tendency to stay out too long for her liking. As a result, she’d insisted Harald place reflective strips on his school bag to improve his son’s visibility on the dark Leipzig streets of the winter months. It hadn’t saved him.

The traffic officers of the Verkehrspolizei had dealt with the matter and by the time he and his wife were informed of the incident young Theo was already in the mortuary. It was a harrowing time for them both and

neither of them ever recovered from the loss of their beloved son.

Harald had seen the formal report. A number plate had been recovered at the scene and, pretty soon, the Police traced the owner; a history of drinking problems was involved. When they'd gone to his home address, he'd fired at them with a small handgun and, whilst they called for assistance and re-organised, he'd hung himself. The report had gone on to state his car, an old Wartburg, had damage that confirmed his guilt. Harald had accepted the findings; he had no reason not to.

But somebody did have a reason and that reason was lying in the Pankow hospice.

Karl Huber had been a uniformed street officer. He was first on the scene, had found the number plate and passed it on to the traffic police. He'd also recovered a fog light from a Tatra 603 which had become detached when the vehicle struck. Karl Huber knew, from the plate number, an official vehicle had caused the death of the little boy whose face he'd wept over when he couldn't make him breathe again.

The Verkehrspolizei had taken control so he'd supplied the investigating officers with a brief statement

and when told to do so he'd resumed his normal duties. That was the end of it but he never forgot the boy and he saw him in his sleep all too often. A chance remark sometime later had raised the matter again, a colleague commenting on the result in a report of completed investigations. "Karl, isn't this the accident you went to, the one with the young lad? They got the bastard, remember? Sorry, no, you were on holiday when the shootout happened, I forgot. You probably never knew."

He read the report, a précis of each completed incident. The Wartburg was mentioned. He knew that was wrong. He'd gone to his superiors, told them what he knew, they told him he was surely mistaken and to forget about it. There were more important things to be concerned about, the racketeering operating out of Plagwitz for instance. He tried to speak to the investigating officers but found they'd been moved on; one to Rostock district and the other to Schwerin, both the other side of the country.

He got a visit from the Stasi investigations branch, in fact, he got several. That's when his life began to slowly but surely fall apart. Well thought of in his own department, he was suddenly transferred to the district

of Suhl, in the south-east, and soon found his personal record had been doctored to show him in a bad light. As a result, he got all the shit, menial jobs and found it difficult to be on friendly terms with colleagues because they ignored him. After the accident, he'd started to drink more often, to cancel the image in his head and help him sleep. As matters got worse, he drank even more. It was like falling down a slide in his socks whilst wearing boxing gloves. He couldn't get back to where he'd been. Eventually, he lost his job and was lucky to get the next one as a dustbin man. The Stasi officers told him that, with smiles on their faces. They also said if he wanted to keep it he should keep his mouth shut, permanently.

Harald knew all this now. He'd visited Karl Huber as he lay in what was to be his deathbed. He'd made a point of popping in on his way home or even in his lunch hour and it didn't take long before he had Karl's confidence and the truth spilled out. He even remembered the registration number. He'd said unless he drank himself to a stupor it was a regular image in his dreams, that and little Theo's face. He'd tried so

hard to not drink so much but in the end, it became his only respite.

Harald had spoken with a trusted contact in the files registry. He and Manfred had met at the chess club several years ago and he'd made some potentially damaging allegations disappear for him. At their next club meeting, the man told him the vehicle number was still in use, issued to an official from the Finance Ministry but he'd only received it late the year before. The previous user had been an under-Minister in the Justice Ministry.

Harald recognised the name, an up and coming party arse-licker expected to 'go places' but oddly overlooked for a prestigious position in '69, the year of Theo's death. Faint rumours of a mistress and a penchant for scotch whisky had circulated briefly. Sidelined, he died in early '74.

There was more to come. Manfred had uncovered a Stasi file which revealed details of the man named as the offender in the traffic report. A 'businessman' who'd had access to West Berlin before the 'Anti-Fascist Protective Wall' went up, he was already of interest well before his suspected involvement in

racketeering and his friendship with several dissidents made him an item of particular note. His post mortem report was interesting in that it revealed death had occurred well before the shooting had started.

It would seem that political expediency had sealed the man's fate.

Radler didn't need any more. He knew how things worked. The people and the 'system' he'd given his life to had lied to him. Covering up an embarrassing situation was far more important to them than just telling him the truth and administering justice.

They had sneered at his and his wife's pain and mocked their anguish by these actions and they were still unrepentant. He decided to get even the only way he knew. He'd defect and tell their enemies everything and his knowledge was considerable.

Chapter 18

Rupert Wilkinson left the consulate, an envelope under his arm containing faxed copies of Hungarian border maps. He'd phoned the request in during the previous day, direct to the little man who sat in the bowels of the building where these things were kept. He'd wanted the lot, the DDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary but the reply he got made him settle for Hungary. The man had told him that a nice young blonde woman from the fifth floor had asked to see the same, days before, but had eventually left with only the material for Hungary. The old fella couldn't remember her name, something German he thought. Rupert suggested Astrid. That was it!

Using the secure line, he filed a further report to his boss, Chamberlain, telling him, besides his encounter with the 'Stasi agent' John Baker, he'd also detected he was being followed by members of what he believed were possibly a Stasi hit squad. The reason he'd made that up was simple. If he was going to return to his previous life undetected, it gave him a lot of leeway should he have to employ extreme measures and

eliminate the opposition or ‘defend himself vigorously’ as the report would invariably state.

He laid it on thick and Hugh fell for it all the way. At least that’s what he thought. Hugh, in turn, informed him of Astrid Hopkins arrival in Berlin and said she was using the alias of Molly Foster. Given what Wilkinson had just told him, Hugh said he’d instruct Astrid not to seek contact until Rupert felt it safe to do so. Felix received no mention.

So, Astrid had met with Baker. His locally recruited surveillance team, employees of a private investigation company that specialised in divorce issues, had reported the Berlin Zoo meeting, housed the female and discovered she was using the Foster details. The description of her didn’t fit the Astrid he’d met, who’d worn no makeup and seemed almost plain to him, the hair was all wrong as well but was probably a wig. Having contact with Baker meant *he* probably wasn’t working for the Yanks and if he wasn’t working for them who? The Israelis? The DDR co-operated closely with Arab countries at a military level *and* with the Palestine Liberation Organisation. All were hostile to Israel. Radler would be a scoop for them but they

wouldn't be employing this London boy, they'd be operating on their own. That meant, whoever he really was, Baker was operating for the British. He was pretty sure he wasn't contracted by the SIS for the job, that's why he had been sent. The Security Service? Why? It only meant one thing to Rupert. Baker wasn't interested in a defector because he'd been sent to flush out a 'mole'. He'd walked straight into it. He'd wasted time trying to get information from a man who never had it in the first place. He should have just killed him outright.

The realisation made him feel slightly better about the decision he'd made. He now knew Astrid and Foster were the same and she'd had contact with Baker so the simple solution was to kill her at the same time they killed him.

Joachim Denzinger and Otto Schnitzer had never met. In fact, they were completely unaware of each other's existence. However, they did have some things in common. They were both 'sleeper' agents of the Stasi, trained in assassination and, whilst neither could be described as a spring chicken, zimmer frames were a distant necessity. Joachim ran a small stationary shop that couldn't be considered busy, there being only room

for one customer at a time, and Otto carried on his trade as a cobbler from a shop some would consider never obviously open. They'd been on the contacts list Drexler had given him, the one he'd committed to memory. He'd met them individually but now he had to put them into play.

Part of the conversation Gally had with the two SIS agents at the hotel had concerned Rupert's state of mind and possible actions. They'd all agreed that if he bought Chamberlain's apparent lack of insight into the truth he'd have to act soon to eradicate the competition, whoever they worked for, before the truth came out. His major concern, though, would be neutralising a defector's ability to harm him and although he could easily now flee through the wall to the East they agreed his Stasi masters would not be well pleased if he jumped the gun and defected unless it was absolutely unavoidable.

At more or less the same moment that Rupert decided that Baker and 'Molly Foster' would have to 'go', Felix, Gally and Astrid had concluded it would most probably be his next important move.

Joachim Denzinger had parked up and watched the street for 10 minutes until he was satisfied he'd located the people he needed to speak to. Casually and unobtrusively, he introduced himself as a photographer sent to obtain some close-up shots of their target then went back to his car.

If Felix Barber was noticed when he left the hotel no one commented on it nor did it generate any action. Conducting counter surveillance from the comfort of his room overlooking the street, he and Astrid had sat back from the net curtains and watched the watchers with the aid of a small pair of binoculars. The arrival of the dull red coloured Renault 4 hadn't been noticed until its occupant sidled up to one of the surveillance and pretended not to have a conversation.

Realising he needed to check it out, he left the hotel, making a quick inspection from the opposite pavement then a more leisurely glance on a closer walk past. He didn't like the look of the small metal case attempting to hide in the passenger footwell so made to the nearest phone, shovelled some change in, and spoke to Astrid telling her to stay in his room until called again, then he took the U-Bahn.

In the street outside Gallagher's hotel, he'd quickly identified the surveillance team then sat in a little cafe from where he could quietly observe. This time the new arrival asked for a light for his cigarette. A brief exchange and he wandered out of view. Coffee finished, Felix found him sat in a dirty white Volkswagen fastback.

Otto Schnitzer rummaged around and found his silencer lodged between the seat and the back rest. Stuffing it under his legs with the pistol, he turned and grabbed the flowers from the back seat just as Felix made his second pass. Seeing the weapon, the SIS man made a call to Gally, telling him to arm himself and remain in his hotel room, then he dialled a friend.

The assassination plan was relatively straightforward. On the hour, confirm with a nod the targets hadn't left their hotels, stroll in, knock on the doors, shoot whoever answered (and anyone else in the room), place the 'do not disturb' sign on handles, close the doors and then calmly walk away. If challenged by reception on the way in, Otto was delivering his flowers to the recipient's door and Joachim was a dear friend who Herr Baker was expecting.

Kilometres apart, watches checked, both men left their vehicles and strolled in. Outside the rooms, Otto slid the silenced Beretta from within the bunch of flowers and Joachim dragged his gun from a shoulder bag. Deep breaths, hands tightened on weapons.

Chapter 19

Suddenly, the corridors exploded with shouts and threats as masked, armed, plain clothes officers of the Berlin Police's 'Spezialeinheit' descended upon them. Joachim turned and sped towards the fire exit which opened as he got there; instant violence took him to the floor. Otto complied and was handcuffed.

The unmarked vehicles of the special unit had slipped into place unnoticed. Behind the buildings, officers accessed kitchens ushering staff to safety, reception desks were taken over with only seconds to spare. When Joachim and Otto entered the hotels, the 'watchers' outside were swiftly and quietly detained then isolated.

Gallagher waited to hear Felix's voice before he responded to the knock. Astrid slipped into a waiting car and was driven away.

"You ready to go?" Felix asked.

Gally nodded and dragged the holdall off the bed. He fixed Felix with an enquiring eye. "How did you manage that so quickly?"

His companion grinned. “Prior planning prevents piss poor performance. I contacted a couple of friends as soon as I got here. All sorted out over a few beers. They agreed to standby for a last-minute job.”

Gally looked a little sceptical. “That was very kind of them.”

Felix affected a serious face.”It was, wasn’t it? Mind you they owed me a big, big favour.”

In the small car park at the rear, Felix introduced Gallagher to a brown leather jacket. Tall with slightly greying collar-length hair, the man nodded, extended his hand and, in almost unaccented English, said, “Tom Schneider, glad we could help you out. My driver here will take you to the airport. That all went relatively unnoticed. We’ll warn the staff not to say anything but you can’t always fully control these things. If we’re asked we’ll say it was an anti-racketeering raid.”

At the airport, after the driver dropped him off, Gally called Deacon and arranged to be picked up in Munich. Deek was already there having driven out the night before. Gally headed for the gate.

Schneider’s driver entered the terminal and watched from a discreet distance. When his former passenger

had departed, he approached the check-in desk and showed his ID.

In Munich, Deek was outside to greet Gallagher. “Your gun’s under the seat,” he said as he drove them away in the car bearing diplomatic plates.

Gally retrieved the PPKL and spare magazines, safety checked the weapon and pulled the pancake holster from his holdall.

Deek glanced at him. “Where we going now?”

Gally zipped the bag back up and dumped it on the back seat. “Did you bring it?”

Deacon pointed to the glove box. “It’s there.”

As he pulled in and turned on the hazard warning lights, Gally unfolded the map. “Right, Deek,” he said as he put his finger on a patch of green. “Take me there, old chap.”

Chapter 20

Max Drexler read the Verkehrspolizei report on the death of young Theodor Radler and the Stasi reports on Karl Huber which included the claims he'd made to his 'superiors'. His assistant, Hans, managed to locate the only remaining exhibit in the case, a dented fog light with a badly cracked lens. Previously a motor mechanic for the organisation, Hans was a methodical man with a tendency to be a little too meticulous but his opinion was valued by Drexler.

When asked if the vehicle the light came from could be identified in any way, Hans replied, "It's from a Tatra 603. Produced 1968, maybe '69." Asked if he was sure, Hans began to go into details that Drexler quickly found somewhat tedious. Could it have come from a Wartburg? A short guffaw followed by an apology provided the answer. Aren't these vehicles only used officially? Hans nodded agreement then added, "But there are some high party officials who own this type of car, very high party officials. However, Herr Drexler, they won't have this type of fog lamp. This came from a Government vehicle." His boss had another question;

had he not found the registration plate the traffic report said had been handed to its officers? Hans shook his head. “I could find no record of it ever having been physically booked in, Sir. The reference number given is meaningless. I also couldn’t find any trace of the registration plate Herr Huber said he handed in.” Why then had they booked in the fog light? Hans had smiled, “They were obviously not Government mechanics, Sir. They didn’t realise the significance.”

Even though his high rank and departmental position gave him access to almost anything, there were certain files that even Max couldn’t see without a relevant authorisation and anything the internal investigation section held was on that list. Whilst he could try to get so authorised, the time, effort and possible consequences were just not worth it. He knew what had taken place. Radler’s son had been run over and killed by a Government and high Party official and, by the way the cover-up had swept immediately into place, he could only surmise that person held a significant Government post.

They’d lied to Radler. He’d taken what they told him as the truth because he’d had no reason to disbelieve,

but now, when Huber had clearly, in Max's mind, spilled the beans, he could imagine his boss's reaction to the deceit and disrespect. Not only that, but knowledge of the contempt they'd showered upon him and his wife before and after her death must have been crushing.

Max had sat thinking about that for some time then eventually he went to Radler's office, locked the door behind him and began to rummage through his desk. He found the keys that opened two filing cabinets and all the drawers, except one. He picked up the phone, "Hans, get me a locksmith."

Chapter 21

With access gained to Harald Radler's last drawer, Max Drexler rummaged through it finding some old western soft porn magazines beneath which were two green folders; one marked 'Akrobat' the other 'Fiedler'.

He thumbed through the pages of the Acrobat file; the usual stuff, background, recruitment, information he'd supplied and the agent's real name. He opened the 'Fiddler file, another well-placed member of the British SIS, a chap called Hugh Chamberlain.

A thought occurred to him. The other Warsaw Pact countries, on their home ground, didn't appreciate foreigners parading armed through 'cultural' visits unless there was good reason and prior permission. There was no way these 'visiting' duties required anyone to carry a weapon.

Radler's service pistol wasn't in any of the drawers and cabinets. He might have left it at home but, seeing as he departed for his visits from the office, surely he would have had it with him on coming to work and following strict protocol left it locked safely in his drawer?

Back at his own desk, Max told Hans, “Find that locksmith again, this time he’s to meet us at Colonel Radler’s home. You’re coming along as well.”

The journey took place in silence. Drexler obviously didn’t want to talk and Hans certainly wasn’t going to ask.

As the locksmith tinkered away, a neighbour approached, a little tabby cat following sedately behind. Was everything alright? Nothing had happened to Herr Radler, had it? He is such a nice man. Yes, they were looking after his cat for him but the little thing spent so many hours at their house these past months she wouldn’t complain if it stayed forever.

Once in, they split up. Max did the bedrooms, bathroom and anywhere more personal to the Colonel; he thought it inappropriate for Hans to be poking around in such places. The house was clean and tidy, family pictures on cabinets but not much evidence the cat stayed there now on a regular basis; a cat flap in the kitchen door with water and food bowls in the cupboard beneath the sink but a wipe of his finger on the uppermost revealed a light covering of dust showing him they hadn’t been used for some time. There were no

toys or amusements and no cat hair; either Radler had a secret mania for vacuuming or the cat was slowly being acclimatised to a new home.

They didn't find the East German produced Makarov, or its magazines and ammunition. It didn't look good.

The locksmith re-secured the door and the Stasi men returned to the office where Max told Hans his tentative suspicions

Hans was shocked; so much was obvious from the look on his face. "But, surely, you don't think he would do such a thing as to defect, Herr Drexler?"

Max looked around and sighed. "Believe me, Hans. I don't want this to be true and I'm dreading finding more pieces to this puzzle in case they don't lead me to where I would like them to go. I really hope it is all a simple misinterpretation but I don't like what I'm finding at the moment. It's not something we can just dismiss."

Meanwhile, in Budapest, Harald had convinced one of his Hungarian intelligence agency hosts to supply him with a permit to visit a small town on the Austro-Hungarian border. He'd told him his great grandfather had been born there and it would be nice if, on returning from Bucharest, he could make a little detour and see

the old place; he said it must be age that brings such things out in one. His Hungarian colleague agreed, stating he'd done the very same thing in respect of his family only the previous year and found it most rewarding. Any particular date? No? Best leave it open-ended.

Chapter 22

Hugh Chamberlain walked out of the Bakerloo line at Lambeth North and commenced his daily hundred-metre trek to Century House. A more convenient placing of an underground station would be difficult to imagine.

He was a worried man and he knew his days here were numbered. He'd had no idea that Rupert Wilkinson had been working for the East Germans and he strongly suspected that Rupert would have been equally surprised about him. His quandary, such as it was, had been simple. Should he continue to play the 'game' and say nothing to Rupert about SIS knowledge of his treachery or should he warn him? He'd not thought about it for too long. It was not as if they were friends and, in fact, he'd never really taken to the man. If he'd warned him in some manner, for instance like 'accidentally' letting slip during their contacts that Radler was actually their would-be defector, it wouldn't have improved Rupert's overall position and would, most probably, have made his own worse.

When told it was Radler who wanted to cross the line, Hugh had momentarily almost been unable to control his bladder. A tick in the corner of his eye had felt like a waving flag but no one else noticed because there was nothing to see.

Hugh's was the same old story, boarding school, university, dabbling in left-wing politics. He'd been an idealistic socialist in those days; it was so easy to be that way when you came from a real upper-middle-class family. He knew it was probably somewhat more difficult for a working-class socialist. They hadn't yet improved their lowly status and when they did they'd smugly abandon the 'cause' in celebration of their golf club membership or be comfortably active in local politics whilst secretly feeling guilty. Of those who managed to transition, few, if any, would still be living in the homes that made them a socialist in the first place.

The more he'd thought about it over the years the easier it had been for him to conclude the communists he'd idealistically served had simply 'solved' their problems with a two-tier system of high ranking Party members living one side of the 'tracks' and everyone else living on the other. That's when he'd begun to

waver, his enthusiasm draining away. But the East Germans hadn't worried. Herr Radler, Hugh's Stasi case officer, had some photographs of youthful experiments and indiscretions to refocus Hugh's spirit of adventure and commitment to the cause.

He would have to leave Rupert to find his own way, hopefully, to succeed in preventing Radler's defection. He himself, however, would need an exit strategy. He could always remain and throw himself upon the mercy of the powers that be, relying on the very real possibility that public knowledge of another 'awkward' infiltration would be too much for the upper echelons to stomach. This option had its benefits. It would bring no real change in his personal circumstances as he was fairly sure he'd be able to screw a pension out of them in reward for his total and complete silence, although, the annuity would probably not reflect his current position, no doubt out of spite they'd demote him several grades at least claiming budgetary requirements but it was better than a kick up the arse and he'd avoid the public ignominy of his club memberships being cancelled.

The other option he was considering was to basically 'go down with the flu', turn up at Folkturnist, Stockholm,

buy a ticket to Leningrad then join the early morning short queue at the Russian Embassy. He'd be in and on his way before Swedish Intelligence could tell anyone.

It wasn't something he could ever consider before Edith had passed away, several years earlier. For her, such a drastic move would have been far too much to bear.

He stopped thinking. He was at the main entrance and it was time to put on the right face and find out if he would survive another day.

Chapter 23

Standing on the edge of the field, Gallagher searched the sky with the mini binos he'd bought in Berlin.

The American shaded his eyes as he looked around. "You sure this is the right place? What time did you arrange the pickup?"

Gally checked his wrist. "I'm absolutely sure and they're twenty minutes late."

Time had just started to drag when they heard the distant engine. Gally captured it in his field glasses.

After landing, the Piper Pacer taxied to the end of the field and turned around. Deek shouted, "See you at the other end. Don't forget, I'll pick you up at the front gate."

The aircraft door opened and an American accent said, "Sorry, I'm late. My wife needed me to do something for her."

Gally climbed in, replying, "I'm standing here waiting and you're shagging your wife?"

The pilot smiled, "That's about it, pal."

Gally laughed. “Fair enough.” Looking around the interior he couldn’t help wondering. “How old *is* this plane?”

The pilot laughed. “It’s virtually brand new, built-in sixty-three. I just need to wash it.”

En route, he was instructed to put on a well worn faded red jacket and a matching baseball cap marked ‘FirstAir’. Gallagher asked about the significance and the pilot laconically replied, “First Air Cavalry, Vietnam.”

On their approach to the airfield just outside Kirchheim, the Austrian side of the border, the American said, “When we taxi in, I’m going to get you as close to that hangar as possible. When you get out, just walk through it real casual; everyone will be in the canteen chowing down. If you get challenged just say you’re looking for ‘Hoot’ the pilot but just keep on walking out the other end. Dump the jacket and cap on the empty oil drum outside, I’ll pick ‘em up later. Turn left then right and you’re out the gate, it’s unmanned. In the meantime, just get out of sight.”

Gally had been standing outside the entrance for twenty minutes when he was asked if he needed any

help. He made it up on the spot. "I'm just waiting for someone. I don't know their name but they said they'd meet me here then we'd go in to see a plane." He added for good measure, "He's a big bloke; I had a few beers with him last night." He thought it more convincing. The man just smiled and said, "Ahh, it's probably Willi, he's never on time," and drove in with a wave.

When Deacon pulled up, Gally slid into the passenger seat. "What took you so long?"

Deek glanced over at him as if he was terminally stupid. "You do know what happens at border controls, don't you? I got here as fast as I could. Where to now?"

"Just head for Vienna."

As Astrid and Felix waited in Schneider's office, the driver informed them Gally was heading for Munich. Initially causing some concern, they soon realised he was working with someone else. Flying commercial, wishing to avoid any security complications, he must have enlisted someone's assistance in getting any weapon he had to Munich. What could easily bypass border controls? They looked at each other. Diplomatic plates! Who then? The Americans? Not impossible but

how'd he managed that? Astrid concluded, "I know his type. It'll be a woman."

Felix shrugged. "Either way, it's not a bad idea, though he's still got the same problem getting through the Austrian border posts. Why didn't he just transfer on to Vienna from Munich?" He rolled his eyes. "I'm going to answer my own question now. It's because he's going in under the radar. He knows we or Rupert could've had him detained at passport control, plus this way we don't exactly know where his final destination is." He paused then gave words to something he'd been thinking for a while, "Why *isn't* he co-operating by the way?"

Astrid checked herself in the small wall mirror and reapplied her lipstick. "I think his main issue with us is that Radler wouldn't deal with Wilkinson because he knew he was one of their agents. Baker doesn't want to spoil the trust he's got with him, especially if he has to go across the wire to find him. I think we should just let him run, Felix. I've got a good idea where he's headed; I've studied the same maps he's had access to. I think you're right though, he's going under the radar and

seeing as he's not the type to swim a river the only other viable option is a light aircraft."

Felix looked her in the eyes. "Why does he trust us? Why doesn't he think we could be compromised as well?"

Astrid brushed it aside as she replaced her lipstick in her handbag. "I don't know. Maybe he knows something we don't know."

Felix looked at her searchingly and replied, "Yeah, maybe he does."

Chapter 24

Max Drexler was back at his desk. “Hans, has Herr Radler called in?”

“Yes, Sir. He said he would be catching the early morning train and would maybe call again on reaching the Hungarian-Romanian border.”

In a calm, measured voice, Max said, “How many of our suspects are in transit, Hans?”

“Two, Herr Drexler. Heinemann and Panzinger.”

“Have the local authorities report when they’ve arrived.” He dismissed him with a casual wave of the hand and made a phone call. “Kovács Zsolt, please.” He sipped the coffee Hans had made him earlier.

“Zsolt? It’s Max Drexler. How’s things? How is Kitti? Good. I wonder if you can do something for me, old friend. My boss, Harald Radler, is currently with you. You know? Good! Are they giving him an official send-off from the station? They are? Will you be there? No? Could you have someone call me when he is on the train and it has left? No! There are no issues. I just have to phone ahead. It’s the Romanians; they’re keen to make

the right impression. Okay, and you. Give my love to Kitti.”

Another call. “Octavian Dragan, please. Yes, tell him it’s Max Drexler from Berlin.” He drained the cup. “Tavi, you old dog! Are you all ready for tomorrow’s visit? Yes, things are on time. Will you be at the station to meet him? You will. I’m expecting he may call in from Cluj when he changes trains but it’s not that important, a little local matter. No, of course I don’t want you to have a local chap meet him at Cluj and tell him to phone in. He’ll do his nut and remind me again that I’m not his keeper. You could ring though when you pick him up in Bucharest and I can let you know whether I need him to call me personally or not. Fine. How’s that crazy brother of yours? Yes, that *was* a hell of a night! Speak to you tomorrow.”

He could now keep a watchful eye on his boss, just in case; worst-case scenario, that sort of thing.

Elbows on the desk, head resting on the fingertips that rubbed his forehead, he sighed, loosened his tie, poured himself a glass of water and sat back in his chair to drink it slowly and thoughtfully.

Leaving the office, he told Hans to call the personal records office to tell the clerk he wasn't going home soon.

In the bowels of the building, the little man glanced at the wall clock with a worried look. His wife was making a special meal tonight for their anniversary and he'd bought a bottle of Rotkäppchen sparkling wine. The conversation didn't start well.

"Herr Colonel, have you got the authorisation slip? I can't let you see the personal records of officers senior to you without one." He managed to produce a nervous smile, Drexler's reputation preceded him.

"I am the authorisation. This is a matter of national security, get me the file."

The nervous smile was becoming harder to maintain. "Herr Colonel, I'm not being awkward. I have to follow the rules."

Drexler demanded his name.

"Heinz, Herr Colonel. Heinz Gesner."

Drexler smiled benevolently. "Heinz, do you enjoy your job. Answer the question."

"Yes, Herr Colonel, very much so."

Max leaned in towards him, ominously. “Well, Heinz Gesner, if you want to keep it you should get me that file now! If not then tomorrow you shall be emptying dustbins on the night shift, permanently!” He adjusted his cuffs and more pleasantly said, “You have ten seconds to decide and I’m being over-generous, I know I am.”

Heinz didn’t need more than a second. He scurried off, returning ten minutes later with Harald Radler’s personal file. Drexler pulled it from his hands and turned to walk away.

With years of conditioning behind him, Heinz found himself blurting out. “Herr Colonel, without an authorisation you’ll have to read it here.” He instantly regretted his stupidity.

Drexler returned to him. “Heinz, do you want to go home tonight? Do you?” His manner was disquieting.

Gesner could feel himself trembling and hoped it didn’t show. “Herr Colonel. It’s our anniversary and...”

Max stopped him with a finger to his lips and a quiet reply. “I’m not interested in why you want to go home, Heinz. I simply asked you if you wanted to go home so now answer my question.”

“Yes, Herr Colonel.”

“Good, then do so.” Max Drexler turned on his heels and disappeared through the door, Radler’s file in his hand.

It was 7.10 pm when he got back to his office and his assistant was waiting for him. “Hans, why are you still here?”

“Herr Drexler, you know I can’t leave until you have no further need for me.”

“It’s fine. You can go. I’ll be working late but I can’t see any reason for you to be here as well. Have a nice evening, Hans.”

Max settled down in his chair, file on the desk, real cognac in the glass beside him. He opened the file and began to read.

He was taken through an entire career which included significant family events: marriage, birth, divorce, re-marriage, birth and deaths. He felt a tinge of sadness reading that Radler’s wife had killed herself on the anniversary of their child’s death but he moved on and found something that momentarily attracted his attention. The previous year, Colonel Radler had gone on a junket to Hungary; they were showing off their

border 'defences'. What surprised him was it was something a more junior officer could have attended but he couldn't suppress a little smile as he recalled Radler's penchant for a free social event. However, the fact he didn't recall it disturbed him until he remembered he'd been on leave and for a second it lost its significance. On reconsideration, it was indeed of more importance than he'd initially thought.

If he'd been on leave, Radler should never have left his post. It was a matter of a week only but still, it was against all protocol. He pondered the matter as he poured his next cognac. Yes, it *was* strange but it wasn't proof that Harald was going to defect. He couldn't go to his superiors and accuse a man such as Colonel Radler without something much more substantial. In the meantime, he had to try and manage the situation as best he could. He downed the drink and poured another.

Perhaps he should call his colleagues in Budapest in the morning? He could tell them he needed to speak to Radler urgently then tell Harald that Colonel-General Wolf, the head of Foreign Intelligence, had instructed he return to Berlin immediately. It would be a total lie that he'd find hard to ride out later whether it worked or not.

Radler's history afforded him direct contact with Wolf so it would be fairly easy for him to check out the veracity of the claim. Max felt he had to be cautious.

Perhaps the reports on Heinemann and Panzinger, their two main suspects, would release him from his dilemma. He was hopeful. Initial reports had indicated that both men appeared to have something to hide. Still, if Radler got on the train despite what he'd been told and Max didn't instantly receive a summons to the Colonel General's office for a roasting, he would know Radler was making a run for it, probably getting off at the next station and doubling back in a bid for the border. He needed to consider things very carefully.

He picked another file from his tray and settled back in the big leather armchair that, along with his desk, dominated the room. The pages inside were marked 'Streng Geheim'; the file of agent 'Silber' otherwise known as Klara Elenora Uhlmann, her case officer being Lemberger, a decent chap whom he knew. It was indeed unfortunate she had passed away and in such circumstances, the copy of the West Berlin 'Berliner Morgenpost' reported her cause of death as a heart attack whilst being 'restrained' during a burglary. From

what he read, she had been of use in her day and had remained in Berlin during the war working for the communist underground, putting herself in peril on many occasions. He fell asleep before he could read the part that said she was a friend and former asset of Colonel Radler of Stasi Foreign Intelligence.

Chapter 25

Felix leant over and studied the maps spread out on Astrid's bed. "I think you're right. This is the weak spot." His finger lay on a point between two villages. He flipped through faxed copies of surreptitiously taken photographs. "Look, this one. It's taken from the Austrian side. See how close that Hungarian patrol vehicle is to the fence? I don't care what the signs say, there's no way they could mine that small section. The barbed wire is practically running alongside the edge of the tarmac. See this one taken from an angle." He held it up to her. She nodded. "Yes, I've seen it. That's why I said."

He dropped it back down on the bed cover and stood up. "Sorry, I forgot you've been through all these before." He ran his hand across his mouth. "If there are any landmines in that small section they have to be under the wire. Plus, to compensate, I think they'll have pretty regular patrols going past it. Have we anything on that?"

She fished a folded sheet of paper from her shoulder bag and handed it to him. "Yes, but it's somewhat

unpredictable. It takes a vehicle ten to fifteen minutes to cover the ground from checkpoint to checkpoint but often they turn around in the villages so the time is less. As you can see, the foot patrols are fairly regular during daylight but seem to depend on who the commander is on the nightshift, suffice it to say there are more patrols in the dark hours.”

He read through the notes. “There’s two guard towers covering the ground between the border posts on the outskirts of the villages; using night vision equipment it would seem.”

She started to collect the paperwork back in. “Yes, but there’s still a tree line on the Austrian side right up to the border fence which means the guard tower on the far side hasn’t got a clear view of that section so the southern one is the only one with full eyes on at that point. There’s the lone tree on the Austrian side conveniently placed next to the narrowest stretch of road and wire which, I reckon, gives about six to eight feet maximum there that can’t be seen from any watchtower and let’s not forget the stream. It’s got to give a little bit of cover, there’s a slight drop from the road because you can see it from the picture of the

patrol vehicle. The bloke looking back with the binos is at a lower elevation to their truck on the hard standing.

Felix looked through several high-resolution aerial photographs taken by a CIA spy plane. “That tree line on the Hungarian side is at least two hundred metres away and the open ground is still being farmed so that means no mines. There’s even this funny little strip sticking out into the fields that’s been left alone. Maybe it’s a tributary or drainage ditch leading to the stream that runs along the border. If it is then perhaps it connects up through a culvert under the road which could be big enough for a person to crawl through but you’d think they’d have it well protected, an iron grill or concertina wire and regularly checked by patrols.”

He passed them back to Astrid and she quickly flipped through them again. “They don’t really help with that but looking at the enlargements there doesn’t seem to be any obstacles in the ditch itself. It could be something our man could use to lie up in or get from the tree line to the road without being seen.”

Felix agreed. He expelled a sigh from one side of his mouth. “It’s not perfect but it’s as close as they’re going

to get on this border. I'm glad it's not our responsibility to get Radler through the wire."

They discussed the checkpoint situation. There were the two they'd already spoken of but then moving south, there was a large one just before a town called Szentgotthard and, further on, there was the still guarded blocked off old road into Austria beyond another village. They agreed they needed to provide some activity at each one in the hope that it caught the attention of the Hungarian border guards and provided a distraction.

Felix thought it over. "We'll need to get some additional help from the Embassy in Vienna, there's too much ground to cover." He gave her an enquiring look. "Why haven't the Hungarians sorted that weak spot out before now?"

She gave him a little smile. "I've no idea but it seems the villagers are very happy with their lives and not at all keen on strangers *and* both villages are covered by a permit system, being right on the border. We've no record of anyone ever trying to cross there. Farms are being used all along the land right up to the border road connecting the two villages so I suppose the local

commander feels they have additional eyes. From the most recent Intel, they have an upgraded reporting procedure, key individuals and farmers tapped into the reporting system.”

She checked her watch, touching his arm. “Come on, we’ve got to make a move, we’ve a flight to catch.”

In Vienna, Deacon and Gallagher were in the Kaffee Alt Wien admiring its eclectic poster decorated walls and waiting to meet Deek’s contact. They’d arrived early; Gallagher had the schnitzel, Deek the goulash. “So, this bloke’s in the Federal Gendarmerie?” Gally asked as he watched the attractive waitress walk away with their plates.

Deek gave a lopsided smile. “You just can’t help it can you?” He shook his head in mock sadness.

“I just appreciate the female form, that’s all.”

Deek continued, “Yeah, don’t we all. To answer your question, the Gendarmerie cover the whole country apart from the big cities. My guy’s name is Christoph and, jeez, what timing, here he is now.” He stood up, so Gally followed suit.

Introductions made, Christoph insisted on ordering three beers. They discussed their current predicament;

knowing where someone was attempting to come over the fence but not knowing how they were actually going to be able to give them any assistance.

Christoph wiped his mouth and placed his glass on the table. “There is a group who will be more than willing to help you. I’ll call them ‘enthusiasts’. I had some dealings with them a few years ago and helped sort out one or two problems for them.” He took out a small notebook and scribbled something down, ripped the page out and handed it to Gally.

“Here, John, call this number. The guy at the end is called Matthias and don’t worry he speaks very good English. He will be able to help you, even with such late notice this is no problem to these people.”

They ordered more beer and the talk slipped effortlessly onto ‘wild’ nights Deek and Christoph had previously had. Their paths had crossed several times over the years and it seemed that on one occasion Christoph had saved Deek’s life. The Austrian played it down. “He tells this all time, John, but the truth is that when I shot the guy I didn’t even know it was this fellow here who was in the ditch, he was covered in so much shit.”

Gally left them, temporarily, to make a phone call to the office and when he came back he tapped the American on the shoulder and said, “Deek, finish that beer off, we have to go. He’s not just falling off their radar tomorrow, he’s going to try and get over the same day.”

Deacon waved his glass at him. “Take a seat, John, we’ve got three more on the way, can’t cancel them now.”

Gallagher complied, the yank asked, “Did London tell you that? How do they know?”

He shook his head, “No they didn’t and they don’t know, but they did give me further information about his wife and son. It seems the little lad was run over and killed six years ago and she hung herself three years later.”

He accepted his new glass from the waitress and when she’d left, carried on. “The date they both died was the tenth of this month. That’s tomorrow! From the train timetables, I assumed he’d hole up for the night and observe the patrol timings during daylight before making a break for it when it got dark. But this changes everything. We’ve lost a bloody day. It’s a significant

date for him; he probably arranged this whole visiting programme around it.”

“Jeez, why couldn’t they have told you that before now?” Deacon necked his beer and picked up the new one.

“They didn’t know, Deek! They only found out because one of my colleagues took it upon himself to go through the East German papers kept centrally. Now, Radler’s family home was always in Leipzig, no matter where he was, so, checking specifically the *Volkszeitung*, the local Leipzig daily, and starting from the last date we officially had a mention of either of them in the intel reports, they eventually found both incidents reported.”

Christoph interrupted.”John, this is now a time problem for you. *I’ll* contact Matthias and make the arrangements” He looked at his watch. “A meeting early tomorrow morning is best, I think.”

Chapter 26

Drexler woke in the morning to the sound of his phone ringing. Bleary-eyed, he made it to the desk and answered. The voice at the end identified himself as Hungarian Intelligence and informed him that Radler was on the train and had not long left Budapest's Keleti station.

Max checked the clock: 6.30. He'd missed an opportunity. He asked what the next stop was and was told Szolnok, in about an hour and a half. He thanked them for the information and terminated the call.

"Hans! Get me the number of the Hungarian Police in this place." His assistant walked briskly in to be handed a hastily scribbled note. Drexler added, "I'm not sure of the spelling so use your imagination."

Given the number he required, Max contacted the local authorities, claiming to be from the Volkspolizei, and asked them to send someone to the railway station to pass a message to one of the passengers on the Budapest to Cluj-Napoca train. He told them there had been a death in the man's family but because he had a weak heart they should not tell him that, just escort him

to a phone at the station. He supplied his number and a description of Radler.

Of course, Harald would know something wasn't right but if he made the call, Max could tell him his lie about being required to return and possibly save him from a decision that would ruin his reputation and career. If he didn't? Then it was simply another piece of evidence towards a conclusion that was becoming increasingly difficult to sidestep.

Hans brought a black coffee and placed the cup on Drexler's desk. "I have the reports on Heinemann and Panzinger here, Sir."

Max looked up. "No doubt you've read them so tell me what they say and give me the short version, Hans. I've no patience today for those long, detailed answers of yours."

Hans nodded. "As you wish, Herr Drexler. Heinemann has a mistress and Panzinger is falsely claiming allowances. Surely, this is not the sort of thing that people like them would defect over. All the evidence in the reports suggests that, other than Heinemann's sexual appetite, they're happily married

men with families. Internal Investigations thinks so too.”

The Lieutenant Colonel sat with his elbows on his desk, palms together against his lips and took a big breath. “Remind me never to leave my personal file lying around, Hans. Now, tell me something. Why are you here?”

His assistant was confused. “I came to bring your coffee and the report, Herr Drexler.”

“No, I meant why you are here working in my office.”

“Colonel Radler didn’t require me anymore; eventually there was virtually nothing he wanted me to do, a little routine filing perhaps. Then, of course, there was that unfortunate incident when your secretary’s son tried to get over the wall and she was dismissed.”

Max considered the answer. It felt to him as if his boss had begun to dispense with assistant services on purpose. Hans had worked for Radler for two years previously and it was only relatively recently that he had less work to give him. Maybe it had been a fortunate coincidence when that stupid boy had been

caught and had given Radler the opportunity to pass Hans on and so keep his secrets his own.

“Do you still file things for the Colonel?”

“Only what he asks me to but sometimes people give me copies of routine items he has received separately. Whilst he’s away, he’s had such stuff routed through me so I can put things in his diary.”

Max looked up at him. “Have you copies of his itinerary for these current visits he’s doing? He sipped from his cup and sat back. “Oh, and also those railway timetables we needed a couple of months ago?”

“His itinerary? Most probably, Sir. I didn’t pay much attention so it’s perhaps still in a tray on my desk. The timetables I know I have. They may be out of date according to the front cover but I doubt if anything has changed.”

The phone rang in the outer office and Hans went to pick it up. Popping his head around the door, he called, “It’s Captain Lemberger for you, Sir.”

“Lemberger. You got my message then?”

“Yes, Colonel. I’m not sure what you want me to tell you. It should all be in the file. I take it you’ve got it?”

“I’ve got it here, yes. I just wanted a little bit more background stuff, anything about her associates that might be interesting. We have a situation here where it might be useful.”

“You know she’s dead, don’t you? Killed in a burglary. The police seem quite convinced. These things can happen. I can understand it because she hadn’t been too productive these last two years. I was handed her three years ago and she seemed quite good, lots of low grade but still interesting stuff. Then it began to tail off. I think she was getting tired. Nice old girl though.”

“I know she’s dead but why isn’t it in the file?”

“Colonel, I’m away on a course at the moment and haven’t had time to update it. Why don’t you ask Colonel Radler about her? They were good friends. In fact, going back years, he used to be her case officer.”

Phone communications between both sides of Berlin had been severed for 19 years when in 1971 five lines each way were reopened by the DDR government simultaneously with East German price reductions and improvements in health and old-age benefits, an effort to placate growing antagonism and disaffection among the 17 million East Germans.

Whilst the lines that were opened proved inadequate for the general population there was no issue for the Stasi. The switchboard operators were Stasi employees and Stasi calls had priority over long-awaited conversations with relatives which were abruptly cut off every now and then. Veiled speech still had to be used; the Stasi weren't the only people listening in.

The switchboard wasn't a means used daily by the likes of Drexler and Stasi case officers but it was there for emergencies and this was one. It was clear to Max what was happening now so he picked up his handset and gave the operator a West Berlin number. He needed to warn 'Akrobat' so he could take whatever action he thought necessary and if that meant him crossing through the wall at the earliest opportunity then so be it. He'd served his time.

Rupert Wilkinson had waited patiently in the bar. Not able to make personal contact because the East Berlin authorities were disrupting the crossing points, he'd sat there at the same time for the last two days.

He hadn't been worried when nothing appeared on the news about the shootings at two hotels because if the plan had gone as expected the 'do not disturb' signs

would have resulted in the bodies not being found until the following morning when the cleaners, as all such people do, used their pass keys to enter despite whatever notice adorned the door. However, if the fact he couldn't contact his assassin assets hadn't particularly disturbed him then the news report he'd seen in the morning did. Both hotels were featured and a determined-looking street reporter announced the police success in an anti-black market operation. Witnesses spoke to camera and it became very clear that things had not gone to plan. He finished his beer, ordered another and stared at the clock behind the counter.

The phone rang, the barman, swarthy and heavy-lidded beneath unruly bushy eyebrows answered then held up the phone. "It's Uncle Ludwig from the east for Leo Volkheimer."

Rupert wandered over, took the handset and listened to Max's voice. "Hello, Leo, it's your Uncle Ludwig. I'm sorry we haven't spoken recently; you know how things can be. Your cousin Harald is having serious doubts about his feelings and your aunts and uncles don't know exactly where he is at present but when we do rest assured he'll get all the help he needs. I know

you were very close to one another so this must be worrying news. Make sure you take care of yourself.” The line went dead.

The gut-wrenching feeling that everything was over for him made his legs feel like they were trembling. For a couple of seconds, before he put the phone down, he wasn't sure he would be able to walk. When he did he took it slow, placing a hand on the back of a chair as he neared the counter. He felt light-headed as he sat on the barstool. The barman said, “Bad news? Here drink this,” then turned and poured a double Asbach, marking Rupert's beer mat as he placed the drink in front of him.

When he'd emptied the glass, he was thinking more clearly so he ordered another. Drexler was telling him they'd lost Radler yet he wasn't asking him if he had any useful information which meant, in Rupert's mind, they probably thought they knew where he was heading and it was somewhere he couldn't influence the outcome but they still could. To him, that meant they believed Radler was heading for an embassy. Yet, Greta's case officer, Astrid, the person who should know more than most was focusing on the Hungarian border with Austria?

If the fact that 'Baker' was still loose and colluding with Astrid wasn't bad enough, the news that Radler was the defector was more than he needed to slam the truth home. He was screwed. Anger began to surge through him but alcohol and fear were not good companions. His mind raced in all directions, including several circles. For him, this meant only one thing, that's what the border crossing disruption was about! He'd have made a run for it otherwise. He was just a 'throwaway'. They were cutting him adrift, probably because they needed to cover up their own failures and he would be a convenient scapegoat. If he tried to cross over now they'd simply arrest him or even worse refuse him entry. The alternative of surrendering to Baker or whoever the British sent out to get him wasn't something he seriously considered. At best, he was looking at a long prison sentence coupled with no chance of exchange once the Stasi had finished assassinating his character and worth. Worst case, when the extent of his treachery was recognised, he doubted if he would be offered a call and collect service. Most probably simple 'extreme prejudice'. In the meantime, he might survive for a few months or even a year

avoiding attention, if he was lucky. It wasn't the life he wanted. He'd wanted to be a hero of the DDR and the only way he saw of still achieving that, and the special privileges that went with it, was to prevent Radler's escape if he could

Austria it was then. He was pretty certain of the location, it seemed quite an obvious choice to anyone who'd studied the appropriate maps and he wondered if Max Drexler would ever get around to doing it. There were frequent flights to Vienna and his fake diplomatic papers would see him through the controls and then all he needed to do was hire a car and head on down to Rechnitz.

Chapter 27

Along a small dirt track off the side road, just outside the town of Mattersburg, they came to a smallholding. A little wooden and white painted plaster walled house sat under a shingle roof amongst several outhouses, some chickens, five goats and an old battered green tractor.

Matthias greeted them, following as he directed them to the compact veranda, sat beneath the eaves, where they took seats around the rough wooden table. A young woman brought them iced lemonade, smiled and left.

Gally explained the situation and showed him a selection of maps whilst Matthias, around 30 years of age with shoulder-length fair, wavy, unkempt hair, a wispy matching moustache and a hooped jumper with holes in the elbows, occasionally nodded. When finished, he simply declared, “We know the whole border well. You’re right, this is their weakest point but last year they made a big show of removing the barbed wire and digging in some things that could have been mines. Then they replaced the wire. Of course, we have no way of knowing if they are fakes or real. The fence is

electrified and if you break it alarms will sound at both border crossings but not in the guard towers, which are notified by telephone wire from the border posts. We've monitored the patrol activity. Its timings are pretty irregular and can't be relied on."

Deek asked him, "Do these guys just allow local traffic to swan up and down between the two villages? That road looks mighty close to the fence, aren't they cautious about some of the locals taking up pole vaulting?"

Matthias smiled. "If your man is an Olympic champion that could be an option for him, but to answer the question, they obviously recognised the problem because only recently they set up two checkpoints preventing access, here and here, on the edge of the villages. The only people who can use the road are the border guards and the two farmers who use the fields on the far side. The locals have a good traditional lifestyle, they're happy and whilst they probably don't appreciate the inconvenience, it's hardly something they'd throw themselves over an electric fence for. It's just a longer walk for them now."

Deacon and Gallagher sipped their drinks then Gally said, "Is there nothing you can do?"

Matthias grinned."There's a lot we can do, relatively speaking. Our electrician has constructed an isolator for the fence. Basically, a large rubber backed wooden frame with multiple electrical isolators connected to carry the current around the hole we're going to cut out. The mine issue we'll approach with some sturdy wooden planking supported at our end and jammed into the stream embankment at the other. As long as we don't drop it we'll be fine and that only leaves the main problem of cutting through the barbed wire which is time consuming."

Gally pointed to the detailed map."What cover is there here, if any? It looks quite open."

His new Austrian friend ran his finger over the map as he spoke. "All this, on our side, is a grassed field, the farmer grows it specially; he has a garden turf business running. Over here on the far side is a small wood and immediately alongside the border fence is an overgrown grass strip, about a metre wide, the farmer doesn't cut it, we have an arrangement. Right here, there's a large

well-established fir tree, a British Leylandii I think they are called. We planted it one night many years ago.

“Now, on the Hungarian side, the woods are around two hundred metres away, the land between that and the road is currently still farmed but there is a bit left uncultivated which runs from the tree line to the road. It’s a drainage ditch and points directly at where you think the attempt will be made. If we’d been responsible for that I’d be proud. It connects to the stream on the border by way of the culvert here.” He stabbed the map with his finger. “The culvert is protected by barbed wire and isn’t big enough for a man to get through, we got a good look at it earlier this year. The ditch it serves is for seasonal drainage and you might think they would have filled it with barbed wire but they haven’t. I don’t know why. If your man hides up in the woods, he could use it as cover to crawl along to reach the road but to be in that area he would need a high-level authorisation though. I assume he has this?”

“I have to assume so too but I don’t have any confirmation. How long will it take you to get all this organised?” Gally finished his drink and put the glass back on the tray.

“I have all the equipment here in an outhouse, the rest is just telephone calls; two hours maximum if people aren’t available and I have to phone others.” He pointed at Gallagher and Deek’s clothing. “It may get a bit dirty out there and I wouldn’t want you to damage your nice jacket on the wire. I can lend you some clothing, John, but your American friend is going to be a problem. I know someone his size but not his height.”

Gally replied, “Thanks for the offer but I’ve got some old stuff in the car.”

Deacon just shrugged. “Hell, I don’t care messing this stuff up, I’m on expenses.”

Matthias continued, “It’ll take about an hour and a half to get there and the sun will be going down between eight and nine roughly. We’ll need to be there by five to be on the safe side. You’re welcome for some food and to rest here but you said you wanted to visit an Austrian border post under some pretext to construct a distraction for the Hungarians. The best one is at Klingebach; it’s the crossing that leads to the Hungarian’s town of Sopron. It has been a popular area in the past for people attempting to leave the East. I’m sure your diplomatic plates won’t go unnoticed. I’ll

show you the quickest route. It's only thirty minutes away."

At the Hungarian checkpoint serving the road to Sopron, it wasn't difficult for the border guard in the sangar on the roof to pick up the American diplomatic plated vehicle through his powerful binoculars. He cranked the field telephone connecting him to the office below.

Chapter 28

Max glanced up from reading the papers on his desk as his assistant stood patiently before him. “Hans, I was wondering, earlier, why, if Colonel Radler was going to defect, he didn’t just go to the British Embassy in either Prague or Budapest but this itinerary explains it. It’s a full schedule and they’ve left him with no time spare other than to sleep. Now, in Romania, the itinerary finishes at four in the afternoon on the twelfth. See, here,” he said, turning the page back and forth. “On the thirteenth, he’s supposed to take the early morning train to Cluj-Napoca then the mid-afternoon one to return to Budapest,” he thumbed to the next page. “He has to stay overnight. I presume a hotel close to the station because his train the next morning is just before six.”

“The Hotel Dorka, Herr Drexler. It’s on the sheet at the back and it’s only three hundred metres from the railway station.”

Max flipped to it then back to the notes he’d made. “Thank you, Hans. So, he takes the early morning train which will eventually result in him returning to Berlin for eleven o’clock, maybe midnight if there are some

delays.” He stared at the sheet in front of him. “It’s the thirteenth, Hans. It has to be! He’s unsupervised, unaccompanied; everyone said their goodbyes the day before. *If* he’s going to do it, this is when he’ll make a run for the British in Bucharest. They’ll have almost fourteen hours to get him out of the country before the Romanian border people can verify he’s not on the train. The British will have him flown out, probably with one of their diplomatic couriers, long before we have time to react. This is what he’s counting on because he thinks we’re running around here chasing or interrogating the list of suspects he and I agreed on.”

The phone rang and Hans picked it up. A few words then he passed it to Max. “It’s the Hungarian police in Szolnok, for you, Sir.”

The Hungarian officer told him they hadn’t found Radler on the train. They’d been the whole length of it and couldn’t find him. Yes, they’d checked the toilets. But when the train pulled out of the station they’d seen a man of the same description sitting in the last carriage, the one they’d first checked. They thought, if it was him, he may have gotten off to get a coffee from one of the platform kiosks then got back on whilst they were going

through the passengers in the front compartment. Drexler thanked them for their efforts.

“The incompetent idiots, two of them went there and both got on the train instead of one remaining on the platform. I would have thought it was common practice to use a brain but it seems not. Never mind. We need to track him through the border checkpoints and have the Romanian Securitate put some people on the train at the first station after the border.” He opened the map in front of him and pointed. “Here, in Oradea, they can then keep an eye on him all the way to Bucharest.”

Meanwhile, in Austria, Astrid and Felix had called at the Klingenbach crossing that Gally and Deacon had not long left. Whilst Felix stood outside making himself look obvious, his colleague went inside with the cover story that they were expecting British diplomatic staff to cross back over the border but had forgotten exactly which one of the two crossing points in the vicinity they would use and, to be honest, they didn't like to phone Vienna to clarify because their position at the Embassy was under review and, well, it would just be another nail in the coffin. The officer understood and commented

that it must be catching as an American had also been there 10 minutes before with much the same story.

The guard on the roof of the Hungarian checkpoint, 200 metres away, cranked the field phone again.

After leaving, the British couple took a two and a half-hour drive to the former crossing between Neumarkt an der Raab and the Hungarian town of Alsoszolnok where they parked up in sight of the two Hungarians guarding the roadblock then generally acted suspiciously; using binos, locking the car and walking into the woods in opposite directions, staying for about half an hour and appearing to talk into a handheld radio.

At the other crossings still open, British military personnel on the support staff of the embassy's Defence Attaché made themselves visible enough to attract the wanted attention from binocular wearing guards on the other side.

As the day wore on, having decided the odd activity meant the West were expecting a forced exit from the east, the Hungarians began strengthening each point by erecting temporary obstructions designed to funnel traffic repeatedly left then right on the approach to their

checkpoints effectively defeating any would be 'gate crashers'.

Chapter 29

When the train drew into Szolnok station, Harald Radler decided he wanted a coffee. Knowing he had 15 minutes before the train departed, he grabbed his little suitcase and stepped down from the front coach and took a moment to visually find the nearest kiosk during which he also spotted the two Hungarian police officers entering the rearmost carriage. It struck him as an unusual event, there being no requirements for internal identification procedures at locations such as this meant they were looking for someone. Deciding to take no chances, he promptly disappeared down the nearby subway which linked the many platforms. Emerging on the same platform at the opposite end of the train, he observed the scene whilst having his small kávé.

A quick check of his watch against the platform clock told him it was time to get back on and just as he climbed aboard the two officers descended from the front. He found the first empty seat, checked there was no luggage above and settled down by the window as the train glided away towards the Romanian border. As

the carriages picked up speed, he returned to his old place in the front coach.

When he'd first pitched his thoughts to Greta he knew all about her extra activities with the foremost western intelligence agencies; associations that had proven beneficial from time to time. A slip of the tongue by Astrid during a relaxed conversation with Greta had given her, and Radler, the knowledge the MI6 case officer also led a double life as an MI5 asset. It was convenient because the Security Service was who he really wanted to deal with, not MI6; he knew *they* were compromised by his own agents. In particular, he was hopeful his previous contact with 'Gally' and his immediate superior would ensure his safety. Aware that, as dear a friend as she was, Greta wouldn't be able to withstand any harsher methods used if subjected to a difficult interrogation, he limited his information to her for both their sakes.

Before the DDR was given wider political recognition in the West, he used to receive asset reports through the Russian embassy with its embedded Stasi agent. Now, they came directly from their own not long founded embassy in London; simple microdot

despatches concealed in routine documentation for the attention of the president of the London trade delegation, Berlin, who just happened to be Harald Radler.

This was how he'd learned from Hugh Chamberlain that MI6 had sent two agents to make contact with a would-be Stasi defector and it was how he knew their names and aliases.

But for now, he could relax and enjoy the journey that took him nearer to the small Romanian city of Oradea and his change of destination, happy in the lack of knowledge that a phone call made from politeness had begun the slow toppling of dominoes that were his escape plan.

Chapter 30

Max Drexler's current quandary was deciding at which point he should impart his suspicions to Colonel General Wolf, head of the HVA. At this point, his conclusion was they would be received with such disbelief that it would probably impede the prevention of Radler's plans. No, he had to keep this under his jurisdiction, especially as he had things under control.

Whilst the thought of his boss being revealed as a traitor to the state was personally disappointing, Max couldn't contain a smile at the thought of the kudos coming his way when he was safely in custody. Abandoning an original idea of having him escorted back from Bucharest on the evidence he currently possessed, his intention now was to catch him in the act; Radler was a wily old goat, as cunning as they come and he'd most probably be able to come up with something to circumvent the circumstantial evidence but caught at the door of the British embassy when he was supposed to be on the train home was something even he would struggle with. Of course, it would mean promotion and, finally, he'd be walking in Radler's shoes. At this point,

he still didn't hate the man, he understood what had brought this all on but he'd lost the respect he'd once had. It was now all about the 'great game' his mentor had taught him so he waited for the confirmation call that the Romanian Securitate had placed people on the train at Oradea to shadow the soon to be former chief all the way to the act of betrayal that would seal his fate. He reached into his top drawer to the little golden bag kept there and popped a couple of 'knusper flocken' chocolates into his mouth then lay back in his chair and relaxed, arms behind his head.

When the call came, it wasn't the news he'd expected. Max's contact, Tavi, was most apologetic. The local office didn't have anyone spare for the task. They were all engaged in an 'anti-bandit operation in the Padurea Craiului mountains having cornered the much searched for Popescu gang in the forest there. The station chief had said there were only two men left behind with him and he wouldn't trust them to guard a chicken. The good news was Tavi had arranged for the Cluj-Napoca office to surreptitiously meet the train at their station and discreetly follow all the way to Bucharest where *he* would personally greet Colonel Radler and have him

covertly followed wherever he went. There was nothing Max could do. As Harald had once told him, the only plan that always works is the one that changes as and when necessary. At the moment, all was still possible but should there be another ‘hiccup’ he would need to rethink everything and do so rapidly. He might even have to speak with General Wolf much sooner than he’d wished.

Chapter 31

Back in Mattersburg, Matthias's team had gathered and demonstrated what they were going to do and what they required of Gally and Deek. Basically, they were to carry the sturdy planking that would be used as a bridge over the depression through which the stream ran, keep quiet, stay low and do as they were instructed without question. When the electric fence had been isolated then breached and the barbed wire cut it was the job of one of them to help their package over or, in the case of a no show, go through and find him. Deek looked at Gallagher and simply said, "He's your prize, besides, I probably won't fit."

Matthias placed a box on a table and handed out the well used commercially bought little 'walkie-talkie' radios with their earpieces. One each to the two drivers, one between the 'electricians' team of three, one to the road watcher on the Austrian side of the border reporting on the furthestmost watchtower and the road beyond, one each for Matthias, Gally and Deek and the last for the man with the German shepherd.

A final check on local intelligence confirmed no knowledge of new barbed wire installations, watches were synchronised and equipment loaded up into a dishevelled VW van. An Audi saloon stood close by. Then they sat at the rustic table for a beer and something to eat.

Chapter 32

The information from the Hungarian and Romanian border posts that Radler was still on the train was much welcomed and served to quell the discomfort in Drexler's stomach. Three and a quarter hours later, the news that he no longer was, had brought on an acid attack that made Hans think his boss was having a heart attack.

The Securitate were certain. When the passengers, in Cluj-Napoca, transferred to the Bucharest train he was nowhere to be seen; he must have got off in Oradea. Drexler was apoplectic. This was exactly what he'd tried to avoid. "Where the hell could he go from there?" Max demanded then drank the antacid Hans placed before him.

"Well, Budapest."

"You mean he's halfway to Budapest by now?"

"No," the voice laughed. "He can't get there until this train turns around and does the return trip."

"So, you're telling me he's going to be standing on the platform at this place, Oradea?" Max was becoming desperate. Hans brought a glass of milk.

The voice at the other end paused for thought. “Well, not really. He’d probably get the train to Arad, that’s what I’d do. It’s another border town and from there you can get an express to Budapest.”

Max took a deep breath. “Can you call your office in this place you speak of and have someone go to the station and arrest Herr Radler? He’s trying to defect.”

“Who to? The Hungarians?”

Drexler spoke carefully and with as much control as he could muster; head down and resting in the palm of his left hand. “Not the Hungarians. No, he’s trying to defect to the West through Austria. Now, can you phone your colleagues and have him arrested?”

“I could but it wouldn’t do much good. Both trains will have already arrived.” A check of the wrist. “To be honest, the Budapest train probably left at least ten minutes ago.” The voice thought on then said, “The first stop in Hungary is Szolnok in about two and a half hours. Try calling the Hungarians.”

Chapter 33

In Arad, he'd barely had time to buy a ticket. As soon as he climbed up into the carriage the train began to move. It was surprisingly crowded and although there were only a few seats available he didn't like the look of the company he'd have to keep. He placed his case on the rack and sat down opposite a young woman and her two children. The girl was probably around 10 or 11 years of age and occupied the window seat with her little brother who looked to be about 3 years old as far as Radler could tell; it'd been a long time since he'd had the company of children.

The mother, a pretty woman, dark wavy hair that glinted auburn when the sun caught it, leant over to retrieve the family's bag which occupied the window seat but Harald pleasantly demurred insisting it remain. When she was momentarily occupied, he made a brief assessment concluding she was around 36, generally happy but slightly stressed (the eyes told him that). Perhaps there was an illness or there'd been a death in the family, he mused. Her manner with the children was nothing but love and kindness so they couldn't have

been the source. She caught him looking at her but his benevolent smile extracted a similar response. He'd broken the ice. The little boy cast furtive glances in his direction eventually sticking his tongue out and when Harald did the same he couldn't help but giggle. Ice crushed.

It was an agreeable journey which caused the angst inside Harald to dissipate to the far reaches of recognition. They fell into a conversation, he mixing a little truth with a lot of fiction and she letting her concerns and hopes escape from their prison within. Her husband was Hungarian and drove a taxi. She, a Romanian, had been to visit her parents but her father was not well and they feared it could be cancer: they were waiting for results from the hospital. The children were Kata, who smiled demurely, and Viktor, who stuck his tongue out again and grinned. Their mother introduced herself as Stefania.

When she broke out the food and drinks, she asked if he would like something. He declined, saying it would be impertinent but she insisted they had more than enough and anyway they were getting off in Szolnok. He complimented her on the sandwich she gave him and

drank coffee from the small cup she passed over. Not long after, the little lad wanted her to read to him from the slim book he'd been clutching as if it were his favourite toy. Stefania asked him to wait as she tidied up around them and Viktor pulled a sad face so Harald asked him if he wanted him to read the book. The boy nodded enthusiastically and plonked himself in the window seat next to the East German. Mum wedged the family bag between her and her daughter and smiled apologetically. Harald assured her it was more than fine, he hadn't done this sort of thing for many a year and he'd missed it.

He looked at the book title; Nemtudomka. In Hungarian, it meant, 'I don't know'. It was the story of the little boy called Dunno. He knew this book, written by a Russian, he'd read it to his son Theo who'd always loved the voices his father would assume for the different characters. It had been a long time but Harald gave it his best shot. Viktor appreciated the effort, very much.

As they pulled into the platform at Szolnok, Radler couldn't help but notice the plainclothes officers dotted amongst those travelling and collecting. To the

untrained eye, they were invisible but to someone of his ability they stood out because they weren't doing what expectant train passengers or greeters do.

She struggled to release the large family suitcase from the luggage rack so he dragged it down then told her he would carry it *and* the boy for her if Kata would carry his lightweight case (he'd been living in a 'one set on, one set washed' clothes world for the past week. The heaviest thing in there was his service pistol). She thanked him, it *would* be a struggle to carry the other bags *and* see to the little chap at the same time and with Viktor being so keen on the idea, then why not. Stepping from the train, he helped them down with the bags, lifted Viktor with one arm, pulled his hat as low as he dared without looking suspicious, took up the family suitcase and joined in the chat as they made their way off the platform, down into the underpass and along to the station entrance where they would await the husband's arrival. The Hungarian intelligence and police people on the Budapest bound platforms were looking for an old guy travelling alone carrying a small bag. They weren't looking for a family man carrying his son and a suitcase the size of a small boat.

A handshake with Kata, mutual sticking out of tongues between him and Viktor and a kiss on the cheek from Stefania and he left for where his next train was waiting impatiently. As he settled in his seat, he saw little Viktor waving at him so he waved back as the train jolted then slipped slowly along the platform.

Chapter 34

At the town of Rechnitz, they split up. The VW van took the south-easterly minor road and the Audi headed straight for the east, both would eventually meet up on the single track road that ran through the small section of woods on the Austrian border that couldn't be seen from either of the elevated Hungarian guard posts. As they approached the spot in a co-ordinated move, the passengers all slid down off their seats so they wouldn't be seen.

The VW pulled up and the electricians quickly carried their equipment into the wood followed by Matthias and their man designated to watch the northern section of road to the next border village. The Audi, travelling in the opposing direction met them head-on. Out spilled Gallagher and Deacon who followed the others through the trees. The Audi immediately reversed back out and pulled into the dirt space on the bend of the road, allowing the VW to pass it to continue to its laying up position in a car park on the edge of Rechnitz. The Audi then drove straight through the woods emerging into the view of the guard towers only

seconds later. The driver and his dog would return much later to the full view of the southernmost tower to play out the planned distraction. The first part of the operation had passed successfully. All that the Hungarian guards saw were the manoeuvrings of two vehicles coincidentally head to head on a road with only one passing place.

Reaching the far end of the woods, they settled down and made themselves as comfortable as they could. Matthias took Gally and the binos to the inside edge of the trees where they had a commanding view of the wire, the road, the solitary large conifer and the watchtower. They went over the plan again, discussing fine detail; when they would move out, positions, actions on Radler not appearing and actions on being compromised.

Chapter 35

Hans wasn't looking forward to giving Drexler the news. He'd just received a call from the Hungarians in Szolnok to the effect they couldn't find Radler. The East German wasn't on any train bound for Budapest that stopped in their city. He waited for his boss to come back from the gym and his shower.

Drexler received the information in a stoic manner. He simply thanked Hans for all the assistance he had provided over the last year, asked him to take a file to the room at the end of the corridor, closed the door to his office, sank into his leather, high-backed swivel chair and opened the drawer in which he kept his service pistol. He took it out, slid in the magazine, pulled the working parts back and released them to carry a round into the chamber. Placed in front of him, on his desk blotter, he stared at it for several minutes. Then he looked down at himself wearing his Stasi sports society sweat-stained standard tracksuit. He didn't want that to be anyone's last memory of him. He got up, went to the cupboard and removed a clean suit, shirt and tie. When dressed, he picked up his service pistol.

Hans returned to the office unsure what he would find. Tentatively, he opened Drexler's door.

Max turned away from the mirror at which he'd straightened his tie. He pointed at the pistol on his desk. "Hans, please do me a favour, unload that and return it to my drawer. I must go to see Colonel-General Wolf and tell him everything."

He'd had better encounters. Briefing a superior with such bad news could have been a lot worse. Of course, Wolf wasn't well pleased but he seemed to understand the position Max had been in. In fact, he actually commented, "Radler's a crafty old bastard. I doubt whether anyone outside this room would have fared better against him."

Meeting over, Drexler had authorisation for extreme measures and full co-operation from the Czechs and Hungarians, including use of their airspace by the Tupolev transport placed at his disposal. He'd been dismissed with the words, "Make sure you do not fail me."

Chapter 36

Max called his Hungarian colleague, Zsolt Kovács.

Answering, Zsolt told him, simply, “I’ve been monitoring this situation and I’ve been expecting your call but you should have contacted me earlier, Max.”

Having discussed the details, Drexler told him bluntly, “I don’t think Radler would have doubled back into Romania. There’s no point. The only place he could go from there is Yugoslavia and it serves no purpose for him. Even with Tito’s current stance, there’s no benefit for them to take him in, quite the opposite. No, his objective has to be the border with Austria, nothing else makes sense.”

Kovács agreed: “But we’ll increase the surveillance on the British and American embassies here anyway. What have you done about Bucharest, just in case we’ve got it wrong and he’s simply taken the lower route along the Danube?”

Drexler: “My contact there has the main station covered and also the embassies, particularly the British. I don’t think it’s what Radler would do but I just don’t

know for certain. What's the weakest part of your border defences?"

Kovács laughed: "If I knew that I'd have done something about it. Leave it with me but in the meantime, I strongly recommend you get your arse over here as soon as you can. I still have time to get people out to the Budapest stations. I'll put that into action now and if we're lucky we'll get a result. I'll have someone on standby at the airport to collect you. Speak to you soon, my friend."

The East German Tu-134 landed at Ferihegy airport, Budapest, just under two hours later. Drexler was met by a driver and ferried into the city.

After a warm handshake, Kovács updated him. "Our people at the train stations report no sightings of Radler. At Keleti, we had a full search of the incoming trains and all passengers checked on the platforms. He wasn't there, I'm certain.

"I checked the crossing posts on the border and all report unusual activity; British diplomatic vehicles coming and going, one American as well. In the southwest, there's a blockaded former crossing, the British actually went into the woods there and were seen

communicating by radio. I've got dogs searching that area as we speak."

He stroked his chin. "I don't know whether they're trying to distract us or whether they don't even know themselves where Radler's going to try to cross over. I've had security stepped up everywhere but I think I know what he's done."

Max accepted the coffee a subordinate brought him whilst Zsolt continued, "At Szolnok, it seems the direct through train that goes to the border and terminates in the next town down was waiting when the train from Arad arrived. Nobody thought to check it because it doesn't stop in Budapest, it bypasses the city. I think, somehow, he managed to get off unseen and get on that one. Given the time-lapse, if it's on schedule, he'll be at the first large border town by now but he could be going on to the terminus because the weak point there is the rail bridge."

Max threw him a questioning look. Zsolt explained, "The train has to slow right down as it nears the station, the bridge is old and due to be replaced so for safety reasons they keep the speed down. He could, I'm told,

slip onto the bridge then simply throw himself into the water and swim for it. Is he a good swimmer?"

Max shook his head and opened his arms in a shrug. "I believe he used to be a member of the Stasi swimming club but that was over twenty years ago now."

Zsolt checked his watch. "Well, the train should get there in an hour but I've requested they deploy a unit to the bridge, they should have ample time. I'm happy we've covered everywhere else but I've only just received the detailed maps for the crossings north of the bridge and haven't had time to look at them myself."

They spread them out on a table and it wasn't long before they both saw what the problem was. Drexler studied the position closely whilst Kovács attended to a phone call. When he returned, he had reasonably good news.

"I've just spoken to the local Commander for the area just to the north." He placed a finger on the main map. "Yes, that point of the road in this village has been an issue of security for them. He says they requested it be re-routed slightly so they could place appropriate measures but the authorities told him to increase the

patrols whilst they thought about it. The situation's been going on for a while so, on a suggestion last year, he put checkpoints up at the edge of the villages it connects and stopped everyone but the patrols using it."

Max picked up the detailed map for the village in question and pointed at a feature. "Look, here, this is like a big finger pointing to 'X marks the spot'. It couldn't be more obvious unless you lit it up with a neon sign." Then he ran his finger across some lines. "There's at least one track through the woods. You could access this feature from them. What measures are employed there? Barbed wire?"

Zsolt scratched his head and his eyebrows drew together in consternation. "I didn't ask, my friend, but not to worry, I have a helicopter waiting on the Margaret Island and our driver is waiting outside. We'll be at the border in just over forty-five minutes."

On the island, in a field between the trees, they boarded the Mi-8 helicopter that had gathered a crowd as it had landed. Rotors spinning above them, Zsolt and Max, in a stooped run, made it to the open passenger door. Whilst Max was instructed to take a seat, buckle up and put on a headset, Zsolt spoke briefly to the pilot

as they consulted a map. Landing site agreed on, he took his place, the pilot checked the crewman in the rear and on the 'thumbs up' increased the power taking them into the sky as an excited and admiring throng looked on.

Chapter 37

His journey passed without incident. At the station, he took a taxi to his final destination, a small village 8kms outside the town.

At the checkpoints, his special authorisation, signed by a high ranking member of Hungarian Intelligence, and his Stasi identification were examined closely. His cover story was accepted without comment. Dropped off in the village at the end of the road that led to the boarding house and others, he tipped the driver and walked the remaining distance.

The 80-year-old woman answering the door in response to his knock smiled willingly. “Colonel Radler, it’s so nice to see you again. How long has it been? A whole year, I think. You know, Harald, I’m so glad you thought of me when you wanted to stay here again.” He kissed her hand and told her, “Hajnalka, I swear you are looking younger and sprightlier than ever.”

In the kitchen, she offered him something to eat but he declined to put her to any trouble and anyway he’d already eaten on the train. All he wanted to do now was freshen up and take a long walk; he’d been sat down

most of the day and needed to stretch his legs. “Yes, you always did enjoy those walks you took up to the woods on the hill,” she told him.

They spoke briefly of the last time he’d stayed, the previous year, when he’d been part of the group visiting the border defences. Radler and his host, a Border Guard General and a native of the village, had an immediate rapport with one another and he’d highly recommended her place for a pleasant, relaxing atmosphere and homely good cooking. Harald didn’t feel he could refuse such a commendation or a General so he’d stayed. When he raised the issue of transport, his new friend had supplied a car and driver but the payback came in the form of several drunken nights out in what became a crazy week.

“Remember, most mornings I had to give you my own hangover remedy?” she laughed.

“Yes,” he replied. “It tasted awful!”

“Ahh, yes,” she wagged a finger at him. “But it never failed. I always thought you let that Tamas Varga lead you astray. He may well be a General but he’s always been an incorrigible rascal when it came to women and drink.”

She showed him to his old room. It was still the cosy little place it had been, decorated in a traditional manner, with a bowl and jug on the rustic washstand, towel alongside. When she left him, he opened his suitcase and found the stationery and pen he'd packed days before. He wrote a quick note and filled an envelope with enough money for a week stay; sealing it, her name on the front. His loose coins he left on the washstand. A not too distant memory returned when he sat on the wonderfully comfy bed and he almost wished he'd be staying the night.

Washed and refreshed, stuffing his old clothes in the case which he closed and stood next to the bed, he put on his clean clothing and placed the service pistol in his coat pocket.

Downstairs, she insisted he have some of her homemade lemonade before he left for his walk. With his coat over his arm, he told her, "I probably won't need this but I'm taking it just in case it gets chilly later on." She smiled back and said, "A wise decision, after a warm day it can cool down very quickly. Now, if you turn left at the end of the track you'll only be able to walk around the village because that checkpoint they

put up last year when you were here is still there and we can't use the border road." He nodded but didn't mention it had been his suggestion.

She patted his arm. "Now, take your key with you because I'll probably be in bed when you get back. No late nights for me, I've livestock to look after," she chuckled. He patted his pocket indicating he had the key even though he'd left it in his room to save her the cost of replacing it.

Along the track leading out of the village, up the gentle slope that led to the woods, he walked with as much casualness as he could muster. He took out the folded piece of paper that contained his handwritten coded notes. Almost complete nonsense to anyone else, to him it meant he turned right on the track when he next had an option then left for 650 paces, through the wood then 550 paces, turn left into another wood and straight on along the trail there until he reached the far edge of the trees from where he could push through to the drainage ditch. Written in case he found himself making this journey in the dark, he stuffed them back in his pocket; it was still light enough for him to see all he needed. Outside the village, his pace increased.

Reaching the second wood, he sheltered in its shadow whilst he watched a helicopter circle high above then turn and head off towards the south.

Chapter 38

Touched down in the waste ground alongside the bridge over the Raba River, Kovács and Drexler clambered out and struggled up the steep embankment to the rail lines. The border guard unit tried to look casual as they concealed themselves behind the stanchions whilst the two intelligence operatives hurriedly discussed the situation with the scene commander; crossing covered, tracks covered, station covered, British diplomats waiting on the opposite bank.

Through borrowed binoculars, they surreptitiously observed the British diplomatic plated black saloon parked beneath the trees on the other side of the river. A suited man of Afro-Caribbean descent walked into view and stood next to the bonnet. Checking his watch, he scanned the bridge with a pair of mini binos. The Hungarians hugged the safety of the bridge girders as if they were long missed lovers.

Felix walked back into the cover of the trees and past the CD registered Mercedes to the little Opel in which Astrid sat listening to the car's radio. He placed a hand

on the roof and leant down at the window. “Yeah, they’re up there, trying to blend with the metalwork. That helicopter produced two guys who I’d bet are from their Intelligence Agency, one of them at least.”

She looked up at him. “What do you mean?”

He gave her a half-smile with a tilt of his head and a nonchalant dismissive wave of his free hand. “It’s just something, a gut feeling; the way the first bloke introduced the second to the bridge commander and subtleties in dress. It wouldn’t surprise me if he was from out of town, maybe even German. I’m starting to smell East Kraut. We’ll give it another ten minutes then I’ll lock the Merc and we’ll go. I think it’ll be a while before they think to take a closer look and realise there’s no one in it. We’ll pick it up later.”

If anyone noticed the Opel emerge from beneath the tree cover at the far junction as it left they never said anything. Max Drexler, however, had become suspicious and walked along the railway track to get a better angle from which to observe the occupants of the diplomatic car. Watching his footing on the uneven track, he too missed the Opel’s departure. Crouching down, he adjusted the focus of the binoculars and

discovered the vehicle empty. He ran back to the bridge just as a train lumbered slowly from the bend towards its final destination for the day, horn sounding triumphantly.

On reaching Zsolt, he hurriedly told him, “He’s not on this train! The British have gone! There’s no one with the car. It was simply a distraction.”

Kovács had nothing to offer as the diesel-engined monster lazily dragged its coaches over the tracks cutting off the opportunity to get back to the waiting helicopter. When the sixth and final carriage had passed they hurried across the lines, almost sliding down the slope, and dashed to the waiting Mi-8, its rotors still turning. Airborne, they turned northeast, heading for the only other weak spot in the border ‘defences’.

Chapter 39

In the densely planted wood, Harald Radler sat on the ground with his back resting against a fir tree in the little ‘nest’ he’d managed to make for himself and peered out through the lower branches of the tree line.

The light was fading as the sun gradually edged below the horizon on the other side of the fence and it had begun to chill down. He’d wrapped his overcoat around himself and pulled it over his head for two reasons, one the chill and the other so it would shield his torch when he tried to make contact in the hope that Gally, and whoever he’d enlisted, had managed to work it all out.

He’d liberally rubbed the coat in the ‘leaf litter’ in an attempt to hide his scent and it wasn’t doing any harm because the border guards disappearing around the bend with their dog hadn’t been alerted. Now, he had only to wait for the patrol coming from the opposite direction to safely pass and it was time to make his move.

He could make them out in the distance and considered that by the time they reached his goal the very last of the light would be almost gone. He checked

his watch. In half an hour, the Bucharest train would pull into the Gara de Nord rail station to be greeted by a reception committee and they would know he wasn't on it. Urgent calls would be made, if they hadn't been done already, and nationwide border and embassy alerts would be put into place. The helicopter he'd seen earlier had kept him wondering and worrying if the game was already up. It hadn't stayed but it didn't mean it wouldn't come back.

His service pistol between his legs, only one 8 round magazine, he'd brought them not for a serious gunfight but simply with the intention to fire several rounds to keep those interfering at bay whilst he blew his own brains out.

He had nothing but ignominy and jail to return to if they didn't put him against a wall and shoot him themselves. Next to the gun, the insulated cable cutters he'd bought in a backstreet electrical and hardware shop in Prague. The man there had spoken German, although not well, but Harald had received the impression they would give him some protection when he cut through the electric fence and then when he asked if they would be effective on barbed wire the man's facial expression

had told Radler it wasn't something he'd considered before but he didn't see why not.

Satisfied with the angles, he lined himself up with the Austrian wood nearest to the border fence. It made sense for them to be there, it was much closer to where he needed to cross; to be in the woods at the far side of the flat, grassed, open field would have been sheer stupidity. If this didn't work, if no one answered, then he was going anyway; he didn't have a choice.

The fact the fence was alarmed didn't matter, he knew from the previous year's visit there was around 20 seconds delay before the nearest watchtower would be alerted and then they had to locate the exact source of the break. A patrol, even if close by, wouldn't be able to respond in under a minute. He was hoping he could make a big enough hole in that time to simply launch himself through and was relying on his woollen coat, thrown over the lower portion of the breach, to lessen the effects of any shock. Anyway, despite what the signs said, he'd been told in confidence the charge wasn't powerful enough to kill. Desperate people do desperate things.

Taking the torch from his jacket, he sent out three flashes of green light and received nothing in return. He waited, then another three.

At the edge of the wood 300 metres away in a foreign country, Gallagher turned in response to the hand on his shoulder. "Alright, Deek," he whispered, as the CIA agent squatted down beside him, taking the binos and scanning the area.

Suddenly, Gally tapped him on the back. "What's that over there!"

Deek readjusted. "Where? I can't see anything."

"To the left, see? In the tree line. I thought I saw something."

The American handed the binos back and said, "These aren't helping anymore in this light. I think I've got you. There, just where the 'finger' meets the trees?"

"Yeah. Look!" He pointed at the three steady flashes of green light. "It's got to be him!" Picking the torch up from the ground in front of him, he sent one red flash back to receive another three greens. He replied with three reds. There was no particular arrangement or code, just what both sides felt enough to confirm contact was

intended and not accidental. Gally waited but nothing else was returned.

Matthias joined them. “Our guy watching the road further up says there’s a patrol coming from the north. They should be here within five minutes so make sure you can’t be seen and no more talking, they’ve got a dog with them.”

In hushed tones, Gally told him what had just occurred and Matthias crept back to inform the others.

When he’d received the return acknowledgements, the sick feeling that had come to Harald’s stomach dissipated. He put on his coat, stuffed his weapon, cutters and torch into its pockets and slid out of the trees into the drainage ditch, carefully crawling several metres before he stopped and waited.

The border patrol seemed in high spirits, laughing and joking, he could hear them as they reached the point he sought. They’d had these sort of alerts before but nothing had ever happened so a certain lack of focus had crept in.

A competent speaker of Hungarian, in the otherwise quiet evening, Radler could hear them, discussing one of the patrol’s new girlfriends and not all was as

complimentary as it could have been. They moved off as the headlights and silhouette of a truck approached them from the village in the south. When the patrol had progressed another hundred metres, the vehicle stopped alongside them, words were said, Harald couldn't hear what but the troops clambered in and the group drove past the end of the drainage ditch only to stop 400 metres further on and start reversing. He flattened himself into the trickle of water and dirt that lay beneath him, fear welling up inside, his hand on his pistol. He could hear shouts but, despite his rising panic, he felt he had to take a look. Cautiously, he raised his head to peer through the grass of the embankment. They were turning around, one man on foot at the rear guiding the driver. He climbed back into the cab and the vehicle swung left from a small track back onto the tarmac road, headlights on main beam lit up the countryside. With a clanking of gears, it gathered speed, illuminating the watchtower whose occupant tried to shield his eyes then it tore away back to the village and the border crossing point beyond.

Radler didn't of course see all this because when the truck swung around, he'd hit the bottom of the ditch

again, one side of his face held so fast to the ground that water trickled along it and through his hair.

Chapter 40

In the border crossing control room, the Hungarian major wasn't in the best of moods. He pointed to the map spread across the table and stared at the two Guards who stood to attention before him. Then he spoke.

“Why did you pick the wrong patrol up and bring them back here? I made it as plain as I could you should collect the patrol from the northern sector of the Bozsok road and take them here!” His finger repeatedly stabbed the map.

The skinnier of the two replied, “Sir, I thought you meant the patrol that had come from the north, not the patrol that was going to the north, Sir.”

The major looked at the other man.

“Sir, I was only doing what he told me to do. It's his fault, Sir.”

The phone rang and the major was called over to it. With the call finished, he turned and said slowly, “Go get the patrol you have just brought back in and get them onto the truck, then wait outside until I come and tell you what to do next. Do not go anywhere without my direct permission.” They both saluted and scuttled

away. The phone rang again. The clerk asked some questions then put the handset down before marking the wall map with coloured pins. “Sir, that was another call about the diplomatic cars at the crossing points. We’ve seen –” He was interrupted by the field telephone; the observer in the roof sangar reporting activity on the Austrian side.

“Sir, the British diplomats are back. The black fellow and the girl.”

“I’ll be straight up,” the major returned the handset to its cradle.

On the roof, he observed the two ‘diplomats’ entering and leaving the Austrian post repeatedly then appearing to speak into a radio of some sort. The sound of an approaching helicopter distracted him. He tried to ignore it but when it circled and began to descend he headed for the base car park to see what problems it had in store for him and his men. Dust flew in successive waves across the post forcing the sangar guard to crouch below the sandbags and the major to remove his cap and shield his eyes.

Chapter 41

They'd cancelled his use of the American Express card so seeing as he was now spending his own money Rupert Wilkinson declined the offer of the more expensive Opel Ascona and plumped for the smaller, and cheaper, Opel Kadett.

Travel map bought from the first petrol station he'd seen, he'd found his way to the only place, from his observations of the Hungarian border defence maps, that would be feasible to attempt an escape to the West without assistance from both sides of the border.

The only overt sign he'd seen of anything likely to happen there was the passing of another vehicle reversed into bushes, a man nearby watching an Alsatian dog having a shit. Nothing unusual there but the parking arrangement struck him as odd. It looked like concealment and the only people who couldn't see him were the Hungarians.

He found himself some bushes of his own, out of the view of man and dog, and studied his maps. As the sun began to sink closer to the horizon, he checked his weapon, pulled on a windcheater and took a stroll

towards the area facing the conveniently placed large fir tree at the border fence. Carefully, checking his surroundings, he pushed through the thicket and found himself a nice, relatively clean spot from which he could observe without being seen.

Chapter 42

Matthias spoke into his radio. “Günter, it’s Matthias. Go do your stuff now, over.”

Günter responded and then, interior light disabled, slipped himself and his dog from the Audi that was crammed into the bushes on the blind side of the field.

Matthias put a hand on Gally’s shoulder, edging him to the left as the electricians stumbled past in a crouching run, the isolator frame between them. Next, it was the Englishman and the American, carrying the planks between them like seasoned stretcher-bearers, Matthias bringing up the rear. As they reached the large fir tree, they could hear a dog barking loudly nearby and see flashes from a torch being waved around on the path that ran alongside the open field. Shouts in German, “Rolf! Rolf! Hier! Fuss! Rolf!! Komm!!!” The Hungarian in the tower shouted back with what German he could muster. “Es ist in ordnung! Komm und hol ihn.” (It’s ok, come and get him).

The electricians swiftly attached the isolator and operated the switches from a wired-in remote. One of

them nodded to Matthias then began snipping the fence within the frame.

When the sound of the truck had receded into the distance, Radler dragged himself rapidly along the last 100 metres of ditch emerging muddied and wet at the barb-wired culvert. Crawling past it up the grassy incline, he popped his head up to road level. He could just make out the group at the wire. He tried to stand up but stumbled. He tried again, this time managing to scramble to his feet. Almost bent double, he staggered across the road to tumble down the slope towards the little stream.

Everybody on the other side froze. No explosion. Gally hissed, “For fuck’s sake Harald, just stay exactly where you are!”

The Austrians were making progress with the barbed wire and slid the planks across; Radler dug them into the bank as much as he could with his bare hands whilst fighting to get his breath back. In the distance, the sound of a helicopter as it circled then descended to the hard standing alongside the southern border crossing.

Günter’s ability to speak Hungarian had much impressed the border man in the tower and they’d

progressed from how he'd learned it from his grandmother to who supported which football team. The Austrian took out a transistor radio, telling the guard he normally listened to the matches on it but needed some earpieces as it could be quite loud which he demonstrated by turning it on but then dropped it on the ground. Rolf, the dog, was on it in a flash and playfully dashed up and down with it in his mouth, music blaring out as his owner seemingly tried to get him under control. The tower guard laughed and shouted encouragement but to whom no one could be sure.

Radler delved into his coat pockets for his insulated wire and cable cutter mistakenly dragging his torch out at the same time, sending it tumbling into the stream just below him. For a second or two everyone froze once more then went back to work.

One hand holding the tool, the other probed deep in the opposite pocket, searching for the pistol that was no longer there; he'd lost it whilst crawling along the drainage ditch. He began to agitatedly cut the wire on his side of the planks.

Back towards the village, they could see approaching headlights illuminating the rooftops and the tower of the

village's little church. The red light on the field telephone in the watch post repeatedly flashed eventually catching the Hungarian guard's attention. Concisely and economically answered, phone down, he shouted across to the now slightly more distant Austrian and his dog that they should go, people were coming and if they found out they'd been talking together he would be in big trouble. With an understanding wave, man and dog ambled back to the path, another purposeful action designed to split the guard's attention from what was behind him. Scanning the countryside with his night vision equipment, he took a quick look back into Austria to see how far they'd got and saw it was far enough for him to be able to deny all knowledge. Back looking across the Hungarian fields, he saw nothing.

Things weren't going as well at Radler's end of the barbed wire as all had hoped. Matthias handed over a set of wire cutters, Gally nodded, crawled along the planks, through the isolator frame to begin cutting and bending away the barbs. Still trying to use his own cutter but with hands now too weak, Harald pulled at it from his end. The movement caught the guard's eye as

he panned along the fence. Shouts to stop and halt only served to increase the activity.

Night vision down, he shouldered his weapon, held the vertical handgrip tightly, shouted again at the feverish actions taking place 300 metres away then started firing, his bullets leaving Hungarian home ground, flying across Austrian air space then digging up bits of Hungary as they impacted all-around a now desperate Radler and Gally. “Come through, Harald! You have to come now!” Gallagher shouted, urgency in every syllable.

Main beam headlights lit up the scene as a ‘jeep’ and truck screeched to a halt, occupants spilling out in all directions.

Radler shuffled across the planks but stopped short as bullets from the tower continued to spit up soil around him. “Gally! I’m caught! I’m caught on the wire!”

Chapter 43

Dirt and splinters of wood danced around them as bullets continued to impact the embankment and planks Radler was trying to cross; the heel of his shoe spun away towards the road.

Gallagher yelled at him, “Harald! Lose the bloody coat! For chrissake, take it off!”

The Hungarian major, knowing his men would inadvertently be placing themselves in the line of fire as they ran towards the breach, screamed at the guard tower to cease firing. The response gave Radler seconds to gather enough fading energy and willpower to slip the bonds of his entangled coat and thrust a free arm into Gally’s outstretched hand. Guards leapt down from the road and lunged at the feet wagging crazily in front of them.

Like fishermen hauling in a bumper catch, Deek and Matthias unceremoniously heaved the two struggling men along the planks and through the fence leaving everyone in a heap in the Austrian wild grass. The electricians, having long abandoned any hope of

retrieving the isolator, were already halfway to the safety and cover of the woods.

Unsure of what to do next, the Hungarians stood and pointed their weapons whilst their colleagues tried to untangle themselves from the barbs of the defensive wire.

The major shouted, “Stand still! No one is to do anything! Lower your weapons!”

Feeling the commands had little to do with them, the remaining ‘escape committee’ dragged Radler to his feet and began to propel him away from the frontier. Heading across the open field, they realised their mistake and abruptly dog-legged right and tried to make the trees under which their companions lay panting.

Still visible on the periphery of light from the two vehicles, three shots rang out. Jacket left protruding from his entangled coat where he’d abandoned both on the wire, his white shirt highlighting him amongst his companions, Radler staggered forward as the first bullet smacked into his right buttock, the second grazing his waist and the third slapped his right arm. He stumbled and ploughed into the ground.

The Hungarian guards wheeled round to see the Stasi ‘Colonel’, wild-eyed, his pistol raised. Open-mouthed, they watched as he fired another two shots before he was struck by the major with such force the weapon flew from his hand as he collapsed sideways to the floor. Recovering quickly, he lunged at the gun lying only feet from him on the tarmac but the major raised his own weapon as the intelligence man, Kovács, began to draw his. Working parts racked rounds into breaches as the border patrol turned as one to point their weapons at the Hungarian agent.

Calmly, the major said, “If you try to pick that up, Colonel, I swear, I will shoot you. You have no jurisdiction here. He’s gone. It’s over. We wouldn’t want to cause an international incident would we?” A momentary look towards Kovács brought the return of his half drawn weapon to its holster. The major picked up Drexler’s gun and pocketed it.

Gally had thrown himself across Radler as the fourth and fifth shots rang out. He’d come too far and been through too much to lose him now. He turned to gauge the situation and saw the drama unfolding behind him. Judging it an opportunity, he and Deacon pulled Harald

up and began, as fast as they could, to drag him for the protection of the wood.

More shots rang out; they threw themselves into the grass, Gally again shielding Radler. Border patrol soldiers began to scatter. A sergeant, seeing the flashes from the far side of the field and believing they were the object of a cowardly ambush bawled instructions to his men and returned fire, the occasional glowing 'tracer' round showing the others the source of the problem. Drivers extinguished headlights and firearms crackled, flame from barrels providing an instant firework display. Deek was up, weapon drawn and cocked, zigzagging several metres away from the others, firing as he moved. Dropped to one knee, he fired three more towards where the last tracer had impacted and where the muzzle flashes now came; Gally felt something whistle past his ear and heard bullets striking the ground alongside him.

Across the fence, the major quickly assessed his men were not being fired at and began shouting, "Cease firing! Cease firing!!"

The American moved again, fired three more rounds then went to ground. Lying prone in the fresh-smelling

grass, arms outstretched, he waited for the next incoming. There was nothing.

Chapter 44

Rupert watched it all unfold before him. The satisfaction he felt when he saw Gallagher and the rescue party was only superseded by the joy that coursed through him when the tower guard began firing and the Hungarian patrol vehicles arrived, their headlamps providing him with a clear view in the fast-fading light. He squinted through the cheap little binoculars, bought at Vienna Airport, and easily recognised Max Drexler, his heart almost bursting with relief. As quickly as euphoria had come it ran away as he realised that Radler had made it through to the West. He was about to open fire when Drexler did it for him but frustration boiled inside him as he saw everything unravel again.

His anger and fear were so great he hadn't thought about the possible consequences of his opening fire. The fusillade that erupted around him, kicking up dirt, breaking branches and covering him in bits of leaves came as a surprise but he kept firing towards where Radler lay; now more difficult to see not only due to the lighting conditions but also because someone was

shielding him. He cursed. He knew he should've taken the shot as soon as they'd stood up to run from the fence. Radler's white shirt had stood out but he'd taken too long in the aim, trying for a perfect score. By the time his finger began squeezing the trigger, Drexler had interceded.

Now, with the pain increasing and a feeling of nausea gripping him, the opportunity was lost. He rolled away from his firing point and hauled himself to his feet. Shoving his way through the bushes, he needed to get back to his car.

No lights, Astrid drove along the track in darkness, guided only by the lightness of the surface. A car ahead was suddenly illuminated from behind by the headlights of an oncoming vehicle which swiftly turned ninety degrees and sped away towards the woods on the border. Catching a brief glimpse of a figure, she turned on her headlamps to reveal a man now slumping down against the front bumper of the car she faced. It was Rupert Wilkinson.

She stopped and, realising he had a gun in his hand, she flooded him with main beam as Felix stepped out from the passenger door.

Rupert heard the crunch of the tyres on the stony track but overcome with increasing pain and crippling weakness he could do nothing more than sink to an eventual sitting position, one hand clutching his bloodstained chest, the other feebly raising the gun.

Felix stayed behind the glare of the light and called out, “Rupert! It’s me, Felix. It’s over. Put the gun down and we’ll get you some help.”

“Fuck you, Felix! Fuck all of you!” Tears dribbling down his cheeks, Rupert fought to control the trembling in his hand whilst he struggled to keep the weapon raised. Finger tightening on the trigger, he began firing as his strength ebbed away.

Rounds smashed through the windscreen then into the grill. Weapon drawn when he got out of the vehicle, Felix pumped four rounds into the already dying man.

Chapter 45

“Gallagher, I’ve been going through the American Express expenditure. Didn’t you take any of your own money with you?”

Innocently as he could, Gally replied, “I did, Sir. Thirty quid but it didn’t go as far as I thought it would.”

The Old Man’s jaw tightened as he shuffled the papers back and forth. “What’s this? Good grief, man! You chartered a two-seater light aircraft!”

“I had to, Sir. I thought the pilot might like to sit somewhere.”

The Old Man’s eyes narrowed as he glared at the nonchalant figure before him. He re-examined the sheet on his desk.

“And this! What’s this?” He waved a receipt at him. “You bought yourself a semi-automatic pistol?”

Gally lifted an eyebrow. “Ah, well, there’s a story to that but it’s all in my report, Sir, there on your desk, when you get around to reading it,” he responded earnestly. “Our friend from Century House took my revolver off me and I didn’t have time to get it back. I needed something because it was quite clear to me from

the way he killed his colleague that he wasn't a very nice chap."

"Where are the six spare rounds you had for the revolver?"

"I had nothing to fire them out of so I threw them away, Sir."

"Well, your mistake. You'll have to pay for them yourself. We're not made of money, Gallagher. What happened to the PPK?"

"It's in my locker, Sir." He gave a half-smile.

The Old Man glowered, his voice raised slightly. "It's not your personal property, man! It belongs to the department!" He re-arranged his blotter then quietly said, "Give it to me. I shall have it issued to one of the others."

Gally's eyebrows almost knitted together in a deep frown. "Why can't I have it? If you don't mind me saying so, Sir, I risked my life so you could get the kudos of bringing Radler over the wire *and* I very nearly died out there."

"But you didn't, did you, Gallagher? You're standing here in front of me. Anyway, if I can't trust you with a two-inch revolver how can I trust you with a proper gun?"

You'd probably lose it within a month." His mouth curved into a weak smile. "Don't look so crestfallen. How is Radler by the way?"

"He's fine, Sir. Flesh wounds, they said. The doctor at the BMH said if Harald's arse hadn't been so big it would've been a lot worse. Will that be all, Sir?"

The Old Man nodded and waved him away with a finger.

At the door, he called him back. Pretending to be occupied with a file, he said, "I'll reconsider the PPK if you give me the spare rounds back."

Gally emptied six bullets from his pocket onto the desk.

The Old man gazed at them then at *him*. "And what were you going to do with them?"

Gally smiled. "You can never have enough bullets, Sir."

The Old Man sighed and capitulated. "Right, well. Take the PPK down to JD and have it itemised and accounted for then sign it back out. I just hope I don't regret this. Oh and *try* not to show it to the others, they'll all want one and I'm struggling with the budget as it is. Close the door on your way out."

As the latch clicked shut, Gally checked his wrist. Tomorrow was soon enough for the weapon. Right now, he was going to meet Clare and he had an important question to ask her.

Epilogue

Hugh Chamberlain bought his ticket at Folkturist and successfully made his way to East Germany via the Soviet Union. He died in 1988, a year before the Berlin wall fell.

Max Drexler was reduced to the rank of major and sent to command an administration department in the district of Neubrandenburg.

Hans returned to being a mechanic and on the collapse of the DDR moved west to build a successful chain of automotive repair shops.

Harald Radler provided crucial information to the Western intelligence services and eventually went to work for the Americans in Langley, Virginia.

Deacon became head of the CIA Berlin station, absolutely nothing happened to the Hungarian major and Astrid later married Felix.



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