

THE MAKEPEACE CONTACT

Few people have heard of the existence of the Blue Brigade, let alone know of what it represents. And that is how its members wish it to remain.

For our purposes here, suffice to reveal that it is an international anti-terrorist organisation, with global tentacles. It has a great hatred of violence, apart from its own.

THE MAKEPEACE CONTACT

This novel is entirely the work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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THE MAKEPEACE CONTACT

Following the IRA massacre in Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday, 8th November 1987, Marcias, the deputy head of the notorious Blue Brigade, an international anti-terrorist organisation, receives a specific order whilst still in a hospital bed. The order is simple – ‘DESTROY THE IRA’.

For years the Blue Brigade had infiltrated its members into the ranks of the IRA, but only one of its men had succeeded in penetrating the top echelons of the Provisional wing of the IRA. He was known only as Makepeace. The coded message received by Marcias had been clear. It had instructed him to contact Makepeace, the Blue Brigade’s top infiltrator within the IRA, and the most dangerous.

Initially, the Blue Brigade’s campaign against the IRA goes according to plan – a vicious thrust of violence, death and destruction, but then, as Marcias successfully commences his assault upon the leaders of the Provisional wing, the Provos start their own preparations for their ultimate act of violence designed to change the course of British history.

The Provos were going to assassinate the first, second and third in line of succession to the British throne. Only Marcias could stop them, but he would need all the help of Makepeace. He would have to make full use of the Makepeace Contact.....

THE MAKEPEACE CONTACT

On what might have happened, and on what could still happen.

Prologue

Sunday, 8th November 1987.....

An IRA bomb containing between ten to twenty kilograms of explosives and activated by a timing device, exploded during a Remembrance Sunday service around the cenotaph at Enniskillen in County Fermanagh. Eleven innocent people were murdered in the explosion and a further sixty were injured.

The father of one of those killed said that, being a Christian and through his faith, he forgave the perpetrators for what they had done to his daughter, a young nurse.

Later... during November 1987.....

Following the IRA massacre in Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday, 8th November 1987, Marcias, the deputy head of the notorious Blue Brigade, an international anti-terrorist organisation, receives a specific order whilst still in a hospital bed. The order is simple – “DESTROY THE IRA.”

In the vicious conflict which followed the good guys are bad and the bad guys are very bad.

THE MAKEPEACE CONTACT

PART ONE: The Consideration.

THE MAKEPEACE CONTACT

Chapter One

The priest pulled out the collar stud and tore off his dog collar and tossed it onto the table in front of him. The white collar was still damp from the sweat which had been pouring down his face. He was a thick-set man in his early forties, just under six foot and with dark receding hair. His face was big and from beneath thick bushy black eyebrows, his eyes could stare at a man as if penetrating his mind if not his soul. Everything seemed to be big about Father Sean Clancy; not surprising that he was regarded by many of his loyal parishioners as a cross between a clerical John Wayne and the fictional Don Camillo – he had that distinct ability to appear much larger than he was, both in stature and in his thoughtful, powerful personality. Some believed him to be much larger than life... and death. But most of all, at this crucial time in his life, Father Clancy was overweight and this was part of the cause of his profuse sweating on that damp, dismal, wet November evening.

The rest of the cause, the main cause of his winter perspiration was nerves; the relentless, merciless, stabbing, tormenting, torturing nerves of mortal fear. Father Clancy was tense and he could feel his blood pounding and throbbing within his veins as he sat at that fateful table. His strained nerves had been activated by a special fear; not the twitching fear for his own personal safety – this had never worried him, he felt prepared to die – it was the dull, dreaded fear for the future of his country and his people, and for certain events which may be about to be planned in this very room, this very night, for the near future. This day was Armistice Day, 1987, three days after the IRA explosion in the community hall alongside the war memorial in Enniskillen, the explosion which had murdered eleven innocent people assembled for Remembrance Sunday morning around the town's cenotaph. And tonight, Father Clancy was in Ballyshannon, only thirty miles from Enniskillen, attending a meeting of the war council of the Provisional IRA.

Ballyshannon lies at the mouth of the River Erne, the same river which passes by Enniskillen. Ballyshannon is in County Donegal, the most northern county of the Irish Republic and it extends further north than Northern Ireland. It is the ideally situated southern county for southern terrorists to strike at the Northern province. Ballyshannon is a small, closely-knit town with a population of less than three thousand; it is a resort which is noted for its salmon fishing... strangers come and go in a resort, here they come and go for the salmon fishing. The town's only other obvious item of interest being its hydro-electric power plant, the whole area

appears sleepy and provocatively peaceful. But it has one more claim to fame, much more obscure and far more notorious. County Donegal is the home of the Sixth Corps of the Provisional IRA. Not only is this the most successful corps of the Republican Army, it is also known as the most secretive and secure – few, if any of its members have ever been captured or destroyed. It holds this unique record within the IRA. It was a group from the Provos' Sixth Corps which blew the revered Earl Mountbatten of Burma to oblivion. And quiet little Ballyshannon is the headquarters of this elite corps.

It was because of this secure, and secretive, reputation that the hierarchy of the Provisionals had decided to meet here to plan their next move, the most important, the most critical and the most devastating of their bloody history. Most of all, they had selected County Donegal and Ballyshannon for its security. Leastwise, that was their idea on this depressing evening in November, the evening on which Father Clancy was perspiring so profusely.

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It was a quiet hospital, one of those obscure Nuffield institutions tucked away in the green and peaceful countryside, only a few miles from a bustling city centre and yet entirely remote and secluded.

The thin man paid his account, expressed his thanks but not his appreciation – he was a professional and he expected, demanded, that professionals do their job professionally – made his goodbyes and walked slowly out through the main entrance. As the low and weak early morning November sunshine settled momentarily upon his eyes, it occurred to him, as it had many times before, that it was like checking out of a modern, comfortable, medium-sized hotel.

Shadows cast by the fleeting winter clouds dimmed his appearance for the few moments in which he stood before the hospital entrance. Then, as he moved forward, the sudden shaft of sunlight failed to brighten his grey appearance. He looked worn and tired, old before his thirty years. Obviously he had once been handsome, the strong masculine features of his face now haggard and ashen, his profusion of blond hair now thinning and greying. He was still upright, carrying his six foot frame erectly – bravely and defiantly – despite the persistent pain. His stance was now but a determined gesture against fate. But the green grey eyes, obviously once powerful, were now tired, very tired. Most of all, the thin man was insignificant; there was no longer any need to notice him.

But a more careful observer, or a better trained observer, may have chosen to study those tired green grey eyes more deeply. They were the clue. Somewhere, locked in the depths of those eyes, lurked the cold despair of inevitable death, the main ally of the successful killing devil of destruction. This unassuming, modest, unnoticed man was a most efficient killer. And the thin man had discharged himself prematurely from the hospital early that morning

because he had received a special signal. It was the order for which he had waited for years, the order which he had always wanted to receive, which he had almost prayed for. Enniskillen had been the final trigger. The order was simple: 'Destroy the IRA.' The coded message was addressed to a name which would have made sense to very few people. It was Makepeace. The recipient of the order was Marcias, the sinister, ruthless, but not cold-blooded killer who was the feared deputy head of the Blue Brigade. The thin man, this apparent wreck of a man, walked slowly to a car parked at the far end of the hospital car park. After he looked inside the car, he opened the front passenger door. Before he stepped inside the car, Marcias looked up at the now unclouded sun and smiled. He liked the sun... most of all he liked it when it was a fiery inscrutable ball at sunset.

Chapter Two

“Wut’s wrung, Farther Sean?”

“Ah, ‘tis nothin’, my boy.”

“Yer sweatin’ a lot, to be sure. You’ll not be worryin’ about anythin’ I hope, Farther?”

The man with the questions was Patrick O’Hare, second cousin of the Border Fox. Despite the man’s rough brogue and his wild face, Father Clancy knew very well that Patrick O’Hare was no fool. He was extremely cunning, far more astute than his infamous cousin. Paddy O’Hare was the treasurer of the Provisionals. Not for him the dashing but dangerous exploits of his legendary cousin. Paddy much preferred to control events from behind the action and from afar, and his power rested in the fact that he controlled the purse-strings; both fundraising and expenditure. But things had not been going well recently with the fundraising, both for the Regular and the Provisional wings of the IRA.

Paddy O’Hare reflected on how the supply of funds from the Soviet Union had dried up completely during the last few years. The monetary support from Boston had diminished considerably, thanks mainly to the efforts of a group of mystery men in Massachusetts. It was as if some unknown and unseen force had determined to declare war upon them and had decided to starve them of all fresh supplies of finance and armaments before commencing engagements against them. The armaments ship, now impounded in the French port of Brest, was another example of these siege tactics. The American authorities, damn ‘em to hell, had tipped off the British and French about that. Con Flynn, the Provos’ munitions purchasing officer, was still raging about it. It had been sheer carelessness and lack of proper and secure planning. Paddy O’Hare was as mad as Flynn about the loss of that particular cargo; they had had to pay dearly in advance for it with money raised the hard way in America. The Colonel Qaddafi (Gadafy) in Libya, from whom the IRA had purchased the arms now lost on the seized ship, wanted to spread terrorism – he had become famous for supporting revolutionary movements from the Libyan oil wealth – but most of all he wanted, and needed, money... to finance his continuing war with Chad.

And O’Hare’s cousin, the illustrious Border Fox - as he liked to be known, had not helped, having contributed nothing from the fiasco and failure of the kidnapping of the millionaire’s son-in-law, John O’Grady. It seemed the Fox was not so cunning or clever as he made out to be. But somebody, somewhere, was being very cunning and clever, and Paddy O’Hare did not like it. He kept his eyes fixed firmly upon the priest, waiting for the cleric’s reply to his question.

In a far corner of the room, well away from O'Hare and the other younger men, sat a small old man whose balding head was covered by a cloth cap. Once he was the most dangerous of them all. Old Joe Cahill, reprieved from execution by the British in 1942, a remnant of the IRA leadership when it was still controlled and operated by the Communists, who had long since abandoned it.

Cahill was also staring at Father Clancy, the old man's eyes cold, glaring intensely and openly hostile. Unlike O'Hare, Cahill hated and despised priests. They represented the first and main barrier and opposition to his own desire and dream for Eire. Cahill wanted a united Ireland, but only if it was to be controlled by communism. The Catholic religion, always the biggest threat to his ideas of progress, must be subdued and eventually destroyed in Ireland if his plans would still be achieved within his lifetime.

As he glared at the priest, this vicious old man also thought about the recent reverses suffered by the IRA. It was no surprise to him that the Russians had withdrawn their financial support for the IRA, since the Provos' new younger leadership had declared their opposition to communist control. But Cahill was still very bitter about it, and their other set-backs. The Provos had lost fifteen active volunteers so far in 1987, almost double what the British authorities realised. And their best bomb-maker, who had achieved such good work in Hyde Park and outside Harrods in London, the British capital – the very heart of the English bastards, had just been jailed at the Old Bailey. They could ill afford to lose him. But above everything, old Joe Cahill blamed Father Sean Clancy for the Provisionals losing the Russian support: it had been the influence of this evil priest, he believed, which had persuaded the new, younger echelons of power within the IRA to turn the Provos away from the Communists.

"Yer haven't answered my question, Farther. Would you be worryin' about anythin' at all?"

Sean Clancy returned the younger man's fixed stare and then he allowed his eyes to flicker slowly, unhurried, around the room. He knew where his eyes would finish, O'Hare knew too, and so did many of the others, but he would keep them waiting. Thus he looked at almost each man in turn before his powerful, penetrating eyes settled on Joe Cahill. He saw the little old man's eyes narrow as their eyes met. There was much hatred there, but hatred could be a great disadvantage and self-danger to the hater if not controlled.

"Yes, Paddy, my boy," Father Clancy replied slowly, allowing his voice to rise and be heard by everyone in the room. "I am worried about somethin'. I'm very worried about many thin's."

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Shortly after Marcias had sat in the front passenger seat of the car, another figure emerged from the shadows by the side wall of the hospital and approached the limousine. Throughout the hundred metres distance from the hospital to the car, the second man scanned his eyes in a continuous sweep of the hospital grounds and car park. As the other man walked to the car, Marcias surveyed the hospital building and grounds in the opposite direction. The newcomer got into the driver's seat of the car without looking at or speaking to Marcias; no acknowledgement passed between them – they knew each other too well and both were concentrating their full attention on watching their surroundings.

The black limousine roared into action and sped towards the exit of the hospital grounds. The driver was black; he was known only as Black John of the Blue Brigade. As the limo passed out through the open gates of the hospital, a man standing on the pavement opposite to where the hospital exit joined the main road, signalled to them. The limo stopped only long enough for the third man to jump into the back seat and then it sped away again. The latest newcomer turned in the back seat and kept a watchful eye out the rear window. He was Mexican with strong Spanish features. He was Chavez. Chavez and Black John, like Marcias, were members of the elite El Veinte – sometimes known as 'Los Veintes' – of the Blue Brigade.

The airport was less than half a mile from the hospital. Very convenient. The small yellow, white and blue Brymon Airways jet circled above Roborough, and then straightened out as it crossed over Cornwall and headed for Cork. Marcias showed the message to Chavez and Black John. The message read:

'To Mister John Makepeace Lovett, Nuffield Hospital, Derriford. Dear Johnny. Wishing you today a full recovery. Your ever loving Mother.'

John Lovett was the name in which Marcias had been booked into the hospital. 'Makepeace' had a two-fold meaning. It meant 'Destroy the IRA', but it could have been replaced by either of two other words which would also have conveyed this destruction message. The use of Makepeace had a secondary meaning, unique to itself. It instructed Marcias to make contact with the Blue Brigade's top infiltrator within the IRA, a person known only as Makepeace. The rest of the message which the three men now read meant nothing, apart from the 'ever loving Mother' being the supreme head of the Blue Brigade. They had simply been ordered to commence the total destruction of the IRA by contacting Makepeace. The Makepeace Contact. The most dangerous.

Chapter Three

Tomas O'Reilly, the titular head of the Provos, called the Ballyshannon meeting to order. There were no minutes of a previous meeting, no proposing or seconding of motions, no voting. It was entirely democratic, in the true traditions of the IRA. They knew what they were doing, and what they had to do. The IRA may not have been a secret organisation – everyone knows of its existence – but what they plan to do, has to be kept very secret. And what faced them tonight, was probably the biggest decision and the most difficult problem which they had had to surmount for many a long year. There would be much argument tonight among the top leaders of the Provos and no little amount of recriminations. Irish tempers would be strained and language bad. It was make or break time for them. After Enniskillen they had to do, had to achieve, something big, or go down for ever. Tommy Sands and countless others would have died in vain, if not for nothing. Father Sean Clancy knew that. He also knew everyone in this room, everyone attending this meeting, both by name and appearance. Nineteen men and one girl. A very attractive Irish girl.

Seamus O'Hara, a general, took the floor. "One big event is what we need now, more an' above anythin'," he stressed. "We need it to restore our credibility and standin'... after Enniskillen... and the bomb that didn't go off... the one we had to tell the bastards about. Why we had tuh tell t'em, I don't know. Why the hell didn't we jest leave t'e damn t'ing there?"

"If it had gone orf, it t'would have killed two hundred civilians, mostly civilians anyway." It was the thoughtful Eugene Duggan, a man with a large conscience; never a safe thing to have in the IRA.

"So what?" O'Hara's face was red, the thick veins protruding on his forehead. There was no fuse to his temper.

"Most of them children," Donal O'Brien's voice may have been quiet, but there was always a deep menace to it. "That would have set our cause back a piece."

Senan Nally stood up; slim and handsome, dark and defiant, the clean-cut but wild look of an Irish fanatic. "I'll ask yer ter shut up, gentlemen, this nonsense is getting' us nowhere. Ferget th' paasst, and let's concentrate on the future."

"Ah, we learn from the past... and from our mistakes," O'Brien quietly reminded him. "And the first thing we learn is that the British... the English establishment... don't care a damn what happens in Ireland... in Northern Ireland. Their papers and their television go mad for a week over somethin' like Enniskillen and then, after a week or two, they forget all about it, and Ireland... until the next event. It's

all forgotten, like yesterday's funeral. We have to hit them on their mainland. In England. Where it hurts them close to home."

"Huh," Seamus O'Hara's voice was now scornful rather than hot tempered. "We've tried that many times... Birmingham... Harrods... an' where did it get us... nowhere."

"Then..." O'Brien emphasised his words distinctly, "We have to hit one of their establishment leaders."

"And so we've tried that as well." The voice of Bridget O'Toole was sweet and gentle amidst the gruff tones of her male companions. She was as fresh and cool as the wind off the Irish sea. "We killed Mountbatten... from here in County Donegal... we nearly got Thatcher in Brighton. We maimed Tebbitt's wife. And blew up Airey Neave right outside the very Palace of Westminster itself. The Nazis didn't destroy him, but we did. But what progress has it got us?... that's what I be askin'".

"We have...." O'Brien was still emphasising his words, drawing them out slowly – almost as sweet and gentle as the girl – and speaking them softly, forcing everyone to listen intently to him. In such a company, it was an effective way in which to command attention. "... to hit closer still to the heart of their establishment."

"The monarchy?" Brendan O'Leary had become really interested for the first time that night. "The Queen, herself?"

"Not quite so close to the heart," O'Brien smiled smugly, having hooked his first minnow. "You're aware of the saying: 'The King is dead, long live the King'. It sums up the British monarchy, and especially the English establishment very well. And it equally applies: 'The Queen is dead, long live the King'. Most of the English would probably think that we had done them a favour. History teaches us...." Donal O'Brien paused and turned his head and focused his charming, snake-like smile upon the still dark and defiant Senan Nally. "... History teaches us that the English couldn't wait for Queen Victoria to die so that they could have the handsome King Edward on the throne, before he became too old and fat. Elizabeth Rex doesn't top the popularity stakes. All the media; the press, the women's magazines, the television, they all follow Charlie boy, and his pretty, fashionable, cute young wife and their little princes. Most of the people, the young, the middle-aged, the old, all seem to adore them. That's the royal family the English are looking forward to and want. That's their royal dream. Let's not fulfil their dream for them; let's shatter it... for ever."

"Kill the Prince of Wales?"

"Not just Charlie boy; all four of them. Prince Charles, the beautiful young Princess Diana, who is so with it and bubbling with charming fun and humour, and... the little princes. Sounds like something out of Shakespeare, how very appropriate. That will destroy their dreams and their bloody sang-froid. That will take their future away from them." The normally quiet Donal O'Brien thumped the table in front of him, no longer for emphasis, but out of triumph.

"How do we do it?" demanded Kevin Monaghan, a pale faced, red-haired young man in his mid-twenties. He was peering through round John Lennon style spectacles and his manner was deceptively demure. He already had much blood on his very anaemic hands. "A bomb again?"

"No. Definitely not!" Donal O'Brien was emphatic. "The British have become very bomb conscious. Better to use something different. Also a bomb can only really be used to assassinate public figures when it is exploded at a special gathering or function, such as the Brighton bombing of the Tory Conference. But since then security has been increased, or..." he smiled in wry amusement, "or rather it has been introduced, and bombs are likely to be sniffed out. And, remember, there is no guarantee with a bombing that you will kill the people you want to kill. At Brighton we didn't get Thatcher, only some bloody old fools nobody had heard of."

There was a general nodding of heads in agreement and confirmation of the truth in what this charming, quietly spoken, slim middle-aged man had said, before he continued. "Also, I do not see this assassination taking place during a function when there are plenty of police and security around. No! They must be assassinated when they are travelling in mid-country in England, with only one or two of their private detectives or police guards with them... when we are least expected. Remember the kidnapping attempt on Princess Anne in the Mall. It was almost successful... if it had been better planned and organised, it would have been."

There was more nodding of heads. Donal O'Brien was holding court, the way the quiet man liked it. He had no ambitions of power as the top leader of the IRA or the Provos or the united Ireland as did some of his companions here tonight. It was on occasions like now, when he was holding court, that Donal O'Brien enjoyed his moments of glory. He proceeded in the quiet, steady manner which had become his trade-mark. "Also it must happen when the four of them are together. We are going to kill two future kings of England, not just one. It must be done in one action. Maybe in the Gloucestershire countryside... or Cornwall. Also, gentlemen, we must use hit men – contract killers – who are not members of the IRA and who are not Irish. They must be able to enter England without being suspected of being connected with us, or they must be already in England and again not be suspected of any connection with the IRA."

"Like the Jackal," the enthusiastic Kevin Monaghan interrupted excitedly.

“That was only fiction.” O’Brien treated the young man’s interruption with kindly tolerance, but definite dismissal. “This is for real. And I propose that we use three contract killers, all professionals of course, operating independently of each other... well, almost independently.”

“Why?” demanded Bridget O’Toole. “And how?”

Donal O’Brien was smiling more than ever, but he was still very serious. Deadly serious. “Firstly, we have four targets... too many for one man to complete alone, and... well, there are three main aims, I reckon, of a professional contract killer... upon which his life and his reputation depend. And, of course, he must maintain his reputation, as well as his life, to obtain future business.... assignments. So, firstly, he will want to hit his target... in a clean kill. Secondly, he will want to get away alive... and unidentified. And thirdly, he will want to be paid. Now my plan is that we hire a gunman to shoot the Prince of Wales without the killer knowing about the next move. The next move being that we have another killer lined up to kill the Princess of Wales immediately after the Prince has been killed. You see, if the communists had wanted to, they could easily have shot Jackie Kennedy at Dallas immediately after her husband... in all the confusion after the first killing.”

More nodding. “And?” Bridget O’Toole persisted.

“And... we simply have then a third killer to follow up by killing the two boys. What do you say, gentlemen... and miss?”

They all agreed, including Father Sean Clancy.

Tomas O’Reilly, titular head of the Provos, now reassumed control of the meeting.

“All agreed, boys, an’ Bridget O’Toole, on Donal O’Brien’s proposal? Right! I’ll refer the idea to up above an’ advise yer all on the final decision and plan o’ campaign. Goo’ night tuh yer all.”

Father Clancy stiffened, but waited for someone else to ask the inevitable question. He had suspected this for a long time.

“What d’yer mean, up above, Tomas O’Reilly?” Senan Nally was up on his feet, a sudden temper flashing through his entire body.

“Yer’ll not be tellin’ us yer’re consulting the Almighty, tuh be sure, Tomas?” Brendan O’Leary’s jesting question brought some coarse laughter and lowered tempers and tension long enough for Tomas O’Reilly to compose himself.

“Gentlemen, whether yer like it or not,” O’Reilly’s rich baritone voice thundered and echoed through the room, “there’s a higher aut’ority than me, a level above me, in the Provos... tuh which I have tuh submit... the big decisions.”

First there was a deadly silence. Those who already knew about this gigantic and unexpected revelation – Seamus O’Hara, Donal O’Brien and the ever silent Callistus Murphy – remained calm and collected, as did Father Sean Clancy, who had suspected it. There was uproar amongst most of the others. There was little that Tomas O’Reilly could do to restore order. There was nothing that Donal O’Brien would do; restoring order now was not his speciality or function. It was the bad-tempered, red-faced general, Seamus O’Hara who, with pistol drawn and standing upon a chair, towered menacingly above the others. It was not the spectacular sweep of his arm, brandishing the pistol, that silenced them, but the contemptuous and murderous challenge in his vengeful eyes that did it.

“That’s th’ way it is, an’ that’s th’ way it will be, an’ that’s th’ way yer’ll all accept it. Anyone who doesn’t, is out... an’ out...” his voice went unusually quiet and low, “means dead.” Seamus O’Hara looked at every man and the girl in turn and then stepped down from his chair. There was no further dissension. IRA democracy had prevailed again.

After a while, everyone was leaving the room except Tomas O’Reilly, Seamus O’Hara, Donal O’Brien and Callistus Murphy. Father Sean Clancy was departing when he was stopped by O’Reilly. “We’d like tuh have a word wit’ yer, Farther,” the big man said, “about yer jumble sale.”

The four men knew that Father Sean Clancy never became involved in jumble sales.

Chapter Four

“So, you’ve bin worried about a few things, Father Clancy?”

They were in the room above the meeting room. Tomas O’Reilly, Seamus O’Hara, Donal O’Brien, Callistus Murphy and the priest. In front of them, sitting at a long table, like a board of directors, were three men; a school teacher, a librarian and a doctor. Once there had been five; a milkman and a taxi-driver as well, but the other two had been slain, not by the security forces, but during the recent bloody internal squabbles of the Provos. Now there were just three. All three were in their forties or early fifties. All three were neatly groomed and attired. Father Clancy reached inside his jacket pocket and fumbled with his damp dog-collar which he had shoved into it. He knew all three of these men as respectable family men and although he knew of their republican sympathies, he had not known until now that they were even members of the IRA let alone that they formed the top rank of the Provos. At last Father Clancy had been permitted to know the identities of those who made up the highest echelon. He was slightly surprised to find that he was no longer sweating.

The man, the school teacher, who had questioned Father Clancy, spoke again before the priest replied. “We had a listening device homed onto the room below. We heard everything that was said at the meeting tonight, Father Clancy. I am pleased to see that you are not perspiring now.”

The priest made his reply. “Yes, I was worried about several thin’s recently. The failures we have sustained... and our lack of success this year. I believe it to be our worse year for a long time. I was also concerned about what we would do in the aftermath of Enniskillen.”

Father Clancy had chosen his words very carefully. The school teacher was well aware of that. He also knew that there were no fools in the priesthood; the clerics were all highly educated and trained. It took eight years to prepare a man for the priesthood, a lot longer than it took to train a school teacher. You must not underestimate the intelligence or astuteness of a priest, the school teacher reasoned, no matter what the colour of his habit.

“Are you still worried... or concerned, Father?” It was still the school teacher; the two men either side of him were remaining silent, observing.

“No, I am not.”

“Are you satisfied with what is proposed to be done?”

“Yes, I am.”

“That’s good, Father. We need everyone to be completely with us. Anyone who is not completely with us, we have to consider to be against us. You understand that? We don’t want you to be, shall we say, unduly influenced by your bishop. What you have learnt today - what we have all learnt today – must not be revealed to anyone outside these two meetings. Our secrecy must be preserved and maintained completely. Any violation of our secrecy will be avenged by the ultimate punishment. The garb of a priest will be no defence against that punishment.”

“I know that.” Father Clancy’s powerful and penetrating eyes more than returned and matched the questioning stare of the school teacher. Eventually the other man had to turn his eyes away.

“Now, Tomas,” the school teacher turned his attention to the big man, O’Reilly, their titular head. “We accept Donal’s idea and we will commence action to implement preparations for it.” The school teacher straightened the papers and the pens on the table in front of him. He took great care to ensure that the one ruler was exactly in line with the top border of the stack of papers, even carefully measuring with his eye to make sure that both ends of the ruler were exactly the same distance from each end of the papers. Twice he straightened the ruler until he was satisfied. The man was as fastidious in his habits as he was in his choice of words, decided Father Clancy. This could indicate that he had a tidy mind, a good thing to have in a soldier and a general; or else it could denote a nervous mind, not such a good attribute for a soldier or a general.

The school teacher was continuing and Father Clancy and the others listened carefully to his monologue which was delivered in dry and steady tones. “We know of three good contract killers, two of whom we have used before. One of these is resident in, or shall we say operates from, Britain and the Continent, and sometimes from the West Indies. The other two are American; one in Chicago... the other one travels around a lot, but he invariably returns eventually to New York City. We will arrange for them to be contacted once we are entirely satisfied as to their suitability for this mission. Meanwhile.... The school teacher stopped speaking and looked at the doctor to his left.

“Meanwhile, Tomas,” the doctor took up the dialogue in the same dry, steady tones; it was as if the teacher was still speaking, “we shall need funds... considerable funds. You will instruct Patrick O’Hare about this... and be careful of that man... be a little wary of him. Just because we allow him to control the funds, does not mean that he should have pretensions to controlling a wider spectrum of power. And... we do not want any stupid interference or nonsense from his cousin... the so-called and inaptly named Border Fox.” The doctor’s lips curled and his voice became slightly derisive as he mentioned what had become a famous name. “We do not want famous personalities who attract unnecessary attention to themselves.” The doctor’s eyes were still focused upon Tomas O’Reilly, but his next words were clearly addressed elsewhere. “Callistus

Murphy, we would appreciate it if you would maintain a special observation on Patrick O'Hare.... Who worries so much about other people's perspiring."

The librarian spoke for the first time. "Tomas, check our arms stock with Conleth Flynn, just in case."

Tomas O'Reilly saluted, and he and O'Brien, O'Hara, Murphy and Father Clancy knew it was time to go. As the five turned towards the door, the school teacher spoke once more. "You can be of great use to our cause, Father Clancy. You have much influence with your people." The priest glanced back and nodded. He had noticed that the school teacher was still fidgeting, in that same fussy manner, with the position of the ruler. The man was obviously given to be fine and precise in trifles, but that did not necessarily mean that he would not be keenly accurate when dealing on a larger scale.

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The touch of a faint smile twitched the hard lips of the thin man, Marcias. They had made the journey north-east from Cork to Dublin in good time. The three of them; Chavez, Black John and himself, had now been joined by two Irishmen, Noel Dwyer from Cork and Eamonn Kinane of the farmlands of Tipperary. The sun was shining... also faintly. There was about Marcias the cool, icy detachment of an old-time gunfighter. He knew what he had to do. He was going into battle again. Marcias liked always to have a purpose in his life. He was inspired by a dread of boredom. Always there had to be an objective to fulfil, a goal to reach, a plan to achieve... an excitement upon the horizon... lest he should die before he lived... or had it now become: so he should live until he died? But what would have been his thoughts if he had known what had been determined and resolved at the meeting at Ballyshannon? He would soon know. Makepeace would see to that.

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Vicente Patto was the personification of Latin masculine beauty. Despite his deprived origins on the Lower East Side, he was tall – six-foot-two at least – dark and handsome, and very strong. Powerful would probably have been a better description than strong; Vicente Patto walked and moved like a coiled mountain tiger. He killed like a tiger, too – going for the throat whenever possible. In the Lower East Side, with the cold, murky East River slipping by, you have to sometimes. His was the world of grey sinister shadows; the snake slipping silently through the undergrowth, the eagle waiting to swoop from the skies, the shark circling in the deep ready to pounce sharply upwards, the motionless crocodile which could snap so quickly, the sharp sting of the wasp... the swift dart of the fox and the crunch of its jaws around the neck of the chicken. The unexpected bullet in the belly before you heard the shot.

Vicente Patto glanced up once at the sky over Central Park and pulled his raincoat tightly around him to ward off the chill of the November rain. Until now, it had been a good day weather wise. He had taken advantage of the dry afternoon, and the fact that he had arrived more than an hour early for his appointment with the big man, by going into the park. It had been a long time since he had last been inside Central Park.

Arriving at just after 2.00 pm, he had leaned against the building on the south-east corner of Fifth Avenue and Sixty-third Street and glanced at his wrist-watch again. Patto always liked to be early for appointments; he liked to be early for everything. For this particular appointment – with the big man himself – he had made a point of coming extra early; to relax himself, and to feel and take in the atmosphere of the place and the people. After hesitating for a moment, he looked along 63rd Street at the blocks of brownstones and then walked across Fifth Avenue to the park side of the street and sat down on the slatted bench in front of the Central Park wall.

He had lived here once, in New York, for a whole year. Too darn hot in summer and too darn cold in winter, but he had sure had a good spring and fall. He had made some good... friends here. He paused in his thoughts for a while, reflecting on his past and his ardent memories of the city during that year. He loved the fall in New York. It was the best of the four seasons here. The heat of summer is gone, the foliage in Central Park turns from green to yellow to a brilliant red, schools start up, plays open on Broadway, the stores are building up for Christmas. Yep, he liked New York in the fall.

But winter was setting in now. November was probably not the best time to come to New York from the South-west; from Arizona. Well, he'd only be here for one more night. First they had told him it was to be Ireland, now it was London. O, hell! What does it matter where a man dies, Ireland or England? He was bored now. He rose from the bench and strolled down Fifth Avenue towards Grand Army Plaza. He still had more than an hour. He was going into the park. You needed to be fully relaxed when you met the big man, to keep your eyes and mind alert.

There was no doubt that Central Park made New York City a just-about-bearable place to live. For many people here, it was their only contact with nature. As Vicente Patto entered the park from Grand Army Plaza, he looked at the Pond to his left. This had always been his first memory of the park as a little boy, when his mother had brought him here. He had dreamed that he could be on a boat on the Pond and sail away to another world. He always thought of his mother here. How she had queued all night to buy him a teddy-bear with one eye. Then it had been the Central Park Zoo to the right, where there were all those animals... from different worlds. A quick glance; a quick chance to be in different worlds. They were restoring the zoo now, it was undergoing a fairly extensive restoration.

Patto followed the path to the Dairy, a kind of dolly-Gothic ranch building originally intended to provide milk for nursing mothers and now the park's visitors' center. The path to his left, westwards from the Dairy, skirted the Sheep Meadow past the Carousel to the Tavern on the Green, one of the city's most exclusive and expensive restaurants. Patto took the route to the north up the Mall, the park's most formal stretch, flanked by statues of Robert Burns and Walter Scott, to the Bandstand and beyond that to the terrace and sculptured birds and animals of the Bethesda Fountains. To the west and south-west of the Lake was Strawberry Fields, opposite the home of Yoko Ono in the Dakota Building on Central Park West. Patto headed the other way, east and north around the Lake. At the Loeb Boathouse, he hired a bicycle –three dollars an hour and deposit – and cycled down East Drive back towards the Dairy. Funny how you never forgot how to ride a bike; like being with a good woman, really. When this was all over.... He longed for the heat of Phoenix, and the girl there. Meanwhile, on the bike, cycling around Central Park, he was like a boy again.

Down by the Pond, realising that he was approaching the witching hour, he handed the bike to a youngster and told the kid to take it back to the Loeb Boathouse and keep the deposit. As he came out onto Grand Army Plaza, the rain started and continued as he walked up the park side of Fifth Avenue. As he reached 63rd Street, the rain turned to drizzle. He sauntered across Fifth Avenue onto 63rd Street and headed eastwards in the direction of Madison Avenue. The drizzle was letting up. By the time he was half way along the block on 63rd, it had subsided. He was outside the large house now, the venue for his meeting with the big man. It was 3.25 pm. He climbed up the brick stairs to the main entrance. Vicente Patto felt the hairs at the base of the back of his head bristle. It wasn't the wind. Everything was calm on that part of 63rd Street between Fifth and Madison. The door opened as he reached the top step.

Chapter Five

They brought the big man down in an elevator.

The interior of the large terraced house on 63rd Street was very much as Patto thought it would be. The entrance hall was like the foyer of an opera house. It reminded Patto of the lobby of the Hotel Moderne Palace in the Place de la Republique, Paris, France, where he had spent some good nights, and some bad ones. The ceilings of the hall were high, the main doors thick, and the sweeping staircase facing the entrance rose a majestic two stories. There were antique, gold-leaf framed mirrors on either side of the hallway, double doors with small mottled glass windows beside each mirror facing each other across the wide expanse of the foyer. Both sets of doors were wide open. Through the one to the right, Patto could see the furniture of a formal dining room, to the left the sofas and tables of the lounge. Expensive rugs lined the parquet floors of the hall, and thick pile carpets graced the living and dining rooms. It would have been a nice home for someone... if it had been a home.

Vicente Patto was not a poker player. He didn't see any point to gambling, and trusting to luck was for other people. But he could assume a poker face. As the doors of the elevator alongside the staircase opened, Patto was wearing his poker expression. He had a good idea what to expect; he didn't want to embarrass or to be embarrassed.

It was almost a year since he had seen the big man. Things had got worse. A slim, almost skinny Negro pushed the wheelchair out from the elevator. Its occupant, the big man, returned the south-westerner's fixed gaze. Once the big man had been like an ox, now he was wasted. But his mighty frame, though shrunken, still managed to completely fill the extra large wheelchair. But it was the head and face which made Patto gasp, the sound stifled before it left his lips. The head, which had been huge and gigantic, was now deflated, like a burst football or a rotten melon. Most of all the face – it was sunken and gaunt and distorted with pain. One fight too many. One bullet too many. No one but those closest to the big man was quite sure of the cause, but the effect was arthritis. The very severe arthritis in the base of the big man's spine... working its way up. One fight too many, one bullet too many. Once he had been the greatest, as Patto well knew – even remembered. Now he had to do his fighting – and killing – by proxy. But he was still the big man. You could see it in his eyes.

In the lounge, half-an-hour and two Glenmorangies later, with just the three of them present; the big man – still in his wheelchair, Patto, and the ever alert and serious, skinny Negro, the big man was instructing Patto on his assignment in England.

"How do you feel," asked the big man, "when you're doing a job like this?"

"I feel fine," Patto replied in a flat monotone. The lights from the chandelier highlighted his pretty-boy face. There was not a twitch or movement in his features as he said those three words. It was the look of the steely-cold eyes, empty of all guilt or compassion; the trim mouth; the icy smile, which conveyed the message. It was the look of a psychopathic killer who appeared to enjoy his work.

The big man, if he had not been the big man, would surely have shivered at the effect of that flat monotone coupled with the frightening cold look of confidence and satisfaction. But the big man knew how he felt. The big man had been through it. Maybe he too had enjoyed it.... Maybe. But, then, he had always been able to laugh afterwards.

But after their meeting, as Vicente Patto walked down the brick steps onto 63rd Street, the younger man felt the hackles again rising on his neck. This time they were accompanied by a tightening at the pit of his stomach. He had never expected an assignment like this one! Never even known an assignment like this one! Why had he been selected for it? There were better men than him. Not many, it was true, but for a job like this.... Why? O, hell! Tomorrow he would be in London Town. It was raining again as he walked westwards to Fifth Avenue. He pulled the collar of his raincoat up around his neck once more. The tingling sensation on his neck had departed, but the rain was wet and cold. He shuddered. It would probably be raining in London.

The big man waited until Patto had gone and then he turned to the skinny Negro. "Where is Marcias?"

"He was in Dublin. He's probably in Northern Ireland now."

"Get Marcias! We must get Marcias!"

"Yes, Mister Warne."

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Marcias was in Northern Ireland.

It is said there are two million members of the Blue Brigade scattered around the world. The British Government estimated afterwards that there had been twenty thousand of them in Ireland at the time of these events. They had underestimated. The British Establishment always underestimates the Blue Brigade. Probably because the Blue Brigade is so damn secretive in its operations.

Marcias, Chavez, Black John and their two Irish colleagues were now all in Northern Ireland. They had been joined by Ricardo Venez, whose small, almost

shrivelled frame and heavily lined and creased face belied the fact that he was one of the Blue Brigade's most competent killers. Now, however, he was acting as a staff officer for the Brigade's activities in Ireland. Age had caught up with Venez; it looked as if he would be spending his future behind a desk instead of a gun.

Ricardo Venez confirmed to Marcias that he had arranged for their men throughout Ireland to do their job on Saturday evening 14th November and on Sunday 15th November 1987. Their men would be ready, outside and inside every Catholic church, with their notebooks and mini cameras, for every Sunday Mass that weekend.

The Bishops of Ireland had prepared a statement to be read out by every priest in every Catholic church during every Sunday Mass for that weekend. "People must choose," the statement declared throughout Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. "There is no longer any room for romantic illusion." Four million Catholics listened as the document condemned those who had weapons, gave safe houses or helped IRA fugitives in any way. "The choice of all Catholics is clear. It is the choice between good and evil. It is a sin to support violent organisations." There were some people in those congregations in the churches and who were listening to the statement, if only for a very short time, who were far from being Catholics.

Father Sean Clancy had warned the IRA about the impending statement from the bishops. The same thing happened in several churches. As the priest started to read the statement, members of the IRA planted in the congregation stood up and walked out of the church in protest. In one church, an IRA man tried to read an IRA prepared statement as the priest read the bishops' statement. He was quickly and unceremoniously bundled out of the church by the genuine churchgoers. After receiving reports from the priests in these parishes, Cahal Daly, Bishop of Down and Connor, summed it up very well: "Those people who walked out of the churches during the statement, don't normally walk into churches. We've never seen them at Mass before."

What thoughts went through the mind of Father Sean Clancy as he read out the bishops' statement in his church that Sunday? But just as he had warned the IRA of the statement, Makepeace had been able to tell Marcias of the IRA's planned protests inside the churches.

Marcias, Chavez and Black John were in Belfast on Sunday, 15th November, when the priests read out the bishops' statement at every Mass. Marcias had his men present at every Mass. As the IRA men got up to make their protest and to walk out, their names were noted and they were secretly photographed by Blue Brigade men inside or outside the churches. Those men unknown to the Blue Brigade were followed home for identification. The Blue Brigade men were good at doing this sort of thing; they had been doing it for ten years in Ireland.

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Lisa Gunn from Hemel Hempstead was twenty-four, had beautiful pale blonde hair, soft blue eyes, a pretty rather cute face with a slightly turned-up nose, and the most luscious inviting lips. At five-foot-four, her figure was very attractive, though, perhaps, a little slim. She worried that her breasts may have been too small but they were firm and round, and her legs were shapely and long. Most of all, she had a wicked, teasing sparkle to her eyes, and those lips were very inviting. Combined with a very fashionable and chic sense of dress style, her bubbling and exciting personality made her highly sought after among the young, and not so young, men of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, the rest of the Home Counties, and North London.

The product of a happy middle-class home and a moderate university education, Lisa Gunn officially worked for a publisher in Bloomsbury. Unofficially, Lisa was deeply in love with a man with whom it was almost impossible to be in love. She tried to console herself with the thought that an interesting man is always difficult to live with.

Lisa Gunn boarded the Swissair flight to Zurich. She had received instructions from her publisher to go to Liechtenstein to compile background information for a book on Malbun, the skiing resort which had been visited by the Prince and Princess of Wales in Januaries 1983 and 1984. Her employers intended to publish a book on Malbun, but Lisa knew that it was really Marcias who was sending her to Liechtenstein. For the life of her, she couldn't understand why, but she did as ordered. No one argued with Marcias, not even Lisa Gunn.

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On Tuesday, 17th November 1987, just nine days after the bomb explosion, the Prince and Princess of Wales made a surprise visit to Enniskillen to meet the victims of the IRA massacre on Remembrance Sunday and the relatives of the dead. They visited the town's Erne Hospital and chatted informally with men, women and children still being treated nine days after the blast. One injured boy was given Prince Charles's autograph, while another injured boy received the autograph of Princess Diana.

The Royal couple met Gordon Wilson and his wife, the parents of the student nurse Marie, the youngest person killed in the outrage. The Prince and Princess also spoke with UDR soldiers and firemen who had helped in the rescue operation. Later, Gordon Wilson said: "Their visit has helped me enormously. Princess Diana is a really lovely girl." Marie's older sister, Julie Ann, added: "It was lovely just to know they cared. Hopefully, if it has hit the Royal Family, it will do some good."

The Prince and Princess of Wales then flew to R.A.F. Aldergrove in a military helicopter on their way home. Before they left Enniskillen, they went upon an impromptu walkabout. Donal O'Brien and Brendan O'Leary were watching from a nearby bar. O'Leary looked surprised and disappointed. "We didn't know they were coming here," he complained, his voice rising to a wailing pitch.

"No, they obviously didn't consider it necessary to advise us," Donal O'Brien smiled sarcastically. "After all, it was a surprise visit.... I can't think why."

"Look at the opportunity we've missed!" O'Leary was screaming in frustration.

"Ah, don't be stupid, Brendan. Look at all the security around. We couldn't have done it here now. Besides, these things take a lot more planning." Donal O'Brien's smile was now a thoughtful one. "And I have a better place in mind to do it. Father Sean gave me the idea this morning. But we will have to wait until January next year." O'Leary said something in reply, but O'Brien wasn't listening. His attention had been attracted by three men outside a café across the street. They were sitting directly opposite to O'Leary and himself. And they were unusual because one was a very handsome black man; you didn't see that many black men in Enniskillen. The second man was even more unusual, a Spanish looking type. Nothing strange or out of the ordinary about the third man of the trio. He was a man who looked as if he was half dead. A very slim, ashen faced man. He was smoking a cigar and he blew a smoke-ring up into the air, and as he did so, his eyes seemed to drift lazily down onto Donal O'Brien. The Irishman didn't like it; he didn't like anyone looking at him. He may have been mistaken, though. It was quite a distance across the street and he may have just imagined that the man looked at him briefly. O'Brien thought that he himself must be getting on edge a bit; maybe worrying a bit unduly about what had to be done. If he wasn't careful and didn't control himself more, he would be sweating like Father Sean. He didn't know the slim man across the street.

But the slim man knew Donal O'Brien. Although the Irishman was not aware of it, the two main adversaries were now facing each other in Enniskillen on this dull November day. Facing each other across the grey asphalt street; the man planning to kill the Prince of Wales and his young family, and the man who intended to stop him. And the slim man was aware of Donal O'Brien and his plan. Makepeace had told him.

The slim man would not fail; he could not fail. He took a final draw on the Dutch cigar and released the smoke slowly from his mouth, around his pointed tongue, upwards. This time the smoke-ring did not materialise. He put his hand to his chest. That pain was there again... that damn pain.

Chapter Six

Enniskillen: Sunday morning, 22nd November 1987. Weather: dry. Unannounced and amidst a huge security operation, the Prime Minister arrived at Enniskillen for this morning's Remembrance Service. Mrs. Thatcher was accompanied by the Northern Ireland Secretary, Tom King, as she laid a wreath at the town's war memorial. She later attended a service in Enniskillen's St. McCartans Church of Ireland Cathedral.

Donal O'Brien was nowhere near Enniskillen on that Sunday morning. Neither was Brendan O'Leary. If O'Leary had been present, he would, no doubt, have regretted another missed opportunity, despite the exceptional security cover. But Brendan O'Leary was not in Enniskillen that morning, but not because he could not face the service to honour the war dead and pay tribute to the victims of the IRA bomb blast. There was another reason for his absence. Apparently Brendan O'Leary had disappeared off the face of the earth.

And if Mrs. Thatcher had looked extra sombre and drawn when laying the wreath that morning, it was not entirely due to grief. She had slept very little the previous night....

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London, Downing Street, Saturday night, 21st November 1987. It had been a cloudy day in London. The night air in Downing Street was cold; dark shadows hung over the Cenotaph in nearby Whitehall. The atmosphere inside the Cabinet Room was no better.

The first reports had come from the Royal Ulster Constabulary. These had soon been confirmed by the Army in Northern Ireland. Tom King's own staff added to the diversion of conflicting information, questions and confusion. Then Mrs. Thatcher received an urgent call from the Irish Premier, Charles Haughey, demanding to know if this was the work of the British S.A.S. But it soon became clear, even in the Irish Republic, that this had happened on too large a scale for the S.A.S. A much larger organisation must be responsible.

The British Prime Minister was due in Northern Ireland the following morning for the Enniskillen Remembrance Service. Immediately following that, she had to fly to Paris for an important meeting with Premier Chirac. Something had to be done immediately about this unexpected and inexplicable series of very disturbing events in Northern Ireland; appalling events which had apparently spread down into the Irish Republic as well. She called a full cabinet meeting for eleven o'clock that night.

There were many disgruntled faces arriving in a dark and dull Downing Street that night, amidst hurried security cover. Her Majesty's ministers did not

appreciate being brought out on a cold Saturday night after all their labours of the week. Besides, very few of them were interested in Northern Ireland; that was Tom King's baby, and he was welcome to it. And what did the old bitch want at this hour of the night? What did she expect them to do? She sorted out everything else; let her sort out this as well, all by herself. Let her hold Tom King's hand for him and allow the rest of them to return to the bosoms of their families, or the warmth of their clubs, or the delights of their mistresses' beds. What was happening in Ireland anyway? All these shootings and kidnappings were not that unusual to warrant a midnight Cabinet meeting. True, though, the numerous reports of people disappearing or going missing were very strange. Weird, in fact. And Tom King did look very flustered. But, then, he was always blowing hot and cold about something.

The great woman, as usual, had immediately controlled the meeting. She suspected the involvement of the Blue Brigade and as a result of this, she had summoned to join them tonight an expert on that particular organisation. A Mr. Duffy would be joining them very soon. Douglas Hurd looked mildly perturbed. Not another bloody expert, he thought, they never knew what they were talking about. Big Willie Whitelaw was more concerned. If the Blue Brigade was involved and it was really it which was behind these events, then it would need more than an expert to deal with them. But he couldn't understand what, after all these years of avoiding Ireland, had suddenly made the Blue Brigade become involved in the problems there.

They never found the body of Brendan O'Leary; if indeed there was a body to find – he had simply disappeared... completely. But they found the body of Donal O'Brien, just outside Ballyshannon in County Donegal in the Irish Republic. Up until then the authorities on both sides of the border, in a desperate and belated attempt to minimise a general panic, had managed to curtail the effect of the press reports of the horrendous happenings in the Emerald Isle that weekend. With the pretence of it being in the interests of national security and it being necessary for the safety of the general public, a form of controlled censorship was imposed upon the press, television and radio by the establishment.

The discovery of the body of Donal O'Brien changed the situation dramatically and opened the media floodgates. 303 people killed, 24 known kidnappings, and... 1,782 people reported missing, unaccounted for. It was not just the finding of O'Brien's body which crowned the calamity. It was the manner in which he had been slain. Throughout all the years of sectarian horrors, degradation and murders in Ireland, no one had ever been killed in that dreadful fashion.

Inside a large brownstone on 63rd Street, when T. N. Warne, the big man in the wheelchair, heard about how the body had been butchered, he knew exactly who had killed Donal O'Brien. Years ago he had known a slim, young man with a cheeky smile. The slim man's smile may have long departed, but his personal method of killing remained. Only one man could have done it so finely and neatly,

could have slit O'Brien's throat from ear to ear so perfectly, using the traditional Mexican stiletto. The big man, T. N. Warne, knew that it was the slim man's trade-mark. He knew that Marcias had killed Donal O'Brien. He knew also the reason why he had done it; why Marcias had done it himself and shown his hand so clearly. Warne stroked the stubble on his wizened chin. It was almost as if Marcias wanted it known that he had killed Donal O'Brien, the highly protected top campaign planner of the Provos. It looked as if the IRA would find that there were new and different rules applying when doing battle with the Blue Brigade. It was a whole new ball game when you came under attack from Marcias's men.

The big man smiled and leaned back in his wheelchair. And he had sent Patto to London! Often it was difficult to know, in this dirty game, just exactly who was the hunter and who was the prey. But T. N. Warne had been around long enough to know that whoever may be the prey, he would be the hunter.

Chapter Seven

London: Sunday, 22nd November 1987. 12.05 am. The Cabinet Room, 10, Downing Street.

Mr. Duffy arrived, very briskly, and entered the great room, carrying with him a neatly rolled vivid blue umbrella and a slim tan-coloured executive case. Mr. Duffy was short and plump, his manner affable and confident. The centre of his head was bald, but crowned with a ring of tufted blond hair which gave him the appearance of a jovial, latter-day monk. Rather like those which keep appearing on Christmas cards, slightly inebriated, and clasp bottles of brandy or red wine, thought Mr. Lawson.

Mr. Duffy had no overcoat or raincoat, and he never wore a hat, except for the occasional deer-stalker (which he invariably lost) when visiting the grand-children in Hampshire. For his appearance before the midnight Cabinet meeting, he was wearing plain fawn cavalry-twill trousers and a green sports jacket. Despite his minimal hair, the shoulders of the green jacket were generously dusted with dandruff. The most prominent aspect of his attire, though, was his huge bow-tie, green with yellow spots, which ridiculed his small stature and gave the impression that he was about to launch off into flight.

Mr. Duffy smiled generally at the assembled meeting without looking at anyone in particular. He turned to the Prime Minister and nodded vaguely in her direction. She promptly commanded him to address them immediately with his information on the Blue Brigade.

Mr. Duffy had the manner of a man confident in the knowledge that he did not have to impress anyone but himself. Least of all did he have to impress this domineering female First Lord of the Treasury. He had not voted for her, anyway. Cabinet ministers, even prime ministers came and, fortunately, went; experts like himself tended to remain. Mr. Duffy was at peace with himself and with the world... his world. Whether the ministers appreciated, or believed, what he had to say, didn't really matter. He placed the effeminate blue brolly upon the big table and smiled at everyone and no-one. "My wife's. Couldn't find mine. Must have left the damn thing somewhere again. Now gentlemen... and ladies, I am an expert on the Blue Brigade, which means that I know very little about them. Most people know little or nothing about them. I know a little about them."

Cabinet eyes were drifting towards the large, fading face of the old, big grandfather clock. Those present who had taken an interest in the activities of the Blue Brigade before tonight's meeting, probably already knew what Mr. Duffy had to say. Those still not interested were now allowing their attention to wander to other more important matters on their minds; current and future directorships, property and share dealings, consultancy fees, Christmas parties and board meetings. The Prime Minister was bristling. Her lawyer training encouraged her

to interrupt this silly little man. She wanted to tell him to get on with it or shut up and go. But for once she was thwarted; every time she was about to speak, Mr. Duffy's dulcet tones grew louder and drowned any potential intrusion upon his discourse on one of his favourite subjects. He secretly admired the Arthurian life-style and never-say-die approach and methods of his topic.

Mr. Duffy picked up the vivid blue umbrella and rolled it absentmindedly in his hands. "The Blue Brigade is a world-wide anti-terrorist organisation – their leader is now confined to a wheelchair – they are an organisation which specialises in... well, what do they specialise in?..." Mr. Duffy replaced the umbrella on the table and took a sip of water from the glass on the same table. He must have swallowed the wrong way, for he gasped and gulped and spluttered and made choking sounds. He fumbled in various pockets and eventually produced a neatly folded handkerchief. When he shook it out, his audience could see that it was green with yellow spots. One or two of them smiled, one may even have sniggered. Noticing from the corner of his eye that the Prime Minister was once again about to speak, Mr. Duffy quickly coughed into the yellow spots and proceeded with his sermon. "We are not sure. All that we know is that when their name is mentioned, certain people disappear and are never seen again."

There was a controlled murmuring from the congregation. Mrs. Thatcher's eyes demanded silence. The murmuring immediately ceased. Mr. Duffy smiled as if to emphasise his next few words. "Prominent members of the IRA, Loyalist extremists who are killers.... Mafia leaders, Moslem terrorists, Libyan and Syrian bombers and hijackers who thought that they were safe inside French jails, Red Brigade members, even dangerous key communist personnel in the heart of Russia, drug barons, evasive murderers – none are immune from the quiet sword of death administered by the Blue Brigade." Mr. Duffy paused. "But never the Corsican Union."

"Why not?" It was Lord Young, out of pure curiosity.

The expression upon Mr. Duffy's face indicated that he apparently considered that to be a silly question. He was there to give facts, not to provide reasons. "I don't know," he said.

"Please do get on with it, Mr. Duffyyy..." Mrs. Thatcher's mournful voice rose to the heavens.

Mr. Duffy looked at the Prime Minister with condescending surprise. "That's it, eh... er... Prime Ministerrr," he smiled smugly. "Apart from the obvious fact that Marcias is the deputy leader of the Blue Brigade.... I mentioned that their leader was now confined to a wheelchair."

"Marcias!" The great woman almost stammered. "I thought he was dead years ago."

“So have a lot of other people,” Mr Duffy looked mildly amused. “I think it’s all very convenient for him to have people believe that sometimes. He must have died a thousand deaths, but I can assure you that he is still alive. He’s had more obituaries than... well I was going to say... than the Gabors and Joan Collins have had husbands. He keeps coming back from death, like the characters in Dallas.”

“I don’t think we’re really interested in the marital status of ancient actresses, thank you Mr. Duffy, and I can assure you from personal experience – my son happens to be there – that the real Dallas is a lot different to the one portrayed in that programme; I went down there after the Commonwealth Conference in Canada this year. I think one can learn a lot more...” the great woman looked around at her assembled ministers, “from the ‘Yes, Prime Minister’ programme.” There was subdued laughter from the congregation. “I know that some of my colleagues have, Mr. Duffy.” Faint, polite laughter.

Mr. Duffy disdainfully ignored what he considered to be the Prime Minister’s unnecessary interruption. Let the little girl have her childish fun. There were more important matters on hand. The little man continued as if there had been no intrusion. “And I understand that Marcias is in Ireland now.”

Tom King was looking flustered, his face its usual reddish pink. He was still trying to grasp all the implications for his beleaguered ministry. “All these killings and disappearances... who are the Blue Brigade?” King demanded irritably.

“I thought that Mr. Duffy had just explained that.”

King recognised the voice but chose to ignore the speaker. He didn’t bother to look at his colleague as he brushed aside the comment and continued. “The merest of background info. No details on numbers, who leads and commands them, where they come from, where they are going to. What financial backing they have. Who backs them? What is their armament and capability? How do we deal with them? How does the law deal with them? How have other countries dealt with them? How do we drive them out of Ireland? We have enough trouble with the IRA.”

“They come mainly from the Americas,” Mr. Duffy explained patiently. “The South-western states of the USA, and various South American countries, including Mexico. At one time they were financed by anti-communist organisations, countries, and international corporations, maybe their own countries even. They are autonomous and indestructible, more so than many countries.”

“I don’t think we can deal with them,” big Willie Whitelaw advised. “I don’t think we are able to drive them out of Ireland.”

"I'm not sure if we should want to," someone suggested. "Let them get on with destroying the IRA if they want to."

"That is not the question," The Prime Minister asserted firmly. "It is a question of law and order, and sovereignty. The Blue Brigade has no right to be in Northern Ireland. They must be dealt with by the full force of the law."

"I don't think we can," Willie repeated his view.

"Are you suggesting, Prime Minister, that we should protect, or the law should protect the IRA from the Blue Brigade?" It was a fresh voice. "The IRA have no right to be in Northern Ireland either, but they are, and have been for a long time."

The Prime Minister was annoyed. She was angry and showed it. "I'm suggesting nothing. I'm simply reminding you, gentlemen, that we have a duty to maintain law and order and to uphold our sovereignty in the province...."

"We've not been doing it very well up to now," the disgruntled minister mumbled, but he was careful to ensure that Mrs. Thatcher did not hear his words.

".... And not delegate our authority and responsibility to some outside force... to some band of cut-throat mercenaries."

A new voice seized its opportunity to gratify itself somewhat with the great woman. "In a law abiding democracy, you can't have dog eat dog, or an eye for an eye. The end cannot justify the means. If the Blue Brigade has committed crimes, murders in Northern Ireland, it must be pursued by the law and its members brought to book for it...."

"Ah, ah." "Aye." "Yes, yes." "Here, here." "Most certainly." "Of course, quite right."

".... After all, this Marcias fellow is nothing but a common, ordinary, run of the mill, international killer."

"You are mistaken. Marcias is no ordinary, run of the mill, international killer. He is simply the best. Far from common." For the first time that night, Mr. Duffy showed his true authority. His voice was compelling and determined.

"No, you are right, Mr. Duffy," the great woman pronounced. Mr. Duffy did not need her to tell him that.

"But it sounds as if Mr. Duffy admires the damn Marcias."

"I respect him," the dulcet tones announced.

“Now, now, gentlemen, I have already said that Mr. Duffy is right. It seems that we too will have to respect Mr. Marcias... until we hang him.”

The affable Mr. Duffy saw no point in remaining any longer. He dismissed himself from this unusual meeting of the Cabinet. He turned to the Prime Minister and told her, “I have another meeting now. G’night, Prime Minister. G’night, gentlemen.” He departed immediately, carrying his slim, tan-coloured executive case which had remained unopened. Shortly afterwards he returned to collect the vivid blue umbrella which he had left on the big table. The old grandfather clock struck the half-hour after one o’clock as he shut the Cabinet Room door behind him. One could only conjecture as to what further meeting he could have had at that time of the night.

As Mr. Duffy descended the steps from Downing Street, he thought he detected a slight movement, a slim figure perhaps, in the shadows and bushes by the lake in St. James’s Park. He halted his brisk strides and peered into the November night-time murkiness of the park. He had them on his brain. It was causing his imagination to play with him. If there was anything there, it was probably a bird or something. He shook his small shoulders, clenched the vivid blue umbrella a little tighter, and proceeded on his way down Horse Guards, past the Foreign Office and King Charles Street and onto Birdcage Walk. As he headed briskly along Birdcage Walk towards Buckingham Palace, a belated shiver racked through all his body.

After the departure of Mr. Duffy, the Cabinet discussed other affairs relating to Ireland. Some of the ministers present already knew about these matters, others were hearing of them for the first time. At dawn on Monday, just over twenty-four hours away, the Irish Republic, using a force of some seven thousand soldiers and police, would launch the biggest search for IRA arms ever mounted in Eire. The operation, which would be officially announced on Monday – after it had started – by Dublin’s Justice Minister, Gerry Collins, would be supported by a similar search in Northern Ireland. The search was expected to last for about a week and had been sanctioned a week before after top talks between the two countries in Dublin. The security swoop had been made necessary following reports of four shiploads of arms having arrived in the Republic for a terrorist offensive.

After this arms swoop topic had been dealt with, one of the ministers raised the subject of Ken Livingstone’s comments on the IRA, reported extensively the previous Monday. The minister who had now referred to this issue, had some written notes in front of him. After glancing up at the Prime Minister and some of his colleagues, he read aloud from his prepared notes. “The left-wing Labour MP Ken Livingstone believes the IRA’s campaign of violence will eventually win the day in Ulster... he said that, Prime Minister, after the atrocity in Enniskillen had been committed. And he’s even been criticised by the Labour leadership, before this statement, for his views on the Province. But look what he is saying now,

and I quote the man: 'I don't think anybody seriously believes the IRA will not eventually get their own way.' And he even likened the situation in Northern Ireland to Aden, Cyprus, and Kenya. They weren't provinces, after all."

"Yes," smiled Tom King, "but you will note that a Labour spokesman was quick to announce that Mr. Livingstone speaks only for himself."

"Hear, hear." "Yes, quite so." "But of course. They would have to."

"Some truth in what he says, though." It was the disgruntled minister, speaking a little louder this time.

"What do you mean by that, Horace?" the Prime Minister demanded sharply.

"Aden, Cyprus and Kenya," the minister swiftly replied. "I mean that after we sent the fair quota of young National Service boys there to be slaughtered, we gave the colonies up to the terrorists who had killed them."

"I can assure you, Horace, that we will not be giving up Northern Ireland. And our party was responsible for doing away with National Service. We have a professional army now, trained and equipped to deal with terrorists."

"That's what the previous governments said, Prime Minister, about not giving up Aden, Cyprus and Kenya, I mean. It's more than likely that a future Labour government will give up Northern Ireland."

"There won't be a future Labour government, Horace," Mrs. Thatcher responded abruptly. "Certainly not during our life-times."

"Mm, but it's possible that a more... er...." the minister considered his next word carefully. He reluctantly decided against the use of 'wet', 'moderate' or 'left-wing' and settled instead for: "... a different shade of Conservative government may decide to...."

"Horace! There won't be another shade of Conservative government. Not during my life-time."

There was some applause and laughter. Tom King was still smiling; but the Northern Ireland Secretary was not necessarily amused at the one-sided contest which had just taken place. He was still thinking about all the media publicity which had been attracted by Ken Livingstone's statement on the previous Monday. It had helped to minimise the attention given to the report the same day about his own activities on Northern Ireland. That report had read:

'Northern Ireland Secretary Tom King and Irish government ministers have started to hammer out in Dublin a new set of measures to combat IRA terrorism.'

But secrecy surrounded the outcome of top-level talks with Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey and Foreign Minister Brian Lenihan. King is thought to have won a pledge that Dublin will meet the December 1st deadline for ratifying a new terrorist extradition treaty with Britain. A statement said talks were devoted 'exclusively to security matters' and that 'both sides agreed on the need for a very positive response.'

It was Tom King's desire that the IRA would be lulled into thinking that the talks had merely dealt with the old subjects of extradition and general co-operation on security. At dawn tomorrow, Monday 23rd November 1987, a week after the initial reports on the talks had been released, the IRA would get the message... the real message, full and true. They would soon feel the impact of the positive response agreed by the governments on both sides of the Irish border. And the IRA would discover that it had something else to worry about... other than the wretched Blue Brigade and that man Marcias.

Tom King would have them in his sights....

Chapter Eight

By one of the mysterious coincidences so prevalent in life and in the destinies of nations, at about the same time that Mrs Thatcher was concluding the emergency meeting of the Cabinet in Downing Street and she and Tom King were preparing to catch some sleep before their visit to Enniskillen later that Sunday morning for the rearranged Remembrance service, another emergency meeting was just starting near the small town of Ballyshannon. The atmosphere at this particular meeting was far more sombre; a vivid sense of fear and the spirit of death prevailed.

This meeting commenced with just three men present; the school teacher, the librarian and the doctor. The cause of this emergency meeting of the top three leaders of the Provos, the anonymous men, was the wave of destruction – deaths, kidnappings, disappearances – inflicted upon the members of the IRA, and especially those inflicted upon the members of the Provos... in particular the vicious killing of Donal O'Brien and the sudden disappearance of some of their top men. When the three men – amidst no little aura of panic – arrived at their incredible decision, they summoned two of their top men, Tomas O'Reilly and Seamus O'Hara, whose co-operation and services they would need.

When men live in the shadow of death, witnessing it or dispensing it, they have an extra sense which immediately recognises its grim presence. It was this way that night with O'Reilly, who had witnessed much death, and O'Hara, who had dispensed even more. As they entered the meeting room, with the three top men waiting for them there, O'Reilly and O'Hara could both smell the aroma of death and destruction inside that place. Involuntarily, they both hesitated before entering, their nostrils absorbing the mortuary atmosphere and, then realising that the ghost of death was not awaiting them, they continued in their tracks, into the place of doom, into the room of death.

Within those walls, death sentences would be passed that night. The three men; the school teacher, the librarian and the doctor, would be the condemning judges; they would assign O'Reilly to organise the executions and O'Hara to be the grand executioner. Both men had done it before, and proved their competence and reliability. But first the trial, with the verdict already decided.

The school teacher checked the roll list with Tomas O'Reilly. The roll list of the top twenty Provos immediately under the authority of the supreme trio. The Blue Brigade had struck well. Of the twenty, the following were known to be dead – killed by the men of Marcias:- Donal O'Brien, the quiet planner, Senan Nally, the fanatic, Brendan O'Sullivan, Kevin Monaghan, the enthusiastic pale-faced young man with much blood on his white hands, "Killer" O'Keeffe, the dedicated "Spits" O'Rourke... all were gone. Their bodies had been found, dumped like garbage, across the beautiful Donegal countryside. Five had been shot; cleanly, neatly, professionally, with one bullet to the head or heart. The other one, Donal O'Brien,

had been trimly and skilfully butchered, his throat slit immaculately from ear to ear, in the manner reserved by the Blue Brigade for those they loved to kill.

Missing, presumed taken by the Blue Brigade, but to where and for what purpose could only be speculated upon, were:- old Joe Cahill himself, Brendan O'Leary, the extreme anti-monarchist, the crafty Danny Gliddon, and the tall upright Dermot Kennedy.

Apart from Tomas O'Reilly, their titular head, and Seamus O'Hara, their general, that left Patrick O'Hare, the treasurer, Conleth Flynn, the arms purchasing officer, Eugene Duggan, the man with the too thoughtful conscience, the beautiful and deceptively innocent-looking Bridget O'Toole, the friendly Kieran O'Shea, and the ever aggressive Garvan O'Dowd... all to be killed, for that would surely be the verdict and sentence. And then there was Father Sean Clancy, and the ever silent Callistus Murphy.

The school teacher addressed Tomas O'Reilly. "To destroy the IRA, an enemy would need to know the identities of the top leaders of the Provos. If they were to destroy the IRA, they would have to destroy we three, myself and my two colleagues. Only twenty people know our identities; even the other wings of the IRA believe that you are the true head of the Provos. Only twenty people. Six are dead. Four are missing. They too may be dead; it may be just a question of finding their bodies, but we suspect they are still alive and are prisoners, somewhere, of the Blue Brigade. They may still be in Ireland, they may have been taken somewhere else; we may never know. They may be persuaded to reveal our identities, if they know them; if they indeed know who we are. We doubt very much if they know our identities. We have always taken pains to ensure that only yourself, Seamus here, Donal O'Brien and Callistus Murphy knew of our identities. The other day, Father Sean Clancy was added to that group. Now Donal is dead, and the method of his killing would seem to make sure that he won't be able to speak even as a ghost."

The school teacher thought for a few moments before continuing. He had not liked the way in which Donal O'Brien had been slain. But there were more important matters now. The other four men in the room had remained silent, O'Reilly and O'Hara standing perfectly still, poised for whatever might come. The school teacher continued. "The four missing men may be persuaded to reveal our identities, if they know them. Joe Cahill has kept quiet before; the other three... we do not know how they would stand up to persuasion. We believe that O'Leary and Gliddon would be more likely to crack before Dermot Kennedy. But... we don't know, and there is nothing we can do about it."

"No," O'Reilly agreed.

The school teacher leaned forward in his chair and looked more intently at Tomas O'Reilly. "But there is something we can do about the others... to make

sure that they do not talk... if they should happen to disappear into the hands of the Blue Brigade. You see, until your last meeting when you announced that you had to refer the decision to assassinate Prince Charles and his brood up to us for confirmation, most of the people under you did not know of our existence – our position- let alone our identities. Now we must rectify that and ensure that they do not have to reveal the existence of our position to the Blue Brigade. Our people, our top people, must not talk.”

“All of them?” O'Reilly asked the question, without a trace of emotion and with minimal interest, as if it was a polite enquiry to ascertain whether the school teacher took cream in his coffee.

“Start with Paddy O'Hare, Tomas. We have already taken steps to relieve him of the bulk of our funds... on the pretence, soon to be true, that we now require the money as half payment for the hire of the contract killers to be employed on the liquidation of the Prince of Wales and his family. Then dispose of Con Flynn... now that we have made all the arrangements that we can at present in regards to arms procurement, Conleth is now dispensable. And Eugene Duggan, Bridget O'Toole, Kieran O'Shea and Garvan O'Dowd have never been entirely indispensable. They will have died for their country, heroic volunteers of the Provisional IRA... martyrs, we could say. One day they may have streets named after them.”

Tomas O'Reilly nodded his acceptance of his orders. Then he turned to the executioner, Seamus O'Hara. “You will need help in disposing of six. Do O'Hare, Flynn and O'Toole yourself, and have Callistus Murphy do Duggan, O'Shea and O'Dowd. You know what to do afterwards.”

O'Reilly turned back to the school teacher. “And Father Clancy?”

“We want to speak to you about Father Clancy, Tomas.” The school teacher coughed twice. “You can carry on now, Seamus... with your duty.”

The door closed quietly behind Seamus O'Hara; the messenger of death and destruction ventured out into the dark night.

The school teacher motioned to Tomas O'Reilly to collect a chair for himself and to sit down. The school teacher leaned back in his own chair, but his voice and his eyes were still very intense as he resumed speaking to O'Reilly. “We are of the opinion that the Blue Brigade would not kill a priest, no matter what they thought of him; we don't think they will kill Father Clancy. This apparent clerical immunity of his makes him more of an asset to us. Nor do we consider that they will take him prisoner. We believe that he would not talk and we further believe that they would not attempt to make him talk. It appears that the Blue Brigade holds high ideals about the sanctity of the confessional.”

The school teacher fussily rearranged and straightened the inevitable ruler on his table. "In regard to our confidence in Father Clancy's ability to maintain his silence..." the teacher permitted himself the luxury of a sickly sweet smile. "We feel that, in this aspect, Father Clancy is in a similar category to yourself and Seamus O'Hara. And, as with yourself and O'Hara, we believe that Father Clancy is of sufficient importance and use to the Provisional IRA and ourselves to warrant keeping him alive. Firstly, he has a great influence with the people... and to have a priest on our side is comforting and reassuring to those of our volunteers who still subscribe to religious convictions... or superstitions. Secondly, he is a valuable source of information to us. And...." The school teacher leaned forward again, perhaps to emphasise the gravity of this point. "Thirdly, right now, he is the only person alive who knows the full conception of Donal O'Brien's plan to assassinate the Prince and Princess of Wales and their two children. Apparently, the priest was able to supply some valuable information to O'Brien and this provided or became the main basis of O'Brien's plan to kill the royals. O'Brien was killed before he was able to inform us of this."

The school teacher slowly leaned back in his chair again and glanced sideways at the librarian and the doctor. Looking back again at O'Reilly, who had not taken his eyes off him, he placed his two hands together, joining them at the fingertips and taking care to match each fingertip exactly in line. "We want you to bring Father Sean Clancy here to us now."

As Tomas O'Reilly exited from the old building on the outskirts of Ballyshannon in County Donegal, the time was approaching four o'clock in the morning. Further up the country lane he could hear the sound of two cats fighting. Everyone and everything was fighting in Ireland today. It seemed to be their way of life... death and destruction... fuelled by Irish tempers and Irish patriotism... and the Irish love of a fight.... There had to be someone to fight.... They were fighting each other whilst still engaged upon driving out the English.

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The persistent loud banging on his front door soon woke Father Clancy from his slumbers. Automatically he reached for his gun and then remembered he no longer had one. These days he still placed his trust and safety in the hands of a higher Authority. The priest flung himself from his bed, knowing from much experience that it was the only sure way to force himself to get up from a warm bed in the early hours of the morning. Instinctively, he put on his trousers, jacket and coat rather than his dressing gown. Calls at his door during the night invariably meant that he would be going out... to administer the last rites or to baptise a newly born babe in danger of death. He grabbed the case containing his miniature altar.

Father Clancy was only mildly surprised to find that it was Tomas O'Reilly on his doorstep. The Provos worked at all hours of the day and night, and came visiting

at strange times. This early morning call was not a visit, however, it was more in the nature of a summons. At first Father Clancy thought that one of their missing men had been found injured or dying and was in need of a priest. He became more alert, thrusting the lingering effects of sleep from his mind and body, when O'Reilly delivered his message.

"Th' big t'ree want tuh see yer now, Farther. Will yer come wit' me, Farther." It was not a question, it was an order. The priest left his sacred case in his hallway and followed the other man to his car.

They drove to the other side of Ballyshannon and entered the grim, old building, once a poor farmhouse, on the outskirts of the town. O'Reilly led the priest up some creaking stairs to the room where the three men were waiting for them. "Good evening, Father Clancy," the school teacher smiled, "or should I say good morning? Thank you for coming, Father, and we are sorry to have brought you out from your bed at this unearthly hour, but we have some important and urgent matters in which we need your guidance."

Little point in thanking him for coming, when he had really had no choice in the matter, thought the priest, and he doubted if they were at all sorry for disturbing his sleep. "Don't worry about the hour," Father Clancy assured them. "I'm used tuh being called out at all times. Now what important and urgent matters could I possibly guide yer upon? Though yer welcome tuh any help I kin give yer."

There were five mugs of hot, fresh coffee on the table. Tomas O'Reilly and Father Clancy sat down directly opposite to the other three, and the five of them formed an intimate, conspiratorial group around the steaming brew, like witches gathered round a boiling cauldron, before each man grabbed a mug to himself.

"'Tis the matter of Donal O'Brien's – may he rest in peace – plan to assassinate the Prince of Wales and his wife and children, Father," the librarian explained. "We were wondering... no, we understand that you were a party to his plan... that you may actually have provided him with the information which supplied the idea for the method... and maybe the place... of the assassination."

"That's true, gentlemen, very true." The priest relaxed and allowed himself to sit back in his chair and sip his coffee. The sweat, which for a while had threatened him again, had cooled and evaporated. He slowly eyed each of the four men in turn, finally returning not to the librarian but to the teacher. "I know for certain that in January, for a week – and I have the exact dates – the Prince and Princess of Wales and their two children will be holidaying in Liechtenstein...."

"Liechtenstein?"

"Liechtenstein?"

"Yes, Liechtenstein, gentlemen, I kin t'ink o' no better place tuh kill Prince Charles and Princess Diana than on the wide open white ski slopes above Malbun. An' I'm sure we can accommodate the little princes ther' somewhere too. Long range shooters, o' course. Now to give you, or to remind yer o' th' background.... is ther' anymore o' this excellent swill, whateve' it may be?..."

The school teacher nodded to O'Reilly who rose from his chair and left the room to brew more coffee. At that moment, the priest could have demanded, and received, almost anything. He relaxed even further into the reaches of his chair. He would take his time and explain it all slowly, as he wished. They would just have to listen, patiently, as he told it his way. He held the floor now, he could dictate the pace. He was going to make sure they got it all exactly right, in every detail, exactly as he wanted it. It was going to be done entirely his way. He waited until the fresh coffee arrived and then he commenced.

"I myself have visited Liechtenstein a few times. 'Tis a beautiful modern fairytale land of a principality, lovely in summer and delightful in winter. I stayed halfway up the mountains at Triesenberg, a charming little village, in a small hotel... the Hotel Martha Buhler. Martha Buhler was the first person tuh ever represent Liechtenstein in the Olympics, as a skier o' course, a downhiller, before Wenzel an' the bearded Frommelt came onto th' slalom runs. Her husband Gerard is Austrian. Ther' are sev'ral Austrians married to Liechtensteiners and livin' in th' principality."

The school teacher was aware that Father Clancy's rich strong brogue had mellowed somewhat as he spoke about the places and people he had obviously been very fond of. It was as if the priest had been transported to another world... perhaps like the bilocation mentioned by the religious writers. And the school teacher was prepared to allow Father Clancy to indulge himself in a little prolonged rhetoric as he warmed up to telling them of the assassination plan he had conceived with the late Donal O'Brien. The school teacher had learnt much about life and death and people by listening patiently to the words of reasonably intelligent persons. And priests, whatever their idiosyncrasies, were no fools. And right now, this particular priest held the key to what could be the Provos' greatest ever achievement. The sudden demise of the first, second and third in succession to the throne of England. Yes, the school teacher would listen patiently to what this wretched cleric had to say, with just one or two interruptions.

"You ski yourself, Father Clancy? You appear to love the atmosphere of the slopes." The priest's love and knowledge of the slopes of Liechtenstein may be used to their advantage.

"Yes, I do, though my increasing weight is becoming a great disadvantage these last few years."

"Please continue with you main theme, Father. I am sorry to have interrupted you."

"Okay. Now where was I? Ah, yes, the hotel. Th' Martha Buhler is right opposite to th' church in Triesenberg. A lovely large church with stained-glass windows depicting th' four evangelists. A window for each o' them. And in the cemetery alongside th' church, photographs o' those buried ther' are placed upon their tombstones. Very movin', tuh be sure."

"Down in Vaduz, th' capital, after you enter the church up some steps, immediately inside the entrance doors, on one side ther' is a small statue o' St. Jude Thaddaeus and on th' o'her side a similarly small statue o' St. Anthony o' Padua. Just above Vaduz, just before yuh come to th' Prince's schloss on th' road up tuh Triesenberg, is one o' th' best hotels in Europe, th' Hotel Park Sonnenhof. Whilst up in Malbun, wher' we'll be killing' th' English prince, ther' is a good hotel called th' Montana."

"I was in Liechtenstein in th' summer o' 1981. I went into a restaurant up in Malbun and, when they thought that I was British, they invited me into their kitchen tuh watch th' weddin' o' Prince Charles an' Lady Diana on their television. Later I went up in a ski-lift chair tuh a mountain peak. Ther' was a café perched up ther'; again a television. I watched the happy newly-weds a wavin' from th' balcony of Buck House. 'Twas a great sight wit' all th' crowds a cheerin' an' a climbin' around th' Victoria Memorial."

"Thet wus in July 1981, I be thinkin'. Now in January 1983 an' agin in January 1984, th' Prince an' Princess o' Wales were ski-ing in Liechtenstein up above Malbun. Before he wus married, th' Prince hisself used to ski at Klosters, further south-east, as it is, in Switzerland. But th' Prince Charles an' his lovely wife are now very friendly wit' th' Prince's family in Liechtenstein. My good contacts in Liechtenstein have confirmed thet Charles an' Diana will be stayin' at th' royal castle ther' from January th' 10th tuh January th' 17th o' 1988. Thet is wher' we will assassinate them, on those beautiful white slopes above Malbun." The priest grinned broadly and raised his head slightly so that his powerful magnetic eyes bore deeply into those of the school teacher. "You have the three hit men all arranged?" he demanded sharply.

"Yes, Father, we do. Our agent Ben Fenton is meeting them in London." The school teacher stared back at the priest; he really wanted to avert his eyes from the cleric's powerful, penetrating gaze, but found that he couldn't. His own eyes seemed to be magnetised, mesmerised, locked in by those of the priest. It was at moments like this that the school teacher feared that Father Clancy could read his innermost thoughts and plans, and the dark secrets which dwelt in his heart. He quickly regained his composure and, still staring back at the priest, albeit with controlled effort, he continued with his reply, still subjected to that scrutinising

focus. "In fact," he heard himself say, "I understand that he has met one of them in London already. There are two Americans and one Briton...."

"Good. Two Americans and a Briton? Yes, that is good. 'Tis important not tuh have any Irishmen involved. An' all t'ree are very experienced?"

"They're the best, Father."

"Thet's good."

"Father Clancy, seeing that you are so familiar with the terrain of Liechtenstein, we want you to meet with the contract killers in London and then go to Liechtenstein."

The librarian now spoke. "We want you to be in Liechtenstein, Father, to check everything before the assassins arrive there and to make any necessary preparations or adjustments for them."

"Okay, gentlemen, if that is what yuh want. How long d'yer expect me tuh be away?"

"Two weeks.... In January," said the school teacher.

"I will have tuh obtain my bishop's permission, then, fur leave o' absence."

"Yes, of course, Father. Although... should he fail to co-operate... well..." The school teacher opened his hands and arms wide in an expansive gesture of the inevitable, "we would have to arrange for him to retire before he reaches the obligatory age of seventy."

"Yes," the librarian confirmed. "You see, Father Clancy, we believe that it is imperative that you are on the spot to oversee both the preparations and the event."

"Yes, I kin prepare details of the best positions from which tuh fire... and the timings. It should be very interestin'... an' rewardin'."

"You have such a sweet perception, Father." It was the doctor speaking now, for the first time. The fact that he spoke at all surprised the priest. All three of these men sounded identical, and spoke the same language, when they were discussing this intended assassination.

The priest leaned forward again, very slow and deliberate in his economic movements. "Now, gentlemen, this is the schedule of the assassination plan...."

The school teacher eyed the priest again, discreetly. Not for the first time did he feel the chill touch advancing down his body, as he watched and listened to the cleric; a dreaded sensation like a scorpion creeping down his exposed spine. The black garb of the priest suddenly became the dark, grim cloak of the executioner. There was something deeply menacing about Father Clancy, the school teacher thought. He wished he'd had him killed with the others, but they needed him, needed him so they could kill the Prince of Wales. He, the school teacher, needed him, to know his plans to kill the Prince of Wales. After that though, well after that, there would simply be another job for Seamus O'Hara.

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A few hours later on that same fateful day, Sunday 22nd November 1987, when Marcias was alone with Chavez and Black John, the slim, sickly looking man turned to his companions as the three of them sat in a small office adjoining the premises of the Catholic Book Company in Newry. "Makepeace has just confirmed. The hit on the Wales will be in Liechtenstein between January 10 and January 17. Three hit men; two yanks, one limey."

Black John smiled. "Nice to have it confirmed," he said.

"We'll take out the hit men," Marcias explained, permitting himself the luxury of a mild grin. He lit his Dutch cigar and this time he managed two neat, distinct smoke-rings. "But that won't be the only surprise we'll have for the amateurs of the Provisional IRA." His grin had changed to a sneer, a most vicious sneer. Marcias hated half-baked amateurs. He hated the Provos. Be careful, boy, he thought, hatred can be unprofessional, but it's a helluva incentive and inspiration.

After the cigar was finished and he had stubbed it out in the large glass ash-tray, Marcias looked earnestly at his two favourite companions. "Black John," he said, "your colour may be a disadvantage to us here in Ireland. Makes you stand out too much, maybe makes you a bit more unusual to watchful eyes. I want you to go to London instead. Stay at the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch."

X X X X X

In a large brownstone on East 63rd Street, not far from Fifth Avenue and Central Park, T. N. Warne sat drinking real Kentucky Bourbon on the rocks with three of his closest colleagues. In addition to the slim elegant Negro who pushed his wheelchair and apparently acted as his valet and guardian, there was a six-foot, very average looking guy, neatly dressed but plain, and a huge giant of a man who looked anything but ordinary and whose casual clothing epitomised his entire approach to life. The smaller man was slim and loose, amiable with a quiet disposition but very observant; he had carefully combed light brown hair. In contrast, his friend and constant companion was tall, wide and as handsome as a grizzly bear from Montana or Wyoming, six foot six of power and vitality crowned

by an untidy shock of rich curly brown hair. His head was massive and his vast face, reminiscent of the Rockies from the air, was forever breaking into ever ready, broadly expansive and naturally happy enormous grins.

The two men made a competently complementary and contrasting duo which had served T. N. Warne well and loyally over the years; the quietly contemplative and intuitive working with the jovial, no-nonsense, fighting extrovert. A strange and unique team which supported each other completely. The smaller man, if such a comparative adjective can be applied to a six footer, was Al Dempsey. The grizzly bear was Ben Brogan.

Al Dempsey was the first to finish his drink. He stood up from the long ornate sofa and walked slowly over to the big, old fireplace. Reaching up to the mantelpiece, he picked up a small carved stone statuette of a fox hunting its prey. After fondling it for a while, in a meditative sort of way, he replaced it on the shelf and turned to face his colleagues. "The hit on the Prince of Wales and his family is scheduled to take place at Liechtenstein, on the ski slopes above Malbun, on between January 10 and 17."

Where is Vicente Patto now?" T. N. Warne asked quietly.

In London... at the Cumberland Hotel in Marble Arch. He has located Benny Fenton," Al Dempsey replied.

"And Marcias? Where is he?"

"In Newry... in Northern Ireland... very near to the border with Southern Ireland. He has Chavez with him, but Black John has gone to London... and is staying at the Cumberland Hotel. And Lisa Gunn... Marcias's girl... the one who works for a publisher in Bloomsbury... in London... has gone to Liechtenstein. She is staying at the Hotel Martha Buhler at Triesenberg. That's halfway up the mountains; it's halfway between Vaduz and Malbun."

"Mm. All pretty good for the hotel trade," T. N. Warne murmured, as he stared speculatively into his Bourbon on the rocks.

X X X X X

As the winter dawn advanced hesitantly upon the Irish countryside on that same morning, Sunday 22nd November 1987, Seamus O'Hara and Callistus Murphy were travelling, independently of each other, southwards down through the Republic. Their six targets had returned to their own counties, all in the Republic, after the meeting in Ballyshannon, County Donegal. At dawn, in County Kilkenny, O'Hara had made his first kill; Paddy O'Hare, the cousin of the notorious Border Fox, had died quickly and cleanly, a single bullet to the brain. Seamus O'Hara and Callistus Murphy had known exactly where to find their victims and, with

silencers fitted on their pistols, they had despatched them quietly and quickly, each with a single bullet to the temple, before their victims' partners, some sleeping alongside them, had known what was happening.

The brutal truth had stabbed home to Maureen Flynn when she awoke an hour later to sleepily wonder what was the sticky substance oozing onto the sheets beside her.

"Con... what is it, darling? Con??.... Con?! Con!!!...."

The killers had gone before the families in the households had discovered that their husbands and fathers or sons had been murdered in their beds. All except one.

Hearing a rumpus in the hallway outside their bungalow bedroom, Declan and Margaret O'Toole came out to find the cause. In a few frozen moments of horror, they saw their murdered daughter Bridget slumped on the floor, a bloody hole in her temple. Then there were two quiet thumping sounds, one almost upon the other and then, in those stilled seconds, they too were dead, sprawled over the cast down body of their Bridget. Seconds later, Bridget's younger sister also came out into the hall. The poor young girl gaped in horror at the killer and the crumpled bodies of her parents and sister. Seamus O'Hara fired again and the entire O'Toole family had been wiped out.

Hours later, Seamus O'Hara joined up with Callistus Murphy. "All done?" asked O'Hara.

"All done," Callistus Murphy replied. "Duggan, O'Shea and O'Dowd are all dead."

"Good," said O'Hara and drew his pistol and at point blank range he shot Callistus Murphy in the chest and killed him instantly. The ever quiet Callistus Murphy would be silent forever. Seamus O'Hara had completed his duty.

It may have occurred to Seamus O'Hara that day that what he had just done to his top ranking Provo colleagues would one day be done to him by someone else, another lightning killer, from the Provos or the Irish National Liberation Army. It is true that not many months would pass before Seamus O'Hara himself would also die a most violent death, but not at the hands of one of his fellow Irishmen or an Irishwoman. Retribution for him would come from another, more deadly quarter. His vicious death would be pleasantly administered by a connoisseur of vicious deaths, a quiet killer from the Blue Brigade.

Much later that day, Father Clancy heard about the killings of six of his colleagues from that fateful meeting in Ballyshannon. There was much talk of these deaths being the result of sectarian killings and INLA rivalry murders, but Father Clancy was an intelligent man. He knew that the school teacher and his

two colleagues were the true perpetrators of the killings. He knew that the school teacher had passed the death sentences. The Blue Brigade had certainly sent a panic through the Provisional IRA. And by ordering the killing of six of their own top people, it almost seemed as if the top echelon of the Provos was doing the Blue Brigade's job for it... that the Blue Brigade, through the use of fear and panic and the Provos' hierarchy's dread of having their identities revealed, had persuasively tricked them into doing it. And, thought Father Clancy, it would almost occur to some people that the school teacher was actually helping the Blue Brigade....

Father Sean Clancy also knew that Tomas O'Reilly, Seamus O'Hara and himself were the only people left alive who knew the identities of the school teacher, the librarian and the doctor... the real leaders of the Provisional arm of the IRA. He wondered for how long they would be allowed to remain alive with that dangerous knowledge.

Chapter Nine

All hell broke out in Ireland on Monday, 23rd November 1987. It started at dawn. And if the IRA had thought that it had taken a hammering from the Blue Brigade during the previous week, it soon discovered that it was going to be allowed no respite throughout the next seven days and beyond. This time, the attack upon them came from the Irish Government.

On Monday 23rd November, seven thousand soldiers and police launched the biggest search for IRA arms ever mounted in the Irish Republic. The operation, which was later officially announced by the Irish Justice Minister, Gerry Collins, began at dawn along with a similar search in Northern Ireland. Dublin security sources said they planned to turn the whole country inside out in a search expected to last for a week.

The swoop, sanctioned a week previously after top talks in Dublin between representatives of the Irish and British Governments, followed reports of four shiploads of arms arriving in the Republic for a terrorist offensive.

In Dublin, during the arms hunt, police raided the offices of the Sinn Fein newspaper 'Republican News' and arrested three people there. The editor of the 'Republican News' was Rita O'Hare, another cousin of Dessie O'Hare, the Border Fox, and of the late Paddy O'Hare, who had been killed the previous day by Seamus O'Hara on the orders of the Provos' top leadership. The Provos called the police action 'a blatant attack on the freedom of the press.'

In the parallel operation north of the border, forty people were detained for questioning about terrorist crimes; five of them were local councillors from the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein. There were fears in Dublin that the IRA may be planning to storm Ulster's Maze Prison or Portlaoise Prison in the Irish Republic. It was believed that the IRA wanted to release their imprisoned members to replace those who had been killed or had gone missing during the previous week's purge on them by the Blue Brigade.

Most of the forty people arrested in Northern Ireland, in connection with terrorist crimes, had come from nationalist areas of the province. A spokesman for the Royal Ulster Constabulary confirmed that the operation had followed recent intelligence reports that substantial amounts of arms and explosives had been brought into the country by terrorists.

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It was said that Fritz "Baby" Muhler came originally from Omaha, Nebraska, and that as a small boy he had witnessed a lynching there. Instead of being abhorred at this spectacle, he was fascinated by it and from that moment onwards he became obsessed and exhilarated with death – or, more precisely, obsessed

with killing. Almost psychopathic in his murderous intent, it had been noted that immediately before each killing, after all the planning and preparations had been completed to his entire satisfaction and checked over several times, he heralded the impending hit by a tell-tale subconscious habit. With his left thumb and index finger he pulled on the left wing of his shirt collar and stretched it up into his mouth where he chewed or sucked tentatively on the point of the collar. He did this without fail before each and every contract killing. Some likened it to a young baby sucking on the exposed nipple of its mother's breast.

"Baby" Muhler was slim, of small stature – being only five-foot-eight, dark haired and pale faced, with the sort of nondescript appearance which was so advantageous and essential to a successful contract killer. At twenty-nine years of age, he dreaded becoming thirty, which he regarded as being over the hill or, at least, the start of the decline.

"Baby" Muhler had travelled throughout the Americas, North, Central and South, and through much of Europe on his killing assignments. So far, he had not extended his operations to include Africa, Asia and Australasia, preferring to keep to the territories he knew, liked and was familiar with. In particular he had avoided the Middle East, with its unprofessional wars, and the Far East where the Japanese and Chinese assassins held command and controlled the contract killings together with most of the vice. And throughout all his travels, "Baby" Muhler never mixed business with pleasure. He never had a girl in a town where he was engaged on a killing, and he never did a killing in a town where he had a girl. If he was offered and accepted a contract in a town where he had a girl, he killed the girl before completing his contract.

At some time or another, Fritz "Baby" Muhler invariably returned to New York City, to stay either down in the Village or across the bridge over in Brooklyn. He was in the Big Apple now, but he was not staying in either of his usual haunts. It was too close before his next assignment for his whereabouts to be noted and his movements monitored. So "Baby" Muhler had taken a three night sojourn at a still fashionable water-hole on Park Avenue. Between 49th and 50th, and amidst a back-drop of the familiar glass box skyscrapers, the solid mass of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel confidently held its own, a resplendent statement of Art Deco elegance of the late twenties and early thirties. Muhler had taken one of the hotel's better double rooms for the three nights, at just over two hundred and fifty dollars a night. And he remained inside his room for the duration of his residence there.

As a professional contract killer, there were two major precautions over which "Baby" Muhler took very great care, in addition to all his other preparations and his inherent caution... a caution which had helped to keep him alive in a profession well known for its high occupational fatality rate. Muhler never bought new guns or equipment prior to a hit, and he took guns and equipment across very few borders. He had acquired all necessary weapons and materials in each

of the countries in which he regularly operated and had stored them in each of the countries for exclusive use in each one only. Thus, in addition to several states in the U.S.A., he could go to most of the major western European countries, to Canada, and to some of the countries of Central and South America and have arms and ammunition, fully cleaned and oiled, waiting for him there where he had placed them in safe deposit boxes or other hideaways. The arms and ammunition had been obtained by him within each relevant country. Not for him the risk of having to smuggle arms through borders or into ports. Such foolhardy risks were only taken by amateurs or fictional assassins. It was all unnecessary, anyway, as Muhler had long since discovered that standard guns, rifles or pistols, were sufficient for most jobs. If a contract required something more complicated, don't accept it; the job was bound to have too high a degree of risk in relation to its chance of success.

The only borders over which "Baby" Muhler ever carried arms were those between the Benelux countries, where the border was often indicated only by a white line painted across the road, which you drove over without stopping or being checked. And the only reason then was that Muhler had found Belgium – both for variety and availability – the best place to buy arms, outside of America, and Luxembourg the best place to deposit money.

The other major precaution upon which Muhler always insisted was that he would not work for anyone or for any organisation which was careless in the manner in which it raised the necessary money to finance his fee. If a terrorist organisation peculiar to a certain country should raise its finance by organising a series of crimes – bank robberies and security van hold-ups etcetera – within its own country, there was naturally a danger that this would alert the authorities that something – such as a large purchase of arms or the hiring of a contract killer for a special assassination – was about to take place. Such an alert and the subsequent activity and attention of the police was bound to increase the risk to himself when engaged upon the hit. Fund raising activities like these taking place inside the same country as the hit were plausible in fiction, but completely unacceptable in the real life, high risk world of Fritz "Baby" Muhler. If his hit was for a French organisation and due to take place inside France, and the organisation needed to raise funds for his fee through crime, then Muhler always insisted that the crimes take place elsewhere – Germany, England, Italy... anywhere but the home country where they would attract and direct attention to his employers and hence to himself. If he was disobeyed on this instruction, he declared the contract null and void.

At 2.30 pm on Monday 23rd November 1987, Fritz "Baby" Muhler checked out of the Waldorf Astoria on Park Avenue, New York City, and headed for Brooklyn. He had considered covering his trail by flying to London on Virgin Atlantic or People Express from Newark Airport in New Jersey, or even taking an American domestic flight out of La Guardia Airport in Queens to either Boston, Montreal or

Toronto and flying on from there to London. He had finally reverted to the usual flight from the John F. Kennedy International Airport, also in Queens.

He would drive from the hotel, in a Hertz car. Muhler always used hired cars, either from Hertz or Alamo (usually Hertz, as Alamo locations were situated 'off airport' necessitating a shuttle bus provision from and to airport terminals), for fear that a car of his own could be identified and betray his movements. When renting a car, he used one of the various aliases for which he had acquired licences, identifications and other documents over the years. It would have surprised and probably have greatly alarmed "Baby" Muhler if he had known that both T. N. Warne and Marcias knew all of his false identities. Both men took a professional interest in the availability and whereabouts of the top contract killers throughout the world.

So it was that at 2.30 pm, on a cold and dismal November day, "Baby" Muhler left the Waldorf Astoria Hotel on his way to the JFK Airport in Queens from which his flight would depart that evening to arrive in London early next morning; a flying time of six to seven hours. But first, he had a slight detour to make.

Muhler's departure from the hotel in midtown Manhattan at 2.30 pm for a flight which didn't leave JFK in Queens until the evening, was not influenced by considerations of finance (the least of his concerns these days) or his eagerness to depart from the room where he had virtually imprisoned himself for three whole days. The early break from his concealment was determined by a strange nostalgia, probably peculiar to a man who lived, and would probably die, by the gun. As a prelude to each and every one of his assignments outside of the States, "Baby" Muhler invariably went back to visit his past, to happy and innocent days spent upon a sweaty and overcrowded beach. He was going down to take a last look at Coney Island. For in his profession, one never knew when it would really be the last.

Coney Island, at the southern tip of Brooklyn. Muhler steered the Buick Regal, which he had chosen in preference to the Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera – the other car available on the Hertz D/F full size car list, down Park Avenue through midtown Manhattan as far as Union Square, from where Broadway took him to the Civic Center area in lower Manhattan. He negotiated the maze and congestion around the noisy, pigeon splattered green triangle of City Hall Park and hit the Brooklyn Bridge. Now he was on his way at last.

The gleaming Buick Regal purred over the more than centenarian Brooklyn Bridge, the Gothic slabs of its gateways dwarfed by lower Manhattan's skyscrapers. At the far end of the bridge he found himself in what is called the Fulton Ferry District, reminiscent of when the ferry was the only crossing of the East River. Passing the beautiful and wealthy neighbourhood of Brooklyn Heights on his right, he headed for the less salubrious downtown Brooklyn. Getting lost, as he had done before, beneath the elevated highway, he eventually

found himself on Flatbush Avenue. “I reckon this leads onto Ocean Avenue,” he murmured to himself, “and Ocean Avenue points in the direction of Coney Island... I guess.”

Like many people, he had developed this habit of whispering to himself, especially when driving alone. His was a lonely trade. You made few friends and kept even less.

He was on Ocean Avenue, more by luck than any real sense of direction, the car speeding southwards towards the sea. Muhler took his eyes off the road for a brief moment and glanced either side at the passing scenery. Drab dwellings, a hint of the sea and beach approaching. He looked in his rear view mirror – an automatic precaution. Nothing following him. He slowed down; this was no time to collect a speeding ticket. He was in Coney Island.

For generations, working-class New Yorkers had come to Coney Island to relax. At the peak of its popularity as many as a hundred thousand had idled away their weekends in a crowded carnival of beach-lounging, hot dogs, candy floss and strolls down the famous boardwalk. By the 1950s, the resort was past its prime and, although plenty of people still flocked here when the weather was fine, the good-time carefree days were gone. Until recently the boardwalk was cracked and broken, and even Nathan’s, the famous hot dog stand once exclusive and unique to Coney Island, now had franchises all over the city. Coney Island was now one of Brooklyn’s – and New York’s – poorest districts.

As he turned onto Surf Avenue, the main thoroughfare, Muhler sensed the pervasive atmosphere of menace. Predominantly Hispanic, it was one of those places where you went to a lot of trouble to avoid direct eye contact with anyone but your friends... if you had any. It was a district through which even the police travelled in groups of three, just hoping they’d survive another day, another duty. Above Surf Avenue, the gaudy subway trains were running on their way back to Manhattan, whilst down in the street, gangs of youths hung about outside bars and along the souvenir hung arcades which were blasting out non-stop fairground type music. Coney Island was a depressing sight that day, the rusty mecano sprawl of the amusement park was peeling and run down, and torn posters on the walls proclaimed the merits of Nathan’s ‘famous’, Coney Island’s still legendary but no longer unique hot dog stand on Surf and Stillwell Avenues. In this most well known of run down seaside resorts, the beach at least was beautiful, a broad clean sweep of golden sand where, on a hot day, it was still difficult to find a space.

But Fritz “Baby” Muhler was not interested in the beach these days, not like those long distant times when the golden sands of Coney had been the ultimate desire and joy in his little life, before the time later when, as a young teenager, he had pressed his nose against the sparkling windows of travel agents and ogled at the colourful pictures of far off places of which he could only dream or imagine. As

an older teenager, Coney Island, or specifically the dives in its side streets, meant something different to him. It was this lure which had brought him back to Coney now. He had come here on a nostalgia of lust.

He found the place just off Surf Avenue; a grimy rooming house, old rambling and dilapidated, permeating with the stale smell of hamburgers, hot dogs, pretzels and knishes. Room 12A was on the second floor; a creaking flight of bare wooden stairs announced his approach despite his light stalker's steps. It was some time before the door was opened in response to his persistent knocking which had grown louder with the delay; he knew that he had been cautiously and carefully observed through a security peephole set in the dry unpainted timbers of the door. When it finally opened, a large scowling unpleasant man of dark Hispanic appearance glared at him questioningly.

"Who are you? What ees it you want, eh?" His voice was weirdly high-pitched for a man of his size. It sent a warning shiver through the radar of Muhler's spine.

"I have come to see the Big Momma," "Baby" Muhler smiled benevolently, his eyes growing suddenly large and very dark. In a single, swift, split-second movement, the little killer had tossed the big man aside and slit open one of the cheeks of his puffy face with the thin and graceful, but razor sharp steel of the tiny stiletto. "That's so next time you'll remember to keep out of my way, my goot friend.... eh?"

The horrible big man was clutching frantically at his face, the blood pouring from it, oozing through his fingers and splashing down onto his frilly shirt front. Begrudgingly he pulled back the door and stepped further aside to allow Muhler a clear passage to enter, whilst still eyeing the visitor both hatefully and suspiciously.

"You'd better see a doctor about your face, sweetie," "Baby" Muhler advised him blandly.

Muhler made his way slowly but surely through the small entrance hall and into the bedroom. She was there, as he knew she would be. It was almost as if she had been waiting for him; expecting him. The bedroom was much larger than one would have expected from the outside. The bed was old-fashioned, a wrought-iron frame with a wooden headboard and tailpiece. The sheets and pillow-cases were black, the blankets a sensual pink.

Fat Dolores, now much slimmer than she used to be, but still retaining her title, sat perched on the edge of the bed, looking up at him, studying him with more than half interest. The eyes weren't as bright as before, the cheeks more pallid and sallow, the hair cheaply dyed and permed, the mouth not quite as firm, a trace of a wispy moustache above the upper lip. She had not grown old, she had grown worn. But she was still Fat Dolores, the one who had taught him, the only

one he really liked, the only one who could truly satisfy his lust. She never asked questions. And she stirred his craving and got his adrenaline flowing to fever pitch for the job ahead; the killing in Liechtenstein.

"Hello, lit'le man," she eventually greeted him, after what seemed an eternity. He always cringed when she called him that. She always called him that. He should be used to it by now, but he wasn't. He lunged forward and tore greedily at her negligee.

It was almost dark when "Baby" Muhler left Coney Island. It was at Coney Island that one of Al Dempsey's men spotted him. A double alert was flashed to the men waiting at La Guardia and JFK.

Muhler followed the Shore Parkway around Jamaica Bay to JFK. The airport is in the southern part of Queens, just north of the Rockaways and the Atlantic Ocean. Skirting to the north of JFK, the Shore Parkway becomes the Southern Parkway. Fritz "Baby" Muhler had turned in the Buick Regal to the Hertz desk and made his way to the European terminal. Not long later that evening, T. N. Warne had been informed that Muhler was on the flight to London. And if T. N. Warne knew this, it was a safe bet that Marcias, somewhere over in Ireland, would soon know it also.

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In the small dingy office in Newry, Northern Ireland, Marcias was sitting drinking coffee with four colleagues from the Blue Brigade; Chavez, the two Irishmen Eamonn Kinane and Noel Dwyer, and a new arrival Packo Jackson, a man with tired eyes and a drooping moustache who looked much older than he was, but who could mix it with the very best. Jackson had replaced Black John who was now residing in the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch, London.

"Hot, strong and made this year," was Marcias's opinion of the coffee as he sipped the steaming brew. Marcias drank a lot of coffee, all the time, throughout the day, but ate little. "We hit the Provos' hit men with our hit men... in Liechtenstein... right as they're on the job," Marcias permitted himself a grim, cold laugh. "As their three contract killers line up to shoot their victims, our three hit men will be right behind them, to take them out before they have a chance to fire. And our men are either already in London or on their way there. Chances are they'll be staying at the same hotels as the hit men hired by the IRA. That's the way we intend to have it. Should be a real cosy arrangement."

"Then why don't our men knock out their men in London, instead o' waitin' 'til Liechtenstein and takin' more risk there?" Noel Dwyer wanted to know.

"Cos they'd simply replace them with another set of hired assassins and send them to Liechtenstein. That's why they've allowed themselves so much time,

November for January, in case we do that. They would prefer us to strike now in London rather than we make plans for Malbun. Whereas when we strike in Malbun, they will not have time or chance for a second attempt. They will have lost their opportunity there, one which they won't get anywhere else. This action is very important; they greatly need a really big success after all their grave reverses." Marcias's mouth smiled grimly – maybe at the use of the word 'grave' – but his eyes remained deadly cold and serious.

"You say our guys will be right behind theirs. How will we know the enemy's positions?" asked Eamonn Kinane.

"Makepeace!.... He will know and he will tell us."

"Who is Makepeace?" Dwyer demanded.

"That's a secret few people know," Marcias smiled, "and that's the way it will remain."

"Our hit men. Where are they from?" Kinane asked.

"Stateside," Marcias murmured. "The best."

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At first, the Provos – that is, the top three committee of the Provos together with their apparent leader Tomas O'Reilly and top men Seamus O'Hara and Father Sean Clancy – tried to play down the impact of the news of the violent deaths of seven more of their top people. After all, they had in reality killed them themselves and they didn't want that fact traced back to them. And they didn't want it widely known that their top ranks had been so greatly devastated.

But when they realised that the news was spreading fast, Tomas O'Reilly, as their official head, issued a statement on behalf of all the leadership of the Provos, condemning the killings and blaming them upon extreme hard-line loyalist paramilitary groups and sectarian murders. Many considered the death of Paddy O'Hare, the Provos' treasurer and the cousin of the illustrious Border Fox, to be a great blow to the IRA and to the Republican cause. In particular, people from all sides were horrified and incensed at the reports of the brutal murders of Declan and Margaret O'Toole and their two daughters Bridget and Philomena. An entire family, so innocent, wiped away. So the Provos were quick to attribute these four murders, especially, to an Unionist paramilitary group once associated with the hard-line and bigoted Loyalist politician George Seawright who had been shot in the head in Belfast on the previous Thursday by the Irish People's Liberation Organisation, a breakaway faction of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).

And when Tomas O'Reilly was charged by supporters of both the Regular and Provisional wings of the IRA that the top ranks of the Provos had been greatly depleted and that, in effect, there remained only himself and two others at the helm, he quickly rebuffed these accusations, claiming that there were several eligible people being promoted up the hierarchy. But this was far from true; the real truth was that most of the Provisional wing of the IRA, from top to bottom, had been destroyed in the onslaught by the Blue Brigade. Much of what had survived that debacle had now gone at the hands of Seamus O'Hara or under the new and unique purge by the Irish Government. The Provos had only one card left to play. It was their new trump card, their joker. They hoped their joker would be wild.

If the Provos had problems, so did the Blue Brigade now. Their objective had been clear; to destroy the IRA. They had started with the Provos and they had been very successful, almost completely destroying that prime wing of the IRA. But not entirely. There were still some men at the top, and these had to be eliminated. And the Blue Brigade had still not reached, had still not trapped the highest leaders of the Provos, the anonymous committee of three. Now, as the Blue Brigade had almost achieved their goal, they had been forced to divert their attention and energy to a new threat from the IRA, the planned assassinations in the little and fashionable country of Liechtenstein. For this atrocity, the Provos would be using men from outside their own ranks; professional hit men imported from across the Atlantic. The wild jokers of planned and marketed death.

The Provisionals had placed great store in their intention to kill the Prince and Princess of Wales and the two young princes, William and Harry. All that stood between them and success was the ingenuity of a dying man called Marcias.... And the Makepeace Contact. Would that be enough? Would it be enough to prevent the greatest disaster in recent British history?

Chapter Ten

Tuesday, 24th November 1987.

The British Foreign Office claimed today that Libya sent four shiploads of explosives and arms to the IRA before French customs intercepted the huge cache of arms on the freighter 'Eksund'. Two of these shiploads reached the Irish Republic in 1985 and the other two were loaded in 1986, according to the British officials. The British Foreign Office declined to reveal its source of the information but it was generally assumed to have come from the French police questioning the five Irishmen who were found on the 'Eksund' and detained after the seizure of the ship.

Although the British Foreign Office continued to remain very secretive about the source of the original tip-off about the 'Eksund' – which had been taken into and impounded in the French port of Brest – and its massive cargo of arms, it was widely believed by most observers that the information had been passed to the French and British authorities from the United States. This was, in fact, true; the tip-off had been supplied by a secret service agency based in Massachusetts. What, indeed, was much more obscure – because they wanted it that way – was the fact that the Massachusetts men had obtained their reliable and authentic information from the Blue Brigade offices right over in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Phoenix, Arizona. This latter office had received its detailed reports on the arms movements out of Libya from its own operators working in Morocco and Algeria.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday November 24th, thousands of police and troops were continuing their search in IRA country on both sides of the Irish border for stockpiles of weapons. There was a spin-off success resulting from this search. Two men involved in the mass break-out from Ulster's Maze Prison in 1983 were arrested on that Tuesday during the massive anti-terrorist sweep in the Irish Republic. Police in the Republic reported that twenty-six year old Dermot Finnucane and thirty-four year old Paul Brennan had been held during a search in County Longford and detained under the anti-terrorist laws. Both were said to be wanted for questioning about serious crimes committed in the Republic, including the murder of a policeman, as well as their escapes from the Northern prison.

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Fritz "Baby" Muhler had arrived in London that same morning, Tuesday November 24th. During the flight from New York, he had considered whether he should hire a car whilst in London. There was always the problem of parking and, as he would be staying at the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch and most of his business would be confined to the West End and the City with possibly one or two trips to the East End, he had been tempted to rely on taxis. But the London

cabs were getting as bad as the New York ones; never available when you wanted one. So he hired a Vauxhall Carlton from the Hertz desk at Heathrow and set out along the M4, eastwards, to London.

Although he loved motorways and it was but a short distance left on this stretch of the M4, just four junctions and the Heston Services, he was glad when the motorway tapered down to the Cromwell Road Extension and the Great West Road into Chiswick and Hammersmith; he was familiar with this territory, familiar with much of London. He had often used the British capital as a springboard to Europe.

The sea of black London cabs, interspersed with a few reds, blues and yellows, engaged upon the lucrative London-Heathrow trail, had dispersed somewhat as Muhler drove through the canyon of neat sand-coloured terraced Victorian houses, now converted into flats or small hotels. This scenario could only be London and he sniffed in its atmosphere and breathed its excitement and pace. Under his encouragement, the Vauxhall Carlton seemed to assume the life of its surroundings and respond to the thrill of weaving in and out of the traffic or simply keeping up with the flow, though for most of the time, Muhler kept to the centre lane of three to avoid being blocked by vehicles turning left or right. Most of all, he was pleased that he had again quickly adjusted to driving on the wrong side. The roads themselves, and even the roundabouts and junctions, were no problem; it was just a case of getting used to sitting and having the steering wheel on the right-hand side of the automobile. Preferable, though, to driving a left-handed car on the left side of the road, where wing mirrors never seemed to line up.

There was less traffic than usual at the roundabout joining Hogarth Lane with Great Chertsey Road and the Great West Road and then he was up and over the Hammersmith Flyover, the Hammersmith Odeon peering over at him from the right like some gigantic 'Chad'. Soon he was through the traffic lights at the much widened section of West Cromwell Road near Earl's Court and onto the Cromwell Road itself. First, the small hotels again and then the remains of the old B.E.A. Air Terminal at Gloucester Road and the start of the larger, plusher and more expensive hotels.

This was another area of London which "Baby" Muhler loved, another area of the world which fascinated him deeply. He admired again the cleaned façade of the old Natural History Museum, though not necessarily its modern extension. Beside it, on the left, the Victoria and Albert Museum and then, at the beautiful Brompton Oratory, he joined the Brompton Road. Harrods appeared obediently and majestic on the right – that had been the scene of an IRA atrocity – and then, on his left, at the traffic lights, the Scotch House shop on the corner, as he flowed into Knightsbridge. The imposing Hyde Park Hotel passed by on his left and he was approaching Hyde Park Corner.

Instead of continuing to the large roundabout at Hyde Park Corner, with its majestic Wellington Arch, and turning left onto Park Lane and up towards Marble Arch and the Cumberland Hotel, "Baby" Muhler descended down into the sweeping underpass for Piccadilly. Surfacing up again into the weak sunlight he progressed eastwards along Piccadilly past Green Park and turned left into Berkeley Street. He found a vacant meter near the Mayfair Hotel and parked the Carlton there, contented to go the rest of the way on foot. It was only a short distance along Curzon Street to the private safe deposit box vaults.

When he reached the steel fronted vaults, he placed his plastic card through the slot and dialled his identification code number on the keyboard outside. A tannoy demanded to know his name. "Richard V. Spellman," Muhler spoke into the mouthpiece. That was the name he used at these particular security vaults. He had considerable means of identification in that name.

Once inside the entrance hall of the vaults he was greeted by an uniformed guard, a man in his fifties, a dour cockney who probably had a dry sense of humour. Muhler showed him his set of two keys and together they went to the huge, iron barred and steel clad door which led to the vaults.

"Luvly day," the guard wheezed, his voice – a touch of the Bow Bells – sounding bronchial, off key and out of tune. Funny, Muhler thought, the fogs had long since been banished from London, but the older people still talked like that. "Darn if I d'aint hear a nightingale o'er in the square as I comes into work this mornin', like," the man continued.

"You Brits! You have such vivid imaginations... or is it good memories?"

"Ah, touch of both, I 'spect. You got yer key there ready, mate?"

They each put a key in separate locks and turned them and the mighty door swung slowly open without a sound. The guard stood aside to allow Muhler to enter the vaults alone. "Give a bang on them there bars when you want to come out, me old fruit, Mr. Spellman, sir," the guard wheezed, more cheerfully now. He pulled the self-locking door shut and then the uniformed man returned to his seat and went back to ogling page three of his 'Sun' and examining the racing tips at the back of the paper. Muhler proceeded along the main gangway inside the vaults, holding his remaining key. Half-way down, he came alongside box number 301. He inserted the slim but complicated key and turned the lock.

There were two padded boxes inside the spacious deposit box; a large box and a small box. Muhler selected the small box and withdrew it from its hideaway. He opened the padded box. The inside of it was also padded and was lined with deep pile, plush, violet-coloured velvet. Carefully he lifted out its single content and balanced the object first in his right hand and then in his left. He no longer felt naked; he was dressed again. The Colt .44 immediately became an

extension of his hand. He checked the barrel and the chamber. Then the hammer. There was no trigger. The trigger had been removed. There was a shoulder holster and a case and ammunition. Also cleaning oil and a cloth. Muhler placed all of it, including the gun, into the large pigskin brief-case he had brought with him. Then he shut and locked the deposit box, leaving the larger padded box inside it. Muhler smiled. Then, subconsciously, his left hand went up to his shirt collar and buckled the collar back and up into his mouth where his front teeth bit and chewed on the point of the collar.

Without realising it, “Baby” Muhler straightened his moist collar and walked briskly back down the corridor towards the iron and steel door, the pigskin brief-case held securely in his right hand, the solitary key twiddling nervously in the fingers of his left hand. He tapped twice – loudly – on the bars of the door and the guard came immediately to open it for him. The man was very agile and quick for his age, the American thought. The professional killer had long since developed the habit of assessing people and their movements. He studied everyone he met, no matter for how briefly they came into his life. Once Muhler was outside of the vaults, the door was shut and the two men locked it with their keys. This double locking was in addition to the door’s own self-locking device which was intended as only a quick and temporary safeguard.

“G’day, Mr. Spellman. Still a nice day, sir.” The guard breezed as he escorted Muhler out through the main entrance door.

“Yeah,” Muhler responded, looking up at the sky. The weak sun shone down into his eyes again. “Have a nice day... mate,” he called over his shoulder to the guard and then muttered to himself, “whatever you’re doin’.”

Muhler walked quickly back towards Berkeley Street where he had parked his rented car. Coming around the curve in Curzon Street, he was brought to an abrupt halt.

“Bang! Bang!”

Sometimes his quick reactions could be a disadvantage. He sprang himself quickly against a wall, his right hand diving inside his coat to his shoulder, before he remembered the gun wasn’t there – he cursed – before he saw the two young boys. Two young boys! They focussed his mind elsewhere... to Malbun. He pulled himself back to the present reality. The two young boys; they looked Middle-Eastern, pointing at him from around the bend in the road.

“Bang! Bang! You’re dead, meester.”

Their toy Magnums looked very realistic. Muhler might have felt sheepish, but he concealed it. His cold blue-grey eyes glared at the two youngsters. Then he brushed impatiently past them. Muhler hated kids. Probably because of his own

unhappy childhood. Today the kids seemed to have everything – everything they wanted, and a lot of things which they didn't even want. He had had nothing. He hated kids. That's why they had given him the job... the contract.

The Carlton kicked into life and he drove it along Curzon Street, past the vaults and out into Park Lane at the point where the Playboy Club used to be. He'd only been in there once. Everything was changing, everything was going. He'd be thirty next year... if he lived that long.

He only had to drive a short way down Park Lane before circling the roundabout near the bottom of the famous thoroughfare – close to the whitish Inn on the Park – and going up Park Lane towards Marble Arch. Hyde Park was alongside Park Lane, to his left. At this lower part of Park Lane he was near to the Serpentine Road in Hyde Park, the path which led to the bandstand. That had been the centre of another IRA atrocity, the bomb which had blasted the Guards soldiers and their horses. Muhler shivered slightly. They got around, those Irish bastards. The thought of that reminded him of his own task ahead; it concentrated his mind admirably.

He parked the Carlton in the underground car park beneath Hyde Park, near the top end of Park Lane. Walking away from his car, the car park seemed vast, a long expanse of exposed vision. He gripped the handle of the briefcase more tightly, and his cold sharp eyes darted swiftly from side to side, ahead, diagonally, and behind as he did quick spins, taking in the long, almost endless, stretch of concrete wilderness behind him.

He came up to street-level somewhere by the Marble Arch itself and he had to negotiate one side of the road as the continuous mass of traffic poured from the Bayswater Road or spun around the corner from the Edgware Road.

He entered the Cumberland Hotel near to the steps leading down to the entrance to the Marble Arch tube station. At the touch of the automatic handle, the hotel's doors spun open for him and he strode past the magazine stall into the large lobby with its huge circular series of reception desks.

He checked in without too much fuss; the reservation having been booked for him by letter some time ago. His room was on what he would have called the fourth floor – they called it the third floor over here in England. That was good. He liked to be well up from the street level.

After tipping a porter to take his luggage up to his room, he adjourned to the Nocturne Bar in the corner of the lobby. One refreshing drink before going up for a shower and an afternoon kip before dinner. Fritz Muhler had found that this combination was his best antidote to Atlantic jet-lag.

The waiter brought the 'blue lagoon', concocted from Blue Curacao, to his table in a corner of the room. "Baby" Muhler glanced around at his fellow voyageurs in the Nocturne Bar. Instinctively his eyes settled upon one man. The black man, young, handsome and smartly dressed, was, like himself, also apparently alone and also sitting at one of the more secluded tables in a dark corner. Like Muhler's table, the black man's position was a good vantage point from which to observe everyone coming or leaving or staying in the bar.

"Baby" Muhler remained in the Nocturne Bar, with just the one drink, for almost half an hour; just trying to decide about the black man in the corner. What made it worse was that the man did not look at him once, did not even glance in his direction; yet Muhler sensed – knew – that the man had observed and examined him closely. But from his demeanour, from his actions – or lack of actions – the black man had shown no interest in Muhler whatsoever, which only served to make the American more suspicious of the Negro.

It was almost time for the bar to close for the afternoon when Muhler finally finished his blue lagoon and wandered out into the lobby again. The black man was still in the bar, as indeed were several other people. Apparently he had not seen Muhler leave.

On the third floor, Muhler's room was at the end of a long corridor, well away from the nearest elevator. Turning the key in his door, Muhler was pleased to find that the door opened inwards. That would make things easier. Inside his room, he was glad to discover that his bed was mobile and came away from the wall, leaving just the headboard attached to the wall. He wheeled the bed across the room and positioned it so that it blocked the door from opening. Then he undressed and showered. He lay naked upon the bed and slept solidly for two hours, the Colt .44 clutched in his right hand. From 5.00 pm he slept less soundly for about an hour, a mixed sort of day-dreaming and light slumber during which he either dreamed or fantasised about an erotic encounter with a raven-haired girl with lovely long luscious legs, a cute little bottom and full firm round breasts.

He was sweating when he rose from the bed at six o'clock. He showered again and splashed himself all over with Brut lotion. The touch of the clean, fresh clothes against his body restored his vitality. He pulled the bed away from the door and replaced it in its correct position. Then he commenced his routine.

From his manicure set, he extracted a small pair of scissors and the tube of superglue. He placed the tube of glue on the dressing-table and took an envelope from the stationery folder there. Taking the envelope and the scissors with him, he went into the bathroom. Looking in the mirror, he proceeded to cut several of the longer hairs from his head and place them inside the envelope. When he had finished this, he returned to the bedroom. After ensuring that all the wardrobe doors and the dresser drawers and his suitcases and bags were

closed, he started with the dressing-table drawers. A minute blob of superglue on the edge of the first drawer and another blob immediately beside it on the frame of the dressing-table. Then a hair to join the two blobs. In seconds, the hair was firmly attached – secured – between the drawer and the framework. If anyone opened the drawer, the hair would be broken or torn away. Muhler repeated this operation with every drawer of the dressing-table. When he had finished, he stood back and surveyed his work. The fact that his hair was a light blond, helped a lot. The fact that his hair was fine – almost as fine as a baby's – helped even more. Only the closest of scrutineers would have detected his handiwork.

He applied the same exercise to the doors of the wardrobe and to the flaps of his cases and bags. If, that evening... or at any time, someone searched his room, he would know. There was no point in taking the same precaution with the main door of the room. Both he and the chambermaid would use that. And he would sleep with the bed across the door; if anyone attempted to open the door whilst he was asleep, the bed would block it and any sudden, sharp pressure against the bed would warn him.

Having completed his tasks, Fritz Muhler left his room – the Colt .44 now at home in the holster attached around his shoulder- and descended the elevator to the ground floor. He crossed the full expanse of the lobby from the elevators, past the large reception, towards the Great Cumberland Place entrance. In that far corner, was the entrance to the Carvery Restaurant. Muhler went in for dinner.

Fritz Muhler liked the Carvery Restaurants, both in the Cumberland and the Strand Palace. After obtaining a small table at the far end of the room, he went over to the central serving area, took a hot plate from the stack, selected his choice of meat and helped himself to vegetables. Returning to his table, he almost bumped into the black man who had just come into the restaurant.

The Negro was escorting a very beautiful white girl; a delicious, stunning blonde who could have stepped down from a Marilyn Monroe calendar. The Negro held the girl's hand as he led her to a table, and then he took charge of her handbag as he pulled out a chair for her to sit down. Quite the black gentleman, Muhler scorned, he would have made a good waiter. The girl's dress, like herself, was white and stunning. Muhler was immediately attracted and fascinated by the peephole keyhole cut out of the centre of the front of the dress to reveal the flesh of her midriff. The delectable golden tan of her skin, visible through the keyhole, stood out in contrast to the pure white of the evening dress. With effort, Muhler took his eyes away from the girl. But no one had seen him staring at her. The girl's clinging white dress had focussed all eyes on her braless bosom. Her lack of underwear was doubly confirmed when, as she turned to take her seat, it was revealed that the backless cut of the dress plunged exceptionally low. Suddenly Muhler heard the silence in the room, he noticed the stillness, the lack of motion occasioned by the girl's entrance and appearance. As she sat down, the spell

was broken when a man at the next table, anxious to catch another glimpse of some part of her anatomy, turned around too quickly or too awkwardly and knocked over a freshly opened bottle of Cotes du Rhone, its blood-like contents pouring across the buff-coloured tablecloth.

It was at that point that the Negro called for the wine-waiter. "Which wine would you like, Leah?" Black John asked the gorgeous blonde.

"Burgundy, darling. Red Burgundy." The blonde responded.

"Chambertin... Nuits St. Georges... Pommard?"

"Whatever," Leah smiled sweetly, a gentle shake of her golden shoulders. Muhler felt that the Negro was showing off with his apparent knowledge of French wines, but that it was not really impressing his female companion.

"We have no red Burgundy, sir," the wine-waiter explained. "But I have a Bordeaux that thinks it's a Burgundy."

"St. Emilion?" Some query. The whites of Black John's eyes flashed knowingly as he glanced up at the waiter. When the man nodded, the Negro confirmed the order. "One bottle of St. Emilion... to start with."

So he was American, Muhler thought, having heard the black man speak. From the South somewhere, but not the Deep South. As Muhler started his meal, he couldn't lose the image in his eye of the blonde whiteness of the girl against the vivid shiny black of the man. Muhler had nothing against Negroes; he just didn't like them. And he didn't like to see a white girl with a black man. He didn't like this particular Negro at all; that man spelt danger.

Fritz Muhler was distracted from his thoughts and his meal by the impact of another grand entrance into the restaurant. The man had to be a Texan; fresh from the Alamo or an oil-splattered ranch in the Panhandle; big, showy, flashy, from his gleaming white suit and high tan-coloured hide boots to the huge wide-brimmed white Stetson and the shining gold bracelets. The girl was as black as a summer's night in New Mexico, her skin like polished ebony. She was tall, serene, resplendent; her exciting clothes accentuating her lithesome limbs. She brought gaiety and exuberance into the atmosphere. To Muhler her appearance brought a tingling to his spine, a cramped feeling to his loins and hot desire to his breast. He never disapproved of a white man having a Negress, he just wished he was the man. This girl was like something out of paradise lust. A sensational jet black diamond.

There was to be another surprise.

The big white man and the tall sensual black woman went to the table occupied by the handsome Negro and the beautiful blonde girl in the stunning white dress. "Good evening. Sorry we're late," The big white man's voice confirmed that he was from the Lone Star state.

"Yes, sorry, darling. Have you been here for long?" It was the black girl speaking to the black man.

"No, honey. We've only just arrived."

The black girl leaned over and kissed the black man on the cheek as he started to rise from his chair. "Don't get up, darling," the girl said.

The big Texan rushed over to pull out a seat for her. As he did so, he smiled over at the Negro. "Have yer all bin lookin' after my honey bun wife and takin' real good care of her?"

"Sure have, Tex. Sit down and see what you think of this here wine. I'll orda another bottle o' the stuff and we'll all drink to de health of absent friends, eh?"

There was general laughter from the group. "Baby" Muhler had become bored – and somewhat disappointed – with the gathering. There was no way that he could have appreciated the significance of the reference to 'absent friends'. To his reasoning now, the black man was not what he had suspected him of being. Obviously the quartet – despite, or maybe because of its strange composition – posed no threat or danger to him. He simply noted the fact that white Texans were now prepared to accept blacks and to socialise with them. Perhaps only outside of Texas.

If "Baby" Muhler had not been so preoccupied and obsessed with the presence of Black John, he would have noticed the only other lonely and solitary figure present in the restaurant. Black John and his companions had actually distracted the contract killer from his usual obligatory and professional scanning of all the people around him. But for that, he would probably – would definitely have seen the alert handsome young man with the dark Latin looks who was sitting alone at a secluded table at the far end of the restaurant. A table from which he could observe everyone in the room. And "Baby" Muhler would have realised that not once did Black John and Vicente Patto allow their eyes to come into contact with each other.

Dining in the Carvery Restaurant in the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch at the same time that evening, were two of America's top hit men – both en route to fulfil contracts in Liechtenstein – and Black John, the man sent there by Marcias to watch.

“Let’s all go to a club.” It was Black John’s suggestion. Tex and the two girls readily agreed. Muhler could hear more laughter and some mischievous giggling, now subdued and conspiratorial, drifting over from their table. He had lost almost complete interest in them. He paid his check and rose from his table. He was going up to his room. As Muhler left the restaurant, Black John took no notice of him, but Vicente Patto, himself unobserved, watched him all the way.

Chapter Eleven

His room had been searched.... Thoroughly searched.

A really good professional turnover which only a really good professional would have detected. Every single hair which Muhler had arranged and attached – to suitcases, bags, drawers and wardrobe doors – had been torn away. However, but for the disturbed hairs, there was no indication that the room and its contents had been searched. It had been the work of a good professional. Everything inside the drawers and cases and bags had been replaced exactly as Muhler had left them. Shirts and ties at the minutely deviated angles; even the small thread of cotton which he had left loose upon an handkerchief, was still there. If it had not been for those hairs, he would not have known.

Now that he did know, what did it tell him? His room had been searched. By whom? And why? First, they would not have found anything. There were no airport labels attached to his luggage. He had been careful to bring clothing which was of a general, chain-store nature, no designer labels to identify his background. His passport, which was in the same name as that in which he had registered at the hotel – James Timothy Hoskings, and his pocket book were safe inside the pocket of the jacket he had worn to the restaurant. Most important of all, his revolver had been secure inside the holster around his shoulder. The intruder – or intruders – would have found nothing, except for an envelope mailed in the States and addressed to Mr. James T. Hoskings at an address in Des Moines, Iowa. Fritz Muhler's lips curled into a bitter sweet smile. Unlike some of the secret agents of fiction, he had always avoided using false names with the same initials as his own name. To the trained eye, identical initials were a dead give-away.

The search would have revealed nothing about him, but someone had been sufficiently interested in his welfare to have had his room efficiently turned-over. Who, friend or foe? In his business, there were no friends. Only people who hired him, and they were often both cautious and suspicious... or just plain scared.

Had this been an intended warning to him? Did someone want to let him know that they were on to him? To scare him off? No. The searcher had taken too much care to conceal the search from him. Someone must have wanted to find out more about him, or just to confirm what they already knew.

Muhler freshened up in the bathroom and then left his room and returned to the lobby downstairs. He glanced quickly into the Carvery Restaurant. The black man and his companions were gone. It was then that Muhler saw, for the first time, the dark young Latin sitting alone in the far corner. Could it be? Muhler hesitated. The young man didn't appear to notice him. Muhler was becoming annoyed with himself; was he beginning to suspect shadows? He turned

abruptly and went out through the Great Cumberland Place exit onto the street. There was one taxi waiting at the rank there. The burly commissionaire held its door open for him.

“Regents Palace Hotel,” Muhler told the driver, “Piccadilly Circus.”

“Yes, Guv, I know,” the cabbie responded and shot off down to Marble Arch and Park Lane. Muhler had expected him to take Oxford Street and Regent Street. No matter. He glanced at the lights of the Dorchester and the Grosvenor House passing by on the left, the dimmer lights of Hyde Park, further over, on the right. They were past the Hilton and around the Inn on the Park and on to Piccadilly. Piccadilly Circus was closed to traffic, even to taxis, but the cabbie had manoeuvred around some side streets north of Piccadilly, crossed Regent Street somewhere, and approached the Regent Palace Hotel in Glasshouse Street. Muhler stopped him there and paid his fare. It was just where he wanted to be; not the main entrance to the hotel, but the entrance to its Stetson Bar.

The Stetson Bar still pretended its mock cowboy atmosphere. The barman claimed he didn’t have any Curacao, so the Blue Lagoon was out. Muhler ordered – and got – a Bacardi and coke instead. Suddenly he felt very lonely. He swallowed his drink and went through the bar’s other entrance into the hotel’s long, large lobby. A girl in a fur coat approached him. Her coat swung open to reveal the short red skirt and dark tights. He waved her aside. He had never had to pay for it yet; not even in Coney Island.

Fritz Muhler went out through the Regent Palace’s main entrance onto the street and looked down towards the lights of Piccadilly Circus. He glanced to his left at the taxi rank alongside the hotel in Sherwood Street. There were no cabs there. He went back into the hotel.

He found the pay ‘phones in the lobby and made his call. She was there; waiting and willing.

He went out into the street again. There were three cabs in the rank now. He hailed the first one. “Liverpool Street Station,” he said.

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Vicente Patto had followed Fritz “Baby” Muhler out of the Cumberland Hotel, keeping at a discreet distance behind the other killer. He was standing in the space between the two sets of doors of the hotel’s west side entrance when he heard Muhler instruct the cabbie to go to the Regent Palace. After the taxi had pulled away, Patto stepped slowly past the outer door onto the street. The commissionaire heard the smooth click of the door’s automatic handle and turned to glance enquiringly at Patto.

"Shall I fetch you a taxi, sir?"

"No thanks. I was thinking of having a short walk... down through the park, maybe... before turning in for an early night."

"Take care then, sir, if you're goin' through the park at this time o' night, it bein' dark an' all, like. There can be a few weirdos in there at night, in them bushes, like."

"Ah, it cain't be like New York, surely. I thought you could still walk the streets of London in relative safety."

"The streets maybe, sir, e'en though I wouldn't be too sure 'bout that no more, what with these here muggers, like, and the tarts an' their pimps. All the pros that walk around Park Lane and Knightsbridge and the Bayswater Road... yeah, an' the parks... is controlled by the gangs. They 'ave to earn so much each night... or else...." The burly commissioner moved his right hand swiftly across his throat.

"I'll be sure to keep out of the way of the girls," Patto smiled. "I cain't abide too much violence."

"Yeah, well you keep out o' Hyde Park as well, sir, when it's dark. Them's real weirdos in there at night."

"Cain't be as bad as dear old Central Park. There you kin get eaten alive during daytime."

"Is that a fact, sir? Bless my soul if you Yanks... pardon me, sir... if you Americans aren't... ain't th' weorks, ser."

Patto laughed. It sounded good, whether it was meant to be Jersey or Brooklyn.

Tyburn Way and the area around Marble Arch seemed unfamiliar to Patto; it must have been some years since he was here last. He threaded his way through the light, late evening traffic and made it to the parkside. Cumberland Gate? Stanhope Gate? He entered the park somewhere; absent-mindedly... his mind was elsewhere. He breathed in the night-time atmosphere of Hyde Park; he had intended going right down to the Serpentine... maybe to compare it with the Lake in Central Park. He looked up at the sky – the awesome night sky, unusually clear for a November night... stars everywhere. The night sky had always filled him with wonder, a reverential fear... sometimes a dread. As a small boy his eyes had misted in awe and his voice had risen to a quiet, almost inaudible, high pitch in spell-bound recognition of the vast, silent immensity of the heavens compared to his own tiny speck. Those same stars up there were shining down upon millions and millions of people.

What was it that Will Henry's Timothy had said? 'The stars are their promises, high as the heavens, bright as the moonlight... cold and empty as the belly of a dead fish.' There would be a few dead fish before this winter was over.

X X X X X

It was later than Muhler thought. He caught the last train for Brentwood before midnight. The next one would not be for another two hours. Liverpool Street looked grey just before a November midnight. Not dark. Not cold. Just Grey. The train left quietly, silently on time. Liverpool Street Station slowly departed.

The train was bound for either Colchester or Southend. About forty minutes to Brentwood; not the fast train, but not the slow train. It would stop at some of the stations, but not all of them. As they passed through them, stopping briefly at some, Muhler remembered all the names; Bethnal Green, Stratford, Forest Gate, Manor Park, Ilford, Seven Kings, Goodmayes, Chadwell Heath, Romford, Gidea Park, Harold Wood.... Some of the names sounded much better than the actual places looked; recalling forgotten forests, woods, greens and parks and heaths and manors. But Essex was one of "Baby" Muhler's favourite English counties, especially when Dawn was there.

The stop after Harold Wood was Brentwood, but Muhler did not leave the train there. He got out at the next station... Shenfield. Dawn was waiting for him. He could see her old Daytona yellow Ford Capri 2000. They embraced and kissed outside the car; again inside it. "You smell good," Dawn chuckled, "Brut... the wonderful... I mean, the great smell of Brut?" When he nodded guiltily, she laughed. "You also taste good, Fritty. Man, I could eat you tonight, I'm so hungry for you. It's been so long, I've been waiting so long... for you..."

The Ford Capri was racing up the Billericay Road, Dawn gripping the steering wheel with her right hand and holding on to Muhler's right hand with her left hand. She forced her left hand down into his lap, along the inside of his legs. She pressed and felt greedily. Excitement flushed through her veins at his growing response to her persistent caressing. Without looking at him, her lips smiled but her eyes narrowed mysteriously.

Fritz Muhler, usually so cold and clinical, was not entirely able to control the burning flood of passion which this girl never failed to arouse within him. In her presence, close to the indulgent warmth of her body, his animal sexual drive seemed to take precedence over the self-survival nature of his killer's instinct. There were times when he did not like this, but he appeared powerless against it.

Dawn had her eyes fixed firmly on the road ahead, which gave Muhler the opportunity to study her sideways, with hooded eyes and without looking directly at her.

Dawn Sanders was twenty-six; a solicitor in partnership with a firm in practice in Brentwood and with offices in Chelmsford. She was blonde with an attractive face, a fetching figure and a divine body. She was five-foot-six and had very, very, very long legs which she often displayed to full advantage. Frequently strong-willed, she nevertheless had a personality which was light-hearted, gay (in the real sense) and lively. Her blue eyes could melt a man and the touch of her luscious lips could warm his breast and send his heartbeats into overdrive. But most of all, her body – firm and round and encompassing, still so young and tender – could excite and arouse a man to undreamt heights of ecstasy and to his utmost desire and drive. Muhler's lips twitched and his nostrils widened. He felt the explosion in his loins, the fire at the pit of his stomach. Subconsciously he reached for his shirt collar and pulled it up into his mouth. He needed that warm body tonight.

"Penny for your thoughts, darling." Her voice was enchanting and carefree.

"They're worth a million dollars, honey." And he was very serious about it.

Fritz Muhler, when studying her left profile, had not noticed that sudden narrowing of Dawn Sanders's pretty blue eyes, which had momentarily transformed them into shining impenetrable ice cool diamonds. For that brief instant, they had seemed more capable of stabbing a man's heart rather than warming or melting it.

Barrington Court, Shenfield, was a modern and exclusive three-storey block of six private apartments, two on each floor. Dawn Sanders's apartment was the one on the right hand side on the first floor. It was comprised of a lounge/diner, kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a small spare room which the young solicitor used as a study.

They drank some coffee, had some red wine and nibbled at some smoked Austrian cheese and listened vaguely to Brahms first symphony playing on the tape recorder. It was gone one o'clock. They slept – very little – in the master bedroom. Dawn allowed Fritz to undress her. She was amused at the striking effect upon him of the dark stockings, suspenders and suspender belt and tiny miniscule briefs, all of which she had put on for the sole purpose for him to take them off her. The bra fastened at the front, just to make it easier for him. She watched silently and appreciatively – as she lay naked upon the bed – as he undressed. It was a familiar body to her. She reckoned that she knew every one of its nooks and crannies. In her eyes he was an Adonis, shaped like some young Greek god. He would be unforgettable! Pity that she would have to forget him one day.

Unknown to the two lovers, there were two men waiting in the shadows of the garages adjacent to the apartment block. The two men were wearing dark raincoats, with the collars turned up, and dark hats. They looked like two Philip

Marlowes from the forties; Humphrey Bogart and Dick Powell, maybe. They saw the lights go out in Dawn's apartment, but they did not move. They would still be there with the coming of the other dawn.

After that night, when they had made love thrice and he lay beside her exhausted and satisfied, the first faint light of dawn intruding upon their room, Fritz Muhler told Dawn Sanders of his dreams.

"One of those big houses up the Drive at Hutton... it's the ideal place to settle down and to retire... and to concentrate entirely upon matrimonial bliss... with the most beautiful girl in the world."

"Did you have anyone in particular in mind?" she asked with mock coyness.

His answer was to lean across her again and to kiss her passionately and fervently whilst he gently fondled her generous breasts.

"When?" she demanded quietly, breathless and panting, when he finally released her lips.

"After this last job, honey," he replied, his voice but a whisper.

"Why not now, darling? Why not now, before... instead of the job? Retire now and marry me now... and forget the job. Forget this job. Don't do it, darling. We could get married right away and go on a long honeymoon, or settle down right now in our dream house... just the two of us, alone together... forever." There was a definite trace of desperation in her pleading. Muhler must have sensed it, but he simply believed it to be her feminine anxiousness to arrive at the altar.

"Yes, we'll be together forever, honey, as soon as I finish this last job. I promise you, honey. We'll get married immediately afterwards."

"Darling..." It was Dawn who was now all over Muhler, kissing, embracing, beseeching. "Drop the job, Fritz!"

"I can't, honeybun. It's a contract. I have to fulfil it. Besides, I want... we want the dinero."

"You can have a contract with me, Fritz. A life-long contract. And I have some money. I haven't exactly been idle as a solicitor, you know. It's a very lucrative profession, if you play it right."

"Yeah, but this is real money. 'Nough to buy that house outright and, with the investments I've made, to live in luxury the rest o' our lives."

"I'd rather have you than luxury... and the damn house."

"I have to make the hit, honey. My professional reputation is at stake. Can't you see that? Besides, I want the money. I can't live without it. And you'll still have me, anyway... afterwards."

There may not be any afterwards, Dawn moaned silently to herself.

"Can you live without me, Fritz?" she demanded aloud.

"No, honey, I guess I can't. But that don't make no difference. I still have to... I'm still makin' and fulfilling the contract."

"I thought so," she whispered. The dice had been cast and they sure weren't sixes.

She drove him to Shenfield station. He had to return to London – to the Cumberland – for a meeting that day with Benny Fenton, the IRA's contact man. They kissed inside the apartment and had one last feel of each other and then they went quietly down to her car, which was parked outside the building, not in the garage. The old Capri didn't start first time; she had to pull out the choke and give the accelerator pedal a kick to bring the car to life.

The two men in raincoats saw them go.

Muhler and the girl remained silent throughout the journey to the station. They kissed again before he got onto the train and then held hands through the open window until the train departed. Dawn felt his hand slip out of hers as the train pulled away. When she turned away from the empty rails, there were tears in her eyes... big silent tears that welled up without any sobbing. They almost drowned her pretty face.

The two men in raincoats watched Dawn Sanders as she arrived back at her apartment block. She had only been inside her apartment a few moments when her front door bell was rung from the entrance door down below. Her whole body shivered. That ring had been too immediate – too prompt – upon her return. Someone had been waiting for her.

Dawn Sanders ran to her front window and looked frantically down to the street. There was a man in a light raincoat and dark hat standing at the entrance door to the apartment block. Dawn dived back through her lounge to the rear window. Desperately she looked down at the lawn below. There was no one there. She could escape through the back way. Too late, she remembered the flat roof above. Next moment there was a terrific explosion as a powerfully built man shattered through her rear window, letting go of his rope as he landed on the carpet beside her. Instantly, he sprang to his feet and Dawn remembered no more... dark oblivion encompassed her immediately his fist connected with her jaw.

Chapter Twelve

Dawn Sanders regained consciousness in her bedroom to find herself secured upright in a standing position, her hands and feet handcuffed behind her to hooks driven into the top and bottom of her heavy old-fashioned oak wardrobe.

The man who had crashed through her lounge window and punched her on the jaw, was towering menacingly over her. "Oh, so yer awake at last," he growled and reached for the collar of her blouse. Still dazed, Dawn realised that her jacket had been removed. The rest of her clothing was still intact, but only temporarily it seemed. The big man had grabbed hold of her blouse and was about to rip it off her, when a quieter, more cultured voice stopped him.

"When you're going to undress a young lady, Jake, be sure to do it more gently. Here, let me show you how."

The other man advanced upon Dawn and she recognised him as the man she had seen through her front window standing at the door below and ringing her bell. The man in the light raincoat and dark hat, though it was probably ominous for her that he had since removed both. He looked the sort of guy who would take off his hat and coat before beating a woman. This quieter, smaller man smiled at her briefly and then slowly unfastened the buttons of her blouse. His touch was gentle, almost delicate. Dawn guessed that he would be thorough at his work and would probably enjoy it. She started to shiver uncontrollably and couldn't stop.

She didn't notice or hear the third man enter her bedroom. He had not been there when she had come to, but suddenly, like a sea fog descending over a stricken ship, his presence filled the room. The other two men melted away from her, and Dawn knew immediately that the third man presented the greatest danger to her. His voice, when it breached the leaden silence, seemed ridiculously conversational.

"Miss Dawn Sanders... I want you to look at a photograph. We have certain questions to ask you, for which we will require accurate answers from you. Now, my colleagues both have very successful techniques for procuring the correct answers to their questioning of... as you are a solicitor, Miss Sanders, shall I say an unco-operative hostile witness? Very successful techniques indeed, Miss Sanders, and they both appear to enjoy applying them... particularly to pretty young ladies... though, regrettably, the young ladies are not so pretty afterwards. But I, Miss Sanders, am, unfortunately, a little squeamish. That is why I would like you to look at this photograph... before we ask you our questions."

Dawn looked at the photograph. What the hell, she might as well look at the damn thing. The girl in the photograph had probably been very attractive once. She had probably also been about the same age as herself once... not long

before the photo had been taken. But in the photo... Dawn gasped. Her stomach seemed to turn over and her throat went very dry and nervous twitches seized her pulse. Even her breathing appeared to be suspended in limbo. Dawn forced herself to study the girl in the picture, an unknown girl in her mid twenties. It was a colour photograph; it had to be. It was an enlargement; this emphasised the effect.

The girl in the photo was wrapped in a blood-soaked sheet. But above the sheet, which had been pulled back at the top, Dawn could clearly see the holes cut in the areas of her naked breasts, blood flowing from gashes beneath the nipples. Dawn's mind swirled; nerve pains stabbed the back of her eyes. She could almost see the blood flowing from the girl's breasts; it was almost as if the picture had come alive before her. The front of the girl's head was shaved; blood poured out of lacerations where once had been soft blonde hair. Hair just like her own hair. Dawn wanted to faint, but she had never been the fainting kind. She wanted to be sick, but her stomach had gone dry and she could only retch. The stark horror of the photograph gripped Dawn, took possession of her, seized her senses. The third man held it closer to her face, but the image of the poor unknown girl was already branded upon Dawn's memory. Her eyes were glued to the poor girl's face. Blood, too, came from the girl's half-open mouth, her lips bruised and split. Saliva had formed at the corners of her lips. The eyes were blackened into deep crevasses of sore flesh. The girl's eyes seemed to move and float around in front of Dawn, in a dreadful silent warning, and Dawn felt she was swimming in a sea of the girl's blood. The half-dead corpse in the picture was warning her. The dead corpse in the picture....

The girl in the picture wasn't dead; she'd been tortured by an expert, and the expert knew his business well. Every slash, every cut, every bruise, every burn had meant utmost pain to the girl in the picture, but it had not meant death.

"Fabrian's work," the third man explained, indicating the second, smaller man. "Jake, here, is more crude." Whilst the big, first man glowered in annoyance, the second man clasped his hands together and smiled in appreciation at the acknowledgement of his work. He was eyeing the outline of Dawn's breasts, still concealed inside her exposed bra, like a dog examines a box of candies.

Dawn tried not to panic; tried not to break down in fright. What had her training taught her? Stall for time, delay for as long as possible. It was the best way... the only chance to save your life. As soon as you answered their questions, you were of no use to them; you were dead. Stall for time, stall for your life. Contradictory demands flooded Dawn's brain. She was going to die anyway. Why not die the quick easy way? Get it over with... quickly, instead of the slow painful way like the girl in the picture. But the truth was there was no easy way to die and the will to live was uppermost in her being. Stall for time...

Stall for time? What was the point? There was no-one coming to rescue her. No-one coming to save her. No shining knight on a white charger dashing to save this distressed maiden from the clutches of these sinister men and from the certainty of a violent and premature death. The only person she could expect was Fritz “Baby” Muhler, and if he saved her, that would be ironical. Like the snake saving the mongoose. Besides, Fritz would not be here until late that evening. These men would have long since taken her away from here by then. In all probability she would be dead by the time that Fritz arrived at her apartment.

So Dawn Sanders rejected the “stalling” theory, she decided to elect for the inaptly named soft option. She decided to co-operate with her interrogators and earn for herself what she hoped would be the quick, clean death.

“Miss Sanders,” the tone of the third man’s voice was again soft and mildly conversational, “we know that you have been working for some years for the British MI6. There is no point in you denying it... though you can if you wish, although it would weaken the credibility of your answers to our real questions... but we are not asking you if this is true... we already know it to be a fact.”

“Who are you?” Dawn demanded abruptly; she was even more alarmed now.

“There is no need for you to know who we are,” the third man replied patiently. “Suffice to say that you are working for MI6 and that it is... was... your job to stop Fritz Muhler from reaching Liechtenstein... and... to say that it is our job to ensure that Mr. Muhler does arrive in Liechtenstein... in time for... well, you may know all that... if you don’t, there is no point in me telling you. Simple, isn’t it, really?”

“Why would the British MI6 be interested in Fritz going, or not going to Liechtenstein?” Dawn tried desperately to make the whole idea sound ridiculous. There was obviously no point in her denying that she worked for MI6, but maybe she could still confuse them regarding her intentions for Fritz Muhler.

“Ah, don’t be naïve, Miss Sanders... and please don’t waste our time or our patience with you... for your own sake. You obviously know as much as anyone why Muhler is going to Liechtenstein. Probably more than most as a result of your close... and intimate... association with him.” The third man smiled indulgently at her.

“Why would MI6 be concerned with Muhler’s contract in Liechtenstein? Tell me that!” Dawn persisted, indignantly, almost defiantly.

“Now you are beginning to annoy me, Miss Sanders.” The third man’s face had flushed with sudden anger. “And it will be you who will be doing the telling, young lady.” Then, strangely, the man’s anger subsided as quickly as it had risen. When he continued, his voice was calm and soft again. “Though I

suppose you had to give it a try... but don't make me lose my temper, Miss Sanders. Now, however, before I commence with the questioning, Miss Sanders, just to keep you reminded of the photograph you have seen and the importance to you of the accuracy of your answers... and of what will definitely happen to you if you are not co-operative, I will remove your bra. Do remember, Miss Sanders, the breasts of the young lady in that photograph... or what was left of them." Slowly, the third man raised his hands towards Dawn's bosom. "Front fastening, I see. How very thoughtful and convenient and easy." Dawn thought, quite ridiculously, how nimble his fingers were as he unhooked her bra and removed it from her, exposing her breasts. The third man tossed the garment onto her bed and then glanced at her breasts. Dawn felt very sub-conscious. Beyond her control, her breasts seemed to rise and thrust themselves up at the man, her nipples, alive and firm, poked... peeped up at him. The third man's eyes completed their examination and rose to meet hers. "Quite nice," he smiled. "I prefer larger boobs, but yours are firm and round. Let us hope they can stay that way."

"Yes," she whispered, very distinctly, so that only he could hear.

"Well, Miss Sanders..." The voice was again patient, almost condescending, as if the man felt sorry for her and her hopeless position. "... the fact that the late Sir Maurice Oldfield, the ex-head of MI6, was once stationed in Ulster is common knowledge. Also that he took a particular interest in the activities of the IRA... among other things..." The third man paced around the bedroom for a moment or two and then turned back to face Dawn again. His slate blue eyes seemed almost gentle... tired. "And it is the IRA which has put out a contract to be fulfilled in Liechtenstein."

The third man turned to his two companions. "I think that Miss Sanders would be more comfortable whilst answering our questions if you would arrange for her to be seated rather than trussed up like a chicken waiting to be plucked."

The first man dragged one of her old solid oak dining chairs from the lounge/diner. Then he and the second man uncuffed her from the wardrobe and pushed her down onto the chair. They handcuffed her legs to the legs of the chair and her hands and arms behind her to the back of the chair.

The third man sat down on a chair opposite to Dawn. "You were... are... in love with Fritz Muhler?" he asked her.

"Yes.... I am."

"And it was your job to prevent him from going to Liechtenstein to fulfil his contract with the IRA. How did you intend to achieve that?"

"By persuasion. Feminine persuasion... the persuasion of a loving woman."

“And if that didn’t work?”

“I’d have killed him.”

“How?”

“Cyanide... in Champagne.”

The third man almost laughed. Incredulity briefly filled his eyes. “How very Agatha Christie-ish,” he exclaimed.

“But effective... and quick,” Dawn rejoined.

“You prefer quick deaths, young lady?”

“When necessary... when there is no alternative.”

“Mm. I’m glad I’m not your lover.”

“Look what you’re missing, kid,” she immediately retorted.

“Ah, we’ll never know,” he smiled.

“Well, as they say, I’m the greatest thing since sliced bread. I could be yours, all yours.”

“You’re crazy! Thanks, but no thanks.” The third man wandered through to the kitchen. Dawn could hear him open the ‘fridge. He returned with two bottles. “You have good taste in Champagne, Miss Sanders, vintage Moet et Chandon.”

“I have good taste in everything, Mr. What’s-your-name.”

“Mm. A good knowledge of Champers, too. 1959 and 1964 were both very good vintages. 1959 is particularly difficult to come by now. Which were you going to use?”

“If Fritz agreed to cancel Liechtenstein and marry me, the 1959.... without cyanide. If he was still determined to go ahead with the contract, the 1964 with cyanide.”

“And yourself?”

“I would have got over him eventually.... I suppose. I would have had to.”

“And poor Fritz? Poor Fritz. He probably doesn’t want to die. Such an unexpected exit for him. Yes, I don’t think he would want to die so soon.”

"Neither does the Prince of Wales... and his family... young family."

"Touche! Mais c'est la vie. C'est la guerre. C'est la mort."

"Will you kill me quickly?"

"Yes."

"How do I know you will? You could turn me over to these.... after you have finished with me... How do I know I can trust you?"

"You don't. All you do know is that if you do not co-operate with us, we will kill you slowly. Did Fritz Muhler suspect you in any way? Could he have any idea that you might try to kill him to stop him from going to Liechtenstein and fulfilling the IRA contract?"

"No. He didn't suspect a thing. He was like a "baby"... except in my bed." Dawn smiled.

"Could he have known that the MI6 was on to him?"

"No... definitely not."

"Thank you, Miss Sanders."

"Is that it, then?"

Yes. We know everything else. You have been most co-operative, Miss Sanders. We will remove you from the scene as quickly... and painlessly... as possible."

Dawn could hear the sudden rush of air out of her lungs. This was it, then. Really it. She had never expected it to be like this, but had always known that it was a possibility. The third man was still holding the two bottles of Champagne. He took them back to the kitchen. Then Dawn heard the two pops of the corks. For a moment she thought that it was going to be that way. Cyanide and Champagne. How very Agatha Christie-ish... using her own poison and method. She wondered what it would taste like. How long it would take? The pain?....

She heard a gurgling and gushing of liquid and the sink tap running. The third man came back into her bedroom, carrying the two empty bottles. "Just in case there was already cyanide in them," he explained to her. "I wouldn't want Fritz Muhler coming here... I take it he has a key to this flat?... and, when he finds you are not here, drinking Champagne in consolation... poisoned Champagne."

"You think of everything."

“One has to.”

“It’s a pity we weren’t on the same side.”

The third man looked at her, but didn’t answer.

They uncuffed her hands from the chair and put her bra back on, and her jacket. They then cuffed her hands behind her back and released her legs from the chair legs. She was told to stand up. The second man placed his light raincoat over her shoulders and secured the tie-belt so that the fact that she was handcuffed would be concealed. She was going to be killed somewhere other than in her apartment.

There was no-one around when they led her out from her apartment. How things had changed since she had first moved in here. Someone must have heard the noise of her window being smashed, but nobody wanted to know.

Fritz “Baby” Muhler would never see Dawn Sanders again. It was doubtful if anyone would.

Chapter Thirteen

Wednesday, 25th November 1987.

T. N. Warne was sitting in his study inside the brownstone on 63rd Street. He was sitting quietly, relaxing. An undisturbed, neat, double Glenmorangie was reclining majestically on the desk before him. The Glenmorangie waited patiently. Like T. N. Warne, it had developed patience with age. For ten years it had matured and mellowed amidst the fresh sea air of the Dornoch Firth. The walls of the room were lined with bookcases and a large drinks cabinet. There were photographs of famous pugilists; Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Archie Moore. A black Labrador dog nuzzled at his feet. Just audible, from the quadrophile, Thomas “Fats” Waller played ‘When Somebody Thinks You’re Wonderful’, exquisitely distilling the harmony, rhythm and melody. It was a very masculine room. A masculine room which seemed to recognise the past more than it acknowledged the present.

Robert Vereston, the slim, debonair Negro from Harlem, entered Warne’s study without knocking. There were no secrets between the wasted big white man and the quiet loyal black man who publicly pushed his wheelchair and privately did much more.

“Wilson has ‘phoned from London,” the black man reported. “Fritz “Baby” Muhler will not be diverted from going to Liechtenstein. The girl from MI6, Dawn Sanders, has been removed from the scene before she achieved anything, Mr. Warne.”

“Thank you, Bob.” T. N. Warne raised the glass of Glenmorangie to his lips, his nostrils savouring the aroma of the fine old Scotch malt whisky. He frowned slightly as a stab of pain shot through his spine. A dark cloud appeared to pass across his eyes. Those pains seemed to be coming more frequently... more acute and longer lasting.

Robert Vereston left the room as quietly as he had entered. It was best to leave Warne at peace with his pain. “Fats” Waller was now playing ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’.

X X X X X

Just further south on the same east side of the Big Apple, in Midtown Manhattan, as T. N. Warne luxuriated in that first sip of Glenmorangie, a tall, thick-set, flaxen haired man was staring serenely out of a large panoramic window overlooking the East River. The man was standing in Suite 401, 4th Floor, 866 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017. He was looking across the river to Queens, from which, from JFK International, he would soon be on a flight to London, England.

Johnnie (the Swede) Johansson was smiling. The Swede was always smiling. This year he had good reason to smile. He had made half a million dollars out of killing people and the Twins had taken the World Series, winning in the seventh and final game against the St. Louis Cardinals. He had gone to that last game. It had been at home, in the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul on the banks of the Mississippi. The motto for both baseball and contract killing was simple – always cover your ground.

Johnnie Johansson's chauffeur driven Daimler transported him from his luxury suite near the end of East 42nd Street through the Queens-Midtown tunnel to JFK.

Before saying goodbye, Richard, the English born chauffeur, handed him the envelope containing the theatre tickets.

"This 42nd Street show should be good, eh, Richard?"

"Very appropriate, if I may say so, sir."

"You may, Richard. Which theatre is it and where did you say it was?"

"The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, sir. The entrance is actually in Catherine Street, sir, and I rather believe that the stage door is in Russell Street. It's not far from the Strand, sir, and Covent Garden. Now, sir, Barnes will be waiting for you at Heathrow, sir, to take you to the hotel."

"Okay, Richard. Thank you. See you next year. Have a good Christmas... and New Year."

"Yes, sir. Thank you. You too, sir. Have a good trip, sir."

"I will, Richard."

The couple sitting beside him on the 747 seemed a bit strange. Weird even. They were from the South; that deep South. Johnnie the Swede did not particularly like the deep South... or its people. The couple insisted on introducing themselves to him.

"I'm Billie Lou Weldon. Please to meet y'all."

"And I'm Maggie Sinclair Lewis. Sure hope we're all goin' to have us a good flight."

"What did yer say yer name wus?"

"I didn't."

“Ah, you’ll all be a Yankee. I thought yer sounded foreign.”

“My name is Johansson.”

“Yer all stayin’ in London, then, Mr. Johansson?”

Barnes met him at Heathrow. The car was a Ford Granada, comfortable, not too big. How the two southerners, Weldon and the capricious Maggie Sinclair Lewis, happened to come with him, he was never quite sure. It turned out that they were staying at the same hotel as he was, the Trafalgar, and he found himself giving his fellow American citizens, and their luggage, a lift to the hotel.

“Real neighbourly of you, Johnnie,” Weldon, having ascertained Johansson’s given name, exclaimed gratefully. “We fellow Americans sure should stick together and help each other in these here foreign lands. This sure is all real cosy and convenient, you hear.”

The hotel was central. Just off Trafalgar Square, in Whitcomb Street. Further up Whitcomb Street, Barnes parked the Granada in the multi-storey; one of those narrow spirally multi-storey parks with more than a dozen floors and most of those below ground.

The four of them dined together in the hotel’s Lady Hamilton restaurant. They shared a bottle of wine and Weldon invited Johansson up to his room for further drinks when they discovered that there was no residents’ lounge and that the hotel’s bar operated as a separate unit for the general public and was crowded. “I have a couple of calls to make and then I’ll join you,” the Swede promised.

Half-an-hour later, Johnnie the Swede knocked on Billie Lou Weldon’s hotel room door.

“Just a moment, Yankee!” The breathless shout from within, with its unmistakeable positive southern accent, was a woman’s voice. Johansson was not surprised that they were sharing a room. He could picture Maggie Sinclair Lewis now, having changed from her dinner attire and in the pulsating privacy of the bed chamber, into something sleek, sophisticated and sensual; a cross between an evening gown and a nightdress. Once it would have been known as the ‘Switch’ – you can go to a party or to bed in it, preferably to both at the same time and place. In see-through satin or silk – or maybe nylon, it would be either long and flowing in length from the waist down with very little above, purely a low cut bodice inadequately housing her generous bosom, or a short baby doll affair adequately displaying long shapely limbs and leaving nothing to the imagination.

The door opened and there was Maggie Sinclair Lewis displaying herself almost completely in its frame, dressed in a short wisp of a skirt and a translucent silk blouse that loosely covered her large breasts. The glow from the tall, powerful,

free-standing reading lamp directly behind her emphasised the full effect of the flimsy clothing on her deliciously curvaceous body as she smiled an encouraging welcome. Johansson found their bodies gently brushing together as he eased slowly past her to enter the room.

The broad figure of Billie Lou Weldon was standing at the mini-bar. He turned abruptly as Johnnie the Swede entered. Too abruptly, Johnnie thought, the southerner had quick reflexes, as if he was used to reacting quickly. Reacting to what? Johnnie was suddenly wary. That was his automatic reaction. He knew all about quick reflexes.

"What's yer poison, Johnnie? Are yer all a Martini man like most hombres north of the Mason-Dixon Line... or d'yuh all drink real drinkin' stuff?"

"Bourbon and a dash of water please, Billie. Sour Mash. I take it you have it."

"Do I have it? I sure do, brother. And the real stuff. None o' yer make-believe piss water. This here's real Kentucky bourbon... from dear ol' Bourbon County, old Kentuckee."

Maggie was still smiling. Johnnie's eyes worked their way up slowly from her soft, soft muscular large expanse of legs to the bulging, heaving, almost tremoring breasts. She draped herself across the bed, just so invitingly. Johnnie wondered what the angle was. There was always an angle, but this was a strange set-up.

"I'm real glad you came, Johnnie," Maggie pouted vocally, her voice suddenly sounding semi-hysterical. "We're both real glad you came, Johnnie."

She was a real comer, Johnnie thought. Her eyes were dark and shining now, devouring him as he sat in an easy chair watching her sprawled across the bed. Billie brought him his drink, a generous sour mash, and didn't seemed to mind when Johnnie didn't look up at him but kept his eyes fixed on the sensuous Maggie. Maybe the southerner was pleased to show off his woman. Perhaps his ego bathed in the glow of her sexy showiness and he reckoned it reflected the strength of his virility. Or maybe this was just a new slant on the old-fashioned southern hospitality... not quite appreciated in the north yet. Whatever it was, it didn't embarrass the Swede to return the girl's come-hither, come-on gaze, but he didn't join her on the bed. He had seen something else in her eyes. He couldn't define it, but it was there. A slight wildness, a trace of panic. The look of a woman whose mind and body knew drugs. He wondered if these two southerners had secreted small tablets of lysergic acid or capsules of methadone. It was a thought... a possibility.

There was something crazy about these two; were they for real or were they a big put-on? He couldn't be sure. Maybe he just didn't want to be sure. They were not artificial in themselves, but there was a falseness in their emphatic

small talk, their over acted expressions. Lysergic acid and methadone, perhaps. Acid heads. Pill poppers, maybe. They could be frightening, these two... but the Swede didn't frighten. Maybe he should.

By ten o'clock, after Johansson had indulged in several bourbons and his hosts a bottle of champers and some Chablis, they were ready to try something different. The Swede studied his two companions with narrowed eyes. The nonchalance of his gaze belied its penetration.

"Look, you guys... I sure hope this won't come as too great a surprise to you both, but I've been too long a time without a joint." Johansson took a silver cigarette case from his inside pocket and opened it. Barnes had done his job well and had supplied what he had been expected to supply. Right now, though, Johnnie the Swede needed a stronger drag. "Before you come to any conclusions, Maggie and Billie, I must tell you this is one American who don't go along with pot laws and I ain't never have."

Johansson chose a stick from the case and left the case open on the small table between them. Billie Lou Weldon and Maggie Sinclair Lewis did not look at each other, not even for an instant. They had obviously been along this path before. At first, they were content to merely stare back at the Swede. Through the flame in front of his face, Johansson watched and waited for their reaction. Initially it was cautious, yet, so the Swede reckoned, it was also positive. He, too, had been down this path many times before. Maggie was the first to react. Perhaps it was the alcohol in the girl, but she smiled hesitantly, as if recognising a fellow voyager and as if she was relieved to find a friend. Billie wasn't quite so responsive.

"You jest go y'all ahead, Johnnie boy," the southern man condescended. "We ain't exactly the feds or fuzz."

"Hardly!" Maggie giggled.

"The laws are repressive," Johansson continued, inhaling deeply. "To deny experience is a crime... the real crime. To prohibit any intelligent individual's right to fulfilment is... well it's real damn shit... real damn bull-shit. You guys know any dive... a real deep dive?"

"Yes... maybe... maybe not." Suddenly the southern man's voice had changed. It was quieter, more mellow, but colder... cooler. The southern sun had deserted it; the warm accent had almost, but not quite, departed. The hidden threat was lurking there somewhere. But why? And for what reason? Johansson again looked at Weldon through the cigarette smoke. He held his gaze steady without blinking and then shifted his stare to the girl. He spoke only four words.

"You're only just kids."

"I'm not at all sure we're all on the same ol' wavelength," Weldon replied quietly.

"No, I guess not. Forget it, Reb... I'll finish this and leave. See you again sometime." Johansson made sure he sounded offhanded, almost disinterested.

For some reason Weldon reacted. For some reason which Johansson could not figure out, Weldon couldn't stand that disinterest. "Mind if I have one of these here smokes, Yankee?"

"Yes, Johnny Reb, if it's your first, I would. Don't try to impress me. It don't matter too many shakes."

"My first? O' what?" Billie Lou Weldon reached down to the table where the cigarette case lay open. He picked it up and held it to his nostrils. "This here's passable grass. Just passable, boy. I'll try one... fer starters."

"For starters?"

"Yep... why sure, Yankee boy. You see, you're all a bit out o' touch in this here ol' London Town."

"You think I'm out of touch?"

"I jest know you are."

"From what, Reb?"

"From where it's at, Yankee. Seems to me you don't quite know your way around this here lit'le ol' capital... not even with the help of that there chauffeur-cum-valet of yours." Weldon took two of the sticks from the case and placed them both between his lips and lit them. He took one from his mouth and handed it to Maggie in the fashion in which Paul Henreid had once lit a cigarette for Bette Davis whilst lighting one at the same time for himself. "Let's treat this as an hors d'oeuvre... an aperitif. You want for us to take you to the main course, Yankee boy?"

They got a cab, just further up the road in Whitcomb Street where it was two-way. The taxi travelled east, having gone down the Haymarket, across Trafalgar Square and along Duncannon Street past St. Martin-in-the-Fields and into the Strand. The theatre traffic was no problem and once they were through the quieter Fleet Street, the streets of the City were deserted at that time of night. They arrived at Aldgate just as it started to rain. The East End, with little traffic around, looked dark, cold, wet and distinctly uninviting. This was gonna be one helluva trip, Johnnie thought, or else it was gonna be just one hell. He hoped his southern friends knew where they were and what they were doing. What had been Billie's words? 'Where it's at.' What they were at, was more like it.

They left the taxi at the Aldgate, near the top of Middlesex Street, which on Sundays is transformed into Petticoat Lane. From Whitechapel High Street, the three adventurers went through the weirdly unique Half Moon Passage. Huddled up against the grimy walls of the narrow thoroughfare, trying to keep out of the rain, were the shabby, tattered and torn meth drinkers. As Johnnie and his two companions passed by, one of these discarded people, a man of thirty looking like sixty, raised a methylated spirit bottle, its neck crudely smashed, to his mouth and sucked a gulp, the purple liquid gushing down into his tormented stomach. The poor peoples' abandoned empty bottles, some broken, lay in piles, like unlit funeral pyres, at regular intervals along Half Moon Passage and into Camperdown Street. As the three Americans crossed Alie Street, Johnnie and the girl quickened their pace to get away from the meth drinkers, but Billie restrained them.

"They're no problem, the meth drinkers. An' while they're here, we know it's all safe, else they'd been gone. They're harmless. They're all prob'ly more afraid o' us. They're kinda bombed out, anyway, like space cadets."

"Big Apple jargon, eh, Johnny Reb? Thought you guys only spoke Dixie."

"I bin around, Yankee. I've even mixed with Wall Street yuppies. Now they's the ones for real speed stuff. You know what I mean, boy?"

"Yeah! But Washington Square in the Village at night is where it's really at. You survive that, mister, you survive any lit'le o' thing. You know what I mean?"

"Well, where we're takin' you now ain't no Washington Square, mister, but it's one high groove... the best in this here town, believe me, an' be prepared to pay, boy."

Saint Mark Street had led them down into Prescott Street. "This is where it's all at, Mr. Johansson."

The Swede looked across the street. To his right was a church, the Church of the Forty English and Welsh Martyrs; to his left a pub, the Princess of Prussia. Billie Lou Weldon was pointing to a spot between the two.

From the outside, it was a plain nondescript building. It could have contained anything. It could even have been empty. It was the sort of place that nobody takes any notice of; you just pass it by. But it contained something very specific. For some people it was everything.

It was a top room. A private room. Away from the distorted crowd of Chinese, West Indians, Pakistanis, Dutch, Africans, and Japanese. The Japs were everywhere, Johansson thought, they were into everything. He was glad of the elevator which rescued them up to the secluded room. Some £50 bills changed

hands. The Turkish-Cypriot running the show returned with a small enamelled box. Inside were twenty to thirty tablets, white... carefully wrapped in transparent cellophane.

"The main course," Billie Lou Weldon smiled. "If you're really up to it, boy."

Johnnie "the Swede" Johansson looked around him and made his decision. "I'm in unfamiliar territory, Billie Boy, maybe even hostile territory. Now you know darn well that ain't no conditions for to take a white trip.... Boy!"

"Okay," Weldon smiled. "What d'you suggest then?"

"A small red trip would do me fine."

It was a small room, but it was comfortable... and cosy. They wanted you to stay. On the second floor. They were sitting on bean beds. Maggie had started her sprawling routine again. Weldon pressed a button on the wall and a bell rang somewhere. The Turkish-Cypriot reappeared silently. Weldon whispered a few words to him and the swarthy man quickly left the room. He soon returned with a small leather tobacco pouch which he handed to Weldon before disappearing again. Maggie Sinclair Lewis's eyes grew wide; she undid a button on her half-unbuttoned, mainly transparent blouse. She stretched her uncovered legs further across the bean bed.

"These are five star, boy, the best." Billie Lou Weldon grinned as he opened the pouch and showed Johansson the contents. Clear cellophane was again wrapped around the tablets, but this time they were deep red and larger than the previous white pills. There were at least fifty doses of Seconal, a proprietary name of a hypnotic and soporific barbiturate.

Maggie Sinclair Lewis jumped up from the bean bed and squealed deliciously. "I love it," she cried excitedly. "It's dem pink ol' groovies!"

"Knocks the shit out of sour mash," Johnnie acknowledged.

"We's goin' on a red trip, folks, but not too far, Yankee. Five's the limit for new members of this here joint."

"The next couple of hours were blurred for Johnnie "the Swede" Johansson and his two companions. The three of them had quickly reached their highs with the five pills each and, once on the first plain, it was not difficult for Johansson to persuade Weldon to go for another dosage.

By now Maggie was clawing at Billie, her hands and arms working over his body and legs as they lay entwined together on the bean bed. The girl seemed to writhe and swoon around, whilst still holding Billie in a smothering embrace.

Leaning slowly and precariously backwards, she shook her head and giggled hysterically, and swooped quickly forward and put her right hand high up between Billie's legs, whilst he, having slipped to the floor, chuckled and reached occasionally for one of her naked and shapely legs. Then she hooted loudly and more hysterically as he suddenly thrust his hand up between her legs. "This is beautiful, jest bootiful," she moaned. She slowly reclined on the bed and giggled.

Weldon laughed with less control than he had shown earlier and rose from the floor. "I'll get the magic bag," he stammered. "Don't go away... I'm gonna pass it around. Pass it 'round, eh?"

Johansson's burning eyes were again fixed upon Maggie. Although he couldn't fully comprehend it, there was no mistaking her action. She looked at Johnnie, opened her mouth slowly and pushed her tongue out at him. Then she opened her legs wide and thrust the lower part of her body at him. Vaguely, he realised, without much surprise, that she wasn't wearing any panties. One of the side effects of the Seconal was showing. As was most of Maggie Sinclair Lewis.

The second dosage was agreed to be three each. The Swede was aware that there was background music somewhere... or was it forward music? He couldn't figure out what it was. He didn't want to know. Damn it. Damn music! In so many minutes... or hours... or half a lifetime Maggie Lewis was sitting on his lap, intermittently rubbing herself against his groin. Suddenly she put her arms around his neck and pressed her breasts against his chest. Johansson looked down at Weldon who had resumed his position on the floor. The soporific side of the effects of the Seconal had worked upon the southerner, inducing an unnaturally deep sleep. Billie Lou Weldon was snoring quietly if not harmoniously, oblivious to any sexual interplay between Maggie and Johnnie the Swede.

Maggie, her short golden hair now very dishevelled but still rather attractive, placed her pretty head to the side of Johnnie's face and began kissing and nibbling his ears. He wondered what would happen if he made love to her. He wondered, but he didn't want to find out. Not now. He had not come to Europe to expand upon his already extensive sex life.

"Pinky groovy..." Maggie mumbled.

The two carefree, abandoned words were enough to bring Johnnie's attention back to the girl. He stared at her, swayed slowly on the bean bed, smiled stupidly and blinked his eyes several times. His eyes were tired and yet he felt elated. Weird lights burned through his brain and he wanted to dance for joy. He wanted to be fully awake and yet he was tired... very tired. But his eyes were wide from the Seconal, his lips parted, the muscles of his face beyond relaxation. The drugged girl on his lap stretched luxuriously. She smiled child-like and reached her arms up for him. He simply smiled down at her. But the Seconal

was playing another of its tricks upon him. Somewhere, his mind and brain, his intentions and his actions, were no longer synchronised.

He had no intention of making love to her. He was not going to make love to her.... But he had removed his trousers, and reaching down, he rolled her over onto her back on the floor. He lay down beside her and undid the remaining two buttons on her blouse, and pulled at her bra until the fasteners tore apart. She moaned and giggled, and when he touched her exposed breasts and fingered her rising nipples, she moaned again and lifted one leg over his hip.

“Pinky groovy, pinky groovy...” She began gasping through her mouth, the intake of air coming in short sporadic pants, as if she had lost some control over her bodily functions. She pushed her pelvis into Johnnie’s groin; her glossed eyes half open, her freckled hands reaching up, stroking his leg, her slim fingers clutching at his skin. “You’re my pinky groovy. I want my pinky groovy. I want to have my pinky groovy.... Inside me....”

That Seconal! Those damn beautiful red tablets! He reached over and cupped her right breast and then he mounted her. Pinky groovy! As he made awkward love to her, she moaned and giggled her maddening, high-pitched giggle. Finally, he collapsed over her in a narcotic stupor.

Later, when the three of them awoke, they found that someone had been sick.

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Meanwhile, Fritz “Baby” Muhler had spent most of that same day and most of that evening with Benny Fenton. Muhler had been advised that the IRA’s chief contract negotiator was a completely amoral man – flirty with women, charming with everyone, and utterly unscrupulous. Muhler had also been told by those who knew such people and such things, that Fenton was a man who thinks that the end always justifies the means. After spending so many hours with the man, during which time they meticulously went over and over again the plans and details of their operation to kill the two young sons of the Prince of Wales in Liechtenstein, “Baby” Muhler had drawn his own studied conclusion about the IRA’ organiser. Fenton was now just cold and ruthless and it seemed to Fritz that Fenton had been ‘dead’ for a long time... ‘dead’ to all human emotion.

It was gone midnight when Fritz Muhler finally left Fenton’s room in the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch. Muhler returned briefly to his own room in the same hotel, for a shower and a change of clothing and to collect the parcel for Dawn. From the state of the hairs he had glued at crucial points around his room, Muhler could tell that it had not been searched since that first intrusion. Whoever had investigated him then, must have been satisfied. But how? And why?

The commissionaire at the Great Cumberland Place entrance of the hotel, oddly still on duty after midnight instead of the hall porter, managed to get him a taxi somehow, despite the hour. A good tip always achieved wonders. Muhler was soon on his way to Liverpool Street Station, clutching the gift wrapped parcel in his lap.

The present was a bottle of Estee Lauder. The full perfume. Not much to give her, really. She was worth so much more, but you can't put a value on a good love. And when you have a true understanding with your lover, little presents are acceptable, often more important and thoughtful than larger gifts. And Dawn liked and always used Estee Lauder perfume and was always ready to receive it. She would appreciate it. He had made another purchase at the same perfumery department, a bottle of the intriguing Aramis after shave for himself. Aramis was the male companion – equivalent – to Estee Lauder and it had been the Aramis which had reminded him of the perfume for her.

Last night, when they had kissed on meeting outside Shenfield Station; first outside her car and then inside it, she had said: "You smell good. The great smell of Brut?" It had been half statement and half question, and when he had nodded guiltily, she had laughed. She had always bought him Aramis. He should have remembered. He should have worn Aramis. And he had always bought her Estee Lauder. She was at her best when wearing that perfume... and nothing else.

Not always, though. Muhler smiled at a sudden, pleasant memory. It had been just over a year ago, the evening before Dawn's twenty-fifth birthday. He had bought her an expensive purse and Chanel perfume then, from Liberty's in Regent Street... the present nicely gift wrapped and placed inside a plastic carrier for protection. He had almost forgotten that, until now. Well, this time, it was back to Estee Lauder. He was pleased that he had been able to get it.

After being cooped up all morning in Benny Fenton's room, the IRA contact man had suggested a short break. Realising that he was going to be there all afternoon as well and wanting to get something – just something little and meaningful – for Dawn, Muhler had dashed down to the Great Cumberland Place entrance. He knew that Harrods stocked the perfume. He could get a taxi down Park Lane and along Knightsbridge and the Brompton Road, be in and out of Harrods, and into another taxi – there were always taxis outside Harrods – and back up to the Cumberland again. But for once there were no taxis in Great Cumberland Place. He remembered that the Debenhams stores stocked Estee Lauder. Back across the hotel lobby to the Oxford Street entrance. There was a Debenhams store further along Oxford Street, the one that used to be called Marshall & Snelgrove. And that was where he had got Dawn's Estee Lauder... and the Aramis which she loved to smell on his naked body.

The taxi pulled up outside Liverpool Street Station. It was about 12.30 am. There wouldn't be another train for Shenfield until about two o'clock. Muhler already had his ticket, a return, having bought it that morning on the way back into London. Now the station looked deserted; bleak and cold. He longed for Dawn's warm body and cosy bed. He asked the ticket collector for the waiting room. The man seemed anxious to closely examine his ticket before showing him the direction.

"We have to be sure you are a bona fide traveller before letting you into the waiting room, sir. Else it would be full up each night with the 'omeless, tramps an' everyone sleepin' rough. If you'd like to come with me, sir, I'll take you there."

Muhler followed the railway employee to the waiting room. Through the windows of the door, he could see that the interior was barren and empty. The official unlocked the door and stood aside for the American to enter. "What happens now?" Muhler demanded.

"I lock you in, sir, and then come for you ten minutes before your train is due to leave."

"Lock me in? Why do you have to lock the door when I'm inside?"

"We have to, sir. It's the only way we can keep the tramps out. They'd be swarming all over you else, sir. Now you wouldn't be wantin' that now, would you, sir?"

Muhler was an independent type. He didn't trust anyone; didn't leave anything to fate. He didn't believe in relying on other people if he could avoid it and he certainly wouldn't put himself in a position where he had to rely on this guy coming and letting him out of the waiting room in time to catch his train. And he didn't intend to miss that train and lose any more hours with Dawn. "Forget it," Muhler grunted.

He found a seat on his platform and sat down. What a bore! Having to wait in a station for two hours... and in the early hours of the morning. He hated trains and he didn't think much better of stations. He should have gone by car. What would Dawn be doing now? Whilst she was waiting for him. Getting herself ready for him... expectantly, anticipatively, excitedly... impatiently? 12.45 am. Nothing to do and nothing to read. What a drag.

Nothing to read? A newspaper van – the Daily Mail – came onto the station. Muhler got up and walked briskly over to it. Better than nothing at all. The Mail would not have been his choice. He had once had a thing about the beautiful and talented Jaclyn Smith, one of the original Charley's Angels, and he had never forgiven the Mail for something it had said about her during one of his previous visits to London. Cheap and brash journalism, he reckoned.

Muhler still considered that Jaclyn Smith was beautiful and talented – a real vivacious Texan, if ever there was one. A picture of her could still do wonders for him, the very thought of her could still turn him on. But right now he was bored and wanted something to read to pass away the time and any old rubbish would do. The van driver was unloading bundles of the newspaper onto a platform and, there being nothing else immediately available, Muhler bought a copy from him and returned to his seat.

As he sat down and started to flicker through the tabloid pages, full of the usual uninteresting trivial, a cold feeling of foreboding seized him. He'd had that kind of feeling before. The killer's instinct that acted as a blind warning when the hunter became the hunted. Sometimes it was the last line of defence for self-preservation. Somewhere, something was not quite right. Something was happening which shouldn't be happening. What was it? He could feel it, could sense it, but couldn't identify it. What was it? Who was it?

That Latin in the Carvery Restaurant. Who and what was he? Muhler had concentrated so much upon the Negro in the restaurant that he hadn't really noticed the other man until the last moment. Was that man somebody? Did he pose an unknown threat? Was he a danger? Or was Muhler being aware of ghosts again?

Muhler glanced around him and raised the collar of his coat against an imaginary chill. He looked down at the newspaper and an article gripped his attention. There had been a series of robberies on mainland Europe; in France, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Germany. The victims had been banks, finance houses, jewellers and, most significantly, wealthy drug barons. And Interpol, at their headquarters in Paris, thought that the incidents might be related – a concerted campaign they called it, by some unknown organisation. Fritz "Baby" Muhler knew that the robberies were related. None had been reported in Britain or the Irish Republic. The IRA was raising funds to pay the balance of his contract. Suddenly the cold chill had left him, replaced with a warm glow. He loved money... he loved the power and security it brought.

The train left on time. He was glad of that... maybe even relieved. He wanted to get to Dawn without further delay. He wanted to be with her as quickly as possible. He wanted to make passionate love to her this night... this morning. But the article in the newspaper had excited him; thrilled him with anticipation in a different way. It had re-aroused his lust for money and power, for death... and for killing. He loved the act of killing. It stimulated his adrenaline. Most of all he loved the act of killing children. Subconsciously, as he sat alone in the train compartment, he twisted the collar of his shirt down into his mouth and chewed frantically and impatiently upon the material. Not long now....

Not long now. It would be soon now. A matter of weeks. Soon it would be days. The gentle feel and squeeze of his finger on the trigger or the hammer –

depending upon the weapon he used – the quiet retort – the merest whisper of death, the crumpled bodies... Death and red blood in the pure white snow. Children's blood on the virgin snow. The thrill of it filled him with an ecstasy greater than sex. Greater, even, than sex with the delectable Dawn.

The train seemed to fly through the Essex night, the Essex suburbs, the Essex countryside.... The monotonous, stretched-out staccato ring of the metal wheels over the joins in the metal rails. Rat, ta tat! Rat ta tat! Rat ta tat! Rat ta tat! Rat ta tat! Lights, darkness, shadows, misty reflections... all whizzing by. Whisking him along.

She was not waiting for him at the station at Shenfield. That was unusual. It was unexpected. She was always there... waiting for him. Perhaps she had given up hope for him that night. But Dawn would never give up hope... for something she wanted, and expected. When he hadn't arrived on the previous train – the last one out of Liverpool Street before midnight, perhaps she had thought that he would not be coming that night. But he had promised her... promised her that he would be there, and Dawn was like a little child promised sweets... she would expect, demand, that he be there. She would have been waiting for him...

No, this was not like Dawn. She would be expecting him – right through the night, until the first glows of daylight. No, she would have come, and kept coming or remained for each train, until he arrived. She would be expecting him, knowing that he would come. Something must have prevented her from coming to the station. That damn old Ford Capri broken down again, that's what it would be... no doubt. Just because they lived near Dagenham, why did everyone here have to rely upon Fords? Muhler was a General Motors enthusiast... in England, at least have a Vauxhall. Early next year, after he had completed the contract, he would buy her a new car... a Merc... or a Jag or whatever she wanted. Damn Benny Fenton for keeping him so long! Damn the Ford Capri.

There were no Taxis. So he walked to Barrington Court, to her apartment. A weird November moon cast strange ghostly shadows across the road as he walked along. He could feel that wretched chill on his skin and in his bones again. The fingers of death were playing on his spine. He resented that. Death, unwanted death. Death was for other people, not for him. The thought of it only disgusted him. He was the dispenser of death; it was his servant – always his obedient servant. Death was his ally, his friend, not his enemy, not his persecutor. That was the way he expected it. Demanded it. Death was for him to control. Death was for other people. How dare it intrude upon him and try to cast its fearful shadows over him?

There were no lights on in Dawn's apartment. Annoyance, rather than fear, took hold of him. He unlocked the outer door with the key she had given him. He entered the small, dark and empty hallway. Automatically he looked all around it before ascending the stone stairs to the first floor landing where Dawn's

apartment was situated. He hesitated outside the door, deciding whether to knock on the door or to ring her bell or to use the other key he had, the one which would open her front door. As he stood there, the corner of his eye caught a slight movement behind him. He whirled around and confronted the source of the movement. At three o'clock on a cold winter's morning he found himself face to face with another wide-awake human being. Standing outside of the door of the apartment opposite across the landing, quite unconcerned, was a little old lady. After studying Muhler for a moment in the pale blue beam of the landing's nightlight, she seemed satisfied and, with remarkable balance and agility for her age, she kicked her door back open with the heel of her right foot. She was now silhouetted in the glowing light within the framework of her door.

"If you've come to see Miss Dawn Sanders, young man, I might have a message from her for you. What might your name be?"

The cold American thought carefully before replying. He took his time; studying the dear old woman all the while. Eventually he answered. "Muhler.... Mr. Muhler," he said simply.

"Then I have a message for you Mr. Muhler... and a letter for you from Dawn. Would you like to come inside or shall I tell it to you here?"

The cold blue beam from the nightlight was playing tricks with the appearance of Muhler's face, making him look ghostly if not ghostlike and emphasising the grim tautness of his mouth. He could see the old woman strain her eyes as she peered at him. "You may as well give it me here, the message and the letter," he replied curtly. Where the hell was Dawn? She should have been here... and why had she left messages, both verbal and written, with this wretched old hag whose lively movement belied her age?

The old lady smiled. Quite ridiculously, Muhler noticed that all her teeth were pure white. "Dawn was very worried about you," she told him. "When she had to go away – sudden like – she got all anxious trying to contact you and, well, she became really uptight when she couldn't get through to you. Made me promise I'd keep trying after she left. And I did, Mr. Muhler, right up to about ten o'clock at night. But every time I 'phoned that there Cumberland Hotel, they kept telling me you wus not in your room, that you wus not available. Really posh and snooty they wus, too. Kept telling me you wus in conference with some geezer and couldn't be disturbed, like. Cor blimey, 'tis easier to get 'old of the blooming crown jewels than you, Mr. Muhler! I got real fed up with being told that story every time I 'phoned. Why couldn't they 'ave....?"

"Where's she gone?"

The question was sharp, impatient, rudely demanding. For a moment, the old woman looked startled, surprised, taken aback, maybe even hurt.

“Up to Liverpool, ducks. On some case or other. A client of hers, some sex maniac geezer what raped or killed a girl or somethin’, escaped from the Scrubs and they’ve caught him up in this here Old Swan place. Seems that’s up in Liverpool. Cor Blimey, fancy her ‘avin’ to go all the way up there to speak to some killer what’s a sex maniac. An’ she only a slip of a gal and so young like. But she’s full of confidence, mind you, that gal, and I ‘ear tell what she’s real good at ‘er job, like. Co’rse you knew she was a solicitor, luv, and she said you’d un’erstand like. That she ‘ad to go up on the case, luv, I mean. Kin I get you a cup of tea or somethin’ Mr. Muhler?”

“No.... thank you..... Can I have her letter, please?”

“Oh yes. I wus nearly forgettin’ that, ducks.” The old lady dug her hands into the pocket of her housecoat and produced an envelope and handed it to Muhler. The American thanked her and bid her a firm and decisive good-night. “Good night, luv,” she replied as she watched him unlock the door of Dawn’s apartment and enter and close the door behind him.

Muhler picked up the London evening newspaper that was lying on the doormat inside the apartment and idly tossed it onto the hallway table. Then something caught his attention and he briefly retrieved the paper. On the front page, printed onto the stop press, was a short message under the headline ‘Sex Killer Recaptured’ which read: ‘Mike Doyle, 34, who escaped last week from H.M. Prison Wormwood Scrubs, has been arrested by police in Liverpool.’

Muhler threw the paper back onto the table. It landed on the edge of the table and then fell over down onto the floor. The American looked at the white envelope in his other hand and walked into the lounge. He looked at the envelope again and with his free hand he bent his shirt collar up into his mouth and his teeth tore furiously and viciously at the cloth. He was still chewing the collar as he walked into Dawn’s bedroom. He sat on the edge of her bed and slowly opened the envelope.

It was Dawn’s handwriting. No doubt about that. He recognised it immediately. He knew it well... cherished what he thought of as being her very feminine, sensual scrawl. It was so bold, positive... and seductive.

He read her letter. First quickly. And then over again slowly. It confirmed what the old woman had told him. Dawn’s message to him was full of the disappointment that they had to be separated for a few days. That they could not be together to make love that night. Love! Through her words of disappointment and apology, there shone an expression of her love for him. And her understanding, even to the point of recognising that he had to go to Liechtenstein for that final contract. After that, they could be together forever in love, peace and happiness. But most of all love, the sublime luxury of love. Love... love...

love... She loved him... warm, paper kisses from her until they were together again... soon.

He replaced her letter inside its envelope and took it into the kitchen. Finding the scissors in the drawer beneath the sink, he cut the envelope and its enclosed letter into narrow strips of paper. He placed all the strips of paper into a metal saucepan, being sure not to drop any onto the floor and, striking a match, he set fire to them. The charred remains he flushed down the toilet. There must be no chance taken of anyone anywhere finding any reference connecting him with Liechtenstein or hired to kill contracts.

Muhler spent the rest of the night in Dawn's apartment and then caught an early morning train from Shenfield back to Liverpool Street.

After Fritz Muhler had entered Dawn Sander's apartment and closed the door behind him, the old woman on the landing had returned to her apartment. Once inside it, after she had shut her door, she nodded to the man waiting there for her. It was the man who had been the leader of the trio which had abducted Dawn.

X X X X X

In the large brownstone on New York's East 63rd Street, T. N. Warne was sitting at the long oak desk in his study. As was often his habit, he had a large cut-glass tumbler containing a generous measure of Glenmorangie close at hand on his desk. The mature Scotch malt whisky was just about the last and only pleasure left in his life. That, and his sharp mind and the functioning of his astute brain which still controlled and influenced the destinies of men and woman in many parts of the globe.

There were three other men in the study with T. N. Warne. Robert Vereston, the slim and debonair man from Harlem, the placid Al Dempsey and the huge Ben Brogan. Warne was doodling on a piece of paper resting on the desk blotter in front of him. He had drawn three separate caricatures. Each one represented the same image; a gallows with a person's head in the noose. Three gallows with three people condemned to die. He added a further figure to each one of the caricatures. Each of the new additions was a person pulling the noose on each of the gallows. Three condemned people and three executioners.

T. N. Warne raised his eyes from his doodling and surveyed his companions. "Vicente Patto and Fritz "Baby" Muhler are staying at the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch. Johnnie "the Swede" Johansson, Billie Lou Weldon and Maggie Sinclair Lewis are staying at the Trafalgar Hotel near Trafalgar Square," the great man said slowly. He leaned back in his wheelchair and gasped suddenly as the shock of pain stabbing through his spine gripped him without warning. "That leaves just one to go. There is still one to go... one to arrive on the scene... on the snowy scaffold."

X X X X X

Still one to go. A terraced house in De Montfort Road, Streatham Hill. One of the newer houses in the road, it had been built in the late fifties or early sixties. The slim, pale faced man in his late twenties was making tea. It had become a daily ritual with him – to have two cups of tea in the morning. The first at five past seven, the second at ten past eight. This was the second one. The young man with the thin austere face and the thinning fair hair sat down at the kitchen table and briefly relaxed as he drank the tea. His name was Roger de Tricart and last week his lover, Richard, had died of AIDS. Roger de Tricart seemed the most unlikely of the six hit men who would eventually gather in Liechtenstein.

X X X X X

“Marcias is also in London... now,” T. N. Warne added. He was now staring at an undefined space somewhere in front of him. He was not seeing anything in the study in which he was sitting. His eyes had become glazed over. His mind and sight were elsewhere. He would loved to have been in Liechtenstein in January. Not that he couldn’t be, even with a wheelchair. But you didn’t keep a dog and bite and bark yourself. These days, his killings were done by proxy. With a sudden jerk of his left hand, he grabbed the tumbler of Glenmorangie and swallowed all the golden nectar in one powerful gulp. He winced as it burnt a hole in his gut. It had not always done that to him... once he could have swallowed it with impunity.

X X X X X

Marcias was indeed in London. He had booked into the President Hotel in Russell Square. This hotel was far enough away from the Cumberland and Trafalgar Hotels to avoid him bumping into any of the professional killers resident at them, but still within easy car or taxi scope should he wish to spy on any of them. The President was also convenient because its sister hotel next door, the Imperial, had a reasonably large car park beneath it which residents of the President could use – unless all the available spaces were taken up by Avis rental cars. There was another attraction. The Imperial also had a roof-top club which welcomed residents of the President into the early hours of the morning. Useful, as Marcias had always found it easier to get into the President at short notice than the Imperial. The arrangements suited his purposes.

After parking his mud-caked Cavalier and registering into the President, Marcias left the hotel and walked across the street and went into the Friendship Inn near to the Russell Hotel. At a round table away from the bar, he joined three colleagues from the Blue Brigade. They were Jonathon Steiner, Julian Sinclair and “Tough Tony” Molloy.

Steiner got a drink for Marcias; a glass of decent French red wine, not the usual rubbish served in English Bars. It was Molloy who spoke: "As you know, Kid," he drawled – he had known Marcias for a long time, going back to the old days when he had been called the "Blue Kid" or the "Killer Kid". "Patto and Fritz "Baby" Muhler are in the Cumberland. Black John and his Texan comrades are there as observers. Johnnie "the Swede", Billie Weldon and Maggie Lewis are in the Trafalgar. The IRA contact man and local organiser, Benny Fenton is in the Cumberland... So is Mr. Roger de Tricart, the gentleman queer."

"Yeah, T.T., it's about time that de Tricart showed up," Marcias remarked. He had lit a Dutch cigar and the inevitable smoke ring circled over his head like a halo above the head of a saint. He had that pain now, in his chest, all the time, not only just when he smoked.

Roger de Tricart had thought about taking his car into the West End. There was a good car park in Bryanston Street between the Mount Royal and Mostyn Hotels as well as the underground one beneath Hyde Park by Marble Arch; both convenient for the Cumberland. In the end, he caught the train from Streatham Hill station into Victoria. He would use taxis, which wouldn't work out much more expensive than taking the car when considering the high price of car parks in the West End.

Roger de Tricart knew the Cumberland Hotel very well. He and Richard had stayed there many times. They used to cross over Quebec Street to the basement bar in the City of Quebec.

Thus all the characters had arrived in the wings, waiting to make their entrance upon the snowy stage high up in Malbun. The three hit men hired by the IRA to murder the Prince and Princess of Wales and their two young sons.... and the three killers from the notorious Blue Brigade commissioned by Marcias to stop them. It was going to be a bloody January in white fairy-tale Liechtenstein.

Meanwhile, that notorious November of 1987 had one final crimson card to play.

It was Friday the 27th. "It's just come through on the news, Kid. They've got the Border Fox," "Tough" Tony Molloy was telling Marcias. "Yeah! Dessie O'Hare himself. He and another guy tried to bust through an Irish army and police checkpoint somewhere in County Kilkenny. The other joker, Martin Brien, is wasted and O'Hare's all shot up, shot fifteen times, but they reckon he'll live."

Marcias smiled briefly. It was a sort of disinterested reaction, as if he had already regarded the Border Fox as being ancient history. "And he was the guy who vowed he would never be taken alive," was all he said. "Shows you c'ain't rely on anyone these days.

THE MAKEPEACE CONTACT

PART TWO: The Realisation.

Chapter Fourteen

Father Sean Clancy liked to travel. The travel bug had caught him relatively late in his life; not until he was well into his thirties. Before then he had been contented to remain, like the Cure d'Ars, the patron saint of parish priests, with his flock within the bounds of his own parish. He had been to Dublin many times and he had once visited the Marian shrine at Knock – that was long before they had built the new airport there, but, apart from a brief trip to Rome, which had been by air, he had never ventured outside his native Ireland. Even the seminary where he had spent seven years training for the priesthood had been within the confines of the Emerald Isle. He had not wanted it to be any other way. Then thirteen years ago, he had been asked to accompany a diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes, in the south-west of France, as its spiritual director. He had immediately accepted, rather willingly, not out of any desire to travel or to see France, the first daughter of the Church, but out of a sense of duty and because his mother had visited Lourdes almost forty years before and she had always and consistently spoken of its high spiritual benefits. It was the one place, outside of Ireland, to which he had always wanted to go.

That journey by road to Lourdes, down through the length of France, had transformed Father Clancy's attitude to travelling. They could have gone by air; it would have been quicker and easier. The airport at Tarbes served Lourdes. Instead they had travelled by coach, crossing over to Wales and then down to Weymouth in England. They had gone to England to team up with a coach party from Devon, from the diocese of Plymouth. It was a joint pilgrimage – an Anglo-Irish pilgrimage. The union of the two coaches took place in Dorchester, not far from Weymouth, the Irish having journeyed from Anglesey.

The car ferry had taken them to Cherbourg. Father Clancy had felt cold on the ferry. Although it was September and the sea was relatively calm, the channel wind had a cold bite about it which tore into his skin and penetrated to his bones. He bought himself a whisky and then concentrated on circulating amongst his flock.

In Cherbourg, it was decided to integrate the two flocks in the two coaches. Father Clancy and half of his people transferred into the English coach. There appeared to be three priests in the English party. Their leader remained in his coach whilst his two colleagues chaperoned half of their group into the Irish coach.

The English priest welcomed Father Clancy and his companions into his coach. Father Clancy reckoned he was about the same age as himself, maybe younger. It seemed to the Irish priest that his English counterpart was used to being in command, but he found him to be, if not effeminate, at least fussy, with an over-emphasised spirit of bonhomie. The Englishman was a regular priest, a Redemptorist. In Dublin, Father Clancy had met many priests from different

religious orders; Dominicans at Tallaght in the County and also in the City, Jesuits at Lower Leeson Street, and Franciscans, whom he particularly liked. He believed that there may have been Redemptorists in Orwell Road at Rathgar. He couldn't remember now. It seemed that the Redemptorists were not actually an order, they were a congregation. Father Clancy himself was a secular priest. Once they were outside of Cherbourg, the Redemptorist led the party in the recitation of the Rosary.

They stopped for one night on the way down through France, at the Convent of the Visitation in Le Mans. Father Clancy found it fascinating and exciting – he was like a little boy – when they drove along some roads which were part of the famous racecourse. He had also been thrilled to see the towering Cross of Lorraine in Normandy and the piling edifice that was the glorious Mont St. Michel. There was something about visiting places and actually seeing them instead of just reading about them and seeing them in pictures. Perhaps there was more to life than just his part of Ireland and his parish. Maybe travelling really did broaden the mind. Anyway, he was beginning to enjoy this trip.

The hotel in Lourdes had been very much third rate. It transpired that of the two other English clerics, one was, in fact, a high-church Anglican minister and not a Catholic priest whilst the other was a semi-retired honorary canon in his late seventies. Father Clancy was especially impressed by the gentleness and helpful kindness of this older priest who had once been a Church of England naval chaplain on H.M.S. Hood. He had been transferred from the ill-fated ship just before her final voyage. After the war he had converted to the Catholic faith and become a priest. The three Englishmen were allocated a three bedded room in the hotel, whilst father Clancy was given a single room. When the Anglican realised this, he kindly offered to swap so that the three Catholic priests could be together, but Father Clancy, not wishing to split a trio which had become used to each other's company, declined. It took him a while to realise what was unusual about his single room. He had been familiar with a bedroom with bath; he now had a bathroom with bed. The French hotelier, having been short of a single room, had simply stuck a bed in the bathroom. The tiny room did not even boast a window, but fortunately the proprietor had taken the precaution of covering the sign on the outside of the door.

Father Clancy sat on the small bed and read his breviary. Despite the poor hotel and the bad food, and the long monotonous French roads, he was happy. He decided he would travel again. And Lourdes was beautiful and holy, crowded with happy people, and any commercial aspect was only there to serve the tens of thousands of pilgrims and was soon lost within the deep spirituality of the place. No-one who has ever visited this small French town cannot fail to be affected by its unique impact nor lose the eternal impression of its atmosphere.

So this had been the modest start of Father Clancy's travels. Within the next seven years he was to visit Belgium, West Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden,

Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg - and Liechtenstein. In the year after the pilgrimage to Lourdes, the teachers' association of the local high school had invited him to join them on their Easter coach trip to Paris. Although he was officially designated as chaplain to the group, his duties were far from arduous – daily Mass, the occasional confession, and leading his fellow travellers in the Rosary and prayer – and he had plenty of time to explore like any other tourist. The following Easter it was Rudesheim on the German Rhine – he even visited the enchanting and unique bars of the Drosselgasse – and then Amsterdam the next Easter. He was included on summer trips to Riva on Lake Garda and to Copenhagen and Stockholm. When the association lost its gifted organiser and the coach trips ceased, Father Clancy looked for other ways in which to continue his travels.

He considered going alone by car to Austria. A friend in Northern Ireland arranged for the RAC to prepare a route with suggested accommodation. They would also book the ferry and advise on insurance cover. On reflection, the priest realised that such a trip presented a number of problems. His twenty-year-old Morris 1000, with its passenger door tied shut with string, could not be expected to undertake such an adventurous journey. Then there was the question of finance. Father Clancy had a few hundred punts in the bank, but that was left there solely as a contingency fund in case any of his parishioners should need money in an emergency. His bishop had long since realised that Father Clancy could survive on very little money. He lived on next to nothing. He took his meals at the homes of parishioners, when invited. On days when there were no invitations, he made soup from potatoes and vegetables grown in his small back garden or he simply opened a tin of baked beans. Even the tramps brought food to him when they called at his door. At first the bishop sent him to poor parishes. Then, recognising a particular and potential talent, his lordship sent him to richer parishes which had incurred large debts when building or rebuilding their church or their parish hall. Father Sean Clancy became the parish debt remover of the diocese. Once he had reduced the debt in a particular parish to manageable proportions, he was transferred to another parish with a high bank loan. It was well known that Father Clancy would not spend a penny on himself or his own needs.

So it seemed that the chances of the good priest continuing his travels were indeed remote. The trips with the teachers' association as their chaplain had been a means by which they had provided him with free, or relatively free, travel. But many good things come to an end. However, Father Clancy still hoped to journey abroad. He didn't know how, but he was a determined man.

He thought about going on one of the coach tours with a commercial firm, but a check on the charges soon pronounced them as being prohibitive to his way of thinking. Some parishioners, some from his own parish and some from a previous parish, offered to club together and pay for his tour. He immediately

declined, saying that there were far more important and essential things to spend the money on. Then a strange thing happened.

It was the time of the annual garden fete. Each year it raised about two thousand punts, which was a lot of money. In previous years, half the money was donated to the Cafod charity – the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development – and the other half went into the parish funds. This year Father Clancy had decreed that half would still go to Cafod but the other half would be given to the new St. Luke's Hospice for the terminally ill.

The unexpected happening occurred when the local travel agent donated a holiday abroad as the first prize in the garden fete grand draw. Father Clancy did not notice that the holiday prize was, rather unusually, for one person only. Nor did he find it surprising that the destination was Tremezzo on Lake Como in Italy – the very place which the teachers' association had intended to visit on their next coach trip, if there had been one.

“Ah, Father Sean, yuh must be after buying a ticket for the grand draw. Just one ticket, Father,” the fete organiser beseeched him.

“Aye, I will at that... jest th' one, John m' boy. T'ough the good Lord knows, to be sure, that I never win, nor want to.”

But this time Father Clancy did win. He won the first prize.

Chapter Fifteen

The Irish travel agent had booked Father Clancy on a Thomas Cook tour which started out from the Victoria coach station in London. Father Clancy had flown to the English capital. In some ways, that was the most comfortable journey of the whole tour. Unlike his previous trips abroad, their coach did not accompany them on the ferry across the channel. They went over as foot passengers from Dover, their luggage carried in a large mobile cage, and boarded a French coach at Calais.

They went clockwise around Europe – France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy. Of the fortnight, they spent a week in Tremezzo; the remainder being one-night stops. Father Clancy soon decided that he preferred Riva and Lake Garda to Tremezzo and Lake Como. The former had been a resort for German tourists – especially the sailing weekenders; it was more modern and livelier and younger; you could go on day trips to Venice, St. Anthony's Padua, and to the open-air opera at Verona. Tremezzo was a resort for the British; it seemed a little out of date, staid and older. Very much like his fellow travellers on this tour. They were the old Commonwealth types – from Australia, South Africa and Canada – visiting their poorer relatives in England. Now, before returning home to other continents, they wanted to do Europe. Most of them were husbands and wives, or brothers and sisters, except for a couple of gay men who were lorry drivers from Queensland, and a pale faced man of about forty from Quebec. This quiet Canadian, who could converse in fluent French and who spoke English with an accent which reminded Father Clancy of Glenn Ford, was also travelling alone and he became a Godsend to the solitary Irish priest who found that he had little in common with his fellow passengers.

Thus it was that Father Sean Clancy and Pierre de Lannurien were thrown together. They became buddies in isolation. During the warm week in Tremezzo, they deserted the twice daily ritual of meal-times on the balcony of the Grand Hotel and repaired instead to the lakeside restaurant of the homely, friendly and family-run Albergo Azalea. During the last night of the tour, in Paris at the Hotel Moderne Palace in the Place de la Republique, they again sneaked away from the trivial discontent of the Commonwealth club and found a large bar in a corner of the busy square.

This bar – it could have been any bar, any place, but it happened to be this particular venue – was to play a significant part in the life of Father Sean Clancy. As he left it that night, about midnight, to return with Pierre de Lannurien to their nearby hotel, he could not have even suspected that one day he would revisit this same bar in the company of this same softly spoken Canadian and that their second visit there would lead to some very fatal consequences.

Six years passed by, during which time Father Clancy had ventured many times from his shamrock shores; mainly to Liechtenstein and Austria – Vaduz, Malbun,

St. Anton, St. Johann and Seefeld; his visits financed by a low-profile corporation in Massachusetts. Then, out of the blue, quite unexpectedly, in January 1984, he received a letter from the Canadian, Pierre de Lannurien. Pierre was coming to Europe in July that year; he would be visiting Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris. Could Father Clancy join him? He would love to have his company. Enclosed with the letter was a KLM airline ticket for Heathrow to Amsterdam. De Lannurien would meet him at Schiphol Airport and they would go by car from there. The Canadian had booked them into the Carlton in Amsterdam and the Bedford in Brussels – both hotels had their own secured car parks. The name of the next hotel was now followed by a series of exclamation marks – the Moderne Palace Hotel in Paris. ‘I know we didn’t rate it very high, but we know where it is, and there is garage parking two streets away.’ De Lannurien would pay for the hotels and everything – he knew that the priest put all his collection money into the parish funds and didn’t wish to spend anything on himself – the Canadian would be only too glad to have his company – he didn’t relish the prospect of travelling alone – Father Sean would be doing him a favour by coming with him. And because de Lannurien respected Father Clancy’s wish not to spend funds on himself, the Canadian was enclosing an international money order to the priest for two hundred Irish punts – that should cover his air fare from Eire to England.

Father Clancy had developed the virtue and art of patience. For him, the six months from January to July 1984 did not pass slowly. But when the holiday itself came, the days on the continent seemed to slip swiftly by. Five days in Amsterdam, four days in Brussels, three days in Paris. The desire to travel and the love for different places had again been reawakened in his heart. Then, on their third night in the French capital, having spent all their previous time there exploring the wonderful tourist attractions of the grand city, they returned for the first time to the large bar in the corner of the busy Place de la Republique, the bar where they had spent the last evening of their previous holiday together, six years before.

The whole of the large Place de la Republique was alive with lights and motion; animated activity interspersed by dark shadows and grey recesses; people and vehicles in a perpetual poetry of movement; voices, some subdued, some shrill, floated across the great expanse of the square; excitement, boredom, routine, discovery – all mixed together to create a contrasting concoction; the synchronous symphony of the traffic sounds providing a glorious background to visual impact and free conversation.

“C’est la vie. Feel the life of it,” the French Canadian breathed with excitement and contentment. “I don’t know if I will ever get to like the Parisians, but I sure do love their city. I love Paris.....” He was blissfully humming the American song.

The Irish priest nodded. It was a bit different from Dublin.

They had reached their bar. They were inside it. It had changed a little. The décor, but not the atmosphere. The old newspapers were missing from the walls, but the tables and the large, wide glass windows alongside the square were the same. It was almost full again, and the people were drinking and eating, just like six years ago.

Although it was only the second time they had been there, and had only spent a few hours there before, it was like coming home to them.

That final night, they drank a lot; biere a la pression, vin rouge - Cotes du Rhone in small bottles which tasted harsh compared with the smooth Cotes du Rhone at home. They sat inside the bar. At midnight the waiters wanted to close. In the early hours of the morning they were still drinking steadily. It was the last night of the holiday in Europe. They had been joined by two Americans, a young man and girl from Chicago.

Hope Cassidy talked a lot about his city on the windy shores of Lake Michigan, but most of all about the Bears and Soldier Field and Walter Payton. "The Raiders won the Super Bowl this year, but the Bears will win it soon. We'll win it in the next year or two, you can bet on that. Walter Payton and Mike Ditka will make it happen."

Finally the Canadian interrupted. "Hope. Now ain't that a girl's name?" Pierre enquired in his quiet drawl.

"Nope," the American smiled ruefully. "Now Charity, that's a girl's name. Hope is for men."

"How about Faith?" asked the priest, his somewhat gruff Irish brogue suddenly clashing with the smoother tones of his drinking companions.

"Faith? Well that's for women too," the young broker from the bear-pit replied after some deliberation. It was three o'clock in the morning. They had drunk enough. It was time to go.

"It's only eight o'clock in the evening back at home," Hope Cassidy protested.

"Aye, but it's two o'clock at night in Dublin's fair city," the priest emphasised decisively. He was still wondering where he'd seen this young American before. Father Clancy always remembered faces if not names, but this particular face was evading his usually keen memory. "Have yuh ever bin in Dublin, Mr. Cassidy?"

"Hope, please. Call me Hope. Don't be so formal, Father Sean. After all, we've drunk a lot of good booze and a lot of bad booze together tonight. No, I don't recall ever having been in Dublin."

“Nor Ireland at all?”

“I guess not,” the American smiled. After a hesitation, “I’d have been sure to remember the Guinness, I guess to be sure.” He laughed and the girl giggled too. Too readily, the priest thought.

They had wandered out into the street, having shared the cost of the pile of tabs which had been stacked in the ashtray on their table, and were encircling the square. Father Clancy and de Lannurien were making their way back to their hotel which was on another side of the large square. Hope Cassidy and his girl were looking for a taxi as their hotel was some distance away. Suddenly, as if on impulse, Cassidy turned back to the priest. “We’re going to Brussels tomorrow for two days. After that we were thinking of going to England or Ireland. Could I have your address, Father, in case we come to the Emerald Isle? We’d sure love to look you up.”

There was no reason for Father Clancy to refuse. He wrote his name and address on a beer-mat he had taken from the bar and handed it to the American. “Thanks, Father Sean.” Cassidy smiled again. “See you again, maybe.” A taxi had drawn up alongside him; the girl had been successful with her waving and shouting. Father Clancy strained his ears to hear the destination given by the American to the driver. It sounded like ‘Louvre Concorde’, but he couldn’t be sure. He would look it up in his Paris guide. It was not only the name Cassidy; the American had smiled like an Irishman too. But it had become an almost perpetual smile.

Suspicion everywhere; it was the age of suspicion, the priest thought as he and the Canadian went in through the large entrance of the Moderne Palace.

Father Clancy had been fortunate. He had a large room on the second floor overlooking the square with a balcony on which he could watch the traffic below. Pierre de Lannurien’s room was up on the fourth or fifth floor or up in the roof itself, with only a sky-light for a window. Strangely enough, but so often the case, the priest was not tired. He felt wide awake and alert, despite it being three-thirty in the morning and that he had consumed a lot of drink and they would have to rise early that same morning. He was standing outside on the balcony looking down at the traffic. In large capital cities, at main junctions, there was always traffic irrespective of the hour. The traffic in the Place de la Republique was always continuous although at this hour it was now sparse. The cars, with their bright headlamps, conformed to a steady and relaxing – relaxing to the eyes of the observer from above, that is – dance of stop-go, stop-go at the traffic lights. Watching this scene became almost hypnotic, but it was also invigorating and reassuring. From his vantage point, where he was both detached from and present in if not involved with the action below, it was like watching a toy electric train set. Spellbinding and comforting.

Father Clancy was reluctant to come in from the balcony. He had the Paris guide in his hand. It listed all the main hotels according to their arrondissements. He had found the Hotel Louvre-Concorde. Not far to look. It was in Arrondissement One, at the end of the Avenue de l'Opera, in the Place Theatre Francais and alongside the Louvre. In the centre of Paris and maybe expensive; National Category four stars; over two hundred bedrooms, most with bath. A strange choice for young American tourists. And a long way to wander for drinks in the Place de la Republique. Suspicion everywhere; it was the age of suspicion. Especially for the Irish.

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Hope Cassidy was not Father Clancy's first contact with the IRA. He was Father Clancy's first direct approach from the IRA.... from the dreaded Provos.

"Have patience, Father," de Lannurien had said, "he will come."

And Hope Cassidy did come, because de Lannurien had arranged it that way. There were times when Father Clancy thought that the Canadian had arranged the whole damn trip, and the coach tour back in 1978, including that raffle prize... and for the specific purpose of Hope Cassidy meeting Father Clancy outside of Ireland and Great Britain. After they parted at Charles de Gaulle Airport, Father Clancy never saw de Lannurien again. The quietly spoken man returned to Canada, or to America, and to the sort of place or foxhole such men go back to after their mission is completed. But three days later, in the morning, as Father Clancy was finishing his eight o'clock Mass in his parish church and had just turned to the congregation to give the final blessing, he saw Hope Cassidy there standing at the back of the church, with that taunting smile dancing on his lips. Having checked out the priest on neutral ground, this particular Provos recruitment officer now considered it safe to confront him at home.

Father Clancy saw a lot of the American over the next year or so. The Chicago Bears did not win the Super Bowl in 1985; the 49ers beat the Dolphins at Stanford Stadium, California to take the crown. But at the end of the year, the Bears won the NFC Central Division and then the playoffs, to reach the next Super Bowl. Hope Cassidy had returned to Chicago for that Christmas. It is possible that he may have been in the magnificent Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans on the 26th January 1986 to see the Bears beat the New England Patriots 46 – 10 and Mike Ditka, Walter Payton and "the Refrigerator" William Perry win Super Bowl XX. It is possible, but not certain, because Father Clancy never saw Hope Cassidy again. It seemed that the American had also completed his mission. He had recruited Father Sean Clancy, a potentially powerful and influential cleric, into the ranks of the Provos. And he had ensured that father Clancy had the means to and indeed did continue to travel extensively throughout Western Europe... for the time when the Provos needed another experienced and well-travelled man on the European mainland.

During the three years after the fateful meeting in Paris in the summer of 1984, that is 1985, 86 and 87, Father Clancy travelled on five occasions to Europe, and he travelled in style – by car which he drove himself. And no one, least of all his bishop, begrudged this dedicated priest taking up his full holiday time. It was making up for those years when, as a young priest, he had always stayed at home.

But one man felt that he was fully aware of the change which had overcome Father Clancy. Just before he departed in December 1985, Hope Cassidy had said to the priest, his smile now almost genuine, “Really, Father Sean, I do believe you’d sell your soul for the sake of travelling.”

In Ireland at that time there were many people who were selling their eternal souls for purely temporal causes.

In July 1985 Father Clancy was going to Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris. It had been arranged for him to fly to Schiphol Airport and collect a hire car there. When he developed a fear of flying to the continent, he was supplied with a car in England which he took across on the ferry from Dover to Zeebrugge. But no one questioned why he had no fear of flying from Ireland to England or why he always preferred the Dover to Zeebrugge crossing rather than the ones from Dover to Calais or Ostend.

In Paris he had felt a special thrill in driving across the Place de la Concorde, and up the Champs-Élysées, and around the Arc de Triomphe. Before that, in Brussels, he had smiled when the priest, Father Johnson, in the beautiful church of St. Joseph, near the Danish Tavern and not far from the Grande Place, had said, rather than asked, “Why go to Paris when you are here in Brussels?”

Nevertheless, when he returned in October 1985, it was to Amsterdam and Brussels only. In the summer of 1986 he did his own version of a grand tour, staying in Amsterdam, Bonn, Rudesheim, Ulm, Vaduz in Liechtenstein, Strasbourg, Luxembourg and Bruges. In May 1987 it was Amsterdam and Haarlem. In July 1987 he stayed in Boppard, Rudesheim, Ulm, Vaduz, Seefeld, Kitzbuhel and Assmannshausen, the latter being a small spa on the German Rhine in the Rheingau vineyard area where best German red wines are produced. Assmannshausen is the next town north of Rudesheim and Father Clancy had already sampled its wine in his hotel in Rudesheim. As on his previous European car trips, except for when he had followed the Seine up from Paris to Le Havre, he spent his last night in the Novotel near Bruges ready for the ferry next day from Zeebrugge.

There had been other journeys in Europe made by Father Clancy, more clandestine visits, some in winter.

The main result, however, was that Father Clancy had become an experienced and knowledgeable sojourner in Western Europe. In particular, he was very familiar with Amsterdam and its surrounding areas and with the tiny, fairy-tale and beautiful country of Liechtenstein. Now, in January 1988, Father Clancy and his knowledge and experience were appearing to be very useful to the Provisional wing of the IRA. Now he would be put to the test.... and what a test it would be.

Liechtenstein is beautiful and colourful and majestic in summer; in winter it is enchanting, it has a pretty serenity then which explodes into life and excitement and gaiety on the white lace slopes above Malbun and amidst the après-ski in the bars and hotels of this delightful, princely ski town. Father Clancy loved Liechtenstein. Who would not?

Father Clancy had decided to stay again at the Hotel Martha Buhler in Triesenberg. It was halfway up the mountain and therefore halfway between the capital Vaduz and the resort Malbun. It was close to the intended action, without being too close. He chose this location rather than the larger hotels in Vaduz, and in preference to the superb Hotel Park Sonnenhof which was very near to the prince's schloss. The Hotel Martha Buhler was the unpretentious hotel suitable for a priest. There was also the large church just across the road where, with the permission of the local priest, Father Clancy could celebrate his daily Mass. He had also stayed at this hotel before, and to have stayed elsewhere may have attracted the attention of anyone who may have been observing.

Father Clancy had flown to Zurich and had been driven from there to Liechtenstein. Apart from not wishing to drive himself in the January conditions of the Rhaetian Alpine region, it had been felt expedient to provide him with a driver-companion in the guise of an old travelling friend. It was the 3rd of January 1988 when the priest and his companion booked into the Hotel Martha Buhler in Triesenberg. Already staying at this homely, hillside hotel straddling the road up to Malbun, was a pretty young lady with beautiful blonde hair, a divinely shapely long-legged figure, and the most luscious inviting lips. Her name was Lisa Gunn and she was from Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire.

Room 32 of the majestic Hotel Park Sonnenhof was long and graceful. Sitting outside on its balcony patio, Marcias was admiring the Swiss Alps across the valley. There being no mist rising from the Rhine that day, in the cold transparent winter atmosphere the snow-capped mountains were clearly defined in all their breath-taking splendour. Only the sentinel fir trees of the garden below and a newer building which had risen since his last stay here in 1980 caused any foreground obstruction to his vision of the view. Marcias was half asleep and half relaxing; his mind nevertheless alert and brooding as it always was... ticking over, suddenly racing forward and then darting back furtively into some dark hidden recess of his memory. No peace.... that was why he almost chain-smoked those infernal Dutch cigars – to relax his strained and cursed

nerves. He was not smoking now; he had tossed the leather case of cigars contemptuously aside. The pain had been gone for a while... that now almost constant, gnawing pain had been absent for some time. The clear mountain air, perhaps. Anyway, he knew that the pain had not stopped because he was not smoking; it was the other way around, he had stopped smoking because the pain was not there. What was it the old people in London had once told him about the blitz? When you stopped hearing a descending bomb, the end was near; that was the bomb which killed you. Maybe it was the same with pain. When you stopped feeling the pain, the end was near; that was the pain which killed you.

Marcias rose from his chair and went back into the lounge of his suite. It was late morning and shafts of sunlight stabbed and crept across the thick gold carpet. He opened the mini-bar and extracted the bottle of Vaduzer Beerli 1986 Originalabfullung Eigenbau. He swiftly and deftly decorked it with his Italian corkscrew and poured a generous measure of its rich, shining red liquid into a tall glass and returned to his chair on the large balcony. Seated again, he took large sips of the nectar of Bacchus and breathed in the richness of his surroundings. If only his mother could see this now. It was a bit different to sheltering from the daytime heat or the night time cold under the viaducts and road bridges of Phoenix or grovelling in grotty motels outside Tucson.

There were four slow, clear knocks coming from the other side of the connecting door leading from suite 33. Marcias glanced again towards the distant Swiss mountains before replying. From somewhere, reflected sunshine was glinting off the snowy peaks. "Come in." Although he spoke quietly, his voice carried without strain and the two men from the next suite entered his room and wandered through his lounge and out onto the patio balcony and stood relaxed but alert before him.

Marcias drained his glass and looked up at them. His pale lips twitched into a half-smile. "Hello, gents," he snarled. He was feeling friendly; heaven help anyone when he should feel otherwise. The two men were of similar build, similar height and similar age – mid-twenties – almost similar appearance throughout. Perhaps that was why they went together so well... blended together so well.

When Jonathon Steiner, a man of mixed and doubtful pedigree, and Julian Sinclair, a true blue Englishman (whatever that might be), had first been promoted to the higher ranks of the Blue Brigade, Marcias, the deputy leader of the Brigade, had not necessarily approved. They represented the new, younger generation of the organisation; he was not sure which he resented the most – the 'new' or the 'younger'. Once he had been the new, younger personality arriving on the scene... the "Blue Kid" they had called him in those days... the "Killer Kid". But now Steiner and Sinclair had grown older just like he had grown older and now there was another new, younger generation following them within the Blue

Brigade. As the boss man, the leader, had told Marcias many years ago when he was still in his teens, “No one is indispensable.”

Steiner had brought his own bottle of Jim Beam Kentucky Bourbon. He took a tumbler from the mini-bar, tossed in some ice and topped it up to the rim with the whiskey. Sinclair poured himself an orange juice and recharged Marcias’s glass from the bottle of Vaduzer.

The two men sat down on the other two chairs; they did not even look out and across at the magnificent mountains. “Father Clancy has gone to London. James Stirling drove him to Zurich and then returned alone to the Martha Buhler, Steiner reported. “Father Clancy’s gone to see Benny Fenton at the Cumberland in Marble Arch, to meet with the three IRA shooters.”

It was Wednesday, the 6th of January 1988 – the Feast of the Epiphany.

Marcias reached for his cigar case and extracted one of the light brown torpedoes. He placed it beneath his nose and sniffed it and held it to his ear and rolled it. Finally he tossed it aside. Everything had been different then, all those years ago. Damn Castro and his damn commies.

It had become cold on the patio balcony. The sunshine had faded, like winter sunshine often does. The three men were sitting silently; sipping their drinks thoughtfully. Not a word was spoken for a long time. Suite 32 had become eerily quiet, hushed with the same gravity as a house where the family is waiting for a loved one to die.

Marcias knew all about death. He had killed his first man when he was twelve or thirteen; knifed a man who had insulted his mother. He had been killing ever since.

Chapter Sixteen

Wednesday, 6th January 1988 continued....

It was raining in London. Father Clancy had been given some English money by James Stirling. It had seemed a lot at the time. Now, standing outside the Great Cumberland Place entrance to the Cumberland, as he paid his taxi, the one which had whisked or water-skied him along the M4 from Heathrow, he wasn't so sure.

Benny Fenton's room was on that same side of the massive hotel edifice; looking sideways from out of the window, Father Clancy could see along the broad, straight line of Great Cumberland Place until it was absorbed into the squat, long rectangle that was Bryanston Square. Its straightness and neatness and grandeur fascinated him; just as the view of the Place de la Republique from the balcony of the Moderne Palace had done in Paris.

"The last time I stayed here in January, or maybe it was February, it was snowing. That was way back in 1969," Fenton explained affably. The IRA special organiser and contact man was treating Father Clancy with the scrupulous politeness due to a person one thoroughly dislikes. Benny Fenton, a little sparrow of a man with small bitter eyes set in a face that seemed stretched like parchment ready to crack, loathed the burly, robust priest. Fancy Clancy he called him to himself. But Fenton concealed his feelings; always kept his opinions to himself. He had found that to be the safest way in the IRA.

"I bet it was beautiful then, th' long road, I mean, covered in snow," the priest softly mused. "Snow conceals a lot o' scars, hides a lot o' secrets."

"Yeah, I guess it was," Fenton replied, with little interest. "Now, let's git down to the business."

"Yes, so be it," the priest rejoined immediately, his voice now brisk and alert. "I have much to explain and tell to th'... er... people you have hired. Are they ready? Ready for me to see them now?"

The little beady eyes flickered up to meet those of the bigger man in black. "You won't be meeting the hit men, Father. Not face to face, that is. Safer not to."

"Safer?" Father Clancy's demand may have been sharp, but it did not betray his irksomeness.

"Safer for them, safer for you, safer for everyone."

"Then how d'yuh propose I give them th' plan o' campaign? Positions, locations, distances... timings... and a lot o' other bloody shit they need tuh know."

The Irish face was red, the Irish voice was rough and menacing, the Irish eyes wild and penetrating, the Irish temper afire and on the brink of exploding. Damn the Irish, Fenton thought as he fought to remain cool and calm and unafraid, they're all mad, fighting bullies, the lot of them. Violence is all they know, all they understand; they think they can always get their own way by coercion.

"Quite simply," the parchment face almost cracked as it smiled sweetly in defiance of the Irishman's semi-controlled aggression. "I have an easy method." The smaller man gently took the arm of the big priest and steered him to a table on which there was a video camera. "The IRA," Fenton continued slowly, "have me... use me... because I am the best, and I hire the best. I am a professional."

There was a chair beside the table. Fenton bid the priest to sit on it. "It's a very simple procedure," the smaller man explained again. "I am going to record you on tape with this video camera. Just look into the lens and tell them all your instructions and information... but be careful to make it sound as if you are addressing only one person. Remember, it was you who said that it was Donal O'Brien's plan that the three hit men should not know of each other's involvement; that they should each believe that there was only one of them, that they were the only assassin hired. That there is only the one hit."

"Yes, that is correct," Father Clancy confirmed, his temper having apparently now cooled almost as quickly as it had fired. "The first one should believe that the sole target is the Prince of Wales and that he has been hired to do the hit and that there is no other hit or hit man involved. The second, likewise, for the Princess, and the third for th' two young princes."

"Right," Fenton pondered a while, as if going over it again. "Yeah." He picked up the camera. "It has a built in recorder... to play back directly onto a television. Each of the hit men has a screen in his room. After I have recorded you on the video, I will rewind and play the tape through to all three rooms simultaneously." Fenton paused for a few moments before continuing. "After that, each shooter has been given a time, staggered at half hourly intervals, when he is to expect a telephone call in his room from you. This will provide an opportunity for any explicit questions and answers or individual instructions, particularly on their separate locations and escape routes."

"You t'ink of everythin'," Father Clancy murmured.

"You have to in this business. One thing I can't understand, though, is that after the first shooter has killed the Prince of Wales, the other two will immediately know that they are not the only assassin at work."

"By then," the priest murmured, even softer than before, so that Fenton had to strain to hear him, "it will no longer matter."

There was a knock at the door. After a moment, and without any summons from Fenton, two men entered. One carried a tray with beakers and milk and sugar in one hand and a steaming coffee pot in the other. The second man had a tray containing sandwiches, rolls, a jar of Alexander's vintage Irish whiskey marmalade, a pot of hot water, and, just in case, a packet of Barry's tea. The tray also carried a full bottle of Jameson's. The two men were not hotel waiters, they were cronies of Benny Fenton. When they had left the room, the IRA's dapper little agent pointed to the coffee and, when the priest nodded, he poured two steaming mugfuls of the rich beverage. Hot, strong and made this year – Alan Ladd's dialogue passed briefly through Father Clancy's mind. Fenton tossed a packet of sandwiches to the priest. "A quick snack now and then we'll make the tape of you. After that the telephone calls and then...." the little man smiled his weak irrelevant smile, "I thought you might appreciate some Jameson's"

The priest thought how Fenton was making jolly sure that his visitor didn't drink before making the tape and the telephone calls. Probably typical of the little rat in all his dealings. He obviously wanted to make sure that Father Clancy looked and sounded entirely sober. Also Father Clancy didn't like the way Fenton had thought he had him and probably all the Irish pegged as to their habits, especially their drinking traditions. This was typical of the English in their approach to the Irish and Father Clancy resented it. Just to be awkward and superior, and maybe different, he replied, "I would have preferred Asbach Uralt Brandy."

"Asbach! What's that?" Fenton seemed too bored to conceal his surprise.

"A good German brandy... from Rudesheim am Rhein; for very cultured tastes. Tell me, Fenton, why don't yuh show th' tape o' me tuh them at staggered intervals, like th' 'phone calls? Then th' second two wouldn't have so long tuh wait between seein' th' tape an' speakin' tuh me on th' 'phone."

"Cos I'm giving them the tape to occupy 'em right from the start. They need your info and instructions. It will hold their attention. These guys get nervy waiting too long with nothing doing. After the tape, they know they have to wait till a precise time for your call. They don't mind that. Something's going to happen at a certain time. Timings they understand. Waiting around with nothin' happening, they don't. Like I said, it makes 'em nervous."

"Suspicion everywhere," the priest murmured quietly. "It is the age of justified suspicion."

"W'yah say?"

"Nothin'... nothin' you'd understand, Fenton."

They made the video tape, and then they played it through to the three screens in the three separate rooms, and then the telephone calls. It was late afternoon, early evening. They had finished the bottle of Jameson's, Fenton drinking almost as much of it as Father Clancy. The priest noticed that the little man's little fingers were twitching; they had become nervous like his little, beady eyes. Before the day's task – the taping and the telephone calls – Fenton had geared himself up for action, used all his hype and nervous energy and had controlled his nerves. Now that the task was over and completed and the tension released, the nerves had returned. He was edgy; he could no longer – had no reason to – control a nervous mannerism which manifested itself in a jerking movement of his head from right to left. It had been Fenton who had needed the whiskey. Father Clancy had simply enjoyed it.

"I've booked you into the Mount Royal for tonight," Fenton explained as he finally discarded his empty glass onto a nearby table. "It's just next door. They've been instructed that everything on your account is to be charged to me. You just sign the bill. You may as well have dinner there. Goodbye, Father Clancy."

It amused Father Clancy that his host had suddenly become very business-like again at the end, and that he had now made no attempt to disguise the fact that he was more than glad to see the back of his guest. The fact had also not been lost on the priest that Fenton had taken the trouble to book him into a different hotel, separating him not only from himself, but also from any chance of the priest meeting up with any of the three hit men.

Father Clancy went next door. At first all he could see was a large Littlewoods store. He went around the corner from Oxford Street into Gloucester Place and then around the next corner into Bryanston Street. There he found an escalator which took him up to the hotel reception. He carried with him a small overnight bag; he preferred to travel light for just a one night stay.

He had dinner in the hotel and didn't venture out of the building until the following morning when, having signed the account handed to him by the cashier, he strolled out into the rain of Oxford Street and hailed a taxi that was going eastwards. The cab did a U-turn and made its way down Park Lane. Soon, the very determined-looking Irish priest was on a flight back to Zurich. In a few hours he would be in his beloved Liechtenstein again.

The telephone rang briskly, sharply in Suite 32 of the Sonnenhof; the normally gentle, purring tones sounding unusually shrill as if the machine was demanding, pleading to be acknowledged and answered extra quickly. Marcias picked up the receiver almost immediately.

"The man in all black has returned," the pleasant, sweet, feminine voice informed him, then, after a pause, "What are you doing now?"

“I’m going down the road. Just down the road.”

Marcias and Lisa Gunn replaced their receivers almost simultaneously.

Lisa Gunn drove the four-wheel-drive ranger down the alternative road from Triesenberg to Vaduz. Unlike the more popular route, this one passed by the Sonnenhof. As she steered the vehicle around the sharp bend by the prince’s schloss she cast a momentary glance in the direction of the picturesque castle perched on the hillside overlooking the valley plain containing Vaduz. The fairy-tale building was, perhaps, the most recognised symbol of the principality of Liechtenstein, particularly on wall plaques and view cards. Now she was near to her destination. Coming out of another bend, she sped past the entrance to the long car park of the Sonnenhof and pulled up at the give way point just below it. She turned right, in the direction of the Austrian border, but stopped a few hundred metres along the road, outside a hotel bar frequented by the locals rather than tourists.

Jumping down out of the ranger, she forced herself to walk slowly rather than run to the door of the bar. Once inside, she glanced quickly around the room. There were four locals sitting at a table playing cards or dominoes and drinking beer and wine. She went to the bar, ever conscious of the shadow in the corner of her eye at the far end of the bar. She ordered a dry martini, but didn’t really want it. She allowed her eyes to look up into the large wall mirror behind the bar. She sensed his eyes flicker as they fastened onto hers. She felt unsteady on her legs and her knees were shaking against the bar and she wondered if she really had peed into her panties or if it just felt that way. She was warm, moist and sticky. She wanted to lower her hand down to the throbbing spot; instead she clamped her legs forcibly together.

He had gone to the toilet. No contact, he had said. No recognition. Shit! She had the hots for him. Burning, frustrated hots she couldn’t hold back much longer. She was counting the seconds... hundred... two hundred... three hundred – five minutes, five whole bloody minutes. He’d been in the john for five minutes. Having made the decision, she twirled her glass defiantly and walked casually to the loo.

At least twenty minutes passed before she reappeared from the toilet. She seemed to have a glow on her face, to her whole personality, her golden hair dancing in the long fingers of winter sunshine seeping through the windows. She took a sip or two from the dry martini and placed five Swiss francs on the counter. Then, turning around and smiling politely to the quartet at the table, she sprang gaily through the doorway and burst out upon the full dazzle of the low afternoon sunlight. Had it not taken sudden refuge behind the buildings and trees and hills across the street, the sun itself would have been eclipsed by her sensual radiance.

She was not to know that this would be the last time she would make love with Marcias.

After the beautiful and wonderful and thrillingly satisfying union with Marcias, the rest of Lisa Gunn's day was bound to be an anti-climax or an after climax. That evening she spent in the company of a strange, rather weird young lady from Cheltenham, who claimed to be an aspiring writer and who had latched herself onto Lisa during the previous day. This girl, also a resident at the hotel, had made sure that she sat next to Lisa for the very homely and delicious dinner served at the Martha Buhler. The girl had learnt from one of the staff that Lisa worked for a publishing firm in London and she plied her with numerous questions about publishing and how to get a novel – her novel – published.

Lisa wondered if the girl really was what she claimed to be. Working with Marcias had made Lisa suspicious of other people, made her be on her guard always. So many people were not what they seemed to be... pretended to be. Were Marcias and herself really what they seemed to be? In front of this girl, just in case, Lisa had better be sure that she was what she seemed to be, be sure to sound and look the part. This cloak and dagger – or rather cloak and gun – stuff was so damn confusing. You had to be on the ball, watch out all the time. Sometimes it wasn't so much fun at all – only when Marcias was around. And whatever Marcias wanted to do, she would help him... to the end. You got caught up in the rapids of life and went along wherever they took you.

"It's not a romance... I'm not interested in romances," Mavis, as she was apparently called, was explaining, as Lisa started on the egg mayonnaise. "I wouldn't want to write one of those slushy type things. Mine's a thriller... it takes place at the Cheltenham Festival. You know, darling, the horse-racing...."

"It's already been done," Lisa mumbled, as she chewed a piece of brown bread and butter. "Many times, by Dick Francis."

"Yes, darling, but mine is different," Mavis enthused, "You see...."

But Lisa didn't see. She was thinking of Marcias. They were always different; writers always said their story was different. But they had been all different, all those guys all those years ago when, just into her teens, a boyfriend much older than herself had sneaked her into the Windmill to see "Rip Off", the completely nude show. She had admired the girls; been envious of them; hoped that she would develop and move like them. The girls had all been beautiful, gorgeous. But the men had fascinated her; and every one of them had been different – unique – their individual pricks... bouncing up and down on the stage as their Adonis owners gyrated to the pulsating, rhythmic music. But she reckoned Marcias had the biggest cock, like a huge inverted ice-cream cornet. As a little girl, she had always liked to turn the cornets upside down and bite off the tip and suck out the cream. Funny how men's tools were now being fully recognised at

last as status symbols just like girls' boobs always had been. Maybe Playgirl had first made the headway.

"I've got a publisher interested," Mavis was going on. "Magician Books, in Devon. You have to contribute to the publishing costs, but they promise to publish and promote it."

"Vanity publishers," Lisa enlightened her.

"Vanity publishers? What do you mean, darling?"

Lisa's steak had arrived. She needed it to restore her strength; she had used up a lot of energy that day. "Look at it this way," she tried to explain to Mavis. "Say you've been trying to win the football pools for years, and then suddenly one week you get eight draws.... Only to find that there are a lot of draws that week and the dividend is very low, just a few pounds. Well it's the same with a book. You've been trying for a long time to get it published and then suddenly one day a publisher offers and agrees to publish it... but he isn't the right publisher... he doesn't do the publicity... he hasn't got the distribution... so your book doesn't sell. You get a low royalty, just a few pounds." Lisa Gunn was sipping the ruby red Vaduzer, sipping it as if it was precious – as if she wanted to drink it, but didn't want it to disappear. It reminded her of Marcias. It was as if it was his life's blood. Ruby red. Sipping away. Slipping away.

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The first of the six killers to arrive in Malbun was the cold, elegant, smoothly electric Vicente Patto. Even in the subdued slush of the car park across the road from the Montana, he was able to walk – to lift and place his feet delicately – like a multi-coloured flamingo tentatively picking its way through a deliberately chartered minefield. In a beautiful place which enthused and expressed only joy, fun, adventure and competition, Patto immediately smelt death. It relaxed him. He was at home with death; he understood it. He had lived a million deaths, each time he woke in the morning. In such a bright, colourful setting as Malbun in January, only Patto could have brought such dark foreboding. He had a habit of turning everything into black and white. As he sauntered across the road towards the hotel, his shaded eyes observed everything, seemingly missing nothing. But despite his inner emotions, his face and whole exterior were now positively jovial, a demeanour which enabled him to blend completely with his remarkable companions.

The members of the Uphill Club were a most unusual bunch. They specialised in the somewhat neglected art of organising and implementing outrageously humorous and uniquely absurd escapades. Fun trips, they called them. Late at night, one member had actually towed a cannon away from Sandhurst and deposited it outside the Dorchester; only to return next morning to find that a

wheel clamp had been fixed to its carriage. Every February, since his quad-centenary in 1978, they had celebrated the anniversary of the death of Giovanni Battista Moroni, the Italian Venetian-style portrait painter. This they did in some style at the Savoy, where they consumed much food and even more wine in front of a large, blown-up print of the “Tailor”. In recent years they had been particularly fortunate to enjoy, at this auspicious function, the culinary delights of the Savoy’s celebrated top chef, the eminent Monsieur Anton Edelmann.

However, despite their heroic efforts at enjoying life, no one ever took the members of the Uphill Club very seriously, which worried them just a little, as enjoying life was a serious business to them. Of course, the idea of skiing uphill was ridiculous – which was probably the reason why they never did actually attempt it. Instead they challenged the famous Downhill Club of Wengen to a downhill race on the latter’s home slopes. When they beat the Downhill Club, people did start to take them seriously, which worried them a lot.

Before their February Moroni function every year, the members of the Uphill Club had got into the habit of staying for a couple of weeks at a different ski resort each January. In the past, they had visited Davos, Klosters, St. Anton, Kitzbuhel, Val d’Isere, and Courmayeur. This year, 1988 (prior to the 410th anniversary of the death of Giovanni Battista Moroni), the choice was Malbun. The Uphill Club had six full members and six associate members. On Thursday, 7th January 1988, nine of them registered into their reserved accommodation at the Montana Hotel which is situated near to the ski-lifts at the upper part of the town of Malbun. One of the associate members of the Uphill Club who registered into the Montana that day was Vicente Patto, of Phoenix, Arizona. Patto had found that the club provided an excellent cover for his fatalistic activities.

There were plenty of people staying in Malbun during January 1988; more than normal even for this popular time of the year. There had been rumours circulating around the principality, and particularly in Malbun itself, that some famous visitors would be arriving soon in the resort. This was nothing unusual for Liechtenstein; many famous people visit it each year, in summer and winter. But the identities of these anticipated visitors had been kept a tight secret – there was even talk that they would be staying at the Prince’s schloss, indicating that it must be royalty or possibly an important head of state. Nevertheless, the fact that their identities had been kept so secret, puzzled both the local population and the surrounding European press and served only to arouse more interest in the impending visit. Who could it be? As one hotelier in Malbun remarked: “When Prince Charles and Lady Di (non-Britons were still having difficulty in calling her Princess Diana) came here on two occasions, it was not kept a secret. So who are these people, that they are so important that we cannot know them?”

However, despite this influx of visitors for this January, five other people had confirmed reservations at the Montana for arrival later that week and their rooms were being kept waiting for them. The Montana was fully booked for the

remainder of January. Hoteliers in Liechtenstein tend to close during the month of February, when they take their own vacations.

Next to arrive at the Montana in Malbun, on Friday, 8th January 1988, were Mr. and Mrs. William Johnson from the United States. At first it was thought that it might have been the famous American World Cup downhill skier of the same name who had done so well in recent years with his brave and swashbuckling attacks upon the slopes. No one knew for sure whether he was married. Perhaps this was to be his honeymoon? Combining pleasure with pleasure! But when they arrived, the couple were older and they both had distinctive southern accents. So disappointment for the curious observers, and the speculation continued. Perhaps not the best environment for a professional hit... for a quadruple assassination.

Vicente Patto had seen the Johnsons arrive. From the Inter Sport shop situated between the Montana and the ski-lift station, he had bought a light baseball cap in the distinctive blue, red and white colours of Inter Sport. A baseball cap! Vicente Patto's game was American football. The Cardinals football team was moving from St. Louis to Phoenix. Maybe next fall he would be watching the game on his own territory. Right now he was watching other game and another game. And a game far more deadlier and destructive than anything which took place on the grid iron.

Patto was on the raised terrace bar of the Montana. He was stretched nonchalantly on a plastic bucket chair beside a table by the wall at the edge of the terrace, from where he could survey the main road and the car park and a fair section of that upper part of the resort. In front of him, on the table, there was a bowl of soup, still steaming in the cold atmosphere, containing one of those gigantic Austrian dumplings; a speciality he had first enjoyed in Innsbruck. In his steady hand, he held a large glass of red wine. Stretched out as he was on the chair, his head was tilted back and down at an angle; the baseball cap, pushed forward, concealed his face, and his shaded eyes watched from the dark recesses beneath the obscurity of its peak. He looked very much the tourist who preferred the relaxation of the daytime terrasse to the exhilaration of the piste; a man who could enjoy his thrills by proxy before venturing forth in the evening to sample the delights of après-ski.

It was probably just as well that Patto, from his adopted observation post, sighted the Johnsons at the moment of their arrival, for, once they had registered into the Montana, they retired to their double room and remained inside it for all of the next forty-eight hours, not venturing out for even a brief moment. Their meals and all their needs were brought to their room. But during the short time it took them to leave their car and hurry across the road to the hotel, Vincente Patto had been able to recognise Mr. William Johnson as being Billie Lou Weldon, the accomplished mechanic from the deep south. Patto had always reckoned that

he was better than Weldon. Just. But, as had been said about downhill ski racing, a second could be eternity in their game.

The next to arrive at the Montana Hotel in Malbun was Johnnie “the Swede” Johansson. Of all the arrivals, Johnnie the Swede must have most looked the part of an innocent American tourist on his first skiing vacation in the Liechtenstein resort. If anything, he looked too much the part, but it had often been Johansson’s contention that to show off was a better cover than discreet, careful concealment or suspicious incognisance. One thing was certain: the appearance of the tall, handsome, blond and athletic American in his flamboyant and bright multi-coloured winter sports clothing attracted the attention of all of the spare and most of the not so spare talent that gathered each early evening at the upper part of this smart town. And, of course, it attracted the attention of the ever vigilant, albeit laid-back, Vicente Patto. It was the first time that the cool, Latin American had seen the hit-man from Minnesota. It was quite an education.

Friendly, effervescent and almost conspiratorial and with a hint of promises to come, Johnnie Johansson had persuaded the Montana’s receptionist, a lady in her thirties who was quite prepared to be charmed by this handsome Adonis without any pretensions on her part, to allow him to glance through her register. The names of Mr. and Mrs. Johnson meant nothing to Johansson. “They’ve been in their room ever since they arrived,” the receptionist explained and added, with a deep smile that released her dimples, “Hot lovers, don’t you think?” Johansson was intrigued by the entry concerning the Uphill Club, but he could gain no information, not even from the co-operative receptionist, about its members who were resident at the hotel. It was a block booking and only the secretary of the club had signed the register. Unlike French hotels, and in common with most western European countries, it was not necessary to produce passports when booking in.

“Do you always book a double room?” the girl’s voice giggled from somewhere below. Johansson looked down. Her black hair contrasted sharply with the velvety white of her shining nude body. His loins tightened and he penetrated hard, almost savagely, so that she emitted a gentle, submissive squeal. But despite his sharp thrust, Johansson was a considerate lover and held his control admirably and brought the girl to an exquisite orgasm before climaxing himself, when he pumped like mad.

“You Vikings,” the receptionist panted, after a lot of time had passed by. “You’re rough.... but caring. I like a bit of rough.” Now she was looking relaxed... still panting... but only partly satisfied. He rolled off her and turned her over onto her tummy and smacked her bottom, three times... as hard as he could. She seemed to like it, so he slapped her ass a few more times. “Mmm,” she moaned ecstatically. They then kissed, full and passionately... she was holding his penis, gripping it tightly... not wanting to let it subside. They broke out of the kiss, then she lowered and closed her mouth over his penis and sucked hard. She was

rocking her head from side to side, vibrating him excruciatingly. They rolled over so that he was astride her again and he could feel her hot breath and he could feel himself coming again. Her lips were clawing at the rim of his knob and then she was opening her mouth wide and he was squirting deep into her throat.

There was a clock ticking somewhere in the background... incessantly... demandingly. He vaguely thought it was his wristwatch, her heart beating, his striking in unison. She was breathing heavily now. They were relaxing side by side. Suddenly she reached over and dug her fingernails, possessively, deeply, into his buttocks... she scratched him, viciously, wildly. They were kissing again; tongues and lips fighting hungrily.

About two hours later he answered her question. "No," he replied with mock seriousness, "but I heard tale that you Liechtensteiner ladies were superb, so a double bed seemed essential."

"I'm Austrian," she smiled and pouted almost simultaneously.

"Well," he grunted, "Liechtenstein was an Austrian name originally."

"That's true," she agreed, and started to bite him playfully around his tender parts.

After a while she relaxed again and stretched out her sleek body and laid back on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. Johansson gently caressed her limbs, tickled her tummy and pulled at her pubic hairs so that she giggled in that cheekily endearing manner of hers and cried out in pretended protest. She was restless again and she forced herself up from the bed, using her elbows for leverage so that her chest was thrust in an upwards arch and her breasts were poked up and silhouetted like the twin trade center towers in Manhattan above the East River.

He watched her from behind as she sauntered across his room. There was much to admire in her desirable body, her come-on personality, her provocative attitude, and her sensuous bearing. Her black hair – earlier immaculately coiffeured, but now slightly and attractively dishevelled – glimmered in the sparkling light from the chandelier like burnished ebony. Not only her complexion, at present turned away from him, but her entire body, even the swaying cheeks of her generously rounded bottom, was pale and creamy. The way she snaked her hips as she slithered over the deep-pile carpet oozed glamour and sexuality and forced Johansson to breathe swift, involuntary gusts of air up his enlarged, laboured nostrils.

"You were going to tell me the name," he reminded her. "One of the Uphill Club, you said, Ramona."

Ramona turned sharply and looked down at him. There was an inquisitiveness to her expression, a hint of teasing in her eyes; but when she saw that cold look on his face and the hardness in his eyes, she relented and answered his demand immediately. "Yes, I saw it briefly... on something that was being passed to his room." Ramona the receptionist could speak fluent English and French, and she spoke German the way the Austrians do, and she had a smattering of Italian. She reckoned the name looked Spanish, which she did not speak. "I wrote it down." She told him, and went to her handbag and after a moment she returned to the bed and sat on the edge of it and crossed her legs so that the fringe of her pubic hairs just peeped at him from between shapely thighs. "Here it is," she smiled and handed him a piece of paper with the name written on it. Johansson looked long and hard at the name of Vicente Patto. It meant nothing to him, but he locked it into his mind.

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The fifth one of the killers, due to arrive that day, did not arrive... anyway, not at the Montana, where a room was reserved for him in the name of James D. Leonard. The hotel received a special delivery containing an international money order to more than cover the cost of his accommodation for the next two weeks, instructions to keep his room available for him throughout the fortnight as he could arrive on any day, and the explanation that he had been delayed on business in Munich but he was still looking forward very much to his vacation in Malbun.

It was an example of the caution which had become a trade-mark of Fritz "Baby" Muhler.

Fritz Muhler liked to be sure, or as sure as possible, of a place before committing himself. He knew that if he was to carry out the assassinations of the two young grandsons of the Queen of England on the ski slopes of Malbun, then it would be necessary for him, in view of the possibility of changing weather conditions in the Alps in January, to reside in Malbun itself. He could not afford to be stranded down in Vaduz or even Triesenberg by sudden heavy snows on the day of the hit. Muhler did not know much about the January weather conditions in Liechtenstein; he knew only what he had read in books about the principality. But he reckoned that with any place near to the Alps, there must always be the danger of sudden climatic changes and he was determined to allow nothing to stop him from completing the killings. He had to stay in Malbun, but he did not want to stay there until he was sure that it was reasonably safe for him to do so.

So on his first day in Liechtenstein, on Friday, 8th January 1988, Muhler steered the silver Mercedes up the mountain road towards Malbun. Near to Triesenberg, he took the road to the left, away from Malbun to the right, and in a short while he arrived at the small village of Gaflei. He had no difficulty in finding the guest house; there could not have been more than half a dozen buildings in the village.

There was a girl standing outside the guest house. "Sprechen sie Englisch?" he asked her.

"Ya," she replied, and then, with a smile, added, "yes," in an easy English with a slight American accent. The smile on the girl's face made Muhler look at her more closely. She reminded him of Dawn Sanders. He had not heard from her since the day she was not at home in her apartment when he called. Not surprising, since she did not know of his whereabouts, and he had not attempted to contact her by 'phone or letter as he did not wish to betray his whereabouts. Liverpool, that was where she had gone. He remembered the old lady with the message, standing outside her door on the dimly-lit landing. Dawn was probably back home in Shenfield by now. Soon he would be there with her, once this contract was over... out of the way. This was to be his last one... his last hit. It had to be. She wanted it that way... she would have it no other way. Muhler twisted the left side of his mouth so that a small dimple appeared there. It was almost as if he was fighting something and it made him snarl a silent snarl, like a big cat hunting its prey. He knew very well that other mechanics had promised themselves that their next hit would be their last contract, but they would accept another one and another until finally it was their last contract, period, only not in the way they had intended. 'You can't retire from this game,' he had once been warned. But he would... he would beat the system – for Dawn's sake. And, the funny thing was, after killing the two sons of the Prince of Wales, he could have named the highest price in the future.

A sweet sounding voice disturbed his thoughts and returned him to the present, bringing him back from his excursions to the past and to the future. He looked up at her – the guest house was up on a small bank from the road – long blonde hair, with the sun shining through it, encompassed a pretty face that was both strong and delicate, and innocently willing.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he heard her ask.

Yes, plenty, he thought, quite a bit, but his reply dwelt on more mundane matters. "I have booked a room here for a week. My name is Gustav Petersson."

"Ah, that is goot. Please... come up inside. Do you have luggage in the trunk?" One moment she was serious and business-like, the next smiling in welcome. When he said he had a case in the car, she asked for the car keys and, despite his protests, she insisted on carrying up the case for him. It was then that he noticed that her arms and legs were muscular, like a Teutonic athlete. Nevertheless, she was completely feminine in every other way and her glances at him were those of a young woman who was interested in men and for their sexual potential. It occurred to Muhler that she might not get a lot of opportunity up here in remote Gaflei. But most mountain girls made their way down to the valleys, and not only in springtime.

"Are you the owner of the pension... the gasthof? The... er, landlady?" he flattered her as they passed through the main doorway into a large entrance room. He noticed that she gave the impression of carrying his case with practised ease, but he thought he detected a slight strain in the muscles of her pretty face.

She giggled at his questions. "No, I am only the daughter of the proprietor. I am only.... " She hesitated, changed her mind and stopped the sentence there. Eventually she said: "I am still fairly young." Her bottom moved economically under the loose dress as she marched across the room to a small reception desk. On other occasions Muhler would have done something with this girl. Now, for reasons he did not want to fully understand, he could only think of Dawn. It was indeed fortunate for the young Austrian wench. Girls did not always survive Muhler's affections when he was employed on a contract.

The girl's mother appeared from a back room and stood, politely invitingly, behind the reception counter. She was not the buxom matron Muhler would have expected; if anything, she was prettier, more attractive than her young daughter who had just disappeared with his case up a narrow stairway.

"Herr Petersson," the landlady greeted him, "you will be staying for a week?" Muhler nodded and they completed the formalities, and then he mounted the staircase and followed in the direction in which the girl had taken his suitcase to his room. He had insisted on paying in advance for his accommodation.

That evening, having told his landlady that he would not be in for dinner, Muhler ventured up to Malbun, arriving in the resort just after six o'clock. He spent the next three hours combing the hotels and the restaurants of the town. It was a good time of the day to check on the people staying in the resort, when most of them were on view at the dining tables.

Only two people attracted Muhler's special attention. The first was a tall, handsome man with striking blond hair, a Scandinavian type who reminded Muhler of Sterling Hayden in the movies of the fifties. The second man was of moderate build and height, a little on the slim side even, and also handsome, but in a dark Latin way. Slightly swarthy, dark hair, dark features, brooding eyes... must be South American... sinister... probably just a tourist. But the Scandinavian, the Nordic Sterling Hayden. There was something about him... not just his manner... there was something familiar about him... a description, maybe, which Muhler had read or heard. What did his presence here in Malbun mean at this very time?... if he was a mechanic. Sterling Hayden had played a hit-man once, a retired hit-man. Muhler loved the movies. He loved them more than real life. He could spend all his life watching movies. They were more realistic than real life.

Muhler returned to the silver Mercedes. It was ten o'clock. He was hungry, but not for food. He made his way back to Gaflei. There were a number of alternatives, but to start with, just two. Yes or no. On or off. Plus or minus. Positive or negative. Like the computer, binary. One or two. One, the big tall blond fellow was not a mechanic. Two, the big tall blond fellow was a mechanic. And if two, then... the next alternatives.

Alternative one: The man was here purely on holiday. It was a mere chance coincidence that he happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Muhler had never accepted coincidences.

Alternative two: The man was here on an entirely different contract, unconnected with the IRA and the Wales family. Again, too much of a coincidence.

Alternative three: The man was here to hit Muhler. Possible, but still unlikely. Who would know of Muhler's presence and mission here, apart from the IRA, and it could not be in their interest to kill him. Not before he had completed his contract, anyway. Afterwards, they may try to save on paying all of his fee by having him eliminated, but they would still have to pay the other mechanic to kill him. Perhaps the other mechanic was cheaper. That made sense. It should come less expensive to have Muhler the mechanic killed than the two young sons of the Prince of Wales. Or maybe they wished to have him eliminated after he had completed the killings so as to avoid or sever any connection – to remove any link – that could associate the IRA with the assassinations. No, the IRA, above all else, wanted to be credited with the killings. Anyway, he did not believe that any professional hit-man would accept a contract to kill another mechanic. It would have to be an amateur. No, he must be getting paranoiac. He could not be a target.

Alternative four: The man was here to hit the Prince or/and the Princess of Wales. The IRA intended to wipe out Charlie's entire family, using two unconnected hit-men. Much more possible.

Alternative five: Either the Scandinavian or himself had been hired as a back-up by the IRA in case the attempt by the first mechanic failed. More than possible. It was the sort of thing the IRA would do; they were a suspenders (braces) and belt brigade. He didn't trust that man in black – the one that could have looked like a priest – on the video film. Well, Muhler had no intention of playing second fiddle to anyone. This was going to be his last hit, and Muhler was going to do it himself. He wanted the cash and he wanted the prestige. And most of all, he wanted the satisfaction. For besides anything else, he hated kids; he was going to kill the two young boys – he had promised himself that, and he never broke his promises to himself... he was especially looking forward to these two killings. Other contracts had been purely business, this job was pleasure as well.

He was out of the delightfully higgledy-piggledy Malbun, the thin moonlight shining off the glistening snow nestling around the beautifully varied assortment of dwellings scattered down the floor of the huge mountain bowl; past the lower car park, down the hill. Maybe he should have used a taxi. An interested observer would have matched him with the silver Merc for future reference. He had slackened his customary caution. That offended his professional instinct and endangered his sense of survival. Too late now. And there was no immediate way of swapping cars.

He had passed the small church at Steg, to the left of the road. He was still deep in thought, the automatic pilot, possessed by all good drivers, having taken over as his mind worked elsewhere. The last hit. This was going to be the last one. He could hardly believe it. Now he had passed through above the upper part of Triesenberg. It was then, having subconsciously and safely negotiated the cliff side bends, that he nearly came to grief. Thinking too much. Going too fast. Over confident on the straighter road after leaving the sharp, raised bends. He swerved across the road when coming out of what was really only a shallow curve.

The condemning screeching power of the Merc and the sudden jerk of his mystical automatic pilot forced him to control the car before it was too late. Steering quickly and braking gently, he returned to the main line of the road, relaxing slowly to balance his nerves. The man in black in the video. He was going to meet with him tomorrow. He must be careful of that man.... extra careful.

When he arrived back at Gaflei, Seger was waiting for him at the approach to the village. At first Muhler didn't see the black BMW parked to the side of the road. Then, as the Merc climbed resolutely up the hill towards the guest house, there was one, quick flash of a headlamp, stabbing at him accusingly from the pinetrees. It was Seger... with the cigars from Belgium.

Muhler stopped the Merc just the other side of the BMW, so that the two car boots faced each other. He doused his headlamps. There was still a weak moon and the moonlight reflected off the silver bonnet of the Mercedes, but ignored the dull black of the BMW. Both men opened the boots of their cars. From his boot, Seger handed a total of six packages to Muhler who, in turn, placed them inside the deep trunk of his car. Not a word was spoken between the two men. Just a couple of nods. Muhler did not even look at the 'cigars' as he placed them carefully, and with some affection, inside his boot. Muhler would examine them carefully inside his room during the small hours of the night. If they were satisfactory, the second half of the payment would be transferred from the 'Bank in Liechtenstein' in Vaduz to a bank in Luxembourg and from there to a bank in Antwerp. The payment was a simple banking transaction. It had not been necessary for Muhler to see Dr. Werner Keicher of the bank in Vaduz. Doctor Keicher's reputation for forming companies based in Liechtenstein for

well-known people, and for less well-known people, was now becoming famous, and if there was one thing that a contract killer had to avoid, then that was fame.

The 'cigars' would be satisfactory. Seger's reputation and continuance as a high-class armourer and secretive international arms dealer depended upon him supplying and guaranteeing satisfaction. A few moments later, the BMW, its headlamps still switched off, was cruising – free-wheeling, its engine not on – silently down the hill. A bit risky, Muhler thought, there being a fresh layer of snow on the road. But Seger disappeared into the night without incident, meandering down the mountain, helped by salt, chains, four-wheel drive and something... confidence... experience... intuition... whatever it is that carries men like Seger through.

After all his precautions, planning and organising down to detail, Fritz "Baby" Muhler would have been amazed at the way in which Roger de Tricart brought his guns into Liechtenstein. De Tricart, the "gentleman queer" as "Tough Tony" Molloy had called him, would arrive on the next day, Friday 9th January 1988, the sixth and last of the deadliest sextet ever to plague one of the most beautiful and romantic and exhilarating and peaceful little places on earth.

It must have been eleven o'clock when Muhler made his way up to his room. He had thought about the young blonde girl. He had thought even more about her mother, the landlady. It would not have been the first time he had screwed a mother and daughter. But he decided against it. This was his last contract. There must be no slip-ups at the very end. As he placed his hand upon the handle of his door, a sweet voice said simply, "Guten Nacht." He turned and saw the young girl standing in the dark hallway. She was looking at him a little wide-eyed. "I have put some supper in your room... for if you are hungry," she explained. Then she turned away as if embarrassed. Muhler wondered if she was blushing.

"Dankeschonen," he said. Then he went into his room and locked the door from the inside. He had not even noticed what she was wearing, if anything. He would get the guns from the car trunk later. Suddenly he was feeling tired. It had been a longish day. And there was still the night....

There was a shower in the corner of his room. Muhler stripped and used it. Then he flung himself naked on top of the bed. He didn't touch the supper. He drowsed into a fitful sleep; sweating and turning over and over from one side to the other. He awoke about one o'clock in the morning. His body was a mass of sweat and the top bedspread was sticky and damp. He realised that he had been masturbating. He hadn't done that since he was a child. He had hated being a child... perhaps that was why he hated and despised children now. He needed Dawn, he needed her now more than anything he had ever needed.

The 'cigars' down in the trunk... he must bring up the guns and check them. Tomorrow he must see the man in black... that bastard. He had never met him, but he hated him already. Fritz "Baby" Muhler had a great capacity to hate. He hoped that damn girl had gone to bed... to her own bed.

Chapter Seventeen

On Thursday, 7th January 1988, Roger de Tricart had flown from London to Bonn where he stayed that night at the Steigenberger by the Bundeskanzlerplatz. Originally he had intended to take his car across on the ferry and drive over to Bonn. He had selected this hotel because the rooms had baths and because it was listed in the RAC continental handbook with a 'G' which signified it had parking space.

"You will be able to find your way to the hotel because it has a large Mercedes sign on the roof," the receptionist had explained when he 'phoned through his reservation from England. Most people in any position of reasonable responsibility spoke English in Bonn, and without an American accent.

Then he had changed his mind. He did not want his own car, with English number-plates, to be seen in Malbun, or anywhere in Liechtenstein, with the danger of it being traced back to him after the hit. So a taxi had taken him to the hotel. It was just as well, for the hotel parking turned out to be meters in the street outside. The hotel itself was perched at the top of a large building block containing commercial and retailing establishments at ground-level. He felt very remote in this high-rise hotel, but at least he had a large, grand room with a majestic view of the West German capital.

The next morning, de Tricart hired a car in Bonn and drove to Stuttgart where he had reserved a room in the Schlossgarten Hotel in the Schillerstrasse. His arrival in Stuttgart seemed to coincide with the local rush time. The city was probably larger than Bonn and it was certainly busier and hectic compared with the more sedately paced capital on the Rhine, and he had great difficulty in locating his hotel. To make his search more futile, the natives had no time to be friendly and did not appear to speak English. Thus his requests for directions, called from the car window, went unheeded by passers-by who seemed only interested in their own destinations and determined in getting to them as quickly and as unhindered as possible. Eventually he found his hotel – a fairly tall building – but only from a distance. He could see the top of the building, he could even make out its sign, but he could not find a street in the maze of the one-way system to take him to it. Nor could he find anywhere to park the car whilst he investigated on foot. In annoyed exasperation, he left Stuttgart, vowing never to return.

On the autobahn south towards Austria he saw a sign pointing to Ulm. He did not know the town, but it sounded inviting and it certainly looked big enough to have some decent hotels. He swung the Audi off the autobahn and headed for the town centre. He had no idea where to look, but coming off a raised roundabout he spotted the Hotel Neutor-Hospiz. It looked more than promising. The hotel had a lock-up garage for his car, a comfortable room with a wood floor and a colourful array of German mats, an excellent restaurant, and a pretty and

pert receptionist whom he supposed some men would have found attractive. She did speak English though.

That evening he wandered down through the new town, past the church with the tallest spire in Europe, and into the old town with its quaint taverns alongside miniature bridges over fast-moving and stony streams. Close to a spot where a plaque indicated the site where the Nazis had murdered their first Jews, the streams rushed through small underground tunnels to join the great river nearby. De Tricart stood on the unrailed concrete riverbank and looked along the Danube.

"It's not blue," he smiled accusingly to the receptionist later that evening.

"No," she laughed, "it's a sort of muddy brown."

It was an easy journey from Ulm to the Austrian border. By early afternoon on the Saturday de Tricart was encircling the eastern side of Lake Constance. The Bodensee, the Germans called it. The Rhine poured into it at one end, forced its way across the grey waters, and seeped out again on the other side. De Tricart thought of a place he had visited in Switzerland, the area with the teeming white falls. What was its name? He couldn't think of it, but Goethe had called that the centre of the world or the birthplace of the world... something like that. Well, for de Tricart Lake Constance was the focal point; its cool waters lapped the shores of Switzerland, Germany and Austria. And Bregenz, through which he was now driving, was for de Tricart the centre of Europe.

Driving on the right-hand side of the road, going southwards, the water was lapping so close to the road that it seemed to be but an arm's length away, as if he could swish his hand across its surface. It reminded de Tricart of his childhood, when his mother used to take him to Margate for a few days as the annual holiday. They used to go out in a small boat, just his mother and himself alone together; she used to take him out in the boat, and he would dip his hand over the side of the boat and swish it through the water. He had never known his father; as a child he had doubted if he had ever had one. His mother was the only person he had known as a boy, the only woman he had ever really known and loved. He detested girls; they had teased him at school and they had vulgar ideas and he had detested them ever since. But he had liked his childhood, he had enjoyed being a child with just his mother. He wished that he could return to those days now, but since she had died life had never been the same for him. There would never be another woman like her. All these girls were just trash. It would not be difficult for him to kill a woman.

He was driving around the curve at the lower end of the lake, gradually turning eastwards. He could see the white, wood-framed, lakeside restaurant, with the quay alongside poking out towards the lake. This was the place. Hans Seger would meet him here. De Tricart parked behind a black BMW with the red Belgium number-plates and waited inside his car. Within a few seconds he saw

a tall figure appear in the doorway of the restaurant. Then the man emerged out into the cloudy daylight. It was Seger. De Tricart knew that it was Seger because the man was wearing a suit that was identical to his own. The Englishman stifled a contemptuous laugh. Really! This cloak and dagger stuff was ludicrous. He was slim and neat; Seger was big and burly. Would anyone really mistake them for being the same man?

However, the appearance of Seger in the entrance to the restaurant was de Tricart's cue. He unlocked the nearside rear door of his car, removed the keys from the ignition and stepped out onto the pavement. He locked the front door and walked over to the restaurant. After de Tricart had entered right into the interior of the building, Seger went out to the Englishman's Audi. The big man was carrying a large, narrow suitcase. He opened the back door of the Audi and placed the suitcase inside and then got in after it. Meanwhile de Tricart ordered a glass of milk at the bar of the restaurant. By the time he had finished it, Seger had returned. De Tricart paid for the milk and went out to his car and sat in the back seat.

The Englishman glanced briefly at the long, narrow case, got out of the car again, stepped into the driving seat and drove away. He followed the road away from the lake, southwards. After about a mile or so, he pulled into the kerb and stopped again. Getting out of the car, he looked up at the sky and noticed a break in the cloud formation; a patch of pale blue was struggling to escape. He climbed into the back seat once more and opened the case. There was a Russian-made Kalashikov rifle. De Tricart smiled coldly at the irony of this, for he knew that the Kalashikov was a favourite of the IRA. Beside the long barrel of the Russian rifle, lay the stubby, grey barrel of a Smith and Wesson Magnum .357. This weapon was very popular with the hoods in the big American cities, especially for quick, short range work. It had even been featured in a street killing on one of the 'Hill Street Blues' television programme.

De Tricart loved a Magnum; it made him feel big and powerful and strong. It made him believe he could compete in a man's world. Once he had used a .44 Magnum, but that had been for a particularly difficult hit which had been executed in the toilet of a gentlemen's club in St. James. That had been a gruesome, close-up job on a giant of a man; a brutish fiend. The .44 Magnum would stop anyone close up and the giant had been thrown, dead, on his ass. Right now, for the job in Liechtenstein, which was planned to be at long range, the Kalashnikov would be the answer. It was handy and reliable and, whilst it may be slower than some weapons, its long barrel ensured that it was more accurate. And accuracy, first time, was the name of the game on the slopes of Malbun.

Not a word had been spoken between Roger de Tricart and Hans Seger, almost a repeat performance of the meeting of Seger with Muhler the previous night. But those two similar meetings had not been to the exclusive knowledge of the participants. Both Muhler and de Tricart, who knew only of their own individual

exchanges with the gun-runner from Belgium, would have been more than a little concerned if they had witnessed a scene which had been played out on the shores of Lake Constance about an hour before de Tricart's arrival there.

Hans Seger had been waiting in his car, further back on the road. The prickling of the small hairs at the nape of his neck had warned him that something was amiss. He got out of the BMW and walked slowly towards the restaurant. When he reached it, he stopped and turned around and casually observed the area around the car. He strolled along the quayside and turned left around the corner to the promenade between the restaurant and the lakeside. He had known it was a mistake to have got out of the car. He stood perfectly still. The gun poking into his spine felt very convincing. Seger was a gun expert. From knowing of the man probably involved, he could only guess it was an old Peacemaker .44, but he could feel and knew the shape of the modified silencer.

The four men walked over to the railings and stared across the misty lake; Seger had got used to the routine. No nonsense, these creeps were fatal. Such men, you gave them what they wanted... always... with no questions. With these people you did not argue.

"Mr. de Tricart is on his way."

Seger was not sure if it was a statement or a question. This man was probably so used to asking questions that even his statements sounded like questions.

"Yeah!" Seger grunted.

"You were a good boy with Herr Muhler last night?"

"Ya."

"That is goot. You keep it that way and you will live to a good age, eh?" It was not a loosely veiled threat. Seger knew that. It was simply a very matter-of-fact statement of the situation.

There was a ferry-boat coming across the lake, approaching the quay. The man looked at it; his two colleagues kept their eyes on Seger. The man looked back at Seger. When he spoke again, his voice sounded a trifle bored, although again it was the inevitable question. "You did not mention de Tricart to Muhler?"

"No."

"And you will not mention Muhler to de Tricart?" The man's pseudo-German accent had now completely evaporated. The theatricals were over, it was now down to business. Seger shook his head in reply. It was not good enough for the man. He wanted to hear it. "No?" he demanded sharply.

People were leaving and joining the ferry. "No!" Seger confirmed loudly.

"That is good. Remember always what we told you in Luxembourg. "Baby" Muhler and Roger de Tricart must both believe that their's is the only contract in Liechtenstein. They must not know of each other's contract. Is that thoroughly understood by you, Herr Hans Seger?"

The ferry was starting to leave. "Yes," said Seger, simply and quietly. He was staring moodily into space. "Thoroughly," he added.

The man reached into his pocket. "Just so that we do thoroughly understand each other," he murmured softly. His hand reappeared holding a brown envelope from which he extracted a colour photograph which he showed to Seger. The arms-dealer looked at it. The man in the photograph was lying on the ground; his throat had been neatly slit from ear to ear. Seger noticed, with some macabre fascination, the dark, blotchy patch that extended down the front of the man's white shirt. "That is what happens to people who we consider talk too much."

"You love photographs," Seger growled.

"I do believe that they convey a message with greater emphasis... greater impact, shall we say... than mere words. Do you not think so?"

"Like I said, you love photographs. But you needn't have worried. I never discuss my clients' business with anyone, and most certainly not that of one client with another. Muhler and de Tricart will not learn from me that they both have similar contracts in Liechtenstein. Good-bye, you creeps. I'm going back to my car to wait for de Tricart. I suggest you make yourselves.... What is the word?... scarce."

After examining his weapons, Roger de Tricart got out from the back seat of his car, unlocked the front door, got in and drove away into the light traffic of Bregenz, in the direction of Liechtenstein. As he continued southwards, he was debating whether to leave the case of weapons on the back seat or to put it in the boot. The Austrian side of the border should be no problem, as he was leaving the country, but he was wondering how to pass through the Liechtenstein customs which might well be manned by Swiss officials. A case lying on the back seat, for all to see, might arouse less suspicion, whereas if the customs asked to see inside his boot, they might well ask him to open the case as well.

It was at this point, on the outskirts of Bregenz, that he spotted the girl hitch-hiker. Strange, he thought, he had never expected hitch-hikers in the middle of winter; not in Austria, anyway. But a female companion in the car might well be an advantage for him. It looked more natural, as if they were on holiday together. A single man in a car did not look like a holidaymaker and tended to place the

customs on their guard. There was something else which de Tricart had to be careful about and that was to hide his homosexuality from the customs. In this part of Europe, if you were queer it was also invariably thought that you were also on drugs and, although de Tricart was not on drugs, if the customs officials searched him for them, they would soon find his guns. The girl could be a convenient cover for him. He could soon ditch her once they were through the customs. He stopped the car a few metres ahead of her. She grabbed up her holdall and came running after him. It was just starting to sleet.

Seeing the car number-plates, she spoke to him in German, asking him where he was going.

"Do you speak English?" he demanded, rather curtly.

"Yes... You are English?... in a German car?"

"Yes... I am English." He sounded irritable. Why did these young girls always have to ask questions all the time, as if they didn't trust people? "Where are you going?"

"To Liechtenstein." She seemed proud of the fact.

"So am I. Hop in, dear girl."

She looked at him a bit askance, a sort of old-fashioned look, but she jumped into the front passenger seat and tossed her holdall onto the back seat where it landed on top of the long case containing the guns. De Tricart had already decided to leave the case on the back seat. He waited until the girl had fastened her seat-belt and then he started the Audi off again.

"My name is Erika. What is yours?"

"Roger."

"Mm. It is a nice name."

De Tricart chose to ignore her opinion of his name. Her views were of no interest or value to him. And he did not like being flattered by girls, in any form. Their flattery was usually false. "I will be staying in Malbun," he told her.

"Me too," Erika responded breezily. "Well, actually it is Triesenberg, just below Malbun. Do you know the way?"

"No, I haven't been to Liechtenstein before."

"I will show you. It is goot to have a guide, eh?" Her voice was high-pitched, he thought, but he could put up with it.

"You are a Liechtensteiner?" he enquired. He was being more polite now.

"No. I am Austrian!"

"Really. Is that so? I was told there was a lot of Austrians in Liechtenstein. I wonder why. I would have expected more Swiss... the currency and everything is Swiss. Do you live there, in Liechtenstein, I mean? Or work there?"

For the first time she was smiling. Before she had been chirpy, but now she was relaxed and even more forthcoming. "It is not surprising... that there are so many Austrians in Liechtenstein. The original Count Liechtenstein was Austrian. And, of course, we share a border. Many Austrians work in Liechtenstein and there are Austrian men who have married Liechtenstein ladies. That way, it is easier for them to own property there."

It had stopped sleeting. At first, de Tricart was pleased at that. His eyes were tired and they were becoming strained through peering through the clouding windscreen. But then she had mentioned the border. Perhaps it would have been better if there had been a snowstorm when they went through it. The girl was talking again and he started to listen to her once more. "Yes, the original Count Liechtenstein... he was called Hugo, and he built a schloss, a castle you say, near to Vienna, I think, so you see, he was from Austria. And he built his castle on limestone, which was a light colour, so he became known as Hugo von Liechtenstein... Liechtenstein means light stone. Leich is light and stein is stone. You see?"

They got through the customs. As expected, the Austrian side had been no problem. By the time they reached the frontier, the road had narrowed and curved and risen, like some demented snake twisting and climbing and falling. They were coming around on a piece of road made even more narrow by the banks of churned-up slush on either side, when there it was. The road had simultaneously risen steeply and curved sharply and when they came out of the bend, the Austrian checkpoint was upon them. The most unlikely place for a border crossing. The Austrian frontier guards had glared at them, but after the minimum of checks, they had waved them through. It was almost as easy as passing out of Belgium into Holland, where at some points a white line painted across the road is the only clue to the border.

The Liechtenstein side was different. By contrast to the garden shed which had sufficed for the Austrian border post, the Liechtenstein equivalent was like a motorway service station. There were between ten and twenty cars queued at the border post waiting to be checked. A border guard or customs official, de Tricart was not sure which, approached their car and demanded to see their

passports. The man was dressed in a neat greyish green uniform, similar to the Germans but with the unique and cool distinctiveness of the Swiss. He was young, blond and very handsome, more of a boy than a man. The young man's short jacket adequately displayed the tight, snugly-fitting trousers which gripped his buttocks. The young man gave only a cursory glance at Erika's Austrian passport. He spent a little longer in looking at de Tricart's British passport and comparing it with the German registered car. He looked over de Tricart's shoulder at the holdall and long case resting on the back seat. Eventually he spoke. "The car is yours?"

"No, hired... from Stuttgart. I have the papers.... "

The young man made a shrugging gesture with his shoulders and hands, and waved them on. De Tricart seemed in no hurry to go and, through his rear mirror, he watched the official as the young man went to the next car. Damn it! He missed Richard. Longed for him. Longed for someone. He had to do something about it, real soon. He had hoped for something in Germany, but there had been nothing. He had probably been in the wrong places. Possibly in Berlin, or even Hambourg, it would have been different. He had to find someone, quick, now... even before the kill.

All the while, Erika had been closely watching him. Now, as they drove away from the frontier post and entered Liechtenstein, the young girl was giggling. "I thought so," she blurted out between the giggles. "You're gay, aren't you. Really , you are." De Tricart did not answer, did not look at her; he fixed his eyes firmly on the slowly rising road ahead. Erika smiled at him. "I don't mind," she said. "I feel safe with you."

The ensuing silence lasted just a few moments, for they were approaching the point where a side road branched off to the left from the main road. "That's the way to Triesenberg... and to Malbun." Erika told him. "To the left."

The new road started to rise more steeply. "You never told me, Erika. Whether you lived or worked in Liechtenstein?"

"Both," she replied briskly, almost eagerly. They had passed a sign for the Hotel Park Sonnenhof and were just starting around an ever rising, gradual bend. "I work in an hotel, a small hotel, in Triesenberg. I am the waitress in the bar. I also live in the hotel." Then, almost without pausing: "That is the first time you have called me by my name, Roger."

They had come around the bend and the prince's schloss was immediately to their right and a sharp S-bend swung them leftwards. "The prince is Franz Joseph II, but now we... they... have a prince regent, the crown prince, Johann Adam. He is forty-two. Not so old, eh? The old prince has many names.... " A shallow turn to the right and now the road was ascending very steeply. Erika

was looking down from her side, at the sheer drop down to the valley to the right. She was used to it, but it always thrilled her. The other route to Triesenberg did not have any spectacular drops like this.

“Where are you staying, Roger? In Malbun, I mean.”

“The Montana.... Erika.”

“Ah, it’s nice there. You’ll like it. Posh.”

Numerous buildings signalled the approach of Triesenberg. “Would you like me... after I’ve finished work... to show you around Liechtenstein?”

De Tricart had seen the sign for Triesenberg. “Where’s your hotel?” he asked her.

“Further up the hill. The Hotel Martha Buhler. You can’t miss it. There’s a big church opposite.”

“What were you doing back in Austria?”

“On holiday.... Back with my parents. It is a place called Stuben. In the Vorarlberg.” She gave him a furtive look, wondering why he had asked her that question.

“Yes, Erika, I would like for you to show me around Liechtenstein... your Liechtenstein. Tonight, you said? What time should I call for you?”

“Twelve o’clock, Roger. Midnight. I do not finish in the bar until then. But, we will have a good evening. Still plenty of time to show you much.”

They had reached the church. The Hotel Martha Buhler was on the left-hand side of the steeply rising road. “I’ll be down at midnight,” de Tricart told her. “I look forward to your guided tour.”

Erika had grabbed her holdall from the back seat, dragging it across the case containing the two guns. “Just follow the road on up, Roger. Malbun is at the end of it. You’ll soon be there. The Montana is right at the top of Malbun.” With that, the young girl jumped out of the car and scurried into the hotel. De Tricart watched her until she had disappeared, without looking back, in through the entrance of the hotel. He liked that girl, had grown rather fond of her; the first and only female he had liked apart from his mother. But right now, however, he needed a man. A nice boy like that border guard. Why the hell did Richard have to die and leave him like this? It just wasn’t fair. Life wasn’t fair... not to people like him.

As Erika stepped into the hallway outside the bar of the Martha Buhler, she met Lisa Gunn. "Hello, Erika," the English girl greeted her. "Welcome back."

"Hi, Lisa. I've just met Roger de Tricart."

Inside the bar, Father Sean Clancy was drinking brandy. It made a change from whiskey. And besides, the local priest from across the road was buying it.

Roger de Tricart had reached the Montana and parked the car outside across the road. He registered in at the reception and a porter carried his luggage to his room, although the Englishman insisted on carrying the long narrow case himself. He gave the porter a five Swiss franc note which seemed to please him. After a much needed shower and a change of clothes, de Tricart went down to the bar to try to relax. At the far end of the terrace, a man was sitting with a bottle of wine and a half filled glass on his table. De Tricart could not fail to notice this man out of all the other people scattered on the heated terrace. The man was striking in a laid-back sort of manner. He was dark and maybe even swarthy and de Tricart couldn't help thinking that a sombrero might have been more appropriate than the kind of baseball cap the man was wearing.

Half-past-eleven eventually came. De Tricart had eaten a light dinner followed by only one drink. He had not really felt all that hungry after the journey, and the truth of the matter was that he was still missing Richard terribly. He went across to his car and headed down to Triesenberg.

Erika could not get away until twelve-thirty. The locals were obviously very thirsty, especially two vicars in the far corner. One of them looked vaguely familiar to de Tricart... surely it was the man in black, in the video. Erika was standing beside him now, tugging impatiently at his arm. She had bathed and changed earlier... she looked like a freshly scrubbed schoolgirl. "Come!" she implored. "Let's go now." She seemed anxious to get away; a sharp urgency creeping into her voice.

They drove down to Vaduz, de Tricart seeing the centre of the capital for the first time. There were two or three medium size hotels and they went into one of these. The bar was still open, but almost deserted. Two old men were playing cards in a corner, the barman tidying a bar which didn't need tidying. De Tricart had a glass of red wine, Erika ordered a drink which he did not understand but which the barman seemed to know. They sat on stools at the bar; the barman, now polishing glasses which didn't need polishing, completing the trio. Erika and the barman were conducting a conversation in German which de Tricart could not understand. The girl and the barman appeared to know each other very well. De Tricart supposed that most people living in Liechtenstein knew each other very well; the size of the country was only about forty or fifty square miles. Just the same, de Tricart felt a little left out as the other two continued chatting. It was

one o'clock. He paid for another round of drinks; the red wine for himself, the strange concoction for Erika; the barman was not drinking.

After that drink they left, Erika and the barman bidding each other a fond farewell. "I have not seen him for a month or so," she explained as they left. "Now we shall go to Balzers," she added.

Balzers is on the Swiss side of Liechtenstein. It stands prominently on the valley plain of the principality. It had the largest disco hall that de Tricart had ever seen or was ever likely to see. They paid nothing to go in. The massive barn-like enclosure was swamped with dancing, jumping, twisting couples, mainly young... overwhelmingly heterosexual. There was a bar, but it was too far away or it was too crowded or it was just not possible to get to it through the teeming mass of gyrating or smooching bodies. Erika dropped her bag on the floor and they danced for a while, part of the time separated, part of the time holding each other, though not tightly. At some stage, perhaps after they had been there about half an hour, Erika seemed to drift away. She was dancing with some younger boys. De Tricart made the effort for a while, dancing loosely amidst a crowded group with no one in particular, but eventually he gave up and retreated to the mainly male preserve of the bar. He knew he would not see Erika again that night, if ever again.

De Tricart stood by the bar. Not drinking, he didn't want any more. It was just a safe place to stand, out of the way. Somehow, he didn't want to leave yet. He was still a bit spellbound by the atmosphere, the impact of the place. A man about his own age approached him. "You're new here, aren't you?" the stranger addressed him in perfect, suave English, although de Tricart had not spoken his native tongue in the man's presence. "On holiday?" the man pursued.

"Yes." Their eyes met and de Tricart returned the smile. He knew immediately. Sensed it instantly.

The other man looked around him. "My name's Steve. It's getting a bit crushed here now, don't you think? It'll probably be all over by two, anyway. D'you fancy a drink in my place? I live close by."

De Tricart fancied something in Steve's place. "Yes, I'd like that," he responded warmly. "My name's Roger, by the way."

Let Richard rot in the grave, he thought. Life had to go on. His life had to. For the first time for far too many days, he was feeling excited... hot. He could feel the blood bursting through his veins, his limbs and loins throbbing in anticipation.

Chapter Eighteen

The day on which Roger de Tricart had arrived in Liechtenstein was the day that Fritz “Baby” Muhler had his first face to face meeting with Father Sean Clancy, the man who had been assigned by the Provisional wing of the IRA to oversee and supervise the killing operation at Malbun. More than that, Father Clancy had the responsibility of passing the detailed instructions and plans, individually, to each of the three hired hit-men, without any of them knowing about the other two’s involvement. It was a fact that Donal O’Brien’s original plan had now become Father Clancy’s plan, with some adjustments. The operation had been codenamed ‘Triple Plume’ by the IRA, an allusion both to the employment of three assassins and to the distinctive Prince of Wales plume of feathers.

“Baby” Muhler drove down to Triesenberg. He had no difficulty finding his destination, it being opposite the large landmark of the local church. He parked the silver Mercedes on the car park alongside the Hotel Martha Buhler. The car park looked as if it had been hewn out of the mountain side. He went straight up to the first floor where Sean Clancy’s room was situated. It was Room 13. Muhler appreciated that little twist. He tapped softly on the door and immediately a powerful Irish voice called out: “Come in!”

Muhler opened the door and stalked in. Sean Clancy was stretched out on his bed, reading his breviary. When his eyes looked up at Muhler, the killer realised that the man in black had studied him extensively in that split second. He had probably judged the American’s height, weight, reach and strength; all in that moment. Clancy had the eye of a street fighter and he reminded Muhler of some pretty tough characters over in Brooklyn in the old days. When those kids grew up and became too old to fight in the streets, they still retained that rough and tumble fighter’s look in their eyes. It was a direct, alert and hard look. In Clancy’s case, it was also a piercing look. This man must have been the strongest in his particular street, in his own backyard.

“I was just saying th’ Divine Office,” Clancy explained, his eyes now more relaxed.

“You a priest!? Ain’t it a little out of your line, organising a hit, Father?”

“No more than you, havin’ once worked in a Nazareth House orphanage, now preparin’ to kill two children, Fritz. Besides, did yer not know that before th’ last great struggle, before some o’ th’ counties became a republic, every IRA brigade had its chaplain. An’ to be sure, th’ IRA uses many different types o’ people, a variety o’ classes an’ professions fer all manner o’ tasks. That’s our strength, me boy. That’s th’ strength o’ the IRA. Now don’t be forgettin’ that.”

I won’t, thought Muhler. “Touche!” he agreed, meaning that they were even, the priest planning murder and the orphanage killer. He had done his homework, this Sean Clancy... this Father Sean Clancy. But it worried Muhler, how this man

had known about his past. Not many people knew about that; not many that were alive, that is. How had the bastard found out?

The priest placed his breviary aside and picked up a couple of maps, a detailed plan, some sketches and notes, and four photographs of the ski slopes. "The hit will be on Tuesday, January the 12th. That day the Prince and Princess of Wales will be taking the two young princes onto the nursery slopes. Malbun has a reputation for being particularly good for beginners. I have all the timings here of where and when the royal family will be. Now, take a look at the pictures and maps here and the positions I have marked out for you...."

It had not gone unnoticed by Muhler how refined Sean Clancy's voice had suddenly become once he had got down to the real business. Gone was the rough, almost harsh brogue of the powerful Irishman; departed the innocent veneer of the simple parish priest. Muhler suspected that he was now seeing the real Sean Clancy for the first time. Or was he? One would never be sure with this man, and would be a fool to think you were. The IRA had certainly selected a devious person in the shape of this man in black.

The two men spoke earnestly and solidly for two hours. Muhler had come here hating... detesting this man. The bastard, he had called him. He went away that night full of admiration for the man in black, the priest, as he now knew him to be. He was amazed and impressed at the knowledge the priest had of where the royal family would be and when. There must be a contact somewhere inside the royal household or on the prince's staff. He also admired the priest's knowledge of the terrain of the country and his planning in such detail. "Baby" Muhler liked to thoroughly plan his hits and to apply the utmost caution. Father Clancy's preparation was going to be of great help to him, and it would also save him a lot of worry and bother. The IRA were more efficient than he had thought possible.

Fritz Muhler and Sean Clancy had indeed got on well together, for the priest had also admired the American for his professionalism, dedication, and the care and caution in his preparation. It looked as if all was going to go well. It augured well for the future. Tuesday, 12th January 1988 was going to be one hell of a day. It was going to be a very successful day. Father Sean Clancy was sure of that.

Fritz Muhler was not Father Clancy's only visitor that night. The cool, handsome, and forever dark Vincente Patto must have appeared even darker as he crept his way, in the early hours of the morning, to Room 13. The Arizonan did not like to be observed; he liked to be the watcher himself. But if Patto had thought that he had gone unnoticed to Father Clancy's room, he was mistaken. Lisa Gunn saw him arrive, just as she had also seen Muhler depart and, as with the previous visitor, she was again on the Blue Brigade field telephone to the Sonnenhof to inform Marcias.

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There was a water bed and a Jacuzzi and a long upholstered bar that seemed to stretch along the full length of the large and richly furnished and delicately decorated room; all the trappings of a successful and sophisticated man. Steve pushed open another door and allowed Roger de Tricart to have a glimpse of a massive mauve-painted bedroom with a four-poster bed in the centre. The pink bedspread had been pulled back to reveal black sheets and pillow-cases. At the touch of a single switch, a romantic orchestra played light strings through quadrophonic speakers and the lighting grew more mellow.

Steve was quick and pleased to sense that his guest was impressed. "It is cosy," he volunteered amiably.

"Yes," Roger agreed, with a smile. "What do you do? Are you a stock-broker or in show-business?"

"No," Steve laughed, "better than that. I am in banking."

It was now obvious that it was important to the host that he should be able to impress his visitor. It had taken de Tricart only a short while to know that Steve was the sub – the submissive type, the submissive partner. This suited de Tricart; he himself had always been the dom – the dominant partner. It had always been that way between himself and Richard. Richard had been the sub. Roger could not have played it any other way; neither could Richard have. It seemed now that Roger had discovered another submissive slave who would crawl and succumb to his dominant desires.

"Have you got your certificate, Steve?" Roger demanded, once they had settled in the lounge; Roger sitting on the luxurious sofa while Steve fetched and served their drinks. "May I see it please?"

When Steve handed him the certificate, Roger examined it carefully. It was signed by a doctor in Zurich. Strangely enough, de Tricart knew that particular doctor – he had once carried out a contract for him, removing a meddlesome partner or a discarded lover or something. Yes, he knew that doctor in Zurich. The certificate was authentic and reliable. The doctor specialised in that sort of thing. Roger showed his certificate to Steve and noticed that the other man was immediately impressed by the Harley Street address which followed the doctor's signature. Funny how the right sum of money paid to people with Harley Street addresses of convenience could buy all sorts of things ranging from spare kidneys for transplants to false certificates guaranteeing that the holder was free from AIDS up to the date on the certificate. For, unlike Steve's, Roger's certificate was false... and highly inaccurate. Richard had died from AIDS.

They had only one drink each... a kind of formality or introduction to break the ice. Just the one drink... they were both impatient, longing... an urgency in their loins. Roger undressed Steve and then stripped himself. Steve's body was pale and

tender, soft and supple, his whole disposition very suppliant. They kissed for a while and cuddled, content to be in each other's arms and to feel each other. Then they went into the bedroom and Steve bent across the bed with his legs opened wide and Roger bent over him and penetrated and they had anal sex.

After that, they kissed and cuddled some more, and then Steve produced some clothes and together they dressed him. There were girls' little black briefs and a suspender belt and black stockings and a skimpy bra. They put the suspender belt on first and Steve had found some lacy pink ribbon which they used for a particular purpose.

Dressed like that, Steve now waited on Roger like a slave. "I have some caviar in the 'fridge. It's the real Russian stuff. Once you could only get Iranian caviar. Now that's not available, the Russian is back. And a nice chilled bottle of Chablis to wash it down. I was keeping it for a special day.... night."

"That will be very nice, Stephanie darling, I'm sure we'll enjoy it very much." Roger responded sweetly. He allowed his hand to work its way up the other man's stockinged leg, up to the bare flesh of the thigh. Then, with a circular motion, he smoothed and occasionally patted the buttocks of the man he was now calling Stephanie. The tone of Roger's voice and the manner of his movements and actions were all designed to be very reassuring.

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It was ten o'clock in the evening in New York City. T. N. Warne was tired. He was gradually becoming more tired, more frequently each day. He was having a final nightcap of the inevitable Glenmorangie before hitting the sack. For a man who was used to staying up regularly until two or three in the morning, these early nights were strange, very unacceptable and downright unsocial. But they had now become his habit – his way of life. Bob Vereston was with him, also drinking Glenmorangie.

"Would you have thought that Marcias would have been afraid of anyone, Bob?"

"No, sir! I reckon that Marcias is not afraid of anyone or anything."

"Bob, I haven't told this to anyone before, not even to Al Dempsey or Ben Brogan, so don't tell it to anyone, but I did used to think that Marcias might have been a little afraid, just maybe, of Vicente Patto. I had a feeling that this may have been the reason why Marcias always had Chavez around, to sort of protect his back from Patto. Chavez is very friendly and amiable on the surface, but underneath he can be very cold and dark... kinda hard... just like Patto. A similar type. He would be just the man to cancel out Patto... if necessary."

"D'you think that ever will be necessary, T. N.?"

“Who knows, Bob? Who knows?”

There was still some Scotch whisky left in that particular bottle and Warne split it between the two glasses and the two men downed it in a single gulp. Then Vereston got behind the wheelchair and pushed it towards the door and outed the light. It was still only ten-thirty.

It was four-thirty in the morning in Balzers. Steve went to a cupboard, unlocked it and brought out a cane and handcuffs. He undressed from the female clothing and bent downwards across the four-poster and handcuffed himself to one of the pillars. Roger, still naked himself, hit him with the cane as hard as he could, many times. A dozen strokes, two dozen, three dozen. Roger could see the welts forming; pink, red, blue, black. Steve was moaning in twisted ecstasy. Roger tossed the cane aside and mounted Steve again, swiftly penetrating for one last relieving spurt of anal sex. Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Big words in a big world.

Yes. Roger de Tricart had known that doctor in Zurich. He had been to him for a certificate, but had been refused. Roger had been tested HIV positive. Now, maybe, dear Stephanie would get a shock... when, next time, the doctor in Zurich would refuse to renew his certificate.

De Tricart left the house in Balzers. He left Steve still handcuffed to the bed, his ass turning a dreadful shade of purple. De Tricart stepped out into the cold morning air. Tomorrow was a big day; tomorrow he had to meet the man in black. Tomorrow was already today.

Chapter Nineteen

Father Clancy disliked queers. He had learnt all about them in the confined area of the confessional. He knew he was supposed to hate the sin and not the sinner, but he still disliked queers and for Father Clancy 'dislike' was a strong word. He knew immediately that Roger de Tricart was one of them.

De Tricart had arrived early for the meeting, parking the now slush-splattered Audi further down the road from the Hotel Martha Buhler. It was about ten minutes before ten o'clock when he tried the main entrance door and found it locked. He gained access by a side door where he was greeted by a charming lady in her early thirties who directed him to the first floor and Sean Clancy's room. Almost as an afterthought he enquired about the girl Erika. "She doesn't start until twelve," the lady explained, and then, with a mischievous laugh, added "I think she may have had a late... ah... session last night. She is still very young."

De Tricart thanked the lady, adding: "You speak very good English."

"Thank you. And French as well as the German. I am Martha Buhler."

The first impression that de Tricart had when he entered Room 13 and came face to face with Sean Clancy, was that of the sharp, piercing eyes which seemed to look right through him into the hallway behind him. He was not surprised to discover that the man was a priest; he had half expected it. These clerics were everywhere, especially the Irish priests. A strange, unreliable lot too. With them being celibate, he had, in the past, expected them to have been more sympathetic and responsive to his own ideas and approaches, but he had found them to be most unsatisfactory and disappointing. They must be weird, he had concluded, being not one thing or the other.

De Tricart settled down on the chair indicated to him. He felt uncomfortable under the direct, searching gaze of this powerful and very masculine man. There appeared to be only one minor chink in the priest's armour; an apparently nervous trait which manifested itself in a tendency to pull and tug at his dog collar. It may have been nerves; it may have been that his neck had grown too large for his collar. As the priest spoke, he was inclined to thrust his neck and chin forward in a forceful and prominent manner, again as if to burst out of the restrictions of that collar. De Tricart was used to spotting nervous disorders in people, and playing on them. But the thing that he noticed most about the priest, apart from those piercing eyes, was that not once, during the entire interview, did the Irishman blink his eyelids. De Tricart had never known that in any person before. Not only was Father Clancy a strong man, he must also be a very controlled man.

“One hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars have been credited to an account in your name at the Duchy Bank in Luxembourg. The balance of a further hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars will be paid into that same account upon your completion of this contract,” the priest told the Englishman. “The hit will be on this Tuesday, as per the instructions and timings in your itinerary here. I trust you have no qualms about killing a woman?”

“No, none at all,” de Tricart assured him, “but why the Princess of Wales and not the Prince of Wales?”

“We consider the princess to be more popular with the English people and of more glamour interest to the English media. Now there is just one more thing....”

De Tricart looked sharply at the priest, but he need not have worried. It was only good news.

“The principality is having a firework display at Malbun on this coming Wednesday evening. Some celebration for Crown Prince or, I suppose, Prince Regent Johann Adam and for the visit of the English royals. Apparently such a display is very effective against the white snow background which it lights up. I believe there will even be downhill skiers swooping gracefully down the slopes whilst waving sparkling Roman candles.” Father Clancy continued patiently. He even allowed an unexpected smile to creep across his face. “They are going to hold a rehearsal on Tuesday morning, when they will be exploding some test fireworks. Very conveniently at the same time as you will be shooting Princess Diana. That is indeed co-operative of them.”

Yes, thought de Tricart, almost too good to be true, but he had experienced equally convenient coincidences in the past. Never look a gift horse in the face. And, like Muhler before him, he was not slow to notice how cultured the priest’s voice had become, now that he was speaking about death, his favourite subject.

Lisa Gunn had used the special telephone link set up by the Blue Brigade between the Martha Buhler and the Sonnenhof to advise Marcias of de Tricart’s arrival at Father Clancy’s room. Her call had coincided with a meeting in Marcias’s apartment.

Marcias had had a bad night, tossing and turning from one side of the comfortable bed to the other, he had probably managed two fitful hours of sleep. He awoke to find himself, the sheets and the pillows saturated with perspiration. It had been made worse by the fact that he had been wearing purple pyjamas and the dye had come off onto the bedsheets. The wife of the owner of the Sonnenhof had laughed. “How embarrassing for you,” she chuckled. Marcias did not usually wear pyjamas, but Lisa had bought these for him and he had shown willing.

Marcias knew the reason for his bad night. It was because they were getting nearer to the day of action. Marcias was always impatient for the action to start; once it had started, he was okay. Now just two more nights to endure and then it would be Tuesday. Tonight would be another bad night for him, probably the worse; the penultimate night always was. He needed Lisa in bed with him tonight – not for sex this time, but to calm him. She could do that, but they could not take the risk, he could not risk her. Tonight his nightmares must be alone. Tomorrow night, Monday, he was sure, he would be alright. He always was on the final night before an operation, for by then everything was ready – all the preparations were done and completed. There would be nothing left to do. He would sleep on the last night.

For this operation, though, his responsibilities had been at their greatest, the stakes at their very highest. Four innocent lives depended upon him succeeding. Anything but total success would be failure. And two of those lives were children. Marcias was worried; he was always worrying these days. In his old age he had become a worrier. And to him, anything over thirty was old age. The pain, that damn almost constant pain, reminded him of that.

It never used to be like this. With the confidence exclusive to youth, he had never worried about anything; he had always been able to sleep. But in those young days, he had expected to die young; had never expected to survive and endure to thirty, let alone suffer to thirty plus. Maybe he had outlived himself. James Byron Dean, whom he had always admired so much, had often said something, which he had liked the sound of. It was something which Dean must have quoted from the film 'Knock on Any Door' which had been directed in 1949, when Dean himself was only eighteen, by Nicholas Ray who had directed Dean in 'Rebel Without a Cause'. In 'Knock on Any Door', John Derek says to his screen wife something like: "Live fast, die young and have a beautiful corpse." It had been that way with Jimmy Dean. Marcias had once thought that it would have been that way with him too. Now it was too late. He was too old to die young. Now wasn't that a damn shame.

The meeting had convened. Some familiar faces were present in Suite 32 of the Sonnenhof that Sunday morning. Chavez y Chavez was there, Jonathon Steiner and Julian Sinclair, and Tough Tony Molloy had joined them. "Let me tell you about the fireworks," was the sentence with which Marcias opened his address to them.

"Fireworks?" Jonathon Steiner raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

"It's always fireworks with us," Molloy responded.

"Gentlemen." The tone of Marcias's voice guaranteed silence. "We have arranged with the Prince Regent, Johann Adam, for there to be a firework display rehearsal in Malbun on Tuesday morning, complete with exploding fireworks."

"The same time as the hits?" Sinclair was quietly interested, as ever.

"Yeah! Well it kinda worried me a bit. I thought the IRA... the Provos... through their typical distrust of everybody and their love of secrecy, may have created a problem for themselves by not allowing the three shooters to know of each other's contracts. It's okay with the first guy whose job it is to waste the Prince of Wales. But what about the second guy? He ain't expecting no other hit. He thinks his contract to kill the Princess of Wales is the only contract operating... so what does he think when he hears a shot and sees the Prince of Wales topple? How does he react?"

Steiner and Sinclair nodded in unison, Molloy was staring thoughtfully out through the balcony towards the distant mountains, and Chavez had not moved a muscle, his face taut and expressionless, his body rigid like a coiled spring.

"Well, gentlemen," Marcias continued, in that slow drawl of his which demanded attention. "We will solve any problem for them in that direction. The Prince of Wales will not fall because he will not be shot. Our boy will have got their man before he is able to take a shot at the prince... and so on, down the line. And, of course, our shots will simply blend in with the fireworks in the rehearsal, and there won't be any shots from their guys. Their shooters won't be suspicious until they're dead. Their first man will line up for his shot on Prince Charles and that will be the last thing that shooter ever does. The next joker beads up on the pretty princess, oblivious of anything else that has happened, and we cut him down. Ditto for "Baby" Muhler. Amen."

"Okay," Molloy agreed. "That's it, but while we're on the subject of the shooters, the IRA have sure selected the hit-men for the job; the gentleman queer to kill the princess and that maniac Muhler for the children."

"Yeah," said Marcias thoughtfully, "but the one we really have to watch is the one on the Prince of Wales. That particular shooter is the most dangerous of the three. We must make no mistake about that one."

"We must make no mistakes," Chavez echoed quietly.

"Beats me how a man can kill a woman... or children," Steiner muttered bitterly.

"I had to kill a woman, once," said Marcias. "I'd do it again, if I had to."

"Yes," said Chavez, "but that time, it was either you or her. She would have killed you if you hadn't got her first."

"Yeah... "

The rest of Sunday passed very slowly and quietly. Lisa Gunn, in her room in the Hotel Martha Buhler, listened to the organ music and the hymn singing from the church across the road where the eleven o'clock Mass was being celebrated. Father Clancy had said the eight o'clock Mass. It was all very peaceful and calm in Triesenberg... in Liechtenstein... as a Sunday should be, a day of rest. The calm before the inevitable. Soon it would be Monday, and then Tuesday would come very quick. Lisa Gunn was not looking forward to Tuesday. She was a bit frightened about it, but she would do what Marcias had asked her to do. But she would be glad when it was all over. She longed for Wednesday.

Fresh snow had fallen during the night between Sunday and Monday. Liechtenstein was still quiet and peaceful that Monday morning. Just under thirty thousand people were gradually rising from their beds, the majority to set about their usual routine, maybe humdrum chores; the minority to enjoy their vacation in a blended mixture of activity and ease. For some, a very select minority, it would be their last full day... in Liechtenstein or anywhere in this world.

Marcias had not slept that night, his mind throbbing with thoughts of what had to be done. Dawn came as a relief to him; at last daylight arrived and others would be awake and he could be up and about... doing something. A frenzied activity burst upon the Blue Brigade early that morning, frenzied but still very much in control according to their plan.

Johansson's gun had arrived that day from Geneva. His own trusted gun which he had used so many times; the rifle with the telescopic sights. Tomorrow was going to be a successful day, he was certain of that. Tomorrow the lights would be going out for someone. And he would be pressing the switch.

Meanwhile, Billie Lou Weldon and Maggie Lewis had still not emerged from their hotel room. Among the dedicated staff of the Montana they were becoming known as the great lovers of Liechtenstein.

It was early on Monday morning that Fritz "Baby" Muhler transferred from the small family hotel in Gaflei to finally take up residence in the Montana in Malbun, where his room had been kept waiting for him.

Vicente Patto, dark, handsome and brooding – looking even darker against the white landscape surrounding Malbun – had, of course, seen Muhler book into the Montana. His observations were not, however, confined to Malbun. He had made a reconnaissance to Vaduz, taking in Mass at the church there – the church with the statues of Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Jude on either side of the entrance vestibule. On the way back to Malbun, he had chosen the secondary road – to go past the prince's schloss. Before reaching the castle, he had stopped by the Sonnenhof and studied the layout of the elegant hotel. It was then that he had spotted Chavez lurking in the Sonnenhof's immaculate gardens. Chavez looked cold... cold right through.

Roger de Tricart spent most of that Monday quietly relaxing. He had a light breakfast and then returned immediately to his room where he lay on his bed reading a paperback book. It was a western, by Max Brand. Big men, big horses; powerful men, powerful horses. He read the entire book that morning. After a snack lunch he again returned to his room where he slept for three hours. De Tricart was one of those fortunate few who are able to induce sleep in themselves at any time of the day and at a moment's notice. When he awoke, he showered and then checked the Kalashnikov again. It was the third time he had checked it. After a good dinner, he retired early for a long sleep. His mind was one hundred per cent on the morrow's job. All his thoughts, energy and rest were exclusively devoted to that sole direction. And for him the final and essential preparation for a kill, was to have a sound and uninterrupted night's sleep.

Although he did not show it and would never have admitted it, T. N. Warne was not so relaxed. Being more than three thousand miles away from the action did not help, though Warne had long since had to accept the controller's passive role rather than the operative's active function. These days he did his killing by proxy. The six hours' time lag meant that the hits would take place between four and five in the morning New York time. Warne would not sleep at all until then; until he received the news. It was his turn for the sleepless night.

Muhler's room was at the back of the hotel, facing up towards the mountains which filled most of the view from his window. To the left of centre, a piece of sky separated the mountain peaks. Muhler stood at his window looking at this piece of sky. It was late in the evening. It was the night sky. Muhler had made a new will. It was in his nature to expect the best, but to prepare for the worse. He had left everything to Dawn Sanders. Muhler stared at that piece of sky. The daytime sky meant nothing to him, but he was in awe of the night sky.

Monday afternoon the Prince and Princess of Wales had taken to the ski slopes of Malbun. Just a short, brief run for the benefit of the press photographers and the television cameramen. Prince Charles and Princess Diana always hoped, with an optimism not confirmed by experience, that by providing the media with this photo and press call, with this brief glimpse of them at the start of their holiday, the media would reciprocate and leave them in privacy and peace for the rest of the vacation. It rarely materialised that way. There was, however, a much smaller congregation of the world's press present for this royal audience on this occasion, simply because the visit of Prince Charles and Princess Diana to Liechtenstein had been kept secret until the very last moment. The inhabitants had been expecting the arrival of a celebrity, purely because rumour had announced it, but they had not known whom to expect until the actual press call. Even then, it was not known for certain whether the two young princes had accompanied their parents to the principality, and all questions to this effect were neatly evaded by the prince and princess. It was well known that Prince Charles

liked to ski off-piste. Tomorrow the locals and visitors in Malbun would find him restricting himself to the nursery slopes for the benefit of his two sons.

Fritz “Baby” Muhler was dreaming. The soldier lay on the ground looking up at the night sky. It was the eve of battle and the sky was clear, with the stars shining. For the soldier it was no time for sleeping as his mind was filled with the one day to come and the thousands of yesterdays which seemed to have slipped so quickly into the past. The army was sleeping or resting or just lying on the slope of a hill and across the valley the soldiers could see the far hill with its still glowing lights of the enemy.

It was the early hours of the morning with four or five hours to go before it would be time to rise up and advance to kill or be killed. What were the thoughts of the men around him? Some may be sleeping. That was the sensible thing to do, to have strength for the conflict to come. It was also sensible, before battle, to have one’s mind shrouded in sleep. Sleep would not come to him, though, and he was not sure if he wished to waste what may be his last few precious hours on sleep. How many of his colleagues were also like him, lying on their backs, staring up at the night sky and thinking? Thoughts of whether they would see the next night sky. Thoughts of the immediate and maybe short future and of the long past which now seemed beautiful in retrospect. How wonderful it would be to be able to cast oneself back into the past. He was, perhaps, not so much distressed at the possibility of losing the future as by the knowledge that he had lost the past and that now there may be no further chance to regain it.

Across the valley other men, the unknown faceless enemy, must also be looking up at the night sky – the same night sky – with their individual thoughts and worries. How many of them were there on that hillside and where were they? Not where the lights were glowing, that was for sure, but probably on the dark side of the hill. Were they also lying awake thinking not so much that they must win, but whether they would survive?

Tonight he had prayed long and hard and he had sweated in the cold night air. Now he was aware that he was calm and relaxed with little hope of sleep but constantly thinking. He was no longer thinking of the coming morning. He was thinking of her. She was again completely occupying his mind and making the battle ahead a factor of secondary importance. At one time it had seemed that it did not matter to him whether he lived or died. Now he wanted to live so that there may still be the chance that one day he might see her again. Did she ever think of him now? Had she looked up tonight at this night sky from many miles away? He thought now of the flowers that he had so often sent to her. She had loved flowers and he wished that it were possible for him, at that very moment, to enter a florist, as he had done on so many occasions, and order flowers to be sent to her. There were to be no flowers for her now though; in fact there may never be a chance for him to send her flowers again.

His eyes reverted upwards to see the stars twinkling in the sky and for that moment it seemed to him that they represented an enormous bouquet of flowers. Flowers from him to her and his heart hoped that she had looked up at that sky tonight and seen those same stars and that she too had seen that bouquet of stars which would have to be his bouquet of flowers for her. He hoped that in her heart, by some miracle, she had recognised the significance of those stars in that sky.

His eyes, misty now, dropped from their vision of the sky and rested upon his identity disc which bore his name and number. This made him think of the pendant which the girl that he loved, the girl to whom he had sent so many flowers, wore from her neck. It was a piece of beautiful solid silver and was usually worn with the silver emblem showing to the front in the fashion photographs, but she had her initials engraved on the reverse side and she wore it with this side showing to the front.

Now his mind had to go back all those years to when he had first met her. Possibly a year had passed before he first fell in love. It had been a gradual thing. First he had realised that she was nice and that he liked her and that she liked him. Then the full and explosive impact of realisation dawned upon him that he loved her, loved her so fiercely that his heart burnt with the agony of it, the desire and need to possess her completely and the unfailing knowledge that he didn't want any other woman but her.

In his dream, Muhler was seeing and thinking through the eyes and mind of the soldier in his dream. The unfailing knowledge that he didn't want any other girl or woman but her.....

That first kiss had probably triggered it, but that may have been a flirtation, a fascination. The real true love had grown a few months later when he knew that he would do anything for her and that he wanted no one but her. It had been real love and desire was secondary. To him she was more important than himself. He loved her because she was nice, kind, helpful, understanding and exciting. It was later that he realised that she was beautiful, sensual and desirable. It was the true love for her that had endured over the years, when everything else had collapsed, to the point where he lived only for her. Now he believed that he had lost her and she was gone, never it seemed to return again and yet his heart had always hoped that one day she may come back.

The sharp clink of metal on stone, the movement of a patrolling guard, returned the dream soldier's thoughts to the present and to the reality of his surroundings, and the cold sweat reappeared on his brow. He recalled the talk of veteran soldiers, of how if your name was on the bullet, there was little you could do to avoid it. Those old soldiers used this philosophy in reverse, to encourage the younger or inexperienced recruits, and told them that if their name was not on the bullet, it would not hit them no matter how much they were exposed to fire. False

courage could also be achieved by convincing yourself that you would not survive and that you may as well forget your fears and go out in glory. Strangely, this latter group often lived and the more they tried to be killed and taunted danger, the more they endured. What was death, anyway, he mused. It was the only certainty in life. He remembered how as a small boy he had looked at the battle scenes engraved on a war memorial and his father had told him that it was the thud of the head upon the rocky ground that brought the final impact of death. He had vowed then that if he should ever be in battle, he would avoid the rocky ground. What was death? Simply a flash in the dark.

Inevitable though death was, it was surely how you lived and not how you died that truly mattered. Samuel Johnson had believed that. The learned lexicographer had also remarked that when a man knows he is to be hanged, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.

Well, Muhler's dream soldier's mind was concentrated now, but surprisingly upon the memories of his childhood and youth. A large garden with many flower beds, fruit trees and magnificent laburnum trees whose racemes of yellow blossoms and clusters of green leaves were emphasised against a clear blue sky, and a fair-haired boy carving a bow and arrows from the stalks of the pink mimosa, yellow forsythia and lilac trees. Cats and a Manchester terrier chasing cabbage-white butterflies in the golden sunlight. The gentle plonk of racket upon tennis ball. His childhood had promised so much, his youth had possessed so much optimism, but what had his manhood achieved? It must have been a great disappointment to his youth, to the young boy with the bow and arrows in his joyful, careless and serious play, accompanied by the friendship of the dog and the kittens. Now was it all to end on the dirty, disinterested battlefield, heralded by the moon drenched night sky sparkled by the unseeing glowing eyes of the stars? Perhaps those stars could see him, but would they know him, or care, or wish to recognise him, for he had deserted the day sky, so why acknowledge the mystique of the night sky?

As if to admonish him, a sheath of ghostly cloud obliterated the moon's candlelight and the stars discarded their friendly sparkle. Suddenly the soldier wanted to live, to clear away the night sky and have done with this battle. Impatiently, with the panic of urgent contrition, he demanded, pleaded to dispel the dawn so that he may return to the promise and golden sunlight of his youth. She no longer possessed him, the girl with the silver pendant. It seemed that she had been drained from his body, been despatched from his mind and evaporated into the bouquet of stars that was the night sky; her gleaming moonlight to be forever shadowed by the burning rays of sunlight, so that all the whole world seemed to be gathered before his eyes to see what truly mattered. Then, perhaps, to see you celestial clear, and know you as you really are. He had regained his freedom, but would he have time to use it?

Before dawn came the wind, howling, brushing the stars away and polishing the moon into a gloomy oblivion. Thus was announced the impending action and, in advance of the resurrected sun, the soldiers rose from the ground in response to the whistles and urging demands of their platoon leaders which deadened the morning chorus of squadrons of hungry birds. Now, as silently as possible, the mighty army prepared itself quickly for instant combat. Golloped food and swallowed water, frantic adjustment to clothing, careful examination and positioning of weapons. As one man, the great horde had risen, shaken itself and advanced. A quiet, horrific and terrifying dark cloud coming up from the ground and creeping forward to engulf and consume another equally terrifying and scared inhuman black mass.

The night sky had departed and with it the thoughts and fears of yesterday. For some it was never to reappear, but also never to be denied. For everyone, there would always be a night sky.

Guns roared, the dawn appeared. Rifles crackled, the light shattered. Steel clashed upon steel and bone and flesh and dirt, the sun shone. As the ghostly clouds dispersed from the sky, leaving the heavens bathed in regal blue and solitary gold, the holocaust below produced its own clouds and drenched the earth in black and grey and brown and scarlet and strewn the newly created craters with mangled and mutilated memories of mankind.

It lasted briefly, was finished even quicker than it had started; the day had departed forever into the judgement of history and the night sky had returned with the torrential rain that mercifully lashed the faces of the soldiers as they lay upon the ground and stared with unseeing eyes up at the night sky. Only tonight there were no stars, there was no moon and a wreath had replaced the bouquet of flowers.

It could have been the Arc de Triomphe or perhaps Westminster Abbey or maybe a flame in Washington, D. C. or any other monolith to grandeur that housed the tomb of the unknown warrior. Such places are very similar in their thoughts. It was night time and around the monument the sky was dark, without a moon to kiss the cold grey stone, without a solitary sympathetic star as the cleansing rain lashed down upon the lonely woman in the unaccustomed black coat. She knelt uncertainly before the plaque, deposited the bouquet of flowers, gladioli, carnations and others, upon the tomb and a tiny hopeless and regretful tear channelled its way down her cheek, its salt gently touching her lips. Uncontrollably, she bit those lips and blood trickled to her chin, to be swept relentlessly away by the constant rain.

Lovingly the woman caressed the flowers and prayed as best she could. Whether she prayed for the one that had gone or for herself remains unknown, but as she prayed she cast her eyes up to the night sky and as she did so the rain ceased and the clouds disappeared and there were a million twinkling stars

smiling down upon her and it suddenly seemed to her that all those friendly sad stars in the night sky were a bouquet of flowers, specially for her.

She rose quickly to her feet, turned, and without looking back at the tomb, she departed hastily from the scene. But as she rose, the moon appeared and when she turned, its light caught the silver pendant hanging from her neck and you could see that there were initials engraved upon it, but the light was not sufficient to distinguish the initials in front of the backdrop of the night sky.

As he dreamed, and in his dream, Fritz Muhler tried desperately to see those shining, silver initials, but each time, with regular, excruciating monotony, the dream faded at this point, into the darkest, mistiest recesses of the night sky.

When Muhler awoke, he was surprised to find that he had not sweated this night. It was the third time he had experienced the dream; on the two previous occasions he had been a mass of sweat when he finally escaped from its clutches. The second enactment of the dream had been last week, the first a month before. The dream had always started and finished in the same weird fashion. Muhler had not been able to identify the soldier, the battle or the war of which it was part, or the woman. It could have been the First World War, it could have been the Civil War, but why the hell did the soldier feel like him and the woman look like Dawn? Muhler was not in any way a religious man, nor did he tolerate superstition in any form, but this melancholy dream had him more than worried.

Muhler got out of bed. It was three o'clock in the morning again. Damn everything. Damn everybody. He was glad this was the last job. Soon he would be back in bed with Dawn. A warm bed. A loving bed. He needed some love. But that wretched dream. What was it all about? What did it mean, if anything? Why did he keep dreaming it, so identical each time in every way? He hated recurring dreams. Sometimes he hated everything, but right now he hated that bloody dream. He felt a dreaded foreboding. He wanted this day to be over quick and done with. He wanted to be away from this place, to be back in sleepy Shenfield with Dawn. Maybe just another twenty-four hours and he could be back with her, in her bed, with only beautiful and real dreams.

But that dream... did it mean anything? He couldn't get away from it, couldn't escape it, couldn't forget it. He couldn't stop thinking about it, no matter how much he tried, like a professional should – put all distracting and conflicting thoughts from your mind, that was the professional dictum, lest they disturb you at the crucial moment, with fatal results... for you. But that dream was preying on his mind, throbbing in his brain, pounding on his head. Was he going to die? Was he going mad? Where was Dawn? He hated life, was afraid of death. And still he couldn't sweat. His safety valve was getting blocked.

He switched on the bedside lamp and went to the dressing table and turned on the light there as well. He took a sheet of hotel writing paper and an envelope from the gold compendium and sat at the table and wrote a letter to Dawn. It was a final letter... a farewell letter... just in case! Muhler didn't believe in dreams – he didn't believe in anything. Everything had an explanation, but he had experienced the same, identical nightmare thrice... and he couldn't explain why. All he wanted to do was to live another night... and to see another day in Shenfield.

Marcias slept soundly that Monday night. So did Roger de Tricart, who never had difficulty sleeping, even at the worse times. These two, and possibly also the ultra cool, if now not quite so calm, Vicente Patto, were the only ones who slept well on that final night. Yet, out of the six careful and thinking killers, not one gave any thought on that fateful night to their intended victim or to what that victim might be doing or thinking that same night. Least of all did the three killers who had been contracted to murder the Prince of Wales and his family give any thought to the Prince and his attractive wife and their two young children, all of whom, if the killers did their job, would be dead in less than fifteen hours. And as for the young royal family itself? Well, that night, Prince Charles and his family were probably sleeping, quite contentedly and oblivious to their impending danger, in the secure sanctity of the fairy-tale Schloss above Vaduz.

Hit-men are professionals. They are implacable to the fate of their victims. They are interested in those who hire them only to the extent of their ability and reliability to pay them. And no one welshes on a hit-man. The contract killers are concerned only with carrying out the hit, getting away, and collecting the fee. If there is one other thing which concerns the mechanics, then it is purely the choice and selection, acquisition, and care of the tools of their trade – their weapons. Both Fritz “Baby” Muhler and Roger de Tricart had favoured the Russian-made Kalashnikov rifle. The cool Vicente Patto had selected the equally cool Lee Enfield .303 bolt-action rifle. Purely by coincidence, as the weapons came from different sources, Johnnie “the Swede” Johansson and Billie Lou Weldon, both big men, had both chosen the big Remington .300. For Maggie Lewis it had been different. Her rifle had been almost custom-made. Not by one of the select and secret band of arm dealers available in Belgium to the underworld. It had been supplied by the cream of Belgian arms manufacturers, the Fabrique Nationale at Liege. It had been selected and modified from the very wide range of weapons which that celebrated company produces, from the tiniest of lady's automatics to the heaviest of machine-guns. Maggie Lewis's weapon had been purpose designed by the Flemish Jans van Metz, Fabrique Nationale's leading expert on specialised weaponry. The female killer's rifle would have no problem with a stationary target at one hundred and thirty yards with its telescopic sight, and Maggie Lewis knew that her target would be stationary at the moment of kill. The silencer for her weapon was not complex, but it was also custom-made. Some silencers could be difficult to obtain as manufactured articles, especially long ones for certain rifles.

Billie Lou Weldon had acquired his Remington from a bona-fide dealer in Brussels. Any Belgian citizen can buy a revolver, automatic or rifle at any sports or gun shop in the country on production of a national identity card to prove their Belgian nationality. Weldon had a Belgian ID card, purchased from a very professional Brussels pickpocket. It would be Billie Lou Weldon's Remington which would start the action on the gentle white slopes of Malbun on bloody Tuesday, 12th January 1988 at approximately 10.09 am.

Chapter Twenty

Bloody Tuesday, 12th January 1988.

Even for a priest, Father Clancy had risen early on this fateful morning. By six-thirty he had already said Mass in the church across the road from the Hotel Martha Buhler. Immediately after Mass, Stirling drove the priest up to Malbun. Lisa Gunn followed him shortly afterwards.

Soon after receiving the call on the field telephone from Lisa Gunn, Marcias and his men left the Sonnenhof and made their way up to Malbun. With Marcias were Chavez y Chavez, Jonathon Steiner, Julian Sinclair and Tough Tony Molloy. Black John, who had arrived the previous evening from London, remained in the Sonnenhof, waiting by the field telephone. Marcias had not wanted Fritz "Baby" Muhler to recognise and remember Black John from the Cumberland in Marble Arch.

That section of the world's press which devoted much of its time and attention to the affairs of the British royal family and particularly those of the Prince and Princess of Wales and their two sons, had now arrived in force in the tiny principality of Liechtenstein. This intrepid body of men, women and cameras was making its way to a part of Liechtenstein which was well away from the ski resort of Malbun. A press announcement had been issued from the office of Prince Johann Adam Pius. This had advised the media that Prince Charles and Princess Diana would be visiting the Liechtenstein dental factory (well renowned for its production of high quality false-teeth) and that Prince Johann Adam Pius would accompany them on the tour of the factory. The visit to the factory had been scheduled for Tuesday morning, 12th January at 10.00 am. The factory was nowhere near the ski slopes of Malbun.

8.30 am. The Montana Hotel in Malbun had become strangely deserted, many of its guests having departed unusually early for their day's activities.

Well before 10.00 am on Bloody Tuesday, Billie Lou Weldon was in his position above Malbun with his Remington .300 in place.

10.00 am. On the nursery slopes alongside Malbun a group of skiers had appeared on the scene. From this group, a smaller group had formed. Detached from the main body by only a few metres, this smaller group consisted of four people and even from a distance, it could be seen that two of these four figures were small children, for they were much shorter and smaller than their companions. From a closer distance, it could be seen that this group actually comprised a man, a woman and two small boys. From close-up, it was possible to identify the man as Prince Charles, with his unmistakable features still distinguishable through goggles and helmet, and the woman as Princess Diana, with her colourful ski-suit very fetching and emphasising her attractively shaped

figure. The two young boys holding onto Prince Charles and Princess Diana, and occasionally losing their balance on their small skis, must have been the Princes William and Harry.

Billie Lou Weldon was interested in only one figure within the royal quartet. Weldon was looking along the barrel and through the telescopic sight of his Remington directly at the Prince of Wales.

A figure from the main party separated itself from its group and came towards the royals. It was the personal bodyguard of the Princess of Wales. The man was far from burly in physique, instead he appeared to possess that confident strength so often displayed by experienced men who have kept themselves fit and in training. The bodyguard had covered half the distance between the larger and smaller groups when the Princess of Wales looked up and saw him approaching. With a gentle, but determined smile, Princess Diana waved aside the bodyguard. The man immediately stopped in his tracks and, a little reluctantly, for he was dedicated to his duty, he turned and started to make his way back to his colleagues. His progress was neither quick nor smooth for, although he was an accomplished skier, he was not happy with his current skis or with the light and slow piste of the nursery slopes. As he slowly returned to his own group, the bodyguard bided his time and slowly surveyed the terrain above and around him. From his place of semi-concealment, Weldon stiffened from the prospect that the man might see him. The bodyguard was now staring so intently in Weldon's direction that the killer was certain that he must be spotted. There was a weak morning sun and Weldon desperately tried to cover his rifle to prevent it from reflecting the sunlight back towards the observer. Then the man turned away; he was looking elsewhere. Then in a moment he had rejoined the larger party of figures and Weldon breathed a grateful sigh of relief and returned his attention to his rifle and to his quarry.

Slowly, very slowly - being careful not to attract any attention - Billie Lou Weldon arced his Remington around until it was secured upon his target. Then, peering through the telescopic sight, Weldon saw the other Remington being levelled into position and Johnnie "the Swede" Johansson looked up to take a final check upon the Prince of Wales. Billie Lou Weldon was about to fire before Johansson took his last aim at the prince when something unexpected happened. Just as Weldon was almost in the act of shooting Johansson, the latter lowered his gun and looked quickly around him. Finally his eyes glared sharply in Weldon's direction. Everything was happening so quickly that Weldon had not had chance to aim again and fire. Johansson had flung himself into the snow. For a moment, Weldon was surprised and uncertain, even confused, until the sun shone briefly again from behind the clouds before disappearing quickly and furtively once more. Weldon cursed. Blast it! That bloody sun. Johansson had caught sight of the merest glint from his gun. But that had been enough to warn the man from Minnesota. It had all happened in split seconds. There was nothing that Weldon could have done. The best laid plans....

Johansson would be coming for him. Weldon knew that. There was nothing else that the contract killer could do at this point. He had to come, because he did not know who was holding the glinting gun, and why. The “Swede” had to check him out, eliminate him or ensure that he was no danger, before he could proceed with killing the Prince of Wales. Johansson had to come.... and Weldon would be waiting for him. It was the best way; it was Weldon’s chance to redeem his botch; he would kill Johansson this time.

Johansson was coming down towards him through the virgin snow. Weldon dropped his rifle aside and, with a vicious growl, drew his twin .44 Colt specials and waited, bracing himself for the ultimate conflict. His favourite conflict; the one at which he was best. The long distance hit-man may not be so good at short range shooting, where you could look into your enemy’s eyes and smell his sweat and almost feel the heat of his breath. And Weldon had the advantage of position, of being perfectly still and balanced, and just waiting for Johansson. And Weldon knew his adversary, whereas Johansson could not be sure, could not know which opponent was waiting for him. Johansson was charging against the unknown. That was a distinct disadvantage. With all his experience, Billie Lou Weldon knew that to be a fact.

As Johansson propelled himself through the snow, it was Weldon who saw his man first. That was the only advantage he needed. “Johnnie the Swede. Hey, Yankee!”

Johnnie glared at him in disbelief. The southerner was standing there, a cocked, ornate pistol in each hand, like a Confederate officer fighting at Shenandoah.

The twin explosions sounded as one as the lights went out for the “Swede”. Johansson stood there, as if suspended like a puppet on invisible wires. He was staring, unseeing, at Billie Lou Weldon. Blood was pouring down the cheeks of his face, oozing out from the sockets where his eyes had once been. Then, with a deathly sigh, he pitched forward into the snow. Billie Lou Weldon drew and expelled a mighty breath of relief. Then he sat down in the snow and watched it turning crimson. Finally he stood up and looked over to where the royal family was situated. Prince Charles was holding Prince William’s hand in a proud and unexpected expression of paternal love.

The firework display rehearsal had commenced at 9.45 am in the upper part of Malbun. Apart from distracting the attention of those people circulating around the ski resort that morning, its various bangers and explosions, specially selected for the purpose, had effectively concealed the sound of Weldon’s twin gunshots.

Billie Lou Weldon, the man from the Blue Brigade, was feeling tired, exhausted and drained. It was one thing being responsible for defending your own life; it was something entirely different being responsible for protecting someone else’s life. It created a far greater strain of incalculable magnitude. Now that he had

successfully fulfilled his part of the planned operation, Weldon might have been excused for thinking that he could now relax. But it was not to be. He would soon have another part to play; one which he would remember and grieve over for the rest of his life. Such is the way of detailed plans when confronted by unpredictable reality. Weldon should have known that you could never relax in the Blue Brigade.

The killing of Johansson, which even in retrospect had seemed an eternity to Weldon, had actually all happened within the cramped space of a few minutes. It was now 10.20 am. Fritz "Baby" Muhler was in position well before the precise time which had been fixed for him by Father Clancy as being the exact time when he must kill the two young princes. It had been necessary for the priest to allocate specific, staggered times to each of the hit-men for when they must kill their targets. Johansson had been assigned 10.10 am and Muhler 10.30 am. In between these two times, 10.20 am had been fixed for the hit on Princess Diana.

Muhler was feeling comfortable, the weird dream which had seemed so important to him a few hours ago was now flung far from his mind by the hype of the impending kill. The Kalashnikov was in place and Muhler was relaxed and alert and ready for action. Maybe he was to be too alert.

Muhler was still nursing the suspicion that there was another hit-man involved, either as back up should he fail or else that someone intended to take him out. Naturally, such suspicions made him extra alert, and his suspicions were fully aroused when his alert and sharp eyes spotted a figure perched in a formation of rocks above and to the right of him. The figure was holding a rifle. Muhler couldn't recognise the make or type of rifle, but he could see that it was trained on a spot below and to the right of the figure holding it. From where he was positioned, Muhler could not see the figure's intended target. It seemed to be located somewhere between the figure and the point where the royal family was gathered on the nursery slope.

Muhler considered the situation for a moment or two. He thought about making his way over towards the figure to investigate what was happening. He rejected this idea on the grounds that his moving over there would interfere with his timing and jeopardise his own hit. One thing was certain. The figure with the rifle and whatever it was doing was obviously of no help to him; therefore it might well be a hindrance. There was a simple solution to resolve the matter. Muhler picked up the Kalashnikov, took aim and shot the figure. The anonymous body jerked up and forward and then slumped down and remained still. Its rifle slid down the rocks and became half submerged in the snow. Fritz "Baby" Muhler smiled, quite contented with what he had done. He had enjoyed it; he had admired the simplicity of his solution.

Others were not so contented. Maggie Sinclair Lewis, having cast aside her role as Mrs. William Johnson, had taken the bearings of her custom-made rifle on the

Princess of Wales and then swung the weapon in an easy arc so that it pointed at the man who was preparing to assassinate the beautiful young princess and mother.

Roger de Tricart, having experienced a very good night's sleep, was full of eagerness for his task that morning. As he lay in wait with his Kalashnikov rifle, the minutes to 10.20 seemed to go by very slowly. It was just before ten past ten. He thought he heard an unexpected gunshot and then realised it was the fireworks. Now it was 10.15 am... 10.16... 10.17... 10.18... He thought he heard a shot again. Those blasted fireworks. No, they weren't really a nuisance, they were a help to him. 10.19 am. He was ready now. 10.20 am. He took aim on the Princess of Wales. De Tricart never had any qualms about killing a woman; he quite enjoyed it really.

Vicente Patto was probably the most determined of the six killers in action on Bloody Tuesday morning. His was the greatest, the most daunting and the most frightening mission. His task was simply to stop Fritz Muhler from killing the two young princes. And, just as the IRA had well selected its killers for the purposes in hand and with the intended victims in mind, so had the Blue Brigade. Vicente Patto loved children. He would not have any harm come to any child. That was why, to him, his task was the most vital. He must not fail; if he did, the consequences would be unbearable.

During the bleak moments before it happened, Vicente Patto's attention was divided between four points; his Lee Enfield, his watch, the two young princes in the distance and, much closer to him, the white figure of Fritz "Baby" Muhler, almost camouflaged against the snow. Nice touch that, thought Patto, Muhler wearing all white. It was typical of the caution and preparation of the man. But weren't the baddies supposed to wear black and the goodies white? Shit! What the hell was the difference anyway? Everybody was a dirty grey in this business and Patto had never been good. And he could shoot a white target just as well as a black one, even against a white background. Shit! What was the bastard doing?

It was just before 10.20 am. Muhler was not scheduled to kill until 10.30 am. Patto had watched Muhler do a practice line up of his Kalashnikov on the nearest of the two small boys. Then he saw Muhler relax and look carefully around him. Patto had looked over at the royal family, glanced at his watch, checked his own rifle again – his fingers and hands were perfectly relaxed and steady – and then returned his attention to Muhler. He was just in time to see Muhler aim and fire. Patto's heart stopped. Stunned and suffocated, nausea rose like acid from his stomach to his throat. Then his mind took over again. It was the wrong direction... it was the wrong direction for the kids! Thank God! Thank God there was a God today. Patto had literally turned ashen grey in panic and it would never have been known that he was the same man as a few seconds before. He had heard the shot and he had thought that one of the boys had been killed; a

boy whose life had been entrusted to his vigilance and skill. Patto had never panicked before in his life, but until now the killing game had always been an adult game for him. Shit and hell! Children should never be in this game. Damn Marcias! Damn that coldest of cold bastards.

To his credit, Patto's one and only panic was short lived. Immediately his mind resumed control. Muhler's gun had been pointed in another direction. Patto could see both the kids, still standing with their parents. Who the hell had Muhler fired at? Hell! There could only be one target. Shit.... shit, shit, shit. It was almost as bad... and it was too late. There was nothing neither he nor Billie Lou could do. What the hell would Marcias say when he found out about this? What the hell would Marcias do? Marcias was a maniac when he went mad. And he was going to be real mad this time. He worshipped that girl!

Maggie Sinclair Lewis had been perfectly balanced, her arms supported on the rock formation, her eyes trained upon the figure of Roger de Tricart. She drew in a deep breath and was just about to line up her rifle on de Tricart for the last time – any moment now she would be squeezing the trigger and ending that wicked life forever, and saving the life of the Princess of Wales at the same time – when Muhler's bullet hit her. The breath she drew had been her last breath; the air burst out of her lungs. She felt her body being propelled up and forward. She had never realised that a single bullet could have so much power. She knew it was a bullet, though she hadn't heard it. She knew she was dying, yet she seemed to have so much time.... time to see whole patches of her life pass before her eyes... as though God was replaying a video of her life before her for the last time. God had pressed the pause button. She slumped forward into the snow. The last thing she knew was the coldness of the ice engulfing her face. God had pressed the stop button. Seconds later, Roger de Tricart fired his Kalashnikov and the figure of the Princess of Wales took two steps forward and fell to the snow covered ground.

Chapter Twenty One

Shit! Lately it had become Patto's favourite word and he hated it. He had picked up some choice language in the college and now he was trying to kick the habit completely, especially the blasphemy and that other four letter word he had acquired from the old man in the prison laundry. Patto's tactic was simple. Say "shit" every time he was fired up instead of those other foul words. He had kicked the other words. Now he couldn't stop saying "shit". And he was saying it a lot right now. It seemed very appropriate.

Patto knew what had to be done and he knew how to do it. It was time to quit playing games. It was more than time to get "Baby" Muhler and he was going to do it his way, before it was too late. Before two young boys joined the two women already killed. Patto reckoned he had seven minutes. Just under eight at the most. It was enough. It was now 10.22 am. Fritz "Baby" Muhler would kill the first boy at 10.30 am precisely. Muhler was noted for his accurate timekeeping and punctuality.

A wind started to sweep its way across the nursery slopes as Patto edged his way over the snow and rocks towards his quarry. He brought the Lee Enfield with him, just in case. This was no place to be caught without a long distance shooter. A guy could be easily picked off in this open terrain. But Muhler would be concentrating now on his own two targets. He would not be expecting Patto. He would not be looking for anyone coming for him. It was 10.24 am. Patto had covered a quarter of the distance to Muhler. It was taking longer than he had anticipated. He needed to keep some time in reserve. 10.25 am. He was losing time; he was falling behind. The ground was getting more difficult. The man from Arizona was not used to travelling across so much snow. He abandoned the Lee Enfield. He had no choice in that matter. He had to move quicker and it was too cumbersome in the snow. He had to take the risk and survive without it. Saving the kids was the most important thing; the only important thing. If Patto died, no one would cry. He still had the Mauser 7.92 strapped to his left side. He was going to win this little battle, even if it turned out to be his last. 10.26 am. Only halfway there. It was touch and go. He had to move faster. The kids' lives depended on him. The Mauser went the same way as the Lee Enfield, abandoned to a snowy grave. But Patto still had his two favourite weapons; his twin messengers of death. His throat was dry, his heart pounding, the blood throbbing through tormented veins. It was 10.27 am. Shit!

Fireworks were still exploding down in Malbun. This place would never see another day like this, Patto thought grimly. Only he didn't have time for thinking... about anything. The ground was getting firmer and flatter and easier to cross. 10.28 am. The Bowie was in his right hand, the stiletto in his left. He was almost upon Muhler. The bastard hadn't heard him, let alone seen him. He was going to get this bastard Muhler. 10.29 am. Maybe just a few seconds to

steady his strength. Never go for the kill until you have steadied yourself. Right. He was ready now. NOW! Then Muhler turned around and saw him.

The Kalashnikov was in Muhler's hands. He swung it around to point at Patto. Muhler should have had plenty of time. Patto only had the two knives. There was no way he could make the final ground between them, to use the knives. No way for him to have time even to throw them. All that Muhler had to do was fire.... and it would be curtains for Patto.... and, subsequently, for Princes William and Harry. But Muhler hesitated. And that was all that Patto needed. The Arizonan thrust forward with the knives. The Bowie came upwards – a knifeman never uses a downward thrust – and entered between the penultimate and last rib of Muhler's left side. Muhler stifled the scream, but his eyes popped wildly. What had made him hesitate so fatally? The sun had come out, its rays suddenly strong and bold. The sunshine was glinting on something... Muhler's eyes had been fixed on it, hypnotically fixed on it... the solid silver pendant swinging from around Patto's neck. Patto left the Bowie in. Deftly, he switched the stiletto from his left hand to his right hand. Then he grabbed Muhler's throat with his left hand, forcing the head and throat back. It was a simple matter then to slit the throat from ear to ear with the razor sharp stiletto, in the way that Patto had learnt from Marcias. Once he was sure that the kill had been completed, Patto let Muhler's body sag to the ground. Patto relaxed. He had not known how tensed up he had been. He watched fascinated as the blood spread over Muhler's white suit. Dead bodies don't bleed, but this body was dead. Patto didn't even look across at the two young princes. There was no need to. They were okay. That job had been done, but now there was something else to be done. Something which had been unexpected.

Patto found the dead body. The remains of Maggie Sinclair Lewis, widow of the late Zeb "Cats" Lewis, sister of Julian Sinclair, lover of Billie Lou Weldon, lay in the snow like a crumpled, discarded rag doll. Already cold in the ice, the dead face looked so forlorn. Patto sighed and went on down the slope. As he had expected before he found her body, poor Maggie was very much dead. There was nothing he could do for her now. But there would be others to grieve her. She did not need his sorrow. But there was still Roger de Tricart to deal with, the one whom Maggie would have taken out if Muhler had not got her first. The one who had shot down the regal figure of the Princess of Wales. So Patto continued down the hill in search of de Tricart. He knew that Billie Lou Weldon must be down there somewhere, coming up the hill looking for de Tricart, the bum who should have been killed by his lover. It was just a question as to which of them would find the homo first. Patto knew that Weldon would want to kill de Tricart, to square things for Maggie, and he was tempted to leave the homo to him. But it was not the way that the Blue Brigade operated. There could be no misplaced macabre sentimentality with these professionals. It was up to each of them to get to de Tricart as quickly as possible and for the first one to find him to blast or knife him to hell before he could do any further damage.

Meanwhile, situated somewhere between Patto and Weldon, de Tricart was feeling very smug and self-satisfied. He had successfully carried out his contract and killed the Princess of Wales. There appeared to be no immediate repercussions. The royal party and their entourage had been thrown into turmoil by the assassination. Now various figures were fanning out from the group, presumably searching for the assassin. He could see radio telephones being used, but he could see only handguns being wielded by the royal bodyguards; no long range rifles. There was no threat to him from that quarter, though, as he was too far away from them, and there seemed to be no close range danger to him either. It was then an easy task for him to bury the Kalashnikov deep in the snow and make his escape back to the Hotel Montana. So, having disposed of the rifle, the only possible evidence against him, de Tricart proceeded confidently down the hill. Once back in Malbun and inside the Montana, there could be no reason for anyone to suspect him of the killing. Additionally, the popular conception of a hit-man was that of a macho figure, not an effeminate man like himself.

Progressing down the hill, de Tricart was keeping ahead of Patto who was also going downhill, but he was heading towards Billie Lou Weldon who had come uphill to meet him. If de Tricart had employed some of the late Fritz Muhler's caution, he may have avoided the trap, but it is doubtful if he or anyone would have spotted the enraged southerner. Weldon was determined to kill this man and nothing would have stopped him. De Tricart, still confident in his own safety and still self-satisfied, did not even see Weldon until the latter stood up from a snowy rock formation – similar to the one in which Maggie Smith had died – and shouted to him. De Tricart looked at him in surprised alarm. Fear did not have time to set in. Only then did de Tricart realise that he was unarmed. It would have made no difference. This time Weldon used only one pistol. A single shot to the heart and de Tricart, the gentleman queer, keeled over, that combined look of surprise and alarm still clearly registered on his face.

Up on the nursery slope, a small crowd had gathered around the fallen figure of the Princess of Wales.

Chapter Twenty Two

Patto stopped. Weldon was standing just below him, the body of de Tricart sprawled beneath him. Weldon looked up at him. "I'm sorry about Maggie," Patto said.

"It happened. It was nobody's fault. It just happened," Weldon growled.

He was putting on a brave show, Patto thought, but Weldon was grieving... grieving real bad. It didn't pay to get fond of anyone... to get involved... to like or to love anyone in this business. You just get hurt eventually. Best not to become attached to anyone. That way you don't get hurt. But you don't get loved either. Patto had played it smart; he had never become attached to anyone. He was now only beginning to realise how empty his life was. Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Shit! It just wasn't his style.

Weldon had a flare. He set it on a rock and ignited it. The pinkish-red smoke billowed up the hill. It was the signal to tell those on the nursery slope that all was now clear. The three IRA shooters had been eliminated.

Prior to receiving this signal and thus knowing that all the hit-men had been accounted for, there was little that those on the nursery slopes could do. The group, now gradually growing in numbers because of the shooting, had huddled around Prince Charles and his two sons as they knelt in the snow beside the prostrate body of Princess Diana. Eventually Jonathon Steiner led the two young princes away to one side where they stood at a distance from the rest of the crowd. Steiner held one tiny hand in each of his hands. He was looking down the hill. The princess had been hit at 10.20 am. It was now 10.25 am. Steiner was joined by Julian Sinclair. Sinclair was doubly worried over what had happened. His sister was supposed to have killed de Tricart before he had chance to shoot the princess. Why had she missed? What had gone wrong? At that stage, it never occurred to Sinclair that anything might have happened to his sister; that she might have been killed. It was 10.30 am. 10.31 am. Where was the flare? It should have been all over by now. The men on the nursery slopes could not have known that Weldon and Patto were still stalking de Tricart. 10.32 am. The figure of Prince Charles was still bent over the body in the snow. But there was no doubt now that the body he was cradling in his arms was dead. 10.33 am. Slowly the minutes, the seconds ticked by. And still there was no flare. Where was that flare? What was happening over there? Were those on the slopes still in danger of being shot at? 10.34 am.... 10.35 am... 10.36 am... 10.37 am... Suddenly, with the wind intensifying, it was becoming very cold on the slopes... very chilly. People were rubbing their arms and stamping their feet and cursing life in general.

10.38 am.... Where the hell was that flare? What the hell were those guys doing over there? Dark clouds were beginning to dawn on Julian Sinclair. Suddenly he

was very alarmed about his sister. Then Steiner jumped with a start. "At last," he growled. As the pinkish-red smoke drifted over towards them, Steiner thought how appropriate its colour was on this day... Bloody Tuesday.

Steiner and Sinclair led the two boys back to the dismal looking group. "Who's going to tell Marcias?" Steiner voiced the question that was on several minds.

"I will," Prince Charles said immediately, looking up at all the others around him. His voice had changed dramatically from the 'plum-in-the-mouth' Windsor accent to a broad Irish-American brogue.

Prince Charles looked back at the figure of Princess Diana. He leaned further over her and gently removed the skin-tight Princess Diana mask and tossed it onto the snow. The gathered crowd stared down at the face of Lisa Gunn, her pretty features already grimly set in death. The figure of Prince Charles stood up and removed his own mask. "I will," Tough Tony Molloy repeated. "I will tell Marcias." He glanced down once more at the dead body of Marcias's girlfriend and then, with Steiner and Sinclair, he led the two young boys, T. N. Warne's only grandsons, now also bereft of their royal disguises, down the slope and over towards where Patto and Weldon would be waiting and where Maggie Sinclair Lewis should have been waiting. Yes, he would tell Marcias. Someone had to, but he was dreading it. The pinkish-red smoke from the flare was dispersing on the wind. Just a crimson patch of ice remained to tell of what had happened on the slope. Everything else was white again. Bloody Tuesday....

Father Sean Clancy departed swiftly from Liechtenstein. It was no place now for an Irish priest who might be identified as an IRA sympathiser. James Stirling drove him to Zurich where he got a flight to Paris and from there to Dublin.

Chapter Twenty Three

Post-mortems are never very cheerful. Neither is a debriefing which takes on the aspect of a post-mortem. There was a grave, sombre mood in Suite 32 of the Hotel Park Sonnenhof for the meeting of the members of the Blue Brigade on that afternoon of Tuesday, 12th December 1988. Present at that meeting in Suite 32 were Marcias, once known as the Blue Kid and the Killer Kid, deputy head of the Blue Brigade, Chavez y Chavez, Vincente Patto, Black John, Billie Lou Weldon, Tough Tony Molloy, Jonathon Steiner and Julian Sinclair, all members of the notorious Blue Brigade.

There was no agenda. Such meetings do not follow protocol. Considerations are either plus or minus. The plus entries were simple and satisfactory. Johnnie “the Swede” Johansson of Minneapolis and New York, contract killer hired by the IRA – eliminated. Roger de Tricart of Streatham, London, contract killer hired by the IRA – eliminated. Fritz “Baby” Muhler of places various and New York, contract killer hired by the IRA – eliminated. Target score 3. Target hit 3. The minus entries were devastating and heart-breaking. Maggie Sinclair Lewis of the Blue Brigade, widow of Zeb “Cats” Lewis, brother of Julian Sinclair, second cousin of Jake “Laughing Boy” Pearce, and lover of Billie Lou Weldon, of the Blue Brigade – deceased. Lisa Gunn, girlfriend of Marcias – deceased. Members actively employed 7. Members lost 2.

A further depressing thought emphasised something which seemed disrespectful and insulting to the two girls who had died. Their lily-white bodies were sharing Liechtenstein’s only morgue with the corpses of the three hired assassins. The thought of this made Marcias’s stomach turn over.

But it was Marcias’s duty to translate their human emotions into a detached and dignified report and into cold statistics and balanced perspective for the Blue Brigade. In doing so, Marcias bravely echoed the earlier reaction of Billie Lou Weldon. “There is no blame,” he reasoned quietly. “We came to do a job and we did it. We had two casualties. We came to kill, knowing that there is always the danger we might be killed ourselves. It was just... well... it was a real shame it had to be the girls. We won’t forget them... we can’t...”

If Marcias’s language seemed moderate, it was only because he had applied the greatest of self-restraint. Marcias would not sleep that night. He would not sleep for many nights. And that damn pain was there again, stronger than ever. He wasn’t sure how long he could go on bearing it... without Lisa’s strength, support, encouragement and inspiration. He placed a Dutch cigar in his mouth and lit it. She used to worry about him smoking. She tried to encourage him to cut back on it. I don’t want to live too long without you, she used to admonish him. I don’t want you leaving me, like Bogart and Bacall. He used to laugh and say it was too late anyway, and then she would get angry with him, but not for long. Marcias’s lips twitched in a bitter grimace as he looked out unseeing at the

mountains. Going out onto the patio balcony, he attempted to blow a smoke-ring, but couldn't do it. Chavez and Black John, both ever faithful to him but knowing only too well that he only wanted Lisa whom he had sacrificed, slowly followed him out onto the balcony, but kept their distance and stood well behind him. The others remained inside. Strategically it had been a successful day for the Blue Brigade, but for these men it could only be a sad day. A bitter day – the start of many bitter days – in particular for Marcias, Weldon and Sinclair. Lisa, the girl he had sacrificed... and Billie Lou Weldon had lost his loving and fighting companion... because of him... because of him, the always successful Marcias. They could never be happy about the way it had gone.

One person who could, perhaps, be happy that day, although in her case it was probably more a case of gaining relief, and again this was tempered with much regret, was Dawn Sanders. She had lost count of the days, weeks, she had been held captive in the cell without windows. She had no watch, no diary, no clothes. She knew that her clothes had been taken away from her for only one reason. There was no question of there being any sexual exploitation of her; no question of them displaying her nakedness for her male captives to ogle at; no question of simply humiliating her. It was just that her captors felt that she was less likely to escape in the nude. She had to admit that it would have made it more difficult if, in the first place, there had been any chance of her getting out of this cell... which there wasn't. The cell had proved to be completely secure. No windows, a solid locked door, and a guard always posted outside the door. No chance! They could have returned her clothes to her with impunity.

And that had not been all of the story. Not once had she been allowed out of the cell; for weeks now it had been her entire world. She lived inside it, she ate inside it, she drank inside it, she slept inside it. Good food was brought to her regularly, the bed was comfortable (although there were no bedclothes) and the cell was warm and airy (although there was no window). She missed her exercise, but most of all she missed the toilet facilities one takes for granted in everyday life. It was true that she was given basins of hot water for washing whenever she asked – which she did frequently, if only to annoy them, but she was never permitted to have the luxury of a bath. Not even a tub in her cell. Perhaps they thought she might drown herself. Everything from soap and talcum powder to sanitary towels was provided on demand, but she had found coping with her periods to be particularly difficult in captivity. Most of all, she found it very embarrassing and degrading to be forced to use a bucket as a toilet. Fortunately two female jailers took it in turns to tend to her needs in this direction, taking away the bucket and emptying it for her. These two women were matronly Amazons in size and appearance – one had enormous breasts which flopped all over the place whilst the other one had hairs on her chin as well as a moustache. Dawn wondered if they were lesbian lovers. They both treated her with a sort of dedicated aloofness, if not actually with disdain, showing no friendliness or compassion to her, and being very firm in their approach to her. However, they always behaved very correctly to her, but their treatment of her was very cold.

Still, Dawn bravely endured her enclosed ordeal, wondering when it would all end and what would happen to her. Originally, after being seized from her apartment in Shenfield, she had expected torture and death, and she had been surprised when neither had materialised. Now her ordeal of captivity had developed into its own excruciating form of torture. Not knowing when, if ever, it would end, simply multiplied her suffering.

Then one day – she had no idea which day or what time it was, although she guessed it was late afternoon and still January – one of the Amazons came into her cell with a large carrier bag, the contents of which she emptied onto the bed. Dawn recognised her own clothing, which she had not seen since when.

“Get dressed,” the Amazon commanded, and then, when she saw the look of alarm on Dawn’s pretty but haggard face, the woman relented for the first time and even smiled a little. It was the one with the hairs on her face and when she smiled, her moustache pointed outwards. “Don’t worry, luv, you’re not going to be killed or anything. You’re going to be taken ‘ome. You’ll be free again soon, ducks.” Maybe this Amazon was human after all, Dawn thought.

Dawn could have kissed the woman. Relief flooded over her. Then suspicion returned. Why would they want to release her? What were they really going to do to her? In her fear and fright, she thought about refusing to leave her cell. The sanctuary and safety of her dear old beloved, protective cell. If they were going to kill her they would have to drag her out to her death. Then the man appeared in the open doorway of the cell. It was the quiet man, the third man, the leader of the trio which had taken her from her flat... all that time ago, a lifetime away. Jake and Fabian, the other two had been called. This one, she never knew his name. Mr. What’s-your-name, she had called him. Mr. Nothing. She still didn’t know who they were. At first, she had assumed they were the IRA. When they didn’t kill her, she didn’t know who they were, didn’t know what to think. When they had seized her that night, she thought they were the IRA... taking her away to kill her, to stop her from killing Fritz Muhler, to stop her preventing Fritz from murdering the Prince of Wales and his family. Now she didn’t know who they were. Now she didn’t know anything anymore. Why hadn’t they killed her? Why had they kept her alive... until now? She didn’t know what they wanted. She soon did.

The third man was watching her closely from the doorway. When he spoke, his voice was soft. She had to strain to hear him.

“Muhler is dead.”

“What date is it?” she immediately asked. A strange question for a girl to ask when she has just been told that her lover and enemy is dead.

The third man did not find her question at least bit surprising or unusual. He seemed to know before she did that the mini computer which she kept in her brain had started to function again. She was really asking: 'Had Muhler been killed before he had the chance to kill the Prince of Wales?'

The third man answered her intended question first, his voice now gentle as well as soft. "We got Muhler before he could fulfil his contract for the IRA. Unfortunately, he got one of our... people before we killed him. It is Tuesday, the 12th of January... late afternoon. Now will you please get dressed, Miss Sanders. I'm waiting to take you home." He smiled at her, a little coyly, she thought. She blushed. Her nakedness had now become important. She respected this man now and she didn't want him to see her this way anymore. Her nudity suddenly meant something again. He gallantly turned away whilst she dressed. Before she put on her clothes, though, and before he left the cell, she couldn't resist a minor tease. "Are you going to take a photograph of me... like this... for your collection?" she called after him.

Without looking back, he replied, "Photographs are only for shock treatment... they're only for nostalgia. Dreams, now they're the stuff of reality."

The third man waited for her outside the cell. The same routine was applied to her before she left the cell as had been applied to her once she had been bundled into their car after being abducted from her apartment. She was blindfolded – a tape secured around her eyes, then blacked-out safety goggles placed over this, followed by a black hood over her head. That first time, she had been almost expecting the executioner's axe. When the car had started to drive away, she had tried counting the seconds, to make up the minutes, to make up the hours, to time the journey away from her home. That had been standard MI6 practice. But the third man and his two companions had been professionals – they had made sure they had distracted her and her timing had soon gone awry. She reckoned the journey had been at least four hours and, for reasons she couldn't explain, she thought they had travelled northwards. The triple blindfold had not been removed until she was secured in her cell. Now the routine was reversed and they were travelling – southwards, she believed - in a car and she was again prevented from seeing anything by the same triple blindfold. Late afternoon, the third man had told her. She wondered if it was still daylight. It was probably dark, she reflected. Her hooded appearance might be spotted, otherwise. What she did not know was that they were being driven in a limousine with closed blinds. This time, also unknown to her, there was just the third man and the driver with her. Jake and Fabian were no longer considered necessary.

There was another part to the now familiar routine. Dawn had been hand-cuffed with her hands behind her back before leaving the cell. With the hood and the bindings around her eyes and the cuffs, Dawn felt all trussed-up like a chicken prepared for the slaughter and, with her hands cuffed behind her, it was not comfortable riding in the fast moving car. After about half-an-hour or so, the third

man unlocked the cuffs and removed them. Dawn was glad to exercise her hands and to be able to sit more comfortably. The hood was not removed, however. They were still not taking any unnecessary chances. There was something different about the hood this time, though. This time she was able to hear through it and, now that her hands were free, she reached up to feel the hood and discovered that hearing slits had been cut in it. The third man now spoke to her.

"I have a ticket for you from Liverpool Street to Shenfield," he explained to her. "It was my intention to drop you off at Liverpool Street or one of the stations en route to Shenfield, rather than take you directly to your apartment. That way would stop you from calling for any help to catch us. I have a case in the boot for you, containing some fresh clothing and some instant food for when you get home, to carry you over until you can get to the shops."

"Very thoughtful of you, but you know it really isn't very good service. After all, you did collect me from my home and you should return me there." Dawn's eyes were now dancing mischievously; she had always been a charmer and now that the danger to her life was over, she felt that it was time to get into, if not the driving seat, at least the front passenger seat of this little old game. The situation had changed somewhat and she could now start making demands.

"Okay," he agreed. She had expected him to laugh at her cheek, but his voice was flat, without any expression or emotion. She thought that it was a tired voice; that he sounded weary. It occurred to her then that he must be tired with his job and what he had to do. It could not be much fun for him. For her, the ordeal was coming to an end. For him, the monotony and the dirty washing continued. She hadn't thought of it that way before. "Okay," he said again. "But no tricks, eh?"

"No tricks," she confirmed... she promised him.

Somewhere near to where the M25 said hello to the A12, he removed the hood and the goggles and the tape, and Dawn got her first view of the outside world for what had seemed an eternity. It was raining. There was a lot of traffic on the A12. Dawn was thrilled to see the rain. She was even glad to see the traffic. "No looking at the number plates when you get out," he warned her.

"No peeping," she promised.

"They'll be changed, anyway, after I leave you."

"But of course." Dawn was amused. MI6 would never believe it. Come to think of it, her bosses never believed anything, least of all the truth. She wondered if they would ever enter the twentieth century, whilst it was still here.

When they arrived at Barrington Court, Shenfield, he carried the suitcase up to her apartment, but declined her invitation to come in. "There's a bottle of Chablis somewhere inside the case," he told her.

"Thank you."

"I thought about Champagne," he confessed with a rueful smile, "but in view of past events here, I decided against it."

"That figures. And I suppose you're not going to tell me who or what you are?"

"You suppose right."

"You said Fritz killed one of your people before they got him. Who was he? Was he someone you knew?"

"It wasn't a he. It was a woman. You wouldn't know her. She wasn't known to any of your people. And I've never met her."

"I'm sorry. I mean I'm sorry she was killed. That Muhler killed her... that he was able to kill anyone."

The third man shrugged. "People get killed in our business. It happens... all the time. Occupational hazard. Occupational habit."

"Yes... Yes, I see." But she didn't really understand.

"Who killed Muhler?" she asked suddenly.

"A top gun."

"Yes... it would have had to be. Muhler was very careful... very good at what he did. Very bad it was, though, what he did. It really was bad. The worst."

"You're not trying to convince me. Are you trying to convince yourself, Dawn?"

"No... not really. I always knew that he was bad. Very bad. I would have stopped him... if you hadn't."

"Yes, I knew that, but our way was the best way. You see, there were three of them we had to stop, three hit-men. That was why we couldn't have you or MI6 getting in the way."

"Three of them? I didn't know that. We didn't know that. Leastwise, I think we didn't know it. What was he like? The man who killed Muhler?"

"He's a very cold man. A ruthless man."

"Fritz was ruthless..."

"Cheer up, young lady. Forget the past. Think of the present... and the future." The third man suddenly grinned. It was his turn to be mischievous. "If you don't mind hearing the opinion of an older man, I do declare, you've got one helluva chassis... from what I've seen of it... and I've seen quite a bit of it. And you've got a bright personality... great!" The third man was enthusiastic for once. The years seemed to briefly roll away from him. "The young guys... the yuppies... will be queuing up to lay you, honey, that's for sure."

"Thank you, kind sir. I've never had such a compliment before."

They were silent for a while. She sensed that he was ready to leave, but that he wasn't sure how. Before he went, she gripped his arm and she chuckled at her next thought. "So we were on the same side, after all, weren't we? D'you remember I said it was a pity we weren't on the same side?"

"Yes, I remember," he replied. He was smiling much more now.

"Well, goodbye, Mr. What's your name. Goodbye, Mr. Nobody."

"S'long Miss MI6."

The third man disappeared into the night and out of her life. Over the next week, after all the fuss had died down in the department over her safe return and she had persuaded control not to extend their investigations into her abduction and captivity, she was able to study the reports on the bloody events in Liechtenstein and reflect that she had survived her one and only encounter with the notorious Blue Brigade.

There was a family of survivors which had been far away from Liechtenstein on Bloody Tuesday. Not for the first time, the world's media was confused. To start with, Buckingham Palace had issued a statement, sometime during late November 1987, to the effect that the Prince and Princess of Wales and their two sons, the Princes William and Harry, would be visiting the Principality of Liechtenstein from the 10th to the 17th of January 1988 as guests of Crown Prince Johann Adam Pius, the Prince Regent. Exactly a week later, a second announcement was made from Buckingham Palace rescinding the previous statement. It was regretted that the Prince and Princess of Wales and their two sons would not now be visiting Liechtenstein in the coming January. Affairs of State had taken precedence over what would have been a purely private holiday and the visit to the tiny principality had unfortunately been cancelled.

William Veritas, Court Correspondent of one of the daily newspapers still in Fleet Street, had said in the Cheshire Cheese that evening that there was a story there somewhere, behind those two announcements, but he just couldn't figure out what it could be. Instead he ordered another double gin-and-tonic and continued with his favourite theme, that journalism wasn't what it used to be.

During the week commencing 3rd January 1988, the world's press started to believe the rumours that one or more important celebrities would be arriving in Liechtenstein the following week. As it had not been possible to identify the celebrity or celebrities concerned, the world press played safe and sent only their second or third – and in some cases, fourth, - string of reporters to the principality. Some newspapers tried to edge their bets by endeavouring to combine their coverage of whoever was going to be in Liechtenstein with their reporting of expected peace talks in Geneva. In the end, this did not prove successful, mainly because Geneva is at the western end of Switzerland whilst Liechtenstein is to the north-east of Switzerland.

Those reporters who did stay in Liechtenstein – and these were mainly old hacks or young virgin rookies – were rewarded, to their own immense surprise and to the incredulity of their editors who at first thought they were drunk on the local wine, with a press and photo call for Monday, January 11th for Prince Charles and Princess Diana (or should it have been Princess Diana and Prince Charles) on the ski slopes of Malbun.

It was then announced that the royal couple would be visiting the dental factory in Liechtenstein on the following morning. Now that the news of the identities of the mystery visitors to Liechtenstein had spread worldwide, the media, both press and television, poured into the tiny country, mainly from the United Kingdom and Japan. One of the notable absentees was William Veritas, the celebrated court correspondent who, by his absence, missed what developed into the news story of the decade. It was ironical for him, as he had been the first to suspect a story behind the original twin announcements from Buck House. Being interested only in the affairs of the British royals, there had been no need for him to be concerned about mystery visitors to Liechtenstein. Once the royal identities had been revealed it was too late for him. By then, he had been admitted to a clinic suffering from an advanced stage of alcohol poisoning.

The media were waiting outside the false-teeth factory more than an hour before the time of the start of the scheduled visit by the royals. But the scheduled visit never took place. This was another surprise which the media people had to endure. No wonder they were becoming confused. But a far bigger surprise soon hit them and confusion was soon to reign supreme. Rumours came floating down the mountain that the Princess of Wales had been injured in a skiing accident. These rumours were immediately followed by more concrete stories that the princess had been shot. By the time the press were halfway up the

mountain, hotly pursued by the television crews, the information now revealed was that Princess Diana was dead, killed by a gunshot.

It was at this point, or actually well before it, that Marcias and the Blue Brigade faced a dilemma. Once they had established that all three of the hit-men had been eliminated, they could easily have revealed that the Prince and Princess of Wales were not even in Liechtenstein and that the woman shot dead on the nursery slopes of Malbun was, in fact, one of their own members and not Princess Diana. But Marcias believed, probably correctly, that to disclose the fact that the man and woman and two small boys on the ski slopes were not the royal family, would prejudice the life of the Blue Brigade's top infiltrator inside the IRA, the person known as the Makepeace Contact. Until any corrective announcement could be made to the media, Marcias and his men had to be given time to get from Liechtenstein to Ireland to eliminate the top command of the Provos and thus save Makepeace, the contact whose information had made it possible for Marcias to save the Wales.

Thus conflicting reports continued to abound about what had actually happened in Malbun. Of course, the royal press officers denied that any harm had befallen Princess Diana and they ridiculed and later emphatically refuted, quite angrily, the accounts that she had been killed. They insisted that a member of the royal party – a friend of the family – had fallen and injured herself. That was all there was to the matter.

Such a denial would have been expected by the IRA. But the IRA would still believe that they had killed the Princess of Wales and, whilst they continued to believe this, then Makepeace should still be safe. Princess Diana could not be produced alive and well to the media until after the Blue Brigade had extricated Makepeace from the reaches of the Provos.

It was not until the following afternoon, Wednesday, January 13th that the media boys were informed that Prince Charles and his family had never been in Liechtenstein that week. Since Sunday, January 10th, the Prince and Princess of Wales and their two sons had been on a Spanish island in the Mediterranean, as guests of King Juan Carlos and his queen and daughters. The press and television reporters and cameramen were even invited onto the island that same afternoon to see and photograph Charles and Diana and their sons. Some photographers were even able to take coloured photographs of Princess Diana in a high-cut, long-legged, one-piece swimsuit which not only cheekily displayed her luscious legs and thighs and the lower cheeks of her shapely bottom, but proved beyond doubt that not only was she still very much alive, she was most certainly not injured in any way. And most of those photographers felt that her sophisticated, but sexy swimsuit transformed her from just a princess into a film star.

That was late on the afternoon of Wednesday the 13th, more than thirty hours after the shootings in Malbun. Late on the afternoon of Wednesday the 13th; still in time for the photographs to make the morning papers. Late on the afternoon of Wednesday the 13th; time enough for Marcias to have made the Makepeace contact – to have saved the Makepeace Contact.

But by then Makepeace was dead.

Chapter Twenty Four

A private jet flew them from Switzerland to Ireland. Marcias had wanted to land at Belfast. Though the road journey to Ballyshannon from Belfast was not much shorter than that from Dublin, his instincts told him that the Belfast route would have been more convenient, if not safer. Before they left Zurich, however, a call came through for Marcias from Santa Fe, New Mexico. The Blue Brigade had been advised that the British Government would refuse Marcias entry into the province. Not even landing clearance. On the explicit orders of the First Lord of the Treasury, it was believed. So they flew to Dublin instead.

Other times Marcias had not experienced difficulties with access or egress in unwelcoming countries, Britain included. He was a master of disguises, but right now they did not have time to play games – speed was the only name of the game. They had to save Makepeace.

It was early afternoon when they arrived in Ballyshannon in County Donegal. The journey from Dublin had made Marcias impatient. He hated wasting time on travelling. If he had his way, they would press a button and be transformed immediately to their destination, like in the old space and science fiction movies. Throughout the journey, he could only think of Makepeace and Lisa Gunn. He could not get it out of his mind that he had failed one. He only hoped that he would not now be too late to save the other.

The Bentley had travelled at some high speeds on that lonely journey north-westwards up through the Emerald Isle. The occupants had remained silent throughout; intent on what lay ahead, on what they had to do. In the luxurious car were Marcias, Chavez, Black John and the two Irishmen, Noel Dwyer from the city of Cork and Eamonn Kinane of the farmlands and staunch republican countryside of Tipperary. The driver was an American, resident in Dublin, Luke “Paddy” Lundigan. Speed was always paramount to him. Crooked roads were turned into straight ones with this man. The passengers in the Bentley swayed from side to side like spectators at Wimbledon.

They found the place. No difficulty. They knew of it well enough. The old stone farmhouse on the outskirts of town, like something out of the Hound of the Baskervilles. They would be upstairs, they reckoned. They left the Bentley with the driver a half-a-mile away and headed for the farmhouse on foot, guns at the ready. Though it was far too early to have darkness as an ally, it had been drizzling for sometime and a thick Irish mist shrouded their approach.

They would be upstairs, they still reckoned. Marcias would go in first and then up the stairway, followed by Chavez, Black John, Dwyer and Kinane in that order. Strange how the pain in Marcias’s chest always retreated when action was imminent. Danger seemed to be a good antidote.

The key worked and turned the lock. They entered quietly and Marcias had almost reached the foot of the stairs when the light flashed on. Marcias's reactions were nearly as quick as ever. He went for the man at the light switch. The Magnum exploded and tore out the stomach of Tomas O'Reilly. Black John was not so fortunate as Marcias. The man behind O'Reilly, attracted immediately by the prominent whites of the eyes of the Negro, fired at Black John. The Negro, in that desperate split-second, instinctively turned sideways and took the slug in the left shoulder. The impact was sufficient to throw him back into the path of Eamonn Kinane. Alongside Black John, Chavez's Magnum spoke twice. He was a man who liked to make sure. The first shot hit Seamus O'Hara in the chest and killed him instantly; the second shot blew his face away as he toppled forward down the stairs. Chavez smiled gently.

Black John signalled to the others to go on; that he was okay. Up the stairs they went; Marcias, Chavez, Dwyer and Kinane. The injured Black John checked the two fallen IRA men to make sure they were dead. He couldn't be sure about O'Reilly; the man's body was still twitching. Not wanting a further gunshot to distract his colleagues, Black John used the knife. With his one good arm, he rammed the Bowie into O'Reilly's throat and turned and twisted it until he bisected the windpipe. With a determined pull, he extracted the knife and saw the Irish blood trickling along the drainage furrow on the blade of the big Bowie.

Half-way up the stairs, the pain hit Marcias, right across the chest. The light seemed to go out. He was swerving around, out of control... floating in space... his skull pressed down upon his brain. A blackout! It couldn't be. This was something new. It had never happened before. It couldn't happen. He had to go on. He had to save Makepeace. He had failed Lisa. He couldn't fail Makepeace. He was going.... He was toppling back into space. An eel of fear wriggled in his bowels. He could only think of Makepeace... and the trusting eyes of Lisa Gunn staring at him reproachfully and surprised and maybe hurt, like the faithful eyes of a black and white Border collie dog, the old collar around his neck, whose master has let him down.

Chavez caught Marcias as he sank back down the stairs. Dwyer and Kinane ran past them up the steps. As Dwyer was the younger and fitter man, he reached and entered the room before Kinane. Marcias was recovering, fighting to recover, fighting to steady himself. Instinctively, Chavez pushed him forward. They heard a single gunshot from the room above and then silence. A long, continued silence.

The silence would not end. The Magnum straightened in response to Marcias's sudden grip. The blackout, or whatever it was, had passed. He and Chavez took two more steps up the stairs. The door of the room above swung wide open. Marcias stiffened. He could sense Chavez alerting himself behind him. Noel Dwyer came out through the doorway above them, followed by Eamonn Kinane. Marcias looked up at them. Dwyer's face was grey and sickly. He looked down

at Marcias, his nostrils twitching and his mouth twisting convulsively. His sing-song Cork accent, which always sounded more Welsh than Irish, had lost its melody.

"God, it's a priest," Dwyer mumbled pathetically. "I've killed a priest... but he had no dog collar.... Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry...."

Marcias gripped the banister with his left hand, the Magnum still steady in his right hand. His knuckles were white; his face was empty. His eyes narrowed and never wandered from Dwyer's contorted countenance. "You've killed Makepeace," he told him.

Without hesitation, Kinane spoke softly. "What does that mean now?" he demanded. "There was nobody else up there."

"It means we ain't finished yet. We ain't finished the job yet." The voice of Marcias was a blend of sadness and determination. The soft, beseeching eyes of Lisa Gunn had been joined by those of Makepeace, powerful, penetrating, piercing. Marcias would never be able to avoid them.

Chapter Twenty Five

They never found the school-teacher, the librarian or the doctor. Only Makepeace could have led Marcias to them. Marcias, Chavez and the patched-up Black John flew to New York, Paddy Lundigan having driven them to Dublin in the Bentley. Noel Dwyer and Eamonn Kinane remained in Ballyshannon for one of the funerals.

The IRA never did find out about Father Clancy. There was even an Irish Republican tricolour on his coffin for his Requiem. It was the final sacrifice made by the priest for the Blue Brigade.

Noel Dwyer and Eamonn Kinane hired a car to return to the south. Dwyer drove the car, as Cork was further than Tipperary. Before they reached his home, just after they had crossed the county border into County Tipperary, Kinane feigned sickness – a giddy attack – and asked Dwyer to stop the car. Kinane picked up his bag, on the pretence of looking for a tablet. His hand fumbled about inside the bag and, without taking out the gun, he shot Dwyer at close range, through the heart. Then, hurriedly for the first time, to avoid as much blood as possible inside the car, he opened the driver's door and pushed Dwyer's body out onto the road.

"I hope I'm not wrong about you, you bastard," Kinane growled at the corpse. He had not liked the way in which Dwyer had killed the priest so quickly – Father Clancy had made no attempt to attack them, nor to defend himself – and he had not liked the way in which the operation had ended. In this business you took no chances.

The Chicago police lieutenant was laconic. They were standing in the middle of Soldier Field. They had found the body of Hope Cassidy in the end zone. Very appropriate, the lieutenant thought. He knew that Pierre de Lannurien had a warped sense of humour. He knew that de Lannurien had done it. He knew it was settlement day. He knew also that de Lannurien would have a cast-iron alibi which they would never break. Yeah, the lieutenant was a laconic sort of guy. He didn't believe in wasting words... or time. You could know an awful lot... which got you nowhere in this business.

A brownstone on East 63rd Street... a crowded room. T. N. Warne looked swiftly and sharply around his study as Bob Vereston pushed him in his wheelchair in through the doorway. Maybe they should have used the lounge, there being so many present. Hell, they were here now. Besides, it would only have meant moving the red-eye bottles again. Al Dempsey was there. So was Ben Brogan. It was always good to have those two around. Also present were Ricardo Venez, Packo Jackson, Vicente Patto, Chavez y Chavez, Black John, Johnnie Lou Weldon and his brother Billie Lou Weldon, Tough Tony Molloy, Jonathon Steiner, Julian Sinclair and Pierre de Lannurien. Almost a full house. Warne noticed

immediately that one face was missing. The face! The face that made all the other faces come to life.

Other faces looked down from the walls. Faces which towered over strong, powerfully muscular torsos. Jack Johnson, William 'Jack' Dempsey, Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Archie More, and Mike Tyson. Warne looked for the missing face. The bottles of Glenmorangie, Jim Beam and Jack Daniels had remained untouched on his desk. They had waited for him. He didn't like that. Once they would have started without him. Now they treated him with the respect reserved for the old and nearly dead. Beyond the whisky and whiskey bottles, on the other side of his desk, was T. N. Warne's old swivel desk-chair; the one he used to use before the wheelchair. The swivel chair was faced away from the desk and its high back meant that Warne could not see if anyone was sitting in it. Eventually a smoke ring floated up from the chair, followed shortly afterwards by a second smoke ring. Warne waited for the third one, but it never materialised. Marcias was also growing old. The chair revolved around and the missing face looked up at Warne. The two sets of eyes looking into each other were both tired, and both reflected pain, but Marcias's eyes also showed a deep sadness. A sadness which would never go.

T. N. Warne had already spoken with Billie Lou Weldon and Julian Sinclair. He had expressed his sympathy to them; one had lost a lover, the other a sister. He had avoided words of comfort, knowing that such words did not rest easy on these men. Warne had even kidded Black John about his busted shoulder, still strapped up. Now it was the turn of Marcias. This would be the most difficult one. As Bob Vereston pushed the wheelchair towards the desk, Marcias poured a generous Glenmorangie and had it ready for Warne. Then he poured himself a large Jim Beam, neat, no water, no rocks, no nothing. Then all the others came to the desk and poured their drinks.

"Hello, Boss," Marcias said. He raised his glass to the big man in the wheelchair and then swallowed half its contents.

"Hello, Kid." Warne raised his glass too, in a return salute to Marcias. Warne sipped his whisky. He could no longer swallow half a large glassful. There had been the time when he could have downed the lot in one go, and many more.

There was a pause. There could be no sympathy. Warne knew that. Marcias hated fuss, and found it difficult to accept sympathy.

"I guess we shouldn't have risked her," Warne said eventually.

"You risked your grandsons."

"Yes."

“What do we do now?”

“You find another Makepeace.”

Marcias looked over at Pierre de Lannurien. That was the French-Canadian’s department.

Bob Vereston kept the red-eye bottles coming and flowing. When dawn slithered in from somewhere across the East River, he was still sober. And possibly Al Dempsey as well.

Epilogue One

Tuesday, 12th April 1988.....

“Border Fox” Dessie O’Hare and four other men pleaded guilty in a Dublin court to charges of kidnapping. The surprise pleas came after a series of adjournments had delayed the start of the trial over the abduction of Dublin dentist John O’Grady the previous year. The five men admitted a total of ten charges, including kidnapping, possession of firearms, and attempted murder. Eleven other charges were dropped. The trial, amid tight security, had been expected to last six weeks.

Wednesday, 13th April 1988.....

Dessie O’Hare, the “Border Fox” was jailed for forty years at Dublin’s special Anti-Terrorist Criminal Court for the kidnapping of dentist John O’Grady and other crimes. Edward Hogan, second in command of O’Hare’s Irish Revolutionary Brigade, also received forty years. Mr. Justice Liam Hamilton, when passing sentence, said that the crime was brutal and barbaric.

Dessie O’Hare was suspected of being involved in up to twenty-seven murders. The twenty-nine year old O’Hare, who vowed never to be taken alive, was shot fifteen times in the previous November when he tried to storm through a police and army roadblock. O’Hare told the court: “I make no apologies for the lengths I went to in the cause of Irish unity.” There was a clenched-fist salute from O’Hare and his companions. The five man gang was jailed for a total of 162 years for kidnapping Mr. O’Grady who had the tips of two fingers sliced off whilst held in captivity by the notorious “Border Fox”.

Tuesday, 6th December 1988.....

The IRA bomb which killed eleven people in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh was planted to cause maximum devastation where civilians would be standing, the inquest heard today. Police witnesses said that the bomb went off inside the Old School House, yards from the cenotaph where 100 to 150 people were standing for a Remembrance Day service. Detective Chief Inspector John Allerton told the inquest in the Enniskillen courthouse that the bomb contained between ten to twenty kilograms of homemade explosives. It was set off by a timing device and it was ‘common knowledge’ that the public would form the bulk of the crowd.

The IRA bombers responsible for the massacre were cowards who showed total disregard for human life, said the coroner, James Rodgers. The sheer brutality of this heinous crime, which sent shock waves across the world, was indiscriminate in its nature. He was speaking after the jury returned findings that the victims died as the result of the injuries which they sustained in the blast.

Friday, 30th December 1988.....

The IRA has admitted that 1988 was a difficult year for them with innocent people killed in a string of botched attacks and some of its top members shot dead.

But the terrorists pledged, in a New Year's statement released in Belfast and Dublin, to carry on their campaign to oust Britain from Northern Ireland.

During the year of 1988, the IRA had blown up a family of three near the border after mistaking them for a judge's family and had killed two people in Belfast with a bomb intended for an army patrol.

In 1988 IRA members were shot dead by British security forces in Gibraltar and Ulster.

Tuesday, 24th January 1989.....

The IRA claims to have disbanded and disarmed one of its most ruthless murder squads after a number of killings in and near County Fermanagh produced a wave of public revulsion. There have also been reports that the same gang was behind the Enniskillen 'Poppy Day' massacre in 1987 in which eleven people were murdered and sixty were injured. On 15th January 1989, former RUC reservist Harold Keyes of Fermanagh was shot dead while visiting his girlfriend's mother in County Donegal. And in March 1988, twenty-one year old Gillian Johnson was killed as she sat in a car in a case of mistaken identity.

Few people, inside or outside of Ireland, were prepared to believe that the IRA would voluntarily disband – and disarm – its bloody destructive Sixth Corps of the Provos, which had operated in and out of County Donegal, and which had claimed the lives of so many victims from Lord Mountbatten to the innocents of Enniskillen, and which had come so close to adding the Prince of Wales and his family to their dreadful list of killings.

Thursday, 26th January 1989.....

There had been a discreet delay with the announcement. Very discreet – more than a year. It appeared in the London Gazette (Published by Authority), Number 51625 dated Thursday, 26th January 1989. Timothy Duffy had been created a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, an honour which only the monarch can bestow. Sir Timothy's knighthood was included in the Queen's personal honours' list.

There had been a prequel to this announcement. The decision to knight Timothy Duffy had been made towards the end of January 1988. Duffy himself had not been officially notified until some time later, and it was on Thursday, 24th November 1988 that he had received the first official confirmation of his

forthcoming knighthood. On that day he decided to celebrate the news of his honour. He determined to have a drink, or maybe two drinks, and the venue he selected was the Cumberland Hotel at Marble Arch. When he entered the hotel through its Great Cumberland Place entrance, he immediately saw a vast change in the appearance and layout of its ground floor and reception area from since his previous visit there.

That previous visit of Timothy Duffy to the Cumberland Hotel had taken place exactly twelve months earlier on Tuesday, 24th November 1987. On that occasion, he had spent some time in both the Nocturne Bar and the Carvery Restaurant, during which time he had been observing Fritz "Baby" Muhler, Black John and Vincente Patto. When he had received the confirmation of his honour a year later to the day on which he had spent those hours in observation there, he felt that the Nocturne Bar, which he had visited on and off for twenty years, would be the most appropriate venue for his celebratory drink. A knight in a Nocturne Bar; a knight in the night scene.

On 24th November 1988, however, he was amazed to find that the large circular reception area of the Cumberland had disappeared and that the familiar and dark Nocturne Bar no longer existed. Somewhere near to where the reception desks used to be, there was a new Austens Bar... bright and comfortable. Duffy entered and selected a table against the low wall to the left. A waitress came up to him and he ordered a double five-star Cognac. Before the girl departed, he asked her: "Have you been here long enough to know the old Nocturne Bar?"

"Yes, sir," she replied cheerfully. "It was all removed about six months ago... in May, I think. It was all done in just two weeks. The old taken down and away and the new parts installed. Out with the old, in with the new."

After he had finished the double Cognac, Duffy went to the bar counter and ordered the same again. He ate some peanuts provided on the counter, drank the second double Cognac, and exited from the hotel through the Quebec Street entrance, having a quick look at the new bars and restaurants on that side. Out with the old, in with the new.

Saturday, 18th March 1989.....

"Destroy the IRA, Molyneaux Tells Thatcher." Ulster Unionist leader James Molyneaux has urged Mrs. Thatcher to heed the advice of her Home Secretary and destroy the IRA. There could be no political solutions in Ulster until Government action ended the campaign of terror, he told his party's annual meeting in Belfast.

"DESTROY THE IRA." Sir Timothy Duffy had heard that before... somewhere.

Epilogue Two

Friday, 18th November 1988

The end had come very quick. Cancer had won the final battle. The Requiem Mass had been held at the little church of Our Lady of Lourdes, not far from the Drake Memorial Park where the burial was now taking place. “Tough” Tony Molloy, a senior member of the Blue Brigade, stood on the fringe of the group of mourners.

It was raining, quite hard now, and the biting cold wind swept across the cemetery from the nearby large farm field where all the cows were seated, chewing and gazing inquisitively at the activity around the grave. The scene, with its pouring rain, reminded Molloy of the start of the Bogart and Gardner film, *The Barefoot Contessa*. It was just as depressing.

Most of them were there: Chavez, Black John, Vicente Patto, Ricardo Venez and Packo Jackson. The Big Man had been too ill to make it. Molloy was somewhat surprised that the burial was taking place in England and not Stateside. But then the deceased had always been full of surprises.

As the coffin was being lowered into the deep hole, Patto moved slightly more forward and gazed down into the pit. It was as if he wanted to make sure that the deceased really was dead. Some of the group tossed soil onto the top of the coffin and this was accompanied by the heavy and thunderous drops of the now slashing rain.

Then Chavez moved forward to toss something onto the coffin. As he did so, the dark cloud directly above broke and a shaft of sunlight suddenly descended on and illuminated the steel of the Mexican stiletto as Chavez dropped it onto the coffin.

Molloy turned away and walked slowly, but in a straight line to the gates of the cemetery. It was the end of an era.

Epilogue Three

Paris, France: 31st August 1997, 12.14 am.
The Ritz Hotel – rear exit on the rue Cambon.

The front entrance of the Ritz Hotel faces onto the Place Vendome which is dominated by its column whose metal came from melted-down Russian cannons. The hotel has a back exit onto the rue Cambon.

At 12.19 am, a black Mercedes S280 arrives at the hotel exit on the rue Cambon. The driver, Frederic Lucard, alights from the Merc and hands the keys to Henri Paul, the acting head of security at the Ritz. The tubby security chief climbs into the driver's seat. Bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones shepherds Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Fayed, son of Harrods boss Mohamed Al Fayed, into the back seats. The bodyguard then takes position in the front passenger seat.

The destination for Diana and Dodi is Dodi's lavish apartment in a building belonging to his father on the rue Arsene-Houssaye overlooking the Avenue des Champs Elysees. The most direct route from the hotel to the apartment would be along the one-way rue Cambon onto the rue de Rivoli, across the Place de la Concorde and up the Champs Elysees.

At the traffic lights near the Crillon Hotel, Henri Paul turns left onto the Place de la Concorde. However, instead of turning right onto the Champs Elysees, he continues on the Place de la Concorde and, having gone through a red light, he right turns the Mercedes onto the Cours la Reine, which is a dual carriageway.

12.23 am. There are a number of tunnels on this dual carriageway. The Mercedes has reached the Pont l'Alma tunnel, close to the Place de l'Alma. A speed camera, set in the tunnel roof, photographs the Mercedes showing Henri Paul looking normal with Trevor Rees-Jones alongside him. Diana and Dodi are in the back seats, their seat belts unbuckled. They appear to be in a happy mood. It will be their last happy moments.

Suddenly, Henri Paul swerves the car violently to the left. The Mercedes S280 runs headlong into the thirteenth concrete pillar in the central reservation.

Dodi and Henri Paul are killed outright. Diana, Princess of Wales, will die from her injuries. Trevor Rees-Jones is the only survivor, knocked unconscious and with serious facial injuries.

1.41 am. Diana is taken to the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital on the Left Bank beyond the Cathedral de Notre Dame and next to the Gare d'Austerlitz. Diana is carried into the Pavilion Cordier which houses the Accident and Emergency Department.

4.00 am. Diana is pronounced dead. Where the IRA Provos had failed someone had succeeded, someone closer to home.

T. N. Warne, Head of the Blue Brigade, and Marcias, Deputy Head of the Blue Brigade, had long since been dead by the time of these events in Paris in August 1997. The new joint leaders of the Blue Brigade, Al Dempsey and Ben Brogan, had sent “Tough” Tony Molloy to Paris at the time of these events because they still wanted to monitor the safety of Diana, Princess of Wales.

Molloy’s report to them was that he believed that the Princess had been murdered, but he could not prove by whom. Molloy himself was shot dead in a shooting accident the following year. The Blue Brigade considered that Molloy had been murdered. It does not take kindly to one of its own being murdered. Someone would pay for that, eventually, twice over.

Two years later two senior members of MI6 were both found dead in their London apartments in the same week. Faceless men in grey suits, the tools of the Establishment. Suicides, it was decided, from overdoses of drugs brought on by the pressures of work and responsibilities.

Yet again, a year later on a dark and misty night in Washington DC close to the Lincoln Memorial two men, alleged to be agents of the CIA, were found brutally shot and killed. The killers were never found. The CIA had a good idea who they were, but never proceeded with the case.

It was year’s later when Fink McDo, an astute senior member of the Blue Brigade and sometimes referred to as the thinking man’s killer, came up with the idea that the Mafia had been behind the deaths of Princess Diana, Dodi Fayed and “Tough” Tony Molloy and that Dodi Fayed had been their target and not Princess Diana.

When news came through that some prominent members of the Mafia had been massacred and that the killings had been attributed to personal rivalries with the Corsican Union, this simply produced a gentle smile from McDo. Molloy had finally been avenged.

Officially the Blue Brigade has lost interest in the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. But those close to the Blue Brigade know that it never loses interest. Its strength has always been its infiltrators, who remain dormant, sometimes for years, until needed. They infiltrate everywhere, even into the echelons of MI5 and MI6. There will be more Makepeaces.