

AFTER EGERIA

DEATH NOTICE

Eleanor Evgenia Maximovna Schablikine, noted in Russian expatriate circles as a tireless crusader against autocratic tyranny, died last night in her London townhome of unspecified causes. Mme. Schablikine, long resident in Geneva, was the widow of Kuzma Kuzmich Schablikine, Adjutant General to his late majesty Czar Alexander II. While in Geneva, Mme. Schablikine supported the cause of Peter Ivanovitch Ziemansky, the famous feminist and former political prisoner who chronicled his difficult escape in his award-winning memoir, "Woman Amid the Firs: A Russian Man Acknowledges the Stronger Sex."

"She advised me in all things," Mr. Ziemansky told a reporter. "A woman from a mythological time, a counselor worthy of a Roman emperor. She was my Egeria."

Mme. Schablikine will be interred in the Russian section of Highgate cemetery.

Chapter 1

He was not optimistic about Russia. Assistant Commissioner Adrian Carr considered who had come out in the rain for Madame's funeral. This loose group of emigres, huddling under umbrellas, had like undernourished monks yoked themselves to a faith they were not strong enough to defend.

The autocracy in power was if anything worse. That bloody row before the Winter Palace — only four months ago — and the shooting of priests in the street, struck Carr as poor ways of handling insurgents.

He was under a tree in dark shade as befits a policeman. There was activity at the pit; they were burying her, at last. The Orthodox funeral rites were complex, and took time. The coffin slipped its ropes and descended to the bottom of the grave, where it blew up.

Carr leaped in one breath to the hole in the ground, now much bigger. A dead man, a grave digger, lay in his path, and Carr detoured around the odd-looking form, odd in that the grizzled head lay next to the neck rather than on it. The coffin itself in the process of disintegration had taken its occupant with it, and a crepitated forearm here, a curl or two of black wig there, showered over the cluster of hats and umbrellas. No blood flowed; she had been dead for a week. In the scrum he locked eyes with his colleague, Chief Inspector Heat, red and shouting and glaring at Carr as if somehow he were responsible. An Orthodox priest, on his knees, prayed in loud Russian and beat his breast. Peter Ivanovich Ziemenetsky, an intimate friend of the dead woman, stood black-clad at his full height of six foot five, quivering like a statue that was tipped but did not fall. Shrieks, clamor, an acrid smell like burning excrement.

Who blows up a corpse? Who blows up a corpse at its own funeral?

The Swiss alienist lit a Turkish cigarette. “And is that even a crime?” asked Carr’s friend, Dr. Frung. “You cannot murder what is already dead.”

Adrian Carr, lounging in a rounded armchair, contemplated portraits of past worthies on the wall. They’d had a late lunch at his club. The dining room was almost empty. “That grave digger wasn’t dead. Before the bomb went off, that is.”

“*Ach*, no. Forgive me.”

“Twenty-five years on the job. Now I suppose he’ll be planted at Highgate himself.”

“What about the great Peter? Is he in good health? You said he fainted at the scene.”

Carr stifled a groan. “*Her insight was so great as to be monumental! To liberate the Russian people was our unending and consummate goal!*” Peter Ivanovich, long face streaked with dirt and mud, his black beard wet with tears, quivered and vibrated in the air. At that point Inspector Heat had stepped up, holding in his handkerchief part of a toothless lower jaw still attached to a scrap of rouged cheek, and at the sight Peter Ivanovich like a felled tree plunged face forward into the turf. “I don’t doubt that was contrived. The man enjoys dramatic gestures.”

“You dislike him immensely.”

Adrian Carr shook his sleek head. He was forty-one years old. Glints of silver shivered through his black hair, neatly parted above a high forehead.. “I wouldn’t put it as strongly as that. Although I admit, I have questioned his narrative all along.”

“It is a remarkable story.”

“A story indeed. One does not — walk — out of Siberia. And the details. Walking naked through thorns, dragging his chains, eating spruce needles — and then staggering at his last breath into the humblest of farmsteads at the very edge of the forest. Convenient — a man is

there who has a forge, and tools. He cuts his chains. Convenient — a brave and beautiful young woman of the people feeds him, nurses him, even — bathes— him. Seems a bit sensational, doesn't it? Rather made-for-the-stage, don't you think?"

Frung smiled, a blond-bearded Buddha. "His escape is a fact. After all, they went looking for him. As for his rescue, whatever happened he is now a great feminist."

"So I am told."

"Why did they leave Geneva anyway? This Peter and the late Madame."

"I believe it was poor health. Hers." Outside the sky was darkening, clouds gone from gray to lurid violet in slanting light. "She owned that house in Bloomsbury. They came here when she started failing. It was a place to go."

"Why did you go to her funeral? With Heat, no less."

Carr hadn't liked the question. He took his time answering, drawling out his words longer than usual. "Heat is — my cross to bear. His idea was sound — in principle. All the anarchists and such in London in one place, I suppose Heat thought they would get up to something and then he could haul a few wagonloads off, couldn't he. And look good in the papers."

"Most unsavory."

"Most typical. Managing Heat is an ongoing task."

"But they did get, as you say, up to something." Frung made a fan of his hands, blew air out his mouth with a whoosh. "Poof!"

"Not our old lot. Doddering, most of them. Since we arrested Thomas Arbuthnot — you remember, the bomb maker — not a peep from his cohorts." A gust of laughter reached him from the billiard room. Carr averted his head. "In this case, I gather we were lucky there was only one fatality."

“One is enough, for one family.”

They sat there, staring past each other’s shoulders. A moment’s silence for the grave digger. Igor Fitch: Carr remembered his name.

“I think you view the great Peter as a suspect.” Frung shook off the silence first.

“I would like him to be.” Carr seldom grinned, but when he did he had a look Annie called *wolfish*. *Stop doing that, Adrian, you look as if blood should be pouring out between your teeth*. “He’s living proof that fraud can grow to great heights. He’s quite capable of masterminding some sort of plot.”

“But perhaps not to carry it out?”

Carr’s face resumed its usual look, thoughtful, alert. “One wonders,” he said.

Inspector Heat had gone straight to the press, the bloody jaw still in his pocket. With a flourish he displayed it to reporters, already gathered outside headquarters like flies on dung. “Here — here you see the evidence, of what this bomb has done. I assure you the public is completely safe.”

“Inspector Heat, but why blow up a corpse?”

“Inspector Heat, why the bomb in the coffin?”

“Inspector Heat, why blow up someone who’s already dead?”

“Inspector Heat, is this another anarchist conspiracy?”

“Inspector Heat has concluded. Our investigation is ongoing. Come.” With a firm grip on the other’s fleshy arm, Adrian Carr took hold of Heat and steered him rather forcibly away from the Fourth Estate. “You are doing it again,” he muttered between clenched teeth. “You can’t just seize on evidence like that and *pocket* it. Haven’t we been through that sort of thing? Before?”

They walked, heads down, hats slanted like eagles' beaks, along octagonal gray concrete pavers littered with fresh green shoots, victims of recent sharp winds.

"Sir," said Heat, short and abrupt as always. "Sir, I have been told, sir. I have what's called the popular touch. My impression has always been that I, I have a rapport of some kind. With the press."

"Give me the evidence, Heat."

With the sigh of the unfairly treated, Heat brought out the offending jaw and skin. A stray strand of black wig hair clung to its underside.

"I'll take that, thank you." Adrian Carr stopped, unlatched his slim leather portfolio, took out the day's newspaper and wrapped the mess in it. "Jorgenson's lot should have picked up the rest. Shall we go put your scrap where it belongs?"

Chapter 2

Jorgenson, who ran the Evidence Room, bent over a box of splinters and shards. All body parts were safely in the morgue. “Amateur job. Old-fashioned. Miracle it went off at all.”

“Why amateur?” asked Heat, just as Carr was asking, “Why old-fashioned?”

Under harsh electric light Jorgenson had the aspect of a restless ghost, a wraith out of northern mythology. Years along the coast and in the shallows of the Java seas had dug deep furrows in his narrow face. He squinted, as if against a tropic sun, ignoring the spectacles that dangled on a cord around his neck. He spoke in monotones, possessed no gestures, was harsh and blunt, and preferred dealing with the inanimate. “Bat guano. They used that to make the gunpowder. Whole islands of guano out in the South Pacific.”

“Was it imported, then?”

“No need. The stuff collects in caves right here. In Torquay, say. Or Yorkshire.” He sniffed. “Can’t miss that smell. They sell it for fertilizer.” Jorgenson, swift-handed, sorted parts and stacked some. “Like this. Easy to build. Went off on contact. Put in a timer too. See that spring? That’s from a watch. The pulp they used was newsprint.” He placed his splayed thumb on a scrap. “Some sort of trashy newsprint. Nicked from the bin most probably.”

Carr peered at the burnt shreds. “Good God, that’s the *Torch*. That revolutionary nonsense.”

“Ah-ha,” said Heat, smug smile spreading across his well-fleshed face. “The gang from the Verloc case. I could have told you, sir.”

“What gang.” Adrian Carr shoved the evidence box an inch or two closer to Jorgenson, farther from the Inspector’s hands. “We arrested the Professor. Thomas Arbuthnot’s in prison, for the rest of his days. Who’s making their bombs in that case?”

“Maybe,” Heat began, but Jorgenson cut him off.

“This isn’t an Arbuthnot bomb. Not half the strength. I know. Just ask me.” He spluttered a bit, through missing teeth under his yellowing white mustache. He was said to have blown up a score of Dyak tribesmen and their praus, in connection with some botched uprising off the coast of Borneo, back in the seventies. Asked about family, all he would say was, “The girl died.” Even among the Special Branch, selected in part for their closed-mouthedness, Jorgenson was the least forthcoming of men. “I know explosives. Detonation on contact. Not reliable.”

“How so?” Carr asked.

“Look. A baby could see this.” He pointed to charred iron bits curled and mottled like orange peel. “They used two frying pans, wired together. Flat package, see? Fits in the coffin. That inch of skin you brought me, in the newspaper? Still had bits of hair on it.”

“Wig,” said Heat.

“Doesn’t matter. Bomb went under the head of the corpse. Coffin drops to ground — because they just let it fall, don’t they? — detonator goes off, inside the box. Contact. That’s how the fellow got the bomb into the coffin, set the timer, without blowing up himself. Lay it down nice and gently — nothing. What you need — what they had here — was strong, hard contact, a heavy object falling to a solid surface. Bam.” Jorgensen slapped his spotted palm on the counter. The box jumped. “Still amateur, though. What if the ground had been wet? We’re in bloody England, pardon my French. Could have been frozen too. Spring’s late. Froze just last week.” He studied a screw bent at the head, held between his thumb and middle finger. The forefinger was missing. “Whoever did this didn’t have half a brain. Too many things could go wrong.”

“Something did go wrong. Someone died. One of the gravediggers.”

“Worse luck for him,” muttered truculent Jorgenson.

Heat shook his head. His jowls shook too. “Full of human kindness, aren’t you, Jorgo.”

“The name is Jorgensen. Why should I care a damn? Nobody cares for me.”

Adrian Carr took a step back. Behind the misanthropic expert loomed rows of shelves, crammed with packages tied with thick ribbons. Numbers were stamped on every one, numbers denoting the past few years. Zero one, zero two. Zero three and four. Behind the shelves, a rogue sunbeam or two made their way past grimy windows. “Whoever — placed — this, this old-fashioned bomb, as you say, Jorgenson — had to have access to the coffin at some time before the funeral. Who’s been seen at Highgate, the last few days? Who would know?”

“Cemetery director.” Heat shuffled his feet. “Except man’s been away this week. Wife in hospital, very bad. Touch and go. Left the gravediggers in charge.”

“Any progress on the second man? The one who wasn’t killed?”

“No one even knows his name.” The Inspector heaved a sigh. “He wasn’t an official employee. Worked for day wages. No records. Completely scarpered, sir.”

“Smart fellow.” Jorgenson, spectacles on, searched his table. “Maybe did it himself. Ah, here’s my stamp.”

While Jorgenson, skeletal frame lost in his worn but clean uniform, took great care affixing the numbers “O5” on the box, Carr recalled the funeral attendees. Mostly Russian. Crackpots, revolutionaries, beneficiaries of the late Madame’s eccentric generosity. The London anarchists he knew had been quiet for some time, the arrest of their favorite bomb maker having fairly quashed their activities.

“There is one thing,” said Jorgensen. He was sniffing at a piece of metal. “Funny smell here. Not the guano. Onions, maybe. Maybe not.”

Heat blew out air through pursed lips. "It's a frying pan. That's what we use them for."

Jorgenson ignored him. "Two iron pans here. But no handles, never had 'em. Not of English manufacture." He held up the fragment, turned it this way and that, before fetching from a drawer a small magnifying glass. Under the gooseneck lamp on his counter, he brought his pale blue eye up to the glass, stared, muttered, sniffed, laid the glass down. Using his thumbnail, he flicked a mote of something burnt loose from the iron. "That's a spot of green. A vegetable."

"Onion, I dare say."

"Not onion, Inspector. Not grown in England. And there's cheese on it too. Not English cheese."

Heat's patience was worn through. "Come now, Jorgenson. You've been reading Conan Doyle."

"Don't know him. Just ask me. I know." Meeting Carr's eyes but ignoring Heat, Jorgenson replaced his glass, taking from the same drawer a minute set of tweezers and an envelope. The scrap secured, Jorgenson inscribed the date, the case number (no one else knew what it was), and the words "Bombing, Highgate" on the envelope's face. Carr admired his precision, while Heat heaved a mixed assortment of aggrieved sighs. "We've got a microscope. I'll use it. Close detail. It could matter."

"Please do so, Jorgenson." To Heat, he said, "I want more talk with Peter Ivanovitch, I believe he's staying at the house in Bloomsbury's, the late Madame's. And check into that lady's will, could you please? Her solicitor is — " He pulled a card from his pocket, gave it to Heat, and then, digging further, brought out his timepiece on its chain. "I have to go home now. My wife — you know."

“How is Mrs. Carr, sir?” To Jorgenson, Heat remarked, “Did you know our Assistant Commissioner is about to become a father? Two months, isn’t it?”

Jorgenson spat, into a wastebasket. “More people. Just what the world don’t need.”

Annie Branch Carr, her fair and dimpled face all smiles, turned to her maid. “Conner, please serve the Commissioner his dinner. In the library.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“And, I must tell you, Conner, when you do dust those old books, be sure you sweep up what comes out, quick-quick. There may well be dead insects in there.” She made a humorous face, clownish disgust, and they both laughed. Broad-beamed Conner, still tittering, left in a flutter of apron, and Annie looked for the first time at her husband. The clown was gone, the disgust lingered on. “Death and dismemberment! That’s your stock in trade. I hope you enjoyed the funeral, after the bomb, that is.”

“It was at least memorable. As a rule, the corpse stays in the coffin.” He threw himself onto a sofa, displacing a pillow, making the leather crack. For all his slimness, he moved and walked with a heavy tread. “Let’s leave that alone. How go your searches?”

“Ugh. Dreadful. Wet nurses are thin on the ground this year.”

“Oh now, shouldn’t that one be hired last?”

“Do you presume to interfere? Whose child is this anyway?” Before he could reply, she took the upholstered divan, carefully descending with her seven-month belly before her like a stack of pillows. “Forgive me, Adrian. I was sick this morning. I don’t expect you even knew that, you were gone before dawn.” With impatient hands, she pushed away a pile of rumpled

notes, scattered across the small table between them. “The procedure is all so wretched dull. Finding a suitable nanny was hard enough, and then — those — other women — ”

“Midwives?”

“Horrid word, please don’t say it.”

“Annie, humans have given birth since Eve, longer if you agree with Darwin. Many women, I would say even most, are delighted at the prospect. They enjoy the preparations. Has the doctor been to see you?”

“Not today, thankfully. Such an odd, twisted lump of a man, although he does seem skilled. Is he Irish?”

“I’ve no idea. He is Dr. Frung’s friend, and you accepted him right at the start.”

“I was half mad at the time! And where were you? Closeted with ancient Ethelred, or scouring the gutter for more criminals to hang?” She took a slice of cake from the tea tray, paused, reflected, took another. “Cook has always done well with her sponges, but recently I find them irresistible. You were saying?”

“Annie, I was saying nothing. Dr. Monygham is more than skilled, in his field he’s in the van, far ahead of most others. That scrupulous hand-washing, for example.”

“Too true. His fingertips are always damp.” She shuddered.

Adrian Carr wished himself far away, so very far away, in fact, the world in his vision sprouted palms and spreading banyans. Air there, already thick, began expanding in hot weather, it did not go whizzing past one like an English wind, it sauntered along and lodged on one’s shoulders and bore the breath of fennel seeds. He had begged Sir Ethelred, Home Secretary, for a posting back to India.

“Toodles was here.” Annie wiped a dab of icing from her upper lip. “He brought a young lady along this time, a most interesting girl.”

“Not an actress?”

“Spare me your assumptions. My young cousin is a *bon vivant*, but not a fool. He wouldn’t dare bring that sort of— creature— to our house. No, this one has a father in Parliament.”

The social habits of Sir Ethelred’s private secretary (unpaid) mattered as much to him as the hoots of the pigeons on the window ledge outside. Indiscretion, however, had a way of wrecking promising young men, and Carr felt an obligation to this one, the son of his wife’s favorite aunt. His marriage entailed much attention to her relatives. “Go on, identify the MP. You were going to anyway.”

Annie expanded, brightening all at once like a phosphorus flame. Pulling her silk shawl over her belly, grasping and releasing her blonde curls in that habit she had, she turned the merry smile he loved in his direction, for a change. “The Tory whip, Sir Alex Harbison. Four daughters, and Janet’s his eldest. Beautiful girl, too, she could be Toodles’ sister. He seems quite infatuated.”

Carr had seen the girl, but felt no need to mention it. “Toodles is easily infatuated. How many broken engagements so far? Six?”

“Oh Adrian, I don’t think there have been more than four. No, what makes Janet interesting is her politics.” Annie sat up suddenly, and with a grunt he did the same. “There, you see, now you’re paying attention. She’s a radical Red, and a suffragette. Look at the book she brought me!”

Adrian Carr recognized the gaudy cover, blood red, dead white, coarse black. Annie waved the volume before his face like a torch in the dark. “Oh no. Not Ziemansky. My dear, you can’t have that.”

“But she brought it for *me*. And it’s too late, I’ve already started.” In gleeful tones, she began to declaim, moving her finger along the opened page. ““Women are our race’s conscience. The hand that rocks the cradle, darns the sock, places the roast upon the table, can and must do more to inspire and uplift the stronger sex. Give them the vote, and watch them lead us from the sordid workings of our grim and heartless times into the softer, greener, pastures of forgiveness and a greater Love.’ What’s wrong with that? I think they’re beautiful sentiments.”

“Annie. He’s of interest in this case. Heat and I plan on visiting him, in the morning. It’s not — appropriate. It isn’t wise — to have that book in our house, don’t you see why?”

“No, I don’t. Peter Ivanovitch has enthralled the whole world. Are you trying to upset me, Adrian? Shock me into losing this baby? Or perhaps I’ll give birth to a monster. Would you like that?”

The sky split open and thunder cracked, a peal so loud it would make the front page the next day, and Annie screamed. He spent eight minutes, by the clock, soothing her. In the process, he put his hands upon *Woman Amid the Firs*, thinking to bury it under a pillow, but she grasped the sensational cover and would not let go. Carr decided to surrender. His personal pride and vanity, and fear, did not overrule the laws of the land he was sworn to uphold. Peter Ivanovitch had been accused of no crime. The wife of the Assistant Commissioner was free to own and read whatever book she chose. Still, the thought of this mental karait under his roof, this small poisonous snake of bound words, set his teeth on edge.

He went upstairs, shed his jacket and tie, completed other rituals such as the loosening of collar and the taking-off of shoes. In slippers and Indian dressing gown, he went downstairs for the rest of the evening. "I'll have a gin and lime," he told Conner. He refused to have a man servant, valet, butler, anything of the sort. He was secretive by nature. He decided tonight he would be kinder to Annie. He made the same decision every night.

Chapter 3

Madame Eleanor Maximovna Schablikine, while she lived, inhabited a house of camel-colored brick on the edge of the artistic district. Inside, the place suggested parsimony and indifference. Scant furnishings, boxes in corners, most surfaces bare but not all. Carr tapped his umbrella against a cobwebbed wall and shot a quizzical look at the current resident, who stood next to him.

“Those photographs are sacred,” came the *basso* reply. “They were sacred to Madame.”

“They’re all of explosions.”

Inspector Heat, balding head at an angle, examined the curtains on the far side of the dining room. A trio of shrouded candelabras drooped over a canvas-covered table. Carr counted twelve chairs, also veiled, while Peter Ivanovich Ziemensky coughed and sniffed. Carr added, “Bombings, actually.” He waved his umbrella to take in the whole wall. “Assassinations. And of prominent people. And political in nature.”

Peter Ivanovitch rumbled into speech. “Those, what you are looking at with so prejudiced an eye, those photographs depict in fact what we would call stepping stones on the road to a far better world.”

Carr came closer, saw something familiar in one of the photos. “Hm, that’s the assassination of DeP—, isn’t it? A year or so ago in your home country?”

“A martyr gave his life to eliminate that deadly boil on the shoulder of the people.”

“He was turned in by someone he knew.” Carr caught the quick tremor that shook the great trunk, and added hastily, “Of course that’s just hearsay. But that is the way these things usually go. So your late patroness? Is that fair to say?”

“She was my friend. My inspiration. My Egeria. Which means — but I assume you’ve been to school?”

“I have.”

“British school. A rat’s nest of the indolent rich. And sexual deviants. I am no friend of the police,” said Peter Ivanovitch, pivoting as if a mechanism moved him, “but I feel I must inform. I can name you two possible suspects.”

“Two?”

“The first one is the instigator. A woman.”

“A woman?”

The bearded feminist nodded and glowered. His black hair, clearly dyed as had been his inspiration’s, ran back in small waves from a widow’s peak. His eyebrows would have furnished a lady’s muff. A curved scar, high on one cheek, stood out pale against the dark tan of his leathery skin. He was a great believer in outdoor exercise. His eyes were heavy-lidded and a goatish gray. His beard, also too black, spread in a fan across his immaculate linen.

“We, that is Madame and I, knew her in Geneva. She was the— companion,” the beard twisted in a sneer, “of a wretched young man from St. Petersburg. The less said of him, the better. After his death, she came *here*.” His tone suggested outrage, as if he blamed Britain for the woman’s immigration. “She came here, and used her wiles to get around Madame. I was too kind to her.”

Carr looked for a place to sit down, found none, drifted out to the corridor with Peter Ivanovich on his heels. Heat came after, upright and bustling. In a parlor there were unmasked chairs of dull red velvet. Carr took one, noticed its greasy strains. “You’d best tell me who she is.”

Ziemenetsky plumped his generous bottom onto a chaise lounge, straining the fraying brocade. His long legs dangled over its edge. “Ah! Tekla! what was her last name? Something unsavory. Oh yes. Katz.” The legs twitched. “She was Madame’s companion at first, a *dame de chambre*. In Geneva, and before. But ultimately it did not suit.”

“A companion. Not exactly a servant then. Was she dismissed?”

“No.” The word came out with a snarl. “She was not. *Au contraire*. She ran off like a thief in the middle of the night. And not alone.”

“Ah yes.” Carr stirred. He had been slumping. His shoulders rose. “The companion’s companion. Who was he?”

“A nobody. A nothing. A disgraced former student, illegitimate son of a prince. Razumov. That was his legal name.”

Heat, perhaps not accidentally, elbowed a pile of papers on a spindly desk. They fell, and he took his time picking them up.

Despite his mistrust of the informant— of all informants— Carr was intrigued. “The son of a prince? Was he acknowledged?”

“Acknowledged?” Peter Ivanovitch jerked his head back as against an invisible garrote. “In a way. Prince K., another wart on the face of my country, left Razumov an inheritance. Tekla produced a cheap ring and a certificate, claimed they’d been married. The funds — and they were not trifling, and could have been put to a much better use — went to her. Madame was in difficult straits. The — Katz — loaned her money, her sort always do, you know. She — in short, she became the owner of this house.”

“Is there a deed?”

The great feminist gave a reluctant nod.

“Where can I find — Miss Katz — Mrs. Razumov?”

“Highgate Cemetery. Too close to Madame, alas.”

“Then she is dead?”

“A year ago. Consumption, contracted no doubt from Razumov. That fiend.”

Carr ran his fingertips, in circles, against the nap of the flat red velvet. He saw no point in stating the obvious, namely that a woman dead a year ago could not be questioned. “Madame left no will. We’ve just learned that. If she was not the owner of this house, at the time of her death — ”

“But her desires were well-known, to me, to everybody in our circle. This house cannot go to the Crown. Madame would have detested that.”

A portrait of the dead Egeria leered — Carr could think of no other word — from the mantelpiece. The artist had not failed to paint her face as she had painted it in life. Her desires, indeed. “That’s for the solicitors to determine. You said two suspects. Tekla is dead. Who is the other?”

“An Englishman. He is well known to us. A despicable reactionary.” The thick, hairy fingers of Peter Ivanovitch insinuated themselves beneath the threads of the brocade, further shredding the fabric. “You, like all Westerners, cannot see through our eyes. I have other plans for this house. I would like to use it as a refuge. For beleaguered peasant girls. My goal is to redeem unlucky women, so that they may rise into equality with men.”

There was something in the way he drew back his lips when he said *women*. Carr dismissed the obvious thought as unfair, a Western prejudice seen through his Western eyes. “An ambitious aim. Who is the Englishman?”

“Pah! An insignificant old man. A meddler, a gossip, a dreadful old spreader of lies.”

“His name, please?”

“What does it matter? He is English. You will never arrest him.”

“Mr. Ziemansky, I do need his name.”

“I suggest you ask Sophia Antonovna, now Mermouliansky. She befriended him for unknown reasons.”

“And who is she? This Sophia?”

“The bell. Excuse me.” Heaving himself to his feet, Peter Ivanovitch swept with an elevated nose out of the room. A faint tinkling sounded from a back door.

Heat with a final shove and pat reassembled the stack he’d knocked onto the floor. He took one sheet off the top, snapping it up between finger and thumb like a thief snatching a banknote. “Found this, sir.”

Yellow, blue-printed, it looked like a bill. It was a bill, from Tolland & Sons, Purveyors to His Majesty Edward VII, Fine Jewelry & Accessories Since 1869. “I know Tolland. Annie’s ring came from there. Can you read this name at the top?”

The two of them — a great dab of butter and a slim spear of asparagus, a thought that reminded Carr he’d left the house without breakfast — bent over the invoice, which looked as if it had passed through several hands.

“Tonio — I believe that’s the first name, sir.”

“Looks to me more like — Raphael? Can’t be sure .”

With a sudden stamping that rattled the shelves, Peter Ivanovitch was back, red-faced and shouting. The invoice disappeared, into Heat’s pocket.

“You came here without a warrant! Did you not?”

“Why, no, we just came here to talk, didn’t we, Inspector?”

“That’s right, sir. Just a talk — and a little look around — ”

“You may not leave the room with anything you have found in it!” His fists clenched and unclenched. “I am the possessor here, Madame told me as much, and under no circumstances are you to take as much as a, a, scrap of paper from my house!” He turned on Heat an accusatory stare. To Carr’s momentary amazement Heat removed the jeweler’s invoice from his pocket, laid it on the nearest table, and backed away.

“Mr. Ziemansky, please calm yourself. Madame left no will, it’s a matter for the courts. As it stands now, this house is not yours. You are technically trespassing.” Coat already in hand (no one had taken it, he had simply placed it on the moth-eaten chair, it was clear there was no servant), Carr began drawing on his gloves. “We, on the other hand, are the law of the land. If, or rather when we return, we will certainly provide a warrant. Good day, sir. Come, Inspector.”

They let themselves out, but before they crossed the threshold the vocal organ of Peter Ivanovitch let fly one last missile. “The law! Your English law is a pustule on the forehead of the people!”

And Annie, his wife — his pregnant wife — was reading this imbecile’s book. On the pavement, Carr asked, “You didn’t really leave that slip behind, did you?”

“You know me, sir.” Proud of his devious ways, Heat drew Tolland & Sons’ bill from the depths of his capacious tweed. “I dropped an advertisement on his table, sir. Had it in my pocket. Used furniture for sale, Donkin’s of Davy Street. Whitechapel.” His friends called him Bill. Carr never did. He was a picture of fleshy contentment, almost Hogarthian Carr thought, the inverted *u* of his yolk-colored mustache rising and falling with his gurgling chuckles. “Here’s the Tolland invoice.”

With a tight grip, for the wind threatened to tear it away, Carr peered at the smudged writing. “Under the name — see there? — it says, ‘Care of Mme. E. M. Schablikine.’ Gives the address we just left. Who had things sent to her house, under her name? I’m off to see Sir Ethelred, but in the interim, please send for Constable Charlie. Tell him — ”

He gave rapid and terse instructions, Heat jotting them down in crabbed cursive. They were at the corner, where a careening butcher’s wagon threatened a great spray of filthy liquid, reminding Carr how much he hated the smell of wet wool. Jumping catlike back to the kerb, he swore. “Damn lot of carelessness these days. I’ll be in all afternoon.”

“Very well, sir.” Heat veered off, coat billowing like a sail.

Ancient Ethelred, indeed. The man was sixty-five at most. Mountainous almost to the point of immobility, Carr’s superior held court in his dim and close office, where velvet curtains the color of Irish lawns kept out the light so trying to the great man’s sensitive eyes.

“You’ll have your warrant,” he told Adrian Carr. “But not yet. I’ve other matters. So he was hostile, was he? Damn his hostility. I’ll have his bearded head, sensation though he is, if we find he was responsible for — for anything. Who blows up a coffin? What on earth does it mean?”

“Sir, that is what we’re trying to ascertain.”

“Glad you didn’t bring Heat. Watch him carefully, Carr. His Majesty’s government doesn’t care for the snatching of evidence.”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred.” He had the invoice in his pocket. “When do you anticipate the warrant will be ready, sir?”

“I’ll let you know. Don’t crowd me. Toodles will see to it. How is dear Annie, by the way? All sorted on that front?”

“For the time being, sir.”

“I’ve never had children.” The Home Secretary’s rheumy eyes lost focus for a moment. “Never had the time to marry. You are fortunate, Adrian. Aren’t you glad I didn’t send you back to India? Come, tell the truth.”

His work, his life, his wife — lose them all in one anguished cry? He could not tell the truth, not today. “Very glad, sir.”

Outside the private office, Toodles waylaid him. “I went to see Annie? She told you?”

“Yes?” Carr mocked the young man’s rising inflection, but Toodles was at that moment not susceptible to joshing. “Rather interesting company you’ve been keeping, so I hear.”

“Shh.” Tall, fair, sprightly and elastic — had anybody ever called him Theodore?— Toodles bent to put his lips at a level with Carr’s ear. “Annie swears you’re the soul of discretion.”

“I strive to be.”

“That’s good. Because Sir Ethelred must never know? Janet is not to be trifled with.”

“I have no intention of trifling.”

“Keep it that way. Listen, Adrian — may I call you Adrian? We are related after all — this Peter Igorovitch, or whatever his name is, Janet has it on good information that he’s, well, a bit of a bounder.”

“The great feminist?”

“Oh, he is, he has been, good for the movement, for the suffragettes I mean.”

Straightening up, Toodles adjusted the knot of his tie, which was already flawless. “But I’d watch him carefully if I were you. I can’t repeat the rumors. One doesn’t speak of such things.”

“What things?”

“Toodles? Where have you gotten to?”

The youth gave a positive start. “Oh no, he’s waxing rambunctious. I’d best go. Yes, Sir Ethelred! I’m right here.”

Carr, dodging the workmen installing a lift, clattered down the musty stairs. A smile flitted across his face. He was not accustomed to taking tips from avowed Socialists — poor Sir Alex! — but he was glad to know his instinctive strong aversion to the prisoner-turned-author might not be entirely groundless.

Chapter 4

At 4 Whitehall Place, he found Constable Charlie lurking in the corridor. "Lady in your office. Foreign type she seems. Said that Peter — what d'you call 'im — mentioned 'er to you. 'As to do with that Derry and Tom."

"The bomb, you mean?"

"Righto. Gravedigger's got 'is funeral tomorrow." Charlie, a "finished devil" as one said in India, had run away to sea at seventeen. At Carr's urging he had later joined the force, having been diverted from a promising career as a second-story man. "But, ah, my apologies, guv. Couldn't find the widow like you asked me. Should I go back?"

"No. We'll talk to her tomorrow. Thank you, Charlie. Here's your cigar." He shook a cheroot loose from its case. "You'd be better off eating than smoking. Have you had tiffin?"

"How's that, Guv?"

"Lunch, I mean lunch, Charlie. You look consumptive. Go get yourself a sausage roll."

Charlie, ducking his small round head, muttered thanks and strode off toward the stairwell. Carr glanced through the open door of his office, saw the outline of the person occupying his guest chair, and, clearing his throat, entered.

"You have seen today Peter Ivanovitch?"

The woman, dark-haired, with a frank, open face, spoke with an accent that was not completely Russian. She offered him her ungloved hand. "Assistant Commissioner of the police, I remember your face from the Verloc affair. Mr. — Cane?"

"Carr, Adrian Carr. And you are?"

Her smile was disarming. “Sofia Antonovna Mermouliansky. In London I go by Sophia Merle.”

“Ah. Yes, I saw him, Mr. Ziemanetsky, earlier this morning.” He settled into familiar discomfort, the better to study this unusual woman. She was not young, not old, occupying that misty middle ground between thirty-five and sixty. Her hat and dress were midnight blue; her black hair encompassed one streak of pure white. Her brows were black and arched. She wore no paint; the glow on her high cheekbones came from walking in cold air. Her generous lips bore a curl of amusement. A silver chain lay upon her open throat, and she fingered this from time to time. She was a piquant figure, plain-spoken, dignified, a strange thing to encounter amid the bulky furniture and pointless ornamentation of his office. Carr wondered where she’d sprung from. Had she been the ring at the back door?

“Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man. Many people wish him dead.”

“I see. Because — ?”

“There was bad blood at the end between him and Madame.”

“You would not think so to hear him.”

“He is somewhat given to exaggeration,” Sophia Merle allowed. “What has he told you? Besides mentioning my name.”

Carr saw the room as she saw it, as anyone might for the first time. Carpet the color of overcooked peas, tall windows dingy and dim, the great desk brooding in the middle like a stranded ship, mahogany as to her timbers, scrollwork rising up her sides. At times he felt as if the desk itself performed the work. He was just the hand holding the pen.

If the desk had a life of its own, the inkstand was its head and brain. From long acquaintance he knew every fluting in the brass, every crease in the bronzed oval centerpiece,

every way the light over the course of a day hit the crystalline bowls that served as inkwells. At night sometimes he'd close his eyes and see the inkstand, see it eight inches from his nose, see himself doing *puja* to it like a Hindu worshipper at a shrine. And sometimes, just before he fell asleep, those full round bowls would turn into his wife's breasts. Carr uncrossed his legs, which had been swinging in a languid way. "Ah — something about an Englishman?"

Merle nodded. "That would be Lawrence Penniman. He is a friend of mine. Fluent in Russian, among other languages. An innocent creature, I assure you."

"I would like to meet him."

"No doubt you will. Tomorrow, at the funeral. I will be there, and so will Lawrence Penniman. If you can spare the time, that is." She waved her hand to encompass the office.

"Someone in your position — no doubt you have responsibilities, right here."

There was something like amusement in her eyes. He was annoyed. He disliked being seen as a functionary, an accessory to the desk. The snakes' mouths of speaking tubes tied to his chair bit him in the small of the back. "Mrs. Merle." He stood up and went to the window, his back to her while he addressed the streaming panes. "I have no wish to be rude, but could you perhaps explain to me, what benefit there might have been to — anyone? In setting off a bomb at Madame's funeral? For placing it inside her coffin, at that? I've learned today that she died intestate. She had no heirs. Peter Ivanovich claims that she left him her house. It can't be proven."

"The house will come later. Mr. Carr, I believe Peter Ivanovitch was the target of that bomb."

"Why?"

“He had many enemies. People hostile to his work, his feminism. Others do not share his vision.”

“I see.” The wind was from the Rhine, and rough. Umbrellas on the street weaved back and forth. A trilby soared, descended to the gutter, rolled away from its owner who was trying to retrieve it. “Then it was rather a botched job, what? If someone were out to kill Peter Ivanovitch, why not place the device directly in his path? No. I believe this explosion may have been more of a — gesture. Perhaps intended as a provocation.” The window was inspiring him. He drew strength from unwallled places. “You’ve heard of the Greenwich attempt, of course. That was instigated by a foreign embassy, but we’ve cracked down, they’re toothless now.” He swerved back to face her, surprising a constrained look on her face that drew two small vertical lines between her eyes, before turning to the dismal view again. “Now who would profit from what happened here? Your movement? The poor gravedigger died — and he was a bona fide member of the proletariat whose welfare, of course, is your movement’s *raison d’etre*. Wasted effort in that case.” Leaving the window, he flung himself into his chair and faced her. She had lost the worried look. A tight smile strained her lips. “Peter Ivanovitch himself? Why not create a bombing incident? His book sales may be flagging. To keep his name before the public eye — he may well have been inspired, based on his own self-interest.” Elbows balanced on the desk, he propped up his chin with laced fingers and returned the smile. “Are all of us not capable of doing the surprising thing?”

Sophia Merle shook her head, as if to shake his words loose. “Not him. Peter Ivanovitch — no, no. No — to risk physical danger — you are slandering the man.”

“Not him? Then perhaps somebody else would like to split your movement. Mme. Schablikine’s place is vacant. Who will fill that void?”

They stared at each other. She folded her hands in her lap and gave a tinkling, brittle laugh, a sound that clashed with her solid appearance. “You are quite perceptive, Commissioner. How is it you became a policeman? I have been to the library, read up on you. Trinity College, and your grandfather a lord — these are hardly typical in your department.”

Carr did not like to talk about his family. He liked making enemies less, however, and silence would strike the wrong note altogether. As would changing the subject. “No doubt you’ve heard, then, of my grandfather’s murder.”

“I have. Stabbed in the road by one of his tenants, not so?”

“The fellow was mad. Stabbed the horse, too.”

“How dreadful.”

“Yes.”

It had been, in truth. That kind old man, dark and bearded and thin, who’d taught his grandson six-pack bezique and the art of disguise — that man, Alistair Carr, son of Absalom, at the young age of seventy-two met Banquo’s fate. *Aye, in a ditch he bides, with twenty trenchéd gashes in his head.* Unlike Banquo, to Carr’s ongoing sorrow his Granddad stayed dead.

“I came down from university. Took rather a — keen interest. In fact I’m afraid I made something of a pest of myself, at police headquarters. The local superintendent — close friends with Lord Woolwick, my grandfather saw no distinctions— suggested I try India. Policing there was in its infancy.” He slapped his desk. “Since then I have been — fortunate enough — to find myself sitting, today, in this chair.”

“An aristocrat in service to the people, then.”

“I wouldn’t call myself that.”

“You’re too modest, Mr. Carr.”

She'd nicked him in a tender place. Carr despised pomposity and egotism. His self-effacement was a well-deep source of pride. Now he'd sounded off like a braggart. "Let's return to Peter Ivanovitch. You implied he had enemies. Can you name any? He was quite incensed over your Mr. Penniman."

That laugh again. Like falling glass, a warning of imminent disaster. "I assure you, Lawrence Penniman is the most innocent of men."

"And Tekla Katz. What can you tell me about her?"

"Ah," said Sophia Merle. To Carr's surprise she took out a cigarette, lighting it herself. Women who smoked — but then, she was unusual. "A sad business. Madame was cruel to Tekla, but quite fond of her paramour, Razumov. She never would believe that he'd betrayed the movement, even after his public confession. She and Peter Ivanovitch would row, is that the word? About Kirylo, that was his Christian name."

"And he is dead?"

"Hit by a streetcar." Her quick, short cough sounded almost like a chuckle. "They had to scrape him off the tracks."

Revolutionaries: a strange breed. This woman, polished, urbane, her intelligence clearly above the norm, spoke of gruesome death as if discussing a missed meal. He resisted the urge to light his own cigar. "Ah. Peter Ivanovitch is a sensation. Some sectors of the public have been incensed, of course — but would a stranger have chosen these methods? Gone to these lengths? Far simpler to shoot the man, I would think."

"What do you believe, Mr. Carr? If I may ask."

"You may. But as I am a policeman, Mrs. Merle, you understand of course I cannot answer."

When she had gone, Adrian Carr lit the cigar. Rising from his chair, he went to the window, and with some effort forced it open six full inches. Peter Ivanovitch was not uninvolved with the bomb in the coffin, he was sure of this, but as to victim vs. perpetrator, he might have been either one. He was equally convinced no casual crank, no run-of-the-mill London madman, orchestrated the events at Madame Schablikine's funeral. The Geneva set was in it, up to their jeweled and bearded necks. Who else would care?

Below him on the street, one omnibus went west, the other east. A motorcar belched smoke, its horn bleating, goatish. He spoke two words, out loud. "A bounder." If the man had *amours* — very well. If — but the thought was too fantastic. One would have to possess far greater courage than Peter Ivanovitch had shown, once the chains on his legs were removed. Also, a business requires a manager, usually someone who knows what a business is. That person was not Peter Ivanovitch. Carr decided he was conjuring, not seeing, and dismissed the thought.

Chapter 5

England was far from perfect, but some things were being done. Private cemeteries, for example. Adelaide Atherwell Carr, his father's mother, lay buried in a churchyard so crowded with monuments, the family fielded the maze in single file. He had heard his parents talking in hushed tones of rabble who dug up the churchyard dead and sold them to medical students. From a newspaper, read on a train on the way to school, he learned of thieves smashing disinterred coffins and selling the wood, the lead, the metal.

Carr in the mid-morning walked in glaucous mist, at Highgate. In U__ Province he had walked the garden of the local Nabob, who by decree and with no expense spared had transformed sun-cracked scrub into something like an English park (the oaks soon died, however). Francis — Thomas? Tompkin? — he'd designed Highgate, put a park where marsh and swampland used to be, and the oaks thrived. Carr wondered if the principals of the General Cemetery Company ever chuckled into their beards over the fact that, within this new and gleaming tribute to the power of private capital, the best-known grave was of a man who'd advocated their destruction, in the name of ideology. Marx's grave was in a side lane, but since the philosopher's death over twenty years ago devotees had flocked there by the score. They were still coming, as the morning advanced, and they were recognizable in draggled gowns and hats turned green by mold. It was time for the gravedigger's funeral.

Inspector Heat — would he look at home anywhere? Was there anyplace in the vast green-gray city where this big man in the bowler hat pulled down so low, all one could see of his face were bristling nostrils and the corn-tassel mustache, could stand at his ease and not be an obvious, an unmistakeable, an instantly recognizable even to a dull child, really, plainclothes

detective of police? Heat in uniform would be a redundancy. They greeted each other at the bottom of a sloping path.

“I’d not have believed it, sir.”

“Believed what?”

“You and me. Here. Second time in as many weeks.”

“Sad business, Heat. Is that the widow?”

“Speaking to that man there, yes. Children here too.”

A beech grove, a skeletal pine or two, rhododendrons with their odd pineapple-shaped buds, a heap of turf newly dug up. Behind a woman — young and stout, white-blonde hair, uttering rhythmical, wheezing sobs by the side of the pit as the coffin began its descent — a straw-hatted girl around ten held a baby and talked to it, keeping her own features hidden. Next to her stood a boy of perhaps five, looking around him with a face in which staring incomprehension was transforming moment by moment into an agony of understanding. That was his father in the box. The box was going in the ground. That was his father. He was not coming out. It occurred to Carr that in a few months he too would be somebody’s father.

The shoveling commenced. After a while, Carr asked, “So was this fellow — Igor Fitch? — born in Russia? Or here?”

“Within sound of Bow Bells, sir. Mother was Russian, a laundress to one of their counts, he came here with his retinue. She ran off, met the father — Ronald Fitch, also a gravedigger — had two children with him before he died. Fell into an open grave while worse for liquor one night, and in the morning they filled him in.” Heat’s sandy eyelids twitched. “Now here’s his son, working same job, same place, and there’s a madman plants a bomb inside a coffin, and he

gets his head, ah, forcibly detached. What's the word, sir, when something's unexpected but it still seems right?"

"Ironical."

"Ironical, that's it. Do you know that woman, sir, standing next to that white-haired gent? She seems to know you."

Carr, who had been looking down at the gravesite, followed Heat's backward shrug. Close to an arching bridge crossing a rill, on a curving bench sat a man and a woman. Under a broad-brimmed red hat with a flopping black feather, the woman cocked her head to one side and waved at Carr. "Ah. Mrs. Merle. We've met. Rather an interesting person. She may be useful, Heat. The older fellow, with the great cloud of white hair, I believe he's an Englishman."

Heat shook his head. "Can't judge by appearances, sir."

"No. But I've advance notice in this case."

The formalities over — the widow, still heaving dry sobs, led away by her daughter, the son lingering behind and needing to be called before he screwed his eyes tight, shook himself, and ran away from the place where his father now lay, covered up — Carr and Heat walked down to the bridge, where Sophia Merle with a most unfunereal smile and a steady hand under her companion's elbow guided him toward the two policemen. "Mr. Carr! Are you enjoying this fine weather? And of course this must be —"

"Chief Inspector Heat, Mrs. Sophia Merle."

"And my name is Lawrence Penniman." The white-haired man spoke for the first time. As Carr had predicted, he was as English as the turf on which they stood and had clearly attended some storied spired college. Penniman offered him a gloved hand. "Mrs. Merle and I are old friends. From Geneva days."

The hand Carr grasped had a tremor, the glove was of the finest fawn but had seen better days. “Ah — Geneva. So you are also a, that is, you are in sympathy with her — ideas?”

“Oh, who, me? Oh, no no no.” Penniman looked as if he’d just been called a rude name. “Oh, not at all, no, I, never. No, my profession is that of a teacher of languages. In Geneva there were many seeking to learn English, from all nations.” He grimaced, whether in pain or at a memory Carr could not tell. “We met through mutual friends. All dead now. Or might as well be.”

Carr drew closer to the worried, bony, face of the language instructor. Sophia Merle, distracted, chatted with a bystander. “Perhaps we might discuss the — shameful — business at Madame Schablikine’s grave.”

Lawrence Penniman shuffled his feet, thrust his hands in his pockets, pulled them out again and knotted them behind his back. “You’d better ask Mrs. Merle.”

As if summoned, that lady reappeared, resuming her grip on Penniman’s elbow. “This is impromptu, but then so is life, I have found. May I ask you to come to luncheon with us, at my house? It isn’t far. There is so much you have to hear. It will be modest of course as I am not a woman of means, but please. There we can talk.”

“Ah — one moment. Inspector Heat?”

When he’d drawn Heat aside, Carr told him rapidly, in a low voice, “Go talk to the widow. Charlie missed her earlier. Did she know the other grave digger, anything about him, has he been seen, who was he anyway? I’d give a great deal to have him before me. Telephone to the house, if you can, later on. Don’t worry about Mrs. Carr. I’ll be sure to pick up.”

“I was surprised Peter Ivanovitch did not attend.”

“What, today’s funeral? Oh no. He was too fearful.”

Lawrence Penniman, picking at his endive salad, muttered something inaudible.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Penniman, I didn’t quite catch that.”

“Peter Ivanovitch is a man of many fears.” His tone was brusque, and hardly complimentary. “Although Sophia will not hear a word against him. I for one am not a member of his — well. His cult.”

“Lawrence despises feminism! And it’s so unfair.”

“I don’t. I don’t, Sophia. All I maintain is that he is a coward. And has been quite cruel. To those, I might add, with no means of defense.”

“We disagree,” said Sophia Merle. “Do have another roll, Commissioner.”

“No, thank you. Was he, in your view then, Mr. Penniman, cruel to the late Madame?”

“Hardly, if anything he flattered her. No, they were both of them cruel, to an innocent, harmless really, third party.”

“It is between us a *rib*? No? A *bone*, then — of contention. Good friends never agree on everything. Do have some wine, it’s an excellent vintage.”

“No, thank you. Grapes in any form make me ill.”

“*Quelle dommage!*”

“So I’m told.” Carr looked about and wondered: is this how a socialist lives? He had expected red flags on the walls, banners quoting the incarnadine prophets, more than a little squalor. Instead he stepped inside a bastion of taste, neater than his own house (because Annie left things around), a flowering of current fashion down to the tulips in a vase shaped like a tulip. Russia? Yes, in the presence of some books in Cyrillic and a large oil painting of a woman yoking herself to a wagon, the ox dead at her feet, the steppe blizzard howling. Lady Gwendolyn,

that partisan of social reformation whose far more ornate and prestigious salon he'd frequented during the Verloc affair, was off in Ireland, for unknown reasons. Pity: she would have swept up Mrs. Merle at once.

Penniman was discussing a Russian novel, a recent one apparently, which he was in the process of translating into English. The plot — unhappy wife, dashing lover, fatuous husband — had an intriguing ring for Carr, and he recalled as if from another work of fiction the days when, in U__ Province, books would arrive in brown packages, for his solitary delectation. Of course with Annie one could not discuss books. Carr remembered *Woman Amid the Firs*, perhaps languishing in her wondrous and expecting lap this very minute. “Who's the author of this one?” he asked. “You said, a count of some sort?”

“A count, yes,” Mrs. Merle responded with a vigorous nod. “But also a madman. Religious believers tend to be fanatics.”

“Oh now, Sophia, hark to the pot blackening the kettle's name!”

“Lawrence, don't shock our guest. I'm sure he thinks we're all fanatics.”

“Not me.” Penniman set down his glass with some vehemence. “I despise all extremes. I can't help it, it's my nature.”

This man, Carr decided, felt less at home *chez* Mrs. Merle than he did himself. Why was that? Penniman from under snowcap brows kept shooting stricken glances at Carr, suggesting a need to say certain things that could not be said at this table. Why on earth not? For a moment, lasting no longer than the time it took a pigeon to wing its way across the window glass, he indulged an absurd fantasy of meeting Mrs. Merle and Mr. Penniman on a regular schedule, to talk of books and fanatics and ideas as he had years ago, in this house where he unaccountably felt he could let down at least some of his considerable guard. He thought of someone else he'd

like to see around this table. “I have a friend — a Dr. Frung, Swiss fellow — whose acquaintance, Mrs. Merle, I think you’d enjoy making. Perhaps you’ll meet him sometime.”

“Had quite enough of the Swiss in Geneva,” Penniman said, into his glass. He poured himself another and set the bottle of white wine next to Carr.

The straw, the sweat, the horsedung flavor latent in the wine: Carr shuddered. “Ah, but Dr. Frung is *aus Zurich*, as he’d say himself.”

“What sort of doctor is he?”

“An alienist. Extremely clever, familiar with the latest theories. In one hundred years, he says, all the secrets of the psyche will be known.”

“Alienists!” It was almost a shriek. Sophia Merle reared back as if she’d seen a viper writhing on the tablecloth. “A most horrible species! Prying into people’s secrets, always attributing dreadful motives to the most innocent acts and thoughts. Why have these spies and snoopers sprung up all of a sudden? Have we at last decayed into a set of navel-gazers? Why can’t they just be banned, outlawed, imprisoned like the quacks they are?”

Her outburst seemed to hang and vibrate in the air. Lawrence Penniman sighed, fixed his attention on his plate, and contemplated a slice of courgette. Adrian Carr broke the silence.

“Science is the coming thing, I’m given to understand. One does not want to be Canute on the beach. That is — ”

“I’m familiar with your English history, Mr. Carr. But there is a greater science, first unearthed right here in London. A science that surpasses history. That will in time *become* history. Ideology, Commissioner.” Sophia Merle clasped her hands together at her throat, the way a nun might clutch a crucifix. “The dialectic is all the science I need.”

Carr set down his empty water goblet, feeling as if he'd been splashed in the face with its contents. He was wasting time, dreaming of vanished salons, deluding himself with this chimera of intellectual harmony while at table with anarchists. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Merle. To return to the bomb in the coffin — had Peter, that is to say Mr. Ziemanetsky, received any sort of threats? Because he is quite controversial, and his views are — unorthodox."

"I'll speak to this, Sophia." Lawrence Penniman laid down his fork with a clatter. "You've heard about poor Tekla, so I gather. And you've heard the name Razumov. Well — "

What followed was a complex saga of which Carr, although eager to understand, caught at first only the outlines. The assassination of DeP___, commemorated in the photograph he'd seen on Madame Schablikine's wall, had been carried out by a young man now deceased, a Russian student dedicated to the cause of revolution, who had been most cruelly betrayed by "poor Tekla"'s companion, the Prince's bastard called Razumov so thoroughly excoriated by Peter Ivanovich. "Kirylo Sidorovitch — that was his name — he regretted his act. You know that, Sophia, just as well as I do. You were present at the time. Sadly, he paid with his life. A dreadful man, a double agent as it turned out, rendered him deaf, bursting his eardrums. While under Tekla's care he wandered out one night, Razumov did, and of course he could not hear the streetcar bearing down on him."

"So I have heard. Where is he buried?"

Penniman shrugged. "Russia? Not in Highgate, at any rate."

Over Carr's head, the floorboards creaked. Steps, heavy steps, a man's steps. Crossing and recrossing, pacing in fact. "Ah, Mrs. Merle, have you another guest?"

"I? No. Must be Waterson. Fixing a window. Does look like rain, doesn't it?"

Fixing a window involves standing still. Carr heard no hammering, creakings, or grunts. The footsteps were emphatic, the pacing rhythmical, the man whoever he was would weigh in at thirteen stone. Waterson, who'd served at table, was a frail reed, slight, looking barely capable of lifting a tea tray.

A clock chimed, and Sophia Merle plucked at her neck again. This time she brought forth a small blue-enameled sphere, pendant from a silver chain. "Or perhaps he was winding the clocks. That one is certainly off. My watch says it still wants twenty minutes to three." With care and gentleness, she shook the gleaming sphere.

"Your watch is from Tolland's." Penniman folded his lips in a prim line. "They sell jewelry, not timepieces. I don't doubt that it's stopped."

"Tolland's?" Carr after a moment spoke with studied neutrality. "My wife's ring came from there."

"As I said," snapped Penniman. "What you've got there, Sophia, is a lovely piece of jewelry. But not a watch."

The invoice. The invoice now slept in a brown envelope, on a high shelf in the evidence room. Carr himself had seen Jorgenson stamp it. That invoice — no one as yet had been able to make out the name of the addressee — had been sent to Madame Schablikine's house. He'd been lulled, confound it! By an hour's intelligent talk. On no more than a decent cup of tea and some French biscuits, Carr willed himself into alertness. He made his excuses, and left.

Chapter 6

“Come now, Inspector, you do know how to use the telephone, don’t you?”

“I’ve a mistrust of that instrument, sir. Don’t know who might be listening, do we?”

Heat in his overcoat which he would not remove, Carr without his tie and coat in the warm library. He’d found Heat sitting like a parcel on his doorstep. “Mrs. Fitch identified the other man. That is, she heard her husband call him by name.”

“Which was, Inspector?”

“Victor, Vladimir, something like that.”

“Very helpful. Are you sure it wasn’t Valentin, perhaps? Or Vasily?” Carr took himself off, to the sideboard. “This might have waited till tomorrow. Brandy, Heat? Water?”

“Neat. That is, if you’re having — ”

“I’m not. But here you are.”

The Chief Inspector raised his glass and swirled it. “Fine brandy, sir. She did have one story to tell, that’s why I’ve come tonight. It seems the day before the funeral, that is to say Madame Schablikine’s funeral, the one that, that concerns us, sir — “

“The one when the bomb went off. Continue, please.”

“The late Mr. Fitch told his wife that a man came to the graveyard. Tall fellow, tall hat, black-bearded, deep voice. Sounds like our friend Mr. Zed, doesn’t it? Just taking a walk, you know, flower beds, trees, and so on. Probably bowed to the tomb of Karl Marx in the process.”

“I don’t doubt it. Please continue.”

“Well, this second gravedigger, whatever his name, took one look at said Peter and ran off. Hid. Hid behind a mound of dirt, dug up for that day’s work, sir. Not himself for the rest of the afternoon. Angry, talking to himself.”

“And yet he came to work the next day.”

“He did, sir.”

“And vanished as soon as the bomb went off. Where to, I wonder?”

Heat ran a hand over his balding head. “I’m afraid the poor widow has no idea. She never saw him, mind you. No idea what he looks like.”

“Please see her again. She’s lost her husband. She’s left with two children. Perhaps with time she can remember the man’s name.”

“Very good, sir.”

Carr saw Heat out, climbed the stairs, sat on his bed, and thought. Annie, across the hall, was sleeping, her light snores raising the ruffles on her pillow. He had competed in swimming and long-distance running, not brilliantly but with much fierce joy, and he had led a demanding and mostly outdoor life in India. He was strong still, he was lean, he breathed easily even in town. The itch to work outdoors was strong in him.

After a while, Carr prepared to depart. He punched the crown of the old hat he had assumed, turned up the collar on the short round jacket he kept just for these times, and twisted the ends of his mustache until they pointed skyward. He was slipping out the door, when the telephone rang. “Carr.”

“Toodles here. He’s asking for you.”

“Why *are* you so outlandish?” Hands on his hips, eyebrows in motion, Sir Ethelred looked at Carr as he might at a badger springing up from the rug in his office. “I would take you for a ruddy Montenegrin. One of those Balkan types.”

“We’ve been over this, Sir Ethelred. I do have your approval to — conduct my cases to the best of my ability. And I believe you’ve often said, Sir Ethelred, I have some ability — abilities, I hope — I can bring to bear, in these bombing outrages, sir.”

Shuffling — “no, no, I can do it alone” — back behind the desk which to Adrian’s was as a battleship to a destroyer, the Home Secretary, seated, leaned all his chins on the palm of one hand. He made phlegmy sounds. “I advise caution. You’ve got another life to think of now. Nonetheless,” he rummaged through red boxes on his desk, “ah. Here it is. You’ve got your warrant now.”

“Thank you, Sir Ethelred. I — ah — ”

“What is it? I haven’t all night.”

“No, Sir Ethelred. I need another one, Sir Ethelred.”

“Another warrant? You jest!”

“On the home of a Sophia Merle. Formerly — here, I have it written out — the address too.”

“Mer-mool-ee-AHN-sky — good heavens! What are we letting into this country?” Sir Ethelred inquired of no one in particular.

Carr stood. He always stood. Over the course of two years he had been in this office several times. For all Annie’s connection to Sir Ethelred himself, and her even stronger connection to Toodles, Adrian Carr was not asked to sit down. “She is part of that Geneva set, sir. I was in her house recently — ”

“You were what?”

“At a luncheon. Sir Ethelred, you understand, and you’ve agreed, that my work must often take place face-to-face. We are not looking for burglars here. This bomb was rather amateur, I’m given to understand.”

“By whom? Jorgensen? Ha! The man’s mad.”

“Undoubtedly, Sir Ethelred. He’s explained it, though. Bat guano — ”

“Spare me the details!”

“I apologize, sir. My point is, there are minds at work in this business. They must be learned, as one would learn a language. Mrs. Merle invited me, knowing full well that I’m in—that I bear serious responsibilities within the Special Branch. Which investigates bombings.”

“She’s at a game of cat and mouse.” Sir Ethelred sneezed. He examined his handkerchief, which would have covered a small table. He sneezed again. “Some cat. Some mouse. What else?”

“I heard footsteps upstairs. I’m convinced of that, sir. Her explanation was contrived and clearly false.”

“Clearly?”

“She claimed a servant was fixing a window, but — ”

“Details, Carr, details. And now you want a warrant for her house. Geneva set? Rings a faint bell. We can’t have those thugs throwing bombs in our midst. Must have learned it from the Irish. Well, you shall have it. Expedited, I assume?”

“If — if that is possible, by all means, sir. In fact, I’d like to go tonight.”

Stretching his great paw across the desk, Sir Ethelred grasped a pen. It disappeared within his fist. He proceeded to scrawl, on his letterhead, a four-line message. “Consider this your warrant. Oh, it’s quite correct. Member of the Cabinet and all that.”

Carr escaped, studiously avoiding Toodles who was pointedly ignoring him. After folding the letter into thirds, he deposited it in the secret pocket he'd had sewn into his waistcoat. Even Annie did not know about that pocket.

Humming "La Dernière Feuille," a tune he'd learned in Marseilles long ago, he went flitting across puddles starting to line the curb.

The train took him east, then south, casting him up on wet streets where a cracked sign announced Pursley Square. He was not far, the next corner informed him, from Brett Street where Winnie Verloc had, with some energy, inserted her kitchen knife into the ample belly of her husband, a double secret agent. Not surprising, perhaps, that Mrs. Merle would choose to reside here, in what Carr was already mentally naming the *anarchist neighborhood*. A lone newsboy, on the corner, erupted into screeching headlines at the sight of him. "Anarchist bomb in an old lady's coffin! Latest from Inspector 'Eat! Get your Glance & Gulp right here, sir."

"You won't sell many papers here, this time of night," Carr commented, pocketing his change. "Shouldn't you go where you'll find more custom?"

The boy grinned through jumbled teeth. "Got plenty custom. Sold all mine bright and early today, sir. I'm just out 'ere now for fun."

"Fun?"

"Ow, it's better 'n sittin at 'ome gettin beaten by me mum."

"I see. Well, here's another something for your trouble." Carr, paper in hand, had an inspiration. "Now get yourself off the street, before I set Inspector Heat on you."

Howling a gutter oath, the boy took off with great puddle-jumping steps in the opposite direction. Carr unfolded his newspaper. Heat was out there making silly anodyne statements.

“Our investigation is ongoing,” sort of thing. Few knew Carr’s name, fewer still knew his face, which suited Heat’s superior very well.

Carr remembered another small boy, the dead gravedigger’s son. The iron ravishing his soul as he stood at his father’s grave. Newsboys might, perhaps often do, fend for themselves and survive, but the way the other child had stood there — wan, slumping, bewildered, defenseless — brought up some urgency in Carr. He could feel it, impending fatherhood, pounding ever closer to the surface.

A tawdry corner store, half-shuttered, again recalled Verloc. There too events devolved around a defenseless child, or rather the mind of a child in the body of a grown man. Inspector Heat had bungled, popping up at the wrong time, leaking information that resulted in a murder and a suicide. Carr winced, the tip of that shaft still buried and causing occasional pain. Heat needed special handling, and he’d let that go of late.

What hadn’t he let go? Ever since Sophia Merle had arrived in his office without invitation, the Assistant Commissioner for Special Crimes of the London police had been distracted from the bomb at hand, an actual bomb that, like Verloc’s, killed an actual person. Today he’d been present at the victim’s funeral, left Heat to do the essential work, and gone off to lunch with — not a fascinating woman, that was not the word, but a woman unlike all the others he had met since he came home. Whatever else she might be, Sophia Merle was a woman whose mind had not been left to rot.

That was it.

Education would be wasted on Annie, he’d always known that, what appealed to him about her was her childishness, irresolution, lack of knowledge of the things that bring men pain and make them go to war — but what if she’d been *encouraged* to care, for books, ideas, the

facts of history, the grip of higher mathematics, the blank spaces of her mind which she might, after all, still color in if she chose to try? Toodles had been sent to school, to university — and was he cleverer than his first cousin? With a sudden jolt, as if his thoughts had run up hard against a railway bar, he remembered Toodles' warning. *Bounder*.

Although he could not say as much in Annie's presence, Carr had noticed Janet Harbison. Not for her beauty, which to Carr's taste was too pale, too infantine, but because it was his job to notice people like her. Rousing the rabble in Hyde Park some Sundays ago, she spoke in fluted tones about the role of women. What did she know about Peter Ivanovitch, feminist extraordinaire? Carr vowed to meet — on social terms, of course — the Tory whip's communist daughter as soon as possible. Perhaps next weekend, if his calendar allowed.

He started walking. He was a free man roaming free streets, for the moment. He had lunched at Sophia Merle's because she lived close to the cemetery and because he'd been devoured by curiosity, most of which remained unsatisfied. The cab ride, with him sandwiched between her corseted flesh and the sharp elbows of Penniman, teacher of languages, had been too brief for him to take in much about the area. Now he was free to look about. There was no lack of Russians in this quarter. Window signs in Cyrillic, a domed church, butcher shops displaying unfamiliar cuts, bakeries with pastries strewn with poppy seeds and other exotica. The passersby, and there were few of those, were bulky shuffling people with fur collars that smelled strongly of cat. No one looked at him, so unlike India where no strange face passed unnoticed. The small square outside Mrs. Merle's house contained a space of grass and, as usual, a statue, some general or admiral feted in his day but now forever on his horse where, from the look of the thing, his only visitors were diarrheic pigeons.

An alley ran behind the house. He entered it, drawn as always to the dark, and heard a rear door thump. A man emerged and walked away. in the opposite direction.

At his left elbow, a voice. "Evening, sir. What brings you out this way?"

The fox about to go to ground, and up he pops: Inspector Heat. Carr wished his subordinate would disappear. He did not. "Good evening, Inspector. Appreciate it if you'd keep your voice down."

Heat, not quite apologetic, joined Carr in the shadow of a moribund elm. "Out on your own again? Best if you didn't do that, sir."

"I've seen Sir Ethelred. I have two warrants."

"And I've talked with the widow again. As you requested."

"Yes. Did you see that man just leave?"

"What man, sir? No, I did not." Lit by the match he applied to his pipe, Heat's face shone like a basket of apples. "Haldin, the second gravedigger. Short name for a Russian. First name Victor. Said he was staying with a casual acquaintance. In this vicinity, sir. Mind you, this is all from her dead husband."

"And thus can't be verified. Acquaintance named?"

"No, sir." Heat blew smoke. His tobacco, to sensitive Carr, stank far worse than Dr. Frung's. "There's a fine boy, though. Going on six. He said he'd seen the man. Big beard, but brown, not black. Middling height. Couldn't speak English, said the lad, but gave him a bit of sweet pastry, once. Coming out the cemetery."

"The lad?"

"No, this Haldin."

"A child's word is no good in court, Inspector."

“That’s right, sir, but if you’ll care to notice, I did not suggest his testifying.” Heat knocked glowing ash from his meerschaum. “And we do need a break in this case.”

His voice took on that fulsome note which as a rule signaled self-satisfaction, as well as his unexpressed but obvious desire to bundle Carr back to his prison-desk and return to running the show by himself. Carr’s predecessors behind the desk had not gone out at night, disguised or otherwise. We are all human, the Assistant Commissioner mused for a moment, and we are all flawed. He thought he knew his own flaws, but it was rather a job of work to know Heat’s as well. His hand went to the secret pocket. “Listen. Here is the warrant for the late Madame’s house. Take a few constables, go there at once. Look for more invoices, legible ones I hope. As for bomb parts and the like, you know what to look for.”

“Yes, sir. Should I take Jorgenson, sir?”

“If he’s amenable. Buy him dinner afterwards, I don’t think the fellow eats.” Jorgenson, melancholy, embittered, and brusque as he was, appealed to Carr. He too knew the world of the East, where April was a sunny sonata, not a dismal concerto for water and mud. “I’m going in here, Mrs. Merle’s. I doubt she’s in. I’ve the warrant in any case.”

“Without constables, sir?”

“I’ve read up on Russians.” Leaning against a shuttered shopfront, Carr took a long draw on his cheroot. “They tend to hate and fear the police. Mrs. Merle has — sought— my company, even though she has to know she and her set are all suspects in this case. A daring move on her part. To show up at the door with men in uniform — it simply isn’t called for. I’ll make my own way in.”

“And out, we hope, sir.”

Carr pushed his meager hat further back on his head, shivered beneath the short jacket, and with a wave became part of the shadows again.

Chapter 7

Clouds obscured the setting moon. Creeping along the back of the house currently leased in the name of Sophia Merle, Carr detected a loose shutter, on a window just over his head. He leaped. No good. He saw a pile of bricks, disinterred from what had been a garden path. He made of them some makeshift steps. The window was narrow, but he was thin. Careful of his buttons, moving as if under water in a bid for silence and fluidity, he slid the sash open and got himself over the sill.

The house was cold, the landing where he found himself bare, with none of the lower floor's stylish touches. Here, he was sure, he would find Peter Ivanovitch, bounder by reputation, enjoying the home of yet another woman he intended to defraud and exploit. His brontosaurid footsteps had sounded over Carr's head while he nibbled crustless sandwiches below in charming company. Carr opened his torch. A door gaped.

In a low-ceilinged bedroom redolent of human sweat, he aimed his torch to see, not the smooth black gabardines of the unctuous memoirist, but muddied trousers, holed socks, a fur-trimmed, belted, coat suitable for colder climes, a checked shirt also thick with mud. He was looking at a stranger's clothes.

A short cold draft coming through the opened window stirred some papers on a desk. There a knife stood upright, swaying, like Peter Ivanovitch about to faint at Madame Schablikine's grave. The blade was bloodless. It pinned a sheet torn from a notebook to the wood. Carr snatched it up, first easing the knife out of its place with gloved hands. The writing was Cyrillic. Copying it in the dark took all the ages of mankind.

Four minutes had passed. Carr replaced his notebook in his waistcoat pocket, left the pencil where he'd found it on the desk, and returned the original to its place of stabbing, the knife just as it was. Sliding out of his rain-soaked shoes, Carr in damp socks pattered downstairs.

There he found much that was interesting. He filled a sack, two sacks. He left the warrant, Sir Ethelred's signature taking up half the page, where Heat had left his advertising flyer.

Lawrence Penniman, or the sliver of him visible through the cracked-open door, allowed Carr in with obvious reluctance. His wide forehead creased with wrinkles that resembled a measure of music, five lines evenly spaced. "Assistant Commissioner Carr. Are you aware of the late hour?"

He was in his late sixties, Carr guessed, angular, moving with unnecessary haste around the two-room flat. Striped wallpaper covered behind rows of photographs, prints, pressed flowers, quotations, all framed in wood and close enough to knock against each other. Chairs, couch, side tables, the piano: all were skirted and fringed and swagged, in prints and lace and Indian cottons. Only the wide writer's table and its straight-backed chair stood unadorned. Deep green velvet curtains, a poor cousin of Sir Ethelred's, fell in a puddle by the two high windows.

"Please sit here." Penniman motioned to a chintz-covered chair. He himself sank into the tufted couch. "If anybody saw me let you in — you don't by some chance have a warrant, do you?"

"Not for this address. And besides I haven't come to search. I believe you can read this?" He drew out the carefully copied sheet. He'd left his sacks in the bushes, outside. "I found it pinned — with a knife — to a desk in a bedroom. Upstairs at Mrs. Merle's."

“Sophia? But she never goes upstairs.”

“She does not have a lodger? A relative, a friend, who might be staying there?”

“I’ve never heard of such a thing. Or such a person.”

“How about Peter Ivanovitch? Does he go up there?”

Penniman stared, goggle-eyed. “Peter Ivanovitch? He wouldn’t dare. I believe Sophia frightens him.” The great fluff of cottony hair, the blue eyes of exceptional paleness, the facial pallor and skeletal limbs, suggested non-corporeality, a fussy and unhappy spirit. His voice was firmer than his grip, but he appeared to have lost it altogether and his mouth made an O, as he stared at the page from Carr’s notebook. “But this is not even possible.”

“How’s that, Mr. Penniman?”

“Dead men don’t leave notes.” Offering no further explanation, the teacher of languages fumbled with spectacles and began to read the note out loud. “History, not theory. Evolution, not revolution. Direction, not destruction. Unity, not disruption. Patriotism, not internationalism.” His trembling fingers worried the paper, his thumbs slid up and down over its penciled surfaces. “I have seen this note before.”

“What does it signify?”

“The destruction of a promising young life. It means, Mr. Carr, that autocracy kills, even at great distances, with no other weapon than the thoughts it engenders in the minds of its wretched and enslaved peoples.” With a slippered foot he kicked a shallow box, its contents one thick notebook. It came to rest by his leg, like a good dog. “Furthermore, I recognize the handwriting. I’ve seen quite a bit of it over the years.”

Carr waited. All he could see of the stained, blotted book — was it a diary? — was one word, on the cover, in Cyrillic.

“This note, though, wasn’t written in the past. Not in Geneva.” His calf nudged the box.
“Certainly not part of this.”

“What, if I may ask, is in that notebook?”

The polyglot’s response was slow in coming. He shivered under a thin dressing robe.
“That, Mr. Carr, is the manifesto of the late Razumov. Kyrylo Sidorovich, of whom we spoke before. He gave it to me, in Geneva. It’s a very personal document.”

“And this? The note that I’ve found?”

Penniman’s nimbus of hair, quite thin on top as Carr could now see, quivered. His voice came out muffled. “The ink is English. P. & J. Arnold’s, iron gall mixed with purple dye. It’s not available on the continent, where they use mostly Herbin and Diamine. The paper itself is Basildon Bond, you can see the watermark right here. English and contemporary. This note was written within the past month.” He raised his head, wary, as if he expected it to be lopped off.
“Every word inside that notebook, that — desperate cry — of sentiment, pain, and — and treachery, was written in the same hand as this note. I know it, I tell you.”

“By?”

“By Kyrylo Sidorovich Razumov. Who, I was told by his wife, died over three years ago.”

Carr himself felt like a piece of paper on which messages were written, crossed out, written over, erased, written again. Ink, not necessarily P. & J. Arnold’s, covered him head to foot. He blinked to see out through the gall and dye. “His wife then — ”

“Was Tekla. Tekla Katz. They were married by a magistrate, in some small town in southern Russia. I received a telegram to that effect.” Penniman rose, somewhat creakily, to his feet and began rummaging on shelves. “I probably still have it somewhere. I responded with

congratulations and a, a small *cadeau*. I'm not capable of much in that regard, I live on a small annuity my brother sends me, rather grudgingly I think but still, it comes. Tekla — have I told you how Peter Ivanovitch abused her? No? She deserved some happiness. A dreadful case.”

Adrian Carr stood up as well. He strode to the window, parted the green curtains, peered out at backs of buildings, a lone streetlight. Green sparks stared from the crotch of a tree: a cat. A blotchy tail waved in the dark. “Mr. Razumov, then, is not dead. If that is indeed his writing.”

“Mr. Carr, I am not one for joking.”

“I never thought so. Tell me about Peter Ivanovitch and Tekla.”

“The famous feminist. Can you conceive? Behind closed doors, he was a monster. Treated poor hapless Tekla like a servant. Screeched at her for forgetting Madame's bonbons, Madame was greedy about her sweets. Forced her to take dictation — his thoughts! As if they deserved to be written down — in icy rooms, forbidding her to speak or even move while he — cogitated — spewed out his poison. Had her hauling heavy samovars, no one permitted to assist her. Why, when Peter Ivanovitch emptied his glass, who but Tekla sprang to his side to refill it? This is his equality of women! This is his praise of the sanctified female! He barked at her like a poodle, yes, a great black hairy poodle. And she volunteered, volunteered, mind you, to serve his mighty cause!”

“Yet she ran off with Razumov. The cause must have seemed less important at that time. And she is also buried at Highgate?”

“I saw to that.”

Carr, his head filled with poodles and samovars and clawlike fingers gripping sweets, considered the narrative he'd just received. That man he'd seen walking away — Razumov, resurrected? He had the rest of the night for that question. In this room he would den the fox.

“Mr. Ziemansky is an unkind man who doesn’t practice what he preaches. I think we can agree on that. To date, however, he has committed no crime.” Penniman was watching him, a lean and slippered pantaloons with wits still sharp. He did not seem surprised when Carr after some diffident throat-clearing asked, “Have you ever heard, or are you aware of incidents that might be viewed as, shall we say, unseemly — involving young women of the peasant class?”

“There was one.”

“Just one?”

“Of which I know. He aligned himself with her, that’s Mrs. Merle’s phrase, after Tekla — and Razumov — left the scene. Madame was unaware. She preferred things that way.”

“I shouldn’t wonder.”

Gas was purring in the fixtures. A lamp glowed. Razumov was alive. The teacher of languages picked up, set down, picked up again small bits of bric-a-brac. A china figurine, a shepherdess. Dried flowers that shattered as he touched their vase, cascades of mauve-brown petals scattering across the Kirman. An incense burner bearing all the arms of Shiva, obtainable at any Indian bazaar. A photograph in an oval frame of a cat, perhaps the one perching outside, seated with folded paws upon a velvet chair. “I was there, in that house, with that odd, odd pair — more than once. I was invisible to them. They would say anything in front of me. The first time I ever met Peter Ivanovitch, he called me ‘nothing.’ ‘Oh, yes,’” said Lawrence Penniman, mimicking the memoirist’s earthshaking voice, “‘your English friend. That’s nothing.’ Nothing! And there I was, a human being, a friend to the poor Haldin women — the only friend they had, although they didn’t know that yet. Mr. Carr, I am not a young man. I — ”

“Did you say Haldin?”

“Yes, of course. That was the young man, Victor Haldin — the fool, I should say — who assassinated DeP__ and whom Razumov, rightfully, turned in to the police. Why do you ask?”

He was still sitting there, head to one side, hugging his elbows, when Adrian Carr with an oath leaped to his feet, grabbed his muffler and coat, and ran out the door without bothering to slam it shut behind him. The cab ride back to Bloomsbury took ten years off his life. On the pavement outside Madame’s house, he ran into Charlie Simmons.

“Lookin for ‘eat? ‘E’s gone ‘ome, ‘e ‘as.”

“Gone — blast Heat! Ah. Constable, you did not hear me say that. Was Jorgenson here?”

“Old bats in the belfry? ‘E was, but ‘e’s gone too. Said to come to ‘is place, I mean Evidence Room, in the morning.”

“In the — what time is it? I can’t see to read my watch.”

“Arf past one only, sir.”

“Very well. Very well. I’ll go — home — too. Goodnight, Constable.”

“Night, Guvnor.”

The cab had gone. Carr stood alone, sacks in his hands. Mist hung heavy on trees barely leaved. Madame Schablikine’s house loomed up crepuscular before him. Peter Ivanovitch had gone to stay in a hotel, for unknown reasons. “Confound this,” said Carr, aloud. A figure, yes, by all that’s holy the same one he’d seen escaping from Sophia Merle’s back door, came edging out from the side of the house. Carr placed his sacks very carefully under a hedge.

Chapter 8

“Annie!”

“Oh, she’s quite well, and so is the baby.” Terence Monygham, seated at his ease on Carr’s furniture, waved a deprecating hand. His black bag gaped open beside him. “False alarm. Happens. Wouldn’t want the baby now. Good thing.”

Carr slid the ottoman to the side of the couch, where Annie lay. He embraced her, awkwardly — he could reach only her head, neck, and shoulders — through multiple wrappings and blankets. Pillows tumbled. Two sacks sat in the vestibule. In his arms she was not limp, but not responsive either. “Annie, my dear, you look painfully pale.”

“I imagine I do. I had a dreadful fright.” This morning he left a quite different woman. Where was his gorgeous bounding big-boned girl? What lay here seemed otherworldly. Her unearthly pallor. Her monotone voice. Her bare wrist, trailing on the floor.

“Looks like a ghost, doesn’t she?”

Why was he besieged by ghosts — or what was worse, humans looking and acting like ghosts? Grinning Dr. Monygham was one himself, a patched and sewn-together hide that had seen wars and revolutions and near-death at the hands of a mad dictator, in the wilds of South America. Why was he looking at Adrian Carr and telling him his wife resembled something not alive?

Carr took deep breaths. This was unconscionable. Whatever had transpired on the streets, he was *safe at home*. Wife. Doctor. Unborn child. The life that was not his real life but which he was to live nonetheless, for all time. “Forgive me. I’ve been— never mind. Annie darling. Are you sure you’re all right now?”

Bit by bit, and with Adrian's help, she sat up, and eventually stood. "I can walk. Yes. I'm just tired. I'm going up to bed."

"That's it. That's right. Try to sleep, darling, I'll be up in a minute." He turned back to his unexpected guest. "Doctor Monygham, apologies for the late hour."

"Means nothing to me." The leather-faced physician watched Annie, assisted by Conner, make her heavy way up the staircase. Then he bent forward. "See here, Mr. Carr. She's fine right now, but I don't trust it. These bigger women — you'd be surprised. Some little scrawny thing can pop out babies five years running, but your wife — and she's rather nervous as well, isn't she? — there could be rough weather. I just wanted you to know. You see, the placement of her uterus — "

Carr, who with some desperation wanted a gin and lime after his evening, allowed the doctor to drone on about anatomy. None of it seemed quite real. Was this his wife the man was discussing? He tried to imagine the baby, its cries, its smiles, its future schooldays. For all his fine intelligence, he could not. He was concerned with his two sacks.

To his surprise, in bed he dropped off to sleep almost at once, and stayed that way until Conner came in with the tea and pulled the drapes. In dawning consciousness he realized the world outside was full of sun. He rose with gusto, yelping a little like a tribesman from the U__ hills.

Carr spilled his two sacks over Jorgenson's counter. "Glass. Screws. Springs. Discarded newspapers. And this. In jars."

Jorgenson snatched up the jars, opened one, grimaced. “Bat guano, all right. Dissolved, mixed with wood ash, left to dry, then mixed with charcoal.” He wiped his fingers, on a dusty rag. “You found both jars in one house? There’s your bomb maker, then.”

Carr drew breath, changed his mind, did not speak, looked away. When he came back to the Evidence Room, he said, “Inspector Heat. What did you bring away from Madame’s?”

Wrapped in his muffler despite the warm day and wearing his hat indoors, Heat presented a face even more rubicund than usual. In fact he was red as a boiled lobster, and appeared far less comfortable. With great care he removed from his coat a large envelope, an envelope so full it could not be clipped shut. His eyes were slits, his beefy jowls shook with the effort of his self-control.

“What is it, Heat?”

He clutched the envelope, would not meet the eyes of Jorgenson or Carr. At length he handed it to his superior. “You may look at this, sir. It’s a funny thing. I don’t like to touch it.”

Carr laid the envelope on the counter, lifted the flap, and drew out a handful of —

Photographs. Peculiar how the human bodies with which we all live can seem so alien in black and white, when they are doing things at which we, mostly, do not look. Obvious samenesses among the girls — they were all girls, and alive too, unlike the pallid postcards ill-starred Verloc had sold in his shadowy shop. There were fewer men, more farm animals and vegetables. Some girls had their feet in thick felt boots, an unsettling note below gartered stockings.

Letters. Many letters. Letters requesting, enclosing, receiving. Some in French, some in German, both of which Carr knew. Of all things, an architect’s sketch, its blue pencilings clean and passionless amid the pile of correspondence and pornography.

Jorgensen brought a basket. Carr dumped the remaining contents of the envelope therein. He looked up, from a letter dated Brussels. "I'm — not completely expert— in Walloon, but it's a business letter. They follow certain forms, in any language."

Heat, arms folded, rocked back and forth on his heels. "May I ask, sir. What business?"

Carr fixed his index to the sketch. "This is Madame's house. You'll see her address at the top. Here it's been broken up into — not complete flats, just — bedrooms — and a salon downstairs. There's a space down there marked *Piano*. Behind that, *Office*." A detail intrigued him. He glanced at Heat. "You'll notice, where it says Office, it denotes *reinforced walls*. And in that corner — *safe*." If he kept thinking and talking about the sketch, about this one unambiguous representation of what he valued – reason, thought, dedication to a goal, accomplishment — he would not begin to shake or utter swear words or, impossibly, to cry. My daughter, he thought. Any one of them could be my daughter. Eighteen, no, make that twenty-one years from this date. Despite his brain-fug of last night — attributed by him to the late hour and the storm of events — he was now thoroughly encompassed by a power that surprised him, a wave like the primordial ocean sweeping through him from the ground up and transforming into cold blue anger. He shook the piece of paper in his hand. "Look at this letter, Inspector. In English. From someone in — a place called Brody — not far from the Austro-Hungarian border."

Heat read the letter with pursed lips, his eyebrows sliding noseward, almost merging at the stalwart bridge. He laid it down at last, smoothing it out before speaking. "You don't think where these girls come from. The English ones, much less the foreign." He groomed the letter again with his fingers. "Easy to call Mr. Zed a great hypocrite. Not so easy to look at the proof of it."

“Seems your man Peter had a sideline in white slavery.” Jorgenson, in white cotton gloves, slipped Carr’s shards and bits into glassine envelopes. He had the voice of a man sleepwalking.

Carr and Heat looked at each other, bemused and not a little aggravated. The senior official, in rank if definitely not in age, spoke first. “Jorgenson. Do you know what you’re saying?”

“I know. Just ask me. Peter Ivanovitch is a white slaver.”

“May I ask how you came to that conclusion? Which you should keep to yourself, by the way.”

“Am I stupid?” Of a sudden awake, and angry, Jorgenson brandished the empty envelope. “Whose house did this come from? Hah? Who signed those letters? I can read upside down. Just ask me. I can read anything upside down. Besides, what do you care?” The moment’s energy was spent. The old sailor retreated beneath the pale husk that was his exterior. “Nobody cares what I think. They never listen to me. I know. Ask me.”

“Jorgo, you’re not sick by any chance? No cough? Drank some dodgy water, I’ll bet.”

“Jorgenson, we are listening to you. We always do. We championed the Chief when he brought you in, old shipboard friend, even though you were overage and had never worked ashore. I’m going to ask you a question now, and when you answer I’m going to listen. Fair enough? Now, when the body parts went to the morgue, was there anything— shrapnel, glass, screws— that had lodged in her body, and was then removed?”

Jorgenson during Carr’s questioning had drifted back among his shelves. He returned with a square cardboard box, stamped 05. “You want to compare what you just brought in to this lot. I can do that for you.” He added, “You pay me to do that. I wouldn’t do it for nothing.”

“The Department pays you, Jorgenson, but would you please shelve these inner thoughts when next we meet?” Adrian Carr, suddenly tired, turned away. He and Heat walked with synchronous steps toward the stairwells. Their footsteps rang in the cold cavelike place.

“Jorgenson. He was quite the tiger on the Sulu Sea some years ago.”

“Rather a mangy old tiger today, sir.”

“Yes. Inspector Heat, I couldn’t say this in Jorgensen’s presence, but that young man Razumov — he is alive. Mrs. Merle — Sophia Merle — has been harboring him. I believe he was employed at Highgate Cemetery — ”

“Good God!”

“Under a false name. I encountered him last night.”

“Last night, sir?”

“It becomes quite complex, very quickly. One moment. Yes?” They’d emerged onto the corridor, on the ground level, where a competent young sergeant waylaid Carr to the point of extending a hand toward his arm.

“Sir. Please. Shocking news, sir.”

“Yes?”

“Peter Ivan — Ivan Eva — Peter Ivan Vovitch. He’s just been found dead, sir. Murdered.”

Chapter 9

Catching up with that man had not been difficult. Carr tapped him on the shoulder. “Mr. Razumov, I presume?”

The younger man whirled on him with a guttural cry. Crouching, hissing, like an animal at bay, he glared black-eyed at the Assistant Commissioner while stepping back and extending his arms as if to ward off evil spirits. “Who are you?” His aitch was thick, and had *k* sounds as well.

“Please be calm, Kirylo Sidorovitch — that is your name, isn’t it? I hope I pronounced it correctly.” Carr brought out his wallet, and pointed to a card. “My identification. My name is Adrian Carr. I am with the Metro Police, Special Branch. If you’re not comfortable with English, I can summon an interpreter. Would you like that?”

“Not comfortable! Not comfortable! Tell me, Commissioner — “

“Assistant Commissioner.”

“Tell me, whoever you are, when have I last been comfortable in this life, in this body, on this earth? I’ll tell you when. Not since that wretched snowy night when Victor Haldin, that pantheon of all stupidities known to exist within Russia’s borders, came to me with his — it was not a confession. He was proud of his act! A murderer, and proud! I was working on my essay, I thought then I might win the silver medal. That would have paved my way. Then — he! Not since then have I known more than five minutes’ ease, and my nights — the dreams I have! Oh yes, I know English. One has to, these days. You and your Queen rule the world, do you not?”

“A king. The Queen died three years ago. Your English is excellent, Mr. Razumov.”

“Ah.” He held out his hairy wrists. He was hirsute in general, and the untrimmed beard obscured most of his face. “I was thought intelligent, once. Come — are you waiting to arrest

me? Wait no longer! I did not place that bomb, I did not make the bomb, I have nothing to do with what happened to the coffin. Madame Schablikine was kind to me, though not to Tekla, while she lived. But this is London! And you are the London police. Of course, you must want to arrest me. Although I've done nothing wrong. Not me! Not yet!"

With a soft voice and a firm grip on the other's arm, Carr eventually managed to bundle Razumov, and himself, into a cab. "We are not going anywhere. Driver, take us around the park, please. Three or four times. I have no intention of — incarcerating — you, Mr. Razumov, since as you say you have committed no crime and we are not aware of any. How, though, have you come to be in London? You do realize they all believe you're dead."

"Dead? Yes! I am dead, yet I keep breathing. There was a man hit by a tram. His face was smashed beyond all recognition. I took his clothes, dressed him in mine, left my identity card in his pocket. I had to get free, you understand, I had to claw my way out of the misery I and, and another, thought would be our lives to the end. Poor Tekla!"

"Poor Tekla indeed. So you let her believe you were dead?"

"I was better off dead! She was killing herself, taking care of me. Oh, she already had the cough, I knew there was only one way. Why should I continue to burden her?"

Carr recalled an important detail. "Weren't you — deafened? You seem not to be — hampered— in any way now."

"Deaf! Yes! I was deaf! But when I hid among the baggage on the train, leaving Russia, a kind conductor found me. Yes. He gave over my care to a doctor. Yes. English doctor. Rexton, Stanwood Rexton was his name. Dr. Rexton brought me here. He performed surgery. I regained my hearing, it is not perfect but you, you for example, you did not notice anything at all. I left the doctor's house in the middle of the night, taking nothing. Why? Because I can manage, on my

own! Because I don't — want — charity, I've had enough, more than my share. I will not obligate another human being to look after me. Not now, not later, not ever again."

The cab wheels groaned and clicked on the cobbles. Carr, without speaking, offered the young man a cheroot. In the light of the match his eyes glowed red. He sucked in smoke with avid fervor. "English tobacco. Now that is brotherly. No, I have to laugh, I have to! Sitting in a London cab with a policeman, not just a policeman, something more than a superintendent if I am correct? Yes? Sitting in a London cab calmly telling my story — "

"You are not quite calm, Mr. Razumov."

"While the man you call Peter Ivanovitch proceeds with his obscene and criminal plans — he is not under arrest? Peter Ivanovitch?"

"No, he is not. What obscene plans are you attributing to him?"

"You don't know? You don't know? What he wants to do with Madame's house?" His laughter was more of a screech. "London police! You are not very efficient then, are you? How is it you do not know?"

"Mr. Razumov." Adrian Carr drew the skirts of his coat farther away from the gesticulating man waving a burning cigar. "You'd best be careful. I suggest you begin at the beginning. What about Peter Ivanovich?"

"He thought he could do it to Tekla. She wasn't that young. She was — not beautiful. Little he cared, though! When he saw he couldn't force her into, into his plans, he turned her into a servant. Monster! Rapacious, degenerate, a top-hatted Thing whose life was a lie from beginning to end!"

Carr leaned out of the window. "Cabbie? Could you drop us — there? Good man, thank you. Come, Mr. Razumov." Already halfway out the door, he beckoned to the man huddled

inside. “Come out of that. We’ll continue our talk in that — eating house, I believe they stay open quite late. Do you need assistance? Well, then — come.”

Carr in a departmental automobile, a recent acquisition, sat with closed eyes behind his driver, Constable Charlie, recalling last night’s conversation. Razumov, chattering on, had rained down imprecations, evoking and cursing the late Victor Hardin, even hurling abuse at the name of Lawrence Penniman.

“Kirylo Sidorovich, you are incorrect there. Mr. Penniman was quite concerned about you. He thought your death a needless tragedy.”

“My death! Ha! Mr. Carr, not my death, but my life is a tragedy.”

“That’s as may be, although I beg you not to cast so wide a net with your aspersions. Lawrence Penniman translated your note — the one you left jabbed with a knife on your desk, upstairs at Mrs. Merle’s. I beg your pardon, at Sofia Antonovna’s. She was putting you up, then?”

“Yes. It was she. She recognized me, on the street. I had to pull her into a bakery, otherwise she might have spoken my name. It was she who suggested my employment, at the cemetery. Digging graves! What better occupation for a man believed dead? The job suited me. I was content. I received pay. I begged Sofia Antonovna not to tell her friends. She knew why I came to England. We promised each other we would not interfere.”

“Interfere with what?”

“Mr. Commissioner Carr — ”

“Just Mr. Carr, please.”

“Mr. Adrian Carr. What was your father’s name? Ah, then you are Adrian Antonovitch, a fine coincidence. Sofia Antonovna had her own plans.”

“I’m beginning to see what they were, I think.”

“It is my fate to be betrayed. And why not? I betrayed Victor Haldin. He was a fool— but his mother — ah! And his sister! Innocent women! Their lives were ruined. They considered me one of them — and I betrayed them, not once but twice. Sophia Antonovna — I left her house tonight. I had to! She threatened me, oh yes, with *you*. With you, Mr. Carr, should I carry out my plan. She was quite proud of her friend in the police.”

Once in U__ Province, he had counseled a silly young Englishman who had been “taken,” for quite a large sum, in the marketplace. Carr managed to recover the funds, after some work, but he had had some private chuckles at the idiot’s expense. Now he had become that man. “What — was your plan, Mr. Razumov?”

“To eradicate a cancer!”

“Please be more specific.”

“A deadly cancer, in human form. A cancer six feet, five inches tall. The — the whoremaster! The panderer! He who procured young peasant girls, driving through the countryside in his high hat, drawing up contracts with fathers who signed with an X. Oh, I have heard! ‘My dear Natasha, you will work in England! What a fortunate thing for your family!’ Tekla knew. I’ve always known. And Madame Schablikine — ”

“Did she know?”

“His Egeria? You know he used to call her that. She knew nothing, he is an expert at concealment. All he ever wanted was that house. For his — his purposes.”

“Very well. Mr. Razumov, I thought tonight you might have been a burglar. You are not. What were you doing, then, outside Madame Schablikine’s house?”

“Looking for a way inside. For evidence! Evidence that is proof. That will prove everything I have told you here tonight.”

“Hm. But I’ve already sent in my men. We had a warrant. You would have stumbled right into the arms of my Chief Inspector. He’d have had you on breaking and entering.”

Razumov swore — Carr presumed he was swearing — in Russian. He slapped his own face, punched his left arm with his right, stomped the floor in his thin boots. “Making a scene? Am I making a scene? Do you see any other patrons in this low dive, at this hour? You English, so concerned with proprieties. Ah, in Russia we have souls, we have feelings, we say what we mean to say and as loud as we want.”

“Yes. Until the Czar’s secret police pick you up. Then it’s off to the Sea of Okhotsk. If my men have discovered evidence bearing out your allegations, will you testify, in court?”

He was not a bad-looking young man, under all the hair and grime. The thickness of his nose stood out less than his languishing eyes, his finely molded forehead, the small close-fitting ears. A barmaid smiled at him. He did not notice. “I — will testify. If I live.”

“Why should you not? Are you sick?”

“No. No one, save Sofia Antonovna, knows I am alive — but I have premonitions. They are often right. The night Haldin visited me, I knew then what would happen. Knew it!” He banged his knuckles against his temples. “Fate will not forgive me. I am a betrayer.”

Histrionics, thought Carr. His was an age of melodrama, but no people self-dramatized as did the Russians. He thought of Annie: how minute her problems seemed! All at once he had

longed to see her. He paid the bill, put Razumov into another cab, and went home — to find Dr. Monygham on the couch. *Annie!*

“Charlie, are we almost there?”

“In a cock linnet, guvnor. I’ll take you in through the side entrance, like. Bloodying the great man’s tomb, now that’s a first for us, innit? Dumping a body on bloody Karl Marx. You understand people, guv?”

“I have tried. But I don’t, yet.”

“Me neither.” The car bucked, kicked, and shuddered to a halt. Carr took the side path, away from the crowds. Inspector Heat was already there.

“Blunt instrument,” that officer announced. “Shovel. It was convenient.”

The back of the famous feminist’s skull was caved in. Pinkish-gray ooze was drawing flies. “Struggle?”

“Some. See where his collar’s torn? And his coat, split up the side. Whoever did this, he meant business, sir.”

“You could call it that.”

“He struck to kill. No doubt about it.”

Carr took in the splayed feet, the legs jutting out at unnatural angles, the blood beginning to dry on the tomb. “Heat, kindly remove him to the morgue.”

“He came to see us last night, sir.”

“*Who?*”

Heat touched the tip of his club to the sole of the dead man’s shoe. “Him. Right here. Peter Zed.”

“And you did not notify me?”

“Sir, we called your house, and were told that the doctor was there. It was very late, sir.”

Carr wished for a shovel himself. Heat would not have survived. “Pray — relay — to me what he said, Inspector Heat.”

“It was very strange, sir. With his accent and all. Said he was going to Highgate at dawn. To meet with a dead man, he said. He sounded agitated, sir.”

“He sounded agitated. But you did not ask for me.”

“What he said made no sense. And what with Mrs. Carr’s condition, and the doctor being there — I — I made the decision, sir. I decided it could wait.”

“Inspector Heat.”

“Sir.”

“It was a poor decision.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And now the man is dead.”

“Yes, sir. My apologies, sir. Ah, where are you going, sir?”

Carr turned up the collar of his coat. “To bring in his killer,” he called over his shoulder.

Chapter 10

Sophia Merle's hand went to her mouth — in shock or to cover a smile? Carr thought, both.

“Let's not waste time,” he said, refusing her affair of tea and a chair. “I spoke last night to Razumov. Kirylo Sidorovitch. Why didn't you tell me he was alive?”

“I — Mr. Carr, how could I know? We all thought he was dead.”

“He was living in this house. Upstairs. We have the evidence, Mrs. Merle. Lying is not a wise policy.”

She looked much older in the morning light. Frowning, she massaged a brown spot on her hands. “In the defense of our movement, some things cannot be told. Some facts must be — altered — to fit. I am not apologizing for my views.”

“No one has asked you to. Did you know he came here to kill Peter Ivanovitch?”

“Oh, Mr. Carr. Please.”

“Kindly answer yes or no.”

“I had hoped he would not. I was trying to dissuade him. I thought he might — we might — come to an understanding. For the good of all.”

“You're wearing that lovely watch again, I see. From Tolland's.”

Her fist closed on the silver ball.

“You see, when we went through Madame's house we found — more bills. Nine in fact. All from Tolland's. For the same watch. And, we deciphered the name at the top. Which was your own. My dear Mrs. Merle, we are not fools in the police. I admired your intelligence. Please respect mine. Why did you have those bills sent to Madame?”

He could not see her face. Her neck was bent. He heard her mutter, “She paid. She always paid. She thought — it — was for some other purpose. Of course I lied, and lied often. Do you think she would have agreed? She worshipped him. As he did her.”

Carr brought out his notebook. “My Evidence officer left this for me. Can you read it?”

With clean hands, nails neatly trimmed, she took the small leather-bound pad. Carr was deriving a form of grim enjoyment from watching her bite her lip, puzzling out Jorgensen’s scrawl. She read aloud. ““Those bits off the frying pan. Not onions. Leeks. The bit of cheese. Swiss. Pans themselves, made in Geneva. H.M. Jorgenson, captain, barque *Wild Rose*.’ Captain?”

“In a former life. Your watch, Mrs. Merle. Your watch, and all of those you ordered — to practice on, wasn’t it? It was you who put the bomb together. We’ve recovered all the makings from your house.” He showed her the notebook page again. “Swiss leeks. Swiss cheese. Swiss pans. Jorgenson knows. Brought those pans here, didn’t you?”

“I did not murder Peter Ivanovitch.”

“No. That day someone else died.”

“You should be looking for Razumov.”

“He will be found. We solve cases here based on chronology, however. The earliest ones always come first. This bomb — may I say now, *your* bomb? Went off almost a month ago. Peter Ivanovitch died last night.” He saw Sophia Merle steal a glance at the poker. “I wouldn’t try anything now, Mrs. Merle. So you put your hands in a jar of bat guano? Hard to imagine.”

“Sometimes, Mr. Carr, one has to dirty one’s hands. For the cause.” She snatched up a plaster Alsatian.

“Put it down, Mrs. Merle.”

“Why? You are the police.” Her eyes blazed, her face contorted. “My natural enemy. For weeks I worked with that horrible substance. Gloves can’t do much, they can’t keep out the smell. I raided the hearths for wood ash. I bought charcoal, from a hawker in Gravesend. Nine expensive watches, sacrificed. Two harmless frying pans. Endless back issues of *The Torch*. Do you think I was trying to kill him? That inspired man?” She laughed, that crashing, glassy sound. “I was doing it *for* him. For Peter Ivanovich, for all of *us*. He was inspired, yes — by his Egeria. I meant to be her successor. I was right there, by the back door, that first morning you visited him. He was talking too much. I stopped him.” *Gracious*, he had thought her. *Wise*. How had his judgment eroded so far and so fast? He blamed the desk. “You were right, Mr. Carr. I did intend it as a provocation. Peter Ivanovitch needed to realize he was at risk. He is a precious resource. I wanted him to be protected — if not by your department, then by me.”

“Mrs. Merle, please place your hands where I can see them.” When she had done so, he continued. “Peter Ivanovitch was a — procurer. He wanted the Bloomsbury house, for that purpose.”

“Peter Ivanovitch championed women.”

“If by that you mean buying and selling them, yes. But I don’t think you do.”

“You cannot prove it. Photographs? Letters? They can all be forged.”

“The courts will take that up. Mrs. Merle, violence towards me will be harmful to your case. I suggest you drop that poker.”

She threw it at him — not very far — but the tip grazed his neck. With a roar he lunged at her. The poker dropped. A shape blocked the door. It was Razumov. He smashed the plaster dog over her head. “You may take me now, Mr. Commissioner.” The young man was breathing hard, but he was smiling. “Are you hurt?”

Chapter 11/Epilogue

Sophia Merle was convicted of murder, as well as possessing and making explosives. She began writing a book, in her cell. Prison memoirs never failed.

Carr wore a plaster on his neck. It was still there when he last saw Razumov, in court. The young man would not hang. He drew life. Carr told him he saw in him the makings of a model prisoner, one who, with luck, would walk out of the place before his hair turned gray.

Razumov, at ease in a chipped wooden armchair, looked much younger without his beard. His shorn hair was curly. He congratulated Carr. "May she be the first of many!"

"Thank you. Ah — we'll see about that."

"And your wife?"

"Very well, thank you. Resting at home."

He'd opened many coffins, he had testified, at Highgate. Sometimes people wanted to slip something in, a coin, a ring, a lock of hair, before the burial. He would nail them up again in time, so subtly no one noticed. In this way he had worked with Sophia Merle, transporting the heavy bomb in his wheeled cart, prying open Madame's mahogany box. Merle herself had lifted the head of the corpse, inserted the instrument, and gone away. That cart, more often used to haul shovels, rakes, and bags of fertilizer, had also permitted Razumov to move the body of Peter Ivanovitch, from his place of death under a tree (Razumov had climbed it, the better to shatter the taller man's skull with his shovel) to the tombstone of Karl Marx. The cart had been found, overturned, a few feet off. Faintly smiling, twirling a pencil, the young man looked in prison garb as if dressed for a masquerade.

Carr had given him a notebook. “It’s bigger than your old one,” he pointed out. “By the way, as Tekla’s lawful wedded spouse, the house in Bloomsbury is yours. You may sell it, if you like, and the funds will go into a trust. Should you obtain a ticket-of-leave — ”

“Ah! But I don’t wish to live outside these walls again. The days will fly past, once I can work. You did say the prison library is well-stocked? I’m looking forward to the peace and quiet. Then I’ll write!”

“What will you write?” asked Adrian Carr.

Razumov, prince’s bastard, looked astonished by the question. “What will I write? I’ll go back to my essay, of course. The one I was working on, the day Victor Haldin came in and threw my life over a cliff. I had almost finished it.” He laid the pencil down, with care. He was the diligent student again, he was the young man he had been, equable, calm, inspiring confidence. “They hold that contest every year. I may still win the silver medal.”

The guard came for Razumov. Carr sat there a moment longer, basking in the early summer sunshine filtering through the bars and mesh. His daughter had been baptized Adriana Melba Carr, but he and Annie in unvoiced agreement addressed her as Mellie or Melbie. He would never have imagined Annie capable of such hard work, much less willing to work as hard as she did giving birth. Since then he had decided women ought to have the vote.