

# **GUNPOWDER TREASON AND PLOT**



GABRIOLA, BC CANADA V0R 1X4

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# **GUNPOWDER TREASON AND PLOT**

A Novel

**H.B. DUMONT**



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## PROLOGUE

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5 NOVEMBER 1978

He gasped as he grabbed Constable Olivia Daniels' arm with a gorilla-like grip, pulling the constable's face to his own. Blood was pulsating through the field dressings that Daniels had applied over the .303 calibre rifle wound to his abdomen. He cringed in excruciating pain as his gut convulsed.

"She did it," he gasped, his eyes revealing alarming panic.

"Who is *she*?" Daniels asked.

"*They* shot me!" His voice was raspy but piercing.

"Who are *they*?"

He hesitated as he laboured to take a shallow breath. "She wanted it!" His resolve was terrifying.

"Wanted what?"

He gasped again from the agonizing pain. His breathing was fast and shallow. "Inside metal box."

Daniels sensed that she didn't have much time to gather specifics. "What box? Where?"

"Corner barn... 321 degrees... fencepost."

"Who shot you?" Daniels pressed for crucial details.

Then a brief, slurred utterance in a barely distinguishable Slavic-Germanic inflection, beyond a faint lilt, projected his fear, panic: "Nein, nein, nyet, nyet," he whispered, scarcely audible through the gurgles in his throat of bright red blood bubbling into his mouth. He knew his death was imminent. His expression was vacant. His eyes were unreadable. His face was gaunt.

"No, what? Nein, was? Nyet, chto?" Daniels repeated.

He gaped in a contorted grimace, seemingly surprised that the constable had acknowledged the languages of his repeated pleas. His grip gradually loosened. His arm slowly dropped. He paused as if hesitant before expelling a broken breath, slurring his words, “Sheenataish ... Mig ... Tavish.” Then his voice vanished.

Daniels made a mental note of the phonetics of what she thought his last utterance had been. She then checked for a pulse. There was none, just the hauntingly empty stare of his blank dark eyes riveted on her like the crowning signature of a Shakespearian sonnet. She took a moment to write in her new notebook in phonetics all she thought he had breathed in his final slurred words.

“Paramedics are en route,” announced Daniels’ partner, Constable Stan Polanski, from outside.

She called back from the barn door. “No pulse, no breath, no need to rush on the ambulance. Suggest we call to confirm Ident and GIS are coming.”

She retraced her steps into the barn, bent down and searched the deceased for identification. His driver’s licence read John Robert Hackett, date of birth 7 April 1931. His chronological age seemed inconsistent with his current appearance, accentuated by wary eyes masking what they wished to hide, she thought. Perhaps the violent circumstances of his death could explain the apparent discrepancy, but the photo on the driver’s licence seemed oddly mismatched also.

Constable Mike Davidson arrived into the farmyard, and rolled down a window. “Just passing by,” he called out. “Need any help?”

Polanski gazed at Davidson and his shiny new cruiser. “Slow day at the office for highway patrol?”

“You might say,” Davidson grinned.

“Best we protect the scene. Can you block traffic entering the farmyard except for authorized vehicles? Even then, direct them away from the entrance to the barn where there appear to be fresh footprints,” Polanski requested. He then joined Constable Daniels in the barn.



“A suicide?” Polanski speculated.

“Could be but perhaps not,” Daniels replied. “A female and someone else may have shot him. He whispered a name to me as he was gasping for a final breath. But I couldn’t make out the name clearly. It sounded something like Sheena Tavish or McTavish but I could be mistaken. Not exactly admissible evidence.”

Daniels sat down on a feed box, the only place in the cow barn that wasn’t covered in manure. She recorded the time and date of death: *11:57 a.m. 5 November 1978. Location: Hammonds Plains, Halifax County, Nova Scotia.* With an apprehensive expression, she mumbled to herself the words that her father had recited annually on this day:

*Remember, remember!  
The fifth of November,  
The Gunpowder treason and plot;  
I know of no reason  
Why the Gunpowder treason  
Should ever be forgot!*

Guido Fawkes, also known as – a.k.a. – Guy Fawkes had conspired to blow up the British House of Parliament on 5 November 1605. His chosen means was gunpowder, his motivation was treason, to kill King James I. His plot had been contrived with fellow Catholic conspirators. Today, the means was a rifle, the motivation was unknown, as were the details of the plot including the identity of the conspirators. Daniels shrugged her shoulders as a shiver of ill omen ran the length of her spine. But a menacing sensation lingered in its wake like a stain of red wine spilt on a new white linen tablecloth. Even if it washed out, its presence would be eternal.

“Cancel Ident and GIS,” a voice crackled over the radio.

Polanski squinted as his brow tightened. He ground his teeth and took a guarded breath. “Damn. I know that venomous voice all

too well,” he muttered. The hair on the back of his neck lifted up as Scrooge’s would have done when Charles Dickens’ ghost from Christmas Past came to visit.

“Who was that?” Daniels asked.

“Inspector J.P.R.C. Leblanc from Security Service. He took over the Security Service – the secret squirrels – this past summer. Came in from ‘C’ Division, Montréal. You want to keep your distance,” Polanski cautioned as he nodded at the deceased. “You could end up like him if you got on Leblanc’s bad side. In fact, everyone starts out on his bad side. He has been instrumental in prematurely ending a few promising careers.”

“Why would he cancel Ident and GIS when he isn’t even here?”

“With Leblanc calling the shots, I can say with a high degree of certainty that there is something *untoward underfoot*. He promotes his own brand of arrogance and disdain unlike any you may ever encounter. We need to tread very carefully.”

Daniels’ forehead furrowed as she walked hurriedly over to their patrol car where she retrieved a Pentax 35mm camera from her private briefcase. Scurrying back to the barn, she took a series of sequential photos for a 360-degree panoramic perspective. She then took several close-ups of the body and the .303 Lee Enfield rifle lying beside the deceased. The camera flash drew Polanski’s attention. He sprinted back into the barn and looked directly at her with an inquisitive yet wary expression.

“Something untoward underfoot,” Daniels mumbled, shaking her head as she looked up. “I’ve got a funny feeling on this one.” She sensed her intuition and initiative would be rewarded.

Polanski looked at his partner, his eyes guarded, his lips set tight. “Be careful,” he repeated. “Be very careful.”

Wheels skidded to a hurried halt, causing a cloud of farmyard dust to swirl, some seeping into the barn between cracks in the weathered wall boards. The vehicle drove over and stopped on

the footprints he had asked Davidson to warn drivers entering the farmyard to stay away from. Polanski peered at the lone occupant through the eddy of farmyard dust rising from the wheel wells. His name wafted on the periphery of Polanski's memory. He quickly whispered over his shoulder to Daniels, "Hide your camera under your coat, *fast*. Secret squirrels are here. Remember what I said. Play dumb. I'll explain later."

Polanski had recently been transferred to Bedford Detachment after a discreet plain-clothes assignment with what he had described as working with interesting people, doing interesting things in interesting places. While on that clandestine assignment, he had learned well how those operating on the fringe conducted the business of espionage and intelligence gathering, and how they looked down with utter contempt at uniformed officers. It became readily apparent that intelligence, unlike defence, was not entirely peacetime work. Instead, it was a constant war, the parameters of which were continually morphing as was the battlespace. Yet espionage was played out in mostly humdrum scenarios. Low-level contacts were the currency of virtually all intelligence work. The nimble and perilous world of James Bond and Goldfinger were limited to Ian Fleming novels and the Hollywood silver screen. Often, agents did not know if they were chasing actual spies or shadows of ideological polarization within the prism of disinformation and utter lies.

"I'm Corporal Werner Hartmann from Security Service. I'm taking over." His tone fell with a disparaging snarl behind an acrid sneer. "Report to your Detachment Commander immediately," he abruptly directed in no uncertain terms. There was something sinister in his demeanour that was all the more menacing. His voice was exacting with a discernible trace of the cruelty inherent in his accompanying malevolent personality. The weight of his stare

was like a medieval curse that would need a priest to perform an exorcism to expel.

Polanski recognized the plainclothes officer from his venomous reputation, which would have fitted in well within the ranks of the Gestapo or Stasi. He was one of Inspector Leblanc's rising stars who, like himself, had earned his rusting spurs in 'C' Division, Montréal. There was neither room for debate in his blunt dictate nor space for a summary synopsis of what Polanski and his partner had noted when they first arrived at the farm, including the fresh footprint now obliterated under his car.

Hartmann's menacing presence engulfed Daniels with his own brand of arrogance like no ill-omened aura or wraithlike apparition had done before. She felt momentarily violated, exposed. Her heart pounded in reaction to the ghoulish threat she perceived. She would not fight. She would not run. She would, instead, stand her ground in silence with an expressionless bearing. She had never acted as a victim of abusive behaviour by school-yard bullies and wasn't prepared to start now.

"Mount up, Daniels," Polanski directed in a forceful tone, not quite an order but not a simple request either. "We need to report to Sergeant McNeill."

Daniels understood the implications of the furtive communications and severity of unknown potential consequences should she so much as hesitate in contemplation.

She slowly backed away from Hartmann all the while holding his harrying stare with her own mounting confidence. He wasn't aware that her camera was concealed from his view under her winter coat, yet within his grasp. Her inner voice told her that she needed to protect that photographic record of what she had witnessed, at all cost.

Once in their patrol car, Polanski said to his partner, "I commend you for taking your stance, but this is neither the time nor the place

to engage with Corporal Hartmann.” He nodded his head slowly. His communication was clear. “There are times when discretion is the better part of valour, Constable Daniels. This is one of those occasions.”

“Lesson learned,” she replied. She sighed deeply as she nodded her head in acknowledgement of her partner’s words of wisdom. This was one of those times when she needed to close her eyes for a brief moment in order to see.

“Rest assured, the day of reckoning will come, Olivia, it just won’t be today, nor will it be tomorrow.” His voice brought with it a sense of tentative comfort and confidence.

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AT THE DETACHMENT, DANIELS TOOK the film out of her camera and stealthily slid it into her pocket. She then replaced it with a new roll of black and white Tri-X film. In her customary jovial voice, she announced to all in the office, “Smile, you’re on *Candid Camera*,” as she took a few shots. “For posterity,” she kidded in the event someone had seen her remove the one roll of film and replace it with another.

“Polanski, Daniels, in my office,” Sergeant McNeill directed in a stern yet guarded voice. “Security Service from Halifax want to interview everyone remotely involved with the case. They will be here shortly. Make yourselves available.”

Polanski whispered to his partner while maintaining his focused stare. “Strongly suggest that you only report what you observed at the scene when we arrived and nothing of what the deceased may have said to you. Understand? I’m deadly serious, Olivia.” *A Freudian slip with that expression*, he reflected, *but most appropriate under the circumstances*. “Don’t say anything more. Play dumb. Say that you are only a probationary constable under training. Minimize your involvement. I’ll back up your story.”

Daniels drew her eyebrows together, subtly tilted her head, and shot back a confirming yet questioning expression. She was good at covering up, of saying nothing, of washing unblemished linen stained with red wine. She had done it so many times, keeping secrets about secrets.

“You thought you might have heard something but you have no proof,” Polanski continued. “You admitted to me that you weren’t certain. Better yet, say that the person was dying when you entered the barn. As you were placing the field dressing on his wound, he took his last breath. If they ask how you knew he had taken his final breath, say that you checked for a pulse on both carotid arteries. There was none.”

“I’m just a dumb junior constable,” she mumbled with a resigned tone, “but a wiser one now, and time will tell.” She reflected on her partner’s sage words of advice: *“The day of reckoning will come, Olivia, it just won’t be today or tomorrow.”*

Inspector J.P.R.C. Leblanc called Constable Polanski into the interrogation room first. Daniels could hear the one-sided conversation from outside the door where she stood reflecting on her partner’s advice while making mental note of the few single syllable words Polanski had been allowed to utter to the inspector – “Yes, sir. No, sir.” She knew what awaited her, even as the junior probationary constable. She would quote Sergeant Schultz, Stalag 13’s memorable rotund comedic character from the TV series, *Hogan’s Heroes*, “I see nutingk. I hear nutingk. I know nutingk.”

Although just a junior constable, her inquisition alone with Inspector J.P.R.P Leblanc seemed longer than Polanski’s. He demanded to see her notebook which she obediently handed over. He admonished her for poorly maintaining her notes as there was no record of the incident or anything else, not even today’s date. He hadn’t realized that she had inserted a new notepad into the holder when she removed the original and changed the Tri-X film in her camera. He was correct in commenting that she had not made any

link to the final time and date of a previous notebook, which there wasn't. She hadn't had time before being called into the interrogation room. After another flurry of one-sided forceful remarks by Inspector Leblanc, some under his breath, but all implacable, she left the interrogation room clearly flustered.

"Everything OK?" Polanski asked. A cloak of compassion overshadowed his concern.

She nodded as a terse acknowledgement but without eye contact.

Polanski watched her hurry out of the detachment. Although they had been working together for only a few weeks, he had become aware of many of her mannerisms. What he noted today was out of character, worrying. He wouldn't press the issue at this time. He was confident she would confide in him in the fullness of time, in the privacy of their patrol car.

Polanski reflected on the first time he had been called into his supervisor's office to account for decisions he had made that the corporal believed were inconsistent with operating procedures. As a junior constable still on probation, he had never had to stand at attention in front of an officer. While in training, corporals were demi-gods. Inspectors and superintendents were gods with whom you dared not make eye contact let alone say anything more than yes sir, no sir, with a vacant façade. The Commissioner was a fabled character from a storied existence like gargoyles adorning steeped spires and gothic abutments on medieval cathedrals. On the one hand, Polanski wanted to protect her. On the other, he knew that she would gain wisdom from this experience. The ancient Athenians referred to two distinct types of wisdom: *phronesis*, the more practical, and *sophia*, the more general. He could teach her about one but she would have to learn the other on her own.

Both Daniels and Polanski knew she would have to endure Inspector Leblanc's torment: officers in the Force were all cut from the same hubris dinosaurian cloth.

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## CHAPTER 1

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SEPTEMBER 2005

“Olivia Daniels! Stanislaw Polanski. Haven’t seen you since Bedford. That must be almost 30 years ago.”

Olivia looked up from her seat in the Air Canada Maple Leaf Lounge at the Toronto Pearson International Airport. Recognizing the face behind the voice, she immediately stood, smiled and extended her hand. “Stan, you are a pleasant sight for a traveller’s weary eyes. Where are you coming from, flying to? Do you have time for a java?” She found herself holding his hand for a little longer than normal. “God, it’s good to see you.”

The tone of her voice emphasized her sincerity. How many times had she reflected on the shifts they had worked together, sharing aspirations, exchanging tales of childhood adventures, engaging in the conversations that a young girl might have had with an older big brother. Banter began to flow as if no time had passed since their last shift together as a team at the Bedford Detachment.

“I have a few hours. Heading back home to Victoria via Vancouver. What about you?”

“Same. My flight to Calgary doesn’t board for two hours.”

He was taken aback by her natural yet still youthful appearance. She was not one of those narcissistic women who spent hours preening themselves in front of a mirror attempting, often in vain, to recapture their fleeting youth. When they worked together in Bedford, he had found her presence to be compelling, their times together on and off the job so unassuming. He conceded that there was discrepancy in perception and his perception had



been influenced by his own rose-coloured lenses. Much water had passed under the bridge since then.

“You haven’t changed a bit,” he complimented her.

“Only my hairdresser knows,” she jested. Hair colour was a socially acceptable means of masking, of covering up both good and hard times.

He rubbed the palm of his hand over his balding head. “I’m follicly challenged. Otherwise, none the worse for wear.”

She chuckled at his amusing self-assessment. There was something about the way he held himself, an ease, a confidence, a neatness, a semblance of presence. She recalled being drawn to these attributes when they first met. But the years had fogged her memory leaving only a remnant of a *je ne sais quoi*.

Aware of the silence between them resulting from her reflection, she re-engaged. “I’ve often thought about you and wanted to express my gratitude so many times for teaching me a few tricks of the trade, especially the artful connotation of *something untoward underfoot*. I’ve muttered your sage words many times.”

He stood in silence, smiling, captivated once again by her company.

She gazed around looking for eavesdroppers. Despite the fact that this section of the first-class lounge was all but vacant, she beckoned him to occupy the padded leather chair beside her where his voice would project against a wall, not the open lounge.

She lowered her voice. “After the shooting in the barn, life went sideways for me. I mean the mysterious murder case at the farm. But in retrospect, I had a relatively successful career although on the periphery of the orbit and gravitational influence of the Great White Buffalo in Ottawa.”

“That case impacted both our careers,” he admitted. “I did well in my first few years before I was transferred to Bedford. There, I was able to shake free of Inspector Leblanc’s intrusion.”

Olivia huffed. “You may recall that within a few days of Hackett’s death, I was swiftly transferred to Ottawa to guard tulips with the cardboard Mounties on Parliament Hill. It wasn’t so bad. I managed to wrangle my way into Carleton University and ultimately completed a PhD in Slavic Studies that the Force paid for. My great grandparents were Russian immigrants. My grandparents and parents spoke Russian so I had a rudimentary understanding of the language. I applied for Security Service after graduating, but was turned down. I concluded that I was still *persona non grata* so I left the Force within a couple of years and ended my working career as faculty at the University of Calgary. I’m now on an open-ended sabbatical.”

Stan smiled, acknowledging with a slight nod her brief yet optimistic autobiography. “I can see you leading the brightest of bright minds in a classroom. You entered this galaxy a star destined to become the nucleus of a constellation.”

“Thanks for that artful compliment.” A faint blush accompanied her smile. “But hardly so.” She savoured the gracious accolade as she had done many times as his trainee in Bedford. Those assessments had meant a great deal to her. Other men in her life had acknowledged her effort with what she interpreted as a hollow expression based on ulterior motives.

“Both our transfers had J.P.R.C. Leblanc stamped all over them,” Stan followed up. “About the same time as you departed Bedford for Ottawa, I was transferred to Assumption Detachment in Northern Alberta. It was said that if the country needed an enema, the insertion point would be Assumption. I received a reprieve for my sins, whatever they might have been, ending up in Identification Services and ultimately as a Crime Scene Analyst where I spent the next ten years or so of my less-than-illustrious career. After that, I accepted an offer to work with some old friends who were providing consulting services to private sector national

and multi-national clients. I retired from that lucrative gig a couple of years ago.”

Olivia added to her abridged summary. “I can’t remember if I mentioned before I left Bedford that someone had snooped through my briefcase about the same time that Inspector Leblanc was reading the riot act to us. I know that because whoever it was opened my camera and the light spoiled the few pictures I had taken in the detachment. Unbeknown to the intruder, I had replaced the roll of film with the pictures of the deceased in the barn. On a subsequent trip to visit my family in Calgary, a friend developed them. I kept the prints and the negatives in my father’s bank safe deposit box.”

“I’m not surprised to hear that. You were known for going nowhere without your camera. They probably thought you had taken photos in the barn.”

Again, with a lowered voice and glancing around warily, Olivia admitted, “Your warning that there was something untoward underfoot certainly rang true.”

“Do you remember Mike Davidson?” Stan asked.

“Highway patrol, arrived at the barn just before Corporal Hartmann, the secret squirrel.”

“Yes. Inspector Leblanc interviewed him after us. Apparently, Davidson had stopped Hackett on the road close to the farm a few hours before the elderly man was shot. For whatever reason, Davidson was suspicious that something just wasn’t right.”

“That might have been why he just happened to be in the area and asked if he could help,” Olivia speculated, intrigued, curious.

After a solemn moment of reflection, Stan added with lament, “Shortly after I left Bedford, Davidson drowned while fishing in Pockwock Lake just north of Hammonds Plains.”

Olivia’s mouth dropped in utter disbelief and abruptly exclaimed, “No way, no damn way.”

“Why?” Stan asked, instinctively drawing back in response to her brusque rebuff to his account.

“Davidson hated fish and despised fishing with a passion. He got seasick just thinking about water. Do you remember the time when he was supposed to supervise the recovery of a stolen truck that went off the road and into Stillwater Lake? That day, the wind was blowing hard and the waves were whitecapped. He started to vomit. We had to supervise the recovery for him while he rested in the back seat of his patrol car.”

“I forgot about that. You’re right,” Stan acknowledged.

“Davidson had previously banged his head in a car accident. Thereafter, he suffered from sporadic episodes of vertigo, spiking headaches, nausea and occasional blurred vision.”

“Right again. The Force eventually took him off highway patrol and stuck him in headquarters driving a desk.”

They sat in brief meditation staring at each other.

Stan was the first to break the silence. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“Is your retirement seemingly as boring and uneventful as mine, particularly with the prospects of having to acknowledge the approach of the body’s autumn season?” Olivia countered. “Looking for a part-time post-retirement career where we call the shots? Sorry about the pun.”

“Two Old Farts Investigative Services, TOFIS, only limited by our arthritis,” Stan responded with a contemplative chuckle and a mischievous grin to her tantalizing invitation. They were both silent in the fleeting moment that followed.

“Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship,” Olivia uttered in hopeful jest.

“Bogie. Casablanca. 1942! One of my favourite classic Hollywood heroes,” Stan crowed with adoration for Humphrey Bogart and for Olivia’s proposal to become partners once again.

She could see the enthusiasm in his reaction to her invitation. Seeing Stan again after all these years, if only by happenstance, brought back a flood of regretful emotional memories. She had contacted a friend who was in RCMP headquarters staffing to expedite her application to attend Carleton University. From her, Olivia had learned that Stan had been transferred to Assumption Detachment in Alberta. She had thought about writing him or at least making note of his address so she could send him a belated Christmas card. She had second thoughts. He had not contacted her so she concluded he wasn't interested in becoming pen pals.

Life got complicated thereafter. She had looked at his address each year as Christmas rolled around but failed to do more until she received her acceptance letter as faculty at the University of Calgary. By then, he had left the Force and Alberta. Her contact in staffing at RCMP Headquarters had moved on also. The last known address was somewhere in Montréal. They had passed each other like ships in the night. Life seemed to remain complicated. On the fifth of November each year, she looked at his outdated address with increasing regret. There were other occasions when she kicked herself for not reaching out. No doubt he would have been married. Would she have been able to hide her true emotions? Wives were good at picking up on such sentiments. It would have been awkward, she surmised.

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## CHAPTER 2

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“Thanks for agreeing to meet in Calgary. Coffee? Tea?” Olivia asked.

“Coffee would be great, double double.”

While Olivia went to the kitchen to summon the coffee pot into action, Stan surveyed her living room with curiosity for the eclectic decor and admiration for the excellence of her furnishings.

“You have more bookshelves than most people have books.” He continued to scan the paperbacks and hardcovers that were organized from classics to contemporary, from Virgil to Shakespeare, Austin to Whitman and Hemingway to Le Carré, all in chronological order for select series. Other books were lying on their side in various piles, perhaps by dates acquired but not yet read or filed. “If I remember correctly, you were a prolific reader back in the day. You had several novels on the go at any one time,” he commented when she returned from the kitchen with the coffee.

“It’s a hazard of the academic profession and affiliation with the ancient guild of the avid *antiquarian*. It’s a fancy word for those addicted to the collectable classics which I started as a child. You’ll find a complete first edition set of Charles Dickens, in addition to Alexandre Dumas in French, and Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky in Russian.”

“I’m impressed.” He was also drawn to a fencing foil and mask, and other accoutrements of the fine art of the Sabreuse, amid numerous trophies that attested to her considerable talents. “Do you fence?”

“I do, have for several years. I find it better for mental and physical exercise than yoga which seems to be more popular among most of my domesticated female friends in their well-intentioned

but misguided endeavour to shed the pregnancy pounds after years gone astray.”

“Remind me to keep on your good side,” he jested.

“What about you? What occupies your spare time?”

“Since moving to Victoria, I’ve become a devoted gardener in pursuit of the Great Victoria Night-hopping Marrow Looper that consumes my tomatoes among other prized veggies between dusk and dawn. Like the Loch Ness monster and Ogotopog in Lake Okanagan, no one has ever seen one, but they leave their calling cards in their wake. I spend the rainy days solving crossword and Sudoku puzzles.”

“Once an analyst, always an analyst,” Olivia chuckled. It had been a while since she had laughed and teased with someone so relaxed.

“I also volunteer with the local American Sign Language Society.”

Olivia gave him an inquisitive gaze.

“My mother was born deaf so sign language was how we communicated as a family.”

“Any problems getting away?” Olivia asked as she poured the coffee.

“Widowed two years ago. Brain cancer. One daughter and one son, both married with budding careers of their own. No grandchildren. No problems getting away.”

Olivia acknowledged his loss. “Thanks for sharing.” She sensed he was still dealing with his wife’s death and rattling around the empty nest.

Stan simply smiled. “And you?”

“Divorced. No kids.” Her matter-of-fact terse accounting indicated there were no outstanding emotional strings.

“So where do you suggest we start?” Stan asked.

“Let’s go back to square one. Do you know who called it in, the shooting at the farm?”

“I never did find out,” Stan replied, noticeably frustrated. “I enquired in order to annotate my notes. First, I was told by the shift supervisor that I didn’t have to complete a report because Security Service had taken over the case. Second, and more puzzling, there was no record of who reported it, no C238 Daily Occurrence Report, not even a reference to the Security Service handover. It was as if the shooting had never occurred.”

“Can you recall who was on the desk?”

Stan paused, searching through his mental Rolodex file. “Brian Hamilton. Off the record, he told me that he had been ordered to say nothing, ordered as in threatened with a fate worse than a permanent transfer to Hades, or worse – Assumption Detachment. He substituted our C238 occurrence number with a supposed anonymous call that was registered as unfounded for uniform crime-reporting purposes. That way it was immediately cleared off the books by the shift NCO. The Detachment Commander liked those calls – reported one, unfounded one.”

“What about Davidson’s drowning?”

“By then, I was at Assumption Detachment counting mallard ducks under the *Migratory Bird Convention Act*. I only heard about his death through the grapevine. I do recall he was buried in the RCMP Cemetery in Regina.”

“OK, first stop Regina,” Olivia responded in an authoritative tone. “There will be a verification of the interment with date of death. I’ll get a copy of the *RCMP Quarterly* which should have a record in the obituary section. If we’re lucky, there will be a reference to the circumstances surrounding his death. I’ll also research obituary records for Halifax County because it will list where John Robert Hackett, the deceased, was buried. The coroner’s office should be able to provide a cause of death.”



“I’ll contact one of the crime analysts I trained. He will be able to dig up contact information for Hamilton which we cannot easily access. Hamilton should also be less close-lipped now and not so easily intimidated.”

“Not easily accessed or not accessed at all,” Olivia added with a tinge of sarcasm in her voice. “I recall one of my Depot training instructors in Regina insinuating that discipline meant not telling anyone outside the Force about what went on inside. To do otherwise would be tantamount to heresy. Corporals were demi-gods so I never thought of challenging their authority or the veracity of their reasoning. I grew out of that false belief when I was researching for my PhD dissertation at Carleton, and challenged every denial under Access to Information while faculty at the University of Calgary. I even challenged redacted information and was occasionally successful in squeezing out additional details. I just surmised that I didn’t trust anyone within the RCMP. I didn’t know anyone else and concluded that I probably didn’t want to know them. I needed to be cautious about anyone who claimed to be a part of the fraternity or anyone who seemed like a favourite uncle not showing any of the expected norms yet showing up for a family dinner unbeknown to other family members.”

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### CHAPTER 3

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The drive from Calgary to Regina allowed them to get caught up on forty-five years of collective career highlights embellished with tall tales. At Depot Division in Regina, the record of Davidson's interment was limited to his service number, date of birth, date of death, and burial plot number. Notation in the obituary section of the *RCMP Quarterly* was equally sparse.

Olivia scanned incoming messages on her cell phone. She pursed her lips and grunted in dissatisfaction. With a passion, she disliked bureaucracy. She had learned the fine art of circumventing university hurdles with the aid of a few select administrative colleagues with senior service. Government was another unwieldy beast that often left her reaching for antacid medication. Drinking glasses of warm water with baking soda was her next best option when she had exhausted her supply of over-the-counter medication. She unwrapped her last few pills.

"What's up?" Stan enquired. Trepidation accented his tone. He had learned when you were confronted early in an investigation with road blocks, it tended not to get easier. It wasn't Murphy's Law but instead Stanislaw's Law.

"My request for records from Halifax County regarding Hackett's death has come back negative. There is no record, not even a reference to a coroner's report. Nor is there an obituary in any Halifax newspaper of his death or funeral. No record. No photos. No references. No details. No correspondence. *Persona non grata* as in disappeared without a trace."

"How can that be?"

"Not sure," Olivia muttered. She had conducted countless online searches for academic papers and research projects. Occasionally,

she would have to modify the words or the search sequence but she invariably came up with some responses. From these initial findings, the snowball effect produced exponentially more leads. She could not ever remember coming up with a blank slate especially when the search string focused on individual names or aliases. The challenge was typically quite the opposite, having to vet too many extraneous hits.

“Perhaps he had a different name,” Stan suggested.

“But his driver’s licence is an official government document. The name I wrote down in my notebook clearly stated John Robert Hackett.”

“You have a point there. I’m not aware that names of deceased can be lawfully altered *post mortem*. There might be an addendum for also-known-as – a.k.a.” He paused in reflection. “The operative phrase being *lawfully altered*. If you simply disappear and no one reports you absent, who is to know otherwise?”

“His wife would know.” Olivia furrowed her eyebrows as she searched her mind for possible explanations. “Unless his wife didn’t want him found,” she added. “Hackett had first gasped, ‘*She did it.*’ Then he said, ‘*They shot me.*’ I distinctly remember writing down in my notebook what he slurred.”

“One person, his wife, suggests premeditated murder. Two people, his wife and this other person, equates to conspiracy to commit murder,” Stan suggested. “Now we add in secret squirrels, one being Cpl. Werner Hartmann, and another being Inspector J.P.R.C. Leblanc.” He inhaled a slow deep worrisome breath. “I don’t like where this is leading in the slightest. We aren’t just looking into suspicious circumstances surrounding Davidson’s death.”

Her father’s lyrics resonated in her mind. *Remember, remember, / The fifth of November, / The Gunpowder treason and plot; / I know of no reason / Why the Gunpowder treason / Should ever be forgot!*

Stan was amused by her odd expression. “And?”

“And the circumstances surrounding this case.” Her voice trailed off. “Too many inconsistencies, perhaps cover-ups.” An ill-omened shiver ran the length of her spine. She recalled Stan telling her to say nothing when asked about what she had seen and heard in the barn where Hackett had been murdered. She was good at covering up, keeping secrets about secrets. She hesitated and then reiterated Stan’s observation. “Lawfully altered. If a student came to me with a research paper that had inconsistencies or unconnected threads, I’d tell them to explore with broader depth and breadth.”

“So, we dig further for the facts.”

“I had one student who responded to my comment to research further by asking how to investigate intuition, the gut feeling.”

“And what did you say?”

“If you can’t find an explicit, the fact, seek the implicit, the intuitive. Explain objectively why you have subjective reservations.”

“So, why do you have reservations about this case beyond the apparent disappearance of Hackett and the questionable circumstances surrounding Davidson’s reported drowning?” Stan probed.

Olivia dwelt on his question. “I can’t put my finger on it... might have been something that Hackett whispered to me just before he died. Or maybe it was something I saw in the barn. It’s been too long.” She raised her head scanning for a single image projected on the monitor of her mind or a series of connected clues which alone might mean nothing but in sequence could lead to a potential solution or another viable clue or lead to follow, something, anything.

Her cell phone buzzed with an incoming message, interrupting her train of thought. She studied the screen with a puzzled

expression. Her smile morphed into a frown. Once more, she slowly shook her head from side to side.

Stan watched her reactions. A double road block he surmised. Murphy's law and Stanislaw's law.

"My request under Access to Information has been denied under the *Official Secrets Act*. We would need written authority from the Director of Canadian Security Intelligence Service or the Minister of Public Safety to access any details, even a mere verification of the incident, let alone specific details pertaining to Hackett's death and apparent disappearance."

"I don't like the sound of that," Stan replied, sharing his partner's growing frustration. "I'm sensing that Inspector J.P.R.C. Leblanc is still pulling some strings in order to maintain a cover-up. We need to tread ever so carefully as we proceed."

"In the words of a wise colleague, there appears to be something untoward underfoot," Olivia muttered. "Have you received anything back from your friend regarding the whereabouts of Brian Hamilton?"

"Nothing yet. I'll call my contact again. At this juncture, I think it would be wise to minimize any electronic email record that can be tracked by any associates of Leblanc or someone else. Not paranoid. Just careful."

Olivia grumbled under her breath as she conducted a first-level online search. "There are over ten thousand references for the name Brian Hamilton on the internet. No help there. Hopefully, your friend can assist us, as Hamilton is now our last known tangible link."

It was Stan's turn to grimace as his colleague replied to his call regarding Brian Hamilton. His face changed from hopeful anticipation to wary speculation. His guarded expression was contagious.

Olivia took a slow deep breath. "Don't keep me in suspense."

She smiled inwardly at the thought of this renewed relationship with her former trainer and mentor, now partner.

“Strike three.” Stan paused. “My friend apologized for taking so long. When he initially enquired about Hamilton, he was grilled by his superior officer as to why he wanted to know. His initial enquiry was denied. Through a friend of a friend, he was advised that Hamilton supposedly committed suicide with a bullet to his head from his own service revolver. I say ‘supposedly’ because circumstances were suspicious. My friend advised me to be very careful.”

“We are being confounded at every turn. If I didn’t know any better, I’d suggest some black-hatted bad guys are masquerading as white-hatted good guys,” Olivia concluded, mirroring Stan’s recommendation for vigilance. “Perhaps we need to find some good-bad guys and exploit their talents.”

“Leblanc is really irritating me. Let’s re-evaluate our strategy. I’m not suggesting we dissolve TOFIS. Quite the opposite. Two of our friends associated with this case have died under suspicious circumstances. If for no other reason, we owe it to them to find out what really happened and who is responsible. I’m more than ever committed. We just need to come up with a different, better game plan.”

“*De l’audace, encore de l’audace, et toujours d l’audace,*” Olivia declared. “Audacity, more audacity, and always audacity. In the *lingua franca*, Leblanc is also pissing me off. As a strategy, I’m inclined to confront the devil on his own turf, but on our schedule, not his. We stay one step ahead of Leblanc and his legacy until such time as we have something irrefutable to hold over their heads.”

“We have exhausted all our standing, breathing potential contacts. What do you suggest?” Stan asked.

“I have one bit of information that they don’t know about and

don't know that I have. Next stop, Hammonds Plains, Halifax County, Nova Scotia. Can you get hold of a surveyor's map of the farm, a compass, or better still a surveyor's transit?"

"Probably could. Why do you ask?"

She smiled. "First a bit more research that cannot be thwarted."

Stan stood erect staring at his new business partner, appreciating her tenacity once again. "If nothing else, my time in Ident and crime analysis taught me to observe. In perceived chaos, randomness and confusion, search for patterns and anomalies, and patterns of anomalies. Even in the apparent absence of anything, there is something: what is not said, not seen, not heard, not done. Anything sensed always leaves a pattern that will get us closer, wherever closer is."

"Closer to what? Further from where?" Olivia queried, appreciating the craving for candour and need for vigilance.

"We'll find out. I'll follow your lead," Stan replied as he bobbed his head. As Olivia's trainer, she had obediently followed his lead. The tables were turning and he liked the thought of being a partner in an equal relationship. It was refreshing.

"I very much appreciate your confidence. But please don't follow without asking why or offering alternative options even if it is just your hunch. I am a firm believer that our intuition is never wrong. It's just our misinterpretation of our intuition that gets us into trouble, or outright dismissal of the implicit that sends us on the wrong path. A mistake on an academic paper could easily be remedied through debate or corrected in a subsequent draft if needs be. An error in this malicious game of cat and mouse has a higher probability of being disastrous."

"Deal," he replied with a warm smile. As an identification technician and later as a crime analyst, he had mostly worked alone. There was a certain level of satisfaction when he was able to link all the dots together, but it was a distanced objective feeling of

gratification. Rarely did he ever meet the victim or families of the victim if a death was involved. This case was different. He was emotionally invested. He knew Davidson and Hamilton. He had seen Hackett, his lifeless body wedged against a structural beam in the barn. And then there was Olivia. He had thought about her just about every day since they were separated. Now they were partners, together.



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## CHAPTER 4

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“What research?” Stan asked.

“Land Titles,” Olivia replied. “The land where the farm was situated all those years ago has been sold twice since then. That’s good news because the probability the current owner is aware of this case is infinitely small, let alone that a murder took place on their property. The current owner is listed as living in Toronto and has been there for over fifteen years. That means there is a good chance that the farm may be vacant or at minimum just rented.”

“So, what are we surveying?”

“Hackett, or whatever his name was, whispered something to me just as he was taking his last breath. He gasped, ‘*321 degrees from the corner of the barn, a fencepost.*’ That is where your surveyor transit and compass skills will come into play. You need to point us to a fencepost under which a metal box is supposedly buried. That was something else Hackett said just before he took his last breath.”

As they approached the farm, Olivia muttered with hesitation in her voice, “Finally, luck may be on our side. The farm appears to be vacant.”

“Never underestimate luck,” Stan replied. “I am humble enough to admit that luck, more so than skill, helped me find evidence that contributed to convictions in a few cases.”

Like a seasoned land surveyor, Stan directed Olivia along the compass bearing of 321 degrees from a corner of the barn.

“Spoke too soon,” she said with rising frustration and a hint of irritation in her voice. “No fencepost, not even a damn fence.”

Stan joined her and focused along the reverse bearing from where she stood, her shoulders heavy with disappointment. “Either

corner of the cattle barn, over this distance would lead us to this approximate point, at least to a fence.” He lingered with a contemplative expression, searching left and right. He then gave her an oblique look. “Correct me if I am wrong but wasn’t there another smaller barn back then? It probably held foxes – fox and mink farming were all the rage back then until the furry four-legged inhabitants contracted ringworm which destroyed their pelts. The animals then had to be exterminated and the barn burned down to contain the fungal infection outbreak. Give me a moment to scan my map.”

Olivia’s hopes were marginally renewed but still reserved. The lyrics of the Righteous Brothers’ melody, *Ebb Tide*, reminded her that change of luck was a cyclical process and overdue:

*First the tide rushes in,  
Plants a kiss on the shore,  
Then rolls out to sea,  
And the sea is still once more.*

Stan exclaimed with a re-energized voice. “Not all lost. An experienced modern-day surveyor goes nowhere without a remote GPS.”

She watched as her partner traced a compass line along an old map of the region.

“Eureka!” he uttered. The ebb tide had turned. “Back to the fox barn, not the cattle barn. We run a new bearing.”

Low shrubs of Nova Scotia blueberries filled the interior of what remained of the foundation of the fox barn and adjacent outdoor pen. The round juicy fruit had been prolific in the decade following the extermination and fire, from the natural fertilizer left behind. But even Mother Nature needs a helping hand after a few years, certainly decades. In every adversity there are the seeds of its opposite.

Olivia braced herself for further frustrations and disappointment

after a first false lead. Again, she followed the surveying signals this time to a fence and fencepost. She jubilantly signalled Stan to join her. With an audible clunk, the spade struck a metal object buried under a rotting fencepost held partially erect only by the strands of rusting barbed wire extending to adjacent posts still standing.

Olivia's eyes lit up. "That could be it," she exclaimed as she scratched the soil with her fingers exposing a rusted metal box. She wrenched it from its secluded grave. Something tugged at her instinct as she held onto it momentarily.

With the edge of the spade, Stan forced the corroded lid free. "What the hell!" he exclaimed as he unravelled what appeared to be an oilskin burlap fabric, exposing its contents.

"Back to the car, *NOW!* Let's get away from here before anyone sees us," Olivia directed with an urgency in her voice that Stan could not recall having experienced before. It suited her well. He liked it. He obeyed her directive.

At their hotel and in the privacy of his room, Stan opened the lid a second time. Again, he carefully unfolded the oilskin material and removed the contents.

Olivia briefly examined the cache. "I need to make a quick phone call," she announced, "to my ex. I think I know what it is and what the Cyrillic script on the document says. The severity of the consequences dictates that we err on the side of caution and get an expert opinion from someone we can trust. If I am correct in my assessment, we now hold the high ground over Inspector J.P.R.C. Leblanc and his cronies."

"You said you can speak Russian? What about reading it? Your ex?" Stan prompted with a combination of curiosity and concern. Proficiency in a second language, even Russian, would be feasible, even commendable given her doctoral credentials in Slavic Studies and family background. Contacting her ex could also be reasonable, even pragmatic.

He felt uncomfortable, uneasy. What had Olivia experienced when he mentioned that his wife, Betty, had died from brain cancer not so long ago? There had been an awkward moment in their conversation regarding previous spouses. But his wife was absent, deceased. Her ex was present, apparently very much alive. A third cog? He took a slow silent breath of resignation.

“To your first question, I studied Russian while at Carleton University. To your second, his name is Uri. He is Ukrainian. He had served with, been conscripted into the Russian army and later the Spetsnaz, their special forces. We met at Carleton, and married when I was starting my PhD in Slavic Studies. I learned more Russian from him than I was ever taught in class. We divorced the year I graduated. He moved as far east as he could while I went west. By chance, he is teaching at Dalhousie University here in Halifax. That’s the *Coles Notes* version of my bizarre university and brief married life.”

Becoming proficient in Russian was commendable. Being married to a Ukrainian, a former Cold War foe with whom he had engaged in electronic intelligence combat, left a sour taste in his mouth. He continued to feel uncomfortable, uneasy. “Do you want me here when he arrives?”

“Absolutely. I want you here.” She reached over and touched his arm. “You and I are partners, always have been, always will be.” Her thought of an embrace to confirm her need for him and commitment to their fledging yet growing relationship felt awkward under the circumstances. It had been too long since Bedford and too short since their meeting in the Air Canada Maple Leaf Lounge at the Toronto Pearson International Airport to show such closeness, despite her longing. Instead, she held his gaze hoping he would recognize her feelings and reciprocate her sincerity.

Within an hour of the phone call, Olivia, Stan and Uri were huddled around the table in Stan’s room.

“It’s a Russian Makarov PB pistol with silencer, the weapon of choice of the former KGB and now FSB, and Russian special forces, the Spetsnaz,” Uri stated emphatically with a faint but still noticeable Russian lilt as he glared at Olivia.

“Don’t ask,” she abruptly cut him off. The acrimony of their marriage remained as strong as it had been on the day of their divorce decree. Olivia said sternly, “I must warn you that if you speak to anyone about what we are showing you, the consequences could be fatal. Two of our former colleagues are already dead, we suspect murdered. One other person is also deceased and missing in action.” She then showed him the four pages of Cyrillic script.

Uri scanned the pages. “St. Cyril’s Byzantine alphabet,” he mumbled. His expression changed from annoyance to vulnerability. “There is no love lost between us,” he flicked a glance over at Stan, “but there is even less affection between me and my former Russian employer because of what Moscow did to my fellow Ukrainian citizens in the years leading up to the Second World War and following the defeat of the Nazis. The genocide of the Jews and others perceived as less than human in the concentration camps is equivalent to the unspeakable atrocities committed by Russia against the Ukrainian people. The only difference is the Ukrainian mass murders were never widely publicized. So, you can rest assured that I will speak to no one.”

“I need you to verify what I believe the four pages state,” Olivia uttered. There was an absence of compassion in her voice also.

Uri frowned with anxiety as he once again read each line. “What were you involved in back in your RCMP days? You told me that you were just a junior constable assigned to general detachment duties.”

“That’s the truth, Uri. That’s all I was doing before I was transferred to Ottawa.” She gazed over at Stan. “Stan was my trainer

and can verify that. By happenstance, we became involved in a murder case, connected to this metal box and its contents.”

Stan nodded, acknowledging her claim. “Can someone tell me what the script says?”

“The first page is a Russian cypher code used to translate highly sensitive communiqués from Moscow to Soviet agents,” Uri explained. “I would say the recipients were part of a network of Russian spies here in Canada. Her Russian name was Lada and his was Nikolai. More than likely a sleeper cell. There is reference to another senior agent name of Ruslan. He appears to be the controller of this sleeper cell in addition to several other Russian agents. Lada and Nikolai were involved in negotiating the transfer of the FLQ separatists to Cuba after the Québec Deputy Premier, Pierre Laporte, and British Diplomat, James Cross, were kidnapped in October 1970. These two Soviet agents, Lada and Nikolai, were ordered by Moscow to murder Laporte. This Russian Makarov PB pistol you found in the metal box was more than likely the weapon used.”

Olivia and Stan stood in stunned silence. They looked at each other with wide eyes before focusing back on Uri, then back to the pistol and documents, and finally back to each other. Their heartbeats increased tempo in unison.

With a dour frown of black humour, Stan summed up Uri’s precise geopolitical analysis, “In the immortal words of U.S. Marshall Matt Dillon from the black and white cowboy TV series, *Gunsmlake*, ‘It only takes one bullet to kill a man and one gun to fire it.’”

“And you cautioned me not to say anything about this to anyone!” Uri barked at his ex. “I’ll see your cautionary bid for silence in this lethal game of poker you are playing and raise your bet with an equally scary warning. You will be highest priority targets of Russian FSB, Canadian CSIS, and American CIA snipers and a

host of other nefarious non-state players if this gets out. I'm torn between thanking you and cursing you for asking me to verify what you have found. I'm leaning toward cursing. I will just be anonymous collateral damage without any footnote in the resurrection of the Cold War. Now I leave you to figure out what you are going to do. I need a stiff drink of Vodka and a few more as chasers. Remember not to call me next time you're in town, Olivia," he snarled.

After Uri left the hotel room, Olivia transferred her attention exclusively on Stan. "I need a stiff drink too. Care to join me?"

"So, what's our strategy now?" Stan asked as he poured two drinks from the mini bar in the room.

"It's an understatement to suggest that we hold the high ground over Inspector J.P.R.C. Leblanc and his co-conspirators," Olivia replied with a serious yet sarcastic tone. A Sunday school silence filled the space between them as they attempted to make sense of what lay on the table.

"Better yet, partner, we hold the high ground over those who yearn for the good old days of the Cold War," Stan countered with a grim tone. "Now Version 2.0 would have exponentially more ramifications on international relations and be much more lethal. We are back in the fray, deeper than we ever could have imagined, whether we like it or not. We have unknowingly crossed the Rubicon, the point of no return."

"Can you lift any fingerprints from the pistol and silencer, in addition to the paper? I am thinking about further potential evidence we might need to incriminate god knows who or use as surety to negotiate if we find ourselves having to fortify our ramparts and bastions."

Stan thought for a moment, still trying to make sense of the circumstances churning in their midst like erratic eddies of flotsam and jetsam at ebb tide.

“*Si vis pacem, para bellum* – If you want peace, prepare for war,” Olivia translated. “I can only imagine what the battle space may encompass and the myriad of armaments available in the armouries of the combatants, some – more than likely *many* – aimed directly at us.”

His stare morphed into a faint yet buoyant smile. “Theoretically, I should be able to lift a print. The environmental conditions are a factor, though. A major consideration is the porousness of the surfaces. The gun barrel, the silencer and the magazine should be ideal surfaces. The paper, possibly, depending on its composition. Because the metal box was sealed tight and the contents wrapped in oilskin, we may be in luck.”

“I was exhilarated that the ebb tide of our luck had reversed when we pulled the metal box out of the ground. There is the old adage – be careful what you ask for because you just might get it. Well, we got it in spades. How can you do this, lift the prints given the fact you have been out of Ident for such a long time? Don’t you need your special bushes, powder and tape for lifting the prints?”

“Let me ask one of my former associates who has a summer home up the coast from Antigonish toward the provincial border. It will be a long shot. If I can, and the operative word is *if*, I will be able to take a photo of any latent prints on the pistol and the paper with the camera on my cell phone. It actually has better resolution than the cameras we used twenty years ago. I’m reluctant to store any e-pics in the cloud because nothing is completely secure from someone who really wants to access digital data. So, I may just copy the file to a thumb drive for you and another for me. Even that has an elevated risk factor.”

Olivia nodded. “I wouldn’t be surprised if red flags have already been raised with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and a few other agencies in Ottawa based solely on our preliminary enquiries to date, like my Access for Information request.”



“And in Moscow,” Stan added. “Ottawa is awash with spies, including some who have infiltrated our CSIS Watcher Service, their sole purpose being to monitor any variation in routine activities including e-traffic.”

“I suggest we find an obscure place locally where we can hide-out,” Olivia proposed. “I say locally because we want to avoid public locations where facial recognition surveillance cameras have been installed clandestinely to monitor persons of interest. I suspect that the CSIS already has our respective homes under surveillance. Any suggestions as to where we can lie low until we can come up with a revised strategy? If at all possible, I’d prefer to have someone else return our rental car to the airport before we rise to the exalted status of number one on the ten most-wanted lists of who knows how many nefarious players.”

“Now that you ask, I do,” Stan offered.

As a child, Olivia would ask her grandmother to tell her stories of the old country. She would always start off, ‘Now that you ask,’ in an almost dutiful manner. Her grandmother would talk about the sparse letters regarding Communist oppression that her relatives wrote to her about. They were always intriguing. And then the letters stopped coming altogether. As Olivia grew older, she saw similarities to what she read in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* and fables of other Russian authors like Dostoyevsky and Turgenev. All were similar to those that Uri had recited to her when they were first married, on those rare occasions when he would reveal rarely disclosed details from his past, specifically from surreptitious Spetsnaz missions. They too were ominous although sparse in specifics and few in number. They stopped when his nightmares became overwhelming.

Accounts by her grandmother and Uri, and now the Russian Makarov PB pistol and the Cyrillic script wove a pattern of premonition. Together, they triggered recollections of the annual

recital of her father: *Remember, remember, / The fifth of November, / The Gunpowder treason and plot; / I know of no reason / Why the Gunpowder treason / Should ever be forgot!* She shrugged her shoulders as the familiar ill-omened shiver ran the length of her spine.

Time to listen to her own advice. *Your intuition is never wrong. It's only your misinterpretation of your intuition that gets you into trouble.* There was more at stake now that she had a partner to consider. Leblanc had been responsible for separating them before. Until they met at the Toronto Pearson International Airport, she hadn't realized how much she resented Leblanc's intervention, how much she missed Stan being by her side. When they met at the airport, she had meant to tell him, emphasize her feelings, not just her gratitude for the lessons he had taught her. But she never got around to it, now regretted it. That time didn't seem to be right. Now, it didn't seem to be the right time either. They were together again. That is all that mattered. She would find a time. She would not regret her inaction again.

From a time-management perspective, she would make note in her university calendar of appointments made and time needed to complete tasks. She would remind people, especially students, the day before their scheduled appointment. Time was of the essence. Her colleagues both envied and admired her for her discipline. Non-scheduled time allowed her flexibility to do as she wanted, to bring balance to her life. She would chuckle at the reality of scheduling in unscheduled time for relaxation. It seemed like an oxymoron. She reflected on an old Yiddish proverb: *man plans and God laughs*. With maximum flexibility, they would need to plan their next steps with contingencies and mitigation strategies in the event the gods started to laugh.

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## CHAPTER 5

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Traffic was sparse as they drove north with Bedford in the rear-view mirror in their nondescript retro SUV. The registered owner was following behind in their rented vehicle which he would park in the vacant rental car space at the Halifax Stanfield International Airport. There he would leave the keys in the overnight drop-off box. He would then take the airport shuttle bus back to Halifax. Stan would see the rental charges on his credit card invoice next month. He wondered which intelligence agency or other alerted non-state players might monitor his mail delivered to his home as a means of establishing an audit trail or a trail of Hansel and Gretel bread crumbs to follow. He could contact his credit card company and just ask for an e-invoice, but that might leave yet one more trail of bread crumbs, more evidence regarding their profiles leading to their whereabouts. A paperless invoice was still a better option.

“You never cease to amaze me, Stanislaw Polanski. When you were my trainer, you seemed to know someone who knew someone,” Olivia grinned. For whatever reason, she seemed more relaxed with Stan as a partner than she had ever experienced with other colleagues or even closer associates, including Uri. She again wondered how their relationship might have advanced had they remained together in Bedford. Some other members of the RCMP married and seemed to stay together despite the Force that demonstrated tacit intolerance for such relationships. Indeed for much of the Force’s existence, a member was strictly forbidden to marry at all, without obtaining prior approval from his superior officers.

Stan glanced over with an equally affable smile. “We will pick up some groceries in Truro and be in Oxford within the hour.

Then on to Port Howe via Kolbec with the River Phillip on the right. Then left onto the Amherst Shore Road. We will be putting on the teapot within forty minutes. On a clear day from Amherst Shore you can see across Baie Verte to the peninsula with Cape Tormentine at its tip. Ferries from the mainland once crossed the Northumberland Straits to Bordon, Prince Edward Island until it was replaced by the Confederation Bridge. Today, there is a quaint ferry that runs from Caribou, Nova Scotia to Wood Islands, Prince Edward Island. Once this case is solved, we can drive over the bridge and return via the ferry. Nothing else happens along this stretch of the coast. The perfect place to get away. No security surveillance cameras to worry about via the roads we will be taking. There is a security CCTV network around the farmhouse which the owner refers to as ‘the ranch’, in addition to outer buildings. Yes, it even has facial recognition software that is state of the art. It comes in handy for identifying intruders or online photos. I’ll show you.”

The road to Amherst Shore had once been the only coastal artery but today was devoid of any traffic except the odd farm vehicle lumbering along at speeds that would allow the tortoise to squander the race. This prompted Olivia to ask with a tinge of glibness but also with cautious curiosity, “What’s there at Amherst Shore that requires this advanced level of CCTV security surveillance?”

“My friend is a retired lobster fisherman according to Canada Revenue Agency, but a computer techie by hobby. He inherited a century-old ranch house with a clutch of outer buildings on a sizeable plot of farm land, today mostly forested. He has fixed up the house on the inside with the most up-to-date satellite surveillance technology in the secure garret. He drives his cherished grey antique F-100 tractor around the few fields as a means of stress reduction and for show. If not being driven, it is stored with loving care in the secure garage. From all outward appearances, you wouldn’t suspect anything. However, there is no point in tempting

providence so we will park our retro SUV out of sight in the garage beside the tractor.”

Olivia felt more relaxed. “Stan, what do you do to pass the time?” she asked.

“We will be able to conduct internet searches without being traced. The log-in sequence can be found in the barn, to the right as you enter the main door. I’ll show you. The property also has some other features that enhance security including two clandestine tunnels, one to the garage and the other to the barn. I will show you them also.”

Her stress level rose slightly at the explanation that there were additional advanced security features including tunnels but not to the point that she needed to drive the F-100 tractor around the property. *Why would that be necessary*, she mused. On second thought, perhaps having enhanced security wasn’t such a bad idea given the fact that they were in possession of the metal box, containing the Russian Makarov PB pistol, silencer and the Cyrillic script which now connected them to Nikolai, Lada, his wife, and Ruslan, their KGB handler and God only knows who in the Canadian Security Intelligence Service hierarchy in addition to untold senior mandarins in the government bureaucracy. Although Uri, her ex, was relatively nearby in the event he might be needed again, he did not know where they were, nor would he. She had no intention of telling him, given his employment history and other associates from the Cold War.

After they placed the groceries on the kitchen counter and put on the teapot, Olivia surveyed the interior of the ranch with its circa turn-of-the-last-century rural decor and refurbished retro kitchen wood stove, in addition to modern fixtures and furnishings and other artifacts of an earlier simpler era. She anticipated being greeted with dingy windows and a dreary dismal structure engulfed in a dank smell of mold that had infiltrated every porous surface.

Instead she was pleasantly surprised at the somewhat opulent surroundings attended to on a scheduled maintenance basis by professional cleaners. A scent of fresh-baked bread and cinnamon buns seemed to linger. Her initial thought suggested that it would be an ideal location for someone seeking isolation from the distractions of a hectic life style such as a contemplative philosopher, fiction writer or a serious antisocial introvert. *Or a retired spy seeking solitude from other spies*, she pondered. The sophistication of technology housed in the secure office left her almost speechless.

“Lobster fishing must be lucrative,” she commented in jest. She couldn’t recall anyone in the agrarian or fisheries industries she had ever known having the means or wherewithal to invest in such high-level technology. They just drew unemployment insurance during the off-seasons when snow covered the corn fields or the fishery had been closed down by the government due to decreasing stocks resulting from over-fishing. She supposed being a techie was as good a pastime as repairing lobster traps and fishing nets, or getting caught up on the most recent publications regarding the best practices in the art and science of Atlantic Canada husbandry.

“He has private sector clients who supplement his income with compensation for services rendered,” Stan added. “He goes fishing for them but not for marine crustaceans. Instead, he hauls in big data, and from it he extracts information, intelligence. For some, secret sins of their pasts can become a harsh mistress. If exposed, it can demand a handsome recompense, like fine Côtes du Rhône AOC wine or exquisite VSOP cognac. And the more illicit the information, the higher the remuneration. That is where the sophistication of his technological system allows for unfettered access to an abundance of such knowledge. That’s what pays the bills. The lobster boat is just a convenient cover. Such is the lifestyle of someone who resides in the growing community of Cyberville and works in the online spyosphere metropolis.”

“Interesting. No lobster traps to maintain. I recall you saying that prior to being transferred to the Bedford Detachment, you had worked with interesting people doing interesting things in interesting places. I’m sensing a little *déjà vu*?”

Stan maintained his subtle smile that hadn’t migrated from his lips. “He is indebted to me for favours – like a few other acquaintances you and I may have to tap on the shoulder after we map out version two of our strategic plan.”

“You mentioned the RCMP Watcher Service. It’s not common knowledge so how do you know about it?”

Stan was short on detail in his response to this question. She recalled him being a master of preferential disclosure when they first worked together. It initially annoyed her. She later found it intriguing and now alluring.

“I played in that sandbox while at university before I joined the Force,” he elaborated. “That is where Bernie and I first crossed paths. I never formally met Inspector J.C.R.C. Leblanc, but I learned about his exploits, both above and below board. It was like eavesdropping without wiretap warrants, and sometimes skating on the periphery of legal authority.” He lowered his voice and dipped his forehead as if paying homage to the technology gods. E-eavesdropping added the necessary leverage, tended to bring balance to the playing field which otherwise leaned in favour of the bad guys. A reed-slim smile expressed his true sentiments.

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OLIVIA HUMMED AS SHE SIPPED her cup of steaming hot green tea. “There seems to be a common, perhaps coincidental theme emerging in this case.”

Without commenting, Stan cast a curious gaze and subtly nodded his head in acknowledgement.

“Barns,” she proposed. “Hackett was murdered in a barn. The

FLQ cell planned to kidnap Laporte and Cross in a barn that the RCMP subsequently burned down. We located the metal box and the contents by following a compass bearing of 321 degrees from the corner of a barn that no longer exists. Now, we are hiding out from the CSIS and possibly the FSB, the CIA and God knows who else in a ranch house adjacent to a barn like the one in which Hackett was killed, as we create our own stratagem to thwart them all. And this barn hides the log-in sequence to what I can only speculate. What else might have Hackett's barn hidden that we did not find in the brief time we were there on 5 November 1978? I wouldn't be surprised if, today, it is also monitored with CCTV cameras. And in 1978 also but not nearly as sophisticated as today's technology."

Stan raised his bushy salt-and-pepper eyebrows and crooked his head ever so slightly. "I like your line of thinking, particularly your differentiation between our strategy as opposed to their conspiracy, whoever *they* are."

"The distinction is delicate but essential," she reinforced. The tone of her voice identified unambiguously the gravity of her intent.

"We need to find out all we can about John Robert Hackett. Part of a partnered Russian sleeper cell with his wife, Lada, and their supposed Russian handler, Ruslan? OK. Maybe? But there has to be more to Hackett, much more," Stan speculated.

"I'm looking forward to exploring your friend's secure internet and its research potential. I sense that I would have been able to write some brilliant research papers in my university days had I had access to this sophisticated level of technology and multi-layered covert databases."

"And you would have been even more frustrated because you would not have been authorized to publish anything due to the high security level of the sources and means of access."

"Ahhhh, the double edge of the intelligence sword," Olivia



uttered with an impatient sigh. She was gaining a better appreciation of Stan's expression to level the playing field. *What the code-breakers at Bletchley Park could have done with Bernie's computer housed in the garret of this rural Nova Scotia ranch house*, she mused.

The first casualty of war is the truth, Winston Churchill had stated. But the truth by whose standards? From her all too brief conversations with Uri when he infrequently spoke about his experience with the Spetsnaz, there were truths, partial truths and make-believe truths. From which of these three playing fields was Inspector Leblanc, the covert croupier, dealing cards – the fixed deck that he could draw three aces off the bottom of the pack? Or was there a fourth field, outright lies being divulged in order to gain and maintain power, in addition to wealth wagered to manipulate that power at a macro geopolitical level. Was that the fifth column veiled in the Trojan Horse, part of their fifth of November treasonous plot?

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## CHAPTER 6

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Stan navigated the labyrinth of carpeted hallways that led to an office in the ranch house illuminated only by the moon shining through the reinforced skylight. He squinted through blurry eyes at Olivia as she sat erect with an elegance he had often dreamed about. “It’s the middle of the night. What are you doing up so late?” He squinted at his watch. “Or so early?”

When confronted with cognitive challenges, she often awoke in the early morning hours with abrupt revelations. Trying to figure out who murdered constables Davidson and Hamilton, and whether Leblanc was a good cop or a corrupt cop were no exceptions. Without breaking her concentration from the blue glow that emitted from the triad of over-sized monitors that surrounded her like a horseshoe, Olivia replied, “I researched John Robert Hackett a.k.a. Nikolai associated with his wife Sylvia Hackett a.k.a. Lada and their comrade controller, Ruslan.”

“And?” Stan prompted.

“And Hackett has a German connection in addition to Russian. He had been a senior Nazi SS officer, Oberstleutnant, who went by the name of Brandt Felix Schmidt. He was taken prisoner by the Allies, more than likely allowing himself to be captured, whereupon he was transported to the POW camp in Lethbridge, Alberta. Life as a POW would have been harsh but significantly more pleasant with higher probability of survival than in the rear echelon let alone the forward edge of any battlefield. He remained in Canada after the war and changed his name to John Robert Hackett. I’m sensing that the maneuvering was purposeful and strategic, and aided by Russian spies already embedded as senior bureaucrats, the start of a well-established communist network.”