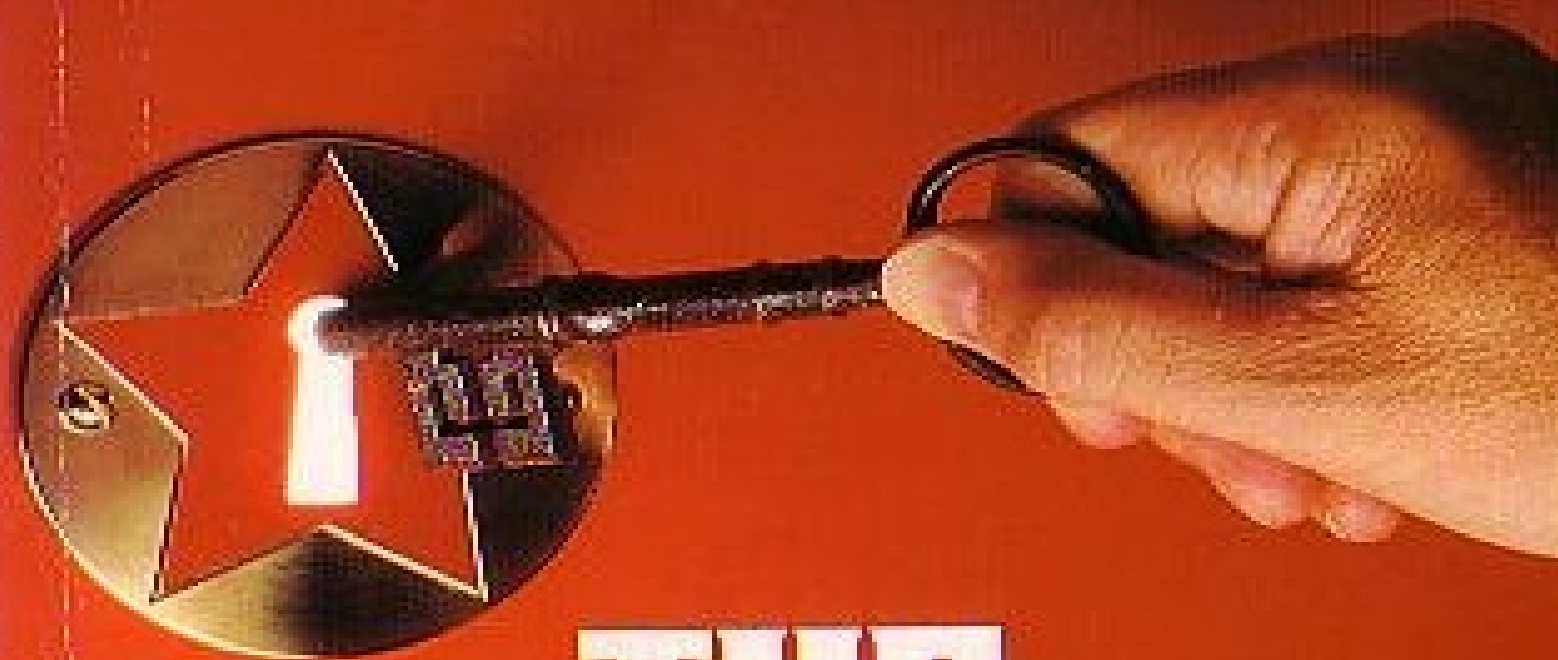


**ANTHONY
PRIORIE**



**THE
MEMORY
TRAP**

HIS NEW BESTSELLER

THE MEMORY TRAP

ANTHONY PRICE

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PROLOGUE

LUNCHTIME IN BERLIN

TWO THINGS, the boss had told everyone to do: to act normal, but to report anything suspicious to the plain-clothes cop just inside the doors to the kitchen. But for Genghis, the new Turkish waiter, those were contradictory orders. Because, if there was one thing he had learnt never to do, both back home in the old country and in Berlin, it was to help the cops. The less a man had to do with those bastards the better. And maybe in this case the safer too, if the kitchen-rumour about two cops-with-rifles on the roof was right. Small guns were bad enough, but long guns meant marksmen. And marksmen meant big trouble for someone. So bugger them! “Dumb Turk”, they were always saying. So he’d be dumb, then!

All the same (and strictly for safety’s sake, anyway), he kept his eyes open. And that eventually paid off in a double satisfaction: it was drugs-bust for sure, and he had two of the ring spotted; and neither of them was at one of his tables.

In the corner of the terrace was, for a guess, the supplier, who was from out of town (he looked more like a Czech or a goddamn Pole than a German), and who was scared stiff with the stuff on him as he wouldn’t yet have been if he’d been the buyer, because carrying money wasn’t yet a crime.

But he wasn’t the scary one, anyway: the one to keep well clear of was the hatchet-faced Arab two tables away, by the steps down to the lake, who was pretending to be a Turk, reading a good Turkish newspaper, but who for bloody-sure wasn’t. You could always tell an Arab.

But he was the minder ... though whether he was minding the sweating-pig Pole, or watching for the money-man, Genghis couldn’t decide. All that was certain was that he had scrutinized every new arrival on the terrace, while he hadn’t given the Pole a second glance since his arrival, and that (unlike the Pole) he wasn’t scared, but sat very still—*too* still—only lifting his eyes from this unread paper.

The head-waiter snapped his fingers. ‘Table Four—Table Five—they are still waiting. Get a move on!’

‘Yes, sir!’ Genghis bobbed his head obsequiously. ‘At once, sir!’

Table Five was the fat Berliner, and his fatter wife and fattening daughter, who had their main course to come. (One day it would be he who would snap his fingers!) And Table Four was the big handsome Englishman with the very plain Englishwoman (not his mistress ... but her clothes were good and her perfume was expensive; so maybe his Mistress, rather!) : they had ordered only a snack

and rot-gut wine. But none of them had business with the Pole, anyway—

He pushed through the kitchen-doors, meeting the cop's eyes blankly.

Dumb Turk!

'Five—three pike.' The heat hit him. 'Four—sandwiches, wine.'

'Not ready—the pike.' One of the cooks slid a tray towards him, rocking the bottle dangerously.

'Anything happening?'

The temptation to be smart, and tell them that nothing would happen until the money-man arrived, reached the tip of Genghis's tongue. But then he remembered the cop behind him, and shrugged stupidly.

Somebody shouted something that he missed, but everyone laughed.

Dumb Turk!

He pushed out into the sunlight again, away from the heat into the gentle warmth of the sun: it was one of those good Berlin autumn days, when the bitter winter still seemed far off. Then he saw the head-waiter bending and nodding to the fat German.

And someone else was coming in—a tall, distinguished-looking man—

The head-waiter intercepted him, bowed him to a table, and then snapped his fingers at Genghis once more.

Genghis set down the sandwiches, and took his time over opening the bottle. Then he gave the plain Englishman all his attention until the rot-gut had been tasted, allowing himself additional time then to smile at the plain Englishwoman as he filled her glass, if only to annoy the head-waiter. And, anyway, apart from smelling good, she had a fine pair of boobs under that string of pearls. 'Thank you madam—sir ...'

'The gentleman at Table Five, you idiot!' The head-waiter hissed in his ear. 'What are you playing at?'

'It wasn't ready—his order.' He saw the distinguished-looking man look round over his menu. He would be the one—

'Don't bandy words with me. *Get moving.*'

Again the doors.

Again the policeman. (If he only knew!)

This time a heavily-loaded tray, with the additional beers the fat German had ordered earlier, about which he had clean forgotten: he balanced it expertly, but then waited until Otto and Dieter, who had not been far behind him, came in for their orders. Otto, he remembered, had been providing the Arab

with his third cup of coffee. But, not being a dumb Turk, he wouldn't have noticed anything, of course—

Into the sunlight again, with everything as busily normal as before, with the pigs all at the troughs, feeding their faces as though their lives depended on it (all except the Pole, who was still sweating, and the Arab, who was still not really reading his newspaper), and the sail-boats on the lake behind. And, inevitably, the head-waiter gesticulating at him.

He began to weave through the tables—

The money-man buyer was still there, studying his menu. So *he* hadn't seen anything (but Genghis had to hand it to the cops there, the clever swine: there wasn't a uniform inside or a suspicious coat outside to be seen, they knew their business all too well, the drugs squad, evidently!)—

Then he swore under his breath as the big Englishman got up, pushing back his chair and blocking his chosen route, so that he had to swing to his left ... only to find that avenue blocked by the head-waiter himself. And, of course, he wouldn't give ground to make things easier, any more than the damned Englishman: no one ever cared for waiters.

He re-routed himself automatically, pirouetting on paper-thin leather through which he could feel the unevenness of the terrace flagstones. But now the woman was also moving, damn her—not getting up, but pushing her chair back in order to keep her eye on her partner: with a face like that perhaps she was used to him straying.

He coughed politely, and began to squeeze past. But as he did so the Englishman came into sight again—

What! He was heading for the Pole—? And—

He saw the Arab get up. And, simultaneously, the Englishwoman began to move, pushing him—almost unbalancing him—*what!*

Suddenly the Englishwoman went mad—and his ankle caught on something, so that the tray began to escape from his control: he had only a fraction of a second to catch up with it, or else—*what!*

Nothing mattered but the tray—*the Englishwoman was either mad or drunk, what she was doing, and glass and crockery was crashing, and the Englishman tripping up, and someone was shouting—*

But it was the tray that mattered!

No one saw Genghis's amazing recovery: his gravity-defying swoop, down and up, and the triumph of speed over impetus which caught up with and corrected the unbalance of his burden so triumphant against all the odds, above Table Five. Or, if anyone did, the next moment obliterated the image, and the *Verfassungsschutz* marksman opened fire. Because then Genghis did finally drop the tray.

A WALK IN THE SUN

1

THEY WERE waiting for him at Heathrow: they took him off the plane ahead of everyone else, like a king or a criminal.

‘Dr Audley? Would you come this way please, sir.’

‘Mmmm.’ He hated being stared at like this. But there was no help for it. All he could do was to come quietly. The uniformed man even took his hand luggage from him. And then the civilian took it from the uniformed man.

It had been obvious, of course, ever since the *Return Immediately* message had been delivered so apologetically by his CIA guard-dog/guide dog, that the shit was in the fan back home; that they had held the flight for ten minutes just so that he could be on it merely confirmed the obvious. But after that the old drug had worked on him as it always did, as it always had done over so many years, so that now he was neither flattered nor apprehensive, but only impatient.

‘Oops!’ The man in the suit had stopped suddenly, so that he had almost cannoned into him. ‘What—?’

‘Hold on a moment, sir.’ The man didn’t need to explain further, since the reason for their halt was blocking the passage ahead. ‘Could I have your identification, please?’

‘Mmm.’ Audley watched as the young soldier, green-beretted, camouflage-jacketed and armed-to-the-teeth, scrutinized his passport.

The civilian handed the passport back to him, unsmiling. ‘Nothing to worry about, Dr Audley. There’s an airport security exercise in progress, that’s all. And we’re in a restricted zone here.’

‘Yes?’ He hadn’t the faintest idea where he was, actually. But within all major airports there were gim-crack labyrinths like this. In fact, the Devil himself had probably re-designed Hell in the light of the information he had gained from observing airport layouts.

‘We’re almost there.’ Misreading Audley’s expression of distaste as transatlantic weariness, the

man nodded reassuringly. 'Not far now.'

He winced within himself. Those were almost the exact words he had been accustomed to feel Cathy on long car-journeys. Which reminded him that, however stimulating, this wasn't the homecoming he'd planned for next week, just in time for her birthday. And he hadn't even got her present now.

Damn!

'Your bag, sir.'

The civilian was offering him his hand luggage while standing outside an anonymous door of which the uniformed man was about to knock.

'Thank you.' On the other hand, depending on the nature of this emergency, it might get him home earlier. And, however important his Washington job was supposed to have been, it had also been ineffably boring most of the time. So all this might yet be a time-bonus. 'And my other luggage?'

'That's being transferred directly to your onwards flight, sir.'

The words took a second to register. 'My onwards flight—' He just managed to clip the humiliating question mark off the end.

'Don't worry, sir. I shall attend to it myself.' The man was wearily accustomed to querulous questions from VIPs. 'And I shall be returning here to collect you—' He looked at his wrist-watch. '—in exactly thirty minutes from now, sir.'

If this was Hell, then he wasn't even properly in it, thought Audley irritably: he was in the limbo of transit to somewhere else. And wherever it was, he already didn't want to go there.

Then he realized that the uniformed man was opening the door for him—he hadn't heard either knock or any reply to it, but the thunderous VIP scowl he had fixed on the poor fellow had rendered the man expressionless.

'Yes—thirty minutes. Thank you.' He heard himself reply to them both as he strode into the room like the wrath of God. 'What the devil—'

'Hullo, David,' said Sir Jack Butler.

Audley felt the wrath of God deflate, collapsing him to his true size in an instant. 'Hullo, Jack.'

'Close the door, there's a good chap.'

'Yes, Jack.' He had expected an underling, he realized. Or an equal, anyway. But, equal or underling—or civil servant of any variety and seniority, bearing whatever instructions and orders, and whatever material to be quickly studied, and then signed for or returned—or even the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, with the Thirty-Nine Articles—it would have been all the same. But it was Jack

Butler. So he closed the door.

‘David, I’m sorry to pull you off a job like this—in this way.’

‘That’s all right, Jack.’ What he hated about Jack Butler apologies was their sincerity. Anyone else’s apologies he could treat with the disdain they deserved. But when Jack said he was sorry, that was what he was.

‘I wouldn’t have done it if it wasn’t necessary.’ Butler regarded him steadily.

‘No? I mean—*no*—’ From having been suddenly embarrassed, Audley became even more suddenly apprehensive: that Jack himself should come to brief him was not in itself too worrying, because knighthood and promotion hadn’t changed him one bit; but this elaboration of his apology was out of character ‘—no, of course not, I mean.’

‘Sit down, David.’

Audley sat down—only to discover that the chairs in this particular VIP safe-room were somewhat lower and very much softer than he expected, so that for a moment he felt that he was never going to stop sitting down until he reached the floor. ‘Ah—yes, Jack?’

Butler had seated himself without difficulty. ‘You are here because I made a grave error of judgement,’ he said simply. ‘As a result of which we have lost someone.’

Audley’s brain went into over-drive. Taking responsibility for mistakes had never been one of Jack Butler’s problems: he had been taking it for upwards of forty years, ever since he had first sewn a lance-corporal’s single stripe on to his battle-dress blouse. But losing someone was always unsettling and all the more so in these somewhat less violent days.

‘Who’s dead?’ It came out brutally before he could stop it, as the possible names of those at risk presented themselves—names, faces and next-of-kin.

‘No one you know.’ Butler drew a single breath. ‘But it should have been you, David.’

‘Me?’ Taken together with that “error of judgement” that had all the makings of a sick little joke. But Butler had never been a man for jokes, sick or otherwise. And he certainly wasn’t joking now. ‘What d’you mean—me?’

‘Jaggard asked us to make a contact with someone from the other side.’ Coming straight to the point was more Butler’s style. ‘From the Arbatskaya Ploshchad.’

‘From—?’ That was even more precisely from “the other side”: it was from the other side of the Kremlin—not the KGB side (from which, in the Dark Ages, orders to kill had so often emanated), but the GRU ... which, in the present climate, was even more surprising. ‘From military intelligence, Jack?’ But then, coming from anywhere over there at this moment, it was not so much *surprising* as *what? Astonishing—? Outrageous?* The synonyms shunted each other almost violently enough to d

rail his train of thought, leaving him finally with *incomprehensible* for choice. ‘But—for Christ sake, Jack!—what—?’ Only then he realized that “What am I supposed to have done?” was redundant. Jack Butler knew as well as he did that neither his Washington activities nor any others in which he had recently been involved could remotely be tagged even as annoying to the Russians, let alone dangerous. ‘What sort of contact?’

‘A defection.’ Butler was ready for him.

Well ... yes, thought Audley, relaxing slightly. Defections were certainly on the cards these days ever since the winds of change had started to blow through the Soviet Union and its satellites the possibility of picking up a useful defector or two had been widely canvassed. He had even written paper on that very subject for the use of station commanders. But that had been all of eighteen months ago, in the early days *oiglosnost* and *perestroika*. And, in any case—but the hell with that!

‘Why us, though? Jaggard knows we’re not usually into field-work. And, come to that, he doesn’t even like us to be, anyway.’

‘Yes.’ In the matter of the duties and scope of the Department of Intelligence Research and Development, Jack Butler was at one with Henry Jaggard, however much they disagreed on other matters. ‘But, in this case, the defector asked for us.’ He sighed. ‘Or, to be exact, he asked for you, David. By name.’

It *had* been that damned defection paper, thought Audley wrathfully: it had carried a routine follow-up request, for those who wanted more information or who had information to give, so that he could up-date it subsequently; and anyone with an ounce of knowledge could have traced it back to him from its style and content; so some imperial idiot down the line had been careless with it, and had fetched up on someone’s desk at GRU headquarters.

‘His name was Kulik.’ Butler returned to his point. ‘Oleg Filipovitch Kulik.’

Kulik—Then the past tense registered. ‘Oleg Filipovitch Kulik ... *deceased*, I take it?’

Butler nodded.

‘Kulik?’ That wasn’t so very surprising, because defecting was a high-risk enterprise, as Oleg Filipovitch must have known. However, what Butler was expecting was that he would now pick the name out of the memory-bank. But the only *Kulik* he could recall from the paying-in slips of three years was a third-rate Red Army general who had never been close to military intelligence (but rather from his long and disastrous career, the opposite); and who, in any case, must be long-since dead.

‘Yes?’ Butler looked at him expectantly.

‘Never heard of him. What was he offering?’

‘He didn’t say. He merely said that it was of the highest importance.’ Butler stopped there.

compressing his lips.

‘And?’ Audley recognized the sign. Beneath that worrying apology and the customary politeness Sir Jack Butler was incandescent with that special red-headed rage which always smouldered within him, but which he never failed to control no matter what the provocation. *Hot heart, cool head*, as one Fred had been so fond of saying: Butler was the sort of man he had liked best of all.

‘They’re not sure that he was GRU.’ Butler released his lips. ‘But they think there was a man named Kulik in their computer records department, liaising with KGB Central Records. Only, since they aren’t sure about the value of what he was offering they’re not prepared to be certain.’

‘They’ were Jaggard’s Moscow contacts presumably. And in this instance they were quite right. Because if Kulik’s lost goodies were peanuts it wasn’t worth risking their necks for him. But if the goodies really had been dynamite, then Kulik’s bosses would be just waiting to pounce on whoever started to ask questions about him now.

But now, also, he was beginning to see the shape of the game, even though the ball was hidden under the usual ruck of disorderly, bloody-minded, dirty-playing players who knew that the referee was hovering near, whistle-in-mouth. ‘So we know sod-all about him really—right?’

‘That’s about the size of it, yes.’ Butler looked as though he was about to pull rank. With reluctance, of course (and especially with Audley, who had once been his superior officer; but with Kulik dead and thirty-minus-minutes at his back and a plane somewhere on the tarmac out there, if it had to be pulled, then he would pull it). ‘They’re working on him now.’

‘I’ll bet they are.’ Audley knew he would loyally do whatever Jack Butler wanted him to do. Because that was the way he felt about Butler, in spite of all appearances to the contrary: in an uncertain world, Butler had somehow become his sheet-anchor over the years, much to his own surprise. Only, in the meantime, he was going to have his pound of flesh, with or without blood. ‘But all they know as of now is that Kulik wanted me. And now he’s dead—?’ Flesh with blood, he decided. ‘And, of course, you didn’t offer me up for the slaughter ... Was that the “error of judgement”, Jack? Because, if it was, then I forgive you for it—’ He refused to quail before Butler’s displeasure ‘—was that the way it was, Jack?’

Butler looked at his watch. ‘The way it was ... was that I didn’t think I could get you back quick enough from Washington.’ He looked up again. ‘Besides which, Jaggard said it was just a routine pick-up.’

There was no such thing as a routine pick-up. ‘So you smelt a rat, did you?’

‘No. That was what Jaggard said. And I had no reason to disbelieve him.’

‘No?’ No excuses, of course. Where others would be looking to avoid blame, if not actually seeking

credit for prescience when things went wrong, Jack Butler was accustomed to tell it how it was. ‘But Kulik did actually ask for me, you say. So what form did this request take? What did he want us to do?’

‘The message was passed at an embassy reception for one of our trade delegations. Low-grade technology—factory robotics for car production. And he didn’t really ask us to do anything. He just wanted to be met—by you, David.’ Butler pursed his lips. ‘It was your name that sparked Jaggard’s Moscow colleagues. They’d never heard of Kulik. But they had heard of you.’

‘Where did he want to be met?’ Audley brushed aside such doubtful fame.

‘In West Berlin.’

‘In West Berlin—’

‘That’s right. He was getting himself across. He said that he had something of the highest importance. He gave his name. And he named the place and date and time of the meeting. Just that—nothing else. Except he wanted you to meet him.’

Too bloody simple by half! ‘Where was the place?’

‘A restaurant beside one of the lakes. Well inside the city—nowhere near any crossing. And Jaggard said he’d have the place properly covered, so he didn’t reckon on any complications.’

Audley felt the minutes ticking away. Maybe that “too-bloody-simple” had been hindsight. Because it did look reasonably simple, if not routine: Kulik himself had been doing all the risky work, and had in effect offered himself on a plate in the restaurant, free of charge and without advance bargaining. So, really, anyone could have picked the man up, since he had nowhere to go except further westward after having come so far already.

Then a cold hand touched him between the shoulder-blades as he found himself thinking that although anyone could have gone, he would actually have fancied a nice easy trip to Berlin, to meet someone who wanted to meet him. He’d always liked Berlin, even in the bad old days.

‘And ... Jaggard didn’t mind, when you refused to supply me?’ It occurred to him as he spoke that Henry Jaggard *might* have smelt a rat. In which case, if things went wrong, Jack Butler’s intransigence could be blamed.

‘I promised to produce you in due course, when they’d got Kulik back here.’

‘Uh-huh.’ He sensed that something was inhibiting Butler now. And it could be that, even if he hadn’t smelt that rat, Butler might well have smelt Henry Jaggard’s calculations, even though he would have despised them.

‘Yes ... Well, I thought it might be as well for us to have a representative there, David.’ Butler scowled honestly. ‘Just in case Kulik really wanted to deal with Research and Development, not with

anyone else.'

The cold hand touched Audley again. But then he remembered gratefully that Butler had already reassured him about the casualty list. 'A very proper precaution, Jack!'

All the same, the coldness was still there, even while he grinned proper curiosity at Butler by way of encouragement. Because, with Kulik deceased (and no matter how frustrating that certainly was) there was nothing much anyone could do now. And yet here was Sir Jack Butler at Heathrow, like the mountain come to Mahomet. 'So who did you send, then?'

'I sent Miss Loftus.'

'Oh yes?' In matters of intelligence research, Elizabeth was razor-sharp. But her field experience was necessarily limited by her length of service. 'A good choice.' And, on the face of it, that was what it must have seemed to be—for Henry Jaggard's "routine pick-up". Only from the granite-faced look of Mount Butler now, it evidently hadn't been. 'She's okay, is she, Jack?'

'Yes—' The VIP cordless phone on the low table beside Butler began to buzz, cutting him off but not startling him. 'Hullo?'

Audley took refuge in the echo of that reassuring "yes" for a moment as Butler stared through his eyes while receiving his phone-message. Then the departure/arrival flight monitors on the wall behind him caught his attention. They gave him a choice of Stockholm, Athens, Naples or Madrid, but not Berlin or even Frankfurt—there were no immediate German destinations at all, in fact.

'Thank you.' Butler replaced the receiver.

It was just possible that they'd chartered a plane just for him, decided Audley, permutating the scheduled alternatives in order of possibility and then rejecting them all as unlikely. But then, since old Jack was quite notoriously tight-fisted with his Queen's revenue, a chartered plane was either out of-character or another disturbing indication of extreme urgency.

Butler nodded at him. 'Your flight's on schedule, David. They're boarding now.'

Audley's eye was drawn to the monitor. If it was one of, those, then it would be Stockholm, with no Berlin connection, the boarding warnings suggested. All the rest were too far away to make sense, so far as that was possible. 'You said Kulik was heading for West Berlin. How far did he actually get?'

'He got to the restaurant. He was killed there.'

'Christ!' Audley began to make connections. There was a Catch-22 about old-fashioned field experience, rather like fighter-pilot's combat-time: the more you had, the safer you were. But that meant surviving to become safer. 'So Elizabeth was on the spot, you mean—was she?'

'Very much on the spot.' Butler bit on his own bullet. 'Kulik wasn't the only one killed in the restaurant. Jaggard kept his word—he arranged for an escort from Berlin station, to look after her

And the West Germans had the place properly staked out—the *Verfassungsschutz* special squad was covering every exit. All the liaison procedures were observed: Jaggard played it by the book.’

Audley nearly repeated his previous blasphemy. ‘Who else was killed?’

‘Our Berlin station man.’ Butler shook his head. ‘You don’t know him, David. But ... he was killed alongside her, anyway.’

Some “routine pick-up”! ‘And what the hell was the *Verfassungsschutz* doing—?’ What made worse was that the special squad was good—not to mention well-armed. ‘Enjoying their lunch?’

‘They killed the assassin. He only got off two shots: one for Kulik and one for our man.’ Butler shook his head again. ‘It’s no good blaming the Germans, David. But I’m not going into any of the detail now. Miss Loftus will put you into the picture soon enough.’

‘Oh yes?’ What made it worst of all was that it didn’t fit properly—in fact, it didn’t damn-well fit at all at this moment. But that had to wait, with the way Butler was looking at him. ‘So now I go to Berlin to clear up the mess, do I?’ He frowned at the departures monitor. The Stockholm boarding warning had gone off, and the remaining destinations were incomprehensible. ‘Or—what?’

‘You go to Naples.’

‘*Naples?*’ If it had been Timbuktoo, it would have made no better sense.

‘Paul Mitchell will meet you—he’s already there. And Miss Loftus will also be there by the time you arrive. They will each brief you. But you are in charge, they know that.’

‘I should damn-well think so—’ A disorderly crowd of questions jostled Audley’s brain, pushing in through the hole *Naples* had made in his concentration ‘—What’s Mitchell doing in Naples?’

‘His brief is to watch your back. But at the moment he’s looking for someone I want you to talk to. Someone you know, David.’ Butler stared at him. ‘Do you remember Peter Richardson?’

The disorderly crowd stopped jostling as Naples suddenly became at least partially explicable. ‘Yes, I remember him.’ He decided to leave it at that with his Neapolitan boarding light winking at him behind Butler.

‘I have his service record here.’

Audley accepted the buff envelope automatically. But then he found he could no longer leave it that after all. ‘What has Peter Richardson got to do with Kulik? He retired years ago. And he wasn’t with us long, anyway.’

‘Kulik gave us Richardson’s name before he died. His name and your name again, David.’ Butler continued to stare at him. ‘Is there anything you know about Richardson that we ought to know—’ He glanced down at the envelope ‘—that may not be on record?’

So that was why he was here: to ask the old 64,000 dollar question!

‘Without looking at the record ... ‘ Then he shrugged. Obviously there wasn’t anything of significance in it, otherwise he wouldn’t have been given it. And the only thing he did know about Peter Richardson which wouldn’t be in there had nothing to do with security matters, but was well covered by his own word of honour. ‘But ... I can’t think of anything. Only, I haven’t set eyes on him for years. Not since he up and quit on us. And that would be ... ‘74, was it? Years ago, anyway. And I didn’t know him all that well, even then.’ He lifted the envelope. ‘Isn’t that clear from the record?’

‘He once pulled you out of trouble, in Italy.’

‘He did—yes.’ No use denying what was on record. ‘And he was there up north, on that job of yours at Castleshields. But I still hardly knew him—he was Fred Clinton’s man, not mine.’ It was Kulik’s word against his, it seemed. ‘Fred’s man—Fred’s mistake, wasn’t he?’ That would also be in the damn record, even if Sir Frederick Clinton himself was honourably dead-and-buried, so he didn’t need to labour the point. But Kulik’s word was final, of course: there was no arguing with a dead man. ‘So you want me to talk to Peter Richardson. So I’ll talk to him.’ All the same he was still more than puzzled. ‘You didn’t sweat all the way from the Embankment just to ask me if I knew more than was in the rubbish—’ he held up the envelope again ‘—did you?’

‘I want you to bring him in, David. We can’t force him to come. But I think he may be safer under wraps for the time being. And he may listen to you, of all people.’

There was a sharp knock on the door. And, on cue, the Neapolitan boarding light had become desperate.

‘*Wait!*’ Butler gave the man outside his old Army voice. ‘When I said that it could have been you in Berlin I meant it. That’s why I’m giving you Mitchell to watch your back. And your front, too.’ The parade-ground volume had gone, but it was still Colonel Butler speaking, not Sir Jack. ‘Until I’m satisfied that that second bullet didn’t have your name on it I can’t be sure that there isn’t a third bullet still unfired, with Richardson’s name on it. So you must exercise due caution in Naples, David. Is that understood?’

‘Yes, Jack.’ Or, as everyone was so fond saying, *See Naples, and die!* But, in the meantime, he had a plane to catch.

THEY WERE waiting for him at Naples too, of course: they took him off the plane ahead of everyone else. Only this time, even though the stewardess treated him like a VIP, the rest of them were in two minds about him—even those who heard him addressed as *Professore*—

‘Professore Audley? This way, if you please, Professore.’

Everyone had looked at him when he’d arrived last and late. Now, regardless of the Italian custom of upping even the most cobwebby doctorate to professorial status, the suspicious expressions on the faces of those passengers nearest to him suggested that they were mentally bracketing him with *Professore Moriarty*, as another master-criminal caught at last.

But after that it was simpler, with no Heathrow labyrinth to negotiate, only a car waiting for him with Paul Mitchell standing beside it.

Or, rather, three cars—

Or, rather ... half the Italian army?

‘Hi there, David.’ In dark glasses and open-necked shirt Mitchell looked like any late-season English tourist, in striking contrast to Audley’s Italian escort, whose shiny crumpled suit had shouted ‘Policeman’ in confirmation of those recent passenger-suspicious. ‘Good flight?’

‘What are all those soldiers doing?’ Audley pointed past Mitchell.

‘Don’t worry. They’re not your reception committee.’ Mitchell waved an acknowledgement to the shiny suit, who was hovering beside the rearmost car. ‘There’s some sort of anti-terrorist scare in progress ... although they’re calling it “an exercise”, like the SURE one you must have seen at Heathrow.’ He re-directed the wave to the front car. ‘So everyone’s being screened and searched. Now he opened the passenger door. ‘Everyone except us, that is ... Get in, David, there’s a good fellow ... No, we’re cleared to go out by the back entrance, with these special branch types for protection.’

Audley regarded the small battered Fiat with distaste.

‘Yes ... well, I’m sorry about the transport.’ Mitchell grinned ruefully at him. ‘Only, I wanted to drive you, so we could talk. And this was all they could find at short notice. But ... it is unobtrusive. And I have put the seat back as far as it’ll go, anyway.’

‘What about my bags?’ Mitchell’s rather strained cheerfulness was almost as irritating as the Fiat. ‘And where’s Elizabeth?’

‘Elizabeth is chatting up the local cops and the *Guardia di Finanza*.’ Mitchell circled the car. ‘She’ll be meeting us along the coast. And your bags are being held at the airport. Don’t worry.’

So that was the last of his luggage, thought Audley. But, although he couldn’t see what the Italian customs service had to do with Peter Richardson, it was perhaps as well that Elizabeth was elsewhere because there certainly wasn’t room for her in the back of this car. ‘I’m not worrying. Just tell me about Peter Richardson.’

The car started with a jerk which banged his knees against the dashboard.

‘Damn! Sorry!’ Mitchell struggled with the gear-box. ‘This isn’t exactly what I’ve been used to—drives in Italian ... or maybe Neapolitan—ah!’

Mitchell’s pride and joy at home was a second-hand Porsche, which he had got cheaply for cash after the stock market crash, Audley remembered. Tell me about Peter Richardson, Mitchell.’

‘Major Richardson—?’ Mitchell flogged the car to catch up with the unmarked police vehicle ahead. ‘I thought you were the expert on the elusive Major, David?’

Audley’s heart sank. So far from being an expert, he still thought of Peter Richardson as *Captain not Major*. But, of course, that last promotion had been Fred Clinton’s work at the time of the fellow’s departure, as a sop to their mutual feelings of still more-or-less friendly regret. But that wasn’t what mattered so much as the adjective Mitchell had added. ‘What d’you mean “elusive”? Haven’t you found him?’

The Fiat juddered to a halt, within inches of the leading car which had stopped at what was now a heavily defended exit, complete with a brace of light tanks.

‘Yes ... well ... “yes-and-no” is the answer to that, David.’ Mitchell peered through the dirt on the windscreen, watching the Italian special branch arguing with the Italian army. ‘Or, rather, “no-and-yes”, more accurately.’

Audley felt his temper begin to slip, but then checked it. Of all his colleagues, apart from Jack Butler himself, he knew Paul Mitchell best. So now he could recognize the tell-tale signs under the man’s accustomed casualness, for all that the man’s eyes were concealed behind sunglasses. And the 300 millimetre cannon which was more or less pointing at them at this minute no more accounted for those whitened knuckles on the hands of the steering-wheel than did the little car’s gearbox account for that bruising start.

‘Uh-huh?’ If Paul Mitchell was frightened, then perhaps Jack Butler was right—and perhaps he ought to be *properly* frightened too. But fear was in itself a debilitating influence, so whatever was scaring Mitchell, a display of Audley-temperament would serve no useful purpose.

‘Uh-huh?’ As Mitchell turned to him he just had time to compose his own expression into what he

hoped was one of innocent inquiry. ‘Is he safe and sound, Paul?’

Mitchell frowned at him, as though such unexpected mildness was just another burden, and a rather unfair one. ‘I think ... so far as I know he is—yes.’

It was going to be very hard to keep up this Butler-like equanimity. And, in any case, overdoing would only worry Mitchell more. ‘You *think*—?’

Activity ahead mercifully distracted Mitchell. The police seemed to have convinced the army that they were not terrorists making their getaway, and barriers were being variously raised and moved.

Audley braced himself, but this time Mitchell recovered his Porsche-driver’s skill, launching the car after the lead car as though they were at the end of a tow-rope, yet still leaving himself half-a-second in which to grimace at his passenger. ‘You know that all this has been happening rather quickly, David—hoicking you back from the States and me from ... where I was—?’

Where Mitchell had been was probably Dublin, thought Audley. And that wasn’t a place for rest and recreation. So, until he’d met Elizabeth, he might actually have been cheering up. But after that he might suspect that he’d exchanged the frying pan for the fire. Only that wasn’t what he was about to enlarge upon. ‘Something’s already gone wrong, you mean.’ He tried to sound resigned to such an accustomed turn of events rather than angry.

Mitchell made a face at the thickening traffic ahead. ‘There was a misunderstanding, let’s say.’

‘Oh yes?’ Resignation was actually more appropriate: since no one yet understood what was happening, what else could be expected? ‘Go on.’

‘London sent an SG to Rome, warning them that I was coming—and that you were also en route—and that you wanted to talk to Major Richardson.’ Mitchell massaged the steering-wheel. ‘To be fair to them in Rome, David ... the SG wasn’t all that explicit. It didn’t specify any sort of emergency asking them to locate Richardson.’

‘It didn’t mention Berlin, you mean?’ That was hardly surprising. ‘So what did they do?’

Mitchell half-shrugged. ‘They had his address in Amalfi of course. And a bit more than that, seeing he’d been in the business himself in the old days. So they didn’t think twice about picking up the phone and calling him up with the good news that you were about to drop in at his *palazzo*—’ He glanced at Audley ‘—is it really a *palazzo*—?’

‘They mentioned my name?’ Audley brushed the question aside.

‘They didn’t at first—’ The slipstream of an enormous lorry made the little car shudder ‘—the message didn’t actually get through to him, only to some servant at the *palazzo* ... what do *palazzos* have for Butlers—? Major-domos?’ The vision of a sun-bathed palace on the Amalfi coast, complete with uniformed staff, animated a curiosity tinged with envy in Mitchell. ‘And it’s the old family place to

isn't it? His mum was a *marchesa* or a *principessa*, or something, wasn't she?'

'They mentioned my name?' There was no particular reason why Mitchell should know anything about Richardson. Except that Mitchell always knew more than was good for him.

'Only when he played hard to get. I think they rather thought he must be an old buddy of your David. And when the ... major-domo, or whatever ... when he kept telling 'em the Master was busy or otherwise-engaged, and could he take a message *per favore* ... then I'm afraid they did name-drop

'And what happened then?' Audley still couldn't put that "yes-and-no", "no-and-yes", together.

'Then I arrived—in Rome. And I had a little talk with Jack. And, of course, he told me to play it by the book, and tell the Italians we were on their patch, looking to have a chat with an old comrade.'

Audley's heart sank again as he imagined what the Italians would have on file under *Audley, David Longsdon*. It would have been all right if old General Montuori was still alive, albeit in well-earned retirement. But with no one to explain the truth between the lines recording his one-time Italian activities Montuori's successor would inevitably expect trouble once that name re-appeared on his blotter—just as Peter Richardson might also have done.

Damn! 'Are you about to tell me that Richardson is now missing, Peter?'

'Yes—yes-and-no, David—'

'And just what the hell is that meant to mean?' As he turned on Mitchell the car plunged into a tunnel, startling him as it bathed everything in garish orange light.

'It's not quite as bad as it seems, maybe.' The orange light flickered eerily on Mitchell's face. 'The Italians got a bit up-tight at first.'

Surprise, surprise! 'They did?'

'Yes ... They insisted on helping us—on finding Richardson themselves, and delivering him to us. I rather got the impression that he isn't exactly *numero uno* in their popularity stakes.'

'What—?' They were in the midst of a deafening maelstrom of tunnel noise-and-traffic on a multi-lane autostrada which hadn't existed in his old Neapolitan days—the days of General Montuori and *Captain* Richardson. 'Richardson—?'

'Uh-huh.' Mitchell annexed Audley's own useful multipurpose non-committal grunt for himself. 'The elusive major himself—' He nodded '—only, as they apparently haven't found him themselves they're being nicer to us now—God!'

Audley's knees hit the dashboard painfully as the little car decelerated fiercely. 'What—?' He could hardly think for the noise.

'Some mad bastard—that mad bastard—' Mitchell stabbed a finger ahead '—has just cut in ahead

of me.’ He looked up at his mirror. ‘They’re all mad—stark, staring mad, David—’ He frowned ‘—
... I hope they are, anyway—’

Audley massaged his bruises. He couldn’t keep shouting ‘What?’, he had to find a more sensible question. ‘If no one knows where Richardson is ... what makes you think he’s safe?’

The car burst into sunlight. ‘Safe—?’ For a moment he didn’t seem to have heard the rest of the question. ‘That’s why I think he’s safe: because no one knows where he is.’ He peered into the mirror again. ‘I just hope the same applies to us, now that I’ve lost our escort somehow—’

Audley looked around. What was certain was that he didn’t know where he was. But this was only a bit of Italy where, on a clear day like this, that ought to be easily rectified once a sufficient gap in the buildings on his left opened up.

‘Ah! There he is—pew!’ Mitchell grinned relief at him. ‘Sorry, David. Really, I quite enjoy driving in Italy. It’s the nearest thing to stock-car racing I know. But keeping in with our escort rather spoils it, that’s all ... But, as I was saying—what was I saying?’

Audley gave up trying to spot Vesuvius. ‘Richardson is safe. But you don’t know where he is.’

‘That’s right.’ Mitchell sounded almost cheerful. ‘So he knows where he is.’

Audley could see another nightmare tunnel ahead. ‘What d’you mean?’

‘I mean that he got in touch with us. The major-domo did his stuff, evidently. So now the Major-domo is calling the shots, David. And we’re going to meet him.’

After Berlin that was an unfortunate choice of words. But the tunnel closed in on them before Audley could react. And this time, with an enormous sixteen-wheeler thundering beside them, no further words were possible, and even thought wasn’t easy.

Light returned at last, yet Vesuvius was still hidden behind buildings. Except, by now they must be beyond it, with Amain” still an hour or more ahead. But now he had thought of what he had been going to say. ‘You know about Kulik, Mitchell.’

‘Not a lot.’ Mitchell sniffed. ‘Does anyone know more than that?’ He glanced at Audley quickly. ‘Have you pulled the’ rabbit out of the hat again, Dr Audley—*Professore*—?’

‘No.’

Mitchell flickered another glance at him. ‘You’re about to remind me that Kulik also called the shots—day, time and place—are you?’

Audley winced at the repetition of “shots”. But, having talked to both Jack Butler and Elizabeth Mitchell had it all pat, evidently. And meanwhile the car was beginning to slow down again.

‘And it didn’t do him a lot of good—is that it?’ This time Mitchell didn’t bother to look at him

'Don't worry, David. I haven't forgotten that. It's at the very top of my list that I'm your minder.'

Audley was about to look away in exasperation. But then he caught a glimpse of the sea beyond Mitchell's profile.

The sea at last! "The sea! The sea!"—the cry of Xenophon's ten thousand fellow-Greeks had been drilled into him so thoroughly at school by old Wimpy long ago that the words always came back to him at every first sight of it, at first almost triumphantly, and then almost sadly as he became conscious of the length of years which now separated him from that first-learning!

'What is it, David?' Mitchell sat bolt-upright. 'What have you seen?'

'Just the sea.' The man was a bag of nerves. 'That's all.'

But it wasn't all. And it wasn't just the sea—it was the Bay of Naples ... Old Wimpy's Bay of Naples—no, not Naples, but *Neapolis*, with Pompeii and Herculaneum close at hand, and Paestum just down the road: the happy hunting-ground of every Classics-master who had ever had to hammer irregular verbs into—

The sea—? This time he also sat bolt-upright. 'What the hell—?'

'What—?' Mitchell's nerves had been jarred again.

Audley looked around as best he could within the maddening constraint of his safety belt and the ridiculous little car itself. 'The sea's on the wrong side. This isn't the way to Amalfi.'

'*What?*' Mitchell's voice cracked with exasperation.

'Where the hell are we?' He fumbled with the window-winder: if the sea was on *that* side—where were they going?

'We're in a traffic jam, is where we are—what d'you mean, "the wrong side"—? *For Christ's sake, David! Don't do that—get your head in—*' The rest of the command was drowned by a cacophony of horns behind them.

Audley could see the jam of cars. But it was about all he could see: with one pantechnicon behind them and another trying to push them off the road, wherever Vesuvius might be, it could be anywhere. But they were undoubtedly in a traffic jam: they were on the approach to some sort of Italian cloveleaf junction, and that seemed to be a *saute qui peut* invitation to every driver to assert himself according to his courage if not the size of his vehicle.

'Get your head back in please, David.' Mitchell ignored the noise behind him and recovered some of his cool. '*Please, David—*'

The very coolness turned Audley back towards Mitchell, because of its underlying panic: it caught exactly the final desperation of that Royal Sussex corporal on the grenade-throwing primary training exercise long ago, when Trooper Arkwright in front had held on to his live grenade between them

instead of throwing it out of the drill-trench—

‘Throw it.’ (Matter-of-fact, the corporal. Almost conversational.) ‘*Throw it—*’ (No longer matter-of-fact: frozen-faced, rather—was that the face? But he couldn’t remember the face: faces sometimes eluded him.) ‘THROW IT—!’ (Memory blanked out at that point, as the Royal Sussex corporal and Trooper Audley had hit the dirt in the bottom of the trench, in an attempt to reach Australia before the grenade exploded)—

He found himself smiling as he turned. Time had quite washed away the sick horror of the moment, leaving in memory only the comedy of their undignified survival after Arkwright’s belated throw, and then the wondrous flow of the corporal’s invective, unleashed after a matching moment of speechlessness. But then he stopped smiling as he saw the half-drawn pistol in Mitchell’s hand.

‘Put the window up, David.’ Mitchell wasn’t looking at him.

Just ahead of them, weaving between the gaps in the cars in the other lane, were a couple Neapolitan urchins carrying trays of cigarettes and assorted junk.

‘For God’s sake, Paul! They’re only—’

‘*Put the window up.*’ Mitchell didn’t take his eyes off the urchins.

‘*Throw it!*’

Audley wound the window up.

‘Only kids.’ Mitchell slid the pistol back under his armpit before completing his sentence.

The car moved again, leaving the children behind.

‘Only kids.’ Mitchell nodded. ‘But that’s the way it’s done. Beirut ... the West Bank ... Belfast one day, I shouldn’t wonder. All you need is a traffic jam in the usual place. Or, if not, they can easily cause one ... And then a bit of carelessness, like an open window. And then, just pop a grenade in, and run.’

‘A—’ The coincidence with his own recent thought chilled Audley into silence. As of now, that would never be a jolly anecdote again. But meanwhile he had to reassure himself. ‘Aren’t you being a bit over-cautious?’

‘Probably.’ Mitchell breathed out heavily as they shook themselves free of the traffic jam, turning under the autostrada on to what looked like a minor road. ‘Maybe I’m a bit twitchy.’

Too long in the trenches, thought Audley critically. Mitchell’s problem was the reverse of Elizabeth’s. And it was one thing (and a good one) to give Research and Development types like Elizabeth a bit of field-experience, but another (and a very bad one) to over-stretch them just because they showed an aptitude for that too.

In fact, seconding Mitchell to Henry Jaggard's Dublin operation was like chartering Concorde fly relief food to Ethiopia: when he finally over-shot some inadequate runway—when his already threadbare academic cover finally split under the pressure—all bloody-Jaggard's sincere regrets wouldn't put the clock back.

Mixed metaphors, he thought, also critically. But, trenches and Concordes and threadbare clocks aside, he must be gently encouraging now—

'I didn't mean that, Paul.' He could see the sea again. 'I know you're just obeying Jack Butler's orders.' But not the sea: this was Wimpy's Bay of Naples, still—it had to be. And ... and there was even a road sign ahead—

Baia—Bacoli—Miseno—

Not just Wimpy's bay: Wimpy's ancient *Misenum*, from which Admiral Pliny had heroically taken his fleet to succour the Vesuvius disaster-survivors of Pompeii and Stabia—

Damn!

'What I meant ... I don't see how anyone can know that I'm here—' He almost added 'wherever I am'. But now he knew where he was, even if he didn't know why he was so far from Amalfi—'except Peter Richardson—?'

'And the Italians.' Mitchell accelerated after the police car in front. 'And the entire staff of the *Palazzo Richardson*—? And Uncle Tom Cobleigh and All, thereafter?' He nodded at Audley without taking his eyes off the police car. 'But chiefly Major—*Peter*—Richardson ... yes.'

Suddenly everything was turned on its head, upside-down, in a way which he'd never even considered. But which, of course, Mitchell had quite naturally taken as a possibility from the moment he'd been saddled with his orders. 'Peter Richardson isn't a traitor, Paul.'

'No?' Slight shrug. 'Well ... if you say not, David.' This time he managed a quick glance. 'After fifteen years—or more, would it be—?' Now he was on the *Miseno* road. 'Are you willing to bet your life on that—never mind mine ... which I still rather value—?' Another shrug.

Audley waited.

'You're the boss.' Mitchell finally remembered the rest of his orders, but with an unconcealed air of resignation. 'And the expert.'

There was more. And Audley wanted to hear it.

Shrug. 'Just so you remember that Kulik must also have reckoned no one knew where he was, David.'

That was the opening. 'I haven't forgotten that. But you told me that Peter Richardson is arranging this meeting. And you also told me not to worry, Paul.'

The police car ahead showed its brake-lights, and then turned off the road.

‘So I did.’ Mitchell followed suit. ‘And so *he* has ... more or less—yes.’

“More-or less” was like “yes-and-no”: as unsatisfactory as it was imprecise. Only now they were running out of road—quite literally running out of it, as the final narrow stretch of tarmac ended and they bumped on to a pot-holed sand-swept track. And he could see the sea again, between a scatter of beach-cafes and kiosks, with a few parked cars and a jetty ahead: they had not only run out of road, they were running out of land, too.

Mitchell parked beside the police car, right on the foreshore.

‘This is where we change horses, David. But you stay here for a moment.’

‘Why?’ The next horse had to be a boat. But there was no craft in view belonging to the police or the customs, let alone the Italian navy. Indeed, what he could see from here suggested that this wasn’t one of the Baia-Miseno peninsula’s more fashionable anchorages.

‘Because I say so.’ Mitchell started to open his door, but then stopped. ‘How much did Jack Butler tell you about Berlin, David? Apart from Kulik.’

Audley could guess what was coming. ‘He said we lost a man.’

‘That’s right. Name of Sinclair—Edward Sinclair. I met him once.’ Mitchell nodded. ‘Big chap. Not specially bright. But big. And a fluent German-speaker. That was why Ted was in Berlin probably.’

Audley couldn’t place Edward Sinclair. But that merely confirmed what Butler had said. ‘So what?’

‘Big like you, David.’ Mitchell paused, and looked around. ‘Elizabeth will tell you in more detail. But when she got to the rendezvous, Kulik was already there, sitting at a table all by himself. *And he was the man who shot him.*’ He stared at Audley. ‘Do you get the picture? He was waiting for you, David.’

Audley stared back at him as the picture formed in his mind.

‘Okay.’ Mitchell nodded again. ‘So I’m just going to have a quick look round. And then we’ll take a boat trip. And we’ll just hope Major Peter Richardson has got his act together properly, and that he hasn’t forgotten all he was taught. Okay?’

If there was one thing they could rely on, it was Peter Richardson’s memory, thought Audley. But at that moment it also looked as if it was the only thing. ‘Where are we going?’

Mitchell grinned suddenly. ‘We’re going to be end-of-season tourists, David.’ He swung his door open. ‘How would you like to visit old Tiberius’s villa on Capri, eh?’

FOR A MOMENT, as he examined the 18-hour stubble on his chin in the mirror of the motor-cruiser's Lilliputian lavatory, Audley forgot about the dead. But then they crowded back into his thoughts uninvited but insistent.

“It’s bad luck, thinking of the dead”: who had said that—?

The question, no sooner treacherously asked, was instantly answered by memory: it had been “Daddy” Higgs—Troop Sar’-Major Higgs himself, no less, of course—of course! Old Daddy Higgs!

“It’s bad luck, thinkin’ of the dead when there’s work to be done, Mr Audley, sir”: memory expanded the superstition automatically, with the words perfectly recalled even though that grizzled face itself had become hazy. (Had it really been grizzled, even?) It had been “Daddy” because the man complained that he was always fussing—but Old because he proudly wore the 1937 Coronation Medal ... so that when he’d been burnt to a crisp on Fleury Ridge he’d been what? All of 30-years-of-age plus maybe a year or two, forever after? God!

He shook his head at his reflection and dried his hands on the dirty scrap of towel. Daddy Higgs was long-dead. And General Raffaele Montuori was five years’ dead, alas! But Oleg Filipovitch Kulik and Edward Sinclair and one as-yet-unidentified assassin were very newly-deceased. And—

Damn! Daddy Higgs’s theory, behind his admonishment to his youngest and greenest (and most stupid?) subaltern, had been that the dead always had a majority vote; so, by thinking of them, you invited them to vote you into their club—

Damn!

But he had to think of the newly-dead, all the same, while he could, with both Elizabeth and Mitchell somewhere out there, waiting for him under the tattered canvas awning at the stern, and the politely-suspicious senior Italian intelligence officer whom he’d so briefly just met also expecting an invitation—damn!

He scowled at himself. There could be very little doubt that his own invitation had been given, in Berlin. Kulik, all alone but no doubt sweating with relief now that he’d crossed the Wall safely, had in fact been comprehensively betrayed: date, time and place-betrayed, from the inside. But, with such exact information, all that bloodbath in the restaurant could have so easily been avoided that it must have been intended.

He shook his head at himself. Because all that, while it was enough to give Butler and Mitchell the

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