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Spy Out the Land

Written by Jeremy Duns

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SPY OUT THE LAND

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For Johanna, Rebecca and Astrid

1969

Chapter 1

Tuesday, 28 October 1969,
Archipelago Sea, Finland

Gunnar Hansson peered through his binoculars at the islet a few hundred yards to his north, and watched the bullet tear into the man in the diving suit.

He'd set out from the lighthouse half an hour earlier, having been woken by a noise he had gradually realised was a helicopter passing overhead. That had suggested some kind of emergency, most likely an operation by the coastguard patrol – and yet the radio set hulking in the corner of the room had been silent. He'd forced himself out of bed and over to the telescope, waking Helena as he did and telling her to double-check the receiver. But there was nothing, just the harsh hiss of static.

So he had scanned the sky, finding the helicopter after a few minutes and shifting his stance rapidly to keep it in sight. It had reached an area where visibility was poor, with layers of mist moving over the water,

but it looked like it was coming down to land somewhere in the skerries behind Örö.

'What's happening?' Helena had asked, an edge of panic in her voice.

He took his eye from the telescope. 'I don't know. I'm going out to see.' He began dressing, pulling on a pair of waterproof trousers, a thick sweater and his oilskin cape. 'If I'm not back by five, call Bengt.'

Bengt Hagerlund manned communications for the coastguard in the area. Gunnar didn't want to sound the alarm prematurely: a patrol could be in the midst of an operation or conducting an exercise of some sort and he might interrupt something important by panicking. He found a torch and a pair of boots, kissed Helena on the lips and clambered down the staircase.

It had rained earlier in the night, so it took him a few minutes to walk the short distance across the rocks and down to the jetty – one slip and he could break his neck. The small motorboat rocked gently against the lapping waves. Once he had loosened the chains he threw them ashore and stepped in. He had glanced up to the tower: Helena stood by the lens watching him, as she did whenever he left the island, and for a moment he'd pictured her pale grey eyes imploring him to return quickly. Then he had headed out towards Örö.

Now he sat with the engine idle and his mouth agape. He had arrived a couple of minutes earlier and watched as some sort of argument had broken out between three men on a tiny islet whose name even he

didn't know, leaving him wondering what the hell they were shouting about and why they had chosen such a place to do so. Then suddenly there had been a gunshot, and a prick of blood had appeared in the forehead of one of the men, the one wearing the long coat. An instant after that a second shot had been fired, and the man in the diving suit had also fallen to the ground.

Gunnar had immediately reached for the revolver he kept in a locker in the stern, but he knew it would be suicidal to approach. The Finnish coastguard had helicopters with orange and green livery, but on the way in he had seen that this one, parked on the eastern edge of the islet, was khaki-coloured with side-mounted machine guns, and had a large red star painted on the clamshell door of the rear fuselage.

Russians.

Gunnar detested Russians. He was fifty-eight years old, as strong as a bear, a Swedish-speaking Finn who had lived in this part of the archipelago all his life. His father had been one of the first lighthouse-keepers on Bengtskär, and he had taken over from him. In the war against the Russians, a Finnish garrison had been stationed there to observe naval movements from the tower, until one night in 1941 the Soviets had landed with patrol boats. Gunnar and several others had been caught in a fierce fire-fight on the upper floors, while others had engaged them among the crevasses below. The Russians had eventually been repelled with the help of the Finnish Air Force, but thirty-one Finns died in the battle.

Gunnar had suffered only minor injuries, but he hadn't forgotten those brutal hours and the friends and colleagues he had lost in them. He had stayed on at Bengtskär for several years, until the coastguard had converted it to an unmanned station and he and Helena had moved a few miles west to run the smaller lighthouse on Utö.

He watched as the shooter and another figure carried the man in the coat over to the helicopter. He expected them to return and repeat the process for the other man, but instead the helicopter's rotors started up and it lifted into the air, a gust shaking it for a moment before it righted itself and swung east. Gunnar watched until it was no longer visible, then started up the motor and pointed it towards the skerry.

The man in the diving suit had been shot in the stomach, and Gunnar couldn't feel a pulse. He considered leaving him there, but something about that seemed wrong so he picked him up by the arms and started carrying him to the boat, dragging him on his heels. It was difficult work, and he had to stop for breath several times on the way. To his surprise, once he had eventually managed to deposit the man into the front bench of the boat, he opened his mouth and spoke, although his voice was barely a whisper.

'*Jag är Engelsman*.'

Gunnar nodded, although he didn't understand why an Englishman would be here, speaking Swedish, with a bullet in his stomach. In a compartment in the rear of the boat he found a blanket. He bound it around

the man's abdomen as best he could, and watched as the cloth bloomed a brownish red. He was about to cast off and head home when he noticed that the man's right hand was bent strangely, waving in the breeze, and he realised he was trying to tell him something. He followed the line of his forefinger, and saw a fallen log lying against the edge of the water on the far side of the islet.

He jumped overboard and trudged back over the rocks. It wasn't a log. It was a woman, the back of her head a mess of blood and matter, her dress clinging obscenely to her young body. He heaved her from the water and began carrying her back to join the Englishman.

Chapter 2

Wednesday, 12 November 1969, Moscow

It was cold in Kievskaya metro station, but Victor Kotov was sweating beneath his overcoat. He had spent weeks preparing for this moment, but he was still terrified something would go wrong. And failure meant a firing squad.

Something moved in his peripheral vision and he looked up, but it was just a bulb flickering in one of the nearby chandeliers. The long marble hall was deserted but for him seated on this bench, trying to stop his legs from shaking. He glanced at his watch for what felt like the hundredth time. If his calculations were correct the man should be on the next train. Just three more minutes.

He marvelled for a moment that he had been brought to this point by a passing remark. He had long known what they called him in the office: 'Akula' – the Shark. Over the years a few subordinates had mistakenly used it in his presence, but he had liked that they feared him.

Taken pride in it, even. But three months ago he had overheard Masevnin explaining the origins of his nickname to a pretty new secretary in the typing pool. 'No, no, it's not because he's dangerous – he's a pushover. It's because of how he looks. The sheen on those two sad grey suits he wears has become so worn over the years they look like the skin of a shark. And the eyes in that great meaty face of his, have you noticed? Tiny black pellets with no apparent feeling or intellect behind them, just a dull malevolence towards the world. That's why we call him the Shark!' And the girl had laughed loudly along with Masevnin.

Kotov had immediately ordered a new suit from GUM, a blue Western-style Super 100 he could barely afford. But the comment had cut him to the quick. His eleven years as the directorate's respected security chief had crumbled to ashes. He wasn't respected at all: he was a laughing stock.

He had started copying down documents a couple of weeks later, scribbling notes straight from the cipher machines whenever he could. Then last week Proshin had asked him to install one of the new safes in his office, and he had seized the opportunity. He had stayed behind two evenings in a row and photographed every scrap of paper he could find.

There was a rumbling in the ceiling, and Kotov looked up expectantly. Passengers began flooding down the staircase and into the hallway. And yes, there he was. Kotov jumped from the bench and hurried towards him.

'Sir!' he whispered in English, reaching out a hand and gripping his sleeve. The man swivelled round, his face frozen with fright. 'I'm not a thief,' Kotov assured him. 'A friend. We met before at your embassy, remember? You are Mister Peem.'

Third Secretary Angus Pimm nodded slowly, and Kotov gestured to the bench. 'Please,' he said. 'I just need a few moments of your time.'

Pimm glanced around anxiously, but the swathe of people were focused on one thing only – getting home as soon as possible. Kotov nodded at the rapidly emptying hall.

'No one watches us. And you know who I am, yes? I mean, who I really am?'

Pimm nodded dully. He knew. He'd been introduced to Kotov as a press attaché, but he was GRU: Soviet military intelligence. He'd been assigned to feel him out last year but had got nowhere and had been under the impression the man wasn't even aware he was approaching him. It seemed he'd been wrong about that, but what madness was this, to accost him in a metro station?

'And I know who you are,' said Kotov. 'Please, we don't have much time,' he continued. 'I wish to defect to England, and I have many secret documents on me.'

'*On* you? Christ! Where?'

Kotov was moving his hand to his coat pocket.

Pimm looked at him, aghast. 'Christ!' He couldn't think of anything else to say. He tried to remember the procedures for such an occurrence. Stay calm was the first, but he wasn't managing that very well.

There was another rumbling sound from the ceiling. It was time. Kotov removed the envelope from his pocket and placed it in Pimm's hands.

'This is my first gift to you,' he said. 'Please make sure it reaches the right people.'

He turned and walked hurriedly up the staircase to the platform.