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Deep Blue

Written by Alan Judd

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ALAN JUDD

DEEP BLUE



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To Derek Hillier

Chapter One

The Present

Agent files – paper files, anyway – told stories. It was never quite the whole story – nothing was ever that – and they could be misleading, repetitive and elliptical, but as you opened the buff covers and fingered the flimsy pages of carbon-copied letters and contact notes, and the thicker pages of Head Office minutes or telegrams from MI6 stations, a skeleton became a body and eventually a person. It was the story of a relationship; sometimes, almost, of a life. And sometimes, as with the file that Charles Thoroughgood sat hunched over that evening, it bore the ghostly impress of another story, an expurgated presence that had shaped the present one without ever being mentioned.

Files rarely lied in terms of content; their lies were usually by omission, nearly always on security grounds. In this case Charles knew those grounds well, having written much of what was in the file, and nearly all of what wasn't, many years before.

Pellets of rain splattered against his office window, invisible behind the blinds he had insisted upon despite assurances that the security glass could not be seen through. Having spent much of his operational career penetrating the allegedly impenetrable, he was reluctant to accept blanket security assurances. The more confident the assertion, the less he trusted it, and now, as Chief of MI6, he was better able to assert his prejudices than at any point in his eccentric and unpredictable ascent to the top. But not as much as he would have liked; Head Office was still in Croydon and the government seemed in no hurry to fulfil its promise of a return to Whitehall.

He was on volume three of the file, the final volume, reading more slowly as he neared the point where he had joined the case as a young officer on the Paris station during the Cold War. He was alone in the office but for the guards and a few late-stayers, having sent his private secretary home. Sarah, his wife, was also working late, the common fate of City lawyers. The file was a relief from his screen with its unending emails and spreadsheets; also an escape into a world which, because it was past, seemed now so much simpler and clearer than the present. But it had seemed neither simple nor clear then.

There was no hint of a link to another file, no reference to papers removed. When at last he found what he sought he moved the green-shaded desk lamp closer and sat back in his chair, the file on his lap. Movement reactivated the overhead lights, which he disliked for

their harshness, but if he stayed still for long enough they would go out. The desk lamp he had brought in himself, against the rules.

The paper he sought was in two sections, the first typed in Russian in Cyrillic script, the second a translation into English by someone from the Russian desk in Century House, the old Head Office during much of the Cold War. They should not have been in this file at all, an ordinary numbered P file belonging to a dead access agent run by the Paris station. Josef, as Charles had known him, was a Russian émigré who, unusually, had been allowed out of the Soviet Union on marrying a secretary from the French Embassy. Before that he was a journalist who had committed some minor indiscretion which had earned him ten years in a labour camp, in the days when ten years was what you got for being available to fill a quota, especially if you were Jewish. Settled in France, he had come to the notice of the Paris station, which had recruited him to get alongside visiting Russians. The relationship with the Secret Intelligence Service lasted many years, sustained by snippets from Josef which usually promised more than they delivered, and by payments from SIS, before Charles was sent to terminate him. That was when the case became interesting.

The paper did not, in fact, pertain to Josef at all, though that would not have been apparent to anyone reading the file. It was recorded that Josef had been in a labour camp, so a first-person account of a visit to

the camp years after it had closed would be assumed to be his. The account had been left on Josef's file after other papers had been silently removed, doubtless because whoever weeded the file had made the same mistaken assumption. By the time Charles had discovered it, both Josef and Badger, code-name of the author of the paper, were dead. It might have drawn attention to the Badger case to have transferred papers to it years later. Not that anyone read old paper files any more. Charles was probably the only person still serving who knew both cases.

There was no real need for him to re-read Badger's account of his visit to his former prison camp. Charles remembered it well enough and his renewed interest in the case now, so many years later, was not because of that. He read it partly because he was nostalgic, partly to revive his sense of the man known as Badger, whose own file he had yet to re-read, and partly in penance, acknowledgement of unfulfilled promise. The description of the camp visit was intended by Badger to be part of the memoir he never wrote, an indication of what he hoped to publish when safely resettled in the West. But he never was resettled and this was the only chapter written. Charles had promised that, if anything happened to Badger, he would see it published somewhere. And never had.

Turning to the typewritten English translation, marked by Tippexed alterations and the translator's margin comments in pencil, Charles read:

Since I was in that remote region, the region of my last camp, and with time to spare before the flight back to Moscow, I told my driver to take me to it. He was puzzled. 'There's nothing there, it was closed years ago. Just the huts and the wire and some of the old guards who have nowhere else to go.'

'Take me.'

It was farther from the airport than I thought and there was fresh snow, unmarked by other car tracks. It was fortunate that the driver knew the way because I should never have found it, hidden in a clearing in the midst of the forest. The iron gates were open and, judging by the depth of snow piled up against them, had been so since autumn. The grey sky was breeding more snow now and on either side the high outer fence stretched into the blurred distance, sagging in places. The watchtowers stood like tall black cranes, one of them with a dangerous list. Inside the wire, the huts were squat white shapes with here and there a misshapen one where the roof had collapsed. The doors at the ends, shielded by overhangs, were mostly shut but some sagged open on rotted hinges.

I told my driver to wait and keep the engine and heater running. Then I walked slowly through the gates. There were other footprints in the snow leading to the first hut, a larger H-shaped one which used to be the guardroom. Behind it was the inner fence

with another set of open gates. Within that fence were the huts. The guardroom door opened before I reached it. I wasn't surprised. The sight of a shiny black ZiL and an official in a long black overcoat with a sable astrakhan and matching gloves was not a common one for the wretches within. A hunched figure hobbled out, muffled in old clothes and using a stick. He hurried over as if afraid to miss me.

'Greetings, greetings, I am Kholopov, Ivanovich Kholopov. I was sergeant here. I am your guide, if you wish.'

He had a thin dirty face and his lips were never still, working continuously. He looked smelly. I knew he would be, I knew exactly how he would smell, but I had no need to get that close.

'I know the camp well, I know everything about it, I have been here nearly thirty years. I worked here, I was sergeant of the guards.'

I took off one glove and fished out a few coins from my coat pocket. I didn't bother to count them. He held out his hand, his glove worn through on the palm, and I dropped them into it without touching him.

'Thank you, thank you kindly. What would you like to see – the kitchen, the offices, the punishment cells, the graveyard, the huts, the bathhouse? It is all empty, all available.'

'Everything. Show me everything.'

That puzzled him. 'Of course, of course, I can

show you every hut, every bunk. Only there are very many and it will take time—'

'I will tell you when to stop.' I noticed now that he had a twitch in his left cheek.

'With pleasure, it is pleasure. Please follow me.'

We crunched through the snow together, slowly because of the curious way he hobbled. He told me about the building of the camp in the 1930s, initially by the first prisoners sent to it who lived – and often died – in holes in the ground until the huts were up. He described its expansion, then its gradual contraction after the death of Stalin until its closure in the Gorbachev era, by which time it housed only a few politicals, as he called us.

'But when Comrade Gorbachev let the prisoners go the authorities forgot about us, the guards and administrators. We stayed, we had nowhere to go. How can we go anywhere? Where could we go? There is no work for us here but we cannot afford to move. Unless they open the camp again.' His laugh became a prolonged cough. 'We have pensions but they are a pittance, which is why we have to beg from generous visitors such as yourself.'

We reached the first of the huts inside the inner wire. The number one was still just visible in faded white on the wooden door. 'We can go in if you want but there is nothing there, nothing to see. They're all the same. In this block there are numbers one to thirty-nine, the rest are in the other block.

Twenty prisoners to a hut but sometimes there were more. They are all the same, the huts. So were the prisoners. Over there are the camp offices and the punishment cells and the bathhouse and the sick bay and our own quarters. They are more interesting. These are just huts.'

I offered him a cigarette. He glanced as if to check that he had not misunderstood, then grabbed one. 'Thank you, thank you.' His eyes lingered on the packet, which he couldn't read because they were American, Peter Stuyvesant. His eyes lingered too on my gold lighter. 'Number thirty-seven,' I said. 'Take me to thirty-seven.'

The cigarette seemed to give him energy and his lop-sided hobble through the rows became more rapid. The smoke was good and pungent in the cold air.

'You see, they are all the same,' he said again when we reached it.

'Open it.'

I sensed he was reluctant, probably because of the effort involved. He put his cigarette between his lips, leaned his stick against the wall, pushed down on the handle and put his shoulder to the door. It was obviously stiff at first but then opened so freely that he nearly lost his balance. He stood back so that I could look in. 'Nothing to see, just the bunks. They're all the same.'

He had to move as I stepped in. It took a while for my eyes to adjust to the gloom. There were

sprinklings of snow on the earth floor beneath the closed wooden window-hatches. The ceiling was low, the wooden double bunks lined the sides, some with broken slats, others still with remnants of old straw. The gangway down the middle was too narrow for two to walk side by side and to get between the bunks you had to go sideways. There was an old metal bucket on the floor by the door and a musty smell. It felt colder inside than out.

I walked two-thirds of the way down and stopped by the lower bunk on the left side. It was no different to all the others, of course. My guide hobbled behind me.

'You knew someone who was here?' he asked.

I didn't answer. After another minute or so of fruitless and circular contemplation, I turned back up the aisle. You live with the past but you can't live it. I left my guide struggling to close the door and headed back towards the gates. The snow was thicker now and the outlines of distant huts rapidly became indistinct. Eventually I heard him shuffling and panting and he caught up with me.

'Is there anything else – the punishment cells, the camp offices?'

I was between the inner and outer fences, approaching the H-shaped guardroom, when he made one last effort, pointing with his stick. 'I could show you the cookhouse. We use it. It still has the ovens and pots and pans—'

That made me stop and think. 'No,' I said. 'That was the guards' cookhouse. The cookhouse for the prisoners was that one, there.' I pointed at a long low building just inside the inner fence.

He followed my gaze, then looked back at me, his lips still for once. 'You are right. I had forgotten. I have been here too long, I am too familiar. But you, how could you—'

'I was here.'

We stared at each other in a long silence, but for the hiss of the snow. Those three words, three simple words, sunk into him like stones in a pond. Who were the prisoners, the real prisoners? And how could I be a senior official with a ZiL and furs? I took the cigarettes and the remaining coins from my pocket. He dropped his stick in the snow and held out his cupped hands. He was still staring, uncomprehending, as my car pulled away.

At the foot of the original Russian text was a hand-written note in English, in Badger's characteristic forward-sloping hand and his usual brown ink: *So you see, Charles, we are all prisoners really, even the guards. Tell your people who doubt my motivation – is this not enough?*

Charles closed that volume of Josef's file and put it with its mate. Then he picked up Badger's file, a slim single volume also buff-coloured but this time with a red stripe, a different number system and a

white stick-on label with heavy black lettering saying, 'Closed. Do not digitise.' He had stuck that on himself years before, proof of rare premonition. It meant the case had remained secret and, unlike digitised files, was fully recoverable.

Chapter Two

The Present

'But I thought you'd have been back ages ago, before me. That's why I left the message about the fish, so that you could be getting on with it.' Sarah closed the oven door with unnecessary force. 'If I'd known you were going to be so late I could have stayed and finished what I was doing.'

'Sorry. I thought you were going to be later so I just carried on.'

'You could've let me know. And now it's gone ten and neither of us has eaten. It's ridiculous. It's not good to eat so late. Medically, I mean.'

'Mexicans do.'

'Bugger the Mexicans.' She had to stop herself smiling. 'I think you enjoy provoking me, don't you?'

'Keeps you young.' He ducked the oven glove she threw. 'Chardonnay or Sauvignon?' In just over a year of marriage they had never had a row. They had tiptoed round each other, careful not to provoke,

each watchful to see where the limits might be, aware that their being together at all was an unimaginable bonus. They had met decades before, as students, an intense relationship whose disintegration had had consequences as unimaginable as their present state. She had gone on to marry one of Charles's friends, who had preceded him as Chief of MI6. The events leading to his death had brought them together, events which could still make their new-found unity feel fragile. Whenever tension threatened, they almost competed to defuse it.

Over dinner, she said, 'I've just avoided a case we would both find embarrassing. Representing the Action Against Austerity movement in a human-rights case against the government. They've got some very left-wing barristers involved and I got out of it by arguing that it's really one for our litigation department rather than the kind of private-client stuff I do and that when – not if – it came out that their solicitor was married to the Chief of MI6, it could look like a conflict of interest and bring the firm into disrepute.'

'Why did they come to you? Not your normal sort of work.'

'No idea. Ignorance, perhaps, or if they knew maybe because they liked the idea of a little embarrassment. Anyway, you should be grateful I got out of it. Bound to be a high-profile case. Just the sort I hate.'

'The Triple A, as Whitehall now knows it, came up at the National Security Council. MI5 are worried

that they're infiltrating the Scottish National Party but can't do anything about it because MI5 don't spy on British political parties.'

In fact, the AAA had not been on the agenda but had been mentioned to Charles, in what bureaucrats liked to call the margins of the meeting, by Michael Dunton, MI5's balding and genial Director General. 'Don't suppose the Triple A will cross your radar screen unless they become an international movement,' Michael said, 'but they're posing us a few problems. Not so much in themselves; they're the usual rag-bag of activists, anti-nuclear, anti-establishment, anti-capitalist, anti-everything except animal rights. We're happy to ignore them unless they're subverting parliamentary democracy or wreaking industrial havoc by violent means, in which case we're entitled to investigate them. But they pose a problem because they seem to have infiltrated the wilder shores of the SNP, the ones calling for a Scottish breakaway, a unilateral declaration of independence, and they've got several secret little things on the go which are almost certainly subversive and may be downright dangerous. But we can't investigate them without simultaneously gathering intelligence on the SNP, which is off limits, of course, and would cause enormous political ructions if it came out. So we can't do anything. Much as the government would like us to, so long as we didn't ask them first.' He smiled.

'Not a flicker on our screens,' said Charles, 'but I can ask stations to report any overseas links with like-minded groups. And they can ask their liaisons.'

'Thanks, but there's something else I wanted to ask you about.' Michael bent his head and moved a few feet away from the others, lowering his voice. 'Does the name Deep Blue mean anything? Not the chess computer but something else. Wasn't there a case, an old Sovbloc case on your side, in which it featured? I seem to remember something about it. Was it the code-name for the case? I can't be sure of anything these days. To be honest, I've not been feeling too good.'

'Your memory's better than you think. It wasn't a code-name but there was a case that featured it, the Badger case. I was the case officer. Didn't run for long. Dead case now. As is Badger himself.'

'It's just that we picked up some Internet chatter. Someone we haven't yet identified who has extremist connections was saying they – whoever "they" are – were going to get hold of Deep Blue and cause havoc. We can't work out who or what Deep Blue is, whether it's a thing or a person. I remembered it as a phrase associated with some case or other of your lot's but clearly it wasn't your agent – ex-agent – from what you say.'

'It had a colloquial meaning which I think I remember correctly but I'd need to check I've got it right.' The meeting was about to start and they were called to order. 'Let me get back to you.'

The Prime Minister wasn't chairing this time, his place taken by the Home Secretary. Alongside him was the new Foreign Secretary, Elspeth Jones, to whom, as Chief of MI6, Charles was answerable. He had had close and friendly relations with her predecessor, who had appointed him, but his meetings with Elspeth so far had been brief, formal and cautious. There was nothing to complain of but she had turned down the first submission they had put up to her, concerning Saudi Arabia, on the grounds that the political fall-out if anything went wrong was too great to be worth the risk. That was her prerogative and was the reason the submission system existed, but he sensed that it might become the pattern; she was no risk-taker, unlike her predecessor who had been unexpectedly demoted – moved sideways and brought into the innermost circle was how Downing Street spinners put it – to Chief Whip.

The meeting took its usual course, surveying threats and looming scenarios at home and abroad, with the heads of agencies and departments giving succinct opinions and the Home Secretary, unconstrained by the Prime Minister and taking advantage of Elspeth's inexperience, holding forth at length. The only unusual feature was the presence of two special political advisors, Elspeth's and the Home Secretary's. Most SPADs were not security cleared and neither of these would have been permitted to attend if the PM had chaired. By unspoken agreement, the heads of agencies

and permanent secretaries all said less than they would have.

During the longueurs of the Home Secretary's peroration Charles studied the SPADs. Elspeth had introduced hers by name only – Robin Cleveley – with no explanation. Having never been in government before, she had perhaps assumed that SPADS were acceptable everywhere. Maybe they had long been political intimates, he knowing all her secrets and helping steer her to where she was, and it had not occurred to her to keep him out of anything. Her private secretary should have warned her. Charles decided he would have to mention it, if no one else did, but would start by getting his own private secretary to raise it with Elspeth's.

Cleveley, tall and tie-less, reminded him of a type he had come across first at university and later in Whitehall: confident, presentable young men with quick intelligence, rapid articulacy and the air of always being on the inside track. More attentive to superiors than inferiors, socially adroit, personally ambitious and committed to the political causes they served, they were essentially courtiers, ready, willing, anxious to please. And like courtiers of old they could, on occasion, stab.

The Home Secretary's SPAD was a woman, Melanie Stokes, short and dark-haired with sharp features and a matching quickness of manner. Charles could do nothing about her since MI6 had no locus with the

Home Office, but Michael Dunton did and would surely not approve. She intervened only once in the discussion, when the Home Secretary, looking at Michael, said that the Triple A, though sometimes posing a public order threat, should not be regarded as a security threat. It was essentially a political party operating above board and we had to be careful not to demonise it.

'Political movement,' said Melanie. 'A movement, not a party. It has no constitution. Sees itself as an expression of political will.'

The Home Secretary nodded. 'Thank you, Melanie, quite right. A movement, not a party. And not a security threat.'

The others looked for a response from Michael Dunton. As DG he had statutory authority to decide what was and was not a threat to the state, but he remained silent. Keeping his powder dry pending private discussion, Charles hoped.

After the meeting, Charles moved towards Elspeth, who was being talked at by the Home Secretary. He had no agenda with her that morning other than wanting to establish more familiar and easy relations, with more regular access. But as he edged towards her Robin Cleveley interposed himself with a broad smile and outstretched hand.

'I've never met a C before.' He used the acronym by which Chiefs of MI6 were traditionally known in Whitehall, although their names had long been public

knowledge. 'Robin Cleveley, the Foreign Secretary's Man Friday.'

'And much more than a Friday man, I'm sure,' said Charles, smiling in turn. It paid to be pleasant to those whose legs you wanted to cut off.

'I was wondering whether I might call on you for a chat. It seems to me, on the basis of admittedly little observation, that it might be helpful for the Secretary of State to have easier access to your views.'

It was exactly what Charles wanted, but not via Cleveley. 'Happily, if you could bear to come to Croydon.'

Robin smiled again. 'Croydon, removal therefrom, is another thing we need to talk about.'

This would have been music to Charles's ears but for the medium. He had been promised by Elspeth's predecessor that MI6 would return to Westminster, and had told his staff they would, but nothing had happened. Cleveley's initiative and his irritating assumption of equality made him feel he was being treated as another courtier, even as a supplicant. For the time being he had no option but to appear to go along with it; to show irritation in Whitehall's undeclared wars was to show weakness.

That night, with Sarah in deep sleep beside him, he listened to Big Ben striking four over the rooftops of Westminster. Perhaps she was right about eating late, though it didn't seem to affect her. He was recalling

the start of the case that featured Deep Blue, decades before.

The 1980s

The Paris station, all eight of them in those days of close liaison with the French on Sovbloc and terrorist casework, were squeezed around the table in the safe speech room while Angus Copplestone, head of station, gave edited highlights of the ambassador's weekly meeting. Pale, black-haired, energetic and ambitious, an earlier version of Robin Cleveley, Angus spent as much time as he could with the ambassador. 'I must say I find myself eye to eye with him on this issue,' he would frequently say, as if announcing a surprise.

This time it was the ambassador's edict on SIS reporting on French issues – deep-chat bilaterals, Angus called it, which included anything from French positions on European Community negotiations to internal political developments and views on British policy. 'He's not keen on us reporting it, as you know, even if we do discover something the Foreign Office hasn't. It should be handled through normal Foreign Office reporting channels. I must say, I have some sympathy. It's not really secret intelligence, doesn't come from recruited agents, just officials with whom we're in liaison who say a bit more than they should. In future, therefore, anything anyone picks up should be reported to me only, orally not on paper. I'll discuss it with the ambassador and we'll decide how it should be

reported to London. If it is reported – and it probably won't be – he or I will do it through Foreign Office channels. There's also no question of cultivating potential French sources or seeking intelligence on France in any form without clearance at every stage, probably all the way up to the Foreign Secretary. And it's most unlikely we'd get it. Does everyone understand that?' He looked at them all, his gaze finally settling on Charles. 'So, Charles, no more surprise weekend reports to London from your talkative French liaison partner about his government's attitudes towards the British rebate. The Foreign Office has already had Number Ten on about it, wanting more.'

'I thought the government would like to know about it, with these negotiations coming up.'

'Not your call. Above your pay grade.'

Angus's eyes stayed on Charles's for a few seconds, perhaps waiting for the acknowledging nod that was not forthcoming. For no reason Charles could define, there had been an unspoken antipathy between him and his head of station since the day he arrived. They had not argued or fallen out, there had been no overt hostility, but from the moment they shook hands he had sensed a mutual lack of sympathy, an almost intellectual estrangement. There being no issue over which they had disagreed, he had concluded it was a matter of temperament. Angus's obvious ambition and his unquestioning self-belief provoked in Charles a juvenile desire for mischievous opposition, which

manifested itself as flippancy. Most of the time he hid it, but he felt that Angus picked up on it.

'The other thing,' Angus continued, returning his gaze to the others, 'is that the visiting Russian trade delegation is out of bounds. The one that's here following up last year's Paris Air Show. Charles's French liaison friends will be crawling all over them anyway so there's no need for us to get involved and risk muddying the waters. More to the point, the ambassador's pretty pally with the head of the delegation, a man called Federov, and he won't want you treading on his toes in your size twelves, Charles. Federov's a smooth operator, apparently, Party apparatchik, Central Committee fixer, blue-eyed boy of Soviet business so far as French ministers are concerned. The ambassador's trying to get his delegation invited to London on the back of this visit, so a big Keep off the Grass sign, OK?'

The meeting moved on to everyone's plans for the week ahead. At the end Angus asked Charles to stay behind. 'Not many morsels on your plate at the moment, I know,' he said as the steel door closed on the others. 'Not your fault, of course, that we're unable to do everything we want but with this secondee from MI5 coming out to take over all your IRA stuff with French liaison you'll have even fewer toys to play with. And as everyone else's plates are pretty full I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to take on a little chore.'

He smiled as he pushed a paper with a list of agent

numbers across the table. His smile, like his regretful tone, always seemed too deliberate. None of the numbers meant anything to Charles except that they signified individuals rather than subjects.

'Pensioners,' Angus continued, 'former agents of various nationalities living in France to whom the Office pays pensions for one reason or another. Some of them go back to the Second World War and we have to check annually that they're still alive. You might find you can cross a couple off. They drop off their perches every year.' He smiled at the thought. 'Interesting reading for anyone with time for that sort of thing. Normally I get one of the secretaries to do it but they've all got more important things to do at the moment. You don't have to do much. Just look them up over a cup of tea or coffee or glass of whatever stronger stuff is keeping them going.'

The files were mostly single volumes, beginning with summaries culled from multi-volume files held in Head Office of the agents' services before they retired to France. They also comprised records of visits, pension payments, illnesses, requests and, in one or two cases, deaths of spouses. Others, whose connections with British officialdom were no secret, contained copies of invitations to the embassy's annual Queen's Birthday garden party.

Charles spent the rest of the day in the station, leafing through them. He hated days spent at his desk without getting out and about, though his colleagues

seemed not to mind. Officers on most stations were generally out meeting people, which was how they got their business, or doing their Foreign Office cover jobs partly with that aim in mind. But Angus equated work with physical presence and liked to see his officers at their desks, reading and writing; out of sight meant out of control. But out of sight was where Charles intended to be, once he had decided his order of visits. Two were pleasingly distant, one near the Swiss border, another in Cherbourg. The others were in and around Paris but he reckoned he could stretch them to several days, allowing half a day each.

His first was to an elderly French couple who lived in the rue d'Astorg, not far from the Arc de Triomphe and near a corner café he sometimes used. He lunched there and called on them afterwards. They had served both SIS and SOE (Special Operations Executive) during the war and had been betrayed while working for the latter. They had survived torture and imprisonment but had been ignored by de Gaulle and successive French governments because they had worked for the British. SIS had paid them a small pension ever since their liberation.

Their small apartment was crowded with ornaments and knick-knacks. Charles had the impression of quiet, forgotten lives and of absolute dependency on each other. They seemed as grateful for the brief annual contact, with the bottle and flowers he had brought, as for their pension. It reminded them they had been

part of something, they said. Also that, 'London never forgets'. It took little prompting to get them to talk about their own operational pasts. Charles much preferred hearing about the war and early Cold War to processing paper back in the station. But they did not talk about their torture and imprisonment.

His next visit was to Machemont, a small town an hour or so outside Paris. It was not clear from the file why Josef, the elderly Russian émigré, was paid a pension. The summary showed that he had been imprisoned in Russia but not for working for SIS; he had been recruited only after leaving. Since then he had performed various services, mostly introductions to or personality reports on visiting Russian officials whom he cultivated as a sympathetic freelance journalist. His intelligence stream, always modest, had petered out over the years as his access dwindled. He had been paid more generously than the results merited and the file recorded his award of a pension without indicating why. It was likely that successive case officers had liked him and had found it more congenial to be nice than to acknowledge declining productivity. His French wife seemed wealthy in her own right. The most recent paper was a letter from Head Office pointing out that, although a pensioner, he was still classified as an agent and that he saw himself as continuing to work for the Office, regarding his pension as a salary. There was no indication that he was in need of money and no prospect of his regaining any useful access; he should

therefore be terminated, politely and considerately, with – if the station thought necessary – a year's pension as a terminal bonus.

Angus had written on the letter: *Clearly one of the Old Scroungers Brigade. Terminate without bonus if poss but do terminate*. That was how Charles met Josef, and how the Badger case started.