RESURRECTION

DAVID GILMAN



An Aries Book

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Human blood is heavy; the man that
has shed it cannot run away.

African proverb

PROLOGUE

The full moon sat low on the desert horizon; its light dressed the corrugated sand dunes in veils of shadows. A night breeze scudding across the sand broke the stillness, eroding and reshaping dunes into another landscape.

The man's skeleton stared upwards into the moon's glow. His head hinged back into the nape of his neck as his mouth, the jawbones cracked, seemed to scream silently at the night sky. The flying jacket was well preserved but bore no insignia, no identification, nothing to link him to any deeds committed in the often squandered name of justice and truth. The dead pilot sat immobile, his shoulder holster split and worn by the ravages of the desert heat, but the service-issued Colt .45 still nestled snugly against his ribs. The obligatory round held in the chamber. Always ready. That had been part of his life – always knowing the back door in any building, ever the professional. His sweatshirt and cotton trousers were tattered, exposing the taut, age-blackened skin, like oiled canvas stretched across his bones. The aviator glasses that once shielded blue eyes from the altitude's glare as he soared across the African sky had been knocked from his face by the impact. The bubble canopy had been lost at three

thousand feet and his helter-skelter ride down to earth had ripped free his cap. He'd cursed when he felt gravity pulling it free. Bitched and screamed. Because of all things he didn't want to lose the best damned baseball cap ever to come out of his team's winning season. He'd fought blurring vision – pulling himself back to consciousness against the G force of the falling plane... the plane... Sweet Jesus, she was more than a machine... she was his... he trusted her with his life, and she'd always done as he'd asked.

She screamed with him as they plunged in a vertical dive towards the desert below.

His hands still gripped the control stick from his final determined effort to bring up the nose of the plane. And he'd done it. In the last moments, yelling in triumph, he'd levelled off, then settled down on to the arid ground of a land waiting for victims. His shattered legs at the rudder controls and splintered fingers were evidence of the force of that landing. Had the impact not snapped his neck, death from the shock of his injuries would have claimed him before that nightfall thirty years ago.

The dune rose forty feet above the floor of the desert. At its base, the breeze had brushed aside sand and exposed the fuselage and its long-range tanks. The aircraft's glistening metal reflected a dreamer's moon. The wind increased, shifting more sand from the cockpit, open to the elements. The P51 Mustang still embraced the man, cradling him, human and machine fused in spirit. The pilot and his mission were now alive only in other men's memories. Men who feared what lay hidden in that wasteland. The worn leather attaché case was manacled around his left wrist, tucked next to his crushed

legs. It held a document men would die for. Information about two names. One a spy and traitor. The other the vital link to him.

Raglan.

1

Edwardes Square in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea lies just off Kensington High Street. It is a wealthy area, even by London standards. The Georgian houses, four storeys including a basement, sell for eye-watering amounts.

A man gazed down into the dimly lit square from a top-floor apartment. He was half-naked, a towel wrapped around his midriff. At sixty-seven, his hair was still thick enough to be slicked back from the shower he'd taken after making love to the woman who lay sprawled asleep on the bed behind him. He liked to watch the streets, especially at night when shadows might reveal a concealed watcher. John Barton's senses, honed over years of intelligence work, would alert him to anything untoward. He wasn't on his home turf, but he liked the neighbourhood. Wealth always encouraged a far more attentive patrolling by the police and that helped keep unfriendlies away. God knew there were enough of them still around. He lit a cigarette as he watched a police tow truck lifting a Porsche. To park in these car-choked streets, you needed a resident's parking permit. No permit – no park. The flashing blue lights illuminated a form, barely visible to the untrained eye. Beyond the iron railings securing the private

park in the square, a man was standing back in the latticed moon shadow under the trees. Unmoving.

The old spy glanced across the far side of the square as the tow truck finally manoeuvred the offending Porsche down the narrow street. The watcher remained in darkness. Barton looked up with an unromantic eye at the full moon as the woman in the bed turned over, felt for him and then restlessly belly-flopped into a new sleeping position. They had spent the evening together at a book publishing launch. Over the years, his name had found its way on to many such invitation lists. The London Game. See and be seen. He did not play it often, but at times it was a distraction and could be a helpful cover when the former MI6 officer wanted to meet people others thought long dead, but who lived in exile under witness protection. The woman was a wealthy widow who had inherited her husband's publishing company. Old friends, they would meet occasionally, have sex and lie in what he ruefully referred to as past-their-prime splendour – soft flesh warm from mutual exertion, happy to be enfolded in the luxury of her lavish apartment and the tenderness their ages afforded them. He envied her untroubled slumber. He was sleeping less these days. Too many memories forcing their way into his consciousness, distorting his dreams. And the insistent voice in his unconscious demanding he get the explosive new information into the right hands. Now. The information that was typed and pressed into the envelope in his suit's breast pocket, hanging neatly on the back of the bedroom door. How far would he get with his subterfuge? Much depended on him leading his enemy astray.

The book launch had been the perfect place for the envelope to be passed to him. But if the watcher below was following

him, and knew what he carried, then he must have seen the handover from Barton's old contact the night before. Barton's contact, a Russian friend in exile here, had warned him the old enemy was closing in. And since then, his friend had not answered his phone.

His lover half raised her head, muttered something and turned over again. He stubbed out his cigarette and sighed. The approaching dawn did not herald a bright new day for him; all it promised was a dull glow as befitted a tired man. Barton was very tired. He'd served his country thirty years and more. A double first at Cambridge meant politics had beckoned, but the Service had been more seductive. Had remained so for all these years. First an active field officer and then the inevitable slow decline to sitting behind a desk with an occasional lecture to bright young things keen to join the Service. Old foes often shared the same fate. Some came over to his side. Some became friends. His had been a solitary life – a woman married to a spy needed exceptional qualities; sadly his wife did not have them, and after three childless years she had divorced him. The final papers had arrived when he was neck-deep in trying to calm the slaughter during another small war in Africa. A long time ago. No regrets. He had lost touch with his wife, but he had maintained contact with his old networks and now, unexpectedly, they had yielded treasure. Pure gold. And, he admitted to himself, a frisson of panic at what could be exposed. His memories flared with a passion he had all but forgotten how to feel: in recent years he had buried his emotions as deeply as the secret consumed by the desert. A secret now resurrected.

He glanced at the sleeping woman. Now he had a chance to serve his country again. One last roll of the dice. Others

wanted what he had, and they would kill him to retrieve the envelope in his suit pocket and the information it contained. His journey was coming to an end, but at least he would go out with dignity, and in a worthwhile cause. The new day would probably be his last. There was no better death than to sacrifice oneself for love. And he loved his country.