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Trust No One

Written by Alex Walters

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ALEX WALTERS

Trust No One

AVON

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Of course, this has to be dedicated to Christine, with thanks for everything. And to James, Adam and Jonny for their continuing love and support.

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This has to be for Christine, of course.
For everything.
Au revoir, love, wherever you are.

Prologue

The last time she saw Jake, Marie found herself awake, sometime after midnight, staring into the darkness. She told herself it was because they'd eaten late, because she'd drunk too much wine. Because tonight, after their conversation in the restaurant, after what had been said and not said, their lovemaking had left her restless rather than relaxed. All that was true, but she couldn't fool herself that it was the whole story.

She rolled over in the bed. Jake was asleep, on his back, snoring softly. She was tempted to wake him, caress him, hope that more sex would calm her tense nerves. The logic of the addict. A second impulse, maybe more rational, was simply to slip away, now, in the small hours. Put an end to all this before it was too late.

Jake deserved better. This was her mess, not his. Whatever she did, she had to do right by Jake. She'd sit down and talk to him properly. Tell him what she could. Not the whole truth. Probably not much of the truth. But something. Enough. Enough so he'd understand. One day soon.

She pushed back the duvet and sat up, for a moment enjoying the small-hours chill of the bedroom on her naked body. Beside her, Jake stirred, rolled over, but didn't wake. She eased herself out of bed and reached for the old dressing gown that Jake had loaned her. It was too small to have been Jake's,

and she assumed that it had belonged to some past girlfriend. Fair enough. Jake's business.

Moving quietly across the room, she paused to gather up her handbag and the clothes she'd left neatly piled on the chair by the door. There was no point in staying in bed. She'd only toss and turn till she woke Jake, and despite her earlier impulse, that wasn't really what she wanted. She'd do what she often ended up doing these days, here and in her own flat. She'd make herself a hot drink, read a mindless magazine or watch some content-free television, or just sit out on Jake's balcony, listening to the distant ripple of the water and the sounds of the night. Calm herself to the point where she could sleep again.

And if that failed, she told herself, she'd wake Jake and give sex another shot after all.

With a kettle boiling in the kitchen, she dressed quickly, more conscious of the cold now. They'd had a quiet evening – a few drinks in the pub, an Italian, a bottle of wine between them – and her outfit was practical rather than decorative. Jeans, a sweater, smart boots.

She'd never doubted that she'd stay over again tonight. It had been inevitable long before she'd knocked back her first large red. But, as usual, she'd brought no change of clothes, reasoning that she'd have time in the morning to get back to the flat, to shower and change, before she needed to get to the shop. She told herself that it was because she wanted nothing taken for granted – but whether by herself or by Jake, she didn't know.

She made herself a decaff coffee and wandered back through to Jake's neat living room. It was like the man himself – unostentatious, slightly chaotic, primarily functional, but occasionally intriguing. The walls were bare except for two small but expensive-looking pieces of figurative art, sitting

incongruously alongside a large signed photograph of the 1974 Leeds United team. Jake was a man with some obvious shallows and many hidden depths, only a few of which she'd so far managed to plumb.

She hovered by the television for a moment, then picked up her leather jacket from Jake's sofa. Returning to the kitchen, she turned off the light, then did the same in the hallway and the living room, plunging the flat back into darkness. Satisfied, she pulled open the large picture window that gave on to the balcony. It was one of the joys of Jake's quayside flat. Her own building looked out over the city, with a distant view of the Pennines and on a sunny day she could glimpse the grey-green hills between the buildings, giving an unexpected sense of space and distance amid the cluttered office blocks. But this was something different again, the kind of view that estate agents measured in the millions – a direct outlook over the heart of the quays and the old ship canal. Off to the right were the modernist lines and angles of the Lowry complex, and over the water the bewitching jumble of the Imperial War Museum. In the foreground to the left, glowing crimson, the imposing monolith of Old Trafford. Beyond all that, there was the mess of industrial buildings that formed Trafford Park. In the daylight, it felt like the ultimate urban landscape, a bustling blend of the old and the new, commerce and leisure. But at night, when the football crowds and concert-goers had disappeared, it was almost peaceful, with the gentle brush of the water against the quayside, the rippling lights across the face of the canal.

She closed the window behind her, and zipping up her jacket, lowered herself on to one of the chairs, adjusting the back so that she could stare up into the starlit sky. The constant glare of Manchester dimmed the spectacle, but it was a clear

night and she could make out the scattered patterns of constellations. Beginning to relax for the first time since she'd woken, she closed her eyes, enjoying the moment of peace, imagining herself drifting away on the cool night air. Trying not to think.

Without realizing, she nodded into sleep and when she woke what might have been minutes or hours later, she had a sense that something – some noise, some movement – had invaded her consciousness. She sat up, trying to work out what had disturbed her. It was a half-familiar sensation – as if someone had been hammering at the door or pressing on the bell in the moments before she'd woken.

She glanced at her watch. She'd been asleep only for a few minutes. But something had changed. A light reflected off her watch. She twisted and saw that the hallway was illuminated. Probably Jake had got up to use the bathroom.

She climbed to her feet, preparing to go back inside. Then she stopped.

It took her a moment to work out what she was seeing. Through the picture window, past the living room, in the hallway. The front door half-open. A man standing in the hall, leaning on the frame of the bedroom door. Not Jake. Someone she didn't recognize at all.

There was something about the man's movements, his body language. It wasn't the posture of a house-breaker – not furtive, cautious, on edge. This was different.

The man was a pro. Somehow, even from this distance, with his back half-turned towards her, she had no doubt. A hitman. Fucking wet work. And Jake was the bloody target.

It wasn't entirely a surprise. She knew what Jake had done. She knew the kinds of enemies he must have made. And she knew that, in part, she was responsible.

Her first instinct was to try to intervene. But even as she

was considering her options, the scene changed. The man pushed himself away from the doorframe and stood back. Two more figures appeared, dragging Jake, still naked, between them. Jake was half-resisting, half-falling. He'd been hit already, blood pouring from a cut in his temple, streaming down his pale face.

She moved back slowly, pressing herself against the balcony railing, keeping out of their line of sight as they manhandled Jake into the living room. Three of them. All pros. She could tell. She'd met people in that line of work. They were a type. Cold, calm, methodical to the point of compulsion. Psychopaths who'd found their vocation.

Her handbag, with her mobile inside, was on the floor by the patio chair. She eased herself forwards, moving as silently as possible. Inside the room, the men had thrown Jake on to the couch. He lay, crumpled, his hands clutched to his groin, blood now smeared across his chest. He looked semi-conscious.

She reached the handbag, pulled it to her, and began to fumble inside for her phone.

At that moment, the balcony was flooded with light.

She looked up, startled, momentarily dazzled. The balcony floodlights were operated from a panel of switches alongside the interior lights. One of the men had hit the lights for the living room and inadvertently turned on the external lamps at the same time.

She stood, caught in the high beam, conscious that at any moment one of the men might look in her direction. There was no time.

She backed to the balcony railing. It was only the second floor. She paused, trying to envisage the layout of the apartment block. There was another identical balcony immediately below. If she could reach that, it ought to be feasible to lower

herself further and drop to the ground below. It was possible, she thought. She hoped.

Throwing the handbag around her neck, she hoisted herself up on to the railing. As she did so, one of the men looked up, his attention caught by her movement in his peripheral vision. She heard him shout something, but didn't wait to find out what.

She hung for a moment on the outside of the railing, then began to slide down, her feet desperately flailing for the top of the railing below. A drainpipe running down between the two floors gave another half-handhold, but she could barely cling on. Above, she could hear the window being dragged back.

She found her footing on the lower railing, paused for a breath, and then, clinging helplessly to the drainpipe, half-dropped, half-slid down again, her hands clutching for the top of the railing where her feet had been resting a moment before. She grasped it, and her fingers sliding agonizingly down the metal rails, lowered herself to the bottom of the lower balcony. From above, she could hear whispering voices, but could make out no words.

Hanging from the lower balcony, she twisted her neck to look down. Her feet were perhaps four or five feet above the ground. She realized with relief that she was hanging above one of the decorative flower beds that surrounded the building; a softer landing than the concrete that stretched away elsewhere.

She released her grip and dropped, landing and slipping awkwardly on the soft earth. She was momentarily winded, but was up and running almost immediately. Her car was parked on the street at the rear of the building. Even if the men had set off immediately, she should reach it before they could.

She pounded hard along the pathway, thanking Christ that she was wearing her low winter boots. Even so, she almost lost her footing on the slick paved surface as she turned the corner.

Her little Toyota was a hundred yards or so ahead, tucked into a row of other parked cars. She had her handbag open as she ran, struggling to find her keys. She glanced over her shoulder. The main doors of the apartment block were open. One of the men was peering out, maybe three or four hundred yards behind her.

She reached the car and pulled out the keys at more or less the same moment, thumbing open the central locking. Then she was in and starting the engine.

She looked in the rear-view mirror as the engine roared into life. As she pulled out into the road, she could see the man, still a long way behind. He'd halted in the doorway, aware that there was no point now in trying to pursue her.

She kept her foot down as she headed along the quays, the roads empty at this time of the night, passing between the lines of silent shops, restaurants, hotels, offices. The lights out on to Trafford Road were on red, but she didn't slow, hoping to Christ that no late-night patrol car was lurking nearby. Moments later, still with no other traffic around, she reached the roundabout and took a sharp left, her foot hard to the floor.

Once she was on the motorway, she finally relaxed enough to look in the mirror. There were no cars behind her. Breathing more slowly now, she pulled off at the next junction, taking a right and following the road round until she saw the massive complex of Salford Royal Hospital on her right. A good place to stop, she thought. In a hospital, people would be coming and going at all hours of the night. Her car wouldn't be conspicuous.

She took another right and entered the hospital grounds, following the signs to one of the visitors' car parks, pulling in among a small scattering of other cars. She paused for a moment to gather her wits, the panic finally subsiding, then dug out her mobile. She couldn't use the formal channels, couldn't reveal that she'd been in Jake's flat. She dialled 999 and gave a false name, reporting a break-in and serious assault at Jake's address. Her number was withheld, so there'd be no clue to her identity showing up on the operator's caller ID. She answered the questions as briefly as she could, trying to give nothing away. No, she didn't know what was happening, she was just a passer-by, didn't want to get involved. Then, feeling guilty at her own impotence, she ended the call.

It was all she could have done, but she felt no confidence that her call had been taken seriously. Then somewhere behind, in the heart of the city, she heard the rising wail of a police siren. Maybe they were already answering the call. Maybe.

She could feel her training kicking in, leading her through the ramifications of all this. Someone had taken out a contract on Jake. She could easily guess why and probably even who. But the real question was how. How had they known? And where did that leave her?

She tracked back through her movements of the previous evening, working out whether she'd left any sign of her presence, anything that would allow her to be identified. She'd taken her clothes, her bag, her mobile. There was nothing else, other than her DNA. No one was likely to make the link, unless she'd already been compromised.

The other question was whether the man had seen her car registration. She thought not. It was dark, she was pulling out from between parked cars, he was a long way away. But she couldn't be sure. If he had, she was a dead woman already.

Shit. The professional part of her mind was grinding through its dispassionate gears. But the other part of her brain was silently screaming. Jake. Jake lying naked, crouched at the feet of three professional fucking assassins. Jake with blood already pouring from him. Jake, her lover only hours before. Jake.

It was possible she'd frightened them off. They might have left the job unfinished. The police might have turned up in time. Any fucking thing might have happened.

But it wouldn't have. She knew that. They were pros. They always finished the job. They didn't leave witnesses. They got what they wanted.

And they'd got Jake.

PART ONE

Summer: Preparation

1

She was looking for her car when she noticed the moving van on the far side of the car park. Going too fast, Marie thought. Not just exceeding the notional speed limit – most drivers here did that – but hitting thirty, forty miles per hour. Open road speeds, in an unlit airport car park littered with jet-lagged arrivals from the long-haul red-eyes. Jesus.

Not her business, though. There'd been a time when she might have felt obliged to intervene, pull out her warrant card to deal with some loser getting his kicks scaring others. But not now.

God, she was tired. Tired and woozy. Not exactly jet lag. She hadn't got her sleep patterns together long enough for it to kick in, or at least that was how it felt. Two days in Washington had been a stupid idea. A knackering interruption to her training, not the relaxing jolly that had been sold to her. She could see why none of the others had wanted to go. She'd learned nothing, met no one of any value. Just a dreary round of mind-numbing presentations, tedious seminars, formal dinners, late-night sessions in the bar, fending off the advances of drunken marrieds who assumed, naturally, that their drawling American accents would be irresistible to any Brit.

It felt as if she'd had no sleep for days. She'd expected to be out cold on the return flight, but she'd slept fitfully,

disturbed by the comings and goings of the flight attendants and the noisy family next to her.

She felt semi-conscious. She'd already alighted from the shuttle bus at the wrong stop and was having to trawl through the rows of vehicles, dragging her wheeled suitcase behind her, to wherever her own car was parked.

She'd planned to go back into work today, but that increasingly seemed like a bad idea. Everyone expected her to take the day off, anyway. All she wanted to do was head home and crawl into bed. Liam would be pleased, at least.

From somewhere close by, she heard the roar of an engine. That bloody van. It had reached the end of her row and was turning left, down towards where she was standing, its speed undiminished.

Instinctively, she stepped back, pulling her case with her, positioning herself between two parked cars. Joyriders, maybe, or some drunk. Either way, best avoided.

She moved back into the shadows, expecting the van to roar by. But just before it reached her, the driver braked hard. For a second, she thought the vehicle would skid, but the control was perfect. The van slammed to a halt just a few feet from her.

The driver's door opened slowly and a figure, little more than a silhouette, leaned out. 'In the back,' the man said quietly. It was a command, and the object in his hand suggested he had the means of enforcing it.

What the fuck? She looked frantically around her. Moments before, as she'd watched the van careering round the edge of the car park, there'd seemed to be numerous other people making their way back to their cars. Now, suddenly, the place was deserted. Somewhere, across at the far edge of the car park, she could hear the churning of a car ignition, but that was no help to her.

'In the back,' the voice said again.

She stepped forwards, as though to obey, leaving her case and handbag on the ground behind her. Then, as she drew close to the van, she raised her right foot and kicked the driver's door as hard as she could. It slammed shut, trapping the arm of the half-emerging figure.

'Shit—'

She was already running, her head down, expecting gunfire at any moment. Instead, she heard the revving of the van's engine and a squeak of tyres as it U-turned.

Where the hell was her car? In the half-light, all the vehicles looked similar, indistinguishable colours and shapes.

And then a further thought struck her.

Her keys. Her fucking keys. They were in her handbag.

She was running headlong now, with no idea what she was going to do. There was no point in trying to reach her car. Her only hope was that someone else would appear, someone who could help her.

She could hear the van's engine coming up behind her. No longer speeding, but moving slowly, taunting her, knowing she couldn't escape. There was nowhere to go. A high metal fence lined the car park perimeter. The entrance was half a mile away across the vast expanse of tarmac.

She stopped and turned, blinking in the van's headlights until it pulled in alongside her. A head peered out from the passenger seat, the face invisible. A different voice.

'Christ's sake. You're going nowhere. Just get in the back.'

She heard the sound of the driver's door being opened, footsteps. She stood silently, gasping for breath, as a silhouetted figure emerged from behind the vehicle. He gestured her to step forwards, a pistol steady in his other hand.

'Nice try. Hurt my bloody hand, though. Now don't open your mouth; just get in the back.'

After only a moment's hesitation, she obeyed both instructions.

'And you're sure you still want to go ahead?' Winsor had asked, two months before.

'Yes,' Marie had replied confidently. Then, after a pause, 'I think so, anyway. As best I can judge.'

He'd nodded approvingly and inscribed an ostentatious tick on the sheet in front of him. 'Exactly the right answer,' he said, a proud teacher commending a promising pupil. 'Confident, but realistic. Just what we need.'

Patronizing git, she thought. Par for the course down here. She could live with it from the operational types. They might have been promoted to pen-pushing and desk-jockeying, but most had been through it. They had some idea of the front line.

Winsor was a different matter. He was a sodding psychologist, for Christ's sake. Most of what he said was either blindingly obvious or plain wrong. Quite often both at once, remarkably. He was here on sufferance because they were supposed to give due consideration to the psychological well-being of officers. Winsor ticked a few boxes and showed that the Agency cared.

And yet here he was, passing judgement about her suitability for a job he probably couldn't even imagine. Assessing her psychological equilibrium, she'd been told. Seeing whether she was really up to it, whether she could handle the unique pressures. In truth, though she doubted Winsor's ability to assess her mental state, she knew the assessment was needed. This was a big deal. She wasn't sure, even now, whether she really appreciated quite how big.

'The main thing,' Winsor said, unexpectedly echoing her thoughts, 'is that you appreciate the magnitude of the challenge.'

Maybe he was better at this than she'd thought. 'I've spoken to people who've done the job,' she said. 'Hugh Salter, for example.'

'Ah, yes. Hugh.' He spoke the name as if experimenting with an unfamiliar word. 'Well, yes, Hugh was a great success in the role. For a long time.' He left the phrase hanging, suggesting that he could say more.

She knew that Hugh had been withdrawn from the field eventually, but that was standard. No one did this forever. There'd been rumours about Hugh, but there were rumours about everyone. It was that kind of place. Whatever the truth, Hugh was still around, still apparently trusted. If she got through this, he was likely to end up as her contact. Her buddy, in his words, though that wasn't how she'd ever describe him.

'What did Hugh tell you?' Winsor asked.

'He said it was a challenge. Hard work. That it required certain qualities.' She tried to recall exactly what Hugh had said. Nothing very coherent. She'd sought him out one evening when a group of them had been in the pub after work. Show willing, prepare for the selection process. But Hugh was already two or three pints ahead of her, and had mainly been interested in boosting his own ego. He was keen to let her know how difficult the job had been, how ill-suited she was likely to be to its rigours. Not because she was a woman, he'd been at pains to emphasize. That wasn't the problem. The problem, she'd gathered, was that, like almost everyone else in the world, she just wasn't Hugh Salter. Her loss.

'What sort of qualities?'

'Resilience,' she said, though Hugh had offered nothing so succinct. 'Attention to detail. Alertness.' She paused, recognizing that she was trotting out clichés. 'He said the main problem was the balancing act.' She paused, trying to translate

her memory of Salter's semi-drunken ramble into something coherent. 'Not just the obvious tension between the undercover work and your home life. But the balance between the day-to-day stuff and the real focus of the work.'

Winsor looked up, showing some interest for the first time. 'Go on.'

She paused, unsure how to render the phrase 'fucking ballsache' in terminology acceptable to an occupational psychologist.

'Well, it strikes me that it's almost as if you're leading a triple life. You spend a lot of the time building up the legend, making yourself credible in the right environments. Just getting on with the fictitious job. The real stuff – the intelligence gathering, the surveillance, all that – is only a small part of the picture, time-wise. So you end up doing a lot of stuff which is very mundane, but you can't allow yourself to switch off, even for a moment.' It wasn't exactly – or even remotely – what Salter had actually said, but it was what she'd inferred from his beer-fuelled diatribe.

Winsor was nodding. 'Absolutely,' he said. 'That's what most applicants fail to appreciate.' He leaned forwards, as though sharing a treasured secret. 'That's one reason it's so difficult to find suitable candidates. It's not a question of ability. It's a question of temperament.' He waved his hand towards the open-plan office outside their small meeting room. 'Not surprising, really. It's a rare mix that we're looking for, and probably even rarer in a place like this. You lot want excitement, the adrenaline rush. That's why you all hate the form-filling.'

Winsor was wrong about that, she thought. It might be what attracted some of them in the first place, but the ones who stayed, the ones who progressed, were those who paid attention to the detail. That was what the job was about.

Gathering data, analysing the intelligence. The fucking balls-ache. Most likely, Winsor was the one hankering after excitement.

'So what do you think the job needs?' she said.

He riffled aimlessly through her file, as if that might provide the answer to her question. 'As you say, a lot of it's very mundane. We set it up, provide the background. But it's up to the individual officer to make it work. And all the time you're waiting for the opportunities, the chances to gather intelligence.' He paused. 'Most good officers can handle the pressure. It's the boredom that does for them.'

She wondered whether he was talking about Salter. 'So what do you reckon?' she said, deciding she might as well cut to the chase. 'Have I got the temperament?'

He didn't answer immediately, but flicked again through the file, this time apparently searching for a particular document. She had no idea what was in the thick, buff-coloured folder. Her original application form. Annual performance appraisals. Results of her promotion boards. Perhaps other, more interesting material.

'I think you just might,' he said finally. 'Have a look at this.'

He pushed the file across the desk towards her, holding it open. It was a printed form, incomprehensible to her, covered with Winsor's own scrawlings.

'It's the results of the personality questionnaire you completed,' he explained. 'Each of these lines shows a continuum between the extremes of various personality traits. So, for example, whether you're inclined to follow prescribed rules or do your own thing.'

'Wouldn't that depend on the rules?'

'Yes, of course. And the context. But we've all got our preferences and inclinations. At the extremes, you get people who feel hidebound by any rules or direction, however

reasonable, or people who feel uncomfortable breaking or bending a rule even when they recognize that it's necessary.'

'And where do I sit?'

He pointed at a pencil mark on one of the scales. 'In that respect – as in most aspects, actually – you're pretty well-balanced. Close to the middle of the scale, with just a small bias towards rule-breaking.' He smiled, suggesting that this was some kind of psychologist's in-joke.

'And is that good?'

He shrugged. 'As you say, it depends. But in this case, yes. That's the balance we're looking for. We don't want someone who's constantly in danger of going off-piste. But equally there'd be times when you'd need to improvise. We don't want someone who'll fall apart if they can't apply the rule book.'

She nodded, her eyes scanning down the sheet in front of her. She could see broadly how the scales worked, but the terminology was opaque to her. 'What about the rest of it?'

'We've got a full debrief scheduled for this afternoon,' he said. Marie decided that Winsor himself was probably rather closer to the compliant end of the spectrum. 'I'll go through it all in detail then. But on the whole it looks very satisfactory. You're a pretty balanced individual.' He picked up his pen and gestured down the column of scales. 'Here, for example. You're fairly affiliative, enjoy working with others. But equally you're comfortable operating on your own when you need to. This is a role that depends on effective networking, building relationships, but you will also really have to work in isolation. Not many people are comfortable with both.'

'No, I can see that.' She squinted more closely at the paper. 'What about these ones? Those look more extreme.'

Winsor leaned forwards, reading the form upside down. 'Ah, now, that's quite interesting. Those traits show how you

deal with your emotions. Would you consider yourself an emotional person?'

She found herself slightly taken aback by the direct question. 'I don't know. Not particularly, I suppose. I suppose I'd see myself as – I don't know – pragmatic. I just get on with things.'

It was difficult for her to answer the question. None of her colleagues would see her as emotional, she thought. But that was a point of principle. Whatever they might say publicly, some of her colleagues still held largely unreconstructed views of female officers. When she'd first joined, she'd been determined not to allow her femininity to be perceived, however unfairly, as a weakness. Whatever crap had been thrown at her – and there'd been plenty in those early days – she'd been determined just to take it. If she had a bad day she never let it show. That was nothing more than simple professionalism. It was what you did. Whatever might be going on outside of work, you didn't bring it through the office door. It was a philosophy that many of her colleagues, male and female, failed to apply. She'd had a bellyful of supposedly macho senior officers who came in and simply unloaded the garbage that happened to be filling their own domestic lives.

But Marie found it hard to distinguish between this work persona and whatever reality might lie beneath. She never showed any strong emotions and, to be frank, she rarely seemed to feel them. Of course, like anyone else, she went through cycles of joy or gloom, she had good days and bad days. But these were variations around a relatively placid norm. When real adversity came around – when she and Liam had being going through a tough time, or when her parents had died, not entirely unexpectedly, within a few months of one another – she simply buckled down and got on with life. In other circumstances, she reflected, a psychologist like

Winsor might see that as unhealthy. Now, he seemed positively enthused by the assessment.

'If we look at these scales, you see, you come across as someone who keeps their emotions carefully in check. You're very conscious of the image you project to others. Your inclination is to subordinate your own feelings to the job at hand.'

He was beginning to sound like a tabloid horoscope, she thought. 'Those don't necessarily sound like positive qualities.'

'Well, again, it depends on the context. And if your responses were at the very extreme end of the scale, I'd have a concern. It might suggest an inability to cope with emotional issues. But this indicates simply a preference for control. Which in this role is important. It's a very isolating job. If you're faced with emotional issues, you have to be able to cope with them yourself. Of course, we keep an eye on agents out in the field, assess their well-being periodically. But we can't provide too much support from the centre without risking compromising the operation.'

'And you think I'd be up to it?' She gestured towards the assessment form. 'On the basis of that, I mean?'

'Well, it's impossible to be sure.' He reached across and picked up the file. 'It's a fairly blunt instrument, this. And it can't give us a definitive insight into the "real" Marie Donovan, whoever that might be. What it really tells us is how you see yourself and how you think others see you. But, for all that, I think, yes, that overall it does indicate that you're likely to be suited to the job.'

Well, that was something, she thought. A fairly lukewarm endorsement, but an endorsement nonetheless. One hurdle climbed.

Winsor was still leafing aimlessly through her file. Finally, he paused and ran his finger carefully down one of the documents.