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Written by Len Deighton

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LEN DEIGHTON

The Ipccress File

HARPER

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1

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And now I will unclasp a secret book, And
to your quick-conceiving discontents, I'll read
you matter deep and dangerous.

Henry IV

Though it must be said that every species of
birds has a manner peculiar to itself, yet there
is somewhat in most genera at least that at
first sight discriminates them, and enables a
judicious observer to pronounce upon them
with some certainty.

Gilbert White, 1778

The Ipccress File

Secret File No. 1

PROLOGUE

Copy to:	no. 1. Copies 2
Action:	W.O.O.C.(P) .
Origin:	Cabinet.
Authority:	PH 6.
Memoranda:	
Please prepare summary of Dossier M/1993 /GH 222223 for Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Defence.	

They came through on the hot* line at about half past two in the afternoon. The Minister didn't quite understand a couple of points in the summary. Perhaps I could see the Minister.

Perhaps.

The Minister's flat overlooked Trafalgar Square and was furnished like Oliver Messel did it for Oscar Wilde. He sat in the Sheraton, I sat in the Hepplewhite and we peeped at each other through the aspidistra plant.

'Just tell me the whole story in your own words, old chap. Smoke?'

I was wondering whose words I might other-

* Permanently open line.

wise have used as he skimmed the aspidistra with his slim gold cigarette case. I beat him to the draw with a crumpled packet of Gauloises; I didn't know where to begin.

'I don't know where to begin,' I said. 'The first document in the dossier . . .'

The Minister waved me down. 'Never mind the dossier, my dear chap, just tell me your personal version. Begin with your first meeting with this fellow . . .' he looked down to his small morocco-bound notebook, 'Jay. Tell me about him.'

'Jay. His code-name is changed to Box Four,' I said.

'That's very confusing,' said the Minister, and wrote it down in his book.

'It's a confusing story,' I told him. 'I'm in a very confusing business.'

The Minister said, 'Quite,' a couple of times, and I let a quarter inch of ash away towards the blue Kashan rug.

'I was in Lederer's about 12.55 on a Tuesday morning the first time I saw Jay,' I continued.

'Lederer's?' said the Minister. 'What's that?'

'It's going to be very difficult for me if I have to answer questions as I go along,' I said. 'If it's all the same to you, Minister, I'd prefer you to make a note of the questions, and ask me afterwards.'

'My dear chap, not another word, I promise.'

And throughout the entire explanation he never again interrupted.

1

[Aquarius (Jan 20–Feb 19) A difficult day. You will face varied problems. Meet friends and make visits. It may help you to be better organized.]

I don't care what you say, 18,000 pounds (sterling) is a lot of money. The British Government had instructed me to pay it to the man at the corner table who was now using knife and fork to commit ritual murder on a cream pastry.

Jay the Government called this man. He had small piggy eyes, a large moustache and handmade shoes which I knew were size ten. He walked with a slight limp and habitually stroked his eyebrow with his index finger. I knew him as well as I knew anyone, for I had seen film of him in a small, very private cinema in Charlotte Street, every day for a month.

Exactly one month previous I had never heard of Jay. My three weeks' termination of engagement leave had sped to a close. I had spent it doing

little or nothing unless you are prepared to consider sorting through my collection of military history books a job fit for a fully grown male. Not many of my friends were so prepared.

I woke up saying to myself ‘today’s the day’ but I didn’t feel much like getting out of bed just the same. I could hear the rain even before I drew the curtains back. December in London – the soot-covered tree outside was whipping itself into a frenzy. I closed the curtains quickly, danced across the icy-cold lino, scooped up the morning’s post and sat down heavily to wait while the kettle boiled. I struggled into the dark worsted and my only establishment tie – that’s the red and blue silk with the square design – but had to wait forty minutes for a cab. They hate to come south of the Thames you see.

It always had made me feel a little self-conscious saying, ‘War Office’ to cab drivers; at one time I had asked for the pub in Whitehall, or said ‘I’ll tell you when to stop,’ just to avoid having to say it. When I got out the cab had brought me to the Whitehall Place door and I had to walk round the block to the Horseguards Avenue entrance. A Champ vehicle was parked there, a red-necked driver was saying ‘Clout it one’ to an oily corporal in dungarees. The same old army, I thought. The long lavatory-like passages were dark and dirty, and small white cards with precise military writing labelled each green-painted door: GS 3, Major this, Colonel that, Gentlemen, and odd

anonymous tea rooms from which bubbly old ladies in spectacles appeared when not practising alchemy within. Room 134 was just like any other; the standard four green filing cabinets, two green metal cupboards, two desks fixed together face to face by the window, a half full one pound bag of Tate and Lyle sugar on the window-sill.

Ross, the man I had come to see, looked up from the writing that had held his undivided attention since three seconds after I had entered the room. Ross said, 'Well now,' and coughed nervously. Ross and I had come to an arrangement of some years' standing – we had decided to hate each other. Being English, this vitriolic relationship manifested itself in oriental politeness.

'Take a seat. Well now, smoke?' I had told him 'No thanks' for two years at least twice a week. The cheap inlay cigarette box (from Singapore's change alley market) with the butterflies of wood grain, was wafted across my face.

Ross was a regular officer; that is to say he didn't drink gin after 7.30 P.M. or hit ladies without first removing his hat. He had a long thin nose, a moustache like flock wallpaper, sparse, carefully combed hair, and the complexion of a Hovis loaf.

The black phone rang. 'Yes? Oh, it's you, darling,' Ross pronouncing each word with exactly the same amount of toneless indifference. 'To be frank, I was going to.'

For nearly three years I had worked in Military Intelligence. If you listened to certain people you

learned that Ross *was* Military Intelligence. He was a quiet intellect happy to work within the strict departmental limitations imposed upon him. Ross didn't mind; hitting platform five at Waterloo with rose-bud in the buttonhole and umbrella at the high port was Ross's beginning to a day of rubber stamp and carbon paper action. At last I was to be freed. Out of the Army, out of Military Intelligence, away from Ross: working as a civilian with civilians in one of the smallest and most important of the Intelligence Units – WOOC(P).

‘Well I’ll phone you if I have to stay Thursday night.’

I heard the voice at the other end say, ‘Are you all right for socks?’

Three typed sheets of carbon copies so bad I couldn't read them (let alone read them upside down) were kept steady and to hand by the office tea money. Ross finished his call and began to talk to me, and I twitched facial muscles to look like a man paying attention.

He located his black briar pipe after heaping the contents of his rough tweed jacket upon his desk top. He found his tobacco in one of the cupboards. ‘Well now,’ he said. He struck the match I gave him upon his leather elbow patch.

‘So you’ll be with the provisional people.’ He said it with quiet distaste; the Army didn't like anything provisional, let alone people, and they certainly didn't like the WOOC(P), and I suppose they didn't much like me. Ross obviously thought

my posting a very fine tentative solution until I could be got out of his life altogether. I won't tell you all Ross said because most of it was pretty dreary and some of it is still secret and buried somewhere in one of those precisely but innocuously labelled files of his. A lot of the time he was having ignition trouble with his pipe and that meant he was going to start the story all through again.

Most of the people at the War House, especially those on the intelligence fringes as I was, had heard of the WOOC(P) and a man called Dalby. His responsibility was direct to the Cabinet. Envied, criticized and opposed by other intelligence units Dalby was almost as powerful as anyone gets in this business. People posted to him ceased to be in the Army for all practical purposes and they were removed from almost all War Office records. In the few rare cases of men going back to normal duty from WOOC(P) they were enlisted all over afresh and given a new serial number from the batch that is reserved for Civil Servants seconded to military duties. Pay was made by an entirely different scale, and I wondered just how long I would have to make the remnants of this month's pay last before the new scale began.

After a search for his small metal-rimmed army spectacles, Ross went through the discharge rigmarole with loving attention to detail. We began by destroying the secret compensation contract that Ross and I had signed in this very room almost

three years ago and ended by his checking that I had no mess charges unpaid. It had been a pleasure to work with me, Provisional was clever to get me, he was sorry to lose me and Mr Dalby was lucky to have me and would I leave this package in Room 225 on the way out – the messenger seemed to have missed him this morning.

Dalby's place is in one of those sleazy long streets in the district that would be Soho, if Soho had the strength to cross Oxford Street. There is a new likely-looking office conversion wherein the unwinking blue neon glows even at summer midday, but this isn't Dalby's place. Dalby's department is next door. His is dirtier than average with a genteel profusion of well-worn brass work, telling of the existence of 'The Ex-Officers' Employment Bureau. Est 1917'; 'Acme Films Cutting Rooms'; 'B. Isaacs. Tailor – Theatricals a Speciality'; 'Dalby Inquiry Bureau – staffed by ex-Scotland Yard detectives'. A piece of headed note-paper bore the same banner and the biro'd message, 'Inquiries third floor, please ring.' Each morning at 9.30 I rang, and avoiding the larger cracks in the lino, began the ascent. Each floor had its own character – ageing paint varying from dark brown to dark green. The third floor was dark white. I passed the scaly old dragon that guarded the entrance to Dalby's cavern.

I'll always associate Charlotte Street with the music of the colliery brass bands that I remember

from my childhood. The duty drivers and cipher clerks had a little fraternity that sat around in the dispatch office on the second floor. They had a very loud gramophone and they were all brass band fanatics; that's a pretty esoteric failing in London. Up through the warped and broken floorboards came the gleaming polished music. Fairey Aviation had won the Open Championship again that year and the sound of the test piece reached through to every room in the building. It made Dalby feel he was overlooking Horse Guards Parade; it made me feel I was back in Burnley.

I said 'Hello, Alice,' and she nodded and busied herself with a Nescafé tin and a ruinous cup of warm water. I went through to the back office, saw Chico – he'd got a step beyond Alice, his Nescafé was almost dissolved. Chico always looked glad to see me. It made my day; it was his training, I suppose. He'd been to one of those very good schools where you meet kids with influential uncles. I imagine that's how he got into the Horse Guards and now into WOOC(P) too, it must have been like being at school again. His profusion of long lank yellow hair hung heavily across his head like a Shrove Tuesday mishap. He stood 5ft 11in in his Argyll socks, and had an irritating physical stance, in which his thumbs rested high behind his red braces while he rocked on his hand-lasted Oxfords. He had the advantage of both a good brain and a family rich enough to save him using it.

I walked right through the Dalby Inquiry Bureau and down the back stairs. For this whole house belonged to WOOC(P) even though each business on each floor had its own 'front' for our convenience. By 9.40 A.M. each morning I was in the small ramshackle projection room of Acme Films.

The sickly sweet smell of film cement and warm celluloid was so strong that I think they must have sprayed it around. I threw my English B-picture raincoat across a pile of film tins, clean side up, and sank into one of the tip-up cinema seats. As always it was seat twenty-two, the one with the loose bolt, and always by that time I didn't feel much like moving.

The Rheostat made that horrible squeaking noise. The room lights dimmed tiredly and the little projector clattered into action. A screaming white rectangle flung animated abstract shapes of scratch marks at my eyes, then darkened to a business-like grey flannel suit colour.

In crude stick-on letters the film title said JAY. LEEDS. WARREN THREE. (Warren Three was the authority upon which it was filmed.) The picture began. Jay was walking along a crowded pavement. His moustache was gigantic, but cultivated with a care that he gave to everything he did. He limped, but it certainly didn't impair his progress through the crowd. The camera wobbled and then tracked swiftly away. The van in which the movie camera had been hidden had been forced to move faster than Jay by the speed of the traffic. The

screen flashed white and the next short, titled length began. Some of the films showed Jay with a companion, code-named HOUSEMARTIN. He was a six feet tall handsome man in a good-quality camel-hair overcoat. His hair was waved, shiny and a little too perfectly grey at the temples. He wore a handful of gold rings, a gold watch strap and a smile full of jacket crowns. It was an indigestible smile – he was never able to swallow it.

Chico operated the projector with tongue-jutting determination. Once in a while he would slip into the programme one of those crisp Charing Cross Road movies that feature girls in the skin. It was Dalby's idea to keep his 'students' awake during these viewings.

'Know your enemies,' was Dalby's theory. He felt if all his staff knew the low-life of the espionage business visually they would stand a better chance of predicting their thought. 'Because he had a picture of Rommel over his bed Montgomery won Alamein.' I don't necessarily believe this – but this was what Dalby kept saying. (Personally I ascribe a lot of value to those extra 600 tanks.)

Dalby was an elegant languid public school Englishman of a type that can usually reconcile his duty with comfort and luxury. He was a little taller than I am: probably 6ft 1in or 6ft 2in. He had long fine hair, and every now and then would grow a little wispy blond moustache. At present he didn't have it. He had a clear complexion that sunburnt easily and very small puncture-type scar

tissue high on the left cheek to prove he had been to a German University in '38. It had been a useful experience, and in 1941 enabled him to gain a DSO and bar. A rare event in any Intelligence group but especially in the one he was with. No citations of course.

He was unpublic school enough to wear a small signet ring on his right hand, and whenever he pulled at his face, which was often, he dragged the edge of the ring against the skin. This produced a little red weal due to excessive acidity in the skin. It was fascinating.

He peeped at me over the toes of his suède shoes which rested in the centre of a deskful of important papers, arranged in precise heaps. Spartan furniture (Ministry of Works, contemporary) punctured the cheap lino and a smell of tobacco ash was in the air.

'You are loving it here of course?' Dalby asked.

'I have a clean mind and a pure heart. I get eight hours' sleep every night. I am a loyal, diligent employee and will attempt every day to be worthy of the trust my paternal employer puts in me.'

'I'll make the jokes,' said Dalby.

'Go ahead,' I said. 'I can use a laugh – my eyes have been operating twenty-four frames per second for the last month.'

Dalby tightened a shoe-lace. 'Think you can handle a tricky little special assignment?'

'If it doesn't demand a classical education I might be able to grope around it.'

Dalby said, 'Surprise me, do it without complaint or sarcasm.'

'It wouldn't be the same,' I said.

Dalby swung his feet to the floor and became deliberate and serious. 'I've been across to the Senior Intelligence Conference this morning. Home Office are worried sick about these disappearances of their top biochemists. Committees, sub-committees – you should have seen them over there, talk about Mother's Day at the Turkish Bath.'

'Has there been another then?' I asked.

'This morning,' said Dalby, 'one left home at 7.45 A.M., never reached the lab.'

'Defection?' I asked.

Dalby pulled a face and spoke to Alice over the desk intercom, 'Alice, open a file and give me a code-name for this morning's "wandering willie".' Dalby made his wishes known by peremptory unequivocal orders; all his staff preferred them to the complex polite chat of most Departments as especially did I as a refugee from the War Office. Alice's voice came over the intercom like Donald Duck with a head cold. To whatever she said Dalby replied, 'The hell with what the letter from the Home Office said. Do as I say.'

There was a moment or so of silence then Alice used her displeased voice to say a long file number and the code-name RAVEN. All people under long-term surveillance had bird names.

'That's a good girl,' said Dalby in his most charming voice and even over the squawk-box I

could hear the lift in Alice's voice as she said, 'Very good, sir.'

Dalby switched off the box and turned back to me. 'They have put a security blackout on this Raven disappearance but I told them that William Hickey will be carrying a photo of his dog by the midday editions. Look at these.' Dalby laid five passport photos across his oiled teak desk. Raven was a man in his late forties, thick black hair, bushy eyebrows, bony nose – there were a hundred like him in St James's at any minute of the day. Dalby said, 'It makes eight top rank Disappearances in . . .' he looked at his desk diary, ' . . . six and a half weeks.'

'Surely Home Office aren't asking us to help them,' I said.

'They certainly are not,' said Dalby. 'But if we found Raven I think the Home Secretary would virtually disband his confused little intelligence department. Then we could add their files to ours. Think of that.'

'Find him?' I said. 'How would we start?'

'How would you start?' asked Dalby.

'Haven't the faintest,' I said. 'Go to laboratory, wife doesn't know what's got into him lately, discover dark almond-eyed woman. Bank manager wonders where he's been getting all that money. Fist fight through darkened lab. Glass tubes that would blow the world to shreds. Mad scientist backs to freedom holding phial – flying tackle by me. Up grams Rule Britannia.'

Dalby gave me a look calculated to have me feeling like an employee, he got to his feet and walked across to the big map of Europe that he had had pinned across the wall for the last week. I walked across to him. 'You think that Jay is master minding it,' I said. Dalby looked at the map and still staring at it said, 'Sure of it, absolutely sure of it.'

The map was covered with clear acetate and five small frontier areas from Finland to the Caspian were marked in black greasy pencil. Two places in Syria carried small red flags.

Dalby said, 'Every important illegal movement across these bits of frontier that I have marked are with Jay's OK.

'*Important* movement. I don't mean he stands around checking that the eggs have little lions on.' Dalby tapped the border. 'Somewhere before they get him as far as this we must . . .'

 Dalby's voice trailed away lost in thought.

'Hi-jack him?' I prompted softly. Dalby's mind had raced on. 'It's January. If only we could do this in January,' he said. January was the month that the Government estimates were prepared. I began to see what he meant. Dalby suddenly became aware of me again and turned on a big flash of boyish charm.

'You see,' said Dalby. 'It's not just a case of the defection of one biochemist . . .'

'Defection? I thought that Jay's speciality was a high-quality line in snatch jobs.'

‘Hi-jack! Snatch jobs! all that gangland talk. You read too many newspapers that’s your trouble. You mean they walk him through the customs and immigration with two heavy-jowled men behind him with their right hands in their overcoat pockets? No. No. No,’ he said the three ‘noes’ softly, paused and added two more. ‘. . . this isn’t a mere emigration of one little chemist,’ (Dalby made him sound like an assistant from Boots) ‘who has probably been selling them stuff for years. In fact given the choice I’m not sure I wouldn’t let him go. It’s those—people at the Home Office. They should know about these things before they occur: not start crying in their beer afterwards.’ He picked two cigarettes out of his case, threw one to me and balanced the other between his fingers. ‘They are all right running the Special Branch, HM prisons and Cruelty to Animal Inspectors but as soon as they get into *our* business they have trouble touching bottom.’* Dalby continued to do balancing tricks with the cigarette to which he had been talking. Then he looked up and began to talk to me. ‘Do you honestly believe that given all the Home Office Security files we couldn’t do a thousand times better than they have ever done?’

‘I think we could,’ I said. He was so pleased with my answer that he stopped toying with the cigarette and lit it in a burst of energy. He inhaled

* The Denning report published September, 1963 revealed that the Home Secretary is in control of British Counter Intelligence.

the smoke then tried to snort it down his nostrils. He choked. His face went red. 'Shall I get you a glass of water?' I asked, and his face went redder. I must have ruined the drama of the moment. Dalby recovered his breath and went on.

'You can see now that this is something more than an ordinary case, it's a test case.'

'I sense impending Jesuitical pleas.'

'Exactly,' said Dalby with a malevolent smile. He loved to be cast as the villain, especially if it could be done with schoolboy-scholarship. 'You remember the Jesuit motto.' He was always surprised to find I had read any sort of book.

'When the end is lawful the means are also lawful,' I answered.

He beamed and pinched the bridge of his nose between finger and thumb. I had made him very happy.

'If it pleases you that much,' I said, 'I'm sorry I can't muster it in dog-Latin.'

'It's all right, all right,' said Dalby. He traversed his cigarette then changed the range and elevation until it had me in its sights. He spoke slowly, carefully articulating each syllable. 'Go and buy this Raven for me.'

'From Jay.'

'From anyone who has him – I'm broadminded.'

'How much can I spend, Daddy?'

He moved his chair an inch nearer the desk with a loud crash. 'Look here, every point of entry has the stopper jammed tightly upon it.' He gave

a little bitter laugh. 'It makes you laugh, doesn't it. I remember when we asked HO to close the airports for one hour last July. The list of excuses they gave us. But when someone slips through *their* little butter-fingers and *they* are going to be asked some awkward questions, anything goes. Anyway, Jay is a bright lad; he'll know what's going on; he'll have this Raven on ice for a week and then move him when all goes quiet. If meanwhile we make him anything like a decent offer . . .' Dalby's voice trailed off as he slipped his mind into over-drive, ' . . . say 18,000 quid. We pick him up from anywhere Jay says – no questions asked.'

'18,000,' I said.

'You can go up to twenty-three if you are sure they are on the level. But on our terms. Payment after delivery. Into a Swiss bank. Strictly no cash and I don't want Raven dead. Or even damaged.'

'OK,' I said. I suddenly felt very small and young and called upon to do something that I wasn't sure I could manage. If this was the run of the mill job at WOOC(P) they deserved their high pay and expense accounts. 'Shall I start by locating Jay?' It seemed a foolish thing to say but I felt in dire need of an instruction book.

Dalby flapped a palm. I sat down again. 'Done,' he said. He flipped a switch on his squawk-box. Alice's voice, electronically distorted, spoke from the room downstairs. 'Yes, sir,' she said.

'What's Jay doing?'

There was a couple of clicks and Alice's voice

came back to the office again. 'At 12.10 he was in Lederer's coffee-house.'

'Thanks, Alice,' said Dalby.

'Cease surveillance, sir?'

'Not yet, Alice. I'll tell you when.' To me he said, 'There you are then. Off you go.'

I doused my cigarette and stood up. 'Two other last things,' said Dalby. 'I am authorizing you for 1,200 a year expenses. And,' he paused, 'don't contact me if anything goes wrong, because I won't know what the hell you are talking about.'