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CJ CARVER

ZAFFRE

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## PROLOGUE

*Thursday 22 January, Murmansk*

Edik Yesikov listened to the tape with increasing disbelief. He forgot all about his guests milling in the gun room, the snow wolf hunt he'd organised, the fact they only had four hours or so to bag their trophies before the sun set. If what he'd heard was true, it was fantastic news.

'It's been verified?' he asked.

The Director of the FSK, the Federal Counterintelligence Service of Russia, glanced at Edik's father, who nodded. As usual, the power in the room was held by the old man, who had flown with the Director straight to the hunting lodge from Moscow this morning. Lazar Yesikov hadn't wanted anyone overhearing what he had to say.

'The British journalist says she heard it from Polina Calder directly,' his father said. 'I see no reason to doubt her.'

Edik felt a moment's alarm. 'We haven't kept her here, have we? The British government will go insane.'

'Of course not.' The old man looked affronted. 'We put her on a plane this morning.'

Edik arched both eyebrows into a question.

‘She’ll be dealt with when she gets home,’ the old man told him. ‘An accident. She bicycles to work. London is a dangerous place for cyclists.’

‘And Polina Calder?’

‘The same. Except she doesn’t use a bicycle. She walks into town. Another accident.’

Edik pulled a face. ‘Are you sure we can get away with it?’

A film fell over his father’s eyes. His expression emptied. Edik knew that look. It meant anyone who stood in his way would, quite simply, be eliminated.

‘Leave any troublemakers to me,’ said the old man quietly.

‘What about Jenny Forrester?’ Edik looked at the woman’s photograph. Tall and slim with sheets of blond hair, she looked intelligent as well as athletic; perfect for their purpose. ‘You’re sure her husband won’t cause us any trouble?’

‘He remembers nothing of his dealings with us,’ his father assured him. ‘He had a breakdown five years ago, when his son was killed. His memory never recovered.’

‘To our advantage.’ Edik found himself nodding. The plan was looking better and better.

At that moment, someone tapped softly on the door and Ekaterina stepped inside. She was holding a silver tray upon which stood a bottle of Zyr vodka. Distilled five times, filtered nine times and taste-tested three times, it was Edik’s favourite for its exceptionally smooth and slightly astringent flavour. He pretended to watch her pour three glasses but in reality he was watching the Director, who was staring at Ekaterina as if he

couldn't believe his eyes. His lips had parted, his tongue appearing briefly as though salivating.

Edik felt his ego swell. He enjoyed watching men drool over his prize, all the more since he knew Ekaterina was unimpeachable, and that he owned her, heart, body and soul.

'To the future,' said the old man, and raised his glass.

'You really think it will work?' Edik asked.

'Oh, yes.' His father smiled, his face creasing into folds of dried parchment. He only smiled when he knew he would win. 'It will work.'

Edik raised his glass high. He felt a rush of euphoria.

'To Russia's new future.'

## CHAPTER ONE

*Saturday 31 January*

‘Russia?’ Dan Forrester stared at Bernard. ‘You want me to go to *Russia*?’

‘It’s not on the moon.’ Bernard looked amused. ‘A four-hour flight, that’s all.’

Dan glanced out of the sitting-room window. The radio had said it was snowing further north, but here it was a beautiful day with clear blue skies stretching over Welsh moorland. Jenny was going to go berserk. Ever since he’d moved out before Christmas he’d tried to fit in with her arrangements but now Bernard was here, the walk she’d planned with him and Aimee across the valley would be scuppered.

‘Does Philip know you’re here?’ Philip Denton was Dan’s boss and the head of DCA & Co, a global political analyst specialist service that he set up seven years ago. He used to be Bernard’s colleague in MI5. The two men held a mutual respect for one another, along with a fair quantity of friendly rivalry, with Bernard always complaining that he trained the best officers only to have Philip poach them.

‘Yes. Although not exactly why.’

‘I see,’ said Dan neutrally. At least this explained why Bernard had driven across the country to see him. But he didn’t like Philip being kept out of the picture.

Bernard propped his hands in front of his face. Gnarled and heavily veined, they had surprisingly sensitive fingertips, which Dan supposed would be an advantage when he indulged his hobby: tying flies for trout and salmon fishing. They were sitting opposite one another, Bernard on the leather armchair that Jenny had inherited from her uncle when he died last year, Dan on the sofa. Jenny hadn’t believed Dan when he’d said he hadn’t known Bernard was coming and she’d gone from being soft and welcoming to furious in two seconds flat.

‘I thought today was for us,’ she spat. ‘Your family.’

‘It is,’ he protested. ‘Bernard didn’t ring or text me. He just turned up.’

Her lips had tightened into an angry white line, showing she didn’t believe him. He couldn’t blame her, not after what he’d learned about his past behaviour. He’d been self-centred and obsessive from the sound of it, concentrating on himself to the exclusion of all others. Nothing like the man he was today. At least that’s what he hoped. But from the look on Jenny’s face it seemed nothing had changed.

She’d called him last week, saying she had something to tell him, something personal that she couldn’t discuss over the phone, but before she could, his old boss had appeared. Talk about atrocious timing – how Dan was going to coax Jenny out of her foul mood he couldn’t think. He wondered if she was

going to broach the subject of divorce. So far, neither of them had mentioned it and he still didn't know how he felt. He was, he supposed, treading water, waiting for quite what he wasn't sure, but at the moment divorce didn't feel right although he couldn't give a precise reason why.

Bernard dropped his hands into his lap. 'We've been approached by someone who calls themselves Lynx. Someone we know nothing about. They're offering us a big story in Russia, something huge that will apparently have global ramifications.'

Bernard cleared his throat and leaned forward.

'They will only talk to you.'

Dan blinked. 'Why?'

'Apparently you met Lynx in Moscow ten years ago. They trust you.'

Dan waited for Bernard to fill in the gap.

'MI6 seconded you. You were pursuing the truth behind Alexander Litvinenko's death.'

Dan wanted to say he'd never been to Moscow, never been involved in the Litvinenko case, but he had to trust Bernard on this. A lot of his memory had been ruined, great chunks of his recall obliterated by what everyone now referred to as his 'breakdown' five years ago when his three-year-old son Luke had been killed in a hit-and-run. Strange how he couldn't remember Moscow or Lynx but could tell you every detail of the den he'd created at the bottom of the garden as a boy. Memories of his job at MI5 had been lost forever but there were faces from his school days and university that he knew as surely as if he'd created them himself.

'Lynx has been a dead agent all this time,' Bernard continued. 'They say you recruited them. It's only now that they feel they have something to say. To you.'

Dan's mind slipped over the code name *Lynx*. A wild cat with distinctive tufts of black hair on the tips of its ears. Large padded paws for walking on snow. A solitary cat. A cat that lived in the northernmost reaches of Russia, in Siberia. A cat that could grow to be the size of a Labrador. He knew all this, but couldn't remember Moscow. A kernel of frustration began to grow and he quickly caught it before it could balloon out of control, and let it go. As Dr Winter, his psychiatrist, had taught him, there was little point in getting angry over it. His memory was what it was and what had been lost would, apparently, never return. He had to learn not to let it get to him.

'How do you know Lynx is genuine?' Dan asked.

'We don't.'

A dog barked outside, a single deep *woof*. Dan took no notice, recognising that the tone wasn't an alarm but playful, as though the animal wanted a ball to be thrown.

Bernard glanced through the window, then back. 'They had the right fax number. The right code.'

Dan mulled things over. 'Could it be a trap of some sort?'

'I suppose so, but what sort of trap when you have no memory of them or the work you did?'

'Perhaps they don't know about my breakdown.'

'Perhaps,' Bernard agreed mildly.

Dan rubbed the space between his brows. 'You should send someone else. I'm not exactly current in trade craft.'

‘Of course,’ Bernard agreed, ‘but Lynx refuses to meet anyone else. I offered them Savannah and Ellis’ – two of Bernard’s best and most trusted officers – ‘but no go.’

‘Does Lynx know I’m no longer with the Firm?’

‘We have no idea. But they appear to be expecting us to persuade you to meet them.’ Bernard’s expression intensified a fraction. ‘There’s something else. They said their information involves you personally, but when we pressed for more details they clammed up. We’re inclined to think they’re using the personal angle to tempt you to meet them, but obviously we can’t be certain.’

Dan’s misgivings rose. He agreed with Bernard that the personal angle smacked of coercion, but what if Lynx was telling the truth? Uneasy, he looked at his old boss and said, ‘What else?’ He needed more information: why the Director General of MI5 had come all the way out here on a Saturday due to a ‘dead’ agent who might exist, but might not, and whose ‘huge’ issue might exist, but might not.

Bernard’s mouth narrowed for a moment. ‘Lynx told us that two FSB agents were coming to England on a top secret mission. Unfortunately, by the time we were alerted they’d already entered the country and vanished. We have absolutely no idea what they’re doing in the UK.’

Dan’s skin prickled. So, Russian state security were involved. ‘When did they arrive?’

‘The day before yesterday.’

Thursday the twenty-ninth of January.

‘They’re on tourist visas,’ Bernard added. ‘A couple, Ivan and Yelena Barbolin.’

‘Are they actually married?’ Dan asked.

‘Doubtful.’ Bernard watched him attentively. ‘Lynx said they were sent by Edik Yesikov. He’s an old friend of Putin’s. Colonel-General of the FSB as well as Director General of Shelomov Gaz.’

*Powerful as well as rich*, Dan thought. A formidable combination.

‘You’ve probably heard Edik Yesikov is being groomed to become Putin’s successor,’ Bernard added.

Dan nodded. He’d read about it in the newspapers recently. ‘Any ideas what they might be up to?’

‘Not yet.’ Bernard pressed his hands together. ‘But one thing we’re sure of is that the Kremlin is becoming increasingly concerned that a revolution is around the corner. Annexing Crimea kept the lid on it for a while, then taking arms to Syria, but the people are getting more and more fed up with living under such a totalitarian regime.’

Bernard glanced at the window again, then back. ‘The Russian economy is in its worst crisis of Putin’s reign. It’s only thanks to his control of the media that the people haven’t rebelled yet. But what will happen when they learn the truth?’

Dan could see where this was going. Bernard wanted to know whether Putin’s spies had anything to do with the President’s need to keep Russia fuelled with patriotism, which could well turn to more annexations and war.

‘I don’t want any nasty surprises,’ Bernard said. ‘Which is why I’ve booked you on a flight to Moscow this afternoon.’ He reached into his jacket and brought out a British passport, passed it across. Dan picked it up to see it had his photograph

beside the name Michael Wilson. There were three separate tourist visas for Russia, each for thirty days; one in 2006, one in 2007 and one current. Bernard then passed over a mobile phone along with some wallet litter; membership cards and receipts in Wilson's name.

'With everything that's going on over there,' Dan said cautiously, 'won't I attract undue attention?'

'Sanctions may be in place but British businessmen are still moving in and out of the country. Not very many, certainly, but you shouldn't stand out.'

Dan checked the mobile phone and saw it had a list of contacts and a history of texts and emails.

'Your cover address is in London,' Bernard told him. 'Someone will vouch for you if enquiries are made. We've allocated you a retired officer in Ealing, Bob Stevens, who will cover the majority of issues but if things get sticky, he can bring in backup.'

Next came a driving licence and two credit cards. 'Try not to spend too much,' Bernard told him. 'And please bring back as many receipts as you can. Our accounts department will be eternally grateful.'

Dan turned the cards over in his hands. 'I don't speak Russian.'

Bernard sent him a sideways look and for a moment Dan thought he might demur but all he said was, 'Nor do most visitors.'

Something inside Dan quickened. Had he ever spoken Russian? His French wasn't bad, and nor was his Spanish, but what about other languages? Had they been consigned to the dustbin of his derelict memory?

Bernard didn't seem to sense Dan's sudden tension. He said, 'Lynx says they'll be in the lobby bar of the Radisson Royal Hotel at ten o'clock tonight. They will approach you with the words, "Have you visited St Clement's Church?" You will respond saying, "Not yet, but I have heard it is very beautiful."'

Dan stared.

'And before you go, I'd like to agree on some basic code words. Since you're meeting Lynx we thought *Mountain Lion* appropriate for yourself. If all is well, say it's meant to be *sunny later*. If you're injured or ill, it looks as though it's going to *cloud over soon*.'

As Bernard ran through more code words, a tingle started at the top of Dan's head and spread through his body. Every object in the room took on a harder, brighter edge. His hearing was amplified. He felt a rush of energy, close to euphoria and knew this was why he'd been addicted to his old job.

He closed his eyes and took a breath.

'Jenny's going to kill me,' he murmured.

## CHAPTER TWO

‘You didn’t think to ask me first?’ Jenny’s eyes crackled with blue fire. ‘We were supposed to spend the day together. Walk with Aimee and picnic at Pentwyn. She hasn’t seen you for *ten days*, Dan. She’s been so excited and you just throw it all away because Bernard asks you to.’

‘I would never give up time with Aimee willingly. You know me better than that. It’s a matter of—’

‘And don’t you dare say the words *national security*,’ she spat.

He held up both hands. ‘Sorry.’

‘Christ.’ She put a shaking hand to her forehead. ‘It’s just like the old days. You putting your job first. Vanishing God knows where for God knows how long. Leaving your family behind to sit around wondering when you’ll return, and in what kind of state. I thought all that was behind us.’

‘It is,’ he said. ‘I don’t work for MI5 any more.’

‘But when Bernard clicks his fingers you jump?’

‘He’s the Director General, Jenny.’ He tried to keep his tone level. ‘Not some middle manager. He wouldn’t ask unless it was absolutely necessary.’

They'd shut themselves in the utility room to prevent Aimee overhearing and now the dryer kicked in with a rumble. Jeans and socks, pants and shirts tumbled. It used to drive him crazy that she used the dryer on a sunny day, when the washing could be hung outside to save electricity, but now he wasn't living here, she could do as she liked.

'It's too cold outside,' she said defensively. She was looking at him, looking at the washing. 'It'll freeze solid on the line.'

'You're probably right.' He wasn't going to argue.

Long silence. He tried not to look at his watch, to gauge when he should leave for the airport. Time was tight, but he didn't want to leave Jenny on a sour note. Desperately, he tried to think of a way to salvage the situation.

'I'll come down next weekend,' he said. 'Stay Saturday night at the pub. Take you both out for Sunday lunch.'

'We're with Granny and Grandpa then.'

'I thought they were coming over tomorrow.'

'So?' Her gaze turned combative. 'Or aren't they allowed to see their granddaughter two weekends on the trot?'

'Of course they are.'

He ran a hand over his head, looking at his wife and wishing he could find the right words to cajole her into a better mood. What to say? He studied her silky sheets of blond hair that he loved gently tucking behind her ears. The lush mouth that he loved kissing. Her high breasts and narrow waist. She was as beautiful as when they'd first met and although he still loved her with an aching passion that sometimes shook him to his core, he'd felt his only choice was to move out to give them both some

space. Jenny had lied to him about how he'd lost his memory, and even though he could understand her reasons, he had yet to forgive her.

'What were you going to tell me?' he asked. 'That you couldn't say over the phone?'

Her chin lifted. 'It doesn't matter.'

'Come on, Jenny. You said it was important.'

She gave him a cold look. 'It can wait.'

Realising she wouldn't tell him if his clothes were on fire in her current mood, he let it drop.

'I didn't mean this to happen.' He spread his hands.

The cold look remained. 'I'll leave it to you to explain to Aimee why you're leaving when you've only just arrived.'

Jenny opened the door. She was about to step into the kitchen when she fell back with a little shriek.

Instantly he was in front of her, shielding her with his body. 'What is it?'

'The . . . your . . .' She took a breath and pointed.

The Rottweiler was flopped on the kitchen floor. She was looking at them, ears pricked, her amber eyes unblinking.

'Dog,' said Jenny. She was holding her hand against her heart. 'I forgot it was here.'

'Poppy's a she,' Dan said.

At the sound of her name the dog scrambled up and ambled over, her stumpy tail ticking from side to side in a happy wag. He'd rescued her from the RSPCA last month, where she was about to be put down. Few people wanted to adopt large breeds,

let alone one that people perceived to be dangerous, and Dan hadn't been able to turn his back on her. Now he stroked Poppy's broad head and she leaned against him, emitting a throaty purr.

Dan looked at Jenny. Then down at the dog. He said, 'While I'm away, I was wondering . . .'

'No, Dan.' Jenny pushed past him. 'I am not having that thing stay here.'

'But Aimee loves her.'

'And that makes it OK? I don't think so.'

He gave Poppy another scratch before glancing at his watch. He had just five minutes left to annoy the other woman in his life.

Aimee was sprawled on her bed with a computer on her lap. She was wearing jeans and a bobbly sweater and her face was scrunched into an expression that Dan knew meant she was worried.

'Sweet pea,' Dan said, 'we've hit a problem.'

She pointed at her laptop screen. 'Daddy, it says it could happen in *weeks*.'

The screen said, in big black letters, HOW MANY DAYS APART EQUALS A LEGAL SEPARATION? Below, in smaller type, *Divorce in weeks from £37*.

'Aimee . . .'

His voice was warning. She knew very well she wasn't allowed to go online unsupervised.

'It's not live, Daddy,' she said. 'It's what Tara sent me. She copied and pasted it.'

Aimee's best friend. Supposedly.

Dan sat on the bed and pulled her into a hug. 'We're not getting divorced. If we were, we'd tell you straight away. Remember what we said?'

Aimee stared at him, eyes wide. She'd stuck her thumb in her mouth, a sure indication she was feeling insecure.

'Mummy and Daddy weren't happy living together and we decided that it was best to live apart for a while.' He repeated what he and Jenny had been saying since he'd moved out. 'We both still love you very much and we'll always be your Mummy and Daddy.'

She unplugged her thumb. 'Why can't you come home?'

'We're trying to work out our problems.' He sidestepped the question, not wanting to give her false hope. 'Any decisions we make will have an effect on you so we'll always talk to you about what's going to happen. We won't do anything without discussing it with you first.'

He'd made a pact with Jenny to try not to say and do things that might make Aimee feel scared or confused. The best way they'd found was to always give her advance warning or an explanation of anything that was going to happen. When Aimee was properly prepared, she seemed to cope better with what was to come and without losing confidence and trust in them. So far, it seemed to be working OK. No thanks to her so-called buddy Tara.

'Anything else worrying you?'

She looked up at him. She'd just turned seven and had the fine bones and fair silken hair of her mother. She'd inherited Jenny's eyes as well, the same piercing blue that made his heart turn over every time.

‘So what’s the problem?’ she said.

‘There’s been a change of plan.’

She stiffened and pushed herself away. ‘You can’t stay?’

‘I’m sorry, sweetheart. Really sorry. But you know that man who turned up this morning?’

Reluctantly, she nodded.

‘I used to work for him. He wants me to do something for him. You know I wouldn’t normally put work first, but it’s really, really important. I’ll make it up to you, I promise.’

‘Can’t I come with you?’

She obviously assumed he was going to London and he didn’t correct her.

‘Maybe next time. We can go to Sea Life and meet some turtles. Oh, and they also have Gentoo penguins. Or so I’ve been told.’

‘It’s open again?’ said Aimee, brightening. Sea Life had been closed over Christmas for refurbishment.

‘Yup.’

‘Can Mummy come too?’

‘If she’d like to.’

Aimee slid off the bed and raced outside. ‘Mummy!’ she yelled. ‘Daddy’s going to take us to Sea Life! They’ve got penguins and fish but they’ve also got turtles, I *love* turtles . . .’ She pounded down the stairs, streams of chatter following.

In the kitchen, Aimee kept up her running conversation with Poppy, who stood looking at her, head cocked and expression expectant, her tail steadily wagging from side to side. ‘You can go snorkelling with sharks if you want,’ Aimee babbled. ‘But you

can't snorkel because you're a dog. You'll have to swim, but then you might not like sharks . . .'

Relieved he'd deflected Aimee's disappointment, Dan looked across at Jenny. 'I'd better go,' he said.

A shadow slid across her eyes, but she nodded. 'I'll get Poppy's water bowl.'

'Can't Poppy stay here?' Aimee said. She looked between Dan and Jenny beseechingly. 'I'll walk her, I promise. And feed her. Pleeeeease!' She put her arms around the dog's neck and buried her face in fur. Poppy's eyes half shut as she heaved a contented sigh.

Jenny looked at Dan who shrugged his shoulders. It was Jenny's call but he didn't want to say so out loud. She would just love it if she was blamed for kicking the dog out.

'Oh, all right,' Jenny suddenly relented. 'The dog can stay.'

Dan blinked. Even Aimee looked amazed. She pulled back and stared at her mother. 'I thought you didn't like Poppy.'

'She's just a bit big, that's all,' Jenny looked defensive.

'Mummy, you're *brilliant*.' Aimee scampered over to Jenny and hugged her. 'Thank you! And Poppy says thank you too! Don't you, Poppy?'

Outside, Dan unloaded the dog's blanket from the rear of the car. 'I haven't got her bed or any food with me.'

'I can get something in Chepstow later.'

He looked at Jenny. 'Thanks,' he said.

As he held her eyes he saw her soften, the anger leaching out of her and making her lips relax and part a little. He saw she'd put on some sort of subtle lipstick – when had she

done that? – and belatedly realised she was wearing her best jeans and a delicate cashmere top that only came out on tidier occasions.

‘I’m sorry I went ballistic.’ She gave a rueful smile.

‘It’s OK.’ He smiled cautiously back.

‘I wanted today to be perfect,’ she admitted. ‘To remind you of the good times. And show how good it will be when you come back.’

He knew he should reiterate the words *we still have to work out where we go next* but he didn’t want to change her mood, which for some reason had lifted.

She stood before him, tall and proud and beautiful. ‘I love you.’ Her words resonated with the truth.

He wanted to say *I love you too* but it was too soon. He saw the hurt in her eyes when he didn’t speak.

Dan said goodbye to Aimee who was dressing a contented-looking Poppy in Jenny’s wool scarf, and gave her a quick run-down on Poppy’s basic needs. Neither the dog nor his daughter seemed particularly perturbed when he left, which was a relief. He couldn’t have borne a teary departure.

Jenny stood by his car as he climbed inside, started it up. He glanced at the clock on the dashboard. Even without having to find somewhere for the dog to stay he’d still have to put his foot down to make the flight comfortably. Winding down the window, he said, ‘I’ll be back in a couple of days.’

She was biting her lip, looking undecided.

‘Everything OK?’ he asked.

She looked away then back. Gave a nod.

Putting the car into gear he began driving down the track, his mind already racing ahead and planning what he needed to buy at the airport, from a pair of gloves and hat – Moscow would be below freezing at this time of year – to toothbrush and spare socks and underclothes. He was about to change into second gear when he heard Jenny's shout.

'Dan! Wait!'

She was running after him.

He rammed his foot on the brake, the tyres squirting gravel as he stopped.

'What is it?' He was already halfway out of the car when she ran up to him. Her face was flushed.

'What I wanted to tell you . . . Well, it's just that . . .'

She took a breath. 'You remember the last time we made love?'

*Dear God. Not now.* He struggled to change mental gears.

'It was after supper at Candy's,' he said. 'In November.'

She smiled at him, a smile of old that reminded him of when they first met. The smile that made his heart soar.

'Well, the thing is,' she said, eyes dancing, 'I'm pregnant.'

His mouth opened and closed. No sound came out.

'I thought . . .' She looked away, suddenly uncertain. 'Maybe Lucy could be godmother.'

'Lucy?' he managed. His mind was reeling.

'Your police constable friend.'

Dan drove to the airport his mind split in two, one half already striding across the airy foyer at Terminal 5, the other

on PC Lucy Davies. Just weeks ago, Lucy had stopped him from making a monumental mistake, for which he was indebted.

As he joined the M25 from the M4, sweeping smoothly south, he decided Lucy would make a great godmother.