JOHN
LE CARRÉ

Smiley's People



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For my sons,
Simon, Stephen,
Timothy and Nicholas,

with love

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I

Two seemingly unconnected events heralded the summons of Mr George Smiley from his dubious retirement. The first had for its background Paris, and for a season the boiling month of August, when Parisians by tradition abandon their city to the scalding sunshine and the bus-loads of packaged tourists.

On one of these August days – the fourth, and at twelve o'clock exactly, for a church clock was chiming and a factory bell had just preceded it – in a *quartier* once celebrated for its large population of the poorer Russian émigrés, a stocky woman of about fifty, carrying a shopping bag, emerged from the darkness of an old warehouse and set off, full of her usual energy and purpose, along the pavement to the bus-stop. The street was grey and narrow, and shuttered, with a couple of small *hôtels de passe* and a lot of cats. It was a place, for some reason, of peculiar quiet. The warehouse, since it handled perishable goods, had remained open during the holidays. The heat, fouled by exhaust fumes and unwashed by the slightest breeze, rose at her like the heat from a lift-shaft, but her Slavic features registered no complaint. She was neither dressed nor built for exertion on a hot day, being in stature very short indeed, and fat, so that she had to roll a little in order to get along. Her black dress, of ecclesiastical severity, possessed neither a waist nor any other relief except for a dash of white

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lace at the neck and a large metal cross, well fingered but of no intrinsic value, at the bosom. Her cracked shoes, which in walking tended outwards at the points, set a stern tattoo rattling between the shuttered houses. Her shabby bag, full since early morning, gave her a slight starboard list and told clearly that she was used to burdens. There was also fun in her, however. Her grey hair was gathered in a bun behind her, but there remained one sprightly forelock that flopped over her brow to the rhythm of her waddle. A hardy humour lit her brown eyes. Her mouth, set above a fighter's chin, seemed ready, given half a reason, to smile at any time.

Reaching her usual bus-stop, she put down her shopping bag and with her right hand massaged her rump just where it met the spine, a gesture she made often these days though it gave her little relief. The high stool in the warehouse where she worked every morning as a checker possessed no back, and increasingly she was resenting the deficiency. 'Devil,' she muttered to the offending part. Having rubbed it, she began plying her black elbows behind her like an old town raven preparing to fly. 'Devil,' she repeated. Then, suddenly aware of being watched, she wheeled round and peered upward at the heavily built man towering behind her.

He was the only other person waiting, and indeed, at that moment, the only other person in the street. She had never spoken to him, yet his face was already familiar to her: so big, so uncertain, so sweaty. She had seen it yesterday, she had seen it the day before, and for all she knew, the day before that as well – my Lord, she was not a walking diary! For the last three or four days, this weak, itchy giant, waiting for a bus or hovering on the pavement outside the warehouse, had become a figure of the street for her; and what was more, a figure of a recognisable type, though she had yet to put her finger

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on which. She thought he looked *traqué* – hunted – as so many Parisians did these days. She saw so much fear in their faces; in the way they walked yet dared not greet each other. Perhaps it was the same everywhere, she wouldn't know. Also, more than once, she had felt *his* interest in *her*. She had wondered whether he was a policeman. She had even considered asking him, for she had this urban cockiness. His lugubrious build suggested the police, so did the sweaty suit and the needless raincoat that hung like a bit of old uniform from his forearm. If she was right, and he *was* police, then – high time too, the idiots were finally doing something about the spate of pilfering that had made a beargarden of her stock-checking for months.

By now the stranger had been staring down at her for some time, however. And he was staring at her still.

'I have the misfortune to suffer in my back, monsieur,' she confided to him finally, in her slow and classically enunciated French. 'It is not a large back but the pain is disproportionate. You are a doctor, perhaps? An osteopath?'

Then she wondered, looking up at him, whether he was ill, and her joke out of place. An oily gloss glistened on his jaw and neck, and there was an unseeing self-obsession about his pallid eyes. He seemed to see beyond her to some private trouble of his own. She was going to ask him this – You are perhaps in love, monsieur? Your wife is deceiving you? – and she was actually considering steering him into a café for a glass of water or a *tisane* when he abruptly swung away from her and looked behind him, then over her head up the street the other way. And it occurred to her that he really was afraid, not just *traqué* but frightened stiff; so perhaps he was not a policeman at all, but a thief, though the difference, she knew well, was often slight.

'Your name is Maria Andreyevna Ostrakova?' he asked her abruptly, as if the question scared him.

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He was speaking French but she knew that it was not his mother tongue any more than it was her own, and his correct pronunciation of her name, complete with patronymic, already alerted her to his origin. She recognised the slur at once and the shapes of the tongue that made it, and she identified too late, and with a considerable inward start, the type she had not been able to put her finger on.

'If it is, who on earth are *you*?' she asked him in reply, sticking out her jaw and scowling.

He had drawn a pace closer. The difference in their heights was immediately absurd. So was the degree to which the man's features betrayed his unpleasing character. From her low position Ostrakova could read his weakness as clearly as his fear. His damp chin had set in a grimace, his mouth had twisted to make him look strong, but she knew he was only banishing an incurable cowardice. He is like a man steeling himself for a heroic act, she thought. Or a criminal one. He is a man cut off from all spontaneous acts, she thought.

'You were born in Leningrad on May 8, 1927?' the stranger asked.

Probably she said yes. Afterwards she was not sure. She saw his scared gaze lift and stare at the approaching bus. She saw an indecision near to panic seize him, and it occurred to her – which in the long run was an act of near clairvoyance – that he proposed to push her under it. He didn't, but he did put his next question in Russian – and in the brutal accents of Moscow officialdom.

'In 1956, you were granted permission to leave the Soviet Union for the purpose of nursing your sick husband, the traitor Ostrakov? Also for certain other purposes?'

'Ostrakov was not a traitor,' she replied, cutting him off. 'He was a patriot.' And by instinct she took up her shopping bag and clutched the handle very tight.

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The stranger spoke straight over this contradiction, and very loudly, in order to defeat the clatter of the bus: 'Ostrakova, I bring you greetings from your daughter Alexandra in Moscow, also from certain official quarters! I wish to speak to you concerning her! Do not board this car!'

The bus had pulled up. The conductor knew her and was holding his hand out for her bag. Lowering his voice, the stranger added one more terrible statement: 'Alexandra has serious problems which require the assistance of a mother.'

The conductor was calling to her to get a move on. He spoke with pretended roughness, which was the way they joked. 'Come on, mother! It's too hot for love! Pass us your bag and let's go!' cried the conductor.

Inside the bus there was laughter; then someone shouted an insult – old woman, keeps the world waiting! She felt the stranger's hand scrabbling inexpertly at her arm, like a clumsy suitor groping for the buttons. She pulled herself free. She tried to tell the conductor something but she couldn't; she opened her mouth but she had forgotten how to speak. The best she could manage was to shake her head. The conductor yelled at her again, then waved his hands and shrugged. The insults multiplied – old woman, drunk as a whore at midday! Remaining where she was, Ostrakova watched the bus out of sight, waiting for her vision to clear and her heart to stop its crazy cavorting. Now it is I who need a glass of water, she thought. From the strong I can protect myself. God preserve me from the weak.

She followed him to the café, limping heavily. In a forced-labour camp, exactly twenty-five years before, she had broken her leg in three places in a coal slip. On this August 4th – the date had not escaped her – under the extreme duress of the stranger's message to her, the old sensation of being crippled came back to her.

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The café was the last in the street, if not in all Paris, to lack both a juke-box and neon lighting – and to remain open in August – though there were bagatelle tables that bumped and flashed from dawn till night. For the rest, there was the usual mid-morning hubbub, of grand politics, and horses, and whatever else Parisians talked; there was the usual trio of prostitutes murmuring among themselves, and a sullen young waiter in a soiled shirt who led them to a table in a corner that was reserved with a grimy Campari sign. A moment of ludicrous banality followed. The stranger ordered two coffees, but the waiter protested that at midday one does not reserve the best table in the house merely in order to drink coffee; the *patron* had to pay the rent, monsieur! Since the stranger did not follow this flow of patois, Ostrakova had to translate it for him. The stranger blushed and ordered two ham omelettes with *frites*, and two Alsatian beers, all without consulting Ostrakova. Then he took himself to the men's room to repair his courage – confident, presumably, she would not run away – and when he returned his face was dry and his ginger hair combed, but the stink of him, now they were indoors, reminded Ostrakova of Moscow subways, and Moscow trams, and Moscow interrogation rooms. More eloquently than anything he could ever have said to her, that short walk back from the men's room to their table had convinced her of what she already feared. He was one of them. The suppressed swagger, the deliberate brutalisation of the features, the ponderous style in which he now squared his forearms on the table and with feigned reluctance helped himself to a piece of bread from the basket as if he were dipping a pen in ink – they revived her worst memories of living as a disgraced woman under the weight of Moscow's malevolent bureaucracy.

'So,' he said, and started eating the bread at the same time.

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He selected a crusty end. With hands like that he could have crushed it in a second, but instead he chose to prise ladylike flakes from it with his fat finger-ends, as if that were the official way of eating. While he nibbled, his eyebrows went up and he looked sorry for himself, me a stranger in this foreign land. 'Do they know here that you have lived an immoral life in Russia?' he asked finally. 'Maybe in a town full of whores they don't care.'

Her answer lay ready on the tip of her tongue: *My life in Russia was not immoral. It was your system which was immoral.*

But she did not say it, she kept rigidly silent. Ostrakova had already sworn to herself that she would restrain both her quick temper and her quick tongue, and she now physically enjoined herself to this vow by grabbing a piece of skin on the soft inside of her wrist and pinching it through her sleeve with a fierce, sustained pressure under the table, exactly as she had done a hundred times before, in the old days, when such questionings were part of her daily life – When did you last hear from your husband, Ostrakov, the traitor? Name all persons with whom you have associated in the last three months! With bitter experience she had learned the other lessons of interrogation too. A part of her was rehearsing them at this minute, and though they belonged, in terms of history, to a full generation earlier, they appeared to her now as bright as yesterday and as vital: never to match rudeness with rudeness, never to be provoked, never to score, never to be witty or superior or intellectual, never to be deflected by fury, or despair, or the surge of sudden hope that an occasional question might arouse. To match dullness with dullness and routine with routine. And only deep, deep down to preserve the two secrets that made all these humiliations bearable: her hatred of them; and her hope that one day, after endless drips of water on the

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stone, she would wear them down, and by a reluctant miracle of their own elephantine processes, obtain from them the freedom they were denying her.

He had produced a notebook. In Moscow it would have been her file but here in a Paris café it was a sleek black leatherbound notebook, something that in Moscow even an official would count himself lucky to possess.

File or notebook, the preamble was the same: 'You were born Maria Andreyevna Rogova in Leningrad on May 8, 1927,' he repeated. 'On September 1, 1948, aged twenty-one, you married the traitor Ostrakov Igor, a captain of infantry in the Red Army, born of an Estonian mother. In 1950, the said Ostrakov, being at the time stationed in East Berlin, traitorously defected to Fascist Germany through the assistance of reactionary Estonian émigrés, leaving you in Moscow. He took up residence, and later French citizenship, in Paris, where he continued his contact with anti-Soviet elements. At the time of his defection you had no children by this man. Also you were not pregnant. Correct?'

'Correct,' she said.

In Moscow it would have been 'Correct, Comrade Captain,' or 'Correct, Comrade Inspector,' but in this clamorous French café such formality was out of place. The fold of skin on her wrist had gone numb. Releasing it, she allowed the blood to return, then took hold of another.

'As an accomplice to Ostrakov's defection you were sentenced to five years' detention in a labour camp, but were released under an amnesty following the death of Stalin in March, 1953. Correct?'

'Correct.'

'On your return to Moscow, despite the improbability that your request would be granted, you applied for a foreign travel passport to join your husband in France. Correct?'

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'He had a cancer,' she said. 'If I had not applied, I would have been failing in my duty as his wife.'

The waiter brought the plates of omelette and *frites* and the two Alsatian beers, and Ostrakova asked him to bring a *thé citron*: she was thirsty, but did not care for beer. Addressing the boy, she tried vainly to make a bridge to him, with smiles and with her eyes. But his stoniness repulsed her; she realised she was the only woman in the place apart from the three prostitutes. Holding his notebook to one side like a hymnal, the stranger helped himself to a forkful, then another, while Ostrakova tightened her grasp on her wrist, and Alexandra's name pulsed in her mind like an unstaunched wound, and she contemplated a thousand different *serious problems* that required *the immediate assistance of a mother.*

The stranger continued his crude history of her while he ate. Did he eat for pleasure or did he eat in order not to be conspicuous again? She decided he was a compulsive eater.

'Meanwhile,' he announced, eating.

'Meanwhile,' she whispered involuntarily.

'Meanwhile, despite your pretended concern for your husband, the traitor Ostrakov,' he continued through his mouthful, 'you nevertheless formed an adulterous relationship with the so-called music student Glikman Joseph, a Jew with four convictions for anti-social behaviour whom you had met during your detention. You cohabited with this Jew in his apartment. Correct or false?'

'I was lonely.'

'In consequence of this union with Glikman you bore a daughter, Alexandra, at the Lying-in Hospital of the October Revolution in Moscow. The certificate of parentage was signed by Glikman Joseph and Ostrakova Maria. The girl was registered in the name of the Jew Glikman. Correct or false?'

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'Correct.'

'Meanwhile, you persisted in your application for a foreign travel passport. Why?'

'I told you. My husband was ill. It was my duty to persist.'

He ate again, so grossly that she had a sight of his many bad teeth. 'In January, 1956, as an act of clemency you were granted a passport on condition the child Alexandra was left behind in Moscow. You exceeded the permitted time limit and remained in France, abandoning your child. Correct or false?'

The doors to the street were glass, the walls too. A big lorry parked outside them and the café darkened. The young waiter slammed down her tea without looking at her.

'Correct,' she said again, and managed this time to look at her interrogator, knowing what would follow, forcing herself to show him that on this score at least she had no doubt, and no regrets. 'Correct,' she repeated defiantly.

'As a condition of your application being favourably considered by the authorities, you signed an undertaking to the organs of State Security to perform certain tasks for them during your residence in Paris. One, to persuade your husband, the traitor Ostrakov, to return to the Soviet Union—'

'To *attempt* to persuade him,' she said with a faint smile. 'He was not amenable to this suggestion.'

'Two, you undertook also to provide information concerning the activities and personalities of revanchist anti-Soviet émigré groups. You submitted two reports of no value and afterwards nothing. Why?'

'My husband despised such groups and had given up his contact with them.'

'You could have participated in the groups without him. You signed the document and neglected its undertaking. Yes or no?'

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'Yes.'

'For this you abandon your child in Russia? To a Jew? In order to give your attention to an enemy of the people, a traitor of the State? For this you neglect your duty? Outstay the permitted period, remain in France?'

'My husband was dying. He needed me.'

'And the child Alexandra? She did not need you? A dying husband is more important than a living child? A traitor? A conspirator against the people?'

Releasing her wrist, Ostrakova deliberately took hold of her tea and watched the glass rise to her face, the lemon floating on the surface. Beyond it, she saw a grimy mosaic floor and beyond the floor, the loved, ferocious and kindly face of Glikman pressing down on her, exhorting her to sign, to go, to swear to anything they asked. The freedom of one is more than the slavery of three, he had whispered; a child of such parents as ourselves cannot prosper in Russia whether you stay or go; leave and we shall do our best to follow; sign anything, leave, and live for all of us; if you love me, go . . .

'They were the hard days, still,' she said to the stranger finally, almost in a tone of reminiscence. 'You are too young. They were the hard days, even after Stalin's death: still hard.'

'Does the criminal Glikman continue to write to you?' the stranger asked in a superior, knowing way.

'He never wrote,' she lied. 'How could he write, a dissident, living under restriction? The decision to stay in France was mine alone.'

Paint yourself black, she thought; do everything possible to spare those within their power.

'I have heard nothing from Glikman since I came to France twenty years ago,' she added, gathering courage. 'Indirectly, I learned that he was angered by my anti-Soviet behaviour. He

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did not wish to know me any more. Inwardly he was already wishing to reform by the time I left him.'

'He did not write concerning your common child?'

'He did not write, he did not send messages. I told you this already.'

'Where is your daughter now?'

'I don't know.'

'You have received communications from her?'

'Of course not. I heard only that she had entered a State orphanage and acquired another name. I assume she does not know I exist.'

The stranger ate again with one hand, while the other held the notebook. He filled his mouth, munched a little, then swilled his food down with the beer. But the superior smile remained.

'And now it is the criminal Glikman who is dead,' the stranger announced, revealing his little secret. He continued eating.

Suddenly Ostrakova wished the twenty years were two hundred. She wished that Glikman's face had never, after all, looked down on her, that she had never loved him, never cared for him, never cooked for him, or got drunk with him day after day in his one-roomed exile where they lived on the charity of their friends, deprived of the right to work, to do anything but make music and love, get drunk, walk in the woods, and be cut dead by their neighbours.

'Next time I go to prison or you do, they will take her anyway. Alexandra is forfeit in any case,' Glikman had said. 'But you can save yourself.'

'I will decide when I am there,' she had replied.

'Decide now.'

'When I am there.'

The stranger pushed aside his empty plate and once more

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took the sleek French notebook in both hands. He turned a page, as if approaching a new chapter.

'Concerning now your criminal daughter Alexandra,' he announced, through his food.

'*Criminal?*' she whispered.

To her astonishment the stranger was reciting a fresh catalogue of crimes. As he did so, Ostrakova lost her final hold upon the present. Her eyes were on the mosaic floor and she noticed the husks of langoustine and crumbs of bread. But her mind was in the Moscow law court again, where her own trial was being repeated. If not hers, then Glikman's – yet not Glikman's either. Then whose? She remembered trials which the two of them had attended as unwelcome spectators. Trials of friends, if only by accident: such as people who had questioned the absolute right of the authorities; or had worshipped some unacceptable god; or had painted criminally abstract pictures; or had published politically endangering love-poems. The chattering customers in the café became the jeering claque of the State police; the slamming of the bagatelle tables, the crash of iron doors. On this date, for escaping from the State orphanage on something street, so many months' corrective detention. On that date, for insulting organs of State Security, so many more months extended for bad behaviour, followed by so many years' internal exile. Ostrakova felt her stomach turn and thought she might be sick. She put her hands to her glass of tea and saw the red pinch marks on her wrist. The stranger continued his recitation and she heard her daughter awarded another two years for refusing to accept employment at the something factory, God help her, and why shouldn't she? Where had she learnt it? Ostrakova asked herself, incredulous. What had Glikman taught the child, in the short time before they took her away from him, that had stamped her in his

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mould and defeated all the system's efforts? Fear, exultation, amazement jangled in Ostrakova's mind, till something that the stranger was saying to her blocked them out.

'I did not hear,' she whispered after an age. 'I am a little distressed. Kindly repeat what you just said.'

He said it again and she looked up and stared at him, trying to think of all the tricks she had been warned against, but they were too many and she was no longer clever. She no longer had Glikman's cleverness – if she had ever had it – about reading their lies and playing their games ahead of them. She knew only that to save herself and be reunited with her beloved Ostrakov, she had committed a great sin, the greatest a mother can commit. The stranger had begun threatening her, but for once the threat seemed meaningless. In the event of her non-collaboration – he was saying – a copy of her signed undertaking to the Soviet authorities would find its way to the French police. Copies of her useless two reports (done, as he well knew, solely in order to keep the brigands quiet) would be circulated among the surviving Paris émigrés – though, God knows, there were few enough of *them* about these days! Yet why should she have to submit to *pressure* in order to accept a gift of such immeasurable value – when, by some inexplicable act of clemency, this man, this system, was holding out to her the chance to redeem herself, and her child? She knew that her nightly and daily prayers for forgiveness had been answered, the thousands of candles, the thousands of tears. She made him say it a third time. She made him pull his notebook away from his gingery face, and she saw that his weak mouth had lifted into a half smile and that, idiotically, he seemed to require her absolution, even while he repeated his insane, God-given question.

'Assuming it has been decided to rid the Soviet Union of

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this disruptive and unsocial element, how would you like your daughter Alexandra to follow your footsteps here to France?'

For weeks after that encounter, and through all the hushed activities which accompanied it – furtive visits to the Soviet Embassy, form-filling, signed affidavits – *certificats d'hébergement* – the laborious trail through successive French ministries – Ostrakova followed her own actions as if they were someone else's. She prayed often, but even with her prayers she adopted a conspiratorial attitude, dividing them among several Russian Orthodox churches so that in none would she be observed suffering an undue assault of piety. Some of the churches were no more than little private houses scattered round the 15th and 16th districts, with distinctive twice-struck crosses in plywood, and old, rain-sodden Russian notices on the doors, requesting cheap accommodation and offering instruction on the piano. She went to the Church of the Russian Abroad, and the Church of the Apparition of the Holy Virgin, and the Church of Saint Seraphin of Sarov. She went everywhere. She rang the bells till someone came, a verger or a frail-faced woman in black; she gave them money, and they let her crouch in the damp cold before candle-lit icons, and breathe the thick incense till it made her half drunk. She made promises to the Almighty, she thanked Him, she asked Him for advice, she practically asked Him what *He* would have done if the stranger had approached Him in similar circumstances, she reminded Him that anyway she was under pressure, and they would destroy her if she did not obey. Yet at the same time, her indomitable common sense asserted itself and she asked herself over and over again *why* she of all people, wife of the traitor Ostrakov, lover of the dissident Glikman, mother – so she was given to believe – of a turbulent and

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anti-social daughter, should be singled out for such untypical indulgence?

In the Soviet Embassy, when she made her first formal application, she was treated with a regard she would never have dreamed possible, which was suited neither to a defector and renegade spy nor to the mother of an untameable hell-raiser. She was not ordered brusquely to a waiting-room, but escorted to an interviewing-room, where a young and personable official showed her a positively Western courtesy, even helping her, where her pen or courage faltered, to a proper formulation of her case.

And she told nobody, not even her nearest – though her nearest was not very near. The gingery man's warning rang in her ears day and night: any indiscretion and your daughter will not be released.

And who was there, after all, apart from God, to turn to? To her half-sister Valentina who lived in Lyon and was married to a car salesman? The very thought that Ostrakova had been consorting with a secret official from Moscow would send her rushing for her smelling salts. In a *café*, Maria? In *broad daylight*, Maria? Yes, Valentina, and what he said is true. I had a bastard daughter by a Jew.

It was the nothingness that scared her most. The weeks passed; at the Embassy they told her that her application was receiving 'favoured attention'; the French authorities had assured her that Alexandra would quickly qualify for French citizenship; the gingery stranger had persuaded her to backdate Alexandra's birth so that she could be represented as an Ostrakova, not a Glikman; he said the French authorities would find this more acceptable; and it seemed that they had done so, even though she had never so much as mentioned the child's existence at her naturalisation interviews. Now, suddenly,

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there were no more forms to fill in, no more hurdles to be cleared, and Ostrakova waited without knowing what she was waiting for. For the gingery stranger to reappear? He no longer existed. One ham omelette and *frites*, some Alsatian beer, two pieces of crusty bread had satisfied all his needs, apparently. What he was in relation to the Embassy she could not imagine: he had told her to present herself there, and that they would be expecting her; he was right. But when she referred to 'your gentleman,' even 'your blond, large gentleman who first approached me,' she met with smiling incomprehension.

Thus gradually whatever she was waiting for ceased to exist. First it was ahead of her, then it was behind her, and she had had no knowledge of its passing, no moment of fulfilment. Had Alexandra already arrived in France? Obtained her papers, moved on or gone to ground? Ostrakova began to think she might have done. Abandoned to a new and inconsolable sense of disappointment, she peered at the faces of young girls in the street, wondering what Alexandra looked like. Returning home, her eyes would fall automatically to the doormat in the hope of seeing a handwritten note or a *pneumatique*: 'Mama, it is I. I am staying at the so-and-so hotel . . .' A cable giving a flight number, arriving Orly tomorrow, tonight; or was it not Orly airport but Charles de Gaulle? She had no familiarity with airlines, so she visited a travel agent, just to ask. It was both. She considered going to the expense of having a telephone installed so that Alexandra could ring her up. Yet what on earth was she expecting, after all these years? Tearful reunions with a grown child to whom she had never been united? The wishful remaking, more than twenty years too late, of a relationship she had deliberately turned her back on? I have no right to her, Ostrakova told herself severely; I have only my debts and my obligations. She asked at the Embassy

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but they knew nothing more. The formalities were complete, they said. That was all they knew. And if Ostrakova wished to send her daughter money? she asked cunningly – for her fares, for instance, for her visa? – could they give her an address perhaps, an office that would find her?

We are not a postal service, they told her. Their new chilliness scared her. She did not go any more.

After that, she fell once more to worrying about the several muddy photographs, each the same, which they had given to her to pin to her application forms. The photographs were all she had ever seen. She wished now that she had made copies, but she had never thought of it; stupidly, she had assumed she would soon be meeting the original. She had not had them in her hand above an hour! She had hurried straight from the Embassy to the Ministry with them, and by the time she left the Ministry the photographs were already working their way through another bureaucracy. But she had studied them! My Lord, how she had studied those photographs, whether they were each the same or not! On the Métro, in the Ministry waiting-room, even on the pavement before she went in, she had stared at the lifeless depiction of her child, trying with all her might to see in the expressionless grey shadows some hint of the man she had adored. And failing. Always, till then, whenever she had dared to wonder, she had imagined Glikman's features as clearly written on the growing child as they had been on the new-born baby. It had seemed impossible that a man so vigorous would not plant his imprint deeply and for good. Yet Ostrakova saw nothing of Glikman in that photograph. He had worn his Jewishness like a flag. It was part of his solitary revolution. He was not orthodox, he was not even religious, he disliked Ostrakova's secret piety nearly as much as he disliked the Soviet bureaucracy – yet he had borrowed her

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tongs to curl his sideburns like the Hasidim, just to give focus, as he put it, to the anti-Semitism of the authorities. But in the face in the photograph she recognised not a drop of his blood, not the least spark of his fire – though his fire, according to the stranger, burned in her amazingly.

'If they had photographed a corpse to get that picture,' thought Ostrakova aloud in her apartment, 'I would not be surprised.' And with this downright observation, she gave her first outward expression of the growing doubt inside her.

Toiling in her warehouse, sitting alone in her tiny apartment in the long evenings, Ostrakova racked her brains for someone she could trust; who would not condone and not condemn; who would see round the corners of the route she had embarked on; above all, who would not talk and thus wreck – she had been assured of it – wreck her chances of being reunited with Alexandra. Then one night, either God or her own striving memory supplied her with an answer: The General! she thought, sitting up in bed and putting on the light. Ostrakov himself had told her of him! Those émigré groups are a catastrophe, he used to say, and you must avoid them like the pest. The only one you can trust is Vladimir the General; he is an old devil, and a womaniser, but he is a man, he has connections and knows how to keep his mouth shut.

But Ostrakov had said this some twenty years ago, and not even old generals are immortal. And besides – Vladimir who? She did not even know his other name. Even the name Vladimir – Ostrakov had told her – was something he had put on for his military service; since his real name was Estonian, and not suitable for Red Army usage. Nevertheless, next day, she went down to the bookshop beside the Cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky, where information about the dwindling Russian population was often to be had, and made her first

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enquiries. She got a name and even a phone number, but no address. The phone was disconnected. She went to the Post Office, cajoled the assistants, and finally came up with a 1956 telephone directory listing the Movement for Baltic Freedom, followed by an address in Montparnasse. She was not stupid. She looked up the address and found no less than four other organisations listed there also; the Riga Group, the Association of Victims of Soviet Imperialism, the Forty-Eight Committee for a free Latvia, the Tallinn Committee of Freedom. She remembered vividly Ostrakov's scathing opinions of such bodies, even though he had paid his dues to them. All the same, she went to the address and rang the bell, and the house was like one of her little churches: quaint, and very nearly closed for ever. Eventually an old White Russian opened the door wearing a cardigan crookedly buttoned, and leaning on a walking stick, and looking superior.

They've gone, he said, pointing his stick down the cobbled road. Moved out. Finished. Bigger outfits put them out of business, he added with a laugh. Too few of them, too many groups, and they squabbled like children. No wonder the Czar was defeated! The old White Russian had false teeth that didn't fit, and thin hair plastered all over his scalp to hide his baldness.

But the General? she asked. Where was the General? Was he still alive, or had he –

The old Russian smirked and asked whether it was business.

It was not, said Ostrakova craftily, remembering the General's reputation for philandering, and contrived a shy woman's smile. The old Russian laughed, and his teeth rattled. He laughed again and said 'Oh, the General!' Then he came back with an address in London, stamped in mauve on a bit of card, and gave it to her. The General would never change, he said; when he got to Heaven, he'd be chasing after the angels and

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trying to up-end them, no question. And that night while the whole neighbourhood slept, Ostrakova sat at her dead husband's desk and wrote to the General with a frankness which lonely people reserve for strangers, using French rather than Russian as an aid to greater detachment. She told him about her love for Glikman and took comfort from the knowledge that the General himself loved women just as Glikman had. She admitted immediately that she had come to France as a spy, and she explained how she had assembled the two trivial reports that were the squalid price of her freedom. It was *à contre-coeur*, she said; invention and evasion, she said; a nothing. But the reports existed, so did her signed undertaking, and they placed grave limits on her freedom. Then she told him of her soul, and of her prayers to God all round the Russian churches. Since the gingery stranger's approach to her, she said, her days had become unreal; she had a feeling of being denied a natural explanation of her life, even if it had to be a painful one. She kept nothing back from him, for whatever guilty feelings she had, they did not relate to her efforts to bring Alexandra to the West, but rather to her decision to stay in Paris and take care of Ostrakov until he died – after which event, she said, the Soviets would not let her come back anyway; she had become a defector herself.

'But General,' she wrote, 'if tonight I had to face my Maker in person, and tell Him what is deepest in my heart, I would tell Him what I now tell you. My child Alexandra was born in pain. Days and nights she fought me and I fought her back. Even in the womb she was her father's child. I had no time to love her; I only ever knew her as the little Jewish warrior her father made. But, General, this I do know: the child in the photograph is neither Glikman's, nor is she mine. They are putting the wrong egg into the nest, and though there is a part of this

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old woman that would like to be deluded, there is a stronger part that hates them for their tricks.'

When she had finished the letter, she sealed it immediately in its envelope so that she would not read it and change her mind. Then she stuck too many stamps on it deliberately, much as she might have lit a candle to a lover.

For the next two weeks exactly, following the posting of this document, nothing happened, and in the strange ways of women the silence was a relief to her. After the storm had come the calm, she had done the little she could do – she had confessed her weaknesses and her betrayals and her one great sin – the rest was in the hands of God, and of the General. A disruption of the French postal services did not dismay her. She saw it rather as another obstacle which those who were shaping her destiny would have to overcome if their will was strong enough. She went to work contentedly and her back ceased to trouble her, which she took as an omen. She even managed to become philosophical again. It is this way or that way, she told herself: either Alexandra was in the West and better off – if indeed it *was* Alexandra – or Alexandra was where she had been before, and no worse off. But gradually, with another part of her, she saw through this false optimism. There was a third possibility, and that was the worst and by degrees the one she considered most likely: namely, that Alexandra was being used for a sinister and perhaps wicked purpose; that they were forcing her somehow, exactly as they had forced Ostrakova, misusing the humanity and courage that her father, Glikman, had given her. So that on the fourteenth night, Ostrakova broke into a profound fit of weeping, and with the tears streaming down her face walked half-way across Paris looking for a church, any church that was open, until she came to the Cathedral of Alexander Nevsky itself. It was open. Kneeling,

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she prayed for long hours to St Joseph, who was after all a father and protector, and the giver of Glikman's first name, even if Glikman would have scoffed at the association. And on the day following these spiritual exertions, her prayer was answered. A letter came. It had no stamp or postmark. She had added her address at work as a precaution, and the letter was there waiting for her when she arrived, delivered by hand, presumably, some time in the night. It was a very short letter and carried neither the name of the sender nor his address. It was unsigned. Like her own, it was in a stilted French and handwritten, in the sprawl of an old and dictatorial hand, which she knew at once was the General's.

Madame! – it began, like a command – *Your letter has reached the writer safely. A friend of our cause will call upon you very soon. He is a man of honour and he will identify himself by handing to you the other half of the enclosed postcard. I urge you to speak to nobody concerning this matter until he arrives. He will come to your apartment between eight and ten o'clock in the evening. He will ring your doorbell three times. He has my absolute confidence. Trust him entirely, Madame, and we shall do everything to assist you.*

Even in her relief, she was secretly entertained by the writer's melodramatic tone. Why not deliver the letter directly to her flat? she wondered; and why should I feel safer because he gives me half an English picture? For the piece of postcard showed a part of Piccadilly Circus and was torn, not cut, with a deliberate roughness, diagonally. The side to be written on was blank.

To her astonishment the General's envoy came that night.

He rang the bell three times, as the letter promised, but he must have known she was in her apartment – must have watched her enter, and the lights go on – for all she heard was a snap of the letter-box, a snap much louder than it normally

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made, and when she went to the door she saw the piece of torn postcard lying on the mat, the same mat she had looked at so often when she was longing for word of her daughter Alexandra. Picking it up, she ran to the bedroom for her Bible, where her own half already lay, and yes, the pieces matched, God was on her side, St Joseph had interceded for her. (But what a needless piece of nonsense, all the same!) And when she opened the door to him, he slipped past her like a shadow: a little hobgoblin of a fellow, in a black overcoat with velvet tabs on the collar, giving him an air of operatic conspiracy. They have sent me a midget to catch a giant, was her first thought. He had arched eyebrows and a grooved face and flicked-up horns of black hair above his pointed ears, which he prinked with his little palms before the hall mirror as he took off his hat – so bright and comic that on a different occasion Ostrakova would have laughed out loud at all the life and humour and irreverence in him.

But not tonight.

Tonight he had a gravity that she sensed immediately was not his normal way. Tonight, like a busy salesman who had just stepped off an aeroplane – she had the feeling also about him that he was brand new in town: his cleanliness, his air of travelling light – tonight he wished only to do business.

'You received my letter safely, madame?' He spoke Russian swiftly, with an Estonian accent.

'I had thought it was the General's letter,' she replied, affecting – she could not save herself – a certain sternness with him.

'It is I who brought it for him,' he said gravely. He was delving in an inside pocket and she had a dreadful feeling that, like the big Russian, he was going to produce a sleek black notebook. But he drew out instead a photograph, and one look was

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quite enough: the pallid, glossy features, the expression that despised all womanhood, not just her own; the suggestion of longing, but not daring to take.

'Yes,' she said. 'That is the stranger.'

Seeing his happiness increase, she knew immediately that he was what Glikman and his friends called 'one of us' – not a Jew necessarily, but a man with heart and meat to him. From that moment on she called him in her mind 'the magician'. She thought of his pockets as being full of clever tricks, and of his merry eyes as containing a dash of magic.

For half the night, with an intensity she hadn't experienced since Glikman, she and the magician talked. First, she told it all again, reliving it exactly, secretly surprised to discover how much she had left out of her letter, which the magician seemed to know by heart. She explained her feelings to him, and her tears, her terrible inner turmoil; she described the crudeness of her perspiring tormentor. He was so inept – she kept repeating, in wonder – as if it were his first time, she said – he had no finesse, no assurance. So odd to think of the Devil as a fumbler! She told about the ham omelette and the *frites* and the Alsatian beer and he laughed; about her feeling that he was a man of dangerous timidity and inhibition – not a woman's man at all – to most of which the little magician agreed with her cordially, as if he and the gingery man were already well acquainted. She trusted the magician entirely, as the General had told her to; she was sick and tired of suspicion. She talked, she thought afterwards, as frankly as she once had talked to Ostrakov when they were young lovers in her own home town, on the nights they thought they might never meet again, clutching each other under siege, whispering to the sound of approaching guns; or to Glikman, while they waited for the

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hammering on the door that would take him back to prison yet again. She talked to his alert and understanding gaze, to the laughter in him, to the suffering which she sensed immediately was the better side of his unorthodox and perhaps anti-social nature. And gradually, as she went on talking, her woman's instinct told her that she was feeding a passion in him – not a love this time, but a sharp and particular hatred that gave thrust and sensibility to every little question he asked. What or whom it was that he hated, exactly, she could not say, but she feared for any man, whether the gingery stranger or anybody else, who had attracted this tiny magician's fire. Glikman's passion, she recalled, had been a general, sleepless passion against injustice, fixing itself almost at random upon a range of symptoms, small or large. But the magician's was a single beam, fixed upon a spot she could not see.

It is in any case a fact that by the time the magician left – my Lord, she thought, it was nearly time for her to go to work again! – Ostrakova had told him everything she had to tell, and the magician in return had woken feelings in her which for years, until this night, had belonged only to her past. Tidying away the plates and bottles in a daze, she managed, despite the complexity of her feelings regarding Alexandra, and herself, and her two dead men, to burst out laughing at her woman's folly.

'And I do not even know his name!' she said aloud, and shook her head in mockery. 'How shall I reach you?' she had asked. 'How can I warn you if he returns?'

She could not, the magician had replied. But if there was a crisis she should write to the General again, under his English name and at a different address. 'Mr Miller,' he said gravely, pronouncing it as French, and gave her a card with a London address printed by hand in capitals. 'But be discreet,' he warned. 'You must be indirect in your language.'

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All that day, and for many days afterwards, Ostrakova kept her last departing image of the magician at the forefront of her memory as he slipped away from her and down the ill-lit staircase. His last fervid stare, taut with purpose and excitement: 'I promise to release you. Thank you for calling me to arms.' His little white hand, running down the broad banister of the stairwell, like a handkerchief waved from a train window, round and round in a dwindling circle of farewell, till it disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel.

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2

The second of the two events that brought George Smiley from his retirement occurred a few weeks after the first, in early autumn of the same year: not in Paris at all, but in the once ancient, free, and Hanseatic city of Hamburg, now almost pounded to death by the thunder of its own prosperity; yet it remains true that nowhere does the summer fade more splendidly than along the gold and orange banks of the Alster, which nobody as yet has drained or filled with concrete. George Smiley, needless to say, had seen nothing of its languorous autumn splendour. Smiley, on the day in question, was toiling obliviously, with whatever conviction he could muster, at his habitual desk in the London Library in St James's Square, with two spindly trees to look at through the sash-window of the reading-room. The only link to Hamburg he might have pleaded – if he had afterwards attempted the connection, which he did not – was in the Parnassian field of German baroque poetry, for at the time he was composing a monograph on the bard Opitz, and trying loyally to distinguish true passion from the tiresome literary convention of the period.

The time in Hamburg was a few moments after eleven in the morning, and the footpath leading to the jetty was speckled with sunlight and dead leaves. A candescent haze hung over the flat water of the Aussenalster, and through it the spires of

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the Eastern bank were like green stains dabbed on the wet horizon. Along the shore, red squirrels scurried, foraging for the winter. But the slight and somewhat anarchistic-looking young man standing on the jetty wearing a tracksuit and running shoes had neither eyes nor mind for them. His red-rimmed gaze was locked tensely upon the approaching steamer, his hollow face darkened by a two-day stubble. He carried a Hamburg newspaper under his left arm, and an eye as perceptive as George Smiley's would have noticed at once that it was yesterday's edition, not today's. In his right hand he clutched a rush shopping basket better suited to the dumpy Madame Ostrakova than to this lithe, bedraggled athlete who seemed any minute about to leap into the lake. Oranges peeked out of the top of the basket, a yellow Kodak envelope with English printing lay on top of the oranges. The jetty was otherwise empty, and the haze over the water added to his solitude. His only companions were the steamer timetable and an archaic notice, which must have survived the war, telling him how to revive the half-drowned; his only thoughts concerned the General's instructions, which he was continuously reciting to himself like a prayer.

The steamer glided alongside and the boy skipped aboard like a child in a dance game – a flurry of steps, then motionless until the music starts again. For forty-eight hours, night and day, he had had nothing to think of but this moment: now. Driving, he had stared wakefully at the road, imagining, between glimpses of his wife and little girl, the many disastrous things that could go wrong. He knew he had a talent for disaster. During his rare breaks for coffee, he had packed and repacked the oranges a dozen times, laying the envelope longways, sideways – no, this angle is better, it is more appropriate, easier to get hold of. At the edge of town he had

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collected small change so that he would have the fare exactly – what if the conductor held him up, engaged him in casual conversation? There was so little time to do what he had to do! He would speak no German, he had worked it out. He would mumble, smile, be reticent, apologise, but stay mute. Or he would say some of his few words of Estonian – some phrase from the Bible he could still remember from his Lutheran childhood, before his father insisted he learn Russian. But now, with the moment so close upon him, the boy suddenly saw a snag in his plan. What if his fellow passengers then came to his aid? In polyglot Hamburg, with the East only a few miles away, any six people could muster as many languages between them! Better to keep silent, be blank.

He wished he had shaved. He wished he was less conspicuous.

Inside the main cabin of the steamer, the boy looked at nobody. He kept his eyes lowered; *avoid eye contact*, the General had ordered. The conductor was chatting to an old lady and ignored him. He waited awkwardly, trying to look calm. There were about thirty passengers. He had an impression of men and women dressed alike in green overcoats and green felt hats, all disapproving of him. It was his turn. He held out a damp palm. One mark, a fifty-pfennig piece, a punch of little brass tens. The conductor helped himself, not speaking. Clumsily, the boy groped his way between the seats, making for the stern. The jetty was moving away. They suspect me of being a terrorist, thought the boy. There was engine oil on his hands and he wished he'd washed it off. Perhaps it's on my face as well. *Be blank*, the General had said. *Efface yourself. Neither smile nor frown. Be normal*. He glanced at his watch, trying to keep the action slow. He had rolled back his left cuff in advance, specially to leave the watch free. Ducking, though he was not

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tall, the boy arrived suddenly in the stern section, which was open to the weather, protected only by a canopy. It was a case of seconds. Not of days or kilometres any more; not hours. Seconds. The timing hand of his watch flickered past the six. The next time it reaches six, you move. A breeze was blowing but he barely noticed it. The time was an awful worry to him. When he got excited – he knew – he lost all sense of time completely. He was afraid the seconds hand would race through a double circuit before he had realised, turning one minute into two. In the stern section all seats were vacant. He made jerkily for the last bench of all, holding the basket of oranges over his stomach in both hands, clamping the newspaper to his armpit at the same time: it is I, read my signals. He felt a fool. The oranges were too conspicuous by far. Why on earth should an unshaven young man in a tracksuit be carrying a basket of oranges and yesterday's newspaper? The whole boat must have noticed him! 'Captain – that young man – there – he is a bomber! He has a bomb in his basket, he intends to hijack us or sink the ship!' A couple stood arm in arm at the railing with their backs to him, staring into the mist. The man was very small, shorter than the woman. He wore a black overcoat with a velvet collar. They ignored him. *Sit as far back as you can, be sure you sit next to the aisle*, the General had said. He sat down, praying it would work first time, that none of the fallbacks would be needed. 'Beckie, I do this for *you*,' he whispered secretly, thinking of his daughter, and remembering the General's words. His Lutheran origins notwithstanding, he wore a wooden cross round his neck, a present to him from his mother, but the zip of his tunic covered it. Why had he hidden the cross? So that God would not witness his deceit? He didn't know. He wanted only to be driving again, to drive and drive till he dropped or was safely home.

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Look nowhere, he remembered the General saying. He was to look nowhere but ahead of him: *you are the passive partner. You have nothing to do but supply the opportunity. No code word, nothing; just the basket and the oranges and the yellow envelope and the newspaper under your arm.* I should never have agreed to it, he thought. I have endangered my daughter Beckie. Stella will never forgive me. I shall lose my citizenship, I have put everything at risk. *Do it for our cause*, the General had said. General, I haven't got one: it was not my cause, it was your cause, it was my father's; that is why I threw the oranges overboard.

But he didn't. Laying the newspaper beside him on the slatted bench, he saw that it was drenched in sweat – that patches of print had worn off where he clutched it. He looked at his watch. The seconds hand was standing at ten. It's stopped! Fifteen seconds since I last looked – that simply is not possible! A frantic glance at the shore convinced him they were already in mid-lake. He looked at the watch again and saw the seconds hand jerking past eleven. Fool, he thought, calm yourself. Leaning to his right, he affected to read the newspaper while he kept the dial of his watch constantly in view. Terrorists. Nothing but terrorists, he thought, reading the headlines for the twentieth time. No wonder the passengers think I'm one of them. *Grossfahndung*. That was their word for massive search. It amazed him that he remembered so much German. *Do it for our cause.*

At his feet the basket of oranges was leaning precariously. *When you get up, put the basket on the bench to reserve your seat*, the General had said. What if it falls over? In his imagination he saw the oranges rolling all over the deck, the yellow envelope upside down among them, photographs everywhere, all of Beckie. The seconds hand was passing six. He stood up. Now. His midriff was cold. He tugged his tunic down to cover it and inadvertently exposed his mother's wooden cross. He

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closed the zip. *Saunter. Look nowhere. Pretend you are the dreamy sort*, the General had said. *Your father would not have hesitated a moment*, the General had said. *Nor will you*. Cautiously lifting the basket on to the bench he steadied it with both hands, then leaned it towards the back to give it extra stability. Then tested it. He wondered about the *Abendblatt*. To take it, to leave it where it was? Perhaps his contact had still not seen the signal? He picked it up and put it under his arm.

He returned to the main cabin. A couple moved into the stern section, presumably to take the air, older, very sedate. The first couple were a sexy pair, even from behind – the little man, the shapely girl, the trimness of them both. You knew they had a good time in bed, just to look at them. But this second couple were like a pair of policemen to him; the boy was certain they got no pleasure from their love-making at all. Where is my mind going? he thought crazily. To my wife, Stella, was the answer. To the long exquisite embraces we may never have again. Sauntering as he had been ordered to, he advanced down the aisle towards the closed-off area where the pilot sat. Looking at nobody was easy; the passengers sat with their backs to him. He had reached as far forward as passengers were allowed. The pilot sat to his left, on a raised platform. *Go to the pilot's window and admire the view. Remain there one minute exactly*. The cabin roof was lower here; he had to stoop. Through the big windscreen, trees and buildings on the move. He saw a rowing eight switch by, followed by a lone blonde goddess in a skiff. Breasts like a statue's, he thought. For greater casualness, he propped one running shoe on the pilot's platform. Give me a woman, he thought desperately, as the moment of crisis came; give me my Stella, drowsy and desiring, in the half-light of early morning. He had his left wrist forward on the railing, his watch constantly in view.

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'We don't clean boots here,' the pilot growled.

Hastily the boy replaced his foot on the deck. Now he knows I speak German, he thought, and felt his face prickle in embarrassment. But they know anyway, he thought stupidly, for why else would I carry a German newspaper?

It was time. Swiftly standing to his full height again, he swung round too fast and began the return journey to his seat, and it was no use any more remembering not to stare at faces because the faces stared at him, disapproving of his two days' growth of beard, his track suit and his wild look. His eyes left one face, only to find another. He thought he had never seen such a chorus of mute ill-will. His tracksuit had parted at the midriff again and showed a line of black hair. Stella washes them too hot, he thought. He tugged the tunic down again and stepped into the air, wearing his wooden cross like a medal. As he did so, two things happened almost at the same time. On the bench, next to the basket, he saw the yellow chalk mark he was looking for, running over two slats, bright as a canary, telling him that the handover had taken place successfully. At the sight of it, a sense of glory filled him, he had known nothing like it in his life, a release more perfect than any woman could provide.

Why must we do it this way? he had asked the General; why does it have to be so elaborate?

Because the object is unique in the whole world, the General had replied. *It is a treasure without a counterpart. Its loss would be a tragedy to the free world.*

And he chose me to be his courier, thought the boy proudly: though he still, at the back of his mind, thought the old man was overdoing it. Serenely picking up the yellow envelope, he dropped it into his tunic pocket, drew the zip and ran his finger down the join to make sure it had meshed.

At the same instant exactly, he realised he was being

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watched. The woman at the railing still had her back to him and he noticed again that she had very pretty hips and legs. But her sexy little companion in the black overcoat had turned all the way round to face him, and his expression put an end to all the good feelings the boy had just experienced. Only once had he seen a face like that, and that was when his father lay dying in their first English home, a room in Ruislip, a few months after they had reached England. The boy had seen nothing so desperate, so profoundly serious, so bare of all protection, in anyone else, ever. More alarming still, he knew – precisely as Ostrakova had known – that it was a desperation in contrast with the natural disposition of the features, which were those of a comedian – or, as Ostrakova had it, a magician. So that the impassioned stare of this little, sharp-faced stranger, with its message of furious entreaty – 'Boy, you have no idea what you are carrying! Guard it with your life!' – was a revelation of that same comedian's soul.

The steamer had stopped. They were on the other bank. Seizing his basket, the boy leapt ashore, and, almost running, ducked between the bustling shoppers from one side-street to another without knowing where they led.

All through the drive back, while the steering-wheel hammered his arms and the engine played its pounding scale in his ears, the boy saw that face before him in the wet road, wondering as the hours passed whether it was something he had merely imagined in the emotion of the handover. Most likely the real contact was someone completely different, he thought, trying to soothe himself. One of those fat ladies in the green felt hats – even the conductor. I was overstrung, he told himself. At a crucial moment, an unknown man turned round and looked at me and I hung an entire history on him, even imagining he was my dying father.

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By the time he reached Dover he almost believed he had put the man out of his mind. He had dumped the cursed oranges in a litter bin; the yellow envelope lay snug in the pouch of his tunic, one sharp corner pricking his skin, and that was all that mattered. So he had formed theories about his secret accomplice? Forget them. And even if, by sheer coincidence, he was right, and it was that hollowed, glaring face – *then* what? All the less reason to go blabbing about it to the General, whose concern with security the boy likened to the unchallengeable passion of a seer. The thought of Stella became an aching need to him. His desire sharpened with every noisy mile. It was early morning still. He imagined waking her with his caresses; he saw her sleepy smile slowly turn to passion.

The summons came to Smiley that same night, and it is a curious fact, since he had an overall impression of not sleeping at all well during this late period of his life, that the phone had to ring a long time beside the bed before he answered it. He had come home straight from the library, then dined poorly at an Italian restaurant in the King's Road, taking the *Voyages of Olearius* with him for protection. He had returned to his house in Bywater Street and resumed work on his monograph with the devotion of a man who had nothing else to do. After a couple of hours he had opened a bottle of red Burgundy and drunk half of it, listening to a poor play on the radio. Then dozed, wrestling with troubled dreams. Yet the moment he heard Lacon's voice, he had the feeling of being hauled from a warm and treasured place, where he wished to remain undisturbed for ever. Also, though in fact he was moving swiftly, he had the sensation of taking a long time to dress; and he wondered whether that was what old men did when they heard about a death.

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