

All in honour, part 2

Kismet

Prelude. Yugoslavia – Pyotr

The man telephoned from Vienna with a better deal. The agent being sent from New York would arrive soon; he would be removed from the scene, so that he, Pyotr could be taken to a safe place with facilities to continue his work.

Pyotr told his children simply that they needed to escape government surveillance and were being helped by an agent from an international law enforcement organisation.

New York – K

Naturally reserved, needing no companionship, K preferred solitude; but he felt increasingly depressed alone, both in his apartment and in his office. Maybe he was ill. The feeling of lassitude and indifference must be down to flu or some other virus.

Some of his colleagues who had known him for years knew better. They were aware of at least part of the story and recognised what it was. He generally ignored friendly overtures of sympathy or, worse, pity – which won them only his glare or the polite indifference that prevented anyone from getting too close. But they were right, nevertheless. Since his partner of so many years had left – with not even a backward glance – he had changed. It wasn't just anger and humiliation, he was lonely.

And now, he missed the partner assigned to him for his last mission; he had hoped it would last, she had been unexpectedly easy to work with on what turned out to be a very delicately balanced mission. But that partner had been recalled; she had left for good. Their partnership had been more than professional, more than friends; they had at least been able to say goodbye, but she too had gone. They had painfully agreed not to write. He now knew that she had resigned.

Taking the file on the new mission, he walked out past reception, dropping his badge on the desk, and went home. In the evening, he read Pushkin, whose ironic commentary on life was a relief after the slightly cloying optimism of his American colleagues. With luck – being unattached at the moment – he might even be able to sleep.

The mission was in Yugoslavia where his knowledge of the language would be useful. A Russian scientist who was working on computer-guided weaponry was being watched by all the wrong people. The organisation was worried that his work might fall into undesirable hands and was concerned about his safety and that of his two children, who would need to be brought out, too.

K would fly to Italy, collect a car and drive over the border. He didn't know the allocated back up partner, whose codename was J (for Janus, apparently). He was coming from Austria and they were to meet at the scientist's home in three days' time. He frowned at the codename, "By the pricking of my thumbs..." he quoted to himself. Superstition, you

fool. He had read the man's file – he sounded like someone with psychopathic tendencies – and shook his head, baffled at their choice for this operation. A woman would have been better, surely, with children involved and (not for the first time) wished his last partner back.

Yugoslavia.

The house was set back from the road in a garden. When he drew up outside, it was shuttered and quiet. The scientist greeted him at the door. He was led into the kitchen, a large welcoming room with a great cooking range and a family table apparently big enough for a family of ten. He wondered if it was a working farm still. A young woman and a boy sitting at the table looked round warily and stood up to shake hands, but before sitting down, K silently began to search the room for microphones.

The atmosphere relaxed a little when the search was over. Their relief at his half-smile and shrug told him how much they were on alert for danger. Nevertheless, he felt himself somehow under observation so it would be prudent to keep to a minimum introductions and details of the plan. He felt uneasy, in this country, about giving his full name, or even his real given name, and suggested they keep to first names: he asked them to call him Kolya, the diminutive of his patronymic, it was close enough to his proper name. The scientist's name was Pyotr Sergeyvitch; he introduced his son Sergei Petrovitch as Seryozha (to the boy's manifest annoyance) and his daughter, Tatyana Petrovnaya, whom he called Tanya.

She was eighteen. Slim and graceful, with long dark hair, she was shabbily dressed in outdated clothes. She had had no idea what to expect of such a strange kind of visitor, and felt only surprise at his appearance as he followed her father into the kitchen, and continued to observe him discreetly while he searched the room. He was shorter than her father, and young, though crows-feet at the corners of his eyes suggested he was older than he looked – in his thirties, perhaps. He was fair and blue-eyed; good-looking with a straight nose and very determined chin; slightly built, lithe and compact. He had a shy, unsmiling, self-effacing quality – an impression quickly dispelled by the assertive manner of his search. Not shy then, but cool and detached. She was conscious too of a dangerous quality; of someone who kept in the background for good reasons. She glanced at her father, and was slightly struck by the blank look on his face.

The boy was eleven. His ideas of what to expect were based on comics acquired through an enterprising black market at school, so, anticipating Superman, he was disappointed. He saw only someone quite old, who looked so un-superman-like that even *he* could knock him over; added to which, he seemed to behave like a lunatic. All this poking about under the furniture and behind the plates. Huh. Weird.

After the evening meal, prepared by Tanya, they talked casually and told him a little of their lives. They had lived there some three or four years, since the children's mother died. Tanya's role, since leaving school had been to keep house and help to raise her brother. It seemed a shame, she looked intelligent and attractive; she was curious about everything, and now she was just a nanny and housekeeper. Her father didn't even involve her in his work. K observing her unprepossessing appearance thought her grace

and dignity needed something better; she should be able to spread her wings and fly. Perhaps that would be possible in America. He was careful not to show his thoughts in his face, but she was more sensitive than he gave her credit for. However young she was, she could read a good-looking man's eyes. The boy sat mumchance – these old men! – their conversation was so boring he was almost willing to go when he was sent to bed.

He shook hands with his father and with K, and kissed his sister. “Good night, Seryozha,” she said, and the boy hissed, “Not Seryozha – Sergei!”

“Sorry, sorry,” she whispered back. K smiled to himself, overhearing this exchange. Diminutives were OK after you grew up, not when you were eleven, and specially not in front of a stranger if he happened to be a special agent.

He would have liked to talk about his own subject, quantum physics, with the weapons specialist, but it didn't seem wise, and instead, conversation turned to literature. K was curious to know whether Pushkin's poetry held the same magic for them as it did for him. Tanya exclaimed delightedly and took him into the study, a room lined with bookshelves. Among the volumes of scientific periodicals was a collection of Russian literature. Tanya reached down Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (in which was the origin of her name) and held it out. “There's Chekhov, too, if you like,” she said, handing him a copy of *Uncle Vanya*. He took them both and smiled at her. He was largely unaware of it, but his smile changed the forbidding aspect he often presented to the world. Close up, she was aware of an intense masculinity belied by his delicate good looks; a toughness, in what looked at first sight such a slight frame, and now, as he scanned the pages not looking at her, his startling blue eyes shaded by his lashes, she watched the muscles round his mouth soften. She shivered slightly. He looked up a little sheepishly as if caught out in some dereliction of duty. “Thank you. May I borrow these to read?”

“Of course,” she said, and they returned to the kitchen.

It was now quite late. K was very tired and decided to turn in. He bade them goodnight and Tanya showed him the way to his room. There was plenty of hot water for a bath, and the bed was comfortable. He read for a while till drowsiness took him. He slept deeply until the rays of the rising sun slipped through a gap in the curtain and caught him in the eyes. He woke disoriented by troubled dreams, and it was a moment or two before he came to himself. The house was quiet – too quiet? No, he could hear just the ordinary household sounds of water running and footsteps on the landing. He washed and shaved, and, before dressing, went to look out of the window. In the clear light of early morning he thought he could see the sea far away in the distance. There were olive groves in between, their lovely grey-green leaves silvery in the sunlight. It must be a nice place to live.

There was a light tap at the door. He wrapped the towel more firmly round his waist and bent over the bed to retrieve his gun from beneath his pillow, before calling “Come in.”

Tanya entered, saying, “I thought you might like a cup of tea before coming down,” adding, “– it's Russian tea.” As he came away from the window she took in his appearance and blushed scarlet.

The sunlight picked out the fine hairs on his muscular legs, and on his chest, but also highlighted the scars that became visible as he turned. Then she saw that he held a gun. If

he had been feeling disoriented in this seemingly safe house, it was nothing to how she felt. The man not only carried an aura of violence, *and* a weapon, but she saw now how badly he had been marked by violence. He came forward quickly and took the cup from her. “Thank you. You're very kind. I'll be down as soon as I'm dressed.”

She smiled slightly, “There's no hurry. It's laid out for whenever you're ready.”

She left the room quickly. He looked down at himself, and shrugged. He was used to the scars, and, for that matter, being seen with few clothes on, but it would have been sensible to have put on a dressing gown.

He spent the morning exploring the area on foot and by car. He also tried unsuccessfully to contact Janus. On his return to the house, he looked for the scientist, but Pyotr was nowhere to be found. Instead there was just Tanya: “He was here just now”, she said, “and now he's gone – he isn't anywhere!”

“Come, we'll look around together. I haven't seen the whole house yet, or the outhouses,” he said. “Where is Sergei?”

“He went to look for papa, just before you came back,” she said, “I think he may have stopped to play somewhere.” K frowned.

He and Tanya searched the house – there was no sign of Pyotr or the boy – and then out into the yard where there was a stable with a door to a cellar, and several other small buildings.

The smaller buildings were clearly empty, as was the stable. Tanya opened the door to the cellar and went down the steps. K followed, on the alert. There was a light ahead. Tanya was ahead of him when he heard her cry out. He ran forward and seeing Tanya struggling with a man, launched himself into a fight to free her. Tanya cried out again in warning just as someone else came from behind and struck him a stunning blow. It sent him reeling into the girl and they crashed together onto a pile of sacks on the floor. Tanya, underneath him, bruised and terrified, took his full weight and found that though he was so slightly built, it was all muscle and he was heavy.

The boy and his father were already on the floor, sitting together tightly bound. Now frightened and shocked, they could only watch as Tanya struggled to get free. She had never been so close to a grown man from outside her family. Like a lover, his face was buried in her neck; his cheek lay against hers; she could smell his skin; his breath was warm; his hair brushed her face. It was only momentary; his eyelashes fluttered; he moved and tried to get up, accidentally brushing her breast as he did so. “I'm sorry,” he gasped, and rolled off her. Horrified by the suddenness of the violence, she put her hand to his face, fearing he was hurt. He smiled at her and gently pushed it away. “I'm all right, don't worry.” He looked round, rubbing his head, and saw Pyotr and Sergei staring at him. He shrugged apologetically.

Two men held them captive. They tied up Tanya and K and pushed them down next to Sergei, but then pulled Pyotr to his feet, dragged him up the steps and took him out, leaving the other three alone in the darkness of the cellar.

K was surprised but gratified not to have been searched very thoroughly. They hadn't even found his communicator, but there was also a sharp blade like a flick-knife in his wristwatch, which his fingers now tried to reach. It was impossible, he had been tied too tight. He asked his companions, "How tightly are you tied? Has either of you any free movement in your fingers?"

Tanya said, "No, I can't move at all."

The boy wriggled his wrists in his bonds and said, "I think I can."

"Turn so that we are back to back, and feel for my watch on my left wrist," said K, twisting round next to the boy. He felt Sergei's fingers on his ropes.

"Your watch is covered with the rope," the boy whispered.

"Can you pull it out of the way?" There was more wriggling and at last Sergei could feel the strap and face of the watch.

"Now, you'll need to be very careful not to cut yourself. If you press a small button on the side, a very sharp blade will shoot out. Keep your hand out of the way."

In other circumstances, it might have been a small boy's dream to carry out a dashing and exciting rescue of the hero; but this was real and more frightening than he would have believed; not dashing or exciting at all, and K was far too real to be his idea of a hero. Very carefully, therefore, he felt for the mechanism, and grimaced at the little start and grunt that came from K as the blade shot out and nicked his other wrist. "OK, take your fingers away."

K sawed at the ropes round his wrists, aware that blood was flowing down his hand. At last free, he turned to release his companions, waiting anxiously beside him.

"They may come back. Keep quiet while I go and see," he said, and after releasing them, he fumbled his way in the darkness to the steps. Climbing up, he carefully opened the door into the stable and looked out towards the house. No-one in sight. Returning to the cellar steps he called quietly and they came to join him.

He went alone to the house, and beckoned them. They ran across and followed him in through the back door. It seemed to be deserted. Tanya, immediately behind him as they went into the kitchen, only now noticed the blood dripping out of his right sleeve. He was trying to wrap a handkerchief round the cut. She exclaimed and took him to the window to examine it. It was still bleeding – the blade was razor sharp and the cut quite deep. She sent Sergei for the first aid box and, ignoring K's protest, set about cleaning him up. With a sigh, he removed his jacket and allowed her to turn up his stained shirt sleeve, thereby revealing old marks of far worse captivity. She turned his wrist over, and lifted his other hand to look at the scars there. She turned her eyes to his questioningly and then, releasing his left hand, reached out to feel the back of his head. Touching him gently, she found the lump where he had been struck. He winced and ducked away.

"Sit down," she said. "I'll get a compress for that."

"Some aspirin would be good too," he said, resigning himself to these ministrations.

Sergei returned to find her pressing a wet cloth to the back of this unheroic superman's head and neck. He rummaged in the box, to produce some gauze and a bandage, and helped her to bind up his wrist. He too saw the scars. Superman didn't get scars. Or bruises. Huh.

"Have you got a clean shirt?" she asked.

"Of course."

"May I fetch it for you?"

"I'll manage." K left the room and went upstairs where he changed and put on his holster and gun, which, concealed on top of the cupboard, hadn't been found. Not that it appeared much search had been made.

While he was gone, brother and sister waited slightly apprehensively, though Sergei was recovering some of his natural buoyancy.

"What's going to happen? Where's papa?" he said.

"I don't know, Seryozha. Kolya will tell us."

"How did he get those scars on his arms?"

"He's covered in scars. I saw him without his shirt earlier."

"Is he a gangster?"

She laughed. "Does he look like one? No, of course he isn't."

K's reappearance with holster and gun was hardly a convincing rebuttal, though Sergei was quite impressed. "You can tell he's been in this sort of trouble before," he whispered.

"Is there anything to eat?" asked K, somewhat spoiling his improved image.

He was hardly reassuring, either, when they asked about their father.

"I really don't know," he said. "I have been in contact with New York to tell them, and other agents have been despatched to look for him. I have been ordered to get you away to Italy – and then to the USA."

Sergei looked excited (Superman country!), but curbed his enthusiasm at the look on his sister's face.

"When?" she asked.

"Tonight. Can you get your things together? We'll leave after dark." He looked at the boy, "It'll be a long night. You probably ought to sleep for a while."

Sergei ignored the last remark, but rushed out and they heard him dashing upstairs to find *all* the stuff a boy would *need* for such an adventure.

Tanya went to sit on the sofa, and gestured to him to join her.

"Kolya, may I ask you something?"

"What is it?"

“What would you do if I said I didn't want to go with you?”

“I would tell you that because these people who came today have seen you, know who you are – and where you are – your life is in danger. You will be safer coming with me.”

“You are a dangerous man. How can I be safe?”

He smiled slightly, “I'm not dangerous to you.”

“You may be dangerous *for* me. You draw danger to you.”

“That may be true, but you are in more danger staying here alone.”

“So, I will be making a choice?”

“Yes. I can't force you.” After a moment, he said, “It's going to be a long night, you ought to rest too.”

“I will if you will.”

She sat straight, looking ahead of her, thinking. K leaned back, his headache now abated, and, apparently released from her interrogation, let his eyes close. When she looked round again to speak, he was asleep. Free to observe him without embarrassing either herself or him, she watched him. The palpable tension he exuded had gone; he was relaxed; the broad brow no longer frowned, though there were dark shadows under his eyes. She could see fine blue veins in his eyelids, long lashes lying on his cheek. His light brown hair, fine and silky to the touch, was bleached to gold on top by the sun; the smooth skin was tanned. There was a fine white line on his neck that extended under his collar – she remembered the other scars on his body, and looked again at his hands with their bruised knuckles and rough skin. She thought of the new bruise on his head; and now that he was so relaxed she saw that his tension, the tautness of his body, was that of someone always expecting a blow – and not just a physical one. She looked at his mouth, softened out of its tight-lipped state, as it had been when he was reading the book she had given him and wondered that a man of such sensitivity had fallen into this job. She wondered about his life outside his work.

She was looking away when he opened his eyes. He turned his head. She was still there with him on the sofa, but not rested, he could see that. The afternoon was well advanced, dusk would fall soon. It was time to get ready.

“Tanya?” he said gently.

“I'm ready,” she said. “I'll come with you.” She went to call Sergei, who had peeped in earlier and, seeing superman asleep, had returned to his room disgusted.

They secured the house and went out to the car. The evening air smelled fragrant. It was very quiet. There was a nightjar's shirring call from nearby; an owl flew silently overhead; bats darted among the trees. The sound of the car's engine starting was an ugly intrusion.

He turned to her. “Sure?” He said.

“I'm sure. Thank you.” She smiled and received a rueful sidelong smile in return. Sergei, forgotten in the background, wondered what had been going on. When he had peeped into the kitchen earlier, he had also observed his sister watching the sleeping man with an

intensity in her expression that had troubled him.

K had at last been in communication with Janus before leaving. It had been entirely unsatisfactory. “Where are you?” he had asked.

“Nearly there. I’ll meet you at the half-way crossroads. There isn’t time to come to the house.”

“Is there any news of Pyotr? Do we know who took him?”

“No idea. I daresay we’ll find him sometime.”

Irritated at this cavalier attitude, K had snapped, “The whole point of this exercise was to get him out. We need to know where he is. I haven’t even had a response from New York.”

“Your pessimism is legendary, K. Calm down.”

K had closed the communicator and stalked back to the car, where Tanya and the boy were waiting.

“What’s wrong?” She asked.

“Nothing,” he said curtly. “Nothing I can do anything about.”

They drove in silence for several miles. It was a fine night, and they could hear the breeze in the trees. Sergei, sitting in the back, fell asleep.

“Kolya?”

“Hmm?”

“How did you get into this – this kind of work?”

“What do you mean?”

“The kind of work that takes you into danger and violence – you seem to be used to it. It’s strange and frightening.”

He hesitated for a moment, then he said, “Intelligence work. One thing led to another, and here I am. But you’re right to be frightened – it would be more strange for you not to be.”

“And do you *like* your work?”

“Like it? Not quite the word, but I’m trained, and I’m good at it.”

“Why do you do it? Just because you’re good at it?”

“The work is – as you might say – on the side of the angels, that’s why. I fight the bad guys.”

“How do you know they are the bad guys?”

He glanced at her and frowned. “Usually, it’s obvious. But mostly I rely on the

intelligence I'm given by my superiors."

"And you just obey?"

"I trust them so I have to obey."

"But if they should be wrong, how would you know?"

He was silent. Her question was too painful to answer.

She pressed him. "Obeying – even at the cost to yourself? I saw your scars. You've been badly hurt."

"Sometimes it's been necessary. We are expendable."

She was profoundly shocked at this terrible mantra. "That's dreadful. No-one should ... Your family, your friends – what do they think?"

"It's not dreadful. Many people are asked to put their lives on the line for something they believe in. Other people don't need to know, so they don't think."

She looked at him gravely, and hesitated. "Are you married?"

"No."

There was silence between them for a while. Then she spoke again.

"What are we to do when we get to Italy?"

"If you agree, I'll take you both with me to New York."

"Seryozha will have to go to school. What will I do there?"

"What do you want to do?"

"Maybe go to college. Then I can earn my living. But I haven't any money."

"My organisation can help you if your father can't."

"What has happened to him?"

"We are looking. Try not to worry."

"If you don't find him, it'll be hard. It will be lonely, too."

She watched his profile outlined in the moonlight. It was a strange situation; how should one trust a man with the face of an angel but the hands of a killer? He said nothing. She paused, took a breath and continued, "You understand that. You're lonely. Unhappy too."

He was startled. "What?"

"I can feel it. What do you want to do with *your* life?"

"This is my life," he said.

"Then it's the wrong life ..."

She stopped suddenly. It was absurd; he must be nearly twice her age; he must know perfectly well what he wanted from life. He didn't reply, but she saw him swallow convulsively.

He was aware that she had penetrated to too many feelings that had been growing in him,

that he had been unwilling to allow to surface. The night went dark as the moon went behind a cloud.

“Kolya? Please stop the car for a minute.”

“Now what?” He glanced at her again, and then at the clock. “All right. Just for a minute. Why?”

The car stopped under trees, where it was very dark.

“I want to help you, that's all. You're helping me... and I feel such sadness from you. Did something happen to make you so unhappy?”

“That's enough, Tanya. There isn't time for this,” he said, almost angrily. “Anyway, you're too young to understand.”

“Not too young – and not too young to care either,” she said. “I'm sorry. Forgive me. It's none of my business.”

“You're very kind, but please stop thinking about me.”

He turned to look at her, his hair a gleaming aureole in the fitful moonlight. “It really is none of your business, Tanya. Please – I'm here to do a job. Just think of me as part of the upholstery.”

She laid her hand over his and held it for a moment, “That's impossible, Kolya,” she began. “Don't,” he said, taking his hand away, “don't,” and started the car again. Sergei, awakened when the car stopped, had heard this exchange. He watched them both, disturbed by emotional undercurrents he didn't understand. His views on Superman were undergoing a change – he was beginning to think the comic character had things too easy. Everything in the comics looked too simple; you knew who the good guys were, and they didn't suffer from doubts. In real life, it wasn't like that.

Tanya said no more, and they remained silent until they reached the crossroads where they were to meet Janus. K got out, and stood looking round and listening. They were within only ten minutes of the agreed time, and at last he heard the hum of an approaching vehicle and saw its lights coming from another arm of the crossroads.

The car pulled up and a man got out. “Are you J – as in Janus?” said K in English.

“The same,” the other replied, showing him his ID. “You must be K – as in ...”, and K said quickly, “Kiev, Killer, Kiss – what does it matter?”

“Where are the kids?”

“In the car, here.”

“I'm taking over from here. Get the kids out of the car.”

Tanya spoke from behind K, also in English. “We are here. Why do you take us? We go with Kolya.” K swung round and caught her hand. Sergei leaned forward in the back seat anxiously.

“They're going with both of us,” said K.

“No, she and the boy, are coming with me and their father.”

“Pyotr? Where is he?”

“Here, in the car with me.”

Tanya cried out, and K, looking at her rather than at Janus, was unprepared when Janus hit him with the butt of his gun. He collapsed, releasing Tanya's hand. She flung herself down beside him. “Kolya, Kolya!” she cried, “Kolyusha, wake up!” and she cradled him in her arms as he blinked and tried to get up. “Tanya. I'm all right,” he whispered. “Let me up.”

She clung to him as he sat up holding his head.

Janus, exasperated, pulled her to her feet and tried to drag her away. She broke his grip suddenly and ran away into the darkness. Janus pointed his gun and fired once. There was the thump of a fall and silence.

Still dazed, K became aware of Sergei screaming hysterically, and heard a man leaping out of the other car, shouting “Tanya!” and running in the direction of Tanya's flight.

He staggered to his feet, trying to follow, but was brought up short by a wail. “You've killed her! She's dead!” Unbelieving, K made for the cry, and stopped when he saw a dark shape coming out of the gloom.

Pyotr emerged into the light carrying his daughter's body. Covering his face with his hands, K whispered, “No, no, ... Ah, Bozhe... Nyet.” Sergei was on the ground at his feet, his arms round his head, sobbing. K sank to his knees and slipped his arm round the boy. Sergei flung both arms round him and buried his face in K's shirt.

And suddenly the silence was broken by the sound and lights of fast-moving vehicles. It was the cavalry arriving too late. Janus leapt into his car and drove off at speed closely pursued by two of the vehicles, while another stopped to pick up the pieces of their failure. They found Pyotr kneeling by his daughter's body, wringing his hands and weeping; the boy, beside himself with shock and terror, clutching K, who was kneeling on the other side of the body, silently holding her hand. They stood looking on, embarrassed and appalled.

The had been despatched just too late, he learned later, to give plenty of time for Janus to reveal his treachery, on the assumption that K would be able to hold things up. K had not been told that his role had been to draw Janus into a trap – did they think he would have given it away? The betrayal of everything he thought he had worked for was beyond forgiveness.

The failure of the trap was not his fault; the girl's death was not his fault. He knew it, but he wasn't innocent. Tanya's words rang painfully in his head, “You may be dangerous *for* me.” He had unwittingly betrayed her to her death. Her hand was still warm in his; he could still feel her arms round him, this girl who had recognised his innermost trouble, and who, to his shame, had been half in love with him. He rose, gently detaching himself from Sergei's grip, and walked away to the edge of the light.

The two other vehicles returned, the men avoiding his eyes when they confessed to having lost their quarry. He said nothing. His grief was unbearable. He stood like a stone, dry-eyed and speechless.

Pyotr finally agreed to be taken to temporary safety, with his son, by two of the men. His own betrayal of his daughter, and of the agent who to whom he had given hospitality, made it hard for him to resist.

Persuading Sergei took much longer. He begged to be allowed to stay with K, who took him aside and talked to him gently and with understanding for some time before he agreed to go with his father. He reached up for K to kiss him goodbye like a brother. And at last, reluctantly leaving his daughter's body in K's charge, Pyotr allowed himself to be driven away.

K helped to lift Tanya's body into one of the larger vehicles and followed as it carried her back to her home, where in the morning they would have to inform the authorities and make preparations for a quiet funeral and burial in the village cemetery.

That process took some time and was among the most painful assignments he had ever had to complete. Pyotr and Sergei were able to return for the ceremony, which made it no easier.

He wrote and sent a report to his Chief that was utterly damning and reflected his anger and sense of betrayal.

Afterwards, he drove back to Trieste and then to Venice, where he intended to stay for a while. He rejected the instruction from the Old Man to return within the week, saying he needed more time, and switched off the communicator. After a few days in too-idyllic surroundings he moved on, travelling slowly through northern Italy and into France.

Notes

Unexplained events in Yugoslavia referred to in the "Fifteen years later affair"

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something evil this way comes" Macbeth, Act 4, sc.1

[Series title "For nought I did in hate, but all in honour." Othello: Act 5 sc. 2]