

One lie put the
nation at risk.

Another might
save it.

Stella RIMINGTON



FORMER HEAD
OF MI5

THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN

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Stella
RIMINGTON

THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN

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PROLOGUE

A cold wind was blowing spray in Harry Bristow's face as he waited in the gloom on the quayside. He wiped it away with his gloved hand, then clapped both hands together and stamped his feet in a futile effort to keep warm. He could hear the water slapping against the hull of the *Bogdana*, the Bulgarian freighter that was the reason he was there.

The ship had tied up several hours ago and, as soon as the gangplank was down, Harry had gone on board with the port customs officer, whose job it was to check the manifest and the cargo. Harry's interest, as the port's Special Branch officer, lay in the crew – and in particular those who wished to go ashore. In these Cold War days a sharp eye was kept on Soviet and East European sailors. They were allowed to land but not to stay and Harry's job was to make sure that those who got off the ship got back on again before it sailed.

It was all quite routine and friendly. They had gathered in the captain's cabin – the captain, an old sea dog who spoke a heavily accented English, and the First Officer, a much younger and altogether smoother character who was fluent. All four men had met before on the *Bogdana's* previous visits and all knew the routine. First the toasts, drunk from small glasses – a sweet, fiery liqueur accompanied by juicy orange segments. Then the conversation: weather, family, football (all of them favoured Liverpool to win the Cup) – never

politics. Then the captain produced the manifest, which he and the customs officer went through while the First Officer gave Harry the crew list, with ticks against the names of those who wanted to go ashore. As usual the First Officer's own name was ticked – he always went ashore, though Harry couldn't think why anyone would want to spend a cold wet evening in Heysham. Igor something unpronounceable was his name.

This must be their fourth meeting, thought Harry. The first time was on Harry's first day on duty at the harbour, shortly after he had been transferred to Special Branch from uniform. The next time he came Igor had remembered that Harry had a son and he had given Harry a Bulgarian flag for the boy. Young Charlie had been thrilled with it – no one else in his class had anything from behind the Iron Curtain. The third time they'd encountered each other Igor had given Harry a little box with a pair of pretty earrings inside for his wife. Harry knew he shouldn't have accepted it, but by the time he had opened the box Igor had gone ashore; when he came back it would have seemed rude to return them, especially as they were nothing valuable, just tiny pieces of red glass in some sort of metal setting. His wife did tell him later that a friend of hers had said that they were real rubies in gold, but he didn't believe it.

Now, waiting on the quayside, Harry peeled back his glove to look at his watch. It was nearly six o'clock. They had finished unloading the cargo more than an hour ago and they must be about ready to come ashore. They had to be back by midnight to sail on the two a.m. tide. As he strolled over to the gangplank the first crew members appeared, wearing identical pea jackets and boots. He checked their passports

one by one, putting a cross against their names on the list. None of them spoke much English.

They moved off as a group, heading for town. They had all disappeared from sight when Igor came down. He had spruced himself up – under his raincoat he wore a blue blazer, and a white shirt open at the neck. He'd changed from boots to polished black leather slip-on shoes. He was handsome, as tall as Harry, with a head of thick blond hair and blue eyes. High cheekbones were the only Slavic hint in his face; otherwise he looked more like a local insurance salesman than the First Officer on a Bulgarian freighter.

'Evening, Igor,' Harry said. The foreigner grinned broadly and handed over what seemed to be a sheaf of newspapers with his passport lying on top. Harry looked at him questioningly. 'Thought you might be interested,' said Igor as Harry handed back his passport. 'By the way, I might not be back tonight. But don't worry – the skipper's OK with it. He'll pick me up at the next port.' And Igor winked as he sauntered off, leaving Harry speechless, clutching the newspapers.

Looking at his list, Harry saw that no one else was expected. He stood there for a minute, wondering what to do. Should he report Igor straightaway? But what if he did come back tonight? He'd only said he *might* not. If he did come back with the others after all, then Harry would look stupid and would have caused a big stink for nothing. Perhaps Igor was joking – pulling Harry's leg. Well, he thought, I'll know for sure when they come back at midnight. If he's not with them, I'll do something then, and tucking the newspapers into the side pocket of his waterproof, he retreated to the all-night café on the dockside from where he could keep an eye on the *Bogdana* while staying dry and warm.

Ordering coffee and toast at the counter, Harry looked around to see if there was anyone he knew, someone he could while away the time with until the Bulgarians came back to the ship. There wasn't; the place was almost empty: just a couple of harbour workers in the corner, talking about the football, and a table of seamen – Portuguese, he guessed, though they could have been anything as he couldn't understand a word of what they were saying.

The exchange with Igor had left him feeling uneasy. He pulled the folded newspapers out of his pocket to see what they were and why Igor had given them to him. It was then he realised that what he had was not a sheaf of newspapers at all; it was one thick newspaper folded round a stiff white envelope. A cold wave of shock washed over him as he hastily covered the envelope up, looking round quickly to see if anyone was watching. But no one at the other tables was taking the slightest bit of notice. Easing the envelope out from the folds of the newspaper, he opened it and withdrew the contents.

His hand held a wad of banknotes – twenties and fifties. He was breathing heavily now, gasping almost. He had never seen a fifty-pound note before and for a moment he wondered if they were real. He riffled quickly through the notes, mentally calculating as he went. There were at least sixty or seventy of them, though he wasn't going to count them out on the table like a cashier in a bank. He returned the notes to the envelope, before shoving it back into the pocket of his coat. There must be at least three grand in that envelope. Jesus. What was he to do? He felt his pulse racing and, quite improbably, he had to wipe a drop of sweat from one cheek, even though it was anything but hot in this half-empty café.

He knew he should report it straightaway – if you wanted a classic example of a bribe, this was a humdinger. And for a moment he resolved to do just that after his shift ended. But then he remembered the earlier gifts – his son's Bulgarian flag was innocuous enough, but what about the little red stones? Were they really rubies? Probably, he thought with a sickening lurch in his stomach, understanding suddenly that he had been set up. If he turned Igor in, he knew what Igor could say about him.

His toast was cold by now, as well as his coffee, and he felt too agitated to stay sitting there. He stood up, and for a crazed half second was tempted to leave one of the fifty-pound notes as a tip – or indeed all the contents of the envelope. But that would be madness. He left fifty pence instead and strode out of the café.

He walked round the harbour, past the big ferry scheduled to leave at the crack of dawn for the Isle of Man, busy now with men loading cargo and refuelling the enormous under-deck fuel tanks. He turned and came back again, still pondering his dilemma.

He knew the right thing to do – there wasn't any question in his mind. Hand over the envelope, explain he'd thought the rubies had seemed mere bits of glass, and throw himself on the mercy of his superiors. Mercy? In the bleak overhead lights of the harbour it didn't seem likely. And what about Igor? It was clear now that he wasn't coming back to the ship. But where had he gone and what was he doing? It must be important to him if it was worth that much money. Surely it wasn't just a girlfriend. He should certainly report it. It might be a matter of national security and it was his job to protect that. But could he report Igor without the presents coming out? No. It would all come out.

He found himself once more at the bottom of the *Bogdana's* gangway, ready to count its crew back when they returned from their jaunt into town. He was still thinking about this new predicament. His wife, Gina, was pregnant and had left her job in the supermarket. They had planned ahead and could just about get by without her wages, but it would be a close-run thing. Three grand would make the difference between scraping by and living decently. But how would he explain the sudden change in fortune to her? He didn't know. Perhaps he should say he'd had an unexpected rise in pay – a promotion – even though he'd already told her it would be at least another two years before his rank was reviewed.

Yes, a surprise promotion – that's what he would say. But why would he have got a lump sum? Back pay? Seemed unlikely, but it would have to do. Gina was so proud of his move to Special Branch, but she was straight as a die; he could never tell her the truth of how he'd got this windfall. Even if he spent it bit by bit, Gina would notice – she was like a hawk when it came to watching their money. And he could never tell anyone else. Only he would know, he decided. Except for Igor.

He wouldn't tell anyone about Igor's unauthorised stay, either. Pray God he made his way back to the ship when it docked in the next port – not that Harry would ever know one way or the other. That would be his secret too. As he saw the group of Bulgarians come out of the shadow along the harbour, heading towards him and the gangway, Harry felt utterly alone. Well, alone except for one companion: his conscience.

The man headed straight for the minicab office just outside the port gates. There was a driver inside waiting for custom

and he asked to be taken to the centre of the town. The journey took only a few minutes. The driver was keen for a chat and was curious why his passenger was on his own and why he hadn't walked the short distance. But the passenger didn't seem to speak English and the driver got only a smile in response to his questions. The passenger got out in the main street and the minicab drove off.

Not long after, in a dark row of terraced houses, the same man knocked on a door. No light came on in the hall but after a short delay the door opened. A stocky figure stood in the doorway holding out a bulky envelope, which jingled slightly as the man took it. Without a word, he turned and walked away, and the door closed behind him.

A hundred yards along the street, he stopped by a parked Vauxhall Cavalier – newish but dirty enough to blend in with the other cars. He opened the envelope, extracted a key, and unlocked the car door. Within seconds he was on his way, and in ten minutes he reached the M6, heading south for Liverpool. The man Harry Bristow thought of as Igor was certain he wasn't being followed.

THE SUN WAS SHINING on the windows of Robinson's Kitchens in the Royal Albert Dock area of Liverpool, bouncing off the taps and sinks and shiny surfaces of the displays inside the shop. In a corner of the showroom Peter Robinson, as the owner of the business now called himself, was engaged in earnest conversation about tiles with a well-dressed young woman. He was arranging and rearranging samples of different colours for her, while she stood back, pondering the effect. At the back of the shop in a small office invisible from the street, a journalist from the *Liverpool Echo* was waiting to interview Peter Robinson for a lifestyle piece in the weekend edition of the paper. Robinson was standing for a seat on the city council and, as he was young, successful, good-looking and unmarried, there was a great deal of interest in him.

At last the customer was satisfied and, with a handshake and a dazzling smile, Robinson left her with an assistant to be shown out while he went back to the office, where the young journalist had set up her tape recorder in the centre of the table.

'I'm so sorry to keep you waiting,' said Robinson. 'That customer finds it very difficult to make up her mind. But I want her to be happy with the result, so I never try to hurry her.'

‘Oh yes,’ replied the journalist, already bowled over by the Robinson charm. ‘You’re known to go the extra mile to make your customers happy.’

‘Let’s get some coffee before we start,’ said Robinson, ushering her out into the showroom where coffee was always to be found, filling the shop with its alluring smell.

‘Now, tell me how I can help you?’ he said when they were sitting down in the office.

‘I’d like to start by asking you about your background,’ she began. ‘I know you’re not from this part of the country. So tell me a bit about your early life; where were you born?’

An image of a flat in a grey block just outside Moscow flashed in Pyotr Romanov’s mind. It was a block reserved for senior diplomats and KGB officers, so the flats were comparatively spacious and well maintained. He had lived there until he was five when his father was working in the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Then they had moved to London to the Soviet ambassador’s residence in Kensington. Pyotr Romanov pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind and replaced them with the cover story carefully worked out in Kazikov’s office so many years ago, when the Cold War was still raging and the KGB was still firmly in place.

Peter Robinson now replied, ‘I’m a bit of a nomad, to be honest, which makes finding myself a home here even more important than might usually be the case. My father was in the oil business and my parents moved around a lot, so it wouldn’t be accurate to name any one place as where I grew up. We did live in Canada for five years and that’s probably the longest we were anywhere.’

‘Your parents are British, though?’

‘Actually, both my parents have passed away.’

‘Oh. I’m so sorry.’

‘It was quite a long time ago. But yes, they were British – and like most of us they were mongrels. I’d be hard-pressed to cite all the different blood that runs through my veins, but I know my father was half-Scots, part Welsh. My mother had some French blood she was very proud of, but otherwise was English – as far as I know. To be honest, neither was very family-oriented, and because we moved around so much I never got to know my relations – not even my grandparents, which is rather sad.’

‘I suppose you must have gone to school abroad. What about university?’

‘No. Like a lot of entrepreneurs, I didn’t go to university – unless we’re counting the University of Life! It’s not something I’m proud of – I’d love to think that one day I could do a degree.’

‘Between your life as a businessman and your new political career, it’s hard to see how you’d ever have the time.’

‘You’re right, but I suppose everyone has to have a dream – even if it’s unrealistic.’ He gave a rueful smile.

‘Why have you chosen Liverpool to build your business in?’

‘I found myself in Liverpool by chance, really, and I loved it. It seems to have such possibilities. You see, when I was eighteen I decided to leave home – my parents were in Canada at the time – and I came to England. But I did it in a very roundabout way. I didn’t have much money, so you might say I worked my way here. I worked on freighters, stopped off in the States for a bit, then I went on to South America and eventually wound up here in Liverpool – and this is where I decided to stay. I had had enough of travelling by that time.’

‘And the kitchens business? Why choose that? It seems a long step from your background. I don’t suppose your parents had luxury kitchens.’

Robinson relaxed a little – they were getting on to safer ground. So far his replies had been a tissue of lies and make-believe. The next bit would be largely true. Kazikov had left it to him to establish himself in British society however he could. The only help he could offer from his office in Moscow was an ample supply of cash.

‘No. They certainly didn’t. That was another bit of luck. I got a job as general dogsbody in a small ironmongery business. Not much more than a corner shop, really – long gone now. I gradually realised the growing interest in kitchens as people began to get more prosperous and wanted to improve their lifestyle. Kitchens are now becoming so much more than a place to cook. Then I moved to Manchester for a couple of years as an apprentice in a designer firm and came back here to open my first shop. I was lucky to benefit from a substantial legacy when my parents died. I had no idea they had saved any money.’ As he said this, an image of Kazikov flashed into his mind, sitting behind his desk high up in the Lubyanka Building, issuing instructions to young Pyotr Romanov about the role he was to play. For the business purposes of Peter Robinson, now well established in the UK, Kazikov had effectively acted as a parent, and fortunately one with deep pockets.

‘And now, I think I am right in saying, you have three shops in Liverpool and another planned for the Wirral. Will you find the time for a political career too?’

Politics of course was the point of it all. He had not come here just to run a successful kitchen business. Within three months of his arrival in Liverpool he had joined not just one

but both of the major parties, though this rapidly became only one after he saw which way the tide was flowing – and before anyone noticed this cynical duplication of membership. He had given money, attended meetings, spoken his calm and reasonable piece each time there was a debate. Without any obvious sign of exertion, he found himself first nominated and then elected to a seat on the local council. His carefully judged, moderate positions were suddenly welcome among an otherwise divided vote, and he was now the favourite for election to the city council.

To the journalist's question he replied, 'You're right – I don't have the time. But I'd like to think Liverpool has room for people like me who come here and fall in love with this great city.' He smiled and looked at his watch. 'I like to think of Liverpool as a foster parent,' he said. 'But now, if you will excuse me, I have a meeting to attend.'

'Of course. Thank you so much for your time,' she said, now entirely captivated by the man and his story.

After she had gone he sat for a moment, thinking. There was one thing missing in the life of Peter Robinson and it wasn't the absence of a university degree. He had a mission in his life, one he confided to no one, and local politics was not its end but merely the means to it. The task he had been given in that office in the Lubyanka was to penetrate the highest circles of British political life, not only to acquire the most secret military, diplomatic and intelligence information, but to get a deep understanding from the heart of government of how things worked in Britain. Kazikov's aim was no less than to have the knowledge which would enable him to influence the course of the country – in fact to operate it like a puppet.

But circumstances had changed. The Soviet Union had collapsed. The KGB that had despatched Romanov on his mission was no more. He had heard nothing from Kazikov and could only assume he had retired or died or even been killed by whoever was in charge. He had heard nothing for more than a year from the small support team who had provided his money when he first arrived.

The last time he had tried to make contact, calling from a phone box miles away from Liverpool, the number was unobtainable. The silence wouldn't last forever, Romanov told himself, but he found the absence of any contact at all unnerving. Already the West was taking advantage of the break-up of the Soviet Union, luring the former members of the Warsaw Pact with promises and membership of NATO.

He felt angry and helpless, marooned as he was in the wrong place while his country went through a trauma. All he could do was listen to various radio stations and watch the news on television and try to interpret what was going on. His loyalties were firm. Russia was strong; hadn't the war proved that beyond doubt? The Germans had reached the outskirts of Moscow, Stalin had almost been forced to flee, yet the line had held firm, the pushback began, and Russia had emerged the victor. He was confident the same would be true now. He would continue on his own. He was sure that when things settled down again in Russia he would be contacted and the progress he would by then have made in infiltrating Britain would be of great value, and more than compensate for the uncertainty he felt now.

‘I’LL NAIL THAT BASTARD one day,’ muttered Harry Bristow to his junior colleague as they walked down the garden path of an immaculate semi in a suburb of Liverpool. The bastard referred to was standing at the door watching them leave. He was strongly suspected of being a senior commander in the Provisional IRA. The problem was that so far nothing could be pinned on him, and it made Harry furious to see him standing there complacently, probably laughing at him.

Much of Harry’s work since he moved to Deputy Head of Special Branch in Liverpool a couple of years ago was involved with Northern Ireland. Though there was nominally a peace process, members and supporters of all the paramilitary groups lived in the city, and he and his team were constantly required to follow up leads from MI5 or the police in Northern Ireland; it was usually pretty frustrating work. Organised crime and drug running were also rife, giving Harry and his team more than they could handle.

Harry’s career had prospered in the past years. He had had several promotions since his days in Heysham and on taking up his present job in Liverpool had become Detective Chief Inspector. Unfortunately for him his private life had not been so successful. It all started to go wrong after he met that bloody man Igor at Heysham docks and decided to keep his

mouth shut and pocket the three thousand pounds. He hadn't been able to think of a credible lie to explain where it had come from by the time he got home so he had shoved it in his sock drawer, right at the back, and left it there. Inevitably, he supposed now recalling it, Gina had found the stash and naturally wanted to know what it was doing there. Caught off guard and with nothing prepared to say, he had blurted out that he had won it on the football pools. Of course she didn't believe him, and when he couldn't come up with anything more plausible she became convinced that he had done something criminal or at the very least disreputable. She refused to have anything to do with the money, even when another baby was born, conceived in an attempted reconciliation. So instead of making their lives easier or providing them with some luxuries, it became a burden and a source of argument and trouble. Harry did nothing with the money; it stayed there, in the drawer in its envelope. But it was always in both their minds, coming between them. Harry knew that Gina took it out occasionally and counted it to make sure he hadn't spent any of it, which meant that Harry could never forget it or overcome his feeling of guilt.

So when the promotion to his first job in Liverpool came up he seized it. He knew Gina would not want to move; she had her job back in the supermarket and their son was settled at school and his younger sister at nursery. Even though Liverpool was no more than two hours' drive from their home in Heysham, the new busier job and erratic working hours inevitably meant he saw less of his wife and their kids; gradually he grew apart from Gina, almost without realising it.

Then one day, when he was in the office talking about the football with another young detective, the receptionist came

in and said he had an urgent phone call. His first reaction was that something had happened to Gina or one of the kids. He took the call in a conference room that was rarely used; later he would remember how someone had filled a vase with flowers that must have died weeks ago.

‘Hello,’ he said nervously.

‘Is that Mr Bristow?’ The voice was formal, a man’s. Was it a doctor from the hospital?

‘Yes, that’s me. What’s happened?’

‘Nothing yet, Mr Bristow. My name is Staverton and I’m a solicitor. I’m phoning on behalf of your wife Gina.’

‘Is she all right?’ If something terrible had happened, why was a solicitor calling, instead of a hospital or the Manchester police?

‘She’s fine, Mr Bristow. I saw her not much more than an hour ago. She asked me to ring you. You will receive notice by post, of course, but she wanted me to introduce myself and to ask for the name of your own solicitor.’

‘What? I don’t have a solicitor.’

‘I think it would be in your interests to retain one right away.’

‘Why? What is this about?’ Any relief he felt that Gina and the kids were OK was disappearing as he tried to take in what this man was saying.

‘Hasn’t Mrs Bristow talked to you? It was my clear impression that she had informed you of her plans.’

‘What plans? To do what?’

‘I’m sorry, Mr Bristow. I thought you knew already. I did not expect to have to impart the news myself. Very well. It’s my unfortunate duty to say that it is your wife’s intention to divorce you.’

‘Divorce me? Why?’

‘I’m afraid you’ll have to ask your wife that question. I’m sorry to be the one to bring bad tidings.’

And soon enough Harry discovered that he had been largely replaced in the whole family’s affections by an accountant so bland that Harry couldn’t summon the smallest bit of dislike for him. Gradually, in fact, Harry actually welcomed seeing less of Gina, since she had become for him the personification of his true constant companion – his guilt.

That had been several years before, and now Harry could not complain about his circumstances. He was well regarded at work and, as Liverpool Special Branch was almost notoriously convivial, he had plenty of opportunity for socialising and could find female company when he wanted to. Once Gina had remarried, the deduction of alimony from his monthly income stopped, which made a big difference – he had bought a small house and a second-hand BMW, and could afford the odd meal in a good restaurant.

But he wouldn’t have said he was living life to the full, and often, just as he felt things were going well, he would think of Igor, those many years ago, and the banknotes, still in his sock drawer, and the fact he had failed to turn them – or Igor – in. And at those moments, deep down, Harry felt a fraud.

‘Drop me off in Bold Street,’ he said to his colleague as they drove back into the centre of Liverpool. ‘I need to go to Boots.’

He got out of the car a few buildings away from the chemist, where he needed to collect sleeping pills his doctor had prescribed. Since the *Bogdana* he had never slept well, and with so much on at work right now he had finally gone to the doctor to do something about it.

As he was walking past a branch of a bank, a grand Victorian building with columns and pilasters and an etched-glass window that had somehow survived the 1940s blitz, a man came down its steps – he looked familiar. He wore a suit and tie, which didn't fit with Harry's vague memory of him, and polished black leather slip-on shoes, which did. Suddenly in Harry's mind the man was walking down a ship's gangway, and when the man turned to the young woman beside him and grinned, Harry remembered him. It was Igor. His nemesis. Harry turned away quickly to avoid eye contact, and waited until the couple had walked off down the street. Then he went into the bank.

There were only two cashiers on duty, and he struck lucky in his first choice, a thin balding man in his fifties. Pulling out his police warrant card, Harry showed it to the cashier whose owl-like eyes widened. 'A man just left the bank. I think I know him, but I can't remember his name.'

'Oh, that's Councillor Robinson,' the man said, eager to help. 'Peter Robinson. Owner of Robinson's Kitchens. I don't know the lady, but he's a customer of ours.'

Harry's voice was shaking with shock as he thanked the man, and his legs were trembling so much that he had to hold the handrail to get safely down the steps outside. He sat for a short time on a street bench as he absorbed what had just happened. After a few moments he pulled himself together and went to collect his prescription, but all the time his mind was churning over what he had just seen, wondering if his memory was playing tricks on him and working out what he could do to learn more about Mr Robinson.

When he had finished with his errand it occurred to Harry that he was very close to the offices of the *Liverpool*

Echo and he knew from past experience that they had a well-indexed set of back copies of the paper. Some time ago he had taken the trouble to cultivate the archivist there and he decided to go along and see what he could learn about Peter Robinson.

‘Ah,’ said the archivist, a young-looking woman who was in her first job after qualifying at the university and hadn’t yet learned discretion. ‘I think he’s lovely. So attractive and he’s going places too. I suppose you’re interested in him because he’s on the city council.’

Harry smiled but didn’t comment, waiting while she consulted her indexes and produced the archive’s back issues, extracted and filed into Manila envelopes of clippings. He found several articles about Robinson, from which he learned that his father had been in the oil industry, which accounted for several years spent as a boy in Canada. He had left home at the age of eighteen, supposedly, and worked his way slowly by sea to England, stopping off in various countries en route – very convenient if you wanted to cover your traces, thought Harry – before pitching up in England seven years later when he was still a youthful twenty-five.

He had no doubt any more that Robinson was the Igor he had encountered on the *Bogdana*. What he couldn’t fathom was why the man had gone to such lengths to disguise his identity – or invent one that would be near-impossible to expose – just to run a kitchen firm. Why was he here at all?

There could only be one reason, Harry eventually concluded. Robinson was a spy, working for Russia, he supposed. But doing what? Designing kitchens for the nouveau riche? What good would that do? True, he was on the city council, though

even that seemed a derisory objective for one with such a complicated cover story. There must be more to this than he could see, he thought, as he thanked the archivist and left.

Harry went back to his house and stayed awake all night worrying about what to do. He knew what he ought to do – what he should have done years ago – which was to report the whole story to his boss, the Head of Special Branch. But then the whole story would come out. There would be an investigation by MI5. They would want to know why he hadn't reported straightaway that Igor had not come back to the *Bogdana* before she sailed. The presents, the ruby earrings and the money would all be exposed. They would find out even if he tried to keep that bit secret. He assumed Gina still had the earrings, and out of his guilt he had kept, though never spent, the envelope full of cash. He would be disgraced, lose his job certainly, possibly go to prison. He would never be able to work in the police again.

He tossed and turned in his bed all night and by the morning he had decided. He would say nothing. What was the point of ruining his whole life to expose a local councillor as a Russian agent? He could hear the snorts of laughter already; it would seem preposterous. Why would the Russians want to know what was going on in Liverpool City Council? And anyway the Cold War was over, wasn't it?

Yet, somewhere in the back of his mind, a doubt lurked. What if it was something else? Something more serious. Sabotage of some kind? Even terrorism or murder? He knew, though he tried to dismiss the thought, that the Russians would not have gone to all this trouble for nothing. And even if the Cold War was over, Robinson was a foreign agent and it was his duty to report him.

But no, Harry would keep his knowledge to himself and keep a close eye on Mr Robinson. He told himself that if he discovered Robinson was up to no good, then he would report him. But not until then.

MANON TYLER WAS GAZING out of her office window so she didn't hear either the tap on the door or her boss come into the room. She got a shock when she turned round and saw him standing in front of her desk. 'You looked a million miles away,' he said with a smile. 'Or was it four thousand?'

Ben Fleishman was a bear of a man – a teddy bear, really, a roly-poly figure who wore unflattering sweaters that did nothing to disguise his pot belly, and glasses with lenses the size of binoculars. He was famously easy-going, though woe betide the junior who mistook his amiability for weakness, or his lack of pretension for stupidity. Fortunately, Manon had never made either mistake, and now she realised with a pang how much she was going to miss the man who managed to be both her boss and her friend.

He said now, 'I hope you're getting a break before you go over.'

'I am. I'm spending two weeks in New Hampshire on Lake Winnepesaukee. My parents have a cabin there.' How grim that sounded – to go on vacation in your late twenties with your parents. It meant there was no partner in her life, and she sighed inwardly. Maybe going to England would change things, after the hapless line of losers she'd dated in the last few years. She knew she was attractive to men, but unfortunately they were always the wrong sort of men.