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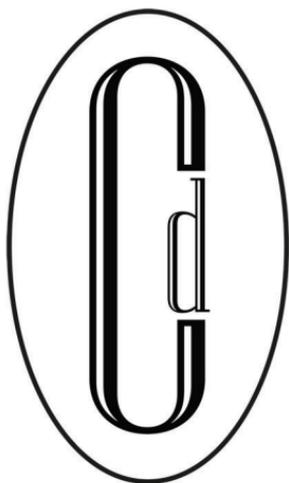
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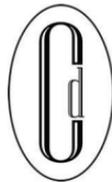


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KATYA

KATYA – THE INFORMER

DAVID BICKFORD



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For my beautiful wife Cary, brilliant co-writer and conspirator—
so much more than a diamond.

THE AUTHOR

Under Secretary of State and Legal Director to the British Intelligence Agencies, MI5 & MI6. David spent his working life diving into the cold murky seas of terrorism, espionage and organised crime. At the forefront of the battle against international terrorism he was among the first to predict its onslaught. David is recognised, both in the Agencies where he was made Companion Order of the Bath for his work, and in the business he now runs, for his ground-breaking solutions to defeat the terrorists and international organised criminals who threaten us.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Although I worked in the Intelligence and Security Agencies, the characters and plot in *Katya* are entirely a work of my and Cary's imagination. That is not to say that I would not like to write about those who work in intelligence. As their legal director, I have nothing but admiration for the officers who do this work. Working closely with them, in the tunnels of secrecy, fighting terrorists and corruption he saw their dangers and trials and their courage and imagination as they overcame them. The qualities and sacrifices that lie behind this extraordinary work.

I really hope you enjoyed this book and thank you for supporting me on my journey from the Intelligence community to the world of writing.

ONE

As soon as she burst through the open gates of the Russian military airfield, Katya knew she was in trouble. The only aircraft standing on the concrete apron was an ancient Russian Polikarpov, smoke billowing from exhausts that had seen service on the front in World War Two. She turned to look at her pursuers—three balaclava'd Federal Security men, followed by two of the gate guards. They were not more than two hundred meters behind her, weapons readied. If they caught her she'd be interrogated and the Federal Security Service methods were designed to be especially brutal for women. After that. . . after that. . .

She raced to the aircraft, two men in white overalls emerged from behind the stubby engine cowl, shouting, waving their arms. Without stopping she barged into them, leapt onto the cantilevered wing, slid into the cockpit. Feverishly she looked over the controls. Yoke, throttle, rudder pedals. She looked forward, over the engine cowling, through the spinning propeller. Was horrified she couldn't see the ground in front of her. One of the men in overalls started to climb onto the wing. Frantically, she engaged the throttle, the propeller thrusting the aircraft forward. He flailed his arms and slid away. Leaning out of the cockpit she could just see in front of her. The FSB men had nearly caught up and were rushing to cut her off. Working the throttle, yoke and rudder she accelerated down a concrete taxiway.

The old fighter-plane was fast but clumsy. What was the take-off speed? Suddenly she saw the taxiway ended at a low maintenance

shed. She pulled back the yoke slightly as a test. The plane yawed, stuck wilfully to the ground. The shed seemed to grow larger. Gritting her teeth against rising fear, she pulled the yoke again. Lurching to the right the aircraft lumbered off the taxiway. She fought the urge to grip the yoke tight, gently used the controls to start a slow turn over the airfield to follow the river Neva and out to sea. Below her she saw the faces of the FSB goons—shouting. She laughed in relief. Looked ahead. She was heading straight for the Troitskiy bridge.

She had no option. The aircraft was too low to pull up over the looming steel structure. Keeping the throttle open she pushed hard on the right pedal and swung the aircraft to face a gap between the huge upright pylons. She felt the controls turn to lead, fighting stability as the plane slumped down towards the black water. With seconds before an inevitable crash she forced the stick forward. The aircraft lurched, straightened, made it through the gap and under the bridge.

The plane would survive but her future as an intelligence agent would be finished before it had even started.

TWO

It was a tense moment in the conference room of the G8 Intelligence Agency Headquarters. The issue being discussed by the Directors was vitally important. Was the new recruit, Katya Petrovna, ready to be sent on her first operation as a G8 agent—to infiltrate and break open a suspected Russian *mafija* operating near the Black Sea.

The large square room contained a state-of-the-art steel conference table and the latest desk top computers. Two large wall mounted plasma screens showed pictures of Katya Petrovna. Her violet-blue eyes and long, sweeping auburn hair seemed to radiate from the screens, intensifying an indefinable electric energy in her.

John Hammond, the Agency's Director General, looked at the pictures as if they could provide an answer to the enigma that was Katya.

He turned to Lev Leviatski, the Russian Director, who was sitting opposite him—an indestructible ex-KGB officer. 'Do you think she's ready, Lev? This is a Russian *mafija* we're talking about, she makes a rash move and she's dead.'

Lev had known Katya since she was a child growing up in Moscow. He was fiercely protective of her. 'She's dynamite,' he said simply. Then, as if to emphasise his words, he drew on one of the Abdullah 7 cigarettes he always smoked. 'She has great courage and a natural charm. But, I've found that on training operations, if driven to it, she can be highly manipulative. Extremely persuasive. Certainly dangerous.'

Walt Sable, his American counterpart sitting beside him, immediately became difficult, his Yale accent as sharp as cut glass. He leaned across the conference table towards John to enforce his point. ‘Those are certainly the makings for a G8 agent. But Katya’s not qualified to take on any operation as important as this until she’s had more training. She’s undisciplined—look at that stunt in St Petersburg when she flew that Polikarpov under the Troitskiy bridge . . .’

John Hammond’s strength was his icy self-control and to him either Katya was sufficiently trained and capable of doing the job or she wasn’t. ‘She will certainly be enthusiastic. But if you’re really saying she’s undisciplined, Walt, then my concern is that these failings might literally prove lethal for her—’

Lev cut across him, smoke from his cigarette gushing from his mouth, propelled by his disagreement. ‘Walt, that aircraft stunt was in 2001—a year ago—when she was training with the Russian Federal Security Service. Anyway, don’t you forget FSB training is tough. She came out top of her year. Of course, she’s ready.’

Walt’s shaven head crinkled into a frown, which it did most often when office banter softened the dangers of the agents’ work—his standards were high. ‘She rushes her fences,’ he said sharply. ‘She doesn’t calculate risk.’

‘Katya Petrovna can do it.’ Lev insisted. ‘She’s Russian and she’s finished her training . . . I kept in touch personally with her FSB trainer, Andrei Savin, and he classified her outstanding. No surprise there—we’re talking about a woman who survived running with the street kids in Moscow when she was a teenager.’ Lev had endless informative connections, perhaps necessary to a man who’d survived years of existence in the maze that was KGB politics. ‘I say we send her to Russia to find out what’s going on,’ he said decidedly.

‘The FSB relegated her to the Federal Immigration Service

because she's headstrong and impulsive,' Walt replied sarcastically, then added a telling point, 'Russia needs every worker and tourist they can get into the country, they aren't refusing anyone entry at the moment—her *only* job was to rubber stamp visa applications. So, what sort of responsibility did she have?'

Lev was true Russian and, with his combination of magnetism and doggedness, he wasn't letting go. He jammed his cigarette end into the ashtray in front of him. 'You're forgetting her father was a KGB Colonel who'd been disowned by them. It was she who paid the price for that.' He saw Walt open his mouth; interrupted him. 'Have you seen her handle a large sailboat in a force ten gale on the Black Sea? Well I have. Her father used to force her out alone in all weathers to toughen her up—teach her to survive. He was a two-time bastard, but he had guts and determination and, I tell you, she's inherited them. She's strong, determined, fearless. If anyone has the guts to take on a Russian *mafia* and find out all we want to know about it, she has.'

There was a silence as both men sat back, as if to determine the effect of their salvos on each other.

John Hammond thought about the two hundred highly trained G8 agents who worked in the huge steel-framed warehouse that housed G8's Headquarters in the heart of Basingstoke, England or who worked in the field all over the world. Their job was planning and executing the destruction of vicious organised international criminals and terrorists. Fighting an underworld whose deadly trade netted trillions of dollars a year and was threatening the economic stability and, even, the existence of democracy. These were the people Katya would be sent to deal with—dangerous, lethal. Lev and Walt had highlighted the difficulties Katya would face but they'd left the problem of whether she was ready to become operational still unresolved.

He took a moment to study each of his fellow Directors. They

had all been together for two years since the G8 nations had set up the Agency in 2000 when the effects of the end of the Cold War were beginning to be felt. The running down of intelligence and law enforcement activity in the afterglow of peace had encouraged organised criminals and terrorists to the point where they were devastating and threatening their countries' existence. He relied on these two men to help him guide G8's fight against them.

Lev, at 50 with grey hair above a creased face was the eldest of the G8 Directors. Whatever the crisis, John found Lev's humour never far distant. Yet he was the most duplicitous and calculating man he'd encountered. Walt, on the other hand was 35, had majored in politics and law out of Yale. Precise and cautious he'd made his mark as a staffer in Washington then as an FBI Assistant Director. Together they made a formidable duo.

John knew he could side with either of these men and they would have accepted his decision. He knew they trusted his judgment. But the question before them at this moment was too critical for anything other than a unanimous vote. Was Katya Petrovna *really* ready to be sent on this particularly dangerous operation?

He made up his mind, broke in on the silence. 'Let's have her up here and talk to her.' He pressed a button on his console which connected him to the Tac Room and spoke into the mic, 'Is that Ami?' He paused. 'Good. Would you find Katya and ask her to come to the directors' conference room, right away. Thanks.'

THREE

Ami Orello—a watchful and careful G8 agent, a fine analyst—was slightly nervous of Katya. They were both in their mid-twenties and had joined G8 on the same day in 2002. They were good friends, played tennis together, often meeting up for a drink after a long day's work. She admired Katya's untiring vivacity and drive, but she found Katya's love of extreme danger disturbing. Everyone knew about the FSB Board of Inquiry into Katya's stunt—when she'd flown her aircraft under a bridge in St Petersburg—and now there was a rumour she'd been flashed by the Traffic Police last night doing 150 mph down the M3 motorway from London to Basingstoke.

As Ami walked through the Tac Room towards Katya's workstation, these thoughts were pushed aside while she took in the nerve centre of the organisation. It never ceased to thrill her even after six months of working here.

The Tactical Operations Room was the biggest space inside the warehouse that was G8HQ. It housed the highly trained multilingual agents, who fought transnational terrorism and organised crime. Here they planned operations to destroy major criminals, terrorists, people traffickers, narcotics cartels and moneylaunderers who dealt in murder, kidnapping, extortion, pornography, prostitution.

Most of the Tac Room floor space was filled with work stations which faced eight huge plasma screens fixed onto the front wall which was forty feet high. The rear wall consisted of three balconies where yet more stations faced the screens. To one side

of the massive room was a bank of three Paternoster lifts, their open platforms constantly revolving to enable a stream of agents to travel between floors quickly and efficiently.

The atmosphere was charged as the agents collected, analyzed and collated intelligence reports from informants and electronic surveillance around the world—operating clandestinely amongst the most vicious, terrifying criminals. *Mafiyas, Tongs, Cartels*. Carrying out G8's sole objective—to bring their targets to justice. They attacked corrupt bankers, lawyers, journalists, judges and, even, governments who colluded with the criminals—whose trade netted trillions of dollars each year and was threatening global economic stability and, even, the existence of stable government.

The plasma screens remorselessly showed the operational results in a maze of coloured lines and patterns which constantly flashed and changed as the agents fed in vital information and intelligence from their personal computers which ultimately connected the criminals to their crimes.

Katya's work station was at the far end of a row and she was intensely studying one of the plasma screens which displayed a shifting body of intelligence tracking her target. She fed in some new information on her computer. It was immediately analysed by the G8 central control computers. She watched the result come up on the plasma screen—a red coloured line flashed across the screen to connect to a blue square with a name printed below.

Ami hurried over to her. 'Katya, you're wanted in the directors' conference room.'

Katya kept her eyes on the screen. 'Thanks, Ami.' She typed a command on her console keypad.

'Right away,' Ami blurted.

Katya frowned slightly.

'Katya, the DG said right away.'

Katya swore lightly in Russian. 'I've just cracked how Obolov

laundered the proceeds from his fraud on those pensioners. You know he had the nerve to filter that cash through eight separate banks—a classic starburst. The money ended up in a cousin's family trust in the Isle of Man.'

Tearing her eyes away from the screen, Katya jumped up. 'Thanks Ami I'll go straight away—let's have a coffee later!' she added. Her long stride took her past the rows of agents at their work stations as she headed for the paternoster that would carry her up to the third floor and the Conference Room.

Ami watched her go. She rather hoped she'd been sent to find Katya about her speeding offence and not a plan to send them both out on a joint operation. She valued her life and, however much she and the other agents admired her, this dynamic, irrepressible woman had no regard for danger.

FOUR

Katya stepped off the paternoster and walked across a dimly lit hall towards an unpainted steel door marked “Conference Room.” She stopped there, feeling uncertain.

When she had been recruited by G8 she had immediately noticed that the Agency demanded a lot more discipline of its agents than she’d experienced while training with the FSB—well, not discipline precisely but self-control, responsibility for one’s actions. In the FSB that sort of discipline, in a hangover from the days of the KGB, was ignored in favour of taking any opportunity possible to advance one’s career or line one’s pockets. So, her speeding offence would have been of little moment unless it could have been used by someone to their advantage. She was sure that that was not the case in the eyes of the G8 Directors and, if her offence had come to their ears, she could be in trouble.

The thought decided her—she must tackle the problem head on. Appear confident. She smoothed back her hair with one hand, straightened her loose-fitting white top, tucking it quickly into the waistband of her black Whistles jeans. A neat appearance was the first requirement of a bold approach.

She didn’t knock but opened the door and marched purposefully into the room. She briefly took in the long conference table and the Russian and American Directors facing her. She then focussed on the Director General sitting at the head of the table, looking down at a document lying in front of him. He looked up

to face her, his sandy coloured hair catching the light from the overhead neon lighting. She saw he was still wearing a chunky cardigan and open neck shirt, the same get-up he'd worn when he'd taken the lead in her final interview. She'd thought then that he was young, early 30s. And from the experience of her training with the FSB, she'd put him down as laid-back, someone she could manipulate. She'd quickly learned that that was a façade, hiding a dominant and powerful personality. Now, seeing him in the formality of a Directors' meeting she was struck by an aura, a magnetism about him and there seemed to be unlimited energy behind those deep grey eyes.

She gathered herself, took a breath. 'Good morning. Katya Petrovna reporting as you requested.'

Lev immediately encouraged his protégé. 'Thank you for coming so promptly, Katya. You needn't be so formal with us.'

She felt reassured. Lev had always supported her. He'd known her family ever since her turbulent childhood days.

Walt wasn't going to let Lev take the lead. He nodded curtly in her direction. 'Ms Petrovna.'

John told her to sit down next to him. He then said evenly. 'Thank you for coming, Katya. We have been discussing your future. . .'

Katya didn't hear the rest of what he was saying. His words hit her like boiling water. Oh god they *were* treating this speeding on the motorway seriously. She was being fired. Instinctively, she knew she mustn't show fear. She looked at Lev. 'I wasn't familiar with that vehicle, I had no idea what . . .'

John raised his hand to stop her. 'We're not talking about your training reports, Katya. You're here to answer a question we have.' He paused to see her response.

Katya stayed silent. Her life at her home in Moscow with a

harsh father and a dilettante mother had taught her never to ask a question if it wasn't necessary.

'The background is this,' John said. 'We've had a report from Customs at Heathrow airport this morning concerning a Russian woman on a flight from Kropse—'

'I know Kropse,' burst in Katya. 'It's a port town on the Black Sea in Russia. I used to sail there.'

'We're aware of that,' Walt said, dryly. 'Not, in my opinion, that it helps much.'

John continued as if the interruption hadn't occurred. 'The woman was carrying an Attaché case stuffed with a quarter of a million dollars.'

'All in hundreds or in various denominations?' Katya asked.

'Good question.' Lev thoughtfully lit another Abdullah. 'I told you, Walt, Katya knows the *mafija's* trademarks. And a quarter of a million dollars cash coming into London from a Russian casino looks like *mafija* to me.'

John looked sharply at him. 'What you're really telling us is that a new *mafija* could be trying to open up a base in the UK? If so, that spells imminent danger.'

Lev laid it out. 'Cross border crime—murder for hire, arms, prostitution, child trafficking, drugs, moneylaundering. You name it.'

'Spreading here, to London.'

'Spreading everywhere.'

'Then we've got to stop them—immediately.' John set the objective.

Walt put forward a suggestion which he hoped would avoid tasking Katya as operational. 'Make a search on the Web. We can find out who we're dealing with.'

'Our tech team tried that. There's nothing,' John replied. 'I spoke to them and they're as frustrated as I am. These search engines look good but they've only been going since the mid 90s

and they're not programmed for this sort of information. Not much help.'

Walt looked thoughtful. 'Satellite surveillance?'

'Tried that too. But Tech say it's still too unreliable to cover Kropse. And they're right. Look what happened to our agent in Columbia when that satellite reported back the wrong coordinates . . . They said give it a few more years and it will be invaluable but not now.'

'So, it's boots on the ground,' Walt said disapprovingly. He was wedded to tech.

John continued calmly, his grey eyes studying Katya intently, 'From what the woman told customs at the airport, the money was given to her by someone in a casino in Kropse. She was to have been met at Heathrow. She didn't know who by.'

'There are two ways to follow up this information,' Lev added. 'Either from enquiries at Heathrow or from Kropse.' He pointed his cigarette at Katya. 'Which would you choose?'

'Only if you were operational,' Walt clarified.

They watched her as she thought about it. 'There would be no helpful lead at Heathrow,' she said. 'I mean, who would we be looking for. If this woman is being truthful there's no lead. And she knows if she does tell us she's dead—the *mafija*, whichever one it is, will hunt her down.'

John nodded. 'You're right. We've placed the woman in witness protection.'

Katya looked straight at Walt's face. 'So, the answer's in Kropse.' She rushed on. 'Whatever you say, Sir, I am ready. I'm Russian, I know the area and I can handle *mafija*.'

'I must emphasize that Katya is ideal for the job of infiltrating this casino if it is run by *mafija*. She mixed with the *mafija* in their Moscow cellar nightclubs in her teens.' Lev fixed his eyes on her. 'Didn't you.'

‘Well, I knew a number of them, knew how they operated, but I wouldn’t say I mixed with them exactly.’

‘That’s an honest answer.’ John interjected. ‘Being honest with us is vital if you are to become operational.’

Katya jumped at his words. ‘You want me to become operational?’ She heard the excitement rising in her voice, ‘I can’t wait.’

‘No. This is what we’re discussing, Ms Petrovna, not what we want, or at least not what *I* want. I don’t think you’re ready,’ Walt said sharply, cutting her down to size. ‘What is your cover, if you do go?’ His mouth was turned down to emphasise his doubt that she’d even thought of this before charging in with her offer.

‘We had gambling in the beer cellars when I was in Moscow. I couldn’t bet much because I didn’t have the money but I watched. From what I saw I don’t have the experience to go for a job. Croupiers and hosts and stuff need experience.’

‘There you are then, you don’t have a cover.’ Walt waved his hand in satisfied dismissal.

‘You don’t need experience to bet.’ Everyone looked at Lev. ‘She’s the daughter of a KGB Colonel. Dead, maybe, but well known. It’s common knowledge KGB senior officers made a lot of money on the side—’ He stopped as he saw everyone look away. ‘No. I was not one of them—I came here instead.’

‘No-one thinks that, Lev,’ said Walt forcefully. ‘You’re just playing the sympathy card. You needn’t. I’ve watched Katya here, seen how she behaves . . . and,’ he crumbled, ‘yes, you’re right, she might be ready to be operational.’ Still not quite certain, he looked across at John a question in his eyes.

‘I never had any doubt, Walt, but I’ve seen her training here and you haven’t.’ John turned to Katya. ‘You will go as a punter. Your task is to find out if the casino is passing on criminal cash and if it is who is behind it and how it is being done. Nothing

more, understand? This is your first operation and the danger you'll be in will be more than in doing the job, it will be in your going too far, pushing the boundaries. Something you have a reputation for.'

Katya stayed silent, knowing that any protest could make the Director General, or DG as John Hammond was known, change his mind. And, as the question of her speeding at 150mph hadn't come up there was no point in prolonging this interview. 'Thank you,' she said, meekly. 'I will get started straight away if that is alright with you?'

He nodded and she stood up, walked towards the door.

'See Guy Leeming in Tech,' Lev called out after her. 'He's into tracking gambling cash, he'll be able to give you good advice.'