

THE END—OF SORTS
*A sense of duty is useful in work, but offensive in personal relations.
People wish to be liked, not be endured with patient resignation.*
—Bertrand Russell

The cell was not getting any bigger. Giles had been locked away for a second day. Plates of food, mostly rice and some fish, shoved through the port hole on the bottom of the door. Also, a bucket of water and a bucket for waste was exchanged during the morning. He had a single rubber mat and a single blanket to keep him warm. It didn't work well; winter was coming and in Russia and specifically this place, Vladivostok, it meant bitter cold. He sat in the corner with his legs tucked up under him, trying to retain what warmth his body produced while trying to find that happy place in the deep recesses of his own mind, like he did in training for moments just like this. The brick wall, probably laid in sometime during the Stalin era over the top of some reclaimed ancient fort from centuries passed, was cold and he felt his body lose what warmth he had through the wall as if it was a living thing as well and pulled the heat out of him. There was a single light bulb over his head, but it had burned out on the second day. He was in almost total darkness for most of the time, causing him to lose track of whether it was night or day.

The state police found him at the hotel. At least he thought it was the state police, probably the KGB's new and improved offspring, the FSB or the SVR. Giles couldn't remember what the acronyms stood for, just like KGB. Useless waste of brain storage space. One wasn't any better or worse than the other. They all wanted what he had and preferred to have him dead as well.

It was the Greek who gave him up, it must have been. It could have been the woman in Bucharest or the child who was a man, pretending to be a woman—but was definitely a man, although he wasn't sure, or maybe he really was a she. It was always hard to tell with those Europeans who use to be part of the Eastern bloc. Their gene line just didn't seem to follow normal protocols, he thought, trying to distract himself from the state of affairs he was in.

He didn't blame the Greek or the woman or the child who was a man, pretending to be a woman for doing so. He had a moment of feeling sorry for them, especially the Greek. Giles loved animals and seeing your cousin and his monkey killed in front of the Greek as a show of sincerity, would have shaken most, including spies like Giles. Their local handlers were even less fortified than the Greek. Giles continued in thought to remove him from his surrounds, at least consciously, the Greek seeing the cousin and monkey painted on the walls, well, the confession came quickly after, Giles surmised, resulting in him meeting what seemed like a large part of the Russian Secret Police or the alphabet soup of government operatives. His captors were standing outside his hotel with their new

Makarov M-442's from what he could see from returning from the meeting with the last contact, just before the agents covered his head with a hood. He didn't get a good look at the weapon stuck in his ear but the one against his forehead, yeah it was the Makarov. Luckily, after getting the files, he'd been able to uplink to SAT-56 the night before. There was nothing in the hotel room where he was staying to give him up. Just the Greek—and whatever was in his brain. In Russia, *'probable cause'* was just a rumor. Only a thought was needed to whisk him away to the cell he now called home. His government wouldn't even admit they knew him. He knew they couldn't. All he had was his passport and his cover story of being a dental tool sales rep out of Nebraska who really dabbled in the import-export business. He used the dental cover as well as the import-export buyer for the rich and famous. He was sure they were working on pinching the nubbin on that angle. Most nubbins were pinched on import/exporters now-a-days. Most people did their own importing and exporting, all on line and sometimes including free shipping if you were a prime member and most of the rich and famous were.

Nope, he was in a fix. He had been in bad spots before, but he couldn't remember one this bad, unless he counted the time in Buenos Aires when the rascal, the Nubian, almost cut his throat for the blueprints he was stealing. Nubians had no sense of humor. Nope, this might not end well.

He was shaking from the cold. He had explored his room; the walls were from an ancient fort who use to guard the Russian mainland from the invading hordes. Stalin, or someone from the era, came and put the communist look to it, modernizing it with electricity and running water, except in the cells. It was still something out of a Dickens novel as far as the cells were concerned. He hadn't seen much of the place. The guards had kept the hood on him until they had him locked in his cell. The walls, feet-thick in places, would muffle any screams. The door was solid steel and since he didn't have any cernex explosive, he wasn't going out that way. The only options he could imagine were an unlikely release or being carried out in a bag.

He was sensing a moment of hopelessness, a feeling he never had much use for. He was always confident of his outcome, his skills always carried him. But now, with this, they were of little use to him.

He heard footfalls down the steel-lined hallway, sounding like a drum coming closer. A key slid in to the steel door, the large metal door acted as a conduit for the sound to be amplified in the room. The heavy door squeaked slowly open. The light in the hallway silhouetted the figure in the door way. It was a man, from what Giles could tell, maybe a soldier. There were two other men standing in the light as well. He shaded his eyes from the glaring light in the hallway. It looked like they were smoking something heavy and tarry, probably some big Cuban cigar from the smell of it, he thought. The work on him, he feared, was about to begin.

The cell filled with the hallway light as one of the three entered the room. The man's shadow fell on Giles, who was sitting on the floor. It was hard to make out any details—just a rough outline and the haze of smoke.

The room was about to get crowded.