

[34] A Hoax?

An hour later, when Carla picked up her office phone, it was an extremely excited Leighton who was on the other end.

“You won’t believe what’s been going on back here in Washington!” he bubbled. “I want you to get Kay and Viktor, and the three of you go into my office where I can talk to you all at once on the speaker. I’ll call back in ten minutes.”

“I’ve been trying to reach you, Frank. Kay, uh—she isn’t here any more. She’s... dead.”

“What?” exclaimed Frank.

“It was an inside job, Frank, and Kay was the one who killed the guards and let the Russians in.”

“I don’t believe it! And you say she’s *dead*?”

“An FBI agent shot her just in time. She was about to kill me and Viktor. She was trained by Chernov—she was his lover. It happened in Viktor’s apartment.”

“Chernov’s *lover*?” There was an anguished silence, then the choked response. “I can’t believe it. She was just as excited about the Plan and just as dedicated as any of us. I was very fond of Kay. We were very close. I—I don’t understand. How could she deceive me so completely?”

There was a long silence. “Frank, are you there?”

“Why didn’t the Archons tell us about her?” he asked at last

“They told us it was a mystery we had to solve ourselves for our spiritual growth—remember?”

“I remember. But to think it was Kay—one of the inner circle, a higher initiate! I cared a lot for her, Carla, and I was sure she felt the same about me. We had such rapport. How could I be so stupid?”

“I wonder how much she passed on to Moscow?” asked Carla.

“We’ve got to assume she passed it all along. The Russians know everything! I don’t think that will hurt us, but it’s a good thing the Plan is going

into effect soon. I just can't believe it!"

"I'm sorry, Frank. It was a great shock to me, too. Should I get Viktor and come into your office?"

"I don't have the heart to talk about it now. We're coming back tomorrow. We'll just wait until then."

.. . .

Carla called Viktor's office on the intercom to tell him of her conversation with Leighton. His secretary answered. "He's not here," she said. "He may still be back at his apartment. An FBI agent came in here about an hour ago and said that a Mr. Jordan wanted to see him over there."

"Thanks," said Carla. She hung up the phone just as Viktor walked through the door of her office.

"So you've already had your session with the FBI," said Carla. "I wish they'd get to me. I don't feel like hanging around here any longer. It's impossible to do anything productive after what we've been through."

"They want to talk to you now," said Viktor. "Jordan asked me to come and get you. Did you ever reach Frank?"

"I did. He took it very hard. He was involved with Kay, and I guess she let him think she cared for him."

"She was incredible." Viktor shook his head in disbelief.

"Viktor, I can't tell you how sorry I am. She had me so confused. I could have shot you!"

"Please. I don't even want to think about it!"

"It's boggling!" sighed Carla. "This is a world of spies and international intrigue I've read about but was never sure how much was fact or fiction. And to suddenly find myself part of it!"

"The FSB makes its own rules," said Viktor bitterly. "Evil becomes good and might is right" He hesitated for a moment, and then plunged on as though there was something he'd been holding back and had to express. "And I have a terrible feeling that whatever the Archons represent operates exactly the same way. I don't like it, Carla."

She put a finger to her lips and shook her head. "We've both had our doubts from time to time," said Carla quickly, "but that's only natural with something of this magnitude—and especially something that's so revolutionary. Nothing like it has ever happened in the history of the world. And I understand your resentment that we have to take orders from the Archons, but after all, it's *their* Plan. The whole world is going to be grateful to them—and us—someday.

That's what keeps me going." She stood wearily. "Well, you said the FBI wanted to talk to me—I suppose to get my version of this nightmare. So why don't you lead me to them."

When they were outside, Carla scolded Viktor, "Have you forgotten? Our offices have ears! You can't talk like that in there!"

"I don't know whether I care anymore," said Viktor angrily. "I'm beginning to feel like I'm back in the Soviet Union of the past—or maybe that I've landed in something far worse. I'm confined to this prison, can't even go outside, and the Archons dictate our every move—and soon our thoughts!"

"But if the Archons are who they claim to be," insisted Carla, "well, I mean, they're so far beyond us, it only makes sense that we should take orders from them."

They had stopped to talk and were standing now between the main structure and the apartment building. Viktor leaned close to Carla and whispered, "Suppose there are no Archons. Suppose the whole Archon thing is a hoax."

"You can't believe that, Viktor!"

"I've been tormented day and night trying to fit the pieces together, and here's what I've come up with. There's no doubt that Antonio has inconceivable powers—beyond imagination, really. In all my years of psychic research, I never even dreamed of anything close to what he can do."

Carla could see Jordan standing on the landing in front of Viktor's apartment watching them. She waved at him and he waved back. "Jordan's waiting for us," she said. "We could discuss this later."

He held her by the arm and continued to talk rapidly. She had never seen him so agitated. "I've got to share this with you—now. Listen! Antonio has all the power he needs to take over the world. Nobody could stop him. But billions of people would resent what he'd done and there would be no end of rebellion. So he pretends the Archons are directing him. Instead of doing it himself and arousing resentment he gets installed as world ruler by this group of 'highly evolved extraterrestrial intelligences who have been guiding our evolution.' It's an ingenious idea. Of course, Del Sasso, like everyone else, must follow *their* orders—and that makes him not the villain but the hero. The idea of 'highly evolved intelligences from another dimension' has enough romance and science-fiction appeal so that everyone would want to go along with it or be afraid not to—at least until he's so fully established that rebellion just wouldn't be possible." Viktor ran out of breath.

Carla's head was spinning. "Are you serious? I never would have dreamed

it, but then—” She could hear the voice of George on the telephone again, and suddenly pieces began to fall into place. “Do you think there might be an elite group within the CIA conspiring with Del Sasso on this?” she asked.

“That’s possible. I haven’t tried to think of such details. I’ve been haunted by this nightmare ever since Inger’s death. I think Del Sasso drove her to suicide!”

“I never told you that he almost killed me.”

“When? How?”

“Well, maybe it wasn’t really him, but there had to be a connection. A figure that looked exactly like him, hooded robe and all, came right into my bedroom when I was asleep and tried to strangle me!”

“That sounds like his psychic double! Why did you come back here after that? And why didn’t you tell me sooner?” Viktor was clearly upset.

“I didn’t want to abandon you, but I didn’t know what to say. The whole thing has been very confusing. I’ve wanted to talk about it, but there never seems to be the right time.”

“Well—how did you escape from Del Sasso?” asked Viktor earnestly.

“I can’t talk about it.”

“Carla, if only you and me—just like in Paris. Only it isn’t Chernov who’s after us now. We’re up against something much bigger. I don’t even know who our enemies might be anymore. It could be anybody! We have to stick together and share what we know.”

Carla spoke reluctantly. “Someone rescued me. He’d have to explain how he did it.”

“Was it Dr. Inman?”

She nodded. “I’d like to get his reaction to your theory.”

“So would I,” said Viktor. “He invented the Psitron, but he’s one of the few I would trust. I’d like to know what he thinks—why Del Sasso is the only one who’s been successfully trained on it. We’ve lost six.”

“Seven,” corrected Carla. “Ken was the first and the Archons almost killed him—remember?”

“It wasn’t the Archons—it was Del Sasso.”

“But he wasn’t even in the picture at that time.”

“I think he was, but no one knew it—except Frank. They’ve got to be in this together. They both work for the CIA, and I don’t see any difference now between that and the KGB or its successor, the FSB.”

“But how could Del Sasso control Ken’s mind then, if Ken has complete

power over him now?”

“He can’t stand up to Del Sasso’s power!” responded Viktor.

“I’m certain that he can, and that has me confused.”

“You mean at the lab? Del Sasso explained that.”

“I’ve seen other evidence since then that I really need to share with you. But I can’t do it without Ken present to give his own explanation.”

Carla thought for a moment There’s got to be some way to get you out of here to meet with Ken, and I think I know how. Come on. Don’t ask me how I know, but Jordan is someone you can trust as well.” They continued the rest of the short walk. At the bottom of the stairs, Carla stopped and called up to Jordan, “Can we ask you a question down here?” He nodded and came down the steps two at a time.

She motioned to Jordan, and the three of them withdrew from the swarms of security men and FBI agents around Viktor’s apartment. “Don, Viktor has something that I think you ought to hear. He can’t tell you inside of this complex, because Ken has to hear it too. We need his opinion. It’s really important. Is there some way you could get Viktor out of this prison long enough to discuss this with Ken—like this evening?”

Jordan thought for a moment. “Yeah,” he said. “That can be arranged. He’s a material witness and I simply need to bring him into my office for some more questioning. I’ll take him in my car. I was heading back there as soon as I’d gotten your statement anyway.”

“Terrific!” said Carla. “I’d feel more comfortable about saying certain things if you took my statement in your office as well. Is that okay?”

“That’s fine. In fact, I was going to suggest it.”

“Okay. I’ll follow you and Viktor. How long do you think you’ll want to spend with me?”

“Half an hour, maybe a little more.”

“Good. One more thing. Viktor has seen nothing but the inside of this sterile installation ever since he arrived in the United States. When you’re done with me, instead of having the discussion with Ken in your office, how about a nice restaurant? Just a little favor for a man who had such high hopes when he defected?”

“I see no problem,” said Jordan. “Where do you suggest?”

“How about the Old Wharf Fish House? It’s 4:30 now, so let’s make it 7 o’clock. Okay?”

“That’s fine. Let me clear up a few things here, and Viktor and I will be

waiting in my car by the gate in 15 minutes.”

“I’ll phone Ken from my office and make sure he can meet us,” added Carla, with obvious relief.

Back in her office, she gathered a few papers into her briefcase, then called Ken’s company. A polite female voice answered. “Sensitronics International. May I help you?”

“Yes, I’d like to speak to Dr. Inman.”

“Just a moment, please.” There was a pause as the switchboard connected her with Ken’s secretary.

“Dr. Inman’s office.”

“This is Carla Bertelli. Is Ken available? It’s rather urgent.”

“Just a moment, Ms. Bertelli.”

Ken’s voice came on the line. “Carla! Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Ken, is your evening clear?”

“It can be. What’s up?”

“Oh, I just thought it would be nice to get together with you for dinner at the Old Wharf Fish House... say about 7:00?”

There was a pause on the other end. “You’re not pulling my leg?”

“No, I’m not. Something awful has happened out here, and I really need some diversion to take my mind off of it. It would be very nice, Ken.”

“I think it would be fabulous. Shall I have my secretary get reservations?”

“Please. Make it for four.”

“For four?”

“Yeah. There are a couple of people you absolutely *must* meet.”