

## [33] Outwitted!

The next few days passed quickly and uneventfully. Absorbed in getting her new secretary oriented and catching up on back phone calls, Carla had little time to devote to long-standing doubts and conflicts. They had only been put aside temporarily, however—not silenced. Disappointingly, Ken had been of little help lately in sorting them out. He seemed, in fact, to be avoiding her. On the few occasions their schedules had brought them into contact over breakfast or a late-night cup of tea, he had been uncharacteristically reluctant to carry on their discussions of the past. She couldn't understand that. Did it mean that he'd given up on her? A few days ago that would have pleased her, but now it bothered her greatly. She felt neglected.

The research center seemed empty without Frank and Antonio, and Carla realized that she had a greater affection for both of them than she had been willing to admit. They had impacted her life in many ways, and she felt a real sense of camaraderie in sharing with them the mutual goal of bringing peace to a world that teetered on the brink of disaster. Whether Project Archon would actually turnout to be the answer or not it was a noble venture. She felt a strong commitment to work together with them to see the Plan through to a successful conclusion, if that were at all possible.

During this time she had seen little of Viktor. He seemed to be working day and night with Kay, and Carla wondered how they were getting along. She had intended to ask him that at lunch that day, but Viktor had not appeared. It was now nearly 2:00 p.m., and still no sign of Viktor in his office across the hall from hers. She pushed back from her computer, stood up and stretched, and decided to check on their progress.

There were three lab assistants—two men she knew and a young woman she had never met—working in the main lab when she walked in. Kay and Viktor were nowhere to be seen. “Do you have any idea where I might find Dr. Khorev?” Carla asked.

“He left here a while ago with Dr. Morris,” said the young woman. “By the

way, I'm Anne White. I've seen quite a bit of you, but I don't think we've ever met."

"How nice to meet you," said Carla. She gave Anne a slight nod and a knowing look to indicate that she knew who she was. "Any idea where they went?"

"I got the impression," said one of the men, "that they were having a serious disagreement. Maybe they wanted to go someplace where they could discuss it alone."

"Really? Do you have any idea what the problem was?"

"I really couldn't say. I don't think it was anything about the work in here—something personal between them, maybe."

"How long ago did they leave?" asked Carla.

"About ten minutes ago, wouldn't you say?" said the young man, turning to Anne for confirmation. She nodded. "About that I'd guess."

"Well, they certainly didn't go to Viktor's office," said Carla half to herself. She picked up a nearby phone and dialed Kay's office, then Frank's, then Viktor's just to be certain. Secretaries at each place said they hadn't seen either of them all afternoon. She dialed the staff lounge, but they weren't there—then Viktor's apartment, but there was no answer. Carla was beginning to feel apprehensive.

"Well, they can't just disappear, can they," she said aloud to no one in particular, trying to sound nonchalant. "I wanted to talk to them about something that really can't wait. Maybe they're back in Viktor's apartment and just aren't answering the phone. I'll take a look over there."

Frank had apparently not been denied anything he'd wanted in constructing the secret complex. Behind the main structure was a set of six luxury apartments in a long, two-story brick building. One apartment was reserved for the director of the CIA, who had not appeared since Carla had been there, but who, she understood, had used it frequently in the past. Frank used another of the apartments, as did Mike Bradford, the head of security. Viktor, of course, who was kept on the base continuously for his protection, had his own apartment, which Carla had visited a couple of times.

Approaching the building, she could see that the door to Viktor's apartment—number 5, in the middle on the upper level—was half-open. As she climbed the stairs, Carla smiled to herself. That was just like Viktor. He was a bit prudish and would never have a woman in his apartment without having the door ajar, so maybe that was a sign that he and Kay were in there after all. If so, it was odd

that he hadn't answered the phone. That wasn't like him.

When she reached the top of the stairs, she heard subdued but angry voices coming from within. Peering cautiously inside the half-open door she could now hear them plainly, but she couldn't make out the words. Then it hit her like a freight train: They were conversing in their native tongue! So Viktor had been right. She *was* Russian! Had he confronted Kay in the lab, and then taken her up here to have it out?

Carla cautiously pushed the door open a bit wider and slipped quietly into the entry hall. From there she could see part of the living room and kitchen. The voices were coming from farther within. Taking the gun from her purse and releasing the safety, she moved quickly through the living room. Beyond it she very cautiously entered a long hall, holding the gun ready. The voices were coming through an open door on the right which she remembered was a large study. Sliding along the wall, she crept closer.

Now she could see Viktor, sitting at the far end of the room in front of the fireplace, his right profile toward her. He was speaking Russian rapidly and his tone was clearly angry and accusatory. Another step nearer, peering carefully through the open doorway, and she saw Kay facing him, looking surprisingly composed. In fact she seemed to be enjoying herself. *What do I do now? Just walk in? Wait? Or should I go back and get security?* In the next moment Carla's heart froze in her chest as that decision was taken from her. Kay's eyes had wandered over and seen her!

With her heart beating wildly now, Carla stepped quickly into the room and pointed the .38 revolver at Kay. There was nothing else to do now that she had been discovered. What followed astonished her completely. Kay jumped to her feet and greeted her with apparent relief.

"Carla! Am I glad to see you. You got here just in time!"

Viktor's reaction surprised her even more. "Carla! How did you get in here?" he demanded with evident displeasure.

Kay started toward her. "Hold it right there!" commanded Carla, aiming the weapon at her head to let her know that she meant business. "Not another inch!"

"Why are you pointing that gun at *me*?" demanded Kay with a puzzled look and hurt tone. "I thought you'd come in to arrest *him*! You have, haven't you?" She looked at Viktor accusingly. "I've just blown his cover."

"Wait a minute!" hissed Viktor. "My cover? You think you'll get away with that?"

"You are a smooth one, aren't you," Kay said, turning toward Viktor and

staring at him contemptuously. Then she added to Carla, “That’s the kind it takes to make a double agent. He’s a plant—and a good one!”

“She’s lying!” said Viktor angrily. “You don’t believe her, Carla—do you?”

“I sure hope she’s lying!” said Carla. She turned to Kay. “I heard you speaking *Russian*. Explain that!”

Kay laughed nervously. “So that’s what has you confused. Of course I speak Russian. My parents were immigrants. We spoke it at home when I grew up. That’s one of the reasons the CIA put me in here.”

“The CIA?” asked Carla in surprise.

“Even Frank didn’t know,” said Kay. “No one but the director of Central Intelligence himself knows who I am and why I’m here—to spot Russian infiltration of this operation. Viktor almost fooled me.”

“Wait a minute!” interrupted Carla. “I happened to have been there when he escaped from Colonel Chernov—the same one who came in here to take Viktor back to Russia.”

“That’s right,” cut in Kay. “*To take him back to Russia*. He wasn’t going to kill Viktor along with the rest of us. You innocently became part of a staged ‘defection’ in Paris that gave Khorev the perfect cover—until I got onto his game. He threatened to kill me just before you came through that door!”

“Carla, this monster is lying through her teeth,” said Viktor. “I knew I’d seen her somewhere, and finally remembered. She’s Chernov’s lover!”

“Viktor!” exclaimed Carla. “You expect me to believe something that incredible?”

Viktor stood to his feet and took a step toward Carla. “Hold it!” she commanded, pointing the gun at his head. “Stay back!”

“Listen to me, Carla!” he pleaded. “I’ve seen her picture on Chernov’s desk! She’s changed her appearance. That’s why it took me so long to realize who she was. But she admitted it.”

Kay was now livid. “Khorev, you lying snake, you’re going to the chair!” She turned to Carla again. “Look, we don’t have to stand here and listen to this garbage. There’s a phone over there. Pick it up and get the DCI. He’ll tell you who I am. I’ll give you the number that goes right into his private office at the headquarters in Langley, Virginia. I just talked to him there not more than 30minutes ago—just before this Russian plant and I came up here to have our confrontation.”

*She’s got to be lying, thought Carla. I know Viktor. He’s no plant! But what if he is? I can’t trust either of them!*

“I’m not calling Langley,” announced Carla. “I’m going to get security up here to arrest both of you and then we’ll sort it out from there.”

“Now you’re making sense,” said Kay. “Just get him into custody—that’s all I want. And then we’ll find out who’s lying.”

“Shut up, both of you!” commanded Carla. To her surprise, she noticed that Viktor now looked worried. “If it’s going to be my word against hers,” he said, “I don’t stand a chance. You know that Carla.”

“I said to shut up!” responded Carla. “I don’t know who’s telling the truth. So get this: I’ll shoot either of you if you make a move! Stay right where you are.” She walked sideways over to the phone sitting on a table at the end of the sofa just to Kay’s left. She picked up the phone, with her left hand, holding the gun in her right and keeping it pointed at Kay. When she heard the tone, she put the receiver down and began to push the buttons with her left hand. To do so, she had to turn her eyes momentarily down to the phone and the gun wavered slightly off target. That was all the opening Kay needed.

“Look out!” Viktor yelled, but the warning came too late.

Before Carla could react, Kay had covered the distance between them in one leap, and a flying foot had knocked the gun from her hand. In another blur of motion, so fast that Carla was hardly aware it was happening, the same foot swept both of Carla’s feet from under her. And in the next instant Kay was standing over her with the gun in her hand pointed at Carla’s head.

“Get up, Ms. Bertelli.” Kay’s voice was like steel. Carla struggled to her feet “Now, over in that chair where I was sitting.” She waved the gun. “Khorev, sit back down again.” There was nothing to do but follow orders.

“You won’t believe this,” gloated Kay, “but Moscow ordered me to get out of here and come home a week ago. I wouldn’t do it. Nothing was going to rob me of my revenge. But I never dreamed it would be handed to me on a silver platter! You really surprised me, Carla. I had no idea you carried a gun—and that’s just perfect!”

“Were you really Chernov’s lover?” asked Carla.

“That’s why I’m going to enjoy this so much!”

“But your New York accent?”

“That’s where I grew up, stupid. My father was with the Soviet delegation at the UN. But that’s enough! I don’t have any more time.”

“You sure don’t” said Carla. “You’re cover’s blown, lady. This room’s bugged—everything’s being recorded. Whatever you do with us, you won’t get away with it!”

A derisive smile formed on Kay's lips. "You're right. And I know where all of that equipment is, so you won't have the satisfaction of thinking that I'll be caught."

She moved over and stood behind Carla. "It's going to be a very obvious murder-suicide. You're in love with each other, aren't you? I've known that for a long time. You've been having an affair, quarreled, and you killed him, Carla. Then you turned the gun on yourself. With all the mental illness and suicides attributed to the Archons, you'll just be two more tragic casualties in the quest for godhood."

She shoved Carla to one side in her chair and knelt down behind her to aim at Viktor, who closed his eyes in anticipation. "I have to get the angles just right."

A shot rang out from the hallway. Viktor dove for cover behind his chair. Carla was suddenly aware of Kay's head, so near her own, jerking violently and turning red as Kay was knocked to the floor with the bullet's impact. As though in a dream, Carla turned to see Anne White racing through the door toward her, gun in hand, pointed at the now motionless body of Kay. She stood over her for a moment then put the gun back into her purse.

"That was close!" Anne said in relief. Viktor was picking himself up from the floor. "Are you alright?" she asked Carla.

Carla nodded weakly. The horrible reality of the last few minutes was just beginning to hit her. "I can't thank you enough!" She closed her eyes. *It could be me and Viktor lying on the floor instead of Kay!* She felt an arm around her and looked up into Viktor's face. He was trembling—like she was. "I'm sorry!" she said. "So sorry!"

"Please!" said Viktor. "She was a good liar. You had to be sure."

"I didn't want to kill her," said Anne matter-of-factly, "but I had no choice. I couldn't take a chance that she'd shoot you if I told her to drop her gun."

"You followed me?" asked Carla weakly.

Anne shook her head. "No, not immediately. But the more I thought about you coming over here, the more worried I became. So I prayed, 'God, please show me what to do.' Thank God that I got here just in time!"

"Thank God, you did!" said Carla.

"She was a member of Chernov's psychic combat troops," explained Viktor. "She admitted to me that she killed the guards and let Chernov in."

"Both of you will be material witnesses," said Anne. "Now let's vacate this apartment—and be careful not to disturb anything in this room on your way out."

I'll just use your phone in the kitchen for a minute, Viktor.”