

## [15] Swallowed Up!

Yelling a command in Russian , Chernov raced into the street. Because of the now-stalled traffic he was able to make much faster time than Viktor and had gained considerable ground on his quarry by the time he entered Rue Debarcadere. The two FSB officers jumped into the limousine and took off with tires screaming, but had to apply the brakes almost immediately. As they turned left into Port de Maillot to make their way around the traffic circle, their progress was impeded by the mass of autos and trucks backed up behind the five-car collision.

Carla made a hurried decision. Pushing the button to retract the roof of the Volvo convertible, she backed out of the entrance to the Palais in the opposite direction from that which the Russians had taken. Then she spun her car around and angled it across the oncoming traffic on the opposite side of the huge circle from the barely moving limousine which had now disappeared from her view. Drivers swore and shook their fists at her, but because of the collision blockage, only a trickle of cars was getting through in her direction. After several near-disasters she had safely negotiated the head-on traffic and was able to turn the Volvo into the small street that Dr. Khorev and his pursuer had entered.

By this time, Viktor was badly winded and his legs were near paralysis. He seemed detached from himself, as though he were watching his own agonizing performance in slow motion from a distance. The briefcase was now an impossibly heavy burden, an unreasonable impediment to his escape. Whenever that thought surfaced, however, he gripped the precious case all the tighter and pushed on. Each time he twisted his head around to look behind him, he could see in growing panic that Chernov was gaining ever more rapidly. Should he take refuge inside one of the shops or cafes he was passing? No, Chernov would tear the place apart. If only there were a gendarme in sight but this was a small street and they weren't likely to patrol here. What could he do?

Rue Debarcadere was too narrow to allow Carla to pass other vehicles. Fortunately, however, the sparse traffic was moving fairly well. Fifty yards into

the small street she saw “Dr. Pavlov” charging like a wild bull along the sidewalk just ahead on her right, bowling over pedestrians in his mad race to overtake the fugitive who was now almost within his grasp. Passing “Pavlov,” she pulled alongside a nearly spent Dr. Khorev. Face contorted with terror and the agony of extreme fatigue, he had scarcely the strength to carry the heavy briefcase any longer, but he still clutched it desperately as though he would rather die than abandon it.

Honking her horn and waving to him from the open convertible, Carla yelled, “Dr. Khorev! Dr. Khorev!” She was directly beside him now and slowed the car to match his exhausted pace. “Get in! Hurry!”

Viktor had no idea who this young woman might be, but she was his only hope. Staggering into the street, he threw his precious burden into the open auto and with his last remaining strength dove in after it, with Chernov now only a few paces behind. Just as Carla pushed the gas pedal to the floor, the colonel, with a superhuman leap, grasped the backseat and hung on with a grip of steel. Legs flailing empty air, trying desperately to find the bumper for support, Chernov struggled against the acceleration of the vehicle to pull himself inside. For one mad moment, Viktor attempted to batter his pursuer with the briefcase, but his strength was gone.

“Drop to the floor!” screamed Carla. Still accelerating, she entered the tight circle of Place Ferdinand at more than 70 kilometers per hour and made a sharp turn to the left into Rue Brunel. The car skidded crazily, throwing the rear around and slamming the right wheel up against the curb. The force was too great even for Colonel Chernov’s brute strength. He lost his precarious grip and flew through the air. Caroming off the top of a sidewalk café table, the colonel crashed through a plate-glass window. The careening car tilted, nearly turned over, then righted itself as Carla regained control and sped away.

Through the rearview mirror she saw the Russian limousine enter Place Ferdinand and pull to a stop at the curb where she had shaken off Khorev’s pursuer. The driver and his companion leaped out. They were half-carrying a staggering and badly bleeding “Dr. Pavlov” back to their vehicle when Carla lost sight of them as she made a sharp right turn onto Boulevard Pereire. Almost immediately she turned right again, this time onto the equally broad Avenue des Ternes. At last she breathed a sigh of relief.

“We’re going to make it! We’re going to make it!” she shouted happily.

In a state of shock, Viktor was crouched on the back floor. He was still clutching the briefcase, his chest heaving in agony.

“The American Embassy!” he managed to gasp.

“That’s where I’m headed. Don’t worry. It’s a straight shot— and not far.”

Carla knew Paris almost as well as she knew Washington, D.C. Just past Place Des Ternes the Avenue narrowed and became Rue du Faubourg St. Honore. She followed its slightly skewed route as far as it went Viktor pulled himself up onto the backseat and slumped against it, still gasping for breath. Every few moments he turned his head fearfully to search the traffic behind them for signs of their Russian pursuers. They were nowhere to be seen.

Turning right at last onto Rue Royale, Carla exclaimed exuberantly, “We’ve got it made—they can’t catch us now!”

For Viktor, the terrifying nightmare had metamorphosed into the surrealist numbness of a dream. Directly ahead, in the center of Place de la Concorde, his eyes focused in surprise upon a huge Egyptian obelisk towering above the traffic. It all seemed unreal--like turning the pages of a schoolbook to see once again a picture of this 3000-year-old treasure of Ramses II brought from Luxor’s ancient temple growing rapidly larger in his vision. Was this actually happening?

“The embassy?” It took all of his concentration to get out the words.

“Look to your right!” yelled Carla in triumph. Turning abruptly onto Avenue Gabriel, she pulled almost immediately over to the curb. A large building set far back could be seen over the top of a high stone wall surrounding it. There was an entrance for autos leading to a circular drive going up to the front of the building, but the heavy metal entry gate was closed. On either side of it paced a member of the French gendarmerie holding a submachine gun. A brass plaque on the wall read: “No. 4, Avenue Gabriel, AMERICAN EMBASSY.” The defector from the Russian Federation could not hold back a sob of relief.

As Carla and Viktor opened their doors to get out of the car, the nearest policeman moved quickly toward them, waving his gun and shouting, “Parking interdit!”

Viktor shrank back into the auto, but Carla kept moving and motioned to him to follow. “Please help! It’s an emergency!” she called back in French. “He’s a Russian defector! We’re being pursued.”

“D’accord!” Quickly the policeman waved them toward a low, narrow structure built into the wall just to the right of the metal gate and, with his gun at the ready, turned to watch for their pursuers. Entering hurriedly, they were confronted by two young United States marines in full uniform.

“He’s a Russian defector!” Carla explained again. “We have to get inside!”

“Yes, ma’am,” came the answer in a welcome Southern drawl.

The marines hardly changed expression. “Let’s have the purse and the briefcase. Just step through this metal detector.”

They both looked back over their shoulders toward the street several times as they half-ran across the courtyard and up the steps of the main embassy building. Over the top of the steel gate, there was still no sign of their pursuers.

“We made it!” exclaimed Carla, giving Viktor a triumphant “thumbs-up” sign as they entered through the broad doors. Safely inside at last, they were motioned by another young marine guard toward a reception counter on the right just beyond a group of sofas and chairs. There Carla confided in a low voice to a clerk, “This is Dr. Viktor Khorev from the Russian Federation—a very important scientist *He wants political asylum!*”

The young woman’s eyes widened. “Please take a seat over there, and someone will be right with you.”

Throwing back her long, auburn hair and taking a few welcome deep breaths, Carla said with a warm smile, “Well, now that we can finally relax, I guess it’s time to introduce myself. I’m Carla Bertelli.”

“Carla Bertelli—the American journalist?” Dr. Khorev asked tentatively.

“You mean I’m known in Russia? I don’t believe it!”

“I’ve read some of your articles. Excellent!” He looked at her admiringly, then blurted out “I thought you were—well, much older.”

They both laughed, the tension draining. There was a brief, spontaneous embrace. Viktor held her at arm’s length. There were tears in his eyes again. “You saved my life! Do you know that?”

Carla nodded. “I suppose so. I didn’t understand what was happening. I guess I just acted on impulse.”

Wearily they sank down together on a long sofa facing the reception counter. Viktor was shaking his head in relief. “I can’t believe it! I’m free! I didn’t think it would happen. How could I ever repay you? I owe you everything!”

“Well, I did have a selfish interest,” said Carla, turning toward him with an impish grin. “I’ve been looking forward to having an interview with you for months—and I wasn’t going to let anything prevent *that*.”

She hesitated a moment and then grew serious again. “I’ll tell you what you could do for me, Dr. Khorev--a very, very special favor.”

“Yes, tell me!” said Viktor eagerly.

“How about an *exclusive* interview?”

“You mean I don’t talk to any other journalists—you get the whole story?”

Carla nodded. “Is that asking too much?”

“Too much?” exclaimed Viktor. “I owe you my life. How do you say it in America?—you’ve got a deal? You’ve got a deal!”

“Dr. Khorev?” A balding and rather owl-like-looking man of about 45 in an impeccable business suit had opened a private door to their left and was looking questioningly in their direction.

“Yes, I’m Khorev,” replied Viktor eagerly.

The man marched over somewhat pompously, almost like a parade of one, bowed slightly and shook Viktor’s hand warmly. “I’m Karl Jorgensen. Do you have any identification?”

“Yes I have.” Viktor picked up the briefcase and patted it affectionately. “And I’ve got more data in here than you could imagine!”

Jorgensen’s eyebrows raised just slightly, and a thin smile formed on his lips. “If you’ll please come with me.”

“And Miss Bertelli?” Viktor gestured toward Carla. “She brought me here—rescued me, saved my life.”

“We must talk to you alone first of all.” He turned to Carla. “If you’ll just wait here for a few minutes, we have some formalities.” He smiled reassuringly.

“Yes, of course.” At the door, Viktor hesitated and turned around. Carla waved. “I’ll be right here,” she called.

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When the First International Congress on Parapsychology reconvened that afternoon, the Russian delegation was conspicuously absent. The conference hall was buzzing with rumors that Khorev and Pavlov had quarreled and that Khorev had last been seen running across Boulevard Pereire into Rue Debarcadere pursued by Pavlov. It took the Congress chairman, Dr. Erickson, longer than usual to quiet the conferees and to get their undivided attention.

“I have been unable to get in touch with either Dr. Khorev or Dr. Pavlov,” began Erickson. “None of the Russians has checked out of the hotel, yet I have not been able to contact any of them. I did reach the Russian Embassy, however, just a few minutes ago. Although they could not help me in locating Khorev or Pavlov, they assured me that their delegation had not withdrawn from the Congress and would accept the formal apology that had been delivered to them by the British delegation.

“The Americans and a number of other delegations,” continued Erickson, “have also expressed their goodwill and their deep concern that the Russians not withdraw from this Congress. We have reminded them how vital their continued participation in the important decisions yet to be made at this conference will be.

I'm sure everything will work out. In the meantime, we must proceed on schedule.

“And now let me introduce our first speaker of the afternoon, the distinguished philosopher and mathematician as well as one of the world's best-known parapsychologists, Dr. Bernard Rogers of Canada.”

The brief applause was quickly enveloped by the solemn hush of anxiety that still hung like a pall over the conference. In spite of Erickson's assurance, the Russian delegation's section was empty, and that spoke louder than the chairman's words. So somber was the atmosphere that Rogers wondered, as he looked up from his notes and cleared his throat to speak, whether his audience would be able to forget the present crisis and actually hear the important points he had to make.

“The title of my paper is ‘Psychic Applications in the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence,’” he began. “As we all know, the existence of extraterrestrial intelligences somewhere—and probably in millions of locations throughout the universe—is no longer doubted by most space scientists. The only question is how to make contact with them. The basic problem, obviously, is the vast distances over which contact must be made.”

It was at that point that the thoughts of Dr. Frank Leighton, who had begun to listen with great interest were interrupted by a messenger presenting him with a United States Embassy envelope and a receipt form to sign. Intrigued as to what it could contain of such urgency, he hastily tore it open and read the message within, whistling softly under his breath as he took in its importance.

As Leighton's concentration was drawn into the message he was reading, the Canadian's speech became muted, as though it were reaching him from another dimension. “Traveling at one million miles per hour—40 times present capabilities, but perhaps conceivable in the not-too-distant future—it would take 30,000 years for visitors to reach earth from the nearest solar system 4.5 light-years away. Our galaxy is 100,000 light-years across, and it is 15 times that distance to the next galaxy.

“Obviously, the likelihood of face-to-face physical contact with beings from other planets is too remote to take seriously. I certainly wouldn't stay awake nights thinking about what to do if it should happen. Even radio contact would take a nine-year round-trip to the nearest solar system, and hundreds or thousands of years to any really likely locations where intelligent life might exist within our own galaxy—to say nothing, of course, of the millions of years it would take for radio contact with those in other galaxies.

“I don’t want to hold Carl Sagan’s Memory and his successors and the entire search for extraterrestrials—to which the world’s governments have committed tens of millions of dollars—up to ridicule, but you can see that some other approach is needed. Nor do I need to tell you the one way that the problem posed by these vast distances can be eliminated. Of course, I’m talking about *psychic* contact

“There is another even more intriguing possibility—that there are not only *extraterrestrial* intelligences out there, but *extradimensional* intelligences as well. Exactly what this means in technical terms need not concern us at the moment so long as we are convinced that it is a viable scientific possibility, which I have no doubt that it is. That this subject is of the utmost importance and urgency...”

Catching the attention of the American delegation’s vice chairman seated next to him, Leighton leaned over and whispered in his ear. “There’s an emergency. I have to fly immediately to Washington, D.C. Please take over for me, will you? Fortunately, I don’t deliver my paper until Friday and hope to be back by then. If not—I hate to put that burden on you, but would you mind giving it for me?”

“I’ll do my best” was the whispered response.

Leighton pulled a file folder from his briefcase and handed it to his obliging colleague. “It’s all typed in final order, no handwritten notes.” He shut the briefcase and, with a whispered word in the ear of another colleague, walked quickly out of the conference hall.

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Carla looked impatiently at her watch for at least the tenth time in the last five minutes. Dr. Khorev had been behind that closed door for more than two hours. *Had something gone wrong?*

She went to the reception desk. The two young women who had been there when she and Khorev had come in had been replaced by two others. One of them looked up and smiled pleasantly as Carla approached. “May I help you?”

“Well, I hope so. I brought someone in here nearly two-and-a half hours ago, and I’ve been waiting. I was told it would only be a few minutes.”

“Well, let me check for you. What kind of business did this person have, or who were they seeing?”

“He was a very important Russian scientist—a defector. He needed political asylum.”

“I don’t recall any such person. We’ve had nothing like that since Iron

Curtain days. No one defects anymore.”

“You weren’t here when we came in. Anyway, a Mr. Jorgensen—I believe it was Karl Jorgensen—took him through that door right over there. Said it would be a few minutes and asked me to wait I’ve been waiting, and waiting. Could you check to see what is happening with Dr. Viktor Khorev—that’s his name—and how much longer it’s going to be?”

“Certainly.” She picked up a phone and dialed. “This is Arlene out in front. There’s a lady here who says she brought in a Russian defector a couple of hours ago—a Dr. Viktor Khorev. Do you have any information I can pass on to her? She’s been waiting.”

The receptionist put down the phone. “He’s going to check and let me know. It could be a few minutes. Why don’t you just sit down again?”

“Thanks, but I’ll stand.” Carla paced back and forth, a growing feeling inside that something had gone terribly wrong.

The phone rang, and she turned eagerly to the reception desk. Arlene picked up the phone and listened for a few moments, then put it down. There is no record of any Russian *defector*—that just doesn’t happen. Are you sure?”

“What do you mean, am I *sure*! I brought him in here myself.”

Arlene looked sympathetic and genuinely puzzled. That was the ambassador’s secretary. Believe me, if any Russian had come in here, she would know.”

“I don’t care what she says,” returned Carla evenly, leaning over the counter. “She’s lying. I brought Dr. Khorev in here myself!”

“Let me assure you, no one lies around here—certainly not the ambassador’s personal secretary!”

“This is incredible! I want to talk to Karl Jorgensen! Get him out here!”

“I don’t think Dr. Jorgensen has been in today. He usually doesn’t come in on Thursdays.”

“Get him out here—now!”

Shaken, Arlene picked up the phone again and dialed. After a brief conversation, she held it away from her ear and said to Carla, “Just as I told you, Karl Jorgensen has not been in all day. In fact, he’s gone back to Washington.”

“Listen to me! Jorgensen or no Jorgensen, I don’t care. Just get someone with authority out here to talk to me!”

Arlene said a few hushed words into the phone. About two minutes later, the same private door opened and another well-dressed and polished embassy-type gentleman called to her. “Miss Bertelli?”



“Yes!” Carla hurried over to him. “What have you done with Khorev?”

He had shut the door behind him and stood with his back against it. “I think the receptionist has told you that we have never heard of a Dr. Viktor Khorev, has she not?”

“And we both know that’s a blatant lie.”

His face reddened. “Those are harsh words, Miss Bertelli. I could call you a liar, too.”

“My word against your word—is that the game?” Carla’s eyes were flashing. “How do you know my name?”

He hesitated. “You gave it to the receptionist.”

“I did not—and she mentioned no name on the phone.” Carla drew a deep breath. She stared at him contemptuously. “Look, I’m not a nobody. I happen to be a very well-known journalist with a photographic and indelible memory that’s been recording everything.”

“Don’t be a fool! The Russian government will officially deny that he’s missing. You’ve got no story.”

“You’re right I’m not publishing anything—until I have the *whole* story. And I’ll get it!”

“Good luck!”

“I saved Dr. Khorev’s life. I’m sure you know that He promised me an *exclusive*, and I’m holding him—and the U.S. government—to that promise! Don’t forget it! And remember this, too: I know where Dr. Khorev is being taken—and if he’s not treated fairly, I promise you, the whole world is going to know!”