

[22] A Foolish Adventure

While praying for Carla the next morning, Ken felt overwhelmed by a sense of responsibility for the part he had played in leading her into her present danger. After all, he had introduced her to the field of psychic research and encouraged her to ever-deeper involvement even when she'd had little interest in it herself and her editors at that time had not been supportive of this new direction her writing was taking. She wouldn't be associated with Frank and heading for who could say what ultimate delusion or destruction at the hands of "the Nine" had it not been for his influence in the past. That realization became an overpowering burden.

Instead of taking this feeling of guilt to God for forgiveness and asking God for His direction, Ken began to think of what he could do to make up for having led Carla astray—something to help her now. In that obsessive frame of mind, the insistent thought wouldn't leave him that he ought to call the CIA in San Francisco. It really didn't make sense, but driven now by a crushing sense of guilt he became the victim of an irrational compulsion. Checking with the operator, he found that there was no listing there or in Los Angeles. Eventually he called Virginia information, got the number of the headquarters in Langley, and dialed it wondering exactly what he would say.

"CIA," intoned the girl on the switchboard.

"I need to talk to whoever's in charge of your West Coast operations."

"What kind of operations?"

"It involves a psychic research installation."

After a long silence, she came back on the line and said, "I don't find any listing for psychic research or anything with 'psychic' in it."

"Listen to me!" demanded Ken. "This is terribly important! Someone's life is in danger! Just get me somebody with some authority who's connected at all with this part of the country!"

Quickly the operator assured him, "I'll put you through to someone who may be able to help you."

After a few moments a male voice said, “Hogan.”

“Mr. Hogan, my name is Ken Inman. I’m calling from Palo Alto. There’s someone out here who is working for you, and I wanted to let you know that her life is in great danger.”

“Hmm. What kind of danger?”

“From Russian agents seeking revenge!”

“Really?”

“Really. She helped Russia’s top parapsychologist escape recently and—”

“How recently? And where?”

“Last week—in Paris.”

“I think someone’s been pulling your leg. There wasn’t a high-level Russian defection anywhere in the world last week. If there had been, I’d have known it”

“Look, Hogan, I’ve got top security clearance with NASA and the Pentagon. I’ve designed computer systems for your agency as well as for military intelligence. I’m not a kook. I know what I’m talking about and if you don’t, then I guess it’s too highly classified. Do you know anything about a secret psychic research installation near Palo Alto run by Frank Leighton?”

“If I did, obviously I couldn’t tell you.”

“A citizen of the United States who helped a Russian scientist defect—and who’s getting involved with your agency—is in great danger. She has to be protected, and nothing’s being done about it! How do I get some action?”

“Mr. Inman, I don’t doubt your clearance level or your sincerity, but I doubt the validity of what you’re telling me. Someone has misinformed you. And even if what you say were true, a man of your intelligence knows I can’t go on hearsay. If your friend is indeed a part of one of our operations involving any kind of personal danger, you may be certain she will be provided all necessary protection.”

“But I don’t think you know she’s working for you!” interrupted Ken anxiously, realizing that didn’t make sense, but trying desperately to keep Hogan from cutting him off.

“Those things have a way of getting sorted out. I really wouldn’t be concerned about it, Mr. Inman. I appreciate your call.” With that he hung up.

Ken realized it would be fruitless to call back. It didn’t make sense no matter how he tried to explain it. *Bureaucracy is an incurable plague! This is incredible! I know she’s in danger, but the CIA probably doesn’t even know she’s working for them. Maybe Leighton has taken some steps, but I doubt it.*

His troubled thoughts were interrupted by the phone ringing. He picked up

the receiver. “Hello.”

“Ken, this is Don Jordan. I just wanted to let you know that two of our men checked in with Carla last night. She’s still at the Hilton—got in very late. She was followed in from somewhere in the foothills, but we don’t have any leads. We’ve got her hotel room under 24-hour surveillance.”

“Don, I don’t want to seem to be interfering, but what about when she drives back and forth from Frank’s lab? If she was followed from out there last night...?”

“Ken, if it weren’t for your top-secret clearance level, I couldn’t even discuss this with you and shouldn’t be. Whatever Leighton is doing out there is apparently so highly classified that I can’t find anyone in the CIA who’ll even admit that his lab exists. We’ll pick her up along the access road about a mile from the highway and follow her in—at the U.S. Government sign. But inside, that’s under CIA jurisdiction. Our men would look silly going in there. We just can’t do it.”

“Silly or not—”

“I understand how you feel. Believe me, I’m doing all I can. In fact, I’m really stretching it.”

“I know you are, and I appreciate it. Thanks, brother—and please keep praying!”

.. . . .

Ken left his office at his computer company early that afternoon. He couldn’t shake off the insistent thought that Carla was in imminent danger and that he ought to do something about it. It seemed all too clear that the CIA wasn’t going to take care of her. She had fallen through a bureaucratic crack. At least he had accidentally alerted the FBI and they were watching her, but not along the most dangerous stretch of access road. He decided to drive up there to check it out himself. If the Russians had sent a team to get Viktor and found that he was guarded day and night inside a fortress, he had no idea how they would tackle that problem—but Carla was clearly vulnerable. The most likely spot for them to go after her, now that the hotel was being guarded, would be that isolated stretch of access road that the FBI wasn’t covering. *Maybe it’s crazy, but I’m going to check that out myself—at least see what it looks like.* On his way out there, he stopped by his house to change into some jeans. As a last-minute thought, he grabbed a down jacket and an old deer rifle he hadn’t used for years and some ammunition.

His mother was sitting outside reading when he hurried by on his way back

to the garage, “Don’t make any supper for me,” he remarked casually. “It’ll probably be late before I get home.”

She looked up at him over her glasses as he walked by. “My goodness! I didn’t know it was hunting season! Where are you going in such a hurry?”

“I’m just going to do a little scouting around up in the hills. See you tomorrow. Take care.”

“You take care!” she called after him. “You hear me? Take care!”

Driving slowly past the “Restricted Government Property. No Trespassing!” sign, Ken began to feel rather foolish. It would be very embarrassing to meet Leighton—or Carla, for that matter—on their way to Palo Alto. When he came within sight of the wall surrounding the property, he turned around, drove a few yards until he could not be seen from the installation, then pulled over to the side and sat there with his engine idling. *So, I’ve looked it over. What do I do now? I’ve just wasted my time. There’s nothing I could do.* He remembered seeing about 100 yards back toward the highway an opening in the trees next to the road that could conceal a vehicle. He decided to check it out on his way home.

Dusk was now settling fast under the tall redwoods. When he came to the narrow clearing, he got out of his car and inspected it with his flashlight. It went deeper into the woods than he had thought—more than 20 feet—and he noticed there were tire tracks that continued back under the trees farther than necessary if one were merely turning around. *Someone has been parking here! A hunter, perhaps, poaching on government property? Not likely—game is scarce in this area. The tracks look very fresh!*

A foolhardy thought crossed his mind and he rejected it. But it came back again... and again. Getting into his car, he drove on another quarter of a mile and pulled off the road as far as he could at one of the few spots where the shoulder was a bit wider than usual. Then he scribbled a note on a scrap of paper—“Ran out of gas. I’ll be right back”—and stuck it under the windshield wiper.

Loading the rifle, he put some extra ammunition in a pocket, locked the car, and started off down the road with the gun wrapped in the down jacket. Five minutes of brisk walking brought him back to the narrow clearing. It was now after six o’clock and nearly dark. *Suppose Russian agents are planning to use this spot tonight! Somebody parked in here very recently. I want to scare them away, but I’d also like to be able to identify them. How can I do that?* Afraid to use his flashlight he groped around until he found some large, loose branches, two nearby logs small enough for him to drag, and some hefty boulders. He carefully made a low barrier somewhat less than a car length inside the trees. A

driver backing in would not be likely to notice it in the dark, especially if he had been there before and had been able to drive back much farther out of sight.

Ken found a hiding place in a cluster of high ferns about 20 feet away, just behind a large tree. There he settled down to wait. The night air grew cold—good thing he'd brought the heavy jacket. He shoved his hands deep down into its warm pockets. The rifle lay across his lap. One hour went by, then two. He must have dozed off. The sound of a car engine approaching from the highway jolted him awake.

Now he could see its lights coming intermittently through the trees. It slowed, stopped directly in front of him, then began to back into the narrow opening. Ken's heart began to pound. He released the safety and moved over to crouch up against the tree. In the dim illumination of back-up lights, he could just make out the low barricade he'd constructed, but the driver apparently didn't see it. There was a crash as the tail pipe hit a large boulder, the grinding of another boulder under the gas tank, and a dull thump as the rear tires struck logs.

Doors opened and two men jumped out and ran back to investigate. The volley of angry words left no doubt that these men were *Russians!* He froze against the sheltering tree trunk. They shined flashlights on the debris and kicked at it in anger, then yelled something at the driver. He pulled the car up and they started to move the rocks and logs out of the way. Then they seemed to have second thoughts and stopped their work. There were subdued mutterings as they held a brief consultation. Hurriedly they got back into the car and drove off. *So there is a Russian team on Carlo's trail, and they had planned to wait for her here! I've got to get word to the FBI!*

Should he go to the guards at the gate? They'd probably just run him off—wouldn't even listen to him. And if he followed too quickly in the direction that the Russians had driven, they might be waiting for him. What if they came back? After about 20 minutes of anxious indecision, Ken cautiously made his way out to the road and, after an uneventful hike, reached his car. Nothing had been touched. The note was still on the windshield. Getting in, he drove out to the highway as fast as the curves would allow, without seeing anyone. It seemed forever before he came to a public phone on the way into Palo Alto. From there he dialed his friend Don Jordan's residence, a number that he knew by heart.

After a few rings, there was a tired, "Hello." It was Don's wife.

"Gloria, is Don there?"

"Who is this? Oh, Ken. I didn't recognize your voice. Don's getting dressed right now to go into the office. There's an emergency."

“I’ve got an emergency, too. Something awfully urgent Can you put him on for just a minute?”

“Hold on.” There was a brief wait then, “Hello. I’m really in a rush, Ken.”

“Listen! I was up on the road into Leighton’s fortress and I ran into some Russian agents!”

“You did? How did you know they were Russians?”

“I was hiding near a spot I thought someone might use to park out of sight—about 200 yards from the installation—when this car backed in. Two of them got out and they were talking *Russian!* Then they took off.”

“How long ago was that?”

“About 40 minutes, maybe a little more.”

“You can be very thankful, Ken. We had two special agents in a car on that road beginning about nine o’clock, waiting to follow Carla back to her hotel. They must have gotten there just before the Russians drove out They radioed that they were attempting to pull over a car they had pursued out of the private road. They chased it down toward Palo Alto and then it turned off to the north. By the time our back-up units and the highway patrol found their car, our men were dead. We have an APB out, but we don’t know who we’re looking for. We have a vague description of the car, but no license number.”

“You mean they were too much for your men to handle?” gasped Ken.

“Who are these guys!”

“It’s a special Russian team, like I suspected would be coming.”

“You mean the *Spetznas?*”

“No. A secret psychic combat group ten times more dangerous. We don’t have anyone on the West Coast capable of dealing with them. We’ve sent to Virginia for some special commandos. They’ll have that road blanketed by tomorrow night.”

“What about Carla?”

“I don’t think she’s in any immediate danger. We’ve probably scared them off for the moment at least. But we’ve got another team out on the road now waiting for her. They’ll escort her to the hotel. Ken, I’ve got to go. I’ll keep you up to date.”

Thanks, Don.”

“Listen, do me one favor, will you?”

“What’s that?”

“Don’t try to play cops and robbers anymore. You may have saved Carla’s life tonight, but stay out of this from now on. I mean that! For your own good—

and for Carla's! Is that clear?"

"I hear you, Don."