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Warrior of Light

by

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Daniel Terrance Long was free, finally free. He felt that freedom like the blaze of late May sunshine and the heady spring scents that filled the London air. He was free from school. Free from his old, horrid school and his old neighborhood. Now he was accepted and enrolled in a new school, and he strolled down the side of the quiet tree shaded street of his new neighborhood. This new neighborhood was a bit more upscale and aristocratic than the last. It was dotted with Tudor mansions and older Victorian homes, all of them possessed large yards and gardens. In his mind, this was quite an improvement from the tightly packed suburban track-built homes that all looked the same, and gave him the impression they were all filled with similar unpleasant and ignorant people. His parents could not understand how happy Daniel was to move away from there. They were so indoctrinated with psychological claptrap along with modern ideas of childhood that he couldn't even speak to them about it.

His old school had been horrid. The boys there were pompous and vainglorious and ready at any moment to beat down anyone who stood out. Daniel couldn't help but stand out. It didn't help that his father worked for the government, and that Daniel hadn't the slightest idea what he

did, but that wasn't the worst. The worst was that Daniel could speak foreign languages like a native. Because of that, he stood out like a sore thumb. He loved to study languages, and he loved to learn. He couldn't help himself. When he stood to recite or replied to his language teachers, he spoke to them exactly as they desired and expected. He couldn't help that he made the other boys look ignorant. He couldn't make himself speak a language incorrectly, and he certainly couldn't fake such a thing. For him, that was impossible.

He had learned Latin, French, German, and Russian: Russian and French from his Father and Mother, German and Latin at his old school. He wanted to study Chinese—Mandarin. He had signed up for the introductory class for the first semester at his new school. He was sixteen and entering into The Grey Coat Hospital in the Sixth Form. The Grey Coat Hospital was an Anglican School for girls. They had an unbelievable language curriculum and taught boys in the Sixth Form. He took a whole semester of ribbing about going to a girl's school, but that was worth it. His parents weren't actively Anglican, and they weren't particularly spiritually minded, but Daniel knew what he wanted. He knew what he wanted to study, and he knew what he wanted to do in the future. His mother had always encouraged him.

Daniel whistled as he walked along the street. His new house lay out of sight around the corner and through the trees. His mother sent him outside for fresh air as much as to get him out from under her feet. She was busy unpacking. Daniel usually preferred to stay inside but not anymore. Now there was no reason for him to stay in. The weather was perfect; the day was wonderful. He had nothing to fear from bullies, jealous classmates, or anyone else. No one here knew him, and Daniel knew everyone—well, at least his Father and Mother did. They knew everyone in the whole block on every side. Bruce Lyons, his father's boss, lived just next door. The rest of the neighborhood was made up of old folks like the Lyons. They all worked in

government, that is, as far as Daniel could tell. Most worked for the same dreary welfare organization, or for the British Foreign Service, like his father. He wasn't sure how Mr. Lyons was his father's boss, but he was. Everyone knew the government was all screwed up.

Most of the houses were populated by older government executives. All, that is, except the house he planned to visit. Daniel's mother told him the two girls at the Rosewood House were also starting this year in the Sixth Form at The Grey Coat Hospital. Daniel wanted to see them, and find out if they spoke any of the languages he did. He was constantly on the lookout for anyone near his age who would speak to him in Russian, German, French, or Latin. He didn't care who they were, or even if they were girls. He had discovered so few young people who could keep up an intelligent conversation in English, much less any other language. He was certain he would find some at The Grey Coat Hospital. He hoped the girls at the Rosewood House were not like the many girls he met at his old school—there, they were all giggles and foolishness.

Daniel stepped to the front of Rosewood House and walked up the circular drive. The house was obviously Rosewood. Roses sprouted everywhere. They were trellised and free standing. They appeared on small trees and large bushes. He had never seen so many roses. The house itself was large, but not very beautiful or graceful. It was two storied with many windows on each level. It was of a very simple Tudor construction—that is, if any Tudor construction could be called simple. The front was long and rambling and straight. The circular drive led up to a set of brick steps with a stone lion on either side. The backs of the lions appeared oddly polished. Daniel smiled at the false fearsome aspect on the snarling stone.

Daniel stepped right up to the door and pulled the bell. He couldn't hear it sound inside the house, but he wasn't foolish enough to pull it again. He learned a reasonable level of decorum even from his public school training.

The door was opened wide by a tall butler with a pleasant face and a slightly balding head. A slight lock graced the peak of his forehead, but the rest of his hair was very thin.

Herbert Lamport looked out with a smile at the young man there. He had heard that Mr. Long's son might come calling. He hadn't expected the lad so soon or so well disposed. Daniel Long was dressed in slacks and a long sleeved shirt. He was a pleasant looking young man with brown hair and hazel eyes. He was thin and didn't look particularly athletic. Daniel's face was not elongated like his father's but his features were relatively nondescript. Handsome, but not particularly noteworthy. Herbert gave a slight bow, "Good afternoon."

"Hello, sir," Daniel replied, "I'm Daniel Long from just around the corner. I would like to inquire if the Calloway girls are at home. We just moved into the neighborhood."

"They are. Come in, Mr. Long. I shall announce you."

Daniel glanced at the silver tray on the side table of the foyer, "I'm sorry. I don't have a calling card."

"That is quite all right, sir."

Herbert led Daniel through the foyer and into the family parlor. The house was very large and magnificent inside. Daniel smiled at both its beauty and the size. His new house was much larger than the track built house he and his parents shared for so many years. Rosewood House was enormous in comparison. He wondered what the occupants could possibly be like. He had heard that the family was large, but today a family was considered unusual if it included more than two children. Herbert left Daniel in the parlor only a few moments, and before Daniel could

get a good look around the comfortable room, the butler came back for him, “Mr. Long, Mrs. Calloway will receive you in the sunroom. Miss Sveta and Miss Klava will join you when I can find them in the garden.” Herbert gave Daniel a wink, and Daniel couldn’t for the life of him figure out what the butler meant.

Herbert led Daniel into a brightly sunlit room full of windows. Plants filled it all around and were interspersed with the furniture. A pretty woman sat at the back of the room. She held a book in one hand and cradled a baby in her other arm. Daniel took another look. Mrs. Calloway was not just pretty, she was beautiful in a very different way. Her face was freckled and sported blazing green eyes. She had heart shaped lips set in a heart shaped face. Her hair was red, and she was thin, perhaps too thin. He could tell she wasn’t very tall either.

The butler, Herbert, introduced Daniel, “Mrs. Calloway, may I present Mr. Daniel Long. He is our new neighbor. He came to visit Sveta and Klava.”

Mrs. Calloway responded in a thick Scottish brogue. Daniel had to listen closely to understand her. He was a little surprised by her speech. She put down her book and reached out to him, “Good afternoon, Mr. Long. I’m Kathrin Calloway, and this is Flora. Sveta and Klava are out in the garden with Seumas and Stewart.”

“How do you do?” Daniel couldn’t help staring at Mrs. Calloway. She seemed suddenly perfect in his mind. It seemed ideal that he greet her while she held a little baby on her lap. He unconsciously bobbed his head at her.

“Why don’t you sit down Mr. Long?”

Daniel sat across from her, “Thank you. You should just call me Daniel.”

“Very well, Daniel. You are Terry Long’s son, are you not?”

“That’s right.” Daniel didn’t feel any discomfort speaking to Mrs. Calloway. He usually felt uneasy around adults, especially teachers and parents. Mrs. Calloway was very easy to speak to, “We moved in last week. School is finally out.”

“Yes, so it is. What are your plans for your holiday?”

A spark of excitement filled Daniel’s eyes. He would have never responded like this to any other adult, and he wondered for a moment about that, “I was mostly exploring the neighborhood and my house. I haven’t had time to look it completely over. Then, I have many books to read.”

“For school?”

He bobbed his head again, “For school and for fun.”

At that moment the door to the sunroom burst open and two young women rushed through. One held a two year old boy in her arms and the other was being pulled by a three year old boy. They were all out of breath.

Kathrin Calloway smiled at them, “Come in and meet our new neighbor. Sveta and Klava, Seamus and Stewart, this is Mr. Daniel Long.”

Daniel stood.

Sveta, holding Stewart, came up to him. Daniel, at first couldn’t tell any difference between Sveta and Klava. Daniel gave an involuntary intake of breath. They were both petite and exquisitely beautiful. Their skin was the color of cappuccino. Their hair was black, long, and silky. It was braided and pinned up on their heads. Their eyes, which would have appeared more appropriately in an Egyptian tomb painting were large and exotic. That was the chief difference Daniel could determine one from the other. Klava’s eyes were a brilliant emerald color while Sveta’s were brown. They didn’t look anything like Kathrin Calloway.

The girls wore matching frocks that were slightly mud spattered with a blouse underneath. The boys were equally dirty. Sveta shifted Stewart to her hip and tried to brush the dirt off her hand. She held it out to Daniel, “Hello.”

Daniel was a little taken aback. Sveta’s voice was childish with a slight lisp. She sounded very aristocratic, but odd. Daniel shook Sveta’s hand. Stewart didn’t say anything. He gave Daniel a two year old’s glare and stuck out his dirty hand. Daniel smiled and shook it too. Stewart and Seamus looked very much like Kathrin Calloway. Their hair was fine and blond with faint red highlights. Their complexion, under the dirt, was light.

Klava, with a laugh pulled Seumas up with her. Her voice was normal and filled with humor, “Hello, Daniel. Do you enjoy working in the garden?” Klava didn’t try to clean her hand, she just stuck it out.

Daniel shook her hand, “Well, I guess so.”

Seumas wiped his hand on his pants and stuck it out, “Then you must come out with us. It is a lot of fun.”

Daniel shook Seumas’ hand. The boy was only three, but he sounded much older. Daniel stared at Sveta. She sounded so young—so much younger than she should. Seumas and Stewart, after Daniel got to know him, spoke with a vocabulary of older children. He wondered right away if there was something wrong with her.

Kathrin Calloway spoke up, “Let’s not rush our guest. Why don’t you sit and find out a little about him. If he wants to go out the garden later...”

Daniel stole a look at Mrs. Calloway, “If it all the same to you, ma’am, I would just as well go out into the garden with them. It looks like I interrupted their play.”

“Good,” Seumas relaxed his face, “Then we won’t have to wash up.”

“Very well, Daniel. If you want to go out with them. Don’t let them hoodwink you into too much work.”

“Work?” Daniel pronounced under his breath.

“Come on,” Seumas took Daniel by the hand. Seumas grasped Klava by the other hand.

Klava held back a little, then followed them out the door. Sveta, still carrying Stewart came right behind them.

Daniel gazed all around. The Rosewood House garden was wonderful and huge. Birds and insects flitted around all the roses and other flowers. Trees of every English variety filled it. Seumas seemed to be leading today. He took them all back toward the left side of the garden. There, they retrieved pruning shears and small garden shovels. Sveta let Stewart down and picked up a pair of pruning shears. She handed them to Daniel. In her strange childish voice, she asked, “Mr. Daniel Long do you know how to prune a rosebush?”

“I’m sorry. I don’t.”

Sveta put out her hand for the shears, “In that case, you’ll just have to watch and entertain us while we do the work.”

Daniel handed the pruning shears back to her, “Where is your gardener?”

Klava turned a bemused expression to Daniel, “Right here.”

Daniel returned a quizzical look.

Klava explained, “We are. Mother and Father taught us. We are training Stewart and Seumas. We’re very good at it. The boys still can’t handle the pruning yet. They do the aeration and fertilizing.”

“Aeration? What’s that?”

In a soft pallet lisp, Seumas answered, “We loosen the soil a little around the plant. Not too much, just a little. Then we add some peat and manure to it.”

“I think I could do that,” Daniel smiled.

“You’ll get all dirty,” Sveta cautioned.

“That’s all right.”

Seumas handed Daniel a small hand spade. Daniel watched Seumas for a while and gave it a try. It didn’t seem very difficult. Seumas provided both Daniel and Stewart encouragement and supervision.

After a little while, Daniel looked up, “I understand you are going to The Grey Coat Hospital this year.”

Klava answered, “Yes, we are entering the Sixth Form.”

Daniel smiled, “I am too.”

Sveta looked up from her work, “I’m glad we met you. Are you going there because you are studying a language?”

Daniel stared at her. Sveta’s words didn’t sound childish, just her voice. Daniel sat back, “Yes. I’m studying a language.”

“Which one?” Sveta continued.

Here is where everything became sticky and difficult. Whenever he told anyone the languages he spoke, especially young people, that information immediately separated them from him. Everyone wanted you around when on holiday to France, but the same people wanted you to keep quiet and out of the way while in Britain.

“Klava,” Sveta called, “I didn’t hear Daniel’s response.”

“He didn’t respond yet.”

Sveta frowned and looked at him, “You don’t have a cover do you?”

Daniel sat up straight and almost stood, “What’s that? What do you mean?”

Klava cried out. Her voice was filled with anguish, “Tais-toi, Sveta. Tais-toi. Combien de fois est-ce que je dois te dire?¹”

Sveta’s eyes flashed. She was about to say something, but she quickly turned her head away.

Daniel started laughing and did stand.

Sveta, Klava, Seamus, and Stewart stared at him.

Daniel replied in French, “You speak French.”

Sveta stared in absolute surprise at Klava. She stated haughtily also in French, “Klava. You just blew our cover.”

Klava stuck her tongue in her cheek, “So I did.”

Daniel glanced from one to the other, “You both speak French.”

Sveta laughed, “And so do you.”

“Marvelous. I was hoping. I knew The Grey Coat Hospital took mainly language students, but I couldn’t be sure. So your language is French?”

“We speak French,” Sveta stared at her feet then began pruning another bush.

“You don’t mind, do you? I really need friends who I can practice with. You both sound just like my last instructor. He was from Paris.”

“We speak Parisian French,” Klava returned.

Seumas stared out from under his bush, “I really wish you would stop speaking in French. Stewart and I can’t understand a word of it.”

Stewart stared at Seumas. Seumas spoke for him, “Except, Tais-toi.”

They all laughed.

¹ Shut up, Sveta. Shut up. How many times do I have to tell you?

Daniel went back under a bush. He stated in English, "Very well. No more French for now, but only if your sisters promise to speak to me later."

Seumas glared at Klava and Sveta. They both shrugged. Klava twitched her nose, "Later, then."

Daniel, Seumas, and Stewart dug a bit more, then Daniel asked, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?²"

No one said anything for a while. Finally, Seumas whispered to Daniel, "They can't say."

Klava yelled, "Tais-toi, Seumas."

Seumas rolled his eyes, "You see."

"Как о русском?"³ Daniel asked.

He glanced up and saw Sveta stare at Klava for a moment. Sveta shrugged, "Everyone at school knows we speak Russian."

Klava nodded.

Sveta turned directly toward Daniel, "We can speak in Russian to you too."

"Then that is your language at The Grey Coat Hospital?"

"We speak Russian," pronounced Sveta.

Klava returned in English, "I know what you are driving at. We might as well tell you. Our language at the Grey Coat Hospital is Latin. We just happen to speak Russian and French."

"Not a lot of modern exchanges in Latin, are there," Daniel replied, tongue in cheek.

Sveta laughed, "No there aren't."

"Well then. May I speak to you in Russian and French and Latin?"

"Yes, please," Sveta and Klava returned almost together.

"No," stated Seumas and Stewart also together.

² Do you speak German?

³ How about Russian?

Seumas explained, "We don't know either of those languages, yet."

"Only with your sisters."

"Very well," Seamus sounded like a petulant old man.

Daniel sat back on his haunches again, "I wouldn't tell everyone. I'd rather you didn't spread it around that I speak Russian, French, German, and Latin."

"Latin too," Seumas mumbled and dug a little savagely around the roots of his rose bush.

Sveta and Klava gave a knowing look.

Klava upbraided Seumas, "Be careful Seumas, we want it to bloom." Klava clipped at her plant, "We understand all about that, Daniel. We won't say anything. Everyone knows we speak French, Russian, and that we are studying Latin. The Sixth Form will be a little new and different. We'd rather it not get around either. I'm sure you know why."

Daniel's ears reddened, "I'll be studying Mandarin at the Grey Coat Hospital."

"Mandarin, really?" exclaimed Sveta. Then she suddenly didn't say anything.

Daniel took a breath, "You both appear a little young to be in the Sixth Form. How old are you?"

Klava's voice became very old, "That is a woman's privilege."

"Oh, for goodness sakes, Klava," Sveta complained, "It's no secret. We're fourteen."

Daniel glanced at her, "Wow, you two must be really smart."

"Too smart by half," Seumas put his finger on his nose.

"Yes, well," Sveta continued, "Klava is much smarter than I am. They just wanted to keep us together."

Daniel stared at them both as though he didn't believe a word Sveta said.

"How old are you, Daniel?" asked Sveta.

“Sixteen.”

Herbert came up behind them, “Children, it is time for tea.”

“Thank you, Herbert,” they all called.

“That means I should be going,” Daniel stood.

“No, not at all,” Sveta motioned, “Come on in and have tea with us. I’m sure mother won’t mind.”

“Are you sure?”

“Certain. We can speak in French and Russian until papa comes home. I’m sure he would like to meet you.”

They all ran off to tea. Daniel helped Seumas and Stewart clean up. They all had a nice tea. Sveta and Klava took Daniel to the library and they did converse in French and Russian until their father James Calloway came home.

James Calloway didn’t carry a briefcase when Herbert opened the door to him. James Calloway was tall and handsome, clean shaven. His hair was slightly tousled—always slightly tousled. It was brown and nondescript. His face, though handsome was still nondescript. Daniel liked him right away.

When he entered the door, he was mobbed by Seumas, Stewart, Sveta, Klava, and Mrs. Calloway, in that order. Daniel smiled to see it. After James greeted his family, he stepped over to Daniel, “Good evening Daniel Long. I know of your father, although, I haven’t met him.”

When James shook Daniel’s hand, Daniel could see the bulge of James’ service automatic under his coat. Daniel wouldn’t have noticed it at all except he had once heard an off hand comment during one of his parent’s infrequent parties. The comment concerned the British government’s requirements for their agents to carry weapons. Daniel hadn’t thought much about

the comment. He had surreptitiously observed the gentlemen at his parents' party. Many of them did carry pistols. Daniel simply answered James Calloway, "I am very happy to meet you, sir. We're your new neighbors, and I'm certain my father would like to make your acquaintance."

"Yes, tell him to come by any time."

Daniel headed toward the door.

"Must you leave so soon?"

Daniel turned, "I've been here all afternoon. My mother is likely looking for me. I'll come again tomorrow, if that's all right."

Sveta, Klava, Seumas, and Stewart called, "Yes, please come again."

Daniel made his way back around the corner. When he arrived home, his mother was slightly frantic, "Daniel, where have you been?" Daniel's mother always looked old to him. She wasn't really, but anguish and worry had burdened her for a long time. She was not old, but she seemed old and appeared a little old—especially to a young person. She wore fusty grey suits and pulled her hair up into a bun. Still, her face was warm, and her eyes filled with humor, but also worry. If she could have told you anything, she would have said how the business wore on her, but she couldn't say anything. She wasn't supposed to know anything. She imagined she knew everything.

"I told you mother, I went to visit the Calloways at Rosewood House. They invited me for tea."

"For tea?"

"Yes, they are very pleasant, and you know their daughters are going to The Grey Coat Hospital in the Sixth Form this year."

His mother smiled, "That is very fortunate for you. To have friends so close..."

Terrance Long came through the door almost right on Daniel's heels. Terrance kissed his wife, Rosalie, and clapped Daniel on the back, "Evening Daniel."

"Hello, father."

Terry gingerly took off his coat and put it in the foyer closet. He tried to hide his service automatic when he put the coat away, but Daniel noted it and smiled. Rosalie followed it with her eyes and frowned. Rosalie went to the kitchen and brought everything to the table. Daniel and Terry both went to help her.

When his father turned, Daniel marked the bulge of the smaller automatic that was always in his back waistband holster. It was usually hidden by his coat. Daniel knew certain people in the government were required to carry two automatic pistols all the time. He wasn't sure why his father, in the Foreign Office, needed to carry any weapon at all, but he accepted it as a matter of course. He wondered why his father often reminded him not to say anything about the weapons. Daniel just thought that had to do with the government and with government service. Over the years, he noticed that many of his father's friends carried automatic pistols. Usually two. One under their coat and one in their waistband.

To Rosalie Long, this was the business. She knew her husband worked for some part of the British government. She suspected one of the Military Intelligence Sections, the MIs. She wasn't sure which one anymore, and she didn't care which. She knew Terry gave up field agent work for her a long time ago. He worked at the Foreign Office now. She had no idea what he did, but she always noticed he still carried his weapons all the time. When they married, he informed her it was service policy. She already knew that. That's when he worked in the field, and she worked for MI too, as an operative. That's how they met, and that was before she had

her first nervous breakdown. She was much better now, but she still felt the hand of dread on her heart when she watched him clean, load, and holster his pistols every morning. She was so afraid that one day he would not come home to her again.

Their dinner was homely and cheery. With Terry here, Rosalie could finally put away all of her fears from the day.

Daniel was a new man. All his fears had dropped away when they moved here and away from his old school and old neighborhood. Terry was afraid of nothing, and Daniel wished to be just like him some day.

Halfway through dinner, Daniel asked, "Father, what is a cover and why would someone need one?"

Terry stopped eating immediately. Daniel's mother's eyes widened.

Terry smiled, "Where did you hear about a cover?"

"Sveta Calloway asked me if I had a cover when I wouldn't tell them what languages I spoke. Then, when Klava Calloway spoke in French, she said Klava broke their cover. What could she mean?"

Terry smiled, "She was just joking, I'm sure. She didn't mean anything. Probably a game they were playing. You met the Calloways?"

"Yes, they are very nice. They invited me to tea. I met Mr. Calloway. Sveta and Klava said they would speak French, Russian, and Latin with me."

"They did?"

"Yes."

"Will you visit tomorrow?"

"I promised I would."

“They are good friends to have.”

Right after dinner, his father made a phone call. He closed the door of the phone closet.

Daniel ran over to Rosewood House directly after breakfast. In spite of the early morning hour, Herbert let him inside. Sveta and Klava took care of Seumas and Stewart while Mrs. Lampport, the cook, finished up her work. The children and Mrs. Lampport greeted Daniel pleasantly, but Sveta and Klava did not appear very happy. They all entertained Seumas and Stewart until Mrs. Lampport was finished, and then Klava and Sveta could give their attention to Daniel.

“Come on,” Klava motioned toward the library. Both she and Sveta did not seem too jovial.

When they were inside the library, Sveta stood by the door. She took a careful look around the frame.

“What’s wrong,” Daniel plopped into one of the big leather chairs.

“Shush,” Klava warned.

Sveta shut the door.

Klava stared at Daniel, “You really got us in trouble.”

“I did?”

“Yes, you did.” Sveta threw herself in another chair and held her chin on her hands.

“What did I do?”

Klava wasn’t tactful at all, “You squealed on us.”

“I did not.”

“You did,” scowled Sveta.

“I didn’t mean to. What exactly did I do?”

Klava stared down her nose at him, "Your father called ours last night. We thought you were read in just a little." She stared at Sveta, "Maybe it was entirely our mistake. Maybe he doesn't know anything about anything."

"Could be true," Sveta's brow beetled.

Klava stared at him, "Your father is Terrance Long? The Terrance Long?"

"Yes, I guess."

Klava turned her gaze to Sveta, "He doesn't know anything."

"Wait a second, what exactly are you talking about? Know about what?"

Klava rolled her eyes, "If you don't know, we won't tell you."

"All I asked my father last night was about what you two said. You both talked about a cover. I just wanted to know what that was."

Sveta sucked in her breath, "He doesn't know anything."

"All right, I don't know anything. Just what is a cover?"

Klava glanced at Sveta, "It couldn't hurt to tell him what a cover is. Maybe that will keep his mouth shut about anything else he hears or sees. He is our neighbor, and we don't have any other friends close by."

Sveta snarled, "We don't really need him. We can always see our friends whenever we want."

"They don't speak French, well, or Russian. We know hardly anyone in the Sixth Form. It might be a good idea to start with one ally. He'll have to do until we make other connections."

Daniel combed his fingers through his hair, "Sorry, should I go. I didn't mean to cause you a problem."

Klava stared at him, "Could you understand us? What were we speaking Sveta?"

Sveta shrugged.

Daniel remarked blandly, "It was French."

Klava bit her lip, "We are so used to people not understanding it... Look Daniel, we like the idea of having you around, but you can't tell your father or anyone about anything here."

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"Don't ask your father anything about what you see or hear at Rosewood House. That would be the best for us and for you. If you can't keep your mouth shut, we'll have to shut you out."

"I still don't know what you mean."

Klava glared at him, "I don't know how I can make it clearer. Don't ask your father, mother, or anyone else about what confuses you here—just ask us. We might tell you, but if something happens again like last night, you're out. Is that clear?"

"Yes, I guess it's clear. Are you going to tell me what a cover is?"

Klava crossed her legs and sounded like she was instructing a child. She slipped into Russian, "A cover is an official and coordinated story you give to hide an unfortunate truth."

"Why would you two not want someone to know you speak French? I mean, I know why I try to hide from other kids the languages I speak. Where I went to school, the boys beat you up for speaking another language."

Klava stared mysteriously at him, "In our business, the fewer who know our skills the better."

"What business is that?"

"Oh for goodness sakes, Daniel. Your father wears an automatic pistol in his drawers and in his coat. What business do you think?"

"How did you know that?"

Sveta raised her hands, “Klava, he doesn’t know anything—nothing at all. Maybe we shouldn’t tell him anything.”

Klava glanced at her, “He should be able to guess it.”

“Klava, he doesn’t have a need to know.”

“Are you telling me my father does something more than work for the Foreign Office?”

Sveta called out, “Klava, you should stop teasing him. You shouldn’t say anything more. He will guess it and then...”

“Why are we speaking Russian?” Daniel held his head.

They both turned to him, “Because mother can’t understand Russian.”

Klava went on, “She may have learned French. She hasn’t told us. She is as quick a language study as we are.”

Sveta pursed her lips, “Lately, when we are speaking French, she gets this knowing look in her eyes—it’s really creepy. She may understand every word we say. That would be sad—no privacy.”

“Yeah,” Klava commiserated, “Now, back to our Daniel problem. How much does he need to know?”

“I vote for nothing,” Sveta raised one hand.

“Don’t I get a vote?” Daniel asked.

“No,” Sveta and Klava glanced at him together.

“Look, are you trying to infer my father is an agent or spy of some kind?”

Sveta and Klava stared at him.

No one said anything for a while, finally Klava smirked, “We didn’t tell you anything. Just don’t say a word of this to your father.”

“Yeah,” Sveta glared, “He’ll guess where you heard it, and he’ll call Papa.”

“And Papa will tell Mama.”

“And Mama will tan our hides.”

“Your parents surely don’t spank you—do they?”

Sveta just glared, “It’s in our contract.”

