

A Moment of Weakness

Nigel Jenkins latched the door behind him as he entered the embassy's flat.

"Coffee."

He walked into the kitchen and automatically reached for the caffetiere.

He stopped, puzzled, and looked around.

"That's funny," he thought, "I'm sure I left it next to the kettle."

He was annoyed with himself. His job required a high level of awareness and recall and this sort of mental sloppiness annoyed him.

His espionage training had taught him to be clinically observant.

"This is my first assignment," he thought, "The Codger would give me a good rollicking if I could not remember what I did a few hours before."

He settled down with the local evening paper.

The main story concerned a security leak about a secret government project.

His task was to gather details of this project. His superiors then decided what irrelevant bits to leak to the press.

He smiled to himself, "I guess I'm getting a few things right."

The next evening he took note of everything as he walked through to the kitchen.

There he stopped dead in his tracks.

Someone had deliberately moved the caffetiere. The previous evening was no accident.

Noiselessly he turned, drew his pistol, and systematically began searching the flat.

Nothing else was out of place.

He wracked his brains to find a logical reason why someone would enter his flat, just to move the caffetiere. Was it a warning? A threat?

First thing the next morning he paid a visit to the NATO airbase where he sought out Morgan, the "keeper of gadgets" for embassy staff.

"Morgan, I need a few of those little window gadgets of yours," Nigel said.

Morgan explained the use of the mini alarms in some detail.

That night he rigged every window and the flat door with the tiny alarms. These would trigger a vibrator strapped to his arm so as not to warn any intruder that he had been alerted.

Knowing the access points were monitored allowed him to feel a little more at ease.

The bedside alarm woke him at seven the next morning. He felt a sense of relief that no alarm had been triggered.

On leaving the flat, he opened the door cautiously and looked around. Nothing seemed out of place in the neighbourhood.

Quickly he bent down and deftly placed an almost invisible hair across the bottom of the door.

Then he set off to the grey building that housed the embassy.

Once there he caught the lift to the fourth floor.

"Morning Nigel," Janet smiled radiantly.

"Hi Janet. My but we do look gorgeous this morning," he said.

"Just for you," she teased.

Nigel felt a warm glow in her presence.

Janet was the ambassador's right and left hand and knew more about the embassy workings than the rest of them put together.

"Have the embassy bags arrived yet?" he asked.

"Yes, but there was nothing for you."

"Thanks. Fancy a bite of lunch later?"

"Tomorrow would be better for me," said Janet.

"It's a date then. Twelve thirty at Rossini's?"

"You bet," she smiled.

Officially, Nigel was a Military Attaché. He had joined the army after 'varsity' and had quickly risen to the rank of major before being recruited by Military Intelligence. This was his first assignment and his only regret so far was that he had not seen combat while with the army.

Arriving at the flat that evening, he bent down and checked the hair on the door. It was intact.

Nevertheless, he entered cautiously and checked each room.

Nothing untoward.

Until he reached the kitchen.

The caffetiere was not on the stove where he had left it. This time it was in the sink.

His mind raced.

"Someone is fucking with my mind," he thought.

Realising that he had not checked the alarms on the windows he set about the task.

They were all fine.

"Ceiling," he thought, "let me check the ceiling panels and floor for a hidden trapdoor."

Again ... nothing.

Puzzled he examined the caffetiere for fingerprints.

As expected – clean as a whistle. Not even his own prints to be seen. "A professional job. They've wiped it clean."

Nigel now knew that someone was trying to unnerve him.

He set an alarm on the door and read himself to sleep.

The vibration on his arm instantly brought him to full alert.

A pattern of three shorts. The bathroom window.

He grabbed his pistol and a pillow and moved to the bathroom door.

Flattening himself next to the door, he flung the pillow inside.

No response.

Cautiously he edged around the door.

Nothing.

But the window was open an eighth of an inch.

Not wishing to expose himself to a shot from outside he merely closed and latched it, then reset the alarm.

Eventually Nigel drifted off to an uneasy sleep.

The next morning, before he left, he hid the caffetiere under his bed.

The day held a bright prospect - all morning he looked forward to his lunch with Janet.

When he arrived at Rossini's Janet was not yet there so he slipped into his usual spot and ordered a whiskey.

"Hello Nigel."

He looked up, startled.

The Codger was a big man.

"Don't look so concerned. I didn't have to kill Janet to stop her coming. I just had to arrange to send her on an errand," he smiled.

Nigel managed a disappointed, "Hello."

The Codger had been assigned to Nigel's training from day one and as such, his ongoing task was to make regular checks to monitor Nigel's performance and state of mind. There were times that he was sure that The Codger knew him better than knew himself.

"You seem a little tired?" The Codger questioned.

"Just a little bug running around my body," he lied. "It keeps me from sleep but I'll soon have it licked."

Nigel was unsure if he should tell The Codger about what was going on. For the first time in his short espionage career, he was totally uncertain.

Thoughts such as, "What if The Codger is a double agent," flashed through his mind, and conflicted with, "This is the one person I should be able to trust."

After some searching questions from The Codger they parted company.

That night Nigel again checked every single area of his flat as he entered.

All seemed well, until he reached the kitchen.

His heart seemed to wither within his chest. His throat closed in on him.

The caffetiere was on top of the fridge.

"Someone is definitely fucking with my mind."

He stifled an immediate urge to break security and contact The Codger using the emergency code. But conflicting thoughts still crashed about his tired

skull and the, “What if’s,” were still more frightening than the unknown threat to his sanity, and possibly, his life.

Nigel sat staring at the caffetiere for hours - undecided.

His mind raced. He felt he was losing touch with reality.

Almost at the point of exhaustion, slipping his pistol under his pillow, he turned off the bedside light.

Suddenly he was awake, heart thumping as the bedside light went on.

Fear gripped him as he realized that someone was straddling him.

“Don’t move,” a voice snapped commandingly.

He recognized Janet’s voice.

“What the hell . . .” his voice trailed off.

Janet was holding a gun to his throat.

“I’ll do the talking,” she said.

Janet explained, “Those leaks to the press. You were getting too close to the truth so my principals instructed me to kill you. Foolishly, I hoped that the caffetiere trick would make you doubt your mind so that you would contact your handler. This would, as you know, have meant that you would have been sent home – giving me an excuse for not having killed you.”

She continued, “It didn’t work so now I have no choice - either I kill you, or they kill both of us.”

At that, instant Nigel thought he saw a tear form in Janet’s eye and her finger muscles tighten.

He closed his eyes.

He heard the “phutt” of a silencer and the “plop” of a bullet hitting its mark.

As consciousness began creeping back, Nigel became aware of a weight on his stomach.

Janet was lying half on him, blood oozing from a neat hole in the side of her head. The blood was already drying indicating that he must have lost consciousness for a while.

He suddenly became aware of a light from the kitchen and, of all things, the smell of coffee.

Confused, he pushed Janet’s body off him, pulled his pistol from under his pillow and followed the smell.

At the kitchen door, he stopped dead in his tracks.

Without even looking around The Codger asked, “One lump or two?”

Ray Hattingh