



# Water Source

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## CHAPTER ONE

I could not help but feel that the man on the other side of the train platform was watching me. I had been travelling since early morning, attempting to put as much distance between myself and London, desperately fleeing the troubles I had left there. But from the corner of my eye I had kept seeing the same man with his worn fawn coloured raincoat from the corner of my eye at various stages of the journey.

The train pulled in at the station and I slumped, heavy with fatigue, into a small compartment and as the train pulled out my mind wandered to the events of the night before.....

I had fled from my home after the brutality of the people of London. They had openly cheered as the men were led to be executed. They cheered the new regime as others were killed or thrown in jail by the police and the secret service. The new government had come into power weeks before and they had purged anybody who dared oppose them. My family had been arrested and taken away that very afternoon. I had hidden and had not been found. When I saw the men going towards the platform to be shot, it was the last straw for me.

I knew I had to get out of London, and since all international borders were closed, I had to go north, to where the regime wasn't as strong. I had run to Kings Cross station and got on the first train to the most northern place I knew, Edinburgh. The man had got in the next carriage to mine. He had followed me to the dining car. At the time I had not been suspicious but now I realised he had been following me all along. I had seen him at the entrance to Kings Cross buying supplies. He must work for the Government. He had been talking to someone when the train had stopped at Stevenage, I had seen him on his phone at Peterborough and now, here in a northern English town, he was watching me.

## CHAPTER TWO

I knew that this was my chance, my chance to lose the man that was following me. I snuck out of my compartment and wandered towards the front of the train. Just as the doors started to close I leapt on to the platform leaving the man on the train. Quickly I ducked behind a newspaper seller. I didn't think the man in the fawn overcoat had seen me jump but I couldn't be sure. I looked about for the exit and found it, near some vending machines and walked casually out of it, my heart racing.

What should I do now? I looked at my phone and scrolled through my contacts. I soon discovered a friend that I had met on holiday last year lived in a town I thought was near here. I pressed the Call button.

"Hi, is that Peter?" I asked as soon as the phone had been answered.

"Yes. Who is this?" came the reply.

"Hi Peter. It's James, remember? We met last year."

"Oh yeah. Hi! What can I do for you?"

"Well, I'm in trouble. Something has happened to my parents and.....I need....". My voice broke a little and I thought, "*What Do I need?*"

"I need help, Peter. Can I stay with you for a few days?" I said, whispering so as not to be overheard.

"Well, er, I'm not sure. I don't think that my mum and dad would like it. We don't want any trouble and we don't really know you", came Peter's nervous reply.

"I know, but I promise it'll only be for a few days. I just need to figure out what to do. Is there somewhere I can stay without your parents knowing? Trust me, I don't want any trouble either", I said thinking of the man in the fawn overcoat and wondering if that was the last I'd seen of him and his kind. Somehow I doubted it.

"Well, we have a shed", said Peter, "I guess you could stay in there".

"What's your address?" I said urgently.

"It's 4 Promenade Close, second road back from the Pier. Where are you now?"

"I'm at the station in Doncaster."

"OK but you'll have to hurry or you'll miss the last train. We're not allowed out after curfew and it'll be nearly that by the time you get here".

Damn, I'd forgotten about the curfew imposed by the new regime to get people off the streets between 10pm and 6am.

"It doesn't matter, just give me some directions".

"Get the train to Hull. When you come out of the station turn right and head for the water. You'll see the Pier. Turn down Granary Lane and it's first on the left. Go in the back gate and stay out of sight. I'll look out for you".

"Thanks Peter, I'll be there soon".

I ended the call and walked, fast, back into the station and towards the Fast Pay Ticket Machine to get a ticket. I didn't want to talk to anyone and be remembered. The last train pulled in and I got on, this time certain that there

was no-one following me. How long until the man in the fawn coat realised I wasn't on the train? And then what would he do? Where were my parents and, more importantly, *how* were they? I worried about these things all the way to Hull. As soon as the train pulled into Hull station I jumped out and hurried to the exit. Quickly I made my way to 4 Promenade Close. Half way there I saw a policeman so I dropped down, undid my shoelace and did it up again. Before I stood up I made sure he was looking the other way and I continued towards my friend Peter's house.

## CHAPTER THREE

I soon came round to the back gates of the houses of Promenade Close. It didn't take me long to find Peter's gate as he was there waiting for me. His first words to me were, "James, you look terrible"! I shrugged. I had more things to worry about right now than how I looked. He led me round to the shed and hurriedly pushed me in. "I've told my parents that I'm getting the cat in so I had better get back. They'll be going to bed soon so I'll be back in about 20 minutes or so".

As Peter left I looked around and saw gardening equipment, paint and a lawnmower. It was a tidy shed though with some space to stretch out. I saw some old lounge cushions and decided they might be good to sleep on for now. The smell was musty; a strong smell of mown grass and paint, and cobwebs in the corners indicated the presence of plenty of spiders! Still, I'd be safe here for a bit. I put the cushions down on the floor and lay on them, resting. When Peter came back I sat up and gestured for him to sit down. He handed me some bread and cheese and a bottle of water. I ate it hungrily suddenly aware that it had been hours since I had last eaten.

"So, what's been happening with you"? he asked. I began to tell him.....

In the two years since the banking collapse of 2008, a new political party had come into existence, led by the charismatic Gavin King. His manifesto was simple: stop crime and corruption and give the people of Britain their country – and their money – back. Police were to be given wide ranging powers, corporal and capital punishment was to be re-introduced as was National Service for students who didn't want to stay on at school and work. The party had gained a lot of support quickly. When it had come into power my parents – investigative journalists – had been asked to do a biographical piece on the new leader. They had been largely in favour of the new regime although they had a few human rights concerns. At first everything had seemed perfectly straightforward; Gavin King, ace mathematician, graduated from Cambridge and entered the banking world. He had worked in both London and Hong Kong and had done well for himself. When the banking collapse happened, he declared himself against the banking industry as a whole and vowed to bring decency and fairness to Britain. My parents had spent a few days in Hong Kong as part of their investigations. I think they found something out there, I don't know what but I want to find out. When they came back the phone calls started. They started whispering together and looked worried. Mum had given us all 'survival packs' containing money, passports and a few essentials. She had joked about it but had shown me a secret hiding place in case anything should happen. It was not long afterwards that the bang on the door came – in the middle of the night. I had run from my bedroom and grabbed the long pole that stood on the landing, thrusting it quickly upwards to open the hatch that led to the attic. My hiding place was behind the water tank and as soon as the ladder had come down, I had scrambled up there and hidden. One of the men had come up there and shone a torch around. I'd held my breath not daring to risk even the sound of my breathing. But he hadn't seen me. I had stayed up there for hours. I didn't know what to do. I was worried that the house would

be being watched, which of course it was. When I had watched the men being led to the platform to be shot from the small window in the attic and seen the cheering crowds, I knew that I had to get out. I grabbed my back pack and ran.

When I had finished telling Peter all this, he just stared at me for a couple of minutes. "Oh God, that's awful", he said and then, worried, "Were you followed here?"

"I don't think so," I said. "There was a man on the train but I think I gave him the slip".

"I can't get my parents into trouble," Peter said, "you know what the police are like these days. What's your plan?"

"I'm not sure", I answered truthfully. "But I'll have one by morning", I promised. Peter looked at his watch. "I've got to go. I'll come back in the morning and you can tell me what you've decided." He nodded towards a bag that he had brought down from the house with him. "There's a blanket in there. Hope you sleep ok."

"Thanks Peter"

"Night"

"Night"

The shed door closed gently behind him, I arranged the blanket and lay down. I needed a plan but was just so tired. I drifted into an extremely deep sleep.

## CHAPTER FOUR

I woke up slowly; gradually becoming aware of a scratching sound in the corner and feeling cold and shivery. I kept my eyes closed, knowing where I was but wishing that I was actually at home in my warm snug bed, with mum and dad just next door. Sighing, I opened my eyes and tried to focus on the illuminated hands on my watch. Just after 2 am. I sat up, shivered and pulled the blanket tight around me. My head felt heavy and I dreaded having to start making some decisions about what to do next. I took a swig from the bottle of water Peter had brought the night before and opened up my backpack. Mum had packed a variety of things that she'd obviously thought would be useful - my passport, a wallet containing some pound sterling, some US dollars and some Euros; a change of socks and underwear, and a toothbrush and toothpaste. At the bottom was a bar of my favourite dark chocolate which I gratefully pulled out and unwrapped. I also pulled out a scrap of paper thinking it was rubbish from a previous trip. Turning it over however I recognised my mum's writing – *Check your videos*. Probably a stray note I thought. Slowly savouring my chocolate I thought about my mum and the way that she had half-joked about us needing to be prepared in case anything happened. Clearly she had realised that we were in some danger. The note must mean something – this was too serious for this just to be a random piece of paper. *Check your videos....*what did that mean? I didn't have any videos with me. I could feel a headache forming over my right eye. I was still dead tired but was now too alert to be able to drop back to sleep. I went through the contents of the bag again. The only other thing I had on me was my mobile phone. I scrolled through the applications. The phone had a camera but I've never really used it. Did it have a video camera? I wasn't sure but it was the best I had at the moment. I began going through the phone menu slowly and carefully. Finally I had it! A folder called Video Files and there it was.....a video message from my dad.

I rearranged the cushions, pulled up the blanket and tried to get comfortable. I pressed Play.

My dad's face filled the screen and I felt a lump rise in my throat. He had started to speak "James, if you're watching this then something bad must have happened. I'm really sorry it's come to this. There's something not right about Gavin King. I just don't buy all that, "Giving away my money to save the country" stuff; not any more. I think we got close to something in Hong Kong but we haven't had time to work out what. It's down to you now James. Hopefully you're old enough to handle this but young enough for the authorities not to consider you as a serious threat. Just try and get out of the country, go to Uncle Andrew in Amsterdam, do what you have to do, don't wait, JUST DO IT! I've hidden some names and addresses in your phone, you won't recognise them, but you should try and contact them. **Not** with this phone though. The Secret Service will be tracking you with it. Get rid of this phone and go to Uncle Andrew. Just remember one thing, you are our son and we believe in you and we love you". The message ended abruptly. I sat there dumbfounded for a few moments. This was way bigger than I'd thought. How was I supposed to deal with it? I could feel the panic rising so I tried to

concentrate on the names my dad had said he had hidden in my phone. I looked through the folders and found them easily enough, in the Saved Texts folder. There were three names there:

Sasha Poskotinov  
Complex 33, Building 2, Flat 15  
Nebraskov Street  
Moscow  
RUSSIA РОССИЯ

Wang Li Kai  
Bijou Apartments  
Flat F, 157 Prince Edward Road West  
Mongkok  
Hong Kong

White Sands???????

The first two sounded like names but the last one? A hotel perhaps?

My immediate problem however was getting to Amsterdam. My dad's brother, Andrew had married a Dutch nurse and lived in a small town not far from Amsterdam. In the days of cheap flights we'd visited often, but with international travel now banned this wasn't going to be easy. I sighed and rubbed my head where a faint ache threatened to turn into a full blown migraine. I lay down and pulled the blanket up to my chin. Staring at the dark wooden ceiling I considered my options.....

I must have drifted off to sleep because the next thing I knew Peter was shaking me awake.

"Morning James", he said, handing me some cold buttered toast wrapped in kitchen roll.

"Thanks", I grunted and sat up. I gingerly shook my head but there was no sign of the headache. I began to eat the toast.

"Well?", said Peter. "Got a plan? You can't stay here you know. What if you get caught?"

"I know, I know." I sounded impatient and immediately regretted it. Peter had really helped me out and he was right to be worried. The new regime worked on the 'Guilty until Proven Innocent' model.

"Listen, I need to get to Holland", I said, "probably by boat. And the sooner the better".

"Holland?" exclaimed Peter, "Are you mad?"

"It's where I need to go", I said. I had decided not to share my dad's video message with Peter. The less he knew the better, in case anyone did come looking for me.

"There are fishing boats here, right? I bet some of them still go across to the Continent. There are always people willing to bend the rules if they can make some money. I can pay – as long as it's not too much. Do you know anyone who works on a boat?" I looked at Peter's stunned face, this was clearly not how he had planned to spend his Saturday morning.

"There is one guy that may be able to help..." he said, hesitantly.

"His name is Alex and I play rugby with him. He runs a fishing boat with his dad only his dad's got cancer so he's being going it alone for a while. I'd heard that he'd been bringing booze and fags in from the Continent to help with the bills. I dunno if he's still doing it though".

I scrambled to my feet. “Excellent! Let’s go and find him! Thanks mate”, I slapped Peter on the back, “let’s get me out of your hair as soon as possible”. This thought clearly cheered Peter up as he picked up my bag and handed it to me, “Come on then, I expect he’ll be down at the fish sheds at this time of day”.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The fish sheds lay at the end of the harbour area. We walked down towards them without really talking. Peter seemed anxious and I could tell he wanted rid of me. I tried to reassure him that I'd be gone soon but I was finding it hard to stay cheerful. My insides were churning as the full reality of what was happening hit home. Suddenly my phone beeped. I couldn't believe how stupid I'd been. Despite my dad's warning I had forgotten to turn off the phone and get rid of it. I pulled it from my pocket and checked the screen. It was a text from my gran. I read it. She was worried too. She'd phoned our home and kept getting the answerphone. No harm in replying I decided so I sent her a quick and jaunty text. I didn't think there was much to be gained by telling her the truth and if my phone was being monitored I had to keep things low key.

Looking about I saw a refrigerated van standing on the quayside. FRESH FISH DELIVERIES ALL OVER THE NORTH EAST read the sign on the side. The back doors were open, the van half filled with polystyrene boxes of ice. Leaving my phone turned on, I threw it into the back of the van and heard it fall with a thud somewhere near the back. Hopefully the van would be on a long journey around the north east, giving the trackers something to follow for a bit. I just hoped that I was still one step ahead.

Peter looked at me as if I had completely lost my mind. "Come on", I said, "let's find this friend of yours".

The fish shed was a huge grey metal-framed building, with two sets of double doors at either end. Inside men dressed in white boots, white coats and white hats looked more like scientists than fishermen. The smell was over-powering and I gagged. I have never been too fond of fish.

"Oi, you two! Get yer gear on or get out". A tall thin man with a clipboard shouted at us and waved towards some hooks on our left, on which some white coats were hanging.

I pulled Peter over and we donned a couple of coats and hats. At any other time I'd have made a joke about how we looked but Peter by now was looking more and more uneasy so instead I asked, "Can you see your friend?"

"Alex? I dunno, everyone looks the same".

"Let's go for a walk about. Look confident, as if we should be here".

We walked between the large yellow plastic containers of fish, me trying not to hold my nose and Peter looking from side to side for Alex.

"There!", he pointed a little way to the right, "the tall guy with the dark hair sticking out of his cap". He waved and I saw the man in question wave back. We walked over, negotiating the slippery floor.

"Hey, Peter! What's up? Don't usually see you up and about this early!" Alex seemed friendly enough, I only hoped he could help.

Peter introduced me.

"Hi," I said, "I hear you might be up for a trip to the Continent".

"SSSSSHH! You wanna lose me my licence?!" Alex looked around quickly, anxious to see if anyone had overheard me.

"I'm sorry, " I apologised quickly, "I need some help".

“Look, we can’t talk here.” Alex said. “Meet me in the café round the corner. I’ll be done here in about half an hour”.  
He turned away quickly and began sorting fish from one crate to another.

Something caught my eye. I looked over my shoulder. At the far end of the shed, by the other double doors, was a man in a fawn coloured overcoat. He was scanning the shed.

“Peter, go!”, I hissed urgently. “You’ve done enough. I’ll take it from here. I don’t want you to get any more involved”.

“S’ok, I’ll come to the café with you”, he said.

“NO!”, I almost shouted, “please, just go.”

I’d kept us both walking back towards the double doors. The man in the overcoat hadn’t spotted us – thank goodness for the white coat and hat get up.

Peter looked a bit fed up that I was ditching him. “Listen,” I spoke softly but carefully so he fully understood, “there’s a man at the far end of the shed. He looks like the same man that was on the train. They’ve found me. I don’t want you involved so please, just go! I’m going to make a run for it as soon as we get to the doors.”

I knew that would get through to Peter. He looked around wildly. “DON’T!” I hissed. “You’ll draw attention to us”.

“Sorry”, he muttered. “Look, good luck.”

“Thanks mate”, I said. “You’ve been brilliant”.

We’d reached the door. The man in the fawn coat was making his way through the shed. Standing by the door was a quad bike with a trailer, now empty of fish. The keys were in the ignition. Casually, I climbed on. I glanced back towards the shed and at that moment the man looked straight at me. There was a flicker of recognition and he raised his arm and began to run. Turning the key, I fired up the bike and roared away from the shed and down the quay, throwing off the hat and coat as I went. I raced along the low buildings. Reaching the end, I turned out of sight of the fish sheds and jumped off. There was some commotion behind me but I couldn’t tell if it was the man who was following me or the man whose quad bike I’d borrowed. I darted up some steps and across the road. There was a café with a neon sign, announcing Julie’s Café. I hoped that was the café Alex meant as I sprinted to the door. Pausing briefly I composed myself and pushed open the door.

The café was brightly lit at the front with small square tables laid with red checked cloths. Leading backwards along one wall were darker more private booths and I headed towards one near the back. The waitress looked younger than me and was completely disinterested. I ordered a bacon sandwich and a cup of tea. The previous occupant had left a paper so I sat back and leafed through it. Gavin King’s photo smiled at me from the front page. The executions were still big news but in a very positive way. Gavin King was showing that criminal behaviour would not be tolerated and why should the tax payer have to pay to keep murderers and rapists in prison? The paper was very much in favour of this tough stance and had printed letters of glowing praise for King from his readers. I pushed the paper away in disgust. What about my parents? Good honest people. Was it right that they should be

dragged from their home in the middle of the night and imprisoned for no reason? I slurped my tea noisily and hoped Alex wouldn't be too long.

## CHAPTER SIX

It didn't take long for Alex to arrive. He was tall, taller than me for sure, with a stocky build and I'd guess he was about 19 or 20. Now, having taken off his white coat and cap, I could see his casual t-shirt and jeans. His hair was spiked up wildly, and he seemed genuinely friendly.

"Hey, I'm Alex", he said introducing himself as he slid into the bench opposite me. "There was a bit of commotion in the shed after you and Pete left. Some idiot stole a quad bike and then this old guy in an overcoat slipped into a pile of fish. It's been a messy morning, I can tell you!"

"Really?" I said, trying to look innocent although I got the strong impression from the grin on Alex's face that he knew I was involved somehow.

The waitress came over, straightening her skirt and smiling at Alex. "Hello Sir, what can I get you?" Alex ordered the same as I'd had but took no notice of the waitress, much to her disappointment. He grinned at me and raised his eyebrows. I figured that he seemed all right and I began to feel a little calmer. We sat in silence for a bit until the waitress brought Alex his order with a bored, "Here you go, Sir".

"Well, you're in a spot of bother then?". Alex spoke in a friendly way, keeping his voice quiet so as not to be overhead.

"I have to get to Holland. I know it sounds crazy but it's a matter of life and death". No point beating about the bush I thought, Alex was either going to help me or he wasn't.

"It is true that I do have contacts on the other side of the water," he said, "and that I have been known to make the occasional 'unauthorised trip'", he made speech mark signs with his fingers as he said this. "But how do I know I can trust you?"

I looked at him, disbelievingly. "Look at me!" I said, "I'm 16 years old. I slept in a shed last night and I haven't washed for days! Do I REALLY look like I work for the authorities?"

Alex laughed out loud and banged his hand down on the table. He was a big guy with strong shoulders and the table shook.

"Point taken", he said cheerfully.

"So, what time can we go?" I enquired hopefully.

"Hold on, hold on. You think we can go today? These things take time to arrange and we have to time it right. We can't go at night because the harbour is more heavily guarded and I have to time it so I am back here with the morning fishing fleet". He must have seen my face fall because he then said, "Hang on, let me make a phone call".

Alex slipped from the booth, pulling his phone from his pocket and walked towards the back of the café. I turned and looked out of the window where the early morning brightness was being replaced by ever-darkening skies. I sat drumming my fingers impatiently on the table. "PLEASE let it be ok!" I thought.

Sliding back behind the table Alex announced, "You're in luck. My mate, Lars, is up for a visit tonight. We'll need to get going though".

"Great! What are we waiting for?" I said, jumping to my feet. I took out my wallet and peeled off a fiver to pay for breakfast. "Come on, show me this boat!"

We walked casually out of the café and across the road towards the harbour. Once there Alex showed me his boat, Serena. It was a lot smaller than I'd imagined. Rain began to fall and Alex threw me a waterproof jacket. He busied himself on board making all the necessary preparations. I put my back pack in the small wheel house and wished that this whole nightmare was over.

We were soon sailing out into the open sea. The rain was now coming down hard and fast and the sea was an uninviting slate grey colour. We stood together in the wheel house; Alex calm and assured at the wheel, me clinging to a rail and feeling distinctly queasy. The boat rose and fell with the choppy sea. Alex handed me a lifejacket just as a wave crashed over the hull and swamped the deck, it was like wading in a swimming pool. I gritted my teeth and hung on tightly as the boat lurched and rocked.

The weather started to calm in the late afternoon as the clouds cleared over the North Sea. Alex spotted his friend a little while later and we pulled along side him; he was a friendly old Dutch bloke, who spoke English and who Alex addressed as Lars. Lars started to hand over some beer and cigarettes from the hold of his boat and for a while Alex and Lars were busy unloading and stowing this cargo. When this was finished Alex said, "James, you gonna have to jump from here to Lars' boat, I can't take you all the way to Rotterdam".

"I can't do that!" I exclaimed.

"Well, you're going to have to. Have a good time!" was Alex's cheerful reply.

"Come on! You can do it!" shouted Lars from the other boat.

I decided that I must do it if I wanted to see Uncle Andrew. I took a deep breath and jumped as hard as I could and landed safely on the deck of Lars' boat. I could see the lights of the Europort at Rotterdam and knew that I was coming close to my destination. I waved back at Alex. "Thank you!" I shouted, though my voice was lost on the wind. He waved back and then he was heading back and we were making our way towards the coast.

It wasn't long before we had docked and Lars guided me through towards the road where he said he could fix up a ride with a lorry driver to take me to Amstelveen, and to the safety of Uncle Andrew.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The lorry driver was called Johannes but spoke no English and showed little interest in trying to communicate. He turned the radio up loud and I sat slumped against the window. It took less than an hour to reach Amstelveen. I had been worrying that Uncle Andrew's apartment might be being watched. I couldn't work out if I was being careful or paranoid but in the end it didn't matter. I didn't speak much Dutch and Johannes couldn't speak English so there was no way I could tell him exactly where I wanted to go. In the end I told him one of the few Dutch words I knew, ziekenhuis, hospital and he nodded. He dropped me at the Amstelland Hospital where my Auntie Julia was a nurse. I turned to wave and thank him but he was already driving away nodding his head to the rhythm of his country music.

I turned and headed towards the low grey building behind me, Ziekenhuis Amstelland. My Aunt Julia worked here but I had no idea if she'd be on duty tonight. I walked into the foyer aware of the way I must look. I could taste the salt dried to my skin, my hair was windswept and my trainers and trousers were soaked.

"Goedenavond". The security guard at the reception desk looked at me warily. "English", I said, "I don't speak Dutch. I'm looking for Nurse Julia Taylor". "Ah, Nurse Taylor. I know her. She works on Ward 4", he said, switching to English. "I'm not sure if she is working tonight". He turned towards the computer built into the desk but as he did so the lift on the right dinged and the doors opened. "Thanks" I called back to him as I ran towards the lift.

Ward 4 was quiet and dimly lit. At the main desk two nurses sat flicking through large beige coloured files. Neither of them was Auntie Julia. One looked up and I could tell that I had startled her.

"Goedenavond", I said politely, and then, in English, "I'm looking for Nurse Julia Taylor. I'm her nephew".

"She's not at work tonight", said the older of the two nurses. "Are you alright?" "Please can you call her? Ask her to come here?", I asked.

"Here", said the younger nurse pushing the phone towards me, "you call her". "NO! I mean, I can't. Please, can you do it? Ask her to come into work but don't mention that I'm here. There may be people listening in".

The two nurses exchanged glances. I could see that they were thinking that I was perhaps a bit crazy. The older one stood up and came around the desk. She put her arm around my shoulders and led me gently to a side room. I craned my neck to see if the other nurse was making the call. She had picked up the phone and I could only hope she was phoning Auntie Julia and not the police.

A short time later the older nurse came back in followed by Auntie Julia. "James!", she exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here?" She took in my bedraggled appearance, "where are your mum and dad?"

Hours later I had finished my story. I was sitting with Uncle Andrew and Auntie Julia in their apartment, clutching a mug of hot chocolate and dressed in an oversized sweatshirt that belonged to my cousin Dirk. They had both been

suspicious at first, thinking that I'd had a row with my parents and run away but Andrew had tried to phone my parents but had only got the answerphone at home and on both of their mobile phones.

"Bed, I think", announced Uncle Andrew. "We'll have time for making plans in the morning".

As I entered the living room the next morning, refreshed and clean, Andrew was just putting down the phone.

"It's really odd", he said, "I've been talking to a few friends in the UK, and they have nothing but praise for this Gavin King. His latest stunt is to announce that he is only going to take the national minimum wage and he is urging his ministers to do the same. So far, only the Health Minister, you know, the Russian guy, has agreed. When I asked them about the executions and people going missing, they all seemed to think that these people deserve it. Usually my friends are a lot more questioning so I don't understand why they are so willing to accept this".

"People are scared, Uncle Andrew, scared to speak out. And on the other hand, he is doing a lot of things that people see as being good".

Uncle Andrew stood up, walked over to the bench and poured two cups of coffee from the pot. He handed me one.

"I've looked at those names your dad left in your phone. I Googled them all but only the Russian one turned up anything. Sasha Poskotinov is a journalist with the Moscow Times so I expect he was a friend of your parents."

I nodded. That made some kind of sense.

"Tomorrow, I'll start making some plans to get you to Moscow."

He patted me on the back. "Your parents believe in you, James. You can do this, you know."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

It took the best part of a week for Uncle Andrew to make the necessary arrangements. He decided to get both Russian and Chinese visas for both of us. He wasn't planning on coming with me, but thought it looked less suspicious if he booked us as father and son travelling together. For the first few days I stayed cooped up in their apartment in Amstelveen but I began to feel very restless, not to mention resentful. Why should I be on the run? Why should I have to look over my shoulder all the time? Uncle Andrew agreed that I could probably go out; he hadn't noticed anyone following him and thought that the authorities in England couldn't possibly know that I was in Holland. We weren't sure how long it would take for them to find out that I had applied for visas in Amsterdam but I had to take the chance and hope that by the time they discovered this, I would be long gone.

I took the number 5 tram into the heart of Amsterdam and had a look round the central station, from where I'd be taking the train to Moscow. We had all agreed that air tickets were much easier to trace.

The weather was warm and there were plenty of tourists strolling around Dam Square and along the canals. Bikes were everywhere! For a few hours I felt like a tourist. As I was walking back towards the tram stop I saw him; a tall guy wearing a fawn coloured overcoat. My heart skipped a beat. He was heading straight towards me and there was no cover. I tried to calm my breathing but he was looking right at me. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a mobile phone; I looked about wildly but it was too late, he was right on me. And then he just carried on walking and talking, in Dutch, into his mobile phone. My hands were clammy and I was breathing heavily. He was just an ordinary Dutch businessman going about his day. I leaned against the wall, taking deep breaths. I really wasn't cut out for this sort of thing.

When Uncle Andrew came home later he tossed me a package. Inside was a new phone.

"It has an international SIM card in it", he said. "It's Pay as You Go and I've topped it up for you. Use it in emergencies and it should have plenty of credit on it."

"Thanks, Uncle Andrew", I said, and set about programming it with some of the numbers I thought I may need.

"Your passport is ready too", he said, handing me a brown envelope. Inside was my passport and some tickets.

"You take the train Saturday night. It's a 48 hour trip to Moscow. I've made a reservation for you, or should I say 'us' at a hotel there, the details are also in the envelope".

"OK", I said, flicking through the passport and looking at the new visas. "how long will I be in Moscow?"

"Well, it depends on this Sasha Poskotinov but I think I've allowed enough time before you need to take the train to Beijing".

I looked up. "Beijing?" I asked. "That's miles away!"

"Afraid it will be a long journey", Andrew agreed "but I thought the safest way to get you to Hong Kong undetected would be to go in through China. Your Uncle Adrian still lives in Beijing, right?"

Adrian was my mother's brother, married to Gao Yun and with two children. He taught English and had been living in Beijing for years. I'd never visited him there as he came to England regularly so the children could spend time with their English relations.

"Yes, he's still there", I replied. I could see that Uncle Andrew's plan made sense.

Inside I was beginning to feel excited. I had sat around too long while goodness only knows was happening to my mum and dad. The incident with the man in the coat today just showed how nervous I was getting. I wanted to get moving, to be actually doing something to help them, to find out what it was they wanted me to find.

I stood up. "I'm going to pack some things", I said.

I was sleeping in my cousin Dirk's room. He was a few years older than me and on a gap year working on an education project in Ghana. Auntie Julia had told me to help myself to some of his clothes to take on my journey so I set about filling a bag with some of his things that just about fitted. I was fired up and ready to go.

A couple of evenings later and we all boarded the tram into Amsterdam. I was headed to the Central Station, Andrew and Julia were going to the theatre, giving the appearance of a typical Saturday night. I'd arrive in Moscow on Monday morning and was planning on getting in touch with Sasha Poskotinov straightaway; it was already a week since my parents had been snatched.

I hugged Auntie Julia and thanked her. We'd been able to have a laugh about my appearance when I'd arrived at the hospital but I could tell she was anxious for me. Andrew clapped me on the back.

"Good luck, James", he said, "Be safe. Don't take any unnecessary risks, ok?"

"Sure. I'll call". I tried to sound upbeat.

I hoisted my pack on to my shoulder and walked towards the station entrance. The next stage of my adventure was about to begin.

## CHAPTER NINE

It had taken well over an hour to get to the hotel that Uncle Andrew had booked. The Moscow traffic had been terrible and I was glad to have a hot shower and stretch out on a soft bed. I laid out my map of Moscow on the bed and drew a circle around my hotel. I did the same for Sasha Postokinov's address. I was going to set out immediately to deliver a note requesting a meeting. I desperately wanted to call Uncle Andrew but we'd agreed I'd only call at pre-arranged times, and then only to allow the phone to ring four times before hanging up. It was a signal to let him know I was ok. If I missed a call, he'd alert the local police.

I decided to take the Metro to the address my dad had given me. It was a short walk from the hotel to the Metro station; through a park with some friendly drunks, across a railway line and through a market. I bought some sour cream blinis at the market as I hadn't eaten since the train station. Munching on these, I made my way into the station and bought a ticket. The train came quickly and after changing twice I emerged into a completely different part of Moscow. I'd spent time on the train from Amsterdam learning the Cyrillic script so at least I could read the road signs although map reading has never been one of my strengths. No-one gave me a second glance as I headed off in what I thought was the right direction. There were lots of police about but I soon realised that this was normal and they weren't looking for me. Eventually I asked a newspaper seller for directions and he sent me back the way I'd come, past the Metro station and a few minutes past it I found Sasha's apartment block.

I didn't expect any answer when I knocked on Sasha's door and I didn't get any. I pushed the letter I'd written through the letterbox and headed back to the Metro. I felt flat; frustrated that I couldn't do more. I was eager to meet Sasha and find out what he knew and what connection he had with my parents. But there was nothing more I could do now. No harm in taking in some sights while I was here. The pancakes had given me energy so I headed back to the Metro and emerged in the city centre. It was a lovely sunny day and there were plenty of tourists about, sitting in cafes, shopping and taking photos of each other. The buildings surprised me. I hadn't expected Moscow to be so beautiful and I was enjoying the walk. Suddenly, through an archway to my left, I saw the brightly coloured onion-shaped domes of St Basil's Cathedral. Wow! I walked up the slope, past a church and stalls selling souvenirs, and there I was....standing in Red Square, St Basils ahead of me, the famous GUM store on my left and crowds of passing tourists all around. Despite all that was going on, the loss of my parents, the journey to find the truth, I felt like an ordinary tourist appreciating the amazing sights of Red Square.

It was getting late by the time I made it back to the hotel. I checked for messages at the front desk and to my surprise, there was one from Sasha Poskotinov. I thanked the desk clerk and ran up the stairs two-by-two to get to my room. Unfolding the message I read:

*“Queue for Lenin’s Tomb tomorrow at 10am. If all is OK I will meet up with you once you have paid your respects”. Sasha*

I’d seen Lenin’s Tomb earlier on the far side of Red Square. Viewing his preserved body hadn’t been on my list of sights but it looked as if that was what was required in order to meet with Sasha. At least I’d be getting some answers tomorrow, or so I hoped.

## CHAPTER TEN

I set off early the next day to get to Lenin's tomb for 10 o'clock. Once there, I joined the back of an already long queue. Mostly it was made up of tourists but there were clearly some Russian families as well, come to see their old leader. It was another bright morning although cooler. I looked around wondering whether Sasha Poskotinov was there. I had no idea what he looked like and wondered how he would know who I was. There weren't any other 16 year old boys on their own in the queue so perhaps it wouldn't be so hard after all.

A man selling Russian military-style caps covered with CCCP badges, walked up and down the queue trying to sell his wares. To the right, tall black iron railings separated the waiting people from a park. Two guards goose-stepped back and forth by the Eternal Flame that marks the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, whilst curious onlookers snapped their picture.

The queue edged slowly forwards. A guard controlled the number of people being allowed through the barrier at any one time. At the corner another guard started shouting loudly in Russian. I looked around to see if people near me understood what he was saying and overheard a Spanish tour guide telling her group that all bags needed to be left at the left luggage office. I followed the Spanish group and checked my small day pack in. Passing through the airline-style security check, I began to feel excited. I was close, close to finding out what my parents had been on to, and, I hoped, close to being able to help them.

Guards in military uniform shushed us as we walked down the steps towards Lenin's Tomb. I entered the gloomy black-walled mausoleum. Security guards stood, still as statues, at each corner. The room was eerily quiet and we passed around the body quickly. Lenin, dressed in a dark suit, his hands folded on his stomach, looked like a waxwork although in truth, I'd had no idea what to expect. I'd heard that Stalin had been there too but had been removed after a woman had a dream about Lenin saying that he didn't want to be next to Stalin.

Emerging from the mausoleum I blinked hard in the bright sunlight. I looked about for someone who might be Sasha Poskotinov but saw only tourists looking at the busts and marble stones that lie behind Lenin's Tomb. A few minutes later I had collected my bag and was wondering what to do next when I felt a slight pressure at my elbow. I turned and saw a thin man with round glasses. He gestured towards a café on the other side of the square, "We'll get a burger, shall we?", he asked steering me through the people towards the golden arches of a McDonalds restaurant.

"Sasha Poskotinov", said the man, holding out his hand. We'd got some food and drink and were sitting opposite each other at a table on the upper floor of the restaurant.

I shook his hand. "James Taylor", I replied.

Sasha laughed. "Well, now we are formally introduced, down to business. Your note worried me. Tell me what has been happening".

I retold my story, concentrating on my parents' disappearance. "What had they told you? Can you help me?"

Sasha took a sip from his coffee and shrugged. "I wish I could. England these days, it sounds like what we had here in the old days; the fear, the police, no-one knowing who they could trust, and yet, the people happy and relieved that someone was taking control" He spoke good English but with a thick Russian accent.

"But why did my dad put your name into my phone?", I asked. "He must have had a reason. He must have thought you could help" I was beginning to speak loudly, desperate for Sasha to have some answers.

He gestured for me to keep my voice down and leant down to take something from the brown leather document case he had been carrying. He pulled out a bundle of papers and lay them on the table.

"Your mum and dad were suspicious of the relationship between Gavin King and Dmitry Morozov, your new Health Minister. They asked me to do some digging, see if I could find anything out. But I didn't find anything that isn't already well known – born and brought up in the Siberian town of Barnaul, his mother a nurse, his dad an engineer. He'd joined the Communist party and attended his local university. As opportunities for entrepreneurs began to spring up, Morozov took advantage and became a successful businessman. He bought a minor English football club and it was there that he first met Gavin King. They became friends and Morozov became one of King's closest advisors. That's it. I couldn't find any thing else. His story checks out. Your parents thought that King and Morozov knew each other before but I couldn't find any evidence of this. "

He pushed the pile of papers towards me – "it's all in there. You can read it for yourself."

I pulled the papers towards me, looking first at them and then up at Sasha. I didn't know what to say. I had hoped for so much more. What did this give me? How did this help?

"James, I'm sorry I couldn't have been more help", Sasha leaned over and put his hand on my arm.

"It's ok. Maybe my mum and dad were wrong. Maybe all is as it seems".

"They're good journalists, James, don't give up just yet".

"I won't. Thanks, Sasha".

We sat and finished our drinks, making small talk. Sasha seemed a bit uncomfortable and I was too quiet, my mind turning over what he had said. Finally, he stood up. "I have to go, James", he said, holding out his hand again.

"Yeah, sure". I shook his hand, "thanks".

"Good luck James", he said, sounding as if he thought I was going to need it.

I sat at the table for some time, reading through Sasha's notes on Dmitry Morozov. "Well," I thought, "time to move on".

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

I sat in front of the computer screen tapping at the keyboard. I wasn't sure what I was looking for but I had some hours to kill before the train left for Beijing and I felt restless. I checked some news sites for information from home. No mention of my parents anywhere and still plenty of praise for the radical strict approach of Gavin King's new regime, I typed in a few keywords looking for some blog sites that were discussing King and followed a few links. They were almost totally in favour of the guy. I found one post which said that he should be congratulated for clearing the streets and prisons of undesirables and there were many more praising the public executions. I couldn't find any pockets of resistance; no groups of people campaigning for human rights or even questioning what people had done to deserve being dragged from their families. Probably it had all been censored and King had technical experts combing cyberspace for rebels with men in fawn coloured raincoats ready to come round and take them away. In China, under Chairman Mao, it had been called 're-education' – King hasn't yet coined a phrase but I had no doubt he would do soon.

It bothered me that Sasha hadn't been able to give me any clear information to help me. I didn't want to believe that my parents were wrong about King. I opened up the folder of notes that Sasha had given me and started flicking through it. I typed in Dmitry Morozov into the search engine and began surfing through some of the results. Nothing new, same old information. I typed in his parents names but they only came back with results about Dmitry. I turned another page in the folder. The name of his university in Siberia jumped out at me so I typed that into the search engine: Altai State University. Not many results in English as the main website was in Russian. This was so frustrating! I suddenly remembered something a friend had told me about, a translation tool that translated web pages into different languages. A few minutes later I had worked it out and was looking at an English version of the Altai State Technical University's web site. I navigated through the pages looking for information about the civil engineering degree that Morozov had taken. I found it and began to read. It wasn't very exciting and I realised that I was just wasting time – I wasn't going to find anything here. I sighed and moved my cursor towards the x top right. But the something caught my eye and I gasped. What I'd seen was the word 'China'. I scrolled down; there it was – Guilin, China. I began to read:

*Altai State offers two civil engineering degrees. The three year degree is a foundation degree that concentrates on the key concepts required to work in the civil engineering sector. The three year course leads to the award of BEng. The four year degree allows students to expand their learning and develop their work experience as they transfer for one year to the Guilin University of Technology in China. Here students have the opportunity to learn Chinese language and culture in combination with expanding their civil engineering studies. The four year course leads to the award of MEng.*

I felt excited! I'd never seen anything about Morozov and China before. I quickly flicked through Sasha's notes, searching for the section on Morozov's education. Which degree course did he follow? Then there it was – the dates

and qualification that confirmed that Morozov had taken the four year degree course. This meant he had spent a year in China!

But what did that mean? I looked at the dates again then turned back to the computer and brought up a biography of Gavin King. Morozov is 5 years younger so by the time he was at university King had completed his studies and was working in.....I scrolled down the page looking for the key information.....Hong Kong! So Morozov was in China while King was working in Hong Kong. I didn't know if this meant anything but it was the first time I had heard or read about this.

I searched for a map of China. I had no idea where Guilin was but I did know that China was a massive country. Bingo! Guilin was in the south of China, about 400 miles from Hong Kong. This could be it! I entered Gavin King's name into the search engine along with the word 'Guilin'. No results. Well, that didn't mean that he'd never been there. I put in Morozov's name along with 'Hong Kong', Again, nothing. I wasn't disheartened. I now had something to investigate when I went to Hong Kong. My mum and dad were right – I was sure of it!

Elated, I sat back. Now I had a lead and something to follow up on when I got to Hong Kong. Uncle Andrew had wanted me to take the train to Beijing but it took a week! I didn't want to spend a week on a train just to get to China. After all, I still had to get to Hong Kong after that and all the time I was doing nothing my mum and dad were suffering. I felt sure no-one was following me here in Moscow; how could they know where I was? I typed in the address in a flight search site and looked for flights from Moscow to Beijing, leaving that night. There were a number of options and I reckoned I could just take my chance at the airport. Satisfied, I logged off. China, here I come!

## CHAPTER TWELVE

“Passengers, we are coming into Beijing. Please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts. The local time is 6.50am and the ground temperature is 21° Celsius”. The Captain’s voice rang out over the intercom. I tuned out as he started talking about local connections, and concentrated at looking at the clouds outside. As the clouds cleared I searched for the Birds Nest stadium, centrepiece for the last Olympic Games. I wondered gloomily what plans Gavin King had for the next Olympics in London. Ten minutes later we had landed and I was standing in a queue for passport control. The immigration guy had taken a little longer than I’d have liked looking at my passport but I was feeling pretty pleased with myself – I was in China and one step closer to helping mum and dad. I felt confident that I hadn’t been followed since I’d left England and I’d seen no-one suspicious on the plane.

Uncle Adrian and Ollie were waiting for me. I ran and hugged them. Adrian pulled me tight and said, “Andrew’s not happy with you. He thinks you’ve been careless taking the plane instead of the train AND calling me”. He was smiling though and I thought that really he was proud of my daring.

Since it was my first visit to China, we spent the morning sightseeing around Beijing. Now my feet were killing me and we were sitting in a rooftop restaurant having a delicious lunch. It was great to see Ollie again and the morning had been great fun. Uncle Adrian had just ordered another beer for him and lemonades for us and we were settling down to plan my next move. The mood was light hearted. “I really want one of those t-shirts with the Beijing subway on”, I said. “The shop that sells them is just down the road”, said Ollie, “we can go after”. “Cool”, I said, and took a swig of my drink. It was amazing to be sitting here on top of the roof, looking down over the street below.

I nudged Ollie, “that man down there, you seen him before”.

Ollie looked where I was staring. “Don’t think so”, he said.

Mmm, I wasn’t so sure. The man in question was wearing a white shirt and chinos. He looked too smart to be a tourist and he was just standing outside the restaurant opposite. I felt sure I’d seen him earlier in the day as well. I shivered, even though the temperature must have been close to 30°.

Suddenly the man turned and looked right at me and I knew that he was one of ‘them’, only this time he wasn’t wearing an overcoat.

“I need to get out of here”, I said urgently, raising my eyebrows in the direction of the street below.

Adrian turned and looked, assessing the situation. “OK, “ he said, exhaling slowly. “Ollie, you take James. Not out of the front door, just find a way. Don’t go back to our apartment. Got your phone?”

Ollie nodded and patted his back pocket.

“Good”, said Adrian, “I’ll take care of him, give you a bit of time”.

We all stood up, Adrian fishing in his pocket for some notes that he threw on the table to pay for our lunch.

“See ya later!”, Ollie said, making light of the situation, and then, turning to me, he said, “come on James, ever been roof surfing?!”

He was off and I was following. The buildings were so close together it wasn't too hard...a run up and then a big jump and we were running across the roofs of Beijing! I turned and saw Adrian in the street confronting the man in the white shirt. Another roof edge, this time I slipped, sending some tiles crashing to the street below but Ollie was there, grabbing my hand and pulling me to safety. We were nearly at the end of the street. There was balcony below us and we jumped down into it, startling a cat snoozing in the sun. We lowered ourselves to the ground and then we were running, away from the restaurant and towards the main road which was swarming with taxis. Behind us we heard some shouts and I turned in time to see Adrian punch the man in the nose. Ouch!

Ollie flagged down one of the green and yellow taxis that were everywhere.

"Where to, do you think?" he asked me.

"Hong Kong!", I joked, as that was where I really needed to be.

Ollie spoke to the driver in Chinese and, before I knew it, we were getting out at Beijing West railway station.

"C'mon", said Ollie, running towards the main entrance.

I slung my backpack, battered but fortunately still there, over my shoulder and followed him.

"You can't go direct to Hong Kong", Ollie said, handing me a ticket. "This ticket will take you to Guangzhou. It's an overnight trip", he added. "When you get there", he handed me a piece of paper covered in Chinese characters, "use this to buy a ticket to Hong Kong".

"Thanks mate", I replied, pocketing the paper. "Bit of a flying visit", I said, "hopefully next time I'll be with mum and dad and you can show us round properly".

"Good luck, James. You'll crack it", he said.

We said goodbye and headed off in separate directions. I found the waiting room and sat there, worrying about Adrian and wondering if this Wang Li Kai in Hong Kong would have the answers that I needed. Would he know about White Sands?

Finally, after what seemed like hours, my train was ready to board.

Fortunately, I had a two-bunk compartment all to myself. As the train moved out of the station into the twilight, I stretched out on the lower bunk and let the motion of the train lull me to sleep

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

My priority now was to find Wang Li Kai and to find him fast. I was angry with myself for being complacent and nearly getting caught in Beijing. Probably if I had taken the time to travel by train I'd have bought myself more time for my investigations. Now I felt I was barely one step ahead. I knew Adrian and Ollie wouldn't tell where I'd gone but I could only hope that Gavin King's Secret Service men wouldn't snatch people from the streets of Beijing like they were doing in London.

I'd picked a small hotel on Kowloon island, close to the neon lights of Nathan Road and to Mong Kok, where Wang Li Kai's address was. I paid cash and booked for one night only. I figured that I had to start taking things more seriously. Dangerous people were looking for me and I hadn't been careful enough up to now. Judging by the amount of people that were around when I arrived, it wasn't too late to go and call on Wang Li Kai. It was harder to avoid the men wanting me to visit their jewellery or tailors shop than it was to find Wang Li Kai's apartment. I climbed the stairs to his floor and knocked, quietly but firmly. After a few moments the door edged open only a crack and a small Chinese man peered out through the narrow gap.

"Hi, my name is James Taylor. I'm from...", I didn't get a chance to finish as the man looked scared and began to shut the door.

"Hey, wait!", I called and pushed my foot into the door to stop it closing.

"Please", the man said, "please, go away. I have nothing more to say".

"I know my parents came to see you", I said, "but now they have disappeared. I NEED your help to find them".

"I don't know anything more", he repeated, increasing the pressure slightly on my foot.

"Please, Mr Wang", I pleaded, "just tell me whatever it was you told them".

He looked frightened but resigned. "Ok", he said, "but not here. Tomorrow morning, midday, have your lunch in Delifrance at Stanley Market".

He withdrew and this time the pressure on my foot told me he meant it. I stepped back. "Thank you", I said quietly.

According to my guide book I needed to take a ferry to Hong Kong island and then the bus to Stanley Market. The green and white STAR ferries were so famous that I recognised them immediately even though I had never been to Hong Kong before. The view across the harbour was stunning even on this cloudy day. I boarded the ferry and looked about me. There was a mixture of tourists and businessmen, dressed in short sleeved shirts and carrying briefcases. The trip across the harbour took barely 10 minutes and then I was following the signs to the bus terminal and boarding the number 6 bus. The journey took us away from the skyscrapers of the central business district and along the coast. I had no idea that there were beautiful golden beaches in Hong Kong. I made a mental note to get mum and dad to bring me back here when all this was over. I was glad that I was feeling positive now as my meeting with Wang Li Kai had left me feeling a little deflated the night before and I'd wondered if he would even turn up this morning.

I arrived way too early at the market but figured I could use the time well. I'd left my main bag at Uncle Adrian's in Beijing so I needed some clean

underwear and t-shirts. The stall holder looked delighted when I paid her what she asked and then I realised that I should have haggled. She kept pressing more items into my hands but I backed out and ventured further into the market. It was a maze of narrow streets selling clothes and souvenirs. I bought a baseball cap, bartering hard this time! I needed a cap as the weather was so hot but I reckoned I ought to be taking more care over disguising myself as well.

By half past twelve I'd finished my baguette and was sipping my iced water, staring disconsolately at the door. Clearly he wasn't coming. He'd only made the arrangement to get me off his doorstep. Well, he'd find me there again tonight and every other night until he agreed to tell me what he'd told my parents, I thought angrily. I stood up, pushing my chair over as I did so. Not even bothering to pick it up again, I walked out of the café. As soon as I left the café the thick humid air hit me. The stall holders were sitting in the shade of their shops, fanning themselves whilst many shoppers sat in air conditioned cafes and noodle bars, readying themselves for an afternoon of bargain hunting.

"Follow me", the voice was low but the words unmistakable. I spun round and saw Wang Li Kai heading off into the market. Had he been waiting for me to leave the café all that time? I didn't have time to think about that question as he was moving at some speed and I had to hurry to catch up. Each time I got closer he sped up some more, side stepping shoppers and turning quickly down this alley or that. At times I had to almost break into a run to keep up and I knocked into more than one disgruntled tourist. Suddenly, I couldn't see him any more. I looked around wildly – where had he gone? Then I saw him, standing, beckoning, at the door of a shop. When he saw that I had seen him, he turned and entered and I ran after him. Inside the shop was crammed with rows and rows of clothing, a mix of t-shirts and traditional Chinese silk jackets and shirts. The man at the counter caught my eye and indicated a door in the far corner. I nodded slightly and weaved through the clothing rails to the door. Pushing it open, I saw a small office and Wang Li Kai seated at a desk. He gestured me in and indicated that I could sit down. He looked nervously at the door as if he expected someone else to come bursting in.

"Please, be quick", he said. "After your parents came to see me, I was beaten up badly and put into the hospital". He spoke quickly with an unmistakable Chinese accent. "The police said it was a street mugging but I know it wasn't. The men were English. It was a warning; a warning against speaking to anybody else".

"I'm really grateful for you seeing me, Mr Wang", I said respectfully. "My mum and dad left me your name. They have been arrested and I don't know what has happened to them but I mean to find out. Please can you tell me what you know"?

Wang Li Kai rubbed his hands together nervously and sat forward.

"Your parents asked me about Gavin King. I told them that I barely knew him. I was merely a junior in the banking office where he worked and the English and the Chinese workers didn't mix much. They asked me if he ever went to China, specifically to Guilin".

I started. So I had been right. There was connection with Morozov and it was all linked to Guilin.

"I told them, not that I knew of".

My heart sank. Just when I thought I was getting somewhere.  
“So, what did you tell them?”, I asked, perhaps a little too impatiently as Wang Li Kai looked pained.  
“I told them that he used to go to Yangshuo quite a lot. The other English men in the bank would tease him and say he had a girl down there but he wouldn’t tell them anything. He went there once or twice a month, maybe more some months, for about a year and then he stopped.”  
“Yangshuo”, I repeated, “where is that? Is it here in Hong Kong?”  
“No”, he said, “Yangshuo is in China, not far from Guilin. In fact, you must travel through Guilin to get there. It is very beautiful there and attracts many tourists. Perhaps he just liked the scenery”.  
“Does the name ‘White Sands’ mean anything to you?”, I asked.  
“Your parents asked me that too,” he said, “The answer is no. I had never heard it until your dad asked me about it.  
He shrugged his shoulders and leaned back. “That is all I know. It was years ago now and I never spoke to King about anything other than work. Please, will you leave now?” It wasn’t a question, but an order. I stood up, thanked him for helping me and slipped through the office door into the shop.  
YES! I was on the right track after all. I was no closer to finding out what White Sands was but at least I had a next step.  
I made my way out through the shop, stopping to buy a cotton shirt, partly because I needed one and partly because I wanted to look like an ordinary tourist, should anyone be watching. I needed a cool drink, some air-con and a space to plan my next move so I headed to the nearest café. Consulting my guide book, I discovered that I needed to take a train to Guilin via the Chinese border town of Shenzhen. No problem! Knocking back the last of my drink, I headed out and back towards the bus stop. I had a train to catch!

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Clearly all foreigners were seated together on the train as I was in a carriage with no Chinese and a number of English and American families. One couple took pity on me, travelling alone. They were concerned as I seemed so young so I had to lie a little and told them I was 18. I explained that I had been staying with my uncle in Beijing when the new government came into power and was now taking a short trip around China. They were both teachers, working in Hong Kong and their two children went to an international school there. It was their first visit to 'real' China and they were very excited, talking enthusiastically about the sights they hoped to see around Yangshuo. It was all interesting to me as I knew only what I had read in the guide book. It was good to be in company again and I enjoyed playing cards with them as the train sped towards Guilin. I asked them how they were getting from Guilin to Yangshuo and they told me there was a bus from the station and invited me to go along with them. I was relieved by this as I hadn't been sure how I was going to organise this section of the trip and the guide book warned that few people spoke English.

It was dark by the time the bus pulled into Yangshuo. I had turned down the offer to stay at the same hotel as the English family, saying I had already booked a hotel. I didn't want to put them in any danger and, although they seemed genuine enough, I was trying to be less trusting. Yangshuo was a small place; a few main roads bordered by the river at one end. I wandered up to the river, famous I knew from my guidebook, for cormorant fishing and for the light show that was held a couple of times a week on its water. Now it was quiet and I could only make out some eerie looking shapes on the other side. I turned and headed back into the town. There were numerous bars and restaurants, clearly catering for an international crowd as there was plenty of Western, as well as Chinese food, on offer. My stomach grumbled and I realised that I hadn't eaten a proper meal for quite some time. I followed a sign promising me a cheap, clean hotel with authentic Chinese atmosphere and was soon throwing my backpack onto a single bed in a very small room. There was an odd smell in the room but the sheets looked clean. I nudged open the door to the bathroom. A single bulb hung from the ceiling, and the shower curtain hung limply, its bottom edge black and grimy. I shuddered. Even if I hadn't decided to keep moving hotels every night I wouldn't be staying here for more than one night. Still, it was late and I was hungry so I resigned myself to the room and headed out into Yangshuo.

The next morning I woke feeling not at all refreshed. The bed had been comfortable enough but the many bars and cafes in the centre of Yangshuo opened late, many playing loud music until the early hours of the morning. I headed out and settled on a café called Drifters that promised delicious pancakes and hot, strong coffee. Opposite the café the shops were opening up, looking forward no doubt to another day of bartering with the many tourists that seemed to flock to this small town. Around me I spread the tourist leaflets that I'd picked up the night before. I had no clues where to begin my search. The name White Sands hadn't leapt miraculously out at me nor had I seen any helpful signs proclaiming that "Gavin King Woz Ere"! The area was

famous for its scenery – limestone karsts, hills and caves created by water dissolving limestone, and many people seemed to see the surrounding countryside by bike, so this is what I decided to do. Fortified by a banana pancake I headed to find a bike shop. There were plenty to choose from. A boy about my own age sat outside one of them, repairing a puncture. I sauntered over,

“Hi, I’d like to hire a bike for the day”, I said.

He jumped to his feet, grinning.

“You have come to right place. I have perfect bike for you!” Closer to I saw that he was actually older than me by a few years, his black hair spiked up at the back, dark sunglasses covering his eyes. He wore a short sleeved white shirt with button down pockets that showed many signs of him rubbing his hands down the front. I liked him immediately.

“The bike is only for you?”, he asked.

“Yes, just me. Thanks”, I replied.

“You don’t have some friends or your mother and father also want bikes?” He sounded hopeful but grinned at me when I said, “No, it’s only me. I am travelling on my own, My parents are back in England”

“Aah, England”, he said, “I would like to go there one day. I try to learn me English. I think it is more good if I can go there to study”.

“Better”, I corrected, automatically, “you don’t say, ‘more good’, you say, ‘better’”

“Better”, he repeated. “Good, I have learnt something more already today. I will give you good bike!”

He grinned again and pointed to a black mountain bike. “You take that one, is good. Good gears and brakes”.

I thanked him and asked if I could leave my main bag with him. I didn’t think he was going to steal a few dirty t shirts and it would save me having to lug it around all day. Already it was feeling sticky and humid.

“No problem, mei wenti!”, he said, putting the bag behind his counter. “Have a good day. I will see you later and we will practice English together!”

He gave me a wave as I headed off down the street, wobbling a little as I got used to the unfamiliar bike. I hoped I’d soon be out in the countryside as there didn’t seem to be anyone keeping to the Highway Code here! It seemed to be every man for himself and there were too many lorries and taxis around for my liking!

The day was a good one. The scenery was truly amazing and once out of the town, the cycling was easy. I passed through small villages where children chased me with bottles of water, promising me a good price! To either side of the road were green fields, many of them being worked by a single man and a water buffalo, slowly making their way up and down. The farmers life seemed tough. I passed a woman carrying vegetables over her shoulder and wearing a traditional Chinese hat. It was unreal, almost as if a director was going to shout “Cut” at any moment.

There were signs of half built hotels and other developments going up but none of them were called White Sands.

I stopped for a drink, dripping with sweat, at a bridge overlooking the river. Strange-looking bamboo rafts were being poled down the river, ferrying tourists through the spectacular landscape. I turned my bike away from

Yangshuo and continued my explorations. I didn't know what I was looking for but I couldn't see that I was going to gain much by staying in the town.

It was late afternoon when I returned to the bike shop. I'd really enjoyed exploring the countryside but was nowhere further forward in my quest to find out what my parents wanted me to find. I'd pushed the bike back through the town, not trusting the traffic. I'd been tempted by some of the traditional massage places as my legs were aching but I was keener to get a cold drink inside me so I hadn't gone in. Approaching the shop, I saw the young man who'd served me earlier dealing with a couple on a tandem. I waited until he'd finished and then pushed the bike up towards him. He greeted me like a long-lost relative!

"Ah, my friend, have you had a good day?"

I assured him that I had.

"I think may be you are in a little trouble?", he said, startling me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"After you had left this morning, a man came asking if I had seen you – he had a photograph".

Oh no. My heart sank. They had obviously got to Wang Li Kai. I looked quickly up and down the street.

"Don't worry", he said, "I didn't trust the man. He said he was your father but you said your father was in England. And he looked like government or maybe police. I don't like police." He added.

"So, you didn't say that you'd seen me?" I asked anxiously.

"No, don't worry, you are safe. Where you stay tonight?", he asked.

"I'm not sure", I said, "I was just going to find a hotel somewhere close".

"I think that is very bad idea. Yangshuo is small place and that man looked like he wanted to find you very bad." Suddenly his face split into a huge grin.

"You stay with me", he announced, "man not find you there and you help me practice my English. Stay as long as you like".

I was stunned by his generous offer. Could I trust him? I thought so and anyway, what choice did I have?

I held out my hand. "Wow, thanks", I said, "that's be great."

He took my hand and shook it hard. "My name is Li Cheung. It means 'Good Luck'. But my English name is Leo".

"Hi Leo, I'm James", I said. I hoped my name wouldn't mean bad luck for him.

"Whereabouts do you live?", I asked.

"Not far away", he said, "on the edge of the town. "It won't take us very long to get there on the bike".

I groaned. I'd had enough of biking for one day. Leo saw my face and grinned.

"Don't worry", he said, "not on a pushbike". He pointed at a scooter parked near the shop. "We will take a scooter".

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Leo's apartment was 3 floors up, on the edge of town. He had one room for sleeping and another for cooking and sitting. There was a tiny shower room off to the left. He gestured towards the couch.

"Your bed!", he said cheerfully.

"Thanks Leo", I said, "this is great".

He opened the windows and the heavy night time smells of China drifted in.

"Sorry", he said, "no air conditioner".

While Leo busied himself in the small cooking area I took a shower and gratefully washed away the days sweat and dirt. It felt great to pull on a clean t shirt and shorts. Out in the living area, Leo was dishing up the most amazing noodle meal. It was utterly delicious, the best thing I'd ever tasted and I told him so.

"Is nothing", he said modestly. "Just local noodles and vegetables". He told me that he wanted to be a chef and that he liked to practice with different flavours. His family lived in a village not too far away and he had dreams of opening up his own restaurant here in Yangshuo. "But there are already so many places here. I try to get a job in a kitchen but is hard with no experience and so I work in the bike shop and practice my cooking at night. It is good to have someone to cook for". He beamed at me from across the small table.

"Now, tell me, what is your trouble with that man?"

I didn't know where to start or how to begin to explain it. So I just started, "It's very complicated. I think he is working for the British government. They have imprisoned my parents because they found something out about the new leader in England and now they are looking for me".

"What did your parents find out?", Leo asked.

"I don't know". I sighed. "They left me some clues and that is what has brought me here, but I'm at a dead end. I don't know what I am looking for or how to find it. Meanwhile, these men are looking for me, presumably to take me back to England and lock me up too".

Leo looked puzzled. "What is 'dead end'?" he asked. I began to explain and soon my troubles were forgotten as he asked me how to say things in English and I did my best to explain. I think Leo would have played that game happily for hours. He brought out some English novels that he had been given and I tried to explain some of the idioms and slang to him. It made me realise how hard English is and I was full of admiration for his determination to learn the language. I had no doubt that he would succeed in life and make all his dreams come true.

Suddenly, a thought hit me. White Sands. May be it wasn't white sands after all, maybe it was Chinese.

"How do you say, 'white sands' in Chinese?" I asked Leo urgently. He looked at me quizzically.

"White sands", I repeated it more slowly this time. "You know, white, the colour and sand, like on a beach".

"Aah", he said, as understanding dawned on him. "White sands. We say Bai se Sha. Why you want to know that?", he asked.

"Why DO you want to know that?", I corrected him and he repeated the question, correctly this time.

"It is the final clue my parents left for me but I have no idea what it means", I said.

"But Bai Sha is the name of the village where my family live. It is only 10 minutes away from here by scooter. Maybe that has something to do with it?" Leo looked at my astonished face and laughed. "You are getting closer to solving your mystery, my friend".

It was unbelievable! It must be the place I was after. My words tumbled out so fast that Leo couldn't understand me at all.

"Calm down, James", he laughed. "I will answer all your questions but you must speak more slowly".

"Tell me about Baisha", I said. "What is there? Is it a big place?"

Leo laughed. "It is just a small rural village. Most of the people there are farmers or they used to be. A few years ago a new factory opened in Baisha and many people now work there. If I hadn't left I would have gone to work there too. My dad and my grandfather both work in the factory".

"What is the factory called? What does it make?", I asked. I was so excited to be this close, I needed to know everything.

"It is called Baisha ZhiYao GongSi. It is a medicine company. You know, it makes medicines, you know, for hospitals".

A pharmaceutical company I thought, established at the same time that Gavin King was making regular trips to this area and the same time that Morozov was at the university in Guilin, only one hour away. They had to be involved in it in some way and it was clearly something they didn't want anyone knowing about. But my parents had made the connection. Now it was up to me.

"Can we go there?", I asked Leo.

"Not tonight", he said, "is too late. But tomorrow I have day off from the bike shop so we can go then. My mother will be pleased to see us.

"Do you know who owns the factory?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know but maybe my father will know. You can ask him tomorrow".

"I need to know Leo. I need to find out what they are making there and what the connection is with the new leader of Great Britain".

"OK", he said, "tomorrow, we will go and investigate".

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The next morning I was clinging to Leo's back as he sped through the streets of Yangshuo, dodging and weaving between the traffic. For much of the time I kept my eyes shut and hung on tightly, wishing I had a helmet. It took only ten minutes, as Leo had said, to arrive at the village of Baisha.

"This is my family home", he announced, skidding to a halt by a small brick house surrounded by emerald green rice paddies. Leo led me in and introduced me to his mother. She smiled shyly at me and I handed her the meat and vegetables we had bought at the market before we left. Leo and his mother spoke quickly together in Chinese and then Leo turned to me.

"My dad is at work at the moment, at the factory, but my grandfather is here. He has a night shift tonight. Come on". He led me through to the next room where an elderly man was sitting by a window, puffing on a cigarette. We went through the introductions again and I held out my hand to shake Mr Li's. He motioned for us to sit and began talking in high speed Chinese with Leo. Every now and then he looked over at me and nodded. I got the impression that Leo was telling him my story and I hoped that he would be willing to help me.

"He doesn't know who owns the factory", Leo said. "They are paid by a Mr Wong who is the manager."

"Can you ask him about the medicines that are made there?", I asked Leo. Another rapid discussion in Chinese and then Leo said, "he says that there are many different types. Some are pills and some are liquids. Some are in small packets and some are in huge containers. He only works in the loading bay and has never been to the area where the medicines are actually made". My heart sank a little. It seemed that Mr Li didn't know anything that could help me.

"What does your dad do at the factory?", I asked Leo. I hoped that perhaps he would be able to help some more.

"He also works in loading bay, as a manager", Leo added proudly.

The door opened and Mrs Li entered carrying a tray and some small cups and a teapot. I smiled warmly at her as she passed me a cup of green tea. I thanked her by taking a sip and smiling some more!

Tea over, Leo and I went out for a walk. We headed down towards the river.

"I need to find out who owns that factory and if there is any connection with England", I said. "I'm thinking that the only way is to go to the factory myself but it would be too dangerous just to walk in and start asking questions. If I'm right then we'd just be walking into a whole load of trouble".

Leo looked at me, a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "Maybe we could pay a visit tonight when my grandfather is at work. He may be able to look the other way while we go in and take a look".

"Do you think he would?" I asked, excited that Leo was thinking along the same lines as me.

"I think he will", said Leo, "there's not many other people on the night shift in the loading bay."

The moon was high and bright as Leo and I stealthily approached the Baisha pharmaceutical factory. The factory was a short way outside the village and we'd ridden there on the scooter, Leo cutting the engine as we'd got closer. He'd tucked the bike behind some bushes and we were now approaching the back of the factory on foot. Over dinner, I'd explained to Leo what I hoped to find. We expected that most of the documents would be written in Chinese and so he would need to translate them for me. His grandfather had told us that the offices were located on the west side on the second floor. I was going to be the lookout and Leo was in charge of gathering evidence. I'd lent him my phone so he could use the camera to take any pictures he needed to. Now we were approaching the factory quietly, my heart thudding in my chest. I felt I was close; so close to finding that Gavin King was up to something.

The metal stairs creaked as we slowly made our way up to the second floor. We both had small torches but the bright moon meant we didn't need them at this point. There were two guards patrolling the factory. They passed along the offices on the second floor every twenty minutes. I hoped this would be long enough. Leo stopped and held his finger to his mouth. I stood, stock still and waited, not daring to make a sound. Leo gave me the all clear and we carried on up the stairs. At the top was a corridor, closed doors running along the left wall, the right, a glass wall looking down on the floor below. Leo edged along the left hand wall, peering at the signs on each door. He beckoned me and pointed towards a door. I guessed he'd found the manager's office. Slowly, carefully, he turned the door handle and pushed the door slowly inward to reveal a dark room. We crept in and closed the door silently behind us. Switching on our torches, we could see a large tidy wooden desk and a row of filing cabinets stacked with black A3 ring binders. Leo scanned the folders with his torch whilst I remained close to the door, listening for footsteps. He pulled down a folder and opened it. "Here", he hissed, "these are the orders". He began turning over the loose papers inside the folder. "UK", he mouthed, pointing. He drew out my phone and began taking photos, just as I'd shown him. He replaced the folder and began opening and closing the filing cabinets drawers. He was being careful but each scrape of metal sounded like a great clanging to me and I looked anxiously towards the door each time. I heard him take a sharp intake of breath. He pulled out a blue cardboard folder and took it to the desk. He began taking photos when I heard footsteps on the landing outside. Had twenty minutes passed already? "Leo", I whispered, gesturing towards the door. "Turn off your torch". I pointed at my torch and turned it off hoping Leo understood. He did as we were soon in pitch black. The footsteps grew louder. Suddenly they stopped and there was a shout from elsewhere in the building. The guard outside shouted something back. The hairs on the back of my neck were standing up and my legs were shaking from standing in the same position for so long. The guard started walking again. He reached the office door, paused, then continued and I heard his footsteps fade away into the night. "Phew", I sighed with relief. Leo turned on his torch and closed the folder. "Here", he said, "put this in your backpack. Let's get out of here". I took the folder and shoved it into my backpack. Slowly, I opened the door a crack and listened. All quiet I thought so we slid out and, keeping our backs to the wall and away from the glass window, we retraced our steps back down

the stairs and through the loading bay. A few minutes later we had retrieved Leo's scooter and were running, laughing with relief, pushing it out towards the main road.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

We were still laughing when Leo slid to a halt by the river bank and jumped off. I gave him a high five and whooped, “Yeee-ha!!”

“That was so exciting!”, I said to Leo, “scary but exciting!”

“I agree with you, my friend”, he said grinning. “Here, see if what I have found is useful”. He passed me my phone and we sat by the side of the river surrounded by the amazing shapes of the karsts, scrolling through to the first photo.

“This one, “Leo said, “is an order for fifty thousand litres of Medaxicil to go to the UK, to a company called H<sub>2</sub>O GB, and this is another one, and another one and another one”. He scrolled through the photos he’d taken.

“What are the dates of these?” I asked.

“The first one was..”, he scrolled back through the images, “about 5 weeks ago. Then there is an order going out every week. Last week the order was for one hundred thousand litres”.

We looked at each other. What could anyone possibly want with so much of this drug? And more to the point, what did this drug do?

“What is this drug?”, I asked Leo, “did you find out?” I really hoped he had because I didn’t fancy having to return to the factory again.

He winked at me and nodded towards my backpack. “I hope you didn’t drop the folder I gave you. That information is in your bag”.

I opened my bag and pulled out the folder and a pad of paper. “Tell me what it’s all about”, I said. “And take it slowly; I want to take some notes”.

“This is unbelievable”, I said when he’d finished. I looked down at the notes I’d made. “Let me get this right. Medaxicil is used in Chinese prisons to keep violent prisoners quiet. The folder you have there shows that if they take it regularly, diluted in water, they become calm and easy to manage”. Leo nodded and I continued. “The drug trials showed it to be extremely effective but side effects include short term memory loss and severe headaches. The drug hasn’t been licensed for use on anyone else EXCEPT violent dangerous criminals”. Leo nodded again, “That’s right”, he said.

“And this company”, I looked down and checked my notes, “H<sub>2</sub>O GB, has been buying thousands of litres over the weeks”.

I looked at Leo. “Why?” He shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know but I think you have found what you are looking for”.

“Maybe”, I said. Certainly I believed that this was the place that people had been trying to stop me finding but I was yet to make a link between King and Morozov, if there was one.

In front of us, the river lapped gently. It was a beautiful scene. I stared out across the dark water trying to make some kind of sense from what we’d discovered. Suddenly I became aware of a new sound, the sound of a motorbike approaching fast along the gravel road.

“Time to go, my friend”, Leo said, leaping to his feet.

He grabbed his own bike and jumped on. I swung my leg over and clasped my arms tightly around his waist as he gunned the throttle. The bike shot forward, spraying loose gravel up in its wake. Fortunately Leo was a strong rider and kept the bike under control and we sped towards the main road. Behind us was the unmistakable single headlight of a chasing motorbike.

Leo twisted and turned down the backroads of rural China, trying his best to lose our tail. I thought about how Leo's Chinese name meant Good Luck and thought to myself that it had certainly been my good luck to meet up with him. Leo's local knowledge and riding skills gave us the edge as we kept well ahead of our pursuer but he wasn't able to lose him entirely. Quickly, Leo swerved and headed into farmland. Keeping to the firm land between the paddy fields he crossed a number of fields and then shot out on to tarmaced road on the other side.

The lights of Yangshuo rose up out of the night and traffic became heavier, even at this late hour. We slowed up and weaved in and out of the cars. I sensed Leo was heading into the centre of the town rather than his apartment. He pulled over.

"What do you think?", he asked me.

"I dunno. I reckon I'll need to get out of here as soon as possible and try and get back to Hong Kong".

He nodded. "OK, I take you to Guilin tonight. It is probably the safest choice. You can get a train to Hong Kong early tomorrow".

"Are you sure?" I asked him. He'd only met me yesterday but already had done so much for me. He grinned. "Sure", he said, "no problem!"

He re-started the engine and turned the bike to face the opposite direction. We pattered gently along the street, not wanting to draw any attention to ourselves. But suddenly there was a shout and there was the other motorbike. It was almost on top of us! Leo opened the throttle and we sped off up the road. The chasing bike had little difficulty keeping up with us on the smooth tarmac of the main road. Leo swerved abruptly into a side street, narrowly missing a vendor's covered street stall. He sped up the narrow lane, gaining ground on the chasing bike. I clung on tightly as Leo turned sharply again, this time into a building development near his apartment. We jolted over the rough ground. Behind us, I could hear the chasing bike and I turned in time to see it skid into the open gates of the building site.

"Hold on tight", said Leo, and I turned back, just in time to see Leo line up the bike with a wooden plank, leaning at an angle up to a builder's skip. He slowed momentarily and then revved hard and the bike shot forward, up the plank and then air borne! We flew over the skip, over the wall on the other side and landed, hard, with a thud on the road on the other side. Behind, a sickening crash confirmed that the chasing bike had failed to make the jump. Leo turned and grinned at me. "High five mate!", I shouted, raising my left hand! Leo smacked his palm into mine, then turned and we were off, down the main highway to Guilin.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Despite the early hour the heat was already building as I walked wearily from the train to the Hong Kong border. Nervously I waited as the queue edged towards immigration. I felt now, that this was the most dangerous time. As soon as my passport had been recorded it would be easy for the Secret Service to pick up that I was back in Hong Kong. This meant the clock was ticking again. I was so close. I didn't yet have all the pieces to the jigsaw but I had no intention of stopping until I had. I held my bag tightly to me. I tried to act casually but there was no way I was risking losing the evidence that Leo had taken from the office in the factory. This company, H<sub>2</sub>O GB, in the UK was shipping thousands and thousands of litres of this drug from the small factory in Baisha. Whoever owned that factory was making A LOT of money and what was happening to the drug? Whatever it was, I would bet my right arm that it wasn't good. I thought about Leo and hoped he would be fine. He had assured me that he would be. I figured that no-one would take too much interest in him once he'd told them where I was headed and I'd made him promise that he would just tell them and not try and be clever. We'd parted with a promise of a return visit once this was all over. "I'll cook for you and your parents", he'd promised.

I was near the front of the line now. Taking a deep breath I walked forward and handed over my passport. The immigration official opened it and examined the photo.

"Take off your cap", he said, gesturing to the baseball cap I was wearing. I did so, ruffling up my unwashed hair as I did so.

"What is your business in Hong Kong?" he asked.

I'd been asked these same questions when I'd arrived less than a week ago. They hadn't seemed threatening then but now I was even more fearful of being uncovered.

"Holiday", I said, "I've just been on a trip to Yangshuo", I explained; "now I'm coming back to Hong Kong for a few more days".

He placed my passport face down on the small scanner on his desk. I waited. He removed my passport and took out his stamp. Suddenly, the phone on his desk rang and he picked it up. My heart was beating madly and I was sure he would be able to hear it racing. The palms of my hands were clammy and I could feel sweat trickling down the back of my neck. I realised I was holding my breath so exhaled slowly. The official barked something into the phone and replaced the receiver. He looked at me, smiled and handed me my passport. "Welcome to Hong Kong. Enjoy your stay".

He waved me on and, almost in a daze, I walked forwards and followed the signs for the train into Hong Kong.

For once I had a plan! I was going to the Central Library where I was going to look up what I could about the Baisha ZhiYao Gong Si. With a bit of luck I might also be able to find out something more about H<sub>2</sub>O GB. I sat on the train and looked at my fellow passengers. So far so good, as far as I could tell. I was sleepy and would have liked to close my eyes for a bit but I daren't. I needed to stay alert at all times until this thing was finished.

The humidity was stifling as I emerged from the MTR station at Tin Hau. The library was only a few minutes walk away according to my map and I set off at a brisk walk.

I was heading for the reference section on the eighth floor. The library had those trendy glass-walled lifts but as nothing on earth would get me in one of those, I took the escalators. The library hadn't been open long so there weren't many people around. I was looking for company registers and asked at the desk to speed things up. The lady pointed me towards a shelf laden with large red leather-bound books that were arranged alphabetically. I pulled out the one labelled B-C and took it to a private study area. I made sure I had a good view of the area from where I was sitting and then turned my attention to the book.

It wasn't difficult to find Baisha ZhiYao Gong Si. I ran my finger down the page along the company names and there it was, listed at the bottom. My eyes scanned the line for the registered owner: Wu Chen with a registered address at a PO Box in Hong Kong. I felt a surge of disappointment. It wasn't the names I'd hoped, or expected to find. I sat back in my chair. There wasn't much more I could do. I needed to get the information I had to news agency or journalist and let them take it on.

From the corner of my eye, I saw a bank of computers. I'd use them I thought to find a newspaper or TV company I could trust and to see if I could find out anything more about H2O GB.

I turned back to the company register and wrote down what I'd found. I realised that the entries above were longer than the one for the Baisha ZhiYao Gong Si. I turned the page. There it was. What I had been searching for; what my parents suspected; what I hoped would set them, and the rest of the country, free. Listed as partners in the company were G. King and D. Morozov.

Game over, I thought to myself. But I'd been complacent before so quickly took out my camera and photographed the pages I needed.

Walking over to the computers, I looked at the clock. I'd been in the library barely a quarter of an hour. I reckoned I had time.

H2O GB was surprisingly easy as well. Turned out they had been put in charge of supplying water to the whole of Great Britain by Gavin King. I wasn't sure what Morozov's role as health minister was. Maybe he was going to make sure any sudden increases in severe headaches and loss of memory were going to go unreported. They were coining it in. Vast amounts of tax payers money was being diverted into their accounts via Baisha ZhiYao Gong Si. The British public was singing his praises all round the world because they had been drugged via the water supply and didn't have any fight left in them. An almost perfect plan I thought. Except they hadn't counted on my parents! Quickly I ran another search. I knew my dad had a friend from university who worked out here, at Reuters I thought. I found the number and called him and arranged a meeting.

Standing up, I felt pleased with myself and once I'd met John and handed over the evidence, hopefully, the nightmare would be over. I logged off the computer and walked casually out. I looked to the left, nothing there, I looked to the right, nothing there. I looked back to my right and saw a man, in a white t-shirt and chinos walking towards me. I looked for my exits. He was blocking the way to the escalator but the lift lay over to my right. I gulped and ran

towards it. I did my best to avoid lifts wherever possible but now seemed like a good time to overcome my phobia.

I jumped in, punching the button for the ground floor. The man raised his arm and I saw he had a walkie talkie. For the first time, I was up against more than one.

I'd agreed to meet John from Reuters at the Bank of China building as soon as possible. I wasn't far away but needed to get out of the library as quickly as possible.

The lift slowed and the doors opened on the ground floor. I could see the man that was watching out for me. Dressed in the same uniform of chinos and white shirt he stood directly opposite the lift. Fortunately for me, the lobby area was now busy with people entering and leaving the library. I took advantage of this, shielding myself behind an elderly lady who was on her way out. I hit the street running, heading for the Bank of China building that loomed tall over this district of Hong Kong. Behind me I could hear shouts and imagined the men chasing me. I leap frogged over a barrier and into a park. A church stood on the opposite side and beyond that was the entrance to the Bank of China. I looked back. One man was behind me, the other was running around the outside perimeter of the park. I wondered if they had any idea why they were chasing me. Probably not, just hired hands that were doing as they were told. There was a woman in the park with her children.

"Help", I panted, as I passed her, "that man is following me". I carried on running and then heard a shout and a yelp. Turning back, I saw the man lying on his back and the woman standing over him, shouting. I smiled to myself and kept on running. One down.....

I exited the park and ran across the road. Behind me I could hear heavy breathing. Neither of us were used to running in this kind of heat I thought. The huge glass and metal structure that was the Bank of China building loomed tall above me. I was home and dry. Suddenly I tripped on the curb and went sprawling, my backpack flying out in front of me.

"Let me help you", the man leaned over and reached for the bag.

No way! I jerked my head up fast and caught him a glancing blow to the side of the head. Scrambling to my feet and grabbed my bag and half stumbled, half ran the final distance to the glass doors.

The ice-cold air conditioning hit me in the face and I nearly shivered. I looked back. The man was getting to his feet and glaring at me. He knew he was beaten. He couldn't chase me in here. I smiled and waved at him and headed for the lift. The observation deck where I was meeting John was on the 42<sup>nd</sup> floor and no fear of lifts was going to get more walking up all those stairs.

The doors closed and I caught sight of sweaty, grubby face reflected in the shiny metal. I grinned!

## **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

In the end, the smartest thing I did was call John at Reuters. My parents had spent time with him when they'd been in Hong Kong investigating White Sands for themselves. So, he believed everything I had to say and immediately recognised the importance of the evidence I had with me. Within the hour he'd persuaded his editor to run the story and I'd been whisked from the Bank of China to a top hotel in a black limo. It was from there that I

watched a US warship sail up the Thames and a stealth bomber fly over the Houses of Parliament. The BBC issued this bulletin:

*Today it has been revealed that Gavin King and Dmitry Morozov were using a drug, that has only been authorised for use on aggressive prisoners, on the people of the United Kingdom. The USS Wasp, fully armed, sailed up the Thames on the order of President Obama. The US warship was armed with cruise missiles aimed at Downing Street and the Houses of Parliament. UN forces, flown in from France by the French Air Force, destroyed the Downing Street terrorist barriers and arrested Gavin King as he attempted to flee. Mr. Morozov's car was shot by an USAF stealth bomber and he was shot in the leg by a UN officer when he drew a gun and fired upon him.*

It was amazing to see the blue bereted UN forces arriving in London and leading King and Morozov out in handcuffs. Uncle Adrian and Ollie flew in from Beijing and we celebrated together when it was announced that the British water supply had been cleared of Medaxicil and was now fit to drink again. The best moment of course was when my parents arrived. They'd been released from jail and had flown straight to Hong Kong. They looked both terrible and fantastic at the same time. I'd tell you all about our reunion but it was pretty mushy and you probably don't want to read that stuff!

It would take the UK a long while to recover. So many families had been affected by King's regime and the side effects of taking Medaxicil over a long period weren't yet known. Hundreds of thousands of people were complaining of long, persistent headaches and many more were finding it hard to function again once the drug had been removed from the water supply.

The money for buying Medaxicil had been traced to off shore accounts; both King and Morozov were stock piling millions of pounds. Neither of them were speaking; I guess they thought there was nothing they could say to make it seem better so best not to say anything at all.

As for me, well, I needed a shower, a change of clothes and some good food! My parents and I got quite a lot of press attention. It was okay for a while but it's really tiring answering the same questions over and over. So I took mum and dad on a short trip.

The sun was high when we turned into the street that I'd first visited only a few weeks before. Nothing much had changed here.

"I'd like to hire some bikes, please", I said.

Leo stood and turned from the bike he'd been tinkering with. He smiled. "I've got the perfect bikes for you, my friend", he said.

**THE END**