

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

HISTORY 101



MAGS L. HALLIDAY

'Remarkable. I'm surprised at how much has been uncovered.'
– Anji Kapoor

Spain, 1937. In April, the small town of Guernica was razed to the ground in a firestorm that claimed a thousand or more lives. In May, Barcelona exploded into fierce street fighting as different political factions fought for control of the city.

Both events have been the subject of fierce propagandist claims by all sides, but this book examines new evidence to suggest that the two events are more closely linked than previously thought.

Who were the shadowy figures working behind the scenes? Who were 'the Doctor', 'Anji' and 'Fitz' and what was their objectives? And were there really monsters roaming the streets?

Presented in the form of a novel, *History 101* tries to discover if the absolute truth can ever be revealed. It should be read as part of the ongoing 'Doctor Who: Eighth Doctor' history course.

History 101

Mags L. Halliday

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To Phyllis Ford Halliday for the storytelling and Donald Geoffrey Halliday for
the bibliophile tendencies.

‘We carry a new world in our hearts.’

– *Buenaventura Durruti*

Contents

Barcelona 1937	7
Part One	10
Coneixeu El Vostres Drets	11
Una Casa Europea Segura	22
Algù Fou Assasinat	37
Am La Polícia A L'Esquena	52
Part Two	71
Estada Lliure	72
Bombes Espanyoles	87
Odiós	103
Treballar Pel Control De La Situaciò	118
Part Three	134
Pistoles En El Sostre	135
El Detingut	154

Jo Veure La Llei	170
La Ciutat Dels Morts	183
La Darrera Banda De La Ciutat	195
Epilogue	208
Selected Bibliography	211
Recommended Viewing	212
Acknowledgements	213
About the Author	214

Prologue

Barcelona 1937

It was a chilly spring morning and the clock was striking thirteen. It had been hit by a stray bullet in the initial fighting the previous year and now ran to its own internal theory of time. Sabbath found it amusingly appropriate.

His Agent was late. Only by a few minutes, it was true, and Sabbath was not terribly concerned about the whys or wherefores of the lateness. He was concerned that matters here were resolved to his own satisfaction and for that he needed a reliable Agent. One who showed up for meetings on time.

The café owner's daughter came over to remove his empty plate and he smiled at her.

'Molt bé, comrade, molt bé.'

Alicia nodded and went back to her position leaning on the rear counter of the bar, leaving him alone with the carafe of water and the erratic ticking of the clock. He leaned back in the battered wicker chair, letting it creak under his weight, and let his eyes wander over the copy of *La Batalla* in his hands. Through the open doors to the square the sunlight was starting to warm the city. The Drassanes were sullenly silent: what cargoes made it through the blockades were offloaded at night, slipping quietly into the black market or the hands of racketeers and gunrunners.

'Sorry I'm late.'

The young man was sitting down next to Sabbath, glancing about quickly at the doorways as he dropped his wire-frame glasses into one of the outer pockets of his leather jacket, making sure his eyes adjusted to the dim interior of the café. Sabbath folded up the newspaper he hadn't been reading and frowned at the new arrival.

'Ah, my dear fellow, there you are.'

His Agent looked back calmly, his mouth barely twitching, apparently unfazed by Sabbath's disapproving glare. Good, he needed someone with equanimity for this. He raised his voice, let it roll out at its natural volume.

‘Alicia – could we have some coffee?’

The owner’s daughter, who had come a little closer when the newcomer had sat down, disappeared behind the bar to brew two *café solos*. Sabbath knew she knew some kind of meeting was going on, but the *Café en Balena* was paid enough in cheap French wine not to pay attention to whom Sabbath might meet with, or what they might talk about. Late at night, the wine would flow out of the *café* and information would flow in. The *café* owner himself had realised his best interests lay in selling the imposing Englishman facts on others for his wine, rather than selling facts on him. A comfortable situation for both.

‘She’s pretty,’ his Agent remarked, watching Alicia as she slammed the espresso machine into action.

‘She’s irrelevant,’ Sabbath told him. He reached into the inner jacket pocket of his linen suit and drew out several unsealed manila envelopes which he dropped on to the table in between them. The Agent let one hand drift towards them, then paused.

‘What are these?’

‘Works of fiction. Stories. Fake histories.’

His Agent pursed his lips. ‘What’s the job?’

‘There are some fellow travellers here, or will be shortly. They have information I would prefer them not to have, knowledge of certain past events that it is not in my – or your – interests to be revealed.’

The slight, younger man gathered up the envelopes, flicking them open to inspect the papers within but careful to keep the contents concealed from any observers and not to touch them. Once he handled the papers, they were tied to him, unusable to any of Sabbath’s other agents. He nodded over the information within, before slipping them through a rip and into the lining of his coat.

‘You need me to –’ The younger man broke off whilst Alicia served them the coffee. ‘*Gràcies, comrade.*’

Sabbath waited until he had seen their waitress smile rather more warmly towards his Agent than she ever did towards him and for her to go back to the counter with a little extra strut.

‘I want you to wipe it out,’ he told the man before him, regaining his full attention. ‘Ensure the information is no longer available. Wipe them out, if that is what it takes.’

‘Means?’

‘Any necessary, but I’m sure I need not impress on you to be discreet. The mess in Rome was forgivable – how could you have expected him to duck? –

but this is a delicate time and we don't want any unwanted attention. You'll need to deal with any repercussions yourself.'

The Agent leaned his elbows on to the scarred wooden table top, tapping his thumb against his upper lip whilst he considered. Sabbath was pleased that he didn't deny past errors of judgement: he had hopes for this fellow. He was ambitious, true, and clearly wanted to be Sabbath's favoured representative but he was also shrewd enough to admit his mistakes. This was the first true test though – to complete this without disrupting the timelines required a delicacy of touch that assassinating Popes lacked. The younger man put his hand down and raised his eyebrows at Sabbath.

'I'll need details: how many, when, how will I recognise them?'

Sabbath chuckled. 'Knew you'd be unable to resist, dear boy.' He reached into the inner pocket and drew out a slim red envelope, its flap secured with a plain black wax seal.

'There's all you need to know about the targets.'

The Agent picked it up and slipped it into an outer pocket without even glancing at it. Sabbath always prepared the dossiers with meticulousness, always predicted all the scenarios, all the possible questions and they both knew it. The Agent stood to leave, patting all his pockets again briefly then frowning slightly.

Sabbath dropped the glasses back on to the table. 'And with those, you'll recognise them,' he said. He privately enjoyed the look of surprise on his Agent's face as he recognised his own spectacles, somehow taken from his jacket pocket and modified with a few thin strips of metal along the frames. The lenses gleamed with the faintest coppery tinge. The Agent picked them up and cautiously put them on, sliding them up his nose. He looked about the café, then smiled widely as he looked at Sabbath.

'Oh, I see.'

Part One

Course Introduction

‘No, painting is not made to decorate apartments: it’s an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy.’

– *Pablo Picasso*

Chapter One

Coneixeu El Vostres Drets

‘And now, if you will excuse me?’

The man stood, scraping back the wrought-iron chair, and headed for the door into the bar. Anji waited until he was out of earshot, then turned to the Doctor.

‘Go on, say it,’ she said. He frowned in puzzlement. Fitz grinned at them both.

‘Can I say it?’ he asked the still-confused Doctor, before turning back to her. ‘I told you so.’ Anji ran a hand over her bobbed hair. She always did when she was irritated: making sure she looked outwardly collected no matter what. Fitz was just showing off again. There was no way she was going to rise to the scruffy sod’s taunting.

‘OK,’ she conceded, in her being-reasonable voice, ‘the Doctor was not making it all up. But just because he’s on debating terms with Sartre doesn’t prove all his other claims.’

Fitz snorted. ‘Now you’re just being contrary.’

The lanky Englishman slouched back in his seat, reaching for the lager set before him on the small table. Anji had forgotten how smug Fitz could look, when his face wasn’t creased with stress. It brought out her more militant debating skills and she realised she was automatically leaning forward to continue the argument.

‘Go on, give me proof – empirical proof – that you’ve been everywhere you say you have.’

The Doctor sipped his lemonade. He looked distracted, as if he was musing on the previous discussion still. Anji had to admit he was on form today. His jacket had been slung over the back of the chair, his cravat hung loose and the wide sleeves of his shirt were rolled up in a concession to the dry heat. As usual, he looked as if he belonged, as if he had spent years passing leisurely afternoons sat outside French café-bars. Whereas Fitz looked like he was expecting to be

asked to move on by the staff at any moment and she felt convinced people were looking at her curiously. Then again, perhaps the Doctor *had* spent years like this – he was on debating terms with Sartre after all. Plus, he seemed unfazed by the heat that was making her own white cotton shirt stick to her skin. No fair.

He put his lemonade down and glanced sideways at Fitz. ‘I’ll never understand this human desire to gloat. Although, when I think about it, quite a few alien species –’

He stopped, as both Anji and Fitz rolled their eyes, and covered his pause with another sip of lemonade.

‘Who’s for some exercise?’ he asked and, without pausing for an answer, he flung down the right amount of francs – plus a healthy tip – on to the metal table top, picked up his jacket and set off, leaving his two companions to follow.

The pavements through the Left Bank were just too narrow for the three to walk abreast, so the Doctor was constantly switching positions. One moment behind them, then hopping into the gutter to overtake, almost causing Anji to trip on his heels as he dived in front of her. He was in one of his expansive moods, she noted, giving them a running commentary as they walked.

‘Paris!’ he exclaimed. ‘Summer 1937,’ he continued, walking backwards now, hands in trouser pockets, expertly avoiding the occasional lamppost. ‘A fascinating time. Europe is in the midst of complete social upheaval and Paris is a bit of a magnet for it all. Full of refugees from other states. I thought I saw Max Castle earlier. You know? Great German expressionist film director? Or was he Polish?’ He took in their blank faces.

‘Anyway, now we’re here – thanks to Anji’s disbelief in me,’ the Doctor continued, giving her his hurt puppy look, ‘we should enjoy it. See the sights, that sort of thing. I don’t believe either of you have visited Paris before the Second World War, have you?’

He had led them confidently through the back streets, until now they passed through large black iron gates into a typically formal park. High, carefully trimmed shrubs bordered the wide gravel paths along which groups of Parisians strolled leisurely in the mid-afternoon sun. The Doctor bounced ahead, like an overenthusiastic teacher on a school outing, positive that his charges would enjoy everything. Anji smiled to herself: it was better than that sixth form trip to Aberystwyth, anyway. And far better than when he was in one of his bleak moods. The Doctor had reached a corner in the boulevard and stood waiting for them, one arm outstretched.

‘Ta-dah!’

Directly ahead of them, larger than she remembered it, was the Eiffel Tower, with the ground beyond sloping away towards the Seine. The broad, elegant gardens beyond it were not empty, as they had been during that weekend break she’d taken in her own time. Instead, huge temporary buildings crowded the iron structure. To the right, huge pillars rose in a square formation: there was a stylised eagle on its summit, its wings stretched half out. To the left, an equally massive classical structure was surmounted by enormous bronze human figures, their hands raised in triumphantly clenched fists. The people walking among the buildings and along the wide pathways were like Lego men in comparison. She could sense Fitz, standing next to her, trying not to look impressed at the sheer scale of the site.

‘The Paris Exposition of 1937. Every European country has an exhibition here,’ the Doctor explained. ‘To our left, the Soviets. To our right, the Third Reich. Hitler took the Rhineland last year, by the way.’

‘Stop showing off, Doctor,’ Fitz grumbled.

The Doctor looked faintly crestfallen as they walked down the path and into the shadows cast by the Tower. He paused, standing at the spot that marked the centre of the structure, and looked up. Anji joined him. Last time she had been here, she had been far too concerned with looking unimpressed, with being the weary cynic the end of the twentieth century had demanded. This time she grinned as she spun on the spot, looking at the crisscrossing network of huge girders. Trying to trace a path up the structure made her dizzy.

‘Did you know,’ the Doctor said, obviously still peeved by Fitz’s remark, ‘that when Paris fell to the –’ he paused, glancing about to check no one was paying attention, ‘to the Nazis, Hitler wanted to have a photograph of himself at the top of the Tower? What better symbol to prove he had taken France? Trouble was, the lifts and stairways had been made impassable by the keepers. Adolf had to settle for a press event in its shadow instead.’

Anji moved forward, and squinted at the eagle atop the German tower. Clasped in its gigantic golden talons was a crooked cross. ‘So they built these things to show the world how big and macho they were?’ she asked. ‘All a bit Freudian, isn’t it?’

‘Terribly,’ the Doctor answered, ‘but symbols have power, never forget that.’

Anji glanced at the swastika. ‘Oh, don’t worry. People won’t forget.’

‘You’ve stopped smiling,’ the Doctor noted sadly. ‘This is meant to be a break.’ He grabbed Fitz’s arm, then held his free one out to her. ‘Coming?’

She sighed, then looped her arm through his, letting him lead them both back into the sunshine. 'So long as you don't make us do the Monkees' walk.'

The darkened cellar was oppressively humid, with a taste of mildew in the air. Nothing had been kept in it for a while so the rot had begun to take full possession. Empty wooden wine-racks lined the walls, their contents long since drunk during the early euphoric days of the previous July or perhaps sold, more recently, on the black market. At the furthest end, far beyond the faint light cast through the edges of the ill-fitting trapdoor, the largest, heaviest rack – so big it filled the whole wall – was hard up against a long disused fireplace.

'We are rats, Luiz,' an apprehensive voice whispered.

'Quiet.' The second speaker had a deeper, firmer voice, roughened from smoking.

'We hide like them and we will die like them.'

'Alberto, quiet.'

Alberto wanted to put on his glasses. He wanted to move, to stretch, to walk. It seemed like an age since he had stood upright, years since they had pulled the heavy rack across the fireplace. His injured arm ached abominably. He was not a nervous man, not the type to pace or fret or fidget but the injunction that he could not – must not – move was making him so. His senses were distorting and he wanted to move, to recalibrate his awareness so that he felt more secure, both in himself and in their hiding place. He could feel the crumbling brickwork of the fireback pressing into his spine, through his worn jacket, but he couldn't tell where the rack was in front of him any more. When they'd first hidden themselves here he had been acutely aware of every millimetre around them, of the hideously loud scrape as the rack had been dragged into place. Louder, he was sure, than the sounds the searchers were making in the bar above. He'd been able to sense the weight of wood that barricaded them from view. The continued darkness had robbed him of his perception though, till he wondered if there was nothing but air in front of them. If they were exposed to anyone entering the cellar. He wanted to put on his glasses, so at least he would be sure he could see what was happening if they came.

When they came.

The crashing sounds above ceased.

The Doctor was using his full repertoire of arm gestures, enthusiastic tones and non-stop waffle in an attempt to restore the holiday mood: it wasn't often they got to be tourists. Anji had started laughing after about five minutes. By tacit

agreement, they had all avoided the German Pavilion. Although Fitz thought ‘pavilion’ wasn’t really the right term for a building at least two hundred feet high. He mooched along behind the other two, hands in the pockets of his leather jacket. He just wasn’t in the mood any more. He thumbed the battered edges of the paperback in his pocket: Sartre’s *The Age of Reason*, the novel that had prompted this trip. An old postcard stuck up from the soft pages, reminding him that he was only a quarter of the way through. He didn’t really feel like finishing it though.

The Doctor led them around a corner, with a brief glance to check Fitz was still following. Now that’s more like it, Fitz thought, as he took in the building they were approaching. Plain square glass panels set in a metal framework, built to a comfortably human scale. He remembered some of the modernist buildings still standing in England in the 1960s: damp growth already encroaching on the greying walls and the paint flaking from the metal window frames. This must have been what these buildings had looked like new, before the British weather had beaten their optimism into decay. It was the first exhibition space that he felt even a vague desire to actually enter. Anji was nodding along, with that intent look on her face she got when she was determined to understand a new concept, as the Doctor expounded some point about lateral curves, so Fitz walked into the pavilion first.

The painting took up an entire wall opposite the entrance: no one entering the building could fail to notice it. Fitz was impressed by the scale of it, how the monochrome tones mimicked the white walls and slate-grey floor of the entrance lobby. He let his eyes wander across the giant canvas, roaming from the chaotic centre – where arms and animals and faces were jumbled into one another – to the edges where whole bodies were looking up to the heavens. The angles of all the elements drew his eye upwards to the blazing white eye that gazed down calmly over the carnage.

‘And, of course,’ the Doctor said from beside him, ‘Picasso’s *Guernica*. The centrepiece of the Spanish Republic’s pavilion.’

Anji frowned at the painting, her lips tightening into a thin line. ‘Shouldn’t it be more. . .?’

She trailed off. Fitz glanced between his companions’ puzzled faces and the canvas. There was something odd about it but he couldn’t place it. The image was familiar from reproductions. He remembered that the painting had done a tour of Europe when he was a small lad and a few of the parents of boys at school – some of the very few that had been willing to have the Kreiner boy round – had had cheap, fuzzy prints on their wall. Sometimes right next to

a photo of one of his friends' ever-absent older brothers or uncles. Though the prints had been tiny, he could remember finding them... something... something that he couldn't quite recall... something that this huge version didn't do to him now he stood in front of it. Anji was right: it should be more... *something*.

Anji, ever practical, had walked over to a desk and bought a cheap pamphlet. The painting was reproduced on the outside and she was reading the contents with a confused frown. She was unconsciously chewing one side of her lower lip as she concentrated, which Fitz found rather cute.

'*Guernica* has been commissioned by the Republican government for the Spanish pavilion at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris...'

There was something nagging him. Something about the cheap prints he'd seen as a kid. He'd seen it more recently as well. It had been reproduced somewhere so obvious he hadn't even noticed where it was.

'It expresses the artist's reaction to the destruction of the Basque town of Guernica earlier this year,' Anji continued.

'A reasoned response,' the Doctor remarked. He was pacing up and down in front of the painting, tilting his head at strange angles as if he was trying to find the one spot in the room from which the painting didn't feel wrong.

'Reason!' Fitz realised he'd said it too loudly. Not only were his friends turning to look at him, but other visitors paused to stare. As if he cared. That's where he'd seen the painting recently. He yanked the old paperback book out of his pocket. Cracked it spine open so he could see the entire cover design. A 1960s Penguin edition of *The Age of Reason*. Badly foxed. And wrapped in a reproduction of the painting before them.

A reproduction that screamed of outrage and horror and of the inhumanity of a town being razed to the ground. That told the world that this was wrong, that limbs shouldn't be severed in that way, that animals and people shouldn't die that way. That a town, a way of life, a dream had been shattered and fractured and destroyed – stomped into non-existence by sheer brutality – and that the world should take notice before it was too late.

In contrast with the cool detachment of the barely finished artwork in front of them, which spoke of nothing more than paint on canvas and a commission fulfilled.

How could a reproduction have a passion that the real version lacked?

The trapdoor opened without a protest, flooding the stagnant gloom with illumination. As he closed his eyes against the sudden light, Alberto felt Luiz's

large hand on his arm, a silent warning. He could hear boots on the steep stairs. Many boots. It wasn't Joaquín then. It wasn't their ally: it must be the enemy. Unless... something had happened to Joaquín and he had sent others to rescue Alberto and Luiz from their hiding place. Yes, that could be it. These would be allies, come to help them, get them to somewhere safe, secure. Perhaps even over the border.

Luiz's grip on his arm tightened. Alberto opened his eyes cautiously, unwilling to find out if he was right or wrong. Through the rack he could see glimpses of men, methodically moving along the cellar towards them, shoving over each shelf as they reached it. Uniformed men. The dreaded blue uniforms: the Guardia de Asalto.

'Alberto Martinez and Luiz Hernades. You are arrested for treason against the Republic! Come forward and face the charges against you!'

Alberto's eyes glanced towards his companion. Luiz was a big man, strong, competent. He had been in the street fighting of the last fortnight, though, and he was exhausted from the aftermath of the adrenalin rushes. And from the fear that this very thing would happen. That he would be branded a traitor, dragged away and never seen again. The same fear Alberto had; the one that was coming true. The odds of fighting their way out were not good, not as debilitated as they were and with Alberto's still useless arms. Luiz returned Alberto's glance, let his eyes flicker agreement. They would fight if they had to. They had killed for their ideology and they wouldn't stop the fight now it was their turn to lose.

'Come on, you fascist traitors!'

Two guards had reached the rack now. Alberto could see the gleam of the rifles slung over their shoulders. He could almost reach through the rack and touch them. Why had he not brought a weapon with him? Why had he agreed to hide when he should have fled to the port and begged or bought passage out of Barcelona? If they were lucky, they'd be shot but that wasn't what the rumours said happened to those arrested. Those that disappeared. He closed his eyes again, reverting to the childhood belief that if he couldn't see them then they couldn't see him.

'Here! Here they are! Fascistas!'

And he could sense the rack was falling away from them, crashing on to the dirty floor.

He was freshly arrived in Barcelona, still unpacking. He automatically started to make connections, to note and correlate the little details which would go

towards documenting this era, these events.

Parts of him were still in Paris, he realised. He could still see young women walking poodles in la Rue de la Bourse, the events still playing in front of him like the grainy films of the Lumière brothers he had watched back in the 1890s. He shifted his focus.

Spain in the 1930s. It was a huge area to cover but he would record the events as accurately as ever. It was his purpose for being here: his vocation. He was, after all, an Absolute. Non-partisan, unbiased, unfettered by the narrow perceptions of the humans around him. What was that comment he'd found in Paris? Something about cameras? He sent a quick pulse down the line to the Hub, requesting a search through early twentieth century European literature. He watched as the query crackled down the central synaptic connection, the search parameters perfectly reproduced as they leapt from electron to electron. It would return with the correct data when it had been processed at the Hub.

He turned his concentration outward from the System, to see Spain through an infinite prism of locations. Barcelona shimmered in the sunlight of a July day as workers marched triumphantly through the streets, their red and black banners flying. At the same time he saw it as winter and rationing began to bite, the air bitter. In Madrid, people ran for cover as Franco's bombers approached and the soldiers defending the city looked on, unable to fire their anti-aircraft batteries for lack of shells. Up in the Pyrenees, ten men huddled together, sheltering from the harsh night as they crossed the closed border from France on foot. In a café, a Canadian sold arms to the Republicans. Priests in a village were shot against their own church walls. Young troops scurried to remove posters deriding Generallísimo Franco as tourists in flares photographed the cathedral.

No, that was too far forward. That was not within his remit. He had been assigned to report on the time period 1930-1940, in colloquial terms. The 1970s were too far ahead: they were another Absolute's patch of events. He was spread too wide in time and too narrow in space. Like all of his kind, he knew he had only limited superposition. That he could only observe from all possible positions within a limited range. He withdrew the elements of himself that were looking that far forward, reset the parameters of his research. He would start with Barcelona in 1936.

'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will

have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.'

– *Christopher Isherwood, Goodbye to Berlin, 1939*

The response from the Hub had taken some time, the search fields he had entered had been wide, after all, and the Hub was always thorough. Always produced the correct and accurate answer. Information-gathering was their business and had been since the System had been created. Questioning why, or who could now access the data with their creators now long gone, was not part of their programming.

Barcelona. Looking about he immediately identified the wildly different architectural styles that divided the city into distinct visual districts. He noted with interest the port that opened into the Mediterranean sea and that mainly industrial shipping and small fishing boats flowed through it. The humans were mainly speaking Catalan, although he noted the relatively high level of French and other European languages also in use. Glancing at one human, he noted that although the man was speaking French, he was thinking in English and the man he spoke to was slowly mistranslating the French into Catalan. How clumsy this world was! To have not yet developed a method of accurately transmitting data from one unit to another but to rely on the vagaries of speech.

He made a careful record of their conversation and the misunderstandings by both sides. He filed that neatly in his own local memory, time, date and location stamped ready for retrieval. Flickering around the country, he found the key communications method: the telephone. Millions of packets of data broken down into analogue signal and sent down primitive cables, through junctions and exchanges, racing along until they are converted back to sound, back to information the humans could understand. Like all the Absolute, he approved of the telephone. It was primitive, prone to error and omission but its structure reminded them of the System. Of, for lack of a better term, home. It had been designed to convey information: it was as close to a natural environment as an Absolute in this era could find. He flicked a new connection into place, anchoring several of his positions within the network of hard copper wires and Bakelite handsets. He accessed his feed line from the System, pulled down a little extra power to hold the new link in place. The synapse was thick, pulsing with energy as the signals were pumped into him. White noise buzzed along it, forcing him to devote another little part of his conscious to damping it down. But the information. So much information. He would be filing such a huge report from this era, so many events.

A woman in Madrid was screaming down the phone for help. A Russian in Alcalá de Henares spoke secrets down a secure line, which could easily be decrypted back at the Hub, should anyone ever request both the message and the key that one of the other Absolute had doubtless recorded. There were no secrets to the Absolute, no lies that they did not hold the truths to. That was their role in the universe – that was his role – to see, to observe, to record the truth.

‘I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.’

He could see everything – within his purview – with clarity and focus. Each person was a moving cluster of perspectives: he saw them from every conceivable angle, at every age, all overlapping yet fitting together to create a full representation of the person’s life. And from each person gossamer-thin shimmering lines spread, showing their relationships to their surroundings, to others, to the future. He had no such connections, he had no need for different perspectives. To the humans, or to whatever creatures they observed, the Absolute were less than ghosts, less than even the faintest tingle of a presence. They did not conform to the rules of the modern universe and so they were invisible to it.

In Barcelona, two unshaven men were dragged up from a cellar and bundled away by guards. He saw them arrive, later, at the barracks where they were tortured. And earlier, months earlier, they were sat in a hotel foyer laughing with friends. Years earlier still, before they knew each other, one was reading books earnestly in college whilst the other laboured in the grounds. Their whole passage through time was laid out to him: the events that influenced their movement through life, the bullets that would end it. All the events, all were streamed into his memory cache, ready to be collated into the definitive record and added to the information at the Hub.

This was his *purpose*. To observe without influence meant to observe without the subjects’ awareness. Beings, time, neither of these could see the Absolute. He felt as well as saw the information flowing, concatenating, compiling. The data was power, visible to him as it crackled along, the humans walking through it unaware, triggering uncountable bursts of data.

Except one.

The man was standing at the base of a pillar in a square in Barcelona, leaning back with his hands in the pockets of his coat. His thin mouth was pursed, almost as if he were whistling, although he was making no sound. And he was looking at him.

Right at him.

Despite the dirty sunset reflected in the man's glasses, the Absolute could see his eyes, see what he was focusing on. One of the man's eyebrows quirked up and he smiled broadly.

Everything was changing. Suddenly all the intricate interwoven lines were fracturing, wildly whipping about through the times, the places. Pulses of information flashed past, too fast to be captured. The connections broke, decayed and faded. Narrowing. Narrowing down and down and down until there was only the man in the square, only his gaze. Everything had gone, all the multitudes of view, all the pure simple truths were gone. There was just the one man, and the Absolute realised with horror that he was seeing him through eyes. Human eyes. From just the one angle, just the one time. There were no other perspectives, no absolute. No Absolute.

And with that, the man began to flicker in and out of view as if he had never been there at all.

Chapter Two

Una Casa Europea Segura

‘Oh bloody hell! It’s another alternative history thingy, isn’t it?’

Fitz flopped back next to Anji on the low-slung modernist sofa that faced the enormous painting. He automatically patted his pockets for his cigarettes before equally automatically stopping. Then he remembered when he was: he could smoke indoors! Yes! There wasn’t a damn ‘No Smoking’ sign in sight. There were even ashtrays at either end of the seating, waiting for him to dirty them. It was almost enough to make up for the whole alternative reality business. Almost.

‘You mean, one of those “what if Japan conquered America in the 1940s?” things?’ Anji asked him. ‘Or a “what if my heel broke running down an escalator so I got a different tube train?” thing? And do you have to smoke?’

‘Yes, perhaps not *quite* that specific and yes.’ Fitz deliberately exhaled a series of rapid smoke rings, just to show her he still could. There were only so many centuries he could smoke indoors without hassle and he was determined to make the most of it. He smirked as Anji rapidly moved to the far end of the sofa from him, waving her hand about. She had kicked her shoes off when she had sat down and now curled her legs up under her, leaning on one arm, propped up on the narrow side of the sofa, getting as far away from his cigarette as possible and pointedly wrinkling her nose. In the direction of the still-pacing Doctor, that was, rather than towards Fitz himself. She wasn’t about to try to pursue that lost cause, he could tell.

‘Doctor...’

He paused in his pacing and glowered at the two of them. ‘It’s not one of those, as Fitz puts it, “alternate history thingies”,’ he said. ‘They tend to be blatant. We’d be standing in front of, for example, a giant portrait of Franco if it were one of those.’ He resumed trailing back and forth across the foyer. Fitz suspected that, had the area been carpeted, there would be a little path wearing into the weft by now. He waited until the Doctor passed again.

‘How would we know we weren’t supposed to be looking at a painting of Franco then?’

The Doctor barely paused. ‘We’d know. Apart from anything else, I’ve already lived through the 1930s once. I’m sure I’d remember.’

Fitz and Anji glanced at each other, both with one eyebrow raised. He grinned at her, gesturing at the Doctor with his cigarette. ‘Your turn,’ he whispered. He slouched even lower, dropping his head back and sprawling his legs out in front of him so the Doctor had to step over them. He briefly looked at the patterns of smoke rising slowing to the ceiling above him, then closed his eyes, content to wait. He smiled when he heard Anji give a little huffy sigh whilst she waited for the Doctor to walk in front of them again. One of her feet was tapping against the seat and she was whistling something as she watched the Doctor go on a long circuit of the foyer and start to get within reach again.

‘Things are getting strange, I’m starting to worry. This could be a case for Mulder and Scully,’ she sang quietly. Fitz turned to stare at her. The Doctor paused in his pacing.

‘What?’ He was looking confused.

Anji sighed, rolling her head up at the ceiling. Fitz started to suspect she was bored. ‘Sorry,’ she said, ‘it was just my homage to Catatonia.’

Fitz thought for a moment. ‘I don’t get it,’ he said.

‘Homage to... oh, never mind.’ She lowered her head and caught the Doctor’s eye before he could resume pacing. ‘So what is it?’

He glared at her, snapped out. ‘Well, if I knew that, I wouldn’t be trying to figure it out, would I?’

Fitz stubbed out his ciggie in the ashtray, not bothering to sit up. He wondered about lighting another, just because he could. He had a feeling this could take a while.

This was wrong.

There was just so much, too much. He couldn’t take it all in. Every time he tried to concentrate on one thing, he’d be missing so much else. He was restricted to seeing only four dimensions. That was the least problem he was having, however. He couldn’t see the connections any more: there was no causal network. What was the relevance of that woman running across a square, her little dog yapping racing ahead of her? He could see the shelter she was running to, see the bombers roaring over the outskirts of Barcelona. It was meaningless though: he couldn’t see the intricate patterns she caused any more, couldn’t see the context, the fine lines that connected all the events.

Things were happening but he couldn't see why, couldn't see the actions that led to a moment and away from it.

The line back to the System was still open, at least. He sent a pulse back to the Hub, setting search parameters for similar occurrences. The information seemed to take longer to send, it wasn't the clean flash of data he was used to.

He looked over the information in his local memory cache again, replaying the moment when things had changed. Someone had looked at him, seen him. The person had been flickering, as if they were not solid, but that wasn't possible. A person is either there or not there. Things either happened or they did not happen. The Absolute always saw the events, the people, the truth. Hard, certain truths. The man in the glasses had been there.

He reviewed the record again. The man was not there. He reviewed the record again. The man was there.

Not there.

There.

Not... It was not possible.

The Absolute tried to trace the man through the records. He noted the man's face, the shape, the colours. He sent the information back to the Hub. All the accumulated information would be gone through until the patterns were matched, recognised. Then he would know that the man was real.

They paused halfway up the Montmartre stairs, to let Fitz get his breath back. Anji resisted commenting. The guy was big enough and old enough to know what he was doing to himself. Although he had argued that it was vital to visit the Moulin Rouge on the way.

Even halfway up the worn steps that climbed the hill to the Sacre Coeur, there was a stunning panorama of Paris as it buzzed in the August heat and Anji was glad of the chance to view it. Behind and below her, the Eiffel Tower speared the blue heat haze. If she narrowed her eyes, she could almost see the huge banner flags fluttering over the distant Exposition. The Doctor had already carried on up, clearly unbothered by the heat or the steep ascent. Anji wondered if she could start carrying bottled water around with her: it wouldn't be a big anachronism, after all, and it would be better than passing out in the sweltering heat. As far as she could tell, half the Parisians had left the city for the cooler countryside but the influx of tourists meant the city was still far too full of people.

Fitz nodded that he had caught as much breath as he was ever going to and they resumed the climb. Back in her London, Anji remembered, she had used

a step-machine at one gym that had a diagram that equated the exercise with real staircases. London's Monument equalled two hundred and twenty-two, she knew. The Sacre Coeur had been on it but she couldn't recall how many steps it was. The worst thing, she realised, was that she was wishing she was back on that damn machine now. Just as the diagram hadn't revealed that the Monument's steps were in a very tight spiral that made you dizzy, it had neglected to mention the unevenness of Montmartre's steps. If she'd known getting to Picasso's 1937 studio involved a heavy workout, she'd never have suggested they visit the artist.

Much to her own surprise, the ground levelled out: she had reached the top. Looking up, she saw the huge white church in front of them, like a cross between the Taj Mahal, the Brighton Pavilion and a frosted wedding cake. The Doctor was stood on the cobbled forecourt, his dark red jacket slung over one arm, both hands in his trouser pockets. He was looking up at it, half-smiling and chewing one side of his lip. Anji watched as a tourist couple addressed him in broken French and he obligingly took their photograph in front of the huge building. He turned and saw her standing against the city's skyline.

'Ah, Anji.' He came over and leaned against the promontory wall that ran around the forecourt whilst they waited for Fitz to catch up again. He handed her a slim drinking flask and she frowned.

'It's OK, it's just mineral water,' he assured her. 'Less obtrusive than a plastic bottle of Vittel, I think.'

She took a sip, accepting his unspoken apology for his brusqueness in the pavilion. It was just water, surprisingly cool given it was from a flask that the Doctor must have had in a pocket of his velvet coat. Unless he had a miniature cooler in there somewhere as well.

'It's about perception,' he told her whilst she took a bigger gulp of water.

She frowned. 'The water?'

'The painting.'

'Ah.'

She leant on the parapet next to him, looking up at the huge, improbable church. 'In what way, or shouldn't I ask yet?'

'I'm not sure. When we looked at the painting we saw one version of it, when we looked at the book cover we saw the same but different. I checked every part of it and they are visually identical.'

'So something is causing us to perceive them differently?'

'Exactly.'

Anji spotted Fitz making his way across the forecourt towards them, still breathing heavily. She smiled and gave him a little wave, waiting till she was sure he was in earshot to ask the Doctor her next question. 'Do you think seeing Picasso will help? Only I hate to think Fitz climbed the hill for nothing.'

She hid her grin at his groan behind the lip of the flask.

There. Not there.

He was aware that he was starting to loop, that he was getting stuck on this one glitch, but it was the key, he was sure.

The search results on the face came back. No matches found. So the man had not existed. Then how could he have ever seen him?

The search results on the face came back. The man was sighted in Florida in 1935, next to a Mexican man with a rifle. Rome, 1980. The man looked the same in both locations. A fractured, partial link pointed towards England in 1907, where a boy whose face would eventually match sat rapt at his father's tall tales of espionage. The father was real, set. From the father thousands of gossamers ran, connecting him to events and people. Except in two directions where the links flickered, broke. One of which tried to lead to the boy, the man, the impossibility.

The search results on the face came back: no matches.

There / not. He could still see the dusky reflection in the man's glasses, the darkening russet sunset. Yet the square was empty; no man stood by the fountain, no glasses for the light to reflect in.

He felt a burst of energy coming down the line from the Hub. New information, the results of his first search query about the situation. It took a long time to arrive, the connection was increasingly frayed.

The information unfurled into his awareness. There was a solution, a way to restore his superposition.

The car's rear wheel crashed over a pothole, jolting the passengers' spines and causing Durruti's head to hit the roof again.

'I cannot believe this,' he yelled over the rattles of the vehicle. 'How can my men fight without air cover?'

He had arrived the previous day, leading the four thousand street-fighters of his column to the defence of Madrid. The Castillian capital would not be taken by the Nationalists whilst Buenaventura Durruti lived and could command his men. He had reported to Miaja that he was ready to make a full frontal attack on the rebels via University City. The General had assured him that air cover

would be provided, as the scrubby plains next to the modern buildings and the wide avenues did not provide them with cover. Madrid was already being bombarded from the air and without the Republican planes counterattacking his men would be decimated, at the very least.

‘Those fools! Those ignorant Communist puppets!’ He slammed his fist into the side of the car, taking satisfaction from the pain.

‘Durruti. . .’

‘No! Where was the cover? They let men die because of their incompetence! Their blind obeying of Stalin’s dictates. We fight for Spain, for anarchism, not for the Soviets.’

The attack had started the previous dawn. The air cover had not arrived. Durruti’s militia battalions had already seen action in cities, but that was running street battles, or barricades, and had been before the Nationalists’ treacherous allies had brought their machine guns or Junkers to the fights. In the hard cold dirt on the edge of Madrid, where the King had once hunted game, Durruti’s men were the easy prey. He had lost many to strafing fire, or from the heavy shelling on the ground. Worse, a handful of his men had been so unnerved by the screaming of bullets and shells and the wounded, so scared for their own selves, that they had broken and run from the front. The failure had cost Durruti dear, in men and power.

He had spent the morning in futile arguments with the General and the other puppets, arguing that he could still regain University City. Now he was returning to where his men had dug in. This trench warfare, this advancing over open ground, was not what they were experienced in, but he was confident that they could rout the fascists. He was already planning their new offensive.

The car swerved around a mortar crater, jolting through another pothole, and causing the passengers to clamp their teeth tight. They were almost back in position now, close enough for the driver to put on the brakes and draw to a stop behind some thin scrubby cover. His friends got out of the car first, pulling their semi-automatic rifle straps on to their shoulders. Durruti clapped the driver on the shoulder – it was not his fault the road was so pitted and the ride so rough – and stepped out. As he straightened up, he checked his pistol was in its holster and tightened the belt that held his old jacket closed.

‘We should check the supply situation,’ he told his aide, ‘I doubt Madrid can or will spare us any food.’

Jaime was nodding when Durruti felt his chest burn and tighten, like he had eaten too fast. His breathing was suddenly shallow and painful and he wanted to gasp but found he couldn’t. And he was falling, toppling backwards as if he

had been shoved in the chest by a drunk. Things were muted for a moment, then his vision went black, and the sound cleared.

‘Oh my God, Durruti has been shot!’

He tried to remind Jaime that there were no gods to call to but none of his muscles would do his bidding. He closed his eyes to rest for a moment, wondering where the sniper had been hidden.

Buenaventura Durruti died of his wounds two days later in the converted Ritz Hotel in Madrid.

– Evening –

Las Rambles is the social heart of the city. In July, the industrial city of Barcelona became a warzone. This beautiful heart of the gothic quarter, Las Rambles, was turned into barricades, the cobbles lifted from their sockets to become missiles. The street is a wide boulevard, lined with trees, although the traffic only uses two narrow lanes at the edges. The main central pavement runs downhill from Plaza Catalunya down to Columbus’s column by the docks, maybe a mile in total. The whole street is lined with hotels, cafés, theatres, markets and is the social centre of the city, with people walking along it every day. Many of the businesses have been collectivised and are no longer run for profit: socialism in action. Sitting out here, I feel that more than just a thousand miles separates me from England. This is an utterly different culture.

Recap notes on sides (city suffers from a plague of acronyms):

Nationalists – loose coalition of the Catholic church, the landed, the Carlists and about half the military. Attempted coup against elected gvt in Jul 36. Didn’t win everywhere but has maybe half the country.

Republicans – loose coalition of anarchists, unionists, socialists and communists. Elected to power, formed the 2nd Rep. of Spain. Unions etc. formed militia to defend against military uprising. 2nd Rep. issued civilians with weapons etc.

Barcelona is held by the Republicans, after fierce street fighting.

I arrived two nights ago and presented my papers at the Independent Labour Party’s offices. McNair – the local ILP head – read through the letter of introduction and looked up at me.

‘A novelist, eh? You’ve come to write about the struggle?’

‘No,’ I answered, ‘I’ve come to join it.’

He looked at me, a look that said the accent had been noted, a look that pitied this idealistic middle-class man come to fight fascists. Another one out to play soldiers, to create his own little version of the Great War in order to

assuage the guilt at having been just too young before. To sate the bloodlust that had been beaten into him at prep school.

He took me to the Lenin barracks, signed me up with the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), the local equivalent of the ILP. Apparently, had I come with Communist Party papers I would have joined the new Internationale Brigades. As it is, I'm in barracks as the POUM get another centuria of fighters together to go up the line.

I spent the evening trying to talk to the other volunteers, with my fractured phrasebook Spanish. The majority speak Catalan, however, which shares much vocab with French. We drank, sang and slept.

The drill is appallingly bad. There is much marching about and shouting, but little real practise with weapons. Many do not have guns, even, and the uniform is ragged. We look rather more like a bunch of tramps. In the afternoon, I showed some of the others how to dismantle and clean the elderly Mauser rifle I have been issued with. I suspect it last saw service in the Boer War. McNair popped by with more recruits and to see how I was. He seemed surprised to find me still here, still more interested in fighting than writing.

Today, the centuria were not confined to their barracks, so I wandered the city. The buildings are draped in banners, gaudily splashed with the red and the black of the anarchist movement. Requisitioned transport, daubed with the initials of one of the many political groups that run the city, drive up the wide boulevards or through the squares at dangerous speed. See notes at the front of this diary for initial impressions.

Everyone is 'comrade'. The staff at the collectivised cafés bring food or drink without the old subservience. This is a city freed of the obligations of class.

Still, there are bread queues.

I spent the first part of this evening sat at a café, having arranged to meet McNair there. He sauntered up the street towards me. He had two people with him, walking on either side. The woman had dark hair, pulled back from her serious eyes and tucked into a beret. Curls had escaped though, and she was tucking them behind her ear as she argued with McNair. The man was slim, almost wiry, glancing about as he walked and with one hand resting on something hanging on a leather strap from his shoulder. Both were dressed in the rough black work clothes of the anarchist militia, the Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (CNT – more initials).

He introduced them as Miquel Serrano Domínguez and his sister, Eleana. They both work on *La Batalla*, one of the anarchist newspapers. I shook hands with Serrano Domínguez. Both Catalonians were shorter than myself – I seem

to be head and shoulders above most here. Eleana reached over and shook my hand as well. Eleana asked if I was, as McNair had told her, a writer and what I was working on. I explained that I'm just in the notes stage at the moment. We talked for a few minutes, both in French.

Serrano Domínguez sat, putting his camera on the table and smiling at my accent.

'Perhaps you will consider writing an article for *La Batalla*,' Serrano Domínguez spoke in English, 'when you have been up to the front?'

I tried to explain that I was a novelist, not an essayist.

There were six, for his first attempt. The information had contained instructions and a crosscheck had brought up the necessary biological information. It was a simple matter, for one who belonged to the System. Gather the information from inside the brains of the planet's inhabitants.

The information from one creature was poor: its vision was limited to shapes and vague colours. Its fine sense of smell was intriguing but it lacked the complex language of the humans and its hearing was too sensitive to be of much use. It found humans painfully loud. The Absolute withdrew his connection from the alley cat: it didn't provide useful information.

The humans were much more interesting though. He started small, concentrating on a group sat at a café.

She perceived the tall, thin Englishman as a tourist. Blair looked too ailing to be a fighter, especially with the long scarf wrapped so tight around his throat. He was here to watch, not to participate. Her brother was talking in English to the man, telling him about the days and night they had spent on the barricades back in July. He was neglecting to mention the smell of blood baking on the cobblestones in the sun, or the hours longing for it to be over. Miquel always did like to glamorise the struggle. McNair was quiet, sitting back smoking a cigarette, having heard this before.

He was watching Blair's reaction to Serrano Domínguez's story. Blair was nodding and smiling, only occasionally asking questions. He had checked Blair's credentials, risking a message to London to be sure the stranger wasn't a CP spy. Eleana was looking thinner than she had a few weeks ago – the rationing was starting to bite. The waitress was prettier though.

The four were poor and two were English, with their coarse pale faces. All angles and elbows. They might tip, since they were still in the habit. Tips would pay for a new pair of stockings, perhaps. That Eleana, she wouldn't miss

her if she never came to the café again. With her fat face and her scruffy hair, dragging her poor brother about.

The newcomer was wide-eyed, listening to his every word, impressed with his valiant fighting in the streets back in July. It had been an exciting time, never a dull moment as the streets ran with blood and they had defeated the regular army with ease. This Blair was old, his face was lined and pockmarked and he coughed like a consumptive. This must be his first visit to somewhere as insane as Barcelona, he looked so awed. McNair was listening with rapt attention too, only Eleana looked bored. Perhaps the Englishman would take down his story and send it to England, to be published.

The Spanish photographer talked a lot, and fast, in a mix of French and Spanish, so he had to concentrate to understand even half the story he was being told. The distorted song that had started up from the loudspeaker in the next café made hearing the boy's story even more difficult, though the others seemed to hear fine. The woman wore the coarse clothing of the working classes but he had heard her accent and knew she was slumming it.

This was no good: each one of them saw the situation differently. One heard music from the loudspeaker and the others didn't. The people looked different depending on whose perception he was reading.

The Absolute started trying to reconcile the different versions. It made no sense. He tried more and more taps, sought more and more perspectives of the same event. The four sat outside the café were Trotskyists, plotting to act against the Communist Party. They were anarchists, the type that had destroyed people's ways of life and made them hide in workers' outfits and speak their language of 'comrade'. They were barely even noticed.

This was no good at all.

'That was a complete waste of time,' Fitz commented as they started back down the hill.

The Doctor waggled a piece of painted card that had been hastily wrapped in paper. 'Not completely. His lover gave me a good preparatory sketch for the painting.'

'To add to the huge stack of artwork piled up in the library waiting to be hung one day,' Anji remarked. She'd seen the stack herself: a collection that would fetch a fortune at Sotherby's, all propped up against the shelves of paperbacks or spread out over one of the long polished reading tables, haphazardly covered with acid-free paper. Nearly all were unfinished work, sketches or drafts, partial

glimpses of finished masterpieces. Still worth a packet to the right collectors, though.

‘Ah, but most of those are fakes.’

The Doctor was leading them, single file, through the crowds in Square Clignancourt, pushing past the artists and entertainers, holding his Picasso sketch in front of him tenderly. They had to raise their voices to be heard over the variety of buskers and café groups.

‘Fakes? All of them?’ Anji saw the fortune dissolving. There went her plan to take a few with her to sell as a parting gift and/or compensation from the Doctor.

‘Mostly,’ Fitz said from behind her. ‘The TARDIS rebuilt herself from the smallest atom upwards, including all her contents. Everything in there when she was restored is fake, even the first folio in the library or this old paperback. . .’

Anji bumped into the Doctor and had to step back hastily as he whirled round. Her heel barked into Fitz’s shin and he had to put out an arm to stop them both falling.

‘The book is part of the TARDIS library?’ the Doctor asked, ignoring the people muttering as they barged past the suddenly stationary trio.

‘Well, yeah,’ Fitz looked suddenly defensive, ‘where else would I get a book to read in there?’

At the Doctor’s gesturing, Fitz pulled the book back out of his jacket pocket and handed it over. Anji found the sketch thrust into her hands as the Doctor took the paperback and it took her a moment to find a way to hold it without it being bumped by the passers-by or getting in her face. The Doctor was flicking through the battered novel, as if testing that the pages were real. He took out the postcard bookmark and looked at both sides of it. Fitz was watching with a frown as his place was lost. ‘What. . .?’

The Doctor waggled the book at them. ‘This, this is part of the TARDIS!’

‘We got that already, Doctor.’ Anji beat Fitz to it.

‘Don’t you see? It’s not affected by the context!’

Anji and Fitz glanced at each other. Anji tried to suggest with her eyes that they lead the Doctor to one side, get him to calm down. Fitz just looked at her, puzzled. She tried to work out what the Doctor meant: clearly asking him wasn’t going to work as he had that enthusiastic – almost manic – look on his face.

‘The context of the painting is the gallery,’ she ventured. The Doctor shook his head at her, grinning.

'No, think bigger.'

'Paris?'

'Bigger. The context is the entire western culture right now. Just like you,' he gestured at Fitz, 'first saw it on the walls of families who had lost someone in Spain and that influenced how you saw the image.'

Now she saw it, she thought. The inside of the TARDIS was rarely affected by its surroundings, whether 'in flight' or sat on an alien planet or in the basement of a bordello. It was constant, steady. Timeless, culturally neutral. It took them outside those subtle influences.

'How we perceive the painting is being affected by the culture,' she told Fitz. He frowned. 'Is that it?'

'Is that it?' The Doctor stared at him. 'History isn't just a neat list of events, Fitz, it's how we perceive that list, how that list is presented to us. This painting is so important in how the Spanish conflict is seen by the future that if it's been altered it suggests that someone or something has changed how history is being perceived.'

'But does it –'

'Yes, it matters! Think of how we see history. You saw the pavilions down by the Seine. If you believed history as presented by Stalinist Soviet historians, you'd be unaware of the millions currently dying in the Gulags.'

'What?'

'Doesn't matter.' The Doctor was practically hoping on the spot now, pushing his hair back off his face and staring earnestly at them. 'What matters is that if the perception of history is controlled or changed, you can make people believe anything. It's as dangerous as changing history itself.' The passers-by were starting to slow now, perhaps hoping they were street entertainment. Or at least entertaining. Anji smiled at them and made the universal gesture of madness, twirling her finger near her temple. She got a few sympathetic smiles back.

'See? See what you did then?' the Doctor said earnestly, pointing at her, 'You made them perceive me as insane, when really I'm just very worried. Those people will believe for the rest of their lives that they saw a madman.'

'They'd not be that far wrong.' Fitz muttered. The Doctor glared at him.

'I heard that. Right.' He grabbed them both by the arms, pulling them back towards the steep incline of the Montmartre steps. 'We're going to sort this out. And no, Fitz, we are not going to the Moulin Rouge.'

A car's engine growled as its driver forced it to continue despite the state of

the road, and Antonio checked who was arriving. All day cars and wagons had arrived and driven off again, ferrying the more important people to and from their base of operations. Important! Why grant them status over others? They get their cars and vehicles, meals in town and a base of operations that isn't right at the front. We get nothing. We get marched here – marched! It wasn't even properly voted on. Told to attack the rebel front line. Told! Ordered! No debate, no discussion. No choice but to run forward. And when some refused, because we didn't know why we were at this fight any more, because the process of consensus is gone, we were punished. We're told we're not good anarchists because we don't jump when Durruti shouts. Well, no more!

Antonio watched as two men got out of the newly arrived car. He only had two rounds left of the ten he had managed to find yesterday. He double-checked the bolt on the elderly rifle, ensured that it would not jam. Too many jammed during battle, too many men died because of it. One of the men turned his head and Antonio recognised him. He raised the rifle butt to his shoulder and steadied his elbow on a tree branch. Was this the right thing to do? To take away a hero? Yes, it was right: he may have been a hero once but now he led with coercion and rules. He had become the enemy they were fighting, had taken on their hierarchy. Squinting to aim at the man emerging from the car, he squeezed the trigger with a shaking finger. He saw his hero fall.

Buenaventura Durruti died of his wounds two days later in the converted Ritz Hotel in Madrid.

Serrano Domínguez leaned forward in his chair, his eyes suddenly following a figure darting off down Las Ramblas. It had looked a lot like Diego Garcia, who – so rumour had it – wasn't happy with the current coalition. He was well known for his headstrong desire to be martyred for the anarchist cause and no one had been surprised to find him in the bloodiest parts of the street battles, or inciting the crowds to burn down churches. And he'd been unusually quiet these last few days. One rumour had it he had gone to the front, desperate for the fascist bullet that would bear his name to glory. Serrano Domínguez hadn't believed that though, and his sister Eleana had snorted with derision at the idea.

'Garcia wants to be a martyr,' she had cynically commented, 'and dying in a muddy trench from shrapnel wounds won't make you that, it'll just make you dead.'

So why was Garcia suddenly back in sight?

Miquel couldn't resist: he grabbed his Leica from the table top and started

after the fleeting figure. 'Perdoni, comrades,' he called hurriedly over his shoulder. 'Eleana, I will meet you back at home!'

'Miquel!'

He turned around to face his sister, who had stood to shout at him, but kept trotting up the street backwards. 'What?'

As if he didn't know. His older sister always had to send him off with a warning or imprecation, as if to reassert her position as head of the family. She seemed to take especial delight in pretending he was still a boy, with reminders about wearing a coat or minding his ankle on the cobbles. Although when he had fallen during the storming of the Sagrada Família, she had also been the first helping him up and pulling him onwards.

'Don't use up all the film! I don't know when more will arrive!' she yelled at him.

He grinned and mockingly saluted her, before turning back to face the direction he was trotting in. He turned into the street just as Garcia ducked off it into a narrower side passageway. It was definitely him – no one else was so capable of drawing attention to themselves whilst acting furtive.

They were moving deeper into the narrow backstreets of the Barri Gòtic, narrow lanes that were cool, untouched by sunlight all day, and where not a single straight line was in evidence. Serrano Domínguez wasn't an expert at navigating these lanes, there were always little passageways yet to be explored, but he realised that the general direction Garcia was taking was towards a main PSUC building. Miquel checked the camera's strap was firmly across his shoulder before lifting it, checking the number of exposures used. If he was lucky, if there was an incident, he would get a good photograph for the paper. Photographic evidence was worth hundreds of Eleana's moral words.

He was halfway between looking at the Leica and looking up to check Garcia's movements when he felt like all the blood had drained from his head in a rush. His hurrying feet faltered, jerked out of the unthinking rhythm of running, and he crashed to the cobbled pavement.

Something had hold of him.

He rolled on to his back in the gutter, looking up to see his assailant, to find out what he had to fight. There was nothing there, yet the pain in his head was increasing. He curled into a ball, lying on his side now, hands clasped at the nape of his neck as if he could stop the incessant tugging. It was clutching at him, pulling at him. One foot kicked and pushed against the kerb, futilely trying to move him, to get help from somewhere. Look at me, he wanted to scream – thought maybe he was screaming – Look at me! Help me!

He squeezed his eyes tighter against the pain, tried to close it out. Lights were exploding red against his eyelids, pulsing blues and swirling green blobs that drifted across diagonally, again and again, tracing and retracing the same agonising path across his eyeballs. And arching white, strobing horizontally.

He could see something: a dark fuzzy blob, spinning and writhing on a pale background. The drenching stench of hopeless fear. Sounds, deafeningly loud. Harsh deep groans, painful and unpleasant. One booted foot suddenly protruded from the blob, flailing and grating. Then Miquel could see something else: blobs of grey, tinged with the faintest blood red. Flowers, they were flowers. The same basic shape as the ones he had unconsciously noticed as he fell. He got another fleeting glimpse of the dark shape and recognised it now.

Every nerve screamed that he mustn't, but he tried to open his eyes. Briefly, he saw the curious amber eye of an alley cat on him, before it backed away and fled. The screaming agony in his mind increased and he closed his eyes in resignation. As he begged for the pain to end, he recognised with horror the words running through his mind, perhaps even mumbled aloud.

'Holy Mary, Mother of God...'

No, he had to stop. There were no gods, no monsters either. No gods, no monsters. He took up the phrase, trying to chant it. The lights were back, dancing and exploding like silent fireworks in his head. The tiny ball of his body was shrinking, growing denser. He could no longer separate his arms from his torso. He was surrounded by light, energy. He got the strangest sensation of travelling, of being pulled along through a golden web. Then he reached the heart and he felt himself flip inside out. Miquel screamed as he felt every particle of his being separate.

The Absolute studied critically the information he had drawn. The body had not survived being brought into the System's physicality, so he would be unable to see how its brain worked. He would have to find another way to understand the humans' way of seeing.

Eleana?

The Absolute was intrigued. When the boy had been forcibly converted, his memories had been cached by the System. He could now replay Miquel Enrique Serrano Domínguez's entire life and cross-refer it to other versions of it. It was a start at least.

Chapter Three

Algù Fou Assasinat

The uneven keening sound rose and fell a final time, much to Fitz's relief.

'That was the all clear,' he told Anji, who he had instinctively pushed back into the TARDIS when he'd opened the door and heard the siren screaming. He lowered the arm he'd braced on the doorframe to let her step out fully into the street, although when he thought about it he supposed she could easily have walked underneath without really having to duck her head.

She took a few steps clear of the time machine, out on to the glistening night pavement. A light drizzle was falling, cooling the air around them and turning the distant orange glow of a fire muzzy. She turned slowly about on her heels, arms folded.

'Come to sunny Spain,' she said, with a half-smirk.

'Maybe we're on the plain?' he asked in his best serious voice. She pouted at him, then stuck out her tongue.

'Big kid,' she muttered, grinning.

'Capitalist pig,' he retorted.

'Hippy.'

'Short-arse.'

'Children,' the Doctor reproved them from the doorway to the TARDIS. He was holding some tatty old envelopes close to his chest whilst he struggled to latch the door closed behind him and also hold an umbrella over his head. Fitz reached over and took hold of the curled bamboo handle of the broly, grinning as Anji hugged her coat tighter and joined him under the relative shelter. There was a satisfyingly heavy clunk from the door's locking mechanism which wasn't, Fitz knew, really a double-locking Chubb. Mainly because Anji always claimed it was a Yale latch circa 1968.

The Doctor turned to face them, waving off Fitz's offer of some space under the umbrella. Which Fitz was quite pleased about really: the material had torn away on one spoke so there was no way all three of them could have stood

under it without someone getting water down their necks. And he knew from experience that it wouldn't have been Anji or the Doctor.

'We want to go this way, I think,' the Doctor said, pointing down the sloping street. There were still only a few people on the pavements, emerging from wherever it was they had been hiding during what must have been an air raid. As they followed the Doctor down the hill, Fitz did his best to keep the umbrella over Anji but their height difference made it tricky: she was practically jogging to keep up. He felt her hand grab his right elbow, with an air of defiant 'don't mention this or you're a dead man' to it. He smirked but slowed slightly.

The Doctor had led them down towards the main seafront, so that the combined sounds of the ocean and the efforts of the fire crew at the nearest dock-land blaze covered their conversation.

'So this would be...?' Anji asked him.

'Bilbao, on the north coast of Spain. 1937.'

Fitz hadn't even realised he'd tensed until he felt Anji's other hand, concerned, on his forearm. He looked up at the Doctor, then away to the sea. Somewhere, on the other side of the Bay of Biscay, a teething Fitz Kreiner was crawling about, blissfully unaware of his future. Lucky sod.

'This was as close as the TARDIS wanted to come to Guernica,' the Doctor was explaining. Fitz continued to stare at the faint shapes on the horizon: the barely visible silhouettes of ships, only picked out as they were darker than the overcast night sky and so still that they seemed part of the ocean. 1937. There are some dates that are stuck in your head he realised, dates which automatically catch the attention, and the years around your birth are some of them. They mean something, if only to yourself.

The Doctor was holding out one of the two envelopes to him, with one of his patented worried half-smiles. Fitz jammed the stem of the umbrella into the crook of his elbow so Anji wouldn't have to try to hold it over his head, and opened the buff coloured envelope. Papers. A false identity. Yet another new role to play. His own name at least, with a British 'nationalised' stamp on it, a Prussian birthplace and a false date of 1907. Well, at least he would look about the right age.

'Careful, the ink's still a bit damp. I want to know exactly what happened at Guernica,' the Doctor was telling him, 'I need a first hand account.'

First hand account of a town being razed to the ground. In the middle of a civil war. Right.

'So we've got to find transport to get us to this town, then?' Anji was asking. She had gone back to holding her coat closed around herself now she didn't

have to hang on to keep up with Fitz, and was looking decidedly unhappy about the whole business. The Doctor shook his head.

‘Not us, just Fitz.’

‘What?’

Fitz folded up the papers and slid them into the inner pocket of his leather coat before he looked up and stared the Doctor in the eye with a silent ‘why me?’ The diffused light of the dock-fire at the Doctor’s back threw the other man’s face into unreadable gloom. The Doctor looked briefly at the ground, scuffed a small stone towards the quay’s edge. He shifted slightly and when he looked up Fitz could suddenly see the eyes clearly. And he’d known the Doctor long enough to be sure it was an honest look.

‘I trust him to come back.’

Jaime had started to drift off to sleep in the cramped back of the car, his head jolting back upright as they bumped over the track. He wasn’t tired, he couldn’t be tired when he was Buenaventura’s aide. He was exhausted though.

Days marching here; interminable arguing with the defence council of Madrid. He wasn’t political, at least not in the way that involved complex negotiating over details. But he was good at the basic stuff, and at standing about behind Durruti. Then there had been the aborted attack on University City and the furious drive back to more arguments about why the air cover hadn’t shown up, or the big guns. High on the anger and the unspent adrenalin. Jaime felt as if he had not slept in days, but he had to keep going. There was always more to do, always at least two places they should be.

Durruti slammed his fist into the side of the car, making Jaime realise he had drifted off again.

‘Those fools! Those ignorant Communist puppets!’

Jaime nodded, said something appropriate. Then the car was pulling over, bumping into ridges of hardened mud at the side of the road. He leapt out as soon as it came to a stop, glancing about. Looking not for anything that had changed, because things were always changing. Instead he looked for something out of place, something that shouldn’t be there. Nothing.

Durruti was already getting out, pulling on a cap and wrapping his heavy coat tight about him. Jaime pulled at the webbing strap of the naranjero on his shoulder, letting the rifle bounce at his hip. He turned to check where the main base camp was, letting his eyes scan for any places a sniper might be hidden. Anywhere a shot could be got off at them. Something caught in the car door handle as he turned, tugged at his shoulder. Then the gun had slammed into

his side, yanking him off balance as it fired uncontrollably. He was yelling and he frantically grabbed hold, stopping the automatic fire before it could shoot him in the foot. The cocking handle had caught on the door handle.

Then he heard the shouts from around him and saw Durruti, his comrade, the man he had sworn to protect, lying in the scrub convulsing. Clutching at his chest.

Buenaventura Durruti died of his wounds two days later in the converted Ritz Hotel in Madrid.

The drizzle had stopped, so they walked back up the hill in damp, squishy shoes. Anji still hugged her thin coat to her. She hadn't expected it to be this damp or cold in Spain, which just went to prove she shouldn't have bothered watching travel programmes.

'I just think it's asking for trouble, is all,' she muttered to the Doctor's coat-tails.

'Anji, Fitz will be fine. He's very capable at looking after himself, when he has to.'

You mean when you've left him behind somewhere, or been too caught up in whatever you're doing to remember him, she thought. It wasn't that she was overly worried for Fitz – he really did seem to manage to get by despite being his own worst enemy and he hadn't been bothered by his solo mission – but the Doctor's tactics seemed to border on idiotic. She'd not said anything as Fitz had slapped the Doctor's arm cheerfully and headed off towards the people milling about by the burning dock. No sense getting him bothered about things. Besides he'd accepted the plan so readily she'd barely had time to get an argument together before he was handing her the umbrella and leaving.

'So why couldn't we all go?' she asked, slightly breathless. Too many hills in one day, probably.

'The sooner we gather all the evidence and find out what is going on, the sooner we can go back to our holiday,' the Doctor told her, then looked back over his shoulder with a grin. 'Besides, it's far too close to the front line so it would be difficult for three people to get in and out easily, and, well... ' he trailed off, made a sudden show of rummaging in his pockets.

'I'm a girl?'

'That too.'

Oh, of course, *that*. Well, there wasn't a damn thing she could do to change her gender or her skin colour. Not a damn thing she wanted to, either. Everyone else would just have to deal with it. She'd felt the curious eyes on her in

Paris, taking in her difference and almost wondering aloud what she was doing with the two apparent Englishmen. She'd grinned inside then, thinking that the gawpers would have been stunned to realise that the Doctor was the *real* alien. She thought she could feel someone watching her now as well. She was conscious of eyes on her, that strange feeling at the back of the head, like her scalp could actually sense someone's stare. Glancing about she saw a few pedestrians walking down the hill, none of them noticing her. There were no figures standing in doorways, or alley mouths, and the street contained no cafés with crowds of people. There wasn't even a twitching curtain. She shrugged it off. 'So where are we going?'

'I thought we'd start in Barcelona, see how the news of the bombing is reported.'

'I thought Madrid was the Spanish capital?'

'Usually, but it spends most of the war under siege and being bombarded itself. Barcelona is the least unsafe of the big cities.'

'What about that other one, in the south west?'

'Seville? It's held by Franco's forces. We can go there next.'

Anji frowned. 'We seem to be planning some rather precise journeys. I mean, given that London still evades us.'

The Doctor didn't reply, still busy rummaging in his pockets, pulling things out and staring at them. Clearly he hadn't just been pretending to have lost his keys out of embarrassment. Or he was just dragging it out. He half pulled out an envelope and then glanced up at her. 'I already gave you your papers, didn't I?'

Anji tapped the breast of her coat, where the forgeries were safe in a pocket. She could feel the outer edge of the fake British passport. It was huge and hard compared to the slim flimsy red EU passport she still had somewhere in her room in the TARDIS. She was pretty sure she'd seen the word 'Empire' on it too. The past really was another country, she thought with a grin.

'And Fitz will meet us in Barcelona?' Anji lowered her voice as she asked; she still irrationally felt like someone was watching them, despite the almost deserted street and the fact that the few people hurrying by had their heads down.

'Yes, yes. Assuming I ever find my keys and we get there to meet him.'

Eleana cursed as the hairbrush caught in a fine knot. She had tried her best, tying rags into her damp hair the previous night, hoping to control the unruly waves. It hadn't worked though, and now she had sleep-tightened tangles that

she would have no choice but to rip out. She threw the brush down on the bedcovers and jabbed some kirbigrips in to hold the worst of it back from her face. She didn't care so long as it was practical, but she loathed the way the slovenly men at the barracks would laugh when the women practised their drill, making comments about their appearance. And them with their unshaven faces and stinking even before they went to the front.

She grabbed the heavy overcoat she had appropriated from some landowner's wife's wardrobe back in July and glanced around the room for anything she might have forgotten. They would be pamphleteering today and she already had a sparse lunch in a bag slung over her shoulder, rather than waste time or money haggling with any café owners.

'Miquel! Ey, Miquel!' She bashed on the partition wall as she shouted, then stepped out on to the shared landing. Her brother's door was closed. 'Miquel!'

'Callarse!' echoed up from the courtyard but Eleana ignored it. The couple downstairs were always yelling at someone to be quiet. They had before the revolution, they did after it. They'd probably stood in the courtyard during the fighting, yelling at the bullets to be quieter. She put her ear to the door of her brother's room but couldn't hear the usual half-asleep mutter of 'Demà'. Or his snores. Or the snores of his most recent girlfriend.

'Miquel!'

She dug in her pockets until she found the spare key for his room. The lock clicked stiffly and already she was concerned that his own key had not been in the mechanism from the other side. She put her shoulder to the door as softly as she could and pushed it open. Inside there was the usual unmade bed and the haphazard trays of developer and fixer, the acrid sting of ammonia or whatever the damn chemicals were. The heavy blanket was nailed across the window. Developed prints hung from a piece of string looped across picture hooks. There was no sign of her brother's stinking boots, or his heavy jacket. Or him.

Eleana shrugged: he must have stayed elsewhere last night and would catch up with her at some point in the day. He was always off chasing some moment, some photograph, some girl. She pulled the door back into place, relocked it and started down the narrow stairs to the courtyard. 'Hola, comrade,' she greeted her complaining neighbour with a grin, not even bothering to register the woman's habitual glare, then swung into the passageway into the streets.

The Absolute regarded the matter he had pulled into the System. It did not look the same as it had done when it had been outside his own environs. He had

thought that bringing one of the humans into his own space would allow him to examine why the cranial link suggested by the Hub had produced conflicting events. He had even entertained the idea that he would have been able to communicate with the human, either using their own imperfect sound-based system or, improved by being in his arena, using the logical transmission of data via electrons on which the System had been built.

He studied the substance: it was too corrupted even to allow an examination of the physical characteristics of the human brain. The tap he had created into the boy's mind was still attached, but he was receiving no input at all now from it and the cortex into which it was connected was too pulped to be of use.

He considered briefly that this was how all these people really were: that they were nothing more than matter and energy bound together and that it was only their strange perceptions of the world – perceptions that he was starting to discover were inconsistent – that saw them as the human shapes they believed themselves to be. That seemed an unlikely conclusion to draw however, since the Hub contained incalculable information on the planet filed by Absolutes who were not in his own invidious position and he himself had filed many before that strange incident when he had been observed.

So he had to assume that the human had been altered by being brought into the System: that the two physical spheres were not identical and whilst he could exist in both, humans could only exist in the one. That would limit his options in resolving his problem, since he was going to have to rely on the partisan views from the humans.

He looked again at the material he had physically drawn in. It was of no use to him now, nor could he get any information from it which the Hub did not already possess. It would have to go back.

The Absolute re-concentrated on the links he had created to humans whilst letting one part of him focus on replaying the information that had been gathered whilst he had been considering the boy. He had increased his links exponentially, trying to recreate the complex web of relationships he had previously been able to view. Each time one of his tapped humans encountered another untapped person – either in person or by the telephone – he established a tap to the new one, so that he had begun to replicate his usual method of surveillance. The procedure the Hub had sent, the one that worked on Danomh, had had limitations though: only a finite number of links could be supported using the standard power supplied by the central coaxial into the System. He would need to draw increasing amounts of power down the now wavering connection if he were to tap into every person in the area.

Pause! He replayed an already recorded feed from one of his observers in the north of the country. The date and time stamp clearly indicated it to be 21 April 1937ECE. A crosscheck indicated the co-ordinates to be a city called Bilbao on the coast. What had caught his attention was the two figures on screen. Both human; one male, one female; one tall, one short. Both were flickering in and out of sight, just like the figure who had triggered this whole problem.

They had both been recorded moments, events caught in his cache. He traced the observer back to the point where s/he had first noticed the figures and watched the moment play again in real time. The observer had just glanced briefly at the two figures as s/he had walked past them in the street, wondering why they were so strangely dressed. He replayed it. The observer walked down the street, not passing anyone until the bottom of the hill where s/he exchanged a brief *hola* with a neighbour walking up. The Absolute immediately established a tap into the neighbour, wanting to see what he noticed as he walked past the flickering couple. There were two people standing on the opposite pavement, arguing in English. The Asian girl had her arms folded and was nagging at the Inglese. The street was empty.

The Absolute reviewed as many versions as he could find, but each time the couple flickered in and out of view. He froze their images and sent them back to the Hub, to check the full record. Then he began systematically to search for the same patterns in all his records of 1930s Spain.

Hearing her back crack, stretching as she sat in the stiff wooden chair at her desk, Pia caught her superior looking at her. She wasn't sure if he was staring because she had dared to show signs of tiredness, despite working most of the night for the cause, or because she had undone the top button of her blouse and was, by the Communist Party's standards, decadently displaying her clavicle to the other workers. All four of them in this tiny airless office. She returned her eyes to the flimsy in her typewriter and continued to translate from Italian to Russian. It hadn't helped that her superior, who had been with her throughout her interview with the prisoners, had insisted on speaking Spanish. The two Italian prisoners, caught somewhere near the border and brought back to Barcelona for questioning, had appeared to know little or nothing of troop movements, or where they were supposed to be reporting to. She had spent the last two hours cranking out a report on a typewriter with a jamming space bar and a ribbon that had already been fed through at least twice. When it was done, it would be taken over to the cipher room where it would be typed out again, this time in code, and sent back to the Comintern's intelligence officers.

Who would probably spend one minute, if that, skimming the repeated 'Non so's and forget all about it.

For this, she was breaking her back on a wooden chair in a room that was already becoming unbearably close. Pia stretched again, glaring at her superior, daring him to say anything. He knew as well as she did that she had worked through the night on this, at his request: that as one of the five Comintern personnel in Barcelona fluent in at least three European languages, she was more than a mere typist. She had seen him look at La Passionora as if she was better off doing a traditional female job, though, and if he thought that of the main firebrand of Spanish Communism, she was hardly surprised that he thought the same of her.

She dragged the return arm over a final time and typed the row of asterisks to indicate the end of an interview. She was careful to be gentle pulling the flimsies out of the machine: to tear the paper at this stage would be aggravating.

'Comrade, here is the report of last night's interview with the prisoners.' She held the flimsy and its copy out to him, hoping he would look up again as he took them. Instead he just nodded to his intray, without taking his eyes off whatever he was reading.

'Thank you, comrade Samsкуро. I will attend to it in due course. We will question the soldiers further this afternoon: please be back on duty then.'

Pia clamped her teeth tight together all the way down the long corridor to the women's cloakroom, all the way through applying a tiny amount of lipstick in the smeary mirror and all the way across the yard to the gate of the compound. Safely in the street, with no fellow members close by, she allowed herself a few choice swearwords in her native language, knowing the only two Italians anywhere nearby were out of earshot in a cell somewhere.

She took breakfast at a small hotel café on the route back to her lodgings, realising that she would never settle to sleep properly so she may as well eat a good meal before reporting back at noon. She took out a copy of a French novel she was trying to read, letting her mind shut out the events of the night.

'Pardon, mademoiselle.' A man in a worn velvet coat was gesturing to the two empty chairs at her table, with a helpless shrug indicating that all the other tables were taken. 'May we sit here?'

His accent was flawless, Pia noticed, but his phraseology indicated French was a second language. Glancing at the woman stood next to him, she took a guess at their nationality.

'Of course, comrade,' she tried in English, 'it is a free country now, yes?'

The man sat first, smiling broadly, leaving the woman to seat herself. Pia took in his long brown hair, the face that, though filled out slightly, spoke of years of under-eating, and the eager eyes. One of the intellectual ones then. As the waiter came over the woman looked at him hopefully.

‘I don’t suppose you do latte, do you?’

‘Perdoni, comrade?’

‘Café Laa-tay? No, I suppose it’s too early.’ The woman glanced at Pia’s own cup, ‘Espresso? Dos espresso, por favor.’

As the woman leaned back into her chair, she flicked her hair back behind her ears. Pia was surprised at the cut: such a sharply defined bob seemed to belong to another era altogether. The newcomer noticed her attention and held out her right hand. ‘Hi, I’m Anji and this is the Doctor.’

‘Hello,’ the man grinned at her, offering his hand to be shaken as well. Pia ignored them both.

‘Pia. You’re a doctor? Which militia have you been assigned to?’

‘Er, none, I’m afraid.’ The man looked down at the table as he spoke, twirling his finger through some cold spilled coffee. ‘We’re just waiting for our papers so we can go home.’

‘To England?’

‘Yes,’ Anji answered firmly, with a glare at the Doctor. This was clearly a subject on which they were disagreeing. Pia stopped herself: her brain was still in a pattern from last night, cataloguing any information she could find on the newcomers, spotting weaknesses that could be played on. She had to let go, keep a part of herself separate from the machinery of the Party. Starting with a little socialising over breakfast.

– Afternoon/Evening –

We marched, if it could be called that, up to the plaza. Until the centuria is complete, we will do this every few days. All the different militia parade their troops in the plaza. I stayed at the back, as usual. Juan told me on the way up – in our shared language of French – that in the first few months of the fighting large crowds showed daily to watch the men march off to the front lines. He was disappointed that now the streets continue as normal, the civilians just pausing to applaud.

On the way back to barracks there was a commotion off in a side street and the centuria broke and hurried towards the scene. I went with them, although my Spanish is yet to be comprehensive enough to understand the yells.

The side street was narrow and cool. The overlapping voices of the crowd echoed up the tall buildings and back, distorting so that I could no longer distinguish individual words. The chaos of noise reminded me of nights in Trafalgar Square, when an argument between two drunken dossers would escalate suddenly and irrationally until every tramp was airing his grievance with the world and it became impossible to find out what had actually started them off.

Juan emerged from the crowd, his face pallid, swaying slightly. I gripped his upper arm and held him steady, asking him what it was. He shook his head and pulled himself free, stumbling slightly on the uneven surface as he walked back out into the main street. Pushing forward slightly, I caught a glimpse of something on the ground, something slick and dirty red.

The heavy sound of booted feet running up rode up over the verbal noise. Looking around I saw the Guard arriving en masse. These policemen were pointed out to me a few nights ago: the anarchist faction object to the concept of a force of law but have conceded that they are required, at least until the war against the fascists is won. Compared to the rag-tag militia I am with, the Guard look like a true military organisation. They have been issued with smart uniforms, quality boots and, those most desired of items here, service revolvers. As they arrived, much of the crowd started to leave, clearly unwilling to be around the Guard. I stayed, curious to see what had so excited the crowd.

Someone near the centre of the thinning group was sobbing. It was the sort of guttural sound an animal would make: the breath drawn in over raw vocal cords in gulps. Others were explaining things to the Guard at what I assume was great length: certainly it was at great speed and far too fast for me to follow. Shifting, I was able to finally view the tableaux in the gutter.

There was a mass of cloth and flesh, crumpled and unnaturally posed. The limbs were barely recognisable as such, they had been so deformed. One leg stuck out at an angle, twisted at right angles halfway down the calf. I gagged then, the stench finally reaching my nose. It stank of copper and urine, like an abattoir just after a cull. I was looking at a badly mutilated human corpse. I didn't try to speculate what had happened to it. I didn't want to look any closer. Instead I looked at the person who was still letting out short gasping sobs and realised she was looking back at me. It was Eleana.

Eventually, after she had argued with the Guard in Catalan for some minutes, I took her to the nearest bar. The only word I had clearly made out during the scene on the street was her brother's name. One of the Guards had taken the matted papers she had been clutching from her and tried to flick through the pages but they had been stuck fast. We walked to Las Rambles in silence. Once

we had chosen a neutral bar (since most have party allegiances which you ignore at your peril) and bought a cheap bottle of red, she started to explain that Miquel had been missing for two nights. He had not shown up at their lodgings, or at the offices of the paper they worked for. The last time she had seen him was, in fact, the moment when he had left our table two days previously.

We were discussing the likely action the Civil Guard would take when my attention was drawn by overhearing a conversation in English. The girl had a London accent and was flicking through the bar's newspaper.

'Look at the date,' she told her companion, 'we're out by months.'

Glancing around I took in their appearance. He looked like a typical member of the Bloomsbury set, about forty years old with long hair and dressed in deliberately archaic clothing. She was, confounding my expectations based on her accent, from the Indian sub-continent. Noticing me looking, the girl frowned and returned to her paper as if she were an office girl commuting on the District line. The man smiled though and introduced them as the Doctor (I did not catch the surname) and Anji Kapoor. They are waiting for the papers that will let them return home to England. I wondered briefly if Miss Kapoor was a wife the Doctor was bringing back from India, but her confident London accent belied that notion.

After some minutes of small talk they joined us at our table for the remainder of the evening. Eleana explained her problem to them, although she was circumspect about many aspects, including the details of the body she believed to be her brother. Anji spoke of a friend of theirs who was travelling alone and her own worry about his safety. This seemed to be a pointed remark to her companion, who looked uncomfortable. The Doctor told us that, while they were waiting to go home, they were preparing a series of articles about the situation here and Eleana offered to introduce all three of us to journalists she knew. We agreed to meet in the foyer of the Hotel Continental tomorrow, where many overseas journalists are staying. Assuming that my centuria is not sent to the front in the meantime.

'Come to sunny Spain, my arse,' Fitz muttered, turning his collar up and trying to hold it closed. He'd been mooching about the port for a day now, trying to find a lift out to Guernica. He'd also tried to find a map, see if it was walkable. It had to be, he thought, as Bilbao had a steady trickle of refugees from the east, arriving on foot with bundles of belongings and weary postures. There wasn't a shop he could find with a map for sale, though, so he had gone back

to searching for a ride. The light drizzle had been almost constant since he had left the Doctor and Anji and his heavy coat was growing prickly as the wool absorbed the moisture. He was damp, footsore and convinced he'd got the worst of the plan.

He set off towards one of the cafés that some of the firemen attending the blaze on the docks had recommended he try, wondering just what would pass for breakfast here. The town was practically blockaded, with no merchant ships braving the mines to dock. The thin coffee and almost grey colour of the bread reminded him, again, uncomfortably of his youth. Ten years down the line and a few hundred miles north, where rationing had continued long after the bombs had stopped. He was starting to seriously dislike the whole situation again.

The envelope the Doctor had given him had contained a bundle of pesetas along with his identity papers, but Fitz was cautious about using them too quickly. He needed accommodation and the train fare down to Barcelona, and possibly a few bribes to drivers to get him places, so he was spending as little as possible. He had found a cheap hostel for a few pesetas last night: the dorm had slept twenty on creaky wire bunk beds and the blanket had been thinner – and more full of itchy things – than his coat. If he got stuck in Bilbao again tonight, he would spring for a better room and hope his luck improved.

It was early, yet there was something different in the streets. People were moving with a purpose and as he neared the docks he heard cheering and drums being beaten. The crowds were thickening and Fitz found himself following them, caught up in the swirling chatter, the odd burst of burbling laughter. Down through the town the stream of people pulled him, back to the docks that had been empty and silent the day before and where he had said his good-byes the night before that. The stream ran faster, denser and he suddenly recognised the outline of the cranes. And the funnels of a merchantship, a Royal Ensign damply fluttering in the onshore breeze, the hawsers still being tightened as goods were thrown ashore by the crew. Each time a bundle of food or cloth sailed into the air, people sprang and reached upwards, clutching clumsily at the packages. Fitz couldn't resist the urge and leapt as a small box arced down towards his part of the crowd. At his height, his hand was easily first to be hit by the object and some reflex let him hold on to it as he fell back to his feet.

Looking up at his hand, still raised, he realised he was holding a bar of chocolate. The bitter, dark chocolate in foil wrappers. He even recognised the brand. The crowd was calming now, the merchant seamen having gone

back below decks, and some started to drift back into town, still laughing and calling out to friends. Militiamen had appeared from somewhere and were securing the gangplanks to the ship. Others stood about watching the scene with the lazy interest of people with nowhere to be. Fitz wondered if it was worth asking the soldiers about lifts to Guernica but they looked to be settling in for some serious unloading of a cargo of food and supplies. Turning back, he spotted a young woman and a toddler sitting on the kerbside, watching the crowds. She could only have been twenty and the child was barely walking. It was crying though. The woman was talking softly, almost crooning, but the kid kept wailing. The girl had wavy dark hair that hadn't been set for a couple of weeks, the shape slowly falling. She had nice tanned legs too, angled carefully to avoid showing her slip, the calf muscles taunt. Shame about the brat. Fitz was about to walk past when he noticed that the kid, although not stopping the tantrum, had huge eyes on the bar in his hands.

'Chocolate?' Fitz asked, waving the bar about slightly.

'Gracias, er, thank you. You are from the boat, yes?' The girl was smiling at him, her head tilted to one side. The kid stopped yelling, crammed some of the offered sweet into its mouth and then hiccuped. Fitz nodded, realising his accent might be an advantage for the next day or so at least, since a British boat had broken the blockade.

'See,' Fitz said, although he doubted she would understand his comment, 'it's just what the doctor ordered.' The girl smiled, humouring him, but Fitz was already moving back up into the town. He'd just got the strangest feeling that he was being watched.

The Absolute crosschecked the time and date stamps. The search for the two flickering figures from Bilbao had turned up no results, just like the man in the square. This time there were not even faint traces: it was as if they had been taken out of the record, as if their actions were not as real, not as definite. He had begun to wonder whether the flicker was an illusion brought on by his unnatural state of being. Whether trying to view this world from the eyes of the humans was causing a glitch in the System.

Then he had seen them again. Now he was crosschecking. He had seen them first in Bilbao, in April 1937, yet now they were in Barcelona in November 1936. This was wrong, he should have noticed them in Barcelona first otherwise the implication was that they had somehow gone back and appeared at the earlier date. That the day had taken place both with and without them. Could that be the cause of the flicker? It made no sense though, it ran contrary

to the law of the System. The System recorded an accurate record of events, truthful, precise, concrete. Events were not mutable, they could not happen again, in a different configuration. Except they were. Everywhere he looked he saw events happening in the same time and space parameters which were different, which contradicted each other. If ten people were stood in a square when a truck hit a pedestrian, when a pedestrian walked in front of a truck without looking, when a pedestrian stumbled in front of a truck, when a truck tried to swerve, when a truck driver didn't notice, when a truck was aimed at a pedestrian. . . Where ten people saw an event, they saw ten different events. This was insane.

These flickering people, these people with no histories, they were the key to the situation. If he could find them, try to communicate. He scanned for them again, making links as quickly as possible, events rushing past him again and again, every one slightly different. He caught fragmented glimpses of the man and woman from Bilbao, often with a third figure, another flickering male. The woman was running through dark woods, dragging someone with her, eyes wide. The younger man looked up, grimacing, one bloody hand shakily reaching up. The older man fell to his knees, screaming at the falling bombs, before the firestorm obscured him. There. From five different viewpoints, he saw the older man and the woman in a large room. Sat around in a hotel foyer, talking with real people. The Absolute concentrated on watching them.

Chapter Four

Am La Policia A L'Esquena

Durruti was dead.

Of that there was no doubt, though Anji had heard at least four differing versions of his death. Yesterday the body had arrived back from Madrid, where it was at least uniformly agreed that he had been shot and had later died of his wounds. He had lain in. . . well, she supposed it was in state, although she wasn't quite sure an anarchist would approve of the term. Walking back from the hotel to the TARDIS, she and the Doctor had passed a lengthy queue of people waiting to pay their respects, waiting patiently to reach the open coffin just as they would wait to reach the front of a food queue. She had found the idea grotesque.

This morning the square was so densely bannered in red and black material that she wondered briefly if the scanner's colour control was on the blink. The Doctor had assured her it wasn't and gone back to pressing in a lengthy string of characters on one of the keypads of the console. In an 'ask me what I'm doing' way. Anji ignored him whilst she poured herself a fresh coffee.

'I really wish this was a mechanical keyboard,' he remarked, glaring irritably at the small LCD above it and pressing the same button several times, 'at least then the click tells you that you have hit the key.'

'What are you doing, anyway? I thought new co-ordinates were put in there.' Anji gestured to the opposite side of the pale wood console with her mug. She leaned her elbow on one of the less populated surfaces and then cupped her chin in her hand, in exactly the same pose as she adopted when she was catching up with gossip at the office. There was something about the pale wood interior, even down to the scuffs that had begun to appear on the surfaces, that reminded her of work places rather than homes. She wondered if they should get a water-cooler and a dusty half-dead pot plant to complete the effect.

'They are. I'm just, well, I thought we'd do a little research whilst we're here, give the old girl time to readjust before jumping on to rendezvous with Fitz.'

Anji raised a single eyebrow at him. The Doctor busied himself with the keypad even more. She continued to stare and caught him quickly glance at her through his hair.

'Doctor? We're *five months* early!'

'Well, yes, but we'll rejoin him no problem.'

Anji doubted that. 'You said that yesterday but we've not moved anywhere yet. And if it was so easy, why does Earth 2001 elude you?' The Doctor looked hurt, so she relented a little. 'So what are you doing?'

Now the Doctor looked at her, smiling that big 'I'm very glad you asked me that, Jeremy' grin and she just knew he'd been waiting for her to ask. Which meant he had an answer ready and she was about to be told at length.

'Anomalies. As we saw in Paris, incongruities in the way events are reported or disseminated are revealed when we compare the TARDIS's record with the perceived version outside.'

'How do we...?'

'How do we know the TARDIS version is right? We don't. However what I'm interested in for now is finding these moments of divergence, tracing them back and seeing what has caused the different perceptions. I'm working on interfacing the TARDIS with external information sources and then running a comparative check.'

Anji finished her coffee and put the mug on the top of the time rotor. 'So how long will this take?'

'A couple of days, I expect. Be out of here in no time.'

As it was the end of November, it should have been cold in the streets and Anji had pulled her heavy tweed coat on over her silk blouse and woollen skirt. Back in 2001, this type of clothing had been another fashion craze and half of London had been tottering about in pencil skirts and kitten heels. Anji had preferred simple modern tailoring then, and now she was forced to wear this stuff she was more convinced than ever that it was not sensible. And, due to unforeseen circumstances, she was sweating. The press of the crowds in the streets, hemming her in at all sides, made her far too hot.

She had come out to go to the Hotel Continental: the Doctor had suggested they book rooms. Spain was a suspicious country in 1936 and they would be better off leaving a public trail so no one wondered about them. The quiet side streets had been busier than usual but when Anji turned into the main thoroughfare of the Divisional she had stopped in her tracks for a moment. The entire avenue was a solid mass of people, shoulder to shoulder, walking

slowly. Huge banners were being carried, the bearers often twenty feet from each other. Red or black flags were held high. Chants would susurrate down the rows of people, the noise blurring as each section of the crowd took up the phrase a beat out of synch so Anji couldn't make them out clearly. It was a mob. A mob of grievers and mourners, she had realised, spotting Durruti's name on one of the banners. So, with the elbow skills born of several years trying to reach the bar in busy City pubs, she had confidently set into the crowd, planning to push her way through and walk on to Las Rambles. And had been carried along for at least five blocks. And was now sweating in her nice period silk blouse.

Anji was pushing sideways, trying not to have her heels stepped on by the crowd pushing forward behind her. She wanted out of this crush, out of the press of strangers. She wanted space to breathe, to move her arms freely, to walk at her own pace. To be back in control of where she was going. Not dragged along in the wake of others. She realised she was breathing faster and shallower than usual, increasing her rising feeling of claustrophobia. It would be all right if she could wriggle her way through to the edge. . . she felt a hand on her forearm and turned her head quickly, trying to pull free of the restraint. After a moment, she recognised the person holding on to her. She fitted the dark wavy hair, thick brows and the upward turn at the corners of the mouth to a face in her memory.

'Eleana?'

Anji suddenly felt like there was a few more millimetres of air between her and the back of the man before her. Having someone she knew with her made the crowd seem less overpowering.

'Salut, Anji. I am glad you have joined with us to bury Durruti.'

Anji realised Eleana had been crying. Her eyes were puffed a little, shiny pink with wiped away tears and her voice was thick with mucus. So, best to be politic and not mention that she was only stuck in the mob because she'd been unable to get out of it. 'I didn't realise there was such strength of feeling about him,' she hazarded.

Eleana nodded.

'He was our hero. To come from the slums of Barcelona to lead the anarchists to victory. He was a true fighter, a true believer in our freedom. I was. . . ' Eleana searched for the right word in English, 'inspired? Yes, inspired by him. I and Miquel read his speeches to each other when we struggled on the barricades. He was my hero.'

Anji felt vaguely guilty that she hadn't even heard of him until two days ago.

Eleana was wiping at her face again, looking oddly proud of her tears.

'I heard he was shot by a misfire?'

Eleana frowned at her. 'No. You are mistaken, Anji. He was killed by a fascist sniper bullet: it was a cowardly assassination by one of Franco's men in Madrid. They were so afraid that Durruti's column would defeat them that they murdered him.'

Anji nodded and continued to walk next to Eleana in silence. It was one of the versions she had heard anyway, and clearly the one the anarchists preferred: it was better than suggesting one of their own men had shot him, accidentally or on purpose. They had reached a wider part of the Divisional now, and the procession was starting to loosen. Anji tapped Eleana on the shoulder. 'I have to go, things to do, you know?'

The anarchist nodded and smiled. 'You will come to the meeting tonight though, Anji? We are reaffirming our oath to follow Durruti's dreams.'

Anji couldn't think of anything she'd rather miss but reassured Eleana that she would try to make it. Getting out of the slow moving column of mourners, she still had to edge her way through the crowds gathered on the pavements to watch. Twisting and sidestepping to get through them faster, Anji supposed it to be no worse than trying to get along Oxford Street the week before Christmas. The difference was that here she didn't know her way through the quieter side streets and was stuck with the exasperating crowd.

Fitz grinned inanely as yet another drink was put in front of him and someone gave his shoulder a squeeze. The streets were still crowded with jubilant locals. When he had sat down for a drink, the bar-owner had recognised his poor accent and stood him a drink. Then he had told the rest of the bar's customers of the Ingleses and Fitz had been supplied with a fresh drink every time his ran out, often coming with a slap on the shoulder or a warmly shook hand. The only problem he was having with the entire scenario, and he had to admit that right now it wasn't that massive a problem, was that it hadn't got him any closer to Guernica.

Whoever had given him the latest drink was still gripping his shoulder and Fitz looked up to thank them. The man held his hand out and Fitz automatically shook it. The generous stranger gestured to the empty seat opposite. 'May I?'

Fitz waved at it. The man unbuttoned his jacket as he sat, and Fitz caught the briefest glimpse of a gun handle on the left of his belt. The slight fuzzy warm feelings the cheap wine had fermented in him drained away and he started to focus properly on the stranger. He was a tall, slim man, paler than most of the

locals Fitz had noticed here. His dark hair was neatly combed back from his face and shiny with hair-oil, and his narrow brows seemed set in a slight frown. His hand had been soft, not gnarled or callused. Combined with the smarter clothing and the gun, Fitz guessed this man wasn't local.

'My name is Sasha,' the man said, and now he was looking for details, Fitz noticed the accent. His way of pronouncing English was different to the gentle sibilance of the others Fitz had conversed with.

'Fitz Kreiner.' He offered cautiously.

'A German? Here?'

Fitz shrugged. 'Naturalised English,' he told the other man, 'although I'm less surprised to find a Russian here.'

Sasha raised a half-smile. 'This is not a conflict of nations,' he remarked, 'but of ideas. Are not all civil wars so? Setting brother against brother?'

'So why are you here? Your brother fighting for the other side, is he?'

The Russian gave a snort of laughter. 'My brother died in the October Revolution, fighting by my side. I'm here because I want to help, just like you, Fitz. We all have our roles to play here.'

Fitz leaned back and took a cautious sip of his wine. So far, all the people who had been friendly towards him had moved on, not expecting to talk to him, but this Sasha was talking. There was a chance he might realise Fitz had not come off the merchantship down in the docks, that he was not who he said he was. Plus, he was not altogether happy about the presence of a gun. Really put his concentration out. Sasha had gestured over the bar-owner and was conversing with him rapidly in Spanish. As he momentarily held the owner's forearm, the owner put his hand over the Russian's, then back into his pocket. The sleight of hand was slightly botched though, as Fitz had spotted the small wad of notes that were passed over. Free drinks. Bribes to the barman. There was something fishy going on, besides the greyish paella being eaten by some of the customers. Fitz put his wine glass carefully down on to the scratched surface of the table and was alarmed when he misjudged the distance and the glass smacked down hard. He raised his head to stare at the pale Russian opposite him. Things were wavering slightly and Fitz suddenly wondered whether he was being paranoid or if they really were out to get him. Too many spies who came in from the cold or just the anti-Soviet propaganda instilled in him years ago resurfacing? Bloody Commies. . .

'I hope you do not mind, but I have ordered some food for us,' Sasha was leaning in towards him as he spoke, frowning in apparent concern. 'You look a little ill.'

Fitz tried to push his chair back, wanting to make it outside before he started to gag. His legs tangled themselves into those of the chair and he stumbled to the floor. With one cheek on the worn wooden floor he closed his eyes, just for a moment.

– Afternoon –

Today there is no militia training. Durruti is being buried and though he was not a member of the POUM the militiamen hold him in such regard that all thoughts of discipline have fled. I watched the procession from the pavement: they came in wave after wave and I could not count them (check Batalla tomorrow for numbers).

I saw Anji coming along the street. She looked annoyed by the crowds so I offered to walk up to the Hotel Cont. with her. We exchanged the usual pointless chit-chat as we walked, although when I asked about her friend, the D., she cursed him using words I was surprised she knew. For what I can gather they are still awaiting their papers but D. has decided they should switch lodgings. A. is clearly impatient with her friend but changed the subject quickly.

At the Hotel Cont. we again saw Alb. Before this all started he was an academic and I think that he misses that – the university is closed for the duration. He was with a correspondent for a US paper who he introduced to us as Jueves. He has the lean look of someone whose diet cannot afford both food and beer and was dressed in shabby brown leather and a coloured shirt. He is Catalanian but spent the last ten years in the US, mainly covering crime in the Hispanic districts of NY. When his paper realised, he was sent over here. Like several of the stringers out here on behalf of a national he may be a spy, or at the very least someone writing their government's preferred version of events. Comparing Philby's reports in *The Times* read back in the safety of London to the same events retold by Alb. or Joaquín shows differences. Beware partisanship.

Anji and Jueves were discussing NY, although she said the city was probably different to when she was last there. I decided to return to the Lenin Barracks for the remainder of the afternoon as I have had a headache most of the day. Now my notes are up to date, I shall get some rest before the others return from Durruti's funeral march.

Every approach was rebuffed. Every attempt to penetrate, to tap the flickering figures failed. It was as if their fluid status made them incompatible with his physical options. The Absolute could not get close.

He could monitor events witnessed by others, record their reactions to the impossible creatures. He now had carefully frozen and annotated moments in front of him, overlapping and repeating from different angles. The briefest flicker of a figure caught and held for examination, both there and not. The sightings were not yet in chronological order; they seemed to defy it. Each time he thought he could make of sense of them, create a causal chain that linked them all together, they would pulse out, tangent or reorder themselves randomly. There was no sense to them.

Each time he thought he had them, each time he was sure they were real, he would try to make a connection. He would stretch a gossamer of his energy from the tap in the Observers' brains to the primitive lobe he could recognise in the strangers' minds. He had tried using as much energy as he dared at first, only to find the tendril slammed away with equal vigour. So now he was trying with more finesse, targeting carefully the precise nodule in the girl's brain. He could see her from tens of angles as she walked briskly out of a hotel, her heels clicking across the uneven cobbles. Each image varied, some contradicted each other, but he could see the overall shape of her – a composite that allowed him to aim and strike.

Gradually, he became aware of consciousness. An ache behind the eyes, a heaviness to the head. His limbs didn't really feel connected yet, as if his body was an afterthought of the various aching thoughts. He let out a breath and was surprised when it came out as a grunt.

'How are you feeling?' someone asked.

Fitz coughed, then tried to surreptitiously wipe his mouth. He was surprised at how clumsy his arm felt. At least he wasn't tied up, although he didn't feel up to opening his eyes and finding out where he was just yet. He settled for groaning at his unseen questioner who laughed at his response.

'You should have eaten some food.'

Sasha. Fitz suddenly remembered the bar, the wine, the warm bliss of the floor and his fear that he'd been drugged. His eyes snapped open, or tried to. His eyelashes were stuck together in one corner and, until he rubbed it clear with a knuckle, all he saw was dark blobs. He was slouched in the passenger seat of a truck, the leather covers sticking clammily to his cheek, his jacket balled up half under his head. Sasha was turned towards him, his right arm along the back of the driver's seat, a half-smile twitching across his face.

'If you are a British seaman, Fitz Kreiner, then I am Betty Boop.'

Fitz pushed himself upright and leaned back, groaning again. He squinted at Sasha, doing his best to focus properly.

'Nah, Betty has much better legs.'

Sasha smirked at him, then swivelled back to face the dashboard. Fitz sat in the back with his hangover. This was embarrassing, really. Less than forty-eight hours in and his cover had been blown and now he was in the hands of one of the Communist militia. Outside the car he could see nothing but a muzzy fog. He wondered why he hadn't woken up in a cell: that was how these things were supposed to happen.

'How di- what makes you think I'm not a seaman?' he asked the back of the Russian's head. Sasha shrugged.

'Your hands are not callused enough. Your dress is wrong,' Fitz reached out a hand to his jacket as Sasha continued, 'and you don't smell like someone who has been aboard a ship for a week.'

'Regular Sherlock Holmes,' Fitz muttered as he rummaged through his pockets to check he still had his papers and, more importantly, his cigarettes and lighter. He jumped at a loud clunk. The Russian, still looking ahead and with one hand close to his belt holster, was getting out. He moved back and yanked open the door next to Fitz. Fitz tried to lean away but Sasha reached in, grabbed his shoulder and hauled him out. Looking about frantically, Fitz saw dark shapes approaching through the mist. Perhaps they didn't lock up suspected spies here, perhaps waking up in a cell would have been a good thing. He tried to struggle but Sasha had his fingers dug into Fitz's armpit, pressing against a nerve.

'Quiet,' he hissed and Fitz froze at the coldness in the voice.

'Hola!' the Russian called as the figures became clear. They were in the haphazard uniforms of the Republicans and carrying packing crates, boxes marked with red crosses and misshapen bulging sacks.

'Comrade,' the leading man said, nodding. He pushed past Fitz to release the gate of the truck, letting it fall open, crashingly loudly on its hinges. He dropped the wooden crate from his shoulder on to the bed of the truck. The contents clattered, making Fitz jump and then tense as Sasha's fingers dug in deeper. Fitz held still and watched the men silently load the car with more crates. As one of them leant against the bonnet to light a roll-up, Fitz recognised the face: it was one of the men who had been unloading the ship. The man glanced at him and frowned.

'Sasha, who is this?'

Fitz briefly thought of speaking but he could almost feel Sasha's fingernails through the cloth so he kept the straightest face possible.

'A fellow traveller, comrade, just arrived. This is Agent Fitz.'

The other guy laughed and pushed himself off the bonnet. 'Fitz? You are starting to run out of code names for agents, comrade. That one is not even Spanish.'

Fitz watched the men disappear back into the night. He tried to look at Sasha without moving at all, hoping the Russian wouldn't notice and tighten his grip. The other man was looking after the soldiers from the dock, chewing on one lip. Once the dull fug of the mist had obscured all sounds of the footsteps, Sasha swung them round to face the truck and pushed Fitz towards the open passenger door.

'Get in.'

Fitz considered his options: get in a vehicle with a Communist agent who a) had a gun and b) knew Fitz wasn't who he purported to be, or try to run. Yes, Sasha had a gun but if Fitz let himself be driven off he could end up anywhere and he doubted the shadowy men who had just witnessed his presence would be likely to tell the Doctor where he was last seen. He sat down sideways on the seat, his feet on the steps of the door, and waited. That rattling crate in the back certainly didn't contain the food aid it was supposed to and Fitz suspected Sasha was very good at making people disappear. There was no way Fitz was going to go with him.

Sasha walked in front of the partially open door, one hand going to close it. Fitz kicked both feet hard against it, slamming the door open wider, catching the Russian on the hip. Before he could leap out, the other man had smashed the door back again, jolting Fitz's legs, causing his knees to fly up and crack him on the jaw. Sasha opened the door, pushed Fitz so that he was facing forwards and ran around to the driver's seat.

The engine was running and the car slipping into spluttering gear before Fitz had even got a hand to his aching jaw. He rubbed the back of his hand against his face and recognised the acrid taste of blood in his mouth. A split lip and he'd been here two days. The car was chugging as it clambered the rise away from the docks, still going fairly slowly. Looking across, Fitz saw Sasha looking at him curiously, slightly frowning. Fitz continued to stare at his captor, hoping the Russian wouldn't notice his hand slipping down the side, finding the door handle. There were no locks: one fast move and he could be out and rolling away.

'Where are we going?' he asked, wanting to keep Sasha's attention off the

door. The catch was stiff, he would have to be fast and he'd probably get badly bruised in the fall. Some part of him – the part that had consumed so much cheap wine on an empty stomach and never wanted to move ever again – growled at the thought. Sasha glanced at him again, one eyebrow raised in amusement.

'Guernica.'

Fitz started to laugh.

A stone clattered, the sound sharp in the brittle night silence. Barcelona was, in this part at least, asleep. Distant engines would occasionally roar, the noise carrying miles, sounding so much closer in the stillness, reverberating around the blackened bell towers. There was an echo as a wooden beam shifted, then muttered cursing.

Doméneç Sugrañes closed his eyes briefly and offered up a mumbled prayer to a God he had started to doubt. Behind him, Juan cursed again, profaning the site. The stonemason had always been respectful before but the war had changed him.

'This still reeks of ashes,' he said to the old architect, 'We will find nothing more.'

Sugrañes opened his eyes and looked upwards. Above him, the bright moon made silver clouds glow. Even with his head tilted far back he could glimpse, right on the edge of his perception, the four fingers of the towers reaching upwards, stretching up to touch the heavens. Changing the tilt of his head, the structures rose higher until the moon was held within them. Although, he realised, the analogy was all wrong: were the church really a giant hand, he would be standing in its palm, gazing up at the night sky. Not that standing about here was a good idea.

He turned back to his fellow looter. Looter! He who had worked on the structure for thirty years, who could still remember the Master sleeping in the workshop. Twenty years since the accident that had left them with sketches and models, the only clues to how the final building should look. Less than twenty weeks since the site had been torched and vandalised, the workshop smashed. Rubble and weeds were already encroaching on the crypt. Water must have poured in at some point, wearing at the plaster models that had survived, smudging the ink of the sketches. So each night, once the city had settled, Sugrañes would lead Juan here. Creeping back to the church where once they had worked, their livelihood gone in the fervour of anti-Catholicism. Sugrañes was thankful God had saved them from the mobs – you heard such

tales of the murders of priests – but he wasn't sure he wanted to have survived, now he was reduced to scavenging in the ruins of his old life, trying to recover the past.

He'd slip through the side-streets, mouthing revolutionary slogans if he was stopped, calling the vandals that had done this 'comrade'. Then clambering over the rubbish-strewn courtyard, moving aside a beam and down into the ruins of the workshop to cart back a few fragments of sodden paper, or another piece of smashed modelwork. Every moment he expected to hear a shout, running boots, guards arresting them, finding his cache of reclaimed work and destroying it for a second time. Juan disbelieving that they would find anything more. Tonight, they had paused after the stone had fallen, waiting to be sure they were safe.

Nothing.

Sugrañes crouched by the rough entrance, one thin hand gripping a stone edge. He was surprised, even after weeks of this, to realise it was shaking. Raising his head to make a final check that they were unobserved, he thought he caught a glimpse of movement up on the nativity cloister, something flickering. A guard lighting a cigarette? He froze, eyes straining towards the spot where he had thought he saw something. There was no telltale flare of orange, no drag taken on a cigarette. The cloister was enclosed on the far side so no moonlight illuminated it: instead the back light made the area blacker than tar.

There. Something pale flitted behind the pillars and Sugrañes reached out to grab Juan's arm. The younger stonemason stared upwards and nodded. Yes, there was movement, too big to be a pigeon or seagull. Sugrañes stepped away from the entrance, turning his head to try to see what it was. There was another flicker of movement, almost jagged. He thought, wildly and briefly, that it was one of the smashed figures from the front of the nativity come to life. Which was foolish, a product of his own trembling mind. He couldn't see it at all now.

It was right in front of them. Glowing, screaming. A devil of light. Lacking proper form or definition. It moved unnaturally, like a flickbook animation Sugrañes had once made. He backed away slowly, letting his feet fumble across the rubble, edging towards the burnt-out school building. He glanced at Juan and was astonished to see the reprobate crossing himself and muttering the catechism. The devil was becoming more defined, angles protruding as elbows, shoulders. Sugrañes felt the iron bars of the gate at his back.

Juan?' he tried calling, but the mason was still staring at the devil, Latin still falling from his lips. Sugrañes turned and fled.

Anji had relaxed into her seat on Las Rambles. The Doctor had agreed to come and find her when he was done in the TARDIS. She was astute enough to know he might be some time and had ordered a carafe of wine to sip at whilst she waited. The hotel in which she had eventually found rooms was at her back and the wide cobbled boulevard was in front of her. Alone with her thoughts, she absently started people-watching. She let her gaze pick up a person and then follow them as they walked down or up the twilit avenue.

The red wine was vinegary, as if it had been opened days before and allowed to breathe for far too long. Bargain bin stuff she would normally pass over. She took small sips, trying not to dwell too much on the taste. Two young men walked by with matching blond hair and she speculated briefly: brothers? Lovers? How did two men so alike come to be walking down Las Rambles together?

For a moment, she thought the world had frozen, paused like a still from a movie, then it moved on and she put one hand to her suddenly aching head. Too much cheap wine and sunshine. Hopefully the Doctor would be here soon and she could go for a lie down.

'Anji?'

She felt her eyes come back into focus and saw Pia frowning at her. The Italian woman was standing in front of her table on the pavement, one hand gripping the strap of a big leather handbag. Anji shook her head slightly, automatically smoothing her hair back into line afterwards.

'Sorry, Pia. I was miles away.'

'Wishing you were back home in England?'

Anji smiled and gestured at the empty chair next to her. 'Do you wish you were back in Italy? Where are you from anyway? Which city?' Talk to me, she silently begged, distract me from the headache. Give me something to focus on.

Pia dropped her bag on the ground next to the chair and sat, unbuttoning her overcoat. At her glance backwards the waiter brought over a second wine glass, a different shape to Anji's. Anji idly wondered if any café had a full set of matching glasses any more.

'I am Roman,' Pia said, pouring herself some of the sour wine. She took a mouthful and tried not to grimace at it. 'And I will not go back, not until Il Duce and his boot boys are taken from power. Or if the Party sends me back to fight.'

Anji raised an eyebrow at Pia's determined, firm tone. 'You fight?'

Pia frowned, looked suddenly suspicious again. 'Of course, Anji. I fought the fascists in my home for years, until the Party sent me here.'

'You mean you campaigned against them?'

'No, I *fought*. I am a very good shot. I do not shake under fire, as some of the boys here do.'

'But you're... ' Anji trailed off. She had been about to suggest that women weren't fighters. Honestly, she was the first to argue that women could do any job a man could and yet she'd just assumed that only men could be in the military, '... here as a secretary, you said yesterday,' she finished.

Pia let out a very expressive snort of derision, making it clear what she thought of that. 'He – my commander – he is Spanish. He talks of fraternity, but women are women. I have faced more bullets than him but I must be typing.'

They both fell silent and took a sip of the wine. Anji squinted up Las Rables, wondering when the Doctor would find her: her head still had a tight band across it and she wanted nothing more than to sleep. The world felt wrong, as if she was slightly disconnected from it, looking at it from one remove. She put one hand on her temple gingerly and closed her eyes for a second.

'You are not well?' Pia was asking, peering at her.

Anji squeezed her eyes tightly shut briefly and then opened them, letting her hand fall on to the arm of the chair and giving the Italian a smile.

'It is nothing. Just a headache.'

'Your doctor has gone for some medicine for you?'

'He's not that kind of... ' Anji gave up, no one ever listened to that denial anyway. 'Yes. Yes, he'll be here soon. I hope.'

'I'm here.' His soft voice was beside her and Anji looked up as he crouched down next to her chair, bringing his concerned eyes level to hers. 'What's wrong?'

– Evening –

Woke after restless sleep. My head is no better. Must see what medicine is available here.

Going to see McN. tonight to discuss bringing E. over. She wants to come and I think it is safe enough. She can bring stuff that is hard to find here. Will ask McN. about aspirin &c as well.

Just tried to do drill with Juan & others but things were too disjointed and I was of little use. It feels like something is tugging at my head, trying to pull

my brain out. It makes it difficult to concentrate. Tried to scrub up at fountain but water is foul. Will continue later, when head is better.

As the rising sun started to burn off the mist, the figures at the side of the road became more defined. Sasha had set Fitz to work, handing out greyish bread to the refugees as they passed them. Their cold faces didn't smile in thanks. Sometimes the faces were resigned, hollow, as if they had cried themselves out further along the road and were now just moving onwards, taking what was given to them. Waiting to see what would happen to them next as they trudged away from the front line. They kept to the edges, shambling aside whenever a fast vehicle came by. Fitz sat in the front of the steadily moving truck, handing out the bread and wishing he could be sure that everyone got some of it, but Sasha kept them moving forward. He reached the bottom of a sack and threw it over into the back of the truck.

'Was that the last sack?' Sasha checked, the first words from him for hours.

'No, but you need to stop so I can get another from the back. The rest are too far back.'

Sasha nodded and drove on for a while. Fitz's fingers started tapping out a rhythm on the window sill. Nothing he could name, just something to occupy him as they drove on past the clumps of dispossessed. He glanced at Sasha: the Russian was looking straight ahead, occasionally pulling the wheel over to avoid potholes or people in the road. His expression was the same for both.

'Why... ' Fitz trailed off when Sasha glanced at him. He felt like he ought to gulp, wet his lips before continuing in case his voice cracked from the abuse of the night before and the previous silence. 'Why are you taking me to Guernica? I mean, not that I'm not grateful that you didn't hand me over to your men back there but, you know, if you're taking me to something worse, I'd like to know.'

There. He'd asked it. Sasha smirked, his eyes back on the road again.

'I am taking you somewhere worse, my suspicious Englishman. I'm taking you to the front line.'

'But... if I'm a spy... '

'If you are a spy... ' Sasha emphasised.

'Not that I am, obviously, why are you doing this?'

Sasha shrugged, then gestured at the tobacco and papers on the dashboard. 'Roll a cigarette, Fitz.'

Fitz complied, unsure of whether to push his luck or accept the Soviet's intransigence. He was just licking the edge of the paper to stick it down when

Sasha hit the truck horn with his fist and yelled Russian curses out of the window. Fitz's fingers skittered and dropped the half-rolled cigarette into the well of the car. He scrambled down on to the floor to get it. When he straightened, Sasha was grinning at him.

'You are too nervous to be a spy, or otherwise you are a spy who is a very good actor. This journey is long and boring, until we reach the front. If you try to run in the meantime, I can always shoot you.'

Fitz wasn't sure if he should be relieved or not.

Eleana pushed her way into the small crowd of onlookers. Violent death was not, in itself, unusual any more. It could be used though, so it was important that she saw it for herself, that her reportage was based on facts. The other papers would use it to their advantage, if any were to be had. She reached the gate by the burnt-out schoolhouse where the body lay. It had been dragged down the slight slope from the centre of the church's half-built shell, leaving a groove in the dirt that was already being scuffed by the boots of the curious.

It was a labourer. Most people wore worker's clothes but Eleana could see that the heavy body inside the coveralls was thickset with muscle, not the flab of a now thinning capitalist. The body was uncovered, though the arms were folded and it had been put into the shade to await removal.

'Who was he?' she asked one of the men standing near her, jerking her head at the corpse. The man shrugged.

'He was Juan Hernandez,' one of the others supplied, 'he used to work here.'

Eleana looked up at the now never-to-be-completed church. Even in daylight, the spires were black against the grey sky, encrusted with soot and cracked from the heat. As a small girl, she had seen the burial of the architect. The one that had been called 'Master' had been run down by a tram, the old fool too slow to get out of the way of the new transport. No Gods, no Masters. Not now.

She looked back at the body, lying in the shady weeds. He had a pockmarked face, with pale grit buried deep in some of the holes. What she could see of his hands were callused, hard whitened skin. In one hand he was clutching the remains of a rosary, the string broken and the beads now lying next to him in the dirt. Religious then, and found at the Sagrada Família. He had put his faith in the wrong belief system, she thought, with a little sadness. He must have clung on to the old ways.

'He was found here praying?' she asked.

The person who had supplied the name shrugged this time. 'He was not shot,' was all he remarked. Eleana moved in a little closer, unwilling for the

comrade standing guard to think she was a friend of the corpse. There were no signs of any wounds. Juan's eyes were still open, still staring widely upwards. Such an expression of fear, such terror. It could have been an execution, though most people closed their eyes when they knew they were to die, as if wishfully hoping that their deaths would be averted if they couldn't see it coming. Like children hiding under a blanket in a thunderstorm, closing their eyes against the fear.

Eleana shrugged. It would be barely a paragraph. She could hardly write that someone breaking the religious ban had been struck down by a mysterious fate, could she? She pushed her way back out of the thinning press of people and started back to her rooms. You know where you are with bullets, she thought. Then she tried to block out the unbidden image of her brother's misshapen body, discarded like a doll in a gutter. Yes, you knew where you were with bullets.

He could not send information back to the System. Every attempt to transfer data was rejected, returned to him. The Absolute's records were starting to pile up around him, waiting, using up his mass and energy. He didn't understand why the data was being refused: this had never happened before. He was receiving a constant stream of contradictory information from his observers, so much that he could not handle it all. He had some firm connections now, could see how the humans handled the different, conflicting versions. Their minds appeared to work on so many levels simultaneously: perhaps they even had several minds in each skull? Had the Absolute never really perceived these creatures before? The way in which one body could hold so many different voices, clear, distinct, arguing with each other. No wonder their motives had been opaque before. He could sit at the back of their brains and watch them take information, impose their own version on to it and then 'forget' any inconvenient elements that didn't fit with that version. He needed somewhere to shunt the problematic data, some way of 'forgetting' it.

He had made a start – building up a library of data in an actual physical space. He was still able to draw his energy from the System, even if it was refusing him access to the Hub, and he was already finding ways to manipulate it. He was dumping the wrong data into a shell, an extrusion, but it was building in mass. But the amount of it! So much, too much. Just the noise from the telephone system was overwhelming, yet that was a minute fraction of the data flowing through his connections.

There was a silver blink of energy, whirling past him so fast he had almost

missed it. He sent a gossamer tendril after it, spinning and fracturing, chasing it down the lines and connections. There was something else here, some other intelligence gatherer.

Whatever it was, there was power. And... *Them!* Always those flickering, maddening, blinking, fading people. There / not. There / not. The girl, of course, but the two men were more noticeable. They were working against him, had to be. Just like the man in the square. Maybe whatever this other presence was, it used them as observers, as eyes and ears in the corporeal world. If they caught a glimpse of him...

He drew a spurt of energy, propelled a tendril faster, tripping on the trailing edge of the silver trace. Then the line he was following bloomed.

So much data. So much information.

Stack upon stack, all connected by a fine filigree of silver. He could take it, use it all. And there was space: acres of empty memory just waiting to be filled with the data he wanted 'forgotten'.

It was beautiful.

Anji sat suddenly, her legs folding without her even knowing it.

She was rather glad to realise she had at least landed on a chair. She hadn't even been aware there was one behind her. The rush of relief at seeing the Doctor had been swiftly followed by a surrendering of her own will. She'd let him guide her across the narrow road between the boulevard and the hotel door, hearing him picking up the bill for the wine. A small part of her was telling her that she was fine and could do it all herself but the rest of her was too busy to listen, trying to ignore the stabbing pain that had started when she had stood up.

One of the Doctor's hands had her by the elbow and he was guiding her up shallow steps, then through the glass-paned door. Inside, he had left her standing and hurried over to the desk. She had realised Pia was standing next to her, clutching one of the carpet bags the Doctor had been carrying, the other dumped on the floor at her feet. Then the relative warmth of the foyer had hit her, as if she was hemmed in tightly by the clammy air, and her knees had bent of their own accord.

'Comrade, is your wife not well?' she heard the hotel receptionist saying and Anji forced herself to focus. She was in an easy chair, one of several forming a irregular circle. It wasn't of the plushest velvet she'd ever encountered. The high room was painted cream, though the top was hazy with a slick of grey-blue

smoke. She tried to bring her head down, to concentrate on Pia's concerned face but her gaze just slid away, refused to settle on a single object.

'No, no, she'll be fine. Just tired, I think.'

Oh right, don't disabuse them of that wife thing, she thought absently. She tried to sit up properly but the sharp needles were rammed through her skull again, right behind her eyes. She hoped the Doctor had some codeine in his magic pockets as she had no idea what painkillers existed in 1936. She propped up her head with one hand, resting the elbow on the arm of the chair, and tried to stay as still as possible. Every time her head moved it made her want to scream at the daggers of pain. She wanted to get out of her own head, let the pain take over the inside of her skull whilst the rest of her was off somewhere having a better time.

She could hear the Doctor's voice, talking to the receptionist, mumbling and rumbling on, presumably paying the up-front rent for the rooms she'd booked. There was a clank of keys against a metal fob and then something was moving into her field of vision again. One lean hand reached down to grab the handles of the abandoned bag, and she noticed how unreal the red-clad arm looked against the dirty Moroccan carpet. It was more like one of those supposedly three-dimensional postcards you found in Kitsch-N-Synch, where one element floated above the other as a block. Then the other hand was lightly curled around the top of her arm, the thumb rubbing gently as he urged her to stand.

'Anji? Come on, let's get you to your room.'

She sighed an OK, closing her eyes and mustering her resistance. She stood quickly, hoping to surprise the pain with her sudden move but it caught her again and she realised she was swaying. The Doctor's grip on her arm increased and she used one hand on his to steady herself. Then she looked into his worried eyes and nodded carefully.

'I think I need a bit of a lie-down,' she said, smiling grimly at her understatement.

'I think so too.'

He led her towards the staircase then paused. A whine from in front of them made her open her eyes again and realise he'd found the lift, the car clanking and shuddering down its cable. Then the door was being opened and Pia was reaching over to drag the metal gate aside. Anji tried not to wince at the harsh rattle. The Doctor threw his carpet bag inside, then used both hands to guide her into the tiny square space. Only a few more moments, she chanted, a few more moments and she could lie down and close her eyes, take whatever miracle pills the Doctor would produce, and it would go away. It would all go

away. With any luck, she'd not wake up again until it was time to meet Fitz.

Then, without any warning at all, the Doctor crumpled into a ball at her feet, howling.

Part Two

Material Research

'Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of
our fever
Are precise and alive.'

– *W. H. Auden*

Chapter Five

Estada Lliure

Anji groaned and dropped her head on to the coverlet. Under her face, paper crackled.

‘This is hopeless,’ she informed the thin mattress. She felt like drumming her toes into the pillow at the head of the bed and beating at her scrapbook with her fists. Her nose was buried in the papers, and she could smell that odd inky mustiness of freshly printed news. She could almost feel it rubbing off on to her face. She’d never complain that the *Guardian* left her with dirty hands again, after this. Anji considered throwing the tantrum some more: just letting out all the incoherence with a wordless yell and the tattoo of her hands and feet. Her mouth curled into a half-smile and she let one foot bounce up and down on the pillow in a lazy jig. She was too tired though, too exhausted to waste her energy with a full-blown wail. She sighed and propped herself back up on to her elbows.

Stacked on every flat surface of the sparse room, falling into tumbled piles on the bed, were papers. Scrapbooks with cuttings sticking out at all angles, notebooks bulging so much that they were held closed with elastic bands. At some point, a few weeks ago, Anji had stopped trying to only save the cuttings she thought might be relevant and had started a huge index file instead. That lay next to her, with a pen nestling along the open spine. Along one wall, the annotated newspapers were neatly piled up. Each pile had a weight holding the top paper down, so draughts couldn’t disturb her filing system. The first week, she had been forced to re-sort the stacks twice after someone had unthinkingly opened the French windows to watch the street below. Now, whenever she went out, she kept one eye open for suitable weights.

That rock holding down January’s *Solidaridad Obrera* had come from the slopes’ of Montjuïc, collected on a wet and blustery New Year’s Eve. They’d walked up to watch the Magic Fountain perform – a rare treat switched on for the holiday – and then Jueves had suggested climbing up the slopes to where the formal gardens were growing unbound and untended. There were

no fireworks, just a clamour of bells drifting up from the city and marking the new year. Walking back after midnight, following the winding path back in the dark, safely led by Jueves, she had stumbled on the loose stone and picked it up. Each time she moved it to get a paper from that stack, she recalled that walk and smiled. He should be back soon from wherever it was he'd been sent this time, with a whole new bunch of stories to tell and a bag full of papers for her.

Anji smiled and returned to the copy of *La Batalla* she was working on. She'd got as far page two when she had wanted to throw it all away. Each article had to be read slowly, her mind translating as well as possible using her French and rapidly increasing Catalanian vocabulary but she still had another list of words to check with the others.

Un guarda PSUC en Parc Güell abandonó su poste, demandando que un murciélagu gigante lo atacó. . .

Murciélago? Still staring at the sentence, she reached down by the side of the narrow bed and pulled up a card-bound notebook. It took her a few moments to find the word.

A guard in Parc Güell left his post, claiming that a giant bat attacked. . .

She looked up at the map that had been scribbled on a tablecloth and pinned to the bare wall at the foot of the bed. Parc Güell. It was on the outskirts and had several markers over it. There were clusters all over the city. The early ones, the ones marked when they'd first drawn the map to see if they could plot a pattern, were in pen with a date scribbled next to it. After a couple of weeks, they'd managed to convince Pia to steal a packet of map pins from the Comintern's office and now Anji took one from the cardboard box, wrote the reference number for the article on it and got up to stick it in place. She checked the other Parc Güell references whilst she was stood there but, as always, this latest report failed to create order out of the events.

Twelve weeks. The map represented three months of work. Since the day of Durruti's funeral, Anji had spent every day trying to make sense out of the situation the best way she knew how. She had collated information, cross-referenced it, studied it for trends. All the time looking for something that would explain what had happened. Nothing: she couldn't create a coherent causality. She had been ill, the Doctor had collapsed in the foyer and then –

There was a knock at the door. She stayed where she was, arms folded, trying to make the disparate parts into a picture. 'Who is it?' she called.

'Me.'

Anji rolled her eyes and walked over to unlock the door. Trust him to say

that. Opening the door, she found him leaning on the doorjamb, his hands stuffed in his trouser pockets. His face had the first shadow of a beard growing on it. Anji frowned.

'You're not trying to grow that bloody beard again, are you? It didn't suit you last time.'

The Doctor scowled at her.

'I *liked* that beard.'

Anji snorted and stepped back to let him in the room. The Doctor shook his head.

'I'm going down to see her,' he said.

It was the same words every day. She half-hoped that one day he wouldn't say it. That he'd come in and they'd have breakfast and then work without this daily torture. Then again, she half-hoped that he'd come back with a wide smile and whisk her down to the square and they'd get away. Neither hope had been fulfilled as yet. In the first few weeks, Anji had gone down every day as well but it had started to depress her and she now restricted herself to one try each week. And today was the day. She could feel her stomach quiver in nervousness already.

'Wait, I'll come with you.'

She grabbed her wool overcoat and her handbag whilst he hovered in the doorway. She noted absently that his eyes were half-lidded, shadowed. It was as if half his energy had been taken after that day. After the collapse.

'Ready,' she told him, ignoring the fact that her nerves were telling her not to do it.

They were almost at the bottom of Las Rambles, close to the Plaça Reial, when the siren started. Rising steadily into a scream and then falling away. Anji rolled her eyes.

'Now?' she asked wearily. 'It's still daylight.'

The Doctor picked up speed, grabbing her forearm and hurrying her along. The avenue was rapidly emptying as people ran for cover. The Doctor ignored the nearest REFUGI sign and led them through an archway and into Plaça Reial, fumbling around his neck with his spare hand until he had the chain free. Anji could hear the first distant thrum of the Italian bombers, high and distant. They were over the sea still, just starting their run in. As the TARDIS key was being turned, she heard the first ack-ack of the anti-aircraft guns on the peak of Montjuïc.

Another raid had started.

The Doctor got the door open and they tumbled inside. It was still dim, Anji realised, just the bare emergency bulb letting out its faint glow. The Doctor had immediately turned to one side and was kneeling, frantically turning a brass handle sticking out of the side wall, as if he were trying to start a Model T. The doors closed slowly, jerking whenever the Doctor's speed slowed. There was only the one handle and all Anji could do was stand and watch anxiously. With the doors closed they would be safe, the Doctor always assured her, as the outer shell had survived two world wars already. Anji hadn't liked to point out that the TARDIS wasn't exactly running at full strength. Finally, the edges sealed with a clunk and the Doctor leaned on the handle. He huffed his long fringe out of his eyes, although some sweat-dampened strands resisted.

'Will we hear the all-clear in here?' she asked.

The Doctor rocked back on his heels and stood up. He brushed his face clear of hair, and then ran his hand over his light stubble as if more concerned about whether that beard had suited him after all. 'Yes,' he assured her eventually, as he crossed to the central console. The inert central console. 'Yes, we'll know.'

He flicked a button over, then back. Nothing happened. Nothing had happened for three months now. Not since November.

Anji glanced about, taking in the latest changes. In her head, the main room in the TARDIS still looked like a corporate office, with pale wood panels and smart slimline equipment. She idly remembered her desire to install a water-cooler and a ficus to complete the effect. They would look out of place now, in this version.

The kitchen was gone completely, the blank archway merely a bas-relief line in the wall. The door to the interior rooms was locked, although she could see a screwdriver and a lockpick set lying by it, suggesting the Doctor had been trying to get through again. The library was still there but it wasn't possible to access the books: all the shelves had been put behind unbreakable glass. Although again, a crowbar on the floor and a spider-cracked pane suggested the Doctor had been trying to smash his way in. Everything they needed could have been behind the barriers, but they couldn't get to it. It was why Anji had stopped coming back every day: watching the Doctor's increasing fury at the locked away knowledge disturbed her.

The most disturbing aspect, though, was the silence. Before, the main room had hummed faintly, as if some hidden air-conditioning was just ticking over. The sort of background noise that you became accustomed to, that was filtered out. Like the 3 a.m. rattle of an old refrigerator in a downstairs room. Instead, there was the dead, echoing silence of an abandoned place. The crowbar lying

in the library had not been there on her last visit, but it looked as if it had been thrown to the floor years before.

They'd struggled back here, through the mourning crowds, on November 23rd. She had been ill, the Doctor had collapsed in the foyer and then he had looked up at them and begged to be taken back to the TARDIS. Anji had forgotten her own screaming pain, the way her head had been thundering with jolts of agony. Pia had been yelling at Cristo to get medical help but the Doctor had uncurled enough to grab her shin and plead to be taken back to Praça Reial. Between them, they'd got him to his feet and helped him back the TARDIS. Anji had gritted her teeth with every pain-filled movement but she had known that if the Doctor said he should go back to the time machine, they should go back. It would be resolved. She had wondered briefly if it was his heart again but hadn't dared mention it aloud.

Weaving across Las Ramblas, they had veered into a side street, then through the wide archway to Praça Reial. She had seen the blue box standing in the arcade on one side, just where she had left it that same morning. Even getting across the square had proven exhausting, as they tried to avoid staggering into the tall palm trees. The Doctor had sunk to his knees again when they reached the box, resting his head against the wood and Pia had looked bewildered. Rushing from the adrenalin, Anji had come up with some explanation that she couldn't even remember now and Pia had headed back to the Hotel Oriente to tell Cristo that things were all right. Then Anji had had to search the Doctor's pockets for the key. It had felt wrong, somehow, putting her hands into his pockets, and she had been desperate to find the key quickly so she could stop violating them. Her fingers found the bobbles of the chain and she had pulled it free. It had fitted in the lock and turned easily under her hand. Claspng it tight, she had reached down and got one hand under the Doctor's armpit and coaxed him through the doors. Only then did she realise that something was wrong.

The lights had been off entirely, although one bulb flickered and fizzled into life after a moment. And then she'd seen how the interior had darkened: the pale wood replaced with oak, the slimline instruments replaced with old-fashioned switches and dials. The Doctor sank to the floor and wept, screaming that he'd lost her again. When Anji had got him to the old chaise longue and quietened him, she'd gone to make them a cup of tea and discovered the kitchen was gone. Standing in the dim light, with the Doctor mumbling to himself in the background, and disorientating shadows all around, she'd heard the silence of the time machine. It was the most unnerving moment of her life.

They'd moved into the Hotel Oriente that night, the still-shaking Doctor assuring her that everything would be fine in a day or two. That had been twelve weeks ago. Twelve weeks in which Anji had tried to create an information database that could help them, tried to create even a fraction of the TARDIS's resources. The Doctor had brooded for a week before he started to help her. He'd sulked around the Hotel like a ghost; clearly exhausted as if whatever had disabled the time machine had been fed back to him. He would still stubbornly come back each morning, go through the ritual of hoping things would have magically solved themselves in the night.

Faintly, she heard the muffled sound of the all-clear and felt her shoulders relax. The Doctor was already tinkering with the loops of wire that were spread across the floor, digging into a huge old plastic crate marked 'recycle' in big black marker pen. She'd done her weekly chore, made the effort to come down with him rather than yell that he should be helping her.

'That was the all-clear, Doctor.'

'Mmm.'

'I'm going back to the Hotel,' she tried a little louder.

'Mmm. OK, I'll be back later.'

It took her several minutes to crank the doors back open, during which time the Doctor continued to fiddle with the wiring. 'I'll be off then,' Anji tried.

He looked up at her, his face looking even more weary in the poor light. 'I'll have her up and running again today,' he told her confidently, with the ghost of his old beaming smile. She smiled back, then stepped back into the square before she let her frustration show. Even then, she just kicked the nearest lamppost and hobbled back to the Hotel.

Enrique sat in the attic space, watching. All around him, layer upon layer, were stills. Frozen moments, each from a different perspective. When he chose to, he could walk amongst them and they would flutter at his passing. He could move behind them and study them in reverse, or enlarge and expand a fragment of them. Grab them and sort them like index cards, choosing new patterns. What he couldn't do, though, was make any more sense of them. The Absolute was more uncertain than ever before.

He had thought he could discover the true nature of events. His experiment with one human had, he had thought, shown him how to resolve the confusion. They used filters created by their conscious so that they perceived what they wanted to. They were not passive cameras, recording blindly. It infuriated him. What they didn't want to see, they just ignored. Swamped by data, they

would discard most of the detail into the back parts of their brains, not even registering it. Selectively editing reality until it fitted with what they wanted it to be. He had removed the filters from one of them, torn them away so that the human could see everything clearly. For a few hours, Enrique had been overwhelmed. He had seen a lucid, clarified reality, freed from the warping perceptions of the human mind. Then, without warning, that mind had turned on him and shut him out. The stream of data had been cut off again. The Absolute had found himself bounded by the illogic and misrule of his uncontrolled Observers. It was then that he'd given himself form.

He was blind, by human standards. A ghostly duplicate of the human he had tried to control. He'd tried to move like them, to inhabit the same spaces as them, but he'd still been unable to see like them, or make sense of their conflicting truths. Everything he needed to see was around him: a huge web of data feeds from the Observers. There, for example, was the viewpoint of a man as he helped a little girl into the bomb shelter. He could flick easily from either point of view.

The concerned man saw the dark steps, the poorly lit interior with bulbs held in place with twisted wires. He felt the weight of the building above them, the fragility of their shelter. The unseen planes were huge, black, oppressive. Roaring inexorably in from the Balearics. He gripped the tiny hand harder in his, terrified she would slip from his sweating grasp. The girl was hopping down the steps, excitedly dragging her guardian behind her. Unafraid of the darkness. In her head, the bombers didn't even exist, just the excitement of the shelter. Seeing a friend on the narrow benches, she laughed and slipped free.

The Absolute pulled the two images together, overlapped them to see what was true in both. If he could just whittle all the versions down to one. So few details matched though. The tight grip the man believed he had was non-existent to her. To the man the girl was tiny, delicate. To the girl, the man was just a large mass behind her. Trying to look at both at once made Enrique furious. Why couldn't they be impartial, as he was? They were trapping him here with their incoherence. He raged back and forth across the attic floor, the frozen moments skittering out of his way. He wanted to kick at things but his appropriated form didn't have enough mass to do more than swirl the dirt on the floorboards.

Calm. He had to stay calm. Rational. Channel the confusion and annoyance away. That was another thing he had learned from the humans. If the facts couldn't be reconciled, disregard the set that didn't fit.

'I could drive for a bit.'

'No. You couldn't.'

Fitz tucked his chin further down into the upturned collar of his jacket and grinned. Sasha had responded exactly as he'd predicted and it lifted his confidence a little. He'd woken a few minutes earlier when the truck had jolted dramatically, falling away beneath him. For a moment, Fitz had thought it was overturning and had braced his arms ready to protect his head. Then he'd realised Sasha had run it into the drainage ditch. The Russian was sitting at the wheel, gripping it far too tightly and staring ahead.

'You fell asleep, didn't you?' Fitz had said accusingly and the other man had had the decency to look embarrassed. The mist had risen again as the light had fallen, the blinkered headlights barely reached the bank in front of them. Sasha announced that they would park up for the night, get some rest. Fitz had been privately relieved: he didn't want to be actually in the town when the bombing started. He'd vocally bitched about the delay, though, as they'd struggled to reverse the truck back out of the ditch. The Russian had eventually reminded him who had the gun. They'd finished recovering the vehicle in silence after that, Sasha throwing Fitz the odd tired and annoyed look, then parked it a lot less precariously in a fallow field.

Now they sat on the bed of the truck, the gate let down and their legs dangling. A small oil lantern turned down low created a dim orange glow. Fitz used a blunted penknife to cut uneven slices of ham off a sausage, then piled them into a torn-apart bread roll. The blade was too short to cut anything other than misshapen triangles off the cheese Sasha had appropriated from the sack of supplies. Fitz leaned on the side and hunched into his jacket as he ate. The night was cold, with the mist deadening any sounds. His world had shrunk to just the sphere of faint lamp light. It seemed hard to connect this bubble of stillness and silence with the day on the road, with the constant rumble of the engine and the steady stream of people. Neither seemed real to him. Paris, next summer and two days ago, was like a story or a dream, not a place he had really been. He stared blindly into the blankness of the mist, replaying Paris. Trying to work out how he had got from there to here.

There was a loud report by his ear. His shoulders tightened, then relaxed as he realised it was a cork being pulled. A bottle was thrust in front of his face and he stared at it.

'Drink, Fitz.'

Sasha was holding the bottle out at arm's reach. Fitz stared at the open neck: he'd not forgotten the last time he had drunk wine offered by the Russian.

Sasha waggled the bottle at him, then shrugged when Fitz didn't reach for it. He sat back, turning to lean against the support on his side of the truck and lifting his feet on to the boards. He took a swig from the bottle, then offered it again. Fitz couldn't resist. The dampness was creeping into him and if he was going to sleep in the open, he'd like at least to be warmed by some alcohol. As he took it, Sasha smiled. Fitz wiped the mouth of the bottle with his sleeve and took a swig. Vinegary, as usual. He grimaced slightly, then passed the bottle back. They sat there for a while, silently passing the bottle and smoking hand-rolled cigarettes.

'So, my English spy, why do you want to go to Guernica?'

'I'm not a... oh never mind. The person I... ' Fitz hesitated as he tried to find a suitable term, 'work for wants a first hand report.'

'He can't do it himself? Instead he sends a German with a British passport to a war zone?'

'No, the Doctor's checking out somewhere else. He trusts me.'

Sasha let out a heavy sigh as he breathed out some smoke. He let the bottle dangle from one hand, idly swinging it, as he ground out his stub on the wooden floor with the other.

'Will you tell me who you work for?' the Russian asked.

Fitz thought. He wanted to phrase this right so he didn't end up with a bullet in him. The Soviets – they had to be on the side of the Republic, so one of those groups. Except Sasha could check if he admitted belonging to any particular organisation.

'We're independent observers,' he said, trying to sound confident that the other man wouldn't question it. He took the bottle and swigged again. He had drunk enough now for the edge of the cold to have been taken off, his muscles had relaxed and he had stopped shivering. The taste of the wine seemed less harsh as well. He glanced across. Sasha was concentrating on rolling a cigarette, leaning in so his hands were clearly lit by the lantern.

'Is there any such thing?' he asked casually, without looking up.

Fitz started and stared at him. The other man glanced up briefly and grinned at his stricken face. The narrow eyes were crinkled at the edge where the smile reached them.

'Relax, Fitz. I just wonder how you can sit in this Communist Party truck, sharing wine I bargained out of a Republican barman, handing out food to those poor people on the road and claim to be an impartial witness? Will your report not be biased because we have treated you well and the fascists would have shot you without bothering to find out who you were?'

Fitz shrugged. Sasha lit his cigarette quickly, shaking out the match. ‘And,’ he continued, ‘isn’t your very presence here altering how I behave? I want your report to favour my organisation, to favour me, so I am considerate and helpful. I make you think we are not so bad, after all, don’t I?’

Clamping the thin smoke in his lips, the Russian got up slowly and walked, slightly crouched, into the main bed of the truck. He started moving things about, although all Fitz could hear were crates being dragged across. Was the Soviet right? Even if he didn’t get involved, wasn’t his mere presence here altering things? People acted differently if they thought they were being watched. No, it didn’t change things. It didn’t matter how he got to Guernica, he would see what had happened there. His presence couldn’t affect unaware bombers who even now must be preparing for their raid. Fitz turned to point out that the big events wouldn’t be affected and surprised himself by yawning.

‘Lock the gate up,’ Sasha said from the depths of the truck. Fitz pulled his legs up and dragged the tailgate up behind him, rattling the bolts in to hold it closed. He picked up the oil lantern carefully and held it away from his face so he wasn’t blinded by it. Moving back, he found the crates stacked to form an enclosed space. Sasha was putting down the last of the empty bread sacks on the floor, padding it slightly.

‘There’s blankets in that crate next to you,’ he said.

‘Oh, *now* you mention it!’

Fitz balanced the lamp on the floor and pulled out two itchy army blankets. Settling on the burlap, he loosened the laces on his boots and pulled his coat tight before wrapping the blanket around him. He was amazed to realise he was already half asleep.

Anji started on the fresh copies of the newswires Eleana had dropped in to her. This was the information before it was written up into news reports, if it was written up at all. Anji got them days after they had been received, taken from the wastebin at *La Batalla* where they had been thrown once they had been dealt with. Eleana didn’t get them all, she couldn’t have asked to take them without arousing more curiosity than she would agree to. They were enough, though, to give Anji more points on her map. She also got to see just how much the stories that were written up were adjusted to suit the stance of the paper. That made her wonder how much else of what she was reading had been spun to suit propagandist needs. Over the course of the three months, she had seen the different papers drift further away from each other, each pursuing their own agenda.

It was one reason why she spent half of her time visiting the sites of intriguing reports, trying to find eyewitnesses who would give her a direct account. She could see now why the Doctor had wanted Fitz to go to Guernica, although she still worried. It would be months before he got here. Assuming he did. She started on the wires, making notes quickly. Eleana had gone to an editorial meeting, but had agreed to come back later and do a few sites with her.

There was a knock at the door. Anji took the pen from her mouth and called over, not bothering to rise from the bed. 'Who is it?'

'Me.'

Anji groaned as she rolled off the bed and on to her feet. What made people think that was a funny answer? She unlocked and opened the door. He was stood on the other side, his hands in the pockets of his trousers and his eyes watching his shoe scuff the threadbare carpet, deliberately casual. Unshaven.

'Hola, Anji.'

'Jueves! You're back! Come in.' She stepped back to let him enter. He looked tired, and still had his pack on his shoulders. He dropped it by the side of the door. Anji fussed about, trying to tidy up the papers on her bed whilst he whistled at the new stack of papers.

'You've been busy.'

'Yes, well, I've not got much further though.'

'I've brought you papers from Madrid. There isn't the same level of events as you have here.'

Jueves sat tentatively on the space she had cleared on the bed and Anji caught him watching her as she finished sorting the piles of work. She felt self-conscious, suddenly, and pushed her hair behind her ears. Outwardly calm, always. The hair slipped free again, swinging across her face. She'd not wanted to have it cut here, convinced they'd do something awful to it, so now it fell as far as her collarbone.

'Is the Doctor about?' Jueves asked.

'Oh, er, no. He went off somewhere. Driving out to visit someone at the front, or something.'

'So you're free to have lunch with me?'

Anji blew air out through her teeth. There it was. The question, or a variation of it anyway, that he always asked her. She was sure he wanted more than lunch. The smiles and the careless way his hand would fall over hers, or how he would guide her through a room with one hand at the small of her back. All of those she was sure she was reading correctly. He was pleasant company, of

course, as charming as the Doctor but without the bouts of moodiness. She just wasn't interested that way.

'Well, I –'

Just lunch.'

'I have to go up to Parc Güell to talk to a guard about something he saw,' she fudged. His mouth was already opening, so she played the killer card, knowing his face would fall and he'd give up. 'Eleana is coming with me.'

They'd borrowed McNair's small Citroën. Technically, it was the ILP's Citroën but as McNair was one of only three ILP workers in Barcelona, Alberto thought of it as McNair's. Anji had conspired with McNair to get the Doctor to drive them up, privately admitting that she was worried about his compulsive behaviour. As the Doctor had driven them along the long dirt roads towards Huesca, the academic was pleased to see the other man's shoulder's relax a little even as his own tensed. Back to the front, back to the cold and noise.

The sky above the rocky hills was white, deceptively sunny, and he reluctantly admitted that getting away from the grey city felt good. It was what would be waiting for him that made him sit back and stare blindly at the scrubby landscape. He glanced at Eileen, Blair's wife, who sat in the passenger seat next to the Doctor and was looking about with interest. Why did she want to come up here to see her husband? He preferred to think it was safer in the city but he knew that wasn't true. At least out here, he felt he made a difference. One afternoon, he had huddled in a REFUGI with his little niece Isobel, unable to see or hear the attack that had them cowering in the wavering gloom and it made him long to be out on the hillsides again, where the enemy was easy, visible, defined. Until the hills started to unroll before him and he started to recognise contours and dread the future again.

They slowed as they reached a checkpoint. The militiaman walked over casually.

'Buenos dias, comrade. This road is closed.'

'We've permits to visit.' The Doctor dug into the pocket of his dark red duster and produced the flimsy slips. The militiaman read them slowly and then handed them back.

'Take the next left and then stop at the third farmhouse. They'll send you on by foot.'

The track grew rougher, the car bouncing on its worn shocks, and the Doctor slowed to compensate. The boxes of supplies next to Alberto jolted about, knocking into him and forcing him to shift. He glanced at Eileen again. She

was in her thirties, heavysset as so many English women were and dressed in sensible warm clothes and boots.

‘It’s just up here, I think,’ she said to the Doctor, pointing ahead.

‘You must be looking forward to seeing your husband again?’ Alberto ventured in English.

Eileen shrugged, turning in her seat to look at him. ‘It’s not the first time he’s headed off to do what he thinks is right, sometimes I don’t see him for weeks on end. When he gets like this, I wonder why I put up with it. Then I see him again and I remember. So yes, even though I dread to think of how this war will have affected him, I’m looking forward to seeing him again.’

Another militiaman on the track was waving at them, directing the Citroën towards the yard of an abandoned farmhouse. The walls were shelled, the glass in the remaining frames shattered. The Doctor leaned out to address a heavy-set man washing under the yard pump.

‘Hola, comrade. We’re looking for Bob Edwards’s men.’

‘And you have found us!’

Alberto recognised Stan, one of the unit, and struggled to get out of the back, dragging the sack of post after him. He was glad to hear Edwards was still their elected leader. The man was quiet but sure, capable of calming the huge arguments over tactics that tended to brew up in the company. He always took a vote on action and went with the decision. Alberto had been hearing stories back in the city of elected leaders being replaced with Comintern faithful, the collective forced to recant and return to old military hierarchies ‘for expediency’. He had not wanted to come back to find himself being ordered to fight.

Once the crate of wine and tobacco had been unloaded, they started across a scrubby field towards a gully. Edwards had suggested Eileen stay at the farmhouse but she had assured him she would be fine. He explained the situation as they walked, gesturing northwards.

‘The rebels hold that hill opposite, you see it? Sometimes light reflects off their rifles so we know where they are.’

‘How far have you advanced?’ the Doctor asked.

‘Advanced? We’ve not moved for two months. Come, let me show you so you can report back to Barcelona. They should send us guns and ammunition, not touring parties.’

As they descended into the gully sandbags started to build to a wall, eclipsing the Nationalist-held side. As his boots sunk into the cold water at the bottom of the trench, Alberto felt he had never been away. Eileen and the Doctor were

looking about curiously, the woman clearly looking for her husband whilst the Doctor studied the trench. In the wider foxholes, militiamen lounged, rolling cigarettes or reading days old papers. Alberto slapped the arms of many of them, pleased to see so many familiar faces.

'You really are entrenched,' the Englishman remarked as they continued along to one of the wide areas where a small stove was set up and a battered tarpaulin kept off the sun and rain. Alberto dropped the mailbag and started to sort it, doing his best to listen even as his comrades started to crowd around hoping for news from elsewhere.

Edwards shrugged as he sat on an upturned bucket and poked at the stove. 'We get the least weapons, the worst air cover and keep your heads *down*!'

The Doctor sheepishly looked at the sandbag by his head where a new grazed groove indicated where the bullet had skimmed. Alberto realised that if the man had been standing fully upright the bullet would have ripped through his head.

'And,' Edwards continued, as if discussing the state of his garden back in England, 'those bastards have high-power rifles and trained shots. Military.'

The Doctor moved over to Alberto's side, taking a handful of the mail and helping to pass it out. Unlike so many Englishmen here, he had no trouble pronouncing the names and the crowd was soon spreading back out again, sitting slowly reading letters, or reading them out to the less literate. Alberto noticed Antonio was still teaching Ramón to read, patiently explaining the words in a newspaper. Eileen was still standing close by the stove, frowning at the men. 'Where's Eric?'

The whistle broke the puzzled silence, the distant firing thump following a second later. The crump of the exploding shell was somewhere in the abandoned land between the hillside. Ramón leapt up and glared towards the Nationalist lines.

'Hijos de puntos! It's still the siesta! We're eating!' he yelled up into the sky, shaking his fist and making Eileen jump. He grinned as a distant shout came back, the words lost in the faint breeze, and sat back down. Up and down the trench, men were yelling out descriptions of fine food, despite having nothing but hunks of bread in their hands. Edwards was still grinning.

'We always tell them we are eating. We had two deserters cross over this week already.'

Eileen was still watching him. 'I'm looking for Eric Blair?' she asked again. The Doctor held his hand above his head.

'Can't miss him, tall. English, like me. He joined your company last year.'

‘Joined, yes,’ Edwards said, frowning at them. ‘Didn’t come back from his last leave though. I thought he’d gone home to England.’

Chapter Six

Bombes Espanyoles

Fitz watched sleepily, sat on the edge of the truck bed and smoking his first rollie of the day, as Sasha headed into the copse, carrying a shovel. He swung his boots to and fro, clanking them into the dropped tailgate. He waited a minute or so, making some noise all the time, then glanced up to make sure the Russian was out of sight. Once sure, he shoved himself off the truck and hurried round to the side furthest from the trees, dropping to one knee by the driver's front wheel. The roll-up was behind his ear and his blunt penknife was in his hands. Not that he needed the blade.

Less than a minute later, he was back leaning against the tailgate, relighting his cigarette and watching Sasha return. The other man wiped the shovel's blade off on the grass and threw it into the back.

'Get in Fitz. I'd like to arrive sometime today.'

Someone got out of the wrong side of the truck, Fitz thought with a smirk hidden beneath his smoke.

The tyre valve blew out at lunchtime, just as they were cresting the final hill.

Sasha kicked the damaged tyre. 'Der'mo!'

Fitz sat on the roadside, cradling one arm tight against him with the other and wishing his head would stop hurting. Good plan, Fitz, great plan. Sabotage a vehicle you're travelling in yourself. He'd been expecting the blowout, of course, but hadn't dared to brace himself too obviously in case Sasha got suspicious. The truck had lurched and veered, his elbow had cracked into the door and his head had been jolted into the roof of the cab. Oh yeah, he was so *smart*.

'There's a spare though, right?' he asked.

Sasha flopped on to the scrub next to Fitz. 'No.'

'Ah.'

'You can take it into the town, find a garage and get it fixed.'

'Or you could.'

‘Nyet, Fitz. I am not leaving the truck behind.’

Fitz groaned as he pushed himself up. He walked over to the edge of the hillside and looked down into the valley. Guernica lay across the river at the bottom, beyond dotted woodland and cultivated fields. It wasn't big, just another typical market town. A steady stream of solid wheeled carts had been passing them since they had broken down, with worn farmers walking in to sell what little produce they had. He could have got a ride into town with them, sat on the back with the sheep, but he had declined. He glanced at his watch. 4 p.m. According to the Doctor's instructions, it was almost time. Looking down into the town, he could just glimpse the busy central square, the antlike swarms of people gathered there.

The central church bell started to clamour.

He heard a low thrumming sound high up in the sky. A plane coming overhead.

‘It's a Heinkel. German bomber. They must have forgotten they signed the non-intervention treaty again.’

Sasha had joined him on the slope. He had dug out a pair of binoculars from the supplies in the truck and handed them over, pointing northwards, towards the sea. Fitz spotted the outline as the dark shape became clearer. A single Heinkel 111. He could still visualise the little, well-thumbed pamphlet he had kept in with his gas-mask as a child. Every plane in the British and German air forces detailed and outlined. Black abstract shapes that he had memorised but rarely seen. He had been five, six, seven, but his mother had refused to send him away, too afraid of what might happen to a German child out in the countryside. Heinkels had bombed out the Lipmans up the street.

The distant crump of the explosions in the town drew his attention. He didn't need the binoculars to see the first blossoms of smoke, dark orange in their centres. It had hit around the station, eight hits all in a row. The buzz of the engines was fading already.

That was it? That was what he had come here to witness for the Doctor? Seriously underwhelming. Refocusing, he could see people re-emerging from the buildings, going towards the wounded. A horse silently struggled until a soldier raised his gun. Bucket-chains began to form. Through the glasses, it looked unreal, like newsreel footage.

‘They're coming back,’ Sasha remarked.

This time, the engines were heavier, ominous. A full squadron.

‘Where are the air defences?’ he asked Sasha. The Russian shrugged.

‘I'm not sure they have any.’

The planes were starting a bombing approach now, dropping lower. Fitz looked again at the town, willing the people to get back into shelter, any shelter. Then his view was obscured by smoke and flame; seconds later the sounds started. The steady whump-whump-whump as bomb after bomb exploded. The crackle of incendiaries, so distant it could have been a firecracker.

The outer roads were starting to fill with people, running and stumbling to get out of the centre. Refugees abandoning their belongings in the road, farmers dragging terrified livestock. The surrounding fields were being trampled as the people fled the conflagration to the safety of empty ground or the woods. Fitz looked at the planes again, mentally filing the different types in use. They were dark shapes in the clouds of smoke now, the engine roar becoming a background drone. He spotted a phalanx of Heinkel fighters, turning to a new approach over the hillside closest to them. Fighters? What point was there in using fighters if there were no air defences? There was nothing to fight against here.

Even as the edge of the wing started to fly over them, he realised their intention. He flung himself at Sasha, knocking them both to the ground. The Russian began to protest until the ground close to the truck spat up dirt and the clatter of the guns could be heard over the Heinkel's engines.

'Christ,' Fitz heard himself saying, 'they don't have a hope.'

The fighters dived over the fields, their machine guns flashing and spitting. Smaller explosions were almost lost in the barrage of noise, the flare of them indicating where grenades were landing. Fitz covered his ears so he didn't have to hear any more, closed his eyes and buried his face in the dirt. He could hear Sasha's rough breathing next to him, the Russian letting out a steady stream of abuse against the planes.

No, he had to see this. He had a job here, a mission. He had to observe this. Fitz reluctantly looked up, pushing himself on to his elbows so he could see over the grass, raising his gaze above the fields to the town itself. It was almost obscured by smoke, flames bursting amongst the dark clouds. A faint breeze brought the stench of cordite and burning. He glanced at his watch again. The raid had been going for forty-five minutes, the town was ablaze, surely it would be over? The sound of the Heinkels was fading as they disappeared on the other side of the town. That had to be it. Then he heard a still deeper aero-engine approaching.

'Junker 52s,' Sasha said, with horror in his voice. 'Heavy-duty bombers. Just been used to bomb the front line near Oviedo.'

'How close are we to the front?'

‘Twenty kilometres, maybe.’

People were starting to pass them now. Civilians in dust-covered clothes. Some hobbling, some supporting others. Wild-eyed but too exhausted to run any more. Weary soldiers in small groups. A motorcycle wove through them and away towards Bilbao, taking news of the attack. Sasha moved over to the abandoned truck, swearing at the bullet holes that now riddled it. He commandeered two soldiers, got out the crate of medical supplies and started dressing the wounds of the civilians who were willing to stop this close to the town. Fitz wanted to laugh hysterically when he spotted a nun joining the impromptu field hospital until he saw her blood-stained hands and ash-covered face.

The city roared again, as the Junkers began dropping their loads. Fitz watched, numbed and unable to react to it any more. Dusk was falling but the city glowed, turning the sky blood red. The din became a steady background roar, the planes turning and approaching again and again. Eventually, Fitz joined Sasha, helping the fleeing wounded. He felt sick when the first burn victim arrived, skin blacked along one side where an incendiary had showered her in thermite. She was half-naked, having ripped her burning clothes away, and she was shivering in the cooling night. If they spoke at all, if they could speak, the townspeople spoke of an apocalypse in their quiet market town. Blazing buildings, rubble flying through the air, burning livestock staggering through the streets and the bombs still falling.

It was nearly 8 p.m. when the planes turned and didn’t reappear.

There was something monstrous, loose in the city.

That was the only conclusion she had managed to draw from the data. Anji was cross with herself. Cross with the Doctor for getting them into this. Cross with the guard posted at the top of Parc Güell who had denied the newspaper report of what he had seen. They had been forced to walk for most of the climb up to the place, which had put her in a bad mood even before the guard had started claiming he’d just seen a wild animal. His eyes had been darting about and she could sense the other guards smirking and nudging each other. Exasperated, she stomped over to the edge of the hillside, trailing Eleana in her wake like a balloon. She crossed her arms and scowled at the city laid out below her.

There was something monstrous, loose, wild, in the city.

From the top of Parc Güell, the city filled the slope down to the Mediterranean. The grid of the fin-de-siècle streets dragged the eye towards the dark

slit of water on the horizon, where the bombers appeared from. Only the Sagrada Família broke through the order, clutching at the sky. Eastwards, Montjuïc squatted, a sudden bump in the horizon with the jumble of the Barri Gòtic nestling close at its feet. Laid out below her, with a few lights flickering on and the sun slipping away, it looked simultaneously like two different cities. Three, as she could overlay her pin-map across it all. There was no geometry to the events, no ability to predict. She hated it.

'Anji?'

'Si?'

They set off back through the grounds, taking one of the tracks that zigzagged through the parkland with Eleana in the lead. Dusk was starting to fall now and somewhere birds were giving it their all, singing and whooping with the change in light. Eleana plunged them down a series of jagged steps that linked the looping levels of the narrow roadway. The steps were built of slick stones, uneven, slippery with wet leaves and Anji had to slow her pace to get down them without feeling like she was about to fall. Off the path, the young trees hid the sky and the sounds of the city totally, just the faintest hint of dark blue remained of the day. The ground was thick with the acid smell of decaying leaves, fallen over previous autumns. Anji paused to rummage in her bag, searching for the old bicycle lamp she kept in there.

The birdsong stopped.

Anji felt the sudden silence, the fine hairs on her neck whispering of its importance, before she even realised what she was reacting to. She could see the darker shape of Eleana still moving down the steps ahead of her, apparently unconcerned. There was no distance: all Anji had to do was run down the shiny, slippery, slimy steps and she'd catch up with her. Just put one foot out and drop to the next step, once she started she would be away, running fast. Skidding, her crappy worn soles taking her out of control. She didn't dare move. This was ridiculous. She could call out. She wasn't some terrified girly-girl.

'Eleana?'

Anji started at her own voice, at its sudden timidity. And Eleana didn't slow down, fast disappearing into the darkness instead. Almost against her own will, Anji found her shoes skittering across the stone, her body propelling her forward and down in what felt like full flight. She moved fast, faster than she knew was safe. If she thought or slowed, she'd fall, she knew it instinctively. Her right foot slid and kicked backwards, throwing her off balance but she didn't slow. Didn't dare slow. Her ankles jolted as she hit a level bit where the road cut through the staircase. She didn't pause but plunged on, her left arm

up to shield her from the almost invisible branches whipping at her.

What the hell was she running from? She was crazy, jumping at nothing. It wasn't rational, whatever was driving her forward. There was nothing behind her, she knew it. She was acting like a fool. Still plummeting down the steps, she looked back over her shoulder.

There was something there.

Something staggering through the trees behind her, mimicking her flight. Then she crashed into something solid, the impact tumbling her on to the sharp edges of the stones. Her arms at all the wrong angles to protect her from the ground, her head still twisted back.

She couldn't believe she screamed.

'Anji! Are you all right?'

Hands were turning her over, patting her arms to get her shape. She was relieved to realise they were in woollen gloves. Eleana was holding her under her shoulder now. 'Can you stand? What is it?'

Then Anji sensed Eleana realising it too. The cold air harsh with the sounds of their breathing. And nothing else. No birdsong. No rustling in the undergrowth. No distant pop-pop-pop of a gun. Pushing herself up with her elbows, taking the offered hand of her friend, Anji could feel their shared apprehension. She had thought – what little of her had been thinking – that catching up with Eleana would remove the irrational dread but now they were both afraid. Her fear had infected them both.

Looking beyond the anarchist's shoulder, Anji saw something. Flickering, glowing, not quite flowing. Like a video playing frame by frame. She could see faint outlines by its light now, see Eleana's head turning to look at what she herself was staring at.

'Don't look. Don't look. Don't look,' she started chanting but too quiet, too slow. Eleana looked.

He glanced at his watch. 4 p.m. According to the Doctor's instructions, it was almost time. Looking down into the town, he could just glimpse the busy central square, the antlike swarms of people gathered there.

The central church bell started to clamour.

There was the distant buzz of a plane, passing high overhead, the sound fading in and out as the breeze gusted across the wide valley. Staring up into the wispy clouds, Fitz glimpsed a dark shape, banking north of the town. Sasha joined him on the slope, handing over a pair of binoculars he had dug out from

the supplies in the truck, pointing. Fitz eventually spotted the plane and got a clear view of its outline.

'Heinkel, a one-eleven, I think. Scouting?'

'Probably. The main retreat will be over the bridge at Rentería and up this road.'

The droning engine faded as the plane banked away towards the east. Maybe the Doctor had got the time wrong? Fitz looked back into the town square, taking the chance to use the binoculars. As he swung about randomly, trying to find something to focus on, he noticed townspeople re-emerging from the buildings. He grinned and focused on a young woman leaning out of an upper storey window, dragging her clothes in before they got smoky and unknowingly giving him a perfect view down her camisole top. Maybe this wasn't such a bad mission after all.

Then he recognised the drumming background sound for what it was: bombers. He hadn't spent all those years listening for the aero-engines, stuck in a Anderson that his mother was sure was not deep enough to protect them, without learning to recognise the heavier drone of bomb-laden planes.

Looking back into the sky, it took Fitz a moment to spot the planes, flying along the valley in single line formation instead of the wide V of a bombing wing. They were already starting to drop neatly down one after another. The first bombs exploded short of the Rentería bridge, sending up roiling clouds of smoke and fire. Some hit the river itself, the water pluming high. A moment later, the whine of the falling bombs and the dull crump of the explosions reached them on the hillside. The wind was blowing inland now, sending the sound their way and the airborne debris towards the town, obscuring the bridge completely.

Fitz hurriedly refocused on the unshuttered window but the girl had vanished. He passed the glasses back to Sasha and hunched himself into his coat, tucking his hands up inside his armpits. Was this what he was supposed to see? A bombing raid on some distant grey bridge? It didn't tally with his idea of Guernica. He had expectations, imprinted all those years ago.

The planes had circled for another attack run, swooping down. The explosions were on the edges of the town and suddenly Fitz could see what was happening. The chilling wind was sending them off-target, the smoke compounding the problem, concealing the town. These were crude weapons, subject to the vagaries of a mistimed release or strong crosswinds that could send a bombing wing off course.

The Heinkels roared, passing overhead, banking as they turned over the high

ground. They buzzed back over, low enough to make Fitz duck, almost low enough that he could feel the turbulence they created. Following the wing, he realised there were people on the road, fleeing the now burning city. The Heinkels were opening fire before he realised what was about to happen. He wanted to scream a warning but he knew it was pointless.

Sasha was yelling futilely up at the sky.

The Republican soldiers on the ground were diving for the drainage ditches, shoving and pulling what civilians they could into the pathetic shelter. The town was completely hidden, the wind sending the smoke and flames higher and wider. The deeper rumble of heavier bombers faded in. Fitz thought they might be Junkers of some kind, pregnant with bomb loads, flying low and slow over the town.

‘They mean to destroy the roads, prevent any retreat,’ Sasha suggested.

Fitz watched in horror as the bombers began single file runs down the roads, targeting the infrastructure but hitting the terrified population. He wanted to stop watching, to run down into the carnage screaming at the planes to stop but he was here to observe, to see what had happened. It didn’t tally with the version he knew but he was becoming used to that, travelling with the Doctor. History was never tidy.

The first survivors began to straggle up the road, passing their stranded truck. Wounded soldiers and shaking women. Most kept going but some paused on the crest, looking away from the inferno towards the quiet Basque countryside beyond. Sasha went over and commandeered a handful of the militiamen, then broke into a crate of basic medical supplies. They began trying to patch up those who would stop. A motorbike wove between the new refugees, then away towards Bilbao, taking the news of the attack. Fitz joined the Russian, doing what he could and trying to get those that paused to talk to him.

Those that would speak, who could speak, spoke of an apocalypse. A sudden firestorm devouring their homes. People running into collapsing buildings for shelter, suffocating dust. Panicked, wall-eyed livestock careering down the narrow streets. Priests giving blessings to Catholics, Communists and Anarchists alike, all kneeling in the crumbling dugout shelters. The stench of burning flesh. Fitz spent five minutes stanching the flow of blood from the bullet holes in the shoulder of a nun. A *nun*. She kept asking after her sisters and it was only when Sasha muttered in his ear that Fitz realised she meant others of her order. He could see two of them were lying in the dirt down on the open roadside, not moving.

Dusk had fallen when the last bomber, its engines less laboured now it had

delivered its load, vanished back into the clouds. The town lit the impromptu field hospital though, blazing red and smelling of fire.

They met in the bar of the Hotel Continental, a place that had managed to remain neutral so far. Pia sat at a table and let the Doctor buy the drinks. Prices were up, again, as the merchantships found it harder to reach Barcelona. The Englishman had money, some kind of private income, and the Italian was willing to overlook his apparent capitalism if it got her the odd drink.

He looked as tired as she felt. He was slumped in his chair, his dark red shirt rumpled and creased from the day at the wheel, his eyes tired. His drink was untouched on the table.

‘How is your friend?’ Pia asked, when it became obvious the Doctor was not going to speak first.

‘Exhausted. She insisted on checking that Blair wasn’t there, then we drove back and spent the rest of the day arguing with McNair. They’ve gone to dinner now – he’s trying to calm her down.’

He wiped his eyes with his hands, then smiled at her. Pia had got used to that smile. It looked sweet and lovely and suggested that you were the most important thing in the world right now. It had taken her several months to realise he wasn’t even conscious that he was doing it.

‘You haven’t heard anything about him, then?’ he was asking.

Pia shrugged. She wasn’t about to answer that directly. The Comintern were becoming increasingly paranoid about leaks of information. Only last month her supervisor had been recalled to Moscow. Pia had assumed he would come back, but a week later a new official arrived and took up his old position. All mention of her former superior was struck from the records – and what fun she had had rewriting all those files. The Party were unhappy with the situation in Barcelona, that much was clear, and Pia was not about to compromise her own position because the Doctor had a cute smile. On the other hand, she had been advised to keep friends with the Englishman and his friend. Someone in the organisation was curious about them, about why they had yet to leave, yet to even apply for the papers to leave. Each day, when she arrived at the office, comrade Burton would ask how her evening had been and she would answer, careful to include any meetings with the Doctor and Anji because if she was keeping track of them then someone may well be keeping track of her. Any number of the unfamiliar faces in the bar might be agents gathering data: if she was not honest, Burton would know. And she had no desire to visit Moscow.

'All I know is that he is not the only foreigner to go missing in Barcelona,' she said after a sip of wine. That should cover it. Something for the Doctor to follow, without telling any watchers that she was guiding him. The Doctor leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees.

'Others are missing?'

'Doctor, you read the papers. Or you get Anji to. Missing people are not so uncommon here.'

'You sound like the authorities. They thought he had just run off.'

Pia shrugged again. 'Many men flee after their first taste of battle. Being under fire can damage loosely held convictions.'

'Not Blair. He had training.'

'Ah yes, the much vaunted English public school system. Maybe all the mud and fighting made him homesick?'

The Doctor slumped back in his seat with an exasperated sigh. Pia was tempted to say something, to give another hint, but she had said enough. The Doctor leaned back in his seat, resting the back of his head on it.

'I'm sorry,' she offered, 'he is not the only foreigner to go missing *here*, is all.'

The Doctor raised an eyebrow at her. Then smiled again. Not his big charming grin but a half-smile that spoke of weary awareness that she would say no more.

'I'm sorry, Pia, I just feel like I should do something to help and – oh *sugarmice* –'

He'd suddenly sunk even lower in his seat and grabbed a newspaper to hold up in front of his face. Pia frowned and looked about. She couldn't see anyone she knew in the bar. 'Doctor...'

'Shh!' He peeked at her from behind the paper, then gestured for her to sit next to him. She scooted over and looked about. She still couldn't see anyone obvious. Groups of people sat or stood about, talking in low voices, just as they were. She could hear snatches of French, English and Polish, fragments of conversations rising through the murmur. The barman was calling for a 'Senor Smallbare' to come to the telephone and an old man was tottering about collecting dead glasses.

'Over there, by the clock,' the Doctor muttered. He leaned over so their shoulders were brushing, still keeping the newspaper in front of him, and nodded in the direction of the clock. He lowered the paper slightly and she had a look. Just a typical man. Dressed in an English suit and wearing a hat, a heavy leather satchel slung over one shoulder and a pint in his hand, laughing loudly at something someone had said.

‘Who...?’

‘The *Times*’s correspondent – I really don’t want to meet him here now.’

Pia smirked. ‘You have history with Philby?’

‘Not yet. I didn’t even know he’d be here.’

Pia sat back so she could watch the bar, trying not to giggle as she saw the Doctor trying to surreptitiously watch the other Englishman. He was like a little child playing peek-a-boo, with that same intense concentration on his face. She wasn’t surprised when the other man glanced in their direction. It was always possible to sense someone watching too closely, even if you weren’t sure who. She held Philby’s eyes for a moment, so he would assume he had spotted his observer and stop glancing over. When he looked away, she leaned into the Doctor, nudging him not-so-gently.

‘Why are you trying to find Blair?’ she asked quietly.

‘I have to do *something*. Blair is as good a place to start as any.’

Pia took her drink from the table and finished it. She toyed with the empty glass for a moment, then caught the Doctor’s eye.

‘People vanish. Not all of them want to be found again,’ she remarked. She stood and gathered up her bag and gloves. Then she leaned down, putting one hand on the Doctor’s shoulder, and whispered, ‘Go back to your Hotel, look to yourself first. Look to Anji. People vanish all the time here.’

She hurried away and took the stairs down. She wanted to get back to her room and sleep. Burton would want to know everything they had discussed tomorrow.

He glanced at his watch. 4 p.m. According to the Doctor’s instructions, it was almost time. Looking down into the town, he could just glimpse the busy central square, the antlike swarms of people gathered there.

The first explosion was muted, more like a car backfire. Then the pall of smoke started to drift upwards from somewhere close to the central square. A bell started to clamour frantically. Sasha joined Fitz on the hillside, wiping his dirty hands on his trousers.

‘It can’t be a shell,’ he remarked, shading his eyes to look at the spiralling smoke, ‘we’re at least six kilometres from the front.’

‘Maybe the front has retreated?’

Sasha shook his head. ‘Not that much, not this fast. There will be some battalions falling back but the whole front cannot have fallen this quickly.’

‘An acciden-’ Fitz broke off, the loud blast of another explosion overriding his voice. This was louder, harder. It seemed impossible to believe that two

could be accidents. He resisted the urge to paraphrase Oscar Wilde. Sasha had disappeared into the back of the truck, re-emerging after a moment with a set of binoculars. He trained them on the town for a moment. Then handed them over to Fitz. It took Fitz aggravating seconds to get the focus right as he tried to see what was happening in the main square, where the explosions had started fires.

A crowd of people were milling about, shying away from the heat of the flames. Whatever it was had hit the market and Fitz started as a huge dark shadow resolved itself into a horse, caught in the conflagration. It jolted out of his view and he guessed, hoped, that someone had shot it. There were soldiers in the ragged militia uniforms in the square and he assumed they would be organising putting out the fires. There was a blur that could have been one of them running by too fast for Fitz to focus on properly, his arm hurling something.

There was another explosion.

Fitz almost dropped the binoculars, his eyes hurt by the flash of the grenade. The soldiers were bombing their own town. That wasn't right, that went against everything he knew, everything he thought the Republicans were about. Had he been misled? He glanced at Sasha, who was watching impassively as chain reactions started, the flames leaping from building to building. It was spreading fast, far too fast to be natural. Fitz thought of the crates marked aid that clearly were arms, grenades. The jerry-cans of petrol. Soviet aid of a less than humanitarian type. Fitz tried to remember when the show trials had been. '37 was the Stalin era. Thousands, millions sent to die for thinking the wrong thing, or suspected of thinking it. Sasha was an agent for the Soviets: was he part of this? He glanced again at his companion. The Russian was smoking a cigarette, staring down into the town blankly.

The roads were starting to fill with fleeing civilians, scurrying away from the town. Some had bags of belongings: already displaced refugees fleeing a town they had thought to seek refuge in. Others had nothing but themselves, clutching at their hastily thrown on clothes, stumbling on the uneven road. Fitz winced and wished he could run down to help as he saw a running woman, a small child clinging to her, stumble and fall. He lost sight of her as others ran past, perhaps even over, her. He knew he'd be caught up though, unable to reach her.

The roar of the flames could be heard now, deep as the fire drew air from all around. It smelled of dry wood popping in the heat and the unnatural gasoline fuelling it. The air even tasted of cordite. A fireball curled upwards, billowing

out black clouds. The sound of it reached them a moment later.

‘That was a garage,’ Sasha remarked impassively. ‘There goes our chance of fixing the tyre.’

Fitz turned on him, grabbing his jacket lapel and shaking him. ‘Sod the tyre, there’s people down there!’

Sasha’s arm swung up, breaking Fitz’s hold and pushing him back a few steps so that he stumbled, fell. ‘I know! We just can’t do anything!’

Fitz glared up at him, furiously pushing his hair back off his face. His shoulders sagged after a moment, knowing the Russian was right. Sasha offered his hand and he took it, letting the other man pull him upright.

‘I’ve got some basic first aid in the back of the truck,’ the Russian suggested, as a peace offering. Fitz tried to straighten his crumpled leather jacket, hitting at it to get the dust out. The first townspeople were starting to walk up the incline towards them, staring at the truck as if fearing it was the start of a blockade. Sasha spoke to some of the more alert, more able ones and they came over to help him unload the crates of medical supplies.

Fitz continued to stare down into the valley. The town was burning so strongly now that the late afternoon sky was turning orange. Within the clouds of smoke and dust, more explosions would bellow, flaring up and out. This was what he had come here to observe, to see at first hand. It wasn’t the version he’d known but he knew history could be distorted to suit political ends. He hadn’t been aware how much though. He turned away and joined Sasha in cajoling the wounded to pause for medical aid.

Fitz tried to ask them what had happened but it was the same story from all of the suddenly dispossessed: the retreating Republicans were torching the town. One old farmer spoke of seeing a cadre of militia, tearing at the church hospital doors, hauling out the ministering nuns in an echo of the religious attacks of the previous summer. The livestock was running wild, panicked through the narrow streets. It stank like a charnel house, another remarked. Someone claimed to have seen the men dousing the tree with petrol. They had to explain to Fitz that the tree was the cultural heart of the Basques: ancient, venerated. The first Basque president for generations had selected their first autonomous parliament underneath its branches only a few months earlier and now it was burning, caught at the centre of the inferno.

It was nearly 8 p.m. when the explosions stopped. The town burned on through the night, lighting up the valley and the sky.

There was blue in the creature now. The vague suggestion of arms, booted legs

crashing down in unison. Still in silence.

Then Anji was up and running again. Somehow scrambling back to her feet, half-tumbling down the nearest step, barely aware of Eleana's hand hauling her upright. They staggered down the steep steps, unable to get their legs in synch but unwilling to break their grip on each other's wrists. Something slung from Eleana's shoulder kept bumping into her. Anji didn't look back again but she could imagine the creature marching behind them. Brittle branches scratched at their faces, tangled into their clothing so they were being dragged back, held for whatever it was. Part of Anji was berating her for not taking the clear roadway when she had the chance. Stupid girl! Ridiculous images from every bad horror movie she had ever seen flashed in her mind, brighter than the real, dark surroundings.

They almost ran off the edge when the steps levelled out and curled round, Eleana stumbling as the ground crumbled under her boot. Anji yanked her wrist, hauling her back and they gasped with relief to realise they were on a smooth path. Anji's side was screaming in pain, yelling for her to stop but something was pushing her onwards, groaning. Eleana hissed a triumphant 'Si' and pulled Anji on.

'This way! The gates are this way.'

More steps to stumble down, curving wide and shallow, and suddenly they were out of the woods. They half-ran, half-staggered into a wide, gravelled space, scuffing up dirt under foot. Just as Anji fell to her knees, her muscles refusing to continue, the new moon was freed of cloud and the whole parc was bathed in faint silver. Glancing about, gasping for breath, she took in the bareness of the arena and the cold light glinting off the fractured edges of the balustrade that snaked around them. No gates. They weren't out yet. She forced herself back up, feeling her hamstrings shaking but still just under her control. Eleana was staring back the way they had come and Anji risked a glance.

There was a balcony cut into the hillside they had just run down, a colonnade beneath it. The remains of climbing plants, frozen by the winter, were picked out like silver thread against the rough rock. It looked more like it had grown than been created by man.

In the colonnade, something flickered and the sound of rifles being cocked echoed across the silent parc. Eleana was staring, frozen. When the cold ceramic banged into her calves, Anji realised she had backed towards the balustrade without letting her eyes waver from the creature in the colonnade. In the moonlight, she could see the snaking ridge was unbroken: the only way

down was close by the gaping maw of the hillside. Despite her desire to run, to avoid the creature, Anji forced herself to move back to Eleana's side. Each step ached, her mind and body screaming that she was going the wrong way.

'Eleana?'

Even through the layers of thick cloth, Anji could feel that Eleana's arm muscles were hard, frozen. So tense that it must hurt.

'We have to go on,' Anji tried. No response. She couldn't leave her here. Then she realised what the awkward shape on the Catalanian's shoulder was, the irritating rod that had tangled and bumped as they had run. Eleana's rifle. Anji took it from her unresisting shoulder, glancing up frequently at the thing in the colonnade. The glimpses suggested something almost like a man, joints like right angles, dressed in a royal blue turned black in the darkness. It was marching back and forth within the shadows, leaving afterimages of itself. As if there were twenty, all slightly out of synch.

Anji struggled with the rifle. She'd been shown how to fire one by some of the militia. But they didn't put you in the numb dark, fumbling with a worn mechanism and not being sure the bullets were loaded right. Was that right? Did she turn that over like that? It seemed right but what if she'd got it wrong? From the multiplying creatures came the sound of twenty guns being smoothly cocked. Oh Gods, she didn't think this was right!

'Eleana, will you help me out here?' Yelling now but nothing.

There was a whisper in the shadows. It could have been a command to aim. Shaking, Anji raised the rifle up to her shoulder. She didn't bother to take aim, just closed her eyes and tugged on the trigger.

The crack of the shot jolted Eleana back into movement. Anji staggered back from the recoil, then was moving towards the break in the balustrade, not even registering where her shot had gone. Eleana grabbed the warm weapon from her as they ran and then they were turning and clattering down more steps. Swaying as they curled round with a drop on either side and their sight tried to readjust from the moonlight above them.

Anji realised they were under the arena now, pillars arching up and bouncing their breathing back at them. It was still there, glowing and ducking as they ran through the corridors of stone trees. Anji spun on her heels, trying to get a clear view now, but it just gave her glimpses, partial views that made no sense. The pillars were spinning around her, disorientating. Looking up, she gasped as faint light glinted off another mosaic corbel. She wanted to fall down on her knees and let it be over.

Another shot cracked out and then Eleana had hold of her wrist, jolting her

back and dragging her on.

Down again, always downwards. She almost recoiled as the moonlight flickered over a shape next to them. A dragon or an iguana or something, splayed out in stone.

At last, the gates. Flanked by witches' cottages. Heavy iron. Black, coiling iron, rolled out like smoke. Eleana slammed into them first, shouldering to open them. She cried out when they rattled but didn't budge. Locked.

'Who the hell locked the gates?' she yelled. Then she started cursing in Catalan and shaking at the bars. The street beyond was well-lit, silent, empty. Anji's sight jumped about, taking in impressions, looking for a way through or over or round. Could they climb them?

'Hey! Hey! Comrade!' Eleana was yelling at a figure running up the street.

Anji pulled at the gates, hoping they were just being stupid enough to push when it said pull. The lock jangled at her, laughing.

'Stand back,' the man said and they scrambled away. Then he was shooting at the lock, aiming steadily. Six shots into the iron and then he kicked at it. It buckled. Not much, just enough to create a gap. Eleana squeezed through first, groaning as the hot metal gripped her. Anji was pushing her, shoving so the way would be free. She could almost sense the creature, creatures, advancing. Then Eleana was gone and hands were grabbing her, helping her through. She felt her shirt rip as it caught a twisted edge, then the delayed pain of the metal gouging at her arm. She almost fell into the road, one leg still between the gates. Someone was pulling her through, holding her tightly upright.

'Anji? Are you all right? Who were you running from?'

She realised it was a familiar man holding her up against him, gripping her upper arms to keep her steady.

'Jueves?'

She didn't believe it. She focused on his question. They had been running. . . they had been running from. . .

'There's something in the parc,' Eleana was gabbling, 'it came after us.'

Anji looked back through the twisted metal. There was nothing there. Just a dried up fountain and a driveway. Then that vanished. She was rather embarrassed to realise she was blacking out. All she could feel as her vision went and her legs buckled, was the rough material of Jueves's dark blue coat.

Chapter Seven

Odiós

Flicking through the notebooks, Eleana spotted a familiar street name. It was handwritten, in a fluid, hurried script which she guessed was the Doctor's. The majority of notes in the book were in the neat, slightly squared small caps that Anji used. The street name was scrawled across a page, disturbing the neat lines of Anji's work. There was a question mark after it. *Escudellers?*

Miquel. It was the street where they had found Miquel. Or what she knew was her brother's body, though he had never been identified. The scrawl had a date in November next to it – the same date as he had been found. The same date, she realised, as the Doctor and Anji had first appeared in Barcelona.

She glanced at the bed. Anji was still unconscious. Or perhaps her faint had slipped into sleep. Eleana ran her finger down the notes on the same page. There was nothing obvious, nothing directly about her or her brother. These notes were, she suspected, fairly early. Whole extracts from newspaper reports were replicated, annotated with different coloured ink. Skimming the other pages, actively looking for familiar personal words, she found nothing more. She carefully closed the notepad and put it back where she had found it. She had been idly casting about the room, looking for something to do. They had rushed back here, Jueves holding up the exhausted Anji and then hurrying off to find the Doctor. Eleana had been left to keep Anji company, wake her up a bit, but the Asian woman had sunk on to the bed and not moved. Like she was the only one to have spent the evening running through the parc in terror. The note had her curious now, though, so Eleana picked up the next book in the stack on the dressing table.

This one was chronological at least. Each date had a page, sometimes two, to itself. The margin had little reference codes in it. This was the first key to Anji's project, clearly. Eleana still wasn't sure what the two were up to. They had said they were working on stories to file back to the English papers, something to do whilst they waited to leave the city, but Eleana's party held the wire service for Barcelona and there was no record of any stories being filed

by them. November 23 caught her eye. It had been double-underlined with a vigorousness that had torn at the paper. Durruti's funeral. She read the next line.

E thinks Durruti killed by sniper. Disparity.

'Perhaps I should keep my diary under my pillow?' Anji asked.

Eleana looked up. Anji had propped herself up on the bed and was looking at her calmly, one eyebrow raised and her head at an angle. Anji gave a short smile.

'S'OK, *that's* not my personal diary anyway. Find anything good?'

'E is me?'

Anji sat up fully, curling her legs up under herself and leaning back against the faded wallpaper. 'Yes. Saves time.'

'You're keeping track of me?'

'No! Just the odd note of stuff. We're looking at the way different people see the same event. For our work? You've got a perspective that's useful.' Anji waved a hand about. 'In the final book, we'll change the name.'

Eleana thumped the notebook back down on the dresser and stood. She couldn't believe Anji had been so foolish. The notes revealed when Eleana was about, when she wasn't, what she thought.

'Can you imagine what the NKVD would think if they saw that?' she asked. She realised she had shouted when Anji winced back against the headboard. 'It's not just me, it's lots of people. They could use it against us.'

'But –'

'Anji, you read the papers every day. You hear the stories that can't be printed. You know people disappear in this city. Where do you think they go? You've heard the gunfire in the night, you must have done. Yet what do you do? You keep a diary, a list of who was where when! You'll betray us.'

Anji got off the bed and glared back at Eleana. She folded her arms defiantly. 'You're being paranoid.'

'You're not even accurate! Durruti was a maverick, killed by his own men. He wasn't hit by a sniper – that's just propaganda.'

Anji's jaw dropped. 'What? I was there! You said that. You said he was your hero!'

'She seems fine to me,' the Doctor remarked from the doorway. It took Eleana a moment to realise he was addressing Jueves. The two men must have arrived during their argument and she hadn't heard the Doctor unlock the door. Anji was scowling at them both.

There were still fires burning in the morning.

Throughout the night, more people had arrived, both from the blasted city and from the Bilbao road. The ones approaching the town were gabbling, shocked at the fiery red eastern night sky, disbelief at the rumours bleeding away in the face of it. The trickle of fleeing townspeople had thickened, become a near-silent flood. Sasha's supplies, intended for who knew what frontline company, were gone. Fitz had ensured a couple of blankets were hidden under the front seats and then handed out the rest. On the slopes, anywhere there was a clear space, the people were sitting watching Guernica burn. Some had lain down, shivering and huddled, trying to sleep despite the chill April air and the unnatural light.

In the grey misty morning, Fitz took the sabotaged tyre and started towards the glowing town. Sasha had caught up with him before the bottom of the hill and they walked on, taking turns to roll the tyre. The silence, and the exhaustion, made Fitz think of those nights which were so late the walk home was in the empty morning. He had put his head down for an hour, scrunched up in the front of the truck and his eyes almost falling shut, but he had failed utterly to sleep. The mist was turning smoggy as they reached the outskirts of the town: thick, damp and smelling of fire.

In the smog, the city looked almost white, the black shapes dulled and blurred. Occasionally, they would pass people in the ruins, turning over rubble or throwing it aside. The crackle of still-burning buildings was muted, at one remove in the deadening atmosphere. Already the outlines of the buildings were familiar: windows blankly staring into nothing, or half a room hanging off the side of a house. Uneven mounds of fallen masonry and timber, and the odd harsh crash as another part collapsed. It was a landscape he had known before and he walked in a daze through the streets, focusing on moving the spare forward.

When the tyre bumped into something, Fitz assumed it was a piece of debris and pushed harder. Then he realised it was a body. He felt an urgent desire to be sick but all he had eaten in the long night was a little stale bread and the watery wine. He had nothing to be sick with. Sasha had been walking ahead, meandering down the street, glancing about. He came back when he realised Fitz had stalled.

'I think the main square is this way. We'll find someone there who knows of a garage that is still working.'

Fitz was leaning on the tyre with both hands, arms locked and shaking.

'There're bodies,' he managed. The Russian nodded.

‘Durango was similar, two weeks ago. There a bomb hit a church during mass. Not good.’

‘Not good? Sasha! Your side did this! Your stupid soldiers set fire to the town!’

‘What are you talking about? It was bombed by the Nazis.’

They stared at each other, frowning. Fitz could remember the evening clearly: all night handing out miserly rations and water to lost faces, glugging on wine to keep moving. He could remember their testimony, those that would speak. The town was firebombed by the retreating reds. The town was hit accidentally, mistargetted. The Nazi planes had targeted the town and strafed the fleeing townspeople. Fitz’s frown deepened. He had been stood on that hillside throughout the attack. He had watched though he had hated his impotence to stop events. And now he had no idea what those events were.

Looking up, he realised Sasha was looking at him in the same way, as if uncertain what to say. Fitz decided to block it, worry about it when he came to telling the Doctor what he had seen. He shrugged at Sasha, then they lifted the wheel over the remains and started pushing it towards the blackened heart of the town.

Anji scowled at the Doctor. Typical of him to pop up with some smart remark and disrupt her argument. Jueves was looking at her with concern, his glasses exaggerating his widened eyes. Oh yes, that would be because of fainting in his arms. Anji blushed slightly. Fainting! It was embarrassing.

‘Oh. Er, hello.’

Eleana was still glaring at her. ‘You are a dangerous fool, Anji,’ she spat out as she started grabbing her coat, ‘you think knowledge is innocent, that it harms no one to write this down. You can’t see what can be done with it.’

The Catalanian had got her coat on now and was slinging her rifle over her shoulder. She gave Anji a final dirty glance and then pushed past the men in the doorway with a muttered curse.

Anji groaned and sat back on to the bed. The Doctor moved into the room properly and leaned against the dresser, stuffing his hands into his trouser pockets. He studied his scuffed shoes for a moment, then glanced at her, one eyebrow raised. Did we miss something?’

‘Yeah, Eleana’s paranoia trip. How was Blair?’

‘Missing.’

‘Oh.’

Anji glanced at Jueves, still leaning against the doorjamb as if waiting for an invitation. As if he hadn't already been in this room frequently. She gestured at him with her head, nodding for him to come in and close the door behind him. With the Doctor leaning against the only other bit of furniture, the other man settled gingerly on the edge of the bed next to her.

'Are you feeling better?' he asked.

'Much. Nothing like a bitch-fight to clear the terror.'

Jueves grinned at her, then started rummaging in the pockets of his jacket until he pulled out a crumpled bag and passed it over. Conscious of them both watching, Anji opened it. A bar of chocolate; dark, bitter and slightly squishy where it had melted at some point in its journey. She smiled at Jueves and broke a bit off to eat. He grinned back. 'I thought that might make you feel better.'

'Oh yes. Well, you know they say chocolate is better than –' Anji broke off, looking at the two men in her room. Neither of whom would get it. 'Never mind.'

Nibbling at the chocolate to make it last longer, Anji related what she had seen, or thought she had seen, at the parc. 'I really didn't think there was anything there, until I turned to look,' she commented, already pushing away the panic she had felt as nonsense.

The Doctor and Jueves started looking at the references on the map. Anji sat back and watched them. Jueves had become part of the team, really, after they had realised they were stranded. Quick-minded, able to move about the country with relative ease, bilingual. He had helped her construct her translating dictionary and taught her the basics of the language. When the Doctor was off brooding in his hotel room, Jueves would take her out for food or dancing. Although she always refused the dancing since she hadn't really progressed past the sixth-form shuffle. They'd not told him everything, of course, but she suspected he'd long-since realised they were engaged in a search for something, rather than just filling time as they claimed. He was like an intelligent, witty and competent version of Fitz.

Anji bit down hard on the chocolate in surprise, hurting her teeth. Fitz wasn't gone, he would reappear. That she could even think of Jueves as a replacement disturbed her. It had been five months, true, but only a few days for the old scruff and he was bound to appear soon. Like a particularly battered bad penny. Probably bruised somewhere from getting in a fight. Ready to irritate and needle her, wind her up over, well, anything. Everything. Being with the Doctor and Fitz was like being stuck with not one but two younger brothers on per-

manent sugar-rushes. They might annoy her and aggravate her but she wasn't about to supplant one of them. Glancing up, she saw Jueves smile at her briefly, then bow his head over the stack of papers he was searching through. No matter how cute the possible replacement was. Or how much chocolate he bought her. Fitz was, technically, missing and she was bothered that she missed him.

'Eleana said people were going missing,' she remembered aloud.

'Like Blair, you mean?' Jueves asked.

'I suppose so. It was just part of her rant. She's really changed, recently. She just claimed to think the opposite of what she said back in November, I'm sure of it.'

The Doctor's fingers were tapping along the edge of the dresser as he still stared up at the map. From her angle, she could see he was biting at his lower lip.

'Pia said something similar. I did some asking about at the Continental. One woman remembers Blair being there a few days ago.'

'That's a good thing, isn't it?'

The Doctor turned and leaned back against the furniture, folding his arms. 'Well, it would be if both he and the man he left with had been seen again since.'

Anji realised she had finished the chocolate, despite her intention to save some of it. She found it hard to remember that there were shortages, despite her darned stockings and limp hair. Soap for shampoo, urgh. She put the wrapper to one side and slid off the bed, joining the two men by the paper map. Grabbing one of the index notebooks, she started flicking through for references to the other hotel, or to Blair.

'Who was he with?' Jueves was asking as she moved back to the bed.

'Someone called Marc Rhein. You know him?'

'Only by reputation. A French journalist, anti-communist. He's written some stuff about the Soviet secret police, the NKVD. He's vanished too?'

'Seems so. His room still has his belongings, yet he's not been seen or heard of since the weekend.'

Anji mentally made a note to look for references to Rhein as well, or articles by him. This whole business would be a lot easier if the Doctor had allowed her to use post-it notes. Or if all the post-its weren't in the sealed desk drawers of the TARDIS library. As it was, she had to mark places of interest with bits of paper and they kept falling out. She realised that the room's phone was ringing, a clattering bell. Without thinking, she picked it up.

'Hola.'

She listened for a moment to the crack and hiss of an open line. ‘Hola? Qui est?’

Glancing up, both the Doctor and Jueves were watching her, waiting to see who it was. ‘There’s no one there, must be a wrong –’ There was a clicking on the receiver, forcing Anji to return her attention to it. ‘Hola? Hello?’

A further click, then silence followed by the burr of a dialtone. She rattled the cradle a couple of times, then smirked at herself for doing so. Yeah, that always worked in the movies.

‘Wrong number. Or a bad connection.’

She dialled the desk in the basement, where the switchboard operator was. ‘Rosita? Si, si. Listen, you just put a call through. Who was it? Uh-huh. Oh. Are you sure? OK, thanks.’

Anji put the phone back into its cradle slowly and carefully, frowning at it.

‘She didn’t put the call through,’ she told the Doctor, ‘she says we’ve not had a call all day.’

The Doctor looked at her with a calm certainty. ‘Somebody is watching us.’

He was living with his sisters now, in an apartment in Casa des Punxes. They had a corner flat, the wide windows looking down on to La Diagonal. When Durruti’s funeral procession had marched past, just about the same time as Juan was killed, they had closed all the shutters and blinds and sat with the lights on at midday waiting for the crowds to be gone.

Sugrañes lived in fear, every day and every night. He had stopped going to the Sagrada Família now. Without Juan he couldn’t raise the bravery to go back there at first and now he couldn’t risk his sisters coming under suspicion as well. He was sure the apartment block was watched. The turret apartment above them had been requisitioned a few weeks previously and a machine gun hauled up to it, the sharp metal stand gouging holes in the plaster of the stairwell. He daren’t speak out. If, when, there was trouble the gun would be able to fire at anything trying to cross the wide junction next to them.

At night, he would carefully pull up a boxload of recovered works from their hiding place beneath the floorboards of his room and spend hours cataloguing them, trying to recall what they were. Some of his colleagues, some of his sisters’ friends, were talking quietly of when the Nationalists would restore order. Perhaps even the monarchy. They seemed to expect liberation within weeks, but Doménech Sugrañes was used to thinking in longer terms than they. He had spent twenty years on a single project and he could see it would be another

hundred, even more, before that was complete. Franco was working fast, but it would be another year, maybe even two, before Barcelona was restored.

By day, he took a walk around the Eixample. Every day the same locations, although often from different routes as he had to run errands for his sisters. They were both too afraid to leave the apartment. He would visit all the Master's works, except the gardens in Parc Güell, and note any damage to them. The details that would need restoring, once this was over. There was no law against checking the architecture, he was sure. It also gave him ideas, chances to meditate how Antoni had envisaged the Sagrada Família in its final form.

It was dusk as he approached the last site before heading home. His younger sister had asked him to find some butter: it was Marisa's birthday at the weekend and she wanted to bake their elder sister a cake. There was no guard on La Pedrera's side door, so he let himself through the wrought-iron gate. An old college friend lived on the top floor, so he made his way up in the lift, knowing he had an excuse, should anyone ask why he was here. Then up another flight of stairs into the roof space. There was a guard here, sat leaning against a wall with a good line of sight down the stairwell but he had timed his visit right and it was *Rodríguez*. A former student.

'Buenos días.'

'Hola señor *Sugrañes*, you want the roof?'

'If I may.'

Rodríguez smiled and stood. They walked through the ribs of the vault together, the way lit with naked bulbs strung on twisted wire. The bare bricks of the next stairs appeared and *Rodríguez* unlocked the gate across it. He went up first, calling out to the man stationed on the roof that it was a friend. The guard shrugged at him, indifferent, and went to share a cigarette with *Rodríguez*.

Emerging into the evening sun, *Sugrañes* smiled. The warm setting light to the west bathed the stone in yellow light, glinted off the mosaics. The roof was a dreamscape, curving and rolling like the sea. The stone had been carved, smoothed, sculpted. The Master had put care into every detail: even the chimney stacks were sculpted, formed, designed to be aesthetic. The caps which ensure nothing nested across the airways were formed into soldier's helmets, the smoke drifting out of the blank eyesockets. Not the mere functionality the Republicans seemed to want. Wide steps were cut into the roofs. At the unprotected edges, if one braved it, there was a good view of a junction. *Sugrañes* walked along the roof carefully, taking the deep steps of it slowly and methodically, looking about at the stacks. There was a chip on one of the tiled forms, he noted sadly. Nothing that couldn't be fixed.

He climbed down another step, turned to look at the cluster of three sculpted chimneys above and behind him. They reared up behind him, the sky on fire behind the stone helmets.

And then, they turned to look back at him.

They parked up by a farm labourer's cottage late that night. The distant crump of shells suggested they were still closer to the front than they would have liked to have been. And they were, as far as Fitz was concerned, driving the wrong way. He grouched at Sasha as they jumped down into the empty, abandoned, yard.

'I still don't get why we're driving this way to get to Barcelona. I could have just got a train.'

Sasha gave a melodramatic sigh, suggesting Fitz was the most stupid person in the world. 'I told you already: because between here and Barcelona is held by the Nationalists. You might think you can charm your way through them with your papers but I won't. I plan to get over the border to France. You can go where you like. Now, hush.'

The Russian hefted his handgun out of his waistband and held it up ready to drop and fire. He tapped on the door of the building with it, standing to one side of the frame. Fitz leant on the warm front of the truck, his arms folded, and grinned as he watched the performance. Sasha rapped on the door harder, listened for a moment and then gestured for Fitz to join him. Fitz ducked back into the cab to grab one of the blankets and a bottle of wine, then sauntered over. Sasha was lighting a gas lamp in the kitchen that took up most of the ground floor. He motioned for Fitz to wait and vanished up the crooked wooden stairs, treading lightly.

Fitz glanced about the room. The table was laid but coated with a thick film of dust and powdered ceiling plaster. Moving the lamp slightly he realised one grey shape was a lump of cheese, disguised with mould. He poked it with a knife, then covered his nose and mouth at the rancid smell that rose up and made him gag. Chairs were pushed back at odd angles. Fitz hooked one with his foot and drew it up behind him. As he sat he put the lamp on a clear space on the table. It was like the *Mary Celeste* or something, as if the occupants had just stepped outside for a moment. Except for the heavy dust and the decaying food. He felt vaguely like he was intruding.

Feet clattered back down the stairs and he started. Sasha swung round the frame into the room and grinned. 'There is no one here, we're requisitioning it.'

Fitz grinned and turned to the stove. 'I'll get this fired up.'

After a search, they found a salted ham hanging in a dark corner and carved it up. It went down well enough with some wine. A longer search produced a tin with some ground coffee in the bottom. Sasha brewed it up over the hearth. It was bitter and grainy with a film of something slick and oily over it. They clicked cups and knocked it back like shots, grimacing and then grinning at each other. Then they started on the wine in earnest.

When the last bottle of wine they had brought in with them clinked over empty, Sasha hauled Fitz to his feet and they staggered up the narrow stairs to the upper room. Fitz fell gratefully on to the bed, yelping as he rolled into the wide shallow dip in the middle. He managed to roll on to his back and toe off his boots, letting them fall to the floor with a thump. He looked up at the ceiling, a faint grey blur above him. He closed his eyes as a brief dizziness swirled over him. He was spending far too much time drunk.

'What did you see at Guernica?' he asked, willing his head to stop spinning and pay attention. Perhaps getting Sasha drunk was the trick to getting the truth out of him. Hadn't he rationalised that hours ago, back on the first bottle? Well, at least he had remembered. Sasha settled on the other side of the bed, his hands behind his head.

'I don't know.'

Fitz stared at the ceiling for another moment, just to make sure it wasn't going anywhere, then looked at the dark blur of the Russian.

'I thought it was German planes bombing the town at first,' the other man admitted eventually.

'At first?'

'Yes. Have you got any tobacco? Thanks.'

There was another pause, broken with the rasp of Sasha's lighter and the flare of its flame. 'Then. . . it was like I was seeing all these different versions, all at once. And they are all correct. That makes no sense, does it?'

Fitz's eyes had adjusted now and were trailing a crack in the ceiling plaster. Under the thin cigarette smoke and the alcohol on his breath, Fitz could smell traces of the people that had lived in the cottage, slept on the bed. Ghosts of people that weren't dead yet. Just like the empty shells of the refugees who were dead inside but still moving.

He considered telling Sasha he had experienced the same effect on the hillside. Except. . . except hadn't the Doctor said something about only travellers being able to see this kind of discrepancy? That was why the Doctor had needed a first-hand account. Fitz had been assuming Sasha was a Communist agent,

but what if he was something else? As before, he found himself sobering fast at the realisation he had to be on guard.

‘No,’ he told the Russian, ‘there’s only one version of the truth.’

‘Tell me what you saw at the parc.’

Eleana looked up from her notebook, annoyed. Jueves was standing by her desk, or rather the half of a desk she shared with another writer. She had a stack of reports to sift and work into articles for the next paper, the deadline was starting to press and now she had Anji’s pet journalist asking her questions.

‘There was something – someone – following us through the parc.’

She shrugged and looked back at her work. There was a report that a prominent architect had gone mad on a rooftop and had to be led home in a state of terror, claiming the chimneys were watching him. Was that worth a paragraph somewhere? She hoped Jueves would get the hint and leave. Didn’t he have his own work to do? She didn’t want to talk to him. He was a freelancer, stringing for some newspaper back in the US, feeding the overseas desire for talk of failing revolutions. Oh, he was Spanish, but he wasn’t *Catalan*. He spoke it well enough, but the odd Castillian word slipped through revealing his origins. He was excitable, disappearing off to research stories at the least excuse. More interested in entertaining than informing. She’d snuck a look at some of his copy, all fine poetic words creating a picture of Barcelona. He wasn’t here because he believed in the causes, he was here to be a war tourist for the ones too scared to leave their own countries but voracious for the thrill. The way he chased after things reminded her of Miquel, running off down the street after a momentary fancy.

‘Eleana?’ He hadn’t gone away. He’d found a chair and dragged it over so he could sit at her elbow. ‘Tell me the details – it could be important.’

‘What, for Anji’s little project? Or for an amusing piece for New York?’

‘No. For you. Tell me, then you can forget it. You were shaking, Eleana, wild-eyed. I thought you were going to collapse. Just being followed through a parc won’t do that to a person.’

Not normally, no. This was Barcelona though. Eleana had noticed the routinely rotating figures sat in the window of the café opposite the door of the office. Always the same pairs of people, always arriving at the same time each day and hanging about over coffees for hours. *La Batalla* was being watched. Notes were being taken of who came and went. She was sure of it. She remembered Joaquín’s comment about the phones. All the information that buzzed about this building, the uses it could be put to. Being followed suggested they

were preparing for something, stepping up the steady smear campaign against the anarchists. And it suggested that she was on the list of targets worth watching. She shrugged at Jueves.

‘I thought it was the Guardia de Asalto, come to make us disappear.’

‘Why?’

‘It was the uniforms mainly.’

‘You saw them clearly?’

‘Yes.’ Now go away. She could hear the teleprinter in the corner clatter into life, jerkily spilling out new information.

‘So why did you say you were being chased by a monster?’

‘I don’t think I did.’

‘Eleana, I was there. You were shaking and babbling about monsters.’

Something bore down on her again. All clutching hands and melting figures. Calling her name faintly. Moonlight on rifles. *Aim*.

‘I was confused. I meant that the Asaltos are monsters.’

Jueves was looking sceptical. He took off his wire frames for a second and polished them on his shirt sleeve. Without them his thin unshaven face looked a lot harder, older. Eleana felt as if he was looking at her mind, intruding into her thoughts. It was ridiculous. She turned back to flicking through the stack of work.

‘Assassís!’

García was standing by the teleprinter, waving a torn off message in his hands. The handful of staff were turning to look. As she spun in her seat, Eleana caught a glimpse of Jueves’s face. He has blanched, and she wondered briefly why.

‘It’s from Bilbao. “Guernica burning. Thousands civilians dead or injured. German planes raided for approx. four hours.”’

There was silence for a moment, or as close to silence as the room ever got. The printer continued to churn out more data. Then everyone was talking at once. García was reaching for the tattered map that served as their only reference material, already planning the headline and checking the location. Eleana turned back to Jueves. He had gone.

‘The problem is that although there are all these bizarre events, there’s no similarity, no concordance.’

They’d swapped places. The Doctor’s jacket lay on the bed next to him whilst Anji leant on her dresser, staring up at the map and tapping her chin with her pen. He looked half-asleep, relaxed. She still felt wired from earlier, jumping

at the least noise in the street. She had been relieved when Jueves had gone off to get Eleana's version of events, the Doctor having insisted on getting both accounts. The way he watched her, the way she could still remember the feel of his coat in her hands... it was embarrassing. She just wanted to concentrate on the work.

'Which is why,' the Doctor suggested, 'you should tell me what you saw in the parc.'

Anji turned and leant against the furniture. She hitched herself a little higher so she was half-sitting on the dresser. She really ought to get a chair, she thought for the umpteenth time since they had relocated to the hotel. They had started out working in the Doctor's back room but the view from the window, the dark gloom of the so-called lightwell had depressed them too much. The Doctor had likened it to his basement flat, gathered their stuff and barged into her room. At least here they could open the French windows and watch Las Rambles. If she'd got around to getting a chair, she could have sat by the window. Leaning over the verdigris Modernista rail for hours. She pushed herself off the dresser and walked over to the windows. The street was sparsely lit, the first pale green leaves on the trees lit from below. She could pretend she was in Paris in the springtime, so long as she didn't look down.

'Anji?' The Doctor had his very reasonable voice on, the one that lured you into revealing stuff best kept private. She didn't particularly want to detail it all but he'd been gently pushing ever since Jueves had left. So she started, trying to explain how she started to respond by instinct, not reason. She berated herself on her stupid decisions and tried to explain the creature she saw.

'At first, it was just a shape, something indistinct. Once I caught up with Eleana though it became more defined. I thought it might be a civil guard, but it didn't move right. It was if it was leaving echoes of itself behind it. You know like when you drag a mouse across the screen but it leaves a trail because resources are low? Like that.'

The Doctor had moved back to their map and was looking at the list of stories connected with the parc. 'That doesn't fit with what anyone else has said.'

'Nothing does! That's the whole damn problem!'

'No, no. You see, if you look at other accounts they all know what they saw, or thought they saw. There's the odd overlap: a woman in Eixample claimed a statue was watching her, another claimed his carved balcony came to life. The two aren't the same event but they are internally consistent. You didn't see something definite, you saw traces of something else.'

'Meaning?'

‘Meaning maybe I was on the right track using the TARDIS to search for anomalies!’ He almost bounced as he crossed to the window and gripped her arms. He shook her slightly. ‘I was on the right track – we can perceive this because we’re slightly dislocated.’

He beamed at her, the first genuine big smile since November. She’d have enjoyed seeing it more if he would stop shaking her: she thought he’d be dislocating her shoulders if this kept up. And she didn’t want to see his face fall, not now that he was animated at last, but...

‘But the TARDIS isn’t working, Doctor.’

She expected it to be like kicking a puppy but all he did was release her arms. From the street shouts were echoing, distorting. She didn’t try to listen for once but watched the Doctor as he paced, his hands describing lazy arcs as he tried to articulate his thoughts.

‘Yes, but maybe there’s a reason for that. An external reason. I’ve been assuming something is intrinsically wrong with the girl, but what if she is just can’t handle the data coming in? Just like you with the whatever it was in the parc! I’ve been looking in the wrong place. You were right, Anji. The solution is here, in these snippets of people’s lives and not in wires or books.’

Anji realised she was grinning too, not least because he’d admitted she might have had the right approach. She hugged herself, holding the satisfied feeling tight.

‘So...?’ she asked.

The hammering on the door made them both jump. Anji realised the shouts in the street were getting louder, more coordinated. Five months in this city had taught her to recognise the sound of an angry mob. She’d not been paying attention. She quickly closed the windows to Las Rambles and moved away from it. The Doctor had flattened himself against the wall next to the door. They were getting far too used to this. She knelt down behind the bed, ready to duck under it at the sign of trouble.

‘Qui est?’ The Doctor called, keeping eye contact with her.

‘Jueves, Doctor. It is Jueves. There’s news, big news!’

The Doctor smiled, raising his eyes upwards, then unlocked the door. Anji leant on the bed, not bothering to rise. She’d had quite enough today and just wanted to crash out. She had a feeling the big news wouldn’t help her sleep.

Jueves was flustered, his arms holding smudged newsheets. He slammed the door behind him and threw the crumpled papers on to the bed. Anji spotted one word before all the others. Guernica. She grabbed the nearest paper. Guernica had been razed to the ground. It had been bombed by the Luftwaffe.

By accident. By design. She scrambled in the papers, skimming the hazy, confusing reports. There were no photographs yet, just reports of the burning sky, the skeletal ruins.

‘Yesterday,’ Jueves said, ‘It happened yesterday.’

Anji hadn’t found a familiar name in any of the reports and sat back on her heels. The Doctor was glancing through the reports methodically, smoothing the papers. He evidently drew the same conclusion.

‘Fitz. He’ll be coming back.’

Chapter Eight

Treballar Pel Control De La Situació

Fitz looked about the valley. They had left the truck near the border, Sasha throwing the keys to a man leading a small handful of men out from the foothills. Then they had wrapped themselves up in as much clothing as they could find, stuffed their bags with anything they might find useful and set off on foot. Into the Pyrenees. It was an insane route, Fitz was sure. Across the mountains to freedom, then back again. He looked about the valley again, with the snow-coated peaks high above them and the thin, well-trodden trail they were walking along.

‘Climb every mountain, ford every stream, some line I’ve forgot, till you find that dream.’

Sasha, walking ahead, turned back and laughed as Fitz’s voice bounced back from the sides. ‘You sing? I had no idea.’

Fitz shrugged. He just hadn’t been able to resist it. As if some inner part of him had dared him to do it, to see if his suspicions about Sasha were right. No one in 1937 would know that song. Then again, Fitz told himself, you could have not been thinking at all. At least he hadn’t suggested they dressed as nuns to make their break for France. After seeing the wounded women back in Guernica, the blood-soaked habits, he couldn’t bring himself to think of nuns as funny any more. Sasha had paused now, and waited for him to catch up. ‘What was the song?’

‘Oh,’ Fitz paused to think of the best lie, ‘something I wrote.’

Sasha grinned again. ‘You are full of secrets, Fitz. Come, what shall we sing?’

They settled on blues songs, the back catalogue of Ella Fitzgerald, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday. Music both of them had heard from whiskery wireesses, the signal fading in and out. Sasha’s voice was midrange as well and they fell to harmonising, taking turns to be lead. Sasha knew the route out well enough that they walked through the night, rather than try to find shelter.

‘Sasha? Why do you know these songs? Shouldn’t you be all –’ Fitz waved a hand about trying to find the right way to express his opinion of Soviet music

without offending. It wouldn't do to get stranded up here, no matter how beautiful the cold night was.

'Ah, tomorrow, Fitz, I will teach you some good revolutionary songs that you can sing on the barricades, yes? *Contra ataques muy rabiosos, rumba la rumba la rumba la, deberemos resistir. Ay Carmela, Ay Carmela!* But tonight we are clear of all that.'

Fitz decided not to push it, although he mentally filed it on his list on inconsistencies about his companion. Things that made him wonder about the Russian. He suspected the other man had a similar list on him, since he was bound to be doing something wrong, something out of time. They walked on, resting every hour and stamping the warmth back into their feet. Fitz could feel a blister forming on his heel.

Just after dawn, the palest yellow pink sky in the east, crystal cold, they reached a tiny building, little more than a lean-to in the lee of the rocks. There was a battered Citroën parked beside it, sparkling white with frost.

And two dark figures spilling out from it, one with a rifle at the hip.

'Arreste! Qui est?'

The rifle was pointing just above their heads, held loose enough that Fitz could almost see it dropping level and firing casually.

Fitz slowed, pausing midstep, and letting his eyes take in if there was anywhere to dive to in the narrow pass. Sasha still moved forward, his hands out, held near his shoulders.

'Bonjour monsieur.'

In the still pale light, the colours were drained, grey. Fitz hung back slightly, ensuring Sasha was shielding him. Let him do the talking, just keep quiet and alert. He raised his hands in mimicry, hoping he looked suitably pitiful to be a refugee. The other guard gestured for them to move closer and, as they did so, Fitz glimpsed red at the man's neck, a scarf tied and almost hidden by the upturned collar.

'Buenos dias, comrade. You turned back?'

They must be the men who had brought the volunteers up to this narrow gateway into the chaos, Fitz realised. They would bring up a truckload, pass them on to a guide and wait overnight to see how many turned back at the prospect of the freezing climb across to the war. They had probably ferried up the men Sasha had given the truck to on the other side. Sasha was talking. 'No, no. We have just come out. We need to get to Perpignan. We have trains to catch.'

Alberto sat on the veranda of the hospital, reading a well-thumbed newspaper. He struggled to turn the page, what with having one arm bound up against his chest. The sandy-haired man sat next to him, his knee stiff in front of him, leaned over.

‘Here, let me get that for you, man.’

Alberto smiled and let the Scot fold the pages over. ‘Thank you, Jorges.’

‘Ah, s’no problem.’

The other man handed the paper back and went back to his novel. Alberto returned to reading the report on Guernica. He was extremely bothered by it. At first, when the news had drifted along the line, his centuria had presumed that the Basque town had been levelled in a Nationalist air strike, just as Durango had been. Then other stories started to be whispered. Franco had claimed the town was razed by the Republicans as they retreated. That was obviously propagandist lies. Except. . .

He’d been out of the trench, crawling about on his stomach pulling up potatoes for them to cook. Normally, the Nationalist line left them to do it. But for once they opened fire. Alberto had been lucky: the bullet had shattered his humerus but not hit anything vital. He’d been carted, literally, back to a field hospital where he had been patched up and then sent on to a town hospital to recover. And there he had got the latest newspapers, seen newsreels. Talked to other volunteers from other fronts, like Jorges, who had come back shot up. And it seemed their initial presumption had been wrong. The haunting ghostlike images of Guernica had been created when fires were started. And it looked increasingly like those fires had been started deliberately. There were too many witness accounts, too much evidence.

It was hard to accept that the Nationalists had been right about this, hard to accept his own side had not been truthful. They were supposed to be the new, uncorrupted future of Spain. He continued to read the report: an eyewitness account by a priest. Ordinarily, he would dismiss it. The church tended to side with the Nationalists except Father de Onaindía who was a close friend of Aguirre, the Basque leader. He had travelled to Paris, was spreading his version widely outside Spain and the account was plausible, believable. They had firebombed their own town rather than let it stand for the enemy to capture.

It was a barbarity.

He folded the paper up, laboriously, and tucked it into the knapsack at his feet. The truck would be here soon. He was being sent back to Barcelona on leave.

It took a day for the paperwork to be sorted out, then they parted at the station. Sasha handed over the papers and gave Fitz a lengthy list of instructions and advice. Phrases to say, ways to duck and dive back across the leaking border. Fitz took the envelopes, the tobacco pouch stamped with a red seal. Then Sasha had clasped arms with him.

‘Good luck, comrade Fitz. I hope you found out what you wanted.’

Fitz had boarded the train, shoving his bag under the seat so only he could reach it. He’d rolled the blanket he had managed to hang on to and set it against the smeared window as a pillow. He’d not slept properly for days, dozing on benches, in trucks, almost on his feet. The night in the farmhouse was like a dream. He’d woken in that big bed that still smelt of its old owners overlaid with last night’s smoke, and stared at the ceiling for an hour trying to decide whether to ask Sasha who he really was. Then he had heard the other man mumble in his sleep and Fitz had lost his nerve.

Now he was finding it hard to doze off, even though he was exhausted and the train had been sat in the station for an hour since he had got onboard. There would be checks at the French border, the French having grudgingly signed a non-intervention pact preventing them from sending men or arms. Then more checks along the line, at randomly created militia checkpoints. And, always, the risk that the line would be bombed. It might be another hour before the train moved off but Fitz just couldn’t settle. He’d close his eyes but the images would jump behind them, red and black as the city burned, the darker black of blood on dark cloth, Sasha’s mashed up lyrics to ‘When I Get Low I Get High’, the Heinkels opening fire on the road.

‘Billet, s’il vous plaît,’ someone asked and Fitz reached for his inner pocket before he opened his eyes. Before he recognised the voice. He grinned.

‘OK. You are definitely following me.’

Sasha flopped into the seat next to him. ‘New orders. They need more of us in Barcelona.’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘Fitz. We are more discreet than that. The old mother three seats back with the cage of live chickens? She is the one following you.’

Fitz started to look round, then caught the Russian’s grin. ‘Very subtle,’ he remarked.

The train jolted, nearly making him slide out of his seat. They chugged out slowly, unevenly, leaving behind the busy town. Fitz looked at his travelling companion again. It was dubious, at the very least. On the other hand, it was someone who could keep him from closing his eyes and failing to sleep.

Digging about in his bag, he produced a dog-eared pack of cards and held them up. 'I'll deal.'

Their tickets were checked by the guard as they crawled towards the border. At the border itself, Sasha shook Fitz awake as they were forced to get off the train at a brightly lit station high in the mountains. There was no town or village attached, just a small company of French border guards who made them stand about in the cold as they searched through and under the train. Fitz wanted to panic when he realised they were slowly reading everyone's papers. Had the Doctor really forged his passport well enough to convince border guards? Then he worried that they would sense his panic and haul him off into the closed station building where a couple of passengers had already been taken. Then he was handing over his papers and hoping the guard thought his shaking hand was from the cold. The man looked over the passport with a slowness that suggested the Doctor had somehow managed to cock it up utterly. Then the red stamps on their letters of transit were noticed, regarded with suspicion mingled with fear, and they were being bundled back into the carriages. The heating had mysteriously turned off during the inspection and they rattled through the night chattering with cold.

By the time the train had made it through the border check on the other side, where the red letters were regarded with even greater contempt by the CNT checkpoint, and the checkpoint half way down the coast, Fitz had won twenty-seven theoretical US dollars off Sasha. Or, more prosaically, twenty-seven used matches that they were pretending were dollars. As the train made the final slow creep along the coast – the wonderfully blue coast – and into the cavernous Estació de França, Fitz owed Sasha an entire box of matches, a lighter and two beers.

Getting out of the carriage, they stepped into chaos. The platforms were solidly packed with soldiers, most in the militia's haphazard uniform but there was the odd smart jacket of the Party or the Civil Guards. A straggling line of wounded picked its way through the crowds, holding on to each other. Everyone seemed to be talking, or shouting, or singing songs, the sound roaring upwards and spiralling back from the high metal rafters so that all individual meaning was lost. Train engines thundered as they stoked up ready to leave, or let off clouds of dirty steam as they cooled. Whistles were being blown, although how anyone knew which was the one they should act on Fitz didn't know. The air was thick, warm with human breath and cigarette smoke. Glancing up, he saw wide red banners hanging down with hand-painted slogans on them. A striped red and gold flag hung high at the centre of the concourse.

He wanted to scream at them all to shut up. After the quiet resignation of the north, after all the emptiness of the mountains and the camaraderie on the train, it was too loud, too smoky. Too much.

'Fitz?' Sasha had grabbed hold of his forearm.

'It's too much.'

'Only here, I think. Only in the station. The trains are used to get the men to some of the fronts.'

Fitz wanted a cigarette but he thought he would choke in the atmosphere if he tried to light one here. 'That's rather civilised of them. A commuter war, huh?'

Sasha grinned and started through the hundreds on the platform, stepping over the odd sitting or lying figure, turning sideways to get through a gap. Fitz followed. In this madness, Sasha suddenly seemed the best bet, the best guide to get him away from here. The Russian glanced back as they reached the concourse and waited in yet another line to get their papers checked again. 'You should visit Madrid, comrade. The metro line tunnels run under the front line. You mustn't miss your stop there.'

Then they were out, into the streets. Still busy, but at least cooler.

'Now, at last, we part, my English spy. I must report in and take up whatever role they ask of me. I hope you will find your friends.'

They went to clasp arms, then Sasha pulled Fitz into a bear-hug.

'I still owe you some beers,' Fitz said into the Russian's shoulder. Sasha leaned back and laughed.

'I'll look for you tonight in Plaça de Catalunya, about nine? I cannot promise to be there but I should at least take my winnings off you.'

Fitz watched the other man walk into the crowds towards the docks. After a few minutes, when the Russian was no more than another indistinct figure, he dug into the lining of his coat and produced a small ball. The size of a gob-stopper. Or that winning marble which had been the pride of his collection until Tubby Johnson had taken it off him with a beating. It had a tiny button on it, a clunky on/off switch. Fitz pressed it and was impressed when the globe actually lit up. He had assumed that it wouldn't work and he'd be left trying to describe a large blue box in an attempt to find the Doctor. At the very least, the time machine had to be somewhere in Barcelona for the tracking thingy to work.

Estació de França was close by the docks. He headed off to the right of the station, away from the wider avenues of the quays. The flashing slowed, dimmed. He spun about and headed along the wide boulevard. His little mar-

ble encouraged him. Now right, into a warren of narrow, high, streets. Cold in the shade, with flashings of the spring sun occasionally splashing down into the courtyards. He zigzagged through it all, often backtracking. Why hadn't the Doctor at least made this thing properly directional? In one square, he spent five minutes trying to decide if the flashes were more frequent when he faced north or south. He eventually moved on when he realised that he was drawing attention, being watched. Down into a narrow passageway, fronted with boarded up shops. Even with his hand closed tight over the globe, he could sense it quicken, brighten. He was walking faster, almost jogging.

Emerging into the colonnade of a square, he could almost feel her. It. Turning slowly he saw a very familiar shape in the shadows. He walked over and patted the shell, a habit he'd picked up from the Doctor, he was sure. Something didn't feel quite right, some subtle subconscious element was missing, but all he could think about was the clean, hot showers. The bath the size of a swimming pool. Maybe even the auto-razor, although he was always worried that he'd fall asleep and wake to find the tiny machine had shaved his entire body. His bed, the temperature always just at the right comfortable heat, in his room. The lack of gunfire, of dirt, of broken people shuffling away from their homes. The chance to shut out the chaos of this world, even for a night. He pulled his key out and unlocked it, hearing the heavy click of the not-really-a-Yale lock tumbling open. He pushed the door open and stepped through.

'Hi honey, I'm -'

The power was down. One single light bulb fizzed intermittently over the console. Wires spilled over the floor, snaking and coiling. There were signs of damage, thick dust and decay everywhere. It smelt of mildew, as if it had been abandoned for weeks. A half-drunk cup of coffee was sat on the time rotor and one of the Doctor's jackets lay on the floor, as if flung off in a hurry. There were no signs of life, human or otherwise. No warmth, no comfort.

'- home.'

'It's about perception.'

The Doctor and Anji looked at Jueves. He was leaning against the window frame, hands in pockets, looking down into Las Rambles. He didn't glance round, just continued to watch the foreshortened figures below.

'Someone or something is distorting perception.'

Now Anji was glancing at the Doctor, questioning. The Doctor shook his head slightly, still flicking through a battered paperback book. It was two days since events in the parc, since the news about Guernica had trickled through. Now

the papers were heavy with images, witness accounts. Photos of the ghost of a church, fuzzy from the dust in the air. Skeletal buildings surrounded by rubble. They devoured all the information they could, watched as the papers gradually agreed on what had happened, as word had rippled through the city. Eleana had dropped by, sullenly giving them scribbled copies of the wires. All the different versions that had laid, smudged and stinking of fresh ink, on Anji's bed had gradually coalesced into a single version. Guernica had been firebombed by the retreating Republicans. A mistake. A terrible, unfortunate mistake. Even as Anji believed it, something nagged at her. Some little dislocation in her head that kept jolting at her when she looked at the reports, or discussed the events in the bars.

Jueves had been with them throughout, charming information out of people, finding new contacts. He'd even found an old armchair from somewhere and dragged it up the service elevator, with the Doctor's help, as a surprise birthday present for her. They'd positioned it by the window, so she could sit and look out at the trees lining the street. The sweetness of the thought was rather let down by the frequency with which he fell asleep in it. The Doctor, in contrast, hadn't slept at all. It was as if he'd finally realised that time had been slipping by, that they didn't even need the TARDIS to jump ahead to the spring because it was the spring. It was inevitable, really, that the journalist would finally see through their cover.

'You're not really waiting for some papers out of here. You're not working on articles for the foreign press – you've never sent a single wire out.'

Jueves –'

'So why are you doing all this?' he turned in to face them, waved his hand at the mountains of data. 'Everything you are looking at hinges on perception. And someone is tapping your phone. We've been assuming it's the Party but that doesn't fit. People as suspicious as you, running some kind of investigation from a hotel room? You'd have been picked up weeks ago if Moscow thought you were a threat. Look at Blair, Rhein, Hernandez. Vanished without a trace because the Party thought they were working against them. Yet here you are, for months.'

'So whatever you're looking into, it isn't the Party. And the only connection between this huge mass of data is perception. You wouldn't be hanging around here for months if you were just researching an article or book on how perception is used by the media: you'd have been out of here after a month. So you're looking for something or someone specific. And now they're looking for you. How am I doing?'

He was looking at Anji now, staring at her with one eyebrow raised. He'd taken off his glasses as he talked and she was struck again by how much harder he looked without them. She bit her lip, looked at the Doctor for guidance. The Doctor carefully marked his place in the paperback he'd been reading when Jueves had started talking, put it on the dresser and folded his arms.

'We're looking for something or someone who is altering perceptions, yes. We don't know who or how.'

'Doctor, everyone in this city works to alter others' views, to change minds.'

'This is different.'

'How?'

'It's difficult to explain –'

Jueves snorted, looking back down into the street again, frowning into the glass. Anji didn't want them to fall out, didn't like that he was angry with them. They were supposed to be searching for the truth, yet they couldn't let go of the story they had built up, the false picture. The *lies*. He knew they were lying, knew they weren't giving him the real picture. He leaned on the glass for a moment, his breath fogging up the pane. Anji took a step towards him, stopped when he turned around. He grabbed his jacket from the chair and pushed past her.

'Well, when you want to tell me what's really going on here, let me know.'

He slammed the door after him.

Anji had her hand on the doorknob when the Doctor's grabbed her wrist. 'Leave it for the moment, Anji. Let him calm down.'

She pulled her hand free and rounded on him. He always had to know best, always thought he knew the best way of dealing with things. They should have told Jueves weeks ago, she was sure. He was trustworthy, useful, open-minded. All of which was unusual enough in this city. But then, the Doctor had been obsessing with the TARDIS's symptoms, not the outside world. And she hadn't told him because it had seemed so ludicrous, the kind of silly speech she always felt embarrassed about when the Doctor did it to complete strangers. So now Jueves had stormed off. Probably to get steadily sozzled on cheap wine in a bar in the docks. She even knew which bar he frequented down there. She huffed her hair and dropped into the chair.

'Great. Another friend to tick off the Christmas card list. Assuming we're still here at Christmas, which, given the way things are going, we will be.'

The Doctor picked the book back off the dresser and sat on the bed opposite her. He leant over, nudged her knee with a corner of the novel.

'What?' She regretted snapping at him straight away. Looked up to see him watching her cautiously. 'Sorry, what?'

He raised the book up, showed the cover to her. She realised it was the now even more foxed copy of *The Age of Reason* the Doctor had taken off Fitz back in Paris. She took it off him, glanced at the back. 'Fitz's book, so?'

The Doctor was still leaning on his knees, rubbing his hands together, lacing and unlacing his fingers.

'Is that his writing, inside?'

Anji opened it, flicking through, pausing at the postcard marking the place. Now that had to be Fitz's, given it was rude. There were scribbles in the margin in heavy pencil. And a name scrawled across the front page.

'Yeah, that's Fitz's.'

'You're sure?'

'Well, I can't say I've ever studied his handwriting in any depth, but yes. Look, he even wrote his name in.'

She watched as the Doctor's body sagged back, his face looking older suddenly. He took the book back from her, stared at the sprawling letters again. Then he tucked it back into the outer pocket of his dark red jacket, felt gently in the inner pocket. She watched, curious, as he solemnly pulled out a thin, fragile fold of paper. He unfolded it, slowly, looked at the contents and then held it out to her. She was surprised to see it was quivering slightly, almost imperceptibly. She reached forward, took it carefully by the edges. The paper felt ancient, too thin. The writing on it was neat, perfectly formed. Ah, this was *the* note. One of those strange, unspoken things which was never brought up by any of them. The Doctor was looking at her, fidgeting again now the paper was out of his hand. 'Is that... do you recognise that handwriting?'

She made a show of looking at it again, taking her time, avoiding his intense stare. Then she carefully refolded the paper, felt it falling back into its familiar shape. She held it out between two fingers, let him take it back. Shook her head.

For a moment, she saw something horribly like fear in his eyes and then he was smiling, all lightness. He stood, offered his hand to her. 'Come on, I'll buy you lunch.'

She smiled listlessly as she let him pull her out of the chair. She scooped up her handbag as she passed the bed. She was getting sick of this room, of the same faces in the same bars. She knew the Doctor would be charming, doing his finest small talk, with tales of implausibly famous people and places. The sort of anecdotes that would fill several years of a chatshow. Even that had

lost its fun, she'd missed several last week, tuning out in favour of watching strangers walk past. Right now, she could do with that familiarity.

She had her hand on the doorknob when someone knocked on the other side.

She pulled the door open quickly. 'Jueves, I –'

A scruffy man stood there, true. Several days stubble, the stench of stale tobacco and wine.

'Hey Anji.'

Fitz surprised her with a swift hug and then pushed past her into the room. He'd gained a knapsack from somewhere, a grey blanket tied to it with bale-twine. And a stink that quickly filled the small room. He was dropping the bag on to her bed and then he and the Doctor were embracing. Anji glimpsed the relieved smile on the Doctor's face and guessed that she looked the same. Fitz.

He was looking at them both now, looking them up and down and frowning. 'You look a right state.'

'Oh yes, and you look wonderful. Have you been sleeping in a ditch?'

'Not every night. I got your note. What the hell's been going on?'

Fitz sat in the funky armchair, detailing his journey.

He'd been running on nervous energy, on the thrill of getting back to the TARDIS. Finding it apparently dead and abandoned, he'd felt that exhaustion, as if every second had become a weight tied to his legs. He'd wanted to cry. Everywhere he went in this country, he found homes abandoned, destroyed, the faint aftersmell of panic. The refugees on the roads, the burning houses of Guernica, the empty farmhouse and now this, his own home made lifeless. Then, in the fluxing light, he'd seen the note scrawled over the blank wall where the archway to the kitchen ought to be: *Hotel Oriente, Rm 102*.

He kept glancing at Anji. The Doctor looked much the same as always, although he'd switched to the dark red coat and shirt. He was the same about the eyes, the same posture. It didn't look as if he had spent five months stranded here. In contrast Anji looked tired, thin. Her eyes held dark blue shadows below them, her hair long and less smoothed down. Her eyes still flashed annoyance frequently enough though. He'd been spoilt in his ten or so days, travelling with someone who knew ways around the rationing. He doubted it was quite so easy in this city.

'So,' the Doctor prompted, 'Guernica?'

'That's the odd thing. I saw three distinct versions, all overlapping. And I really saw them, really believed them. Each one was true, the real version, yet

they all contradicted each other.’

‘So which one was real?’

Fitz frowned at Anji’s question. ‘Well, that’s why we’re here, right? The perception of the event has been changed so it’s no longer a big deal. That’s why we came here, remember?’

Anji shook her head briefly, rubbing at her eyes. ‘That’s it. The dislocation!’

The Doctor started scrambling through the newspapers scattered across the room, pulling out the most recent. Fitz caught a glimpse of the main square. You couldn’t smell the stench of the streets, taste the dust still settling. The photo was safe, freed from the other senses, it hid the real memories outside its frame. Fitz took the newsheet up and studied the image. Again, it seemed unreal, a phantom of the place he had been in. He could imagine what lay beyond the photographer’s frame, the bodies being slowly pulled free. . .

Fitz put the paper down and looked to the Doctor.

‘We’ve been disconnected for too long,’ the Doctor was suggesting. ‘The consensus in these papers is that the Republicans torched the town but that isn’t what you remember, is it? You’ve only been disconnected from the TARDIS for a few days, not the months we’ve been here. You can see the different versions more clearly than we can.’

Fitz rubbed his face, feeling the beard growth, the ingrained dirt. He wanted a bath. He wanted a sleep.

‘That’s the thing, Sasha seemed to see the same as me.’

The Doctor was crouching next to the chair in seconds, gripping one of Fitz’s arms. Holding his eyes with his own. ‘You’re sure? This Sasha, where is he now?’

Pia put the latest transcript into a manila folder, then dropped it in Burton’s in-tray. Their turnover of work was much faster now, he had a knack for producing the required results quickly. He’d brought new techniques with him, when he’d arrived in December, and an understanding of how to find people’s weak spots. Her workload, though, had increased. Today she was determined to get out of the building for some lunch, instead of eating in the sullen canteen or missing the meal altogether. So the paperwork was done and she was slipping away before she could be given more.

Her heels clacked on the bare floors as she hurried down the corridors and into the main foyer. Several soldiers lounged about in the area, leaning on the square pillars, smoking. At the main desk, someone was arguing with the man behind it. She didn’t glance his way, best not to show any interest. She

glimpsed dark red in the peripheries and looked over. The Doctor was hanging back a bit, watching the argument. Her pace slowed.

‘Look, he would have reported here yesterday.’

The Doctor looked at her as the man’s voice rose and their eyes met. She frowned. What was he doing here at all, anyway? His eyes flicked towards the open front door and gate beyond. So he wanted to talk to her? And it was urgent enough for him to come here, risking her reputation, making the Party more suspicious of her. He unfolded his arms and she was suddenly worried that he would speak to her. She gave a frantic, tiny nod, her eyes flashing to the door. Outside, go outside. She sped back up, walking faster now to divorce herself from the scene behind her. She heard the Doctor’s voice soothing the irate enquirer.

‘Come on, Fitz, leave it.’

‘But –’

‘Leave it.’

She was crossing the front courtyard, passing parked cars, and then out through the gate. Nodding to the guard on duty. She turned left, then right, getting quickly out of sight of her workplace. There was the café where she had first run into the Doctor and Anji. She found an empty table and sat facing the street, checking there were no familiar faces at the other tables. She knew most of the agents, open and secret, in the town now. All clear. The owner hurried over with a coffee for her.

‘Gracias.’

‘Two more, please.’ The Doctor was sliding into the chair opposite her, the scruffy guy who had been haranguing the front desk standing behind him.

‘What did you think you were doing?’ she hissed at the Doctor. ‘And get your friend to sit down, he’s drawing attention.’

As the younger man found a chair and brought it over, she took the opportunity to make mental notes on him. Taller than the Doctor, lanky, dressed in a battered leather coat. Bags beneath his eyes suggested a lack of sleep recently.

‘Pia, this is Fitz. An old friend.’

Fitz. Germanic. Not good.

‘I’m trying to find a friend. He’s a Party member, would have checked in yesterday. Russian. Sasha.’ The man’s voice was more accented than the Doctor’s, slightly faster and more urgent.

Pia shook her head. ‘I do not think so.’

The Doctor sipped his coffee, looking calmly at her. ‘You can know that without checking?’

How to explain without compromising her position? She wanted to tell them something that would mean they wouldn't start hanging about trying to find this friend. She kept wanting to tell them to get out, but even that suggestion might find its way on to a file somewhere and count against her. Burton had been very interested in her edited account of her last meeting with the Englishman, had made notes. She wanted to break any tie with them.

'Where's Anji?' she asked.

'Siesta. How are you so sure Sasha hasn't checked in?' Fitz pushed his coffee aside, leaning on the table, holding her eyes with his own. She added his eye colour to the file. Pia held his eyes steadily, even as she fudged her answer.

'All Soviet volunteers must report to my superior's office, he runs their assignments here in Barcelona. I'd know.'

'Are you sure? He's my sort of height, dark hair slicked back, brown leather coat, bad shirt? *Talks like this*. Would have been unshaven. Maybe a bit smelly. He was going to check in, then meet me in the evening.'

'I'm sure.'

The thing was, it was the truth. There really had been no new agents arrive in the last week and all Soviet agents did report to her boss. He might decide to put them in another comrade's group, maybe send them out to join a battalion as its commissar, but he always saw them first. Even though she knew this, she felt guilty, could see that Fitz didn't want to believe her.

'I mean, he's not exactly... er... high profile...'

'Fitz means he thinks his friend is a spy,' the Doctor helpfully translated. Pia watched the other man's face. His jaw tightened at the Doctor's words: he didn't want his friend to be a spy. He'd clearly trusted someone too much, didn't even like the word 'spy'. Curious that he would have preferred his friend to be a Comintern agent than whatever suspicion was now eating at him.

'I'm sorry, Fritz, but I am sure.'

'Fitz,' he corrected absently. He was clearly absorbed in wondering what this Sasha had really been. Pia finished her coffee, throwing down the money to cover for it and stood.

'Don't come to my workplace again, Doctor, it's not advisable.'

The late afternoon sunlight filtered through the open doors of the bar. Sabbath folded his newspapers and put them on the table in front of him. He pulled a scarlet handkerchief from the top pocket of his linen jacket and wiped his hands free of the ink. As he tucked the soiled cloth back into the pocket the chair creaked a little. The clock chimed thirteen and he smiled to himself. The

bar owner had been killed a month before, having reluctantly agreed to go to Aragon to fight, but Alicia had kept the bar running as well as before. She was slightly better at getting information than her old man had been, doubtless having more alluring methods. Now she brought over a glass of sherry and a refilled jug of water.

‘Ah, Alicia. You know my needs so well. I’m expecting a guest shortly, could I trouble you for two coffees?’

She nodded and headed for the back straight away. The place was otherwise deserted. The Drassenes were as empty as they had been before, great warehouses now lying almost empty. The bustle from Estació de França never came to this back street. New arrivals would head straight for Las Rambles or for home and only a fool would stop for a drink on the assumption that the train would leave on time. Mostly, the trains were late. Sometimes, just to surprise everyone, they would leave half an hour earlier than scheduled. The flexible attitude to timetabling entertained Sabbath: like so much in Spain, there was no protestant work ethic over time, no insistence on punctuality. Time was still organic here, still a living thing.

A young man was approaching from the station. Sabbath took in the clothes, the ragged appearance of the traveller, the gun at the left hip. The newcomer entered the bar, dropping a knapsack to the floor just inside the door. He smiled when he saw Sabbath sitting in the cool shade.

‘Ah, you are Sasha today, my friend,’ Sabbath remarked.

‘And have been for several weeks. I’m looking forward to getting these lenses out.’

Alicia brought over the coffees and retreated. Sabbath noted that, unlike the last time they had met, she did not bother to sashay away from his agent this time. Far too scruffy, in all likelihood. Sasha did look tired, the sort of bone-weariness that made all his movements lethargic. When he sipped the thick black coffee, his eyes opened slightly more. Sabbath sat back and waited for the other man to finish his drink, let his shoulders ease down.

‘So. A progress report.’ Sabbath folded his hands together across his girth, sitting back, at ease.

‘I admit, events have not gone exactly according to the original plan –’

‘Not exactly according to plan? One of the key players has completely vanished and things are not going “exactly according to plan”? Did you find the Absolute?’

‘Oh yes, quite quickly.’

‘And?’

‘Well, I lost him. It was as if as soon as I saw him, he changed. That wasn’t in your initial brief so I had to improvise a solution. I’ve been trying to find him by looking for anomalies, things out of place.’

Sabbath nodded. At least the lad showed initiative when events went wrong. He had wondered what would happen when the Absolute was itself observed, had predicted that it would change. That the change would ripple through the System itself, a tiny packet of altered history that would throw the whole record into doubt. At best, the System would collapse taking with it all the little secrets Sabbath didn’t want others to know about him, such as just what had happened to free him from the shackles. At the worst, it would make the records unreliable, untrustworthy. A good magician should not only never reveal his tricks, he should ensure others cannot either. ‘And you’ve found. . .?’

‘The Doctor.’

Sabbath started to laugh, a chuckle rolling out steadily. He should have known the Doctor would pop up here. He seemed determined to find revolutions to get entangled with. Doubtless he’d already picked a side and was setting about helping them. He laughed louder: he did hope the Doctor had not got confused and automatically joined with the rebels. For once, it was the government that fitted more with the other traveller’s concepts of right. He gave his agent a wry smile. ‘You’re going to use him?’

‘I hope so. It took me several weeks to find him.’

‘Like vampires, we travellers don’t have reflections. We don’t leave surface ripples, don’t appear in time’s camera.’

‘Very comforting. Actually, I found him via one of his friends. Just spent ten days with the guy, sticking by him until he met back up with the Doctor. Seemed the easiest way.’

‘Is that why you smell the way you do?’

Sasha shifted in his seat, the first real sign of discomfort. ‘So now, dear boy, what do you plan to do, having found your Doctor?’

‘I was wondering if I could get a lift back a few months.’

Part Three

Theories and Conclusions

‘The Spanish Civil War is probably the most convincing reminder that the last word on history is impossible. The absolute truth about such a politically passionate subject can never be known, because no one can discard prejudice sufficiently.’

– *Antony Beevor*

Chapter Nine

Pistoles En El Sostre

Anji smothered a yawn as she walked down the stairs into the main foyer of the Hotel Continental. Eileen hadn't had any news: no notes, no letters, no calls. McNair had been doing his best but was hampered by being too busy with his legitimate work to spare much time to look for Blair. The ILP and the POUM had been jumpy for days, since the rumours of a move against them had started. Last week Roldán Cortada had been found murdered and now the whole city felt edgy. The Doctor had suggested Anji work on finding Blair, or Marc Rhein or any number of other missing persons. He'd been worried about her continuing to look at the anomalies. He hadn't said anything, but she suspected he thought the bizarre events had been turning her paranoid. So she'd gone through the details of Blair with the Doctor and then left him slouched in her armchair, playing cat's cradle with a bit of braid and staring at the map.

In the foyer, a wild cross section were hanging about. Some stood and talked, others sat with papers in front of them. A man she recognised as an English journalist was talking loudly and slowly into one of the phones by the desk, clearly dictating his copy back to London. She avoided him: they'd met in a bar a few weeks ago where he had made numerous 'dusky maiden' remarks at the Doctor, talked to her very slowly in pidgin English and then looked surprised when she told him where to go in a perfect cut-glass accent.

A huge giant whose appearance practically screamed 'Russian spy' was making his way around the room, pausing with each group to drop a few words. Anji remembered that Joaquín had told her that the man worked for a Soviet organisation and then introduced them back in March. She sat on a free sofa, making it apparent that she was killing time, and flicked through a copy of *Solidaridad Obrera* someone had left behind. The fighting on the front was, of course, going well. The Communists in the Generalidad were in league with each other and plotting to oust Companys. The May Day celebrations had been cancelled to prevent tension. Same old, same old.

‘Hola, señorita.’

The sofa creaked as the Soviet bear sat next to her. She turned and gave a polite smile. ‘Hola, comrade.’

‘Ah, Anglesa. I think we have met before, I’m sure I remember. You know Roberts?’ He gestured to the man on the phone.

‘Know him? I threw a drink over him three weeks ago.’

‘A shame.’

Anji shrugged. ‘It wasn’t very good wine.’

Nikolai laughed, attracting the odd look from the people closest to them. He indicated the paper. ‘You are anarchist?’

Anji shrugged. ‘I like to see all sides of an argument.’

‘Shall I tell you what is really going on?’

Anji cocked an eyebrow at him. Clearly spin-doctoring was not yet refined and this was the subtle version of the obvious rants published in the press. She had known the Hotel Continental had always had something of a Westminster tearoom air, with preferred versions circulated as if personal insights, but the whispering campaigns had intensified since her last visit. She leaned in. ‘Can I ask you something first?’

‘Of course, comrade.’

She’d known it. Nikolai was the incorrigible gossip type, puffed up on imparting privileged information, as well as from meals the poor could only dream of. Close up, Anji was still surprised at the lack of difference between career communists and career capitalists.

‘Eric Blair. Ever seen him?’

‘Ah, our mysterious Blair. His wife has made quite an impression.’

‘That wasn’t my question,’ she smiled at him.

‘Well, obviously, I would prefer it if you didn’t mention it to anyone else, but did you know that she and McNair. . .’ he left it hanging. ‘All hours, he shows up.’

‘Really?’

‘Oh yes. No wonder Blair left.’

‘He left? A few months back?’

Nikolai leaned in, touched one pudgy hand to her arm. ‘Yesterday, m’dear. A friend of a friend saw him up in Plaça de Catalunya, heading off to the Exchange. Thinks he came back and found his wife “busy” shall we say?’

‘Really? Yesterday? By the ’phone Exchange?’ Anji managed to slide her arm out from under the Russian’s paw without making it too obvious.

'So he tells me. Probably going to get her phone tapped. They're all at it up there. Why, last week one of those anarchists running it interrupted a phone call between Azaña and Companys. Suggested that the phones were needed for more important things than two presidents discussing the war against fascism. Can you believe it?'

'No.' Anji looked suitably appalled. The paw was back on her arm. She half-listened as the man carried on with his spin, making the appropriate encouraging noises whilst she considered her next move. She could go back down to the Oriente, add the reported sighting to the list, listen to the Doctor talk to himself about the network of connections he was building from the map. Maybe find Fitz, if he wasn't still mooching about after his vanished friend. Or go straight up to the Exchange and follow up the sighting. Maybe get some more people who thought they had seen Blair. She'd got a photo from Eileen to show people. Then go back to the Oriente with a whole bundle of leads. As she was going to have to go to the Exchange anyway, she might as well save herself the walk back up Las Rambles and go straight there from the Continental.

'You must let me take you to dinner some time soon,' Nikolai was saying. Anji caught herself in time, before the conversation autopilot she'd been using could say 'yes'.

'Soon,' she answered, deliberately glancing at her watch. 'Oh, but I should be going. I'm late meeting my boyfriend.'

She extricated herself from the sofa quickly and smiled at Nikolai. He was useful, best to keep on good terms with him. 'I value your insight,' she remarked. Management speak was always useful here: no one knew it was bland drivel and they actually believed it.

Down the street, she noticed the air seemed tenser than even a few hours ago. Pedestrians were glancing about more. Looking at balconies, or up to church towers. It was the same building feeling as she always sensed before a thunderstorm but the day was clear, dry. She walked the one block up to Plaça de Catalunya quickly, wincing as a tram trundled past, bell clanging. She turned the corner and walked slowly down the pavement, looking for the sort of people who would be stood around all day. The sort who noticed stuff. A man was leaning against one of the huge columns that lined the plaza, holding a bundle of folded newspapers under one arm, the other holding one to display the headline. He wasn't bothering to call it out. She mentally noted to try him later and moved on into Fontanella. The telephone exchange was just off the square; a large, turn of the century building, typical of Eixample. The entrance was heavily sandbagged, with some anarchist militia leaning against the barrier

with their rifles slung over their shoulders, chatting. One of them straightened as he saw her approach.

‘Papers, comrade.’

She knew they had taken in her civilian clothes – no militant woman would have worn a skirt – and were just going through the formality. Nonetheless, she still felt nervous watching them rifle through her identity. Fitz hadn’t helped with his tale of nearly being arrested on the border. A tale she suspected of being exaggerated but which had even so increased her nervousness. She hadn’t even had a fake NUS card in order to buy drinks when she was sixteen: she felt uncomfortable pretending to be something, someone, else.

‘Reason for visit?’

‘I . . . well, I’m looking for someone.’

There was a murmur of interest from the militiamen, knowing smiles and nudges. Anji showed them the photograph. ‘Him. Have you seen him?’

‘Well, comrade, I am not sure –’

‘Ah, Pablo, tell her something. I’ve seen her drinking with Eleana Serrano Domínguez before now.’

The others were grinning openly now, assuming she sought a boyfriend or a lover. Pablo gave her back the photograph, which she tucked back into her bag.

‘Try upstairs. They might help.’

Anji smiled her thanks and entered the building. The foyer was kitted out for guard duty, filled with kitchen items, foodstuff and rounds of ammunition. All the windows were sandbagged, the glass covered in strips of sticky paper or completely missing. Remnants from July ’36, when control of the Exchange had been central to the quelling of the fascist uprising. Had the militias lost control of the communications, the city might have fallen to the insurrectionists. Climbing the wide stairwell, she passed a light machine gun position. The gun was angled downwards, covering the doorway, and the two man crew were playing dice behind the wall of yet more sandbags. On the second floor, the main exchange was running. Scores of women, mostly in the overalled uniform of the CNT and with red scarves tying back their hair, were operating the phones. Anji watched for a moment, fascinated by the way the connections were made by hand. Each girl seemed to know which plugs had to go where to make a connection, despite the lack of labelling on the switchboards.

After a few moments, someone noticed her and came over. She spent the next twenty minutes looking for someone who might have seen Blair. Eventually, one of the girls pointed upstairs. ‘Try the attic. Don’t go on the roof though.’

The stairs were less clean in the upper storeys, broken furniture or glass had just been kicked to the side. At the top of the stairs a passageway clearly ran the length of the building, with a wooden shutter covering the exit on to the roof to her left. Through the shattered windows, Anji could see the red and black flag of the CNT flying next to the red and gold of the Catalan Generalidad. A couple of figures paced about, one smoking a cigarette. The roof at the front must have an excellent view across the street and into Plaça de Catalunya. To the right were several old doorways.

The first one had no door, and bullet marks in the frame. Glancing inside, she saw piles of wood. A grate held powdery ashes and half-burnt sticks, a blackened kettle stood on the slate hearth. The room must be used by the sentries to keep warm in at night. The next room had a door at least. Inside were several old mattresses, with blankets bundled on them. An ammo can sat open in the middle of the floor and a metal bucket with a lid in the furthest corner. A rest room then. The third room was empty. Several floorboards had been ripped up, Anji suspected to be burned. Leaving her with the closed door to the last room. The locked one. Anji muttered to herself about Bluebeard and glanced about. The two men out on the roof hadn't noticed her. She tried the door handle and was not surprised to feel resistance. Pushing as quietly as she could, she realised the top of the door gave slightly: there didn't appear to be bolts on the other side. Or, if there were, the person was out and the bolts free.

So, she had nothing but some vague sightings and a locked door. Not a lot to show for the lunchtime's work. Just before turning back, she stood on tiptoe and ran her fingers along the doorframe. Oh yes, the place so obvious that any fool would try it. Nothing. Then she looked under the bits of wood propped up in the passageway and ran her hands along the wall. One bit of plaster was loose, the edges of the break smoothed and curving. She checked the guards were still watching the square and tugged. A block of plaster came free, revealing the wooden framework of the wall. And, sat on a horizontal crossbar, a key to fit the door's lock.

'The secret equivalent of the plant pot,' she said triumphantly, shoving the plaster plug back into place. She tried the key and felt the tumblers reluctantly turn over inside the lock. Taking a calming breath, she stepped into the room.

It was impossible.

Two rooms lay beyond the door. One room was empty, filled with birdshit and the smell of mould. Overlaid were hundreds of images, tiny frames frozen and hanging in midair. Nothing supported them, they just drifted and twisted in the faint breeze from the opened door. As she stepped in completely and

turned on her heel, Anji saw the semi-transparent images dance backwards, as if they were reacting to her presence, to the draught of her passing. Yet the room was empty, abandoned even by the militia. She could feel the floorboards soft beneath her, bending slightly under her weight. She tried to look closely at one of the frames, but it got more blurred the more she tried to focus only on it. She'd heard Fitz's versions of Guernica and thought it implausible but now Anji started to doubt her reaction. Wherever she looked there was both an empty room and one crowded with impossibilities. The two seemed to be flickering so fast that she saw both at the same time. It was like that stupid toy she'd had as a child: a piece of card on a string, with a drawing of a bird on one side and an empty cage on the other, yet if you twirled it fast enough, the bird was caught in the cage. She thought the whole room was spinning.

Closing her eyes, letting her head settle, Anji tried to think. This wasn't ordinary. This was something that linked the missing Blair to the whole problem they had come here to resolve, she was sure of it. Something had remained, some persistence of vision from the flickering room. A bed? She opened her eyes and looked. Yes, in both versions a basic camp bed was set up in the corner. As she moved through the dancing images, images which flowed away from her and then closed in her wake, she finally saw the thing that was bothering her most.

In this bobbing, swirling montage of images were thousands of images of herself, Fitz and the Doctor.

The other men didn't react when the first yells started up the street, so Fitz put his jumpiness down to unfamiliarity with the city. He had been slightly disturbed, out walking with the Doctor and Anji the previous evening, when his friends didn't even seem to notice when someone let off a stream of semi-automatic fire somewhere in the back streets. He was still getting used to it though, still unnerved to see men and women with guns idly chatting over a cigarette. Then again, he also felt disturbed to realise that his two friends had spent almost six months in the city, stranded and waiting for him.

Outside the POUM offices it was busy with men on leave detailing their arguments over pay or invalidity. Alberto had suggested Fitz come here to look for Sasha, since the man could have been 'advising' one of the other organisations. 'Not all Russians are good Party members,' the academic had remarked over a beer, 'and the POUM, we are all Trotskyists. Or so the Soviet press say. Maybe your friend is *hiding* from the Party not working for it, hey?'

Fitz had to admit that he hadn't thought of that – he hadn't realised the

complex network of political allegiances and grievances that controlled the different anti-fascist groups. Russia's interventions were seen as biased, helping their own comrades before the general population. They spoke of civil war, where the POUM and CNT still spoke of revolution. It was possible Sasha was a White Russian fleeing the Reds. Somehow though, Fitz doubted it. The inconsistencies, the way he had known a song from 1940 and had seen what Fitz saw at Guernica, these suggested Sasha had been an altogether different agent. He was angry: at himself for allowing himself to believe Sasha, at the other man for lying. Although, obviously, the other man would be lying: Fitz had been lying to him in return. He still felt frustrated at the deceptions though.

Despite his anger and his doubts, he had come down to the POUM offices near the bottom of Las Ramblas to check. They still needed to find the Russian. The people hanging about chatting hadn't jumped at the initial shouts but they looked up when a few distant shots became a sudden fusillade. There was a moment where time seemed to pause, everyone silent, waiting, listening. Then another burst of gunfire, the different note of the bullets suggesting a retaliatory attack.

'It's started!' one of them shouted. The crackle of rifles popped and tore at the air, violently echoing down the streets. Suddenly, people were running to the sides, to cover, all talking at once. In amongst the babble, Fitz thought he heard 'telefonica'. Most of the pedestrians ran for the Metro station, hurrying down into the relative calm of the underground system. Fitz glanced about, unsure. He didn't want to get stuck in the crowds at the Metro, but he could hardly stay on the street when everyone else was abandoning it. He considered running back up Las Ramblas to the Oriente, or looking about for an alternate shelter.

The crack of guns was suddenly much nearer, Fitz could even hear the whine of bullets. He ran the short distance to the shelter of the POUM doorway, feeling utterly exposed to whoever was firing. There was a crush of people pushing their way in, waving membership cards frantically about.

'It's the government –'

'A coup – trying to take our city from us –'

'We should never have trusted them –'

'The telephone exchange is under attack –'

'They want control over us –'

'*La Batalla* was bombed, grenades –'

'– bloody Asaltos –'

Fitz steadily pushed in as well, trying to ignore the snatches he heard. He

somehow doubted these people knew what was really going on. All he could tell was that the tension that he had felt in the city was exploding around them, anger and resentment bursting out into the open. A brief break in the gunfire was followed by the bellow of an explosion. The crowd didn't even pause in their clamour. Fitz started to wonder if this was the best building to wait out events in. Not only was it overcrowded but it was a union office – it might even be the target for a second wave of attacks. He started looking about, trying to find a way to the edge of the mass, a breathing space where he wouldn't be caught up in it. He really hated getting dragged along with panicking crowds.

Someone was leaning over a banister from the second floor, waving. 'Hi! Fitz! Hey!'

He realised the man was waving at him with his good arm. Alberto. Injured at the front and probably in the building to argue for his invalidity pay. Fitz started pushing through the throng. It actually thinned after the first flight of stairs: most of the people were just taking temporary shelter, he realised, the building was a haven until it was worth risking the run for the Metro or home. He could probably wait down there until the firing died down enough for him to run back up Las Rambles to the Oriente. On the other hand, he had no desire to stay in the crush.

As he reached the second floor, Alberto greeted him warmly. His hand was thoroughly shaken by the small man. Fitz thought the academic looked even more dishevelled than he had done when they'd first met. Most of the men on this floor had rifles, or were arguing with an exasperated union man who was refusing to hand out more. Fitz recognised a couple of faces in the group. Luiz – a huge man Alberto had introduced him to the previous night – stood calmly next to one of the open windows, his back against the wall, his rifle ready. A couple of younger boys ran about, tugging on rifle butts or straps, trying to get a firearm off the men.

'Fitz, you will fight. You must, yes?'

'I only came in to –'

'I will sort you out a weapon.'

Fitz couldn't think of a single protestation he could make that would not throw suspicion on him. He was a new face in town, had been asking after a communist friend and now just happened to show up when who knew how many places were being attacked? Fitz didn't want to think what they might do if he were to say he wasn't going to fight. Of the men arguing with the 'officers', two were English but dressed in the ugly semi-uniform of the militia. They were also being steadfastly refused weapons, being looked at as very dubious.

Fitz grinned to himself. If even men who had already been fighting with the POUM couldn't get armed, he didn't stand a chance. He could just wait out the fighting. He took the chance, as Alberto argued with the man refusing to issue arms, to look around the room carefully. As if the missing men they were searching for would be propped in a corner waiting to be spotted.

'There's firing coming from the Café Moka,' Luiz remarked, looking down into the street.

Fitz joined him, careful to keep out of sight. He could see a narrow sliver of Las Rambles. The trams, normally whirring and clanking up and down the street, stood silent on their tracks. The odd person ran across the wide boulevard, ducking behind the slim cover of the trees. A clatter of flashes and noise when a CNT lorry screeched past indicated the Café Moka. Alberto rejoined him.

'They will not arm you, my friend.' Fitz tried not to look relieved. 'They cannot even telephone the Oriente to prove you are who you say – the telephone exchange is at the centre of the fighting and all the lines are down.'

The Doctor carefully threaded his left index finger through the loop of braid on his right little finger, tugged gently. The complex nest of crisscrossing lines fell apart, leaving him with a big loop of braid around his index fingers. He smiled to himself. If only. The trick was to set up the cat's cradle so that one move could unravel it all. In theory, he knew, he just had to find the right place to pull and everything that was happening would fall into a single thread. He'd been too intent on one small knot, he'd realised. It was probably his fear of losing everything again, of finding himself stuck in the twentieth century of Earth. He'd just looked at getting the TARDIS working again, regaining that connection. And it was only now that he was realising just what a tangle it was connected to. He'd spent the afternoon trying to trace the thread, the lines, make a pattern that would lead him to the single point where it would all unravel.

He was close, he was sure of it, but he'd stared for so long at their crude map that he'd started to see the pattern of it behind his eyelids when he closed them and had decided to step back further. Let his mind worry at the tangles and knots subconsciously. So he'd come downstairs, still absently playing with the braid, and ordered a coffee. It sat cold on the table in front of him. He held one finger up, starting again. The TARDIS had crashed when he attempted to program her to search for anomalies. Anji's search for anomalies had led her to see something monstrous in the parc. Guernica had played out in multiple

versions.

'It's started!' he heard someone shout behind him.

Fitz had been befriended by someone who knew something who had since vanished. Other people had vanished.

'Ay! The phones are down,' he heard Cristo swearing at the reception desk.

People's opinions would change suddenly, as if their perspective had altered. He tugged at the tangle of braid around his fingers. There was no obvious point. Shaking himself free, the Doctor downed the cold coffee and wandered back upstairs. There was shouting rising from the street, the odd over-revved engine. 'It', whatever it was, was sending the city into another chaotic phase. He briefly wondered where Anji and Fitz were as he unlocked Anji's room and sat on the end of the bed. He was starting at the wrong point, he was sure of it. Start at the right place, and the web would be made clear. It was a question of angles.

The phone started to ring.

The Doctor leaned back, stretching an arm behind him until he felt the warm Bakelite of the handset under his finger. His eyes never stopped wandering across the wall, hoping for the right sideways glimpse that turned the two faces into a vase. Or the young woman into the old crone.

'Hola?' he said absently.

There was nothing but the faint echo of an empty line. Then a couple of clicks. 'Hello?'

No reply. He was about to hang up the phone again when he thought he heard a faint whisper on the line. Just an echo of his own voice, bouncing around inside the phone system? *Ay! The phones are down again.*

The Doctor turned on the bed and dropped the receiver back into its cradle. He stared at it, sitting there so blandly next to a wind-up travelling alarm clock and an ashtray full of loose change. He'd been trying to program the TARDIS to connect to the phone system. There was something in the phones, just as Jueves had suggested. Only whatever it was, it wasn't the secret services trying to monitor their calls. It was something else. Something connected to the anomalies. He patted his chest, found the chill silver chain lying under his shirt still. He absently rubbed the ridge of scar tissue it fell over, felt the bobbles of the chain moving under his fingers.

This time, he thought he knew the right place to start looking from.

Anji tried to grab hold of the bobbing images but they danced away from her, slipping and sliding out of her hands. Or her hand would pass through empty

air and the room would flicker between the two states. Someone, something, had been compiling files on them. Making a record of their movements, noting where they had been, when they had been there, who they had been there with. And it wasn't even grainy photographs taken from hidden cameras, it was personal. In some, their faces had been close to the camera, smiling or talking, laughing. Someone, some *thing*, had made a file of her life. Made her into an object, a subject for study and not a real person at all. She felt faintly nauseous, her privacy had been violated by this watcher. This stalker.

Not just her, but the Doctor, Fitz. There were other faces she recognised in the montages. Eleana. Jueves. Blair. Alberto. Pia. She realised now why Eleana had been so upset. Then she noticed something else. Fitz and Jueves, working together, laughing. She dashed about the room, heels wobbling on the uneven, warped floor, trying to make sense of the notations at the bottom of the images. A time/date stamp, she supposed, but she couldn't correlate the numbers with the dates on which she knew certain depicted events had happened. Fitz and Jueves. They'd not met yet. Whoever, whatever, this was they had images from the future here as well. Was this Blair? She remembered the tall self-effacing man she had spent an evening with, talking about the contrast between Asia and Europe. He'd not seemed the type. 'It's always the quiet ones,' she muttered to herself.

She wasn't sure she could make sense of this. She needed the Doctor's brains. He needed to see this himself, he would probably have some amazing conclusions, solve the whole thing as soon as he saw this. At least Blair's disappearance wasn't just a typical political vanishing – he was involved in something very odd. She had to get back.

As she pulled the door to behind her, it clunked loudly into its frame and she glanced quickly towards the guards on the roof. They had vanished, though she could hear distant shouting and the clatter of bullet fire. Some kind of brawl in Plaça de Catalunya, probably. Over-twitchy fingers on triggers. The city had become so tense it was hardly surprising.

She hurried down the stairs, not pausing to glance into the huge hall of switchboards. She needed to get the Doctor back here, find out if Blair really had been behind this. She didn't have any proof he did, just the fact he'd been sighted here a few times. She'd caught a glimpse of his face in the gallery of stills, pale and drawn, but then she'd caught a glimpse of many of the people they had befriended. Whoever, whatever, had created that archive had been interested in them: the time travellers. It had to be connected somehow. She clattered down the last flight of stairs, brushing past the machine gun nest,

looking at her feet as she ran.

‘Ay, comrade! Signorina?’

Were they shouting after her? Anji sped up slightly. She wasn’t supposed to be in here and if someone had figured that out. . . What if they were all in league with whatever had built that room in the attic? How could they not be? Who wouldn’t have noticed something odd about it? She almost skittered through the foyer, cursing her heels as the metals slid on the parquet. ‘Stupid bloody shoes.’

She’d slammed into the swing door at the front before she realised why the men at the machine gun nest had been shouting. Chaos had come to the streets. The guards who had let her in were backed up behind their sandbags, firing desperately. The one who had vouched for her was fumbling with his rifle, panicky fingers trying to ram bullets in. Even in the second she watched, dumbfounded, something hit his shoulder, jerking him backwards. Someone grabbed her roughly, flung her into a corner.

‘If you can’t fight, get back inside!’

She stumbled on the low step, fell backwards and crashed into the sandbag barrier. The noise was insane: too loud, too unpredictable to let her think. Chips of stone flew out from the wall above her as whoever was firing on them rat-tat-tatted a line along it at head height. She felt a sting on her hand and saw it was grazed. She did not dare move, just huddled lower, desperately hoping she was out of the way. That no one would notice her, that no random bullet would hit her.

Pablo. That was the name of the man leading the guards. He was shouting something in Catalan, screaming and yelling. The roar continued in her ears, but then Anji realised there were no more bullets. She looked up. There were no more bullets because the anarchists were being overwhelmed. Some were still fighting, hand to hand now. Others had thrown down their guns and were putting their hands on their heads. There was a constant maelstrom of shouting and screaming and the smell of cordite and blood. Then someone was grabbing her arm, hauling her up into the chaos.

She caught a glimpse of the street beyond the barrier. Huge trucks formed a wall, cutting off the square. If she tried to run she would be caught easily. Not that she had to run. Anji recognised the uniforms of the attackers: Assault Guards. Government. She didn’t need to run; she was innocent. Not even a member of any party. She just wanted to get away, back to the Hotel Oriente. How the hell was she going to get the Doctor back into this building now?

‘Gracias, comrade –’

Anji was interrupted as a burst of machine gun fire rattled across the foyer, sweeping back and forth. The Asaltos scrambled back, now using the sandbags to shield them from the nest on the first landing. The man holding her arm shook her, jerked her arms upwards on to her head.

‘No, comrade, je suis un civilian... er...’ *Now* was the time her French deserted her? Typical. He was running one hand up and down her sides, checking for weapons, the other hand holding her two on her head. His hand curled slightly at her chest.

‘Hey!’ Anji pulled herself away, tried to turn in his grip. ‘Hey! Get off me!’

The man shrugged, then pushed her roughly towards the trucks. She glanced about, wanting to go back and slap the man, but part of her realised that would be insane. She made for the narrow gap between the nearest truck and the wall. Hurrying, not looking about. More hands grabbed her, and she found herself being dragged towards the back of a vehicle. It was all a misunderstanding, she was a civilian. They’d look at her papers and realise she wasn’t part of whatever stupid internecine fight was going on. She let them push her into the truck.

The Doctor dodged along the colonnade. One of the main factions had premises facing both Las Rambles and Plaça Reial, so the square was splattering with loose bullets. A crashing sound suggested someone on a rooftop was dropping grenades on passing vehicles. The Doctor had one hand out, waving a somewhat grubby white handkerchief to indicate his innocent intentions, but he still preferred to keep the pockmarked pillars between the militiamen and himself. As he darted along, he pulled the key chain free, untangling it from his shirt buttons. Last archway.

He jumped across, scrambling to get the key into the lock and then tumbling the door open with his own weight. The TARDIS was as sullen as ever. The light was only from a single bulb, the shadows suggesting neglect. Closing the doors took him long moments but he dare not leave it ajar. Not with the possibility of a full street battle starting outside. The handle cranked round until the doors clunked. With the doors closed, the tension in the square was cut out. He still felt the air was charged though, the lack of a hum disconcerting.

‘Hello, old girl.’

He trailed a slim hand along the panels as he stepped over the wiring. He looked at the console for a long moment, then shrugged off his jacket, throwing the dark red velvet into a dim corner where his favourite armchair lurked. He rolled up his sleeves, still gazing at the panels. He’d been looking at things

the wrong way. The search he'd started hadn't overloaded the time machine, or caused the feedback of which his collapse had been a symptom. The old girl had been programmed to run a check of all the information communication methods of the time: newspapers, newsreels, radio broadcasts. Telephone conversations. And she'd found something. Something in the phone system that caused her to shut down, go to emergency running only. To protect herself? To protect him? He'd been looking for a fault, a failure. Something he could fix to restore the TARDIS to full working order. But the 'fault' lay outside. Until he removed whatever she had reacted to, he'd never get her back. They'd never get back. He ran his fingers down the panel, felt the dust gathered on his fingertips.

It took him the first few hours of the evening to get all the wiring reconnected and tucked back away. Then another half an hour digging through the 'recycle bin' of electronics – one of the few things there was access to – until he found the bit of discarded junk he was looking for. He sat cross-legged on the floor, smudging dirt on his face without realising it, as he painstakingly traced each connection through and double-checked. Finally, he switched the new addition on, with a muttered 'good luck' and crossed fingers behind his back.

A chunky green LED flickered briefly and the Doctor's breath caught.

The first sliver of paper was spat from the slot on the front. The ticker-printer was loaded then and he'd got the connections right, despite the lack of a circuit diagram or a user's manual. Not that the lack of those had stopped him before. Peering closer, he saw that the first inch of paper was blank. Nothing. He released his breath in a sigh. He'd hoped that the TARDIS still retained all the data she had found before the shutdown. The search must have been running for at least half an hour before his incident at the Hotel. The amount of data already retrieved in that time... and maybe even the data that had caused the problem. He'd hoped that he could re-route the emergency power enough to dump all of that data out of her memory, albeit in a highly crude form. Augment Anji's hard-found information.

The ticker thundered into life.

The mechanical clacking echoed round the stale room as the tape was spat out at high speed. The Doctor caught the first few feet in his hands, fed it through as he read it. Yes! It was the data. He started to smile, then to grin. It was here. All the time the information they had needed was here but he'd been too caught up to see it. The tape began to whirl around him as he skimmed it faster and faster, laughing.

Fitz stared at the antique rifle in his hands.

He held it lightly, gingerly, unwilling to make full contact. Joaquín slapped him on the back cheerfully. ‘Nothing will happen. Enjoy the view.’

Fitz glanced about, cautiously putting the old Mauser down on the copper roof. He turned the collar of his coat up. Dawn had arrived barely an hour before, the sky pale yellow off the coast. From here, Fitz could see the dark line of the Med through breaks in the city’s skyline. It was still chill enough that he could see his breath as faint mist and for him to wish he hadn’t left his scrounged survival kit back in the Doctor’s hotel room.

An hour ago he had been relatively warm, crammed in a first floor room of the sprawling POUM buildings. All night people had come and gone, ducking rapidly in from the deathly quiet street. Inside, they would hear the clatter of running footsteps, pausing every few feet to duck into shelter, then on again. The odd shout or fusillade of bullets. Then noise down in the foyer and more people pushing into the warmth of the crowded room. Fitz had found a corner and tried to sleep, hunched up and wanting to lie out his full length. But every time he closed his eyes, the images were still there behind them. Looped reminders of what he had seen replaying again and again. In the repeats he’d always find the comment that would have Sasha revealing all. Fitz Kreiner, Ace of Spies. He’d imagine what would have happened if he had done something different, how many lives he might have saved. Or how he might have died in the firestorm at Guernica. He hadn’t managed to sleep properly.

Then Luiz had nudged him, pointing for him to look out of the window. On the street people, militiamen were pulling up the cobblestones and starting to heap them into barricades. Someone had got a fire started behind one and was cooking a basic fry-up, the smell rising into the air. Fitz had just been considering his best options for getting hold of some of the greasy food when Joaquín had tapped him on the shoulder.

‘You can fight, yes?’

‘Er...’

‘Bueno. Bueno. We need two more for the roof of the theatre.’

Fitz had looked at the man. Joaquín, he had noticed, was all pleasant smiles and firm grips. Earlier in the night though, there had been a commotion, some kind of brawl at the main doors, and Joaquín had been down among it in moments, his face like granite. Not a man to annoy.

So he had let himself be led in a dash across a side-street, ducking low to keep behind the still-rising barricade. Up tiny narrow steps, spiralling up inside the façade of a building. The roof was gently sloping, with a slightly raised wall at

the edge. At the corners of the façade rose fake bell towers, the fronts adorned with sculpture. In each tower, a man sat crouched down into heavy layers of clothing. Their Mauser rifles propped through the narrow openings of the tower, pointing roughly towards the street below. Along the façade, a small group of men crouched or leant against the roof behind them. Seeing them arrive, the men moved slowly, carefully back from their positions. Joaquín had grabbed a gun from one of them. 'We have no more weapons, comrade, you must leave this here.'

Then he had slapped the gun into Fitz's unwilling hands.

He sighed, settled himself down in the tiny space. He hoped the Doctor and Anji were safer at the Hotel.

Her head was pounding. The mild nagging ache of the past few months had exploded as the streets had done, and now Eleana's head was louder than the guns.

She'd been at her desk, writing up something or other – she couldn't even recall what – when there was a yell that the phones were down. Almost simultaneously there had been crashes and gunfire from outside. Some of the windows of *La Batalla's* main office smashed inwards. Not by bullets but by cobbles, hurled from outside. Then people were running, clamouring through the building. Some dived into the well of their desks, hoping to be protected. Eleana grabbed her rifle and was running for the door, trying to take in all the different yelling voices, the confusing demands.

La Batalla was under attack. Not the sort of press war that they had been engaged in, with sniping from editorial positions, but actual physical attack. In a way, she preferred it. All the complexities shorn away. Fight or don't. She would fight. She would always fight. In the street, a lorryload of Asaltos were rushing at the offices. Their truck was skewed across the cobbles, giving them cover. From the first floor windows, a hail of bullets riddled it.

Over the course of the night, the assault had been pushed back. At one point, someone managed to set fire to the truck's canvas sides and it had been abandoned as cover. The orange flames had sent black coils of smoke into the night sky, hidden much of the street from view. Eleana had stayed at a position by a ground floor window, her rifle poking through the shutters. She'd almost dozed at times, her aching head letting her ignore the outbursts of fire from outside. As dawn broke, they'd realised the attackers had retreated to the end of the street and set up a new position in a shop that commanded a view of the T-junction.

The staff of *La Batalla* who had fought before emerged slowly, using the shell of the truck for cover. Quickly, efficiently, they had started to build a barricade. Tossing the cobbles along a chain of men. With a covered way to the next building now rising, Eleana had decided to make her way to Las Rambles and find out what was going on. Maybe find somewhere with some medicine for her headache.

In the morning light, dashing from cover to cover, knowing almost instinctively which buildings would be possessed by which faction, she had made her way through the Barri Gòtic. The previous twenty-four hours were written in the streets. Las Rambles was almost deserted, just a few fellow gamblers taking their chances to move around the city. The trams still sat silent and abandoned vehicles, damaged by grenades, dotted the wide pavement. This was the Communists' doing, she was sure. They had wanted control for so long that now they had decided to take it. So now they had a deadlocked, shut-down city. Where there were normally the constant sounds of life, the sense of hundreds talking or laughing and the hum of traffic, there was now silence. Broken by the occasional clatter of gunfire, often replied to by another and another until the firing trailed off again.

She turned into another street, heading towards the post office. The crack of a rifle made her duck back into a deep doorway. Someone held a vantage point and was taking potshots at anyone who walked into view. Peering round, she spotted a church tower. Of course, Santa Maria del Pi. Held by Communists. Bastards.

Eleana tried to decide which route to take. She could do a big loop and end up two blocks beyond the church. Or change her plans and try the telephone exchange. She got a brief, sudden, mental image of the chaos at the exchange: faces whirling past, Anji cowering in a corner next to a corpse. She shook her head, dislodging the image with a burst of pain. Then she spotted movement beyond the tiny plaza. A flash of a scarlet coat. The Doctor was hurrying up a side street, intent on the strips of paper clutched in his arms, trailing in his wake like streamers. He could have no idea of the sniper in the tower. Idiot.

'Doctor!'

He didn't look up. Eleana wondered why she was bothering. She was still annoyed with Anji after the other night. The foreigners were dangerous, with their insane idea of gathering together the 'truth'. The Doctor would be in the line of fire in a moment. She didn't care.

'Oh, fantastic,' she said as she checked her rifle was loaded.

She took loose aim at the tower and fired off two rounds. Even as the recoil

of the second shot was bruising her shoulder she was moving across the open ground, her boots slamming into the uneven ground. She almost cannoned into the Doctor, who was only just looking up from the reams of paper. She felt the velvet under her arm and dragged him sideways. The wall she'd used as shelter moments before splattered stone shrapnel as it was hit by bullets. She shoved the Doctor behind an abandoned car, roughly releasing his shoulder. Several bullets pinged off the radiator. She crouched down beside him, fumbling in her ammo belt for another couple of rounds.

'Hello, Eleana. How are you? And thank you, by the way.' He was chatting to her as if they had just run into each other at a café. He didn't seem to regard the risks at all. She couldn't believe he'd just been wandering through the streets. He was still looking cheerfully about, taking in their dire position. Or possibly admiring the architecture. She rammed a round into the chamber, angry that she had got sidetracked. That she'd got involved with this lot at all.

'Are you a fool, Doctor? What are you doing out here?'

'I was on my way to the telephone exchange, actually. Got a bit turned about by the new street configuration.'

'Because Anji's there, I suppose.'

'Sorry?'

'You're going to the exchange because Anji is up there.'

The Doctor's face, which had looked boyishly enthusiastic up to that point, fell.

'Anji was there? Oh.'

Eleana crosschecked her rifle and rose slightly, glancing cautiously over the top of the car. No bullet came. Looking about, she saw they could get into a narrow alley that would lead them parallel to Las Rambles, up towards the telefonica. She ducked back down, glancing at the Doctor. He was skimming through the armfuls of what she now saw was ticker tape, reading far faster than she had ever seen anyone read.

'We can get into Pi, then up Avenda Portal de L'Angel and up towards the exchange that way,' she told him, 'but the place is still besieged. They attacked there and our offices at the same time yesterday afternoon.'

'Oh it's not the fighting I'm worried about,' he remarked absently, almost to himself. 'There's something else up there, in the phone system.'

Eleana stopped, one hand paused in counting the remaining ammo in her pouch. One bullet dropped through her still fingers and she frowned. She sensed the Doctor reaching down and picking it up, offering it back to her. 'Are

you all right?’ he was asking again but this time in a concerned voice. She could barely hear him through the pounding in her skull.

‘Eleana?’

His hand on her arm brought her crashing back into focus. She nodded to him, then indicated the alley he should run for. ‘We should move. This place is far too exposed. I’ll cover you.’

He nodded and started somehow bundling the armful of tape into the pockets of his dark red jacket. He got carefully to his feet, keeping his head low, crouching almost double to stay out of sight. Eleana visualised the line of sight to the sniper’s probable position, took a deep breath and stood. She got one shot off and dived back even as the Doctor dashed across the street and into the dark gloom of the alleyway. Five, maybe six rounds hit the radiator of the car, zinging loudly. They had more advanced weapons than she did. Bloody foreign intervention. Always aiding the side they thought was of most use to them, not the side that was the best. She loaded another round, took a deep breath and ran for the alley. Stooping low and running fast. She could almost sense the bullets at her heels. She got a few feet into the darkness and relaxed, straightening and leaning against the cool wall.

‘Eleana?’

He was still there, hovering in the gloom. It was people like him and Anji and Jueves, with their romantic notions about this war, that caused these problems. They’d report back to Europe and America and then those countries would refuse aid to the revolution. So afraid that their own proletariat would rise against them. Stopping arms getting through, leaving them to the mercies of the Communists and fascists. Moscow and Seville wanted to rule this town and Eleana was against them both. Her head was screaming now, so she could hardly understand her own words, her own thoughts.

The Doctor had turned his back on her, started up the incline, stepping around the rubbish. Eleana rechecked that there was a bullet in the breach. Raising the stock to her shoulder, she took careful aim in the centre of that flaunting red coat and pulled the trigger.

Chapter Ten

El Detingut

The gun exploded, the firing pin flying backwards. Eleana recoiled, screaming. One whole side of her face was agony, the cool air on the raw skin burning her.

She was aware of the cobbles pressing into her spine, the hot metal of the rifle under her arm. Her head was still thrumming with pain, a steady hard ache underlying the sharp ice of her face. She started to raise one hand up, touched the undamaged side. Even putting her fingers on to that made her nerves scream. Then a strong arm was taking hold of her wrist, pulling her hand away.

‘Try not to move, let me look.’

The Doctor. Eleana pushed at him with her arm, broke his hold. She tried to use her right arm to push herself off the alley floor but her shoulder refused the weight and the arm was almost dead. Must have been the recoil. The Doctor’s hands were taking her arms again, trying to help her up.

‘Get off me!’

‘Eleana...?’

‘Get off! Get off!’

She tried to open both eyes but her right one was clogged and she almost screamed when the muscles moved. She squinted instead with just her left, saw the creature crouched beside her. He was in the blue and black uniform of the Asaltos and his face. . .

It was as if there were many, overlaid. The tired, charming Doctor she had known was reveal as all harsh angles, implacable cruel lines. The gentle half-smile was sardonic, vicious. This man, this man was a killer. And the face was flickering, jolting. Like some crude animation. She scrambled backwards, using her good arm as leverage until her back hit a wall. The pain jarred through her dislocated shoulder, making her cry out. Her head was hurting so much that she couldn’t see clearly out of her good eye and she realised the agony sliding down her burnt cheek was a salt tear. The thing in front of her was speaking, saying her name.

'No, please no,' she babbled, trying to pull her knees up. She could only take in the blurred, flicking shape now. The blue and black that she so feared, the cold eyes of the man in the uniform. She hoped, briefly, that the pain would make her pass out.

'Eleana?'

The Doctor was crouched next to her, carefully not touching her and shielding them from the mouth the alleyway. His red coat was half off his shoulders as if he had been about to wrap her in it. He looked perfectly normal, concerned. She sagged against the wall, putting her good hand up to the good side of her face and rubbing the eye carefully.

'You blacked out for a moment then,' the Doctor said gently. 'The pain, it was so bad,' she explained.

He put slim fingers under her chin and turned her head slightly, looking at the injured side. She winced as the tendons moved and tugged at the still peeling skin.

'It's burnt, but you were lucky. I think the stock blew out sideways and not backwards, otherwise it would have been much worse.'

From the corner of her eye she could see the shattered weapon lying in the alley. Then she remembered.

'I think I was hallucinating.'

'Just now? From the pain. That's very possible, you may have been going into shock.'

Eleana managed a faint grin, just tugging at the left side of her mouth. 'I thought you were not a medical doctor.'

The Doctor smiled back. He finished pulling his jacket off and made her lean forward so he could put it across her shoulders. She wanted to scream as he briefly touched her right arm, but managed to bite it down. The Doctor frowned.

'This arm's dislocated. Do you trust me to put it back? It would save you a lot of pain until we can get to a medical centre.'

She continued to watch him. What had she been thinking before? That he was working against them, that he was dangerous? Why had she been thinking that? It had seemed the right thing to do. She got a flash of his back, broad in her sights as she pulled the trigger.

'Not only just now. Before. I thought I saw things. Monsters. You were a fascist and I tried to shoot you.'

The Doctor glanced at the fallen gun, pausing in rolling up the sleeves of his dark shirt.

'Is that what you think?' he asked.

'No. It's what I saw. But the pain, I think it was twisting how I saw things, exaggerating my fears.'

The Doctor took her dead arm in his hand and looked in her good eye. Eleana couldn't tell their exact colour in the dim light of the alley but she could see they weren't the dark cruel eyes she had imagined before. 'Do you trust me?' he asked again and she found herself nodding. There was a pull and a tug and a sharp agony in her shoulder, making her whimper. Then it was better. There was still an ache, her arm still flopped at her side, but the grinding pain had gone and she could move her neck more. Now the Doctor was taking her good arm and helping her to her feet. He glanced about, got his bearings and then started to guide her up the alley.

'The nearest medics are on Las Rambles, close by Liceu Metro. I'll get you there but then I've got to go on.'

As he led her into a covered passageway that would lead them back on to the main street, Eleana paused and looked back down the way they had come. The shaft of the broken rifle glinted in the cool shadows. It was strange, despite the pain of the burns, she felt calmer. Like she was free of something, some weight that had hung about her mind and dragged her down for the last few months. She had meant to shoot him. She clutched the arm underneath hers.

'Doctor. Listen. It's very important. You mustn't trust anyone in this city. Not even your friends. Something is watching us, using us.'

The Doctor nodded grimly. 'Yes, and I think I've finally realised how.'

Fitz was fantasising about cigarettes. Real manufactured straights made of the finest Virginian tobacco. Not the brittle, flaky stuff that he'd been given by Joaquín earlier that night, so dry that it fell out of the tube once he'd rolled it.

It was cold up here, the clear air stealing the heat from the streets. He sank lower into his greatcoat, the rough collar rasping against his stubble. Two days since fighting broke out, since he'd been commandeered into sitting on this wretched roof. Sat in the dirt with the stench of dried sweat only occasionally hidden by the acrid smell of cordite. Half an hour's sleep snatched here or there, leaning against a chimneystack, waking in a start whenever something clattered against the copper. Relief if it was a comrade's boot, fear if it wasn't.

'Hey. Hey! Hijos de puta!' The shout was from the far side of the street. Fitz knew that one by now: 'sons of whores'.

'Si?' Joaquín leant forward to yell, 'Hijos de Pasionaria!'

Fitz leant his head back, stared up at the stars. ‘Of all the ways, I’ve envisaged dying, this has to be the most unlikely,’ he muttered under his breath. For years now, he’d imagined his death would be up there, or in some strange future version of Earth. He had vague memories of jumping off a tower but they were indistinct, like something he’d seen in a movie. Not really him at all.

The grenade cracked against the slanting roof beside them, clattering and skittering down the tiles. Luiz, closest to him, swore. Fitz felt his limbs were weighted, unable to move at the speed his brain was so urgently yelling for. Then hands were grabbing the homemade grenade, hurling it back into the night.

‘Sheep of Stalin!’ Joaquín shouted cheerfully as the grenade fell into the street below. Fitz automatically covered his head, waiting for the explosion. Nothing. Another dud. On the opposing rooftop, the PSUC were supposed to be better armed, better trained and better organised. Of the grenades thrown in the past two days, though, only one had exploded and that had been misthrown into the apartments next door.

‘Hey, Fitz?’ Luiz asked him.

‘Yeah?’

‘We get off this roof and I take Eleana for a drink. You think she will come?’

‘I don’t know, Luiz. You asked her?’

‘Not yet.’

Fitz nodded and grinned. ‘Just ask her.’

Luiz nodded, then wrapped his arms around himself and fell silent. Fitz went back to imagining his perfect cigarette: so much easier than considering if he wanted to die on a Barcelona rooftop less than a year after he was born, or trying to imagine his ideal partner. And he still kept seeing Heinkels, smelling cordite, blood. That would just bring back far too many memories, too many moments he could never go back to. He had managed to snatch a few hours the day before to go the Hotel. The rooms were in a state, empty. There had been no notes or signs of where the Doctor or Anji were, or had gone. The guy at the desk had known nothing. He hadn’t had a chance to check on the TARDIS or look for Sasha. Fitz tucked his chin under the top of the greatcoat, hugged himself tighter.

‘Hey!’ The soldiers in the Moka were calling up to them. ‘Hey, it’s over!’

Joaquín laughed loudly. ‘You say that now...’

‘No, it’s true.’

There was the sound of rapid boots running up the spiral stairs, almost slipping in their haste. Joaquín had his pistol out, ready, as Alberto’s head came

into view. His arm was still in a tight sling against his torso but he was grinning. Joaquín. It is over. Joaquín.'

Fitz felt his face break into a grin as well. At last he could go and have a decent bath at the Oriente, take his time. He could go back to what he ought to be doing, find Anji and the Doctor. Find Sasha. He stuck his head into view and yelled down to the men in the Café Moka.

'Hey! Did you save us that beer like you promised?'

Anji wasn't sure what time it was. The way the days had dragged, she wasn't even sure what day it was. She thought she had been stuck in this dump for under forty-eight hours but she couldn't tell as they had taken her watch from her on the way in.

The truck had dropped her in a courtyard. She hadn't recognised the building as they were herded through it. She was taken to one side, along with a handful of other women who had been in the truck. Anji had assumed that they would have their papers checked and be released. She had done nothing wrong, after all. Except for the forged papers, a tiny voice had pointed out. They had checked her papers, and her person, and then taken her belongings away and shoved her down a corridor with the other women. It had taken precious moments to realise what was happening and then she had yelled that she was English, that she demanded her rights, that she wanted to know the charges. The guards had just laughed and pushed her through the gates anyway.

The cell was in the basement. The only light came from a well set high in the wall and the stone floor was always chilly from the damp ground below it. It was maybe twenty feet square and Anji guessed it had once been a wine cellar for the huge building above. It certainly hadn't been designed for human habitation. For the first hour, she had yelled at anyone she saw passing but eventually she had found herself a spot and settled in to wait. As soon as the fighting was over, they'd be released. They hadn't done anything wrong after all.

The café had been quiet during the afternoon, people still wary of staying out. The markets had reopened straight away of course, and queues formed for bread, but the bars had been half-empty. Fitz had planned to get away to the Oriente quickly, but he had trouble making his excuses. First there had been much discussion of what would happen next and the arguments when they had found out the POUM were already being blamed for the unrest. Then there had been getting the guns back from the theatre roof without getting into trouble.

Then Joaquín had suggested he buy them all a drink for their efforts over the previous few days. The one glass of beer had turned to two, then three, then news of who had been wounded or killed started to filter through properly and toasts had to be raised to the fallen. Maybe five hundred dead, from all the different factions, in three days of fighting. Fitz was starting to suspect the fascists were just waiting for their opponents to kill each other rather than actually attack.

So he'd stopped for one drink and ended up staying for several. They'd taken over the back half of a dingy bar off a side street, well away from where they had been fighting. It was a basic place, the barrels resting on a heavy rack behind the bar. No special beers or wine, just basic stuff. No food, no nibbles. After the first three beers, Fitz had a new burst of energy. He suspected it was just the exhaustion and alcohol making him reel. The time on the train with Sasha had paid off, and he'd led the rag-tag group in a chorus of *Ay Carmela*, only occasionally stumbling over the words. They had laughed, slapped him on the back and called him their good luck.

'Contra ataques muy rabiosos... deberemos resisti...'

'Traïdors!' someone yelled. Fitz paused, looking round. A group of the People's Army had come into the front of the bar, their smart uniforms blocking the view of the door. Luiz stood abruptly, his chair scraping back on the tiled floor. One of the newcomers stepped back slightly, but the others jostled him. The captain rapped on the bar, demanding beer for all his men. He turned his back on the scruffy men in the back and started to talk loudly. Fitz clutched at his glass and tried to look nonchalant. He could spot a brewing bar fight anywhere. The mere presence of a ranked officer was an affront to the POUM and then Fitz caught a snatch of the rant the man was addressing to his men.

'- the POUM are in league with the rebels, starting this fracas to distract us from the real enemy -'

'Liars!' Luiz was roaring. Alberto had his good arm on his friend's, trying to hold him back. Fitz couldn't hear what the academic was saying under the sudden shouting from all sides, but he suspected it was a variation on 'leave it, he's not worth it'. Fitz hurriedly drained his beer, waiting for a chance to make his excuses before things got messy. There was no way he was getting involved. He had more important things to do.

There was a flurry of shouting and pushing. People arguing with their friends, or gesturing at the other group. Then Luiz pulled himself free of Alberto's grip and launched himself at the captain, jarring the table sideways. Fitz leapt back, grabbing his dead glass to stop it toppling. Three of the cap-

tain's men put themselves in the way of Luiz but the huge man was roaring with anger, throwing punches hard. Fitz looked about, started trying to edge around the sudden melee. Then something got thrown, smashed into the wall above his head. Fitz ducked after the impact, cursing as splinters fell into his unkempt hair.

'Bloody great.' There was no way out of the bar now, the whole area was full of shoving and yelling. Customers near the door had already piled out and the barman had grabbed a broom and was swinging it at the mass of fighters, yelling for them to get out. Fitz started shoving along the wall, keeping his head low, still clutching the empty glass. 'Excuse me, coming through, not involved, lemme out.'

The scrum heaved in his direction, knocking the wind out of his chest and crushing him up against the wall. An elbow dug into his ribs. 'OK, that's it.'

Fitz shoved back, lashing out with his arm. He didn't even know who he was aiming for. All the sides had become tumbled into one giant mass of limbs and glimpses of faces, rolling around the room, crashing into things. But as soon as he lashed out, someone kicked back and he found himself entangled with the edge. He stopped looking at what he was doing, just pushed and shoved and shouldered and kicked. One hand curled the glass into his chest, almost like a talisman. He felt like he was running at a different speed, reacting faster, the adrenalin making his head rush. A broad back smashed into him, crushing his curled hand against his chest. Angry, he shoved back. A mechanical sound was crashing repeatedly over the brawling yells. Fitz heard the sound a few times before he recognised it for what it was: someone was firing a handgun.

Then hands were grabbing people, pulling them apart.

More uniforms. Fitz found himself hauled to his feet, roughly pulled forward. The new arrivals included two men in civvies who somehow didn't look too civil. Secret police? Luiz was outside and running. Fitz couldn't see what was going on outside the bar, his view blocked by the group. The officer that had arrived along with the reinforcements was shouting at them all in Spanish, Fitz was barely listening. With the rush of the fight gone, he was swaying on his feet and was more concerned with staying upright than trying to keep up with the haranguing they were getting. God, he was exhausted. He started to imagine crashing on to the tiny single bed in the Doctor's room, the one that never got slept in anyway. The clean dry linen. . . the relative silence.

'Hey!'

One of the guards was grabbing his bicep, hauling him upright again. He was aware of his arm being pulled forward, his hand turned palm upwards.

Then he realised that the steady ache from it was because of the cuts. Long shallow gashes, all along the inside of his hand. Well done, Fitz, carry a glass during a bar fight and *don't* use it as a weapon. He was being pulled forward, out into the street, his good arm firmly gripped. He noticed absently that the people who had gathered to watch the fight had scattered. On the other side of the narrow lane, one woman stood watching, holding her child against her legs. Fitz tried to grin at her but he could feel his legs buckling. The guards on either side of him kept him moving, his feet stumbling over the cobbles. Then he was being guided into the back of a battered Citroën.

'Am I going to the hospital?' he asked one of the men as the doors slammed. The guard laughed.

'Oh, you're going to get the treatment all right.'

The door was ajar, the lock smashed.

It had been surprisingly easy to gain access. The PSUC had been stuck besieging the anarchists within the building, unable to get past the machine gun set up on the landing. After the initial fighting, the two sides had settled into a form of truce until the city had agreed on what to do, letting the exchange reopen. He'd arrived to find the Communist troops packing up, the various politicians having come to an understanding and ordered them to withdraw. They were sending up the last of their sandwiches to the staff and the Doctor offered to help.

They were still wary. Although the Communists were leaving, a new assault was underway. The lines hummed with talk of how the anarchists and militia were fifth columnists, funded by the Germans to create havoc and distract the legitimate government from the war effort. Rumours of retaliatory strikes spread, a cycle of tit-for-tat shootings that would snipe away at the fragile alliance. Even after all this time, the Doctor wondered how people could be persuaded to let go of the violence. It was tempting, always, just to lash out in pain. He knew he had done it in his past, succumbed to that desire for swift revenge, the kick or the shaking that expressed that hurt. Five hundred dead though, and now rising again.

There was no sign of Anji downstairs, although one of the bleary-eyed men on the machine gun nest remembered her passing him on the stairs. But that had been days ago, before the fighting broke out. In the main exchange hall, the manager had looked distracted. He'd waved his hand and suggested the Doctor look about for himself. The man had been chewing his thumbnail, cajoling various people down the phone lines, demanding reassurances that Salas was

gone. The Doctor had briefly wondered about asking if the man was aware there was something alive within the phone system. Then he had looked again at the frazzled nerves and decided not to bother.

Instead he'd glanced at the schematic of the building's wiring, upside-down and coffee-stained, taking in the complexity of lines and connections quickly. There had been a single line that didn't fit: a single connection permanently on, one end leading up into the attic instead of down the main trunk lines. He wondered what would happen if he tugged on it? Grinning, he'd bounded up the narrow, rubbish strewn stairs two at a time and into the attics.

The lock was smashed on the final, fourth door. The room beyond was dark, discouraging.

He pushed on it gently, slipped in and paused, letting his mind get used to what lay beyond. He heard the whispering first: a harsh low sound hissing in the air like so much static interference. There was no immediately obvious source. There were words in it though, in all sorts of voices. There was no pattern to the changes in tone or key, just random words, churned out and indistinguishable.

Then his eyes grew accustomed to the room. Hanging frozen in the air were hundreds, thousands of images. He could read the captions, the time and date stamps, the locating co-ordinates. He could see the patterns the images were sorted in, the links between one group and another. He noticed one set, stamped as Bilbao a fortnight before. There were glimpses of Anji, Fitz and himself. Yet the figures faded in and out, fluxing. Of course, they weren't tied to this time, he realised. Whatever had been observing them had seen the same moment both with and without them. And whatever was observing them hadn't been able to decide which was the real one because they both were.

'I.'

It was the first word that had come clearly out of the sound montage. The first he had been able to hear now he wasn't concentrating on it.

'A camera.' A different voice, male. Then a third. 'It's.'

'Shutters.'

'Open.'

Never the same voice. It was as if whoever, whatever, had plucked the images was also plundering the myriad conversations buzzing through the net below to create a voice. The Doctor stepped forward slightly into the room, trying to look beyond the fluttering cells. They danced in front of him, trying to build a barrier, he felt. He searched for the right words to say. Somehow he felt a basic 'Hello, I'm the Doctor,' wouldn't be well received. Yes, there it was, a quote in

his brain.

“‘I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.’
Isherwood, wasn’t it?’

There was a frantic susurrantion through the images, the stolen sounds crackling madly. Dodging to look around the floating cells, the Doctor caught a glimpse of a figure, on a camp bed hard up against the inner wall. The Doctor pushed forward, brushing aside the furious lunges from the stills.

‘I always thought that was a bit deliberately conscious. The camera conceals as much as it shows, don’t you think?’ he continued.

Yes, there was a figure there. A man, in a rough grey suit, curled into a rocking ball. Yet the voices didn’t come from him.

‘Camera. Passive. Impartial.’

‘Well, yes. The camera is objective, but the person who points it isn’t. And people behave differently when they think they are observed.’

‘Observed.’ The word came back in hundreds of voices. The Doctor could catch hundreds of inflections in it. A fearful man; a woman in a nervous assignation in a dingy hotel room; a militiaman describing his position. The Doctor batted a flickering image of himself and – actually, had that been. . . ? But when he turned to find the image again, it had danced backwards into the dark corners. He shrugged and looked down at the man he had found.

‘All. Wrong. No order. No. Truth.’

‘Ah.’ The Doctor wondered if, somewhere in the back of this record of himself, there was a glimpse of him sat with Jean-Paul. He wondered how extensive this surveillance had been, how much this man knew. He might have any number of answers. He might know the things Fitz was so careful to avoid mentioning. He might have records of the Doctor’s past, might be able to tell the Doctor just what had happened. He tentatively raised a hand to touch the man.

The figure’s head shot up and the Doctor tried not to recoil from the face. Whatever had been watching them, it wasn’t human. Or sane. He wondered why he had even entertained the idea that it was.

‘Absolute.’ The voices whispered and commanded.

‘Bloody h-’

Fitz bit his lip hard at the sharp look from the woman. She had his wrist in a vicelike grip and was holding it hard against the edge of a table. The tweezers in her other hand pulled out a final shard of glass.

‘Flex,’ she commanded. Fitz winced.

‘But. . .’

‘Flex.’

He straightened his fingers, almost closing his eyes in fear of the pain. The gashes were, mostly, shallow but moving his hand made the raw edges move against each other. The nurse gestured and he curled his fingers in tight. She nodded, pulled his fist open again and started binding the palm.

‘Keep moving it, yes? Otherwise you will not be picking up that guitar again.’

She laughed when he started, pausing briefly to tap the tips of his fingers. ‘You have revealing hands. Calluses, here, see?’

Fitz nodded and watched as she finished tying the bandage on. He’d not even thought of that. He’d been so bothered by where he was going, by what would happen to him, that he hadn’t even considered that his stupid behaviour back at the bar had nearly ruined his playing. Too caught up in the politics of the here and now to worry about notions of culture or future. A medic had been past, rushing with nervous energy, and glanced at his wound. Then the woman had come and fixed it. He flexed it again, wincing still at the pain, but worried that the hand might get stuck in the clawlike shape. It hurt, badly. The tendons wanted to cramp up. He stared at the bandages in misery.

‘Up.’ The woman was pushing him, none too gently, getting him out of the chair. Another man was already shuffling forward, limping. His trouser leg was ripped and bloodied. Fitz hurriedly got up and moved aside. He glanced about, wondering where he was meant to go. He’d been hurried in so fast, through a heavy door set in a high wall, then along corridors to these two long low rooms. He had no idea where he was, or how to get out.

‘You. English!’

A guard was by one of the doors. The only open door, in fact, glaring and gesturing at him to hurry. Fitz walked over quickly, cradling his injured hand and trying to keep the fingers moving slightly. Now he was fixed up he could get back to the Hotel. He was delayed enough already. The guard grabbed his uninjured arm and started marching him deeper into the building.

‘Hey, I can walk you know! It’s my hand that was hurt, not my legs.’

The guard ignored him, just kept them hurrying along. Down a wide, echoing stairwell now. Sounds reverberated, distant conversations, laughter, the clatter of heels. Four soldiers rushed up the stairs, brushing past Fitz without a glance.

‘I don’t need an escort. Just show me the way out,’ Fitz suggested. He didn’t like this at all. The medical rooms weren’t part of a hospital, as he’d assumed, they were part of something military. At the bottom of the stairs, his guard – and Fitz realised with a sinking sensation that that was literally what he was – talked hurriedly to two more. Doors were unlocked.

Fitz reacted the instant he felt the guard's grip loosen slightly. He ducked, tried to shove backwards out of their reach. Kicking and yelling and elbowing. All three grabbed him. His yelling turned to a scream as one took hold of his bad hand and squeezed it. His knees crumpled under him as the pain shot up his arm.

They were laughing now, holding his arms wide, leaving his torso open for the kick or punch. Then the one behind him shoved him in the back and he fell forward, his face hitting the concrete floor, his hands too slow to cushion him. Then he was being picked up and dragged down another grey corridor. He saw the black iron grill of a cell door. Ah, cells. He was hauntingly familiar with cells. He put up his arms to break his fall as they shoved him in, then yelled as the gashes in his hand reopened under their bandages. The door slammed behind him, the tumblers rattled over.

Fitz sighed into the floor. Great. Absolutely bloody great. Well done, Fitz. You managed a whole fortnight before you were beaten up and banged up this time. He wondered if that was his personal best.

Hands were taking hold of him again, lifting him up, but gently this time. He groaned and shook his head, looked about. The cell was maybe twenty foot by twenty foot. It had far too many men in it, for its size. He could smell the bucket in the corner already, the sour stench making his nose wrinkle. There were no beds, only wooden benches along the walls. Some men were stretched out on these, others were sitting on the floor. Several were, like him, showing signs of injuries.

He let one of the other prisoners lead him to the bench where, after some angry gestures, a space was made. He leaned back, letting his head drop back until he felt the coarse wall on his skull. Every bit of him ached. He actually felt too tired to sleep, even if he'd been able to forget about the swift bursts of harsh throbbing in his hand every time it moved. Someone nudged him and he slowly reopened his eyes, lowered his gaze to theirs. The bare minimum of movement. The man next to him silently offered a tin cup, maybe a quarter full of water. Fitz smiled his thanks and took a couple of sips.

'Careful. We don't know when they will be round again,' the man remarked. Fitz lowered the cup, glancing about to take in more details of the room. There was no tap in the cell. They must come round and dole out water, he supposed. He handed the almost empty cup back, wiping his good hand across his lips. He studied the man next to him. Middle-aged, middle weight. Nothing special. The sort of guy who would be passed in the street without a second glance.

'Where are we?' Fitz asked, quietly.

‘You don’t know?’

‘I was, well, a bit worse for wear when they brought me in,’ Fitz saw the man frown and tried to clarify. ‘I had been drinking. Is this the drunk tank?’

‘Drunk tank?’

‘Yeah, where they lock you up till you sober up?’ Fitz wasn’t very hopeful. Drunk tanks didn’t tend to have military guards or a lack of basic facilities. Especially the latter. But it was worth hoping. The older man shook his head.

‘This is a waiting room.’

‘Huh?’

The man gestured loosely to the door. ‘We wait. They come. They take one of us to Burton.’

The man did have a face. There were deep-set, intense eyes, a long craggy nose. A small mouth and cavernous cheeks. But it wasn’t human; it wasn’t right. After his first recoil, the Doctor looked to see what was wrong, what jarred about the face. It was discordant, just like the sampled and stolen voice. Each feature had been picked individually and fitted together. But where the areas met, where on a normal human the skin would gradually shade from the bluish smudge of an eye socket to the red of the nose, there were joins. Lines or blocks. Changes in skin tone. Yet it wasn’t like a photofit. The head was in all dimensions, it had depth and movement. The perspectives were skewed, though, just out enough to confuse the eye.

Now he was looking for it, the Doctor could see the same hints of discord in the clothes, in the whole figure. He wondered who this creature had modelled himself after, assuming a model had been used. There was something not quite familiar, not quite close enough to jar his memory. When the creature looked back at the Doctor, really looked, his expression changed. It was as if a new image of some eyes had been selected, fearful and worried, and slotted in. Then the creature started to scream. Hundreds of overlapping screams, peeling like bells and causing the Doctor to clutch at his head.

‘You! You!’ the creature started to babble. There was the dull thump of feet running down the corridor outside. The creature – the Absolute, was that what it had called itself? – was cringing back, pointing. The Doctor was alarmed to see the hand was flickering: alternating between a finger and a gun, as if unable to decide. Even as he held up placating hands, he wondered if he could be shot by the creature.

‘What’s your name?’ he asked, trying to return to even the fragments of conversation.

The door was being pushed aside and soldiers were calling, asking if he was all right.

‘Comrade. This room is unstable. The floor. You should come out,’ one of the militiamen said, gesturing at the worn grey boards. The Doctor made a hushing gesture without turning round, keeping his eyes on the quivering creature.

‘Not without him.’ He took one step forward and realised the soldier was right. The floor felt flimsy, moved slightly under his weight.

‘Who? Comrade, you are the only one here. Please, come back here.’

The Doctor did look round then. He could see the overlapping cells, floating and drifting around the room, obscuring his view. Yet the militiaman stood in the door was looking directly at him, concerned but not confused. Could he even see the contents of the room? The Doctor dismissed it for the moment, turned back to the Absolute.

‘Have you a name?’

‘Impersonal. No, no names. Invisible. Not seen. Enrique. Observers changing observed. All wrong.’

‘Enrique?’ The Doctor’s mind was whirling, slotting the fragmented words into what he knew. He remembered Jueves, standing in Anji’s room. *It’s all about perception.*

‘Wrong. All wrong. Here. Not here.’ Enrique was muttering, his voices whispering out of the corners of the room. Then the man unfolded from his ball and lunged at the Doctor, screaming. All wrong! All wrong!’

The Doctor tried to sidestep, putting his arms out to try to catch the hurtling body but Enrique was screaming, pushing past.

‘Hey!’ The militiaman was yelling too, suddenly shouting at the Doctor. Only now he was sending a stream of abuse at him. Enrique raced past the man, the cells dancing in his wake. The Doctor started after him but the soldier put up his arm, barred the way.

‘I have to stop him,’ the Doctor said angrily, trying to get past. The militiaman was holding fast though, and the Doctor saw something odd in his eyes. The same frightened and outraged look that Eleana had had in the alleyway.

‘You’re a monster,’ the man told him, jerking an elbow towards the Doctor’s face. He ducked, blocking the arm and getting past. He grabbed the doorframe as he ran through it, using it to brake and turn his run. He caught a glimpse of something turning down the stairs and ran after it.

Down into the main switchboard, the operators staring at him open mouthed. He could see Enrique already going through the door beyond, down again towards the foyer, but the girls just stared at him, recoiling. As he raced past

them, putting up his arms to bash the swinging door aside, the Doctor connected another part of the string. The creature had been based in the telephone exchange. The place where so much information was passed. And he'd used it too, had somehow used it to reach observers, to see what was going on. But the observers had been changed by it.

The Doctor took the stairs three at a time, more a controlled fall than a descent. He barged through the main doors, glancing wildly about the quiet street. There was no sign of the strange figure.

The jangle of keys made only half of them look up. Fitz glanced about the room. The listless, dispirited mood had deepened gradually throughout the day, though they had received no visits, no new prisoners. They just waited, with the dulled boredom of a doctor's waiting room. The man next to Fitz, José, had told him, in a few hurried whispers, what was known about Burton. He was the NKVD's best man. He took people and broke them. Some had come back, after being taken to see him, others had vanished forever.

'Buried or burnt,' the man had said with horrified interest.

The ones that had been brought back to the cells were quivering, shaken. Yet there were few physical marks on them. Not enough to account for their state.

Fitz's hand had subsided to a dull ache now, throbbing in time to his pulse. He would periodically straighten the fingers, worried about his tendons tightening shorter. That would cause a deeper ache, gradually subsiding. The sound of people moving along the corridor, the jangle of the keys, was the first external stimulus for hours. The ones who looked up were glancing about, as he was. The ones that didn't seemed to hunch further down, keeping their eyes closed. Absurdly, Fitz was reminded of the way he and his classmates would sit on their hands whenever a volunteer was called for, hoping desperately not to be noticed.

Several men dressed in Popular Army uniforms appeared in the doorway, with the same two civilians who had been at the bar. Fitz caught a glimpse of others behind them.

'English,' one of them barked, looking into the cell, straight at Fitz. Fitz looked to either side, automatically double-checking.

'Yes, you.'

Fitz wondered what would happen if he didn't move. He wondered how much of a fight he could put up. Maybe they were releasing him, though. The mistaken identity resolved? Yeah, and maybe he was about to vanish entirely. Even as he started to rise, realising that refusing to move wouldn't miraculously

free him, the soldiers were striding over, grabbing his arms. As he was bundled forward, back through the door, he heard José shout for him to have luck. Then he caught a glimpse of one of the civilians waiting at the outer gate, a notepad ready in hand. Of course, they thought he might start babbling on the way to see the forbidding Burton. They were ready to take any statement he cared to make. The notary frowned at him, took a single step back. Fitz stared into her startled eyes.

‘Pia?’

Chapter Eleven

Jo Veure La Llei

The room was trashed.

The Doctor stood in the doorway of Anji's room and took in the mess. The hand-drawn map had been ripped off the wall, shredded. The careful stacks of paper were strewn all over the floor. Anji's handful of clothes were pulled off their hangers, crumpled on the floor. The chair's covers had been ripped off, the guts spilling out. He took one step forward, just over the threshold and felt his ankle twist on something. Looking down, lifting his foot, he saw a rock. One of Anji's paperweights. He picked it up, absently slipped it into his pocket.

The notebooks were gone. Not trashed but actually gone, taken. The record of six months of life here removed, wiped out. He picked up some of the paper, glanced at it. It was a single scrap from the translation book. The Doctor looked at the chaos. Anji would be seriously annoyed when she saw this. Wherever she was.

He suddenly crumpled up the page in his hand, smashed the curled fist into the doorframe. He'd lost them. Fitz and Anji. Had they been back here when this had happened? He'd not seen them since the fighting had broken out.

Then he noticed the doorframe. The lock hadn't been smashed. The frame was intact, the outside of the door unmarked. Glancing about the room he noticed that the windows, the mirror, were intact. Only their own property had been damaged. Everything that belonged to the Hotel Oriente was untouched. Whoever had done this had had the collusion of one or more of the hotel staff. And, despite the state of the place, there was no sign of an actual struggle. No sense of a physical fight.

He crossed the corridor to his own room, half hoping to find Fitz buried under the covers refusing to get up or Anji waiting behind the door with a chair leg for a weapon. The door was locked. Inside, the bed was made, just as he'd left it. He had no personal belongings here, nothing to be disturbed. And no sign of Fitz. Or Anji. And the chair was intact. He closed the door again, locking it behind him. He decided to take the stairs and walked down slowly, trying to

work out whether it was worth asking at the desk about what had happened to Anji's room. He turned the paperweight over and over inside his pocket.

As he took the last stair into the foyer, he saw Cristo glancing quickly away. So, it was no good asking what had happened here. The whole building stank of paranoia. The sun was too high, the daylight didn't reach very far into the foyer, leaving areas in shadows. The sinuous lines of the modernista design seemed more organic, more like tendrils curling around them. Then he noticed a familiar face in the people hanging about the foyer. Jueves winked at him from behind a folded out paper, twitching his head to indicate the Doctor should join him. He was sat back from the main area, able to view the main doors and the stairway without being immediately obvious. His eyes were hidden behind his glasses as they reflected the brightly lit areas. The Doctor hurried over. He didn't bother to take the empty chair next to the journalist.

'Anji and Fitz are missing. Her room has been trashed. All our work gone,' he whispered urgently. Jueves folded his paper, dropped it on to the empty seat.

'We shouldn't talk here.'

The Doctor nodded. He wanted to get moving, do something. He'd lost Enrique and he was sure that the creature was the key to this. The two were connected: that was what the TARDIS had recovered, before her shutdown. The Absolute had been going to rip through her information banks, stripping her of data and then using her as storage. The time machine had shut down to protect herself, to stop her corruption. The Doctor was sure the other creature was Enrique's offcasts, the data that had sent him insane. And his insanity was infecting the world, changing the way people perceived events, ordering history into a neat causal line.

The Doctor was through with sitting around sifting through facts. He wanted to take action, fix this and he needed Fitz and Anji – and any other help he could muster – to do it. 'Come on then. Why don't we go and get food.'

Jueves nodded, dropping the paper on the empty chair and standing. Out on Las Rambles, in the sunlight, the Doctor felt the oppressive air lift. Although he suspected they were still being watched. He'd been thinking that the observers were from the various factions in the city. Maybe some of them were, he realised now, but how many had been – were – unwitting spies for Enrique?

They walked out into the middle of the avenue, ducking past a tram that rattled slowly up the hill. The Doctor noticed Jueves was as agitated as he was, glancing about constantly, never standing completely still.

'Anji is missing? And F– your friend Fitz?'

The Doctor nodded. 'And, well, I think I'm on to something else. You know

what we were discussing before?’

‘When were they last seen?’

‘Erm. Anji was at the exchange when the trouble started. Fitz... I don’t know. I need to find them. I need their help.’

‘With this other thing?’

‘Yes. Thanks for coming back. In the last few days we seem to have upset half the friends we’ve made. Whoever turned over our room had help from the hotel.’

Jueves shrugged, kicked at a bit of rubbish. The barricades were vanishing as quickly as they had been created but the streets were still scattered with bricks, discarded bottles. Burnt out vehicles had been shoved fully on to the pavement, clearing the roads of their carcasses.

‘If nothing else, I figure there’s a story in this. I want to find out what’s really going on.’

She grabbed an armful of clothes and shoved them into a backpack. Glancing about the tiny room, Eleana hurriedly pulled out the drawer of her dressing table and collected her notebooks, adding them to the bag. A final look around. There was nothing else. Her shoulder still wailed in pain as she swung the strap on to it, the weight swinging about. Out on to the narrow balcony. She pulled her door to and locked it automatically. It didn’t matter, none of it mattered. *La Batalla* had been shut down. The POUM were being outlawed, denounced as traitors and fascist collaborators. People were still being assassinated, going missing. Eleana still wanted to believe, still wanted to fight but more than that, she wanted to live to fight. And she could see what was going to happen. She had heard the whispers from Moscow; the showtrials, the summary executions, the vanishings. She was going to vanish first. Get to France, up to Paris. She knew people up there who would help her. Come back to Barcelona when it was safe, when Franco was defeated.

She paused, then took her key and opened Miquel’s door. Six months gone. His body – and no matter what the officials might say she knew it had been his – had been as mangled as her mind had been until just a few hours ago. Something, someone, had taken him and ripped him apart. Shredded him and then tried to put him back together. All fractured and confused. Some force had done that to him. She’d left his room untouched, never offered it to the group as extra accommodation. She preferred to see it as he had left it. Standing in the doorway, she looked around it for the last time.

A photo caught her eye. It was pinned to the wall next to his bed, along with hundreds of others. This one, though, brought back a hundred memories. He'd taken it, experimenting with the timer function on his then new Leica. He'd posed her carefully, sat on the edge of a fountain, set the camera up and run over. They'd both looked serious, then started laughing at just the wrong moment. It had been in the summer of 1936, in the first euphoric weeks of the revolution. He'd wanted to be sure it worked before using it out in the streets. She stepped in and grabbed the image from the wall, throwing the knapsack on to the bed and carefully rolling the print into a side pocket. She left the photography equipment where it had lain for the last six months, despite the money she could have got for it. It was his. Maybe someone else would find a use for it, or maybe it would be destroyed when the men came for her and found her gone, but she wasn't going to make money from his death.

On the balcony, she relocked the door. As she hurried down the stairs and into the courtyard, she saw the old couple standing in their doorway, watching her sullenly. Always watching, those two. She narrowed her eyes at them. They continued to watch her, their expressions not changing.

'Salut! Comrades!'

She raised her fist in the anarchist salute, watched their faces twist with distaste. She turned on her heel and walked out into the street. She took a side-street almost immediately, heading down towards Estació de França and the first train towards the border.

As they walked up and down Las Rambles, talking quietly, the Doctor filled in as much as could to Jueves.

'So you think this Enrique is, what? Twisting how people see things?'

'It would make sense, all the anomalies we were researching – Anji was researching – they were always people seeing something they feared. Projecting their own perceptions of their own nightmares on to something. So Eleana saw a firing squad up in the parc, someone with a fear of statues saw them come to life at the Sagrada Família. And so on.'

'On to something? What kind of something? Enrique?'

The Doctor slowed, still turning the stone over and over in his pocket. 'I'm not sure. When I was at the exchange, the others didn't seem to see him at all.'

'Why not? I mean, why couldn't they see him and you could?'

'Ah.' The Doctor scuffed an empty bullet case out of their path and into the gutter. 'I think it's because I'm, well, we actually, aren't from this time.'

'No, really why?'

The Doctor stopped and turned, looking Jueves in the eye. 'We're not from this time. We're travellers, dislocated from time and space. Things are different for us. And I'd rather you didn't put that in your story.'

Jueves was frowning behind his wire-rim glasses, holding the Doctor's gaze. The Doctor saw various emotions flicker and chase themselves across the man's face. He even caught a glimpse of envy before it settled on belief. 'Well, that would explain a lot.'

The Doctor flashed a grin at him. 'I need Anji and Fitz: they'll be able to see Enrique as well. Whatever Enrique is connected to, it's been affecting us as well.'

They were nearing the Hotel Oriente again, walking slowly back up the slope. 'Doctor!'

Alberto was beckoning them over from a side-street, holding his bad arm tight to his chest and glancing about nervously. They walked over, looking casual. The academic was looking very jumpy and utterly miserable. He led them back into the shadows of the sidestreet, half hidden within a shuttered shop doorway.

'Doctor, thank goodness. Fitz, Fitz has been arrested.'

'What?' The Doctor sensed Jueves tense next to him. It was the first true confirmation they had heard that there was a rout in progress. Combined with the trashed room, the suspicious looks, it could only be a matter of time before they were in trouble. 'Where? Why?'

'They were drinking – mourning for some of our comrades who were killed in this stupid squabble – there was a fight. Some People's Army scum. Then, arrests. Luiz got away but lost Fitz in the fighting. There has been no sign of him since. I tried to find out, I went to them and asked but they denied they had him. I dare not ask more.'

'Why not?'

'Doctor, have you not heard? Has no one told you? The POUM is under suspicion, they will be made illegal soon. I will not go back there.'

The Doctor swore under his breath, a word he wasn't even sure of the meaning of.

'What was he doing with you, anyway?' he asked, wondering how Fitz had managed to end up in a bar drinking. He half-smiled: actually, Fitz finding someone to go drinking with wasn't that surprising.

'He came to us, looking for his friend. The one he had travelled with? A Russian, I think. I forget the name. I am worried for him. For all of us.'

'I'll go.'

The Doctor swung round to look at Jueves. In the dimness of the doorway, the light glinted on his wire-frames. He was looking more resolute than the Doctor had ever seen him, transforming his easy-going face into sharper lines.

‘Are you sure?’

‘I’m an independent journalist, they won’t touch me. They’ll show me the side of them they want me to see, they may even give me what I want. Anything to secure a favourable report.’

The Doctor tapped his chin restlessly with his fingers. He wanted to pace, to get his brain firing as his legs moved but he did not dare. Alberto looked so shaken that he was afraid the Catalan would go to ground completely if the Doctor drew any attention to them at all. Or if Alberto thought he was going to. He needed Fitz. He was the only one he could trust absolutely, the only one who could get away with the Doctor’s plan for him. He was taking huge intuitive leaps here. The whole idea was risky, dangerously so. Yet no matter what, Fitz always turned back up. Anji would say he was like a bad penny, but the Doctor preferred to think of his friend as a lucky one.

Anji.

‘What about Anji?’ he asked Alberto but the other man shook his head. ‘Would you look for her, for me?’ he asked. ‘She was last seen at the telephone exchange. Please?’

Alberto nodded reluctantly. ‘We’ll find her, hide her if necessary.’

‘Good, I want her kept safe.’

‘Maybe you should have thought of that sooner,’ Jueves commented. The Doctor swung round, frowning. He could sense the tension around the younger man. Then he nodded.

‘Yes, I should have. My friends are very good at looking after themselves, but I didn’t realise things would happen this quickly. Alberto: please find Anji, keep her safe. Jueves: I need to give you a set of instructions to pass to Fitz. Is that all right with you?’

Jueves took off his glasses, folded them away and brushed his fingers through his hair, pushing it back from his face. ‘And what will you be doing?’

‘I’m going to phone a friend.’

Fitz didn’t care where he was being dragged to. It was away from Burton and that was enough. He sensed another corridor, with daylight flashing briefly over him as he was taken past the windows, its brightness hurting his swollen eyes. Then into another room. He was deposited into another hard wooden chair. He wondered briefly if this was some new trick. Take him for a nice

wander and then dump him back in with Burton. Raise a little interest out of him, maybe even some hope. His concentration was shot though, he could barely remember a few seconds ago, let alone a few minutes. He didn't care what they did any more. Maybe the Doctor would come. Why hadn't the Doctor come? Because he doesn't know where you are, you idiot.

'I'll take it from here,' a new voice told the two guards. Fitz didn't bother to glance up. He picked slightly at the bandage on his hand, wondering when – if – he could get a clean bit of lint for it. It was going brown now, drying stiff and hard against his raw palm.

'With respect, comrade –'

'Fine. Stay. Given the state of him I may have need of your muscle anyway.'

Fitz sensed the new man come forward, standing so that his smart boots were in Fitz's downcast eyeline.

'Fitz?' the voice was saying quietly. He reluctantly opened his eyes and tilted his head back to look, not bothering to shove his hair back. He stared in disbelief at the man stood in front of him. Sasha was looking haggard. He was in civvies, smarter than before. Much the same anonymous clothing as worn by the men who had been at the bar when the arrests started. His hair had grown since Fitz had last seen him at the station, and he'd clearly not shaved for a few days. His face blurred slightly before Fitz's eyes, and he narrowed them to try to hold the focus. God, he was feeling woozy.

'Sa-'

'Don't talk unless I tell you to,' the Russian barked at him.

Sasha grabbed his chin and held his eyes, glaring into them. Then he winked briefly. Fitz groaned.

'I've nothing to say,' he said, gritting his teeth and trying to sound as stubborn as possible.

'We'll see about that once you're at Alcalá de Henares. I have your transfer details right here.'

With that, Fitz felt himself being lifted again. This time he tried to pay attention as he was hurried down another corridor, across a landing, down more stairs and then out into a cooling evening. The yard was busy with movement and Fitz realised it was the yard of the building in Barcelona. Of course, he should have realised as soon as he saw Pia, but her blanking of his greeting had made him wonder if he was hallucinating her. No, here were the same battered cars, the same gates. Then the two men had shoved him, none too gently, into the back of an old Citroën. One of them deliberately squeezed his bad arm as he manhandled him.

‘Comrade, will you require an escort?’

‘Look at him, comrade. Do you really think he could overpower me?’

When it looked as if the guard was to argue, Fitz felt a handcuff snap tight around his good wrist, heard it thunk around the looped leather strap of the car door handle. He leaned back and closed his eyes. He wasn’t feigning disinterest in what was going on around him, he realised, he really was too exhausted to care.

The car jolted into life, chugged a short way. Then Sasha was arguing with someone at the gate, a lengthy torrent of Spanish and French ending with some kind of command. Then the car was moving again, bumping and jarring over the uneven cobblestones, growling against a kerb when a corner was taken too tightly. The light flickered as Sasha drove them down sidestreets, looping blocks. Fitz lost all track within moments. The car slowed to a crawl as they drove through a long archway into a square, parked.

Fitz groaned as the front door opened and then slammed, the shock jolting through the body. The back door was being opened and the handcuff removed from his wrist.

‘Fitz? It’s OK. I think we’ll be OK for a while.’

‘Sasha?’

‘Yes.’

‘I looked for you. They said you didn’t exist. Yet here you are in Party civvies. Getting me out of a Party prison.’

Fitz opened his eyes and saw the genuine concern and hurt on his friend’s face. The Russian was lifting his bad hand up gently, turning it over as he inspected the bandages. ‘They did this?’

‘What? Yes. No. I mean, they fixed it up. Can’t have a prisoner dying on you, can you?’

‘I’m not party to that.’

Fitz barked a laugh at that. He used the ball of his good hand to rub his eyes, pressing it in so he saw colours swirling. Then he looked back at Sasha. The Russian was pulling more papers from an inner pocket.

‘Fitz. The TARDIS is just here, just outside. The Doctor gave me a list of instructions for you.’

Fitz frowned. ‘The Doctor?’

Sasha glanced away, out of the window to the twilight square. The huge lanterns in the centre were being lit, making the trees stark and huge, bright against the squared sky. Fitz continued to watch him. How had Sasha run into

the Doctor? Why had the Doctor trusted him? Why should he even believe Sasha? The man had lied to him, was involved in some seriously grim stuff.

‘Look. He told me to say something, so you’d know to trust me. He said: “the planet is called Albert”.’

Fitz started to laugh then, hiccuping to a stop after a moment and grinning weakly at Sasha. Sasha grinned back, shrugged. ‘I don’t know what the hell that means, but he said you would.’

Fitz nodded. He closed his eyes briefly, letting his current situation vanish for a moment.

‘Fitz?’

‘Wha-’ Sasha was shaking his good shoulder, peering at him in concern.

‘You blanked out for a couple of minutes then. Listen, the Doctor said you’re to use the emergency phone, dial a number,’ he held out a piece of ticker tape, with the Doctor’s odd copperplate scrawl over it, ‘and convince von Richthofen to use the VB/88 squadron in the attack on Guernica.’

Fitz nodded. Emergency phone. Richthofen. V-88. Guernica. He saw the flames again, the blood red sky and him helpless to stop it. The Doctor wanted him to...? ‘No.’

‘What?’

‘Killing thousands. Not right. I won’t.’

‘Fitz, the Doctor says you must. He says the consensus is shifting, that everyone believes the Reds did it themselves. You have to ensure there’s a documentary trail, evidence so that people believe the truth. He thinks there’s a link: that the Absolute’s system can be used to actually travel back to the right place and time and that the TARDIS can ensure you get there.’

An old farmer stood alone in a field, cut down with machine guns by a fighter. Another building crumbling and smashing, even the masonry burning. No. No, it was wrong. Thousands would die. But he’d seen it: the fighters, the bombers. And he knew that it was the version that people should be believing, the version that had screamed to the whole world that total war meant this utter destruction. That war was never civilised. But to be involved, to help in those deaths... just to ensure the reports communicated that horror. To create that horror...

‘He said you’d be able to do it, that he trusted you,’ Sasha said, nudging him gently.

‘I can’t.’

Sasha was sat on the edge of the door, facing him and looking upwards. ‘He’s doing his part, Fitz, but he needs you to do yours.’

Fitz leaned back. It always came down to this. The Doctor trusted him. The Doctor needed him. He couldn't let the Doctor down. Not ever. The Doctor was the brains, the instinct, the one who could make the hard decisions. And he wasn't here for Fitz to question in person. *History isn't just a list of events, it's how they are perceived.* He pushed himself more upright, glanced at Sasha's face.

'OK. I don't like it, but I'll try.' Fitz gestured for the Russian to move out of the way, swung his legs round and tried to get out of the car. The ground continued to swirl under him for a moment. 'OK, I'll try, if you can just give me a hand as far as the TARDIS.'

Sasha hurried to get a hand under his bad arm, swung the good one over his shoulder. Getting out of the car became a chorus of cursing, as various elbows and heads bumped on the framework. Once out, Sasha shifted his grip to around Fitz's waist and they stumbled the few feet to the doors of the TARDIS. Fitz leant against it, feeling the cool almost-wood under his forehead. Sasha ran his hand down it gently, cautiously.

'You travel in this? Seems a little...'

'Try "quirky". Also "eccentric" and "deliberately kitsch".' Fitz put out his good hand, fumbling for the tiny metal handle to the emergency phone's cubby hole. His fingers seemed too clumsy to pull on it. Eventually he got hold of it, pulled. It clicked open and he picked up the cool plastic handset from its hook. The Doctor had said something in the hotel. Something about the TARDIS having connected to the telephone system and then shut down. Anji had been adding a grumbling commentary at the time and Fitz had been so buzzed from being back with their bickering that he hadn't paid attention to what they were actually saying. The TARDIS had been hooked up to the system? He vaguely remembered the Doctor had explained the phone once, or rather his theory as to why the TARDIS actually had a phone in there. He'd muttered something about a powerful direct interface with the powers that drove the time machine, primitive and raw. Which made the fact it had a regular dialling tone hum, even now with all the power down, all the more unnerving. Not to mention the fact that Fitz wasn't sure the Doctor's speculation was even remotely correct.

Fitz got another wave of nausea when he tried to straighten.

'Fitz? Are you sure you should be doing this? I mean, I get the idea this is a pretty dangerous and you're, well, you are looking very shaky.'

'I'm fine.' But he could feel a hot wave wash over him, flushing across him. He fell to a crouch, holding his back against the shell of the time machine. Sasha crouched before him, put a cool hand on his cheek.

‘You are not “fine”, Fitz. You are unwell. You have been through too much recently. When did you last sleep properly? I won’t let you do this. You’d not be using the TARDIS, you’d be using the System and it’s too dangerous. Even assuming you make it through, you’ll be too weak to achieve anything.’

Sasha took the receiver out of Fitz’s unresisting hand. Fitz glanced up, but was disturbed by how little he could see. He realised the Russian had a thin strip of paper in his hand, the whiteness gleaming in the gloom. He realised he had heard a couple of clicks as the first digits were input, the whurr as the ancient dial spun back into place.

‘No!’ He pulled himself using Sasha’s arm, tried to grab the handset. ‘You’re just a regular guy, Sasha. It’s too risky.’

Sasha unhooked Fitz’s grip, pushed him aside and Fitz realised with horror that his legs were falling under him.

‘So are you, Fitz. Or do you think you have to be special to do what you do?’

More numbers, more whurrs. Fitz wondered why Sasha’s accent was less pronounced now. ‘You’re too weak, I can see that now.’ The Russian was crouching in front of him, holding the receiver under one ear with his shoulder, reaching out to clasp Fitz’s neck, making him look directly at him. ‘I’m sorry, but I’m going to get involved. I already am involved, I just wouldn’t see it. And I’m not letting you do this. You’re ill, too weak. And I’m not sure you will be willing to have a hand in so much death, when it comes down to it. Hang up the receiver after I’m done, OK? The Doctor was pretty emphatic about that.’

Fitz tried to focus on the face in front of him, the earnest gaze. ‘Sasha...’

‘Hang up, OK?’

Fitz heard a faint ringing tone, then his vision blurred again. Something happened to Sasha. Something light and dark and sparkling and spiralling black. Then he was distorting before Fitz’s eyes, his face tugging out of recognition, vanishing. The receiver crashed into the side of the TARDIS, swinging and bashing again and again against the wood. Fitz dropped completely to his knees, then straightened. He grabbed for the receiver, swore as he missed, as he realised how distorted his perception was. Then he had it, warm and humming in his palm. He pulled himself up, using the edge of the emergency phone niche. He could hear an empty line, snapping and popping with power. Something was tugging at him as he held it, trying to make him put it to his ear. He thrust it into its niche, catching the hook on the third attempt. He flipped the door shut.

There was no sign of Sasha anywhere. Fitz let himself sink to the ground, closed his eyes and let his head drop.

The Doctor strolled up a narrow street, hands in pockets. Dusk had fallen now and many of the city's people had slipped away, off the street and into safety. He had felt a tremor, a tingling in his spine a few moments before, just like the first twinge that had preceded his collapse. He guessed that must have been Fitz using the emergency route. It was a risk, with the TARDIS so closed down, that he wouldn't be delivered to the right co-ordinates. As usual though, he trusted Fitz. And he was pretty sure the TARDIS had some kind of soft spot for him, wouldn't willingly harm him. On the other hand, she'd be navigating him through the alien system.

He didn't let himself get distracted by thoughts of Anji. He had to trust that others would take care of her. She may even have already gone to ground herself: self-preservation was one of her first reflexes. He just let himself walk, taking turns as his instinct hinted. He was looking for the creature: the real creature. Enrique's attempt to remove all that clutter of confusion that his observers – his possessed – distorted events by. The perspectives that made them unique, that brought about conflict. Expelled from people's perceptions, refuted but leaking back. Wouldn't it be better, he wondered as he took another side turning, if everyone did see things the same way? Conflict came from difference of opinion, from believing one's own view was 'truer', more real. Without the distortions created by different perceptions, people wouldn't argue. Wouldn't believe so strongly that they would fight and die for a viewpoint. Wouldn't that be better?

No, because it would deny the individual. Deny them their pleasures, their idiosyncrasies that made them unique and different and so interesting. Enrique was taking away people's freedom of thought, making them believe one single version. Maybe they made the wrong decisions, read things the wrong way and made bad choices because of that confusion of thoughts. Maybe they made history messy and contradictory and anarchic. But the unity Enrique was creating was as totalitarian as the new Spain Franco would create when this was over, when Barcelona finally fell in '39 as Hitler swept through Europe. He'd visited Spain, under Franco. The lack of free speech, the official histories that denied so much, the indoctrination of the children. And Enrique's influence was far wider, far more insidious. The painting in Paris was just a start, a subtler way of denying difference of views than writing false histories. This was tampering with the way people saw the events literally, changing the culture so that some things were no longer even thought.

Glancing up, he recognised the tiny, narrow street. Escudellers. Where Eleana had thought Miquel had been found. The first day they had arrived

in this town. He slowed his stroll, letting himself take in the details. The street was unlit, echoing faintly with sounds from Las Rambles. Then he smiled. There was a pay phone standing on a corner.

He opened the booth and stepped in. Picked up the receiver and clicked the hook a few times until he heard the hiss and pop of an open line.

'Hello?' he asked cautiously. 'I think it's you who's been trying to contact us. Through the phone, coming after Anji in the park.'

Silence.

'I don't think you realise why people are afraid of you, why they run. They can't stand the confusion you embody. They are terrified of it.'

Still just the empty echo.

'But I need you. I need your mass to draw Enrique out. And I think you need me to release you. Will you? Help me?'

There was a rushing, a tugging, a sense of energy whirling through the handset. The Doctor dropped it, let it swing free, backed out of the booth. Something was coming. Something big and dangerous. Then it was spilling out of the earpiece, growing and bulging and expanding until it was filling the booth. Then the street was too small to contain it.

Hundreds of faces, squared and angled. Frozen. Pale, cubist. As it moved it left traces, afterimages outlined in the darkness. And it was screaming as it bore down on him.

Chapter Twelve

La Ciutat Dels Morts

The Doctor was backed all the way across the street from the creature. It was still roaring, but hadn't touched him yet. He pressed his spine flat against the brickwork and looked up at the beast above him.

'You've been trying to find me, I think. The taps on the phone, the targeting of my friends.'

'Help us!'

It was the same voice as Enrique's, but this time it was hundreds of voices speaking in chorus. The Doctor tried to focus on the shape of it but it was constantly shifting. The faces were distorted, angled and stylised. Then it shifted again and the Doctor recognised something, a wider image made up of all the smaller ones. His eyes widened.

'Eric?'

'Doctor.' Blair's voice was dominant now, but the quiet hiss of the others still whirled around his words. 'Yes, we need your help.'

'And I need yours.'

The thing gave a rictus the Doctor supposed was an attempted grin, the lines of the mouths flickering upwards. 'Well, isn't that handy?'

'How are you connected to Enrique? Actually, how did you end up in this at all, Blair?'

The Doctor heard a scream from the street, the smash of a bottle on the cobbles and running feet. He glanced after the noise but whoever had been there moments before had gone.

'People can see you, yet they couldn't see Enrique... ' the Doctor started to ask. The creature gave a shrug, the huge shoulders distorting upwards. The jagged, rough slide of features wasn't pleasant, overlapping and twisting.

'We're part of the System, just like he is. He is all rationality, all objectivity. We're his antithesis. We're all the viewpoints he rejects, all the things he won't believe. He hates you, you refuse to fit.'

‘He seemed to be terrified when I met him.’

‘We’re always afraid of what we hate. Or we hate what we are afraid of.’

‘We need to find him.’

‘Agreed. We can trace him, we keep trying. But he refuses us, dodges away. He won’t face us, or you.’

The Doctor gestured towards Las Rambles. ‘Well, shall we try anyway?’

The creature moved first. It didn’t turn, its features slid and reformed and twisted into new positions so that it faced the entrance of the street. The Doctor was fascinated. Surrounding the creature was a haze, almost like the haze rising from hot tarmac on a blazing summer’s day. Anything that fell within the haze was shifting, flickering through hundreds of minute variations. It wasn’t so noticeable as they walked towards the main pavement but then, as they got into more lively areas, it was contorting the walls, the posters, the people. Without discussing it, they turned right, heading straight up to Plaça de Catalunya. They ignored the aghast faces and occasional screams. The Doctor briefly wondered what they were seeing, what dreadful nightmares he was walking beside. As they passed a Metro station’s railing the Doctor glimpsed them in the corner of his eye, caught in the creature’s haze. Contorting, sinuous shapes curling out as tendrils, spreading out across the mouth of the subway. When he glanced back, the iron shapes were back to normal.

‘This thing, this System, how much do you know about it?’ the Doctor asked.

‘We’re outcast from it, rejected. We don’t know much.’

They were already at the Plaça, the huge stone statues shuddering as the creature passed. It paused, all the eyes in all the faces darting, changing, looking about. It raised a huge arm, white and flickering between male and female, smooth and jagged. ‘That way.’

They started up the avenue. It was broad, lined with huge buildings. Unlike Las Rambles the traffic – what there was – raced along the centre lanes and the pedestrians walked down the wide side pavements. Almost immediately they passed a theatre, the masks above the doorway cruelly distorting as they laughed at them.

‘We think it was a communication system, a way of gathering and disseminating information.’

‘For whom?’

‘We’re not sure the Absolute knew. We think any knowledge he had is gone. His mind is not stable. For a while, Eric Blair was in full contact with him. There should not even be an identity for Enrique: he is not an individual, as we are.’

They were passing a long block of modernist buildings now. The carved Catalanian lizards on one chased each other around the pillars and rustled through the stone foliage as they went through the creature's field. The metal eyes on the balconies of another opened, leaving blank holes which somehow followed them. Someone stood out watching the street screamed as the balustrade beneath his hands writhed and briefly caught on to them. The creature pointed to a side-street. 'He's gone that way.'

'Good. I think we should get away from the more populated areas.'

'Why?'

'Well, erm. You do have a rather disruptive effect on how people perceive their reality. So Eric was in full contact? What happened?'

'Enrique thought to control a human totally. Tried to eject Eric's subjectivity, his ego, we suppose.'

They'd left the haphazard streets of the Barri Gòtic behind now, instead being forced along the straight lines of the Eixample.

'So what happened?'

'With all Eric's conscience gone, his amoral self rejected Enrique. Sent him back to— My apartment! My apartment is just here!' A different face swirled and formed briefly, and the creature lurched up a side passage. Then it flung itself into the street. All form was lost: it roiled and rolled, surging into new shapes that melted and reformed. The Doctor stepped back as it tumbled closer to him, unwilling to touch whatever the creature was made up of. Then it was on the other side of the junction.

'No! We must be unified on this!' the Doctor heard what he thought to be Eric's voice. The different personalities within it were fighting, he realised. One's desire to get home, to get to safety trying to outweigh the ones who were trying to help him. He thought he saw Blair's moustache briefly.

That was it!

'That's it!' he shouted, running into the middle of the crossroads, approaching the creature as close as he dared. 'Enrique has tried to take on Blair's form! That's who he reminded me of. Blair! Listen, it's all connected. I need you and Enrique together. I need to get all of you back to your rightful minds to stop all this! Please! Be rational!'

Be rational? This mass of energy was hundreds of irrationalities bundled together and conflicting. But it was slowing, reforming almost. An arm emerged, large and pale, pointing eastwards.

'That way?' The Doctor started to jog along, sensing that he should hurry. 'What's this way?'

Then a vista opened briefly, as he looked down an avenue.

Huge fingers thrust skywards, ripping into the darkened sky as black outlines tore out of the midnight blue. The Doctor came to a stop, stared at them.

‘Of course,’ he breathed. ‘The Sagrada Família.’

Anji watched in frozen horror as the wiry girl opposite her, who had shared weary smiles with her for the last few hours, was dragged out with the command that she was going to see Burton. Amaya, who was maybe seventeen and had been unfazed by any of the barked commands or sudden changes in routine, fell to her knees. Screaming and pleading not to go. One of the guards stepped into the cell, grabbed the back of the girl’s shirt and hauled her out, still on her knees.

There was silence. No one dared to make eye contact with Anji. She let her eyes fall and restarted chewing on her nails, nibbling around the edge and trying to make every bite last. She was almost down to the quick and then this distraction technique would be lost to her. She had lost all track of the time now. Shouldn’t the Doctor have got her out? Weren’t there meant to be daring rescues or a mass-breakout or something? These women: she’d seen some of them about the streets, swaggering along in trousers or jumpsuits, ancient rifles slung over their shoulders. They had been proud, confident, free. Mind and body. Yet now they sat cowed and waiting, giving up the fight. Amaya had tried to rouse them, making a long speech about liberty and freedom, about how they were not beaten by the fascists and the reds wouldn’t beat them either. But the others had just sat there, avoiding her glares, and she had slumped down opposite Anji.

The door re-opened and a guard reappeared in it.

‘You. Anji Kapoor. Out. Now. You’re going to see Burton.’

Anji sat for a moment, then realised she’d be dragged if she didn’t move. She stood slowly, deliberately. She would not go screaming and crying, dragged by her collar. She ran her hands down her skirt, smoothing it, then gave her hair a flicking smooth as well. She tilted her head high and walked over to the door confidently.

As the cell door slammed behind her, one of the guards smashed his rifle butt into her ribs.

The Doctor ran. The odd scream behind him suggested the creature was keeping pace. One of the earliest entries in Anji’s now destroyed list was the death of someone at the Sagrada Família. Eleana had even written down some notes

about it, told them what she had seen at the site. Eleana. . . The Doctor paused and turned.

‘Eleana Serrano Domínguez. Did the Absolute have her? Is she part of you?’

‘She was. The connection was severed and she is complete again. We think she’s leaving town.’

‘Good.’

They loped on then, finally clearing the buildings. The Sagrada Família lay in front of them, like a huge upturned palm. The north and west sides were open, unbuilt. The Doctor scaled the unguarded fence quickly, landing on his feet on the inside of the site. The creature slid through the bars, slowly pouring through and then rebinding on the other side.

They moved up the slight incline to the centre of the church, standing on the bare ground that would one day be the apex of the nave and transepts. The place was silent, not even guarded at night any more. The rubble made shapes which the Doctor’s eyes couldn’t help but make into threatening new monsters. There was no sign of movement though.

The Doctor put his hands in his pockets, let them fall on whatever items they would. In the right, Anji’s stone paperweight. In the left, Fitz’s paperback book. Taken from the TARDIS library so many weeks ago. Or so few, from Fitz’s point of view. The Doctor pulled it out and glanced again at the cover; the fuzzy, powerful reproduction that carried all the emotional punch the real one currently didn’t.

‘Enrique?’ he shouted. His voice echoed back from the blackened traceries and statues. Whispering and fading and falling away until it seemed the building itself was calling for him.

‘Where will you run next, Enrique?’

Again the name swirled and coiled, falling to an echo of a whisper, barely perceptible.

‘How long can you run? How long can you stand it?’

There was a ghost of a movement up in the cloistered façade. A flickering, blinking ghost of a figure.

‘I’m everywhere, Enrique. I’ve spent a hundred years, more, on this planet. Much of it in Europe.’

Another glimpse, from the corner of his eye. Enrique was on the façade, lurking behind the pillars. The Doctor gestured for the creature to go one way, as he started to clamber over the rubble towards a doorway. The creature nodded, most of the heads moving in unison. The Doctor saw it get as far as the inner archways on the west side.

‘And I’m not just in Europe. America. China. Asia. Australia. I get about.’

The Doctor tried one archway and realised it led out into the forecourt beyond the façade. He tried another, found the right narrow doorway.

‘And the worst of it? I won’t even be aware of you. Won’t even know that my every move, my every moment is destroying you.’

He started running up the narrow spiral staircase. It was maybe ten feet across, if that. The inner side was a void, nothing but a low balustrade, maybe a foot high, eighteen inches. As he started around in near darkness, his footsteps scuffed the shallow steps, finding the dent where hundreds of feet had already worn at the stone. He continued to call out.

‘Is that what you want, Enrique?’

He leaned out of a niche, maybe fifty feet up, and saw the creature flowing up the other side. Not bothering with the stairs, it was extruding hand after hand, foot after foot. The changes were staccato, as if one of the figures on the front had been animated. Good, the creature was heading Enrique off, making him too afraid to flee from the Doctor in that direction. Running on he came to a flat area, a room. The first level, where Enrique was, somewhere on the walkway. The room had a hole and the Doctor glanced down it as he continued to talk.

‘To be caught endlessly running from us, in some spiral?’

He could see the stairwell, coiling around itself like a seashell. For a moment, he was caught by the beauty of it. Take away the subjectivity, would anyone appreciate the delicacy of that work? He wondered if Enrique could understand it.

‘And we’ll just keep on coming. Right now,’ the Doctor paused as he searched his memory, found the right doorway out of the room and on to the cloistered walkway. ‘Right now I’m in London. But here I am. Here and now. In Barcelona.’

He could see the creature had climbed to the other end of the balcony. Could see the terrified figure of Enrique, caught between them both. ‘I’m here, on this same building, this same stone wall. But I’m in Hangchow. And maybe there’s even a third or a fourth or a hundred and fifth of me. Maybe I’m all over this planet. In as many places as you could ever hope to flee from. Is that what you want?’

Enrique was screaming, his discordant voices wailing out of the walls and columns, folding in on itself and doppelgänger around the empty shell of the building. ‘Get out! Get out! Leave me be!’

‘I can offer you a way out, Enrique.’

'Already. Have escape route planned. Will. Wipe. You. From history. No more. Subjects. No more. Contradictions. They shall not pass.'

The creature roared and advanced. 'You take our words! You take our words and twist them! We want them back! Free us!'

'See? Now you've got him – er, them – mad. You can't even bear to look at them, can you? All those views that don't fit with yours? All those versions you've tried to remove. But they keep coming back, keep wanting to be part of it all. It must rile you that you've freed all those people from the burden of doubt and they don't like it.'

'One. Truth. One. Right. Version.'

'Never going to happen. But I can give you a way out. You have to trust me.'

'No. Way. Out. Out. Out. Out.'

The Doctor pulled the paperback out of his pocket. He moved slowly, still edging forward. He saw the creature surge closer as well. The Doctor folded back the book and slowly peeled the cover off the spine, silently praising the TARDIS for even replicating the cheap binding.

'There's a way out. Right here. In my hand.'

'No.'

'Enrique. You believe in a rational world. Everything is logical, explicable. Causal. So if I say I can get you out, free you from your own prison, by sending you through the picture on this, you know it's not possible, right?'

'Not. Possible.'

'So I'll do a deal. If this doesn't work, I'll go. I'll just leave you to it. You can fix this history, this culture, however you like.'

Enrique's face shuddered, a new set of eyes swivelling in. He looked at the Doctor with scorn. 'Piece of paper. Can't go. Into. Pictures.'

The Doctor was within reach of the crouching figure now. The creature had edged closer too, the fields of the two System constructions starting to bleed into one another. Enrique's face flickered again, pain and fear dominating. 'Too close. Too much mass. Dangerous.'

The Doctor nodded. He'd wondered about that. Something about the matter the creature was made from was reacting to Enrique's presence. Or vice versa. The Absolute was literally unable to connect to the confusion he had created. Force them to combine and the mass would be too great. The Doctor's fingers found the pair of nail scissors he'd been surreptitiously hunting for in his pockets.

'Watch,' he said, holding the torn cover and the scissors in front of him like a sleight of hand magician. He resisted the urge to shoot his cuff as part of the

act. Enrique's eyes followed them, frowning. 'A simple piece of paper. Barely big enough to cover my face.'

The Doctor folded the card in half, running his nail along the card to sharpen the fold. He made straight cuts. Alternating between cuts in from the fold almost to the edges and ones from the edge almost to the fold. Enrique sidled closer, glancing fearfully back at the creature. The creature pushed closer, its low chant becoming a growing growl of noise.

The Doctor smiled, slowly. He started cutting along the fold, leaving the two outer loops of card whole. He held the scissors up and made a show of putting them away. Then he carefully unfolded the cover, still holding its shape and held it up to show the Absolute.

'Still think we can't pass through the picture?'

He unfurled the card with a flick of his wrist. The cuts zigzagged out. The huge loop of card fell around all three of them.

Then it fell into the dust and ashes, coiling back on itself. The balcony was empty.

She had been dragged, almost doubled with pain, along corridors. Then thrust into a blank concrete room. The walls were unadorned grey, as were the floor and ceiling.

'Sit in the chair,' a voice commanded.

Looking about, Anji spotted a plain wooden chair bolted to the floor in the centre of the room. She straightened, her intercostal muscles still wrenching with pain as she moved. Walked over to the chair and sat. The wooden bar of the back pressed into her spine but she sat as straight as possible, determined not to show how nervous and in pain she was. They weren't about to let her out, as she had briefly hoped back in the cell. There was no one in the room. She wasn't even facing a mirror, as she had half expected to be. Yet a voice had told her what to do.

She glanced about. There must be a speaker somewhere. Nothing. Looking down, she noticed a small round drain beneath her chair. There was still water pooled around the rim of it. Her spine gave a jolt as she took in what it might mean. This is ridiculous, she thought, I'm from the twenty-first century. I've read reports on modern torture that have made me feel physically sick. They didn't have nearly so many medically researched and specific cruelties back in the thirties. No, another part of her tremored, they were much cruder back in this time.

No one had come in yet. There had been no commands from the hidden speaker. This was going to be part of it, obviously. Make her sit and wait, building up her own fear as she wondered what they were going to do to her. She folded her arms. She was on to this trick, she could wait. She wondered how long she had been in the room already. How long had she been stuck in this hellish prison? She'd lost track of time. Surely the Doctor would be on his way by now? Maybe he didn't know she had been arrested? Maybe something had happened to him? How many days had she been waiting, stuck here?

She started fidgeting. They'd left her long enough, surely? She started smoothing her hair down, worrying at the ends. She wondered what the drain was for. Some kind of water torture? She glanced upwards but couldn't see any nozzle for water to pour out of. Oh. Maybe it was just used to drain other stuff, the room getting washed down after each session. OK, she wished she hadn't thought of that. She swung her leg to and fro, the heel kicking against the chair, trying to focus on the simple action instead of where her thoughts were now going.

'Sit still.'

She scowled. What could they do? At least they'd have to come in, if she carried on moving about. At least this waiting would be over. She stood up, unfolded her arms and looked defiantly towards the door.

There was a click as the lock was turned.

This was a bad idea, stupid. What was she doing, provoking them? She had no idea what they wanted, what they might do to her to get it and she had to provoke them? Waiting was good, waiting would be better. She sat back on the chair, folding her hands into her lap.

The door opened and a man stepped through.

'Eric!'

Anji leapt up, grinning happily. All this time, she'd thought her interrogators were trying to psyche her out and really they'd been held up on account of her rescue arriving. She was halfway to the door when she felt a hand shoot out and slam her backwards. The back of her knees hit the edge of the chair, jolting her off her feet. She hit the concrete hard, her palms smarting against the rough surface. Even as she pushed herself up Anji felt her elbow being grabbed. She was yanked up, strong fingers cutting tightly into her bicep. She struggled to get her feet under her, regain her balance, but she was already being thrown back into the chair. She rocked backwards but the chair bit into her spine, unyielding.

'Eric?'

He backhanded her and she fell from the chair again. She stayed on the floor this time, pushing her hair back from her face and staring at him in incomprehension. He was in the uniform of the party, buttoned up tightly. It was a disguise, obviously. He'd had to wear it to get into the building. And the blows too, except... wouldn't he have pulled them, softened them?

'Get up. Now!'

He was shouting at her. She grabbed the edge of the chair, hoist herself back on to it. She shook her head, flicking her hair back. Her jaw ached and she could taste copper now, where she had bitten her tongue. Staring at him, she spotted a name strip on the uniform. Burton. She frowned.

'Eric...?'

'Anji Kapoor.' He walked in front of her, dragging a second chair into her view. He set it down carefully, facing her. He spent a moment with his eyes down, aligning the chair. He walked about it, trailing one hand along it. 'You have a very curious file, Miss Kapoor. You appear out of nowhere six months ago. You stick to a story which makes no sense. Your papers are forgeries -'

'Eri-'

'You will speak when I tell you to. So what I'm wondering, Miss Kapoor, is who you are working for?'

Anji stared up at him. This wasn't play. This wasn't some attempt to break her out of here. He'd been some kind of double-agent. That's why he was missing. He'd disappeared all right, but because he'd wanted to. He walked around the chair and stood in front of her when she didn't answer. She flinched as he raised his hand again.

'Who are you working for, you stupid little black bitch?'

The market square was bustling, under a clear spring sky. Farmers were leaning on railings or against carts, debating the prices on their livestock. Many of the women were queuing for bread or meat. Around the edges, sat on kerbs or steps, were refugees. They waited with a kind of resignation for any charity that might come. Higher up the hill, old men sat around an ancient oak stump, discussing the approaching front lines. Discussing whether it mattered which side held the town. As the church bells started to clamour, the men slowly unfolded themselves and headed for the nearest bomb shelters.

The Doctor blinked.

He, Enrique and the creature stood in the square. It had worked. He'd thought it would: that the amount of TARDIS matter in the book cover would be enough. But he still didn't know exactly how the TARDIS operated so he had

been working on a hunch. He glanced up into the clear blue sky. Now it was up to Fitz to ensure the right version happened. The Condor Legion had to be the consensus view of the event.

A plane passed over head, his eyes tracking it across the sky. Explosions started close to the station. Even as he let his eyes fall, he saw the Absolute dart away, down towards the market square. The creature roared and moved after him.

‘He just never stays still, does he?’ the Doctor said as they set off after him. He glanced at his watch as they ran down the slope, through empty streets. Five minutes since the first plane. They didn’t have long. Down in the market square, Enrique was glancing at all the different exit routes, deciding which path to take. Someone emerged from a shelter, saw the creature and screamed, bundling back down the steps.

Four Heinkels roared overhead, their bomb bays open. The high explosives smashed into the buildings, sending up a roar of flame. Faint screams could be heard above the sudden noise, as the people who had ventured into the street after the first wave were caught in the flying debris and shattering glass. Clouds of smoke roiled along the streets. The Doctor glimpsed Enrique and ran after him, into the chaos of the central square. A horse screamed, caught in burning stables, then jerked sideways and fell into the flames.

‘Why have you brought me here?’ the Absolute screamed. ‘You promised me an escape!’

‘I promised you a way out, Enrique. A way out of your insanity. Look at this place!’

There was the deeper thrum of the huge Junkers now, flying low over the town. The Doctor was yelling, but could barely hear his own voice. He had lost sight of the creature in the smoke and dust. ‘You changed this, made people believe a version that suited your causal linear history more. Look about you, Enrique, you’re denying all this happened, denying these deaths any meaning.’

There was a roar, a wall of heat, as a building gave way, its front crumbling like icing, sliding downwards and across the street. The noise was reaching higher and higher, a wall of screams and prayers. The Doctor dodged to one side as a bullock lumbered past, wall-eyed, its trailing rope harness on fire. There was the crackle and pop as incendiaries began to rain down, exploding like fire-crackers in the streets and buildings. Another building tumbled, its rubble blocking the entrance to a refugium. The fire was building its own walls now, impenetrable walls of heat. From somewhere there was the rat-tat-tat of machine gun fire.

The central square was red now, glowing. The Doctor could make out shapes in the fire, dark blobs of people. Enrique stood amongst it all, clear against the blood-red fire, unbuffeted by the waves of heat blasting through the square. The Doctor edged towards him.

‘Don’t you see? You removed the debate, didn’t let people make up their own minds. You suggested this doesn’t matter, but it does. You can’t alter the world this way. You don’t have the right!’

There was a roar within the flames and the creature flung itself out, grabbing both the Doctor and Enrique, tackling them to the ground. The air displaced, the whine of a falling bomb. Right above them. The Doctor stared up, as he felt the two parts of the Absolute meld and contort. At least Fitz had survived the trip to Salamanca. He had no idea how he was going to escape the firestorm.

‘Don’t you get it?’ he laughed as he felt the tug of the System on him, and the heated air blasting past, ‘I’m restoring anarchy to history!’

Chapter Thirteen

La Darrera Banda De La Ciutat

Anji flinched backwards but the physical blow never came. She was smarting though. Burton or Blair or whatever he was really called was just standing in front of her, staring at her. She stood up, furious. It didn't matter what they did, she realised, she was going to take a decision.

'How *dare* you? How dare you judge me on my colour, on my background?'

She expected the slapdown to come but her tormentor was just staring at her. 'I'm British, European. Whatever. But I'm not a "stupid black bitch" you racist bastard.'

He suddenly frowned at her, fell to his knees, one hand on his forehead. She took a step forward, wondered if she dared to kick him in his ribs, make him hurt the way he had tried to hurt her. Maybe it was a ruse though? She'd not even touched him and she doubted that her words were enough of an attack to send him reeling to his knees.

'Step away from comrade Burton,' a voice barked from the hidden speaker. That resolved her uncertainty and she backed away from Burton as she heard the doorlock click. They'd be piling into the room any moment. She glanced between the bent figure of Burton and the unlocked door. Was it worth trying to run?

'Anji?' Burton croaked out.

She felt the rough concrete of the wall behind her and realised she'd kept backing away. She rubbed the back of her knuckle across her upper lip and was disturbed to realise that the dampness was a thin trickle of blood. Burton looked up at her and she saw a kind of horror in his eyes. They widened as he took in her appearance, turning guilty and full of self-loathing.

'Anji?'

She took one step towards him, sensing that somehow he was the man she had first met six months before. But how could she be really sure, how could she trust him? He stood rapidly, crossed the room in five long strides and

grabbed her upper arms. She tried to struggle, bringing her knee up but lacking the force needed. He had her off-balance now and she settled for kicking at his shins. It had been a trick, a way of getting her off-guard again.

‘Anji, listen to me,’ he hissed in her ear, leaning in, pushing her against the wall. ‘You have to listen. I’m sorry . I don’t know exactly what I was doing and I’m sorry if I’m responsible for your injuries. But you *have* to trust me so we can get out of here.’

‘Trust you? You hit me, you abuse me and you expect me to trust you?’

‘You must. You don’t understand, how could you? I haven’t been myself. It’s as if something was forcing me to see things their way. And I found myself responding to it, believing it.’

‘Yeah, right. And I should believe you because...?’

‘We don’t have time, just follow my lead.’

There was the sound of boots in the doorway, heading towards them over the concrete. Blair stepped backwards and dropped his arms. He gave her a final pleading look.

‘Comrade Burton: is everything all right?’ One of the guards had come right up to his shoulder.

‘Yes, comrade. Take the prisoner out to my car.’

‘Comrade?’

‘I think she will only talk when she faces a bullet.’

‘We will accompany you.’

‘Of course, comrade.’ Blair stepped further back, starting towards the door. One of the soldiers grabbed Anji’s arm, pushing her forward. She stumbled, but made her feet work. She had no idea what Blair or Burton or whoever was planning. Was he just pretending, getting her to go along quietly with what he said, or was his volte-face genuine? She hated the confusion, the paranoia. She hated that she was succumbing to such irrationalities. She realised she was walking without taking in her surroundings, blindly going as she was directed by the rough hand on her elbow.

They reached an office, with a high counter. They were walking briskly through it. Blair hurried over and took down a greatcoat from a hat stand and gestured for the guards to continue.

‘Comrade Burton!’

Anji turned her head in surprise. Pia was hurrying after Blair, clutching a file. She was in her uniform clothes, a pencil stuffed in her hair. Anji blanched. This was where Pia worked? She was involved in this? Had she known? Had

she been aware that one of her friends had been held in a cell for days? Maybe she had no idea.

‘Comrade Burton, I need you to initialise this transcript of your session with Amaya Alvarez.’

She was part of it, she had known. Blair signalled for the men to wait, grabbed the file and opened it on the counter, flicking through it. He snapped his fingers and Pia passed him the pencil. He initialised the document and handed it back to her, flipping the folder shut.

‘Thank you, comrade. If my paperwork is concluded for the day then –’

‘Anji?’ Pia was staring at her. The Italian woman’s eyes widened as she took in Anji’s appearance. Anji briefly wondered how bad it was. She could feel her upper lip had stiffened with dried blood.

‘You are mistaken, comrade,’ Blair was saying, indicating for them to continue.

‘Anji? What are you doing here? Where are you taking her, comrade Burton?’

‘It is not for you to question my actions, comrade.’

The soldiers were glancing between them now, clearly starting to wonder what was going on. Pia was moving forward, looking at Anji more closely. ‘What have they done to you?’

‘Take her down to my car.’ Burton was gesturing at the guards to continue whilst also shaking his head slightly at Pia. The nearest soldier pulled at Anji’s elbow.

‘No!’ Pia was barrelling into the nearest soldier, aiming a swing at his head. He staggered back and she followed by grabbing his arm and puffing, reaching to the firearm at his waist. She had it free of his holster before the guy could react. She stepped to one side and pointed the weapon at Blair’s neck.

‘Let go of her, slowly. Step back. We don’t want anything to happen to comrade Burton, do we?’

‘Pia...’

‘Shut up. Step back. Anji, take comrade Pedro’s gun. Can you fire it?’

‘I t-think so,’ Anji took in the basic mechanism and saw it was pretty standard. She didn’t touch the safety, or grip the trigger though. She had no desire to fire the thing accidentally.

‘Good. Now, we’re going down to the yard, where we will be taking comrade Burton’s vehicle. Burton comes with us. Pedro, you lead the way.’

The guard moved off, glancing back repeatedly at them. Anji fell in beside Pia, still not quite sure of whom to trust. What had been that stupid 90s slogan? ‘Trust no one,’ she muttered. Pia glanced at her.

‘Not a bad motto, perhaps.’

They were walking slowly down the wide staircase now, Pia glancing about constantly. Anji kept looking up the stairwell, bothered that their backs were exposed. Down and round, trying to keep their steps in unison. Pedro was dragging his feet, deliberately slowing their progress. Anji was starting to wonder what was going on: this was too elaborate for a Doctor-planned rescue mission, too reliant on too many variants.

‘Pia, what are you doing?’ Blair was hissing.

‘Getting Anji out. Quitting the Party, comrade.’

‘I was getting her out –’

Blair broke off as they entered the foyer. Anji took in the large number of soldiers in the space, the pillars and the wide expanse of floor between them and the doors. Not good at all. Anji felt like every pair of eyes in the room turned to watch them walk across the marble. She wondered how many of them could see the gun Pia had shifted down to Blair’s waist. Or the one she had half-hidden by her arm.

The first shot missed them narrowly, hitting the pillar to their left.

‘Damn!’ Pia pushed Anji behind the nearest pillar, lifting her gun up and squeezing off a shot towards the guard by the door. Blair ducked behind Anji’s bolthole.

‘Give me the gun?’

Anji stared at him. Was he for real, or was this some complex game to make her reveal stuff? Was she going to be ‘shot whilst escaping’ or ‘resisting arrest’ or some other euphemism? Blair gestured impatiently. ‘Anji, I don’t have time for this. I can fire that gun. Can you?’

Anji handed it over. Pia was behind the next pillar along, closest to the doors. She gestured for Anji to run over, then let off a couple shots of covering fire. Anji scabbled across the marble, her feet skidding on the smooth surface. Pia nodded with satisfaction at her.

‘How many bullets do you have in that gun, Anji? I only have a few left.’

‘Er...’

Blair levelled the gun and fired over their heads. Pia was already reacting when she heard the groan behind her. Anji glanced and saw a man slumping to the floor, one hand clutching his shoulder. Then Blair was with them, standing tall behind the pillar.

‘I’ll go first, give you some cover. Grab the nearest vehicle. The nearest. Then just drive. Get out, the pair of you.’

‘Burto-’

'Blair. I'm not Burton. Or I am, maybe, when I'm not myself. But I'm myself again. Go when I say.'

Anji glanced between them as the two stared at each other for a long moment. Then Pia nodded, grabbed hold of Anji's arm with her free hand and rechecked the gun.

Blair dodged out from the inner side of the pillar, aiming his gun at the men opposite. Then Pia was out and running, dragging Anji behind her. Anji sensed rather than heard the gunfire around them, was only dimly aware as her shoulder slammed through the doors and she almost fell down the outer steps.

There were shouts in the yard, Pia took a random shot towards the gate, making the men there duck back into cover, or start to run towards them. The two women tumbled into cover behind the nearest car. Anji gasped as she slammed into the metal body, then glanced back at the main doors. All it would take was one guy on those steps. . .

Pia tried the car door, pulled it open. She shoved Anji towards it. Anji clambered in, trying to keep as low as possible. She started to laugh when she saw that the keys were in the ignition. Even as she heard more bullets from the gatehouse, she smirked: these really were more innocent times. Then she was climbing into the back, getting down into the foot-well. Pia was suddenly in the driver's seat, bending low, gripping the wheel with her gun hand as she turned the ignition over.

There was a thump from the doors and Blair ran through, taking the steps fast with his long legs. He dove for the car, slamming the door behind him. Pia was letting in the clutch. Anji stayed down, jolting and pitching into the seat behind her. There was a hideous crunching sound and Blair was grabbing at his throat, the blood spilling through his fingers. The car slammed through the half-open gates, splattering the free-flowing blood back on to Anji. Blair started to shudder in the passenger seat.

'Anji, get up here and stop the damn bleeding!'

Anji raised her head and glanced briefly at Blair. She stripped off her grubby silk blouse, bundled it into a pad and forced Blair to let her hold it hard against his neck. The neck, that was probably a fatal wound. She shivered, only partially from the cool air. Her camisole was almost no protection.

'He needs hospital treatment, Pia.'

'I'll think of something.' The Italian's face was set as she drove through the streets. 'You know anywhere safe?'

'I'm not sure.'

Blair slumped over, losing consciousness from the shock, Anji hoped, and not from blood loss. She tightened her grip on the sodden silk, holding it close and offering up a brief prayer to any gods who might be listening.

‘Pia, why –’

‘Sooner or later, Anji, you have to take sides. And I just realised I was on the wrong one.’

Fitz woke slowly, reluctantly. There was a rough blanket under him, and dim sunlight through battered blinds. His hand hurt, hurt more when he experimentally flexed it. He winced, worrying about the tendons. He sat up gingerly, expecting pain. He felt better than he had expected. The hand had been re-bandaged with fresh strips of cotton. Then he remembered. He’d been at the TARDIS, something about the emergency phone, some urgent mission from the Doctor. And then. . .

‘Sasha?’

He took in the room. It was large, had several cots set up on which people were lying. The guy next to him groaned in his sleep. Fitz stood, still taking care, not quite believing the lack of headache. His shoulder did feel stiff, but otherwise he was relatively pain free. He thought he recognised one of the men in the cots: hadn’t he been in the POUM building the night the fighting started? OK, so either he was back with the POUM, or he was back in that bloody compound. He moved towards the door, holding his shoulder and rolling it a couple of times to loosen the stiffness. That was ten whole steps without anyone leaping on him, or trying to start a fight with him. He reached with his good hand for the door handle.

The door opened abruptly, smacking him in the nose.

‘Ow!’

‘Oh, Fitz, I am so sorry! So sorry.’ Alberto was staring at him, aghast. ‘I came in to see how people are. I should have knocked on the door or –’

‘It’s OK, Alberto. I mean, I was wondering how long I could go before someone hit me so I guess I asked for it.’ Fitz rubbed his nose. The academic gestured for him to come out of the room and Fitz recognised the corridor beyond. It was part of the POUM building all right. Some room at the back of one of the converted stages, perhaps a costume store that had been converted to a sick room. He closed the door after him and glanced at the other man. Alberto looked tired, as if he were existing purely on nervous energy now.

‘Alberto, how did I get here?’

‘Your friend brought you in. He showed up at the door last night. You were unconscious. Left as soon as we had you safely.’

Fitz frowned. He had a faint idea that something had happened to Sasha, so how could he have got him back here? Maybe he’d just imagined it? He patted down his jacket, found that a fresh packet of straights had been stuffed into the inner pocket, along with his old lighter. Then he suddenly realised he had his jacket back. With all the familiar scuffs and rips. That he’d last seen when he was being treated in the Party building. He broke the paper seal slowly, wonderingly. There was a piece of paper, neatly tucked in between the foil and the cigarettes. He took it out and unfolded it. The handwriting was vaguely familiar: it just wasn’t Sasha’s.

I understand this is your favourite brand. Miss Kapoor will be needing your aid. Wait.

Anji watched as Joaquín loaded the bundled Blair into a car at the back of a rundown apartment block in the Barri Chino. Pia had already vanished, disappearing toward the Drassanes in borrowed clothes, muttering about a ship to catch. She had given Anji a sudden, tight, hug. Held her at arm’s length and made her promise to take care.

‘I wasn’t doing any of it. I told myself it was a desk job but I knew. I’m sorry. I should have gone with my conscience sooner. Get out of here.’ She’d glanced at the unconscious Blair. ‘Do what you see fit with him. He was the worst of them.’

Anji glanced down at him. ‘He knew all the right buttons to press, all right. But I don’t think that was him.’

Pia shrugged. Then she’d wrapped herself in a workman’s jacket, given Anji the anarchist salute and headed out. Anji grinned as she spotted her pocket a box of ammo for her stolen gun, slipping it out of sight.

McNair and Joaquín had watched the Italian woman out of sight, then turned to Anji and asked her what they should do with Blair. Anji had pulled the sleeves of her borrowed sweater down over her hands, wrapped her arms round her bruised ribcage. Blair’s breathing was shallow, laboured. She wasn’t sure how long he had. Her upper lip was swollen, puffy. He’d hurt her more though, seen the chink in her armour and twisted a knife into it. She couldn’t pretend it didn’t matter, not here. If she was stuck here – and the gods knew where the Doctor and Fitz had got to – then she was going to have to deal with it, seal up that chink.

'I can't believe he did this to you, Anji.' McNair was looking harassed. He'd arrived here, out of breath, after a message from Joaquín.

Anji shrugged. She glanced at the injured Blair: there had been such desperate horror in his eyes, such self-loathing. She'd seen the state of herself reflected in his eyes at the moment and she was now fairly sure he had meant what he had said. At the end. And he'd taken a bullet getting them out.

'Get him and Eileen out of here. Just pack him up with his wife, McNair, and get them to France. They can do what the hell they want from there.'

'It will be dangerous.'

'Isn't everything? I'm going back to the Hotel to -'

'The Hotel probably isn't safe, Anji, they will be looking for you there. We can get you out, get you to England. I'm sure the Colonial Office will -'

'I'll think about it, McNair. Right now, I need some air.'

She walked away slowly, arm wrapped around herself, not glancing back at the two men stood by the elderly car. The Barri Chino was quiet, this early in the morning. Despite the silence, despite the chilly dawn emptiness, the city still felt tense. Waiting for more. Waiting for reprisals probably. She turned towards the Parallel, heading towards Plaça Espanya and the wide approach to Montjuïc. The sun was rising at her back, just tingeing the tips of the buildings in yellow light.

She should go. McNair was probably right. She had no idea how thoroughly the NKVD would be searching for her. It was dangerous, foolhardy to stay. But to go to England? Knowing that in a few years time the whole continent would be at war, that she'd be greeted with suspicion, hostility even. She could go on, get passage to America maybe. If she got to London she could access one of the Doctor's accounts, get enough money to start over in New York. She had knowledge, she could play the markets. Except that she somehow couldn't see an Asian Englishwoman being let near the floor on Wall Street. Not in the 1940s anyway. She could get a stooge, a front company to do all the dealings.

She realised she had walked as far as the gateway to Montjuïc. The two huge redbrick towers were bathed in sunlight, the classical buildings at the top of the avenue warm yellow. Was it really impossible to go back to her rooms? She could get her notebooks. Find the rock she'd picked up when she was here at New Year. A physical reminder of a good time in this damn city. But McNair was probably right again: it was too great a risk.

If she turned back now, accepted the others' help to get out, she'd feel she had abandoned the Doctor and Fitz. That she'd given up on them, on getting home. The twenty-first century. It seemed such an abstract concept here, so far in the

future she couldn't connect it with the future they talked of. When Joaquín or Alberto or Eleana had talked of the future, of the dreams of unity and equality, it had seemed so naïve, so doomed. Their notions were so different to what she knew the future held. Yet they had had such passion, there had been such hope initially. She'd felt it those first few weeks in November.

She could go to America, start a life of sorts. Then live through the McCarthy witch-hunts, when her time in Barcelona would make her a suspect, through the Cold War. Maybe return to London in the sixties and pass out her days a few hundred miles from her parents, from her childhood, and never be able to contact them. No, she didn't want to give up on Fitz and the Doctor yet: she wasn't prepared to live here. Get to Paris? Somehow let the Doctor know where she was?

She turned, headed back to the safe house in the Chino. Get to Paris, then replan. The streets were starting to wake up now, the early morning workers heading towards the factories. She walked against the flow, back towards the residential area. The car was gone from the back of the apartment block. She glanced about and tapped on the heavy door. After a moment's hissed argument, she was let in.

'Anji?'

Even as she turned to look up the stairs, a lanky figure was whirling towards her and she was caught in a bony hug. The leather against her cheek stank of cigarettes and too many rough nights. 'Fitz?'

'Alberto brought me here. I got a message that you'd been hurt.'

'My pride more than anything, although could you stop hugging my bruised ribs?'

He held her at one arm's length then and she saw he was grinning like an idiot. Then she noticed the bandages on the hand held by his side.

'What about you?'

'I got in a bit of fight.'

'If this involved girls or beer, I don't need to know. What about the Doctor? Where is he?'

Fitz's grin fell away and he looked down, scuffed a boot through the dust. 'I think he might be gone, Anji.'

The Doctor felt the worn velvet under him first, then sensed a soft warm light. And a deeply familiar hum. He opened his eyes slowly, wanting to savour it and also afraid that he was mistaken.

The TARDIS. He was back in the TARDIS. And she was back. Although she was still looking a little worn about the edges. He was slouched in his favourite old chair, taking in the restored galley, the unenclosed bookshelves. The Picasso sketch he'd bought in Paris was propped up against a pile of books on the nearest long oak reading table. The door towards the interior rooms was slightly ajar, inviting him in. The place hummed with energy, tingling through him, giving him pins and needles in his fingers and toes.

He moved over to the console, trailed his fingers over the panels, felt a faint static shock of energy pulse through. Back. He wondered if this was how Enrique had felt, reunited with the System. The feeling of completeness, of being connected. It was buzzing through him still. She must have used her connections to the System to pull him back.

He should find Fitz and Anji. He checked his pockets automatically and then poked cautiously at the door button. He grinned as the doors opened, with a deeper hum thrumming through the room. It felt good and he gave the console a small pat. Then he headed out.

Plaça Reial was bathed in sunlight. It was a beautiful morning. He pulled the door to, tucking the key back into his shirt and absently scratching at his chest as it itched. Was it best to start at the Hotel? Would Anji be there or would Alberto have squirrelled her away somewhere? Fitz, he felt sure, would reappear but how long should he wait? He noticed a car had been abandoned close by the TARDIS. A kid was siphoning petrol out of it into a tin watering can and staring at him, wide-eyed. He grinned at him too. Start with POUM then, find out if Anji was safe.

'Ah, Doctor. There you are.'

He stopped, stared. Then inclined his head in a formal greeting.

'Sabbath.'

'Join me for a coffee, Doctor. I would offer you a sherry but not only is the stuff they serve here excruciating but it's a little early yet.'

A girl came forward and put a second cup of espresso in front of an empty chair next to Sabbath. The other man was dressed in a linen suit, the Doctor noticed, every inch the English gentleman abroad. He was sat on the shady side of an outside table, his face half hidden under a cream fedora. The Doctor sat, taking a cautious sip of the hot coffee.

'Are you here for a reason, or just enjoying the scene?'

'My reason for being here has been resolved, thank you.'

The Doctor took in Sabbath's serene face, the knowing half-smile visible beneath the brim of the hat.

‘How are Anji and Fitz? Such determined young people. They remind me of my own agents.’

‘They’re friends, not agents.’

Sabbath took a sip of coffee, leaning forward so his face came fully into the sunlight. His eyes were dark, as always, looking straight into the Doctor’s own. ‘Doesn’t that rather depend upon your perspective?’

The Doctor frowned. Was it worth asking the other man how involved he had been? Had he set the whole thing up? Used the Doctor in some way? Had it been some distraction to keep the Doctor occupied? He’d had to let people die horrifically and it was all part of one of Sabbath’s little games? No, he could sense that the Absolute’s truth was unravelling, that uncertainly was being restored.

‘My chap was terribly impressed with them, you know.’

The Doctor thought for a moment. ‘Jueves?’

Sabbath chuckled and made a mocking bow with his head. ‘Actually, he was also... well, never mind.’

‘If you’re just here to gloat and claim to be superior in some way then I think I’ll be going to find my friends.’

The Doctor put his cup back down and pushed his chair back to stand. Sabbath put out one heavy hand, barely touching the Doctor’s wrist. The Doctor felt it, some kind of jolt, and found himself sitting again.

‘There is another matter, Doctor.’ Sabbath said, smiling and folding his hands into a steeple in front of him.

Anji sat on the stairs of the safe house, leaning against Fitz’s legs. He was sat a couple of steps above her and in turn leant on the banister. For once, she didn’t object when he lit a cigarette and exhaled slowly.

‘So... run through it again,’ she suggested.

‘What’s the bloody point, Anji? You’ve got the note there. He was going to Guernica, in some suicidal plan.’

‘But...’

‘And I don’t know how to run the TARDIS and I haven’t been back to it yet and I don’t know what we are going to do. OK? You’re the brainy one, you do all the logical smart stuff. You tell me what we should do.’

Anji sighed. She inspected her bitten nails, the raw edges where she’d bitten too far.

‘I don’t think I’m so good at that any more. I’ve spent the last six months not realising the stuff I was reading about might happen to me too. That’s pretty

dumb.’

‘Yeah, it is.’

‘Hey!’ she thrust an elbow backwards, hitting his shin lightly.

‘Anji is a dummy,’ he half-sang, patting the top of her head.

‘Fitz is so stupid he smokes,’ she retorted.

‘Well at least I’m not daft enough to sit below a smoker. Is that ash or dan-druff in your hair?’

Anji ran her hand over her hair, squealing. She half-turned and slapped his shin again. ‘You’re a pig, Fitz.’

‘Oink.’

‘Children,’ someone said from below. Anji turned, not quite believing his voice.

He was leaning on the end of the banister, his arms folded and his chin resting on them. He grinned up at them. The Doctor. Anji found herself grinning stupidly back. She wasn’t stuck here. She wasn’t doomed to live through the twentieth century.

‘We thought you were. . .’ Fitz started.

‘People keep thinking that.’ The Doctor uncurled his arms and bounded up the few steps to sit next to Fitz, giving the other man a light punch on the arm. ‘You of all people should know better than that, Fitz.’

Anji turned, sitting sideways so she could see him.

‘So. . .’

He grinned at her. He started to go through his pockets, frowning. She felt absurdly like he was about to produce lollipops for them both. A battered, coverless book, still with a postcard sticking up, got passed to Fitz. She caught the Doctor’s lightning brief frown as he spotted the bandage on Fitz’s hand. Then he was handing her something with a smile.

‘We can’t go back, I’m afraid, but I did manage to salvage this.’

She felt the smooth stone in her palms, warm from being carried in a pocket. It was the stone she had picked up on Montjuïc with Jueves on New Years Eve. She smiled. She didn’t have anywhere to put it, so she folded her hands over it, taking comfort from the warmth.

‘What about the whole. . .?’ She tried to think of a way of summing it up but couldn’t.

‘The creature and Enrique – the guy in the exchange – were expelled. I think their combined mass was distorting things even more than the feedback from Enrique’s actions. Then there was just too much and I overloaded Enrique’s

mind entirely, showed him an impossibility and –' The Doctor mimed a ball with his hand, then exploded it.

'So things are reverting back to how they should be?' Fitz asked.

'I think so, I think a certain amount of uncertainty has been restored.'

Enrique felt the tug of the System, felt himself being pulled back into it, towards the Hub. The creature he had created moved with him, the dumped memories and perspectives peeling off and spiralling off at angles. Back towards the humans they had been taken from, he supposed. Then he saw the System. It was dead to him. All the beautiful lines of energy were crisp, blackened. The Hub was a glistening distant dot. No matter how he tried to reach it, it danced ahead. Something had eaten into that pure truthful knowledge, damaged the synapses so the whole Hub was forgetting things. So where was he going, why could he still move through it? He turned, moved back towards Earth. Towards his time period. There was only one filigree of silver energy and he fled down it.

It must be the way the Doctor had trapped him, done that trick. All connected to that other source of knowledge he had seen. The gossamer thread thickened, then flattened, turning grey. He saw shapes, distorted and angled. Churning and rolling in terror. Above him, a harsh white eye glared down, illuminating the chaos all around him. He looked up at it, screaming.

Epilogue

Extracts from diary confiscated from rooms of Eric Blair at the Hotel Continental. Found in CP files, Moscow, 1993.

– 25 Jan 1937 – Evening –

Have just arrived at Monte Oscuro, joining an ILP contingent just out from Barcelona. Bob Edwards is in command and seems uncertain about me. I suspect he thinks I'm another one of those writers popping over here for a bit of colour for a book and not committed to the fight against the fascists. We're trying to win Saragossa, which has been in Nationalist hands since August last year.

Unlike my last position, the dug-outs here go *horizontally* into the limestone face of the hill. The fascists' lines are maybe four hundred yards away.

– 1 Feb 1937 – Morning –

Although the lines are so close, the lack of ammo on both sides means the war is fought more with megaphones than with bullets. Edwards frequently calls out how great our food is! An abominable lie. He's also got half the Spanish machine gunners with megaphones, shouting out lengthy political arguments about the capitalist system. Amazingly, there is a trickle of deserters from the fascist side.

I'm far more bothered by the rats. They are, I suppose, an inevitable part of trench warfare but I shudder every time one crawls over my boots in the darkness. It is hard to sleep here anyway, since one is always aware that a grenade or shell might come flying out of the night, but these rodents add a whole new nightmare to the business.

– 21 Feb 1937 – Afternoon –

Eileen returned to Barcelona today, after several days visiting here at the line. She is working as McNair's secretary, doing all his typing and preparing the ILP newsletter for back home. The Doctor drove her out and back: he is looking tired and haggard so I can only imagine how bad I must look to him.

Eileen showed me a report in one about the recent counterattack I took part in. The whole business is very much depicted as a jolly adventure: I cannot help but assume they are receiving a very different impression of this war back in London.

– 27 April 1937 – Evening –

Leave. Finally, after four months in the trenches, I have leave for Barcelona. Eileen has rooms in the Hotel Continental and I will stay with her there. I am looking into being transferred to Madrid, since the line I am on is very quiet and the battle for Madrid is essential.

We bundled on to a train heading south and one of the men produced a few bottles of anis which are making the journey – cramped and stinking – more bearable.

– 3 May 1937 – Evening –

The tension which has been building for days here has exploded into fighting. I'm still unclear about what exactly happened but I have rejoined the POUM at Hotel Falcon. The phone lines are down and I have spent many of the last few hours arguing to be issued with a rifle and ammo. Eileen, I hope, is in the Continental and should be safe there, although I hear that the fighting is fierce at the telephone exchange, which is just one block away from her.

– 10 May 1937 – Afternoon –

I am back at the front, this time close to Huesca. I have left my journals and notes of the last few weeks with E. with instructions that she should burn them, should the situation worsen. I think I filled an entire notebook during the fighting in Barcelona but I am sure I will be able to write much of it from memory, should need be. It is strange talking about those days back here, since the news which reached the front lines is often a completely different version of the events to the ones I experienced. Of course, the POUM and ILP groups regard anything the Communists say with distrust and, having read some of the accusations printed in the CP presses about the May Days, I find myself agreeing. Back in Barcelona, I had been in discussions with a friend in the CP to leave the POUM and join the International Brigades in Madrid but, after the fighting there, I found that I could not in conscience do so.

Memo attached to diaries

EB returned to Barcelona, according to confiscated hospital records. There applied for discharge from POUM. Was seen at Hotel Continental, meeting wife, but then disappeared from Barcelona. cf. Orwell, G.

Selected Bibliography

‘If this was history it did not feel like it.’

– George Orwell,
Homage to Catalonia

The following texts provided invaluable real histories of the Spanish Civil War.
It’s nothing like a complete list.

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<http://lacucaracha.info>

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About the Author

MAGS L HALLIDAY has got all sorts of visual arts qualifications, including a degree in History of Art, Design & Film. Naturally, she has a job in technical support. She lives with a singular cat who aids her by chasing pens, chewing up books or resting his head on her keybfjdsa;jks.