

**TED F.
STRAHAN**

**THE
BORISOV
DILEMMA**



When ex-CIA operative Damon Courter is called back to help interrogate one of his old Russian contacts, he gets more than he bargained for. The contact is an imposter, his ex-wife is also on the case, and she wants to reunite with him. They discover a Russian plot to identify the Israeli agent within the Iranian nuclear program, an assassin who is to eliminate anyone who might derail the Russian plot.

The Borisov Dilemma

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6761.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Your Free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

Ted F. Strahan

Copyright © 2013 Ted F. Strahan

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-62646-329-5

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-62646-330-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2013

First Edition

For Brenda, Amy, and Bethany.
I am blessed.

CHAPTER ONE

Obdorsk Work Camp
Salekhard, Yamal-Nenets Administrative District

The thud of a collapsing body onto the hard-packed snow snapped Yevgeni Nikandrovich Grushko's mind back to awareness. He didn't have to open his eyes or look around to realize what had happened. He didn't care what happened. He resumed his slight rocking motion, moving his weight from one foot and then to the other. His feet were numb from the cold and lack of movement.

"One foot then the other, one foot then the other," he reminded himself. *"Concentrate!"* He had no friends here. Even though he had chosen to be close to Anatoly Borisov, he would not count him as a friend. They were just prisoners, each of them trying to make it through to their release dates.

He could feel the wooden side of the garage against his back. He measured his movement against the wall, trying to will his mind to overcome the bone-chilling cold enveloping everything at Obdorsk. He sank his scarf-covered chin down against his chest, allowing his nose to breathe in the warmer air from his coat and preventing his nostril hairs from icing. He shifted his weight from leg to leg and waited for the stinging pain that always occurred when his pumping blood reasserted its dominion over his stiffened legs.

His swaying jostled him into the next man in line, who mumbled something that could have been a curse.

Ted F. Strahan

“Open your eyes fool!” He muttered obscenities to himself for nearly falling asleep. *“That could be you in the snow, fool! You don’t have much longer to be here, and then you can finish it. Stay alert!”*

He was swaying more easily now, the slightest movements fighting against sleep and the ever-present cold. He bent his knees slightly. His mind became more alert with the swaying, but his eyes were still closed.

Grushko visualized the scene. Another prisoner, somewhere to his right in the line, had succumbed to the cold and sleep and had fallen, face first, to the ground. He was probably now bending his legs at his knees, slapping them up and down against the hard-packed snow, to get feeling back and regain his place in the line. This pathetic scene happened every time there was a “standing.” The guards marched the prisoners out into the cold and simply forced them to stand in formation until they were almost frozen. In the warmer months it was not so bad, except that the guards walked the line, occasionally punching or kicking the prisoners. But winter was worse. The guards just left the prisoners in the quadrangle: a name much too formal for the barren wind-swept space between the prison barracks, the administrative building, the guard barracks, and the garage that housed the work camp’s vehicles at Grushko’s back. The prisoners lived in long wooden single-storied structures packed with double-stacked metal bunks. The dismalness of these surroundings intensified in the winter, when everything turned a dirty grey from the accumulation of snow discolored by the soot from the coal-burning stoves.

A *standing* could last any length of time, or at least up until the point where the prisoners might incur some permanent malady. Injuries required medical attention, and a physician, or some semblance of one, would have to be called

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

in from Tobolsk to attend the victim. This required paperwork that could contain some assertion of administrative inefficiency on the part of the camp's staff; therefore medical attention was avoided.

In this case, the *standing* was due to the release of prisoners, one final abuse to remind them of future consequences. The guards watched the line of prisoners from windows, ready to issue forth from the building like irritated ants to enforce the standing. Any slouch who tried to move or fell out of position received a few good kicks for good measure, "One to remember them by," so they said. The thumps stopped and Grushko heard a low groan, almost a whimper, from the fallen man. *It had to be Rostoy*, he thought. The frail *apparatchik* from the Bureau of Agriculture did not do well in the line. An embezzler, an obviously clumsy one, had been there thirteen months and was scheduled for release today along with Grushko and eight others.

"Rostoy!" Someone from the line called out to the fallen man. Grushko recognized Borisov's voice.

Grushko heard someone move from the line. He forced his eyes to open. The suspended icy mist colored the buildings, vehicles, watchtowers, the fences, and the prisoners various shades of white. He turned his head toward the center of the line and saw Rostoy face down in the snow. Borisov, roughly five prisoners down from him in line, had left his place in efforts to bring Rostoy back to his feet. Grushko didn't know what to do; he watched Borisov struggling with the hapless and moaning Rostoy like two teetering drunks. This would bring the guards.

"Borisov," he called. "Get back in line! It's our last day. Leave the fool in the snow!"

Ted F. Strahan

“Help me, Yevgeni,” Borisov replied, frantically pulling at the man’s coat to get him to his feet.

“Get away from him,” Grushko ordered. “They’ll come any moment!” He looked toward the hole; two guards emerged from the doorway and were buttoning up their greatcoats. “Borisov!”

Grushko reluctantly abandoned his position and stepped over to Borisov and the embezzler. He jerked Rostoy up and shook him. “Stand up or be beaten, fool!”

Rostoy’s eyes lost their glazed stare, and he stiffened in place, forcing his legs to support him; the thought of the beating overwhelmed the tingling numbness of his feet and legs.

Borisov pushed him back into the line of men and left him; it was all anyone could be expected to do for him. He followed Grushko back to their places and then lowered his head; watching a beating seemed to enrage the guards, and they might turn their aggression on the watcher.

The guards reached the line and Borisov heard the sharp ‘whack’ of the guard’s nightstick against Rostoy’s head. Two more ‘whacks’ followed, duller sounding; blows to the body or the legs, Borisov reasoned, trying to topple the stiffened Rostoy. A grunt and then another whack, but still no sound of Rostoy falling, which would have initiated a flurry of blows with the accompanying facial bruises and cuts, which would have precluded Rostoy’s release. Prisoners were not released in a beaten state. The guards seemed satisfied with their work and left. Twenty minutes later, the *standing* concluded.

The bus finally left the Obdorsk camp with only two hours until nightfall. Rostoy the clumsy embezzler, sat alone in his seat behind Grushko and Borisov. He felt a kinship with the two men. When release from the camp meant everything, they had helped him. He had a dull headache

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

from the nightstick but his back and legs suffered only some minor bruises. Rostoy took off his worn gloves and rubbed his hands, forcing the fingers and joints to loosen, to regain some of the flexibility so he could again type. He could still get a job. He was only sentenced for one year, and what he did was only a minor problem compared with the larger graft and corruption he had witnessed. He would get a job, maybe even his old one at Agriculture, if his father would speak for him.

Borisov sat by the window, lost in his own thoughts. He watched as the camp slipped from his view when the bus turned toward the Ob, a river crossed by ferry when he arrived, but that would now be solid ice and easily accept the weight of the bus.

The bus bypassed the town of Salekard and stopped at the transit station in Ust Tsilma, a thirty-mile trek that took all of the remaining daylight due to the frozen conditions. The small town was already settled in for the cold evening, and the only people at the station were the cadre of guards and transportation officials who waited for the bus, the last from the surrounding work camps for the day.

Borisov looked at the dimly illuminated building, his first stop toward freedom. He remembered little of this transit station from four years ago when he was transferred to Obdorsk, his third and thankfully his last work camp. All transit stations had a depressing familiarity to them, with Obdorsk having the dubious distinction of housing Leon Trotsky in the early years of the gulag. The buildings had been requisitioned or confiscated during the Stalin years to accommodate the increased traffic in discarded humanity. At Karaganda, the station was an old warehouse set near the railroad leading southward to Tashkent, where he thought he would be worked to his death in the coalmines.

Ted F. Strahan

At Tobolsk, the station was just an old horse stable, the windows boarded over more in an effort to keep the internees from talking with the townspeople than to prevent an escape. And escape to where? No one would have helped him. He had been so depressed at that period of his confinement that to converse with anyone who was not in his predicament would have been torture in itself. At Tobolsk, he received the letter from his brother, Petya, informing him of Tamara's death. Married almost sixteen years before his sentencing, he never found out the cause.

He vaguely recalled the station at Saratov. He tried to remember all the stations in order to keep his mind and memory as sharp as possible, but Saratov eluded him. Saratov, he had concluded some years earlier, must have been on the way to Kharkov when he had the fever, and each station was just some lucid moment between deep sleeps permeated with fever-induced dreams of Tamara toiling in the coal mines of Tashkent, sucking in great mouthfuls of black dust that clogged her lungs.

Borisov followed Grushko off the bus, and the line of released men moved silently and obediently toward the right side of the station, a learned routine that no longer required any directive from the guards. As soon as the bus was emptied, other men filed onto the bus, to take their places in the snow. As soon as the bus pulled away from the station, they were ushered into a holding room to wait for the bus to Kotlas.

Borisov, saying little, sat beside Grushko and Rostoy, occasionally murmuring about the station or issuing a quietly spoken warning if a guard was watching too closely. After Kotlas it would be better. He had heard that the train ride after Kotlas took over four hours until the next station, and he was even unsure of the name of that station. But once on the

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

train, he would be able to entertain thoughts about his future. Tamara was dead. He had not heard from Petya in almost three years, and he was sure his brother would not want to be bothered by him. He had no job. At the thought of his former job, a shudder raced down his spine and he clutched his jacket closer to his chest. He surveyed the room. The guards paid him no special attention, no sideways glances; he feared a sideways glance from a guard would cut through his mask of anonymity and portray him as the traitor he was.

For the first two years of imprisonment, he had dreaded his fate. He listened for the steps of the executioner coming up behind him, wondering what last thought would be in his mind when the bullet entered his brain. There were other such traitors in Obdorsk and in the other camps. They never spoke to one another, nor were they overtly aware of the other's crime, but he could always tell. Common criminals; those blissfully ignorant burglars, rapists, even the intellectuals imprisoned for some written or spoken blasphemy against the government or some member of officialdom, they all had their moments of outrage against their captors. But there was no outrage by Borisov or the others like him; they were caught and convicted traitors. They were under sentence of death, doomed by a desire to extract a vengeance on the Soviet system as Penkovsky had done, or just entangled in a never-ending attempt to better their lives by trading secrets to the West. He had hoped his children, those he and Tamara never had, would have a life in the West. To gain that, he had given secrets to the CIA.

Grushko had been different and seemed to care little for any crime he had committed, even treason. Borisov had allowed himself to speak of his former life to Grushko. He told him of Tamara and how he learned of her death. Grushko in turn, discussed little things he had done, strange food he

Ted F. Strahan

had eaten in the army, and even his dislike of where the country was heading. The criminals will run everything, he had said. Grushko understood why Borisov betrayed Russia. Grushko had kept him sane.

And he was still alive. After the first two tortuous years, waiting for a bullet that never came, he had given up hope of any freedom, just the interspersed changing of work camps that provided the only segmentation in his life. The train to Kotlas would allow him to think of a future, albeit one without Tamara.

The welcome noise of the train stirred all of the men to action; the guards straightened their coats, and the released prisoners picked up their sacks of meager belongings.

“Let’s stay together,” Grushko suggested as they fell into the queue for the railroad car. Once in line, the guards paired off the prisoners two by two, and handed each of them a sack containing new clothes for the train, then ushered them into rooms to change. Grushko and Borisov followed a large burly guard into a room where he directed them to place their old clothes in a prepared sack in the corner of the room. Borisov took off his jacket and laid it on the floor, glad to finally be rid of it. Grushko did likewise, then, while Borisov sat to untie his shoelaces, Grushko retrieved the silencer-equipped pistol from his guard-supplied bag, turned, and shot Borisov in the top of the head.

CHAPTER TWO

Damon Courter replaced the newly cleaned optics into the cylinder for the telescope and snapped the lens cover securely over the lens. He glanced upward; the sky's color had already turned to the deeper blue preceding full nightfall and no clouds hindered his field of view. He never tired of looking at the moon, and his amateur telescope afforded him a private pleasure as it passed over his valley. He only had about three hours of observation before the moon would disappear over his portion of the narrow river valley and leave him with only the black, star emblazoned canopy above him.

Damon took in a deep breath of the mountain air, now cool and heavily fragranced with juniper. He loved this little valley. Mountain juniper and aspen clung to the slopes of the steep walls on either side of the small river. The lower sides of the mountains had been cut out to allow for home sites and for a small two-lane county road that followed the river's course. The road crossed back and forth across the Little Red Butte River with concrete low water passages that allowed for access to homes on both sides. The Little Red Butte was small even by Colorado standards, barely fourteen miles in length of quickly flowing and gurgling water before it emptied into the long Rio Grande.

The echoing rumblings of the moving van's diesel engine interrupted Courter's anticipation of a peaceful evening as it wound back up the valley toward Ridgeback. Sylvia Hopkins-

Ted F. Strahan

Hare, his new neighbor, had just unloaded the remainder of her furnishings after moving down from Canada. The valley was never exclusively his. He used his savings to purchase five adjoining lots on his side of the river and his neighbor, Henderson, had previously purchased six. Through their purchases, they maintained almost seventy yards of space between them and had ensured no more homes would be built within their sight along the narrow river. In his less selfish moments he could admit his ownership was constrained to only a strip of this quiet paradise, but no one had been in the old Henderson place for almost seven years.

Even he thought of it as the “old Henderson place” now. After five years, his practiced patience, and his trained ability to capture social nuances, made him now one of the locals. To infiltrate a group was second nature; the group was irrelevant. In this case, Damon had made the Ridgeback, Colorado community his own. He was a part of them now.

Damon knew the Henderson’s only through the eyes and memories of the locals. There had been three of them; a father, mother, and a young daughter of about ten, he was told. But now he could speak of the Henderson place with the town’s mantle of authoritative knowledge, granted through and placed on him by community acceptance, just as if he had been one of the chosen few townsfolk who had helped to pack up the household belongings and ship them off to San Francisco. The wife and daughter had then used the house in the summers, with the husband rejoining his family on the weekends. With his business improving, or so the story went, the Henderson’s decided to sell their summer home and would not even be available to oversee the movement of their household goods.

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

“Making money hand over fist in the computer industry,” Harley Ware said as he noisily folded his newspaper and adjusted the crease in the page.

“Having to work for the Japanese to get it, though,” added Gib Long, who stopped trimming the half-asleep patron in his chair so as to emphasize his displeasure of working for the Orientals in any endeavor.

“Didn’t you want that place?” Harley questioned, unconcerned with any answer Gib, who had returned his attention to his customer, might supply, and watched the comings and goings on the street in front of the barber shop.

“Didn’t necessarily want it,” Gib retorted as he straightened some miscreant strand of hair on his dozing patron. “Henderson didn’t want to sell it that bad and I was just interested in seeing how much he wanted for it.”

“I heard he wanted a shitload of money for it.”

“Harley Ware,” Gib said, interrupting his scissor snipping, “you know damn well how much he wanted for that place and it was too damn much. Only another fool employed by a bunch of Japs could afford it.”

Although Gib’s statement of a Ridgeback fact concerning global polemics brought the subtle approvals of the barbershop faithful-- Bob Kinshaw’s barely audible “umm” and Jason Wheland’s nod and straightening of the Ridgeback Post-- Damon respectfully said nothing. He had heard this same story, to include the friendly badgering by Gib, at least three times prior. And it was not his place to speak, to pronounce judgments on world leaders, or offer opinions on daily town activities. He had been the newcomer, barely a resident for three years.

But Damon Courter had opinions and could render judgments, most of them highly skilled and artful on a myriad of subjects, from eating and an evening’s night of

entertainment at a Beijing Shenzhen club, to the taste of kabobs in Turkey, or to the identification of nuclear sites in Iran. And he could have had them spellbound with stories of how he, in one of his most successful activities, albeit one that begged for the more colorful euphemisms of language that would have had even the normally reticent Bob Kinshaw in tearful laughter, had to hand-carry the rectal offerings of the KGB station chief in Italy all the way to Washington. In his earlier days, this story always ended with, "This is such a shitty line of work!"

Damon had kept silent but attentive. What Gib, Bob, and Jason said was the gospel in Ridgeback and if one wanted to progress from newcomer to full-fledged membership, to "fit in, it was the time-honored rule to wait on your invitation.

"Old Wintchell's making his way down," Harley said. "Whose turn is it anyway?"

"I laid one out there yesterday," Gib answered, again fully engrossed in his work. "It must be Damon's," he said. "I don't remember when he did it last."

"I've got one handy," Damon said as he stood up and dug into his jeans pocket. The reason Harley didn't remember Damon's last time was because Damon had never been asked to lay a quarter on the sidewalk for Mr. Wintchell. And with Harley's pronouncement, Damon was fully accepted. Delmar Wintchell, or simply Wintchell, with stooped head, hunched shoulders, attired in his customary white Mexican marriage shirt, khaki trousers, tennis shoes, and walking cane, was making his daily trip down the street from the nursing home to the Conoco station across from the elementary school. He had acquired this habit jointly from a life of caring for his community, and now after eighty-six years, to a progressing stage of dementia. He searched the sidewalks for dropped coinage, which he gathered and presented to the attendant at

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

the Conoco service station, so children could have small candy suckers for free after school. As soon as the townspeople understood his routine, they planted coins for him to find along his route. As a rule, the largest coin that Wintchell would accept was a quarter. Damon dutifully deposited his quarter on the pavement near the parking meter, in plain sight, so Wintchell would easily spot it.

Now that he was a local, Damon introduced himself to his new neighbor, Sylvia, an attractive single woman, with little effort. He managed to mention he was a published author, (since he noticed how many book cases she had moved into the house), and offered to introduce her to the other locals in Ridgeback. From that point they had an occasional dinner together and he introduced her to some of the townsfolk. Gib told him they had become an 'item' in the town. Sylvia was outgoing, and to Damon's pique, he knew she didn't need him to be accepted into the community.

She had light brown hair almost shoulder length, which was now tied up in a ponytail. As the sound of the van's engine finally faded all that remained was the gurgling of the water over the rocky riverbed. He continued to clean and ready the telescope before total darkness set in. He could now see lights in the house and the occasional glimpse, although undistinguishable at this distance, of Sylvia moving across the upstairs window frame.

"What the hell," he told himself as he traversed the telescope toward his neighbor's house. He adjusted the eyepiece and trained the scope on the upstairs window after detecting movement and shadows in that room.

She was very attractive with full lips and brown eyes. So far Damon had only seen her in denim jeans, but the cut of the jeans left little to speculate about. She had the legs and the figure to go along with the beauty. Tonight, she was wearing

Ted F. Strahan

a checked blouse, beige and white with the sleeves rolled up, he noted as she wiped perspiration from her forehead. She moved to the right, out of his view. *Good sized painting on the wall*, he observed as he waited for her to reappear. Damon observed the room with a trained, almost clinical, interest. He did not realize how quickly he lapsed into his past life.

“Could be a G. Harvey,” he spoke out loud and to no one. “Has the right colors.” He liked G. Harvey but couldn’t come close to affording one. He adjusted the eyepiece for a better focus on the picture to ascertain if it was just like his, a numbered replica.

Something tanned moved across his view. “She must be back,” he said as he readjusted the eyepiece to another focus.

“Oh, mama!” he exclaimed as he quickly pulled back from the telescope. He self-consciously looked around him to assure himself that he was alone.

He returned to his business, which had now moved from the purely clinical to the purely voyeuristic. Sylvia had removed her blouse and Damon had an unrestricted view of two perfect breasts. Not overly large but demonstrably firm by their rhythmic bounce as she moved back and forth across the window. “Look at those abs!” He involuntarily sucked his own stomach in a belt notch. “I’ve got to do more sit-ups.”

After she moved from his sight, he quickly fumbled with the eyepiece to bring those breasts just as up close and personal as he could get.

No sooner had he made the adjustment did the woman come into full view. He moved the telescope to the left and then to the right, trying to locate the twin objects of his newfound affection.

“What the hell?” He had the perfect chance. She was standing before the window but something was not quite

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

right. He again adjusted the eyepiece. "Better back it off, some."

Now she was perfectly in focus; standing full face in the window, her flat stomach accented by the lower curve of each breast that were partially hidden behind each of her elbows. He moved the telescope upward to see her face, which was to his horror, hidden behind a pair of large binoculars.

Damon jumped away from the telescope as if he could escape the view of the righteously judgmental eyes behind those binoculars. He was caught, like some zealous hormone-enhanced seventh grader who dropped one pencil too many in hopes of learning the color of the panties on the girl in the desk behind him. With as much courage as he could muster, he turned back toward the woman's window. Try and be casual, he cautioned himself. She should have covered her window, he thought, purposefully overlooking the dilemma that the telescope still presented in his moral rationalization of his situation. Out of the corner of his eye he could tell that the window was darker. Upon a more studied view, the curtain was pulled.

Damon retreated back into his house determined to extricate himself from his own voyeuristic trap. He couldn't remember doing anything this stupid since his Dorothy Toolset infamous pink-panty incident and the ensuing apology in front of his sixth grade class. But he wasn't twelve, anymore.

"Damn." His consternation was interrupted by the knocking on his door. He could see Sylvia through the glass in the door. *This is going to be bad*, he assured himself. He opened the door and waited for the deserved slap in the face.

"I thought we might have some wine, first." She said as she held up an unopened bottle of red wine in one hand and two wine glasses in the other. The pony tail was gone and her

brown hair was loosely brushed out. The checked blouse was on but held together by only a single button. There was no bra and the opening showed the tan was complete. "I didn't see any need to dress up for the visit, since your telescope was so large."

"I was fully prepared to apologize and give up the telescope," Damon answered, trying to avert his eyes from the barely concealed breasts.

"I wouldn't," she said as she sat the wine and the glasses on Damon's coffee table. She stepped up to Damon kissed him slowly on his lips, letting her body come full into contact with his. "A nice large telescope is too good to waste."

Desire rushed over Damon. "Why don't I show you around?" he asked. "Let's start with the bedroom."

Damon had not been very involved with women since his divorce. There was an occasional date and a few one-night stands, but nothing lasting. He had been enthralled with Sylvia since meeting her, obviously first with her beauty and personality, and finally with her interest in his writing and his prior history with the CIA. Before his death, her husband had been a professor in the international studies department of Simon Fraser University at Burnaby, and she enjoyed discussing almost any international subject at length.

But tonight there was no talk of trade imbalance, global intrigue, or book titles; it was all about sex. To Damon's amazement and indulgent pleasure, Sylvia was totally free in her love-making. While Damon explored her body, she touched, massaged, kissed, and caressed him. She matched his intensity and almost his strength as they finally spent themselves in a tight embrace. "Well," Sylvia said with a smile while taking in a deep breath, "that was better than I expected."

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

“I hope you had some high expectations, then,” Damon replied.

“The highest, of course.” She stood up, unabashedly naked, and dressed while Damon watched her. “Since you had the telescope and all, I didn’t think you would have any problems with me dressing in front of you.”

“It just capped off what turned out to be a perfect evening,” he answered.

Sylvia bent over and gave Damon a quick kiss and without any further words, turned and left the bedroom. Damon laid his head back on his pillow, heard the clinking of wine glasses as she gathered them up in the living room, and then the door open and close. He slept fitfully that night, his rest punctuated by dreams of his former wife and their love making, of the sixth grade, of Dorothy Toolsen’s infamous pink panties, and his forced apology in front of the entire class. In his dream, however, the class was composed of Gib, Bob, Jason, Harley, and old Wintchell in his white marriage shirt.

CHAPTER THREE

CIA Headquarters, Langley, Virginia

Herbert Ramsey liked challenges. Not the heady challenge of a corporate mogul fighting off a hostile takeover, and especially not the daily grind to obtain higher personal achievement. That was what had gotten him to this place. Herbert Ramsey had become just “Herb,” and he now abided in what was commonly termed, the “lower reaches” by case officers and other personnel at Langley and throughout the CIA. His area did have an official title, the CIA Counterintelligence Center Analysis Group – Archival (CIC/AG-AR), but this was a dead-end for the career. But to Herb it was the perfect environment; stacks of yet-to-be filed and recorded tidbits of information, rows upon rows of file cabinets with a myriad of diverse security classifications on them, and then there were the cross-referenced files, his own pride and joy. The files had not yet been transferred to a digital database and Herb suspected they never would, not until the current crop of CIA bureaucrats retired out for a few years. Herb knew computer records were much harder to refute, deny, or generally obfuscate away, unlike the handwritten records, which could be bludgeoned away with any number of rational or irrational arguments and accusations. Finding the hidden piece of information was his challenge. The monotony provided his sustenance.

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

For Herb, it wasn't always like this. As he perused the files that moved from one compartment to the next, from the in-bound documents for filing and classification, or to cross-match some name, some of the names or digraphs triggered memories that he would just as soon forget. Herb was easily panicked. The initial clue to his problem surfaced at The Farm. The problem wasn't in the classes, for the regurgitation of facts was his forte', nor was it the memorization techniques, for that too was no more difficult for him than multiplication tables in grade school. It was all in the application as he tried to transfer the studied technique into a behavior.

Herb first felt the sensations of panic when he tried to pick out the enemy agents on the street. He rationalized this first fear into an acceptable perspective by always remembering that the supposed enemy agents were just other CIA trainees from the classes ahead of him. His class standing dropped slightly but otherwise he survived. The interrogation sessions should have told his trainers that he was unfit for field work. He began to sob under the relentless questioning about his cover story, but again he survived claiming that his breakdown was only a trick to hinder his inquisitors. But really it was the fact that he was second-generation CIA, and his father had risen to Sector Chief.

After leaving training, Herbert, with his father's help, was assigned to the Bonn Station, where the panic could not be rationalized away and the breakdown was complete. He was reassigned back to Langley after he refused to leave his desk one day. He had calmly told the Chief of Station, Ray Waverly, he knew he should get on with things, but that he could not make his legs obey. Waverly, never at a loss in his explanations of human behavior, called the episode a 'one-looper,' or just a mild mental problem that probably would

Ted F. Strahan

not hinder his further service as long as it was not overseas. The stress of the job had simply thrown Herb for a loop. According to Waverly, and as repeated by members of his staff, a 'two-looper' had to contain incoherent babbling, while a grandiose 'three-looper' not only had the babbling but was usually followed up with suicide threats while naked. Needless to say, Waverly gave his case officers considerable leeway before he requested a reassignment and had yet to report a bona fide 'three-looper' to Langley.

It was mid-afternoon when Herb tackled the request from Helsinki. He had read the secure message that morning: REQUEST INFORMATION ON RUSSIAN WITH CODE NAME WILLOW (?). SECOND PARTY CONTACT. ROUTINE. HATCHECK.

Herb had set aside the request until afternoon and took care of the quicker actions first. He knew that the Helsinki request would not be a quick affair. The question mark behind the code name meant the code name might have been a guess or the officer did not totally trust the informant's message. Usually the latter applied. That would require numerous cross-checks against any WILLOW on the list plus any close resemblances to WILLOW, such as PILLOW or GOODFELLOW. And since it was a second-party contact, Helsinki did not place a high value on the Russian. The Russian might be a hoax, possibly on the messenger or maybe the Agency itself. Either way, Herb knew that Helsinki was not overly concerned about turnaround time on the request.

Since the code name WILLOW was not within his recent memory, and his memory was exceptional on digraphs, he began with the closed out Russian files, leisurely scanning the alphabetized listing of code names starting with the last recorded year of operation and then working his way back in time. Some of the code names were only words. Some were

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

familiar because of previous referencing and others were intimate to him, those agents whose work had crisscrossed with other agents and case officers leaving behind the tell-tale thread of names, rumors, secrets, and unraveled lies that the Agency passed on or withheld as the current policy dictated. The wall clock turned to five o'clock and Herb dutifully acknowledged the "good-evenings" from the other drones as they left for the day. He was now alone. This time of day suited him, the silence of the room broken only by the flipping of note cards containing his digraphs and code names, punctuated by an occasional "hmm" of some peculiar memory or individual captured by the note cards as they rolled by, year after year. There was a WIDOW, a WARLOCK, and a WALLFLOWER, but not WILLOW as he closed out the listings for 1996.

"Hello." He spoke to himself, a habit that some of his fellow drones had noticed a few months earlier but had declined to make comment upon, most of them attributing the development as a natural consequence of the prolonged basement environment. "So there you are, WILLOW," he said as he pulled the card.

WILLOW had not been contacted since 1995, he noted. The card reported that contact was lost after WILLOW failed to follow up on a request for routine personnel listings on couriers in Italy's area of operations.

"Well then," Herb said to himself, the habit manifesting itself more actively after he was alone in the basement, "if WILLOW was asked about couriers, then he was in the First Chief Directorate with at least access to Directorate S and probably even Active Measures." Herb looked at the card as he pondered how to prepare his message back to Goreley.

Herb jotted down the message: FOR HATCHECK. WILLOW FOUND IN 1995. CONTACT LOST WITHOUT

Ted F. Strahan

ARRANGEMENT. INITIAL DOCUMENTATION SUGGESTS WILLOW HAD LISTING KNOWLEDGE OF COURIERS. WILLOW IDENTIFIED BY CARD AS ANATOLY ANDREIVICH BORISOV. CASE OFFICER WAS TIMECLOCK. SEARCH NOT COMPLETE.

He studied the message carefully. Once he had ascertained that the Russian might have been a part of the FCD, or the Foreign Intelligence Service as it was now called, or SVR, by acronym, the importance of the man was escalated. The SVR performed all of the actual spying for the Kremlin and one had to be careful not to say too little or too much with regard to them. The last thing he wanted was for Al Goreley to jump to some erroneous conclusion about WILLOW or Borisov or whoever the Russian, if he really was a Russian, might be and then point the finger at him if a mistake was made. The reference to the card would cover him as to whether or not Borisov really was an SVR operative or employee. The last "search not complete" phrase was an out if he needed one.

"Better cover your ass here, Herb," he said. He decided that the reply was as evasive as he needed. He then added his own code name, BALLGAME, at the end of the message. After making his own notes of his actions in the duty log, he moved WILLOW back to the active card file and headed for Communications. He dropped one copy of his message at the COMM-Center as his immediate reply to Goreley in Helsinki and another copy for the Operations Duty Officer since it pertained to one of their areas of responsibility.

There was still plenty of daylight left as Herb headed for his car. His mind, however, was still on his card file. "TIMECLOCK?" He said to himself as he tried to remember why that was familiar. But if Operations wants to know, then

THE BORISOV DILEMMA

they can ask, he reassured himself and dismissed the message from his mind.



When ex-CIA operative Damon Courter is called back to help interrogate one of his old Russian contacts, he gets more than he bargained for. The contact is an imposter, his ex-wife is also on the case, and she wants to reunite with him. They discover a Russian plot to identify the Israeli agent within the Iranian nuclear program, an assassin who is to eliminate anyone who might derail the Russian plot.

The Borisov Dilemma

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6761.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**