

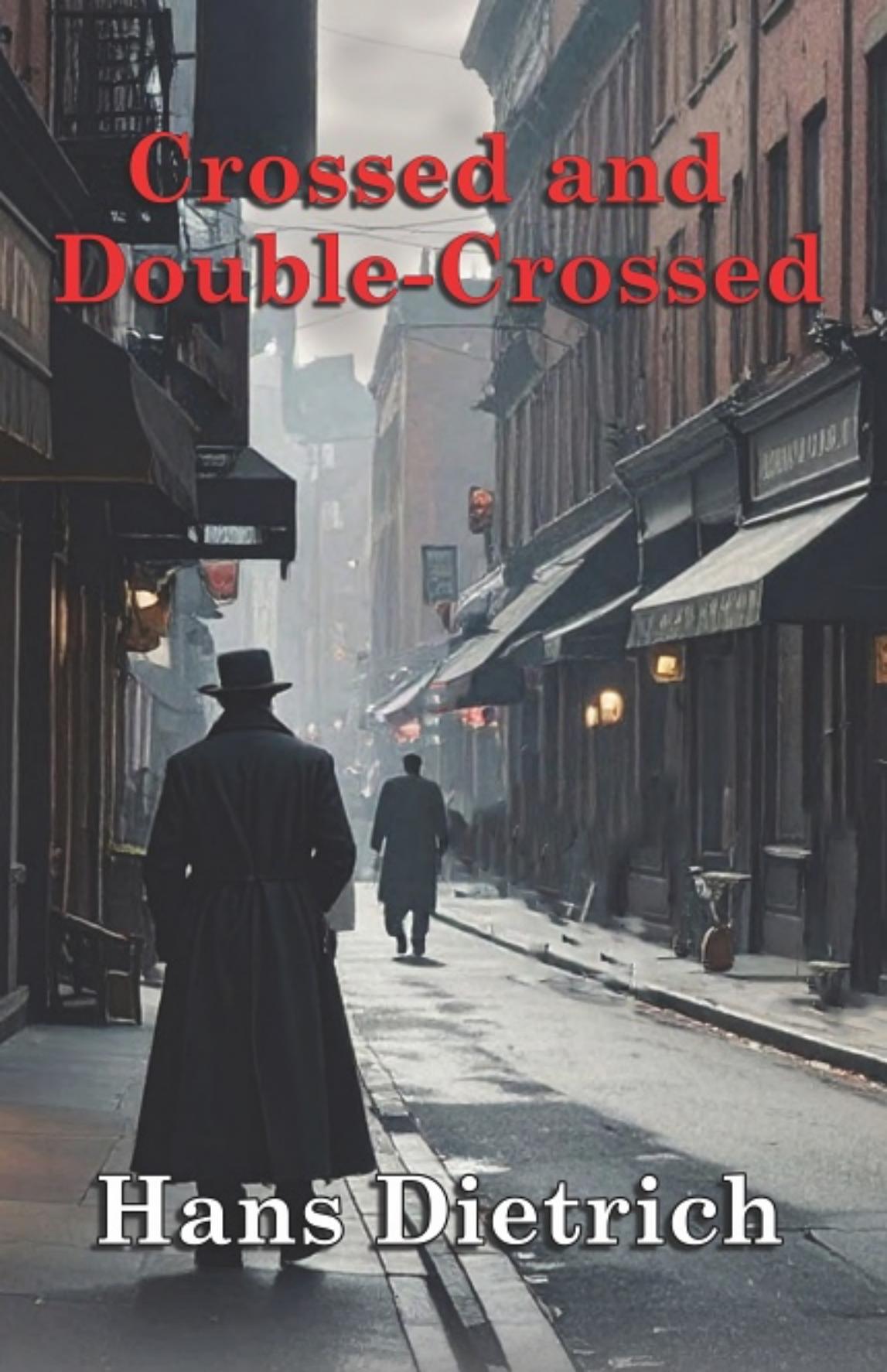
Clayton Morris shepherds a courier to Paris to watch the handover. When couriers start dying, he needs to follow the package to its destination. More people are dying, is he next? He hides, is found, they are still trying to kill him.

Crossed and Double-Crossed

By Hans Dietrich

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First Edition

Chapter One

I opened my eyes, all was black. Not dark but black, no light at all. No idea how I got here. Closed my eyes and tried to think back, I was sitting in the back seat of the vehicle, door open to get fresh air and watching the trail, the trail where Katarina and Yuri went down.

I have a headache mainly behind the eyes. I remember, a hand and cloth over my nose and mouth then nothing. Damn!

I sat up or tried but hit my head, ouch! I flopped back down and with my right arm reached up, wood. The ceiling was very low. Stretched my arm and touched the side, a wooden wall. I extended my left arm, another wall also of wood.

I touched my chest, still have my clothes on, I can move my legs and feet, shoes okay. I think I am in a wooden box. I ran my right hand along the seam of the floor and wall, wet? I extended my arm and there was moisture the whole length. Don't panic! I stretched out my left arm, found the wall edge and there was moisture also. Now I am concerned. I tapped hard against the wall, got a dull echo, not hollow like but dull, solid. I tapped the roof and received a thud, no echo. I listened very carefully and thought I heard water, waves, splashing faintly.

Panic! It would appear that I was in a wooden box, coffin, in the water with very, very limited air supply. I kicked out and felt more moisture on the floor than before.

I AM GOING TO DROWN!

Perhaps I should start at the beginning and explain what led to this inexcusable predicament.

I stood at the front door of the Premier Inn London on Euston Road surveying the scene. It was drizzling, not a downpour but that misty annoying sprinkle that tends to leak through any unsealed opening. I didn't have an umbrella as I was travelling, and it would only get in the way or as usual I would forget it somewhere. I was wearing a waterproof jacket but being a jacket and not a coat, it just covered me slightly passed my waist so that the water soaked into my trousers.

I had my small suitcase by my side, a handy convertible, an extendable handle, with two wheels, a carry handle on one side and hidden straps for carrying as a backpack. I learned over the years and many trips, to load the bag only with the bare essentials and light enough that I could lift it over obstacles, and over a distance. This morning however, I had the wheels extended to be dragged along beside me. Though I had a filling breakfast, the luke warm coffee was not enough to motivate a great deal of energy.

I cautiously descended the wet stairs to the sidewalk, a twisted ankle was the last thing I needed. I hugged the walls of the buildings with the hope of minimizing the falling drizzle. The wheels of my case clattered across the joints of the concrete tiles that paved the footpath. I stepped under the bus shelter at Piableton Place and received a greeting from the wet passengers eagerly waiting for the bus.

At Midland Road I crossed the street and took shelter under the portico of the St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel mapping out my next move as I had to traverse the wide open space which served as the driveway, spied an entrance to the St. Pancras Railway Station and gratefully ducked in. I stopped in awe just inside as I was overwhelmed by this huge modern complex. In this old building, with its historic façade, they had renovated the interior like a modern shopping mall but also as a railway station. Yes, there were shops but also corridors leading to the Underground, National Rail and the Eurostar. I got bounced from both sides as I had stopped in the middle of the entrance, I quickly hauled my bag out of the way, and was then again pushed out of the way as I slowed to stare at the overhanging direction signs. I found the corridor for the Eurostar and got caught up in the crowd waiting for the departures as that gate was still closed.

I stepped into the line in front of the ticket office, the woman seated there gave me a blank look. I glanced around, there were numerous signs, yes, big, small, brightly colored, all exalting the benefits of ordering on-line, no waiting in line for example. I had to smile for if everybody bought on-line, there would be no line at the ticket counter and no need for this person.

“There should be a ticket waiting for me,” I stated as pleasantly as I could.

“Name?”

“Morris,” I replied.

“Identification.”

I passed my passport under the grill separating us.

“Clayton Morris, Canadian,” she stated looking me over. I’m sure my photo matched, perhaps she thought I might have grown an extra appendage. You never know with these Canadians. I’m sure my hair was still dark and I know my eyes were still brown and I was still 5 foot 11 inches. Don’t think I have shrunk at all.

“They say Canada is very pretty?” she casually as she reached into a cubby hole and extracted an envelope.

I always had a problem on how to answer such a question as Canada was 5000 miles wide and the UK would fit in about 40 times.

“Yes it is,” I said friendly like.

“Here’s your ticket. It’s standard seating. No food, you’ll have to get your own,” she pointed out in a mechanical tone as she passed an instructional brochure, “the gate opens in ten minutes.”

I stepped back to orientate myself with the required gate. My ticket showed my designated seat was number 63 so I realized that I didn’t have to struggle to get seating, also in the envelope was a folded note, cryptic of course, ’T – 82’. Yeah okay, target seat 82.

The ticket for the Eurostar was provided with minimal spending money, already in the bank, and instructions to *follow and observe*. The instructions concluded with *report, and await further instructions*. I had done several jobs for this department before, mostly when their own people were known to the target organization. Rarely was violence involved.

Chapter Two

I was shaken out of my daydreaming by a loud buzzer which I surmised was to signal that the train was ready for boarding as the departure gate was sliding open. As usual there were those that needed to be first on board as they crowded the train door with wheeled suitcases, duffle bags and backpacks. Those of us more travelled or perhaps older, stayed back until the congestion cleared. The seating arrangement for my carriage was two rows of seats on one side and one row of seats on the other. I was on the two row, available or cheaper, didn't matter, it was the aisle seat so would give room for my legs. I made sure that the extended handle on my case was securely locked in place and the two wheels securely tucked away to avoid damage, and placed in the overhead compartment. This was my first time on Eurostar and I nodded my approval at the seat comfort. I started reading the front page of the Daily Mail which I had picked up on the way in.

“Excuse me,” said a pleasant feminine voice at my elbow. I turned my head, pushed tightly against my right shoulder was a plaid woolen skirt, cinched narrow waist by a leather belt. I followed with my eyes the line of buttons of the white blouse, noticed the plaid jacket, and was met by a pretty smiling face ringed by light shoulder length hair.

“I believe that is my seat,” she said pointing passed me. I dragged my eyes from her face reluctantly, and looked at the empty seat. My heart took an extra beat as I smiled at the possibilities.

“Right,” I replied smiling, “if you let me up I’ll make room.” I attempted to get up and we were ever so close. She needed to move sideways as people were still pushing to go forward. We were standing at eye level though I noticed that she was wearing heels so I would have topped her by two inches or so. Her perfume sent a ‘zing’ to that particular part of my brain that blanked my thought process, as she edged passed. The smell of her hair reminded me of a rose garden. Not fair!

“Would you like a hand with your case?” I asked having trouble forming the words.

“Yes, thank you,” she replied gracefully with a beaming smile. I placed it in the overhead next to mine, it wasn’t as heavy as I expected, she must be travelling light. Even if it was overweight, I would have made it look effortless.

I made myself comfortable again and picked up my newspaper scanning the front page. My ‘ESP’ sent a ‘bong’ across my frontal lobe and in my peripheral vision I sensed her staring at me.

“Hi,” I said as I turned in her direction. Her chin raised slightly as she looked at me with those dark piercing eyes. Her face was smooth except for an annoyed expression.

“Good morning,” she said in what she might have felt was in a friendly tone but to me sounded slightly snippy.

“Yes it is, will be much better when we get underway. My name is Clayton,” I replied giving her the once over again, nice hair, dressed comfortably for travelling, no rings on the left hand, and just one red stone ring on the right.

“My name’s Karen,” she said as she thrust out her right hand, “Karen Renton.” The name didn’t register as someone special but I now had to get into my communication mode. I glanced to the front of the carriage and noted that seat 82 was in the single row against the opposite side and was occupied. I reached for her hand and held it, giving it a gentle shake.

“Hello Karen, on the way to Paris then?” I asked still holding her hand, she made no effort to pull it back.

“Yes, Fashion,” she remarked as if I should know what that entailed. She looked at me expectantly. I looked outside and realized that we were moving, it had been such a gentle start that I hadn’t noticed.

“We’re on our way,” I nodded to the window. She reluctantly broke eye contact and glanced at the passing scenery. She stared at me again and gave a frustrating ‘umph’.

“So, why are you on this train?” Damn!

“I’m going to a real estate seminar,” I explained.

“That’s a long way to go for a Canadian,” she stated pointedly. Made me wonder how she knew I was from Canada.

“Well, I’m into real estate and it’s interesting to know the current trends and expected innovations.” I explained hoping to end the probing questions but no such luck. She took her hand back.

“Why should Paris or Europe have any bearing on Canada?” She again put me in a corner. I gave her a long look as I didn’t really want to explain.

“This trip was actually an attempt to rejuvenate our marriage, between my wife and myself, you know, Paris the city of love and romance.” She made an exaggerated effort to look around.

“She doesn’t seem to be with you.”

“If she was you wouldn’t be sitting in that seat.”

“So, what happened?” she asked sitting up straight and made it clear that, no answer was not an option.

“My wife, a lawyer, went to New York on assignment for her company,” I replied with a touch of emotion, “she indicated that she may not be there when I return.”

“That’s rather cold of her,” Karen commented placing a hand on my arm as if to express sympathy.

“Well yes, she only told me that after I produced the tickets for the trip.” I noticed the outside had gone dark, we must be in the Tunnel under the channel. I glanced forward in time to see the passenger in seat 82 ease out and head forward. Karen nudged my arm.

“I want to go and get a coffee and something to eat. You coming?”

“Yes, good idea.” I stepped into the aisle, stood back to give her room and followed.

The dining car was almost empty of passengers, only three or four people sitting at the tables. Number 82 was sitting by himself facing forward with a coffee and a croissant. Karen, leading the way, sat on a stool at the counter and faced to the back which left me no option but to face her looking to the front. That turned out okay as I could see

number 82 in the mirror lining the back of the serving counter.

She ordered two coffees and two croissants and then purposefully looked at me when the server came with the bill. I was thinking of accepting her challenge, but relented as I had hopes for the future, after all, Paris!

I casually glanced at number 82 fixing his features to memory, grayish long hair, not trimmed office like. About fifty years old, broad forehead more English than European. He was wearing a dark color sports coat and tan slacks. There were no distinguishing outstanding features which was going to be hell in the crowded streets of Paris.

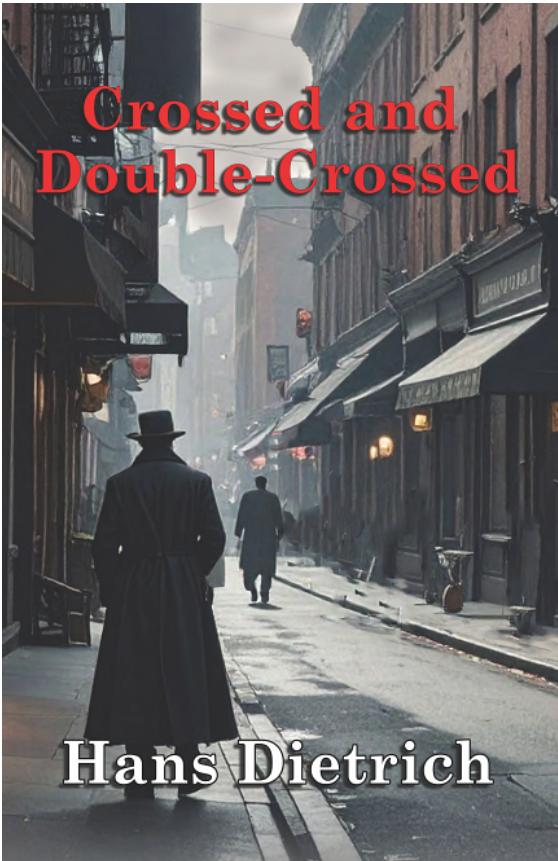
“I’m ready to go back,” Karen said wiping the crumbs from her mouth. I was finished so I lead the way back to our seats, I had to wait as she had stopped to adjust her shoes holding on to the backrest of the seat for balance. She skewed me with a most beaming smile that made me forget all my doubts. We sat holding hands, not saying much until the train left the tunnel and viewed the French country side. The intercom announced that the train was approaching Lille in five minutes.

Karen shook my shoulder and said she was getting off.

“I thought you said you’re going to Paris, you know, Fashion Show?” I exclaimed rather troubled now.

“I changed my mind. I want to see some friends in Brussels and remembered Cologne, and Frankfurt, are also having Shows. I can go from there and catch another show in Paris,” she replied hurriedly. She attempted to stand which forced me out of my seat. I offered to bring down her bag but

she wrenched it down with ease narrowly missing my head. In a moment of panic I looked forward for passenger number 82 but saw that he was sitting quietly reading a magazine. Karen kissed me on the cheek and hurried to the doors. Shortly she was besieged by others also leaving and I lost sight of her. I stood at a window but didn't see her as the flow of passengers was in the other direction.



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