

The Hunt for Dmitri

by Gayle Lynds,

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The French never got enough credit. The Germans never got enough control. The Romanians had a guilt complex. And the Americans hadn't a clue. As the good-natured slanders continued, Liz Sansborough, Ph.D., peered around the Faculty Club for her close friend and colleague Arkady Albam. He was late.

The dimly lit bar was packed, every table filled. The rich aromas of wine and liquor were intense. As glasses clinked, a world atlas of languages electrified the air. Academics all, they were celebrating the conclusion of a highly successful international conference on cold war political fallout, post-9/11, which she had helped to organize. Still, there was no sign of Arkady.

The economist from the University of London grinned pointedly at Liz—the only American in their group. „I hear Russia's economy is so rotten that the Kremlin has had to sack dozens of its American moles.“

„Only because we don't sell ourselves cheap.“ She grinned back at him. „Moscow can afford to keep your MI6 turncoats on the payroll forever.“

As laughter erupted, the sociologist from the Sorbonne nodded at the empty bar stool beside Liz and asked in French, „Where’s Arkady? He isn’t here to defend his country!“

„I’ve been wondering, too.“ Liz’s gaze swept the lounge once more.

Arkady was a visiting scholar in Russian history, on campus here at the University of California at Santa Barbara since January. They had met soon after he arrived, when he sat beside her at a mass faculty meeting, peered at the empty seat on his other side, then introduced himself to her. „I’m the new kid,“ he said simply. They discovered a shared European sensibility, a love of movies, and that each had pasts neither would discuss. In her mind, she could see his kindly wrinkled face, feel the touch of his fingertips on her forearm as he leaned toward her with an impish smile to impart some piece of wisdom or gossip.

The problem was, he was elderly—almost seventy years old—and so unwell the past week that he had missed all of Monday’s events, including his own seminar. He had phoned to tell her, but stubbornly refused to see a doctor.

As the lighthearted banter continued, and more people arrived, there was still no Arkady. He was never late. Liz speed-dialed his number on her cell phone. No answer again. Instead of leaving another message, she toasted her colleagues farewell and wound through the throngs to the door. His apartment was only minutes away. She might as well look in on him.

The night sky was dull black, the stars pinpricks, remote. Liz hurried to her car, threw her shoulder bag across the front seat, turned on the ignition and peeled out, speeding along streets fringed with towering palms until at last she parked in front of Arkady’s building. He lived in 2C. In a rare admission, he had joked once that he preferred this „C“ to the one that referred to the Cellar, Soviet intelligence’s name for the basement in the Lubyanka complex where the KGB executed dissidents and spies and those who crossed them. He barely escaped, he had told her, then refused to say more, his profile pinched with bad memories.

Liz ran upstairs and knocked. There was no answer. His drapes were closed, but a line of light showed in a center gap. She knocked again then tried the knob. It turned, and she cracked open the door. Just inside, magazines were strewn in piles. A lamp lay on its side, its ceramic base shattered. Her chest tightened.

„Arkady? Are you here?“

The only sound was the ticking of the wall clock. Liz opened the door wider. Books lay where they had been yanked from shelves, spines twisted. She peered around the door—and saw Arkady. His brown eyes were wide and frightened, and he seemed small, shriveled, although he was muscular and broad-chested for his age. He was sitting in his usual armchair, drenched in the light of his tall, cast-iron floor lamp.

She drank in the sight of him. „Are you all right?“

Arkady sighed. „This is what greeted me after the last seminar.“ He spoke English with an American accent. „It’s a mess, isn’t it?“ He still wore his battered tweed jacket, his gray tie firmly knotted against his throat. His left hand held a blue envelope, while the other was tucked inside his jacket as if clutching at his heart. He was a man of expressive Rus disposition and ascetic Mongol habits and was usually vibrant and talkative.

She frowned. „Yes, but you didn’t answer my question. Are you hurt?“

When he shook his head, experience sent her outside to the balcony again. A gust of wind rustled the leaves of a pepper tree, cooling her hot face. As she inspected the street and parked cars, then the other apartment buildings, uneasy memories surged through her, transporting her back to the days she had been a CIA NOC—nonofficial cover operative—on roving assignment from Paris to Moscow. No one at the university knew she had been CIA.

Seeing nothing unusual, she slipped back inside and locked the door. Arkady had not moved. In the lamplight, his thick hair and heavy eyebrows were the muted color of iron shavings.

„What happened, Arkady? Who did this? Is anything missing?“

He shrugged, his expression miserable.

Liz walked through the kitchen, bedroom and office. Nothing else seemed out of place. She returned to the living room.

Arkady rallied. „Sit with me, dear Liz. You’re such a comfort. If I’d been blessed with a daughter, I’d want her to be you.“

His words touched her. As a psychologist, she was aware of her desire for this older man’s attention, that he had become a surrogate father, a deep bond. Her real father was her most closely guarded secret: He was an international assassin with a code name to match his reputation—the Carnivore. She hated what he had done, what he was. That his blood flowed through her veins haunted her—except when she was with Arkady.

She sank into her usual armchair, where only the low reading table separated them. „Have you phoned the sheriff’s department?“

He shrugged. „There’s no point.“

„I’ll call for you.“

Arkady gave his head a rough shake. „Too dangerous. He’ll be back.“

She stared. „Too dangerous? *Who’ll* be back?“

Arkady handed her the blue envelope he had been holding.

She turned it over. The postmark was Los Angeles.

„Ignore that,“ he told her. „The letter was sent originally from Moscow to New York in a larger envelope. A friend there opened it and put the letter into another big envelope and mailed it to Los Angeles. That’s where my address was added.“

Liz pulled out folded stationery. Inside were three tiny dried sunflowers. In Russia, an odd number of blooms was considered good luck. The writing was not only different, it was in the Cyrillic alphabet—Russian.

„Dearest,“ it began. She peered up at him.

„It’s from my wife, Nina.“ He looked past her to another time, another life. „She wouldn’t escape with me. We’d never had children, and she knew I could take care of myself. She said she’d rather have me alive far away than dead in some Moscow grave.“

He paused. „I suspect she knew I’d have a better chance alone.“

Liz took a long breath. With the stationery in one hand, and the sunflowers on the palm of the other, she bent her head and read. The letter recounted the ordinary life of an ordinary woman living on a small pension in a tiny Moscow flat. „I’ve enclosed three pressed sunflowers, my love,“ the letter finished, „to remind you of our happy times together. You are in my arms forever.“

Liz gazed a moment longer at the dried blossoms, now the color of desert sand. She folded the letter and slid the flowers back inside.

Arkady looked at her alertly, as if hoping she would say something that would rectify whatever had happened, what he feared might happen.

„It’s obvious Nina loves you a lot,“ she told him. „Surely she can join you now.“
„It’s impossible.“

She frowned. „I don’t understand what’s going on.“

„Nina and I decided before I left that if either of us ever suspected our mail was being read, we’d write that we were enclosing three sunflowers. Some snooper must’ve thought they’d fallen out, so he covered himself by adding them. The mistake confirms what Nina surmised, and it fits with this.“ He gestured at the damage around them. „I thought I was being followed yesterday and today. The vandalism proves he’s here. And it’s a message that he can have someone in Moscow scrub Nina to punish me if I try to escape now. He knows I know that.“

Liz remembered an official statement during the Communist show trial of Boris Arsov, a Bulgarian defector: *The hand of justice is longer than the legs of the traitor*. A few months later, Arsov was found dead in his prison cell. The Kremlin had been relentless about liquidating anyone who escaped. Even today, some former operatives prowled the globe for those they felt had betrayed the old Soviet Union.

„You expect him to kill you,“ she said woodenly.

„You must go, Liz. I accept my fate.“

„Who is this man?“

„A KGB assassin called Oleg Olenkov. He’s a master of impersonation and recruiting the unsuspecting. Even after the Soviet Union dissolved, he hunted me. So I decided to become Arkady Albam—I thought he’d never look for me in academia. But for him, eliminating me is personal.“ He peered at her. „My name is actually Dmitri Garnitsky. I was a dissident. Those were desperate times. Do you really want to hear?“

„Tell me.“ Liz’s eyes traveled from window to door and back again. „Quickly.“ As her gaze returned to Arkady, a small, strange smile vanished from his face. A smile she had never seen. For an uncomfortable instant, she was suspicious.

* * * * *

Day after day in the bitter winter of 1983, Moscow’s gray sky bled snow through the few hours of light into the black well of night. From their flat, Dmitri and Nina Garnitsky could hear the caged wolves in the zoo howl. Across the city, vodka poured until bottles were empty. Meanwhile in Europe, Washington was deploying Pershing missiles aimed at the Soviet Union. A sense of helpless desolation shrouded Moscow, escalating the usual paranoia. The Kremlin became so convinced of a surprise nuclear attack that it not only secretly ordered the KGB to plan a campaign of letter bombs against Western leaders but also to immediately erase Moscow’s dissident movement.

Dmitri was the city’s ringleader. Still, he managed to evade surveillance and disappear for a week to print anti-Soviet pam-phlets on an old press hidden in a tunnel beneath the sprawling metropolis. Nina was with him in the early hours before sunrise of that last day, making fresh cups of strong black tea to keep them awake.

Suddenly Sasha Penofsky hurtled in, snow flying off his muskrat *shapka* hat and short wool coat. „The KGB has surrounded our building!“

„Tell us.“ Dmitri pulled Nina close. She trembled in his arms.

„That KGB animal, Oleg Olenkov, is under specific orders to get you, Dmitri. When he couldn't find you, he decided to go ahead and arrest our people. They took everyone to Lubyanka.“

He swallowed hard. „And there's more. The KGB wants you so much that they brought in a specialist to wipe you. He's an assassin with a reputation for never failing. They call him the Carnivore.“

Nina stared at Dmitri, her face white. „You can't wait. You have to leave *now*.“

„She's right, Dmitri!“ Sasha turned on his heel and ran. He had his own escape plans. No one knew them, just as no one knew Dmitri's. It was safer that way.

„I'll tell them where your cell met, darling.“ Nina's voice broke.

„I'll be fine.“ They would interrogate and release her in hopes they could find him through her. But if they believed she was also a subversive, her life would be at risk, too.

His heart breaking, they rushed down the tunnel. He shoved up a manhole cover, and she climbed out. His last sight of her was her worn galoshes hurrying away through the alley's fresh snow.

Dmitri paced the tunnel five minutes. Then he accelerated off through the bleak dawn, too, carrying a lunch pail like any good worker. The cold pierced to his marrow. Little Zhigulis and Moskvich cars roared past, a stream of bloodred taillights. He watched nervously. He knew Olenkov by sight but had never heard of the Carnivore.

On the other side of Kalininsky Bridge, he was running down steps toward a pedestrian underpass when the skin on the back of his neck suddenly puckered. He glanced back. Walking behind were a young couple, an older man with a briefcase and two more men alone, each carrying lunch pails like his. One had a mustache; the other was clean-shaven. All were strangers.

When an evergreen hedge appeared on his right, he yanked open a wooden gate and slipped into a small park beside an apartment building for the privileged *nomenklatura*. The skeletal branches of a giant linden tree spread overhead like anemic veins. He grabbed a snow-covered lawn chair, carried it to the trunk and jumped onto the chair. Reaching up to a hole in the trunk, he pawed through icy layers of leaves until he found his waterproof bundle. In it were rubles, rare U.S. greenbacks and a good fake passport.

But as he pulled it out, Dmitri heard the quiet *click* of the gate.

He stiffened. Turned awkwardly—and looked at a pistol with a sound suppressor aimed steadily at him. Pulse hammering, he raised his gaze, saw the mustache. The gunman was one of the workers behind him in the underpass.

„You are Dmitri Garnitsky.“ The man spoke Russian with a slight accent and stood with feet planted apart for balance, knees slightly bent. About six feet tall, he was muscular but not heavy, with a bland, expressionless face and nearly colorless eyes. There was something predatory about him that had nothing to do with his weapon.

Dmitri tried to think. „*Nyet*. I don't know—“

Abruptly, the gate swung open again. The gunman tensed, and his head moved fractionally, watching as the notorious Olenkov marched in, impressive in his mink shapka hat and black cashmere overcoat. He was taller and broader—and smiling. He un-buttoned his coat and removed a pistol, which he, too, pointed at Dmitri.

„Very good,“ he told the first man. „You’ve found him.“ Then to Dmitri: „Come along, Comrade Garnitsky.“ He held up handcuffs. „We’ll make a good show of it. A lesson for others who would harm our Soviet.“

Dmitri climbed off the chair and tucked the packet under his arm. „Why bother with handcuffs? You want me dead to scare the others into recanting publicly before you send them to the gulags. You’ll kill me here anyway.“

„That’s almost true,“ Olenkov said easily. „But I see no reason to make myself sweat carrying you. And my specialist was not hired to lug corpses. No, it makes much more sense to shoot you at the van where there’ll be witnesses that you resisted.“

The other man’s head whipped around. Expressionless, he studied Olenkov.

Dmitri’s rib cage clenched. Olenkov’s words thundered in his mind „—my *specialist* was not *hired*.“ The other man must be the Carnivore.

„What about my wife?“ Dmitri demanded.

„I’ll deal with her later.“ Olenkov gestured with his weapon and ordered the other man, „Bring him!“

The Carnivore did not move. „A man in my business must be careful.“ His tones were quiet, commanding. „You’re the only one who was to know who I am, yet you had me followed.“

„So?“ Olenkov asked impatiently.

„I never do wet work in public.“ His eyelids blinked slowly as he considered the KGB officer. „Never on the street. Never where there are witnesses who can identify me. My security rules are absolute. You knew what they were.“ It seemed almost as if he was giving Olenkov a chance to come to his senses. „I work alone.“

But the muscles in Olenkov’s jaw bunched. His face tightened. „Not this time!“ he snapped. „The chief’s in a hurry for Garnitsky’s corpse. *Get him!*“

Disgust flashed across the Carnivore’s face. His silenced pistol lashed around in a single smooth motion. He fired. Pop. The bullet slammed into Olenkov’s overcoat, burning a hole blacker than the black cashmere. Blood and tissue exploded, spraying the gray air pink.

Rage twisted Olenkov’s features. As he staggered sideways, he swung his pistol around to aim at the assassin. The Carnivore took two nimble steps and slammed a foot into Olenkov’s knee.

The KGB man grunted and toppled onto his back, a black Rorschach blot against the white snow. His pistol fell. He stretched for it. The Carnivore smashed a foot down onto the arm, scooped up the gun, and pocketed it, watching as Olenkov struggled to free himself, to sit up, to fight back. But his face drained of color. His eyes closed. Finally, he lay motionless. Air gusted from his lungs.

Dmitri fought nausea and terror. He waited to be shot, too.

The Carnivore glanced at him, showing no emotion. „The contract on you is canceled.“ He opened the gate and was gone.

* * * * *

For a long moment, Liz said nothing, suffocated by the past.

During the cold war, government officials and private individuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain had alternately used the Carnivore and tried to eliminate him. He was ruthless, a legend.

Allegedly, he had only one loyalty—to money. He always worked in disguise, so no one knew what he really looked like, much less his true identity. All of the protocols in the story were accurate.

Still, his appearance in it was too much of a coincidence. Ignoring Arkady's gaze, she lifted the blue envelope, examining it closely against the bright light of the floor lamp. There was no hint of a covert French opening—slitting one end of the envelope then gluing it back together. No sign of a roll-out—Soviet tradecraft using two knitting needles on the flap. And no indication of steam or one of the new chemical compounds.

Breathing shallowly, she lowered the letter. She remembered Arkady's strange smile before he told her the story. „You know the Carnivore is my father, don't you?“ she asked.

„How did you figure that out?“

Liz did not respond. Instead, she peered pointedly across the low table to the bulge in his jacket where his right hand remained near his heart. She had to know.

Acknowledging her unspoken question, he used the other hand to push aside the lapel.

Shocked, she stared. As she feared, he held a pistol trained on her. What she had not guessed was that it was hers—her Glock, which had been locked in her bedroom safe. She looked up into the face of the kindly man who was a close friend. A better father. His sweetness had vanished, a mask. Raw hatred burned from his dark eyes.

A fundamental of survival was to adapt. Liz erased emotion from her face. She had to find a way to take him or escape.

„It was the envelope,“ she told him. „No one opened it before you received it.“

He inclined his head once. „Where is the Carnivore?“

„If you know he's my father, then you know he's dead.“ That was a lie. It was possible he was still alive. When she was CIA, she had discovered his real work when she spotted him in the middle of a wet job in Lisbon. She stopped it, and he promised to let her take him in. But before that could happen, he was apparently killed—yet his body was never found. „Was there any truth in your story?“

„There was a Dmitri and Nina Garnitsky, an Oleg Olenkov and a Carnivore. Olenkov was shot, and Dmitri Garnitsky escaped.“

She thought swiftly, trying to understand. Then she remembered his words—*Oleg Olenkov ... a master of impersonation and recruiting the unsuspecting*—and everything made a crazed kind of sense: last January, it had been no accident that „Arkady Albam“ sat beside her at the faculty meeting. That was the beginning of his campaign to cultivate her, make her vulnerable to him. At some point, he wrote the „Nina“ letter, and on Monday, when he claimed to be sick, he drove down to Los Angeles to mail it to himself. Tonight he set her up so she would

worry and come to check on him. That was why he had been waiting, with her Glock hidden under his jacket, pointed at the chair where she always sat.

„You're Olenkov!“

His thin lips curved in a smile, pleased with his ruse. Chilled, Liz listened as footsteps sounded faintly, climbing the outside staircase. He had created the envelope and story to distract her, keep her from causing trouble as long as possible because someone else really was coming—but not to terminate him.

She kept her voice calm. „Dmitri Garnitsky, I assume.“

Olenkov pulled a 9mm Smith & Wesson from between his back and the chair. Neither it nor her Glock was equipped with a sound suppressor, which told her he had no intention of trying to hide what he planned.

„You think you'll walk away from this,“ she realized. „I'll bet the sheriff's department will find my place was tossed, too, so you can tell them that I was carrying my Glock for protection. That I'd found out somehow that Oleg Olenkov was hunting me because he couldn't get revenge on my father.“ She was beginning to have a sense the envelope and story were a test of her, too.

He chuckled, pleased with the results of his operation. „You have given me my answer—the daughter is confirmed as a worthy substitute for the father. Naturally you must defend yourself. In the end, sadly, you and Dmitri will have wiped each other. I'll be very convincing when I talk to the authorities.“

A trickle of sweat slid down her spine. „But what you're angry about happened long ago. No one cares anymore!“

„I care! I nearly *died*. I spent two years in hospital! Then when I was finally able to go back to work, they demoted me because of Garnitsky's escape. My career was over. My life was ruined. They *laughed* at me!“

The most powerful psychological cause of violent behavior was the feeling of being slighted, rejected, insulted, humiliated—any of which could convey the ultimate provocation: the person was inferior, insignificant, a nobody. Olenkov was a venomous and volatile man, probably with an inferiority complex, who could easily act irrationally and against his own interests—including relating tonight's tale, in which he appeared to be both arrogant and incompetent.

„You have no reason to feel ashamed,“ Liz tried.

„I *did nothing wrong*. It was all your goddamn father's—“

There was a knock on the door. It sounded like a jackhammer in the small apartment.

Olenkov rose lithely and walked sideways away, never moving the aim of the Glock from her. He lowered the S&W and unlocked the door, then retraced his steps. He sat again, pointing the S&W at her now, while he trained the Glock on the doorway.

„Come in!“ he called.

The door opened, and fresh salt-tinged air gusted inside. A man stood on the threshold, the drab night sky and distant stars framing him.

„Liz Sansborough?“ He had a Russian accent. „I got a note to come—“ He saw the pistols. His soft blue eyes darkened with fear. His boxy shoulders twitched as if he was preparing to bolt.

Liz recognized him. He was a historian from the University of Iowa, not using the name Dmitri Garnitsky. He had a flat, tired face and large hands. Dressed in chinos and a tan corduroy sports jacket, he was probably in his late forties.

„Don't try it," Olenkov warned. „I'll shoot before you finish your first step away. Come in and close the door.“

Dmitri hesitated, then moved warily inside. Gazing at Olenkov, he shoved the door shut with the heel of a tennis shoe.

For a moment, puzzlement replaced his fear.

„Who are you? What do you want?“ Dmitri peered quickly at Liz.

„You don't recognize me?“ Olenkov asked.

„Your voice maybe.“

Olenkov laughed loudly. „I didn't recognize you either until I saw you walk. It's a rule—never forget how a person moves.“ He looked him over carefully. „The CIA has taken good care of you. I had plastic surgery, too.“

Olenkov's reaction was a classic example of the compelling nature of deep shame. It not only inflamed, it consumed. He was engrossed in Dmitri, hanging on every word, milking pleasure from every shock, every surprise—which was the distraction she needed. She gazed swiftly around, searching for a weapon, a way to disarm him. She checked the cast-iron floor lamp just behind the little table between Olenkov and her.

Dmitri seemed to shrink. „Oleg Olenkov.“ His voice rose. „You bastard. Where's Nina? You've done nothing to Nina!“

Olenkov laughed again. „I have something more important for you—this is the Carnivore's daughter, Liz Sansborough. You remember the Carnivore—your savior?“

Liz leaned toward the tall lamp, hoping Dmitri would recognize what she had in mind. She rested her right elbow on the arm of her chair. From here, she would be able to reach up and back with both hands and pull the lamp's heavy pole down onto Olenkov's skull.

But Dmitri gave no indication he understood. He returned his focus to Olenkov and announced, „The Carnivore didn't save me. Your *stupidness* did!“

Everything happened in seconds. Olenkov jerked erect as if someone had just stretched his spine. Without a word, he glanced at each of them and leveled the guns.

As Liz's hands shot up and yanked down the lamp, Olenkov saw her. He ducked and squeezed the triggers. The noise was explosive, rocking the walls. The iron pole struck the left side of his head hard. Blood streamed down his cheek as the lampshade cartwheeled and the pole landed and bounced.

Liz's side erupted in pain. She had been hit. As the assassin shook his head once, clearing it, she snatched the closer gun. And hesitated, dizzy. She collapsed back against the other arm of the chair, taking deep breaths.

Across the room, Dmitri slumped against the wall. A red tide spread across his tan jacket from a bloody shoulder wound. His eyes were large and overbright, strangely excited, as if he had awakened from a long nightmare. Swearing a long stream of Russian oaths, he peeled away and hurled himself at Olenkov.

But Olenkov raised the Glock again. Liz kicked, ramming her foot into his fingers. The pistol flew. His arm swung wide.

Dmitri slammed the heels of both hands into Olenkov's shoulders. The chair crashed backward. As they fell with it, Dmitri dropped his knees onto Olenkov's chest, pinning him. Like a vise, his big hands snapped shut around Olenkov's neck.

Olenkov swung up a fist, but Dmitri dodged and squeezed harder. Olenkov clawed at the hands that crushed his throat. He gasped. He flushed pink, then red. Sweat popped out on his face.

Liz exhaled, fighting the pain in her side. With effort, she focused on Dmitri, a man fueled by years of rage and fear, by terror for Nina's safety. His mouth twisting, he glared down into Olenkov's eyes, cursing him loudly again, his iron grip tightening. He shook the throat, and Olenkov's head rocked. He laughed as Olenkov's eyes bulged.

Liz forced herself up. Resting the pistol on her chair's arm, she pointed it at Dmitri's temple. „Stop! Let him go. He can't hurt us now!“

Dmitri gave no sign he heard. He continued to strangle Olenkov, while Olenkov's chest heaved.

„Dammit, *stop*, Dmitri! The sheriff's department will arrest him. You'll be able to fly to Moscow. You can be with Nina!“

At Nina's name, Dmitri went rigid. His curses turned to mutters. Still, his hands remained locked around the assassin's neck, and his knees crushed the man's chest. Olenkov's eyes were closed, but his raw rasps told her he was alive. The awful sound of approaching death filled her mind. Her husband, her mother and many of her colleagues had died violently. She wondered how she managed to survive. Maybe she was the one in the nightmare.

She clasped her wound and worked to strip the anger and pain from her voice. „You and Nina have a real chance. I'd give a lot to have the chance you have.“

At last, Dmitri's shoulders relaxed. As he stood and walked away from the unconscious Olenkov, his upper lip rose with dis-taste. He did not look at Olenkov.

Sickened by Olenkov, disgusted by her misjudgment, she turned away from Olenkov, too.

In the distance, sirens screeched. Dmitri lifted his chin, listening as they drew near. „When Nina was born, I was in hiding. My wife's parents raised her. She is twenty-three now.“ He paused. „My fault. I wanted to know about her so bad that I finally wrote her last year. That is probably how he traced me.“

Liz's breath caught in her throat. „So Nina is—?“

„My daughter.“ Dmitri smiled a brilliant smile. „Thank you.“

He headed for the door and opened it. Behind him, the night sky that had seemed so drab now shone like ebony. The once-distant stars sparkled brightly.

Gingerly, he touched his wound. „Not bad. How are you?“

„I'll live. Olenkov told me Nina was your wife.“

His hand fell from his shoulder. Pain torqued his flat features.

„Her name was Natalia. Olenkov terminated her.“

„How horrible. I'm sorry.“ So Olenkov had lied about that, too.

„Are you sure my father didn't do it?“

He shook his head. „As soon as the Carnivore found us, Olenkov scrubbed my wife. That pissed off the Carnivore. He said he was hired for wet jobs on

criminals—not dissidents. So when the bastard tried to scrub me, too, the Carnivore shot him.“

Liz stared. Her father had saved Dmitri? She felt a strange kind of awe. She had always accepted the government’s version of the Carnivore’s career as an assassin. But then, he had never said anything to make her think otherwise. What else had she missed?

„He sneaked me out of the Soviet Union,“ Dmitri continued.

„We almost got caught twice. We walked three days across terrible ice and snow into Finland.“ He swallowed and looked away.

„They say he was a killer, but he was very good to me.“

As if it were yesterday, pieces of her childhood returned. Liz remembered holding her father’s hand as they laughed and he led her in a race across the Embankment. Their long conversations as they sat cozily alone to drink tea. The gentle way he brushed away her hair to kiss her cheek. She might have been wrong about him. What else had she missed? For her, the hunt had just begun.

