

ABLE ARCHER

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CHAPTER 1

Hiding in Plain Sight

COLUMBIA, SC, USA

The door struck a bell hanging just above it. Dmitri looked up from his sewing machine to see who had come into his shop. He stopped sewing just briefly to announce he'd be just a moment, and then he finished sewing the patch onto the shoulder of the olive-drab field jacket. He lifted his foot from the pedal, pulled out long, chrome sheers and trimmed away the excess thread. He straightened himself from the hunched-over, fetal position that brought his eyes close to the footplate and needle, the better to focus on the application of uniform insignias and ranks. Over the years, he had grown to know each design. From the single chevron of a corporal to the multiple stars of a general. Every company. Every brigade. He knew them all.

On the radio, WNOK played the current Top 40 songs. He walked to the counter from his sewing table behind the automated racks while some silly song about being blinded by science played.

“Yes, yes, hello my friend. What can I do for you?”

“I have some uniforms to pick up.”

“You have ticket, no?”

“Yessir, I do.”

The PFC in front of him produced a pink carbonless copy of the original receipt and offered it to Dmitri. He collected the ticket, then turned to the switch that controls the rotation of the racks. The clothing floated by, kites of plastic on wire hangers, leaning into their movement. The number on the ticket came around the bend and flashed before Dmitri's eyes. He stopped the racks. Hanging between a couple of men's business suits and a woman's silk blouse was the Private's

order. One Class "A" uniform and three battle-dress green uniforms cleaned and pressed with heavy starch.

Nearly half of Dmitri's customers were in the army. They were stationed at Fort Jackson, just a half-mile east on Forest Drive from his dry-cleaning business. It was an enormous base, dedicated to providing the army's recruits with basic training. In the ten years since the draft was discontinued, and America's military had gone completely volunteer, the base had seen a precipitous fall in soldiers in training. A number that had American conservative politicians concerned with the fighting capabilities of the modern army. As a result, a school was opened on the base to teach NCO's how to recruit volunteers. A sales school for the career soldier. An improbable marriage of gung-ho, patriotic rhetoric and a slick sales pitch was developed, and the NCO's were sent out to find men that wanted to "Be all you can be." The United States also reopened enrollment in the Selective Service for all men eighteen to twenty-six years old after the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan in 1980. They were confident they wouldn't have to reinstate the draft, but they wanted to keep the option available if things in the Middle East blossomed into a larger conflict.

The numbers were now on an uptick, with all sorts of financial benefits being advertised on the television. Dmitri had seen the increase around town. He had felt it in his business. He was sewing new patches on more uniforms, as the inductees finished their training, graduated and prepared to move to their next assignment. Most of them were going to end up in infantry. Some would end up in mechanized units. A very small number would end up in some other MOS. Maybe Air Cav, maybe medical.

Dmitri would often think about the merits of the army going all volunteer. On the one hand, there

was always an element of the population that maintained a patriotic fervor and would voluntarily join to defend their nation. Then again, based on the American military's commercials, he wondered how many men were joining just for a paycheck. America was a country in the midst of a financial recession. Jobs could be hard to find, especially if you didn't have any particular skills.

Dmitri would take notes. He would write down the names and movements of every soldier, keeping particularly thorough records of the officers, commissioned and NCO. As any other small business owner, he was keen to create relationships with his customers. He would strike up conversations and kept well informed of all manner of rumor and conjecture. Soldiers are trained to be mindful of what they say concerning equipment and troop movements *en masse* but are remarkably candid when speaking about themselves. Especially when talking about promotions or new training opportunities. Ft. Jackson trained about half of all the United States Army's new recruits. Something like 40,000 soldiers. Dmitri quickly learned what advance training was taught where. A soldier heading to Fort Knox would be training on tanks. Heading west to Fort Huachuca was a signal corps gig. Fort Leonard Wood (or Fort "Lost in the Woods" as the soldiers preferred to call it) was the engineers' training base. Dmitri liked to befriend the soldiers. He offered a free patch application with every ten dry cleanings. He was careful to make sure he followed the military regulations to the letter on every sewing job.

"I couldn't help but notice you are going into the Armored division, yes?"

"Third Armored, Spearhead." The PFC answered with pride. "I want to become a tank driver."

"I see. So, you go to school for this?"

“Yes, I will go to Fort Polk to link with my unit and then train up at Fort Knox.”

“Very good. I wish you luck and safe journeys, my friend.”

Dmitri still had his Ukrainian accent and he was quick to correct anyone that had mistaken it for Russian. That was usually enough to sidetrack people’s prejudices. Americans could be suspicious of people with accents but being around a college campus or a city tended to help. Those places attracted foreigners. Columbia was a very desirable post because of this. It was much harder to explain your presence in a rural setting. No, Columbia was a nice, little city with a good-size university. Plenty of foreigners.

He would regularly attend the local Baptist church, though back in the Ukraine, he was not religious. The Soviet Union forbade religious practices. He was dating a plain, American woman. He met her in a bible study group. They were wholly unremarkable to see together—she wasn’t terribly attractive, average in height and weight. She wore conservative clothes, modest and uninspiring. She owned no Jordache jeans. She didn’t listen to rock music and had been trying to convince Dmitri to change the station on the radio in his shop to a Christian station. Amy Grant was her favorite singer.

She was a teacher at the elementary school at Fort Jackson for the children of the soldiers. Dmitri was genuinely interested in everything about her work. She loved that he was so intrigued by her day-to-day and listened to everything she has to say. Sexually, she preferred things rough. Dmitri had to be careful not to bruise her face. He pulled her hair and called her degrading names, and she responded intensely. She was no stranger to leather and whips and Dmitri obliged her sadomasochistic exploration, though he had never once felt the pull of such idiosyncrasies.

At night, Dmitri would go home to his modest, Shandon home. It was a simple bungalow, typical for the central Midlands of South Carolina. Two bedrooms, a bath, a kitchen, a family room on the ground level. A basement downstairs. Dmitri would spend most of his evenings down in the basement, even though he would leave his television on upstairs, in the living room. He would leave the volume turned up loud, so the programs echoed throughout the house. Metal picture frames would rattle and vibrate against plastered walls with every rumble of machinery, every explosion, every laugh track.

Downstairs, the basement walls were unfinished cinderblock and mortar. The floor joists crossed the underside of tongue and groove floorboards above his head, with a mere foot of clearance. A single hundred-watt bulb buzzed from a porcelain fixture. Romex wires were tacked along a floor joist and went directly into the circuit box. On the underside of the circuit box, a newer, shiny conduit ran towards the floor. It came to a junction and then continued along the floor where cinder block and concrete met. Dmitri would sit on a folding chair in front of a collapsible table with a ham radio unit. The antenna line ran up the wall, through the floor boards, behind the refrigerator in the kitchen and through the ceiling, up into the attic.

He would sit with a well-worn soft-cover book in his lap and scribble notes into a spiral notebook he picked up at the Piggy Wiggly supermarket. All he would write down were a seemingly random tally of numbers. They were broken into groups of 5 digits. His clear, fluid script filled pages in his notebook. Number after number. No rhyme or reason to the hundreds of digits. The broadcast of tones and notes, complete gibberish, a non-broadcast, white noise to any outsider would come to a close and he would put down his pencil and close the notebook. He glanced at his digital, American Timex watch and noted that the broadcast has ended right on time, as usual. He took the paperback on his lap and the notebook on the table and headed upstairs to watch the television

news.

Channel 10 was the only local news broadcast in the evening. The other channels would show dreadful reruns of American television shows from the 1950's and 60's. *So trivial. So ridiculous.* He could barely stand the vacuousness of American "culture". How could these people be so trite? How could these people poke fun at themselves when there were so many important things going on? The idea of astronauts and a genie. The thought of being stranded on an island with millionaires and movie stars. Preposterous. But he must watch the television; he had to keep up on American culture. He could not appear anything but assimilated.

His girlfriend watched *Dynasty* and *Dallas*. *Such decadence.* He had to watch these shows with her sometimes and feigned interest in the selfish narcissism and extravagance of these fictional families. Were there really American families that lived like this? There must have been. Art imitates life, Dmitri thought. The only network that seemed to want to provide some kind of worthwhile programming was the state-run PBS. His girlfriend hated watching PBS. She thought it was boring. On Saturday evenings, she insisted on watching *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* and Dmitri had to fight the urge to wretch and vomit. Such decadence, he reflects again. *What magnificent waste.* Can't these foolish capitalists see how they toil for the benefit of their bourgeoisie masters? They're slaves and they don't even see it. Even worse, they celebrate the conspicuous consumerism. It is not good enough for them to have a fine house and a good car. They must strive to have a bigger house. A foreign car. They are not satisfied with just being able to do honest work and live good lives. *It is shameful to live this way.*

Dmitri sat through the local newscast and then went to the kitchen to throw his dinner into the oven before the NBC Nightly News. He had a VCR with a timer set to record ABC World News

Tonight. He'd watch that next, instead of Wheel of Fortune. This Tom Brokaw seemed to do an admirable job of reporting, if not biased to the American sensibility. But that was to be expected. Perhaps the Canadian on World News Tonight, Peter Jennings, will develop a more enlightened world view, he thought.

He put his instant scalloped potatoes and frozen steak, covered with Worcestershire sauce, in the oven. He poured himself a cold Coca-Cola and returned to the television. The newscast began, and he watched.

BAD KREUZNACH, RHEINLAND-PFALZ, FRG

“Listen dude, that shit you hooked us up with last week was incredible.” Lieutenant Irwin told his dealer. “What’s it going to cost us to get more?”

“*Ja*, is good shit, yes. Vell, I tell you Lieutenant, it isn’t so easy to come get. I can get Turkish heroin much easier.” Klaus was playing his customer. He had no interest in getting into the opium game, but he had to keep his customer thinking he was a legitimate dealer.

“No, no. Just the coke, Klaus. How much?”

“*Ja* vell, how much you vant?”

“Ten grams? Can you swing that?”

They were sitting at a large, oak table in the local beer hall, no one payed them much mind, even with a handful of locals at the Lew’s elbows, easily within earshot. It was Friday night and his company was on R & R after a three-week cycle of training. Irwin was wearing civvies, not that it was uncommon to see American Army uniforms in Bad Kreuznach. Klaus was in his typical garb- a black turtleneck, a knit scarf and a pair of tight pants. Irwin could not understand why the Germans insisted on wearing their pants so tight. It was uncomfortable to see them in their tight pants. Not physically uncomfortable, but visually so unsettling. He could swear he could tell Klaus had not been circumcised. *Gawd, those pants are tight.* At least it was better than seeing Klaus at the pool—*what was the deal with Germans and their Speedos?*

“Of course. For you, Lieutenant, three thousand Deutsche Marks.”

Lieutenant Irwin scribbled on the thick oak table with his finger, doing the conversion from Dollars to Deutsche Marks. He thought for a moment, considering if his calculations were right and then waved his hand dismissively. “Too much. Will you take twenty-five hundred?”

“In Deutsche Marks, *ja*?”

“In Deutsche Marks. Twenty-five hundred.” Irwin reached into his pocket and pulled out a money clip. He pulled the silver clip emblazoned with the West Point insignia off the cash and counted out twenty-five DM100 notes under the table, his eyes darted left and right. No one watching. Klaus waited patiently and looked toward the band playing traditional music at the front of the hall. He was well trained in using his peripheral vision to watch his quarry. He rose a moment after Irwin and followed him out to the street, then he directed him to his pea-soup-green Opel Ascona silently, with just a tilt of his head. The two got in the car silently. Irwin handed over the money in a tidy wad, then Klaus opened the glove box and pulled out five 2-gram baggies. The transaction complete, the two went their separate ways without so much as another word.

Klaus had to report the exchange. In excruciating detail. Everything that was said. Everything that was done. What did the Lieutenant eat? What did he drink? Who paid at the beer garden? Where did Klaus park on the street? How many people saw them in the car together? How long were they in the car? Did the Lieutenant leave immediately? Which way did he go? Where did he end up?

Klaus had made the initial contact with the Lieutenant, so he was responsible for all the paperwork that came with developing an asset. The members of his team were all his comrades, all his equals. They didn't have to answer to him; they had their own assets to monitor. But it would take a team to stage a meeting. Observers, surveillance teams. Klaus had comrades all over the sale. Two

team members in the beer hall. One in a car across the street and down a few meters from Klaus's. Another two a few blocks down the street in either direction to pick up the tail on Lt. Irwin. After they had tailed him to a *gästehaus* on the edge of town, the observers from the beer hall took up an observation post outside. With a high-gain microphone—a West German made Neumann, of course, they listened to the activities taking place in the Lieutenant's room.

Klaus was still developing Irwin as an asset. Irwin had no idea that he had been marked and was in the process of being measured. The Stasi had learned over thirty-five years of very fine espionage that Americans weren't so tough to turn. So many of them in power positions lacked the kind of commitment, the true-believer attitude of their Eastern counterparts. Find a weakness and exploit it. Get their hand caught in a cookie jar and threaten to expose them. Once you had them on the hook for a stupid mistake, they were easy to keep and cheap to control. Klaus had always tried the drug angle first. It was a good bet that an American soldier was hooked on something. The Stasi's reports (which were recycled reports from the American Department of Defense) put the drug use rate at one out of every four or five soldiers using regularly. It was like shooting fish in a barrel. Get Irwin hooked on really good cocaine, and then threaten to expose his addiction.

But first, they needed to figure out if Irwin was purchasing exclusively for his own use, or if he'd been reselling the coke. Ten grams was a lot of coke for one person, but being in the military, Irwin hardly had a flexible schedule that would allow him to pick up smaller hits. From the sound of the surveillance, it seemed like he was buying for a small cadre of soldiers. The room in the *gästehaus* quickly filled up with other male voices. Soldiers in neighboring rooms that had been waiting for their guy to make his connection and return. A few of the voices sounded like they had gotten an early start on the party. There was plenty of slurred speech and the sort of obnoxious

attitude that Americans always get when they drink.

First Lieutenant David Irwin was originally from Sugar Land, Texas. His grandfather had worked at the Imperial Sugar refinery. His father owned an insurance agency. His brother played football at Texas A&M. The Lieutenant played his American football at West Point. He was undersized for a defensive lineman, but well recruited by the I-AA schools.

Never more than a Corporal, Irwin's grandfather had been an infantryman and slogged his way through France. The Stasi had good intel on the senior Irwin's military career, just like they had details on the Lieutenant. His grandfather would retell the story how he capped that Nazi piece of shit that had his Sergeant in his sights. The Stasi didn't know that. It was his only confirmed kill, but it had been a big one. The Stasi did know that. It was one kill that earned him quite a lot of praise in his company. He would march every Veterans' Day with the VFW Post 4010 out of Missouri City, Texas. On the Fourth of July, Gramps would buy hundreds of dollars-worth of fireworks and set the sky ablaze. It was his idea to go to West Point. David was happy enough to head to Nicholls State or Southeast Louisiana to play ball. Gramps knew somebody who knew Congressman Ron Paul, and he managed to secure a recommendation for The Point without David even knowing.

West Point had never really lost its luster, though in the late 1970's the service academies didn't shine quite so brightly. America was war-weary after Viet Nam and Watergate had left a lot of Americans with a sour taste in their mouth. But that wasn't necessarily the case in Texas. There were still a lot of very patriotic, very conservative Americans that respected the military. David respected the Army. And he loved America. And he loved his grandfather. And now he had the career path to prove it.

Listening on the Neumann microphone, through a Sony tape recorder, Klaus and his comrade Willem could hear that Lt. Irwin liked cocaine. And scotch. And hookers. There were at least five other men in the room with him and they all seemed to be taking part in the fun. Klaus gave Willem a knowing nod. They might be able to catch a few well-placed fish in this net.