



Our
Woman
in Moscow

BEATRIZ WILLIAMS

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER



In the shadows of war, she must lie to survive

OUR WOMAN IN MOSCOW

Beatriz Williams



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RUTH

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In the Sky Above Northern Europe

When we were eight years old, my twin sister, Iris, saved my life. I'm serious. I had a fever and a terrible stomachache, and our parents were out at some party. The nanny was one of those no-nonsense types you get, and I was not then—nor am I now—someone who likes to air her private miseries for the delectation of others.

Iris was the one who noticed my gray, shining face, as I curled up in bed and tried to read a book. Twin sisters and all. She just *knew* something was awfully wrong. She made the nanny call up 21, or wherever it was, and have the maître d' send for our parents. Of course, Mother told Nanny she wasn't coming home for any silly stomachache, and really Ruth should *know* better than to seek attention that way. She'd thought *better* of me. Nanny relayed this message with an air of triumph. I said *Fine* and curled back up, shivering as you shiver when a fever's come on.

So what did Iris do? My sweet, small, timid, delicate flower of a sister? She called up the ambulance service all by herself, that's

what she did, and a half hour later they burst into our apartment, swept past poor astonished Nanny, and swiftly diagnosed a probable case of acute appendicitis. Within the hour, they were wheeling me into the operating room at the Hospital for the Relief of the Ruptured and Crippled on East Forty-Second Street. Mother burst hysterical into the waiting room in her fur coat, I'm told, though by then I was under some combination of nitrous oxide and chloroform, so I can't say for certain.

Anyway, my point is Iris saved my life that day, so it seems I owed her one.

WHERE WAS I? MY mind's wandering a bit. It's been a long day, and it's not even noon yet, and I'm afraid I've already drunk the best part of a bottle of English gin in order to cope. I'm sitting inside the fuselage of some type of military aircraft—don't ask me what *kind*, for God's sake—in the company of a United States army doctor and a pair of army nurses. We're on our way to evacuate an injured American citizen. It's an important mission. He's an important citizen, a genuine twenty-four-carat hero. I'm not allowed to tell you where we're going—that's top secret—and I'm probably not allowed to tell you his name, either.

Still, now that I think about it, they didn't specifically say I *couldn't*.

All right. I'll whisper it, so pay attention.

Charles Sumner Fox.

Nice name, isn't it? So distinguished. On his business card, it reads C. SUMNER FOX. That's because of his mother. He told me the story once, when we were in Italy together. It goes like this. His father's from Savannah, and his mother's from Boston, and they met

in western Massachusetts where Mr. Savannah attended Amherst College and Miss Boston attended Smith. Some mixer, I guess. They fell in love somehow. She agreed to marry him and start a new life in Georgia, but she insisted on naming their firstborn after a famous abolitionist, just to make a point. Look for Charles Sumner in your encyclopedia and you'll see what I mean. Senator from Massachusetts during all those squabbles and treaties before the Civil War, the ones you learned about in school and forgot. Once, while he was on the Senate floor delivering a speech against slavery, some congressman took his cane and beat Charles Sumner until he almost died. I'm serious. Grievously injured, all because he stood there on the floor of the United States Senate, if you will, and called the congressman's cousin a *pimp for Southern interests*.

Men. I tell you.

Anyway, as a result of these shenanigans, Charles Sumner became the hero of Massachusetts, where the good citizens reelected him even though he couldn't actually attend the Senate, on account of being beaten so badly, so that his empty desk could stand as a noble reminder, et cetera. All the world loves a martyr. As time went on, mothers named their sons after him, just to make a point.

But listen to this. It's sort of funny. After Charles Sumner Fox was born, his mother decided he didn't look like a Charles after all, so she called him Sumner. And he's been Sumner Fox ever since, to the world and to me. If the name rings a bell, it's because he once played football for Yale, where he was considered one of the greatest fullbacks ever to carry a pigskin. So you probably heard of him.

I'M BUCKLED INTO A seat across from the doctor and nurses. They're wondering who I am and what I'm doing here, and why I stink like

a gin distillery. They won't look me in the eye. That's all right. I light a cigarette and offer the case to them. They accept gratefully. I light them up one by one with a fine gold Zippo loaned to me by my sister's lover, who doesn't actually smoke. Have you ever noticed how every single doctor and every single nurse smokes like a damn chimney? Not that I blame them. You see enough death and sickness and grievous injury, you need something to keep your nerves in order.

We sit smoking, not looking at each other. Smelling the human stink of the inside of a troop transport, the scorch of engine oil and aviation fuel. I wonder if they know who he is, this patient. Like I told you, it's all top secret. And believe me, the US government is going to keep this one under lock and key for some time to come. It's a daisy, all right.

I turn my head to stare out the window at the thick clouds below. My foot keeps tapping against the deck of the airplane—I think the doctor and nurses are annoyed. But I can't seem to stop. I'm a bundle of raw nerves that no quantity of English gin and cigarettes can soothe. And it comes to me, as I sit there strapped into my metal seat, blowing smoke from my parched mouth, that maybe this is why my sister saved my life all those ages ago, when we were eight years old.

Iris saved me for this moment.

And what I have done this summer, I have done to repay my debt—the debt I owe her, the debt I owe people like Sumner Fox, the debt I owe to civilization itself—to all who came before me and saved me without my knowing it.

Outside the window, the great humming engine changes key. The airplane drops. I stub out my cigarette and close my eyes. Within the hour, I'll know how our story ends.

ONE



Love is whatever you can still betray.
Betrayal can only happen if you love.

—*John le Carré*

LYUDMILA

MAY 1951

Moscow

When she was six years old, Lyudmila Ivanova watched as a trio of men in dark suits searched her family's tiny apartment in the middle of the night and arrested her father for the crime of owning a set of English novels. He was a professor of literature, and the books were Russian translations. Still, English novels were decadent, and when his case went before the tribunal, her father refused to admit his crime and repent. Lyudmila still remembers his straight back and clear voice as he addressed the three judges on the dais before him. He was sentenced to ten years' labor in some work camp in Siberia. The family never heard from him again.

When Lyudmila was sixteen, her older brother Piotr was recalled from Paris, where he had run a network of local intelligence agents supplying information to the international Communist Party, although everybody knew that Comintern was actually run by the Soviet espionage agency. Six months later, he was arrested because he had lived in the West and his ideological purity had

therefore been corrupted. This time there was no trial. Lyudmila later learned that he had been executed by firing squad.

Two years after that, another brother simply disappeared while working for Soviet intelligence in Germany, and as a result, when Lyudmila joined the intelligence service herself—at the time, it was called the NKVD—she underwent a rigorous interrogation. Miraculously, she survived. The fact that she had been the one to denounce her brother to the NKVD worked in her favor, as did her extensive knowledge of Marxist theory, her avowed disgust of bourgeois capitalist society, and her exceptionally ascetic lifestyle.

That was in 1932. Since then Lyudmila has survived the purges of the late 1930s and the slaughter of the Great Patriotic War, from which nobody else in her entering class at the NKVD—by now reformed into the KGB—was left alive. Lyudmila survives not because she's extraordinarily brilliant, or strategic, or well connected. She survives because she has two rules. The first is not to attract attention to herself. Comrade Stalin doesn't know her name. Beria of the secret police doesn't know her name. She serves them quietly, anonymously. Others who clamored for recognition are now dead, or starving to death in a Siberian gulag. Not Lyudmila. She does all the dirty work. She finds girls to supply Beria's particular needs, for example, and she finds ways to silence the grieved family members who demand some explanation. When it comes to sniffing out heretical thoughts, nobody has a more sensitive nose than Lyudmila. She's particularly good at extracting confessions. Never once has she claimed credit for any of these acts of patriotism. She lets others claim the credit and then watches as they, too, fall victim to some denouncement. Some discovery of impurity in thought or deed. They all fall eventually.

The second rule is even more important: trust nobody. Trust nothing! Every single person she meets, inside the KGB and outside of it, is suspect. Every piece of information that crosses her desk, gathered from networks within the Soviet Union and without, is suspect. Lyudmila has one faith—the Communist state. Everything else falls sacrifice to this one idea, even herself.

LYUDMILA DOESN'T TRUST *THIS* particular man one bit, even though he's supplied the KGB and its predecessors with valuable information from the British Foreign Office for the past twenty years. His name is Guy Burgess, and he's recently arrived from London with a fellow spy named Donald Maclean. They defected together, just ahead of the authorities who were about to unmask them at last.

Lyudmila knows who tipped them off. She knows where all the Soviet Union's diligent moles have built their hills and tunnels in the great institutions of the West—political, academic, military, scientific, you name it. She knows the almost laughable fact that one of Britain's top spy catchers is, in fact, a Soviet spy himself. She knows their code names, and what they've done and what they've produced, over the years and last week, and exactly how much alcohol they drink to dull the psychological pain of committing treason against a country and a culture that consider a gentleman's honor so sacrosanct as to be taken for granted. (Quite a lot, even by Russian standards.)

She carries all this information in her head as she sits across the table from Burgess, who lounges in his chair and chain-smokes the British cigarettes they've provided for him.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he's telling her. "If there were some clever high-level plot to infiltrate Moscow Centre—

American or British—I'd have heard about it. Philby gets all that intelligence right from the source, and I happened to be living in Philby's own bloody basement in Washington, not one month ago."

"Perhaps this operation is taking place above STANLEY's head," she says, in her nearly flawless English—taking pains to use Kim Philby's code name, as good tradecraft requires.

Burgess shakes his head. "Nothing takes place above Philby's head. MI-6 trusts him like a priest. My God, they handed him the Volkov defection case, didn't they? About as hush-hush as it gets. He speaks to the CIA head on a daily basis. He and Jim Angleton are like brothers."

"Nevertheless. They will have been made suspicious by these telegram decryptations. They will have realized our network has penetrated their agencies and their government departments at the highest level. It is possible and even likely that they will have undertaken an operation outside of the intelligence service itself, to root out everyone who has been disloyal."

"That's your own paranoia talking," Burgess says. "I assure you, the British don't see it that way. They can't conceive a Cambridge man passing along secrets to a foreign country. They'll go on assuming it was some cipher room clerk from Reading who needs the money to pay off his bookie."

Lyudmila stares at him with distaste. He's slovenly, this man. His shirt collar is stained, his teeth are indescribably yellow, his skin is slack and paunchy from incessant drinking, from indulgence in rich food, from scorn for physical exercise. Possibly he's the most undisciplined man she's ever met, at least in this profession, and what's worse, he's an open homosexual who makes no effort at all to disguise or control his voracious carnal appetites. But while Lyudmila is suspicious and puritanical, she's also fair.

Burgess possesses a brilliant intellect and exerts enormous charm, when he chooses. He also knows everything about everybody.

She decides to lay a single card on the table.

“We have recently intercepted a communication from here in Moscow to a contact named ASCOT in London. Do you know who this ASCOT might be?”

He flicks some ash from his cigarette into the overflowing tray at his elbow. “Not the slightest idea. I’ve never heard of an agent named ASCOT. Where was the communication directed?”

“To a private address. A flat in West London that seems to be owned by a shipping company called Lonicera. We have the flat under surveillance at the moment, but we have not been able to determine anything of significance. We suspect, however, that this communication may be the key to a number of recent security leaks, for which we have been unable to identify the source.”

“Lonicera, eh? Doesn’t ring a bell.”

As an intelligence agent of nearly two decades’ standing, Burgess is a practiced liar. Still, Lyudmila can’t detect any sign of deception in his voice or his affect. He looks so at ease, he might be sprawled in his own living room, except Lyudmila suspects that Burgess’s living room—the one he left behind in London, anyway—is equally as squalid as Burgess himself.

“Very well,” she says. “You will, of course, inform us immediately should your memory ring a bell, after all?”

“With pleasure. I’m eager to be of service.”

If she were alone, Lyudmila’s mouth would curve with contempt. Defectors! Really, they’re such a nuisance. They know too much, they’re altogether too *eager to be of service*. Don’t they understand that *defection* means *retirement*? What use can a defector possibly be? He’s already given up all his information. He can’t go

back to his home country for more. His only value is publicity—the triumph of Soviet intelligence. Otherwise, he’s just a drain on the state. You have to find him some job that will keep him out of trouble. You have to give him a nice apartment and access to luxury Western goods, so he doesn’t complain. You have to keep a close eye on him, to make sure he’s not getting restless and disillusioned.

In fact, Lyudmila can think of only one defector whose assimilation has gone smoothly, without any headaches for her—a happy, contented Soviet citizen with his happy, contented family.

Almost as if he can read her mind, Burgess stubs out his cigarette and says, “By the by, how’s Digby coming along?”

Lyudmila gives him a hard stare. “*HAMPTON*,” she says, with emphasis, “has been a model citizen. He and his family are now living in Moscow. He serves us as an academic and adviser on matters of international affairs.”

“Given up the booze, has he? That’s what I hear.”

“Where do you hear this?”

He shrugs as he lights another cigarette. “Here and there. Well, that’s fine news. He and I were chums for a moment or two, back in London. Good chap, for an American. Wife’s a trifle uptight for my taste, but the children were charming.”

“Yes.” Lyudmila checks her watch. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, Comrade Burgess, I’m afraid I have other demands on my time this afternoon. My colleagues will arrive shortly to continue the debriefing.”

Burgess props the cigarette in the ashtray and stands to shake hands. He is, after all, an English gentleman.

LYUDMILA MAKES HER WAY to her afternoon appointment, which is of such long standing that she doesn’t have to think about her

route as she navigates the Moscow streets. She thinks instead about Burgess—so pleased with himself, so delighted to have created such an international ruckus. The world's press is in the middle of an apoplexy right now over the missing English diplomats, and Burgess is enjoying every moment.

Still, for all his faults, Burgess has always been loyal. More mercenary than the others, to be sure, but only because he has expensive tastes and a Foreign Office salary. He's provided a wealth of priceless information over the years. Not once has any of that information proved false. Nor did he display so much as a hint of the classic signs of deception, throughout the course of the interview.

Lyudmila has to conclude—provisionally, at least—that he doesn't know anything about the ASCOT operation, including its existence.

Which only goes to support her hypothesis. This operation, after all, seems to have as its objective the systematic exposure of Soviet moles burrowed within the most secret inner corridors of Western intelligence—all those Burgesses and Macleans and Philbys and Hisses, so carefully recruited and managed over years and even decades.

It stands to reason, therefore, that it's being conducted from outside the formal intelligence service, by some renegade officer or officers who—like her—have finally learned to trust nobody.

A man code-named ASCOT.

And the agent whom ASCOT has boldly sent into Moscow, into the heart of the Soviet state, to uncover the traitors, one by one.