

**KILLER
TRAITOR
SPY**

Also by Tim Ayliffe

The Greater Good

State of Fear

The Enemy Within

**TIM
AYLIFFE**

**KILLER
TRAITOR
SPY**



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For David 'Mac' McInerney

‘There are more foreign intelligence officers and their proxies operating in Australia now than at the height of the Cold War.’

*Mike Burgess, Director-General of Security
Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
20 February 2020*

PROLOGUE

John Bailey often had a roundabout way of getting to the truth.

Even when it almost killed him.

But this time he'd crossed a line.

What the hell was he doing sitting behind the wheel of a car with a man bound and gagged in the back?

He was supposed to be a journalist. Someone who knew how to extract that grain of truth from a sandbag of lies.

He wasn't a kidnapper. He wasn't a killer, either.

By the end of the day, though, he would be tied to both these crimes.

And it was all because of one man.

Ronnie fucking Johnson.

CHAPTER 1

SUNDAY

She could feel his eyes watching her.

Standing naked by the open door, she flicked the ash of her cigarette onto the balcony, puffing a lungful of smoke into the cool night air.

‘You know you’re not supposed to do that.’

She ignored him, watching a cruise liner slowly edge its way across the face of the Opera House, adding an entire city block to the quay.

‘There’s a lot I’m not supposed to do.’

Sliding the door further open, she leaned her head out into the breeze, listening to the sounds climbing the old brick façade of their hotel. Traffic. Conversations. Laughter. A group of late-night party people stumbling along the cobblestones. There was always something going on around here. Somewhere to go.

‘Can you close that?’ he said. ‘It’s cold out.’

She did as he asked, losing interest in her cigarette, leaving it to sizzle in a glass of water on the small table by the door.

‘Got anything to drink?’

‘Over there.’ Dmitry sat up in bed, pointing at a gift bag on the coffee table by the television. ‘Or try the minibar.’

Dmitry was always generous with Scarlett. Nice hotels. Fancy restaurants. Fine wine. Always paying her in cash.

She pulled the bottle from the red cardboard bag, examining the label, a Russian-sounding name she'd never heard of before and had no chance of pronouncing.

'What's this?' Scarlett said, holding up the bottle.

His chest wobbled as he laughed to himself.

'It's no good?'

'No good?' Dmitry laughed again. 'That vodka sells for nine hundred dollars a bottle, if you can even find it here. It's better than good.'

Scarlett cracked the seal, unscrewing the lid, pouring the liquid into the glass.

'Want one?'

She held up the glass of vodka before taking a tiny sip, unsure about the taste but welcoming the sting in her throat. The rush of warmth.

'Sure.'

She poured one for Dmitry, walking back towards the bed.

'Put it there.' He pointed at the bedside table. 'Bathroom.'

'I need to get going soon.'

'No you don't.' Dmitry left the bathroom door open while he urinated in the bowl. 'Stay the night.'

'I can't.'

He flushed the toilet and climbed back into bed, patting the sheets. 'Come on. You know I'll –'

'Dmitry, I've got another client.'

He frowned, not liking the reminder.

'I'm sorry.' Scarlett smiled, trying to ignore his changed mood. 'When will I see you again?'

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‘Soon. Very soon. And next time you’ll stay the night.’

‘That would be expensive.’

‘Not a problem.’

‘One of these days you’re going to tell me exactly what you do, Dmitry,’ she said, playfully. ‘I really would like to know.’

‘I have lots of money.’ He shrugged, dismissively. ‘What else is there to know?’

Scarlett looked at her watch: 11.55 pm. She’d had only the smallest taste of vodka, but its potency was already kicking in.

Her clothes were neatly folded on the armchair by the window and she stumbled as she walked towards them, pausing to regain her balance.

‘You okay?’

‘I’m fine,’ she said. ‘The vodka. You know it doesn’t take much.’

Dmitry kept his eyes on her, watching more intently than before.

She stumbled again as she reached the chair, resting her hand on the arm, steadying herself.

‘Dmitry?’

The warmth in her head was now a fuzzy haze tugging on her eyelids, distorting her vision.

‘What’s wrong?’

He lunged out of bed, arriving just in time to grab her by the elbow as she wavered.

‘Dmitry?’ Scarlett was slurring. Swaying. Confused. ‘What did I . . . what did you give me?’

Dmitry couldn’t hold her up anymore and Scarlett dropped to her knees, her cheek resting on the cushioned chair. He let go of her arm, muttering something to himself in Russian.

‘The vodka, Dmitry?’ she said, slowly. ‘What was . . .?’

Her mouth stopped working, leaving her question stranded inside her head.

Dmitry raced to the other side of the room, staring at the bottle on the table, moving to pick it up and then stopping himself. Muttering more words she couldn’t understand.

Scarlett slumped to the floor. Unable to move. Unable to speak.

She watched Dmitry hurriedly throw on his clothes.

Then darkness. Her eyelids surrendering to the weight of whatever drug was shutting her down. Disabling her muscles. Turning her limbs to jelly.

She could hear footsteps pounding carpet. Keys jangling. Things being stuffed into a bag. A zipper.

Then a whispering voice. Final words.

‘I’m sorry.’