

# THE TURING PROTOCOL

NICK CROYDON

 affirm  
press

# PROLOGUE

## London

*March 1st, 2022*

The bomb's massive explosion shook the ground, shattered electricity substations and destroyed apartment complexes and hospitals, killing hundreds of Kyiv civilians. The cries of women and children were punctuated by the sound of rapid gunfire as Ukrainian soldiers fought the Russians street by street, house by house, the fallen left dead in their own blood on the desolate streets.

Annabelle turned off her TV, unable to watch any more.

She sat in the kitchen of her father's apartment in Paddington, sipping a latte from Harrison's on Spring Street, her customary beverage, even if the rest of the day would be anything but customary. The war was intensifying by the hour.

How had life come to this?

She had no answer. But she did have access to power – to a singular, godlike technology, unknown to any other person alive – enabling her to alter this war, perhaps end it. But to use it was to break a solemn promise she had made to her father four years ago. The power was within Annabelle's reach at all times. But the use of it, even with good intentions, came with great risks and unforeseeable consequences.

It terrified Annabelle to possess this power and the secret of it, all alone, but to involve anyone else entailed monumental risk, both to her and her family, who'd guarded the secret since World War II.

She paced, thinking, weighing the dangers against her chances of using the device successfully.

Could it even be done?

It came down to belief. Belief in herself, belief in her own ability to use the power safely, responsibly, not just for her, not just for her family or even her country, but for all humankind.

# CHAPTER 1

## London, Savoy Hotel

*June 6th, 2018*

Since she was twelve years old, Annabelle's father, David McIntosh, would take her for afternoon tea at the Savoy Hotel, where they enjoyed the mouth-watering delights of smoked salmon sandwiches, strawberry tarts, a pot of Earl Grey for her father and a hot chocolate for her. As she got older, these wonderful tea parties in the opulent lounge would give way to the American Bar, the hotel's Art Deco cocktail bar, where they would listen to the soulful tunes of the resident pianist while enjoying glasses of champagne.

She rarely wore a hat, but for her father and the location she made an extra effort. Her pink and yellow summer dress from Karen Millen was stylish but not overstated, perfect for the uncommon heat of the English summer. Entering the hotel lobby, she was hit by the cool air conditioning as she scanned the lounge for her father. He was obsessed with being on time for appointments and within seconds she saw him, wearing his 'posh cloths', as he called them: chinos, button-down Oxford shirt from Polo and a blazer. Despite being in his early seventies, David was handsome and would easily pass for someone ten years younger.

She walked steadily towards him, her high heels reverberating through the lobby as they connected with the marble floor. Her smile widened with her excitement. Every year was the same: the hotel, seeing him. She felt like a teenager all over again, basking in the company of someone who she loved.

But today she could tell there was something wrong.

He was nervous, preoccupied too. He barely touched his champagne following the toast. This was not like him. He was usually full of energy, eager to see and talk to his daughter. He started their conversation on safe and familiar ground. 'How are the boys?' he said. He knew how they were.

'They're fine,' she replied anyway. 'Alex is growing up so fast. Too fast. But Justin still likes me to cuddle him and kiss him like a little baby. It melts my heart every time.'

'And Edward? How's his law practice? Is he coping, being married to a government minister? It can't be easy for him.'

At the age of thirty-seven, she had been elected as Member of Parliament for Guildford in the 2015 general election and now, just three years later, had been invited to join Theresa May, the British prime minister, as a junior minister for health. Her husband, Edward, ran a successful law firm in London.

'He adores the boys, and the firm is doing well. For both of us, the pressure from work is sometimes overwhelming. I don't know what I'd do without him.'

'I'm so proud of you, Belle. It's not easy to juggle career and parenting, and you hardly had the best teacher in me.' David's guilt from being absent from his daughter's life could be seen in his eyes.

'Don't say that, Dad. You did your best, I know that, and anyway I haven't turned out so bad, have I?'

'No, Belle,' said David, staring at his untouched champagne.

He paused for a long moment. It worried her. Her father was not one to be at a loss for words. David looked at his daughter and there it was,

a subtle change in his posture, his eyes alert, focused, back on mission.

‘It’s your fortieth birthday, Belle,’ he said as if she might not know. ‘I need to give you something very important. Something given to me by your grandma when I was a bit younger than you.’

‘A present, from Grandma? From Scotland?’ Annabelle said, perplexed. ‘She’s been gone so long. Why didn’t she give it to me herself when she was alive? And why are you just giving it to me now? Why wait, Dad?’

‘I’m not sure I would class this as a present,’ he said. ‘It’s more of a ... legacy. This is something that goes back to World War II, and you have to believe me when I tell you this – what I’m going to give you, Belle ... it’s important. And it needs to be protected at all costs.’

Annabelle, who was nervous now, stared at her father, his face so serious, and found herself unable to speak. She leant forward in her chair, holding her gaze, urging him to continue, confused and impatient.

‘Okay. Tell me, Dad, where is this mysterious gift? Do you have it on you?’

‘I think,’ her father said, ‘that maybe we should order a real drink first.’