

Also by Gavin Scott
HOT PURSUIT

A FLIGHT OF LIES

Gavin Scott

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS
NEW YORK

To my mother and father

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For information, write: St. Martin's Press,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress in Cataloging in Publication Data

Scott, Gavin, 1950-
A flight of lies.

I. Title.

PR6069.C588F57 1981 823'.914 80-52654
ISBN 0-312-29614-2

Who is Li Hsiao Meng?

A Mystery Man Takes Over China's Foreign Affairs

He is slightly built. He works eighteen hours a day. He is an obsessive chess player. He smokes eighty cigarettes a day. He scorns nearly all aspects of Western culture. His name is Li Hsiao Meng, he is the new Foreign Minister for the People's Republic of China, and he has the State Department more nervous than any new arrival in the Peking Politburo for years.

Most of China's top politicians are well known to the China-watchers of Washington: their careers followed in detail, their attitudes and methods analysed and re-analysed. Not so Li Hsiao Meng. Before his sudden elevation to power as a protege of Vice Premier Cheng, he was an obscure academic at the University of Hunan. The Treaty of Accord between the US and China was the creation of his predecessor Wei Fuang Dai, who died May 1 of a heart attack. How will Li regard it? There are some hints that making Li Foreign Minister may signal a cooling in the Politburo's enthusiasm for closer links with the US.

The *New York Times* this week carried a translation of an article published in a Chinese academic journal while Li was still at Hunan. In it, the then professor called for a massive expansion of China's assistance to the 'struggling peoples of the Third World against imperialism in all its forms'.

He reasoned that the power of the West was ultimately based on the raw material wealth of the under-developed countries. If the Com-

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munist world could smash the power structures which ensure this wealth went 'cheaply' to countries like the United States, Li urged, there would be no need for 'compromises and rapprochement'.

There have been no public statements from Li, since he took over Wei's mantle, but it is known that a major shake-up is going on inside the Foreign Ministry and several old stagers have been fired. And the officials and negotiators in Washington ironing out the last wrinkles in the Treaty of Accord, due for signing next month, are looking nervously over their shoulders in case the former academic decides to try any of his professorial concepts in the real world.

July 7th

Dear Peter,

How fortunate you were to run head-on into that lorry on the M1; what a superb sense of timing you showed; what foresight! A few ribs smashed? The arm? Your knee? Cheap at the price. As you will by now have effortlessly gathered, by taking yourself out of commission when you did, you avoided the most embarrassing cock-up the service has had since - well, since 1972. You got yourself well out of it just before the shit hit the fan. You're clean. Hence this letter.

What the Old Man wants you to do is an analysis. What went wrong. Where. When. Which officers. Why. No punches pulled: it's for us - not for the Minister.

We can't afford to have it happen again. We want to know. I mean - if Ronald Foster can do this to us, what - no; I don't want to influence your thinking. We want a fresh mind on it. Forget what you've read in the papers, and heard on the radio, and oh God, seen on the bloody telly, and just read the documents. See what we were seeing at the time and look for the point where things went out of control. Out of control! Can you imagine it? All Whitehall is ringing like a bell. We're in a state of shock.

What I've done is I've pulled the relevant pages from all the twenty-five files involved, and strung them together in roughly chronological order, with notes from me to bridge the gaps. Odd documents from other sources. And the transcripts of the Foster debrief. The Foster debrief! Peter, you've never seen anything like it. Look at that first page. Just read the dialogue. Doesn't it make your hair stand on end? Doesn't it make you ask - what we have come to? All of us?

It doesn't bear thinking about. But the fact remains you'll have to. Serves you right, you cunning bastard. You're still clear.

Best of luck,

Cheers,



P.S. I've also put in an article from a news magazine which appeared about a week before this whole thing started. You probably read

it at the time, but it's worth refreshing your memory: it's what our masters were feeding themselves on as Armageddon approached. And remember: you are what you eat.

HA

DOC. NO: 01781/32/TTC/1

CLASSIFICATION: ABA

TITLE: THE RONALD FOSTER DEBRIEFING. SESSION ONE

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE, OFFICER GUIDED

OFFICER: MARION QUINLAN

DATE: 1/7

TIME: A.M. 1

DISTRIBUTION:

RF: Hello, Hello. *(Pause)* Mary had a little lamb. *(Pause)* One two three four testing. *(Pause)* How do I know if it's working?

MQ: Spin it back and listen.

RF: Oh. *(Discontinuity)*

Do I really sound like that?

MQ: Yes.

RF: Oh. I feel a bit silly doing this. *(Pause)* Have you ever done it?

MQ: Many times. We've found it's the quickest way. Once you get on with it.

RF: Yes, yes. I'm just . . . I just feel a bit silly, that's all. Should the needle go into the red bit?

MQ: Don't worry about the meter, Ronald. The machine has automatic record-level control. All you have to do is talk into it. Are you ready to start?

RF: I think so. Do you want that biscuit?

MQ: No, Ronald, you have it.

RF: It's the last chocolate one, you know.

MQ: Take the biscuit, Ronald, eat it, and get on with telling me what you've got to tell me. There's quite a lot to get through, isn't there?

RF: *(Indistinct)* Yes, I'm sorry Marion. They're very nice, though, these biscuits. I don't like those ginger ones at all, do you? *(Pause of fifty-five seconds duration. Certain unidentified noises on tape)*

MQ: Are you ready now? Good. Right, start on that first day.

RF: In the shop?

MQ: *In the shop.*

RF: Gents Outfitting. Third floor. Next to Stationery.

MQ: It was June 15th, wasn't it? Do you remember the time?

RF: About ten-thirty. Shall I start when I saw them coming in?

MQ: Yes.

RF: Well, I was selling a tie. Blue velvet. I'd just sold it, actually, it was £3.50. Rubbish. For poofers. I was feeling quite pleased. I

looked up and saw this bloke wandering past the Double D Shirts. I thought he looked shifty. That was Braithwaite.

MQ: You didn't know that at the time, did you?

RF: No, no, I just thought he looked shifty. He was wearing a maroon polyester suit and a green hat. He looked a bit like a rat. I didn't know he was Braithwaite until you told me. Well, that other fellow did.

MQ: And then?

RF: He went and stood by the Greetings cabinet at the edge of Stationery. He put his hands in his pockets. He just stood there. Like he was waiting for somebody. *(Pause)* And then these other fellows came in. Three of them. One after another.

MQ: How did you know they were together if they came in one after another?

RF: I dunno. I just knew. They looked—I dunno. I had this feeling. I thought they were detectives, you see. A team of detectives, like on telly. The first bloke thought the same thing. He saw them, and he went all rigid. Like this. See? And I thought, he's a robber. Possibly a shoplifter. They've come to get him.

MQ: So what did you do?

RF: I thought, this is my chance. I'd always wanted to be a policeman, you know. Only I was too short, and they wanted all these 'O' levels and that. So I ducked down and crept along behind the counter. Like this. *(Next sentence indistinct)* And I crept right along like this through Socks and Hats and *(inaudible)* until I *(inaudible)*.

MQ: All right, Ronald, you can get up again. I can imagine the scene.

RF: And then I was right next to the Greetings cabinet, and the bloke couldn't see me at all, and I looked through the glass and I could see these three detectives—well, you know—sort of closing in on him and I could see he was going to make a run for it, so I thought, okay Ronald Foster, this is it, over the top, and SLAM! I just went straight up there and leapt at him. Jesus, he nearly jumped out of his skin! You've never seen anybody so frightened. He went right over the Greetings cabinet and knocked over the entire Father's Day stand. Feeow! Just like that! Feee-yow! So I just went straight after him. Wham! Right over the Greetings cabinet, right over the Father's Day stand, which was on the floor, and smack into Posters. You know how they're on those swing things? Well, he swung the whole lot at me, and dodged round the other side, back through Gents Outfitting. You bugger, I thought. I'll get you for that, and I turned round, and there were these three

detectives with guns. Yeah, all three of them. That shook me a bit, but I thought, well, they're police, it's all right. I was quicker than them, and rolled over the floor and under Overcoats and came up about a foot behind Braithwaite and grabbed at his leg. As I went down I heard a sort of crack, and a whoosh, and there was a hole in the Umbrellas cabinet. It's funny, I didn't think about bullets then. I just thought, oh, there's a hole in Umbrellas, and that was that. Anyway, Braithwaite half-fell down when I grabbed at him, and then got up again, and then I was just feet behind him and he zapped into Travel Goods and quick as a flash he tipped an entire pile of Pigskin Number Three right in front of me, and I went arse over tip. Sorry, I mean I fell over very heavily. By this time there were people yelling and screaming and running all over the place and I think somebody had pushed the fire-alarm. But anyway, I started to get up and what do you think? A bloody great hole appeared in this suitcase I had fallen on, about an inch from me head. I heard this whoosh, and there was this hole. This time I knew it was a bullet. I thought, they're bloody careless, for coppers. It's him they ought to be shooting at. I mean, I should have thought, it wasn't like coppers to go shooting up a Gents Outfitting department in a shop in Oxford Street, but, well, you don't think things like that at the time, do you? Well, I didn't, anyway. I just shouted, 'Over there,' or something, and got up again and carried on after Braithwaite. He'd reached the Emergency Exit and he was halfway down to the second floor. I grabbed the bannisters like this—it's a sort of tube, you know, and I sort of swung right down after him and headed him off and he threw himself through the door into Lingerie and hit this woman with his shoulder and she went arse over tip as well. Sorry. So. Lingerie everywhere. I thought, right, you villain, I'll get you, and went after him right through Lingerie, several people knocked over, screaming and so on, somebody put the sprinklers on, and he did another one of his jumps to get over the perfume counter and came right down on top of it and he was hardly out of it before the whole bloody thing just disintegrated. I mean, it just fell apart, and I looked behind me, and there were these three blokes like this—you know, in the police firing position, all crouched down with their guns. It scared the hell out of me. I thought, I'm in the way. Can't they see I'm in the way? How can they shoot at him when I'm in the way? But I didn't stop to think, I just powered through Perfumes—Jesus what a stink!—and took another leap at the bugger, and missed, and away he went down the other Emergency Exit. This time he was really moving, but I didn't

use the stairs at all, I just jumped, and landed right on him, and away we both went down the stairs and he was fighting like mad, and I just held onto him like grim death, and we were both yelling, and then everything went quiet. He was looking over my shoulder – I was sort of on top of him – and I looked over my shoulder and there were these three coppers and I looked up at them with a big fat grin and I was just going to say, 'I've got him for you, do I get a medal?' when I suddenly thought, 'Oh Jesus, Ronald, what have you done now?' Because I could suddenly see, plain as day, they weren't bloody coppers at all. I could see they were hoods. I don't know how I knew they were hoods, I just knew they were hoods and they still had their guns out and I'm telling you I just about shat myself. I swallowed, I remember that, and it was a very loud swallow. You could have heard it in Oxford Circus. I stood up. I gave them a sickly sort of smile, and then I just turned and zapped right out through the Emergency Exit doors and into the street. They've got opening bars on them, you know, and I just threw myself at them and they opened and I went right through. One of them shot at me, I heard it as I went, but it was too late. I rolled right off the pavement onto the road, stood up in front of this taxi, which stopped just like that, about an inch away, put me hand on the bonnet, went over it, like that, like a vaulting horse, and straight across the road. A bus just passed right there, about two inches away, and it was an ordinary bus, you know, that you can just jump on, and I just jumped on it – I don't know why, don't ask me why – and ran up the stairs, hid under the front seat, and didn't get out till Kilburn High Street.

(Pause)

And that's how it started, really.

DOC. NO: 15681/20/TTA/2

CLASSIFICATION: ABAA

TITLE: REPORT ON TRANSFER ASSIGNMENT 880A

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE REPORT

OFFICER: WILLIAM MATHESON

DATE: 15/6

TIME: 1315

DISTRIBUTION:

This is a report on the surveillance assignment on Ngo Kim Pang, Second Secretary at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China. Allan Hodges was the officer originally rostered for the task. I took over from him for the morning of the 15th only. He was required for an urgent evaluation by Section III. There were no pressing engagements in Liaison B and I cleared the transfer through Offices.

I withdrew a modified Ford Escort from the pool, equipped with an Illuminator II Mapboard. Hodges had tagged Ngo's car on a previous surveillance and the blip showed clearly throughout the morning on the screen. But for at least 20 per cent of the time the map-select was not working properly and kept trying to route me through Aberdeen towards Inverness. I have reported this fault before: please give it urgent attention.

There was no suggestion Ngo was aware of surveillance. The weather was fine, visibility good, traffic moderate. I was able to stay well back as soon as Ngo hit the Westway, to which he proceeded straight after leaving Portland Place. Straight down Western Avenue, up into the Chilterns, and straight through them. As we came down the chalk canyon where the motorway drops out of the hills and onto the plain, Ngo moved swiftly into the left lane and pulled off onto the 4009, going south under the flank of the Chilterns. I gave him a moment or two, trusting to the blips, and followed: through Benson, through Britwell Salome, and then onto the 423 by Preston Crowmarsh. In Wallingford, where the river was full of pleasure boats, there was a jam over the bridge caused by caravans pulling off to go down to the river. Ngo showed no particular signs of impatience, and finally we wound out of the village and onto the 4130, which was full of roadside fruit stalls. The Wallingford Clumps, hills which border the Thames along here and were once an Anglo-Saxon boundary line, rose on our right. Five minutes along the 4130 Ngo swung off down a B road

which took him right into them. 150 yards down this road he stopped the car and got out.

I left the Ford on the 4130 and went after him on foot: over the fence and into the field above the road. He was just locking the car as I caught sight of him. He put the keys away, glanced around him (no particular concern) and strolled off down the road, beside the ditch which ran along it. Twenty yards from the car he disappeared.

I was watching him continuously: one second he was there, the next he was not. Just like that. I started down the hill at a rush, but just as I reached the fence he popped straight up out of the grass and continued on his way, as if nothing had happened. Extraordinary. No explanation occurs at all, unless he simply tripped into the ditch and fell into the grass. But there was no mark of it on his clothing: neat grey slacks, white shirt – all immaculate.

I thought, perhaps he just went into the ditch for a quick – to relieve himself. No, I don't think he did actually. It wasn't like that. Possibly he was playing Red Indians. Being clever.

Five minutes later he climbed the fence and headed uphill for a beech clump. When he reached it he stopped, looked around him, and dropped down over the brow of the hill. There was a sort of cleft, a mini-valley, just below the crest of the hill, and he was in that. It wasn't hard to keep him in sight because of the white shirt. Every now and then there would be a flash of him through the trees. He was making for the river. I stuck to the crest of the cleft, he stayed in the bottom. I could see the river, which was still full of boats. There was a long island in the middle at this point, and beyond the island a lock and a weir. (Map reference 1426/7023) On the far side of the water wheat fields and barley fields and pasture – the whole rural England bit. Very restful. I mention this because I had to sit for about fifteen minutes looking at it. Ngo was down at the bottom of his little valley, just sitting there. Then, without warning, he moved off. I went down into the cleft and stuck close to him. I could smell the water. Everything was very still. I could hear him breathing.

Then boomph! everything exploded. There was a shout, somebody gunned a big marine engine, and Ngo jumped from the bush where he'd been squatting, straight at the river. He must have been able to see the boat. Somebody grabbed him. There was another shout – no distinguishable word, but it was English. Then the boat shot away from the bank, and Ngo went with it. I went belly-down, among the roots, and stuck my head out at water-level.

It was a big Marinecraft cruiser, no visible identifying name, white hull, blue-striped, blue super-structure, twin-screwed. No sign of Ngo. Deck empty, except for one person. Person known to us.

It is possible that the identification was faulty, because the target was distant and moving, but I personally am quite certain that the cruiser which Ngo Kim Pang boarded also contained the man known as the Revd Oscar Suto, leader of the African People's Army, and perhaps at this moment the most dangerous opponent the South African government faces in the entire world.

I handed over surveillance to 809 at 1205 hours, and returned to West Centre Two.

End of report.

DOC. NO: 15681/25/PCTA/3

CLASSIFICATION: ABAA

**TITLE: TELEPHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN OFFICER AND D. BELL,
CIA LIAISON**

DESCRIPTION: TAPE TRANSCRIPT FROM AUTORECORD

OFFICER: WILLIAM MATHESON

DATE: 15/6

TIME: 1335

DISTRIBUTION:

WM: Bill Matheson speaking.

DB: Hi, Bill. It's David.

WM: David who?

DB: David Bell, you idiot.

WM: Bell?

DB: Bell.

WM: Don't seem to recall the name. You're not in insurance, are you?

DB: Very funny. I'm sorry it's a while since I've been in touch, but we've had work to do. Look, Bill –

WM: Work? What's that? Not something to do with Liaison, is it?

DB: Okay, okay, okay. Abject apologies. But listen, I've got something to put to you now. Now, we need you.

WM: Now you need me. Ha! Now you need me! Now you need me. Okay, hit me with it. You want your shoes taking to the menders.

DB: Let's meet in the park.

WM: Let's meet in the park.

DB: Fifteen minutes?

WM: Fifteen minutes? You think I have so little to do in the Liaison - CIA (S) Department that I can drop everything I have to do in a mere fifteen minutes?

(Pause)

DOC. NO: 15681/27/SBTB/4

CLASSIFICATION: BABA

TITLE: OPEN-AIR CONVERSATION BETWEEN OFFICER AND
D. BELL, CIA LIAISON, LONDON

DESCRIPTION: TAPE TRANSCRIPT

OFFICER: WILLIAM MATHESON

DATE: 15/6

TIME: 1400

DISTRIBUTION:

DB: You're not toting that damned recorder this time are you, Bill?

WM: Of course not, we gave that up years ago.

DB: That Old Man of yours has a fetish for records, do you know that, Bill? You are constipated with documentation. You don't need it, you just collect it. What the hell use is it all, tell me that?

WM: It helps pass the time.

DB: Yeah, right, absolutely right.

WM: You're not going to rile me, you know, my dear David. I am here to help you. What scrape can I get you out of this time?

DB: No scrape, David, don't jump to conclusions.

(Pause)

There's just been a - hiccup. Probably of no significance. A minor hiccup in an operation.

WM: Translation: a major balls-up.

DB: No, no, certainly not. Put simply, it's this. We had an off-the-street offer; we arranged a rendezvous; the applicant was knocked over before we got to him.

WM: Shot? Knifed? Hustled away? What?

DB: There was shooting; the applicant disappeared. Whether he was shot we don't know. It was all over about ninety seconds before we arrived. Happened in an Oxford Street store.

WM: Who made this off-the-street offer?

DB: He identified himself as Jackson, Wally Jackson. Claimed he had been working in a gang digging up the road in Portland Place near the Chinese Embassy. Said he had something that was of value to us.

WM: A roadmender offering you intelligence about the Chinks? You've got to be kidding.

DB: He didn't say it was intelligence. We didn't get the impression it was intelligence. An object. That was the feeling we had. An object.

WM: He was one of ours, was he?

DB: Well, he didn't say. He - yeah, well he sounded like a national. We would have told you if he'd been of any interest. Natch.

WM: Natch. (Pause) But as it happens you've lost him.

DB: Somebody knocked him over, Bill, which suggests it's at least worth checking out who he was.

WM: And how do you expect me to do that?

DB: Well, the police are involved.

WM: The police?

DB: Well, the shooting, you see. There were witnesses and so on. They moved in pretty fast.

WM: None of the shooting was yours, was it, David? You're not asking me -

DB: No, no, like I said, we got there too late. All I'm asking is that you see if you can get us any facts from the Mets, that's all. Just so we can bulk out the file.

WM: I see.

DB: I'd be very grateful for anything you can come up with, Bill.

WM: A roadmender, David? A roadmender?

DB: Well, I didn't rate that story, frankly. It was just a hook. But it had the ring, you know, of something. So . . .

WM: All right, I'll see what I can do.

DB: That's terrific, Bill. I'm very grateful to you.

WM: So you should be, you bum.

DOC. NO: 15681/30/TTA/5
CLASSIFICATION: ABAA
TITLE: REPORT ON LIAISON ASSIGNMENT 1450
DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE REPORT
OFFICER: WILLIAM MATHESON
DATE: 15/6
TIME: 1930
DISTRIBUTION:

As far as the Yard was concerned it was East End gangs. Parker was dealing with it, and Ronald Foster's description and those of several other witnesses had identified the man calling himself Wally Jackson as a resident of Stepney (and on several occasions of Wormwood Scrubs) by the real name of Bryan Braithwaite: a very minor villain with an undistinguished record of petty thieving, embezzlement, and attempts at fraud. He'd served his longest stretch for his part in a washing-machine racket in which the washing-machines existed only in the customer's imagination. It was very doubtful he'd have known what a roadmender's pick was if it had hit him in the eye; which, by the sound of the people who had taken him away by now, it very probably had.

Parker had no suggestions as to who these gentlemen might have been. None of the descriptions seemed familiar. He was convinced, however, that Braithwaite had got himself out of his depth in some labyrinthine Dockland dirty work, and he was perfectly certain his snouts would come up with the goods within twenty-four hours. He was convinced I was wasting my time going to see Ronald Foster.

I got the impression he hadn't taken to Ronald Foster.

I left the Yard at 1530 hours and drove down to 15 Cadiz Street, Walworth, down Kennington Park Road. An area of tight-lipped and threadbare respectability and extreme deadliness. His mother answered the door.

She was a large woman about fifty with dyed black hair and a flowered smock. She said:

'You come with the compensation, mister?'

I demurred, and started to show her my identification card, and she steamrollered right over me.

'You shouldn't be here without compensation, do you know that? Have you seen the lump on that lad's head? Have you seen

it? And what did the forces of law and order do to protect him? Nothing! They done nothing!'

She grabbed me energetically by the lapels and dragged me into a hall papered in orange roses of extraordinary luminosity and full of the smell of old fried liver. All the way up the stairs she kept saying things like: 'Coppers! Nothing! Questions, that's all! No use. No actual use! Taxes! What do we pay taxes for, then? Eh? For layabouts, that's all. That's where the money goes. I know all about the colour tellies they got in the Scrubs. Oh, yes, don't tell me they can't afford it. It's a disgrace, that's what it is, a disgusting disgrace, and I don't care who hears me say so.' She flung open the door at the end of the landing. 'There,' she said, as if it proved her case conclusively, 'look at that!'

Ronald Foster had the back room, overlooking the back yard, and he was sitting up in bed with a massive picture of Raquel Welch pinned to the wall behind him, with a big Chelsea rosette pinned on her, and about fifteen yards of bandage round his head.

An expression of enormous mindless self-satisfaction was spread across his features like jam.

'I put that on,' remarked his mother, pointing to the bandage. 'Them at the hospital just put a plaster on.' She rounded on me, met my eyes. 'That's typical, mister, isn't it? Bloody typical.'

'I don't need all this bloody clobber,' chimed in Foster Jr, clearly without a moment's consideration whether I was from the Yard, the Secret Intelligence Service, or Brixton Christian Missionary Society. He pointed to the bandage. 'She's daft, she is,' he said, nodding towards his mother. 'I don't even need to be in bed, even.' He eyed me shrewdly. 'It's better than working, that's all. Are you from the papers then?' This idea had plainly just occurred to him. There was a hopeful note in the query which bothered me. 'I have a very dramatic story to tell, you know,' he said.

'Tell it me,' I replied.

'So you are from the papers then?' he asked again.

'No,' I said.

He eyed me shrewdly for a moment, smiled to himself, and began to talk.

DOC. NO: 01781/33/TTC/6

CLASSIFICATION: ABA

TITLE: THE RONALD FOSTER DEBRIEFING. SESSION TWO (A)

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE, OFFICER GUIDED

OFFICER: MARION QUINLAN

DATE: 1/7

TIME: A.M. 11

DISTRIBUTION:

RF: So Mr Matheson came to see me. Well, I didn't know he was Mr Matheson, did I? He was just a geezer. Asked questions. A bit cleverer than the rozzers, a bit sharper, but basically just the same, wasn't he? Me mum kept asking him about the compensation, she did. She's a right laugh, is me mum. You should have her here, you know. You'd never get rid of her. She put him right off his stride, she did. Every time he took out this little card he had, she asked about the compensation. I was laughing me head off. Or I would have been, if it hadn't bloody hurt so much. When he'd gone she came in to talk to me about it but I didn't feel like talking so I made out I was asleep, and then I reckon I must have drifted off, because the next thing I know I'm awake again and it's one-thirty in the morning, according to my alarm clock. Very smart alarm clock. Digital. Special offer. Green figures.

I lay there, and tried to work out what day it was, you know the way you do when you wake up at a funny time, and for a bit I was just watching these little green figures going flick, flick, flick on the clock, and feeling dozy. Then I got bored with that and looked up at the ceiling. There's cracks in the ceiling. I suppose there's cracks in everybody's ceiling, but I've always liked the cracks in my ceiling. There's a sort of mountain there, a volcano actually, with lava coming out, just by the light-shade, and an iceberg, and this camel. Sometimes it's a giraffe, sometimes it's a camel. I like lying there and looking up at the cracks and listening to the cars. That time in the morning you can hear a lot of cars. I lay there and looked at the ceiling and listened to the cars. It was about one-thirty. I said that already, didn't I?

Yeah, well, there was this particular car, and I was listening to that. It was going down the main road, I thought it all out, a sort of picture in me mind, and I saw it going past Tesco's and the Jolly Friar Fish Bar and Boots and I expected it to carry on south, down to Croydon or somewhere, that was all I was thinking about

you know, how it was going south and southern climes and vineyards and senioritas and all that, when I heard it change gear and turn down East Street. I knew it was East Street because that was the only street coming our way, and this car was coming our way. I knew it was coming our way because the engine kept getting louder. I tried to think who it was - anybody we knew, you know, the way you do, somebody in the area. Or some driver taking a short cut across to the Old Kent Road. That might be it, I thought, taking a short cut through Walworth. Then it turned into Portland Street. Don't ask me how I knew it was Portland Street. I just knew. I thought they were still heading east, joining up with Albany Street. I thought, that's a better route than East Street. More direct, if you're heading for the Old Kent Road. But they didn't. They stopped.

They stopped at the end of Cadiz Street.

I started to feel all cold at what they call the extremities. That's what they call them, isn't it? The extremities? The toes and that. And the head. Prickly. I don't know why. It could have been anybody. I said to meself, I said, it's Freddy Winkler, from Oldar Close, back from the clubs. Little fat bloke Freddy is, great laugh, very funny, never stops knocking it back. Great bloke for practical jokes, whoopee cushions and that.

But I knew it wasn't Freddy. I knew that all along really. Freddy always slams the car doors. They closed them quietly. That's how I knew.

I lay there and listened. I listened for them walking down the street. I didn't hear them. I started to sweat. Funny, isn't it? You feel cold, and then you start to sweat. Not logical, is it? I didn't know what to do, you see. I knew they were coming for me. Don't ask me how I knew - I just knew. But I didn't know what to do. What would you have done? Phoned the police? And said you had a sore head and you were awake at one-thirty - well, it was getting on for two now - and you thought some men were coming to get you? Would you have done? Eh?

MQ: Well...

RF: Exactly, 'course you wouldn't. You'd think, go to sleep, you bloody idiot, stop farting about. That's what I did. I closed me eyes. I tried to force myself to go to sleep.

That's when I heard them cutting the front-door window out.

How did they know, eh? How did they know she has a Banham lock and a Chubb and a chain and all that stuff? She's very security conscious, you know, me mum. Everything's always locked up

like the bloody Bank of England. How did they know that they had to cut the window out if they wanted to get in?

No, well you don't know. Neither did I. I just lay there and sweated blood.

I kept saying, it's imagination, that's all, imagination, go to sleep, you silly bugger. Go to sleep.

Then I heard the door open. It squeaks, you know, me mum kept going on at me to oil it. And I heard it squeak, as they opened it.

I thought, oh Gawd.

I knew it was the blokes that had got Braithwaite. I knew it was them. Nobody had to tell me.

They'd come to get me.

All the way to Walworth.

(Pause)

MQ: So what did you do then?

RF: What? Oh yeah – then. Well, I got out of bed, didn't I? Went to the back window.

MQ: In your pyjamas?

RF: I put my coat on top. I could hear the stairs creak. They were coming up to get me. The window got stuck halfway up. I could hear them breathing, just outside the door. Possibly imagination. Though I thought I could hear them breathing. I got the window up, climbed out and hung down from the sill. I heard the bedroom door open. I let go and dropped.

(Pause)

The bag went over my head as I hit the ground. They just folded their arms round me – whoomp, like that. They said, real quiet, just a whisper:

'Thank you, Mr Foster, you have been most co-operative.' I think I passed out.

DOC. NO: 01781/34/TTC/6

CLASSIFICATION: ABA

TITLE: THE RONALD FOSTER DEBRIEFING. SESSION TWO (B)

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE, OFFICER GUIDED

OFFICER: MARION QUINLAN

DATE: 1/7

TIME: P.M. 1

DISTRIBUTION:

MQ: You got up to where you passed out. Where were you when you woke up?

RF: In the car. In the back of the car.

MQ: Do you remember the sort of car?

RF: Big. That's all I remember. I think it might have been a Mercedes. I wasn't thinking about the sort of car it was, at the time. I was thinking, oh, Gawd. There was one on either side of me and one driving and one in the passenger seat. Big blokes. All of them. They none of them said a bloody word. The windows were dark, I couldn't see where we were going. I was terrified out of my mind.

After about ten minutes I started to talk. I didn't decide, right, now I'm going to start talking, I just started talking. It was – what do you call it? – involuntary. Just came pouring out. I said, 'Now don't laugh when I tell you this it's very funny but quite true and I know you might find it hard to believe but you've got the wrong man. How do you like that, eh? You've got the wrong bloke out of bed at two o'clock in the morning, what do you think of that, eh? Ridiculous, isn't it? Yeah, well, you see I understand how the confusion arose. It's quite clear to me. You think I had something to do with that bloke you were after in the shop today. You think I was with him, don't you? Yes, I can see that, because of me getting in your way and that. But what happened, you see, was that I thought he was a shoplifter, and I was trying to catch him. Silly, isn't it? Makes you laugh, when you think about it, but there you are, and you jumped to the wrong conclusion, quite understandably, of course, that I was with him. Ha ha! No, no, quite the contrary. Never seen him before in my life, I hadn't. So there you are then. You've had a wasted journey. Sorry about that but I suppose you get used to that in your line of country. Never mind, now you know, so if you'll just drop me here I'll get back to my bed. No need to run me home, just let me out, and I'll, er, jog

back. Do me good, a bit of exercise . . . eh?' To all of which they replied not a word. It was like throwing marbles at the Bank of England, talking to them. So in the end, I dried up, folded my hands, and waited.

There was nothing else to do.

This went on for about three hundred years. That's what it felt like, anyhow. Several lifetimes, at the very least. Decades. Then we stopped, and they opened the doors, and bounced me out, and there we stood. Right in the middle of nowhere.

Well I know where it was now, of course. Got this book about it, didn't I, while I was laid up afterwards. *London's Docklands*, by some geezer. Quite interesting, actually. I never realized they was that old, you know? While Napoleon was still alive and that, some of them. Quite historical.

That's not how they felt at the time, of course. They felt like the end of the world at the time.

We were out on the road, outside, with the river on one side, and the walls on the other. Those walls—they're really something, those walls, two, three storeys high, I reckon, miles of them, winding round these little narrow alleys that go through the docks. Very creepy. Like being at the bottom of a—thingy—a canyon, you know? Specially at night. Specially at two-thirty in the morning. Specially with company like I had. Very creepy.

The largest stretch of artificially enclosed water in the world, the London docks are, did you know that? True.

So they went in through this hole that was already cut in the wire across the gap in the wall where the canal went in. From the river. I looked down as we went in. It was full of rubbish. And mud. On the other side of the walls, where the dock should have been, it was all flat, empty, like a bomb site. They'd started filling it in.

We walked for quite a long time then—these weeds all going crunch crunch crunch under our feet, because they'd all dried up in the heat. Far off, against the sky, I could see the warehouses, very black-looking, next to the water. The water sort of glistened.

The closer we got the worse I felt.

They were quite a tourist sight once, those warehouses, you know. People from the City used to bring visitors down and show them off. They kept rubber from Malaya in there, bales and bales of it; and wool, wool from Australia and New Zealand, spices, from Indonesia and that, and ivory. Great heaps of tusks, this book said. Heaps of them. I suppose that came from Africa.

They just look like ruins now though. Great big empty shells. Empty.

'Down there,' said the boss man when we were next to them, and pointed straight down. I couldn't see anything at first, so I stood and looked, and they just shoved me over the edge, and I grabbed at this rusty ladder and slithered down to the bottom. I shoved at this door that was there, went through. It was the cellars.

You ever been in the cellars of the London docks? No? You ought to go there, you know, before they knock them down. Fantastic place. Like a film set. Hammer horror. All these arches—vaults, I should say—like this—and as they shone the torch round you could see all these funguses hanging from the stones—huge things—like animals. They were in the book too. They used to store all the wines here, see, in barrels, France, Italy, Spain, all these places; they brought the wine here, and left it in the barrels, and there was a different fungus growing in the place where they kept each different wine. Amazing, isn't it?

'Course as far as I was concerned they'd just hung the bloody things up to scare the living daylights out of me. Which they did.

Right in the middle of the cellars was Bryan Braithwaite—as I now know him to be—looking as dead as mutton, and half as cheerful. He still had his hat on.

'Oh Gawd,' I said.

'Exactly,' said the boss man. 'We didn't intend to promote him to glory,' he said. He was very close, just whispering in me ear. The other hoods stood on either side of me. The driver had stayed with the car. 'There was no need for him to pass to the great beyond on this trip. It was just unfortunate that he had a weak heart. What was more unfortunate, he couldn't tell us where they were before he departed. We got this far—no further. Which is why you're here, Ronald. You're here to take us the rest of the way. Show us where, Ronald, and, as you say, bob's your uncle. Back home and tucked up in bed in no time at all.' He put his arm round my shoulder. It felt like a tentacle. 'Delay showing us, Ronald, muck about with us in any way at all, and you and Mr Braithwaite will be learning the harp in tandem, so to speak.' And he sort of laughed.

'Look,' I said, 'you've made a—' and that was as far as I got. One of the hoods went Bonk, like that, and it felt as if somebody had hit me on the head with Nelson's Column. I thought, they're not going to believe me, are they?

They weren't, either.

So about sixteen bonks later, I said, 'All right, you win, I'll show

you,' and I pointed my hand out like that - I'd no idea which way that was - and said, 'It's that way.'

'Good,' says the head hood. 'The lad is learning some sense at last,' and they pick me up and march off in the direction indicated. All the time I'm thinking, what happens when we hit the wall? And also, what the bloody hell are they on about? What is it we're supposed to be looking for? I thought, I only hope it's not an atom bomb, that's all. I don't know why I thought that, I must have read about it in a book, about pinching one. I said to myself, it'll be all right as long as it's not an atom bomb. Daft, really.

So, after a while, as had to happen, we came to the wall. Now it was up to me, and suddenly, I had this feeling - that I had the initiative. You know? That they were all waiting on me, because they were so keen to find what it was they were looking for, and they thought I knew. I thought, okay, Ronald.

I said, 'Shine your torches along to the right.'

They shone their torches along to the right. Nothing there. Just wall.

'To the left,' I said. I'd no idea what I hoped they'd find, but it felt good to be telling them what to do for a change. Just like that: 'To the left.' You don't get much opportunity to tell people what to do when you work in a shop, you know. (Pause) Very little at all. So anyway, that's what they did.

And there was the ventilator grid, large as life.

'He didn't tell you about that?' I said. They didn't answer. 'Pull it off,' says the head hood. And they set about it in a similar manner to the way they set about me - nearly had the wall down. 'There,' says one of the villains, chucking the grid on the floor. 'Look up the shaft,' says the boss. 'Shine the torch up.'

At which point, of course, I go a bit watery inside.

The villain sticks his head up the shaft, but only his head. His shoulders are too big. I take a - what's the word - clandestine - a clandestine glance at my anatomy.

My shoulders are narrow.

'Nothing,' says the villain, withdrawing his bonce. Genghis Khan grabs my ear and starts to remove it. 'Well?' he says. Nastily.

I keep my cool. 'Tell him to climb up there about four feet,' I say. 'It's tucked into the wall.' Pause for thought.

'Climb,' says Genghis to the underling. The underling tries.

'It's too small,' he says. As anticipated. Of course it's too small, that's why I suggested it. 'Nobody could get up there,' says the underling.

'Except me,' I remark, before Genghis starts his ear manipulation again.

Silence. They all look at me.

They hadn't thought of this.

Genghis, however, is not slow on the uptake. He takes a gun the size of a howitzer from the other thug and shows it to me.

'See this?' he says. How could I not see it? I was looking down the barrel. 'See it? Well, I'll be holding it about two feet behind you. One false move and you'll look like a Polo mint. Get me?'

I got him. No difficulty. He was a model of clarity. But I thought - and this wasn't like me at all, very clear-headed, I even registered that at the time - he's got to get his head, and the hand with the gun, and the hand with the torch, into the shaft, and work out whether or not I'm conning him, and decide where to Polo me, all at once.

There's a chance, Ronald.

A slender chance, but a chance.

So I climb into the hole in the wall.

DOC. NO: 01781/35/TTC/7

CLASSIFICATION: ABA

TITLE: THE RONALD FOSTER DEBRIEFING. SESSION TWO (C)

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE, OFFICER GUIDED

OFFICER: MARION QUINLAN

DATE: 1/7

TIME: P.M. 11

DISTRIBUTION:

RF: Now, explain this to me: how did I know there was a ventilation system? How did I know it was there, eh? Never been there before, knew nothing about it? How did I know that the vaults of the warehouses of the London docks have one of the most sophisticated ventilation systems of pre-modern times? Hundred and seventy years old, working perfectly. How did I know that?

Subconscious, that's what it was. I read about that, too, afterwards. The subconscious mind.

You see the air in those cellars wasn't damp and stale, like it ought to have been. It was perfectly fresh. Sweet, even. You know where that was coming from? From the ventilators. Which my subconscious mind must have twigged. Eh?

So anyway, I climb into the hole—black as pitch, it was—and as soon as I got in, I thought: rats. Oh my Gawd, rats. And then I thought, rats, or Genghis Khan? And I chose the rats. As it happened, there weren't any rats. But I mention them, to give you an idea. Of my state of mind.

As I went up, I heard one of them say, 'How long till Thor's back?'

'Nineteen hours,' grunts Genghis, and shoves his head up the ventilator after me.

The shaft went at an angle, like that, almost straight up. The stone was cut close, hardly anything to hold onto. I had to shove against the side, with my elbows, inch at a time. It was murder. And I couldn't see a bloody thing.

'Aren't you there yet?' shouts Genghis.

'No I'm bloody not,' I shout down. 'I'll tell you when I'm there.' Keep the initiative, you see. Sound confident. That was the theory. It came out like a little squeak.

I thought, why can't I see any light? Even just pale light? Where the other end is? Why—and then I thought, oh Gawd, it's a dead end. I've chosen a dead-end. There's just a stone wall at the other end, and there's nowhere to go, and I'm going to end up like a Polo mint.

'If you don't start getting them out within the next ninety seconds,' shouts Genghis, 'I'm going to fire.'

And he starts counting.

I say nothing; just keep on climbing. My arms feel as if they're going to fall off and slide down the shaft behind me. I keep imagining the stone wall at the other end. Genghis keeps on counting. And then this breeze comes.

Straight across my face, like that. It was another tunnel. I was at the junction.

'Forty-five, forty-four, forty-three,' goes Genghis. I put my head in the other tunnel. It was at right angles to mine. Extremely hard to get into. I got my shoulders in.

'Thirty, twenty-nine, twenty-eight, twenty-seven. I hear no box being moved,' says Genghis. 'Twenty-six, twenty-five twenty-four...'

Now it was a matter of pushing with my legs, wriggling them up and pushing against the tunnel. I couldn't get a purchase; they kept slipping. My elbows were wedged too tight against my sides, you see, in the corner. I couldn't make any headway.

'Fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, twelve, eleven . . . You have ten

seconds left, Ronald, in which to slide that box down to me, or I will blast you into eternity. Ten, nine, eight . . .'

I got a purchase with my feet, and then, whoof, all the strength went out of me, you know how it does sometimes? When your legs go all rubbery? Well it happened then. I just had no strength at all. That was the worst moment. I was stuck, just laying there, and this loony less than six feet away is aiming at me with this bloody howitzer.

'Five, four, three. Last chance, Ronald. Last chance coming up.' So I said, right, and just willed, you know? Just forced with my mind, and my legs pushed, and oomph! I was into the next tunnel, and at the same second the gun went off.

It sounded like a bloody volcano erupting in there. It hit the stonework—Pow! two pounds of gravel in my legs. You've seen the scars, haven't you? Something dreadful. Pow! I didn't feel it at the time, though, I just kept crawling.

'Wah!' I said. I was deafened. Deafened but still going.

It was a bigger tunnel, you see, horizontal, not vertical, running right round the building inside the walls, and every now and then another little shaft like the one I'd crawled up, leading down into the vaults. I took no notice of those; I was looking for the one that led up again, to the outside.

So were the hoods. I heard Genghis shouting at them, telling them where to look. I set a world land-speed crawling record, I can tell you. You couldn't see me for dust. You couldn't see me at all, actually. It was still pitch black. I didn't care no more by then. I just crawled.

Two minutes later I found it: the first connecting shaft. I could see the pale light outside, see the grid. One of the bars was broken. I thought, let's try that.

Up I went.

As I got to the top I stopped breathing, and just listened. I could hear footsteps, but they seemed to be a long way off. I put my face up to the grid. Outside was the water of the dock, very still. Just above the grid hung a hoist, with a chain, and one of those big balls on the end of it. Nothing else. I started to get my fingers round the grid.

It seemed to take hours, levering that grid off. It was probably only a few minutes, actually, but, you know. Just jiggling it back and forth, back and forth, till it gave. In the distance I could hear the hoods calling to each other, running. I even heard a shot once:

they must have seen a shadow. About two seconds after that I got the grid off, lowered it to the ground, let go of it.

Bang, it went. And sort of rang, the way metal does on stone. I started wriggling back in the shaft, changed my mind, and landed on the ground as the hood came round the corner.

I froze. He didn't see me, couldn't make me out against the wall. He just came on, very slowly, looking for the exit from the ventilator. I reached up, ever so gently, above my head.

The iron ball fitted into my hands as if I'd just caught it. I thought, the chain will rattle. As you swing, duck. I watched the hood—ten feet away, eight, six, peering at the wall for the hole I'd come out of. Leaned back, took the ball with me, and swung it at him with everything I'd got. He heard the chain rattle, fired, and hit the wall. But it was too late. The ball hit him smack in the head. Splat! Marvellous noise. Splat! I can still hear it. I went up from the ground in one single movement and jumped right over him and round the corner before you could say, well, anything. Then I was in among the weeds on the infill again, crunch crunch crunch, and I could hear them behind me, and I was running like a bloody champion for the gates. I didn't know there were gates, didn't know what direction I was going in, I just ran. But then there were these gates, great corrugated iron things, fifteen, twenty feet high, and I was going up them like a monkey, and they were ringing as the bullets hit them, and shuddering sort of, and then I was on top, and the edge of the metal went right into my hands—see, there—and I dropped straight down the other side, bam! hit the ground, bounced, and rolled right into Ratcliff Highway.

I was up and running again, straight away, just running, not thinking about anything, just going pound pound over the road, and up Dock Street, into Cable Street and up towards Whitechapel.

That's when the patrol car picked me up. I fell down, got up again, and the rozzers appeared. They thought I was drunk. I couldn't talk, just kept breathing like a rip-saw. It wasn't till they got me to the station that they realized. And by that time I'd remembered Matheson. I demanded to see him. I showed the rozzers that card he'd given me. I said I wouldn't say a word till he came.

And in the end, he did.

PETER,

Okay, at this point I think it's time to bring in the international dimension of the story. Of course, on the night of 15 June we were not aware that there was an international dimension to the Foster case, but by that time the items of information we came to link with it later had begun to flow in. It was Mackintosh who was most concerned about our lack of knowledge of the new Foreign Minister of the PRC and it was to him that most of these reports finally came. It was he who began to put them together. Well, he had no option, did he? They spoke for themselves. Positively shouted about what Li was up to. Didn't they?

DOC. NO: 10681/56/RR/8

CLASSIFICATION: AA

TITLE: REPORT 100789 FROM RESIDENT, BRUNEI

DESCRIPTION: DECODED CABLE

OFFICER: P. MILNE

DATE: 10/6

TIME: 0400

DISTRIBUTION:

SECOND QUANTITY SMALL ARMS (SEE REPORT 100780) IN A FORTNIGHT FOUND BY MALAYSIAN CUSTOMS AGENTS LAST NIGHT ON CHINESE LAUNCH 'TWENTIETH CENTURY' BOUND FOR LIMBANG FROM BRUNEI. OWNER OF LAUNCH LAU HSI HSIEN OF LIMBANG. THIS TIME THE HAUL INCLUDED 24 MI9IIAI .45 CALIBRE PISTOLS WITH 500 ROUNDS AND 15 MI6IAI ASSAULT RIFLES WITH 1000 ROUNDS. ALL WEAPONS US ARMY ISSUE. MOST USED. PROBABILITY EX-VIETNAM. NOTHING KNOWN LOCALLY AGAINST LAUNCH OWNER. CREW MEMBER ALFRED PENG A CASUAL WORKER UNACCOUNTED FOR SINCE CACHE UNCOVERED. NO PUBLICITY GIVEN BRUNEI OR FIFTH DIVISION TO FIND. THE INFORMATION WAS NOT PASSED TO ME OFFICIALLY. PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE SOONEST RE LIAISON BRUNEI SERVICE. P.M.(T)

DOC. NO: 12681/87/RR/9
CLASSIFICATION: AA
TITLE: REPORT 100794 FROM RESIDENT, BRUNEI
DESCRIPTION: DECODED CABLE
OFFICER: P. MILNE
DATE: 12/6
TIME: 0400
DISTRIBUTION:

SEVERAL CLANDESTINE MEETINGS HAVE BEEN HELD IN THE LIMBANG AND LAWAS AREAS WITHIN THE LAST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN WHICH YOUNG CHINESE MAINLY UNEMPLOYED HAVE BEEN HARANGUED BY OUTSIDE AGITATORS OF CHINESE ORIGIN ON THE INIQUITIES OF THE K.L. REGIME THE UNFAIRNESS WITH WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY TREATED (BUMIPUTRA JOB DISCRIMINATION, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, ET CETERA) AND THE JUSTIFICATIONS FOR ARMED REBELLION. THERE WERE HINTS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF WEAPONS, BUT NO DEFINITE OFFERS. THE JARGON WAS MARXIST, FREQUENT REFERENCES TO THE 'HOMELAND'. THE INFORMATION COMES FROM INFORMANTS AT TWO OF THE MEETINGS. NO IMMEDIATE ACTION WAS PROPOSED BUT OTHER MEETINGS ARRANGED FOR NEAR FUTURE. THIS IS RAW INFORMATION BUT THE INITIAL IMPRESSION IS OF A REBELLION BUILDING AS IT DID IN 1965. THE DISCONTENT IS REAL BUT THE AGITATION IS UNDOUBTEDLY FROM OUTSIDE. AM SEEKING DEFINITIVE FACTS ABOUT THE MEN WHO ADDRESSED THE MEETINGS. WILL INFORM YOU SOONEST. P.M.(X)

DOC. NO: 13681/50/RR/10
CLASSIFICATION: BAA
TITLE: REPORT 5667 FROM RESIDENT, JOHANNESBURG
DESCRIPTION: DECODED REPORT
OFFICER: T. MASTERS
DATE: 13/6
TIME: 0100
DISTRIBUTION:

MOST IMMEDIATE. ATTENTION S.A. I: PERSONAL.

You will by now I assume have received my report 5664 sent at 0900 hours this day on the Roben Island riot and the escape of Joshua Kumaningi. You will doubtless have also seen the press reports of same and coverage of strong nervous reaction among the white community and sympathetic riots in the black settlements here and in Cape Town. The latest information is that the helicopter which was used in Kumaningi's escape has been found, not far from the coast. It had been hit by rifle fire several times during the attack on the island and abandoned almost as soon as it touched the mainland - clearly as intended, because it was in the vicinity of a landing strip suitable for light planes. The machine was on hire from the High-Hover Air Company, and the hirer was given as Alfred J. Roberts, of Johannesburg, engineer, according to the identification he produced. This identity has been used once before, to the knowledge of Local Intelligence, at the time of the Peitsburg Incident (Report 3542), in which one of the Chinese Liaison Staff from the Dar Es Salaam office was apprehended by BOSS delivering a payoff to a member of ANAA. The name was used by a driver questioned in connection with the affair and subsequently cleared. Enquiries at his home have revealed he has not been seen for twenty-fours hours.

N.B. No other intelligence reaching this office in the last year has suggested Chinese links with Kumaningi or the Black Struggle organization. Am researching files this AM but do not expect to uncover any links not mentioned in this report. Any corroboratory info. gratefully received.

DOC. NO: 16681/25/TTA/11
CLASSIFICATION: ABAA
TITLE: MID-OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT FOR FILE ON
ASSIGNMENT 880A
DESCRIPTION: WRITTEN SUMMARY
OFFICER: ALAN HODGES
DATE: 16/6
TIME: 1630
DISTRIBUTION:

I have received this hour report 5667 from Jo'berg and on the basis of the information therein draw your attention to my report 13681/14/TTA/O, section three. This mentioned a meeting which took place on 13/6 between John Machanga, Liaison Officer with the African People's Army, and James Kichingcha, London representative of Black Struggle. Machanga arrived in London from Algiers with the rest of the entourage of the Revd Oscar Suto, and checked into the Savoy. Shortly after his arrival there, he left the hotel for a clearly pre-arranged meeting with Kichingcha on the Embankment by Charing Cross. They took the District Line tube and their conversation is unrecorded, but the meeting was noteworthy at the time because of the general level of hostility between APA and Black Struggle. Now that Joshua Kumaningi has been sprung from Roben Island the question arises: is an alliance being considered? A.H.

DOC. NO: 17681/47/RR/12

CLASSIFICATION: BAAF

TITLE: REPORT 1400 FROM RESIDENT, BANGKOK

DESCRIPTION: DECODED CABLE

OFFICER: G. TRAVERS

DATE: 17/6

TIME: 0845

DISTRIBUTION:

REPORTS ARE REACHING BANGKOK THAT A MILITARY AIRCRAFT BEARING THE INSIGNIA OF THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA HAS CRASHED ONE HUNDRED MILES NORTH-EAST OF CHANG MAI. NEEDLESS TO SAY THERE HAD BEEN NO PRIOR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE THAI GOVERNMENT AND PEKING ABOUT ANY INTENDED MILITARY OVER-FLYING AND THE INCURSION IF CONFIRMED WILL BE VIEWED AS A HOSTILE ACT. AS MY RECENT REPORTS WILL HAVE SUGGESTED THIS WOULD BRING TO AN END THE BRIEF PERIOD OF GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN PEKING AND BANGKOK WHICH ARE ALREADY UNDERMINED BY THE KAMPHAANG PHAT AFFAIR (1748T/56/RR/5). THE TERRAIN IN WHICH THE AIRCRAFT IS REPORTED TO HAVE CRASHED IS DIFFICULT AND INACCESSIBLE, BUT FURTHER INFORMATION SHOULD BE AVAILABLE WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. G.T.(U)

DOC. NO: 16681/68/CDI/13

CLASSIFICATION: AAA

TITLE: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

DESCRIPTION: WRITTEN REPORT FOR O.M. AS REQUESTED

OFFICER: A. D. MACKINTOSH, HEAD OF CHINA SECTOR

DATE: 16/6

TIME: 2245

DISTRIBUTION: O.M. & FOREIGN SECRETARY ONLY

SUMMARY

The fact which has to be borne in mind when considering the report is that fundamental changes in the *basic assumptions* of China's foreign policy are clearly taking place. The continuity which underlay even the changes of the Cultural Revolution and the succession of Chairman Hua appears to be coming to an end. It is, needless to say, doubly unfortunate that this rethinking is going on in the Politburo after the death of — — — last year. Without the information he was able to provide, we are once more reliant on analysis to an unacceptable extent, and it is our belief that our allies find themselves in a very similar position.

Bearing this in mind, however, I would venture to suggest that the Politburo is split between those who favour an increased strengthening of the ties with Washington, and those who believe that China has sacrificed too much of its leadership in the Third World in the interests of good relations with the United States. The swiftness of the rise of Li Hsiao Meng before his appointment as Foreign Minister makes it very difficult to assess his position, but there are aspects of his career (notably during 1967) which suggest that he would be a member of the latter group.

He is committed by decisions made before his appointment to the steps leading to the signing of the Baxter-Markham Treaty and to the US visit which will precede it. It could possibly be that the actions in which the People's Republic are now apparently involved are designed to make it possible for him to avoid that commitment: that is to say, to antagonize the Americans to such an extent that they call the thing off themselves.

By the same token, if it is true that we are witnessing a major semi-covert Chinese offensive in South-East Asia, Malaysia, and Southern Africa (among others), then the Third World leadership by which China once set such store might well be re-established

with extraordinary speed – to the discomfiture of the USSR as much as the United States – and Li might then consolidate his position in the Politburo to an extent otherwise impossible.

We have seen changes in Chinese foreign policy as swift as this one appears to be both during the Cultural Revolution and in 1968/9, before the initial rapprochement with the United States. But we have not previously seen a similar combination of fundamental policy revision and such expedited implementation. It is here that the unknown qualities of the new Foreign Minister become vitally important. Quite apart from the implications of this series of events for relations between the United Kingdom and China, and the United States and China, if the operations which Peking appears to have mounted are to prove effective, our own interests are in several instances (notably South Africa) directly affected. This, naturally, is beyond the scope of this paper, but my interim conclusion on the evidence available is that urgent action is required to inform the People's Republic of China of our knowledge of their offensive, and seek to contain it.

A.D.M. (P)

PETER,

No sooner had A.D.M. sent this report off to the Old Man, and the Old Man driven round to Whitehall to see the F.S. than Granger's news came through about Ngo, the Second Secretary at the Chinese Embassy who had been the object of Matheson's surveillance before he took over the Foster case. It came through about midnight, having originated in Tokyo, where there was an aluminium alloy delegation from Peking. Well, you can imagine the panic it caused.

DOC. NO: 16681/77/RR/14

CLASSIFICATION: ABAA

TITLE: REPORT 3457 FROM RESIDENT, TOKYO. QUERY ANSWERED

DESCRIPTION: DECODED CABLE

OFFICER: R. GRANGER

DATE: 16/6

TIME: 2350

DISTRIBUTION:

RE YOUR QUERY ON NGO. SUBJECT IS TENTATIVELY IDENTIFIED AS WEI SIEN MAH A COLONEL IN THE AIR FORCE OF THE PRC. HIS LAST POSTING WAS ON THE HUANG YANG BASE WHERE HE WAS EMPLOYED ON THE HUNDRED FLOWERS PROJECT. THIS PROJECT AS YOU WILL KNOW IS AIMED AT CREATING FOR CHINA A CREDIBLE TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY. R.G.(O)

And as you can imagine, Peter, the mere possibility that the Chinese had sent an expert on tactical nuclear weapons to talk to the man most likely to bring blood, death and destruction to the good people of South Africa was enough to drive rational thought right out of the window. Which, of course, it did. And all the time, of course, the Ronald Foster saga proceeded along its own unique and extraordinary path.

DOC. NO: 16681/38/TTA/15

CLASSIFICATION: ABAA

TITLE: REPORT ON LIAISON ASSIGNMENT 1450

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE REPORT

OFFICER: WILLIAM MATHESON

DATE: 16/6

TIME: 1630

DISTRIBUTION:

Well, I knew in my bones we were not finished with Ronald Foster, and I was right. I was awakened by a call from the police station at Whitechapel at four-thirty this morning and told that Mr Foster had been found in an hysterical state running round Dockland in his pyjamas and demanding to talk to the Secret Police: to wit, myself. Needless to say, when I arrived at the station, I received some funny looks from the officers on duty, identification notwithstanding. With some difficulty, I extracted Ronald's story from him (see attached transcript) and having done so realized, of course, that we were going to be too late. Which we were. The station sent out a Calling All Cars and we threw an imperfect cordon round the London Dock, but they had long gone. By the time we got some lights up in the cellars it was getting on for five-thirty and it was clear that not only had they gone, but they had found what they were looking for before they went. Ronald took us to the ventilator shaft through which he had made his spectacular escape (a feat of some ingenuity, I must admit), and less than twenty feet away, about three grids along from the one he had chosen at random, there was another grid ripped out of the wall. Even on a

cursor examination of the ventilator shaft we found wood splinters. My uniformed colleagues, more experienced in these matters than myself, deduced that a wooden box, about the size of the shaft itself, had been jammed into the aperture and recently hauled out again. The box had been painted green, a long time ago. I have asked them to see if they can let me know how long ago, when they have analysed the paint. My working assumption, then, is that the wooden box contained whatever it was they were seeking so urgently, and that Foster unwittingly led them to it in the course of making his escape.

The gentleman whose demise had brought Foster into the case for a second time was recognized immediately by the local police as the same Bryan Braithwaite who had been kidnapped by the gang after the fracas in Oxford Street. Cause of death was, it seems at this point, a coronary occlusion, doubtless brought on by nervousness and bad company. There was no evidence of his kidnappers having done anything more than rough him up before he departed this life. There was nothing of interest about his person except a bus ticket with the number of the American Embassy written on it, which seems to confirm that he was indeed the party who made initial contact with Grosvenor Square claiming to have information relating to the People's Republic of China. Casual conversation with the Whitechapel uniformed officers suggested nothing about his activities which would explain how he was likely to have obtained any such information.

The third discovery in the London Dock cellars may well prove the most significant. It was picked up at the door on the east side through which it seems likely the kidnappers made their escape. It was a snapshot, bearing traces of that same green paint which had apparently covered the box which had been the object of the night's activity. It was an aged snapshot, badly taken, badly preserved. Proper analysis will be necessary before it can confidently be asserted when it was taken or under what circumstances. But my preliminary impression is that it shows three US Marines, arms on each other's shoulders, posing for a souvenir photograph in some part of Peking. The last time, if I have it correctly, that US troops were able to pose for tourist pictures in China, was the winter of 1941, before the Japanese invasion, and Pearl Harbor. The picture might be considerably older than that, but 1941, I believe, is the last date it could have been taken. My further surmise is that it had been stuck to the box the kidnappers took away with them, and possibly gives a clue to its contents. I have sent the photograph

over to David Bell at Grosvenor Square with the suggestion that he enlist the aid of the Pentagon in checking its origin.

Foster had by then been examined by a police physician and passed as uninjured, if not exactly fit. He was now taken down to the Yard for yet another attempt to identify the kidnappers, without success. A police artist, however, produced three rather unconvincing identikit pictures, and I took copies of these back to West Centre Two. I also took Foster to the Safe House nearest us, the Doughty Street one, and enlisted the aid of Marion Quinlan to get him to take the tranquillizers and sleeping pills the police doctor had given him, and babysit for a while. I myself contacted his mother and told her some story about sleep-walking and pacified her – temporarily. I then set about going through our own files to see whether the information Ronald had given about the villains led us in the direction of any of our own friends and acquaintances. I similarly provided David Bell with what information we had, in case they had had dealings with CIA. These activities occupied most of the morning.

At twelve the liaison man at the Yard rang to invite me for 'discussions' (see attached Briefing Note from P.) and the upshot of it was that by lunchtime I was heading east with a CID man to go the rounds of Braithwaite's social circle. The CID man (Edward Parker) asked the questions; I listened, took notes, looked like a sidekick.

Most of Braithwaite's circle, despite the fact that it was the middle of the working day, were at home, in council flats with the windows closed against any intrusion by the air, with at least one transistor glued to each ear, and the telly on, and a telephone near at hand, and the racing pages piled up round them like they were anticipating a siege. Nearly all of them appeared to have orange furniture, but I think that's irrelevant. They weren't pleased to see us. They cursed, swore and looked untrustworthy. Parker pried small pieces of information from most of them, but if you put it all together into the tallest pile possible it amounted to the fact that for the last few weeks Braithwaite had gone to ground, that he had been seen about looking shifty (which in that locality must have meant positively going round with a blanket over his head) and not saying nothing to nobody. Beyond that his grieving professional colleagues could not go, despite some pressure from the said Parker. It was highly unsatisfactory. After lunch we started on the pubs the good Bryan used to frequent, and this was even less edifying than going up and down the lifts in the tower blocks.

Note: find out if the Clean Air Act applies to pubs. All Braithwaite's favoured hostelrys had clearly been hoarding old cigarette smoke since about the time of the Munich Crisis, and if the bars had been full, you could have leaned up against the atmosphere and not known the difference. All the people the landlords told us they had seen Bryan talking to were the people we had already been to see, or people who had departed, since their conversations with our deceased friend, for tours of inspection of the British penal system. Only in the seventh pub did we strike paydirt, and then, we wouldn't have known it was paydirt if somebody on the east bank of the Potomac hadn't been working as if there was no tomorrow since ten-thirty that morning. But paydirt it was. And we found it.

The pub was empty of customers except for a man in a bright blue drapesuit and string tie staring fixedly into the smoke about three feet in front of him and listening to Eddie Cochrane. The landlord, Wm. (Bill) Richardson, was an indistinct little man with thin grey hair combed carefully across his scalp and a faded purple cardigan and all the time we were interviewing him he polished the rail round the bar and when he'd finished the rail he started on the glasses.

'He was quite a rocker was Bryan, you know,' said Wm. (Bill) Richardson, when we told him the news. 'In the fifties I'm talking about now, he was very very keen, well, they all were then, and this place was a Mecca. See all those photos on the wall there, Buddy Holly, Bill Haley, all those, all signed? Well, this place was a Mecca then. Rock music all the time, the best drapes in the East End, and a Harmonizer Series Two Juke Box, most up to date in London. See, over there? There it is, still going strong, beautiful piece of work, look at those lights, and all that chrome. They don't make quality like that these days, do they? It was a Mecca, this place, then, a palace of rock and roll. What is it now? It's a museum, gentlemen, it's a bloody museum. I'm sorry to have to say it about my own establishment, but that's the truth of the matter. It still pays, I'm not saying it doesn't. Trade is still good, but it's a museum. All those lads that was rock and rollers and Teds in the fifties come back here to find their lost youth. They don't, of course, but there you are, that's the human condition, isn't it? And this is where they come.'

We led him back to the subject of Bryan Braithwaite. We showed him the pictures the identikit man had based on Ronald Foster's description of his kidnappers. The landlord looked at the first one,

sort of blanched, and nodded. Four days ago he'd been round, asking after Bryan, and giving Wm. (Bill) an unpleasant feeling down the back of his spine. No, he hadn't got a foreign accent, but he'd been sure he was foreign. He could tell, having been in the war. He (Wm.) had accepted a drink and regretfully informed the strangers that Bryan had not been in since – well, since Mr King died. Then he'd told the stranger about Mr King.

'Tell us about Mr King,' instructed Parker.

Mr King was the old man that Bryan had been so nice to over the last six months, said Wm. Mr King and Bryan had been great buddies. Strange, really. Not like Bryan at all, as a rule.

'Say on,' said Parker.

It started the night Mr King had come in from the hospital – he'd gone to the hospital for a check-up, he'd told him the evening before. He came into the pub looking as white as a sheet and walked straight into Bryan Braithwaite, who had been carrying three pints of bitter and a gin and tonic, and Mr King was bloody lucky, said Wm., that he didn't get his head knocked off, because Bryan didn't take kindly to people getting in his way. But he didn't get his head knocked off and when Bryan's friends had gone – and you'll probably know where they were going, he added, looking significantly at Parker – he (Mr King) had gone up to Bryan, uninvited, with a drink for him, and sat down and started talking. Again, most uncharacteristic, because normally he said very little to anybody. But he'd had a nasty shock, you see, at the hospital. They'd told him he had – something very nasty. Months to live.

'Who was he?' said Parker.

Worked in a pet shop, said Wm. Been in the area for years – oh, ten years at least. Very quiet, not at all sociable. Lived on his own, by all appearances, had a funny accent. Wm. wondered if it was Scottish. But it wasn't really Scottish.

That was all he knew about him.

The fruits of ten years' social intercourse.

'So Mr King and Braithwaite got talking,' said Parker.

'Hind leg off a donkey,' said Wm., from whom this was no mean tribute. 'All night. Mr King talking and Bryan listening.'

'What about?' said Parker.

'No idea,' said Wm. 'They were too far away. I was curious, but they were over there and I was behind the bar and I just couldn't hear them.'

He looked wistfully at Parker. I believed him.

'Bryan's eyes were sort of – glittering,' said Wm.

'With greed,' said Wm.

Greed.

It was at this point that my bleeper went and when I called in from the phone box it was a message saying to get round to the park as quickly as possible for a rendezvous with David Bell.

They'd identified the men in the snapshot.

DOC. NO: 16681/44/SBTB/16

CLASSIFICATION: BABA

TITLE: OPEN-AIR CONVERSATION BETWEEN OFFICER AND
D. BELL, CIA LIAISON, LONDON

DESCRIPTION: TAPE TRANSCRIPT

OFFICER: WILLIAM MATHESON

DATE: 16/6

TIME: 1615

DISTRIBUTION:

DB: You got that recorder running?

WM: Sure. You want it off?

DB: No, I want it on. I've just got notes. This came live down the wire. You can get it typed up on Autotrans pretty soon, right?

WM: Right.

DB: And distributed. The urgency on this one is big with a capital B, William.

WM: Ah.

DB: Don't ask me why; I don't know. But I suspect as of this moment the significance of this item is being communicated from mine to yours at a rather higher level than where we are, Right?

WM: Point taken. Fire away.

DB: You were right about the photograph being taken in China, and we followed your hunch about the date. Anyway, the military history buffs at the Pentagon pinned it down to within a few months by looking at the equipment. The photo was taken in Peking in the autumn of 1941, by the Hatamen Gate, which is near the Legation Quarter. The soldiers were Marines and the Legation guard was a detachment of Marines, so the chances were that was where they came from. Records must have pulled out the stops, because within two hours of us wiring the snap, they'd dug up the

most senior surviving officer and flown him from Maryland to see if he knew any of the guys in the picture.

WM: That is pulling the stops out.

DB: Precisely.

WM: And did he recognize any of them? The officer?

DB: He recognized one right off, the second when he had a chance to look at the Corps records, and the third he's still not sure about.

WM: Very impressive.

DB: Very lucky. Most of those guys went straight into Japanese POW camps and stayed there for the rest of the war, or until they were dead. Which they frequently were.

WM: And the Marines in the picture?

DB: The first guy was a Walker Johnson, a farmboy from Iowa who enlisted in 1937, was posted to China in '39, and was captured by the Japs in '41. He survived, was repatriated in '45, and granted a disability pension for an injured leg. We got that from Records, and for the rest got onto the Association of Former US marines, of which he'd been a member for a while. He'd moved to Chicago after the war, and set up in business making sports equipment, squash racquets, trampolines, anything faddy. He cleaned up, apparently, made enough to retire in 1969, and in 1970 moved to Santa Barbara, California.

WM: And what did he have to tell you?

DB: He was on vacation.

WM: Ha! Where?

DB: In a camper van. Touring.

WM: Touring where?

DB: South America.

WM: Oh. What rotten luck.

DB: Yeah. But we have a photo. Here.

WM: Why is he wearing a chef's hat? I thought you said he made sports equipment.

DB: He's at a barbecue. We blew that up from a neighbour's snapshot.

WM: Well, let's hope he took the hat with him to South America. It'd make your job a lot easier.

DB: Bill, this is a matter of the gravest importance.

WM: Absolutely. What about number two?

DB: Ryan Secker, born Oklahoma 1915, enlisted 1934, made Sergeant 1938, went out to China 1940, captured by the Japs 1941, December. End of story.

WM: He didn't survive?

DB: We don't know whether he survived. There were conflicting reports even about the capture. Some said he was killed right then. Others said he was seen in one of the mines in North China that the Japanese ran with POW labour. His parents were dead, there were no next of kin to inform, and nobody enquired very thoroughly. He just disappeared off the face of the earth.

WM: Picture?

DB: Here. That's him when he enlisted.

WM: Looks innocuous enough.

DB: Yeah.

WM: And that's it so far?

DB: That's it.

WM: And can you throw a little more light on what the whole thing is about?

DB: No. I'm not authorized to. I haven't been given the information anyway. And for the time being it's irrelevant.

WM: Too many reasons there, chum.

DB: Well, I'm sorry, Bill, but there you are. But way above our heads somewhere, I think they're talking.

WM: Let's hope so, David.

DOC. NO: 16681/40/TTA/17

CLASSIFICATION: ABAA

TITLE: REPORT ON LIAISON ASSIGNMENT 1450

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE REPORT

OFFICER: WILLIAM MATHESON

DATE: 16/6

TIME: 1915

DISTRIBUTION:

I rejoined Parker just after he arrived at Edwin King's lodgings, which he had discovered through dogged leg work, during my journey to the park and back. The address was 33 Nairn Street, E2, a row of terraces surrounded by tower blocks, and the interior was tiny and worn and spotlessly clean. Linoleum, gleaming like marble, dustless jubilee mugs on the mantelpiece and polished pottery spaniels from Morecambe. Enid Stacey, King's landlady, was tiny, white-haired and as sharp as a needle.

'I've been telling him you've no business with Mr King,' she said, nodding at Parker. 'He was perfectly harmless, never said a

word to anybody, and now he's dead and gone. What are you on about then? What are you *all* on about?'

'There've been others,' said Parker wearily, picking up his cup of tea from the table beside the bird cage.

'Others, others,' said the budgerigar, ringing its bell.

'The gentleman who visited the pub,' said Parker, ignoring it.

'And the Teddy boy,' said Mrs Stacey. 'You're the third. Why can't you leave him alone? He'd suffered in the war, you know. Ever so much.'

'Mr King told Mrs Stacey he'd been a prisoner of the Japanese,' said Parker.

'It had affected his mind,' said Mrs Stacey. 'Something terrible. He used to wake up in the night, yelling.'

'Who was the Teddy boy?' I asked.

'Bryan Braithwaite,' said Parker quickly. 'We've just got that sorted out. Mrs Stacey remembers him from when he was a Ted.'

'I never liked him,' said Mrs Stacey. 'And I'm sure Mr King didn't, really. He used to smash milk bottles, you know. The Teddy boy. I hadn't seen him for years when he came round, but I remembered him. 'You used to smash my milk bottles,' I said. But he had all the papers, and what could I do? He said they were official American papers, all legal, and they entitled him. So, what could I do? I give it him. Will you have a cup of tea, luv?'

Without waiting for an answer she got up and bustled into the kitchen. I exchanged glances with Parker.

'What was it that you gave to Bryan Braithwaite?' I asked when she came back in again.

'Don't you know?' she said.

I shook my head.

'He said it was all quite legal,' she said. 'That Mr King had said he was to have it, and he showed me the papers. Well, I had to let him have it, didn't I?'

'Didn't I, didn't I?' repeated the budgie.

'What was it, Mrs Stacey?'

She eyed me shrewdly, smiled, and said, 'Why, the box, of course. His soldier's box. That he kept in his wardrobe all those years, and never showed me, and never said what was in it, and used to take out at night and look at, when he thought I couldn't hear. That's what he'd left to the Teddy boy. The same box that the tall man wanted, the one who looked as if he could see through the back of your head.'

'He came round later,' said Parker, 'asking for King, and looking for the box.'

'I sent him away with a flea in his ear,' said the old lady. 'Told him the Teddy boy had inherited it, quite legal, and it was nothing to do with him.'

'And then?'

'He just went away, and didn't come back, and that was that.'

She poured Parker another cup of tea. 'And now you,' she said.

I took out the two photographs Bell had given me an hour before. She took them suspiciously, held first one, then the other, at arm's length, and then inches away from her glasses. She looked at me thoughtfully.

'I don't know any bakers,' she said, and gave me Walker Johnson and his barbecue hat back. She looked again at Ryan Secker, as he was in 1934 and I handed her a blow-up of the blurred snapshot of 1941.

'He was quite good-looking when he was young, wasn't he?' she remarked. 'You wouldn't have thought it, would you?'

'That's Edwin King, is it?' I said.

'Oh yes,' she said, 'That's Mr King. No doubt about it. Poor man.'

There was a silence. The budgie chattered incoherently to itself.

'Tell me,' I said, 'did Edwin King ever explain to you how he came to be living in the East End of London, working in a pet shop and lodging with you, when he was born in America?'

There was another silence.

'I think he worried,' said Mrs Stacey at last. 'I think he worried about something that had happened—in the past. In the war.' She pursed her lips. 'I think he worried about people—coming to get him.'

'Get him,' said the bird.

'I think it was the Japanese,' she said, 'that had affected his mind. Don't you?'

'Could be,' I said. 'What was in the box, Mrs Stacey?'

She looked me straight in the eyes. 'How should I know?' she said. 'It was his box, wasn't it? It was in his wardrobe all those years, all locked up.'

I nodded, said nothing. The quiet went on for a long time.

She said, 'Well, Mister, curiosity's only natural, isn't it? He was lodging with me for ten years. That's a long time to be wondering what's in a box in a wardrobe, isn't it?'

'Yes,' I said, and sat tight.

'It's a very long time,' she said. 'And I never touched nothing

until they said from the hospital that he'd passed away. I never touched nothing after that, neither, till I was doing out his room, and the keys fell off the back of the chest of drawers. Otherwise I'd never have looked. And it was nothing, really, just a little peek, that's all.' She sniffed and drank her tea, defiant of reproach. I waited till she'd finished.

'Mrs Stacey, what was inside?'

She smiled again, relieved that the confession was off her chest. Her eyes glinted with the satisfaction of old age triumphing over youth. 'Ah well, dear,' she said. 'That's where the joke is, isn't it? That's what makes it so funny all these people coming round all the time after this box. That's the laughable part. *There's no money in it!* No money – now what do you think of that? No money, no jewels or gold coins or anything like that. Not even *papers*. Nothing valuable at all.' Her face was creased with laughter and her eyes almost disappeared into the wrinkles. 'Do you know what was in that box after all these years, darling? Well I'll tell you, tell you for nothing. What was in that box, dearie, was *bones!* Nothing but bones, bones, bones! Now what do you think of that, eh?'

'Bones,' said the budgie, 'bones, bones, bones,' and it rang its bell ecstatically.

'Dead, dry old bones,' said Edwin King's landlady, rocking back and forth with laughter.

'Bones, bones, bones,' said the budgie.

I reached over and took Ryan Secker's picture back and returned him to my wallet.

Bones.

DOC. NO: 02781/34/TTC/18

CLASSIFICATION: ABA

TITLE: THE RONALD FOSTER DEBRIEFING. SESSION THREE (A)

DESCRIPTION: TRANSCRIPT OF SELF-OP TAPE, OFFICER GUIDED

OFFICER: MARION QUINLAN

DATE: 2/7

TIME: A.M. 1

DISTRIBUTION:

RF: So I came into the hands of the authorities. That's what happened. I surrendered my freedom and gave myself up to the powers that be. I was absorbed into the system. That's it. That's what it

was like. It was like being fed into a machine. Whoosh – you disappear inside. They clean out everything that's in your head, take you to pieces, look at the bits, and decide how to reassemble you. Putchuck, putchuck, putchuck.

MQ: Isn't this a little melodramatic, Ronald?

RF: You said you wanted to know all my impressions. Well, this is them. If you don't want them after all, I won't trouble you no further. I'll be on my way.

MQ: No, no, carry on. I was just making sure you really meant what you were saying.

RF: Certainly I mean it. That is how it felt. That is what my experience was. X-rays, injections, pills, those blood-pressure things, and that room down at Scotland Yard. I think it was Scotland Yard – it wasn't daylight when I went there, you know – where I sat in that chair and they flashed up all them villains on the screen and asked all those questions. It was – like a machine. Like I was in it. And when they'd finished with me of course you lot took over, and off I went to Lincoln's Inn – no, I'm not supposed to say that, am I? – anyway, where your lot hang out, and it was more of the bloody same, only moreso. They actually connected me up with a machine, did you know that? Little things on my fingers and just here, on my head – would you credit it? – and more villains. Different from the first lot, a better class of villain, I would have said, but a nasty lot all the same. Films, photos, drawings, all silent, just coming out at you from the wall. And then the voices. They had all these voices on tape, and they played them as well, and asked me about them, and all the time I could hear this tape recorder going round and round in the dark, and everything I said they were taking down and broadcasting and storing and putting in computers, and it was horrible. Well, not horrible, but like a dream, and I was going through it like I was half-asleep, and it was like I didn't have a mind of my own any more. I had to speak to my mum on the phone, and I didn't know what to say, and this bloke told me what to say, and I said it, just like a robot, because my mind had been all cleaned out. And then you took me up to that place off the Gray's Inn Road, where you said Charles Dickens used to live, I remember you telling me that and trying to work out what he had to do with it, and there was a lot of stairs and this little room at the top of the house, quite posh it was, I remember thinking that, and there was this bed and I fell into it and wham – out like a light. I had some horrible dreams too, I can tell you.