

MERLIN'S CRAG

The dining room was full for breakfast as the first conference session was scheduled at 9.30am. But Silla held on to Mr Weiszacker's small side table, and he appeared at 8.30am with his usual impeccable timing.

On most mornings, Adam Weiszacker attracted notice amongst the standard tourists. His height, slightly stooped, sweeping white hair, and cowboy boots were unusual fare at the Moffat House Hotel. But today there were other rarities, including Russian Orthodox priests, Japanese academics, and a scattering of exceptionally smart conference attendees who might have been trade emissaries or business consultants.

Weiszacker confirmed his normal full breakfast order without any discomfort or surprise.

Amidst the bustle, Silla wondered again about Mr Weiszacker's profession, and his reasons for retiring to sleepy Moffat. He had always observed imperturbable reserve on both counts, restricting their small talk to the weather and his food. She and her boyfriend Angus, whom Weiszacker lived near at the head of Annan Water, had concluded he was a wealthy businessman who had sold off his company to enjoy the simple life. But this morning, amidst all these experts on Russia, she saw the American in a fresh light. Perhaps he had worked for the State Department or the United Nations? But in those cowboy boots?

'Excuse me, but who is that distinguished looking gentleman? I don't recall seeing him at the opening reception.'

Silla came to a halt beside one of the younger delegates. She was an immaculately groomed and proportioned blond, who spoke in a subdued American accent.

'He's a regular here, Ms Struthers,' responded Silla, namechecking the guest's badge, 'a local, retired from the States to live in Scotland.'

'How interesting,' commented Melanie, 'I must introduce myself. What a shame he's not at our conference.'

Silla was called to another table before formulating any cautionary advice about Weiszacker's reserve. And she was too preoccupied to witness the subsequent encounter.

Melanie Struthers dallied at her table as the delegates dispersed. When Weiszacker finished his meal, she headed towards the door meeting him halfway.

'Good morning, are you at the conference?'

'No, just visiting.'

Weiszacker's head seemed to lower in a way that left her looking at two shaggy eyebrows. She persisted.

'But you're local. That nice waitress told me you lived nearby. It would be so nice to learn something about this charming neighbourhood.'

'The people here are very hospitable. Reminds me of the Old South. Well, better be getting along. Enjoy Russia.'

'Russia's a long downhill ride, Mr Weiszacker.'

The tall American moved off with no further comment, so Ms Struthers went to her second floor room to collect the conference papers and adjust her make-up.

Adam wandered through the imposing hotel gates and turned right into the spacious market square where his car was parked. It was a damp November day but unseasonably warm. Having picked up some bread and milk from the store, he decided to look in on his acquaintance Bill Ross in the police station at the far end. He walked in and rang the counter bell.

'Adam Weiszacker, Bill,' he called through.

'Come on in, Adam,' came the immediate reply.

As was his custom, Sergeant Ross was wedged beside the fireplace, with two desks pushed aside against the walls. At his right hand was a small

open cabinet with mugs and glasses. Adam squeezed into a seat on the other side of the burning gas fire.

‘Warm, isn’t it?’

‘Aye, but damp and that gets intae the bones.’

The two men had fallen into a habit of acquaintance after bumping into each other one afternoon at the Lockerbie Memorial. Ross had presumed that Adam was a visiting relative, but it transpired that Bill had the closer connection for he had been on duty that apocalyptic night when fire and fury had descended on a sleepy Borders town from the night skies.

‘Ah think I’ll hae an early dram, Adam. Will ye join me?’

‘Bit early for me, Bill, but thanks for the offer.’

The sergeant pulled out a half bottle from deep in one of the cabinet shelves.

‘Richt eneuch, tae early for the guid stuff.’

He knocked back a generous snifter and shoved bottle and glass away amidst the clutter.

‘Jist as weill it’s a solo posting these times.’

Adam fixed his gaze on Bill, drinking in some of the younger man’s depression and suppressed pain. That night had marked Ross for life. His mind replayed daily the terrible events when Pan-Am Flight 103 exploded over his home patch. Sherwood Terrace was engulfed in a fire storm of exploding fuel tanks. That was where the locals had been killed, their bodies never recovered. Rosebank Crescent’s back gardens were strewn with the dead, but it was the sight on Tundergarth Hill that remained burnt into his memory. The aircraft’s nose lay there like a limp bird and behind it ran a long skein of aircraft seats, each with its lifeless occupant still strapped into place. The police had been overwhelmed and quickly replaced by American security personnel and the army. Sergeant Ross’s Moffat assignment was in effect compassionate leave, till the wounded policeman could officially retire without disgrace.

He had become abstracted staring into the fire’s imitation flames.

‘Not too much crime hereabouts,’ prompted Weiszacker

‘Poaching and a few shoplifters frae Glasgow.’

‘What about all these Russians? The hotel’s swarming with them.’

‘Not all Russians, just academics and suchlike. We’re not expecting any Novichok poisoners.’

‘There was an American woman at the hotel this morning keen to get me talking – Ms Struthers, Melanie Struthers.’

‘Don’t know the lady. Did she hae any luck?’

‘What do you think?’

For the first time that morning Ross managed a smile.

‘No likely. I’ve seen a neip be mair forthcomin.’

‘A what?’

‘A turnip, a swede. Ach there’s no talking to you Yankees. Ye dinna speak the Queen’s English.’

They both laughed.

‘Thirty years tomorrow,’ murmured Adam, as the joke subsided.

‘Dinna be tellin me. An we’re no further forward in knowing whit really happened.’

‘True enough. But they’re still digging. The wheels of God.’

‘Weill he’d best spin them a wee bit faster else they’ll be ower late for me. Have you read anything new?’

‘No. But I reckon it’s a matter of timing now. When the truth can be told, not if. I’d like to have that satisfaction, for the sake of you folks here, and for my pride.’

‘Your pride?’

‘In my country. That airplane was a stain on America’s honour, and will be till the facts are known.’

‘You believe in the conspiracies.’

‘I don’t know for certain. But I do know my government has never told the full truth.’

‘Or mine. We’re in the same boat there, Adam. And that’s the fact whether I’m talking Edinburgh or London. Sometimes though I’m thinkin you ken mair nor you’re lettin on about this business.’

‘Thirty years is a long burden to carry, Bill. I’ll look back in tomorrow. Maybe we could take a turn down to the graves?’

‘Aye, such as they are. I’ll not be attending any ceremony but. No till we hae the truth of it out in the clear licht o day.’

‘Be seeing you, friend.’

The big man had uncoiled himself from Bill’s easy chair and departed as unobtrusively as he had arrived.

Angus had brought some hay up to the high pasture behind Hill Farm Cottage. There was a moist south westerly blowing, and enough grass at a push, but he broke out a couple of bales for his prize crossbreeds.

Even in these cloudy conditions you could see the whole glen from here. He was surrounded by the expansive headwater fields. To the northwest the precipitous Beef Tub closed off the Annan valley, but southwards a fertile green sward stretched between the hills towards Moffat.

Angus watched Adam Weiszacker’s jeep bumping steadily along the track to Hill Farm. He seemed a wise old cove, bred in country ways. Now and then in passing he gave Angus a sympathetic ear. ‘Hold your own ground, young fella,’ he would advise, when the young farmer stressed his desire to keep the family farm going, and to buy their land outright from the estate.

Better head back, considered Angus, to check on the newborn calf and its mother in the steading. First though, he decided to drive his quad down between the burns. The fields there should be fine for grass but it was worth checking the sheep. He revved up and bounced across the slope

towards the Lochan ford. Soon he was through the field gate and racing downhill.

In the event it was almost two hours before Angus emerged onto the road. He spotted a lame sheep, and having left his dog at the stading in pup, the young shepherd had to drive the hobbling beast up into the corner of the fence which shielded livestock from the rocky Auchencat bluff. There he tipped the reluctant sheep, trimmed its hooves, and cleaned out the forefeet. The last thing he could afford at this juncture was footrot.

Coming eventually onto the glen road, Angus noticed a retro Mini parked outside the wooden community hall. Yet he had not seen any walkers on the favoured path up to the old Spa Well, which ran on a high bank alongside the tumbling river. So he was unsurprised to pass someone further up the road. She was wrapped up against the wind - over wrapped perhaps given the day – wearing a tartan shawl like a headscarf. But that could not hide her classic features, and the tightly curved blond hair tucked beneath the wool. She moved on the secluded country road with a decisive flow.

The woman acknowledged his wave as the quod rattled past, but kept her head down, going purposely back towards the car. Not a run of the mill tourist. Maybe she was at the conference, taking a break between sessions. Angus made a mental note to ask Silla that evening after work.

The hotel kitchen was a scene of happy exhaustion. Sixty delegates had sat down for dinner, not counting the local dignitaries whose interest in Russia did not extend to the conference proceedings. Everything had been prepared, cooked and served to perfection.

Silla's natural ability had come to the fore in the course of that evening's work. She had organised the waiting team, thinking it was a bit like teaching practice, when she had to handle thirty plus children and their diverse needs simultaneously. Now she could relax and enjoy a social drink courtesy of the management.

Angus was a familiar and welcome guest in the kitchen. Arriving to collect Silla, he had to sit down and eat leftover chocolate mousse, laced with banter about 'who he would like for dessert'. He was pleased to see

Silla so relaxed and cheerful. Black hair swept back, blouse loosened with glass in hand, her compact form exuded energy and beauty. Angus had loved her since schooldays, and now she was a settled part of his future. In Annandale.

The young couple had a routine for these working evenings. Leaving Moffat House in Angus' battered Volvo, they found a quiet spot off the road for some welcome intimacy. Then they headed on down to Lockerbie for a final drink before closing time. Then it was round to Sherwood Terrace for the drop-off, both ready for sleep before another early start.

'Thanks, Angus, you're a life saver.'

'Almost forgot, is there a blond woman - bit of a looker - at the conference?'

'Yes, an American. Struthers, Melanie Struthers - she seemed very interested in Mr. Weiszacker.'

'She was up the glen road today. Must have been her.'

'Really, maybe she's spying on him, or after his money. Like I am with you.'

'That'll be the day.'

'I'd better get in. Mum's going to be upset about tomorrow.'

'Thirty years to the day.'

'Aye, and the Johnstones are still living in Sherwood Terrace. That's Lockerbie for you. She was Mum's favourite sister. Wiped off the map.'

'House and all.'

'What's past can't be mended. See you tomorrow, Angus.'

'Sleep well.'

'Aye. When I qualify, we can have our own bed.'

With a last kiss Silla was out, and he turned the car for home.

When darkness enveloped the glen it came with an icy blast of north wind. Despite this Ms Struther's garb was stripped back to black jacket and trousers, as she strode along the few yards between Weiszacker's track end and the front door. She was wearing close fitting boots but no head covering. Coming round the gable end she checked off the infra red sensors she had spotted with night sights from the road.

As she reached the front door of the low set stone building it swung open to reveal a dim empty corridor.

'Come on in, Ms Struthers. To the right.'

She followed the voice down the short passage and turned right.

The room was surprisingly large but low ceilinged, and warm. Weiszacker was seated on the far side of the fireplace against the opposite wall. He gestured with his gun to the seat on the near side. There was a silencer on the silver muzzle.

'Please, do sit down. Make yourself at home.'

'That's hardly necessary, Adam,' she commented as she took the proffered seat.

'Well, maybe so and maybe no,' drawled her host, and she became aware of two piercing steel blue eyes that glinted below the white brows, fixing her to the chair. 'What do they want?'

'The top floor's jittery about this anniversary, and about why you're living here. And for that matter about the way you resigned.'

'What I have on them, you mean.'

'What you intend to do with it? What's the point of this game?'

'Could be I'm the last of the bad guys. Got out before the shit flies.'

'It's not going to fly though, Weiszacker. That is the point. It's sealed up forever like nuclear waste.'

'So, maybe I'm the last of the good guys, with a truth to tell.'

'What have you got? That's what they want to know. It's the condition.'

‘Of what?’

‘Leaving you be in bonny Scotland.’

‘You threatening me, Struthers?’

‘I’m just the messenger.’

‘Don’t reckon so. Why a little precaution’s in order,’ and Weiszacker adjusted his gun level by a few centimetres. ‘This lady’s more killer than consultant.’

‘Don’t fool around, Weiszacker. This is a serious warning. Turn over what you’ve got. By tomorrow. Silence is no longer an option.’

‘Flush out the damage while there’s still a lockdown. Force my hand. Do you take me for a fool? They’re gambling on long odds.’

‘I’m just the messenger. Told you. I’m at the hotel till Friday and can take delivery of any material. Think it over, Weisacker. The next deputation might be less friendly disposed.’

She stood up slowly keeping both hands in full view.

‘Very courteous of you to call, Ms Struthers. You remind me of everything I came to hate about the service.’

‘Once in, Adam, always tainted,’ she shot back, then turned her back contemptuously and walked out. The front door swung to noiselessly behind her.

As she went towards her car Melanie knew she was still under surveillance. This was not going to be a straightforward mission. But having read through all the Weiszacker files, she knew that the elderly Texan had enjoyed one of the most resourceful and successful operative careers in the CIA’s history. The old lion was not about to roll over peaceably.

Silla was doing a chambermaid shift at Moffat House to get in some extra cash for Christmas. There had been no sign of Ms Struthers at breakfast and she was surprised to find a ‘Do-not-Disturb’ card on the door handle

of the guest's second floor room. The Russia conference was not a scene of late night partying, while as Silla knew Moffat had little to offer in that line.

Gripped by curiosity, she quietly inserted her pass card and the door clicked open. The room seemed deserted but then she heard a voice from the en suite. That door was closed. A few steps were enough to make out the words.

'12 noon and I'm out. You got the GPS co-ordinates?'

It was a phone call. That's why she was speaking so clearly.

'Just remember, it seems like a narrow valley but then it opens right out. The house commands the whole landscape. Weiszacker's tooled up and he's got eyes like a hawk. '

Another pause.

'No, he's on his own, I'm sure of that. Over and out.'

Silla turned lightly on her trainers and let the outer door close soundlessly. Her breathing was shallow. Struthers was a fraud, some kind of criminal aiming to rob Adam Weiszacker. She went downstairs to reception.

'The American woman in 2.04's on *Do Not Disturb*.'

'She's checking out early - 12 noon. So you'll be able to clean it at the end of the shift. No rush mind you as she was booked till tomorrow morning.'

'Thanks.'

What could she do? Silla headed towards the back garden to phone Angus. Here's hoping he was somewhere in the glen with mobile reception.

A nondescript tide of people came and went as usual in the Abington Services car park. The place seemed to advertise its nowhere location, but in fact provided a stopping point between two stretches of hill bound

motorway, and a cross-country route from Ayrshire through Lanarkshire to Edinburgh. It was twenty miles or so north of Moffat.

The four-by-four attracted no special notice as it slid into line. The three men who got out could be classed as seriously dressed hill walkers, with just a dash of mountaineer. If anyone bothered to look, their kit was high cost, all-weather, and they appeared ready to use it, fit and capable. Their vehicle had a new registration, spic and span, with strongly tinted rear windows.

They re-emerged from the Services with coffees and rolls, standing round the car to eat. Then, as if by some mutually understood timing, they dumped everything in general waste, climbed aboard and drove away.

Silla's call hit an already ringing alarm. As Angus hurriedly explained, old Adam had stopped him that morning on the glen road to ask if there had been any strangers around. Angus mentioned the blonde woman as the only person out of the ordinary. 'Spotted her coming,' confirmed Weiszacker, 'but happen I might be expecting some other visitors. Let me know if you see anyone.'

And off he had gone into Moffat as normal. It had seemed a bit strange to Angus, as if they would be unwelcome visitors. Now Silla had articulated an outright threat.

'I'm heading to the police station, Silla, right away. I'm at Granton Farm halfway down, so I'll be there inside ten minutes. Keep an eye on that Struthers woman. I'll tell Bill Ross everything we know.'

'If he's sober, Angus.'

'Aye, but he's no fool. I'll let you know what he says. Speak soon, Silla.'

When Angus arrived at Moffat's cottage-sized police station, Sergeant Ross was manning reception in full dress uniform. The young farmer, clothed as normal in working cord dungarees and a tattered jumper, was nonplussed. He shoved back his thick tangle of brown hair.

‘It’s for the anniversary, Angus. And in case you’re wondering I haven’t had a drink yet.’

‘I wasn’t - ’

‘Why pretend? Aabody kens. What they don’t know though is how it was for folk round here that night.’

The Sergeant’s outright tone suggested that ‘no drink taken today’ might be a slight exaggeration.

‘I’m here about Mr. Weiszacker.’

‘Adam?’

‘Silla overheard a woman at the hotel, calling in someoneby phone to rob him.’

‘The blond American bint? Adam asked me about her.’

‘Aye, Silla said she was curious about Mr. Weiszacker.’

‘This might be a robbery, Angus. But, in my view, based on a when o conversations, Adam Weiszacker knows more than he lets on about the bombing. It’s an obsession, which I share, so I should ken. There’s some connection between him and American involvement with Lockerbie. The timing’s no coincidence.’

The Struthers woman was leaving the hotel at 12 – half an hour ago.’

‘Never mind her. We have to get up to Hill Farm before her reinforcements arrive. You’d better drive.’

Off the Volvo went up the glen road as fast as safety allowed. The wind had softened again but the day had cleared bright and fresh. The cottage was plainly visible on its vantage point. They bumped up the track, parked behind Weiszacker’s car, and headed for the front door.

‘Careful, Angus, there’s a lot of technology fitted around here.’

Ross pressed the buzzer.

‘Adam, it’s Bill, Ross shouted, ‘we’re here to help. Adam, can you hear me?’

They could hear the buzzer ringing inside but there was no other response.

‘Hell, where is he?’

Then from another direction, they heard the noise of a car. A dark blue four-by-four came along the track and three men quickly emerged.

‘Who are you?’ demanded Ross, placing himself between the door and the parked cars.

‘Officials from the American Consulate, officer. We have a concern for Mr. Weiszacker’s safety.’

‘So do we. Sergeant Bill Ross, Police Scotland. Angus Morrison, a local farmer, friend and neighbour of Mr Weiszacker.’

‘Is he at home?’ quizzed the mouthpiece.

‘It seems not.’

‘We have authorisation to search the property.’

‘From whom?’

‘The American Government.’

‘This is Scotland, last time I looked.’

‘Unusual circumstances – and a matter of national security. You seem, Sergeant, to have lost your car, but you have transport.’

‘I’m attending the scene, on duty.’

As this exchange continued, Adam saw that two of the Americans had split round either side of the cottage. They were aiming what looked like hand held digital scanners at the walls.

‘We would advise against that, Sergeant.’

‘Mr. Weiszacker is a respected and well known member of this community. I repeat, I’m here on a logged callout.’

‘Place seems empty,’ reported one of the outriders.

‘So, Sergeant Ross, where could the respected Weiszacker be hanging out?’

‘Maybe he’s at the Spa Well,’ suggested Angus, ‘he often walks there.’ But surely not in an emergency like this, he added silently.

‘Where is it?’

‘Up there. Couple of miles towards Hartfell,’ replied Angus. ‘They call it Merlin’s Well hereabouts.’

‘Alright, we’ll take a trip to this well. He has to be up here somewhere. At least we’ll get a view.’

‘Angus,’ intervened Ross, ‘go down to the farm and alert your father that Mr. Weiszacker might be on the hill, and that a search party is setting out from Hill Cottage. Tell him to put out the word in case anyone has seen him and can let Adam know.’

‘But, Sergeant, I’m - ’

‘Just do it, Angus. I’ll stay with the search party.’

‘We’ll not be needing your company, Sergeant.’

‘Listen, whoever you may be or represent, thirty years ago today your lot turned out at Lockerbie and took over the Tundergarth wreckage. We’re still wondering why. So this time local jurisdiction won’t be ordered off. Either I’m coming or the Dumfries cavalry will be called out now, in force.’

Angus knew this was a bluff. Would these commando types stand by and watch Bill phone in? Even if his phone had a network signal. Was that why he wanted Angus to go?

‘Alright, you’re in the party, but your cavalry’s already countermanded. You can beat it as instructed, boy.’

Angus ran to the Volvo, and reversed round their car. His mind raced as to what Bill Ross wanted him to do.

‘How faraway’s his farm?’

‘Less than a mile.’

‘Will he stay put?’

‘That’s what I told him to do.’

‘Alright, I don’t think this will take too long.’ He unfolded a map on Weiszacker’s car bonnet. ‘But we’ve no time to waste.’

As Ross, pointed out their locations, the two sidekicks raised their rear door and unloaded fatigues, bullet proof vests, and three long range rifles.

‘Just a winter hunt,’ commented the leader, ‘so take us to Merlin’s Well, but first I’ll have your cellphone.’

‘There you are,’ acquiesced Ross. ‘The quickest way is down onto the road and back along there to the Community Hall. The main path runs up the Auchencat Burn and you can access the whole Hartfell area along the river.’

That should give Angus a fifteen, even twenty minute advantage, if he used his native wit.

‘In case anyone has seen him and can let Adam know’. He had to find Weiszacker and warn him, but why did Bill think the American would be near the well?

Angus watched from the cover of Newton stading as the blue car turned round and went back onto the road. Bill was taking them the long way by the main path, leaving him to cut up by the Lochan Burn and onto Well Rigg. He set off swiftly on foot over ground he had known all his life.

By the time he was dropping down the steep side of the Spa gully, darkness was gathering beneath clear skies. There would be a full show of stars with visibility on the tops. He called gently into the gloom.

‘Mr. Weiszacker, are you there?’

A disembodied voice sounded back.

‘I’m here. Are you on your own?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then come along towards the well.’

As Angus worked his way carefully along the rocky path, a figure appeared beyond the well house, waiting for him. It was Weiszacker, but not as Angus knew him. The long white hair was tied back under a band. He was dressed all in black, and as Angus drew level he could see two revolvers strapped in holsters across his chest. What might have been a walking stick was a repeating rifle.

‘Are you alright?’

‘So far, so good. How many of them are there?’

‘Three, but with Sergeant Ross. He’s leading them round by the Auchencat path.’

‘Bill’s a hero, Angus, don’t be fooled. He would have been an infantryman at, what do you call it – Bannockburn. I’ve got ten minutes at the most. Sit beside me for a moment. This is where Merlin hung out right? When he was shafted, and had to recoup his strength. It feels good, to an old ghost like me anyhow.’

Weiszacker pointed to the big rock below the well which as Angus knew gave dry shelter underneath its hollows. There was a rucksack there and a small primus already alight.

‘What’s it about, Mr Weiszacker?’

‘This,’ he stated curtly, ‘holding up what looked like a very small memory stick sealed in close fitting rubber. ‘It’s been up here in the well house for nearly five years.’

‘The bombing?’

‘It’s all in here, Angus. America’s shame; my shame. We let it happen so as two whistleblowers would be silenced. 257 innocent passengers, and eleven more on the ground. But you know all that.’

‘Will you go public now? Is that why they’re after you?’

‘Can’t, not yet anyhow. Time’s not right to be believed. Need to keep ahead for a year or two more. They know it’ll come out eventually, but

just makes them try the harder for now. This darned anniversary gave the top floor the jitters, I suppose, or they turned something up in the ashes.'

'Where are you going to go?'

'Merlin's Crag.'

'That's not on any map.'

Angus was surprised at Weiszacker's local knowledge. The Crag was tucked into the steep side of Arthur's Seat.

'But you use it.'

'Young people – Silla and I used to go there. You can see everything but be completely hidden under the ledges. There's a freshwater spring, but it's a hard scramble up the loose rocks.'

'The eagles' lair, Angus. They'll be tooled, but if it comes to it, I'll take them out one by one.' He indicated the rifle. 'Night sights. Have to be going. But first a small medical precaution.'

Weiszacker held up the rubber stick in the dim light. Then he slipped it into his mouth and took a long swallow from a metal cup which was sitting beside his stove.

'Mineral water, good for the body they say. That's one for an autopsy, if it comes to that.'

'What can I do?'

'Wait here till they come. Tell them which way I've gone. It'll slow them up if they're savvy.'

In a minute, Weiszacker, had everything packed.

'So long, young friend. Give Silla my best, and yours.'

And with a last handshake he leapt the burn and started up the opposite side, agile as a mountain goat. Within minutes he was swallowed into the lowering dark of the gully wall.

The next five minutes felt like the longest Angus had ever lived. But eventually lights appeared at the foot of the gully and bobbed their way towards him. The first to arrive was the talker, clad in fatigues and body armour like a special forces operative.

‘Now here’s a surprise, guys. Our friendly young farmer. Which way?’

‘Up,’ said Angus, indicating the general direction of Hartfell.

‘Great, now it’s a mountain manhunt. Fully armed I’ll bet? Stupid question.’

Angus kept quiet, eyeing the rifles and revolvers the search party was carrying. Then Bill Ross appeared dragging himself along with laboured effort.

‘I’m arresting you, Angus Morrison, for aiding and abetting a suspect.’ He drew breath. ‘And I’m taking you into immediate protective custody. Read your rights later.’

‘Very good, Sergeant. But we’re leaving you and your new found prisoner here.’

‘I’m staying with the search,’ wheezed Bill, but it was plain for all to see that the policeman was unable to go any further.

‘Thank for your help, buddy, but this is where it gets dangerous. We’re splitting up to cover both sides of the main valley. Could be a chopper call, if he’s on the loose at the top. Tape them up.’

The others came over, and tied the two local men, hands behind back, with superfast adhesive tape. Then they put them on the ground and bound their feet together, and to oneanother. Angus was forced to hand over his phone.

‘We’ll get someone to fetch you in the morning. And don’t listen for shots because you won’t hear any. The whole thing will be like something you dreamt. Don’t expect we’ll be seeing you again. Sleep well.’

Then they headed down the gully in single file.

‘Christ almighty,’ muttered Bill, ‘fucking nightmare, and no even a half-bottle.’

‘I’ve got a sheep knife tucked in my boot,’ whispered Angus. ‘Could take a wee while to bend far enough backwards.’

‘What about Adam?’

‘From what I saw, he’ll give as good as he gets.’

Even in his exhaustion, Bill Ross put up a last ditch effort.

‘He might be the Lone Ranger, but right now it’s every man for himself. Get bending.’

Melanie Struthers sat unobtrusively in a corner of the departure lounge at Prestwick. She was aware of her minders hovering at a distance, wary to see her safely off and away. Before anything else could go wrong.

It had been a bloody disaster, with Weiszacker always at least one step ahead. They had tried to call out a helicopter, but that had been vetoed by higher-ups nervous of another public incident on Scottish soil. The Scottish Nationalists were less subservient than London.

So now he could be anywhere, assuming a new identity, and still carrying who knew what inside information. Knowing Weiszacker it would be meticulously documented, filed and evidenced.

She should have killed him herself when she had the chance. This operation was supposed to pave her way from frontline to the top floor. Now she’d be struggling to keep her own grade.

Someone locally had been helping Weiszacker. That girl who kept hanging round her hotel room, Silla? Melanie wished she had time to go back and break her slender little neck.

Whichever matters were resolved through that dark night, they did not include the whereabouts of Adam Weiszacker. He seemed to have merged into the landscapelike a latter day Merlin.

When finally Angus released himself and then Ross, the Sergeant was in a poor way. Half carried, half dragged out of the gully, it was first light before he was hospitalised, by which time the huntsmen had sped off, frustrated of their prey.

When Angus and Silla visited Ross in hospital, he insisted they stick to the missing Weiszacker story, without explanations or additions.

‘Trust old Adam, he’ll deliver when the time’s right. We wouldn’t be believed anyway.’

The Sergeant was quickly retired due to ill health, and went to live in Annan. Silla and Angus moved into Hill Farm Cottage, and brought forward their wedding. That way they could visit the well whenever they wished, and keep an eye on the Crag, watchful for Weiszacker’s return. Their sense of normality was lastingly altered, but then this was where an apocalypse had descended from the skies to consume ordinary lives.

The next biannual Russian conference passed off smoothly at Moffat House Hotel, but without Silla. By then she was a fully fledged infant teacher at the expanding Lockerbie Primary School.