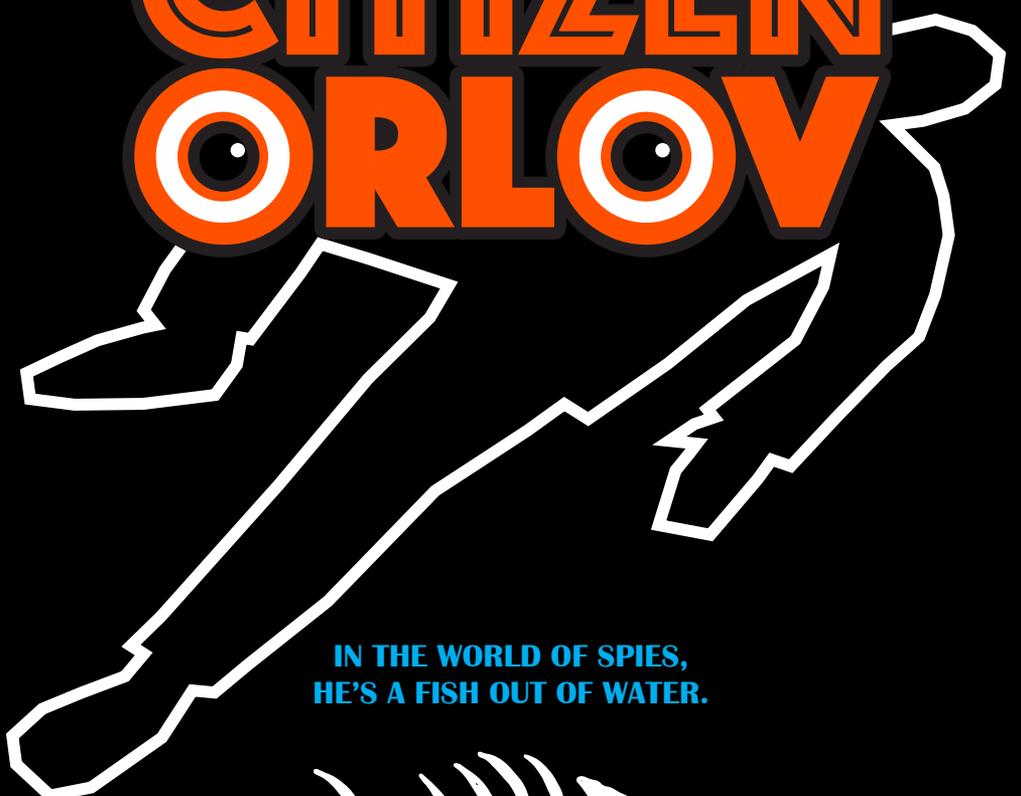
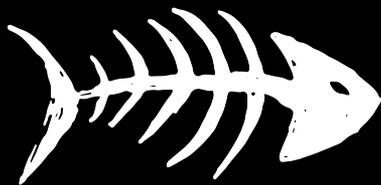




# CITIZEN ORLOV



IN THE WORLD OF SPIES,  
HE'S A FISH OUT OF WATER.



## JONATHAN PAYNE

# CITIZEN ORLOV



# CITIZEN ORLOV



**JONATHAN PAYNE**



**CamCat**  
Books

CamCat Publishing, LLC  
Brentwood, Tennessee 37027  
camcatpublishing.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

© 2023 by Jonathan Payne

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address CamCat Publishing, 101 Creekside Crossing, Suite 280, Brentwood, TN 37027.

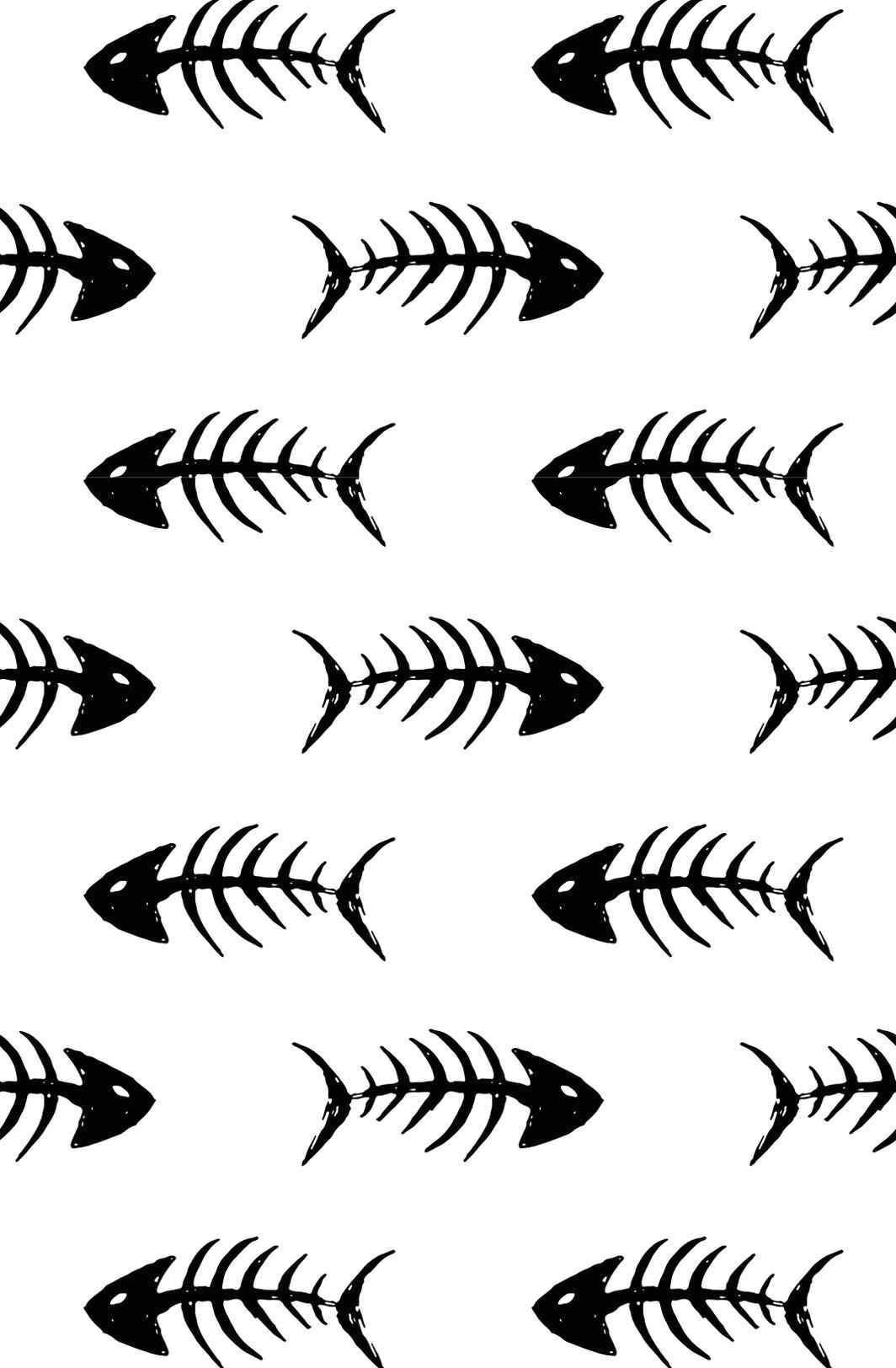
Hardcover ISBN 9780744309010  
Paperback ISBN 9780744309058  
Large-Print Paperback ISBN 9780744309072  
eBook ISBN 9780744309096  
Audiobook ISBN 9780744309119

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
available upon request

Book and cover design by Maryann Appel

FOR SONYA





PART ONE

An Account  
OF THE  
Attempted Assassination  
of His Majesty,  
The King





## CHAPTER ONE

In which our hero meets a new and unexpected challenge

 In a frigid winter's morning in a mountainous region of central Europe, Citizen Orlov, a simple fishmonger, is taking a shortcut along the dank alley behind the Ministries of Security and Intelligence when a telephone begins to ring. He thinks nothing of it and continues on his daily constitutional, his heavy boots crunching the snow between the cobbles.

The ringing continues, becoming louder with each step. A window at the back of the ministry buildings is open, just a little. The ringing telephone sits on a table next to the open window. Orlov stops, troubled by this unusual scene: there is no reason for a window to be open on such a cold day. Since this is the Ministry of either Security or Intelligence, could an open window be a security breach of some kind?

Orlov is tempted to walk away. After all, this telephone call is none of his business. On the other hand, he is an upright and patriotic citizen who would not want to see national security compromised simply because no one was available to answer a telephone

call. He is on the verge of stepping toward the open window when he hears footsteps ahead. A tight group of four soldiers is marching into the alley, rifles on shoulders. He freezes for a second, leans against the wall, and quickly lights a cigarette. By the time the soldiers reach him, Orlov is dragging on the cigarette and working hard to appear nonchalant. The soldiers are palace guardsmen, but the red insignia on their uniforms indicates they are part of the elite unit that protects the Crown Prince, the king's ambitious older son. Orlov nods politely, but the soldiers ignore him and march on at speed.

The telephone is still ringing. Someone very much wants an answer. Orlov stubs his cigarette on the wall and approaches the open window. The telephone is loud in his right ear. Peering through the gap, he sees a small, gloomy storeroom with neatly appointed shelves full of stationery.

Finally, he can stand it no longer. He reaches through the window, picks up the receiver, and pulls it on its long and winding cable out through the window to his ear.

"Hello?" says Orlov, looking up and down the alley to check he is still alone.

"Thank God. Where have you been?" says an agitated voice, distant and crackly. Orlov is unsure what to say. The voice continues. "Kosek. Right now."

"I'm sorry?" says Orlov.

"Kosek. Agent Kosek."

Orlov peers into the storeroom again. "There's no one here," he says.

"Well, fetch him then. And hurry, for God's sake. It's important."

Orlov is sorely tempted to end the call and walk away, but the voice is so angry that he dare not.

"One minute," he says, and lays the receiver on the table. He opens the window wider and, with some considerable effort, pulls himself headfirst into the storeroom, where he tumbles onto the

floor. Picking himself up, he slaps the dust from his overcoat, opens the storeroom door, and peers along the hallway; all is dark and quiet.

With some trepidation, Orlov returns to the telephone. "Hello?" he says.

"Kosek?"

"No, sorry. I'll have to take a message."

The caller is still agitated. "Well, focus on what I'm about to say. It's life and death."

Orlov's hands are shaking. "Hold on," he says, "I'll fetch some paper."

Before he can put the receiver down, the caller explodes with anger. "Are you a simpleton? Do not write this down. Remember it."

"Yes, sir. Sorry," says Orlov. "I'll remember it."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here it is. We could not—repeat not—install it in room six. Don't ask why, it's a long story."

The man is about to continue, but Orlov interrupts him. "Should I include that in the message: 'it's a long story'?"

"Mother of God," shouts the man. "Why do they always give me the village idiot? No. Forget that part. I'll start again."

"Ready," says Orlov.

This time the man speaks slower and more deliberately, as if to a child. "We could not—repeat not—install it in room six. You need to get room seven. It's hidden above the wardrobe. Push the lever up, not down. Repeat that back to me."

Orlov is now shaking all over, and he grimaces as he forces himself to focus. He repeats the message slowly but correctly.

"Whatever else you do, get that message to Kosek, in person. No one else. Lives depend on it. Understood?"

"Understood," says Orlov, and the line goes dead.

Orlov returns the receiver to the telephone and searches for something to write on. He remembers the message now, but for how long? He has no idea who Agent Kosek is, or where. Now that the caller has gone, the only sensible course of action is to make a note. He will destroy the note, once he has found Kosek. On the table he finds a pile of index cards. He writes the message verbatim on a card, folds it once, and tucks it inside his pocketbook.

Standing in the dark storeroom, Orlov wonders how to set about finding Agent Kosek. He considers climbing back into the alley, going around to the front entrance, and presenting himself as a visitor, if he could work out which ministry he is inside. But it's still early and it might take hours to be seen. Worse than that, there is a possibility he would be turned away. He imagines a surly security guard pretending to check the personnel directory, only to turn to him and say, "There's no one of that name here." Perhaps agents never use their real names. Is Kosek a real name or a pseudonym? Orlov decides the better approach is to use the one advantage currently available to him: he is inside the building.

He lowers the sash window to its original position and steps into the hallway, closing the storeroom door behind him. All remains dark and quiet. The hallway runs long and straight in both directions, punctuated only by anonymous doors. He sees nothing to suggest one direction is more promising than the other. Orlov turns right and tiptoes sheepishly along the hallway, now conscious of his boots as they squeak on the polished wooden floors. He walks on and on, eventually meeting a door that opens onto an identical dark corridor.

As he continues, Orlov becomes increasingly conscious that he is not supposed to be here. He imagines an angry bureaucrat bursting out from one of the many office doors to castigate him and march him off to be interrogated. However, he has walked the length of a train and still he has seen no one.

Finally, Orlov sees the warm glow of lamplight seeping around the edge of another dividing door up ahead. He is both relieved and apprehensive. He approaches the door cautiously and puts his ear to it. It sounds like a veritable hive of industry. He takes a deep breath and opens the door onto a scene of frenetic activity. Banks of desks are staffed by serious men, mostly young, in formal suits, both pinstripe and plain; the few women are also young and dressed formally. Some are engaged in animated conversations; some are leaning back in chairs, smoking; others are deep into reading piles of papers. A white-haired woman is distributing china cups full of tea from a wheeled trolley. At the far end of this long room, someone is setting out chairs in front of a blackboard. Above this activity, the warm fug of cigarette smoke is illuminated by high wall lamps. Orlov hesitates, but is soon approached at high speed by a short, rotund man in a three-piece suit. He has a clipboard and a flamboyant manner.

“You’re late,” says the man, gesticulating. “Quickly. Overcoats over there.”

“No, no. You see,” Orlov says, “I’m not really here.”

The man slaps him on the back, taking his coat as they walk. “You seem real to me,” he laughs.

Orlov protests. “I have a message for Agent Kosek.”

The man rolls his eyes. “Do not trouble yourself regarding Agent Kosek. He is late for everything. He will be here in due course.”

He directs Orlov to take a seat at the back of the impromptu classroom, which is by now filling up with eager, young employees. Orlov is suddenly conscious of his age and appearance; his balding head and rough clothes stand out in this group of young, formally dressed professionals. He also feels anxious about being in this room on false pretenses. However, he need only wait until Agent Kosek appears; he will then deliver the message, make his excuses, and leave. He could still make it to the Grand Plaza in time for the market to open.

The flamboyant man, now standing in front of the blackboard, bangs his clipboard down onto a desk to bring the room to order. "Citizens," he says, "I would appreciate your attention." The room falls silent, and he continues. "I am Citizen Molnar, and I will be your instructor today."

Orlov turns to his neighbor, an earnest young man who is writing the instructor's name in a pristine leather notebook. "I'm not supposed to be here," says Orlov. The young man places a finger on his lips. Orlov smiles at him and returns his attention to Molnar, who is writing on the blackboard. Molnar proceeds to talk to the group for some time, but Orlov struggles to follow his meaning.

The instructor repeatedly refers to the group as *recruits*, which adds to Orlov's sense of being in the wrong place. He becomes hot under the collar when Molnar invites every recruit to introduce themselves. One by one the impressive young recruits stand and detail their university degrees and their training with the military or the police. When Orlov's turn comes, he stands and says, "Citizen Orlov. Fishmonger." He is surprised when a ripple of laughter runs through the group.

Orlov is about to sit down again when Molnar intervenes. "Is there anything else you'd like to tell us, citizen?"

Orlov says, "I have a message for Agent Kosek."

"Yes," says Molnar, gesturing for Orlov to sit down, "the agent will be here soon, I'm quite sure."

Orlov's hopes pick up some time later when Molnar says he wants to introduce a guest speaker. Orlov reaches inside his pocketbook to check that the message is still there. But Molnar is interrupted by a colleague whispering in his ear.

"My apologies," says Molnar. "It seems Agent Kosek has been called away on urgent business. However, I'm delighted to say that his colleague, Agent Zelle, is joining us to give you some insight into the day-to-day life of an agent. Agent Zelle."

Orlov is disappointed at the change of plan, but perhaps this colleague will be able to introduce him to Kosek. Taking her place in front of the blackboard is the most beautiful woman Orlov has ever seen. She is young and curvaceous but with a stern, serious expression. Her dark curls tumble over pearls and a flowing gown. Several of the male recruits shift uneasily in their chairs; someone coughs. Agent Zelle seems far too exotic for this stuffy, bureaucratic setting. She speaks with a soft foreign accent that Orlov does not recognize.

“Good morning, citizens,” says Zelle, scanning the group slowly. “I have been asked to share with you something of what you can expect, if you are chosen to work as an agent for the ministry. I can tell you that it is a great honor, but there will also be hardship and danger.”

She paces up and down in front of the blackboard, telling them stories of her life in the field. Orlov is entranced; these real-life tales sound like the adventure books he used to read as a boy. There are secret packages, safe houses, and midnight rendezvous in dangerous locations. There are car chases and shootouts, poisonings and defused bombs. It is so engrossing that, for a while, Orlov forgets that he has no business here aside from finding Kosek.

As he focuses on Zelle’s lilting voice, Orlov is struck by a thought that has never before occurred to him in more than twenty years of fishmongering. Perhaps he is cut out for something more challenging, even thrilling. Perhaps, even at his age, he is capable of taking a position in a ministry such as this one where, instead of standing all day in the cold selling fish, his days would be full of adventure, danger, and even romance. Zelle’s stories fill his head with possibilities. But perhaps this is foolish. After all, he and Citizen Vanev have a good business and a monopoly situation, since theirs is the only fish stall in the Grand Plaza. What’s more, Vanev has always been loyal to him, and he has always tried to be loyal in return. Orlov tries to banish these silly ideas from his mind.

When Agent Zelle finishes, spontaneous applause fills the room. The agent seems surprised, almost embarrassed, and gives a slight curtsy in acknowledgement. She turns to talk to Molnar as the class breaks up and the recruits begin to mingle. Orlov sets off in the direction of Zelle, but several recruits are in his way, now forming into small groups, discussing what they have just heard. Orlov attempts to get past, saying “Excuse me. Sorry. May I . . .” but by the time he reaches the blackboard, Agent Zelle has gone.

“Is everything all right, citizen?” asks Molnar, seeing Orlov’s distress.

“I really need to see Kosek,” says Orlov. “It’s very important. I have a message for him.”

“I’m sure he’ll be here, before induction is completed,” says Molnar. “He always likes to meet the new recruits.”

“That is what I was trying to explain,” says Orlov. He gestures in the direction of the window through which he climbed. He is about to explain his entry to the building, but thinks better of it. “I’m not supposed to be here.”

Molnar eyes him with a puzzled expression. “I assure you, citizen,” he says, “that we rarely make mistakes.” He brandishes his clipboard, showing Orlov a sheet of heavy, watermarked paper with a list of neatly typewritten names. Molnar runs his finger down the list ostentatiously, stopping in the middle of the page. “Here we are,” he says. “Orlov.”



## CHAPTER TWO

**In which our hero sets out on a journey**

**T**he next morning, Citizen Orlov forgoes his daily constitutional and sets out early for the Grand Plaza. In consideration of his new situation, he wears the dark suit he last wore at his father's funeral. It appears that the waistband has shrunk since those days, but Orlov finds that he can tuck it under his belly by wearing the trousers a little lower. This unattractive arrangement is hidden by his heavy overcoat, since it is another frigid day.

As he walks to the market, Orlov's head is full of possibilities. He understands that very few recruits are chosen to be agents. Most of the positions in the ministry are mundane and menial—clerks, copyists, mailroom operatives, and the like. And he should remember that no one has offered him anything so far. He needs to focus on delivering the telephone message. Already a day has gone by, and he has failed to find Agent Kosek. If he can find Kosek today and successfully deliver the message, perhaps that will stand him in good stead when the ministry comes to decide on the allocation of positions. Not wanting to incur the considerable wrath of his employer,

Orlov determines to tell Vanev only about his short-term task, for now. He will keep the possibility of a position at the ministry to himself, until it is confirmed.

Orlov is disappointed, but not surprised, to see that Citizen Vanev has arrived at the market stall before him. Vanev—an obese, unshaven man who perpetually wears the same fish-stained overalls—is busy setting out the wooden display boxes. In a vain attempt to lessen the inevitable anger of his employer, Orlov rushes up to the stall, grabs a bag of ice, and begins to fill a display box.

“So, he’s not dead after all,” says Vanev.

“My apologies, citizen,” says Orlov.

“What happened yesterday?” asks Vanev. “I was slaving away over cold fish all day without so much as a cigarette break.”

“I have a job,” says Orlov.

“Exactly,” says Vanev, slamming a box full of ice into position. “And it’s traditional to do your job, if you expect to get paid for it.”

“No,” says Orlov, “for the government.”

Vanev stops in his tracks. “Doing what?”

“I’m not sure, exactly,” says Orlov, “but it’s very important.”

“Which ministry?” asks Vanev.

Orlov hesitates. “Security. Or perhaps Intelligence.”

Vanev continues. “So, you don’t know what the job is or who you’re working for, but you’re going to abandon me anyway. Sounds like an excellent plan.”

“I won’t be gone forever,” says Orlov. “There’s just one task I need to complete. It’s life and death. As soon as that’s done, I’ll be back.”

“And how long will this take?” asks Vanev.

“I just have to find someone and deliver a message. That’s all.”

“I need you to be here on Saturday,” says Vanev, reaching over to spread a dozen haddock across the ice. “I have some political business to attend to.”

“The People’s Front,” says Orlov.

“The People’s Front,” repeats Vanev. “One day, you will join us.”

“I don’t care for politics,” says Orlov.

“I don’t care for tyranny,” says Vanev.

“How can you be sure a republic would be an improvement?” asks Orlov.

“How can *you* be sure you or your mother will not end up disappeared, or worse?” asks Vanev.

“Let us leave my mother out of this,” says Orlov, a little more sharply than he had intended.

“I mean no offense,” says Vanev. “I am merely concerned for your wellbeing, as well as my own.”

“I understand,” says Orlov. “But I do not share your conviction that a revolution is in the best interests of our great nation.”

Vanev sighs. “It is the least terrible option available to us.”

Since versions of this exchange have played out between them many times, Orlov knows it is futile. He is anxious not to be late for his appointment at the ministry.

“Do not fear, citizen,” says Orlov, turning to go. “I shall return.” He trudges away across the snow-covered square, pausing while a tram trundles past slowly before he continues down the hill and across the bridge into the government sector.

Orlov arrives at the foot of the stone steps that lead up to the grand front doors of the Ministries of Security, on his left, and Intelligence, on his right. He felt sure, while walking here, that he would know which door to approach, but now he is singularly lacking in enlightenment. He thinks back to the remarks made yesterday by Citizen Molnar and Agent Zelle; they had plenty to say about security, but then again, they also talked about intelligence. It could be either. He imagines being interrogated by skeptical security guards in the lobby of either or both buildings. Finding this a distinctly unattractive proposition, Orlov walks around to the back of the buildings, where the dark, narrow alley is familiar and comforting compared

with the formal front entrances. He finds the rear entrance through which he and the young recruits exited the previous afternoon, but the door is closed and a surly security guard leans against it, smoking a cigarette. Orlov nods politely and keeps walking, feeling the guard's eyes following him all the way up the alley and around the corner.

Once he is out of sight, Orlov leans against the wall at the end of the Ministry of Security and enjoys a cigarette of his own. He takes a couple of peeks around the corner, but the security guard is still there. He is just about to build up the courage to try one of the front entrances when he hears voices. A gaggle of besuited men is approaching at high speed, led by Citizen Molnar. Orlov stubs his cigarette on the wall and steps forward to attract their attention. Perhaps he can follow them into the building. But Molnar speaks first.

"Ah, the very man," says Molnar, holding out a hand so that one of his aides can pass an envelope to him. He hands the envelope to Orlov. "We need you on the next train to Kufzig," he says. "Your ticket is in here. Check into Pension Residenz. Kosek will meet you there."

Orlov is stunned and for a while is unable to speak. Eventually he says, "I'm not going to be working in the mailroom?"

Molnar looks surprised, and his aides laugh. "We know talent when we see it," says Molnar. "We need you in the field."

"And Kosek will be there?" asks Orlov.

"Yes; he's expecting you," says Molnar.

"What will I be doing?" asks Orlov.

"Kosek will explain your task," says Molnar and begins to walk away.

Orlov calls after him. "How will I recognize him?"

"He will find you," Molnar replies over his shoulder.

Orlov cannot believe his good fortune. He grins involuntarily while watching Molnar and his aides disappear around the corner. Agent Zelle's stories of espionage and danger flash through his head.

He is both elated and nervous. Could he really be about to leave fishmongering behind for the life of an agent? He opens the envelope and finds a first-class ticket to Kufzig, leaving in less than an hour. It is a small town in the mountains about two hours south of the capital. Orlov has visited it only once before, as a child. He has never before travelled in the first-class carriage of a train. He considers returning to the market to explain this change of plan to Vanev, but it is a shorter walk to the railway station. He will find Kosek, deliver the message and, all being well, return in time to cover the stall on Saturday.



ORLOV STEPS OUT onto the platform at Kufzig and pauses to admire the view while fastening his overcoat against the thin, freezing air. The picturesque little town is surrounded by rugged, snow-capped mountains. Well-dressed travelers rush past him, lifting suitcases down from the train. Others run to board before the train continues its journey south. When the train pulls away, Orlov is still in the middle of the platform, admiring the view, and finds himself engulfed by a cloud of steam. By the time the steam has dispersed, all the other passengers have gone on their way, and Orlov is left alone on the platform with a guard, a haggard old man who limps toward his hut as though in a hurry to get out of the cold.

Orlov waves at the guard and walks toward him. "Excuse me," he says. "I'm looking for Pension Residenz."

The guard stops at the door to the hut. "Residenz, you say?"

"Yes," says Orlov. "It was recommended." He is about to say who gave the recommendation, but thinks better of it. "Is it a good place to stay? Reasonable?"

"Oh, yes," says the guard. "Quite good. And quite reasonable. Only . . ." He pauses.

“Only?” asks Orlov.

“Some people mistake it for Penzion Rezidence,” says the guard. “It’s an easy mistake to make.” He heads inside the hut.

Orlov leans into the doorway. “I’m sorry,” he says. “There’s another pension called Rezidence? Here in Kufzig?”

“Oh yes, sir,” says the guard. “It causes all sorts of confusion.”

“I imagine it would,” says Orlov.

“That’s why I always like to check,” says the guard.

“I’m quite sure it’s Pension Residenz that was recommended,” says Orlov, confidently.

“Straight down the hill, sir,” says the guard, “a short walk along Feldgasse—that’s our beautiful main street—and you can’t miss it.”

Orlov thanks the guard and sets out down the hill, admiring the view of the town beneath him. He was confident that Molnar had said *Residenz*, but the farther he walks, the more he wonders if he had misheard *Rezidence*. He would like to call Molnar on the telephone to confirm this but, even if he could find a telephone, he has no idea how to reach the ministry. Only now he realizes that he missed an opportunity this morning to ask Molnar which ministry he works for. Perhaps it would have been embarrassing to admit that he didn’t know, but the embarrassment would have been over in a second, and then he would have been quite sure. As it stands, he will have to live with the uncertainty a little longer. He determines to ask Agent Kosek this evening, as soon as they meet. He hopes Kosek is a kind person, the sort of person who will not be cruel about this simple misunderstanding.

In any case, Orlov is bringing with him an important message, and he is therefore confident of striking up a good rapport with the agent. He will deliver the message, complete whatever task Kosek has in store for him, and return home without delay. Given Citizen Vanev’s mood this morning, he does not want to be away from the market any longer than absolutely necessary.

At the foot of the hill, Orlov sees the sign for Feldgasse and follows it into the heart of the town. The scene in front of him stirs memories of his childhood visit to Kufzig: a quaint main street with a steepled church at one end and, at the other, a square with an ornate fountain. Between these two landmarks, the busy thoroughfare is full of restaurants, bakeries, and street cafés. Half way along Feldgasse, equidistant between the church and the square, sits Pension Residenz. Like many of the pensions in this part of the world, it is a tall, elegant townhouse that was once the home of a wealthy family but has long since been converted into a boarding house, with guest rooms spanning four floors. A faded picture of Beethoven at his piano decorates the sign that hangs above the door.

Now that he has seen the sign clearly showing Pension Residenz, Orlov is feeling more confident that this is the right place. He steps into the cramped reception area and, since no one is at the desk, he rings the bell, which elicits no immediate response. While waiting, Orlov peruses the newspaper rack and sees an interesting headline: Kufzig Prepares for Royal Visit. He considers removing the newspaper from the rack in order to read the article but, before he does so, a curious little woman in thick spectacles appears from the back office and stares at him sideways, as though her peripheral vision is better than her ability to see straight ahead.

“How may I help you?” she says.

“I’d like a room, please,” says Orlov.

“You know the king is visiting?” says the woman.

“I just saw it in the newspaper,” says Orlov.

“Full up,” she says. “Quite full. A lot of people want to see His Majesty. Those people booked in advance. On account of our excellent views along Feldgasse. Those with a balcony can see all the way down to the fountain.”

Orlov is nonplussed. “I was supposed to stay here. I have to meet someone.” She shrugs and Orlov continues. “Could you tell me if,”

he is about to say *agent* but corrects himself just in time, “Citizen Kosek checked in yet?”

“Can’t say,” she says. “Against the rules.”

“But he is booked to stay here?”

“Against the rules.”

“May I leave a message?”

She shakes her head. Then, to Orlov’s surprise, she says, “Go to the Bierkeller later.” She points along the road in the direction of the square. “Every man in town will be there tonight.”

“Why?” asks Orlov.

“Trust me,” she says.

“Is there anywhere else to stay nearby?” says Orlov.

The woman looks at him and for a while seems to be weighing something up. “She might have a room. Across the street.” She pulls a face, as though making this recommendation is distasteful. “She’s always slow to fill up. On account of the inferior views.”

Orlov turns to look out through the front door and across the street. “There’s another boarding house opposite?”

“Directly across the street,” says the woman.

“That wouldn’t be Pension Residence, would it?” asks Orlov.

The woman raises her eyebrows, as though he has used inappropriate language at the dinner table. “If you say so,” she says and disappears into the back office.

Orlov heads outside and crosses the street, where he finds an almost identical townhouse. Hanging above the door, under the words Pension Residence, is a sign with a faded picture of Gustav Mahler waving his conductor’s baton. Orlov steps inside to a similar reception area.

This time, he does not need to ring the bell because someone is at the desk. She looks much like the proprietor opposite, except that her spectacles are not so thick.

“Good day, sir. May I help you?” she says.

Orlov sounds a little more desperate than intended. “Do you have a room?”

The woman looks down at the ledger on the desk. “How many nights?”

“Just tonight, please,” says Orlov. “I’m meeting a colleague this evening. Returning home tomorrow, I hope.”

“You’re not planning to stay for the royal visit, sir?” she asks.

“No, this is strictly business,” says Orlov, and he enjoys how that sounds—much more impressive than fishmongering.

“Room three is the only one available,” says the woman. “It doesn’t have much of a view, but if you’re not staying for the king, I dare say you won’t mind that.”

She fetches the key while Orlov signs the ledger. Room three is a drab affair on the second floor with a restricted view of the street and a shared bathroom in the hall. Since Orlov has no luggage to unpack, he decides to go out again. He takes a stroll around the town, but it is too cold for a prolonged walk. He eats an early dinner of sausages and cabbage at the least expensive restaurant on Feldgasse and then makes his way to the Bierkeller. It is mostly empty when he arrives, and he drinks two beers alone at the bar before the place begins to fill up. It is a literal cellar and a typical pub in most respects, with the addition of a small stage, complete with lights and curtains.

Orlov watches all the newcomers closely, wondering which one is Kosek. By the time he is on to his third beer, Orlov is becoming agitated that Kosek has not made himself known. He does not like the sense of being powerless.

He wants to take control of the situation.

At the other end of the bar, a serious, middle-aged man has been drinking alone for some time. He is well dressed and appears to be surveying the busy cellar with eagle eyes. Orlov might be just a simple fishmonger, but he has good intuition. He picks up his beer, walks slowly toward the man, and leans against the bar next to him.

He takes a sip of beer and smiles at the man, to ensure he has been noticed. The man looks uneasy; he half-smiles back.

“Good evening,” says Orlov.

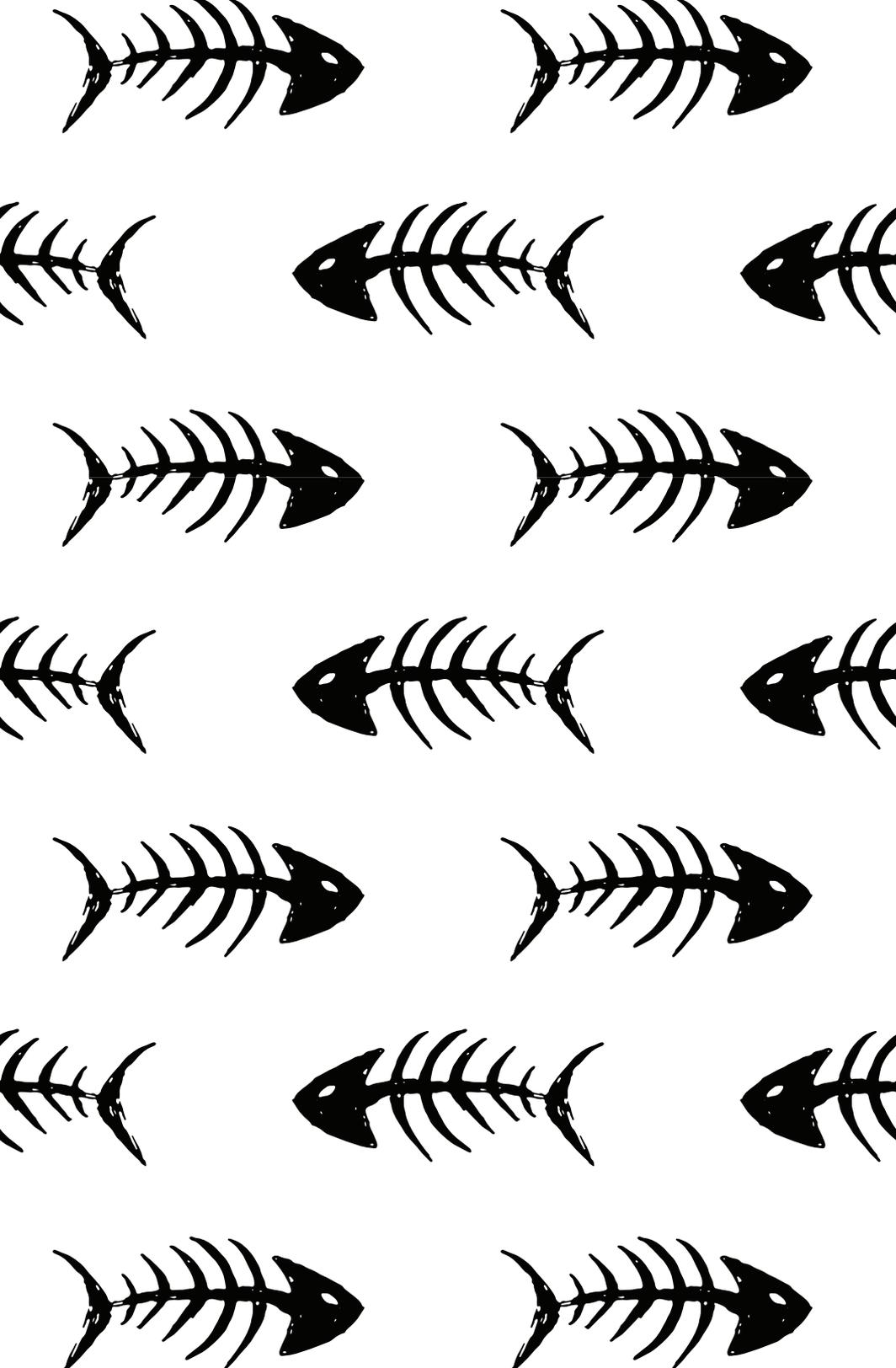
“Evening,” says the man.

“Are you, by any chance, Citizen Kosek?”

“Leave me alone,” says the man. “I’m just here for the show.” He nods toward the stage, where the lights are going up and a weaselly little man with a shaggy moustache calls the room to order.

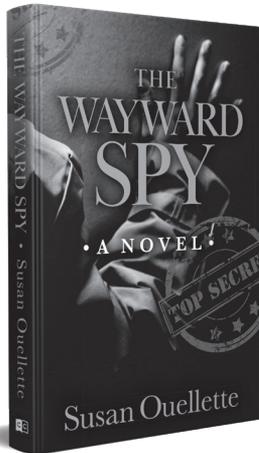
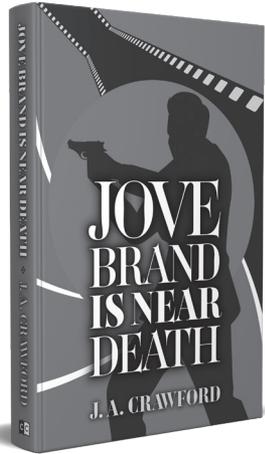
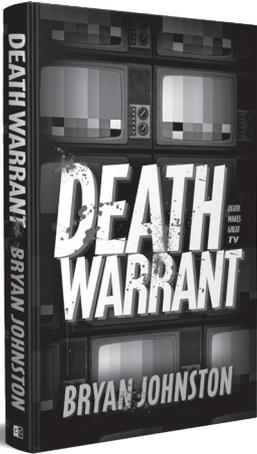
“Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please,” he says in the shrill tones of a carnival barker as oriental music begins to emanate from a tinny loudspeaker. “We are very proud to announce, by popular demand, for one night only, the return of the one, the only, Mata Hari.”

To Orlov’s surprise, the whole cellar erupts in applause. Some men bang their beer glasses on the tables as others stamp their feet. The cacophony dies down as the music swells. From behind the curtain emerges an exotic, barefoot dancer, dressed in nothing aside from carefully placed jewels and flowing veils. She gyrates into the center of the stage to begin her act. Only when she arrives in the full glow of the spotlights does Orlov sense that this dancer is familiar. In fact, he saw her only yesterday. It is Agent Zelle.



MORE THRILLING READS FROM CAMCAT BOOKS

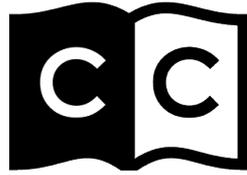
---



---

Available now, wherever books are sold.





# CamCat Books

VISIT US ONLINE FOR MORE BOOKS TO LIVE IN:  
[CAMCATBOOKS.COM](http://CAMCATBOOKS.COM)



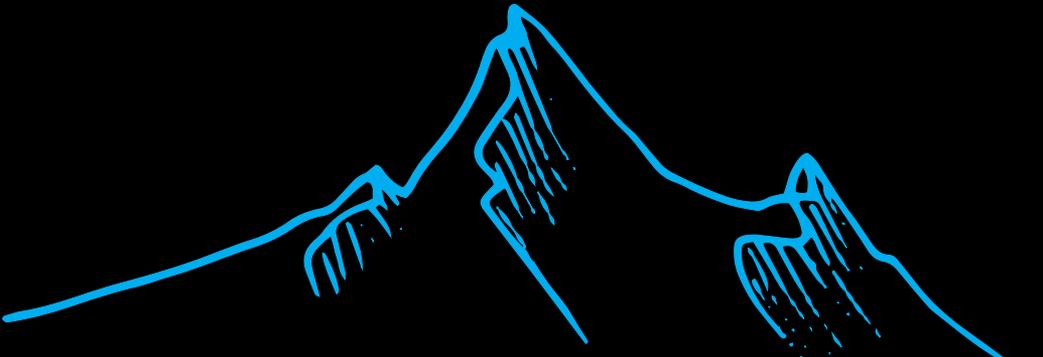
CamCatBooks



@CamCatBooks



@CamCat\_Books



# NOT EVERY FISHMONGER CAN BE A SECRET AGENT.

**J**ourney to an unnamed mountainous country in central Europe at the end of the Great War. Enter Citizen Orlov, a simple fishmonger and an honest, upright citizen, who stumbles into the Ministry of Security, and consequently a hidden world of espionage and secrecy. His first assignment? To safeguard the king when he visits the scenic town of Kufzig.

But Orlov soon discovers that his ministry handler, the alluring but-couldn't-possibly-be-a-femme-fatale Agent Zelle, is planning not to protect the king but to assassinate him. Caught in a web of plot and counterplot, confusing loyalties, and explosive betrayals, Orlov finds himself on trial for murder. He has an opportunity to clear his name—but with his friends, mother, and fellow citizens' lives in the balance, freedom comes at a high cost.



*“We could not—repeat not—install it in room six.  
You need to get room seven. It’s hidden above the wardrobe.  
Push the lever up, not down. Repeat that back to me.”*



Cover Design: Maryann Appel  
Illustration: Robin Olimb / LesyaD / Anastasia Vintovkina



BE THE FIRST TO HEAR about new CamCat titles, author events, and exclusive content! Sign up at [camcatbooks.com](http://camcatbooks.com) for the CamCat Publishing newsletter.