

## The Clouds Part

For more than two years I was left in peace—or perhaps armed neutrality would be a better word. I had no illusions that my file was closed; but no charges had been proffered and I remained on friendly terms with a few cx-colleagues in MIS and SIS. It was an anxious period. I had my £2,000 and the prospect of another £2,000, and perhaps two or three thousand more in the shape of insurance policies. Lucrative employment remained a distant aspiration since when I applied for work, the first question asked was always \*ny I had left the Foreign Service. My best chance seemed to be journalism; my thoughts turned to Spain where I had made my first breakthrough. I had no j<sup>TM</sup> could soon pick up the threads again, and frh ik ^ \* \* \* Sp<sup>TM</sup> destination would strengthen » hands of those who still doubted my guilt. Madrid hardly be further from the Iron Curtain. So I ° to Skardon asking for the return of my pass-

port. It reached me by return of post—without comment.

My Spanish venture was of short duration. I had scarcely been in Madrid three weeks when I received a letter offering me a job in the City. The salary mentioned was modest but commensurate with my total ignorance of business procedures. So for a year I dabbled in general trading, commuting daily between Rickmansworth and Liverpool Street. I was totally unsuited to the job, and was relieved when the firm for which I worked teetered towards bankruptcy owing to the rash behaviour of its shipping department with which, fortunately, I had nothing to do. My employers were happy enough when I took myself off, thus relieving them of the burden of my salary. From then on, I made some sort of a living from free-lance journalism, a most arduous occupation calling for a depressing amount of personal salesmanship—never my strong point.

This rather dreary existence was enlivened by a curious episode which began with a letter from Captain Kerby, M.P. for Arundel and Horsham, who asked me to tea at the House of Commons. After explaining that he himself had been sacked from the Foreign Service, he told me candidly that he was gunning for the Foreign Office in general and Anthony Eden in particular. His own position, he said, was impregnable; he had one of the safest seats in the country and his local Conservative Association ate out of his hand. He had heard that I had also been sacked from the Foreign Service, and had surmised that I must suffer a sense of grievance. If I could give him any dirt o

throw at the Foreign Office, he would be most grateful. There was much to the same effect from my host, accompanied by gusts of laughter at his own sallies. I replied that I fully understood the reason behind the Foreign Office's request for my resignation, and left Kerby abruptly. I mention the incident because Kerby was to impinge on my life again in a different role.

Several times during this period, I revived the idea of escape. The plan, originally designed for American conditions, required only minor modifications to adapt it to European circumstances. Indeed, in some ways it would be easier from London than from Washington. But each time I considered the project, the emergency appeared to be less than extreme. Finally, an event occurred which put it right out of my head. I received, through the most ingenious of routes, a message from my Soviet friends, conjuring me to be of good cheer and presaging an early resumption of relations. It changed drastically the whole complexion of the case. I was no longer alone.

It was therefore with refreshed spirit that I watched the next storm gather. It began with the defection of Petrov in Australia and some not very revealing remarks he made about Burgess and Maclean. Fleet Street raised the familiar hue and cry after the Third Man, but this time there was a difference. Somebody leaked my name to the newspapers. It is quite astonishing, in view of the hundreds of thousands of pounds which the popular press must have spent in ferreting out official misinformation about the missing diplomats, that it took them four years to get on to me—then only because of an indiscretion. One of my

SIS friends told me that the leak came from a retired senior officer of the Metropolitan Police, a gentleman we both knew for his loose tongue. This idea seemed quite plausible since the crime reporters were the first to get the story. In connection with the Third Man, the *Daily Express* mentioned a "security officer" of the British Embassy in Washington who had been asked to resign from the service. It was a characteristic inaccuracy; I was never a security officer. But it was near enough to prepare me to slap a libel suit on the first newspaper to mention my name.

I soon had my first visitor from Fleet Street. He telephoned from London, asking for an interview. I suggested that he should put his questions in writing. Two hours later, he called again from the station, and I decided to show him the form. I told him that I would say nothing whatever unless he gave me a written guarantee that not a word would be printed without my approval. I explained that most of my knowledge of the Burgess-Maclean case came from official sources, and that I would therefore lay myself open to a charge under the Official Secrets Act if I discussed it. After telephoning his editor, he went away empty-handed. But then the press closed in.

I should explain that I had moved from Hertfordshire to Sussex, and was living in Crowborough, midway between Uckfield and Eridge. By a lucky coincidence, I was not the only attraction in the neighbourhood, for Princess Margaret was staying at Uckfield and Peter Townsend at Eridge. The reporters would cover the Princess in the morning and Townsend in the afternoon, or vice versa. Either way, they

swarmed round me at lunchtime. It was lucky in two ways. First, the fact that T was king pestered in such an exalted company swung local opinion in my favour. My stalwart gardener offered to put a fork through any reporter I cared to indicate. Second, the regularity of the reporters' movements enabled me to avoid them by the simple expedient of advancing my clock three hours. I got up at five, breakfasted at six, had lunch at nine-thirty, and was deep in Ashdown Forest when the press converged on my house. When I got back at three, they had vanished. The system failed only once. A lady from the *Sunday Pictorial* got into the house late one Saturday night to ask for urgent comment on a "very damaging article" written by my friend Captain Kerby, and due to appear the following morning. I declined to read it, declined comment, and bundled her out of the house, stopping just short of force. Next morning I bought the *Sunday Pictorial* and found not a word about me. The frothy Captain had got cold feet.

As soon as the furore began, I got into touch with my friends in SIS. They urged me to make no statement that might prejudice the case. The Government had promised a debate on the subject, and it was imperative that no spanner should be thrown in the works. They made two requests. First, that I should submit to one final interrogation, not by MI5 this time, but by two ex-colleagues in SIS. Second, that I should again surrender my passport. I agreed to both. My passport changed hands once more, and I paid two visits to London to answer questions. The interviews followed a familiar pattern which suggested

that no new evidence had been turned up. Meanwhile, the fact that I had made no attempt to escape over a long period was beginning to tell heavily in my favour. With the passage of time, the trail had become stale and muddy; there was murk enough to confuse counsel.

With the spotlight focussed on me, I had cut two appointments with my Soviet friends. But when the date for a third came round, I decided that they probably needed information and that I certainly needed encouragement. It had to be an all day job. I left Crowborough early and drove to Tonbridge where I parked the car and took a train to London. I was last to board from a deserted platform. At Vauxhall I descended and after a good look round took the underground to Tottenham Court Road. There I bought a hat and coat, and wandered around for an hour or two. After a snack lunch at a bar, I did the cinema trick, taking a seat in the back row and slipping out in the middle of a performance. By then, I was virtually certain that I was clean, but still had a few hours to make sure. I wandered round districts which I had never seen before, on foot, by bus, and on foot again. It had been dark for an hour or two before I finally set course for my rendez-vous. What passed there is no concern of the reader.

I was strap-hanging in the underground when I read the news. Looking over my neighbour's shoulder, I saw my name in the headlines of the *Evening Standard*. Colonel Marcus Lipton, M.P. for Brixton, had asked the Prime Minister whether he was determined to go on shielding the dubious Third Man activities

of Mr. Philby. My first reaction was one of intense disappointment. Lipton's remarks were privileged and I could not get at him through the courts. Furthermore, he had shattered my dream of extracting a very-large sum from a Beaverbrook newspaper. But my personal chagrin was soon swallowed up in the need for action. I had already laid plans for the dispersal of my family and had to put them into immediate effect. I then holed up with my mother in her flat in Dravton Gardens and telephoned my SIS friends to tell them that I could no longer keep silence. They agreed that I would have to say something sometime, but again urged me to postpone action until after the debate in the Commons.

There were twelve days to go. I disconnected the doorbell and buried the telephone under a mountain of cushions. My mother forbade me to unscrew the knocker on the ground that it was inaudible anyway. I need not have bothered because the press had broken it from its moorings within two days. The kitchen window had to be curtained day and night because a journalist peering through from the fire-escape had scared the cook. But she was a lady of spirit and kept us well supplied throughout the siege. Meanwhile, I spent the days in careful preparation of my inevitable statement to the press. An awful lot would depend on getting the tone just right. Unless I could force Lipton to retract, I would have no option not to escape.

I fully expected a favourable outcome. I had attended many press conferences before and knew them well. Orderly affairs with everyone asking questions

at once. It was essential for me to keep control of the proceedings for the first half-hour or so, concentrating on the Lipton issue and hammering home the enormity of the accusation from every angle. After that I did not care what they asked me; all my answers were ready. Simple reasoning had brought me to the conclusion that Lipton's charge had been an empty one. I did him the credit of assuming, perhaps wrongly, that he would have passed any hard evidence in his possession to the proper authorities—instead of warning me by blurting it out publicly in the House of Commons. If the authorities had received such hard evidence, from Lipton or anyone else, they would have taken action already and pulled me in. Therefore, neither Lipton nor anyone else had hard evidence. The crucial fact of the situation was the inaction of the security authorities, since they knew ten times more about the case than the combined population of Fleet Street. It was they I had to fear, not the press.

The day of the parliamentary debate came. In his speech to the House on behalf of the Government, Harold Macmillan, the Foreign Secretary, said that I had performed my official duties conscientiously and ably (which was true) and that there was no evidence that I had betrayed the interests of the country (which was literally true). That statement gave me the green light. I removed the cushions from the telephone and asked my mother to tell anyone who called that would be available to visitors at 11 A.M. the following day. Within twenty minutes there were half a do-

calls. Then peace. I telephoned a contact in SIS to warn him of my impending appearance in public, then went to bed and slept for nine hours.

The doorbell began ringing at ten-thirty. But with the necessity for controlling the situation still in mind, I let it ring. I had said eleven o'clock and it was going to be eleven o'clock. On the dot, I opened the door and said: "Jesus Christ!" I had expected perhaps a dozen visitors. What I saw was a spiral of humanity winding down the staircase out of sight. It seemed impossible that they would all get into the living room, but somehow they did. For some five minutes the flash bulbs went off continuously. Then the cameramen disappeared giving us space to breathe. When we got settled, I asked one of the reporters lolling in an armchair to yield his seat to a lady leaning against the door. He shot up as if stung by a wasp, and the lady shyly sat down. It was a lucky little break for me; it confirmed my control of the meeting at the outset.

The conference was extensively reported at the time, and there is no need to recapitulate the questions and answers in detail. I began by passing round a typewritten statement to the effect that, in certain respects, reticence was imposed on me by the Official Secrets Act. With that reservation, I was prepared to answer questions. Of the first half dozen shot at me, one mentioned Lipton and I seized on it. "Ah, Lipton," I said. "That brings us to the heart of the matter." It was not only the press which knew Graham Greene's lies. I then invited Lipton to produce his evidence

for the security authorities or repeat his charge outside the House of Commons. After some twenty minutes, four or five of the reporters excused themselves politely and hurried off. Good, I thought, that looks after the evening papers. I could now relax, so I threw the meeting open to questions. What did I think of Burgess? Was I a friend of Maclean's? How did I account for their disappearance? Where were they? What were my politics? Was I the Third Man? It was easy. After an hour or so, we adjourned to the dining-room where there was beer and sherry. (Luckily, our numbers had dwindled.) There was marked friendliness by now; only the *Daily Express* reporter showed a slight excess of zeal, so I gleefully "no-commented" most of his questions. As I have since learnt that he spent eleven years on the story, "and for five of them did very little else"—I quote from Anthony Purdy's *Burgess and Maclean*—I cannot hold his importunity against him. I can only suggest that he should take a fortnight's course in interrogation with Skardon.

It was past my normal lunchtime when the last of my visitors left. The reports of the conference carried by the evening newspapers left nothing to be desired. The challenge to Lipton was down in black and white in precisely the words I had used. The favourable impression was confirmed, by and large, in the morning papers on the following day. A friendly reporter telephoned to congratulate me on my press. The ba

i Anthony Purdy, *Burgess and Maclean* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1963).

as now in Lipton's court. On the first evening, the BBC reported that he had attended the session of the House but had remained silent. The following evening, he gave in. His exact words were given me by a parliamentary reporter who asked if I had any comment. I told him to call me back in five minutes. In my relief, my first reaction was to congratulate Lipton on a handsome apology. But I decided that it was undeservedly fulsome, and settled for a more non-committal formula: "I think that Colonel Lipton has done the right thing. So far as I am concerned, the incident is now closed." I took my mother round to the local for the first time in two weeks.

The incident was indeed closed, and remained so for more than seven years. The press dropped me like a hot brick. In the light of subsequent events, it is easy to blame Macmillan, and through him the Government, for giving me a clean bill of health. But the blame lies elsewhere. No one in the Government, and particularly no one in the security service, wanted to make a public statement as early as 1955. The evidence was inconclusive; they could not charge me and did not want to clear me. They were forced to take action by the ill-informed hullabaloo in the popular press and by the silly blunder of Marcus Lipton.

For this monumental fiasco, the Beaverbrook press bears a particularly heavy responsibility. It started running and kept it up, blundering but relentless, in pursuance of Beaverbrook's stupid feud with Eden and the Foreign Office. It would be interesting to know the overseas expenditure of the Foreign

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Service with the money squandered by the *Daily Express* in the acquisition of irrelevant snippets of information about the Burgess-Maclean case. But "it is an ill wind turns none to good/" I have Beaverbrook's quirk to thank for seven years of decent livelihood in the nick of time, and of further service to the Soviet cause.