

# **PART ONE**

Money



1

## INKWELL/129

TOP SECRET

FOIA EXEMPT

FROM: Gatekeeping  
TO: Private Office  
SUBJECT: Re: Urgent request for INKWELL update  
DATE: 28 September 2016

1. You asked to be kept informed about this most sensitive of matters.
2. Events beyond our control brought Operation INKWELL to a sudden and violent conclusion this afternoon. We are doing what we can to restrict knowledge of the case within the Service, but the sight of an officer washing blood off his face in the toilets and trying to re-set a broken nose was unusual enough to have triggered the rumour mill. We must be realistic: staff will be talking. INKWELL has attracted considerable attention because of the regrettable characterization of the perpetrator as some sort of Robin Hood figure. There will no doubt be those advising you

to issue an office-wide bulletin downplaying the incident. My own view is that this would be a waste of time. It is, after all, quite unreasonable to ask a community of spies to accept the official version of things and refrain from further enquiry, even – or perhaps especially – when it is their masters making the request.

3. Almost four years ago to this day, you set my team the task of identifying the insider responsible for this series of most unusual security breaches, and of collecting sufficient evidence to enable a prosecution. We agreed at the time that the best deterrent to others of a similar mind would be the news that a traitor had been caught and placed behind bars.
4. It is with regret, now this sorry episode has come to an end, that I can inform you we have been only partially successful. CPS lawyers concluded last week that there is no “smoking gun” in the attached file. Collecting evidence that would stand up in court against an officer with such extensive operational experience proved too much of a challenge, although the CPS does note the existence of a “damning (but ultimately circumstantial) collection of daggers, ropes and candlesticks” within the pages of our INKWELL file.
5. Despite this, I remain of the firm view that INKWELL has been a model of patient and thorough investigation, and that in August DRUMMOND we have identified a grave threat to the integrity of the British intelligence community. Our strategy of confronting him this afternoon with such a detailed, compelling case is undoubtedly what forced him to accept that the game was up, which in turn

triggered his violent outburst and subsequent dismissal. We may not have got the confession we wanted, and there will be those who continue to argue that other than the Egyptian episode the evidence against him is flawed, but the problem has been dealt with. And there is, I maintain in my old-fashioned way, value in the principle of *keeping things quiet*. I know that in our current incarnation as a counter-terrorism agency we view anything not resulting in a prison sentence as a failure, but the reputational damage ensuing from a prosecution of one of our own officers for multiple breaches of the Official Secrets Act would have been huge. We have avoided that outcome, and for this my staff should be congratulated, not least Lawrence, whom I have sent to St Thomas' A & E to be examined for signs of concussion.

6. There is a wider point here about the insider threat. Over the past year we have been working at full stretch dealing with reverberations from events in Beirut. While we remain some way off understanding the full scale of Jonas WORTH's betrayal, it is surely becoming clear that we must broaden our understanding of what a British traitor might look like in this day and age. Concepts of nationality and loyalty are changing, whether we like it or not. This does not mean that we should take our eye off the traditional threat from states such as Russia and China. They will continue to recruit our officers and steal our secrets. But we must reposition our antennae. Inevitably this will require more staff and more resources, at a time when such things are at a premium.

7. I attach for your information five key INKWELL documents (report numbers 001, 023, 046, 071 and 128) that span the years 2012 to 2016. These may prove useful as an aide-memoire in your conversations with Whitehall seniors, as they describe the five acts of disobedience and betrayal for which we assess with a high level of confidence August DRUMMOND was responsible. Of course, there may well be others.
8. Whatever office wags will soon be saying, it is in our view no more than an ironic footnote that WORTH and DRUMMOND were contemporaries at Cambridge.

Charles Remnant  
Head of Gatekeeping

## 2

“You want to keep an eye on your drinking, buddy,” said the man in the seat next to him. “They might call it a bridge between East and West but these days it’s tilting towards Mecca, if you know what I mean.”

Three cups of gin, half a bag of peanuts and two visits to the toilet to get a better look at the young man four rows ahead in 34c and August Drummond still hadn’t finished cataloguing everything that was bothering him. People didn’t understand, his neighbour certainly didn’t understand: drinking wasn’t *leisure* in this context, drinking was *work*. Drinking was making sense of things, it was transformation – of details into observations, of randomness into patterns. 34c’s unfamiliarity with the workings of an overhead locker, for example, or the old socks and the new shoes, or the way he took a copy of *Foreign Affairs* from his bag, peeled off the plastic and raced through the pages in a matter of minutes, astonished by all those words. Drinking was alchemy and magic was all around him. How else could you explain the fact that he was floating at 35,000 feet?

“Erdogan, now he’s your traditional strongman.” He lowered his voice and leaned towards August. “Locks up

journalists, protestors, politicians, even schoolteachers. Make no mistake, he's turning the clock back."

August closed his eyes and imagined the scene: 34c waiting until his mum was watching TV downstairs – a comedy, that way he could hear her laughing, if it was *EastEnders* or *Emmerdale* he wouldn't have a clue until she appeared on the landing. Clothes laid out on the bed, duvet ready to pull down like a shutter if the floorboard creaked. His suit still smelled of vomit from those three months working on nightclub doors but everyone knew the only kind of suit that got stopped at airports was a tracksuit. He'd bought it one size too big, had a whole programme of protein shakes and dawn workouts planned, but the job spat him out ten pounds lighter, what with all the fights, the banter about white boy jihadis, the jokes girls make. He'd use his mum's razor at first light, take the beard off, apply some wax to his new haircut. It'd be a while before it stopped feeling weird putting his hand up and finding nothing there. Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and a second-hand Fodor's from 2007 he bought from a market stall for 50p. Look, what's your problem, the books said, I'm just a tourist. If he'd had the money he would have bought ten, put the matter beyond doubt. I've always wanted to visit the Bosphorus, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, the thingy Sophia. Built in AD 537, it was originally a Greek Orthodox patriarchal basilica. Beautiful.

"I'm not saying you shouldn't drink, buddy, Istanbul's a party town. I'm just saying you need to be aware of the local customs. I once heard of a fella got chased by a

mob for having a couple of Friday beers on the wrong street corner.”

August picked up his book and read:

Dick said no American men had any repose, except himself, and they were seeking an example to confront him with. Things looked black for them – not a man had come into the restaurant for ten minutes without raising his hand to his face.

“Live and let live, that’s my motto. But they’ve got a rule for everything, that’s the problem, and I mean *everything*: alcohol, pork, women, cartoons – you name it. Who would have thought anyone needed a rule about *cartoons*, for Christ’s sake? And heaven help any of us if we cross the line, even if we’re not Muslims, even if we didn’t know there was a line there in the first place.”

A well-dressed American had come in with two women who swooped and fluttered unselfconsciously around a table. Suddenly, he perceived that he was being watched – whereupon his hand rose spasmodically and arranged a phantom bulge in his necktie.

That was it, that was another thing. Deploy in a secret capacity for the first time and you will feel that everyone is watching you. You will see surveillance everywhere; the most innocent of encounters will be freighted with suspicious intent. And if you think everyone is watching you, August thought, you will want to look your best,

especially if you are a young man engaged in something you believe to be heroic, and so without knowing it, while those around you are taking advantage of the gloom to loosen their belts and pick their noses, you will adopt the expression you use when wanting to look your best, for Facebook or Tinder – in this case: jaw clenched, brow furrowed, shoulders raised and pushed forward to broaden the trapezius, deltoids and latissimus dorsi. If 34c had been wearing a necktie he'd have been making sure every few minutes that it was just so.

August was fortunate not to have the same problem himself. The impulse to be a hero had stopped on the day of his wife's death, four months earlier, like a frequency jammed by an enemy he didn't know he had but who was suddenly everywhere, armed to the teeth with weapons that made him ache in ways he had never dreamed possible. He refilled his plastic cup. The alcohol might have done its job – he could close the file on 34c, it was no longer his responsibility to worry about such things – but still more transformation was required. That was the problem with alcohol: it didn't know when to stop. In his case it had a long to-do list, filled with items such as grief, regret and anger. It had to turn a tall, bony, broad-shouldered, darkly dishevelled and comprehensively disgraced spy with a slight stoop and hands like shovels into someone prepared to submit calmly to the humiliations of international travel. It had to stop him crying in public.

His neighbour was still talking.

“Don't get me started on Saudi. Men buried up to their waists, women up to their shoulders. Stones gotta be small

enough that a couple of them alone won't do the job. Dig yourself out in time, you go free, like the Hunger Games. Those are the rules."

"I can imagine how that'd feel."

"What's that, buddy?"

Other transformations were less desirable: sour breath, loss of appetite, rudeness.

"I'm just saying that I can imagine how it'd feel to be trapped at the waist somewhere I'd give anything to escape from, unable to stop an endless barrage of trivial but deadly —"

"Hey. I don't know what... Stewardess spotted you drinking from your duty-free, that's all I'm trying to say. I've seen people taken to one side at the other end for not much more than that. A friendly warning. Sorry to trouble you."

And then the guilt. He hated other people because he hated himself, or so the grief counsellor had said. Was it as simple as that? Another thing to depress him, the idea that his feelings about the world were nothing more than his feelings about himself, written across the sky.

"That came out wrong," he said, offering his hand. "My name's August. Truth is I can't get by with the booze they give you on aeroplanes, I swear they water it down. Would you like some? Come on, I insist. You keep an eye out for the stewardess and I'll... There we go. Sounds like we'll both need something to fortify us, with all those barbarians crowding the gates of Constantinople."

"I'm not saying... Whoa, steady on there, buddy. Got anything to mix with this?"

“It’s expensive stuff, you don’t need a mixer. Look here, it’s flavoured with liquorice, almonds, grains of —”

“Uh, okay —”

“Tell me,” said August, “it sounds like you know this part of the world pretty well.”

“I should do, I spend enough time here. Austria to Azerbaijan and everything in between.”

“Is there even a country between those two?”

“Are you joking? Hungary, Romania, let’s see, Bulgaria —”

“Oh, I thought you meant alphabetically.”

“What? No, no, on a map.”

“My money’s on ambassador, something like that.”

“Agricultural equipment, regional sales manager for the second largest firm in the US. Yourself?”

It was the first time he’d been asked that question since being fired just eight weeks earlier. Civil servant? That certainly didn’t apply any more. Between jobs, unemployed, on a career break? Former spy under investigation for breaches of the Official Secrets Act?

He watched 34c stand up four rows ahead to check for the third time that his rucksack was still in the overhead locker.

“Me?” he said. “Executive recruitment.”

With that, having decided that 34c wasn’t his responsibility, August was suddenly working again, thinking about collection, about agents, about deniability, about risk. He was imagining the operation going wrong, as he’d been trained to do, and watching from 35,000 feet the subsequent investigation running its course like a

river, and building a dam here and weakening the banks there so the water would run off into unimportant fields. Espionage was a complete system, that was its chief advantage to someone in his position – someone looking for distraction. It required minimum input; he could do it without thinking. It was like one of those vacuum cleaners that works its own way discreetly around a room, taking its time and keeping things tidy, powered by the belief that this way is good and that way is bad, as universal a principle as one of those plugs that will fit any socket.

And he had been good at it, too, before it all went wrong in such spectacular fashion: gifted with tenacity, imagination, natural authority and a gently eccentric manner that put people at their ease. If it is true that most people are defined by a number of “facts” that orbit them like vague moons, like space junk, the ones that circled August, truthfully or otherwise, were as follows: that he found it impossible to sit at his desk for any period of time without removing his shoes and socks; that the bump halfway down his long nose had been acquired during a short but reasonably successful amateur career in the boxing ring; that he had once been formally reprimanded for using what was described in the official record as “language unbecoming a representative of Her Majesty’s Government” towards a senior CIA agent; that he’d had a mysteriously aristocratic upbringing, as evidenced by a surprisingly shabby collection of Savile Row suits, the ability to speak Romansh and attendance at a long succession of boarding schools; and that you didn’t want to find yourself sharing a crowded lift with him, as he was

oblivious to the idea that conversation in public spaces should be limited to the blandly impersonal. More than once a colleague had got out a floor early to avoid a looming question or confession.

All that had changed on the day his wife died. Suddenly *that* was the only thing people knew about him – that and the fact he should be avoided where possible, because of behaviour described in a steadily increasing stream of emails to the personnel department as “taciturn, tearful and prickly”, “wilfully reckless to the point of seeking out risk” and “utterly fucking oblivious even to the *idea* of a management chain”.

He had written his own reference and used a clean email address for the Istanbul job, to avoid giving his former employers the opportunity to block his application. Not that he would have been too disappointed if it came to nothing. It was hard to imagine a more dead-end role than the one waiting for him on the third floor of a building in Cihangir. Give it a week and he suspected his new boss would find it hard to imagine a more deadbeat employee.

“Executive recruitment?” asked his neighbour. “And what – your firm won’t fly you business either?” His brown hair was combed in straight lines like a freshly ploughed field. “Fucking cutbacks. With your height too. What are you, six three, six four? Cheap bastards.”

“It’s a point of principle with me,” said August. “Downsizing, you should try it. Last year I had an epiphany, sold my BMW, the cottage in the country, gave twenty Italian suits to my local charity shop.”

“The result being that you don’t look like any executive I’ve ever seen. What, did you sell your washing machine too?”

“One of the perks of being the boss is that no one can tell you what to do.”

“*You’re* the boss? No offence but you look a bit ... what are you, thirty-five? Forty? I thought business prodigies were into yoga, tofu, that kind of thing. Not drinking neat gin from a bag hidden under the seat.”

“I only drink when I fly. I’d be a bag of nerves otherwise.”

“Okay, it’s like that.”

“I’ve got two days of back-to-back interviews followed by an overnight to New York. And perhaps the most difficult client I’ve ever seen.”

“My home town. You recruiting for this client?”

“In theory, yes. In reality, nobody’s good enough. Plenty of interested parties, given the crazy bonus structure. They’re offering upwards of – well, it’s a good package. They keep on saying they’re looking for someone a little different. What does that mean, though, that’s my question.”

“Someone from outside the sector is my guess.”

“Who knows.”

“Okay, Mister Recruiter, you’ve got me interested. Tell me more.”

“What? Oh, I see. Listen, no offence, but it’s a few levels above agriculture salesman.”

“Regional sales manager.”

“Let me top up your medicine there while Nurse Ratched is out of sight.”

“I’m good, thanks. What’s the company?”

“Come on, hold your cup still.”

“American or European?”

“Can’t say, it’s all very hush-hush, they’re still clearing out dead wood.”

“What sector, then?”

“Your firm probably makes a machine for clearing out dead wood, am I right?”

“Finance?”

“No, and it’s not farming either, don’t worry, your job’s safe.”

“Industrial?”

August sighed. “Could be.”

“If they’re paying top dollar it’s got to be either —”

“I’m not going to confirm any names.”

“That sector’s not a million miles from agriculture. As I tell my team, end of the day it’s all about men, money, materials and machines.”

“Or plants, pitchforks and pesticides in your case.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“Tractors then.”

“Our bestselling combine starts at half a million, buddy, and I closed on six of them last quarter. Have you heard the saying ‘sell snow to the Eskimos’?”

“What? No. I like it, though.”

“That’s me all over.”

“Come on, let’s stop talking business and make a toast. To a successful —”

“I mean it, I’ll send you my numbers. You on LinkedIn?”

August thought: now’s as good a time as any. Quicker and considerably rougher round the edges than he would

have liked, but over the years he'd seen too many opportunities missed by people waiting for a perfect opening that never came. Besides, he had to dodge the LinkedIn question somehow.

"I'll tell you what," he said. "See that young guy with gel in his hair? Four rows ahead of us?"

"What? Listen, I've got —"

"In seat 34c. Sell him ... this." He picked up his paperback. "Instead of sending me your numbers, show me how good you are. You can't give it away; I want at least ten dollars. Now, this is the important bit. See if you can find out in the process where he's going and what he's doing there. You must be good at reading people in your line of work. He doesn't look like a tourist, does he, in that cheap suit, but he's got all those books stacked up. So what's his story?"

"I'm not going —"

"If it makes it easier, imagine he's an Eskimo."

It was only as his neighbour was lowering himself into 34b with a wink in August's direction and a loud comment about how the view was better from this side of the plane that he suddenly remembered the book had been a gift. Martha had even written an inscription inside the front cover, just one year ago, on the occasion of his fortieth birthday. What else did he have with her writing on it? He had burned all the letters, all the cards, in a bonfire that made his eyes water for days afterwards, the smoke clinging to him like grief. Two parks police had appeared from nowhere and chased him as far as Battersea Bridge. He wished he'd burned the book too — that he'd burned

everything. Her clothes filled three bin bags. He tried to leave but found himself sitting at a bus stop outside the charity shop for the rest of the day, watching through the window as other women bought pieces of her. He even followed one of them home, the one who bought her pea-green winter coat, and on the worst nights he was ready outside her house long before her morning walk to Clapham Common Tube station, the change at Stockwell, the Earl Grey with skimmed milk from Starbucks and the arrival at work at nine on the dot. Some evenings there were work drinks or a date. He even saw off a mugger once, snapping his wrist and throwing him into a rose bush while she clutched the coat around her and ran off in tears down the street. That night his house felt emptier than ever.

“Piece of cake, buddy.”

“What’s that?” August said, rubbing his face. He couldn’t swear he hadn’t fallen asleep.

“The book, he bought the book.”

“What did he say?”

“I told you, he said yes. Ten US dollars for a rare first edition complete with an inscription from the author’s wife.”

“With a what?”

“Talk about making lemonade. There’s some handwritten thing on the first page that makes no sense at all so I improvised —”

“Hang on, let’s start at the beginning. What’s his name?” asked August.

“Joe or John or something like that.”

“Why’s he wearing a suit?”

“I don’t know, I was trying to sell him a book, remember?”

“Where’s he going?”

“Istanbul would be my guess, Sherlock. Listen, I started telling him how Turkey’s changed, all the years I’ve been going there. He comes across pretty nervous, must be the flying thing, like you. He’s a tourist – I could hardly shut him up about the places he’s going to visit: the Blue Mosque, Topkapı, the spice bazaar. He’s from Trafalgar Square in London. Is that good enough? Now listen to this.” He leaned towards August and lowered his voice. “I told him the book was a gift from the writer’s crazy wife, what was her name, Zorba, Zelda, something like that. Anyway, I spun him a story about her last night in the asylum before she topped herself. Puts the value of the book *through the roof*. His lucky day, though, because I need cash for a cab. You should have heard me, I’ve got her stuck in the tower of this castle, thunder and lightning outside, she uses a bed sheet to fashion a noose —”

“Okay, I think I’ve got it.”

“Then the rafter breaks but it’s too late, she’s writhing in agony as the staff rush in —”

“I get the picture.”

“They can’t bring her back, they search for a suicide note but the only thing they find is this crazy inscription about —”

“Jesus Christ,” said August, “I’ll give you ten dollars to stop talking too, how about that?”

“Hey, what’s your fucking problem?” His neighbour pulled back sharply from their conspiratorial huddle. There was a sudden, audible hush. All around them faces appeared in the gaps between seats like rows of pale fruit in a slot machine. “This was your idea, remember? Don’t look at me like that, what, you want to go back to sleep, you want to go back to your *gin*? What am I doing this for if you’re just snoozing? Who drinks neat gin anyway?” Even 34c was watching them now. “You want some free advice, you’re such a fucking success story, run a comb through your hair, have a shave, have a *shower* for Christ’s sake. You know what one of those is?”

On the plus side, had he still been in government service, August would have had to heap praise upon his agent, however talentless and unproductive he’d been. He would have had to apologize and empathize and agree that no one could have done a better job. He would have had to consider a substantial pay-off to keep him quiet.

“Tell you what, buddy,” he said, turning away and closing his eyes with a sigh. “You keep the ten dollars and we’ll call it quits.”

Perhaps there were some benefits to being on the outside after all.

You couldn’t call it sleep, what came next. Six cups of gin and his mind was nothing like the map on the screen in front of him, each thought like a country with a name and a border and his mind a pixelated plane, crossing neatly and in the straightest possible line from one to the next. Instead he roamed over a dark and illogical landscape: the songs Martha liked to sing, the last words

she had said to him, the way 34c had started four films but not watched more than twelve minutes of any of them. Converts were among the fiercest people August had known – if that’s what 34c was. Often it took so much momentum to propel themselves through the thicketed objections of others and over the line that they ended up further than they had ever expected, in a place they had never imagined.

August felt some sympathy with this. In his own way he was a recent convert too. He would have been the first to admit that by that point the unsurfaced road of grief had done its bit to judder loose the nuts and bolts that held him together. But while walking an anti-surveillance route on his way to meet an agent in Green Park, six weeks after her death, ten weeks before he boarded the flight to Istanbul, he saw the same man – late thirties, short brown hair, athletic build, grey business suit – behind him on no less than three separate occasions.

Things weren’t quite the same after that, and not just because of what he went on to do. It wasn’t that the man in the grey suit had been following him. Rather, August realized that he had seen him three times because they caught the same early train to work from the same exclusive neighbourhood, because they drank the same expensive coffee, because they favoured the same well-maintained streets, because they made the same small choices about when to cross and how fast to walk and when to stop and look at something in a shop window that had caught their eye. It was a poor anti-surveillance route, that’s what the tradecraft instructors would have told him – and with some

justification. Wrong time of day for that part of town, not enough stops. Your route should be able to defeat pure coincidence, which is exactly what this was. But all August could think about was that in a city of ten million people he was living in a town of thousands, one that might cover every geographical corner of the city but was as separate from it and the people who lived there as it was possible to be. It wasn't political, this epiphany. It wasn't about rich and poor or black and white. It wasn't about class. It was an understanding that despite everything he had done, so much of his life still ran like a factory machine along grooves worn into the air around him by routine and conditioning. It was a conversion to the belief that he wouldn't be free until he smashed everything around him to pieces.

The plane banked and tipped August out of his thoughts. Four rows ahead, 34c began his preparations. He stood up to open the overhead locker and August saw him take a small piece of paper from a pocket of his rucksack, glance at it and then feign a cough in order to put it into his mouth and swallow it. As the wheels hit the runway he covered his face with his hands and moved his lips as though in prayer.

It was all for nothing. Two men in cheap suits stood at the end of the gangway, watching the passengers enter the terminal. August saw the confusion in their eyes, and it registered for the first time that he and 34c were the same height and build, with the same dark hair, even if they were a good ten years apart in age. The two men examined a piece of paper and settled on 34c, following him closely,

more concerned with control than discretion. As they turned a corner another three policemen standing to one side looked up and started walking in their direction. At that point even 34c realized what was going to happen. He stopped to tie his shoelace and made a sudden dash for a nearby bathroom door. The two men following him were slowed by the passengers streaming past. When they came out one of them was carrying 34c's rucksack and the other one was holding him by the elbow. There was a red mark on his face and he looked as though he might cry.

August watched the group disappear through a narrow grey door in the corner of the arrival hall. He had to be quick – the bathroom wouldn't stay empty for long. Inside, six cubicles, cisterns behind wall panels, no signs of interference. Anything flushed away would be long gone by now. A padlocked storage cupboard. The ceiling panels were too high to push loose without a broom or a mop handle, even standing on a toilet seat. The bin was a slot in the far wall. He rolled up his sleeve and pushed down through damp bundled paper towels until his fingers touched something. He was surprised – he hadn't expected this. Did he really want it back, along with whatever trouble it was about to get him into?

He waited until he was on the train into the city. The inscription from his wife was still there. And on page 26, newly written in the margin, "Clive Albert Scrivener", on page 173, "Feriköy cemetery, Abide-i Hürriyet Cd.", and on page 210, "b. 1930".

August was working again.