

changed last minute and full information did not arrive to China on time. He was suspecting that the information did not arrive, because no one knew what it would be before he left the country.

“Excuse me, Mr. Chang?”

He looked at the person, who spoke: a short lady at her thirties.

“Yes, my name is Chang,” he replied.

“Sorry I am late. My name is Barova. Please, follow me. My car is outside.”

He followed her.

He did not ask any questions, and he did not need to. He was sure she was here just to take him to a hotel or precinct, but could not provide any information on the subject of a reason he came here for. It was his and only his case. The fact he came to Prague was only because his case was supposed to appear in Prague.

“First time in Czech Republic,” asked Barova.

“Yes,” he answered.

He was looking out of a window – completely different place from what he was used to. Other style of buildings, other style of streets, other style of people. Crowd, colours, noises, and traffic. All that only reminded him how tired he was.

“Tourists. They’re everywhere. They leave a lot of mess and trash when they leave,” commented Barova.

Chang glanced at a bridge in distance. It seemed to be full of people, like all where going there.

“Karlův Most,” said Barova, noticing direction he was looking.

“Number one spot for all tourists.”

They were going in silence for some time and then Barova spoke again:

“You’re not talkative, are you?”

“I am just tired. Are we going to hotel or precinct first?”

“Hotel. There is a reservation for you. You’ll have all the time you need for resting. We promised to help you and we will. Whatever you’ll need just ask me and I’ll do my best to help you.”

“How will I reach you?” he asked.

She stopped on a red light and used this time to take something from back seat. She handed him a folder.

“You have here my phone number if you need something, useful addressed and English-Czech dictionary,” she smiled. “Who knows what may come in handy?”

He nodded.

She pulled over and stopped the car in front of a high building. Chang opened the door, left the car and took his bag. He followed her to the lounge and reception. He did not listen to her bubbling with the hotel worker, besides they were talking in Czech. Then he followed her to the lift to finally enter his room on fifth floor.

“I have a favour to you,” he said, when she places keys on a table by a door and intended to leave.

“Oh, so you can speak longer sentences,” she laughed. “Yes, what can I do for you?”

“Could you bring here all information you have on the case? I do not want to waste my time and wish to read files.”

“Sure thing, but didn’t you say you were tired?”

“I am, but it does not mean I cannot start reading. It does not require much energy.”

“From what I heard reading on this guy requires a lot of energy. And nerves.”

“Will you do it?”

“Yes, sure. I will be here back soon.”

“No need to hurry. I need a shower, dinner and some sleep.”

“All right, but I will not be able to push in the folder under the door. It’s quite thick file.”

“I’ll leave the door unlocked for you. Just leave it there,” he pointed the cupboard next to the door.

“As you wish. Have a nice rest,” she smiled at him, turned away and left the room, closing the door behind her.

“Creepy guy,” she muttered to herself in Czech.

In a meantime Chang opened his bag and took fresh clothes: a turtleneck and pants, socks and underwear. Then he went to the bathroom to take a long shower. He kept standing under water for a long time, thinking. Then he changed water’s temperature too much colder, and kept standing in the shower until he felt coldness. Then he left the bath and changed to fresh clothes.

A quite thick folder of files was laying on a cupboard by the door. Chang finishing drying his hair with a towel and approached the board to take the folder. He threw the towel on his shoulder and sat with the files at the table, which was standing in the middle of the room. He opened the folder and revealed its content. In spite of first impression there was not much information there. Content was mostly pictures, which were completely irrelevant for him and his case. He was interested in newest findings on the matter.

Fortunately all files had a date written in upper right corner and he could easily find the newest ones. He chose those, which had a date of last month and put the rest back to the folder and pushed it away. That was of no interest for him.

He took the papers and lay on a bed with them.

He started to read starting from oldest files. After few sentences he knew which papers were useless and contained no information on the subject that interested him. Quickly he selected those that were important, pushed others off the bed and then started to carefully read what he had.

“Kalina” indeed was in Europe. After her last action (on which there were some files in the folder, but they did not interest Chang) she was planning something big. No one knew what, because if there was any information on it, it always was coded while passed from one criminal to another; but there was one thing certain: it was something big. Very big.

The first proof on it was her newest friend. And that occasion was Chang’s chance to finally put cuffs on her wrists.

“Kalina” aka Olga Biernova was planning a meeting with Takeshi Takumi. Both of them were known to police of Europe and Asia. She was known on both continents, he was known more to Asian police and South American one. However at that time Takumi did not interested Chang. He was another matter and surely there was someone hunting his head. Chang’s attention was directed fully and completely on “Kalina” – former KGB agent, trained to infiltrate Far East, pretty good martial artist and very dangerous person, who first was killing and then asking questions. No one knew how it happened that she became a terrorist. One hypothesis said she got used to money she could illegally collect while being a KGB agent, and which she could not collect in new

Russia so she became doing something that was bringing money – killing for anyone, who would pay enough. There was a rumour – no one ever managed to prove that fact and it could have been only a legend about her – that she was offered to kill one person, but when her victim doubles her pay for keeping him alive and killing the person, who hired her, she switched her target without any hesitation. Another hypothesis said she liked it and new Russian way was not for her.

Whichever hypothesis was true – “Kalina” was dangerous and so far no one managed to catch her. It was very hard to locate her, police was learning on where she was after she had her job done. She was leaving enough traces to know it was she, but not enough to track her down.

But this time police knew where she would appear and it was first real step forward. Catching her and Takumi would be great, but Chinese police did not want to risk an attempt to catch them both at the same time and not catch anyone in result. Takumi was Japanese problem, not his. Not this time at least.

The biggest problem was that no one knew what Kalina looked like. No one saw her face, she was always wearing a Ninja-like suit and all what was known on her looks was nothing more than rumours. Blonde, with blue eyes. Yes – could be, after all the entire thing was seen. But hair?

Chang did not like blondes, he had an impression they were sick or something – bright eyebrows and lashes were making people look naked on their faces.

He put papers away and took his notebook. He intended to write down most important things not to forget them, but when his hand hanged above the paper he realized he did not need to make notes. He had all in his head already, he had been thinking about the case and over-thinking it so many times there was no need to write any reminders.

He was feeling tired, but knew he would not fall asleep. Sleep would be helpful, even required, but in spite that he had not been sleeping for sixteen hours, that he spent that time in a plane, that he was instantly thinking about work he had to do, that his eyes were burning and getting more red with every minute – he knew he would not feel asleep. His mind was not calm, it would not be able to rest; and peace of mind was the first step to restful sleep.

Well, he was wrong. Reading boring papers (if any information they contained would be new they would not be boring, but since he already

knew all that, reading it once again was almost a horror), after many hours without sleep, laying on a bed was not exactly the situation physiology of one's organism would not use: Chang fell asleep almost against his will, but he could not do much about it – he did not even notice when his head laid on a pillow.

He realized he fell asleep when he woke up. First moment of: where am I, who am I and what am I doing here? passed and he glanced at his watch with a slight panic in his eyes. He was not late anywhere, he just feared he wasted his time.

But then – what would happen to his think and reflex if he would be tired tomorrow – or rather today, since the watch told him it was three o'clock in the morning. He should be rested to have clear mind; after all he was here to arrest a dangerous terrorist, who would not hesitate to kill him if she only needed. Actually she would not hesitate to kill him even if she would not be forced to or need to, she was doing it for some sick pleasure she felt of it.

All right, so the decision was made: Chang was going to sleep. Another decision – what time to wake up. Not too early to be rested and not too late not to waste any more time. He called the reception and asked for a wake up call at nine o'clock. That should be enough. Then he went back to sleep, exactly as he was, in clothes, just taking off his shoes.

When the phone rang he was sure they forgot about him and woke him too late. However there was nine o'clock on the clock. He thanked for waking him up and sat. So it was the day. The day of his greatest victory or his greatest loss. That was to be determined.

The thought of trying to arrest Takumi was still tempting, but he decided to fight it totally. Jeopardizing whole mission for fame was not his style. Especially if jeopardizing could mean total loss; that was even less his style.

He brushed his teeth, straightened his clothes, which looked pretty well after the night, serving as his pyjamas, and left the room.

Among all files Barova left for him, there was address of the precinct. He took the card with him and showed it to taxi driver. The man took the card, looked at Chang, then at the card again and then nodded, giving the card back to the Chinese.

The precinct was something completely different the Chang imagined. Too many people running all directions without any order. He had no

idea who he could ask of anything. They all were speaking – or rather yelling, because normal speech would be unheard – in Czech and he had no idea who was who, who was police and who was a citizen. So he kept standing, waiting for someone to noticed him and ask what he needed.

And finally someone noticed him. A policeman (the man was wearing a uniform, so Chang did not have any doubts this one surely was a policeman) approached him and asked something in Czech. Chang inclined his head to the left with a face saying: ‘do I look like someone who speaks Czech?’ and waited. The policeman obviously realized he started wrong way.

“What can I do for you?” he asked with terrible accent that even Chang could hear the man was speaking English very badly.

“My name is Chang,” he replied.

The policeman made a face: “So what?” and the Chinese realized he was not exactly expected here.

“I need to see Barova,” he added. An attempt to explain anything more might fail, who knows how much this Czech would understand.

The word “Barova” was obviously enough, because the policeman smiles a smile: “Ah, now I understand” and gestured for Chang to follow him. Then he headed for stairs and went upstairs to second floor. There he opened the door, revealing a huge room with many people running all directions and yelling at each other in Czech. He went to one of desks and from behind it Barova’s face popped up. She smiled at Chang when she saw him and said something in Czech to the policeman, who brought the Chinese there. The policeman left and Chang stayed alone – if it was possible in this room full of people – with Barova.

“So it’s your big day,” she smiled at him.

“I will need some distraction,” he said.

“You’re going straight to business. All right,” she started to search for something and finally took one of folder from one of three quite big piles of folders on her desk. “We have chosen some officers to help you. According to your request no one will get closer to Biernova and leave her to you.”

“Good.”

“But you don’t mind if we arrest some of them to?”

“As long as it will not ruin my work. I have no interest in others.”

“Even Takumi?”

“He is not priority at the moment.”

“I see. I know Germans want him. They would be glad if you’d arrest him for them.”

“They will have to arrest him themselves. I did not come here to do your or their job.”

“Sure.”

She lowered her head and rummaged on her desk, searching for something again. Chang was standing over her head and waiting. Another waste of time.

“I will need a map. And a meeting with those people, who will be there with me. There are some things I have to explain them.”

“That may be difficult, not all of them speak English.”

“Then find an interpreter.”

“Where?”

Chang sighed.

“You could do it, you speak both English and Czech,” he said calmly.

“Of course, I live here so I speak my own language!”

“So what is the problem?”

She looked at him and he had an impression she was just about to hit him. He did not like her, and he was sure she did not like him.

“There’s no problem,” she replied finally.

“Good. When will be the meeting?”

“In two hours, here, there in that room,” she pointed some door.

“Fine. I will be back here in two hours,” he said, then turned and left without any additional word.

“Creepy guy,” Barova muttered in Czech.

Chang left the building. Good relax and clear mind needed not only sleep but also nutritious food. In simple words: breakfast. He looked around, searching for anything that could resemble a place, when they feed, but there was nothing as far as his sight could reach. Easiest way was to get back ask Barova about some good place with good breakfast, but heading back to that noisy and messy place and talking to her again was more then he could stand on an empty stomach. Asking anyone on the street also did not seem to be a good idea. This nation was not

English educated and how many people should he ask to learn anything?
Another waste of time.

Corners of his lips raised a little – wasting of time became a line in often use lately. Some kind of fetish or something?

He moved. He did not want to go far from the precincts not to get lost, but he had to eat something. Especially since he did not have any supper last evening. Stupid planes.

Finally he spotted a place. He entered it to see a few people eating and a nice and friendly smiling girl, who obviously waited for him to order something. He noticed most of people were eating white balls of something. They seemed like some kind of dumplings. Chang slowly approached the girl, looking round at people, then scratched his head and shrugged. The girl's smile became wider and she pointed a board above her head: there were all sorts of food they served there, and to some were attached pictures. He quickly noticed the dumplings were called “knedlicky” and there were many different kinds of them. First he pointed “knedlicky” and then formed his hand, hiding two fingers and showing her three. She understood he meant “knedlicky no 3” and nodded, then pointed one of free table. He glanced there, then back at her and then smiled back, nodding.

He sat and waited. Soon the girl, who not only collected orders but obviously was a waitress too, placed a plate in front of him. Then she placed next to it some kind of a small pot. He glanced into it – there was something white inside. He hopelessly looked at the girl. She smiled and shook her head, then purred some cream – it was cream inside the pot – on knedlicky. Then she said something in Czech and left.

Knedlicky had something inside. It occurred to be a plum. Each knedlicek had one plum inside, boiled with some cinnamon – generally it was rather sweet dish; and Chang had to admit it was very tasty.

After classical Czech breakfast Chang went back to the precinct. This time he did not wait for anyone to help him and went directly to the second floor in search of his liaison. However she was nowhere to be found. He had no idea who he could ask where to look for her, so he simply sat at her desk and waited. Sooner or later she would have to appear here and take him... right, the meeting was supposed to be in that room over there. He got up and headed for the door. He stopped when he reached them and hesitated: shall he knock or not? Well, being

polite never hurts so he knocked, then opened it and then put his head inside.

There were several people sitting in. They all looked at him, he smiled, still not sure what to do next. If they were his support then they knew who he was, but he had no idea of they were his support.

“Come in,” said one of them finally.

Chang entered and stood in doorway, looking around and wondering if the empty place at the top of a long table was for him.

“You must be this policeman from China,” said the same man. “I am lieutenant Jirasek.”

Chang smiled slightly.

“Officer Chang,” he replied.

“Please sit down,” Jirasek pointed a chair next to him.

“Tea or coffee?” asked someone behind him.

Chang looked that direction to see a young woman.

“No, thank you.”

“Are you sure? It may take some time,” she said. “Barova likes things discussed twice.”

“Once is enough for me.”

“She’s a boss here.”

“Not mine. She is boss of my support.”

“Do not be surprised,” the lady laughed. “Oh, I am so rude. My name is Jana Kominkova.”

Chang nodded.

“Shouldn’t we start already?” he asked.

“Barova is late very very often,” replied Jirasek.

“My time is precious,” Chang was getting irritated.

“Do you want me to look for her?” asked Kominkova.

Chang hesitated: he did not want to tell the girl to run and chase her boss, but then he did not want to sit there and wait for who knows how long. However he did not have to make a decision, because Barova entered the room finally.

“Ah, you’re already here,” she said, noticing the Chinese.

“I am able to find my way,” he replied.

“Fine. Let’s start. Come here.”

Chang got up and approached her while she unrolled a huge piece of paper she brought with her. It occurred to be a map of some building.

“This is the object we are going to visit today,” she started and then repeated it in Czech for non-English speakers. “The trip is going to be dangerous, so be careful. We cannot lose anyone, and we cannot come back with empty hands.”

“More concretes, less metaphors, please,” Chang interrupted her.

Jirasek smiled to himself, trying to hide it from his boss.

“Fine,” barked Barova. “If you are so smart then you tell what you have to say.”

She crossed her arm on her chest and defiantly looked at him.

“Will you interpret it to those who do not understand?” he asked and immediately felt his voice sounded a little too unsurely.

“I will,” she slowly said and sat in a chair.

Chang glanced at Jirasek, who twinkled at him, trying to encourage him.

“You all are my support,” started Chang. “I was sent here to catch Kalina and this is the only thing that interests me. Other persons, including Takumi, are not my concern. You must be warned Kalina works always alone, but Takumi is going to have a small army of his bodyguards and others, who work for him. Your task is to keep them on distance while I take care of Kalina.”

“What if we arrest Takumi?” asked Jirasek.

“You do with him whatever you wish. But expect Japanese, Germans and French to reach their hands for him,” answered Chang.

Someone asked something in Czech and the Chinese waited for Barova to interpret it.

“What if we arrest Kalina?” she asked in the name of a policeman.

“That is not possible,” was Chang’s short answer.

Barova told that the policeman and he asked another short question.

“Why?” she then repeated in English.

“Were you not listening? Your place is not by Kalina. She is my responsibility. You will not get anywhere near her to arrest her. You will be there to distract others and give something them to do that they would not mess when I take care of her. Is that clearer now?”

She translated it back to the Czech and they started a discussion. Chang crossed his arms on his chest and listened to their noise with inclined head. His eyes met Jirasek’s eyes: the Czech smiled at him; for some reason he was not taking part in whole discussion.

“Excuse me,” said Chang finally.