

Range

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I Spy

Jeremy Harmer

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Range **6**

Fiction

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Jeremy Harmer

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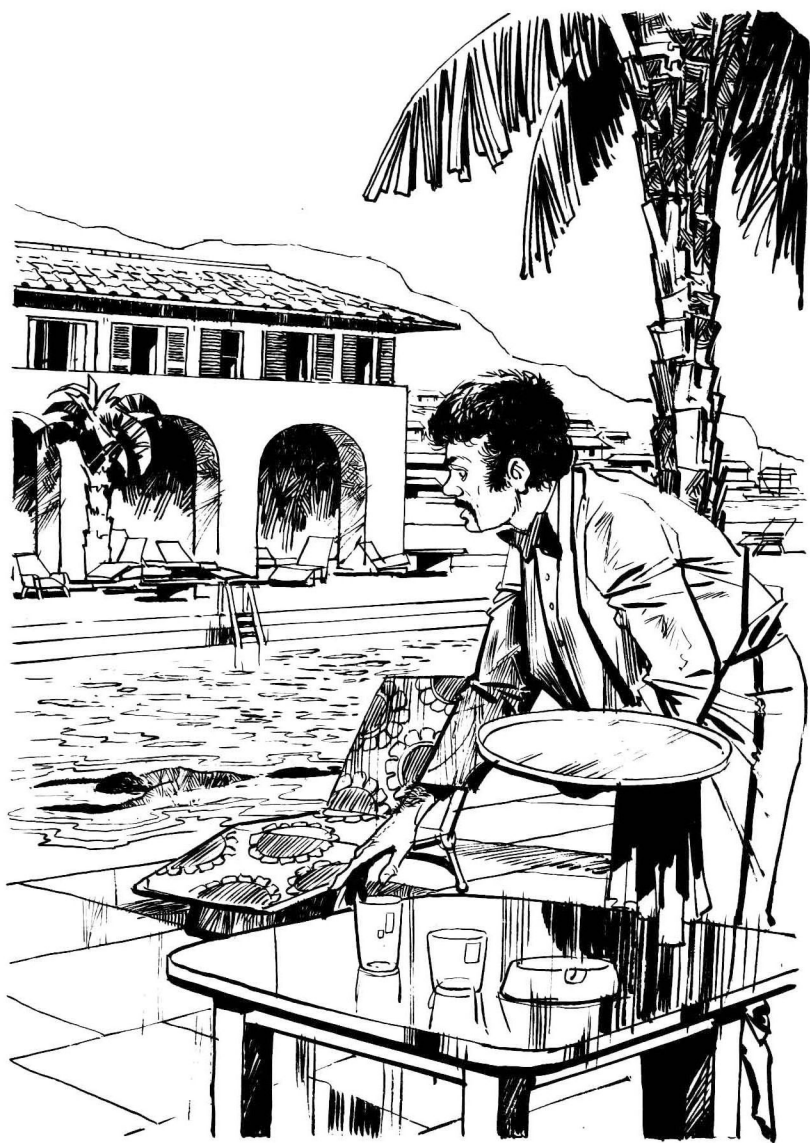
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Prologue Acapulco

On this particular morning it was already very hot by ten o'clock. Even Alejandro, who had been born in Acapulco, felt uncomfortable as he climbed the stairs up the side of the hill to house number six. Alejandro had only been working at Las Brisas for a few weeks.

5

The hotel—if you could call it that—was a collection of tiny white houses with pink roofs on a hillside near the sea front. Each guest had his own little house and each house had its own small swimming pool. Rich and famous people often stayed there, which made it exciting for Alejandro. He had never rubbed shoulders with such people before.

10

The Englishman in Number Six had arrived two days earlier. Alejandro didn't know who he was—so many of the visitors used names like Smith or Jones—but he knew he was someone important. The British Consul had brought him along and booked him in personally. On leaving, he had surprised Alejandro by pressing money into his hand and whispering, 'Ring me if you see anything unusual.' So Alejandro was keeping his eyes open.

15

The first thing he saw was the empty glass on the table by the swimming pool. He picked it up and set it on the tray he was carrying, giving the table an automatic wipe with his polishing cloth. He started towards the house, wondering if he would find the Englishman still in bed. Suddenly a move-

20

-ion (collection)	pink	book (v.)	
-al (personally)	wipe	polish	cloth

25 ment in the pool caught his eye. There was a man in the water, floating face downwards. Breathing hard, Alejandro stood still for a moment and stared. He didn't have to go any closer to the pool to see that the man was dead.

Young as he was, Alejandro had seen dead bodies before, 30 but not so ugly as this. The body was naked and its skin was a strange, sickly colour. He was trembling and very nearly sick as he unlocked the little house and ran to the telephone.

'Hello! Get me the British Consul. Right away! Hurry!'

'What is his number, please?' said a lazy female voice.

35 'I don't know. Look it up. Hurry! It's urgent!'

'Just one moment. Hold the line, please.'

Even then it was a servant who answered. Alejandro had difficulty persuading him to call the Consul. At last he heard the Consul's voice: 'Hello. This is the British Consul speak- 40 ing.'

Tears were standing in Alejandro's eyes. 'Please come quickly, sir. Your friend . . .'

'Who is that speaking?'

'Alejandro, from Las Brisas. Your friend . . . you brought 45 him here. He is dead in the swimming pool.'

'My God! Are you sure?'

'Yes, sir. There is no mistake.'

'I'll come immediately. Don't touch anything. And don't tell anybody else about this.'

naked female tremble urgent God

I. London

Christian opened his eyes slowly and carefully, as though his head might break. It was raining outside the window, but that did not surprise him. 'It's always raining in this country,' he thought. He felt awful. He had drunk too much the night before and a thousand drums seemed to be beating 5 inside his head.

'Pull yourself together!' he said out loud to himself. 'You've got work to do.'

He dragged himself up into a sitting position and stretched his arms. It was a sad fact, but his holiday was over . . . more 10 than over.

Getting up was difficult. Every time he moved his head, his eyes hurt. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and walked, rather unsteadily, to the kitchen. He made some coffee and drank it sitting by the window, watching the 15 traffic move slowly down the wet street. Then he took a shower and got dressed. Eight o'clock. Time to go to work.

At the bus-stop the cold rain hit his face. God, how he hated cold, damp weather! But the fresh air was like a shock 20 treatment. Already he was feeling less miserable. Standing in the bus he could even take an interest in other people's newspapers. 'MEXICO BUYS BRITISH SHIPS' he read. 'Oh well,' he thought, 'nothing to do with me.'

shower

damp

treat(-ment)

miserable



Getting up was difficult. Every time he moved his head, his eyes hurt.

At Trafalgar Square, Christian got off the bus and made 25
his way through the rain to a cheap camera shop.

'Good morning,' said the girl in the shop.

'Good morning, beautiful!' said Christian. He walked to
the back of the shop and disappeared through the door. The
girl smiled to herself and pressed a red button near the light 30
switch.

Christian descended some stairs until he came to a large
iron door. It swung silently open and he walked through.

A girl of about twenty-two sat behind a wooden desk. She
was wearing a very short skirt. The view of her lovely legs 35
was not wasted on Christian, but he had work to do. She
smiled at him warmly.

'Hello. Where have you been?' she asked.

Christian sighed, not wanting to answer that question.

'So that's how it is! And where's the famous Christian 40
Taylor charm?'

Christian saw that he had annoyed her. She was one of
those girls who like a lot of attention. 'Take it easy. I had a
hard night,' he said.

'You ought to keep off whisky and women,' she remarked. 45
'You look in bad shape. Here . . . read this . . . the Chief's
orders. He'll be in soon. You're lucky you're still working
for this Department. You've over-stayed your leave and the
Chief's very angry.'

'Even spies take an occasional holiday,' said Christian. 50

The girl said nothing, but just gave him a pitying look and
handed him a brown envelope. Christian took it from her,
looked at it and went towards a door on his right. It led into
a large room which had no windows. The only furniture was
a desk and three chairs. There was a pile of papers on the 55
floor as well as some brown envelopes and a few bits of rub-

-en (wooden) charm annoy attention
remark envelope

bish. You could tell it didn't belong to anyone in particular. This was Christian's office on the rare occasions when he used one. He shared it with two other people in the Department.

60 He sat down at the desk and took a tin of tobacco from his pocket. Then he got out a thin piece of paper, put some tobacco on it, and rolled his first cigarette of the day. He lit it and sat for two or three minutes blowing out smoke. Then he looked at the envelope again. On the front it had a red cross. This meant that it was 'top secret'. Christian opened the envelope, pulled out the contents, and started to read.

DEPARTMENT Q **TOP SECRET**

Subject: James Henry Lovelace Fitzroy

70 *Date of birth:* 9th January, 1911

Occupation: Minister of Defence

General History:

Oxford LL.B. 1933

Called to the Bar 1936

75 Practised law 1936-39

Secret Service Special Agent, France and Germany
1939-43

Prisoner of War 1943-44

Escaped and returned to England 1944

80 Special duties, North Africa 1944-45

Company lawyer 1945-58

Entered Parliament as Member for Footleworth 1958

Appointed Minister of Defence 1974

Married, three children

tobacco birth minister defence law
lawyer appoint

Christian finished reading and rolled another cigarette. He didn't know why the Chief had made him read about the Minister, but he knew he would soon find out. 85

* * * * *

Nobody knew the Chief's real name. He was a tough man with a red face and a large black moustache. He had been the head of Department Q for ten years. In that time nobody had ever seen him laugh, and he rarely smiled. Life was like that in Department Q. Working there was no joke. 90

Department Q was part of the Secret Service, but few other departments knew that it existed. Agents like Christian worked in secret and worked alone. When they were discovered or arrested, the Department could do nothing for them, because it had to remain secret. The Chief expected his agents to be tough and efficient. If they weren't, they were as good as dead. 95

Christian sat up and straightened his shoulders as he heard the Chief arrive. Through the thin dividing wall he heard him hang up his coat and shout for his secretary. 100

'Bring me a cup of coffee, an electric fire, and tell Christian Taylor I want to see him,' he told her. 'And be quick.' That was the Chief all over, no turning on the charm. 105

When Christian walked in, the Chief had his back to him, reading the newspaper. Christian stood in front of the desk, holding the brown envelope, and waited until the Chief swung his chair round, put the paper down and looked up. He looked hard at Christian. 110

'Why haven't you been to work for two weeks?'

'I was given leave, after a difficult assignment.'

'Ten days, not two weeks. Are you trying to get yourself fired, Taylor?'

tough exist arrest efficient

115 'I wouldn't mind a change of job.'

'Anyone who gets fired from Department Q gets a worse job, not a better one. I see to that. Do well and you might earn yourself a desk job. But it's too late to think of leaving. I won't let you go. You know too much about our work and, in spite of your many bad habits, you're useful to us. As agents go, you're not bad. You're quick-thinking and level-headed and attractive to women. We need you, Taylor. I won't give you permission to leave Department Q, so you'd better make the best of it.'

125 Christian said nothing. There was nothing to say. Besides, the Chief didn't like people who wasted words.

The Chief lit his pipe, which was big and ugly, like the Chief.

'You know Mexico, don't you?'

130 'Yes. I taught English there for two years.'

'Good. You're going there this evening.'

Christian was surprised, even pleased, though he didn't say so. He just waited. The Chief continued, 'We've had orders from the Prime Minister himself. Yesterday morning

135 Fitzroy, our Minister of Defence, was found dead in a swimming pool in Acapulco. He'd gone to Mexico because the Mexicans were interested in buying some boats for their navy. When he died, he was having a three-day holiday before coming back to England. You've got two jobs to do.

140 Find out what happened to the Minister and arrange things with the Mexican police. We want the whole affair kept quiet.

'We've got you a false passport under the name "Inspector Feltham". It says that you're a policeman working for Scotland Yard. No one must suspect otherwise. So keep quiet and let other people do the talking. No disguise is necessary. Just wear a moustache or something!'

level	attractive	permission	affair
false	suspect	disguise	

‘Yes, sir. Why is Department Q working on this?’ asked Christian. ‘Surely it’s a job for the police.’

‘The Prime Minister is anxious to keep the affair secret until we find out what happened to Fitzroy. It’s a political matter. Now go and get ready. Can you leave for London Airport in three hours? My secretary will give you all the necessary papers.’ 150

‘Yes, sir. I’ll be off, then.’ Christian walked towards the door but the Chief spoke again. 155

‘Taylor, I’ve been meaning to ask you something.’

‘What’s that?’

‘What do you put in those rolled cigarettes of yours? They smell awful.’

Christian took a chance and smiled for the first time that morning. ‘I think it’s the same tobacco you put in your pipe, sir.’ 160

He left the office and returned the brown envelope to the girl at the desk outside. She gave him a passport with his photograph in it and the name Feltham on it. For *Occupation* it said, ‘Police Inspector’. Then she gave him an air ticket to Mexico and an envelope full of Mexican money. Christian’s face brightened at the sight of the money. 165

‘Don’t look so happy,’ said the girl. ‘We want a detailed account of how you spend it. Good-bye now. Drop me a postcard.’ 170

Christian blew her a kiss and climbed the stairs to the camera shop. It was pouring with rain in Trafalgar Square.

2. *Acapulco*

'Fasten your seat belt, please.'

Christian woke up. At first he wasn't sure where he was. He didn't recognise the pretty dark girl who was bending over him. Then he remembered. The plane was making its
5 descent towards the airport at Acapulco. He hadn't slept on the journey from London to Mexico City. He'd had too much to think about. But on the short trip to Acapulco he'd had a deep, restful sleep.

Christian loved Mexico. He had only left the country three
10 years before because he was offered a job in the Foreign Office. And he had expected that job to take him straight back to Central America, the place he knew best. That would have been all right. He should have stuck to that job in the Foreign Office.

But one day he had been invited, by a man he didn't know,
15 to join the Secret Service. Christian had accepted. In his present mood he wondered if he had made a big mistake. But, at the time, he hadn't even hesitated. He'd seen all the James Bond films and imagined that the Secret Service was full of excitement and beautiful women. It hadn't turned out
20 quite like that. The pay was bad and the women were few and far between. He couldn't tell anyone what he was doing. He had told his friends so many lies he had hardly any friends left. It was a lonely life. And he often wondered what the purpose of it all was.

belt **hesitate** **wonder** (v.)

Still, he couldn't leave Department Q. The Chief would 25
make sure he never found another job. And there were times
when he felt well satisfied. He knew he was a good agent
and he didn't mind taking risks. In fact, he enjoyed
danger.

As the plane came in to land, he saw the blue sea and the 30
white sand. Well, this was one of the good things—he was
seeing Mexico again. He wondered what situation he would
find when they landed.

* * * * *

'Inspector Feltham?'

'What? Oh, yes.' Christian remembered his false name 35
just in time. He smoothed his moustache to make sure it was
still there, and looked closely at the man who was speaking.
He was a tall, neatly-dressed man with short, fair hair.

'My name's Johnson. I'm the British Consul here. I've got 40
a car outside.'

They walked out to the green Ford in silence, each waiting
for the other to speak. Then Christian asked, 'Was it you
who found the Minister?'

'No. It was Alejandro, who works at the hotel—Las Brisas.
But he rang me at once. I'd asked him to take good care of 45
Fitzroy.' He gave a sad little laugh. 'He rang me up, very
frightened, to say that "the Englishman" was dead.

'Of course I went to the hotel at once and found that it
was true. The Minister was dead in the swimming pool and
had been so for several hours. So I called in the local police 50
and phoned the Prime Minister's Office in London.'

'Do you know what Fitzroy was doing in Mexico?'

'Yes. That was no secret. He'd been in Mexico a week.
He'd had talks with the Mexican Government and had sold

situation **neat(-ly)**

55 them five British Patrol boats. He came here for a few days' rest, under another name, just to enjoy the sunshine.'

'How did he die?'

A shadow seemed to fall across the Consul's face.

'I don't know. The police may be able to tell us. It seems
60 strange, when the pool is so shallow, but he appears to have drowned . . . or had a heart attack. Perhaps the heat . . .'

Christian said nothing. When the Consul spoke again he sounded annoyed. 'Look! We haven't told anybody about his death. We didn't want reporters all over the place before
65 we'd received our orders from England. And now you've come. What for? The Minister had an accident. I'm sorry, because he was a friend of mine. But I could have arranged everything without your help. So why all the mystery?'

'I've been sent to find out what happened,' said Christian.
70 'Where's the body?'

'In the mortuary. Here we are now. Be careful. Don't say much. The men who work there don't know whose body it is. Only the Chief of Police knows that.'

The car stopped and they got out. 'This way,' said the
75 Consul. He led Christian through a door and up some steep stairs. Christian felt himself beginning to sweat. After the cold and rain of London, Acapulco was so hot that every movement was an effort.

They went into a room which had rows and rows of
80 drawers in the walls. It was cooler there. The Consul spoke to a man in a white coat who walked up to one of the drawers and pulled it out. He lifted a white sheet.

The Minister's body was naked. His face was a strange, sickly colour and his staring eyes had an expression of complete despair.
85

Christian turned away and took the tobacco tin from his

sweat effort sheet express (-ion)