



JOHN TRENHAILE NOCTURNE FOR THE GENERAL

'A fast-moving, exciting, compelling
spy story . . . brilliantly described'

DAILY TELEGRAPH

John Trenhaile

John Trenhaile lives in Ashdown Forest with his wife and two children. His bestselling novels include *The Mahjong Spies*, *Krysalis*, *Acts of Betrayal*, *Blood Rules* and *The Tiger of Desire*. He has recently published his eleventh novel, *A Means to Evil*.

Nocturne for the General, first published in 1985, is the third in the bestselling series of three novels by John Trenhaile set in the Soviet Union, hailed by the *New York Daily News* as 'A brilliant trilogy'. The other volumes are *The Man Called Kyril* and *A View from the Square*. *The Man Called Kyril* was made into a highly successful TV film, first broadcast in 1988 under the title *Codename Kyril*.

THE MAN CALLED KYRIL

'Brilliant . . . tremendously exciting.' *Sunday Telegraph*

'A wonderfully tough and fascinating story that kept me guessing to the very end . . . if you liked *Gorky Park*, you'll love this.'

New York Newsday

A VIEW FROM THE SQUARE

'A breath of fresh air . . . fairly oozes authenticity and impending peril. The mood is chilling and the excitement of the manhunt almost tangible.'

Los Angeles Times Book Review

'Compellingly told, a cliffhanger to the very end . . . finishes with the very best of Soviet espionage thrillers.'

Library Journal

NOCTURNE FOR THE GENERAL

'Enormously talented . . . the final chapter to a cold, brilliant trilogy.'

New York Daily News

'Extremely complex yet compelling. One of those rare tales of espionage – a gripping page-turner so well written that it can stand proudly alongside "serious" fiction.'

Daily Telegraph

WORKS BY JOHN TRENHAILE

The Man Called Kyril
A View from the Square
Nocturne for the General
The Mahjong Spies
The Gates of Exquisite View
The Scroll of Benevolence
Krysalis
Acts of Betrayal
Blood Rules
The Tiger of Desire
A Means to Evil

JOHN TRENHAILE

NOCTURNE FOR
THE GENERAL

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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*For Julian Friedmann and Carole Blake
Joint Chiefs of the Main Directorate
With love and gratitude*

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.

The Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene 1

Peace! Would you not rather die
Reeling, – with all the cannons at your ear?
So, at least, would I,
And I may not be here
Tonight, tomorrow morning or next year.
Still I will let you keep your life a little while,
See dear?

I have made you smile.

Charlotte Mew, from 'On the Road to the Sea'

ONE

'*Dedushka* was a railway man also, said Belikov. 'Until they shot him, that is.'

He eyed his companion anxiously, uncertain whether he had perhaps gone too far. But the journalist's face disclosed only polite interest.

'Why did they shoot him?'

Belikov hesitated. He still wasn't quite sure where he was with this Englishman, foisted on him at the last moment by an uncompromising official of the Ministry in Moscow. To speak or to remain silent? Belikov never knew.

'Anti-Soviet activity,' he said at last. 'He joined the wrong union. *Vikzhel*, that was what they called it. The Reds were all for *Vikzhedor*. Big rivals, they were. Granddad ended up arguing with the wrong people.' Belikov shrugged, cocked his head on one side and raised an eyebrow. 'See?'

'More or less. Trade unions are a bit like that where I come from, only they don't shoot each other.'

While Belikov poured more coffee into their cracked mugs Anthony Lowe stood up and wandered over to the window to see if it had stopped snowing.

The scene before him was bleak. A couple of days previously he and a select delegation of other foreign correspondents had accompanied Yakov Belikov from Sverdlovsk up to the small township of Mendelejewa, the end of the branchline from Tobolsk. Railways were hardly his field. Lowe, the Moscow-based correspondent of the London *Times*, normally concerned himself with matters weightier than the five-year plan of the Sverdlovsk

Regional Division. At first he wanted to refuse the assignment, but now he was glad he'd decided to come after all. As a foreign journalist he was not permitted to travel more than twenty-five miles from the Kremlin without official permission, and almost any chance to escape from the capital for a few days was to be welcomed. Then again, it was difficult to refuse an express invitation from the Ministry, although god knew what the TASS mandarins thought they'd find of interest in the glum marches of Siberia. February – hardly the best of months for travel within the Soviet Union. Outside, the narrow street was still thick with snow from last night's fall; in the sticks, in out-of-the-way places like Mendelejewa, street-clearing took time to organize.

He returned to the table and sat down, pushing aside the huge map of the Sverdlovsk region which Belikov had earlier spread out in order to illustrate his points on the proposed development of the branchline north of Mendelejewa to Uwat. Lowe liked his Russian host. At the age of fifty-five Yakov Belikov had made it to chief of the planning sector in his division and he was realistic enough to accept that he wasn't going any farther. By now he had hardly any hair left, his Joe Stalin moustache was a uniform battleship grey and he had finally stopped arguing the toss with the bathroom scales. ('The scales I can fix,' said the black-market repairman down the block. 'The scales I *have* fixed. You I can't fix. Go away.') Lowe too was stouter than a man in his early fifties ought to be, and like Belikov he devoted more and more time to scheming for early retirement on a full pension that wasn't yet due. Before their train reached Mendelejewa both men had discovered a mutual ambition: to blow their accumulated life savings on the best stereo equipment money could buy and spend their declining years, semi-drunk, listening to the entire Beethoven canon, over and over again. So while the French, the Dutch, the Italian and the Swiss trooped out into the snow to hear the chief divisional

engineer earnestly declaim the merits of electric traction over diesel oil, Lowe and Belikov made an unspoken agreement to treat these few days as a little holiday, a brief, companionable respite from Life.

'Tell me about your grandfather.'

Belikov drained his mug as a way of covering his hesitation. He had never been in close contact with a foreigner before. The man from the Ministry had been very specific in his instructions for handling Lowe – 'Make friends with him, Yakov, you'll find him a lot more fun than the rest' – but everybody knew you had to be a bit careful with outsiders, especially newspapermen.

'I never knew him,' he said at last. 'He died before I was born. It's time we went to lunch, come on.'

The two men shouldered their way into heavy overcoats and donned their fur hats. As Belikov slipped the catch on the outer door he began to whistle. Lowe recognized it as Chopin and told him so.

'You're right.'

'I can't quite place it. A nocturne . . . ?'

'Yes.'

'I'll get it, I'll get it, don't tell me.'

As they began to saunter down the nearly deserted street Belikov whistled the melody again, more slowly this time.

'Once more,' said Lowe.

But before Belikov could comply there was an interruption. Somewhere behind them and to one side another voice took up the tune.

'Dar! Dar! Dan-dum-dum-dum-tum!'

'Come on,' said Belikov quickly. 'It's bloody freezing out here.'

But Lowe had already stopped. He turned his head and there, slumped in the scant shelter afforded by a doorway, was the owner of the cracked and discordant voice which had intruded on their private game: a man, quite an old man by the look of him, whose clothes gave only

slight protection against the extreme winter's day. Long, unkempt hair, thin arms and legs, torn trousers, a cotton shirt under some shapeless woollen garment now full of holes, shoes that might have been made of cardboard, mittens . . .

Lowe frowned. There was something familiar about this pitiful wreck of a human being but Lowe couldn't place it, couldn't absolutely lay his hand on his heart and swear, yet there was something, *something* . . .

'Hello,' he said quietly.

The beggar looked up at him, grinning stupidly. At the side of his mouth a bubble of saliva grew and shrank, grew and shrank. The eyes were empty of understanding. Most of his teeth had gone, Lowe noticed, and those that were left were almost black. The antiseptic cold isolated him from the beggar's smell, but Lowe knew he stank, his breath, his body, everything about him stank.

Nevertheless, he moved closer. The beggar raised his arms across his face and squeezed himself even farther into the doorway, as if willing his emaciated body to pass through the wood and stone, away from the piercing interest displayed by the threatening stranger who loomed over him; and Lowe understood that this man had been beaten. Very slowly so as not to frighten the beggar, he knelt down. He had been right about the smell, but that didn't matter. Recognition. He had been on the point of identifying the Chopin nocturne and now he was within an ace of putting a name, yes a *name*, to this heap, this shrunken apology for a man – dammit, it was there, next second he'd have it . . .

Nocturne no. 18. Of course.

Lowe began to whistle the tune softly. For a moment the beggar's face did not change; then, or so it seemed to Lowe, a glimmer of light showed at the back of the soulless eyes, the ghost of a smile gathered at the corners of the slack mouth.

'Dan-dum-dum-dum-tum.'

Lowe smiled and nodded. 'Listen,' he heard Belikov say behind him, 'you want to leave him, OK? Your colleagues'll be coming back soon, won't they wonder . . . ?'

Lowe continued to smile at the beggar, suddenly desperate to preserve the gossamer-thin line of communication between them.

'Listen, it's a crime to beg.' Belikov's voice was becoming urgent, less friendly. 'You want to get us both into trouble?'

'Shut up.'

Chopin. The eighteenth nocturne. Moscow Conservatoire. December 1981. Lead artist.

Dar-dum-te-tum . . .

Lead artist, lead artist . . .

The beggar was not so old, Lowe now realized. And at one time he must have been very good-looking. Moscow Conservatoire. December 1981. Lead artist, lead artist, *lead artist*.

Suddenly his eyes flickered downwards and narrowed with surprise. The hands. My god, he thought, the fingers, ruined, what a mess. An industrial accident? The ghostly miasma of recognition was dissipating quickly; silly of him, strange how the human brain plays such tricks, nothing so treacherous as the human brain . . .

'Here,' he said softly. 'Take this.'

He fumbled in his overcoat pocket, searching blindly for his wallet. Belikov's jealous, frightened eyes bulged at the sight of this latest outrage.

'Six roubles!' he exploded. 'It's too much!'

The beggar took the money and stared, as if unaware of its significance. Lowe folded his own hands around the notes, around the beggar's mittens, averting his eyes from the mauled hands.

'Militia! *Shit!*'

At the end of the street a blue and white car was slowly turning towards them. Lowe uneasily realized that he had placed Belikov in danger while at the same time making

an idiot of himself, all for this beggar, this – he 'tcha'd' in anger, cursing his own folly. Now there would be awkward questions, papers, hostility, suspicion . . .

The car cruised up to them and stopped. Four militiamen got out. Two of them approached the beggar and took him by the arms. At that the beggar cried out in fear, but now his distress touched no answering chord in Lowe's busily working mind.

'Your identification.'

As Lowe placed his *propiska* into the militiaman's black-gloved hand he felt a second of premature relief. This was low-key stuff.

The militiaman scarcely bothered to read the documents which Lowe and Belikov handed over. For a moment his face remained expressionless. Then he said, 'This person has been bothering you, Comrades. We will deal with him. I am sorry that it should have happened.'

Lowe stared at the man with growing professional interest. Three years' residence in the Soviet Union had led him to anticipate a good deal of unpleasantness from any encounter with the police, however trifling. This was unexpected. This was, to a newspaperman, interesting.

The beggar was being searched next to the car. One of the militiamen approached with the two *treshkas* which Lowe had handed over earlier.

'This money belongs to you.'

It was not a question but Lowe and Belikov both shook their heads, the latter with some show of reluctance.

'This money belongs to you,' the militiaman repeated, his eyes fixed on Lowe. When the Englishman did not reply the militiaman forced the notes into his hands, much as Lowe had made the beggar take the money a few minutes previously. Then, just as suddenly as they had arrived and with as little fuss, the militiamen withdrew. They slung the beggar into the back seat of their car, closed the doors and drove off. Lowe stood in the middle of the street and watched them go, Belikov by his side. The

car reached an intersection and turned right, vanishing almost immediately. Belikov plucked Lowe's arm.

'Lunch,' he said aggressively. 'Come. *Please!*'

But Lowe did not move. His gaze was still fixed on the spot where he'd had his last sight of the beggar sitting between the two militiamen on the back seat. Belikov looked greedily at the three-rouble notes in his companion's hands and damned himself for an idiot in not claiming the money when he'd had the chance. Lowe muttered something.

'What?'

'I said . . . ' Lowe seemed to collect himself. He pocketed the notes, replaced his gloves, and turned to face Belikov. 'I said I've remembered the nocturne. Number 18 . . . '

'Yes. Good.'

' . . . And where I last heard it.'

'Ah.'

Lowe put an arm round Belikov's shoulders and the two men began to walk down the street together, as if linked by a common resolve to pretend that the whole recent incident had never occurred.

' . . . And who was playing it.'

In the traction sector of the Sverdlovsk Railway's divisional headquarters there is a fully comprehensive electronic display indicator. In Belikov's eyes this machine was capable of wonderful things. A flick of a switch would cause the entire freight network of the division to light up, with green lines joining all the far-flung railheads. Another switch, and there was the passenger network, the various towns conjoined by white lines along which moved red cursors, indicating trains travelling between stations. Yet another switch, and those lines disappeared, leaving only the principal towns illuminated, with no obvious means of communication between them. Sometimes Belikov would leave his office and stroll down to the first floor to watch this marvel of modern electronics for an hour or

more, while the planning sector got on as best it could without him.

It so happens that the KGB have a similar facility at their headquarters overlooking Moscow's Dzerzhinsky Square, although neither Belikov nor Lowe was aware of this. The KGB's display is not electronic, nor in a sense is it even a display, because it exists only in the mind of the Chairman himself. Still, it exists. Inside the Chairman's brain a switch is pulled and lines appear, connections are made, links forged, until at last a railwayman's nightmare is born, a veritable cat's cradle of criss-cross lines and points and junctions and U-turns and conflicting signals, through which the blood-red cursor of the Chairman's thought must move, now fast, now slow, but always with a purpose, a sense of mission.

Anthony Lowe returned to Moscow with the rest of the press delegation. A few days later he strolled down to Maurice Thorez Embankment to call at the British Embassy where he remained (according to the KGB's logbook) for twenty-seven minutes. And suddenly, in the mind of the Chairman, the display became alive.

The duty officer's instructions were very strict and he obeyed them punctiliously. As soon as he saw the words 'Sight C 24 hours' appear at the top of the printout he reached for his red phone and dialled Sir Richard Bryant's home number. The fact that it was two o'clock in the morning made no difference; anything designated 'Sight C 24 hours' had to be laid before the Head of the Service at once. The telex was waiting on C's desk when, forty-five minutes later, he entered his office on the very top floor. Seeing the coded groups he tut-tutted with annoyance; then he looked again, saw that it was a cipher reserved for Head of Service and departmental chiefs and mentally squared his shoulders.

An hour later he sat back and stared into space while he allowed his thoughts time in which to settle. Then he