

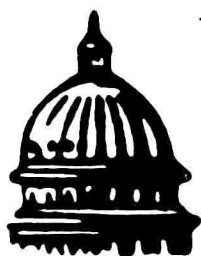
JIM LEHRER



BLUE HEARTS

A N O V E L

A Novel



BLUE HEARTS

Jim Lehrer



RANDOM HOUSE

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BLUE HEARTS

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PART ONE

Charlie

October 7–14, 1990

Charlie's train was at 9:35. He awoke on his own just before 8:00 and ordered a continental breakfast from room service. A danish, a hard roll, orange juice and coffee. He also asked them to bring along a *Washington Post*. A morning that did not start with the *Post* was a rare and deprived morning for Charlie. He read everything in the paper except the Style section, which, except for the art and book criticism, he considered to be mostly overwritten, overblown gossip and drivel. Mary Jane strongly disagreed and always read Style first and thoroughly.

Increasingly, it was the obituaries in the back of the Metro section that interested Charlie the most. Seldom a day went by that he did not read about the demise of someone he knew or worked with at the Agency, usually from emphysema or throat or lung cancer. In the early days, all spies of all ranks and talents from all countries and interests were chain smokers. Charlie was always amused about the fact that he and most American agents smoked Gauloises, Gitanes and other French brands, while he seldom met

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a European operator, East or West, who smoked anything other than American-made Marlboros.

The obits sometimes made him sad but they always made him angry. None of them ever had the real story about what the guy had done for the government and people of the United States. In fact, he was still annoyed about the case of Jack Douglas.

Jack was the CIA officer who thought of the idea of smuggling the manuscripts of Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn and other great Russian novelists out of the Soviet Union for publication in the West. It was a great psychological warfare victory that drove the KGB up the wall. But when Jack Douglas had died twelve days ago, his modest obituary said only that he had been a career intelligence officer with the Central Intelligence Agency. There was not a word about the book triumph. Charlie had gone to Jack's funeral and it wasn't talked of publicly there either.

Charlie had even mentioned it to Bruce Conn Clark. They had run into each other on the night of Jack's funeral at DeCarlo's, a restaurant in the Spring Valley section of Northwest Washington. Clark was the former secretary of state who had also been a young warrior intelligence officer in the 1960s. Charlie had worked with him briefly on a special assignment after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Charlie thought again of Jack Douglas and of who might have died today in the *Post* before stepping into the shower. He had brought only a clean sports shirt and a change of socks and underwear for the brief overnight trip into Washington for the Brookings Institution dinner symposium on economic intelligence gathering in the post-Cold War world.

He was dressed and waiting when the room-service waiter knocked on the door, a pleasant young black man in a white coat who spoke in broken but precise English. Ethiopia, thought Charlie. Maybe the Sudan. Charlie was good at that kind of ID. It was another of those things he did almost automatically out of habit.

The waiter placed the tray on a small conversation table in one

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corner of the room. Charlie only glanced at it and signed the check. And the waiter left. Charlie sat down, poured himself a cup of coffee from the silver coffeepot and then noticed something was missing. The newspaper. Where was the *Post*? Damn!

He went to the door, hoping to catch the waiter. He was gone. Charlie thought about calling back to room service. No, to hell with it. He felt in his pocket to make sure the room key was there and closed the door. I'll go get a paper downstairs myself.

The elevator was ten or so room doors down the hall. He arrived, pushed the down button.

A tremendous explosion rocked him backward and almost knocked him down. He looked back. Smoke was pouring out of a room some ten or so doors up the hall.

So Charlie went home to West Virginia on the 2:35 train. He went without his dirty clothes and his small overnight bag and shaving kit. They were all destroyed in the explosion and fire. When he called Mary Jane to tell her of the change in travel plans he told her somebody had stolen his bag. She had spent all of her married life with worries about awful possibilities that went with her husband's work and there was no need to bring them out of retirement. Not yet, at least.

And, most important, he had never before told her when he was really scared. He was certainly not going to start now.

The train was less than half full, so he had no one next to him, no one to distract him from the scenery or his thoughts. Charlie loved the train ride to and from Washington. The states of Maryland and West Virginia ran it as a subsidized commuter train seventy-five miles up the Potomac River to Martinsburg. It was early October, his favorite time of the year everywhere, but particularly on the train. The trees were red and yellow and purple, the sky was a soft, clean blue and the combination always reminded

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Charlie of a quilt his grandmother had on her bed in Joplin. Joplin, Missouri, was where Charlie was born, grew up and got much of what was in him that was important.

His thoughts. Detective Sergeant Linwood Bock of the Metropolitan D.C. Police was in them for a while. Charlie had always been partial to cops because he felt they and schoolteachers were the only real daily heroes in America. But on a one-to-one basis cops could be difficult to handle; the better they were, the harder. Bock, a Vietnam vet in his forties with a west North Carolina accent, was one of those. He would not accept Charlie's line that he had no idea why somebody would bomb his hotel room. In the old days Charlie would simply have given him a name and number to call. That name and number would have supplied whatever information Bock needed to quit asking questions. That option was not available anymore. Charlie deflected Bock for the time being, but he knew he would be back after laboratory test results were available and some more interviewing of the room-service waiter and other hotel employees was completed.

Charlie went through the possibilities, beginning with the one he tried to peddle to Bock. Mistaken identity. The bomb was meant for somebody other than me, a retired government bureaucrat about to catch a train back to his peaceful life as an innkeeper in the panhandle of West Virginia. Bock clearly did not buy it.

What Bock did or did not buy was the least of it. What did he, Charlie himself, buy? Could it have been a mistake? Could he dare believe it was a mistake? The intended victim was not Charlie Henderson, oh, no, not Charlie Henderson.

But on the other hand, what if it was no mistake? That blown-up breakfast tray was meant to be mine. So who would want me dead?

He ran through the current "consultancies" he was doing for the Agency. One had to do with helping the new Hungarian government determine which of their old Communist government's intelligence officers should be fired, retired or indicted. Another was nothing more than looking at a few organizational charts for Philippine intelligence to see if a planned reorganization made sense.

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Neither had any protruding sticklers that he could think of. They were mostly boring, in fact. But everything in this new post-Cold War world of the Agency seemed boring to him. All of it made him so grateful he had come into the spy business when he did, when there were real enemies, real things to be done, real adventures to be had. Protecting Microsoft's software secrets from the Koreans and Taiwanese, as they were talking about at the Brookings thing, was not Charlie's idea of a good time, or of a life, for that matter.

He Rolodexed backward casually and lightly with hops and skips through his thirty-five years as an intelligence officer for the United States of America. He had been both covert and overt, both operational and administrative. He had served overseas in Europe, Southeast Asia and Latin America and had held many jobs that were headquartered in or run right out of Langley. Nothing came to mind. Sure, there were some tricky times and there were some enemies made. But nothing that he could think of that would cause somebody to bomb his breakfast at the Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill now.

The train sounded its whistle. Duffields, his stop, was next. Duffields was only a small country store, a few houses, a gravel parking lot for commuters' cars and two churches—a trim historic Episcopalian one for whites, a run-down white frame AME for blacks. There was no train station and the train stopped in the middle of the blacktop road for passengers to get on or off. Tickets had to be bought from the conductor.

He saw Mary Jane waiting for him alongside their Jeep Wagoneer.



"Let's walk the track," Charlie said within minutes after they pulled away from Duffields. Mary Jane smiled. That was her way of saying, Sure, Charlie. There was a Chessie Railroad branch track that ran through the front of their property. Every morning

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around eleven o'clock a train of ten to twelve freight cars went slowly by west, and then in the afternoon around four o'clock another one about the same size came back east. Walking up and down the track through some nearby wetlands was Charlie's favorite form of exercise and relaxation. Mary Jane preferred tennis, but she didn't mind walking with Charlie and he didn't mind playing tennis with her. It was their life together.

"We now have two bookings for Friday night," she said as she drove the Wagoneer down Highway 231, the windy two-lane blacktop, toward Charles Town. "A third called for Saturday. A couple from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. So we'll have six for dinner," Mary Jane said. "Maybe you could shoot up to Martinsburg for some more brandy snifters?"

"Tomorrow, you bet," said Charlie. "I'll put them on the list."

Theoretically, their bed-and-breakfast was open seven days a week, but as a practical matter it was mostly a weekend place. That was when people from Washington and Baltimore could come to spend some quiet time in the country of West Virginia. Their operation was also not technically just a bed-and-breakfast. On Saturday nights there was always a black-tie dinner for the guests, fully catered and served by Wes and Paul, two young men from Shepherdstown, one of them a former chef at the Greenbriar resort hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. They brought with them fine wine, exotic desserts and three young women in white dresses from the music faculty at Shepherd College to play string music during dinner. It was part of a high-class weekend designed by Mary Jane to make staying at their place more than simply special.

Mary Jane Lawrence Henderson was the same age as Charlie and in every other way his equal. Her hair was gray but her body was thin, tight, brown like Charlie's. Her mind was active and quick and she was of a Nantucket and Needham, Massachusetts, breed that was at home and at peace with themselves and in almost any situation.

Charlie and Mary Jane Henderson's eighteenth-century house

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was called Hillmont. It was a Georgian manor house of red Dutch brick that had eight huge rooms with a fireplace in each, huge hallways, three smaller stone outbuildings and a history that included at least one meal of George Washington's. George's brother Samuel lived two miles down the road from Hillmont, and on a trip to see him George stopped for dinner at Hillmont, then owned by an old friend of his. That was on March 10, 1771, and George wrote it up in his diary. Charlie went to the Library of Congress, found the exact notation in George's own hand, had a copy made, blew it up a little bit and put it in a frame which he then hung on a wall inside the house. Said George: "Dined at Mr. Nurses & returned to my Brother's in the Evening." Hardly Declaration of Independence material and short on detail, but Charlie and Mary Jane's paying guests loved it.

Charlie had found the house through a former Agency clandestine type who sold real estate in Shepherdstown, which was fifteen miles north of Hillmont and, along with Charles Town, Martinsburg and Harpers Ferry, formed a thirty-square-mile cluster of towns, roads, fields and streams full of Civil War as well as colonial history. The real estate guy was Jay Buckner, whom Charlie had known mostly around the edges in the Congo, Laos and other places as someone with special skills in the so-called technical services—electronics, armaments, communications. He got the boot in the so-called Schlesinger purge following the Church Committee investigations of the Agency in 1974. Buckner had almost single-handedly turned the panhandle of West Virginia into a little haven for ex-Agency types with a desire for the good country life near Washington at a price and pace second to the toney hunt country around Middleburg, fifty miles south in Virginia. The word was out that Buckner was also working "secretly" with one of the United States senators from West Virginia to bring part of CIA headquarters out to a five-hundred-acre spot only ten miles from Hillmont. Charlie and Mary Jane had joined the effort to keep it out of the area.

Hey, what about that? Maybe Buckner was trying to kill him for

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standing in the way of his big real estate deal? Oh, come on, Charlie.

Mary Jane showed him the menu that was being planned for the weekend. For Saturday night dinner, some chicken patties alleged to have been a favorite of Martha Washington, French oxtail broth, veal with mushrooms, salad, white peach ice cream and two good wines, a white and a red. For breakfast the next morning, shad roe sautéed in brown butter and lemon, quail braised with lardons and port wine sauce, eggs scrambled with truffles, apple fritters, a cured ham, grits with Asiago cheese and all kinds of fruits and tarts. The boys from Shepherdstown had come up with another winner. Those two meals, plus three lighter ones and two nights' lodging, came to \$450 a person. Expensive but worth every penny.

"I can hardly wait to eat this stuff," Charlie said.

"It's not stuff, Charlie," Mary Jane said. "It's elegance."

Charlie had continued his burglar lie about how he lost his shaving kit and other clothes. After about fifteen or so minutes on the railroad track Mary Jane suddenly but quietly said, "When will you tell me what really happened?"

Mary Jane's unerring skill at seeing through him continued to startle her husband. He was sure she was the only one who could. "Soon," he said. "Soon."

"Is it something serious?"

"No, no."

"Official?"

"I don't think so."

Charlie had changed to his favorite walking outfit that included a pair of faded dark green corduroy pants, scuffed cordovan boots and a red, green and dark blue striped cotton sweater. He had a collection of more than twenty walking sticks. He had chosen one they had picked up at the Portobello antique market in London shortly after they bought Hillmont. The handle was a hard ivory head of a cocker spaniel. Mary Jane was already dressed for walking.

The cattails in the wetlands were still out. So were some of the

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late wildflowers, small pink and purple and yellow things that were difficult to cut because of their prickly stems. Walking the track meant awkwardly stretched strides from one wooden tie to the next. Charlie, who was just over six feet tall and had long legs, loved the rhythm of left-right, left-right. Mary Jane was five inches shorter than Charlie, which meant shorter legs and the constant possibility that she would miss the next tie and fall flat on her face.

“Don’t do anything crazy, Charlie,” she said, her eyes downward, intent on the business of walking without tripping. “Remember your age, please.”

“Remember what Po Chü-i said, please,” he said, his eyes looking off to the right at the back of the marvelous white main house and outbuildings of Altona Farm, another eighteenth-century masterpiece still standing and alive in the twentieth century.

Po Chü-i was a Chinese poet who lived from the year 772 until 846. When he turned sixty in 832 he wrote a poem about it. An old friend had sent it to Charlie on his sixtieth birthday and Charlie had taken it as his life’s creed.

Saith Po Chü-i, in part:

Between thirty and forty, one is distracted by the Five Lusts; between seventy and eighty one is prey to a hundred diseases. But from sixty to seventy one is free from all ills. Calm and still—the heart enjoys rest. I have put behind me Love and Greed. I have done with Profit and Fame. I am still short of illness and decay and far from decrepit age. Strength of limb I still possess to see the rivers and hills. Still my heart has spirit enough to listen to flutes and strings. At leisure I open new wine and taste several cups; drunken I recall old poems and sing a whole volume.

Martinsburg, twenty minutes north of Charles Town on State Highway 9, was where Charlie and Mary Jane did most of their