

MOSCOW TWILIGHT



A NOVEL BY

WILLIAM E.
HOLLAND

MOSCOW TWILIGHT

WILLIAM E. HOLLAND



POCKET BOOKS

New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore

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



POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 1992 by William Holland

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce
this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.
For information address Pocket Books, 1230 Avenue
of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Holland, William E.

Moscow twilight / William E. Holland.

p. cm.

ISBN: 0-671-74643-X

I. Title.

PS3558.O3492S4 1992

813'.54—dc20

91-31317

CIP

First Pocket Books hardcover printing July 1992

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

POCKET and colophon are registered trademarks of
Simon & Schuster Inc.

MOSCOW TWILIGHT

To Lisa and Cindy, with love.

Dad

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Misha and Volodya for their expert comments, and to my wife, Olga, for her knowledge, advice, and support.

Contents

I. MOSCOW	<i>1</i>
II. TBILISI	<i>97</i>
III. MOSCOW	<i>151</i>
IV. THE OLD HELL-RAISER	<i>213</i>
V. MOSCOW	<i>241</i>

• I •

MOSCOW

• 1 •

Wednesday, January 18, 1989

3 A.M.

Lenin Prospect

THE TELEPHONE FINALLY DRAGGED CHANTURIA FROM HIS SLEEP, UNWILLING as he was to leave it. The scratch in the voice on the other end might have been the connection, or might have been the time of night. No reasonable person functioned quite right at 3:00 A.M. "Comrade Captain Chanturia?"

"Yes."

"Captain Novikov here. I'm the duty officer. You have been assigned to an investigation. Lieutenant Orlov will be at your apartment with a driver in fifteen minutes. Meet him downstairs."

"I'm not on duty," Chanturia mumbled. The part of him that was awake knew it would do no good.

"You are now. By personal order of Comrade Colonel Sokolov."

"Shit. All right." He felt the other side of the bed. It was still warm where Tanya had been. He found the light switch and enjoyed the several minutes he wasted blinking at the glare before getting up to dress.

He stumbled over Tanya's nightgown on the bathroom floor. She had by nature the ways of a true princess: her discarded garments she would leave lying for the girl to pick up—although there was no girl and never had been one and never would be.

Orlov was already waiting outside in the car. Chanturia kicked the snow from his boots and got into the back of the Volga beside him.

"You look happy this morning, Comrade Captain," Orlov said, using Chanturia's title with ironic politeness—he was friendly enough with Chanturia to address him by his name and patronymic, *Sergo Vissarionovich*, or even just "Sergo" if he was feeling self-confident. Chanturia was not much older than Orlov, and they had once been lieutenants together, when Chanturia was stuck in grade as a lieutenant. Now he expected Orlov would catch him again.

"Of course I'm happy. Work is joy. What's going on?"

"It's a wild story. A gang broke in at one of the late-night cooperative cafes. The one out on Prospect Mira. Cut up some of the patrons and then torched the place."

"Why has the colonel got me out of a sound sleep for a Mafia attack on a cafe? Have all the militia died of boredom?"

"It seems there were foreigners in the cafe."

"Who else would be able to afford it?"

"Cooperative owners, Mafiosi . . ."

"Yes, of course."

The car went quickly through the snow-choked back lanes around Chanturia's apartment bloc east of Lenin Prospect in southern Moscow. Nothing was moving. Even Lenin Prospect, when they turned onto it, was deserted. Ignoring the two inches of new snow on the street, and of course ignoring the speed limit, the driver set the speedometer needle at 120 kilometers per hour and held to the inner lane toward the center of the city. Chanturia would have told him to slow down, but he knew it would be a waste of time. The driver was young, just out of school; and drivers had their own rules—even KGB drivers.

The cooperative cafe Come In and Taste was located on the ground floor of a nine-story stone building of Stalin's time—square, solid, and ugly. The heavy front door, specially built up with boards to present a luxurious and formidable appearance, was standing open to the cold.

A militia captain met them at the door. He saluted, although they were not in uniform, his precise correctness as good as a sneer to show the policeman's disdain for the representatives of the Committee on State Security. All the policemen Chanturia had ever known were convinced that the KGB thought themselves superior to mere militia-men; and all the KGB men he knew did think so. He thought so himself.

MOSCOW TWILIGHT

"What do we have here, Captain?" Chanturia asked.

"Murder. Arson. The investigator is in the main hall. I will tell you what I can of the scene here in the front premises." The captain stepped back into a small anteroom—little more than a wide part of the hall with a small desk, and behind it a coatroom that was only a narrow closet.

"The assailants, reported to be five in number, entered through the front door," the captain said. "They had already cut the telephone wires. They tried to knife the manager, there"—he pointed to a few dark spots on the floor, apparently the blood of the manager shed in defense of the cafe's business—"and then proceeded to the main hall, where they methodically attacked the guests. It was like a military operation." He turned and led them through the narrow front hall of the cafe, to the "main hall" in back, which was hardly a hall at all, but a low small room just large enough for seven tables. A curl of soot licked across the ceiling. Inside there still hung the sour smell of gasoline smoke and soaked drapery. The bold-painted wall murals—they looked like Georgian scenes—were startling in their brilliance, except near the door, where a blaze had brought the paint off in curls like dying fingers.

A tall man in a dark blue suit came from the far side of the room. "You're the investigator?" Chanturia asked.

"Yes. Filin, from the Procurator's office." Filin had a lean face, topped by wild blond hair—no doubt he'd been called from bed too—and a skinny neck that didn't fill his shirt collar. His red tie hung slack in his collar.

"How many guests?" Chanturia asked the militiaman, ignoring the investigator.

"Fifteen in all, it appears."

"What did the intruders do here?"

"They produced bottles of benzine, smashed them on the furnishings, and lit the fuel with a pocket lighter."

"A brave action. If not completely wise. Were any of the attackers burned as a result?"

"Not to our knowledge."

"That's a pity," Orlov said. It was nothing personal: a burned assailant might show up at a hospital.

"How many persons injured?" Chanturia asked.

"Five of the guests. The service personnel were all in the kitchen at the instant of the attack." The investigator pointed out through the

door of the "main hall," to another door only two steps away. "When they saw what was happening, they barricaded themselves in the kitchen. The assailants were unsuccessful in breaking in there, and departed quickly once the fire was started."

"How many foreigners were here?"

"Six of the fifteen. A German and a Finn, three Japanese, and one other." He hurried to add, "Three were injured. Two of the Japanese, and . . ."

"Other? What do you mean by 'other'?"

"We don't know. He didn't have any papers."

"What?"

The investigator shrugged. It wasn't his job to keep track of foreigners. Let the Committee on State Security worry about it.

"How serious were the injuries?" Chanturia demanded. "Are they all at the hospital?"

"The two Japanese sustained superficial cuts on the arms and hands trying to defend themselves. They were taken to the hospital. The other one is over there." He pointed to a bundle covered with two tablecloths. "We saved him for you."

"Many thanks."

They uncovered the body. "Male of European ancestry," Orlov said, taking notes for the report. "Name unknown—'Mister X.' Height about 180 centimeters."

"That's standing up," Chanturia said. "As is, about, oh . . . twenty centimeters."

"Weight maybe eighty-five kilos," Orlov continued. "Hair brown, eyes brown. What'd he die of?" he asked the investigator.

"You'll get the autopsy report. As of now, I'd say he died from the stab wound in the right lower rib cage. Probably it cut the heart." The investigator motioned toward the body, and the policeman, using a handkerchief, pulled open the dead man's shirt, which was unbuttoned. He used the handkerchief to avoid touching the bloodstain that spread over the right side of the shirt. The wound had been wiped clean, however, probably by the ambulance crew, and was only a thin red line on the man's pale side.

"He had no identification at all?" Chanturia asked.

"None."

"Where were his clothes made?"

"A mixture of European countries. English suit, Italian shirt and tie, German shoes."

"Underwear?" Orlov asked.

The investigator smirked. He wasn't about to be caught so easily. "Italian. Boxer shorts."

"No credit cards?" Chanturia asked.

"No. Only cash. Some American dollars, some Finnish marks, some German marks, a few Italian lira. A lot of rubles. Also a French wristwatch—Hermès; an English fountain pen; a fine Irish linen pocket handkerchief; no rings or other jewelry."

"Not Italian, then," Chanturia said. "There's always jewelry. The underwear had me excited for a minute." He stood at the corpse's feet, studying the face. "What do you think he is?" he asked the investigator.

The investigator shrugged again. He didn't think for a minute that the KGB gave a fart for his opinion. "Could be anybody. You see one foreigner, you've seen them all."

"Well, he's not African."

"Might as well be," the policeman said. "He's not Russian."

Orlov, out of the side of his eye, looked at Chanturia. Chanturia was Georgian, both on his father's side and his mother's. But Chanturia showed nothing. "Was he with anyone?" he asked.

"Yes," the investigator said. "He was with a Russian woman. Age about thirty, blond, strikingly beautiful, according to the waiters."

The bitch, the policeman thought.

"Well, then?"

"She disappeared before we got here. The kitchen staff escaped out the back windows, but the alarm had already been turned in from the next building—the watchman called in. No one dared go back inside until our men arrived. By then the woman was gone. No one else knew her. None had seen her before."

"Did the raiders kidnap her?"

The investigator didn't answer at first: he hadn't thought of that possibility. Finally he shrugged. "Could be. No one knows anything. None of the other clients knew either her or the dead man."

Chanturia pulled the tablecloths back over the corpse. "Have him taken to the lab," he said. "What about the citizens? Who were they?"

"Two whores with the Japanese. Plus a birthday party of six. Three men, three women."

"This place was a regular menagerie, wasn't it?" Chanturia said. "There was one of everything. Well, where are they all?"

"I took statements and told them all to report to us in the morning."

"All right. We'll want them for interrogation. Send them to us first." As he turned away, Filin, the investigator, only stared. The policeman saluted again—more a wave than a salute.

"Not much there," Chanturia said to Orlov as they went out.

"Except for one asshole investigator."

"Ah, that's his job. Getting up at two in the morning to look at dead bodies."

"You'd think he'd want to share them, instead of keeping them for himself."

"Everybody wants to hold on to all of his job that he can these days, Lyosha."

"Do you think he'll make a decent job of it?"

"On his own? What does he care about a dead foreigner? He'll file his report and forget it. For that matter, what do I care about a dead foreigner? If our Comrade Investigator knew who the foreigner was, we'd never have heard about it either. And I wish we hadn't. I'd rather be in bed."

"With anyone in particular?"

"Not your business, Lyosha." Although said lightheartedly, it was a rebuke.

"What do you make of it, Sergo Vissarionovich?" Orlov asked. He used the formal address in reaction to Chanturia's words, despite their tone. "What was a foreigner doing here with no identification?"

"Maybe he left his hotel without his passport, by mistake."

"And also without his hotel card and his wallet?"

Chanturia sighed. "Did you ever notice, Alexei Ivanovich"—Chanturia used the formal address too, in reaction to Orlov's use of it—"that no one ever understands irony? And in a country with so much of it!"

"Oh."

"I don't know what he was doing here, other than spending an expensive evening with an apparently beautiful Russian woman."

"The son of a bitch."

"Ah, Alyosha, why begrudge our fellow creatures their pleasure when it doesn't lessen our own?"

"Maybe I could have been out with this beautiful woman, if it weren't for this foreigner."

"You'd have a hard time explaining to the Comrade Colonel how you could afford a meal at a cooperative café on a lieutenant's salary."

In the morning we'll see who *can* afford such a thing. Now let's get some sleep. We'll need our wits sharp. But first, call in and have someone contact all the foreigners' hotels in the morning."

"I can have that done right away."

"No. In the morning. By then the maids will know who didn't come home tonight."

• 2 •

Wednesday, January 18, 1989

9 A.M.

The Lubyanka

CHANTURIA LIKED TO START WITNESS INTERVIEWS WITH THE SMALL FRY and work up to the bigger fish. He often got useful background information that way before the important interviews; and it let the main characters worry a little longer. Worry was a useful activity for a witness.

In this case, he started with a warm-up.

"Maria Petrovna Popova," Chanturia read from the woman's identification card. He looked across the table at her. She was dressed this morning in American blue jeans and a West German sweater that would cost three months' wages from a street trader, although certainly she hadn't got hers from any *fartsovshchik*. There was a lighter streak, perhaps natural, in the mass of dark blond hair that framed her head and shoulders. Her carefully unkempt coiffure gave her a wild look. There were lines at the corners of her blue eyes, and the eyes were tired. She was not used to being up so early. She looked back at him steadily at first, but then the eyes switched away to one side. They always did, sooner or later. She had lasted longer than most.

"Are you still living on Warsaw Prospect?" he asked.

She looked back at him. "That's what it says, isn't it?"

"I didn't ask that."

She waited a while. "You know I'm not."

He made a note. "Are your parents still living there?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

Again a pause. "I rent an apartment at 156 Svobodny Prospect."

"You live alone there?"

"Yes."

"How much are you paying?"

"A hundred fifty rubles a month."

Half of a KGB captain's salary. "Who owns the apartment?"

Maria Petrovna's back stiffened. "She's just an old woman. She needs the money. Her pension wouldn't pay for bread and tea, let alone sausage. She went to live with her daughter."

"Her name?"

"She's got nothing to do with this."

"Her name?"

A pause. "Kuzina. Varvara Mikhailovna."

He made another note. "When was the last time you reported to the Committee?"

"I'm sure you have a record."

"When was it?"

Her eyes were icy. "Two nights ago. I gave a report to your officer at the International Hotel. I was with a German."

He made a note to have Orlov look for the record, although he was sure it would be of no interest.

"Is it all right if I smoke?" she asked.

He didn't answer. She started to take a pack of Marlboros out of her bag, then put them back. The bag was black leather, probably French. About two months of his salary there. Another two months, he supposed, for the simple black leather shoes. Simplicity you couldn't buy in a Soviet shoe store.

"What time did you arrive at the cafe last night?"

"About eleven."

"Who were you with?"

"You know that already."

"Who were you with?"

"My friend Elena."

"Her patronymic and family name?"

"Elena Semyonovna Smolenskaya."

"Who else were you with?"

"We were with three Japanese men. I don't know their names. Yukio and somebody and somebody."

"Had you known them before?"