**PART ONE**

**DISHONOURABLE TRANSFER**

“You do know that blood is the hardest stain to clean, right?”

- Jim Grant

**ONE**

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THE HEAVY-DUTY MILITARY suitcase slid all the way down the escalator at the London Underground and broke the passenger’s leg. An innocent bystander. Wrong place, wrong time. The Northern Line at Waterloo Station. A hundred and fifty feet at an angle of forty-five degrees. By the time the suitcase reached the bottom it was travelling at almost thirty miles an hour. The passenger didn’t even see it coming.

A young soldier coming back from leave stood at the top of the escalator with the suitcase handle in one hand. Defective equipment. That wouldn’t save him from instant dismissal since he’d only just completed his basic training. The thing that would save him was the soldier standing two steps above him, a squaddie who was barely twenty years old himself but had two years seniority. Stepping in helped save the recruit’s career but it also gave the Army the excuse it needed to move the senior soldier. That’s how Jim Grant got posted to Germany.

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THE BUZZER ON the door had a handwritten label in the plastic insert. *French Model*. The writing sloped to the left and Jim Grant tried to remember if she had been left-handed. He kissed his fingertips and touched the label then closed the door as he came out onto the quiet backstreet near Leicester Square. It didn’t matter if she was left-handed or not; the model had used both hands to good effect. Both hands and everything else. Grant smiled all the way back to the Union Jack Club, across the Thames opposite Waterloo Station.

Grant rubbed his chin and thought maybe he should have had a shave before seeking female companionship. He remembered wondering as a sixteen-year-old if he was ever going to start growing whiskers and that memory sparked another; his father telling him to be careful what he wished for because one day he’d regret having to shave every day. The memory was bittersweet, the carefree days of not having to shave at odds with his father trying to be a father and failing badly. Packing young James Grant off to boarding school at the earliest opportunity had been bad enough but wanting him to follow Commander Grant into the Royal Navy was why Grant joined the army instead. Anything to piss his father off. His dad had been right about one thing though; Grant wished he didn’t have to shave every day.

It was a pleasant summer afternoon so he walked instead of taking the Tube and enjoyed the views of London as he crossed the river on Waterloo Bridge. He was staying in the enlisted men’s Annex just down the road from The Union Jack Club, the main building being reserved for officers and senior NCOs. His weekend pass was almost up and he needed to collect his bag before heading to the station.

In the past he would have worn his uniform and hitchhiked back to camp but the escalation of the Irish troubles meant the IRA were targeting lone soldiers, even on mainland England, and travelling in uniform was forbidden. Grant had risked it twice and spent three days on jankers as punishment, extra guard duty and peeling potatoes in the cookhouse. Being Company Clerk might have given him access to extra travel warrants but it hadn’t got him off punishment detail.

So, it was the train station for him with a forged travel warrant. It wasn’t the forged travel warrant that got him into trouble though, it was his urge to help those who couldn’t help themselves. In a way that was his father’s fault too, since fighting bullies at Moor Grange School For Boys was what gave him his thirst for battling injustice.

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GRANT WAS HIT by a wall of sound when he entered the main hall at Waterloo Station. It never ceased to amaze him how much noise a few hundred people could generate by simply having random conversations. The vaulted ceiling filtered daylight through smoke-stained glass and bounced the noise back on itself. The station announcer’s voice echoed across the concourse, hindered by the occasional horn from an incoming train. People were dashing every which way as passengers raced to catch their trains and the Underground disgorged travellers from the bowels of the Tube network.

Grant recognised the suitcase before he identified the beret tucked into the young soldier’s epaulet. The soldier was traveling in mufti, civilian clothes not uniform, but displayed the beret to gain favour with transport and shopkeepers. Everybody loved a soldier. Discounts were offered freely without having to ask if the vendor knew you were a squaddie, hence the beret tucked into the epaulet. Grant shifted the kitbag strap on his shoulder and looked at the suitcase again. The chunky square luggage marked the young man as a soldier without having to risk court martial by mixing uniform with civvies. It wasn’t the IRA that Grant was concerned about though; the soldier was going the wrong way. He didn’t need to go down to the Tube because the train to Blackdown Barracks left from Platform 2.

Grant changed course and waded through the mass of humanity. A station announcement gave out platform information and the latest delays. A rush of warm air blasted up the escalator as an underground train pulled into the Northern Line platform. In a few minutes there would be another pulse of passengers heading up to the station concourse. For now there was a lull that allowed Grant to catch up with the young soldier.

Grant reached the escalator two steps after the recruit. The escalator was clear all the way to the bottom, where a passenger was checking his pockets as if looking for his ticket. The passenger stood with his back to the escalator and patted himself down. The young soldier looked undecided whether to rest his suitcase or keep hold of it. Grant stepped onto the escalator and the rolling staircase began to carry them both down to the Northern Line and connections across the capital.

The passenger found his ticket.

The soldier decided to keep hold of the suitcase.

Grant was about to tell him he was going the wrong way.

Then the handle broke.

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WITNESSES WOULD LATER give conflicting accounts of what happened next. Some said a wild man came charging down the escalator, grabbed the suitcase and made off into the subway tunnels. Some said there were two men, not much older than boys, and that they retrieved the suitcase and raced back up the escalator. Some said that the older man made sure the casualty was comfortable before handing the broken suitcase to the younger one, both making a calm and measured escape up to the main concourse.

Whatever the truth of the matter was, only one witness recognised the suitcase as military issue. In the absence of CCTV footage – surveillance culture wasn’t widespread yet – and the unreliable nature of early mobile phones, there was no physical evidence. Nobody thought to take a photograph. Only a few went to help the injured passenger, apart from the older man who had whispered a few short words before leaving.

It was the suitcase that led the investigation. British Army issue not RAF or Royal Navy. Meaning the perpetrator was a soldier returning to barracks. There was a limited number of army camps south of London. It wouldn’t take long to narrow them down to one.