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**TYPHOON**

A DARK SECRET. A GLOBAL CONSPIRACY.  
A DESPERATE RACE TO AVERT DISASTER.

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Typhoon  
by  
Charles Cumming

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# Prologue

*'Washington has gone crazy.'*

*I am standing at the foot of Joe's bed in the Worldlink Hospital. Six days have passed since the attacks of 11 June. There are plastic tubes running from valves on his wrists, a cardiac monitor attached by pads to the spaces between the bruises and cuts on his chest.*

*'What do you mean?'*

*'Only a handful of people at Langley knew what Miles was up to. Nobody else had the faintest idea what the hell was going on out here.'*

*'Who told you this?'*

*'Waterfield.'*

*Joe turns his head towards the window and looks out on another featureless Shanghai morning. He has a broken collarbone, a fracture in his left leg, a wound on his skull protected by loops of clean white bandage.*

*'How much do you know about all this?' he asks, directing his eyes into mine, and the question travels all the way back to our first months in Hong Kong.*

*'Everything I've researched. Everything you've ever told me.'*

*My name is William Lasker. I am a journalist. For fourteen years I served as a support agent of the British Secret Intelligence Service. For ten of those years, Joe Lennox was my handler and close friend. Nobody knows more about RUN than I do. Nobody except Joe Lennox himself.*

*He clears a block in his throat. His voice is still slow and uneven from the blast. I offer him a glass of water which he waves away.*

*'If the CIA didn't know about Miles, they'll be going through every file, every email, every telephone conversation he ever made. They'll*

want answers. Heads are going to roll. David Waterfield can get you those files. He has a source at Langley and a source in Beijing.'

'What are you getting at?'

A nurse comes into the room, nods at Joe, checks the flow rate on his IV drip. Both of us stop talking. For the past six days the Worldlink has been crawling with Chinese spies. The Ministry of State Security will be keeping a record of everybody who comes in and out of this room. The nurse looks at me, seems to photograph my face with a blink of her eyes, then leaves.

'What are you getting at?' I ask again.

'They say that every journalist wants to write a book.' Joe is smiling for the first time in days. I can't tell whether this remark is a statement or a question. Then his mood becomes altogether more serious. 'This story needs to be told. We want you to tell it.'

PART ONE  
Hong Kong  
1997

## 1. On the Beach

Professor Wang Kaixuan emerged from the still waters of the South China Sea shortly before dawn on Thursday 10 April 1997. Exhausted by the long crossing, he lay for some time in the shallows, his ears tuned to the silence, his eyes scanning the beach. It was 5.52 a.m. By his calculations the sun would begin to rise over Dapeng Bay in less than fifteen minutes. From that point on he would run the greater risk of being spotted by a passing patrol. Keeping his body low against the slick black rocks, he began to crawl towards the sanctuary of trees and shrubs on the far side of the beach.

He was wearing only a pair of shorts and a thin cotton T-shirt. All of his worldly possessions were otherwise contained in a small black rucksack attached to the makeshift raft which he dragged behind him on a length of twine attached to his leg. The plastic containers that had floated the raft clattered and bounced on the rocks as Wang inched inshore. The noise of this was too much; he should have prepared for it. Twenty metres short of the trees he stopped and turned. Sand had begun to stick to his damp, salt-stiffened fingers and he was aware that his breathing was hard and strained. Two hours earlier, in the half-light of eastern Shenzhen, Wang had attached a cheap kitchen knife to his calf using a stretch of waterproof tape. It took all of his strength now to tear the knife free and to sever the twine so that the raft was no longer attached to his body.

*Kuai dian*, he told himself. *Hurry*. Wang cut the rucksack free and tried to sling it across his shoulders. It felt as though

he had been drugged or beaten and a grim sense memory of the prison in Urumqi crept up on him like the rising sun. The rucksack was so heavy and his arms so tired from the swim that he felt he would have to rest.

*Jia you.*

*Keep going.*

He stumbled to his feet and tried to rush the last few metres to the trees, but the rucksack tipped on his back and Wang fell almost immediately, fearing an injury to his knee or ankle, something that would hamper him on the long walk south across the hills. *Imagine that, after everything I have been through: a tendon sends me back to China.* But he found that he could move without discomfort to the nearest of the trees, where he sank to the ground, sending a flock of startled birds clattering into the sky.

It was six o'clock. Wang looked back across the narrow stretch of water and felt a tremor of elation which numbed, for an instant, his near-constant dread of capture. He reached out and felt for the bark of the tree, for the sand at his feet. *This place is freedom,* he told himself. *This shore is England.* Starling Inlet was less than two kilometres wide, but in the darkness the tide must have pulled him west towards Sha Tau Kok, or even east into the open waters of Dapeng. Why else had it taken him so long to swim across? The professor was fit for a man of his age and he had swum well; at times it was as if his desire to succeed had pulled him through the water like a rope. Wiping seawater from the neck of the rucksack he removed several seals of waterproof tape and withdrew a tightly bound plastic bag. A few minutes later he had discarded his T-shirt and shorts and dressed himself in damp blue jeans, a black cotton shirt and dark sweater. On his feet he wore grey socks and the counterfeit tennis shoes from the market in Guangzhou.

*Now I look like a typical Hong Kong Chinese. Now if they stop me I can say that I am out here watching for birds.*

Wang removed the binoculars from his rucksack and the small, poorly bound volume on egrets posted to him from Beijing three weeks earlier. The back of his throat was sour with the salt and pollutants of the sea and he drank greedily from a bottle of water, swallowing hard in an effort to remove them. Then he looped the binoculars around his neck, placed the water bottle back in the rucksack and waited for the sun.

## 2. Black Watch

Lance Corporal Angus Anderson, 1st Battalion Black Watch, three months into the regiment's final tour of Hong Kong, walked along the path from Luk Keng. This was magic hour, before the heat and the mosquitoes, before cockerels and barked orders and discipline punctured his private dream of Asia. Breathing the cool salt air, he slowed to an easy stroll as the first rays of the dawn sun began to heat the surrounding hills. One of only six Black Watch soldiers assigned to patrol the border in support of the Hong Kong Police, Anderson had been dispatched by an immigration inspector to make a brisk check of Starling Inlet before returning to headquarters for breakfast.

'Sometimes they try to swim,' the inspector had told him. His name was Leung. There were purple scars on his hands. 'Sometimes they escape the sharks and the tide and make their way on foot to Tai Po.'

Anderson took out a cigarette. The sea was calm and he listened to the rhythm of the water, to the cry of a cormorant on the wind. He felt a strange, anarchic impulse to strip out of his uniform and to run, like a stalker at Murrayfield, down into the lukewarm freedom of the ocean. Six hours earlier he had helped to untangle a corpse from the coils of razor wire that stretched all along the land border from Deep Bay to Sha Tau Kok. His commanding officer called it 'Chateau Cock', like a bottle of cheap claret, and everybody in the battalion was expected to laugh. The body was that of a Chinese peasant girl wearing shorts and flip-flops and

he could not erase from his memory the picture of her pale neck twisted into the fence and the blood from her arms which had turned brown in the sulphur glare of the floodlights. Would this kind of thing end after 30 June? Would the eye-eyes stop coming over? Leung had told them that in 1996 alone the Field Patrol Detachment had arrested more than 5,000 illegal immigrants, most of them young men looking for work in the construction industry in Hong Kong. That was about fourteen coming across every night. And now the FPD was facing a last-minute, pre-handover surge of Chinese nationals willing to risk the phalanx of armed police massed on both sides of the border in the slender hope of vanishing into the communities of Yuen Long, Kowloon and Shatin.

Anderson lit the cigarette. He couldn't see the sense in chogies risking their lives for two months in what was left of British Hong Kong. There wouldn't be an amnesty on eye-eyes; there wouldn't be passports for the masses. Thatcher had seen to that. Christ, there were veterans of the Hong Kong Regiment, men sitting in one-bedroom flats in Kowloon who had fought for Winston bloody Churchill, who *still* wouldn't get past immigration at Heathrow. Outsiders didn't seem to realize that the colony was all but dead already. Rumour had it that Governor Patten spent his days just sitting around in Government House, counting down the hours until he could go home. The garrison was down to its last 2,000 men: everything from Land Rovers to ambulances, from coils of barbed wire to bits of old gym equipment, had been auctioned off. The High Island Training Camp at Sai Kung had been cleared and handed over to the People's Liberation Army before Anderson had even arrived. In the words of his commanding officer, nothing potentially 'sensitive' or 'hazardous' could be left in the

path of the incoming Chinese military or their communist masters, which meant Black Watch soldiers working sixteen-hour days mapping and documenting every fingerprint of British rule, 150 years of naval guns and hospitals and firing ranges, just so the chogies knew exactly what they were getting their hands on. Anderson had even heard stories about a submerged net running between Stonecutters Island and Causeway Bay to thwart Chinese submarines. How was the navy going to explain *that* one to Beijing?

A noise down on the beach. He dropped the cigarette and reached for his binoculars. He heard it again. A click of rocks, something moving near the water's edge. Most likely an animal of some kind, a wild pig or civet cat, but there was always the chance of an illegal. To the naked eye Anderson could make out only the basic shapes of the beach: boulders, hollows, crests of sand. Peering through the binoculars was like switching off lights in a basement; he actually felt stupid for trying. Go for the torch, he told himself, and swept a steady beam of light as far along the coast as it would take him. He picked out weeds and shingle and the blue-black waters of the South China Sea, but no animals, no illegal.

Anderson continued along the path. He had another forty-eight hours up here, then five jammy days in Central raising the Cenotaph Union Jack at seven every morning, and lowering it again at six. That, as far as he could tell, was all that he would be required to do. The rest of the time he could hit the bars of Wan Chai, maybe take a girl up to the Peak or go gambling out at Macau. 'Enjoy yourself,' his father had told him. 'You'll be a young man thousands of miles from home living through a little piece of history. The sunset of the British Empire. Don't just sit on your arse in Stonecutters and regret it that you never left the base.'

The light was improving all the time. Anderson heard a motorbike gunning in the distance and waved a mosquito out of his face. He was now about a mile from Luk Keng and able to pick out more clearly the contours of the path as it dropped towards the sea. Then, behind him, perhaps fifteen or twenty metres away, a noise that was human in weight and tendency, a sound that seemed to conceal itself the instant it was made. Somebody or something was out on the beach. Anderson swung round and lifted the binoculars, yet they were still no good to him. Touching his rifle, he heard a second noise, this time as if a person had toppled off balance. His pulse quickened as he scanned the shore and noticed almost immediately what appeared to be an empty petrol can lying on the beach. Beside it he thought he could make out a second container, perhaps a small plastic drum – had they been painted black? – next to a wooden pallet. So much debris washed up onshore that Anderson couldn't be certain that he was looking at the remains of a raft. The men had been trained to look for flippers, clothing, discarded inner tubes, but the items here looked suspicious. He would have to walk down to the beach to check them for himself and, by doing so, run the risk of startling an eye-eye who might care more for his own freedom than he did for the life of a British soldier.

He was no more than twenty feet from the containers when a stocky, apparently agile man in his late forties poked his nose out of the trees and walked directly towards him, his hand outstretched like a bank manager.

'Good morning, sir!' Anderson levelled the rifle but lowered it in almost the same movement as his brain registered that it was listening to fluent English. 'I am to understand from your uniform that you are a member of Her Majesty's Black Watch. The famous red hackle. Your bonnet. But no

kilt, sir! I am disappointed. What do they say? The kilt is the best clothes in the world for sex and diarrhoea!’ The chogie was shouting across the space between them and grinning like Jackie Chan. As he came crunching along the beach it looked very much to Anderson as though he wanted to shake hands. ‘The Black Watch is a regiment with a great and proud history, no? I remember the heroic tactics of Colonel David Rose at the Hook in Korea. I am Professor Wang Kaixuan at the university here, Department of Economics. Welcome to our island. It is a genuine pleasure to meet you.’

Wang had at last arrived. Anderson took an instinctive step back as the stranger came to a halt three feet away from him, planting his legs like a sumo wrestler. They did indeed shake hands. The chogie’s closely cropped hair was either wet or greasy; it was hard to tell.

‘Are you out here alone?’ Wang asked, looking lazily at the colouring sky as if to imply that the question carried no threat. Anderson couldn’t pick the broad face for northern Han or Cantonese, but the spoken English was impeccable.

‘I’m on patrol down here at the beach,’ he said. ‘And yourself?’

‘Me? I stayed in the area over the weekend. To take the opportunity to look for the egrets that are native to the inlet at this time of year. Perhaps you have seen one on your patrol?’

‘No,’ Anderson said. ‘I haven’t.’ He wouldn’t have known what an egret looked like. ‘Could you show me some form of identification, please?’

Wang managed to look momentarily offended. ‘Oh, I don’t carry that sort of thing.’ As if to illustrate the point, he made a show of frisking himself, patting his hands up and down his chest before securing them in his pockets. ‘It

is a pity you have not seen an egret. An elegant bird. But you enjoy our surroundings, no? I am told – although I have never visited there myself – that the hills in this part of the New Territories are very similar in geographical character to certain areas of the Scottish Highlands. Is that correct?’

‘Aye, that’s probably true.’ Anderson was from Stranraer, a pan-flat town in the far south-west, but the comparison had been made many times before. ‘I’m sorry, sir. I can see that you’re carrying binoculars, I can see that you’re probably who you say you are, but I’m going to have to ask you again for a passport or driving licence. Do you not carry any form of identification?’

It was the moment of truth. Had Angus Anderson been a different kind of man – less certain of himself, perhaps more trusting of human behaviour – the decade of events triggered by Wang’s subsequent capture might have assumed an entirely different character. Had the professor been allowed, as he so desperately desired, to proceed unmolested all the way to Government House, the name of Joe Lennox might never have been uttered in the secret corridors of Shanghai and Urumqi and Beijing. But it was Wang’s misfortune that quiet April morning to encounter a sharp-eyed Scot who had rumbled him for a fake almost immediately. This chogie was no birdwatcher. This chogie was an illegal.

‘I have told you. I don’t usually carry any form of identification with me.’

‘Not even a credit card?’

‘My name is Wang Kaixuan, I am a professor of economics at the university here in Hong Kong. Please telephone the department switchboard if you feel uncertain. On a Wednesday morning my colleagues are usually at their desks by eight o’clock. I live at 71 Hoi Wang Road, Yau Ma Tei, apartment number 19. I can understand that the Black Watch

regiment has an important job to do in these difficult months but I have lived in Hong Kong ever since I was a child.'

Anderson unclipped his radio. It would only take ten seconds to call in the sighting. He seemed to have no other option. This guy was a conman, using tactics of questions and bluster to throw him off the scent. Leung's unit could be down in a police patrol boat before seven o'clock. Let them sort it out.

'Nine, this is One Zero, over.'

Wang now had a choice to make: sustain the lie, and allow the soldier to haul him in front of Immigration, which carried the risk of immediate deportation back to China, or make a move for the radio, engendering a physical confrontation with a Scotsman half his age and almost twice his height. In the circumstances, it felt like no choice at all.

He had knocked the radio out of Anderson's hand before the soldier had time to react. As it spun into the sand Anderson swore and heard Wang say, 'I am sorry, I am sorry,' as he stepped away. Something in this surrendering, apologetic gesture briefly convinced him not to strike back. For some time the two men stared at one another without speaking until a crackled voice in the sand said: 'One Zero, this is Nine. Go ahead, over,' and it became a case of who would blink first. Anderson bent down, keeping his eyes on Wang all the time, and retrieved the radio as if picking up a revolver from the ground. Wang looked at the barrel of Anderson's rifle and began to speak.

'Please, sir, do not answer that radio. All I am asking is that you listen to me. I am sorry for what I did. Tell them it was a mistake. I beg you to tell them you have resolved your problem. Of course I am not who I say I am. I can see that you are an intelligent person and that you have worked this out. But I am asking you to deal with me correctly. I

am not a normal person who swims across the inlet in the middle of the night. I am not an immigrant looking for a job. I do not want citizenship or refugee status or anything more or less than the attention of the British governor in Hong Kong. I am carrying with me information of vital importance to Western governments. That is all that I can tell you. So please, sir, do not answer that radio.'

'I have to answer.' Anderson was surprised to hear a note of conciliation in his voice. The encounter had taken on a surreal quality. How many Chinese mainlanders pitched up on a beach at 6 a.m. talking about David Rose at the Hook in fluent, near-accentless English? And how many of them claimed to have political intelligence that required a meeting with Chris Patten?

'What kind of information?' he asked, amazed that he had not already jammed Wang's wrists into a set of PlastiCuffs and marched him up the beach. Again the voice said, 'One Zero, this is Nine. Please go ahead, over,' and Anderson looked back across the water at the pale contours of China, wondering what the hell to do. A fishing boat was edging out into the bay. Wang then turned his head to stare directly into Anderson's eyes. He wanted to convey the full weight of responsibility which now befell him.

'I have information about a very senior figure in Beijing,' he said. 'I have information about a possible high-level defection from the Chinese government.'

### 3. Lennox

Joe Lennox left Jardine House at seven o'clock that evening, nodded discreetly at a French investment banker as he sank two vodka and tonics at the Captain's Bar of the Mandarin Oriental, hailed a cab on Connaught Road, made his way through the rush-hour traffic heading west into the Mid-Levels and walked through the door of Rico's at precisely 8.01 p.m. It was a gift. He was always on time.

I was sitting towards the back of the restaurant drinking a Tsingtao and reading a syndicated article in the *South China Morning Post* about the prospect of a Labour victory in the forthcoming UK elections. A ginger-haired Canadian woman at the next table was eating crayfish and throwing out dirty looks because of the cigarette I was smoking. When she coughed and waved her hand in front of her face once too often, I stubbed it out. The air conditioning was on high and it felt as though everyone in the room was shivering.

Joe looked the way Joe always looked in those days: fit and undiminished, his characteristically inscrutable expression becoming more animated as he found my eyes across the room. At first glance, I suppose he was no different from any other decent-looking Jardine Johnnie in a Welsh & Jeffries suit, the sort who moves millions every day at Fleming's and Merrill Lynch. That, I suppose, was the whole point about Joe Lennox. That was the reason they picked him.

'Cold in here,' he said, but he took his jacket off when he sat down. 'What are you reading?'

I told him and he ventured a mildly critical opinion of the columnist – a former Tory cabinet minister – who had written the piece. (The next day I went through some cuttings and saw that the same grandee had been responsible for a couple of Patten-savaging articles in the British press, which probably explained Joe’s antagonism.) He ordered a Tsingtao for himself and watched as the Canadian woman put her knife and fork together after finishing the crayfish.

‘Been here long?’ he asked.

‘About ten minutes.’

He was wearing a dark blue shirt and his forearms were tanned from walking in the New Territories with Isabella the previous weekend. He took out a packet of cigarettes and leaned towards the Canadian to ask if she would mind if he smoked. She seemed so taken aback by this basic display of courtesy that she nodded her assent without a moment’s hesitation, then eyebrowed me as if I had been taught a valuable lesson in charm. I smiled and closed the *Post*.

‘It’s good to see you,’ I said.

‘You too.’

By this point we had been friends for the best part of a year, although it felt like longer. Living overseas can have that effect; you spend so much time socializing with a relatively small group of people that relationships intensify in a way that is unusual and not always healthy. Nevertheless, the experience of getting to know Joe had been one of the highlights of my brief stay in Hong Kong, where I had been living and working since the autumn of 1994. In the early days I was never certain of the extent to which that affection was reciprocated. Joe was an intensely loyal friend, amusing and intelligent company, but he was often withdrawn and emotionally unreadable, with a habit – doubtless related to

the nature of his profession – of keeping people at arm's length.

To explain how we met. In 1992 I was reporting on the siege of Sarajevo when I was approached at a press conference by a female SIS officer working undercover at the UN. Most foreign journalists, at one time or another, are sounded out as potential sources by the intelligence services. Some make a song and dance about the importance of maintaining their journalistic integrity; the rest of us enjoy the fact that a tax-free grand pops up in our bank account every month, courtesy of the bean-counters at Vauxhall Cross. Our Woman in Sarajevo took me to a quiet room at the airport and, over a glass or two of counterfeit-label Irish whiskey, acquired me as a support agent. Over the next couple of years, in Bosnia, Kigali and Sri Lanka, I was contacted by SIS and encouraged to pass on any information about the local scene that I deemed useful to the smooth running of our green and pleasant land. Only very occasionally did I have cause to regret the relationship.

Joe Lennox left school – expensive, boarding – in the summer of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. He was not an exceptional student, at least by the standards of the school, but left with three good A-levels (in French, Spanish and history), a place at Oxford and a private vow never to submit any children of his own to the peculiar eccentricities of the English private school system. Contemporaries remember him as a quiet, popular teenager who worked reasonably hard and kept a low profile, largely, I suspect, because Joe's parents never lost an opportunity to remind their son of the 'enormous financial sacrifices' they had made to send him away in the first place.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, who went off to pick fruit in Australia or smoke weed for six months on Koh

Samui, Joe didn't take a gap year but instead went straight up to Oxford to study Mandarin as part of the BA Honours course at Wadham. Four years later he graduated with a starred First and was talent-spotted for Six in late 1993 by a tutor at the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he had gone to enquire about the possibility of doing a PhD. He went to a couple of interviews at Carlton Gardens, sailed through the Civil Service exams and had been positively vetted by the new year of 1994. Years later, Joe and I had dinner in London, when he began to speak candidly about those first few months as an Intelligence Branch officer.

'Think about it,' he said. 'I was twenty-three. I'd known nothing but straitjacket British institutions from the age of eight. Prep school, public school, Wadham College Oxford. No meaningful job, no serious relationship, a year in Taiwan learning Mandarin, where everyone ate noodles and stayed in their offices until eleven o'clock at night. When the Office vetted me for the EPV I felt like a standing joke: no police record; no debts; no strong political views – these were the Major years, after all; a single Ecstasy tablet swallowed in a Leeds nightclub in 1991. That was it. I was a completely clean slate, *tabula rasa*. They could do with me more or less as they pleased.'

Vetting led to Century House, in the last months before the move to Vauxhall Cross. Joe was put into IONEC, the fabled initiation course for new MI6 recruits, alongside three other Oxbridge graduates (all male, all white, all in their thirties), two former soldiers (both Scots Guards, via Sandhurst) and a forty-year-old Welsh biochemist named Joanne who quit after six weeks to take up a \$150,000-a-year position at MIT. On Joe's first day, 'C' told the new intake that SIS still had a role to play in world affairs, despite the ending of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Joe specifically remembered that the Chief made a point, very early on, of emphasizing the importance of the 'special relationship with our Cousins across the pond' and of praising the CIA for its 'extraordinary technical resources', without which, it was implied, SIS would have been neutered. Joe listened, nodded and kept his head down, and within two months had been taken to the spook training centre at Fort Monckton, where he persuaded strangers in Portsmouth pubs to part with their passport numbers and learned how to fire a handgun. From the sources I've spoken to, it's fairly clear that Joe, in spite of his age, was considered a bit of a star. Spies, declared or otherwise, usually operate from the safety of British embassies overseas, using diplomatic cover as a means of running agents in hostile territories. Very early on, however, it was suggested that Joe would be most effective working under non-official cover in Asia, at long-term, deniable length from the Service. It was certainly a feather in his cap. While his fellow IONEC officers were moved into desk jobs in London, analysing intelligence and preparing for their first postings overseas, the Far East Controllerate was finding Joe a job in Hong Kong, ostensibly working as a freight forwarder at Heppner Logistics, a shipping company based in Jardine House. In reality he was a NOC, operating under non-official cover, by far the most sensitive and secret position in the intelligence firmament.

Joe turned twenty-four on the day he touched down at Kai Tak. His parents had seen him off at Heathrow under the misguided impression that their beloved only son was leaving England to seek his fortune in the East. Who knew? Perhaps he'd be back in a few years with a foxy Cantonese wife and a grandchild to show off in the Home Counties. Joe felt awkward not telling his family and friends the truth about what he was up to, but Six had advised against it. It

was better that way, they said. No point in making anyone worry. Yet I think there were additional factors at play here. Secrecy appealed to something in Joe's nature, a facet of his personality that the spooks at Vauxhall Cross had recognized instantly, but which he himself had not yet fully come to understand. Lying to his parents felt like an act of liberation: for the first time in his life he was free of all the smallness and the demands of England. In less than a year Joe Lennox had cut himself off from everything that had made and defined him. Arriving in Hong Kong, he was born again.

Heppner Logistics was a tiny operation run out of two small offices on the eleventh floor of Jardine House, a fifty-two-storey edifice overlooking Victoria Harbour and dotted with tiny circular windows, an architectural anomaly which earned it the local nickname 'The House of a Thousand Arseholes'. Ted Heppner was a former Royal Marine who emigrated to Hong Kong in 1972. For eighteen years he had facilitated the international shipment of 'sensitive' cargoes on behalf of SIS, but this was the first time that he had agreed to take on an intelligence officer as an employee. At first, Ted's Singaporean wife Judy, who also functioned as his secretary, wasn't keen on the idea, but when the Cross bought her a Chanel handbag and bumped up her salary by twenty per cent she embraced Joe like a long-lost son. Nominally he was required to show up every day and to field whatever faxes and phone calls came into the office from clients looking to move freight consignments around the world, but in reality Ted and Judy continued to deal with over ninety-five per cent of Heppner business, leaving Joe free to carry out his work for Queen and Country. If anybody asked why an Oxford graduate with a starred First in Mandarin was earning less than £20,000 a year working for a logistics company in Hong Kong, Joe told them that he'd

been involved in a failed business venture back home and had just wanted to get the hell out of London. If they continued to pry, he hinted that he saw Heppner's as a short-term option which would allow him, within six or eight months, to apply for a job with one of the larger Taipan conglomerates, such as Swire's or Jardine Matheson.

It was illustrative of the extreme sensitivity of Joe's position that Ted and Judy were two of only a handful of people who knew that Joe was under non-official cover. The others included David Waterfield, Head of Station for SIS in Hong Kong, Waterfield's second-in-command, Kenneth Lenan, and Rick Zagoritis, a legendary figure in the Far East Controllerate who acted as Joe's mentor and go-between in the first few months of his posting. I became aware of his activities when Zagoritis was obliged to fly to London for medical reasons in the autumn of 1995. Up to that point, Rick had been my SIS handler. As a result of an article I had written for the *Sunday Times Magazine* about Teochiu triad heroin dealers, London had become interested in the contacts I had made in the criminal underworld and I had provided Zagoritis with detailed assessments of the structure and intentions of triad groups in the Pearl River Delta. With Rick gone, I needed a new handler.

That was when Joe stepped in. It was a considerable challenge for such a junior player, but he proved a more than competent replacement. Within less than a year of arriving in the colony, he had made a name for himself as a highly effective NOC. Nor were there any concerns about his private life. In two reports commissioned by Kenneth Lenan as routine checks into the behaviour of new recruits, Joe demonstrated himself to be surprisingly self-disciplined when confronted by the myriad opportunities for hedonism which are part and parcel of male expat life in Asia. ('He'll

learn,' Waterfield muttered glumly. 'He'll learn.') Nor was he troubled by the paranoia and duplicity of his double life. One of the more potent myths of the secret world, put about by spy writers and journalists and excitable TV dramas, is that members of the intelligence community struggle constantly with the moral ambiguity of their trade. This may be true of a few broken reeds, most of whom are quietly shown the door, but Joe lost little sleep over the fact that his life in Hong Kong was an illusion. He had adjusted easily to the secret existence, as if he had found his natural vocation. He loved the work, he loved the environment, he loved the feeling of playing a pivotal role in the covert operations of the state. About the only thing that was missing in his life was a woman.