Dust on the Nettles

PROLOGUE

April 1957

The Sunday morning rain drips tentatively from a colourless sky. Through the windowpane I see the dark figure of my grandmother at the foot of her urban garden. She bends forward from the waist and with a pair of scissors snips the stems of daffodils with the grim determination of a hired executioner. She takes twenty-three flowers. When she has come back into the house and laid them out on the kitchen table, beside the budgerigar in its cage, I confirm my count. Twenty-three is an uncomfortable number.

Once she has changed the budgie's water, told the bird to behave and hung the cage back in its place, my grandmother takes my left hand and leads me upstairs to the bathroom. My face is scrubbed. My hair is brushed severely back from my forehead and held down with some ancient concoction produced from a metallic tube that my grandmother has found in an overflowing medicine box. I am made to wear my finest shirt and tie and to gargle with salt water before we leave the house, lock the door behind us and set off. The uncertain rain has stopped now. The day is close and humid in its wake.

My grandmother, my mother's mother, wears a dark coat and thin, dark gloves. On top of her grey hair perches a dark hat. A loosely knit gauze veil falls across her eyes and nose. Through it I can see the patina of perspiration on my grandmother's face. She smells of mothballs and synthetic lavender.

From beneath the weave of the glove, my grandmother's hand grasps mine tightly. In her other hand she carries a handbag that matches the colour of her coat and hat, a brown paper bag and the clutch of innocent daffodils. Why twenty-three? Twenty-five would be a good number. It is five times five. And twenty-four can be captured by two, three, four, six, eight and twelve. But twenty-three is different. It is a free number.

"Come along there, Nicholas," my grandmother says. "We mustn't be late. And mind you don't take one of your tumbles, now." We are going to the cemetery – the place where, my grandmother says, they bury people's bodies after they die.

I summon the courage to ask a question. As we walk along the damp street, I ask what they do with the heads of dead people when they bury their bodies.

"Oh, Nicholas," says my grandmother, looking down at me, "don't be silly."

We pass through the cemetery gates and, as we move into the melancholy landscape beyond, I imagine myself in an underground room, surrounded by severed heads that look at me and laugh.

Our purpose is to lay fresh flowers on my grandfather's grave. When we reach a tombstone with a crossed hammer and sickle discreetly carved into the granite, my grandmother places me at the foot of the grave and says, "Now you stand here, Nicholas. That's a good boy."

I stand as instructed, trying not to pick my nose or scratch my head where it itches. My grandmother kneels, reverently removes the previous Sunday's floral offering, puts the faded blooms carefully into the brown bag and replaces them with the new flowers she has brought. She produces a faded duster from her handbag and runs it over the lettering on the stone that I am too young to read. Then she rises from her knees, comes to stand beside me, reaches down to take my hand, bows her head, closes her eyes. I want to leave this grey, silent place, this place where the dead land clutches and keeps. But my grandmother is holding my hand and I do not move.

I hear, then see, a group of children running in and out among the gravestones and the weeping trees. They are boys and girls of maybe seven or eight, two or three years older than I am. One of the girls, seeing my eyes follow her as she runs past, stops and looks towards me. For just a moment our eyes lock. She sticks her tongue out at me and lifts the front of her skirt. I see she is not wearing knickers. Then she turns and runs to catch up with her gang as they vanish among the cemetery trees. She does not look back.

"Urchins," mutters my grandmother, dismissing the wayward children from her mind. Sighing, she returns to the past. "He was a good man. Always very good to me, he was. I'm sorry you never knew him." She looks down at me, frowns deeply and says, "You have his eyes, you know." This makes me feel guilty, because I do not know where I have them, nor how I came by them, nor what I would do should she ask for their return.

The mist begins to fall again. We scurry solemnly away, our damp duties done. I smell the mothballs again and wonder whether it is my grandfather's dead eyes that give off that odour, wonder

whether mothballs are the eyes of the dead, wonder what smell the urchin with no knickers has.

"Come along there, Nicholas," says my grandmother. "I'll make us a nice cup of tea." The dark texture of the glove tightens around my hand.

CHAPTER ONE

Wednesday, 25 July 2007

I never quite forgot the real Janice Day. But when the phone on the desk at my Curzon Street office rang, at thirteen minutes past eight precisely, hers was the last name I expected to hear.

I don't usually answer my own phone. I employ two secretaries to do that and pay them well. Linda tells me they filter out more than 90% of the calls that come through. But, by eight-thirteen that July evening, they had both long gone home. It was a rare fine evening in a summer that until then had been wet and cool.

The markets, however, if not the weather, had been kind to us over the past month and particularly so over the last three days – days when the long-only funds were growing increasingly worried by the financial storm clouds gathering on the western horizon. But for well-run hedge funds, like Kellaway & Co., they promised to bring another golden era, a repeat of the performances we had racked up in the first years of the millennium. We were the silver lining on the clouds. I felt good, happy to be alive, pleased to be on the right side of a series of well-conceived trades in a volatile market, confident that I was propelling myself a few notches higher up the *Sunday Times* Rich List.

I was also half expecting a call from my son, Robert, and I could think of nothing better than stretching back in my chair, basking in the warm glow of the money we were making and shooting the breeze with my eldest child. A good conversation with Robert was not a pleasure that often came my way.

I pushed the button to activate the speaker phone and said, "Kellaway."

The voice on the other end of the line was hesitant, betraying a slight tremor. An American voice, speaking slowly and deliberately. A voice for long summer evenings on the back porch as you listen to the corn grow in the bottom forty. A female voice.

"Is that Mr Nicholas Kellaway?"

"Speaking."

"Hello, Nick. My name is Barbara McIntosh."

I was about to hang up. One gets these crank calls. Headhunters.

People trying to sell time shares in Spain or refurbish your kitchen. Some, it would seem, are prepared to come all the way from Bangalore to do so. They often use the technique of phoning in the evening, when they think the secretaries will have gone and the defences will be down. But there was something in the diffident pause after the caller announced her name that caused me, in turn, to hesitate.

"I'm really sorry to disturb you this late in the evening, Nick," she continued. "You knew me a long time ago, back when we were kids in Geneva together."

"Did I?"

"My name then was Janice Day."

"God Almighty!"

"Do you remember me?"

Did I remember her? *Did I remember Janice Day?* A far better question would have been did I believe her? The answer to *that* question was no. I did not believe her. Not then at least. The voice, the accent, the rhythms of her speech did not consistently ring true. Besides, my banking training means that I suffer from a sceptical turn of mind even at the best of times. The real Janice Day was dead and had been dead, almost certainly, for well over thirty years. But… but there was just sufficient detail, as the conversation expanded, to intrigue me, just enough Cold War doubt surrounding her alleged death to keep me listening.

She said, "I've booked a table at the Mezza Luna." *La Mezza Luna!* The only time Jan and I had ever been in London together we had taken dinner at La Mezza Luna, a little Italian-run greasy spoon near Paddington Station. That was in October 1971, shortly after my twentieth birthday. "A belated little celebration," Jan had said then with a smile, that dimple forming in her cheek as she paid the bill. "We'll have to do better next year – for your twenty-first. Keys to the house and all that."

I had not been back since and I did not think I had ever mentioned La Mezza Luna, our dinner together, or indeed anything at all about that day trip from Oxford to London, to anyone. Not even to the police. "God! Does it still exist?" I asked.

"Well, they took the booking," she said.

It was a quick decision. I agreed to meet the woman with the American voice for lunch the next day. After I had hung up, I told myself that I could always change my mind, fail to show up, walk away at any time. Alternatively, I could actually keep the appointment,

see whether this voice really did belong to Janice Day, find out where she'd been hiding all these years, find out what had really happened to her after she'd walked out on me, out into the dark night and driving November rain back in 1971. I could even, if it really was Jan, return her guitar to her.

I googled 'Mezza Luna London' and dialled the phone number I found. A voice redolent of stolen goods and North Kent gravel pits answered. He called me 'guv', which nobody had done for years.

"Sorry, guv."

"No table booked in the name of Day *or* McIntosh? Are you sure?"

"Sorry, guv."

"Can you tell me in what names you *do* have tables booked for two people for tomorrow?"

"You don't expect me to do that, now, do you, guv?"

"Well, actually I do. I'm meeting someone at your restaurant for lunch tomorrow and my secretary hasn't left me the name of the person I'm meant to be meeting."

"What's your name then, guv?"

"Kellaway. Nick Kellaway."

"Well, I'm sorry, I can't help you there, Mr Kellaway. The only table reserved for tomorrow is in your name."

I phoned Downing Street. On the line I heard the kind of voice people in high places use to cut the geometric patterns on crystal whisky tumblers. I advised the voice that Nick Kellaway regretted he would be unable to keep his appointment the following day. My absence would, I knew, be noted by those who cared about these things, by the keepers of the List of the Great and the Good and those who are paid to spend their days worrying over the next set of the Queen's Birthday Honours. But, frankly, I knew I would not be missed in any substantive way. Others had also been invited. They would cope perfectly well without me, probably be glad that one of their competitors had pulled out, possibly even more than mildly curious as to what was so important that it could draw me away from such a prestigious meeting. Anyway, none of them had the depth of my Labour Party connections; none my history of consistent generosity since the dark days in Opposition; none my legitimate expectations of kneeling – 'for services to finance' – before the Queen.

I phoned Caroline's mobile. I could hear the sounds of a restaurant in the background. Caroline said that she would be late

home, that there was poached salmon and half a bottle of Chablis in the fridge and that I should not wait up.

Then I made another phone call – to the number I had jotted down from the caller display when Janice Day or Barbara McIntosh, or whoever it was, had phoned. I let it ring for a long time. But there was no reply and no answer phone to take a message.

There was at that time a painting by Ferdinand Hodler hanging on the wall of my office. It is classed as one of Hodler's unfinished paintings, although it would take an expert to tell you why it merits the 'unfinished' classification. It is absolutely clear that the scene is the waterfront at Geneva. In the picture's middle distance a paddle-steamer makes its way up the lake against the waves. You can see that it is *La Suisse*, an earlier incarnation of the ship of that name that now plies the waters of Leman. In the foreground, the *Statue de la Bise* bares her granite breasts to the north wind. Stretching out to the right of the statue's base is a bed of white flowers.[1]

As I leaned back in my chair, gazing absently at the painting and wondering about tomorrow's lunch, an exquisite tingle ran unexpectedly through me – from the base of my skull to the root of my loins. For a brief moment I was filled with an intense longing for those summer days in the late sixties, days when I walked beside that lake dreaming of paths not yet trodden, of songs not yet sung, of women not yet tasted – a longing for the heady perfume of those white flowers that had never existed, but that might have existed given a few propitious mutations in the random chain of evolution. Forty years? Twenty years is nothing. With her Argentine roots, Jan would understand that. And what is forty years, but twice nothing?

I locked the door to my office, pushing my face into the box containing our new iris-recognition technology. Confidentiality and security are axiomatic to my business. We drill it into all our recruits

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[1] Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918) was the most famous Swiss painter of his generation. He was born in Berne but moved to Geneva in 1871 to pursue his career. His paintings include portraits, figures at work and landscapes, many of which depict scenes around Geneva. Perhaps the most famous of his figure paintings is *Die Holzfäller* which was reproduced on the reverse of the National Bank of Switzerland's green second-series fifty-franc note (issued, in Hodler's lifetime, in 1911 and withdrawn in favour of the fifth series only in 1958). Hodler's early painting style is highly realistic, but evolved through his career towards a sparse expressionism. At his death, Hodler left many unfinished paintings. But he cannot have painted the picture described here by Nick Kellaway: the *Statue de la Bise* was only sculpted, by Arnold Koenig, in 1939. – Ed.

and fire those who breach the code. The physical ritual of locking up each night reinforces the message. And the boss must set the example.

Only two people were still at their desks on the trading floor. Valentin the Bulgar, who trades volatility, had his eyes glued to Chicago. Val had made his name in the late nineties when consulting firms were spreading panic about the millennium bug and making a fortune selling remedies. Operating from a back room in the University of Sofia, he captured the entire server and computer array of one of the Big Five accounting firms and held it to ransom. He'd not seen anything wrong in that. It was a new era of freedom. It was 'business'. He'd even contacted a firm of City solicitors to represent in him the negotiations. He was just doing what, according to his communist schoolmaster, capitalists did. When we heard about him on the cocktail-party circuit, Fabrice flew to Bulgaria to find him and hire him for Kellaway & Co.

Across the floor, my oil trader – the girl whose computers arbitrage Brent and West Texas Intermediate – was packing her handbag. "Have you seen Fabrice?" I asked her. That afternoon, Fabrice had sold Northern Rock short – through three different brokers to keep our profile low – but had been unable to borrow enough stock to cover his position.

"He was in the boardroom a few minutes ago."

I checked the boardroom. A candle flickered alone in the empty room. It was one of two Richters that Kellaway & Co. owned.[2] The other hovered in blurred black and white on the wall of our private dining room. That's Richter the painter, of course – not the earthquake wallah; though no doubt Oil and Volatility would have preferred the earthquake to the candle. In banks, during the old days, leaving a male and a female alone on the floor would have been against the rules. But Kellaway & Co. played by different rules – adult rules. If a couple of traders wanted to let off steam together after I left the premises then that was their business and not the kind of transaction my risk officer had any mandate to police. They could even do it, as the tradition had been at Harriman's, on the boardroom table. Though, at Kellaway & Co., every movement on the table and every flicker of the painted

[2] Gerhard Richter (1932 -) is a German painter. He was born in Dresden and after training in East Germany moved to West Germany shortly before the Berlin Wall was built. He has painted both abstract art and photographic-style realistic paintings – the latter often blurred. His candle series was painted in 1982 and 1983. – Ed.

candle on the wall would be automatically recorded on the internal CCTV system and there was always the rumoured possibility that the choicest scenes of the year would be shown on the big screen at the Christmas party.

Oil was peering into one of her darkened screens, using it as a mirror to apply a bright pink lipstick, when I returned to her desk. "He must've gone home," I remarked as I pretended not to watch her.

"He can't have gone far yet. You'll get him on his phone." Fabrice's flat was less than fifteen minutes walk away. Office rumour had it that he lived there with a robotic spaniel.

"It can wait 'til morning." Kellaway & Co. often ran naked shorts for longer periods than overnight. We had also learned – the hard way during the weeks after 9/11 – not to put anything important in emails or text messages. I was about to extend the policy to phone calls. Even a quick call asking Fabrice to return to the office was capable of misinterpretation. "Good night. You should be getting home. It's late."

"Good night, Nick," Oil responded, smiling a well-crafted smile for the boss through her half-painted lips. Before that evening, in the entire seven years she'd worked for me, I don't think I'd ever noticed the dimple that formed in her cheek when she smiled. It set the memory, the imagination and the visions running again as I left the trading floor.

I walked home to Knightsbridge through streets full of happy, summer people. I took my supper from the fridge, laid it on one of Caroline's Florentine trays and carried it into the sitting room. I ate the salmon and drank the wine – *Premier Cru Chablis Homme Mort 2001* – as I sat on the sofa facing the marble mantelpiece and the ruins at Paestum in their ornate gilt frame. Caroline had bought the painting at auction in September 2002, five years earlier. "Seventeenth century in the style of Claude," the Sotheby's catalogue had said. Ostensibly, it had been my fifty-first birthday present; though it also, I knew, marked another anniversary that fell in that same month, an anniversary that Caroline's generous red lips and gentle smile had alluded to as she watched me open her carefully wrapped package.

But I scarcely saw the ruined temples that evening of 25 July 2007. My eye kept being drawn to the far corner of the room where an old guitar leant awkwardly against the wall.

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Jan's was a very ordinary guitar. It had probably not cost her parents very much at all when they bought it for her for her fourteenth birthday. I imagine they thought she would play with it for a few months and then outgrow it and discard it like any other toy. But they were wrong. The guitar became a cherished companion. Affection had worn its varnish thin in places: in the curve where the instrument rested on her thigh; between the frets where her fingers picked out favourite chords. An old injury had healed into a twelve-inch scar across the pale wood and during its travels the guitar had acquired a dozen stickers, faded now like the causes they recalled: 'Make Love Not War', 'Woodstock 69', '*L'Imagination au Pouvoir*', 'This Machine Kills Fascists', a green apple that stood for New York…

Just before she disappeared, Jan had left her guitar with me. I assumed she would be back to collect it the next day or, at worst, a few days later. But she did not return. The days turned into weeks, the weeks into months. With no leads to work on and in the belief that she had gone to Germany, the British police classified Jan's file 'inactive'. In 1972, the German police had better things to do than to look for a runaway American kid simply because she had sent a postcard franked in Berlin. The years passed. Thin police files were consigned to remote archives. Jan remained 'missing' and, while nobody was watching, drifted into that unsatisfactory category 'presumed dead'.

I kept the guitar. It came with me from Oxford to London and stood in the corner of one sitting room after another as I climbed the property ladder. It even made it past the vigilant eyes of the interior decorators into Knightsbridge, reincarnated as a designer relic of a bygone era, taking its place alongside Caroline's statue of Ganesh, the Hindu elephant god, and rare pieces of antique Sèvres porcelain. Occasionally, Caroline, or later Amanda, would pick it up, tune the strings, play a few chords or even an entire song. Amanda asked to take it with her when she went up to Cambridge. I said no and bought her a new guitar. I had it custom made for her by Renato Bellucci and delivered to her at college. Jan's old guitar stayed where it was.

I poured myself a whisky, an old cask-strength Lagavulin. I drank it

quickly and, as I poured myself a second glass, I found myself staring at the guitar in the corner of the room, unable to shift my gaze from it. Through the raw peat smoke of the whisky and the untuned strings of the old guitar, I gazed at the girl with pale-blue eyes. I saw the blonde hair hanging long, breaking on warm suntanned shoulders and flowing down onto the swell of her breast. I heard a song that I thought had ended long ago. I heard the rainbow voice.

The images are like the soap bubbles a child blows through a plastic ring. A bubble, rippled with translucent, ephemeral colours, floats softly upwards, bursts, and is replaced by another. Images of a long-ago country. She sits, then, in the familiar Auberge of my youth, a half-empty glass of Fendant on the table before her. She has a cigarette in her right hand. It is a gold-tipped Sobranie Black Russian. She ignores the talk of Revolution that ebbs and flows around her. She blows smoke rings. Now she is lying on a jetty that reaches out into the blue lake. Perhaps she is asleep. Or perhaps she knows I am watching her from behind the low wall that separates the beach at La Bise from the formal lawns that surround the house. Perhaps she is ignoring me. Perhaps she wants me to stare at her. In another bubble I see her standing on the battlements of a ruined castle, illuminated by the harvest moon, like the ghost of a long-dead medieval courtesan. I call to her. But there is no response and then she is gone.

Memory or imagination? Daydreams or history? The raw ore from which the refiner's fire draws poetry? Or fools' gold?

In the still air of a forgotten night, I hear the muffled sound of travellers on the open road. In the darkness I see their festive lanterns swaying as they walk. Like a procession of carnival gypsies, they make their way toward the wide horizon, knowing there is no way home. They follow the pathway of Abelard and Héloïse, of Bonnie and Clyde, of Baader and Ensslin; lives magically entwined in erotic intensity, fed and watered by breaking all the rules, soaring like eagles, touching the goosebumps on the skin of eternity.

Once I dreamed of adding Kellaway and Day to that list, dreamed of Jan leaning out of a window on a hot Texas night and shouting at me, "Hey, boy, what you doin' with my mama's car?" The road not taken.

Anyway, Kellaway and Day sounded far too much like a provincial firm of cut-price solicitors. And did I think, for even just a nanosecond, that Jan would now be the age my clutching

grandmother had been when she stood beside a damp gravestone, smelling of widowhood and mothballs? You know, I believe I did.

As I poured my third whisky, I watched my hand pause along the arc between when the bottle was vertical and the moment the amber liquid flowed into the glass. In that brief flash along the arc of time, I caught a whiff of lavender and suddenly saw that I preferred Janice Day dead, preferred my memories and images, my dreams and stories, preferred *my* Janice Day to the unknown, Midwestern voice on the telephone. If Jan really was still alive… if it really had been her voice on the other end of the line… if…

The phone rang. I looked at my watch. It had gone eleven-thirty. Late enough not to answer the call. I waited as the phone switched itself to answer phone. I heard Caroline's voice and let her leave a message. "Nick," the machine said, "you're probably already in bed. But I thought I'd better let you know that I'm only just leaving now. It's getting pretty bad here."

If I had thought about it in advance, I imagine I would have expected to dream that night, as I had so often in the past, of Janice Day. But I didn't. I dreamed of Caroline. I dreamed of a damp November beach from which the tide had sucked the raging sea. There were thousands with me on that pale, impressionist morning: male and female, rich and poor, good and bad. Some wore top hats and carried parasols and seemed to be awaiting the unseasonable opening of an opulent party. Others were clothed in rags, shoeless and bare-headed. They were waiting for the signal to hoist their red banners and join together in singing the '*Internationale*'. On a platform festooned with blue, white and red, a man with a megaphone and warts on his voice ran an auction. Caroline stood beside him. She was cold and wet and her head drooped wearily forward, as if she had just been captured from the sea after a heroic struggle. Her rich, dark hair, normally so shiny, soft and clean, was matted with mud. The sparkle in her eyes had been replaced by the dullness of unfired clay. Her lips, once full and red, were grey, tight and cracked. With the broken fingernails of dirty hands she clutched at a scarlet rope, tied like a noose around her neck and hanging long between her breasts. "What," croaked the frog in the megaphone, "am I bid for freedom?"

Then, just before I awoke, the auctioneer turned to me and winked. It was my old friend Colin Witheridge, his thinning, middle-aged hair blowing in the wind, still directing the show, still alive in my dreams. He stooped to gather a fistful of sand from the beach, let the

grains of time trickle through his fingers as he answered questions I had not yet asked.

The barque that bears the dead
Has foundered on our shore;
The past has won the day,
The future is no more. [3]

I had only an apple for breakfast. I ate it as I stood in the entrance hall, looking at the reflection of myself in the enormous mirror that nearly fills one wall. I bent to smell the roses in their Sèvres vase on the polished table that had once belonged to a nobleman executed during the French Revolution. Caroline orders two dozen red roses to be delivered direct from New Covent Garden twice a week. Their scent fills the room. It is infinitely more intense when you put your nose within an inch of the flowers and inhale deeply.

I turned the key in the lock and stepped out into the fresh summer morning. There I met our neighbour, Phil Scott. In my private, unvoiced vocabulary, Phil was 'Santa Claws', an old man with sharp, holy talons. He was, he said, on his way out to buy a newspaper. I have no recollection of how long we spoke for or of what we spoke about – until he asked, rather abruptly, what it was I hadn't liked about the previous Sunday's sermon.

"What do you mean?" I retorted.

"You folded your arms and leaned back in the pew," he said.

I tried to make a joke of it, "You should have been listening to the sermon yourself, Phil, instead of watching me."

"'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' That's the point in the sermon where you folded your arms, right?" When I said nothing, looked straight through him to the sunlit day beyond, Phil added, "'Money can buy you freedom. Freedom from suffering.' Do you remember saying that once, Nick? The evening we first met?" When I still said nothing, he said, "And yet it's a curious – and a very uncomfortable – fact of life that most true human transformation comes through suffering." Then there was another pause before he said, "Or doubt. Suffering and doubt."

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[3] From Adam Heggie's 'A Private Game of Pooh Styx' in A. Heggie, *Posthumous Poems* (London, 2004). – Ed.

As I walked on, I didn't think long about camels or the kingdom of God or about Santa Claws and his facts of life. My thoughts were fixed on Janice Day.

I frittered away the morning in front of the Bloomberg screens that are today's markets. I interrupted others who were trying to put in a decent day's work. I tried to read a backlog of reports that on a normal day would have been consigned directly to the waste-paper basket. I googled 'Janice Day' and 'Barbara McIntosh'. I found nothing that I felt was linked to the voice on the phone. I went into Richard Huffman's Baader-Meinhof site and then looked up 'Red Army Faction' on *Wikipedia*. I learned that Brigitte Mohnhaupt[4] had been released from prison on 25 March. I wondered how I had missed the news at the time. I wondered what she was doing now, wondered how a twice-freed terrorist spends the rest of her days, wondered whether the previous evening's phone call had anything to do with her release. Amidst the public anger that greeted Mohnhaupt's release, the president of the Federal Republic of Germany had, less than three weeks earlier, declined clemency for her fellow Red Army Faction prisoner Christian Klar.[5] Many of us in the City had met Horst Köhler, now president of Germany, during his days in London at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. I googled him.

Then I googled myself and followed various links from the references I found. I was looking for something very specific. But I could not find it. Nowhere on the web could I find the number of my ex-directory private landline, the number that had rung the previous evening at eight-thirteen.

A few minutes after noon, I went down to the street to find a cab. I would like to say that, as I climbed into the back of the

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[4] Brigitte Mohnhaupt (1949–) led the second generation of the Red Army Faction, popularly known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, through the so-called German Autumn of 1977, the terrorist campaign to free the group's original leaders from prison. She was first arrested in 1972, released in 1977 and captured again in 1982. – Ed.

[5] Christian Klar (1952–) was a leading member of the Red Army Faction's second generation, active in the gang's 1977 campaign. He was captured and imprisoned in 1982, convicted of, among other crimes, a bank robbery in Zürich in 1979 in which a bystander was killed. He was also allegedly the third member of the group that assassinated Jürgen Ponto, chairman of Dresdner Bank, at his home on 30 July 1977, his accomplices being Susanne Albrecht and Brigitte Mohnhaupt. Klar issued a communiqué in January 2007 indicating he had not abandoned the radical anti-capitalist opinions of his youth. – Ed.

anonymous taxi, there was a little child blowing soap bubbles through a plastic ring, dancing joyously among them as they floated on the currents of soft summer air. But there wasn't. This was Mayfair. This was 2007. I doubt any of the passers-by would have recollected, even five minutes later, seeing a balding businessman of average height in a discreet dark-blue suit hail a passing cab, give the driver the name of an obscure, stubby little street around the back of Paddington Station and nervously straighten the knot in his pale-blue silk tie as the taxi driver pulled out into the slow-moving traffic.