

A dark, atmospheric street scene at night. The street is paved with cobblestones and lined with old buildings. A bright light source in the distance creates a strong lens flare and illuminates the scene. A blurred silhouette of a person is walking away from the viewer down the street. The overall mood is mysterious and suspenseful.

MISSION:

Angela

DENISE MAIN

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Chapter 1

West Berlin. January 1974

In the early morning light of a bruised sky, a fisherman saw something unusual drifting in the river's cold, murky waters. Later, the police found that it was the fully clothed body of a young woman floating face down in the Havel River on West Berlin's border. She was pulled from the water; a long swathe of dark brown hair covered her face. The retrieval was in full view of a small, huddled group of locals shivering in the cold misty fog, which hung like a grey curtain over the dismal scene. She had a buoyancy jacket under her clothes and a sealed identification card in her sock. It appeared she must have drowned attempting to escape from East Berlin, by swimming the deep river with its strong currents.

The ID papers noted: *Angela Muller born 1937, Gorlitz, Silesia, Southeast Germany. Single. No living family listed. Deceased Parents: Peter Gunter Muller and Charlotte Rachel (nee, Rubins) Muller, died Dresden, 1945. Grandmother, Gertrude Angela Muller, died 1964.*

Occupation: general typist. Potsdam, East Brandenburg.

The jarring sound pierced my foggy brain like a shard of glass. I reached out in the darkened bedroom and fumbled for the phone. It forced me from the depths of a much needed sleep.

'Hello.' I struggled to find my voice and separate it from my parched throat.

'Wake up, Erna. You're wanted immediately at the Station,' my colleague, Kirk, demanded in a hurried jumble. It had been a big night drinking and partying at the American Club until the dawn had broken over the sullen West Berlin skies.

It took me some seconds before I could wrestle myself into a sitting position and push the tousled mop of hair from my face; glad to see that Peter, my good friend with the occasional benefits, wasn't still in my bed.

'Why?' I eventually managed to rasp out.

'Don't ask me, I am just doing as I am told, and this means you too, if you know what's good for you,' Kirk replied impatiently.

I stood in the shower and let the hot water sluice over my body giving gentle relief from the aching tiredness. Adrenaline began to kick into my system. My mind struggled to ponder the possible reasons to present myself at the West Berlin MI6 Station so early on a Sunday morning. *It must be important or somehow I have screwed up over something. What could it be?*

I dressed quickly in dark slacks and a white shirt and checked my make-up, ensuring I had covered the lines on my tired face. *37 and I already look like my darling mother.* 'Bless her soul,' I said to my image.

The creaky lift took me to the third floor. I knocked on the large wood panelled door at the end of the corridor and entered. Major Bruce McKenzie was seated at the desk, his faded and thinning ginger hair was uncombed and stood on end; his face was unshaven, chin covered with a strong stubble of white and ginger whiskers. Usually dark suited, this morning he was dressed in a scruffy jumper and baggy track suit pants. Clearly, he too had been dragged out of his bed unexpectedly on this gloomy Sunday morning.

'Please be seated Erna, sorry to bring you in so early without any warning.' He waved me to a nearby chair.

'This morning, a woman of your age, build and colouring was recovered from the Havel River. It seems that she had drowned while trying to cross the river at the East/West border. The West Berlin police have handed in the identification found on the body. We think this provides a good fit with what is recorded on your file.'

He continued. 'I have it on good advice from Intelligence that you could take on this Angela Muller's ID and go into the East Berlin Sector as an undercover agent. If you accept this assignment, the overall mission is to infiltrate the Stasi Headquarters as Angela Muller, general typist and office manager. With your extensive training, fluency in German and office administration, we think you could manage this.'

His eyes did not leave my face. I sat quietly, listening.

'The undercover role is to provide information and intelligence from Stasi Headquarters for our agent Dietrich Kaufmann. He is the contact for

other MI6 agents working undercover in the East Berlin Sector. Also, with his network, he assists those wanting to leave the Democratic Republic of East Germany; especially those who are under surveillance for what is considered anti-government activities. The initial plan is that Kaufmann would liaise with you and take you to the Safe House in the East Sector. He will then prepare a pathway for you to enter the Stasi Police Administration.’ McKenzie explained, leaning forward on his desk, his pale blue eyes on me waiting for my reaction.

‘What are your thoughts at this stage Erna?’ he asked.

‘I am with you so far. Tell me more of what the plan would entail,’ I replied, keeping my face from revealing the quickening of my heartbeat.

McKenzie continued, ‘Kaufmann and a network of resistance workers have dug a tunnel under the Wall and Death Strip, used for defection and, or escape. To date they have organised the successful crossing of twenty men, women and children. Kaufmann suspects that the Stasi has been informed of a raised level of anti-government activity. They have reacted swiftly by organising an intense level of surveillance and interrogation of people in general. Any questions so far?’

‘No, please go on.’ I could barely breathe as the tension and excitement in my body increased. It clamped my chest and head as I took it all in; my first big project since I was given leave after the death of my mother, and further training last year.

‘Our agent Kaufmann, known as Code Hawk, on arrival through the Tunnel in East Berlin, will take you to a Safe House for orientation and prepare the groundwork for you getting employment in the Stasi Headquarter’s typing pool. The mission’s ambition is that you should be able to reach the offices of higher command by means of your expertise and training. There you would be able to access files of information and intelligence on those under surveillance, planned house raids and investigation. Kaufmann needs to be informed and warned of these lists in order to protect all involved in the Tunnel’s operations.’ He paused for breath and checked his notes.

‘Kaufmann and networker Marlene Herschel are our contacts in the East. All communication will be through them to reach the Station in West Berlin. We expect the mission’s duration could be up to a year, or until it is too dangerous to stay.’

McKenzie waited for an answer.

‘When would I need to leave?’ I asked in as clear a voice as I could manage.

‘You will need to prepare today to be able to take on this Angela Muller’s identity; the quicker the better,’ he said peering at me over the top of his glasses, as he thumbed through a sheaf of papers. ‘I have taken the liberty to organise identity papers from the information found on the unfortunate woman’s body: these are being prepared as we speak. They could be ready for you by tonight... Well, Erna, what do you say?’

Without hesitation I replied. ‘Yes Sir, I can do this. I will be ready by tonight and thank you for offering me this mission.’

‘You, as Erna Klemp, will have to disappear for quite a while. We will communicate that you have been transferred to another Station project somewhere in the South of Germany.’

McKenzie stood, shook my hand, and walked me to the door. ‘Good luck as Angela Muller.’

He opened the door for me.

On the way to the boarding house, I thought back to my past and how eventually I became an agent or “Joe” as they used to call us in the early days. I was studying Politics at Cambridge University when I met Jurgen, a handsome, intense 25 year old who became my boyfriend and lover. We became heavily involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, CND and joined the 1958 Aldemaston Protest March.

Unknown to me at the time, Jurgen had been spotted and recruited by an MI6 agent and was in the process of being trained to become an agent in the field. When he confided in me, I was at first astonished, but not totally surprised. It seemed quite natural and exciting for him to follow this pathway.

After my graduation we were married in a simple but romantic ceremony and then moved into a shabby flat in central London. I was five months pregnant.

Our love for each other became a roller coaster of extremes; untroubled one day, then without warning, his mood would become dark and stormy, often followed by passionate lovemaking and apologies. Then one memorable morning he left on what he told me was a brief assignment. He

never returned. No note, no explanation. The miscarriage came two weeks later. In a blinding blur I was jolted from a deep sleep by a sudden gripping, vice like pain in my belly which had me gasping and grunting for breath. A warm rush from my vagina onto my thighs had my hands reaching and cupping, trying to stem the flow of blood from my womb. The blood kept seeping from me. I could not stop it.

“My baby, my baby,” I sobbed as my womb convulsed again with the pain of being unable to hold the most precious thing to me; Jurgen’s child. “Jurgen, Jurgen, help me,” I screamed into the darkness of the room. The wail of an ambulance siren in the street below, seemed to echo my anguish. The urgent sounds of the ambulance faded in the distance and the silence of my room engulfed me; I knew then how alone I was, and maybe forsaken. I sobbed until exhausted and then troubled sleep claimed me until the grey morning light crept through the window.

The warm water from the shower head filled the base with a swirling whirlpool of water and blood. My baby’s blood and mine. I stood numbed, watching it disappear down the drain. Then I stared, for what seemed an eternity, at the nothingness that was left.

The following days, months and years of not knowing what had happened to Jurgen left me with painful emotional scars from the grief, rage and recriminations. *Why?* I kept asking myself.

MI6 couldn’t provide answers except to suspect that he may have turned. I found that hard to believe, but he had left with no trace. Germany was where MI6 had last heard from him. They had put agents to work that tried to find him, but they only found dead ends and blank walls.

He had disappeared. I needed answers and decided the best way I could do this and earn a living, was to follow up the recruitment offer by his handler and join MI6 for processing and training.

I dragged my thoughts from that dark past and thought about my own life as it had unfolded since then. A life as a career undercover intelligence agent who still hoped to find some answers, somewhere.

At 37, here I was getting close to middle age and more than able to abide by the strict parameters set for being absent without much notice. It was much easier to be independent of relationships beyond casual acquaintances, some with pleasurable benefits. Or to find entertainment with a bunch of ragtag spooks and party crowd who really didn’t notice or

care when someone wasn't around to party. They might offer a careless comment or speculation, but that would be all.

I had become used to living this extraordinary, but nonetheless, disciplined life. But tunnels; I hated the bloody things. They were always the worst aspect of my physical training. I dreaded the dark creepiness of being underground. But I have kept this suspect claustrophobia to myself.

'I will have to cope, take orders and shut up,' I said under my breath as I left the bus to walk the remainder of the way.

My kind landlady, Mrs Stone appeared downcast when I told her that I was being sent to another job in the south and was leaving my rooms that day. I also told the handyman and caretaker of my concerns for Mrs Stone when I gave him the key upon quitting the rooms.

'She is quite a lonely old soul,' I said. 'She reminds me a little of my English mother who had left England before the war to marry my German lawyer father. I noticed the expression on her face when I told her I was leaving West Berlin. She seemed quite forlorn, not that we knew each other that well, but we did have a chat on the stairs sometimes. I would give her a hug to show my understanding.'

'Sure Miss, I have a soft spot for her myself. You know she came to Berlin to marry her American soldier husband in 1948. Mrs Stone has really gone downhill since he died three years ago; lonely she is,' said the grey-haired caretaker with a sad shake of his head.

He gave me a shy smile and remarked, 'I guess I will miss you too. Where are you taking up this new job?'

'Not sure yet. I have applied for a position down south.' I shook his hand, picked up my case, went through the door and down the steps to the waiting taxi.

Chapter 2

The Taxi pulled up alongside the kerb on a street near the walled border that separated West and East Berlin. I stepped onto the wet pavement, which shone in the light of a nearby streetlamp. The temperature had fallen rapidly since dusk and there were signs of first snowflakes. I pulled the coat collar up to cover my ears and dragged the tight-fitting beret down over my brow.

I walked quickly down the street toward the bus stop, checked that no one was in sight, then slipped down a laneway leading to the rear of a house with the hidden entrance to the Tunnel in the basement. The house was only a street away from the Wall and in full view of armed East Berlin Border Guards. The Wall and Death Strip of 45 km, and three hundred watch towers were patrolled night and day. From the laneway I could see the guards on watch in the bright lights of the towers.

In the deep, dark shadows of the lane, there was the bright glow of a cigarette. I guessed it to be my contact, Dietrich Kaufmann. However, I cautiously slowed my footsteps when I saw a tall dark shape emerge from the lane's wall.

'Raven?' The question came in a hoarse whisper.

'Yes.' I acknowledged my code name.

'Hawk?' I whispered. '*Ja.*' He emerged from the shadows, stubbed his cigarette with the heel of his shoe, shook my hand and led the way into the house.

'Welcome aboard Angela Muller,' Dietrich said as he put the pot on the stove to brew some coffee.

'We'll get to know each other and your consigned role as an agent, but not too much information now for safety reasons—Don't know. Can't tell,' he quipped with a wide smile creasing his boyish face, a mop of light brown hair falling over his brow. 'We'll have another briefing with my friend, and soon to be yours, Marlene, or code Sparrow, when we get to her house after our crawl through the grand old Tunnel. I have had a briefing about you

from the Berlin Station Intelligence.’ He handed over the steaming mug and sat down opposite me.

‘Can you tell me a little more about the Tunnel?’ I asked as I sipped on my coffee.

‘Sure, in brief. “The Tunnel” we give it the dignity of its own name, was dug 12 metres deep by hard sweat and labour. It is 145 metres long through the sandy and clay soils of Berlin, under the Wall, below metres of bloody Soviet style concrete and what is called the Death Strip. It was completed in six months and burst through into the basement of Marlene Herschel’s house, in Bernauer Strasse, East Berlin. A group of tough and driven young men dug this tunnel and it is now used as a route by those willing to risk everything to escape the Soviet regime of East Berlin and East Germany. This unnamed group has helped many men, women and children escape through the Tunnel. However, this time tonight, Angela, you will be going to the East to become an agent for the West. Something quite different,’ Dietrich added, as his eyes scrutinised me. ‘You will need better clothing than what you are wearing. I have some that will give you much better protection for crawling.’

Sipping on my strong brew I spoke to Dietrich’s back, as he gathered what he needed from his haversack.

‘I didn’t know of its existence until this assignment, and I am glad for your safety it is not known outside MI6. Your group has done an amazing, brave and dedicated service for equally brave people. I am very privileged and ready to work with you and Marlene. When we get to the East, I expect I will be briefed on the crucial things I need to know.’

‘Of course, that will happen. You will stay in Marlene’s house for the orientation period and until we find an apartment for you. But first things first, we need to do the long crawl.’ Dietrich hurriedly explained what to expect in the dark and cold. I glanced at him with a small shamefaced grimace.

‘I have to be honest at this point. Even though I have had to do the garden variety of tunnel crawls in my training, I need to tell you that I have a deep-seated anxiety about them with their tight, creepy, dark spaces. But I can reassure you that I have passed the SOE tests. So, I promise I will not let you down and freak out halfway through.’

‘You’ll be fine, I will be close by. Let’s go, the night’s our best cover.’

Dietrich led the way down the steep, dimly lit steps to the basement where I saw the harness, ropes and pulleys that would swing me, with gritted teeth, down the 12 metre shaft to the Tunnel's floor. Two young men greeted us, shook my hand, no names were exchanged. They would assist us down to the floor of the Tunnel and then clear away any evidence of our presence and the operation.

Crawling was never my preferred mode of moving. Especially wearing a bulky, musty, used jacket. I met Dietrich's approval with my knees padded and cumbersome thick leather gloves for the icy, muddy floor into which I was told my hands would sink.

God help me, I groaned inwardly.

Dietrich, seeing my eyes roll, reassured me again with words of encouragement.

'You will soon get used to it, I haven't left anyone behind, yet,' he chuckled.

'I am glad to have you with me,' I told him honestly. 'You are well used to this confined space. I have been told that you helped with the excavating challenge. Hours on your back and knees, carving out the space over many months. *Bravo*. You are a champion and well prepared for these long crawls.'

He acknowledged my compliment with a smile and an old-fashioned bow.

'At your service madam,' he quipped, relieving the tension in the basement. I was able to find a laugh.

Fitted with the harness and lowered down the shaft, I reached the floor with a thud and a groan. My legs had buckled under my weight, and the harness and ropes. I removed the gear in the dark and dropped to my knees behind Dietrich. 'Here we go,' I muttered to myself as I drew in a few deep breaths to calm down. Dietrich shone his torch and with three sharp flashes signalled our farewell to the men above. He moved away with a light strapped to his black balaclava covered head.

After crawling on my hands and knees for what I thought was an eternity, I noticed that Dietrich shone his torch to highlight marks on the wall. He pointed with a thickly gloved hand and gestured with a throat slashing motion that we were crawling under the Death Strip. Despite the 12 metre depth, he said he was always cautious and rightly afraid of being heard and discovered.

I crawled on. Suddenly I felt something run across my outstretched arm, then a tail, or something like a small, sharp whip sting my cheek. A scream I refused to utter, died behind my clenched jaw. We crawled on in silence. Inwardly I groaned, wishing the torment over. Water had seeped into the tunnel's floor, and we squelched our way through the ice-cold mud, our hands and feet chilled to the bone.

Whenever I raised my head and eyes from searching the blackness of the floor, I saw Dietrich's head lamp shining ahead of us, striking the walls and roof, throwing grotesque shadows which danced weirdly with each sway of his body. They appeared like ghosts from Saint-Saen's *Dance Macabre*. I tried to remember the music to distract myself but failed and could only think, *Surely, we must be under the Wall by now, and in East Berlin. Glory be, only to be safely in the house in Bernauer Strasse where this bloody tunnel ends.*

Suddenly his head lamp flickered and went out, leaving us surrounded by a solid wall of an impenetrable blackness. I froze.

'Dietrich, Dietrich,' I hoarsely whispered. 'Are you there?' It felt like the walls were closing in on me. I waited for his voice to answer. Then a beam of light broke through the darkness, and I saw Dietrich beckoning me to move on. I realised I had been holding my breath. With relief I started to breathe again. Feeling somewhat reassured, the nausea and bile rising in my throat subsided. I plodded on.

We slowly covered the distance to the end of the tunnel, well over 100 metres in length. At last, a glimmer of light from its opening. Dietrich shone his torch upwards to let Marlene know that we had arrived; ready to be hauled to the top. He grabbed the harness and ropes while waiting for me. I was cramped and shivering from the cold. With numbed, fumbling fingers I managed to put on the rig of harness and pulleys. Then with a burst of newfound strength pulsing through my arms, I braced ready for the tension and tightness of the harness, like bands on my chest and legs, as I was hauled to the top. The first thing I saw in the light above me was a beaming face framed by long blonde hair. Arms reached down and helped me climb and scramble onto the basement floor. Exhausted, I extended my shaking, mud-covered hand.

'Marlene? Angela Muller at your service.'

Chapter 3

Comrade Henkel, a large middle-aged woman dressed in official Stasi uniform, stared across the paper strewn desk at me. She held a manila folder in her beefy hands. The interview for a position in the typist administration had taken thirty minutes. I was convinced I heard each of the tick and tocks of the clock.

‘Fräulein Muller,’ Henkel spoke at last, with an edge to her voice that could have sharpened knives. I stared unblinking at her broad Slavic face. Her pale blue, ice cold eyes lowered.

She continued. ‘From the interview and what I can see here from your file you have quite extensive work experience, office management skills and a reference from your College Administrator, the late Herr Jager. His reference supports your application for a position in Stasi Headquarters. We can give you a six month trial in the Typist Administration Department, starting on Monday. Will that be satisfactory?’ Henkel asked, her eyes still on the papers before her.

‘Yes Comrade, thank you,’ I replied, hastily getting to my feet when she rose from behind the desk to end the interview. I watched the rigid back of the severe figure of Comrade Henkel as I followed her to the door. I released a soft, long held breath in relief on leaving the room and heard the door shut sharply behind me.

I walked down the long dim corridor; the heels of my shoes clicked out a tattoo in the otherwise quiet office building. Six months had passed since the interview and subsequent promotion to the Administration of Stasi Operations Department. I stood before Oberleutnant Axel Hempf’s door and smoothed the regulation skirt over my hips and thighs. I thought of Dietrich’s thorough and detailed briefing of the Stasi Headquarters which included a quipped reminder that the strategy of seduction should be

considered. I knocked three sharp raps and entered the room on his command.

Hempf, a tall, dark, statuesque figure in Stasi uniform, was standing before the third-floor window watching the traffic flow by on the street below, a lit cigarette in his hand. The car lights were on full beam as the clouds had not cleared; the light was poor in the East Berlin winter afternoon. He turned as I entered the room.

‘Good afternoon Fräulein Muller; you have documents for me to sign?’ He spoke in a modulated voice with a distinct Berlin accent giving more than a hint that his education was gained in expensive schools. I had come to like the sound of his voice.

‘Good afternoon Oberleutnant. Yes, more approvals for surveillance and inspections. These are the list of names of those who are under suspicion of helping people to leave illegally and those who are under active surveillance.’ I crossed the floor and placed the documents on his desk.

Axel Hempf, Head of the Department, returned to his desk and stubbed the cigarette in the large copper ashtray. With a wave of his hand, he indicated for me to be seated. Placing the glasses lower down on his nose, he read the papers before him one by one, lifting the pages with his long fingers.

‘Operational Stasi is putting more and more citizens under surveillance,’ he said raising his head, his dark blue eyes narrowed by a frown. ‘Why can’t these people understand that we are keeping the borders tightly controlled to protect the German Democratic Republic from loss of population. His neck and face flushed with the heat of his rising frustration. ‘Don’t they realise that when they are caught, and it is not an *if*, they will be punished as traitors?’ With his fists clenched, he put his question not to me, but to the desk.

‘Yes, it is hard to fathom Oberleutnant.’ I reached down to take the signed papers.

After a few minutes, Hempf relaxed. He sighed and leaned back in his chair; his arms folded over his chest, an embarrassed smile on the full lips of his lean face.

‘Forgive me Fräulein Muller, I have let my frustrations show.’

‘There is nothing to forgive Oberleutnant.’ I smiled at him and turned to leave.

‘Wait a moment,’ he said, rising to his feet. ‘I want to thank you. You have been an excellent secretary; I do appreciate your diligence. And here we are working late again. Could I tempt you to have dinner with me tonight, a small gesture of my appreciation? I dine most nights at the Metropole Hotel. It is just a few blocks from here. Will you join me?’

I stood stock still with the bundle of files in my arms and turned toward him as he walked to open the door and waited for my reply.

‘Thank you Oberleutnant, that is kind of you, I would like that very much,’ I replied, with a wide smile. ‘But I will meet you there as I have some tasks to do beforehand.’

I left Hempf’s office. My shoes clicked their way back to my workstation on the same floor. I entered the small dingy space, sat at my desk, the signed papers clutched in my trembling hands. My heart’s pulse hammered in my chest.

I could easily flirt with him to secure my position in his department. But I know the risks and the high price I would pay if I overplayed my hand and was exposed as a spy.

The daylight had closed in and below, at street level, the shine from the lights struggled against the developing fog. I left the workstation, entered the lift where I turned up my coat collar and pulled the tight-fitting hat down over my hair. Stepping down onto the busy pavement, I walked to the corner where I stopped to buy the evening paper. I glanced around to see if I was being followed. Satisfied, I crossed the road and caught the bus just before it moved away. I exited at the next stop and walked through a dimly lit laneway to the public bar at the end of the cobble stones.

Dietrich Kaufmann (Code Hawk) had been working undercover at this seedy bar for the last year. He turned his head from tending a customer and saw me sitting on a stool at the counter.

‘What would you like to drink, Fräulein?’ he asked as he leaned over to wipe the bar top.

‘Metropole; number four pigeonhole, tonight,’ I whispered and, ‘Vodka, please.’ I bent my head to examine my fingernails, took the drink without looking at him and sat down at a table near the window. I finished the drink in three gulps and left the bar.

With my handbag tucked tightly under my arm I walked the five blocks in soft rain to the Metropole Hotel. I walked briskly with my thoughts centred on the sealed envelope tucked away in the lining of my handbag.

The envelope was addressed to Ditty and contained a birthday card with the words *'To Ditty with love.'* A carefully folded note secreted in a sleeve in the card had the coded names of ten people under immediate surveillance and possible arrest by the Stasi police.

I entered the hotel foyer where I saw a row of letter slots behind the reception desk. Standing in front of them was the hotel manager, who greeted me with a nicotine-stained toothy smile.

'Welcome Fräulein. Good evening. Your name please?'

'Fräulein Muller.'

'Oberleutnant Hempf has arrived and is expecting you,' he added, avoiding making eye contact.

'Would you mind taking my coat?' I asked. 'It is too wet to take into the dining room.' I shrugged the damp coat from my shoulders and handed it to the manager.

'Of course, Fräulein.' He held it with an expression of disdain and disappeared down the corridor to the cloak room. *OK. Not a fan of the Stasi,* I thought, taking the envelope from my handbag. I quickly slipped behind the counter and placed it deep out of sight into the number four pigeonhole. Without a backward glance, I drew in a deep breath and walked into the dining room where Axel Hempf was waiting.

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