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I shrugged a bit deeper into my coat. I gave him a dead stare. I had to watch over things. Things had been bad enough with the fire, though nobody had come running: There was still dark in the windows. Tilney has been known to put you in your place less gently than that, but he wanted to humour me, I think. He said he was going to Reigate, and asked me if I wanted to follow him up. Had he tried to phone you before, at your flat or anywhere? Did he sound worried? To have asked you to follow him up? Wanted to know if there were any ticks on his tail. He knew the score now: Then you phoned Signals? I told them to pass it on to whoever was running him. He picked up the intercom phone and I waited, my body heavy in the worn leather chair, my eyes wanting to close. There was only one thing, really, I could do that would get me at least some of the way out of this appalling sense of guilt, almost of betrayal, and Shatner could help me do it. I want you to deal with them. I could feel the cold going through to the bone. I did it as a matter of routine. The essence of intelligence is secrecy, of all and any kind. Everything was too hot to touch until the early hours. Was he in his car, or maybe a pub? Tilney had the pencil between two fingers, and was swinging it up and down; it was getting on my nerves. We did some infiltration work in Beirut a couple of years ago. I enjoyed working with him. How long would it be, how long before this smell was out of my clothes, out of my soul, this smell of burning? Now get me in to see Shatner, will you? I was not, on this black winter morning, inclined to think good of anyone. There are a few rooms here, cubicles really, where we can get some sleep if we need to. There were only a few people at the floodlit mission boards - Stacey, Freeman, Holmes, and a couple of new recruits up from training at Norfolk. Only two of the boards were active, with their code names chalked at the top: They said I could come back tomorrow. Holmes was standing beside me. At the board for Stingray one of the new people was looking edgy, leaning forward over the console. Have you got any support out? The voice coming from the speaker sounded a little tight now. I came here alone. Holmes left me and went over to the central console and picked up one of the phones, presumably to ask the Chief of Signals to get here. This is the market area, with people milling about. When you realised what that car was going to do you had about half a second to get in its way and you were something like a hundred yards behind, not terribly easy. The first of the winter daylight was coming through the small high windows. It would be creeping among the trees out there, touching the blackened wreck, giving it highlights. I just want you to stop feeling it. If you like, we could go along to a funfair tonight and bash the bumpers off the dodgem cars and get some of that lovely adrenaline out of the bloodstream. Would that be nice? He would have a rough idea. Holmes is the most sentient being in the whole of this bloody building. The problem with this one was that they were absolutely, right, Tilney and Holmes: But in a bleak shadowed corner of my mind the excoriating monologue kept up its whispering. He asked you to protect him, and what happened? He might not see what I was after. Even if I could have eaten anything, the buns in here were like bits off a boulder, and for butter read margarine. Pull up the drawbridge and drop the portcullis, but the enemy within the citadel will undo you. Holmes lowered his head an inch, his eyes watching me from the deepened shadow of his brows. And if you still decide to see him, be very, very careful. Perhaps that was what Shatner meant. It could have got him killed last night: I was there when they got him. There might be questions you want to ask. I might not have covered everything with Tilney. Then tell them to route him through Paris. And Phyllis - no more calls. You tend to play hard to get. There was nothing you could have done. So I knew what I looked like, not quite your eager beaver just dying to see his name on the board again. How do you feel personally? The phone rang again and the sound brought the sweat out on me, because that had been tricky going. This man had also had his executive wiped out on home ground and without any warning, and he must have had a lot to do in the last few hours. I stayed by the door. Shatner swung me a look. I might not be in bad hands if Shatner agreed to run me in Berlin, give or take a stray shot or a blown cover. I can pass for a native Berliner. That makes a difference. All the controls have got to do in this place is press a button and the computers throw you on the screen like an X-ray. He stood still for a moment

and looked at me. When can you take over from McCane? Or rather, on his death. A week ago he was murdered, and his body taken away. His flat had been broken into with some violence, and the police found evidence of massive blood loss. There were marks on the floor indicating that his body had been dragged out of the flat to the lift. She reported sounds of the door being smashed in, an outbreak of voices and finally a cry. I sent McCane out there. He ran into a lot of resistance when he started asking questions. McCane was going there last night, to put up at a hotel and see her this morning. It could finish you off, one fine day. Shatner said there was no need for me to go through Clearance at this stage; a lot was going to depend on how much Helen Maitland was prepared to help us and whether she could give us any positive information to work on. Shatner had officially started running me but there was no actual mission on the board and the truth was, after all, that the reason that was driving me south from London on this cold November afternoon was purely personal. I owed a man a death. There was frost on the grass, and dead leaves, their edges silvered in the last of the winter daylight. A birdbath stood on a stone pedestal with ice in it, and something else, a 7 small rounded object, perhaps a dead bird: It was intensely quiet here, but in the distance there was traffic, its sounds muted, it seemed, by the cold and the lowering dark. She turned round and saw me. We stood facing each other for a time in silence. At this distance she looked insubstantial, a small cold face above the coat, her hands tucked into the sleeves, her feet together in their fleece-lined boots. There was a toy railway engine not far from where she stood, lying on its side among the frosted leaves. I went towards her. Not at me, perhaps, but at all the things I meant, because I was here, all the things she was going to have to do now that she was a widow. That was my impression. I was breaking into the small Confusing world that was taking its place between the old one, where her husband had been, and the new one, where he would not be.

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