

Six weeks previously

May 2nd, 2016

Vauxhall Cross

London, United Kingdom

“Scotland!”

“Yes, Jasper, Scotland.”

“But why? As far as I know, Scotland has not become independent. What good is an MI6 officer there?”

“That brings me to the next topic,” C announced.

“I’m not going to like this, am I.”

“Not a lot, no. We are transferring you across the river...”

“Five!”

“Yes. Permanent transfer. It’s the only option Jasper. While I and many others applaud you for your actions, two weeks ago, and I am very sorry for your loss at that time, there are many who feel that your actions embarrassed the Service.”

“But what could I do in Scotland?”

“That I cannot tell you at this point. You will be briefed once you move. I understand there is a substantial pay rise available and you get the usual moving allowance. A range of suitable properties have been made available to you so you can move as soon as you like once you have made your selection. You will also have four-weeks leave. See this as a promotion, Jasper.”

“Define ‘promotion’!”

Friday, June 10th

Scotland

I had found out about the secret life that our parents lived, two months previously.

It had been a combination of bad luck on the part of Dad and debatable good timing on the part of Christopher Collins, me. Although, to be honest, I would have preferred never to have known what Mum and Dad did for a living and not just because of the events of that night. I had never suspected anything, during my eleven years of life, while we were living down in England.

I had started getting curious about the times that Mum and Dad had ‘vanished’ for a day here and a week there – although, only one at a time. Mum did a lot less once I was about seven and my sister was five when she started a new job as a paramedic.

It had all started one dark and stormy Tuesday night – okay, maybe not so dark and stormy.

Two months previously

A Tuesday night

High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

I was supposed to have been in bed – Mum and Dad had very strict rules about going to bed and staying put.

As was usual, Mum and Dad were on the sofa in the living room enjoying some time together. My sister, Charlie, was fast asleep in her bedroom opposite mine. I poked my head around the living room door just as Dad stood up and went over to the window.

“Something’s wrong, honey. I can see men in the Kensington’s back garden.”

The Kensington family were our next-door neighbours. We went to school with their two daughters. As Dad turned away from the window his expression was one which I had never seen before. It was all business and the first thing he did was hold his thumb against the mirror over the fireplace and I saw the space around his thumb turn green. Dad removed his thumb and the mirror swung upwards to reveal a cache of some kind.

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I could see stacks of notes on two shelves – some were the red of £50 notes. Dad ignored those and he reached inside for a large black plastic case with a carry handle on the front. I looked over at Mom and her expression was all business too. She obviously knew about the ‘safe’ too. Dad placed the black case onto the living room table and after spinning a combination lock, he opened the lid. It was a weapons case!

Dad lifted out a foam insert with what looked like the trigger and stock for a rifle. He placed this to one side and pulled out a black pistol with something attached beneath the barrel as well as four items which went into his pockets and another longer item which he inserted into the base of the pistol. He pulled back the top of the pistol and made his way to the kitchen. Mom replaced the foam insert and then placed the black case back into the hidden safe.

She pressed a small button and the mirror slid closed without a sound.

Jasper Collins

I moved out of the kitchen door and then to the fence between our two properties.

I peered over and was not happy to see that the back door had been forced open – the frame was bent and the door no longer hung true. I noticed a sentry, just to the side of the garden shed. He was in shadow which to most observers would have made him invisible. But to a seasoned Government Agent who had operated on every continent of the world, he stood out like a dayglo penguin in the Arctic.

With quick steps, I moved down the garden and then I quickly swung myself over the 6-foot fence. I landed, rolled, and came up mere inches from the sentry. The first thing the black-clad man knew of my presence, was my legs as they wrapped around his neck and pulled him down to the grass. I literally squeezed the life out of him until he ceased his frantic struggle for life and I instantly released him. He was still breathing as I stepped back to study my target.

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He wore light-weight black combat trousers with a black flak-vest and boot. His face was covered with a black balaclava which when removed revealed a Caucasian male with dark brown hair cut very short. I found no ID, nothing. I pulled out some paracord and hogtied the sentry. I used his balaclava as a makeshift gag, stuffing it into his mouth. The man had been armed with a large knife, a Glock 23 pistol, and a .40-calibre UMP submachine gun fitted with a suppressor.

He had a radio with an earpiece and a throat microphone. I grabbed the radio and inserted the earpiece into my left ear just in time to catch the tail end of a transmission.

‘... targets secure!’

It was an American voice and by the sound of it, they had the Kensington family. I knew little about my neighbours. They kept to themselves and we merely exchanged hellos. Their daughters went to the same schools as Chris and Charlie. As far as I knew, Ryan Kensington was a doctor of some notoriety and the wife was a well-regarded solicitor. Both were acceptable targets for ransom, my professional mind told me.

I checked my Glock 17 pistol and screwed a suppressor into the muzzle. Next, I made my way towards the open back door of my neighbours’ house.

Fifteen minutes earlier

The Kensington House

“Night, Mum!”

“Night, honey – don’t wake your sister.”

“Would I do a thing like that,” thirteen-year-old Olivia responded facetiously.

“Yes, you would,” Sophia Kensington laughed. “Dad’ll look in on you when he returns from work.”

With that, thirteen-year-old Olivia ran down the corridor to her bedroom. She clambered into her bed and turned out the light. Within minutes she was fast asleep.

“Peace and quiet reins!” Ryan Kensington quipped as he walked into the living room a few minutes later. “Let’s . . . oh, my God...”

Three armed men had suddenly materialised, seemingly out of nowhere.

Sophia Kensington screamed as she was seized by her blonde hair and forced to her knees. Another man did the same with her husband. The third man stood before the both of them and oversaw the operation. More screams came from the opposite end of the house as the two girls were roughly seized from their beds. The petrified youngsters were dragged kicking and screaming into the living room where they were forced to kneel beside their parents with their hands on their heads. Having just been roused from a deep sleep, neither girl had the faintest idea about what was going on.

“Daddy!” Olivia was able to sob before she was backhanded across the face.

All four Kensingtons were quickly processed as duct tape was placed over their mouths and their wrists were zip-tied behind their backs. Ryan Kensington had struggled and thus, he had received the barrel of a pistol across his face. The three females sobbed in fear of what was to come.

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Two of the men vanished, but they returned after a few minutes. One nodded at the leader. While they had been absent there had been the obvious sounds of searching as the men had ransacked the study next door. The leader turned to Ryan Kensington and he ripped the tape from the kneeling man's mouth.

"I trust that you will cooperate, Mr Kensington. We need access to your safe and we need it now. Any hesitation or attempt to thwart us will be met with a reprisal. You would not like the results of any reprisal, I can assure you."

Ryan Kensington shook his head firmly without saying a word.

"You put the information in that safe above the welfare of your wife and daughters?"

The leader walked over to the younger of the two near-hysterical girls and he yanked her to her feet by the shoulder. The eleven-year-old shook with fear and she looked to her mother and father for help. The leader seized the young girl's jaw and he turned her face to look up at him.

"A very sweet little girl – shame..."

With that, he ripped off the girl's nightwear leaving her naked before everybody.

"Let me know when you have had enough, Mr Kensington..."

He moved over to the next child and repeated his act of ripping the girl's nightwear off and baring her developing body to all. The leader ran the muzzle of his pistol across the teenage girls breasts as she squirmed in abject fear.

Seeing no reaction from the father, the leader placed the muzzle of his pistol against the younger girl's bare left shoulder and the girl began to whimper. He pulled the trigger. The girl screamed out and she fell to the floor where she writhed in agony as blood soaked into the carpet.

"Plenty more joints to go..."

The room went silent again as the young girl passed out with the pain. Her elder sister had been stunned into silence.

"Eight, seven, nine, four, four, two, eight, six, six, four, one."

"Thank you, Mr Kensington."

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The leader left the room for several moments before he returned to the living room holding a large grey folder in his left hand.

"Mr Kensington, you have been most helpful, goodbye..."

With that, the leader shot Ryan Kensington in the forehead before he did the same to his wife. Both bodies fell together side by side to the floor. He turned to the eldest child, Olivia. She was shaking with fear and she was struggling to comprehend what was occurring before her very eyes.

"I think your sister is past saving – this is purely business, but with a little pleasure..."

The leader raised his .40-calibre Glock 23 pistol to her head and he squeezed the trigger.

Jasper Collins

The room echoed to the sound of gunfire.

Only it was not the dull boom of the .40-calibre rounds but the sharper crack of the nine-millimetre rounds from Jasper Collins's Glock 17. The first man to die was the leader followed by one of the men to his right. The others dove to the ground the moment the first round exploded out of the 17s muzzle.

"The pleasure is all mine!" he growled.

Jasper made a move towards Olivia who was making a stupid and ill thought out attempt to stand up. Jasper shoved her very roughly to the floor beside the still warm bodies of her dead parents.

"Stay!" he growled with menace in his tone.

Automatic gunfire rattled out as one of the gunmen sprayed the living room from behind a sofa. Jasper paused until the man's weapon locked on empty and he arose firing into the sofa. The gunman fell backwards but his armour had protected him from major injury. He struggled to reload his UMP but he was not fast enough as two nine-millimetre slugs tore his head apart.

More automatic gunfire erupted in Jasper's direction shattering the glass of the patio doors which led out to the garden. Jasper sent half a dozen rounds towards the gunfire as he lay flat on the floor before he swapped out his magazine. As far as he was aware, he had killed four of the team – that just left two...

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Jasper ran towards the door out of the living room. He could hear boots pounding on the staircase. Just as he arrived at the foot of the stairs, he could see the backside of an individual almost at the top. He sent four bullets up the staircase. The gunman received two in the buttocks while the other pair struck a pair of something else and he screamed out in agony as he fell backwards.

The man was so stunned that he never noticed that he had reached the hall at the bottom of the stairs. He never saw the muzzle erupt in flame as a bullet coursed through his brain.

Olivia screamed out. Jasper ran back into the living room just in time to see the last gunman seizing the large grey folder and sending two bullets towards Olivia. He fired two more bullets into the front window, shattering it before he dove past Jasper's bullets and out into the front garden. Jasper had no idea if he had hit the man but first he checked on Olivia.

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She was screaming.

Jasper could see plenty of blood on what remained of her pyjamas but it was difficult to tell what might be hers and what was soaked up from the carpet beneath her. He glanced over the naked girl and he could see where a bullet had grazed her left side. He took a glance at the prone younger girl and was very surprised to see movement in the girl's chest.

Jasper quickly cut the zip-ties of both girls and he seized hold of Olivia's left hand and placed it on to the girl's own side. He then took her right hand and placed it onto her sister's shoulder and he pressed down hard.

“Keep pressure on it.”

Jasper was in no mood for bedside niceties as he then dove after the escaping gunman. He could see the gunman as he vaulted the front fence. Jasper rolled on the grass after diving out of the window and he gave chase while swapping out his almost empty magazine. He could hear sirens approaching – he had only minutes, if not seconds to finish the action and call for help before a Police Trojan unit shot him down.

After vaulting the fence, Jasper closed on the gunman and he noticed that the man was limping – at least one bullet had struck home.

“SIS, stop!” Jasper yelled in the distant hope that the man might do what he was told – no such luck, though.

The man simply turned and he sent a stream of automatic gunfire in Jasper’s direction. Jasper ignored the gunfire and he fired off half a dozen rounds at the gunman who fell to the tarmac just as two Police ARVs came out of the road behind Jasper. As the two Volvo estates skidded to a halt a few yards away, two Police Officers jumped out of each vehicle and they each raised a Heckler & Koch MP5 submachine gun to his shoulder.

“Armed Police, put the gun down!”

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Jasper ejected the magazine and the round from the breech before he placed the pistol on the ground beside him.

“Turn around!”

Jasper turned slowly with his hands part-raised on either side of him.

“Lie down!”

Jasper did as he was ordered just as his wife burst out of their house and ran towards the Police.

“Sergeant, stand down!” Lynn ordered as she approached.

“Ma’am, please stand back!” the Police Sergeant admonished.

“That is my husband and he is SIS.”

“James bloody Bond?”

“Funny.”

Lynn Collins proffered Jasper’s and her own identification. The Police Sergeant swore as he looked at the identification cards before he passed them over to a subordinate for checking.

“MI6 has no jurisdiction within the UK, ma’am.”

“This was an extraordinary situation. There was a home invasion next door and my husband reacted.”

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A few minutes later, Jasper was brought before the Sergeant. His hands were cuffed behind his back and another officer had gone down the road to inspect the fallen gunman.

“Your wife tells me that you are James Bond. How many?”

“Five dead X-rays, one detained. Two innocents dead and two wounded; one seriously.”

The Sergeant turned as one of his subordinates came over with the two ID cards.

“Both are clean, Sergeant.”

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While his wife headed back home, Jasper took the Sergeant and his men over to the Kensington house where Paramedics were already tending to the two girls. The bound man in the back garden was taken into custody while each of the dead men were accounted for. Jasper explained his actions while a young officer took notes. The younger Kensington, Jessica, was being taken out to an ambulance.

Her elder sister was in the kitchen where she was having a dressing applied to her left side. She had no need for hospital treatment, so for the moment Jasper took her next door and he gently laid the young girl onto the sofa wrapped in a blanket. The paramedic had given the girl a sedative to help her sleep. Lynn laid another blanket over the youngster and left her to rest.

Jasper turned to the doorway which led to the bedrooms, “You might as well come out, Christopher!”

“Sorry, Dad – I saw it all and I know I shouldn’t have.”

“We’ll talk about it in the morning. Go check on your sister – she must be frightened to death with all the noise.”

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“Charlie!”

Christopher was getting annoyed; he knew that his sister would be awake – the noise outside had been enough to awaken the dead. Christopher pushed open the door to his sister’s bedroom. It was large and looked out over the front garden. He turned on the light and saw that his sister seemed to be asleep under her duvet.

“Charlie!”

He strode over and yanked back the duvet.

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“DAD!”

Jasper ran towards his son’s panicked yell.

“Oh, my God . . . Charlene!” Jasper shouted as he saw his daughter soaked in blood. “PARAMEDIC! We need a paramedic!”

Everything appeared to happen in slow motion. Two paramedics appeared from outside and they rushed into the house. They pushed everybody aside and ripped open the nine-year-olds pyjama top. She was covered in blood but she was still breathing. Jasper knew what a bullet would look like when he saw one. He turned and yanked back the curtains where he just stared at the single hole in the glazing.

It took several minutes to stabilise the girl so that she could be moved. The stretcher with Charlene Collins securely strapped aboard was quickly loaded into the waiting ambulance along with Lynn Collins and with a curt wave, the ambulance, blue lights flashing, accelerated away from the house and towards the hospital.

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As Christopher Collins watched the ambulance, he saw it slow a hundred yards down the road and then pull over to the side of the road and stop. Several minutes passed as the ambulance sat stationary with its blue lights flashing. Then a door opened and a paramedic climbed out.

And the blue flashing lights . . . they stopped flashing.