

The President's Murderer

by Jennifer Bassett

(Adapted book. Beginner level)

The First Day

‘Run!’ the man thought. ‘Move! Faster! I can’t stop now.’

Over the man’s head the night sky was black and cold, and in front of him were the trees. Tall, dark trees ... five hundred metres away.

‘I can hide there,’ the man thought. ‘I can hide in those trees. They can’t see me in the trees.’

He looked behind him. He could see the lights. There were five or six men. They ran fast, and their lights moved up and down. They were not far away now. He could hear their feet on the ground.

The man ran faster. His legs were tired, his body was tired. There were noises in his head, he could not see. The trees were two hundred metres away. He wanted to stop running. He wanted to lie down and sleep.

Then he heard a new noise. Dogs.

‘They’ve got dogs!’ he thought. ‘Oh no! Not dogs! I can’t run faster.’

But he did. Faster and faster. The trees were a hundred metres away ... fifty ... twenty ...

And then he was there. The trees opened their dark arms to him. But he did not stop running. It was dark and quiet under the trees. He ran first to the left, and then to the right. He came to a hill, and for a second or two he stopped and listened.

Nothing. Then he heard the dogs again, but he could not see the lights.

‘Don’t stop now,’ he thought. ‘Dogs don’t need eyes. They can find you in the dark.’

Quickly he ran down the hill. It was very dark here, and he could not see very well. He ran into a tree and nearly broke his arm.

‘Careful!’ he thought. ‘Careful.’ He put his hands out in front of him, and ran more slowly. Then he heard a new noise. Water.

‘A river!’ he thought. ‘The dogs can’t follow me across water. Where is it? Quick!’

Soon he found the river. It was not very big, but it ran quickly. The water was cold on his tired legs. He walked and ran up the river, through the water, for about two kilometres. Then he stopped and listened again.

He could hear nothing. He stood there and waited. The trees watched him with dark, secret eyes.

Nothing. No dogs, no lights, no noises.

The man was cold now, and very, very tired. ‘I need sleep,’ he thought. ‘Where can I hide?’ He looked up at the trees.

‘Up there,’ he thought. ‘The dogs can’t follow me up a tree!’

He found a tall tree and went up it. He could not see the ground now. He half-sat, half-stood in the tree, and listened. Nothing.

‘An hour,’ he thought. ‘Sleep for an hour. Then go on. Go south. Hide in the day, and move at night. I can get there in five days, perhaps six.’

The man put his head down on his arms, and slept.

* * *

‘What are you saying? You lost him?’ the Chief of Police said angrily.

The young police inspector in front of her was tired. Very tired. He wanted to sit down, but people did not sit down in the Chief’s office. They stood and waited, and perhaps the Chief said ‘Sit down’. Then they sat down - but not before.

So the inspector stood. ‘I’m sorry, Chief,’ he said. ‘We couldn’t find him in the trees. We looked all night, but it was dark and ...’

The Chief of Police put her hands on the desk in front of her. ‘You had five men with you, Inspector, and two dogs. And you couldn’t find him!’

Eva Hine, the Chief of Police, was a tall woman of about fifty. Her eyes were grey and very cold. Dangerous eyes. When Eva Hine said ‘Jump!’, people jumped. They did not ask questions first.

The inspector waited, and the Chief of Police looked at him coldly. ‘What are you waiting for?’ she asked. ‘Go out and find him! Three months ago this man - Alex Dinon - killed the President of our country. He’s a murderer - a dangerous man. Twenty-four hours ago he escaped from prison, and our new President wants him back in prison - today! Now! At once!’

The inspector quickly left the room.

His name was Felix, and he was thirty-three years old. That was young for an inspector, but he was a good policeman. He liked his job, and worked long hours, but he was sometimes afraid of Eva Hine, the Chief of Police.

Ten minutes later he was back in his office, and Adam came into his room. Adam was twenty-five, and usually worked with Felix on important jobs.

‘What did the Chief say?’ Adam asked.

‘Find Dinon quickly,’ Felix said. ‘So, let’s begin. Have we got photographs of Dinon? And what about his family?’

Adam put some photographs on the desk. ‘He’s got a wife and two young children,’ he said.

‘Right. I want photographs on television and in all the newspapers. Four men can watch his house and family, day and night - four hours on, and four hours off. Next, I want policemen at all the airports and ...’

Telephones rang, and people came and went in the office. Felix and Adam worked on, late into the night.

The Second Day

The next morning Alex Dinon was forty kilometres south of the prison. He moved quickly and stayed away from towns and villages. It was winter and the weather was cold, so there were not many people in

the fields. He looked behind him often, but nobody saw him and nobody followed him.

At midday he found a quiet field and lay down under some small trees. He slept at once.

At about three o'clock Alex opened his eyes, and saw an old woman in front of him.

'What are you doing in my field, young man?' she said.

Alex sat up quickly. 'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I was tired, and needed some sleep. I'm going now.'

'You're very dirty,' the old woman said. 'Look at you! Where are you going?'

'North,' Alex said. He stood up and began to move away.

'Don't run away. I'm only an old woman.' She looked at him carefully. 'You're dirty, and hungry, and tired ... and afraid. Am I right?'

Alex smiled slowly. 'Yes,' he said.

'Well, come back to my house and have some food. And you can have some of my husband's old clothes. He died last winter.'

Alex looked at her. It was true. He was hungry and tired and dirty. And afraid ... but not of this old woman. 'Thank you very much,' he said.

The old woman's name was Marta. Her house was very small, but she put some wonderful hot food in front of Alex. He ate quickly, and Marta watched him.

'Oh, you were hungry,' she laughed.

Alex smiled, but did not stop eating.

Marta found some old clothes for him, and then made some coffee. She said nothing, but watched him with a smile. Alex finished eating and drank some coffee. He began to feel better.

'How did you escape from prison?' Marta asked suddenly.

Alex's face went white. He stared at Marta and said nothing.

Marta laughed. 'It's all right,' she said. 'I'm not afraid of the President's murderer. You can stay here tonight, Alex Dinon, and have a good sleep. I don't like the police, and I'm not going to tell them.'

* * *

Felix and Adam did not get much sleep. They stayed in the office and slept between telephone calls. The phones rang often, but in the morning there was no news of Alex Dinon. The day went slowly. The phones rang again and again - but there was no news.

‘Where is he? What’s he doing?’ Felix said to Adam. ‘He’s hiding - perhaps with friends.’

‘We questioned all his friends early this morning,’ Adam said. ‘They said nothing.’ He looked at Felix. ‘Can we bring some of them in here? With their wives. Then we can ask more ... difficult questions. Somebody usually talks then.’

‘No,’ Felix said coldly. ‘That’s not right, and you know it. Dinon can’t get out of the country now. But we need to find him today. The Chief isn’t going to be very happy.’ Late in the afternoon the Chief of Police telephoned. ‘Come to my office in half an hour,’ she told Felix.

Felix felt tired and dirty. He quickly drank some black coffee, and changed his shirt. Twenty minutes later he stood in front of Eva Hine’s desk.

She did not smile, but looked at Felix and waited. ‘The police are looking for Dinon in every town and village,’ Felix said quickly. ‘We’re watching the roads and the airports, and the houses of his family and friends ...’ ‘Sit down, Inspector, and listen,’ the Chief said. ‘We need to find this man quickly. The President is not happy. You’re a good policeman, Inspector, and this is an important job for you.’

‘Chief,’ Felix began. ‘How did Dinon escape from prison?’

‘That’s not important now,’ the Chief said.

‘But perhaps he had friends in prison,’ Felix said. ‘Perhaps they know something. I need to talk to people at the prison.’

‘Well, you can’t,’ the Chief said.

The telephone rang on the Chief’s desk. She picked up the phone. ‘Eva Hine here.’ Then she smiled. ‘Yes, Mr President,’ she said. She listened for a minute or two. ‘Yes, of course, Mr President. I understand. Yes. Goodbye.’ Eva Hine put the phone down and looked at Felix

angrily. 'Forget Dinon's escape from prison. Get out there and find him. And bring him back dead or alive!'

At the door Felix turned and looked at her. 'Dead?' he asked slowly.

'Dead men can't talk. Now go!'

Felix walked slowly back to his office. There were a lot of questions in his head, and he did not know the answers. 'Why can't I talk to people at the prison?' he thought. 'What did the President say to the Chief on the phone? And why does she want Dinon dead? He went to prison because he murdered the old President. Everybody knows that. What can he talk about ... now?'

The Third Day

Alex slept well for many hours, and the next morning Marta put a big breakfast on the table. Alex ate hungrily, and Marta talked.

'What's happening to this country?' she said. 'I don't know. I didn't like the old President. He was old and stupid. There's never much food in the shops. When did I last eat some good meat?' she said angrily. 'I work every day, and what do I get? Nothing!'

'What do you think about the new President, then?' Alex asked.

'Oh, he's worse! He's a younger man, and he's not stupid, but he's more dangerous. He's very friendly with the police and the army. And he's putting a lot of people in prison. That's not good for the country. We want more food, not more prisoners.'

Just then they heard somebody at the door.

'Quick!' Marta said. 'Upstairs. Hide under the bed.' Alex ran upstairs and hid. Three minutes later Marta came quickly upstairs. Her face was very angry.

'That was my friend George from the house down the road. Somebody saw you at the window this morning. It was that woman from the post office. The police give her money, and she tells them all the secrets of the village. Everybody hates her!'

‘The police always have a “friend” in every village,’ Alex said sadly. ‘Marta, I’m going now. At once. The police are going to be here soon, and ...’

‘Huh!’ Marta said angrily. ‘I’m not afraid of the police or their questions. Alex Dinon? Who’s he? Is he somebody on television?’

Alex smiled. ‘You’re a wonderful woman, Marta,’ he said. ‘Goodbye, and thank you.’

Marta looked at Alex and her old face was suddenly unhappy. ‘Good luck, boy,’ she said.

Alex left the house quickly. He went through Marta’s back garden, and out into the fields again. He felt better after the night in Marta’s house. He thought about Marta and smiled. Boy! He was thirty-three years old and a “dangerous murderer”, but to Marta he was only a tired and hungry boy.

* * *

At eight o’clock in the morning of the third day the telephone rang on Felix’s desk. Felix listened, then put the phone down quickly.

‘Adam!’ he shouted. ‘We’ve got him! He’s in a village up north. In an old woman’s house. Come on. Let’s go!’ The big police car was fast, and the kilometres went quickly. Adam was tired and wanted to sleep, but Felix wanted to talk. ‘I saw the Chief again last night,’ he said. ‘She’s getting angry. I was in her office and the President phoned her. They want Dinon badly - dead or alive. Why do they want him dead?’

‘I don’t know,’ Adam said. ‘Let’s find him first.’

In Marta’s village a policeman stood at the door of her house. ‘We looked all through the house, and there’s nobody in there,’ he said. ‘Only Marta, the old woman. And she’s not talking.’

Felix, Adam and the policeman went into the house. ‘Hello!’ Marta said. ‘More policemen? What an exciting day!’

‘Listen to the Inspector,’ Adam said angrily. ‘He wants to ask you some questions.’

Felix sat down and smiled at Marta. ‘Now, Marta,’ he said. ‘Somebody saw a young man in your house yesterday. Who was he, Marta, and where did he go?’

‘He was my sister’s youngest son,’ Marta said happily. ‘He’s a very nice boy.’

The policeman whispered in Felix’s ear. Felix looked sadly at Marta. ‘Your sister and all her family live in Australia, Marta. Who was the man in your house?’ ‘Oh dear!’ Marta said. ‘I’m an old woman, you know. Seventy-two last month. I forget things very easily. In Australia, did you say?’

Felix asked question after question, but Marta told him nothing. Sometimes the young man in her house was her sister’s son. Sometimes he was the young doctor from the next village, but he was never Alex Dinon, the President’s murderer. Adam got very angry and whispered to Felix:

‘Can I ask the questions?’

‘No,’ Felix said. He did not like Adam’s questions. He stood up and moved to the door, but Marta now wanted to ask him a question:

‘And why do you work for the police, young man? The police always put the wrong people in prison, you know.’

‘Marta,’ Felix said tiredly, ‘Alex Dinon is a murderer. He murdered-’

‘Oh, I know that,’ Marta said. ‘The newspapers said that. But newspapers and the television never tell us the true story. Alex Dinon isn’t a murderer. He’s a nice young man.’

‘A nice young man?’ Felix said quickly. ‘How do you know that?’

‘He’s got a nice face. That’s why. I saw his picture on the television. I’m an old woman and I can read people’s faces.’

‘So who did murder the President, then?’ Felix asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Marta said. ‘You’re the policeman. You go and find the murderer. But I can tell you one thing. You can begin with the new President. He’s got a murderer’s face.’

Adam said angrily, ‘That’s dangerous talk.’

Marta laughed, and Felix opened the door. ‘Let’s go, Adam,’ he said quietly.

Out in the road Adam said, ‘Stupid old woman!’

‘Yes,’ Felix said. ‘Perhaps she was ... and perhaps she wasn’t.’

The Fourth Day

After he left Marta’s village, Alex moved quickly and quietly across the fields. Nobody saw him. Fie walked and ran, and walked again. It rained all day and all night. He walked through the night, and the next morning - the fourth day - he was very tired and very hungry. He hid in some trees for an hour or two, then he went on south. Always south. To his home town.

‘Where can I go?’ he thought. ‘Perhaps I can escape from the country, but I want to see Olivia again before I leave ... or before the police find me.’

But first he needed food. He had some money in his pocket - Marta’s money. He remembered her words. You take it. I don’t need it. An old woman doesn’t need money. Alex smiled. What a wonderful old woman!

He came to a small town on a river, and found a food shop in a quiet street. He opened the door and went in. There were a lot of people in the shop, and he waited quietly behind them. People looked at him, and a man went out quickly. Alex wanted to run, but he was very hungry, so he waited. Then a woman with her young son came into the shop. The woman whispered to the boy, and the boy came up to Alex. ‘There are two policemen in the street,’ he said very quietly, ‘and they’re coming here.’ Alex looked quickly at the door, but he could not escape now. Then the shopkeeper called to him, ‘Hey, you!’ he said. ‘Quick! Go out through the back.’

Alex ran through the back of the shop, and the shopkeeper followed him. ‘I never help the police - they’re all bad,’ he said. He opened the back door and looked out. ‘It’s OK,’ he said quickly. ‘You

can get out of town along the river. Follow the back of the houses. Nobody goes there. Good luck!’

‘Thank you,’ Alex said, and ran.

Three kilometres from the town Alex came to a road. He crossed the road quickly but a lorry came along at the same time. The lorry slowed down and the driver called out to him, ‘Where are you going?’

Alex said the name of his home town, and the driver said, ‘Come on. I’m going near there. You can come with me.’

Alex got into the front of the lorry, and the driver looked carefully into his face. ‘Do I know you?’ he asked.

Alex said nothing, and waited. He felt very tired. The driver stared at him for a minute, then he smiled. ‘No, I don’t know you,’ he said. ‘Get into the back of the lorry. Nobody can see you there. Are you hungry?’

‘Yes, I am,’ Alex said. ‘Very.’

‘Well, I’ve got some sandwiches. Here you are. Now, get in the back quickly. Before we see a police car.’

The lorry drove slowly south. Alex ate all the driver’s sandwiches and then slept like a dead man.

* * *

‘We’re always three hours or more behind him,’ Felix said to Adam in the car. ‘We drive up and down the country, but Dinon always moves on before we get there.’

‘Perhaps this shopkeeper can tell us something,’ Adam said.

But the shopkeeper was not helpful. ‘Alex who?’ he said.

‘DINON!’ Felix shouted. He was very tired. ‘He escaped from prison five days ago. Somebody saw him in your shop.’

‘I don’t have prisoners in my shop,’ the shopkeeper said angrily. ‘And I don’t want the police here.’

‘Did Dinon come into this shop?’ Felix asked.

‘Dinon,’ the shopkeeper said slowly. ‘What did he do?’

Wait a minute. Yes! Did he write a book about the old President?’

‘He killed the President,’ Adam said. ‘He murdered him.’

‘Oh yes,’ the shopkeeper said. ‘I remember now. It was a good book. But the President’s murderer did not come into my shop this morning.’

Felix watched the shopkeeper’s face carefully. ‘My question’, he said, ‘asked about Alex Dinon.’

The shopkeeper looked at Felix and smiled slowly. ‘That’s right,’ he said.

Felix and Adam talked to a lot of people and asked a lot of questions in that small town, but they learned nothing.

Later, back in the office, Felix was very quiet. Suddenly he looked at Adam across the desk, and said:

‘We can’t get Dinon’s book in this country. Do you know it, Adam?’

‘No,’ Adam said.

Felix stared at the telephone on his desk. ‘Where is Dinon?’ he said slowly. ‘People are helping him, but why? He’s a murderer. And nobody wants to help us.’

‘People never help the police in this country,’ Adam said. ‘People don’t like us.’

‘Why are we policemen, Adam?’

‘It’s a good job,’ Adam said. ‘And the money’s good.’

After a minute or two Felix said, ‘Did Dinon murder the President? What do you think, Adam?’

‘Well, why did they put him in prison, then?’

‘That doesn’t answer my question,’ Felix said.

‘I do my job,’ Adam said, ‘and I don’t ask questions.’ Felix looked at him, but said nothing.

The Fifth Day

In an old house in a quiet road a woman waited. She waited day and night, and did not sleep. At nine o’clock in the evening of the fifth day, she heard a noise at the window at the back of the house.

Quickly, she ran and opened the window. A minute later she was in Alex's arms. They did not speak for a long time.

Then they talked quietly about their friends and their family. 'The children are with my sister,' Olivia said. 'It's better for them there. But I came here to Rudi's house. Rudi's away, and Pauli told me this was the best place to wait. I wanted to see you before you leave the country. Oh Alex, I'm so afraid for you.'

'Yes, escape is going to be difficult,' Alex said. 'I talked to Pauli on the phone. The police ...'

'Yes, but you escaped from prison,' Olivia said quickly. 'You have a lot of friends. Perhaps Pauli can help you. Or ...'

'Perhaps. I've got some good friends. I know that. But I've got a lot of enemies too,' Alex said slowly. 'Very dangerous enemies.'

Suddenly Olivia saw his hands. 'Your hands! Oh Alex, what happened to your hands?'

Alex looked down at them. 'It happened in prison,' he said slowly. 'They did it with a knife ... and cigarettes.' 'But why?' Olivia whispered. 'Why did they do that?' 'They wanted a name, but I didn't tell them.'

'What name?'

'The name of the President's murderer.'

'But they say you killed him ...' Olivia began.

'Yes, but I did not kill the President. And the police know that.'

'So they put you in prison,' Olivia said, 'because they needed a murderer.'

'Yes. And because of my book about the old President, and the government of this country. It was a very angry book. Do you remember?' Alex smiled. 'But the old President read it, and liked it. He wasn't a bad man, and he wanted a better life for the people. He wanted to change things in this country, but he couldn't. The police and the army stopped him. And the new President, of course, is a good friend of the police and the army. A very good friend.' Alex laughed angrily. 'You see, Olivia, the police know the murderer's name, but it's a secret. They don't want people in this country to know the name. And so they

were angry with me in prison, because they think that I know the murderer's name.'

Olivia's face was afraid. 'Do ... Do you know?' she whispered.

'Yes.' Alex looked at his wife's white, unhappy face. 'But I'm not going to tell you,' he said quietly. 'It's a very ... dangerous name.'

Alex ate some food and changed his clothes. Then he slept, and Olivia watched the road through the windows.

* * *

In his office Felix waited for more news. He waited, and he thought - about his job, about the dead President and the new President, about the old woman Marta, about Eva Hine, the Chief of Police - and about Alex Dinon.

At 9.05 p.m. the telephone rang on Felix's desk. He listened, then quickly jumped to his feet and called to Adam. 'Dinon's in his home town,' he shouted. 'He's in his old teacher's house. He went in three minutes ago.' Adam laughed. 'We've got him now,' he said happily. 'Listen,' Felix said quickly. 'Take ten more men with you and drive down to Dinon's town at once. Wait near the house and watch, but don't go in. I'm going to phone the Chief now, and then follow you.'

'Right,' Adam said, and quickly left the room.

Felix phoned the Chief and told her the news. 'Good,' the Chief said. 'Now wait there. I want to speak to you again in ten minutes.'

Felix waited angrily. He wanted to leave at once. He wanted to talk to Alex Dinon. Perhaps Dinon knew the answers to Felix's questions. The phone rang and Felix picked it up quickly.

'Now listen, Inspector. Don't go into the house. Wait in the road and watch.'

'But we can go into the house and get him!' Felix said. 'Why not?'

'No, that's dangerous. Perhaps his wife and children are in the house.'

'But his children are with his wife's sister. We know that,' Felix said. 'So ...'

'LISTEN TO ME, INSPECTOR!'

Felix did not answer.

‘Are you listening to me, Inspector?’

‘Yes, Chief,’ Felix said quietly.

‘Now, Dinon can’t stay in the house. He’s going to come out later in the night, when the streets are quiet. He can’t escape. The soldiers-‘

‘Soldiers? What soldiers?’ Felix said angrily. ‘I don’t need the army!’

‘This man Dinon is very, very important, Inspector. You need help, and the army is going to help you. They’re putting three hundred men in all the roads near the house. I want Dinon tonight, Inspector!’

The Chief put the phone down, and Felix stared at his desk. ‘Alive ... or dead?’ he thought. ‘Which does she - and our new President - want? I think I know the answer. They want him dead. And I want to know why!’

The police car took Felix to Dinon’s home town, an hour away, and Felix found Adam in a quiet street behind the house. They sat in Adam’s car and talked.

Adam looked at Felix’s face. ‘What are you angry about?’ he asked. ‘Dinon’s in the house. And he can’t escape now. When he comes out - Wham! We’ve got him!’ ‘I’m angry,’ Felix said, ‘because half the army with its guns is in this town tonight. I wanted to go into the house, but I can’t because the Chief said “no”, and the soldiers are watching the house. But I wanted to get to Dinon first.’ ‘That’s going to be difficult,’ Adam said. ‘Soldiers shoot first, and ask questions later.’

‘Yes,’ Felix said slowly. ‘They’re going to kill Alex Dinon, and I can’t stop them.’

The Sixth Day

At three o’clock in the morning Alex got up from the bed and looked out of the window. Olivia opened her eyes. ‘Are you ... Are you leaving now?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ Alex said. ‘I can’t stay longer. Perhaps the police are out there now. They’re watching all our friends’ houses. Pauli told me.’ He put on his shoes and coat, then looked at his wife.

‘Olivia. Listen. Be very careful and live very quietly. The police are going to watch you for some time. Wait for a year, then take the children and leave the country secretly. Our friends can help you. Find a new home in a new country and make a new life.’

Olivia began to cry. ‘But Alex! You’re going to be there with us.’

Alex smiled. ‘Yes. Perhaps.’ He took his wife’s face in his hands and looked into her unhappy eyes. ‘Don’t cry, my love,’ he said quietly. ‘Give me a smile before I go.’ ‘Oh Alex! I’m afraid!’ Olivia could not stop crying. ‘I love you, I love you,’ she whispered. ‘Go quickly. And be careful. Please.’

Alex smiled sadly. ‘Goodbye, my love.’

He left the house quickly and went out into the dark night. He waited for ten minutes at the door and listened, but he heard nothing and saw nothing. He came out into the road very carefully. Again he waited. From an upstairs window in his house, a white face watched him.

Then Alex began to walk quickly along the road. He stayed near the houses and looked behind him again and again. Two hundred metres along the road there was a car. Alex stared at it, but there was nobody in the car, and he walked quickly past.

Suddenly there were noises and lights - and soldiers with guns. Alex began to run, but he did not run far. There was a shot... two, three, four, five shots ... And Alex did not move again.

* * *

Felix ran across the road and looked at the body. Adam was there before him.

‘Is he alive?’ Felix asked quickly.

‘No, he’s dead.’ Adam stood up and looked at Felix. ‘Very, very dead,’ he said.

Felix’s face was angry. ‘The soldiers killed him,’ he said.

Adam looked at Felix. ‘Well, that’s their job. Dinon ran away, so the soldiers shot him. “Alive or dead”, the Chief said. But we found him. That’s the important thing.’

Felix stared down at Alex Dinon’s face. ‘I wanted to talk to him ... to ask him ...’

‘To ask him what?’ Adam said.

Felix did not answer. He looked down at the dead body on the road, then he turned away.

‘Nothing,’ he said. ‘It doesn’t matter.’

There was a lot of noise in the road now. Soldiers and policemen moved here and there. Police cars came and went. The people in the houses looked out of their windows, but they did not open their doors. It was better not to ask questions. An ambulance came and took the body away.

Later that day Felix went back to the Chief’s office. The Chief called him into her room.

‘So he’s dead,’ she said. ‘Well done, Felix. The President is very pleased with you.’

The Chief did not often say ‘Felix’. Usually she called him ‘Inspector’.

Felix sat down and looked at Eva Fline. ‘A lot of people think He stopped. Then he began again. ‘They say ... Alex Dinon wasn’t the President’s murderer.’

‘People say a lot of things,’ the Chief said. She smiled. ‘But they’re not all true. Don’t listen to stories, Felix. You’ve got a good job. Don’t ask questions.’

‘But perhaps,’ Felix said slowly, ‘the stories are true. And it’s a policeman’s job to ask questions.’

Eva Fline stood up and came nearer to Felix. She looked down into his face, and her grey eyes were cold.

‘Listen,’ she said. ‘Somebody murdered the old President. Right? And our new President needed a murderer. Quickly. So we found a murderer for him. Alex Dinon. We don’t kill murderers in this country. They go to prison. But Dinon escaped from prison - and now he’s dead.’

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The murderer is dead, Felix, and that's the end of the story.' It was very quiet in the room. The Chief watched Felix and waited. Felix looked down at his hands and said nothing. Then he looked up into Eva Hine's cold eyes. 'Who murdered the President?' he asked.

Eva Hine's face did not change. She stared at Felix, and Felix stared back at her.

After a long time Eva Hine said, 'Perhaps you need a new job, Felix. Think about it ... very carefully.'

The young man looked at her face, then he looked away, out of the window. After a minute or two he stood up, and went to the door. Then he turned and looked at the Chief of Police.

'I'd like to know the murderer's name,' he said quietly. 'And I'm going to find it.' He opened the door. 'Goodbye, Chief.'

He went out and closed the door behind him, for the last time.

- THE END -

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