

# Callan!

## FILE ON A HARASSED HUNTER

THE Lear executive jet began its descent, and Callan fastened his seat-belt. "This is going to be a hell of an expensive night out in the theatre," he said, and looked down at the landscape that rushed to meet him: moorland for a background, limitless and vast, but a foreground of old, neat stone houses, and then the strip of concrete that the Lear's tyres softly kissed in making the smooth, unfustered landing of a pilot who worked for Hunter for one reason only: he was the best.

"You like the play?" said Hunter. "Familiar? I always have," said Callan. "But couldn't we have waited till it came to London?" "Unfortunately that may never happen," said Hunter. His voice was sour, and Callan knew why. There was no Bentley waiting at the airport, because Hunter would have been far too conspicuous in that grimy Northern town. Hunter loved his Bentley—not least its bullet-proof coachwork and windows of specially toughened glass. And here he was reduced to riding in a hired Daimler, for a shot from the left there was no protection but the car door—and a bullet from a Magnum revolver could go right through a car that hasn't been specially treated in the way from the boot to the engine block.

It had to be a big one to get Hunter out like this. Standing orders were that he was to take maximum security precautions at all times, and here he was without even the statutory bodyguards. Not just a big one, thought Callan, a very, very secret one as well. They travelled in silence; there was a dividing panel between passengers and driver, but no written guarantee that the Daimler wasn't bugged.

They reached the hotel at last. Hunter looked at it and sighed. All right, thought Callan, it isn't the Ritz. But did you have to come here? By the look on Hunter's face Callan decided that he had to do just that. They went up to their rooms, and Hunter waited as Callan went over their books, for bugs and booby traps; waited and sipped at sherry that was pale and dry enough even for him. Thank God, thought Callan, as he worked.

If the hotel had sent up a claret, Hunter would have burst into tears. Callan went on searching. No bugs. No bombs under the bed. "Well?" Hunter said. "I don't like it here," said Callan. Hunter looked disgustedly round him: wallpaper that for some reason reminded him of the soup at his school, and a carpet that recalled the cabbage. "Who would?" he said. "I mean I don't like the set-up," said Callan. "The

locks aren't even a joke—and there are too many ways up: stairs, lift, fire-escape." There was a knock at the door, and the Magnum came into Callan's hand as he'd willed it there. He moved Hunter from the line of the window, then went to the angle of the door. "Yes?" he called. "You ordered beer and sandwiches sir," said a voice. Callan transferred the gun to his pocket, kept his hand on it, and opened the door. A waiter with a tray, chicken sandwiches, two bottles of beer. Callan gave the man money, and watched him leave, and Hunter's hand reached out for a sandwich. Callan reached out to stop him. His hand closed on Hunter's forcing the

fingers open so that the sandwich fell and parted. Chicken that by the look of it, hadn't died without a struggle. "David—what the devil?" Hunter began. "We're at risk," Callan said. "You are at risk. My orders say that should never happen. Never. But it is happening—and if you die I'm to blame." Callan asked, and Hunter nodded at last. Callan released him, and Hunter looked at the hand marks that Callan's fingers had made. "You don't know your own strength," he said.

"Oh, but I do," said Callan. "Your experts taught me how years ago. Why are we here?" "To learn a man's address. And then the man—and kill him." "And you broke cover for that? Why not just send Mercedes with me—or Fitzmaurice?" "I have to know this man is dead." "My word wouldn't be good enough for you?" Hunter looked towards the table. "I'm hungry," he said. "Thirsty too," said Callan. "But first I've got to know." His voice altered. "Sir, please, I've said. For God's sake tell me." Rare indeed, thought Hunter, that Hunter said. "The man I'm after is K.G.B.," Hunter said. "His code name is Lubov. That's all

I know. He's a wet-job expert. Grade Four." And that was all it needed. Wet-job was K.G.B. jargon for assassination, and Grade Four was the highest there was. "There's an actor at the theatre here who knows who Lubov is—and I want Lubov." Hunter paused, and for the briefest of moments Callan thought he saw a human emotion on Hunter's face, and the emotion was grief. Then Hunter became impassive again. "Twenty," said Hunter. "I wasn't the head of the section in those days and this was my only job. I was responsible for Lubov killing one of my operatives. A good one." Callan thought: But this is craziness. Blokes like Hunter expect operatives to get killed. It's a risk you take. They know it. And Hunter knows it. And if he loses one he sends another. He doesn't start yelling for revenge like Hamlet's father. "You want Lubov because he doesn't kill some gear twenty years ago?" "Not a ceaser," said Hunter. "A woman. A young, brave, intelligent woman."

the five fully paid up members of the Trotskyite Workers' Party, and the actress who performed her mad scene naked, which occasioned some novel use for her wild flowers, but the only actor worth two pence was Polonus. Polonus was Evan Lang. A big man who could look old, comic, crumpling, an actor with the range and ability and power of a Chello. Lear with any company in the world. And here he was shoring up the stakes for a lot of money. During the interval Callan said to Hunter, "Then what's he doing in this disaster?" "He's got to come," said Hunter. "At every available opportunity." "Evan Lang died beautifully behind the arras, but wasn't on stage for the curtain call?" "It ended, Callan said: 'Do we go back?'" "No," said Hunter. "You pick him up and we talk at the hotel." Callan went round to the stage-door. That meant Hunter, three lads with a job to do, lads in a hurry. They must have been: they even let their car come running, as they fanned out in a line across the street and moved. "It was it even worse than I thought. He had the Maxim, of course, and even by the rather odd light of a street lamp he could shoot them with no trouble at all—but was it right to start gunplay in this fair if grimy city?" "They were a problem, no doubt about it. He had the Maxim, of course, and even by the rather odd light of a street lamp he could shoot them with no trouble at all—but was it right to start gunplay in this fair if grimy city?"

by JAMES MITCHELL



It was three to one... and dare he use his gun?

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