

## Chapter 1: The Day of the Siren

Harvey Hunter woke slowly on the morning of 13 October 2013. The wind howled haphazardly, crashing against the bare branches in the courtyard below the block of flats while the rain fell steadily, heavy and cold, like a message repeated too many times to be ignored any longer. The sound felt wrong, misplaced on that day, or any day. It seemed to come from an older place, somewhere deeper, torn loose from another time.

He rose without hurry. Sleep still clung to him, but the cold inside the flat cut through every trace of comfort. He walked to the window and rested his forehead against the wet glass. As the city dissolved into a blurred mass of shadows, the rain drowned the buildings, and the downpour drained the life from their outlines. The sky hung low and compact above everything, like a sheet of lead pressed over what remained. The rain washed the city, cleaning none of it.

“Morning,” he murmured without conviction.

“Did you sleep?” His mother’s voice drifted from the next room, filtered through steam and the weakening whistle of a kettle losing its last strength.

“Not well, not badly. The rain woke me.”

“Harvey, are we going today? Is your brother coming too?” His father asked, his voice tired but steady. Alex was already sitting at the table, wrapped inside a thick jumper, his expression fixed in a calm that felt strangely out of place.

“I don’t know. He doesn’t really want to,” Harvey replied without looking at him.

“Mum, are you coming with us?” Alex asked.

“I can’t,” she answered simply. “I have work today, and I’m meeting a friend.”

Alex did not argue; he only tightened his fingers around the edge of the table. “I’ll go. But I want to know I’m coming back.”

“Stop talking nonsense. There’s no war here. We’re taking the Tube, that’s all,” their father replied. Harvey looked at him, noting there was no fear in the boy’s eyes; something else resided there—a silence that did not belong to childhood.

“We’ll be careful,” Harvey said.

“You know the rules.”

“Yes, Dad.”

Alex reached out instinctively. “I’ll hold your hand the whole time.”

“Then do it when I’m not driving the train,” their father answered. Nobody smiled.

“Did you hear the news?” their mother asked. “About the alliance?”

“Yes. It’s worse than it looks. Relations have broken down. And when things break in silence, they rarely mend again.” Harvey did not understand everything, but her tone left no room for doubt.

“Does that mean war?” Alex asked quietly.

Their father remained silent for a moment, staring into his cup. “Not yet. But it’s the beginning. When people stop working together, everything falls apart.”

“And will it reach here?”

“The world is small. Smaller than you think. What begins far away arrives just when it’s too late to stop it.”

Silence settled over the room. “Why are you looking like that?” Harvey asked. “Because I know I won’t be able to protect everything. And those with nothing will fall first.”

“It sounds like a nightmare.”

“No,” his father replied quietly. “It’s reality arriving slowly.”

A heavy silence spread around them. “As long as we stay together,” he added, though the words carried little certainty.

“Together,” Harvey repeated, and Alex whispered the same word.

Their mother watched them, her face calm, but her eyes were tired and dark. “Eat. We need to get ready. Whatever comes, comes. Together.”

“Together.”

Yet a crack had already slipped between the words, and nobody could close it. Outside, taxis moved through the streets in greasy waves, wheels bursting through dark puddles with heavy, choking sounds. Headlights reflected across the wet tarmac like extinguished eyes, while the grey sky seemed to dissolve into the water, melting without edges. London was not crying. It was dissolving in silence with its teeth clenched.

Inside the car, the boys watched through the window without speaking. Their breath misted the glass in small circles while their father sat motionless, hands locked together, eyes fixed on the streets unfolding without meaning ahead of him. Shadows stretched across the pavement like brush marks, black and without direction, while the buildings, once alive, appeared to shrink beneath the rain, their windows dull and incapable of reflecting anything except absence. Although everything moved, yet nothing seemed alive.

Every turn deepened the quiet. Their father’s thoughts remained unspoken, but they weighed heavily on the surrounding air. He wondered whether they would understand whether there was anything left he could say without destroying what remained, whether protection still existed beyond words that no longer held any weight.

Along Millennium Way, the taxi pulled over under a low, grey morning sky. The sky hung above the city like dull metal, while cold light mixed with the faint glow of streetlamps fading across the wet pavement. The area looked almost unnaturally ordered: clean glass facades, polished shop windows, a café only just opening, everything reflecting the steel lines of the suspended bridges with cold precision. Nothing seemed damaged. Nothing abandoned. Everything worked, yet everything felt strangely empty. In the distance, the dome of the O2 Arena rose in silence, white and perfectly shaped, its surface throwing back the light in a diffuse

glow that felt almost clinical. Few pedestrians crossed the area; steady footsteps, tired faces, no hurry.

Their father drew a deep breath before stepping out, finding no relief in it, only the damp weight of the morning. He paid the driver, climbed out, and took both boys by the hand. The gesture came instinctively, firm without effort. He led them towards the entrance of North Greenwich without looking back, without hesitation, though certainty had already left him.

They descended underground.

The station felt crowded, but not with people. It felt crowded with pressure. Footsteps, shadows, low voices, laboured breathing and restrained sighs merged into a dull industrial rhythm where people had become little more than noise. Harvey could still feel his brother beside him, yet everything else moved unevenly, like a film running the wrong way, stripped of landmarks and time, leaving only crowds and a feeling that refused to let go.

Inside the carriage, the space felt narrower, not because of its construction, but because of the silence gathering within it. It pressed people towards the walls and into their own shadows. Nobody spoke. Nobody dared lift their eyes, as though a single glance might break something irreversible. The ventilation system breathed with cold indifference while every face carried the same layer of exhaustion and fear, clinging to skin, eyelids, and the corners of mouths. Hidden hands and folded arms betrayed the same absence.

Harvey remained standing and allowed the movement of the train to carry him. His father and brother had stayed behind, the separation arriving without intention, only as a vague impulse to shift perspective. He had moved through the passengers unnoticed, crossing them as though he were passing through space. An old man clung to the handrail while absent-mindedly stroking a worn bag. A woman clasped her child against her chest with closed eyes. A teenager stood against the doors, headphones hanging lifelessly around his neck.

Nobody spoke, and nobody moved more than was necessary.

He craned his neck, searching for his father, but the distance between the carriages suddenly felt absurd, measured not in space, but in silence. A few minutes earlier, he had left his place beside them. He could no longer bear the heavy air and had pushed through the connecting door between the carriages, convinced he could still see them through the crowd. Only a few yards remained between them, yet they seemed impossibly far away.

He ran his hand over the watch on his wrist, following the seconds that passed with indifference as his patience slowly faded.

The fogged window trembled slightly; the lights flickered for a moment, then silence returned, broken by the siren.

It was not merely a sound, but a rupture, a cold wail that cut through concrete, flesh and thought, slipping beneath the skin like a thin blade. The train froze for a fraction of a second, then came to a brutal halt with a quick scream of metal. The silence shattered at once beneath the first wave of panic.

Voices erupted around him, shapeless and broken, no words, only noise, clipped breaths and sudden movements. The surrounding faces had twisted into raw expressions stripped of identity. A hand brushed against him. Harvey reacted instinctively, closing his fingers around

it for a moment, but the contact vanished immediately, swallowed by the human mass now shifting in blind confusion. He tried to hold himself in place, but fear had already become stronger than any bond.

It was not an incident; it was the beginning.

“Harvey!” His father’s voice disappeared into the chaos.

They pulled him apart, pushed him forward, and moved him without direction on the platform. Hands separated in an instant. Alex was gone. His father was no longer there. The world had split apart.

He did not know how much time had passed. Seconds, perhaps minutes. At some point, amid the panic, the train had moved again, carrying its passengers towards the next station, and Harvey had not even noticed. When the doors opened and the crowd forced him onto the platform, he lifted his eyes to the station board.

London Bridge.

The train moved again, slow and without warning, and Harvey remained on the platform, watching the carriages pull away, never to return. The station had become something suffocating, a living body made of footsteps, screams, sirens, and sounds without origin, where every movement had turned into a struggle for air. Dust, smoke, and the taste of old panic clung to everything. Harvey searched without direction—a face, a voice, anything that could still serve as an anchor—but everything dissolved into the human current.

He stumbled, fell, rose again without thinking, carried by a rhythm that no longer belonged to him. He no longer knew whether he was running or merely being pushed, and direction itself had lost meaning. At last, he withdrew into a dark corner where the pressure of other bodies disappeared and lowered himself to the ground, palms against the cold concrete. Intermittent lights cast warped shadows across the walls, shapeless and stripped of identity.

His breathing came in broken bursts, his crying silent. He pressed his forehead against the cement and tasted metal inside the panic. He prayed without knowing to whom, without knowing whether answers still existed. His mother’s face returned to him, along with her voice and the promise spoken in haste, yet none of it seemed attached to anything anymore. The station continued to tremble, and sirens tore through the air while Harvey remained motionless, a child curled inside a world collapsing in real time—a world that no longer resembled anything he knew.

**Twenty-five years later.**

The two couriers had left North Greenwich over four hours earlier. They had vanished from the customs guards’ sight immediately after the formalities, completed in silence, quick and without wasted movement. Customs guards recorded the departure, and the westward route towards the centre was established: a mile or two of blind tunnel to Canary Wharf and back. It was a short distance and a routine assignment—at least on paper.

The hours had passed, but they had not returned. On an ordinary day, routine meant small and vital things: a sack of rationed flour, a packet of filters, a dose of antibiotics, ammunition counted round by round, and a sealed letter that prevented unauthorised access. Couriers did not leave loaded like caravans; they travelled light and fast, knees trained for

darkness, minds trained never to stop. That was why four hours were no longer a delay. They represented a red line; during this time, a man either arrived or disappeared, leaving the station with his absence rather than a report. They had not announced the disappearance, not yet.

But the border point had already tightened like a muscle. Four armed men stood facing the tunnel, uniforms damp and worn, eyes fixed on the dark. They were not checking; they were holding. Between them and the tunnel stood everything that remained of order. Above the tracks, an improvised floodlight flickered without rhythm, an unstable beam cutting through the darkness only enough for things to be seen, never understood. Energy had become rare; light had become rarer than ammunition.

They brought every figure to a halt: password, reason, documents. No passage without the full chain. Underground, absence left no room for questions; only waiting. Somewhere behind procedures and failing light, time continued to move, and with it came the same question: how long could people keep waiting before the darkness answered instead?

Harvey Hunter stood motionless inside the suspended shelter at North Greenwich, eyes fixed on the watch at his wrist, a Rolex Submariner No Date, finely scratched along the edges, the bezel worn by years. He had found it long ago during a surface expedition among the ruins of a luxury shop in what had once been the financial district. The watch, though marked and worn, continued to beat with cold precision and complete indifference. He was not looking at the watch; he was focusing on the rhythm. The second hand moved smoothly without interruption, a constant motion that asked for nothing and offered nothing. In recent days, that had become routine: wrist slightly raised, eyes fixed, following that endless movement while searching for deviation, a sign, anything at all.

Nothing came. Sweat dampened his palms, and the strap shifted between his fingers in small, repeated gestures. His thoughts no longer arrived in order. *Where is he? He should have been back by now.* Every sound became a possibility, every rustle became a beginning. He stood caught between the mechanical and the organic, between something that still worked perfectly and something that no longer obeyed rules. Fast, heavy footsteps crossed the platform without hesitation.

He rose at once and without a sound. The rhythm was familiar, too clear to ignore. Good news never arrived with footsteps like those.

He put on his uniform without haste, though not without purpose. The movements were precise, repeated too many times to require thought. Buckles closed correctly. Straps tightened exactly as needed. His heartbeat had fallen into the same rhythm as the second hand.

There was no difference between them anymore.

When he stepped outside, the cold air of the station struck him directly and woke him completely. He descended the raised stairs at an even pace, feeling dampness cling to his skin. The gas lamp hanging beneath the vault trembled faintly, its yellow light throwing unstable shadows across cracked tiles.

In that light, he saw him.

Michael.

Slightly bent forward. Knees flexed. Heavy breathing. His faded camouflage uniform hung open at the collar, streaked with dried salt. The trousers sat stiff above worn boots polished only enough to pass inspection. Wet blond hair reflected the light with an almost metallic sheen. He lowered his eyes to the floor. Damp hands rested against his knees.

Harvey descended the last step and stopped a measured distance away.

“Michael. What are you doing running across the platform at this hour, mate? What happened?”

Michael lifted his eyes slowly and attempted a brief smile that carried no meaning.

“Where do you think I was going?”

The answer felt empty the moment it left him.

“You alright? What happened?”

Michael straightened and swallowed.

“Chris and I were patrolling east, near Adam Stewart’s office. We could hear him inside. Calm. I told him we’d be there in a minute. He came out suddenly. No warning. Started shouting. Explained nothing. Just pointed towards you.”

He stopped for the briefest moment before continuing.

“When we went in, he was standing with his back to the window. Not moving. Didn’t speak straight away. Then he told me to come for you. Bring you in. If you were asleep, wake you.”

Michael lifted one shoulder, almost imperceptibly.

“I’ve never seen him react like that.”

Harvey said nothing. He ran a hand through his beard, a mechanical gesture. His thoughts had lost all order.

Adrian. Mason. Gone for hours. No return.

He remembered. It had been a simple contact run. Nothing complicated. Adrian had said he would stop by Adam first. One quick question.

Harvey remained still. A change of orders was possible. But not like that. Not without traces. A chill ran down the back of his neck.

What if they never made it? What if the route had changed? What if someone had sent them up? The thought refused to leave.

Surface deployment was never routine. Without authorisation, it wasn’t possible. Not without approval. Not without records. But what if it had happened anyway? His jaw tightened. It was not panic. It was a pattern.

Something familiar in Adam’s behaviour. The insistence. The silence before an order.

Adrian had a bad habit, as though he wanted to challenge the odds themselves. Before leaving, he always tapped his chest plate twice with two fingers, as if counting something invisible, then said the same words in a tone far too light for life underground.

*See you when I'm back.*

Mason said nothing. He tightened his straps until his fingers turned white and checked his torch three times, as though light itself were a promise.

Harvey had watched them leave like that dozens of times.

That was exactly what frightened him now.

Their routine left no room for simple mistakes.

If they had disappeared, it was not because they'd lost their bearings.

It was because the tunnel had been chosen otherwise.

The thoughts gathered again, sharper now, clearer.

The air on the platform had grown heavy, almost sticky. No movement from the tunnel. No news.

"This isn't right," Harvey whispered. How Adam reacted... there was a reason behind it.

He lifted his eyes without focusing on anything.

"Adrian and Mason should already be back. You know how it works. When somebody's late... we can't afford to guess anymore."

He fell silent for a moment.

"Maybe I should've gone after them. Or maybe it wouldn't have mattered."

He looked directly at him.

"Do you know anything?"

Michael shook his head.

"No, mate. They didn't come back. If they had, I'd have seen them. I checked. West first, then everything else. East made no sense. It would've meant they'd gone up."

He stopped before adding quietly:

"I thought I'd check there too. But I don't think we'll find them. Better speak to Stewart. He knows something."

He held Harvey's gaze. "Are you coming?"

Harvey remained motionless for several seconds. "Do I have a choice?"

"No."

Michael drew a quick breath.

“Talk to him. Tell me what you find.”

“You sound curious.”

“I am.”

A faint smile crossed his face. “Very.”

Harvey started walking without hurry, though every step followed a clear direction. After several yards, he stopped and glanced back towards the shadows of the suspended dwelling. The thought of the military rucksack crossed his mind for only a moment, without reason, only that same dull pressure in his stomach, identical to the one he had felt when Adrian left.

He ignored it and continued toward the manager’s office.

Adam Stewart, manager of North Greenwich station, was sixty-three years old and spoke rarely. He never raised his voice, never repeated himself, and never explained. His words were few and sharp, and when he spoke them, people stopped. His eyes, brown and outwardly calm, became difficult to hold after several seconds, as they reached too deeply. He did not command through stature, yet he moved with precision and without hesitation, and his presence alone was enough; in the station, decisions gathered around him without announcement. Before the collapse, he had been a bank director, but after that, he went underground and never came back up. The years had not weakened his control—they had strengthened it.

Under him, North Greenwich had become one of the few stations still functioning without interruption, held together by a system built without compromise. Shifts changed without ceremony: a short whistle, a paper document with a written message, and the torch moving from one hand to another. Those who went to the surface left rarely and left deadly, with signatures, weapons, and the promise of returning with water, flour, or medicine, while the rest remained below, where the air was filthy but predictable. That was why only soldiers ran at that hour; when an ordinary man ran, it meant he had either lost his mind or seen something that should not exist.

The walk to Stewart’s office was not long, yet that evening, every step seemed to draw it out. Wet concrete yielded beneath Harvey’s boots while his thoughts drifted towards a time when things carried different meanings—no memories, only fragments and lost sensations. The station was no longer the same, or perhaps he was not. The walls bore new marks, deeper cracks, and dark stains that had not been there before, or perhaps he had simply never noticed them. The improvised homes lining the rails looked more fragile now, held together by dry timber, bent metal, and tightened ropes, but everything still held for now. Old plaster still clung to the ceiling, swollen and ready to fall, yet somehow remaining in place. Nobody touched it, and as long as it stayed, it was enough. The station was resting, not sleeping, with no movement, no voices, and only Harvey’s footsteps echoing back from the walls, repeating themselves, multiplying.

The manager’s office was a circular structure, once a newspaper kiosk, now turned into a control point. Windows encircled it, giving full visibility over the platform, tunnel, and work areas. Stewart had chosen it for that reason: he watched without being watched. Harvey stopped in front of the door. His heartbeat had turned uneven, though he refused to focus on it. He raised his hand and knocked twice, short and controlled, then stepped inside. The air was different—

colder, heavier. He remained still for a moment, having prepared himself for bad news, though a part of him was still waiting for the opposite.

At the border, the rules had tightened over the years: too many missing shipments, too many entries recorded incorrectly, and too many galleries appearing overnight. Passwords changed often, documents were hand-copied, and the customs guard no longer checked out of courtesy; they checked out of fear. One mistake was enough to open the station like a wound. The station manager waited for him in silence, leaning over a rusted metal desk surrounded by damp papers, bent and yellowed at the edges. He turned them slowly, with measured movements, as though every page confirmed an older suspicion. Harvey remained near the door, motionless, hands at his sides, careful not to disturb the room. Only his eyes moved, catching on the dirty windows of the circular booth, the nearly empty platform beyond them, and the shadows of soldiers crossing his view from time to time.

The station seemed frozen; the others were sleeping or pretending to be. Inside that office, Harvey had always carried the same feeling: that he was being watched, not by people but by the room itself, by the silent walls, the dirty glass, and the shape of the place. More than once he had felt the urge to pull shut the heavy red curtains, yet every time he stopped, knowing Stewart hated that gesture.

“Evening, Harvey. How are you feeling, mate? Hope I didn’t wake you.” His voice was low, dry, almost absent. He watched him carefully, without warmth, as if Harvey had arrived too late to a decision already made. “I wanted to speak to you as soon as possible. Couldn’t wait until tomorrow. It’s late, I know.” His eyes moved briefly towards the clock on the wall: 21:47.

“But I know you. You can’t sleep when something’s weighing on you. Neither can I.”

“I wasn’t sleeping, sir. The same thing I told Michael. It’s fine. Been a hard day. Heard footsteps running across the platform and thought of the platform soldiers straight away. Nobody else would run at this hour. I hoped it was news about Adrian and Mason.”

Adam studied him for several seconds with the same expression he used when reading figures from old papers.

“What’s wrong, mate?” asked Stewart.

“I don’t know. I’ve got a bad feeling.”

Harvey let his eyes move across the office, over the windows, over lights that seemed too steady for that time of night. Adam noticed but said nothing at first. He turned towards one window, letting the pale light cut across his profile.

“I know you never liked this office. This office wasn’t designed for people to like it. For me, it’s an observation post. I’m observing. I listen. I remember.”

“I didn’t say anything, sir.”

“You didn’t need to. I know you very well.”

“It isn’t the office. It’s the eyes. You can’t talk in here without feeling the platform at your back. If we closed the curtains, maybe we could speak without being watched from every corner.”

Adam touched the edge of one of the old red folds, heavy and faded.

“I recovered these from the surface years ago,” he said, touching the edge of the faded cloth. “They belonged somewhere once. That’s enough for me.” A tired smile crossed his face. “I’d risk a lot for you, Harvey. But not these.”

He looked at him more carefully now, the beginning of a tired smile appearing.

“Years have passed, and you still haven’t changed. You’re as stubborn as ever.”

Harvey answered with the faintest trace of a smile.

It was not defiance; it was acceptance.

Adam trusted him. Old trust. Unspoken trust. Built through years of silence, orders, and nights spent underground. He had known him from the beginning, from the moment Harvey had been nothing more than a lost child at London Bridge, swept away by the crowd and the scream of the sirens, shouting for his father and brother until his voice had broken.

Then a hand caught his wrist. “Stay calm, lad. Don’t be afraid. My name’s Adam Stewart.” From that moment, Stewart had become more than the manager of North Greenwich station. Not authority. Not uniform. A fixed point inside a collapsed world.

For Stewart, that child had been something else: a shadow of the son he had lost in the fire on the day of the war. He had never spoken it aloud. Never said *my son*. Some things had no need for words.

Among the damp papers on the desk, Harvey noticed the old departure register, thick pages stained by fingers, straight-ruled lines and names written hard enough to resemble nails driven into wood. Fragments of broken wax seals clung to the corners, while beside them rested a blunt pencil worn almost to the timber. Stewart turned another page, and the sound seemed clearer than it should have been, dry and thin like the movement of a brittle wing.

Harvey felt the watch on his wrist. He could not hear it; he felt it in his bones. Inside the round room, every second felt prerecorded.

“Harvey, let’s get straight to it,” Stewart said, and something changed in his voice. “Sorry I called you at this hour. But it’s serious.”

He leaned across the desk, fingers tightening around the frosty edge.

“Something’s broken in our Tube. We sent two couriers to Canary Wharf. You know why you’re here. It isn’t his absence that worries me most. It’s this silence. And the thought that maybe I waited too long.”

“You’re not disturbing me, sir. A scout doesn’t sleep. I expected you’d call.”

“I told Adrian to stop by on his way back. He never came.”

The office seemed to close in around them, cold and dense. Adam drew a heavy breath before continuing more quietly.

"The mission wasn't just for me. The message was for our station. Maybe for what's left of the Tube."

Harvey remained still, eyes fixed on him. He knew that tone; Adam only used it when he could no longer afford to avoid the truth.

"I was called to Green Park last month. Monthly meeting. Managers, advisers, the Council President. Peace treaty. Tunnel trade. Relations between stations. Upgrades. Taxes. Everything still keeping the system functioning. We agreed on one thing: if we lose balance now, everything built over twenty-five years turns back into ash. Into 2013. Into 2014. You remember. Rotten mushrooms. Dirty water. People dying for less than a crust of bread."

Harvey felt the weight of the words but did not move. "What were Adrian and Mason carrying?" he asked quietly. "What was in the message?"

Adam let out a quick breath. "Our vote, mate. One vote only, but enough to tip the balance. It had to reach Canary Wharf, then Green Park. Our neighbours offered to carry it further. Deliver it to Igor personally." His fists tightened on the desk. "It was a mistake. Maybe I should've sent you instead. Straight to Green Park."

The words remained between them, heavy.

"We supported the alliance. Free trade. Controlled exchange of resources. Some form of order. But if we lost the vote... or were intercepted..." He did not finish. "The stations in the west and north kept delaying. Promises. Courtesy without substance. Notting Hill Gate belongs to Salim al Kadir. On paper, an independent station. In practice, only one piece of a larger structure spreading through the western lines and into the north. Resources. Men. Weapons. Orders. Most roads lead back to King's Cross St. Pancras. That's where the weight sits. Notting Hill Gate is merely the public face. They refuse the alliance because they stand to lose something. They aren't weak; they only pretend to be."

He paused. "Salim gathers resources, avoids government taxes, pulls in workers, soldiers, and information. Some people like to call it Salim's Power. The name doesn't matter. The fear around him does. I warned Igor. He didn't listen."

Adam lowered his voice. "If they want independence, they have the means to demand it. If they want control, they have the means to enforce it."

"And the taxes?" Harvey asked.

"More than half of anything brought down from the surface. No negotiation. When people go up for water, flour, or antibiotics, officials confiscate all their belongings upon their return, if they return, and impound the items. That's how the old galleries began. Smuggling. Tunnels dug in silence."

Harvey understood before Adam finished. "The deforms."

Adam did not answer immediately. "If the digging goes wrong, if someone opens a breach in the wrong place, it won't just be sacks of supplies coming through."

The silence finished the thought. Harvey felt the skin tighten across his bones. He had seen openings that appeared on no map, passages sealed in haste, people arriving from impossible directions. He had passed them too many times, always pushed onward by another order, another emergency. Now all of it was returning. He rose slowly and moved towards the window. The platform was almost empty. Gas lamps flickered weakly, distorting the outlines. If the deforms came down through an opened gallery, there would be no time for signals—no sirens, no orders.

Adam spoke behind him. "If Salim al-Kadir wants control, he'll take it. He isn't looking for alliances. He's looking for obedience. I saw him at Green Park. Igor says I'm wrong. Says he's faithful, peaceful, reliable. Faith isn't the problem, Harvey. The man is. What he does when power remains in his hands."

Harvey was no longer thinking only about Salim. He was thinking about the deforms, the tunnels, the silence lying too deep inside the galleries. He remembered the last encounter: the blood, the cold through his ribs, the emptiness afterwards. Now he carried responsibility not only for himself but for the station, for the people inside it, for the thin thread still maintaining order.

"You can count on me, sir," he mumbled. "If there's something I can stop, I will."

Adam looked at him without blinking.

"I know, mate. I know. That's why I called you. Maybe I should've sent you from the beginning. But after the accident, I thought you needed time. Maybe I was wrong."

Silence settled once more.

"Now I've got something else for you. You can't find this information publicly. It isn't diplomatic. It's dangerous. And it's yours alone."

After Stewart explained the details of the mission, Harvey asked no further questions. Stewart explained everything. Everything understood.

Before leaving, he paused for a moment beside the dirty window and looked out across the station. Under Stewart, North Greenwich was no longer just a point on a map. It had become an ecosystem kept alive through sheer determination. In the side chambers carved directly into the damp rock, pig pens filled the space with welded bars; heavy animals fed on scraps. Above them, in darkness, mutated mushrooms grew in mixtures of organic waste and saturated soil. The butchery never stopped working, and the smell of smoke and metal clung to everything. Electricity came from the surface, unstable and unreliable. Solar panels fixed to collapsed structures gathered weak light and sent it underground through protected cables, where an old transformer divided it into flickering currents. Side corridors had become storage rooms and resource chambers secured with locks, their presence bringing tension.

That was what he was truly protecting—not a station, but a fragile balance.

"When can you leave, mate?" Adam asked.

"As soon as possible. I'll collect my rucksack, check what's missing, and move."

"Nothing's missing. It's ready. I knew it would be you."

The rucksack was military, heavy, made of dark waxed canvas with worn edges, thick straps, and hand-reinforced stitching. Old traces of soot and dried blood stained one side. Though worn, the buckles remained solid.

It was not new. It was not decorative. It had already gone into darkness, and it had come back.

“Spare batteries. Torch. Supplies for two days. Four filters. Two full rifle magazines. Three hundred pounds. Calibrated radiation meter.”

Harvey looked at the money.

“Do I really need that much?”

“It’s a long road. Money avoids questions.”

Adam reached into his breast pocket and removed a folded letter.

“Keep it safe. Everything depends on it.”

Harvey nodded and slipped it into an inner pocket between two layers of cloth. His fingers remained there for a moment, pressing against the material.

They moved toward the door.

“Harvey.” Adam’s voice dropped. “The Tube isn’t what it used to be. If somebody finds out what you’re carrying, they’ll rob you.”

He paused. “Or kill you.”

Harvey met his eyes directly. “Let them try, sir.”

He stepped outside.

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Somewhere inside a buried tunnel between Canary Wharf and oblivion, Adrian opened his eyes.

The silence was nothing like the ordinary silence of the Tube. There was no steady dripping of water, no rustle of rats in the dark, only a dense stillness pressing down on everything that remained alive. He could barely see. Two figures stood above him while the rail vehicle moved slowly forward, its headlamp cutting through the darkness and making the bricks along the walls tremble in weak flashes. The wheels made no sound at all. Nothing. Only the sensation that they were gliding rather than moving.

He tried to shift, but his body felt heavy. His head pulsed. His neck had locked. The air smelled of metal, rust, wet clothes, and something else, something impossible to name. Two blurred faces watched him. One wore a headlamp. The other held a cigarette between his fingers. No smiles. No words. Only eyes, hollow and expressionless like dusty mirrors. Hands and legs tied with coarse rope had rendered him nothing more than cargo.

He understood he was a prisoner, yet his mind could not piece the last hours together. The nightmare was too silent to be a dream and too real to reject. Straps pinned his torso to the cold floor of the rail vehicle as it glided under its own power along the tracks, almost soundless

in the dark. Every movement deepened the feeling of captivity. His chest rose unevenly, not only from fear but from that suffocating helplessness tightening around his throat.

His movement caught the attention of the man in front of him. He was tall, slightly bent forward, the lamp fixed to his forehead, wearing overalls that had once been blue but were now hardened by oil, dust, and soot. The fabric clung to his thin frame, hinting at restless energy beneath it, while cracked boots squeaked against the metal floor whenever he moved. Dirty black hair hung over his eyes, but behind it, Adrian caught the outline of a thin smile, sharp and unnecessary.

“Well, look at that... he’s awake,” the man muttered with dry satisfaction.

The other man stood further back, outlined by the headlamp. He wore a green jacket with reflective stripes buried beneath dust, cleaner overalls and a worn cap pulled low over his brow. An old scar crossed his cheek almost to the bridge of his nose while pale blue eyes remained fixed ahead, too clear, too steady. A cigarette rested between two fingers as he worked a rusted lever with slow movements, never looking at it and never looking at Adrian.

“Time’s come,” said the driver, calm, almost bored. “He’s slept long enough.”

The tunnel seemed to breathe above them. The smell of burned clothes, sulphur, and mould thickened in the air while the black-painted bricks threw the light back in sick reflections. Beside the rails lay broken planks, twisted iron, crushed boxes, and melted plastic, remains of an older escape abandoned in haste.

Adrian clenched his teeth, trapped somewhere between dizziness and fury.

“Who the hell are you, you bastards?” His voice struck the walls, broke apart, and came back to them.

Nobody answered.

The man with the lamp smiled again, only with the corners of his mouth.

“Don’t struggle. It doesn’t matter who we are yet. But you’ll know soon enough.”

Adrian bit the inside of his cheek, the taste of metal sharp against his tongue. He tried to gather his thoughts and found only fragments: the manager, the document, the departure, and Mason.

“Mason. What did you do to him?”

A short, crooked laugh rolled across the rails. Pain pulsed through his temples in rhythm with the vehicle, and the thought of the document reached him too late.

“Where’s the document? You bloody idiot, you’ll pay for this. If the manager finds out...”

The laugh came again, emptier now, before silence settled over them once more. The man at the controls spoke without turning.

“Myles, we’re nearly there. Couple more minutes and you’ll know what needs doing.”

The man in the overalls leaned towards Adrian and pulled a black balaclava over his head. Rough fabric covered his face. The light vanished. The air grew heavier as direction disappeared and only darkness remained.

“Take it off! Leave it! Don’t you see what you’re doing, you bastard?”

His voice broke beneath the cloth, angry and breathless. The fabric pressed against his cheek, soaked with dust and old smells, each breath returning hot against his mouth.

“It’s only a balaclava, not a bullet,” the other man replied calmly. “I prefer this to hitting you. Like I did with your fat friend.”

The word remained between them like a dirty cut.

Adrian could no longer breathe properly, not because of the lack of oxygen, but because of rage. His temples were hammered. His jaw locked. Hands and legs tied with coarse rope had turned him into cargo. He could move only his head and shoulders.

They had restrained everything else. The rail vehicle continued through the darkness. Vibrations climbed through the floor, into his spine, through every nerve. He could no longer see, yet he felt everything: the breathing of the two men, the smell of old petrol, oxidised metal, sweat and dampness. Time lost its shape; two minutes or twenty, it no longer mattered, and every second worked against him.

He had no plan and no escape, only that mute instinct buried somewhere deep inside him to endure. Not like this. Not here. Not in silence.