

CODENAME: MADELEINE

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ALFREDO DE BRAGANZA

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*For my friend Ernest Seinfeld, who survived the Nazi concentration camps of Auschwitz
and Dachau.*

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"By plucking her petals, you do not gather the beauty of the flower."

Rabindranath Tagore

"You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety."

Job 11:18

"I'm my own boss. So, put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Greta Garbo in *Anna Christie* (1930)

Preface

On the night of 8th July, 1943, the Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, Aloysius Viktor Stepinac, who before his current position was considered the world's youngest Catholic bishop, was dining with his closest and most trusted men – highly influential extremist leaders in Yugoslavia – when he received a phone call informing him that a group of partisans, along with two British agents, had been arrested attempting to escape from France with documents on their person: documents incriminating the Croatian Catholic Church in the massacres taking place in the Jasenovac concentration camp. As well as containing the names of local witnesses, the seized documents also exposed the leeway afforded to Stepinac by Pope Pius XII, for various reasons, including the fact that the Archbishop had been plundering immense quantities of gold which was being sent to Rome. The documents also contained the code name of a radio operator they were planning to meet in Paris, to provide London with the coordinates of the geographical location of the camp, faced with a possible bombardment by the Allies. The British agent, a radio operator for the French Resistance group known as Prosper, was called Madeleine...

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Two guards were escorting her down the corridor towards the office of the interpreter and unit commander, Karl-Maria Steinbrinck.

Their steps echoed against the hard floors and bare walls, as if they were walking through a vast cathedral. As they walked along the narrow corridors, the sound of screams could be heard in the distance, as well as cries, blows, the slamming of doors and the stamping of boots.

Noor's body was still shaking and she could not hide it. Her face was pale, her dark eyes, tired from lack of sleep, were filled with anxiety. Her hair was light brown, although unevenly dyed due to the constant change of colour she had been applying to it in recent days to avoid being recognised. She was afraid, and aware that she was letting her weakness show. She was trying to control her feelings, but could not.

She probably only had a few minutes left to live. She had heard of the brutality committed by the Gestapo in their interrogations, and could not prevent her distress from showing when she thought about what they might do to her.

"Your name as a secret agent?" asked Steinbrinck in a quiet yet steady, baritone voice; a voice that was accustomed to giving orders.

The German officer sat with his legs crossed, one elbow resting on the table as he exhaled the smoke from his cigarette.

"I will not tell you anything... nothing! Nothing!" replied Noor, raising her voice, still shaking, breathing deeply.

She was beautiful, Steinbrinck realised. Her anger made her dark almond-shaped eyes widen and brought colour to her cheeks. He thought he knew that her real name was Nora Baker, alias Madeleine. When they arrested her, they found a notebook full of codes and messages; the very notebook that Noor's comrades had so often warned her that it was dangerous to carry with her everywhere, and that she should destroy.

The members of her group were arrested one after the other: she had been the only one left. All her fellow members of the Prosper circuit were captured, interrogated and tortured to death; some were shot, and others were later sent to concentration camps in Germany. Even those whose obsession with security bordered on paranoia, finally toppled like dominoes, in ambushes, after being betrayed by their own comrades, who were then subjected to such extreme forms of torture that they made the methods used by the Spanish Inquisition look like a gentle warning. All of the Prosper agents and most of the sub-groups of the Resistance disappeared in just one month because of those betrayals.

Even the leader of the group eventually gave in and collaborated with the Nazis. In war, when the leaders switch sides, people always die.

For days, Steinbrinck's unit had been chasing her in a game of cat and mouse all over Paris. Noor, although the least experienced of her group and whom London had not bet on surviving in occupied France for even a week, survived because she was organized, meticulous, determined, with fast reactions. In England, however, they had underestimated her potential. The ugly duckling, who they regarded as a sacrificial lamb designed to keep the attention of the Gestapo in Paris while the Allies attacked the Germans on other fronts, had become a tiger.

She knew all the names and addresses of the members of the French Resistance who gave support to the British circuit, Prosper. Noor was unable to destroy her notebook because it contained numerous codes, which she needed for transmitting messages to England. In addition, at the time of her arrest she was awaiting a message from a secret agent from Yugoslavia, known by the pseudonym of Buckthorn.

Steinbrinck wanted more time to get to know the prisoner and work out how to make her talk, before taking her to the basement of the building and imposing the agony of torture on her. His goal was for one cell to lead him to another, and thus, in a chain, successively, to cause irreparable damage to the Resistance and its circuits of British agents operating on French soil. Once he achieved his aim, it would be like shooting fish in a barrel.

There was no doubt that she had insider information and the mere fact that she was a woman was helpful. Women usually broke down, hiccupped, sobbed, murmured unintelligible words, but they immediately started talking without stopping, interrupted only by their stuttering, the nervousness of being scared to death. They gave away small, very precise details, thinking they would make it out of the infamous Avenue Foch alive.

No individual could endlessly endure pain, but unfortunately, during arrest and interrogation nothing could be guaranteed. Steinbrinck had seen how some sun-baked prisoners, who appeared to have been dragged there from the most rural village in France, were well-prepared enough to invent lies that were impossible to discover. He also had a great deal of experience with foreign agents who came up with ingenious ways to commit suicide, when the torture became impossible to endure.

With Noor, however, it was different; she was a woman who gave off an air of exotic sophistication, in the way she expressed herself and the unusual way she moved her body. Her French accent was musical, sweet and harmonious to the ear. No matter how hard he tried, he could not work out where she was from. It was pleasant to hear her talk, even if she said very little. She was so exquisitely bold that she had avoided being arrested for days, which meant that Noor was properly trained and could intentionally give false

information in the event of being detained by the Gestapo. If this was true, when she succumbed to torture, anything she said would be part of a deception perfectly planned by London.

"I want to know who you were working with. I want to know who obtained the empty apartments for the radio transmissions, and who you met with on a daily basis," Steinbrinck said patiently, as he stubbed out his cigarette in a heavy glass ashtray brimming with cigarette butts.

Standing in the middle of the office, Noor remained silent and looked in the direction of the window. Steinbrinck looked her up and down with astonishment, as he emptied the ashtray into a wastepaper basket at his feet. She was definitely someone special, he thought. Her appearance was unique. He had never seen a British agent with that colour skin, much less with that character.

"Reden ist silber, schweigen ist gold,"¹ Noor said suddenly in German, much to the surprise of Steinbrinck and the SS elite soldier to his left, who was startled to hear her speak so correctly in his mother tongue.

"Well, well, hark at the *madame*," said Steinbrinck, placing another cigarette in the corner of his mouth and leaning back in his seat. He sighed and smiled with satisfaction at the prisoner's knowledge. "You are a woman of many talents. Your pronunciation is very good. In fact, that German accent is from Frankfurt. Maybe the city where your language teacher at the training school in England comes from, am I right? Well, it's pointless to keep silent about the Resistance. For the time being, there is nobody left to inform on, as you know ... They've all have been arrested. You are the last member of the group."

Standing in front of the German officer's desk, Noor could not hide her nerves: her whole body was visibly trembling. She wore a dress that had lost its colour and shape through hand-washing with cheap bar soap over the past few days. The left lapel of her blouse was stained with dried blood, and from where the German officer was sitting, he could even smell the stench of urine emanating from her dirty clothes.

"We have a double agent on Baker Street," Steinbrinck added, leaning over and placing a file on his desk. "Your boss, the head of Section F, named after the British department dedicated to France, is called Selwyn Jepson and he was trained in Beaulieu, Hampshire. We also know that you received parachuting training in Manchester. Look, these are pictures of the camp he trains in," he said, showing her a large aerial photograph. "As you will see, we know everything. I'm not asking you to tell us anything. I want you to admit that you have knowledge of the Resistance by giving me accurate information, such as names and addresses, so that we can verify them. That is all."

¹ Speech is silver, but silence is golden.

Here he made a mistake: Noor never received such training in Manchester, but rather in Scotland. Using the interrogation techniques he had learned during his preparation as an operative agent, Steinbrinck tried to win her over by saying that he knew everything about her organization. He was being persuasive with the prisoner. The German had made a very basic error, and was behaving very naively with her.

Although only a few seconds passed, Steinbrinck realized from her silence that although she was scared to death, it would be very difficult to obtain information from this strange young woman without using physical torture. This was what he had learned from his – extensive – experience with prisoners: with minimum contact, overcome by fear, they had told him everything he wanted. But she was different. He could see in her face that she would rather die than tell them anything. He remembered how when she was arrested, she was not prepared to go down without a fight. Seeing she had no way out, she lunged directly for the gun instead of swallowing the cyanide pill which, unlike the French partisans, British agents always carried with them in case of arrest.

Prisoners always talked in the end. He had never encountered a single prisoner who had not. Sometimes, with the stubborn ones, the Gestapo had lost patience and in the basement, amid an excess of adrenaline and enthusiasm, they had killed them. But his boss, Otto Kramer, expected him to obtain the information through more persuasive means before sending them down there. In the basement, determined to get results, the agents could make even the strongest and best-trained of individuals betray their closest comrades.

They had arrested her the previous day. Someone she knew had betrayed her. They had been looking for the elusive agent Madeleine all over Paris. Her ability to change her appearance, as well as change her location by transmitting messages using her radio prevented them from finding her. "As always, the enemy is usually on the inside," thought Steinbrinck. It had to be one of her own who had betrayed her.

In the end, he had found the most wanted British agent in the last few days, and now he had as much time as he wanted to make her talk.

The van, with lettering on both sides that read 'Blanchisserie Dauphin'² and which stealthily cruised the streets picking up transmission signals, confirmed the address they had been given in advance after the tip-off that Noor would make a radio transmission from there. They alerted Steinbrinck – who was behind them in another vehicle – as soon as they picked up the signal, and when it increased in intensity as they approached the building. The minutes passed. There was total silence; they were smoking anxiously when the receiver let out the high-pitched beep. A muscle-bound Gestapo officer in the front

² Dauphin Laundry

seat was carrying a heavy sledgehammer on his knees, in case any doors needed to be broken down. They quickly rounded the corner and parked the car in front of the main entrance. When he and the soldiers burst into the apartment, she tried to go for a 45-gauge Colt automatic that was in the drawer of the dresser, but she was unsuccessful. Two soldiers fell upon her, trying to immobilize her on the ground; Noor would not let herself be caught. Fiercely she bit deep into one hand after another, screaming and kicking hysterically.

Steinbrinck watched the scene calmly: he sat on the bed, crossed his legs, opened his cigarette case, and lit one. He watched the behaviour of Noor, who reacted like a wild animal, like a tigress who refuses to be taken to the zoo and lays into its attackers with tooth and claw; doing anything to avoid capture. Tired of all the screaming, and seeing that the struggle was never-ending, he slammed his palm down hard on the bedside table. The SS soldier Teichmann immediately understood what his superior was ordering him to do: he punched Noor so hard that she immediately collapsed onto the wooden table, stiff as a board.

Steinbrinck heard something heavy rolling around inside the desk: he opened the drawer, reached inside and smiled as he pulled out a Mills No. 36M hand grenade.

"Look what treasures there are in this apartment," he said. Steinbrinck showed the explosive device to those present, with a wry look on his face.

They dragged her to her feet, with her wrists tied behind her back. Her hair tumbled over her face and her nose was gushing with blood.

One day after her arrest, he was now looking at her standing in front of him in his office. The fierceness she demonstrated when she was struggling on the floor with the soldiers was still bubbling just beneath the surface, and he knew from personal experience that she would not keep calm. He would have to use other methods. For the moment, he knew it was useless to continue questioning her.

"Out. Take her back to her cell." He gave the order lesiurely, as he reclined in his chair.

Once more she heard the heavy sounds of the boots of the soldiers guarding her, going down the hall like hammers striking against the marble floor of the building – judging by its appearance, it seemed to have been built for the most Influential and wealthy people in the world - located at number 84, Avenue Foch.

After she was arrested in that vacant apartment, she was transported in a black Citroën Traction Avant, which the Gestapo used to use in France, to the elegant five-storey building topped by a high roof full of garrets that had been chosen as the Gestapo headquarters. On the fourth floor was the office of the Waffen-SS Sturmbannführer, leader of the assault squadron, Otto Kramer, the highest authority of the intelligence service

during the Nazi occupation in France. On an upper floor were Steinbrinck's office, a room for the guards, a toilet, a room with a bath, and a corridor with prison cells along both sides. At first glance, the tiny cells looked more suited to housing animals than people. On the other floors, there were the switchboards and radio operators. In the basement, there were the torture rooms and all the automatic telephone systems and amplifiers essential for long distance lines. The neighbouring buildings, numbers 82 and 86, were occupied by the intelligence service, the Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS (SD), and by the Gestapo.

The avenue was named after French field marshal and commander-in-chief of the allied armies during the First World War, Ferdinand Foch, who accepted the German surrender in 1918. By way of avenging that defeat, Hitler symbolically chose those buildings as headquarters for the Gestapo. Soon, for Parisians it became an infamous place: a person being taken to Avenue Foch became synonymous with their disappearance and torture.

In solitary confinement in a filthy cell, Noor recalled the story her father had told her as a child about her distant relative Sultan Fateh Ali Tipu, better known as the Tiger of Mysore, and nicknamed Tipu Sultan.

Tipu Sultan went out hunting in the forest with a French friend. They came to a place full of tigers. After the trackers spotted one, Tipu dismounted the elephant and walked alone in front to show his courage. He came face to face with the wild cat. His rifle did not work and he realized that, in his nervous state, he had dropped his dagger on the ground a few metres from where the tiger was. The moment the animal pounced on him, he immediately leapt to one side, rolled over on the ground, reached for the dagger and fiercely plunged it into the animal's body, again and again, until he was exhausted. That is why the sultan had the image of a tiger on his flag.

More than ever before, she prayed for her father and her brave Indian ancestor to give her strength. For the moment, nobody knew that she was an Indian princess descended from the famous Tipu Sultan of the eighteenth century.

She was born in Moscow's Vusoko Petrovsky monastery on the first day of January, 1914. She was called Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan. Her mother, an American, was called Ora Ray Baker (niece of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science in the United States), and her father, Inayat Khan, was born in India.

Inayat Khan was a Sufi devotee and founder of the Universal Sufism movement, a preaching that aimed at spreading spiritual love, peace, harmony and freedom to the West and was opposed to any other religion interfering with its message. He was descended from the sultan of the kingdom of Mysore, named Tipu Sultan, the founding member of the group of Jacobins in France. His reign ended after his defeat by the British in eighteenth-

century India, a territory where the interests of the European expansionist economies converged and was much disputed by the Danes, Dutch, Mughals, French and English. Since then, the survivors of the royal family lived in exile, and settled in the region of Gujarat in northern India, where Noor's father was born.

From a very early age he spread traditional folk music - which he considered to be the best path for spiritual development - and even introduced traditional meditation techniques into it. Influenced by Vedanta philosophy, Inayat Khan believed in religious tolerance, largely inspired by the Mogul tradition in which believers, especially Hindus and Muslims, could overcome their differences in pursuit of spiritual unity.

Following the guidelines of his teachers, who advised him to combine traditional rhythms and Sufi philosophy for a better understanding between East and West, he travelled to the United States along with a group of family musicians who called themselves the Royal Musicians of Hindustan.

They gave concerts at Columbia University and various cities throughout the country. During his stay in California he gave lectures at the Ramakrishna School in San Francisco, where he met his future wife, a young blonde named Ora Ray Baker.

They were both madly in love with one another, although their families disapproved of their relationship. Inayat Khan's relatives urged him to travel back to Europe. Before leaving for England he told his young fiancée that he would send for her once he had settled in.

In England, the family group did not receive a warm reception, and in September 1912 they decided to travel to France, believing that Indian traditional music would be better accepted there. They were not mistaken: fascinated by everything Oriental, Parisians were soon keeping the Royal Musicians of Hindustan incredibly busy, giving lectures and talks about Sufism and concerts throughout the city. The famous dancer Mata-Hari even hired them as part of her musical group, introducing them as *mon orchestre*.

During that time in Paris, Inayat Khan became friends with numerous cultural figures, such as the actor Lucien Guitry, the actress Sarah Bernhardt, the sculptor Auguste Rodin, the writer and composer Edmond Bailly, the dancer Isadora Duncan and the musician Claude Debussy.

As time passed, he decided to break with the group and go to meet his fiancée. They were reunited in England, where they got married in a registry office. At that time, Ora Ray Baker made the decision to sever all ties with her American family, who did not want to accept the Indian prince without a kingdom, the wandering musician. In addition, she

changed her name to Amina Shrada Begum, and decided from then on to wear traditional Indian clothes, making the sari her main clothing.

In London, Inayat Khan used to meet in the mornings with influential figures in culture, politics and society, and in the evenings, he performed concerts with a wooden musical instrument called the *veena*: one of the oldest instruments in India, and slightly larger than the sitar.

He received an invitation from Moscow to play classical Indian music at a nightclub called Maxim's. Once there, he was captivated by the cultural world of Russia, a country that was also enchanted by his recitals and his lectures on Sufism. He made friends with the son of the novelist Leo Tolstoy, Sergei Tolstoy, who became the representative of the music section of the Sufi order in Moscow, where sophisticated luxury and extreme poverty coexisted just as it did in colonial India, filled as it was with extravagant maharajas. Through his friend Sergei Tolstoy, he met Tsar Nicholas II and even the mystic Rasputin.

Noor was born in the Vusoko Petrovsky monastery, located a short distance from the Kremlin. Her mother was horrified when she saw the nurse give the new-born baby a black coffee to drink, and massage it with a stiff brush. However, this aside, they had plenty of friends and acquaintances endlessly visiting them, offering songs and music. On the other hand, on the street the scene was not so cheerful or festive. The social atmosphere was bubbling with an undercurrent of violence: communists and anarchists were encouraging a revolution against the tsar. Due to his well-known friendship with Nicholas II, realising that they were in danger and on the advice of their friends, they decided to travel to France; but after the outbreak of World War I, the patriarch decided that they should move to England, where they would spend the next six years.

In London, unlike in Moscow, Inayat Khan was disappointed because he did not find any places drawing large crowds to listen to him. The effects of the Great War made it increasingly difficult to support his family. The prevailing prejudices in English society towards mixed marriages between a white woman and a man of Indian origin with olive skin, even led Noor's mother to occasionally spurn her Indian clothing, so as not to attract attention in the street. The family survived daily with a serving of rice and lentils; there were days when a single loaf of bread was the only food on the table.

Even so, Inayat Khan played at the reception of the leader of India independence, Mahatma Gandhi, who, according to eyewitnesses at the time, had tears rolling down his cheeks as he listened to him play the *veena* with such deep devotion. He also offered numerous charity concerts to hospitalized Indian soldiers, a gesture that caused the British government to be suspicious of him and consider him as an artist promoting independence and, therefore, a possible criminal to keep an eye on.

One day, after a recital in a hospital before hundreds of soldiers of Indian origin, he got carried away by his enthusiasm and started to sing patriotic songs of his country, to the jubilation of the sick and wounded. This led to the British prohibiting him from holding any more concerts in public.

In June of 1916 Noor's brother was born in London. They named him Vilayat. From an early age they were inseparable. When they could not sleep, their father sang and played his instrument, which he soon taught them to play as well. According to him, no person should be awakened from sleep suddenly. Considering the effect that music has on the psyche and people's health in general, Inayat used to wake his children every morning by playing gentle songs in Sanskrit.

The constant situation of anguish, poverty, death and other effects of the world war led Inayat Khan to become a lecturer. He began lecturing to give encouragement to the most disadvantaged and needy; he focused on talking to people about the meaning of death, meditation and prayer. People seeking inner peace and spiritual solutions to help them go on living during those days of war became his audience, and his audience gradually grew in number.

Noor and her brother lived in an apartment whose doors were wide open to all visitors. The house was always full of people, students, musicians, followers and onlookers who wanted to learn Sufism or any Hindu philosophy in particular. Noor played in the garden and the visitors smiled when they saw her talking to imaginary friends; she told them that she was playing with her beloved friends, the fairies. A girl from the neighbourhood confronted her one day, arguing that Santa Claus did not exist, that it was the parents who gave the gifts, and that fairies were a lie, and that Noor was just pretending to talk to herself.

When she asked her father about the existence of her friends the fairies and Santa Claus, he frowned slightly and remained motionless, thoughtful. He felt a kind of distant compassion for his daughter. He thought to himself, "What a strange creature she is." Finally, he exclaimed, "When something exists in somebody's imagination, be sure that there is a place where it really exists."

Although she was still too young to understand the meaning of such words, she knew that her father had told her a wise sentence that could only be positive, and she went away happy and satisfied, because he had assured her that fairies really did exist and that they were there, with her.

Sitting on the floor against the wall of the damp cell of building number 84 on Avenue Foch, she smiled bitterly as she remembered her father, who had died when she was just a teenager. She remembered her Resistance comrades who had been arrested and who subsequently disappeared; perhaps they were already dead after intense torture or had

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been sent to forced labour camps. She thought of their families, destroyed by anguish, or the pain of not knowing where they were, the work they did, and the fact they would never know how they died, perhaps in complete anonymity and with code names, far from their homes and their loved ones. She promised that her sacrifice would not be in vain. She would not collaborate with the Gestapo.

Propped against the freezing wall, she closed her eyes and began to mumble a Vedic chant, as a way of meditating. The power of the sound resonated throughout her body, strengthening her physical, mental, and emotional ability.