



Ingrid Pearson

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The Beginning: "A day after OSI training ended nobody knew what to do with me and they had me filing and typing when a Major taped me on the shoulder." Even then there was less of men actually touching a woman, but the idea of sexual harassment or inappropriate touching was slow to catch on. There was nothing inappropriate, I was just startled to be touched by a senior officer." Colonel Blom* wants to see you. Now." (An asterisk indicates name changed.) Colonels don't send Majors to fetch a Captain. With a shiver of dread, I knocked at the door frame. He motioned me in and to close the door. There were two well sorted men sitting in front of Blom. He introduced them as FBI agents. He said, "Captain, these gentlemen have something to discuss. If you decide to tell them no, it will not be held against you. It will not go into your permanent record. If you say yes, your job will change and for the duration you will be on a special team." He nodded and left, closing the door behind him. Ingrid Pearson, having already spent several years in the Strategic Air Command, at 25 years old in 1968 was the first commissioned female intelligence officer in The Office of Special Investigations, Airforce OSI. She trained with a male only group of Airforce officers in a stately mansion in the DC suburbs that was given to the government. Underneath the house was a warren of target ranges and specialized training facilities. "The others treated me like I was a girl in their high school locker room. Constant teasing until the TO handed me a .38." Our dad had taught her how to shoot, how to change attire, how to troubleshoot an auto no-start problem and how to Judo-

throw an aggressive man. "Someone yelled, better stand behind her sarge." I fired six rounds, five in the bull's eye and one on the edge. The silence was deafening. There was very little locker room harassment after that."

The lead agent introduced himself as Blanchard*. "I understand you're exceptionally good at 'chase the rabbit.'" Chase the rabbit was an exercise in following people. It was how a lot of human intelligence was done before the explosion in surveillance technology. The rabbit would write down several locations and times in DC where he could be intercepted. He had a camera. His job was to spot the hound and get a photo. If he got a photo, the hound lost. If the hound was able to follow the rabbit and photograph him at each stop then the hound won. I was very, very good as the hound. I made all my own clothes, and I'd produced several reversable light weight jackets, usually a bright color and a dull color. I had a reversable purse and several quick things I could do to my hair. If the rabbit so much as looked my way, when he looked back again my hair had changed and my jacket was reversed. I followed rabbits all day long and they'd report I never found them and then they'd be handed a folder with the photos I'd taken. At the time all the agents who might be acting as a hound were men. White, tall, usually muscular, men. But even when the rabbit was told he was being stalked by a woman, they failed to spot me. Not once did a rabbit get a photo of me. "Yeah. I'm pretty good." "In the final exercise, we slipped a ringer in on you. He's a for-real top operative." He handed over an eight by ten glossy. "Kilanger*. I remember him. I thought he had me several times." "Well, he didn't. And you really torqued him off." He smiled. "You got him at all eight stops. He's asked for you by name. I have to tell you this is dangerous. I can't tell you more. Are you in or out." Heart pounding, I said, "I'm in." I arrived thirty minutes early at the address, what appeared to be a disused office high rise near the center of DC. The lobby was filthy, with cartons stacked against one wall. I was in my hound attire. I'd just finished a short, reversable skirt held together with Velcro. I wore it over shorts, so counting the reversable jacket and the various scarves I could conjure quite a few quick changes in about five seconds each. A man

watched me from a desk. His stance said he was bored to death. His eyes said otherwise. I reached in the purse for my ID. He waved me on, saying, "They're waiting on the third floor." The elevator had a set of open steel accordion doors. I rotated the dial to three and it lurched upward. At my stop, I unhooked the doors and folded them aside. It started down with the doors open. Safety was obviously not a concern. Several men were having coffee against a backdrop of filthy casement windows overlooking DC. Blanchard motioned me over. He poured a coffee and handed it to me. I was very conscious that men expected the woman to go get coffee. That was one of my pet peeves. I didn't normally drink coffee, but I understood the gesture. They were inviting me to be one of the guys. They were setting the tone for the relationship. They wanted me on the team. That meant more to me than anything at that moment. Blanchard caught Kilanger's eye, and he broke off his conversation and sauntered over. Shaking my hand he said, "You have no idea how much ribbing you put me through. I'd like to know how you followed me for six hours without me noticing." The group had turned and were coming our way. I was the center of attention, and it was unnerving. I put the cup on the table and took several steps away. Turning I said, "At the steps of the capital you gave me a long hard look. When you turned away, I did this." I reached into the bag and drew a scarf over my hair, and it clicked into place. I turned around reversing the jacket and did a "ta-da" with a little curtsy. "Every time you looked my way, I did something similar." A man said, "That's like a magician's trick. What was that click?" "Magnets. I weave them into my hair. I sewed some metal into the scarves so I can change the headwear in almost the same motion as reversing the jacket. I can do the same with the skirt," I demonstrated, "or," I draped the skirt over my shoulder and showed off my legs in very short shorts. "Sometimes if you look really obvious, you're even more invisible on the next change." Frank, who had asked about the "click" was supposed to help me with my costumes. He was taking notes and ended up copying my hand made patterns. He supplied me with an airbrushed pair of

sneakers that looked like open-toed flats. He said I might have to run. Oh, boy. The meeting started when a tall black man arrived, also in civilian attire. These people had obviously been working together but everyone was introduced. The black guy, who somehow projected that he was going to enjoy meeting you said his name was Colonel Voss* and he worked for the Strategic Air Command, SAC, in planning and operations at the Pentagon. It dawned on me. This was why OSI had been invited to the party. The fact that my boss wasn't cleared said this was really big league. Colonel Voss was a rare man who slept only two hours per night. This gave him twice the awake time of a normal man. He loved people. He practically radiated that he wanted to talk to you. He had a second job in a shoe store where he had met Victor Caladen* who had introduced himself as the cultural attaché at the Soviet embassy. Focusing on me, as I was obviously the new guy, Voss said, "Naturally, I filled out a 3510, the I've-spoken-to-a-Soviet form and filed it. The next night Victor was back and bought two pairs of shoes, to send home," he chuckled. "He was really chatty and the words to his song were how racist the Airforce was that they weren't paying a black man enough that he needed a second job. I hummed along to his tune. I got to the office and filed another 3510, wondering if anyone actually read those. The next day there was a passel," he paused squinting, "is a group of FBI agents a passel, a flock or a herd?" Somebody said, "more than three is a murder." Somebody said, "that's crows. We can go with passel." "Four of them." Voss pointed using the little and index fingers of both hands indicating the agents he'd met. "They seemed an equal mix of, 'are you crazy? are you trying to set this guy up? do you have any idea what this means?' The answers to which were, 'yep.' Ain't gonna live forever." Kilanger said, "He thinks he's running Colonel Voss as a source. He pays Voss, Voss turns the money over to us and we supply carefully curated false information. We're positive this man is running a huge network. If we can bust him, we will set the KGB's intelligence apparatus back a decade or more. But we can't keep this up much longer. The objective," he turned to me, "is to identify his contacts and his drop points. That's where you come in. I talked to

your TO and he's impressed with your shooting. Obviously, a six-inch Smith is out of the question. We're issuing you a thirty-eight Airweight. You'll have this afternoon to get familiar with it. Also," he took out a leather box and opened it on the table. It contained what looked like a large CROSS pen. "You'll have this." He popped it open, inserted a .22LR and snapped it closed. He unloaded it so I could watch and then he showed me it was empty. He put it in his pocket, drew it while simultaneously twisting the top, holding it in his fist like he was going to stab with it, he pushed the top down. It "clicked." Leaning closely and looking me in the eye. He said, "You are not to engage. If he makes you, you run. If you have to, you empty the Airweight. If you end up using the pen, things have gone very badly. But you'll have the pen. There will be three teams on you at all times. But they'll be at least a block ahead of the target, or behind the target or off on a side street. We haven't been able to follow this guy or even do a drive by. He has spotted us every time. Your job is to ID contacts and drop points. If you lose him, like he gets into a cab, we'll work out hand signals so you can get picked up and dropped near wherever the other teams think you can pick him up." "As far as communications go," Kilanger said, "We won't be using radios. Everyone will have a phone booth map and a handful of dimes. We can't risk the extensive network of listening posts run by the Embassy catching wind something is up." At the time, the main dispatch for the FBI had the callsign "WKGB" as the idea of encrypted transmissions simply hadn't happened. There were walkie-talkies but they were big, obvious and easy to listen in on. "By-the-way," Kilanger continued, "We're almost certain he killed two Greek NIS agents, execution style. This was in Athens in '65. No idea as to motive. But we must assume he'll kill to protect his network." I tried my best to look like that didn't matter to me. A shiver ran through my spine. Days into this and after several failed attempts to follow, two agents dropped me on a side street. Victor came around the corner a block away heading towards me. The agents did a three point and sped away and I waved as if it was my dad driving. Two white guys in a shiny gray Plymouth four door looked as out of place on this seedy street as a whale in

the desert. Okay this was bad planning. The layout of the streets and the position of the car had left little choice. It was a one-way street coming towards me. It was late afternoon. Not a great time to start in my hunt, but the rabbit set the time and place. A woman leaned on a lamp post about mid-block. She appeared to have been poured into her clothing and had a major muffin top going on at her waistline. Well, I couldn't just stand here. I decided to walk towards him, then cross the street and turn back to follow him. He stopped, looked back then up and all around. Then he angled across the street and slid into a bar. I'd almost forgotten the camera and got a shot of his back as the door closed. I already knew the f-stop was wrong and it would be too dark, so I made a mental note of the location while cursing myself for not having been ready. I stopped near the woman. "Honey. What the fuck are you doing? This is my corner. You call that makeup? Honey, you need some mascara. And some lashes. Jesus! You gonna give girls a bad name." The speaker could have swept cobwebs off walls with her eyelashes. Victor oozed through the door, looked around and then dropped a coin in the newspaper machine. I squeezed off a photo. It looked like he had taken the bottom paper. He walked towards the corner, took something from his pocket, folded it into a page of the paper and stuffed it between a metal fencepost and the wall. There was so much trash around it was unnoticeable. I aimed my purse and clicked. "Honey, this is my corner, and the next one is Flo's. So just keep on walkin'. Understand?" "So, what kind of clientele is there at this hour?" "The newspaper crew gets off in a half hour and hit the bar." She nodded at the hole in the wall. "Your corner. Thanks." I trailed off after Victor. It was the ninth day, and I'd lost track of where in DC we were. Somewhere east of the mall. Victor had done two bumps, where he "accidentally" walked into someone. I'd gotten a good shot of him handing off an envelope in one. At the second one and on a hunch, I broke contact with Victor and followed the man with the envelope. I was breaking orders, but I had a "feeling" about this guy. I got a good side shot of his face as he thumbed through the envelope. I was

itching to run after Victor but something about the guy screamed importance. He was dressed in a Brooks Brother suit with gold cufflinks and a watch chain looped on his vest pockets. Luck was with me. He got into little British sports car and I got a shot of the license plate. Then I sprinted after Victor. I was approaching the corner where Victor had made a left. At a full run now, I had just reached the corner when Victor rounded it coming the other way. We collided. Crap! I landed hard on my butt. He'd barely budged with the impact. He turned on a smile, like flipping a switch. He knelt and helped me up. "I'm so sorry," I gasped. "I'm late for work." He said something but it didn't register. Then he was gone. I thought my heart would break my ribs. I staggered to a bench. Apparently, I sat for a long, long time. "There she is! Captain? Captain?" It was Charlie and Grant on the chase team sprinting towards me. I explained what happened. I was too rattled to go on and it galled me to admit it in front of these men. Later at a meeting Kilanger asked, "Do you think he recognized you?" Something just dawned on me as I thought back, "I don't exist. In his world, I don't exist. Even while he was helping me up, his eyes were scanning to see who was around him. He was holding my hands, and he never once looked at me. I mean, 'looked' as in seeing me as an individual." "Charlie thinks you were in shock. Are you still good to go?" Thrumming with a weird excitement and surprising myself I said, "Yes. But I'm wondering what value I'm bringing to the table."

We were on the third floor of the dilapidated office building. Dusk had come and gone, and the city skyline shown through the dirty windows. Blanchard spun the combination on a filing cabinet. Pulling out a folder he dropped it on the desk, resuming his seat. He flipped the first photo I'd taken out. You could barely make out the bar's door and Victor's back. "Sorry. I wasn't quite ready for that one."

"It's the address that matters. It's the headquarters for an antiwar group funded by the KGB. We've had a team on it from the moment you put it in your report. We've recorded several IRA members and a couple of German guys wanted by Interpol and the West German government. This is like the central

clearing house for domestic and European terror operations. We had no idea it was here.” Flipping out several photos of Victor’s “bumps” where he exchanged money for information Kilangersaid, “We’ve identified these people. One is a secretary in the White House. This guy,” he nudged a photo of the guy with the watch fob on his vest, “works at the State Department. Every one of these people is supplying intelligence of varying values to the Soviets and we’ll build a case on all of them. Already, you’ve helped create more cases than we’d normally see in a year. So, yeah, value added.” “I broke protocol to get that one,” I jabbed at watch-fob guy. “Good call. This guy is important. He has amazing access. You’ve got great instincts. I probably haven’t made this clear. You’re in the field. You’re in command of what you do. The orders are a general guidance, not an unbreakable order. You do what feels right. Sometimes it will pay off. Sometimes it won’t. Either way, when you’re on your own it’s your play. Are we still good to go? Need some time off?” He was offering time off. But we all knew the longer this went on the more opportunities it had to go south. Also, Victor had requested information he would know Voss had access to and the FBI didn’t want the KGB to have real information. But they might detect fake information by cross-checking with other sources, putting Voss in danger of getting dead. “I’m good. Thanks.” “We’ve bought you some more time by getting the Air Force to order Voss to go TDY at Barksdale. It’s completely legit. It’s happened before where General Coleman* had Voss take his place. We’ll extend it a bit but there’s no reason to believe it will cause undue suspicion. We think we’ve been through two complete pay cycles. At this point you’re crossing t’s and dotting i’s.”

Takedown:

We’d been through at least four pay cycles at this point. It was repetitive, same bumps, same drop points. The FBI called in agents from all over to run cases on targets I’d help develop. We were in the abandoned office building. It was morning and the group had grown. They’d set up rows of chairs. Against the inner wall was a rolling chalk board like you’d see in a college classroom. Someone had drawn a detailed layout of a Sears store parking lot, an

intervening street, a McDonald's and the other relevant buildings. Shrubbery in the Sears lot was marked with distances between the rectangle indicating a car from each concealed location. Kilanger addressed the group, pointing at the rectangle. "Colonel Voss will park here. This is the best location given what Victor wants and how fast we'll have to move. These guys," he nodded at four FBI agents leaning against the windows, "are the FBI's fastest sprinters. They'll be concealed in these bushes." He used his pointer to indicate the bushes. "The idea is to do this with no casualties. But we think he might go down hard if he's threatened. Colonel Voss will tell Victor the information is in the trunk. When he exits the car and opens the trunk, our sprinters will fly in and pin Victor. If things go badly, there's a sniper on the roof with me here." He pointed to a roof on the far side of the parking lot.

"Captain, you'll be with Charlie in a car across the street in the McDonald's parking lot. We've decided the car will face away from the Sears' lot and you'll have a good view from the car's mirrors. We've already checked all that." My heart was doing a tap dance on my ribs. I was the only woman present in a group of some twenty FBI and OSI agents. Of the OSI agents I was the only one with an active role in the takedown. They didn't really have to use me at this point as my job was over. But Kilanger had insisted.

Looking around it was easy to spot the difference between the FBI agents, who looked like football players and the OSI agents who could be mistaken for insurance salesmen. J. Edgar Hoover liked tall, blond, muscular white men and he selected each agent. Turns out in the long run that hiring only one body type and guys who had never smoked pot or lived in anything other than middle or upper-class environments was terribly limiting to what the FBI could functionally accomplish. That's why they needed me. It was funny, actually. It was gratifying that Kilanger was acknowledging my contribution by including me in the takedown. An hour before the appointed time I sat with Charlie in his dad's six-year-old Rambler on account of the fact the FBI had made a bulk purchase of four door Plymouth's and that was a well-known fact. We were

fighting with the full-sized walkie-talkie which we could use in an emergency. The whip antenna was being a problem, and I was attempting to run it between the seats when I caught a motion in the mirror from the corner of my eye. "Oh, my God," I whispered. "Victor is about to pass by my window!" I bent over the antenna to cover it with my body and grabbed Charlie. He folded into me, and we pretended to kiss while he strained his eyes to see through the windshield. "Let's hold the pose, looks like he's walking around the whole stand." McDonald's at the time was just a walk-up window. You paid your money and ate your food at a couple of picnic tables or took it with you. Holding the smooch pose I whispered, "This antenna is trying to do a boob-ectomy on my breast. Do something." He captured the antenna and held its sprung weight away from me. "Thanks. What's he doing?" He giggled. Whispering, he said, "He's picking up some change off the tarmac. I think he just ordered." I made a stroking motion on Charlie's head in an attempt to alleviate a muscle cramp. "How long can we believably hold this pose?" "My record's thirty minutes." A moment later he added, "He's walking past your window. I don't think he's even looked at us." He leaned away, letting the whip antenna swing up and hit the headliner. "He's walking south towards the other end of the mall. He's probably parked there." "Let them know?" I indicated the radio. He grimaced. "The damned thing is too loud. We have spotters on the rooftops. They almost certainly saw him. Now we just wait." As we watched the mirrors, Colonel Voss rolled up, stopping between the discrete piles of pebbles used to mark his spot. Watching his rear view, Charlie said, "Right about now all across DC people are being called into offices and finding out their fates. Some are being arrested. Others are getting a wrist slap on account of 'politics.' There's Victor's car." I adjusted the Rambler's side mirror to center Victor's 1967 AMC Ambassador. He got out and got into Voss' car. They sat there for several minutes. I felt my pulse in my temples. "Here it comes," Charlie pulled the door latch but waited on opening the door. I did likewise. We were going to be very late to the party, but I wasn't going to miss it.

Voss got out, moved to the back of the car and opened the trunk. He hit the ground, lying flat. The bushes erupted as four FBI agents attempted to set a world record. They flashed across the lot, threw open the doors and slammed onto the bench seat sandwiching Victor between them. The slower two slid into the back seat. A hand tossed a gun out through the passenger window. Victor was disarmed. We threw open the doors. Charlie shot across the road regardless of traffic. I had to stop twice to let honking cars go by. By the time I arrived so did Kilanger in the passenger seat of a blue two door International Scout. He got out and motioned the guys in the back seat to exit. He got into the back seat. Voss had gotten up and, per instructions, got into the Scout and was driven away. Victor had turned gray and sat staring ahead. Kilanger's voice murmured through the air, but I couldn't make out any words. After a few minutes, the two agents got out of Voss' car. Someone handed Victor's gun to Kilanger. He pulled the magazine, thumbing the bullets into his other hand. He ejected the chambered round and handed the gun to an agent, who held it out to Victor. He just looked at it. Finally, he took it. He got out. An agent started Voss' car and drove away. We all walked away, leaving Victor standing next to his car. He just stood there. Later, the sniper reported he didn't move for fifteen minutes, then he got into his car and drove away.

Denouement:

We met in a Sambo's private room. It was an all-night family restaurant, and we were practically alone in it. The atmosphere was we'd just won the big game, and everyone was excited and talking at once. I backed off mentally and again marveled that I was the only woman in a group of twenty of the FBI's best. Everyone was clapping Voss on the back. I got a few handshakes and Kilanger told me he was putting me in for a commendation. He meant J. Edgar Hoover. He said, "I'm sure I'm not telling you something you don't know, but he isn't fond of women. But I'm going to insist. Whether that results in anything only time will tell. There's no way we could have tied up this many cases without you. I'll make certain he knows that." "What's going to happen with Victor." "He's untouchable. I made the pitch to turn him, but it was just an

expected move. Kabouki theater. He can't accept. We know it. He knows we know it. What this has done is completely broken a spy ring that may have been in development for a decade or more. Their mistake was they'd condensed it down to just one guy running it. You so thoroughly exposed his contacts we took down some thirty sources in one sweep. We're finding out how much information the Soviets got and we can take corrective actions." So, this is Ingrid Pearson's story. It's just one part. It's a part that made a huge impact. For a moment, she was a rock star in the intelligence field. But she finished off a career having commanded several OSI detachments and she oversaw drug cases, murders, suicide cases and spy operations. The OSI has morphed into a Cyber Intelligence operation and no longer does what she did. "The moving finger writes. And having writ, moves on." Goodbye friend.

Tribute Wall



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