

The Valley

It is a late afternoon in September. The scene is a valley in south-western France. The river flows slowly between the steep, wooded hills. The sun is shining on the water. It is quiet. A man is sitting on a flat rock, which sticks out into the river. He is alone. He sits absolutely still. Like a stone statue. After a while he bends to look at something in the water – a fish perhaps. As he does so, something hits the water and there is a sudden splash. He puts his hand to his ear. It is covered with blood. He falls forward into the river and disappears into its muddy water.

Chapter 1 *The River*

The pain exploded in my ear sending shockwaves through my body. When I saw the blood on my hand, I knew it was a bullet. Someone had shot at me from the hillside. I immediately fell forward, and swam underwater further up the river. Far above me the green and yellow light of the surface seemed out of reach. But I had to swim as far upriver as I could. They might fire at me again if I showed my head above the surface. When I felt as if I could swim no further, I came up under some trees by the river bank. Here I was safe. No one could see me from the hillside.

My heart was racing. Someone had tried to kill me. Why would anyone want to kill me? Where were they now? What would they do next?

I forced myself to be calm. All my old spy training came back to me: stop and think before you act; decide on the most important thing to do; take one thing at a time. Above all, never panic, never lose your cool, always stay calm.

Whoever had shot at me would probably come to check that I was dead. I decided to find a place to hide and wait there. Slowly and carefully, I crept on hands and knees along the river bank until I could see the rock clearly again. I sat down behind some bushes, and waited. I pressed my wet shirt against my ear to try and stop the bleeding. Only five minutes later I heard the sound of someone coming down the path from the hillside.

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Excerpt
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He was a tall man about my age. He had his back to me, so I could not see his face. But when he looked in my direction, I saw that it was . . . Heid! He turned and walked down the path.