

Alert For Copnick

The chief of the Copnick Police office looked up at the two men, after studying their credentials – the peculiar identity cards they had presented him.

“I have never heard about S.S.A.T.A.”

“Of course not,” the senior of them, identified as Colonel Hawkins, said. “It is utterly secret. It is, as the name indicates, the Superior Secret Anti-Terror Agency, and all other government organizations are obliged to assist us – which is the reason why we disclose us openly to you, because we need your assistance – or better, you need ours.”

“Then tell me, what is the purpose of so high-standing agents visiting our humble village?” the police officer continued.

“We have received credible information that a branch of al-Qaida is planning an attack here in the coming days.”

“Here in Copnick? I can’t believe it. This is the most peaceful and honest village of the nation.

“That is one of the reasons while al-Qaida wants to attack this place. Another is that there are already two ‘sleepers’ here, who have been in contact with the terror central in Afghanistan.”

“Who are they?” The policeman sprang up, surprised and outraged.

“I can only tell you so much that it is a man and a woman. Our telephone surveillance has disclosed them but we are not able to make any arrests. Not yet. Unless, of course, we receive more precise information from the population. That, however, is difficult since our mission here must be kept strictly secret. Only the local police shall be told about it. Therefore, I suggest that we make a confidential briefing for your staff right away. Are they all here?”

“Yes, we were just going to have our 10 o’clock strategic conference as you came in. Do you want a cup of coffee, too?”

Captain Hawkins politely declined but his assistant, lieutenant Brown, could not resist the offer. Captain Hawkins was in his 50ties with a narrow moustache, brown hair mixed up with grey strains and a sunburned taint. Lieutenant Brown was some 20 years younger, had no beard but black, light curled hair and a pale skin as if he spent his whole life in-door.

The Chief of Police, Robert Myrants, rose from his chair and opened the door from his office. “Please come in here, all of you. Ann, bring another cup for one of these gentlemen.” Turned to the strangers, he introduced the newcomers: “This is Mr. Cooper, my second-in-command, and Mr. Kendrick, our young successor. And may I further introduce you to my wife, Ann Myrants, who has the most important position to keep the rest of us occupied.” Mr. Cooper was slim, approaching forty years, dark but short-cut hair the military style and clean-shaven. Mr. Kendrick seemed to be a large boy who had just graduated from the police-academy. His blond hair amplified the youthful impression he made. Mrs. Myrants was a red-haired (or red-coloured hair), somewhat obese lady, acting at the police station as secretary and responsible for the coffee-machine. You could feel that here, Robert was formally the chief but at home, these roles were changed. Finally there was the chief of police himself. Mr. Myrants had a few white hairs, halfway encircling a bald scalp. His belly betrayed that he had spent the later years predominantly behind the desk and liked to have a beer after office hours.

“How many officers are active during the evening and night?” Colonel Hawkins wanted to know.

“What you see is the entire police force of Copnick,” the chief answered. “As I told you, this is a peaceful small town, full of honest inhabitants.”

“With two exceptions,” Lieutenant Brown commented.

“What?” Mr. Cooper shouted surprised.

“Tell me whom, and our cell shall finally get occupants,” Mr. Kendrick added energetically.”

"One after another," Mr. Myrants answered. "First I must stress that this meeting is strictly confidential and it has a serious background. These two gentlemen have arrived from the capital of our proud nation. Their organisation SSATA is in charge of the anti-terror protection of all civilians and entitled to support by all civil organizations."

"I never heard of such an organization," Mr. Kendrick interrupted.

"Of course not, it is secret, only known to a few," the chief answered sourly and included himself to the exclusive group of the enlightened. "It stands for 'Secret Superior Anti-Terror Agency' and is coordinating the efforts in our struggle against terror."

"Ahem, it means 'Superior Secret Anti-Terror Agency'," Colonel Hawkins corrected.

"The order of the factors is not that important," Mr Cooper meant, defending his chief.

Mr. Myrants ignored the interruptions. "The purpose of these gentlemen's presence is the existence of credible reports that al-Qaida is planning an assault in this town. And two local persons are assisting them, a man and a woman ..."

Captain Hawkins interrupted: "You shouldn't have told that! That is a secret. Please respect that, all of you"

"Who are they?" Kendrick still wanted to know.

"We do not know presently," Mr. Myrants explained, "And even if we did, we were not expected to let that knowledge affect us. Anyhow, these two gentlemen are sent from the government and are in charge of the local anti-terror efforts. We shall support them when demanded and otherwise pretend as if we do not know them – am I right, Captain Hawkins?"

The mentioned person nodded. "Absolutely."

"When is the attack expected?" Mr. Cooper wanted to know.

"In the coming week," Lieutenant Brown answered.

"And which is the target?" the youngest again asked.

"No comments," Both newcomers answered.

"Do you use sugar in the coffee?" Mrs Myrants wanted to know.

"No comments ... I mean, yes thanks, two peaces," Mr. Brown answered.

Mr. Myrants answered questions from Mr. Hawkins about details of the town, including where to stay – there was only one small pension, no hotel, so nothing to choose between. When Mr. Brown had finished his coffee, his superior again stressed the obligation to secrecy from all police officials present, and then both men left to fight terrorism. But first of all to find a room.

In order to understand the following, you must know that Copnick has no longer any own newspaper. The bigger over-regional paper "Longhorned Area's Times" used to have a page for regional news from Copnick, but since there hardly occurred anything worth printing, it was generally filled up with advertisements, and as these also became scarcer, this page simply disappeared. Most households in the village had no newspapers. Therefore, all kinds of gossip, mostly not worthy of printing, were spread by the barber- and hairstyle shop, which was owned and employed by none others than the parents of before-mentioned Mr. Kendrick, she for the female and he for the male costumers. And if there was anything explosive going on in the area, this spare news agency got its information from the son, whether he wanted or not.

The same evening, the following conversation occurred at the Kendrick home around the table for supper.

"What happened at the job today?" Mrs. Kendrick asked her son, Cecil.

"Nothing," he answered. Then he kept silent. The way he kept silent was very informative for his mother who immediately understood that something very important had happened – as compared to normal days when really nothing occurred and Cecil therefore pumped his parents for information.

"Did you have troubles with Mr. Myrants? Just tell your mum and she shall have a talk with his wife, then it shall never occur again."

"Heavens, no, please don't talk to her about today, it is strictly confidential."

That, of course, awoke the curiosity of Mrs. Kendrick She decided to get the truth out of her son and she was experienced in that sort of interrogation. Her husband was eagerly listening as the strained son finally gave up his resistance and with the usual 'but

don't tell it any further, and you haven't got it from me' explained that in this peaceful town, there were two persons, a man and a woman, who were affiliated to al-Qaida and even had contact to the terrorists in Afghanistan. And within the coming week, a terrorist attack was to be expected in Copnick. The government had sent two experts to fight the terrorist and, by the way, they were living in Cooper's pension, owned and employed by an aunt to Cecil's mate at the job and a confidential friend of his mother.

Thereby it is explained, how the whole town soon knew that there were two traitors among them and the government was worried about the loyalty of all of them. 'Don't tell anybody that you heard it from me but ...' it was whispered over the garden fences and in the streets, and Kendrick's barber- and hair-style shop, citing a 'usually reliable source,' had a high season. Mrs. Cooper added information about the two agents who drove away every morning and returned rather late each evening, apparently tired and disappointedly mute about how they had spent their day.

Mrs. Kendrick was, however, an expert in filling out a knowledge-vacuum with expected occurrences, and so the inhabitants of Copnick were getting the impression that the local fight against terrorism was approaching a successful end. They were, however, disturbingly unaware of the identity of the two traitors. That had another consequence.

Already from the third day, the police station experienced a run of people who spontaneously wanted to give information about suspicious behaviour, mostly from their neighbours. Mr. Myrants led the interrogation while his wife made a protocol. Many interesting details were revealed but unfortunately for the Kendrick family and thus the transparency of the police's work, the two cops were sent for daylong lasting patrols in the vicinity. "It is important to show our presence in this critical situation," Mr. Myrants had explained and decided to increase the patrols even in the early evening. Anyhow, within a week it should all be over.

Thus, the mood among the inhabitants of Copnick slowly deteriorated. Everybody betrayed everyone but apart from that, nothing really happened – until one morning, the sixth after their initial appearance, Colonel Hawkins suddenly arrived at the police station.

"Give order that all patriots meet in the church and the associated festival hall of the city this evening at eight," he said, "I shall then explain what is happening. A terror act can be expected shortly after and it is important that none of the citizens are exposed to be taken hostages, because then there is little we can do to save them. And tell your citizens that they should not keep any values at home."

"Unfortunately, we have not found the traitors, although I have a list of suspected persons – a long list, I am sorry to say."

"How sad, but just tell that only patriots are invited, and they must bring all their children. No potential hostages should remain in the houses if the terrorists retreat to there."

"I may require assistance from the neighbouring districts," Myrants suggested.

"Please don't do that. We have required a load full of agents, experienced to fight terror attacks, coming from the capital. We do not want intervention from a third party. To make it clear: You are responsible for the security of your citizens; the war against terror must be left to the experts."

Myrants understood. He called the patrol car and gave them orders to drive around in the city and require all patriots to behave as ordered. Then he called various person by phone repeating that, first Kendrick's 'News Agency,' then the priest, the doctor, even the old mayor, and so the news spread to the small town.

People, who had any values, went to the bank, either paying money to their account or depositing jewellery et cetera in the box. The employees at the town's only small bank were totally unprepared, but for the special occasion extended their opening hours until the last customer had been served around 7 p.m.

At eight p.m., all patriots had gathered. If some had not come, you would know that they were not true patriots, so nobody was missing, not even a single person on Mr. Myrants long list of suspects. The church had never been so full and still, many were forced to wait in the associated festival hall, which was just adjacent to the church. The Myrants couple were defending the church and the younger cops the festival hall. A quarter later,

Colonel Hawkins in the church and lieutenant Brown in the festival hall assisted them. Their behaviour were roughly identical, but we can only follow one of them."

"Ladies and Gentlemen, may I ask your attention" Colonel Hawkins started. This evening, your idyllic town has been chosen by the enemy as target for a terror attack. Unfortunately with some local help. We may not be able to prevent the terror attack itself, but as soon as it has occurred, a large force of terror experts from the capital will fight back. It will be dangerous there and I appreciate that you have all come here where we can protect you and avoid any hostages being taken."

A large explosion interrupted him. Shortly afterwards, there was a serial of minor explosions. "I am glad you are not out there, the fighting seems harder than we expected. I shall have a glance. Make sure that nobody leaves the church, afterwards we shall arrest the sleepers" he said and left.

The priest used the occasion of the exceptionally full church to celebrate our nation and bless those fighting terror. In the festival hall, where also Lieutenant Brown had left under similar circumstances, the Mayor was enjoying the big and attentive audience. After two silent hours, however, Mr. Myrants got impatient and called the equally impatient cops, who had had identical experiences and then the lack of any, except sporadic and increasing outbursts of impatience among the people they should protect.

The police chief courageously left the church. The city was absolutely quiet, no shots or explosions heard. Why, then, did the SSATA-officers not return when the fighting had stopped? Had they perhaps lost the battle and were lying around, killed or seriously wounded? He decided to take the patrol car, which his subordinates had parked in front of the festival hall. There he found all four tires flat. He then proceeded on foot and found the bank widely open. Cautiously, he proceeded inside – and found the big door to the box section lying on the ground – that must have been the big explosion. The many small explosions then originated from the personal boxes, which were also left open, all empty but with a lot of papers on the floor, contracts and other items of possible personal value, but worthless to the thieves.

Mr. Myrants slowly understood. He was utterly uncomfortable with the task now to tell the inhabitants of Copnick what had happened, but there was no alternative. He opened the door to the church and was met by hundreds of pair of eyes. Then he spoke the now famous words, "Patriots, we have been robbed," which were the next day found on page one of the nations leading papers.

While bringing the sad news to his subordinates by radio, the inhabitants slowly realized that they had been fooled. A few poor people, who anyhow could have lost nothing, started laughing and one of them even used a word which ended with the same four letters as 'patriots' but they were soon silenced by the remaining ..iots. Mr. and Mrs. Myrants escaped the wrath of the crowd and ran to the police station where the two younger cops had already arrived. From there they called the regional police headquarter which immediately released a super-regional alarm, but without any result.

In the capital, a number of oh so secret organizations were represented but none with a designation nearly the SSATA. A few people were grinning with large smiles while they again and again repeated Mr. Myrants words:

"Patriots, we have been robbed!"

The government was very upset how the terror-threat had been abused to the disadvantage of peaceful citizens. It was therefore decided fully to compensate the victims as to the damage not covered by any insurance.

Colonel Hawkins and Lieutenant Brown had ceased to exist that evening. They were, however, suspected of having caused similar terror-alerts using other pseudonyms.

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The intelligent reader – and only for such was this story written – will notice that Copnick is familiar to the German Köpenick, a Berlin suburb which 1906 became famous as a man with a borrowed captain's uniform abused the respect for authorities to divert a group of soldiers help him arrest the mayor and confiscate the city cash. This story is speculating in the general neurotic symptom of 'terroritis' as abused for criminal purposes – which are often the case, except that we are *not* dealing with state terror here.