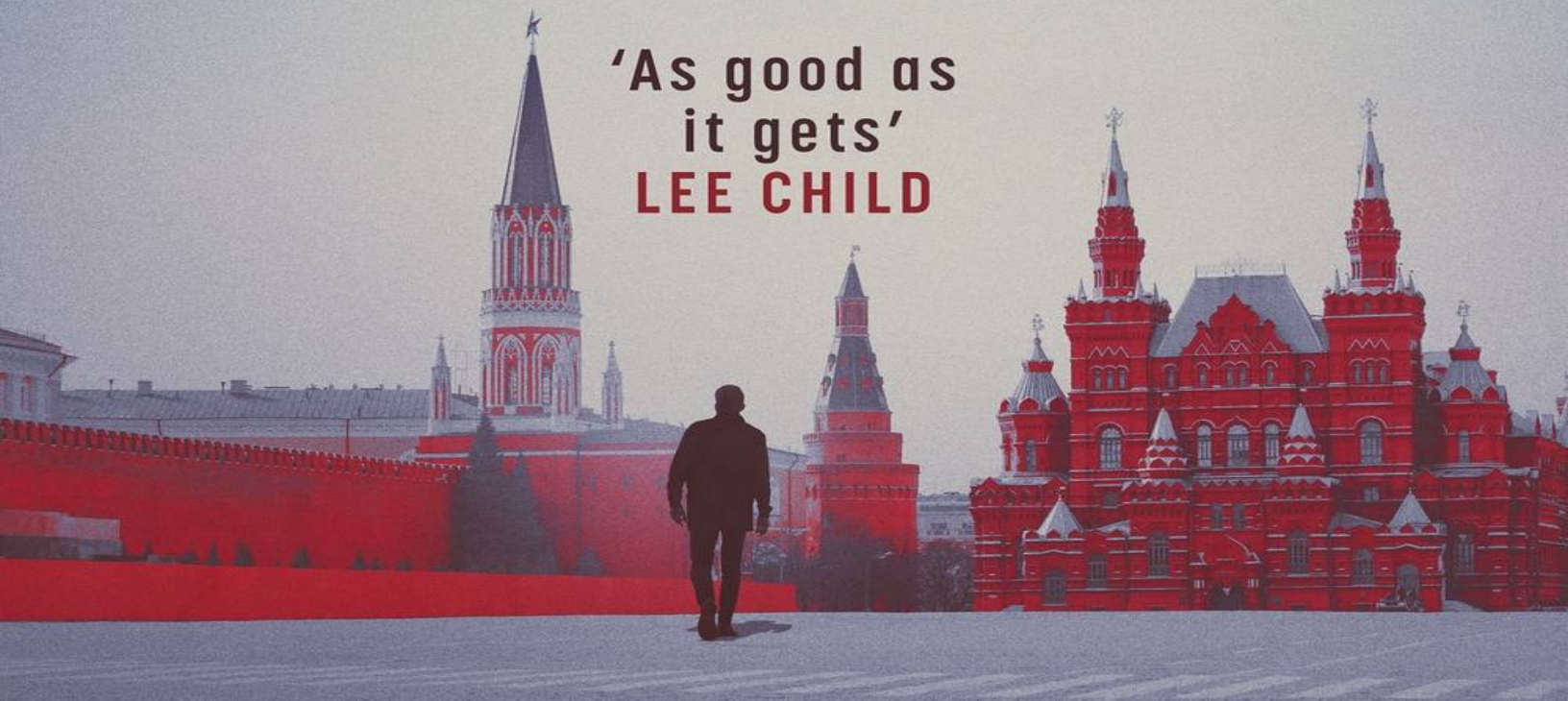


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*For my longtime readers, with gratitude, who've stuck by me since
The Moscow Club and allowed me to make my living as a writer.*

Contents

Also by Joseph Finder

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

Epigraph

Part 1: Everyone Dies

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Part 2: Deep Dive

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Part 3: Red Fred

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Part 4: Pocket Change

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Part 5: Evasion Skills

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Part 6: Misfit Toys

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

Chapter 40

Chapter 41

Chapter 42

Chapter 43

Chapter 44

Part 7: Trail Angels

Chapter 45

Chapter 46

Chapter 47

Part 8: Phantom

Chapter 48

Chapter 49

Chapter 50

Chapter 51

Chapter 52

Chapter 53

Chapter 54

Chapter 55

Chapter 56

Chapter 57

Chapter 58

Chapter 59

Chapter 60

Chapter 61

Chapter 62

Chapter 63

Chapter 64

Chapter 65

Chapter 66

Chapter 67

Chapter 68

Chapter 69

Chapter 70

Chapter 71

Part 9: Woodsmen

Chapter 72

Chapter 73

Chapter 74

Chapter 75

Chapter 76

Part 10: A Cup of Tea

Chapter 77

Chapter 78

Chapter 79

Chapter 80

Chapter 81

Chapter 82

Chapter 83

Chapter 84

Chapter 85

Chapter 86

Chapter 87

Chapter 88

Chapter 89

Chapter 90

Chapter 91

Chapter 92

Chapter 93

Chapter 94

Chapter 95

Chapter 96

Part 11: The Safe House

Chapter 97

Chapter 98

Chapter 99

Chapter 100

Chapter 101

Chapter 102

Chapter 103

Chapter 104

Chapter 105

Chapter 106

Chapter 107

Chapter 108

Chapter 109

Chapter 110

Chapter 111

Chapter 112

Chapter 113

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

About the Author

An Invitation from the Publisher

The Russian soul is a dark place.

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*

PART ONE

EVERYONE DIES

Present Day

1

Until that day, Grant had never killed anyone. He had thought about it before, of course, the way you imagine the worst thing you could do if you had to. You rehearse it in your dreams, in your unconscious. Inwardly, you debate.

How far would I go?

Grant's girlfriend was helping him cook dinner, the night before it happened. She was Sarah Harrison. She taught first grade in the town's elementary school and was sweet and gentle with a core of steel. He'd been attracted to her since the first time he met her, at the Starlite Diner five years ago. But there remained a distance between the two of them. Entirely his fault. He cared about her, but there was too much he couldn't tell her about himself.

Sarah was making a salad while he kept watch on a chicken roasting in the oven. The kitchen of the old farmhouse was big and comfortable and cluttered—red-and-white linoleum floor, a tin-topped dining table, wood-paneled walls. He'd restored the house himself, mostly, doing the carpentry in his boat shop. The whole kitchen smelled of roasting garlic, an aroma Grant loved.

As she chopped, Sarah told him about her day. "This girl threw up on the stairs during dismissal, and I sent her out to her mom," she said. "The mom was so pissed off she called the school to complain that her daughter had vomit on her shirt. 'Why didn't you clean her up before sending her out?' she said. So I get yelled at, and meanwhile, I had to clean up this giant pile of barf." Sarah was tall and slim and had shoulder-length chestnut-brown hair

and cognac-brown eyes, and she was wearing her old UNH sweats, maroon with fraying cuffs. (It was a chilly evening.)

Grant tried not to laugh, but then she did, a rueful laugh, which made it okay.

“How was your week?” Sarah said. “Tim still refusing to pay you a deposit?” A local fisherman named Tim Ogilvy had brought in a bare-hull fiberglass boat for Grant to finish out but refused to pay until the work was done.

“Today I told him either he gives me a couple hundred bucks for materials or I’ll put his boat in the yard and chain her to a tree.”

“What’d he do?”

“He paid.”

“Didn’t that piss you off? That you had to do that?”

Grant shrugged.

“There’s that shrug. Was that too feel-y a question?” she asked.

That was when his phone rang.

Later, he would wish he’d never answered the call. But it was a good friend, Lyle Boudreaux (Captain Lyle, he liked to be called), and he didn’t phone very often.

Sarah nodded and smiled, silently letting him know she didn’t mind if he answered it. She was peeling a cucumber.

“Captain, what’s up?”

“Look, Grant, I’m not feeling so hot tonight, and I don’t think I can make tomorrow morning’s trip. And I was wondering if you could cover for me. Some couple from New York. I don’t want to lose them as customers.” Lyle had a deep-sea fishing charter business and depended on repeat business.

Meanwhile, Grant was waiting for a coat of epoxy to dry and didn’t mind making a couple hundred bucks for a morning of sailing Lyle’s boat. Lyle was very protective of her, a twenty-eight-foot Downeaster, but he trusted Grant. After all, Grant had built her.

“Sure,” he said.

“Oh, great, thank you,” Lyle said, sounding relieved.

“Okay. Be at the boat at seven?”

“Can you deal? I know it’s early.”

“Sure.”

Grant had taken Lyle’s boat out for a morning charter once before, when Lyle’s second baby was born, a few months back. She was a great boat, of course, and according to the maritime forecast, tomorrow was supposed to be a clear, sunny day.

No problem, Grant told him.

*

He woke just a few minutes before five the next morning, before his phone alarm sounded, and he turned it off before it could wake Sarah, who was staying over. It was still dark. He made coffee, dressed, and drove the ten miles to the harbor. He arrived by quarter of seven and found the *Suzanne B* docked where she always was.

There’s a whole routine to starting up a boat. He pulled out the rods, set her up. Lyle kept a stack of folding chairs in the cabin so they wouldn’t get wet from condensation overnight. Grant unlocked the cabin and retrieved them, set them up on the deck. He checked the engine, turned on the valves. Lyle’s boat was only three years old and still looked new. He took excellent care of her, was fanatical about cleaning her, thoroughly scrubbing her down before and after each trip. *He’d want me to do the same*, Grant thought.

He gathered the cleaning solutions from the pilothouse down below, and in fifteen minutes he’d cleaned and sanitized the *Suzanne B*, first with boat soap and a long scrub brush and then with Clorox bleach; finally, he sprayed the deck with an alcohol-based product.

After checking the oil, Grant started the engine, let her warm up. The customers were scheduled to arrive by seven thirty, so there was plenty of time. He switched on the radios and talked to some of the early-bird fishermen who were out there already, to find out where the good fishing