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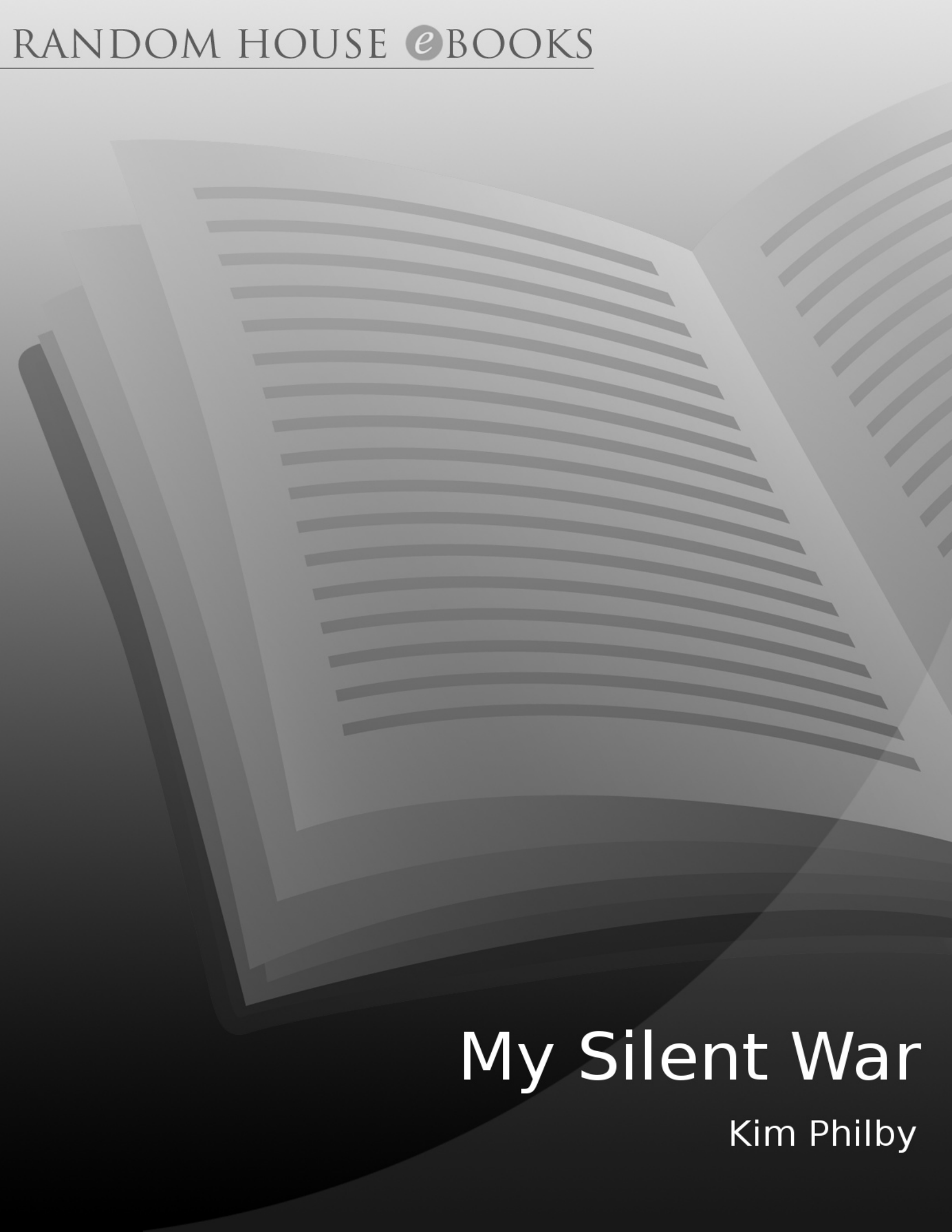

My Silent War

Kim Philby

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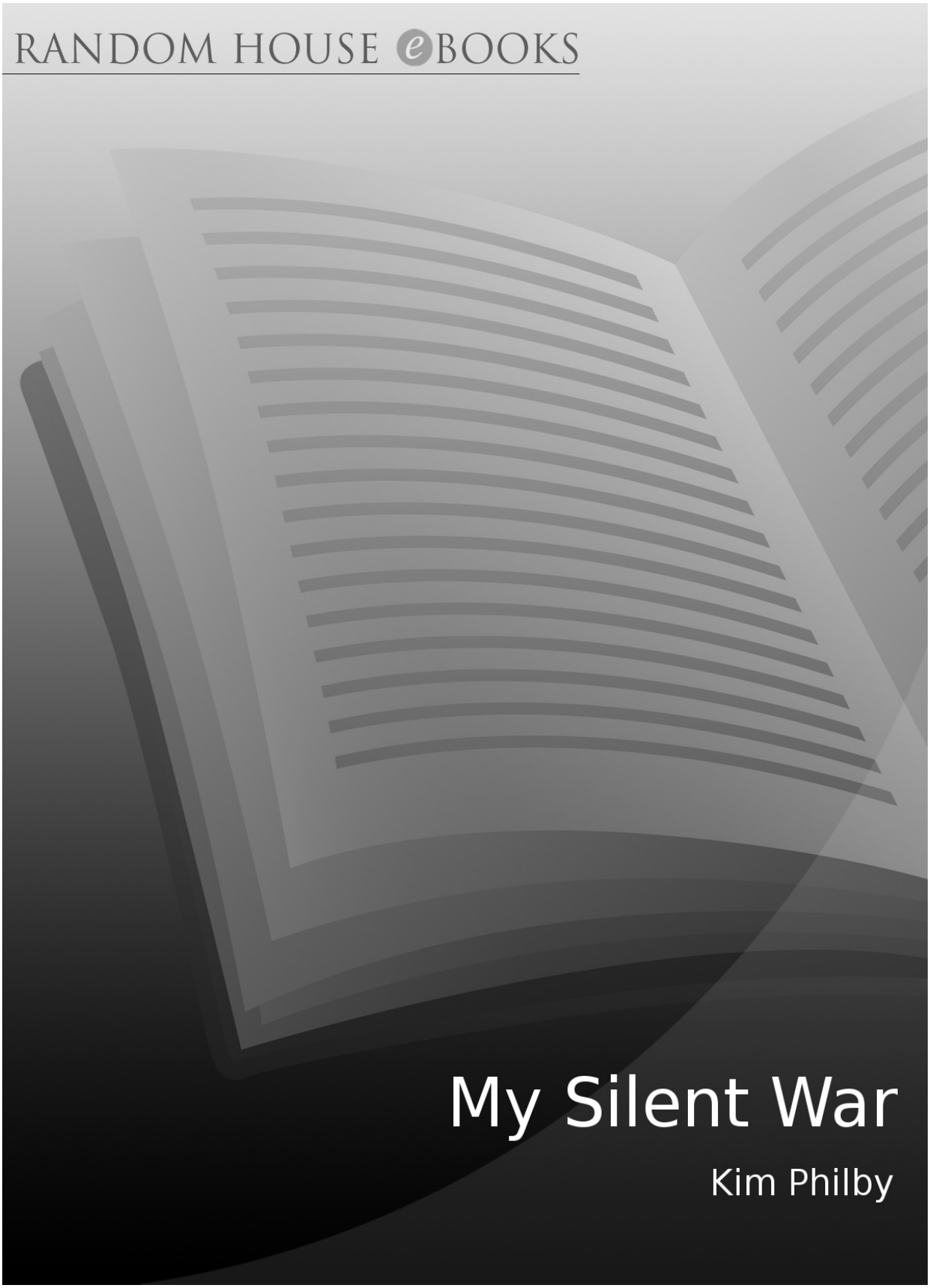

My Silent War

Kim Philby

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“Many people in the secret world aged the night they heard Philby had confessed. . . . It is one thing to suspect the truth; it is another to hear it from a man’s lips. Suddenly there was very little fun in the game anymore; a Rubicon had been crossed. . . . To find that a man like Philby, a man you might like, or drink with, or admire, had betrayed everything; to think of the agents and operations wasted: youth and innocence passed away, and the dark ages began.”

—Peter Wright, former assistant director of MI5

“Kim Philby is a legend—a demon or an antihero, depending on one’s philosophical bent. Philby himself, or a thinly disguised fictional counterpart, stalks through many modern spy novels.”

—Robert J. Lamphere, FBI special agent

“[Philby] never revealed his true self. Neither the British, nor the women he lived with, nor ourselves ever managed to pierce the armour of mystery that clad him. His great achievement in espionage was his life’s work, and it fully occupied him until the day he died. But in the end I suspect that Philby made a mockery of everyone, particularly ourselves.”

—Yuri Modin, KGB controller of “the Cambridge Spies”

“Philby has no home, no women, no faith. Behind the inbred upper-class arrogance, the taste for adventure, lies the self-hate of a vain misfit for whom nothing will ever be worthy of his loyalty. In the last instance, Philby is driven by the incurable drug of deceit itself.”

—John le Carré

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INTRODUCTION

Phillip Knightley

Harold Adrian Russell Philby—“Kim” to his friends and family—has been part of my life for the past thirty years. I have written hundreds of thousands of words about Philby, appeared in many television and radio documentaries discussing him, and once spent a whole week talking to him in Moscow for six or seven hours a day. I have read every word of the more than twenty books written about him. I know his children and grandchildren and I keep in touch with his widow. Yet when people ask me, “What was Philby really like?,” I have to reply, “I’m not certain I know.”

So before you embark on the journey of reading this, the only book Philby ever wrote about himself, before you decide whether it is a frank confession, a fascinating justification for his life, or an insidious piece of Communist propaganda—or possibly all three—let me tell you what I know about a man whose motives and exploits continue to intrigue a new generation fifteen years after his death.

We should begin by giving Philby his professional due. In the history of espionage there has never been a spy like him, and now, with the Cold War over, there never will be. His achievements seem incredible. He joined the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) in 1940 and in three years rose to be head of its anti-Soviet section. Yet right from his Cambridge University days this urbane, pipe-smoking paragon of the English middle class had been an agent of the KGB. So the man running British operations against the Russians was actually working for the Russians himself. No wonder so few British plans worked. No wonder so many

Western agents who slipped behind the Iron Curtain were never heard of again.

Worse was to come. In 1949 Philby was promoted to be the British Secret Service's liaison officer in Washington with the CIA and the FBI. This gave him access not only to British operations against Moscow but to American ones as well. The result: at the height of the Cold War, every move the West made against the Communist bloc was betrayed by Philby before it even began. And there was every possibility that had it not been for one mistake, Philby would have gone on to become CSS, Chief of the British Secret Service. The KGB would, in effect, have been running MI6, a disaster that could have changed the course of the Cold War.

This did not happen because Philby had shared his house in Washington with a fellow KGB agent, the British Foreign Office official Guy Burgess, and when Burgess fled to Moscow in 1951, Philby came under suspicion in the United States. He lingered on as a spy until 1963, doing freelance work for MI6 in Beirut under cover as a journalist, until his KGB masters, fearing that the British now had sufficient evidence to prosecute him and that the CIA might try to kill him, "brought me home to Moscow."

Back in 1968, with two colleagues on the *Sunday Times* of London, I wrote the first book about Philby—*Philby: The Spy Who Betrayed a Generation*. I then corresponded with Philby for twenty years and, in 1988, just three months before he died, spent a week with him, taking him step by step through his life.

We used *My Silent War* to jog his memory. He told me that he had been working on the book intermittently ever since he had come to Moscow, but had been doubtful that the KGB would ever let him publish it. When my book came out in Britain, the KGB arranged for Philby's book to be rushed into print. "But a lot of it was cut out," Philby said. "And I didn't have enough time to add new material." It was clear that the book had enhanced his reputation within the KGB,

although there were still some officers who wanted nothing to do with him. He was invited to give lectures to training classes, and occasionally he was shown files concerning difficult operational cases and asked for his view. He warned his masters against becoming too involved in Africa and did his best to deter them from invading Afghanistan. Then, in the stultifying years of the Brezhnev regime, he slumped into a long period of despair. He cheered up when the former head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, became leader, and when Mikhail Gorbachev took over, Philby was ecstatic. “This is the man we’ve been waiting for,” he said. He was annoyed that American commentators were suggesting that the West should wait to see whether Gorbachev meant what he said about peaceful coexistence, or whether his words concealed an aim to control Western Europe, China, and Japan. “Such a suggestion is ridiculous,” Philby said. “We have enough problems of our own without taking on other people’s. This is just another myth, like all that talk of the Soviet Union being a ‘Threat to the West’ since the end of the war. In 1945, the Soviet Union was exhausted. The United States had the atomic bomb. What would we hope to gain by deliberately attacking Western Europe? No one wants to be incinerated.”

My main impression of Philby during these talks was that here was a man at ease with himself in the twilight of his life, happy to exist quietly in his comfortable Moscow apartment and, since he was not sorry that his career as a spy was over, prepared to speak frankly about what it had involved. I did my best to get to the core of the man, no easy task with a master spy for whom deception is a professional skill. He was a charming, witty, and amusing host with a mind as sharp as a cut-throat razor. Although we mostly discussed espionage and politics, I sought his views on marriage, friendship, patriotism, honor, loyalty, treachery, betrayal, and the human condition. He talked about his favorite spy-thriller writers, today’s youth, modern

music, and the difficulties of life in the Soviet Union—but also its rewards. He touched on his health, Soviet medicine, his finances, a trip he had made to Cuba, his travels within the Eastern bloc, and his memories of his colleagues in the CIA, including a list of those he would like to see again. But since then I have learned things he never even hinted at, such as his role in the exposure and eventual execution of the American atom spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg; the missing year in his life as a spy; what the KGB really thought about him; and, most astonishing of all, how MI6 tried to persuade him to re-defect to Britain.

Philby came from an adventurous family. His father was Harry St. John Bridger Philby, a former magistrate in the Indian Civil Service, an explorer and an Arabist who became an adviser to King Saud. He held perverse political views and was interned at the start of the Second World War for telling Saud that he thought Hitler would win and that Saud should get his money out of pounds sterling. He felt that life should be lived to the hilt, an example he passed on to Kim. Women found the mix of idealism and love of action in both men an almost irresistible combination. After a tempestuous marriage, St. John Philby ended up with a Saudi slave girl. Kim had numerous affairs and married four times—a Viennese, an Englishwoman, an American, and a Russian. (The American joined him for a while in Moscow but left him when he expressed amazement that she should even bother to ask “If you had to choose between Communism and me, which would you choose?”)

Kim Philby was in the thick of events in the thirties as the lights began to go out over Europe. He helped smuggle Jews and Communists out of Vienna. He was wounded in the Spanish Civil War, which he covered for *The Times* from the Franco side—while reporting to the KGB on German and Italian weapons being used there. He was still with *The Times* in France in 1940 and got out just ahead of the

Germans. His expense account for the belongings he lost as he fled via Boulogne is still in the archives of the newspaper—"Dunhill pipe (two years old but all the better for it) one pound ten shillings." No wonder he looked an ideal recruit for MI6.

Yet this ideal recruit had already been signed up by the KGB back in 1934. Spotted while still at Cambridge because—like his fellow students Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, and Anthony Blunt, later known as the Cambridge spy ring—he believed that the Western democracies were unable to check the rise of Fascism and that only the Soviet Union could save the world. His critics—and, of course, there are many—while conceding that his initial commitment to the Soviet Union might have been understandable at the time, wonder how he could possibly have remained in the service of Moscow after the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact of 1939.

One new piece of information is that he did not. According to KGB files, he was worried that valuable secrets he was providing about the British Expeditionary Force and the French army might now be passed on to the Germans. He demanded of his controller, "What's going to happen to the single-front struggle against Fascism now?" On February 20, 1940, the London resident of the KGB reported to Moscow that Philby's controller in Paris no longer knew where Philby was and that efforts to find him had failed. Moscow replied that such efforts should cease—Philby was finished; he was to be left out in the cold.

But in 1941 the KGB learned to its surprise that without its orders and without its help, Philby had got into MI6. It hastened to get in touch with him again. This was a surreal period in the master spy's career. It was clear that Germany was about to invade the Soviet Union: he could resume the anti-Fascist fight with a clear conscience.

But having reestablished contact with Philby, the KGB was suddenly very wary. What if he was part of a devilish MI6 plot to penetrate the KGB? It ordered counterintelligence

officer Elena Modrzhinskaya (she is said to be still alive and well and living in Moscow) to examine Philby's file and decide whether he was a genuine recruit to Communism or a British penetration agent.

The first point Modrzhinskaya raised with her bosses was the volume and value of the material Philby had sent to the KGB. Could MI6 really be run by such fools that no one had noticed that precious information was leaking to Moscow? Next, was it really possible that Philby—with his Communist views, his work for the Communists in Vienna, and his Austrian Communist wife—had sailed through MI6's vetting procedures? She concluded that Philby was really working for the British and that so too were all the other members of the Cambridge spy ring—except, perhaps, Donald Maclean.

Her report split the KGB. Many of its officers believed that she was wrong and that Philby was an outstanding and loyal agent. In the end they prevailed, and the KGB continued to use Philby and the Cambridge ring. But there was always a group within the KGB who refused to trust him, and their nagging influence made his early years of exile in Moscow a misery. Word of Philby's unhappiness leaked back to London, and MI6 mounted an operation to convince him to return, to redefect. This was a secret, long-term, and persistent plan. How do I know of it? Maurice Oldfield, who had been head of MI6 at the time, told me after he had retired that persuading Philby to return had been a ongoing operation. And in 1997 I met the former East German spymaster Markus Wolf, who had been host to Philby on his visits to East Germany. Wolf said, "I was responsible for his security arrangements and I entertained him—we did a bit of cooking together at my place in the country. He had a KGB escort, and one evening this officer told me that the KGB lived in fear that Philby would go back to Britain, a move that would deal a propaganda blow to Moscow. He said that the British Secret Service in Moscow had found ways of making several offers to persuade Philby to return." This was puzzling, because in

his twenty-five years in the Soviet Union, Philby had kept his Moscow address a secret. He avoided all other Westerners. If he wanted to go to a restaurant, his KGB minder arranged it, usually reserving a private room. So the “several offers” could only have been made in person by someone who had access to him on more than one occasion, someone he knew well. What follows now is speculation, because it is often impossible to prove matters in the secret world, but only one man fits the bill—the British novelist Graham Greene. Greene, who had been a colleague of Philby’s in MI6, had been corresponding with him since 1968, when, to the amazement of the literary world, he accepted an invitation from Philby’s British publishers and wrote the introduction to the first edition of this book. Then, in 1986, Greene went to Moscow and the two old spies got together for a reunion in Philby’s flat. Five months later, Greene went back to Moscow; he went again in September 1987, and then again in February 1988. He saw Philby each time.

From recent biographies of Greene, we now know that he reported on all these visits to MI6. Further, Greene has said that Philby would have expected him to do just that: “I knew that Kim would know that I would pass it on to Maurice Oldfield [then head of MI6].”

Greene would never have made the offer to Philby without authorization, and it would appear most likely that it was Oldfield who gave him the go-ahead. Greene even gave a tantalizing hint of the operation in interviews with his official biographer, Professor Norman Sherry. Sherry told me, “Greene said he had this dream of seeing Philby come walking down the street towards him in Britain. I suspect that this was not a dream but Greene’s roundabout way of saying what he had been up to with Philby.”

Philby had no moral qualms about the agents he had betrayed during his spying career. He saw the struggle between Western intelligence and the KGB as a war. “There

are always casualties in war," he told me, adding, "Anyway, most of them were pretty nasty pieces of work and quite prepared themselves to kill if necessary."

He told me at our Moscow meetings that he had regrets about the way he had handled some things but no regrets whatsoever about the life he had chosen. He was uneasy, however, when our talk turned to the American spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who had been sent to the electric chair in 1953 for betraying American atomic secrets to Moscow. But there was doubt at the time about their guilt, and allegations that they had been made scapegoats to appease American public concern that the Soviets had exploded their own bomb in 1949—years before the CIA had predicted that they would. A worldwide campaign appealing to President Eisenhower for clemency was whipped up by national Communist parties, and there was international outrage when the president ignored it. Over the years, debate over the Rosenbergs' guilt had not died out, so I asked Philby's view. But apart from saying that all the Rosenbergs were guilty of was being "lowly couriers with no link to the main KGB atomic spy rings" and that he could not understand why Eisenhower denied them a reprieve, he refused to talk about them.

I did not learn why until 1996, when stories began to appear about the "Venona decrypts," the successful American deciphering of radio traffic between Moscow and the Soviet consulate in New York in 1944–45. This material, which began to be decoded in the early 1950s, gave clues as to the identity of KGB spies in the West and was ultimately behind the uncovering of nearly every major Soviet spy in the postwar period. As MI6's liaison officer in Washington, Kim Philby had had access to the Venona material and knew the way the FBI was using it. This was a great break for the KGB, but it put Philby in a difficult and dangerous position. What should he do as he followed the FBI's homing in on his Soviet intelligence service comrades?

If he were to use his knowledge of Venona to warn those most at risk so that they could flee, the FBI would suspect a leak. It would investigate everyone who had had access to Venona, including Philby, and he would never again enjoy the same degree of confidence. He made a brutal decision—he would tip off those agents who were of most importance to Moscow and sacrifice the others.

So he tipped off Donald Maclean, then a rising star in the Foreign Office, who fled to Moscow in May 1951. He tipped off Morris and Lona Cohen, responsible for couriering atom secrets stolen from Los Alamos to the Soviet consulate in New York, who fled the United States on an hour's notice in June 1950.

But no one tipped off the Rosenbergs, because the KGB considered them expendable. And no one imagined that the Americans would execute them. In the KGB's eyes, according to Philby, "They were minor couriers, not significant sources, [and] provided no valuable secrets." Philby felt guilty about the Rosenbergs for the rest of his life.

Why are we so intrigued by Philby? That someone was capable of such treachery puzzles and frightens us. If Philby did not do it for money—as has been the case with most American traitors—what did he do it for? Philby made a total ideological commitment when he was only twenty-one and had the strength of purpose to stick to it for the rest of his life. Like a character in a Graham Greene novel, he mixed duplicity and charm. In his treachery he risked all for his convictions, and he got away with it.

He recognized at one stage that things were going wrong in the Soviet Union but he told me that his choices were limited. "I couldn't give up politics altogether. I'm too much the political animal. I could whine, as some have, that the cause had betrayed me. Or I could stick it out in the confident faith that the principles of the Revolution would outlive the aberrations of individuals, however enormous."

He had no doubt whatsoever about the verdict of history on this point, and four months later, before his beloved Communism collapsed, he died happy and fulfilled—perhaps his greatest coup of all.

PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY is an author and journalist who lives in London. He is best known for *The First Casualty*, a history of war correspondents and propaganda; *The Second Oldest Profession*, an examination of the role of intelligence services through the ages; and *Master Spy: The Story of Kim Philby*.

Foreword

Graham Greene

This is not at all the book that Philby's enemies anticipated. It is an honest one, well-written, often amusing, and the story he has to tell, after the flight of Burgess and Maclean, is far more gripping than any novel of espionage I can remember. We were told to expect a lot of propaganda, but it contains none, unless a dignified statement of his beliefs and motives can be called propaganda. The end, of course, in his eyes is held to justify the means, but this is a view taken, perhaps less openly, by most men involved in politics, if we are to judge them by their actions, whether the politician be a Disraeli or a Wilson. "He betrayed his country"—yes, perhaps he did, but who among us has not committed treason to something or someone more important than a country? In Philby's own eyes he was working for a shape of things to come from which his country would benefit.

Like many Catholics who, in the reign of Elizabeth, worked for the victory of Spain, Philby has a chilling certainty in the correctness of his judgement, the logical fanaticism of a man who, having once found a faith, is not going to lose it because of the injustices or cruelties inflicted by erring human instruments. How many a kindly Catholic must have endured the long bad days of the Inquisition with this hope of the future as a riding anchor? Mistakes of policy would have had no effect on his faith, nor the evil done by some of his leaders. If there was a Torquemada now, he would have known in his heart that one day there would be a John XXIII. "It cannot be so very surprising that I adopted a Communist

viewpoint in the thirties; so many of my contemporaries made the same choice. But many of those who made the choice in those days changed sides when some of the worst features of Stalinism became apparent. I stayed the course," Philby writes, and he demands fairly enough what alternative there could possibly be to the bad Baldwin-Chamberlain era. "I saw the road leading me into the political position of the querulous outcast, of the Koestler-Crankshaw-Muggeridge variety, railing at the movement that had let *me* down, at the God that had failed *me*. This seemed a ghastly fate, however lucrative it might have been."

His account of the British Secret Service is devastatingly true. "The ease of my entry surprised me. It appeared later that the only enquiry made into my past was a routine reference to MI5, who passed my name through their records and came back with the laconic statement: Nothing Recorded Against." (He was luckier than I was. I had a police record, for after a libel action brought against me by Miss Shirley Temple, the papers had been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the trace had therefore to be submitted to C himself.) There was even a moment when Philby wondered whether it really was the Secret Service which he had entered. His first factual reports inclined his Soviet contact to the view that he had got into the wrong organization.

His character studies are admirable if unkind. Don't talk to me of ghost writers: only Philby could have been responsible for these. Anyone who was in Section V will agree with his estimate of its head, Felix Cowgill, whom he was to displace. "Cowgill revelled in his isolation. He was one of those pure souls who denounce all opponents as 'politicians.'" The Deputy Chief of the Secret Service is immediately recognizable. "Vivian was long past his best—if, indeed, he had ever had one. He had a reedy figure, carefully dressed crinkles in his hair, and wet eyes." To C himself, Brigadier

Menzies, Philby is unexpectedly kind, though perhaps the strict limitations of his praise and a certain note of high patronage will not endear the portrait to the subject. For Skardon, the MI5 interrogator who broke Fuchs down, he has a true craftsman's respect.

If this book required a sub-title I would suggest: The Spy As Craftsman. No one could have been a better chief than Kim Philby when he was in charge of the Iberian section of V. He worked harder than anyone and never gave the impression of labour. He was always relaxed, completely unflappable. He was in those days, of course, fighting the same war as his colleagues: the extreme strain must have come later, when he was organizing a new section to counter Russian espionage, but though then he was fighting quite a different war, he maintained his craftsman's pride. He was determined that his new section should be organized better than any other part of the ramshackle SIS. "By the time our final bulky report was ready for presentation to the Chief, we felt we had produced the design of something like a service, with enough serious inducements to tempt able young men to regard it as a career for life." He set about recruiting with care and enthusiasm. "The important thing was to get hold of the good people while they were still available. With peacetime economies already in sight, it would be much easier to discard surplus staff than to find people later to fill in any gaps that might appear." No Soviet contact this time would be able to wonder whether he had penetrated the right outfit. A craftsman's pride, yes, and of course something else. Only an efficient section could thoroughly test the security of the Russian service. It was a fascinating manoeuvre, though only one side knew that it was a mock war.

The story of how, to attain his position, he eliminated Cowgill makes, as he admits, for "sour reading, just as it makes sour writing"—one feels for a moment the sharp

touch of the icicle in the heart. I saw the beginning of this affair—indeed I resigned rather than accept the promotion which was one tiny cog in the machinery of his intrigue. I attributed it then to a personal drive for power, the only characteristic in Philby which I thought disagreeable. I am glad now that I was wrong. He was serving a cause and not himself, and so my old liking for him comes back, as I remember with pleasure those long Sunday lunches at St. Albans when the whole subsection relaxed under his leadership for a few hours of heavy drinking, and later the meetings over a pint on fire-watching nights at the pub behind St. James's Street. If one made an error of judgement he was sure to minimize it and cover it up, without criticism, with a halting stammered witticism. He had all the small loyalties to his colleagues, and of course his big loyalty was unknown to us.

Some years later, after his clearance by Macmillan in the House of Commons, I and another old friend of Kim were together in Crowborough and we thought to look him up. There was no sign of any tending in the overgrown garden and no answer to the bell when we rang. We looked through the windows of the ugly sprawling Edwardian house, on the borders of Ashdown forest, in this poor man's Surrey. The post hadn't been collected for a long time—the floor under the door was littered with advertising brochures. In the kitchen there were some empty milk bottles, and a single dirty cup and saucer in the sink. It was more like an abandoned gypsy encampment than the dwelling of a man with wife and children. We didn't know it, but he had already left for Beirut—the last stage of his journey to Moscow, the home which he had never seen. After thirty years in the underground surely he has earned his right to a rest.

GRAHAM GREENE (1904–91), one of the greatest and most widely read English writers of the twentieth century, was the author of, among many novels, *The Man Within, England*

Made Me, The Power and the Glory, The Quiet American, Our Man in Havana, and *Travels with My Aunt*. He was, as well, a noted short-story writer, essayist, film reviewer, and occasional playwright.

Author's Note

This short book is an introductory sketch of my experiences in the field of intelligence. More will follow in due course. But already at this stage I must draw attention to a problem by which I am confronted.

The public naming of serving officers whose work is supposed to be secret cannot fail to cause personal embarrassment. I have no desire to cause such embarrassment to former colleagues in the British, American and sundry other services, for some of whom I feel both affection and respect.

I have tried therefore to confine the naming of names to officers whom I know to be dead or retired. On occasion, however, it has proved impossible to write a lucid story without naming officers who are still in service.

To these latter I apologize for any embarrassment caused. I, too, have suffered personal inconvenience through my connection with secret service.

Moscow, 1968

INTRODUCTION

This book has been written at intervals since my arrival in Moscow nearly five years ago. From time to time in the course of writing it, I took counsel with friends whose advice I valued. I accepted some of the suggestions made and rejected others. One suggestion which I rejected was that I should make the book more exciting by heavier emphasis on the hazards of the long journey from Cambridge to Moscow. I prefer to rest on a round, unvarnished tale.

When the book was brought to a provisional conclusion last summer (1967), I gave long consideration to the desirability of publishing it, again consulting a few friends whose views might be helpful. The general consensus of opinion, with which I agreed at the time, was that the question of publication should be shelved indefinitely. The main reason for this was that publication seemed likely to cause a rumpus, with international complications the nature of which was difficult to foresee. It seemed unwise to take action that might have consequences beyond the range of reasonable prediction. So I decided to sit on my typescript.

The situation has been completely changed by articles which appeared in the *Sunday Times* and the *Observer* in October 1967. Those articles, in spite of a number of factual inaccuracies and errors of interpretation (and, I fear, gratifying exaggeration of my own talents), present a substantially true picture of my career. It was immediately suggested, of course, by rival newspapers that the *Sunday Times* and the *Observer* had fallen victim to a gigantic plant. The absurdity of this suggestion has already been exposed in the *Sunday Times*. For my part, I can only add that I was offered an opportunity to vet the typescript of the *Sunday Times* articles before publication and, after reflection,