

***Karla's Choice*, by Nick Harkaway**

Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy

George Smiley, the late John Le Carré's iconic British spy character, takes center stage in *Karla's Choice*. The new espionage thriller, written by Nick Harkaway, Le Carré's son, features Smiley in the period following *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*.

Karla's Choice begins in 1963, with George Smiley in self-imposed exile from the spy network known as the Circus. Still brooding about the botched Operation Windfall in Berlin which had cost another agent his life, Smiley was keen to spend more time with his wife Lady Ann. He now "lived in the daylight world and enjoyed the simple pleasures of other men. He had stopped paying attention to the minor and irrelevant doings of others."

Control, the Circus's enigmatic leader, requiring Smiley's skills, coaxes the reluctant spy back into service. Smiley is tasked with interviewing Susanna Gero, a young Hungarian émigré, who worked in London for a literary agent named Laszlo Banati. It seemed that a Russian agent came to Banati's office to assassinate him, after Banati had disappeared.

Smiley "once again was engaging in the exercise of paranoia, which had governed his former life. Intelligence work was not drawing room entertainment. The notion of constant danger was a madness that men in his profession must both inhibit and put aside...the world could change in an instant from clear and kind to desperate and cold."

Susanna Gero, first encountering Smiley while being driven to her interview, mistook him for a doorman: "a stout, hurried little man with pouchy cheeks and thick-framed spectacles who opened her door. She judged he was wearing a second-hand suit. It was well made but not for him." Gaining confidence in Smiley during her interview, she entrusted him with a packet of letters she had found in Banati's apartment.

Smiley's investigation into the missing Banati leads him to return to Berlin, the site of the failed Operation Windfall. There, as he excavates Soviet spy networks, he will confront Karla: "Soviet agent, real name: unknown. Born, turn of the century, possibly just before, which made him a child of Tsarist times and a first generation Soviet. Rumored to be one of the original Moscow spies."

Nick Harkaway perfectly mirrors Le Carré's writing style, and his depiction of George Smiley is spot-on. Given today's cyber-spying, the cat-and-mouse espionage of the Cold War era may seem anachronistic to contemporary readers. Fans of Le Carré's thrillers, however, will revel in this new addition to the master writer's canon.