

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Catch 22

by Gill Kane

It was love at first sight. When my seven year old eyes first embraced the curly haired, freckled five year old Marta, I was lost. But Marta, she only had eyes for Alexei and for years I trailed along behind them, the unwanted third wheel.

I never liked Alexei. Not from the day I met him. Even before he brought shame upon Marta and his homeland. But Marta, she loved him, and for her I tolerated him. But I watched with contempt as he, a middle ranking officer, swaggered and strutted around telling the world how important he was. For I, who hid in the shadows, was aware that braggarts know nothing and the still, silent men know everything.

So it came as no surprise when he betrayed us all and brought disgrace upon his family, his village and his motherland. Alexei had no secrets to tell but his big talk brought him to the attention of our enemies and he took their shilling and turned his back on our beloved homeland.

I could do nothing whilst Marta lived but when she died, shamed and in exile, I prepared my own justice. I rarely discuss my profession but suffice to say I have unquestioned access at the highest level and I have for many years slipped in and out of countries under many guises. Obtaining and transporting substance N was of no consequence to me. This may have been personal but I am a professional.

I may, however, have miscalculated. First I underestimated the British response. The phlegmatic, measured, diplomatic British seem to have undergone a change of national character and reacted with aggression bordering on hysteria.

This I had not accounted for. Secondly substance N does not appear to be as deadly as believed. Thirdly the British have an antidote, which would suggest they are already aware of the existence of substance N. Oh what a tangled web we weave.

So Alexei lives on and where does this leave me. My beloved leader and homeland are reviled by the world with expulsions and sanctions threatening our economy and our very existence. However if I own up, confess to the world that it was me alone, not the state, not my leader, then I expose the existence of our continuing chemical weapons programme. This in itself will bring further censure and hardship and I personally will surely pay with my life.

I have wrestled with this problem for several days now and have decided to do what I always do, put my trust in my leader. Trust him to confuse and obfuscate and one way or another convince the world that my country is not one to be threatened or challenged. That he is not a man to be meddled with. And I am hopeful, after all he has been in this position many times before and he always wins through.