

Screen Treatment
Putin's Useful Idiot,
A Romance of Cultures, The Intrigue of Spies

From the novel authored by Kenyon Kane

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Genre: Fiction (inspired by true events), Spy Thriller, Romance, Intrigue.

Logline: *The Accountant* (2016, Ben Affleck) meets *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977, Roger Moore, James Bond movie)

Synopsis:

Richard Hart (Protagonist/Hero, CIA) arrives in Moscow in 1984 to buy a hotel from the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs. His task is to rig the transaction to produce black money he must use to bribe certain KGB operatives to retire to make way for the issuance of credit cards by western

banks to the People's Collective. He has a U.S. Treasury guaranty to fund the purchase. The point man for the Soviets is Colonel Putin. If Hart succeeds, he goes home with one million dollars. If he fails, he's headed to a Siberian labor camp for the rest of his life. But, along the way, Hart gets sidetracked by an internecine war inside the KGB and an unsuspected romance.

Prologue

In November 1984, Richard Hart lands at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport on a hazardous duty project he didn't want. He carries with him a dossier he doesn't have security clearance to open, a map of Moscow missing most of the street names, five ten-dollar bills (probably dyed with invisible ink) and an American Express card in his name, though the government pays the charges. Unlike the ballyhoo he is used to seeing in the papers, the Soviet Union is not the superpower it's made out to be. Nothing works, there is no food, there is nothing to buy, and too often no water to drink. Coming from his ritzy lifestyle in New York city, Hart must survive with less by employing his resourcefulness. And everyone in Moscow is under surveillance 24/7 by multiple agencies of the Soviet government, and Hart is being tracked by the CIA as well.

Main Characters:

***Richard Hart** - Untrained in espionage, though tall and athletic, Hart starts out the arrogant cowboy from the canyons of Wall Street, not prepared or well suited for a black money project in the Soviet Union, except, he speaks Russian from college, and no one knows it outside the beltway. And of course, Hart was a street kid, out on his own since he was fifteen years old, and it made him people-wise, and resourceful. But now, Hart is disillusioned. He couldn't bring himself to pay the bribe his last time out, in Grenada, and when he came home with no money, his wife of two years, half his age, moved out and sued him for divorce. Hart has no siblings, no kids, and his parents are dead, so he misses his wife because she was the only friend he had and now he's totally alone.

***Laura** – is a decorated officer in the Red Army from a famous Soviet military family. Late-thirties, fit, Laura's the dedicated communist the first time she meets Hart. She hates Hart

initially, deeming him a greedy materialist and condemning his sorted business around Moscow with the “ladies.” But as she explores deeper into Hart’s psyche, she finds his lonely heart, and sees his perceptions of life change in reaction to the communist environment he’s living in. But Laura is shy, and not experienced in love. Like her mother, the Director, Laura has spent her life devoted to duty serving the People’s Collective, first in Afghanistan, and now in the Central Hospital for Veterans where her mother is the Director.

***Petrov** – a grizzled veteran in a ragtag Red Army field uniform, is Hart’s “minder” while Hart works in Moscow. Petrov is Hart’s only direct communication with Colonel Putin since Putin won’t use telephones to communicate. Petrov loves everything American, from the Marlboro cigarettes he bums off Hart to cherish, to the country music that plays on his jury-rigged eight-track suspended under the dashboard of his car. Though he starts out cynical, after spending time with Hart, Petrov wants to become an entrepreneur like Hart, selling bikinis with Red Army symbols on a beachfront in Havana.

***Colonel Putin** – is a rapidly rising officer in the KGB in 1984. Feared by his men, the Colonel is at war with other departments in the KGB to secure hard currency cash-flows. The Colonel focuses on controlling casinos in hard-currency hotels, and he has several already in hand. The Hotel in Moscow Hart is buying with the US Treasury guaranty will house another casino for the Colonel.

***The Director** – is a famous war hero singlehandedly saving a troop of teenage girls before the gates of Moscow in November 1941. She is a rigid communist spewing Marxist rhetoric and condemning capitalist greed with almost every sentence she utters. The Director is Laura’s mother and her commanding officer for protection. The Director despises Hart from the get-go, but her hate amplifies as the seeming attraction between Laura, her daughter, and Hart develops.

***Vlady** – is a Soviet veteran back from Afghanistan without his legs and just a stump of one arm. Oddly, by happenstance, Hart and Vlady become good friends. It is the unbearable conditions Vlady endures to keep living, the overcrowding of patients, the overburdened hospital staff that leads Hart to a more humanist view of the world. But Vlady is a realist too, and he

warns Hart his new comrades, Colonel Putin, Petrov, the Director, even Laura are in it together, out to deceive him until he's just Putin's Useful Idiot.

Primary Locations:

- 1) Moscow Airport – the terminal, the baggage claim, the customs station, the border control station, out on the street (ext), the interior of a plane and the runway (ext).
- 2) Street Scenes in Moscow – Red Square (ext), GUM department store, Gorky Boulevard (ext). a shoe store, the one road from the airport to Moscow (ext), the Ezry Monument (ext).
- 3) The Peking Palace Hotel – the front desk, the Pirate Den Bar, the front street entrance (ext) one hotel room and it's balcony.
- 4) The Ritz Hotel – the Golden Bar, reception and out on the street (ext).
- 5) On the Train from Moscow to Leningrad – the dignitary car.
- 6) Leningrad Train Station – a loading platform (ext), the terminal and out on the street (ext).
- 7) The Romanov Dining Room in Leningrad – the front door (ext), the coat check room, the dining room, the cigar lounge.
- 8) The People's Central Hospital for Veterans – a patient room, the smoking lounge, a ward, a corridor, the front entrance (int and ext), and the vacant lot across the street (ext).
- 9) The Black Market Warehouse (int).

Act 1—The Set Up

Hart meets Colonel Putin for the first time on the balcony of his hotel room (Peking Palace Hotel). Putin tells Hart his room is tapped, and his phone is tapped, and so they meet outside. Hart plans to close in just a few days. All he is waiting for on his side is the US Treasury guaranty to arrive in Moscow, and it will come courtesy of his college roommate, nick-named the Professor, who is ferrying it to Hart personally from Washington D.C. But Hart needs two more documents from Putin, a signed purchase agreement with the Red Army for the Moscow hotel, and a building permit from the Moscow Architectural Committee. Putin doesn't have them ready, and it causes Hart concern.

Instead Putin has set up a meeting with the proposed signatory of the purchase agreement, a Red Army general about to retire, and the Chairman of the Committee, a man named Kopatyn. Hart attends the meeting to find the General and Kopatyn hate each other. The General is old-school, a veteran of World War 2, and Kopatyn is a free-market capitalist. Arguments get heated, the General leaves abruptly. Kopatyn tells Hart he wants a bribe, \$250k sent to a bank account in Canada, in exchange for the permit. Hart's not opposed to paying it, though he fears he will pay the bribe but not get the permit.

The party ends for Hart when a messenger summons him to the Ritz Hotel. The KGB prison department has arrested the Professor on trumped-up charges of economic crimes, killed his "minder," and stolen the US Treasury Guaranty from the guest safety-deposit box in the Ritz Hotel. Concerned he is the next target for abduction, Hart considers leaving Moscow right away. But Laura invites him to tour the Kremlin as her special guest. Thinking it's a subterfuge for a meeting with Putin, which he needs desperately, Hart goes along. But it seems she just wants to be friends, and frustrated, Hart starts to leave.

But Laura shoulder blocks him through a doorway to a staircase, where, waiting for him, is Putin. Putin explains the KGB is no longer a unified agency. Everyone needs hard currency as the free markets are coming. Putin has monopolized the hard-currency casino income, and the KGB prison department has no way to get any. So, they picked up the Professor, shot his minder in the head, and stole the US Treasury guaranty to extort hard currency from Putin.

Hart offers to bribe the KGB prison department for the Professor's release, but Putin will have none of it. Instead, Putin has allied himself with the KGB operatives Hart is supposed to bribe into retirement, and they plan to invade the homes of certain KGB officers to gain the release of the Professor and retrieve the Treasury guaranty. But will it work, and what repercussions will it bring down on Hart?

Act 2—The Conflict

The next morning, Petrov and Hart pick up the Professor outside the Lubyanka prison. He's been beaten. They drive the Professor to the airport. Along the way Hart tries to find out if the

Professor revealed his identity to the KGB prison guards. At first the Professor denies it, but as he leaves Petrov's car, he confesses. "They knew nothing about you," the Professor tells Hart, but "I told them everything."

Even though the KGB operatives recovered the Treasury guarantee, Hart fears for his safety. Should he stay in Moscow and try to close the deal. or try to escape over the border without an exit visa? Looking back on his experience, Hart relives a scene in Grenada. He's there to build a power plant this time, instead of buying a hotel. Behind a weapons factory in a courtyard covered with blood-red puddles, Hart discharges a special new weapon manufactured in the factory behind the courtyard by the Grenadian Defense Minister, the man Hart is there to bribe. But the weapon disturbs Hart. It's light, and powerful, but it isn't for a soldier in a combat zone; the weapon's spray pattern is all over the place, and it can't be aimed.

It's for boy-soldiers in Angola and made to kill people in a marketplace in Luanda, and not for a battlefield. Dismayed, Hart is ready to leave, but instead, he decides to take a trip to the far side of the island, to a government housing project without electricity that he's been told his project will supply. And that was a mistake, and it wrecked his life, because after visiting the housing project, Hart crashed the deal and went home. The lesson he derives from his flashback, when you don't know what to do, do nothing.

So, Hart decides not to decide and travels down to his hotel's bar to buy some cigarettes and have a drink and wait to see what arises the next morning. But he's contacted in the bar by a beautiful blonde, who claims she is CIA here to extract him. She's made arrangements, she says, for Hart to escape via the airport and a plane-ride to London. The next morning, Hart ditches Petrov, and uses a pack of Marlboro's to bribe an old man to drive him to the airport.

After barely avoiding getting caught, he makes it to the plane. But as the plane takes-off, it loses all power and crashes on the runway. Hart pops open the emergency exit window, but it's the Soviet Union, and there is no slide. Flames engulf him and he's forced to jump. He breaks his knee and his hip and is entombed in a snowbank. Freezing to death, Hart thinks he is about to die, but just then, a huge hand pulls him out of the snow. It's a soldier from Laura's hospital.

Laura is there too, and she gives Hart first aid, packs him up on a stretcher, and has him placed in a bakery truck the Soviets call an ambulance. As Hart passes out, he hears the soldier say, “Hart’s in the custody of the State.”

Act 3—The Conclusion

Hart wakes in a hospital bed, just a patient smock over his shoulders and an old-school, hard-plaster cast from his hip to his ankle. Drugged, exhausted, plagued by nightmares relating to the crash, Hart searches for things to think about to distract his attention away from the bad dreams. Hart flashes back to Grenada, to the government housing project without electricity. Hart has never seen such poverty. The sewer is open, just a ditch in the ground, and the people are starving. Skinny young girls jump a rope of rags.

Realizing the power generated by his project is destined for the arms factory, and not these desperate people, Hart leaves Grenada and crashes the deal. Later, Hart wakes again to find the General by his bed smoking a cigarette. The General tells Hart Kopatyn sold the permit to a German Hotel company, and Hart is now useless because he has nothing to buy with the Treasury guaranty and no way to fund the KGB bribes. But, the General admits, the German’s money hasn’t arrived in Canada yet. Hart pleads for more time to rig something else.

Later, Hart gets a Soviet bathrobe and a pair of crutches. He wanders the hallways searching for a route to escape. But he comes across an Afghan veteran without arms or legs, who needs help relieving himself and can’t get to the bedpan beneath his bed. No nurse around, Hart succumbs to the pleading, and fetches the bedpan and helps Vlady relieve himself. But all the other armless, legless men in the ward witness Hart’s kindness, and they start cheering “USA.” In marches the secret police, but they can’t arrest the veterans, they have no wheelchairs.

So, they arrest Hart instead. Back in his room the Director is waiting. She has signed his transfer papers to Lubyanka prison and Hart is carted away hobbling on his crutches. But as he reaches the door, Petrov, whose been eavesdropping the whole time, barges in with orders from the Kremlin. The Director and Petrov argue over who has the right to Hart’s possession, but the

Director agrees to let Hart get back to work so long as he has a nurse with him at all times, she indicates Laura, because Hart's head is injured, and only if Petrov tells her what Hart's doing in Moscow.

Being the rigid communist, the Director, Petrov can't tell her Hart's job is to bribe KGB operatives with black money. Looking like Hart is headed for prison, Hart volunteers his project is to build a new hospital for the wounded veterans the Director cares for, a complete lie. The Director thinks Hart is lying, but she decides to call his bluff. She'll let Hart out of the old hospital to build the new hospital during the day, so long as he returns to the hospital every night, but as soon as she sees it's a scam, warns the Director, she's sending Hart to the prison, no more discussion.

Later that night, Hart returns to Vlady to pump him for information in search of an escape plan. Sharing a cigarette, since Vlady has no hands, Vlady tells Hart about his duty in Salang. Hart learns Vlady has never left his bed because the hospital doesn't have wheelchairs. Horrified by the thought that Vlady is confined to a bed 24/7, Hart puts Vlady on his back to carry him outside. But when they get to the glass doors at the front entrance, they witness their image in the reflection, an armless legless Soviet riding on the back of a New York banker clad in a Red Army bathrobe. "You should have seen the other guys," Vlady jokes.

But then he cries. He wasn't wounded in battle. Vlady has never done anything heroic. Vlady got drunk at the top of a mountain and fell asleep, and his arms and legs froze. Next day back in hospital's lounge, the General is there, and the German wire to Canada has arrived and Hart's Moscow hotel was sold to the Germans. It's over for you, remarks the General. But Hart has a plan. He will swap out the Moscow hotel for a new hospital to be built on the vacant lot across the street. The General points out such a move would be fraud, but Hart doesn't care. Ten years in a Federal prison is a lot better than spending the rest of his life in a Siberian labor camp.

But Hart needs the General to perpetrate the fraud, and the General doesn't want to engage in the conspiracy. Hart makes the General recount the heroic deed of the Director in 1941. But at the end of the story, the Director is out in the battlefield knocked out unconscious. It is the General

who went out in the battlefield to save her. That's why you must help me Hart argues, because the Red Army doesn't leave it's wounded on the battlefield. The men in this hospital Hart points out, are your wounded General, and you can't retire and leave them to rot in this hospital. The General agrees to help Hart in his fraud, but only if Hart gets Colonel Putin to agree to it. Colonel Putin is not in Moscow though, he's hiding in Leningrad, and since Putin won't use a phone, Hart must go to Leningrad to meet Putin.

It's an overnight train trip, with Laura at his side. The two spend the night conversing. Hart gets Laura drunk, and she seems to want to be kissed, but Hart thinks it wrong. Laura's still an officer in the Red Army. When the two arrive in Leningrad their security detail is not there to meet them. Instead they're confronted by three KGB thugs from the prison department set on killing Laura and taking Hart into their custody.

Desperate, Laura warns Hart not to be taken alive, and gives him a cyanide pill. Not scared but angry, Hart throws it away, hops to the street, and holds up a pack of Marlboro's, and the two escape in the back of an old man's car. Later Hart is taken to a beat-down old storefront where Laura is waiting. She holds a card up to the peephole. No names, no numbers, the card is just a field of purple poppies, but it works, and the two enter.

Inside is the Romanov's dining room, filled with fine food and Soviet generals and hot looking ladies. But Hart doesn't get to eat. He's summoned to a cigar lounge in the back where Putin is waiting. Though Putin is angry, Hart convinces him to approve the transaction, the swap out of the hotel for the hospital. Back in Moscow, Hart sets up a closing. All he needs is the permit from Kopatyn, and he has set a meeting with the Architectural Committee for the next day.

Both the General and Putin promised Hart they will get Hart the permit without paying a bribe, on the spot, the Soviet way. Thinking he's set, Hart goes to a block party in Laura's building. It's a pot-luck affair thrown to feed a family without food, a subterfuge to avoid shaming them. Hart thinks back to Grenada, the starving children jumping a rope of rags, the people capitalism has forgotten. At the end of the party, Laura wants to stop at her flat. Hart thinks she needs to use the loo, but she doesn't. She wants to make Hart a cup of tea.

Cramped in her tiny kitchen, on top of each other, their lips meet as a tank outside on the street rumbles past them shaking the building to its timbers. She lifts herself up into his arms, and they start to kiss passionately, when the front door opens and in walks the Director with her goon squad. Seeing what's going on between Laura and Hart, the Director is infuriated. She orders her goons to return Hart to the Hospital, strip him naked and chain him to his bed. But the next day, she must let Hart go the Architectural Committee hearing.

The Committee tells Hart he's too late. His hotel was sold to the Germans. But Hart's not there to build a hotel, he's there to build a hospital. The committee laughs at Hart, but they're willing to consider his proposal after he sends the bribe to Canada. Hart reminds them that he's building a hospital for veterans not a commercial hotel, and he shouldn't have to pay a bribe to provide a hospital for the Red Army wounded.

"I piss on your wounded," the Committee tells Hart. Pay the bribe or get lost. But one of the members realizes just then, the Committee room is bugged, like everywhere else in Moscow, and just as matters look dismal, the General barges in with a dozen commandos.

"You piss on my wounded?" inquires the General, "I piss in your mouth till you drown," he threatens. With the permit in hand, Hart goes to the closing and funds the transaction by fraud, pays the KGB operative their bribes, and thinks he's home free.

But Petrov and Laura don't return Hart to the hospital. They tell Hart's he's done his job and now he's useless and off to a prison camp. For hours they drive, Hart cuffed in his seat. But it's not a prison camp they're going to, it's a dacha on a lake. Petrov exits the car leaving Hart and Laura alone in the car.

Hart cuffed, is at Laura's mercy. But she wants to kiss him, no tank to disrupt them, no Director to barge in on them, she finally has Hart alone. They make love for the first time in the back of Petrov's car. Then, for next three days, Hart and Laura make love all day and night as Petrov gets drunk and goes out on the lake to ice-fish.

When they return to the Hospital, the Director knows what they did, and she wants to shoot Hart in his room. But Laura intercedes confessing she loves Hart. And Hart confesses his plans have changed. He wants to give up his cushy life in New York to live with Laura in Moscow. And though the Director is a rigid communist, anti-emotions, love and feelings, she cries for the first time in her life, and then acquiesces in her daughter's desires, because after all is said, she loves her daughter and wants her to have the happy life.

Epilogue

Although it seems all is content, Hart still searches for food. It's Vlady who finds it, witnessing a man in a suit outside on the street drop a shopping bag filled with western food, a lot of pretty labels on the cans. Tracing back to the food bank, Hart arrives at the black-market, but the Director has followed him with a troop of goons. She's bent on arresting everyone when she finds out the market is owned by the KGB, and anyone can shop there for hard currency provided they have the card with the purple poppies.

Enraged at the hypocrisy, the Director confiscates the entire market. After a wondrous dinner, Laura and the Director are called to duty. There's been an accident at the Nuclear power plant, and there are numerous casualties suffering third degree burns. While they are away, Hart wheels Vlady to the street in a wheelchair Hart bought for him in New York and had shipped to Moscow. Just a short stroll Hart intends, while they smoke cigars Hart purloined from the black-market. An ominous car drives up to them slowly. A weapon issues from the back seat.

Vlady rises up on the chair by his stumps, sacrificing his life to protect Hart; at last Vlady is heroic. But the first shot kills him, and the second shot hits Hart. On his back, bleeding out on the street, Petrov is the only one there. But now Petrov speaks in perfect English. In fact, Petrov reveals it was all a big plot.

Putin's team was supposed to assassinate Hart. That was their agreement with Washington, after he completed the deal and before he left to go home. But all of them had grown to love Hart, and

they couldn't do it. Although Hart believes he's about to die, Petrov's not so sure. The weapon used to shoot Hart is made in Grenada, and it has no aim, and though Hart is wounded, Petrov asserts most of the shot missed him, and nothing hit his vitals.

About the Author, Kenyon Kane

Kenyon Kane grew up in the San Fernando Valley north of Los Angeles before there were freeways. Born on a citrus farm, from these humble beginnings, he made his way into UCLA and on to its Law School, and wound-up working for two US Cabinet Secretaries.

Over his career, Kenyon focused on a particular type of offshore real estate transaction involving foreign entities, and he did these transactions in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Grenada, Panama, the Gaza, and Northern Ireland.

Kenyon's next novel in the series, *Belfast Brothers*, roots in Kenyon's assignment to Northern Ireland. There his black money was slated for buying weapons and ammunition for the IRA.

