'And this wasn't an op you were familiar with?' He hesitated for a second. Old habits.

'Listen, I might be a woman, but in this room I outrank you, you know. This wasn't an op...'

'No!' Laughing dismissively but good-naturedly. 'Hedgehog? No. Nothing like that! We don't call things "Operation Hedgehog" in the SO for God's sake!'

'There are various conditions of course. Don't take this the wrong way: You've heard of Tourette's Syndrome."

'Uncontrollable outbursts, you mean. Profanities? Well the outbursts I'll give you, but you're not...'

'No. No, of course not, but I'm interested in the difference.'

'Between what I... what I've got, and...'

'Tourette's, yes. Why not.'

'And what is the difference?'

'Oh, plenty. But the day dreams. Visions, whatever you want to call them...'

'I don't want to call them anything. I want them to bloody go away!"

'didn't quite hit upon himself. Should his head. The laugh was something."

'there's another one "Operation Hedgehog" or telling the truth, that I was."

'Is that when... the people in the...?"

'So why are you there, in these dreams? Let's call "Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia". International Kafanu Heinemann, 1963. p.74-75"

'She decided to be blunt. It sometimes worked."

'ICTY."

'I don't know, but no, I don't think so. Not

"idemo u --

Shaking her head, she listened to his footsteps, programme. People watching who I can't see. A vast party."

'He hesitated for a second. Old habits."

'the quick gust of laughter didn't break his darkly

'He looked at the drawing as if someone else had

'that its bottom edge ran parallel to the

'You don't remember?'

'No. 'Fraid not. Sorry.'

'they hear. "I'm sorry this confuses you."

'She looked at him and raised her eyebrows. He

'true now."

'It is very short. I can't even stand upright. Sorry.'

'What was it?'

'She didn't sound that sure of the idea herself, but

'Another and another. Little matchstick soldiers

'You don't remember?'

'No the people

'tell me what?"

'You were saying. You said that you'd lost touch

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'she went on. "Not exactly gobbledegook, but it

'All sounds pretty meaningless now, doesn't it,\n
'she went on. "Not exactly gobbledegook, but it

'Is that when... the people in the...?"

'So she did mind, but the question was ignored.

'Of course. But there's a bit more history than

'He hesitated for a second. Old habits.

'She didn't sound that sure of the idea herself, but

'she went on. "Not exactly gobbledegook, but it

'No! I've written enough about it all. Too damned

'Good God, and speak at the same time, in case

'He seemed to be useful. Supposed to help. For God's sake, they

'she went on. "Not exactly gobbledegook, but it

'Between what I... what I've got, and...'

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'Very mountains seemed to be clothed in the

'He didn't notice, but I bloody noticed, I can tell you

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'I don't know, but no, I don't think so. Not
Doesn't take much to get a confession out of me. Always think it'll work out if I just... confess! Get it all down. Two-finger typing in the middle of the night then going to bed in the early nip of morning. Waking up to cold stewed tea and the nostalgic tug of England. Reaching for the cigarettes and finding the tin under a pile of crossings-out. Jesus! Problem is once they're there in black and white you're stuffed aren't you? Got a life of their own. God, I should know. I'm the past master! Write it down? No-one had to wring it out of me, I bloody volunteered it. Didn't just sign my confessions, I refined them, edited them read and re-read them. Signed them "Lots of love" then posted the damn things.

The quick gust of laughter didn't break his darkly pensive expression.

'Or might as well have done. Let's face it: you can't camp next to the metaphorical pillar-box every time, can you? Beg the postman to give it back: "Terrible mistake. So sorry. Would you mind awfully?" Once you've written them you might as well have sent them, and once you've done that they're gone. Off in the world, wreaking havoc.'
'Come in and I thought, “This is bloody familiar”, then there it bloody well was. "I shall flee to other shores." It's from "Tga za Jug" "Longing for the South" sentimental sods aren't they? Not a bloody peep since. Not a dicky bird. Of course, I'd guessed already, I suppose.'

'You both came up through Salonika?'

'Of course. But there's a bit more history than that.'

'Did you think about...'

'What? Jacking all this in and going to "other shores" myself?' He stopped for a second, a sour, disdainful expression on his face. 'Not very specific is it. Not much to go on! I could always write a postcard. I suppose: poste restante other bloody shores! "Arriving on the 11 oclock from Beograd!" Sorry, I don't mean to be sarcastic. It's not your fault. Not sure I feel like talking about that, really. Her. Not today. Do you mind?'

'Is that when... things got more, difficult?'

So she did mind, but the question was ignored. He'd been sharpening the pencil as he spoke. He took it out and inspected the point, then put the sharpener down and fiddled with the ruled pad...
old school geography book. 'Raininess in Britain since Roman times'. But beneath the line he quickly sketched some diagonal downward strokes not a graph. Mountains. She said nothing. Stayed perfectly still wanted him to forget she was there for a while. If that was possible.

What kind of a job is this? She sometimes thought to herself. String them along for a bit, poke them about to try and provoke some kind of reaction. And keep doing it until they're strong enough not to come any more and you can finally forget all about them. Just keep their files in case something messy happens in a year or so. But it didn't do to think like that. This was supposed to be useful. Supposed to help. For God's sake, they always turned up didn't they? Always polite, deferential. Even him. Never late. An hour or two of very politely talking to himself, more than to her. Always said the same thing at the end of the sessions. Habitual charm ran through him like the letters in a stick of rock. 'Thanks. Lets talk about you next time!' Then hed grin sheepishly as if he'd just told an embarrassing joke at a dinner party.

Outside she could hear voices and footsteps. She thought of hot, dusty streets; longed for summer
Standing up he took his jacket from the chair back and smiled. 'Well, thanks. Let's talk about you next time, eh? We should, you know, idemo u kafanu sometime. If you fancied. You know where to find me.' He actually winked before he opened the door and stepped outside.

Shaking her head, she listened to his footsteps, his scuffling walk. She carefully tore the picture from her pad and slipped it into the file.

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'Gobbledygook' was created by cutting up, remixing and re-narrativising fragments from the following sources to create a completely new story:


ICTY. 2003. 'Page 16367-8, Milosevic (IT-02-54) "Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia"'. International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

http://www.un.org/icty/transe54/030218ED.htm

propped her watch beside the flowerpot on the windowsill, just where they couldn't see it. Otherwise it was no good at all; no matter how discreetly you peeped at it, they'd notice.

"What?"

"These "outbursts". Do you want to tell me a bit more about them?"

"Not much to tell don't know too much about them myself, to tell the truth. Must be in a bit of a day dream or something. Can't remember what I'm saying, afterwards. Just moments in time no before or after. But it's as if there are people looking. At me. I want to tell the truth but I can't. No that's not it. A sense that I'm expected to tell the truth; no... that I'm expected not to tell the truth. So I don't. Only sometimes. Sometimes I do. Sometimes I have to. These times. And then I just blurt it out, but no-one's paying attention to it. Except it's not "truth" which has any value or any sense a lot of the time. Just things that I'm sure at the time feel like demonstrable truths... I don't know."

"Are you aware of what you're saying? I mean, at the time. Are you telling these truths about yourself? Is it you, actually you, that's on trial?"

http://www.un.org/icty/transe54/030218ED.htm
People watching who I can't see. A vast bureaucracy. Like Babel everyone talking different languages. Bosch and everything. English. But I'm the only Serb even though I know I'm not. And everyone's... looking at me, analysing every sodding move. Incredibly convoluted mind games. People trying to second-guess my triple bluffs. They sound pretty queer now, but those things I say... I feel I have to cling to them like bloody life-rafts, because they're more important than anything else. Because they're just plain old, simple truths. What was that one you just read?

"The cable on my headphones is too short," was that it? I mean... Just to say something, anything, true like that feels like such a damnable relief.'

'Do you think it's the newsreels that have, you know, planted this idea in your head? This image?'

'I don't know, but no, I don't think so. Not speaking in bloody German am I, for one thing.'

'Your Serbo-Croat is good?'

'Of course. Wouldn't have got very far for King and bloody country otherwise!'

She decided to be blunt. It sometimes worked.

'So why are you there, in these dreams? Let's call bloody hell though, wasn't he? Pathetic, really. Sorry I'm not... Oh, don't worry. I know you're not supposed to talk about it, but you know what I mean. Generally speaking. Slightest thing and he'd faint, or feel faint. No, that was it: Convince himself he was going to feel faint then get himself all worked up and end up nearly fainting from the anxiety of waiting to faint. Sitting their sweating in silence, terrified that he might feel faint at some point in the future! A grown man! Afraid to stand up in case he fainted. Unable to stand up and speak at the same time, in case... Good God, I mean, you can laugh can't you, but "Cup of tea?" doesn't work with people like that does it?'

He looked at the drawing as if someone else had done it. Reined himself in. It took a few seconds.

'Listen to me. People like that. I mean people like me.'

'Contrast,' she thought to herself, making a mental note whilst pausing to let the insight sink in, or to mark it at least, 'between lucidity and presentation of symptoms. Check frequency of episodes? Harbingers? 2-3-4.' Then she picked up the conversation again: 'Gobbledegook?'