



Survival
of the
Fittest
A Novel

Robin Hawdon



**SURVIVAL OF THE
FITTEST**

by
Robin Hawdon



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My researches for this book involved many sources, including of course Charles Darwin's own writings. But I should mention in particular Edna Healey's magnificent biography of Emma Darwin which partly inspired the whole project.

Valuable information about Klaus Fuchs also came from various sources, including biographies by Robert Chadwell Williams, and Russell Aiuto.

Some of the Darwin quotations have been edited for clarity and brevity.

R.H.

LOGIC (*Greek*–‘*logos*’): The science that investigates the principles governing correct or reliable inference. Inexorable truth or persuasiveness.

PROLOGUE

Peculiarly, the thing that dominated his dreams was the smell. The sickly sweet odour of decaying flesh. Only after that came the image of the limbs—limbs that in youth had been so smooth and neatly formed, which he could have sketched all day had he been an artist—now scarred with festering wounds. And of course the hair, gathered in handfuls each morning from the pillow—grey, wispy, brittle, that had once been the luxurious brown into which he used to bury his face as if to smother himself. And lastly it was the eyes. Eyes that had always been so amused and knowing—that were now so faded and pain filled.

And it was always the same—the dreams were always a panic stricken rush down endless corridors to find the room and cover the awful wounds with dressings which were never large enough, feed the intravenous drips which never seemed to ease the pain, interpret the flashing lights which signalled a never ending emergency.

He had the dreams every night. He was resigned to the fact that there was no way of evading them. It was God's way of telling him. Of reminding him that he had failed her. He had allowed her to slip from his grasp, sending her on her way with all her questions unanswered, her doubts unsoothed, her remarkable love unmatched. He had failed her miserably, and God would punish him for evermore.

Except of course that there was no God. How could there be? She was the living and dying proof that he was not there.

CHAPTER ONE

January 1951. Wakefield Prison.

I have been sitting here staring at my dark stone wall for almost an hour and still I have no idea how to commence this treatise, memoir, chronicle—call it what you will. There is so much to tell and it is all so complex. I am truly angry at what has happened to me, yet I have to keep that anger at bay in order to rationally explain my purposes.

I have to jump in somewhere, so let me begin with the simple part.

My cell is roughly twelve feet by eight. The size, I suppose of a normal bedroom. In most prisons it would probably accommodate two people, but thankfully here at Wakefield we have our own individual cells, probably due to the violent proclivities of many of the inmates. I cannot imagine the anguish of having to share this space with some coarse hoodlum. I have a somewhat sagging metal and wire bed with a hard horsehair mattress, a wooden table and chair, a basin with a cold water tap (which I am told sometimes freezes up in the bitter Yorkshire winters), and an odd cork-backed board on the back wall which I suppose is for attaching letters, photos, the traditional half naked pin-up girls, or whatever else the occupant desires. I use it to pin up my mathematical calculations, which to me at least have their own beauty. It gives me some amusement to watch the wardens puzzle over them when they pay their visits. There is no toilet, merely a crude bucket with lid, which I empty twice a day in the vile slops room at the end of the building, an unpleasant task to my fastidious self. The cell door is solid, with a small observation window in it, and there is, joy of

joys, a high barred window through which I have a view of the sky, part of the opposite prison roof, and just a glimpse of the foliage of what must be quite a large tree beyond—a beech by the look of it, or possibly an ash—I must find out which. Occasionally I catch birds flying across my piece of sky—pigeons, sparrows, once or twice a hawk of some kind. Free spirits—I envy them. I must face east or south-east because the sun, when it is out, slants into my cell first thing in the morning, but by early afternoon it has gone, and by evening the opposite roof is bathed in its glow. I am fortunate with that position. It is good to wake to the sun. It starts the day with hope. It helps to keep my black demons of despair at bay, which are always worst at first wakening. I have lived with that first assault of negativity most of my life, but here without the challenge of a vocation to distract me the threat is worse. So I am glad of the sun, and especially of the tree. It is a friend. It will enable me to keep track of the seasons. It will tell me whether the wind is blowing, and how bright the sun or the moon is. It will remind me there is life.

I am told I am quite lucky to be at Wakefield. It is not the worst of British prisons, and not the harshest of prison regimes. And British prisons and regimes are a long way from rivaling the worst elsewhere, that is certain. This will be my home for the best part of the next fourteen years. A long time. A large proportion of anyone's life, let alone as a proportion spent in prison. I wonder how they arrive at such a maximum term? It seems a strange number until you realise that of course it is exactly one fifth of man's allotted three-score and ten. Yes, twenty per cent of one's lifetime as a penalty for betraying one's chosen country—I suppose that's a reasonable equation, though still a fairly arbitrary one. Of course it's better than the prospect of execution, which is what I anticipated. Perhaps I should be grateful to the moderate British legal system for not imposing the harsher sentence. However, contemplating such an infinity here in my

claustrophobic space, I sometimes think that perhaps execution might have been a kinder alternative. Oh lord, such self-pity is ridiculous!

I have begun writing this during my third week at Wakefield. I have decided that, if I am to retain my sanity, I must establish a strict routine of mental exercise. I have my maths (or math as they call it in America) of course—a never ending source of challenge and fascination—but in addition to that I need something else, something to replace the intense routine of research and experiment, debate and argument, which has been at the core of my daily existence for most of my life until this point. This chronicle is my solution. And perhaps in the course of writing it I will be able to refute some of the slanders that have been cast upon me, and to disprove the more pernicious accusations. It might have considerable repercussions, not least from my original Russian paymasters (they never paid me anything but I don't know what else to call them), but nevertheless I feel honour bound to explain myself. The world has a right to know my reasons. Though why I should imagine the world will ever read it, I don't know.

I am fortunate that the regime here is so relatively relaxed. I have access to ink and paper (although even this is in short supply thanks to the post-war austerity measures), and also to the prison's surprisingly extensive library. I have this modest, but not hideously uncomfortable cell to myself, whilst at the same time a tolerable amount of contact with other inmates. There is quite a bit of banter between the cells, across the corridors, and amongst the duty orderlies. I rarely participate but I get considerable amusement listening to it. Many of my associates in crime are extremely colourful characters, some quite witty (not one of my own attributes), and a few surprisingly intelligent, despite their perverted mentalities. They are the kind of men whom I encountered all those years ago back home in my own country, the difference being that

there they were the ones in command. They are the kind of men I suppose one needs to understand if one is to interpret the origins of war, which is—was—one of my aims.

I am allowed visitors, although I'm not sure how many of my former associates will deign to come here, since I appear now to be a total bete noire amongst the scientific fraternity. It is the thing that distresses me most about the whole business. I had grown to look on most of my fellow scientists with a good deal of fondness—even though I was by nature and circumstance unable to demonstrate it effectively. But then it would have been naive of me to expect them to react differently to my circumstance. They were all so certain of their loyalties and affiliations. So confident of what the great struggle was all about. Few of them had actually seen the terrible things I had seen. They had no cause to suffer the titanic ethical struggle with their consciences that I had. And of course, being in the position I was in, I could never communicate those thoughts to them. I know they respected my abilities as a physicist, but they must have found me a strangely enigmatic animal.

The plain fact is that I was in the unique position of being able to assess, perhaps better than anyone, the immense and fundamental issues that now lie so glaringly exposed in the aftermath of that appalling war. Presumptuous of me no doubt, but after all few people were as well qualified to do so. I may not have the reputation of Einstein or Niels Bohr, but few have been endowed with the intellectual and analytical capacity that I have. And few were able to observe the strategies of the contesting nations from such an elevated inside position. To that extent I was privileged.

Despite my acceptance of the charges against me, I still look back on the three days of my trial with resentment. I should by now, some nine months later, have come to terms with things, but I am still offended that my motives were so misunderstood. The judge, Lord Goddard, distinguished

though no doubt he is, was clearly prejudiced against me right from the start. What was it he said in summing up? That I had ‘betrayed the hospitality and protection given me with the grossest treachery.’ That I had ‘done incalculable harm both to this country and to the United States, merely for the purpose of furthering my political creed.’ Such immoderate language shows that he had no idea of my real motives. He had not the remotest concept of what I was about. I certainly had no intention of betraying anyone, or of doing harm to any country, except perhaps temporarily the country of my birth. No—attempting to further the cause of humanity, is how I would describe my purpose. A touch portentous perhaps, but sincere. And in the light of the subsequent events it may appear to have been misguided, but in the cataclysmic circumstances of that time it was not an unreasonable assumption. An error in political calculation is the most one could accuse me of, and one which no-one could have predicted at the time. The judge called my crime, ‘only thinly differentiated from high treason,’ but I consider that grossly misinterpreted. I do not claim innocence but I am, I think, justified in feeling deeply wronged. The question is, can I prove to the rest of the world that I was wronged?

Good. I have begun. It has not been as difficult as I imagined. Writing is without doubt a therapy. I feel more optimistic already.

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