

Siren: For Queen And Country

“Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power.”

- Oscar Wilde

Chapter 1 The Secret Agent

As Drake left the woman's bed and moved towards the door of the modern studio flat, he turned his head to take one last look at the young woman snoring gently behind him, completely undisturbed by his movements. She was asleep the whole time; so quiet were his movements that she did not wake when Drake slipped out of her bed, she did not wake when he was getting dressed, and she did not wake when he went through her handbag to steal her phone.

Drake felt pride at his unnerving ability to leave any woman's bed without ever waking the target. As he slowly and carefully pushed the lever of the door handle down all the way and felt the door give way, he hoped that his record will not be ended tonight. As he slowly and carefully shut the door behind him, he smiled and thought to himself, for what must be the hundredth time in the past year, *I have the best job in the world.*

Drake paused in the airlock of the tower's lobby as the doors in front of him slid open, taking a deep breath and patting himself down, readying himself for the evening's frivolities. It was almost midnight when he arrived at the venue. Ahead of him, he heard the sounds of a group of women chattering excitedly as they headed towards the club for their typical Friday evening activities. He walked behind them until their chatter was joined by the sounds of a multitude of other women waiting in line to get into the club. Some had their arms wrapped around the arm of a man, some did not, but every one of them were dressed to impress. At this point, Drake took a good look at himself to make sure that he, too, was dressed to the nines. He ran his hands over his new tailored suit, his most expensive clothing purchase to date, and felt the expensive fabric between his fingers.

It was worth every penny.

Drake had been told by Carter on many occasions over the past year that the service did not have an unlimited supply of funds and that it was funded by the taxpayer. He was actually given quite a large expense account to do his job, but he always joked that it wasn't enough. Carter, as always, responded to his attempts at humour and his requests with the unimpressed look and frustration of a parental figure to an obstinate child in a toy store.

The suit he had before was nice, but not *Savile Row* nice.

Naturally, Drake kept the receipt, even though there was not a chance in hell that Carter would approve the purchase. The jacket alone was more than the average taxpayer's monthly salary. Drake almost felt guilty about asking the British public to fund his extravagant tastes. He had resolved himself to paying for the suit out of his own pocket if Carter refused to reimburse him - he was happy to pay for the suit himself. As his weekend's assignments showed, his job called for an expensive suit.

He joined the queue of women entering the club, knowing that one of these could be his target for the night. He checked himself out in the reflection of the glass wall, before checking his phone. On it was a picture of a woman in her late twenties, and a large block of text about her that Drake could not be bothered to read right now. He memorised the face and put his phone back in his blazer, where he stored his last condom.

Drake straightened out his suit, then his shirt, checking it for creases and wishing that he had time to wash both him and his shirt before both had to spend another night in a stranger's bed.

He wasn't worried, of course; the environment of a nightclub often rendered most drenched in sweat at the end of the night anyway. Drake knew his body well enough - and a *woman's body* well enough - to know that if anything, he was even more attractive to women with a layer of glistening sweat over his muscles. Something about the release of pheromones, or something to that effect; Drake never quite understood the *science* of seduction. Seduction was just second nature to him; he could get a woman to sleep with him - in his sleep.

Drake was living his childhood fantasy. He was probably living most men's fantasy. A year on, Drake still cannot believe this is what he did for a living.

He, *Jonathan Drake*, was a secret agent.

The financial district known as *Canary Wharf* is a strange place.

It is a predominantly lifeless development filled with steel and glass office towers and the new residential towers springing up to house their staff, not the kind of place to go for a Friday night out. Everyone congregated into the same few bars, and every one was filled with the same type of people. Banker and lawyer types, mainly.

Here, into one of these trendy, anonymous bars filled with equally anonymous people, stepped a *woman* in her late twenties, one of many who had entered, and will enter on this Friday night.

It was almost half past midnight.

She was wearing a white cocktail dress, with one hand holding onto a little beige clutch. The woman waited in queue, checking out the similarly dressed women in front of her. Within such a context, she did not feel very special, but unbeknownst to her, she was very special to one man. A man who had momentarily stepped out of the club after spending the last half hour scanning the club for his target. The man took his phone out of his blazer pocket and checked it, staring at it intently before slipping it back into his Savile Row blazer. He checked out the women in the queue as the woman and their gaze met. She did not know him, and he did not know her. Their eyes stayed on each other for a while.

He smiled.

She smiled.

The woman broke eye contact first, *stop staring at the cute guy*, she thought.

This is the one, he thought.

The man kept watching her from the outside smoking area, even as she broke eye contact. He was interested in her now. *She's quite cute, I wonder who this one works for?* He wondered. Why is Miranda and the service interested in her boss? What is her name? Not that it matters.

The man would know this and much more besides if only he had bothered to read the profile Carter had sent him. If he had, he would know that this woman worked for the McIntyre group, that she was one of two assistants to none other than the media mogul, Lord Andrew McIntyre, whose person and whose business activities the service have been tracking for the last year. He would also know that she was here tonight to celebrate a friend's engagement, a detail that Carter thought might be useful in his assignment, having spent a day analysing the woman's emails.

The woman had spent the last hour in an office bathroom getting dressed and fixing her makeup, making sure that everything was perfect on a night when her insecurities threatened to bubble to the surface. She was regretting that she had picked a white dress on a night of merriment that was sure to be filled with red wine. The woman had just left a stressful day at the office. Her boss had been utterly unreasonable about a deadline and knew nothing of boundaries, and now, she was reluctantly meeting friends to celebrate the fact that one of them had just got engaged.

Her phone vibrated and she regretted once again that she had given her boss her personal number. Now she could be reached anywhere.

As she stepped in, eyes fixed onto her phone, she bumped into someone. Despite knowing she was at fault, the woman got annoyed. She had said sorry immediately without meaning it, and so had the person she bumped into. It was only at this point that initial annoyance quickly dissolved into delight.

It was the cute guy from before.

He started talking to her, explaining that he also had his face fixed to his phone, and offered to buy a drink. Normally, an offer like that would have been dismissed, but on this night, when she was about to celebrate the second engagement of her social circle in as many months, she agreed, even though she suspected the cute guy had bumped into her on purpose. The woman was beautiful, and she knew it, but there was always the fear that she was beautiful in a too conventional a manner, insecurities she hoped the guy would not pick up on for a while. When the man wasn't looking, she scanned the length of the bar, comparing herself with the other women, with a slight feeling of arrogance that such a handsome man had chosen to approach her. When the woman wasn't looking, the man checked at his phone and read the profile her had been sent, making sure that this was indeed the woman he was meant to meet, since she looked so similar to the other women at the bar.

For the woman, she had been approached by a handsome young man on a night when she might have had to suffer the embarrassment of being the only of her friends without a boyfriend.

For Drake, she was his second assignment of the week, and the *third* woman he'll sleep with in the last forty eight hours.

Fortunately, he had one condom left.

Drake awoke as the woman opened the curtains to let in the Monday morning sun, studying with eyes half shut the back of her naked body as she pulled open the other curtain.

I can't believe this is my *actual* job, Drake thought.

He had spent the whole weekend with her and he still forgot her name at times, spending every moment she was not looking to correspond with his last assignment, checking his phone for the frequent messages he was receiving.

The current assignment had told him from the onset that this was just a convenient arrangement, nothing more. *They always do*.

This convenient arrangement then stretched over the whole weekend. *It always does*.

She had talked so much in such a short time and he had pretended to listen so intently that she had fallen a little bit in love with him. *Everytime*.

Jennifer! Drake remembered, just as her phone rang, and Drake quickly moved to kiss her and snatch the ringing phone gently from her hand. She laughed at this and playfully tried to get her phone back

“Go get ready, Jen!” Drake said as he tickled her with his free hand - she laughed again.

Jennifer's work phone continued ringing until Drake dismissed the call. She smiled at this bold act of rebellion, and the two continued toying for a few minutes before she looked at the time.

"Oh my God, I've got to go! Give me my phone back," she pleaded, again, more playfully than with any genuine desire to speak with her boss.

"Nope, your boss needs to learn about boundaries." Drake replied, smiling and shaking his head.

This time, her *personal* phone rang.

"Now you can't switch off, you see?" Drake said, with mock pity.

"I know..." she whined.

"You should never give them your personal number," Drake added.

"I know...."

Drake moved quickly to silence her with a kiss before she tried to get her work phone again. He kept his lips and tongue locked with hers until he was sure she had forgotten. He could feel her body relax as he ran his hands down her back. *It's a lot easier when they haven't been with a man for a while.*

Now it was Drake's phone that rang as Jennifer rushed off to the bathroom to get ready.

It was Miranda.

Only after Jennifer had got dressed and left for the office did Drake dress himself. He then followed Miranda's protocol and spent an hour scanning the flat for any other useful pieces of information, both business related *and* personal, going through most of Jennifer's belongings in the process and expertly putting them back the way he found them.

His phone rang again. Miranda needed him back in HQ.

Miranda was technically the only boss he has ever had, so he could not compare her with any other boss, but Miranda's attitude towards him had always fluctuated abnormally between hot and cold. She has these round eyes that pointed upwards at the ends, like a cat's, set within a round, feline face, which was coupled with a serious case of 'resting bitch face'. That was Miranda in summary, her expressions oscillated between feline and canine with a smirk or a scowl. She would be considered beautiful if she wasn't so stuck up.

Still, wouldn't kick her out of bed. Drake chuckled at the childish thought.

Drake left the apartment and proceeded to meet his boss. Along the way, he walked past rows of office buildings filled with people with more conventional, and respectable, professions.

Jennifer... (he repeated the name several times to avoid forgetting again) was in one of these buildings. It is an environment that Drake had been expected to enter into; instead, Jonathan was offered something better. *Yes*, he may be a glorified prostitute, but Drake had always been fairly philosophical about these things.

You see, there are many ways to prostitute oneself besides *actual* prostitution. Many of Drake's friends worked in this part of town, frequently late into the night; selling their bodies, and souls, in their towering brothels of steel and glass that appeared on either side of him as he walked, not knowing what he *actually* did for a living.

They know that he works for the government, they know that the nature of his work is top secret, and they know that he sleeps with many women, like he has *always* done; but none of them has ever put two and two together.

Jonathan Drake's friends could never imagine, in a million years, that he sleeps with all these women *for the government, for the secret service, for Queen and country.*

Chapter 2

Miranda

The tower at 20 Fenchurch Street is a strange looking building. It rises up amongst the ancient City of London, jutting up from the flat landscape before getting wider and thicker towards the top of the tower. The people of London gave it a nickname, as they do with so many other Skyscrapers in London, the 'Walkie Talkie' they call it.

Her Majesty's Secret Service occupied the building under the guise of a variety of legal firms. Counter-terrorism measures included ram-raid barriers along the main entrance to the North, and on the South, the entrance was protected from vehicular explosives by a raised plateau accessed by ramp or steps, an entrance that led to the lobby of the 'Sky Garden', which is ostensibly a public park, but with airport-style security on the ground floor, making it one of the safest '*public*' spaces for the service to meet.

Into this entrance stepped a woman with a Burberry trench coat, with shoulder length blonde hair swept back as she stepped into the airlock leading up to the lobby. She ignored the queue of civilians waiting to go up to the Sky Garden and walked straight to the reception desk.

A bored receptionist looked up.

The woman pushed a card onto the desk, and the receptionist picked it up lackadaisically and typed in the name on the card with a complete lack of interest, until she read the message that appeared on her screen:

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Lockhart, Miranda  
Maximum authorization
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It was a message that she had been trained to receive, but have not seen before. In her three months on the job, she had not encountered this level of security clearance. Her first impression was that she had not expected the recipient of those words - *Maximum authorization*, to look like the woman in front of her. This woman could not be anything older than her mid thirties. She was also, in her mind, stunningly beautiful. Flowing blonde locks framing a round, elfin face, adorned with slanted eyes of a brilliant blue.

As she returned her card, the receptionist looked up at Miranda and was met with the cold gaze of those brilliantly blue eyes.

"Have a good day, Ms. Lockhart," the receptionist said nervously, trying to maintain eye contact as a mark of respect to Miranda before realising it was probably having the opposite effect on her. Miranda moved on without a word. She walked past the queue of visitors placing their bags on a conveyor belt to be scanned. As she approached the gate, Miranda regretted not leaving something in her handbag, as well as not having a handbag. Miranda hated carrying bags and preferred to keep everything on her person, which makes this whole security ruse slightly more difficult.

As she walked past the gate, the alarm sounded accordingly.

In front of her was a young man and an elderly one which Miranda knew as agent Tanner. Tanner was preoccupied with searching a member of the public so the role of searching her fell to the younger man, who took to the task with some enthusiasm. She sighed and forced a smile,

Miranda watched him closely. She could see the gears turning in this young man's head as he patted her down, trying to navigate the thin line between searching and groping. Miranda sighed again. She could sense the unease, him getting slightly sweaty from the physical exertion and the physical arousal. Miranda hadn't realised it, but her fake smile had now turned into a scowl, her mouth muscles unable to hide her contempt for the young man.

And then, he *felt* it.

Miranda smiled, genuinely this time, as the realisation dawned on his face.

He looked nervous now. Has no-one taught this boy anything?

Thankfully, Tanner stepped in. The old hand searched Miranda with the agility of experience and a vanished libido - a fact that meant most elderly men are unable to become physically aroused by something as asinine as simply having his hands on the body of a woman. When Tanner got to her waist, he avoided pressing too hard against her hips. Miranda smiled. Tanner knew that if his hand pressed any harder, the outline of her gun would show through her coat.

Tanner smiled back; a warm, paternal smile. Miranda always liked to imagine that Tanner was searching her to make sure she *was* armed instead of checking to make sure she wasn't. Her gaze returned to the boy, scowling again without realising it, before exchanging one last glance with Tanner. Miranda smiled at the latter; a wide, genuine smile. Safe in the knowledge that if Tanner ever erred on the wrong side of the line between searching and groping, she wouldn't even need to resort to her gun. After all, an elderly pervert is easier to kill than a young one.

On one of the terraces, among the vegetation of the Sky Garden sat a young man, waiting for her. As Miranda approached him, he quickly took his earphones out and put them in his pocket and jumped to his feet like a schoolboy about to be told off.

Miranda loathed Jonathan and his ilk and no doubt it showed at times. Rich, entitled, cocksure, affable womanisers with a boyish charm; *a potent combination*. Unfortunately, many young women have and many more will fall victim to their manipulations. Less fortunate still is the fact men like that have always existed and will continue to exist. If you control them, at least they could serve a higher purpose and so far, this one has proven himself to be incredibly useful.

Jonathan got into the service the same way all unqualified men did in any industry - *nepotism*. That, and the fact the secret service still recruits disproportionately from the upper class. After all, you can't *teach* a man to have an undeserved sense of entitlement; they have to be *born* with it. Now usually,

the right name is no guarantee of pedigree but in Jonathan's case, he really did remind Miranda of his father. Even after the scandal, the Drake family name was still held in high esteem within the service.

So it was that when Miranda found herself in need of a particular 'expertise', she recruited from within the family. Finding an agent willing to use their bodies in this way is not as easy one would think; there is no contract that could compel an agent to do something they do not want to.

Thus, it is easier to train a whore to be a spy, than to convince a spy to act like a whore. And *Jonathan Drake* was the biggest man-whore around.

When she sat down, Drake gave Miranda about a dozen highly sensitive documents and the work phones of the two women in whom she was interested. Miranda, as always, was shocked at his efficiency and had to stifle these feelings as she listened to Drake regale her with the stories of his conquests.

She could not help but be impressed. In the old days, it would have taken several agents months to obtain the kind of information Drake managed in just over a week. You don't need to tap their phones, or watch their movements or plant listening devices in their office; just find a personal assistant desperate enough for a man's affection and you get the *whole bloody phone*. Now you can clone it and return it to the unsuspecting victim and the person you're spying on is none the wiser that his whole security network has been compromised by one gullible woman and one horny man-child.

It's combining the two oldest professions in the world – *spying* and *prostitution*.

Suddenly, Miranda's phone vibrated. She looked down at it whilst pretending to listen to Drake, who continued on without noticing he had lost his audience like the self-obsessed narcissist he is.

It was a message for a private hire car.

Jaguar F-Type
SW18 PMJ

Miranda interrupted the boy and shoved the two phones back into his hands.

"Take these to Carter, get them cloned, and then return them - *discreetly*." With that, Miranda got up and walked away.

"I will. Don't you worry." Jonathan shouted, with enthusiasm and cocksure certainty.

At those words, Miranda glanced back, let off a half-smile before she could help herself, and walked on without a word. Whilst she could never admit it, neither to him nor to herself, she was charmed by the young man's brash attitude and boyish charm. *See? A potent combination.*

Miranda turned back to the message on her phone:

The car you requested is on its way.

Miranda, of course, made no such request, which could only mean that a request was being made of her.

SW18 indicated the meeting place - Belgrave Square in west London.

PMJ indicated both the name and importance of the meeting; this was a request from the very top.

This was a meeting with Pandora.

Chapter 3 Belgrave Square

Miranda returned to the base of the tower and got into the Jag. The driver recognised Miranda and knew she preferred to be driven in silence, so the two did not exchange a single word as he drove through central London with the sirens on pretending to be plain-clothes officers, switching them off when he arrived at the streets of Chelsea before stopping at a 19th century garden square.

Belgrave Square was the other favoured meeting place of the Church, the name given to members in the inner circle of the service. It was an apt choice indeed, euphemistically referring to the secret service's many missions around the world. Heading this Church was Pandora Milton-Jones, who was sat on a bench waiting for Miranda.

Miranda walked briskly, and languidly towards her boss; hurried but hesitant about what awaited her. She walked towards the naked man, with arms and legs outstretched to touch a square and a circle to indicate a perfectly proportioned body - *An Homage to Leonard*, the statue seemed to greet her every time she came.

She was slightly annoyed to be here; everyone else in the Church was happy to meet in the public garden at Fenchurch Street, in the eastern heart of London's financial district, Pandora preferred this garden in the west - a site of royalty, foreign dignitaries and *old* money; a metaphor for the woman herself.

Pandora Milton-Jones operated primarily within that demographic; she had a wealth of knowledge, and a knowledge of wealth, making her perfectly suited as the head of British intelligence. That, and being able to speaking over ten languages, which she would practice with the many European ambassadors, Arab sheikhs and Russian oligarchs who made their home around Belgrave Square.

Pandora Milton-Jones looked - in the popular parlance of the tabloids - beautiful, comma, *for her age*. Without the foundation, the powder and the ritual of moisturisers, Pandora would look all sixty-five years of her age. *With* all the makeup, however, she could easily pass for younger; fifteen years younger if one did not know her and was being polite, ten if one knew her a little and was being complimentary, and five if one knew her well and was being realistic.

For Miranda, she looked *five* years younger.

Miranda would often look at her boss' continuing attempts to look younger and think: *if I still have to look good at her age, kill me now*.

Miranda looked forward to retirement, not from work or a career, but from the similarly arduous task of having to maintain her appearance. Miranda looked forward to the day when she no longer had to look beautiful, or sensual, or available, or whatever society required. If she ever lives to Pandora's age, and this was a big *'if'* given the nature of her job, she fully intends to not *give a damn*. She would

gather every pair of heels she ever owned and set fire to them for the years of pain they have caused her, although she has not worn them in quite a while.

Miranda preferred combat boots and a trusty trenchcoat.

Pandora was wearing a pressed, brilliantly white blazer which contrasted with Miranda's beige, creased, coat. Miranda wore it with the kind of rugged practicality required of field work, with sleeves rolled up. The younger woman dressed with a lack of vanity that highlighted her natural beauty, whilst the older woman's prim appearance compensated for her waning but still considerable beauty. Their contrasting dress sense formed the perfect metaphor for the mindset of the two women and exhibited an inverse correlation between age and clothes; the more ironed one's clothes were the more wrinkled one's skin, as if - over time - creases migrated from fabric to face.

Miranda was in no hurry to meet her boss; the more time she spent with this woman, the more cynical her perspective on the human condition became. If this woman had not saved her life, Miranda would never have worked for the service, let alone for Pandora.

It was Pandora who taught her never to feel sympathy for any woman stupid enough to fall for her honey traps, men like *Jonathan*. For Pandora, these women were either tools or fools. It is not difficult to tell the difference: if she had information, she was a tool; if she did not, she was a fool. In either case, the best position to take with regards to these women is to be as dispassionate as possible. These women were tools first, fools second – just some dumb bitch to be manipulated to further her goals.

Pandora had a phrase that summarised her beliefs - the 'glass ceiling of shared victimhood' was, as she argued, a myth that men created to keep women down. She detested the notion that somehow, as a woman - the plight of one is the plight of all.

Men have no qualms about exploiting other men; why, then, should women?

To be fair, Pandora Jones had never suffered any of the indignities associated with her gender. She had always been rich and she had always been powerful and she had always been feared. Men have either respected her as an equal, or they had knelt at her feet; not for matrimony, not *voluntarily*. It was the default position you found yourself in after encountering her bodyguards: on your knees, hands tied behind your back with a gun pointing at your head. If the negotiation or interrogation goes wrong, professional cleaners are always at hand to remove all blood, bone and brain matter as soon as a bullet has made its way through your skull. Interrogation, negotiation or execution; a meeting Pandora Milton-Jones is not meant to be a pleasant experience.

Miranda was one of the few people with whom Pandora actually had a *conversation*.

"How are we, Miranda?" she began as Miranda neared.

Miranda was a little taken aback. Pandora wasn't even looking at her as she spoke.

"Wow, we haven't done small talk in a while," said Miranda. This was true, Pandora was not the type to be wasteful with her time.

“Have we not?” Pandora replied with a forced smile and a note of knowing flippancy in her voice. At this point, she raised her head. Pandora had that wonderful quality of looking past you, with eyes pointing in your general direction, not deeming the recipient of her gaze worthy of her full attention.

“It’s been a while.” said Miranda, mockingly.

“Well, things have been busy before.”

“Well they’re even busier now. Aren’t you up to date?” inquired Miranda.

“What, another possible terrorist attack? Come on, What else is new?” she replied, nonchalantly.

Pandora’s attitude towards a possible loss of life is not just cavalier - she genuinely does not care.

“I need you to look into something much more interesting.”

When Miranda was seated, Pandora handed her a file. Although physical copies of anything are rare these days, it is still preferred by the more old-fashioned heads like Pandora, who believe the physical transfer of files to be more secure in a digital world, which ironically, is true.

Miranda opened the file.

She read the code at the top of the file: A, K, dash, four, seven. Miranda chuckled silently at the numerical designation as she had done the last time she read this file and all the times before that. *It never gets old.* Normally, a file’s alphanumeric designation was random, but in this particular case it was laughably appropriate because AK-47 referred to none other than Petrov Kalashnikov. Yes, an *actual* Kalashnikov; proof, if proof were needed that the normally humourless analysts in the service were *not* without a sense of humour.

Miranda read quickly, scanning for the important details, before Pandora cut her off:

“He’s been making some interesting trades, Petrov, and I’ll like you to find out why.” she summarised.

“Well, if you’d come round to HQ we’re literally surrounded by thousands of traders who can help you with that.” Miranda responded sarcastically. “Why bother me with it?”

“Just read the ledger, he’s betting against the market.”

Miranda continued reading and then paused when she noticed the quality of the paper; these were not printed copies of said ledger, it *was* the ledger. Physical documents may be more secure but the problem is there’s only one copy of it. Miranda looked up at Pandora as the realisation dawned on her.

“I assume these were stolen?” surmised Miranda.

“Yes.”

“Petrov’s going to find out.”

“Yes.” Pandora replied - she was switching to her patronising one word answers now.

“He’s already found out, hasn’t he?” Miranda added. Pandora did not say a word.

That’s why. Pandora’s other agents messed up.

Miranda looked at Pandora whilst the latter stared into the distance. Pandora was not the type of person to acknowledge her own mistakes. The closest thing to an admission was her pursed lips. Pandora did not have to say it: Petrov knows they were watching him.

How do you spy on someone who already knows they’re being watched?

“I trust you know what to do.” said Pandora after a while.

“...Leave it with me.” Miranda sighed, already thinking ahead.

It would appear that the young Jonathan is due for a promotion.

With that, Pandora got up to leave whilst Miranda watched her, the file with the ledger still opened in her hands.

Then it happened.

It was close.

Miranda heard it first.

Then she heard nothing else.

Her training kicked in.

Head down, ears still ringing, she moved to cover Pandora.

Miranda looked up, she looked around, barely turning three-sixty, before -

Head down, now!

Head still down, Miranda moved away whilst Pandora’s men rushed to protect her.

She did not remember what happened after that.

Everything happened quickly.

Two thunderclaps. One right after the other.

The unmistakable sound of two bombs going off in central London.

