

# Secret Agent

---

*Read through the text and decide which of the four alternatives you think is correct. Mark your choice by writing one of the letters A, B, C or D in the boxes at the bottom of the following pages.*

---

*Rebecca appears to live a quiet life as a housewife in the south of England. But she also works as an undercover agent, investigating the world's illegal trade in tiger products, ivory and whale meat. A reporter team followed her on her latest mission—a three-week trip to Singapore and South Korea.*

FOUR o'clock in the morning in a Singapore hotel room. Rebecca lies in bed, wide awake. She can't go back to sleep; too many things are running through her head.

Rebecca is a secret agent. She has come here to track down the people who violate international laws by illegally trading in products from endangered species. During her search she will slip in and out of various roles—businesswoman, tourist, rich man's daughter. Her most important tool is a secret video camera, mounted in her handbag. With it she will gather damning evidence.

This particular mission is to gather hard facts to back up the claims of environmental organisations lobbying the meeting of the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. It

is a joint assignment for two small groups from the United States—the Endangered Species Project and the Global Crime Research Group.

Our task is to follow her at a safe distance, taking great care not to blow her cover during the trip. The photographs of her we will shoot secretly, too. The consequences of exposure could be devastating.

Rebecca is understandably anxious. But not too anxious; she has done this before and she is perfectly suited to investigations in Asia. Now aged 32, she was born in Taiwan and doesn't arouse the same suspicions as westerners. She is also a natural actor and she understands the local cultures.

“I know the Asian people's mentality. That's why I investigate mostly in the Asian area, she explains. “The dealers here know that the Taiwanese also illegally trade in animal products. I can get them to trust me. And being a woman I can allay the doubts of a suspicious trader with a charming smile. Often posing as a simple housewife or a dutiful daughter, I can ask for forbidden goods without anybody ever suspecting me of being a spy.”



- 1 What is Rebecca's mission?
  - A To find proof of illegal trade in animal products
  - B To warn against dangerous medicines
  - C To make up a list of bad hotels
  - D To take part in a convention
  
- 2 What makes it easy for her to take pictures?
  - A She is very clever with her hands
  - B She has a hidden video camera
  - C She is a great charmer
  - D She is taken for a tourist
  
- 3 Why is Rebecca ideal for her job?
  - A She is already a well-known scientist
  - B She knows the area and the people
  - C She can get help from relatives
  - D She has trained as an actress

Eight o'clock: Rebecca picks up the phone and dials the number of an import-export company. She introduces herself as a businesswoman from Taipeh and hints that she's looking for a discreet supplier of

tiger products. The man at the other end of the line reacts immediately. He will pick her up within half an hour.

Now Rebecca is growing increasingly nervous. When they meet she presents her business card, a fake, specially printed for this case. The cover works. Immediately after arriving at the company's headquarters she excuses herself, locks herself in the ladies' lavatory and activates her camera. Back in the office she places her handbag beside her on the sofa, aiming the wide-angle lens to cover the whole room.

At first the talks run smoothly. Then suddenly one of the men wonders why he's never heard of her company in Taiwan. He's been in the business for years and knows all the branches in Taipeh. This seems strange to him.

Rebecca pauses briefly but she came prepared. "Up to now my father has pulled the strings using various front companies," she replies calmly, leaning back in her chair. "But father thinks I am now ready to take over and he has bought and organised for me a business with a brand new name."

They buy it. It's a relieved Rebecca who says good-bye two hours later—relieved to have emerged safely from this tricky situation and pleased to have made the most of the encounter. It had been a rewarding conversation: the men had revealed all the vital information about their business practices—sources of supply, means of delivery abroad, customs-evasion techniques, payments, etc. ... Now they are looking forward to the future partnership with their new Taiwanese connection.

## Answers

1     2     3



- 4 What is said about Rebecca's contact with the import-export company?
- A She was treated as a potential customer
  - B They were not interested at first
  - C A secret meeting place was suggested
  - D They were not used to dealing with women
- 5 Why did one of the men get suspicious?
- A He thought her dialect was strange
  - B He had never heard of her firm
  - C He had never met her father
  - D He thought it was a curious request from a young girl
- 6 How did Rebecca handle the situation?
- A She pulled some strings
  - B She pretended to be sorry
  - C She told a lie
  - D She said her father was guilty
- 7 How does Rebecca sum up her first meeting?
- A She hadn't learnt very much
  - B She had wasted everybody's time
  - C She thought the men had looked down on her
  - D She got a lot of useful information

We move on to Chinatown.

For more than 1,000 years the Chinese have believed in the healing powers of tiger products. The whole animal is transformed into pills, creams, powders, plasters and more. The eyeballs are supposed to heal epilepsy and malaria; the tail, various skin diseases; the bile is good against convulsions in children; the whiskers fight toothache and the brain is supposed to cure laziness and pimples. The bones are mainly prescribed for rheumatism.

"Fear? I was never really scared," says Rebecca, back at the hotel. "I concentrate on my job, on my goals. That helps. But I'm well aware of the danger. If my cover was blown while I was there, it would mean big trouble for me. The tension is often enormous."

The next day we came across a small antiques and souvenir shop near the Merlion statue —half lion, half fish—that stands at the mouth of Singapore River. In the shop window are whale teeth with fine engravings, artistically carved ivory tusks and exotic furs. This time we accompany Rebecca pretending to be ordinary tourists. We show an interest in various valuables. She activates her camera.

The forbidden treasures mostly come from sailors. Russian sailors visit him regularly, boasts Ronnie, the owner. His best clients come from the United States. "Filthy rich men," he says. "They fly over and buy loads of things from my shop."

## Answers

4

5

6

7



- 8 Why have tigers been hunted almost to extinction?
- A Various parts of the animal are used as medicine
  - B Sooner or later they become man-eaters
  - C Some areas have become unsafe
  - D They spread dangerous diseases
- 9 How can Rebecca keep her nerves under control?
- A She keeps reminding herself she's safe
  - B She keeps her mind on the job
  - C She tries to pretend it is a dream
  - D She feels nothing bad can happen
- 10 What are we told about the souvenir shop-owner?
- A He does not say very much
  - B He says business has gone down
  - C His best customers are wealthy Americans
  - D He gets most of his stuff from tourists

The next morning she leaves, her mission accomplished.

Her flight back to England goes via Singapore. There good news awaits her. The government has passed a law reinforcing

the ban on trade in endangered species and setting more severe punishments for violation effective from November 4, 1994.

As to her own future, Rebecca says she will not be able to do this job for very much longer: there is too much stress. "I am looking forward to going back home and to seeing Michael (her husband)." And she has a deal with him: as soon as they have children, she will quit her dangerous life as a spy and devote herself to her family.

- 11 What does she learn when she gets to Singapore?
- A Trading in all animal products will be banned
  - B Her cover had been blown
  - C Sailors had been caught smuggling
  - D Stricter laws have been passed
- 12 How does Rebecca look upon her future?
- A She wants to carry on being an agent
  - B She is making plans for her baby
  - C She is thinking of giving up the job
  - D She is rather pessimistic

## Answers

8  9  10  11  12

Points  
12