stop him.

(signed)

Leon Androvitch Vorontsov.

TO: Deputy Chief, Middle East Desk

FROM: Chairman, Committee for State Security

DATE: 24 May 1968

Comrade Vorontsov:-

Your recommendation is approved.

(signed)

Andropov.

Feliks:-

Keep an eye on this kid. The little bastard wants your job, and if you're not careful I'll have to give it to him.

Yuri.

*

This is how Nat Dickstein lost his tail.

He spent a day in and around the town near the nuclear power station, travelling by bus and taxi, driving a hired car, and walking. By the end of the day he had identified the three vehicles - the grey Opel, a dirty little flatbed truck, and a German Ford - and five of the men in the surveillance team. The size of the team explained why he had not sniffed the surveillance earlier: they had been able to switch cars and personnel continually. The trip to the power station, a long there-and-back journey on a country road with very little traffic, explained why the team had finally blown themselves.

The next day he drove out of town and on to the autoroute. The Ford followed him for a few miles, then the grey Opel took over. There were two men in each car. There would be two more in the flatbed truck, plus one at his hotel.

The Opel was still with him when he found the right spot for his dodge. There was a pedestrian bridge over the road, in a place where there were no turn-offs for four or five miles in either direction.

Dickstein pulled over to the shoulder, stopped the car, got out, and lifted the bonnet. He looked inside for a few minutes. The grey Opel disappeared up ahead, and the Ford went by a minute later. Dickstein reckoned the Ford would wait at the next turn-off, and the Opel would come back on the opposite side of the road to see what he was doing.

He took a collapsible warning triangle from the boot of the car and stood it behind the offside rear wheel.

The Opel passed him on the opposite side of the autoroute.

Dickstein began to walk.

When he got off the autoroute he caught the first bus he saw, and rode it until it came to a town. On the journey he spotted each of the three surveillance vehicles at different times.

They had fallen for it.

He took a taxi from the town, and got out close to his car but on the wrong side of the autoroute. The Opel went by. The Ford pulled off the road a couple of hundred yards behind him.

Dickstein crossed the autoroute on the pedestrian bridge.

One of the men in the Ford got out and began to follow him, then seemed to realise what was happening and ran back to the car.

Dickstein folded up the warning triangle and got behind the

wheel of the hired car. All the surveillance ~~xx~~ vehicles were now on the wrong side of the autoroute, and would have to go all the way to the next junction before they could cross over and come after him. He probably had a clear ten minutes start on them.

He pulled away, heading for Paris, humming a chant that came from the football terraces of West Ham: 'Easy, easy, eeee-zeee.'

*

Life is not a popularity contest, especially in the KGB. Leon Vorontsov was now very unpopular with Old Feliks, his boss, and with all those in the section loyal to Feliks. Nevertheless, his career had taken a big step forward. The Qattara business had brought him to the attention of the higher-ups, and then he had succeeded in impressing Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB and confidante of Leonid Brezhnev. The fact that Feliks was boiling with anger at the way he had been by-passed was the price you had to pay for ambition. Vorontsov was already dreaming of the finely stitched, stylishly cut dark blue English suit he would buy when he got a pass for Section 100 on the third floor of the GUM department store.

But first he had to put together a team which would catch The Pirate.

He huddled inside his wolf fur coat as the unheated Volga limousine took him through the wide, straight streets of Novosibirsk, the largest city of Siberia. Because he had orders signed by Andropov personally, he was able to choose from the entire 110 000 employees of the KGB. Vorontsov himself worked for the First Chief Directorate, responsible for the collection and analysis of information. Most of the field agents were attached to the Second Chief Directorate, the largest KGB department, involved in

subversion, sabotage, treason, economic espionage, and any internal police work considered politically sensitive. But the man Vorontsov was going to see was with the Third Directorate, which had been called Smersh until that name got a lot of embarrassing publicity in the West.

The Third did counter-espionage and special operations, and it employed some of the bravest, cleverest, nastiest agents in the world.

The file photograph had shown a tall, thin man of about fifty, with close-cropped greying hair, a high forehead, and a calm, impassive expression: a face that could not be read. The man was described as a first-class field agent with considerable skills of administration and leadership. He held the rank of Colonel. His days of handling firearms and tailing people were long over: he was a man who sat in hotel rooms and told others where to go and what to do. He had always worked in Western Europe. His greatest coup had been the 'springing' of a convicted agent from a British jail called Wormwood Scrubs. But spycatching was his field, and his talents were for interrogation, detection, and the setting of traps for the unwary.

The car turned into a street called Krasny Prospekt and stopped outside a massive four-storey building set apart from the other houses. This was KGB school No. 311. The man Vorontsov wanted to see had been lecturing here for the past six months, but his file included a letter from him to his Director requesting that he be returned to active service despite his age.

Inside the building, the duty officer saluted Vorontsov and checked his papers, then said: 'There is a lecture in progress at the moment, sir, but the Principal would be pleased to receive you

in his office.'

'I'd prefer to sit in on the lecture,' said Vorontsov.

A guard led him through the building. They passed laboratories, a gymnasium, and the mess hall. Vorontsov dismissed the guard and slipped into the back of the lecture theatre, taking a seat on the end of a row.

The file photograph had been accurate but inadequate. The man behind the lectern was indeed tall, thin, greying, and impassive. But there was nothing of the professor about him. He had a tremendous presence. His dark, deep-set eyes flashed while he talked; he was like a cat as he moved from lectern to blackboard and back again; his sentences were crisp and economical, delivered in a calm, level voice that should have been monotonous but somehow was not. He never smiled.

The lecture itself had finished, and the trainee spies were asking questions. The talk had apparently been about recruitment of civilians as informants. One of the students asked: 'How do you recruit a man who has no weaknesses?'

'You've failed to understand the technical use of the word "weakness",' the lecturer replied. 'It does not mean just a vice, like gambling or homosexuality, which you can threaten to expose. The perfect family man can be recruited by threats against his family. The careerist can be recruited by putting his career in jeopardy. A businessman? We can set fire to his shop, bomb his factory, send anonymous letters to his clients. A man's weakness is anything he loves.'

He had been a chess champion in his youth, Vorontsov recalled. It figured. He would have played carefully, defensively, with the patience of a cat waiting outside a mousehole.

The class ended and the students trooped out. Vorontsov remained in his seat. The lecturer came up the aisle toward him.

Vorontsov watched him approach. He was convinced this was the right man. On top of his many talents, he had been at Oxford University with Nat Dickstein. Vorontsov wondered whether the two men had ever played chess.

The lecturer held out his hand to shake. 'I'm David Rostov,' he said.

Vorontsov stood up. 'Comrade Colonel, your teaching days are over.'

*

Egyptian Intelligence had a big team in Rome, so it was easy for Mahmoud, the tall Arab double agent, to find an excuse to go there in order to meet with Pierre Borg, the head of the Mossad.

They went by devious routes to a homosexual bath-house. There, in the steam room, their eyes met; and, like secret lovers, they went side by side, not looking at one another, into a private room with a bed.

Borg switched on the device that made the bed vibrate. Its hum would interfere with any listening devices in the room. The two men stood close together and spoke in low voices. Naked but for the towels around their waists, they made an odd couple: Mahmoud's body was lean and dark brown, with very little hair; Borg was white except for his tanned face and hands, his body softly plump, with a carpet of greying hair across his shoulders.

Mahmoud said: 'I've put a man into Qattara.'

'That was clever,' Borg said. 'Your department isn't even involved in the project.'

'I have a cousin in Military Intelligence.'

'Okay. Who is the man in Qattara?'

'Saman Hussein, one of yours.'

'Good. What did he find?'

'The construction work is finished. They've built the reactor housing, plus an administration block, staff quarters, and an airstrip. They're much farther ahead than anyone imagined.'

'What about the reactor itself?'

'They're working on it now. It's hard to say how long it will take - there's a certain amount of precision work.'

'Are they going to be able to manage that?' Borg wondered. 'I mean, all those complex control systems ... '

'The controls don't need to be sophisticated, I understand. You slow the speed of the nuclear reaction simply by shoving metal rods into the atomic pile. Anyway, there's been another development. Saman found the place crawling with Russians.'

Borg said: 'Oh, fuck.'

'So now I guess they'll have all the fancy electronics they need.'

'This is bad news,'

'There's worse. Dickstein is blown.'

Borg stared at Mahmoud, thunderstruck. The Arab had never known him to show his emotions so plainly. 'Blown?' he said. 'How did the prick manage that?'

'He was recognised by an agent of ours in Luxembourg. Apparently it was just a chance meeting. The agent is called Yasif Hassan. He's small fry - works for a Lebanese bank and keeps an eye on visiting Israelis. Of course, my people recognised the name Dickstein - '

'He's using his real name?' Borg said incredulously.

'I don't think so. This Hassan knew him from way back.'

Borg shook his head slowly. 'You wouldn't think we were the Chosen People, with our luck.'

'We put Dickstein under surveillance and informed Moscow,' Mahmoud continued. 'He lost the surveillance team quite quickly, of course; but Moscow is putting together a big effort to find him again.'

'Terrific. The Egyptians are well ahead with their reactor; the Russians are helping them; Dickstein is blown; and the KGB is putting a team on him. We could lose this race, do you realise that?'

'You'll have to contact Dickstein and tell him,' Mahmoud said. 'Where is he now?'

'Fucked if I know,' said Pierre Borg.

Six

The only completely innocent person to be ruined by the spies during this affair of the yellowcake was the Euratom official whom Dickstein nicknamed Stiffcollar.

After losing the Egyptian surveillance team Dickstein returned to Luxembourg by road, for he guessed they would have set a twenty-four-hours-a-day watch for him at Luxembourg airport. And, since they had the number of his rented car, he stopped off in Paris to check it in and hire another one from a different company.

On his first evening in Luxembourg he went to the discreet nightclub in the Rue Dicks and sat alone, sipping beer, waiting for Stiffcollar to come in. It was the first club of this kind he had been to, and he was mildly surprised to find it so unexceptionable. A few of the men wore light make-up, there were a couple of outrageous queens camping it up by the bar, and a very pretty girl was holding hands with an older woman in trousers; but most of the customers were normally dressed by the standards of peacock Europe, and there was no-one in drag.

At eight-thirty Stiffcollar's fair-haired friend came in, wearing the same maroon double-breasted jacket. He was a younger man, perhaps twenty-five or thirty, broad-shouldered and in good shape. He ~~xak~~ walked across to the booth they had occupied last time. He was graceful, like a dancer: Dickstein thought he might be a goalkeeper in a soccer team. The booth was vacant. If the couple met here every night it was probably kept for them.

The fair-haired man ordered a drink and looked at his watch. He did not see Dickstein observing him. Stiffcollar entered a few minutes later. He wore a red V-necked sweater and a white shirt with

a button-down collar. As before, he went straight to the table where his friend sat waiting. They greeted each other with a double handshake. They seemed happy. Dickstein prepared to shatter their world.

He called a waiter. 'Please take a bottle of champagne to that table, for the man in the red sweater. And bring me another beer.'

The waiter brought his beer first, then took the champagne, in a bucket of ice, to Stiffcollar's table. Dickstein saw the waiter point him out to the couple. He raised his beer glass in a toast, and smiled. Stiffcollar recognised him and looked worried.

Dickstein left his table and went to the ~~k~~ cloakroom. He washed his face, killing time. After a couple of minutes Stiffcollar's friend came in. The young man combed his hair, waiting for a third man to leave the room. Then he spoke to Dickstein.

'My friend wants you to leave him alone.'

Dickstein gave a nasty smile. 'Let him tell me so himself.'

'You're a journalist, aren't you? What if your editor were to hear that you come to places like this?'

'I'm freelance.'

The young man came closer. He was five inches taller than Dickstein, and at least thirty pounds heavier. 'You're to leave us alone,' he said.

'No.'

'Why are you doing this? What do you want?'

'I'm not interested in you, pretty boy. You'd better go home while I talk to your friend.'

'Damn you,' said the young man, and he grabbed the lapels of Dickstein's jacket in one large hand. He drew back his other

arm and made a fist. He never landed the punch.

With his fingers, Dickstein poked the young man in the eyes. He jerked his head back and to the side. Dickstein stepped inside the swinging arm and hit him in the belly, very hard. The breath rattled out of him and he doubled over, turning away. Dickstein punched him once again, very precisely, on the bridge of the nose. Something cracked, and blood spurted. The young man collapsed on the tiled floor.

Dickstein straightened his tie, smoothed his hair with his hands, and went out. In the club, the cabaret had begun, and the German guitarist was singing a song about a gay policeman. Dickstein paid his bill and left. As he went he saw Stiffcollar, looking worried, making his way to the cloakroom.

On the street it was a mild summer night, but Dickstein was shivering. He walked a little way, then went into a bar and ordered brandy. It was a low-class place, noisy and smokey, with a television set on the counter. Dickstein carried his drink to a corner table and sat facing the wall.

The fight in the cloakroom would not be reported to the police. It would look like a quarrel over a lover, and neither Stiffcollar nor the club management would want to bring that sort of thing to official notice. Stiffcollar would take his friend to a doctor, saying he had walked into a door.

Dickstein drank the brandy and stopped shivering. There was, he thought, no way to be a spy without doing things like this. And there was no way to be a nation, in this world, without having spies. And without a nation Dickstein could not feel safe. It did not seem possible to live honorably. Even if he gave up this profession, others would become spies and do evil on his behalf, and that was

almost as bad. You had to be bad to live. Dickstein recalled that a Nazi camp doctor called Peder had said much the same.

He had long ago decided that life was not about right and wrong, but about winning and losing. Still there were times when that philosophy gave him no consolation.

He left the bar and went into the street, heading for Stiffcollar's home. He had to press his advantage while the man was demoralised. He reached the narrow cobbled street within a few minutes, and stood guard opposite the old terraced house. There was no light in the attic window.

The night became cooler as he waited. He began to pace up and down. European weather was dismal. At this time of year Israel would be glorious: long sunny days and warm nights; hard physical work by day, companionship and laughter in the evenings. Dickstein wished he could go home.

At last Stiffcollar and his friend returned. The friend's head was wrapped in bandages, and he was obviously having trouble seeing: he walked with one hand on Stiffcollar's arm, like a blind man. They stopped outside the house while Stiffcollar fumbled for his key. Dickstein crossed the road and approached them. They had their backs to him, and his shoes made no noise.

Stiffcollar opened the door, turned to help his friend, and saw Dickstein. He jumped with shock. 'Oh, God!'

'What is it? What is it?' the friend said.

'It's him.'

Dickstein said: 'I have to talk to you.'

'Call the police,' said the friend.

Stiffcollar took his friend's arm and began to lead him through the door. Dickstein put out a hand and stopped them.

Dickstein said: 'You'll have to let me in. Otherwise I'll create a scene in the street.'

Stiffcollar said: 'He'll make our lives miserable until he gets what he wants.'

'But what does he want?'

'I'll tell you in a minute,' Dickstein said. He walked into the house ahead of them and started up the stairs.

After a moment's hesitation, they followed.

The three men climbed the stairs to the top. Stiffcollar unlocked the door to the attic flat, and they went in. Dickstein looked around. It was bigger than he imagined, and very elegantly decorated with period furniture, striped wallpaper, and lots of plants and pictures. Stiffcollar put his friend in a chair, then took a cigarette from a box, lit it with a table lighter, and put it in his friend's mouth. They sat close together, waiting for Dickstein to speak.

'I'm a journalist,' Dickstein began.

Stiffcollar interrupted: 'Journalists don't beat people up.'

'I didn't beat him up. I hit him twice.'

'Why?'

'He attacked me, didn't he tell you?'

'I don't believe you,' said Stiffcollar.

'How much time would you like to spend arguing about it?'

'None.'

'Good. I want a story about Euratom. A good story - my career needs it. Now, then, one possibility is the prevalence of homosexuals in positions of responsibility within the organisation.'

'You're a lousy bastard,' said Stiffcollar's friend.

'You'd better believe it,' Dickstein told him. 'I'll drop

the story only if I get a better one.'

Stiffcollar ran a hand across his grey-tipped hair. Dickstein noticed that he wore clear nail varnish. 'I think I understand this,' the official said.

'What? What do you understand?' said his friend.

'He wants information.'

'That's right,' said Dickstein. Stiffcollar was looking relieved. Now was the time to be a little friendly, to come across as a human being, to let them think that things might not be so bad after all. Dickstein got up. There was whisky in a decanter on a hihgly-polished side table. He poured small shots into three glasses as he said: 'Look, you're vulnerable and I've picked on you, and I expect you to hate me for that; but I'm not going to go on pretending to hate you. I'm a bastard and I'm using you, and that's all there is to it. Except that I'm drinking your booze as well.' He handed them drinks and sat down again.

There was a pause, then Stiffcollar said: 'What is it you want to know?'

'Well, now, Euratom keeps records of all movements of fissile materials into, out of, and within the member countries, right?'

'Yes.'

'To be more precise: Before anyone can move an ounce of uranium from A to B he has to ask your permission.'

'Yes.'

'Complete records are kept of all permits given.'

'The records are ~~all~~ on a computer.'

'I know. If asked, the computer would print out a list of all future uranium shipments for which permission has been given.'

'It does, regularly. Such a list is circulated once a month

within the office.'

'Splendid,' said Dickstein. 'All I want is that list.'

There was a long silence. Stiffcollar drank some whisky. Dickstein had not touched his: the two beers and one large brandy he had already drunk this evening were more than he normally took in a fortnight.

The friend said: 'What do you want the list <u>for?</u>'

'I'm going to check all the shipments in a given month. I expect to be able to prove that what people do in reality bears little or no relation to what they tell Euratom.'

Stiffcollar said: 'I don't believe you. I think you're planning to steal some uranium.'

The man was not stupid, Dickstein thought. Aloud he said: 'Believe what you like. You've no choice but to give me the list.'

'I have,' Stiffcollar said. 'I'm going to resign the job.'

'If you do,' Dickstein said slowly, 'I will beat your friend into a pulp.'

'We'll go to the police!' the friend said.

'I would go away,' Dickstein said. 'Perhaps for a year. But I would come back. And I'd find you. And I will very nearly kill you. Your face will be unrecognisable.'

Stiffcollar said: 'You're no journalist.'

'It really makes no difference what I am, does it? You know I can do what I threaten.'

'Yes,' Stiffcollar said. He buried his face in his hands.

'The printout will be bulky,' Dickstein said gently.

Stiffcollar nodded without looking up.

'Is you briefcase searched when you leave the office?'

He shook his head.

'Are the printouts supposed to be kept under lock and key?'

'No.' Stiffcollar looked at him. 'This stuff is classified Confidential, rather than Secret.'

'Good. Now, you'll need tomorrow to think about the details - which copy of the printout to take, exactly what you'll tell your secretary, and so on. The day after tomorrow you'll bring the printout home. You'll find a note from me waiting for you. The note will tell you how to deliver the document to me.' Dickstein smiled. 'After that, you'll probably never see me again.'

Stiffcollar said: 'By God, I hope so.'

Dickstein stood up. 'You'd rather not be bothered by phone calls for a while,' he said. He found the telephone and pulled the cord out of the wall. He went to the door and opened it.

The friend said: 'Are you afraid he'll change his mind?'

Dickstein said: 'You're the one who should be afraid of that.' He went out, closing the door softly behind him.

*

David Rostov thought, on balance, that socialism was the political system of the future. However, this credo did not burn inside him like a passion. He believed in communism the way most people believe in God: it was probably the truth, but he would not be greatly surprised or disappointed if he turned out to be wrong, and meanwhile it made very little difference to the way he lived. He did this work because he was good at it, and he wanted to get on in life.

He arrived in Luxembourg on a flight from Athens, having changed identities twice and planes three times since Moscow. He took this little precaution because, if you came direct from Russia, the local intelligence people sometimes made a note of your arrival and kept an eye on you, and that could be a nuisance.

There was nobody to meet him at the airport, of course. He got a taxi to the hotel.

Rostov was lukewarm on ideology, but he was keen as mustard on this assignment. For one thing, lecturing at a KGB school in Siberia was not the way he wanted to end his distinguished career. Andropov obviously thought Rostov was too old now for field work, played out; and this job was a chance to prove the old bastard wrong. Secondly, although Rostov had risen high in the Soviet meritocracy, he still fell short of his expectations. His wife no longer had to queue up in markets with the hoi polloi - she shopped at the Beryozka stores with the elite - and they had a big apartment and a little dacha on the Baltic; but Rostov reckoned he was clever enough to go one step higher, and get a second dacha in a Black Sea resort where he could keep his mistress, a chauffeur-driven Volga, invitations to private showings of decadent Western movies, and treatment in the Kremlin Clinic when old age began to creep up on him. If he could catch The Pirate he would get all that and maybe more. Thirdly, and most importantly, this was Nat Dickstein - smart as hell and slippery like a young salmon, a real challenge to Rostov's abilities.

He had told Hassan he would be using the name David Roberts. When he checked into the hotel under that name, the desk clerk gave him a message. He opened the envelope as he went up in the lift with the porter. It said simply: 'Room 179.'

He tipped the porter, picked up the phone and dialled 179. A voice said: 'Hello?'

'I'm in 142. Give me ten minutes, then come here for a conference.'

'Okay.'

Rostov hung up. There had been a time when he would have turned out the lights and sat watching the doorway with a gun in his hand until the other man arrived, in case of a trap. Nowadays he considered that sort of behaviour to be obsessive, and left it to the actors in the spy shows on Russian television. Elaborate personal precautions were not his style, not any more. He did not even have a gun, in case customs officials searched his luggage at airports. He did, however, have one or two KGB gadgets subtly concealed; like an electric toothbrush which gave out a hum calculated to swamp listening devices, a miniature Polaroid camera, and a bootlace garrote.

He unpacked his small case quickly. There was very little in it: a safety razor, a toothbrush, two wash-and-wear shirts (American) and a change of underwear. He made himself a drink from the room bar: scotch whisky was one of the perks of working abroad. After exactly ten minutes there was a knock on the door. Rostov opened it, and Yasif Hassan came in.

Rostov said: 'It is you!' and smiled broadly.

Hassan stared at him for a few moments, then recognition gradually dawned. 'The Russian!' he exclaimed. 'Well, I'm damned.'

They shook hands. Hassan sat down and Rostov made him a drink. 'It's almost twenty years,' Rostov said. 'What have you been doing?'

Hassan said: 'What has happened to me since we last met can be summed up in one word: Israel.'

'I see.' Rostov nodded. 'That's why you're in the game.'

'Yes. And you?'

Rostov smiled. 'I was in the game already when we first met. Why do you think they let me go to Oxford?'

'Well, I'm damned,' Hassan said again.

Rostov savoured his whisky. 'Bring me up to date,' he said. 'You spotted Dickstein, then your people picked him up again at Nice airport. What happened next?'

'He went on a guided tour of a nuclear power station, then shook his tail,' Hassan told him. 'Now we've lost him again.'

'Shit.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Don't worry. If he wasn't the kind of agent who is bound to spot a tail and lose it, we wouldn't be so worried about catching him. Was he using a car?'

'Yes. He hired a Peugeot at the airport.'

'Okay. Do we know anything about his movements before that, when he was here in Luxembourg?'

'He stayed at the Alfa hotel for a week under the name Ed Rodgers. He gave as his address the Paris bureau of a magazine called Science International. There is such a magazine; they do have a Paris address, but it's only a forwarding address for mail; they do use a freelance called Ed Rodgers, but they haven't heard from him for a year or so.'

Rostov nodded appreciatively. 'Nice and tight - a typical Mossad cover story. Anything else?'

'Yes. The night before he left, there was an incident in the Rue Dicks. Two men were found quite savagely beaten. It had the look of a professional job - neatly broken bones, you know the kind of thing. The police aren't doing anything about it: the men were known thieves, thought to have been laying in wait close to a homosexual nightclub.'

'Robbing the queers as they come out?'

'That's the general idea. Anyway, there's nothing to connect

Dickstein with the incident, except that he is capable of it and he was here at the time.'

'That's enough for a strong presumption,' Rostov said. 'Do you think Dickstein might be homosexual?'

'Yes. However, I gather there's nothing on his file, so he must have been very discreet.'

'Too discreet to go to queer clubs while he's on assignment, I think. No: my guess is he had another reason for going there. He may have an informant who is queer.' Rostov stood up and began to pace the room, deep in thought. 'All right, let's speculate for a moment. Why would he want to look around a nuclear power station?'

Hassan said: 'The Israelis have been on bad terms with the French since the Six-Day War. De Gaulle cut off the supply of arms. Perhaps the Mossad plans some retaliation ... like blowing up the reactor?'

Rostov shook his head. 'Even the Israelis aren't that irresponsible. Besides, why then would Dickstein need to come to Luxembourg?'

'Who knows?'

Rostov sat down again. 'What is there, here in Luxembourg? What makes it an important place? I mean, why are you here, for example?'

'It's an important European capital. My bank is here because the European Investment Bank is here. But there are several Common Market institutions here - in fact there is a European Centre over on the Kirchberg.'

'Which institutions?'

'The Secretariat of the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and the Court of Justice. Oh, and Euratom.'

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Rosov stared at Hassan. 'Is Euratom what it sounds like?'

'It's short for the European Atomic Energy Community, but everybody calls it ... Oh, ~~xxxx~~ I see what you're thinking ... Of course.'

'He comes to Luxembourg, where Euratom has its headquarters, then he goes to visit a nuclear reactor.' Rostov shrugged. 'It's something.'

'Listen, the French ~~xxxxx~~ helped the Israelis build their nuclear reactor. Now they've probably cut off their aid. Maybe Dickstein's after scientific secrets.'

'It must be something like that. Good thinking. Let's have another drink.' Rostov went to the ~~xixi~~ mini-bar.

Hassan said: 'How are we going to work, you and I? I've had no orders except to co-operate with you.'

Rostov poured whisky. 'Well, basically, we're the team, us two. We use Moscow for back-up research. I report to Moscow and you report to Cairo. In the field, we use the local talent, yours or ours, as we please. I think we'll end up using both. We might as well make the most of our pawns.' Cheers.'

'Good health.'

Rostov smiled: the English toasts reminded him of Oxford.

Hassan said: 'What's our first move?'

'We must make sure we see him if and when he comes back to Luxembourg.'

'I've got a man at the airport, twenty-four hours a day.'

'He'll have thought of that. We should cover some other spots as well. We need somebody at Euratom ... '

'The Jean-Monnet Building, yes.'

'We can cover the Alfa Hotel by bribing the desk clerk, but

he won't go back there. And put someone into the nightclub in the Rue Dicks.'

'Who shall we use for all this?'

'I'll bring in the Russian Embassy legals. You'll have to meet the team. Now then, you said he hired a car.'

'Yes, at Nice.'

'He'll have dumped it by now - he knows that you know the number. Call the hire company and find out where it was left - that will tell us what direction he was travelling in.'

'Right.'

'I think that's all we can do for now. Moscow has put his photograph on the wire, so our people will be looking out for him in every capital city in the world, for what that's worth.' Rostov finished his drink. 'We'll catch him, one way or another.'

'Do you really think so?' Hassan asked.

'I've played chess with him, I know how his mind works,' Rostov said. 'His opening moves are routine, predictable; then suddenly he does something completely unexpected, usually something highly chancey. You just have to wait for him to stick out his neck - then you chop his head off.'

Hassan said: 'As I recall, you lost that chess match.'

Rostov bared his teeth in a grin. 'Yes, but this is real life,' he said.

*

There are two kinds of shadow: pavement artists and bulldogs. Pavement artists regard the business of shadowing people as a skill of the highest order, like acting or cellular biophysics or poetry. They are perfectionists, capable of being almost invisible. They have wardrobes of unobtrusive clothes, they practise blank expressions

in front of their mirrors, they know dozens of tricks to play with shop doorways and bus queues, policemen and children, spectacles and shopping bags and hedges. They despise the bulldogs, who think that shadowing someone is the same as following him, and who trail the mark the way a dog follows its master.

Nik Bunin was a bulldog.

He was a young thug, the type of man who always becomes either a policeman or a villain, depending on his luck. Luck had brought Nik into the KGB; his brother, back in Georgia, was a dope dealer, running hashish from Tbilisi to Moscow University. Nik was officially a chauffeur at the Russian Consulate, unofficially a bodyguard, and even more unofficially a full-time professional ruffian.

It was Nik who spotted The Pirate.

Nik was a little under six feet tall, and very broad. He wore a leather jacket across his rather wide shoulders. He had short blond hair and watery green eyes, and he was embarrassed about the fact that at the age of twenty-five he still did not need to shave every day.

At the nightclub in the Rue Dicks they thought he was cute as hell.

He came in at seven-thirty, soon after the club opened, and sat in the same corner all night, drinking iced vodka with lugubrious relish, just watching. Somebody asked him to dance, and he told the man to piss off, in bad French. When he turned up the second night they wondered if he was a jilted lover lying in wait to have a showdown with his ex. He had about him the air of what the gays called rough trade, what with those shoulders and the leather jacket, and his dour expression.

Nik knew nothing of these undercurrents. He had been shown a

photograph of a man, and told to go to a club and look out for the man; so he memorised the face, then went to the club and looked. It made little difference to him whether the stakeout was in a whorehouse or a public library. He liked occasionally to get the chance to beat people up, but otherwise all he asked was regular pay and two days off every week to devote to his enthusiasms, which were vodka and colouring books.

When Nat Dickstein came into the nightclub, Nik felt no sense of excitement. When he did well, his bosses always assumed it was sheer luck, and they were generally right. He watched the mark sit down alone, order a drink, get served, and sip his beer. It looked like he, too, was waiting.

Nik went to the phone in the lobby and called the hotel. The Arab answered. Nik had been told that Rostov was working with the Arab.

'This is Nik Bunin,' he said. 'The mark just came in.'

'Really? That's terrific! Well done,' the Arab said. Nik ignored all such empty phrases. He heard the Arab relaying the news, then Rostov came on the phone.

'What's he doing?' Rostov asked.

'Waiting.'

'Good. Alone, I presume.'

'Yes.'

'Stay with him, and call me if he does anything, meets anybody, you know?'

'Sure.'

'I'm sending Boris down. He'll wait outside. If the mark leaves the club, you follow him, doubling with Boris. There'll be a third man with you, in a car, well back; in case you need wheels, it's a ... wait a minute ... it's a green Volkswagen hatchback.'

'Okay.'

'Get back to him now.'

Nik hung up and returned to his table, not looking at Dickstein as he crossed the club.

A few minutes later a well-dressed, good-looking man of about forty came into the club. He looked around, then walked past Dickstein's table and went to the bar. Nik saw Dickstein pick up a piece of paper from the table and put it in his pocket.

Nik went to the phone again.

'Nik Bunin.'

This time Rostov was on the other end of the line. 'What happened?'

'A queer came in and gave him something - it looked like a ticket.'

'Like a theatre ticket, maybe?'

'Don't know.'

'Did they speak?'

'No, the queer just dropped the ticket on the table as he went by. They didn't even look at one another.'

'All right. Stay with it. Boris should be outside by now.'

'Wait,' Nik said. 'The mark just came out. Hold on ... he's going to the desk ... he's handed over the ticket, that's what it was, it was a cloakroom ticket.'

'Stay on the line, tell me what happens.' Rostov's voice was deadly calm.

'The pansy behind the counter is giving him a briefcase. He leaves a tip ... '

'It's a delivery. Good.'

'The mark is leaving the club.'

'Follow him. Do whatever Boris tells you. Go!'

Nik hung up. He gave the cloakroom attendant some notes, saying: 'I have to rush. This will cover my bill.' Then he went up the staircase after Nat Dickstein.

Out on the street it was a bright summer evening, and there were plenty of people making their way to restaurants and cinemas or just strolling. Nik looked left and right, then saw the mark on the opposite side of the road, fifty yards away. He crossed over and followed.

Dickstein was walking quickly, looking straight ahead, carrying the briefcase under his arm. Nik plodded after him for a couple of blocks. Then Boris came up alongside Nik, touched his arm, and went on ahead. Nik dropped back, letting Dickstein get well ahead but keeping Boris in sight.

After another half a mile, Nik was ready to pass Boris again. But before he caught up the green Volkswagen pulled into the kerb beside him and Jan jumped out.

'Fresh orders,' Jan said. 'I'll double with Boris. You're to take the car and go back to the nightclub. Hassan will be there. They want you to point out the man who made the delivery drop.'

'Okay.'

Jan went after Boris and Nik got into the car. He returned to the club, parked outside, went in, and found Yasif Hassan sitting at a table.

As soon as Nik had sat down Hassan said: 'All right, where's the delivery man?'

Nik looked carefully all around the club. 'He's gone,' he said.

*

The printout ran to more than a hundred sheets of computer paper,

and it was not immediately comprehensible. Nat Dickstein pored over it in his hotel room, eating roast beef sandwiches and drinking coke while he struggled with the computer alphabet and the codewords.

About sixty consignments were listed. There were three main types: large quantities of crude uranium ore, coming from mines in southern Africa, Canada and France to European refineries; fuel elements - oxides, uranium metal or enriched mixtures - moving from fabrication plants to reactors; and spent fuel from reactors going for reprocessing and disposal. There were a few non-standard shipments, mostly of plutonium and transuranium elements extracted from spent fuel and sent to laboratories in universities and research institutes. On the last page of the printout there was one shipment headed NON-NUCLEAR.

It was this one that Dickstein concentrated on. He had been briefly told, by the Rehovot physicist with the flowered tie, about the non-nuclear uses of uranium and its compounds in photography, in dyeing, as colouring agents for glass and ceramics, and as industrial catalysts. Of course, the stuff always had the potential for fission no matter how mundane and innocent its use, so the Euratom regulations still applied. However, Dickstein thought it likely that in ordinary industrial chemistry the security would be less strict.

The entry on the last page of the printout referred to two hun dred tons of yellowcake, or uranium oxide. It was in Belgium, at a metal refinery in the countryside near the Dutch border, a site licensed for storage of fissile material. The refinery was owned by the Societe Generale de la Chimie, a mining conglomerate with headquarters in Brussels. SGC had sold the yellowcake to a German concern called F.A. Pedler of Wiesbaden. Pedler planned to use it for 'manufacture of uranium compounds, especially uranium

carbide, in commercial quantities'. Dickstein recalled that the carbide was a catalyst for the production of synthetic ammonia.

However, it seemed Pedler were not going to work the uranium theselves, at least not initially. They had not applied for their own works in Wiesbaden to be licensed , but instead for permission to ship the yellowcake to Genoa by sea. There it was to undergo 'non-nuclear processing' by a company called Angeluzzi e Bianco.

As Dickstein understood it, transport would be by railway from SGC's refinery to the docks at Antwerp. There the yellowcake would be loaded on to the motor vessel Coparelli for shipment to Genoa. The short journey from the Italian port to the Angeluzzi e Bianco works would be made by road.

For the trip the yellowcake - looking like sand but yellower - would be packed into 560 200-litre oil drums with heavily-sealed lids. The train would require eleven wagons, the ship would carry no other cargo for this voyage, and the Italians would use six lorries for the last leg of the journey.

It was the sea journey that excited Dickstein: through the English Channel, across the Bay of Biscay, down the Atlantic coast of Spain, through the Straits of Gibraltar, and across a thousand miles of the Mediterranean.

A lot could go wrong in that distance.

Journeys on land were straightforward, controlled: a train left at noon one day and arrived at eight-thirty the following morning; a lorry travelled on roads which always carried other traffic, including police cars; a plane was continually in contact with someone or other on the ground. But the sea was unpredictable, with its own laws - a trip could take ten days or twenty, there might be

storms and collisions and engine trouble, unscheduled ports of call, sudden changes of directions. Hijack a plane and the whole world sees it on television an hour later; but hijack a ship, and no one will know about it for days, weeks, perhaps for ever.

The sea was the inevitable choice for The Pirate.

Dickstein thought on. Hijack the m.v. Coparelli ... then what? Transfer the cargo to the hold of the pirate ship? The Coparelli would probably have its own derricks. If not, the pirate ship could have derricks. But transferring a cargo at sea could be chancey. He looked on the printout for the proposed date of the voyage: November. That was bad. There might be storms; even the Mediterranean could blow up a gale in November. What, then? Take over the Coparelli and sail her to Haifa? It would be hard to dock a stolen ship in secrecy, even in top-security Israel.

Dickstein glanced at his wristwatch. It was past midnight. He began to undress for bed. He needed to know more about the Coparelli: her tonnage, how many crew, present whereabouts, who owned her, and if possible her layout. Tomorrow he would go to London. You could find out anything about ships at Lloyds.

There was something else he needed to know: who was following him around Europe? There had been a big team in France. Tonight as he left the nightclub in theRue Dicks, a thuggish face had followed him out. He had suspected a tail, but the face had disappeared - coincidence, or another big team? It rather depended upon whether Hassan was in the game. He could make enquiries about that, too, in England.

He wondered how to travel. If somebody had picked up his scent tonight, he ought to take some precautions tomorrow. Even if the thuggish face were nobody, still Dickstein might be spotted at

Luxembourg airport.

He picked up the room phone and dialled the desk. When the clerk answered he said: 'Wake me at six-thirty, please.'

'Very good, sir.'

Dickstein hung up and got into bed. Yes, a little fancy footwork would be in order tomorrow. He closed his eyes. That kind of thing he could figure out in his sleep.

*

Rostov picked up the phone. It was Boris.

'He got off the train at Zurich, sir,' Boris said.

'Zurich? Go on.'

'He took a taxi to a bank, entered the bank, and went down into the vault. This particular bank has safe-deposit boxes, sir. He came out carrying a briefcase.'

'And then?'

'He went to a car dealer on the outskirts of the city, sir, and purchased a used E-type Jaguar, paying with cash he had in the briefcase.'

'I see.' Rostov knew what was coming next, but he let Boris tell it.

'He drove out of Zurich in the car, got on to the E17 autoroute, and increased his speed to one hundred and forty miles per hour, sir.'

'And you lost him.'

'We had a taxi and an Embassy Mercedes.'

Rostov was looking at a road map. 'He could be headed for anywhere in France, Spain, Germany, Scandinavia ... unless he doubles back, in which case Italy, Austria ... what's the point? He's vanished. Come back to base, Boris.'

Rostov hung up. Hassan looked at him. Rostov said: 'Don't be so depressed. If he hadn't shaken off our people, we'd have been

forced to wonder whether he really is doing something important.'

Hassan scratched his head, and Rostov noticed for the first time that the Arab was thinning on top. 'What next?' Hassan asked.

'We must pick up Dickstein's trail again. I need to think about that. Meanwhile, I want the delivery man at the club.'

'But he had gone before - '

'I know.' Rostov took off his shoes and lay down on the hotel bed. 'Nik Bunin will have to spend every night at the club. In the day ... Let's see. He can do one day at the airport, one day at the Alfa Hotel, and one day outside the Jean-Monnet Building. If he hasn't spotted the pansy at the end of three days, we'll have to think again.'

'All right,' Hassan said glumly.

Rostov raised himself, leaning on an elbow. 'Listen, we've got the whole of the KGB, the whole of Egyptian Intelligence, and me. He's on his own. Cheer up - we'll catch him. There's no such thing as The Invisible Man.'

Seven

The city of Oxford had not changed as much as the people. The city was predictably different: it was bigger, the cars and shops were more numerous and more garish, the streets were more crowded. But the predominant characteristic of the place was still the cream-coloured stone of the college buildings, with the occasional glimpse, through an arch, of the startling green turf of a deserted quadrangle. Dickstein noticed also the curious pale English light, such a contrast with the brassy glare of Israeli sunshine: of course it had always been there, but as a native he had never seen it. However, the students seemed a totally new breed. Dickstein had seen, in the Middle East and all over Europe, men with hair growing over their ears, with orange and pink neckerchiefs, with bell-bottom trousers and high-heeled shoes; and he had not been expecting people to be dressed as they were in 1947, in tweed jackets and corduroy trousers, with Oxford shirts and Paisley ties from Hall's. All the same he was not prepared for this. Many of them were barefoot in the streets, or wore peculiar open sandals without socks. Men and women had trousers which seemed to Dickstein to be vulgarly tight-fitting. After observing several women whose breasts wobbled freely inside loose, colourful shirts, he figured out that brassieres had gone out of fashion. There was a great deal of blue denim - not just jeans, but shirts, jackets, skirts, and even coats. And the hair! It was this that really shocked him. The men grew it, not just over their ears, but sometimes half way down their backs. He saw two chaps with pigtails. Others, male and female, grew it upward and outward in great masses of curls, so that they always looked as if they were peering through a hole in a hedge. This

apparently being insufficiently outrageous for some, they had added Jesus beards, Mexican moustaches, or swooping side-whiskers. They might have been men from Mars.

He walked through the city centre, marvelling, and headed out. It was twenty years since he had followed this route, but he remembered the way. Little things about his college days came back to him: the discovery of Louis Armstrong's astonishing cornet-playing; the way he had been secretly self-conscious about his cockney accent; wondering why everyone but he liked so much to get drunk; borrowing books faster than he could read them, so that the pile in his room always grew higher.

He wondered whether the years had changed him. Not much, he thought. Then he had been a frightened man looking for a fortress: ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ now he had his fortress, Israel, but instead of hiding there he had to come out and defend it. Then as now, he had been a lukewarm socialist, knowing that society was unjust, unsure how it might be changed for the better. Growing older, he had gained skills, but not wisdom. It seemed to him that he knew more and understood less.

He was somewhat happier now, he decided. He knew who he was and what he had to do; he had figured out what life was about and discovered that he could cope with it; although his attitudes were much the same as they had been in 1947, he was now more sure of them. However, the young Dickstein had hoped for certain other kinds of happiness which, in the event, had not come his way; indeed the possibility had receded as the years passed. This place reminded him uncomfortably of all that. This house, especially.

He stood outside, looking at it. It had not changed at all: the paintwork still green and white, the garden still a jungle in

the front. He opened the gate, walked up the path to the door, and knocked.

This was not the efficient way to do it. The man might have moved away, or died, or simply gone on holiday. Dickstein should perhaps have called the university to check. However, if the inquiry was to be casual and discreet, it was necessary to risk wasting a little time.

The door opened and the woman said: 'Yes?'

Dickstein went cold with shock. His mouth dropped open. He staggered slightly, and put a hand against the wall to steady himself. His face creased into a frown of total astonishment.

It was her, and she was still twenty-five years old.

In a voice shaking with utter incredulity, he said: 'Eila ... ?'

*

She stared at the odd little man on the doorstep. He looked like a don, with his round spectacles and his old grey suit and his bristly short hair. There had been nothing wrong with him when she opened the door, but as soon as he set eyes on her he had turned quite grey.

This had happened to her once before, walking down the High Street. A delightful old gentleman had doffed his hat, stopped her, and said: 'I say, I know we haven't been introduced, so please forgive me, but ... '

This was obviously the same phenomenon, so she said: 'I'm not Eila. I'm Suza.'

'Suza!' said the stranger.

'They say I look exactly like my mother did when she was my age. You obviously knew her. Will you come in?'

The man stayed where he was. He seemed to be recovering from

the surprise, although he was still pale. 'I'm Nat Dickstein,' he said with a little smile.

'How do you do,' Suza said. 'Won't you ... ' Then she stopped. It was her turn to be surprised. 'Mister Dickstein!' she said in what was almost a squeal. To his astonishment, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

'You remembered,' he said when she let go. He looked pleased and embarrassed.

'Of course!' she said. 'You used to stroke Hezekiah.'

He gave that little smile again. 'Yes, I did.'

'Well, come in.'

He stepped into the house, and she closed the door behind him. Taking his arm, she led him across the square hall. 'This is wonderful,' she said. 'Come into the kitchen, I've been messing about trying to make a cake.'

She gave him a stool. He sat down and looked around slowly, giving little nods of ~~r~~ recognition at the old kitchen table, the fireplace ~~wood-fire~~, the view through the window.

'Let's have some coffee,' Suza said. 'Or would you prefer tea?'

'Coffee, please. Thankyou.'

'I expect you want to see Daddy. He's teaching this morning, but he'll be back soon for lunch.' She poured coffee beans into a hand-operated grinder.

'And your mother?'

'She died ten years ago. Cancer.' Suza looked at Dickstein, expecting the automatic 'I'm sorry'. The words did not come, but the thought showed on his face. She ground the beans. The noise filled the silence.

When she had finished Dickstein said: 'Professor Ashford is still teaching ... I was just trying to work out his age.'

'Sixty-five,' Suza told him. 'He doesn't do a lot. What do you do? Didn't you emigrate to Palestine?'

'Israel. I live on a kibbutz. I grow grapes and make wine.'

'Are you on holiday?'

'Business. We now think the wine is good enough to export to Europe.'

'That's very good. And you're selling it?'

'Sniffing out the possibilities. Tell me about yourself. I'll bet you're not a university professor.'

'What makes you say that?'

'You're too ... warm.' Dickstein looked away, as if he regretted that remark. 'Anyway, too young.'

'I have my father's ear for languages, but not his academic turn of mind,' Suza said. 'So I'm an air hostess.' She poured boiling water into a filter, and the smell of coffee filled the room. She did not know what to say next. She glanced up at him and discovered that he was unabashedly gazing at her, deep in thought. His eyes were large and dark brown, like a spaniel's. Suddenly she felt shy - which was most unusual. She told him so.

'Shy?' he said. 'That's because I've been staring at you as if you were a painting, or something. I'm trying to get used to the fact that you're not Eila, you're the little girl with the old grey cat.'

'Hezekiah died, it must have been soon after you left.'

'There's a lot that's changed.'

'Were you great friends with my parents?'

'I was one of your father's students. I admired your mother

from a distance. She wasn't just beautiful - she was striking.'

Suza looked at his face, realising from the way he spoke that he had been in love with her mother. She was beginning to understand the severity of his reaction to the sight of herself. She said: 'She was the original hippy - did you know that?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'She wanted to be free. She rebelled against the restrictions put on Arab women, even though she came from an affluent, liberal home. She married my father to get out of the Middle East. Of course, she found that Western society had its own ways of repressing women - so she proceeded to break most of the rules.'

'That makes her a hippy?'

'Hippies believe in free love.'

'I see.'

And from his reaction to that she knew that her mother had not loved Nat Dickstein. For no reason at all, this made her sad. She said: 'Tell me about your parents.'

'Only if you pour the coffee.'

She laughed. 'I was forgetting.'

'My father was a cobbler,' Dickstein began. 'He was good at mending boots, but he wasn't much of a businessman - in that way I suppose he wasn't a typical Jew. Still, the thirties were good years for cobblers in the East End of London. People couldn't afford new boots, so they had their old ones mended year after year. We were never rich, but we had more than many people around us. And, of course, there was some pressure on my father from his family to expand the business, open a second shop, employ men.'

Suza passed him his coffee. 'Milk, sugar?'

'Sugar, no milk. Thankyou.'

'Do go on.'

'The leather dealers thought my father was a tartar - they could never sell him anything but the best. If there was a second-rate hide, they would say: "Don't bother giving that to Dickstein, he'll send it straight back." So I was told, anyway.' He gave that little smile again.

'Is he still alive?' Suza asked.

'He died before the war.'

'What happened?'

'Well. The thirties were the Fascist years in London. They used to hold open-air meetings every night. The speakers would tell them how Jews the world over were sucking the blood of working people. The speakers, the organisers, were respectable middle-class men, but the crowds were unemployed ruffians. After the meetings they would march through the streets, breaking windows and roughing-up passers-by. Our house was a perfect target for them. We were Jews; my father was a shopkeeper and therefore a bloodsucker; and, true to their propaganda, we were slightly better off than those around us.'

He stopped, and sat staring into space. Suza waited for him to go on. As he told this story, he seemed to huddle - crossing his legs tightly, wrapping his arms around his body, hunching his back. Sitting there on the stool, in his ill-fitting suit of clerical grey, with his elbows and knees and shoulders pointing at all angles, he looked like a bundle of sticks in a bag.

He said: 'We lived over the shop. Every damn night I used to lie in bed, awake, waiting for them to go past. I was blind terrified, mainly because I knew my father was so frightened. Sometimes they did nothing, just went by. Usually they shouted out slogans. Often,

often they broke the windows. A couple of times they got into the shop and smashed it up. I thought they were going to come up the stairs. I put my head under the pillow, crying, and cursed God for making me Jewish.'

'Didn't the police do anything?'

'What they could. If they were around, they stopped it. But they had a lot to do in those days. The Communist Party were the only people who would help us fight back; and my father didn't want their help. All the political parties were against the Fascists, of course - but it was the Reds who gave out pickaxe handles and crowbars, and built barricades. I tried to join the Party, but they wouldn't have me - too young.'

'And your father?'

'He just sort of lost heart. After the shop was wrecked the second time there was no money to fix it. It seemed he didn't have the energy to start again somewhere else. He went on the dole, and just kind of wasted. He died in 1938.'

'And you?'

'Grew up fast. Joined the Army as soon as I looked old enough. Got taken prisoner early. Came to Oxford after the war, then dropped out and went to Israel.'

'Have you got a family out there?'

'The whole kibbutz is my family. I never married.'

'Because of my mother?'

'Perhaps. Partly. You're very direct.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Don't apologise,' Dickstein said. 'I rarely talk like this. Actually, this whole trip is, I don't know, full of the past. There's a word for it. Redolent.'

'That means smelling of death.'

'Well.'

There was a silence. Suza picked up the coffee cups and opened the dishwasher. A spoon slid off a saucer and bounced under the large ~~old cooker~~ freezer. She said: 'Damn.'

Dickstein got down on his knees and peered under the ~~cooker~~ freezer.

Suza said: 'It's there forever, now. That thing is too heavy to move.'

Dickstein lifted ~~the cooker~~ one end of the freezer with his right hand and reached underneath with his left to retrieve the spoon. He lowered the ~~front~~ end of the ~~cooker~~ freezer, stood up, and handed the spoon to Suza.

She stared at him. 'What are you - Captain America?'

'I work in the fields. How do you know about Captain America? He was the rage in my boyhood.'

'He's the rage now. The art in those comics is fantastic.'

'Well, stone the crows.'

'Do you really work in the fields?'

'Of course.'

'A wine salesman who actually gets dirt under his fingernails in the vineyard. That's unusual.'

'Not in Israel. We're a little ... obsessive, I suppose ... about the soil.'

Suza looked at her watch, and was surprised to see how late it was. 'Daddy should be home any minute,' she said. 'You'll eat with us, won't you? I'm afraid it's only a sandwich.'

'That would be lovely.'

She sliced a French loaf and began to make salad. Dickstein offered to wash lettuce, and she gave him an apron. After a while she caught him watching her again, smiling. She said: 'What are you

thinking?'

'I was remembering something which would embarrass you,' he said.

'Tell me anyway.'

'I was here one evening, around six,' he began. 'Your mother was out. I had come to borrow a book from your father. You were in the bath. Your father got a phone call from France, I can't remember why. While he was speaking, you began to cry. I went upstairs, took you out of the bath, dried you, and put you into your nightdress. You must have been four or five years old.'

Suza laughed. She had a sudden vision of Dickstein, in a steamy bathroom, reaching down and effortlessly lifting her out of a hot bath full of soap bubbles. In the vision she was not a child, but a grown woman with wet breasts and foam between her thighs, and his hands were strong and sure as he drew her to his chest. Then the kitchen door opened and her father came in, and the dream vanished, leaving only a sense of intrigue and a trace of guilt.

*

Professor Ashford was now bald except for a monkish fringe of white hair. He had put on a little weight, and his movements were slower, but he still had the spark of intellectual curiosity in his eyes. Nat Dickstein thought he had aged well.

Suza said: 'A surprise guest, Daddy.'

Ashford looked at him and, without hesitation, said: 'Young Dickstein! Well, I'm blessed! My dear fellow.'

Dickstein shook his hand. 'How are you, Professor?'

'In the pink, dear boy, especially when my daughter's here to look after me. You remember Suza?'

'We've spent the morning reminiscing,' Dickstein said.

'I see she's put you in an apron already. That's fast, even for her. I've told her she'll never get a husband this way. Take it off, dear boy, and come and have a drink.'

With a rueful grin at Suza, Dickstein did as he was told and followed Ashford into the drawing-room.

'Sherry?' Ashford asked.

'Thankyou. A small one.' Dickstein suddenly remembered that he was here for a purpose. He had to get some information out of Ashford without the old man realising it. Dickstein had been, as it were, off-duty, for a couple of hours, and now he had to turn his mind to work. But softly, softly, he thought.

Ashford handed him a small glass of pale sherry. 'So tell me, what have you been up to all these years?'

Dickstein sipped the sherry. It was very dry, the way the English liked it. He told the Professor the story he had given to Ashford and to Suza, about finding export markets for Israeli wine. Ashford asked informed questions. Were young people leaving the kibbutzim for the cities? Had time and prosperity eroded the communalist ideals of the kibbutzniks? Did European Jews mix and intermarry with African and Levantine Jews? Dickstein's answers were Yes, No, and Not much.

Suza called them to the kitchen for lunch before Dickstein had a chance to ask his own questions. Her French sandwiches were vast and delicious. She had opened a bottle of red wine to go with them. Dickstein could see why Ashford had put on weight.

Over coffee Dickstein said: 'I ran across a contemporary of mine a couple of weeks ago - in Luxembourg, of all places.'

Ashford said: 'Yasif Hassan?'

'How did you know?'

'We've kept in touch. I know he lives in Luxembourg.'

'Have you seen him much?'

'Several times, over the years.' Ashford paused. 'It has to be said, Dickstein, that the wars which have given you everything took everything away from him. His family lost all their money and went into a refugee camp. He's understandably bitter about Israel.'

Dickstein nodded. He was now almost certain that Hassan was in the game. 'I had very little time with him - I was on my way to catch a plane. How is he, otherwise?'

Ashford frowned. 'I find him a bit ... distrait,' he finished, unable to find the right English word. 'Sudden errands he has to run, cancelled appointments, odd phone calls at all times, mysterious absences. Perhaps it's the behaviour of a dispossessed aristocrat.'

'Perhaps,' Dickstein said. In fact it was the classic behaviour of an agent, and he was now one hundred percent sure that the meeting with Hassan had blown him. He said: 'Do you see anyone else from my year?'

'Only old Toby. He's on the Conservative Front Bench now.'

'Perfect!' Dickstein said delightedly. 'He always did talk like an Opposition spokesman - pompous and defensive at the same time. I'm glad he's found his niche.'

Suza said: 'More coffee, Nat?'

'No, thankyou.' Dickstein stood up. 'I'll help you clear up, then I must get back to London. I'm so glad I dropped in on you.'

'Daddy will clear up,' Suza said. She grinned. 'We have an agreement.'

'I'm afraid it's so,' Ashford confessed. 'She won't be anybody's drudge, least of all mine.' He said it with mock regret: clearly he wouldn't have it any other way.

Suza said: 'I'll walk into town with you. Let me get my coat.'

Ashford shook Dickstein's hand. 'A real pleasure to see you, dear boy, a real pleasure.'

Dickstein said: 'Goodbye, Professor.'

Suza came back wearing a velvet jacket. Ashford saw them to the door.

As they walked along the street, Dickstein talked just to have an excuse to keep looking at her. The jacket matched her black velvet trousers, and she wore a loose cream-coloured shirt that looked like silk. Like her mother, she knew how to dress to make the most of her shining dark hair and perfect tan skin. Dickstein gave her his arm, feeling rather old-fashioned, just to have her touching him. There was no doubt that she had the same physical magnetism as her mother: there was that something about her which filled men with the desire to possess her, a desire not so much like lust as greed; the need to <u>own</u> such a beautiful object, so that it would never be taken away. Dickstein was old enough now to know how false such desires were, and to know that Eila Ashford would not have made him happy. But the daughter seemed to have something the mother lacked, and that was warmth. Dickstein was sorry he would never see Suza again. Given time, he might ...

Well. It was not to be.

When they reached the station he asked her: 'Do you ever go to London?'

'Of course,' she said. 'I'm going tomorrow.'

'What for?'

'To have dinner with you,' she said.

*

Nat Dickstein called the Israeli Embassy from a phone box at

Paddington Station. When he got through he asked for the Commercial Credit Office. There was no such department: this was a code for the Mossad's message centre at the Embassy. He was answered by a young man with a Hebrew accent. This pleased Dickstein, for it was good to know there were people for whom Hebrew was a native tongue and not a dead language. He knew the conversation would automatically be tape-recorded, so he went straight into his message. 'Rush to Bill. Sale jeopardised by presence of opposition team. Henry.' He hung up without waiting for an acknowledgement.

He walked to his hotel from the station, thinking about Suza Ashford. He was to meet her at Paddington tomorrow evening. She would spend the night at the flat of a friend. Dickstein did not really know where to begin: he could not remember ever taking a woman out to dinner, just for pleasure. As a teenager, he had been too poor; after the war he had been too nervous and awkward; as he grew older he somehow never got into the habit. There had been dinners with colleagues, of course; and with kibbutzniks after shopping expeditions in Nazareth. But to take a woman, just the two of you, for nothing more than the pleasure of each other's company ...

What did you do? You were supposed to pick her up in your car, wearing your dinner jacket, and give her a box of chocolates. Dickstein was meeting Suza at Paddington Station, and he had neither car nor dinner jacket. Where would he take her? He did not know any posh restaurants in Israel, let alone England.

Walking alone through Hyde Park, he smiled broadly. This was a laughable situation for a man in his forties to be in. She knew he was no sophisticate, and obviously she did not care, for she had invited herself to dinner. She would know the restaurants, and what to order. It was hardly a matter of life and death. Whatever happened,

he would enjoy it.

That evening he went to see a French film called Un Homme et Une Femme. It was a simple love story, beautifully told, with an insistent Latin-American tune on the soundtrack. He left before the movie was half-way through, because it made him want to cry; but the tune ran through his mind half the night.

In the morning he went to a call box in the street near his hotel and phoned the Embassy again. When he got through to the message centre he said: 'This is Henry. Any reply?'

The voice said: 'Go to ninety-three thousand and confer tomorrow.'

Dickstein said: 'Reply: Conference menu at airport information.' Then he hung up.

Pierre Borg would be flying in at nine-thirty tomorrow.

*

Nik Bunin found the delivery man on the third day, the day he spent watching the Jean-Monnet Building on the Kirchberg.

'Are you sure?' Rostov asked over the telephone, knowing that Nik was moderately stupid.

'Oh, yes. He doesn't look quite so much of a nancy-boy, in his office suit, but I'm quite positive it's him. I should say he must work here.'

'Good. Follow him home this evening, then call in and give me the address.' He hung up.

Hassan was with Rostov. They were in Rostov's hotel room, reading the morning newspapers and drinking coffee. Hassan said: 'Euratom?'

'Yes.' Rostov made a disgusted face. 'I should have sent him there on the first day. If Dickstein's after secrets, his informants

won't be from the airport or the Alfa Hotel.'

'You can't think of everything.'

'Yes, I can.'

Hassan stood up and folded his copy of Le Monde. 'I'll go to the office,' he said. 'After all, the Cedar Bank of Lebanon is paying me.'

'We'll snatch this delivery man tonight,' Rostov told him. 'Organise a fairly large car, will you?'

When Hassan had gone Rostov paced up and down restlessly. He had spent two inactive days, and he was missing his wife, his two sons, and his lover; especially his lover. Olga was twenty years his junior, a blonde Viking goddess from Murmansk, the most exciting woman he had ever met. He knew she would not have been his lover without the KGB privileges that came with him; all the same he thought she loved him. They were alike, and each knew the other to be coldly ambitious, and somehow that made their passion all the more frantic. There was no passion in his marriage any more, but there were other things: affection, companionship, stability, and the fact that Mariya was the only person in the world who could make Rostov laugh helplessly, convulsively, until he fell down. And the boys: Valery, studying at Moscow State University and listening to smuggled Beatles records; and Vladimir, the young genius, attending the prestigious Phys-Mat School No. 2 where even he had to work hard to come top of the class, already tipped as a potential world champion chess player. Neither of them would be a spy, if their father had any say in the matter: there were faster, safer routes up the Soviet hierarchy. He had missed them when he was at the school in Novosibirsk, of course, but then he had been able to get back to Moscow once a month, and anyway Siberia was still Russia:

here, in a foreign country, they seemed so much farther away.

He picked up his newspaper again. Tonight there would be some action.

*

Hassan had got hold of an American car, a Buick, not the most unobtrusive of vehicles, but big and coloured black. As soon as they got the call from Nik Bunin - they had started to call him, in English, 'thick Nik' - they drove to the little cobbled street in the old town where the delivery man lived.

Hassan was at the wheel, Rostov in the passenger seat beside him. They pulled up at the end of the street, and Nik got into the back of the car.

'Which house?' Rostov asked him.

Nik pointed. 'On the right, third in the terrace. See the attic window? I think that's him - the light went on a couple of minutes after he went in.'

'It's early for lights,' Rostov muttered.

Hassan said: 'These little attics can be dim.'

Rostov said: 'We can't do much yet. If he comes out now we'll just have to follow him. Let's hope he stays in until after dark. If he comes out then, we'll drive alongside, and Nik will jump out and bundle him into the car.'

'Where shall we take him?' Hassan asked.

'If he's co-operative we can just drive around. Otherwise, think of somewhere quiet, out in the country, in case we need to get rough.'

Nik Bunin said: 'I know a place.'

Hassan said: 'What if he doesn't come out?'

'We'll have to go in,' Rostov told him.

The three men sat in the car with the patience of spies, silent and watchful, as the day darkened. Nik scratched himself. Hassan drummed his fingernails on the steering wheel, making a noise like pigeons' feet on a roof. Rostov said: 'Dickstein did this, of course. He did what we've done, and what we're doing. He watched the Jean-Monnet Building, he followed this man home, and he waited here in this street. The man came out and went to the homosexual club, and then Dickstein knew the man's weakness, and used it to turn him into an informant.'

Nik said: 'He hasn't been at the club the past two nights.'

Rostov said: 'He's discovered that everything has its price, especially love.'

'Love?' Nik said with scorn in his voice. Rostov did not reply.

An hour later Rostov said: 'Look.'

A fair-haired young man in a double-breasted jacket stopped at the door to the house and rang a bell. Rostov looked up to the attic window, and saw a net curtain briefly drawn aside. After a minute or two the front door opened, and the fair-haired man stepped inside.

'The lover, perhaps,' said Rostov.

Another hour passed. Hassan said: 'They're spending an evening indoors.'

Rostov said: 'If they've had a brush with The Pirate, they're probably frightened to go out into the streets at night.'

'Do we go in?' Nik asked.

'There's a problem,' Rostov told him. 'From the window, they can see who is at the door. I guess they won't open up for strangers.'

'The lover might stay the night,' Hassan said.

'Quite.'

Nik said: 'We'll just have to bust in.' The others ignored him.

'Is there a parking place nearer to the house?' Rostov said.

'Yes.' Hassan started the car, drove a little way along the street, and backed into a space a few yards from the front door. 'Do we take them both?' he asked.

'I think we'll have to. Have we got any firearms?'

'A pistol in the glove box in front of you.'

Rostov opened the compartment, took out the gun, and handed it to Hassan. 'Whatever you do, don't fire it.'

Hassan grinned in the dark. 'It's not loaded.'

Nik said: 'If the other man stays the night, do we take them in the morning?'

'We can't do this in daylight,' Rostov told him. 'It's not that urgent. If the lover stays the night, we'll have to come back tomorrow evening.'

The lover left at midnight. Rostov, who by then appeared to be half asleep but in fact was very wide awake indeed, saw the first movement of the front door as it began to open, and said: 'Go!'

Nik was first out of the car, being younger and used to this sort of thing. Hassan was a few paces behind. Rostov stayed where he was.

They were saying goodnight, the young man on the pavement, the older one just inside the door wearing a robe. The older one reached out and gave his lover's arm a farewell squeeze. They both looked up, alarmed, as Nik and Hassan burst out of the car and came at them.

'Don't move, be silent,' Hassan hissed at them in French, showing them the gun.

Nik's sound tactical instinct for the situation led him to stand beside and slightly behind the younger man.

The older one said: 'Oh, my God, no, no more, please.'

'Get in the car,' Hassan told him.

The younger man said: 'Why can't you fuckers leave us alone.'

Nik, sensing that the young man was thinking of disobedience, seized both his arms just below the shoulders and held him very tightly.

'Don't hurt him, I'll go,' said the older man.

'Get in the car,' Hassan repeated.

The older man moved forward, stepping out of the house. His friend began to struggle in Nik's grip, then tried to stamp on Nik's foot. Nik stepped back a pace and hit the boy in the kidney with his right fist.

'No, Pierre!' the older one said, too loud. Hassan grabbed him and bundled him into the back of the car before he could make any more noise.

Pierre had fallen to one knee and was groaning. Nik seized him by the arms again and pushed him into the car after his friend. Hassan got behind the wheel and Nik climbed into the back with the two captives.

The car pulled away. Pierre was still groaning. The older one said: 'We haven't done anything to harm you.'

'Haven't you?' Rostov replied. 'Three nights ago, at the club in the Rue Dicks, you delivered a briefcase to an Englishman.'

'Ed Rodgers?'

'That's not his name,' Rostov said.

'Are you the police?'

'Not exactly.' Rostov was deliberately vague, letting the man believe whatever he wanted to. 'I'm not interested in collecting evidence, building a case, and bringing you to trial. I'm interested in what was in that briefcase.'

There was a silence. Hassan said: 'Do I go into the countryside?'

'Wait,' Rostov said.

The older man said: 'I'll tell you.'

'Stay in the town,' Rostov said to Hassan. To the man in the back he said: 'So tell me.'

'It was a Euratom computer printout.'

'And the information on it?'

'Details of licensed shipments of fissile materials.'

'Fissile?' Rostov said. 'You mean nuclear stuff?'

'Yellowcake, uranium, nuclear waste, plutonium ... '

Rostov sat in the front seat thinking, a faint smile of satisfaction on his lips.

'Will you let us go home now?'

Rostov said: 'I'll have to have a copy of that printout.'

'I can't take another one, the disappearance of the first was suspicious enough!'

'I'm afraid you'll have to,' Rostov said. 'But, if you like, you can take it back to the office after we've photographed it.'

'Oh, God,' the man said. 'All right.'

Rostov said to Hassan: 'Head back to the house.' To the man in the back he said: 'Bring the printout home tomorrow night. Someone will come to your house during the evening to photograph it.'

The big car purred through the lamplit streets of the old city. Nik said to Pierre: 'Don't look at my face.'

They reached the cobbled street. Hassan stopped the car. Rostov said: 'Okay, get out. Your friend stays with us.'

The man yelped as if hurt. 'Why?'

'In case you're tempted to break down and confess all to your superiors tomorrow. Young Pierre will be a hostage. Get out.'

The front door was still open; they had been away only a few minutes. The man got out of the car. He stood on the pavement for a moment.

'Shut the door,' Nik told him.

He shut the door. The car pulled away.

Hassan said: 'Will he be all right, d'you think?'

'Until he gets Pierre back,' Rostov said.

'And then?'

Rostov said nothing. He was thinking that it would probably be prudent to kill them both.

*

This is Suza's nightmare.

It is evening at the green-and-white house by the river. She takes a bath, lying for almost an hour in the hot scented water. Afterwards she goes into the master bedroom, sits in front of the three-sided mirror, and dusts herself with powder from an onyx box which belonged to her mother.

She opens the wardrobe, expecting to find her mother's clothes moth-eaten, falling away from the hangers in dun-coloured tatters, transparent with age; but it is not so. She chooses a nightdress, white as a shroud, and puts it on. She gets into the bed.

She lies still for a long time, waiting for Nat Dickstein to come to his Eila. The evening becomes night. The river whispers. The door opens. The man stands at the foot of the bed and takes off his clothes. He lies on top of her, and her panic begins like the first small spark of a conflagration within her as she realises that it is not Dickstein, but her father; and that she is, of course, long dead; and as the nightdress naturally crumbles to dust and her hair falls out and her flesh withers and the skin of her face dries and

shrinks baring the teeth ~~and~~ and the skull and she becomes, even as the man thrusts at her, a skeleton, so she screams and screams and screams and wakes up, and she lies perspiring and shivering and frightened, wondering why nobody comes rushing to find out what is wrong, until she realises with relief that even the screams were dreamed; and, consoled, she wonders vaguely about the meaning of the dream, drifting back into sleep before she has it figured out.

In the morning she is her usual cheerful self, except perhaps for a small imprecise darkness, like a smudge in the sky of her mood, not remembering the dream at all, only aware that there was once something that ~~worried~~ troubled her, not worrying any more, though, because, after all, dreaming is instead of worrying.

Eight

'Nat Dickstein is going to steal some uranium,' said David Rostov.

'You think so?' Yasif Hassan replied.

'Uranium, plutonium, yellowcake ... I'm certain.'

'Why?'

They were walking through the valley at the foot of the crag which was the old city of Luxembourg. Here, on the banks of the Petrusse River, were lawns and ornamental trees and footpaths. They passed beneath the Pont Adolphe. Rostov said: 'They've got a nuclear reactor at a place called Dimona in the Negev Desert. The French helped them build it, and presumably the French supplied them with fuel for it. Since the Six-Day War ~~khx~~ de Gaulle has cut off their supplies of arms, so perhaps he's ~~x~~ cut off the uranium as well.'

'So the Israelis are just going to steal some?'

Rostov stopped and looked back, admiring the view through the arch of the bridge. 'It would be a completely characteristic Mossad move,' he said emphatically. 'This is exactly how those people think. They have this backs-to-the-wall mentality which helps them to ignore the niceties of international diplomacy. De Gaulle cuts off their uranium? Then they'll go out and steal some - preferably from the French.' He walked on.

'It figures,' Hassan said.

'Next question - <u>what</u> uranium?'

'We'll have some idea when we get the printout from the nancy-boy.'

'Yes. I've a feeling that might be a long list, though. Listen: what else is on his mind?'

Hassan said: 'Well, he knows someone has been following him.'

'And presumably he's made the connection with you.'

'Has he?'

'Well, look, he goes on an assignment, he bumps into an Arab who knows his name, and suddenly he's tailed. He must suspect a connection.'

'I don't see how he could be sure, though.'

'You're right,' Rostov said. 'He has to check. Now, is your name on the file in Tel Aviv?'

Hassan shrugged. 'Who knows?'

'How often have you had face-to-face contacts with other agents - Americans, British, Israeli?'

Hassan smiled. 'My friend, I am a very small fish. I have never met another agent, except for you.'

'And Dickstein. Well, that means you're not on the file. How else could he check?'

'There is no way.'

'There is, there is.' Rostov was showing impatience: he greatly preferred to work with real professionals. 'He just has to ask two or three questions about your general behaviour, to see whether it conforms to the pattern of clandestine work. Have you any acquaintances in common?'

'No,' Hassan said. 'I just bumped into him, by chance. I haven't seen him since college.'

'Is there anybody from Oxford whom you still see?'

'None of the undergraduates. I've kept in touch with some of the faculty, off and on. Professor Ashford, in particular.'

'Did Dickstein know Ashford?'

'Of course. Ashford had the chair of Semitic Languages, which was what both Dickstein and I read.'

'There. All Dickstein has to do is call on Ashford and mention your name in passing. Ashford will tell him what you're doing and how you behave. Then Dickstein will know you're an agent.'

Hassan nodded. 'So, you think that's what he's done.'

'It's possible. It's what I would do. Besides, it's one of only two places where we can look for him.'

'The second being the French nuclear power station. We have that covered already.'

'Then I think you should go to Oxford, Yasif.'

'Today?' He looked at his watch: it was midday.

'Tomorrow. I want you to photograph this printout tonight.'

'Okay. Let's go back. I've walked far enough.'

'You Europeans are soft,' Rostov said.

Hassan laughed. 'Don't try telling me that the KGB have a tough life in Moscow.'

'Want to hear a Russian joke?' Rostov said as they climbed the side of the valley toward the road. 'Brezhnev was telling his old mother how well he had done. He showed her his apartment: huge, with Western furniture, dishwasher, freezer, everything, servants. She didn't say anything. Then he took her to his dacha on the Black Sea - a big villa, swimming pool, prvate beach, more servants. Still she wasn't impressed. He took her to his hunting lodge in his Zil limousine, showed off the beautiful grounds, the guns, the dogs. Finally he said: "Mother, mother, why don't you say something? Aren't you proud?" So she said: "It's wonderful, Leonid. But what will you do if the communists come back?"'

Rostov roared with laughter at his own story, but Hassan only smiled.

'You don't think it's funny?' Rostov said.

'Not very,' Hassan told him. 'It's guilt that makes you laugh at that joke. I don't feel guilty, so I don't ~~laugh~~ find it funny.'

They reached the road and stood there for a while, watching the cars speed by, while Hassan caught his breath. Hassan said: 'You must have known that Dickstein was acquainted with the Ashford family. We were at their house one day, you and me and Dickstein.'

'Were we?'

'Yes. And he had some American with him, a man whose life he had saved in the war.'

'I don't remember that.'

They started to walk, looking for a taxi. Rostov said: 'Oh, I know what I've wanted to ask you all these years. Did you really screw Ashford's wife?'

'Only four or five times a week,' Hassan said, and he laughed uproariously.

Rostov said: 'Who feels guilty now?'

*

He got to the station early, and the train was late, so he had to wait for a whole hour. It was the only time in his life he read Time magazine from cover to cover. She came through the ticket barrier at a half-run, smiling broadly. Just like yesterday, she threw her arms around him and kissed him; but this time the kiss was a fraction longer. He had vaguely expected to see her in a long dress and a mink wrap, like a grocer's wife on a night out at the 61 club in Tel Aviv; but of course Suza Ashford belonged to another country and another generation, and she wore high boots which disappeared under the hem of her below-the-knee skirt, with a silk shirt under an embroidered waistcoat such as a matador might wear.

Her face was not made up. Her hands were empty: no coat, no handbag, no overnight case. They stood still, smiling at each other, for a moment. Dickstein, not quite sure what to do, gave her his arm as he had done the day before, and that seemed to please her. They walked to the taxi rank.

As they got into a cab Dickstein said: 'Where do you want to go?'

'You haven't booked?'

I should have booked a table, Dickstein thought. He said: 'I don't know London restaurants.'

'Kings Road,' Suza said to the cabbie.

As the car pulled away she looked at Dickstein and said: 'Hello, Nathaniel.'

He smiled. 'Hello, Suza.'

The Chelsea restaurant she chose was small, dim, and trendy. As they walked to a table Dickstein thought he saw one or two familiar faces, and his stomach tightened as he strove to place them; then he realised they were pop singers ~~faxxx~~ he had seen in magazines. He was faintly relieved that his reflexes still worked like this despite the atypical way he was spending his time this evening. He was also pleased that the other diners in the place were all ages: he had been a little afraid he might be the oldest man in sight.

They sat down, and Dickstein said: 'Do you bring all your young men here?'

Suza gave him a cold smile. 'That's the first witless thing you've said.'

'I stand corrected.'

She said: 'What ~~xxx~~ do you like to eat?' and the moment passed.

'At home I eat a lot of plain, wholesome, communal food. When I'm away I live in hotels, so I get a lot of junk tricked out as

haute cuisine. What I like is the kind of food you don't get in either sort of place: roast leg of lamb, steak and kidney pudding, Lancashire hot-pot.'

'What I like about you,' she grinned, 'is that you have no idea whatsoever about what is trendy and what isn't; and furthermore you don't give a damn.'

He touched his lapels. 'You don't like the suit?'

'I love it,' she said. 'It must have been out-of-date when you bought it.'

He decided on roast beef from the trolley, and she had some kind of sauteed liver which she ate with enormous relish. He ordered a bottle of burgundy: a more delicate wine would not have sorted well with the liver. His knowledge of wine was the only polite accomplishment he possessed. Still, he let her drink almost all of it. His appetites were small.

She told him about the time she took LSD. 'It was quite unforgettable. I could feel my whole body, inside and outside. I could hear my heart. My skin felt wonderful when I touched it. And the colours, of everything ... Still, the question is: Did the drug show me amazing things, or did it just make me amazed? Is it a new way of seeing the world, or does it merely give you the sensation you might have if you saw the world in a new way?'

'You didn't want more of it, afterwards?' Dickstein asked.

She shook her head. 'I don't relish losing control of myself to that extent. But I'm glad I know what it's like.'

'That's what I dislike about getting drunk - the loss of control. Although I'm sure it's not in the same league. At any rate, the couple of times I've been drunk, I haven't felt I've found the key to the universe.'

She made a dismissive gesture with her hand. 'I don't believe in drugs as the solution to the world's problems.'

'What do you believe in, Suza?'

She hesitated, looking at him, smiling faintly. 'I believe that all you need is love.' Her tone was a little defensive, as if she anticipated scorn.

Dickstein said: 'That philosophy is more likely to appeal to a swinging Londoner than an embattled Israeli.'

'I guess there's no point in trying to convert you.'

'I should be so lucky.'

She looked into his eyes. 'You never know your luck.'

He looked down at the menu, and said: 'It's got to be strawberries.'

With the directness of youth she said: 'Tell me who you love, Nat Dickstein.'

'An old woman, a child, and a ghost,' he said immediately, for he had been asking himself the same question. 'The old woman is called Esther, and she remembers the pogroms in Czarist Russia. The child is a boy called Mottie. His father died in the Six-Day War.'

'And the ghost?'

'You will have some strawberries?'

'Yes, please.'

'Cream?'

'No, thanks.'

Dickstein did a Tennessee accent: 'I be dog ifn the child ain't a-fixin to waste away and die.'

She smiled. 'You're not going to tell me about the ghost, are you?'

'As soon as I know, you'll know.'

It was June, and the strawberries were perfect. Dickstein said: 'Now tell me who you love.'

'Well,' she said, then she thought for a minute. 'Well ... ' She put down her spoon. 'Oh, shit, Nathaniel, I think I love you.'

*

They took a taxi to the flat where she planned to stay the night. She invited him in - her friends, the owners of the flat, were away - and they went to bed together; and that was when their problems began.

At first Suza thought he was going to be too eagerly passionate, when, standing in the little hallway,he gripped her arms and kissed her roughly, and when he groaned 'Oh, God,' as she took his hands and placed them on her breasts. There flashed through her mind the cynical thought: I've seen this act before; he is so overcome by my beauty that he practically rapes me, and five minutes after getting into bed he is fast asleep, and snoring. Then she pulled away from his kiss and looked into his big, soft, brown eyes, and she thought: Whatever happens, it won't be an act.

She led him into the little single bedroom at the back of the flat, overlooking the courtyard. She stayed here so often that it was regarded as her room; indeed some of her clothes were in the wardrobe and the drawers. She sat on the edge of the single bed and took off her shoes. Dickstein stood in the doorway, watching. She looked up at him and smiled. 'Undress,' she said.

He turned out the light.

She was intrigued: it ran through her like the first tingle of a cannabis high. What was he really like? He was a Cockney, but an Israeli; he was a middle-aged schoolboy; a thin man as strong as a horse; a little gauche and nervous superficially, but confident and oddly powerful underneath.

She got into the bed, oddly touched that he wanted to make love in the dark. He climbed in beside her and kissed her, gently this time. She ran her hands over his hard, bony body, and opened her mouth to his kisses. After a momentary hesitation, he responded; and she guessed he had not kissed like that before, or at least not for a long time.

He touched her tenderly now, with his fingertips, exploring, and he said 'Oh!' with a sense of wonder in his voice when he found her nipple taut. His caresses had none of the facile expertise so familiar to her from a string of casual affairs; he was like ... well, he was like a virgin: the thought made her smile in the darkness.

'Your breasts are beautiful,' he said.

'So are yours,' she said, touching them.

The magic began to work, and she became immersed in sensation: the roughness of his skin, the hair on his legs, the faint masculine smell of him. And then, suddenly, she sensed a change in him. There was no apparent reason for it, and for a moment she wondered if she might be imagining it, for he continued to caress her; but she knew that now it was mechanical, he was thinking of something else, she had lost him.

She was about to say something when he withdrew his hand and said: 'It's not working. I can't do it.'

She felt panicked, and fought it down. She was frightened, not for herself - <u>you've known enough stiff pricks in your time, girl, not to mention a few limp ones</u> - but for him, for his reaction, in case he should be defeated or ashamed and -

She put both arms around him and held him tightly, saying: 'Whatever you do, please don't go away.'

'I won't.'

She wanted to put the light on, to see his face, but it seemed like the wrong thing to do. She pressed her cheek against his chest and said: 'Have you got a wife somewhere?'

'Certainly not.'

She put out her tongue and tasted his skin. 'I just think you might feel guilty about something. Like, me being half an Arab?'

'I don't think so.'

'Or, me being Eila Ashford's daughter? You loved her, didn't you?'

'How did you know?'

'From the way you spoke about her.'

'Oh. Well, I don't think I feel guilty about that, but I could be wrong, doctor.'

'Mm.' He was coming out of the shell. She kissed his chest. 'Will you tell me something?'

'I expect so.'

'When did you last have sex?'

'Nineteen forty-four.'

'You're kidding,' she said, genuinely astonished.

'That's the first witless thing you've said.'

'I ... you're right, I'm sorry. But why?'

He sighed. 'I can't ... I'm not able to talk about it.'

Suza reached out to the bedside lamp and turned on the light. Dickstein closed his eyes against the glare. Suza propped herself up on one elbow. 'Listen,' she said. 'There are no rules. We're grown-ups, we're in bed, and this is nineteen-sixty-eight: nothing is wrong, it's whatever turns you on.'

'There isn't anything.' His eyes were still closed.

'And there are no secrets. If you're frightened or disgusted or inflamed, you can say so, and you must. I've never said "I love

you" before tonight, Nat. Speak to me, please.'

There was a long silence. He lay still, impassive, eyes closed. At last he began to talk. 'I didn't know where I was - still don't. I was taken there in a cattle truck, and at that age I couldn't tell ~~recognise~~ one country from another by the landscape. It was a special camp, a medical research centre. The prisoners were selected from other camps. We were all young, healthy and Jewish.

'Conditions were better than in the first camp I was at. We had food, blankets, cigarettes; there was no thieving, no~~n~~ fighting. At first, I thought I had struck lucky. There were lots of tests - blood, urine, blow into this tube, catch this ball, read the letters on the card. It was like being in hospital. Then the experiments began.

'To this day I don't know whether there was any real scientific curiosity behind it. I mean, if somebody did those things with animals, I could see that it might be, you know, quite interesting, quite revealing. On the other hand, the doctors must have been insane. I don't know.'

He stopped. Suza whispered: 'You must tell me what happened. You must.'

He was pale, and his voice was very low. 'They took me to this laboratory. The guards who escorted me kept winking and nudging and telling me I was glücklich - lucky.

'It was a big room with a low ceiling and very bright lights. There were six or seven of them there, with a film camera. In the middle of the room was a low bed with a mattress on it, no sheets. There was a woman on the mattress. They told me to fuck her.

'She was naked, and shivering - she was a prisoner too. She whsipered to me: "You save my life and I'll save yours." And then

we did it. But that was only the beginning.'

Suza ran her hand over his loins and found his penis taut. Now she understood. She felt a thrill of triumph. She stroked him, gently at first, and waited for him to go on - for she knew that now he would tell all of the story.

'After that they did variations on the experiment. Every day for months there was something. Drugs, sometimes. An old woman. A man, once. Intercourse in different positions - standing up, sitting, everything. Oral sex, anal sex, masturbation, group sex. If you didn't perform, you were flogged or shot. That's why the story never came out, after the war, do you see? Because all the survivors were guilty.'

Suza stroked him harder. She was certain - without knowing why - that this was the right thing to do. 'Tell me. All of it.'

He was breathing heavily. His eyes opened and he stared up at the blank white ceiling, seeing another place and another time. 'At the end ... the most shameful of all ... she was a nun. At first I thought they were lying to me, they had just dressed her up, but then she started praying, in French. She had no legs ... they had amputated her, just to discover the effect on me ... it was pitiful, and I ... and I ... '

Then he jerked, and Suza bent and closed her mouth over his penis, and he said 'Oh, no, no, no!' in rhythm with his spasms, and then it was all over and he wept.

*

She kissed his tears, and told him it was all right, over and over again. Slowly, he calmed down, and eventually he seemed to sleep for a few minutes. She lay there watching his face as the tension seeped away and he lay peaceful. Then he opened his eyes, and said: 'Why did you do that?'

'I could have given you a lecture,' she said. 'I could have told you that there is nothing to be ashamed of; that everybody has grisly fantasies, that women dream of being flogged and men have visions of ~~xxxxx~~ flogging them; that you can buy, here in London, pornographic books about sex with amputees, including full-colour pictures. I could have told you that most people would have performed in that Nazi laboratory, and would have done it not out of fear but out of lust. I could have argued with you, but it wouldn't have made any difference. I had to show you. Besides - ' She smiled ruefully. 'Besides, I have a dark side too. It turned me on.'

He touched her cheek, then leaned forward and kissed her lips. 'Where did you get this wisdom, child?'

'It isn't wisdom, it's love.'

Then he held her very tightly and kissed her and called her Darling; and after a while they made love, very simply, hardly speaking, without confessions or dark fantasies or bizarre lusts, giving and taking pleasure with the familiarity of an old married couple who know each other so well; and afterwards they went to sleep full of peace and joy.

*

The voice of Yasif Hassan came three hundred miles along the international telephone cables. 'You were right. He was here. Two days ago.'

David Rostov lay back on the bed in his hotel room and allowed himself a sigh of satisfaction. 'So, now we know that he knows that we know.'

'Yes. What now? Shall I return to Luxembourg?'

'I don't think so. Did Ashford know how long Dickstein plans

to be in England?'

'No. I asked the question directly. Dickstein didn't tell him.'

'He wouldn't.' Rostov frowned, calculating. 'First thing Dickstein has to do now is report that he's blown. That means he has to contact the Israeli Embassy in London.'

'Perhaps he already has.'

'Yes, but he may want a meeting. This man takes precautions, and precautions take time. All right, leave it with me. I'll be in London later today. Where are you, now?'

'I'm still in Oxford. I came straight here off the plane. I can't get back to London until the morning.'

'All right. Check into the Hilton, and I'll meet you there around lunchtime. Ask for David Roberts' room.'

'Check. A bientot.'

Rostov hung up. It was just after one a.m., but he had been waiting up for Hassan's call. Now there were more calls to make, and no time to lose.

He put on his jacket, left the hotel, and took a taxi to the Russian Embassy. He had to wait some time, and identify himself to three different people, before they would let him in in the middle of the night. The duty operator stood up when he entered the communications room. Rostov said: 'There's work to do. Get the London office first.'

The operator picked up the scrambler phone and got through to the Russian Embassy in London. 'Comrade Colonel David Rostov will speak to the most senior Security officer there,' he said. He motioned to Rostov to pick up the extension.

'Colonel Petrov.' It was the voice of a middle-aged soldier.

'Petrov, I need some help,' Rostov said without preamble. 'An

Israeli agent called Nat Dickstein is believed to be in England.'

'Yes, we've had his picture sent to us in the diplomatic bag - but we weren't told he was known to be here.'

'Listen. I think he may contact his embassy. I want you to put all known Israeli legals in London under surveillance from dawn today.'

'Hang on, Rostov,' Petrov said with a half-laugh. 'That's a lot of manpower.'

Rostov gritted his teeth. 'Don't be stupid. You've got hundreds of men, the Israelis only have a dozen or two.'

'Sorry, Rostov, I can't mount an operation like that on your say-so.'

Rostov slammed the phone down, furious, and said: 'Bloody Russians! Never do anything without six sets of authorisation. Get Moscow, tell them to find Vorontsov and patch him through to me.'

The operator got busy. A few minutes later the sleepy voice of Leon Vorontsov came on the line. 'Yes, who is it?'

'David Rostov. I need some backing. I think The Pirate is about to contact the Israeli Embassy in London, and I want their legals watched.'

'So call London.'

'I did. They want authorisation.'

'Shit.' There was a pause while Vorontsov thought. 'If yours isn't good enough, neither is mine. I'll call Andropov. I'll get back to you.'

Vorontsov was back on the line two minutes later. 'Sorry, Rostov. The great man is sleeping, andthey won't wake him for me.'

'Never mind,' Rostov said. 'Goodbye.' He turned to the operator.

'Tell Moscow to patch me through to Yuri Andropov's apartment at number twenty-six Kutuzov Prospekt.' He waited, fidgeting. 'I bet it isn't like this working for the CIA,' he muttered.

The operator gave him the sign, and he picked up the phone. A voice said: 'Yes?'

Rostov raised his voice. 'Your name and rank!'

'Pyotr Eduardovitch Scherbitsky, Major.'

'This is Colonel Rostov. I want to speak to Andropov. This is an emergency, and if he isn't on this phone within one hundred and twenty seconds you'll spend the rest of your life building dams in Siberia, do I make myself clear?'

'Yes, Colonel. Please hold the line.'

A minute later Rostov heard the deep, confident voice of the head of the KGB. 'You certainly managed to panick young Eduardovitch, David.'

'I had no alternative.'

'All right, let's have it. It had better be good.'

'Mossad are after uranium.'

'Are they, by God!'

'I think The Pirate is in London. He may contact his Embassy. I want surveillance on the Israelis there, but an old fool called Petrov in London is giving me the runaround.'

'I'll talk to him now, before I go back to bed.'

'Thankyou.'

'And, David?'

'Yes?'

'It was worth waking me up - but only just.'

There was a click as Andropov hung up. Rostov laughed.

'Success?' the operator asked with a smile.

'Yes,' Rostov said. 'Our system is inefficient and cumbersome and corrupt, but in the end, you know, we get what we want.'

Nine

It was quite a wrench for Nat Dickstein to leave Suza in the morning and go back to work.

He was still ... well, stunned ... at eleven a.m., sitting in the window of a restaurant in the Fulham Road, waiting for Pierre Borg to show. He had left a message at Airport Information, telling Borg to go to a cafe opposite the one where Dickstein now sat. (The Fulham Road was full of cafes and restaurants.) He thought he was likely to stay stunned for a long time, maybe permanently.

He had woken up at six o'clock, and suffered a moment of panic wondering where he was. Then he saw Suza's long brown hand lying on the pillow beside his head, curled up like a small animal sleeping, and the night had come flooding back, and he could hardly believe his luck. He thought he should not wake her, but suddenly he could not keep his hands off her body. She opened her eyes at his touch, and they made love playfully, smiling at each other, laughing sometimes, and looking into each other's eyes at the moment of climax. Then they fooled around in the kitchen, half dressed, making the coffee too weak and burning the toast.

Dickstein wanted to stay there forever.

Suza had picked up his vest* with a cry of horror. 'What's this?'

'My vest.'

'Vest? Vest? I forbid you to wear vests. They're old-fashioned and unhygienic and they'll ~~xxxxxxx~~ get in the way when I want to feel your nipples.'

She put on such a lecherous leer that he burst out laughing.

* 'undershirt' in USA

'All right,' he said. 'I won't wear them.'

'Good.' She opened the window and threw his vest out into the street, and he laughed all over again.

He said: 'But you mustn't wear trousers.'

'Why not?'

It was his turn to leer.

'All my trousers have flies,' she said.

'No good,' he said. 'No room to manoeuvre.'

And like that. They had acted as if they had just invented sex. The only faintly unhappy moment came when she looked at his scars and asked how he got them. 'We've had three wars since I went to Israel,' he said. It was the truth, but not the whole truth.

She asked him: 'What made you go to Israel?'

'Safety.'

'But it's just the opposite of safe there.'

'It's a different kind of safety. There had to be a place where nobody could say: "You're different, you're not a human being, you're a Jew;" where nobody could break my windows or experiment on my body just because I'm Jewish. It didn't matter to me whether we chose Palestine or Uganda or Manhattan Island - wherever it was, I would have said "That place is mine" and I would have fought tooth and nail to keep it. Any other place Jews live - New York, Paris, Toronto - no matter how good it is, how assimilated they are, they never know how long it's going to last, how soon will come the next crisis that can conveniently be blamed on them. In Israel I know that whatever happens, I won't be a victim of that. So, with that problem out of the way, we can get on and deal with the real problems that are part of everyone's life: planting and reaping, buying and selling, fighting and dying.'

Suza said: 'My father holds the opinion that Israel itself is now a racialist society.'

'That's what the youngsters say. They've got a point. If ... '

She looked at him, waiting.

'If you and I had a child, they would refuse to classify him as Jewish. He would be a second-class citizen. But I don't think that sort of thing will last. At the moment the religious zealots are quite powerful in the government: it's inevitable, Zionism was a religious movement. As the nation matures, that sort of thing will fade away. The race laws are already controversial. We're fighting them, and we'll win in the end.'

She came to him and put her head on his shoulder, and they held each other in silence. He knew that she did not care about Israeli political issues: it was the mention of a son that had moved her.

Sitting in the restaurant window, remembering, he knew that he wanted Suza in his life always, and he wondered what he would do if she refused to go to his country. Which would he give up, Israel or her? He did not know.

He watched the street. It was typical June weather: raining steadily and freezing cold. The familiar red buses and black cabs swished up and down, butting through the rain, splashing in the puddles on the road. A country of his own, a woman of his own; maybe he could have both.

I should be so lucky.

Dickstein tensed. A cab drew up outside the cafe opposite. Two men got out. Dickstein recognised the bulky figure of Pierre Borg, in a dark short raincoat and a trilby hat. He peered at the second man, who was paying the driver. He did not recognise him.

The two men went into the cafe. Dickstein looked up and down the road.

A grey Mark II Jaguar had stopped on a double yellow line fifty yards from the cafe. Now it reversed and backed into a side street, parking on the corner, within sight of the cafe. The passenger got out and walked toward the cafe.

Dickstein left his table and went to the phone booth in the restaurant entrance. He dialled the cafe opposite.

'Yes?'

'Let me speak to Bill, please.'

'Bill? Don't know him.'

'Would you just ask, please?'

'Sure. Hey, anybody here called Bill?' A pause. 'Yes, he's coming.'

After a moment Dickstein heard Bog's voice. 'Yes?'

Dickstein said: 'Who's the face with you?'

'Robert is head of London Station.'

'One of you picked up a shadow. Two men in a grey Jaguar.'

'We saw them.'

'Lose them.'

'Of course. Listen, you know this town - what's the best way?'

'Send Robert back to the Embassy in a cab. That'll lose the Jaguar. Wait ten minutes, then take a taxi to ... ' Dickstein hesitated, trying to think of a quiet street not too far away. 'To Redcliffe Street. I'll meet you there.'

'Okay.'

Dickstein looked across the street. XXxxxx 'Your tail is just going into your cafe. Bye, now.' He hung up.

He went back to his window seat and watched. Robert came out of the cafe, opened an umbrella, and stood at the kerb looking for a

cab. The tail had either recognised Borg at Heathrow Airport or had been following Robert. It didn't make any difference. Robert got a taxi. Dickstein watched it pull away, and saw the grey Jaguar come out of the side street and follow. Then he left the restaurant and hailed a cab. Taxi drivers do well out of spies, he thought.

He told the cabbie to go to Redcliffe Street and wait. After eleven minutes another taxi entered the street and Borg got out. Dickstein said: 'Flash your lights - that's the man I'm meeting.' Borg saw the lights and waved acknowledgement. As he was paying, a third taxi entered the street and stopped. Borg spotted it.

The shadow in the third taxi was waiting to see what happened. Borg realised this, and began to walk away from his car. Dickstein said to his driver: 'Don't flash again.'

Borg walked past them. The tail jumped out of his taxi, gave the driver some money, and walked after Borg. When the tail's cab had gone, Borg turned and came back to Dickstein's cab. He jumped in. Dickstein said: 'Okay, let's go.' They pulled away, leaving the tail on the pavement looking for another taxi. It was a quiet street: he would not find one for five or ten minutes.

Borg said: 'Slick.'

'Easy,' Dickstein replied.

The driver said: 'What was all that about, then?'

'Don't worry,' Dickstein told him. 'We're secret agents.'

The cabbie laughed. 'Where to now - MI5?'

'The Science Museum.'

Dickstein sat back in his seat. He smiled at Borg. 'Well, Bill, you old fart, how are you?'

Borg frowned at him. 'What are you so fucking cheerful about?'

They did not speak again until they were inside the museum.

They stood in front of a reconstructed dinosaur, and Dickstein said: 'I've been blown.'

'I knew that weeks ago,' Borg said. 'If you'd keep in touch with Tel Aviv you'd be up-to-date on these things.'

'If I kept in touch I'd be blown more often.'

Borg grunted and walked on. He took out a cigar, and Dickstein said: 'No smoking in here.' Borg put the cigar away again.

Borg said: 'The thing is, how much do they know?'

'What does your man in Cairo say?'

'Only that they're on your tail - but it takes a few days for his information to get through.'

'I think we must assume the worst. The thing is, they've got a big team on me, so I don't always know when they're following me. I spotted them in France, and I think they were in Luxembourg. The chances are they've at least guessed what the game is.'

'What have you been doing in France and Luxembourg?'

'Well.' Dickstein collected his thoughts. 'I've picked a consignment of uranium for us to steal. It's going by ship from Antwerp to Genoa in November. I'm going to hijack the ship.'

'And how will you keep that secret?'

'I'm working on that. I have to visit Lloyds, here in London. I'm hoping that the ship - it's called the Coparelli, by the way - will turn out to have been one of a series of identical vessels. Most ships are, I believe. If I can buy an identical vessel, I can switch the two in the middle of the Mediterranean.'

'I don't see ... '

'I haven't figured out the details, yet,' Dickstein said. 'But I'm sure this is the only way to do the thing clandestinely.'

'All right,' Borg said. This was a virtue of his: he was ready

to bow to the better judgement of the man in the field. 'The question now is whether to put someone else on to the job, and let you run it from the office.'

'If you put in an experienced man, he may be spotted too, now that they know what we're up to.'

'And if I use someone unknown, he won't be experienced. Besides, you're the man for this job. You're The Pirate. And there's something else you dont know.'

They had stopped, by mutual consent, in front of a model of a nuclear reactor. 'Well?' Dickstein said.

'We've had a report from Qattara. The Russians are helping them now. We're in a hurry, Dickstein. I can't afford delays. There's no time for a change of plan.'

'Will November be soon enough?'

'Just.' Borg came to a decision. 'Okay, I'm leaving you in. You'll just have to take evasive action.'

Dickstein grinned broadly and slapped Borg on the back. 'You're a pal, Pierre. Don't you worry, now. I'll run rings around them.'

Borg frowned. 'Just what is up with you? You got religion, or something? You can't stop grinning.'

'It's seeing you that does it. Your face is like a tonic. Your sunny disposition is infectious. When you smile, Pierre, the whole world smiles with you.'

'You're crazy, you prick,' said Borg.

*

Pierre Borg was vulgar, insensitive, malicious and boring, but he was not stupid. 'He may be a bastard,' people would say, 'but he's a clever bastard.' By the time they parted company, he knew that something important had changed in Nat Dickstein's life.

He thought about it, ~~riding in a cab~~ walking to the Israeli Embassy for another meeting with Robert. He had known Nat Dickstein for twenty years. Back in 1948 Borg had been sure the boy was not agent material. He was thin, pale, awkward, unprepossessing. But he had pulled off that stroke with the boatload of rifles, and they had given him a trial. Borg had rapidly come to acknowledge that the kid might not look much, but he was smart as shit. He also had an odd charm which Borg never understood. Some of the women in Mossad were nuts about him - not that Dickstein ever took advantage. Over the years Dickstein had grown in skill and confidence, and now Borg would rely on him more than any other agent. Indeed, if Dickstein had been more personally ambitious, he could have had the job which Borg now held.

However, some things about Dickstein had not changed. It was still only rarely that the force of the man showed through. He had remained quiet, withdrawn. He still looked like an out-of-work bank clerk. And, except for occasional flashes of rather cynical wit, he was still dour.

Until today.

At first he had been his normal self - brief to the point of rudeness. But after they had finished their little gambit and lost their two shadows, Dickstein had come on like the stereotyped chirpy cockney sparrow in a Hollywood movie about wartime England.

Borg had to know why.

He would tolerate a lot from his agents. Provided they were good agents, they could be neurotic, or aggressive, or sadistic, or insubordinate. If he knew their faults he could make allowances. One of the things he could <u>not</u> put up with was instability. An unstable agent could not be controlled. Dickstein had changed,

so Borg had to regard him as uncontrolled until he figured out the cause of the change. That was all. He had no objection in principle to one of his agents acquiring a sunny disposition. The fact that he himself was a thoroughly miserable bugger was neither here nor there.

The taxi arrived at the embassy. Borg paid the driver and got out. A London policeman complete with pointy hat stood outside the door. Borg wondered what the bobby would do if an Arab shot at him.

He went in. He found Robert in his office, behind a door marked 'Political Staff - International'. He went in and sat down. He said: 'Before we get down to the routine business, I want Dickstein followed.'

'Dickstein?'

Borg ignored Robert's tone of voice. 'Twenty-four hours a day, two cars, three teams of three men. You'll find him at the Jacobean Hotel. Start immediately.'

Robert said: 'I'm short of men, Pierre. Make it two teams of three men, twleve-hour shifts instead of eight-hour.'

'All right, but I don't want him to know about this.'

'Sure.' Robert hesitated. 'Looking for anything special?'

Borg stared at him.

'Sorry I spoke,' Robert said. He picked up the phone. 'Find Solomons and said him in, quick as you like.'

Apropos of nothing in particular, Borg said: 'I see you've got a policeman on guard outside.'

'The British are getting very nervous,' Robert said.

'The bobby might be more use if he had a gun.'

'Don't worry,' said Robert. 'He has.'

*

One thing you could say for Colonel Petrov: when he ran a big operation, it went like clockwork.

There was not much else you could say for Petrov, in the opinion of Major Pyotr Alekseivitch Tyrin. Tyrinwas a pavement artist, so his opionion counted for nothing. However, he worked for Petrov, and he knew the man's strengths and weaknesses. Petrov was a big man, a little overweight in a rather glossy, sleek way; crisply dressed and rigidly correct; politically very orthodox. He was better at planning than improvisation - an ideal KGB combination, indeed an ideal Soviet one. He was not bad to work for. His instructions were always very clear. But his way of criticising or reprimanding people was graceless and faintly malicious, as if he needed continually to reassure himself that he was more able than his subordinates. Tyrin did not like him; but then, there were not many terrifically loveable people in the upper echelons of the KGB.

Abba Allon. High Street exit. Fifty-two, or nine? Where are you, fifty-two?

Fifty-two. We're close. We'll take him - what does he look like?

Plastic raincoat, green hat, moustache.

Tyrin had not been on duty on the already-legendary shift they called The Night of the Petrov Put-Down. He wished he had been there. Like everyone else in the London residency, he had been told the story of how a nobody by name of Rostov had telephoned from Luxembourg in the middle of the night asking for some big surveillance, and Petrov had told the man to go fly a kite. Oh, boy, was that a mistake! Petrov must be losing his instinct for in-fighting. Next thing he knew, he got a phone call from Andropov. The man himself. They said Petrov looked like a ghost when he hung up the phone.

Okay, this is Ruth Davisson, and she's going ... north ...

Nineteen, we can take her -

Relax, nineteen. False alarm. It's a secretary who looks like her.

Now, this Rostov character was a different kind of man. He came out of the same mould as Petrov, in that both were career men, both stiff and starchy like a pair of boiled shirts. And Rostov, like Petrov, was bound to have a good loyalty record and connections in the Party hierarchy - he must have, to be a Colonel. The difference was, in Tyrin's opinion, that Rostov had brains. His quiet watchfulness was also curiosly more formidable than Petrov's sharp tongue. He seemed the kind of person with whom you might like to let your hair down and drink a lot of vodka. You would have to watch your mouth, though.

Rostov had not needed to tell Petrov how to set up today's operation. The old boy had done a magnificent job. The area around the Israeli Embassy in London was crawling with agents - someone had said 'There are more Reds here than in the Kremlin Clinic' - but it was very hard to spot them. They were in cars, vans, minicabs, trucks, and one vehicle that looked remarkably like an unmarked Metropolitan Police bus. There were more on foot, some in public buildings and others walking around the streets and the footpaths of the park. There was even one inside the Embassy, asking in dreadfully broken English what he had to do to emigrate to Israel.

The Embassy, at No. 2 Palace Green, was ideally situated for this kind of exercise. It was in a little diplomatic ghetto on the edge of Kensington Gardens. So many of the lovely old houses belonged to foreign legations that people called it Embassy Row. Indeed, the Soviet Embassy was close by in Kensington Palace Gardens.

The little group of streets formed a private estate, and you had to tell a policeman your business before you could get in.

Nineteen, this time it is Ruth Davisson ... nineteen, do you hear me?

Nineteen here, yes.

Are you still on the north side?

Yes. And we know what she looks like.

None of the agents was actually in sight of the Israeli Embassy. Only one member of the team could see the door, and that was Colonel Petrov. He was a good half-mile away, on the twentieth floor of an hotel, watching through a powerful Zeiss telescope mounted on a tripod. Several high buildings in the West End of London had clear views across the park to Embassy Row. Indeed, certain suites in certain hotels fetched inordinately high prices because of rumours that from them you could see into Princess Margaret's back yard at the/neighbouring palace which gave the streets their names.

Colonel Petrov ~~had a radio transmitter~~ was in one of those suites. As well as the telescope he had a radio transmitter. Each of his pavement squads had a walkie-talkie. Petrov spoke to his men in fast Russian, using confusing codewords; and the wavelength on which he transmitted and on which the men replied was changed, every three minutes, according to a computer programme built into all the sets. The system worked very well except that somewhere in the cycle everybody was subjected to three minutes of BBC Radio One.

Eight, move up to the north side, please.

Understood.

If the Israelis had been in Belgravia, the home of the more senior embassies, Petrov's job would have been more difficult. There were almost no shops, cafes or public offices in Belgravia - nowhere for agents to make themselves unobtrusive; and because the

whole district was quiet, wealthy, and stuffed with ambassadors, it was easy for the police to keep an eye open for suspicious activities. Any of the standard surveillance ploys - telephone repair van, road crew with striped tent - would have drawn a crowd of bobbies in minutes. By contrast, the area around the little oasis of Embassy Row was Kensington, a major shopping area with several colleges and four museums.

Pyotr Tyrin himself was in a pub in Kensington Church Street which he knew to be frequented by detectives from Special Branch - the distinctly coy name for Scotland Yard's political police. The four youngish men in rather sharp suits drinking whisky at the bar were probably from the S.B. They did not know Tyrin, and would not have been much interested in him if they had. Indeed, if Tyrin were to approach them and say 'By the way, the KGB is tailing every Israeli legal in London at the moment,' they would ~~say~~ probably say 'What, again?' and order another round of drinks.

In any event, Tyrin was not a man to attract second glances. He was small and rather rotund, with a big nose and a boozer's veined face. He wore a grey raincoat over a green sweater. The rain had removed the last memory of a crease from his charcoal flannel trousers. He sat in a corner with a glass of English beer and a small bag of potato crisps. The radio in his shirt pocket was connected by a fine, flesh-coloured wire to the plug - it looked like a hearing aid - in his left ear. He sat with his left side to the wall. He could talk to Petrov by pretending to fumble in ~~his~~ the inside pocket of his raincoat, turning his face away from the room, and muttering into the perforated metal disc on the top edge of the radio.

He was watching the detectives drink whisky and thinking that the Special Branch must have better expense accounts than the KGB. He was allowed one pint of beer per hour. The potato crisps he had

to buy himself. At one time the agents had been obliged to buy beer in half pints, until the accounts department had been told that in many pubs a man who drank halves was as peculiar as a Russian who took his vodka in sips instead of gulps.

Thirteen, pick up a green Volvo, two men, High Street.

Understood.

And one on foot ... I think that's Yigael Meier ... Twenty?

Pyotr Tyrin was Twenty. He turned his face into his shoulder and said: 'Yes, I know Meier. Tall, grey hair - '

High Street gate.

Tyrin said: 'I'm on my way.' He drained his glass and left the pub.

It was raining. Tyrin took a collapsible umbrella from his raincoat pocket and opened it. The wet pavements were crowded with shoppers. At the traffic lights he spotted the green Volvo and, three cars behind it, Thirteen in an Austin.

Another car. Five, this one's yours. Blue Volkswagen beetle.

Understood.

Tyrin reached Palace Gate, looked up Palace Avenue, saw Yigael Meier's tall, bent figure heading toward him, and walked on without pausing. When he reckoned Meier had had time to reach the street he stood at the kerb, as if about to cross, and looked up and down. Meier emerged from Palace Avenue and turned west, away from Tyrin. Tyrin followed.

Along the High Street tailing was easy because of the crowds. Then Meier turned south, into a maze of side streets, and Tyrin became a little nervous; but the Israeli did not seem to be watching for a shadow. He butted through the rain, head down, walking fast, intent on his destination.

He did not go far. He turned into a small modern hotel just off the Cromwell Road. Tyrin walked past the entrance and, glancing through the glass door, saw Meier stepping into a phone booth in the lobby. A little farther along the road Tyrin passed the green Volvo.

He concluded that this was a stakeout.

He crossed the road and came back on the opposite side, just in case Meier came out again immediately. He looked for the blue Volkswagen beetle, and did not see it; but he was quite sure it would be close by.

He spoke into his shirt pocket. 'This is Twenty. The green Volvo, the blue Volkswagen and Meier have staked-out the Jacobean Hotel.'

Confirmed, ~~Fixex~~ Twenty. Five and Thirteen have the cars covered. Where is Meier?

'In the lobby.' Tyrin looked up and down and spotted the Austin.

Stay with him.

'Understood.' Tyrin now had a difficult decision to make. If he went straight into the hotel, Meier might spot him. But if he took the time to find the back entrance, Meier might push off in the meanwhile.

He decided to chance the back entrance, on the grounds that he was supported by two cars who could cover for a few minutes if the worst happened.

Beside the hotel there was a narrow roadway for delivery vans. Tyrin walked along it, and came to a fire exit in the blank side wall of the building. He went in. He found himself in a ~~blank~~ concrete stairwell, obviously built only to be used as a fire escape. As he climbed the stairs he collapsed his umbrella, put it in his raincoat pocket, and took off the raincoat. He folded it and left it in a

little bundle on the first half-landing, where he could quickly pick it up if he had to make a fast exit.

He went to the second floor and took the lift down to the lobby. When he emerged, in his sweater and trousers, he looked like a resident rather than a visitor to the hotel.

Meier was still in the phone booth.

Tyrin went up to the glass door, looked out, looked at his wristwatch, and returned to the waiting area to sit down, as if he was meeting someone here. He was now fairly sure that this was not his lucky day. The object of the exercise was to find an Israeli agent called Dickstein. He was known to be in England, and it was hoped that he would have a meeting with one of the legals. The Russians were following the legals in order to witness that meeting and pick up the trail of Dickstein. The Israeli team at this hotel, however, were clearly not involved in a meeting. They were tailing someone, and that someone was unlikely to be one of their own agents. Tyrin could only hope that what they <u>were</u> doing would turn out to be of some interest.

He saw Meier come out of the phone booth and walk off in the direction of the bar. He wondered if the lobby could be observed from the bar. Apparently it could not: Meier came back a few minutes later with a drink in his hand. He sat down, across from Tyrin, and picked up a newspaper.

Meier did not have time to drink his beer. The elevator doors hissed open and out walked Nat Dickstein.

Tyrin was so surprised that he made the mistake of staring straight at Dickstein for several seconds. Dickstein caught his eye, and nodded politely. Tyrin smiled weakly and looked at his watch. It occurred to him - in hope more than conviction - that staring was

such a bad mistake that Dickstein might take it as proof positive that Tyrin was not an agent.

There was no time for reflection. Moving quickly, with - Tyrin suspected - something of a spring in his step, Dickstein crossed to the counter and dropped a room key, then went out into the street. Meier dropped his newspaper on the table and followed. When the plate-glass door closed behind Meier, Tyrin got up, thinking: I'm an agent who is following an agent who is following an agent. At least we keep each other in employment.

He entered the lift and pressed the button for the first floor. He spoke into his radio: 'This is Twenty, I have the mark.' There was no reply - the walls of the building were blocking his transmission. He got out of the lift at the first floor and ran down the fire stairs, picking up his raincoat at the half-landing. As soon as he was outside he tried the radio again. 'This is Twenty, I have the mark.'

All right, Twenty. Thirteen has him too.

Tyrin saw Meier crossing Cromwell Road. 'I'm following Meier,' he said into his radio.

Five and Twenty, both of you listen to me. It was a new voice - Rostov's. Do not follow. Have you got that - Five?

Yes.

Twenty?

Tyrin said: 'Understood.'

Twenty, go back into the hotel. Get his room number. Book a room close to his. Call me on the telephone as soon as it's done.

Tyrin turned back, thinking up a plan as he walked: Excuse me, the chap that just walked out of here, short fellow with glasses, I think I know him, but he jumped into a cab on the Cromwell Road before

I got a chance to speak to him ... His name is John, but we all used to call him Jack, what room ... ? As it turned out, none of that was necessary. Dickstein's key was still on the desk. Tyrin memorised the number. The desk clerk approached.

'Can I help you?'

'I'd like a room,' Tyrin said.

*

He kissed her, and he was like a man who has been thirsty all day. He savoured the smell of her skin and the gentle touch of her lips. He touched her face and said: 'This, this, this is what I need.' They stared into each other's eyes, and the truth between them was like nakedness. He thought: I can do anything I want. The idea ran through his mind again and again like an incantation, a magic spell. He touched her body greedily. He stood face to face with her in the little blue-and-yellow kitchen, looking into her eyes while he fingered the secret places of her body. Her red mouth opened a fraction and he felt her breath coming faster and hot on his face, inhaled deeply so as to breathe the air from her.kxxx He thought: If I can do anything I want, so can she; and, as if she had read his mind, she opened his shirt, and bent to his chest, and took his nipple between her teeth, and sucked. The sudden, astonishing pleasure of it made him gasp aloud. He held her head gently in his hands and rocked to and fro a little to intensify the sensation. Anything I want! he thought. He reached behind her, lifted her skirt, and feasted his eyes on the white briefs clinging to her curves and contrasting with the brown skin of her long legs. His right hand stroked her face and gripped her shoulder and weighed her breasts; his left hand moved over her hips and inside her briefs and between her legs; and everything felt so good, so good, that he wished he

had four hands, six. Then, suddenly, he wanted to see her face, so he gripped her shoulders and made her stand upright, telling her: 'I want to look at you.' Her eyes filled with tears, and he knew that these were signs, not of sadness,but of intense pleasure. Again they stared into each other's eyes, and this time it was not just truth between them but raw emotion gushing from one to another in rivers, in torrents. Then he knelt at her feet like a supplicant. First he laid his head on her thighs, feeling the heat of her body through ~~the skirt~~ her clothing. Then he reached beneath her skirt with both hands, found the waist of her briefs, and drew them down slowly, holding the shoes on her feet as she stepped out of the thin cotton garment. He got up from the floor. They were still standing on the spot where they had kissed when he first came into the room. Just there, standing up, they began to make love. He watched her face. She looked peaceful, and her eyes were half closed. He wanted to do this, moving slowly, for a long time, but his body would not wait. He was compelled to thrust harder and move faster. He felt himself losing his balance, so he put both arms around her, lifted her an inch off the floor, and without withdrawing from her body moved two paces so that her back was against the wall. She pulled his shirt out of his waistband and dug her fingers into the hard muscles of his back. He linked his hands beneath her buttocks and took her weight. She lifted her legs high, her thighs gripping his hips, her ankles crossed behind his back, and, incredibly, he seemed to penetrate even deeper inside her. He felt he was being wound up like a clockwork motor, and everything she did, every look on her face, tightened the spring. He watched her through a haze of lust. There came into her eyes an expression of something like panic; a wild, wide-eyed, animal emotion; and it pushed him over the edge, so that he knew that

it was coming, the beautiful thing was going to happen now, and he wanted to tell her, so he said 'Suza, here it comes,' and she said 'Oh, and me,' and she dug her nails into the skin of his back and drew them down his spine in a long sharp tear which went through him like an electric shock and he felt the earthquake in her body just as his own body erupted and he was still looking at her and he saw her open her mouth wide, wide, and she drew breath and the peak of delight hit them both and then she screamed.

*

'We're following the Israelis and the Israelis are following Dickstein. All we need is the CIA to start following us and we'll have a three-ring circus,' said David Rostov.

Pyotr Tyrin hurried along the hotel corridor beside him, his short plump legs almost running to keep up with Rostov's long stride. He said: 'I was wondering what, exactly, was your thinking in ordering us to abandon the surveillance as soon as we saw him.' Rostov was the kind of man whom you could ask questions like this: he was approachable.

Rostov said: 'Dickstein has been under surveillance a great deal over the last few weeks. Each time, he has eventually spotted us and thrown us off. Now, a certain amount of surveillance is inevitable for someone who has been in the game as long as Dickstein. But, on a particular operation, the more he is followed the more he begins to think he's blown, and the more likely he is to abandon what he's doing and hand over to someone else - but we wouldn't know who. All too often, the information we gain by following someone is cancelled out by the fact that they discover we're following them. This way - I mean, by abandoning the surveillance as we have done today - we know where he is, but he doesn't know we know.'

'I see,' said Tyrin.

'He'll spot those Israelis in no time at all,' Rostov added. 'He must be hypersensitive by now.'

'Why do you suppose they're following their own man?' Tyrin asked.

'I really can't understand that.' Rostov frowned. 'I'm sure Dickstein met Borg this morning - that would be why Borg threw off his tail with that taxi trick. I wonder what they decided. It's possible Borg pulled Dickstein out, and now he's just checking that Dickstein really will come out, and not try to carry on unofficially.' Rostov shook his head irritably. 'That just doesn't convince me. But the alternative is that Borg doesn't trust Dickstein any more, and I find that unlikely, too. Careful, now.'

They were at the door to Dickstein's hotel room. Tyrin took out a small, powerful torch and shone it around the edges of the door. 'No tell-tales,' he said.

Rostov took a skeleton key from his pocket. The London residency had a huge collection of skeleton keys, and he had brought a large selection to the hotel. By trying them out on the door of the room Tyrin had booked here, he had established that this one fitted the locks of the Jacobean Hotel. He opened Dickstein's door slowly and stayed outside, looking in.

There appeared to be no booby-traps in the entrance.

Rostov stepped into the room, and Tyrin followed. The room was laid out according to the universal Holiday Inn plan: the door opened into a little passage with the bathroom on one side and the wardrobe opposite. Beyond the bathroom, the room was square, with the single bed against one wall and the television set against the other. There was a large window in the exterior wall opposite the door.

Rostov stood at the foot of the bed, looking around, trying to get an impression of the man who was staying in this room. There was not a lot to go on. The room had been cleaned and the bed made. On the bedside table were a book of chess problems and an evening newspaper. There were no signs of tobacco or alcohol. The waste-paper bin was empty. A small black vinyl suitcase on a stool contained clean underwear, one shirt, and a tie. The drawers of the dresser were empty. Rostov looked into the bathroom. He saw a toothbrush, a rechargeable electric shaver with spare plugs for different kinds of electricical outlet, and - the only personal touch - a packet of indigestion tablets.

Rostov said: 'See to the telephone.'

Tyrin unscrewed the mouthpiece of the phone and placed a radio transmitter, about the size of a large coin, inside the receiver. He reassembled the mouthpiece and put the phone back on its cradle.

'And one behind the headboard,' Rostov said.

Tyrin placed another bug behind the headboard of the bed, on the side nearest the phone.

The phone rang.

Rostov had a man in the lobby, watching for Dickstein's return. The man was to warn Rostov by calling Dickstein's room on the house phone, letting it ring twice and hanging up. This was so that Rostov did not have to risk revealing his presence if someone should try to call Dickstein.

The phone rang seven times then stopped.

Rostov said: 'I wish he had a car for us to bug.'

'I've got a shirt button,' Tyrin said.

'What?'

'A bug like a shirt button.'

'I didn't know such things existed.'

'It's new.'

'Got a needle? And cotton?'

'Of course.'

'Then go ahead.'

Tyrin went to Dickstein's case. Without taking the shirt out, he snipped off the second button, carefully removing all the loose thread. With a few swift strokes he sewed on the new button. His podgy hands were surprisingly dextrous.

Rostov watched him, but his thoughts were elsewhere. He wanted to do more to ensure that he would hear what Dickstein said and did. The Israeli might find the bugs in the phone and the headboard; he would not wear the bugged shirt all the time. Rostov liked to be sure of things, and he now felt frustrated. Dickstein was slippery. There was nowhere you could hook on to him.

'There.' Tyrin showed him his handiwork. The shirt was plain white nylon, with the commonest kind of white buttons. The new one was indistinguishable from the rest.

'Good,' Rostov said. 'Close the case.'

Tyrin did so. 'Anything else?' he said.

Rostov pulled on his nose, thinking. 'Let's take another quick look around for tell-tales,' he said. 'I can't believe Dickstein would go out without taking any precautions at all.'

They searched again. There were dozens of ways of planting tell-tales to show whether your room had been entered while you were out. A hair lightly stuck across the crack of the door was the most simple; a scrap of paper jammed against the back of a drawer would fall out when the drawer was opened; a lump of sugar under a thick carpet would be silently crushed by a footstep; a penny behind the

lining of the suitcase lid would slide from ~~x~~ front to back if the case were opened.

They found nothing.

Rostov said: 'All Israelis are paranoid. Why should he be different?'

'Maybe he's been pulled out,' Tyrin said.

Rostov grunted. 'Why else would he suddenly get careless?'

'He could have fallen in love,' Tyrin suggested.

Rostov~~x~~ laughed. 'Sure,' he said. 'And Joe Stalin could have been canonized by the Vatican. Let's get out of here.'

He went out, and Tyrin followed, closing the door softly behind him.

*

'So it's a woman,' said Pierre Borg. 'Fuck.' He said it twice.

Robert said: 'That's bad?'

Borg picked a flake of cigar tobacco from his teeth. 'It's the tension in Dickstein that makes the man so fierce,' he said. 'The last thing I want is for him to relax.'

'It might be a nine-day wonder,' Robert said.

'You don't understand,' Borg told him. 'Dickstein <u>never</u> has women.'

Robert shrugged. 'I don't see that it's a bad thing for him to have some fun.'

'There's a lot you don't see. That's why you haven't got my job.'

Yigael Meier said: 'All the same, we should know what kind of relationship they have.'

Borg looked at Meier. Meier had the air of a family doctor: he was a handsome middle-aged man, tall and slightly stooping, with

a quietly confident manner and a deep,soothing voice. Borg asked him: 'Did you find anything out?'

'It's a sexual relationship.'

'Terrific.'

'I heard her orgasm.'

Robert said: 'Any clue as to who she is?'

'I spoke to the caretaker of the apartment house. It seems the flat doesn't belong to either Dickstein or the girl. I have the name of the owner. It doesn't ring any bells.'

'Is it an expensive place?'

'Everywhere in Chelsea is expensive,' Meier said. 'But it isn't splendid.'

Robert took a bottle of whisky and some glasses from the drawer of his desk and poured three shots. 'I have an idea,' he said as he passed out the drinks. 'The caretaker was lying. Dickstein owns the flat. He uses it as a rendezvous. He meets someone from the other side, a woman, They make love and he tells her secrets.'

Borg said: 'I'd buy that if we had found out about it some other way. But if Dickstein were a traitor we wouldn't have become suspicious. He's too clever. He would have covered his tracks. He would never have led Meier to the flat, just like that, without once looking over his shoulder. Just consider his behaviour. He meets me, looking like the cat that got at the cream, either not knowing or not caring that his mood is written all over his face. When I ask him what's up he makes jokes. Naturally I'm suspicious, so I have him tailed. Hours later he's screwing some girl who likes it so much you can hear her out in the fucking <u>street.</u> The whole thing is so damn naive that it has to be true.'

'He's behaving like a teenager,' Robert said.

Meier said: 'That's because he never had a teen-age.'

'How do you know?' Borg asked him.

'I don't know,' Meier said mildly. 'It's a guess based on his apparent age. He's a little younger than I. When he should have been sowing his wild oats, he was probably in the army.'

Robert said: 'If he's so vulnerable to women, why isn't it on his file?'

'Because up to now he's appeared to be utterly invulnerable to women,' Borg said.

Meier smiled. 'She must be something special.'

'I'm wondering how special,' Robert said.

'You think she might be an agent, and he's too besotted to know it,' Borg said. 'The thing is, I'm sure his frigidity is on their file as well as ours.'

'The Arabs have files?'

'The Russians do. They should assume, as we did, that he was safe from a sexual approach.'

'Still ... '

'Yes. We'd better find out.' Borg sucked on the last inch of his cigar. 'Keep an eye on the girl, find out all about her, and let me have a report.'

Robert said: 'You'll pull Dickstein out now, surely?'

'No.' Borg stubbed his cigar in an ashtray, mashing it into a pile of shreds. 'Despite all this, Dickstein is still the best bet we've got.'

*

The fun was over, Dickstein told himself: it was time to get back to work.

Entering his hotel room at ten o'clock in the morning, it occurred to him that - incredibly - he had left no tell-tales. For the first time since 1948, he had simply forgotten to take elementary precautions. He stood in the doorway, looking around, thinking about the shattering effect that Suza had had on him. It was like climbing into a familiar car which has been garaged for a year: he had to let the old habits, the old instincts, the old paranoia seep back into his mind.

He went into the bathroom and ran a tub. He now had a kind of emotional breathing-space. Suza was going back to work today. She was with BOAC, the intercontinental airline, and this tour of duty would take her right around the world. She expected to be back in twenty-one days, but it might be longer. He had no idea where he might be in three weeks' time; which meant he did not know when he would see her again. But see her again he would, if he lived.

Everything looked different, now: past and future. The last twenty years of his life seemed dull, despite the fact that he had shot people and been shot at, travelled all over the world, disguised himself and deceived people and pulled off outrageous clandestine coups. It all looked trivial now.

Sitting in the tub, he wondered what he would do with the rest of his life. Would he continue to be a spy? Would he marry Suza? Would they live in Israel? Would she still be an air hostess? It was all imponderable, but the uncertainty was enjoyable, like wondering what you would be given for Christmas.

If I live, he thought. Suddenly there was even more at stake. He was afraid to die. Until now, death had been something to avoid

with all skill because it was, as it were, a losing move in the game. Now he wanted desperately to live; to sleep with Suza again, to make a home with her, to learn all about her, her idiosyncracies and her habits and her secrets; the books she liked and what she thought about the Vietnam war and how she brushed her teeth.

It would be terrible to lose his life, now that she had saved it.

He got out of the bath, rubbed himself dry, and dressed. The way to keep his life was to win this fight. His next move was a phone call. He considered the hotel phone, decided to start being extra careful right here and now, and went out to find a call box.

The weather had changed. The last few days had emptied the sky of rain, and now it was pleasantly sunny and warm. Dickstein passed the nearest phone booth to the hotel and went on to the next one: extra careful. He looked up Lloyds of London in the directory and dialled their number.

When he told the switchboard girl he wanted information about a ship, she put him through to Lloyds of London Press.

'Good morning,' Dickstein said. 'I want some details about a ship.'

'What sort of details?'

'I want to know whether she was built as part of a series; and if so, the names of her sister ships, who owns them, and their present locations.'

'We can give that information, but not over the phone,' the man said. 'The research takes time, and there's a charge, of course.'

'Do I have to write to you, or can I call?'

'Um ... this inquiry shouldn't take long, so you could call.'

'Okay. What if I wanted plans of the ships?'

'That's Lloyds Register, not us, and I think they only give them out to owners.'

'Okay, skip that,' Dickstein said. 'Give me the address.' He wrote it down. 'I'll be with you later today.'

'If you'd like to give me the name of the ship, I could get the research started. We might have everything ready when you arrive.'

'Okay,' Dickstein said. 'She's the Coparelli.' He spelled it.

'And your name?'

~~XDickstein~~ 'Ed Rodgers.'

'The company?'

'Science International. But payment will be on my personal cheque.'

'Fine. We look forward to seeing you.'

'Goodbye.' Dickstein hung up and left the phone box. He crossed the road to a cafe and ordered coffee and a sandwich. His scheme for hijacking the Coparelli had gelled in his subconscious over the last couple of weeks.

He would buy one of the sister ships, and take his team on it to meet the Coparelli at sea. After the hijack, instead of the dicey business of transferring the cargo from one ship to another, he would simply sink his own ship and transfer its papers to the Coparelli. He would also paint out the Coparelli's name, and over it he would put the name of the sister ship. Then he would sail what would appear to be his own ship into Haifa.

This was still only the rudiments of a plan. What would he do about the crew of the Coparelli? How would the apparent loss of the Coparelli be explained? How would he avoid an international inquiry into the loss at sea of tons of uranium ore?

The more he thought about it, the biggier this last problem seemed. There would be a major search for any large ship which was thought to have sunk. With uranium aboard, the search would attract

publicity, and consequently be even more thorough. And what if the searchers found, not the Coparelli, but the sister ship which was supposed to belong to Dickstein?

He shelved the problem for a while, and considered whether he had now covered his tracks well enough. Only Pierre Borg could know of his plans, he thought. Even if his hotel room were bugged - even if the call-box nearest the hotel were bugged - still nobody else could know of his interest in the Coparelli. He had been very careful.

He sipped his coffee with satisfaction; then another customer, on his way out of the cafe, jogged Dickstein's elbow and made him spill coffee all down his clean shirt.

*

'Coparelli,' said David Rostov. 'That rings a bell. Where have I heard of a ship called the Coparelli?'

Yasif Hassan said: 'It's familiar to me, too.'

'Let me see that computer printout.'

They were in the back of a listening van parked near the Jacobean Hotel. The van, which belonged to the KGB, was dark blue, without markings, and very dirty. Powerful radio equipment occupied most of the space inside, but there was a small compartment behind the front seats where Rostov and Hassan could squeeze in. Pyotr Tyrin was at the wheel. Large speakers above their heads were giving out an undertone of distant conversation and the occasional clink of crockery. A moment ago there had been an incomprehensible exchange, with someone apologising for something and Dickstein saying it was all right, it had been an accident. Nothing distinct had been said since that.

Hassan opened up the briefcase on his lap and took out a wad of paper. He handed it to Rostov.

While the Russian was looking through the papers, the sound from the speakers changed. There were street noises for a minute or two, then more dialogue.

Where to, guv?

Then Dickstein's voice: Lime Street.

Rostov looked up and spoke to Tyrin. 'That'll be Lloyds, the address he was given over the phone. Let's go there.'

Tyrin started the van and moved off, heading east toward the City of London.

Hassan said pessimistically: 'He'll probably get a written report.'

'Here it is!' Rostov said. 'The Coparelli. Good, good, good!' He thumped his knee in enthusiasm.

Hassan leaned forward, trying to read the printout upside down. 'Where?'

Rostov showed him the last page. 'Under NON-NUCLEAR. Two hundred tons of yellowcake to go from Antwerp to Genoa aboard the motor vessel Coparelli.'

'That's it, then,' said Hassan, catching some of Rostov's excitement. 'That's his target.'

'What a piece of luck.' Rostov was smiling broadly.

Hassan said: 'We've got the bastard now!'

'Not quite,' Rostov said. 'We know what he's going to steal, and who he's going to steal it from. We don't know when, where or how.'

'All this stuff about sister ships must have something to do with it.'

'Yes.' Rostov pulled his nose. 'I can't see the relevance of that.'

Two-and-sixpence, please, guv.

Keep the change.

'Find somewhere to park, Tyrin,' said Rostov.

'That's not so easy, around here,' Tyrin complained.

'If you can't find a space, just stop,' Rostov said, a little impatiently. 'Nobody cares if you get a parking ticket.'

Good morning. My name's Ed Rodgers.

Ah, yes. Just a moment, please.

'Maybe we'll get some more clues now,' Hassan said.

Your report has just been typed, Mr Rodgers. And here's the bill.

You're very efficient.

'Damn,' said Hassan. 'Now we won't hear the answers to the questions.'

'Makes no difference,' Rostov told him. 'It's just occurred to me. We know the questions. All we have to do is ask the same questions outselves, and we'll get the answers he got.'

Thankyou very much.

Goodbye, Mr Rodgers.

'He's not very chatty, is he,' said Pyotr Tyrin.

Rostov said: 'Good agents never are. You might bear that in mind.'

'Yes, sir.'

Hassan said: 'Listen, he's out in the street again. Go around the block, let's try to spot him.'

The van moved off. Before it had completed a circuit of the block, the street noises faded again.

Can I help you, sir?

'He's gone into a shop,' Hassan said.

I need a new shirt.

'Damn,' Hassan said.

I can see that, sir. What is it?

Coffee.

It should have been sponged right away, sir. It will be very difficult to get the stain out now. Did you want a similar shirt?

Yes. Plain white nylon, collar size fifteen.

Here we are. This one is thirty-two-and-six.

That's fine.

There was a chink of coins.

Thankyou. Would you like to put it on now, perhaps?

Yes, please.

The dressing room is through there.

Footsteps, then a short silence.

Would you like a bag for the old one, sir?

I'd rather you threw it away for me.

'That button cost a thousand pounds!' Tyrin said.

Certainly, sir.

'That's it,' Hassan said. 'We won't get any more, now.'

'A thousand pounds!' Tyrin said again.

Rostov said: 'I think we got our money's worth out of it, though. I shall do a report on that shirt button. Look what a difference it's made to us.'

Tyrin said: 'Where are we heading?'

'Back to the Embassy,' said Rostov. 'I want to stretch my legs. I can't feel the left one at all.'

Tyrin went west. Hassan said thoughtfully: 'We need to find out where the Coparelli is right now.'

'The squirrels can do that,' Rostov said.

'Squirrels?'

'Desk workers in Moscow Centre. They sit on their behinds all day, never doing anything more risky than crossing Granovsky Street in the rush hour, and get paid more than agents in the field.' Rostov became faintly professorial, quoting from his own lectures. 'Remember, an agent should never spend time acquiring information which is public knowledge. Anything which exists in books, reports, and files can be found by the squirrels. Since a squirrel is cheaper to run than an agent - not because of salaries, but because of support work - the Committee always prefers a squirrel to do a given job of work if he can. Always use the squirrels. Nobody will think you're being lazy.'

'Dickstein doesn't seem to work that way.'

'The Israelis have a completely different approach. Besides, Dickstein isn't a teamwork man, I suspect.'

'How long will the squirrels take to get us an answer?'

'Maybe a day. I'll put the inquiry through as soon as we get to the Embassy.'

Tyrin spoke over his shoulder. 'Can you put through a fast requisition at the same time?'

'What do you need?'

'Six more shirt buttons.'

'Why six?'

'If they're like the last lot, five of them will not work.'

Rostov grunted.

Hassan laughed, and said: 'Is this Communist efficiency?'

'There's nothing wrong with Communist efficiency,' Rostov told him. 'It's Russian efficiency we suffer from.'

Tyrin laughed loudly.

The van entered Embassy Row, and was waved on by the duty

policeman. Hassan said: 'What do we do when we've located the Coparelli?'

'Obviously,' said Rostov, 'we put a man aboard.'