Ten

'You sound British,' said the taxi driver. 'I noticed your accent, you know what I mean? I noticed you got some kind of an accent, sounds British. You British, or what?'

'I'm an Israeli,' said Nat Dickstein.

'No kidding. You sound British, by your accent. Now why would a man leave a beautiful sunny country like Israel to come to a hole in the ground like Buffalo? You realise, this is the best goddamn weather we get? I mean, ~~this~~ you're wearing a topcoat, right? And this is summer. This is a terrible place. Why do you want to come here? You doing a penance, or what?'

Dickstein looked out of the window. 'I came to call in a debt.'

'See, what it is here, you got Lake Erie in the west, and Lake Ontario in the north. Now, the way I see it, those Canadian winds come across those lakes so fast, with nothing to stop them, you understand? Now, if we had a few mountains and stuff between us and Canada, it might slow down the wind; but no, all we got is lakes, and the damp just makes the wind that much colder, you understand what I mean? Jesus, you ought to be here in the winter, correction, you shouldn't never come here in the winter, it's worse than Alaska. You here on business, or what?'

Dickstein realised the man was not listening to the answers. 'Sure, on business,' he said.

'This used to be a very prosperous business town. I can remember when the waterfront was crammed with ships and barges. Canadian wheat, it was, and iron ore. It's a harbour, see, Buffalo is a harbour. Now, I'm interested in economics - you interested in economics? - I'm interested in economics, now listen, where is the best place to build a steel mill? I'll tell you: right where the

iron ore comes off the boat. So that's why we got steel mills. And you know the best place to build an auto plant? Right next to the steel mill. That's economics. I read books, you know? I'm a cab driver, but I read books. You can do a dumb job, but you don't have to be dumb.'

The place did not look prosperous now, Dickstein thought. They were passing through a semi-industrial area, with tumbledown tenements, vacant lots, garish stores selling junk furniture, cyclone fences, overhead cables, and a cheap bar on every corner. He said: 'What went wrong?'

'If you ask me, people don't want to work,' the driver said. He went on, but Dickstein tuned him out, and thought about Al Cortone. He had once had an address for Cortone, but he had lost it and anyway it was sure to be out of date by now. Unfortunately, Cortone had not been in the phone book. However, there had been three other Cortones in the book. Dickstein had found one who was related to Al. Pretending to be a sorting clerk in the post office, he had asked for the correct address for Mr A. Cortone. Now he was on his way there.

He could remember, as clearly as if it were yesterday, the occasion when he had put Cortone under an obligation. In those days he had learned about the psychology of a cornered animal. When there is no longer any possibility of running away, you learn how fiercely you can fight. Landed in a strange country, separated from his unit, advancing across unknown terrain with his rifle in his hand, he had drawn on reserves of patience, cunning and ruthlessness he did not know he had. He had lain for half an hour in that thicket, watching the abandoned tank which he <u>knew</u> - without understanding how - was the bait in a trap. He had spotted the one sniper, but was looking for another, when the Americans came roaring up like college boys arriving at a party. That made it safe for Dickstein

to shoot - for, if there were another sniper, he would fire at the obvious target, the Americans, rather than search the bushes for the source of the shot.

So, with no thought for anything but his own survival, Dickstein had saved Cortone's life.

Cortone was even more new to war than Dickstein, and learning just as fast. They were both street-wise kids applying old principles to new terrain. For a while they fought together, and cursed and laughed and talked about women together. When the island was taken, they had sneaked off during the buildup to the next push, and visited Cortone's Sicilian cousins.

Those cousins were the focus of Dickstein's interest now.

They had helped him once before, back in 1948. He knew they had acquired vast stocks of weapons during the fighting on the island - weapons abandoned by Italian and German troops as well as those taken from battlefields. He wanted those weapons for Israel, but he had no money to buy them. He had put the cousins in touch with Arab buyers, and the Sicilians had made a small fortune from the sale. Then, in return for Dickstein's services, they had told him exactly how and where delivery was to be made; and Dickstein had stolen the whole consignment. It was an operation after the Sicilians' own hearts, and they had revelled in it.

There had been profit for them in that, and so Dickstein had gone straight to them with the plan. This project was different: he wanted a favour, and he could offer no percentage. Consequently he had to go to Al and call in the twenty-four-year-old debt.

'This is it,' said the taxi driver.

They had stopped at a high gate in a long wall. Through the bars Dickstein could see a large house - in England he would have called it a mansion - built of red brick and pale green tiles. The

grounds were laid out beautifully, with lawns and young trees and gravel paths. The Cortone family business had obviously done well.

Dickstein got out of the car. The driver said: 'You want me to wait, in case they don't let you in?'

'No,' said Dickstein. 'Keep the change.'

The cab pulled away. Dickstein found a bell-push embedded in the stone gatepost below an entryphone speaker. He pressed the bell.

'Yes?' The voice came from the speaker.

'I want to see Al Cortone,' Dickstein said.

'Who is it?'

'Tell him ... ' Dickstein hesitated, instinctively reluctant to give his name. 'Tell him it's a friend from Oxford University.'

*

The Don had had a bad day.

It had started at breakfast when Steven Backhouse, his counsellor, had brought the news that some of their people had got busted in the night. The police had stopped and searched a truck containing two thousand five hundred pairs of fur-lined bedroom slippers and five kilos of heroin. The load, on its way from Canada to New York City, had been hit at Albany. The smack was confiscated and the driver and co-driver thrown in jail.

The stuff did not belong to the Don. However, the team that did the run paid dues to him, and in return expected protection. They would want him to get the men out of jail and get the heroin back. It was close to impossible. He might have been able to do it if the bust had involved only the State police; but if only the State police had been involved, the bust would not have happened.

And that was just the start. His eldest son had wired from Harvard for more money, having gambled away the whole of his next

semester's allowance weeks before school started. He had spent the morning finding out why his chain of restaurants was losing money, and the afternoon explaining to his mistress why he could not take her to Europe this year. Finally his doctor told him he had gonorrhoea, again.

He looked in his dressing-room mirror, adjusting his bow tie, and said: 'What a shitty day.'

'Nothing we can't handle,' said Steven Backhouse.

'You find out who was behind that bust?'

'NYPD,' said Backhouse. He crossed his black-trousered legs and sat with his hands together in his lap, looking like an unusually elegant accountant, which he was. 'I figure they got the tip, but passed it to State to avoid trouble with the New York family.'

'They could have ignored the tip.'

'The fact that they didn't is a sign the tip came from someone important.'

'Like Justice?'

'Right.'

'So what do we do?'

'Hire lawyers, take care of the families of the two drivers, and buy the smack back from the police.'

'And lean on whoever forgot to call us.'

'Right.'

The Don put on his dinner jacket and sat down opposite Backhouse. 'What am I going to do about Giovanni?'

'Johnnie's a kid,' Backhouse said. 'Kids run wild, especially rich kids. So he gambled away a few thousand bucks. Nobody's hurting.'

'I'm hurting.' The Don took out a cigar, and Backhouse got up to light it. 'Why isn't he home for the summer? College boys are

supposed to come home for the summer. I never went to college, but this I know.'

'You want one of us to go and see him?'

'If anybody goes, it has to be me. If I send somebody, it looks like I'm only worried about the money.'

'I see that.'

'I better go see him next week. You ready for supper?'

'Sure.'

The phone rang, and Backhouse picked it up. 'Yes?' He listened for a moment. 'Wait, I'll ask.' He looked up at the Don. 'A man at the gate wants to see you.'

'So, who?'

'He's ... ' Backhouse spoke into the phone. 'What was that again? Oh, right. A friend from Oxford University.'

The Don frowned, and then his face broke into a smile. 'No kidding! Bring him in - and put out the red carpet!'

*

It had been a year for seeing old friends and observing how they had changed; but Al Cortone's appearance was the most startling yet. The increase in weight which had just begun when he returned from Frankfurt seemed to have continued steadily through the years, and now Cortone was at least two hundred and fifty pounds. There was a look of sensuality about his puffy face which had been only hinted at in 1947 and totally absent during the war. And he was ~~totally~~ completely bald. Dickstein thought this was unusual among Italians.

After dinner they sat in leather armchairs in Cortone's den and a ~~wa~~ butler brought brandy and cigars. The meal had been a strange affair. Mrs Cortone had sat at the foot of the table without speaking or being spoken to throughout. Two ill-mannered boys had wolfed their food and left early with a roar of sports-car exhaust.

Cortone had eaten large quantities of the fattening Italian food and drunk several glasses of dreadful Californian red wine. But the most intriguing character was the shark-faced Steven Backhouse, who behaved sometimes as a friend, sometimes as an advisor, and sometimes as a servant.

No business had been talked during dinner. Instead they told war stories - Cortone told most of them. It seemed Backhouse had not been in combat, and somehow that was entirely fitting. Cortone also told the story of Dickstein's 1948 coup against the Arabs - he had heard about it from his cousins, and had been as delighted as they were. The tale had become highly embroidered in the retailing.

Only the three men went into the den. Dickstein guessed that Backhouse was even more intrigued with him than he with Backhouse. Dickstein refused both the brandy and the cigar.

'You used to be a hell of a drinker,' Cortone said.

'It was a hell of a war,' Dickstein replied. The butler left the room. Dickstein said: 'Al, can you put your hand on your heart and say that Mr Backhouse here knows all your secrets?'

'No,' Cortone said, and laughed heartily. 'He don't know what I do when I'm in bed with a cunt. Otherwise, he knows everything.'

Dickstein said: 'I hope you'll pardon me, Mr Backhouse. I've come here to talk to Al about something very secret.'

Backhouse shrugged, and looked at Cortone for guidance.

Cortone said: 'Steve knows enough about me to put me in jail for the rest of my life. My advice to you, Nat, is trust him as far as you trust me. Besides, sending out of the room won't do any good if you're going to ask my help, because whatever I do for you, he'll put it into operation. But if you just want to tell me something ... '

'Okay,' Dickstein said. He had guessed it would be this way. 'Do you remember what you said to me last time we met?'

'Sure. I told you I owe you a debt of honour. You saved my life.' Cortone inhaled on his cigar.

Dickstein nodded. 'I'm here to ask for your help.'

'You got it.'

'Thanks. Mind if I put the radio on?'

Backhouse said: 'This building is swept for bugs about once a week. You're safe.'

'Good,' said Dickstein, but he put the radio on all the same. 'Cards on the table, Al. I work for Israeli Intelligence.'

Backhouse nodded silently, as if he had suspected as much. Cortone said: 'I'm not surprised.'

'I'm running a big operation in the Mediterranean in November. It's something that could mean the end of the wars in the Middle East.' He paused, remembering a phrase Cortone had used habitually. 'And I ain't shittin' you.'

Cortone smiled. 'If you were going to shit me, you would have been here sooner than twenty years.'

'It's important that the operation should not be traceable back to Israel. However, I need a base from which to work. I need a big house, on the coast, with a landing for small boats and an anchorage, not too far offshore, for a big ship. While I'm there - a couple of weeks, maybe more - I need to be prtected from inquiring policemen and other nosey officials. I can think of only one place where I could get all that.'

Cortone nodded. 'Sicily.'

'And only one person who could get it for me.'

'Sure.'

'Well, that's what I came to ask for,' Dickstein said.

'You're kidding,' said Cortone. 'That's <u>all</u>?'

*

TO: Head of Mossad

FROM: Head of London Station

DATE: 29 July 1968

Suza Ashford is almost certainly an agent of an Arab intelligence service.

She was born in Oxford, England, 17 June 1944, the only child of Mr (now Professor) Stephen Ashford (born Guildford, England, 1908) and Eila Zuabi (born Tripoli, Lebanon, 1925). The mother, who died in 1958, was a full-blooded Arab. The father is what is known in England as an 'Arabist': he spent most of the first forty years of his life in the Middle East, and was an explorer, entrepreneur, and linguist. He now teaches Semitic Languages at Oxford University. He is well known there for his moderately pro-Arab opinions.

Therefore, although Suza Ashford is strictly speaking a U.K. national, we may be fairly sure that her loyalties lie with the Arab cause.

She works as an air hostess for BOAC on intercontinental routes, travelling frequently to Tehran, Singapore, and Zurich, among other places. She therefore has many opportunities to make clandestine contacts with Arab diplomatic staff.

She is a strikingly beautiful young woman (see attached photograph - which, however, does not do her justice, according to the field agent on this case). She is promiscuous, but not unusually so by the standards of her profession nor by the standards of young people in London in 1968. To be specific: for her to have sexual intercourse with a man to whom she is not attracted, solely for the purpose of getting information from him, would be an unpleasant experience, but not a traumatic one.

Finally - and this is the clincher - Yasif Hassan, the agent who spotted Dickstein in Luxembourg, studied under Ashford at the same

time as Dickstein; has remained in occasional contact with Ashford in the intervening years; and may have visited Ashford (a man answering his description certainly *did* visit) around the time Dickstein's affair with Suza began.

I recommend that the surveillance be continued.

(signed)

Robert.

TO: Head of London Station

FROM: Head of Mossad

DATE: 30 July 1968

With all that against her, I cannot understand why you do not recommend we kill her.

(signed)

Pierre Borg.

TO: Head of Mossad

FROM: Head of London Station

DATE: 31 July 1968

I do not recommend killing Suza Ashford for the following reasons:

1. The evidence against her is strong but circumstantial.

2. From what I know of Dickstein, I doubt very much that he has given her any information, even if he is romantically involved.

3. If we kill her the other side will begin looking for another way to get at Dickstein. Better the devil we know.

4. We may be able to use her to feed *false* information to the other side.

5.I do not like to kill on the basis of circumstantial evidence. We are not barbarians. We are Jews.

6. If we kill the woman Dickstein loves, I think he will kill you, me, and everyone else involved in the operation.

(signed)

Robert.

TO: Head of London Station

FROM: Head of Mossad

DATE: 1 August 1968

Do it your way.

(signed)

Pierre Borg.

POSTSCRIPT (marked Personal)

Your point 5 is very noble and touching, but remarks like that won't get you promoted in this man's army.

*

She was a small, old, ugly, dirty, cantankerous bitch.

Rust bloomed like a skin rash in great orange blotches all over her hull. If there had ever been any paint on her upperworks it had long ago been peeled away and blasted off and dissolved by the wind and the rain and the sea. Her starboard gunwale had been badly buckled just aft of the prow in an old collision, and nobody had ever bothered to straighten it out. Her funnel bore a layer of grime ten years thick. Her deck was scored and dented and stained; and although it was swabbed often, it was never swabbed thoroughly, so that thre were traces of past cargoes - grains of corn, splinters of timber, bits of rotting vegetation and fragments of sacking - hidden behind lifeboats and under coils of rope and inside cracks and joins and holes. On a warm day she smelled foul.

She was some 2,500 tons, 200 feet long and a little over thirty feet broad. There was a tall radio mast in her blunt prow. Most

of her deck was taken up by two large hatches opening into the main cargo holds. There were three cranes on deck: one forward of the hatches, one aft, and one in between. The wheelhouse, officers' cabins, galley and crew's quarters were in the stern, clustered around the funnel. She had a single screw driven by a six-cylinder diesel engine theoretically capable of developing 2,450 b.h.p. and maintaining a service speed of thirteen knots.

Fully loaded, she would pitch badly. In ballast she would yaw like the very devil. Either way she would roll through seventy degrees of arc at the slightest provocation. The quarters were cramped and poorly ventilated, the galley was often flooded, and the engine room had been designed by Hieronymous Bosch.

She was crewed by thirty-one officers and men, not one of whom had a good word to say for her.

The only passengers were a colony of cockroaches in the galley, a few mice, and several hundred rats.

Nobody loved her, and her name was Coparelli.

Eleven

This is how Nat Dickstein became a shipping tycoon.

There is in West Africa a tiny country called Liberia. It is somewhat smaller than New York State. It is sandwiched between Sierra Leone in the west and Ivory Coast in the east, and its population is a million and a half. It was founded by the government of the USA in 1822 as a colony for freed slaves, and became independent in 1847. But the American people have long memories, especially for their mistakes; and a century later they were still trying to take care of Liberia. A U.S. Secretary of State called Edward Stettinius set up the Liberian Trust Company to encourage American investment there. But the man responsible for the great success of the Company was, wait for it, Aristotle Onassis. Onassis suggested to Stettinius that Liberia could become a legal and financial capital by exploiting its very lax laws concerning the registration of companies, especially shipping companies. When the suggestion was taken up, Onasssis promptly registered many of his oil tankers in Liberia. The Liberians were happy and so was Ari. So, too, was everyone who wanted to set up a shady little shipping company with no questions asked and no rules about safety, crew levels, or the number of flush toilets on the mess deck.

The formalities are minimal. You do not have to give references, or establish that you are honest or solvent or sane. You do not have to live in Liberia, indeed you do not have to go there. The only requirement is that you make your application through a lawyer. Any lawyer will do, even if he qualified in a Tibetan monastery or a Patagonian bible college, so long as his name appears under 'Lawyers' in some phone book, somewhere.

Nat Dickstein got his lawyer out of the Manhattan phone book.

He picked one with a Chinese name and an address on the Lower East Side, and instead of calling on the phone he went there personally to make sure Mr Chung was the kind of cheap low-grade attorney he wanted.

Dickstein and Chung then got a cab to the Park Avenue offices of Liberian Corporation Services, Inc., a company set up to assist people who want to register a Liberian Corporation but have no intention of ever going within three thousand miles of Liberia. There, for a fee of five hundred dollars (which Dickstein paid in cash) they registered the Savile Shipping Corporation of Liberia. The fact that at this stage Dickstein did not even own a rowing-boat was of no interest to anyone.

The company's headquarters was listed as No. 80 Broad Street, Monrovia, Liberia; and its directors were P. Satia, E.K. Nugba, and J.D. Boyd, all residents of Liberia. This is the headquarters address of most Liberian Corporations, and the address of the Liberian Trust Company. Satia, Nugba and Boyd are founding directors of many such corporations; indeed this is the way they make their living. They are also employees of the Liberian Trust Company.

Afterwards Chung asked for fifty dollars and cab fare. Dickstein paid him in cash and told him to get the bus.

Satia, Nugba and Boyd resigned twenty-four hours later; and that same day the notary public of Montserrado County, Liberia, stamped an affidavit which said that total control of the Savile Shipping Corporation now lay in the hands of someone called Andre Papagopolos; and that is another story.

*

Papagopolos's origins were obscure, but he could not take the credit for this. The village where he was born in 1912 was then part of Turkey, but a year later it was ceded to Bulgaria, then in 1920 it became Greek. Around that time it was razed to the ground in the

fighting and ceased to exist. Its site is close to the modern border; but nobody knows which side.

Throughout his adult life, then, Papagopolos could call himself Greek, Turkish or Bulgarian, as it suited him.

As a boy he worked on fishing boats with his father when they were not hiding from Bulgarian troops or Greek troops or Turkish troops. In his teenage he graduated to other kinds of maritime work, mainly smuggling. Nobody knows what he did during World War Two, but immediately after the war he turned up in Ethiopia.

North-east Africa in 1946 was the biggest scrapyard in the world. Military supplies of all sorts - from tanks to topees - which had been priceless a year earlier were now just so much junk, surplus. Much of the stuff could be had for the taking away, and there was lots more for sale, through channels both legal and illegal, at knock-down prices. To make a fortune you needed a little capital, a sharp business brain, and contact with a buyer.

The War was over, but there would be more wars, and Papagopolos knew where.

Palestine.

Papagopolos bought rifles, handguns, machine-guns, anti-tank guns, and ammunition for all of these. He contacted the Jewish Agency in Cairo and did deals. He arranged shipping - and here his smuggling background was invaluable. He delivered the stuff to Israel and collected his money. Then he asked if they needed any more.

This was how he met Nat Dickstein.

The Ethiopian adventure was only a stage in Papagopolos's career. He soon moved on, to Farouk's Cairo after the mysterious death of a partner, and then to Switzerland. Ethiopia marked his transition from totally illegal business to dealings which were at

worst shady and at best pristine. By 1968 he called himself a ship broker, and that was most, though by no means all, of his business.

If you have a cargo, a broker will place it in a ship for you. If you have a half-full ship, a broker will find a cargo to fill the other half. And if you want to buy a ship, a broker will do that, too.

In 1968 Dickstein wanted to buy a ship.

*

Papagopolos was a big man, olive-skinned, with thin dark hair combed over a growing bald patch. On a bright summer day in Zurich he wore a navy-blue suit, pale blue shirt, and dark blue knitted tie. He had small dark eyes and wore gold-rimmed spectacles for reading.

He had no address. He could be reached via half a dozen telephone numbers all over the world, but he was never <u>there</u> - always, somebody took a message and he called you back. Many people knew him and trusted him, especially in the shipping business, for he never let anyone down; but this trust was based on reputation, not personal contact. He lived well but quietly, and Nat Dickstein was one of the few people in the world who knew of his single vice, which was that he liked to go to bed with lots of girls - but <u>lots</u>: like, ten or twelve. He had no sense of humour.

Dickstein took the bus from the airport to the railway station, and Papagopolos was waiting for him when he got off. They went to the Veltliner Keller in the old city for lunch. (Dickstein did not care about the food, but Papagopolos did.)

Papagopolos had already visited the Zurich office of the Liberian Corporation Services, Inc., on the Pelikanstrasse, to register himself as president and chief executive of Savile Shipping.

For this he would receive ten thousand U.S. dollars, paid out of Mossad's account in a Swiss bank into his account in the same branch of the same bank.

Dickstein now explained to him his duties as President.

'One: buy a small, fast ship, a thousand or fifteen hundred tons, small crew. Register her in Liberia.' This involved another visit to the Pelikanstrasse and a fee of about a dollar per ton. 'For the purchase, you take your percentage as broker. Do some business with the ship, and take your broker's percentage on that. I don't care what the ship does, so long as she completes a voyage by docking in Haifa on or before 7 October. Dismiss the crew at Haifa.

'Two: buy any one of the ships on the list.' He handed over a single sheet of paper bearing the names of the four sister ships of the Coparelli, with their owners and last known locations. 'Offer whatever price is necessary: I have to have one of them. Take your broker's percentage. Deliver her to Haifa by 7 October. Dismiss the crew.'

Papagopolos was eating chocolate mousse. 'No problem,' he said. He knew there was more to come.

Dickstein handed him another sheet of paper. 'Buy this ship - the Coparelli. But you have to buy her at exactly the right time. She sails from Antwerp on Sunday 17 November. We must buy her after she sails, but before she passes through the Straits of Gibraltar.

'Four: early in 1969 you sell ship no. 1, the little ship, and ship no. 3, the Coparelli. You get from me a certificate showing that ship no. 2 has been sold for scrap. You send that certificate to Lloyds. You wind up Savile Shipping.' Dickstein smiled and sipped his coffee.

Papagopolos folded the typewritten sheets and put them in his inside pocket. 'As you must realise, this is all straightforward except for the purchase of the Coparelli while she is at sea. The normal procedure for the sale of a ship is as follows: negotiations take place, a price is agreed, and the documents are drawn up. The ship goes into dry dock for an inspection. When she has been pronounced satisfactory, the documents are signed, the money is paid, and the new owner takes her out of dry dock. Buying a ship while she is sailing is most irregular.'

'But not impossible,' Dickstein said.

'No, I think not impossible. We have to open negotiations, agree the price, and have the inspection arranged for a date after her November voyage. Then, when she has sailed, we say that the purchaser needs to spend the money immediately, perhaps for tax reasons. The buyer would then take out insurance against any major repairs which might prove necessary after the inspection ... but this is not the seller's concern. He is concerned about his reputation as a shipper. He will want cast-iron guarantees that his cargo will be delivered as promised.'

'He will accept a guarantee based on your personal reputation.'

'Of course - but then I want a similar guarantee from you.'

Dickstein nodded. 'I can promise you that the owner of the cargo will not complain.'

Papagopolos shrugged. 'That is sufficient.'

'Good! What else is there ... You open an account in Savile's name at your bank. The Embassy puts funds into the account as they are required. You report to me simply by leaving a written message at the bank, which will be picked up by somebody from the Embassy. If we need to meet and talk, we use the usual phone numbers.'

'Agreed.'

A waitress brought a little bowl of Swiss chocolates for them to eat with their coffee. Papagopolos took one; Dickstein refused. Dickstein said: 'You'll make a useful profit from all this.'

'Indeed,' said Papagopolos. 'But what, I wonder, are you getting out of it?'

*

It so happened that Pyotr Tyrin had done three years in the Soviet Navy. That, plus the fact that he was a radio and electronics expert, made him the ideal choice as the man to be planted aboard the Coparelli.

'She's a grubby old ship,' he said.

Rostov did not reply. They were sitting in a rented Ford on a quay at Cardiff docks. The squirrels at Moscow Centre had informed them that the Coparelli would make port here today, and they were now watching her tie up. She was to unload her cargo of Swedish timber and take on a mixture of small machinery and cotton goods: it would take her several days.

'At least the mess decks aren't in the foc'sle,' Tyrin muttered, more or less to himself.

'She's not that old,' Rostov said.

Tyrin was surprised Rostov knew what he was talking about. Rostov continually surprised him with odd bits of knowledge and deadly accurate forecasts.

From the rear seat of the car Yasif Hassan said: 'Is that the front or the back of the boat?'

Rostov and Tyrin looked at one another and grinned at Hassan's ignorance. 'The back,' Rostov said. 'We call it the stern.'

It was raining. The Welsh rain was even more persistent and monotonous than the English, and colder. Pyotr Tyrin was unhappy. He did not want to go back to sea. In truth, the main reason he had

applied to join the KGB had been that he wanted to get out of the navy. He hated the damp and the cold and the food and the discipline. Besides, he had a warm comfortable wife in an apartment in South Kensington and he liked to go home to her every evening.

Of course, there was no question of his saying No to Rostov.

'We'll get you on as radio operator, but you must take your own equipment as a fall-back,' Rostov said.

Tyrin wondered how this would be achieved. His approach would have been to find the ship's radio man, knock him on the head, throw him in the water, and board the ship to say 'I hear you need a new radio operator.' No doubt Rostov's plan would be more subtle.

The activity on deck had died down, and the Coparelli's engines were quiet. Five or six sailors came across the gangplank in a bunch, laughing and shouting, and headed for the town. Rostov said: 'See which pub they go to, Yasif.' Hassan got out of the car and followed the sailors.

Tyrin watched him go with a sinking heart. He was depressed by the whole scene: the figures crossing the wet concrete quay with their raincoat collars turned up; the sounds of tugs hooting and men shouting nautical instructions and chains winding and unwinding; the stacks of pallets and the bare cranes like sentries; the smell of engine oil and ship's ropes and salt spray. It all made him think of the Kensington place, his chair in front of the electric fire, a leg of English lamb, beer and vodka in the fridge, and an evening of television.

'Your first job is to befriend the crew,' Rostov said, interrupting Tyrin's thoughts. 'You are a radio operator. You suffered a minor accident aboard your last ship, the Christmas Rose - you broke your arm - and you were discharged here in Cardiff to convalesce. You got an excellent compensation payment from the

owners. You're spending the money and having a good time while it lasts. You say vaguely that you'll look for another job when your money runs out. You have to discover two things: the identity of the radio man, and the anticipated date and time of departure of the ship.'

'Fine,' said Tyrin, though it was far from fine. Just how was he to 'befriend' these people? He was not much of an actor, in his view. Would he have to play the part of a hearty hail-fellow-well-met? Suppose the crew of this ship were an insular lot? Would they think him a bore, a lonely man trying to attach himself to a jolly group? What if they just plain didn't like him?

Unconsciously he squared his broad shoulders. Either he would do it, or there would be some reason why it could not be done. All he could do was his best.

Hassan came back across the quay. Rostov said: 'Get in the back, let Yasif drive.' Tyrin got out and held the door for Hassan. The Arab's face was streaming with rain. He started the car and pulled away.

Rostov turned around to speak to Tyrin in the back seat. 'Here's a hundred pounds,' he said, and handed over a roll of banknotes. 'Don't spend it too carefully.'

'Do you want a receipt?' Tyrin asked.

'No.'

Hassan stopped the car opposite a small dockland pub on a corner. A sign outside, flapping gently in the wind, read 'Brains Beers'. A smokey yellow light glowed behind the steamed-up windows. There were worse places to be on a day like this, Tyrin thought.

'What nationality are the crew?' he said suddenly.

'Mostly Swedish,' Rostov told him.

Tyrin's false papers gave his nationality as Austrian. 'What

language should I use with them?' he said.

'All Swedes speak English.'

There was a minute of silence. Rostov said: 'Any more questions?'

'No.' Tyrin opened the car door.

Rostov said: 'Speak to me when you get back to the hotel tonight - no matter how late.'

'Sure.'

'Good luck.'

Tyrin slammed the car door and crossed the road to the pub. As he reached the entrance someome came out, and the warm smell of beer and tobacco engulfed Tyrin for a moment. He went inside.

It was a pokey little place, with hard wooden benches around the walls and plastic tables nailed to the floor. Four of the sailors were playing darts in the corner, and a fifth was at the bar calling encouragement to them.

The barman nodded to Tyrin. 'Good morning,' Tyrin said. 'A pint of lager, a large whisky and a ham sandwich.'

The sailor at the bar turned around and nodded pleasantly. Tyrin smiled. 'Have you just made port?'

'Yes. The Coparelli.'

'Christmas Rose,' Tyrin replied. 'She left me behind.'

'You are lucky.'

'I broke my arm.'

'So?' said the Swedish sailor with a grin. 'So you drink with the other one.'

'I like that,' Tyrin said. 'Let me buy you a drink. What'll it be?'

*

Three days later they were still drinking. There were changes in the composition of the group, as some sailors went on duty and others came

ashore; and there was a short period, between about four a.m. and opening time, when there was literally nowhere in the city, legal or illegal, where you could get a drink; but otherwise life was one long pub crawl. Tyrin had forgotten how sailors can drink. He was dreading the hangover. He was glad, however, that he had not got into a situation where he felt obliged to go with prostitutes: the Swedes were interested in women, but not whores. Tyrin would never have been able to convince his wife that he had caught venereal disease in the service of the Motherland. The Swedes' other vice was gambling. Tyrin had lost about fifty pounds of KGB money at poker. He was so well in with them that last night he had been invited aboard at about three a.m. He had fallen asleep on the mess deck and they had left him there until eight bells.

Tonight would not be like that. The Coparelli was to sail on the morning tide, and all officers and men had to be aboard by midnight. It was now ten past eleven, and the landlord of the pub was moving around the room collecting glasses and emptying ashtrays. Tyrin was playing dominoes with Lars, the radio operator. They had abandoned the proper game and were now competing to see who could stand the most blocks in a line without knocking the lot down. Lars was very drunk, but Tyrin was only pretending.

The landlord called out: 'Time, gentlemen, please! Thankyou very much.'

Tyrin knocked his dominoes down, and laughed. Lars said: 'You see - I am smaller alcoholic than you.'

The other crew from Coparelli were leaving. Tyrin and Lars stood up. Tyrin put his arm around Lars's shoulders, and they staggered together into the street.

The night air was cool and damp. Tyrin was now stone cold sober, and his heart beat fast. He had to stay very close to Lars now.

He began talking, asking questions about Lars' home and family. He kept the two of them a few yards behind the main group of sailors.

They passed a blonde woman in a micro-skirt. She touched her left breast and said: 'Hello, boys. Fancy a cuddle?'

Tyrin said: 'Not tonight, sweetheart.'

They walked past a dark blue Ford Capri 2000 parked at the roadside with its lights out. The interior light flashed on and off momentarily, and Tyrin saw the face of the man at the wheel. Tyrin took a white flat cap from his pocket and put it on his head. When the sailors had passed on, the car started up and moved away in the opposite direction.

Lars said: 'I have a fiancee.'

Oh, no, not now, Tyrin thought.

Lars giggled. 'She has ... hot pants.'

'Are you going to marry her?' Tyrin said. He was peering ahead intently, listening for something.

Lars leered. 'What for?'

'Is she faithful.'

'She better be faithful or I slit her throat.'

'I thought Swedish people believed in free love,' Tyrin said. He was saying anything that came into his head, now.

'Free love, yes. But she better be faithful.'

'That's not logical.'

'I can explain ... when sober.'

Come on, Tyrin thought. Get it over with.

One of the sailors in the group stopped to pee in the gutter. The others stood around making ribald remarks and laughing. Tyrin wished the man would hurry - he was messing up the timing. At last he finished, and they all walked on.

Tyrin heard a car, and he tensed. He saw its headlights

approaching. It was moving steadily, in the middle of the road. The sailors moved toward the pavement to get out of its way. It wasn't right, it wasn't supposed to be like this, it wouldn't work this way! Tyrin was suddenly confused - then he saw the outline of the car as it passed beneath a street light, and he realised it was not the one he was waiting for, it was a patrolling police car. It went by them and accelerated away.

The end of the street opened into a wide, empty square, badly paved. There was little traffic about. The sailors headed straight across the middle of the square.

Now, Tyrin thought, now.

A car came tearing around a corner and into the square, headlights blazing. Tyrin tightened his grip on Lars's shoulder. The car was veering wildly.

'Drunk driver,' Lars said thickly.

It was a Ford Capri.

It swung toward the bunch of sailors in front of Tyrin. They stopped laughing and scattered out of its way, shouting curses. The car turned away, then screeched around and accelerated straight for Tyrin and Lars.

'Look out!' Tyrin yelled.

When the car was almost on top of them, he pulled Lars to one side, jerking the Swede off balance, and threw himself sideways. There was a stomach-turning thud, followed by a scream, and a crash of breaking glass. The car went by. Tyrin got to his feet. Lars lay on the road, groaning.

He's alive, Tyrin thought; thank God.

The car braked. One of its headlights had gone out - the one that had hit Lars, presumably. It coasted, as if the driver were hesitating. Then it gathered speed and, one-eyed, it disappeared into

the night.

Tyrin bent over Lars. The other sailors gathered around, speaking Swedish. Tyrin touched Lars's leg, and the man yelled out in pain.

'I think his leg is broken,' Tyrin said.

Lights were going on in some of the buildings around the square. One of the officers said something, and a rating ran off toward a house, presumably to send for an ambulance. There was more fast speech, then another men went off in the direction of the dock.

Lars was bleeding, but not too heavily. The officer bent over him. He would not allow anyone to touch his leg.

The ambulance arrived within minutes, but it seemed like forever to Tyrin. He had never killed a man, and he did not want to.

They put Lars on a stretcher. The officer got into the ambulance, and turned to speak to Tyrin. 'You had better come,' he said.

'Yes.'

'You saved his life, I think.'

'Oh.' He got in.

The ambulance sped through the wet streets, it s flashing blue light casting an unpleasant glow over the buildings. Tyrin sat in the back, unable to look at Lars or the officer, unwilling to look out of the windows like a tourist, not knowing where to point his eyes.

They arrived at the hospital. The ambulance men carried the stretcher inside. Tyrin and the officer were shown where to wait. And, suddenly, the panic was over. They nad nothing to do but worry. Tyrin was astonished to see that it was not yet midnight. It seemed hours since they had left the pub.

After a long wait, a doctor came out and spoke to them. 'He's broken his leg and lost some blood,' he said. He seemed very tired. 'He's got a lot of alcohol in him, which doesn't help. But he's young, strong, and healthy. His leg will mend and he will be perfectly fit again in a few weeks.'

The officer said: 'Our ship sails in the morning.'

'He won't be on it. Is your captain on his way here?'

'Yes.'

'Fine.' The doctor turned and left.

The captain arrived at the same time as the police. He spoke to the officer in Swedish while a young sergeant asked Tyrin to describe the accident.

Afterwards the captain approached Tyrin. 'I believe you saved Lars' life,' he said.

'I tried to pull him out of the way, but he fell. He was very drunk.'

'Horst says you are between ships.'

'Yes, sir.'

'You are a fully qualified radio operator?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I need a replacement for poor Lars. Would you like to sail with us in the morning?'

*

They stood beside the lake at Zurich, Pierre Borg and Nat Dickstein, and talked about how they would steal a holocaust.

Dickstein said: 'Papagopolos has paid one-and-a-half-million Deutschemarks for the Stromberg. The Coparelli will cost a little more.'

'Why?' Borg asked. 'They're supposed to be identical.'

'We'll be buying Coparelli in a hurry. We'll have to pay a

premium.'

'Okay.' Borg did not really have his mind on these details. He was thinking about what he would have to say to Dickstein in a few minutes. It was going to be ... delicate; and delicacy was not Borg's strength.

Dickstein continued: 'Papagopolos has found a small ship for us, too. She's called the Gil Hamilton. She's costing eighty thousand pounds sterling.'

Borg nodded. 'So we will own all the ships involved in the operation. Smart. But the Coparelli will have her original crew, won't she? What about them?'

'I'll have to get them off. I'll need an agent who is also a ship's engineer.'

'I see.' Borg smiled. 'Yes, I think we have someone. Do you know young Koch?'

'No.'

'Came to us from Naval Intelligence. I believe he carries engineer's papers. Anyway, I'll handle it. That just leaves the problem of the owner of the uranium.'

'A German chemicals company, F.A. Pedler of Wiesbaden. I plan to recruit them to the Israeli cause. I want your help there, too. I need details of government requirements of all bulk chemicals, and accreditation as a buyer for the State.'

'You're spending some money.'

'Are you complaining?'

'Not about that.'

The lake was crowded with boats, their multicoloured sails flapping prettily in the Swiss sunshine. Dickstein waited, calm and silent, for Borg to explain his last remark. Looking at him, Borg was reminded of his son Dan, the teenage rebel. Like Dickstein, Dan

was sure of himself, too sure. He would stand there, sullenly confident, while Borg tried to explain that going on peace marches was disloyal to father, mother, country and God, until Borg strangled himself with his own inarticulate rage. He knew he should like Dickstein, who was a brilliant and loyal agent; and he knew he should love Dan, who was his son; and both of them refused to be quite what he wanted them to be. It had been the same with his wife, God rest her soul.

He decided to speak plainly, as he always did when he had this kind of difficulty. 'I believe you're fucking one of the other side's agents,' he said. He knew, instantly, that he had phrased it just about as badly as he possibly could; and he knew that that, too, always happened when he decided to speak plainly.

Dickstein had gone pale. He stared at Borg. 'No,' he said tonelessly.

'I'll give you the headlines,' Borg said. 'She's Arab, her father's politics are pro-Arab, she travels all over the world in her job so she has plenty of opoortunity for contacts, and the agent Hassan, who spotted you in Luxembourg, is a friend of the family.'

Dickstein turned and faced Borg, standing too close, gazing fiercely at Borg's face. 'That's all?' he said.

'All? What the fuck do you mean, <u>all</u>? You'd shoot people on that much evidence!'

'Not people I know.'

'Has she gotten any information out of you?'

Dickstein shouted: 'No!'

'You're getting mad because you know you've made a mistake.'

Dickstein turned away and looked across the lake. After a long pause he said: 'Yes, I'm angry because I've made a mistake. I should have told you about her; not the other way around. I understand how

it must seem to you.'

'Seem? You mean you don't believe she's an agent?'

'Have you checked through Cairo?'

Borg gave a false little laugh. 'You talk as if Cairo was my intelligence service. I can't just call them up and ask them to look her up in their files while I hold the line, you know.'

'But you've got a very good double agent in Egyptian Intelligence.'

'How can he be good? Everybody seems to know about him!'

'Stop playing games. Since the Six-Day War, even the newspapers say you have good doubles in Cairo. The point is, you haven't checked her.'

Borg held up both hands, palms outward, in a gesture of appeasement. 'Okay, I'm going to check her with Cairo. It will take a little time. What are you going to do in the meanwhile?'

'Nothing - at least, nothing about her. Damn it, Borg, I can smell agents, you know that.'

'And if they confirm her to be an agent? What then?'

~~XXxxxxxxxxxx~~ 'I'm confident the answer will be negative.'

'But if it's not.'

'You'll kill her, I guess.'

'Oh, no.' Borg pointed a finger at Dickstein's nose. 'Oh, no I won't, Dickstein. If she's an agent, <u>you</u> will kill her.'

With deliberate slowness, Dickstein took hold of Borg's wrist and removed the pointing finger from in front of his face. There was only the faintest perceptible tremor in his voice as he said: 'Yes, Pierre. I'll kill her.'

Twelve

In the bar at Heathrow Airport, David Rostov ordered another round of drinks. It was the first time Yasif Hassan had seen him take more than one drink, and the first time he had seen the Russian enjoy drinking. They were both in a curious kind of holiday mood. They were going back for interim debriefing, and they knew they had done a good job so far.

'Look at this,' Rostov said, and he handed Hassan a decoded message. Hassan read:

TO: Colonel David Rostov via London residency
FROM: Moscow Centre
DATE: 3 September 1968

Comrade Colonel:-

We refer to your signal g/35-21a, requesting information concerning each of four ships named in our signal r/35-21.

The motor vessel Stromberg, 2500 tons, Dutch ownership and registration, has recently changed hands. She was purchased for DM 1,500,000 by one Andre Papagopolos, a shipbroker, on behalf of the Savile Shipping Corporation of Liberia.

Savile Shipping was incorporated on 6 August this year at the New York office of Liberian Corporation Services, Inc, with a share capital of five hundred dollars. The shareholders are Mr Lee Chung, a New York lawyer, and a Mr Robert Roberts, whose address is care of Mr Chung's office. The three directors were provided in the usual way by Liberian Corporation Services, and they resigned the day after the company was set up, again in the usual way. The aforementioned Papagopolos then took over as president and chief executive.

Our people in New York have interviewed Chung. He says that

'Mr Roberts' came into his office from the street, gave no address, and paid in cash. He looked like an Englishman, or something. The detailed description is on file here.

Papagopolos is known to us. He is a wealthy international businessman of indeterminate nationality. Shipbroking is his principal business. He is believed to operate close kk to the fringes of law. We have no address for him. There is considerable material in his file, but much of it is speculative. However, he is believed to have done business with Israeli Intelligence in 1948. Nevertheless he has no known political affiliation.

We will of course continue to gather information on all the ships in the list.

Moscow Centre.

Hassan gave the sheet of paper back to Rostov. 'How do they get hold of all this stuff?' he asked.

Rostov began tearing the signal into shreds. 'It's all on file somewhere or other,' he said. 'The sale of the Stromberg would have been notified to Lloyds of London. Somebody from our Consulate in Liberia would have got the details on Savile Shipping from public records in Monrovia. Our New York poeple got Chung's address out of the phone book; and Papagopolos was on file in Moscow. None of it is secret, except the Papagopolos file. The trick is knowing where to go and ask the questions. The squirrels specialise in that trick. It's all they do.'

'It's still impressive,' Hassan said.

Rostov put the shreds of paper into a large glass ashtray and set fire to them. 'Your people should have squirrels.'

'I expect we're working on it.'

'Suggest it yourself. It won't do you any harm. You might even get the job of setting it up. That could help your career.'

Hassan nodded. 'Maybe I will.'

Fresh drinks arrived: vodka for Rostov, gin for Hassan. They clinked glasses. Rostov examined the cinders in the ashtray to make sure the signal had burned up completely.

Hassan said: 'Of course, you're assuming that Dickstein is behind the Savile Shipping Corporation.'

'Yes.'

'So what are you going to do about the Stromberg?'

'Well ... ' Rostov emptied his glass and set it on the table. 'My guess is, he wants the Stromberg so that he can get an exact layout of the Coparelli.'

'It'll be an expensive blueprint.'

'He can always sell the ship afterwards. However, he may also use the Stromberg in his hijack of the Coparelli - I don't quite see how, just yet.'

'Will you put a man aboard Stromber, like Tyrin on the Coparelli?'

'No point. Dickstein is sure to get rid of the old crew and fill the ship with Israeli sailors. I'll have to think of something else.'

'Do we know where the Stromberg is now?'

'I've asked the squirrels. They'll have an answer by the time I get to Moscow.'

Hassan's flight was called. 'We meet in Luxembourg?' Hassan asked.

'I'm not sure. I'll let you know. Listen, there's something I've got to say to you. Sit down again.'

Hassan sat down.

Rostov continued: 'Cairo isn't secure. It's certain there are double agents lurking somewhere in the Egyptian Intelligence apparatus. You'll have to tell what we've found out, of course; but I want you to

be as vague as possible about the details. Don't give names, times, places. When you're pushed, complain about me, and say I've refused to give you all the information. Don't talk to anyone except the people you're obliged to report to. In particular, tell nobody about Savile Shipping, the Stromberg, or the Coparelli. As for Pyotr Tyrin being aboard Coparelli - try and forget it.'

Hassan looked worried. 'What's left to tell?'

'Plenty. Dickstein, Euratom, uranium, the meeting with Pierre Borg ... You'll be a hero there if you tell half the story.'

Hassan looked dubious. He saw the sense of what Rostov was saying, but he suspected hidden extra motives. This way, Rostov would be giving a much more impressive report than Hassan: was he preparing to take most of the eventual credit for the success of the operation? He probably was, but his advice was sound all the same. 'All right,' Hassan said. 'I'll be vague.'

'Good.' Rostov waved his hand for a waiter. 'You've got a little time, have a quick one before you go.' He settled back in his chair and crossed his legs. 'I'm looking forward to getting home.'

'Any plans?'

'I'll try to snatch a couple of days on the coast with Mariya and the boys. We've got a dacha in the Riga Bay.'

'Sounds good.'

'It's pleasant there - but not as warm as where you're going, of course. Where will you go, Alexandria?'

The last call for Hassan's flight came over the public-address system, and the Arab stood up. 'No such luck,' he said. 'I expect to spend the whole time stuck in filthy Cairo.'

But he was lying.

*

Franz Albrecht Pedler's life was ruined when Germany lost the war. At the age of fifty, a career officer in the Wehrmacht, he was suddenly homeless, penniless and unemployed. And, like millions of other Germans, he started again.

It was worse than tough for the first five years. He became a salesman for a French dye manufacturer: small commission, no salary. In 1946 there were few customers. But by 1951 German industry was rebuilding. Pedler had taken on more clients in the meantime - he wasn't exactly busy, at the start - and when at last things began to look up, he was in a good position to take advantage of the new opportunities. He took on a partner, a young man who had made some money in Africa. They opened an office in Wiesbaden, a rail junction on the right bank of the Rhine which promised to develop into an industrial centre. Their product list grew, and so did their customers: they were selling soaps as well as dyes, and they gained entry into the U.S. bases which then administered that part of occupied Germany. The American forces normally bought all their supplies from home, but they were permitted to buy locally if they could get lower prices. Franz Pedler had learned, in those hard years, to be an opportunist. If a U.S. Army procurement officer wanted disinfectant in pint bottles Pedler would buy disinfectant in ten-gallon drums, pour the stuff from the drums into second-hand bottles in a rented barn, slap on a label saying 'F.A. Pedler's Special Disinfectant', and re-sell [illegible] at a fat profit.

From buying in bulk and repackaging, it was not a very big step to buying ingredients and manufacturing. The first barrel of F.A. Pedler's Special Industrial Cleanser - never called 'soap' - was mixed in the same rented barn and sold to the U.S. Air Force for use by aircraft maintenance engineers. The company never looked

back.

In the late fifties Franz Pedler and his partner split up. Pedler liked the manufacturing end of the business, the idea of buying cheap ingredients and selling dear products. The partner's speciality was dreaming up fancy names for ordinary items: he left to start his own marketing company and ended up owing one of the biggest advertising agencies in West Germany. His last brainwave before departing was to say: 'We are not in the soap business. We are in decontaminants.' It was an inspiring thought. Pedler read some technical books on chemical warfare and won a big defence contract to supply a range of solutions designed to neutralise various kinds of chemical weapon.

F.A. Pedler was now a military supplier, small but secure and profitable. The rented barn had grown into a small complex of single-storey buildings. Franz married again - his first wife had been killed in the bombing in 1944 - and fathered a child.

But he was still an opportunist at heart, and when he heard about a small mountain of uranium ore going cheap, he smelled a profit.

The uranium belonged to a Belgian company called Societe Generale de la Chimie. Chimie was one of the corporations which ran Belgium's African colony, the Belgian Congo, a country rich in minerals. After the 1960 pull-out Chimie stayed on; but, knowing that those who did not walk out would eventually be thrown out, the company expended all its efforts to ship home as much raw material as it could. Between 1960 and 1965 it accumulated a large stockpile of yellowcake at its refinery near the Dutch border. Sadly, a nuclear test ban treaty was ratified in the meantime, and when Chimie was finally thrown out of the Congo there were few buyers for uranium. The yellowcake sat in a silo, tying up scarce capital.

F.A. Pedler did not actually use very much uranium in the manufacture of their dyes. However, Franz loved a gamble of this kind: the price was low, he could make a little money by having the stuff refined, and if the uranium market improved in the meanwhile he would a make a capital profit too. So he bought some.

And that is how he became a pawn in a very much bigger game.

*

Nat Dickstein liked Franz Pedler right away. The German was a sprightly seventy-three-year-old who still had all his hair and the twinkle in his eye. They met on a Saturday, and Pedler wore a loud sports jacket and fawn trousers. He spoke good English with an American accent, and gave Dickstein a glass of Sekt, the local champagne.

They were wary of each other at first. They had, after all, fought on opposite sides in a war which had been cruel to them both. But Dickstein had always believed that the enemy was not Germany but Fascism, and he was nervous only that Pedler might be uneasy. It seemed the same was true of Pedler.

Dickstein had called from his hotel in Wiesbaden to make an appointment. His call had been expected eagerly: the Israeli armed forces would be a big new customer for F.A. Pedler. Franz had suggested a short tour of the factory on Saturday morning, when it would be empty, followed by lunch at his home. If Dickstein had been a genuine army procurement officer, he would have been put off by the tour: the factory was no gleaming model of German efficiency, but a straggling collection of old huts and cluttered yards with a pervasive bad smell. After sitting up half the night with a textbook of chemical engineering, he was ready with a handful of intelligent questions about agitators and baffles, materials handling and quality control and packaging. He relied upon the language problem to

camouflage any errors. It seemed to have worked.

Afterwards Pedler drove him, in a new Mercedes, from the factory to a wide chalet-style house on a hillside. They sat in front of a big window and sipped their Sekt while Frau Pedler - a pretty, cheerful woman in her forties - got busy in the kitchen. Bringing a potential customer home to lunch at the weekend was a somewhat Jewish way of doing business, Dickstein mused, and he wondered if Pedler had thought of that.

The window overlooked the valley. Down below, the river was wide and slow, with a narrow road running alongside it. Small grey houses with white shutters clustered in little groups along the banks, and the vineyards sloped upward to the Pedlers' house and past it to the treeline. If I were going to live in a cold country, Dickstein thought, this would do nicely.

'Well, what do you think?' said Pedler.

'About the view, or the factory?'

Pedler smiled and shrugged. 'Both.'

'The view is magnificent. The factory is smaller than I expected.'

Pedler lit a cigarette. He smoked heavily - he was lucky to have lived so long. He said: 'Small?'

'Perhaps I should explain what I'm looking for.'

'Please.'

'Right now the Army buys cleaning materials from a variety of suppliers: detergents from one, ordinary soap from another, solvents for machinery from someone else, and so on. We're trying to cut costs, and perhaps we can do this by taking our entire needs in this area from one manufacturer.'

Pedler's eyes widened. 'That is ... ' He fumbled for a phrase. ' ... a tall order.'

'I'm afraid it may be too tall for you.'

'Not necessarily,' Pedler said. 'The only reason we haven't got that kind of bulk manufacturing capacity is simply that we've never had this kind of ~~xxdexx~~ business. With a large firm order we could get credit to expand ... it all depends on the figures, really.'

Dickstein picked up the briefcase from beside his chair and opened it. 'Here are the specifications for the products,' he said, handing Pedler a list. 'Plus the quantities required and the time scale. You'll want time to do your sums and consult with your directors - '

'I'm the boss,' Pedler said with a smile. 'I don't have to consult anybody. Give me tomorrow to work on it, and Monday to see the bank. On Tuesday I'll call and give you prices.'

'I was told you were a good man to work with,' Dickstein said approvingly.

'There are some advantages to being a small company.'

Frau Pedler came in from the kitchen and said: 'Lunch is ready.'

*

My darling Suza,

I have never written a love letter before. I don't think I ever called anyone Darling until now. I must tell you, it feels very good.

I am alone in a strange town on a cold Sunday afternoon. The town is quite pretty, with lots of parks, in fact I'm sitting in one of them now, writing to you with a leaky ballpoint pen and some vile green stationery, the only kind I could get. My bench is beneath a curious kind of pagoda with a circular dome and Greek columns all around in a circle - like a folly, or a summer-house you might find in an English country garden designed by a Victorian eccentric. In front of me is a flat lawn dotted with poplar trees,

and in the distance I can hear a brass band playing something by Edward Elgar. The park is full of people with children and footballs and dogs.

I don't know why I'm telling you all this. What I really want to say is I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I knew that a couple of days after we met. I hesitated to tell you, not because I wasn't sure, but

Well, if you want to know the truth, I thought it might scare you off. I know you love me: but I also know you are twenty-five, love comes easily to you (I'm the opposite way), and love that comes easily may go easily. So I thought: softly, softly, give her a chance to get to like you before you ask her to say 'forever'. Now that we've been apart for so many weeks I'm no longer capable of such deviousness. I just have to tell you how it is with me. Forever is what I want, and you might as well know it now.

I'm a changed man. I know that sounds trite, but when it happens to you it isn't trite at all, it's just the opposite. Life looks different to me now, in several ways - some of which you know about, others I'll tell you, one day. Even this is different, this being alone in a strange place with nothing to do until Monday. Not that I mind it, particularly. But before I wouldn't have even thought of it as something I might like or dislike. Before, there was nothing much I'd prefer to do. Now there is always something I'd rather do, and you're the person I'd rather do it to. I mean <u>with</u>, not <u>to</u>. Well, either, or both. I'm going to have to get off that subject, it's making me ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ fidget.

I'll be gone from here in a couple of days, don't know where I'm going next, don't know - and this is the worst bit - don't even know when I'll see you again. But when I do, believe me, I'm not going to let you out of my sight for ten or fifteen years.

None of this sounds how it's supposed to sound. I want to tell you how I feel, and I can't put it into words. I want you to know what it's like for me to picture your face many times every day, to see a slender girl with black hair and hope, against all reason, that somehow it might be you, to imagine all the time what you might say about a view, a newspaper article, a small man with a large dog, a pretty dress; I want you to know how, when I get into bed alone, I just ache with the need to touch you.

I love you so much.

N.

*

True to his word, Franz Pedler phoned Nat Dickstein at his hotel on Tuesday morning. 'I think we can accommodate you,' he said. 'Shall we meet at lunchtime?'

They went to a modest restaurant in the Wilhelmstrasse, and drank beer instead of wine: this was a working session. Pedler said: 'The prices, which I'll give you in a moment, are conditional. We need a five-year contract. We will guarantee prices for the first twelve months; after that they may be varied in accordance with an index of world prices of certain raw materials. And there's a cancellation penalty amounting to ten per cent of the value of one year's supply.'

'That's stiff,' said Dickstein.

'It's not excessive,' Pedler said. 'It certainly would not recompense us for our losses if you did cancel. But it must be large enough to deter you from cancelling except in very compelling circumstances.'

'I see that. But we may suggest a smaller percentage.'

Pedler shrugged. 'Everything is negotiable. Here are the prices.'

Dickstein studied the list. After a while he said: 'This is close to what we're looking for. I think we'll be able to do business.'

Pedler beamed. 'In that case,' he said, 'let's have a real drink. Waiter!'

When the drinks came Pedler raised his glass in a toast. 'To many years of business together.'

'I'll drink to that,' Dickstein said. As he raised his glass, he was thinking: You poor bastard, I've got you now.

*

Outside the temperature was one hundred and twenty-five degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, except that there was no shade. Inside it was hotter still.

The hot place was a pile of graphite bricks pierced with tiny channels. Some of the channels contained plugs of uranium oxide, and these were causing the heat. Other channels contained movable rods of boron steel: when the rods were all the way in, they stopped the nuclear reaction; the heat built up as the rods came out. Ordinary water poured through all the channels all the time, to take the heat away somewhere where it could be used, like to a generator. The whole thing was surrounded by a steel sphere encased in concrete; and that was surrounded by a concrete building painted dull brown to blend in with the desert.

The building was air-conditioned, but a lot of people were sweating: one in particular, a man called Abdel (although that was not his name) was trembling a little, despite the fact that all he had to do was stand guard.

Today the reactor was going critical. Up in the control room the scientists and technicians, Egyptian and Russian, were going through a countdown. Abdel was in the basement, practically underneath the atomic pile. He was in charge of one switch. The switch would insert the control rods fully into the atomic pile,

overriding all other control-rod mechanisms. Returned to its 'off' position, it would restore the function of the other mechanisms. Abdel was to throw his switch if a general alarm sounded during today's proceedings.

He had decided to throw it anyway, and for that a man could get killed.

Things were going well at Qattara, much too well. The Russians were two months ahead of schedule, despite the additional safety precautions they insisted on every other day. This first run-through had been planned for November, and Abdel intended to make sure it did not take place, at least not successfully, before then.

So, when he heard, over the public-address system, the countdown reach zero, and the Director say in Arabic and Russian 'Rods one through four, withdraw half way,' he threw his switch.

If the Russians had been back home, working with a proper big reactor designed to produce electricity for millions of people, they would have known what was wrong, for their would have been a computer, monitoring - among other things - the several thousand alarm and fail-safe systems in the machinery, and the computer would have said: CONTROL RODS UNWITHDRAWN; and a second later: MANUAL EMERGENCY SWITCH NUMBER 4 OVERRIDES. But this was a small, almost experimental atomic pile, built solely for the purpose of manufacturing plutonium for bombs, built in a hurry and on the cheap. There were some fairly elaborate control systems, but there was no computer.

The partial withdrawal of four control rods should have caused a slight, but measurable, atomic reaction in the pile. Of course, it did not. This was discouraging, but by no means a total failure. The Director order half-way withdrawal of four more rods. Again there was no nuclear reaction, and this time everyone knew something was wrong. The first thing the Russians checked was the meter indicating

the extent of withdrawal of the control rods, and then they knew where the trouble lay.

They threw switches controlling several more rods, and still nothing happened. They ran some checks, one of which consisted of calling Abdel on the phone and saying: 'What position is your switch in?'

'Off.'

'Okay.'

Eventually, thinking that maybe Abdel was not too bright, they sent a man down into the basement to look at Abdel's switch. Abdel heard the footsteps on the stone staircase, and at that point he had to turn his switch off.

The man from the control room came into the basement, looked at Abdel's switch, picked up the phone, and said: 'Yes, this one is off.' Then he went away again.

But by this time all the control rods which they had failed to shift had begun to withdraw from the atomic pile, and the chain reaction started very quickly. It went so fast that the aluminium cladding on the fuel elements melted away, and then the uranium inside melted too. The sudden fierce heat boiled some of the water coolant passing through the pile. The reaction was already going too fast because the uranium without its aluminium cladding was much more radioactive; and now the cooling system was less effective because the water was turning to steam.

All this happened in less time than it takes to say it. Within half a minute every alarm in the place was going off. Abdel threw his switch for the third time, but the Russians in the control rooom were ahead of him, and the moderator rods were already sinking back into the reactor, catching and absorbing neutrons, deadening the chain reaction, while more water rushed through the channels taking

away the heat.

A few seconds more and there would have been a catastrophe. The uranium would have got hot enough to steal the oxygen from the water molecules, leaving hot hydrogen; something somewhere would have burst, letting the air in; the hot hydrogen ⊠⊠ would have reacted with the oxygen in the air; and the explosion would have been heard in Addis Ababa.

As it was, the damage was considerable. Before the reactor could be used again, all the melted fuel elements would have to be extracted, and some of the graphite blocks in the heart of the pile would have to be replaced. Since all this hardware was now highly radioactive, the process would take weeks, maybe months.

At the same time they would be investigating the cause of the accident. All the control-rod mechanisms would be stripped down and examined in the effort to discover (a) why they had failed to work when activated, and (b) why they had suddenly commenced to operate later.

Sooner or later, someone feeling frustrated at the lack of progress would begin to cast about in his mind for alternative, non-mechanical explanations, and would connect the sudden start-up with the visit to the basement to check Abdel's switch. And once that unlikely sequence of events had actually occurred to someone as a possibility, everything else would be seen to fit in with it.

Abdel reckoned he had five or six weeks to live.

He hoped he had saved his country.

*

Life at sea was uncomfortable, but it was not as bad as Pyotr Tyrin had expected. In the Soviet Navy, ships had been run on the principles of unremitting hard work, harsh discipline, and bad food. The Coparelli was very different. The captain, Eriksen, asked only

for safety and good seamanship, and even there his standards were not particularly high. The deck was swabbed occasionally, but nothing was ever polished or painted. The food was quite good, and Tyrin had the advantage of sharing a cabin with the cook. In theory Tyrin could be called upon at any hour of the day or night to send radio signals; but in practice all the traffic occurred during the normal working day, so he even got his eight hours' sleep every night. It was a comfortable regimen. It had to be, for the ship was a bitch. As soon as they rounded Cape Wrath and left The Minch for the North Sea she began to pitch and roll like a toy yacht in a gale. Tyrin felt terribly seasick, and had to conceal it since he was supposed to be a sailor. Fortunately this occurred while the cook was busy in the galley and Tyrin was not needed in the radio room, so he was able to lie flat on his back in his bunk until the worst was over and he began to get his sea-legs back. The quarters were poorly ventilated and inadequately heated, so as soon as it got a little damp up on deck above, the mess-decks were full of wet clothing hanging up to dry and making the atmosphere worse.

Tyrin's radio gear was in his sea-bag, well protected by polythene and canvas and some sweaters. However, he could not set it up and operate it in his cabin, where the cook or anyone else might walk in. He had already made routine contact with Moscow on the ship's radio, during a quiet moment when nobody was listening, but he needed something safer and more reliable.

Exploring the ship in daylight, he had discovered a little labyrinth of stores up in the bows, beyond the for'ard hatch. The architect had put them there merely to fill a space between the hold and the prow. The main store was entered by a semi-concealed door down a flight of steps. It contained some tools, several drums of grease for the cranes, and - inexplicably - a rusty old lawn mower.

Several smaller rooms opened off the main one: some containing ropes, bits of machinery, and decaying cardboard boxes of nuts and bolts; others empty but for insects. Tyrin had never seen anyone ~~xxxx~~ enter the area ~~xxxxx~~; stuff that was used was stored aft, where it was needed.

He chose a moment when darkness was falling and most of the crew and the officers were at supper. He went to his cabin, picked up his sea-bag, and climbed the companionway to the deck. He took a torch from a locker below the bridge, but he did not yet switch it on.

The almanac said there was a moon, but it did not show through the thick clouds. Tyrin made his way for'ard holding on to the gunwale, where his silhouette would be less likely to show against the off-white deck. There was some light from the bridge and the wheelhouse, but the duty officers would be watching the surrounding sea, not the deck.

Cold spray fell on Tyrin continually, and as the Coparelli executed her notorious roll he had to grab the rail with both hands for fear of being swept overboard. Every so often she shipped a little water - not much, but enough to soak through Tyrin's sea-boots and freeze his feet. He hoped fervently that he would never find out what she was like in a real gale.

He was miserably wet and shivering when he reached the bows and entered the little disused store. He closed the door behind him, switched on his torch, and made his way through the assorted junk to one of the little rooms off the main one. He closed that door behind him, too.

He took off his oilskin, rubbed his hands on his sweater to get the water off and warm them a little, then opened his bag.

He put the transmitter in a corner, lashed it to the bulkhead with a wire tied through rings in the deck, and wedged it with a cardboard box.

He was wearing rubber soles, but he put on rubber gloves as an additional precaution for the next task.

The cables to the ship's radio mast ran through a pipe along the ceiling of this room. With a small hacksaw stolen from the engine room, Tyrin cut away a six-inch section of the pipe, exposing the cables. He took a tap from the power cable to the power input of the transmitter; then he connected the aerial socket of his radio with the signal wire from the mast.

He switched on the radio and called Moscow.

His outgoing signals would not interfere with the ship's radio, for he was the radio operator and it was unlikely that anyone else would attempt to send on the ship's equipment. However, while he was using his own radio, incoming signals would not reach the ship's radio room; and he would not hear them either, for his set would be tuned to another frequency. He could have wired everything so that both radios would receive at the same time; but then Moscow's replies to him would be received by the ship's radio, and somebody might notice.

This system would work well enough. There was nothing very suspicious about a small ship taking a few minutes to pick up signals. Tyrin would take care only to use his radio at times when no traffic was expected for the ship.

When he reached Moscow he made: Checking secondary transmitter.

They acknowledged, then made: Stand by for signal from Rostov. All this was in a standard KGB code.

Tyrin made: Standing by, but hurry.

The message came: Keep your head down until something happens. Rostov.

Tyrin made: Understood. Over and out. Without waiting for their sing--off, he disconnected his wires and restored the ship's

cables to normal. The business of twisting and untwisting bare wires, even with insulated pliers, was time-consuming and not very safe. He had some quick-release connectors among his equipment in the radio room: he would pocket a few and bring them here next time to speed up the process.

He decided to drag in another cardboard box to put in front of the radio and conceal it from a casual glance. He opened the door and shone his torch into the main store. He gave an involuntary shout of shock and jumped several inches into the air.

He had company.

The overhead light was on, casting restless shadows with its yellow glow. In the centre of the store, sitting against a grease drum with his legs stretched out before him, was a young sailor. He looked up, just as startled as Tyrin and - Tyrin realised from the boy's face - just as guilty.

Tyrin recognised him. His name was Ravlo. He was about nineteen years old, with pale blond hair and a thin white face. He had not joined in the pub-crawls in Cardiff, yet he often looked hung over, with dark discs under his eyes and a distracted air.

Tyrin said: 'What are you doing here?' and then he saw.

Ravlo had rolled up his left sleeve past the elbow. On the deck between his legs were a phial, a watch-glass, and a small waterproof bag. In his right hand was a hypodermic syringe, and he was about to inject himself.

Tyrin frowned. 'Are you diabetic?'

Ravlo's face twisted and he gave a dry, humourless laugh.

'An addict,' Tyrin said, understanding. He did not know much about drugs, but he knew that what Ravlo was doing could get him discharged at the next port of call. He began to relax a little. This could be handled.

Ravlo was looking past him, into the smaller store. Tyrin looked back and saw that the radio was clearly visible. The two men stared at one another, each understanding that the other was doing something clandestine and shameful.

Tyrin said: 'I will keep your secret, and you will keep mine.'

Ravlo gave the dry twisted smile and the dry, humourless laugh again; then he looked away from Tyrin, down at his arm, and he stuck the needle into his flesh.

*

The exchange between the Coparelli and Moscow was picked up and recorded by a British Intelligence listening station. Since it was in a standard KGB code, they were able to decipher it. But all it told them was that someone aboard a ship - they did not know which ship - was checking his secondary transmitter, and somebody called Rostov - the name was not on any of their files - wanted him to keep his head down. Nobody could make any sense of it, so they opened a file titled 'Rostov' and put the signal in the file and forgot all about it.

Thirteen

When he had finished his interim debriefing in Cairo, Hassan asked permission to go to Syria to visit his parents in the refugee camp. He was given four days. He took a plane to Damascus and a taxi to the camp.

He did not visit his parents.

He made certain inquiries at the camp, and one of the refugees took him, by means of a series of buses, to Dara, across the Jordanian border, and all the way to Amman. From there another man took him on another bus to the Jordan river.

On the night of the second day he crossed the river, guided by two men who both carried submachine-guns. By now he was wearing Arab robes and a headdress like them, but he did not ask for a gun. They were young men, ~~x~~ their soft adolescent faces just taking on lines of weariness and cruelty, like recruits in a new army. They moved across the Jordan valley in confident silence, directing Hassan with a touch or a whisper: they seemed to have made the journey many times. At one point all three of them lay flat behind a stand of cactus, while lights and soldiers' voices passed a quarter of a mile away.

Hassan felt helpless - and something more. At first he thought that the feeling was due to his being so totally in the hands of these boys, his life dependent on their knowledge and courage. But later, when they had left him and he ~~stood~~ was alone on a country road trying to thumb a lift, he realised that this journey was a kind of regression. For years now, he had been a European banker, living in Luxembourg with his car and his refrigerator and his television set. Now, suddenly, he was walking in sandals along the dusty Palestine

roads of his youth: no car, ~~xxxxxxx~~ no jet, an Arab again, a peasant, a second-class citizen in the country of his birth. None of his reflexes would work here - it was not possible to solve a problem by picking up a phone or pulling out a credit card or calling a cab. He felt like a child, a pauper and a fugitive, all at the same time.

He walked five miles without seeing a vehicle, then a fruit lorry passed him, its engine coughing unhealthily and pouring smoke, and pulled up a few yards ahead. Hassan ran after it.

'To Nablus?' he shouted.

'Jump in.'

The driver was a heavy man whose forearms bulged with muscle as he heaved the lorry around bends at top speed. He smoked all the time. He must have been certain there would not be another vehicle in the ~~xxxx~~ way all night, for he drove on the crown of the road and never used the brake. Hassan could have used some sleep, but the driver wanted to talk. He told Hassan that the Jews ~~xxxxx~~ were good rulers, business had prospered since they occupied Jordan, but of course the land must be free one day. Half of what he said was insincere, ~~xx~~ no doubt ~~xxxxxx~~, but Hassan could not tell which half.

They entered Nablus in the cool Samaritan dawn, with a red sun rising behind the hillside and the town still asleep. The lorry roared into the market square and stopped. Hassan said goodbye to the driver.

He walked through the empty streets as the sun began to take away the chill of the night. He had precise directions to a house with no number in a street with no name. It was in a poor quarter, where the little stone houses were crowded too close together and nobody swept the streets. A goat was tethered outside, and he wondered briefly what it ate, for there was no grass. The door was unlocked.

He hesitated a moment outside, savouring the excitement in his belly. He had been too long away: now he was back in the Land. He had waited too many years for this opportunity to strike a blow in revenge for what they had done to his father. He had suffered exile, he had endured with patience, he had nursed his hatred enough, perhaps too much.

He went in.

There were four or five people asleep on the floor. One of them, a woman, opened her eyes and saw him, and she sat up instantly, her hand under the pillow reaching for what might have been a gun.

'What do you want?' she said.

Hassan spoke the name of the man who commanded the Fedayeen.

*

Mahmoud had lived not far from Yasif Hassan when they were both boys in the late thirties, but they had never met, or if they had then neither remembered it. After the European war, when Yasif went to England to study, Mahmoud tended sheep with his brothers, his father, his uncles and his grandfather. Their lives would have continued to go in quite different directions but for the 1948 war. Mahmoud's father, like Yasif's, made the decision to pack up and flee. The two sons - Yasif was a few years older than Mahmoud - met at the refugee camp. Mahmoud's reaction to the ceasefire was even stronger than Yasif's, which was curious, for Yasif had lost more. But Mahmoud was possessed by a great rage which would allow him to do nothing but fight for the liberation of his homeland. Until then he had been oblivious of politics, thinking it had nothing to do with shepherds; now he set out to understand it. But before he could do that, he had to teach himself to read.

They met again in the fifties, in Gaza. By then Mahmoud had

blossomed, if that was the right word for something so fierce. He had read Clausewitz on War and Plato's Republic, Das Kapital and Mein Kampf, Keynes and Mao and Galbraith and Gandhi, history and biography, classical novels and modern plays. He spoke good English and bad Russian and a smattering of Cantonese. He was directing a small cadre of terrorists on forays into Israel, bombing and shooting and stealing and then returning to disappear into the Gaza camps like rats into a garbage tip. The terrorists were getting money, weapons and intelligence from Cairo: Yasif Hassan was, briefly, part of the intelligence back-up; and when they met again Yasif told Mahmoud where his ultimate loyalty lay - not with Cairo, not even with the pan-Arab cause, but with Palestine.

Yasif had been ready to abandon everything there and then - his job with the bank, his home in Luxembourg, his role in Egyptian intelligence - and join the freedom fighters. But Mahmoud had said No, and the habit of command was already fitting Mahmoud like a tailored coat. In a few years, he said - for he took a very long view - they would have all the guerillas they [illegible] wanted, but they would still need friends in high places, European connections, and secret intelligence.

They had met once more, in Cairo, and set up lines of communication which bypassed the Egyptians. At first Yasif sent over much the same kind of stuff he was giving [illegible] to Cairo, principally the names of loyal Arabs who were salting [illegible]away large sums of money in Europe and could therefore be touched for funds. Recently he had been of more immediate practical value, as the Palestine movement began to operate in Europe: he had booked hotels and flights, rented cars and houses, stockpiled weapons and transferred funds.

He was not the kind of man to use a gun. He knew this and was faintly ashamed of it. So he was all the more proud to be so useful

in other, non-violent but nonetheless practical, ways.

The results of his work had begun to explode in Rome that year. Yasif believed in Mahmoud's programme of European terrorism. He was convinced that the Arab armies, even with Russian support, could never defeat the Jews, for this allowed the Jews to think of themselves as a beleagured people defending their homes against foreign soldiers, and that gave them strength. The truth was, in Yasif's view, that the Palestine Arabs were defending their home against invading Zionists. There were still more Arab Palestinians than Jewish Israelis, if you counted the exiles in the camps; and it was <u>they</u>, not a rabble of soldiers from Cairo and Damascus, who would liberate the homeland. But first they had to believe in the Fedayeen. Acts like the Rome airport affair would convince them that the Fedayeen had international resources. And when the people believed in the Fedayeen, the people would <u>be</u> the Fedayeen, and they would be unstoppable.

The information that Yasif brought to Nablus could lead to the biggest and best publicity stunt the Palestinians had ever had.

*

They embraced like brothers, kissing cheeks, then stood back to look at one another.

'You smell like a whore,' said Mahmoud.

'You smell like a goatherd,' said Yasif.

They laughed and embraced again.

Mahmoud was a big man, a fraction taller than Yasif and much broader; and he <u>looked</u> big, the way he held his head and walked and spoke to people. He did smell, too: a sour familiar smell that came from living very close to many people in a place that lacked the modern inventions of hot baths and sanitation and garbage disposal. It was three days since Yasif had used after-shave and talcum powder,

but still he smelled like a scented woman to Mahmoud.

The house had two rooms: the one Yasif had entered, and behind that another, where Mahmoud slept on the floor with three other men. There was no upper storey. Cooking was done in a yard at the back, and the nearest water supply was one hundred yards away. The woman lit a fire and made them a porridge of crushed beans. While they waited for it, Yasif told Mahmoud the story.

'Three months ago in Luxembourg I met a man I had known at Oxford, a Jew called Dickstein. It turns out he is a big Mossad operative. Since then I have been watching him, with the help of the Russians, in particular a KGB man called Rostov. We have discovered that Dickstein plans to steal a shipload of uranium so the Zionists will be able to make atom bombs.'

Mahmoud asked a lot of questions, all through breakfast and for most of the morning: the quantity of uranium, the names of the ships involved, how the yellowcake was converted into nuclear explosive, places and dates and people. They talked in the back room, just the two of them for most of the time, but occasionally Mahmoud would call someone in and tell him to listen while Yasif repeated something.

About midday he summoned three of the men at once. Yasif guessed they were his lieutenants. With them listening, he went over again the points which, presumably, he thought crucial.

'The ship is an ordinary merchant ship with a regular crew?'

'Yes.'

'She will be sailing through the Mediterranean to Genoa.'

'Yes.'

'What does this yellowcake weigh?'

'Two hundred tons.'

'And it is packed in drums.'

'Five hundred and sixty of them.'

'Its market price?'

'Two million American dollars.'

'And it is used to make nuclear bombs.'

'Yes. Well, it is the raw material.'

'Is the conversion to the explosive form an expensive process?'

'Not if you've got a nuclear reactor. Otherwise, yes.'

Mahmoud nodded to the three lieutenants. 'Go and tell this to the others.'

*

In the afternoon, when the sun was past its zenith and it was cool enough to go out, Mahmoud and Yasif walked over the hills outside the town, and did not speak of uranium at all. Yasif talked about David Rostov, whom he admired.

'It is well to admire the Russians,' said Mahmoud, ' so long as we do not trust them. Their heart is not in our cause. There are three reasons why they take our side. The least important is that we cause trouble for the West, and anything that is bad for the West is good for the Russians. Then there is their image. The underdeveloped nations identify with us, so by supporting us they gain credit with the third world. And, in the contest between the United States and the Soviet Union, the third world has all the floating voters. But the most important reason - the only <u>really</u> important reason - is oil. The Arabs have oil.'

They passed a boy tending a small flock of bony sheep. The boy was playing a flute. Yasif remembered that Mahmoud had once been a shepherd boy who could neither read nor write.

'Do you know how important oil is? Hitler lost the European war because of oil.'

'No.'

'Listen. The Russians defeated Hitler. They were bound to.

Hitler knew this: he knew about Napoleon, he knew nobody can conquer Russia. So why did he try? He needed oil. There is oil in Georgia, in the Caucasian oilfields. He had to have the Caucasus. But you cannot hold the Caucasus secure unless you have Volgograd, which was then called Stalingrad, the place where the tide turned against Hitler. Oil. That's what our struggle is about, whether we like it or not, do you realise that? If it were not for oil, nobody but us would care about a few Arabs and Jews fighting over a dusty little country like ours.'

They sat in the shade of a fig tree. The smooth, dun-coloured landscape stretched all around them, empty. The sky glared hot and blue, xxxx cloudless from one horizon to the other. Mahmoud uncorked a water bottle and gave it to Yasif. Yasif drank the tepid liquid and handed it back. Then he asked Mahmoud if he wanted to rule Palestine after the Zionists were vanquished.

'I have killed very many people,' Mahmoud said. 'At first I did it with my own hands, with a knife or a gun or a bomb. Now I kill by devising plans and giving orders, but still I kill people. We know this is a sin, yet I cannot repent. I have no remorse, Yasif. Even if we make a mistake, and we kill children and Arabs instead of soldiers and Zionists, still I think only "This is bad for our reputation," not "This is bad for my soul." There is blood on my hands, and I will not wash it off. There is a play called The Picture of Dorian Gray. It is about a man who leads an evil and debilitating life, the kind of life that should make him look old, give him lines on his face and bags under his eyes, a destroyed liver and venereal disease. Yet he does not suffer, indeed as the years go by he seems to stay young, as if he had found the elixir of life. But in a locked room in his house there is a picture of him, and it is the picture that ages, and takes on the ravages of evil living and terrible disease.

Do you know this play? It is English.'

'I saw the movie,' said Yasif.

'I read it when I was in Moscow. I would like to see it. Do you remember how it ended?'

'Oh, yes. Dorian Gray destroyed the painting, and then all the disease and damage fell upon him in an instant, and he died.'

'Yes.' Mahmoud put the stopper back in the bottle, and gazed out over the brown hillsides with unseeing eyes. 'When Palestine is free, my picture will be destroyed,' he said.

After that they sat in silence for a while. Eventually, without speaking, they stood up and began to walk back to the town.

*

Many men came to the little house in Nablus that evening at dusk, just before the curfew began. The woman gave them bread and fish and watery wine, and there was a long debate. When Yasif saw which way the discussion was going, he went outside, into the yard at the back of the house, to breathe the night air and think.

He had been excited about bringing the news, and had not thought carefully about what the Fedayeen could do with the information. He had assumed, vaguely, that at some crucial moment they would hold a press conference in Beirut or Damascus and reveal the Israeli plot to the world, thus gaining prestige for themselves, and scooping the Russians, and showing the Zionists to be lawless adventurers. But these men had grander ideas.

Yasif did not know who they were, exactly: they might have been the local leaders of the movement, or an assorted group of people whose judgement Mahmoud respected, or a permanent council of war that stayed close to Mahmoud but did not actually live with him. Yasif could see the logic in the last alternative, for if they all lived together, they could all be destroyed together. Anyway, they

seemed to speak as equals, and Mahmoud listened to each with the same attention.

Yasif sat outside, hearing the low, calm voices of the men who looked like peasants and talked like senators, and he knew that now he was going to be asked to do something much more difficult, violent and risky than anything he had been involved in so far; and he felt both thrilled and afraid.

Finally there was a chorus of quiet voices from inside, like voting, and a few minutes later Mahmoud came out. He squatted beside Yasif in the mean yard, smelling the night and the dying fire.

'I have sent for a car,' he said.

'Oh?'

'We must go to Damascus tonight.'

'We?'

'There is a lot to do. It will be our biggest operation. We must start work immediately.'

'It is decided?'

'Yes. The Fedayeen are going to hijack the ship and steal the uranium.'

'So be it,' said Yasif Hassan.

*

David Rostov had always liked his family in small doses, and as he got older the doses got smaller. The first day of this holiday had been fine. He made breakfast, they all walked along the beach, and in the afternoon Vladimir, the younger of the two boys, played chess against Rostov, Mariya, and Valery simultaneously, and won all three games. They took hours over supper, catching up on all the news and drinking a little wine. The second day was similar, but they enjoyed it less; and by the third day the novelty of each other's company had worn off. Vladimir remembered he was supposed to

be a boy genius, and stuck his nose back into his books; Valery began to play degenerate Western music on his guitar and argued with his father about dissident poets; and Mariya fled into the kitchen of the dacha and stopped putting make-up on her face.

So, when the telegram came from the squirrels saying they had located the Stromberg in dry-dock in Rotterdam, Rostov pretended it was a summons back to Moscow, and left his family in Riga with feigned regret.

He went to the office, told them to put a radio beacon on the Stromberg, and took a taxi to Olga's apartment.

Very late that night, as he sat on a giant American bed watching a naked and sweating Olga sodomise herself with an imported vibrator, a KGB agent in Rotterdam (where it was eight a.m.) entered the docks posing as an electrician.

The Stromberg was in dry-dock for the usual inspection prior to completion of a sale. The inspection had revealed that she was basically sound, but there were a number of small repairs required, and after Papagopolos had bought the ship he ordered the repairs to be done, and as an afterthought - for he was going to have to sell the ship again, he thought - he had one or two bits of obsolete equipment replaced. This work was still going on.

The 'electrician' studied the design of the ship as he approached her. Since she was exactly the same as the Coparelli, she had a radio mast in her bows, and the electrician guessed that the mast would be connected with the radio room next to the bridge by piped cables running just below the top deck. As he got closer, he observed that beneath the mast, for'ard of the hatches, there was one or several small holds, doubtless used for storage, but not much used since they were such a long walk from the main accomodation aft. So, like Tyrin aboard the Coparelli, he decided that the place

to hide something that had to be connected with the radio mast was in the stores in the bows.

In his overalls and serge coat, carrying his toolbox, he climbed the gangplank to the deck. He said a loud 'Good morning!' in the general direction of the bridge, and was answered by a vague white hand waving behind a pane of steamed-up glass: the nightwatchman.

He made his way for'ard and entered the store. Like Tyrin, he found it half empty; like Tyrin, he opened the door to one of the smaller, secondary stores; like Tyrin, he removed a section of the pipe with a hacksaw to expose the cables.

He worked faster than Tyrin because he had better tools and did not care how much noise he made.

He pulled out a stretch of cable, cut it, stripped the wires, and joined the two ends together again with a T-junction which was already connected to the beacon. He did the same with a second cable.

The beacon was a radio, but it would transmit only one signal and would not receive anything at all. Consequently it was much smaller than Tyrin's radio - so small, in fact, that the electrician was able to stuff it into the pipe along with the cables.

Then he replaced the section of pipe he had removed, welding it at the joins and painting over the weld with a small brush and a pot of paint more or less the same colour as the original - dirty white.

He put away his tools, wiped a few spots of paint off the deck with a rag dipped in turpentine, and swept the odd bits of wire and plastic which he had dropped into a polythene bag.

He picked up his toolbox and went up on deck.

As he stepped on to the gangplank, the dock foreman hailed him from the companionway.

'What company are you from?'

The electrician smiled, and gave the name of the contractors

who did most of the electrical work in the dock.

'What have you been doing?'

'Aerial booster in the radio mast.'

'That's not on the schedule. Are you sure you've got the right ship?'

'It's a bit late if I haven't - I've done the job now.'

'You should have checked with me.'

'You weren't here early enough. Never mind - your boss and my boss can argue about the bill. You and I will still get paid.'

The foreman laughed. 'You're right there,' he said, and he walked off, looking through the sheets of paper on his clipboard. The electrician continued down the gangplank and walked away.

From now on, whenever the ship's power was on - which was all the time she was at sea and most of the time she was in dock - the beacon would send out a signal every thirty minutes until the ship sank or was broken up for scrap. For the rest of her life, wherever in the world she was, Moscow would be able to locate her within an hour.

*

From a hotel room in Antwerp, Nat Dickstein phoned the local representative of the company that owned the Coparelli.

When I die, he thought as he waited for the connection, they will bury me from a hotel room.

A girl answered the phone. Dickstein said briskly: 'This is Pierre Beaudaire, give me the Director.'

'Hold on, please.'

A man's voice: 'Yes?'

'Good morning, this is Pierre Beaudaire from the Beaudaire Crew List.' Dickstein was speaking his best French.

'Never heard of you,' said the Director.

'That's why I'm calling you. You see, we're contemplating opening an office in Antwerp, and I'm wondering if you would be willing to give us a try.'

'I doubt it, but you can send me your literature and so forth if you - '

'Are you completely satisfied with your present crew agency?'

'They could be worse. Look here - '

'One more question, and I won't trouble you any further. May I ask who you use at the moment?'

'Cohen's. Now, I haven't any more time - '

'I understand. Thankyou for your patience. Goodbye.'

Cohen! That was a piece of luck. Perhaps I will be able to do this bit without brutality, Dickstein thought as he put down the phone. Cohen! It was unexpected - docks and shipping were not typical Jewish business.

Well, sometimes you got lucky.

He looked up Cohen's crew agency in the phone book and memorised the address. He put on his coat, left the hotel, and hailed a cab.

Cohen had a little two-room office above a sailors' bar in the red-light district of the city. It was not yet midday, andthe night people were still asleep - the whores and thieves, musicians and strippers and waiters and bouncers, the people who made the place hum in the evening. Now it might have been any run-down business district, grey and cold in the morning, and none too clean.

Dickstein went up a staircase to a first-floor door, knocked and went in. A middle-aged secretary presided over a small reception room furnished with filing cabinets and orange plastic chairs.

'I'd like to see Mr Cohen,' Dickstein told her.

She looked him over, and seemed to think he did not look like a sailor. 'Are you wanting a ship?' she said dubiously.

'No,' he said. 'I'm from Israel.'

'Oh.' She hesitated. She had dark hair and deep-set, shadowed eyes, and she wore a wedding ring: Dickstein wondered if she might be Mrs Cohen. She got up and went through a door behind her desk into the inner office. She was wearing a trouser suit, and from behind she looked her age.

A minute later she reappeared and ushered him into Cohen's office. Dickstein closed the door behind him. Cohen stood up, shook hands, and said without preamble: 'I give to the cause every year. In the war I gave twenty thousand guilders, I can show you the cheque. This is some new appeal? There is another war?'

'I'm not here to raise money, Mr Cohen,' Dickstein said with a smile. 'Can I sit down?'

'If you don't want money, sit down, have some coffee, stay all day,' said Cohen, and he laughed.

Dickstein sat. Cohen was a short man in spectacles, bald and clean-shaven, and looked about fifty years old. He wore a brown check suit that was not very new. He had a good little business here, Dickstein guessed, but he was no millionaire.

Dickstein said: 'Were you here in the war?'

Cohen nodded. 'I was a young man. I went into the country and worked on a farm where nobody knew me, nobody knew I was Jewish. I was lucky. I escaped.'

'Do you think it will happen again?'

'Yes. It has happened all through history, why should it stop now? It will happen again - but not in my lifetime. It's all right here. I don't want to go to ~~Palestine~~ Israel.'

'Okay. I work for the government of Israel, and we want you to do something for us.'

Cohen shrugged. 'Go on.'

'In a few weeks' time, one of your clients will call you with an urgent request. They will want an engineer officer for a ship called Coparelli. We want you to send them a man supplied by us. His name is Koch, and he is an Israeli, but he will be using a different name and false papers. He will be a competent engineer - your clients will be quite satisfied.'

Cohen said nothing.

Dickstein said: 'That's all.'

'You're not going to tell me why the government of Israel wants this man Koch aboard the Coparelli?'

'No.'

There was a silence.

'You carry any identification?'

'No.'

The secretary came in without knocking, and gave them coffee. Cohen used the interruption to marshal his thoughts. When she had gone out he said: 'I would have to be mad to do this. You come in off the street, saying you represent the government of Israel, yet you have no identification, you do not even tell me your name. You ask me to take part in something that is obviously underhand and probably criminal; you will not tell me what it is that you are trying to achieve. Even if I believe your story, I don't know that I would approve of the Israelis doing what you want to do.'

Dickstein sighed, and began to think of the alternatives: blackmail him, kidnap his wife, take over his office on the crucial day ...

He said: 'Is there anything I can do to convince you?'

'I would need a personal request from the Prime Minister of Israel before I would do this thing.'

Dickstein stood up to leave, then he thought: Why not?

'All right,' he said.

'What do you mean, "All right"?'

'Put on your coat. We'll go to Jerusalem.'

'Now?'

'Are you busy?'

'Are you serious?'

'I told you it's important.' Dickstein pointed to the phone on the desk. 'Call your wife.'

'She's just outside.'

Dickstein went to the door and opened it. 'Mrs Cohen?'

'Yes.'

'Would you come in here, please?'

She hurried in, looking worried, and spoke to her husband. 'What is it, Josef?'

'This man wants me to go to Jerusalem with him,' said Cohen.

'When?'

'Now.'

Dickstein said: 'This is highly confidential, Mrs Cohen. I've asked your husband to do something for the Israeli government. Naturally, he wants to be certain that it is the government that is asking this favour, and not some criminal. So I'm going to take him there to convince him.'

She said: 'Don't get involved, Josef.'

Cohen shrugged. 'I'm Jewish. I'm involved already. Mind the shop.'

'You don't know anything about this man!' she protested.

'So I'm going to find out.'

'I don't like it.'

'There's no danger,' Cohen told her. 'We'll take a scheduled flight, we'll go to Jerusalem, I'll see the Prime Minister,

we'll come back.'

'The Prime Minister!' she said.

Dickstein said: 'It has to be a secret, Mrs Cohen. Please tell people your husband has gone to Rotterdam on business. He will be back tomorrow.'

She stared at the two of them. Cohen took his coat from a hook and put it on. Mrs Cohen kissed him, then put her arms around him.

'It's all right,' he told her. 'This is very sudden and strange, but it's all right.'

She nodded dumbly and let him go.

They took a cab to the airport, and Dickstein bought two return tickets to Tel Aviv, paying with his credit card. ~~Xxxxx~~ They had to take a connecting flight to Paris. Before they took off, he called the Embassy in Paris and arranged for someone to meet them in the transit lounge.

In Paris, he gave the man from the Embassy a message to send to Pierre Borg, explaining what he wanted. Cohen listened to the conversation, and when the diplomat had gone, he said: 'We could go back. I'm convinced already.'

'Oh, no,' Dickstein said. 'Now that we've come this far, I want to be sure of you.'

Borg met them at Lod airport with a car to take them to Jerusalem. He told Dickstein: 'You better have a fucking good reason for all this.'

'I have,' Dickstein said.

They went to the Prime Minister's residence. Dickstein and Cohen waited in an anteroom while Borg told the Prime Minister what was required, and why.

A couple of minutes later they were admitted. Borg said: 'This is Nat Dickstein, sir.'

They shook hands, and the Prime Minister said: 'We haven't met before, but Mr Borg speaks very highly of you, Dickstein.'

'And this is Mr Josef Cohen from Antwerp.'

'Mr Cohen.' The Prime Minster smiled. 'You're a very cautious man. You should be a politician. Well, now ... Please do this thing for us. It is very important, and you will come to no harm by it.' He shook Cohen's hand again. 'Thankyou for coming. Goodbye.'

They all went out. Cohen had not said a word.

Back at the airport Borg got Dickstein alone for a few minutes. 'If you ever pull a stunt like this again ... '

Dickstein smiled. 'It was necessary. It took less than a minute. Why not?'

'Why not, is because half my fucking department has been working all day to fix that minute. For God's sake, why didn't you just point a gun at the man's head or something?'

'Because we're not barbarians,' Dickstein said.

'So people keep telling me.'

'They do? That's a bad sign.'

'Why?'

'You shouldn't need to be told.'

On the plane, flying back to Europe through the night, Cohen drank some gin and went to sleep. Dickstein reflected on the work he had done over the past five months. He had started out, back in May, with only a vague idea of how he was going to pull this off. He had taken the problems as they arose, and found a solution to each one: how to locate uranium, which uranium to steal, how to hijack a ship, how to camouflage the Israeli involvement in the theft, how to prevent the disappearance of the uranium from being reported to the authorities, how to placate the owners of the stuff. If he had sat down at the start and tried to dream up the whole scheme

in advance he could never have foreseen all the wrinkles.

He had had some good luck, and some bad. The fact that the owners of the Coparelli used a Jewish crew agency in Antwerp was a piece of luck; so was the existence of a consignment of uranium for non-nuclear purposes, and one going by sea. The bad luck mainly consisted of the accidental meeting with Yasif Hassan.

Hassan: the fly in the ointment. Dickstein had shaken them off when he flew to Buffalo, and they had not picked up his trail since. But that did not mean they had dropped the case.

It would be useful to know how much they had found out before they lost him.

Dickstein could not see Suza again until the whole thing was over, and Hassan was to blame for that, too: if Dickstein went to Oxford Hassan would pick up the trail, somehow.

He reclined his seat and settled down for a nap. It was all done, now; the scheme fixed, the preparations made. The cards had been dealt. He knew what his hand held, and he knew some of his opponents cards; and they knew some of his. All that remained was to play out the game, and no-one could foretell the outcome.

Fourteen

That same night Yasif Hassan, too, was on a plane; but, unlike Dickstein, Hassan could not sleep.

It had sounded rather simple when Mahmoud said: 'The Fedayeen are going to hijack the ship and steal the uranium,' but none of it would be easy. The Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1968 was not the tightly-knit political entity it pretended to be; in fact it was not even a loose federation of individual groups working together. It was more like a club for people with a common interest: it represented its members, but did not control them. The individual guerilla groups could speak with one voice through the PLO, but they did not and could not act as one.

So, when Mahmoud said the Fedayeen would do something, he spoke only for his own band. Furthermore, in this case it would be unwise even to ask for PLO co-operation. The Organisation was given money, facilities and a home by the Egyptians, but it had also been infiltrated by them. If you wanted to keep something secret from the Arab establishment, you had to keep it secret from the PLO.

Mahmoud thought he did not need the others. His group had the best connections outside Palestine, the best European set-up, and plenty of money. He was now in Benghazi, trying to borrow a ship. His plan was to hijack the Coparelli before Dickstein got to it, then ambush the Israelis as they came aboard. Expecting only an ordinary crew and half-hearted resistance, Dickstein's group would be wiped out. Then the Coparelli would be taken to a North African port and the world would be invited to come aboard and see the bodies of the Zionist criminals. The cargo would be offered to its owners at half its market price - a million U.S. dollars. Mahmoud would pretend he had no idea that Egyptian Intelligence also had plans for the Coparelli; and, whatever they might privately suspect, the Egyptians would be obliged to join in the general

acclamation of the Fedayeen for foiling an Israeli act of aggression.

Mahmoud had a lot to do. He had to find a ship and a crew, and gather his international team from various parts of the world ready to board. But the most crucial task devolved upon Hassan: for, if the Fedayeen were to get to the Coparelli before the Israelis, Hassan had to find out exactly when and where Dickstein's hijack was supposed to take place.

For that, he needed the KGB.

*

Hassan finally got to sleep late that night in a drab, draughty room at the Hotel Rossiya, the largest hotel in Europe, with 5,738 beds, ten miles of corridors and no air-conditioning. He rather thought Rostov might have offered him a bed in in own apartment. It seemed that here in Moscow Rostov's attitude was different: he was more conscious that he outranked Hassan by a long way. Anyway, he had said his place was too small, despite the fact - which he let slip - that his family were all in Riga still. Either he did not want to spend the night with Hassan, or he wanted to spend the night with someone else.

They met at noon the next day in the KGB building, at the office of a foxy young man called Vorontsov who was the nominal case officer: 'nominal', because Rostov showed no sign of deferring to him, rather the reverse. Hassan gathered that Vorontsov had pulled Rostov out of semi-retirement for this job; but if Rostov felt any gratitude he kept it hidden.

'The Stromberg has been bugged with a very powerful radio beacon,' Vorontsov said. 'She's out of dry-dock now, and heading south across the Bay of Biscay. The assumption would be that she is going to Haifa to take on a crew of Mossad agents. The picture is almost complete. I think we can all be quite satisfied with our

intelligence-gathering work. The project now falls into the sphere of positive action: our task becomes prescriptive rather than descriptive, as it were.'

'They all talk like this in Moscow Centre,' Rostov said irreverently. 'This is the plan. I'm going to ~~Konigsberg~~ Odessa to board a Polish merchant ship called the Karla. She's an ordinary cargo vessel superficially, but she's very fast and has certain extra equipment - we use her quite a lot.

'The Karla will cruise down into the Mediterranean and head for Gibraltar. Tyrin will be giving me regular reports from the Coparelli - sending via Moscow at first, then directly as soon as we get close. Since he knows the hijack is coming, he has prepared himself a hiding-place aboard. When the hijack takes place, Tyrin will tell me.

'He will also tell me one other crucial fact: whether the cargo is transferred from the Coparelli to the Stromberg, or simply left aboard the Coparelli to be taken to Haifa and unloaded.

'After the hijack, the Karla will set a course for Dickstein's ship, whichever one carries the uranium. We will collide with that ship.'

'I see,' said Hassan as he began to understand.

Rostov continued: 'And Egyptian vessel will be nearby with you on board. You will arrive on the scene as witnesses, and you will report the accident. You will also report that the crew are Israelis and the cargo is stolen uranium.

'There will be an international inquiry into the collision, and the presence of both Israelis and stolen uranium on the ship will be established beyond doubt. Meanwhile, the uranium will be returned to its rightful owners and the Israelis will be covered with opprobrium.'

Hassan said: 'The Israelis will fight.'

'So much the better, with your ship there to see them attack us and then help us beat them off.'

'It's a good plan,' said Vorontsov. 'It's simple. All you

have to do is crash!' He thought that was funny, and he laughed until he realised nobody else was.

The office was too hot. Hassan went to the window and looked down at the traffic on the Moscow ring road. 'We need to know exactly when and where he plans to hijack the Coparelli,' he said.

'Why?' Rostov asked, making a gesture with both arms spread, palms upward. 'We have Tyrin aboard the Coparelli and a beacon on the Stromberg. We know where both of them are, all the time. We just have to stay close and move in when the time comes.'

'My ship has to be in the right area at the crucial time.'

'So, follow the Stromberg, staying just over the horizon: you can pick up her radio signal. Or keep in touch with me on the Karla. Or both.'

'Suppose the beacon fails, or Tyrin is found out, or both?'

Vorontsov said: 'The risk of that has to be weighed against the danger of tipping our hand if we start following Dickstein around again - assuming we could find him.'

Rostov said: 'He's got a point, though.'

Hassan unbuttoned his collar. 'Can I open a window?'

'They don't open,' said Vorontsov.

'Haven't you people heard of air-conditioning?'

'In Moscow?'

Hassan turned to Rostov. 'Think about it,' he said. 'I want to be perfectly sure we nail these people.'

'I've thought about it,' Rostov told him. 'We're as sure as we can be. Go back to Cairo, organise that ship, and stay in touch with me.'

'I can't, in all honesty, tell my people I'm happy with the plan, unless we can eliminate that remaining uncertainty,' Hassan said; and he thought how infectious was the KGB's bureaucratic

verbiage.

'All right,' said Vorontsov. 'If your superiors agree with you, tell them to talk to me.'

And that was that.

*

And suddenly it was amateur night.

In all his experience of the intelligence business, Hassan had been part of a professional team - Egytpian Intelligence, the KGB, and even the Fedayeen. There had been other people, experienced and decisive people, to give him orders and guidance and to take the ultimate responsibility. Now, without warning, he found himself on his own.

All alone, he had to find the most elusive man in the world and discover that man's most closely guarded secret.

For several days he was in a more or less blind panic. He returned to Cairo, reported Rostov's plan, had his doubts brushed aside brusquely by his superiors (who were not about to argue with the KGB about anything), and organised the Egyptian ship for November. The problem stayed in front of his mind like a sheer cliff which he could not begin to climb until he saw at least part of the route to the top. Unconsciously, he searched back in his personal history for attitudes and approaches which would enable him to tackle such a task, to act quite independently.

He had to go a long way back.

Once upon a time, Yasif Hassan had been a very different kind of man. He had been a wealthy, almost aristocratic young Arab with the world at his feet. He had gone about with the attitude that he could do more or less anything, and thinking had made it so. He had gone to study in England - a totally alien country - without the slightest qualm, and entered its society without caring or even

wondering what people thought of him.

There had been times, even then, when he had to learn; but he did that easily, too. Once a fellow undergraduate, a Viscount Something-or-other, had invited him down to the country to play polo. Hassan could ride, but he had never played polo. He had asked the rules, and had watched the others play for a while, noticing how they held the mallets, how they hit the ball, how they passed it and why; then he had joined in. He was clumsy with the mallet, but he could ride like the wind: he played passably well, he thoroughly enjoyed the game, and his team won.

Now, in 1968, he said to himself: I can do anything, but whom shall I emulate?

The answer, of course, was David Rostov.

Hassan tried to recall how Rostov reacted when he was stumped, clueless, up a blind alley.

Question: Why is Dickstein in ~~Brussels~~ Luxembourg?

Well, what do we know about Luxembourg? What is there here?

Well, there's the stock exchange, the banks, the Council of Europe, Euratom -

Euratom!

Question: Dickstein has disappeared - where might he have gone?

Don't know.

But who do we know that he knows?

Only Professor Ashford in Oxford -

Oxford!

Rostov's approach, Hassan decided, was to fumble around for bits of information - <u>any</u> information, no matter how trivial - in order to get a line on the target.

The trouble was, they seemed to have used all the bits of information they had.

So I'll get some more, Hassan thought; I can do anything.

He racked his brains for all that he could remember from the time they had been at Oxford together. Dickstein had been in the war, he played chess, his clothes were shabby -

He had a mother.

But she had died.

Hassan had never met any brothers or sisters, no relatives of any sort. It was all such a long time ago, and they had not been bosom pals even then.

There was, however, someone else who might know a little more about Dickstein: Professor Ashford.

So, in desperation, Hassan went back to Oxford.

*

When Professor Ashford said: 'What brings you back to England so soon?' Hassan could think of nothing to say in reply other than the truth.

So he said: 'I'm chasing Nat Dickstein.'

They were sitting by the river, in the little corner of Ashford's garden that was cut off by the box hedge, where Hassan had kissed the beautiful Eila so many years ago. The corner was sheltered from the October wind, and there was a little autumn sunshine to warm them. During the summer the professor had at last yielded to fashion: he had allowed his monkish fringe of hair to grow long, and he had bought a pair of denim jeans which he now wore with one of his old tweed jackets and a wide leather belt. He had grown his side-whiskers.

Ashford's eyes twinkled with curiosity as he said: 'I think you'd better tell me what's going on.'

'I will,' Hassan said, with a panicky feeling that Rostov would not have done it quite this way, 'but I must have your word that it

will go no farther.'

'Agreed.'

'Dickstein is an Israeli spy.'

Ashford did not bat an eyelid.

Hassan plunged on. 'The Zionists are planning to make nuclear bombs, but they have no plutonium. They need a secret supply of uranium to feed into their nuclear reactor to make plutonium. It is Dickstein's job to steal that uranium - but I have discovered his plan.'

'You?'

'I'm with Egyptian Intelligence, Professor. But my loyalty - and, I believe, yours - lies with Palestine.'

'Go on,' said the professor non-committally.

'The Fedayeen are going to steal that uranium.'

Ashford's eyes glittered. 'That's marvellous,' he said. 'What can I do to help?'

*

Suza had decided to tell her father that she was in love with Nat Dickstein.

At first she had not been sure of it herself, not really. The few days they had spent in London together had been wild and happy and loving, but afterwards she had realised that those feelings could be transient. She had resolved to make no resolutions: she would carry on normally and see how things turned out.

Something had happened in Singapore to change her mind. Two of the cabin stewards on the trip were gay, and used only one of the two hotel rooms alloted to them; so the crew used the other room for a party. At the party the pilot had made a pass at ⊠⊠ Suza. He was quite a dish: a quiet, smiling, blond man with delicate bones and a delightfully wacky sense of humour. Normally Suza would have jumped

into bed with him without thinking twice. He was, the stewardesses all agreed, a piece of ass. But she had said No, astonishing the whole crew. Thinking about it later, she decided that she no longer wanted to get laid. She had just gone off the whole idea. All she wanted was Nathaniel. It was like ... It was like five years ago, after the second Beatles album came out, and she had gone right through her pile of old records by Elvis and the Everly Brothers and Roy Orbison and realised that she did not want to play them, they held no more enchantment for her, the old familiar tunes had been heard once too often, and she now wanted music of a higher order. Well, it was a bit like that, but stronger.

Dickstein's letter had been the clincher. It had been written God knows where and posted at Orly airport, Paris. In his small, neat handwriting with its incongruously curly loops on the g and y, he had poured out his heart in a manner which was all the more devastating because it came from a normally taciturn man. She had cried over that letter.

She wished she could think of a way to explain all that to her father.

She knew that Professor Ashford disapproved of Israelis. Dickstein was an old student, and Ashford had been genuinely pleased to see him, and prepared to overlook for a few hours the fact that the old student was on the enemy side. But now Suza planned to make Dickstein a permanent part of her life, a member of the family. His letter said 'Forever is what I want,' and Suza could hardly wait to tell him 'Me, too, me, too.'

She thought both sides were in the wrong in the Middle East. The plight of the refugees was pitiful, but she thought they ought to set about making themselves new homes - it was not easy, but it was easier than war, and she despised the theatrical heroics which

so many Arab males found irresistible. On the other hand, she had no doubt that the whole damn mess was, in the end, the fault of the Zionists. Such a cynical view had no appeal for her father, who saw Right on one side and Wrong on the other, and the beautiful ghost of his wife on the side of Right.

It would be hard for him. She had long ago scotched his dreams of walking up the aisle with his daughter beside him in a white wedding dress; but he still talked, occasionally, of her settling down and giving him a grand-daughter. The idea that his grandchildren might be Israelis would come as a severe blow.

Still, that was the price of being a parent, she thought as she entered the green-and-white house by the river. She called 'Daddy, I'm home,' as she took off her coat and put down her airline bag. There was no reply, but his briefcase was in the hall: he must be in the garden. She walked through the kitchen and down toward the river, still searching in her mind for the right phrases with which to tell the news. Maybe she should begin by talking about her trip, and gradually work round -

She heard voices as she approached the box hedge.

'And if you find him, what then?' It was her father's voice.

She stopped, wondering whether she ought to interrupt or not.

'I must follow him,' said another voice, a strange one. 'Dickstein must not be killed until afterwards.'

She put her hand over her mouth to stifle a gasp of shock. Then, terrified, she turned around and ran, soft-footed, back to the house.

*

'Well, now,' said Professor Ashford, 'following what we might call the Rostov Method, let us recall everything we know about Nat Dickstein. He was born in the East End of London. His father died

when Nat was a boy. Have you contacted the mother?'

'She's dead too, according to our files.'

'Ah. Well. He went into the army mid-way through the war - 1943, I think it was, anyway, he was in time to be part of the attack on Sicily. He was taken prisoner soon afterwards, about helf-way up the leg of Italy, I can't remember the place. It was rumoured - you'll remember this, I'm sure - that he had a bad time in the concentration camps. After the war he came here. He - '

'Sicily,' Hassan interrupted.

'Yes?'

'Sicily is mentioned in his file. He is supposed to have been involved the the theft of a boatload of guns. Our people had bought the guns from a gang of criminals in Sicily.'

'If we are to believe what we read in the newspapers,' said Ashford, 'there is only one criminal gang in Sicily.'

Hassan went on: 'Our people suspected that the thieves had bribed the Sicilians for a tip-off.'

'Wasn't it Sicily where he saved that man's life?'

Hassan looked blank. 'What man?'

'The American. Don't you remember? Dickstein brought him here. A rather brutish G.I. He told me the story of how Dickstein had saved his life, in Sicily. It was at this house! Now we're getting somewhere. You must have met the man, you were here that day, don't you remember?'

'I can't say I do - perhaps I had something on my mind,' Hassan muttered.

'It was ... unsettling,' Ashford said. He stared at the slowly-moving water as his mind went back to the years when Eila had been here to share the river with him. 'Here we all were, a bunch of academics and students, probably discussing atonal music or

existentialism while we sipped our sherry, when in came a big soldier and started talking about snipers and tanks and blood and death. It cast quite a chill. Then he said his family originated from Sicily, and his cousins had feted Dickstein after this life-saving incident. Did you say the Sicilian gang had tipped-off Dickstein about the boatload of guns?'

'It's possible, that's all.'

'Perhaps he didn't have to bribe them.'

Hassan shook his head. 'I don't see what use all this is going to be to us. How could the Mafia be connected with Dickstein's hijack?'

'The Mafia,' said Ashford. 'That's the word I was looking for. And the man's name was Cortone - Tony Cortone - no, Al Cortone.'

'But the connection?'

Ashford shrugged. 'Simply this. Once before, Nat Dickstein used his connection with Cortone to call upon the Sicilian Mafia for help with an act of piracy in the Mediterranean. People repeat their youth, you know: he may do the same thing again.'

'Maybe.'

Ashford looked pleased with himself. 'It's rather a nice piece of speculative reasoning - I wish I could publish it, with footnotes.'

'It's a bit thin.'

'Anything would help, you told me when you came. It's getting cool - let's go into the house.'

As they walked up the garden, Hassan thought fleetingly that he had not learned to be like Rostov; he had merely found, in Ashford, a substitute for Rostov. Perhaps his former proud independence had gone forever. There was something unmanly about it. He wondered if other Fedayeen felt the same way, and if that was why they were so bloodthirsty.

Ashford said: 'The trouble is, I don't suppose Cortone will tell you anything even if he knows something.'

'Would he tell you?' Hassan suggested.

'Why should he? He'll hardly remember me. Now, if Eila were alive, she could have gone to see him.'

'Well ... ' References to Eila embarrassed Hassan. 'I'll have to try,' he said.

They entered the house and, stepping into the kitchen, they both had exactly the same thought when they saw Suza.

*

By the time the men came in Suza had convinced herself that she had been mistaken when, in the garden, she thought she heard them talk about killing Dickstein. It was simply unreal: the garden, the river, the autumn sunshine, a professor and his guest ... murder had no place there, the whole idea was fantastic, like a polar bear in the Sahara Desert. Besides, there was a jolly good pseudo-Freudian explanation for her mistake: she had been planning to tell her father that she loved Dickstein, and she had been afraid of his reaction - a psychologist could probably have predicted that at that point she might imagine she heard her father plotting to kill her lover. So she was able to smile brightly at them, and say: 'Who wants coffee? I've just made some.'

Her father kissed her cheek and said: 'I didn't realise you were back, my dear.'

'I just arrived.'

'You don't know Yasif Hassan - he was one of my students when you were very small.'

Hassan kissed her hand and stared at her the way people always did when they had known ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ Eila. 'You're every bit as beautiful as your mother,' he said, and his voice was not flirtatious

nor even flattering: it sounded amazed.

Ashford said: 'Yasif was here a few months ago, shortly after a contemporary of his visited us - Nat Dickstein. You met Dickstein, I think, but you were away by the time Yasif came.'

'Was there any connec- connection?' she asked, and silently cursed her voice for cracking on the last word.

The two men looked at each other, and Ashford said: 'Matter of fact, there was.'

Then she knew it was true, she had not mis-heard, they really were going to kill the only man she had ever loved.

'I want to ask you to do something, my dear,' said her father. 'Something very important, for the sake of your mother's memory. Sit down.'

No more, she thought: the nightmare can't get worse.

Ashford said: 'I want you to help Yasif here find Dickstein.'

From that moment she hated her father.

'There's a man in America, in Buffalo, who may know where he is,' Ashford continued. 'I want you to go there with Yasif and ask the man.'

Hassan said: 'You see, this Dickstein is an Israeli agent, working against our people. We have to stop him. Cortone - the man in Buffalo - may be helping him, and if he is, he will not help us. But he will remember your mother, and he may co-operate with you. You could tell him that you and Dickstein are lovers.'

'Ha-hah!' Suza's laugh was faintly hysterical, and she hoped they would assume the wrong reasons for it. She controlled herself, and managed to become numb, to keep her body still and her face blank, while they told her about the yellowcake, and the man aboard the Coparelli, and the radio beacon on the Stromberg, and about Mahmoud and his hijack, and how much it would all mean for the Palestine

liberation movement; and at the end she was numb, she no longer had to pretend.

Finally Ashford said: 'So, my dear, will you help? Will you do it?'

With an effort of self-control that astonished her, she gave them a bright, air-hostess smile, got up from her stool, and said: 'It's a lot to take in, all in one go, isn't it? I'll think about it while I'm in the bath.'

And she went out.

*

It all sank in, gradually, as she lay in the hot water with a locked door between her and them.

So this was the thing that Nathaniel had to do before he could see her again: steal a ship. And then, he had said, he would not let her out of his sight for ten or fifteen years ... Perhaps that meant he would give up this work.

But, of course, none of his plans were going to work, because his enemies knew all about them. This Russian planned to ram Nat's ship, and Hassan planned to steal the ship before Nat. Either way Dickstein was in danger; either way ~~Hassan~~ they wanted to kill him. Suza could warn him, if only she knew where he was.

How little those two men downstairs knew about her! Hassan simply assumed, just like an Arab male chauvinist, that she would do what she was told. Her father assumed she would take the Palestinian side simply because he did and he was the brains of the family. He had never known what was in Suza's mind: for that matter, he had been the same with his wife. Eila had always been able to deceive Ashford: he simply never suspected that she might not be what she seemed.

When Suza realised what she had to do, she was terrified all over again.

There was, after all, a way she might find Nat and warn him.

'Find Nat' was what they wanted her to do.

She knew she could deceive them, for they already assumed she was on their side.

So she could do what they wanted, and then when she had found him she could warn him.

Would she be making things worse? To find him herself, she had to lead them to him.

But even if Hassan did not find him, he was in danger from the Russian.

And if he was forewarned, he could escape both dangers.

What was the alternative? To wait, to go on as if nothing had happened, to hope for a phone call that might never come.

She had no choice. She had to pretend to work with Hassan until she found Nathaniel.

She was very, very frightened.

She got out of the bath, dried herself, dressed, and went downstairs to tell them the good news.

*

At four a.m. on 16 November, 1968, the Coparelli hove to at Vlissingen, on the Belgian coast, and took on board a port pilot to guide her through the channel of the Westerschelde to Antwerp. Four hours later, at the entrance to the harbour, she took on another pilot to negotiate her passage through the docks. From the main harbour she went through Royers Lock, along the Suez Canal, under the Siberia Bridge and into Kattendijk Dock, where she tied up at her berth.

Nat Dickstein was watching.

The advantage of this particular berth - No. 42 - was the railway line which ran almost to the edge of the quay. There was a

train on that line now, consisting of eleven trucks and an engine. Ten of the trucks carried fifty-one 200-litre drums with sealed lids and the word PLUMBAT stencilled on the side; the eleventh truck had only fifty drums. There was a crane standing by ready to load the drums on to the ship.

The Coparelli would have a fast turnaround. The port authorities had been convinced that the yellowcake could be handled safely, but all the same they did not want the stuff hanging around their harbour for a minute longer than was absolutely necessary.

Nevertheless there were formalities to be gone through before loading could begin.

The first person to board the ship was an official from the shipping company. He had to give the pilots their pourboire and get from the captain a complete list of the crew for the harbour police.

The second person aboard was Josef Cohen.

After his sensational day trip to Jerusalem, Cohen was ready to do all Dickstein asked and more; so Dickstein asked for more.

In the officers' mess, Cohen shook hands with the captain and with the official, whom he knew, and handed over a bottle of whisky - a gift from Cohen's crew agency. Despite the early hour, they all had a drink. When the captain handed over the crew list, Cohen smiled and said: 'Can I see that?' He looked at it and counted the number of officers. Then he took out his wallet and counted out the same number of tickets for free entrance and one drink at a nightclub in the town. He also made a mental note of the name of the engineer. He gave the list to the official and, smiling, he handed the tickets to the captain. 'They have the best floor show in Belgium,' he said.

On the way back to his office he passed Dickstein on the quay

and, without stopping, said: 'The engineer's name is Sarne.'

It was not until afternoon that the crane went into action and the dockers began loading the drums into the three holds of the Coparelli. The drums had to be moved one at a time, and inside the hold each drum had to be secured with wedges of wood. As expected, the loading was not completed that day.

All but two of the officers used the free tickets that evening. The exceptions were the captain, who was busy with paperwork, and the new radio operator they had taken on in Cardiff after Lars broke his leg, who said he had a head cold.

If this was the best floor show in town, remarked one of the officers, Antwerp wasn't much of a town for floor shows. The dancers were girls in bikinis, and they didn't take them off. However, to compensate for that there were several unattached girls, apparently non-professional, in the place. In particular, sitting at the bar next to the telephone was a quite astonishing woman of about thirty, with black hair and a long, aristocratic face with a slightly haughty expression. She wore an elegant black dress which made the most of her sensational legs and her high, round breasts. They discovered she was not soliciting when the first officer tried to buy her a drink and she refused. She seemed a little out of place there. What the Coparelli's officers never knew was that she was a very high-class prostitute who had been brought from Amsterdam and paid eight thousand Dutch guilders by Nat Dickstein to seduce Mr Sarne.

It happened like this. Around nine-thirty there was a phone call for Sarne. He went to the bar and picked up the receiver. 'A woman,' the barman told him with a wink.

'Yes?' Sarne said into the phone. He waited a moment, and said: 'Hello? Hello? Is anybody there?' After a few seconds he cradled the receiver.

The woman in the black dress, who was still sitting next to the phone, said: 'She changed her mind,' and smiled. It was a nice smile, a smile to make any man look twice: it was warm and red-lipped, showing even white teeth, and it was accompanied by a certain languid half-closing of the eyes which was very sexy and gave no indication at all that it had been rehearsed a thousand times in front of a mirror.

'I guess she did,' Sarne said, and he tried desperately to think of something else to say so that he could get another dose of that smile.

'Have you got a light?' the woman said, taking a cigarette out of a leather case on the bar in front of her. Her voice, too, was warm and inviting: she might have been a telephone salesgirl, but that the pay was not a tenth of what she was used to.

Sarne did not smoke, but he found a matchbook on the bar and lit her cigarette, and while he was doing all that he thought of what to say. 'This kind of thing is always happening to me.'

'The phone call?'

'Woman trouble. I hate women. All my life, women have caused me pain and suffering. I wish I were a homosexual.'

She smiled - it <u>was</u> an original line of chat. 'Why don't you become one?'

'I don't fancy men.'

'Be a monk.'

'Well, you see, I have this other problem, this terrible lust. I have to get laid, all the time, sometimes several times a night. It's a great burden to me. Would you like a fresh drink?'

It was all downhill from then on. She continued to let Sarne think he was making the running, and she knew she had him hooked when he switched from gin to vermouth-and-soda in order to be sober enough

for sex. She told him that she was stopping over in Antwerp just for tonight, and let him know that she had a room in a good hotel. Around eleven-thirty he said they should have champagne, but the champagne sold in the club was very poor stuff, not like they might be able to get somewhere else, like at an hotel, say; her hotel, for example.

He never suspected her, not even when she slipped out of the dress and walked toward him, wearing only her shoes, stockings, garters, and tiny bikini-briefs, her round breasts bouncing delightfully with each step, and he saw that her body was even more beautiful than he had imagined.

She was good at her trade: much too good for Nat Dickstein, who was sittingin the adjoining room trying not to hear. It was past three a.m. before she gave the tap on the ~~x~~communicating door which indicated that Sarne had fallen into an exhausted alcoholic sleep.

Dickstein tiptoed in, carrying the cylinder of anaesthetic gas in one hand and the mouthpiece in the other. When he was ready, the woman turned out the light. He listened while Sarne breathed in, then all the way out; and just as he began to inhale again, Dickstein clapped the ~~xxxxxxx~~ mask over his nose and mouth and turned on the tap.

Sarne woke, just for a second or two, then the gas put him to sleep again.

Dickstein paid the woman. She got dressed and went back to Amsterdam.

In the morning the first officer of the Coparelli searched the brothels, flop-houses and bars of Antwerp for his engineer, but did not find him.

At midday the stevedores ~~xxxx~~ loaded the five-hundred-and-sixtieth drum on the Coparelli.

At twelve-thirty the captain phoned Josef Cohen and said was

there the remotest chance he could find an engineer officer without a ship in the next couple of hours.

Cohen said: 'Captain, it's your lucky day.'

At two o'clock a young Mossad agent called Yigael Koch went aboard the Coparelli with his kitbag over his shoulder.

At the hotel, Nat Dickstein gave Sarne a little more gas every time he showed signs of waking. He administered the last dose at six a.m. the following day, then he paid his bill and left.

When Sarne woke up the woman had gone. During the morning he discovered that he had been asleep for two nights and a day, not one night as he imagined.

He never found out what had happened to him during that lost day.

*

Meanwhile, on Sunday 17 November 1968, the Coparelli sailed.

Fifteen

The Don was having breakfast in his bedroom when the girl came. He was sitting at the table, getting into the eggs and homefries and listening to Steven Backhouse outlining the day ahead, when the phone rang. Backhouse picked it up, and a moment later said: 'A young woman asking for you - Suza Ashford.'

'Never heard of her,' said the Don. 'Is it the usual scam?'

'What does she want?' Backhouse said into the phone; then he told the Don: 'She says it's personal.'

'It's the usual scam.'

'Wait a minute - she says she's a friend of Nat Dickstein.'

The Don paused with a forkful of potatoes halfway to his mouth. He put the fork down and turned to look at Backhouse with raised eyebrows. 'That's dangerous,' he said. 'Dickstein's Mediterranean deal is coming off about now, isn't it?'

Backhouse looked at the date on his watch. 'Soon. A few days. They're using the house already.'

'You see how it's dangerous?' said Don Cortone. 'Whether she's telling the truth or ⊠ lying, the question is who the hell told her to come here?'

'Send her up,' Backhouse said into the phone.

Cortone continued his breakfast. 'Who knows about Dickstein?' he said through a mouthful of food.

Backhouse shrugged. 'You, me, and some family in the old country.'

'I can't figure it.'

When she came through the door Cortone stood bolt upright with a look of terror on his face and shouted: 'You should be old!' Then his breakfast went down the wrong way and he began to cough

and splutter.

Backhouse, reacting simply to the noise, ducked behind a chair and pulled his gun. Then he saw that the girl was doing nothing, and he got up and patted Cortone's back.

'What did you do?' Backhouse yelled at Suza. 'What did you do, for Christ's sake?'

She ignored him. She sat down at the table and poured herself a cup of coffee. When Cortone stopped coughing she said: 'She was my mother.'

'No kidding!' Cortone said. 'You're so like her, hell, you scared me half to death.' He screwed up his eyes, remembering. 'Would you have been about four or five years old back in, um, 1947?'

'That's right.'

'Sheet, I remember you, you had a ribbon in your hair. Your father was a professor.'

'Yes.'

Cortone turned to Ashford. 'Nat Dickstein was so crazy about her mother. Then we saw her ... Well, hell, that's history.' He looked at Suza again. 'You said she <u>was</u> your mother?'

'She's been dead years.'

'I'm sorry,' Cortone said automatically. 'Do you remember Dickstein?'

'I'm in love with him.'

'Lucky him.' Cortone's eyes widened, and he muttered: 'I guess he got what he wanted in the end.'

Backhouse said: 'I remember, he told you there was a woman in England, he didn't say who.'

'Yeah, right, he did. But he never was gabby about broads, the way most people are.'

Suza said: 'So he has been here.'

Cortone and Backhouse looked at one another. 'Maybe,' Cortone said.

'I want to know where he is.'

'And I want to know who sent you here.'

'Nobody sent me.' The girl collected her thoughts. She looked luscious in her mini-skirt. Cortone wished he could believe she was lying about being Dickstein's girl. 'I guessed he might have come to you for help with this ... project he's working on. The thing is ... the Arabs know about it, and they'll kill him, and I have to warn him ... Please, if you know where he is, help me.'

'Helping you is easy,' Cortone said. 'Trusting you is the hard part.' She looked desperate and a little tearful now, and he found her almost irresistible - almost. There were two dilemmas. The first was that she, knowingly or in ignorance, might be being used by someone else. If she was, the thing to do was send her away empty-handed. But then, what if she were right, and Dickstein was in mortal danger, and Cortone had refused to help? The second problem was contacting Dickstein. Some of his people were at the house in Sicily, and he would be there sometime, but where was he now? It was not even possible to find out by phone, for the house did not have a phone.

Yet he had to do something, for here was a way for him to repay the biggest debt he had ever owed: he had a chance to save Dickstein's life, and square the account. He felt he had to take it.

He unwrapped a cigar and lit it. Backhouse and Suza watched him, waiting. He took his time. He was accustomed to making decisions like this: finding the optimum path through a maze of problems. There had been a time when life was a matter of spotting opportunities and seizing them. Things were not so simple any longer. Nowadays it seemed the best he could do was choose the least of several evils.

Were times changing, or was he?

'I could send Dickstein a message,' he said, 'but I could not be sure he would get it.' He drew on the cigar. 'I could tell you where to go look for him, but you might pass the information on to the wrong people. But I have to do something, because I owe that man my life. So I'm going to take you to where we may be able to contact him.'

Suza sighed with relief. 'Thankyou,' she said.

Backhouse said: 'Have you thought this through, Don? If you go away - '

'If I go away, nothing,' said Cortone. 'It'll be a few days. You can take care of business for me.'

Backhouse nodded dubiously. 'Whatever you say.'

'I'd like to see the old country again. You know, I haven't taken a vacation in twenty years?'

'Sure.'

'If something comes up, I can get back here in a day. But I want you to make sure nothing comes up.'

'What can I say?' said Backhouse. 'Have a nice trip.'

*

From the big house on the cliff top, Dickstein went down a long, zig-zag flight of steps cut into the rock, to the beach. He splashed through the shallows to a waiting motor-boat, jumped in, and nodded to the man at the wheel. 'Go.'

The engine roared and the boat surged through the waves and out to sea. The sun had just set. In the last faint light, the clouds were massing above, obscuring the stars as soon as they appeared. Dickstein was deep in thought, racking his brains for things he had not done, precautions he might yet take, loopholes he still had time to close. There were none.

The high shadow of the Stromberg loomed ahead, and the boatman brought the little vessel around in a foamy arc to stop alongside where a rope ladder dangled in the water. Dickstein scrambled up the ladder and on to the deck.

The ship's master shook his hand and introduced himself. Like all the officers aboard the Stromberg, he was borrowed from the Israeli navy. He said: 'Welcome aboard, sir.'

They took a turn around the deck. Dickstein said: 'Any problems, captain?'

'She's not a good ship,' the captain said. 'She's slow, clumsy and old. But we've got her in good shape.'

From what Dickstein could see, the Stromberg was in rather better condition than her sister ship, the Coparelli. She was clean, and everything on deck was squared away, naval fashion. The captain did not know he was going to be ordered to scuttle her before the voyage was over.

They went up to the bridge, looked over the powerful equipment in the radio room, then went down to the mess, where the entire crew was assembled. Unlike the officers, the ordinary seamen were all Mossad agents, most with a little experience of the sea. Dickstein looked them over, nodding Hello to a couple he had worked with before. They were all at least ten years younger than he. They were a bright-eyed, well-built bunch, dressed in a peculiar assortment of denims and home-made sweaters; all tough, humorous, well-trained men. Dickstein sat on the edge of a table and accepted a cup of coffee from the galley.

'We're going to steal a ship,' he began. 'If everything goes well, there will be no rough stuff - she should be empty when we take her over. This is the plan.

'The ship, the Coparelli, will pass through the Straits of

Gibraltar in two or three days' time. Soon after, her engines will break down. Her engineer - he's one of us - will say the damage cannot be repaired at sea. The captain will cable the owners to that effect.

'Since the Coparelli sailed from Antwerp, we have bought her. The captain's signal will therefore come to our people. By an apparent lucky coincidence, another of our ships will be close by. She's the Gil Hamilton, now moored just across the bay here. She will go to the Coparelli and take off the entire crew except for the engineer. Then she is out of the picture: she will go to her next port of call, where the crew of the Coparelli will be discharged en masse and given their train fares home.

'This ship will then come alongside the abandoned Coparelli. We will repair her - we have the necessary spare parts aboard. Then we are going to switch the identities of these two ships. They are sister ships, you see; identical in most respects. We will paint out the name Coparelli and re-name her Stromberg. We will switch log books. If we find any noticeable differences between the two vessels we may have to make other changes to the Coparelli.

'When all that is done, we scuttle Stromberg in deep water at night and head for Haifa in the Coparelli: but she will be Stromberg for all intents and purposes. However, she will have aboard a vital cargo which the Stromberg never had. Any questions? Yes, Raoul.'

A short, swarthy young Mossad man with a three-day beard said: 'Why not simply switch the cargo at sea? We have cranes.'

'That was my original intention, but I could not guarantee it would be possible, especially in bad weather.'

'If the weather turns out good, we could still do it.'

'Yes. But now that we have two identical ships, it will be easier to switch the names than switch the cargo. Any more?'

A crewcut kid with a chest like a barrel of ale said: 'If it's going to be so easy, what are all of us tough guys doing here?' The others laughed.

Dickstein said: 'I've been running around the world for the past six months setting up this heist. Once or twice I've bumped into people from the other side - inevitably. I don't think they know anything about this. But if they do ... If they do, we may find out just how tough you are.'

'Fair enough,' said the kid.

Dickstein waited a few moments, but there were no more questions. He turned to the captain. 'We sail in the morning,' he said.

*

It had occurred to Suza, while she flew from England to America with Yasif Hassan, that there might have been an easier way for her to reach Nat Dickstein. She could have refused her father's request and gone straight to the Israeli Embassy in London. Of course, they would have said they knew of no one by the name Nat Dickstein, that nobody in the Embassy had anything to do with secret intelligence, and that there was no such organisation as Mossad. All the same, they would have to pass on a message. She could have simply said: 'Tell him Yasif Hassan knows his plan.' It would have been better than nothing.

Even after she had agreed to co-operate, she could have phoned an Embassy; but Hassan had been by her side continually. They had gone from the house to the airport, and from Buffalo airport to Cortone's house. The cab had dropped her at the house and taken Hassan to a hotel ~~in~~ downtown where they had arranged to meet. After Cortone agreed to help her, there did not seem to be much point in contacting the Embassy: she could fall back on that plan if Cortone's efforts were in vain.

Cortone had sent his chauffeur to pick up Suza's suitcase from the hotel. She guessed that Hassan would figure out what was happening; and, when she and Cortone got on the plane, she saw Hassan back in the economy-class cabin.

They changed planes in Rome and arrived in Sicily early in the morning. Cortone said: 'My family here don't know I'm coming. When they know, there will be parties and dinners and scores of people to meet and talk to ... it will take forever. So we're going to do our work, and I'll see my family afterwards.'

At the airport they rented a big Fiat. Suza drove, under Cortone's direction. They took the coast road. The transatlantic journey had tired Cortone - Suza found it difficult to think of him as being the same age as Nat, he was so fat and bald and ... well, he had an air of weary depravity that might have been amusing but in fact was merely elderly.

The island was pretty when the sun came out. The road twisted along the edge of the sea from town to town, and on their right-hand-side there were views of rocky beaches and the sparkling Mediterranean. Cortone lit a cigar. 'I used to do this kind of thing a lot, when I was young,' he said. 'Get on a plane, go somewhere with a pretty girl, drive around, see places. Not any more. I've been stuck in Buffalo for years, it seems like. That's the thing with business - you get rich, but there's always something to worry about. So you never go places, you have people come to you, bring you stuff. You get too lazy to have fun.'

'You chose it,' Suza told him. She had just realised that she kept seeing the same white car in her rear-view mirror, following her at a distance of a quarter of a mile or so: Hassan.

'I chose it,' Cortone admitted. 'The young have no mercy.' He gave a rare half-smile and puffed on his cigar.

'Why don't you tell me where we're going?' Suza asked.

'I guess I can, now. Nat asked me for the loan of a house with a mooring, and protection from police inquiries. We're going to the house. If he's not there, his people should be; and they can help us.'

Suza's heart beat faster. She might see him! She said: 'How far?'

'Couple of miles.' A minute later he said: 'We'll get there, don't rush - we don't want to die on the way.' She realised she had unconsciously put her foot down. She eased off the accelerator, but she could not slow her thoughts: any minute now, to see him and touch his face, to kiss him hello, to look into those soft brown sad eyes, to feel his hands on her shoulders -

'Turn in there, on the right.'

She drove through an open gateway and along a short gravel drive to a large villa of white stone. When she stopped in front of the door, Suza half-expected Nat to coming running out to greet her. But there were no signs of life in the house, and the shutters were closed.

They got out of the car and entered the house. Cortone called out in Italian: 'Hallo! Anybody there?' There was no reply. They crossed the hall, entered a big drawing-room, and went out to the back of the house through a pair of French doors.

A short garden ran down to the edge of the cliff. They walked that far, and saw a long stairway cut into the cliff, zig-zagging down to the sea.

'Look.' Cortone was pointing out to sea with one fat hand. Suza looked, and saw two vessels: a ship and a motor boat. The motor boat was coming toward them fast, jumping the waves and slicing the water with its sharp prow. The ship was sailing out of the bay, leaving a broad wake behind it.

'Looks like we missed them by a few minutes,' Cortone said.

Suza wanted to cry.

'Wave!' she cried. 'Maybe they'll see!'

'Waste of time.'

'This boat - maybe we can take that and catch up with the ship - '

'No. By the time the boat gets here the ship will be too far away, much too far, and going faster than the boat can.'

'Well what can we do?'

Cortone frowned. 'You can call up ships, can't you? I mean, you can call them on the phone. Or at least send a wire? They have radios, right? We'll try that. Some of my family will know - Who the fuck are you?'

Suza looked around, surprised. Coming out through the French doors was Yasif Hassan.

Cortone said to her: 'You know this nigger?'

Suza said nothing.

Hassan came half way across the garden, then stopped. 'You have outlived your usefulness, Cortone, and now you know too much.' There was a heavy gun in his hand.

Cortone spoke to Suza again. 'What is this, a set-up?'

'No!' she said. 'It isn't, I promise!'

Hassan said: 'Get out of the way, Suza.'

Cortone said: 'Listen, nigger, if you kill me on this island they'll cut off your cock and hang you upside-down to bleed to death, you hear - '

Hassan pulled the trigger and the gun went off, twice, making a huge, deafening bang, and Cortone sunk to the ground.

Suza screamed: 'NO MY GOD NO YOU CAN'T NO NO NO - '

Hassan slapped her hard, sending her reeling. She fell to her

knees and stopped screaming. She crawled across the ground to where Cortone lay. His eyes were closed, and blood was seeping through his jacket. Suza whispered: 'You shouldn't have done that, you shouldn't.'

Hassan said: 'Palestine heroes die every day at the hands of the Zionist police!' but his hands were shaking.

Cortone opened his eyes. 'Listen,' he said hoarsely.

'I'm listening,' Suza said.

Hassan said: 'Leave him, let's go.'

Suza turned her head to face Hassan. At the top of her voice she shouted: 'JUST FUCK OFF!' Then she turned back to Cortone.

'I killed a lot of men,' he said. Suza bent closer to hear. 'Eleven men, I killed myself. I fornicated with a lot of women. All my life, I was a thief and a bully. But I died for my friend, right? I mean, this counts for something, it has to, doesn't it?'

'Yes,' Suza said. 'This really counts for something.'

'Okay,' he said. Then he died.

Hassan said: 'Someone's coming.'

Suza looked down to the beach, and saw that the motor boat had stopped and the boatman was climbing the stone steps up the cliff.

Hassan grabbed her hand and pulled. She was afraid he would kill her, too. She stood up and together they ran through the house.

Out front Hassan said: 'We'll take my car.'

Suza jumped in.

'Wait,' Hassan said. 'The phones.' From a corner of the house, just below the roof, the cable ran across the drive to a telephone pole beside the road. Hassan went to the corner and aimed his gun upward, sighting along the barrel. He pulled the trigger. He hit the ceramic insulator at the connection. He put his hands over his head as the shards showered down on him. The cable sagged a fraction

but did not fall. He fired again, and this time he had to jump out of the way as the wire snapped down to the ground.

He jumped in the car and they drove off.

'I'm disappointed in you,' he said, driving furiously. 'That man was helping the Zionists. You should rejoice when an enemy dies.'

She covered her eyes with her hand. 'I never saw anybody killed before.'

'Get used to it.' He patted her knee. 'You've done well, I shouldn't criticise you. You got the information I wanted.'

She looked at him. 'Did I?'

'Sure. I know whre the Stromberg sailed from and exactly what time she sailed. I know her maxium speed. I can figure out the earliest possible moment at which the Stromberg could meet up with the Coparelli. So I can have my ship get there a day earlier.' He patted her knee again, this time letting his hand rest on her thigh afterwards.

'Don't touch me,' she said.

He took his hand away.

She closed her eyes and tried to think. She had achieved the worst possible outcome by what she had done: she had led Hassan to Sicily, but she had failed to warn Dickstein. What could she do now? She must look for an opportunity to get away from Hassan and phone an Israeli Embassy somewhere.

She said: 'Oh, I'll be glad to get back to Oxford.'

'Oxford?' He laughed. 'Not yet. You'll have to stay with me until the operation is over.'

'I'm so tired.'

'We'll rest soon. I couldn't let you go: security, you know. Anyway, you wouldn't want to miss seeing the dead body of Nat Dickstein.'

*

On a deserted stretch of road Hassan hid the gun in a ditch, just in case he were to be searched before boarding the plane.

They got back to the airport, checked Hassan's car, and went to buy tickets.

David Rostov found them at the Alitalia desk. He said to Hassan: 'You damn fool, you deserve to be shot!'

Hassan's eyes widened, and he looked about him like a cornered rabbit. Rostov had two KGB heavies with him.

Suza thought: Dear God, what now?

Rostov took Hassan's arm in a tight grasp and led him away to a quiet corner. 'You might have blown the whole thing if you had not been a few minutes late.'

'I don't know what you mean,' Hassan said.

'You think I don't know you've been running around the world searching for Dickstein? You think I can't have you followed just like any other bloody imbecile? I've been getting hourly reports on your movements ever since you argued with me and Vorontsov. And what made you think you could trust her?' He jerked a thumb at Suza.

'She led me here,' said Hassan.

'Yes, but you didn't know that then.'

Suza stood still, silent and frightened. She was hopelessly confused, and the multiple shocks of the morning had paralysed her reasoning powers. Keeping all the lies straight had been difficult enough when she had been deceiving Hassan and telling Cortone a truth which Hassan thought was a lie. Now there was Rostov, to whom Hassan was lying, and she could not figure out whether what she should say to Rostov was the truth or another, different lie.

'How did you get here?' Hassan was saying.

'On the Karla, of course. We were only forty or fifty miles from Sicily when I got the report that you had landed here. I also obtained permission from Cairo to order you to return there immediately and directly.'

'I still think I did the right thing,' said Hassan.

Rostov said: 'Get out of my sight.'

Hassan walked away.

Rostov took Suza's arm and led her out of the airport to a car. He said: 'I know you've proved your loyalty to us, Miss Ashford, but in the middle of a project like this we can't ~~xixpxiy~~ let newly recruited people simply go home. On the other hand, I haven't any people here in Sicily other than those I need with me on the ship, so I can't have you escorted somewhere safe. I'm afraid you're going to have to come aboard the Karla with me until this whole thing is over. I hope you don't mind. Do you know, you look exactly like your mother.'

They got into the car, Suza and Rostov in the back and the two heavies in the front. It had crossed her mind that she did not have to go with them: she could have struggled and kicked and screamed, and there were plenty of police and other officials about to rescue a damsel in distress. But she had seen a man killed today, and she thought that what Hassan had done to Cortone, Rostov could do to her. Anyway, she had not taken the opportunity, and now it was too late.

As the car headed for the harbour, she fought down her fear and began to think constructively again. Most of her life, she had got the things she wanted: she had passed exams, she had been head girl at school, she had landed the job she went for, she had had the men she liked. Now she wanted Nat Dickstein, and she was not going to let these thugs take him away from her.

She had one big advantage: she was in the enemy camp, and they

trusted her. She could not see just how to use that advantage, but she thought there must be a way: there had to be. And she had an ace up her sleeve. She knew about the Fedayeen hijack plan, and Rostov did not. Hassan, assuming she was loyal to the Palestine cause, would expect her to keep the secret. But if she did, Rostov would eventually know she had deceived him. There would be a moment when it was right to tell Rostov, a moment when that ace could be played to the maxium effect. She would wait for it.

The car drew up at the quay. There were yachts and fishing boats in the harbour, as well as one or two big ships. It was very pretty. Suza got out of the car with Rostov and walked across the gangplank on to the deck of the Karla, wondering if she would ever get off it alive.

*

It was in Athens that Pierre Borg and his Egyptian double agent Mohammed met for the third time that year.

Both took the usual precautions against being followed before going at night to the rendezvous, a stretch of beach outside the city where occasional lovers strolled.

Both went by car. They parked at opposite ends of the beach and walked along the shoreline to meet in the middle. Wavelets lapped sleepily at their feet. The night was clear, and Borg could see the handsome face of the tall Arab by starlight. Mohammed was not his usual confident self.

He spoke first of the nuclear reactor at Qattara and the agent there, Saman. 'It went operational ahead of schedule, two months ago, but Saman managed to sabotage the first trial run.'

'Good.'

'From what I can gather, he interfered with the control rods and caused a partial collapse of the atomic pile.'

'He should have blown up the whole god damn thing.'

'They have spent the time since then repairing the damage and investigating the cause. A few days ago they arrested Saman Hussein. He was shot and killed while trying to escape.'

'So that's why you look worried.'

'No.'

'Surely they will trace Saman's appointment back to you?'

'No. He was recommended to the job by Assam, my second cousin who works for the Director of General Intelligence.'

'They'll interrogate Assam.'

'Possibly.'

'They'll question him, at least.'

'Yes.'

'And he'll blame you.'

'Will he? "I recommended this man because my cousin asked me to." Not very convincing, is it? I think he'll keep his mouth shut and try to hold on to his seat with both hands.'

A plastic bottle floated in on the tide and landed at Borg's feet. He kicked it back into the water. 'What else?' he said.

'The Russians suspect there is a leak out of Cairo. They are playing their cards close to their collective Communist chest, so to speak.' Mahommed smiled thinly. 'Even when Yasif Hassan came back to Cairo for debriefing, we didn't learn much. And I didn't get all the information Hassan gave.'

'Don't waste time making excuses,' Borg said. 'Just ~~xx~~ tell me what you know.'

'All right,' Mohammed said mildly. 'They know that Dickstein is going to steal some uranium.'

'You told me that last time.'

'I don't think they know any of the details. Their intention

seems to be to let it happen, then expose it afterwards.'

'They won't be able to prove it,' Borg said. 'Dickstein's cover-up is too good.'

'There was a row between Rostov and Hassan: Hassan wanted to find out exactly where Dickstein was, and Rostov said it was unnecessary.'

'I can't figure that at all,' Borg said, frowning. 'What about Suza Ashford?'

'Definitely working for the Arab side,' said Mahommed. 'After this row, Hassan went out on a limb. He got the Ashford girl to take him to Buffalo. A man named Cortone, an American of Sicilian extraction, brought her to Sicily. They did not find Dickstein. Hassan shot Cortone. Rostov ordered Hassan back to Cairo. He had not arrived when I left.'

'What the hell is going on?' Borg said.

'I don't know. Is Sicily important?'

'Yes, it is.' Borg belched loudly, then sighed with satisfaction. He had eaten a good Greek dinner. 'If they've been to Sicily, they must know a lot more. But how much?' Not for the first time, he wished he could be a fly on the wall in the Kremlin.

'I've told you all I can,' Mahommed said.

'Pity,' said Borg. 'See you.' He turned to go.

'Thankyou for coming,' Mahommed said.

'Sure.' Borg waved as he walked away. He did not know why Mahommed was thanking him. If anyone should say Thankyou, it was Borg.

Of course, Mahommed had been making precisely that point. The man did everything with subtlety, including insults. There's nothing worse than a crafty Arab, Borg thought. He turned his mind back to the problem at hand: how much did Rostov know?

Presumably he knew all that Cortone had known. What did that amount to? Well, given that Dickstein had secretly moored a ship off Sicily and had just set sail, Rostov could safely assume that he was going to steal uranium somewhere in the Mediterranean. Did Rostov know about the Coparelli? If Dickstein could find out that she carried uranium, Rostov could too.

There was a good chance Rostov had guessed the broad outlines of Dickstein's scheme, Borg concluded.

Now, he thought: What would I do if I were Rostov?

I would let Dickstein do the hijack, then attack his ship.

He got into his car and headed back toward the city.

*

TEL AVIV TO MV ~~XX~~ STROMBERG

PERSONAL BORG TO DICKSTEIN EYES ONLY

MUST BE DECODED BY THE ADDRESSEE

BEGINS SUZA ASHFORD CONFIRMED ARAB AGENT STOP SHE PERSUADED CORTONE TO LEAD HER TO SICILY STOP THEY ARRIVED AFTER YOU LEFT STOP HASSAN KILLED CORTONE STOP OPPOSITION MAY KNOW MORE OF ~~XXX~~ YOUR PLANS THAN WE PREVIOUSLY BELIEVED STOP STRONG POSSIBILITY YOU WILL BE ATTACKED AT SEA STOP THIS IS THE FIRST TIME YOU HAVE MADE A MISTAKE OF THIS KIND STOP MAKE IT THE LAST ENDS

*

The clouds which had been massing over the western Mediterranean for the last few days finally burst that night, drenching the Stromberg with rain. A brisk wind blew up, and the shortcomings of the ship's design became apparent as she began to roll and yaw in the burgeoning waves.

Nat Dickstein did not notice the weather.

He sat alone in his little cabin, at the table which was screwed to the bulkhead, with a pencil in his hand and a pad, a codebook and a

signal in front of him, transcribing Borg's message word by crucifying word.

He read it over again and again, and finally sat staring at the blank steel wall in front of him.

It was pointless to speculate about why she might have done this, to invent far-fetched hypotheses that Hassan had coerced or blackmailed her, to imagine that she might have ~~done~~ acted from mistaken beliefs or confused motives: Borg had said she was a spy, and he had proved his point. She had been a spy all along, and that was why she had made love to Dickstein.

She had a big future in the intelligence business, that girl.

Dickstein put his face in his hands and pressed his eyeballs with his fingertips, but still he could see her, naked except for her high-heeled shoes, leaning against the cupboard in the kitchen of the flat, reading the morning paper while she waited for the kettle to boil.

The worst of it was, he loved her still.

Before he met her he had been a cripple, an emotional amputee with an empty sleeve hanging where he should have had love; and she had performed a miracle, making him whole again. Now she had betrayed him, taking away what she had given, and he would be more handicapped than ever. He had written her a love letter. Dear God, he thought, what did she do when she read that letter? Did she laugh? Did she show it to Yasif Hassan and say: 'Look, see how I have him hooked!'?

And <u>still</u> he loved her.

If you took a blind man, and gave him back his sight, and then, after a day, made him blind again during the night while he was sleeping, this is how he would feel when he woke up.

Dickstein had told Borg he would kill Suza, but now he knew

he had been lying. He could never hurt her, no matter what she did.

It was late. Most of the crew were asleep, except for those taking watches. He left the cabin and went up on deck with seeing anyone. Walking from the hatch to the gunwale, he got soaked to the skin, but he did not notice. He stood at the rail, looking into the darkness, unable to see where the black sea ended and the black sky began, letting the rain stream across his face like tears.

He would never kill Suza; but Yasif Hassan was a different matter.

If ever a man had an enemy, Dickstein had one in Hassan. The young Dickstein had loved Eila, only to see her locked in a sensual embrace with Hassan. Now Dickstein had fallen in love with Suza, only to find that she had already been seduced by the same rival. And Hassan had used Suza in his efforts to take away Dickstein's home, too.

Oh, yes, he would kill Yasif Hassan, with his bare hands if he could. And others: he would kill them all. The thought brought him surging up out of the depths of despair in a fury: he wanted to hear bones snap and wounded men scream, he wanted to see bodies crumple and blood pour, he wanted the smell of fear and gunfire and the opened bowels of the dead and dying; he wanted death all around him.

Borg thought they would be attacked at sea. Dickstein stood gripping the rail as the ship sawed through the unquiet sea; the wind rose momentarily and lashed his face with cold, hard rain; and he thought So be it; and then he opened his mouth and shouted loud and angry into the wind: 'Let them come! Let the bastards come!'