48pp.

THE YELLOWCAKE PIRATES

Prologue

Eila was talking to the Russian when Nat Dickstein came in.

The Russian was David Rostov, an earnest, sly young man too tall and thin for his mass-produced suit. He seemed very naive, and perhaps he was, at least by comparison with the well-bred young Englishmen at Oxford; but he told her that he had been sent here to study bourgeois economics, and then that sly smile crept over his face, and Eila realised he was kidding. She laughed, and looked again at the door.

'More guests,' David Rostov said. 'You must welcome them.'

She smiled at him a moment longer, and suddenly saw herself through his eyes. Before he came to Oxford he had not been outside Russia except as a soldier in a conquering army: to him, Eila seemed wealthy, privileged, and fabulously glamorous.

'You're very considerate,' she said: then she thought No, that's not what he wants to hear. She added: 'Such a gentleman.'

He laughed aloud at that, and she realised she had underestimated him again. He said: 'The Kremlin would be horrified.'

She left him, thinking: Not so naive: and went to the newcomers.

The boy in the doorway was small and frail, with dead-white skin. He wore plastic-rimmed spectacles and a demob suit, black with pin stripes.

Eila said: 'I'm Professor Ashford's wife,' and waited for the usual look of surprise that the Professor should have married a woman twenty years his junior and dark-skinned at that.

The look did not come. The boy stuck out his hand and said: 'I'm Dickstein.'

The surprise was hers: first, because that stick-thin body produced a confident voice and a firm handshake; and second, because she had heard of Dickstein, and expected him to be both older and larger. She shook his hand and turned to his companion.

Dickstein said: 'This is my friend Alan Cortone.'

Cortone said: 'How are you, ma'am,' in an American accent. Eila had thought he seemed to well-fed and well-dressed to be English.

Eila ushered them across the drawing-room to the fireplace, where a beautifully-dressed Arab stood looking at a wooden carving on a shelf. 'I want you to meet Yasif Hassan, a friend of my family from ... home,' she said. She introduced the newcomers and went to fetch sherry. She had been about to say 'from Palestine,' but at the last minute had remembered several things.

Six weeks ~~ago~~ earlier, on 1 September 1947, the United Nations had proposed that Palestine should be partitioned into two separate states, Arab and Jewish. Eila was Lebanese, but she had not lived there since childhood: England was her home. However, she knew that Arabs and Jews were murdering each other in Palestine now, and she had heard rumours about what Dickstein, who was Jewish, had suffered as a prisoner-of-war in Germany; and she began to wonder whether it had been a mistake to invite Hassan and Dickstein to the same party.

She came back with the drinks, and was relieved to find them cheerfully discussing Henry James. Alan Cortone, the American, seemed slightly out of it, so Eila eased him away

from the other two and asked him what he was studying.

'I'm a soldier, ma'am, not a student,' he said. 'I'm passing through on my way from Frankfurt home to Buffalo. That's in the north.'

'I know,' she said. 'A cold place. Have you known Mr Dickstein long?'

'We met in 1945.'

'People are saying he's a very brilliant student.'

'He saved my life.'

'Good Lord,' she said. She looked at Cortone more closely, wondering whether he enjoyed being melodramatic. No, he was just being American, she decided; so she said: 'I'd like to hear about it.'

'It doesn't take long to tell.' He glanced over at Dickstein, arguing now with Professor Ashford as well as Yasif Hassan; and spoke quietly, as if he did not want the hero to hear the story told. 'It was in Sicily, near a place called Ragusa, a hill town. I had taken a T-force around the outskirts. To the north of the town we came on a German tank in a little hollow, on the edge of a clump of trees. The tank looked abandoned, but I put a grenade into it to make sure. As we drove past, there was a shot - only one - and a German fell out of a tree. He'd been hiding up there, ready to mow us down as we passed the tank. He had a machine gun. It was Nat who shot him. He had come around the city from the other direction, seen the tank like I did, and smelled a trap. He'd spotted the sniper, and he was waiting to see if there were any more, when we turned up. If he hadn't been so damn clever I'd be dead.'

Eila was silent for a moment. The sherry-party chit-chat

going on all around her suddenly seemed unreal, having nothing to do with life because it had nothing to do with death. She said: 'It's a remarkable story.'

Cortone nodded. 'Later, I took him to meet my cousins - my family came from Sicily. We had pasta and wine, they made him a hero, we had a good time. We exchanged addresses. Months afterward I heard Nat had been taken prisoner at La Molina. I knew he was Jewish, and I thought I'd never see him again. But when, after the war, I went to his mother's house in Stepney, there he was.'

'What had happened to him?'

Cortone shrugged. 'He survived the camps.'

'He was fortunate,' Eila said.

Cortone looked into her eyes. 'Was he? I don't know.'

She stared back at the American for a moment, then looked around for Dickstein; but he had gone.

Professor Ashford sat down and motioned Dickstein to a wooden chair. A weak autumn sun spread a soft light in the conservatory and the long garden outside. A girl, five or six years old, came in from the garden carrying an elderly grey cat. Ashford detached her from the animal and sat her on his knee with the coy pride of a man who has become a father in middle age.

'This is Suza,' he said.

Dickstein smiled and said: 'Hello, Suza.' The child had her mother's skin and hair: she, too, would be beautiful.

Ashford said: 'How are you getting on?'

'The work is fascinating,' Dickstein said.

'But the company not so?'

'I didn't mean that.'

'I know how it is,' Ashford said. 'Men your own age who haven't been to war seem like children. It's difficult for a soldier to go back to school. But I hope you'll persist with it - you certainly have the ability.'

'Thankyou.'

'However, that wasn't what I wanted to say.' He set the child on the floor and patted her bottom. 'I think you'll find there's some tea for you in the kitchen,' he told her. She ran into the house.

Dickstein waited for the Professor to speak. The boy sat hunched, his arms folded tightly, his legs crossed, looking like a bundle of sticks in a bag. Ashford had never seen him relaxed.

'I'm in a good position, here at Oxford, to do the occasional favour for an old friend intthe Foreign Office,' Ashford began.

Dickstein's eyes narrowed slightly, and the Professor had a feeling that the boy knew what was coming.

'I had lunch with him the other day, and we were talking about David Rostov.'

'The Russian.' Dickstein nodded and smiled faintly.

Ashford continued: 'Our relations with Russia have changed rapidly since the end of the war, as I'm sure you know. Not to beat about the bush, it's possible - unlikely, but possible - that we shall find ourselves at war with them. What do you think of that?'

'We'd lose,' Dickstein said. 'The Russians have oil.'

Ashford cocked his head, thinking. 'You might be right.'

'And David Rostov?'

'He's a spy.'

Dickstein's raised eyebrows were sceptical, not startled. He said: 'Is it just that he writes home about any interesting tidbits of information he happens to pick up? Or do you mean more than that?'

'That's the question, really; and that's why I'm telling you all about it.' Ashford pulled at his earlobe, the way he did in lectures when he was deciding how best to phrase a subtlety. 'If Rostov had a fairly close friend, who saw him every day, spent weekends with him, went to cinemas and pubs with him ... then we could find out.'

'I see. Suppose he resisted close friendships?'

'That, too, would be information.'

'And you'd like me to be the close friend.'

'Yes.'

'Why me?'

'You're bright, you're mature, and you need the money.'

'Money?'

'The Foreign Office would pay you, and additionally meet any reasonable expense to which you might be put.'

'Well, well.'

Ashford stood up. 'Think about it,' he suggested.

'I've thought about it,' Dickstein said. 'I'll do it.'

'Excellent!'

'Who'll be my Control?'

Ashford showed no surprise at Dickstein's use of Intelligence jargon. 'I will. Shall we go back to the party? You might as well start right away.'

One
One

PROLOGUE: CAIRO

His name was Towfik el-Masiri, at the moment, and he was an orphan. His name changed a lot, but he was always an orphan.

His mother had died of tuberculosis in 1962. Three years later his father, driving a five-year-old imported Chevrolet through the desert at ninety miles an hour, collided with a five-ton truck and died instantly. Towfik had sold the family business - a small carpet exporting concern with a warehouse in Alexandria - and was now living on the money while he studied chemistry at Al-Azhar university in Cairo.

All this was lies, of course. Both parents were still alive: the mother healthy, the father prosperous. It was Towfik who was dead, killed in the Six-Day War.

He toyed with this paradox in the empty hours, turning it over in his mind and exploring its ramifications. Israel had killed Towfik, and Israel had brought him back to life, but the price of the resurrection was the death of the parents. And if the resurrection was phoney - why, then, so was the price.

And so on. There were a lot of empty hours. When he - the resurrected, phoney Towfik el-Masiri - should have been memorising the periodic table of the elements, or listening to lectures on polymers, he was often hanging around the streets of Cairo, watching people go in and out of government buildings, eavesdropping in restaurants and tea-shops, gossiping with high-priced Caucasian prostitutes, or - as now - waiting at the airport on the edge of the desert for a man he had never seen and would never speak to.

That was the truth - that he was waiting for a stranger -

but, as always, he had a lie to go with it. The lie was that he had ordered a parcel of textbooks from New York, and they should have arrived yesterday. This morning he had made something of a fuss at the TWA freight counter, and eventually had been persuaded to wait and see whether the books had arrived on the morning plane.

While he waited, sipping coffee and reflecting on his paradoxes, he made eyes at a mouth-watering pair of blonde American girls at the next table.

If the first rule was 'Never tell the truth,' the second was 'Never do nothing.'

Towfik could often spot the others by the way they did nothing. The Americans were always window-shopping; the English liked to read newspapers; Russians would sit and watch the world go by, looking stolid. It was nothing to do with national characteristics; just the mark of the personality who had trained them. Maybe <u>they</u> recognise <u>us</u> by the way we are always doing something, Towfik thought: being rude to the waiter, arguing with the shopkeeper about our change, discussing metaphysics with the drunk in the corner. We know each other by the distinctive methods we use to be unobtrusive. Another paradox.

The airport public-address system made a noise like a doorbell, and the arrival of the Alitalia flight from Milan was announced in Arabic, Italian, French and English. With a parting leer at the American girls Towfik left his table. He bought Egyptian cigarettes, lit one, then made his way to the observation deck. He put on his sunglasses to gaze out over the shimmering concrete apron. The Caravelle was already down and taxiing.

[illegible]

Towfik was there because of a cable. It had come that morning, from his uncle in Rome, and it had been in code. Any business could use a code for international telegrams, provided it first lodged the key to the code with the post office. Such codes were used more to save money - by reducing common phrases to single short words - than to keep secrets. Towfik's uncle's cable, transcribed according to the registered code book, gave details of his late aunt's will. However, Khalil Towfik had another key, and the message he read was:

OBSERVE AND FOLLOW PROFESSOR FRIEDRICH SCHULZ ARRIVING CAIRO FROM MILAN WEDNESDAY 28 FEBRUARY 1968 FOR SEVERAL DAYS. AGE 51 HEIGHT 180 CM WEIGHT 150 LBS HAIR WHITE EYES BLUE NATIONALITY AUSTRIAN COMPANIONS WIFE ONLY.

After transcribing the signal Towfik had gone into the lobby of the Nile Hilton and phoned the airport. He had begun with Alitalia, as the likeliest airline for a flight from Milan, but he would have checked them all if necessary. Speaking Arabic with a German accent, he had asked whether the name of his friend Professor Schulz was on the passenger list. The clerk told him there was a Herr Schulz on the manifesto.

Such modesty was intriguing.

The passengers began to file out of the aircraft, and Towfik spotted his man almost immediately. There was only one tall, lean, white-haired man on the flight. He was wearing a light blue suit, white shirt and tie, and carrying a plastic bag from a duty-free shop and a camera. His wife was much shorter, and wore a mini-dress and a blonde wig. As they crossed the tarmac they looked about them and sniffed the warm, dry desert air, the way people always did the first time they

landed in North Africa.

The passengers disappeared into the arrivals hall. Towfik waited on the observation deck until the baggage came off the plane, then he went inside and mingled with the small crowd of people waiting at the meeting point.

He did a lot of waiting. That was the one thing they didn't teach you: how to wait. You learned how to handle guns, memorise maps, break open safes and kill people with your hands, all in the first six months of the training course; but there were no lectures in patience, no exercises for sore feet, no courses in coping with tedium. And it was beginning to look like What the fuck was that? beginning to look Lookout lookout! beginning to ...

There was another agent in the crowd.

Towfik was thinking about patience when his subconscious hit the fire alarm. The people in the little crowd, waiting for relatives and friends and business acquaintances off the Milan plane, were impatient. They smoked, shifted their weight from one foot to the other, craned their necks and fidgeted. There was a middle-class family with four children, two men in the traditional striped cotton galabiya robes, a businessman in a dark suit, a young white woman, a chauffeur with a sign reading Ford Motor Company, and -

And a patient man.

Like Towfik, he had dark skin and short hair and wore a European-style suit. At first glance he seemed to be with the middle-class family - just as Towfik would seem to a casual observer, to be with the businessman in the dark suit. The other agent stood casually, with his hands behind his back, facing the baggage hall exit, looking unobtrusive. There was

a streak of paler skin alongside his nose, like an old scar. He touched it, once, in what might have been a nervous gesture, then put his hand behind his back again.

The question was, had the other agent spotted Towfik?

Towfik turned to the businessman beside him and said: 'I never understand why this has to take so long.' He smiled, and spoke quietly, so that the businessman leaned closer and smiled back; and the pair of them looked like acquaintances having a casual conversation.

The businessman said: 'The formalities take longer than the flight.'

Towfik stole another glance at the agent. The man stood in the same position, watching the exit. He had not attempted any camouflage. Did that mean that he had not spotted Towfik? Or was it just that he had second-guessed Towfik, by deciding that a piece of camouflage would give him away?

The passengers began to emerge, and Towfik realised there was nothing he could do, either way. He hoped the people the agent was meeting would come out before Schulz.

It was not to be. Schulz and his wife were among the first little knot of people to come through.

The agent approached them and shook hands.

Of course, of course.

The agent was there to meet Schulz.

Towfik watched while the agent summoned porters and ushered the Schulzes away; then he went out by a different exit to his car. Before getting in he took off his jacket and tie and put on sunglasses and a white cotton cap. Now he would not be easily recognisable as the man who had been waiting at the meeting point.

He figured the agent would have parked in a no-waiting zone right outside the terminal exit, so he drove that way. He was right. He saw the porters loading the Schulz baggage into the boot of a five-year-old grey Mercedes. He drove on.

He steered his dirty Renault on to the main highway from Heliopolis, where the airport was, to Cairo. He drove at 60 k.p.h. and kept to the slow lane. The grey Mercedes passed him two or three minutes later, and he accelerated to keep it within sight. He memorised its number, as it was always useful to be able to recognise the opposition's cars.

The sky began to cloud over. As he sped down the straight, palm-lined highway, Towfik considered what he had found out so far. The cable had told him nothing about Schulz except what the man looked like and the fact that he was a professor. The meeting at the airport meant a great deal, though. It had been a kind of clandestine VIP treatment. Towfik had the agent figured for a local: everything pointed to that - his clothes, his car, his car, his style of waiting. That meant Schulz was probably here by invitation of the government, but either he orthe people he had come to see wanted the visit kept secret.

It wasn't much. What was Schulz a professor of? He could be a banker, arms manufacturer, rocketry expert or cotton buyer. He might even be PLO, but Towfik could not see the man as a resurrected Nazi. Still, anything was possible.

Certainly Tel Aviv did not think Schulz was important. If they had, they would not have used Towfik, who was young and inexperienced. It was even possible that the whole thing was yet another tranning exercise.

They entered Cairo on the Shari Ramses, and Towfik closed the gap between his car and the Mercedes until there was only

one vehicle between them. The grey car turned right on to the Corniche al-Nil then crossed the river by the 26 July Bridge and entered the Zamalek district of Gezira island.

There was less traffic in the wealthy, dull suburb, and Towfik became edgy about being spotted by the agent at the wheel of the Mercedes. However, two minutes later the other car turned into a residential street near the Officer's Club and stopped outside an apartment block with a jacaranda tree in the garden. Towfik immediately took a right turn and was out of sight before the doors of the other car could open. He parked, jumped out, and walked back to the corner. He was in time to see the agent andtthe Schulzes disappearing into the building, followed by a caretaker in galabiya struggling with their luggage.

Towfik looked up and down the street. There was nowhere a man could convincingly idle. He returned to his car, backed it around the corner, and parked between two other cars on the same side of the road as the Mercedes. Then he settled down to wait.

Half an hour later the agent came out alone, got into his car, and roared off.

If Schulz had been important, they would surely have given him a bodyguard ... except that a bodyguard would have drawn attention to his importance and thereby made him more vulnerable. It was another paradox, Towfik thought with pleasure; and, like a bored child finding a curious pebble on an empty beach, he picked it up and saved it for the long hours ahead.

It went on for two days, then it broke.

The Schulzes behaved like tourists, and seemed to enjoy it. On the first evening they had dinner in a nightclub and watched a troupe of belly-dancers who (Towfik happened to know) came from South London. Next day they did the Pyramids and the Spinx, with lunch at Groppi's and dinner at the Nile Hilton. In the morning on the third day they got up early and took a taxi to the mosque of Ibn Tulun.

Towfik left his car near the Gayer-Anderson Museum and followed them. They took a perfunctory look around the mosque and headed east on the Shari al-Salibah. They were dawdling, looking at fountains and buildings, peering into dark tiny shops, watching baladi women buy onions and peppers and camel's feet at street stalls.

They stopped at a crossroads and went into a tea-shop. Towfik crossed the street to the sebeel, a domed fountain behind windows of iron lace, and studied the baroque relief around its walls. He moved on up the street, still within sight of the tea-shop, and spent some time buying four misshapen giant tomatoes from a white-capped stallholder whose feet were bare.

The Schulzes came out of the tea-shop and turned north, following Towfik, into the street market. Here it was easier for Towfik to idle, sometimes ahead of them and sometimes behind. Frau Shulz bought slippers, a gold bangle, and a sprig of mint from a half-naked child. Towfik got ahead of them and drank a small cup of strong, unsweetened Turkish coffee under the awning of a cafe called Nasif's.

They left the street market and entered a covered souq specialising in saddlery. Schulz glanced at his wristwatch and spoke to his wife, and then they walked a little faster until they emerged at Bab Zuweyla, the gateway to the original

walled city.

For a few moments the Schulzes were obscured from Towfik's view by a donkey pulling a cart loaded with Ali Baba jars, their mouths stoppered with crumpled paper. When the cart passed Towfik saw that Schulz was saying goodbye to his wife and getting into an oldish grey Mercedes.

Towfik cursed under his breath.

The car door slammed and it pulled away. Frau Schulz waved. Towfik noted the number - it was the car he had followed from Heliopolis - and saw it go west then turn left into the Shari Port Said.

Forgetting Frau Schulz, he turned around and broke into a run.

They had been walking for about an hour, but they had only covered a mile. Towfik sprinted through the saddlery souq and the street market, dodging around the stalls and bumping into robed men and women in black, dropping his bag of tomatoes in a collision with a Nubian sweeper, until he reached the museum and his car.

He dropped into the driving seat, breathing hard and grimacing at the pain in his side. He started the car and pulled away on an interception course for the Shari Port Said.

The traffic was light, so when he hit the main road he guessed he must be behind the Mercedes. He continued south-west, over the island of Roda and the Giza Bridge on to the Giza road.

Schulz had not been deliberately trying to shake a tail, Towfik decided. Had the Professor been a pro he would have lost Towfik decisively and finally. No, he had simply been taking a morning walk through the market before meeting someone

at a landmark. Towfik would bet that the agent in the Mercedes had suggested both the meeting-place and the walk.

They might have gone anywhere, but it seemed likely they were leaving the city - otherwise Schulz could simply have got a taxi from Bab Zuweyla - and this was the major road westward. Towfik drove very fast. Soon there was nothing in front of him but the arrow-straight grey road, and nothing either side but yellow sand and blue sky.

He reached the Pyramids without seeing the Mercedes. Here the road forked, leading north to Alexandria or south to Faiyum. From where the Mercedes had picked up Schulz, this would have been an unlikely, roundabout route to Alexandria; so Towfik plumped for Faiyum.

When at last he saw the Mercedes it was behind him, moving at high speed. Before it caught up with him it turned right off the main road. Towfik braked to a halt and reversed the Renault to the turn-off. The other car was already a mile ahead on the side road. He followed.

This was dangerous, now. The road probably went deep into the Western Desert, perhaps all the way to the oil field at Qattara. It seemed little-used, and a strong wind would obscure it completely. The agent in the Mercedes was sure to realise he was being followed. If he were a good agent, the sight of the Renault might even trigger memories of the journey from Heliopolis.

This was where the training broke down, and all the careful camouflage and tricks of the trade became useless; and you simply had to get on someone's tail and stick with him, whether he saw you or not, because the whole point was to find out where he was going, and if you couldn't manage that you were

no use at all.

So he threw caution to the desert wind and followed; and still he lost them.

The Mercedes was a faster car, and better designed for the narrow, bumpy road, and within a few minutes it was out of sight. Towfik followed the road, hoping he might catch them when they stopped or at least come across something that might be their destination.

Sixty kilometres on, deep in the desert and beginning to worry about getting petrol, he reached a tiny oasis village at a crossroads. A few scrawny animals grazed in sparse vegetation around a muddy pool. A jar of fava beans and three Fanta cans on a makeshift table outside a hut signified the local cafe. Towfik got out of the car and spoke to an old man watering a bony buffalo.

'Have you seen a grey Mercedes?'

The peasant looked at him as if he was speaking a foreign language.

'Have you seen a grey car?'

The man brushed a large black fly off his forehead and nodded, once.

'When?'

'Today.'

'Which way did it go?'

The old man pointed west, into the desert.

Towfik said: 'Where can I get petrol?'

The man pointed east, toward Cairo.

Towfik gave him a coin and returned to the car. He started the engine and looked again at the petrol gauge. He had enough fuel to get him back to Cairo, just; if he went

much farther he would be in trouble.

He had done all he could, he reckoned. Wearily, he turned the Renault around and headed back toward the city.

Hansi was a different kind of spy. Middle-aged and married, he had experience and ingenuity but no courage. He operated in Milan, which was no hotbed of international intrigue; and although the Servizio Informazione Difesa knew all about him, he had never done anything for which he could be prosecuted under Italian law.

The cable was brought to him by his wife, who thought he was a freelance journalist (which was the truth, if not the whole truth). He was still asleep when she came into the bedroom and said: 'Telegramm.'

Hansi, who had a hangover, said: 'Auch. Das noch.' and turned over.

A few minutes later she returned with a steaming mug and said: 'Kaffee.'

'Danke.' Hansi sat up, lit a cigarette, and opened the cable. He drank his coffee while decoding it, then he dialled a local number on the bedside telephone.

He was answered by a girl. 'Alitalia, bonjourno.' She sounded young and beautiful.

Hansi lied to her in Italian. 'Good morning. I wonder if you can help me. I'm secretary to Professor Friedrich Schulz, who flew with you to Cairo two days ago.'

His wife came in for his coffee cup. She shook her head and said: 'Luegner.' He grinned and waved her away.

'Now,' he continued, 'the problem is, he doesn't seem to have paid for his tikket, and we have no record here in the

office of who might -have booked for him.' Hansi gave a little laugh. 'He hates to leave unpaid bills behind him on his travels.'

'One moment, please,' the girl said. There was a long pause. When she came back she said: 'It's all right - the ticket has been paid for.'

'Oh! By whom?'

'Mr Farah.' She spelt it.

'Is that Muhammad Farah?'

'No, Gamal.'

'Oh, his brother. Well, that solves the problem. Thanks for your help.'

'No trouble.'

Hansi hung up and felt under the bed for the Milan phone book. He found two Farahs, but only one G. Farah. He dialled the number.

Another woman, this one older: 'Hello.'

Hansi said: 'Is Gamal there?'

'No, he's gone to the Consulate.'

Hansi thought: But which one? He said: 'Okay, I'll catch him there. Have you got the number handy?'

'Yes.' She gave it to him.

'Thankyou. Goodbye.'

His wife stood in the doorway, wearing a puzzled frown. '<u>Was machts du</u>?'

'<u>Geshaeft</u>,' he said irritably, and dialled again. She returned to the kitchen.

Again his call was answered by a woman. She said: 'Egyptian Consulate.'

It was all he needed to know. He hung up without speaking.

He picked up a pencil, thought for a minute, then scribbled on the pad beside the phone: SCHULZ TICKET BOUGHT BY EGYPTIAN CONSULATE. He turned the message into code, then sent it in a cable to Bonn.

When it was done, he put on his dressing-gown and went into the kitchen. His wife was reading the newspaper, and consequently spoke now in Italian.

She said: 'What was all that about?'

'Little queries. Nothing. How about breakfast?' He grinned. 'I've just done a good day's work.'

That evening a young Arab, wearing a dinner jacket and driving a German Ford, called at the apartment in Zamalek. He was carrying a bunch of flowers. He came out a few minutes later with Frau Schulz, who wore a long dress and a mink stole.

One hundred yards down the road, Towfik watched from inside his car.

He followed the couple to a top Egyptian restaurant. They had booked, but Towfik had to wait half an hour for a table. He enjoyed his meal - one thing Tel Aviv never complained about was expenses. Frau Schulz had a good time, too. The Arab was very handsome. He wore English shoes. He had a faintly vacuous expression. Towfik guessed that he had been laid on as an escort for the woman while her husband was out of town on government business. The Arab did not look bright, and he was much too relaxed to be an agent, but he seemed good at what he did: he made the woman laugh, he danced with her once, and then he took her home soon after midnight. He kissed her cheek under the jacaranda tree in the garden. Towfik nodded approval: it was wise not to go up to the apartment. A woman

that age, a mild spring evening, an exotic strange city, a husband involved in sensitive political work ... the escort was right to stay out of her bed.

The Ford drove away, and Towfik went into the building. The Nubian doorman was in the hall.

Towfik said: 'The European woman who just came in - which apartment, please?'

The caretaker looked at him through narrowed eyes. 'Why do you want to know?'

Towfik took his wallet out of his pocket. 'She left her purse in the restaurant.'

The caretaker put out his hand. 'I'll give it to her.'

'Oh, no,' Towfik said. 'I found it.'

The caretaker shrugged. 'But you don't know where she lives.'

'I'll give you ten per cent of what she gives me.'

'Fifty,' the doorman said.

'Twenty-five.'

'Fifty.'

'Okay.'

'Apartment three, first floor.'

Towfik ran up the marble stairs and walked along a corridor to the door of No. 3. He noted that it had a Yale-type lock. He counted to fifty, then went downstairs and gave the doorman an Egyptian pound note.

Then he went home to bed.

In the morning he went to the main post office and sent a coded cable to Rome: SHULZ MET AT AIRPORT BY UNSUSPECTED LOCAL AGENT. SPENT TWO DAYS SIGHTSEEING. PICKED UP BY

AFORESAID AGENT AND DRIVEN DIRECTION QATTARA. SURVEILLANCE ABORTED. NOW WATCHING WIFE. TOWFIK.

He made no excuses for losing Schulz in the desert. They weren't interested in excuses in Tel Aviv. They knew that mistakes sometimes happened; and if they didn't, the hell with them.

He was back in Zamalek soon after nine a.m. Now that he knew which apartment they were using, he could park in sight of its balcony.

Frau Schulz was a late riser. At eleven-thirty she came out on the balcony with a cup and saucer in her hand and sat in the sunshine for a few minutes.

Around lunchtime the interior of the Renault became very hot. Towfik ate an apple and drank tepid beer.

Professor Schulz arrived late in the afternoon, in the same grey Mercedes. He looked tired and a little rumpled, like a middle-aged man who has travelled too far. He left the car and went into the building without looking back. After dropping him, the agent drove past the Renault and looked straight at Towfik for an instant. There was nothing Towfik could do about it.

Where had Schulz been? It had taken him most of a day to get there, Towfik speculated; he had spent a night, a full day, and a second night there; and it had taken him most of today to get back. The Libyan border was only six hundred kilometres away - one day's hard driving. There were many possibilities.

At nine p.m. the Schulzes came out again. The Professor looked refreshed. They were dressed for dinner. They walked along the road a little way and hailed a taxi.

Towfik made a decision. He did not follow them.

He got out of the car and entered the garden of the apartment building. The doorman, who had been useful last night, was a problem now. Towfik stepped on to the dusty lawn and found a vantage point behind a bush from which he could see into the hall through the open front door. The Nubian was sitting on a low wooden bench, picking his nose.

Towfik waited.

Twenty minutes later the man left his bench and disappeared into the back of the building.

Towfik hurried through the hall and ran, soft-footed, up the staircase.

He had three Yale-type skeleton keys, but none of them fitted the lock of apartment three. In the end he got it open with a piece of bendy plastic broken off a college set-square.

He entered the apartment and closed the door behind him.

It was now quite dark outside. A little light from a street lamp came through the unshaded windows. Towfik drew a small torch from his trousers pocket, but he did not switch it on yet.

The apartment was large and airy, with white-painted walls and English-colonial furniture. It had the sparse, chilly look of a place where nobody actually lives. There was a big drawing-room, a dining-room, three bedrooms and a kitchen. After a quick general survey Towfik started snooping in earnest.

The two smaller bedrooms were bare. In the larger one, Towfik went rapidly through all the drawers and cupboards. A wardrobe held the rather gaudy dresses of a woman past her prime: bright prints, sequinned gowns, turquoise and orange and pink. The labels were American. Schulz was an Austrian

national, the cable had said, but perhaps he lived in the US. Towfik had never heard him speak.

On the bedside table were a guide to CAiro in English, a copy of Vogue, and a reprinted lecture on isotopes.

So Schulz was a scientist.

Towfik glanced through the lecture. Most of it was over his head. Schulz must be a top chemist or physicist, he thought. If he was here to work on weaponry, Tel Aviv would want to know.

There were no personal papers -Schulz had his passport and wallet in his pocket, evidently. The airline labels had been removed from the matching set of tan suitcases.

On a low table in the drawing-room, two empty glasses smelled of gin: they had had a cocktail before going out.

In the bathroom Towfik found the clothes Schulz had worn into the desert. There was a lot of sand in the shoes, and on the trouser cuffs he found small dusty-grey smears which might have been cement. In the breast pocket of the rumpled jacket was a blue plastic container, about one-and-a-half inches square, very slender. Towfik opened it. It contained a light-tight envelope of the kind used to protect photographic emulsion.

Towfik pocketed the plastic box.

The airline labels from the luggage were in a waste basket in the little hall. The Schulzes' address was in Boston, Massachusetts, which probably meant that the Professor taught and Harvard, MIT, or one of the many lesser universities in the area. Towfik did some rapid arithmetic. Schulz would have been in his twenties during World War Two: he could easily be one of the German rocketry experts who

went to the US after the war.

Or not. You did not have to be a Nazi to work for the Arabs.

Nazi or not, Schulz was a cheapskate: his soap, toothpaste and after-shave were all stolen from airlines and hotels.

On the floor beside a rattan chair, near the table with the empty cocktail glasses, lay a lined foolscap notepad, its top sheet blank. There was a pencil on top of it. Perhaps Schulz had been making notes on his trip while he sipped his gin sling. Towfik searched the apartment for the sheets torn from the pad.

He found them on the balcony, burned to cinders in a large glass ashtray.

The night was cool. Later in the year the air would be warm, and fragrant with the blossom of the jacaranda just below the balcony. The city traffic snored in the distance. It reminded Towfik of his father's apartment in Jerusalem. He wondered how long it would be before he saw Jerusalem again.

He had done all he could here. He turned away from the parapet and crossed the balcony to the French windows leading back into the drawing-room.

He had his hand on the door when herheard the voices.

Towfik froze.

'I'm sorry, honey, I just couldn't face another overdone steak.'

'We could have eaten something, for God's sake.'

The Schulzes were back.

Towfik rapidly reviewed his progress through the rooms:

bedrooms, bathroom, drawing-room, kitchen ... he had replaced everything he had touched, except the little plastic box. Schulz might assume he had lost that. If Towfik could get away unseen they might never know he had been there.

He bellied over the parapet and hung at full length by his fingertips. It was too dark for him to see the ground. He dropped, landed lightly, and strolled away.

It had been his first burglary, and he felt pleased. It had gone as smoothly as a training exercise, even to the early return of the occupant and sudden exit of spy by prearranged emergency route. He grinned in the dark. It was a pity he had not discovered anything of value.

He got into his car, started the engine, and switched on the lights.

Two men emerged from the shadows and stood either side of the Renault.

Who ... ?

He did not pause to figure out what was going on. He rammed the gearstick into first and pulled away. The two men stepped aside.

They had made no attempt to stop him. So why had they been there? To make sure he stayed in the car ... ?

He jammed on the brakes and looked into the back seat.

A tall Arab in a dark suit smiled at him over the snout of a small handgun.

'Drive on,' the man said in Arabic, 'but not quite so fast, please.'

Miller was a thoroughly modern spy.

He had studied law at college and learned to pilot jets in the Air Force. He lived in a split-level ranch-style house in Belleview, Virginia, with his wife Peggy and children Betsy and Dave. Every day he commuted to Langley on the Georgetown Pike in a two-year-old Chevrolet. In 1968 he was still wearing white shirts and narrow ties, but Peggy had persuaded him to grow his hair a little, not quite to the collar. His first name was Charles, but everyone called him Chuck.

His office was in an attractive modern complex in the Virginia countryside, just a couple of miles beyond the city limits of Washington, DC. The sprawl of buildings was surrounded by woods and fields, not to mention fences, guards, dogs, and electronic surveillance devices. It was a pretty setting, but Miller saw little of it, for he worked in the basement.

He had very good eyes, and his job was looking at photographs.

It was not very dangerous.

It had been dangerous, once upon a time, for the people who took the photographs, the crews of the high-altitude spy planes; but nowadays the pictures came from unmanned satellites. The quality was the same, despite the greater distance, because of technological improvements.

The day he did North Africa, he was not at his best. He and Betsy had quarrelled, the evening before, about hippies. The kid was thirteen and thought she was an adult already. Miller had handled it badly. She talked dreamily about peace, love and beauty, while he raved about drugs, disease and anarchy. He finished up sending her to bed, which - as his wife pointed

out - was an admission of defeat. Later, in bed, Peggy had said that maybe the war was not such a good idea after all, and Miller felt his family was deserting him to join the enemy.

He was distracted and irritable the next morning as he sat in front of the screen in the basement. Indistinct black-and-white pictures of great squares of the Sahara Desert came and went before him, and he wondered if the whole damn United States was going to pieces.

There were always two phtographs on the screen. Beside each shot he screened an earlier picture of the same area. Normally he looked for changes, differences in the landscape which might indicate large-scale troop movements, construction of missile silos, blighted crops, drought and flood, new industry beginning and old jungles dying. The technique was no use for desert pictures, because they were always different: the landscape was totally redesigned by every sandstorm.

At times like this he hated his work.

He needed a discovery to cheer him up, and today he got one.

It was in Egypt's Western Desert, south of the Qattara Depression. What caught his attention was that two photographs were the same, in a part of the world where nothing was permanent unless it was man-made.

He enlarged the two pictures until black lines became scattered dots. He superimposed the new one on the old, and found that there were slight differences. He sent a secretary to fetch the pictures of this area going back three years: they showed a steady accretion of permanent shadows over the last twelve months.

He selected six pictures which showed the changes, and

ordered eight-by-ten glossy prints. Then he sat at his desk to write his report.

He was beginning to feel better.

Q: What is your name?

A: Towfik el-Masiri.

Q: Describe yourself.

A: Age twenty-six, five-foot-nine, one hundred and eighty pounds, blue eyes, black hair, Semitic features, light brown skin.

Q: Who do you work for?

A: I am a student.

Q: What day is today?

A: Saturday.

Q: What is your nationality?

A: Egyptian.

The above questions are designed to facilitate fine calibration of the lie-detector.

Q: You work for the CIA.

A: No. (TRUE)

Q: The Germans?

A: No. (TRUE)

Q: Israel, then.

A: No. (FALSE)

Q: You really are a student?

A: Yes. (FALSE)

Q: Tell me about your studies.

A: I'm doing chemistry at Al-Azhar. (TRUE) I'm interested in polymers. (TRUE) I want to be a petrochemical engineer. (FALSE)

Q: What are polymers?

A: Complex organic compounds with long-chain molecules. The commonest is polythene. (TRUE)

Q: What is you name?

A: I told you, Towfik el-Masiri. (FALSE)

Q: The pads attached to your head and chest measure your pulse, heartbeat, breathing and perspiration. When you tell untruths, your metabolism betrays you - you breathe faster, sweat more, and so on. This machine tells me when you are lying. Besides, Towfik el-Masiri is dead. Who are you?

A: (no reply)

Q: The wire taped to the tip of your penis leads to this button here. When I press the button -

A: (scream)

Q: - an electric current passes through the wire and gives you a shock. We have put your feet in a bucket of water to improve the effect of the shock. What is your name?

A: Peter Hellman.

<u>The electric device interferes with the functioning of the lie detector</u>.

Q: Have a cigarette.

A: Thank you.

Q: Believe it or not, I hate this work. The trouble is, people who like it are never any good at it - you need sensitivity, you know. I'm a sensitive person ... I hate to see people suffer. Don't you?

A: (no reply)

Q: You're now trying to think of ways to resist me. Please don't bother. There is no defence against modern

techniques of ... interviewing. What is your name?

A: Peter Hellman. (TRUE)

Q: Who is your control?

A: I don't know what you mean. (FALSE)

Q: Is it Bosch?

A: No, Freidman. (READING INDETERMINATE)

Q: It is Bosch.

A: Yes. (FALSE)

Q: No, it's not Bosch. It's Krantz.

A: All right, it's Krantz. (TRUE)

Q: How do you make contact?

A: I have a radio. (FALSE)

Q: You're not telling me the truth.

A: (scream)

Q: How do you make contact?

A: A dead-letter-box intthe faubourg.

Q: Your instructors told you that when the prisoner is suffering continual pain, the lie-detector will not function. There is safety in torture, they said. They lied to you. Your resistance will give out long before my machine. How do you make contact?

A: A dead-letter - (scream)

Q: Ali! He's kicked his feet free - these convulsions are very strong. Tie him again before he comes round. Pick up that bucket and put more water in it. (pause) Right, he's ▪▪ waking, get out. Can you hear me, Towfik?

A: (indistinct)

Q: What is your name?

A: (no reply)

Q: A little jab to help you -

A: (scream)

Q: - to think.

A: Peter Hellman.

Q: What day is today?

A: Saturday.

Q: What did we give you for breakfast?

A: Fava beans.

Q: What is twenty minus seven?

A: Thirteen.

Q: What is your profession?

A: I'm a student. No don't please and a spy yes I'm a spy don't touch the button please oh god ... oh, god.

Q: How do you make contact?

A: Coded cables.

Q: Have a cigarette. Here ... oh, you don't seem to be able to hold it between your lips - let me help ... there.

A: Thankyou.

Q: Just try to be calm. Remember, as long as you're telling the truth, there will be no pain. (pause) Are you feeling better?

A: Yes.

Q: So am I. Now, then, tell me about Professor Schulz. Why were you following him?

A: I was ordered to. (TRUE)

Q: By Tel Aviv?

A: Yes. (TRUE)

Q: Who in Tel Aviv?

A: I don't know. (INDETERMINATE)

Q: But you can guess.

A: Bosch. (INDETERMINATE)

Q: Or Krantz?

A: Perhaps. (TRUE)

Q: Krantz is a good man. I like him. Dependable. How's his wife?

A: Very well, I - (scream)

Q: His wife died in 195?. Why do you make me hurt you? What did Shculz do?

A: Went sightseeing for two days, then disappeardd into the desert in a grey Mercedes.

Q: And you burglarized his apartment.

A: Yes. (TRUE)

Q: What did you learn?

A: Nothing. (TRUE)

Q: Who was your instructor in training?

A: Ertl. (INDETERMINATE)

Q: That wasn't his real name, though.

A: I don't know. (FALSE) No! Not the button let me think it was just a minute I think somebody said his name was Manner. (TRUE)

Q: Oh, Manner. Shame. He's the old-fashioned type. He still believes you can train agents to resist interrogation. It's his fault you're suffering so much, you know. What about your colleagues? Who trained with you?

A: I never knew their real names. (FALSE)

Q: Didn't you?

A: (scream)

Q: Real names.

A: Not all of them -

Q: Tell me the ones you did know.

A: (pause) (scream)

The prisoner fainted.

Q: What is your name?

A: Uh ... Towfik. (scream)

Q: What did you have for breakfast?

A: Don't know.

Q: What is twenty minus seven?

A: Twenty-seven.

Q: What did you tell Krantz about Professor Schulz?

A: Sightseeing ... Western Desert ... surveillance aborted ...

Q: Who did you train with?

A: (no reply)

Q: Who d'd you train with?

A: (scream)

Q: Who did you train with?

A: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death -

Q: Who did you train w th?

A: (scream)

The prisoner died.

Four days later, at two a.m., the tall Arab entered the elevator at the mezzanine floor of the London Hilton.

Pierre Borg was already inside. He pressed buttons for the eighteenth and nineteenth floors. The head of the Mossad was a stocky man who spoke English with a French-Canadian accent.

The Arab said: 'We picked up one of the youngsters in Cairo on Friday.'

'Which?'

'Towfik el-Masiri ... Peter Hellman.'

'He told you his real name?'

'We're using the electric shock and the lie-detector

together. You're not training them to cope with it.'

'If we told them about it, we'd never get any fucking recruits. What else did he give away?'

'Nothing we didn't know. He would have, but I killed him first.'

'You killed him?'

'Would you rather someone else did?'

Borg stared at the Arab, then dropped his eyes. 'What did the boy discover about Schulz?'

'An agent took the professor into the Western Desert.'

'What for?'

'Don't know.'

'You must know, you're in Egyptian Intelligence!'

'Whatever it is they're doing out there, they've set up a special group to handle it. My department isn't informed.'

'Is that all Towfik could manage?'

Suddenly there was contempt in the soft voice of the tall Arab. 'The kid died for you,' he said.

Borg was oblivious to scorn. 'Did he die in vain?'

'He took this from Schulz's apartment.' The Arab drew a hand from the folds of his robe and showed Borg a small, square box of blue plastic.

Borg took the box. 'How do you know where the kid got it?'

'It has Schulz's fingerprints on it. We arrested Towfik right after he broke into the apartment.'

Borg opened the box and fingered the light-tight envelope. It was unsealed. He took out a photographic negative.

The Arab said: 'We opened the envelope and developed

the film. It's blank.'

Borg reassembled the box and put it in his pocket. The elevator slowed to a stop.

As the Arab stepped out, he said: 'I don't know what on earth the box is.'

Pierre Borg looked stonily at him as the doors began to close. 'I do,' he said.

Two

'It's a mild evening,' said the one-eyed man. 'Let's go into the garden.'

The aide followed him out. Eli was a clever, nervous man, both flattered and frightened to have been invited to his boss's home.

The great man was casually dressed, in cotton trousers and an open-necked uniform shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He took a few steps into the garden, then turned to catch his guest's reaction.

It was a pretty place in the evening sun, with terraces of flowers, several species of tree, and many antique pots and vases, the products of the man's interest in archaeology. Eli looked at the nearest: it had been painstakingly glued together from shards.

He decided that small talk was called for. 'How did you come to be interested in all this?' he said.

'I found a jar by accident,' said the one-eyed man. 'I was out shooting with my son ... oh, ten or fifteen years ago. It had been raining heavily, a lot of soil had been washed away, and this jar was standing up in the middle of a field. Itturn d out to be three thousand years old.'

Eli calculated. 'From the original Israelites.'

'That's right.'

'An unusual pastime for a soldier.'

'I like to do things with my hands.' Sit down.'

There were two cane seats beside a small table. As ~~they~~ they sat, a servant appeared with drinks and bowls of nuts. Eli made no further attempt at polite conversation: his boss was known to be a man who couldnnot be charmed, which was just as well for Eli.

'I want you to draft a background paper for presentation to the Cabinet,' the man began. 'I want you to do it because you're the best, and because this may be the most important step of my whole political career.'

Eli sipped his drink, his nervousness gone: he understodd talk like this, he was on familiar territory, nobody could frighten him here. He took a handful of nuts and began to chew them as he listened.

'The paper is called "The Inevitable Destruction of Israel", and it is in three parts.

'One. During the War of Independence, we bought arms from Czechoslovakia. When the Soviet bloc began to take the Arab side, we turned to France, and later West Germany. Germany called off all deals as soon as the Arabs found out. France imposed an embargo after the Six-Day War. Both Britain and the United States have consistently refused to supply us with arms. We are losing our sources one by one.

'Two. Suppose we are able to make up those losses, by continually finding new suppliers and by building our own munitions industry: the fact remains that Israel must be the loser in a Middle East arms race. The oil countries will be richer than us throughout the forseeable future. Our defence budget is already a grievous burden on the national economy, whereas our enemies have nothing betteroon which to spend their billions. When they have ten thousand tanks, we'll need six thousand; when they have twenty thousand tanks, we'll need twelve thousand; and so on. Simply by doubling their arms expenditure every year, they will be able to cripple our national economy without firing a shot.

'Three. The recent history of the Middle East shows a

pattern of limited wars about once every decade. The logic of this pattern is against us. The Arabs can afford to lose a war from time to time. We cannot: our first defeat will be our last war.

'Conclusion. We must break out of the vicious spiral our enemies have prescribed for us. We must inflict, or at least threaten, permanent and crippling damage to the next Arab army that crosses our borders. We must have nuclear weapons.'

He sat back and lit a cigarette. 'What do you think?' he asked.

'It's sensational,' Eli told him. 'Golda will hate it. So will Yigal Allon. Peres will support you, of course.'

'What about Eshkol?'

'The Prime Minister will listen to the arguments. May I suggest a refinement?'

'I hope you'll come up with several.'

'We could use the threat of nuclear weapons to persuade the United States to supply us with conventional weapons.'

'Excellent. Include that.'

Eli observed that his boss was becoming restless. He stood up. 'I'm just thinking aloud,' he said. 'I'll go away and work on it.'

'Splendid. Let's talk again in three days.'

'It's nothing to do with me,' said the old woman. 'I've retired.'

'Don't be silly,' John told her. 'You control the party.'

The faction meeting was taking place at the old woman's home, a small semi-detached house in a leafy suburb of Tel Aviv. Her guests were young by the standards of Israeli politics, which is to say that they were middle-aged. They sat in the book-lined living-room, with the evening air coming in through the open door to the garden; supplicants at the court of an ageing monarch whose power was symbolic, but was nonetheless power.

John was their spokesman. 'Shimon Peres is said to be in favour of the nuclear bomb,' he said slyly, knowing that the old woman hated Peres.

She paused in the act of lighting a cigarette. 'Don't try to manipulate me,' she snapped. 'If I walk this road with you, it won't be out of dislike for Shimon and Moshe.'

Another of the visitors said softly: 'Why will it be?'

The old woman inhaled. 'You remember Friday, 14 May 1948,' she said, and her masculine voice became harsher, the way it did when she was afraid of sounding sentimental. 'I cried all over Rothschild Boulevard. I also <u>signed</u> the Scroll of Independence. My tears are on that scroll, John. It says that the State of Israel "will rest upon foundations of liberty, justice, and peace, as envisioned by the Prophets of Israel". And now these generals want to build bombs that can wipe out the Middle East for a thousand years? That's not what <u>I've</u> spent my life working for.'

'You're with us, then.'

'Let's look at the practicalities,' she said briskly. '<u>Can</u> they make these bombs?'

'I've looked into this, and it's not straightforward,' John

began. 'The mechanics of the business are simple: anyone who can make a conventional bomb can make a nuclear bomb. The problem is the explosive material, plutonium.

'Plutonium is a by-product of nuclear fission. The uranium oxide which fuels an ordinary nuclear power station becomes exhausted after a few months. The spent fuel is cooled in a water tank, then transferred to a reprocessing plant where it is crushed and dissolved in acid. Plutonium is extracted from the resulting mixture.

'Now, we have a nuclear reactor, at Dimona in the Negev Desert. We don't have a reprocessing plant, but we could build one. The problem is that we havenno uranium.'

The old woman said: 'Where do we get the uranium for Dimona, then?'

'From France. But it's supplied on condition we return the spent fuel to themfor reprocessing.'

'Other suppliers?'

'Would impose the same condition. It's part of all the non-proliferation treaties.'

'Surely these people at Dimona could siphon off some of the spent fuel without anyone noticing.'

'No. Given the quantity of uranium originally supplied, it's possible to calculate precisely how much plutonium comes out the other end.'

The old woman said: 'Good. So even if the Cabinet agrees, the generals will have troubling making their bobms.'

'I can't see how it can be done without causing an international scandal,' John said.

The old woman got up to help herself to another drink. 'Let's look at the international consequences,' she said. 'If we

have this bomb, people are going to find out about it, sooner or later. I mean, eventually we're going to use it or threaten to use it, otherwise there's no point in having it. So, what will be the reaction of the rest of the world?'

'We'd be condemned,' John said.

'We're always condemned. The world is pro-Arab, we know that. What would the Americans do?'

'Stop financing us?'

'I doubt it. The Jewish vote is too big.'

'People might refuse to sell us arms.'

'So what? The whole point of the bomb is to release us from that sort of pressure. What I'm asking is: Is there anything anyone can <u>do</u>?'

John shrugged. 'As far as I can see, our allies can't do anything.'

The old woman pointed at him with her cigarette. 'Precisely. Our <u>allies</u> are powerless. But the other side could do something. The Russians could give the Arabs a nuclear bomb.'

'Shit, yes. No, wait. They wouldn't trust these lunatics with nuclear weapons.'

'They might not have to. They could have their own personnel in Egypt to operate the hardware, like the Americans do in England.'

Another of the visitors said: 'That's the strongest argument yet.'

'You're right,' said the old woman. 'The idealistic argument will carry no weight at Cabinet level. The generals will brush aside the practical difficulties - these people believe they can do anything. But this third point is a strategic one, and I think it will convince the Prime Minister.'

John said: 'You'll talk to him, then?'

'Sure,' said the old woman. 'For what it's worth, I'll talk to him. And now, I have to remind you all that I'm a grandmother, and I'm too old to stay up drinking all night like I used to.'

The visitors stood up. Each of them kissed her, then she saw them to the front door. John was the last. As he left he said: 'With you on our side, we can knock this thing on the head.'

'Don't count on it,' said the old woman.

Pierre Borg, who was not very sensitive to the atmosphere of a place, felt the bare emptiness of the Prime Minister's huge residence in Jerusalem: it was like a church whose congregation has dwindled until only the priests are left.

The head of the Mossad was received in the kitchen and offered tea. Politicians always confused informality with security.

Borg began by saying: 'I have some information relevant to your discussions about nuclear weapons.'

The Prime Minister stared at him. 'How did you know about that?'

Borg stared back, ox-like, and said nothing.

The Prime Minister said: 'Look, I want to know how the most secret Cabinet debate of the decade has reached your ears.'

'If I relied on official channels of communication, I couldn't do my job,' Borg said.

'Defence told you,' the Prime Minister said.

Borg shrugged.

'We'll return to that question. You'd better say your piece.'

Borg hesitated, wondering how to proceed now that he had given offence. The Prime Minister was a balding, bespectacled man

in his seventies. His peculiar combination of high ideals and pragmatism came from his background in the kibbutz: he was the first genuine kibbutznik to reach the premiership. He was also easily the worst orator in the Knesset.

Borg decided to offer unadorned facts. He said: 'A physicist named Friedrich Schulz visited Cairo in February. He is Austrian, but he works in the United States. He was apparently on holiday in Europe, but his plane ticket to Egypt was paid for by the Egyptian government.'

'A rocket man?' the Prime Minister asked.

'No, sir. His speciality is isotopes. We had him followed, but he gave the tail the slip and disappeared into the Western Desert for forty-eight hours.' Borg opened his briefcase and took out a sheaf of glossy black-and-white photographs. 'These are CIA satellite pictures of a part of Western Egypt, and they show a major construction project in the desert.'

'You think that's where the isotope man went.'

'It's likely. Our man searched Schulz's apartment and noted both sand and cement on the clothes.' Borg paused.

'Anything else?'

'He found one thing more.' Borg took from his briefcase a small box made of blue plastic and handed it to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister opened the box and looked at the little envelope inside. 'What is it?' he said impatiently.

'It's a personnel dosimeter,' Borg said. 'The envelope, which is light-tight, contains a piece of ordinary photographic film. The box is a multiple sandwich of different thicknesses of metal and plastic. You carry it in your pocket, or pinned to your lapel or your trouser belt. If you're exposed to radiation, the film will show fogging when it is developed. The sandwich construction

enables you to tell how much radiation you've suffered, and even the direction it came from.'

The Prime Minister's eyes narrowed behind his glasses. 'Who uses these things?'

'They're carried, as a matter of routine, by everyone who visits or works in a nuclear power station.'

'You're telling me that the Arabs are making atom bombs,' the Prime Minister said softly.

'That is my department's evaluation of the data.'

There was a silence. Through the kitchen window, Borg saw the outline of a bodyguard pass by on patrol. Borg sipped his tea: it had gone cold.

The Prime Minister said: 'You realise that the principal argument against the Defence Ministry's proposal has been that if we build a bomb, the Arabs will too.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And this information invalidates that argument.'

'Yes, sir.'

The Prime Minister looked at Borg, and smiled thinly. 'I thought I held that decision in my hands. I was wrong. You held it in yours.'

Borg said nothing.

'However, there remains the practical question of how we are to get hold of uranium without causing an international incident.'

'I may have the answer to that, too,' Borg said; and for the first time, he smiled.

Three

The American girl was quite taken with Nat Dickstein.

They worked side by side in a dusty vineyard, weeding and hoeing, with a light breeze blowing over them from the Sea of Galilee. Dickstein had taken off his shirt, and worked in shorts and sandals, with the contempt for the sun which only the city-born possess.

He was a thin man, small-boned, with narrow shoulders, a shallow chest, and knobbly elbows and knees. Karen would watch him, when she stopped for a rest - he never seemed to need a break. Stringy muscles moved like knotted rope under his brown, scarred skin. She was a sensual woman, and she wanted to touch those scars with her fingers and ask him how he got them.

Sometimes he would look up and catch her watching, and he would grin, quite unembarrassed, and carry on working. His face was regular and anonymous in repose. He had dark eyes behind round-lensed, plastic-rimmed spectacles of the kind which Karen's generation liked because John Lennon wore them. His hair was dark, too, and short: Karen would have liked him to grow it. When he grinned that lopsided grin, he looked younger; though it was hard to say how old he looked at any time. He had the strength and energy of a young man, but she had seen the concentration-camp tattoo under his wristwatch, so he must be at least forty.

He had arrived at the kibbutz shortly after Karen, in the summer of 1967. She had come, with her deodorants and her contraceptive pills, looking for a place where she could live out hippy ideals without getting stoned twenty-four hours a day. He had been brought here in an ambulance. She assumed he had been wounded in the Six-Day War, and the other kibbutzniks agreed,

vaguely, that ~~it~~ it was something like that. Karen's welcome had been friendly but wary: in her philosophy they saw their own, with dangerous additions. Nat Dickstein returned like a long-lost son. They clustered around him, fed him soup, and came away from his wounds with tears in their eyes. Him getting better. Him getting better.

His past was vague, with one exception. They all knew, and told with relish, the story of his arrival in Israel in 1948, during the War of Independence.

He had come at the head of a group of half a dozen or so En lish Jews, some of them undergraduates from Oxford University, the rest working-class Londoners. They had gone first to Corsica, where Dickstein made contact with the local Mafia. He persuaded them to sell a boatload of sub-machine-guns to the Arabs, and leak the details to him. The deal was done, and the Corsos got their money. On its way to Beirut, the ship called in to Sicily, where Dickstein apparently knew people. With the connivance of some powerful criminals there, Dickstein stole the ship and its cargo and sailed to Haifa.

None of the boys had ever sailed a dinghy, let alone a 5,000-ton cargo vessel. They steamed into Haifa, yelling and throwing their hats into the air, just like students in the varsity rag; and ploughed head-on into the quay. Afterwards Dickstein explained that he had looked up in a book how to start the ship, but the book had not explained how to stop it. The authorities forgave him everything: the arms were more precious than gold, quite literally.

He was, of course, just the kind of immigrant that the new State needed.