First draft - 17 January 79

TRIPLE

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115,000 words

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A dictionary for landlubbers

A floor is a deck, a wall is a bulkhead, and a ceiling is a deckhead.

The pointed or front end of a ship is the stem. The point itself is the prow. The general area of the front is the bows. The middle section is called amidships, the latter part the afterdeck, the back end the stern.

Forward means forward, but for'ard is an adjective meaning 'at the front end' or 'towards the front'. Aft, after and abaft all mean 'behind' or 'at the back'.

Buildings above the main deck are called upperworks or superstructures. Below the main deck, inside the ship, are more levels or decks sometimes called tweendecks. A place where you put cargo is a hold, and the lid of a hold is a hatch. The galley is the kitchen, a dining room is a mess, a bedroom is a cabin and the plural of cabin is quarters. The bridge is the place from which you drive the ship.

A corridor is a gangway and a staircase is a companion. You don't go down, you go below; and instead of going up you go above.

As you face the front of the ship, left is port and right is starboard.

It must be appreciated that the only difficult part of making a fission bomb of some sort is the preparation of a supply of fissionable material of adequate purity; the design of the bomb itself is relatively easy ...

- Encyclopedia Americana

Prologue

There was a time, just once, when they were together. Indeed, for a few minutes they were all in one room. Each of them met all the others on that day in 1947, although some of them immediately forgot the names and the faces. Some actually forgot the whole day; and when it became so important, twenty-one years later, they had to pretend to remember; to stare at blurred photographs and murmur 'Ah, yes, of course,' in a knowing way.

This early meeting is a coincidence, but not a very startling one. They were mostly young and able; they were destined to have power, to take decisions, and to make changes, each in their different ways, in their different countries; and those people often meet in their youth at places like Oxford University. Furthermore, when this business of the yellowcake took place, those who had no other reason to become involved were drawn into it just because of that meeting in 1947.

It did not seem like an historic meeting at the time, of course. It was just another sherry party in a place where there were too many sherry parties (and, undergraduates would add, not enough sherry.) It was an uneventful occasion. Well, almost.

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'What I want to know is, how on earth did you find me?' said Nat Dickstein, when he had finished grinning and shaking hands.

'I'll tell you, it wasn't easy,' Alan Cortone said. He took off his uniform jacket and laid it on the narrow bed. 'It took me most of yesterday.' He eyed the only easy chair in the

little room. Both arms tilted sideways at odd angles, it was propped up at one corner by a copy of Plato's Theaetetus, and a spring poked through the faded chrysanthemums of the fabric. 'Can human beings sit on that?' he said.

'Not above the rank of sergeant. But - '

'They aren't human beings anyway.'

They both laughed: it was an old joke. Dickstein brought a bentwood chair from the desk in the window and straddled it. He looked his friend up and down for a moment and said: 'You're getting fat.'

Cortone patted the slight swell of his stomach. 'We live well in Frankfurt. Listen, Nat, you really missed out, getting demobilised. I've made a fortune. Jewellery, china, antiques - all bought for cigarettes and soap. The Germans are starving. The girls will do anything for a Tootsie Roll.' Cortone waited for a laugh, but Dickstein just stared at him, straight-faced. Disconcerted, Cortone changed the subject. 'One thing you ain't, is fat.'

Now that he came to think of it, Cortone realised that Dickstein was worse than thin: he looked wasted. He had always been short and slight, but now he seemed all bones. The dead-white skin, and the large brown eyes behind the plastic-rimmed spectacles, accentuated the effect. Between the top of his sock and the cuff of his trouser-leg a few inches of pale shin showed like matchwood. Four years ago Dickstein had been brown, stringy, and as hard as the ~~xxxx~~ leather soles of his British Army boots. When Cortone talked about his English buddy, as he often did, he would say 'The toughest, meanest bastard fighting soldier that ever saved my

God damn life and I ain't shittin you.'

'Fat? No,' Dickstein said. 'This country is still on iron rations, mate. But we manage.'

'I heard you got took prisoner.'

'At La Molina. A bullet broke my leg and I passed out. When I came round I was in a German lorry.'

'Did the leg mend okay?'

'I was lucky. There was a medic in my truck on the PoW train - he set the bone.'

'How was the camp?'

'All right until they discovered I'm Jewish. Then they decided to find out how many times they could break a leg and mend it again.'

'Shit.'

'Al, that was the best part.'

Cortone said: 'Bastards.' He could not think of anything else to say. There was a strange expression on Dickstein's face; something Cortone had not seen before; something - he realised after a moment - that was very like fear. It was odd. After all, it was over now, wasn't it? 'Damn, but we won, though, didn't we?' Cortone said heartily, and punched Dickstein's shoulder.

Dickstein grinned. 'We did. Now, what are you doing in England? And how did you find me?'

'I'm on my way back to Buffalo. I managed to get a stopover. The War Office gave me an address in Stepney. When I got there, there was only one house standing in the whole street. In this house, underneath an inch of dust, I find this old man.'

'Tommy Coster.'

'That's right. Well, after I drink nineteen cups of weak

tea and listened to the story of his life, he sends me to another house around the corner, where I meet your mother, drink another nineteen cups of tea and hear the story of her life. By the time I get your address it's too late to catch the last train to Oxford, so I wait until the morning, and here I am. I only have a few hours - my ship sails tomorrow.'

'You've got your discharge?'

'In three weeks, two days, and ninety-four minutes.'

'What are you going to do, back home?'

'Run the family business. I have discovered, in the last couple of years, that I am a terrific businessman. And you? What is this with Oxford University, for Christ's sake? What are you studying?'

'Hebrew Literature.'

'You're kidding.'

'I could write Hebrew before I went to school, didn't I ever tell you? My grandfather was a great scholar. He lived in one smelly room over a pie shop in the Mile End Road. I went there every Saturday and Sunday, since before I can remember - and I never complained. I love it. Anyway, what else would I study?'

Cortone shrugged. 'I don't know, atomic physics maybe, or business ~~studies~~ management. Why study at all?'

'To become clever, happy and rich.'

Cortone shook his head. 'Weird as ever. Lots of girls here?'

'Very few. Besides, I'm busy.'

'Liar. You're in love, you fool. I can tell. Who is she?'

'Well, to be honest ... ' Dickstein looked bashful. 'She's out of reach. A professor's wife. Exotic, intelligent, the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.'

Cortone made a dubious face. 'It's not promising, Nat.'

'I know, but still ... ' Dickstein stood up. 'You'll see what I mean.'

'I get to meet her?'

'Professor Ashford is giving a sherry party. I'm invited. I was just leaving when you got here.' Dickstein put on his jacket.

'A sherry party in Oxford,' Cortone said gleefully. 'Wait till I tell them about this!'

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It was a cold, bright Sunday morning in November. Pale sunshine washed the cream-coloured stone of the city's old buildings. Cortone kept saying: 'Dreaming spires. Fuck.'

They had walked about a mile, mostly in comfortable silence, when Dickstein said: 'There's the Russian. Hey, Rostov!'

The Russian came across the road to meet them. He had an army haircut, and he was too tall and thin for his mass-produced suit. Cortone was beginning to think everybody was thin in this country.

Dickstein said: 'David Rostov, Alan Cortone. Me and Al were together in Italy for a while. Rostov's at Balliol, same college as me. Going to Ashford's house, Rostov?'

The Russian nodded solemnly. 'Anything for a free drink.'

Cortone said: 'Are you interested in Hebrew Literature also?'

Rostov said: 'No, I am here to study bourgeois economics.'

Dickstein laughed loudly. Cortone did not see the joke. Dickstein explained: 'Rostov is from Smolensk. He's a member of the CPSU - the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.' Cortone still did not see the joke.

'I thought nobody was allowed to leave Russia,' Cortone said.

Rostov went into a long and involved explanation which had to do with his father's having been a diplomat in Japan when war broke out. He had an earnest expression which occasionally gave way to a sly smile. Although his English was imperfect, he managed to give Cortone the impression that he was condescending. The American turned off, and began to think about how you could love a man as if he was your own brother, fighting side by side with him, and then he could go off and study Hebrew Literature and you would realise you never really knew him at all.

Eventually Rostov said to Dickstein: 'Have you decided yet, about going to Palestine?'

Cortone said: 'Palestine? What for?'

'I haven't decided,' Dickstein said.

'You should go,' said Rostov. 'The Jewish National Home will help to break up the last remnants of the British Empire in the Middle East.'

'Is that the Party line?' Dickstein asked with a smile.

'Yes,' Rostov said seriously. 'You're a socialist - '

'Of sorts.'

' - and it is important that the new State should be socialist.'

Cortone was incredulous. 'The Arabs are murdering you people out there. Jeez, Nat, you only just escaped from the Germans!'

'I haven't decided,' Dickstein repeated.

They were walking briskly. Cortone's face was freezing, but he was perspiring beneath his winter uniform. The other two began to talk about a scandal: a man called Moseley - the name meant nothing to Cortone - had been persuaded to enter Oxford in a van and make a speech at the Martyrs' Memorial. Moseley was a

Nazi, he gathered. Rostov was arguing that this proved how social-democracy was closer to Fascism than Communism. Dickstein said the undergraduates who organised the event were just trying to be 'shocking'. Cortone had a feeling that Dickstein was ever so slightly showing off.

Eventually Dickstein seemed to realise that Cortone was somewhat left out of the discussion, and he began to talk about their host. 'Stephen Ashford is a bit eccentric, but a remarkable man,' he said. 'He spent most of his life in the Middle East. Made a small fortune and lost it, by all accounts. He used to do crazy things, like crossing the Arabian Desert on a camel. Just before the war he married a Lebanese girl and came back here. He's Professor of Semitic Literature. If he gives you marsala instead of sherry it means you've overstayed your welcome. We're there.'

Ashford had a large house by the river. Cortone was half-expecting a Moorish villa, but the Ashford home was imitation Tudor, painted white with green woodwork. The garden in front was a jungle of shrubs.

The door was open. The three young men went into a small, square hall. Somewhere in the house several people laughed: the party had started. A pair of double doors opened and the most beautiful woman in the world came out.

Cortone was transfixed. He stood and stared, with his mouth open, as she came across the carpet to welcome them. She shook hands with Rostov and Dickstein, then he heard Dickstein saying 'This is my friend Alan Cortone,' and suddenly he was touching her long brown hand, warm and dry and fine-boned, and he never wanted to let go.

She turned away and led them into the drawing-room. Dickstein

touched Cortone's arm and grinned: he had known what was going on in his friend's mind.

Cortone recovered his composure sufficiently to say: 'Wow.'

Small glasses of sherry were lined up with military precision on a little table. She handed one to Cortone, smiled, and said: 'I'm Eila Ashford, by the way.'

Cortone took in the details as she handed out the drinks. She was completely unadorned: there was no make-up on her astonishing face, her black hair was straight, and she wore a white dress and sandals - and yet the effect was almost like nakedness, and Cortone was embarrassed to the point of blushing at the animal thoughts that raced through his mind as he looked at her.

He forced himself to turn away and study his surroundings. The room had the unfinished elegance of a place where people are living slightly beyond their means. The rich Persian carpet was bordered by a strip of peeling grey linoleum; someone had been mending the radio, and its innards were all over a kidney table; there were a couple of bright rectangles on the wallpaper where pictures had been taken down; and some of the sherry glasses did not quite match the set. There were about a dozen people in the room.

A beautifully-dressed Arab was standing at the fireplace, looking at a wooden carving on the mantelpiece. Eila Ashford called him over. 'I want you to meet Yasif Hassan, a friend of my family from home,' she said. 'He's at Worcester College.'

Hassan said: 'I know Dickstein.' He shook hands.

'You're from Lebanon?' Rostov asked him.

'Palestine.'

'Ah! And what do you think of the United Nations partition plan?'

'Irrelevant,' Hassan said languidly. 'The British must leave, and my country will have a democratic government.'

'But then the Jews will be in a minority.'

'They are in a minority in England. Should they be given Surrey as a national home?'

'Surrey has never been theirs,' Rostov said. 'Palestine was, once.'

Hassan shrugged elegantly. 'It was - when the Welsh had England, the English had Germany, and the Norman French lived in Scandinavia.' He turned to Dickstein. 'You have a sense of justice - what do you think?'

Dickstein took off his glasses. 'I don't give a monkey's for justice. I want a place to call my own.'

'Even if you have to steal mine?' Hassan said.

'You can have the rest of the Middle East.'

'I don't want it.'

Rostov said: 'This discussion proves the necessity for partition.'

Eila Ashford offered a box of cigarettes. Cortone took one, and lit hers. While the others argued about Palestine, Eila asked Cortone: 'Have you known Dickstein long?'

'We met in 1943,' Cortone said. He watched her brown lips close around the cigarette. She even smoked beautifully. Delicately, she picked a fragment of tobacco from her tongue.

'People are saying he's a very brilliant student,' she said.

'He saved my life.'

'Good Lord.' She looked at him more closely, as if she were

wondering whether he was just being melodramatic. She seemed to decide in his favour. 'I'd like to hear about it.'

A middle-aged man in baggy corduroy trousers touched her shoulder and said: 'How is everything, my dear?'

'Fine,' she said. 'Mr Cortone, this is my husband, Professor Ashford.'

Cortone said: 'How are you.' Ashford was a balding man in ill-fitting clothes: Cortone had been expecting Lawrence of Arabia. He thought: Maybe Nat has a chance after all.

Eila said: 'Mr Cortone was telling me how Nat Dickstein saved his life.'

'Really!' Ashford said.

'It doesn't take long to tell,' Cortone said. He glanced over at Dickstein, now deep in conversation with Hassan and Rostov: he heard <u>The British promised Palestine to the Jews,</u> and the reply <u>Beware the gifts of a thief.</u> 'It was in Sicily, near a place called Ragusa, a hill town,' he began. '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 with a machine-gun fell out of a tree. He'd been hiding up there, ready to mow us down as we passed. It was Nat Dickstein who shot him.

'The British had come around the town from the other side. Nat had seen the tank, like I did, and smelled a trap. He had 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.'

The other two were silent for a moment. Ashford said: 'Well, well.'

Eila excused herself and went across the room to where Hassan was trying to open a pair of doors that gave on to the garden. Ashford said to Cortone: 'It's a remarkable story.'

Cortone nodded. 'Later, I took him to meet my cousins - my family comes from Sicily. We had pasta and wine, and they made a hero of Nat. We were together only for a few days, but we were like brothers, you know?'

'Indeed.'

'When I heard he was taken prisoner, I thought I'd never see him again.'

'What happened to him? There are rumours ... '

Cortone shrugged. 'He survived the camps.'

'He was fortunate,' Ashford said.

Cortone looked at him. 'Was he? I don't know.'

Ashford frowned. 'I don't ... You mean ... I see.'

They were joined by a red-faced youth in a tweed suit and a very wide paisley tie who said abruptly: 'Any chance of a tip from the stable? Will Dickstein win?'

The question was addressed to Cortone, who said: 'Win what?'

Ashford said: 'Dickstein and Rostov are to play a chess match - they're both supposed to be terribly good. Toby here thinks you might have inside information.'

Toby said: 'They say Dickstein's a very dashing player. But I've seen Rostov at work - he just waits for his opponent to make a mistake, then goes in for the kill.'

Cortone said: 'I thought chess was an old man's game.'

Toby said: 'Ah!' rather loudly. He and Ashford seemed floored by Cortone's remark. A little girl, four or five years old, came in from the garden carrying an elderly grey cat. Ashford introduced her with the coy pride of a man who has become a father in middle age.

'This is Suza,' he said.

The child had her mother's skin and hair: she, too, would be beautiful. Cortone wondered whether she was really Ashford's daughter. There was nothing of him in her looks.

Suza went over to Dickstein, and said: 'Good morning, Nat. Would you like to stroke Hezekiah?'

'She's very cute,' Cortone said. 'Excuse me.' He went to Dickstein, who was kneeling down and stroking the cat, and bent to speak to him.

'I wouldn't say she's out of reach,' Cortone said quietly.

Dickstein stood up, and Suza ran off with her cat. 'Wouldn't you?'

'She can't be more than twenty-five. He's at least twenty years older. If they got married before the war, she must have been around seventeen at the time. And they don't seem affectionate.'

'I wish I could believe you. Come and see the garden.'

They went out through the French doors. The sun was stronger, and the bitter cold had gone from the air. The garden stretched in a green-and-brown wilderness down to the edge of the river. They walked away from the house.

Dickstein said: 'This isn't really your scene, is it?'

'The war's over,'Cortone said. 'You and me, we live in different worlds. All this - professors, chess matches, sherry parties ... I might as well be on Mars. My life is doing deals,

fighting off the competition, making a few bucks. I was fixing to offer you a job in my business, but I guess I'd be wasting my time.'

'Alan ... '

'Listen, what the hell. We'll probably lose touch now - I'm not one to write letters. But I'll never forget that I owe you my life. One of these days you might want to call in the debt. You know where to find me.'

Dickstein opened his mouth to speak, then they heard the voices.

'Oh ... no, not here, not now ... '

'Yes!'

They were standing beside a thick box hedge which cut off a corner of the garden: someone had begun to plant a maze, and never finished the job. A few steps from where they were a gap opened, and then the hedge turned a right angle and ran along the river bank. It seemed as if some acoustical trick made the voices bounce off the hedge and through the gap.

'Don't, damn you, I'll scream.'

It was a woman's voice. Dickstein and Cortone stepped through the gap.

Cortone was never to forget what he saw then. He stared at the two people and then, appalled, he glanced at Dickstein. Dickstein's face was grey, and he looked ill. Cortone looked back at the couple.

The woman was Eila Ashford. The skirt of her dress was around her waist, her face was flushed with pleasure, and she was kissing Yasif Hassan.

One

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 four-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.

The real Towfik el-Masiri was dead, killed by a French-made hand grenade at Sharm el-Sheikh during the Six-Day War. Israeli Intelligence had taken his identity. The new Towfik, who was Egyptian but not Arab, pretended that his parents were dead, to avoid complications. He was always an orphan.

He was also friendless. He had plenty of acquaintances, but nobody knew him well: for anyone who knew him well would have seen through his lies, and that would have been the end. He could not, unfortunately, behave much like a student. When he 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, gossipping 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 arrived on the next plane.

While he waited, sipping coffee in the airport buffet, 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 British liked to read newspapers; Russians would sit and watch the world go by, looking stolid. It might be to do with national characteristics; but more probably it was the stamp of the school in which they had trained. 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. He smiled. He liked paradoxes.

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 over the shimmering concrete apron. The Caravelle was already down and taxiing.

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 registere d code book, gave details of his late aunt's will. However, 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.

Schulz's 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, a white shirt and a tie, and carrying a plastic bag from a duty-free shop and a camera. His wife was much shorter, and wore a fashionable 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 something they didn't teach you - how to wait. You learned to handle guns, memorise maps, break open safes and kill people with your bare 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 seem like _What the fuck was that?_ beginning to seem _Lookout lookout!_ beginning to -

There was another agent in the crowd.

Towfik's subconscious hit the fire alarm while he was thinking about patience. 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 saying _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 nonchalantly, with his hands behind his back, facing the exit from the baggage hall, 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 he 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 formalites 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 passengers 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 front door, 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 kph 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 an Austrian 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 style of waiting. That meant Schulz was probably here by invitation of the government, but either he or the people he had come to see wanted the visit kept secret.

It wasn't much. What was Schulz a professor <u>of?</u> He could be a banker, arms manufacturer, rocketry expert or cotton buyer. He might even be with Al Fatah, but Towfik could not quite 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, for this surveillance. It was even possible that the whole thing was yet another training 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 and the 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.

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It went on for two days, then it broke.

Until then 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 a district called Brixton in South London. Next day they

did the Pyramids and the Sphinx, 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 Schulz bought slippers, a gold bangle, and a sprig of mint from a half-naked child. Towfik got far enough in front of them to drink 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 read the number plate - 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 engine 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. But Towfik would bet that the meeting-place, and the walk beforehand, had been suggested by the agent.

They might have gone anywhere, but it seemed likely they were leaving the city -otherwise Schulz could simply have got a taxi at 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 catching 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 other car it was behind him, going very fast. Before it could catch 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 easily obscure it under a layer of sand. 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 trainigh 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 stared at him blankly, as if he were speaking a foreign language.

'Have you seen a grey car?'

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

'When?'

'Today.'

That was probably as precise an answer as he could hope for. '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 west he would run out on the return journey.

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: 'Telegram.'

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

A few minutes later she returned with a steaming mug of coffee. 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 Schulz, who flew with you to Cairo two days ago.'

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

'Now,' he continued, 'the problem is, he doesn't seem to have paid for his ticket, 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. Thankyou 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. Do you have the number handy?'

'Yes.' She gave it to him.

'Thankyou. Goodbye.'

His wife stood in the doorway, wearing a puzzled frown. 'What are you doing?'

'Business,' 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.

She said: 'What was that all about?'

'The office wanted me to check out a couple of little details in someone else's story. Nothing big. How about breakfast?' He

grinned. 'I've just done a good day's work.'

*

Towfik did not like his work. When it was dull he was bored, and when it was exciting he was frightened. But they had told him that there was important, dangerous work to be done in Cairo, and that he had all the qualities necessary to be a good spy, and that there were not enough Egyptian Jews in Israel for them to be able to just go out and find another one who had all the qualities; so, of course, he had agreed. It was not out of idealism that he risked his life for his country. It was more like self-interest: the destruction of Israel would mean his own destruction; in fighting for Israel he was fighting for himself; he risked his life to save his life. It was the logical thing to do. Still, he looked forward to the time - in five years? ten? twenty? - when he would be too old for field work, and they would bring him home and sit him behind a desk, and he could enjoy the land he had fought for.

Meanwhile, having lost Professor Schulz, he was following the wife.

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 and 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, and exotic strange city, a husband involved in politically sensitive 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 percent of what she gives me.'

'Fifty,' the Nubian said.

'Twenty-five.'

'Fifty.'

'Okay.'

'Apartment three, first floor.'

Towfik ran up the marble stairs and walked along a corridor to the door of number three. He noted that it had a Yale-type lock.

He counted to fifty, then went downstairs and gave the caretaker 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 his uncle in Rome: SCHULZ MET AT AIRPORT BY SUSPECTED 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, they could go to hell.

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 their balcony.

Frau Schulz was a late riser. At eleven-thirty she came out on to 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. Qattara was only one of several possibilities: the desert road went

all the way Matruh on the Mediterranean coast; there was a turn-off to Karkur Tohl in the far south; with a change of car and a desert guide they could even have gone to a rendezvous on the border with Libya.

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 caretaker, 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 witha 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 USA. 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. It contained a light-tight envelope of the kind used to protect photographic film.

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 at 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 USA 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 lying on the pad. Perhaps Schulz had been making notes on his trip while he sipped his gin sling. Towfik searched the apartment for 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 remind 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 would look again at that foolscap pad, to see whether Schulz's pencil had pressed hard enough to leave an impression on the next page. 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 he heard 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 boxes. He had to keep that anyway. Schulz would have to assume he had lost it.

If Towfik could get away unseen now, 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. He might yet live to see that desk job.

He got into the 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 awy. 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, and then he knew, with unbearable sadness, that he would never see Jerusalem again.

A tall Arab in a dark suit was smiling 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 USAF. 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 his daughter 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 Peggy 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.

So 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 photographs 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 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 thattwo 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 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

a set of 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, brown 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.

Q: What is twenty minus seven?

A: Thirteen.

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 your 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, which was given to us by our Russian friends, tells me when you are lying. Besides, I happen to know that Towfik el-Masiri is dead. Who are you?

A: (no reply)

Q: The wire taped to the tip of your penis is part of a different machine. It is connected to this button here. When I press this -

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 efficiency of the apparatus. What is your name?

A: Avram Ambache.

<u>The electrical apparatus 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: Avram Ambache. (TRUE)

Q: Who is your control?

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

Q: Is it Bosch?

A: No, Friedman. (READING INDETERMINATE)

Q: It is Bosch.

A: Yes. (FALSE)

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

A: Yes, it's Krantz - whatever you say. (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 in the faubourg.

Q: You are thinking that when you are in pain, the lie-detector will not function properly; and that there is therefore safety in torture. You are only partly right. This is a very sophisticated machine, and I spent many months learning to use it properly. After the initial shock, it takes only a few minutes to readjust the machine to your faster metabolism; and then I can still tell when you are lying. 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: Avram Ambache.

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. (READING INDETERMINATE)

Q: But you can guess.

A: Bosch. (READING 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 1958. Why do you make me hurt you? What did Schulz do?

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

Q: And you burglarized his apartment.

A: Yes. (TRUE)

Q: What did you learn?

A: He is a scientist. (TRUE)

Q: Anything else?

A: American. (TRUE) That's all. (TRUE)

Q: Who was your instructor in training?

A: Ertl. (READING 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 somebodyx 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: (no reply) (scream)

The prisoner fainted.

(pause)

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 did 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 with?

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, the head of the Mossad, was already inside. He pressed buttons for the eighteenth and nineteenth floors. Borg was a stocky man in his middle forties, and spoke English with a French-Canadian accent.

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

'Which?'

'Towfik el-Masiri ... Avram Ambache.'

Borg's fleshy face creased in a frown. 'He told you his real name?'

'We're using the Russian equipment - 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.'

'Any idea why?'

The Arab shrugged. 'I'd say they don't want the Russians to know about it. These days Moscow gets everything that goes through us.'

'Is that all Towfik could manage?'

Suddenly ~~kkey~~ there was contempt in the soft voice of the 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 lightproof 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, Eli,' 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. As he walked he put his hands into his pockets and took them out again, twice.

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 aide's reaction.

It was a pretty place in the evening sun, with terraces of flowers, lots of shrubs and palm trees, and many antique pots and vases, the products of the man's hobby, archaeology. Eli looked at a pottery jar: 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. It turned 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 canexx seats beside a small table. As 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 could not be charmed, which was just as well for Eli, whose talents were not social.

'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 political career.'

Eli sipped his drink, his nervousness gone: he understood 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. All right so far?'

'No,' Eli said bluntly. 'There are - '

'Wait. I know what you're thinking. Part Two: suppose we are able to make up those losses, by continually finding new suppliers and by building our own munitions industry.'

'That's what I was going to say.'

'Even then, the fact remains that Israel must be the loser in a Middle East arms race. The oil countries will be richer than we throughout the forseeable future. Our defence budget is already a

grievous burden on the national economy, whereas our enemies have nothing better on 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.'

Eli was quite still, one hand full of nuts poised half way to his mouth. 'I think I see where this is going,' he said.

'No, you don't. But you agree, the survival of Israel depends on our breaking out of the vicious spiral our enemies have prescribed for us.'

'Yes ... the usual conclusion to this line of argument is "Peace at any price", isn't it?'

'Not this time. We must inflict, or at least have the power to inflict, 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.

'What reaction will it get?'

Eli scratched his nose. 'Golda will hate it. So will Yigal Allon. Peres will support you, of course.'

'What about Eshkol?'

Eli made a balancing gesture with both hands. 'The Prime

Minister will listen to the arguments.'

'It could rest with him.'

'May I suggest a refinement?'

'I'm hoping you'll come up with several.'

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

'Excellent. Include that. Another drink?'

'No, thankyou.' Eli knew when an audience was over. 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 inthrough the open door to the garden; supplicants at the court of an aging 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 signed 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 I've spent my life working for.'

'You're with us, then.'

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

'I've looked into this, and it's not straightforward,' John began. 'The mechanics of the business are simple - the actual clockwork of the bomb, so to speak. Anyone who can make a conventional bomb can make a nuclear bomb. The problem is getting hold of the explosive material, plutonium.

'You get plutonium out of an atomic reactor. It's a by-product. Now, we have a reactor, at Dimona in the Negev Desert. We don't have the equipment for extracting the plutonium from the spent fuel, but we could build a reprocessing plant. The problem is that we have no uranium to fuel the reactor with in the first place.'

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 them for 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. And they weigh it very carefully, believe me - it's expensive stuff.'

'Good,' said the old woman. 'So even if the Cabinet agrees, the generals will have trouble making their bombs.'

'I don'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?'

'Cut off the funds?'

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

'Everyone 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. 'Now, that's the smartest thing you've said yet. Our <u>allies</u> couldn't stop us. But the other side could do something. The Russians

could give the Arabs a nuclear bomb.'

'Shit,yes! No, wait. They wouldn't trust those 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 Turkey.'

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 - those 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 and talking 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 normally 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 very Israeli 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. '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 our man 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.

He 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 trouser belt. If you're exposed to radiation, the film will show fogging when it's developed. The sandwich construction is a refinement: it 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: 'Your man in Cairo ... I'd like him to know how well he's done.'

'He was killed, sir.'

The Prime Minister covered his eyes with his hand. Borg waited.

Eventually the man lifted his face. '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 that 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 - which she did often, although 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 staring, and he would grin, quite unembarrassed, and carry on working. His face was regular and anonymous in repose. He had dark eyes behind cheap round 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 at any time it was hard to say just how old he might be. 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, she thought.

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 was something like that.

His reception had been very different from hers. 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.

He had recovered very quickly. Within a few days he was sitting out in the sun, peeling vegetables for the kitchen and telling vulgar jokes to the older children. Two weeks later he was working in the fields, and soon he was labouring harder than all but the youngest men.

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 English Jews, some of them undergraduates from Oxford University, the rest working-class Londoners. They had gone first to Sicily, where Dickstein apparently knew the Mafia. He had persuaded them to sell a boatload of sub-machine-guns to some Arabs, and then give him all the details. The deal was done, the Sicilians got their money, and then Dickstein and his friends stole the boat with its cargo and sailed to Israel.

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 told him how to stop it. The authorities forgave him everything: the arms were more precious than gold, quite literally. He had instantly been nicknamed The Pirate.

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

Karen wanted to seduce him, but she could not figure out how. He obviously liked her, and she had taken care to let him know she was available. But he never made a move. Perhaps he felt she was too young and innocent. Or maybe he wasn't interested in women.

His voice broke into her thoughts. 'I think we've finished.'

She looked at the sun: it was time to go. 'You've done twice as much as me.'

'I'm used to the work. I've been here, on and off, for twenty years. The body gets into the habit.'

They walked back toward the village as the sky turned purple and yellow. Karen said: 'What else do you do - when you're not here?'

'Oh ... poison wells, kidnap Christian children.'

Karen laughed.

Dickstein said: 'How does this life compare with California?'

'This is a wonderful place,' Karen said. 'I think there's a lot of work still to be done before the women are genuinely equal.'

'That seems to be the big topic at the moment.'

'You never seem to have much to say about it.'

'Listen, I think you're right; but I think it's better for people to take their freedom rather than be given it.'

Karen said: 'That sounds like a good excuse for doing nothing.'

Dickstein laughed.

As they entered the village, they passed a young man on a pony, carrying a rifle, on his way to patrol the borders of the settlement. Dickstein called out: 'Be careful, Yisrael.' The shelling from the Golan Heights had stopped, of course, and the children no longer had to sleep underground; but the kibutz kept up the patrols. Dickstein had been one of those in favour of maintaining vigilance.

'I'm going to read to Mottie,' Dickstein said.

'Can I come?'

'Why not?' Dickstein looked at his watch. 'We've just got time to wash. Come to my room in five minutes.'

They parted, and Karen went into the showers. A kibbutz was the best place to be an orphan, she thought as she took off her clothes. Mottie's parents were both dead - the father blown up in the attack on the Golan Heights during the last war, the mother a year earlier in a shootout with Fedayeen. Both had been close friends of Dickstein. It was a tragedy for the child, of course; but he still slept in the same bed, ate in the same room, and had almost one hundred other adults to love and care for him - he was not foisted on to unwilling aunts or ageing grandparents or, worst of all, an orphanage. And he had Dickstein.

When she had washed off the dust Karen put on clean clothes and went to Dickstein's room. Mottie was already there, sitting on Dickstein's lap, sucking his thumb and listening to Treasure Island in Hebrew. Dickstein was the only person Karen had ever met who spoke Hebrew with a Cockney accent. His speech was even more strange now, for he was doing different voices for the

characters in the story: a high-pitched boy's voice for Jim, a deep snarl for Long John Silver, and a half-whisper for the mad Ben Gunn ~~Bones~~. Karen sat and looked at the two of them in the yellow electric light, thinking how boyish Dickstein appeared, and how grown-up was the child.

When the chapter was finished they took Mottie to his dormitory, kissed him goodnight, and went into the dining room. Karen thought: If we continue to go about together like this, everyone will think we're lovers already.

They sat with Esther, an old woman who had been one of the original founders of the kibbutz. After dinner she told them a story, and there was a young woman's twinkle in her eye. 'When I first went to Jerusalem, they used to say that if you owned a feather pillow, you could buy a house.'

Dickstein took the bait. 'How was that?'

'You could sell a good feather pillow for a pound. With that pound you could join a loan society, which entitled you to borrow ten pounds. Then you found a plot of land. The owner of the land would take ten pounds deposit and the rest in promissory notes. Now you were a landowner. You went to a builder and said: "Build a house for yourself on this plot of land. All I want is a small flat in the house for myself and my family."'

They all laughed. Dickstein looked toward the door. Karen followed his glance, and saw a stranger, a stocky man in his forties with a cruel, fleshy face. Dickstein got up and went to him.

Esther said to Karen: 'Don't break your heart, child. That one is not made to be a husband.'

Karen looked at Esther, then back at the doorway. Dickstein

had gone. A few moments later she heard the sound of a car starting up and driving away.

Esther put her old hand on Karen's young one, and squeezed.

Karen never saw Dickstein again.

*

Pierre Borg briefed Nat Dickstein on the sixty-mile drive to Tel Aviv. As they travelled through the darkness, with nothing ahead but the cone of light from the headlamps, Dickstein felt the sense of peace and wellbeing that came from simple hard work on the land seeping away, to be replaced by the first twinges of a familiar adrenal tension.

'Have you recovered from that business in Damascus?' Borg asked.

'Yes.'

No more was said about Dickstein's last operation. Borg told him about the photographs the CIA had given him, and the inquiry that West German Intelligence had made about Professor Schulz's plane ticket, and the personnel dosimeter Towfik had stolen from the apartment in Cairo. He told him that the Israeli Cabinet had given the go-ahead for the construction of a nuclear strike force. He explained that plutonium came from used reactor fuel, and said that work had already started on a reprocessing plant near Dimona.

'However,' he said, 'nobody will sell nuclear fuel to us unless we guarantee to return it to the supplier for reprocessing. So the problem is to get hold of some uranium.'

'And the solution?' said Dickstein.

'The solution is, you're going to steal it.'

The car roared through the Arab town of Nazareth, deserted

now, presumably under curfew. Borg and Dickstein were in the back of a big black Citroen. Borg's bodyguard was driving, with his machine-pistol lying on the front passenger seat beside him. They left the lights of the town behind and went on into the night.

Dickstein said: 'If we're going to steal it anyway, why not buy it and simply refuse to send it back for reprocessing?'

'Because that way, everyone would know what we're up to.'

'So?'

'Reprocessing takes time - many months. During that time two things could happen: one, the Egyptians would hurry their programme; and two, the Americans would pressure us not to build the bomb.'

'Oh! So you want me to steal this stuff without anyone knowing that it was us.'

'More than that.' Borg's voice was harsh, throaty. 'Nobody must know it's been stolen. It must look as if the stuff has just been lost. I want the owners, and the international agencies, to be so embarrassed that the stuff has disappeared, that they will hush it up. Then, when they discover they were robbed, they will be compromised by their own cover-up.'

'It's bound to come out eventually.'

'Not before we've got our bomb.'

Dickstein looked out of the window. The moon came out, revealing a flock of sheep huddled in a corner of a field, watched by an Arab shepherd with a staff: a Biblical scene. Dickstein said: 'How much uranium do we need?'

'They want twelve bombs. In the yellowcake form - that's the uranium ore - it would need about a hundred tons.'

'I won't be able to slip it into my pocket, then.' Dickstein

frowned. 'What would all that cost if we bought it?'

'Something over one million dollars, U.S.'

'Christ! And you think the losers will just hush it up?'

'If it's done right.'

'How?'

'That's your job, Pirate.'

'I'm not sure it's possible,' Dickstein said.

'It's got to be. I told the Prime Minister we could pull it off. I laid my career on the line, Nat.'

'Oh, stop it, you'll have me in tears.'

They drove in silence, now on the coast road from Haifa to Tel Aviv, sometimes within sight of the Mediterranean. Borg lit a cigar, and Dickstein opened a window to let the smoke out.

Dickstein said: 'Also, I'm not sure it's necessary.'

Borg shrugged. 'I wouldn't know. I don't get involved in politics.'

'Bullshit.'

Borg sighed. 'Okay, so what's unnecessary? If they have a bomb, we have to have one, don't we?'

'If that was all there was to it, we could just hold a press conference, announce that the Egyptians are making bombs, and let the rest of the world stop them. I think our people want the bomb anyway. I think they're glad of the excuse.'

'And maybe they're right!' Borg said. 'We can't go on fighting a war every few years - one of these days we might lose one, and that would be the end.'

'We could make peace.'

Borg snorted. 'You're so fucking naive.'

'If we gave way on a few things - the Occupied Territories,

the Law of Return, equal rights for Arabs in Israel - '

'The Arabs have equal rights.'

Dickstein grinned. 'You're so fucking naive.'

'All right, Nat. Maybe we should sell our birthright for a mess of potage. But this is the real world, and the people of this country won't vote for peace-at-any-price; and in your heart you know that the Arabs aren't in a great hurry for peace either. So, in the real world, we still have to fight them; and if we're going to fight them we'd better win; and if we're to be sure of winning, you'd better steal me some uranium.'

Dickstein said: 'The thing I hate most about you is, you're usually right.'

Borg wound down his window and threw away the stub of his cigar. It made a trail of sparks on the road, like a firework. He said: 'You know, with most of my people I don't feel obliged to argue politics every time I give them an assignment. They just take orders, like operatives are supposed to.'

'I don't believe you,' Dickstein said. 'This is a nation of idealists, or it's nothing.'

'Maybe.'

'I once knew a man called ~~Peder~~ Wolfgang. He used to say: "I just take orders." Then he used to break my leg.'

'Yeah,' Borg said. 'You told me.'

*

When you hire an accountant to keep the company's books, the first thing he does is tell you he has so much work to do on the overall direction of the company's financial policy that he needs to hire a junior accountant to keep the company's books. Something similar happens with spies. You set up an intelligence service to find out

how many tanks your neighbour has and where he keeps them, and before you can say MI5 the intelligence service announces that it is so busy spying on subversive elements in its own country that you had better set up a separate service to deal with military intelligence.

So it was in Egypt in 1955. The country's fledgeling intelligence service was divided into two Directorates. Military Intelligence had the job of counting Israel's tanks; General Investigations had all the glamour.

The man in charge of both these Directorates was called the Director of General Intelligence, just to be confusing; and he was supposed - in theory - to report to the Minister of the Interior. But another thing that always happens to spy departments is that the Head of State ~~always~~ tries to take them over. There are two reasons for this. One is that the spies are ~~always~~ continually hatching lunatic schemes of murder, blackmail and invasion which can be terribly embarrassing if they ever get off the ground; so Presidents and Prime Ministers like to keep a personal eye on such departments. The other reason is that intelligence services are a source of power, especially in unstable countries; and the Head of State wants that power for himself.

So the Director of General Intelligence in Cairo always, in practice, reported either to the President or to the Minister of State at the presidency.

The tall Arab who interrogated and killed Towfik, and who subsequently gave the personnel dosimeter to Pierre Borg, worked in the Directorate of General Investigations, the glamorous civilian half of the service. His name was ~~Mahmoud~~ Mohammed. He was an intelligent and dignified man of great integrity, but he was also

deeply religious, to the point of mysticism. His was the solid, powerful kind of mysticism which can support the most unlikely, not to say bizarre, beliefs about the real world. He had been secretly converted to Christianity in 1953, and his particular brand of Christianity had it that the return of the Jews to the Promised Land was ordained in the Bible, and was a portent of the end of the world. To work against the return of the Jews was therefore a sin; to work for the return was a holy task. This is why Mohammed ~~Mahmoud~~ was a double agent. He was the best double Pierre Borg ever had.

Nevertheless, the atom bomb project was run, not by General Investigations, but by Military Intelligence, so Mohammed ~~Mahmoud~~ had some difficulty finding out what was going on. However, Mohammed ~~Mahmoud~~ had a second cousin, called Assam, who worked in the office of the Director of General Intelligence - who was in charge of both Military Intelligence and General Investigations. Assam was more senior than Mohammed ~~Mahmoud~~, but Mohammed ~~Mahmoud~~ was cleverer.

They sat in the back room of a small, dirty coffee house near the Sherif Pasha in the heat of the day, drinking lukewarm lime cordial and blowing tobacco smoke at the flies. They looked similar in their lightweight suits and Nasser moustaches.

Mohammed ~~Mahmoud~~ said: 'My cousin, do you know what is happening at Qattara?'

A rather furtive look came over Assam's handsome face. 'If you don't know, I can't tell you.'

Mohammed ~~Mahmoud~~ shook his head. 'I don't want you to reveal secrets. Besides, I can guess what the project is. What bothers me is that Maraji has control of it.'

'Why?'

'For your sake. I'm thinking of your career.'

'I'm not worried - '

'Then you should be. Maraji wants your job, you must know that.'

The cafe proprietor brought a dish of olives and two flat loaves of pitta bread. The spies were silent until he went out.

Mohammed Mahmoud continued: 'Maraji is reporting directly to the Minister, I suppose?'

'I see all the documents, though.'

'You don't know what he is saying privately to the Minister. He is in a very strong position.'

Assam frowned. 'How did you find out about the project, anyway?'

Mohammed Mahmoud leaned back against the cool concrete wall. 'One of Maraji's men was doing a bodyguarding job in Cairo and realised he was being followed. The tail was an Israeli agent called Towfik. Maraji doesn't have any field men in the city, so the bodyguard called me and asked me to get Towfik off his back.'

Assam snorted with disgust. 'Bad enough to let himself be followed. Worse to call the wrong department for help. This is terrible.'

'I think we can use it, my cousin.'

Assam scratched his nose with a hand heavy with rings. 'Go on.'

'Tell the Director about Towfik. Say that Maraji, for all his considerable talents, makes mistakes in picking his men, because he is young and inexperienced by comparison with someone such as yourself. Insist that you should have charge of personnel for the Qattara project. Then put a man loyal to us into a job there.'

Assam nodded slowly. 'I see.'

Mohammed
Mahmoud leaned forward. 'The Director will be grateful to you for having discovered this area of a sickness in a top-security matter. And you will be able to keep track of everything Maraji does.'

'This is a very good plan,' Assam said. 'I will speak to the Director today. I'm grateful to you, cousin.'

Mohammed
Mahmoud stood up. 'Haven't you always been my patron?'

They went arm in arm out into the heat of the city. Assam said: 'And I will find a suitable man immediately.'

'Ah, yes,' Mohammed Mahmoud said. 'I have a man who would be ideal. He is intelligent, resourceful, and very discreet - and the son of my wife's brother.'

Assam's eyes narrowed. 'So he would report to you, too.'

Mohammed
Mahmoud looked hurt. 'If this is too much for me to ask ... '

'No,' said Assam. 'We have always helped one another.'

They reached the corner where they parted company. Mohammed Mahmoud said: 'I will send the man to see you. You will find him completely reliable.'

'So be it,' said Assam.

*

Nat Dickstein spent a day in a Mossad safe house in the town of Ramat Gan, just outside Tel Aviv, taking detailed briefing. Security-vetted Mossad employees made him coffee, served his meals, and patrolled the garden with revolvers under their jackets. In the morning he saw a young physics teacher from the Weizmann Institute at Rehovot. The scientist had long hair and a flowered tie, and he explained the chemistry of uranium, the nature of radioactivity, and the working of an atomic pile with limpid clarity

and endless patience. After lunch Dickstein talked to an administrator from Dimona about uranium mines, enrichment plants, fuel fabrication works, storage and transport; about safety rules and international regulations; and about the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, and Euratom. In the evening there was Pierre Borg, again.

They had dinner together: skewered lamb and salad. Borg was slimming, and ate no bread, but he drank most of the bottle of red Israeli wine.

After dinner he gave Dickstein three keys. 'There are spare identities for you in safety-deposit boxes in London, Brussels and Zurich,' he said. 'Passports, driving licences, etc. If you have to change, leave the old documents in the box. You'll also find some cash and a weapon in each box.'

Dickstein nodded. 'Do I report to you or Mike?'

'To me, please. Whenever possible, call me direct and talk the jargon. If you can't get through, contact any embassy and use the code for a meeting - I'll try to get to you, wherever you are. As a last resort, send coded letters via the diplomatic bags.'

At this point - the night before the start of an operation - many controllers would yield to the temptation to become friendly and personal. It was a reaction to the knowledge that they might be sending a man to his death, Dickstein thought: you only call the soldiers 'dear friends' when you are sending them ~~into~~ unto the breach once more. It generally had a demoralising effect on the agent. Borg never made that mistake: he was his usual oafish self.

Dickstein said: 'Presumably there's a deadline.'

'Yes, but we don't know what it is.' Borg began to pick

onions out of the remains of the salad. 'We must have our bomb before the Egyptians have theirs. That means your uranium has to go on stream in the reactor before the Egyptians' reactor goes operational. After that point, everything is chemistry - there's nothing either side can do to hurry the sub-atomic particles. The first to start will be the first to finish.'

'We need an agent at Qattara,' Dickstein said.

'I'm working on it,' Borg said shortly.

Dickstein nodded. 'We must have a terrific man in Cairo.'

'What are you trying to do, pump me for information?' Borg said crossly.

'Thinking aloud.'

There was silence for a few moments. Borg crunched onions. Then he said: 'I've told you what I want, but I've left all the decisions about how to get it to you. Have you got any idea where you're going to start?'

Dickstein said: 'Yes, I have.'

Four

Nat Dickstein never got used to being a secret agent. It was the continual deceit that bothered him. He was always lying to people, hiding, pretending to be someone he was not, surreptitiously following people, and showing false documents to officials at airports. He never ceased to worry about being found out. He had a daytime mightmare of being surrounded suddenly by policemen who shouted 'You're a spy! You're a spy!' and took him off to prison where they broke his leg.

He was uneasy now. He was at the Jean-Monnet Building in Luxembourg, on the Kirchberg Plateau across a narrow river valley from the hilltop city. He sat in the entrance to the offices of the Euratom Safeguards Directorate, memorising the faces of the employees as they arrived at work. He was waiting to see a press officer called Pfaffer, but he had intentionally come much too early. The disadvantage of this ploy was that all the staff got to see Dickstein's face, too; but he had no time for subtleties.

Pfaffer turned out to be an untidy young man with an expression of disapproval and a battered brown briefcase. Dickstein followed him into an equally untidy office and accepted his offer of coffee. They spoke French. Dickstein was accredited to the Paris office of an obscure journal called Science International. He told Pfaffer that it was his ambition to get a job on Scientific American.

Pfaffer asked him: 'Exactly what are you writing about, at the moment?'

'The article is called MUF.' Dickstein explained in English: 'Material Unaccounted For.' He went on: 'In the United States radioactive fuel is continually getting lost. Here in Europe, I'm

told, there's an international system for keeping track of all such material.'

'Quite so,' Pfaffer said. 'The member countries hand over control of fissile substances to Euratom. We have, first of all, a complete list of civilian establishments where stocks are held - from mines through preparation and fabrication plants, stores, and reactors, to reprocessing plants.'

'You said "civilian" establishments.'

'Yes. The military are quite outside our scope.'

'Go on.'

'As an example, take a factory making fuel elements from ordinary yellowcake. The raw material coming into the factory is weighed and analysed by Euratom inspectors. Their findings are programmed in to the Euratom computer and checked against the information from the inspectors at the dispatching installation - in this case, probably a uranium mine. If there is a discrepancy between the quantity which left the dispatching installation and the quantity which arrived at the factory, the computer will say so.

'Similar measurements are made of the material leaving the factory - quantity and quality. These figures will in turn be checked against information supplied by inspectors at the premises where the fuel is to be used - a nuclear power station, probably. In addition, all waste at the factory is weighed and analysed.

'This process of inspection and double-checking is carried on up to and including the final disposal of radioactive wastes. Finally, stocktaking is done at least twice a year at the factory.'

Dickstein looked impressed. 'So, at any given moment, your computer knows the location of every scrap of uranium in Europe.'

'Within the member countries - France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. And it's not just uranium, it's all radioactive material.'

'What about details of transportation?'

'All have to be approved by us.'

Dickstein closed his notebook. 'It sounds like a good system. Can I see it in operation?'

'That wouldn't be up to us. You'd have to contact the atomic energy authority in the member country, and ask permission to visit an installation. Some of them do guided tours.'

'Can you let me have a list of phone numbers?'

'Certainly.' Pfaffer stood up, opened a filing cabinet, and took out a cyclostyled leaflet. Dickstein folded it and put it in his pocket.

'Thankyou for your help.'

Pfaffer said: 'Where are you staying?'

'The Alfa, opposite the railway station.'

Pfaffer saw him to the door. 'Enjoy Luxembourg.'

'I'll do my best,' Dickstein said, and shook his hand.

*

The memory thing was a knack. Dickstein had picked it up as a small child, sitting with his grandfather in a smelly room over a pie shop in the Mile End Road, struggling to recognise the strange characters of the Hebrew alphabet. The trick was to isolate one unique feature of the shape to be remembered, and ignore everything else. Dickstein had done that with the faces of the Euratom staff.

He waited outside the Jean-Monnet Building in the late afternoon, watching people leave for home. Some of them interested him more than others. Secretaries, messengers and coffee-makers

were no use to him; nor were senior administrators. He wanted the people in between: computer programmers, office managers, heads of small departments, personal assistants and assistant chiefs. He had given names to the likeliest ones, names which reminded him of their one unique feature: Diamante, Stiffcollar, Tony Curtis, Nonose, Snowhead, Zapata, Fatbum.

Each night he would follow someone home until he found one who was vulnerable.

Tonight it was Diamante. She was a plump woman in her late thirties without a wedding ring. Her name came from her spectacles. Dickstein followed her to the car park, where she got into a white Fiat 600. Dickstein's rented Peugot was parked nearby.

She crossed the Pont Adolphe, driving badly but slowly, and went about fifteen kilometres south-east, finishing up at a small village called Mondorf-les-Bains. She parked in the cobbled yard of a square Luxembourgeois house with a nail-studded door. She let herself in with a key.

The village was a tourist attraction, with thermal springs. Dickstein slung a camera around his neck and wandered about, passing Diamante's house several times. On one pass he saw, through a window, Diamante serving a meal to an old woman.

The baby Fiat stayed outside the house until after midnight, when Dickstein left.

She had been a poor choice. She was a spinster living with her elderly mother, neither rich nor poor - the house was probably the mother's - and apparently without vices. If Dickstein had been a different kind of man he might have seduced her, but otherwise there was no way to get at her.

Dickstein also drew a blank with Zapata, Fatbum and Tony

Curtis.

But Stiffcollar was perfect.

He was about Dickstein's age, a slim, elegant man in a dark blue suit, plain blue tie, and white shirt with a starched collar. His dark hair, a little longer than was usual for a man of his age, was greying over the ears. He wore handmade shoes.

He walked from the office across the Alzette river and uphill into the old town. He went down a narrow cobbled street and entered an old terraced house. Two minutes later a light went on in an attic window.

Dickstein hung around for two hours.

When Stiffcollar came out he was wearing close-fitting light trousers and an orange scarf around his neck. His hair was combed forward, making him look younger, and his walk was jaunty.

Dickstein followed him to the Rue Dicks, where he ducked into an unlit doorway and disappeared. Dickstein stopped outside. The door was open, but there was nothing to indicate what might be inside. A bare flight of stairs went down. After a moment, Dickstein heard faint music.

Two young men in matching yellow jeans passed him and went in. One of them grinned at him and said: 'Yes, this is the place.' Dickstein followed them down the stairs.

It was an ordinary-looking nightclub, with tables and chairs, a few booths, a small dance floor and a jazz trio in a corner. Dickstein paid an entrance fee and sat at a booth, within sight of Stiffcollar. He ordered beer.

He had already guessed why the place had such a discreet air, and now, as he looked around, his theory was confirmed. It was a homosexual club. Stiffcollar was sitting intimately close to a

fair-haired man in a maroon double-breasted jacket.

Dickstein listened to the music and drank his beer. A waiter came across and said: 'Are you on your own, dear?'

Dickstein shook his head. 'I'm waiting for my friend.'

A guitarist replaced the trio and began to sing vulgar folk songs in German. Dickstein missed most of the jokes, but the rest of the audience roared with laughter. After that several couples danced.

Dickstein saw Stiffcollar put his hand on his companion's knee. He got up and went across to their booth.

'Hello,' he said cheerfully, 'didn't I see you at the Euratom office the other day?'

Stiffcollar went white. 'I don't know ... '

Dickstein stuck out his hand. 'Ed Rodgers,' he said, giving the name he had used at the office. 'I'm a journalist.'

Stiffcollar muttered: 'How do you do.' He had the presence of mind not to give his name.

'I've got to rush away,' Dickstein said. 'It was nice to see you.'

'Goodbye, then.'

Dickstein turned away and went out of the club. He had done all that was necessary, for now: Stiffcollar knew that his secret was out, and he was frightened.

Dickstein walked toward his hotel, feeling grubby and ashamed.

*

He was followed from the Rue Dicks.

The tail was not a professional, and made no attempt at camouflage. He stayed fifteen or twenty steps behind, his leather shoes making a regular slap-slap on the pavement. Dickstein

pretended not to notice. Crossing ~~xx~~ a road, he got a look at the tail: a large youth in a leather jacket.

Moments later another youth stepped out of the shadows in front of Dickstein. He stopped and waited. The blade of a knife glinted in the street light. The tail came up behind.

The youth in front said: 'All right, nancy-boy, give us your wallet.'

'Don't hit me,' Dickstein said. 'I'll give you my money.' He took out his wallet.

'The wallet,' the youth said.

Dickstein took out all the notes. 'I need my papers,' he said. 'Just take the money, and I won't report this.' He held out the money.

The kid took it.

The one behind said: 'Get the credit cards.'

Dickstein walked forward, passing the youth with the knife on the outside of the pavement.

The one with the leather shoes moved forward and aimed a kick at Dickstein, and then it was too late.

Dickstein spun around, grabbed the boy's foot, and broke his ankle. He shouted with pain and fell down.

The one with the knife came at Dickstein. He danced back, kicked the boy's shin, danced back, and kicked again. The boy lunged with the knife. Dickstein dodged and kicked him a third time ~~again~~ in exactly the same place, and there was a noise like a bone snapping, and the boy fell down.

Dickstein walked away. This was an evening to forget. He decided to leave town in the morning.

*

There was a godalmighty panic in Moscow when they heard about the Arab atom bomb.

The Foreign Office panicked because they had not heard about it earlier, the KGB panicked because they had not heard about it first, and the Party Secretary's office panicked because the last thing they wanted was another who's-to-blame row between the KGB and the FO, the last one had made life hell in the Kremlin for eleven months.

Fortunately, the way the Egyptians chose to make their revelation allowed for a certain amount of covering of rears. The Egyptians wanted to make the point that they were not diplomatically obliged to tell their allies about this secret project, and the technical help they were asking for was not totally crucial to its success. Their attitude was: 'Oh, by the way, we're building this nuclear reactor, in order to get some plutonium to make atom bombs to blow Israel off the face of the earth, so would you like to give us a hand, or not?' The message, trimmed and decorated with ambassadorial niceties, was delivered, in the manner of a footnote, during a routine meeting between the Egyptian Ambassador in Moscow and the deputy chief of the Middle East Desk at the Foreign Office.

The deputy chief who received the message was Maksim Yurivitch Bykov, a charming but ambitious man in his forties who knew just exactly how to work the Soviet political system. When the Ambassador had left, Maksim Yurivitch did nothing but sit and think hard for ten minutes. His first duty, naturally, was to pass the news to his chief, who would then tell the Secretary. However, the credit for the news would go to his chief, who would also not fail to use the chance of scoring points off KGB. How,

then, was Maksim to gain some advantage to himself out of the affair? He knew that quite the best method of getting on in the Kremlin was to put KGB under some obligation to yourself. He was now in a position to do the boys a big favour. If he warned them of the Egyptian Ambassador's message, they would have a little time to get ready to pretend they knew all about the Arab atom bomb and were about to reveal the news themselves.

He was acquainted with Vorontsov, his opposite number in the KGB. He put on his coat, thinking to go out and phone Vorontsov from a call box in case his own phone was tapped - then he realised how silly that would be, for he was going to phone the KGB, and it was they who tapped people's phones. So he took off his coat, sat down again, and picked up the phone.

Vorontsov, too, knew how to work the system. The news Maksim gave him was hot stuff; and the more people who knew that it was Vorontsov and nobody else who had brought in this information, the better. In the new KGB building on the Moscow ring road, he kicked up a huge fuss. First he called his boss's secretary and asked for an urgent meeting in fifteen minutes. He carefully avoided speaking to the boss himself. He fired off half a dozen more noisy phone calls, and sent secretaries and messengers scurrying around the building to take memos and collect files. But his master stroke was the agenda. It so happened that the agenda for the next meeting with the Middle East political committee had been typed yesterday and was at this moment being run off on a duplicating machine. Vorontsov got it back, and at the top of the list put a new item: New Developments in Egyptian Armaments: Special Report (Vorontsov). Then he ordered the new agenda to be duplicated, still bearing yesterday's date, and sent around to the interested departments by

hand that afternoon.

Then he went to see his boss.

And so it came about that the forum for discussion of the Arab bomb was the Middle East political committee. It could have been any one of eleven or twelve committees, for the same factions were represented on all the interested committees, and they would have said the same things; and the result would have been the same, for this issue was big enough to override factional considerations.

The committee had nineteen members, but two were abroad, one was ill, and one had been run over by a truck on the day of the meeting. It made no difference: only three people counted. One represented the Foreign Office, one the KGB, and one the Party Secretary. The supernumeraries included Maksim, with his boss, and Vorontsov, with his.

The KGB was against the Arab bomb, because its power was clandestine, and the bomb would shift decisions into the overt sphere and out of the range of KGB influence. For that very reason the Foreign Office was in favour - the bomb would give the FO more work and more influence. The Party Secretary was against, for if the Arabs were to win decisively in the Middle East, how then would the USSR retain a foothold there?

Vorontsov opened the discussion by reading his report. What little information he had been able to get from his people in Cairo and from phonetaps on the Foreign Office was padded out with guesswork and bullshit.

Maksim's boss then stated, at some length, his interpretation of Soviet policy in the Middle East. Whatever the motives of the Zionist settlers, he said, it was clear that Israel was established only because of the support it had recieved from Western capitalism;

and capitalism's purpose had been to build a Middle East outpost from which to keep an eye on its oil interests. Any doubts about this analysis had been swept away by the Anglo-Franco-Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956. Soviet policy was to support the Arabs in their natural hostility to this rump of colonialism. Now, he said, although it might have been imprudent - in terms of global politics - for the USSR to initiate Arab nuclear armament, nevertheless once such armament had commenced it was a straightforward extension of Soviet policy to support it.

Everybody was so bored by this interminable statement of the obvious that the discussion thereafter became quite informal. So much so, in fact, that Voronstov's boss said: 'Yes, but, shit, we can't give nuclear bombs to those fucking lunatics.'

'I agree,' said the Party Secretary's man, who was also chairman of the committee. 'If they have the bomb, they'll use it. That will force the Americans to attack the Arabs, with or without nukes - I'd say with. Then the USSR has only two options: let down its allies, or start World War Three.'

'Another Cuba,' someone muttered.

The man from the Foreign Office said: 'The answer to that might be a treaty with the Americans under which both sides agree that in no circumstances will they use nuclear weapons in the Middle East.' If he could get started on a project like that, his job would be safe for twenty-five years.

The KGB man said: 'Then if the Arabs dropped a bomb, would that count as our breaking the treaty?'

Then a woman in a white apron entered pulling a trolley of tea, and the committee took a break. In the interval the Party

Secretary's man stood by the trolley, with a cup in his hand and a mouth full of fruit cake, and said: 'It seems there was a Captain in the KGB whose stupid son had great difficulty understanding the concepts of the Party, the Motherland, the Unions and the People. The captain told the boy to think of his father as the Party, his mother as the Motherland, his grandmother as the Unions, and himself as the People. Still the boy did not understand. In a rage, the father locked the boy in a wardrobe in the parental bedroom, and forgot about him. That night, the boy was still in the wardrobe when the father began to make love to the mother. The boy, watching through the wardrobe keyhole, said: "Now I understand! The Party rapes the Motherland while the Unions sleep and the People have to stand and suffer!"'

Everybody roared with laughter. The tea-lady shook her head in mock disgust. Reluctantly, the committee went back to work.

The Party Secretary's man asked Vorontsov a direct question. 'If we refuse to give the Egyptians the technical help they are asking for, will they still be able to build the bomb?'

Vorontsov said: 'There is not enough information to give a definite answer, sir.'

The Foreign Office man said: 'I think we must assume that they will be able to build it without our help, if perhaps more slowly.'

'I can do my own guessing,' the chairman said. 'The fact is, we don't know whether they can build it or not, but we think they might, and we know they're trying.'

'Quite so,' said the Foreign Office man, chastened.

The chairman said: 'My reading of the situation is as follows. If we help the Egyptians build their bomb, we continue and strengthn

our existing Middle East policy, we improve our influence in Cairo, and we are in a position to exert some control over the bomb. If we refuse to help, we estrange ourselves from the Arabs, and we possibly leave a situation in which they still have a bomb, but we have no control over it.'

The Foreign Office man said: 'In other words, if they're going to have a bomb anyway, there had better be a Russian finger on the trigger.'

The chairman threw him a look of irritation, and continued: 'We might, then, recommend to the Secretariat as follows: The Egyptians should be given technical help with their nuclear reactor project, such help always to be structured with a view to Soviet personnel gaining ultimate control over the weaponry.'

The Foreign Office man said: 'So move.'

Maksim said: 'Seconded.'

'All in favour?'

They were all in favour.

The committee moved to the next item on the agenda.

*

When Dickstein was working he stayed in his hotel room as much as possible, to avoid being seen. He might have been a heavy drinker, but it was unwise to drink during an operation, and at other times he felt no need of it. He spent a lot of time looking out of windows, or sitting in front of a flickering television screen, thinking of other things. He did not walk around the streets, did not drink in bars, did not even eat in the hotel restaurant. But there are limits to the precautions a man can take: he cannot be invisible. In the lobby of the Alfa Hotel in Luxembourg, he bumped into

someone who knew him.

He was standing at the desk, checking out. He had looked over the bill and presented a credit card in the name of Ed Rodgers, and he was waiting to sign the American Express slip, when a voice behind him said in English: 'My God! It's Nat Dickstein, isn't it?'

Dickstein looked first at the desk clerk, who was at that moment checking him out in the name of Ed Rodgers. The clerk did not seem to react: either he did not understand, or he had not heard, or he did not care.

A hand tapped Dickstein's shoulder. He started an apologetic smile and turned around, saying in French: 'I'm afraid you've got the wrong - '

The skirt of her dress was around her waist, her face was flushed with pleasure, and she was kissing Yasif Hassan.

'It is you!' said Yasif Hassan.

Dickstein smiled. 'Stone the crows, it's Yasif Hassan. How the hell are you?'

They shook hands. Hassan said: 'How long ... it must be ... more than twenty years!'

'It is. What are you doing here?'

'I live here. You?'

'I'm just leaving.' Dickstein signed the slip and looked at his wristwatch. 'Damn, I've got to catch this plane - listen, scribble your number down quickly and I'll call you when I come back.'

'My car's outside - I'll take you to the airport.'

'I've ordered a taxi ... '

Hassan spoke to the desk clerk. 'Cancel that cab - give the driver this for his trouble.' He handed over some coins.

Dickstein said: 'I really am in a rush.'

'Come on, then!' Hassan picked up Dickstein's case and led him outside.

They got into a battered two-seater English sports car. Dickstein studied Hassan as he steered the car out of a no-waiting zone and into the traffic. The Arab had changed, and it was not just age. The grey streaks in his moustache, the thickening of his waist, his deeper voice; these were to be expected. But something else was different. Hassan had always seemed to Dickstein to be the archetypal aristocrat. He had been slow-moving, dispassionate, and faintly bored when everyone else was young and excitable. Now his hauteur seemed to have disappeared. He was like his car: somewhat the worse for wear, with a rather hurried air. Still, Dickstein had sometimes wondered how much of his upper-class appearance was cultivated.

'You live here now?' Dickstein asked him.

'My bank has its European headquarters here.'

So, maybe he was still rich, Dickstein thought. 'Which bank is that?'

'The Cedar Bank of Lebanon.'

'Why Luxembourg?'

'It's a considerable financial centre,' Hassan replied. 'The European Investment Bank is here, and they have an international Stock Exchange. But what about you?'

'I live in Israel. My kibbutz makes wine - I'm sniffing at the possibilities of European distribution.'

'Taking coals to Newcastle.'

'I'm beginning to think so.'

'Perhaps I can help you, if you're coming back. I have a lot

of contacts here. I could set up some appointments for you.'

'Thankyou. I'm going to take you up on that.' If the worse came to the worst, Dickstein thought, he could always keep the appointments and sell some wine.

Hassan said: 'So, now your home is in Palestine and my home is in Europe.' His smile was forced, Dickstein thought.

'How is the bank doing?' Dickstein asked.

'Oh, remarkably well.'

They did not have as much to say to each other as they had imagined. There was a lot Dickstein would have liked to ask - about Eila Ashford, about Hassan's family in Palestine, about the battered sports car - but he was afraid of the answers.

Hassan said: 'Are you married?'

'No. You?'

'No.'

'How odd,' Dickstein said.

Hassan smiled. 'We're not the type to take on responsibilities, you and I.'

'Oh, I've got responsibilities,' Dickstein said, thinking of Mottie.

'But you still have a roving eye, eh?' Hassan said with a wink.

'As I recall, you were the ladies man.'

'Ah, those were the days.'

Dickstein tried not to think about Eila. They reached the airport, and Hassan stopped the car.

Dickstein said: 'Thankyou for the lift.'

Hassan swivelled around in his seat. He stared at Dickstein. 'I can't get over this,' he said. 'You actually look younger than you did in 1947.'

Dickstein shook his hand. 'I'm sorry to be in such a rush.' He got out of the car.

'Don't forget - call me next time you're here,' Hassan said.

'Goodbye.' Dickstein closed the car door and walked into the airport.

And then, at last, he allowed himself to remember.

*

The four people in the chilly garden were still for one long heartbeat. Then Hassan's hands moved on Eila's body. Instantly Dickstein and Cortone moved away, through the gap in the box hedge and out of sight. The lovers never saw them.

They walked toward the house. Cortone said: 'Jesus, that was hot stuff.'

'Let's not talk about it,' Dickstein said. He felt like a man who, looking backward over his shoulder, has walked into a lampost: there was pain and rage, and nobody to blame but himself.

Fortunately the party was breaking up. They left without speaking to Professor Ashford, who was in a corner, deep in conversation with a graduate student. They went to The George for lunch. Dickstein ate very little, but drank some beer.

Cortone said: 'Listen, Nat, I don't know why you're getting so down in the mouth about it. I mean, what it signifies is, she's available, right?'

'Yes,' Dickstein said, but he did not mean it.

The bill came to more than ten shillings. Cortone paid it. Dickstein walked him to the railway station. They shook hands solemnly, and Cortone got on the train.

Dickstein walked in the park for several hours, trying to sort out his feelings. He failed. He knew he was not envious of

Hassan, nor disillusioned with Eila, nor disappointed in his hopes, for he had never been hopeful. He was shattered, and he had no words to say why. He wished he had somebody to whom he could talk about it, but there was no-one.

Soon after this he went to Palestine, although not just because of Eila.

In the next twenty-one years he never had a woman; but that, too, was not entirely because of Eila.

*

Yasif Hassan drove away from Luxembourg airport in a black rage. So Nat Dickstein lived in Israel now, and grew grapes to make wine! The Jew had been so calm, so smug, so confident. He had found a home; and Hassan had lost one.

Dickstein had been wrong: Hassan was no longer rich. He had never been fabulously wealthy, even by Levantine standards; but he had always had fine food, expensive clothes, and the best education.

His grandfather had been a successful doctor who set up his elder son in medicine and his younger son in business. The younger, Hassan's father, bought and sold textiles in Palestine, Lebanon and Transjordan. The business prospered under British rule, and Zionist immigration swelled the market. By 1947 the family had shops all over the Levant and owned their native village near Nazareth.

The 1948 war ruined them.

When the state of Israel was declared and the Arab armies swept in, the Hassan family made the fatal mistake of packing their bags and fleeing to Syria. They never came back. The warehouse in Jerusalem burned down; the shops were destroyed or

taken over by Jews; and the family lands became 'administered' by the Israeli government. Hassan had heard that the village was now a kibbutz.

Hassan's father had lived ever since in a United Nations refugee camp. The last positive thing he had done was to write a letter of introduction for Yasif to his Lebanese bankers. Yasif had a university degree and spoke excellent English: the bank gave him a job.

He applied to the Israeli government for compensation under the 1953 Land Acquisition Act, but he was refused.

He visited his family in the camp only once. To watch his father queuing for food and wasting his life playing backgammon made Yasif want to throw bombs at school buses. He continued to write letters to his mother, but he never returned to visit her.

He was a modest success as a bank clerk. He had intelligence and integrity, but his upbringing did not fit him for careful, calculating work involving much shuffling of memoranda and keeping of records in triplicate. Besides, his heart was elsewhere. He never ceased bitterly to resent what had been taken from him. He carried his hatred through life like a secret burden. In 1957 he found an outlet for it.

He began to work for Egyptian Intelligence.

He was not a very important agent, but as the bank expanded its European business he began to pick up the occasional titbit, both in the office and from general banking gossip. Sometimes Cairo would ask him for specific information about the finances of an arms manufacturer, a Jewish philanthropist, or an Arab millionaire; and if Hassan did not have the details in his bank's files he could get them from friends and business contacts. He also had a general

brief to keep an eye on Israeli businessmen in Europe, in case they were agents; and that was why he had approached Nat Dickstein and pretended to be friendly.

Hassan thought Dickstein's story was probably true. In his shabby suit, with the same round spectacles and the same inconspicuous air, he looked just like an underpaid salesman with a product he could not shift. However, there was that odd business in the Rue Dicks last night: two petty thieves, who were know to prey upon people leaving a homosexual nightclub, had been found in the gutter, savagely disabled. Hassan had got all the details from a contact in the city police force. Clearly they had picked on the wrong sort of victim. Their injuries were professional: the man who inflicted them had to be a soldier, a policeman, a bodyguard ... or an agent. After an incident like that, any Israeli who flew out in a hurry the next morning was worth checking up on.

Hassan went back to the Alfa Hotel and spoke to the desk clerk. 'I was here an hour ago when one of your guests was checking out,' he said. 'Do you remember?'

'I think so, sir,' said the clerk.

Hassan gave him two hundred Luxembourg francs. 'Would you tell me what name he was registered under?'

'Certainly, sir.' The clerk consulted a file. 'Edward Rodgers, from Science International magazine.'

'Not Nathaniel Dickstein?'

The clerk shook his head patiently.

'Would you just see whether you had a Nathaniel Dickstein, from Israel, registered at all?'

'Certainly.' The clerk took several minutes to ~~check~~ look through a wad of papers. Finally he said: 'Definitely not, sir.'

'Thankyou.' Hassan left. He was jubilant as he drove back to his office: Dickstein had to be an agent! As soon as he got to his desk he composed a message.

SUSPECTED ISRAELI AGENT SEEN HERE. NAT DICKSTEIN ALIAS EDWARD RODGERS. FIVE FOOT SIX, SMALL BUILD, DARK HAIR, BROWN EYES, AGE ABOUT 40.

He encoded the message, added an extra code word at its top, and sent it by telex to the bank's Egyptian headquarters. It would never get there: the extra code word instructed the Cairo post office to reroute the telex to the Directorate of General Investigations.

Sending the thing was an anticlimax, of course. There would be no reaction, no thanks from the other end. Hassan had nothing to do but get on with his bank work, and try not to daydream.

Then Cairo called him on the phone.

It had never happened before. Sometimes they sent him cables, telexes, and even letters, all in code, of course. Once or twice he had met with people from Arab embassies and been given verbal instructions. His report must have caused more of a stir than he anticipated.

The caller wanted to know more about Dickstein. 'I want to confirm the identity of the customer referred to in your message,' he said. 'Did he wear round spectacles?'

Hassan said: 'Yes.'

'Did he speak English with a Cockney accent?'

'Yes.'

'Did he have a number tattoed on his forearm?'

'I didn't see it today, but I know he has it ... I was at Oxford university with him. I'm quite sure it is him, you know.'

'You know him?' There was astonishment in the voice from Cairo.

'Is this information on your file?'

'No, I've never - '

'Then it should be!' the man said angrily. 'How long have you been with us?'

'Since 1957.'

'That explains it ... those were the old days. Okay, now listen. This man is a very important ... client. We want you to stay with him twenty-four hours a day, do you understand?'

'I can't,' Hassan said. 'He left town.'

'Where did he go?'

'I dropped him at the airport. I don't know where he went.'

'Then find out. Phone the airlines, ask which flight he was on, and call me back in fifteen minutes.'

'I'll do my best - '

'I'm not interested in your best,' said the voice from Cairo. 'I want his destination, and I want it before he gets there. Just be sure you call me in fifteen minutes. Now that we've contacted him, we must not lose him again.'

'I'll get on to it right away,' said Hassan, but the line was dead before he could finish the sentence.

Five

Nat Dickstein chose to visit a nuclear power station in France simply because French was the only European language he spoke well, except for English, of course, but England was not part of Euratom. He travelled to the station in a coach with an assorted party of students and tourists. The countryside slipping past the windows was a dusty southern green, more like Galilee than Essex, which had been 'the country' to Dickstein as a boy. He had travelled the world since, getting on planes as casually as any jet-setter, but he could remember the time when his horizons had been Park Lane in the west and Southend-on-Sea in the east. He could also remember how suddenly those horizons had receded, when he began consciously to try to think of himself as a man, after his bar mitzvah and the death of his father. Other boys of his age saw themselves getting jobs on the docks or in the print, marrying local girls, finding houses within a quarter of a mile of their parents' homes, and settling down; their ambitions were to breed a champion greyhound, to see West Ham win the Cup Final, to buy a car. Young Nat thought he might go to California or Rhodesia or Hong Kong, and become a brain surgeon or an archaeologist or a millionaire. It was partly that he was cleverer than most of his contemporaries; partly that to them foreign languages were alien, mysterious, a school subject like algebra rather than a way of talking; but mainly the difference had to do with being Jewish. Dickstein's boyhood chess partner, Harry Chieseman, was brainy and forceful and quick-witted, but he saw himself as a working-class Londoner, and he knew he always would be one. Dickstein knew - although he could not remember anyone actually telling him so - that wherever they were born, Jews were

able to find their way into the greatest universities; to start new industries like motion pictures; to become the most successful bankers and lawyers and manufacturers: and if they couldn't do it in the country where they were born, they would move somewhere else and try there. It was curious, Dickstein thought as he remembered, that a people who had been persecuted for hundreds of years should be so convinced of their ability to achieve anything they set their minds to. Like, when they needed nuclear bombs, they went out and got them.

The tradition was a comfort, but it gave him no help with the ways and means.

The power station loomed in the distance. As the coach got closer, Dickstein realised the reactor was going to be bigger than he had imagined. It occupied a ten-storey building. Somehow he had imagined the thing fitting into a small room.

The external security was on an industrial, rather than military, level. The premises were surrounded by one high fence, not electrified. Dickstein looked into the gatehouse while the tour guide went through the formalities: the guards had only two closed-circuit television screens. Dickstein could get fifty men inside the compound in broad daylight without the guards noticing. That was a bad sign: it meant they had other reasons to be confident.

Dickstein left the coach with the rest of the party and walked across the tarmacadammed car park to the reception building. The place had been laid out with a view to the public image of nuclear energy: there were well-kept lawns and flower-beds, and lots of newly-planted trees; everything was clean and natural, white-painted and smokeless. Looking back toward the gatehouse,

Dickstein saw a grey Opel pull up on the road. One of the two men in it got out and spoke to the security guards, who appeared to give directions. The tour party was led into a lounge. There in a glass case was a rugby football cup won by the power station's team. An aerial photograph of the station hung on the wall. Dickstein stood in front of it, imprinting its details on his mind.

They were led around the station by four hostesses in smart uniforms. Dickstein was not interested in the massive turbines, the space-age control room with its banks of dials and switches, or the water-intake system designed to save the fish and return them to the river.

He was enormously interested in the delivery bay. He asked the hostess: 'How does the fuel arrive here?'

'On lorries,' she said casually. She was intentionally being arch, and some of the party giggled nervously at the thought of uranium running around the countryside on lorries. 'It's not dangerous,' she went on. 'It isn't even radioactive until it is fed into the reactor. It is taken off the lorry straight into the elevator and up to the fuel store on the seventh floor. From there, everything is automatic.'

Dickstein said: 'What about checking the quantity and quality of the consignment?'

'This is done at the fuel fabrication plant. The consignment is sealed there, and only the seals are checked here.'

'Thankyou.' Dickstein nodded, and the party moved on. Later, they saw the reactor loading machine. Worked entirely by remote control, it took the fuel elements from the store to the reactor, lifted the concrete lid of a fuel channel, removed the spent element, inserted the new element, closed the lid, and dumped the old one

into a water-filled shaft which led to the cooling ponds.

The hostess, speaking perfect Parisian French in an oddly seductive voice, said: 'The reactor has three thousand fuel channels, each channel containing eight fuel rods. The rods last four to seven years. The loading machine renews five channels in each operation.'

They went to see the cooling ponds. Under twenty feet of water the spent fuel elements were loaded into pannets, then - cool, but still highly radioactive - they were locked into fifty-ton lead flasks, two hundred elements to a flask, for transportation by road and rail to a reprocessing plant.

As the hostesses served coffee and pastries in the lounge, Dickstein ran over what he had learned. It had occurred to him that, since plutonium was ultimately what was wanted, he might steal used fuel. Now he knew why nobody had suggested it. It would be easy enough to hijack the lorry - Dickstein could have done it single-handed - but how would he sneak a fifty-ton lead flask out of the country and take it to Israel without anyone noticing?

Stealing uranium from inside the power station was no more promising an idea. Sure, the security was flimsy - the very fact that he, Nat Dickstein, had been able to make this reconnaissance, and had even been given a guided tour, showed that. But fuel inside the station was locked into an automatic, remote-controlled system. The only way it could come out was by going right through the nuclear process and emerging in the cooling pond. There had to be a way of breaking into the fuel store, Dickstein supposed; then you could manhandle the stuff into the elevator, take it down, put it on a lorry and drive away: but that would involve holding some or all of the station personnel at gunpoint for some time, and

his brief was to do this thing surreptitiously.

A hostess offered to refill his cup, and he accepted. Trust the French to give you good coffee. A young engineer began a talk on nuclear safety. He wore unpressed trousers and a baggy sweater. Scientists and technicians all had a look about them, Dickstein had observed: their clothes were old, mismatched, and comfortable, and if many of them wore beards, it was a sign of indifference rather than vanity. He thought it was because in their work, force of character generally counted for nothing, brains for everything. But perhaps that was a romantic view of science.

He did not pay attention to the lecture. The physicist from the Weizmann Institute had been much more concise. 'There is no such thing as a safe level of radiation,' he had said. 'Such talk makes you think of radiation like water in a pool: if it's four feet high you're safe, if it's eight feet high you drown. But in fact radiation levels are much more like speed limits on the highway - thirty miles per hour is safer than eighty, but not as safe as twenty; and the only way to be completely safe is to avoid travelling by car.'

Dickstein turned his mind back to the problem of stealing uranium. It was now clear that he would have to take a consignment in transit. He could already see one or two ways of doing that surreptitiously. The fuel elements were not checked at this end, they were fed straight into the system. ~~The exp~~ One possibility was this: hijack the lorry, take the uranium out of the fuel elements, close them up ~~g~~ again, re-seal the consignment, and bribe or frighten the lorry driver to deliver the empty shells. They would gradually find their way into the reactor, five at a time, over a period of months, perhaps years. Eventually the reactor's output would fall.

There would be an investigation. Tests would be done. Perhaps no conclusions would be reached before the empty elements ran out and new, genuine fuel elements went in, causing output to rise again. It was possible that no-one would ever know the reason, for when the duds came out of the reactor, four to seven years later, they would be processed by machine, along with spent elements from other plants ... Oh. Yes. Then, of course, the plutonium recovered would be below expectations, and they would know. Still, after four years the trail would be cold, and that was all Borg wanted.

The lecture ended. There were a few desultory questions, then the party trooped back to the coach. Dickstein sat at the back. A middle-aged woman said to him: 'That was my seat,' and he stared at her stonily until she went away.

Driving back from the station, Dickstein kept looking out of the rear window. After about a mile a grey Opel pulled out of a side turning and followed the coach. Dickstein did not look out of the window any more.

*

TO: Chairman, Committee for State Security

FROM: Deputy Chief, Middle East Desk

DATE: 24 May 1968

Comrade Andropov:-

My department chief is absent today and I feel that the following matters are too urgent to await his return.

An agent in Luxembourg has reported the sighting there of the Israeli operative Nathaniel ('Nat') David Jonathan Dickstein, alias Edward ('Ed') Rodgers, known as The Pirate.

Dickstein was born in Stepney, East London, in 1925, the son of a shopkeeper. The father died in 1938, the mother in 1951. Dickstein joined the British army in 1943, fought in Italy, was promoted Sergeant, and was taken prisoner at La Molina. After the war he went to Oxford University to read Semitic Languages. In 1948 he left Oxford, without graduating, and emigrated to Palestine, where he began almost immediately to work for Mossad.

At first he was involved in stealing and secretly buying arms for the Zionist State. In the fifties he mounted an operation against an Egyptian-supported group of Palestinian freedom fighters based in the Gaza Strip, and was personally responsible for the booby-trap bomb which killed Commander Aly. In the late fifties and early sixties he was a leading member of the assassination team which hunted and killed escaped Nazis. He directed the terrorist effort against German rocket scientists working for Egypt in 1963-4.

We do not know yet what he was doing in Luxembourg; but we are entitled to assume that it may be a 'special operation' of considerable importance conducted with what one might term a certain buccaneering style.

On his file the entry under 'Weaknesses' reads: 'None known.' He appears to have no family, either in Palestine or elsewhere. He is not interested in alcohol, narcotics or gambling. He has no known sexual liaisons, and there is on his file a speculation that he may be sexually cold as a result of being the subject of medical experiments conducted by Nazi scientists.

My recommendation would be that this desk set up a special team to discover what Dickstein is up to and, if appropriate, to