

Preface

Geneva

In 1873, the citizens of Geneva acknowledged the generosity of the eccentric Charles II, Duke of Brunswick by permitting him to construct, on the shore of Lac Lemman, a Mausoleum identical to the Scaligeri Mausoleum in Verona.

One hundred and twenty six years later, on park land adjacent to the Mausoleum, the burghers of Geneva allowed construction of an obscene, stark, fortress like building. The permit was granted despite the outrage of the citizenry. Deposits of gold and currency that fattened the coffers of Switzerland's five largest Banks would be withdrawn if construction did not proceed.

A small cast bronze plaque with a street number was the only marking on the building.

Eighty men and women, employees of the International Diamond Security Organization (IDSO) entered each day. They directed the activities of an army of mercenaries, thieves, smugglers, politicians and businessmen charged with maintaining the primacy of the De Forster Diamond Syndicate, an empire born out of the misery of Africa.

Tel Aviv - 2003

The first bullet struck Basheer in the back; he screamed, grabbed an elderly woman for support and staggered a few steps before dragging the terrified woman down with him. She struggled, pulled free, and ran. Basheer stumbled to his feet. He attempted to grab the kafiya of a young man, who fended him off with a violent shove. A second bullet struck the back of Basheer's head; he twisted, raising his hands to the spot where a circle of red appeared. He collapsed, blood oozing from the two small wounds. Bystanders cried out; some covered their heads and threw themselves to the ground, others ran; pandemonium replaced the normal sounds and sights of the busy souk.

The IDF soldiers rushed toward the bedlam, their Uzis at the ready. The Citroen, unnoticed, headed down Ha Carmel Street toward the heart of Tel Avi. Abbas Hilmi turned to his sister. “Your friend should never have gone to the Mossad.”

“He was foolish and so was I for helping him, but he was desperate for money.

Abbas snickered, “Sure, desperate enough to work for the Mossad. Now he doesn’t need your help and he has no need for money.”

As Abbas and his sister drove away, the two soldiers pushed their way to the body. A group of young Arabs crowded around the fallen Palestinian. “The Jews killed him! Kill the Jews.”

Chapter 1

London, England

November 5, 2000

Walter Gordon, the Director of the International Diamond Security Organization, and his deputy George Deveraux exited the rear of the Rolls Royce. They were saluted by a security guard and escorted into Harmon House, the meticulously restored 19th Century brick townhouse that was the nerve center of a global economic empire.

“You never mentioned who’d be attending this meeting,” said George as they passed through a metal detector in front of a bullet proof cubicle from which a second guard surveyed visitors.

A massive Lalique chandelier lit the foyer. Exquisite oriental rugs graced a parquet floor whose rare African woods showed no signs of wear. Portraits of the previous occupants, none more wealthy or powerful than the current resident, lined the ornately plastered walls.

“Alex has kept his intentions to himself, but I believe that all of senior management have been summoned.” The director then added, “I doubt they know what’s in store for them.”

“I assume you do,” said Deveraux.

“Assume what you will George,” responded the Director as they proceeded to the conference room where nine men were seated on both sides of a massive mahogany table. The distance of each man from the Chairman’s place at the head of the table indicated his status. Walter and his deputy were seated on the Chairman’s right.

Alex Rothman entered the room and eleven men rose. The Chairman took his seat. He turned to Walter. He smiled as if to acknowledge a shared secret. An attendant entered the room and manipulated an ornate bell pull. Maroon drapes designed to block visual or audio surveillance drew closed. Overhead lighting replaced the sunlight.

Alex Rothman waited for the aids departure before he spoke, his voice almost a whisper. One of the men cocked his head and adjusted his hearing aid.

“Gentlemen. Three generations of my family have managed this organization. Each has succeeded in increasing the value of diamonds and our dominance of the industry. We dictate to whom we sell and the price to be paid. Our authority has never been meaningfully challenged.” Alex paused for a moment. “Unfortunately the greed of a few individuals and corporations threatens the viability of our enterprise.”

Alex rose from his chair, turned toward a full-length portrait of his Grandfather, Benjamin who, with legendary ruthlessness, gained control of every diamond mine on the African Continent and made the diamond a symbol of wealth and power for the nouveau riche. His hair was white, full, and perfectly trimmed; his beard short and immaculate. He wore a tailored waistcoat. A gold watch fob, a huge uncut diamond set in its side, dominated the center of the portrait. A gold-handled cane in his right hand seemed poised to strike. Small coal-black eyes set in a massive coarsely featured face gleamed with an intimidating intensity.

Now, a century later, eleven senior managers of the empire were in conference with his grandson who seemed ordinary except for one feature he shared with his Grandfather; fiery coal black eyes that intimidated the most stalwart of men.

As Alex turned from the portrait his complexion reddened. His voice, as he addressed his managers, was louder, its tenor now menacing. “We will deal with those who defy us. We have spent and will continue to spend a fortune to create consumer demand and maintain order in the markets. Diamonds have been and must continue to be viewed as the most stable storehouse of wealth. Our sightholders, men who prospered by dealing solely with us are no longer loyal. They come to the Sights, purchase their allotment, and complain about the quality and quantity of stones they receive. They leave London and resume their trade in diamonds smuggled from mines in Africa, Russia, Canada, and Australia.

“This insurrection will stop. We created the illusion of the timeless value and rarity of diamonds. We will destroy that illusion for these gray market stones. A diamond will be of value, only if it carries our brand and is sold through our own outlets.”

Alex walked to a side table, emptied a chilled bottle of Perrier into a crystal goblet, took three sips and put the goblet down.

The marketing director, a veteran of 15 years at De Forster leaned across the table and whispered to Walter. "My God, I wonder how far Alex is willing to go."

"Far enough," replied Walter.

Alex's face lost its crimson flush, his black eyes softened as he returned to the table. He placed his chubby, well manicured hands, palms down on the polished surface. He leaned forward.

"You share my concerns; you wonder how we will respond. I have brought you here, to allay your concerns, to set an agenda. I intend to restore order to the markets, to reestablish our absolute dominance. Part of the answer has come from our laboratories, the rest will come from your efforts.

"Our laboratories have accomplished more than the alchemist's dared to dream. We can transform inferior brown diamonds to fine whites. With carbon, heat, and pressure, we can create vivid yellow diamonds; with vacuum and high temperature, we can create flawless white diamonds.

"We will use this ability to create chaos in the markets, to destroy our enemies. The IDSO will discover the first treated and created diamonds in Israel. We will announce that only we can identify these counterfeits and that only we can insure genuine unaltered diamonds. Natural diamonds will in the future be branded by us and distributed sources approved by us."

The Director of Marketing interjected. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but why Israel?"

"The Israelis are troublesome, especially the Russian, Lekovsky. He and his Mafiya backers are siphoning off two billion dollars a year from our markets. We will make an example of him and his Russian cronies. Treated and created diamonds will be found in the finished goods that he delivers to his best customer. We will make his stockpiles worthless, and his sources suspect. We will put him out of business.

"To create broader concern, and further enhance the value of our inventory and trademark, you Henry, and your public relations staff, will create and fund human rights organizations to provide the worldwide media with unforgettable images of atrocities. Senseless acts of violence committed by diamond smugglers, especially those in Africa. Public outrage will pressure the major diamond importing countries, especially the United States, to stop the importation of smuggled diamonds. Through disguised

correspondence with the media you will introduce the terms 'Blood Diamonds' and 'Conflict Diamonds.' Our branded diamonds will be untainted by the scandal and ensuing regulation.

"We will move our headquarters to Geneva and end the interference of the British Government in our affairs. We will decentralize our operations; so that no single government will ever again dictate our actions. We will eliminate our sightholders and vertically integrate our operations to include retail outlets.

"New vaults and cutting centers will be built in Israel, Belgium, India, South Africa, the United States, and England. Each of these centers, in addition to cutting and polishing stones from our mines, will create and treat diamonds with the processes developed in our laboratories.

"Walter and the IDSO will direct this restructuring. Each of you will receive a portfolio detailing your responsibilities."

Walter rose from his chair. He had been recruited from the British intelligence service, where he had honed his skills in the Government's complex bureaucracy. His ruthlessness in dealing with opponents was legendary, his intelligence unquestioned, and his pomposity unbearable.

Over the years, he maintained his youthful good looks, raising conjecture that it was not just nature that had shielded him from the ravages of time. His black hair showed no gray, his face nary a wrinkle; his complexion was unmarked and tanned. Every aspect of Walter Gordon, including his choice of clothes, portrayed a man to whom appearance meant a great deal.

He acknowledged the Chairman and addressed the ten executives.

"Alex, I can assure you that we will all pursue the course that has been set for us." Nods of agreement passed from man to man. Walter continued,

"This restructuring, will bring confrontation with the Russian Mafiya, the Israeli Mossad, the U.S. Justice Department, and the Economic Council of the European Union. Gentlemen, we will use whatever means necessary to get them to co-operate, or at the least to ignore what some may view as transgressions.

"Our new facilities will require state of the art security. The methods and facilities we use to alter and create diamonds must remain secret and secure. This undertaking

will require untraceable money, money obtained from the sale of synthetic and treated diamonds into the Gray Market.”

Alex interrupted. “Each of your divisions will support the IDSO. A request from Walter will be viewed as mine.”

He turned to Walter, “You will use whatever means necessary to deal with uncooperative individuals, organizations, and governments.

“As to security: the Chairman of our Bahamian Bank tells me that a young man, Malcolm Boulton, who provided excellent references, developed and installed a system that is superb. We will engage him to develop the security systems for our new facilities.”

Walter responded with obvious trepidation, “Alex, of course I will do as you suggest, but consider the possible consequences of involving someone from outside the IDSO for security work on this scale.”

Alex responded, “His Grandfather banked us during difficult times and I owe the family. We will engage his grandson!”

George Deveraux shook his head in disbelief.

Chapter 2

International Diamond Security Organization (IDSO)

Geneva, Switzerland,

June 3, 2003

Exhausted, but relieved that the end of the massive transfer of diamonds was near completion, George Deveraux lit an English Oval. He watched the third, and he hoped final shift of security officers, four men and two women, impeccably attired in dark blue suits and white shirts, monitor their communications consoles. Information on every aspect of the transfer, forty million carats of uncut diamonds, weighing over eight tons, from vaults in London to newly constructed facilities in six nations was relayed to them by the Argus computer in the bowels of IDSO Headquarters on the shore of Lake Geneva.

“Mr. Deveraux, we have problems in Antwerp and Tel Aviv. We’ve lost communication with the armored cars and the vaults at both sites,” said David Martin, the shift supervisor.

“Lost communication?”

“Yes sir, we had voice, computer, and visual contact with every truck and vault involved in the transfer until just a moment ago, when Antwerp and Tel Aviv went silent.”

“And the other sites?”

“They’re functioning normally.”

“What’s causing the problem?”

“Sir, we have no idea. As far as we can tell the Argus computer is functional. The armored vehicles have satellite links which are also operational.”

“Exactly how long have we been out of communication?”

“Three minutes and forty-five seconds. We’re trying to reach the vault managers on land lines.”

“Damn it to hell, it’s got to be something in Boulton’s code. I’ll crucify the bastard.”

The operators of the consoles monitoring Tel Aviv and Antwerp spoke up simultaneously, "Communication is back."

Seconds later, David Martin said, "Sir, we've reached the managers in both facilities on land lines. Their systems are operational. They've resumed the transfer of diamonds into the vaults. No one knows what went wrong."

"The problem has to be in the communication program on the Argus mainframe. I want our systems people to go over every line of code. Is that understood?"

"Yes sir, understood."

Walter Gordon, the director of the IDSO, walked into the computer room as the crisis ended. It was his third visit in the past two hours. "George, you look awful. Certainly not the man we recruited from MI6."

"Thanks Walter, on the other hand, you look like the Beau Brummel you've always been. Please don't hesitate to take charge, if only for appearance's sake."

"I don't need sarcasm George, I need results. I told Alex we'd be done hours ago."

"You might have checked with me before you made predictions; we had unexpected problems."

"You've had months to prepare for the transfers, there shouldn't be problems."

"Well there are, damn puzzling ones, and they all originate in Boulton's code. At first the Argus computer wasn't getting reliable readings from the receiving scales in the vaults; we got that fixed and then we experienced a communications blackout with Antwerp and Tel Aviv."

"Why on earth didn't you identify the problems before we started moving the diamonds?"

"Because the bloody system worked for each of the sites until we linked them into our central computer."

"Fix it George; Alex is hounding me."

"It's fixed, but I'm not sure how reliable it will be. Boulton's code is quirky at best."

"Don't make excuses George; you've had the resources and authority to do the job properly."

“If you question my competence, bring Alex’s golden boy back and let him fix this mess.”

“That’s quite enough George; I have other matters to attend to. Call me when the transfer is complete. In the meantime make yourself presentable.”

George glared at the departing executive: “*You vain, pompous ass.*”

“Mr. Deveraux, you seem exhausted. Why don’t you get some rest? The transfer is almost complete. I’ll call you when we’re finished,” said his second in command.

“I’ve been here since the beginning, and I intend to be here ’till the end, although I might have a change of heart if Walter shows up again.”

George ran his pale, bony hand through his hair, and then felt the stubble on his face. He slumped against the wall, took a box of English Oval’s from his shirt pocket, lit one, inhaled the dense smoke, and dropped the cigarette to the floor, crushing it with the toe of his loafer. He remembered the doubts and concerns he had had at the meeting in London three years ago, when Alex announced the massive restructuring. The opening of the new vaults had brought one part of the plan to fruition, but the focus would now be on creating the De Forster brand, eliminating sightholders, and forever changing the way diamonds would be marketed.

“Mr. Deveraux, all of the transfers have been made, and all security systems are functioning.”

“Thank God, and speaking of him, call Walter. Tell him it’s done.

Chapter 3

Geneva, Switzerland

June 5, 2003

“Do I hear one hundred thousand? One hundred thousand? I have one hundred thousand Euros from the lady,” said the auctioneer, as his assistant turned the glass-topped box containing the pink diamond toward the bidder. The young woman smiled and took the hand of her elderly escort.

“One fifty,” signaled a bearded man wearing a yarmulke.

“One seventy five,” responded the attractive red head, after a quick glance at her companion.

“I have one hundred and seventy five thousand . Do I hear two hundred, two hundred, do I hear two hundred thousand? One seventy five going once, one seventy five going twice.” The woman beamed and shifted her hand to his leg. He placed his hand on hers, anticipating his reward for the bidding victory.

The auctioneer hesitated, his gavel raised above the lectern.

“Two hundred thousand.” said a blonde haired man who had remained silent during the early bidding.

“Two hundred and twenty five,” signaled the man in the yarmulke as he wiped sweat from his brow, knowing he was at the upper limit of what his client would pay for the stone.

The red head shifted her body, her breast brushing her lover’s shoulder. He grudgingly nodded his assent. “Two hundred and thirty,” she exclaimed, this time in an overly loud voice.

“I have two hundred and thirty thousand Euros. Do I hear two thirty five? Two thirty five. Do I have two thirty five? Two thirty, two thirty going once, two thirty going twice.” Once again he raised the gavel.

“Two hundred and fifty thousand,” said the blonde haired man.

There was a murmur from the crowd as the bidding reached a record level for a pink. "I have two hundred and fifty thousand Euros. Do I hear two hundred and fifty five thousand?" asked the auctioneer, fixing his eyes, in turn, on the under bidders.

The red head knew that another encounter with her breast would not elicit approval from her bemused consort, and so said nothing. The man wearing the yarmulke dropped his eyes, as he saw the profit from the purchase disappear.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand going once, two fifty going twice." The gavel came down with a resounding thud. "Sold to the gentlemen for two hundred and fifty thousand Euros."

There was scattered applause from the auction goers as they speculated on the identity of the successful bidder.

The carved wooden doors of the Charise auction gallery swung open into a brisk, cloudless Swiss afternoon. Malcolm Boulton blinked against the brightness as he looked down the crowded Quai du Mont Blanc, toward the Noga Hilton and the Casino de Geneve. His sky blue Hooper-bodied Rolls Royce was somewhere in a queue of chauffeur-driven Mercedes Benzes, BMWs, and Jaguars. Seeing it he strode down three wide granite stairs, set between massive bronze lions. When he reached the car he rapped on the rear window.

Etienne Whye emerged, his blackness and considerable size in startling contrast to Malcolm's delicate and somewhat effeminate perfection. "Mac, I'm sorry; I didn't see you coming," said Etienne as he assisted his employer into the richly appointed passenger compartment.

"Take me home," said Malcolm as he fondled the folded paper that protected the two carat pink stone.

As Etienne pulled onto the Boulevard, he asked. "How did the bidding go?"

"I got the stone. A Jew boy from New York, and some spoiled bitch with her sugar daddy, both wanted it, but they backed off. Ariana always adored colored diamonds, especially vivid pinks; she'll come to Geneva to get this one," Malcolm replied.

"Mac, I thought you two were finished."

Malcolm was reminded of his last conversation with Ariana. She was incensed. *“I have my life, my business, and my friends; I’m not going to be used by you or anyone else.”* After a moment he responded, “I need her at the meeting with the producers.”

Etienne was silent as the sedan sped into the hills above the city. Pastoral meadows, stately trees, and elegant mansions replaced the bustling streets of Geneva. The driveway of the two-story, rough-hewn log and stone chalet was hidden in a grove of massive pines. As they pulled in Etienne asked, “Do you want me to cook dinner tonight?”

“Do whatever the hell you want!”

“Malcolm I don’t need this shit. One minute you’re on top of the world, and the next one you’re telling me to fuck off. It’s that bitch. When she’s here she’s a pain, and when she’s gone she still causes grief.”

“Not as much as the Rothman’s,” replied Malcolm. He remembered his walks from the carriage house in which he lived with his parents, to his Grandfather’s stately brick home. The brief stroll through the manicured English garden which separated the two homes brought the ten year old into a different world, away from the tirades of his feckless and frustrated father, and into the welcome presence of his Grandfather, a man alone since the death of his wife.

A formal handshake, followed by a long, almost desperate hug, and then a restrained kiss on the forehead, preceded the ritual of biscuits and tea in the study with its massive leather chairs and polished wood. This was the time and place that Malcolm loved, with the man who was his emotional anchor; an anchor that he would lose, in a sea of greed.

Malcolm’s final visit to the study provided only pain. No hug, only the motionless body of a defeated man. No kiss, just a single ruby blister on a pale white forehead. No biscuits and tea, just a pool of blood and a gun.

On that day Malcolm vowed that the Rothmans and their company, DeForster, would pay; no matter how long it took, no matter the cost or consequences; they would pay for their treachery; for driving the man Malcolm had worshiped to end his own life.

His reverie ended, he said, “You’re right. I’ll soon be finished with her and the Rothmans. Tonight we’ll enjoy dinner.”

Chapter 4

Tel Aviv, Israel

October 25, 2003

“Avi, how come my partner, the son of one of the most important men in Israel, gets a shitty assignment and a shitty wreck to drive?” asked Reuven Brenner.

Avi ignored his partner. The mention of his father, a man whose life had passed as a whisper, brought back memories of the Stein family’s migration from city to city; Paris to London, London to Moscow, and finally Moscow to Washington. After eight years abroad they returned to Israel where Benjamin Stein assumed his new post as the manager of the Office of Postal Security. He was ensconced in a career ending office, in an innocuous building, distant from the center of power.

Then there was the bombing; the devastation; the death of Benjamin Stein and the truth. Avi’s father had been the Chief of Station at three of the most important cities of the world and had returned to Israel to assume. In anonymity the post of of the Mossad.

A horn blared. Avi snapped to attention, “Where in the hell is Basheer? He should have been here fifteen minutes ago.”

Reuven, the stub of a burning Gauloise in his heavily chapped lips, mumbled a reply, “He’ll be here. He needs the money.”

Avi responded, “I can’t understand a fucking word you said.”

Reuven responded with a ring of acrid smoke. Avi raised his middle finger and looked down Ha Carmel Road where oriental rugs, their beauty worn away by decades of heavy use, lay over the windshields of parked cars, preventing the blazing sun from creating infernos.

Blue and white Dan Line buses discharged Arabs, Israelis, Europeans, and Americans into the Shuk Ha’ Carmel. Street vendors, their speech as varied as their clothing, hawked breads, olives, and exotic spices to the shoppers who crowded Tel Aviv’s busiest market. Avi was looking for one man, his informant, Basheer Sakhr.

Two soldiers of the Israeli Defense Force, wearing Kevlar helmets and vests, and armed with submachine guns and semi-automatic handguns, guarded the market entrance.

Three suicide bombings in the past two weeks had set the city on edge. The older of the two men observed the men in the black Chevrolet and said, "That black Chevy has been in there too damn long. I'm going to move them along."

The younger man nodded and replied, "If they don't look right signal and I'll call for backup." Both men took their machine guns off Safe, and unsnapped the straps that secured their handguns. Moshe crossed the busy thoroughfare and approached the Chevrolet.

Avi watched the soldier for a moment, nudged his partner and said, "Reuven, badge him off."

Reuven opened his leather case and lifted his gold shield to the window. The soldier nodded and returned to his post. "They're Mossad, something's going down."

His partner said, "They always bring trouble, and trouble for them means trouble for us."

Five minutes passed before Basheer Sakhr arrived.

"He's here, getting off the third bus down," said Reuven as he threw the butt of his Gauloise out the window.

Avi snapped to attention. His Glock dug into his ribs. He exclaimed. "Fuck that damn holster."

Reuven snickered, "Stop bitching. You're lucky they still let you carry."

The soldiers watched the bus discharge his passengers. "That guy, the tall skinny one who just got off the bus, looks awfully nervous; we better see what he's up to," said Moshe. Both soldiers drew their handguns and pushed through the crowd of shoppers. As the soldiers approached, Basheer darted into the thoroughfare.

"Basheer's going to get himself killed, he should know better than to run," said Avi.

Basheer reached the Mossad vehicle. A construction truck, its open bed crammed with Palestinian day laborers, blocked the approaching soldiers. Basheer opened the rear door of the Chevy, contorted his body to fit into the back seat and shaking with apprehension, said, "I followed."

"Don't worry about the soldiers," said Avi.

"Not soldiers; tall man, black hair."

“I hope he’s not imaginary, something to make us worry and pay you more,” said Reuven as he floored the accelerator. The tires smoked; horns blared as the overpowered sedan erupted into the congested thoroughfare.

“Shit, all that running for nothing,” said Moshe as he holstered his weapon, removed his helmet and wiped sweat from his forehead. “What’s with those guys; they bolted as soon as they had the Palestinian.”

“Well, at least they’re gone, and so are the problems that follow them.”

Reuven ran a red light, wove a tight path through traffic and accelerated. The tires screamed in protest as he took a sharp right at the next crossing.

Avi, who had not taken his eyes off the rear, said, “Slow down, there’s nobody tailing us. Pull into that alley on the right. It’s time we have a chat with our friend.”

Reuven turned into the narrow, trash-littered service drive. The car, with its three sweating occupants, stopped in front of a large dumpster. The odor of rotting food was overwhelming. “Reuvi, you picked one hell of a place to park, it smells like dead fish.”

“I hope it’s not an omen,” replied Reuven as he closed the car’s fresh air vents.

Avi turned toward the Palestinian. “Now, calm down Basheer, nothing’s going to happen to you. Who do you think was following you, and why?”

“Not know. See when leave house. No take chance. Change bus three time. Why late.”

“What’d he look like?”

“He look like Jew, tall, black hair.” As if in prayer, Basheer placed his flattened palms together. “Praise Allah, no see again.”

“Basheer, if he was one of us, you never would have seen him. Tell us what you found out.”

Basheer responded, his voice tremulous, “I get call from girlfriend. Her brother work for Hassan Nabuli. She say he get me job diamond place. Say he give me money, tell me what do.”

“Basheer, you said diamond place. Do you mean Ramat Gan?” queried Avi.

“Sure, new place at Ramat Gan. Girlfriend say her brother, Abbas, tell her Nabuli plan steal diamond from diamond people.”

Avi’s voice hardened. “Have you met this man, Abbas?”

“No meet, no want meet. I no want work for Nabuli, no want be at diamond place.”

“We pay enough to count on you,” said Avi. “If your girlfriend can help us, we’ll pay her. You won’t get hurt, and neither will she. You’ll take the job.”

“You have faith in us,” said Reuven as he blew a cloud of smoke toward the terrified Palestinian. Basheer’s gaze shifted from Reuven to Avi.

Avi said, as if the Palestinian wasn’t present, “He better have faith in us. If his friends found out he spent afternoons with the Mossad, he’d be buzzard bait in the desert, but they’ll never know as long as he does what he’s told.”

Basheer’s eyes rolled upward as tears rolled down his cheeks. “Allah be praised. I know never start with Jews.”

“Bullshit Basheer. Tell your friend that you’ll take the job with Nabuli. Get us more information. We’ll protect you.”

A tan Citroen 2CV pulled up behind them. “We’ve got company. Let’s get out of here,” said Reuven as he jerked the car into gear and sped out of the alley.

“I know not get involved with Jews. I finished. I finished.” Basheer crouched in the seat. “I dead man. I dead man. Man with black hair, he in car.”

The Citroen left the alley and turned in the opposite direction.

“Basheer, calm down, they have no interest in us; we’re not being followed, by them or by anyone else,” said Reuven as he circled the block. “Avi, we’re clear; there’s no one on our tail.”

“Look Basheer, the Citroen is gone. We’ll take you back to the bus stop.”

“Praise Allah, I finished with Jews.”

Ten minutes later the Mossad vehicle stopped at the market entrance. Basheer climbed out and scurried across the street to the bus stop.

“He’s scared shitless, Avi. He’s certain he’s seen the same man several times.”

“Screw him, most of the men in Tel Aviv have black hair, and God only knows what he means by tall. What we need to do is make some sense of Basheer’s information. Why would a political type like Nabuli plan a diamond heist? He uses words to stir up trouble, not violence. And if he really is planning a theft, I’m surprised he picked the new facility at Ramat Gan. It’s the most well protected buildings in Israel. It doesn’t figure. We’ve managed to keep terrorists out of the diamond facilities. If there’s a successful

attack on the De Forster facility, the Syndicate will use the incident as an excuse to pull out of Israel.”

“We ought to kick this upstairs,” said Reuven as he pulled the sedan away from the curb and headed down Ha’ Carmel Road.

“Hell no! We’re finally onto something that will make this job interesting. I want to work this to the end.”

“Sure Avi, if they let us. You’ve been off the booze for six months and they are beginning to trust you. But you know damn well that if the De Forster security people get wind of this, and we haven’t brought it upstairs, there will be a shit storm.”

“Don’t worry Reuvi, we’ll take it to the generals when we know more, and remember, as you pointed out, I am a general’s son. And you’re right, they are beginning to trust me.”

“Sure Av, a general’s son in a beat up car without air-conditioning, waiting for a informant that until now hasn’t given us shit,” retorted Reuven as he took a deep drag on a fresh Gauloise.

Basheer’s nervous pacing between the market entrance and the bus stop caused shoppers to shun him and the soldiers to watch him, this time with more amusement than suspicion. “Whatever that poor sucker has going with the Mossad, it didn’t calm him any. He’s scared shitless.”

“Yeah, maybe he knows something we don’t.”

The tall man with black hair stepped out of the market entrance, noted the positions of the IDF soldiers and Basheer, and re-entered the crowded bazaar, blending into the hoards of shoppers.

Minutes later, a tan Citroen turned onto Ha’ Carmel Road, moving slowly in the heavy traffic. Abbas Hilmi sat in the front passenger seat, his sister drove.

“The IDF soldiers are just in front of us near the market entrance. Basheer is at the bus stop a little farther down. When you get to the bus stop, slow down,” said Abbas.

As the car slowed, Abbas lifted a silenced Ruger 22, loaded with high-velocity ammunition, from below his seat. Basheer saw him. Blinded with fear he turned and ran.

The first bullet struck Basheer in the back; he screamed, grabbed an elderly woman for support and staggered a few steps before dragging the terrified woman down

with him. She struggled, pulled free, and ran. Basheer stumbled to his feet. He attempted to grab the kafiya of a young man, who fended him off with a violent shove. A second bullet struck the back of Basheer's head; he twisted, raising his hands to the spot where a circle of red appeared. He collapsed, blood oozing from the two small wounds. Bystanders cried out; some covered their heads and threw themselves to the ground, others ran; pandemonium replaced the normal sounds and sights of the busy souk.

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"He was foolish and so was I for helping him, but he was desperate for money.

Abbas snickered, "Sure, desperate enough to work for the Mossad. Now he doesn't need your help and he has no need for money."

As Abbas and his sister drove away, the two soldiers pushed their way to the body. A group of young Arabs crowded around the fallen Palestinian. "The Jews killed him! Kill the Jews."

Chapter 5

Mossad Headquarters, Tel Aviv, Israel

The same Day

The desk officer at Mossad headquarters received the call from the IDF. He forwarded it to Avi Stein. “Stein, there’s an IDF lieutenant on the phone. He’s looking for the officers who were at the Shuk Ha’ Carmel earlier today. They were in a black Chevrolet. That was you and Brenner, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, that was us. Did he say what he wants?”

“Something about a shooting.”

“Put the call through,” said Avi.

“Stein here.”

“Stein, this is Metzger at IDF headquarters. Two of our men on duty at the Shuk Ha’ Carmel saw a Palestinian enter your vehicle.”

“Yes, that’s correct,” said Avi as he activated the speakerphone.

“He’s been killed. You had an interest in him, so we’re notifying you before taking further action. We’ve kept the police out of it, but we need you to take over if you want to keep it that way. His body was moved to the National Center for Forensic Medicine.”

“Thanks, you did the right thing. We’ll be at the Center within the hour. Your men did well.”

“Not well enough, the murder occurred at their post.”

Avi turned to Reuven. “Shit, I fucked up. Basheer said he was followed and I said ‘trust us;’ the poor son of a bitch did. He’s dead.”

“It’s not our fault,” said Reuven as he placed a call to the Center for Forensic Medicine.

“The Citroen, the damn Citroen,” said Avi. “David won’t let us stay on this.”

“Av, I’ve got the Center on the line.”

“Find out as much as possible,” replied Avi.

Reuven after a brief conversation placed his hand over the receiver. He turned to Avi, "The description fits Basheer. He died from a small-caliber gunshot to the head, after a non-fatal one to the back. A professional hit."

"Tell them not to release any information; we'll be there within the hour."

Reuven finished the call as the secure satellite phone flashed. He answered. After a moment he placed the phone on hold. "It's Kimmel."

"What does he want?" asked Avi.

"You."

Avi activated the speakerphone. "Yes sir."

"I received a call from Walter Gordon at the IDSO in Geneva. They had a snag in the transfer of diamonds into the vaults at Ramat Gan; they resolved that problem but they seem to have another that involves us."

"How?" asked Avi.

"An *i.t.* consultant, Malcolm Boulton worked on security for their new vaults. Somehow he's involved with a Palestinian who we have under surveillance."

Avi interjected, "Hassan Nabuli?"

"How in the hell did you know?" asked David.

"We had an informant."

"What do you mean, 'had an informant?'"

"He was killed at the Shuk Ha' Carmel after he told us he'd been asked to work for Nabuli. Our man was vague but he said that Nabuli was planning a diamond heist, probably from Ramat Gan."

The Mossad chief's irritation was obvious as he said, "We have someone inside Nabuli's organization and she's reported nothing about the planning of a diamond theft."

"Who's inside?" asked Avi.

"Normally it would be none of your damn business, but since you seem to have stumbled into something---It's Assiz."

Avi was stunned, "She's not ready for that kind of assignment!"

David replied, "Because she's your sister—bullshit—she's damn good, and in my judgment, she's ready."

Avi sensed it best to not question the Director General's judgment. He asked, "What else did Gordon have to say?"

"He thinks this fellow Boulton is planning some sort of play in our neck of the woods. He's going out with Ariana Wright, the granddaughter of Dikran Matossian, a major player in Mid-East oil."

Avi responded, "I've heard of him, but not his granddaughter. Do we know anything about her?"

"Only what I found out from Walter. Miss Wright is wealthy, beautiful, and a bit of a renegade. She keeps company with Middle Eastern oil sheiks, financiers, diamond dealers, European royalty, and American blue bloods, all with big money. Boulton has worked his way into her circle and is hitting on the wealthiest of them, especially the Arabs. He's raising money to finance a foray into the diamond business.

"She also introduced him to a Russian and two Africans, all three of them bureaucrats in diamond mining, and supposedly exclusive suppliers to DeForster.

"Walter is very, very concerned. Boulton made unusually large deposits of cash into a numbered account at Credit Suisse. My concern is that Boulton might provide Nabuli, who's potentially dangerous, with a major source of new money.

"I want to know if Wright is aware of Boulton's relationship with Nabuli and if her Grandfather is involved. If he is, it gives Boulton's scheme a new dimension. Matossian has played the middle ground, friends with us, the Palestinians, and the oil producers; it pays to know where he stands."

"Where do I find this Princess?"

She lives in a brownstone in Chelsea, apparently a rather seedy area for someone of her means, but you'll be able to meet her in Baltimore. She'll be staying at her parent's farm in Glyndon, a little town outside of Baltimore and attending the opening of a Faberge exhibition at the Walters Art Museum. I've arranged for you to be there as the guest of Doug Wilson, the president of Wilson Investments, a banking firm that has a relationship with one of our business fronts. Your travel arrangements and IDs, as well as information about our front company, will be delivered to your office within the hour."

“O.K. David. Is there anything else?”

“No.”

“I’ll be there by Friday. *Shalom.*”

Avi turned hung up and turned to his partner, “Reuvi, it looks we’re still on. We’ve landed something to sink our teeth into. Will you take care of the identification of Basheer’s body, and make sure his family has enough money to give him a decent burial?”

“Sure Avi, I’ll stay and look at a dead body while you play with a woman in New York.”

Avi chuckled. “We get what we deserve.”

“Bullshit,” replied Reuven.

Avi turned away and called Shlomo Cohen in the Records Department, the central storehouse for Israel’s intelligence.

“Cohen here.”

“Shlomo, this is Avi.”

“What do you want?”

“David wants me to take a trip to the States to investigate a woman.”

“Your kind of job, Avi.”

“Can it Shlomo. I get enough bullshit from Reuvi. I want to know what I’m in for. I’ll need background on Malcolm Boulton, a computer consultant and a recent employee of De Forster; Ariana Wright, an American, who’s having an affair with him; and Dikran Matossian, her Grandfather.”

“Matossian’s easy? He’s always on our screen, but I’ll see what I can do on the others. I’m up to my ass in requests for background info on businessmen in Iraq and Iran. Still, your father saved my ass more than once, so you get some priority. But it will cost you. Give me a couple of hours. Then bring me a bottle of single malt. And it better be good ... and old.”

“You got it, you *goniff*. I’ll see you at 3:00.”

“*Shalom ale’ hem*, and remember, old, very old,” said Shlomo as he hung up the phone and turned to his computer screen.

Avi returned to his apartment and began to pack for the trip. Other than his old Navy uniforms, he had little in the way of clothing suitable for a trip to the States. He needed a suit, a sport jacket, two shirts, a pair of dress shoes, a tie, and a tuxedo. He glanced at his watch and saw that he had enough time to do shop before he was due at Shlomo's office. He took a bottle of LaPhroaig scotch from the kitchen cabinet, put it in his briefcase, and walked out into the blistering sun.

The Kirya was deserted. Recent suicide bombings had set everyone on edge, and the few people on the usually busy street walked in silence, with uncharacteristic stiffness. He stopped in a high-end men's clothing store and selected the clothing he would need for the trip, buying more than he had planned. The proprietor, a recent refugee from Russia, agreed that, given the size of the purchase, the necessary alterations would be completed that afternoon, and the entire order would be ready for pick-up first thing in the morning. Avi paid for the clothing with his government credit card and walked out of the shop. In ten minutes he arrived at the non-descript building adjacent to Mossad headquarters. At the security desk he presented his credentials.

"I'm here for Dr. Cohen."

"Yes sir, I'll let him know."

After a moment the guard said, "Sir, please go into the waiting room; someone will be out to escort you to Dr. Cohen's office."

"Thanks."

Avi passed through the first door. When it closed behind him, a second opened. He entered a stark room with a small worn sofa, and two folding chairs. He waited five minutes until the third door opened and an attractive woman in uniform entered.

"Mr. Stein, I'm here to take you to Dr. Cohen's office. Please follow me. If you are carrying a cellular phone or a pager, please turn it off. Any calls or pages will be intercepted in the communications room and forwarded by land line to Dr. Cohen's office."

Avi reached into his pocket and turned off his cellular.

"I don't have a pager; no one ever needs me that badly."

The young woman grinned coyly and said, "I can't imagine why."

Avi smiled, "I bet you have one."

The woman laughed, and with no further banter, they proceeded to Shlomo's office.

"Avi, I hope you brought an offering to the Gods of Cyberspace, otherwise your trip will be in vain."

"Did you have any doubts?" said Avi as he removed the bottle of 12-year-old LaPhroaig from his briefcase.

"Will this appease your pagan deities?" he asked.

"Your father was the one who really knew how to deal with them, but given time you'll learn. In the meantime this will suffice. I have a dossier that you can take home with you."

"Thanks Shlomo, I'll get out of your hair, what little you have left of it."

The woman watched the two men with amusement. "Dr. Cohen, whenever you and your buddy finish your *shtick*, I'll escort him out of the secure area."

Shlomo looked at the young guard and said, "Be careful of Mr. Stein. He's been looking at you as if you're worthy of his personal attention."

"Don't worry, Dr. Cohen, I'm armed, married, and don't need any more attention."

Chapter 6

Glyndon, Maryland

October 30, 2003

Ariana's eyes drifted closed. Her Saab veered right, jolted over a narrow culvert, and collided with a post-and-rail fence. Shaken but uninjured, she got out and looked down Butler Road. "Damn it, damn it to hell."

The lights of a nearby barn flickered through the shroud of fog. There was nothing else on the country road. Ariana tripped over a root as she assessed the damage to her car. She muttered, "Shit, what a mess," as she wiped mud from her hands on to her slacks. She replaced a fence rail that had been dislodged, kicked it in place and reentered the car. As she backed onto the road the tires spun on the damp grass. Determined to do no more damage, she eased off the accelerator. The tire scars in the pristine grass would heal. Her life was another matter.

Her family's farm nestled in the low hills of Worthington Valley, a few hundred yards past St. John's Episcopal Church. The church spire appeared through the mist, and Ariana remembered the pleasant hours she had spent with Reverent Phillips, a warm, understanding man able to deal with the intrigues of the wealthy horsemen and women who constituted his parish. His conservative ecumenical views suited some, and alienated others. To Ariana, he was an anchor in a tumultuous sea of divorce, ill-conceived affairs of the heart, and internecine disputes.

She arrived at her parents' farm. Cherry and dogwood trees, barren as they prepared for winter, were skeletons in the moonlight drive.

A gate, 100 feet from the road, opened to her voice command. Another 200 feet brought her to a weathered bridge over Slade Run, a pristine stream that wended through the farm's 300 acres. The stables, barns, and guest cottage stood on the left, halfway between the gate and the main house. A slate roof, which would last generations, covered three stories of massive gray stones. Brightly lit, leaded glass windows, faced the drive.

Dominating the rear of the house, and accessed through an arched stone passage, stood the greenhouse. Hundreds of lights dotted the grounds, like unblinking summer fireflies.

Dikran Matossian, Ariana's maternal Grandfather, had paid for everything. Her father, a failed unhappy man in his early fifties, appreciated only two pastimes, horse racing and drinking.

Ariana dreaded the drunken confrontations with her father and made her visits home infrequent and as short as possible.

Her Grandfather's request, to attend the opening of the Faberge exhibition at the Walters Art Museum as his representative, had brought her here. The prospect of seeing, for the first time, his entire collection of the Russian jeweler's work was irresistible.

As she stepped out of the Saab, three Jack Russell terriers bounded from the house, their tails wagging as they clamored for her attention. Ariana's father, having spent the day sipping Jack Daniels, leaned drunkenly against the doorway, his lanky body dwarfed by the massive entryway.

"Well, I'll be damned if it isn't my jet-set daughter. "

"Hello, father."

Ariana's mother heard the dogs, exited the greenhouse where she had been tending her orchids, and walked to the drive to greet her daughter. She turned to her husband.

"Frank, help your daughter with her bags."

"Is she crippled?"

"It's all right mom, I only have two."

"You look exhausted," said Serena as she took one of the bags out of the trunk.

Ariana took the other, closed the trunk and said, "I am. Traffic on the turnpike was hell, and then when I was almost here I ran off the road."

"My God. Was any one hurt?"

"No one else involved. Just a fence post and my car's headlight."

"Thank goodness. After you're settled we should talk."

Frank stood aside as the two women entered the house, grabbed Ariana's shoulder and turned her toward him.

“Your mother tells me that you’re finished with your boyfriend. What’s wrong, wasn’t he good enough for a Matossian?”

Ariana moved back; the smell of alcohol and stale tobacco was overwhelming. “Father, please get out of my face. You’re drunk, and I’m old enough not to have to put up with it.”

“Frank, leave her alone!”

“I’ll leave you both alone; I’m going down to the barn. The fucking mare is colicky, and that sonnabitch groom ya’awl love so much decided that he needed a night on the town.”

Frank stumbled away, and Ariana turned to her mother. “How long has he been like this?”

“Too long. My friends are sick and tired of him, and so am I. I should have made him go years ago.”

“Mom, he’s ruining your life.”

“I know,” said Serena. As she had so many times before, she changed the subject. “After you’ve unpacked why don’t you join me in the greenhouse, the orchids are spectacular.”

“Thanks, but not tonight. I’m bushed. I’ve got to be up early for the meeting at the Walters.”

Ariana put her hand on her mother’s forearm, “I’m glad to be here. I only wish father weren’t. You deserve someone better.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll deal with your father soon enough.”

“I love you mom,” said Ariana as she climbed the stairs to her bedroom. She collapsed onto her bed. “*My God, I can’t get away from problems, even here. There must be a man who isn’t a drunk or a calculating bastard.*” The sounds of horses running in the field soothed her. She slept.

She awoke as light streamed through the leaded windows. She showered, put on a robe, and went downstairs. Serena sat at a wrought iron table in the sunroom, her orange juice, coffee, and croissants untouched.

“Morning mom, I’m sorry we didn’t talk last night, but I was exhausted.”

“Did you get some rest?”

“I did, but before I dozed off I thought how horrible it must be for you to live with a drunk.”

“I let it happen; pride, whatever. I was warned about him. I didn’t take the advice and after we were married I didn’t want to admit that I chose the wrong man. He should have been out of my life years ago.”

“I’m not going to make that mistake with Malcolm. No one warned me, but I ignored my own instincts and fell for the creep. I let him use me. I was his trophy, Dikran Matossian’s granddaughter. I can’t believe I was such a patsy.”

“Then end it,” said Serena

“I’m trying. He’s agreed to stop hounding me if I meet him in Geneva. I have to go to put an end to it.”

“I’ll speak to your Grandfather; he’ll know how to deal with Malcolm.”

“No, please don’t. If this trip doesn’t end it, I’ll go to Grandpa.”

Serena settled her eyes on her daughter and asked, “Why on earth was your Godmother so anxious to have you meet this man?”

“Mom, she had no idea what’s behind the façade. His family has the right credentials; he’s gorgeous and very smart. I don’t blame her and neither should you. I’ll get rid of him and get on with my life.

“Larry Winston wants me as a partner. He needs a new designer and, I suspect, more capital. I have money in my trust. Do you think Grandpa will agree to an advance?”

“I’m sure he will. You’re doing what I should have done years ago: recognize a bad situation, get out of it, and get on with your life.”

“Thanks Mom. You should do the same.”

“You’re right and I will.”

Ariana looked at her watch. “Mom, I’m sorry I’m due at the Walters in an hour. Can I tell them you’ll come to the affair tonight? I’d love it if you did.”

“It would be awkward to be there without your father, and impossible to be there with him, although, I must say, I’d love to see the reaction to your announcement.”

“Are you sure I can’t convince you?”

“Quite sure. Give my regards to Dr. Johnson. ”

Chapter 7

The Walters Art Museum,

Baltimore, Maryland

October 30, 2003

“Miss Wright, we’re delighted to have you represent your Grandfather at the opening. I understand that you are a jewelry designer, which will make your remarks quite appropriate.”

“Thank you Dr. Johnson, but fortunately Grandfather’s collection speaks for itself and my jewelry is not Faberge. I don’t know how much I can add; and please, call me Ariana.”

“Fine, Ariana. Now let’s go over the schedule. We start at 7:00 with cocktails, at which time the Exhibit Hall will open. Dinner will be in the Old Gallery at 8:00. You’ll be seated at the head table with the Russian Ambassador, the Chairman of our Board, her husband, and me and my wife.

“I’ll make an opening statement and introduce you. We’d love your comments to last about five minutes, but of course that’s up to you. When you finish, I’ll introduce the Russian Ambassador who will make a few remarks, at the conclusion of which, dinner will be served. The Exhibition Hall will reopen at 9:00 and remain open until 10:00. Will you be accompanied by anyone?”

“No, Larry Winston was hoping to be here, but unfortunately couldn’t make it.”

“That’s too bad; I’d love to meet him.”

“I’m sure you’ll have the opportunity; Larry is anxious to see the collection. I’ll see you at 7:00.”

When Ariana arrived home the maid greeted her. “Ariana, you have two messages. A Mr. Wilson called. He’d like you to call him at home. He said you had the number.”

“I do. When did he call?”

“About an hour ago. And your mother called from the Club to see if you would join her for lunch.”

“Doris, please call her at the club. Tell mother that I won’t be able to join her.”

“Don’t forget Mr. Wilson.”

“I won’t,” said Ariana as she walked into the study and made the call. “Doug, hi. Doris said you called.”

“Ariana, thanks for getting back to me. My firm has two tables at your affair tonight, and I’ll be bringing a guest. He’s an executive at Signal Development, one of our clients in Israel. I was hoping you’d shepherd him around. No one in our group is Jewish, and you have lots of Jewish friends in the diamond business. He’s here by himself, and he won’t know anyone but me. I don’t want him to feel out of place.”

“Doug, I can’t believe you. Do Jews only talk to Jews, or friends of Jews?”

“I didn’t mean it the way it came out. It’s just that I thought you might like to meet him.”

“Because he’s Jewish?”

“No Ariana, because he’s good looking and I was told you didn’t have an escort this evening.”

“Doug, do me a favor, don’t dig a bigger hole for yourself. I’ll see you tonight.”

Ariana went upstairs, put on jeans, a sweatshirt, and boots, and walked down to the stables. Joe Hall greeted her. “Miss Ariana, good you here. This here place ain’t been much good widout you. Your daddy’s makin’ everybody crazy; finding help be hard ’nough, an ifin they come, they don’ stay.”

“Joe, mom couldn’t manage without you. We need you to keep things straight.”

“You right about dat. You an’ your mama the only reason I be here.”

“Is there a horse that I can take out? I have a few hours to kill before I have to go back downtown, and I’d love to spend them on the trails.”

“Yep, got just the ticky, a filly what could use work. She green, but sweet. Got another could use ridin’. How ’bout I go wit you?”

“I’d love it. Let’s get saddled.”

Ariana spent a glorious day on the trails that wended through the Worthington Valley.

The event that evening was black tie, the guests carefully culled from the Baltimore and Washington social and financial hot lists. Ariana showered. The scanty white dress that she selected would set her apart from the conservative Baltimoreans.

Her jewelry was magnificent. Ruby and diamond hoop earrings; a stunning necklace of vivid yellow diamonds, with a six carat, cushion-cut Burma Ruby pendant; and a simple diamond bracelet, set with thirty-five, one-carat flawless, Asscher-cut white diamonds.

Ariana entered the living room, where her mother was alone but preoccupied. Serena turned to her daughter. She assessed her daughter, smiled, and said, "Ariana, you are stunning. A bit too sophisticated for Baltimore, but this town could use a little glamour."

"Thanks Mom, are you sure you won't join me? You should be the one doing this."

"I've already made my excuses. I told Frederick that your Grandfather and I wanted you to do the honors. I told Joe that he'd be driving you. He's so pleased that he got out the black suit he wears to funerals and washed and waxed the car." Downtown is no place to be alone, especially at night with all that jewelry."

"Don't worry about the jewelry, mom, no one will think it's real. And besides, I've been living in New York; I can certainly deal with Baltimore. Please tell Joe not to bother."

"Ariana, please don't argue. You might want to have cocktails, and they've been cracking down on drivers leaving these events, just looking for someone who's enjoyed themselves; the city's vengeance on county residents."

"Fine mom, Joe can drive; it will make things easier, but drinking is not on my agenda. I have to leave early tomorrow. I'm having lunch with Larry."

"I'll see you before you leave. I can't wait to hear the reaction to the gift," said Serena.

The black Lincoln Town Car gleamed for the first time in months. Joe, dressed in a well worn black suit, stood by the side of the car. He bore no resemblance to the man with whom she had spent the afternoon.

"Miss Ariana, you look beautiful."

"So do you, Joe."

They laughed as Joe opened the rear door.

“Joe, I’ll sit up front.”

“No ma’am, you most certain’ won’t. This is a big party, and you’ll arrive like the lady y’are. Besides, if your mama saw you get in front, she’d fire me.”

They left and drove downtown. At the Charles Street entrance to the Walters, the Director, who had been waiting in the foyer, greeted Ariana and escorted her inside to the reception.

“Doug, who is that woman? She’s exquisite,” said Avi who had arrived in Baltimore the previous day.

“That’s Ariana Wright. She’s not only exquisite, but exquisitely wealthy. I spoke to her this morning, and she’s agreed to spend some time with you. Your boss insisted that you meet her; I assume because he’s wants to do a deal with one of Matossian’s companies.”

“You’re right, he does.”

The two men approached Ariana, who was now in the midst of classmates from her days at the Garrison Forest School.

Doug moved through the circle of women. “Ariana, you look stunning.”

“Thanks Doug, you know Sarah Hearn, Tiffany Spear, and Muffy Thompson.”

“I certainly do, the Garrison Riding Team, but all grown up. I’d like you to meet my guest Avi Stein. He’s visiting us from Israel, and I thought he might enjoy the exhibition.”

“Hello, Mr. Stein, we’re delighted to have you here.”

Sara Hearn added, “All the way from Israel, you must be Jewish, a perfect companion for Ariana.”

Avi looked at her with amusement, as Doug and the others cringed with embarrassment.

“I am, Miss Hearn, Jewish and a perfect companion for Miss Wright. You went to Garrison Forest. You must be a gentile and a perfect companion for Doug.”

“Excuse us ladies, since my date has come so far for this event I want to spend some time with him.” Ariana took Avi by the arm and moved to the bar.

“You have quite the sense of humor, Mr. Stein.”

“As do you, Miss Wright.”

“Have you been to the States before? Your English is perfect.”

“I spent two years in Washington, when my father was at the Embassy, and I’ve worked hard to keep my English up.”

“What do you do now?”

“I’m just a high-tech salesman.”

Doug rejoined them. He said, “Avi is being modest, he’s the Vice President of one of the most successful technology companies in Israel.”

“Really, that’s quite impressive; what brings you to Baltimore?”

“I came to meet you.”

“Quite the charmer, Mr. Stein.”

“Quite deserving of charm, Miss Wright.”

Ariana turned away from the bar as the announcement of the first viewing was made. “Well, now we get to see Grandpa’s collection. I used to play with some of the stone animals that are on exhibit. I had no idea of their value. Would you like me to show you my favorites, Mr. Stein?”

“I’d be delighted, and please call me Avi.”

“O.K., Avi, then make it Ariana.” She turned toward Doug and said,

“Will you please excuse us?”

“Of course,” responded Doug, politely disguising his disappointment at being excluded.

For the next half-hour, Ariana pointed out the virtues of each of the exquisite works of art created by Faberge and his work masters. Her favorite: a bell push called “Frog under Glass,” created at the beginning of the twentieth century in St. Petersburg. A small green nephrite jade frog, with diamond eyes, playfully climbed a ladder inside a rock crystal dome, set atop a red guilloche enameled base. A finial on the dome was set with a cabochon garnet.

“They don’t make bell pushes like that today,” commented Avi.

“I don’t believe they make bell pushes at all; they’ve gone the way of the buggy whip.”

“Doug says you two grew up together, but you left the fold to go into the jewelry business in New York.”

“I moved to New York to get away from Baltimore. This town is so snobby and provincial; if you’re not an Episcopalian blue blood you’re a second-class citizen, that is unless you have a huge amount of money and one of your parents is Church of England. At least, that’s what the circle at school thought.

“According to them I should have gone to Vassar, married a moderately rich guy from Baltimore, preferably an investment banker from one of the old-line houses, and settled in with the ‘Mink and Manure’ set. The half of me that’s Armenian would have become barely acceptable, and my ne’er do well husband would have become wealthy.”

“You mean someone like Doug?”

“Exactly like Doug. Instead, I followed my instincts and became a jewelry designer, and much to everyone’s surprise my life has been glorious, at least until recently. The wrong man can do that, but it’s something I’ll deal with and then forget.

“Now what about you? You said you were in Washington.”

“For two years, my father was the military attaché at the Israeli Embassy.”

“ ‘Military attaché.’ From my limited experience that means ‘spook.’ ”

“I never thought of my father as spooky.”

Ariana’s laughed. A chime indicated the end of the cocktail hour.

“It’s time for dinner. We won’t be sitting together, but I’d love to see you again.”

“I’d like that, Avi.”

“How about after dinner?”

“That would be fine, but I have a driver waiting for me.”

“Is there a phone in your car?”

“Yes, there is.”

Avi removed a cell phone from his jacket pocket. “Why don’t we give him a call?”

Fredrick Johnson, the Gallery Director, approached, “Ariana, please join me at the head table. You’ll be giving your speech in just a few minutes.”

“Alright Fredrick, just a moment.”

“Avi, my driver’s name is Joe, the number is 410-576-5773. Tell him I won’t need him tonight. If he has any questions give him your number and ask him to call in an hour. I’ll talk to him.”

“Ariana, please; everyone is waiting for you.”

“Fine, Fredrick.”

The Director stood at a small lectern and tapped on the microphone. “Ladies and Gentlemen. It is my privilege to preside over the opening of this magnificent exhibition of the works of Carl Faberge. As you are all aware, we would not be here if it were not for the generosity of Mr. Dikran Matossian and the Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg. Not only have they graciously lent us many of the objects that are now on view, but the Matossian Foundation has provided the funds to ensure that they are exhibited in a manner that befits their beauty.

“We are fortunate to have with us, Miss Ariana Wright, Mr. Matossian’s emissary and granddaughter. Also with us is the Right Honorable Ambassador, Vladimir Cherkin, a man who has fostered the relationship between fine arts organizations in our respective nations.

“Miss Wright, if you please?”

Ariana rose to polite applause.

“Dr. Johnson, Mr. Ambassador, Ladies and Gentlemen. Art is timeless and universal. My Grandfather recognized this when he assembled his collections. His tastes were broad, much as were those of the founder of this Museum. It is appropriate that the collection of Faberge *objects*, which was assembled over the past 45 years, be exhibited here for the first time. They are both charming and exquisite.

“It is my pleasure to inform you that the Matossian Foundation and my Grandfather, Dikran Matossian, are presenting them as a permanent gift to this institution. In order to enable them to be widely appreciated, and placed in the broad context of Russian creativity, the Matossian foundation is also pleased to present you with a check, for 25 million dollars, to fund a new gallery devoted to the works of contemporary Russian artists. Together with the works of Fabergè, they will provide a living view of art in this great nation, once home of the czars, and now of democracy.”

There was a collective gasp in the room, which exploded into applause. There had been no hint of the gifts; it was typical Matossian showmanship, and Ariana relished the moment. She returned to her seat. Avi watched her intently. *“This woman is strong and enjoys power. What was her relationship with Malcolm Boulton? Is her Grandfather backing him?”*

When the Russian Ambassador was introduced, there was little that he could say that did not relate to the gift which had been presented by Ariana.

Dinner was served. Just before dessert, Ariana rose from her chair, “I hope you’ll excuse me, but I leave quite early tomorrow and need a good night’s rest.”

Before anyone could respond, she walked away, stopping at Doug’s table. “Mr. Stein, I’d like to take you up on your offer of a ride home.”

“It will be my pleasure. Doug, please excuse me for leaving early. It’s been a delightful evening.”

Doug looked on in amazement.

When they reached the main entrance, Ariana asked, “What did my driver say?”

He laughed, and said, “You better take good care of Miss Ariana.”

“Where are you parked?”

“Just up the street. Why don’t you wait here, I’ll pick you up.”

“I’ll walk with you.”

“Are you sure, you’ve got a lot of jewelry on, and I hear that downtown Baltimore isn’t the safest place at night.”

“I have you to protect me. But the jewelry is a bit much for a stroll.” Ariana took off the earrings, necklace and bracelet, and dropped them into her purse.

Avi smiled, “You look even more beautiful when you’re undressed.”

“Mr. Stein, you have no idea what I look like when I’m undressed, and it’s unlikely that you ever will.”

“We all have our dreams,” said Avi as he offered her his arm.

They walked slowly up Charles Street to the rented Buick.

“Not much of a carriage for a lady who just gave away 25 million dollars,” said Avi as he helped her into the car.

“Not my money, Avi; it was easy to part with. Let’s get dessert; I’m famished. Every time I raised my fork, some one walked up to tell me how wonderful my Grandfather’s gift was. I finally gave up, and just greeted them as they came. I hardly got a bite to eat.”

“Would you prefer something more than desert?”

“No, it’s too late for anything heavy. I’d rather just relax and nibble.”

“Doug told me about a coffee shop in an area called ‘Little Italy,’ but I forgot the name.”

“It was probably Vacarro’s. We all used to go there for espresso and cannolis. It will be easier if I drive. Little Italy is a maze, and you have to navigate a bunch of one-way streets to get to the restaurant.”

“That’s fine with me, I’ve always wanted to be chauffeured by a beautiful woman.”

Ten minutes later they entered Vacarro’s. The room was crowded and noisy, but quieted as all eyes turned toward Ariana. Avi looked around the room and spotted a vacant table in the far corner. He turned to Ariana and pointed to the table, still cluttered with cups and plates, “It looks as if we’re lucky; there’s a table for two over there if you don’t mind it being a mess.”

“Let’s get it while we can,” responded Ariana as she headed across the room. Avi followed and helped her into a chair.

“Ariana, I was really impressed with your performance tonight. You handle the spotlight well.”

“Thanks Avi, I guess I’m a bit of a show off. But tonight was really great. Some of the people in Baltimore get my goat. They think they’re the center of the world, especially if they went to one of the better private schools and belong to the right country club. If my Grandfather weren’t so damn rich, I wouldn’t have ever been accepted by the girls you met.”

“What about the men? Doug seems like a really nice guy.”

“He is, but he’s boring, boring, boring.”

“I know it’s none of my business, but you mentioned something about being with the ‘wrong man.’ ”

“That seems to be a problem that runs in the family. My father is a drunk and the guy I’m dating is a megalomaniac, besides being the most prejudiced person I’ve ever met outside of Baltimore.”

“Where is he from?”

“He’s from England, but he went to graduate school in Boston.”

“What did he study?” asked Avi as he brought the conversation closer to his inquiry.

“Computer Science. He just finished a job in Geneva for a big diamond firm.”

“Really, our company supplied some electronics to De Forster. Is that who he worked for?”

“Yep, and now he’s making noises about competing with them.”

“I wonder if I’ve ever met him?”

“I doubt it; his name is Boulton, Malcolm Boulton.”

“I don’t recognize the name, but he sounds like an interesting fellow.”

“I never thought I’d say this, but he’s too damn interesting and I can’t wait to end our relationship. His life is a colossal intrigue. He’s met with Russians, Africans, European diamond dealers, and my Grandfather’s Middle Eastern associates. Whatever he’s up to is driven by a pathological hatred of the Rothman family.”

“Rothman? Isn’t that the family that controls De Forster?”

“The same.”

“But didn’t you say he worked for De Forster, and wouldn’t that mean working for people he hates?”

“You’re a quick study, Mr. Stein. When I first met Malcolm he had just started there. He seemed to enjoy his work. But as time passed I sensed there was an underlying resentment toward the Rothmans and the De Forster executives, but Malcolm wouldn’t talk to me about it. But it was obvious that he was interested in competing with the Syndicate. He wanted to meet the big players, both producers and sightholders.

“sightholders?” queried Avi.

“I’m sorry. I thought, being from Israel, you’d know all about the diamond business. sightholders are men, and I mean only men, who get to buy directly from DeForster.”

“Ah ha, the chosen people. Please, I didn’t mean to interrupt. Go on.”

“When Malcolm finished the job at De Forster, he showed his true colors. He started making the most vicious anti-Semitic jokes, and talking about how the Rothman’s used to be Jewish until it had suited them to convert to Christianity. Whenever he was with my Grandfather’s Arab friends he voiced an almost rabid hatred for the Israelis. I couldn’t stand it anymore and tried to end the relationship, but he just wouldn’t leave me alone. Then, in an attempt to gain my sympathy, he told me why he felt the way he did.”

“And his reason?” asked Avi.

“Malcolm’s Grandfather was the only banker who would finance the Rothmans business in Africa. After they were well established and successful, they pulled their money from the Boulton Bank and moved it to the Morgan Bank in America. The Boulton bank failed and the family was disgraced. Malcolm’s Grandfather shot himself. Malcolm found the body.”

“That sounds like a good reason to hate the Rothmans, but it doesn’t explain why he went to work for them,” said Avi.

“I didn’t put it together at first. Now I know that Malcolm wanted to see the inside of their organization, to learn enough to compete. He said several times that Alex Rothman is wrecking the company, making it vulnerable to a well financed competitor. Anyway, that’s the reason he gave me for wanting to meet important diamond dealers and my Grandfather’s oil-rich Arab associates.”

“You make it sound like he was using you.”

“He was.”

“That sounds like a relationship you could do without.”

“It is, and I’m going to Geneva to end it; long distance rejection doesn’t seem to work.”

Avi took her hand. “Ariana, you’re a lovely woman; you don’t deserve problems.”

“Everyone has problems. It’s just a matter of dealing with them, and this one will be dealt with.”

Ariana made no effort to move her hand as they sat. Her eyes warmed.

The waitress arrived to clean the table and take their order.

“Do you love birds want to eat, or should I just leave?”

“And let us starve?” said Avi.

“Yeah hon, that’s the choice, moon over each other or order and eat.”

“We’ll each have a double espresso and two cannolis.”

The waitress smiled, turned and muttered to herself as she walked away, “Rather order than make lovey-dovey, huh?”

Avi turned his attention to Ariana. “You’re not the woman I expected.”

“Why did you have expectations?”

“Doug told me a little about you, and of course I’ve heard a great deal about the Matossian family. Quite frankly I thought you’d be spoiled and arrogant.”

“Your expectations weren’t very high. Why did you bother meeting me?”

“I saw you and fell in love.”

“You fall in love very easily. Does it occur often?”

“Actually only once before.”

“What happened?”

Aviv’s averted his eyes. “She died. I was engaged to a young lieutenant in the Israeli Defense Force. We were stationed together in Gaza. We were looking forward to completing our tour and raising a family. When I was young, I traveled with my family. I had promised myself that when I was married I would settle down and raise a family in one place, Israel. Two months before she was to be discharged, she was on patrol. A bomb exploded alongside of her vehicle. She was on the passenger side and died a day later in the hospital.”

“What was her name?”

“Leah, Leah Bronstein.”

“Leah, that’s a beautiful name.”

“She was a beautiful woman, inside and out,” said Avi as he averted his eyes.

“I’m sorry. This time it was none of my business.”

They left Little Italy and headed back to the country. Avi said, “I’d like to see you again.”

“I’d like that Avi, but I’m leaving tomorrow. If you get to New York, call me. Here’s my card. My number is unlisted, so don’t lose it.”

“I won’t lose it, and I will be in New York in the next few days.”

Brilliant halogen lights lit the driveway as they approached the gate.

“The gate is voice activated. Say the numbers 7653,” instructed Ariana.

“Security conscious here, almost like a *kibbutz* in Israel.”

“I don’t know about *kibbutzs*, but grandpa insisted that we gate and alarm the farm. He’s worried that I’ll be kidnapped; one of the problems with having a family that’s obscenely rich. A security company has video surveillance of the entire property. The cameras are hidden so you’d never know you were on candid camera.”

“Do you think a kiss would set off any alarms”?

“Only mine,” responded Ariana as she gave him an affectionate peck on the cheek.

Avi thought about Ariana as he drove toward his hotel; she was not the woman he had expected.

He parked his car in the circular drive outside the Harbor Court Hotel, gave the keys to the doorman, and went to his lavishly appointed room on the third floor, an extravagance but a necessary part of his cover. He removed the satellite phone from his briefcase, punched a single number that speed dialed headquarters in Israel, and left a message for David Kimmel.

“David, I made contact and will nurture a relationship. I’ll be in New York tomorrow. Please inform Menachem.”

Chapter 8

New York

October 31, 2003

The following morning, Ariana left her car, which she seldom used in Manhattan, at the farm and had Joe drive her to the train station. She boarded the early morning Acela to New York. As the train passed through Newark, she placed the call to Geneva. Etienne answered, "Boulton residence."

"Etienne. Is Malcolm there."

"Yeah, Ariana, he's been waiting to hear from you, I'll get him."

A moment passed before Malcolm picked up the phone. "Ariana, I've been trying to reach you."

"I know, and I want you to stop hounding me? I want nothing to do with you or any of your schemes."

"Ariana, damn it I want you here. I'm finished with De Forster, and can get on with my plans, plans that include you. I bid and bought the most gorgeous pink diamond at the Sotheby's auction. Some Jewboy wanted it, but I got it for you."

"You're unbelievable, apart from being a bigot, you're arrogant enough to think you can buy my affection, you did a number on me once, and that was enough; I don't want to see you, hear from you, or get anything from you. I'm finished, done, *kaput*. Can I make it any clearer?"

"Ariana, you call me a bigot; your Grandfather made his money off the backs of Arabs; I'm going to make mine from the Jews. What's the difference? Come to Geneva, at least let me give you the diamond, as a reminder of what we had together."

"Had together. Are you serious? All you've done is use me."

"You know better than that. In any event, there's no sense in arguing. You agreed to come to Geneva, and Matossians always keep their word."

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“It was in one of my weaker moments, but if it still takes a trip to Geneva to end this, I’ll make it. Meanwhile, take your pink diamond and shove it; I have enough of my own.”

“Ariana, we’ll get back what we had.”

“Malcolm you’re out of your mind. I’ll call you after I get settled in my hotel. Exactly what time, and where is this all-important dinner?”

“At the Richmonde, this Friday the 14th at 8:00. You’ll stay at my chalet.”

“Not a chance.”

“Then I’ll pick you up. Where will you stay?”

“I haven’t made arrangements, but I’ll have my own driver.”

“No Ariana, at least let me do that. I insist.”

An announcement punctuated the end of the conversation.

“Arriving Penn Station, New York City. Please exit through the cars in the rear.”

Thirty minutes later Ariana was home. She pulled off her clothes, threw them onto the bathroom floor, and turned on the steam shower. As she relaxed in the moist heat, her anger dissipated and her thoughts shifted from Malcolm to Avi Stein. He was attractive, amusing, and easy to like.

She toweled herself, dressed, and walked out onto 19th Street.

As she approached 8th Avenue she remembered that she hadn’t eaten. She entered a tiny Cuban restaurant on 8th and sat at the counter. She had a breakfast of black coffee and the house specialty, a sandwich of roast pork and crusty bread toasted to perfection. Sated, she went out onto the street.

The decrepit Yellow taxi, driven by a turbaned Indian who spoke no English, responded to her waving and pulled to the curb. The taxi headed uptown, slowing to a crawl in heavy traffic. At the intersection of 45th Street and 6th Avenue, Ariana gestured for him to stop, handed him a ten-dollar bill, and walked uptown on 6th Avenue to 47th Street.

In the single block between 5th and 6th Avenues were 2,500 jewelry businesses, most above street level. High-rise buildings lined the narrow thoroughfare. The tallest were occupied by the

most important dealers, and the highest floors of those were occupied by the most successful. Ariana's appointment with Larry Winston was on the penthouse floor of 580 5th Avenue, the Jewelers Building, the tallest in the block.

Ariana noticed the increased number of uniformed police officers, whose presence was meant to deter the Colombian gang members who preyed unmercifully on deliverymen, diamond dealers and jewelry salesmen, all of whom now walked with a sense of urgency and caution.

Armored cars bearing the logos of Brinks and Dunbar lined the street, as armed guards cautiously emerged to deliver or pick up parcels from the upper floors. Mantrap doors, bulletproof glass, and sophisticated surveillance equipment protected the immeasurable wealth of the wholesalers and manufacturers in the upper reaches of each building.

Ageless men of the Hasidic sect were ever-present in their black full-length overcoats, no matter the weather; their long loosely curled lengths of hair, *peyahs*, showed beneath their wide-brimmed black hats. These men roamed the district in a relentless quest for business, carrying parcels of diamonds or finished jewelry from the wholesalers above to the retailers below, making a small profit on each transaction. They alone seemed unafraid; the Colombians were, after all, not Nazis.

Astute traders, the Hasidim often were able to find just the right buyer for an item that would otherwise languish in a dealer's inventory. They were the emissaries between the worlds of wholesale and retail. The thrum of rapid-fire Yiddish was heard wherever they congregated, as they recounted the deals that had been made and lost, a diamond sold for a good profit, a missed opportunity when a competitor, 'thanks be, not a goy,' offered more money for an exceptional stone.

The ground-level stores, of which there were hundreds, were occupied by retail businesses that preyed on the bargain-hungry shoppers arriving at the Mecca of "the deal." The anxious buyers who sought something for nothing were easy victims for unsavory merchants who would ensure that they got the bargain they deserved. When they arrived home to Boise, they could make the time-honored proclamation; "I went to New York, my cousin has a friend in the jewelry district, and I got it

wholesale.” Or, “Man, whoever sold this must have lost a bundle, I got it for nothing from a dealer who bought it from a guy who needed cash.”

Signs and banners proclaimed:

“Wholesale to the Public”

“Jewelry and Diamonds Purchased — Immediate Cash”

“Distress Inventory — 60% to 75% Off”

“Store Closing — No Offer Refused”

The storeowners, often from Russia, Armenia, Lebanon, India, or Israel, passed on locations on the street from one generation to the next. The merchants hired hawkers, almost always native-born Americans with New York accents. These men, never women, were skilled in the art of false flattery and seduction. They lived off the commissions they derived from the bargain hunters who they lured into the store with tidbits of whispered information; “We got the stone from a dealer down the street who’s going broke; it can be yours for a song;” or the hallowed, “My boss is dying in there, you can kill him. Make an offer, I guarantee he won’t turn you down.”

As Ariana passed the most notorious of the retailers, a hawker beckoned. He wore a gray silk shirt, open to his navel. Three heavy gold rope chains hung over a bed of matted black hair. His eyes moved up and down her as he assessed his victim.

“Hey lady, you look like someone who knows a bargain. We just got a gorgeous three carater; we stole it, if you know what I mean. You can have it for six thou. Take it anywhere. You’ll get ten. Get my drift.”

Ariana decided to give him some grief, avenging the poor souls who had fallen victim to his spiel.

“You mean it’s really stolen?”

“Well, sort of.”

“What do you mean, sort of?”

“We sorta stole it, got it for a great price.”

“And I can take it anywhere on 47th Street and make a four thousand dollar profit?”

“Hey lady, what’s with you? I just said I had a real bargain.”

“Well, that’s great. I’ll tell my husband. I’m sure he’ll be interested, he’s sort of in the business.”

“What do you mean, in the business?”

“He’s with the fraud squad, and he loves bargains.”

Ariana turned and walked away; she heard him call to someone in the store. “Christ, what a wise-ass ball-busting bitch.”

Ariana moved effortlessly through the chaos, her interlude with the hawker an amusing diversion as she prepared to change her life, to fully engage herself in her work. Above the turmoil at street level, diamonds, colored stones, pearls, and finished jewelry, often of superb quality, were traded on a handshake. There were no hawkers, no sham bargains, no signs, only the business of making jewelry and money. The entrance of 580 Fifth Avenue opened onto a small gray marble lobby, it’s high ceilings decorated in the style of the fifties.

A metal detector in front of the security desk emitted a shrill noise as she passed. The elderly officer, smiled and said, “Not carrying a gun, are you Miss Wright?”

“No Lucas, but sometimes I wish I did.”

“I know what you mean, but they won’t let me have one; afraid I might shoot one of our visitors.”

Ariana approached a bank of elevators where a cluster of Hasidim conversed in hushed tones as they waited impatiently for one of the interminably slow elevators. A bell and a flashing light finally announced its arrival.

The men jockeyed for position, creating an impenetrable mass of black gabardine. Ariana stood behind them. The door opened and a tide of black filled the small cabin. An older man caught her eye, noticed the warmth of the smile with which she responded, and with a nod to the others, created a small space into which she stepped.

She was comfortable in the packed elevator. The Orthodox Jews could not come into physical contact with a woman, especially a “*shiksa*.” One of the bearded Hassidim, young and handsome, bent his head and whispered softly into the ear of the older man, “*a shainheit*.” They both smiled and looked with restrained admiration at Ariana. After six stops, the elevator emptied. Another five floors passed before she arrived at the penthouse.

Ariana walked briskly down the corridor and stopped in front of a walnut door with the name Lawrence Winston Inc. emblazoned in gold on a black ebony background. A polished brass plate housed a speaker and a button that she gave a short tap.

“May I help you?”

“It’s Ariana.”

A buzzer sounded, and Ariana entered a small waiting room where an attractive woman sat behind a bulletproof glass window.

“Hi Ariana, Lawrence is expecting you.” The woman’s lips moved, but the voice came from a small Bose speaker, mounted on the wall of the elegant room. “I’ll buzz you in. He’s in his office.”

Ariana walked down the corridor where fifteen jewelers worked at small 4-foot wooden benches. The smell of heated metal and acid fluxes permeated the cool air. She hesitated midway, delighting in her surroundings.

Lawrence Winston, an exceptionally handsome, but prematurely gray haired man in his early forties, rose from his rosewood desk and waved her in.

“God I’m glad to see you,” he said as he, with obvious affection, kissed her cheek . “I hear that you’ve been quite busy; a commission to design a necklace for Van Cleef, and lots of running back and forth to Geneva.”

“Larry, the back and forth to Geneva is almost over with, I’m going one more time to deal with Malcolm. Phone conversations don’t seem to work.”

“I never understood your attraction to the man. How on earth did you get hooked up with him?”

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“It’s a long story,”

“I’ve got the time, and I’ve always been curious. Please have a seat.”

“My Godmother decided that I was getting a bit long in the tooth. She was insistent that I marry before I turned gray. She threw a party for my 28th at her apartment in Paris. She invited Malcolm to attend. She thought he’d be quite a catch and hoped we’d hit it off. Much to her disappointment, he was fascinated by a lovely 35-year-old husbandless Austrian countess. Earlier that day, Carl Nachman, a jewelry designer, described Malcolm as an imperious, rude anti-Semite. He went so far as to refuse his invitation to the party if Malcolm was there. With the lowdown from Carl, I was delighted to have Malcolm devote himself to the countess.”

“That sounds like it would have been the end of it.”

“Would that it were. Malcolm showed up in New York a week after I got back, and invited me to lunch. He wanted to know everything about my work and my plans for the future. At one point I asked him if he knew Carl. He said he had met him at an exhibition at Somerset House, and found him to be an intolerable snob. Malcolm’s exact words were, ‘Nachman treated my driver abominably, as if he had no right to view anything other than the road in front of him.’ I was satisfied with the answer and we soon began to see each other. He was anxious to meet my Grandfather’s friends in the Middle East, and my friends in the diamond business. I was pleased with his interest in my friends and family. I thought the relationship might go somewhere.

“Then he changed. He was the man Carl described. I knew I made a mistake and tried to disentangle myself, but Malcolm wouldn’t let go. He needed, and apparently still needs, a handmaiden to assist in the chores of the great man he fancies himself to be. I’m sick and tired of it! I’m going to Geneva to end it. If that doesn’t work, I’ll ask my Grandfather to exert some pressure through his friends who have, unfortunately, gotten financially involved with Malcolm.”

“That should put an end to it,” said Larry.

“I can assure you it will. I want to get on with my life; I’d love to be your partner.”

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“Ariana, with your talent and connections, and a fresh infusion of capital, we’d be world-beaters. But, I’d love to have you as a partner in more than just business.”

“I know Larry, I know.”

Chapter 9

New York

October 31, 2003

Morris Goldman entered Gerber's Delicatessen on 47th Street at 7:00 a.m., and was greeted by his usual waitress. A cup of black coffee and two pieces of dry rye toast awaited him. Morris was a solitary, childless man whose wife had died early in their marriage. A big man, he was impressive; dark gray eyes, close together and deep in their sockets, with bushy black eyebrows above, and pouches of wrinkled skin below. His large aquiline nose was set well above ruddy, often chapped, lips. His full head of white hair dropped past his collar. He sipped his coffee and nibbled the toast as he recalled the day when Ariana Wright, brimming with the enthusiasm of youth, arrived at his office.

It was the first time since the death of his wife that he had enjoyed the company of a woman. The young designer's talent, intelligence, and beauty entranced him. Since that meeting two years ago, he had nurtured her career, ensuring that she met everyone of importance in the diamond and jewelry business. She repaid him with the warmth and affection usually reserved for a father.

Now, he was concerned that her relationship with Malcolm Boulton was going to create an intolerable situation. The Englishman was attempting to purchase large quantities of uncut diamonds, referred to in the trade as "Rough," buys big enough to attract the attention of De Forster. There would be an investigation, and it would ultimately involve Morris who was known to deal in gray market goods.

He was determined to get to the bottom of this craziness and remove himself, and hopefully Ariana, from Malcolm's dealings. He left the restaurant and went to his office on the 15th floor of the Swiss Building. He turned off the alarms and opened one of his four diamond vaults. Inside were stacks of small black rectangular boxes, each containing fifty white paper parcels known in the trade

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as *briefkes*. Each parcel held at least ten diamonds weighing from 1.0 to 2.0 carats. He took out a box and removed five *briefkes*, opened one and examined each diamond for color, clarity, and make. He then assigned a price to the parcel and moved on to the next.

Later in the morning, at the Diamond Dealers Club, he would begin liquidating his inventory. It amazed the industry "*machers*" that Morris continued to do business this way. A man of his importance shouldn't sort and price stones; and he most certainly shouldn't peddle them himself.

Ariana arrived at his office just as he finished with the last of the five parcels.

Morris began the conversation. "Ariana, I don't know what's going on with you and your friend Boulton, but I want nothing more to do with him."

"Morris, I'm so sorry I got you involved; I didn't know what he was up to. If I had I would never have introduced him to you, and certainly never have gone out with him. Malcolm's plans are preposterous and grandiose. He infuriates me when he compares himself to my Grandfather.

"I'm not going to sacrifice my future and your peace of mind for Malcolm's obsession. He wants to be the major player in the diamond business, and he's convinced several of my Grandfather's associates to finance him.

"I told him that I'd had enough of his obsessions and that we were finished. He agreed to amicably end the relationship, but only if I meet him in Geneva on the 14th; I agreed."

"Have you discussed this with your Grandfather?"

"I called him at his office in Paris, and explained the situation. He already heard God-awful things about Malcolm, and he wants me out of the relationship. He assured me that he would deal with Malcolm if I couldn't."

"Good, then that's settled. Your Grandfather always gets his way. By the way, I understand, through the grapevine, that you may go into business with Larry Winston. A smart move! Larry's honest, bright, and successful."

"How on earth did you find out so fast?"

"I have my sources."

“Morris you dear, sweet man. I love you. I’m sorry I involved you with Malcolm.”

“Don’t worry about me, but don’t let that *momser* con you again.”

“Believe me Morris, he won’t,” replied Ariana.

Morris left his office and spent the remainder of the morning at the Diamond Dealers Club, where he dealt with the small dealers who used the facilities as their office. He sat at one of the rectangular tables with large windows that faced to the north. On the table was a two-foot square pad of white paper, lit by two eighteen-inch fluorescent lamps.

The Club was unusually quiet. An ominous announcement had been made that morning: De Forster was going to drastically reduce the number of sightholders, especially in the United States and Israel. Because of the uncertainty only a scanty procession of dealers came to Morris to buy and sell.

Udi Cohen arrived at the table and sat down opposite his old friend. He said, “Morris, it’s a bloodbath. I can’t believe it; six big players in New York, four in Israel, and six in Antwerp are losing their Sights. Most have been with De Forster for over twenty years, dealing in better-quality goods. De Forster, with their big new plans, told them to create brands, and they did. De Forster told them how much to buy, and they did. De Forster told them to advertise and they did. They spent a fortune doing what they were told, and what they got in return was a kick in the *betzim*.”

Morris responded, “This is just the beginning. In a few years there won’t be sightholders, or middlemen, just De Forster with it’s own stores selling branded diamonds and some low-end retailers selling *dreck*. Rothman is determined to regain absolute control of the market. He’s listening to MBAs that know nothing about the diamond business. The fool is going to destroy what three generations of his family built.”

Udi frowned, “You heard about Lekovsky. He shipped five hundred carats of D and E color, Flawless and VVS four grainers to Marchand in Paris. The stones were certified, but De Forster convinced Marchand that there might be a problem. They took some of the stones to their laboratory

in London where, with supposedly new technology, they identified ten percent as synthetics. Marchand then sent the rest of the stones for testing. The De Forster labs found fifty-five synthetic and ten treated diamonds. Marchand returned the whole *business* and terminated their relationship with Lekovsky. He accused De Forster of trying to destroy him. De Forster's reply to his accusations is silence."

Morris said, "It's going to get worse. But, fortunately, the public isn't aware of the problems. As long as the diamond they buy is certified they don't care, especially if they think they got a bargain. There's still time to sell into the market before it tanks.

"Since De Forster opened their new facilities, they've been calling back inventory from the remaining sightholders for branding. Prices for unbranded stones are plummeting, and bankruptcies are in the making. I'm getting out of the business. I'll sell off my inventory and call it quits."

Udi responded, "So you're telling me I can get a bargain on your goods?"

"That's what I'm saying. Make me an offer."

By the end of the morning, Morris had disposed of only half the stones he had brought to the club. He went to the Kosher dining room, sat alone at a small table, and with little appetite began his meal of boiled white fish and cold vegetables. Menachem Harel entered the restaurant and was greeted by dealers who showed him more respect than one might anticipate for a mid-sized Israeli diamond dealer. He approached Morris.

"Sit, Menachem; join me for lunch?"

"I was planning to. Time for a little talk, also?"

"Of course, all the time in the world."

Menachem sat, leaned toward Morris, and lowered his voice to a whisper, "This branding business is moving ahead faster than any of us suspected. The powers-that-be in London and Geneva want to get back everything they've lost to the "gray" market. And they aren't hesitating to chop off heads. Their vaults are complete and operational, and they're eliminating sightholders as fast as they can.

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“Dealers are scrambling to sell their unbranded diamonds even at a loss. There are rumors that more synthetic and treated diamonds are in the marketplace. A number have been identified as coming from Lekovsky, and presumably the Russian Mafiya. The word is that if a stone doesn't have the De Forster holograph in it, you can't be sure it's natural.

“As of now, the De Forster labs are the only ones that can identify the synthetic and treated diamonds. Major retailers are clamoring for them to examine their inventories and certify the stones as natural, but De Forster won't issue papers on any but diamonds they sold to the remaining sightholders.

“The GIA, AGS, EGL and IGI gem labs don't have a clue as to how to identify the 'bad' stones, and the market is paranoid and chaotic. There is even speculation that Al Queda has gotten hold of a machine to create the synthetics, and are cranking out dozens of 1 carat D Flawless stones every day.

“But you, my friend, have another problem; the word is that you were instrumental in introducing Malcolm Boulton to African and Russian producers. My associates in Israel have information that he's planning to buy huge quantities of *Rough* at prices higher than DeForster, and is offering to sell to selected dealers at lower prices than those at the Sights. No one is sure how much financial muscle Boulton has, or when he'll have the first *Rough* to sell, but the word is that it's oil money and virtually unlimited. The most obvious problem for us is that Boulton hasn't approached Israeli dealers, and, in fact, seems to be avoiding them. The dealers in other cutting centers won't say how much, or even whether they have committed to buy from him. It's each man for himself. De Forster has Lekovsky on the ropes and they're going after the rest of the independents. Created and treated diamonds, similar to those found in Marchand's inventory, are now appearing in their inventories. The dealers have no place to go but De Forster.. No one wants to be stuck with an inventory that's unbranded and subject to being tainted by the created diamond scandal.

“Boulton is viewed as the only potential alternative to De Forster, but no one, and I mean absolutely no one, knows when or how he intends to enter the market. In the meantime there is

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absolute chaos. Your protégè, Ariana Wright, is involved with him and has placed you in the middle. We need your help in finding out more about Boulton, his backers, and his timeline for entering the market.”

Morris replied, “I was, and I emphasize was, involved with Boulton, but only to the extent of introducing him to Beritov, the bureaucrat involved in the sale of Russian Rough, and Moise Akimbe and Nelson Donbo, two officials who have the same function in Botswana. I’ve had some dealing with them in the past, a few “gray” market purchases to make my business profitable. At the time, I had no idea that Boulton was planning anything big. He appeared to be just another young man who wanted to get into the “gray” market diamond business. Now that Ariana and I know what he’s up to we’re going to have nothing to do with him.

“But what puzzles me about this business is why De Forster let one of their employees cause this much trouble. In the old days, if they viewed him as a serious threat, they would have taken him out of the picture---if you know what I mean.”

“I do,” replied Menachem.

Morris continued, “In any event, it’s of no consequence to me. I’m selling off my inventory and getting out of the business. Fortunately I’m not into the banks, and if I sell at a loss it’s my money I’m losing.”

“That’s fine for you, Morris, but De Forster’s agenda is not good for the dealers in Israel, and Boulton might have one that’s worse.

“We need to know whether, and to what extent, Ariana’s Grandfather is involved. With his money and connections Boulton has a chance, without him, I doubt it.”

“What do you want from me?” asked Morris.

“I’d like you to meet my associate, Avi Stein; he’s looking into these matters, on behalf of the Israeli Government. I would also appreciate it if you would convince Miss Wright to shed some light on the matter. She’s in a position to help.”

“Menachem, let me think about it. I’ll call you. O.K.?”

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“Be sure to Morris; you’re in the middle of a very bad situation.”

Morris thought: *“how did I let myself get into this? Thirty years and I’ve never had this kind of ‘tsouris.’”* Morris finished his lunch, returned to his office and placed a call to the Israeli Foreign Minister, whom he had met and befriended when he was the keynote speaker at a diamond conference in New York. “Yael, Morris Goldman here. I’ve just finished lunch with Menachem Harel. He tells me you have concerns about an Englishman, Malcolm Boulton, especially his relationship with Dikran Matossian.”

“That’s correct Morris. I understand you’re involved with Boulton, and are a friend of Matossian’s granddaughter, Ariana Wright.”

“Unfortunately I am indirectly involved with him. Ariana introduced us, and I, in turn, introduced him to dealers and producers.”

“Morris, I urge you co-operate with Menachem. We need your help.”

At his apartment that evening, Morris fixed a glass of Russian tea, added a slice of lemon, and stirred it with a silver spoon just as his mother and father had. He called Menachem.

“Menachem, Morris here. I’ll meet with Stein.”

“A wise decision, Morris. Can you come to the Stanhope, Suite 1403, tomorrow morning at 8:00? We’ll have breakfast and talk.”

“Yes, I’ll see you at 8:00,” said Morris, “Shalom.”

“Shalom ale’ hem.”

Morris put down the phone and poured a long shot of seventeen-year-old Czechoslovakian slivovitz.

Menachem hung up and turned to Avi. “That was Goldman. He’ll be here tomorrow at 8:00; he knows that the Wright woman has involved him in business that’s not good for any of us; he’ll convince her to assist.”

Chapter 10

New York and Mossad Headquarters

Evening October 31, 2003

Menachem, after informing Avi of his conversation with Morris Goldman, stood by as the Mossad agent called Headquarters. “David, Morris Goldman agreed to help. He told Menachem that Wright is fed up with Boulton and regrets having brought him into the orbit of her family and friends. It seems that her Grandfather is not directly involved in financing Boulton, but several of his Middle Eastern associates are.”

David responded, “I’ll discuss the situation with the Prime Minister. There’s reason to be concerned if Arab moguls take a major position in the diamond business. They would like nothing better than to see our diamond industry go into a tailspin and devastate our banks.

“Boulton, according to word from the Bourse, has made no secret of his antipathy for Israel, and has threatened, once he is a major player, to stop supplying ‘*rough*’ to our dealers. If he succeeds, and at the same time De Forster continues to eliminate our sightholders, we’ll be faced with an economic holocaust.

“And to make matters worse, Nabuli’s involvement with Boulton is an indication that more than just buying and selling is involved. Your informant paid with his life when he told you about Nabuli’s plan to steal diamonds from the De Forster vaults at Ramat Gan.

“I believe Nabuli has more in mind than a theft at Ramat Gan. With Boulton financing him, he might hit not only DeForster, but Jewish dealers in Israel, Antwerp and the United States.”

Avi replied, “I don’t understand why the IDSO has let Boulton get this far without intervening; they’re ruthless when it comes to controlling the activities of De Forster employees, past and present, especially someone who might cause a problem.

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“Walter is playing a closed hand, telling us only enough to get our help. The bastard has to know why Boulton is financing Nabuli.”

David responded, “If the IDSO isn’t more forthcoming, we’ll have to find another way in, and Wright might be it. If you can convince her that it’s in her best interests to help us, she might provide enough information to fill in the blanks.” Avi replied, “In order to get her help, I’ll have to break my cover.”

“Do it,” David responded, “but be careful; I hear that she’s beautiful and rich. Don’t break your cover by taking off your clothes. *Shalom.*”

“Shalom ale’ hem.”

Avi turned to Menachem. “David agrees that Miss Wright might be of use.”

“Then we should ask Morris to bring her to breakfast.”

Avi said, “She’s not going to be happy when she finds out I lied to her in Baltimore.”

“So be it. I’ll call Morris.”

On the fifth ring, Morris answered the phone. His voice was tinged with sleep and obvious irritation with the awakening.

“Morris it’s Menachem, I’m sorry to call you this early.”

“Sorry, *shmorry*, what do you want?”

“Stein would like you to bring Wright with you this morning. She’s important to us.”

Morris looked at the clock by his bed. “For this you wake me at 6:00? O.K., I’ll try, but don’t hold your breath. She doesn’t want to have anything more to do with Malcolm or his intrigues, and she knows you’re part of them.”

After making a cup of instant coffee, Morris made the call. “Ariana. I’m sorry to call so early, but I’ve been asked by an Israeli official to invite you to join us for breakfast this morning.”

“Why on earth does an Israeli official want to me to come to breakfast, and why is it so damn important that you call me at 6:00 in the morning?”

“It involves Malcolm. His activities are of concern to the Israeli Government.”

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“Morris, I told you I want nothing more to do with Malcolm or anything he’s involved in. I have no idea why the Israeli’s are concerned, and I’m not interested in finding out.”

Morris raised his voice a notch, “Your friend Boulton has put me in an uncomfortable situation. His activities might cause great damage to Israel, a country that is the final refuge for Jews. I shouldn’t have to say any more.”

“Morris, you’re right; I did get you involved and I’m sorry. Malcolm is my problem as well as theirs. When and where is this breakfast?”

“The Stanhope, Suite 1403, at 8:00.”

“O.K., I’ll do what I can, but then I want nothing more to do with Malcolm, or anyone involved with him.”

“Don’t worry, this *mishegaz* will be over with soon enough.”

Morris hung up and called Menachem.

“Ariana will join us for breakfast.”

Chapter 11

The Stanhope Hotel, New York City

November 1, 2003

“Mr. Goldman, thank you for joining us; please come in. I’m Avi Stein.”

Morris assessed the Israeli official: mid-thirties, military bearing, rugged but handsome features. His eyes were an unusual shade of green, a green that he had seen only once before. They were wide-set below a full head of curly black hair.

“Has Ariana arrived?” asked Morris, as he and Avi shook hands.

“Not yet.”

“So what do you want from her?”

“Miss Wright is involved with Malcolm Boulton who we suspect is providing financial support to a Palestinian terrorist organization. I don’t believe she’s knowingly acting against the interests of the State of Israel, but as the granddaughter of a man who has immense power in the Middle East, we need to understand her, as well as her Grandfather’s, involvement.”

“How did you find out that she was seeing Boulton?”

“He is of interest to us, and in the course of our inquiries we became aware of their relationship. I subsequently arranged to meet her at an affair in Baltimore. She had no idea that I’m employed by the Israeli Government. We talked and the conversation became personal; she told me she was in an unpleasant relationship with Boulton and wanted out.”

Morris nodded, “She’s fed up with him and his grandiose schemes. I’m sure she has no idea he has links to terrorists and until now neither did I. It’s unfortunate, but I did introduce him to men with whom I do business.”

“And these men?”

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“As I told Menachem, one is Russian and the other two are from Botswana, all bureaucrats in the diamond mining industry.” Morris paused for a moment before asking, “Mr. Stein. Are you a relative of Benjamin Stein? You bear him a striking resemblance.”

“He’s my father. Did you know him?”

“I was visiting Moscow at the time Benjamin was posted to the Israeli Embassy. He approached me to gather rather sensitive information for him, which I did, but not without encountering difficulties. Your father got me out. I liked him, a man very much to himself, but a man whose word was gold. I’m sorry he’s no longer with us.”

“Thank you Mr. Goldman; we all miss him.”

Ariana arrived at the Stanhope wearing denims and no jewelry. She took the elevator to the 14th floor, walked to 1403, and knocked.

“That’s probably Ariana,” said Morris.

Avi opened the door.

“What on earth are you doing here?” asked Ariana.

“Mr. Stein is here to help,” interjected Morris before Avi could answer.

“Help with what? I don’t need assistance from an Israeli businessman,” said Ariana.

Menachem Harel came out of his bedroom, shook hands with Morris and said, “Miss Wright. I’m glad you could join us. Please come in. I’ve taken the liberty of ordering for everyone; juice, pastries, bagels, smoked salmon, coffee and tea. If there is anything else you’d like, please, just ask. There’s no point in talking business on an empty stomach. We’ll have breakfast and then deal with our problems.”

“Avi, why are you here and what is this ‘our problems,’ ” asked Ariana. She had not entered the suite.

“Ariana, you’ll understand in a few minutes. Please, come in.”

“No, I want an answer now or I’m out of here.”

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Avi's discomfort was obvious as he responded, "I work for an agency of the Israeli Government. I arranged to meet you in Baltimore to find out the nature of your involvement with Malcolm Boulton."

"The Israeli Government? You were a high-flying executive, and now you work for your Government. Who in the hell are you, and what agency? Answer me."

Before Avi could respond, Ariana said, "Everything you told me in Baltimore was a lie wasn't it, even your sob story. "

Avi flinched, "Ariana, I know how upset you are. Believe me. I want to help you."

"Help me. Help me with what, my love life?"

"Please hear us out. You'll understand."

"Understand. Is that like believe me. What will I understand? Why you lied to me? You're no better than Malcolm."

Hoping to defuse the situation Menachem interjected, "Miss Wright, we need your help. Avi was acting under orders, he had no choice in the way he approached you. Please come in."

"Really? No choice, and under orders. Who pulls Mr. Avi Stein's strings, if that's even his name?"

The confrontation was interrupted by the arrival of the room service porter.

"Room service, I have your order."

"Yes, one moment," said Avi. "Ariana, please come in."

"Alright, but I expect answers, not more lies," said Ariana as she followed the porter into the suite. There was no conversation while the food was set out. The porter left.

Menachem gestured toward the table, "Please help yourselves."

No one did.

Avi said, "It's time to answer Ariana's questions."

"No shit." Ariana placed her hands on her hips and glared at Avi. "What's your name, and exactly who do you work for?"

“Avi Stein. As Avi in Baltimore, and Avi in New York, I apologize. What I told you in Baltimore was the truth, except for my occupation. I work for an arm of the Israeli Government. Had I been aware of the circumstances surrounding your involvement with Boulton, I would have made a direct and honest approach.”

“What circumstances? What circumstances would make you an honest man?” asked Ariana.

“You’ve inadvertently become involved in a very volatile situation with people who can do both the diamond industry and the State of Israel irrevocable harm.”

Menachem interrupted, “Please, please. Slow down; have a bite to eat, at least some juice and coffee.”

“You all do as you please. I want this over with. It’s time for me to get on with my day, and my life.” Ariana looked to Morris and then Menachem. She continued, “I’m ashamed of my naiveté in my dealings with Malcolm and Mr. Stein.”

Morris spoke up, “Ariana, it’s important to keep an open mind. Malcolm and his associates are intent on destroying the Israeli economy, as well as De Forster. You owe it to yourself, and to me, to give these men a hearing. Then make your decision.”

“Morris, I’m sorry I lost my temper, but I can’t stand being lied to. I’m going to Geneva, to tell Malcolm, what a miserable, bigoted, bastard he is; I want him to understand that I will have nothing more to do with him.”

Avi lowered his voice and said, “Ariana, we need to know what Malcolm is planning and how much financial backing he has. We especially need to know more about his relationship with the Palestinian, Hassan Nabuli. If you know anything, tell us; help us stop him. If, as I suspect, he hasn’t shared his plans with you, we need you to get details. If you work with us, we’ll protect you.”

“Protect me? Malcolm is a prejudiced bastard, and an annoyance, and I want to be rid of him, but I certainly am not afraid of him. I allowed Malcolm to use my Grandfather’s name and influence to obtain financing for his plans. He used me and got away with it, but I don’t need to be protected. I’ll do what I can, for Morris, for myself, and for my family’s reputation.

“I’m going to Geneva this Friday. Malcolm is having a dinner meeting with the Russian and the two Africans that he met through Morris; he’s desperate to impress them with the presence of a Matossian. All I know about the meeting is that he intends to make an offer for a large quantity of Russian and African diamonds.”

Morris interjected, “Do you have any idea how big a purchase? When I met with the Africans, they bragged that they had a customer on the hook. I pressed them and found out it was Boulton. He told them he had the resources to compete with De Forster.”

“That’s talking big money, hundreds of millions,” said Menachem.

Avi commented, “Big dollars in the diamond industry, but petty cash in the oil business.”

Menachem continued, “To absorb that much *Rough*, he must have major buyers; we need to know who they are and how much they committed to purchase.”

Morris responded, “As I told you, Malcolm used me to meet the producers. He hasn’t offered to sell to me. I’ve heard rumors that dealers in India and Belgium, none of them Jewish, are planning major purchases, but I have no idea how much. If they buy enough to disrupt De Forster’s business, they will lose, if they haven’t already lost, their Sights. I’m sure you’re all aware that sight holders, primarily in Israel, Belgium, and the U.S. are being dropped; they’re scrambling to find new sources, or unload their inventory and get out of the business. I’ve chosen to do the latter.

“Boulton is either a genius or he’s blowing smoke, but if he’s serious, his timing couldn’t be better. The markets are in chaos. Everyone is worried about blood diamonds, treated diamonds, and synthetic diamonds. It’s mass paranoia.

“DeForster is touting their branded stones as the only ones that are issue free. They’re counting on consumers becoming uneasy and demanding De Forster’s branded diamond from retailers. Dealers with substantial inventories of unbranded stones will be wiped out. The dealers that are willing to gamble that the branding strategy won’t work welcome a new source. Boulton is feeding off the uncertainty. He’s assured several dealers that branded diamonds will not reach the market.”

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Avi interjected, “We need to know why Boulton asserts that De Forster won’t be able to deliver branded diamonds, and why he’s involved Nabuli. Walter Gordon and George Deveraux are in charge of the logistics and security for the new facilities. They believe their security is impenetrable and their inventory adequate. Still they have evidenced concern.”

Ariana added, “I’ve never heard Malcolm mention Walter Gordon, but he can’t abide George Deveraux. At dinner one evening in Geneva, I overheard Malcolm tell several investors that he had Deveraux by the balls. That was followed by a diatribe about Rothman and the worldwide Jewish conspiracy. I couldn’t believe Malcolm’s virulence. I excused myself from the table, went upstairs, and called for a limousine. After his guests left Malcolm came upstairs. I told him I was leaving.”

Avi said, “Ariana, you’re in a position to help. Will you?”

“When I see him in Geneva, at the dinner. I’ll choke on the words, but I’ll tell him that I thought about it, and that he is a lot like my Grandfather. he’ll validate my approval by impressing me with the grandness of his scheme. After that I’m finished.”

“Ariana, I know how upset this is making you; you don’t have to do this,” said Morris, “You’ve told us what you know.”

For the first time that morning Ariana smiled, “Morris, I must admit that the thought of getting even with the bastard is rather appealing.”

“I’ve heard that your Grandfather always gets even, sometimes more than even,” said Menachem.

“And so do I,” replied Ariana.

Chapter 12

Villa Shindell, Zurich, Switzerland

November 2, 2003

The Villa Shindell occupied three acres of magnificently landscaped grounds, on the outskirts of Winterthur, Switzerland's sixth largest city. Stone walls surrounded a contemporary, two story, wood, stone and copper residence. Upon the death of its owner it was purchased by the Winterthur Insurance group and used a conference center. When Winterthur Insurance was purchased by Credit Suisse the villa was refurbished as a residence; a guest house for the bank's most valued customers. At the time of the renovation, a state of the art security system was installed. Only the most senior security officers knew that every conversation within the villa's walls was recorded and monitored. Walter Gordon, the Director of the IDSO, when describing the system to Alex Rothman, quipped, "It pays to know our customers."

An abundance of cultural activities, magnificent scenery, as well as close proximity to the Zurich Airport and the Zurich center city made it an ideal and much sought after perquisite.

Credit Suisse, at the request of two of its valued Middle Eastern customers, had made the Villa Shindell available to Malcolm Boulton and Hassan Nabuli. Nabuli arrived on October 27th. He was accompanied by his consort Assiz, and several servants. Boulton was to arrive the morning of November 2nd.

Assiz, sat at the breakfast table opposite Hassan. The table was set with warm croissants, butter, strawberry preserves, chilled orange and tomato juice, and piping hot coffee "Hassan, I haven't been out of the Villa. I hope I'll see Zurich before we return to Syria,"

Hassan buttered a croissant, tore off a section and dipped it in his coffee, "I am sorry, but it has been prudent to restrict the activities of my associates."

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Assiz sipped orange juice and with a casualness that belied her concern, asked, “Is there a problem?”

Hassan finished his croissant before responding, “Yes, but it will be resolved.”

Assiz put down her glass, “Perhaps I can help.”

“That is most unlikely unless you have more knowledge than I.”

“Knowledge of what, Hassan?”

“The identity of the remaining Israeli informant.”

Assiz pulled her chair away from the wrought iron table, “Remaining informant. What are you talking about. I have heard nothing of this.”

“The Israelis placed two informants in my organization. Abbas uncovered and dealt with one.”

Assiz hesitated before asking, “Who was it, Hassan?”

“A Palestinian who valued Shekels more than loyalty.”

“Have you identified the other?”

“No, but I will.”

Assiz placed her left hand on Hassan’s shoulder. She stroked his heavily bearded face with the right. “I know this must weigh heavily, but certainly no one here is disloyal. You must not worry.

“We’ll go into the city, just the two of us.”

“That will not be possible---- not until my business is concluded.”

“What business is that Hassan?”

“A meeting with Dr. Boulton, a supporter of our cause.”

“I have not met this man.”

“No my dear, but you will. He’ll arrive within the hour; I will ask that his driver take you to Zurich while I attend to business.”

“I’d rather be with you, but if that’s not possible, a trip to Zurich even with a stranger will be a diversion.”

“Assiz. I’m certain you’ll find Dr. Boulton’s driver to be a pleasant and amusing companion. He is that and more for Dr. Boulton,” said Hassan, his implication obvious.

“He is his lover,” said Assiz. “That is why you permit him to accompany me.”

Two rust-colored Dobermans who were napping on an oriental rug in the study, rose, bared their teeth and moved silently through the breakfast room to the foyer.

“My guest and your escort have arrived?” said Hassan as he rose from his chair.

The voice on the breakfast room intercom was deep, “Dr. Boulton for Mr. Nabuli.”

Hassan, looked at the screen before pressing the control on the security system. The heavy wrought iron gates slid open. The Rolls Royce pulled into the circular drive. Hassan, the dogs at his side walked out to greet his guest.

“I don’t like those dogs,” whispered Etienne as he eyed the two Dobermans.

“I’m sure Hassan has them well trained.”

“I’ll shoot the fuckers if they get near me,” said Etienne as he moved his hand to the 9-mm Glock in his shoulder holster.

“Don’t worry about the hounds,” said Malcolm as stepped out of the car. He lowered his hand toward the larger dog’s head.

Hassan seized Malcolm’s arm “Not advisable my friend.”

Malcolm laughed , “Oh, I think it’s quite advisable. They must learn who their friends are.”

Hassan signaled the dogs. They sat.

Malcolm patted both. He said to Etienne. “They’re nice puppies; come play with them.”

Hassan scowled, his eyes narrowed. “Malcolm, you have more important things to do than fondle my dogs.”

The young Englishman stepped back, looked at Hassan appraisingly, and put his arm around the Arab’s shoulder. The Dobermans snarled.

“Hassan, it’s been too long.”

Etienne stepped out of the car, his hand still under his jacket.

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Hassan said, "Isolde, Tristan. Back."

The dogs turned and trotted through the door. They settled on the rug to continue their nap.

Etienne withdrew his hand from his jacket. He followed Malcolm and Hassan into the house.

"Malcolm, we must have privacy. Will you have Etienne drive my companion into Zurich?"

"Of course, Etienne will be delighted to be of service."

Etienne frowned.

Assiz entered the foyer and after being introduced led the three men into the living room.

Hassan said, "Malcolm has graciously agreed to have Etienne accompany you to Zurich. You'll have a chance to sightsee and shop."

"Oh Hassan, that's wonderful; but only if it causes no inconvenience."

Etienne couldn't take his eyes off the woman. Her statuesque figure was striking barely hidden by a sheer silk caftan. Her features were chiseled in flawless milk chocolate. Her ebony eyes were accented by sculpted brows. Glistening waist length coal-black hair framed her face.

Etienne said, "I've been around the boss too long, it won't be an inconvenience, it will be a pleasure."

Assiz asked, "Hassan, is there anything in Zurich you require?"

"Wine for our dinner tonight," responded Hassan. "Our hosts are hospitable but they keep a lock on the wine cellar."

Malcolm interjected, "Allow me to provide the wine."

"Quite generous but certainly not necessary," replied Hassan.

"It will be my pleasure," said Malcolm.

"Assiz please provide Dr. Boulton with the menu for this evening. Then, show Etienne to his room. And by the way my dear, I suggest you change into something more appropriate for the city."

Assiz's eyes flared, "Certainly Hassan, I wouldn't want to be an embarrassment."

She turned to Etienne, "Will an hour be time enough to freshen up?"

“Sure. And as far as I’m concerned you’re dressed just fine.”

Hassan ignored the remark. He addressed Malcolm, “Might I have a word with you before you unpack?”

“Certainly,” said Malcolm as he followed his host into the study.

An antique desk of dark mahogany dominated the room. Mahogany paneling with the patina of age covered the walls. Book shelves bent under the weight of leather bound volumes, most not read since their publication in the 1800’s. The colored panes of a Tiffany lamp blended with the rich colors of oriental rugs. A massive burgundy leather sofa was opposite the fireplace, two finely tooled chairs of identical color on either side. Malcolm sat on the sofa, Hassan on a chair.

“Malcolm the canisters from Dimona have arrived in Syria. When we’re ready they will be smuggled into Italy, and then forwarded to Sint-Maarten.”

“Excellent, Hassan. But what is it that requires my immediate attention?”

“The Mossad has infiltrated my organization. One traitor was identified and dealt with. The second is in my household.”

Malcolm said, “You can’t be serious.”

“Unfortunately I am,” replied Hassan.

“Is the second informant here or in Syria?”

“I don’t know, ” replied Hassan “ though I have my suspicions.”

“I can’t believe you let this happen.”

“I assure you our plans will not be compromised,” replied Hassan.

“You say you suspect someone. Who?”

“It saddens me, but I believe it is Assiz. If she is the second informant I will deal with her.”

“Deal with her now,” said Malcolm.

“I will not act prematurely, I must confirm my suspicions,” replied Hassan.

“Hassan, I want her out of the picture.”

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“Must I remind you that we are business associates and nothing more,” said Hassan, “Do not interfere in my affairs. You will tell me how you will deal with the De Forster security systems and how we will transport and dispose of the diamonds.”

“I will tell you nothing until the informer has been identified and eliminated.”

“We are partners Malcolm. I will not risk the future of my organization on a plan that I have not reviewed. I need details.”

“And I need to see the body of the informer,” replied Malcolm.

Chapter 13

Villa Shindell and Zurich

“Etienne, I’m sure you’ll be comfortable,” said Assiz as they entered the smallest of the three guest suites. “Robes, towels, and slippers are in the bathroom.”

“I’ll manage,” replied Etienne.

“I’m sure you will. I’ll be back in half an hour.”

Malcolm entered as Assiz departed.

Etienne said, “That’s one gorgeous lady.”

“She’s that,” replied Malcolm, “but she may well be a Mossad informant.”

“Come on Mac, she’s a Palestinian. Why would she work for the Mossad?”

“I don’t know. But what I do know is that Hassan is thinking with his prick and won’t confront her. You’ll be with her this afternoon. Get a read on her.”

“That’ll be my pleasure.”

“Enjoy her will you can, I have a feeling she won’t be with us much longer.”

As Malcolm departed, Etienne shook his head and whispered to himself, “Never can tell where either of us will be.”

Assiz knocked on the door.

“Come in,” said Etienne

“Are you ready?” asked Assiz.

“Sure am,” said Etienne as he admired his hostess. “My, my you look fine in slacks, but then you’d look even better without them.”

Assiz frowned, “Stop this nonsense; you have no interest in me.”

“Why do you say that?”

“It’s of no consequence; in any event I’m with Hassan, and you’re his guest.”

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“I may be his guest, but he sure ain’t my daddy, and you ain’t his wife.”

“Etienne, please don’t make this afternoon uncomfortable.”

Etienne ignored her comment and said, “We’ll take the Rolls.”

“No,” said Assiz, “we’ll take Hassan’s Toyota, it will be better in town.”

“That’s fine with me,” replied Etienne.

On the road to Zurich, a black Mercedes pulled behind the Toyota, stayed there for a moment, swung to the inside lane and began to pass. It slowed. The driver stared at Assiz.

“What’s that fool doing, eyeing you; I should run him off the road.”

“Ignore him,” said Assiz. She put her hand out the window and gestured. The Mercedes passed.

Smiling, Etienne asked, “Where’d you pick up on the horns?”

“From a bellman in the hotel where I worked. He was Italian. He gave the fingers to anyone who didn’t tip.”

“That man looked you over real good,” said Etienne

Assiz laughed, “Just a horny old goat.”

Etienne replied, “There’s no way I’ll get used to these tight assed Swiss. They come on as real proper and then light on any thing with tits. Mac’s girlfriend gets the once over whenever she’s here.”

“His girlfriend?”

“Yeah. Ariana Wright, a bona fide ball buster, whose granddaddy is one of the richest men in the world.”

“Etienne, why is your boss meeting with Hassan?” queried Assiz.

Etienne replied, “They have a common interest.”

“And that is?”

“They both hate Jews,” replied Etienne.

“But that doesn’t explain why they’re meeting. Hassan said he had business with Dr. Boulton.”

“Yeah, they have business, but that’s enough about them. What you doin’ here? The A’rab doesn’t seem your type.”

“What type is that?”

“Old, mean, and ugly.”

Assiz responded, “Hassan’s a good man, and very generous.”

Etienne said, “Yeah, sure.”

The Toyota sped onto Universitatstrasse, past the University of Zurich, onto Ramistrasse, and finally over the Quai Bridge at the end of the Zurichsee. Assiz opened the window. Her hair fluttered in the wind. “I’ve never seen so many boats; and the wonderful buildings, so old and well cared for.”

“So this is your first time in Zurich?”

“Yes, my first time outside the Middle East.”

Etienne said, “I’m hungry. How about a picnic at the Marina we passed. I’ll pick up the wine and something for lunch, maybe cold cuts, bread, and cheese.”

“That sounds delightful.”

“You can window shop while I get the wine and food,” said Etienne.

They arrived at the corner of Bahnhof and Augustinergasse, parked the car in an underground garage, and walked out into the shopping district. The weather was perfect with scattered cumulus clouds.

Etienne said, “There’s a grocer on the corner. You window shop and meet back here in ‘bout half an hour. If one of those Swiss goats latches on to you give him more than the finger.”

Assiz laughed. She watched Etienne enter the food shop. She walked in the opposite direction. The black Mercedes pulled alongside.

The driver lowered the passenger window, “Avi’s worried about you. One of his informants was killed. He thinks it’s time for you to pull out.”

“Not yet. I’m onto something; an Englishman, Malcolm Boulton, is meeting with Nabuli. Stay near the Villa. If you see me outside the gate, get me.”

The driver said, “Get in, there’s no point in further risk.”

“Not until I find out what Hassan is up to.”

At the grocer’s, Etienne engaged in a battle of non-comprehension with the shopkeeper whose already ruddy complexion turned beet red. He seemed not to understand the American’s request. Five bottles of wine were lined up beside the cash register. Etienne jabbed at Malcolm’s wine list. The balding shopkeeper exclaimed, “Ich habe das nicht. Nein, Nein.”

Assiz walked into the store and saw Etienne at the register, “He doesn’t have that wine,” she said. She smiled at the shopkeeper and said, “Haben sie ein anderer das ist sehr gut.”

“Ya, Ya, ich habe wunderbar,” replied the merchant, relieved that he no longer had to deal with the American.

“Sehr gut, danke” said Assiz.

“He said that he doesn’t have the Merlot you want, but he’s picking something very good, and I suspect, considerably more expensive.”

Etienne said, “You speak German?”

“Enough to get by,” replied Assiz.

Assiz smiled as the shopkeeper, Merlot in hand, returned. She said, this time in English, “Two bottles of Hugel Gewürztraminer, a baguette, two Anjou pears, a half pound of ripe brie, and a quarter pound of English Stilton.”

The shopkeeper smirked, looked at Etienne, and addressed Assiz, “Certainly, dear lady.”

“What the hell? That sonnabitch didn’t understand a word I said, and now he understands you just fine.”

The shopkeeper bustled away for the Gewürztraminer, stopped at the produce area for the fruit, and returned with two bottles and two pears. He went behind the delicatessen counter, cut the Brie and Stilton, wrapped it, and handed the packages to Assiz.

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As the shopkeeper returned to the cash register, Etienne said, "I'm gonna kick his ass."

Assiz whispered, "Relax it not only you he resents, it's probably all Americans, especially handsome ones who might steal his wife or daughter."

Etienne eyes expressed amusement. He put his hand under Assiz's chin, turned her head toward him. "Yes sir, you're a hell of a woman. It's you I'd like to steal."

"You don't have to steal me; I'm delighted to picnic with you."

"And maybe more?" asked Etienne as they walked out of the store and to the car.

They arrived at the Marina, and as she set the food and wine on a picnic table she asked, "How did you meet Dr. Boulton?"

"I finished my tour in the Navy and decided to make something out of my life. I enrolled at B.U. in Boston and took courses in business administration. I made ends meet by working evenings as a bartender. Mac came into the bar where I worked. A hard ass who didn't like white boys hassled him. Mac may not seem tough but he's damn good with his hands. He put the guy in some sort of choke hold and ran him out the door. We talked; he offered me a job. Said I'd learn about the security business. Instead I've landed up being his house nigger."

"And his lover," said Assiz.

"What the hell. Where'd you get that idea?"

"From Hassan."

"Your A'rab's full of shit."

Assiz took his hand, "Don't be upset. It doesn't matter to me."

Etienne said, "That's the problem. You don't take me seriously."

"I'm with Hassan."

"You best be careful."

"Really, what makes you say that?"

"That man doesn't trust you and neither does Mac."

"Hassan trusts me. And Dr. Boulton doesn't know me."

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During lunch there was an uneasy silence. The picnic was less than idyllic. Etienne finished his wine. He looked at Assiz, his eyes softened as he said, "Like I said before, you best be careful."

"Why are you telling me?"

"Because I'm tired of hearing Mac rant and rave about the Rothmans and the Jews. It won't be long before he calls me a nigger. We'd both be better off if we split."

"You might be justified in leaving Dr. Boulton, but there's no reason for me to leave Hassan."

"Believe what you want," said Etienne.

Assiz rose from the bench, "It would be best if we kept this conversation to ourselves."

"Yeah, but I've had it with Mac and you're A'rab. I'm out of here."

The drive back to Winterthur was uneventful. As they passed through the Villa gate Assiz said, "I enjoyed the afternoon, and please don't worry about me, Hassan is my friend."

Etienne responded, "Maybe, but Mac sure isn't."

As the car entered the courtyard, Hassan ended his phone conversation with Abbas Hilmi. With the dogs at his side, he met Assiz and Etienne at the door, "You're back early."

"Yes, I wanted time to help Hejaz prepare dinner. He still needs guidance."

"Thank you my dear, I'm sure everything will be perfect." Hassan turned to Etienne.

"Malcolm wishes to see you. He's in the study."

Etienne grumbled, "Yeah, but keep those dogs away from me."

"Don't worry, they'll ignore you," said Hassan. After Etienne left Hassan gripped Assiz's arm, "I was concerned you might leave me."

"Leave. Why would you think that? Before Hassan could reply Assiz said, "You trust me, don't you Hassan?"

"You have not given me a reason to do otherwise. But I'm afraid Malcolm is convinced that you are an Israeli informant."

"Hassan, you know that's absurd. The Israelis killed my family. I would never help them."

Hassan's voice hardened, "I wish to believe you."

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“I love you Hassan. If I were to choose someone to mistrust, it would be the Englishman.”

“Why?” asked Hassan.

“Etienne says that he is consumed with hate. Hate for the Jews and, like most of the English, probably for Arabs.”

Hassan replied, “Malcolm is a driven man. He seeks money, power and most, I think, revenge. As long as he is of use to me his prejudices are of no concern.”

Assiz removed her arm from Hassan’s grip. She took him in her arms and said, “I hope it is as you say my love.”

Hassan drew away from her and said, “Of that I can assure you.”

“I’ll attend to dinner,” said Assiz.

“Do that. I have business to attend to,” said Hassan.

The tone of his voice sent a barely disguised shiver through Assiz.

Hassan entered the study where Malcolm was reading a novel by Flaubert. Malcolm put the book aside, glanced at Etienne, and said, “Etienne tells me that they were followed by a black Mercedes, which, after several miles, pulled up alongside and remained there until Assiz acknowledged the made an obscene gesture which I’m sure was a signal. The woman is an informant.”

Etienne rose from his chair, “Mac, you’re making too much of it. That woman’s no spy. The driver of the Mercedes was a horny old goat and she dissed him.”

Hassan glared at Etienne before turning to Malcolm, “Our discussions are of no concern to your driver. He enjoys Assiz’s company. I think it best that he join her in the kitchen.”

Malcolm said, “Etienne is aware of my plans; he’ll stay.”

“Forget it Mac, I’m out of here.”

“Stay,” said Malcolm.

“What am I, your fucking dog?” said Etienne as he rose from his chair. The Arab is right, I’d rather spend time with his woman.”

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Hassan's face reddened. "Your insolence is intolerable."

"Insolence, that's a big word for an Arab; you're the one handing your woman off; probably cause you can't handle her yourself."

Malcolm interjected, "Enough of this. Etienne, do as you please."

Etienne left the room. "You should not be so presumptuous as to dictate who will be privy to my plans," said Malcolm, "You're the one with the problem."

"If I have a problem I will deal with it, but I won't tolerate your driver's insolence. Now tell me how we will proceed?"

"After DeForster's security system and personnel have been disabled, your people will move the diamonds from the vaults into vans for transport. Once they are in our possession De Forster will be forced to buy *Rough* on the open market if they wish to fulfill their commitments to their sightholders. The Russians and Africans, upon whom DeForster depends, will have committed their future production to me and the Syndicate will lose all credibility."

"You say 'will have'. So you do not have commitments from the producers?"

"Not yet, but I will by the end of my stay in Geneva. I can assure you I will bring the Rothmans and their Syndicate to their knees."

"And the Israeli's?" asked Hassan.

"They will receive no diamonds from my new cartel. Their economy will be in shambles.."

"Don't you mean our cartel?" asked Hassan.

Malcolm realized his mistake, "I'm sorry Hassan, I didn't realize that you have an interest in the diamond business. I assumed that the destruction of the Israeli economy was your goal."

"A means to an end. My people deserve a future; a homeland and the means to support it. That is my wish."

Malcolm responded, "Of course Hassan. You have my word, they will have the future they deserve."

"As partners in the new cartel?"

“Yes, as partners.”

“ Then we will proceed, but I must know more. We must deal with the details, for that is where the devil resides.”

“Certainly Hassan, but I can assure you that we won’t encounter that charming fellow. This operation is meticulously planned, and I hope will be well executed.” Malcolm continued, “The nerve gas in the canisters that your people removed from Dimona will disable the occupants of each facility for ninety minutes. Your associates will have masks to protect them.

“Five minutes after the canisters are put in place they will be activated. At that time I will cut off communications between the vaults and De Forster headquarters and unlock any areas that are secured. Trucks will arrive at each facility fifteen minutes after the activation of the canisters. Your people will have one hour and fifteen minutes to load the diamonds, dispose of the gas masks. and return to their work areas where they will appear to reawaken with the other employees.”

“And this is all arranged?”

“Of course, except for the briefing of your people. Now tell me Hassan. Are they reliable and in positions that will permit them to do what is required?”

Hassan unlocked the top drawer of his desk, and handed Malcolm a brown folder with twenty-one dossiers . “See for yourself.”

Malcolm spent the next half hour reviewing Hassan’s account of his recruiting efforts.

The De Beers facilities in India were the first to be infiltrated.

Hassan became aware of the Sen brothers when he reviewed a list of individuals who had left South Africa with India as a destination. The Sens were disillusioned and bitter. They immigrated to South Africa in the booming economy of the early seventies, hoping to establish themselves in the diamond industry. Their experiences with apartheid, their treatment as non-whites, had been infuriating and humiliating. Even with the prospects of financial gain their status as second-class members of society was unacceptable. They returned to Bombay. They needed money and wanted revenge. Hassan promised both. The Sens now worked for De Beers; Tapas, the older brother as an

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accounting clerk in the new facility and Rajid as assistant plant manager. They had performed well in their jobs, were well liked and trusted.

The Syndicate's Antwerp facility for processing industrial diamonds had been easy to infiltrate. The need for low level employees was substantial and Hassan placed two Palestinians, whom he had provided with credentials identifying them as Syrian Jews, in the sorting area. They were trained by the Syndicate and performed admirably. In Antwerp Jews were treated well. Most importantly they were trusted. Joseph Dabbah and Jacob Hassan would serve him well. The third recruit, Miriam Abrams, was a Belgian Jew, a trained nurse, unmarried, who, with idealistic aspirations had gone to South Africa to work in Soweto. She met and fell in love with a black physician who, shortly after their engagement, was accused of anti-government activity and imprisoned. After a prolonged interrogation he died and she fled the country. The South Africans were her mortal enemies.

London teemed with prospects. Hassan found two of his four recruits already in the employ of the Syndicate. Heinrich Stetzman and Ludwig Metzger were Germans, and former classmates at the Hochschule in Berlin where they learned that the Jews had caused the Second World War and then undermined the German war effort. As far-fetched and unreal as their views were, they became a reality for these two young men who came to London to attend graduate school in Economics. Their subsequent employment at the Syndicate's currency trading department was part of their scheme to create huge trading losses for the Zionist controlled Syndicate. They would undermine the power of Jews in the diamond business and re-establish the Aryan supremacy that had reigned during the era of Cecil Rhodes.

The alternative course offered by Nabuli would inflict even greater damage and received their enthusiastic support. This enthusiasm belied their view of Nabuli as a "Schwarze", and an arrogant black savage."

The other two recruits were women, Jane Lydell an idealistic Cambridge graduate married to a Palestinian lawyer, and Phyllis Ringer, the daughter of a black South African lawyer who had

attended the London School of Economics. Jane worked in the public relations department and Phyllis in the investment department. Both women had experienced apartheid and both were dedicated to its abolition.

New York was a very different story. The infiltration there occurred at a low, but critical level. Two blacks, Ridgely Hull and Joe Itkins both worked as security guards. They were Black Muslims. They hated Jews and South Africans.

Mustaf Karingi, alias Morris Karin, and Jahid Samedi, alias Jerry Samuels were both Libyans. They were professional terrorists, infiltrated into the United States with false papers in the late seventies. They were skilled in the art of destruction and had patiently waited for the right opportunity. When Khadafi decided that direct action in the U.S. was too dangerous they came to work for the PLO. They now worked for Nabuli. Morris was the plant manager for the new facility and Jerry was the assistant purchasing agent.

Though DeForster, in its proclamations had been an opponent to apartheid Capetown proved fertile ground for recruitment. The Syndicate provided employment for blacks, with equal pay and equal opportunity, except at the executive level that was the dominion of white Anglo-Saxons.

Nabuli had recruited Joseph Bly, Nellie Attila, Ronald Wilke and Jesse Savimbe. Bly worked as a diamond sorter, Attila a cook, Wilke a security guard and Savimbe a chauffeur for the managing director. De Forster was not their enemy but it was a remnant of the past, the last dominion of the white Boers and colonialists who had ruled their country. If De Forster fell, the government and the blacks of South Africa would control what was rightfully theirs.

In Israel security was unrelenting, but Hassan's persistence was rewarded. Over a period of three months four members of his organization were hired by a building maintenance firm in Tel Aviv whose personnel manager, though born of Jewish parents, dedicated himself to the aid of Palestinians living in Israel. When his firm received the contract for cleaning and maintenance at DeForster's facility in Ramat Gan he became Hassan's unwitting accomplice. Mohammed El

Dheilan, Abd El Shaman, Nauru Zahid, and Abbas Hilmi entered the DeForster facility at six a.m. six days a week. The dossier on Beni Sakhr had been removed from the folder.

Malcolm completed his review, placed the folder on the desk and said, “You seem to have chosen your people well and I am comfortable that we can proceed. Now as to the timing. In October and early November the vaults will be full of goods for the holiday season. We will empty them on November 5th.”

“I’ve made arrangements for a meeting place on the island of Sint-Maarten. Your people should arrange to arrive on Thursday October 15. We will meet on the 16th. I will brief them and distribute the canisters and gas masks. They will return to their jobs on the 18th.”

“Why have you chosen this island?”

“Two reasons. First because there is minimal narcotics traffic and the island doesn’t attract the attention of drug enforcement officials and second because immigration and customs are lax so as not to offend vacationers.”

Without warning, Assiz entered the room. Both men turned. Hassan returned the folder to the desk drawer.

“Hassan, I’m sorry to interrupt, but there is a problem.”

“I told you that we were not to be disturbed. What is this problem?”

“Dr. Boulton’s driver has gone.”

“What do you mean gone?” asked Malcolm.

“He had his bags. He got into a taxi.”

“Did he say anything?” asked Malcolm.

“He asked me to leave with him.”

Chapter 14

That Evening

It was time to return to Israel, but, to the young Israeli agent, the prospect of more information was irresistible. Tonight, while the household slept, she would find the folder Hassan shared with Malcolm. Then, with what she was certain would be valuable intelligence, she would leave. Hopefully the agent she met in Zurich would, as agreed, be parked outside the gate.

At eight that evening Malcolm entered the dining room. He wore a blue blazer, an monogrammed silk shirt, a dark blue Sulka tie, and tan gabardine slacks. Hassan arrived moments after his guest. His flowing robe was without a flaw and startlingly white. Assiz followed. She was stunning. This time in European clothes; a beige, full-length skirt, a shear, pale-yellow blouse of Italian silk that did little to veil the darkness of her breasts. A twenty two carat gold mesh necklace gleamed against the yellowed darkness of her breasts.

Assiz had supervised the preparation of the meal. The table was set with crystal and silver from the vaults of Credit Suisse. Broiled prawns from Portugal garnished with sprigs of dill and paper-thin slices of lemon were presented on a bed of rock salt. A bottle of crisp white Burgundy was poured. Malcolm ignored the food and drank the wine. The departure of Etienne had put him in a foul mood. He spoke sporadically and with vitriol directed at the Rothmans, the Jews, Ariana, and Etienne. Assiz listened attentively. Hassan wanted the evening to end.

Beef Wellington arrived, the crust delicate and flaky, the meat rare and warm. Hejaz carved. Malcolm declined. Neither Hassan or Assiz displayed an appetite. A bottle of Hospice de Beaune remained open but untouched.

Assiz recognized that there was nothing to be gained by prolonging the dinner. "Hassan, Malcolm, please excuse me. I'll leave you to your business."

"It's too bad Etienne isn't here to tuck you in," said Malcolm.

"Assiz, our guest is taking the loss of his companion badly and chooses his words poorly."

“You’re a sensitive wog aren’t you.” said Malcolm.

Hassan rose from the table. He glowered as he said, “Do not address me in this manner. If I did not have so much vested in this scheme of yours, I would have nothing more to do with you.”

“But you will Hassan, you will deal with me because your people have a great deal to gain.”

“Your right, I will finish what we have started, but not unless you pull yourself together and deal with the situation at hand. Etienne knows too much, and is disgruntled. Where has he’s gone?”

“I could care less; the nigger is probably on his way to Geneva to steal as much as he can from the Chalet.”

“He must be dealt with.”

“Believe me I’ll deal with him and you will deal with your bitch.”

Assiz listened. She closed her door as the two men left the dining room. Hassan went to his room. Tonight he would not enjoy the pleasures of her bed.

She undressed and showered. Neither willing nor able to sleep she remembered Benjamin Stein the man who had rescued her from a refugee camp in Palestine. He adopted her, ensured that she had an education, and most importantly, used his influence in the Government to guarantee her Israeli citizenship.

She would never forget him, a man with neither uniform nor fear who walked into the most violent camp in Gaza. At his side was a teenage boy.

The man saw her; shabbily clothed, and alone, cringing in the corner between a concrete wall and a tin shack. He approached her, lifted her chin, and gazed into her eyes. She sensed his compassion.

The man turned to the boy and said a few words. The boy turned away and walked to the camp office.

When he returned he said, “Father, I spoke to the woman in charge of the red crescent. She said the girl’s name is Assiz. Her parents were killed in the shelling.”

“Is anyone caring for her?”

“No, the woman said she roams the camp. She sleeps in the aid tent when there is room and eats when food is available.”

“There’s something special about this girl,” said Benjamin.

“There’s something special about everyone. But here, living like this it is destroyed.”

“Avi, I am taking her to our home. Your mother needs a girl to love.”

“And I will have a sister,” responded Avi who then turned to the girl and said, in the stilted Arabic he had learned in school. You will have a home with us. You will be my sister.”

Assiz, was terrified. Despite the warmth of the words, she knew that Israeli’s took away Palestinians only to imprison them. Avi recognized her fear. He took her hand and said, “Don’t be scared. No one will harm you.” Reluctantly she accompanied the man and boy into the Red Crescent tent. After signing a few papers Benjamin turned to Assiz and said, “Now dear child, you will have a home.”

It was a week before she spoke, first to Avi, then to Benjamin and Miriam. In a year she was fluent. Her adoptive parents did nothing to diminish her heritage and she was at home in the Arab community in Tel Aviv as well as the school she attended. She matured into a beautiful woman.

As do all Israelis, she served in the Military. Her language skills led her into Army intelligence where she recognized that she could help to build a bridge toward peace. She was loved by some and resented by others. Her skills were coveted by all. Despite Benjamin’s perfunctory objections she joined and was welcomed into the Mossad where she worked undercover in Israel’s Palestinian communities.

Her first major assignment was the infiltration of Hassan Nabuli’s organization. Nabuli was to all appearances an activist, not a terrorist but still, the Israeli Intelligence community was wary of his growing influence. She found Nabuli to be intelligent, kind, and thoughtful, but she quickly recognized that the heat of anger and vengeance simmered beneath a façade of political compromise.

Her reverie ended.

Hoping that Hassan and the others were asleep she dressed. Black slacks, a dark blue turtleneck sweater, and black loafers. She opened her door and peered down the dark hallway. She left her room, and staying close to the wall, felt her way to the first floor.

In the kitchen, a light glimmered from the refrigerator's water dispenser. Using it as a beacon she moved forward. In the dim light she found the drawer that contained cutlery. She slid it open, reached into the back, and grasped a short bladed paring knife. As she removed it, the razor-sharp edge of a long carving knife sliced through her flesh. She dropped the paring knife. The clatter as it hit the marble floor startled her. She sucked blood from her finger.

The dogs, entered the kitchen. Their greenish gold eyes were malevolent. She bent down and her eyes on the dogs, felt for the knife.

She rose and hesitantly made her way to the study. The dogs followed.

She walked to the desk and turned on the stained glassed lamp. Neither moved from the door, instead, their eyes followed her every movement.

She inspected the top drawer of the desk where Hassan had placed the documents he shared with Boulton. She inserted the blade of the paring knife next to the lock and pressed down, the knife bent, the lock held. She inserted the knife again and twisted, this time wood splintered and the lock loosened. Once again she inserted the knife and lifted. The sound of wood splintering aroused the dogs. They moved forward.

Assiz twisted the lock and the drawer opened. She took out the brown folder, opened it, and held it beneath the lamp. Blood from her finger dropped onto the page. Her eyes moved over the names and places. Satisfied, she placed the folder in her shoulder bag and walked toward the foyer.

As she reached the front door, the dogs who had followed, responded to a high-pitched whistle from the top of the stairwell. They bared their teeth and separated; Tristan to Assiz's right, Isolde to her left. Assiz tightened her grip on the paring knife as she grasped the brass knob with her left hand.

Isolde lunged, sinking her teeth into Assiz's left forearm. She let go of the knob, swung around, and kicked, the sole of her shoe hitting the eighty-five pound dog squarely in the chest.

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Tristan sprang for Assiz's knife hand. Assiz plunged the blade into his throat. The dog swallowed blood, gave a sickening whimper, and fell to the floor.

Isolde attacked, this time sinking her teeth into Assiz's right hand. The knife fell to the floor. Isolde's back arched, and her feet dug into the carpet. A shot rang out.

Malcolm stood at the top of the steps, gun in hand, Hassan behind him.

Assiz stumbled out the door, staggered to the courtyard and fell.

Chapter 15

International Diamond Security Organization (IDSO)

Geneva, Switzerland November 12, 2003

The windows of IDSO headquarters were dark except for those of Walter Gordon's fifth floor office. The sixty-three year old director sat in his aged brown leather chair, brought with him from his office at MI5. File folders were laid out in orderly rank on the left side of his oak desk. A diamond-shaped crystal ink well and an 18 kt gold pen, gifts from Alex Rothman, were on the right. Walter addressed his colleague, "Alex called this morning. He's delighted with operations at the new facilities. He asked that I congratulate you on a job well done."

George Deveraux, the nub of an English oval cigarette in hand, replied. "That's kind of him, but I'm not pleased, not pleased at all; a three and a half minute loss of communication that can't be explained. That is not a job well done. It's got to be something Boulton wrote into the program. My people reviewed every line of code in the Argus programs and couldn't identify the problem."

"That, I'm afraid is not our only problem," replied Walter, his involvement with this Palestinian Nabuli is, at best, problematic. I called Kimmel and asked him to look into his relationship with Boulton."

"And what did he say?" asked Deveraux.

"That they would, but I'm sure he already knew and that he's holding back, waiting to see if he can take advantage of the situation.

"You have experience dealing with the Jews. I want you to remind them what's at stake. Demand their cooperation. Let them know that we consider the Palestinian to be their problem and we expect them to deal with him. And George, let them know that if they don't, you will---- after you eliminate Boulton."

"Should I consult prior to action?"

“No,” responded Walter, “Do what needs doing, and do it expeditiously, and if at all possible, discreetly.

Walter continued, “On a positive note, we have word from London that negotiations with the Russians are going well. They’re ready to sign a five-year contract for the bulk of their production.

“And our negotiations with Botswana?” asked George

Walter responded, “A bit more tenuous, but I expect that they’ll be successfully concluded.”

George asked, “Then why in blazes has Boulton been communicating with Beritov, Donbo, and Akimbe? He seems to have accomplished nothing.”

Walter placed the inkwell in its prior position and said, “A bit odd isn’t it?”

George commented, “And nothing that he seems to be up to explains Nabuli’s involvement.”

Walter rose from his chair. “But we are about to find out.”

“How?” asked Deveraux.

Walter replied with a smugness that exceeded what George had been accustomed to.

“Nabuli has been in residence at Credit Suisse’s Villa at Winterthur; Boulton visited. The bank, like ourselves, wants to know what their clients are up to. They maintain audio surveillance of facilities frequented by their clients, the Villa in Winterthur is one of them.

“We provide the bank’s security department with a list of our current and former employees, our sightholders, and others we do business with and they provide us with information that they think will be of interest. We, of course, reciprocate.

“Boulton, as an ex-employee, was on our list. His name came up during conversations recorded at the Villa and , of course, I received a copy of the tapes.”

“Have you listened to them?” asked George.

Walter responded, “No, but I believe we ought.”

Chapter 16

Geneva, Switzerland

November 14, 2003

Ariana's flight to Geneva left Newark International Airport at 6:55 in the evening. The Boeing 767-200's First Class cabin, capable of accommodating 25 passengers, was sparsely occupied. Ariana sat alone in the second row, unaware of the Mossad agent in an aisle seat in the third row of the crowded main cabin.

"Miss Wright, can I offer you a cocktail before departure?" asked a young steward.

"Yes, a whisky sour, and then I'd like to take a nap. Please don't wake me."

"Should I put aside a salad for later in the flight?"

"Yes, thank you, if it's no trouble."

"None at all."

The steward returned with the whisky sour. Ariana finished it as the plane taxied onto the runway. One half hour into the flight the steward brought her a blanket and pillow. Ariana drew the window shade and fell into an uneasy sleep.

"Miss Wright, we're on our final approach to Geneva," said the steward as he placed his hand on her shoulder.

Ariana awakened, her eyes reddened from the recirculated dry air, "I can't believe I slept through the flight."

"You must have needed the rest. Would you care for some juice?"

"Orange would be great. I'll be back in a minute," said Ariana as she put aside the blanket and headed to the rest room. She splashed her face with cold water, reapplied her lipstick, and returned to her seat. The steward brought her orange juice and an extra glass of ice and water, and said "You slept through breakfast; I'm afraid we don't have the time for anything other than juice."

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“That’s fine. I’ll have breakfast at the hotel.”

Ariana passed through Customs and Immigration. A limousine from the Noga Hilton was waiting. The driver opened the rear door. “Welcome to Geneva Miss Wright.”

“Thanks, I can’t wait to get to the hotel and get some rest.”

The limo pulled onto the airport road and headed west toward Chamonix, drove a short distance and turned south on the road into Geneva. Within ten minutes the limo pulled up to the entrance of the Noga Hilton.

A black Mercedes with two occupants pulled to the curb fifty feet from the entrance. A bald heavy set man in the rear said to the driver, “Call Stein and tell him the woman has arrived at the Noga Hilton.”

The hotel manager, Jean-Pierre, was waiting in the lobby as Ariana entered. “Miss Wright, Mr. Matossian called yesterday. He was concerned about your safety, and asked that we take certain precautions, actually no different than those we take when he is our guest. We have changed the elevator key that allows access to the penthouse floor, and only you, myself, and the on-duty security officer have copies. There will be no other guests on this floor during your stay. The household staff and room service will be accompanied by one of our security people when their services are required.”

“My Grandfather is a very cautious man, and I’m truly sorry if my stay causes any inconvenience.”

“Miss Wright, it is our pleasure,” said Jean-Pierre as he escorted her onto the elevator and to her Grandfather’s penthouse suite. Your luggage will be up shortly. Would you care for anything from room service?”

“Thanks, I slept through breakfast on the plane; juice, coffee, croissant, and preserves would be perfect.”

“I’ll have it sent up. If you require anything else, please call me directly, or if I’m not here ask for my assistant, Carlo Lampert.”

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“Thank you Jean-Pierre.”

As the manager left the suite, Ariana opened the French doors onto the balcony. The view of Lake Lemman was magnificent. The morning sun and the blue, cloudless sky belied the fact that for Ariana it was the middle of the night. She left the door open and went to the telephone that sat on an elaborate writing desk. She called her Grandfather’s private number in Paris. His secretary answered and immediately recognized Ariana’s voice.

“Ariana, your Grandfather has been waiting to hear from you. He’s very concerned.”

“I know, but there’s nothing to worry about. Malcolm and his friends wouldn’t dare do anything to alienate him.”

“It’s not Malcolm that bothers him. He was furious when he found out the Mossad is using you.”

“He may be upset but I had to help. Let me speak to him.”

Dikran took the phone call in his office, “Ariana, I still can’t believe that you let yourself be dragged from the frying pan into the fire. Involving yourself in a Mossad operation is sheer insanity. I told you that I would deal with Boulton. Why didn’t you listen?”

“Grandpa, believe me I understand how you feel, but I got myself and my friends into this situation, and the least I can do is help them get out.”

“That’s noble of you, but you have no idea of the ruthlessness of the men you are involved with. The Mossad will do anything to protect Israel’s interest. To them you are a pawn in a dangerous game. Fortunately I have enough influence to extricate you from this mess.”

“Grandpa, I’m going to see this through. I’ll find out what Malcolm is up to, and then I’ll be done.”

Dikran responded, “For your sake, and theirs, I hope so. As Jean-Pierre told you, I’ve instructed the hotel staff to take precautions to ensure your safety. If you insist on proceeding, go to your dinner. But then I insist that you leave Geneva. The Mossad will be content with whatever you give them. After this I guarantee you will hear or see nothing more of them and you will do nothing

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to encourage further contact. If it becomes known that you are working with them your career will be ended. No one wants to be involved in their business.

“On a more pleasant note, and speaking of business, your mother told me about the possibility of your partnering with Lawrence Winston. You have my wholehearted support; you will have the money you need.”

“You dear sweet man, you’re bribing me aren’t you?”

“I wouldn’t call it that. I’m insuring the future you deserve, a future with out Malcolm Boulton.

“Grandpa, after dinner tonight I can assure you he’ll be out of my life.”

“My dear girl, I have a great deal of confidence in you, but still I’d be more comfortable if you let me handle everything.”

“Grandpa, there’s no need for you to worry. I love you.”

“Please Ariana ----”

“Don’t worry, and thanks for the use of the suite. I’ll see you soon.”

Ariana walked through the penthouse. There were three bedrooms, each with an elaborate bathroom. The huge living room and dining room overlooked the lake. A fully equipped kitchen was used by the hotel chef to provide meals for meetings that took place on Dikran’s occasional stays.

She picked the smallest of the three bedrooms, unpacked her two suitcases, and prepared to take a shower. She was interrupted by a voice coming from the intercom at the entrance. “Miss Wright, I have your breakfast. Would you like me to bring it in and set it out for you?”

“No thanks, just leave the cart at the door. I’ll get it in a few minutes.”

The shower in the suite was state-of-the-art. In two minutes the glass enclosure was filled with steam. Ariana set the thermostat to deliver 99° water into the steam and stepped in. The steam and warm water was soothing. After five minutes she got out, toweled off with an oversized plush towel, put on a white terry cloth robe, and wrapped a second smaller towel, turban like, around her hair.

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She walked out into the foyer, opened the door to the hallway and wheeled in the cart. The croissant was still warm, and a small caddy contained cherry, raspberry, and orange preserves. Coffee, hot milk, and chilled, freshly squeezed orange juice were in three insulated carafes.

As she ate, Ariana speculated on the evening to come. She had met the Russian, Beritov, in London, where she had approached him on Malcolm's behalf. Beritov had made a good impression on her. He seemed honest and forthright, willing to deal with Malcolm if it did not conflict with his responsibilities to his employer, the Russian Bureau of Mineral Development. On the other hand, the two Botswanians whom she had met on a party hosted by Morris, were intolerable. They were officious, greedy, and rude. Only after Morris informed them that she was Dikran Matossian's granddaughter did their behavior improve. Obsequious fawning replaced rude flirtation.

She glanced at the dossiers Avi had given her; almost immediately she put them aside. The backgrounds of the men she would dine with were unimportant. Tonight she would ascertain their relationship with Malcolm, and never again deal with them.

It was noon when the phone rang. She put down the book she had been reading. The receptionist informed her that a Dr. Boulton was on the line.

"Yes, Malcolm"

"I'll pick you up at 7:30."

"That won't be necessary," said Ariana, "I'll use the hotel limousine."

"I think it best to arrive together," said Malcolm.

"For the last time," replied Ariana

Chapter 17

Geneva

The biannual meetings of the United Nations Office of Economic Development provided Mikhael Beritov with the opportunity to develop friendships, eat well, and acquire a taste for the affluence of the West.

Leonard Gelman's elegant apartment at the edge Lake Geneva was adjacent to the wooded grounds of the Palais des Nations. It was Beritov's to use during his stays in Geneva, a token of appreciation from the largest De Forster sightholder in Antwerp who was also Beritov's most important "gray" market customer. Michael, upon his arrival in Geneva went directly to the apartment, napped and dressed for his meeting with Donbo and Akimbe whom he despised. Unfortunately, as Chairman of the first conference he have to greet them, and to make matters worse, spend the evening with them at Boulton's dinner at the Richmonde. Were it not for the possibility that Boulton would make an offer that would enable him to break De Forster's yoke on the Russian diamond industry he would have dined with Gelman.

Moise Akimbe and Nelson Donbo arrived on a chartered flight from Botswana. A porter carried their baggage through Customs and Immigration and a waiting limousine took them to the Noga Hilton. They unpacked, showered, became somewhat sober, and dressed.

The driver, whom they had engaged for the duration of their stay in Geneva, delivered them to the Palais des Nations. They entered and were greeted by a strikingly beautiful oriental receptionist.

Nelson addressed the young woman, "Inform Michael Beritov of our arrival."

Responding to the discourtesy with which the request was made, the receptionist replied brusquely, "Your names?"

Before they answered she took an incoming call.

Donbo and Akimbe interrupted her conversation. "Your rudeness will be noted. Now tell Mr. Beritov that the representatives from Botswana have arrived.

"Certainly, as soon as I finish with this call."

Five minutes passed before Beritove entered the lobby. He greeted the Africans with studied indifference. "Nelson, Moise. You had a pleasant flight?"

Moise replied, "Satisfactory. We're here to see our offices, and prepare for the work ahead."

Mikhael did not betray his amusement as he replied with feigned warmth.

"Certainly, I know you have many issues to deal with; I'll take you to your office."

Beautifully appointed offices were on both sides of the luxuriously carpeted hallway, and the two Africans looked at each in anticipation. At the end of the main corridor they turned right, passed through a steel door, and walked down one flight of uncarpeted stairs to a dingy passage with a brightly lit Coke machine at its far end.

"We're almost there; just around the corner," said Mikhael, as he awaited the response of the diplomats to their quarters.

Mikhael motioned to his left, and the three men entered a room, barren and barely large enough to accommodate them. Two undersized gray metal desks, two straight-back metal chairs covered with worn green naughahide, and a slightly rusty filing cabinet, its drawers open and littered with old documents, filled the space.

Nelson glared at the Russian, "This is our office? Impossible!"

Mikhael, delighted with their response, answered, "It is the best available at this time."

There was a moment of silence.

Knowing that they would never step foot in the office again, Moise changed the subject. "Mikhael, you know the Wright woman?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you trust her?"

"Why do you ask?" replied Mikhael.

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Moise smiled. "Why do you not answer? You are sensitive, my friend."

"That is not your concern," snapped Mikhael, "and I am not your friend."

As the Russian turned to leave, Moise said, "Mikhael, the Wright woman spoke of this Englishman as a buyer for our diamonds. With De Forster playing their new game, our stockpiles have grown, as I'm sure have yours. Both our countries need hard currency. We should co-ordinate our strategy."

Mikhael turned back, closed the door, and seated himself on the edge of the nearest desk.

"I cannot imagine that the requirements of her friend would be of any real significance to either of us; although his association with Goldman and Miss Wright gives him some credibility. She is, after all, Dikran Matossian's granddaughter."

Nelson casually investigated the contents of the filing cabinet, seemingly ignoring the conversation. Moise sat behind the desk in the far corner and asked, "Did you know that Boulton worked for De Forster? I have heard that he was involved with the development of their new security system. I made inquiries, but no one at De Forster will discuss security, even when they are drunk."

"Have you heard of Argus?" asked Beritov.

Neither man responded.

Beritov continued, "It's the name of their new computer system. Boulton headed its development and installation. I suspect that he wishes to do more than buy our diamonds. If he intends to use his knowledge to damage DeForster I will not risk doing business with him."

Nelson said, "We will make our own decisions, but in any event the dinner will be entertaining. I have heard the food at the Richmonde is outstanding and I'm certain our host will spare no expense. And our hostess Miss Wright is a beautiful woman whose company I relish. I'm looking forward to the evening."

Moise nodded in agreement.

Beritov walked out of the office without comment.

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Moise said, “ Nelson, these offices are abominable. I suspect the Russian has chosen to humiliate us.”

Nelson responded, “He will pay; Russia is falling apart and will be run by gangsters. A man like Mikhael will not last long.”

“No he won’t,” replied Moise, “I suggest we return to our hotel, and decent surroundings. I do not intend to work here.”

Chapter 18

The Hotel Richmonde

November 14, 2003

Malcolm dialed the main number of the Noga Hilton, "Miss Wright please."

"One moment sir," answered the woman at the switchboard.

The next voice Malcolm heard was that of a man. "May I ask who is calling?"

"You may, but I choose not to answer," responded Malcolm. "Put her on the line. She's expecting me."

"One moment sir."

The next voice Malcolm heard was Ariana's.

"Malcolm, where are you?"

"I'm at the entrance. I'll come up."

"No, I'll be down." Ariana locked the suite, took the elevator from the penthouse to the first floor, and exited into the lobby. A group of Japanese businessmen looked at her appreciatively, several took photos. She ignored them as she walked out of the hotel, her golden fox coat hanging loosely over a tailored beige Chanel suit.

Noting the new driver, she asked, "Where is Etienne?"

"Etienne and I have parted ways."

"Parted ways; you two were joined at the hip."

"No more than we are," responded Malcolm as Ariana entered the rear passenger compartment.

Ariana didn't respond, remaining silent throughout the short drive to the Richmonde, a hostelry that catered to the powerful and affluent, especially those who disliked the ostentation of the nouveau riche.

Malcolm and his guests were unaware that the Richmonde was a holding of one of De Forster's many subsidiaries; its ownership buried from public view in interwoven partnerships that tax authorities in Switzerland and England had never unraveled. They were also unaware that business conducted in its lavish suites and entertainment venues was monitored by the IDSO.

A liveried doorman approached the car, walked to the right rear passenger compartment, and ceremoniously opened the door for Ariana. He then moved briskly around the rear of the car to assist Malcolm.

The driver was already there, the door fully open. As Malcolm stepped out, he backed into the attendant, who fell to the ground, landing in a puddle of water, remnants of a late afternoon shower. Malcolm laughed. Ariana approached the embarrassed doorman, and helped him to his feet.

"Let the clumsy oaf be! You needn't soil your shoes," said Malcolm as he walked to the entrance.

Ariana ignored his comment and, using her handkerchief, brushed off the stain on the rear of the man's uniform. "There was no need to do that Mademoiselle, but thank you for your kindness. May I escort you to the hotel?"

"Certainly, I apologize for my companion. His rudeness was uncalled for."

Malcolm waited impatiently in the lobby. "There was no need to help that oaf," he said as he took Ariana's arm and propelled her into the cocktail lounge. Ariana pulled away from him as they approached the table where Mikhael, Nelson, and Moise were seated. There were only four seats at the table. With neither apology nor comment to the occupants of an adjacent Malcolm removed a chair.

Moise wasted no time getting to the point. Addressing Malcolm, he said, "Miss Wright, on the occasion of Morris Goldman's party, indicated to us that you wish to purchase our diamonds without the participation of De Forster. If we sell to you we risk retribution by De Forster. It must be worth our while. How much will you buy, and at what price?"

Malcolm smiled, turned to Ariana as if to recognize her complicity, and responded, "I will buy all of your production for the next five years, at 10% more than you are now receiving, a deposit now, and cash on delivery each year thereafter."

Moise's astonishment was evident as he turned to Nelson, and then Mikhael. "That is not possible. Do you realize how much money that would require?"

Before Malcolm could answer, Mikhael asked, "And from us? A similarly absurd amount."

"Your entire production for five years on the same terms," answered Malcolm, his pleasure in their bewilderment evident.

"You can't be serious. You know how much is involved, how much money, and how much risk? I'm not here to play games. Miss Wright told me that the purchase was to be significant, but you are asking us to permanently destroy our relationship with De Forster, and jeopardize the stability of the market, to make a deal worth billions of dollars with a man with no history and no apparent resources," said Mikhael.

Malcolm responded, his voice almost a whisper, "No history, no history indeed. My Grandfather's bank lent the Rothman's the money to build De Forster. Without my family there would be no Syndicate, and I now have the resources to regain control of what should rightfully have been mine."

Donbo spoke up, "I can be no part of this madness. You are insane! Mikhael, how can you be a part of this craziness? De Forster will never tolerate this. They will destroy our diamond business."

Beritov ignored the African and said, "You are quite serious aren't you?"

"I certainly am," replied Malcolm.

"How do you intend to proceed?" asked Beritov.

"I have sufficient funds to purchase your entire production, and the production of all of De Forster's suppliers for the next five years. I can assure you that the sightholders will be happy to buy from me, especially at lower prices. They are aware that the new branding program, and De Forster's

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efforts to destroy confidence in unbranded diamonds, could end up destroying them. Besides, they will have no choice.”

“What do you mean by ‘no choice?’ ” asked Mikhael.

“De Forster will have no diamonds to sell,” answered Malcolm.

“That’s absurd,” said Nelson “They have huge inventories; that is how they manipulate the market.”

“I assure you that when the time comes, they will neither compete or retaliate,” responded Malcolm.

“And what is your assurance worth? Even though Miss Wright’s presence provides credibility, we do not know that you have the funds to support your offer and even if you did, you do not have the organization to distribute our diamonds. You cannot succeed, and although you may have been able to convince investors with no knowledge of our business, we will not be fooled. I for one will not give up a proven, though thorny, relationship to participate in a wild scheme,” said Mikhael.

Donbo and Akimbe nodded their agreement. “Mikhael is correct. You may have the money to make the initial purchases, but the IDSO will intimidate the sightholders. De Forster has sufficient inventory to flood the market and make all our diamonds worthless, and it is absurd to say that they will not have diamonds,” said Nelson.

“They will bankrupt you and your foolish investors if you attempt to gain control of the market,” said Moise, raising his hands in mock despair.

“Gentlemen,” continued Malcolm, “the sightholders know that the Syndicate is planning to eliminate them from the chain of supply. They will be more than happy to buy and distribute my diamonds, especially after I have destroyed De Forster.”

“Destroy the Syndicate? Just how do you intend to do that?” asked Beritov, as Ariana listened in amazement.

“That is my problem, but as I said, they will neither flood the market nor retaliate against you.”

“What about the productions from Canada and Australia?” asked Nelson.

“Once I have an agreement with you gentlemen, I will approach the Australians. They have not been satisfied with their arrangement with De Forster, and their new finds of gem-quality material are causing even greater stress in their relationship with the Syndicate. I have it on good authority that De Forster is trying to prevent them from opening new mines.

“The IDSO has been covertly funding environmental action and human rights groups who are raising a furor over the effects of mining on indigenous populations. Believe me, the Australians will join me when the time comes. They have, as you are aware, already ended their contractual relationships with De Forster. The Canadians want to go out on their own, and will sever whatever is left of their relationship once they see events unfold.

“But those are details that need not concern you at this time. I don’t expect you gentlemen to respond until you are convinced of my resources and obtain the agreement of your governments. I will, therefore, provide you with substantial down payments, sufficient to convince your superiors of my ability to proceed, and to compensate you for your efforts on my behalf.”

Donbo and Akimbe smiled. Mikhael remained impassive.

Donbo asked, “And exactly how much do you mean by substantial.”

Malcolm withdrew three letter-size envelopes from his jacket pocket, “Gentlemen, I have drafts on Credit Suisse. He raised them in the air, and placed them, with a flourish, on the cocktail table. Akimbe and Donbo took their envelopes. Mikhael let his sit. Donbo was the first to respond. “If this is your idea of a joke, I don’t ...”

He was interrupted by Moises’s vituperative eruption, “I don’t appreciate your humor, Mr. Boulton.”

Malcolm laughed, “I am quite humorous at times, but in this instance, there is no humor intended. The funds are available to you, and your respective governments, immediately upon presentation of the drafts, and my oral confirmation to Credit Suisse.”

“This draft is equal to the full amount of De Forster’s purchases from us for the last two years, and the second draft, which is made out to me, is quite ample,” exclaimed Nelson.

“Your backer must be Dikran Matossian,” said Moise as he turned toward Ariana.

Ariana was expressionless as she thought of the response that her recounting of this meeting would get from Morris and the Israelis.

“My backers are my business,” interjected Malcolm. “Money is money, especially when there is a great deal of it. Mr. Beritov, if you care to take your envelope, you will find that the first draft equals the amount paid by De Forster for two years of your country’s production, plus the ten percent that I mentioned. The second draft should be adequate to ensure your efforts on my behalf. Additional funds, for the next three years of our contract will be forthcoming upon agreement by all parties.

“Gentlemen, I think this should convince you of my seriousness, and of the substance of my finances.”

Malcolm lifted his glass and offered a toast, “Gentlemen, to a prosperous future!”

The Africans reciprocated; Beritov turned toward Ariana, moved his glass near his slightly parted lips, and said, “To the Matossians and their Arab friends!”

Ariana was not prepared for the magnitude of Malcolm’s plans, nor the financing he had obtained from her Grandfather’s associates. She turned to Malcolm, smiled, stood up and said, “Malcolm, if you don’t mind, could we speak privately for a moment?”

“Of course, my dear,” replied Malcolm, enjoying the conspiratorial nature of her request. The three men watched, with unbridled curiosity, as Malcolm followed Ariana into the lobby.

Ariana stopped twenty feet before the reception desk, “My God Malcolm, what is going on here? I thought this was to be a purchase of some size, but billions of dollars. Destroying De Forster, bribing government officials. This is madness. You’re involving my friends and my family in your preposterous scheme. I want no part of this, and neither will they when they become aware of your plans.”

Malcolm glowered, grasped her forearm, placed his lips to her ear as if to kiss. He whispered menacingly, “You are a part of this. You’ll stay for dinner, be your usual charming self, and then we’ll be through. Through forever.”

Ariana recognized the threat. She should have listened to her Grandfather. She blanched as Malcolm tightened his grip and shoved her back toward the lounge. She wanted to strike out, but was determined to keep her promise to the Israelis and to Morris.

“Malcolm, take your hands off of me. If you touch me again I’m out of here.”

“Why don’t you just leave?”

“I wouldn’t think of it, Malcolm, I’m curious to see just how insane you really are,” she said as she pulled away and headed back into the lounge.

“Gentlemen, shall we proceed to dinner? I’m famished, and a bit exhausted from my flight.” She turned to Malcolm who had followed her back into the lounge, took his arm in the firmest grip she could manage, and led the way into the dining room.

Her Grandfather had taught Ariana many things, one of which was to appreciate fine food no matter the company or circumstance. The offerings of the Richmonde were indeed fine, and she decided that nothing would come between her and the meal. She remembered her Grandfather, at dinner with an especially difficult and obnoxious Middle Eastern oil man, whispering to her, “Remember my dear, that revenge can often be the sweetest dessert.”

Her decision made, she focused on the meal.

Sevruga caviar and oysters from the French coast accompanied by ice-cold Grey Goose vodka; Chateaubriand rare, with a wonderful Shiraz; and sweetbreads delicately sautéed with Mersault. The feast seemed endless, the prior conversation virtually forgotten in the almost Bacchanalian atmosphere, until Mikhael, without prelude, asked, “Malcolm, who are your backers, these friends of Mr. Matossian?”

Malcolm seemed to ignore the question, but after a few moments, he replied, “Mikhael, as I said, my backers are not your concern, but I can assure you my finances are adequate.”

Nelson spoke up, his voice colored by the wine. “You can count on my support, my wholehearted support. But, I must first find a way to convince my government. Surely, additional funds for my efforts will be forthcoming.”

“Of course, Nelson, of course,” said Malcolm as he lit a thick Montecristo cigar. The aromatic smoke swirled around him. Malcolm observed his guests, his face animated, Ariana all but forgotten. He would deal with her soon enough. She had heard too much, but her presence had been essential.

Ariana listened and thought to herself, “*No wonder the Israelis wanted information.*”

Mikhael asked Ariana, “Would you care to dance?”

“Delighted, Mikhael, I’d love to. I’m sure Malcolm and his new partners have a lot to discuss.”

As they stepped onto the dance floor, Mikhael said, “Your friend’s scheme is quite implausible, nevertheless my responsibilities to my government require that I present it. We still have unresolved issues with De Forster. An alternative proposition might provide us with leverage.”

“Mikhael, you are a good man. I advise you not to get involved with Malcolm.”

In an alcove, a waiter stood motionless behind a large pillar and adjusted the sensitivity of his microphone.

Chapter 19

Moscow, Russia

November 18, 2003

Bank drafts in hand, Mikhael Beritov returned to Moscow. Middle Eastern oil moguls were the financiers behind Boulton's plans, and it was clear that a battle of epic proportions would be waged. Malcolm Boulton, backed by immense Arab oil wealth, against the mineral empire of single family, the Rothmans. The State of Israel would be a victim, and Russia a pawn in the struggle. With this in mind, Mikhael entered the offices of the Ministry of Trade.

The huge building, once crammed with bureaucrats, was half-empty; scaffolding and empty paint buckets littered the canvas-covered floors where workmen, paid only intermittently by the near-bankrupt Government, exerted minimal effort.

A decrepit elevator, with crackled paint and worn flooring, made ominous sounds as it carried Mikhael to the third floor reception room where an aged, hawk-faced woman sat on a straight-backed chair behind a worn wooden desk. His entrance disrupted her perusal of a tattered copy of *Vanity Fair* magazine.

"Ah, our wandering prodigy returns. Have you brought me something from Geneva? Some chocolates, perhaps?" She placed the magazine on the desk, and in a pretended whisper said, "No, no, that would be too much trouble for a man of such importance. Your father, he always brought me something. He knew how to treat his associates."

She looked at Beritov with obvious affection and continued, "You are here for your appointment with the Minister. He is occupied. Have a seat."

Beritov walked behind the desk, bent down and gave the old woman a hug, and then went to the far end of the room where he seated himself on a tattered cloth chair. He looked at the secretary,

who had been a friend of his father's, and said, "If the ruble had been worth anything, I would have brought you some Swiss chocolates."

"No matter," she responded, "I'm already too fat."

A half hour passed, and a short buxom woman emerged from the minister's office. "He's ready for his next appointment. I'll be back next week, same time. Convince the old goat to requisition a decent sofa, it would make my labors much easier."

"A decent sofa, hah; I'll have a chair that doesn't break my back before you get your sofa."

The minister came to the door of his office, straightened his tie, and motioned Mikhael to join him.

"Mikhael, back from your Swiss playground just in time to deal with the complaints from London. De Forster finds your procrastination unacceptable, and is threatening to withdraw their offer for our diamond production. They want to conclude the agreement within a week, as does our President. He is depending on the one billion dollars in hard currency they are willing to advance, and the subsequent monies, to ease our rather shaky transition to "the New Economy" and inspire confidence in our economic future. He has emphasized to me that we cannot afford to antagonize those willing to provide us with hard currency. Explain to me why the negotiations with De Forster have not been completed."

"Minister, a new buyer for our diamonds has entered the market, Malcolm Boulton. He is backed by Arab oil interests associated with Dikran Matossian, and is proposing to purchase our diamonds on better terms than those offered by De Forster. As you are well aware, De Forster has in the past gotten their way by economic and political intimidation. Their sudden generosity may be the result of weakness, resulting from the new policies that Alex Rothman is implementing. De Forster's attempt to brand diamonds, the elimination of sightholders, and the appearance of created diamonds in the market, has caused confusion, unrest, and instability in the markets.

"Boulton's offer, if it is creditable, will, if nothing else, strengthen my ability to get concessions from De Forster. I have a Swiss bank draft for two and a quarter billion dollars, in hard

currency, as an advance against the purchase of diamonds, and a second draft that was offered as a bribe. The first draft will be negotiable only after we formally accept the offer, the second is negotiable now.”

The minister looked in amazement at his aide, his anger evident; his eyes suddenly animated. “Mikhael, so that is what you have been up to in Geneva. You have exceeded your authority. Although you may not be enamored of De Forster, they have been reliable and their current offer has merit. The President is disposed to accept it, as am I. The prospect of hard currency from De Forster has reached the news media and the financial community. The value of the ruble is already rising, and by acceptance of De Forster’s offer we are indicating our commitment to work with the West. Our relationship with De Forster, although thorny, is proven, and their control of the marketing of diamonds is iron fisted. Without them, our diamonds would be shiny pebbles lost in the sands of commerce.”

Beritov looked at the ceiling, as though asking the newly allowed God for permission to speak. “Minister, if I had not believed that Dikran Matossian was involved, I never would have considered the offer, and I must admit that at the meeting his granddaughter seemed surprised at the magnitude of the finances involved.”

“You consider this worthless paper an offer. Mikhael, you are blinded by your resentment of De Forster and their heavy handedness. However, if you are correct and Matossian is actually providing the financing for this scheme, I suppose we must take it seriously and present the offer to the President. Matossian is already a major player in our oil businesses, and I know he has indicated an interest in our diamond mining and cutting. This matter should be considered at the highest level.”

Mikhael opened his briefcase and removed the two bank drafts. “Here are the drafts that I received from Boulton.”

The Minister took the drafts. “We will undoubtedly continue our relationship with De Forster. However, this is an uncertain world. You will make a written report; omit nothing; though you need

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not mention the smaller draft. The funds, though negligible, might prove of use to us. You will deliver your report and the larger draft to Professor Kosensky, the Director of Economic Intelligence. He will discuss the matter with the President.”

“Minister, with your permission, I would like to see Professor Kosensky at once. I believe this matter deserves his immediate attention.”

“See him, and then get back to me.”

Chapter 20

Tel Aviv, Israel

November 20, 2003

Awakened by the sound of an incoming phone call, Reuven rolled over, glanced at the clock, and lifted the handset.

It was Avi. "Reuvi, we need to talk."

"What the fuck do you want to talk about at 2 a.m.?"

"Deveraux called," replied Avi.

"And that's the reason you're calling me in the middle of the night, to tell me how important you are? Hold on a minute, I need a smoke." Reuven lit a Gauloise, inhaled deeply, and blew the smoke at the receiver.

"What did he have to say?"

"That Boulton hired Nabuli, the leader of a terrorist organization, to cripple De Forster's diamond operations. Deveraux says that Nabuli is our problem, and if we let him interfere with the operations at Ramat Gan, or elsewhere, there will be consequences. He wants me to come to Geneva to discuss the problem."

"What was David's response when you told him about the conversation?"

"He got royally pissed; he doesn't like his people threatened. He said that Deveraux is up to no good and that he knows more than he told me."

Reuven asked, "So--- what's he expect you to do?"

Avi replied, "He's going to meet with the Prime Minister to discuss the matter and then get back to me."

Reuven, disgust evident in his tone and words, replied, "So why the fuck couldn't you wait till morning to call? There's nothing to do until you hear from David."

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Avi replied, "There's plenty. I want the *skinny*. David is right, Deveraux knows more than he's willing to share."

"O.K., so what do you want from me?"

"I want you to wake the fuck up and give me your ever insightful opinion as to what Boulton and Nabuli are up to."

Reuven responded, "You call me in the middle of the night to get my opinion. O.K. Here it is. I think the IDSO might be masterminding this whole business."

"Come on Reuven, why the hell would they do that. What reason do they have?"

Reuven responded, "You know that the guys that run that organization are anti-Semites. De Forster would love an excuse to pull out of Israel----- what better than the threat of terrorism? They involve the Mossad to make the threat credible, make sure we don't have the facts, and then blame us for permitting a terrorist conspiracy to disrupt their operations at Ramat Gan."

"Reuvi, that presupposes they want to pull out of Israel. First we need to know if they do want out, and then why. Then we need to know whether they've ever used terrorists or the threat of terrorism to justify shutting down one of their facilities.

"And you expect me to find out?"

"Of course, this is your theory, find something to support it. Shlomo is in by 6:00. Get to his office and see what he can dig up."

At 6:00 that morning, Reuven entered the Mossad computer facility and was escorted to Shlomo Cohen's office.

"Reuven, what the hell do you want at this time in the morning? I've been feeding you guys whatever I have, and you and your partner are becoming a pain in the *tuchus*. The morning is the only time I can get my work done in peace."

"Shlomo, I need everything we have on the IDSO especially on the Director, Walter Gordon, and his deputy, George Deveraux. I'm particularly interested in any links between terrorist

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organizations and the IDSO. Also see if we have anything on Nabuli, Boulton--- the ones we asked about last time.”

“I’ll see what I can do, but it will take time.”

“Sure, sure, it always takes time; I also need a review of De Forster’s security arrangements at Ramat Gan, especially any precautions they take to avoid terrorist attacks.”

“What’s up Reuvi? Why the interest in Ramat Gan and the IDSO? That’s off your beat.”

“Shlomo, you know damn well what’s going on. Every time anybody wants information they have to come to you, and you and your cronies put it together. Just get me the files. By the time you’ve chewed over them you’ll know more than me. Maybe even tell me what’s going on. I have to be out of here in an hour. Can you do it?”

“Why not ten seconds, and if you say ‘sure, sure’ to me again, you’ll get *borscht*. Come back in an hour, I’ll see what I can put together, but I probably won’t have it all done before tomorrow.”

Reuven smiled as he ruffled Shlomo’s hair. The head of records returned the smile. “Get the hell out of here, and let me get to work.”

A half pack of Gauloises, and an hour later, Reuven returned.

“We don’t have any more on Boulton, Nabuli, or Wright, but there’s a good bit on Deveraux and Walter Gordon. Deveraux is a key player in the dirty tricks department of the IDSO. After he got out of MI6 he worked in Israel and Africa; he seems to have access to people who normally won’t talk to government officials. He was also a friend of Avi’s father, and they may have worked together.

“When I started the search on the IDSO and terrorist organizations, I hit the mother lode, with Deveraux in the center of it. There’s too much to sort through in an hour or even a few days. The IDSO has had their hands full since De Forster started building new facilities. It is no coincidence that the role of terrorist organizations in the ‘blood diamond’ and synthetic diamond trade hit the headlines at the same time De Forster was reorganizing their marketing. There are indications that

they are purposely raising concern in order to get governments to put the *kibosh* on smugglers, gem manufacturing laboratories, and independent dealers.

“They have teamed up with terrorist organizations to force uncooperative governments, unions, and workers to toe the line. What’s more, this isn’t only about diamonds. DeForster controls the mining of uranium, plutonium, gold, platinum, iron, copper; anything that comes out of the ground in Africa. The Rothmans use the IDSO to funnel money to various organizations to stir them up or shut them down, as the situation requires.

“They also control companies in the sugar, timber, liquor, beer, and health care industries. The diamond business is small change in relation to their overall activities.

“What is major to us, is incidental to them. The issue of sightholders, and their elimination, is nothing more than a plan to gain further control of a small aspect of their empire.”

“Shlomo I have a general idea of who these sightholders are and what they do, but tell me what you know about them.”

“Actually, quite a bit. I had to brush up on them when we created our database on the diamond industry.

“De Forster distributes their uncut diamonds to about one hundred dealers around the world. These sightholders go to sales ten times a year to buy the diamonds. De Forster calls these sales “Sights,” because the dealers get to look at the diamonds they will be allowed to buy. It’s an all or nothing deal. The dealer can buy the diamonds at De Forster’s price or walk away, never to be invited back again.”

“So why get rid of them?” asked Reuven.

“De Forster recognized that they were losing control of the diamond market to independent producers in Canada and the Mafiya in Russian and some of our more aggressive dealers, especially Abraham Lekovsky. What happened to him is an example of how the IDSO operates. They accused him of shipping treated and synthetic diamonds to his customers. He denied the allegations; said De Forster framed him in order to justify taking away his Sight. He’d be a good guy for you to talk to.”

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“As far as your request for information on IDSO security at Ramat Gan, there is information, but I don’t receive it.”

“Why not,” asked Reuven.

“They go directly to David?”

“Is there a reason you’re bypassed?”

“I don’t know why, but her name is Branoff, Muriel Branoff . David recruited her and he insists on handling her. I see what he sends me, and that isn’t much. If you want to find out about security at Ramat Gan, better you talk to David.”

“I will or, better yet, Avi will,” replied Reuven.

Shlomo laughed, “Send Avi into the lions den, eh.”

Reuven responded, “Better him than me; Avi is protected by his father’s ghost.”

Shlomo said, “I didn’t know you were a believer.”

“I am, especially when it comes to the influence of a deceased Director General.”

Shlomo chuckled, as then presented Reuven with a large manila mailing envelope. “Here’s everything that can leave the office. The rest you read here. I’ve requested that you and Avi be sent back issues of *The Diamond Intelligence Report*. It’s published in Tel Aviv, and gives you every rumor and fact that’s available. The editor is fearless, and I have it first hand that the IDSO isn’t happy about his reporting.”

Reuven asked, “Is David aware of the extent of the Rothman’s holdings and the links between the IDSO and terrorist organizations.”

“I’m sure he has a damn good idea, but I’m getting information from databases in England and the U.S. that he may not have seen. I don’t know how many people have put together the pieces. David will get my report as soon as I finish sorting it out.”

“I’ll be back,” said Reuven.

“Not too soon,” said Shlomo. “I’ve seen enough of you to last me a lifetime.

Twenty minutes later Reuven entered Avi’s office.

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“Reuvi, I’m not going to Geneva. David said to tell Deveraux that if he wants information he can come get it.”

“Why the hard line, Avi?”

“I’m not sure, but there’s more to it than resentment. Deveraux worked in Israel, and David said he and my father were friends. David might believe that once Deveraux is here he’ll get sentimental and tell us what’s going on.”

Reuven replied, “You didn’t bother to ask, but Shlomo hit the mother lode. There have been and still are links between the IDSO and terrorists and Deveraux is the coordinator.”

“What do you think Reuvi? Will he come here, or get royally pissed that we’re not at his beck and call and tell us to fuck off?”

“My prediction is that he’ll call Kimmel, bitch a little and come.”

Reuven then, almost as an after thought added, “I asked Shlomo about the security arrangements at DeForster facility at Ramat Gan.”

“Yeah, and what did he tell you.”

“That David personally runs an agent at the DeForster facility and doesn’t share the bounty with Records.”

“Who’s the agent, and why the special arrangement?”

“A woman, someone I never heard of, Muriel Brannoff; and as to the arrangement and what it yields, you better ask David.”

“I think I’ll pass,” said Avi.

Reuven smirked, “I already did.”

Chapter 21

Tel Aviv, Israel

As Reuven predicted, Deveraux, called David Kimmel.

“Stein refuses to come to Geneva.”

“With good reason. He suspects you’re backing Boulton and Nabuli.”

“Absurd. Why the blazes would we?”

“He theorizes that the threat of terrorism by Palestinians will give you a reason to shut down your facility at Ramat Gan and marginalize our dealers.”

Deveraux hesitated before responding, “Frankly David, there was a time we considered that option, and it had nothing to do with terrorism. Your dealers gave us good enough reason when, in the eighties, they attempted to manipulate the market by accumulating huge stockpiles of uncut goods. We struck back, but we didn’t pull out. Instead, we convinced the banks to call their loans. Then we released enough goods into the market to deflate prices. They had to come up with enough cash to stay in business, but the value of their diamonds had decreased. We bailed out the ones that were not major offenders. Your diamond industry survived and, by playing by the rules, has prospered. It wasn’t in our interest then and it isn’t in our interest now to see the Israeli market collapse. ”

“I hope that’s true,” said David.

Deveraux responded, “I can assure you it is but, of course, we expect your co-operation in dealing with Boulton and this Palestinian fellow. With financing from oil interests in the Middle East they pose a threat to our interests. We will deal with Boulton. The Palestinian is yours.”

Deveraux paused for a moment and said, “And David, there is something else.”

“What?” asked David

“We’ll discuss it when I come to Israel. In the mean time, make sure Stein will cooperate.”

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“George, I warn you not to bull shit him. He’s inexperienced, but as smart as his father.

Deveraux replied, “If he’s as smart as his father he’ll trust me. I’ll ask him to meet me at the airport. We’ll have a talk before we join you.”

George’s email to Avi read, “The mountain will come to Mohammed. Will arrive at Ben Gurion, Swiss Air 101, at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow. Meet me at airport. Deveraux”

Avi called Reuven into his office, “Reuvi, Deveraux will be here tomorrow. I need to get up to speed. What do you have?”

After an hour of reviewing the documents from the Center for Information, Avi said, “ You and Shlomo were right. There’s no doubt that the IDSO has and still does use terrorists, or at least the threat they pose, to manipulate the diamond market.”

Reuven commented, “Not just diamonds. DeForster has their hand in gold, platinum, uranium---.”

Avi interrupted, “Any thing that comes out of the ground. These guys are fucking amazing; they exert their influence whenever and wherever they choose.”

Reuven said, “Yeah, but on occasion they overstep themselves, like during World War II when they refused to allow the U. S. Defense Department to create an industrial diamond stockpile. The Americans were afraid that mines in Africa and inventories in Europe might come under Nazi control. On the other hand, DeForster was concerned that, when the war ended, the Americans, if they won, would dump whatever remained of the stockpile into the market and depress prices. The Americans accused DeForster of aiding the Nazi’s. To avert retaliation if the Americans won, DeForster compromised and shipped the diamonds to their Canadian subsidiary where they were released as needed.”

“And Boulton and Nabuli plan to take these guys on.” said Avi. “I can’t imagine they have the muscle, even with backing from Matossian and his buddies.”

Reuven replied, “There’s more to this than is apparent.”

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As he left headquarters, Avi marveled at extent of Alex Rothman's empire. Tomorrow he would meet the Deputy Director of the private army that protected it.

Avi entered his apartment on the fourth floor of a run down 1950's apartment building. After Leah's death, and with no one to please but himself, the dismal surroundings were appropriate to his mood.

He turned on the television, took a beer and leftovers from the Sabbath meal with his mother out of the refrigerator.

The grisly images on the evening newscast, the results of two suicide bombings, turned his stomach. He had first hand experience with the results of these brutal attacks but the never ending reports of the carnage still took their toll.

Switching stations served no purpose. The image of death was pervasive. He put his half eaten meal aside and went to his bedroom. He undressed and showered.

The night passed. An interminable stream of nightmares dominated every moment. Leah, an infant, a girl, in her arms sat in the rear of an armored truck. Assiz was at the wheel. Then, as if transported from heaven to hell the vehicle disintegrated. The images, sounds, and smells of death were horrific; burning body parts strewn across the road, a never ending infants wail.

The alarm went off. Avi, covered in sweat, was immobile, unable or unwilling to rise. Fifteen minutes of anguish preceded a shower and shave. He put on jeans and a turtleneck, retrieved his gun from a lock box in his closet, and put on a brown leather jacket. Almost as an afterthought, he called David Kimmel. After three rings he was forwarded to a secure voice mailbox. He left a message. "I'll pick up Deveraux and be at your office by 6:30."

At 5:45, Avi drove into the short term parking lot at Ben Gurion Airport. Before leaving the car he unholstered his weapon and placed it in a locked compartment under the driver's seat.

Flight 101 arrived on time. Avi greeted George as he walked out of immigration.

"Thanks for picking me up," said George.

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“Not a problem,” replied Avi. “Wait at the exit --- I’ll get the car.”

“If you don’t mind, I’ll walk with you.”

“Fine,” responded Avi.

Once in the car, Avi turned to Deveraux, “Mr. Deveraux, what do you want or need from us?”

Deveraux responded, “I need nothing. And it’s you that should want.”

“Want what?” asked Avi.

Deveraux countenance darkened, “Want the Mossad, and the State of Israel, escape irreparable damage.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. But if I did, I would find it hard to believe you give a damn about the welfare of the Mossad or Israel,” said Avi.

“I have reason to care,” replied Deveraux.

“Please don’t bullshit me Mr. Deveraux.”

Deveraux asked “Did you know your father and I worked together to protect the interests of the State of Israel and while doing developed mutual respect and, one might say, affection.”

“My father never spoke of you.”

“Benjamin was a discrete man. I’m certain no one other than the Prime Minister, and David Kimmel knew of our relationship.”

“Was the IDSO your employer when you and my father worked together?”

“No, I was in the service of Her Majesty’s Government.”

Avi asked, “And now, in the employ of Alex Rothman’s private army, you intend to protect us again?”

“Quite right, but this time for a very different reason.”

“And that is?”

“Because we face an enemy who possess and plan to use weapons devised in your country. Weapons whose existence you deny.”

“Weapons?” asked Avi. “What the hell are you talking about?”

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“You’ll know after we meet with David. What I will tell you is that they came from Israel and are in the possession of Malcolm Boulton, an ex-employee of ours, and the Palestinian terrorist, Hassan Nabuli.”

“Once again Mr. Deveraux. What weapons?”

“You should know the answer to that question.”

Avi’s face reddened, “Damn it Deveraux, stop dancing around.”

Believe me Avi, I’ll stop dancing if and when the Mossad stops the music.”

“My God. I find it hard to believe you and my father worked together. He wouldn’t tolerate the shit you’re throwing my way.”

“No, he wouldn’t. Nor did I ever find it necessary to fertilize him.”

Exasperated, Avi said, “Forget the humor Mr. Deveraux. This conversation will end if you don’t level with me.”

“All right Avi. I will, as you put it, ‘level with you.’---in the presence of your boss.”

The two men entered the lobby of the IBM building. rode an elevator to the basement, got out and walked thirty feet to the right. Avi placed his palm on a scanner adjacent to an unmarked door. The door opened and they proceeded two hundred feet to a second, larger door. Avi placed his other palm on a second scanner. The door opened into the private lobby of Mossad headquarters. The reception area was Spartan; three video cameras, and a single phone with no dialing pad. Avi picked up the phone. “Were here to see the General.” His image and voice print were transmitted and analyzed by the security system before a nondescript computer generated voice answered, “Please enter the elevator.”

One of two heavy steel doors slid open. The elevator, its door open, was waiting. Avi motioned George to enter. When both men were in the door closed and the elevator ascended to the sixth floor.

The doors opened into a waiting room where a secretary greeted them. “General Kimmel is occupied at the moment. Please have a seat.”

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Chapter 22

Mossad Headquarters

Inside his Spartan office General David Kimmel, the man who had assumed Benjamin Stein's position as the head of the Mossad, was in heated conversation with his counterpart at Shin Bet, Israel's internal security organization.

It was five minutes before he called his secretary, instructing her to have Stein and Deveraux enter his office.

"George, it's been a while."

"And a great deal has happened, most of it unfortunate."

"A pessimistic view from an eternal optimist," commented David.

George, his expression reflecting the somberness of his mood, responded, "At the moment there is no reason for optimism."

Avi rose from his chair and interjected. "Mr. Deveraux has information on Boulton and Nabuli which he obtained from audio surveillance of a Villa in Switzerland."

"Is what you heard the reason for your pessimism, George?"

"Not entirely. But it confirms my suspicion that you have not shared information, information that is crucial to protecting the interests of DeForster. If it weren't for our surveillance, we would have been unaware of a threat that originates in Israel."

Retaining a poker face, Kimmel asked, "What threat?"

Deveraux looked at Avi and said, "You see! This bloody damn well is what I meant by a lack of candor."

Before Avi could respond, Deveraux fixed his gaze on the General and said, "Damn it David, you know bloody well what threat."

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Avi waited for his superior's response. There was none. After a moment of silence it was Deveraux who spoke, "David, we've known each other too long and been through too much for you to stonewall me. I am aware of the gravity of the breach in your security. Because of that breach there is a threat not only to DeForster but also to your Government.

"You know bloody well that the Palestinian, Nabuli, while under your surveillance, stole and is planning to deliver, or possibly already delivered, fifteen canisters of nerve gas to Malcolm Boulton."

David, although relieved, showed nothing as he asked, "And how do you know this?"

"From Boulton's discussions with Nabuli at the Villa Shindell, Credit Suisse's guest residence in Winterthur."

George hearing no response from the Director General, changed his expression and voice to one of, almost fatherly, concern. He turned to Avi and said, "Your father adopted a Palestinian child named Assiz, as I remember from a refugee camp in Gaza."

Avi blurted an angry response, "What the hell concern is that to you?"

David interjected, "Avi. This egotistical bastard, despite his remonstrations, is a friend, a friend who deserves our co-operation."

Avi regained his composure. "And we can expect the same, Mr. Deveraux?" Deveraux answered, "Yes Avi, you can. And please since we're going to work together forget the formalities, I was George to your father and I'm George to you."

Avi spoke, "Assiz is a Mossad agent."

"I know," said Deveraux who continued, "I'm surprised Benjamin allowed her to join the Mossad. It's a dangerous life, especially for a Palestinian."

"He knew that, but she was determined to join, and she got whatever she wanted," said Avi.

Deveraux, his eyes expressing genuine concern, said, "Unfortunately the worst has occurred. She was shot and killed by Boulton or Nabuli, we're not sure who fired the gun."

Avi asked, "How do you know?"

George responded, "We heard enough to make that supposition."

"On the surveillance tapes?" asked Avi.

"Yes, on the tapes. I had them transferred to a CD. We've edited out the parts that are of no concern."

"Edited?" asked David.

Deveraux replied, "But not censored, we deleted the silences. You will find the last part painful but it is best you hear it all."

"Now," asked David.

"When better?" responded Deveraux as he handed him a CD. David inserted it into his computer and for the next forty five minutes they listened in silence."

At the conclusion of the recording Avi said, "The bastards."

"Its as much as we know," said Deveraux.

David, having already received a report from the two Mossad agents in Switzerland, had chosen to say nothing to Avi until he received confirmation of Assiz's demise. Deveraux provided the confirmation.

David watched Avi, wondering whether his response to Assiz's murder would prevent him from continuing on the assignment.

To David's surprise, Avi did not dwell on her fate; rather, he directed a question to Deveraux, "How likely was it, if we you hadn't gotten on to them, that Boulton and Nabuli would have succeeded in gaining control of your inventories."

"Not at all likely. Boulton's scheme is patently absurd."

"Absurd, in what way?" asked Avi.

Deveraux responded, "Given that Boulton has the ability to, at least for a period, disable our security system; the money to pay Nabuli and his compatriots; and the weapons to neutralize the staff of our facility, one might assume that he has the capability of carrying out a major theft. But, the reality is that he doesn't. The logistics of moving eight tons of diamonds out of our vaults,

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storing and distributing them are daunting, and believe me I know since we have just completed that task. Boulton simply does not have what is needed and most importantly he knows it.

“What’s more, we are aware that he has promised to sell to the dealers at a price lower than he’s paying the producers.”

Avi said, “In other word, he’ll lose money on every stone he sells.”

Deveraux responded, “Quite right. Even if his plan is to corner the market and then raise prices, he doesn’t have the infrastructure to deliver sorted rough, even if he succeeded in stealing it from us.”

“And your saying he won’t succeed,” said David.

“He won’t,” replied Deveraux “and the Bastard isn’t prepared to do business. He has another agenda, but, for the life of me, I can’t imagine what he has in mind.”

“Is that why you’re here? You’re worried about this unknown agenda.”

“That, and to find out about your damn canisters. Why the devil would Boulton have bothered to steal non-lethal nerve gas when nothing is to be gained?”

“Who at De Forster is aware of the situation and your analysis of it?” asked Avi.

“Only Rothman and Gordon; but Boulton’s professed objective is no secret. Every one in the business became aware that he’s making a move on us when he offered to sell to the sightholders and raised money to negotiate deals with the Russians and Africans.”

David asked, “And you think I’m going to tell you what he intends to do with the canisters?”

“I know you will if you expect to come out of this fiasco with your skin. One hates to think of the repercussions if word got out that your facility at Dimona has been penetrated by Palestinian terrorists.”

David said, “George, it doesn’t behoove you to threaten.”

“I’m not threatening. Just giving you a realistic assessment of the situation.”

Avi said, “Realistic. Bull shit! You know damn well the canisters don’t contain non-lethal gas.”

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“You’re right, I’m not naïve. I’m certain that Boulton has deceived Nabuli; and I am also certain that the contents of the canisters are lethal.

“This is part of a sinister plan, one in which innocents will die. We don’t know what Boulton hopes to achieve but we’re taking no chances. Alex has instructed the IDSO to eliminate with Boulton and the Palestinian, and if deemed necessary, his associates. I believe we are justified to expect you to deal with the Palestinian.”

David said, “George, give us a moment, would you? My secretary will get you coffee, or if you prefer, something stronger.”

“Stronger I think,” said George as he walked out of the room.

Avi hardly waited before asking, “You knew about Assiz didn’t you?”

David replied, “We had an unconfirmed report from our agents in Switzerland. I thought it best to wait until we knew for sure.”

“And now we know for sure, don’t we?”

“I believe so,” answered David.

“Then I want the bastards that murdered her,” said Avi.

“You can have them Avi, if you can handle this case without your emotions jeopardizing the investigation.”

Avi said, “I can handle it David, especially if I know the truth about the damn canisters. Is there any substance to what Deveraux is saying about them?”

David replied, “Some substance--- there was a theft from a non-secure maintenance facility at Dimona. Fifteen canisters labeled as herbicide were taken.”

“And Boulton told Nabuli he was getting, not herbicides, but non-lethal nerve gas,” commented Avi, “Both his story to Nabuli and our leaked information are bull shit aren’t they?”

“Yes.” replied David.

“So what the hell is in them?” asked Avi.

“Avi, under no circumstances is what we discuss to go out of this office.”

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“If Boulton has those canisters he has fifteen explosive nuclear devices containing high-grade radioactive dust in shielded containers; enough nuclear material to cause irreparable damage. Fortunately, we’re certain he didn’t get the detonators and timing devices to use them.”

Avi said, “And his intention is to irradiate the DeForster vaults?”

“Possibly more than then the vaults,” said David. “He has fifteen canister and there are only six vaults. He has other targets.”

“My God,” said Avi, “He’s insane.”

David frowned, “No less sane than the people who built them.”

Avi said, “So his dealings with the Russians, the Africans, the sightholders and his investors are a charade, a cover for a attack with *dirty bombs*. What the hell is his motive?”

“I’m sure George knows the motive even though he is mistaken about the means,” said David “I think it best he know the truth.”

“If we want his help, we better level with him,” said Avi.

Kimmel phoned his secretary. “Would you ask Mr. Deveraux to rejoin us?”

George re-entered the office and said, “Finished your little chat have you?”

David replied, “We have George, and I need your word that what is discussed from this point on will be treated with the same discretion as your dealing with Benjamin.”

“My, my, this is serious---- you have my word.”

David grimaced as he said, “The canisters contain nuclear dust, not lethal or non-lethal nerve gas; they’re what are euphemistically referred to as ‘*dirty bombs*.’

Deveraux was almost speechless but managed to mutter, “My Lord, what a bloody mess.”

Without waiting for further comment, David asked, “What motives might Boulton have for going after De Forster and Israel, apart from diamonds and money?”

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“That’s rather an interesting question, one I’ve, many times, asked myself. Let me answer as best I can.

“Alex introduced us to Boulton and was determined to bring him on board to work on the Argus security system. Walter and I objected. Neither of us wanted to involve someone from outside.

“I made discrete inquiries to see if there was a reason for Alex’s insistence. After a bit of digging and calling in a favor I learned that Boulton’s Grandfather, Preston, was the Rothmans’ banker. He lent them money when no one else would give them a hearing. Boulton’s support enabled the Rothmans to build De Forster.

“Then the Rothmans screwed him by switching their banking business to J.P. Morgan. The Boulton bank, having allowed DeForster to become its major customer, went belly up. Boulton’s Grandfather shot himself.

“Malcolm, ten years old at the time, found the body. Quite enough for a young man to fantasize and finally actualize revenge.

“As to Israel and Jews, I think he is posturing to gain credibility with the Arabs who are financing him.”

David said, “So you don’t believe we are a principal target.”

Deveraux replied, “No, whatever damage is done to you will be of no consequence to Boulton.”

“If even one of those devices is detonated any where in the world,” said David, “no matter whether Boulton cares about the consequences or not, we’ll have political, economic, and social repercussions that are unparalleled in our history. Concerns about our diamond industry will seem to have been insignificant. Avi, I want no holds barred; kill the bastards, and get the fucking canisters back.”

“How on earth did Boulton get nuclear devices out of Dimona?” asked Avi, “He didn’t have Nabuli pick a lock and walk off with them.”

Deveraux, his attention now focused on Kimmel awaited the response.

David addressed both men, “Before you gentlemen arrived I had a conversation with the head of Shin Bet. He briefed me on both the history and status of his investigation.

“A routine inspection of Dimona’s non-secure storage facilities revealed that there had been an intrusion into the one used to store chemicals and although it was not deemed high priority, a team from Shin Bet was assigned to aid the Dimona security staff in an investigation. At the time no one realized what had been taken.

“The investigators checked records of all transfers of materials out of the secured areas, no matter their destination. They noted that several cases, labeled as herbicide were moved from a heavily secured, but not frequently accessed area into the maintenance facility. The transfer records were altered and we don’t know who ordered the transfer, or when it was made. We don’t even know how they got into the area from which they were removed.

“The investigators thought there had been a screw up but after further inquiry they concluded that the scheme was orchestrated, planned, and executed by a person with knowledge of a discontinued top secret project named ‘*hell bent*.’

“When confronted with the results of the investigation, the administrators at Dimona claimed that the team that had run ‘*hell bent*’ had been disbanded and that the, so called, *dirty bombs* dismantled and disposed of. To their chagrin we are certain that the last of their assertions is not true.”

“Fortunately the components necessary to detonate the devices are still in our possession, as are the blueprints and instructions for their assembly. For reasons known only to

the perpetrator, he or she did not remove them from the secure area.”

Deveraux said, “So Boulton needs someone, most likely the individual who orchestrated their removal, to provide the detonators and assemble the devices.”

David Kimmel said, “And that might give us time.”

“I believe it does,” said Deveraux, “As far as we know from our surveillance Boulton hasn’t met with any nuclear scientists.”

“But he must have,” said Avi, “that’s the only way he would know the bombs existed. He, or possibly Nabuli, had to have a source inside Dimona.”

“Avi. I want you to find the source of Boulton’s information, find out how the bombs were moved into the maintenance storage area, and retrieve the fucking abominations.”

“You’re not asking much,” replied Avi.

“You’ll have help. I’ll as the Prime Minister to instruct Shin Bet to co-operate; if they give you a problem they’ll be get his shoe up their ass. You’ll have whatever you need to get the job done.”

Kimmel turned to Deveraux, “George, we’re going to have to keep the lid on this and we’ll need your full co-operation.”

Deveraux was still stunned by the revelation but managed to nod his assent.

Avi asked, “I wonder what reasons, other than the ones he gave Nabuli, Boulton had for choosing Sint Maarten as a meeting place?”

George, having regained his composure, responded, “Maybe he wants to give Nabuli and his associates a vacation before dying.”

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“A rather macabre thought,” said Avi.

David said, “Your sense of humor hasn’t failed you George.”

He then turned back to Avi and said, “The best place to get at the canisters, and round up Nabuli’s people, will be Sint-Maarten. If, as I suspect, the canisters are shipped from the Middle East, we will identify and seize them. I’ll assign two men to assist you.”

Avi said, “I agree that the devices should be intercepted in Sint Maarten, but my guess is that they’ll be shipped from either Italy or France. Both export food, wine, and automobiles to the region.”

“That will make our task more difficult, but not impossible,” said David.

“Will the customs authorities cooperate?” asked Avi.

“I’ll see what I can do about that,” said David. “But if it can’t be arranged you are to do whatever is needed.”

”O.K. said Avi, “But, as you said, my first order of business is to identify Boulton’s collaborator at Dimona.”

“What about Nabuli?” asked George.

“Nabuli was naïve enough to swallow Boulton’s cock and bull story; he doesn’t have a fucking idea what’s going down and without functional devices he and his people don’t pose a threat,” replied Avi. “but he’ll pay for Assiz.”

David said, “We have ample justification for a sanction.”

George added, “I can assure you my support. In fact, if the opportunity arises I might well save you a bit of trouble.”

Chapter 23

Records Office Tel Aviv

The devastation of six De Forster facilities, the threat to the Israeli economy, the embarrassment to the Government; all were potentially devastating, but for Avi the murder of Assiz had been a precursor, a very personal one, of what was to follow. His grief was profound.

He remembered the girl huddled against a crumbling wall in a refugee camp; the child his father brought home and adopted. The sister he loved. The men who killed her would pay.

At the Records office Avi was greeted by an elderly agent who, after informing Shlomo Cohen of his visitor, summoned an escort to take him into the computer facility.

Shlomo was at his desk, his fingers flying over the keyboard of his workstation. He did not acknowledge Avi's presence.

Knowing full well that the Director of the Records section was waiting for him to speak, Avi remained silent. After several minutes Shlomo looked up and said, "I see you've learned not to interrupt me."

Avi smiled and said, "Only because I need your help. I want everything on Malcolm Boulton, more than you've given me."

"I know. David let me know that you'd be on my beggars list. I called in a few favors and got access to data bases at MI5, MI6, and C.I.A."

"Did he tell you that Boulton has, or soon will have, the canisters that were stolen from Dimona?"

"No he didn't. I know of the theft, but had no idea Boulton was involved," responded Shlomo.

"Do you know what the canisters contain?" asked Avi.

"I know the official version and I know what I know."

“And that is?” asked Avi.

“We don’t make or use herbicides or nerve gas at Dimona.”

“Then you know enough to recognize the seriousness of the threat,” said Avi.

“And I also know that the thieves didn’t get everything they needed,” said Shlomo.

“How did Boulton learn that we had the devices?” asked Shlomo.

Avi responded, “He has to have a contact at Dimona, someone who worked on their development and had the authority to move them from the secure area into in a non-secure maintenance facility. I need to find that person.”

Shlomo said, “Then we need to find out where and when Boulton came into contact with an employee or ex-employee of our nuclear programs.

“We’ll have to review the background of everyone who worked at our nuclear facilities and find any coincidences of location with Boulton. In order to do that, we must track their movements in the years from the construction of the canisters to the time of their theft and cross reference that to places where Boulton worked or visited. That will take a lot of digging. I’ll need help.”

Avi responded immediately, “We don’t have help on this one. I’ll work with you until it’s done.”

“What about Reuven?” asked Shlomo.

“Not unless it becomes absolutely necessary,” said Avi.

“ I don’t know how big a dose of you I can take, so we better get this over with,” said Shlomo, “You’ll work on the console over there; pull up whatever you can on Boulton; where he worked, studied, visited. Now that David has arranged for the use of British and American databases, you might get more than I’ve given you.

“While you’re doing that, I’ll list all employees at our nuclear facilities from 1980 to the present. There are going to be several thousand----then we’ll cross reference.”

After an hour and a half, Avi spoke up, “I have everything on Boulton from all the databases.”

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“Yeah, and I have a list of employees at Dimona, our other nuclear facilities, and nuclear scientists working at the universities. We’ll start the hard part after you bring me some coffee.

Avi stood, stretched, and left the room. He returned with two cups of luke warm coffee.

“ Maybe we’ll get lucky,” said Shlomo as he took one of the cups. “Have you absorbed everything you got on Boulton--- where he’s spent the last ten years.”

“Then start checking for connections between Boulton and someone in our nuclear programs,” said Shlomo.

“I have a feeling it’s going to be a long night,” said Avi.

“Not if I’m lucky,” replied Shlomo, as he put his hands together in mock prayer before returning to the work Avi had interrupted.

After the first hour Avi’s frustration was obvious.

Then, while examining the foreign universities where Israelis visited or worked, he exclaimed, “This guy is interesting. He worked at Dimona, but was a visiting scientist the Massachusetts Institute of Technology when Boulton was there.”

“And now,”

He’s still is employed at Dimona, but he’s visiting M.I.T. again.”

“They must like him,” said Shlomo. “What’s he doing there?”

“He’s working at their accelerator facility,” answered Avi, “ supervising graduate students while doing research of his own.”

“And you think he’s our man?” asked Shlomo.

“The most likely I’ve come across. Take a look.”

After reading the file Shlomo said, “You’re right. He’s your connection.”

“ I’m going to pay him a visit,” said Avi.

Shlomo commented, “He’s not likely to be co-operative.”

Avi smiled, “ I’ll bring him around.”

“I’m sure you will,” said Shlomo.

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Avi picked up Shlomo's phone and called Kimmel.

"David, I think we have Boulton's collaborator, a nuclear physicist by the name of Baruch Cinai."

"Where does he work?" asked David.

"At Dimona, but he's in Boston now. I want to interrogate him."

"Where and when?" asked David.

"In Boston. As soon as possible."

"Go ahead," replied David, "and while you're in the States, visit Miss Wright again. She's back from Geneva and has been debriefed by Menachem. Apparently Boulton threatened her and, before leaving Geneva, she called her Grandfather. He called me and was furious that we involve her in our problems. He said he would hold us responsible for any problems she encountered.

"That's a serious threat from a man who controls most of the oil exported from the Middle East. He's been a friend, but if anything happens to his granddaughter, he'll be a bitter and dangerous enemy."

Avi said, "We had nothing to do with her affair with Boulton."

"I'm fully aware of the circumstances of our involvement, but Matossian said she broke off the relationship, and resumed it at our request.

"In any event, we've got to insure that she stays safe. After you see the professor, go to New York and convince her to accept our protection until this matter is resolved; Nabuli has associates in the United States that wouldn't hesitate to kill her, if asked."

"I don't think Nabuli would be that foolish. Matossian is a force in the Arab world, especially with the oil men who support the Palestinian cause. Nabuli wouldn't want to make an enemy of him," said Avi.

"That's most likely the case, but we can't afford to take chances. In the mean time I'll have Menachem assign two agents to keep an eye on her."

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Chapter 24

Boston, Massachusetts

The next day

Avi arrived at Logan International Airport in Boston, rented a car, and drove to the campus of M.I.T. where he followed signs to the Administration Building. He stopped in front of the entry, parked, and went in. A young woman wearing a t-shirt with a portrait of Albert Einstein drinking a frothy beer through a straw and the caption "Einstein sucks," greeted him warmly. She wore large horned-rim glasses, which did nothing to disguise the fact that she was beautiful.

"The Physics Department, I'm trying to locate it," said Avi.

She responded, "It's not far---- walking distance actually---- but I noticed that your car is out front. You'll have to move it to the visitors parking lots on the other side of the campus. It's a pain, but the Campus Police love to tow. They make a mint from the fines.

"How do I get there?" asked Avi.

The girl reached under the counter, brought out a map highlighted the route.

She pointed to the Administration Building and ran her finger along the thick red line. "You're here. Take the first left and then the second right. Go 'till you see the blue visitors parking sign on the right. You might have trouble finding a space, but if you circle, one will open up. A shuttle bus stops at the glass pavilion. Tell the driver that you want the Physics Department. May I ask who you're visiting? I'm a grad student in the department."

Avi responded, "Baruch Cinai."

The girl's eyes lit up, "Baruch, he's my thesis advisor." "Really," said Avi, "That's a coincidence."

"Yeah, but his office is in the Accelerator facility not the Physics Building. Our misfortune is your good luck. There was a major layoff when one of our grants wasn't renewed and the employee

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parking lot is half empty; the campus cops don't even bother checking it out. Pull in and park; no one will bother you."

"What's the best way to get there?" asked Avi.

She highlighted the new course as she spoke. "Follow the road out front until it comes to a dead end, make a right, turn at the first left, and go to the end. Would you like me to call Baruch and let him know you're here?"

"Thanks Cynthia, but I'd rather surprise him."

As Avi started to leave the girl said, "Tell Baruch I said HI."

"I'll do that," replied Avi.

Avi left the building. An overweight campus cop was ticketing his car. Avi yelled out, "Hold on, I'll move it now."

"Shouldn't park here."

Avi said, "I needed to get directions."

The man, with practiced indifference, put the ticket book in a leather holster, that substituted for a weapon and said, "Let you go this time."

Avi followed Cynthia's directions to the Accelerator facility. As promised, he had no difficulty finding a parking space. He walked 50 feet to the entrance and was greeted not by a campus cop, but by a fit and well armed sentry. Without speaking, and with military bearing the guard escorted him inside the building. At a gray metal desk adjacent to a metal detector a uniformed woman asked,

"Sir, who are you here to see?"

"Baruch Cinai." responded Avi.

The woman handed Avi a pen, pointed to a loose leaf binder and said, "Your name and address here, and a photo i.d."

While Avi was writing she asked.

"Is Dr. Cinai expecting you?"

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“No,” responded Avi, “But I’m sure he’ll see me. I’m an associate of one of his colleagues in Israel.”

“Your photo i.d. please.”

The woman inspected the i.d. then Avi. After a moment she said, “Mr. Stein, I’ll let Doctor Cinai know you’re here.”

After a call she said, “Doctor Cinai will see you. His office is on the third floor, room 339. Take the elevator at the end of this corridor on your right.”

Then , pointing at the metal detector she said, “Remove any keys, change or other metal objects, and place them in the basket. After Avi passed through she handed him the basket and a radiation badge. “Wear this---- and don’t forget to return it as you leave.”

At the third floor an arrow on a plastic plaque directed Avi toward room 339.

An attractive young blonde sat at a Sun Systems work station in what served as reception area. She was absorbed in entering data.

After a moment she turned to Avi and said, “Mr. Stein. Professor Cinai is in conference. He’ll be finished in five. Please have a seat?”

Avi said, “You and Cynthia wear the same shirt.”

“You know Cynthia?”

Avi smiled, “Not well enough.”

The girl laughed and said, “Maybe I’ll do.”

Five minutes passed before five graduate students exited the inner office, the last of them said, “See you tonight Chelsea.”

The blonde directed a smile at Avi and replied, “ Only if I’m not lucky.”

A portly red head wearing a brown tweed jacket and tan corduroys followed; his rolling gait, flattened nose and flabby cheeks reminded Avi of an overweight bulldog.

Avi stood, “Professor Cinai, might I have a few moments with you?”

Cinai hesitated before responding “Mr. Stein. Am I supposed to know you?”

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“No, but we have mutual acquaintances in Israel,” responded Avi.

“Are you a physicist?”

“No, but it will be best to speak privately. Do you mind?”

“No, no. Not at all,” responded Cinai. “Please come into my office. Avi entered and shut the door behind him. Cinai pointed to a chair and said, “Have a seat. Now what required privacy and who the devil are you?”

Avi remained standing, “You are in trouble, very serious trouble!”

Cinai blanched; recovered his composure and asked,

“Once again. Who are you? And what kind of trouble?”

Avi went for the jugular. “I want to know about the 15 canisters of radioactive material from Dimona.”

Cinai’s pupils dilated, his face reddened, and he began to perspire. He sputtered, “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

Avi knew he had his man and said, “You worked at Machon 8 when the canisters were developed. You know damn well what I’m talking about. ”

“For the last time, who are you? Our conversation is ended unless you identify yourself.”

Avi ignored the question and asked, “Is the name Malcolm Boulton familiar?”

Cinai rallied, “Who do you work for? Unless you have proper authority, I want you out of my office!”

“The Mossad, will that suffice?”

“Do you have identification?”

“Of course.”

Avi withdrew his I.D. from his vest pocket. He continued, “Cinai, there will be grave consequences if you don’t co-operate. I know you and Boulton worked together. If you don’t stop the bull shit, I will leave and the matter will end, as will your career and freedom. Is my position clear?”

The portly scientist shrunk in his seat, his face sagged, "And if I co-operate?"

"We'll see," responded Avi.

Cinai's voice quavered, "I met Malcolm here when he was a graduate student. I encountered difficulties with the robotic devices I used to handle radioactive material. I heard there was a student in the Computer Sciences department who had the expertise to assist us. I called him and asked that he come to the lab. He came, we talked and he agreed to work with me.

"He was brilliant. Within a week, he had us up and running. Despite the difference in age and positions we became friends. We corresponded after we left M.I.T. Malcolm's career blossomed, as did mine.

"Two years ago, Malcolm invited me to visit him at his parents' flat in London. He was interested in my work, especially my efforts to lengthen the half-life of radioactive material. When I told him about the radioactive dust that I developed from Cesium-137 and Plutonium, he was fascinated. I appreciated his interest and I suppose I told him more than was appropriate."

"About the canisters?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me," said Avi.

"We designed them to contain and disperse radioactive dust upon remote activation of a detonator. They were disguised to look like ordinary Thermos bottles, but they had a false bottom that covered tungsten carbide core containing nuclear dust, a detonator and a radio receiver. They were powerful enough for tactical use and could be remotely detonated by a radio signal from a satellite or ground radio transmitter."

"Any thing else?" asked Avi.

"Actually one other thing that was actually quite important . Ultra-light shielding was used to prevent detection by radiation monitors."

Avi asked, "So that they could pass through airport security?"

Cinai answered, "Exactly or across protected borders."

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Avi next question was rhetorical, "Who in the hell were we going to use these bombs on?"

"I have no idea," replied Cinai, "but your superiors in the Mossad might answer that question. In any event someone else, someone high up in our Government, asked the same question and didn't get a satisfactory answer. The project was terminated and the canisters were to be disassembled and destroyed.

"A right winger who ran the program decided that they would be disassembled and stored and then an idiot in our division labeled the the canisters as herbicides and the detonators and timers as sprinkler controls. He had them crated and moved to an infrequently used secure area.

"When he and others involved in the project retired, resigned or were fired there were only a few of us who knew their fate. It became an inside joke and we laughed at the bureaucratic incompetence."

Avi said, "But Boulton found the story more than humorous."

"Obviously he did," said Cinai, "Last month he convinced me to have them moved to the maintenance facility."

"Convinced. How did he convince you to become a thief and traitor?"

"I couldn't help myself."

For the next ten minutes Avi listened.

Finally he said, "I don't believe that you were that damn stupid. The man wasn't holding a gun to your head?"

Cinai slumped in his chair; his rust red hair was damp with sweat and matted from the movement of his hand across his scalp. "I loved him; I've loved him since the day we met."

Chapter 25

New York City

The Acela high speed train left Boston at 6:42 p.m. and arrived in New York at 10:15. Avi walked out of Penn Station and hailed a cab. The driver dropped his flag and in five minutes deposited Avi at the Hilton on 54th Street where he was greeted at the reception desk and informed that a reservation had been made in his name.

Given Menachem Harel's legendary thriftiness, Suite 1403 was spacious and well appointed. Avi unpacked his overnight bag, went to the bathroom and splashed his face with water, dried himself, and called David Kimmel.

Kimmel answered on the second ring, "Yes."

"David, I left Cinai this afternoon. He not only worked with Boulton while they were at M.I.T. , they were lovers. He's our connection.

David said, "So they shared a bed along with information on his work at Dimona. Tell me more."

Avi responded, "Cinai finished his year of research and romance and returned to Israel. They corresponded. The long distance romance continued for a couple of years before, as Cinai described it 'out of the blue,' Boulton called and invited him to come to London, all expenses paid. Cinai knew that Boulton had done well financially and didn't hesitate to take him up on the offer. He assumed Boulton wanted to renew their love life. Once they were together he said Boulton was interested in information rather than bed. He pumped Cinai to get information about his work at Dimona."

David asked, "And that's when Cinai told him about the canisters?"

Avi continued, "It appears as though it was by chance."

"How was that?" asked David.

“While joking about the mismanagement of our research efforts and bitching about the influence of the Americans, Cinai recounted how, due to pressure from politicians, the *dirty bomb* project was terminated. Then he gave him the zinger and told him that the bombs, which were to have been destroyed were relabeled and stored.

“Boulton played Cinai like a fiddle. He convinced him, with money and promises of everlasting love to, after he returned to Dimona, have the canisters moved from Machon 8 to Machon 2, from the high-security building to a non-secure maintenance facility.”

“Wasn’t Cinai curious as to why Boulton wanted the canisters moved?” asked David.

“He damn well knew, but he rationalizes his actions by saying that he only moved the canisters and not the detonators, timers and radio receivers; components his lover would need to detonate the bombs.”

“And he didn’t tell Boulton about the missing components?”

“No. Once Boulton had the canisters he thought he was finished with Cinai. But, he was cautious and hired a Russian physicist, who at the time was working in Syria, to inspect them. According to Cinai Boulton was furious when he found that critical components were missing and that he would need someone knowledgeable to fabricate the missing components and assemble a functional bomb.

“Boulton realized that he couldn’t cut Cinai loose but by then Cinai realized he was in deep shit. Boulton made nice and asked him to fabricate the missing components and help with the assembly. Cinai said he refused.”

“What then?” asked Kimmel.

“Boulton turned off the charm and resorted to blackmail. He told Cinai how he felt he had been betrayed and threatened to expose Cinai’s duplicity. He gilded the threat by painting a picture of life for an imprisoned homosexual.”

“And did it work?” asked Kimmel

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“According to Cinai it didn’t. He said that he couldn’t live with the thought of the damage that could be done. He’s planning to double cross Boulton.”

“How?” asked David.

“A shop that does work for M.I.T. is fabricating the missing components. According to Cina they are simple to make --- nothing about them to arouse suspicions that they would be used for anything sinister. Cinai says he’s going to arm the devices so that the explosive charges won’t rupture the housings that contain the radioactive material.

“He assured me that Boulton wouldn’t realize that the charges weren’t properly placed.”

“Is he telling the truth?” asked David.

“I think so, but it’s too risky to take a chance.”

“You’re damn right,” said David. “We have to get the canisters back before they’re armed, correctly or incorrectly. Where and when is Cinai to assemble the devices?”

Avi answered, “In Sint Maarten, just before Boulton is to hand them over to Nabuli and his people.”

David said, “I want the canisters recovered before they get to Sint Maarten.”

Avi said, “I think we should let Boulton play his hand?”

“What the hell are you talking about Avi? It’s bad enough that Boulton has the canisters, we can’t let him arm them.”

Avi responded, “If we move too soon we’ll tip our hand. We risk losing Boulton and Nabuli.”

David “Screw them. We’ll deal with them later. I want the canisters!”

“I’ll get the canisters and I’ll kill the bastards that murdered Assiz.”

“Avi, we’re not going to replay the ‘Wrath of God’, we’re going to prevent a fucking disaster, not take revenge.”

“I know, I know, but I have a plan,” replied Avi.

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“A plan to do what?” asked David.

“David, just hear me out----Do the creeps at Dimona, the ones that ran the *hell bent* project, still have thermoses and tungsten carbide housings in storage?”

“Despite the fact that they should have been destroyed, I’m certain they do,” responded David.

“Will they provide fifteen canisters, identical to the ones Boulton stole, but without the nuclear core?”

“They won’t want to admit they still exist, but I’m sure they will after the Prime Minister reams them a new orifice,” replied David, “but I don’t understand where you’re going.”

Avi replied, “I want to waylay the shipment in Sint Maarten and substitute duds.”

“Or, if ordered, dump them and their replacements in the Caribbean,” said David.

Avi sensed David’s willingness to proceed. “I need the substitute canisters before Boulton’s shipment arrives in Sint Maarten.”

David replied, “Shimon Nachman is in charge of the team Shin Bet assigned to the investigation. He’ll find out if it’s possible. Then I’ll speak to the Prime Minister. When I have an answer I’ll let you know.”

Avi hung up, undressed and showered. As he was drying himself his satellite phone rang. It was David.

“The Prime Minister gave the go ahead and Nachman contacted the director of Dimona. They’ll have fifteen canisters, sans nuclear material and detonators before the end of the month.”

“Did the Prime Minister say anything more about the situation?” asked Avi.

“He said to consider employment at the C.I.A. if this gets screwed up.”

“It won’t,” said Avi. “I’ll make the substitution. When Cinai assembles them he can place the detonators any damn way he wants. Nabuli’s people will get them, return to the facilities where they work, place them and be arrested and charged by the local authorities. We’ll have avoided an incident on foreign soil.”

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“Alright Avi, but damn it, intercept that shipment and if anything falls out of place you are to destroy everything related to hell bent. Then kill Boulton, Nabuli and Cinai.”

Avi put the satellite phone in his bag, looked at his watch, and decided it was not too late to call Ariana. A machine answered on the third ring. A sterile, gender neutral, voice recited the phone number.

Avi began to leave a message. “Ariana, it’s Avi, I’---”

Ariana picked up, “Sorry Avi. I was afraid it was Malcolm again. He’s called so damn many times I don’t bother to answer.”

Avi said, “I need to see you.”

“Why?” asked Ariana

“Are you free now?”

“I am, but it’s almost 10:30.”

Please Ariana, it’s important.”

“Alright, I’m too antsy to sleep and I haven’t eaten all day. There’s a French restaurant on 8th Avenue. I put something in my stomach before I get hypoglycemic.”

Avi said, “I’ll pick you up.”

“Fine,” replied Ariana.

After a fifteen minute taxi ride Avi paid and got out on the corner of 19th St. and 9th Avenue. Five teenagers rapping to the music from an oversized *boom box* congregated at the entrance to a convenience store. They held the jive to observe Avi as he exited the cab and walked down 19th St. They decided he wouldn’t be an easy mark and returned to their rapping. At the entrance to Ariana’s four-story brownstone Avi pressed the bar on the polished brass intercom.

She answered, “Avi?”

“Yes.”

“Give me a minute.”

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Ariana was more beautiful than he remembered. She wore tan slacks, an off white silk shirt, and a shawl thrown casually over her shoulders.”

“Aren’t you going to be cold,” asked Avi.

“I need to chill out,” quipped Ariana.

“They headed down 19th St. toward 8th Ave. A woman with a pit bull lunging at its leash, and seemingly in charge of its nightly expedition, walked a short distance in front of them.

After a moment of silence, Ariana spoke. “I hate that damn dog; he’s vicious and ugly and he pisses the tree in front of my house to death.”

As if an afterthought, she said, “On the phone you told me you have some concerns. About what?”

“Your safety.”

Ariana stopped and turned to Avi, “You heard about Malcolm’s threat?”

Avi responded, “Yes, and we take it seriously.”

“Why?---- because my Grandfather called your boss and tore him a new ass. I’m not sure Malcolm meant what he said.”

“No, Ariana, not because your Grandfather called, and not because of anything Boulton said. I’m concerned because the man and the people he’s working with are dangerous.”

“Avi, Malcolm is obsessed with the Rothmans and the Jews but he doesn’t have the balls to hurt me. He knows that if he did, my Grandfather would ruin him, and his grandiose plans for revenge would go up in smoke. Even though he’s obsessed, he’s too smart to go up against a man who can cut off his financing.”

“Believe me Ariana, Boulton is up to something far more dangerous than an attempt to control the diamond business.”

“That’s nonsense Avi. Getting even with the Rothman’s is all he cares about; for him that means getting their diamonds, not violence.”

“Ariana, you’re wrong. You don’t have any idea what Boulton is up to.”

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Ariana frowned, hesitated a moment and then said, "I see how you would say that. He did a good job of conning me; I believed he cared about me and my work. Still, I don't believe he's capable of violence."

"Ariana, he is, he's already killed."

"Killed? I don't believe it."

Exasperated, Avi exclaimed, "Believe it, he shot a Mossad agent."

"Then why isn't he in jail?"

"Because, he's been smart enough not to be caught."

Ariana after a moment of thought said, "I don't believe he's a murderer."

Avi said, "We have proof, not the kind you need in Switzerland but enough to make sure he pays. I'm going to kill the bastard."

"Avi. What the hell is wrong with you? You can't take the law into your hands."

Avi responded, this time with anger, "What's wrong with me----- what's wrong with me is that Boulton killed my sister. I loved her as much as anyone in my life."

In silence they resumed their walk. As they turned right on 8th Avenue Ariana, her eyes reddened and tearful, said, "I don't know what to say."

"Don't say anything, just tell me about Geneva."

Ariana gathered herself together before continuing, "I told Mr. Harel everything there is to tell."

"Humor me," said Avi, "Another time won't hurt."

"Allright, but it's a waste of time," replied Ariana who continued, "As I told your associate, The evening was unreal. Malcolm, after several cocktails was effusive; he boasted about the amount of money he had raised from friends of my Grandfather who he implied was behind his scheme. I lost it and started to leave. Malcolm grabbed my arm. He hurt me. If I hadn't promised you information, I would have made a scene. Instead, I stayed, and frankly I'm glad I did. As the evening continued, I realized that Malcolm was a fraud, nothing more than a con artist."

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“He presented the three men with bank drafts on Credit Suisse, drafts that were worthless. But Malcolm is convincing he made it seem as the oral confirmation they required was nothing but a formality. Knowing my Grandfather and his associates, the oral confirmation that was needed was from them not Malcolm.

“The Africans were drunk and thought they hit the jackpot. The Russian played it cool, as if he knew the offer was bogus.”

“Bogus?”

Ariana said, it's obvious to anyone who is sober and knows the business, “Purchases of rough diamonds by De Forster are made in cash or gold. Malcolm's drafts requiring authentication are nothing more than worthless paper. Any serious dealer would know that and required payment at the time of the offer and as I said, it would be in cash, a wire transfer or gold. Malcolm doesn't and, if my Grandfather has his way, won't have access to the deposits in Credit Suisse.”

Avi said, “If what you say is accurate, then Boulton, as I suspected, is putting on a charade.”

“And if they are dumb enough or greedy enough they fall for it,” replied Ariana.

“Yeah, and there appears to be a glut of dumb greedy businessmen in the diamond business,” replied Avi.

Ariana put her hand to her forehead, and tilted her head as if trying to remember something. A moment passed before she spoke, “There was something else, something I forgot to tell Mr. Harel. My God Avi I'm stupid. I'm one of the dumb ones.”

“What did you forget?” asked Avi.

“Malcolm's answer when I asked him why Etienne wasn't with him.”

“Etienne, isn't he Boulton's chauffeur?”

“Yes, but I've wondered if he wasn't more than that. They were joined at the hip,” replied Ariana.

“What surprised you about his answer?”

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He said, 'Etienne is no longer with me and he'll be dealt with him like the woman----- the woman was the agent you said he murdered; wasn't she?'

"The bastard," exclaimed Avi, "he's bragging about murdering my sister."

Avi and Ariana walked on, neither spoke

At the entrance to *Provence*, three couples, all male, sat at a bar adjacent to the entrance of the dimly lit restaurant. The *maitre d'* approached them.

Avi said, "We'll be having dessert and drinks."

After they were seated, Avi asked, "At dinner, did Malcolm say when he wanted delivery of the diamonds?"

Ariana's eyes closed slightly as she attempted to remember their conversation.

"No, nothing specific but the implication was that he was prepared to accept delivery immediately after the deals were consummated.

"And if the checks bounce, that will be never,--- the end of his charade," said Avi.

Ariana said, "He's going to the Caribbean next month. I'm certain that by then the Africans and Russian will know they've been duped."

"If they have any sense," said Avi, "they'll know before that? But I don't understand what Boulton had to gain by this charade."

Ariana responded, "Probably the investor's money,"
responded Ariana. "According to my Grandfather about two million euros."

Avi said nothing but thought, '*The money to pay Nabuli.*' He then asked, "Did Boulton say who he was meeting in the Caribbean?"

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“I was surprised that he didn’t try to convince me to go with him. My curiosity got the better of me and I asked him who he was going with?” He said, ‘ Business associates, a colleague from MIT, and several Arabs.’

Avi asked, “Did he mention any names?”

“No, no names.”

The waiter, check in hand, came to their table and laid it in front of Avi.

Ariana said, “We’ll have a look at the dessert tray.”

The gangly young man seemed unwilling to move. “I took it back in the kitchen, we’re ready to close.”

Avi lost his temper, “Then get your skinny ass back to the kitchen and get it. You’ll damn well stay open until we finish.”

His bow tie askew, and alarmed by the patron’s outburst he scampered to the kitchen and after removing most of the desserts. Only a piece of tired cheesecake and a Crème Brule, with a cracked coating of burned sugar remained on the tray.

Avi said, “You win. We’ll leave, along with your damn tip.”

The waiter gathered his courage and replied, “Frankly sir, I doubt you’re the type to leave one.”

Ariana cupped her hand over her mouth to restrain her laughter. Avi said, “You might have dessert, but at least you have balls.”

As they got up and walked out of the restaurant Ariana said, “You were a bit hard on him.”

As they walked down 8th Avenue Avi said, “Don’t worry about him, worry about yourself. I want you out of New York until this is resolved. Malcolm and his friends are dangerous. If they think you might endanger their plan they won’t hesitate to, as you’ve heard Malcolm say, deal with you.”

Ariana eyes blazed and her lips tightened, almost to the point of unattractiveness.

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“You want me out of New York. I don’t take orders from you and I’m certainly not going to let that bastard drive me away from my work and friends!

“I’m going into partnership with Larry Winston, and I don’t intend to put it off.”

Avi took her hand. “I’m sorry if I sounded officious, but we know Malcolm is working with a Palestinian who has associates who wouldn’t hesitate to do you, your friends, and your business associates harm. They’ll be caught in the middle of something that can be avoided if you are out of town.”

Ariana calmed herself and asked, “A Palestinian. Is he the man Malcolm met with in Zurich, the one he called Hassan?”

Avi responded, “Yes, Hassan Nabuli.”

“You’re probably right Avi. I don’t want anyone else involved in my problems. I’ll go to Baltimore. My mother can use the company.”

“Then it’s settled?”

“I’ll have to talk to her, make sure it’s o.k.” responded Ariana.

“Ariana, you have to get out of New York.”

Ariana looked at Avi’s bloodshot eyes. She said, “You’re exhausted, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“And you?”

“Yes, exhausted, and humiliated. I’ve been a fool. One of the dummies.”

Avi took her hand in his. He drew it to his lips. Ariana shivered. She said, “Stay with me tonight.”

Avi placed his hand under her chin, and kissed her cheek. She rested her head on his shoulder. He felt two brief, almost imperceptible, shudders. After a moment, she gathered herself together and said, “I want you.”

What had been a light snow turned to a heavy flurry. “We should take a cab back?” said Avi.

“No, please; let’s walk. When it’s cold enough to stick and falls, like this, late at night, the streets and sidewalks stay white until morning. You wake up in a different place. You forget the ugliness until traffic beats it down and the grime and pollution turn it to gray slush.”

As they reached the townhouse Avi turned and looked down 19th Street. A half inch of snow had fallen. “I see what you mean. The snow transforms everything.”

“Every thing but problems,” said Ariana as she opened the door to her apartment.

Avi watched her tap a five digit code on the keyboard of the alarm control panel. “You have an elaborate system.”

Ariana replied, “Sometimes it’s a pain, but the insurance company requires one. This one is supposed to be state of the art.”

“It is,” said Avi.

“I guess so, but its still a nuisance. After I enter and turn it off it resets within two minutes into intruder alarm. The motion detectors remain off, but all of the entry points to the building stay on. I have to enter a code before I open a door or window. If I don’t the silent alarm goes off; the alarm company patrol and police are here within minutes.”

“Remind me not to leave without telling you.” said Avi as he followed Ariana into the living room. Antique furniture, priceless paintings, and oriental carpets exuded wealth. Avi was in awe.

Ariana, noting Avi’s expression said, “My Grandfather is very generous.”

“That appears to be an understatement,” said Avi. Ariana said, “I love it all, but especially the art. I only wish I had earned it.”

Avi commented, “I’m sure your Grandfather believes you have.”

“How? What have I done to be given so much.”

“You’ve given him your love?”

“Damn you Stein, do you think love is all I have to offer?”

“I didn’t mean to imply that.”

Ariana said, “I know you didn’t. I’m too damn edgy.” Avi drew her to him. “I’m sorry.”

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Ariana pulled away, "Avi, I'm sorry too, I'm sorry I led you on. As much as I want to hold you, to kiss you, to make love, I can't. This isn't the right time."

"Will there ever be a right time?"

"I don't know, and I'm not sure I'll ever know. We live in two worlds, and we each have work we love. I made a terrible mistake when I let Malcolm into my life; he might have destroyed everything I loved and had worked for. I'm not ready to take another chance."

Avi said, "I'm not like him."

Ariana said, "I want to believe that, but you entered my life just as Malcolm did, with a lie. I was fooled by Malcolm, and I won't chance being fooled again."

"Ever? You'll never take a chance on a man?" asked Avi.

"When I trust myself," replied Ariana who then blurted the rest of her response, "Malcolm told me what I wanted to hear. He fed me a line, and I was hungry for a relationship so I bit. He pretended to enter my world to be a part of it, when what he wanted was to destroy it."

"Ariana, you're the first woman since Leah that I've wanted to love."

"Wanted? You didn't say loved. How do you want to love me? As a mistress; as an informer. What does 'want' mean to you, Avi?"

"Ariana, I want you as a friend, a lover, but there's more."

"How much more? What kind of more?" asked Ariana.

"I'm not sure, but I want to share our lives," replied Avi.

"I can tell you what Malcolm wanted. He wanted a handmaiden, a trophy that would help him in his insane quest for power. Now you come along, you know nothing about my work or my feelings, and you say you want to love me. You see me as coming in to your world, but I can't see myself coming in to yours."

Chapter 26

Sint-Maarten, Saint-Martin

The Caribbean

At 9:45 a.m., the American Airlines flight from Boston arrived at Juliana Airport on the Dutch side of Sint-Martin. Baruch Cinai emerged from the Boeing 747. The sun was blistering, the air humid. The Israeli scientist sweated as he walked from the plane into the terminal. Twenty minutes after arrival, his single piece of luggage was placed on the floor of the baggage area; bag in hand, he proceeded to Customs and Immigration. After five minutes in line, and a perfunctory glance at his passport, he was passed through Customs without an examination of his luggage.

At the circular drive outside the terminal he was surrounded by drivers vying for his business. Baruch motioned to a young man who yelled out, "Alright boss, get you there cheap, get you there quick." The driver moved quickly to his side, took his bag, and without regard to the contents tossed it into the trunk alongside a half full container of motor oil and a flat tire. He moved to the rear passenger compartment and motioned Baruch into the wretchedly hot Toyota; the smell of ganja was overwhelming. After a thirty minute ride to the French side of the island, the taxi arrived at Baruch's destination, a rambling assemblage of three once separate residences meant to pass as a villa. He was greeted by an elderly black woman who came out onto the front porch of the largest of the three buildings.

She picked up the suitcase and led Baruch down a hallway and up a flight of stairs. She opened the door to a sun-drenched room that appeared to have been furnished for the wife of the original owner.

The bed and the single arm chair were upholstered in gingham, a dressing table with a barely silvered mirror was centered in front of one wall, a ornately carved dresser on the other. The curtains, with a brilliant floral design were held back by two pink ribbons. "This here the purtiest

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room in this whole place,” said the woman as she turned on the window mounted air conditioner and pointed out the bathroom.

“Misser Mac say after you settle in you come on down to the sunroom.”

Baruch reached into his rear pocket and took out his wallet. The old woman said, “No need for dat, misser Mac he take care of me.”

Baruch unpacked, carefully arranged his clothes in the dresser and closet, undressed, and got into the shower stall. Surprisingly, the water pressure was good, the hot water hot. He soaped himself and was rinsing off when the phone rang. Dripping water on the bare wood floors he almost ran to the phone. It was Malcolm.

“Bar, I can’t wait to see you!”

Cinai answered, “I’m just out of the shower; I’ll be down in a few minutes.”

The plant filled open-air sunroom was wide and long; three wide-bladed teak fans rotated slowly above the stone floor and white wicker furniture. Baruch entered, took in his surroundings, looked out at the turquoise ocean and wished that the canisters never existed.

Malcolm was seated; drink in hand, his back to the entry. There was a moment of hesitation before the portly scientist approached his former lover. He placed his hand on Malcolm’s shoulder. Malcolm turned to him,

“Bar, I’ve missed you!”

The first two days on the Island were glorious. A light breakfast and then hours on the sun drenched beach followed by lunch at a nearby concession, a return to the beach and after a shower and change of clothing, dinner at a small restaurant that specialized in seafood. The morning of the third day, Malcolm called.

“Bar, I’m afraid the vacation is over. It’s time we get to work. I gave the maid the day off so we’d have some privacy; we’ll have breakfast and then get started.”

Baruch said, “Alright, I’ll be down after I shower.”

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The scientist entered the kitchen, absent the smell of frying bacon and the charming chatter of the cook. Malcolm pointed at the orange juice, muffins, and coffee---- “Help yourself.”---- he left the room and returned with a corrugated box from which removed a canister and a set of the devices Baruch had fabricated; he laid them out on the kitchen table.

Baruch asked, “Malcolm, where did you get this canister? You told me they were arriving tomorrow.” Sweat ran down his forehead as the sight of the bomb brought him back; back from two days of sun, crystal clear water, and French food that had made the Mossad and the deadly devices a dim memory.

“This,” said Malcolm as he picked up the canister, “is a model I had made. I want you to teach me how to arm and after that we’ll write an instruction manual.”

“Teach you? An instruction manual?” I thought you wanted me to arm them, all fifteen of them,” said Baruch.

Malcolm appeared exasperated and responded, “ You didn’t think I’d be stupid enough to ship fifteen nuclear devices to the island. My clients have them. I’ll ship them the components you fabricated along with written instructions which you will help me write.”

“You don’t have the canisters!” exclaimed Baruch.

Malcolm smiled, his voice was condescending as he said, “No Baruch; what I have is a great deal of money with more to come when I deliver the missing components along with instructions on their assembly into the canisters.”

“Who are your clients?” asked Baruch.

“That’s not your concern, but I will tell you what they’re going to do with the bombs.”

“My God Malcolm, they’re not going to detonate them? That would be disastrous.”

“Of course not. Unlike the Israeli’s who built the bombs to kill, my clients want justice. They want territory and political concessions, not death and destruction. They intend to blackmail your Government.”

“That’s unfair, they were for our protection, insurance against an attack?” replied Baruch.

Malcolm snickered, “My God Baruch, you are either very naïve, very stupid, or both.”

Baruch sighed. “Unfortunately I’m both.” He then asked, “You’re certain the people who have the canisters won’t detonate them? The devastation would be horrifying.”

“I told you Baruch, they will be used as bargaining chips,” replied Malcolm. “The threat of their use and the threat of another scandal involving the Israeli nuclear program will insure they receive the concessions they desire. Besides, they know, based on past experience that the Israeli retaliation would be disproportionate to any damage they might inflict.”

Baruch wiped sweat from his head and forehead, “But s there’s the chance that some maniac will use them. The bombs would be devastating.”

Malcolm replied, “You’re right Bar, and that’s not a chance either of wants to take. You mentioned a place on the carbide housing that was weakened. Didn’t you refer to it as the ‘*sweet spot*?’

Baruch sensed that the conversation was headed in the right direction and replied, almost enthusiastically, “That’s correct. If the detonator isn’t aligned properly relative to the ‘*sweet spot*’ the thermos housing will disintegrate, but the tungsten carbide core will remain intact and no radioactive material will be released.”

“Then my clients will receive directions that improperly position the detonator. The bombs will be harmless?”

“I’m so relieved Malcolm? I can’t stand the thought of the deaths that would result if they’re ever used.”

“Honestly Bar, I don’t understand why you worked on their development. You’re a wonderful man, a moral man.”

“It was a terrible mistake. I should have resigned.”

“You should have!” said Malcolm. “Now show me how we assemble the bombs so that they will be harmless.”

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Halfway through his demonstration Baruch pointed out the sweet spot on the tungsten carbide housing. "Aligned like this the bomb will detonate and the nuclear core will be ruptured."

Malcolm pointed into the thermos, "So the detonator has to be below the line on nuclear core to render the bomb useless."

"Correct," replied Baruch, "If it's above the line and opposite the sweet spot the core will split and the nuclear material will be dispersed."

Malcolm positioned the detonator below the line. After the assembly was complete, he put the device aside and said, "Bar, now that our business is done, let's take the boat around to the Dutch side and have a swim and some lunch?"

"I'd love that. I can't swim but a trip on the water and a delightful lunch will make a perfect ending to a wonderful three days."

"Yes, I thought you might enjoy it. Put a bathing suit on and we'll beach the boat on one of the coves and you can get some sun."

"Just give me a few minutes to change."

Fifteen minutes later they were underway, staying close to the shoreline until they reached the Dutch side. Far off shore a Zodiac inflatable with two divers paralleled their course. Neither Baruch nor Malcolm noticed.

As the Malcolm's boat approached a sandy cove, he said, "I'm so glad we've had this time together."

Baruch responded, "I was afraid I was making a mistake, I thought there would be anything more, but I was wrong, it's been wonderful and I love you."

"I know," said Malcolm as he headed out and away from the cove.

"I thought we were going to sunbathe," said Baruch.

Malcolm cut the engine, turned to Baruch and said "I have something else in mind."

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He placed his hand behind Baruch's head, drew him forward and kissed him on the lips. Baruch leaned back in expectation of more. With his free hand, Malcolm grasped his lover's leg, lifted, and pushed the Israeli into the ocean.

Baruch screamed as he hit the water; his arms flailed, "Malcolm, my God, help me, help me. I can't swim."

"I know," said Malcolm.

"Why, why are you doing this to me, please help me,"

As he watched Cinai gulp water Malcolm shouted, "You're going to die because you are a wretched sweaty man who is of no use to me or any one else."

Malcolm turned his boat toward a Marina near Juliana Airport. Fifteen minutes later he docked and was greeted by a teenage dock hand. Malcolm ignored her and, showing all the distress he could muster, ran into the Marina office. "I need help. My friend went overboard."

"Where?" asked the office manager.

"Outside of a cove near the French side--- he can't swim--- it was horrible.

"When and how did this happen?" asked the Manager.

Malcolm removed a handkerchief from his bathing suit pocket. He wiped tears from his eyes, blew his nose and, while looking down, replied, "I don't know, ten- twenty minutes ago. He stood to change position, tripped on the anchor line and fell into the ocean." He blew his nose again and continued, "He went under and came up. He was flailing--- gulping water. I dove in--- the tide was coming out from the cove--- he panicked and went under. I couldn't find him."

"Did you circle the area?" asked the Manager.

"I got back in the boat, circled for a few minutes, and then headed here for help.

"I blame myself, I should have insisted that he wear his life vest, but he said it was too hot. Oh God, I can't believe it. Bar is gone, he's gone."

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The office manager led Malcolm to a 19 foot Edgewater powered by a two hundred horsepower Evinrude. With Malcolm's guidance sped they to the area where his companion had disappeared, slowed and circled the cove for a half hour. There was no trace of Baruch Cinai.

A police officer, his white, stiffly starched, uniform still unstained with sweat had been summoned to the Marina. He was waiting in the air conditioned office and observed the Edgewater pull alongside the fueling dock.

Malcolm followed the Manager into the office and repeated his story. The policeman, noting the Englishman's distress, and determining that he was the only witness to his friend's drowning, decided there was no cause for an investigation.

At a warehouse on the French side of the island, two Mossad divers deflated the high-speed Zodiac and disassembled the underwater sled used to rescue the Israeli scientist.

Avi who had awaited their return was on the phone with David Kimmel.

"We have Cinai, and we got the canisters, but only fourteen of them. I made the substitution but I have no idea where the fifteenth canister is."

"Does Cinai know?" asked David.

Avi responded, "He isn't talking?"

"Then make him talk!" said David. "Call me when you know more."

Avi put down the phone and turned to the distraught scientist.

"I hope, for your sake as well as ours and the hundreds of innocents who might die, we recover the missing canister."

Cinai said, "You should have let me drown!"

Avi replied, "If you don't tell me where the fifteenth canister is you will experience a great deal of pain."

Cinai wept, his voice cracked as he responded, "I did what you told me. Now I want to die."

"Not until you tell me everything you know," said Avi.

Malcolm arrived at the customs area of the port and picked up the shipment of wine from Italy. He returned to the Villa, carried the seven crates of Chianti into the kitchen, and with a scissor cut the fiberglass tape that secured each carton of wine. From each he removed two canisters and placed them on the counter.

He removed one bottle of Chianti, retrieved a corkscrew from the counter, opened it, filled a glass and walked to the sunroom.

The phone rang. It was Hassan. "I've been trying to reach you," he said.

"I've been indisposed," replied Malcolm.

"Have you received the wine?" asked Hassan.

"I'm drinking it as we speak," replied Malcolm.

"Save some for me," said Hassan, "I'll join you tomorrow."

Later that evening Malcolm returned to the kitchen. He removed the false bottom from inside each thermos, inserted and aligned the detonator, connected the radio receiver and replaced the silver mirrored bottom.

He then went to pantry and brought out a case of mango juice and a liter of dark rum. He filled each of the thermoses, replaced the screw cap cup and affixed colorful Sint-Maarten vacation stickers on the side of each.

Hassan arrived the next morning, was briefed by Malcolm and shown the bombs.

On two succeeding days twenty one of his associates arrived on six separate flights. Each group, after clearing customs and immigration, went to the sidewalk outside the terminal. A Honda Odyssey with a window sign that said *Halston Villa* was waiting. A Mossad operative photographed them as they entered the bus. A second operative with a telephoto lens photographed them as they entered the Villa.

The last to arrive were from Israel. Mohammed El Dheilan, Abd El Shaman, Nauru Zahid, and Abbas Hilmi, Hassan's second in command.

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They arrived at the Villa, and were greeted by Hassan who informed them, as he had the others that dinner that night would be served at eight.

Malcolm had arranged for the best of the Islands Italian restaurants to provide a catered dinner to be prepared and served by four serving staff. Twelve card tables, twenty four chairs, tablecloths, wine glasses, flatware, cutlery, insect repellent torches and candles were also provided. The catering staff arrived at five thirty unloaded their two trucks and assembled the tables and chairs on a patio overlooking the ocean. The tables were placed end to end, with a single chair at each end, eleven on one side and ten on the other. Two of the staff remained on the patio, to set the table and place the torches. Two prepared the food. Malcolm had selected the menu; Roasted Red peppers with anchovies as an appetizer, Lasagna or Manicotti as an entrée, a salad dressed with either, olive oil and vinegar or Parmesan Reggiano, olive oil and oregano.

At seven forty five Malcolm greeted Hassan as he entered the living room, “Good evening Hassan. Dinner tonight will be Italian and it will be appropriate to use the Chianti. It shouldn’t be left behind.”

Hassan laughed, “I can assure you Malcolm that nothing you provide will be wasted.”

Malcolm brought a case of wine out of the pantry. Hassan removed a bottle and noted the two empty spaces from which canisters had been removed. He read the label, ‘*Sassicaia Tenuta San Guido 1999*’, and said, “this is Italian but isn’t labeled ‘*Chianti*.’”

“I know said Malcolm, but as you can see it’s bottled in Tuscany and would have received that appellation but for recalcitrance of bureaucrats who insisted that the blend of grapes wasn’t representative of classical wine from the region. But, believe me, at \$170 a bottle it’s the best available.”

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Malcolm signaled one of the servers to uncork the entire case, turned to Hassan and whispered, "I suggest you inform each of your people, as they arrive, that nothing related to their occupation, or their reason for being here, should be discussed in the presence of the catering staff."

Hassan said, "Of course, Malcolm. Nothing will be overheard except word concerning the graciousness of their host and the excellence of the wine."

By eight, every one was seated, Malcolm at one end, Hassan at the other. Candles lit each table. Crystal goblets were filled by two of the serving staff.

Hassan lifted his, "To our gracious host, this wonderful island, this wonderful wine, and all the joy that will come from this visit."

The following morning, after a final briefing, the thermoses were distributed, fourteen of them harmless. The fifteenth, as deadly as the day it was made in the laboratories at Dimona, was received by Abbas Hilmi. The game of Russian roulette began.

Over the next two days Boulton's guests were photographed as they entered the boarding gate. As the twenty first boarded her plane, Aaron called Avi, "Boulton's guests have departed, except for Nabuli, whose waiting for a charter."

Avi said, "Once he's off the ground, check his destination."

"Will do," said Aaron.

"What about Boulton?" asked Avi.

"He hasn't left the house. What do you want us to do?"

"Go back there and don't let him out of your sight,"

Chapter 27

Sint-Maarten

When Aaron arrived at the Villa he conferred with his partner and called Avi. “There’s one drive from the house to the road and a path from the house to the dock; he might be able to leave by boat.”

“Can you see the dock?” asked Avi.

“Only the road,” replied Aaron.

“Is there a position from which you can see both?” asked Avi.

“No, I don’t think so,” replied Aaron.

“Then split up, you watch the road, Mutti the water,” said Avi.

“This might be a long stakeout; once we split up neither of will be able to take a break,” said Aaron. “Is there anyone to relieve us?”

“No, stay awake and cut the griping,” replied Avi.

Inside the house Malcolm, exhausted by the events of the past week, had fallen asleep on the sofa. He was awakened the next morning by the maid.

“Misser Mac, what you doing down here?”

“I fell asleep Penny. I’m going upstairs to shower. Fix me breakfast.”

“Yes suh, and with all those people gone you’ll have yourself pleny hot water and, Hallelujah, I’ll have me time to get the place cleaned up.”

Malcolm chuckled, “Hallelujah, indeed.”

A half hour later as he breakfasted on mangos, papayas, coffee, and corn bread he called Penny, from the sunroom where she was cleaning, to the kitchen. “This afternoon I’m going to

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Grand Case for lunch and a swim at Orient. I'll have leftovers tonight so you might as well leave once you've finished the sunroom."

"You certin bout that Misser Mac, it ain't no trouble to fix you a proper meal."

"I'm certain Penny, you've done quite enough this past week."

Early that afternoon, Malcolm drove to restaurant row in Grand Case. As he parked he noticed a blue Toyota pull into a parking space further up the street. It had been behind him since his departure from the villa.

He entered the Fish Pot restaurant, was seated at a table with an ocean view, and ordered a half bottle of Hugel Gewürztraminer, broiled grouper, and salad — all of which he consumed at a leisurely pace.

As he walked out of the restaurant, he looked in both directions. The blue Toyota and its two occupants hadn't moved. He decided not to alter his plans, and drove to Orient beach.

The well publicized beach was not the idyllic, isolated nude beach portrayed in travel magazines. What had once been a tranquil strand of sand bordered by brilliant blue water, was now a megapolis of beach chairs and umbrellas that stretched out of sight in both directions. Only the beach in reach of the tides was uncovered.

Loud music from food and beverage concessions, each identified by the color of its umbrellas, created a cacophony of sound. Men and women, all of whom who would have benefited from bathing attire, strolled at the water's edge; the men were looking for the occasional beauty, the women were comforted by the lack thereof.

Malcolm walked until he spotted a small oasis of solitude behind a large underbrush-covered sand dune. He found a bare patch of sand, and spread his towel, removed his clothing, and lay down. The scorching afternoon sun penetrated every inch of his body as he speculated as to the identity of the men who followed him.

No matter who they were, he would elude them and get off of the island. After less than a half hour he dressed and returned to his car.

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“Our boy didn’t spend much time in the sun,” said Mutti.

“Yeah, and he didn’t go in the water. I wonder why he bothered to come to the beach?” replied Aaron.

“Maybe he wanted to look at the women, but from what I’ve seen, it’s not worth the effort.”

Malcolm pulled out of the parking lot. The agents waited a few minutes and then followed.

As Malcolm pulled on to the main road the blue Toyota, with its two occupants appeared in the rear view mirror and stayed behind him all the way to the Villa. Malcolm pulled into the drive, parked and went inside. He took out the thin telephone directory and called the only chartered plane service on the French side.

He arranged for a chartered flight on the next day, giving his destination as San Juan, Puerto Rico. He insisted that no other passengers be on board. After keeping him waiting for five minutes, the attendant came back on the line and informed him that only one plane was available, a Beech Baron, and that the cost of the charter, without other passengers, would be \$1,000 per hour. Without hesitation Malcolm agreed. The flight would depart immediately upon his arrival at the airport between 1:00 and 2:00. The attendant insisted upon payment in advance. Malcolm put the charge on his American Express.

He then called a taxi service and arranged to be met the rear of the Grande Marche supermarket at 12:00 and driven to the Airport. Once again he was asked for payment in advance.

Outside, the two Mossad agents had taken their posts and prepared themselves for a long foodless vigil.

At eleven fifteen the next morning Malcolm packed his belongings in two small suitcases, which he gave to Penny along with an envelope containing an address in London and written instructions to the shipping company. “Penny, I want you to have a taxi deliver the bags to the freight forwarding company at the airport. The address, shipping instruction and my credit card

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number are in the envelope. He handed her Fifty dollars. "This is for the taxi. And this," handing her four hundred dollar bills, "this is for you."

Penny looked at the money and exclaimed, "Lordy , Lordy, I ain't never had this much money at one time."

Malcolm smiled as he said, "You've earned every penny of it Penny."

The maid put her hands on her hips and laughed hysterically. She calmed herself and said, "You be somthin' else Misser Mac."

Malcolm went to his rental car, pulled out of the drive and onto the road to the Grande Marche. He saw the blue Toyota come out of a pullover, make a u-turn and follow.

The parking lot of the ever busy supermarket was full. Malcolm circled to find a parking space; a battered Subaru pulled out of one near the entrance. Malcolm pulled in, turned off the ignition, and placed the keys on the floorboard. He left the car unlocked, and entered the crowded market.

Mutti turned to his partner.

"Should I follow him inside?" he asked.

Aaron said, "No, we'll find a parking place where we can see the entrance and wait."

"O.K. responded Mutti, but I need to piss and we both could damn well use something to eat."

Aaron said, "Then go in, make sure he's shopping, grab two sandwiches and a couple sodas and get your ass back here."

Mutti entered the market; he spotted Boulton filling his shopping cart with groceries. His bladder needed immediate attention and he almost scurried into the lavatory. When he came out Malcolm was waiting in a long line at the cheese counter; one clerk was desperately trying to serve a half dozen annoyed customers.

Malcolm, while waiting to purchase cheese, watched the man from the Toyota enter, and exit the bathroom, purchase sandwiches and 'Orangina,' and leave the store.

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To the relief of the customer behind him in line, Malcolm, with a gesture of frustration, left the cheese line and pushed his cart toward a loading dock in the rear. He abandoned the cart and walked through a set of double doors onto the loading dock. Six concrete steps led to the ground.

Two employees were unloading a truck of frozen meat. They stopped for a moment, eyed the well dressed white man, decided that, since he was carrying nothing, he wasn't a shoplifter and let him pass.

The taxi was waiting, as arranged. In twenty minutes he was at the airport, and in another fifteen he was airborne.

Back at the shopping center, the Mossad agents became concerned when, after ten minutes, Boulton had not returned to his car. Aaron said, "Mutti, wait here, I'm going into the market. Boulton should be out by now."

"Yeah, unless he was buying enough for guests that already left," replied Aaron.

Mutti exclaimed, "Damn it Aaron, I should have realized something was wrong. Boulton had enough stuff in his cart to feed an army. He had a reason to kill time."

Five minutes later Aaron trotted out of the market and to the car, "The son of a bitch is gone. I checked every isle and both bathrooms. One of the guys in the shipping department said a white man came through the loading dock. He said he wasn't carrying anything so no one stopped him. The son of a bitch was killing time so that he could loose us."

"We better call Avi," said Mutti.

"Yeah, and you can bet he's going to be pissed," said Aaron. "We better check his car for anything that might give us an idea where he's headed."

The two agents approached Boulton's car, opened the door which had been left unlocked and found the keys on the floor. Mutti pocketed them. After a search of the glove compartment, underneath the seats and visors, and the trunk Mutti said, "Nothing here, let's go back to his house. He wasn't carrying any luggage, we'll see what he left behind."

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The two agents drove to the Villa and were greeted by Penny, "Yes suhs, can I help you?"

"Yes ma'am, we're here to see Mr. Boulton. We have a meeting with him," said Aaron.

"You ain't gonna have a meetin' with him. He done packed and gone. He say to send his bags beginnin' next week."

"That's impossible, he told us to come here this afternoon to have him sign a very important contract. If he forgot we'll have to send him the contract. Can you give us the address where the luggage is to be sent?"

"I don' know 'bout that. Mr. Boulton didn' say nothing 'bout no meetin' but I guess it be aw'right. He done gave me a 'lope and say I to give to de shipping company. You wait right here an' I'll git it."

In a few moments she returned to the porch with an envelope. Mutti took the envelope, opened it and jotted down the shipping address.

"Thank you ma'am, I'm sure Mr. Boulton will be pleased to get the papers we have for him."

"I hope so, he's a nice man, and a big tipper," said the maid, pointedly.

Aaron handed the maid two five dollar bills.

"Thank you suh, you have a good day."

Aaron called Avi as soon as they were back in the car. "Avi, the bastard gave us the slip, and he left luggage to be forward to an address in London. It must be a relative. The luggage is to be sent to 37 Grovenor Place, care of Julian Boulton."

"Aaron, check every airport and every boat that's leaving this island. You take the Dutch side and I'll have two of our people work the French side.

The following afternoon, Avi waited at Juliana Airport to board his flight to New York. Before he boarded he called David Kimmel.

"David, we lost Boulton on the French side of the island."

"All I'm getting from you is bad news. When and how did it happen?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

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“Why did you wait to inform me?”

“I hoped we’d pick up his trail.”

“But you didn’t?”

“No, but I think I know where he’s heading. He had his luggage shipped to his parents’ flat in London.”

David voice was tinged with disgust, “And he might wait months to pick it up. Where is he now?”

“We traced him to an airport on the French side. He flew off the island in a twin-engine Beech Baron with a range of over 1,700 miles, giving his destination as San Juan. He either paid or forced the pilot to alter the flight plan; the plane didn’t land in San Juan and hasn’t returned to Sint Maarten. With the range of that Beech, Boulton could have gone anywhere in the Caribbean, or possibly even the southern U.S. As it is, the pilot and plane have disappeared. The charter company notified the police and aviation authorities.”

“Matossian, not to mention the Prime Minister will be furious when I tell them we lost track of Boulton,” said David.

“I screwed up,” said Avi.

“I know, and when I informed the Prime Minister that one of the canister’s had not been recovered he went ballistic. When I finished the story he exploded. Loosing Boulton will ice the cake. He wants it back and he wants Nabuli’s people in our custody.”

Avi commented, “Even though most aren’t Israeli citizens?”

“Neither was Eichman,” replied David.

“That’s right,” said Avi, “But we’re talking about twenty one people, most of whom are foreign nationals.”

David replied, “I’m aware of the problems, but those are our orders. I want to station a team at each of DeForster’s vaults.”

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“What was Deveraux’s reaction when you told him you want our people in the DeForster facilities?” asked Avi.

“What you’d expect,” said David. “He said that would not be possible.”

Avi asked, “So he believes the IDSO can handle the situation?”

David responded, “Yes, he insists that we stand down.”

“He’d be singing a different tune if he knew that one of the canisters was missing, armed and nuclear.”

“Tell him!” said David. “We need his co-operation.”

Chapter 28

Point-a-Petre, Guadeloupe and Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, England

The Beech Baron taxied to a remote corner of the flying field at Point-a-Petre on the island of Guadeloupe. Malcolm paid the pilot, who was relieved to be alive, in cash, with a bonus to insure his silence and delay his return to Sint Maarten. "Yes sir," said the pilot as he pocked one hundred, hundred dollar bills. "I'll find a room here, register under a false name, and when I resurface tell the tallest damn tale my bosses ever heard."

"Good man," said Malcolm. "Just make sure it's seven days."

"Seven days. Got it," said the pilot who as he walked away muttered to himself, "Crazy damn bastard thinks I'm going to risk losing my license for ten grand."

The Air France flight to Paris was not until 5 p.m. With several hours to spare Malcolm called Hassan.

"Hassan, I was followed when I left the Villa."

"By whom?" asked Hassan.

"Probably the Mossad, but it could have been freelancers from the IDSO. In any event, I lost them."

"I too have been followed. It's a game the Mossad and I often play and I always win. I'll lose them once I leave Switzerland. But in the off chance that it's the IDSO----I know little of their techniques."

"They're good Hassan---- but I can assure you they will not be a problem. As long as DeForster views me as nothing more than a potential competitor, they'll do as they have always done, intimidate those that would sell to me, and those that would buy."

"You know them better than I," said Hassan.

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“As you know the Mossad better than I. For my sake Hassan, contact your Mossad informant; see how much they know about us.”

Hassan responded, “I’ll do that, but the Mossad, if they were aware of our plans, would act, not follow.”

“I take you at your word,” replied Malcolm. “I’ll contact you again when I arrive at my final destination.”

At 4:30 Malcolm boarded the Air France flight to Orly Airport. He settled into First Class, had two cocktails, ate dinner, and watched the in-flight movie before dozing off. He awakened to the roar of the Airbus engines as the pilot used reverse thrust to slow.

Malcolm passed through French Customs and Immigration, hailed a cab to the train station, and boarded the first Chunnel train to London.

He left the train at Waterloo Station, took a cab to Paddington, and boarded the local train to Oxford. Upon his arrival he walked to the Randolph Hotel on Beaumont Street and rented a room. After unpacking he left the hotel, savored the familiar surroundings, and strolled down Broad Street to The Turf, an almost ancient pub tucked below the walls of New College.

A hostess seated him and in a moment a waiter, his apron stained with beer, arrived to take Malcolm’s order. The old man, his face wrinkled into a perpetual frown, attempted a smile as the young man selected steak pie, mushroom pie, chips, and a pint of Guinness. “Rather a bit to eat isn’t it Sir?”

Malcolm grinned, “And I’ll have bread pudding for desert.”

After dinner Malcolm walked to the bookstore he had favored during his student years. He browsed the vast selection of books; modern and ancient. Blackwell’s was as he remembered. An hour later he returned to the Randolph, went to his room, undressed and climbed into bed. He pulled the down comforter over him and, for the first time in months enjoyed a dreamless sleep.”

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At 9:00 the next morning, totally invigorated, he called the BMW dealership in London where he had stored his motorcycle. He instructed the Service Manager to have his BMW K1200 LT-E motorcycle fueled, tuned, and prepared for pick up in two days.

The arrangements made, he left the hotel and spent the day visiting his favorite Oxford colleges — Magdalen, Trinity, Balliol, Merton, and of course Queen's College, his alma mater. At 3:00 he attended a computer sciences lecture at Keble College, and then at 5:30 a chamber music concert at Christ Church Cathedral. Mozart's Serenade for Winds in B flat was aphrodisiacal.

The concert concluded, he left the Cathedral and walked to Brown's for a leisurely dinner. For the first time in months he had for an entire day forgotten DeForster, the Rothmans and the Israelis.

The Cherwell River ran, with its walking trails and meadowed banks, along the east side of town. Malcolm strolled for two hours past darkness, before returning to his hotel.

Early the next morning he checked out of the Randolph and boarded the train to London where he hired a taxi.

At the BMW dealership he was greeted, by name, by a septuagenarian Service Manager who recognized the young man who, most notably, paid what seemed to the old man, an exorbitant monthly rate to keep his motorcycle freshly fueled, waxed, and ready for immediate use. During the past two years he had ridden the bike twice and then only for a few hours.

He led the young man into the service area. Malcolm assessed his bike and after complementing the service manager on the immaculate condition of the machine, he removed his leather jacket, pants, helmet, and boots from the twin luggage carriers. He went into the w.c. and changed, returned to the bikes and packed his street clothing and shoes in one of the luggage carriers.

The polished black leather of his jacket and pants, and the black acrylic of his hooded helmet, glistened in the afternoon sun as he sped southwest on Great Scotland Yard. He turned on Whitehall, without slowing, and passed Charring Cross. It was a two hour, 150 mile ride to the Low Lighthouse

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at Burnham-on-Sea. He relished every moment as he brought the bike up to its cruising speed of 85 miles per hour.

As he merged onto the M5, he thought of the devastation he would inflict on Alex Rothman and De Forster.

The top of the Lighthouse appeared; solitary, bleak, and shrouded by the fog that rolled in daily along the narrow sea channel. The Low Lighthouse, built in 1832, had been abandoned in 1998. It remained vacant and deteriorating until Malcolm purchased it in 2001, restored it, and equipped it with sophisticated electronics — computers, satellite communicators, and an array of surveillance equipment he used to monitor the surrounding grounds.

The computer room was in the remodeled and waterproofed basement; a trapdoor beneath the kitchen table remained the only access.

Malcolm parked his bike and entered. Before settling in, he climbed down a narrow ladder into the computer room. He called Hassan in Syria.

“Hassan, I’m ready to proceed. Did your informant provide anything new?”

“Nothing of importance. She says the investigation into the Dimona theft is being coordinated through the Prime Minister’s office and she has heard nothing. She did say that there is speculation at Mossad headquarters about a potential theft of diamonds from Ramat Gan.”

“And your people Hassan; are they under surveillance?”

“No. It appears that only you and I have that problem.”

“I have dealt with it ,” replied Malcolm, “But you Hassan, what about you?”

“As I told you in the beginning, I am always watched,” responded Hassan, “but have learned to become invisible when required.

“Now tell me Malcolm; when will we go after the diamonds?”

“You will notify your associates that the canisters must be in place eight hours from now, at 3:05 GMT.

Hassan replied, “That will be done. And your arrangements; the armored vehicles and air transport?”

“Everything is arranged. In eight hours we will be exceptionally wealthy.”

“You will be wealthy Malcolm, and my people will regain what the Jews have taken; their future.”

Malcolm hung up, ascended the ladder into the kitchen, brewed himself a cup of hot tea, and climbed the lighthouse tower to his bedroom. Without undressing, he lay on his bed. He sipped the tea and set the alarm. He slept to a dream; Alex Rothman, his empire in ruins, slouched in a huge leather chair, a ruby glowing above his bloodshot eyes.

The alarm sounded. Malcolm oriented himself, undressed and showered. He emerged from the steaming water ready for the moment when his dream would become reality.

He shaved, towed himself dry, and dressed for the long awaited occasion — pleated, light tan gabardine slacks; a soft doeskin belt with an 18kt gold buckle, a single ruby set discretely on its underside; and a tan cashmere sweater.

He turned on his computer. He watched the screen come to life as one by one the icons for the Argus Security System appeared followed by the icons for each of the ‘*dirty bombs*’ and its satellite communications receiver.

A one inch diameter blood red ruby was last to appear on the screen. Malcolm double clicked it to initiate the program that would shut down Argus and detonate the fifteen bombs. In three minutes lethal radioactive dust would course through ventilation ducts and elevator shafts in each of DeForster’s vaults.

For decades, possibly centuries, the De Forster facilities and hundreds of millions of Euros in inventory would be radioactive, their employees would die, an agonizing passing. The Rothmans would pay for their treachery.

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George Deveraux received notification from the IDSO Security Center that Boulton had entered Argus. He addressed Avi and David. "Boulton has entered Argus!"

Avi, picked up a satellite phone that simultaneously connected to the six Mossad teams.

In London, Antwerp, New York, Surat, Moscow and Ramat Gan took action. They took twenty of Nabuli's associates into custody and recovered fourteen canisters.

Avi listened to the reports as they arrived from each of the teams. His concern was evident as he turned to Deveraux and said, his voice quaking with rage, "Abbas Hilmi, Nabuli's number two, was not at Ramat Gan or any other facility. Neither was the fifteenth canister."

"Why so concerned?" asked George, "You made the substitution, the device is harmless." Neither Avi nor David answered.

David changed the subject. "Now I want Nabuli and Boulton."

Avi said, "Nabuli left Saint Martin, flew to San Juan and from there to Switzerland. We followed him to the Villa Shindell."

"And then?" interjected Deveraux.

"He left the Villa and we lost him."

"My Lord!" exclaimed Deveraux, "You people are bloody hopeless."

Avi replied, "You're right, first I lose Boulton and then our Swiss detail loses Nabuli."

"The two ringleaders are on the loose and one or both will hook up with Hilmi and the missing canister."

George, this time made his determination to get an answer clear, "Once again Avi, and for the last bloody time, why are you so damned concerned with a harmless thermos?"

David said, "There's something you should know."

"That sounds rather ominous."

"It is, and I need your word that what I tell you will never be repeated."

"You have my word."

"The missing canister is nuclear and fully armed."

“Oh my Lord, ominous doesn’t suit.”

“No it doesn’t,” said Avi,

Deveraux exclaimed, “My Lord, you bloody Israelis have gotten yourselves in rather stormy straights. Fortunately, we’ve done a bit better. When Boulton attempted to enter Argus we intercepted and quarantined his code, we locked the back door he used to enter and blocked his communications pathway.

“He’s deaf, dumb, and blind. He bloody well doesn’t know what happened.”

“So he doesn’t know about the missing bomb?” asked David.

“I would think not,” said Deveraux, “Nor is he aware of the fate of Nabuli’s operatives, including this fellow Hilmi.”

Deveraux smiled, “And better yet my dear fellows, we know the location of the computer he used to communicate with Argus.”

“You know where he is and you didn’t taken him out. I don’t fucking believe it. And why the fuck didn’t you tell us you located him?” exclaimed Avi.

“Don’t pop your cork Avi. We didn’t know his location until his attempt to enter Argus. At least now you’ll have the opportunity to go in with us.”

“Assuming he still there,” said Avi.

“Oh, he’s there alright. We didn’t go in, but we bloody well are watching to make sure he didn’t go out.”

“Where is he?” asked Avi.

“At a lighthouse, actually a rather charming restoration in Somerset County, about one hundred and fifty miles from London.”

“I want him dead,” said Avi.

“Given what he’s done to you that doesn’t seem unreasonable. You might say I saved him for you. Of course, since he’s on our turf, I will accompany you when we go after him.”

“I don’t have a choice, do I George?”

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“No, it would seem not. I wouldn’t miss participating in sanctioning the bastard. And by the way Avi, as you’re father once told me, I’m an artist of sorts when it comes to this sort of thing.”

Avi said, “I didn’t know my father appreciated, as you say, ‘this sort of thing.’”

“Oh yes!” exclaimed Deveraux, “in fact he was rather an artist himself---- but that’s besides the point.”

Avi said, “Someday I’d like to hear about that.”

“Someday you will.---oh, one other thing, if perchance the local authorities become involved I have the ability to, as they say, ‘disappear’ the problem.”

“Fine, I’ll need help to find my way around your pretty little Island.”

“Then it’s agreed---I’ve arranged to have a Gulfstream V at our disposal and I’ll have two freelance operatives meet us at Gatwick with the appropriate transport and tools of the trade.”

Chapter 29

New York City & London, England

“Morris, I can’t believe it’s come to this,” said Ariana. “Avi called from Tel Aviv; he wouldn’t tell me where he’s going, but he won’t be coming to New York.”

Morris asked, “Does he still think you are in danger?”

“Yes, and he was furious with me for staying in the City. I told him that no one was going to force me to leave my work or my friends. Our conversation didn’t end on a happy note; he said I was obstinate and selfish. He may be right; I’ve given my friends and family a lot of aggravation.”

“You should take his advice. Go to Baltimore. Stay with your family.”

“Not a chance Morris, as I told Avi, I’m not going to run scared.”

“At least stay with me until this is over; my building has a doorman. No one gets in without and invitation.”

Ariana replied, her voice echoing her fatigue, “Thanks, Morris, I’ll be fine; my apartment is alarmed, and my Grandfather will have his people in New York keep an eye on me. If anything, since I got you into this mess, I’d like to hire you a bodyguard.”

Morris responded, “I appreciate the offer Ariana, but if I needed protection, which I don’t, I wouldn’t let you pay for it. Besides your Grandfather also offered to have his people watch over me; and I turned the offer down.”

“Morris, there is something that I didn’t mention to Avi or Grandfather. Two men have been following me. Can you call your friend Menachem and ask him if they’re Mossad?”

“Right now,” said Morris as he placed the call. “Menachem, this is Morris. I’m with Ariana. She thinks she’s being followed by two men. Are they yours?”

Menachem replied, “I would hope so. Two men have been assigned to protect her; our best. They have orders to be seen but unobtrusive.”

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“Thank you, Menachem. Shalom.”

“Shalom Ale hem” responded Menachem.

Morris turned to Ariana, “Menachem says they are his best and that you were meant to see them.”

Gatwick Airport, England

The Gulfstream V landed at Gatwick. Avi and George exited the plane. They had no luggage and no weapons. A tall, obviously fit man in his early thirties greeted them. His blonde hair was close-cropped, his eyes steel gray behind steel-rimmed aviator glasses. There was no doubt as to either his capabilities or his profession. “We’re ready for you, sir. Everything you requested is in the Rover.”

“Fine,” said Deveraux. “Where is Boulton?”

“He’s still at the Light House in Somerset.”

“How long will it take us to get there?”

“It’s at Burnham-on-Sea, less than two hours from here.”

“Let’s get on with it then,” said George.

Avi and George entered the rear of the Range Rover. The steely eyed blonde went to the rear of the car and opened the trunk.

The driver, who had not left the car, and had remained silent, appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent. He turned to the rear, “Mr. Deveraux, it’s good to see you again. Not so good to see you Mr. Stein.”

“Have we met?” asked Avi.

“Yes, in Tel Aviv. You and your fucking blonde haired partner interrogated me.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t remember you,” said Avi.

The man narrowed his eyes and snickered, “Unfortunately I remember you Mr. Stein.”

Avi put his head to Deveraux’s ear and whispered, “And this guy is supposed to help?”

George smiled but did not reply.

During the exchange the blonde agent had removed two packages from the trunk. He brought them to the rear side door, opened it, and handed them to Deveraux.

“Thanks,” said Deveraux.

He handed one package to Avi and opened the other, “I believe these might be of use.”

Avi opened his; it contained a Glock 40 caliber semiautomatic pistol, three thirteen-round clips of Black Talon ammunition, a 10-inch Maglite, and a pair of thin doeskin gloves. Avi quipped, “You’re supplying the paint and brushes.”

“Of course,” responded Deveraux, “and I expect you’ll use them as competently as your Father.”

The driver said, “Any stops along the way?”

Deveraux responded, “None, and Muwakkil, please assure Mr. Stein that you bear him no ill will.”

“Nothing that will keep me from doing my job,” replied the Palestinian.”

Avi said nothing.

“Thank you ‘Mukki’,” said Deveraux who went on, “When we arrive at the Lighthouse, Mukki you’ll stay with the Rover; Arnold you’ll position yourself out of sight, but close to the lighthouse. Avi and I will deal with Boulton. If we’re not out in ten minutes, come and get us. I assume you’re both properly armed.”

Arnold, responded, “Uzis, Berettas, and a stun guns.”

Deveraux smiled, “Quite adequate, but if you have to enter the house, forget the stun gun.”

The four men drove in silence until they reached the outskirts of the small town of Burnham-on-Sea. Muwakkil said, “The lighthouse is one hundred yards past the next intersection. The driveway is sixty yards long with a remotely controlled gate halfway to the house. We have the equipment to open the gate and silence any alarms.”

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Avi said, "I'd rather not have to deal with the alarm or gate. George and I will go to the lighthouse on foot."

Arnold asked, "If you're not out in ten minutes should I remain in the car?"

"Crash the gate and fuck the alarm," replied Avi.

George said, "Sounds a plan."

He and Avi stepped into a cold, drenching coastal rain. A heavy fog rolled in from the sea. An apparently unobstructed and unprotected path led around the gate and rejoined the road twenty yards further down.

In the lighthouse, Malcolm, sickened by his failure the previous day, had climbed to his bedroom and remained there, neither sleeping nor eating.

Malcolm was startled by the chirping from the lighthouse security system. He looked at the wall mounted, six quadrant monitor. The fog dimmed images transmitted by the night vision video cameras at the gate barely showed the reflective surfaces of a car.

He rose from bed, went to the first floor, opened the trap door, and climbed down the ladder into the computer room. He opened the word program, typed three words, hit the print command and entered 250 into number of copies.

Outside, fifty yards from the lighthouse the two men paused. George looked at Avi and whispered, "I worry when things are this easy."

Avi responded, "So do I."

George said, "Best we get on with it." The two men took the fifty yards at a run.

The ground floor of the lighthouse was dark; there was no car in the parking area. A light flickered from the second floor. Both men drew their Glocks, and chambered a round.

Avi turned the knob on the front door.

"Too bloody easy," whispered George as the door opened. Avi was first through; George followed. Lights were on in the kitchen.

Avi moved forward, he heard the hum of the refrigerator's compressor and another less familiar sound.

Avi motioned George to follow and moved forward. The less familiar sound came from an opening in the floor, an open trapdoor.

Both men pointed their weapons down into a room lit only by a computer screen. Avi, looked at George, pointed his finger at himself and climbed down the narrow ladder. George, his gun still pointed at the room below remained in the kitchen.

A Hewlett Packard color printer, its receiving tray missing, was spewing paper onto the floor. Avi picked up a page, placed it near the computer screen and read the three blood red words.

"Fuck," said Avi.

"What the hell is it?" asked George as he joined the Israeli. Avi handed him the paper. "My God Avi, lets get out of here."

Avi replied, "This printer holds two hundred fifty sheets of paper. Who knows how many are on the floor, but the feed tray is almost full. Boulton hasn't been gone long."

George muttered, "He might still be in the lighthouse."

The roar of an engine echoed off the water as a Black BMW motorcycle screamed out of a shed in the rear of the lighthouse and sped toward the gate.

Arnold heard the bike engine start and rushed toward the sound. As he approached the rear of the lighthouse the bike and its black leather clad driver roared by him. He lifted his Uzi just as Muwakill crashed the Rover through the gate. His line of fire was obstructed, there was no shot. Avi and George stood helplessly and watched the debacle unfold.

The Rover stopped in front of them. Muwakill said, "He's on a BMW, too damn fast for us to keep up."

George looked at Avi and said, "We have to get him before he gets to Rothman."

"Where is your beloved Chairman?" asked Avi.

"He and his wife are in London at their townhouse."

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“Does he have IDSO protection?” asked Avi.

“Of course, five good men; all well armed. Boulton won’t get past them.”

Avi said, “Boulton didn’t expect to fail, and he’s too smart to make an unplanned attack on Rothman’s home. He’ll be in London for a few days; he’ll need a place to stay and get organized.”

George said, “His parents have a flat in London, but winter in the Bahamas. I’m sure Boulton has a key to their flat.”

“Where is it?” asked Avi.

“In a genteel but rather run down apartment block not far from Alex’s town home.”

“Are you going to notify Rothman?” asked Avi.

“No, there’s no need to alarm him. I’ll alert the security detail,” replied George.

Chapter 30

Damascus, Syria & the El Basra Restaurant, New York City

Abbas Hilmi called Hassan's apartment in Damascus. "Hassan, something is very wrong, I have heard nothing from our people at the vaults."

"And yet you are able to call me----- where are you, and where are the others?"

"I'm in New York. I can only assume the others have been apprehended. It appears that fate has spared me from that misfortune."

"Why are you not at Ramat Gan?" asked Hassan.

"Jahid Samedi, the man chosen to lead the operation in New York was killed in an automobile accident. Hakim, who you know well, called to inform me of Jahid's death. He said that Jahid had not shared the final plans for the placement of the canisters, and that there was great confusion."

"So you took it upon yourself to solve this problem?"

"Yes Hassan, unlike those in New York, our people at Ramat Gan were well prepared and could proceed with out me. I flew to New York, instructed Hakim on the placement of the canisters, and planned to leave the following day."

"But you chose to stay?"

"Only after much thought. I realized that the Israeli immigration officials would be suspicious if my stay in New York was only for two or three days. I made the decision to wait until our mission was completed. Fortunately I remembered that Jahid's canister was still in his apartment. I went there and, *Praise be to Allah*, though it was well secreted, found it."

Hassan responded, "Your decision may have unforeseen benefits. I will inquire as to the fate of our people; then I will join you in New York at an apartment I maintain above the El Basra restaurant. It's at 14th Street and 3rd Avenue. Go there and wait."

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Hassan hung up the phone and called a number in Israel. The wall phone in a coffee shop outside of Ramat Gan rang. It was answered by a Palestinian waitress. Hassan left a brief message. It was relayed to his informant. His call would be returned. Early that evening his phone rang.

The caller was frantic.

Hassan said, "Calm yourself."

She replied, "How can I be calm, Mossad headquarters is ablaze with rumors that our Action teams arrested twenty conspirators involved with the theft of materials from Dimona. What is even worse, some say that the stolen material was not canisters of herbicides but nuclear devices, *dirty bombs*.' Of course no one in authority will confirm the rumors."

"Is there truth to the rumors?" asked Hassan.

"I believe so, but the official line is that the conspirators, those who were apprehended, were involved in the "*blood diamond*" trade. The materials stolen from Dimona were not bombs, but empty shielded Thermos bottles that, at Dimona were used to transport small quantities of nuclear material. The conspirators were going to use them to transport the "*blood diamonds*" through customs.

"You lied to me Hassan and I was stupid enough to believe your story."

Hassan interjected, "I did not lie. I told you what I believed to be true."

Muriel Brannoff countered, "You bastard; you said there would be no violence and no damage to the Government. I'm finished."

"Not yet, Miss Branoff. You have provided me with valuable information and I have but one thing more to ask of you."

"And my family won't be threatened?"

"Never again," replied Hassan.

"Alright Hassan; what do you want?"

"I wish to locate Malcolm Boulton."

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The following afternoon, Hassan left his apartment in Damascus, drove to the airport, and boarded an “Emirates” flight to Dubai. His flight from Dubai left at 1:30 a.m. At 7:30 a.m. approximately 21 hours after leaving Damascus, he landed at Kennedy Airport, presented a forged passport and visa, and was admitted into the United States.

He called the El Basra. No one answered. The taxi ride to lower Manhattan took forty-five minutes and Hassan got out just as the restaurant’s owner was arriving.

Hassan was surprised at the formality of the Palestinian expatriates greeting.

Abbas Hilmi was in his apartment. Hassan climbed the stairs and knocked. Abbas, still in night clothes opened the door. He was obviously upset, “I do not know the reasons for our failure. I have heard nothing from our people and the American press is silent. No other information is available to me, nothing but rumors amongst the wives and families of the missing.”

“I will answer your questions Abbas, but first tell me, Do you have Jahid’s canister?”

“I do, it is in the room above.”

“Abbas, I alone am to blame for this disastrous misadventure. The Englishman is not one of us, and I should never have trusted him.”

Hassan’s eyes blazed as he continued, “He never intended for us to have diamonds and wealth for our people. His scheme was a fraud. We were sacrificial lambs destined to perish. The fabric of his plans was woven with deceit and treachery; he will pay ... pay with his life.

“The irony is that the lives of our associates were saved by the Israelis.”

Abbas said, “Saved our lives ? I do not understand.”

Hassan grimaced as he explained , “The canisters Malcolm arranged for us to steal do not contain gas.. They are nuclear devices.”

Abbas was stunned, “We were meant to die?”

“Yes, and though the Israeli’s saved our people from that fate, they may well choose another, one equally as slow and painful.”

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“Fortunately we have two bargaining chips the nuclear device that is now in your possession and a woman who will so also be ours.”

“Who is the woman?” asked Abbas.

“Her name is Ariana Wright, and her family and associates financed the Englishman.”

“Where is this woman and how do we get her ?” asked Abbas.

“She lives not five minutes from where we sit. We will use the woman and the canister to make good on the promises I made to our people. The men who financed Malcolm and the Israelis, who secretly developed the ‘*dirty bomb*,’ will pay.”

“And the Englishman?” asked Abbas.

Hassan ran his hand across his neck and said, “ I will find him and he will die by the knife. His departure from this world will be slow and painful, and Allah willing he will rot in hell.”

Abbas followed Hassan to the apartment above the restaurant. “Abbas, bring the canister to me,” said Hassan.

Abbas left the room and returned with the thermos in one hand and a Lewis International Israeli Commando knife with a steel pommel and leather sheath in the other. He placed the canister on the floor in front of Hassan and ceremoniously presented the knife. “I have killed many Jews with this. It will serve you well when you deal with the Englishman.”

“Thank you Abbas,” said Hassan as he removed the knife from the sheath and ran his finger along the razor edged blade. “If you choose to remain with me, pray for Allah’s guidance.”

“I am with you! *Allah akbahr*,” replied Abbas.

Tel Aviv

David entered the Prime Minister’s office.

“I’ve terrible news.”

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“That’s an unpleasant way to start a conversation,” said the Prime Minister. “Why bring it to me, I’ve got enough *tsouris*.”

“Unfortunately sir, you’re directly involved.”

“Enough of this *mishgaz*, tell me what the hell I’m involved with that I don’t know about.”

“We’ve identified Nabuli’s informant,”

“I expected you would,” replied the Prime Minister

“ It’s Muriel.”

“Oh my God!” exclaimed the leader of the Israeli Government, “Not my granddaughter.”

David said, “I thought it best if this matter was handled with the utmost discretion.”

“I appreciate that David, I really do. Now tell me everything, I want the details.”

“It started innocuously, with a routine surveillance. We have been monitoring phone traffic to and from a coffee shop near Ramat Gan that is frequented by Palestinian day workers.

The person monitoring the phone traffic noted a call from Damascus. It was answered and terminated within ten seconds. He recorded it; seven words were spoken with no response.”

“And the words?” asked the Prime Minister.

A man in Damascus said, ‘Have her call me at my apartment,’ Our man was curious as to the identity of the caller and requested a voice print match. He received an answer in less than an hour. The caller was Hassan Nabuli.

The question was who was he asking to return his call and why was it made to the coffee shop. Later that afternoon a call was made from the coffee shop to a number at the DeForster facility at Ramat Gan.

“The caller asked to be connected to Muriel Brannoff. Of course our people had no idea who Muriel Brannoff was or what she did other than working at DeForster. Once again, the conversation was brief, “Call him at his apartment.” Muriel gave no response and hung up.

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Our agent followed through; obtained Muriel's home number and placed a tap. A call from her residence to Damascus was recorded not only by our agent, but by Shin Bet, who routinely records calls placed from Tel Aviv to Damascus.

Muriel although unaware of our tap was aware that Shin Bet monitors all calls to Damascus.

She used every trigger word in the book to get their attention — “canisters, stolen, nuclear, irradiated.” Shin Bet, did not share the information with us. Fortunately we had our own tap.”

The Prime Minister slumped in his chair, “Muriel wants to be caught.”

“Yes sir, she does. The conversation with Nabuli was quite lengthy and we understand why she worked for him.”

“Why?” asked the Prime Minister.

“Nabuli threatened to harm her family if she didn't provide him with information. She did not know, until she heard the recent rumors, that he was planning anything other than a diamond heist.”

“Why in the hell didn't she ask for protection?” queried the Prime Minister.

“I think she's seen enough to know that there's no protection from a determined assassin. She made a bargain with Nabuli which she kept until she heard the rumors that nuclear material had been stolen. Now she wants out.”

“It's a little late for that,” said the Prime Minister.

David replied, “Nabuli said he had only one more thing to ask of her and then she would be cut loose.”

“And that was?” asked the Prime Minister.

“Where he could find Malcolm Boulton,” replied David.

“Did he mention the fifteenth canister?”

“No, it wasn't mentioned.”

“Bring her in,” ordered the Director, “to me.”

“Yes sir,” replied David.

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As David prepared to leave the Prime Minister said, "David, no one else is to be privy to this information."

Muriel was at home. Her six year old daughter was watching television. David knocked.

Muriel said, "I knew you would come."

David's face was expressionless as he spoke, "Why Muriel, why?"

Muriel's eyes were bloodshot, the lids scarred with mascara.

"Answer me."

Muriel wiped her eyes, went to her daughter and led her out of the room.

She returned and said, "David, I knew you would hear my conversation with Nabuli."

"He threatened your family," said David, "but why didn't you come to me, or to the Prime Minister.

"I was to scared; you know that no one is safe when they are targeted. I tried to respond to Nabuli's requests, which at first concerned the DeForster facility, and only recently, after he learned that I worked for the Mossad, about us. I avoided giving him information that would compromise our operations.

"That's really not the point Muriel; you are a traitor."

"I know David, believe me I know, and I pay for it every waking moment, and then in my nightmares."

David said, "The Prime Minister wants me to bring you to him. Call your mother now and ask her pick up your daughter. They will be protected until this matter is sorted out."

"David, I'm truly sorry."

Almost as an aside David asked, "Did you know that we had an agent in Nabuli's organization?"

Muriel hesitated, "Yes I did, but I didn't give Hassan a name. In fact, I had no name to give."

David replied, "Her name was Assiz and you are responsible for her murder."

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Muriel was stunned, “ Not Benjamin Stein’s adopted daughter.”

“Yes, Avi Stein’s sister.”

“Oh my God.”

Chapter 31

London, England

The night was overcast. A light fog drifted down the deserted street; a solitary street lamp cast densely patterned shadows of young, newly planted Pin Oak. The Rover, with Deveraux driving, pulled in front of the Rothman residence, Deveraux removed his phone from his overcoat and used speed-dial to connect to John Rinker, the senior IDSO officer protecting the Rothman residence.

“This is Deveraux; come out to the Rover. We’re opposite the residence.”

Rinker answered, “I’ll call your unlisted to confirm.”

The cellular vibrated, Deveraux answered, “Deveraux here. And John, good of you to confirm.”

A short, athletic man in his mid-thirties strode out of the townhouse and to the Rover. Deveraux motioned to the back seat; the two IDSO agents shifted to make room for Rinker.

“Sir, what are you doing here at this time of night?”

Deveraux responded, “We have a situation. An attempt may be made to harm Alex and his family. I don’t want him, or any member of his family, to leave the house until it is resolved. If we haven’t dealt with the threat before morning, you will inform him of the danger. Emphasize that he is to stay inside until you get word from me that the situation is under control. Do I make myself clear?”

“Quite clear Sir, but, if I may ask, where is the threat from?”

“Malcolm Boulton, an ex-employee; he’s a very unstable, very dangerous man.”

Rinker exited the Rover and returned to the townhouse.

Avi said, “George, let’s head over to the Boulton apartment.” As they drove the short distance to the apartment, the elegant mansions of the ultra rich gave way to buildings that had once housed the aspiring, but were now the abode of the defeated.

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George addressed the two security men, who had remained stoically silent, "If Boulton is here, his motorcycle will be nearby. Muwakill, Arnold, go to the back, check the alley and garages. Avi and I will check both ways further along the street. He may have parked some distance away and walked."

"Right Sir," said Muwakil as he removed two flashlights and two holstered Berettas from a locked compartment in the rear of the Rover. He handed a gun and a flashlight to Arnold, and the two men walked toward the alley. George and Avi got out of the car, locked it, and separated walking in opposite directions down the dimly lit street. As Deveraux arrived at the first intersection, his phone vibrated.

"Sir, the bike, a Black BMW is here, a K1200 LTE. It's parked in a small garage, but we can see it through a window."

"Break in and disable the bike; we don't want Boulton roaring off again. Stay there until you hear from me, and be careful. He might be armed."

George called Avi, "Boulton is here. His bike is in a garage in back."

Avi responded, "Julian Boulton's apartment is on the third floor, 3B. Malcolm had his luggage forwarded here from Sint Maarten and has most likely come to retrieve it."

"Let's do it," said George. "I'll meet you at the car."

"Right," answered Avi.

The two arrived simultaneously. They removed their weapons from a locked compartment beneath the dash, and retrieved a flashlight from the rear compartment.

Avi used a thin metal pick to open the front door of the apartment building. Lights activated by motion detectors came on as George, flashlight in one hand and Glock in the other, led the way up a wooden staircase. Avi, his weapon drawn, followed. A fan of light came from below the entrance to apartment 3B.

Avi stepped to the side of the door, grasped the doorknob, turned it, and meeting no resistance, opened it slowly; a rusty upper hinge made the entry less than silent. The foyer of the

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shabbily elegant apartment was lit by a small table lamp across from the doorway. George motioned toward the rear of the main corridor. A light showed in the space beneath a closed door. As they got closer to the door, they heard a faint electrical hum. George turned off his flashlight and placed it on the carpet. Avi continued to move forward, signaling George to hold steady. Avi, with a single kick, splintered the door. They entered Avi moved to the right and signaled George to move forward. When George was in position on the left, Avi entered the room. A laptop computer greeted them with the now familiar words, "He will die ."

Avi cursed, "The bastard got away again!"

Chapter 32

New York City

Ariana left Morris's office, went out onto Fifth Avenue, and hailed a cab. The presence of the two Mossad agents brought home the reality of Malcolm's threat. They were tangible proof that his words were to be taken seriously. As she entered the cab, one of the men climbed into a dark blue Chevrolet Suburban.

As the cab pulled away from the curb she said, "19th and 9th." At the corner of 19th Street and 9th Avenue the cab stopped; Ariana handed the driver a ten dollar bill, got out, and walked the short distance to her townhouse. The dark blue Suburban continued on 9th Avenue, circled back to 19th Street and stopped thirty feet from her building.

Ariana had settled in and was picking up her messages. The first was from her Grandfather.

"Ariana, I'm certain that your friend Boulton is up to no good and I am taking precautions to insure your safety. I've asked the Mossad to provide you with protection., I've also instructed my people in New York to do the same. Even with this, I would feel better if you stayed at your Mother's until this matter is resolved. I love you."

The second was from Avi.

"Ariana. I won't be able to get to New York until we wrap of this affair with Boulton. Sorry I can't be there, and even sorrier I got you involved in our operation."

Ariana went to the bar, poured a scotch, added two ice cubes, and lay down on the sofa. Within five minutes, she was asleep, her drink untouched.

Outside, a second Suburban pulled up. Reuven got out and approached the two agents, "Jeremy, I'm leaving the truck with you. I want yours behind the apartment, and mine in front. I'm going to get some shut eye. If anything, anything at all, comes up, call me. I'll relieve one of you at 3:00 a.m., and we'll rotate from then on."

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“Alright Reuven; do you want me to drive you to your hotel?” asked Chaim.

“No, I’ll grab a cab.”

As Reuven walked away, Jeremy drove his truck into the alley behind the townhouse. When he was positioned in the narrow, seldom-used passageway, he called Chaim. “I’m here, with a good view of the back entrance; let’s keep in contact, on the hour.”

As evening approached, the streetlights on 19th Street came on. The alley remained unlit. At 2:00 a.m. Chaim called his partner.

“Jeremy, nothing’s going down, except piss from a bum into a basement entrance and the occasional cop car that slows to hassle the punks that hang out on the corner.”

Jeremy replied, “If it was any quieter back here it would be a morgue. No bums, no cruisers, nobody. Talk to you again at 3:00. Reuven should be here by then.”

Hassan stood on the corner of 19th and 9th, his head bent, a brown bag with a bottle in one hand and a tattered canvas bag in the other. He had watched Ariana enter her brownstone and over the past several hours watched a second Suburban pull into a space further down the block. The driver had remained for only a few minutes and then walked toward 8th Avenue. Shortly after his departure one of the men drove a Suburban into the alley behind the brownstone.

At 2:05 a.m., Hassan, head bowed and with a drunken gait, made his way into the alley. He stumbled past the Suburban and walked another fifty feet before removing a moth eaten blanket from his bag. He dropped it next to a garage door. He appeared to almost fall on to it. He raised the brown bag to his mouth and took a swig of water.

Jeremy, using a small night vision monocular, watched the vagrant, decided he posed no threat, and settled back in his seat.

Hassan waited. Twenty minutes passed before the agent’s head dropped down and to the side. Hassan rose, left bag and bottle on the blanket and crept to the driver’s side of the parked car. As he had hoped the door was not locked. He yanked it open.

Jeremy awakened. Disoriented, he grasped for the gun that lay by his side; too late. Hassan struck him on the temple with the steel pommel of the Israeli Commando knife; a second blow to the back of his head rendered him unconscious.

Hassan reached into his overcoat, brought out a roll of duct tape, wrapped three turns around Jeremy's mouth, , tore the tape with his teeth, and wrapped three turns around his wrists. He dragged the agent out of the front seat, bound his legs with three more turns of tape, and rolled him to the side of the alley.

Hassan discarded his green army coat. Fifteen minutes remained before, what he had observed to be, the hourly phone call between the two Mossad agents.

Hassan with an electronic device obtained from a Syrian Intelligence Officer disabled the alarm system and pried open the rear door of the townhouse. He entered, tread noiselessly up the stairs to the dimly lit living room where

Ariana lay on the couch, a glass of whisky beside her. He put the knife to her throat, and placed his hand over her mouth.

“Wake up, dear lady.”

Ariana opened her eyes, tried to scream, and seized the hand that covered her mouth.

Hassan put pressure on the knife; a thin red line formed along the blade. “Do not resist. I do not wish to harm you.”

Ariana blinked her eyes in acknowledgement; Hassan removed his hand from her mouth and lowered the knife.

“Who are you and what do you want?”

“Malcolm has betrayed me and you and your family supported him and now must make amends. You will come with me. Your Grandfather is a rich and respected; if he agrees to meet my demands, you will be released unharmed.”

Ariana responded, “My Grandfather won't be blackmailed; you'll never get away with this.”

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“For your sake, I hope you are wrong,” said Hassan as he pulled her up, wrapped duct tape around her mouth and wrists, and pushed her toward the stairs. He supported her as they descended to the rear entrance. Before exiting, he reactivated the alarm system. The silent alarm was sent.

He looked at his watch, He had five minutes before the Mossad agents were due to communicate. He opened the door of the Suburban and pushed Ariana in, locked the door, and went to the driver’s side. He started the truck; with the lights off he drove out of the alley.

At the security company’s offices, the silent alarm came in at 2:56. The on duty officer dispatched a car and called the police, who had also received the alarm.

“We have a silent alarm from 310 19th Street, the Wright residence. We’re dispatching a car.”

“We have two on the way,” responded the police desk sergeant.

At 3:00 am Chaim placed the call to Jeremy, as the sixth ring went unanswered two police cars, lights flashing, turned onto 19th Street; one pulled diagonally in front of Chaim’s Suburban, the other diagonally behind it. Two officers, one a sergeant, the other a corporal, their guns drawn, approached the Suburban.

“Jeremy, answer the fucking phone,” said Chaim as the corporal screamed, “Get out of the fucking truck and put your fucking hands above your head.”

Chaim, still holding the phone, got out of the car. He raised his hands and started to protest. “There’s another agent----- “Shut the fuck up,” said the corporal.

The sergeant asked, “Agent----who the hell are you?”

“I’m a security officer at the Israeli consulate. I’m carrying and licensed. My I.D.’s in my jacket pocket..”

The sergeant said, “ Get his weapon and check his I.D. The corporal took Chaim’s weapon out of his holster and checked his identification. “The guy’s got a permit and diplomatic I.D.”

An alarm company car pulled alongside the three vehicles. The driver got out and yelled, “You guys screwed up; the alarm came from the rear entrance.”

The sergeant said, “Shit, we wasted fucking time with this fucking diplomat, whoever broke in is gone by now.”

The alarm company officer said “I have a key, but I’m not going in without an escort; not the way it’s been around here lately.”

“I’ll go in with you,” said the sergeant.

He addressed the junior officer, “Take your car and check the back,” and pointing at Chaim he said, “You stay out of the way!”

At 3:05 Reuven’s taxi entered 19th Street from 9th Avenue. One of two police cars that had blocked the Suburban reversed past him.

“What the fuck?” muttered Reuven, “Pull over, and wait,” he said to the cab driver as he jumped out and ran toward the front door. Reuven exclaimed, “I’m with the Israeli consulate.”

“You too,” said the sergeant as Chaim joined them. “Your credentials.”

Reuven handed him the I.D. and asked, “Now what the fuck is going on here?”

“Sir, there is no reason for that kind of language, now calm down.”

“Alright, alright,” said Reuven in the most apologetic tone he could muster.

The sergeant responded, “We’re responding to a burglary alarm.”

Reuven turned to Chaim, “Where the fuck is Jeremy?”

Chaim replied, “He’s still in the alley. I was trying to call him when these guys pulled up.”

The Sergeant face reddened, “I don’t know what the fuck you guys are doing here, but I do know you’re wasting my fucking time,” he turned to the alarm company employee and said, “Open the fucking door.”

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Reuven said, "We're going in with you."

"The fuck you are. Do yourself some good and find your other guy."

Inside the townhouse the sergeant said to the alarm company employee, "Check all the rooms on this level, I'll go downstairs."

The sergeant walked to the lower rear level and yelled, "There's been a forced entry and there's no one down here." The alarm company guard said, "The system indicated that someone was in the house when the alarm came in. There may have been a kidnapping."

Fifteen blocks away in an alley, Hassan parked behind a black Ford Explorer. He assisted Ariana out of the Suburban and into the waiting vehicle. In five minutes he arrived at the El Basra restaurant, and was greeted by Abbas Hilmi. The two men took Ariana to a second floor apartment, removed the duct tape, and locked her in a bedroom.

Abbas said, "This is the Wright woman."

"Yes, a beautiful young woman, is she not?" commented Hassan.

"Indeed, too beautiful to have wasted herself on the Englishman," replied Abbas.

"After we move her to New Jersey, I'll call Matossian to inform him that we have his granddaughter. I will tell him that we are protecting her from those who might wish her ill and that we require payment for our services. Matossian is familiar with the niceties of abductions. He will agree to pay. Then I will call the Israeli consulate. I will inform them that we have one of the bombs from Dimona. They also will pay."

Inside the townhouse, Reuven spent ten minutes explaining the situation to the police sergeant while a paramedic bound a gaping wound on Jeremy's temple.

Chaim was on the phone with Menachem Harel.

"Menachem, Ariana Wright has been kidnapped. I'm calling from her apartment."

Menachem's voice was calm as he asked, "When did the abduction take place?"

"According to information from the alarm company, at 2:50."

"Is Reuven with you?"

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“Yeah, but the police are giving him a rough time; they want to know why three armed Israeli consular officials are staking out a private residence in their city.”

“Stay there until you hear from me, I’ll straighten things out, but first I have to notify Kimmel.”

Menachem made the call to Israel.

“David, we have a situation. Ariana Wright has been kidnapped.”

There was an ominous silence, followed by an emotional outburst, “How the shit did it happen? Reuven is there, and you had two of your best men watching her. What the hell is going on?”

“David, you don’t want to know.”

David exclaimed, “Yeah, I want to know, but first tell me who has her.”

“The most obvious suspect is Nabuli.” answered Menachem.

“If she’s harmed, her Grandfather will hold us accountable, and will make us pay dearly for our ineptitude. I want hourly updates on the situation.”

Menachem, placed a second call, as unpleasant as the first.

“Morris, Menachem here. I have unfortunate news. Ariana Wright has been abducted. We will get her back safely.”

“I can’t believe it; I assumed you were protecting her. I should have known better.”

Chapter 33

Grand Cayman Island, The Caribbean

Avi waited at Gatwick Airport for the IDSO Gulfstream that was to take him to Grand Cayman. His satellite phone vibrated.

“Avi, we’re in the midst of a nightmare.”

“David, wait a second, there’s a plane taking off. I can barely hear you.”

As the plane left the runway Avi asked, “Now what is this about a nightmare?”

“Ariana Wright has been kidnapped, almost certainly by Nabuli.”

Avi shook his head in disbelief, “David, I don’t believe it. Has he made any demands?”

“Not yet, but he will. And it gets worse, he has the fifteenth canister stashed in New York.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“As sure as we can be without having the damn thing in our hands; we’ve finished preliminary interrogations of Nabuli’s people. Jahid Samedi, was to lead the operation at the New York vault but was killed in an automobile accident two days before the attack. Abbas Hilmi flew in from Tel Aviv to replace him. Hilmi gave the orders, found Samedi’s bomb and hasn’t left the country.”

“David, we look like amateurs. We can’t protect anyone, even our own, and we let a Palestinian terrorist organization, that is under surveillance, steal a nuclear device and carry it into the United States, and then kidnap the granddaughter of one of the most powerful men in the Middle East while we are protecting her--- if we keep up the good work the C.I.A. will be looking to recruit us.”

“Avi, at least you still have a sense of humor and you’re going to need it. I spoke to Caldwell at C.I.A. and asked for logistical assistance. We have to find Ariana Wright and the missing device. Caldwell assured me that he’ll do what he can, but said that the F.B.I. had already been called in by the New York City Police Department.”

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“Great,” said Avi.

His voice indicated his disgust as he finished his thought, “We’ll let the Americans clean up our mess.”

“At least help with part of it,” said David. “I called the Director of the F.B.I. to inform him of our involvement in the kidnapping. He was none too pleased, especially when he found out that Ariana Wright was Dikran Matossian’s granddaughter, and that Dikran had asked our people to protect her. He reluctantly assured me that — if and only if we were totally forthcoming — we would have their co-operation.”

“And how forthcoming will you be?” asked Avi.

“Very forthcoming, about Wright; but no one else is going to find out about the missing canister.”

Avi asked, “Wouldn’t it be advisable to let the C.I.A. know that the device is in New York?”

“Hell no!” replied David, “The political ramifications of an Israeli nuclear device on American soil would be disastrous. We have to get it back on our own. I want you in New York as soon as possible.”

“I’m on my way to Grand Cayman. The money Boulton’s investors had on deposit with Credit Suisse was transferred to the Caribbean branch of Arab American Bank, and he’s trying to pry it loose.”

“Screw Boulton and the money,” responded David.

“David, the bastard killed my sister. Give me a few days or, at the least, until Nabuli makes his demands.”

“O.K. Avi, but when we hear from him I want you in New York.”

As the Gulfstream taxied to the gate, Avi called Jim Caldwell at C.I.A.

“Jim, it’s Avi Stein; David informed you about the kidnapping, and I appreciate your offer of assistance. In the meantime, we have another situation that I have to deal with. Malcolm Boulton, an Englishman who was planning a heist for the DeForster Diamond Vault at Ramat Gan, got away

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from us in London; we believe he's on Grand Cayman trying to access money that the backers of his scheme transferred from Credit Suisse to the Arab American Bank."

Caldwell asked, "Why in the hell would he go to Grand Cayman to access money from an Arab Bank?"

"The Bank has a branch on the island and he knows we would have picked him up on a flight from the U.S. to the Middle East. He probably got to the Island by private plane or by boat from Miami."

"Sounds logical," replied Caldwell. "What do you want from us?"

"You've been monitoring the Cayman banks since the Patriot Act was enacted and I hoped you might have someone that could give me a heads up if and when Boulton shows up at the bank."

"You're in luck Stein. I have an agent working on a laundering operation in the Caymans. Get me a photo of your guy and I'll ask her to check around. I'll also ask her to provide you with assistance in dealing with the authorities if the need arises. Her name is Shannon Flanagan. She can be reached through our consular office on Grand Cayman."

Forty minutes later, well out over the Atlantic, Avi received a call from Reuven.

"Avi, I fucked up, I should never have depended on anyone but myself."

"Reuvi, get her back. I never thought she was in danger from Nabuli. That was my mistake; I thought Boulton posed the threat.

Reuven replied, "Hassan knows that a reasonable ransom demand won't rile Matossian too much. Rich people in the Middle East view paying for kidnap victims as a cost of doing business or keeping their families intact.

"Nabuli knows damn well that if anything happens to Ariana, he'll make an enemy of Matossian and land up, at best an outcast, but most likely dead. He won't harm her."

Avi said, "David gave me the go ahead to deal with Boulton. Once Nabuli makes his demands for the return of Ariana and the canister I have to return to the States. In the mean time, I'm going to find the bastard and kill him."

“How did he get away from you and George in London?” asked Reuven.

“George sent some people to search the lighthouse where Boulton was operating from. They discovered sophisticated surveillance equipment in the building and on the grounds surrounding it. Boulton heard everything we said. He knew where we’d go and when we’d get there; he had time to take care of his business and get out.”

“So he knew where you were going to look for him,” said Reuven.

“Yeah, he did, and he left there in a taxi twenty minutes before we showed up. We finally located the cab driver and traced to the Airport Hotel at Heathrow. The next morning a man fitting his description boarded British Airways flight BA253 to Grand Cayman; passport control confirmed his arrival.”

Reuven ended the conversation, “Avi, this time get the bastard and kill him.”

Newark, New Jersey

Hassan and Abbas drove down Interstate-95 to Newark, keeping their speed well below the limit. The battered white van was similar to hundreds of others, except for the woman, gagged and bound under a tarpaulin in the rear. After thirty minutes they entered the Arabic section of Newark, and in another five were at 1340 Arnot Street.

Hassan said, “Abbas, get the woman out of the back; we’ll take her to the bedroom on the second floor.”

Abbas opened the van’s rear, grasped Ariana’s arms, and pulled her out. He helped her gain her balance and led her into the house. Hassan guided her up a dimly lit stairway.

They entered a bedroom; a bare, dust-covered, 60 watt bulb hung from the ceiling casting a sickly yellow light through the room. Shades, brown with age, covered two windows which were secured with heavy metal grates and padlocks. A television monitor mounted on the wall opposite the window flickered with an image of the front entrance.

Hassan lowered Ariana onto a bare mattress and removed the gag. He left her hands tightly bound.

“Miss Wright, I apologize for the accommodations but we will make you as comfortable as possible until we reach an agreement with your Grandfather. I would appreciate your cooperation; as a first sign of your good faith, please provide me with a number to reach him without the necessity of going through reluctant or curious intermediaries.”

Ariana looked around the room, and finally at Hassan.

“My Grandfather will not be blackmailed; he has friends in the Middle East who won’t tolerate your actions.”

Hassan responded with passion, “Your treacherous lover has cost my people a great deal; money which they desperately need, as well as respect, of which they receive too little. I must recover both.”

Ariana was surprised by the eloquence and sincerity of the man. Hassan Nabuli was not as she expected.

Her response was measured, “I didn’t know much about Malcolm’s plans. Only that he intended to compete with DeForster. I knew nothing about his relationship with you.”

“I find that hard to believe,” said Hassan.

“Believe it and believe that when I found out what he was up to I left him and wanted nothing more to do with him. But again, believe me that it would not serve your interests, or the interests of your people, to make an enemy of my Grandfather. I suggest you release me and put an end to this.”

“Unfortunately it is too late for that. Provide me the number and spare yourself further discomfort!”

Ariana’s eyes glowed; defiant in the face of the threat she said, “Don’t threaten me! And spare yourself the discomfort of my Grandfather’s retribution.”

Hassan ignored her response and turned to Abbas. “The woman will stay here with you. I’m going to bring her someone to keep her company while she considers our request.”

“Please don’t involve my friends.”

“Morris Goldman will join you; then you might choose to reconsider your position.”

Hassan left the room before Ariana could reply.

New York City, Morris Goldman’s office

“Hannah, come in for a moment.”

“Yes Morris, what is it?”

“I can’t get any work done; I might as well go home. Would you lock the safes and close up?”

“Sure, but I’ll stay a while; I’m behind on my paperwork.”

“All right, but don’t let anyone in, and go home early.”

“Morris is there anything I can do? I’ve never seen you like this.”

“No, nothing, nothing at all; I’ll tell the security guard to stay on duty until you leave.”

Morris spoke briefly to the guard, and took the elevator to the ground floor of the Swiss Building. He walked out onto Fifth Avenue. The air was, clear and crisp, the setting sun brought new colors; altogether an afternoon he would have enjoyed. He started to hail a cab, decided to walk, and at Lexington the he turned right toward 71st Street. At the entrance to his apartment building, a white panel van was parked in the loading zone, the front passenger door open. A man with paint-stained overalls lounged against it, looking at what appeared to be a photograph. Morris noted his perfectly trimmed beard, patrician nose, and olive complexion. The man looked up, stared at Morris for a moment, and then approached him.

“Mr. Goldman, you will please get into the van.”

Morris looked at the man wondering what insanity led to the invitation and asked, “How do you know my name?”

Rather than answer Hassan said, “Do not resist Mr. Goldman; Miss Wright insists that you join her.”

“Nonsense,” said Morris, “What kind of *mishegaz* is this? Who are you?”

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“The man who has your friend.”

“Where is she?”

“No more questions Mr. Goldman. Get in!”

Morris reluctantly obeyed. Hassan closed the door, and walked to the driver’s side.

“Mr. Goldman, you have made a wise decision. Soon you will understand.”

Neither man spoke as they drove to Newark.

Grand Cayman Island, The Caribbean

Malcolm arrived at Owen Roberts Airport on British Airways flight 253. The plane arrived fifteen minutes early, at 4:00 in the afternoon. He passed through Customs and Immigration and rented a four-wheel drive Toyota using his own passport and credit card.

The temperature was 75, the sky was overcast, the wind was gentle and from the sea. Malcolm drove out of the airport and headed northwest onto South Church Street, then due north out of George Town. He continued on Bay Street past the Grand Bay Club, The Anchorage, and fifteen other hotels and condominiums. At the tip of the island, he turned northeast, finally arriving at Coach Point and the Spanish Reef Hotel, a petite, slightly run-down resort whose clientele were mostly British and genteely poor. He had stayed there when he created a computer security system for International Management Systems, an offshore financial institution.

The hotel nestled in a lovely cove, with grounds that received minimal care. He walked to the reception area where a tall, light-skinned man greeted him enthusiastically. “Malcolm, it’s so good to see you after all this time.”

“Thomas, I can’t believe you remember me.”

“How could I forget you? If it were not for your generosity, I would have gone bankrupt.”

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“That was nothing, but I can use your help. I’d like to stay here. I’ll pay in cash. I don’t want anyone to know I’m here. There are so many demands being made of me, and my office will search relentlessly to get me to answer a stupid question from a stupid client.”

“That won’t be a problem, there is no need for you to register; you will be my guest for as long as you choose to stay with us, and of course I will not accept your money.”

“That’s very gracious of you, but I insist upon paying, and I have an additional request. I need a high-speed, ocean-capable boat.”

“That won’t be a problem. After you lent me money to meet my debts, my fortunes turned for the better; I bought the boat I had always dreamed of, a thirty-eight-foot Quantum Eclipse. She’s a Catamaran with twin 240 hp diesels and extra fuel tanks. Once a week I transport freight to Little Cayman and Cayman Brac. Occasionally I’m lucky enough to charter it to a tourist. The boat is yours to use as you need.”

“Wonderful, I’m going back to Georgetown tomorrow morning, and then I’ll go to Brac for an indefinite period. Your sister has a small guest cottage?”

“Yes, she does, very charming, near the dive center.”

“I’d like to rent it, and the boat, for at least two months.”

“I’ll call her. She’ll be thrilled to see you again.”

“I know that giving up your boat will cause you some problems. I’ll pay you ten thousand dollars a month, and your sister four thousand.”

“That’s too much.”

“I insist.”

As the Gulfstream touched down at Owen Roberts Airport Avi called Sharon Flanagan at the U.S. consulate.

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“Miss Flanagan, this is Avi Stein, Jim Caldwell suggested I call you. I need assistance in locating a visitor to the island who is doing business with the Arab Banking Corporation.”

“Mr. Stein, I was expecting to hear from you. Jim sent me a photograph of the man you’re looking for, and I’ve already looked into the account he’s trying to access. The money was moved from Credit Suisse with a fiche that gave the three initial depositors the right to add or remove signatories other than each other. Boulton’s signature was removed two days ago. He arrived at the bank office in Georgetown this morning and attempted to make a substantial withdrawal.”

“How substantial?”

“Two million dollars. He was informed that his name had been removed from the account. He flew into a rage, said it was impossible; it was his money. Finally he was forcibly escorted from the office by a security guard.”

“At what time did this happen?”

“Just after the bank opened at 9:00.”

“And he’s still on the island.?”

“I checked with Immigration. As far as I can tell he’s still here.”

“You know this island, how do you suggest I find him?” asked Avi.

“That’s sort of obvious, isn’t it Mr. Stein? We look for him,” said Shannon. “Where are you? I’ll pick you up and we can get started.”

“I’m at the airport.”

“I’ll be there in about twenty minutes. Meet me in front of the cab stand. I’ll be driving a red Geo Tracker.

“Not exactly the car that I’d expect a C.I.A. agent to be driving,” responded Avi.

Shannon didn’t respond, and in twenty minutes arrived at the airport. Avi entered the car. Shannon Flanagan was a beautiful woman, bright, long, curly red hair, large blue eyes set into a wide freckled face. It was impossible to gauge her height, but she was obviously not a small woman.

“Thanks for meeting me,” said Avi.

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“Mr. Stein, I’m here because my boss told me to help you out. No thanks are necessary. I made a few calls, your man is definitely still here. He can only leave the island by boat or plane, and no one fitting his description has chartered either. I’ve alerted Passport Control at the airport and they’ll call me if he tries to fly out on one of the commercial airlines. We know that he rented a Toyota under his own name. We have the tag number, and the police have been asked to inform us if the vehicle is located.

“All hotels are required to keep a register of guests and the license plate numbers of a car, if one is being used. The registration logs are forwarded to immigration weekly. We are looking at those, but so far no sign of your man. If he’s planning to leave the island by boat, he’ll either have to buy, charter, or steal one. We’re looking into all three possibilities.”

“You’re very thorough, Miss Flanagan.”

“I try to be, and since we’re going to be working together, why don’t we make it Shannon and Avi.”

“Alright Shannon, it seems as if I’m a third wheel; you’re already doing everything I would have, but more efficiently. The Mossad can’t get much co-operation from the local authorities, but I have information from our own files that might be helpful. Three years ago Boulton had a contract with an offshore financial firm, International Management Services. He was here for three months. He must know the island fairly well, and will likely go back to someplace familiar to hole up. If any one at IMS remembers him, they might know where he stayed when he was here.”

“I know a gal who works there; I’ll give her a call.”

Three minutes later Shannon was on the phone with Cheryl Lynch.

“Cheryl, its Shannon.”

Cheryl replied, “My God girl, its been a long time.”

“Damn right. Too long. How have you been?”

“As great as you can be on this damn island.”

“Same complaints?” asked Shannon.

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“Same old,” replied Cheryl.

“Too bad,” said Shannon.

“What brings the call?” asked Cheryl.

“I need a favor,” said Shannon. “Do you remember the guy who worked on your computer system a few years ago, an Englishman, Malcolm Boulton?”

“Sure do--- a real pain in the ass arrogant son of a bitch.”

“Liked him that much,” said Shannon. “By any chance do you remember where he stayed while he was here?”

“Yeah, I do. He made a big point of wanting privacy, so he stayed at a hotel on Coach Point.”

“Do you know the name?” asked Shannon.

“Nope. Sorry I don’t?”

“Thanks anyway,” said Shannon. “And let’s get together.”

“Sure Shannon, in another two years----.”

Shannon laughed, “Same old, same old; you haven’t changed.”

“What did she say?” said Avi.

“I’ll tell you on the way to Coach Point. Cheryl didn’t know the name of the hotel where Boulton stayed, but fortunately three years ago there weren’t many at the point. A man named Thomas Thompson runs a hotel and boat service. He knows everybody.”

The Spanish Reef Hotel

“Thomas I’m going to Brac. If anyone comes looking for me, tell them I went to the airport. Take my car and drop it off in the parking lot, leave the keys under the front seat and come back here by cab. Then call the rental agency and tell them that I dropped my car off when I flew out.”

“I can do that. Is something wrong?”

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“You might say this trip is not working out as I planned. It’s important to me that no one other than you and your sister know that I’m staying on Brac. Call her and tell her that I’ll be using the name James Gordon.”

“I’ll do as you say, but if something is wrong and you need help, tell me; I owe you.”

“You owe me nothing; just forget I’ve been here. When I’m ready to leave the Caymans, I’ll either bring your boat here, or leave it at the Dive center on Brac.”

In an hour Malcolm started the diesel engines of the catamaran, untied the bow, stern and spring lines, brought them on board and headed out to sea. Brac was about 90 miles away, a three-hour trip with the boat at top speed. But Brac wasn’t his destination. Once he was out of sight, he turned northwest toward the Isla de la Juventud. The ocean was calm; the sun not yet at full strength. If the weather heldm, he would arrive at the Punta Frances in seven hours.

Malcolm brooded on the magnitude of his failure. The Rothmans and De Forster were untouched, his funding for any future attempt was gone, and he was now alone. “*Was life worth living?*” His Grandfather had decided it wasn’t. “*Should he make the same choice?*”

The ocean spray came over the bow as the wind picked up the sea. The boat plowed on through six foot waves, rising and then falling into each trough with a solid thump. He turned on the autopilot and stepped out of the cabin. Crouching, he grabbed the rail and moved to the bow where he stood erect, releasing his grip on the handrail. His blonde hair streamed in the 30 mile per hour wind.

—

“How long have you been in the Mossad?” asked Shannon, as they drove toward Coach Point.

“Not long enough to be important or good at it.”

“A reasonable answer from someone in the Mossad. Do they make you read the Talmud every day?”

“No, just once a week on Shabbat.”

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“You don’t seem to have the disposition for this kind of work.”

“What kind of disposition is that?”

“I didn’t mean it as criticism, but you seem very impatient.”

“You’re right; patience isn’t one of my virtues. My father saw that, and encouraged me to go into the Army rather than the Mossad. He used to say ‘stand guard at an outpost in the Sinai and you’ll learn patience.’

“Was he right?”

“No, I never learned much of anything. I left the Army after my fiancée, who was also in the army, was killed in a car bombing. Now I’m an ex-army officer with no patience, and no wife. I spend my life alone, searching for needles in haystacks.”

“I’m sorry Avi, I shouldn’t pry; but that’s my failing.”

A sign on the left side of the road indicated the driveway of the Spanish Reef Hotel.

“Avi, this is the largest hotel up here, and it’s pretty damn small. It’s run by the fellow I mentioned, Thomas Thompson. He’ll know if Boulton is staying on this part of the island.”

As the car pulled into the entrance of the hotel, Thomas Thompson came out to greet his visitors. “Welcome to Spanish Reef. I’m Thomas, what can I do for you?”

“We’re looking for someone, a man who may have stayed with you before, blonde about 5 feet 11 with an English accent.”

“What do you want with him?” asked Thomas.

“We need to discuss some financial matters.”

“You’re talking about Malcolm Boulton, and I want to find the son of a bitch. He took my boat yesterday, said he was going to Brac to stay at my sister’s place. He made a big deal how it’s all hush-hush. Then, he never showed up. I owed him a big favor, but not big enough to cost me my boat. I was going to call the police.”

“When you say hush-hush, what do you mean?”

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“I mean what I said, he didn’t want anybody to know he was here, or on Brac, but now he’s somewhere in the Caribbean, and he’s got my boat.”

“Maybe we can help,” said Avi. “Can you give us a description of the boat and its range?”

“Better than that, I’ve got a picture, and as far as range goes, I added auxiliary tanks. That baby, she can make it to Jamaica or Cuba. I tried calling Malcolm on the radio, but the bastard won’t answer.”

“And you’re sure he didn’t go to Little Cayman or Brac?”

“Sure as can be. Everybody knows my boat, she’s the only Eclipse Cat on the islands, and no one has seen her since she left here yesterday.”

“Mr. Thompson, can you lend us the picture? We’ll get it back to you.”

“If you find my boat, you can keep the damn picture.”

As Avi and Shannon headed back to Georgetown, Avi said,

“With the range of that boat, assuming full tanks, he should have arrived at his destination by late last night or early this morning. If he didn’t, he’s stranded somewhere in the Caribbean, without fuel.”

“That assumes he didn’t hole up in the Caymans,” said Shannon.

“No, I believe Thompson, the boat is too well known. He’d have heard about it.”

Shannon thought for a moment, “C.I.A. runs satellites over this part of the Caribbean. and the information gets fed to the F.B.I., N.S.A. and D.E.A. With the picture of the boat, and with some help from the computers at N.S.A., we have a chance to locate it on open water during daylight. At least then we’ll know where he headed.”

“How long will it take?”

“My guess is two days.”

“In that case there’s nothing more I can do here. We have another situation in New York. If you locate the boat, call me.”

“Good luck, Avi.”

Chapter 34

New York City

Avi disembarked from the American Airlines flight from Owen Roberts to LaGuardia. Reuven was waiting by the luggage carousel. There was no greeting, only an apology, “Avi, I’m sorry.”

“Screw being sorry; have you made any progress?”

“No, Nabuli has gone to ground, and there still hasn’t been a ransom demand. We’re checking Palestinian hangouts and communities in New York and Jersey, but, for all we know, he could be at the Waldorf. Unless we get lucky, we’ll just have to wait for him to contact us.”

“Are we getting help while we sit on our asses?” asked Avi.

“Yeah,” replied Reuven, “Caldwell has an agent with a vehicle and unregistered weapons waiting for us in the garage.”

A swarthy middle-aged man in a black leather jacket greeted them at the entrance to level 3 of the parking facility.

“Here’re your keys; your weapons are in a gun safe in the trunk of the car, they’re untraceable but we’d prefer you didn’t lose them. The combination to the safe is 42 left, right two times to 33, and left once to 47. Surveillance cameras cover every inch of this place; leave the airport grounds before you arm yourselves.”

The C.I.A. agent took fanny pack out of the rear seat and handed it to Avi. “You have satellite phones and GPS transmitters. Your people and ours will know where you are and be able to reach you. The Lincoln has a transmitter in the roof panel and there’s one in the trunk that can be placed on another vehicle. The GPS on the dash has a second WAAS receiver tuned to the frequency of the spare.”

“Thanks,” said Reuven, as he handed the agent the keys to his rented Buick. “Now all we have to do is find someone to track.”

The dark-brown Lincoln Navigator was lightly armored and equipped with a heavy-duty suspension, a high-performance engine, and a DVD of specially formatted, highly detailed, East Coast electronic maps for the GPS system.

Avi took the driver's seat, "Reuvi, I'll drive; you look beat."

"Beat doesn't cut it! I'm fucking running on empty," replied Reuven.

C.I.A. Headquarters — Langley, Virginia

"Frank, have you finished the background checks on Nabuli's people?" asked Jim Caldwell.

"We've received all of the employment records for the ones involved in the attempt on the De Forster facility in New York," replied Frank Perle, "a routine inquiry showed them as U.S. citizens without criminal records, but when we dug in we found sleepers. Ridgely Hull and Joe Itkins were security guards at the vault, Morris Hakim was the maintenance manager, and Jerry Samuels was the assistant purchasing manager. Hull and Itkins are U.S. citizens, and have been associated with radical Muslim groups. Morris Hakim is an alias for Mustaf Hakingi, and Jerry Samuels is an alias for Jahid Samedi. Both men used the aliases and false papers to obtain citizenship. The papers were produced in the 70's by the Libyans; they weren't the best---- the F.B.I. identified them early on but decided they'd get more by watching than arresting.

"We weren't copied, the staff in the F.B.I. field office changed, and these guys were forgotten. When the F.B.I. started sharing we entered their files into our database, but we had no reason to take action on these guys, that is, until now."

"Hull and Itkins have Newark addresses; Samuels was killed in an auto accident, but his wife lives in Manhattan.

"Hakim resides in Brooklyn, and we've obtained search warrants for his house, as well as the residences of the others in Jersey. We'll be with the local police when they check out the houses.

“One other thing,” added Perle. “F.B.I. surveillance of the El Basra Restaurant, a hangout for radical Muslims, has been on going since 9/11. We’re getting their tapes to see if our boys hung out there. I should have them in a couple of hours.”

Caldwell said, “If Stein or Brenner call, let them know what we have, without the sources.”

“Do you need anything else?” asked Perle.

“What I need is to find Ariana Wright; her grandfather called Biden and Luger and I’ve had on the hour calls from their staff. Find her Frank and you’ll get an Eagle Scout badge.”

“It will make my mother proud,” responded Perle.

Ariana Wright’s apartment

“My God, this girl really knows how to live. I couldn’t afford even one of the rugs!” said Reuven.

“She’s a Matossian, and by their standards she’s living modestly. Even with all her money she not a put on,” said Avi.

“I’m sure she’s nice,” replied Reuven, “but she made a big mistake getting involved with Boulton.”

“Believe me, she knows. Now stop ogling the rugs and let’s give this place a going over.”

“Avi, we went over it with a fine tooth comb and found nothing but the point of entry. There’s no sign of violence, no fingerprints other than hers, Goldman’s and yours.

“How did he get in?” asked Avi.

“He disabled the alarm system and entered through the rear downstairs door----pried it open with a very large thick-bladed knife.”

Let’s take one more look. After half an hour Avi commented, “The only thing I noticed was the glass on the table by the sofa. It’s still half full and there’s no lipstick on it. She probably fixed it, laid down on the couch, and was asleep when the intruder entered. That’s why there’s no sign of a struggle. Ariana isn’t the type to go along quietly.”

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“You’re probably right,” said Reuven.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Avi as they left through the back door.

Reuven said, “No one bothered to secure the place. It’ll be cleaned out if it remains unprotected.”

Avi said, “I’ll get Menachem to send a locksmith to repair the door and call the alarm company reactivate the system.”

As they entered the Lincoln, Avi continued, “Jim should have something by now.” Avi hit a single number on the programmed satellite phone and was connected to Caldwell’s office. The phone was answered on the second ring.

“Yes.”

“This is Stein, is Jim there?”

“Not at the moment, but he asked me to give you some information. My name is Frank Perle.”

“Wait one second,” said Avi as he activated the speaker phone. Okay, go ahead.”

Perle reiterated his report to Jim Caldwell. At the conclusion he said, “You might want to start at the El Basra, the address is 14th and 3rd. It’s a hangout for Palestinians who work in Manhattan.

“One other thing; two of the guys from the vault, Itkins and Hull, live next to each other in Newark. Both residences are single-family homes and neither man is married. Seems odd for two security guards to have so much space. The street addresses are 1338 and 1340 Arnot Avenue.”

“Thanks Frank, we’ll get back to you if we come up with anything.”

Newark, New Jersey — Day Two

Hassan brought Goldman to Arnot Street the evening after Ariana’s kidnapping. When he was brought to her room she exclaimed, “Morris I’m so sorry I got you into this. Please forgive me.”

Hassan said, “My dear Miss Wright, exactly what do you think you have gotten into? I’m not sure how you became involved with Malcolm, but I am willing to listen, since we both made the

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same mistake; we trusted him and became his victim. You will call your Grandfather; if he agrees to help my people, neither of you will come to harm.”

Morris started to speak, but Hassan raised his hand and said, “Please Mr. Goldman, do not interrupt.”

Ariana said, “I’ll call my Grandfather, but if you know anything about him, you know that he doesn’t take kindly to threats. He does, however, respond to reason.

“I’m sure he’s sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. If your people mean so much to you, talk to him, but certainly don’t expect him to reward cupidity.”

“Miss Wright, you are an intelligent woman who speaks with sincerity and eloquence. You and your Grandfather must understand that my anger is directed at the Zionists who murdered my wife and child. I detest the Government of Israel and the Zionists who have taken our land and destroyed the lives and futures of a proud people.

“I was a scholar and a man of peace, until a single shell, from an Israeli artillery piece, killed my wife and son.”

Morris listened in amazement and said, “May I speak?”

Hassan turned to him, looked into his eyes, and assessed the man. “Please do, Mr. Goldman.”

“There are those of us who do not want bloodshed, ours or yours, we want your people to have a home and a homeland. There must be a just accommodation.”

“Words are cheap, Mr. Goldman. We have heard them from your Prime Minister, but we still live under the thumb of the Israeli military. Still, I agree; there must be a beginning, a way to peace.

“Ms. Wright, your grandfather is an influential man, with the ear of the Americans, the Israelis, and my people. If he assures me that he will mediate, and use his influence to provide my people with a just portion of the wealth of our lands, and the lands of our Arab brothers, then you will both be free.”

Ariana said, “Mr. Nabuli, you are not a man I would have expected to work with Malcolm.”

“And you, my dear girl, are not a woman I would expect to be his consort.”

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Ariana laughed, “Well said, Mr. Nabuli, I’ll call my Grandfather. I’m sure he will listen to what you have to say.”

El Basra Restaurant

The ground floor of the four story brick building housed the El Basra. A sign in Arabic covered the upper half of a large plate glass window through which ten vacant tables were visible.

Avi parked the car at a meter twenty feet past the entrance. He left the engine running and made no move to get out.

“What’s up Avi?” asked Reuven.

Avi replied, “We’re wasting our time. There’s nobody in the joint. We’ll find out more in Newark.”

“You’re right,” said Reuven, “two side by side single family homes owned by two guys that belong to the same organization would make nice safe house and meeting place.”

Avi pulled out of the parking space, entered 1338 Arnot Street, Newark, New Jersey, into the car’s navigation system, selected *Shortest Time* from the navigation menu, and pressed the *Route* button.

After a forty minute drive through heavy traffic, they arrived at their destination, circled once around the block, and parked six doors down.

Avi said, “1338 first. You go around the back. I’ll take the front. In five minutes, I’ll knock on the front door. Make sure nobody comes out the back.”

“Should we call for backup?” asked Reuven.

“We’ll deal with this ourselves; it’s a long shot that they’re here, and we’ll look like fools if we call out reinforcements for nothing.”

Inside 1338, Ariana had finished speaking to her Grandfather. She put Hassan on the phone.

“Mr. Matossian, I am with your granddaughter and Morris Goldman. Frankly I did not intend this to be a conversation, but rather an ultimatum. I am sure that you know of the undertakings of her

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friend, and my former partner, Malcolm Boulton. It was his intent to kill my associates and everyone else in the De Forster vaults. I am ashamed to admit that I was duped and betrayed.”

“You are not the only one,” said Matossian.

Hassan said, “Humiliation seems to have brought me a modicum of wisdom. I would like to end this. Your granddaughter and Morris Goldman will go free, no matter your decision as to my request.”

“A wise decision Professor Nabuli,” said Dikran.

“I see you know of my past,” said Hassan.

“Enough to know that you are a man of integrity and intelligence,” said Dikran.

“You flatter me, and it is your skill with people that I ask you to use in behalf of my people. Your intervention will preclude an escalation of a very dangerous situation.”

“And what is that situation,” asked Dikran.

“I am in possession of one of an Israeli abomination, a canister that only recently learned was a nuclear device, what the Americans call a ‘*dirty bomb*’. It was built to kill my people and stolen by Malcolm to kill every one in the De Forster vaults.”

Matossian was stunned. “A nuclear bomb? I find that hard to believe.”

“Believe it Mr. Matossian. The Israelis will deny its existence, but I have it in my possession. In exchange for its return, and my assurance that its existence will not be divulged, I want the Israelis to release my associates. In addition, I want them to enter into serious negotiations for a peaceful settlement to our differences.

“Professor Nabuli, I will do what I can, however, the course of events may well be inevitable. The Israelis will not easily forget the murder of one of their agents. However, wars do end and enemies become allies.

“Your assurance that my granddaughter and Morris Goldman will be released, no matter my decision, is compelling. What will be even more compelling to the Israelis is your possession of their nuclear device. I am astonished that it exists, and that you were able to gain possession of it.”

“And your decision as to my request?” asked Hassan.

“I will speak to the Israeli Prime Minister, who will, I am sure, listen with great interest. Now, please put Mr. Goldman on the phone.”

“Mr. Matossian, I thank you on behalf of my people. Here is Mr. Goldman.”

“Morris, I trust this man. I’m going to call the Prime Minister. Ask Nabuli to permit you to contact Menachem Harel. Tell Menachem what’s going on, and that I want him to call off his agents. We must make sure that the agents who are looking for Ariana do not compromise our agreement.”

“Dikran, I’ll do my best, but things may have gone too far,” said Morris.

“Tell Professor Nabuli what I said, and please take care of Ariana.”

“I’ll do my best!” answered Morris.

There was a knock on the door of 1338 Arnot. Hassan and Abbas looked at the television monitor. Hassan motioned to Morris. “Do you recognize this man?”

Morris hesitated for a moment. “He’s a Mossad agent, Avi Stein. Let me go to him and explain the situation.”

“Hassan, you cannot trust this Jew, his words are empty,” said Abbas.

“Abbas, my anger and desire for vengeance led me to trust the Englishman, a man who had no sympathy for our cause. Dikran Matossian is a friend to our people; I’m sure Mr. Goldman will carry out his will.

“Go, Mr. Goldman, and Allah be with you,” said Hassan as he unlocked the bedroom door.

Morris Goldman went downstairs, opened the door, and stepped out onto the porch.

“My God, Morris, what are you doing here? Are you all right? Is Ariana here?”

“Ariana is here, and she is unharmed. I’ve just talked with Dikran. He is aware of the situation. At this moment he is calling your Prime Minister and I was to call Menachem. You’ll be receiving instructions to stand down. Nabuli and Dikran have reached an agreement!” said Morris.

“Agreement, my ass, Matossian isn’t my boss,” replied Avi.

Morris said, “Avi, where is the other man?”

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Avi's satellite phone vibrated. It was Kimmel.

"Avi, Hassan Nabuli is not to be harmed. He has Wright and the fifteenth canister and he's willing to negotiate."

Avi almost screamed his response, "The bastard is a murderer," replied Avi.

"Avi, that's an order."

Before Avi could reply, a shot rang out from inside the house.

"What the fuck?" exclaimed Avi. He turned to Morris, "Where is she, and how many people are in there?"

"A second floor room on the right, and there is only Nabuli and another man, Abbas Hilmi."

"Stay here!" said Avi as he drew his weapon, opened the door, and ran to the stairs. Reuven stood at the top, the body of Abbas at his feet.

"Reuvi, my God, get down here."

"Avi, are you crazy, Nabuli's here."

"Reuven, we have orders from David."

The bedroom door opened. Ariana and Hassan stepped out. Reuven swung his weapon toward the movement.

Avi exclaimed, "Reuven! Wait! I'm coming up!"

Ariana was motionless, her eyes wide, as she saw Reuven standing over Abbas's bloody body.

Hassan moved toward the Mossad agent.

The Palestinian said, "The killing doesn't stop, it will never stop."

Reuven took aim. Ariana jumped forward, knocking Hassan to the floor. Reuven fired. Ariana collapsed.

Morris exclaimed, "My God, Oh my God."

Avi clambered up the stairs and went to Ariana, "She's breathing."

"I'll call an ambulance," said Morris.

Avi yelled, "and then call Menachem. Tell him what happened."

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Avi was possessed by an unnatural calm as he pressed his handkerchief to the wound. Blood pooled around Ariana's head.

Reuven, his hands covering his face, fell to the floor.

Avi said, "Reuven, there's no time for this, get yourself together. It's over. All we can do is pray that Ariana doesn't become another victim."

Nabuli spoke up, "I have bandages in the bathroom; we've got to stop the bleeding."

A siren wailed in the distance as the ambulance approached.

Chapter 35

New York City

As the Boeing 747 reached cruising altitude, Dikran Matossian called David Kimmel.

“David I can’t believe the incompetence with which this matter has been handled. I knew that my people should have taken charge of Ariana’s security.”

“I have trouble believing it myself,” replied David. “Fortunately your granddaughter is doing well. The wound to her scalp is healing, and she’s recuperating with no complications.”

“I’ll arrive in New York in six hours with three of my senior security staff. Boulton is on the loose, and you have neither the will nor the competence to provide protection for Ariana.”

“Dikran, you have good reason to have lost faith in us. The Prime Minister has agreed to the arrangements that you proposed. Nabuli will be granted amnesty, and his associates will be released from custody.

“Once the device is in our hands, we will enter into meaningful negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. Both sides would, I’m sure, welcome you as the mediator.”

Matossian said, “Before I agree to having anything more to do with the State of Israel, I demand to know why you were still in possession of nuclear devices, devices that you had agreed to destroy. Then I want to know how on earth you allowed them to be stolen.”

“Dikran, the Government’s position is that the items in question were destroyed years ago, and what Nabuli managed to steal were canister’s of herbicide’s similar to Agent Orange, dangerous but not lethal.”

“Your Government can take any position it chooses, but you and I know the truth. I want assurances that any weapons of this type will be destroyed.”

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“Dikran, there are no more, and believe me heads are rolling. Dimona was to have destroyed those canisters years ago. I’ll be glad to meet with you to provide a detailed account of what happened, and what is being done.”

“And where is Boulton? Ariana won’t be safe until he’s either dead or in custody, and quite frankly, I’d prefer dead.”

“He was in Grand Cayman, but stole a boat and fled before Stein could get to him. We have a description of the boat and the Americans are using their satellite surveillance to locate him. Stein and Deveraux are convinced that he’s going to go after Alex Rothman, not your granddaughter. If you allow us, we will continue to provide protection for Miss Wright; this time with no screw ups.”

“David will not allow it. As soon as we land, I’m moving Ariana from New York Hospital to a secure location at a clinic outside of the city. I don’t want any interference. You and your young agent have already placed Ariana in harms way. If any of your people attempt to see or communicate with her, there will be unpleasant consequences. Do I make myself clear?”

“Perfectly clear,” responded David.

Dikran hung up and called Alex Rothman.

A woman with a lilting South African accent answered the phone. Dikran recognized it immediately.

“Loretta, my dear, this is Dikran. How are you?”

“Dikran, it’s been a long time, we’ve missed you. As for me I’m fine, but Alex is having a devil of a time, not a moments peace since he started to restructure De Forster. I’ve never seen him so upset and testy.”

“That’s unfortunate, but I’m sure he’ll deal with the problems,” said Dikran

“I’m sure he will, and I’ll deal with him ’till he does,” replied Loretta as she turned the conversation back to Dikran, “and how are you doing?”

“I’m well, but my granddaughter Ariana, whom you met in Nice, has been having a miserable time. I’m actually on my way to see her.”

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“I hope it’s nothing serious.”

“Serious enough, but she’ll be fine, she’s quite a fighter. Is Alex available?”

“Certainly Dikran, hold on, I’ll get him.”

“Dikran, I expected this call. I’m sure you are aware of the situation at De Forster. We’ve been competitors in the mineral resource business, and recently in the Canadian diamond rush; with your intelligence operation you probably know as much about my operations as I.”

Dikran responded, “I know a bit, but for what I have in mind I need more. I’ve heard some rather unsettling rumors about your diamond operation.”

Alex said, “We are encountering difficulties with our branding initiative; our sightholders and producers are in open revolt, and this fellow Boulton has created an immense problem.”

“That’s why I’m calling,” said Dikran. “I am aware of the situation, and as I’m sure you know, he used my granddaughter and my name to obtain financing from Middle Eastern oil interests for his plan to unseat you from the throne. Before we go on, despite what you might have heard, I assure you that I was not a part, nor do I condone Boulton’s activities.

“But,” Dikran continued, “I’m sure you realize that the course that you have taken is not inspiring good will neither from the governments or the individuals with whom you do business.

“I have a proposition that I’d like you to consider. I would like to merge your holdings in the diamond business into mine. De Forster represents only a small portion of your family’s holdings, but it is the visible portion, one whose failure can lead to significant political as well as financial difficulties.”

“Dikran, why on earth would you want to get involved in the diamond business? You don’t need the headache.”

“From what I’ve heard and what you’re telling me, I’m not sure I do. But I might have to. As you are well aware, my businesses have extensive operations in the Middle East and in Russia. Economic and political stability in the regions where we operate is essential to continued success.

Control of the diamond business will provide me with the additional political and economic leverage I need to ensure stability.”

“Dikran, you’ll get leverage and big headaches. None of my children have any desire to remain in the diamond business. Quite frankly, they are sick and tired of dealing with the Israelis and Russians. They are concentrating on our businesses in non-ferrous metals, real estate, timber, and sugar. My family’s interests will be best served by getting rid of DeForster.”

“I’m willing to pay a fair price,” said Dikran.

“I’m sure you are, and I’m also sure you’re aware of the problems you’re taking on. I made the mistake of taking advice from hot-shot M.B.A.’s who knew nothing about the diamond business. I abandoned a system that worked well for all concerned and let the independents and Israeli’s play too great a role. The results have been less than gratifying.”

“Thank you for your candor, I am aware of what needs to be done.”

“Then I will sell you De Forster.”

“Wonderful, Alex, I’ll have to do some juggling with the Governments that have involved themselves in the affairs of De Forster, but that shouldn’t be difficult. Before I take control, I would like Walter Gordon to retire and have George Deveraux assume his position. Deveraux has extensive experience in dealing with the Israelis and the Russians. I’d like him at the helm of the IDSO.”

“You’ve obviously given this a great deal of thought,” commented Alex.

“I have. Since Ariana became involved with Boulton, and Boulton starting wooing my friends in the Middle East, I’ve had my people study your operations. It was obvious to me that if you continued on your present course you would encounter severe problems; dissatisfied customers, at both the wholesale and retail level. I then asked my people in our Canadian diamond operations whether an acquisition would be beneficial. The answer was a resounding ‘yes,’ as long as the issues we discussed were resolved.”

“We’ll talk again to establish a price,” responded Alex. In the meantime, our legal departments should start to deal with the details.”

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"I agree," said Dikran and hung up.

The co-pilot entered the main cabin as Dikran finished his call.

"Mr. Matossian, we're on our final approach. Would you and your associates please move into the forward landing seats? We'll be on the ground in five minutes."

"Of course," Dikran replied. He then rose from the sofa and motioned to the three security men who were seated in the rear lounge.

The plane soon touched down, taxied to a private gate where they were met by Customs and Immigration officers. The party was cleared for entry without delay. A Lincoln limousine was waiting on the tarmac. In thirty minutes they arrived at New York Hospital.

"Two of you come with me. Frank stay here, we won't be long."

"Yes Sir."

Dikran entered the hospital, one security man in front, the other behind. They boarded the elevator and ascended to the third floor. A nurse approached them.

"Gentlemen, may I be of assistance?"

"You certainly may. I'm here to move my granddaughter, Ariana Wright, to another facility. Will you ask her physician to join us? I'll need a copy of her medical records and discharge papers."

"And your name sir?" asked the nurse, obviously perturbed by the abruptness of the man confronting her.

"Matossian, Dikran Matossian."

"Of course Mr. Matossian, I'll get Miss Wright's doctor. Please wait here."

Ignoring the nurse's request, Dikran walked briskly down the corridor, followed by his two guards. Ariana was in room 301, a Mossad agent at the door. As he approached her room, the agent came forward.

"I'm sorry, sir. No one enters without the authorization of Miss Wright's physician."

The guard expected opposition, and was surprised when Dikran responded.

"Very well, we'll wait here. I'm sure he'll join us in a moment."

A young physician walked down the corridor, medical records in hand.

“Mr. Matossian, I’m Doctor Northrup, your granddaughter’s physician. I was informed that you’re moving her to a private facility. I have the necessary paperwork for her release. I also have copies of her charts, X-rays and MRIs. Miss Wright is a very lucky young lady. The bullet just grazed her scalp. She lost a good bit of blood, required a transfusion, and suffered a minor concussion when she fell. But her memory is fine, and she is ambulatory. She does need rest, however, and is now sleeping. Are you sure that you want to move her? Her care here is quite adequate.”

“I’m sure it is Doctor, but I’d prefer her to be in a private facility. Would you please let her know that we are here?”

“Certainly sir. She can be dressed and ready to go in ten minutes. I want to check her before she leaves. The nurse will bring a wheel chair to take her to your car.”

“Thank you for your co-operation doctor. We’ll wait by the nurse’s station.”

Fifteen minutes later, the nurse wheeled Ariana down the hallway. She saw her Grandfather waiting, and rose from the chair. She started to walk toward him, but he motioned her back, as he came to her side.

“Grandpa, I’m so glad you’re here. This situation is unbelievable. I had no idea what Malcolm was capable of.”

“Ariana, the situation is being dealt with and I can assure you that you will not be troubled by anyone, especially your Englishman. Let us get you out of here into more comfortable surroundings, certainly a place with better food.”

“Dear, dear grandpa, you know me so well.”

The nurse spoke up. “Young lady, you’re going nowhere unless you get back into that chair.”

Dikran looked at Ariana, and they laughed. The nurse stood stoically, one hand on the back of the wheelchair. The two guards remained silent, as the entourage proceeded to the waiting elevator, Ariana twisting in the chair to wave goodbye to her doctor.

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The trip to Greenwich was uneventful. Ariana and Dikran chatted, each recounting the events of the past weeks, each minimizing any unpleasantness. An hour later they arrived at a gated medical facility, where an armed guard checked the passengers' identities. The Lincoln proceeded up a tree-lined drive to a three-story Edwardian mansion. A doctor and two nurses were waiting on the brick landing.

The doctor spoke first, addressing Ariana.

"Miss Wright, we have everything ready for you. We'll get you settled in your suite. Mr. Matossian, once we get your granddaughter comfortable, we'll take you to the guest facility that you requested. We understand that you have brought your own security; we have accommodations for them next to your granddaughter's suite."

"Fine Doctor, I am delighted with your preparations."

Chapter 36

New York City & Tel Aviv, Israel

Avi was awakened by the ringing of his satellite phone.

“Avi, it’s Shannon. We’ve located the boat. Surveillance photos showed it heading to a small island, Juventud, fifty miles southwest of Cuba. The island has a major dive center with good air and sea connections to anywhere in the world, via Havana.

“Boulton probably took a small plane to Havana, and is on his way to England or the Continent. I’ll call you when we find out more. At the moment there’s no reason for you to be here. How did things go in New York?”

Avi replied, “Not well. Matossian’s granddaughter is safe, but was accidentally wounded. A bullet from my partner’s gun grazed her scalp; lots of blood, but no permanent damage, except for a scar across the left side of her head. Her Grandfather moved her to a private facility; he doesn’t want me, or anyone from the Mossad, anywhere near her.”

“Do I hear the sound of tears running down your cheeks, or is it just the connection?” asked Shannon.

Avi laughed, “Another bit of your Irish humor, but seriously, there is nothing more for me to do here. Nabuli is in custody and I’ll be taking him back to Israel. If you locate Boulton, please call me; I want to be there.”

The El Al flight to Tel Aviv left Kennedy Airport at 7:00 a.m. Hassan and Avi were seated alone in the First Class compartment. Hassan broke the silence that had prevailed since boarding.

“Mr. Stein, we are both victims of history and circumstance. I loved my wife and my son. I watched as they died, my son from shrapnel wounds in his belly, his agony my agony. My wife decapitated, her head scorched, her body mangled. My anger toward the State of Israel and its

Government is profound, but I must put it behind me. I know that you too have lost loved ones to the violence.”

“Mr. Nabuli, I want nothing more than to live in peace, to not lose loved ones to bombs and bullets, but it will take more than words to resolve the conflict. Both sides will have to compromise, and realize that each has rights and responsibilities. You can play a major role in convincing your people to seek a peaceful resolution of our differences.”

“I’m not sure what can be done,” replied Hassan.

“I know you’ll try,” said Avi.

Avi continued, “We’ve arranged for you to stay at the Metropolitan Hotel on Trumpeldor Street. We have adjoining rooms. We’ll remain there while you meet with David Kimmel. Then other arrangements will be made.”

The conversation ended as dinner was served. The two men, exhausted, then slept and did not awaken until the pilot announced their approach to Ben Gurion Airport.

The Metropolitan Hotel — Tel Aviv, Israel

Avi and Hassan were greeted at the airport by a Mossad agent with a vehicle. He drove them to the Metropolitan Hotel, where they registered and waited at the front desk for their room keys.

“Hassan, under no circumstances are you to leave your room without me. Do I have your word?”

“Of course.”

The clerk returned, handed the keys to Avi, and said, “Room 1111 is yours Mr. Stein, and 1113 is Mr. Nabuli’s. As you requested, the connecting door has been unlocked and you will be able to utilize the two rooms as one. Here are two keys if either of you choose to lock it.”

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“Thank you,” said Avi as he took both keys and placed them in his pocket. Turning to Hassan he said, “I suggest we get something to eat. I’ll come to your room in about half an hour and then we can get some rest.”

“As you wish,” replied Hassan.

Two hours after the men arrived, Fatima parked the tan Citroen 2CV a half block from the hotel entrance and walked to the hotel. The desk clerk greeted her, “May I be of assistance?”

“My brother just checked in with his friend. Can you give me his room number?”

The clerk whispered, “I see you received my call,” and then in a normal voice asked, “May I have your name? I’ll call him to let him know he has a visitor.”

“Oh, please don’t, I want to surprise him. His name is Hassan Nabuli, and mine is Fatima.”

“Since you’re his sister, I’m sure he won’t mind. The elevator is down the corridor, he’s on the eleventh floor, room 1113.” The clerk watched Fatima enter the elevator, and smiled knowingly when it paused on the eleventh floor.

Fatima got out and walked down the corridor to Hassan’s room. She knocked and Hassan came to the door. Abbas Hilmi’s sister placed the gun to his chest and fired twice.

The shots were silenced, the “pop-pop” of a sound-suppressed small-caliber handgun but distinctive and loud enough to alert Avi. His gun was on the bedside table. He chambered a round and opened the door between the two rooms. Hassan was on the floor, blood pouring from his chest. He gasped, “Abbas did not want peace, his sister follows in his footsteps.”

Avi retrieved his cell phone and called Mossad Headquarters.

“Send an ambulance to the Metropolitan, Nabuli has been shot; he’s still alive, but barely.”

“Stay there. An ambulance and two agents are on the way.”

Fatima walked, without haste, to her car and drove toward the Syrian border.

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The ambulance and two Mossad agents arrived at the Metropolitan Hotel within minutes. Hassan was unconscious, his pulse barely perceptible. The paramedics started a transfusion, placed the mortally wounded Palestinian on a gurney, and moved him down the hallway to a waiting elevator. One Mossad agent remained to clean and secure the rooms; the other accompanied Avi, Hassan, and the paramedics to the ambulance. Within a few minutes of leaving the hotel, Avi called David Kimmel.

“David, Nabuli has died, but before he did he identified his assailant; it was Abbas Hilmi’s sister. Have our people at the hotel turned up anything?”

“What we have is sketchy. The doorman saw the woman enter and leave within five minutes. She told the receptionist she was Hassan’s sister. He bought it and gave her the room number. The receptionist and doorman tell the same story: she came and left within five minutes. We have a picture of her from the hotel’s surveillance camera and I put out an all-points alert, with special attention to the checkpoints at the Syrian border.”

David continued, “I don’t want Nabuli’s body to go to the morgue; keep it in the ambulance and come to headquarters. The Palestinians may have gotten wind that he was going to work with us, and will probably attempt to blame us for his death. They’ll turn their traitor into a martyr. If we let them get away with it, there will probably be a major uprising in Gaza. We’ll secure the body in our clinic until we decide how to deal with the situation.”

Chapter 37

New York City

Alex Rothman and George Deveraux arrived at JFK within an hour of each other; George from Geneva, Alex from London, both on private jets belonging to De Forster. Limousines transported them to the Stanhope where they checked into their suites. A message awaited each, "Please join me on the 24th floor after you are settled."

Alex arrived first, was received by the butler, and ushered into the study. Dikran Matossian was seated behind an exquisite wood and leather desk, pen in hand, documents spread in the center.

"Alex, I'm glad you made it. How was your flight?"

Rothman responded, "It provided some badly needed relaxation. Nabuli and his people have been dealt with, but Boulton is slippery as hell and is still on the loose. George is concerned that he might find another way to disrupt our operations, and was hesitant to come to this meeting."

Dikran said, "But he is coming?"

Alex responded, "He'll be here within the hour, that is, unless Boulton is located."

"We'll wait until he arrives to start our discussions." Pointing to the bar Dikran said, "Please help yourself."

Alex poured LaPhroaig single malt scotch into a crystal snifter. Can I fix you anything Dikran?"

"Scotch will be fine, thank you."

The two men spoke not a word of business until George was ushered into the study. "George, why don't you have a seat? Would you care for something to drink?"

"Port, if you don't mind."

"Again pointing to the bar, Dikran said, "Help yourself. I believe we have a rather fine 48 Taylor," said Dikran.

Dikran waited while George poured an overly large serving of port before speaking, “Alex and I will jointly announce the acquisition of De Forster by Matossian Holdings. Agencies involved in antitrust matters, especially the United States Justice Department and the European Union Office of Competition, will most likely involve themselves. In Russia, organized crime will recognize that the IDSO, when integrated with my security organization, will be a significant hindrance to their efforts to control the Russian diamond business, and will surely attempt to strengthen their position prior to our consolidation.

“We will deal with the governments. You, Goerge, will deal with the Russian Mafiya. You will assume control of the security arm of Matossian, and begin an immediate integration of the IDSO into it. The IDSO is formidable in its own right, but with the combined resources you will have a small army at your disposal. If Alex agrees, you may use whatever methods necessary to intimidate the intimidators. The Russian Government will thank you for ridding them of a powerful and counter-productive force in their country.”

“Dikran, it’s brilliant,” said Alex.

“I’m not so sure,” responded George. “We’ve always avoided confronting organized crime. Quite frankly, there have been times when we made use of their rather nefarious talents.”

“George let me make myself very clear,” continued Dikran. “I will have no dealings with organized crime, especially the Russian Mafiya, except to eliminate their influence in our affairs. No gangsters or intelligence agencies will interfere or involve themselves in our operations. Alex and I will deal with the antitrust issues that have plagued both of us for years, and you will deal with the gangsters and the intelligence communities.”

“I quite understand, replied Deveraux, “and I admire your intentions, but it is unrealistic to assume that we can rid ourselves of the influence of the criminal elements in all of the countries where we operate.”

“Quite the contrary George, you will not have the restraints that those governments place on their law enforcement agencies, and there will be no shortage of funds. Laws protecting privacy will

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not restrain you, nor will you have to go to court. The circumstances under which you will operate will be quite ideal,” said Dikran, who paused for a moment before asking, “George, you’ve worked closely with Avi Stein. What’s your opinion of the man?”

“My opinion; why is that an issue?”

“He’s developed a personal relationship with my granddaughter. Although it doesn’t appear that it will evolve into anything serious, I don’t want to take any chances. She doesn’t need a Mossad agent in her life.”

“Avi is an honorable man, exceptionally intelligent, and very loyal, but I agree, a Mossad agent, in fact anyone in the intelligence community, doesn’t make an ideal husband or wife.”

“Do you think he might be useful to us?” asked Dikran.

“I do, but I doubt if he would leave either Israel or the Mossad.”

“Well, it’s something to think about. It’s been a long day and I suggest we get some rest,” said Dikran.

After the two men returned to their suites, Dikran called his secretary in Paris.

“I’ll be visiting Ariana in the morning. Have you prepared the dossier on Avi Stein?”

“Yes, it’s on its way by courier. You’ll have it by 7:00 a.m. tomorrow.”

“Brilliant, my dear. I look forward to seeing you in New York, after Rothman and Deveraux leave.”

“That will be wonderful. By the way, you’re already starting to sound a bit like a Brit with that ‘brilliant.’ ”

“From being around Alex, I imagine,” replied Dikran

“Sleep well my love, and make sure you sleep alone.”

“As always, except when I’m with you.”

Chapter 38

Greenwich, Connecticut

Dikran found Ariana seated on a bench in the exquisite garden behind her suite, her bodyguards nearby.

Ariana stood when he entered, “Grandpa, I can’t tell you how much I appreciate everything you’re doing for me. I feel so much better now that I can be outside. I’m ready to get back to work. Mom told you about my plans to go into business with Lawrence Winston. Do you still think it’s a good idea?”

“My dear girl, I think it’s splendid, especially now that I am acquiring De Forster.”

“Acquiring De Forster; are you serious?”

“I certainly am. Alex has gotten himself into an uncomfortable situation, and your Englishman gave him more than a bit of trouble when he was most vulnerable. Alex’s children are not at all interested in the diamond business, and his other interests are much more significant, and more to the children’s liking. Alex has agreed to sell De Forster to my holding company.

“Once I take control, it will be my pleasure to have you and Lawrence as customers. I might even arrange for your venture to obtain a prime Sight, possibly one with the pinks and blues you fancy.”

“Grandpa, you are unbelievable. If we do get a Sight, I promise to make the most beautiful jewelry.”

“I am sure you will, no matter the circumstance. There is, however, one matter that concerns me. I feel obliged to ask you if you are seriously involved with that young Mossad agent, Avi Stein? This normally would be none of my business, but he is involved in my dealings with De Forster.”

“I honestly don’t know. Avi helped me through a very difficult time. He’s different from anyone I’ve ever known, and we haven’t had what might be considered a normal relationship. I’m

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very fond of him, but I don't think he'll be anything more than a friend. I don't even know if I'll ever see him again."

"Ariana, I want you to be careful and I would prefer that he remain out of your life, even as a friend. The man works in a dangerous world with dangerous people. You made a mistake with Boulton that could have cost you your life; please do not make the mistake of getting involved with a Mossad agent."

Ariana replied, "Grandpa I do love you, and I know that you have my best interest at heart, but their are choices I have to make for myself. Please trust me not to make a mistake in choosing a man to spend my life with.

"My doctor says that I will be discharged tomorrow, or the day after. I'll have bandages on my head for at least another week; after that I'll need a wig until I grow some hair. I spoke to mother and she is having a difficult time with daddy. It might suit all of us if I spent time at the farm, at least until I'm presentable."

"That's a wise decision, your mother can use your support, and you'll have time to relax. Just make sure you're completely recovered before you and your horse go bouncing over the countryside."

"Don't be silly, neither me or my horse bounce at all; she trots, and I post!" quipped Ariana. She paused for a moment and then continued, "I love you grandpa. Be careful not to get yourself in the middle of a bad situation; Malcolm is on the loose, and he'll never be content until he does real damage to the Rothmans and anyone in business with them."

"Ariana, I can assure you that Boulton will be dealt with; he won't pose a threat to anyone, especially you. My security people will arrange to fly you to Baltimore. I want them to stay with you until Boulton is dealt with. Your mother has arranged for them to stay in the guest cottage. They won't get in your way."

Baltimore, Maryland

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Ariana was one of three passengers on her Grandfather's Gulfstream when it landed at Baltimore Washington International Airport. Her mother, Serena, was waiting for her on the tarmac. Two very large, obviously very fit men followed Ariana out of the plane.

"My God Ariana, you look like you've been hit by a truck. I had no idea. You said you had a small wound to your scalp," said Serena.

"My face got bruised; it looks worse than it is. In any event, I'm fine. With a little rest, and some hair on my head, I'll be ready to get back to work. I'll have to wear a wig until my hair grows back."

"With all the falls you've taken from horses, your head must be indestructible, but the other things, what you've seen and been through, it's all just horrible."

"Mother, you're right, it's been a nightmare. Let's go home."

Almost as an afterthought Ariana asked, "And how is Daddy?"

"He almost drank himself to death. He'd tie one on during the day, take the car at night and go down to the Valley Inn to drink some more. When the bar closed he'd drive home drunk and fall asleep in the stable. It was intolerable. His doctor and I finally committed him to a rehabilitation facility. If we hadn't he would have killed himself, or someone else. Unfortunately, he's to be discharged tomorrow afternoon. I wish they'd keep him longer, but they say returning home is part of the recovery process."

"Oh mother, I'm so sorry you have to deal with both our problems."

"Don't be sorry. I'm going to file for divorce. He's never been able to stop, and I can't deal with him and his drinking. I bought him a farm on Dover Road, a going away present. As to your difficulties, your Grandfather assures me he will deal with them, and I'm certain he will."

"By the way, and on a more positive note, Lawrence Winston heard from Morris that you were out of the hospital. He called to see if you were coming here. I said you were, but wouldn't be entertaining anyone for a while."

Serena turned toward the two men who were standing silently at a Range Rover that had been waiting on the tarmac. “I assume those huge men are the bodyguards your Grandfather insisted on. I’ve asked Doris to move into the main house. Your bodyguards can have the guest house to themselves; near enough but not underfoot. I’m sure they’ll find it comfortable.”

“Mother, I would never have believed that I needed a bodyguard, much less two of them. They’re actually quite nice though, and go out of their way to be unobtrusive, which is quite hard, given their size. They have their own car, and will follow us to the farm. By the way, don’t think that they are being rude; they don’t introduce themselves to anyone, and they won’t carry on a conversation.”

“That suits me perfectly.” replied Serena as the two women entered the black Buick driven by Joe Hall. The bodyguards got into the Range Rover and followed the sedan out of the airport. The drive to Worthington Valley took forty-five minutes, during which Ariana recounted the details of the past month.

“Ariana it’s unbelievable. Nonny would be so dismayed that introducing you to that young man has caused so much chaos.”

“Mother, it was my fault not hers. I sensed that there was something wrong with him; I just didn’t realize how much.”

“We all make mistakes. I certainly did.”

At the corner of Belmont and Butler roads, Serena addressed the driver, “Joe, when we get to the farm, please show the gentlemen in the car behind us to the guest house. Doris has it ready for them. The refrigerator has been stocked, and there’s fresh fruit. Give them the number for Santoni’s, and tell them to call if they need more food or sundries. I’ve asked the manager to bill me and deliver whatever is requested.”

“Yes ma’am,” responded Joe. “I’ll make sure they get settled in. Those men, they worry me a bit. They look like policemen! Is everything all right?”

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“They’re here to protect me from a man I met in Paris. I don’t think it’s necessary, but Grandfather insisted. They don’t talk much, but they are quite nice. I’m sure they’ll want to look around the farm. Give them the guided tour.”

“Yes ma’am, Miss Ariana, I sure will. They too big to say no to.”

“You’re right about that Joe, and don’t be alarmed by their guns. They never leave home without them or their Am Ex cards.”

Serena chuckled, “I’m glad you haven’t lost your sense of humor.”

Ariana responded, “My head might be a wreck, but my humor is fine.”

The next three days were idyllic. Ariana felt as though life had begun afresh. On the fourth day she received a call. “Ariana, it’s a Mr. Winston,” said Doris.

“I’ll get it in the study, please tell him to hold on a moment.”

Ariana walked to the study, anticipating the conversation. She entered the paneled room and closed the door.

“Larry, it’s so good to hear from you. I’ve been put in isolation, but mother is finally taking her boot off of my back. I needed the rest, and I’ve had it. A few more days and I’ll be ready to get to work. My Grandfather loves the idea of us working together. I’m sure that you heard that he’s acquiring De Forster. Morris and all of the sightholders must be ecstatic.”

“Ariana, unfortunately, that’s why I’m calling. Morris died yesterday. He had a heart attack while he was in his office sorting stones. The funeral will be tomorrow. Do you feel up to coming to New York?”

“Of course I’ll be there! Where, and what time?” asked Ariana.

“I’ve hired a limo to pick you up in Baltimore. They’ll bring you to my office and then to the Synagogue and cemetery.”

“Larry, you don’t have to do that, I can take the train.”

“Ariana, please, a limo will be easier.”

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Ariana said, "I haven't been to my apartment for a while and I'm sure it's a wreck. I'd rather stay at a hotel for the night. I'm not up to an eight-hour roundtrip in a car, especially with two bodyguards."

"I've taken the liberty of getting you a suite at the Waldorf. I'll call and arrange another room for the bodyguards. The limo will take you back to Baltimore whenever you want," said Larry.

"I can't believe Morris is gone, he was like a father to me. It's my fault he's dead. The stress of the kidnapping was too much. I'll never forgive myself."

Larry responded, "Ariana, Morris has had problems with his heart for years. He never talked about it, and he never listened to his doctor. He smoked his cigars and drank his Slivovitz until the end. Don't blame yourself. I talked to him after the kidnapping. He seemed to have taken it in stride; his only concern was for you. He was an old man with a bad heart, but not a man to be intimidated or frightened. He died because he didn't take care of himself."

Ariana sobbed softly, "I can't talk now. I'll see you tomorrow."

Ariana arrived at Larry's office at 1:45, her bodyguards behind her. She was dressed in black; a wig and large hat covered her shaven head. Her eyes were red and her face still swollen.

"Ariana, are you sure you feel up to this?"

"I'll never be up to this. I'm to blame and there is nothing I can do, not a damn thing. He's gone, and I'm responsible."

"There's nothing more to say than I said yesterday. It's not your fault. If Morris saw you like this, he'd be furious. Ariana, I never said this before, but I love you. I can't stand to see you punishing yourself. Please let me help you. We can have a life together, we can work together, we can create jewels that would have given Morris joy."

"Larry, I can't think now. Please don't ask me to make any decisions. You know how fond I am of you, but not now, not anything now."

"I'll wait."

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“I’m sorry that I can’t give you an answer. I do love you. Please give me time to think. You know that I want to work with you, to spend time with you. I just can’t think about love right now, not for anyone but Morris.”

The Synagogue was huge, but there was standing room only. Seats in the front were reserved for family members, of whom there were none, and close friends and dignitaries, of whom there were many.

Menachem, Ariana, Larry, Morris’s secretary, the Mayor, the head of the Diamond Dealers Club, and the Israeli Ambassador sat in the first row. Menachem gave a short but eloquent memorial, followed by the Israeli Ambassador.

Hassidim filled the back half of the Synagogue, the hum of their timeless chants reverberating through the synagogue. When the service concluded, the four-block procession of vehicles to the cemetery was led by a trio of police motorcycles.

At the cemetery, Menachem recited the Mourner’s Kaddish. Morris was lowered into his grave. Menachem took a shovel full of earth and dropped it onto the coffin. Ariana wept, as did many of the men. Close friends and dignitaries sat Shiva at the Israeli Consulate; there was no family to provide a home for the mourning.

Chapter 39

Tel Aviv, Israel

Al Jazeera television received a note, photographs, and videotape from a previously unknown Palestinian organization claiming responsibility for the assassination of Hassan Nabuli. The note read, *The traitor Hassan Nabuli has met his just end. Let him rot in a Zionist graveyard*; the photographs showed Hassan disembarking from an El Al flight and passing through Israeli security. The video tape was a vivid portrayal of the slain Palestinian laying spread eagle, a gaping knife wound in his chest. Three days after the airing of the story, the body was discovered in a deserted warehouse in Amman. Hassan was buried in a pauper's grave; no mourners and, like Morris, no family.

Avi and David viewed the Al Jazeera story and the subsequent media coverage, "Avi, I think we'll get away with it. The massive knife wound obliterated the damage done by the bullet, and the body was buried without an autopsy."

"This didn't end the way we hoped, Nabuli could have been a major force in resolving issues with the Palestinians; but thank God he lived long enough to return the last canister. Now I'll deal with Boulton; the bastard isn't going to get away again."

Has he been located?" asked David

"Flanagan got hold of satellite surveillance photos that are used by the D.E.A., and arranged for a computer image scan using a photograph we got from the owner of the stolen boat. Fortunately it's a power catamaran with a very distinctive profile, and they were able to spot it on open water. It was headed toward Juventud, an island off the coast of Cuba. They found it again on the photos of the Juventud Marina. Shannon is trying to pick up his trail from there."

"Where do you think he's headed?"

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“To Cuba, and then back to England,” responded Avi, “George is sure he’ll go after Rothman. I agree with him, and I’m going to England too. I want to be there to nail the bastard.”

“Avi, I want you to be careful, we don’t need an international incident on our hands. If you succeed in eliminating Boulton, make sure it isn’t attributed to us. By the way, I don’t know if you heard about Goldman?”

“No, nothing since his release.”

“He died of a heart attack. Menachem was at the funeral, and told me that Ariana Wright broke down; she blames herself for Goldman’s death.”

Avi responded, his surprise evident, “I hadn’t heard, Ariana — Miss Wright — didn’t call me, and neither did George.”

David continued, “Avi, I have no right to get involved in your personal life, but prior to his death, Morris talked with Menachem; he was concerned that you and Wright were becoming emotionally involved, and I must tell you that I share his concern, although for da

different reasons. The Matossian’s and their offspring live in a world of their own, and its very different from mine or yours. Their lifestyles and needs are incomprehensible to most of us. You became involved with the woman when she was under immense stress. She needed your strength and competence, but you have no place in her world, nor she in yours. Can you imagine being a businessman, a lawyer, or an executive in one of Matossian’s companies? I don’t believe you could stand the thought of being supported by her, and I don’t think she could accept the life of a Mossad agent’s wife.”

“You’re right David, you shouldn’t involve yourself in my personal affairs. I’m well aware of everything you and Morris believe.”

—

Malcolm, his blond hair cut short, his face unshaven, disembarked from Cubana de Aviacion Flight 120. Shannon Flanagan watched as he passed through Customs and Immigration. Boulton’s disheveled appearance was not what she had expected.

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She removed a satellite phone from her purse, and called Avi at Mossad headquarters, “For once in my life, one of my hunches paid off. He’d left Juventud by the time I got there. I checked out flights from Havana to England and Europe. He booked a First Class seat on Cubana de Aviacion to Heathrow. I might have caught up with him in Havana, but I decided it would be better to take the chance of catching up with him in London, and I hitched a ride on an airforce plane from Guantanamo. I beat him here by a day.

“He just arrived at Heathrow. He doesn’t look at all like the perfectly groomed sharp dresser in the photo you gave me. I have no authority to detain him; all I can do is watch the guy. Have formal charges been filed against him?”

“No formal charges of any kind. The Israeli Government doesn’t want Boulton testifying in Court, and the IDSO has agreed. I have the authority to deal with him on a more unofficial basis. I’ll catch the next commercial flight to London. Can you keep an eye on him until I arrive.”

“Sure, I’ll get some help from our station. Call me when you know your arrival time. I’ll pick you up.”

“I’ll be there within eight hours. Once I pick him up you can pull out. I don’t want you involved, this might get ugly. And I don’t want you to get in hot water; you’ve already done enough.”

“Avi, I’ve been in hot water all of my life. You’ll need backup, and I intend to be it.”

“I could get to like you, Shannon; you think more like an Israeli than an American.”

“I already like you, Stein.”

Reuven listened to the conversation.

“What in the hell are you planning to do? It doesn’t make sense for you to go after Boulton while he’s in England. Deveraux should be with you.”

“Reuvi, this is personal, I’m going to kill him, and I don’t want anyone else involved.”

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Reuven replied, "Avi, you take him out in London, and get caught, they'll charge you with murder. Boulton is a British citizen; the authorities won't tolerate a Mossad sanction against one of their own; but if Boulton makes an attempt on Rothman, the IDSO or Scotland Yard will nail him."

"But not necessarily dead, and dead is the way I want him."

"If you're going to be stubborn, at least let me come with you."

"Not a chance Reuvi, you find Hilmi's sister."

"Avi, you know as well as I do that she's tucked away in a safe house in Syria. I can't do a damn thing while she's there. I'll have to draw her out, or wait for her to try something in Israel."

"That's right Reuvi, and that's what you'll do. I'll deal with Boulton."

"Avi, some times you're a real *putz*."

"Yeah, but I'm a *putz* who needs a ride to the airport."

"Sure, I'll take you, but only if you promise that if you kill the bastard, you won't get caught."

Avi laughed, "I promise to kill him, but I can't be sure about not getting caught."

London, England

Shannon met Avi at Heathrow. "Avi, it's good to see you again. One of my associates is watching Boulton."

"Shannon, thanks for everything you've done. Where is the bastard?"

"He registered at the Dorchester, off of Park Lane in Mayfair, and hasn't left his room. The registration clerk was taken aback by his disheveled appearance, but Boulton solved that with a hundred dollar bill. Since his arrival there have been packages coming to his room from Harrods. Whatever he's planning, he's going to do it in style."

"The only thing he's going to do in style is die."

"Avi, you've got to be careful; let him make the first move; have a reason to kill him."

"I already have a reason; I just need the opportunity."

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Malcolm lay in his bed at the Dorchester, his newly acquired laptop at his side. He had spent the better part of the afternoon hacking into the De Forster administrative files. Once in he had no difficulty accessing the flight plans for the IDSO jet fleet. Alex's personal plane was in Geneva, and was scheduled to bring him to London tomorrow.

Tonight he would retrieve the gun that had fallen beside his Grandfather, and tomorrow it would be fired for the last time. The decision made, he went to the hotel dining room. He had no appetite. He got up before ordering, threw his napkin on his chair, and left. It took him forty-five minutes to walk to his parents' apartment.

The apartment was vacant, his parents still on holiday. He went to the kitchen cabinet where tools were kept, and retrieved a screwdriver. In the bedroom that had once been his, he lifted a floorboard with the screwdriver, reached down, felt the smooth plastic bag in which he had wrapped the revolver, and lifted it out of the hiding place in which it had rested for more than twenty-five years. There were still five unfired bullets and one empty casing in the cylinder.

The agent maintaining surveillance called Shannon as Malcolm left the apartment block, "Shannon, your man went to a flat near the Rothman residence. He was inside for about twenty minutes. Now he's heading back to the Dorchester."

"Thanks Jerry, we'll be at the hotel within the hour to take over."

"I don't know what this guy is up to, but he is one unhappy camper. Be careful."

"We will be."

Shannon turned to Avi, "Boulton went to his parents' apartment, stayed there twenty minutes, and is walking back to the hotel."

Avi replied, "Rothman is due back in London tomorrow; I assume that Deveraux has provided added protection and that Boulton is aware of it. He'll go for Alex where he's most vulnerable, probably as he enters or leaves his home. I want to deal with Boulton before the IDSO or anyone else gets their hands on him."

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“Avi, I can help you, but I can’t be responsible for a cold-blooded murder. If you’re going to go after Boulton you’re going to have to catch him, weapon in hand, going after Rothman.”

“You have one set of rules Shannon, I have another. Boulton killed one of our agents, my stepsister. I’ll take him down the minute I have a clear shot, and a likelihood of not being caught.

Chapter 40

London

Malcolm returned to his room at the Dorchester, removed the revolver from his pocket, took out the five remaining shells and spun the cylinder. It was stiff, but after several revolutions, it loosened. He cocked the hammer and dry fired. Satisfied that he had a functional weapon, he reloaded with fresh ammunition that he had smuggled in from Havana.

Early the next morning, after a sleepless night, he dressed, left the hotel, and walked north.

“Shannon,” said Avi. “I’ll follow him on foot, get the car and stay behind us.”

Malcolm walked two blocks, and in the middle of the third, crossed the street and entered the taxi he had arranged for Avi ran back toward the car.. Shannon sped forward, slowing as she reached him. She reached over and threw open the door. As soon as Avi was in she began a U-turn. A horn blared as a Morris Mini traveling in the outside lane slammed into the rear right of Shannon’s Rover. Avi, almost oblivious to the accident, exclaimed, “Damn it, I should have shot the bastard the moment I saw him. Are you O.K.?” asked Avi, almost as an afterthought.

“Yep, but that Mini isn’t,” replied Shannon as she walked toward the irate driver of the devastated Mini. After five minutes of heated conversation, during which allusions were made to her Irish ancestry, license numbers were exchanged. Shannon returned to the Rover where Avi was finishing a conversation with George Deveraux.

“That guy give you a rough time?” he asked.

“Yep, he called me a drunken Mick. I would have popped him if it hadn’t been my fault. Those Minis are so small you don’t notice them. My Rover has a little dent and his front end is a wreck.”

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“At least no one was hurt,” said Avi, his voice hardening as he continued, “Alex is due back from Geneva in about three hours. George has two of his people waiting at the airport for him. We should stick to Alex like a fly on glue; Boulton is bound to show up.”

The taxi took Malcolm to a BMW dealership on the outskirts of London. Malcolm gave the driver a generous tip and walked into the showroom. A nattily attired salesman greeted him.

“Good afternoon, may I be of assistance?”

“I’m Malcolm Boulton. You have a BMW bike I ordered.”

“Certainly Mr. Boulton. I’m glad we finally have the opportunity to meet. It was quite fortunate that we had the model you requested. It’s a rather special machine, one we don’t normally stock. We special ordered it for a client whose financing didn’t go through.”

“I really don’t require the history. Just get it ready. And the accessories I requested?”

“Yes sir: helmet, leather jacket, pants, boots, and goggles.”

“Have you a place where I can change?”

“Yes sir, the men’s room, right down that corridor.”

“Fine, give them to me and bring the bike to the front drive. I’m taking delivery now.”

“Of course, sir. We received your payment yesterday and the paperwork is ready. We require only your signature.”

Thirty-five minutes later, Malcolm mounted the black BMW K1200 LT-E and drove out of the dealership toward Gatwick Airport. He stopped at the first gas station, purchased a ten-liter plastic fuel container, filled it with high test, and placed it in the luggage carrier along with a rag that he picked up from the service bay.

Alex was greeted at the private plane facility by two IDSO guards who walked him to his waiting limousine. They then re-entered their Range Rover and followed him out of the airport.

Alex addressed his chauffeur, “Paul, take me home, there’s nothing at the office that can’t wait till tomorrow.”

“Yes sir,” said the driver as he accelerated onto the M23 to London. The truck followed five feet behind, close enough to prevent another car from getting directly behind the limo.

Shannon and Avi followed, five car lengths behind.

The black BMW motorcycle entered the M23, stayed behind the three vehicles for two miles, and then suddenly accelerated, roaring past the small caravan.

“Damn if that bike doesn’t look like Boulton’s, but it can’t be, we trucked that one away from his parents’ flat.”

“Avi, black BMW touring bikes are pretty popular, but whoever is on that one is flying.”

Two miles ahead of the approaching vehicles, Malcolm pulled to the shoulder, removed the gas can from the luggage compartment, and saturated the rag for three quarters of its length. He then stuffed it into the can. When Alex’s caravan came into view, Malcolm ignited the rag; the unsaturated portion smoldered as he tossed the can into the limousine’s path. He jumped on his bike and sped off. The gasoline ignited and engulfed the limousine in flames. The Range Rover with the two bodyguards plowed into the inferno.

Avi and Shannon swerved to avoid the conflagration. They pulled to the side, several hundred feet in front of the flaming vehicles.

The BMW traveled less than a thousand feet and turned, speeding back toward the chaos.

Avi and Shannon drew their weapons and fired at the oncoming bike, which veered right than left, making a difficult target. Both missed.

Malcolm skidded to a stop a few feet in front of the limo, as Alex staggered out of the rear door.

“This is for my Grandfather,” said Malcolm firing a single bullet into Alex’s forehead.

The two bodyguards, in shock from the collision, stumbled onto the road, weapons still holstered. Malcolm fired, this time twice. The two men dropped to the ground. The chauffeur was trapped in the burning vehicle.

“Avi, he shot them, he shot them all,” yelled Shannon as she ran toward the flaming vehicle.

Malcolm lowered the visor of his helmet and sped off.

Alex Rothman lay by the roadside, a single fatal wound to his head. His two bodyguards were still alive.

“Sweet Jesus, where did he come from?” moaned one of them.

Fire trucks, ambulances, and police vehicles appeared on the scene.

“Shannon, we can’t get involved. I’m going to tell the police we stopped to help.”

“They might buy it if the IDSO guards don’t say anything.”

“They’re not in good enough shape to say anything. More to the point, I doubt if they saw us fire at Boulton,” said Avi, adding, “I need to call headquarters.”

Malcolm

Malcolm exited the M23, and traveled via an alternate route into London. With Alex dead, the Rothman dynasty was ended. There was only one person left to deal with.

At Charing Cross he turned onto a road that led to the Embankment. He removed his helmet, got off his bike, and walked it into the Thames, throwing the helmet and leather jacket in after it. He then walked back to Charing Cross train station, hailed a cab, and in less than an hour he was at Heathrow. His flight to Baltimore left two hours later.

Avi and Shannon

After being interviewed by the police, Avi and Shannon headed to the Dorchester, hoping to pick up Malcolm’s trail. The radio was tuned to BBC News. The coverage of the murder of Alex Rothman had begun, but was soon interrupted by a bulletin,

“We have just learned that the BMW motorcycle involved in the fire bombing of Alex Rothman’s limousine has been recovered from the Thames near Charing Cross. Police units and divers are on the scene, but no body has been found. More on the story as it unfolds.”

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“Shannon, forget the Dorchester; let’s get to Charing Cross. If the bastard killed himself, he saved us a lot of trouble.”

Dikran — Paris, France

“Dikran, I’m sorry to interrupt, but George Deveraux is on the line from Geneva. He says he needs to speak to you.”

“Catherine, tell him I’ll pick up in a moment. Paul, I’ll get back to you; I have a call from Geneva. Finish up the documents and send them to Rothman.”

“George, what’s so urgent?”

“Alex has been murdered.”

“Murdered, my God, by whom? And when?”

“It was Boulton. He firebombed Alex’s limo and then shot him in cold blood. Two bodyguards were seriously wounded, and the chauffeur died in the fire.”

“George, can you come to Paris tomorrow?”

“Certainly, I’ll be there first thing in the morning. The De Forster offices are in chaos. Walter and I have been fielding calls from everyone in the industry, especially our own senior management. I need to spend a few more hours here to help calm things down.”

“Fine, do what you have to and then call me with your arrival time. My driver will pick you up at De Gaulle,” said Dikran, who then called his secretary back into the office, “Catherine, Alex Rothman was murdered. Get Paul back on the line.”

“My God Dikran, who did it, and why?”

“Let me deal with Paul, then I’ll tell you what I know, which isn’t very much.”

Catherine returned to her desk, placed the call, and buzzed Dikran’s intercom. “Paul is on the line. He’s frantic, he just heard about Alex.”

“I’ll pick up. In the meantime reserve suites at the Mayfair for George and Paul, they will arrive tomorrow morning.”

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“Paul, this is Dikran. Forget about sending documents to Rothman. George Deveraux is flying in tomorrow. I want you to be here. I’ve booked a suite for you at the Mayfair.”

Catherine re-entered, “It’s Deveraux again.”

“Yes George.”

“Boulton got away. Our people are trying to find him and both the Mossad and C.I.A. are going after him.”

“With little hope of success, I would imagine. Our young Englishman has been one step ahead of all of you. I can’t say I’m impressed with the IDSO’s performance, and I needn’t comment on how I feel about the Mossad and the C.I.A.”

“I know Dikran, I assure you I know.”

“George, I’ll see you tomorrow. I’ve arranged suites at the Mayfair for you and Paul Coudert.”

“Coudert, I don’t know him.”

“He is the head of my legal department. I assigned him to work on the De Forster acquisition. George, before you leave Geneva, find out how Boulton managed to get away, and where in the devil he’s headed. Then get back to me.”

“Catherine, this is unbelievable. Not only did Boulton manage to assassinate Alex, he escaped and is at large. Please get Ariana on the phone.”

“Alex, it 5:30 in the morning in the States; shouldn’t you wait to call?”

“No, just do as I say, and get her on the line.”

“There’s no need to be cross.”

Chapter 41

Thursday Morning — Baltimore, Maryland

Ariana was awakened by the first bars of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony from her cell phone. Disoriented, she reached for the receiver of her bedside phone, heard the dial tone and the continued musical sounds of her cellular. She rose and retrieved the cell phone from the charger on her dresser.

"Who in the hell is this? It's 5:30."

"Ariana, I'm sorry to awaken you, but it is quite important; Alex Rothman was killed this morning. Malcolm blew up his car, shot him and his security detail, and then fled. The man is insane; he's killed four people that we know of, and if his plan had succeeded it would have been hundreds, possibly thousands. The Mossad, the IDSO, the C.I.A., and now Scotland Yard are after him. George Deveraux and David Kimmel both think he will come after you, in a final dramatic gesture. He is out to punish anyone he thinks betrayed him or his family. I want you to avoid going out unless it is absolutely necessary, and then only in the armored Range Rover with two body guards. I'm sending two more men from New York to provide back up. They should be there in four hours."

"Grandpa, Malcolm knows the authorities will be watching the airports. He won't risk coming here."

"My dear girl, you, of all people, should know that the authorities are less than stellar in their performance, and I do not think Boulton gives a damn what they do. The man has evaded them, and by this time probably thinks of himself as invincible.

"I will arrive at the farm tomorrow. My chief of security is making plans to move you where Boulton cannot possibly get at you. If your Englishman is half as clever as he seems, he knows where you are, and is on his way."

Dulles Airport — Thursday Evening

Malcolm arrived at Heathrow three hours before his flight's scheduled departure for Dulles Airport in Northern Virginia. His hair was now dark brown and he wore a baseball cap and jeans. His passport identified him as Sterling Priest, and his business card identified him as President of Priest Computer Services. There was a terrorism alert that resulted in an unnerving two-hour delay, during which the plane was searched for explosives. As he waited for the predicted 9:30 departure, Malcolm called Lawrence Winston's office, asked for Ariana, and was told she was out of town for an extended period. A call to Morris Goldman's office was answered by his secretary, who informed Malcolm that Morris had passed away, and that the office was closed; his call to Ariana's apartment was unanswered, not even by the machine. It was not until the final call to the Wright farm in Maryland that he received the answer that he was hoping for. The maid answered, and when asked if Ariana was there replied, "I have no idea, sir."

Shortly after he finished his calls, the flight was boarded. Malcolm was seated in the First Class compartment. He instructed the steward that he wished not to be disturbed during the six-hour flight. Upon his arrival at Dulles, he passed through Customs and Immigration without incident, and went to the Avis booth where he requested a full-size car with GPS navigation.

After a seventy-minute drive, he arrived at the Harbor Court, Baltimore's premiere hotel, and checked into the Suite he had reserved prior to his departure from London. It was almost midnight Eastern Standard Time when he was settled into his bed. He awakened at 5:00 a.m. and called Room Service to order breakfast. He then shaved and showered, careful to remove all vestiges of the brown hair coloring.

After a breakfast of Eggs Benedict and orange juice, he called for his car, went down to the lobby, and waited in the library until the car was delivered to the circular drive at the hotel's entrance. Malcolm entered the car and set the navigation system to the intersection of the street address of the Wright farm. The ubiquitous computer voice guided him out of downtown Baltimore,

onto the Jones Falls Expressway, across Greenspring Valley Road and then onto Greenspring Avenue.

At Butler Road, he made a right, and in two miles the computer voice alerted him that he had reached his destination. He paused briefly in front of the entrance to the farm, noting the heavy steel gate located fifty yards into the drive. A Chevrolet Suburban with a single occupant was parked immediately behind it.

Malcolm drove on for a half mile until he arrived at Belmont Avenue, where he made a U-turn. There was an unpaved and seemingly unused farm entrance, less than a hundred feet past the Wright farm on the opposite side of Butler Road. He backed his car in far enough to be obscured by a small stand of trees, and there he waited.

At 11:45 a Range Rover came through the gate and turned right onto Butler Road. As the truck passed he saw Ariana in the back seat. Two men were in the front. The Rover had an unusually low stance, and thick glass that produced a mild distortion. It was armored.

It was obvious that Dikran Matossian was taking no chances with his granddaughter. Given Matossian's reputation, both the guards and the vehicle were the best money could buy. Malcolm made his decision; he was going to have to get in close, very close. During the thirty-minute drive back to the Harbor Court, he formulated his plan. He would be patient, pick his time and place, and be done with the Rothmans and the Matossians.

Avi and Shannon — London, England — Thursday Morning

After a wasted morning at Charing Cross, Avi and Shannon agreed that with Alex Rothman dead, Malcolm would have reason to go after only one person, Ariana.

Shannon called Jim Caldwell, "Jim, we think Boulton will go after Ariana Wright. I'd like to stay on him."

"Go ahead. Wright is Dikran Matossian's granddaughter; we've already had a dozen calls from the Hill asking how a Palestinian terrorist could enter the United States illegally and kidnap a

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prominent American citizen. With the new provisions of the Patriot Act, you can operate freely, as long as I inform the F.B.I. that we are dealing with a terrorist situation. This fellow Stein that you're traveling with complicates the situation. He has no authority to operate in the U.S., to carry a firearm, or to take action against Boulton. Tell him to keep a low profile once he's in the States. We can provide a cover story to account for his presence, a joint training operation or some other bullshit tale. What do you need once you're in Baltimore?"

"A car, and another agent, someone who knows his way around the area where Wright is staying."

Avi said, "Tell Jim its Glyndon, a small community about 20 miles northwest of downtown Baltimore."

"It's a town called Glyndon, thirty minutes northwest of Baltimore."

"Was that Stein I heard?"

"Yeah, it's him. He sticks to me like glue. And Jim, it might help if the agent you assign to me is more than a desk jockey. The situation might get wet."

"An agent with field experience will meet you at the airport. Call and let me know your arrival time."

Avi and Shannon — Baltimore — Friday Evening

The United Airlines flight to BWI was nonstop and arrived at 6:00 p.m. Jack Evers was waiting at the gate.

He recognized Avi and Shannon from photographs emailed to the Baltimore field office, and greeted them as they walked out of the plane.

"Hey, I'm Evers, I have a car outside."

"We only have carry-on luggage, but our weapons are in the pilot's lock box. We'll have to wait for them at the airport security office."

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“Can you guys tell me what’s up? I got the call to pick you up, and instructions to assist, but no details.”

Shannon answered, “We’re after an Englishman, Malcolm Boulton, he’s responsible for two murders; one of the murder victims was a Mossad agent, the other the Chairman of De Forster. He also masterminded attempted thefts at six diamond vaults owned by the De Forster diamond Syndicate. We suspect he’s going to go after a woman who helped us break up his organization.”

“Heavy-duty shit,” said Evers.

“Yeah, heavy duty, and liable to get messy,” said Avi as the three agents walked to the airport Security Office.

“Where to from here?” asked Evers after they picked up their weapons.

“Let’s go out to the Wright farm; then we can make hotel arrangements,” said Avi.

“No need for the hotel arrangements, we already booked you into the Holiday Inn near the field office, and it’s only fifteen minutes from Glyndon, a straight shot down Interstate-795.”

“Great,” said Shannon. “We have no idea where or when Boulton will make a move, and we need somewhere close and convenient to work out of.”

“Are you guys sure he’s here?” asked Jack as they entered his gray Chevrolet.

“If he’s not here now, he will be,” said Avi, as Jack pulled onto Interstate-695.

In forty minutes they arrived at the Boulton farm. An armed guard from Dikran’s security force was at the brightly lit gate. The agents presented their identification. The guard called the house, and after a short conversation opened the gate and motioned them on.

Ariana came out of the house to greet them. “Avi, thank God you’re here. Everything is insane. Armed guards and German shepherds; the dogs keep on tangling with father’s Jack Russells. They almost killed one of them. Father went into a drunken rage when we moved his dogs to the barn. He threatened to shoot the shepherds. Two of the bodyguards finally calmed him down. They almost had to resort to force.”

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Avi waited for Ariana to finish, and then said, "Ariana, this is Shannon Flanagan, and the big guy is Jack Evers. They're C.I.A. field agents. Shannon has been following Malcolm, and was with me in London when he killed Alex Rothman; Jack is from the Baltimore field office.

"With your permission, we'd like to spend a good bit of our time on or near the farm. We think Malcolm will come to Baltimore," said Avi, his tone professional, without a hint of affection.

"I'm sure he's here," said Ariana.

"Larry Winston called; he said someone with a phony Boston accent, who refused to identify himself, was trying to reach me, and then there was a call to my apartment; I have caller I.D. The call was from London. Then Doris answered a call from someone who was looking for me. Malcolm knows that if I'm not in New York or traveling on business, I'm most likely at the Glyndon farm."

Shannon said, "Miss Wright, I can assure you that you'll be protected. Your Grandfather has assigned four of his best men to watch over you and we have instructions to support them. FBI agents from the Baltimore field office will maintain an around the clock surveillance of your farm, while we attempt to locate Mr. Boulton."

Ariana said, "If Malcolm comes to Baltimore, you can be sure he'll stay at the best hotel. He has an obsession with the trappings of money."

"And which hotel would that be?" asked Shannon.

"Probably the Harbor Court." replied Ariana.

Avi nodded in agreement.

"That's where I stayed when I came to Baltimore to meet Miss Wright."

"Since when am I Miss Wright, Mr. Stein?"

"Since your life is being threatened, and I'm one of the people responsible for your safety." replied Avi.

Shannon watched the interaction with interest, an interest heightened by her attraction to Avi, rather than professional curiosity.

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Ariana noted the change in her relationship with Avi. She did not invite the agents into the house.

Evers watched the three of them. As he drove them to the Holiday Inn he thought, "Just what I need; a fucking love triangle."

Malcolm

Early Friday morning, Malcolm returned the Lincoln to the Avis office and requested a four wheel drive pickup truck. There were none available downtown, but the agent made a call.

"Mr. Boulton, our office in Towson has a Dodge Ram. We can either deliver it to you here, or have someone take you there."

"I'd prefer to go there. I'll get a chance to see a bit more of Baltimore."

"Fine, we're not busy, and I have an errand to run in Towson. I'll take you."

She called out to a young man who had just entered the rear of the office.

"Jerry, watch the front, I'm going to take Mr. Boulton to Towson to pick up a truck."

"Do you want me to take him?" asked Jerry perversely, noting the attention that was being lavished on the good-looking Englishman.

"No Jerry, I'll do it. While I'm in Towson, I'm going to pick up some shoes I had repaired at Nordstroms."

"Sure Angie, take your time, nothin's happening here."

As they drove to Towson, Angie asked, "How come you need a four wheel drive truck?"

"I'm thinking about buying a farm. Some of your horses do very well in our Grand National, especially ones that race in your Hunt Cup. I want to nose around the countryside to see what might be available."

"I go to that race every year. My boyfriend and I love it. We pack a picnic lunch and tailgate," said Angie.

"You must be pretty familiar with the area?"

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“No, not me, but my boyfriend is. He works at Southern States in Cockeyville. He delivers feed to the farms around here.”

“What’s your boyfriend’s name?”

“Stanley, Stanley Hoover.”

“Do you think Stanley would be interested in making some extra money? I need someone to show me around. I’d like to get familiar with the farms in the area before I buy.”

“Sure Mr. Boulton, if you want I can call him. He always has his phone with him. I’ll let you talk to him.”

“Super, Angie; pull over, it will be safer.”

“Hey Stan, I’m taking a customer to Towson. He’s from out of town, way out of town, England. Yeah, a foreigner; he’s gonna buy a farm in the Valley where they have the Hunt Cup. Yeah, Worthington Valley, that’s right. Anyways he’s interested in finding someone to show him around. Yeah, not a realtor, he just wants to get the lay of the land. Can you talk to him?”

She handed the phone to Malcolm.

“Stanley, this is Malcolm Boulton. I’d like to see some horse farms, and I don’t want to attract attention by engaging a realtor. Once they know I’m in the market, they’ll jack up the prices. Is there a chance I could tag along when you make deliveries.”

“That’s sorta hard, the company don’t allow any passengers.”

“Sure, I understand, but Southern States wouldn’t have to know. I’ll pay you two hundred dollars a day, and I’ll even help unload the feed.”

“Are you talking cash?”

“Certainly, nice crisp hundred dollar bills.”

“Well maybe we can work something out. Let me check my delivery schedules.”

“Call me tonight; I’ll give Angie my number at the Harbor Court. We can set things up.”

Malcolm handed Angie the phone and said,

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“This is super. Stanley can show me the farms; I won’t have to flounder about on my own. A bit of good luck for a change.”

“Well, we’re all lucky. Stan is trying to put together the money to buy a new truck. His old one is beat to shit.”

Angie widened her eyes and put her hand over her mouth,

“Excuse me Mr. Boulton, I shouldn’t talk that way with a customer. Speaking of trucks, do you still need the rental?”

“Indeed, I might have business to take care of, on my own.”

Malcolm left the rental office in a new Dodge Ram pickup.

That evening, Stanley called the Harbor Court and was connected to Malcolm’s room.

“Mr. Boulton, this is Stanley, you know, Angie’s boyfriend. Do you still want to come on deliveries with me?”

“I certainly do.”

“Well, I checked the delivery schedule. Tomorrow, I make deliveries in the North East, from York Road over. There are some real nice farms there. But on Tuesday I deliver over in Worthington Valley. Those are the best, a lot of rich folks have big spreads, and that’s where they have the Hunt Cup.”

“I think that will be the day I’d like to go. What time do you start?”

“I usually leave the store at 7:00, and work from York Road west.”

“There’s a farm I heard about that interests me. It belongs to a horse trainer, a Mr. Wright.”

“Shit yeah, that’s old Joe’s farm. Wright is a drunk, thinks he knows about horses, but old Joe runs the place. They got guards there all the time now. It’s a real pain in the ass, if I don’t get there at my scheduled time I can’t get in. Joe said they got them to protect the daughter. She must be a rock star or something.”

“Will you be delivering there on Tuesday?”

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“Wait a sec, I brought my schedule home. Yeah, they’re getting a half dozen salt blocks, and 24 bags of oats. I’m supposed to be there at 2:00 sharp. Now look Mister Boulton, if you’re on the truck with me you gotta wear work clothes, and don’t talk to any of the customers. If anybody asks, I’ll tell ’em you’re a buddy, thinking of working for the company.”

“I understand. I’ll pick up some overalls, work boots and a flannel shirt.”

“How big are you?” asked Stanley”

“Five eleven, 175 pounds.”

“Shit, you’re my size. What size shoes you wear?”

“Ten and a half.”

“You’re paying me two hundred, right? Make it two fifty and I’ll lend you the shit. No need to buy it. You can change in the back of the truck.”

“That’s a deal, Stanley. Where should I meet you?”

“I don’t want anybody at the store to see you. How ’bout I pick you up somewhere along my route?”

“That’s fine, how about somewhere on Butler Road, before you make your deliveries to the Wrights. Then you can drop me off there after you’ve finished your deliveries.”

“Yeah, that’ll work. There’s a farm road right down from their entrance. Nobody ever uses it. Park your truck there and I’ll pick you up about ten of 2:00.”

“Great Stanley, I’ll see you on Butler Road. I’ll get there early. I don’t want to make you miss your 2:00 deadline.”

“You bring the cash, and I’ll bring the clothes,” said Stanley, chuckling as he hung up.”

Immediately after hanging up, Malcolm packed his bags, called the bellman and checked out of the Harbor Court.

C.I.A. office Baltimore Saturday Morning

“Avi, the agents started checking the hotels this morning. They took our advice and made the Harbor Court first on their list. Boulton arrived there Thursday night driving a Lincoln town car. He

checked out Friday evening. The receptionist remembered him because he didn't squawk about paying for the unused night. She described him as a real English gentleman."

"Have you been able to trace the Lincoln?" Asked Avi.

"We checked all the car rental agencies at Dulles. He got the car from Avis." replied Jack , who then added, "I called the Maryland State Police. I had them put out an all-points bulletin for the car. It went out first thing this morning."

"Your man is slippery, he's always one step ahead of us," said Shannon.

Malcolm — Saturday

Malcolm spent Friday night at a motel in Virginia, just two miles from C.I.A. headquarters. He awakened early , showered, and once again dyed his hair brown. Before going out for breakfast, he checked the phone book and found a sporting goods store, just a mile away. A chance meeting had given him an easy way to get at Ariana. He needed to prepare.

After an Egg McMuffin at a nearby McDonalds, he drove to the sporting goods store, pulled into a loading zone, and was buzzed into the shop. He was greeted by a short wiry man, with a Glock in an open holster conspicuously displayed on his hip. "Hey Mister, that a loading zone, you'll get a ticket."

"I won't be long, my requirements are very simple. I need a gun like yours, and a hunting knife," said Malcolm, making no effort to disguise his British accent.

"O.k, but if you get a ticket, don't blame me."

"Don't worry, I won't."

"Awright then; the knife is no problem, but to get the gun I need I.D., and you have to wait five days to pick it up."

"That wouldn't be convenient, I'm only in town for a day," said Malcolm as he assessed the man and the store. He spotted the surveillance camera and the two buttons that activated the silent alarm.

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“May I see your weapon,” he asked as he moved closer to the clerk.

“No sir, I don’t take this baby out of it’s nest unless I’m gonna shoot somebody.”

“Well then, the knife will have to do,” said Malcolm.

The store owner came from behind the counter and moved to the freestanding showcase that contained several dozen knives, ranging from a Swiss Army penknife to a full-size Navy Seal rig.

“What’s to your liking?”

Malcolm pointed to a beautifully decorated knife that was unopened, “That’s a Walker Locker isn’t it?”

“Man, you know your knives, especially for a foreigner.”

“My accent gave me away?”

“Sure did,” said the clerk, well pleased with his powers of observation. He removed the knife from the show case, opened it with a smooth, one handed movement, and ran his finger along the side of the blade.

“Sharp is it?” asked Malcolm

“Damn sharp, cut through deer skin like butter,” replied the clerk as he snapped the blade back in. He handed the knife to Malcolm.

“Now, you’re sure I can’t buy a gun, and take it with me?” asked Malcolm as he opened the knife.

“No sir, not for all the money in the world; I’d lose my firearms license.”

“I’m sorry about that,” said Malcolm as he plunged the knife into the man’s neck, severing his larynx, jugular vein, and carotid artery. The clerk fell to the floor unable to scream. Two streams of blood pulsed from his neck, one bright red, the other a brownish purple. The bright red stream rose six inches into the air, the brownish purple pooled around the wound.

Malcolm reached down, removed the Glock from its holster, looked at the surveillance camera, and traced the wire into a rear room. The door to the room was closed. Malcolm returned to the body and yanked a leather key ring from the cloth belt holder of the dead man’s jeans.

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He chose the most likely key and opened the door to the storage room. A VCR was recording from two cameras, one in the shop, and the other in the storeroom. Malcolm removed the videocassette, stripped out the tape, and placed both in a waste can full of brown wrapping paper. He then walked to the rear of the storeroom and removed two boxes of Black Talon .40 caliber ammunition from an open shelf. As he walked out of the room, he took out his Zippo and carefully lit the contents of the waste can.

He got into his car and returned to the motel where he packed, checked out, and drove north to D.C. In an hour he arrived at the Mayflower Hotel, where he again used the name and passport of Sterling Priest to register. The desk clerk noted, with suspicion, the sixteen \$100 dollar bills that the Englishman used to pay for three nights in advance.

Dikran Matossian — Glyndon, Maryland — Saturday

Two bodyguards followed Dikran out of the Gulfstream V. A limousine was waiting on the tarmac where an Immigration officer and a Customs inspector stood by to clear the party for entry. Dikran called Jim Caldwell as the officials completed their paperwork and inspection.

“Jim, I just arrived in Baltimore. Do you have any information on Boulton?”

“Yes, he arrived at Dulles Thursday evening, before Immigration got the word to pick him up. He used a passport issued to Sterling Priest. We checked it out and found that Mr. Sterling Priest died five years ago. Boulton used his own name and passport when he registered at the Harbor Court Hotel in downtown Baltimore. He stayed one night and checked out early the next evening.

“He was driving an Avis rental that he paid for with his own credit card. We had the Maryland police put out an all-points bulletin for his rental car. Unfortunately we were late again. He switched vehicles with Avis, this time he got a pickup truck. We reissued the bulletin, but haven’t heard anything.”

“Why would he switch to a truck?” asked Dikran before answering his own question. “He is going to try to get on the farm; the question is when and how.”

“We’ve got two agents, Shannon Flanagan and Jack Evers, working this case. The Mossad has their man, Avi Stein, in Baltimore, purportedly on a training mission with us,” said Caldwell.

“I have four of my people at the farm, and I am bringing two more, but I do not want to take chances. I am going to move Ariana, her mother, and her father to somewhere Boulton cannot possibly get at them,” said Dikran.

“If you move them, we’d like permission for our people to stay at the farm. As long as Boulton thinks your granddaughter is there, he’ll try to get at her. This is the first time we’re not playing catch up with him, and I don’t want to fluff it.”

“I’ll speak to my daughter, but I am certain she will not object. I will have someone call you as soon as the arrangements have been made,” said Dikran.

After a forty-five minute drive to the farm, the limousine pulled to the gate. The driver identified himself to the guard, and the limo sped up the driveway. Frank Wright stood at the front door, his pose defiant, his condition, drunk. It was his second day home from rehab.

“Well, well, looky who’s here, the little-big man his self, come to take care of my baby girl.”

Dikran looked at Frank, said nothing, and walked into the house. Ariana was in her room, Serena in the greenhouse. Dikran exclaimed, “Ariana,” as his granddaughter came down the steps.

“Grandpa, I was just getting into something presentable. I’m glad you’re here.”

“I see your father has not changed; as far as I am concerned Boulton can have him, but I want you and your mother out of here. This farm has too many ways in, and Boulton has proved himself to be quite ingenious.

“I have a penthouse at my casino in Las Vegas. It is used by some very important individuals who choose to part with their wealth at my gaming tables. They demand security and I provide them with the best. You and your mother stay there until Boulton is apprehended.”

“Grandpa, I’m not going to run; coming here was compromise enough. Malcolm isn’t going to drive me away from my work and my home.”

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“Ariana, listen to reason. Securing this farm is next to impossible. The fences are meant to keep horses in, not people out.”

“I won’t let Malcolm make me a prisoner. I’ll take your advice about the body guards and security, and I’ll let the C.I.A, the F.B.I., the Mossad and whoever else you want mill around, but I will not leave----- would you?”

Dikran responded, “You know the answer to that, but I am an old man with little to lose; you have a whole life in front of you. If you insist on staying, I want to make arrangements for the Government agents to stay on the farm with you. They have dealt with Boulton before, although I must say, rather unsuccessfully. Your mother will go to the casino. Your father can do what he damn well pleases.”

Ariana said, “That’s fine, but you better speak to mother. Daddy won’t care as long as you give him a bottle.”

Dikran smiled, “Don’t worry about your mother, unlike you she will do as I ask. I’ll call Jim Caldwell and tell him his agents can stay in the main residence; there’s more than enough room in the guest wing.”

Shannon -- C.I.A. field office Baltimore – Saturday

“Shannon, its Caldwell, he wants to talk to you,” said Jack Evers.

“Yes Jim, what’s up?”

“Dikran Matossian is what’s up. He just called; he wants agents stationed at the farm, in the house. He tried to convince his granddaughter to move to a more secure location, but she refused.”

“She’s probably the only person in the world that can turn down one of his suggestions. In any event I want you and Evers over there. Until we locate Boulton I want both of you there around the clock.”

“I’ve been asked to stay worse places. What about Stein?”

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“Matossian didn’t mention him; take him with you. And one more thing, which might not amount to much. A gun dealer was murdered within a mile of headquarters in Virginia. I wouldn’t think of putting it together with Boulton, except that there was a pickup truck, a Dodge Ram, the same color as the one he rented from Avis. No one saw the plates, but a store owner noticed it because it was parked in his loading zone. He was going to complain, but the driver came out and drove away. The store owner said the guy didn’t seem in any sort of hurry, and didn’t think any more of it until the body was found. He described the man with the truck as blonde, about one eighty, and around six feet.

“I had our people check the crime scene. The clerk’s throat was cut and his holster was empty. There was a store room with a surveillance recorder, but the tape is gone. It doesn’t appear that anything else was taken, but the dead guy’s partner is doing an inventory.:

“What’s your gut say, Shannon?”

“Probably the same as yours. We better extend the bulletin to adjacent states.”

“It’s already done. Get over to the Wright farm. Matossian is waiting for you,” said Jim, concluding the conversation.

Shannon, Avi, and Jack drove to the farm in two cars, passed through the farm’s security, and were greeted at the door by Dikran Matossian.

Avi and Shannon got out of their car. Jack remained in his. Avi stared at Dikran in amazement; the wealthiest man in the world was only five feet six inches tall, and weighed no more than a hundred and forty pounds. His features were feminine, the resemblance to Ariana striking.

“I’m glad you got here so quickly,” said Dikran, his deep, resonant voice that of a man of large stature. “My stubborn granddaughter is making life difficult. But what is life without problems? I’ve arranged quarters for you in the guest wing on the second floor. You’ll each have your privacy. I’m sure you’ll be comfortable.

“I complied with Caldwell’s request to allow you to come here because you have experience dealing with Boulton, although not with a satisfactory result. Your knowledge of the man may help

us protect my granddaughter. I have informed the security organizations of both De Forster and Matossian Holdings to deal with the man, but if he comes here I want you to do whatever you can to ensure Ariana's safety. If there is anything you need that you cannot get from your respective organizations, ask me and arrangements will be made to satisfy your requirements. My daughter and her husband will move to my hotel in Las Vegas where they will be out of your way, and out of harm's way. I will remain on the farm until Boulton is dealt with. Unfortunately I have not been able to convince Ariana to leave; she is too proud and too stubborn to be driven from her home."

"Mr. Matossian," replied Avi, "speaking very bluntly, your granddaughter is very brave and very foolish. Boulton has gone mad, and is more dangerous and driven than ever. Please convince her to go with her parents. As long as Boulton doesn't know she's gone, he'll come and we'll get him."

"Mr. Stein, I know you and Ariana have more than a passing relationship, of which I totally disapprove. There is the ever so slight possibility that you can accomplish what I cannot. Convince her to leave and I will be forever grateful."

Shannon was bemused and silent, as the world's wealthiest man and Avi Stein discussed Ariana's future.

Two uneventful days passed. The Wright farm developed a rhythm, the three agents dining with Dikran and Ariana, Matossian's men living and dining in the guesthouse.

Avi and Ariana preserved an awkward formality, one that had characterized their conversations since the night in New York.

Malcolm — Glyndon — Tuesday

Malcolm parked in the drive that he had used to observe the entrance to the Wright farm. The Glock was tucked into his waistband. The knife was in his pocket. He looked at his watch, 1:45.

The Southern States truck pulled into the unpaved road and stopped, its engine running. Stanley watched as Malcolm got out of his pickup and walked toward his truck.

“I see you decided not to borrow my clothes, even dirtied up your hands a bit. You might pass for a workin’ man, but you’ll still gonna have to pay me extra. I went to a bit of trouble getting ’em duds you wanted.”

“That’s fine Stanley, you’ll get everything you deserve,” said Malcolm as he entered the passenger side of the truck.

“Have you ever seen one of these, Stanley? It’s called a Walker Locker,” continued Malcolm as he flipped the knife open with one hand.

“Man, that’s a sharp-looking knife,” said Stanley, laughing at his pun.

The laugh turned to a scream as the knife plunged into his neck, severing his carotid artery. In one minute Stanley was dead, in another he was dragged into the woods. Malcolm wiped blood from his hands and the front seat, got behind the wheel, and drove down Butler Road to the driveway of the Wright farm. As he pulled the truck up to the gate, the guard signaled him to stop, “You’re not the usual guy. Where is he?”

Malcolm smiled as he replied, “Stanley got his self fucked up last night, weren’t worth nothin’ this morning. The boss asked me to cover for him.”

“Well your boss didn’t notify me. Get out and let me see some I.D., then we’ll give him a call.”

“Sure enough,” said Malcolm as he stepped out of the truck and reached in his pocket. The knife was open and in the guard’s throat in seconds. Malcolm dragged the body behind a watering trough adjacent to the fence.

He re-entered the truck and drove slowly toward the main house. Joe Hall heard the truck as it passed the barn. He came out, a pitch fork in his hand and yelled, “Where in the hell you goin’, Stanley? Slow down you fool.” Joe dropped the pitchfork and pursued the truck. He was out of breath after just a hundred feet. He stopped and yelled out, “Damn you Stanley, you ain’t supposed to go up there.”

Malcolm drove around the circle to the front of the house, left the engine running, and went to the front door. He knocked. Jack Evers looked out, saw the delivery man and the Southern States truck. He opened the door. Malcolm fired point blank into the agent's chest. The sound of the gunshot echoed through the house.

Malcolm entered the foyer, reached into his pocket, and brought out the pink diamond.

He shrieked, "Ariana you bitch, where are you, I brought you a present?"

Avi and Shannon had heard the gunshot, followed by Malcolm's taunting. They drew their weapons and ran toward the foyer. Jack's body, blood pouring out of his chest, was sprawled in front of the open door. Malcolm stood inside the entrance, out of their line of sight.

"Shit," said Shannon as she and Avi cautiously moved toward the entrance. Malcolm moved to the center of the doorway and fired at the two agents, hitting Shannon. Avi got off two shots as Malcolm fled toward the truck. Malcolm staggered when the second bullet penetrated his thigh. He rose, turned, and fired, this time emptying his clip as he got behind the wheel. Tires screamed as he pulled off the pavement. Crashing through the fences he drove through the pasture and onto Butler Road. Four of Dikran's guards, who had been at lunch, ran toward the house. They were followed by Joe Hall, who had retrieved his pitchfork.

"Shannon, are you O.K.?" asked Avi.

"Yeah, get the bastard."

Ignoring the guards and the frantic groom, Avi jumped into one of the Range Rovers and tore down the drive in pursuit of the Southern States truck.

One of the guards went over to Shannon, who sat slumped against the wall in the foyer. He pressed a handkerchief over the wound in her shoulder.

"Christ, shot by a bloody Englishman. See about Jack," Shannon said."

A second guard went to the fallen agent, pressed his finger on his neck, and said, "He's dead."

Dikran and Ariana came out of the greenhouse, where they had remained during the violent exchange. Ariana saw Shannon on the floor, the guard at her side, the bloody handkerchief on her shoulder.

“My God, what can I do?” asked Ariana.

“Stay with her and keep pressure on the wound until an ambulance arrives; I’m going after Stein and the guy in the truck,” said the agent as Ariana pressed down on the handkerchief.

The Southern States truck lurched from side to side as it approached the intersection of Butler and Falls Road. Malcolm turned left, nearly crashing into a crowd of children that had gathered near a convenience store on the corner. Avi arrived at the intersection, saw the truck as it disappeared around a curve, and followed. He saw the truck as Malcolm attempted to negotiate a hairpin turn.

Avi watched it go airborne into the stone cliff that rose from the stream that rushed down from the Butler Quarry. The rear of the truck exploded into flame as it fell into the water. Avi and the guard, who had just arrived, watched as Malcolm clambered out of the front and into the rushing water. The current grabbed him and he went under, came up and went under again. The two men, weapons drawn, climbed down to the stream.

Malcolm came up a few yards down stream, he screamed as his head collided with a massive rock. The current took control until Boulton came to rest on a fallen tree.

Avi and the guard carefully approached the limp body. Avi, one hand held by the guard, entered the water and dragged Malcolm onto the bank. Malcolm’s eyes opened as he gasped, “Forgive me grandpa, forgive me.”

Epilogue

The De Forster diamond Syndicate was merged into Matossian Holdings Ltd., where it became an independent division.

Ariana Wright and Lawrence Winston became partners, in work and in life, and remained in Manhattan. Both serve on the Board of Directors of Matossian Holdings, and their company, Lawrence Winston Ltd., is a sightholder specializing in colored diamonds.

Avi Stein returned to Israel and was promoted to head of field operations. His partner Reuven Brenner remained a field operative.

Shannon Flanagan recovered from her wounds, but not from her love for Avi. She continued with the C.I.A. for two years before moving to Israel.

Malcolm's pink diamond lay in the grass of the Wright Farm.