



Troika

Hersch L. Zitt

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Dedication

For Ruth, my ever patient wife.

In memory of

ERIC KLEIN

who first gave me the idea for TROIKA

Acknowledgments:

To my son, Joseph Samuel Zitt.

To my editor, Claudia Crowley

Troika

Naval Weapons Station,

Earle, Colts Neck, New Jersey

29 October

0500 Hours

A steady, soaking rain was falling as the eighteen wheeler backed slowly into the loading dock. With short, skillful maneuvers, the driver, Alex Burr, jockeyed into the assigned cargo bay. The crew loaded several gray canisters. The crew chief flipped up the required yellow and black insignia. The contents were radioactive.

Burr returned, checked his load, wrote "16" on the bill of lading, climbed into the cab, swung left and continued on to the exit road where a guard waved him out of the compound.

The truck moved out onto the access road parallel to the New Jersey Garden State Parkway. The windshield wipers oscillated rapidly to clear the now heavy rain that obscured his vision. Four and a half miles outside the gate, Burr stopped, opened the rear door, removed two canisters and placed them in a slight depression on the edge of a clearing. He returned to the cab, slipped a thin sheet of cardboard under top layer of the bill of lading, erased "16" and wrote "14" in the space left by the erasure, then checked the altered bill to make certain that it was not smudged. Satisfied, he edged onto the highway.

Burr reached over with his right hand and felt again for the package on the passenger seat. The large manila envelope, picked up at the truck sign up hall, held the job sheet, other related papers, and ten used one hundred dollar bills.

Ten minutes later, a small gray panel truck pulled up to the place where the canisters were lying. Two men got out of the truck, picked up the canisters and stowed them in the cargo space, and moved out onto the highway toward Trenton.

The rain was still coming down heavily. Suddenly, the panel truck swerved, spun halfway around and headed toward the ditch on the far side of the road. "Goddamn, that was hairy," the driver, Ben Ford, muttered as he regained control of the vehicle. His partner nodded in agreement.

"We're almost at the truck stop," his partner, Lew Carter said. "I could use some coffee. What a hell of a night for a pick up. What are we hauling anyway?"

"Who cares! We're gettin' paid, ain't we? All I know is we make the pick up, leave the truck and drive back to town in my car. Two hundred bucks for a two hour job ain't bad. No questions asked." Ford shrugged. He and Carter often operated outside the law.

The truck stop was one of the thousands of eating, resting and refueling depots which are strung out across the country like a series of life buoys. The parking lot was brightly lit. A large red, white and blue neon sign announced, in oversized capital letters that this was S D's PLACE. The windows, steamed with condensation, made it difficult to see inside.

Ford and Carter entered the diner and greeted several drivers whom they knew. A general griping about the lousy weather and bad driving conditions hung like a cloud intermixed with stale tobacco and grill smoke. The pair ordered their coffees and moved to a booth. Several minutes later they left by the side door, got into a light blue Pontiac and drove out of the parking lot. Their work was finished.

Tom Crespi, glanced at his watch, as he had been several times each minute. Seeing that it was finally exactly 07:00/00 he stood up from a stool at the counter, fumbled in his pocket for change, put a dollar beside the empty coffee cup to pay for his coffee, and left.

In the parking lot, he got into the gray panel truck, looked back to see that his cargo was secure and backed out of the parking space. Grinding the gears, he lurched out of the lot onto the highway, cursing as he drove, not used to shifting. He moved into the flow of traffic.

The rain had eased and visibility was better. The ride went smoothly. He felt secure enough to turn on the radio and listen to an all-night talk show. After a while, he changed to a country and western station and began to sing along with the music.

Dawn was breaking; traffic beginning to pick up. By the time it was fully daylight, the once nearly empty road traffic was getting heavier. In this crowd, he was inconspicuous. This was the essence of the operation--anonymity and discretion. Now was not the time to be noticed.

He pulled off the main highway onto a local street, spotted a parking space, and pulled into it. With sixteen minutes to kill, he walked into a small coffee shop, ordered coffee and a doughnut, sipped the coffee and read the local paper: nothing unusual, nothing outstanding, just the normal items found in any small-town paper. Glancing again at his watch, which now read 09:18/44, he paid his bill and walked out into a morning mist. Crossing at the corner, he paused in front of the drug store and checked his denim jacket pocket before entering. His prescription was still there.

The girl behind the counter barely glanced up when he came in.

"Hi, Claire, is Ken around?"

She tilted her head in the general direction of the prescription counter and continued arranging her merchandise. He took the slip of paper from his pocket as the pharmacist appeared.

"Oh, hi, Tom. Can I help you?"

"Can you fill this for me? No rush. I'll be back for it after lunch."

"No problem."

Tom walked out of the store, down the street, got into the truck, and drove to a gas station where he filled the tank. He looked at his watch--09:44/55. Right on time.

At precisely ten o'clock, Tom pulled into the Pennsauken Industrial Park loading area, and walked to the door of the MID-EAST AIR FREIGHT, INC warehouse. He rang the bell. From inside the building he could hear movement.

Tom stood waiting. When the door opened, the warehouse was cold, damp, and smelled of long forgotten cargoes.

"Hey," he yelled. "Where's the john? I need to take a leak!"

"Hold your water," a voice answered. "I'm comin'. The john's in the office, but it's locked."

"For Crissake, hurry up, I'm dancin'!"

A middle-aged gray haired man, dressed in a dirty striped coverall, emerged from the dark rear of the warehouse and admitted Tom. He unlocked the office door, switched on the light, and motioned with his thumb to a door at the right rear of the office. Tom entered rapidly, and with a long sigh, relieved himself. Vowing to stop drinking so much coffee, he re-entered the office, sat down and waited.

"Good morning, Thomas."

Tom turned around in his chair. Only one person ever called him "Thomas": his uncle, Farid Attiyeh, his mother's eldest brother. He was a short, slight, well groomed man. According to family gossip, he was one of the few Palestinians who had been able to retain his wealth after the 1948 disaster.

Tom wasn't surprised to see him. He had assumed that somehow Uncle Farid was involved in whatever it was that brought Tom to the Park. He was smart enough not to ask questions when his parents told to do something.

Uncle Farid extended his hand. "Thank you for bringing the truck. My men will remove the cargo. Outside, there is a gift for you. Use it in good health. Now, please, leave. The matter is closed. Give my regards to your mother." His uncle smiled and handed him a set of car keys. Tom took the keys, stammered his thanks and left the office. In the warehouse, he tossed the truck keys to the waiting elderly man and left.

Outside the warehouse, sitting beside the truck was a new, fully equipped, Toyota sports car. Tom grinned as he lowered himself into the driver's seat. It was sure nice not to have to explain where he got a new car. Everyone knew that the Crespi's had rich relatives who often gave them spectacular gifts. Within seconds, he

was on his way back home.

As soon as Tom's car was out of sight, Farid Attiyeh summoned the older man to his office. Handing him the keys to the panel truck, the gray haired man stood silently awaiting further orders.

"Vermaat, I want the material unloaded as soon as possible. Ship them to the Nuclear Medicine Department of the Ibn Rosht General Hospital, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Place the canisters in one of our trucks. Then get rid of the truck that Thomas brought." The older man nodded and left the office. Attiyeh turned to his desk and placed a long-distance call. "The shipment will leave Philadelphia International Airport tomorrow morning via Lufthansa Cargo. You should have it in two to three days. Goodbye."

He sat back in his chair, lit a cigarette, and smiled. All was going well. In fact, much better than he had expected.

Willem Vermaat took the keys, called to his helper, and loaded the canisters on to a dolly, which they wheeled into the rear of the warehouse. Using a spray paint gun and stencil, he put the address on a crate. He repeated the operation on each of the other three sides. He and his helper then loaded the canisters into the crate and sealed it.

"Drive this shipment to the Lufthansa Cargo terminal at Philly International. I'm going to lunch. I'll take the panel truck," Vermaat said.

Willem Vermaat drove the truck to a diner about a mile from the warehouse. In the diner, he ordered a sandwich and a coffee to go. Placing the bag on the seat of the panel truck, he drove further until he came to the Cherry Hill Mall. He parked the panel in a remote corner of the parking area, ate his lunch and went into the Mall.

Sauntering casually, moving from store window to store window, as if window shopping, Vermaat zigzagged down the corridor. Periodically, he checked shop window reflections to make certain that he was not being followed. As soon as he had reassured himself, he went to a phone booth and made a call. He spoke quickly, hung up and went back to the truck.

Vermaat drove the truck out of the Mall parking lot, down a deserted side street near an vacant building in Merchantville, and stripped it of all visible identification. When he had finished he took a bus back to the Industrial Park and walked back to the Mid-East warehouse.

Farid Attiyeh was waiting in his office when Vermaat returned. He lifted an eyebrow to ask if the job had been completed. The older man nodded his head affirmatively and disappeared into the gloom of the warehouse.

DIMONA, ISRAEL

4 November

2330 Hours

The cold desert wind moved across the Dimona Atomic Energy Complex. The work crew had just finished cleaning up the dock area.

"Hey, Itzik, any of that crap you call coffee left?" yelled the crew chief.

"Avi, you wouldn't know decent coffee if it rained on you. I don't know why I even bother to pour it for you,"

retorted the dispatcher.

The phone rang. "Dispatcher," answered Itzik, glaring at the phone. "O.K.Sure. We'll take care of it," he said in a resigned tone. He hung up turned to Itzik and said angrily, "Now they tell me. Another half hour and Shimshi and his bunch would have had the job."

A truck from the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot had just pulled up to the main gate. The guard checked the driver's photo identity card and waved him on to the loading dock where he handed Avi a requisition form. Avi called to the hazardous materials storeroom and asked that the two canisters be brought out and loaded onto the newly arrived van.

"Where's Eli?", Itzik asked.

"I don't know, took the day off, sick, changed shifts, or something," replied the driver shrugging his shoulders. "Can you load me fast? It will get hot today and I don't have an air-conditioned van!"

Itzik and Avi stared at the man. "Well," Avi said to Itzik, "the gate guys passed him. I guess it's okay."

The van was loaded and on its way. At the gate, the guard checked the requisition and waved the van out. The driver moved onto the Dimona-Be'er Sheva road. At the fueling station in Be'er Sheva, he topped off his tank, handed the cashier his fuel chit and drove off. Once out of sight of the station, he veered off the road to Rehovot and proceeded toward the road to Eilat.

Ten kilometers from Be'er Sheva, the driver stopped, removed the Weizmann Institute emblems from the van, tore them into strips, and burned them, scattering the ashes as he drove on. The truck now bore the insignia of the Marine Biological Institute in Eilat.

The driver stopped at a roadside restaurant near Ein Gedi, where he ate breakfast. After finishing his meal he went to the men's room, stripped off his Weizmann coverall, discarded it in a garbage dumpster behind the rest-stop, put on a blue-green coverall with the Marine Institute emblem, went back to his van, and drove onto the back road to Eilat.

Several hours later, he drove into Eilat, down the road toward the Marine Institute, and cut over to a deserted part of the beach, where he was met by two similarly dressed men. All three emptied the van, buried the canisters in the sand under a pier, and drove the truck into the Institute parking lot.

At dusk, the men returned to the beach and dug up the canisters. The shovel hit a canister with a loud clang. Cursing, they moved back into the shadows and waited. A few minutes later they resumed digging. When the canisters were uncovered they were lifted into a small speed boat.

Moving at "dead slow" speed, the craft eased out into the channel. Keeping in the shadows, they slipped past the border at Taba and into Egyptian territory. Once inside Egyptian waters, the crew raised the Egyptian flag, roared across the Gulf of Aqaba to the Jordanian port city of Aqaba and pulled up to a pier at the far end of the docks. The canisters were lifted out of the speedboat onto the deck of a freighter with Kuwaiti markings. The men in the boat released the fore and aft lines and sped back to the Egyptian coast. They moved quietly past the border once more, re-entered Eilat, moored the speed boat at the Institute's slip and returned to their quarters in town.

SEVASTOPOL BREEDER REACTOR

SEVASTOPOL, CRIMEA

5 November

0120 Hours

The Sevastopol Breeder Reactor Installation guard shack was barely warmed by the inadequate kerosene heater. A horn blared short, peremptory blasts, summoning the soldiers to their duties outside the shack.

Glumly, the guards went out into the late night cold. A truck from the Soviet Nuclear Research Institute had pulled up to the gate. The driver and his helper showed their passes and photo identity cards. The guards waved them into the installation and returned to the shack.

The two men in the truck wore civilian clothes. The wind, blowing off the Black Sea, sent a penetrating chill through their clothing. Both men shivered as they moved the truck to the side door of the unmarked warehouse. The driver, impatient, honked several times. The door opened.

The occupants of the truck got out and opened the center doors of the vehicle. A soldier, wearing a heavy pullover sweater, rolled a dolly out of the warehouse and lifted two canisters into the truck. Each had been freshly stenciled with the international nuclear material logo.

No one spoke. The soldier in the sweater gave a mocking half-salute to his comrades in the truck as they closed the doors and moved the truck back toward the main gate. The guards, recognizing them, waved them on without checking the cargo.

Once outside the facility, the men put on their caps and jackets, which were standard Red Army winter issue. They removed the Simpferopol symbol from the truck, replacing them with the markings for commissary at the Sevastopol army barracks. The men drove the truck to the loading wharf where they unloaded their cargo at a small pier at the end of the docks, then drove back to the barracks.

Almost immediately, a rubber dinghy pulled along side the pier. The crew took the canisters and rowed quietly into the channel which would lead them southeast to the small Turkish town just across the Bosphorus from Istanbul.

In the darkness, the dinghy moved across the Black Sea. About two hours out to sea, a searchlight suddenly played on the dinghy.

"Heave to and identify yourself!"

The oarsmen lifted their oars from the water; one of the men stood.

"We're Navy frogmen on a training exercise. You're welcome to check us out!"

He lifted his arms showing a packet of papers in an oilskin envelope. A sailor reached down from the patrol boat and took the envelope. He passed it on to an officer who had just come to the rail. Opening the envelope, the young officer studied the papers and passed them back to the men in the dinghy.

"Khorosho," he grunted. "Go ahead, but frankly, I wouldn't want you guys on a sabotage mission. You're too easy to find." Calling to the helmsman to return to the original course, he continued on his patrol.

"That was damn close. I thought we were cleared all the way out of the area," one of oarsmen whispered hoarsely.

His comrade replied, "Ah, the guy's probably on his first patrol as commanding officer. Don't worry, we're

clear now. We should rendezvous with the others in about two hours."

They rowed silently and steadily until they came to a point just inside the Turkish waters. There they rested on their oars and waited. Finally, a yellow blinker came on and off in a 2-4-4 pattern. The men in the dinghy replied with a 4-4-2 pattern using a flashlight with a similar yellow lens. A large deep-water ship came into view. A ladder was tossed over the side of the ship along with a rope. The men in the dinghy tied the cargo to the rope. One man reached down and pulled the dinghy's inflation plug. The small craft was designed to sink when the plug was pulled. Then he climbed the ladder to the deck.

The dinghy was left bobbing in the ship's wake. It capsized before it was completely deflated, and drifted slowly back into Russian waters. In the darkness, no one on the freighter noticed.

On deck, the oarsmen stripped off their wet-suits and went below for a hot meal. The contraband was stowed in a hold under piles of sheepskins. The Turkish ship was bound for Port Jebel Ali, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

MACLEAN, VIRGINIA

CIA Headquarters

30 October

1000 Hours

Henry Lyons Wheatland, Deputy Director, Special Services Section, Central Intelligence Agency, broke the seal on his "eyes-only" in-basket. Wheatland separated the file folders into several small neat stacks, each identified by color-coded numbers on its upper right hand corner. One item, however, was coded only with a small red, white, and blue tab. He tapped it against his thumbnail before opening it. Wheatland had only received such a folder four times in his career. Each summoned him to a top-secret conference room off Lafayette Square across the park from the White House. This time the contents were simply a time and a date for him to appear. He glanced at his watch and placed all the other documents into the Top Secret file basket.

"Ms Curtis," he called, "Please have Security return this to the safe."

His secretary, Regina Curtis, a fiftyish, brown haired, slightly overweight woman entered his office. She was dressed in a blue business suit and wore steel-rimmed trifocals. The combination gave her the appearance of a prim school principal. She reached over the desk, picked up the ring of keys that her boss had casually dropped on the desk, and picked up the ring of keys that her boss had casually dropped on the desk and locked the file basket. Regina Curtis shook her head, shrugged her shoulders and left the room.

Hank smiled. Her silence was an admonition. He knew he should not have left the keys on his desk in such a cavalier manner, even though he was in the most security-sensitive sector of the building.

At fifty-seven, Hank Wheatland was just a few years older than his secretary. In appearance, he could almost have been her younger brother. Just over middle height, he was as trim and fit now as he had been at Colgate College and the Woodrow Wilson Graduate School at Princeton, thirty years earlier. His jet black hair was just beginning to gray, slightly, at the temples.

Summonses from "On High" meant that something was happening, and it was about to become his albatross.

He called for a staff car to take him into Washington. The CIA driver had an encyclopedic knowledge of the back streets and short cuts into and in the District. He stopped the driver on Connecticut Avenue and walked

down the street to his destination, several blocks away.

A few minutes later, Wheatland stood in front of a building with a small brass plate which read, AMERICAN CARTOLOGICAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, and, in smaller letters "members only". At the reception desk he signed the register "HOW", surrendered his hat, coat and gloves and took the elevator to the third floor. As he walked down the corridor, surveillance cameras followed him. At the end of the corridor there was an inconspicuous door. He touched a panel with his hand, which recognized his hand print. He entered what looked like any conference room. It was electronically swept every forty-five seconds in a random pattern. The facility provided a place for various intelligence officials to meet when it was not prudent to have sessions in their own offices.

Inside, he recognized the CIA Director, the National Security Advisor, and the head of the National Security Agency. He did not know the fourth man, a major general. Hank greeted the three whom he knew and waited to be introduced to the fourth.

"General Robert Cowan," the man said as he extended his hand. "I'm with the International Commission on Verifiable Nuclear Testing. You're here specifically at my request. The Russians assigned a Military Intelligence Officer, GRU Colonel-General Grigory Obadivsky to their team. We need someone to bird-dog him. Since you are on 'unspecified duty' at Special Services, you fit the bill. Your official title will be Special Assistant."

Hank stood until he was motioned to a chair. The group sat down.

"When do I start?" he asked, looking at the other three.

"In a couple of weeks," answered his immediate superior, the Director of Central Intelligence, Philip Miller. "You'll join the team at Lawrence-Livermore in California. We're fairly sure the GRU and KGB have some idea of who you are, but then we know who Obadivsky is, too. So it's a fair trade. By the way, I want you to read over all the reports, thus far, of the International Commission. That was what was in your in-basket this morning."

When the meeting was over, Miller remained behind and motioned to Hank to remain. "I want you to know, before you find out from Bob Cowan. Mary Mallory's a member of the team, too. I hope it won't cause problems for you."

Hank shook his head. It shouldn't matter one way or the other, was the implication. The men left the building as they had arrived--separately.

Hank returned to his office and began to read the file which he had asked Ms Curtis to retrieve. It was not very thick. He read slowly, circling some items, checkmarking others and underlining still others. Two items were heavily underscored; the date he was to meet the team, November 3rd, and the dates of the International Commission meetings, November 5-11 in Philadelphia.

Leaning back in his chair, he rubbed his face. Enough reading for today. He would begin a serious re-reading tomorrow and prepare to leave for California. Right now it was time to wrap up the day.

He descended one floor to the garage, took his car and drove out into the Virginia countryside. In about two hours he had reached Colonial Williamsburg. He made a dinner reservation at Campbell's Inn for seven thirty, which gave Hank a chance to wander through the town where he often came just to find a place where the late twentieth century, had not intruded. He stopped at the blacksmithy to watch him make a cast-iron finial for a lamp-post. By then, it was time for dinner before returning home.

It was close to midnight when he entered his apartment. The telephone was ringing. "Well, it took you long enough to answer. It's me, Mary--Mary Mallory. Don't tell me you forgot it's Davey's birthday on Friday. We're celebrating on Saturday. He specifically wants you there.

"No, David won't be there. He's in Kuala Lumpur on some sort of business deal, or so his Hong Kong office says. Oh, yes, Bob Cowan told me you're joining the team. Welcome aboard. When you get here Saturday, if you are coming, I'll fill you in a little on what's going on and who's who and who ain't. It'll be nice to work with you on something that's open and above board. Leave your cloak and dagger home! See you, love. 'Bye."

The next morning, Ms Curtis booked him on a late flight to Los Angeles. The birthday celebration was to be near the UCLA campus where his nephew was in medical school.

The flight left, and arrived, on time. This gave him a chance to rent a car and drive to the motel near the campus, where his ever efficient secretary had also reserved a room. At the motel, he undressed, showered, shaved and dropped off to sleep. This was his standard method for overcoming jet lag.

Hank awoke at 6:30 and glancing at his watch, he dressed hurriedly and drove to the restaurant. Just as he parked the rental he saw David get out of a car David opened the door, and his mother stepped out

They arrived within seconds of each other. Uncle and nephew were strikingly similar in looks. David was several inches taller than his uncle. He was wearing the local uniform, a short-sleeved sport-shirt, khaki cords and dirty white sneakers. His uncle was dressed in a striped shirt, open at the neck, a v-neck sweater, blue slacks and tan loafers.

At forty-eight, Mary Mallory was still a striking woman. Her brunette hair framed her heart shaped face and high cheek bones. Mary's wide set gold-flecked hazel eyes accented her tanned skin. The white and gold knit dress she wore softly accentuated her figure. Seeing Hank, she ran to him and greeted him with a kiss full on the mouth.

"How's that for hello?" she laughed.

"It sure beats the hell out of a handshake," he replied, holding her closer than a polite hug would require. He felt her stiffen slightly and then relax. He realized, then, that he was still as much in love with her as ever. Taking her arm, he led her inside while his nephew held the door open for them.

The trio were seated almost immediately. The restaurant was one similar to others near the campus. The food was excellent and the setting unpretentious.

When dinner ended, David left to return home to study, leaving his mother and uncle at the restaurant.

The conversation turned serious. Mary filled Hank in on what was going on in the Verification Unit. There was no more private a place to have such a conversation, unless they returned to his motel or her apartment. Public places make excellent sites for such talks.

"This job is no walk in the woods. I've been to about twenty sites so far and there are more to come I'm due to leave for Hanford, Washington and then Latrobe, Pennsylvania before we get to Philly."

"What do you know about Dr. Obadivsky?" he asked

"I'm vaguely aware of the members of the Russian group, after all there are delegates from about thirty countries most of us now that he had some find of position in Russian Intelligence before he was assigned to ICEVENT. He's polite has sense of humor and is really knowledgeable in his field," she answered.

Hank drove Mary back to her apartment, but did not go in. After helping her out of the car and accompanying her to the lobby, he returned to his hotel room and prepared to leave on the first flight to Washington.

Langley, Virginia

2 November

1400 Hours

CIA Director Miller had just returned from a meeting when his secure line button flashed. Muttering under his breath, he lifted the receiver. The caller was Richard Grant, Director of the FBI. Miller and Grant were old friends. Both were lawyers, both had served in Military and Naval Intelligence in various capacities. They were tall, lanky men with blond, graying hair.

"What's up? This must be an official call."

"There may be serious trouble. One of our undercover men reported to us a couple of days ago that his employer just shipped medical nuclear isotopes to the Ibn Rosht General Hospital in Dubai."

"So?"

"We've checked every firm that produces the stuff. None reports sales of such material, nor requests for it from Dubai. I've already alerted, ONI, G-2, the Joint Chiefs, and the White House."

There was a soft ping and the light on the phone went out. The Director leaned back, put his feet up on the desk and chewed on the end of a pencil. For reasons he could not readily state, Miller was very disturbed by the conversation with Grant. His musings were interrupted by the winking light on his secure phone.

"Phil?" It was Grant again. "We may have a lead. G-2 has drawn a blank, but Eric Short over at ONI might just be on to something. The same day that our man reported the Dubai shipment, October 29th, the Iowa and her task force received bomb quality and power quality stuff for arming her missiles and recharging her engine reactors.

"Eric has impounded the truck that brought the stuff from Earle Depot to Staten Island. He's having it stripped and everything micro-analyzed. In the meantime, I've got the forensic boys from our South Jersey Office doing the same thing to the panel truck that our man drove and was told to abandon. I'll keep in touch." A few minutes later, the phone winked again. This time it was Vice-Admiral Eric Short, Chief of Naval Intelligence. "Hello, Phil. I imagine that Dick Grant has filled you in on our mutual concern. We just got a report via AEC and NJ State Police. Highway Patrol saw a panel truck off the side of the Parkway just south of Earle. He couldn't quite tell in the rain, but he thought he saw men outside lifting a canister and thought he might have seen a nuclear materials insignia on one of them. By the time he doubled back to check they were gone, but he filed a report--and the truck he saw sounds like the one we're investigating."

"I'm really worried. Eric Short just called." Grant continued. "He told me about the report of the possible nuclear canister in New Jersey. We know that two canisters were unloaded by our man. I told Eric that e. Christ, I'm worried sick over this. If it's what Eric and I think it is, we better tell the President. He might just want to call a special meeting of the National Security Research and Planning Group."

Miller's intercom blinked again. His secretary informed him that Vice-Admiral Short was on his way to Langley. He sounded, she said, very agitated.

""Please call Admiral Short an Mr. Grant and set up a secure con call. There's little point in his making the

trip from his office."

Within a few minutes the three men were connected.

"Well, boys," Admiral Short began, "it's about to hit the fan. We checked the original requisition against the delivery. The Iowa asked for sixteen, but got fourteen. The dock-master at Earle remembers his crew loading sixteen, but the truck manifest reads '14'. The manifest was altered. I've informed the Secretary of Defense, who's asking President Dunstan for a special meeting of the NSPRG. The three of us may be ordered to attend. The NSC people will call here with the time of the meeting, if in fact we're invited."

"My guess is that there was a transfer from the semi to the panel." This from Grant.

"Who owns the outfit that shipped the medical isotopes?" asked Philip Miller.

"Farid Attiyeh," responded Richard Grant. "He's a Palestinian-born naturalized citizen. We've been watching him, but up to now, we've drawn a blank. His crew chief, Bill Vermaat is our 'plant'."

There was a short moment of silence. "We know him too," said Miller. "Attiyeh's got lots of connections with various Palestinian and other Arab groups. He seems to be a silent partner in a number of shady businesses, all with ties to Palestinian and Islamic fundamentalist factions, but thus far, we haven't been able to nail him."

Barbara Little, Miller's secretary, interrupted the meeting. "Admiral Short, sir, I have a message for you. The caller said the meeting will be held tomorrow at NSC. They'll call you with the definite time."

"See you and Dick, soon," said Admiral Short as he and the FBI Director left.

"Miss Little? Barbara, will you please locate Hank Wheatland and tell him to get back to me as soon as he can?" Miller requested.

MacLean-Langley

1445 hours

Hank was seated at his desk trying to catch up on his work and fight off sleep, when his secretary buzzed him.

"Director Miller is on the line, Dr. Wheatland," she said. In fifteen years as his secretary, she never called him anything but "Dr. Wheatland."

"Yes, Phil?"

Hank Wheatland sat silently listening to his boss. After several minutes he asked, "What the hell does all this have to do with us?"

"I'm not sure but there's a special NSPRG meeting tomorrow. The only point of contact seems to be one Farid Attiyeh. If he's mixed up in this thing, then we need to keep on top of it. Just in case, I want you in Philadelphia tomorrow. I have a hunch that we and Ivan may be up to our asses in alligators, and so possibly may the Israelis. Don't ask me to base my hunch on anything but gut feeling," Miller explained.

Hank patted his pockets searching for a pack of cigarettes, then remembered that he had given them up six months ago. Clearing his desk, he left his office. On the way out, he informed Regina Curtis that he had to leave for Philadelphia that evening and asked her to change his room reservations. She nodded and reached for her phone as he closed the outer office door.

Hank picked up his already packed bags, which were in his office and headed Union Station for the evening Amtrak shuttle to Philadelphia.

Philadelphia

1930 hours

In Philadelphia, he stayed at the Franklin Inn, where the rest of the Nuclear Testing Commission members were housed. For the next several days, Hank attended numerous briefing sessions at the Commission offices in Philadelphia. He also spent some time re-reading the reports and documents which had been in his non-sensitive in-basket, and ordered and read several basic texts on Atomic Physics. It would not have been appropriate for him to seem to be an absolute novice.

The sessions were long and arduous, but never boring. It was at these meetings that he learned how simple it was for materials simply to vanish. By the Commission's own figures, several kilograms were unaccounted for. The usual explanation given to the public was that there was some "attrition of matter" among various processes by which energy was distributed and decayed matter disposed of. While this satisfied the majority of Americans, scientists were less taken in and there was increased rumbling that there were real possibilities that some of the missing material might have gotten into the hands of terrorist groups at home and abroad.

These revelations left him decidedly uncomfortable. Hank felt slightly nauseated. He sat in his room in tried to imagine the extent of the horrific devastation which would result. He was not at all certain that the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the National Science Foundation had the real figures. If they did not, then the consequences were totally catastrophic.

Two days after he arrived, Mary Mallory came in from the inspection tour of the Latrobe, Pennsylvania facilities. She was more somber than she had been in California, but made no effort to tell him what was bothering her. After introducing him to the rest of the inspection party, Mary invited him to dinner at a restaurant she had frequented as a student at Swarthmore.

"C'mon," she said. "I want to prove to you that Philadelphia food is more than soft pretzels with mustard, cheese steak sandwiches and scrapple. Remember Old Original Bookbinder's? It's down near the river. The restaurant is over a hundred years old and so are most of the waiters."

"Of course, I remember it, but no graduate student could afford its prices, even then," he laughed.

She took his hand and led him down to the taxi stand. Once at Bookbinder's they ate in silence. When coffee was served, she leaned over and brushed his lips with hers. Quietly, he motioned the waiter for the check.

The night was damp and bone-chilling, but Mary wanted to walk for a while. Taking her arm, he followed her lead. After walking for several blocks, they stood in front of Independence Hall. Suddenly, she shivered.

"Take me back to the hotel, please. Then come up for a night-cap."

Without a word Hank hailed a cab and directed it to the Franklin Inn. As soon as they were underway, Mary snuggled close to him, and he took her in his arms.

Hank first met Mary decades before, at a dinner party in Manhattan, with his brother, David, and Mary's roommate, whose name he had long since forgotten., Hank was a post-doctoral fellow at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton. His brother was a student at New York University Law School. David, the younger brother, pursued Mary almost from that day. Hank stepped aside at once. He felt that he could not compete with his sibling, even though he, too, was in love with Mary.

David graduated from Law School that June. He and Mary were married in the Fall, just after he passed his Bars. Two years later, Mary received her doctorate and their son was born. Within four years, David and Mary were divorced. David resented Mary's burgeoning career. He constantly denigrated her efforts and insulted her in the presence of his colleagues. What David wanted was a beautiful ornament he could dangle on his arm when they were in public.

Mary came from a solidly middle class family from Oak Forest, Illinois. All four of her grandparents had arrived in the United States at the turn of the century. They had fulfilled their dreams.

Her father, a bio-chemist, had encouraged Mary's interest in science. A brilliant student, she had won first a full scholarship to Swarthmore College, where she graduated with highest honors and then fellowships and teaching assistantships at Columbia University, working on a Ph.D. in Atomic Physics.

After the divorce David moved to Hong Kong, where he established a law firm specializing in international corporate mergers. Mary and the boy moved to California, where she became a Senior Physicist at Lawrence-Livermore Laboratories.

At about that time, Henry had completed a tour of duty with the Navy and was recruited to the CIA by his present boss, Philip Miller. Although he was transferred from post to post, over the years he kept in contact with Mary and young David.

Mary lifted her face, put an arm around Hank's neck and drew him down for a long kiss.

"What a hell of a time to find out we're in love", he said. "I was a damn fool to let David have you. It's an old story between us--what ever David wants, David gets, no matter what, nor whom, it hurts."

They entered the hotel lobby arm-in-arm and went up to Mary's room. She motioned him to a place beside her on the bed. He sat down beside Mary who leaned her head against him.

Hank began to caress her, gently moving his hands over her smooth, warm body. Mary responded by turning toward him and moving his hands to her breasts. She reached behind her and partially unzipped her dress. The zipper stuck. Mary guided Henry's left hand to her back. He tugged at the recalcitrant zipper, which became unstuck, and moved down. He reached in and unhooked her bra.

Mary loosened and removed his tie, unbuttoned his shirt and began to fumble with his trousers and belt. All the while they continued kissing. In moments, they were undressed and passionately making love as if to erase the years between Mary's divorce and the realization that they had been in love--for God knows how long. Later they lay entwined in each other as they slept.

When Mary's wake-up call came, Hank reached over and sleepily handed the phone to Mary. "It's for you," he mumbled.

Mary took the phone and gently placed it back on its base. Quietly, dreamily, she turned into Henry's arms as they softly began to rouse, and arouse, themselves to make love once more.

Playfully, Mary ejected him from her bed. "Go home, love," she said. "Meet me in the coffee shop for breakfast. I love you. Now, scram. If you see anyone in the hall, just smile. Let them try to figure out why."

He left the room, quietly closing the door behind him. Although there was no one in the hallway, he smiled as he moved down the corridor to his room.

Philadelphia, Pa.

5 November

0500 Hours

Colonel General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky awoke with a start. He had dreamt--again--the nightmare he had lived through in Afghanistan. Once more he was in the headquarters tent of the XVII Corps when the shelling began. He never heard the rocket-launched grenade that hit the tent, knocked him unconscious, and left him with the severe leg injury which even now caused him to limp slightly.

Slowly, the room came into focus. He was not in Afghanistan, but in a hotel room in Philadelphia. The leg was throbbing. Obadivsky eased himself out of bed, put his weight on his good leg and limped to the bathroom, where he took several ibuprofen tablets that he had purchased earlier in the day at the hotel's lobby shop.

He washed his face, went back to bed, cursing the foul weather and tried, unsuccessfully, to get back to sleep. Resignedly, he got out of bed, walked across the room and headed for the shower. Sometimes a hot shower combined with the medication helped him to get back to sleep. He stood silently in the shower stall letting the hot water pour over him. After soaping himself, he looked down at the scar on his leg. It was changing from white to red. Obadivsky winced as he stepped out of the stall. This time, the combined hot shower and medication had not eased the pain. Obadivsky stood pinching the bridge of his nose. It served both to help him concentrate on, and alleviate, the pain.

Scratching his head, he put on the terry cloth robe and came out into the dark room; turned on the light, reached into his night table drawer to remove the Russian novel he was reading. Dr. Zhivago was no longer banned. Boris Pasternak, its author, had long since been "rehabilitated". Obadivsky read slowly, homesick he savored the silent sounds of his native tongue.

Obadivsky was, luckily, out of the country when the second November coup was crushed.

The Russian officer, "Grisha" to his friends and "Grigory Osipovich" to his superiors and certain subordinates, was one of those Russians whose personal appearance substantiated the stereotypical "Bear Who Walks Like A Man". Just under 5'10" tall, he was barrel-chested with powerfully muscled arms and legs. Even if he shaved twice a day looked as if he had a day's stubble.

At precisely seven o'clock, Obadivsky's driver knocked on the door. They performed the ritual which had been established between them ever since Obadivsky had been assigned to the Verifiable Inspection Team as head of the Russian delegation.

"Are you awake, General?"

"Da, Pavel Semyonovich, I'm awake. Come in," he answered in Ukrainian.

The driver, Pavel Semyonovich Luborsky, preferred to speak Ukrainian and purported to not to speak English. Since the General spoke fluent Ukrainian, he kept up the pretense. Pavel Semyonovich entered. He carried with him the General's attaché case and several newspapers which he handed him.

With a brief nod, Obadivsky acknowledged the entrance, took the papers and the case and proceeded to dress. He chose a gray pinstripe suit, white shirt, a blue-gray striped tie, gray socks and black oxfords. In his lapel, he wore the miniature medal of the Hero of the Soviet Union, First Class. It lent a spot of color to his otherwise austere clothing. The driver helped him on with his coat, handed him his hat, and, after carefully closing and locking the door, walked with him to the elevator.

Obadivsky would have preferred to eat alone, but under the circumstances it might appear rude and somewhat suspicious to his driver. At that moment, however, the General was reprieved. One of his American counterparts, Dr. Mary Mallory, approached the table. She had in tow a second American, whom he had not met.

"Good morning, Mary," he said as he rose. "Would you and your friend please join me for breakfast?"

"Thank you, Grisha," Mary replied. "This is Dr. Henry Wheatland. He's just been assigned to our team as Special Assistant to General Cowan. Dr. Wheatland, meet Colonel-General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky, General Cowan's opposite number on the Russian delegation."

Henry Wheatland extended his hand. "Most honored to meet you, General. I trust we will be seeing more of each other as time permits," he said, smiling.

Obadivsky matched his smile. "I trust we will."

The waitress arrived with three menus. She placed their three cups and began to fill them with coffee. Obadivsky turned his cup over just in time to prevent her from filling it. He ordered tea--very strong tea. The waitress brought three tea bags, put them into the cup and filled it with hot water. Once she had taken their orders and left them, Mary Mallory began to speak, in Russian, about the foul weather. Obadivsky interrupted. "When did you learn Russian?" he asked, somewhat amazed.

Mary laughed. "I've been speaking it all my life. As a matter of fact, it was my first language! The family name wasn't always 'Mallory'. All four of my grandparents were Russian. Their names were too difficult for some immigration official in Baltimore to pronounce or spell, so Malenovsky became Mallory and Griboldonsky became Gardner on their entry papers. Instant WASP!"

"Do you speak Russian, Dr. Wheatland?"

"Yes," he answered without elaboration.

The group sat quietly as the waitress brought them their meals. Obadivsky had ordered a large orange juice, three eggs, sausages and a double order of pumpernickel toast. Mary had ordered grapefruit juice, cereal and toast. Hank ordered tomato juice, two eggs over hard, scrapple and rye toast. The Russian looked at the scrapple quizzically.

"Would you like to try it?" Hank asked.

"Yes, thank you. But what is it?"

"It's called 'scrapple'. I think it's some sort of sausage patty. I'm not certain what's in it, but it's a local breakfast dish. I always order it when I'm in this area," he said as he cut off a portion for Obadivsky who put it on his plate.

"I'm not sure I like it," he commented as he ate.

Mary added, "It certainly is an acquired taste. I've lived in the part of the country, off and on, for about twenty years and still can't get used to it."

As soon as they had finished their second cups of coffee and tea, Obadivsky excused himself. Mary and Hank remained in the coffee shop and lingered over additional coffee.

The Russian officer collected his driver and was driven to his hotel where he dismissed his driver. After a few moments, to make certain that the FSB agent had left, he hailed a cab and was driven back to an unpretentious house on a quiet street in suburban Hatboro. Obadivsky took a key from his pocket, unlocked the front door, pressed a digital combination on the lock on the inner door, and entered the vestibule. The place was a GRU safe house from which he conducted certain of his affairs.

Mounting the stairs slowly, favoring his throbbing leg, Obadivsky was puzzled. For some reason the name Wheatland was familiar, but he could not quite place it. He needed to know. Inside a back bedroom, shielded from the street and the neighbors across the backyard, was a code room filled with the most sophisticated electronic equipment Russian Military Intelligence could provide. Because of the long standing feud between GRU, Russian Military Intelligence and FSB, Russian Internal Security Forces, he did not want to use any of the standard communications channels for fear they would be compromised. It was bad enough he had to put up with his shadow.

Obadivsky handed the code clerk a slip of paper with Wheatland's name. The clerk typed it onto a coding machine which transmitted the material in 45,000ths of a second bursts, 1,000ths of a second apart to GRU headquarters in Moscow. The transmitting-receiving antenna looked like a multi-channel video reception dish. Within moments, the decoding machine began to print out information about Wheatland.

WHEATLAND, HENRY LYONS

Age 59. Born, Holtsville, NY

Education

Colgate College: B.A. Major- Russian Studies

University of Pennsylvania: M.A., Ph.D. Near East and Middle Eastern Studies.

Woodrow Wilson School of Diplomatic Studies: Post-Doctoral Fellow

Employment

Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Agency, Special Services Section. Present assignment - Special Assistant to Chief, American Section, Verifiable Nuclear Testing Commission.

Personal Information

Single. Never married.

Living relatives:

David Scott Wheatland: Brother. Presently living in Hong Kong. International Corporate Mergers expert.

David Scott Wheatland, Jr., nephew. Medical Student, UCLA.

Lives modestly. Drinks occasionally. Former smoker. No sexually aberrant behavior.

Grisha Obadivsky tore the sheet from the printer and read it. Then he pulled Mary Mallory's file. Something still bothered him. He opened the file and scanned it rapidly. There was the connection, the reason Wheatland's name seemed so familiar.

".....Divorced. One child, David Scott Wheatland, Jr. Medical student....."

He replaced the file and smiled. Obviously, the meeting this morning was not as casual as it seemed. Mallory wanted him to meet Wheatland. Was this a warning? Were the birdwatchers watching the bird? Who was watching the birdwatchers? If so, why had it taken so long to begin watching? What ever else the Americans were--naive perhaps--they were not stupid. The mess about the hidden microphones at their newly constructed Moscow Embassy in 1987 had led to great improvements in American surveillance methods.

Obadivsky looked at his watch. It was almost 10:30, time to return to Philadelphia for the Commission meeting. As second cab drove him back to Philadelphia, Obadivsky sat mulling over the information he had just received from Moscow and tried to correlate it with the data he had already collected. Bits and pieces were floating loosely about. The nagging questions about Wheatland would not go away.

"In time, Grisha, in time," he whispered to himself. "All in good time. After all the Americans must know as much about you as you now know about Mallory and Wheatland."

He leaned back and watched the flow of traffic into the city along the Schuylkill Expressway, which, mercifully, was not crowded, nor torn up with construction barriers, nor potholes. Colonel-General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky permitted himself to doze for the balance of the trip.

Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa.

5 November

0600 hours

Professor Zvi Ben Yosef fumbled with the alarm button on his bedside clock, threw off the covers and sat on the edge of the bed. Searching with his foot under the bed, he sighed. The only thing worse than taking an eight o'clock class was teaching one!

Then, having located his slippers, he moved slowly into the bathroom, turned on the water in the shower and viewed himself in the as yet unsteamed mirror. He stared at the somewhat overweight, white-haired, bearded man who stared back at him, and stuck out his tongue. By now, the mirror had misted over and he appeared as if in a dense fog. Shrugging his shoulders, he stepped into the shower stall and began to sing in a tone which resembled a cross between a love-sick moose and a coyote in heat.

"Sheket, b'vakasha! Oh shut up Zvika! for once let me sleep past six-thirty," pleaded his wife, Elisheva.

He knew he was in trouble when his wife began a sentence in Hebrew and switched to English. The sound of his vocalizing ceased, abruptly. Completing his shower, he toweled himself dry and came back into the bedroom.

Ben Yosef dressed himself in a blue button down shirt, striped tie, dark blue jacket with brass buttons, gray trousers and brightly polished black loafers. He looked, as he frequently told his fellow faculty members at Swarthmore. like the 'compleat collidge perfesser.' Ben Yosef's dress was in sharp contrast to the very casual attire of his colleagues, who fancied open collared shirts, sweaters and unpressed slacks.

Zvi Ben Yosef, an American-born Israeli, was Visiting Professor of Eastern European Studies at Swarthmore College, a small Friends school just outside Philadelphia. On leave from his position as a senior Israeli intelligence officer, he had been invited to teach at his alma mater. Ben Yosef received his B.A. in Polical Sicence from Swarthmore,He attended Yale University, where he had received his Master's and Doctor's degrees in Eastern European Studies. For several years after completing his studies, he returned to

Swarthmore to teaching the Political Science Department.

"Don't wait dinner for me. I'm going to Philadelphia for meetings at the Junto right after this seminar," he called.

The Ben Yosef's spoke English, a habit they had developed when their two sons were very young in order to make certain that they would be totally bi-lingual. Elisheva, like her sons, was a Sabra, a native-born Israeli, whom he had married after his arrived in Israel. In time, the mother and sons spoke English with a pronounced Philadelphia accent.

Elisheva, at fifty-eight, was stunning. A petite woman, just over five feet two inches, her pleasantly graying hair set off the olive complexion she had inherited from her Sephardi ancestors, who had lived in Jerusalem for over two centuries. She had served for several years as an Arabic-Hebrew translator in the Foreign Office. It was during a period when Zvi was on detached service to that Office that they had met.

Ben Yosef looked at his watch. It was only 7:05. He decided to have breakfast at home before he left for class. Walking down stairs quietly, he entered the kitchen went to the refrigerator, took out a container of orange juice, two English muffins and several slices of cheese. He poured his juice, put the cheese covered muffins into the toaster oven, got a plate and mug from the cupboard and filled the mug from a pot of already brewed coffee that Elisheva had set up the night before. The timer on the toaster oven rang. Absentmindedly, he took the muffins out of the oven and dropped them quickly onto the plate. He had forgotten how hot they were. Glancing at the kitchen clock, he decided to eat quickly and not read his newspapers.

Zvi reached for his hat and coat, opened his attach case and put the morning editions of the New York Times and the two most influential Israeli papers, The Jerusalem Post and Yediot Achronot, which were waiting outside his front door, into it. He walked to class.

Harper Hall was one of the older buildings on the campus. It had been remodeled to serve as a seminar/classroom building. When he arrived, his students were already seated around a conference table. A fire was set in the fireplace, but the real warmth came from the central heating system. A copy of the paper to be discussed was in front of each student. They waited patiently while he filled, tamped, and lit his pipe, blew out the match and surveyed the room.

"Let's get started. Who's on today? Miss Paige?"

Alice Paige, a short, slim senior, began to read from a paper she had written on the background of the Solidarity Movement in Poland. The daughter of a Canadian diplomat, she had lived in Warsaw for six years and was fluent in Polish. As a result, she was able to incorporate Polish documents into the paper.

Ben Yosef sat silent for several minutes waiting for a student to begin the discussion. Finally, several of the seminar participants began asking questions, probing, agreeing and disagreeing with Alice Paige.

Then the professor spoke. "A good job, Alice, but you should work over the section of the relationship between Cardinal Glemp and General Jaruzelski. That's it for this week."

The students left the seminar room still talking, arguing, and discussing. He smiled. Things had not really changed since he was an undergraduate here. Gathering his papers, he placed them in his case and left.

Dr. Ben Yosef walked out into one of those leaden, dismal days that plague the Philadelphia area in the winter. A ten minute walk brought him to the railroad station, where he boarded a train for Philadelphia. On the train he took the Times from his attach case, worked the cross-word puzzle, glanced at the editorials and Op-Ed page, read some of the lead stories and reached for the Israeli papers for news from home.

The train arrived at Suburban Station a few minutes late. He looked at the large clock in the station which read p12:30.40. For once, it was working. Taking the escalator to the upper level of the station, he could see that it was still raining. He returned to the lower level, took the subway to Fifth and Market Streets, and walked to the Junto Building.

The cold, damp wind penetrated his heavy woolen coat and scarf. He hurried up the steps to the entrance. A large bust of its founder, Dr. Benjamin Franklin sat on a pediment above the entrance, dominating it. Inside the lobby, he removed his hat and coat, put them into the cloakroom and wandered over to the announcement board looking for the listing of the meeting he was to attend. He found it. MIDDLE EASTERN GEOPOLITICS IN THE WAKE OF THE COLLAPSE OF OPEC. rm. 213 7:00 p.m. He was startled; he had been certain that the meeting was to start at three o'clock.

He scanned the rest of the board. Most of it was taken up with meetings of the International Commission on Verifiable Nuclear Testing. Ben Yosef noted them, perfunctorily, walked to the Members' Dining Room, took his pipe from his pocket and lit it.

In the dining room, he was seated at a small table near the kitchen. He did not object, since it offered him both a secluded spot where he could eat leisurely, read his papers and still survey the room. This was a carry-over from his days as a field agent. A waiter came to the table. Ben Yosef ordered. He opened his attach case and began a careful article-by-article reading. Periodically, he tore a story from the paper and stuffed it in his case. Smiling to himself he knew that would have to call Elisheva and tell her to get her own copy. She detested his habit of "butchering" the newspapers.

The waiter appeared with his lunch. Ben Yosef thanked him. Over his coffee, he continued reading. After finishing his meal, he signed the check, placed a cash tip on the table and left. It was just past two, still five hours until his meeting.

The rain had stopped. Ben Yosef retrieved his hat and coat and left the building. A native Philadelphian, he had never lost his love for, nor his fascination with, Penn's "greene countrie towne". Like many of his townsmen, he felt that New York was too brash, and Boston too staid. He often kidded his New England friends by saying that Boston must be horrible, or Ben Franklin would have stayed home.

Zvi hesitated for a moment, looked across the street to Independence Hall and its surrounding buildings. Even on this cold, miserable, damp day, there were people waiting to enter the historic buildings. Children stared wide-eyed. Some reached out to touch the bricks to prove they were real. Some squirmed. The adults, too, showed various attitudes, ranging from awe to discomfort.

He decided to go into Independence Mall and walk around. As always, he shook his head when he looked at the building housing the Liberty Bell. This, he felt, was the ugliest structure in the city. It reminded him of an unfinished Parisian pissoir. Like many others, he thought the Bell should have remained in its place in Independence Square.

A passing car splashed him as he crossed Fifth Street. "Welcome home," he thought, wryly, and continued his walk. Much of the restoration and reclamation of this part of the city was complete. Still there were some vestiges of what was there when he was growing up. Lit Brothers Department Store was now a bank operations building. The facade had been cleaned and the brick returned to its original cream color. Gimbel's and Wanamaker's Stores were gone. There would be no more "Meet me at the Eagle", a local landmark.

Zvi Ben Yosef suddenly felt depressed. He was a native-born alien, a stranger in a familiar land. Quietly he turned back and retraced his path to the Junto Building. No sooner had he entered the building than his cell phone rang. The call was from Elisheva. Shew was agitated but able to speak clearly.

"Zvika, you have the most unusual telegram!"

"Read it to me 'Sheva, slowly so I can copy it." He fumbled for pen and paper.

"B'seder. Go ahead."

"It's in English. It says 'TWO CHILDREN MISSING STOP CALL HOME AT ONCE STOP'"

"Who signed it?"

"A.P. Nefesh."

"The address?"

"5752 Shana St. Mt. Hebron, NJ"

"L'at, L'at. Todah, 'Sheva. It's O.K. Thanks, don't worry, I understand. By the way, you better get your own copy of the Times today. I've shredded ours. I'll bring home the JP and Yediot. Again, don't wait up. I may be very late."

"Zvika," she complained, "you're impossible! I always have to get my own copy. I can never read yours, anyway."

As soon as his wife hung up, he rushed out of the building and down the stairs. A taxi was just unloading passengers. Ben Yosef stepped into the cab.

"115 S. 15th Street!" he ordered.

The cabby nodded, gunned his engine and roared out into the traffic. Within minutes, Zvi got out of the cab and entered the building which housed the Israeli Consulate General. He took the elevator and waited impatiently for it to reach its destination.

Ben Yosef reached for his wallet. From a inner compartment, he withdrew a plastic card, inserted it into the slot in front of an unmarked door and entered a small side room which was empty except for some office furniture and a phone. He punched a series of numbers into the phone. Finally, after several rings the phone was answered.

"Mr. Nefesh, please."

"Shalom, Zvika, I gather you got my telegram. In a nutshell, we received notice from the Home Office that some bomb-grade material was stolen from Dimona. It's possible that the U.S. and Russia may be in the same boat. You'll need to contact their people at the International Nuclear Commission meeting in Philadelphia. Check the attendance list. You'll recognize them."

Returning to the Junto Building, he asked the executive director for a list, if possible, of the persons attending the International Nuclear Commission meeting. He explained that he was trying to locate some friends and former colleagues who might possibly be at the sessions. The director not only had a list, but it was divided by national delegation and in alphabetical order, giving names, positions and local addresses.

Zvi thanked him and looked through the list. He found a name, Mary Mallory, Ph.D. Mary Mallory had been a student at Swarthmore. The second was something of a shock. On the Soviet list he found the name of G.O. Obadivsky, Eng. Dr. Mary Mallory was somewhat of an unknown, but he knew Obadivsky, having had to

deal with him and his SPEZNATZniks, Russia's Special Forces troops, in the past.

"Obadivsky? Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky? What the hell was a GRU Colonel-General doing at this meeting?" he wondered, as he handed the list back to the director, thanking him for his help. Now that he had identified his contacts, he would have to reach them and set up a meeting.

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

3 November

0900 Hours

Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail, Chief of Nuclear Medicine, Ibn Rosht General Hospital, sat at his desk in his air-conditioned office reading computer print-outs. He was making notes on the last of the print-outs when the phone rang. The incessant ringing irritated him. Once he answered it, the irritation and annoyance vanished as he listened intently. After he hung up, he sat motionless for several minutes.

The physician pressed the intercom button on his desk. Within seconds his chief laboratory technician entered. "Alfar, there is a shipment of nuclear isotopes from the United States at the Lufthansa freight dock. Would you arrange to have it brought here?" Alfar nodded. "When it arrives," the doctor continued, "put it in the Special Projects room, along with the other equipment. See to it that it not be stored near the other nuclear material. It is for a very special project and I don't want to run the risk of mixing batches. Is that clearly understood?"

The short, balding, dark skinned man spoke quietly. His English had the lilt of the Arabic inflections of his first language; though Alfar and the doctor had worked together for several years, they spoke English to one and other to avoid confusions between Alfar's native Druse dialect and the doctor's Palestinian speech.

"I shall tend to it myself, Doctor. I do not trust important tasks to some bungling former camel driver. I shall leave as soon as I can get the proper vehicle to transport the material," he said as left.

The doctor waited several minutes to make certain that Alfar was gone before he placed a long distance call. Fortunately, the telecommunications system was functioning properly and within seconds his connection was made. Speaking swiftly in Arabic, he turned and looked at the group picture on his desk. It was of him, a smiling woman, two girls, and a boy. They were standing in a doorway above which were words "Shatilya Infirmary" in several languages. The doctor's blue-green eyes darkened to almost black as he ran his fingers over the faces in the photograph. He would soon avenge their deaths in the 1984 massacre. He had vowed it, and intended to achieve it at whatever cost.

The Shatilya massacre had changed Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail. Until then, he had sincerely believed that a rapprochement could be effected between the Israelis and the Palestinians. After all, they were "cousins," descendants of the same Patriarch--Abraham. Both had seemingly valid claims to the same small piece of the planet. Like many others, he felt that negotiations and mediation could solve the problem. His family, for example, had been residents in Palestine, which the Turks had called "Lower Syria" for centuries.

A tall, well built, sandy-haired man with blue-green eyes and a fair skin, he was clean-shaven except for a neatly trimmed mustache. He looked more like a British Army officer than a stereotypical Palestinian Arab. He was born, in fact, in Jerusalem. His parents were both descendants of Circassian Moslems who had served as the traditional bodyguards to the Turkish Governors of Lower Syria.

It was not until the secret British-French Sykes-Picot Treaty had divided the former Turkish territory that "Palestine" had even come into being. The British Foreign Office Arabists had renamed it. Originally, the

Romans had named the area "Palestina" after they had wrested control of it from the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra.

There must be a better solution, he and many others felt, than armed struggle. It was in this spirit that Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail volunteered to work with the United Nations International Children's Fund. He had spent six months in various refugee camps as a primary care physician. His wife and children, who had remained in Dubai, had come for a visit to Lebanon.

Then came the brutal 1983 attack by the Christian Falangist Army, and, some said, the Army of South Lebanon, armed and supported by the Israelis. The roar of cannons, the flickering flames, and the screams of the dying and wounded drowned out rational thought. Out of the rubble emerged "Al-Suyuf Al-Kharb: The Swords of War" even more militant than Abu Abbas's and Dr. George Habash's extremist terrorist groups. To him as to Abu Abbas and Dr. Habash, Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization was less than useless. It was, for them, irrelevant.

He was still sitting transfixed, when the yellow light caught his attention. It was Alfar reporting his return and that he had placed the canisters in the Special Projects room as ordered. Abu Ismail thanked him and looked at the clock on the wall opposite his desk. He shook himself alert. Almost late for a staff luncheon, he hurried to the staff dining room.

In the room, he was greeted by the other department heads. They met once a week to discuss problems, difficult, interesting cases and share general gossip. The Dubain hospital was no different from any other such institution anywhere in the world.

The Medical Director, Dr. Robert MacPherson, a Scot, had been in Dubai for almost twenty years. He began the luncheon meeting by having each department head, in turn, bring the others up to date with problems or other matters relating to their areas of concern. By common consent, the discussion was in English, since the staff had been trained in a variety of Western and Third World medical schools, where English was the language of instruction.

Ibrahim Abu Ismail paid little attention to most of the conversation. Preoccupied with a project that had nothing to do with the hospital nor its staff, he was roused from his thoughts by a question from Dr. MacPherson.

"I'm sorry, Robert. What was it you asked?"

"How is the computerization of the nuclear medicine data coming along?"

"When we work out the intercommunications problems, it will relieve us of our dependency on other institutions excepting for esoteric or exotic tests. By-the-by, there is a conference on computerization of medical test data in Paris next month. I think, Yusuf, Pierre, you and I should attend," he offered.

Dr. MacPherson leaned back in his chair. "I'll think about it and get back to you by next meeting. What's the deadline?"

"November eleventh, but we can always call Paris with our reservations," Abu Ismail suggested. The medical director rose. The meeting was over. The others left quickly.

Abu Ismail lingered for a moment. He had seen Alfar come into the adjoining cafeteria and wanted to talk to him about the Lufthansa delivery. Alfar was in deep conversation with another nuclear technician, Khalifa Hasan.

In the hospital, the usual subservient position of women in Islamic society was suspended. None of the female professionals and technicians were Dubain nationals. They had been recruited abroad.

Dimona, Israel

6 November

0500 hours

The Weizmann Institute van pulled up to the gate of the Dimona Nuclear Energy Plant.

"Shalom, Eli, your place must be working overtime. Two trips in three days!" yelled the guard.

"What the hell are you talking about? This is my regular run. We don't have anything special going on, at least that I know about. C'mon, let me in. I'm in my usual rush!," he grumbled.

The guard raised the arm of the control gate and passed the truck onto the grounds

"Security." the guard spoke quietly into the phone in his shack. "Eli, the regular driver from Weizmann just pulled up. He says today is his regular run and didn't know about the other day."

By the time Eli Bar-Shimshon arrived at the loading dock, the chief security officer of the installation was waiting. Instead of being routed to his usual spot,

Eli and his van were directed to a place at the rear of the warehouse. "What..." His hands began to shake. "...is this all about?" Eli asked the guard who brought him into the office. The guard said nothing. Eli was hustled into the office. Inside, a group of five men were waiting. He was ushered to a seat across the table from the others. He was bewildered and apprehensive. In the six years he had been making the run between Rehovot and Dimona, Eli had not received as much as a traffic ticket.

"Eli." It was his friend Itzik who spoke first. "Who was the driver from the Institute who was here yesterday? None of us knew him."

"What run? I told the guard that we didn't have a special run yesterday. Look, Itzik, you know my regular schedule. I only make two runs a week. I was in Haifa, yesterday, chauffeuring a couple of American scientists to the Technion. So far as I know, my van never left the parking lot. What's going on?" he asked.

"I filled a requisition for two canisters. The other driver said you were on vacation or something, and that he was covering for you. Is it possible that someone would be sent on a special assignment to make up a pick up here?" answered Avi.

Eli held up his hands. Anything is possible. He fell silent for a moment. Then he asked, "What did he look like?"

"About your height and build, but with darker hair and either darker skin or a good tan, almost as if he worked outside most of the time. He had the right requisition forms and all the other papers were in order."

"Doesn't sound like anybody I know, and I know most of the drivers. They hate this run. You have to leave when it's still dark and by the time you get back it's getting hot, if it's in the summer, and might be raining all the time if it's in the winter."

The security chief moved to the edge of his chair, directly in front of Eli Bar-Shimshon. He looked genuinely

puzzled.

"Are you telling us that the run was out of sequence?"

"Yes."

The security officer continued. "How many vehicles at Weizmann are equipped to carry nuclear material? Are there special security precautions when these runs are set up? Are you cleared for secret work?"

Eli laughed, "Me? Cleared by security? Secret work? Hey, I'm a driver, not a spy. All I know about spying is what I read in spy novels, in the papers, see in the cinema, or on television."

"You didn't answer the other part of my question. How many vehicles are equipped to carry nuclear material?"

"Actually, sir, almost any van or truck can be used. When I pick up the stuff, it's already packed and sealed. It's loaded into the vehicle, tied down, and that's that. As far as security precautions, we check in at the main gate and check out. The guard opens the doors, checks the number of pieces against the manifest and the requisition, closes the doors, and I'm on my way."

"That's all, Mr. Bar-Shimshon. You're free to go."

"O.K., Eli," Itzik said. "I'll get you a cup of coffee. Drive round to the loading dock and stop in my office. The boys will load you, as usual."

After they had gone, the Dimona security chief called his counterpart in Rehovot. He wanted to be sure that there was no slip-up on that end. Within fifteen minutes, he had the answer. No vehicle had been sent to Dimona and no delivery had been received. The chief stared out the window, scratched his head and reached for his telephone. He dialed a code number which put him in direct contact with Shin Bet, General Security Services. The call was automatically scrambled.

"Moshe? Yossi. We've got a problem. Evidently someone got hold of legitimate papers and a van from Weizmann and made off with two canisters of nuclear material. 'Who?' What do you mean 'who?' How should I know? That's why I'm calling you! Damn this connection"

Moshe Arielson, the head of Shin Bet, General Security Service, responded. "Our people in Ein Gedi found a coverall with Weizmann's insignia in the dumpster and a gas chit from the station at Be'er Sheva in the pocket? Good. Now you can put the pieces together. Keep in touch. L'hitraot. So long."

The Dimona security chief let out a long whistle. What ever was up, at least his men, thank God, were in the clear.

Tel Aviv

0800 Hours

After the call from Dimona, Arielson, folded his hands in his lap and swiveled back and forth in his chair. This was no small matter: for the first time in Israel's history, radioactive material had been stolen.

What was the connection between the Dimona problem and the Ein Gedi discovery? Reaching across his desk, Arielson picked up the Ein Gedi report, read it again, added the information he had just received from Dimona, and summoned his second-in-command, Chaim Lachmi.

"Chaim, whom do we have down around Ein Gedi? I just got a call from Yossi ben-Gur at Dimona. There seems that some nuclear material is missing. They think it might have been stolen. There may be a connection with that coverall we found down there."

"I sent a team down yesterday," responded Lachmi. "I'll get on to them right now." The phone rang as Lachmi was leaving. Arielson motioned him to stay.

"Good morning sir, How can we help the Navy? Were there any reports of activity last night? Uh-huh, right, okay. Thanks for the call." Arielson hung up the phone. The puzzle pieces began to fit together.

"Never mind Ein Gedi, Chaim! A Navy patrol at Eilat found a speedboat with an Egyptian flag under the gunwales. I'd better call the Prime Minister. I'm fairly certain now about what's happened!" said Arielson and followed with a string of curses in five languages. In the midst of this stream of invective, Lachmi quietly closed the door behind him.

Moshe Arielson placed his call to the office of the Prime Minister, Levi Shalom. He growled into the phone that he did not want to speak with anyone but Shalom. Why else did the idiots think he was calling on a secure line?

There was silence for a few seconds. "Good morning, Motti. What's so urgent that you have to speak to me directly, and right now? I'm on my way to a Cabinet meeting," said an exasperated Levi Shalom.

Moshe Arielson gave the Prime Minister a synopsis of the events in Dimona, Ein Gedi, and, Eilat. Levi Shalom listened quietly and ordered him to come to Jerusalem before noon. There was to be a cabinet meeting at 2:00 and he wanted Arielson there with a full report and his analysis.

Sevastopol Naval Station

4 November

1900 hours

The Russian Patrol Boat Ulanov pulled into its dock towing a small rubber dinghy. The crew secured the fore and aft hawsers, lowered the gang-plank and awaited the arrival of a Naval Intelligence Office. The skipper, Lt. Pyotor Alexeivich Kalinkov, stood on deck nervously peering toward the administration buildings. This was his first command and he had wanted everything to go perfectly. The young officer was upset that he had not further challenged the men in the dinghy when he stopped and questioned them at sea.

After approximately two hours, the Naval Intelligence Officer, Captain Second Class, Vasiliy Ivanovich Valinsky, arrived, looking bored. He had seen these eager young officers before. Their information was, uniformly, useless, but just on the chance that something might turn up, he met the incoming patrols. Captain Valinsky walked up the gang-plank, returning the crew's salutes with a half salute-half wave of the hand.

"Lt. Pyotor Alexeivich Kalinkov, reporting, sir." He stood at stiff attention.

"At ease, Lt. Kalinkov. I'm Captain Valinsky, ONI," he responded. "Now what is this mysterious and urgent matter?"

"Captain Valinsky," he began. "Just after dawn this morning we intercepted a rubber dinghy with two men on board who claimed to be Navy frogmen on a training mission. They showed what appeared to be genuine orders, so we broke off contact. At 0900 hours we discovered the dinghy, empty and apparently abandoned just inside Russian waters. My first thought was that the men had somehow entered Turkish waters and were

forced overboard. But, when we took the dinghy and brought it aboard, we found the oars neatly secured. On the bottom, caught under the port gunwale, were the papers and the outline of a nuclear material warning logo. I decided to return to port immediately after making radio contact with Fleet Headquarters. It seemed the most prudent course of action, sir."

Lt. Kalinkov handed Valinsky the oilskin envelope which had been recovered in the craft. Both then proceeded aft so that Valinsky could inspect the dinghy. The faint imprint of the warning logo was clearly visible on the starboard gunwale.

"Well done, Lieutenant. I'll have the dinghy taken to the mooring point near my office. Please report there in one hour. I will need a complete statement from you to forward to Fleet Headquarters."

Valinsky left less bored and sanguine. If nuclear materiel had been smuggled right out from under the noses of the Russian Navy, there was no telling where it might be headed. He did not even want to surmise what the consequences of the loss might mean. Back in his office, he called Fleet Headquarters and relayed the information.

Moscow, Russia

2200 Hours

Fleet Admiral Bolgarov sat at his desk in Naval Headquarters, read the report he had received and called the Commander-in-Chief, Black Sea Command. Ordinarily, he would have let his Chief of Naval Intelligence make the inquiries, but he wanted to handle this investigation himself.

"Sasha, Lenka. I just got the report of that patrol boat pick up. Given the timing, where do you think the material came from?"

"My best guess would be the Sevastopol Breeder Station. My boys are checking it out now."

Podolsky's aide entered and handed the Admiral a sheet of paper. Podolsky read it and let out a long whistle.

"What's that all about?" inquired Bolgarov.

"I was right, Lenka. There was an unauthorized shipment of two canisters of the material. It was supposed to go to Simferopol, but it never got there. We're questioning the guards now, but they claim the truck had proper identification, was driven by two men in civilian clothes, and left in direction of the Institute."

Bolgarov immediately called the Defense Minister who was on his way to a Cabinet meeting and could not be reached. Bolgarov slammed the phone back on its cradle. He lit a cigarette and was pacing angrily when his aide entered the office.

The aide coughed loudly to get Bolgarov's attention. The Admiral spun around and glared at the man. "Petya," he ordered, "send a code-fax to Defense Minister Ignatiev at his meeting with the information about the nuclear material."

Several minutes later, his aide reported back. "Admiral Bolgarov, sir. An urgent message from President Kronsby. The President wishes you to report, immediately, to the Cabinet meeting in the Kremlin."

"Thank you, Petya."

Within ten minutes, Bolgarov was ushered into the Cabinet conference room. Seated around the long, polished

table was the entire power structure of the Russian Republic.

The initial attempts at democratization of the remains of the Soviet Union had begun to unravel during the previous winter's severe shortages and the failure of the crops that summer. Even massive humanitarian aid from the West and Japan was unable to keep things going forward.

Early that November, hard-line military officers and former KGB troops attempted a second coup d'etat. There was brutal fighting in Russia and several of the other republics when the bulk of the Armed Forces sided with the nascent Commonwealth of Independent States. The situation was still volatile. An election was held after the failed coup. Andrei Pavlovich Kronskey, the candidate of the moderate Future for Democracy Party was elected by a narrow margin as President of Russia. Kronskey had been a Professor of International Relations and Rector of Moscow University. A tall, graying, stoop-shouldered man, he had quietly and forcefully intervened in the attempted expulsion of several members of the Faculties of Law, Economics, and Science. Like Gorbachev, Kronskey was a lawyer by training, but had never practiced. He found the Halls of Academe more suited to his talents. Kronskey, who had never married, divided his time between a modest apartment outside the Kremlin complex and a dacha outside the city.

His cabinet included several members of the Armed Forces as well as the new head of the FSB, successor to the KGB. At Kronskey's immediate left sat Defence Minister Ignatiev, who had quietly passed the decoded fax to President Kronskey. The rest of the Cabinet also sat in their accustomed places. A chair had been brought into the room and placed at the far end of the conference table. The President motioned Admiral Bolgarov to be seated.

"Admiral Bolgarov, please repeat the information you sent to the Defense Minister."

Admiral Bolgarov spoke quietly in a firm and direct tone. There was silence for several moments. The head of the FSB, Dimitri Lazarovich Chevechavadze, asked to be heard.

"Our intelligence reports nothing of this nature by our agents who have infiltrated terrorist groups. How can we be sure this is not a provocation?"

"We can't," replied the Admiral, "but this might be a rogue operation of an as yet unknown splinter group. I take it seriously."

"I'll put our operatives on the alert, Mr. President," said Chevechavadze.

Marshal Ignatiev interjected. "There is no need for your agency's involvement. We have our own sources. At the moment, I consider Admiral Bolgarov's information top priority. GRU has its own man on the Verifiable Nuclear Testing Commission, With the permission of the President, and this body, I'll get in touch with him at once."

The group acceded to Ignatiev's request. Noting that he had been adroitly out-manuevered by the Defense Minister, Chevechavadze grudgingly agreed.

Outside in the corridor, Marshal Ignatiev waited for Admiral Bolgarov.

"So, Lenka," he began. "I finally outsmarted Dimitri Lazarovich. I don't trust him, but I have to work with him. By the way, I'm reasonably certain that he's not aware that we've spotted his man on Grisha's staff. We watch them watch us." Bolgarov smiled. "All the mice run in little circles. No to incidentally, what made you so certain that this was a Cabinet level matter?"

"Well, to begin with," Bolgarov answered, "I know the ONI man in Sevastopol. He's most thorough, but a bit

lazy. For him to break protocol and call Black Sea Command directly was unusual. Then I called Sasha Podolsky. He filled me in on the rest. Putting the whole thing together scared the hell out of me! This is no half-baked scheme. It's too smooth."

The two men parted, Bolgarov to his office and Ignatiev to the Communications Center in the most secure section of the Kremlin. The Defense Minister dictated a Top Priority message to Obadivsky to be encoded and transmitted immediately.

President Kronsky was also agitated. If what Bolgarov was saying was true, then the United States, and who knew what other nations, inevitably, would become involved. He was as anxious as the military to keep the FSB in check. The Russian president had no desire to rock the international boat.

Washington

9 November

1600 hours

President Peter Philip Dunstan sat at the far end of the long mahogany table in the National Security Council "War Room". At just over six feet seven inches in height, he was still taller, seated, than any of the others in the room. He was dressed casually, in a brown tweed jacket, dark brown turtleneck sweater, tan trousers and highly polished cordovan loafers. His ruddy, tanned, skin contrasted sharply with his unruly shock of white hair.

Adjusting his glasses, President Dunstan surveyed the room. Included in the group were the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Directors of the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the Vice President, Steven Elliott. By invitation, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was present. The President opened the discussion. "Sorry to have called you on such a beautiful day, but there is some urgency in handling the delicate matter at hand.

"Damn! I hate it when I sound pompous. We may have a hell of a mess. Mr. Grant, will you fill us in."

As the FBI Director began to rise, the President motioned him to remain seated. In the background was the steady whirl of the air conditioners and the "white noise" machines, rendering unintelligible any stray bits of conversation which might escape from the room.

Richard Grant placed a legal pad before him, put on his reading glasses and began to speak, "A few days ago, one of my men working under cover at a shipping company informed us that his firm had shipped some high quality nuclear material to Dubai. What made him suspicious was the nature of the protective packaging. It was more extensive than would be necessary for radio-isotope transport. He was also told to dispose of the vehicle which brought the material to the warehouse. By now a trusted employee, he did as he was told, but informed us at once. I called the Attorney General who directed me to get in touch with the CIA, NSA, and the President."

The President then called CIA Director Philip Miller.

"As you know, one of the senior members of the Soviet delegation to the International Commission on Verifiable Nuclear testing, ICEVENT, is a GRU Colonel-General. Although his activities, until now, have been uneventful, it was felt that we have one of the American delegation assigned to monitor his actions. We are never certain what other duties any Russian official may have beyond the stated purpose of the position. With the concurrence of the FBI, I selected Dr. Henry Wheatland, a Deputy Director, presently without formal duties, to undertake the assignment. He is attending the Commission meeting in Philadelphia," Miller stated.

"Madame Secretary," asked the President, "What information do you have?"

Secretary of Defense Eleanor Manning, the first woman to hold the position. A retired Vice Admiral, Dunstan had chosen her for several reasons; she was an African-American, an expert in military affairs, and one of the most persuasive Cabinet members in working with Congress.

"Well, as you said, Mr. President, we are in a hell of a mess. The Chief of Naval Intelligence, Admiral Eric Short, tells me that a tampered shipment of bomb-quality material was received at the Staten Island Naval Facility. ONI and FBI identified the truck which picked up the shipment, but thus far have been unable to locate the driver. Earle Depot records indicate that sixteen canisters left there, but only fourteen arrived. The invoice also shows a shipment of 14 canisters. We are certain that the invoice was altered. At the moment, we're still trying to figure out how it happened."

"Dr. Randolph?" inquired the President.

Dr. Robert Randolph, the head of the National Security Agency responded, "Thank you, Mr. President. A few days ago, we intercepted a message from the Mossad, Israel's Intelligence Agency. It came in over an open line and was transmitted to someone in Philadelphia. We have tentatively identified him as Dr. Zvi Ben Yosef, an American-born Israeli, on leave from that agency, presently a Visiting Professor of Political Science at Swarthmore College. It would appear that Israel may have wanted the message to be intercepted.

"Also, just before I came here, we intercepted a coded message from Moscow Center to a previously unknown receiver. It was directed to Colonel-General Obadivsky. We are now in the process of decoding it, but a rough breakdown indicates some sort of difficulty and advises him to contact U.S. and Israeli intelligence personnel."

"Mr. President," suggested Miller, "Let's let the field people figure out this one. Wheatland, Obadivsky and Ben Yosef know each other. They can set up the entire operation among themselves."

"What about a nuclear physics expert?" asked Admiral Short.

"No problem," replied Director Miller. "Dr. Mary Mallory is already on board at ICEVENT. I'll tell Bob Cowan that we need to re-assign her and Hank Wheatland, temporarily, to other special duties. Besides, she knows the other three. Wheatland's on ICEVENT with her; so is Obadivsky, and Ben Yosef was her Poli Sci professor at Swarthmore College," said Miller.

The meeting adjourned. President Dunstan returned to the Oval Office, picked up a special green phone which was on a small stand behind his chair and punched in two series of numbers. The phone rang several times before it was answered.

Moscow

9 November

2210 Hours

President Andre Pavlovich Kronsky was seated at his desk in the inner court of the Kremlin, working on the stack of papers which had accumulated during the day. A bachelor and a workaholic, he habitually worked late. It gave him time, he often said, to think and to plan. His enemies, however, said that he used the time to plot and to scheme.

The silence in the room was shattered by the buzzing of the red phone on his desk. The phone was a direct

line from the White House. It had not rung since the Iran-Iraq War, when there could have been a nuclear holocaust. The Ayatollah Khomeni's forces had procured the technical information and some of the components to build a nuclear device. In the ensuing power struggle after Khomeni's death the threat subsided.

"Kronsky," he answered.

"Peter Dunstan, here, Andrei. This is a matter that can't wait. I understand that we may have a serious problem in common. There is strong evidence that bomb-quality nuclear material has been stolen from us and from the Israelis. Is it possible that you have had a similar theft? Please be open about this. We can't afford to play games on this one. As soon as I have your input, I'm going to call Levi Shalom and let him in on this mess."

"It's true, Peter. We have just had such an incident, here. Actually, from what I understand, the amount missing is a sub-critical mass. Our guess is that the amounts missing may very well add up to more than enough to power a bomb. I'll wait until you make the connection. The Israelis definitely need to be included in any plans and operations."

Jerusalem

9 November

2130 Hours

Prime Minister Shalom was dozing in an easy chair in his home when the call came from Washington over his secure phone. He was startled to hear the voices of the President of Russia, Andrei Kronsky, and the President of the United States, Peter Dunstan. This was the first time, to his knowledge, that the heads of state of the two most powerful nations in the world had included the Israeli Prime Minister in a conference call.

Levi Shalom, a short, dark haired, dark skinned man, was the first Sephardi Prime Minister. He had come to power with a government which did not include the extreme Right, Left, or Religious Parties. Sometime earlier, the old electoral system, based on a confusing form of proportional representation, was eliminated in favor of a system somewhere between that of the United States and the United Kingdom. Under the new system, the Prime Minister was elected by popular vote. Members of the Knesset were elected from districts and the government was formed by the party with, or closest too, a majority of the elected members.

"Good evening, Prime Minister," said President Dunstan, "President Kronsky and I have been advised that our respective nations may share a serious problem. All of us have quantities of nuclear material missing."

Kronsky continued, "Both President Dunstan and I feel that a multi-national endeavor needs to be undertaken to solve the problem and recover, as soon as possible, the missing material. It is necessary that our respective intelligence and security forces collaborate in this effort."

"Yes, gentlemen," Shalom said. "I agree, in principle with the plan, but before we do anything, I feel I must know more about what is going on in your countries. After all, we may be sitting on a nuclear time-bomb. No pun intended, but I must admit to having only a sketchy understanding of what happened here in Israel, right under my nose. Of course, without question my government will co-operate fully."

Levi Shalom, still somewhat in a state of shock and disbelief, was clearly stalling. Given the seriousness of the matter, he wanted to confer, with his cabinet.

"Mr. Prime Minister," It was Andrei Kronsky. "Let me assure you that we are quite ready to share whatever we know about the situation. Let President Dunstan begin!"

The Israeli was silent for a long moment. It was now quite clear that he did not have the time to enlarge the circle of men who would be included in this particular conversation. This was to become a new troika--and the three horses had better pull in the same direction.

Washington-Moscow-Jerusalem

9-10 November

"Thank you, gentlemen. This is one hell of a mess! The question is--what is the best way for us to get a handle on the rest of the problem? It makes a great deal of sense to have all three of our Intelligence Agencies work together to arrive at a solution. I'm prepared to put some of our best people to work on this. In order to have some control, let's use what senior staff we have on ICEVENT, which means, Drs. Mallory and Wheatland, from our staff." stated Dunstan.

"I agree, Peter. We have already alerted Dr. Obadivsky, the head of our delegation, concerning what is going on. He knows your people. The problem is, whom can Levi involve? There are no Israelis assigned to ICEVENT, to the best of my knowledge," responded Kronsky.

"That's no problem," said Shalom. "I have been informed by Mossad that one of our people Dr. Zvi Ben Yosef, is on leave in the United States. We have instructed him to co-operate with the project."

"Andrei, why Obadivsky? We know he's GRU Russian Military Intelligence, but is he not going to be involving FSB? We want this kept as closed as possible."

Kronsky laughed. "We've thought of that already, Peter. At our Cabinet meeting we finessed the FSB. Marshal Ignatiev and Fleet Admiral Bolgarov, our Defense Minister and Chief of Naval Operations, took care of that situation. Incidentally, we know that Dr. Wheatland is a CIA Deputy Director. Why him and not the FBI? Isn't internal security their responsibility? Also, who is Dr. Mallory, besides being on your delegation?"

"Right now, Andrei, we feel that this is an international problem which becomes a CIA matter. Dr. Wheatland was assigned for that purpose. Since Dr. Mallory is already involved in ICEVENT, it solved the problem of assigning a nuclear expert. We wish to keep the operation down to as few people as possible," Dunstan explained.

"Gentlemen, I have the uneasy feeling that my country is the ultimate target. Our people have uncovered a new group about which we know nothing. Perhaps this is where we should begin our inquiries," offered Levi Shalom.

"Please dispense with the formalities! In these conversations, we are on a first name basis, so I'm Peter, and he's Andrei. I think we had best leave the details to the professionals. Thanks again, gentlemen!" said Peter Dunstan as he hung up.

Washington

November 9

1900 hours

President Peter Philip Dunstan had built his reputation as a cool, level-headed Midwestern senator. In three terms in the Senate, he introduced very little legislation, but had been able to convince men from both sides of the aisle that if the United States was to remain a world power, it might be necessary to work out an elaborate

system of co-operation with the former Soviet Union. Statements about glasnost and perestroika, however, should not result in a lowering of the guard against Russian expansionism, he had said.

As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he had helped draft the ICEVENT agreement by making certain that it was not a simple US-Russian monopoly, but included all nations with acknowledged nuclear capabilities. Only three or four nations, mainly in the Middle and Far East, had declined to join in the agreement and participate in the Commission's work. Any rogue nuclear operation had to be stopped--and soon!

Dunstan rose from his chair and decided to walk a bit on the White House grounds. His Secret Service escorts walked, discreetly, in back and in front of him. As he walked, the President rubbed the back of his neck in an attempt to relieve the tension headache which had been building up with increasing severity ever since he had been briefed by Defense Secretary Eleanor Manning the day before. He felt that the conference call he had just placed had served its purpose. If only he could be certain that there were no leaks, then the tri-national combined intelligence operation would have a real chance to succeed. While Dunstan felt he could trust Levi Shalom, but he was still somewhat doubtful about Andrei Kronskey.

Moscow

10 November

0100 hours

Hands clasped behind his head, Andrei Kronskey sat behind his desk. His uneasiness was caused by the uncertainty whether the FSB had bugged either the red phone or this office itself, even though he had had the room checked daily to detect any bugs. On several occasions some were found. In fact, the day he assumed office, he had had the walls stripped down to the lath and rough coat plaster. About a half dozen were found planted in the walls. Rather than have them removed, he had them neutralized, much to the consternation, he was sure, of Dimitri Chevchevadze. The FSB Director could neither admit that they were there, nor that they were not functioning.

The Russian President's instinct for survival told him that even if there was no bomb, that he should not yet inform anyone of his conversation with his American and Israeli counterparts. He trusted neither one, completely, but if this troika was to run, he could not be the balking horse. That decided, he returned to the piles of paper still sitting on his desk. Kronskey began to read, thought better of it, and rang for his chauffeur to drive him to his apartment in a quiet neighborhood a few kilometers from the Kremlin.

Tel Aviv

10 November

0300 hours

Like Dunstan and Kronskey, Levi Shalom was distressed. He felt that Israel was the ultimate target of whatever nuclear holocaust was being set in motion. For Washington and Moscow, it might be an inconvenience, but for Jerusalem, it might mean annihilation. Still, he knew that insofar as it is ever possible, in international affairs, he had to trust Dunstan and Kronskey. He too, decided to keep the conference call to himself. He felt, as the Hebrew saying went, "Im yirtzeh Hashem", God willing, the tri-partite operation would succeed.

As he prepared for bed, his wife awoke for a moment and asked what had kept him up. Shalom mumbled something about a phone call. She nodded her head. Levi Shalom's sleep was fitful; he dreamed about nuclear explosions.

Philadelphia

9 November

1730 hours

Zvi Ben Yosef left the Junto executive offices, and noticed Mary Mallory standing in the lobby speaking with a group of people. After a moment's hesitation, he walked over to them.

"Mary? Mary Mallory?"

"Yes?"

It took a few seconds for her to recognize him. "Oh, for God's sake! Dr. Josephson! What are you doing in Philadelphia? The Alumni Quarterly said that you're living in Israel now. What a pleasant surprise," Mary exclaimed.

"Actually, I'm on sabbatical and teaching a couple of seminars at Swarthmore. There's a meeting I'm going to attend here this evening, but right now I'm at loose ends. How about a drink with an old professor? It will give us a chance to catch up on what's been happening to us since we were on campus," he said in a somewhat strained tone.

Mary was hesitant. She sensed, however, that her old teacher was not simply asking her to join him for old times' sake. She was, after all, never a member of one of his advanced seminars. Finally, she smiled. Why not?

Zvi led her to a table in the members' lounge. They ordered drinks and held a rambling conversation, during which he learned about her post-Swarthmore career, and she about his move to Israel. Hank Wheatland entered the room and saw Mary sitting at a table with a man he didn't know, nor could he place, as having any connection with the Commission. Mary motioned to him to join them.

"Henry Wheatland, I'd like you to meet a former teacher of mine from Swarthmore College. When he taught me, his name was Harold Josephson. Now it's Zvi Ben Yosef. He's here on sabbatical from Israel and teaching at the college this year."

Zvi rose, and they shook hands as Mary gestured them to sit.

"Dr. Ben Yosef is buying, Hank. How about a drink before dinner?"

"Yes, thanks. Double Scotch on the rocks," said Hank as he opened the conversation. "Dr. Ben Yosef, were you ever on the staff of the Israeli Embassy in Ankara? At the time, I was the Assistant Cultural Officer at our Embassy, there."

"Sorry, but I don't quite follow you, Dr. Wheatland."

"We were to be introduced to each other by a man who claimed to be a friend and associate of his--a Mr. Nefesh. He said if we ever met I should give you his regards. Unfortunately, I left Ankara somewhat hurriedly and we never did meet," Hank explained.

"Yes, I am. I spoke with Nefesh a short while ago and he asked me to do the same," Zvi replied.

"What the hell is going on here?" Mary Mallory asked in an exasperated tone.

"We're sorry, but this wasn't as chance a meeting as you might think," Hank explained. "Remember you said last night that something was giving you the jitters? Well, I might have started that. My own anxiety may have affected you. It would appear that we--the United States, Israel and Russia--might have a serious problem in common. It may well be that we're on the same side for the first time since the Persian Gulf flap a few years back. Mary, if we can get the three of us together with Grisha Obadivsky, the puzzle pieces may begin to fit together."

"That shouldn't be too difficult," responded Mary. "Hank, you and I are meeting him here for dinner at seven. Perhaps you'll join us, Dr. Ben Yosef? Right now I really don't know if I'm supposed to be involved. I'm no intelligence person. If it turns out that you three need to talk business, I'll make a graceful exit."

"Grisha? Colonel-General Obadivsky?" said Zvi. "He's GRU. I know him. We've had a couple of run-ins in the past."

In the lobby, Grisha Obadivsky checked his hat and coat and called the unlisted, secure phone in Hatboro. The code clerk answered.

"Sir, I have a message for you."

"From whom?"

"It's signed Lenka and Vladi."

Obadivsky sucked in his breath. This was most unusual. Why both Bolgarov and Ignatiev?

"Sir? Sir?"

"I'm sorry," he said as he exhaled. "What is the message?"

The code clerk cleared his throat. "It's a bit odd, Dr. Obadivsky, but this is what it says: 'Two cases of prepared mushrooms are missing. It is possible that some cases of Eagle and Star brands have also been misplaced. Please get in touch with the distributors.'"

"Is that it?"

"Yes sir," the clerk answered. Obadivsky headed for the members' lounge and joined the others.

"You know Dr. Wheatland. May I introduce Dr. Zvi Ben Yosef?", asked Mary.

"We've met," said Obadivsky, dryly.

Zvi acknowledged Obadivsky with a curt nod of his head. He might have to work with him, but he didn't have to like him or trust him--at least not for the present.

"May I suggest a more private place for us to have dinner?" asked Mary.

"Not too private, I hope," Hank said. "In any case, as we all know, the more public, the more private. What about that place we went to last night, Mary?"

"How about the dining room at the Franklin Inn? Our eating there would be less noticeable, especially if there's a chance we might be followed or that someone would eavesdrop," suggested Mary.

Zvi offered, "There's a new restaurant in the basement of the Bourse Building. It's close and reasonably large. By the way, Dr. Mallory, perhaps you should join us. You have already been somewhat compromised in this situation. We may need your expertise."

"The Bourse Building? It is within walking distance?" asked Grisha.

"Oh, yes," Zvi affirmed. "Besides, the restaurant's parking lot is almost always full."

Obadivsky was relieved. It meant that his FSB shadow would not follow them.

"How about reservations?" Mary asked.

"Not necessary. I know the staff," explained the expatriate Philadelphian. "It's not pretentious. The restaurant isn't an 'in' place--yet. Remember, I'm a native; my family still lives here. They keep me up-to-date on what's 'in' and what's 'out'. I avoid the 'in' places. They usually reach too deeply into my pocket for comfort."

They laughed and proceeded to the cloakroom. Once outside, Ben Yosef led the way to the Bourse Building, Philadelphia's original Stock Exchange, a short distance away. The rain had stopped, but a chill wind swept in from the northeast over the Delaware River. The puddles were beginning to ice over. There was a threat of nastier weather in the air.

The Bourserie was down a flight of stairs to a half-basement landing. The room was decorated in blue and gold, Philadelphia's city colors. The floor was inlaid with an intaglio map of the old city as it had been laid out by William Penn.

Obadivsky opened the conversation. "Dr. Wheatland, let us not beat about the bush. I am well aware of who you are, and what your real mission is. I, for one, have suspected, for some time, that your people have known my identity and that sooner or later--what is your phrase--I would be 'bird-dogged'. Under the circumstances that won't be necessary. We'll be very close to each other for the foreseeable future. As for you, Ben Yosef, we know each other for whom and what we are, but let us try to put away the past and work on this puzzle together. I am unclear, as yet, as to your role in all this, Dr. Mallory. Perhaps your colleague, Dr. Wheatland can enlighten us both."

"Dr. Mallory is involved since she has the greatest technical knowledge. It makes it unnecessary to reach out beyond the American delegation's staff for such expertise." Hank responded. "American intelligence has reported some bomb-quality nuclear material missing from one of our storage depots and is apparently on its way to the Middle East."

"Our intelligence reports that similar material is missing from our site in the Crimea. A dinghy has been recovered, which, we think, was used to transport similar material out of the Soviet Union by way of the Black Sea. Its destination is unclear," added Grisha.

"Israeli internal security forces reported the theft of some of the same type of material from our Dimona facility. A speed-boat carrying an Egyptian flag was found docked at a pier near the Marine Biological Institute in Eilat. They have very little else to go on." stated Zvi.

"I can't seem to make any sense of what you men are saying. If you can give me some more concrete information, I may be able to help you!" exclaimed Mary.

"I'm sorry if we sound confusing, Mary, but this is all the information we have. It'll have to do for now," said Hank soothingly.

They finished dinner and made their way back to the Junto Building and to their separate meetings.

SS JEBEL AL TARIK

6 November

0900 hours

The Kuwaiti freighter *Jebel al Tarik* in Dubahad just cleared the Straits of Tiran and headed out into the Indian Ocean. The captain, Salah ibn Salim, emerged from his cabin and descended to the forward hold. He was curious about what cargo had been brought aboard during the dog-watch, between 0000 and 0800 hours. A careful man, Captain ibn Salim wanted to be certain that the cargo was securely lashed down in the event of rough weather. He did not relish the thought of cargo rolling around below decks like loose cannons, and had no idea of the nature of the cargo which had been brought aboard from the speed-boat. The ship was a tramp freighter, picking up and discharging cargo wherever it was to be found. The destination, *Jebel Ali*, was one of its usual ports-of-call. Even the consignee, the Ibn Rosht General Hospital, in Dubai, often received heavy equipment, transshipped from ports as varied as Oran, Liverpool and Piraeus.

As he clambered down the ladder, the captain noticed that the new cargo had not been secured as thoroughly as he would have liked. At that moment, the ship rolled slightly to starboard, having taken a swell amidships. One of the canisters broke loose and rolled over, exposing its radioactive logo and warnings in English and in a language he could not decipher. A very frightened Captain Ibn Salim went to a phone on a bulkhead near the ladder and called for his First Officer and Chief Mate to join him in the hold. Then he lashed down the container as securely as he could.

"What the hell is going on aboard my ship?" he roared as his subordinates dropped down the ladder hurriedly. "Why wasn't I told that this cargo is radioactive? Where the hell is that bill of lading?"

The First Officer and the Chief Mate looked at each other blankly. Neither had a ready explanation. The First Officer handed Captain ibn Salim the clipboard holding the bill of lading. He read the documents carefully. As he thought, they did not list the material as radioactive.

The Chief Mate, Elias Iskanderani, a Palestinian, looked at the radioactive logo on the container and paled. He recognized the other language as Hebrew. Regaining his composure, he understood what must be happening. He managed a weak smile and told his superiors that he would secure the cargo, explaining that there must have been a mistake in preparing the material for stowing and that the nuclear material was placed in error. As for the other language, he did not know what it was, but he thought that it could safely be ignored. To his amazement, the others seemed to buy the story. The First Officer returned to the bridge and the Captain to his quarters. Iskanderani remained below and called a crew to secure the cargo.

Captain Ibn Salim was not entirely taken in by Iskanderani's explanation. He made a ship-to-shore telephone call to the Shipping Company's office. He gave the office the name of the shipper and the invoice number. The office confirmed the shipment and assured him that there must have been a mistake. They had been dealing with the consignee for many years. While he could not explain what happened, the office manager suggested that it might have been a prank on the part of someone who had access to such a stencil. He was advised to cover the mistakes and simply deliver the cargo as indicated. A still uneasy ship commander returned to his cabin.

Meanwhile Iskanderani, still somewhat shaken by his discovery, made his way back to the crew's quarters and took a small brown leather booklet from beneath the lining of the top of his sea chest. He began to check off a series of names and numbers against a similar list that was pinned to the corkboard above his desk. As soon as he completed the task, he replaced the booklet beneath the lining and secured the sea chest.

Now he was ready to move on to the next step in the delivery of the two newly repainted pieces of cargo. It was necessary to make sure that one of his fellow conspirators was on duty on each watch making certain that nothing was moved and to ensure that when the ship docked at Jebel Ali, one of them would handle the unloading under his direction. The vessel was several days away and was due to make several stops before reaching Jebel Ali.

SS BOGUZ-KEVI

4 NOVEMBER

1300 hours

The Turkish vessel sailed cautiously through the Straits of Bosphorus on its course to the Suez Canal. From there it would make its way to several ports of call on the Arabian Peninsula. Among them was Jebel Ali.

The two men who had come aboard from the dinghy in the Black Sea sat at a table in the galley drinking thick Turkish coffee and eating the yogurt-like leban. This was their first meal since leaving Sevastopol and rowing to the Bogusz Kevi. Both were exhausted from the rigors of rowing and the tension from the unexpected challenge by the Russian patrol boat. They finished their meal and went below to check the cargo. Satisfied that everything was secure, they returned to the crew's quarters and fell sound asleep.

The materials necessary to put together the detonator and other non-nuclear materials, including the bomb casing, were already on board the ship disguised as oil drilling bits and hospital supplies. There would be enough time to prepare the arming device when the ship docked in Jebel Ali.

They themselves were not Arabs, but Tatars, native Crimeans, involved in a struggle to free their homeland from Russian "occupation". The Tatars, Crimean Muslims, had been exiled to remote areas of Turkestan by Stalin who wanted to "Russify" the area. It was at the same time that Stalin had ordered the annihilation of the Crimeans, the Jewish population, who had lived there for over two thousand years.

Both were deserters from the Soviet Army's Afghanistan Campaign, where they had served as armorers for the helicopter gunships. Their contact in Afghanistan was a Pakistani arms dealer with connections to many of the so-called "Liberation Armies". The Tatars became mercenaries. Payment always in cash, and always in hard currency. The split with the Pakistani was usually 60/40, but because of the danger of going back into the Crimea, the arms dealer reluctantly agreed to a 70/30 split.

Their return was simple. Both had retained their uniforms. With excellent forged identity cards, back-pay slips and dozens of bits and pieces which soldiers accumulate over time, they had slipped back into Russia several months earlier. Their new papers identified them as members of a demolition unit assigned to the Sevastopol Naval Base as frog-men trainees. No one questioned their papers. A Tatar officer vouched for them.

The deserters were accepted into the clandestine "freedom cell" on the base and at the nearby Army barracks, as well as at the Breeder-reactor Station. The Tatars had formed an uneasy alliance with other dissidents who were interested in breaking away from the Confederation. None completely trusted the others, but they operated on the Middle Eastern principle of "My friend's friend is my friend; my friend's enemy is my enemy; my enemy's friend is my enemy; my enemy's enemy is my friend."

By early on 9 November the Jebel al Tarik and Bogusz Kevi were steaming south of the Arabian Peninsula when a sudden squall line passed through the area. The storm was exceptionally violent causing both vessels to pitch and yaw. The ships heeled over as much as fifteen to eighteen degrees. Several times waves engulfed the bows of the ships. Spume obscured the helmsmen's vision. The respective captains returned to their bridges. Radar scans showed no ships within several miles West and North. The distance was enough to

assure no danger to the vessels. As rapidly as the storm had arisen, it abated. Both vessels proceeded without incident into the Straits of Hormuz, rounding the Arabian Peninsula.

SS JEBEL AL TARIK

10 NOVEMBER

1600 hours

The day was bright and clear. Radar weather information indicated fair skies and calm seas for the next forty-eight hours. Captain ibn Salim ordered "full ahead". The ship groaned, shuddered and squeaked under the strain. As she steamed North, she passed a French frigate on its way South which patrolled the still unsettled Straits of Hormuz region. Each vessel acknowledged the other's passing.

The watch had just changed. Iskanderani slid down the ladder to the forward hold to check his secret cargo. According to coded instruction he had received from the radio-man, he began to prepare and attach flotation devices to the canisters. Under the new plan, the canisters were to be off-loaded during the night of the 11/12 November when the ship docked in Jebel Ali. Iskanderani secured the floats and began his ascent to the deck when a roar and a shock-wave sent him slamming into the bulkhead. Emergency sirens began their ominous wail--a wail he did not hear. His head was crushed by the force of the explosion.

Captain ibn Salim ordered an immediate damage report. Before it could be relayed to him, a second blast ripped the Jebel al Tarik in half. The captain ordered the crew to abandon ship. As rapidly as possible, life-boats and life rafts were dropped into the water. Life jackets were distributed. Then the boilers blew. The ensuing explosion threw Captain ibn Salim and the helmsman into the water, clear of the sinking ship.

The radio-man was able to send only two "mayday" and "SOS" calls before he was forced to join his shipmates in a life raft onto which he jumped as he cleared the rail. The lifeboats and life rafts were fitted with outboard engines. This enabled them to circle the ship and pull their comrades who had jumped with or without life jackets, out of the water and roar away from the ship as she began to sink. A huge vortex was created as she sank, more and more rapidly.

The Captain and his helmsman were pulled semi-conscious from the water. The captain had suffered a broken back. Both of the helmsman's legs were broken. Captain Ibn Salim was laid flat on the bottom of the lifeboat. The emergency oars were used to splint the helmsman's legs. One of the crewmen opened the first-aid kit, located two vials of a sedative and a hypodermic needle and administered each man one injection. Both lost consciousness.

The French frigate, L'Arliessene having passed the stricken vessel only a short time before, responded to the calls for help. A British minesweeper, H.M.S. Spenser, which was just a few miles ahead of the French ship, moved into place, lowered her gear, and began a sweep of the area. Her captain assumed, correctly, that the Kuwaiti freighter had struck by at least one rogue mine which had torn loose from its moorings. Mines had been left over from the Iraqi incursion into Kuwait. Some mines had sunken farther beneath the surface. Eventually the moorings deteriorated and the mines had surfaced. Both vessels joined forces to rescue the crew of the sunken ship.

The larger French vessel had a medical officer on board, who supervised the transfer of the injured captain and helmsman from the lifeboat onto his ship. The British vessel steamed ahead, carrying many of the crew to the nearest port.

L'Arliessene made one more sweep of the area, searching for other survivors. As she was about to break off the search, a lookout spotted two flotation devices bobbing in her wake. A small-boat was launched to pick

them up. They were lifted onto the deck and the floats were removed from the canisters. As they rolled over, the paint, which had been smeared over the nuclear material warnings, rubbed off onto the deck. The petty officer in charge of the small-boat immediately reported the find to the captain.

Commander Etienne Poitier came aft. When he saw the insignia and noticed the lettering on the canisters, he ordered them secured and instructed the radio-man to inform the French Fleet Commander of the Kuwaiti vessel's sinking and the subsequent recovery of the survivors and dangerous cargo.

Tel Aviv

10 November

2000 hours

The night duty officer at Shin Bet, David Goldner, reached for the phone after the third or fourth ring. The person on the other end was speaking French. Goldner put him on hold and called the agency's translator's section, transferred the call and hung up. He waited patiently for the section to get back to him with the translation of the French report. About fifteen minutes later, the transcript arrived. Goldner read it quickly and put in an urgent call to Moshe Arielson. Arielson called the Offices of the Prime Minister and the head of Mossad. The times of the calls were entered into the night log.

About half an hour later, a highly agitated Moshe Arielson arrived at his headquarters. He rushed into the duty office and almost tore the paper out of David Goldner's hand. When Arielson was in one of his moods, the best thing was to say as little as possible and wait for him to calm down.

About an hour later, the head of Mossad arrived, a few seconds before the Prime Minister. Arielson handed each of them a copy of the French transmission.

"Well, at least we know where the missing material is, but not who stole it and how it got onto that ship in the first place," said the Prime Minister.

Washington

10 November

1300 hours

The National Security Agency regular transmission scanners picked up the message from the French vessel as soon as it was sent. It was translated into English and brought into Robert Randolph's office. He read the report and reached for his secure line. In moments Randolph was connected to the CIA and FBI Directors. He placed a third call to Gen. Edward Forbes, the National Security Advisor.

"I've just gotten a copy of an open transmission from a French frigate in the Straits of Hormuz. I suggest that we meet as soon as possible in Lafayette Square." Randolph told the others.

1345 hours

All three men arrived at the Society Building within moments of one and other. After going through the usual security checks, they sat down in the conference room where Randolph presented each of them with a copy of the French communication.

Philip Miller leaned back in his chair, "My guess is that this is related to what we have heard from Dick Grant

and the Russians. If so, it's sure as hell in my ballpark. I don't think that Israel is trying to sell nuclear material to Kuwait. Besides, it's easier for the Kuwaitis to get it from Pakistan. The question is, where was that ship headed? Dubai? Qatar? Why flotations? I'll fill Hank Wheatland in. He'll work on it with Ben Yosef and Obadivsky."

"In the meantime, I'll get my man at Mid-East Air Freight to do more checking and find out what Farid Attiyeh is up to. I'd love to nail him. We know he's involved, but we can't prove it--yet." said Dick Grant.

"How can my team help?" offered Ed Forbes. "Right now I don't seem to find any direct connection with either NSC or NSPRG in this, but. I'm sure the Oval Office will want to stay on top the situation."

Each man as he left the room, dropped his copy of the transmission into the shredder bin. Every copy was destroyed.

Moscow

10 November

1900 hours

Marshal Vladimir Grygorivich Ignatiev was seated at his desk at the Ministry of Defense, working at the details of his budget proposals for the coming fiscal year. It was an increasingly painful task. His Ministry was forced to cut back its requests since the completion of the various Disarmament Treaties with the Americans, NATO, and the nations of the former Soviet Bloc.

His aide knocked quietly and handed him an orange-tabbed folder. He broke the seal on the folder. It contained the Russian translation of the message from the L'Arlesienne. He called Admiral Bulgarov. "Lenka, Vladi. I just received a communication that I want to share with you. Please come to my office as soon as possible," he stated.

Fifteen minutes later Bolgarov arrived at the office. Without a word, the Defense Minister handed the Admiral the transcript.

"So, Vladi, we have another piece of the puzzle. Let's get to Andrei Pavlovich with this as rapidly possible," suggested Bolgarov.

Ignatiev placed the call. Kronsky ordered them to come to his apartment with the transmission as soon as possible. Within moments, The Defense Minister's staff car pulled around to the entrance to the Kremlin. The Marshal and the Admiral were driven to the President's residence.

Kronsky had left his office just about an hour before the call from Ignatiev. His home was a safe place for uninterceptable conversations. The President put aside the work he was doing. First, he placed the most sensitive documents on his desk in a locked safe-file cabinet. Then he activated a hidden tape recorder to record the conversation. Just as he completed his self-appointed tasks, the buzzer sounded. Crossing the room, he opened the door to greet his visitors.

"So, gentlemen, what now?" he asked.

Ignatiev silently handed Kronsky the French transmission. Taking the sheet, Kronsky read it swiftly, then rose from his seat and began to pace the room. Absentmindedly, he had neglected to invite the others to be seated. Protocol, here as elsewhere in the world, regardless of ideology, requires that the head of government request others to be seated, even in times of crisis. They stood, patiently and impassively, awaiting permission

like cadets in their respective academies. Kronsky looked up, smiled, and motioned them to be seated.

"I trust that this is the only copy in Moscow. I hope that Chevchevadze and his thugs haven't got hold of this! I think it's time to activate the plan that President Dunstan, Prime Minister Shalom and I put together. Don't look so damned surprised. We had a meeting a few days ago over our hot-lines.

"Lenka, I think it would be appropriate to get in touch with Grisha Obadivsky and start the ball rolling, as the Americans would say. He knows who his American and Israeli counterparts are."

"Andrei," asked Ignatiev, "I just had a nasty thought. Is it possible that FSB is involved in this in any way? After all, it's their job to keep the pot boiling in the Middle East."

In the quiet of their informal meetings, the men, old comrades, addressed each other by their familiar names.

Andrei Kronsky paused, mused for a moment and said, "What is it that that Western philosopher said, 'With God, all things are possible.' Well, with Dimitri, all things are probable. So let's plan as if it's false and act as if it's true."

"Meaning?" asked Ignatiev.

"Just that. Get in touch with Obadivsky. Keep this quiet, although I'm sure the French will broadcast this all over the world. Pravda, Izvezia, The London Sunday Times, The Chicago Tribune, Der Spiegel and Figaro will have a field day." He went to the door, indicating that the conference had ended.

The two military leaders returned to their car and were driven back to the Kremlin. In the car they began to speak to each other in Dutch. Long years of service in foreign stations, had helped them master several languages, but they had perfected their Dutch on their own. It was one way they were certain that even if their relief drivers were FSB, they could still converse openly.

"What made you think that our 'friend' might have a hand in this?" asked Bolgarov.

"Just a gut feeling," Ignatiev answered. "Sometimes I feel that he is so goddamned involved in keeping us in trouble, that he forgets that he's not in a little world populated by good guys and bad guys. You know his secret passions is old-fashioned American cowboy movies! He thinks that Hoot Gibson is the greatest actor since Stanislavsky."

"Hoot who?"

"Never mind."

The car stopped. They had arrived at the Intelligence Command Center. The driver stepped out and opened the door for his passengers then, once they were inside, left the compound. He was, indeed, a low level agent. The relief driver called the head of Moscow District to report on the trip, but also to say that he could not understand a word of the conversation between his passengers, that the eavesdropping equipment had also malfunctioned so he could not record it, nor had it been possible to monitor the meeting at the President's home.

Meanwhile, Ignatiev and Bolgarov created the orders to be sent to General Obadivsky. To be certain that it would by-pass other devices to decode it in Moscow, it was put into the "Bear Hug" code, known only to a few top people in the various military intelligence services and specifically excluded Moscow Center. It had a code priority of Plus-plus AAA prime. Once encoded and on its way, the men went to their homes. Like Levi Shalom's, their sleep was fitful.

Langley, Virginia--Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

10 November

1830 hours

Philip Miller returned to his office at CIA Headquarters in a somber mood. The information in the French intercept was truly disturbing. He was concerned that any need to co-operate with GRU and Mossad would open up an area of problems he would just as soon avoid. More to soothe his own trepidations than for any other reason, Miller had the confidential files on both Colonel-General Grigory Obadivsky and Dr. Zvi Ben Yosef brought to him. Miller was reading Ben Yosef's file when the phone blinked. It was Eric Short.

"We're beginning to get somewhere with the truck business," Short told Miller. "For political reasons, it was decided that materiel hauled from Earle to the Iowa's station would be carried by private trucking companies rather than by Navy vehicles. Neither the Navy nor the Administration, wanted to distress the environmentalists and anti-nuclear people by having a blatantly Naval presence moving this ordnance to the base. It's taken too long to get that place operational, anyway. There are four or five firms which have divided the job among themselves. My staff is checking them out.

"Dick Grant's team is running a check on the panel truck. We both think there's a direct connection between the two vehicles. So far, he's been able to recover the serial number of the body and the engine block. He'll check with the manufacturer and get a complete sales history. I told him to get in touch with both of us when he gets that information."

"Thanks, Eric." Miller ended the conversation.

He resumed reading. There was nothing extraordinary in the file. He noted that Wheatland and Ben Yosef had both been in Ankara at the same time, but efforts to bring them together had not worked out. Ben Yosef's activities, since arriving in the United States, seemed to be entirely in keeping with his appointment as a Visiting Professor at Swarthmore College.

He placed the file on his desk and picked up Obadivsky's file. This one proved to be more interesting. Obadivsky had started out as an Engineering Officer, but proved to have a talent for languages. He was sent to the Voroshilov Military Academy, then to the Soviet Union's equivalent of the United States War and Command Colleges, and finally, for advanced intelligence training. From that point, Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky had moved steadily upward in the Soviet military establishment. He had been a Komsomol member as a teen-ager and had become a party member shortly after graduating from the Military Academy. Most of his postings had been in the Near and Middle East. He was on the staff of the Military Attaché or was the Military Attaché. He had been posted to Afghanistan as Chief of all GRU operations in that conflict until he was wounded and returned to Russia for hospitalization and rehabilitation. Shortly after his return, he was sent to Moscow University to complete graduate studies in Atomic Engineering. His transcript showed that he had taken almost as many courses in Russian Literature as in engineering. Colonel-General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky was a complex man, not simply a well-trained professional soldier. After completing his studies, he had various positions with the Soviet equivalent of the Atomic Energy Commission. It was from that post that he was assigned to ICEVENT.

Miller closed the files and called his secretary to return them, and asked her to call Deputy Director Wheatland in Philadelphia. The phone rang several times before it was answered.

"Yes?"

"Hello, Hank," Miller responded. "I have some information for you. A Kuwaiti freighter sank in storm in the

Straits of Hormuz. It was carrying some interesting cargo--Double Triangle brand cans. I think you had better get together with the others and find out what they know. By now the basic story is out. A French frigate picked up some of the survivors and found the containers floating in the water. The nature of the cargo has not yet been leaked to the press, so far as we know."

"Thanks, Phil," he answered. "I'm meeting with Mary, Obadivsky and Ben Yosef for dinner in about an hour. I've made arrangements with Grant's people here in Philadelphia to use their secure fax line. Would it be possible to send me more information? It might be better if there is something in writing, when we meet with the others."

"O.K. Hank. I'll call Dick and send some data to him by courier for faxing in about half an hour. I have to clear this with the Puzzle Palace, but that shouldn't be a problem. Goodbye."

Miller deliberately had not told Wheatland that the Kuwaiti ship had been sunk by mines, because of his fear of open phone lines, he thought that that information should be forwarded to Wheatland by the secure fax line.

Hank Wheatland slowly placed his phone back on the cradle. He knew how careful the DCI was about information relayed over open lines. In any case, he would go with what he had.

He called Mary to say he would be a few minutes late for dinner, and that he would tell the others himself. He called Obadivsky and Ben Yosef. It was agreed that they would meet an hour later.

Ever since their night together, Mary and Hank had spent as such time as was possible, and prudent, in each other's company. They could not, however, prevent other members of ICEVENT from speculating about their relationship.

At about the same time, Grisha Obadivsky received a call from Hatboro that a special delivery had arrived for him from Moscow. Greatly disturbed, he made trip to the safe house to get the message. When he arrived he opened the "Bear Hug" transmission. He was told that when he met Wheatland and Ben Yosef, they would have information it was not possible to convey to him at the moment, but that it had to do with the Star or Eagle shipments.

Grisha got in touch with Hank and agreed to the change of schedule. He heard a click of a phone being hung up. Slowly, Obadivsky opened the bedroom door. His chauffeur had been listening. Moving quickly, he seized the man by his jacket and lifted him off the floor. While his leg was impaired, his arms were developed and very muscular, so he was able to handle the agent without much strain.

"Listen you nekulturnik, you stupid bastard," he growled. "I have known for some time for whom you work. Now let me tell you the next time I find you eavesdropping, opening my mail, or bugging my phone, I'll send you back to your boss in Moscow with a neat round hole in you head and you balls in your mouth. Who the hell do they think they're messing with? Some snot-nosed kid?"

He dropped the terrified man, slammed the door and returned to Philadelphia to meet the others.

Zvi Ben Yosef had just returned from meeting with A. P. Nefesh, who had told him as much as Mossad headquarters had given. Nefesh made it clear the Zvi was to be completely open with the others. There was nothing to be gained by holding back, since it was certain that all concerned had picked up the uncoded transmission from the French Persian Gulf Command.

It was after nine o'clock when the group finally assembled for dinner. They ate quietly, each man looking for an opening to discuss what each knew and could share with the others.

As was becoming the normal pattern, Mary spoke first. "Why do I feel as if I'm attending a funeral? You three are less communicative than usual. If I'm to be part of this operation, I must know what's going on!"

"I'm sorry, Mary," said Hank. "But we've received some distressing news. The French picked up some nuclear materiel containers with Israeli markings. They were part of a cargo of a Kuwaiti freighter that sank in a storm in the Straits of Hormuz. None of us are sure, yet, what this means, but it's part of the puzzle. I'm waiting for a fax from Washington. The full transmission is on its way here."

Grisha Obadivsky joined the conversation. "I received a message from my superiors in Moscow about the same thing. There is only one problem--my driver is a FSB operative. I found him eavesdropping. I have no idea how much his boss, Chevchevadze, now knows. My instructions are explicit--keep FSB out of this operation. I don't know if our intelligence people broke a French code, or..."

Zvi Ben Yosef broke in. "There was no code. The message was sent in clear language from the French frigate to the French Persian Gulf Command."

"What was found?" inquired Mary.

"Two canisters were attached to flotation devices. Apparently the materiel was to be dropped overboard when the freighter reach the designated port and be retrieved there by whomever was expecting it," Ben Yosef explained. "Is there a standard size container for shipping nuclear material?"

"Oh, yes. It's usually shipped in containers that are the size and shape of oxygen bottles, including all the padding and shielding. You don't need much material to make a nuclear warhead. In fact a student at Princeton, some years back, wrote a paper in which he designed a theoretical hydrogen bomb. Including the atomic material, shaped explosive detonator and arming device, the whole thing was about the size of a medicine ball. At least that was his theory," Mary explained. "How much is missing from each country?"

"We're missing two," said Hank.

"So are we!" exclaimed Grigory Obadivsky.

"Mary," asked Zvi Ben Yosef, "are you saying that there is enough material missing to build two nuclear bombs? If those containers of ours weren't found, the would have been enough for three?"

"There would be," Mary affirmed.

"Thanks for the lesson, Mary. I, for one could have done without it as dinner conversation," Hank said.

"Just doing my job, Hank. I'm the nuclear guru here. Now let's eat," Mary said quietly.

Moscow-Washington-Tel Aviv

11 November

1730 hours (Moscow Time)

Andrei Kronsky waited until late afternoon Moscow time to call Peter Dunstan and Levi Shalom. He had just had his red phone thoroughly examined. There was no bug in the mechanism.

"By now, gentlemen, you must know about the sunken Kuwaiti tramp steamer. I have had serious discussions with my Defense Minister and Chief of Naval Intelligence. We are all puzzled as to how that ship came to be

carrying Israeli nuclear material. It does, however, lend some credence to the supposition that there is a terrorist conspiracy to construct a nuclear device.

"There are several problems. Who is involved? Where was the freighter headed? How is the rest of the material being moved? When will it be detonated? Why is anyone insane enough to risk a nuclear war?" he said as he opened the discussion.

"Andrei, Levi here. First let me assure you and Peter that we were not involved, as a government, in any sale of nuclear material to any Arab nation. We are not suicidal! Secondly, this is perhaps my own bias, but it seems to me that the logical target of such a bomb would be Israel. I have already authorized our agent in Philadelphia to co-operate in any way necessary with your men. I sincerely feel that now is the time for us to bow out and the professionals get to work."

"Levi, Andrei," Peter spoke. "I guess there isn't much for me to add. I've instructed our people in Philadelphia to work closely with your men. My senior intelligence advisors agree with Andrei's people's analysis. I think that we three had better keep close tabs on what is going on. The political and diplomatic ramifications of this issue are too delicate for anyone else to manage. I trust them, you understand, but I feel more comfortable knowing that we have our fingers on the pulse of this operation."

"I see that we're in agreement. I've advised our man in Philadelphia to work with his American and Israeli counterparts. I guess we can step back now," said President Kronsby as he ended the call.

The three national leaders, while reassured, still had doubts as to whether their services could work actually together. A troika was tricky team to handle, but it usually arrived at the end of the journey without tangling the harness.

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

11 November

0700 hours

Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail had completed his morning prayers when the telephone rang.

"Dr. Abu Ismail, here."

"Good morning, Ibrahim. Bob MacPherson. The trip to Paris has been approved. We leave tonight after dinner."

"Thank you, Bob, I shall be ready."

"Please have dinner with Nancy and me. We haven't seen much of each other, socially, of late. This will give us an opportunity to have a quiet time before leaving for the conference. I'll arrange to have your bags taken directly to the airport from your apartment."

"Thank you, Bob. That'll be fine. I'll pack now. We can leave from the hospital together. Who else is coming along?"

"Everyone you suggested at the last staff meeting. Dinner, however, will be just the three of us. Nancy doesn't feel up to arranging a large party on such short notice."

The doctor set about his tasks. He finished his preparations and began to pack a small carry-on case. This was

just what he had hoped for. By his calculations he would be back in Dubai in sufficient time to retrieve the material from the Jebel al Tarik. Within days after that, the Bogusz Kevi should arrive with the rest of the material and the armorers. His original hope was to have the mission completed earlier. However there was still enough time to plan the entire operation properly.

He seated himself in the breakfast nook of the kitchen and sat down to the meal his servant, Yusuf al-Khali, had already prepared and set on the table. Abu Ismail turned on the radio. Never trusting the local news broadcasts, he had tuned the instrument to the BBC Overseas Service. He listened with scant attention to the football scores and tennis match results while waiting for the news summary. As the scores ended, the announcer introduced the news.

"This is the BBC Overseas Service, Roger Summersby speaking. It has just been learned that sometime during the night, local time, a Kuwaiti freighter, the Jebel al Tarik, bound for a number of Gulf ports was sunk by a rogue mine, or mines, in the Straits of Hormuz. Preliminary accounts indicate that the French frigate L'Arlesienne, assisted by the minesweeper HMS Spenser, rescued most of the crew. Many suffered severe injuries or exposure.

"French Naval sources state that two packages of nuclear material, with Israeli markings, may have been found floating along with other items of the ship's cargo. Israel denies the possible theft of nuclear material from its inventory. We shall bring you further information as it becomes available.

"Last night, the Prime Minister announced..."

An agitated Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail reached over and switched the radio off. Glancing at his watch, he called to Yusuf to have his car brought round, took his carry-on case and hurriedly left the apartment. The car was waiting at the door when he emerged. Abu Ismail drove to his office as rapidly as traffic permitted. Parking the car in his assigned spot, he entered the building and strode down the corridor to his office.

He picked up the phone and dialed a number. There was a busy signal. The doctor slammed the phone back on its cradle and began to fondle his strand of worry beads. His hands trembled with agitation and frustration. Why should that phone be busy? It was essential that he get through and set up a meeting in Paris with the others. This had to be done as soon as the Ibn Rosht General Hospital people arrived in Paris. There would be no problem getting away from the other physicians.

Abu Ismail sat back in his chair, closed his eyes and reviewed the situation. It was difficult, but not hopeless. He knew that there was still more than enough bomb quality material with what was already on hand, and what was on board the Bogusz Kevi, to construct a nuclear device with the power to do the job. So for the moment, he could put the problem aside and attend to his rounds.

The physician stood up, changed from his suit jacket into his lab coat and left the office. He and the other members of the Nuclear Medicine staff proceeded to move from patient to patient, reviewing charts, changing treatment plans, and attending to the myriad details associated with his duties. He marveled at his ability to completely compartmentalize his life and tasks, so that he could devote full attention to immediate matters.

Philadelphia

11 November

1045 hours

November 11--Veterans Day. The streets of Philadelphia were strung with bunting. The traditional parade route, down Broad Street, around City Hall, over Chestnut Street and terminating at Independence Hall, was

crowded with people. Hank, Mary, Zvi and Grisha were given passes to the Independence Mall area from which they could watch the parade.

Obadivsky had never seen an American parade. The Russian officer was most impressed with the absence of a show of military might. There were, of course, military bands: a company of men and women from the various Armed Forces and cadets from the Military, Naval, Coast Guard and Air Force Academies. Most of the marchers were veterans of the several wars the United States had fought in the twentieth century.

Zvi Ben Yosef recalled his service in the United States Army Intelligence Corps. He watched, sadly, as his fellow veterans marched past. It was this military service which had had a great deal to do with his decision to emigrate to Israel. He felt that some of the skills he had acquired in the Army could be put to good use in Israel, perhaps in some future time.

Hank had served in Navy Intelligence in the Pentagon, where he had first met Philip Miller. Miller had recruited him for the CIA when his tour of duty ended. For him the march past recalled unmarked graves in half a dozen outposts. A lump rose in his throat at the march-past.

Although Mary Mallory was the only member of the quartet who had not seen military service, she too, was moved by the parade. She had a strong sense of country and patriotism.

As the Liberty Bell rang its broken tone eleven times, the marchers came to an abrupt halt. A lone bugler stood in front of Independence Hall; a second, at the Liberty Bell. The bugler at Independence Hall sounded the first notes of Taps. He was echoed by his partner at the Liberty Bell. The sound and echo continued through the entire call. The marchers stood silent at salute or at present arms. A flight of aircraft from the various services as well as several veteran airplanes passed overhead together, then one peeled away, leaving the rest in the traditional "Lost Man" formation--one position empty. It was exactly 1100 hours. For a long moment, everything was still.

As the last notes of Taps reverberated, the foursome looked at each other. Of all those present, only they knew that the bugle call might be prophetic. As Vice President Elliott was introduced, they left the crowd and walked across the street for lunch at the Philosophical Society.

In the private dining room each ordered a sandwich, soup and coffee, except for Grisha Obadivsky. The staff knew his preferences. He was served a pot of very strong tea with lump sugar. He took a lump of sugar, placed it between his teeth and lip and strained the tea through the sugar.

Mary Mallory began laughing. "I'm sorry, Grisha, but you remind me of my Grandfather Malenovsky!" She gasped and drew a deep breath. "But at least you didn't pour your tea into the saucer, as he always did!"

"Oh, you mean like this?" asked the Russian as he poured some tea into his saucer and lifted it to his lips. He too, laughed. The tea dripped over the side of the saucer onto his napkin. The solemn mood was broken.

The party held amiable, quiet conversation while waiting for the table to be cleared. Soon, there was a discreet knock on the door. The assistant director entered and handed notes to each of the three men. Obadivsky and Ben Yosef excused themselves and left.

Mary turned and looked quizzically at Hank, who handed her the note. "Now?" she sighed.

"Now."

They got their coats and walked the four blocks to the FBI Office in the Federal Court Building.

Philadelphia

FBI Regional Office

1315 hours

After identifying themselves and passing through the metal detector, Mary and Hank went up to the office. Philip Miller motioned to them to sit down.

"Hank," Miller began, "a Kuwaiti tramp steamer was sunk yesterday in the Straits of Hormuz by a couple of rogue mines. We found out from the French Navy that the cargo contained Israeli nuclear material. At least now we know where some of the contraband has turned up.

"The FBI and ONI have traced the missing American materiel to an outfit called Mid-East Air Freight. It's owned by a naturalized Palestinian-American named Farid Attiyeh who's been shipping nuclear material to a hospital in Dubai. Last night, Dubai called him.

"The head of Nuclear Medicine at that hospital is headed to a conference in Paris. Mary, you're to attend that conference as our nuclear expert. Here are your new passports. You'll be flying as Dr. and Mrs. Henry Lyons. Your flight leaves Newark at 6:05 p.m.

On the way out, Mary whispered, "Mrs. Henry Lyons. It has a satisfying sound, Hank. Who knows, we might make it for real." Hank leaned down and, in the privacy of the elevator, kissed her thoroughly and emphatically.

Mary and Hank took a taxi to the Franklin Inn. In their rooms, each found a set of luggage, emblazoned with their respective new initials, HL and ML, and slightly scuffed. Like their luggage, the passports had a well-used look about them. The visas and other stamps showed Dr. and Mrs. Lyons to be well-traveled. His passport identified him as a college professor. Mary was listed on hers as a consultant. Their address was that of a CIA safe house in Park Forest, Illinois.

At 9:30 the following morning, a limousine was waiting at the side entrance to the Inn. Hank suggested that Mary take out her new passport and examine it.

Philadelphia

The Israeli Consulate-General

1330 hours

Zvi's note instructed him to come to the Consulate for an urgent meeting. He walked down Fifth Street to Walnut, where he took a cab to his destination. On his way he realized that he had not read the morning papers.

He arrived at the meeting place and found his superior, the rather agitated Ari Meron, pacing the length and width of the conference room. Then he spun on his heel and turned and glared at Zvi, who had been aping his movements.

Zvi grinned, "Mr. Nefesh, I presume?"

"Look, Zvika, this is no joke. I guess you haven't seen the papers or heard the radio. Remember that nuclear material we were missing? Well, it was found floating in the wreckage of a Kuwaiti freighter that was sunk by

a mine in the Straits of Hormuz. A French Navy patrol boat found it. The damnfool captain of the ship radioed French Fleet Headquarters over an open line. It was picked up and put on the air by Reuters."

Zvi sat down abruptly.

"I got a call from our boss," Meron continued. "He wants you to get back to Tel Aviv as soon as possible. That was followed by a call, directly to me from Levi Shalom. However it's managed, you are to co-operate fully and he emphasized fully, with your American and Russian colleagues. Motti Arielson, from Shin Bet, told the boss that he was sending a man to Bahrain to question the shipwreck survivors.

"We need you to head up our part of this operation. We don't particularly care what story you cook up for the people at Swarthmore, but we need you back home within seventy-two hours. I'm sure you and Sheva will work it out. You're a professional and she understands that. As soon as you get things organized, call me. A ticket will be waiting for you."

Zvi thought for a few moments. "We're couple of weeks away from a semester break. My seminar is a two semester course. I'll simply give them the reading material for the remainder of the course. For the next semester I'll tell them that in the tradition of the College, part of the work will be independent study projects. As for my wife, I can simply say that I'm being called home for an urgent project and that she is welcome to stay at Swarthmore or come back with me."

Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

1600 hours

Mechanically, Zvi filled, tamped and lit his pipe as he walked down the tree-lined street from the train station to his home at the far end of the campus. While he did not appreciate the short notice, he understood the urgency.

Elisheva Ben Yosef was standing in the doorway as her husband walked up the path. From his demeanor and his voice when he had called her, she could sense that something important was troubling him.

"Coffee?" she offered as Zvi came through the door.

He nodded and followed her into the kitchen, where a fresh pot of coffee was brewing.

"So?"

"Just had a meeting with Nefesh. I've got to go home. They want me to head up a new, important operation. It'll be up to you as to which you would prefer, to stay here or come home. I'm not sure how long this will take."

'Sheva put the coffee carafe on the table, took two mugs out of the cupboard and carefully poured the coffee. Then she sat down opposite her husband and asked, quietly, "Is it about that Israeli nuclear material they found?"

"You know better than to ask me a question like that!" he said, sharply. Elisheva blanched.

"I'm sorry 'Sheva," Zvi apologized. "I shouldn't bark at you. Right now all you need to know is that I must go back and you have the choice, as I said, to stay or to go."

Elisheva Ben Yosef looked over her coffee cup at her husband. "I would love to come home with you, darling,

but I think that until the semester break, I should remain here. I'll come home then, and if necessary, I'll stay. For appearances' sake, this is the better approach. This way, we can tell everyone that you had to go back home to take care of some urgent family business and that you'll be back, hopefully, in time for the next semester. I will miss you, Zvika. Be careful."

Zvi leaned across the table and kissed her, then reached behind him for the telephone and called Swarthmore College President Elbert Hunter. They agreed to meet in the President's office within the hour.

President Hunter greeted him at the office door. He listened carefully to Ben Yosef's request.

"Of course, I understand, Dr. Ben Yosef. It must be somewhat unnerving to have a problem arise half a world away. You may leave as soon as you can take care of the remaining matters with your classes and seminar," said Hunter.

Then in a more informal tone, he added, "I'm sorry to see you leave on such short notice. Please tell Elisheva that we'll do what ever we can to help her, if she needs anything."

The next afternoon and the morning of the following day, Zvi Ben Yosef met with his students, distributed open book final examinations to the classes, and gave instructions for acceptable independent study projects to his seminar students.

As soon as he had accomplished these tasks, he went home to get his bags. Elisheva drove him to Philadelphia International Airport. After a wait, he boarded the afternoon flight to Tel Aviv.

Philadelphia-Hatboro

11 November

1300 hours

Colonel-General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky opened the note handed to him by the assistant director, went to the men's room, read it, ripped it into strips, and flushed it down the toilet. Then he went to the outer dining-room, cut short his chauffeur's lunch, and was driven out the Schuylkill Expressway to the safe house. Traffic was light. The trip went swiftly.

At the house he dismissed the car and went up the front steps, limping slightly. The weather was affecting his wounded leg. As he unlocked the door to the vestibule, Obadivsky detected the unmistakable aroma of Russian cigarette tobacco. He was furious. The standing instructions to the code clerk and her husband were never under any circumstances to buy, or use Russian products. They were to be the stereotypical lower middle class American couple.

His fury evaporated as he opened the door and found his old comrade, Field Marshal Vladimir Grygorivich Ignatiev standing in the living room doorway. Ignatiev was dressed in well cut civilian clothes. The two men embraced, stepped back and embraced each other again.

"Vladi," he stammered, "What the hell are you doing here? It's good to see you again, old friend!"

"Hello, Grisha,. It's good to see you too, old dog. But this is no social visit. Andrei Pavlovich wanted me to brief you in person. It may not have been reported in the American press as yet, but an Kuwaiti tramp steamer was sunk by a rogue mine in the Straits of Hormuz. In the debris, the French frigate that rescued the crew found two canisters of Israeli marked nuclear material.

"So far we have no idea who is behind this. In fact, the whole thing might be a FSB pot-stirrer. Chevchevadze and his boys might think it's too quiet in that area since the Iraq-Kuwait cease fire. In any case, Kronsky, Lenka Bolgarov. and I feel that this is a job we want GRU to handle. In a couple of days, we will send Pyotr Satinsky to replace you, temporarily, of course. You will be called home because of a severe family crisis. Pyotr Vissionarovich was given the same tale so he won't screw up. Your shadow will remain behind to cover Satinsky. Satinsky is clean. He's a bona fide physicist. We couldn't come up with anything on him that the Dimitri could use. You're to return to Moscow, with me, on November 14th. In the meantime, you will have an opportunity to show an old friend a part of the United States he has not seen."

"What do I do in Moscow?" asked an astonished Obadivsky.

"You will visit your nephew Viktor Leventov for a few days. He was injured on a training flight. You'll be briefed and then we're sending you to Israel to work with Zvi Ben Yosef on the nuclear matter. There was a conference call among President Dunstan, Prime Minister Shalom and Andrei Pavlovich. They decided that this needs to be a joint effort among the three nations. We may not completely trust each other, but we can't take a chance that the world will blow up."

Obadivsky stood up. "Well, old friend, why don't we start sightseeing right now? Bring your bags. We'll go back to my hotel and get accommodations for you. For dinner tonight, I'll take you to as fine a restaurant as I can find. On your expense account, of course!"

Ignatiev exploded in laughter. "You old bastard. You haven't changed a bit! You're still a first class schnorrer!"

The Yiddish word for moocher slipped unnoticed from his lips. This was one of the few reminders that his family was originally Jewish. His grandfather, an Old Bolshevik, and his father, a Hero of the 1917 Soviet Revolution, had survived Stalin's purges. As a result, Ignatiev was able to remain in, and eventually, head the Russian Armed Forces.

The two old comrades left the safe house in Obadivsky's car and were driven to the Franklin Inn. In the evening, Obadivsky and Ignatiev went to a French restaurant in Society Hill called L'Arlesienne. Ignatiev smiled as they entered the establishment. He had not yet told Obadivsky the name of the French vessel that had rescued the seamen from the Kuwaiti ship. That could wait.

They were ushered to a table with a good view of the room. Ever cautious, they sat so that no one could pass behind them. The waiters were courteous. Obadivsky had established a reputation as knowledgeable about food and wine, and as a substantial but not overly generous tipper. For the next two days, Ignatiev and Obadivsky walked around Philadelphia.

Grisha took his friend to all the important historical sites and to the Philadelphia Art Museum. His driver was bored stiff.

They ate in various restaurants from the most expensive to the most ordinary neighborhood places, including one or two Russian restaurants. Finally, on the morning of November fourteenth, they took the short helicopter flight from Philadelphia to Kennedy Airport, where they boarded the Aeroflot flight to Moscow.

Paris, France

Charles de Gaulle Airport

13 November

0740 hours

The plane rolled to a stop at the discharge port. Hank and Mary picked up their carry-on luggage and moved toward the door marked DOUANE-IMMIGRATION-PASSAGERS D'ARRIVEE.

Their passports were checked and stamped. As they moved to the luggage carousel, they noticed a man carrying a sign that read: "Dr. and Mrs. Lyons". They moved out of line to meet the sign carrier, a slightly built Frenchman. After helping them clear customs and retrieving their luggage, he led them to a waiting car.

Hank smiled broadly as he and Mary entered the cab. Seated in the far corner of the back seat was an old co-worker, Ronald Grover, the Paris CIA station chief.

"I didn't expect you to meet us, Ron. The boss didn't tell me that you would be part of the reception committee," said a delighted Hank.

"Phil Miller called and told me to expect you. I thought it prudent to meet you here, rather than at the pension in the 14th Arrondissement which we own. How about introducing me to your wife, Hank?"

"Hank, your taste is exquisite," said Grover as he shook hands with Mary. "But what happened to hers?" Hank ignored the remark.

"Now let's get you people to your lodgings and let you freshen up. At ten o'clock, meet me at the Hotel Scribe. Enjoy Paris, mes amis." Grover gave the driver the address of the pension, and left the cab. He got into his own car, a vintage Peugeot and followed them at a safe distance, to make sure that neither he, nor they, were being followed.

Speaking over his shoulder the driver said, "My name is Eduard Didier. M. Grover has assigned me as your driver during your stay in Paris."

Hank and Mary moved closer to one another and held hands. It was the most natural thing to do at the moment. Didier moved deftly into the traffic flow. Within a short time they arrived at their destination. It was exactly like hundreds of similar accommodations in Paris, shabby enough to look "quaint", comfortable enough to be satisfactory, and unobtrusive.

Didier took their luggage out from the car and carried the bags to the concierge's cage. "Bon jour, Monsieur, Madame. You are expected. Your rooms are ready," he said as he handed them their keys and called the porter to take their baggage to their rooms.

The concierge was of middle height, stout, with a large flourishing mustache. His uniform was clean, slightly shabby, and frayed at the sleeves. His gray hair was parted exactly in the middle and heavily pomaded. His English was slightly accented.

Hank and Mary followed the porter to the second floor, where he ceremoniously unlocked the door, placed the bags in the room and stood waiting. Hank reached into his wallet and gave the porter a generous tip.

"Darling," Mary called, "Would you mind taking out my blue knit dress? It's in my carry-on. I'm going to shower. On second thought, why don't you lay out our clothes and join me in the shower. Remember--from our college days, 'Save water--shower with a friend.'"

Hank laughed as he laid out their clothes, stripped and joined Mary in the shower. As they stood under the hot, running water and soaped each other's backs, standing face-to-face, they kissed and ran their hands over each other's bodies. Only the pressure of time kept them from making love on the spot. Rinsing clean, they

stepped out of the shower and were toweling dry when the phone rang.

Hank answered. "Oh, hello, Ronnie. Yes, just a minute. Let me get a pen and paper. What was that address again? Right, we'll be there in an hour. "

"Now what?" asked Mary as she finished drying her hair and proceeded to dress.

"Evidently things are moving more rapidly than we thought. I still can't figure out what's going on and just how we fit into the operation, but I guess we'll find out.

"One nice thing, Ronnie says we're meeting at a four-star Michelin restaurant. He's treating. Somehow, I get the impression that whatever else is happening, he thinks that you and I are really married and this is a working honeymoon."

"I wish it was, Hank! When this is over, maybe we should think about it, seriously. We were idiots not to do it long ago."

Hank shrugged his shoulders and finished dressing. His mind was occupied with the issues they would discuss with Grover. Anything else would have to be put aside, including his answer to Mary's proposal.

Hank had begun to think of himself in his new identity. It was one of the earliest survival techniques he had been taught--once your identity is changed, be that person. It was fortunate that neither of their given names had been altered. The probability was that the DCI didn't want to compromise them, especially since Mary was a complete novice.

"Mary", he cautioned, "from now on you must think of yourself as Mary Lyons. For now, Mary Mallory doesn't exist. Whenever you are addressed, if you are introduced, or if you need to give your name to anyone, remember your new identity. Live her, think her, be her. One day our lives may literally depend on it!"

Mary assented with a nod of her head. Mary Mallory did not exist. Besides, she thoroughly enjoyed the idea of being Mrs. Henry Lyons.

Eduard Didier pulled up at a restaurant just outside Neuilly-sur-Seine, and parked the car beside a maroon Lancia. Hank and Mary went inside.

The Paris station chief was waiting at a table toward the rear of the establishment, facing the door and away from the windows. Again, elementary but necessary precautions. He rose from his seat as the Lyonses approached the table. His greeting was friendly. To other patrons, they appeared to be old friends enjoying a drink and a late dinner.

Ronald Grover said, "I took the liberty of ordering some cheese, bread and wine. The food on the flight is fine, but I thought you might be hungry. Besides, I am, and I couldn't very well sit here and starve, could I?" he asked as he patted his stomach. Ronald Grover was approaching the corpulence indicating a love of fine food and relative physical inactivity.

"We wouldn't think of it! Would we, darling?" smiled Mary.

"Of course not, Ronnie. Remember that for us it's almost lunchtime anyway. Our internal clocks are still on Eastern Standard Time. You chose the place, you choose the menu. I trust your gastronomic judgment, friend. It's always been impeccable," said Hank.

Their host laughed and motioned to the waiter. "I took the liberty of ordering before you came."

The trio ate in silence. With dinner over, the conversation turned to their work. Ronald Grover unlocked a small attaché case which he had placed under the table. He withdrew a buff colored file folder, put it on the cleared table and opened it. Leafing through the several sheets of paper, he handed a single sheet to Hank and another one to Mary. They studied the papers and handed them back to Grover.

"All of which doesn't tell us why you dragged us out of the pension, changed our plans, even though the meal was excellent, and had us drive all the way out here," queried Mary. "I'm not used to this cloak-and-dagger routine. Remember me? I'm just a convenient cover for whatever you two are up to."

"Relax, darling," soothed Hank. "I'm sure Ronnie will tell us just what the hell is going on." His voice had an edge to it that Mary had rarely heard.

"It's this simple," said Grover. "Someone was following us as we drove to your pension. Right now we don't know whom--or why. It may have been a coincidence. Rather than take a chance on something going wrong, I changed the plans. problem, at which point, Mrs. Lyons, your expertise in nuclear physics and Hank's in intelligence analysis. Now let's relax over another coffee before we go our separate ways."

Ronald Grover motioned to the waiter, ordered, lit a cigar and sat back in his chair. Hank and Mary joined him in a last cup of coffee.

The trip back to Paris was uneventful. Mary dozed and fell asleep with her head on Hank's shoulder.

"Wake up, honey. We're home," Hank said in a low voice. Mary yawned and stretched as she half awoke. Hank helped her out of the car. They went to the concierge's cage. He handed them their key and entered their arrival time in a special entry book on his desk.

Once in their quarters, Mary kicked off her shoes and collapsed into a soft chair. Hank moved behind her and began to massage her neck. The muscles were tense. As he kneaded them, they relaxed. Mary reached back, pulled his head down and kissed him. He moved around to the front of the chair and sat on an ottoman.

"Hank," she asked. "Was I pushing Ronnie too hard at lunch I still don't know the rules of this game, you know. Please give me a crash course in spying. Help me, darling. I don't want to mess up anything because I'm new at this!"

"Basically," he explained, "you know as much as I do about the operation. We'll be getting orders from time to time which may not have an apparent logical connection with one another. What you need to know, honey, is to keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, trust no one you don't know, and be suspicious of most of those that you do! In this business, everybody spies on everybody. Sometimes we share and pool information. Most of the time, we don't. Right now, we--Zvi, Grisha and I, may be up to our asses in alligators. Just remember that our job is to drain the swamp, so we have no choice but to work together. Besides, evidently all of our illustrious leaders want it that way, for now. The Company doesn't lay out money for plane tickets and set up alternate identities for the fun of it. For the moment, that's where we are."

Moscow

17 November

1100 Hours

Colonel-General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky, now in uniform, was being driven from a Military Hospital just outside Moscow to join his comrades, Marshal Ignatiev and Admiral Bolgarov, in the Admiral's office in the Kremlin.

The carefully planned cover story, that he had been called home because of a family emergency was accepted by everyone, including a skeptical Chevchevadze.

The FSB, had, as a matter of course, checked the story. What they found was a nephew, a young Russian Air Force officer, Captain Viktor Vissionarovich Leventov, Obadivsky's late wife's brother's son. The young man's father had been killed on a botched KGB-GRU joint mission. Capt. Leventov, a navigator, had been injured in a plane crash while on a routine training flight in Belarus.

The navigator had not seen his uncle, the Colonel-General, in several years. Grisha was properly solicitous of the injured young airman. He came to visit him several times over the course of next few days after his arrival on the 14th of November. On November 17th, Grisha came to the hospital to tell his nephew that he was leaving. Victor Vissionarovich thanked his uncle and wished him well.

The car pulled up to the entrance of the Red Square office complex. The driver stepped out and held the door open for his passenger. Obadivsky, ever cautious, had not uttered a word during the drive from the Hospital. He had followed that practice wherever, and whenever, he was being driven. Even though the new driver had been chosen by his comrades, there was always the chance that he may have been compromised.

Obadivsky returned the driver's salute and hurried into the building. Snow had begun to fall heavily, and his uniform coat was not as warm as he would have liked. Once in the building, however he took off the coat--the corridor was overheated. He showed his ID at the reception desk and was admitted to the elevator bank which led to the offices on the upper floors. When Grisha stepped out of the elevator he bumped into Dimitri Chevchevadze who had just left Ignatiev's headquarters.

"Well, good morning, Grisha! And how is your nephew? Recovering, I hope? It must feel fine to be home away from the decadent Americans," he said as he extended his hand.

"Oh shut up, Dimitri. We both know you don't give any more of damn about my nephew than you did about his father, when he was killed after your boys blew the mission. You'd like nothing better than to be able to return to the West and settle in that lovely condominium you own in the Canary Islands!" Grisha growled, as he pushed past a startled Chevchevadze and into the outer office.

Once inside, he gave his coat to the orderly and requested him to inform Marshal Ignatiev of his arrival.

"Field Marshal Ignatiev wishes you to go right in, sir. You are expected," said the orderly.

Inside the office he broke out in loud, almost uncontrollable, laughter. Catching his breath, he recounted to the others his meeting with Dimitri Chevchevadze.

"I wish I could have seen his expression when you dropped that bit about the condominium. That's supposed to be top secret," gasped Ignatiev as he wiped his eyes. Bolgarov roared with laughter and shook his head in affirmation. The laughter subsided in a few moments.

Ignatiev reached into his desk and handed Obadivsky a copy of a message from someone in Bahrain, sent to an office in the Ibn Rosht General Hospital in Dubai. It recounted some of the already known information about the sinking, but mentioned that "Iskanderani is dead." Iskanderani was not otherwise identified.

"I don't know who sent this to Dubai, but I know who forwarded it here," said Obadivsky, after reading it. "GRU has an operative in the United Arab Emirates. A very competent woman, Khalifa Hasan. She's been in Dubai for several years. Hasan works at the hospital. Her main task is to collect information about military movements in that area, especially about men and material going to Iraq and Iran, and whatever else she can find. Most of her reports are made when she is on holiday and can get the data to us without anyone else's

knowledge. When did this arrive?"

"Late last night," answered Ignatiev. "It wasn't even in difficult code, but it was over military lines. I guess your person assumed that there was no need to do anything more than just to forward the report. At least it solves part of the puzzle. We now know where the ship was headed, but we don't know if there is any connection with the sinking, and we don't know who this Iskanderani may have been."

"We've sent a Naval Intelligence team to Bahrain to see what they can sniff out. The French Fleet Commander has been very quiet about the whole thing, even though Havas, the French News Agency and Reuters have been bleating like a couple of sick sheep about the whole affair", stated Bolgarov.

"What about Tass?" inquired Obadivsky, as he handed the sheet of paper back to the Defense Minister.

"President Kronsky issued the usual statement blasting the 'international gangsters', but otherwise he's keeping a low profile," Ignatiev said.

"And the Americans?"

"Their press is making the expected noises, depending on who owns which of the news media. President Dunstan has declined comment until 'the investigation is completed.'" Ignatiev continued.

"The Israelis have been denying any sort of connection with the affair. They claim that their logo and other data were put on the canisters by 'parties otherwise unknown'. The Arab world has, as expected, claimed it as a Zionist conspiracy against the freedom-loving Palestinians. You know, the usual bullshit, all the way around."

"So?" asked Obadivsky.

"So now you will be temporarily re-assigned. The cover here is that you will be a member of a Special Task Force On Peaceful Uses Of Exotic Nuclear Material, which is meeting in Tel Aviv. You'll be working in Tel Aviv with Zvi Ben Yosef. You leave tomorrow on Aeroflot for Zurich. Once there you will transfer to a Swiss Air flight to Tel Aviv where the latest round of plenary sessions of the agency will be taking place. In Tel Aviv, you will go with the rest of the passengers to the International Arrivals Lounge. Ben Yosef will meet you. We believe that by now even Moscow Center has some inkling of what is going on, but Kronsky still wants to keep them out of it. That is the agreement we have with the Americans and the Israelis," said the Defense Minister.

Ignatiev and Bolgarov shook hands with Obadivsky, who shrugged his shoulders and left the inner office, retrieved his coat, and asked the orderly to have his car brought round.

Within a matter of minutes, Grisha Obadivsky was returned to his quarters in the Moscow Garrison Headquarters, where he packed his bag and prepared to leave his beloved homeland once more. This time, he packed several novels and volumes of poetry. It might be some time before he would return. As he packed he mused over the fact that no matter how brutal Matya Rossiya (Mother Russia) was to her children they still loved her. They were able to differentiate the land from the regime--whether Communist or Czarist. It was one of the many ways in which the people retained their essential dignity and sanity.

Tel Aviv

Ben-Gurion Airport

14 November

1400 Hours

An exhausted Zvi Ben Yosef stepped off El Al Flight 14 onto the tarmac. Because there were two colicky babies on board, passengers in the First Class cabin had had little sleep. Those in the tourist cabin, including Zvi, had none. He put on his sunglasses and almost tripped over his superior, Ari Meron. The other man laughed as he steadied Ben Yosef.

"Take it easy, Zvika. Relax, you're home!"

"Relax, hell. If I relax, I'll fall down. Does the Law of Return specify that all children under a year who come here must cry their way to the Promised Land? We had two squalling brats on board! Right now, I'd like get some sleep before I do anything intellectual," moaned Zvi. "After all these years, I still can't handle jet lag."

"That can be arranged. I'll have the car take you home to Kfar Saba. We'll want you at the office at about nine o'clock tomorrow morning. We need you wide awake and in full possession of what ever faculties you have left," quipped Meron.

They walked over to the car which was waiting at the side of the Terminal. Zvi's luggage had already been placed in the trunk of the car. He entered and began nodding. He suddenly recognized the back of the head of his driver. It was his eldest son, Pesach.

"Shalom, Abba," Pesach laughed. "They let me out of class to come and pick you up. Dan is waiting at home. How is Imma? Why are you here alone? Abba, abba?"

Zvi's head had fallen on his chest. He was sound asleep. Pesach drove down the road from the airport, through several towns where newly built three and four story apartment buildings and older single homes stood side by side, their solar panels reflecting the sun which warmed the hot water heaters on the roofs. He made his way into Kfar Saba, a suburb of Tel Aviv, where he and his parents lived. Both Pesach and Dan had been born and grown up there.

Pesach pulled the car into the carport. His brother burst out of the doorway and ran over to the car. The squeaking car door roused Zvi who stumbled out of the car and went into the house, both boys questioning him. He waved off their inquiries and headed straight for the bathroom.

Zvi stripped, dropping his clothes on the bathroom floor and stepped into the shower. He stood silently under the running water for several minutes. Then he reached for the soap and began to sing. His voice was no better in Kfar Saba than it had been in Swarthmore. The only difference was that without Elisheva there was no one to stop him. He reached for a towel, dried himself and walked directly into his bedroom. Once there, he collapsed, nude, onto the bed and fell sound asleep.

It was almost ten o'clock when he woke up. "Pesh? Dani? Are you still here? I'm sorry if I conked out on you, but I couldn't do anything else. As soon as I get dressed, why don't we go out and get some dinner? I'm starved!"

His sons came into the room and sat down on the bed while he dressed. At twenty-seven, Pesach, the older son, was a career soldier. The Army was sending him to Hebrew University to study linguistics and advanced mathematics. He had inherited Elisheva's dark handsomeness. Like her, he was slender, of middle height with jet black, curly hair and green eyes.

Dan, five years younger than Pesach, was studying computer science at the Haifa Technion--Israel's M.I.T. He had Zvi's stocky build and a lighter complexion. After his compulsory three years in the army, Dan had decided that he was more interested in computers than in guns. More outgoing, boisterous and social than his

older brother, Dan was always falling in, and out, of love.

Zvi finished dressing, walked over and hugged and kissed both his sons. Arm-in-arm they left the house. Dani looked at his watch. It was almost eleven.

Wordlessly he guided the trio down the street, toward the only place that was still open, Kapulsky's. In a few minutes, they were seated. The place was not quite a restaurant, nor an ice cream parlor, but a combination of both. The waitress came took their orders.

"Nu?" chorused the boys.

"I'm here, because I'm here. Your mother isn't because she isn't. Something came up and it became necessary for me to return. You know better than to ask me for details."

"Does it have anything to do with that freighter?" asked Pesach.

At that moment the food arrived. Zvi took advantage of this and began eating. The boys could read their father well. They had learned over the years that some questions were not going to be answered. Zvi had always tried to keep his family sheltered. Even his wife had only a sketchy understanding of what it was he did.

After dinner, Zvi and his sons returned. Pesach and Dan went to their rooms. Buses had stopped running, so there was no way for them to get back to their apartments in Jerusalem and Haifa.

Zvi took out his pipe, lit it, and moved out onto the porch, where he mulled over what he had been told in Philadelphia. What ever it was, he knew that it was not going to be an easy assignment. But, then, his assignments never were. Resignedly, he sat on the porch swing and rocked back and forth, looking at the stars. It became chilly. He stood up, knocked the dottle out of his pipe and went inside. The morning would arrive soon enough.

Tel Aviv

15 November

0900 hours

Zvi Ben Yosef traveled from his home by public transportation. Driving to and parking in Tel Aviv was horrendous. The bus was crowded with the usual array of workers, housewives going shopping, tourists, and soldiers returning to the Central Bus Station to get back to their units.

He arrived at an office building on Ibn Gabirol Street that had seen better days. The elevator was rickety and swayed slightly as it wheezed its way up to the third floor. Zvi stood at the back of the lift, amused by the thought that as soon as he entered the building it was as if he had never left. He got off the elevator, went to the door marked ENTER and knocked. In a few seconds, he was admitted to what might have been the ante-room of any slightly seedy business operation. There was a desk occupied by a middle aged receptionist, a worn leather sofa, a magazine rack with periodicals, the most recent one six or seven months old. The receptionist sent him into the inner office. Zvi smiled. In all the years he had been in the service, this same receptionist had never spoken more than a dozen words to him.

Ari Meron looked up from the files on his desk, motioned Ben Yosef to a chair in front of him, passed him a duplicate set of files and continued reading. Zvi picked up the file and read them. Without thinking, he reached into his pocket, withdrew his pipe, tobacco, tamper, lighter and a pencil. He placed the papers and pencil on the desk and set about the ritual of lighting his pipe. Once that was completed, he resumed reading

the file, making marginal notes.

"I'm sitting-in for the boss," said Meron. "He's in Jerusalem meeting with the P.M. Besides, I guess I know as much about this mess as he does, perhaps more, but that's neither here nor there. What do you think of the stuff you've just read?"

"Well, Ari, the report certainly seems full enough. At least Alfar Habibi's information tells us who is getting the cargo. Maybe there is something to the Al 'Suyuf Al Kharb business, after all," reflected Ben Yosef. "What do we know about Dr. Abu Ismail?"

"Nothing much. Alfar has been working for him for several years. This is the first time the doctor seems to have stepped out of character. Up to now, his nuclear research has been quite open. He's in Paris now at some sort of International Conference on Nuclear Medicine and Computerization. It's quite legitimate. Several Israeli doctors are there, too." Meron offered.

"What's next, for me?" queried Zvi.

"Obadivsky is due here in a few days. He'll be working with you from this end. In the meantime, your old office is available. The boss will be back from Jerusalem tomorrow. We should have a better idea of what's going on when he gets back.

"For the present, chaver, relax, get to know your kids again. Get back into the routine, my friend. I have a feeling that before this is over all hell will break loose--or we--and the rest of the world may no longer exist!"

The two parted company, Meron to his other duties and Zvi to his office to set things up for future operations. He called for all the information both from Mossad and Shin Bet regarding the theft of the material from Dimona and the sinking of the Jebel-el.-Tarik. Shortly later, a shamefaced clerk appeared at the door.

"I'm sorry, sir," he mumbled. "I can't get you those documents. You don't have a current security clearance."

The clerk retreated into the hallway before Zvi had a chance to recover from his shock and anger. He bolted out of his office and down the corridor to Meron's office, cursing volubly. By the time he reached the office, Meron was outside his own door, looking sheepish.

"Just blame it on a bureaucratic error, Zvika. The request wasn't filed until the other day and I forgot to pick up the IDs. Now, stop fuming and come in here. Your clearance will be up in a few minutes. Then I want you to go home! Get the hell out of here and take the day off. Don't argue with me on this one. I'm ordering you out! Besides, I want a rested and coherent Zvi Ben Yosef at the meeting. You'll have plenty of time to review. The meeting's at 3:30 tomorrow in the boss's office."

A mollified Zvi left the office and took a bus back home. Zvi tried to take a nap, but couldn't relax. An active man, he had problems doing nothing. He did, however, find his garden a relaxing place to work. Zvi changed into old jeans and tried to repair the damage done by weather and neglect since he had left for the United States. In other stressful situations, the garden had always served as a refuge.

Zvi was on his knees, weeding, when the phone rang. He stood up, wiped his hands and moved toward the door. If 'Sheva had been home, he would have removed his shoes before entering the house, but since she wasn't, he didn't. Zvi reached the phone just before an exasperated Elisheva said, "I was just about to hang up! Where were you? It's eight o'clock in the morning, here. I just woke up, and I miss you!"

"I was just working in the garden. Mr. Nefesh gave me the day off."

"I hope you took your muddy shoes off."

"Oh, yes," he lied. "That's what took me so long to answer. I miss you, too. The boys met me at the airport and drove me home. We had a late supper. They miss you and send their love."

"Darling, I'll be back home in three weeks. The semester break is next week, but there are a few details and social obligations to finish up. Don't work too hard. Leave the pretty young secretaries alone!"

"Ha! Don't worry, I always come home to you, Elisheva Ben Yosef. Love you. 'Bye."

"Shalom Zvika, y'deedee! Good bye, my beloved."

Feeling lighter-hearted, he returned to his gardening and worked until dusk. When his sons came home, they had a makeshift dinner and spent the rest of the evening in animated conversation as Zvi brought them up to date concerning their mother and his impressions of his old school. They in turn filled him in on their lives. Dan, as usual, was in love. Pesach, talked about Daliah, the girl friend he was living with in Jerusalem.

Tel Aviv

16 November

0920 hours

Because his bus was delayed, Zvi Ben Yosef did not reach his office as early as he had hoped. He was not among the "anointed ones" who had a staff car at his disposal.

His new security clearance documents had arrived. Then, as he had done the day before, he ordered the files and began to read. There were apparent contradictions. From where did the transport vehicle appear and where did it disappear? How did the nuclear material get from Israel to the Kuwaiti freighter? How could it have been transported overland without being discovered at the Lebanese or Jordanian, or Egyptian border checkpoints? If it was delivered by water, how and from where? What connection, if any, was there between Alfar Habibi's report concerning the radio-isotope material sent to Dubai from the United States and the missing Israeli containers?

Zvi rose from his desk, looked at a large relief map of Israel, and circled the border control locations. Using his pipe as a pointer he traced several possible land routes. None seemed plausible. Several times, he traced the route from Dimona to Be'er Sheva and from there to Ein Gedi. Then he saw a side road he had missed. It was a local road that paralleled the main highway, running through a sparsely settled area of the Northern Negev. That would have taken the truck south down towards either Eilat or Taba depending on what markings were on the vehicle. Excited, he made a quick call to the Israeli control point at the Israeli-Egyptian border. The officer in charge said that no vehicle, Israeli, Egyptian, nor any other had passed through the control point on the day in question, nor the day after. This left only one possibility--the material was taken out of Israel over water to the waiting freighter, most probably moored in Aqaba. Fine, but how did it get there?

Ari Meron stuck his head into Zvi's office. "How about a break, Zvika?" he asked. "Some fresh air and a cup of decent coffee should help."

He and Meron walked to an outdoor cafe on the edge of Dizengoff Square. For several years it had been overwhelmed by a gigantic sculpture designed by Ya'acov Agam, one of Israel's most famous artists. Most people, Zvi and Ari included, called it Agam's "Mah zeh?"--Agam's "Whatzit?" For his part, Zvi thought it to be the third ugliest structure in the world, surpassed only by the Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens, London, and the Liberty Bell Center in his native Philadelphia. They finished their coffee and returned to their

offices to prepare for the meeting with their superior. It was almost three o'clock.

Tel Aviv

1530 hours

Hanoch Caleb, the head of Mossad, Moshe Arielson of Shin Bet, Ari Meron and Zvi Ben Yosef sat around the table in the chief's office. Before each was a folder with all the pertinent information gathered from every source which had any possible bearing, however remote, on the problem. There were computer print-outs, copies of reports, hand-written memoranda, scrawls, scribbles, doodles--in short, all the detritus which evolves over time in any investigation. No one spoke. Arielson sat quietly. He was only an interested bystander.

They each leafed through the material. Meron read quickly, separating the data into several piles. Ben Yosef read each bit of paper intently, making notes on a pad. Caleb read the information, cursorily. He had been over it several times. Meron and Zvi were waiting for their chief to open the conversation.

"HaMemuneh"--"The One in Charge"--or THE BOSS, as the head of Mossad is known, cleared his throat. "Now we're all up to date. My own inclination is that the three missing shipments are closely related. Just why our antagonists would need so much material escapes me. It also scares the Hell out of me. That's why I called you and Ari back here, Zvika. With a GRUnik coming here, I'm even more certain that my hunch is right. However, from here on in, chevra, it's your operation. Everybody will co-operate. That's a direct order from Levi Shalom. So what ever you need from me, Motti Arielson over at Shin Bet, or, Shmulik Lavri, from Aman, IDF Intelligence, you will be given. Shalom, I'll see you when I see you."

By now it was dark. Meron and Zvi walked down the dimly lit corridor. There was no need to talk. These old friends had worked together long enough not to need many words. Much of their work had placed them in open conflict with the GRU and KGB. Members of Meron's family had been murdered during the Stalin purges and Doctors' trials. Zvi had ducked Russian bullets and knives on several occasions. Thorough professionals, they put their personal feelings aside. A possible nuclear holocaust was enough of a problem.

Tel Aviv

18 November

2145 hours

Zvi Ben Yosef and Ari Meron arrived at Mossad headquarters at about eight A.M. They had an Israel Defense Forces map of the area from Central Israel to the Negev, which showed every main, secondary road and path in the area from Ashkelon on the north to Eilat on the South. Zvi had taken a marking pen and had traced the known route taken by the bogus Weizmann Institute vehicle. Both men studied the map carefully, but nothing came of their search. After several fruitless hours, both Zvi and Ari leaned back and closed their eyes. They were on the edge of exhaustion.

"The Purloined Letter!"

"Zvika, what are you talking about?"

"Dammit, Ari, the answer has to be right here, in this mess. Something reminds me of Edgar Allen Poe's story, where the stolen letter is hidden in full sight! We're not looking in the right place. If the van disappeared after Ein Gedi, then it never left Israel. If it never left Israel..."

"...then we have to look here," interjected Meron. "In which case we'd better look at the map again, only this time even more closely."

"Nope, Ari. That's not it. It has nothing to do with the map. We've already eliminated any land route. It must be a sea route, but from where to where?"

"Logic, Zvika, would suggest the shortest distance. One of the pieces we don't have is where that Kuwaiti freighter's last port of call was. My hunch is Aqaba. It's the shortest distance from Eilat on our side of the Red Sea."

"Ari, I think you've found the 'letter!' As soon as we get in tomorrow, let's check with the Marine Institute. They may have the van that was used to get the nuclear material from Dimona. But for now, my friend, I'm bushed. We've been over this stuff for about thirty-six hours. My eyes are crossing, my hair aches, my teeth itch, my pipe tastes like stale coffee and the coffee tastes like wet tobacco. I'm going home--right now!"

Ari laughed and waved his comrade out of the conference room they had commandeered as a work station. Zvi Ben Yosef left. Ari Meron followed, turning out the lights as he moved down the corridor to the elevator.

Moscow-Zurich

18 November

1000 hours

Field Marshal Ignatiev and Fleet Admiral Bolgarov had said their goodbyes over breakfast in Ignatiev's apartment earlier that morning. As a precaution, Grisha had taken his luggage with him to the apartment, a small bag and a carry-on garment pack, which would fit either overhead or under the seat. He did not want to give Chevchevadze's people an opportunity to inspect it. Since it was all hand carried baggage, it would never be out of his sight or control at any time.

As usual, Grisha Obadivsky traveled in civilian clothes. His arrival at the airport was uneventful, as was his security check. All his papers--passport, travel documents, Israeli visa, Russian exit permit, tickets Moscow-Zurich, Zurich-Tel Aviv--were carefully examined by the airport staff. The papers were in perfect order. He boarded the flight and began to read a book of Russian classical poetry.

After a flight of several hours, the Aeroflot jet touched down at Zurich. Obadivsky took his baggage and went from the Aeroflot lounge to the Swiss Air ticket counter to have his ticket confirmed. From there, he went to the Swiss Air lounge, purchased copies of the *Zuricher Zeitung* and *The International Herald-Tribune*. He was deeply engrossed in reading the *Zuricher Zeitung* when his flight was announced. Grisha gathered his bags and proceeded to the gate. Walking to the loading gate, he noticed that he was being followed. The shadow made no attempt to conceal himself.

Obadivsky spun on his heel and with a twinkle in his eye confronted his shadow. "Dobry vechere, good evening," he whispered as he kissed the astonished FSB man on both cheeks. "Give my regards to Dimitri Lazarovich. Please tell him that my flight was most comfortable and uneventful."

Once on board and seated, Grisha read *The International Herald-Tribune*. The only item that caught his attention was one recounting the sinking of the Kuwaiti freighter. He was bemused by an editorial which decried the continued damage being done by left-over mines from the Iraq-Kuwait War. Eventually, the droning of the jet's engines and the whispering hiss of the air conditioning outlet lulled him to sleep until squeal of the aircraft's tires indicated touch down.

Tel Aviv

18 November

2130 hours

Since he was carrying his own luggage, Grisha Obadivsky passed through Customs and Immigration without difficulty. Zvi Ben Yosef was waiting for him in the VIP lounge.

"Shalom! Baruch haba! Welcome to Israel," he said. "How nice to see you, Dr. Obadivsky. A pleasant flight?"

"Quite quiet and peaceful, thank you, Dr. Ben Yosef."

Zvi hailed a car waiting close to the arrival exit. The driver took Grisha's luggage and drove from the airport to downtown Tel Aviv.

The highway was divided by grass and a line of trees. The first part of the journey was through an industrial area before reaching the turn off to Tel Aviv proper. Even at that late hour, the streets were crowded. The driver wove his way expertly through the fast moving traffic. The noise from the constantly honking horns was deafening. Israeli drivers never seemed to learn simple road etiquette--it was every car for itself.

The driver stopped in front of the Maariv Hotel, unloaded the luggage, let his passengers out and drove away. Mossad had rented the room several days before Obadivsky was scheduled to arrive.

"I hope this will be satisfactory, Grisha," said Zvi as he and Obadivsky entered the lobby.

"Yes, Zvi. This is fine," he answered.

"Join me for dinner?"

"Thank you. Give me an opportunity to unpack and wash up. Say, a half hour?"

Zvi nodded in agreement and left the lobby.

The place was clean and neat, but not luxurious. Traveling academics were usually accustomed to this. The hotel had the advantage of being within walking distance of the office which Mossad had made available to them while they worked on the project. Even though the agreement among the government leaders called for complete co-operation, neither Zvi nor his superiors were without lingering doubts and apprehensions. They could never be entirely certain that Moscow did not have an alternative agenda.

Obadivsky wasn't exactly overjoyed by the prospect of working with the Israelis. The saving grace in the whole operation was that he was going to be able to work on something which completely cut out Moscow Center. As a career soldier, he was never happy with "destabilization projects". They had the unfortunate possibility of provoking a war, or at least a major incident or incursion. He was well aware of the dangers which overzealous KGB apparatchiks had created. Even though he had been first a Komsomol, or Young Communist League member, and then a party member, he viewed that as part of the dues he had to pay in order to pursue his profession and to advance within its structure. Like most such men, regardless of other affiliations, within and without the Eastern Bloc, he knew the consequences of military adventurism. Colonel-General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky, a truly professional soldier, hated war. It held neither glamour nor heroic action for him. The innocent as well as the guilty, soldier and civilian, paid the price. His constantly aching leg was a persistent reminder.

Grisha unpacked his bags and carefully placed his pajamas and robe on the bed, his slippers at the bedside and his books and newspapers on the night stand. He then took a small device from his jacket pocket. What appeared to be a ball point pen was actually a detecting device used to uncover any bugs which might have been planted in the room. A thorough walk around the room, into the bathroom and down the hall to the elevator revealed nothing. Obadivsky took down the small case and removed a package of hair-like strands which he placed on the door jamb of the room, on the drawers of the dresser and night tables, and on the medicine cabinet. He then took the "pen" from his pocket and turned the cap a quarter turn, which activated the strands. They were sensors which would inform him if the quarters were entered or tampered with in any way. Satisfied, he returned and finished getting ready for dinner.

Zvi was waiting in the lobby when Grisha entered. They left the hotel and walked toward the center of Tel Aviv. They observed the usual precautions against being followed; crossing the street randomly, looking into store windows, checking their clothing or combing their hair at convenient store window display mirrors. No one appeared to be following them.

Zvi broke the silence. "You haven't been here before, Grisha. In the past it's been either one of your men or KGB. We're having dinner at a Yemenite restaurant. The food is delicious, perhaps even exotic. In fact, you'll be eating a 'cigar.'"

"What the hell is a 'cigar?' I don't smoke, so why would I eat one?" asked Obadivsky.

"Never mind, you'll find out when we get there. Just leave everything to me. What ever else might happen, believe me, I won't try to poison you. It might have international repercussions!" laughed Zvi.

"I hope it isn't like some of the so-called delicacies I ate in Kabul. The food was spicy and tough, something like the people. But, I guess I'll just have to take my chances. I hope we'll be there soon. The walk and the sea air made me hungry. Besides, I can't stand airline food, especially Aeroflot's, so I passed up the meals on the planes."

Ten minutes later, the pair arrived at a Yemenite restaurant close to the shopping center of the city. They were early for their reservation. Grisha and Zvi went to the small, cramped bar, ordered drinks and waited quietly for their table. Obadivsky took the opportunity to survey the other diners. It seemed a varied group. Some were dressed casually, others more formally, a few in evening dress. Finally, the maitre d' approached and led them to their table.

The waiter placed bilingual menus, Hebrew and English, on the table. Grisha opened the menu and shook his head. He couldn't identify most of the items. He looked helplessly at Zvi who laughed and motioned to the waiter.

"Shalom, Effie. It's been a long time. My usual order--for two this time." Effie nodded and proceeded to the kitchen, returning with a plate of something rolled in dough that had been baked. These were the "cigars" to which Zvi had alluded. He watched his Russian companion taste the appetizer, first with apprehension, followed by enjoyment.

The rest of the meal proceeded in a like fashion. Although Grisha could read the cursive Hebrew script, he was baffled by the unfamiliar names of the foods. He recognized many of the dishes, however, as ones he had eaten in other parts of the Near and Middle East.

After the meal they walked leisurely further into Tel Aviv, where Zvi showed Grisha the bustling shopping area. Obadivsky pointed to the Agam sculpture, and raised an eyebrow, quizzically.

"We call that thing the 'Agam Whatzit,'" Zvi chuckled. "Most of us can't figure it out either. They do have a

nice light and sound show here on most evenings. We just missed the performance; the next one's in about an hour. I promise to bring you here again. For now let's walk back to your hotel. We've a long day ahead of us. I'll pick you up at about eight for breakfast and then we'll walk over to the office."

Zvi and Grisha walked silently back to Grisha's hotel. Zvi bade him good night at the door. Tel Aviv might never sleep, but Zvi needed to get home. He made his way to the Central Bus Terminal for the last bus to Kfar Saba.

Tel Aviv

19 November

0700 hours

Grisha awoke, showered and dressed an hour before he expected Zvi. He took down his small case, and with his pen knife, carefully lifted the inner lining of the bottom of the bag, took two 3.5 inch computer disks and put them in his inside jacket pocket. Then he went down to the lobby to meet Zvi. After a typical Israeli breakfast of juice, salad, herring, eggs, breads, tea and coffee, they proceeded to their work place.

Zvi directed Grisha to a waiting vehicle called a sherut, a compromise between a taxi and a bus which carries eight people. All the other passengers were soldiers and government workers. After a short ride, they left the carrier and walked into a small office building.

The place was modest, but clean and well-kept. A wall directory showed that it was tenanted by a number of small, individual firms, mainly lawyers and professionals. There was a listing in Hebrew and English for METURGEMAN Ltd. International Translators and Interpreters, Room 346. The lettering was a bit worn, indicating that the firm had occupied their offices for some time.

They took the elevator to the third floor. With a mixture of legitimate and front operations, the building was a "safe site" for intelligence operations too ephemeral to warrant permanent quarters at Mossad itself. The elevator operator was a retired Israel Defense Forces sergeant.

"Shalom, Uri. Boker Tov. Good Morning!" Zvi greeted the operator.

"Shalom. Boker Or. Good morning to you, sir," he answered impersonally.

Zvi and Grisha left the elevator, and went down the hall to Room 346. The same legend that was posted on the building directory was on the front door. The black paint was chipping off some of the letters. The door itself was solid wood. Zvi took a key from his pocket and unlocked the office.

The Israelis had prepared the office with maps, furniture and a personal computer. The Computer Specialist assigned to the project, Miriam Safti, arrived shortly after the two intelligence agents. She had top security clearance and would be able to work with them on anything that came in. The Israeli computer was compatible with the disks Obadivsky had brought with him from Moscow. They contained all the information Russian Military and Naval Intelligence had compiled.

"How good is your Russian, Zvi?"

"Why?"

"Well, all our reports are in my language. It would have been too difficult, and obvious, to take the time to translate them, given the urgency. So we'll use them, unless you can get them translated very quickly."

"I'll work with what you brought. If I have any difficulty, you can help. Besides, your files must indicate that I read and write Russian. It's speaking that I need to brush up on. So let's get started. By the way, how's your Hebrew?" Zvi inquired.

Grisha smiled. "In the same class as your Russian. Which means, I think, for efficiency's sake, that we'd keep speaking English." He handed the disks to the computer operator who brought up the information.

Zvi and Grisha studied the information on the monitor as Miriam printed out the data. This made it easier to follow, to go back and forth, and to otherwise work with the reports. They read and re-read the print-outs. Zvi read slowly, as he re-acquainted himself with the Cyrillic alphabet. After the first run-through, his fluency had, by and large, returned.

Zvi performed his pipe ritual, leaned back, put his hands behind his head and began to blow smoke rings. Grisha looked at him, questioningly, but said nothing.

Finally Zvi spoke. "O.K. Let's put aside your material and get to mine. I'm trying to find a pattern, but until we both look at what we have pulled together, it will remain elusive," Zvi said as he passed copies of his data across the desk to Grisha.

Grisha removed his reading glasses, cleaned them, pinched the bridge of his nose, replaced the glasses and picked up the Israeli reports. He read through them two or three times, at first haltingly, but then with greater fluency as his reading skills returned. For the next several hours, they went over both reports again and again. Whatever pattern was to be found remained hidden in the data. And now it was early afternoon. They were eye-weary and hungry. Zvi sighed and pushed the material back to the center of the table.

"Let's get out of here and get lunch and breathe some fresh air," he suggested.

Grisha nodded his head and stood up. His wounded leg buckled under him. The long hours, sitting, in one position, had stiffened his knee. Leaning on the table as he rose, he steadied himself and let out a string of Russian epithets. Zvi and the PC specialist laughed.

"I'm sorry, young lady. I apologize. I didn't know you understood Russian," said Grisha.

"Yes, sir," she replied. "It's just that I had never heard such explicit and graphic language."

"Miriam," said Zvi soothingly. "Why don't you get something to eat? Dr. Obadivsky and I will be back in two hours. We may be here for some time this evening." The three left the office, locked the door and went out into the relatively cool afternoon.

Zvi and Grisha walked slowly down the streets of Tel Aviv. The two were still taking each other's measure. The last time they had been in each other's "company", Grisha's men were trying to kill Zvi. His men, in turn, were trying to keep their chief out of the Spetzatniks' way. Zvi and Grisha were thoroughly professional. If their superiors ordered them to work together, they would. Obviously the assignment was as important as it was unprecedented. Even the choice of the code name, OPERATION TROIKA, was unusual. For the first time, three governments were using the same code rather than establishing individual identifications.

Zvi smiled and said, "Those strips you hung in your room are a clever idea. We decided to let them stay in place, just in case your Moscow comrades were still tailing you. Oh, yes, we're aware that they have agents here in Israel. We know who most of them are. They are somewhat ineffective, given our Shin Bet's efficiency. Don't worry about us. What's the old joke? 'With friends like these, who needs enemies?'"

Grisha looked at his companion and grinned. "I was beginning to get anxious. I was sure that you had me

under constant surveillance and must have slipped up. You know, there's been a constant battle between KGB and GRU ever since the Revolution. We've never quite forgiven their predecessors, OGPU and NKVD, for damn near destroying our ability to fight and plan effective military strategies after the 1937 purges. Hitler could not have been more effective if he had completely replaced Beria's men with his own people," he said.

Zvi stopped suddenly and pointed to a man several paces behind them, reflected in a bookshop window. He shook his head slightly from side-to-side, indicating that he did not know the man. Grisha shrugged his shoulders, almost imperceptibly. They entered the store and pretended to browse. The third man stopped for a moment, looked into the shop and moved on.

"Let's separate, Grisha. You cross the street and walk back toward our office. I'll go on ahead. He may be a tail, or he may be just another pedestrian. If he's the tail, he can only follow one of us."

Grisha nodded, left the book shop and began his walk back toward their office. Zvi moved casually down the street, away from the shop, in the other direction. After walking a few blocks, Zvi realized that he had lost his quarry in the crowd, turned back and walked briskly to overtake Grisha. The incident left him unnerved.

Grisha had seated himself at a sidewalk table in a pastry shop. Zvi saw him and sat down. Grisha raised an eyebrow. Zvi turned his hands palms up, indicating his perplexity. He had not been able to follow the other man. They returned to their offices, earlier than they had anticipated.

When they arrived at the building, Zvi excused himself and walked over to Ari Meron's office. He wanted to find out if he and Obadivsky were under surveillance, under protection, or were being followed by someone outside the agency. The meeting with Meron was inconclusive. To his knowledge, there was no surveillance of any kind. This left both men uneasy. Meron agreed to contact Motti Arielson and have Shin Bet attempt to trace the follower. It was possible that local FSB agents were trailing Grisha Obadivsky. It would be prudent to have both Zvi and Grisha given security personnel to deter any attempts by outsiders to disrupt the mission.

Zvi reluctantly agreed. He insisted that Grisha be fully informed. Zvi didn't want Grisha looking over his shoulder every time he was outside the work area.

Grisha barely noticed his partner when Zvi returned. He was busy trying to establish a pattern based on what his data and the Israeli data might show.

"Grisha, the bosses have put us under protective surveillance as a precaution,. Neither Mossad nor Shin Bet have tails on us. My boss is concerned that Chevchevadze's apparatchiks may be trying to find out what the hell is going on. Just because you and your people want to cut them out of the picture doesn't mean they don't want in. From now on, we'll be watched," Zvi explained.

It was better to know that he was under surveillance than to be paranoid every time he traveled around the city. He felt sure that Chevchevadze would try to worm his way into this project; either to sabotage it, because he was behind Al Suyuf Al Kharb, or because he had missed the train for this ride.

They tacked several sheets of paper on a cork board opposite the map, and listed in short form what was known. A pattern was beginning to emerge:

1. The material was stolen by persons able to escape initial detection.
2. The amounts stolen were enough to result in a chain reaction, were they detonated.
3. In two cases a ship needed to be involved:

- (a) The Israeli material surfaced after the sinking of the Kuwaiti freighter.
- (b) The Russians, earlier, had recovered the rubber dinghy in the Black Sea with the Nuclear Material imprint on the gunwale.

Now it was necessary to get the American data and integrate it with what Grisha and Zvi knew. This would mean that Zvi's superiors would have to request that Mossad inform the CIA of the proceedings. They decided this would be the only way to get Wheatland or Mallory to Tel Aviv with their pieces of the puzzle. Zvi agreed to make the request in the morning. The Russian returned to his lodgings. Zvi returned home for a quiet dinner alone. His sons had gone back to their own apartments.

Tel Aviv

20 November

0900 hours

Instead of going to his office, Zvi went directly to Mossad headquarters. Meron listened to him carefully and reached for the phone. The Director of Mossad, Hanoch Caleb, answered and agreed to meet with Meron and Zvi in about an hour. Even with supposedly secure internal communications, the two men felt it would be more appropriate to discuss this extremely sensitive matter face to face.

At ten o'clock, they arrived at the Director's office. His secretary admitted them at once. Zvi briefed Caleb on the work that he and Grisha had been doing and made his request to add an American to the team. The Director agreed, but told Zvi and Ari that it was not necessary to involve Levi Shalom nor President Dunstan. He had full control of the operation and would get in touch with his American counterpart. There would be no problem, he said, getting an American assigned to this part of the operation.

MacLean, Virginia

20 November

0900 hours

Barbara Little put the incoming call on hold and buzzed Philip Miller. "Tel Aviv on the line, sir. Mr. Caleb would like to speak with you."

"Thank you, Barbara, put him through. Good morning Mr. Caleb. How are things going?" he asked. He listened intently. It was clear that important progress was being made in Tel Aviv. He told Caleb that Dr. Henry Wheatland complete the team. After the usual amenities, he hung up and placed a call to Ronald Grover in Paris.

Paris

20 November

1200 hours

Ronald Grover spun his desk chair around, opened a roller file and called the pension.

"Allo? Allo? Pension Des Artistes!"

"Le Docteur Henry Lyons, s'il vous plait. Ici M. Grover."

"Un moment, M. Grover."

"Merci"

The concierge connected the parties, rang off, entered the time and date of the call in a small brown leather book, then put the book back in a locked drawer in the old fashioned safe which also served as a place for his coffee cup and ashtray. Each month, Didier delivered it to Ronald Grover's office and replaced it.

"What's up, Ron?" asked a puzzled Hank. He had thought that he and Mary were free for the evening. They were planning to go to the theater.

"The boss just called. Could you be at my office about four o'clock? I need to talk to you and I don't want to tie up the phones."

"O.K., Ron. I'll be there at four. Mary and I have tickets for the theater, but I'll let her know there's a change in plans and we may not make the curtain," Hank answered.

"It won't take too long. You'll still make it. I'll fill you in when you get here," said Grover and hung up.

Hank called out to Mary, "Honey. I have to meet Ron at four at his office. Suppose we have lunch in the Tuilleries and then I can go to see him while you go through the gardens. Let's plan on meeting at the Pompidou Gallery about six and go to dinner from there."

"O.K.," Mary answered. "Give me ten minutes to get ready and we can leave. I gather I'm not invited to the meeting. I haven't been in Paris in years. Don't be surprised if I make a side trip to the Galleries Lafayette and buy something outrageously expensive. Can I bill it to the Company?"

"You can," Hank laughed, "but I doubt they'll pay."

"In fact, why don't you meet me at the Galleries Lafayette instead of at the Pompidou. We can come back here and get ready for the evening," Mary suggested.

Didier drove them to Tuilleries Gardens where they ate a leisurely meal. The day itself was rather raw and did not lend itself to strolling. Mary and Hank left the gardens. She proceeded to the Galleries Lafayette. He decided to walk a while before going to the CIA station chief's office. He was sure of only one thing, Grover sounded upset and urgent.

The weather had turned foul. A cold, steely-gray rain was lashing the cobblestone streets and pouring off the awnings. Hank ducked into a shop and purchased an umbrella. He waited twenty minutes before he was finally able to get a taxi. He was only mildly surprised to find that the driver was the ubiquitous M. Didier.

"What the hell took you so long to pick me up?" asked a wet and angry Hank.

Didier shrugged. "Even in Paris, Dr. Lyons, taxis hide when it rains. I had orders to follow you and Madame, but to remain discreetly out of sight until I was needed. I thought it would be all right for me to pick you up in this deluge. Where can I take you?"

"Take me back to the pension so I can change into dry clothes. Then you can drive me to the American Embassy. I have a meeting there at four," Hank requested.

Didier turned the car around and headed back to the pension. Hank went directly to his room, took a quick shower, changed and was ready fifteen minutes later.

Didier's sedan wove its way through the puddles and potholes between the pension and the Embassy. The weather had not improved. Didier drove his vehicle up to the front of the Embassy, handed Hank his umbrella and drove away.

Ron Grover's operations office was on the third floor of the United States Embassy building. A small brass plate RONALD GROVER was fixed to the office door. He arrived at precisely four o'clock.

"I just had a call from Phil," Grover began, "he wants you to head for Israel by the first available flight tomorrow evening. We've had a request from your buddies that you join them. Evidently they need our information to piece together more of the puzzle."

"You said 'you', Ron. Isn't Mary coming with me?"

"No. I just got her invited to the International Conference on Computerization of Nuclear Medical Information. I have a hunch that there's a connection between Farid Attiyeh's trip to Paris and a meeting he had with one of the Dubaian physicians, Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail. The doctor was the only person who has entered and left the chateau. I did a quick check on him. We've nothing in our file. In any case, as soon as the courier arrives from Washington, I'll be in touch. In the meantime, enjoy this evening."

"Who tells Mary about the change in plans?" questioned Hank.

"I will. We're having breakfast tomorrow morning. As usual, I'll choose the place. I feel the urge for a good old-fashioned American breakfast. Meet me at the Hilton at about eight-thirty. Mary's a smart woman. We won't change her passport again. Phil isn't sure, yet, what her next role will be, but her present cover as a 'consultant' is flexible enough for whatever comes up."

"What about my cover?" asked Hank.

"For the moment, Hank, keep it. We don't want people who shouldn't be asking to start asking. Besides, if anyone else runs a check on Mary, for whatever reason, her file will show her current identity, complete, by the way, with a birth certificate, school transcripts, dissertation abstract, marriage license and other such data. If they check the house in Illinois, they'll find neighbors who've known you for years. If they check on you, the same kind of information will be found. Even a copy of your class schedule for the last two years will be in there. Should they check with Roosevelt University, a most co-operative Graduate School Dean, University Provost and President will vouch for you," Grover explained.

Hank stood up, glanced at his watch and said, "See you at breakfast, Ron. Mary's expecting me to pick her up at the Galleries Lafayette in about fifteen minutes."

Hank arrived at the Parisian department store a few minutes late. Mary was standing in the doorway holding several small packages. She was smiling. Hank looked at her packages, shrugged his shoulders and hailed a taxi.

"How was the shopping expedition?" he asked. "I know from experience that the size of the package is in inverse proportion to its cost."

"Boy, do you sound like a husband," Mary giggled. "Actually, I spent about a hundred dollars. Just trinkets. Oh, this is for, you, darling." She handed him a small package.

Hank opened it. There was a small jewel box inside the wrapping. He lifted the lid. Inside were a set of opal cuff links set in silver and a matching tie tack.

Mary kept on talking. "I paid cash for them. When the salesgirl wrapped them, I told her they were a present for my husband. I don't know about you, but I feel married. Maybe it is better, the second time round." They were quiet for the rest of the trip back to their quarters.

Hank relaxed in the sitting room while Mary showered and changed. He took the little jewel box out of his pocket and opened and closed it several times. Pensively, he stared into space, mulling over what Ron Grover had told him were the next few steps. He would miss Mary, he knew. Hank had made up his mind. He would ask her to marry him when the operation was completed. Details about where they would live, who would have to change jobs, and when to tell David would have to wait.

Mary came out of the bathroom and started dressing. She looked over at him and saw him staring at her.

"Like the view?" she joked. "I was hoping you'd always leer at me, lasciviously, but no! You just stare. Once, just once, indulge me and leer like a proper dirty old man."

"Mary," he began, tentatively, "Ever since we left Philadelphia and began this charade, you have been hinting. Hinting--hell! announcing that you like the idea of being a wife again. Well, I'm sitting down, so I guess that qualifies 'as on bended knee'. When this job is over, will you marry me, Mary Mallory?"

Mary stood frozen in place with her dress up over her head. Then she shrugged into the dress, let out a whoop of joyous laughter, sat down on the bed and chortled. Then she said, "Of course, I'll marry you. It's much simpler. We won't have to change the monograms on the towels, linens or silverware. I've been wondering for what seems like forever, when you'd finally get around to it. Now get up, kiss me and let's go out."

All through the performance, Mary had rested her hand on Hank's thigh and he on hers. After the theater Hank and Mary returned to the Pension Des Artistes. The rain had stopped and the night breeze was brisk and carried the scents peculiar to clean air after a rainstorm.

Back in their room, Mary and Hank changed and settled down on the sofa with a bottle of wine and a plate of cheeses which the porter brought up shortly after their arrival. Mary began nuzzling his ear, while Hank moved his hand along the inside of her left thigh. She lowered her head and moved her tongue between his lips. Within seconds their tongues met and moved more and more rapidly, thrusting and parrying like rapiers. Mary swung her right thigh over her left, locking Hank's hand between. He braced himself against the sofa, lifted Mary from above him and laid her against the pillows and freed his imprisoned hand. Mary matched his increasing passion, opened herself to his penetration and moved in rhythm with his deeper and harder thrusting until she reached several climaxes before collapsing with a deep throated growl as her lover reached his final shuddering orgasm.

They slept.

Paris

20 November

0830 hours

Hank and Mary met Ron Grover at the restaurant in the Hilton. They had a truly American breakfast.

Ron Grover leaned forward and took Mary's hand as they were finishing their coffee. "I hate to break up a

matched pair, dear Mary, but I received a call from our boss yesterday afternoon. Hank is being reassigned to Tel Aviv as part of the continuing operation. You will be staying on in Paris. I've gotten you invited to a conference on Nuclear Medicine Data Computerization. We have reason to believe that whatever brought Farid Attiyeh to Paris is somehow connected to someone at this conference. Our hunch is that a Dubaian physician, Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail, is involved. Your job is to get to know him, professionally, and perhaps get yourself invited to visit his hospital in Dubai."

"How soon does Hank have to leave?" she asked.

"Tomorrow. For the rest of today, he's going to be holed up with me analyzing the information that we received from Washington. Pick up your conference information at the Cultural Attach 's desk at the Embassy and get to the late morning session. One of the American delegates will meet you. He'll introduce you to Dr. Abu Ismail. The time you spent at UCLA Medical Center ten years ago should come in handy. Now excuse us, but your husband and I have a lot of work to do, and so do you."

They left the restaurant and went to the Embassy together. Once there, The CIA agents went to Ron's office. Mary received her information packet and left for her conference.

Ecole Medicin, d'Universitie de Paris, Le Sorbonne

Conference Hall

1030 Hours

Mary arrived at the conference just as the session on Nuclear Medical Data Retrieval was beginning. For several minutes she was unable to follow the discussion. She was not at all surprised that many advances had been made in the years since she had left UCLA. Mary started reading the name tags of the people in the chamber looking for Dr. Abu Ismail. She finally found him in conversation with one of the British physicians, a man he had studied and worked with in London. Mary was surprised to see that he was tall, light-haired and blue-eyed. She had expected a short, swarthy man. He could have passed as American or British. Just before the lecture began, one of the American delegates, Dr. Edward Braithwate, called out to her, "Good heavens, Mary Lyons! I haven't seen you since you left the Hospital! How are you and how is your husband?"

Mary was startled for a moment, but quickly glanced at his name tag and responded, "Hello, Ed. It has been a long time! I just arrived in Paris. How have you been? It's really been ages. Let's have lunch after the session. We can bring each other up to date."

She was intrigued by Dr. Braithwate. He must have been briefed in Langley and told to watch for her. It was just as well that he had, because she caught a glimpse of a familiar face on the other side of the auditorium. It was Dr. Arthur Dutton, one of her former colleagues from the UCLA Medical Center. She hoped that Braithwate would keep them apart, since she could not afford to have her cover blown.

The lecturer began by asking that the room be darkened so that a series of slides could be shown. The material covered the different formats of the data that the project would merge, and went on to an explanation of the relationship between the existing programs and plans for the merging of data from several sources into a single data base.

When the lights went up Ed Braithwate was sitting beside her. He smiled and reminded her of their lunch date. She followed him out into the lobby, where he led her away from the former colleague whom she had wanted to avoid.

"I'm connected with the Company. When Phil Miller assigned you to this conference, he realized that if

somebody didn't intervene, your position might be compromised. There was always the chance that someone out of your past at UCLA might call out to you. I was invited to attend the conference, both to chaperone you and to bring you up to speed about the current state of the art in nuclear medicine. We also want you to get acquainted with Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail from the Ibn Rosht General Hospital in Dubai. I'm not quite sure what this has to do with anything, but Director Miller was most explicit. Let's get some lunch. I'll brief you later this evening. I'll arrange an introduction to our Dubaian friend. Do you have any preference as to restaurants? I haven't been here in several years."

"Wait, slow down, Doctor! The least you can do is confirm who you are, before we go any further," said Mary, sharply.

"Excuse me, but in the rush to avoid Art Dutton, I forgot my manners," Braithwate apologized.

He produced an ID which listed him as chief of Nuclear Medicine at what Mary knew was the CIA's private hospital in Crystal City, Virginia. His conference badge, however, listed him as a Nuclear Medicine specialist on the staff of the Bethesda Naval Hospital and Clinical Professor of Nuclear Medicine at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

More at ease, Mary suggested a small bistro several blocks from the Sorbonne's Medical School. They walked casually toward the establishment. The rain had stopped, but a chilly wind still blew across Paris from the Seine and the Ile de France.

When they had finished eating, Braithwate suggested that they go back to the medical school and use one of the ante-rooms to sit and talk. To all intents and purposes, they would be old colleagues. He then proceeded with the crash course in the advancements in Nuclear Medicine. Mary was pleased to find that she was not as out of touch as she had thought.

The evening session was about to start. Mary and Ed Braithwate walked back to the Medical School Auditorium in enough time to be seated before the lecture began. Art Dutton was not at the session. The lecturer droned on relentlessly. The following presentation was equally boring. The audience stayed.

After the presentation, Mary and Braithwate made plans to attend the dinner and reception, where he would introduce her to Dr. Abu Ismail. It was agreed that they would meet at eight. The dinner was scheduled for nine.

Paris

The President's Reception Room

Le Sorbonne

2000 Hours

Mary arrived promptly. It was formal affair. She wore a full length, green moiré, off-the-shoulder evening gown which was designed to show her figure to its best advantage. Ed Braithwate came toward her as she entered the room. He too, was in formal dress. At that moment, Dr. Arthur Dutton, her old colleague from UCLA Medical Center, approached her. Mary quickly turned to avoid him. An alert Ed Braithwate interposed himself between them.

"Thanks, Ed, but sooner or later I'm going to bump into Art when you're not there. It may be better to get it over. I'll leave the particulars up to you," Mary suggested.

"You're right, you know," Braithwate acknowledged. "Luckily, Art and I have known each other for a long time. I'll simply call him over and introduce you. If he thinks he knows you, I'll tell him that he must have seen you around UCLA. If he insists that you are Mary Mallory, the story will be that you have a cousin with a remarkable resemblance who was on the staff of the hospital several years ago."

As Mary and Ed walked toward their table, Art Dutton approached them again. "Hello, Ed," he greeted his old friend. "I heard you were attending the conference. How about introducing me to your lovely dinner companion.?"

Then to Mary, "You seem vaguely familiar. Have we met before?"

"Dr. Arthur Dutton--Dr. Mary Lyons. She's a consultant with us at Johns Hopkins in Nucleonics. She's here as a guest of Hopkins for the conference. We may be expanding part of our Nuclear Medicine facility and we want Dr. Lyons's input," said Ed as he moved toward the Bethesda group.

"It's my pleasure, Dr. Lyons," Dutton said as he extended his hand. Mary extended hers and wordlessly accepted the introduction. As Dutton left, she released her breath and turned to Ed.

"That was relatively painless," Mary acknowledged. "I guess Art never saw me without my glasses and lab coat. Those things make you sort of anonymous. Now for the hard, serious, part. How do I get to meet Dr. Abu Ismail? "

"A few years ago, his hospital had a consulting relationship with Hopkins. I met him there a few times. I was in charge of the inter-hospital inter-disciplinary group. That meant that I had to go over to Dubai five or six times. He was my opposite number. We've been in touch from time to time since then. I'm not entirely sure what his connection is with this whole business, but, as I said this morning, Phil Miller is most insistent that you two meet. Everything at the Company is on a 'need to know' basis, and I guess I just 'need to know' that you have to meet Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail and let it go at that. I know that if I'm to be further involved, Miller will let me know as needed," explained Braithwate.

At the table, Ed Braithwate introduced Mary to his colleagues. As they were seated, the keynote speaker, the Minister of Health was introduced by the Dean of the Sorbonne Medical School. The introduction and the main address were mercifully short--by French standards--just over an hour.

After dinner, Mary and Ed moved smoothly through the crowd, looking for Dr. Abu Ismail. Ed introduced Mary to some of the delegates he knew. It would not serve their purpose then to walk over to the Dubaian physician. Soon, they saw him standing with his chief, Dr. Robert MacPherson. Braithwate guided Mary toward the two men. Dr. MacPherson saw the Americans coming toward him.

"Dr. Braithwate," he called, "How pleasant to see you again. You remember Dr. Abu Ismail?"

"Good evening, Edward," Abu Ismail responded. "I'm glad to see you. In fact, I was hoping to run into you. We are still having some problems with our hospital's Nucleonics program.""

At that moment, MacPherson and Abu Ismail realized that Ed Braithwate had a companion with him.

Ed introduced them. "Dr. Robert MacPherson, Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail--Dr. Mary Lyons. Dr. Lyons is a Nuclear Physicist and a consultant to my department at Hopkins. As you can see, we are both here for the conference. Perhaps we can have breakfast or lunch tomorrow? Then we can discuss your problem and see how we can help."

"That will be fine," said MacPherson. "Ibrahim and I are staying at the Hotel Lafayette. How about breakfast

there at nine o'clock? The sessions don't begin until ten thirty or eleven."

"I guess we're in!" exulted Mary.

"Maybe," said a more cautious Ed Braithwate, "I just hope it's just a coincidence and not something more sinister. Just remember, Mary, I'm a live, practicing, devoutly religious cynic. In my world nothing comes this easily."

"That's O.K., Ed. I believe in serendipity. As my father used to say, 'there's a pony in there someplace',"

"quipped Mary. "I'm bushed. It's time for me to go home."

Mary stepped out of the Conference Hall. Didier was parked outside in the cab rank. He pulled his vehicle up to the entrance. Mary got in the cab and was driven to the pension. The concierge dutifully recorded the time of her return in his log and handed her the room key. She was pleased to find Hank waiting up for her. Mary had considered herself married, emotionally and mentally, ever since his formal proposal that afternoon.

"How'd it go?" he asked.

"A little weird. I met my, what do you call it, contact, a Dr. Edward Braithwate, shortly after I got to the Conference Hall. He took me in hand, filled me in, escorted me to the banquet and introduced me to the Dubaian Physician. I can't tell whether the introduction was carefully planned or simply serendipitous." Suddenly, she burst out laughing. "Serendipitous! I like that word!"

Hank looked up at his wife. He too, had felt emotionally and mentally wed ever since his proposal.

"Don't knock serendipity, darling. Most of the greatest breaks in this business came from just that kind of thing. It's how you handle it that will be the pay-off. Just follow your hunches. Right now, you're moving along quite well. How about breakfast?" Hank asked.

"Sorry, sweetheart, I can't. Ed Braithwate and I have a breakfast date with Dr. MacPherson, Abu Ismail's boss, and Dr. Abu Ismail. This may be the break we need for me to get to Dubai. How about dinner instead? The morning session runs from about half past ten to noon. When does your plane leave?" Mary explained.

"Late evening. It depends on how fast I can finish my briefing, but dinner sounds fine."

Mary leaned down and kissed the top of Hank's head. He reached up, pulled her down to him and began undressing her. She pretended to struggle but gave in to her passion and became more and more aroused. Hank responded with a heat and passion equaling hers. Thoroughly ready, he rolled over, lifted himself above her and moved in total rhythm with Mary. Both climaxed at the same moment and lay quietly, for several minutes.

"God, I love you," they said in unison, and fell asleep still intertwined.

Paris

21 November

0730 Hours

A raucous, jangling alarm clock virtually blasted Hank and Mary out of their bed. Yawning, they silently moved into the bathroom and showered together. Mary toweled herself, dried her hair and dressed. Hank followed her out of the bathroom. dressed and started packing for his new assignment.

"I'll call you at the Embassy when the morning session ends. If you're there, maybe we can have still have dinner together. If not, I guess I see you when you get back--from wherever 'back' will be," Mary said.

"That sounds fine, honey. If I'm not back, Ron Grover will take care of you until your next move." Hank thought for a moment and continued. "As a matter of fact that's a good idea. If anyone is interested in what we are about, it would be strange for a wife not to see her husband off at the airport. So, definitely, call me. I'm sure Ron will agree. Besides, I'll miss you! We may be apart for quite a while--it's a damn shame that just as we found each other, that we have to part, again, but that's the way it is, darling."

Mary finished applying her makeup, picked up her handbag and attach case, kissed Hank and left for her breakfast meeting.

Hank finished packing and went down to the lobby of the pension, picked up the International Herald-Tribune, and walked down the street to a small out-door cafe where he had a leisurely breakfast and read the paper. Hank breathed a sigh of relief; the press had stopped second-guessing the incident in the Persian Gulf. He walked back to the pension, where the ubiquitous M. Didier was leaning against the wall. The car was parked in front of the building. Didier drove him to the American Embassy.

United States Embassy

0845 hours

Ron Grover greeted him in the lobby. They passed through security and went directly to the Station Chief's office.

"I need to be completely familiar with what you have before I take off for Tel Aviv. By the way. can you book me on the latest possible flight? Mary and I would like to have dinner together and then go to the airport. It would look less suspicious than if I went to de Gaulle alone. Just in case there are any nosy-bodies around. What do you think?" Hank inquired.

Ron Grover laughed. "Hey, remember me? I'm an old pro, too. After you left, I thought of that. We're pretty sure that the local Russkies are very interested in who comes and who goes, and especially whom people entertain. You're booked on El Al Flight 326 to Tel Aviv at 10:50 tomorrow evening. You can ship your luggage right to Tel Aviv. This information is going by diplomatic pouch to our embassy there. Roger Stockton will meet you at Ben Gurion Airport. You've been booked into a different hotel than Obadivsky. For the first day and a half you'll play tourist. Then you start working," he said as he opened the pouch and took out several computer discs.

Ron slipped the first into the computer. The FBI report indicated that one of the sets of fingerprints on the wheel of the pickup were those of Attiyeh's nephew, Tom Crespi. A investigation proved only that he had driven the truck, had no idea what as in it, and had delivered it to his uncle's warehouse and left it there. There were two more sets of prints. One was Vermaat's. The other set was indistinct, since Crespi's and Vermaat's prints overlapped. One clear thumb print was on the horn button, but the FBI had no record of such a print in their files. The truck itself had been traced to a used car auction where it had been purchased for cash. The name and address on the title proved to be non-existent. Tracing the driver of the Navy truck proved to be more difficult. He wore gloves; no prints were available. Since his papers and identification badge appeared to be authentic, there was no way to follow up. The trucking company's log indicated that the driver was a pool driver from the Teamsters Union local. That, too, turned out to be a dead end. Identified as Alex Burr, a resident of Toms River, New Jersey, he had collected his pay and disappeared. There was no further record of his returning to the local for other temporary jobs. The investigation was continuing.

The second contained what little information there was on the stolen nuclear material. Earle had identified it

as two canisters which, by their code numbers, had failed to arrive at the Iowa's home port. The investigation had determined that these were the two which had been shipped to Dubai. The FBI's man, Vermaat, had quietly and unobtrusively copied the numbers when he prepared the material for shipping. This confirmed Attiyeh's link with whatever was going to happen. Coupled with the telephone tap, that gave the FBI what it would need to arrest Attiyeh.

The third contained the biographical information on Zvi ben- Joseph and Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky, which the DCI had had copied for transfer to Paris.

Hank was disturbed. It seemed almost too easy. Somewhere, there had to be a hidden reef on which the whole mission could run aground. Yet, he could not find the flaw.

Hotel Lafayette

0845 hours

Mary Lyons entered the lobby of the hotel. The decor of the lobby was an eclectic mix of various styles of furniture, pictures and sculptures. But there was no sense of disorder or asymmetry. All the elements blended to give an air of casual comfort.

The three men were already there when she arrived. Ed Braithwate stood at her side as the group were ushered into the hotel's dining room. The room was elliptical. On one side there was a series of windows which looked out onto a small park; the other side was lined with banquettes. At the far end of the ellipse was large portrait of Lafayette. In the center were two rows of tables. The maitre d'h te led them to a table near a window. Ed and Mary sat opposite one another. Dr. MacPherson sat next to Mary with his back to the window. Dr. Abu Ismail was facing him. Within moments, a waiter appeared with four menus. Mary opened her menu and frowned. She beckoned to the waiter.

"There is something wrong with my menu. Where is the price list?"

"It is our custom, Madame, to give the ladies such a menu. Since it is the role of her escort to pay for her meal."

"These gentlemen are not my escorts. I would prefer the regular menu!" Mary's tone was polite. The waiter looked helplessly at the men.

"Give Madame the correct menu," said Ed Braithwate, firmly.

There was absolute stillness. Dr. MacPherson and his companion, Dr. Abu Ismail stared at each other and then at their American guests. This was a complete change from what they had come to expect. Although Dr. MacPherson was a Scot, he had become acculturated to the mores of the Middle East, where women, how ever well educated, were subservient to their husbands or other men when in public. The man, without question, always made the decisions.

As the flustered waiter left the table with the offending menu, Ed Braithwate smiled and said, "Dr. Lyons, there is no mistaking your point of view in these matters."

"I guess I was a little hard on him, Dr. Braithwate, but I know that you understand my position as a professional," Mary stated.

The waiter returned with the menu replacement and handed it to Mary with a flourish. The foursome then ordered breakfast. The meal was without incident, but the atmosphere remained strained.

"If this is a business meeting," a slightly irritated Dr. Abu Ismail began, "I suggest we discuss the problem in Dubai. It seems that our medical nucleonics work has not been moving as rapidly as we would like. Apparently there are problems in developing the protocols for determining dosage levels and screening base lines. My staff and I have been unable to stabilize these areas and come to a successful conclusion."

"If you would be kind enough, Doctor, to let me examine the work, I might be able to help you and your staff solve the problem," suggested Mary.

"But that would require you to come to Dubai, Dr. Lyons, and I am not certain that the data are complete enough for even a beginning analysis," Dr. MacPherson demurred. Before Mary could respond, Ed Braithwate intervened.

"Gentlemen, this meeting was supposed to be a kind of introduction and very preliminary discussion. Surely, it is too early to make any commitment, one way or another. Perhaps we should take more time to think about our proposal. Let's meet again tomorrow afternoon, gentlemen. That might be the time to show us what you've done this far." The meeting was over. They parted without a definite decision to meet the next day as Braithwate had proposed.

An angry Ed Braithwate turned to Mary after the two men had left. "Dammit, you almost blew it! Don't you realize with what and whom you're dealing? These men, and most men in that part of the world, are just getting used to women going unveiled and leaving the home to go into the workplace. Women there still walk two steps behind their husbands, do not appear alone in public and keep their damn mouths shut! If you want to get to Dubai, Dr. Lyons, you better soft pedal the feminist agenda."

"Ed, you should have warned me," she retorted. "How was I to know just how far back in the dark ages they are? I'm a nuclear scientist, not a Middle East anthropologist. If was that important, lay out the ground rules!"

"I'm sorry I barked at you, but I was truly afraid that the whole thing was a washout. Let me soothe their antediluvian egos, Mary. Bob MacPherson has been in the Middle East too long, and Ibrahim Abu Ismail, for all his British education, never left," he said by way of an apology, as they left for the morning session.

Dr. Abu Ismail excused himself from the morning session. He told Dr. MacPherson that he wanted to go over some material that he had brought from the hospital, just on the chance that Braithwate would remain for the balance of the conference.

Returning to his room, Abu Ismail made a call to the Emirate's Embassy, and asked to speak to the Cultural Attache. "Salaam Aleykum," he said. "Jamal, it's Ibrahim. I need a favor. There is an American woman physicist, one Dr. Mary Lyons attending the conference. I need to know who she is and something of her background. It may be necessary for me to use her as a consultant, back home."

"That is no problem, Ibrahim," the attache answered. "I'll cable Washington and ask my counterpart there to get the information you need. There is, I take it, a need for speed, is there not?"

"There is, indeed, my friend. As a matter of fact, I would most deeply appreciate your expediting the request. The conference is over in two or three days and I should like to be able to confer with the doctor and her colleagues. So please, as rapidly as possible. Salaam."

Abu Ismail gently placed the telephone back on its cradle. It was certainly true that some aspects of the Nuclear Medicine program protocols were incomplete, and that he needed help, but he was somewhat uneasy about working with a woman as a peer. It was one thing to have a woman laboratory technician, but something else to have an unattached female as a colleague. However, there was nothing to do but to wait for Jamal's answer.

United States Embassy

1030 hours

Ron and Hank were still working when there was a discreet knock on the door.

"Come," Ron said.

One of the Station Chief's staff entered with a sheet of paper in her hand.

"Miss Lassiter. This is Henry Lyons. Hank, let me introduce you to our chief eavesdropper. What have you got?"

Miss Lassiter nodded in Hank's direction but spoke directly to her boss, "We just had this translated. It's transcript of a conversation between Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail and the Cultural Attache at the U.A.E. Embassy. It would seems he's interested in finding out about Dr. Mary Lyons."

"Thank you. Miss Lassiter, just leave it on my desk." The eavesdropper left, nodding, once again, to Hank.

"When did you begin bugging the Embassy?"

"We haven't, we're bugging the doctor's room. Ever since he began going to the chateau, we've become very, very interested in him. I better call Langley and have them send up the smoke about Mary and you. This probably has nothing to do with TROIKA, but if there is, then we've just gotten lucky."

"My hunch, Ron, is that the pot is beginning to simmer. I just hope Mary can handle the next step. After all, she's not one of us. I'm beginning to have second thoughts about the advisability of her sending her out there without back-up," said Hank, suddenly concerned.

Ron Grover's affable demeanor changed. "Look, Hank, once Mary was teamed with you she became what you so delicately call 'one of us'. Her mission is to get to Dubai and find out why that hospital needs so much enriched nuclear material. If the boss thinks she'll need back-up, it will be provided! Let's get on with your assignment, shall we?"

Hank grudgingly acceded. The uneasiness which he had been feeling all morning was not relieved by Ron's bland assertion that a back-up would be provided, if need be. His concern was that the back-up be as good, or better, than Langley would usually send on such a mission. Suddenly, he realized that Ron Grover was talking on the telephone. Hank had not even been aware that it had rung.

"She did what!. How the hell did that happen? Thanks for smoothing it over. All we need now is to make Mary persona non grata with MacPherson and Abu Ismail!" Grover fumed.

He slammed the phone back on its base. Whatever it was, Mary had made a blunder. His uneasiness increased. The men sat staring at each other for a long moment.

Then Ron opened the conversation. "Your wife had a breakfast meeting--well you knew that. She told the waiter that since this was a business meeting and not a social occasion, she wanted the regular menu with the price list.

"Ed Braithwate, her baby-sitter, had the presence of mind to defuse the situation. I gather he gave her hell. But he did it after the others had left. Ed's an in-house MD, who was sent over by the boss to take care of Mary at the conference and to use his connections with the UAE people to get her introduced to Abu Ismail and have

her invited to the Hospital."

Hank smiled, but said nothing. He knew Ron well enough to let him fulminate and calm down. He was concerned, though, that if Mary was unable to get to Dubai, a back-up plan would have to be developed. Since time was short, or so it seemed, he made a mental note to reinforce Ed Braithwate's admonition.

"I guess we've worked this over pretty thoroughly. Let's break for lunch. There are a couple of things we ought to work out regarding your co-operation with the Israelis and the Russians. If I'm not wrong, weren't you in Ankara about the same time Ben Yosef was? Stockton had made contact with the Mossad Chief of Station, a guy named Nefesh. What happened?" Ron inquired.

"The Turks got a little antsy about my mission status and persuaded Washington to pull us out. I did have a preliminary meeting with Nefesh, but we got out before I could meet Zvi. In fact, when I mentioned that we had an acquaintance in common, he bristled and changed the subject. Of course, Grisha Obadivsky was there, so he may have wanted to keep things quiet. Besides, the two of them had had run-ins in the past. It was interesting to watch them circle each other, both wary as hell. Two old combatants suddenly on the same side. It is more than a little weird. I'm sort of in Zvi Ben Yosef's boat. After a half-century of overt rivalry and opposition, it'll take some time to work things out smoothly, with the three of us working together in Tel Aviv," Hank finished.

Ron suggested that they eat at the Embassy mess to make time for further briefing. He, too, was somewhat worried about the smoothness of Operation TROIKA. Somehow, he reasoned, the FSB would stick its finger into the pot and stir. The intelligence community played by its own rules, regardless of what the politicians in any of their respective countries were braying. At some point during the afternoon, he planned to discuss his concerns with his colleague.

Hank intended to broach the subject of his uneasiness. His concern was as much for Mary's safety as it was for any inter-agency rivalry between and among the several parties to the investigation. In the past he had often relied on hunches many times that had proved out. As a matter of record, one or two of them had saved his life. At least one had prevented the rolling up of one of his networks in Turkey at the time of his abortive attempt to meet Zvi. Once, in Cyprus, he left his office just before a letter bomb exploded. At that time he had been feeling uneasy and "spooked". Afterward he found out that the Cypriot nationalists believed him to be a Turkish agent.

After lunch, they returned to Ron's office. He cleared his throat and leaned back in his chair, "It's going too damned smoothly," Ron ventured. "I don't like it! Why do I get a feeling that the whole mess is a trap? The Israeli and the Russian are working so well together that Compton is calling them 'Boris and Natasha'. Mary may well be on her way to Dubai, and the local KGB thugs haven't been sniffing around more than usual. Their chief, Boris Verdansky, is in Brussels. I most definitely don't like it!"

"By the way, who are Boris and Natasha?"

"Oh," Ron laughed. "They're a couple of cartoon characters my grandchildren watch."

"I'm just as puzzled as you are, but with one extra head-scratcher. If all I'm going to do in Tel Aviv is to be a messenger boy, why can't Roger do it himself? What can I possibly contribute there?"

"You'll be on site, just in case something comes up."

"Like what?"

"I don't know, but I still feel peculiar. Besides, Phil Miller may know something we don't and isn't ready to

tell us yet. It's his idea to send you out there, not mine."

Ron stopped. He shook his head and said, "For God's sake will you listen to the two of us. Hank, we sound like a couple of kids playing 'Who struck John?' in the playground instead of mature, intelligent adults. Let's call it quits for now. Go enjoy dinner with your lady. Just get to the airport on time. Good luck."

Le Sorbonne

1530 hours

The early afternoon session had just broken when Ed Braithwate and Mary encountered Doctors MacPherson and Abu Ismail as they left the lecture hall. Mary and Ed hesitated for a moment, waiting to see what MacPherson and Abu Ismail would do.

The Scotsman broke the silence. "Dr. Lyons, Dr. Abu Ismail and I would be pleased if you could find the time in the next day or two, before the conference ends, to meet with us for a preliminary planning session regarding Dr. Abu Ismail's problems."

Turning to Ed, he continued, "Since you helped establish the original protocols, Dr. Braithwate, we would be honored if you stayed for the meeting."

"It will be our pleasure, gentlemen, to meet with you," Ed replied, acknowledging the invitation. He took charge of the discussion. Braithwate thought he might be able to smooth some of the ruffled feathers left over from the breakfast meeting. Mary followed suit and let him set the scene.

The Dubaians and the Americans took out their appointment books and leafed through them looking for a mutually convenient date and time. Mary was amused at the ritual dance they all were performing, but she suppressed the laughter that threatened to bubble up by coughing into her hand.

Dr. Abu Ismail looked up from his book and asked, "May we meet tomorrow after the evening session?"

Ed thumbed through the pages of his appointment calendar and suggested the afternoon of the fourth day of the conference, since he and Dr. Lyons had a commitment to meet with several of their French colleagues. Mary surmised that this was a haggling technique. She knew that there was no meeting.

MacPherson and Abu Ismail consulted their calendars. Finally, a compromise was reached. They all agreed to skip the morning session of the fourth and final day of the conference. It was suggested that they meet in one of the small meeting rooms, if one was available, in the Ecole Medecin. Ed agreed to make the necessary arrangements.

Mary and Ed waited until the Dubaians had left the building. But as soon as they reached the entrance to the building, Mary let out her breath in a loud whoosh.

"It looks like we're in phase two," Ed said quietly. "For a while there after your performance at breakfast I was not at all certain that we could bring it off. By letting me lead the conversation this time, and your remaining silent, they are at least willing to talk with us. By the way, if you have no dinner plans, perhaps we could meet?"

"Sorry, Ed," Mary responded, "but I'm having dinner with my husband. Maybe tomorrow."

Hank had not yet returned from the meeting with Ron Grover. She took the time to sit back and relax. It was hard for her to accept that her faux pas had nearly ruined the operation. She shrugged her shoulders and

considered the matter closed. Mary was more concerned about being separated from Hank. For some reason she felt that something could go very wrong and that they might never really marry. She dozed off feeling tense and anxious.

A little while later she was awakened by the sound of the door opening and Hank entering. She stood up from the easy chair and stretched.

"What time is it, Hank? Do I have time to change for dinner?"

Hank glanced at his watch. "It's about five, Mary. We don't have too much time, so while I finish packing, you freshen up. We're going to that restaurant in the Tuileries where we got rained out yesterday. I've already made the reservations. Didier will meet us there. By the way, Mary, my flight doesn't leave until ten forty five tomorrow night."

Mary smiled. It meant one less day away from Hank. She was becoming grateful for small things.

Hotel Lafayette

1640 hours

The phone rang just as Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail was finishing his afternoon prayers.

"Salaam," he said, automatically, his mind-set was still in the Arabic of his prayers. The caller was the attache from the Embassy.

"I have just received the answer to your inquiry. Dr. Lyons is well known in her field. I will bring you a copy of the transcription from Washington. Will you be available this evening, Ibrahim?"

"It may be possible. There is a dinner meeting of those of us from my hospital at nine o'clock this evening. If you can bring the information to me, here at the hotel, I will be most appreciative. Until then, good afternoon."

Abu Ismail called the others at the chateau, informing them that he would be a bit late for their meeting that evening. The monitored call was recorded; the CIA watchers near the hotel were alerted. They moved their cab into the rank in front of the hotel, but far enough back so that no fare would hail them. Inside the hotel, one of Grover's men sat quietly sipping a mild kir. It was enough cover to let him go unnoticed, but weak enough so that his senses would not be impaired. The U.A.E. attache arrived, announced himself and took the elevator to his compatriot's apartment. Abu Ismail greeted the attache and took the envelope from him. The bug hidden in the room transmitted the crackling sound of the envelope being opened and its contents removed.

"Thank you, my friend," Abu Ismail said. "This is most interesting. I do believe that we shall invite the good doctor to come to Dubai. My first sense thought was that my American counterpart, Dr. Braithwate was trying to avoid coming back to my hospital, but it seems that Dr. Lyons is quite genuinely what she appears to be--an expert in this field." He ushered the diplomat out of the room, put the envelope into his attache case and went from his room to the hotel taxi rank, hailed a cab and directed it to the chateau at Neuilly-sur-Seine. The cabbie blinked his lights and swung out of the stand followed by Ron Grover's people. When the cab pulled up to the chateau, the doctor looked around to see if he had been followed. Seeing nothing unusual, he entered the building and went into room where his colleagues were waiting.

Moscow

20 November

0700 hours

FSB headquarters occupied buildings on three sides of Dzerzhinsky Square. The main building was the pre-Revolutionary headquarters of Imperial Russia's largest insurance company. All that had changed since the Revolution was who was being protected.

Until the failed coup in August, 1991, guards stood outside the entrance to the main building. Their principal duty was to inspect the identification cards of those persons who entered on official business. (Others were taken to a rear entrance connected directly to the Lefortovo or Lubyanka Prisons.) Inside the high-ceilinged hallways, its inhabitants trod softly, as if to preserve the secrets hidden in endless cubic meters of filing cabinets inside offices, storage rooms and archives. These massive records began with the Imperial Russian Secret Service, OKHRANA, many of whose agents defected to the CHEKA, after the October Revolution. In fact, the continuing derisive nickname for the secret police was "chekist".

Beginning with the first head of "Internal Security", Feliks Dzerzhinsky, down through Beria, and Andropov, to its present head, Dimitri Lazarovich Chevchevadze, "Internal Security" remains an entity unto itself. Through all the changes of its initials, OGPU, GPU, NKVD, MVD, KGB to the present FSB, the essential character and mission never changed--to collect information, develop international intelligence networks, employ what ever means necessary to advance the Soviet cause--and, equally important, to increase and enhance its power and the power of the Director.

There was, however, a constant source of irritation that even Beria in the 1937 massacre of most of the top ranking military and naval officers, could not remove. GRU, Soviet Military Intelligence and its counterpart, Soviet Naval Intelligence, continued to exist and to operate, albeit under constant surveillance and attempted sabotage by Moscow Center. This was the immediate problem facing Chevchevadze. He was well aware that since the changes under perestroika and glasnost, engineered by Mikhail Gorbachev, and intensified by Boris Yeltsin, his organization's star was almost a red dwarf.

A furious Dimitri Lazarovich Chevchevadze moved through the silent halls of his headquarters, past the series of life-sized portraits of the former Directors from the legendary Dzerzhinsky to his immediate predecessor. The portrait of the still unrehabilitated Beria was conspicuously absent.

His man in Zurich had been spotted and he, himself, had been insulted. It was bad enough to be cut out of the information loop, but it was humiliating to find that he could not seem to penetrate the operation. The sentry outside his office snapped to attention as the Director moved past him into his aide's office, through that to his own, summoning the startled man with a sharp shake of the head.

The office was an extension of its occupant, almost lifeless. One wall was hung with the mandatory portrait of President Kronskey. A tired reproduction of "Red Square in Winter" occupied the second. The third held bookcases filled with bound files. In a corner next to the bookcase, a table with an inlaid chess board sat against the wall, with a straight back chair in front of it. A partly completed chess game covered the remaining squares. Chevchevadze's desk was clear with only an in-out basket, a desk blotter and a penholder. There were no photographs.

"What the hell is Obadivsky up to, Andrei Vissionarovich? We baby-sit him in America, eavesdrop on him in Moscow, follow him to Zurich, and the son-of-a-bitch is always two steps ahead of us! We bug Ignatiev and Bolgarov. The lousy equipment in their staff car breaks down. The stupid driver can't understand a word of what they're saying! Kronskey's apartment, dacha and office are swept clean! Now Grisha's in Tel Aviv for some sort of half-assed nuclear energy conference, they tell me. Our legmen there are blocked off by the Shin Bet bastards. They roll up just enough of our network to let us know that they know that we know that

something is coming down. And we can't figure out what the fuck it is!"

Andrei Vissionarovich Voroshilov, Chevchevadze's aide, winced as his chief spoke. The Director presented himself as an unpolished person. His language often grated on his staff.

The shrill tones of the telephone on his desk stopped Chevchevadze's tirade. The aide picked it up, spoke softly into the instrument. "It's Boris Evgenyovich. He's calling from Brussels, Director," he said, handing the scramble-secured instrument to the KGB Director.

"Spasiba! Thank you, Andrei Vissionarovich."

Director Chevchevadze listened for a few minutes. His habitual frown lessened as he heard his Paris Station Chief's report. He reached into his rumpled jacket pocket, extracted a crumpled package of cigarettes, placed one in a long tobacco stained cigarette holder, lit it with an ancient Zippo lighter, purchased years before when he was first stationed at the USSR Mission to the United Nations. Inhaling deeply, he sat down at his desk.

Chevchevadze motioned to his aide to be seated. He sat still, drumming on his desk with his short, splayed fingers. The hands, he often said, of a peasant. This was a facade he had carefully built over time. In truth, he had come from a middle class family in Soviet Georgia. His father, a devoted Communist, had advanced to become the director of a petrochemical plant. This assured his son of a privileged place in the "classless" Soviet society. Chevchevadze was a student at the University of Moscow Engineering School when he was selected to be trained as a GPU agent. After a careful and complete vetting he was admitted and began a long career in the Secret Service.

Naturally suspicious, and equally ambitious, Dimitri Lazarovich Chevchevadze was the quintessential apparatchik. Posted around the world, collecting information, arranging everything from turning agents, planting moles, setting up successful assassinations and subversion of governments so skillfully that at no time was he spotted. He was never expelled from any of his various host nations.

The Director had served as a junior attache at the United Nations; assistant cultural attache in various Central American countries; London Chief of Station, ostensibly as head of the Russian trade delegation to the United Kingdom. His only failure was a sabotage mission in Turkey. That was when Grisha Obadivsky's brother-in-law was killed.

On his way up, Chevchevadze had made few friends, and only those enemies that came from intraservice rivalries. A gray man, he rose like a spiral of smoke until he became head of the agency.

Leaning back in his chair, the FSB Director spoke, "Our comrade in Paris has been prying and poking about into a new CIA operation. It would appear that there is an inordinate amount of activity at a place in Neuilly-sur-Seine that has the CIA skulking about. Thus far, our man has been unable to find out what it's all about. One of the people in that group is a medical man from Dubai. He does, however, know that several Palestinian nationalists are out of their respective countries. One of them may be Kaoukji. If so, Boris should have a complete report on what's going on. It may be time for us to stir the pot. I have a gut feeling that this whole business may tie into the missing nuclear material and the mission from which Kronskey has kept me out in the cold."

His voice dropped to a sibilant whisper, "So Kronskey, Bolgarov, Ignatiev and Obadivsky, I'm going to upset your global plans. You sons-of-bitches, you owe me and I intend to collect in full!"

Chevchevadze rose from his chair and walked to the window. A snow storm, almost a blizzard, obscured the far side of Dzerzhinsky Square. He stared intently into the storm, as if to conjure up the Ice Queen of Russian legend. An evil spirit, she was the handmaiden of Mischief. They saw her as a sort of "patron saint". After

several minutes, he turned to his aide.

"Locate Kaoukji. He should be on one of his rug buying expeditions. If he isn't to be found, Boris may be right--he's at that meeting in Paris! While you're at it, find out what other 'freedom fighters' are out of place. Then get to Boris Evgenyovich and tell him to get his fat ass back to Paris. I want to find out what in hell is going on there! We haven't been able to bug the U. S. Embassy, but we should be able to intercept their transmissions," he ordered.

The aide was out the door a few seconds after his boss had given the orders. As soon as the inner door was closed, he began dialing the FSB Station Chiefs. After scrambling the transmission, he delivered the same message to each of the men.

Colonel Andrei Voroshilov was effectively off active status. Several years earlier, he had been identified as a spy in Toronto, Canada. After two years in a Canadian jail, he had been returned to Moscow in a swap for three businessmen, two Canadian, and one Australian, who had been arrested for espionage. The fact that they were not show-trialed and shot underlined the fact that Chevchevadze knew the trio were innocent, but needed them as bargaining chips for the return of his agent. Nonetheless, like his predecessor, Colonel Abel, Voroshilov could no longer be sent out of the Soviet Union, or later, Russia.

When he was first assigned to the Director, the Colonel felt humiliated. It appeared that his punishment for having been discovered was to end up as office boy to a foul-mouthed paper pusher.

In time, Voroshilov made himself the indispensable man. Having accrued power in small increments, he was more nearly chief of staff than simply aide to Chevchevadze. Like all successful bureaucrats, he was the gate-keeper. Access to Chevchevadze had to come through him, except in those rare instances when powerful Cabinet members bypassed Voroshilov.

With his aide back in his own office, Chevchevadze began to plot his next series of moves. His only passion was chess. For him life, professional and personal, was simply a set of moves leading to checkmate or being checkmated. Sitting before the chessboard, he placed his partly consumed cigarette on a charred corner of the table and concentrated on the game. He had named the various pieces after various members of the Cabinet. Kronskey was the King; Ignatiev and Bolgarov, the Bishops; Obadivsky, a Knight. Other pieces, on his side of the board, represented members whom he felt he could count on to back him, or were totally ineffectual players, in the intrigues and back-biting endemic to the constant struggles for power and position within the Cabinet and other governmental structures.

Moscow

20 November

0900 hours

The secure line in Defense Minister Ignatiev's office sounded the burrrup, burrrup, burrrup, characteristic of the ring of military telephone hardware throughout the Russian Military Establishment. Ignatiev lifted the receiver and listened for a few minutes.

"Da, da. Spasiba. Dobry dvas. Thank you, good evening," he said as he quietly returned to the pile of papers and reports on his desk. The Minister sat at his desk going through the materials in front of him, but found his attention wandering. The phone call was upsetting.

"Please bring a car around. I won't need a driver. I'll drive myself. And, Sergei, cancel my appointment with General Glinovoy. I'm 'diplomatically' indisposed," he said to his aide who helped him into his overcoat.

A small ZIS car was waiting as he emerged into the underground parking area. The license plate indicated that it was from the central motor pool. The car itself was simple, with no luxurious appurtenances, not even a radio, but there was a powerful heater.

Ignatiev removed his coat and placed it over the seat. He kept his hat on. As he passed out into the street, the guard did not even salute. So far as he could tell a middle-aged civil servant was driving. As soon as he could be certain that he was not being followed, Ignatiev moved out into the highway that led to President Kronsky's dacha.

During the almost three quarters of an hour's drive, Ignatiev sang quietly to himself--a childhood habit which he had not outgrown. To his family, and later to his colleagues, it signified increasing mental discomfort and presaged an emotional display of anger. The guarded phone call to his office had triggered that response.

When he arrived at the President's dacha, he parked the car in the rear of the building, screening it from the road. The steady snow fall would obliterate any tire tracks within a few minutes. Without bothering to put on his coat, Ignatiev walked to the back door and entered the building. Kronsky and Bolgarov were waiting.

"Sit down, Vladimir Semyonovich," said the President, "Have a drink. As soon as you warm up, we'll talk."

He handed Ignatiev a large mug of tea and moved over to an arm chair facing the fire place. Fleet Admiral Bolgarov was seated in a similar chair to the right of the fire place, hunched over, cupping the tea in his hands. Ignatiev took the chair to the left of the fireplace. The three men sat sipping their beverages.

"Dimitri Lazarovich is making not too subtle inquiries. I'm afraid he's getting ready to meddle with TROIKA," began the Chief of Naval Intelligence. "He's alerted his networks in the Middle East and ordered his Paris Chief of Station back there from vacation. You know Grisha had a run-in with one of his men in Zurich. He's mad as Hell about that. Furthermore, he's trying to follow up on Grisha's activities in Tel Aviv, but got his wrists slapped by the Israelis. Our colleague is not a happy man.

"We have some news of our own," he continued. "My Sevastopol ONI man has what may be a lead on what happened to our Nuclear material. A couple of Tatars 'borrowed' a truck from the Commissary and had taken it for an unauthorized ride. A civilian worker at the Breeder Station remembered a truck coming into the compound and something being loaded onto it. He said that the men in the truck were dressed partially in civvies and partially in uniforms. He didn't think much of it then, but when my men began asking questions, he came forward. Right now, we're trying to identify the men and the truck. Our guess is that the truck had its identification changed. The rest was easy. All it took was one or two inside men to pull off the theft."

"The Sevastopol Station isn't exactly Gorky Park, Lenka," observed President Kronsky. "How long do you think it will take to complete your investigation?"

"That won't be too much of a problem," Bolgarov answered. "We are concentrating on the storage area, the gates and interrogating all of the staff who were on duty that night. We will only have to meet with a handful of people--perhaps forty to fifty. Actually, I'm more worried about Dimitri Lazarovich messing around in Operation TROIKA. Even if we find the culprits, we may have to deal with some of his operatives inside our own establishment. He's so damned mad at us that he may be just reckless enough to wreck the operation and start Armageddon on his own!"

"That's what this meeting is all about, Lenka," Marshal Ignatiev stated. "We have our own mole inside his office who's feeding us information. His place is as bug-proof as is humanly possible. So we've had to get someone inside his fiefdom--and that's what Andrei and I have been able to do. At the moment, old friend, we can't tell even you, who it is, but don't sweat it. He's absolutely reliable. What he's been giving us has been excellent product. For the first time, we have some idea as to what makes our FSB Director tick."

Field Marshal Vladimir Semyonovich Ignatiev leaned back in his chair and made a tent of his fingers. He stared at the fire for several minutes. As he raised his fingers to his pursed mouth, he began to sing softly. It was always the same song, an old Red Army song from the invasion of Russia by the Germans, "Meadowlands". After many years it had become so habituated that he no longer heard it.

Finally when he spoke, his words were uttered as if they were carved, individually, from marble. "I don't like the prospect of Chevchevadze getting involved in TROIKA. It scares the hell out of me, friends. We have to interdict what ever his field men get into. Partly because of the mission, but also because of Grisha. I've known him since we were at cadets at The Academy. I damn near lost him in Afghanistan, you know. What ever it takes we must stop Dimitri and his thugs. I can't understand, Andrushka, why you don't get rid of the Georgian. Wouldn't it be easier just to move him out of the way? He's been a pain in the ass for long enough!"

"Vladi," the President responded. "it's a case of trading the devil you know for the devil you don't. I've been working on changes ever since Mikhail Sergeivich was in my place. We've pretty much reined in them in, but until Dimitri Lazarovich trips over his own galoshes, I'm stuck with him. If he is meddling with TROIKA this may be my chance."

"Then let's follow up on what is being done in Sevastopol. If there is anything you need from the Army, it's yours!" a still angry, but less agitated Defense Minister, finished.

President Kronsky and Fleet Admiral Bolgarov clearly understood their colleague's anger. They knew that when Shasha Ignatiev yelled and ranted, it was nothing to worry about, but when he sang and his voice turned cold, he was virtually unstoppable.

By mutual consent, they left the dacha at uneven intervals. First Ignatiev left, followed by Bulgarov. Kronsky remained behind for about an hour to allow the others to return to their offices before departing for Moscow himself.

Always a careful man, Kronsky had his driver check his vehicle. On a hunch, the driver reached under the edges of each of the fenders. As he did so, his hand grazed against something between the tail-pipe and the hanger. The President's man slowly turned his hand over, moved his fingers along the pipe and felt a small square object in what was normally an empty space.

"I'll be damned," he muttered. "It's some kind of homing device, sir!"

He closed his hand and pulled the device loose. It was held in place by a magnet. The driver smiled as he rose, brushed himself off and placed the homing device under the fender of a second, disabled, car, which was sitting in the garage a few meters away from the main house.

"Thank you, Ilya!" said the President, aloud. "Now I can get back to the Kremlin and leave Dimitiri's men holding an empty bag. I guess they felt a need to convince themselves that I'm still going away from the apartment to get away from such nonsense." He was driven back to the Kremlin.

Black Sea Fleet Headquarters

Sevastopol Naval Station

November 20

1100 hours

Captain Second Class Vasiliy Ivanovich Valinsky, Chief of Naval Intelligence, Black Sea Command, sat at

his desk in the Headquarters Building, examining the latest reports on the disappearance of the nuclear material, when a chief yeoman entered his office after a discreet knock. He handed Valinsky a green-bordered sealed envelope and left. Valinsky set aside the reports and opened the envelope with a miniature dress sword. After carefully reading the contents, he immediately shredded the message.

The intelligence officer touched the intercom button on his desk. "Please ask Lt. Kiever to come in here. Tell him to bring the data I asked for this morning. Thank you."

Navy Lieutenant Stefan Davidovich Kiever, Valinsky's computer operations officer, entered the office carrying several computer printouts. He placed them on the desk and awaited orders. Kiever was a recent graduate of the Advanced Naval Training College. A brilliant young officer, he showed an amazing aptitude for computer programming and analysis. After several hours of work, he had compiled a list of all Breeder Reactor Station personnel on duty in the sensitive areas on the day the material was taken. It was arranged by name, rank, serial number, for military personnel, and badge identification number, for civilian personnel.

"Sit down, Kiever. I just received direct orders from Moscow to intensify our nuclear theft problem search. I can't go into detail, but rest assured, this is no make-work project. For the immediate future, I want you to concentrate on developing a computer directory of every one and everything that could have been most closely involved. For myself, I'm to assemble a team of interservice investigators and follow up at the Army barracks. My guess is that there is a direct link between the unauthorized use of that Army truck and the discovery of that raft a couple of weeks ago."

Lt. Kiever smiled and pointed to the printouts he had just placed on Valinsky's desk. "Captain Valinsky, sir, I had anticipated the need for that information. It's all in the sheets on your desk."

Valinsky looked up. He did not like to be out-guessed by subordinates. He forced a smile. "Well done, Lieutenant. It should save us a great deal of time. Now I still need a breakdown of arrivals and departures, by time of arrival, time of departure, agency, material delivered or released. If possible I want the identities of the crews on the delivery and receiving vehicles. It's possible that the Station has kept such records. If so, have your them send you a printout. That will be all."

The computer officer rose, saluted and left the room. Valinsky returned his salute, almost a wave of the hand, as Kiever left.

Valinsky tilted his old style chair back so that it rested on its rear legs. Years before, Valinsky had injured his back when the anti-submarine frigate he commanded was rammed by a tender on a foggy night on maneuvers in the White Sea. Modern swivel chairs were less accommodating to his needs. He began a review of the situation. Until now it had been a straight-forward investigation of the raft and the discovery of the Nuclear materials logo. If Moscow was interested he had better see to it that there was more than a desultory inquiry. He slowly eased the chair back on its four legs and reached into the small safe built into his desk. He withdrew the oilskin packet with the papers recovered from the raft. Until now he had not sent them to forensics for analysis. Next he went to the file on the Ulanov matter. The essential facts were there, but Valinsky was looking for anomalies in the report. There were none.

The Intelligence Officer reached for his phone and dialed an internal number which connected him with Naval Operations. "This is Captain Valinsky, Office of Naval Intelligence calling. I need to know the whereabouts of Lt. Pyotor Alexeivich Kalinkov, the captain of the Ulanov. When you locate him, please have him come to my office. I need to tie up some loose ends on a matter which involved his vessel."

A short hand-written message, directly from Fleet Admiral Bolgarov, ordered him to by-pass the FSB and coordinate his investigation with GRU and no one else. The Fleet Admiral stated that a matter of this nature was best left to the Armed Forces to handle without any outside interference. It also ordered him to refrain

from discussing the matter with anyone except the Commander, Black Sea Fleet.

Valinsky turned his attention to the printouts. Very few personnel were actively involved in the handling of nuclear materiel. He decided to call his GRU counterpart and ask for a meeting that afternoon. It was clear that he could not waste time. Bolgarov was the kind of superior who wanted it "yesterday--and good." For him to break protocol and come directly to him, rather than through channels, was reason enough to energize the usually slower moving Fleet Intelligence Officer.

Valinsky reached for his secure phone and activated the line to GRU headquarters. It was answered by his counterpart's aide, who put him through to the GRU Officer-in-charge, Brigadier General Generikh Borisovich Blaskovich.

"Good afternoon, Captain. This is General Blaskovich. I was expecting your call. I have received a communication directly from Marshal Ignatiev directing me to work with you--and no one else--on a matter of extreme importance. There was a handwritten addendum from him which I would rather not discuss over the phone, even this secure line. Are you free later today? My time is free after 15:00. If it is convenient, let's meet here in my office."

"Since the data are here, perhaps we could meet at my office at that time. I'm not standing on ceremony, but I would much prefer that the information not be carried from place to place," Valinsky countered.

"That seems reasonable. Fifteen hundred hours at your office. Good day," he answered and hung up.

Captain Valinsky sat staring at the unfinished work on his desk. What could not wait he would delegate. The problem was that he could never be certain that one of his people might be a plant.

At Army headquarters, General Blaskovich was faced with a similar problem. It was further exacerbated by the fact that he did not have the first clue as to what was on Moscow's mind, excepting that it had to do with missing nuclear material. There had been rumors of such an incident at Sevastopol. Nothing hard, until this morning when he opened the specially coded envelope.

The message from the Defense Minister's office was explicit. Blaskovich was instructed to keep the investigation out of the reach of the possible FSB operatives on his own staff.

Like Vasiliy Ivanovich Valinsky, Generikh Borisovich Blaskovich was a career officer. His present position was a reward for several decades of quiet, dedicated service to his country. At this stage in his life, he had no desire to become a hero, but on the other hand, the successful solution of this matter might bring him the promotion he coveted.

Black Sea Fleet Headquarters

Sevastopol Naval Station

1300 Hours

The Operations office at Fleet Headquarters had located Lt. Kalinkov. He was on patrol with the Ulanov, the vessel which had initially intercepted the rubber dinghy. A radio message was sent to the vessel informing Kalinkov that a launch would be picking him up at 1300 hours to bring him back to Fleet Headquarters.

The launch arrived a few minutes after 1300. The Ulanov's worried and confused Commanding Officer climbed down the Jacob's Ladder from his vessel to the deck of the launch. As soon as Lt. Kalinkov was on board the launch roared back toward the base. He could think of no reason which would take him from patrol

duties to return to shore. Anything he had reported regarding the raft he had encountered earlier was as complete as he could possibly have made it. His service record was clean. So far as he knew, there were no adverse reports in his personnel file.

Thirty minutes or so later, the launch returned to her moorings at Fleet Headquarters. Captain Valinsky was at the dock waiting to greet him.

"Good afternoon, Lt. Kalinkov," said Valinsky as he returned the junior officer's salute. "I've called you back to answer a few questions regarding that raft you retrieved. Let's walk to my office."

It was a five minute walk to Valinsky's office from the dock. Lt. Kalinkov strode along with him. He had thought the matter with the raft was over and done with.

In the office, Valinsky motioned the young officer to a chair. A forensic artist was seated at an easel beside Kalinkov's chair.

"I would like you to give me a description of the two frogmen you encountered on the raft. As you speak, this man will draw their portraits. Feel free to correct any part of the drawings that you feel need to be altered."

Lt. Kalinkov cleared his throat, "They were about the same height, between 1.7 and 1.8 meters. Their wet suits were snug and their bodies seemed muscular and well developed."

"What were their faces like, Lieutenant?" the artist interjected. He had been drawing rapidly.

"Vaguely Oriental, but the light was not of the best. I only saw them for a few minutes, and that was by the light from our forward spotlight. I do remember, however, that one had a heavy mustache. Their hair, in both cases, was cropped short--standard military length. Dark, I guess, but, again, it was hard to tell. The spokesman spoke fluent Russian, but with an accent I couldn't place. Remember, Sir, the entire encounter lasted, perhaps ten to twelve minutes."

"That will be all. Thank you, Lt. Kalinkov. You may return to your ship."

"I want those sketches within the hour." The forensic artist gathered his materials, saluted and left.

Valinsky read the Ulanov commander's report again. At that time the matter was one of internal security involving the Reactor Station and the Black Sea Command. Now the investigation had taken a different turn. The Fleet Intelligence Officer was not comfortable with the inferences resulting from the communications between him and Fleet Admiral Bolgarov. This time he read the report even more carefully than he had earlier that afternoon.

1500 Hours

Valinsky analyzed the report. He was so totally absorbed in the work that he barely heard his chief yeoman's knock. When he responded, the enlisted man ushered General Blaskovich into the office.

"Good afternoon, General," he said rising from his chair. "You certainly are prompt. Please sit down."

"Let's not stand on ceremony, Captain. Obviously Moscow wants us to work together and it would seem more appropriate, and more comfortable, if we were to operate between ourselves as informally as possible!" With that he extended his hand, "I am Generikh Borisovich, and you?"

"Vasiliy Ivanovich," he replied, smiling broadly. At least the start was good. There was a knock on the door.

"Come!" he ordered.

The forensic artist entered with a large black carrying case. He opened it to display the two sketches he had made from Kalinkov's description and left.

"They look like a couple of Tatars, or Turkomen," offered General Blaskovich.

"So they do!" Valinsky agreed. "At least that's a beginning. I'll check with our frogmen and find out if there are, or were, any Tatars or Turkomen in their outfit, and if any of their men have deserted in the last couple of months. I don't get that information on a regular basis. Desertions are handled by the Navy Provost Marshal. He'd also handle reported or discovered missing materiel. Those wet suits, raft and papers had to come from somewhere. For one thing, the papers were not forgeries."

"Our Military Police are investigating some damn fool joy-riding problem at the barracks. It seems somebody took one of their trucks and when they brought it back, parked it in the wrong place. If it's possible, I'd like a copy of that report and of those drawings. There may be a connection between the joy-ride, the loss of the nuclear canisters, and the raft," General Blaskovich responded as he rose to leave.

"I'll have them hand-delivered by courier, first thing in the morning, Generikh. I want to make the copies myself. There is no point in creating a possible leak. In fact, I'll bring them over myself, at say, 0830 tomorrow morning."

"I look forward to seeing you in the morning, Vasiliy. Dobry dvas!" said Blaskovich, and left Valinsky's office.

As soon as possible after Blaskovich left, Valinsky took the report and the drawing to the copier room and reproduced the information. He placed them in a green-bordered envelope similar to the one he had received from Moscow and locked it in his safe.

"Sufficient unto the day are the problems thereof, Vasiliy," he told himself. Nothing would be gained by going over the material again. He still had to piece together a connection, if any, between the theft and the joy-ride.

Brigadier-General Blaskovich settled back in his staff car for the return trip to his office. He sat quietly, except for soft humming. No matter how loud he hummed, nor how hard he concentrated, Blaskovich was not able to make sense out of any apparent connection between a couple of soldiers' joy-ride and missing nuclear weapons components. The answers to part of the puzzle would have to wait until morning when he met with Valinsky.

Moscow

Office, Chief of Operations, Russian Naval Forces

1700 hours

Fleet Admiral Bolgarov had returned to his office several hours earlier, and was holding a meeting of his senior staff. Most of the agenda dealt with a joint NATO Naval-Russian Northern and Baltic Fleet exercise. There was still a great deal of distrust of the Western Powers on the part of some of the men, but they had bowed to the inevitable and were hard at work on the protocol and logistics of the operation. However, as attentive as he was, a corner of Bolgarov's mind remained concentrated on TROIKA. Joint maneuvers were a kind of sport and could almost be done as a computer game, but the threat of nuclear devastation was hauntingly real.

Just as the meeting was breaking up, Bolgarov's aide handed his chief a recently decoded message from Captain Valinsky. At last something had begun. He noted the time--for him only half a day's work had been completed.

1700 hours

Office, Ministry of Defense

Field Marshal Ignatiev was preparing to leave his office when his aide handed him a message from General Blaskovich. He was pleased. He might be able to give Grisha Obadivsky something more concrete to go on.

Meanwhile, Director Chevchevadze stared glumly at the day's reports. Nothing unusual, except that for some reason President Kronsky was staying at the dacha. The homing device was still functioning, but had remained stationary all day. Chevchevadze shrugged his shoulders, lit a cigarette and sat down at his chess board. He needed to relax. Chess was either a stimulant or a soporific, depending on his need at any given moment. For this afternoon it would be a soporific.

In the outer office, Colonel Voroshilov was completing his own daily briefing report. It was typed on an old manual machine, a left-over. All other such instruments were either word processors, or electric typewriters. For his purposes, however, the antiquated, so-called "silent" machine could accommodate old-fashioned onionskin paper which the new machines could not handle. Voroshilov finished typing and slipped a carbon copy into the inside pocket of his uniform jacket.

Voroshilov knocked on Chevchevadze's door.

"Come," he called.

Voroshilov entered and asked, "If there is nothing else, sir, I would like to leave, now. I have tickets for the Bolshoi. I should like to have a chance to change uniforms before going out."

Chevchevadze looked up from the chess board and with a wave of hand motioned Voroshilov out as he nodded his consent. The colonel left the inner office and went down to the underground parking lot, took his car and drove out into the still swirling snow.

His route took him back across Dzerzhinsky Square, down past the Kremlin, over Red Square to Lenin's Tomb. Just past the tomb, he turned right and drove several more blocks to a newspaper kiosk, where he stopped his car to buy copies of Izvestia and Krasnoi Armee, the Army's own newspaper. He reached into his uniform jacket for his wallet, extracted a five new-ruble note which he folded over the sheet of onionskin paper and handed both to the elderly woman in the kiosk. She stuffed the rubles into her apron pocket and handed Voroshilov his change. The FSB officer drove off toward his apartment five kilometers farther down the avenue.

Exactly eleven minutes later, an Navy staff car pulled up to the kiosk. The driver got out and purchased copies of Trud and Litareryia Gazeta. He paid with a ten ruble note. The vendor gave him his change. The Navy officer returned to his vehicle and moved off in the direction of the Kremlin. The drop and retrieval had been successfully completed.

Port of Jebel Ali

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

November 20

0700 hours

The Turkish freighter Bogusz Kevi was nudged into her dockside berth by two small tugboats and tied up within a matter of minutes. Huge cranes moved ponderously on railroad tracks. The grapples and nets dangling from the forward booms swayed gently, giving them the appearance of toy elephants built from a huge Erector set. One crane stopped at the Turkish vessel's mooring and began to lower its grapple and net on to the deck. Deckhands deftly maneuvered the net into the forward hold, where others slipped it under the pallets holding the sheepskins. The second mate blew short blasts on his whistle. Slowly, at first, and then more rapidly, the cargo was lifted out of the hold and lowered to the dock. The maneuver was repeated several times until all the holds, fore and aft, were emptied of their cargo.

By eleven o'clock, the Bogusz Kevi was unloaded and her crew received liberty for twenty four hours. The dockmaster inspected the cargo along with the Customs Officers. The merchandise matched the invoice given him by the ship's captain. The Customs men also reviewed the invoices, and assessed the material according to the dockmaster's sheets. The legitimate material destined for the Ibn Rosht General Hospital was stamped DUTY-FREE. The Government ruled that such life-saving equipment was not subjected to levies and taxes.

Just after one o'clock in the afternoon, the two Tatar deserters made their way back to the dock and collected the detonators, bomb casing and the shaped charges. A large utility van picked up the men and the materiel. The men and their cargo were dropped at a warehouse near the airport.

The nuclear material was delivered to the hospital. At the hospital, the Purchasing Department checked the shipment, found a confirming requisition and called the Nuclear Medicine Department to take the material. Alfar Habibi accepted the shipment and placed it in the safe room with the other isotope material. The invoice accompanying the canisters showed that they had been sent from a plant in Kidderminster, England, via Turkey and Cyprus to Dubai. The document also specified that radio-active tracer isotopes had been ordered by Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail.

Alfar Habibi closed the door and secured the room. He saw Khalifa Hasan, the other nuclear technician walking down the corridor toward him. He hailed her, "Khalifa, do you know anything about another shipment of tracer isotopes the Chief had ordered? We just got some more from England. Does Dr. Abu Ismail expect a big increase in Nuclear Medicine?"

"Not that I know about, Alfar, but you and I don't have anything to do with ordering supplies. The chief has been working on a couple of experiments lately that don't seem to involve us," she answered casually.

"The shift's over, I think we can go home now. The lab is closed, Dr. Al-Yassir says he had nothing urgent," he responded, as he moved down the corridor to the department's office to close the operation for the day. The Senior Nuclear Medicine Technician was disturbed by the apparently secret nature of the experiments being conducted by Dr. Abu Ismail. In the five years he had been in Dubai, there had never been such a large accumulation of isotopic material.

Habibi left the hospital and made his way to the office of a travel agent. He asked for the tickets for his flight to Cyprus. The agent reached into a locked file cabinet.

"Yes, Mr. Habibi, here they are," said the man as he handed his customer a ticket envelope and a brochure of the tourist attractions on that island. Habibi took the packet and returned to his apartment in the staff quarters adjacent to the hospital.

He sat down and opened the ticket folder. Inside the left flap, where the ticket would normally be, was a half sheet of paper. It contained coded instructions for him to forward any further information of suspicious activity, using "Code Tashtid" to the address on the sheet -a Mossad drop on Crete. Further orders instructed

him to co-operate with a Russian Military Intelligence agent already in place in Dubai. The contact would ask him for a recipe for kibbeh, a Middle Eastern lamb dish. He was to reply that he would need to write his sister to ask for it. Habibi destroyed the note and spent the rest of the evening reading.

Khalifa Hasan changed into traditional Muslim garb and walked down to the open market, the souk. In the souk, she stopped at stall where she purchased a scarf. The merchant handed her change and a small white envelope, which she placed in her purse. She thanked him and returned home.

Her apartment was in the same building as Alfar Habibi's. As soon as she closed her door, Khalifa opened the envelope, and decoded the message. It ordered her to meet with an Israeli agent, already in place. She was to ask him for a recipe for kibbeh. He would reply that he would have to write to his sister to ask for it. From that point, the two operatives were to work together and forward any information to the enclosed address in Crete. Kalifa destroyed the message and spent the rest of the evening watching television.

November 21

0700 hours

Alfar Habibi and Khalifa Hasan reported to the Nuclear Medicine Department to begin their shift. They began the day as usual, checking the lab request sheets in the holder on the door. That morning there were only two requests. The samples had been drawn and already inserted in their lead lined covers. The two technicians removed the samples and set to work analyzing the contests. The counters clicked steadily, recording the level of radioactivity in each. The data were transferred to the information sheets for entry into the patients' folders. Less than an hour had elapsed since they entered the workplace.

Alfar Habibi, stepped down from his stool and suggested that they might go to the staff lounge for coffee.

Alfar and Khalifa sat quietly drinking their beverages when she asked, "Alfar, I'm having a party on the week end, I need a new recipe for kibbeh. Do you think you could get me one? I've lost my old recipe."

Alfar put his cup down gently and answered, "I don't have one, but I'll call my sister and ask for hers. It's quite good."

After the initial interchange, they were quiet. Each was shocked for the moment, but recovered their composure almost immediately. Now was not the time, and this was, most assuredly, not the place for discussion.

"I think we had best get back to the lab," Alfar Habibi suggested. "It's the only place were we can be seen together, outside the staff lounge or cafeteria, which won't arouse suspicion."

"Worse yet," she agreed. "It could start rumors if we were seen together too often. Neither of us needs that!"

They finished their coffees and walked down the corridor toward the laboratory. As they turned the corner, they were stopped by Dr. Hussein Al-Yasir, the Assistant Chief of Nuclear Medicine, who was in charge when Dr. Abu Ismail was absent.

"It's about time," he said, petulantly. "I needed those results an hour ago. You both know that rounds cannot start without everything in place! It's rarely that things get done on time when Ibrahim isn't around to watch his children."

Habibi and Hasan looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders and proceeded back to the laboratory with the whining Assistant Director directly behind them. It took all their presence of mind to neither turn and

confront him, nor worse still, to laugh or smile. When the trio reached the laboratory office, Alfar Habibi unlocked it, walked in, took the patients' records from the table and handed them, without a word, to Dr. Al-Yasir.

Dr. Yasir stood in the doorway for a long moment, reading through the data. He absentmindedly balanced himself on one foot, a stance which had led his coworkers to call him "the Ibis" behind his back. Habibi and Hasan silently ignored him. The nuclear medicine staff treated him with quiet disdain, doing nothing more, nor less, than what was asked. While Dr. Abu-Isma'il's absence had, as he complained, led to a slow down of research data compilation, his officious complaining made things no better.

Once Dr. Al-Yasir was finally out of the way, the two agents seated themselves at the desk in the outer office of the laboratory. They were still uncertain as to how to open the discussion. Alfar Habibi took a set of well-worn worry beads from the pocket of his lab coat and moved them between his thumb and forefinger. Their clicking was the only sound in the room except for the whoosh of the air-conditioning system. Khalifa Hasan sat silently making and unmaking a steeple with her fingers.

Khalifa broke the silence. "I suppose our first step is to report the unusual procurement of these new isotopes. There seems to be too large an amount for any of the experiments we've been working on. Dr. Abu Isma'il did say something about working on a new protocol for some special research."

Habibi interjected, "Our agencies must think he's involved in clandestine activities of some kind. Whatever it is, we had better file separate reports, even if the information is the same. As this develops we may each be given different assignments inside this operation."

1500 hours

It was time for Habibi and Hasan to finish their regular shift and close the laboratory for the evening. They went to their quarters, still somewhat confused. The two of them had worked together for almost five years. Neither had reason to believe that each was anything more than what appeared on the surface. Their respective covers were tight. Both had been trained in nuclear technology.

Khalifa Hasan quickly wrote and encoded a short report which acknowledged the orders to co-operate with Alfar Habibi. She smiled. This was an interesting development. Until now, her assignment was rather routine and boring, complicated only by the fact that she had to dodge any of Moscow Center's personnel who might be stationed in Dubai.

It was not prudent for her to be out alone in the late evening, so she decided to deliver her report the next morning when she went shopping. Under most conditions Khalifa Hasan sent her messages to GRU headquarters from Abu Dhabi or Oman when she took a few days leave from the hospital.

Alfar Habibi wrote and encoded his report. His was a bit longer than Hasan's. As chief technician, the Israeli agent had greater access to the Departmental operations. It was vital that Dr. Abu Isma'il continue to trust him completely. He was therefore most circumspect in making his drops when sending information to Israel.

The Druze was not under the same constraints as his GRU counterpart. It was much easier for a man to go into town without arousing suspicion. He was single, and often ate out in one of the several restaurants which flourished in the more modern section of the city.

Habibi placed the encoded report in his pocket and went to the travel agency he had visited the day before where he passed the agent the document in with a check for the ticket he had "purchased". After making the drop, he went to his favorite restaurant for a leisurely dinner.

Tel Aviv

November 22

0230 hours

The terminal in the Mossad code room chimed, alerting the night duty officer that a new message had arrived. The officer captured the encoded message into a buffer. Checking the source and timestamp of the message against a table, he saw that it was encrypted with "Code Tashtid". He typed in the private key for that coding, and the terminal displayed the decrypted message.

"Code Tashtid" messages had top priority. Zvi Ben Yosef was to be notified at once, regardless of the time of day or night. A special number was already in the automatic dialing chip in the code room telephone. He pushed the number and the "Blue Line" phone in Zvi's bedroom began to ring.

Zvi was disoriented for a few seconds, but became fully awake in an instant when he realized that the special-line phone was ringing.

"Ken, Yes!" he answered.

"Dr. Ben Yosef, sorry to disturb you, sir, but a 'Code Tashtid' message has just come in. We have standing instructions to alert you as soon as possible regardless of the time," the duty officer said.

"Thank you. I'm on my way. Please call Dr. Obadivsky and ask him to meet me at our office at 0330 hours. Just tell him we have a message. Please have a courier deliver the message to us at my office," He said as he hung up.

Zvi dressed hurriedly and went to the carport. The sometimes cranky car started smoothly. He backed the car out into the deserted street and headed for his office in down-town Tel Aviv. Traffic was mercifully light.

Grisha was waiting for him when he arrived. "Code Tashtid," Zvi said. Grisha nodded. The front door buzzer sounded. Zvi went down, greeted the courier at the door and took the manila envelope from him.

The two intelligence officers examined the contents of the envelope which Ben Yosef had already opened. Inside was Alfar Habibi's message detailing the arrival of the isotopes from the United States and Great Britain. Habibi also included the protocols for several experiments which Dr. Abu Ismail was proposing. He noted that until now, neither he nor Khalifa Hasan, the senior technician had been involved. The Mossad agent also indicated that the recent arrivals had been placed in a more secured part of the storage facility. Finally, he reported that the American shipment had arrived by air, the British by sea.

"Somewhere in these protocols Dr. Abu Ismail may be hiding his plans for the contraband," said Ben Yosef.

"I need to spend a little time with the report," Obadivsky answered. "Nothing is ever simple in nuclear research, Zvi. It may be that what ever our 'friend' is involved in may not even appear in any written protocol. He may simply be the originator with several others to do the actual work. After all, if we are right, we're not dealing with a wild-eyed fanatic, but with a well trained professional who knows what he is doing. A Nuclear Medical man, he has an above average knowledge of the power of such material. Let's wait for any report my person may send. It may help to clarify the initial report."

Zvi looked at his watch. It was almost seven o'clock. There was no point in returning to Kfar Saba. The morning traffic was building, in both directions, so that a fast return trip was not possible.

"Why not stop for breakfast at that little place down the street? It's not gourmet, but it is substantial. The coffee is brewed by the pot, not instant!" said Grisha.

"The owner is an American oleh who came here a few years ago, with fond memories of decent coffee. That's one reason the place is always crowded. The other is that he's introduced 'American Breakfast'- juice, eggs, toast, potatoes and coffee. Thank God, he's here!", Zvi explained.

Grisha Obadivsky laughed, "Believe me, Zvi, my stomach is rebelling against your typical Israeli breakfast, too. So let's get out of here before the place gets too full."

Zvi and Grisha left the office and walked down the street to the restaurant. The strain of the long night was beginning to wear on them. They needed to be totally alert. Things were beginning to move. Just how rapidly they could not tell, but intuitively, they knew that the game had advanced to another stage.

As they left the building, Zvi looked behind them. Their shadow was there, just across the street. He walked a discreet distance away, but always in eye contact. Given the sensitive nature of their assignment, as well as the original disquieting "tail"--even though it turned out to be nothing--Meron was taking no chances.

Grisha stopped in front of a men's clothing store pretending to make certain that his belt had passed through every loop, when he glanced into the mirror and froze. A few feet in front of their shadow was an FSB operative whom he had known on a previous mission. Zvi drew abreast of his companion.

Grisha spoke softly, "The guy across the street with the dark red jacket is one of Chevchevadze's men. I don't like his being here. Our shadow is about ten steps in front of him. Try to get his attention. I want that agent out of the way. Not 'neutralized'. Just sent back home with a clear message to Chevchevadze to stay out of my way!"

Zvi nodded, crossed the street and quickly moved beside the shadow. He spoke a few words and crossed back to join his companion. A few seconds later there was scuffle involving the Israeli and the Russian. Neither Zvi nor Grisha looked back. As they entered the restaurant, the shadow caught Zvi's eye and gave a "thumbs up" signal. The man in the dark red jacket was no where to be seen.

They ate quickly, paid their bills and returned to the office. Another shadow followed behind, with a second tailing them from the other pavement.

Dubai

22 November

0715 hours

The telephone in the Nuclear Medicine office rang several times before Alfar Habibi picked it up.

"Nuclear Medicine, Habibi, here."

"Alfar, it's Khalifa. I'll be a bit late this morning, I have some shopping to do. I don't think there is anything pressing. The Ibis's charts are in the door slot. He can start rounds on time."

Habibi surmised the real reason for the delay. She was sending her report to her agency. He shrugged his shoulders and checked the charts to make certain that everything was in order.

Khalifa Hasan made her way to the souk, where she made several purchases in various fruit and vegetable

stands. She wended her way, apparently casually to the scarf merchant's stand.

"Salaam, Mr. Khoury," she greeted him. "I am in need of a special scarf, ochre with tan binding. Would you have one?"

"Salaam, Miss Hasan. I just happen to have one in the back of the shop. If you will wait for a moment, I shall bring it to you."

Khoury returned moments later with a package wrapped in translucent paper through which the vague outline of a colored scarf could be seen. Khalifa took the scarf and paid for it with a 200 Rial note into which she had folded her report. The 200 Rial note signified that the message was top priority. Khoury placed the money and the report in the cash drawer of his register and turned to serve another customer who had entered his shop.

Khalifa Hasan came back to her apartment and changed into her hospital uniform. Alfar was in the storage room as she entered. He was checking the new shipments of isotopes against the invoices. There was nothing unusual about the air shipment from the United States. He could not, however, find a confirming bill of lading indicating the name of the ship on which the English material had arrived. Suspicious, he had begun to unpack the second shipment.

"Alfar," she said, "If you're checking the isotopes, we better find a way to examine the packing crates without disturbing the seals."

"Look here, Khalifa. The American material has the Lufthansa shipping data right on the crates, but there's nothing like that on the English crates. All we have is the Purchasing Department notation that it arrived by ship directed to the chief, but no shipping slip on the crates," noted Habibi.

Khalifa looked down. Caught on a corner of one of the crates was a tuft of dirty brownish-black matter. At first she thought it was a mouse trapped under the crate when it was moved into the storage room. She crouched down and saw that it was a bit of what appeared to be raw wool. They stared at the wool for a moment.

"Khalifa, let's check with Purchasing and find out if anything else arrived by ship. We can always say we're waiting for some equipment. I'll bet these containers came off that same ship and were never near Kidderminster! I have a friend in that office, Saida Kitabi. Let me ask her what she knows. Dr. Abu Ismail and I are always bothering her office when things we ordered are delayed or misdirected here in the hospital," said Alfar as he for the purchasing department to check with his friend.

When she saw Habibi, Saida said, in a mocking, petulant tone, "What now, Alfar? Are you here to collect on what husband owes from having lost at sheshbesh again?"

They both smiled. Saida had been with the hospital from the time it opened, and she and her husband had been Alfar's first friends when he arrived in Dubai.

"Not really, Saida. We were wondering where the shipment of instruments for our department came from. Actually, we need to know what ship brought them here. What we received was a partial shipment and we thought we might check with receiving about the rest," Alfar replied.

She tapped a few keys on her computer. The screen showed that the vessel involved was the Turkish freighter Bogusz Kevi. She printed out the information and handed Habibi the sheet. Everything was listed--but the isotopes! He thanked her and went back to the lab.

Once in the laboratory office, Alfar Habibi rapidly encoded a short message listing the name of the ship. He

shed his lab coat and left the hospital. Taking a small motorbike which he kept in the employees' garage, Alfar sped down the street to the travel agent, to whom he handed the note. It was forwarded, immediately, to Crete.

Tel Aviv

1030 hours

A second coded message was received at Mossad headquarters from Crete. It was in a Russian code which Mossad had broken several months before. After decoding, it was sent by courier to Zvi Ben Yosef.

Ben Yosef handed the envelope to Obadivsky. This first report from his agent was somewhat brief. It corroborated the first report. Grisha was not surprised that the GRU code had been broken.

Zvi called Ari Meron, and requested an urgent meeting at the Mossad office. The meeting was set for eleven thirty. Twenty minutes before the meeting, Zvi excused himself and left Grisha to put the further pieces into the puzzle which was beginning to take shape. He walked the several blocks to Mossad headquarters.

Meron was standing in his office doorway as Zvi climbed up the stairs.

"Nu?" asked Meron.

"I had a rather long report from Alfar Habibi. He discovered that ship carrying the nuclear containers is a Turkish freighter, the Bogusz Kevi. The bill of lading indicated a shipment from Kidderminster, via Cyprus to Dubai. He seems dubious. I'd like our people in London find out if such a shipment actually left England bound for Dubai. If it did, then we may be chasing a phantom, but if not, we may be on to something," Zvi requested.

"Zvika, I have a better idea," said Meron. "I'll have the commercial attache at our London Embassy find out from Lloyd's this ship's itinerary prior to arriving at Jebel Ali."

"Fine. I'd better be getting back to my office. I'll let Grisha know the name of the ship, but not our next step. I'm sure he'll find a way to let Moscow know what's going on," Zvi stated.

"Of course he will, Zvika. We've given him a tie-line to Moscow over scramblers. I'm willing to bet that his people will do the same thing about the Bogusz Kevi. They'll let him know what they find. It should corroborate anything we come up with," finished Meron.

"Shalom, Ari. L'hitraot, See you." Zvi said as he left Meron's office.

At the office, he pinned a slip marked "Bogusz Kevi" to the cork board under "Miscellaneous Information."

Zvi looked up from his desk and asked Grisha if he had eaten lunch. Grisha nodded his head "Yes." Zvi left the office again. As soon as he had gone, Grisha dialed a number which connected him with a code room where his message was sent in the special priority code he had used earlier in the mission. He gave the name of the Turkish ship with the suggestion that Moscow try to establish the Bogusz Kevi's whereabouts prior to arriving at the port of Jebel Ali, Dubai.

When Zvi returned to the office, his phone was ringing. London was looking into the matter. He was told to expect an answer by the following morning.

A few minutes later, Grisha received a similar message over the scrambler line from Ignatiev.

Nothing was left now, but to wait.

Paris

21 November

1800 hours

Mary returned from the meetings at the Sorbonne in a gray mood. She was still smarting from the reprimand which Ed Braithwate had given her. On an intellectual level, Mary knew that he was right, on an emotional level she still felt that she was right. The charade was getting to her. She felt that at any moment she and Hank would be unmasked and that the Dubai mission would be fatally compromised. It was clear to Mary that the success of the next step hinged upon her being accepted by Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail.

Mary had selected her outfit--a black jersey dress similar to the one she had worn to the luncheon in California, a pair of pearl earrings and a matching pearl necklace. She stood motionless staring at the clothing. It was difficult for her to accept that by the next evening, she and Hank would be apart for an indefinite period. This did not help her mood one bit.

Her brooding was interrupted by the phone ringing. "Yes," she said, her voice cracking. She cleared her throat before continuing. "This is Mary Lyons. Oh, I'm sorry, honey, for a second I didn't recognize your voice. No, nothing's wrong. I just haven't spoken for several hours and my throat was a little dry. When will you be here? The reservation's for nine o'clock, you know. Please hurry, I miss you already, 'Bye."

Mary began to cry. The tension of the whole incident, beginning in Philadelphia with the meeting with the Miller and continuing here in Paris with the meeting with Ed Braithwate and the two physicians from Dubai, as well as the fear of exposure, together with Hank's departure for Israel, was released by the tears. It's okay, she thought, she'd just let the tears come.

She went into the bathroom, turned on the water as hard as possible and cried loudly for several minutes. When the tears stopped, Mary removed her clothes, took her robe, hung it on a hook behind the door and stepped into the steaming tub. The hot water soothed her as she slowly relaxed in the strong flow. She heard the door open; Hank was home. A relieved Mary stepped from the bath into the room and gave her husband a long kiss and clung to him.

Hank looked down at his wife and kissed the top of her head. towel and all. Grinning, Hank said, "I don't know what brought this on, but aside from getting my suit and shoes damp, it's very nice."

"I just got a case of the willies, honey. Everything that's happened to us since that meeting with Phil Miller in Philly last week caught up with me, I guess. Now with you leaving for Israel tomorrow, and my going to Dubai, for God knows what reason, I feel as if it's hailing and I'm out in the open without any cover. Mama didn't raise me to be a hero--or a heroine for that matter. Daddy always said that the difference between a heroine and heroin, was one letter--most of the time the heroine was a dope, too."

Mary began to giggle, then to laugh, and finally to cry, once more, hysterically. "Oh, Hank, I'm scared. Scared to death," she sobbed. "I don't know what I'll do if anything happens to you. And, for Christ's sake, don't tell me everything will be all right. Don't patronize me, nor underestimate me. In your, I mean, our, business nothing is taken for granted. You've already told me that!"

Hank gently disengaged himself from her arms and stood looking at her. Then he spoke, quietly and precisely: "Mary dearest, I'm glad you're scared. Only a damn fool or a psychopath wouldn't be. Your feeling the tension isn't surprising. Remember, you're very new at this game. Besides, as a scientist, you expect clear and

irrefutable evidence and proofs in the results of your work--negative or positive. Espionage can't offer them. Ours is the operation of conjecture. It's not like books or movies where the case is solved by the end of the story. All the 'facts' don't always fit and sometimes all the loose ends aren't tied up.

"As far as your assignment is concerned. I know very little about the details. Whatever the reason for you being sent to Dubai, it certainly is related to the missing atomic materials. Believe me, before you leave Paris, you'll be fully briefed as to what, where, when, how and why you are being sent and what is expected of you. Aside from which, information is given on a 'need-to-know' basis and I may, or may not, be told exactly how you fit into the picture. Now let's get ready for dinner."

Mary dried her eyes, smiled, quietly finished drying herself and began to dress. Her relief was palpable. Hank undressed and took his shower. Mary laid out her husband's gray pinstripe suit with an appropriate shirt, tie and socks. He finished showering and shaving and dressed quickly. As soon as they were ready, Hank called the concierge to have the car ready when they came down.

They took the rickety lift to the lobby where Didier was waiting to drive them to the Auberge restaurant.

Didier pulled out into the evening traffic and had driven about half a mile when he became aware of a car following them. He motioned to Hank to look into the rear view mirror.

Hank leaned forward, "Don't try to lose him. Just slow down long enough to force his hand. He will either pass us or drop back and keep us under surveillance."

The car behind them pulled along side and passed. To Mary's surprise, the passenger was Dr. Abu Ismail. He neither turned his head nor in any way indicated that he had noticed her. He was on his way back from the chateau. It was pure coincidence. The road from the chateau passed the pension.

The rest of the evening was without further surprises. After dinner, Hank and Mary returned to the pension after dinner. It was late. Neither spoke, and holding each other they fell into troubled sleep.

Paris

United States Embassy

22 November

0700 hours

Hank reported for his final briefing. "Essentially, Hank, you have the information that Phil Miller sent. As I told you, the main reason for you going to Tel Aviv is to work closely with Ben Yosef and Obadivsky. It puts you in striking distance of Dubai, in the event that we need you there.

"You won't pass through Israeli arrival procedures. Zvi Ben Yosef is arranging a little show at the airport. We don't want Israeli stamps on your passport."

"Ron, I'd like to run through the material from Langley once more. I know I'll be getting additional information from Stockton. We know the Israelis and Russians are using American cloned equipment. This will make it a whole lot easier to carry and to work into whatever database my colleagues in Tel Aviv have developed," Hank suggested.

Ronald Grover leaned back in his chair, drew on his cigar and handed his fellow agent the discs. "For once, old buddy, I'm one step ahead of you. However, if you want to go over it again, I'll put it on my monitor and

we'll run it down."

Hank was trying to memorize the material so that there would be no delay on his part in fitting whatever he found in Tel Aviv into what he was bringing. Satisfied that he had done what he could with the data, Hank shut the monitor and waited for further instructions. Ron handed him a packet containing his ticket to Tel Aviv with an open return.

"Good luck," said Ron as they shook hands.

Didier drove Hank back to the pension, where he finished packing for the trip to Israel. He packed his lighter clothing and several sweaters. He did not pack his raincoat, which he had decided to wear.

Mary had left a note saying she was doing some small shopping and would be back shortly. He smiled as he folded the note and put it in his jacket pocket.

He left the pension and walked down the street to a local bistro where he ordered a croissant and coffee. Hank looked up and found Didier standing over his table, blocking the window.

"What are you doing, Didier?" he asked.

"Doctor Lyons, there is a man across the street whom we know to be a Russian agent. I'm trying to avoid his taking your picture. In a moment, he will be jostled and his camera, how do you say it in America, will be 'lifted' by one of M. Grover's men who is an accomplished pickpocket," Didier explained.

Hank accepted the explanation. Didier moved away from his table. When Hank looked across the narrow street, there was no one standing anywhere in sight. Hank was surprised at the bravery, or foolhardiness, of his chauffeur. Relieved, he walked back to the pension where he found Didier in his usual spot, leaning against the door of his cab.

"M. Didier," he exclaimed. "Your action was most appreciated. Ever since we arrived in Paris, I have felt that yours is more than mere attentiveness to a job."

"Merci, M. Lyons. You see, as a young boy I was working with the Maquis--French resistance. In addition, I am Jewish. This made it even more perilous for me to work, but I persisted. Whether out of fear or foolishness, I'm not certain. At one point, I was almost caught, but an OSS officer, working with my group, convinced the Gestapo that I was an acolyte in the small church where he was the curate. Ever since, Dr. Lyons, I have felt a great debt to the United States. From the time that our concierge, Pierre Corbet, recruited me, I have been involved."

Mary was waiting for him. They went down to the car and were driven to Charles de Gaulle Airport. When they arrived at the airport and got out of the car, Didier was instructed to pick up Mary as soon as Hank's flight was boarded.

In the airport, they made their way to the El Al counter, where he chose a bulkhead window seat in coach. This was his accustomed place. It provided space for him to stretch his legs and to spend his time looking out the window. He did not usually watch the on-board film. Most of the time, he either read the newspapers or dozed.

Mary looked at the El Al departure board. There was a notice that the flight would depart at 12:00 midnight. "C'mon, Hank. We have a little time before you board. Let's have a quiet drink in the Air France Lounge. I'm a member of the 2000 Club. It's an advantage of being Mary Lyons, frequent flying 'consultant'. It will give us a little privacy. You always tell me that a public place is the most private," she offered.

They went into the Lounge and sat quietly with their drinks, just looking at each other. Both sensed that the next time they met it might be less tranquil.

"Your attention please. El Al Flight 362 Paris-Tel Aviv is ready for departure. All passengers are requested to come to the boarding gate, now. Thank you."

"Take care, Hank. I love you," said Mary as they walked to the boarding area.

"I love you too, Mary," he said as they embraced. He turned to wave to Mary and disappeared into the plane.

Mary stood at the observation window until the aircraft moved out onto the taxi strip and into position down the runway. As soon as it took off she left to return to Paris in a slightly morose mood. She had found, and might lose again, the man she had loved for so long. Mary was both sad, and angry, that had taken so long for her to realize it.

Paris

November 22

1930 hours

Mary entered the pension, and asked "Are there any messages for me?"

"Oui, Madame," the concierge said and he handed her a phone message.

Mary nodded her thanks and proceeded to open the envelope as she mounted the stairs to her room. The message was a delicately worded, urgent request from Ed Braithwaite to meet him that evening for dinner at seven o'clock at a restaurant near the Place de la Concorde called Les Trois Chevaux. She smiled as she read the note. What a strange coincidence! The translation was "The Three Horses" or TROIKA! For a moment, Mary wondered if it was more than a coincidence. She shrugged off the thought. It was possible that he knew the name of the mission, but such an obvious play on words might compromise the situation. "Stop this," she told herself, "you're getting touchy. Leave it alone!"

Les Trois Chevaux

1900 hours

Ed was already in the restaurant when she arrived. He was seated at the bar nursing a drink. Mary moved to the stool next to him and ordered a vodka martini.

"Well, Mary, I must say you are prompt. Our table won't be ready for half an hour. We will not be dining alone, Dr. Abu Ismail and Dr. MacPherson will be joining us. I needed the time to brief you. Ibrahim has checked you out. Of course, his Embassy in Washington got our smoke and mirrors about you. I am virtually certain that you will be invited to his hospital. The conference is over the day after tomorrow, but he's not going back to Dubai for a few days after that. My understanding is that he is going to London for a visit and to look at a couple of similar operations in the UK. He trained there, you know. Should he invite you, there are a few ground rules:

"First: Western women unaccompanied by a husband or male escort are considered fair game.

"Second: Dress as modestly as possible, within limits.

"Third: You will be assigned a local contact. It will be your job to keep in touch with that person. I don't know if this will be a man or a woman. My guess is that it will be a man, probably someone in the oil industry.

"Last: If everything falls apart--Get the Hell out! You're not paid to be a heroine.

"Before you leave, Ron Grover will have one more session with you. He will give you last minute instructions and what ever 'paper' is necessary to complete your cover."

Ed turned as the two Dubaian physicians entered the restaurant. "Good evening, gentlemen," he greeted. "Dr. Lyons and I have just arrived. Our table isn't ready, yet. Can I order you drinks?"

Robert MacPherson ordered a Scotch, neat. Ibrahim Abu Ismail, a practicing Muslim, did not drink alcohol. He requested a soft drink. Mary selected a second vodka martini. Ed Braithwate chose a Bloody Mary. The foursome seated themselves comfortably in the lounge. They sat silent, each waiting for one of the others to open the conversation. Before the silence could become onerous, the maitre d' arrived and led them to their table.

Conversation during dinner was very casual. As the evening moved on, Mary became increasingly edgy. There was an undercurrent of tension and anticipation. The three physicians also attempted small talk, but it was evident that something was brewing.

Over coffee, Dr. Abu Ismail turned to Mary. "I have consulted with Dr. MacPherson. We would be delighted to have you come to Dubai, if possible, with Dr. Braithwate. I took the liberty of checking your credentials, Dr. Lyons. You appear to be highly qualified. Both Dr. MacPherson and I will be traveling to London for a few days holiday, after which we shall return to Dubai. Bis m'Allah, God willing, we will be back at the hospital on November thirtieth. Is it convenient for you both to meet us there?"

"I'm sorry, Ibrahim," Ed Braithwate demurred, "but I have to be back at Johns Hopkins for a post-graduate seminar on the twenty-sixth. Dr. Lyons will have to go on without me. I'm certain, however, that she is more than able to assist you without me present."

"If that is the case," Dr. MacPherson interjected, "I should like to invite Dr. Lyons to come. I'm certain, from what my colleague has indicated, that the task will be performed in an outstanding manner."

Mary suppressed a smile. "I would be delighted, gentlemen. Your project seems to be interesting. I look forward to helping in any way I can. Please excuse me, for a moment," she said as she rose from the table.

Mary went to the powder room, where she leaned over the sink and took several deep breaths. The tension had broken and she needed to get away for a few minutes to compose herself. Adjusting her makeup she returned to her companions.

When she returned, the others were ordering dessert and coffee. Mary sat down and permitted Ed to order for her. He seemed as relieved as she. After lingering over the end of the meal for a reasonable time, MacPherson and Abu Ismail left Les Trois Chevaux.

Outside the restaurant, Dr. Abu Ismail excused himself and took his car, which was parked behind the establishment and drove to the chateau for a late night meeting. A taxi driven by a CIA agent, with a man and woman acting as passengers, tailed Abu Ismail. Dr. MacPherson returned to his hotel.

"Let's take a little walk, Mary," Ed suggested. Mary nodded. They walked out into the chilly Parisian night. The pair walked down the street for several minutes before either spoke. "Well, Ed, I'm glad that's over!" Mary's breath hung in small cloud shaped puffs just in front of her mouth.

Ed took the opportunity to light his pipe before he answered. His head was covered by a combination of tobacco smoke and breath. He took several deep puffs.

"Just remember, this is just a step. A big one, to be sure, but just a step. I want you to meet me at the morning session tomorrow. I still need to tell you about the work I was doing with Ibrahim Abu Ismail. He will expect you to have had a full briefing from me. I'll bring the paperwork with me. Our meeting will be perfectly legitimate. Until tomorrow, then," he said as he hailed a cab and was driven to his lodgings. Didier had followed them. He sped up and pulled alongside and drove Mary to the pension.

Neuilly-sur-Seine

2200 hours

Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail parked his car in the circular driveway in front of the chateau and mounted the steps two at a time. He was late. One of the servants came out and moved the vehicle to the side of the building where it could not be seen from the roadway.

The tailing taxi moved past the target and dimmed its lights. Satisfied, the driver turned the cab around. As he passed the utility truck, he hit his high beams. The driver of the other vehicle responded by turning on his parking lights for a moment. The taxi returned to Paris.

The occupants of the truck checked their equipment. Highly sensitive tape recorders continued whirring, capturing every word and side comment. Extraneous sounds, such as papers rustling, chairs scraping and cups clinking against their saucers, were automatically suppressed. Their sole responsibility was to tend to the equipment, making certain the sound levels were even.

The conspirators met for several hours. When Abu Ismail came out of chateau, the servant who had parked his car brought it around to the front of the building. Light snow had begun to fall as he eased out of the driveway, back onto the road to Paris and his hotel.

The driver of the truck alerted a Citroën parked a few meters down the road. The car turned around and stopped at the back of the utility truck. One of the eavesdroppers handed the Citroën driver the tapes of the conversations from the chateau. The car headed back to Paris. A half hour later, another van, with the logo of the telephone repair service moved into position. The utility van moved out and returned to a garage in Neuilly-sur-Seine operated by the CIA. The garage served both as a storage place and as a repair shop.

Le Sorbonne

23 November

1000 hours

Mary and Ed arrived at the Conference Hall as planned. The meeting was a symposium on electronic networking and data interoperability. Both took places several rows behind Drs. MacPherson and Abu Ismail. For the next two hours, Mary took detailed notes. The subject matter related to the problem she was about to help solve. When the meeting was over, she and her Ed left the hall and went to in an anteroom where Ed took a large notebook from his bag.

"This is the report on the project we had going with Dubai. The data are incomplete, but what we have suggests that the difficulties are in the inability of the two hospitals to settle on a common protocol.

"Ibrahim Abu Ismail is a brilliant nuclear medicine practitioner, but he's not as advanced in his knowledge of

operations and applications as he thinks he is. His ego may be a separate problem, but that's one you'll have to handle on-site. If you find a solution too rapidly, it may upset him, so stall, if you have too. Your real mission is to find out what he is doing with all the atomic material he's collected."

Mary put on her glasses to read the voluminous report. It was a clear reprise of what had been accomplished and a projection of the probable difficulties. She had read about half the document, when she removed her glasses and leaned back to rest her eyes. Dr. Arthur Dutton, her colleague from UCLA, stopped by. He greeted Mary and Ed and then joined several other men and women who were leaving the meeting.

"I'm glad I had my glasses off, Ed, when Art Dutton stopped by. I'm still afraid that he might remember me. I told you when we met him at the reception, that he had never seen me without my glasses and a lab coat," Mary said.

"You're right. There's always the chance that if Dutton saw you with those glasses, he'd remember you. He's such a loud guy, that everybody within fifty feet would hear him greet you. So just leave it to luck," Ed replied. "Do you have any questions? Remember, when you get to Dubai, you'll be the 'Internationally Renowned Expert'--that's anybody who's lectured at a conference outside their home country."

Mary laughed and continued to read. She finished the report and handed it back to Braithwaite. "I'm bushed, Ed. It's a tough read. Can we get together tomorrow? By then you can have the answers to my questions."

"Fine, Mary. Just remember that I'm leaving for home the day after tomorrow, the twenty-fifth. I want to be back home in Bethesda for Thanksgiving. Let's make it a breakfast meeting. You pick the place."

"There's a little local place down the block from my pension. We can eat there and finish working. Meet me at eight o'clock," Mary offered. Ed agreed.

The Americans looked up to find their Dubaian colleagues moving toward them. Ed hailed MacPherson and Abu Ismail who had come into the anteroom. They sat down on two chairs across a small table from Ed and Mary. Abu Ismail took a package of cigarettes from his pocket. Before he could light it, Mary pointed to a sign above his head--Defense de Fumer--No Smoking.

"Please excuse me, Dr. Lyons. As a physician, I know, on an intellectual level, that smoking is unhealthy, but, a weak human being, I am still addicted to tobacco."

Mary smiled understandingly. "My husband smoked up until a few months ago. He hasn't slipped yet, but periodically he will search for the non-existent package."

Everyone laughed. Dr. Abu Ismail appeared more gracious. His Scots chief was more restrained. MacPherson and Abu Ismail rose, explaining that they had to return to the Hotel Lafayette. They were leaving in the morning for London and needed to wind up their affairs in Paris.

"I'm looking forward to seeing you at our hospital, Dr. Lyons, I trust that our relationship will be mutually satisfying." Dr. Abu Ismail said as he left.

Mary and Ed sat quietly for several minutes. Each was trying to assess the results of the impromptu meeting. On the surface, things seemed to be moving smoothly, if more rapidly than the agency had hoped. Neither scientist was a trained espionage agent. This was a single mission, with a limited goal. Once it was accomplished, Mary would return to her position at Lawrence Livermore. Ed Braithwaite was not given any more information than was absolutely necessary. He knew neither the scope of the mission, its relevance, its relationship to any other operation, nor its final outcome. His task was to introduce Mary to Abu Ismail, and to fill her in on the task she was to perform. Nothing more nor less. He would return to his duties at the

agency's hospital in Crystal City, Bethesda Naval Hospital and at Johns Hopkins Medical School.

Ed and Mary returned to the conference. The afternoon session dealt with difficulties in developing a totally compatible networking system, since almost every nation had its own operating standards. It was finally decided to create a network to be known as NUCMEDNET. Any hospital could then be brought on-line and connected to any other institution or group of institutions. The meeting broke up just after five o'clock.

That Hank would not be waiting had just registered as she stepped into Didier's vehicle for the trip back to the pension. Mary sank back into the seat and tried to relax. Her mind was too tired to even think. She tried to doze as the car weaved its way in and out of the Parisian evening rush hour. Suddenly Didier swerved, crossed the dividing line, spun the car around, and turned into a side street.

Mary snapped awake. She tapped Didier's shoulder. He turned his head slightly, and pointed to the rear-view mirror. Mary was unable to figure out what was happening. After two more turns, the car returned to the main street. The driver pulled over to the curb and turned around in his seat.

"Madame Lyons, just after you got into the car, I noticed a pair of motorcyclists following us," he explained. "My first thought was that they were simply part of the traffic, but as I drove, it became clear that they were following us. When I changed directions, they slowed down, but were unable to continue. Now I shall return you to the pension by a side street. I can only reach it by coming back to this avenue and turning off again. The route will be unfamiliar to you, but it is much more safe. My apologies for disturbing you."

Mary nodded. Didier put the vehicle into gear and returned to the pension. Neither spoke until they had arrived in front of the pension.

"Merci. M. Didier," Mary said as she released her held-in breath.

This last bit was all she needed. With Hank gone, Ed giving her tomes to read, and playing games with the Dubaian physicians, Mary felt drained. She walked slowly to the elevator and dragged herself wearily to her room, kicked off her shoes and sank into the arm chair too exhausted to move.

Sufficient unto the day was the cloak-and-dagging thereof.

23 November

0730 hours

The clock-radio at Mary's bedside chimed gently. By a few minutes to eight, Mary went to the lobby of the pension to wait for Ed Braithwaite. He arrived promptly and the pair set out for breakfast at the little bistro down the block.

Ed was carrying a medium-sized attache case which contained the rest of the Ibn Rosht General Hospital reports. As the were walking to short distance to their destination, Mary sensed that someone was following them. She half-turned, but could see nothing. Mary decided that her nerves were more jangled than she had thought.

When they arrived at the bistro, they took a table under a lamp, away from the windows. There were a few patrons in the room. Didier and the concierge, Corbet, were there. Mary realized that this was no coincidence. The usual practice was for only one of the men to leave the pension at mealtime. After a short while, the waiter came and took their orders. Only when they had finished the first cups of coffee and asked the waiter for a carafe of the beverage did Ed open the attache case. Didier moved over to a table between them and the door, ordered coffee and picked up a copy of Les Temps. This gave them a modicum of privacy. The

concierge left and returned to his duties at the pension.

"You covered most of the material yesterday at the conference, but in this batch there is information which you should almost memorize. It's the heart of the technical details. If you don't appear to be current with the information, it could cause some suspicion on their part. I'd like you to read them through now. If you have any more questions, I can give you answers. I'll leave the report with you. Bring it to the session," Ed stated as he moved around the table to give her room to spread the pages.

"Ed, actually, this is the easiest part of the report for me to handle. The rest of it was just so many words, mainly the standard boiler-plate in every proposal. It's tedious, boring reading. I guess it's necessary, but I wish they'd stop using unnecessary jargon. What ever happened to plain English?" Her tone was light, but incisive.

Ed shrugged his shoulders. He understood and agreed with her. Somehow, in the attempt to standardize proposals and grant requests, simplicity was lost.

Mary reached over and put the report into the attache case. As Mary and Ed left the bistro, Didier followed them. From the pension, Ed drove back to his hotel. It was just a little past nine thirty. The next, and closing session, was not scheduled until the evening.

Mary stopped at the concierge's desk to inquire about any messages. She had hoped to hear from Hank, by now. He handed her two envelopes which she carried with her up to her room. As soon as she closed the door, Mary tore open the first envelope. It was a message from Ronald Grover asking her to come to the Embassy at about one o'clock in the afternoon. The second was a short cable from Hank, telling her that he had arrived safely.

Mary reached for the telephone and dialed the Embassy number. "Mr. Grover's office, please?" she requested. "This is Dr. Lyons returning his message."

There was a short pause before Ron Grover's secretary answered. "I'm sorry, Dr. Lyons, Mr. Grover is out of the office at the moment. May I help you?"

"Yes. Would you tell Mr. Grover that I will be delighted to meet with him as he requested?" she answered

"Thank you, Doctor. I'll tell him as soon as he comes in," his secretary answered.

Mary spent the next hour and a half studying the entire report. If Dr. Abu Ismail had any questions, she wanted to be ready to handle them as they arose. Just before noon, Mary called down to the desk and asked that Didier bring the car around.

She had a light lunch at a small establishment a few blocks from the American Embassy. It gave her time to relax before meeting with Ron Grover and attending the closing session of the conference. Mary walked the short distance to the Embassy, where she identified herself to the Marine guard at the reception desk. The guard called Grover's office. A second Marine escorted Mary to her appointment. Grover's secretary asked her to take a seat while she let him know that she had arrived. After a few minutes she went into Grover's office.

"Please sit down, Mary. I'm glad you could make it, my dear. Tel Aviv cabled me that Hank had arrived on time."

"Ron, why do I get the distinct impression that this is not a social call. You know very well that my husband sent me a cable as soon as he arrived. I don't want to be rude, but could we please get to the point. Yesterday afternoon on my way back from the conference I was followed by a couple of men on motorcycles. Didier

seemed upset. Evidently, he has some idea of who should be shadowing me--and this pair didn't fit. He took me on a wild ride through a couple of back streets, but he was able to shake them," Mary said.

Ron tilted back in his chair, pursed his mouth and placed his index fingers on his lips, and spoke softly. "I know. My people reported that to me yesterday. It may have been a couple of motorcycle crooks who thought you were an easy mark--or it could be more serious. Unfortunately, Didier was unable to get license numbers, so we can't even make discreet inquiries with the Paris Police. You're absolutely right. This is not a social call," he continued. "You know, of course, that our Dubaian friend and his boss are going to London tomorrow. At first we had considered letting you stay here in Paris until the doctors went back to the hospital, but on a second look at the situation, we want you in Dubai before they get back. It will give you a chance to get settled. Dr. MacPherson has already informed the hospital staff of your impending arrival. Quarters should be ready when you arrive. We want you to tell them that you would like to begin working as soon as possible. They won't question it. Their feeling is the sooner you get started, the sooner the kinks in their program can be worked out. Abu Ismail realizes that a good deal of time can be saved if you are ready to start analyzing the problem.

"Please be ready to leave the day after tomorrow. Your travel arrangements will be made by Travel Tours, Ltd., 1127 Rue Ste. Honore. Bring your passport there tomorrow. They'll handle the visa requests and any other paperwork. When you get to Dubai, check in with Ted Bradley, he's Chief Project Engineer with Morrison Drilling, Inc. He's your contact with us. Any information you have to transmit will be through him. He's expecting you. Good luck!" Ron said.

"I have a couple of questions, Ron. How am I supposed to get a wardrobe together for that climate on such short notice? The clothes I have here are fine for Paris in November. I'm a fast shopper, but even I need more than two days to get things together," Mary said.

Grover called his secretary, Fran Harding, "Miss Harding. You've met Dr. Lyons. She needs a whirlwind shopping tour for appropriate clothing for her trip to Dubai. I want you to take the afternoon and help her make her selections. Charge them on the agency's account under the name of Mrs. Gordon Johnson, as usual."

Fran Harding smiled. "I don't think we'll have trouble carrying it out." The two women left immediately.

Paris

Sorbonne

1600 hours

Mary arrived at the conference after the hectic shopping expedition. She had had barely enough time to change for the evening. Mary settled in her seat a few rows below the two Dubaian physicians. She nodded in acknowledgment of their presence's. Ed was a few chairs to her left. He gave her a "thumbs-up" signal.

The session ended with a short address by the Minister of Health. After the talk, the participants moved from the amphitheater to the main dining hall for the closing dinner. The various national delegations were seated together, making it difficult for Mary and Ed to meet with Abu Ismail and MacPherson until after the affair. When the banquet was over, Ed maneuvered into position to meet the others.

Ed spoke first. "Good evening, gentlemen. I'm glad the sessions are over. The conference was very informative, but, like all such operations, it was a trifle too long. However, it did give us the chance to bring Dr. Lyons on board to help with your problem. I have already informed Dr. Lyons that she might be able to arrive in Dubai before you return to the hospital so that she can become familiar with the institution."

"That should be no problem, Dr. Braithwate," offered Dr. MacPherson, "I called ahead. Her quarters are being readied for her. Dr. Abu Ismail has informed his staff of her arrival and arranged for what ever she needs in the Nuclear Medicine Department."

"When are you planning to leave Paris, Dr. Lyons?" Abu Ismail asked.

"The day after tomorrow, Dr. Abu Ismail, if it presents no problem for you or your staff," she answered.

"That will be fine, Dr. Lyons, I will call my Assistant Director, Dr. Al-Yassir, and ask him to make the necessary preparations. I shall also call my Chief Technician, Alfar Habibi, the person most familiar with my research work. I look forward to a fruitful association with you in Dubai," said Abu Ismail.

The group separated, the Dubaians to their hotel and the Americans to the cafe down the street from the Medical School, where they ordered drinks and sat back in their chairs for a few quiet moments. Up to now, the operation had gone very well--almost too well, but that was the Company's problem.

"Two days?" Ed asked.

"Yep. That's what Grover wants. So I'll be on my way." Mary extended her hand. "Thanks for everything, Ed. We certainly seem to be able to work well together," Mary replied.

"When this operation is over, Mary, look me up at Johns Hopkins. I'm sure we could use someone with your experience. I do have a legitimate research section at the University Hospital," he offered.

"Thanks, Ed. Right now, I have to concentrate hard on this assignment. But I'll think about it," she answered.

After the dinner, he walked her to the curbside, where Didier, as always, was waiting. Ed turned, waved goodbye and hailed a taxi to take him back to his hotel.

Mary sat in the back seat of the cab. She felt a strange sense of both exhilaration and apprehension. "Well," she thought, "I wish Hank was with me for the next step. I know I'm not entirely on my own in Dubai."

Didier eased the car to the curb in front of the pension. Mary went directly to her room where she fell into a fitful, dreamless sleep.

Tel Aviv

Ben Gurion International Airport

22 November

0630 hours

El Al's Paris-Tel Aviv flight arrived late due to the delay in Paris. The thump of the wheels and the whine of the engines as the aircraft landed woke Hank. The flight from Paris was so smooth that he had dozed within minutes of take-off. An experienced traveler, Hank was able to shut down his mind almost as soon as he took his seat. There was never any way of knowing what would greet him on landing. He wanted to have a clear head when he stepped out of the plane.

Several mini-buses were lined up about 50 yards from the runway. Both as a security measure, and cost savings, there are no landing ramps at Ben-Gurion Airport, which makes it possible to move passengers swiftly to the gates and saves the cost of building and maintaining the gates-to-aircraft ramps. The passengers

were guided onto the vehicles and taken to the arrivals gates to clear Customs and Immigration and retrieve their luggage.

Hank got off the bus at the gate, with the other passengers. As he moved into the Arrivals Hall, he was stopped by two airport security guards.

"Dr. Henry Lyons?" asked a grim-faced sergeant.

"Yes, I am," he replied.

"Passport please!," the security man demanded.

Hank handed his passport to the sergeant, who gave it to his companion, an equally stern young woman. She opened the document, turned the pages and requested that he accompany them to a side room. Hank followed them, without question. Inside the room, he found a smiling Zvi Ben Yosef. The guards handed him his passport and quietly left.

"Shalom. Baruch haba! Welcome to Israel! Hello, Henry. It's good to see you again. I'm sorry for the charade. Our agencies felt it was important that there should be nothing to show a visit to Israel in case you have to leave for the United Arab Emirates on short notice.

"A cab is waiting outside. Roger Stockton has taken care of your accommodations. My understanding is that you will not be seeing us for a couple of days. If you haven't been here before, enjoy some sight-seeing."

Zvi and Hank left the arrivals area by a side door where the car was waiting for him. His luggage was already in the trunk. The driver, a U.S. Marine in civilian clothes drove out of the airport toward Tel Aviv. At the airport exit the cab stopped and picked up a second passenger.

It took Hank a moment to recognize Roger Stockton, whose hair, once bright red, had begun to show some white. Hank had kept track of Stockton's work over the years. As CIA Station Chief, his old friend had reestablished the close relationship with both Mossad and Shin Bet, which had deteriorated during the Pollard affair and the Kuwaiti-Iraqi crisis.

"Langley wants me to keep you busy and out of trouble for a couple of days. Miller doesn't want your departure from Paris to cause any ripples. Once you've had a chance to sight-see and visit, the two of us will sit down and go over the information from home. There is some new material, which was sent directly to me, because you were already on your way from Paris. If you have to get to the UAE, we'll fly you to Athens and from there by Lufthansa to Dubai. Tom Sandford in Athens will make the arrangements. Phil was a bit vague about why you might have to get to Dubai, but like everything else in this business, it's on a need-to-know basis," Stockton explained.

"Could you please drop me off at my hotel, Rog," Hank requested, "I'd like to get into something more comfortable. I refused the breakfast on the plane. The truth is--I slept through it. The steward probably didn't want to disturb me. Once I've settled in, I'd like to get something to eat."

Stockton looked at his watch. "We're putting you up at the King Saul, a three star hotel. I guess vacationing academics don't travel first class any more. The place is within walking distance of Zvi Ben Yosef's office. I hear the hotel has an OK restaurant, so you can get breakfast there. You have the day off today--I know how you are with jet lag. Why don't you freshen up and have dinner with Nancy and me tonight? We'll pick you up at about seven thirty."

The driver stopped the car and helped his passenger take his baggage into the hotel lobby.

"Dinner sounds fine. What will I be doing until I report to the salt mine?" Hank inquired.

"I've arranged a tour for you with a group of Americans and Canadians, down to the Negev. The tour guide will call for you at four o'clock tomorrow morning. Be ready, these guys don't appreciate lateness, especially when the trip is down there. Even though it's November, the Negev and Masada get pretty hot in the late morning and afternoon. The day after tomorrow, I'll pick you up and take you to Jerusalem for part of the day. After that it's showtime!" Roger concluded.

Hank went up to his room, emptied his bag and laid out fresh clothing: a sport shirt, tan slacks, brown socks, and dark brown loafers. Even though it was a relatively short flight, he felt rumpled and unkempt. Once showered and dressed, he went down to the lobby restaurant.

Hank's American accent had alerted the waiter. Most Israelis ordered coffee, which, unless it was Turkish, was instant Kaffee Hag, a brand which was, mercifully, no longer sold in the United States.

"Coffee or American Coffee?" the waiter asked, a standard question, now that a milder ground coffee was available in Israel. With the increasing number of Western tourists, the Ministry of Tourism insisted on having this roast widely available.

"American, please," he answered.

"Very good," said the waiter. "Will you be having our breakfast buffet?"

"Yes, thank you," Hank replied.

The waiter brought a cup with a plastic device on top. He poured water into the device and left it at the table. In a few moments, he returned and removed the plastic. It was a filter with a measure of ground coffee inside. Lyons noticed that the others had instant coffee, either black or with milk. After finishing his breakfast with a second cup of coffee, he went to the news stand near the cash register, bought copies of the Jerusalem Post and the International Herald-Tribune, seated himself in a corner of the lobby and read the newspapers for a while.

1930 Hours

Roger Stockton arrived promptly at seven-thirty, with his wife, Nancy. A short, slender, dark haired woman, she seemed to complement her husband as only physical opposites can.

"My God, Hank," she gushed, "you look wonderful. You're aging gracefully, my dear. We haven't seen you in what--five or six years. Still single?"

Henry mumbled something unintelligible, but Nancy Stockton continued talking without taking notice of his lack of answer.

Roger drove through the evening traffic in Tel Aviv to the suburban community of Herzliya P'tuach, and into the American Embassy compound. The Stocktons' apartment was down the street from the Ambassador's official residence. The United States Embassy was still in Tel Aviv, although there was increasing pressure to relocate it to Jerusalem. Some embassies and missions were already in Israel's capital.

Nancy Stockton had prepared an excellent dinner. The evening passed quickly as the old friends exchanged gossip and shop-talk. Their guest managed to keep the conversation away from his private life. He no idea whether or not Miller had shared his "marriage" with Stockton. About eleven o'clock, he drove his guest back to Tel Aviv.

23 November

0400 Hours

For the next two days, Hank "touristed" his way around Israel, visiting all the famous places he had read about and studied. It was relaxing to visit a country without being involved, if only for short time, in a local mission. His tour companions on the trip to the Negev were several American and Canadian Jewish families. Four had been to Israel several times, but always for family affairs. This was their first trip without any obligations. Hank kept to his cover story as an American college professor on sabbatical and just traveling.

Their tour guide, Avigdor Bulgari, a middle-aged Israeli, was very cordial and knowledgeable about his nation's distant and recent past, which kept the trip from becoming boring. At the rest stop in Ein Gedi, he sat with Hank while the others wandered about the gift shop and milk bar. Bulgari told him that unlike most Israelis he had not Hebraized his name. After the War of Liberation, it was customary for Jews born outside Israel to do so. Some of the pioneers, like David ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister and Yitzhak ben-Zvi, the second President of Israel, had changed theirs upon arriving in pre-World War One Palestine. The guide was a Sabra, born in pre-Israel Palestine. A veteran of several of Israel's wars--and the son of one of the founders of the Israeli Army--he felt that he did not have to justify himself by making the change.

The group arrived at Masada at mid-morning. By noon, the group had arrived at the top of the ship shaped plateau. Bulgari explained the situation, physical and political, that led to the construction and defense of the site. These men and women, called Zealots, died either by lot at the hands of their fellows or in the end fell on their swords, had held out an incredible three years against the Tenth Legion, Rome's most formidable troops. Henry Wheatland looked down from the "prow" of the promontory and was able to see the remains of the Roman camps.

One of the Canadians, a professional actor, read the final speech of the commander of Masada, Eliezer ben-Yair, as recorded in Josephus' Wars of the Jews. The group fell silent as the address was read. After the reading, the group moved, quietly, back to the path and down to the cable car which would take them to their bus. As they descended, Hank felt that for the first time he understood the tenacity for survival in the small nation.

24 November

0900 Hours

The following morning, Roger Stockton arrived at the King Saul Hotel shortly after nine and they left for Jerusalem. Roger left his car at the American Consulate-General, where he had parking privileges. The men took a taxi to the Old City, where they spent several hours exploring. Stockton was something of a Biblical scholar and he pointed out the various Holy Places of all three major faiths. He took his guest outside the city to the area which was the actual City of David. Hank was amazed at how small it was. After the tour they returned to the New City where Stockton took him to dinner at a typical Israeli restaurant. It was late when they returned to Tel Aviv, and Stockton dropped Hank at the hotel.

"I'll pick you up at about seven-thirty, Hank, and we'll get to work. When we finish, I'll get in touch with Zvi Ben Yosef and you two will take it from there," Roger said.

"Thanks for the two day rest-up. I'm ready. Ron gave me two disks. I'll bring them with me in the morning. Good night," Hank answered.

Tel Aviv

United States Embassy

25 November

0930 hours

Stockton and Lyons entered the embassy offices. The Marine guard examined Hank's identification card and passed him through. He did the same with Stockton. Even though he was with a senior staff member, all the security measures were taken.

Like his Parisian counterpart, Roger Stockton operated out of offices in an obscure corner of the embassy. There was just a number on the door. The Station Chief punched in a series of numbers on a door lock to gain entrance. The interior space was divided into a small reception area, Stockton's office and a special CIA code room.

In Stockton's office, Hank removed the first disk from its travel-pack. It held the detailed account of the problem. The second was a lengthy document, containing the specific atomic energy information relating directly to the Philadelphia shipment.

Willem Vermaat, the FBI plant, had located the Lufthansa manifest which showed onto which freight flight it had been loaded. There was no indication that either Lufthansa or its employees were involved in the problem.

The second disk was an exchange of messages between Attiyeh in Paris, his office in Pennsauken, New Jersey, and a request, by him, that Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail be given an open account, without limit, for any isotopic material, of what ever nature it might be. The entire fax operation had been photocopied by Vermaat and forwarded to FBI headquarters in Washington. Richard Grant, FBI Director had made a courtesy copy for DCI Philip Miller.

"I guess that establishes the link between Attiyeh and the Doctor. As far as we are concerned, we have four pieces of the puzzle, Rog. We know who sent the shipment, to whom it was directed, where it was delivered, and when it arrived. We still don't know why Dr. Abu Ismail wants the atomic material, and for what he intends using it.

"We put the material together from what the Company, Mossad. and GRU had gathered," explained Hank.

"You may get some answers, Hank, when you meet with Zvi Ben Yosef and General Obadivsky. I haven't been filled in on what this is all about, but everything hit the fan here when that French report appeared. The Israelis were putting out denials and pushing like hell to find out how those markings got onto those canisters. I was given strict orders to give Mossad anything that we picked up at this end, as well as keeping the boss up to speed. We had nothing here. I met with our man in Dubai, Ted Bradley, in Nicosia, the day before yesterday, but he had come up dry, as well. Whatever is going down, even the material you brought to add to what I have, doesn't clarify it one damn bit!" said the Tel Aviv Station Chief.

"Let's go back over the disks. Maybe I can fill in some of the gaps. Obadivsky, Ben Yosef, Mary Mallory and I have been in on this from the get-go. We were told that there were quantities of enriched atomic material missing from otherwise secure installations. The President instructed Phil Miller to assign Mallory and me to work closely with the Russians and the Israelis. They, in turn were directed, by their respective Chiefs of State, through their channels, to work with us and each other.

"Dr. Mallory and I were sent to Paris to get involved with what Farid Attiyeh was up to. She was selected to meet Dr. Abu Ismail and get to Dubai to find out what's going on there. An atomic physicist, she and Obadivsky were on the ICEVENT team."

"What is ICEVENT, Hank?" queried a confused Roger Stockton.

"I'm sorry, Rog. It stands for the International Commission on Verifiable Nuclear Testing. I had just been assigned to bird dog Grisha Obadivsky when this mess broke. Believe me, it's been no easy job to have us get over all the years of mutual distrust, but when the politicians make those decisions, us peons follow through. Phil is glad that the three top dogs are letting the professionals handle the real work. They'll take the bows, if it works. We'll catch hell if it doesn't. C'est la vie, pal, c'est la vie," he ended, wryly.

"Ron Grover filled me in on what's been going on in Paris as well as your 'marriage' to Mary Mallory. That'll make it much easier for you to move out of here, should the need arise. For now, you're going to be working with your friends down the road. I've got a cab waiting for you," Stockton continued, glancing at his watch.

"The driver has instructions to take you to their office. It's in the commercial area here in downtown Tel Aviv. Unless the home office tells me differently, I won't be seeing you on a regular basis," Roger concluded.

The two men went down to the waiting taxi. The cab hurtled into the Tel Aviv traffic. His driver seemed determined to prove that Israeli cab drivers were crazier than kamikaze pilots. In about seven or eight minutes, it pulled up to the drab, nondescript building which housed the team's work place. He was greeted by the others as he walked into the lobby of the building.

"This is the place," offered Zvi.

"It's good to see you again," said Grisha, extending his hand.

"I'm glad to be here," Hank answered, as he shook hands with his Russian counterpart.

The three men rode the elevator to their destination. A fourth desk, chair and office supplies had been brought in just prior to the American's arrival. The pin-studded corkboard dominated the room. His colleagues had been working steadily compiling and organizing the bits and pieces of the puzzle.

Miriam Safti, the Mossad computer technician, was copying data onto a back-up disk. Zvi Ben Yosef introduced her to Henry Lyons. She smiled and greeted him in Hebrew.

He greeted her in rather stilted Hebrew. "I'm sorry, but I haven't spoken Hebrew in several years. I'm rather rusty."

Miriam Safti answered in precise, but accented English, "I am certain that we will understand each other, Dr. Lyons. I studied English all through school and university. It is the official third language of the State of Israel." She returned to her task. The computer chirped and whistled as the data were being saved.

"What goodies have you brought us?" asked Zvi.

Hank took the two small disks from his briefcase and handed them to the Israeli. Zvi gave them to Miriam Safti. The three men crowded around the monitor as she scrolled the material up onto the screen. When she finished, Zvi requested copies for each of them. Miriam stroked a few more keys and the clacking of the printer intruded on the quiet in the room. She handed each of the men his own copy of the material.

Hank took his copy, put on his glasses, tilted his chair back and began to read. He had seen the information before, of course, but this was the first time he had held it in his hands and was able to relate to it as a document.

Zvi went through his pipe ritual before starting to read the sheets. He lounged in his chair and rapidly scanned

the sheets, before he placed them on the desk and began to re-read them, more carefully for a second time.

Grisha sat upright in his chair, pinched the bridge of his nose, adjusted his glasses and began a slow and careful first reading of the data. As he began to re-read the material, he, like his companions made notes on the margins.

Zvi spoke first. "This fills in some of the blanks, Hank. We have a clear paper trail in so far as your nuclear material is involved. Now we know how both shipments, yours and Grisha's got to Dubai. We know where all the canister were headed. Destination is clear--purpose is uncertain."

"My people are still tracing the Bogusz Kevi's itinerary. Like the Jebel al Tarik, she's a tramp steamer. It's possible for her to have picked up the nuclear material legitimately in Cyprus, but we don't think so," offered Grisha.

The shrill tone of the telephone interrupted the conversation. Zvi lifted the receiver, spoke a few words and hung up.

"We know more about the Jebel al Tarik. Her last port of call before she sank was Aqaba! She left Aqaba several days before the accident, but made no other stops," announced Zvi as he moved to the corkboard and put a slip under the Jebel al Tarik information with the word "Aqaba" neatly printed.

"Our guess is that she received the Israeli material while she was docked there. The problem is how it was moved on from Dimona to the ship. We know that Weizmann never ordered the canisters, and that the papers were probably excellent forgeries, but where the conspirators got the truck and the Weizmann Institute insignia is still being investigated. Weizmann's vehicle fleet is intact."

The CIA agent stood looking at the large scale map of the Middle East. A smaller map of Israel, including the Gulf of Aqaba and adjacent Jordanian and Saudi territory, was pinned up next to it. A series of colored push pins traced the movements of the Israeli materiel from Dimona to Ein Gedi. Hank reached down, took a pin from the box and placed it on Aqaba.

Zvi turned back to the cork board. "That's it!," he exclaimed. "That's how they did it! Hank, as soon as you put that pin into Aqaba to place the Jebel al Tarik, the whole thing made sense. The closest Israeli territory to Aqaba is Eilat! The stuff must have been moved from Dimona, through Ein Gedi. The driver discarded his uniform there, drove down to Eilat and got the canisters over to the ship. I'll get in touch with Shin Bet. This is in their jurisdiction." He reached for the phone, dialed and spoke softly in Hebrew. There was a short silence, "Nahon, L'hitraot, Great, so long," he murmured and returned the instrument to its cradle.

Hank smiled, "Serendipity, Zvi, just serendipity."

Their more serious-minded Russian colleague stood staring at the maps and began to place differently colored pins onto the larger map: red for Russia, striped blue and white for Israel, and blue for the United States. The stereotyped colors made identification simple. Two of the pins, a red and a blue were placed at Dubai. The blue and white pin was placed in the Straits of Hormuz where the Kuwaiti ship had foundered and sunk.

Grisha placed a blue pin on the border of the large map and ran a thread from it to Dubai. He placed blue and white pins at Dimona, Eilat, Aqaba and ran a thread to the pin at the Gulf. A red pin was placed at Sevastopol. A second showed the place where the Ulanov recovered the rubber dinghy.

"We know where the nuclear materials originated and their destination. The American and Israeli routes are complete. We have only departure and arrival information for the Russian 'contribution'. Our problem is not how it got onto the Bogusz Kevi, but how it got from the Breeder complex to the dinghy. That's for our Naval

Intelligence to handle." he said.

Neuilly-sur-Seine

23 November

1730 hours

The six Palestinian conspirators sat around the table in the small conference room in the chateau. The discussion had gone on for over three and a half hours. The CIA eavesdroppers diligently recorded every word. Unfortunately, the CIA operation had been put into place one day after Farid Attiyeh arrived in France and had not recorded the crucial initial session. Grover and his men had no idea that Attiyeh would be arriving for the meeting at the chateau which had been arranged by Mehdi Kaoukji, a Parisian rug merchant.

The ever flamboyant Kaoukji, using florid rhetoric, had been speaking for over half the time of the session, "In Allah's name, for how long do we have to wait to avenge ourselves on the Zionist jackals and their American pigs? Have we not suffered enough, for long enough? When will I return to my native land and retrieve and redeem my family's honor, land and holdings?" Kaoukji stopped for breath.

"What 'native land?' sneered Henri Sayyid. "You've never been within a thousand kilometers of Falastin, you pompous ass! The closest you ever get is here in France, when we call a meeting, or when you get to Syria or Iran on your rug buying expeditions! If it wasn't for your name, Kaoukji, and the noble lie associated with your late grandfather's deeds, we wouldn't even talk to you. So just shut up!"

Mehdi Kaoukji's grandfather was "General" Fawzi el-Kaoukji who had led a group of Arab "volunteers" in Palestine during the 1948 Arab-Jewish conflict and was driven out by the nascent Israeli Army. In the Arab world it was touted that he had stopped the "Zionist Entity" at the Litani River. Actually, the Israelis had stopped there to avoid further problems with the United Nations. While no member of the Arab League would admit that defeat to the outside world, the intense internecine fighting for position among the various factions all too often led to such acrimonious and insulting interchanges.

Final details were ironed out. Each man had his specific assignment, or as in the case of Farid Attiyeh, had completed it. Everything was in place except the actual date of the operation.

"The date will be set when everything is in place. That won't be until I get back to Dubai from London. Almost all the arrangements have been made. Just make certain the plane is ready when I call for it. We will not meet again. This session is closed. Allahu Akhbar!" said an exasperated Ibrahim Abu Ismail, as he rose from his place at the head of the table.

Ron Grover's people recorded the scraping of the chairs and the conspirators' farewells as they prepared to leave the chateau and return to their usual residences.

Abd-el bin Mahmoud, the Syrian contact, went back to Damascus that same evening. Henri Sayyid flew to Beirut the following morning. Jamal Ali Akhbar returned to Teheran. Farid Attiyeh took the opportunity to contract for several legitimate shipping arrangements, which would keep him in Paris for several more days. Dr. Abu Ismail drove back to the Hotel Lafayette and Kaoukji to his villa near the meeting site.

Paris

24 November

0930 hours

Mehdi Kaoukji made several phone calls the next morning, one of them to his control in the FSB Paris Station.

As soon as he lifted the instrument, a bug in it activated a tape in the offices of the Surete. The French had had him under surveillance for several years.

"Hello, this is M. Mehdi Kaoukji. May I speak with M. Agrotov?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but M. Agrotov is not in this morning. May I ask what this is about?" asked his secretary.

"Please tell him that the shipment of rugs which he ordered have arrived from Tabriz. I should like to make an appointment for him to see them as soon as possible. Please ask him to call me. He has my number. Thank you," said Kaoukji. Approximately an hour later, Kaoukji's phone rang. It was his control affirming an appointment for half-past three that afternoon.

The Surete prepared surveillance teams to tag him. One team, made up of two couples, ostensibly shopping, staked out his establishment which was in an expensive row of shops on the Faubourg St. Honore. As Fhad, Kaoukji & Cie, he operated a successful, expensive rug and carpet boutique. This enabled him to travel without difficulty everywhere in the Middle and Far East, mixing legitimate business with clandestine missions.

A second team was placed near the address of his control, an office building in the business area which housed several Russian commercial offices as well as several honest establishments with no connections to their Russian neighbors. One "business" was a front for a Surete operation which had bugged Agrotov's operation.

"Semyon Gurevich Agrotov" was listed as the executive director of the Societe General France-Russie Commerciale, a kind of French-Russian Chamber of Commerce. French intelligence agencies knew that "Argotov" was FSB Major Leonid Volkovich Markov, whose major mission was industrial espionage. This was their first knowledge of any expansion of his duties to include Middle Eastern contacts. That was usually handled directly from the Russian Embassy in Paris.

1500 Hours

Mehdi Kaoukji left his villa shortly after he received confirmation of his meeting that afternoon and drove to the store. His assistant had arrived earlier to prepare the shop for its usual fashionable opening hour of three in the afternoon. All viewing and sales were held between that hour and seven or eight o'clock in the evening. Most were by appointment, but the occasional buyer came in to inquire about certain pieces and make appointments to return for formal presentations.

Under that guise one of the surveillance couples entered Fhad, Kaoukji & Cie., apparently interested in a rare Bokhara wall rug. A flustered Kaoukji met them at the door. It was almost three-fifteen! He did not want anyone in the store while he hand delivered his hastily assembled report. The two agents wandered around the boutique and, while examining the Bokhara for the second or third time, planted a miniature microphone in the base of a free-standing Chinese cloisonné vase a few feet from his office. The fine wire mesh which secured the delicate colors to the clay base acted as an enhanced antenna which increased the range of the transmitter. It also overrode the muffling effect of the rugs and wall tapestries. After a short conversation, the couple promised to return the next afternoon to discuss the purchase of the rug. At three twenty-seven they left.

"Argotov" arrived precisely at three thirty. His short, blond Van Dyke beard was, as always, perfectly trimmed, in line with the impeccable suit that exactly fit his tall, slender frame. He spoke perfect French, with

just the trace of a Slavic accent.

"Bon jour, M. Kaoukji. It is always a pleasure to meet with you. May I examine the rugs? My firm is anxious to have me inspect them and decide which we shall be purchasing," he said.

"Of course, M. Argotov. The merchandise is in my private showroom. Please come in so that you can examine them in daylight," he responded as he opened the door. The Russian was legitimately interested in making several purchases. His superiors had expensive tastes. One of his assignments was to satisfy their needs. He and Kaoukji spent almost two hours inspecting the rugs.

When they finished examining the rugs, Kaoukji handed "Argotov" the report, which he read and began questioning his agent. "The information is most interesting, but there are several gaps. For example--are the armorers sufficiently expert technicians to make certain that the device is properly designed to have the full effect necessary? What is the ultimate target? Can we be certain that my people will be involved in the destabilization of the region as a result of the attack? What assurances does this so-called Al 'Suyuf Al Kharb organization have that the plane will, in fact, be available?" he asked. It had the tone of an interrogation.

Kaoukji replied, "I should have all that information within the next few days. Dr. Abu Ismail may call a final session, most likely in Damascus, to fine tune the operation. I will send the results of the meeting to you through our usual channel there."

The entire conversation was recorded on a tape deck inside the Peugeot parked outside the boutique. When the agent left the establishment, the second couple entered the shop, ostensibly to re-examine a possible purchase, and surreptitiously removed the bug while Kaoukji and his assistant returned the merchandise to the store room.

Paris

Russian Embassy

24 November

1745 hours

Unlike Dimitri Lazarovich Chevchevadze, Boris Evgyenovich Verdansky, the Station Chief in Paris, did not hide his intellectual prowess under a layer of false "proletarianism". He was an honors graduate from the Department of Fine Arts of Moscow University, with several published articles on French Medieval Art. In his dress and demeanor, Verdansky looked vaguely like an academic. His covers were almost always in the Office of the Cultural Attache, or as a visiting professor, or lecturer, in Third World universities and colleges. Until his present assignment, he had been FSB's Chief Recruiting Officer in Algeria, Morocco and The Ivory Coast.

Verdansky sat reading Kaoukji's report. He blew acrid clouds of smoke from an ancient pipe filled with a blend of strong Latakia tobacco. Markov sat opposite him, carefully masking his distaste for his superior's nicotine habit.

"What do you think, Semyon Gurevich? Is this reliable product?" he inquired.

"Yes. Kaoukji may be a blusterer, and somewhat fatuous, Boris Evgyenovich, but most reliable. He's managed to keep his relationship with us entirely under wraps," Markov answered.

"There's pressure from Dimitri Lazarovich to stir up the situation in the Middle East. He's ordered a contact

check with every network from Nicosia to Teheran. We need to know what GRU and ONI are up to. Kronsky has given the operation to the Defense Ministry to handle. Needless to say, to paraphrase an old Western cliché, when Dimitri Lazarovich Chevchevadze sneezes, I catch cold and the field men get pneumonia!" Verdansky said with a wry smile, as he rose from his chair. The briefing was over.

Neither Verdansky nor Markov were entirely satisfied with the new development. Elegant espionage operations are not based on fits of pique or personal vendettas. Both were superior agents. The two operatives had painstakingly developed intricate networks of reliable agents all over the Middle East.

Chevchevadze's orders could lead to unexpected and equally unwanted changes in this delicate balance. If they were being sent on a fishing expedition for his own ends, perhaps he should have sent some of his personal "experts" to handle the matter, they reasoned.

The French press's "revelations" concerning the Israeli markings on the atomic material containers kept Verdansky and his entire staff busy trying to make sense of the matter. Jerusalem's denials seemed hollow. The reactions from Washington and Moscow were the standard knee-jerk statements. None of the various intelligence agencies were taken in by the press releases.

After Markov left, Verdansky returned to his office and began a more careful analysis of Kaoukji's report. He sensed, but could not prove to his own satisfaction, that even if what his contact said was true, that it might simply be the constant dreaming and fulminating that was a part of the Palestinian problem since the 1948 defeat. It might just be bombast and fatuous posturing, but it still was worth refining the document and sending to Moscow Center.

Verdansky took several hours to remove the extraneous material from the report. The long hand-written document which Markov had given him was reduced to less than two typewritten sheets. The essence was that a meeting had taken place in Paris involving Palestinians from almost every important group. They apparently were developing an attack plan against Israel which included the use of a crude nuclear device.

Moscow Centre

24 November

1900 hours

Moscow Centre received the report where it was decoded and brought to Voroshilov, Chevchevadze's aide. He was just preparing to leave when the short statement was placed on his desk. Voroshilov read the communication and slipped it into his uniform jacket pocket. His responsibility, under his covert connection to Admiral Bulgarov, was clear: under no circumstances could he permit this document to get to Chevchevadze. On his own authority, he ordered the code room to destroy the coded original and any copies of the decoded document. His position ensured immediate compliance. As soon as he completed the call, Voroshilov left Dzerzhinsky Square.

Chevchevadze had left early for meetings in Odessa, Kiev and Kursk. He would be gone for several days.

Colonel Voroshilov was unnerved by the possible consequences of the report from Paris. His loyalty was to his country, not to the FSB. He still smarted from the cavalier manner in which he had been removed from the tasks for which he had been trained. It was his resentment at being effectively demoted to a clerk that made it possible for Bolgarov to turn him around. His father, Rear Admiral (ret.) Vission Denisovich Voroshilov, had been a classmate of Bolgarov's at the Naval Academy. They had kept in touch over the years. When his son voiced his dissatisfaction to his father, the old salt put him in touch with his classmate. From that point it was easy. The first trial assignments were enough to convince the Fleet Admiral that he had found the ideal mole.

Voroshilov drove to his drop and repeated the transfer procedure. The woman in the kiosk went to the public phone near her kiosk and placed a coded call. As before, within minutes, a Navy petty officer retrieved the document and drove to Navy Department Headquarters.

He delivered the envelope to Bolgarov's aide, Commander Boris Alexeivich Lermontov. Lermontov knocked on Bolgarov's door and handed him the sealed document. The Navy's Supreme Commander dismissed him before he slit open the envelope.

Moscow

2200 hours

Office of the Chief of Naval Operations

Fleet Admiral Bolgarov removed the report from its envelope and read it carefully. His astonishment moved to anger and from anger to action. Bolgarov dialed President Kronsky on a recently installed safe scramble phone. The line was put into place by a group of Navy electronics technicians whom he trusted. It completely circumvented the regular telephone circuits, which made it almost impossible to trace or bug the new instrument. A similar phone had been installed in the President's office as well as in Defense Minister's.

"Da!" answered Kronsky. Even with the assumed super security, the President answered with the simple word "Yes". He had, of course, recognized Bolgarov's voice.

"Can we lunch together?"

This was an internal code indicating a special urgency. The request had nothing to do with real time.

"Certainly! Will our friend be coming along?" asked Kronsky.

"I haven't invited him yet, but I'm certain he will accept," said Bolgarov and put through a call to Ignatiev. As soon as the second call was completed, the men left their offices and drove themselves to President Kronsky's Moscow home.

Kronsky arrived first and had his servant admit the two senior officers. As soon as they entered, the President put them at ease and ordered tea and vodka for all.

Fleet Admiral Bolgarov wasted no time. He took the report from his uniform jacket pocket and read it to the others.

"Are there any other copies?" This from the President.

"I doubt it. My man has sufficient authority to order the complete destruction of the document. He will put a highly laundered report in its place. It will move through the normal FSB coding and decoding process. What Dimitri Lazarovich receives will have just enough data for him to accept it's authenticity, without question."

"Where do we go from here?" queried the Defense Minister.

"I want this translated into English and sent over my most secure fax lines to President Dunstan and Prime Minister Shalom. Then I want a "Bear Hug" code transmission to General Obadivsky immediately. The original remains in my office in the Kremlin under tight security. What Dimitri Lazarovich doesn't know can't hurt the world," ordered the President. The men returned to their offices to continue the daily routine operations which had been so abruptly disrupted.

The Chief of Naval Operations spent the next hour or so composing the altered report from Verdansky to Chevchevadze to be entered into the Moscow Center logs. It was almost 2300 hours when he finished the document and called his mole.

Voroshilov answered the phone on its second ring. He held his breath until he recognized Bolgarov's voice. For the moment, he feared that the Director had returned unexpectedly, and was summoning him to an all night meeting, which Chevchevadze often did after returning from a field visit. The unusually terse message asked him to purchase a copy of Krasnoya Armea, the Red Army's official journal, on his way to the office in the morning.

Moscow

25 November

0600 hours

Colonel Andrei Vissionarovich Voroshilov stepped out of his car into the dull, blustery, dark pre-dawn hours to purchase the copy of Krasnoya Armea at the drop kiosk. He followed his usual procedure and paid with a large denomination note. The kiosk operator handed him his change and a copy of the newspaper, which was a few pages thicker than the others. He returned to his car and drove the rest of the way to Moscow Center. At the security gate he presented his pass. Voroshilov went directly to the code room which he entered with his own key-card. The only person present was the night duty officer. He was not surprised to find Voroshilov at a code console. As Chevchevadze's aide, it was not unusual for him to send and receive coded messages.

Voroshilov entered the altered report into the coder-decoder and placed a copy in his brief case. He checked the log, and found, to his relief, that the original entry had been deleted. He and the duty officer had a brief conversation and Voroshilov placed the falsified document in an appropriate envelope, initialed it, entered the time and date to correspond with the entry log and put it on the Director's desk.

Washington, DC

The Oval Office

24 November

1600 hours

President Dunstan had just returned to the Office from a long lunch meeting with the Senate and House Majority Leaders. He was in a sour mood. The two men, both from his party, were adamant in their opposition to further cut-backs in the Defense appropriation which he had submitted several weeks earlier. Each came from areas with heavy concentrations of military and naval bases, as well as prime defense contractors. They felt that it was political suicide for them to support him.

His private secretary, Janet White, placed the faxed report from Kronskey on his desk.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Mr. President? It's fresh."

"Thanks, Janet, but right now I couldn't put another thing into my stomach. Lunch with those two always leaves me dyspeptic. Is there anything on my calendar for the next couple of hours? I'm pooped!" he asked as he sat down behind the desk which dominated the room. His secretary shook her head.

The President was ready to lean back and relax, when he noticed the fax. The envelope had the extraordinary

red, white and blue corner tab which denoted a TOP SECURITY--URGENT message. Dunstan reached for the envelope and his letter opener, a miniature of a formal Army dress uniform sword, and slit it open. The first page was a note from President Kronskey, somewhat stiff and formal, The next four pages was a translation of the original report Verdansky had sent to Moscow. Dunstan read the document and groaned.

He reached for his intercom. "Janet, get me Ed Forbes at his office, or where ever he is, and ask him to report to me ASAP! Then line up a meeting of his group and ask Miller at CIA to join us. Tell them it will be a working dinner meeting. Then cancel what ever else is on my agenda for the day. Have the Press Secretary let the White House Press Corps know that I ate something that didn't agree with me and I'll be back at my desk in the morning."

"Yes, Mr. President," she answered and reached for her confidential phone file. In less than five minutes, she found Ed Forbes, the National Security Advisor, at his home in Vienna, Virginia. He acknowledged the call and told her he would be at the White House within the hour, unless the snow storm which was building up made travel slower than usual. Forbes, a North Dakotan, was annoyed at "Washington Panic", which virtually closes down the Nation's Capital when there is more than a light dusting of snow.

Phil Miller received his message while on route from Crystal City to Langley. Usually, he didn't like using his cell phone. When Janet White's voice came through the receiver, he had his driver slow down so he could to listen to the message. It was terse. He was to report to National Security Council situation room immediately. Miller ordered the driver to turn the car around and drive back to Washington. He was both puzzled and agitated. President Dunstan was not in the habit of issuing pre-preemptory orders, especially over an open telephone line.

General Forbes drove back to the Situation Room barely able to hold his speed down to the legal limit. A retired Marine Major General, he had been recommended by Secretary of Defense Manning. Forbes was a supremely capable advisor. Beginning his third year as National Security Advisor, he had become accustomed to short-notice calls from the President. Like most of his predecessors, Forbes referred to remain in the background. He felt, deeply, that his role was to advise, not create policy. Good to his word, Forbes arrived at the White House in one hour after taking the President secretary's call.

As soon as he settled into his office, the National Security Advisor called all the other members of the National Security Committee, as well as his senior staff. By six o'clock all concerned were there. Philip Miller arrived and took his place at the conference table just before President Dunstan entered.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the President began, "I have word from President Kronskey that there is an apparent conspiracy to release an atomic bomb on Israel. Much of the information is sketchy, but it presents a grim picture. This is the first confirmation what we have is not simply a problem of missing, strayed, or stolen atomic material. There is a need for this body to help me set a policy for handling the development."

"Given the information at hand, Mr. President," Ed Forbes asked, "isn't this still the CIA's and FBI's responsibility?"

"Certainly, General. I understand that I have the final authority. What I am asking is how to broaden the mandate we have given Mr. Miller and Mr. Grant," he replied.

The Secretary of Defense, Eleanor Manning: "We have already given them carte blanche. Let them handle the situation. We have no obligation to answer to anyone!"

"Madame Secretary," said the soft spoken Secretary of State, Paul Mazel, "I have the difficult problem of presenting any decision we make to the rest of the world. I'd feel much more secure if we kept certain well defined boundaries around the CIA and FBI."

"What do we tell the Senate and House Intelligence Committees? If there is a leak, and they, or at least the respective chairmen are not briefed, we'll have a hell of a time keeping the lid on the thing," said Vice President Steven Elliot.

The meeting continued, with neither appreciable progress nor consensus. President Dunstan, tired and cross after his session with the Congressional leaders, said testily, "My decision is simple. Based upon what am I hearing, the situation will continue as it has up to now. I will give Director Miller the full text of President Kronsky's report. Mr. Miller would you please return to the Oval Office with me? Thank you all."

The NSC members and the staff departed quietly. Philip Miller walked out of the Situation Room with the President. In the Oval Office, the President handed him the Russian report.

"Sit down, Phil. In the end, I think I could have done without that intellectual circle-jerk. At least we didn't build some kind of committee-developed cameleopard. Still, I feel it necessary for them to know that this thing is getting more complicated than we thought."

"Mr. President, I think it may be time to fill in my field man, Hank Wheatland, in Israel. It might not be a bad idea to send him a copy of this by tonight's diplomatic pouch. I'm certain that his colleagues, Dr. Ben Yosef and General Obadivsky will be getting copies from their respective leaders. Additionally, Dr. Mallory is in Paris on her way to Dubai. She'll be in place in the next day or two. If seems necessary, I'll re-assign Wheatland to Dubai."

President Dunstan was interested in the wider scope of the problem. It had quietly slipped out of the public mind. Unless the matter became more critical, this was just what he wanted. He moved out from behind his desk and led Philip Miller to the door of the Oval Office.

"I promised not to run the professional end of the operation, Phil. I'm not going to change that now. You and Dick Grant have the full authority to work this problem out. I'm leaving it up to you two. Just keep me posted. Good night," he said as Director Miller left the Oval Office.

Jerusalem, Israel

24 November

2300 hours

Prime Minister Levi Shalom had just stopped back at his office, after a late dinner meeting with the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Peter Townshend. The British had been pressing Israel for more information on the sinking of the Jebel al Tarik. Shalom informed Lord Townshend that Israel's position remained unchanged: his government had no idea how or why the Israeli markings appeared on the recovered canisters.

True to the agreement with Dunstan and Kronsky, Levi Shalom had stonewalled the Foreign Secretary, politely, but firmly. OPERATION TROIKA still was held under tight security: the fewer nations involved, the less chance for leaks. As it was, the three leaders had some trepidation's about the inquiries made by their respective Commercial Attaches in London to Lloyds regarding the itinerary of the Turkish vessel, the Bogusz Kevi.

The faxed transcription from Kronsky was sitting on his desk clearly separated from the rest of his mail and other matters. Levi Shalom picked up the envelope tore it open and read the contents carefully to make certain that he understood them clearly.

He pushed the intercom button on his phone, "Call Hanoch Caleb, and tell him to get here at once. Just tell

him to drop everything else!"

Less than forty minutes later, the head of Mossad was in the Prime Minister's office reading the Russian document. He sat quietly for a time and said, "With your permission, Levi, I'd like to give this to our project director as soon as possible."

The Prime Minister nodded his consent. Caleb had Ari Meron pass it on to Zvi Ben Yosef. The nature of intelligence operations dictates that information is relayed to the fieldman through his control, in this case from Ari Meron to Zvi Ben Yosef.

Meron had just left a meeting with Zvi when he was summonsed to his chief's office and handed the Markov-Verdansky report. Meron lifted his eyebrows as he read the document. If true, the report was the most significant breakthrough. If not, what was the purpose of deliberate disinformation?

"It's a shame we didn't have this thing a few hours ago. I had dinner with Zvika. He, Obadivsky, and Wheatland feel they are spinning their wheels, twiddling their thumbs, doing busy work--or whatever cliché comes to mind. Even pros get itchy if they feel they've hit a dead end. The information they have doesn't hang together. If this thing is what it purports to be, some of the empty spaces are about to be filled in."

Tel Aviv

25 November

0800 hours

Miriam Safti took the call from Ari Meron. Zvi arrived about fifteen minutes after his control's call. "Now what!," he grumbled. "I just had a meeting with him last night. Oh, well, call him and tell him I'm on my way."

Miriam called Ari Meron. Zvi left the office without a word. Neither of his companions looked up. They were reading the local Russian and English language newspapers, after first going over a line-by-line re-reading of the available data for the, as Hank put it, "umpteenth time."

Zvi hurried out of the building and walked angrily the several blocks to Meron's office. He was upset at the peremptory tone of the request, but intrigued as well. It was unlike him to hold a meeting and as an afterthought call an agent to a second meeting. He was, however, certain that whatever it was it had to do with TROIKA.

Ari Meron was in his office when Zvi arrived. He handed him the report which he read with quiet, intense concentration. He did not even take the time to relight his pipe when it went out.

"Nu?" Meron asked.

"Baruch Hashem yom, yom! Thank the Lord for each day!" he responded, sarcastically. "Where did this come from? If it's true it's pure gold. If it's a fake it's bullshit!"

"The Chief got it from the P.M., who got it from a fax and can't, or won't, tell him from whom. Levi Shalom insists that it is true. My guess is that it came from either President Dunstan or President Kronskey. Our listening posts never picked it up, so it came over a tight secure line. My suggestion, Zvika, is that we treat it as if it is false, but act as if it is true. I'll send it to your office by courier. It's still not a good idea for you to transport stuff. Even though Shin Bet rolled up most of the local FSB operation, we aren't sure we've got them all."

Zvi let himself out of Meron's office. By the time he returned to his office, both Wheatland and Obadivsky were out. Miriam Safti said that she had no idea where they had gone, but each left after receiving a short phone call. It was Zvi's hunch that they were reporting to their controls. Henry Wheatland reported to Roger Stockton. For Grisha Obadivsky it was someone in the Russian Embassy. For want of anything better to do, he turned to the Atlas and began to trace maritime shipping routes.

Shortly after Zvi's return, Hank and Grisha came back to the office. Henry Wheatland was patting his pockets searching for the package of non-existent cigarettes. Grisha removed his glasses and was pinching the bridge of his nose. Zvi looked at them, but said nothing as he went through his pipe smoking ritual. The three men sat quietly.

About ten minutes later, the Mossad courier appeared, followed closely by American and Russian couriers. Each man signed for his package and placed it on his work table.

Zvi broke the quiet. "I guess you both have copies of the fax report my Prime Minister received. My agency is going to act as if the information is true, while we try to find out as much as we can. Even though it's rather short, as you yourselves know, there are significant gaps. Mossad has been tracking Kaoukji for years, but this is the first we know that he has a FSB connection."

"The FBI and CIA have been watching Farid Attiyeh. Nothing was ever found to connect him, operationally, with the PLO or any other such organization. Most of what he has done has been to provide funds for their operations, but was always done by way of relief groups. The FBI suspects that some material may have been sent through his business connections. This is the first open contact he has had with terrorists that we know about," Hank stated.

"If Kaoukji is FSB, GRU missed him. Still, I wish we had a complete list of who was at that conference in France. I know Verdansky. He's no puppet. He's as ruthless as his boss and if he wants to stir the pot, he'll do it. I don't know Markov, at all. My Embassy contact just got the document without comment from Moscow, with the note to give it to me. It was sealed by the GRU code clerk. I think we ought to work with this, as you suggest, Zvi, as if it is true," offered Grisha Obadivsky.

Dubai

26 November

2225 hours

Lufthansa Flight 632, Paris-Dubai, arrived precisely on schedule. There were fewer than twenty passengers; most were wearing the traditional Keffiyeh and Jeballa. Two were dressed in Western suits, a German metallurgist and a Swedish geologist. Both were employees of the Emirates' petroleum industry.

Mary reclaimed her luggage and went to Customs and Immigration. The agent made a cursory examination of the luggage and her passport. As she passed into the Arrivals Lounge, she spotted Alfar Habibi waiting for her, holding a sign DR. MARY LYONS.

"Welcome to Dubai, Dr. Lyons. I am Alfar Habibi, the Senior Nuclear Medicine Technician. Dr. Abu Ismail cabled us from Paris that you would be joining us. He asked me to meet you and take you to your hotel. Unfortunately, there is no room in the hospital living quarters available at the moment. We have registered you at the Dubai Sheraton. I will be glad to take you there, at once, if you wish," Habibi offered, as he took Mary's luggage, attache case and led her to a waiting taxi.

"Sheraton Hotel. In the shortest time and route," he ordered in Arabic. "It is necessary to make oneself

completely clear to the taxi drivers. Otherwise they will take the longest route possible. I do not wish to inconvenience you, Doctor," he continued.

Mary smiled. "I imagine that taxi drivers the world over are the same. 'Take the longest route.' Thank you for your consideration. I appreciate your taking me to the hotel. It's been a long, tiring trip and I would like to rest and freshen up. What time tomorrow morning would you like to start? There must be some information regarding the Johns Hopkins Project with which I could begin," Mary said.

"We suggest that you take tomorrow to rest," Habibi replied. "Our preparations are running somewhat behind schedule and our materials are not yet ready. Transportation to the hospital will arrive for you at about half past six AM the following day. We have the morning shift, starting at seven AM."

The cab pulled up in front of the Sheraton. The doorman helped Mary out of the cab while Habibi reclaimed the luggage and paid the driver. A bellhop took the bags from him to the registration desk.

"I shall leave you now, Doctor Lyons. Good night," said Habibi as he left the lobby.

The hotel clerk, an expatriate Frenchman, handed Mary her "key". She took the card after completing the registration procedures. The bill was debited to the Hospital account.

There was a note with the room card. Mary took both items and went up to her room on the 12th floor of the hotel. She gave the bellboy a generous tip. Mary opened her bags and hung up her clothes before opening the note. It was from Ted Bradley, her local CIA contact, inviting her to dinner in the hotel restaurant at eight o'clock the following evening, with a telephone number for her to call to confirm the invitation.

Mary stripped off her rumpled clothes and showered. The hotel provided heavy towels, terrycloth bathrobe and slippers. A hair dryer wired for the local current rested on a small dressing table outside the bathroom. She dried herself and called down to the hotel lobby for a seven AM wake up call.

27 November

0900 Hours

"International Oil Exploration."

"Mr. Bradley, please. Dr. Mary Lyons returning his call."

"One moment, please."

There was a short pause before a man's voice with a deep Southern accent answered. "Hullo, Dr. Lyons. I trust your trip was uneventful. May we meet for dinner?"

"Thank you for the invitation, Mr. Bradley. I'm glad to have someone to eat with tonight."

"You're most welcome, ma'am. Please call me Ted. I'll meet you in the lobby a few minutes before eight. Our table is reserved, but there might be a delay. Service isn't always very prompt."

"I'll be ready, Ted, and again, thanks for the invitation."

Mary put down the phone and opened the first of the reports.

1745 Hours

Mary looked at her watch. It read 5:45. She had had room service deliver her breakfast and lunch, and spent the day poring through the files Braithwate had given to her.

She took out the last report from the stack and began reading. Mary gauged herself to finish her initial scan by seven fifteen. This would give her a half hour to dress and be in the lobby by seven forty-five. As she read, Mary became convinced that either Dr. Abu Ismail was not interested in the project or not able to make the necessary changes which Ed Braithwate and his team had suggested several months earlier. The other possibility was that the Company simply wanted her in Dubai, on site, to find out if the nuclear material was there and what possible use there could be for it outside legitimate nucleonic experimentation. The latter possibility added to her apprehension.

A disciplined scientist, she looked up from the document. It was seven ten. She closed the attache case and laid out her dress for the evening. Mary chose a multicolored silk dress with half sleeves and a nehru neckline. It was demure enough to meet the local standard, but stylish enough not to be dowdy.

At seven forty-five, precisely, she stepped out of the elevator and into the lobby lounge. A middle aged man with a deep tan and white hair rose from a corner chair and moved toward her. He was an inch or so shorter than Hank, but had the same trim body.

"Well, good evening, Mary Lyons. No one told me you were so beautiful. I'm Ted Bradley. Some friends in Washington asked me to meet you and to be of any assistance while you are here. The menu is rather limited, but the food is excellent," he said as they were escorted to their table.

Ted Bradley was in the last group was recruited by George Bush when he was the Director of Central Intelligence. The others were either retired or dead. Some of natural causes--and some not. He was carried as a Special Assignment Consultant. Each time the Central Intelligence Agency was "reorganized", there were attempts to force Bradley out. He was given several boring desk assignments, which he fulfilled efficiently and effectively. Much of his field work was in the Near and Middle East. A graduate of Texas Christian University, Bradley was originally an oil geologist. With that background, he was moved from post to post in the Persian Gulf area.

Philip Miller had found him at one of the desk positions which had made Bradley increasingly despondent. It seemed that he was destined to remain in the back room until he reached the mandatory retirement age and was pensioned off. Miller reviewed his personnel file and decided that the old hand would be much more useful back in the field.

In his present assignment, Bradley was officially working with a consortium of American, British and Dubaian businessmen exploring for more oil in the back country of the Emirates. His actual task was to try to uncover a surreptitious refinement of Iraqi crude in the Emirate, sold as Emirate oil with the sales laundered and placed in a number of Iraqi controlled bank accounts. The United Nations sanctions had not been lifted.

As agent-in-place, he was responsible for controlling the operations of any agents temporarily assigned to the United Arab Emirates. Mary was to report to him, and to receive instructions with reference to OPERATION TROIKA. Local counter-intelligence was alert, if not first class. Prudence dictated a minimal contact between Mary and Bradley. Most meetings were to take place in public, usually in restaurants when he would be accompanied by his wife, or at least one other person. A series of mail drops had been up. A delivery code was in place. Several "escape hatches" were developed if Mary had to leave Dubai on short notice. All this had been handled in Paris before she left for Dubai.

The details of the local operation were laid out during the dinner on the first evening of her arrival. Mary acted the role of the inquisitive woman interested in the "romance" of oil exploration. Bradley told her stories of the thrills and dangers of searching for oil, while giving her a copy of International Exploration's annual

report and a stock prospectus.

Ted Bradley escorted Mary to the elevator. The intelligence officer stationed in the lobby of the hotel had noted her arrival and subsequent dinner with her fellow American. He concluded that Dr. Mary Lyons posed no threat to the security of the Emirates.

28 November

0530 hours

When Mary's alarm went off she was momentarily disoriented. The call of the muezzin startled her. She showered and dressed, took her attache case from beside the desk and went down to the hotel coffee shop. There would be just enough time for her to get coffee and a roll before Alfar Habibi arrived to take her to the hospital. He was precisely on time.

The hospital staff car was air-conditioned, but small swirls of dust still entered the car. The heat was already becoming oppressive. Mary was glad that she had had the chance to purchase her new wardrobe in Paris. She sat in the back to avoid attracting attention by sitting beside the driver.

Alfar and Mary arrived at the Ibn Rosht General Hospital a few minutes before seven o'clock. When she first entered the hospital lobby Mary shivered for a few seconds while her body adjusted to the lower temperature. The hospital's climate control system was more effective than the staff car's. They went directly to the Nuclear Medicine Department offices, where the Chief Technician handed her a lab coat. Khalifa Hasan and Dr. Hussein Al-Yasir were already waiting for them, the doctor balancing impatiently on his right foot in his unconscious one-legged Ibis stance.

"Dr. Al-Yasir. Miss Hasan, this is Dr. Mary Lyons. Dr. Abu Ismail, as you know, has asked Dr. Lyons to help us with the joint project we have with Johns Hopkins Hospital," said Alfar Habibi.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Doctor. We look forward to working with you. Is there anything we can get you to help you while the Chief is in London?" offered Khalifa.

Dr. Al-Yasir acknowledged Mary's presence with a curt nod of the head. "Well, let us get going on our rounds! We still have patients to care for," he sniffed.

"It is my pleasure to be here. I hope I will be able to be of assistance. Of course, Dr. Al-Yasir, I would not think of intruding on patient care," said Mary smoothly. "Patient care, is, in the end, the main purpose of any hospital!"

The Egyptian-born physician grunted a response, as he strode toward the corridor with the charts. With his head thrust forward, his long legs moving rapidly, and his lab coat flapping behind him, "The Ibis" stopped at the nurses' station, balanced himself on one leg again and scanned the patients charts before entering their rooms.

"We must apologize for the doctor. He is jealous of Dr. Abu Ismail. Dr. Al-Yasir feels that he should be in charge of patient care; not just when the chief is away, but at all times," explained Khalifa Hasan.

Mary's murmured reply was non-committal. She did not want to become involved in departmental political in-fighting. "Would it be all right for me to look at the paper work on the joint project? I'd like to be up to speed when Dr. Abu Ismail arrives from London."

The two technicians looked at Mary, somewhat bewildered. The American slang expression was new. Alfar

Habibi recovered first. He opened the file cabinet in the corner of the office and handed Mary a rather slim file.

Mary opened the file. It was abstract of the longer document which Ed Braithwaite had given her in Paris. In less than half an hour she had read and digested the report. Something was definitely wrong! There should have been, at the very least, a full copy of the material she had brought from Paris, as well as progress reports, notes, requisitions and other data relating to a project of such scope and importance.

Alfar noticed her perplexed expression. "What is wrong, Dr. Lyons?" he inquired.

"Mr. Habibi, are you certain that this is the only file on the joint project with Johns Hopkins? The file seem somewhat slight for such an important operation. Given the time the program has been in the works, I would have expected more data!"

"It is possible that Dr. Abu Ismail's personal files may contain more information on the protocol. We are not privy to everything that he works on. This particular operation has been handled almost exclusively by the doctor," offered the chief technician.

"When is Dr. Abu Ismail expected to return?" Mary asked.

"The day after tomorrow," answered Khalifa Hasan. "He cabled the hospital yesterday. We had expected him to return today, but he said that he was delayed in London. The doctor asked that you accept his apology for the delay and requested Mr. Habibi and me to offer you any assistance."

"Perhaps we should take you on a tour of the hospital. We are one of the largest facilities in the Persian Gulf area. In fact we have the most complete Department of Nuclear Medicine," said a proud Alfar Habibi as he and his co-worker escorted Mary out of the office into the corridor.

The layout of the institution was one of the most efficient Mary had seen in some time. All central services were located in a shaft in the center ring of the building, which was arranged in a series of concentric rings. There were nurses' stations at each of the four quadrants with patient rooms radiating in arcs so that each room was visible from the station. The operating suites were located in a special basement area. It was entered first through an air lock where physicians changed into scrub suits and prepared themselves for surgery. Nurses entered from a second such area with similar facilities. Patients entered from a third area and left through a fourth.

The Department of Nuclear Medicine occupied an entire floor in the outer ring. Totally sealed off from the rest of the hospital, it was the only section that had its own central supply closet. The radioactive material was stored in a special area with three foot thick lead shielding and specially constructed individual spaces for each canister of the isotopes. With money no object, Dr. Abu Ismail was able to have such a wing constructed. The Ibn Rosht General Hospital was taking no chances.

Mary was surprised by the amount of nuclear material in the storage room. Even if the hospital had the only such facility in the region, by her rough calculations, there was enough to supply the hospital for, at the very least, thirty to forty years!

The tour ended at the staff dining room. The two technicians were somewhat uncertain as to which room was proper for Mary to eat in.

She noticed their discomfort and said, "I'd be delighted to have lunch with you and Mr. Habibi. I'm not sure of the protocol, but until Dr. Abu Ismail and Dr. MacPherson return, there seems to be no reason we cannot share a table."

"Thank you Dr. Lyons, we would be pleased to have you join us." Khalifa answered, as the three entered the line at the cafeteria.

Mary picked up her tray and looked quizzically at the array of food. Most of it was strange to her. Khalifa and Alfar noticed her hesitancy. Both moved to help her with selecting food. They placed tabouli, rice filled grape leaves, skewers of lamb, pita and a small cup of Turkish coffee on her tray. As each item was placed there the technicians told Mary what was on her plate and of what it was made.

The explanations and subsequent conversation over the meal put Mary at ease. She had not called undue attention to herself. Still her very presence and appearance, so definitely non-Arabic, made her stand out. There were, of course, several Westerners on the staff, but so far as she knew, she was, the only Western woman. This might present a problem later on. Mary felt that this would be something for MacPherson and Abu Ismail to handle. For the moment, her only concern was to work with Abu Ismail on the joint project and follow what ever orders she received through Ted Bradley.

After lunch they returned to the department office. Mary felt superfluous, but could not think of a polite way to indicate that she wished to return to her hotel. She absent-mindedly began looking at the papers on Ibrahim Abu Ismail's desk. Most of them were copies of instructions to the staff, old inter-office memos and notes in Arabic appended to some of the instruction sheets. Mary glanced at a note that was partly hidden under the telephone. It had a 001-856 number under an Arabic scrawl. She remembered that Farid Attiyeh, the man she and Hank had followed to Paris came from Southern New Jersey. The Area Code was 856. Mary quietly pocketed the slip of paper and moved back to the work table where the joint hospital report still lay open.

An hour later, Khalifa Hasan and Alfar Habibi finished running the new batch of tests. The technicians cleared their work areas, placed the test results in the patients' files and piled them neatly in Dr. Al-Yasir's in-basket. They swung around and saw Mary seated at the work table with the closed file folder.

"If there is nothing further that you wish to see today, Dr. Lyons, I would be pleased to drive you back to your hotel," offered Alfar Habibi. Mary thanked him.

Alfar brought the staff car to the door and they drove out into the blazing mid-afternoon heat. The car's air-conditioning system was barely able to keep the occupants comfortable as they drove back to the hotel. The streets were relatively deserted. Most of the Dubaians were in their homes, keeping as cool as possible. In her travels, Mary had come to appreciate the siesta hours, whatever they were called locally, as a sensible break in a long day. She often wished that this idea had reached the United States. It would have made much of her work more tolerable.

Mary stopped at the front desk to check for messages. The desk clerk handed her two phone slips. She smiled wryly as she noted that the notes had been clumsily opened and resealed. In her room, Mary kicked off her shoes and sat down on the bed near the telephone. The first message was from Ted Bradley inviting her to dinner at his home that evening. The second was from a tourist agency informing her that there were two messages for her. A puzzled Mary Lyons called the front desk and asked the hotel operator to call the number on the second slip.

"International Travel Services," answered a voice with an American accent. "Ellen Cassidy, speaking. May I help you?"

"Yes, please, Miss Cassidy. This is Dr. Mary Lyons. I have a message from your agency regarding messages you are holding for me."

"One moment, please, Dr. Lyons. I'll be glad to check. Oh yes, Dr. Lyons, they're here. Would it be possible for you to come to our office and pick them up? We're about a five to ten minute walk from your hotel. I can

give you directions, if you wish."

Mary fumbled in her hand bag. "O.K. Miss Cassidy, I'm ready." The travel agent spoke slowly, giving Mary time to copy the directions.

Mary immediately called Ted Bradley to accept his dinner invitation. They were to dine at his home with him and his wife. She said nothing about the call from the travel agency. The phone line was most certainly not secure. Prudence indicated that she tell him about the message when they were traveling from the hotel to his home. After a short conversation, she lay back on the bed. Ted Bradley was to pick her up at eight thirty. She decided to take a rest before changing for dinner, it had been a full day. Mary left a wake up call for seven thirty and dozed off almost at once.

1935 Hours

At seven thirty-five she was startled into wakefulness by the shrill ring of the telephone. By twenty past eight she was in the lobby waiting for Bradley to pick her up.

At nine o'clock, Mary realized that something must have gone wrong. She went back to her room and placed a call to Bradley's office. There was a steady tone. The phone was either off the hook--or worse. Mary went back to the lobby and requested a taxi to take her to the travel agency. Just as she was ready to step into the cab, Bradley's car arrived. He looked somewhat unkempt. The CIA agent motioned her to get into the car. Mary dismissed the cab, and stepped into his car. Bradley raced the engine and moved off into the heavy traffic.

"What's going on, Ted. First you're late. Then you arrive looking like the wrath of God!" Mary exclaimed.

"Sorry, Mary, I didn't have the chance to call and change the time. There was an incident in my office building. At first we thought a bomb had gone off. Our entire communication system was knocked out. Sabotage is still a possibility. I couldn't even call my wife, Alice, to get in touch with you to tell you I'd be delayed. I've come directly from the office. When I get home, while you and Alice get acquainted, I'll change," he explained.

Mary waited until Ted Bradley was somewhat more calm, before she broached the subject of the travel agency's call. She related the entire sequence of events in detail. To her surprise, he smiled broadly.

"The travel agency is one of our mail drops. Incidentally, International Travel Services does a great deal of legitimate business. It would be rather embarrassing if the agency staff sat around doing next to nothing. We can continue our conversation at my place. Even with the sophisticated bugging equipment our hosts have bought from the French, Germans and Brits, they haven't quite mastered the technology well enough to eavesdrop on foreigners in their homes."

A relieved Mary Lyons leaned back in the seat and let her mind clear itself. She realized how tense she had become since picking up the messages. It was apparent to her that she would not be totally comfortable until the mission was completed and she and Hank were out of the operation. Her main concern, then, was to do her job, keep a low profile and get out as rapidly and judiciously as possible. She remembered her father's dictum: "The difference between a heroine and heroin is one letter, so don't be a dope."

After a short ride, Ted Bradley turned off the main road into a housing development which looked like it had been dropped, pre-built from any Southwestern suburb. He drove into the driveway of a single level house with an attached two car garage, using a remote control door opener to enter and park.

His wife, Alice Bradley, stood in the doorway of the entry hall from the garage. Both women let out short

gasps of recognition. They had been at Columbia University together. Alice Bradley was the girl with whom Mary and the Wheatland brothers had double dated when Hank and David met her.

"Mary Mallory! My Lord, I haven't seen you since we graduated. Ted," she continued, "Mary and I went to school together. She married a hot-shot young lawyer and I lost track of her. I didn't know she was the woman you were bringing to dinner."

"Neither did I," answered her husband. "All I knew from Washington was that she was sent here to work on a project about which I know less than nothing, about which I don't ask, and about which she won't talk, even at dinner. Just catch up and reminisce."

Turning to Mary, he added, "It's getting late. I suggest you spend the night here. I'm sure Alice will be able to find something for you to wear. In the morning we'll stop at the travel agency and you can get your messages. That is unless you need to be somewhere early in the day."

"Thanks, Ted. I'm in no rush. I haven't anything planned. Until Dr. Abu Ismail and Dr. MacPherson get back, I'm on my own."

"Ted, for Heaven's sake, Mary's our guest. Let's get out of the doorway and into the house. Besides, if she's going to be spending the night, I want to show her to her room."

"Mary," she continued, eyeing her, "we're about the same size. There must be something you can wear tomorrow. Right now, freshen up. Dinner in about half an hour."

Alice Bradley led Mary to the guest room, a rather large space with its own full bath and walk-in closet. Her hostess opened the closet door and rummaged inside. She emerged with a robe, slippers and clothing for the following day, which she placed on the bed. After showing Mary where the towels and toiletries were, she withdrew.

Mary had still not recovered from her initial shock. She wondered how she would explain her divorce and subsequent "marriage" to "Henry Lyons." Alice was not a stupid woman. At Columbia they were friendly rivals. She had lost touch with Alice just before her divorce from David Wheatland. Mary decided to play it as straight as possible. She didn't know how much Ted Bradley knew about TROIKA, or her role in the operation. After a few minutes, she returned to the living room where her host was preparing drinks.

"What would you like, Mary? Gin, Scotch, Bourbon, wine?"

"Just a soft drink, Ted. I'm not much of a drinker," she said, apologetically. In the bedroom Mary had decided that she would not take anything alcoholic, just in case. He handed her a cola with a twist of lemon. She nodded her thanks and sipped the drink. Alice arrived a few seconds later. Her husband handed her a scotch and soda without asking. Obviously, this was a normal routine. Alice Bradley sat down beside Mary.

"Well, when did you and David split up? Ted and I have been traveling around for so many years, that I've been out of touch with almost everyone. The last I heard, you had just had a child, a son I believe," she said. "We've never had children, which is just as well, considering the number of moves we've made. I've worked as a biophysicist in a number of countries. Here in Dubai, I'm a simple housewife."

"David and I were divorced when our son was four years old. He's based in Hong Kong now, specializing in international corporate and merger law. My son, David, is in UCLA Medical School," Mary began. "I've been working as an atomic physicist at UCLA for the past few years. I married Hank Lyons a few years ago. He's a tenured professor at Roosevelt University. We're on sabbatical this year. He's doing some research in Paris and Israel. I'm here in Dubai working on a joint Johns Hopkins-Ibn Rosht project in Nuclear Medicine. Some

friends put me on to your husband. He's been gracious enough to show me around," Mary explained.

Alice took her drink and quietly left the living room. Mary was impressed with the grace with which she left. Ted Bradley sat down on a chair facing Mary. He still looked fatigued. She sensed that there was more to the communications system breakdown than he had told her. Before he had a chance to speak, Alice returned with the announcement that dinner was served.

Ted led Mary into the dining room. It was set with exquisite table cloths and napery, elegant sterling silver utensils and beautiful crystal. The Bradleys lived well. The meal was a combination of American and Middle Eastern dishes, which blended well.

After dinner the Americans returned to the living room for after dinner drinks. The Bradleys each had a brandy. Mary had a lemonade. She was still very cautious. A few minutes later, Alice left the room, discreetly. She was the perfect Company Wife. Mary felt certain that Alice Bradley would not gossip about her to mutual acquaintances when she either wrote or encountered them. Keeping their mouths shut was as much a part of the lives of Company wives as of their mates.

"Thanks for the invitation. Do you entertain all the Company people?" she asked.

"You're welcome, Mary. We do a lot of entertaining. Westerners live in a closed society. We have very little social contact with our hosts. Most of the men are here on short term contracts, usually a year. They can't bring their wives.

"I wasn't aware that you and Alice were schoolmates. You two can renew your friendship. That makes it easier. As I told you, over dinner at the hotel, most of our meetings with take place with Alice present. Too many solo lunch or dinner engagements between the two of us will start the rumor mill grinding.

"Tomorrow I'll take you to the travel agency to pick up your mail. Your main contact will be Frank Boyer, the manager of International Travel Services. He's your 'handler'. My job will be to make certain that everything is under control. We will meet on a random schedule. Langley has given OPERATION TROIKA a very high priority. Your role is crucial in getting the nuclear material matter cleared up. Washington seems to think that whatever is coming down, will be doing so in the very near future."

"Excuse me, please. I'll be back in a moment," Mary stated as she stood up from her chair.

She remembered the note she had lifted from Ibrahim Abu Ismail's desk and the notes she had made concerning the amount of nuclear material at the hospital. In her room, Mary rummaged through her handbag. The slips of paper were wrapped in some tissues jammed into a corner of her purse. It seemed appropriate to give them to Ted Bradley, now, even if she was unsure of the importance of the phone number. She located the notes and went back to the living room where Ted was waiting for her. Mary handed him the information.

"I found this note on Abu Ismail's desk. I don't read Arabic, but I recognize the telephone area code number. It's for a phone in South Jersey. It may be nothing, or it may be a connection with our flight to Paris."

Her host pocketed the note, but said nothing as his wife came back into the room carrying a silver coffee service which she set down on the coffee table. There were two pots of coffee, one with the thick Turkish brew and the other with American. It was clear that Bradley did not want Alice involved. She assumed that over time there was a tacit agreement that if business needed to be mixed with pleasure, Alice would handle the pleasure.

"I don't know your taste in coffee, Mary, so I've brought two pots. Please help yourself," Alice offered.

"Thanks, Alice, but I'm kind of over coffeed. At the hospital they had only a blend that made espresso seem like decaf. If it's not too much bother, I would like a cup of tea." Her hostess rose and returned to the kitchen.

As soon as his wife was out of the room, Bradley took the note from his pocket and read it. His face was impassive, but there was something in his manner which signaled Mary that she had stumbled on something important. Mary was about to ask a question, but Alice Bradley had returned to the room.

A weary Mary slumped in the comfortable chair and dozed. Her re-discovered old college friend noticed her closed eyes and gently suggested that she might want to get ready for bed. Mary nodded and excused herself.

29 November

0600 hours

Mary woke up with a sudden start. As she swung her feet over the side of the bed, her head cleared and she remembered that she had spent the night at Ted and Alice Bradley's home. It was still dark as she went into the bathroom, showered and prepared for the day. Alice Bradley was right. Her clothes fit Mary well enough to do until she returned to her hotel and was able to change.

The Bradleys were already up and dressed when their guest entered the kitchen. Alice had prepared a breakfast of juice, eggs, toast and American coffee. Mary joined them at the table. When they had finished, Ted stood up and headed for the front hallway.

"I'm sorry to rush you, Mary, but if I'm to get you to the travel agency and make it to my office on time, we're going to have to leave. I'll call you this afternoon to find out how things went," he explained.

Mary followed her host to the door. Alice had placed her clothing from the previous evening in a small travel bag.

"Thanks for dinner and the place to stay, Alice. It's nice meeting you after all these years. Can we get together for lunch or dinner, just the two of us, later in the week?" Mary asked as she left the house.

"I'll call you in a few days, Mary," she answered.

Ted Bradley had brought the car to the door. The air-conditioner was going full blast as they moved down the driveway. Mary felt a chill for a few seconds until she adapted to the cooler vehicle. Even at that seemingly early hour, traffic was quite heavy as Ted maneuvered the car in and out of what ever lanes were passable. About a half hour's drive later, Bradley pulled up in front of the travel agency. He stepped out of the car and held the agency door open as she entered the building.

International Travel Services looked like every other such operation in the rest of the world. There were the usual travel posters, a large map of the world, ranks of brochures, and several desks with personal computers which the travel personnel were using to locate and order flights and other accommodations for their customers.

A medium height, slightly overweight man with a fringe of dark brown hair greeted them as they entered the premises. Frank Boyer shook hands with Ted and Mary and ushered them into his office in the rear of the agency work area.

"Good morning, Ted. It's good to see you," he began as he turned toward Mary. "You must be Dr. Lyons. It is my pleasure. Ellen Cassidy will be here with your mail as soon as she finishes with her customer. We try to keep appearances as normal as possible. We are an active bona fide travel agency. Ah, here's Ellen!"

A tall, red haired woman of indeterminate age had just come in. She was holding two envelopes, one with French postage stamps, the other a small brown envelope with no markings. Ellen Cassidy smiled. It was a purely professional gesture. Mary felt that she was relating to her as if she was another customer. For some reason, this was comforting. It was as if Ellen Cassidy was trying to inject a degree of normality into the somewhat unreal situation which had brought Mary to Dubai in the first place.

"Doctor Lyons, these came yesterday, but I was unable to reach you at the Hospital, so I left the message at the hotel," Cassidy said as she left the office.

"I'll be going. I need to find out how much damage that breakdown caused. With any luck, we won't have to redo any of the faxes or cables. See you!" said Ted Bradley.

As he left Frank Boyer's office, Bradley put the notes Mary had given him in the middle of a pile of as yet unopened correspondence on his desk.

Ted Bradley was scarcely out the door when an explosion sent shards of glass and rubble into the travel agency's offices. Frank Boyer jumped to his feet and shoved Mary under his desk.

"Stay here until I check things out," he commanded. Mary complied and crouched under the desk between Boyer's chair and the modesty panel. She began to cough and sneeze as the dust from the blast rolled into the enclosed space. Time stopped.

An expressionless Frank Boyer returned to his office, covered with dust and grime. He went behind the desk and helped Mary to her feet. His shirt was sweat covered and his hair was disheveled.

"Apparently, it was a bomb. Ted Bradley's car was ruined, but he's unhurt, just a couple of scratches. The thing went off in the building across the street. He pulled away just as the device was detonated. A couple of my people, including Ellen Cassidy, have been seriously injured and I think one of my customers was killed. The local police and the Emirate intelligence agency are on their way. Please stay here until they give the all clear."

"Are your telephones still working, Frank? I need to call the Hospital to tell the Nuclear Medical Department people that I've been delayed," Mary requested.

They were working. He handed her his desk phone. The hospital lines were busy. Mary sighed and sat down in a chair Frank Boyer had righted. She suddenly began to shake violently. Where was Hank when she needed him, she asked herself, irrationally. After a few minutes the shaking subsided and Mary went out into the work area. It was a shambles. The entire window had been blown out, chair and desks were lying in strange positions all over the floor. The damage could have been much worse, but by design, the plate glass window was shatter resistant so that it crumbled into thousands of pellets rather than sharp edged pieces. The force of the explosion had caused much of the plasterboard to break and wires hung drooping from the broken and displaced ceiling panels.

Mary looked out at the building across the street. It had been reduced to a large pile of bricks, wood, twisted aluminum window frames and large shards of glass. Flames, several stories high, were being fed by a broken gas main. The dust had already been blown away by the hot breeze. Cars, animals and people were covered with dust, and in many cases, blood. Ambulances, police cars and fire fighting equipment were moving slowly down the street with horns blasting and sirens screaming. The moving vehicles and people made no attempt to move aside to let them pass. Finally, in desperation, a policeman in the first patrol car fired his weapon. Traffic gave way.

Mary searched for Ted Bradley. She found Ted kneeling beside Frank Boyer. His face and shirt were covered

with blood from several scalp cuts. The two men were administering first aid to the less wounded and clearing the areas around the more severely injured to make an open path for Emergency Medical Services personnel.

By this time, Mary had picked her way to their sides. She opened a third first aid kit and began working on a secretary, who was bleeding from several minor cuts and moaning in Arabic and French. Mary patted her shoulder gently, and reassured her, in French, that help was on the way. The young woman nodded, sighed and slipped into unconsciousness.

Mary moved to the next person, a young man who was cursing under his breath in English. He was sitting on the floor grasping his right arm just below a tourniquet he had made from what was left of his shirt sleeve. She looked at his arm. There was a gash running down from the shoulder to the elbow. The tourniquet had stanchied the blood flow. A piece of metal from the cubicle partition was still embedded in the arm. Mary spoke quietly and reassuringly to him, too, but he was too frightened to hear.

The wailing of the sirens stopped and an EMS team entered the International Travel Services offices. With quick efficient triaging, the team tagged the injured according to the severity of the wounds. Ellen Cassidy, the young man with the metal in his arm and several other seriously injured staff members and customers were lifted into two waiting ambulances. A third EMS vehicle pulled up to the shattered building with a larger rescue team on board. The group worked swiftly treating the remaining injured. A tarpaulin was placed over the body of the dead customer. Mary looked at her watch. The entire matter had taken less than half an hour.

A bandaged Ted Bradley stood talking with the EMS crew chief. In answer to Ted's questioning, the man shook his head and spoke briefly before returning to his crew and moving them across the street.

"Thank God! It wasn't a bomb. A gas pressure regulator failed and the pilot light on a stove blew. Right now they can't estimate the total casualties. I'll call my firm and ask for a car to pick us up and take us to the hospital," Bradley said to Boyer and Mary.

The trio looked at one and other, gulped and suddenly dissolved into the uncontrollable laughter and tears of hysterical relief. Just as quickly, it subsided and they entered Boyer's office which was relatively intact. His phone was blinking. Like other utility lines, the telephone lines were in cables buried deeper underground. He picked up the phone, spoke for a second and handed the instrument to Ted Bradley.

"Yes? Oh, hi, darling. No I'm O.K. So is Mary. I have a couple of scratches, but the car was destroyed. The police told me it wasn't a bomb, just a gas leak. As soon as a car from the office gets here Mary and I are going to the hospital, then I'll go on to the office."

Frank Boyer reached across the desk and handed Mary her messages and the envelope she had left behind in the confusion. She took them and opened the manila envelope first. It was a note from Langley. She read it quickly, tore it in half and handed it to Boyer to be shredded.

The second was a long letter from Hank. He told her of his arrival in Tel Aviv and sent her regards from Dr. Josephson. The sabbatical was going well. He had unearthed some interesting data. There was, he concluded, nothing from home. Mary smiled and pocketed the note.

"It may take some time before the street is reopened," said the travel agent. "There's a small coffee shop a couple of blocks away. I suggest we go there and have something to drink."

"Before we leave, may I please try to get through again to the hospital and tell the people there I'll be delayed?" Mary asked. Boyer handed her the phone. Mary dialed the main number. The line was still busy. She tried several alternate numbers, with no more success. With a shrug, she handed the phone back to Boyer. She and the two men headed for the front of the building. At the entrance they were met by a police officer.

"I am most distressed," he said in heavily accented English, "but I cannot permit you to leave. The gas main has not yet been turned off and there is serious danger of a second explosion. Please remain here. We shall inform you when safe egress may be attempted."

He saluted and turned back to facing the damaged street and buildings. The area had been cordoned off. The dust had settled. The street was strangely quiet. A distant hum of traffic was the only sign that the rest of the city was still functioning.

Frank Boyer sighed and raised his hands in a gesture of despair and annoyance and turned back to his office. Mary and Ted followed. The three Americans stepped around the tarpaulin covered body, which still was lying beside the desk where it had been placed by the EMS personnel. The men looked down, impassively. Mary shuddered. Natural death was something with which she could deal. Sudden, violent death was something else. She held back the urge to vomit.

Inside the office, Frank Boyer began rummaging through his desk. He found a fresh pack of American cigarettes, opened it and offered it around. Ted accepted, Mary declined. The room was getting very warm. With the power out, the air conditioning was not functioning. The sweat had caked the dust and grime on their faces and arms. Mary went into the small bathroom connected to Frank's office. The water was barely running. She washed her face and used the toilet. Each of the men did the same after she finished. The face and arm washing did little to relieve the increasingly stifling heat. Two water coolers in the outside space had not been damaged nor displaced by the blast. The tepid water barely quenched their thirsts.

It was almost noon when the barriers were removed and the car Ted Bradley had sent for was allowed to enter the area and pick them up for the drive to the hospital. Only after Mary showed her identification card were they permitted to enter the Hospital grounds. At the front entrance, Bradley's car stopped long enough to let Mary out. She told him that she would be in touch as soon as possible. The hospital switchboard was certainly still swamped, she would try to call later from the hotel.

Mary made her way to the elevators and went up to the Nuclear Medicine floor. The two technicians were absorbed in their work when she entered the Department office. However, as soon as she shut the door, they turned from their benches.

"We have been very worried, Dr. Lyons," said Khalifa.

"Yes," continued Alfar. "When you did not arrive, we called your hotel. They were only able to tell us that you had been picked up by an American gentleman for a dinner engagement and had not yet returned. The hotel desk said you had also received a call from the International Travel Services. We assumed that you had gone there. When we heard about the explosion, and the first casualties arrived, we became very upset. All of us were pressed into service to work with the casualties. I spoke with several who had been at that agency at the time of the incident. One gentleman told us that there was an American woman who had helped dress his wound. From his description, we knew that it must have been you. Allah be praised, you don't seem to have been injured."

Khalifa Hasan left the office and returned with a set of greens and a lab coat, which she handed to Mary and led her from the office to a shower room.

"These may not be stylish, doctor, but I think you will feel more comfortable after a shower and a change. Here are soap, shampoo, a hair dryer and towels. We keep them here in case of an emergency."

Mary thanked her, stripped and turned on the hot water full force. As she shampooed her hair for the second or third time, Mary noticed a number of scratches and bruises on her arms and right leg. The dirt, grime, and dust disappeared first in a flood of black, then gray and finally, clear water. Her tension was also released by

the flow of the steaming liquid. Mary dressed as quickly as she could make herself move. She was bone tired, but decided that there was no reason for her to postpone further examination into the two problems she had come to Dubai to solve, or to clarify.

The simplistic answer to the joint hospital project situation was to get Dr. Abu Ismail to accept the limitations of his staff and his own lack of computer knowledge. Simple as that might appear, Mary was well aware, after her experiences with him in Paris, that his ego and mind set would make any such solution difficult.

The TROIKA matter would need further instructions from CIA headquarters. The note from Langley was essentially confirmation of her position--Ted and Frank were to be her only direct contacts. Ellen Cassidy was simply a messenger. She was instructed to attempt to discover the actual amount of nuclear material at the hospital. Mary had already given that information to Ted Bradley at his home.

In the Nuclear Medicine Department office, Mary asked for all the files pertaining to the computerization of the Nuclear Medical data. Alfar Habibi brought a small cardboard file drawer out of the file room just down the hall from the departmental office. It was filled with varicolored computer binders. Each folder contained all the information regarding cases involving inter-action between Johns Hopkins and Dubai. Mary began to read the files, but developed a headache which made it almost impossible for her to continue. Mary realized that she had left her glasses in her hotel room. She knew that she could not work any longer that day. Mary asked Alfar Habibi to drive her back to her hotel. As she left the office, Khalifa Hasan handed her a bag containing her soiled clothes.

At the hotel she stopped at the desk to ask for messages. There were none. In the lobby, she noticed the intelligence agent who was assigned to monitor the comings and goings of the guests. She could not resist the temptation and waved at him. He was flustered and dropped the magazine he had been holding. Mary grinned and went into the empty elevator.

When she entered her room, Mary held her breath. The room was neat--too neat. It was obvious that the place had been searched and everything put back meticulously. Mary saw that the arrangement of her clothes closet had been changed. Everything was hung back almost in the order in which she had placed it when she unpacked, but several of her skirts and blouses were out of position. She always placed skirts and complementary, or, contrasting blouses close to each other. Her shoes were neatly arranged, but again, out of order. The dresser drawers had also been searched. Everything was replaced neatly, but also slightly out of order. Her luggage had been opened. There was a slight cut in the lining of her large case, and a small slit in her carry-on.

Mary had no idea why the room had been entered, and was very disconcerted. Evidently, local police or intelligence agency felt there was reason to make the search. She wasn't certain why she had been singled out, or if this was standard operating procedure whenever a new Westerner appeared. Nothing, apparently, had been taken. Mary began to breathe normally.

She composed herself and called the concierge to have someone come and take her soiled clothing to be laundered. It took her a few minutes to change out of the hospital greens and lab coat into her own clothes. A short time later, a bellman arrived to pick up the garments. When he knocked, Mary opened it and simply handed him the bag. She had been informed earlier, by the concierge, that the clothing would be returned before noon the next day.

Mary felt famished. She had had nothing to eat since breakfast at the Bradleys. In the confusion and stress of the morning, she had missed lunch. The hotel was operated by a Swiss firm and kept European dining hours.

It was siesta, or schlaf stunde, as the Swiss called it. The coffee shop would have to be one of the few eating establishments open. Mary saw Frank Boyer and motioned him to join her. He walked over to her table and

sat down. He too had been able to change clothes.

"How is Ellen Cassidy, Mr. Boyer? She seemed in pretty bad shape when I left your place. Were there any other fatalities?" Mary inquired.

"She's been badly injured. It may be several weeks before she can return to work. In the meantime, I've assigned Tom Ericson, Ellen's assistant, to assume all her duties. Thank you for asking, Dr. Lyons. Thank God, there were no other fatalities aside from the gentleman who was killed when the blast took place." he answered.

The innocuous seeming conversation was overheard by intelligence agents from several nations who were in the restaurant, none of whom attached any importance to it. Mary's cover was so well planned that so far as other agents could ascertain, she was not connected with any intelligence operation. For the moment, she was home clear.

London, England

24 November

0900 hours

The American, Russian and Israeli Commercial Attaches were in their offices when the simultaneous requests came for information about the Bogusz Kevi. When the International Ship Registry was checked, they found that the Bogusz Kevi was registered in Cyprus, but owned by Caraglou, Menkadis Ltd. of Ismir, Turkey. The vessel displaced seventy five thousand metric tons with a load capacity of just under sixty thousand tons. She was built just after World War Two in the Clydeside Shipyard in Scotland, specifically for the tramp trade.

Discreet inquiries were made by each attache into the latest voyage of the Bogusz Kevi. The ship travel orders did not indicate stops in either England or Cyprus. Further, she had recently come out of dry-dock for minor repairs and had lain to in the Turkish waters just north of the Bosphorus with a partial cargo of untanned sheep hides and some medical instruments and machinery destined for Jebel Ali, the Port of Dubai, as well as oil drilling bits and slurry for delivery in Kuwait. She had stopped in Salonika for several bales of Greek tobacco to be offloaded in Bahrain.

The results of the queries were forwarded by diplomatic mail pouch to the respective capitals. The Bogusz Kevi information was received in Moscow, Washington and Tel Aviv within hours. Mail pouches were placed aboard various flag-carrier airlines, El Al for Israel, Aeroflot for Russia and American Airlines for the United States, each day. It was not unusual for such commercial information to be requested and submitted, routinely. The American and Russian reports were filed with the proper governmental agencies. The Israeli report was sent to the TROIKA team in Tel Aviv as soon as it arrived.

Tel Aviv, Israel

24 November

1600 hours

The Mossad courier handed the sealed envelope to Miriam Safti, who signed for it and placed it on Zvi's desk. He cocked an eyebrow, quizzically. Miriam shrugged and held her hands palms up. She had no idea what it was. Zvi carefully slit the envelope and removed its contents. The report on the Bogusz Kevi was short and concise.

"Hank! Grisha!," he called to the others. "We've struck precious metal. I'm not sure if it's silver or gold. Here's a report on the Bogusz Kevi, the Turkish freighter that delivered the atomic material to Dubai which was supposed to have come from Kidderminster, England, by way of Cyprus. She never stopped in Nicosia or Lanarca!"

Grisha stepped to the corkboard and entered the itinerary on the map. He placed a pin in the Turkish waters north of the Bosphorus and dropped a line through the Straits, down the Mediterranean Sea, past the Suez Canal, around the Arabian Peninsula and then north, to Jebel Ali. The new pin was close to the old pin indicating the position of the rubber dinghy the Ulanov had retrieved. He stepped back and looked at the map. He placed a pin at Sevastopol, dropped a line and wound the end around the dinghy position and then to the Bogusz Kevi indicators.

"There's another piece of the puzzle," Grisha observed, "but we still have no idea why so much nuclear material was shipped there."

"I think we had better start thinking like nuclear age terrorists. 'What is our mission? Who is our target? How do we get it there? How much do we need? Do we plan redundancy?'" Hank said.

"My guess," Zvi Ben Yosef offered, "The catch is where? Israel. I doubt it's Jerusalem. Jerusalem would deny Muslims and Christians their Holy Places, even if it destroyed ours. More likely Haifa or Tel Aviv. Our most important problem is when!"

Holding a map protractor, Grisha walked to the large topographic map of the country. He placed one edge of the protractor into the Mediterranean just off Haifa and began to scribe a series of concentric and intersecting arcs. The intersecting arcs were scribed, after Haifa from Tel Aviv-Jaffa, and, finally, from Jerusalem. When he had finished, he turned to his companions.

"It doesn't much matter where they drop the device," he began. "The arcs indicate distances from ground zero whether the target is Haifa, or Tel Aviv-Jaffa, or Jerusalem. Let's discount Jerusalem, given Zvi's scenario. Then I would see Haifa as a second possibility because the concentration of shipping and the oil refinery. My conclusion would be Tel Aviv-Jaffa. They are the largest centers of population, nearest the sea, closest to the airport. Everything in the radius of the first arc would be vaporized. The next radii show the area which would be destroyed by the fire storm. What was left of the country would be so radioactive that whatever remained would be uninhabitable for several thousand years. For the Palestinian terrorists, especially the most nihilistic fanatics, it wouldn't matter. Their enemy would be destroyed," Grisha pointed out.

"Just a minute, Grisha," Hank interjected, "Let's scribe the arcs into full circles. Most of the Fertile Crescent would be just as liable to destruction. Wouldn't be self destructive? Why chance wiping out your own people? It isn't logical!"

Zvi drew on his pipe and exhaled a large plume of smoke, moved walked to the map, and completed the circles. He stood in front of it and shook his head. "Logic doesn't have a damn thing to do with it," he said sadly. "When you deal with those fanatics, especially those fueled by both religion and politics, nothing matters but the immediate result. Bottom line--was the mission successful?"

The chastened group of intelligence officers stood staring at the map. The old nuclear warfare scenarios were now nothing but video games played out on oversized monitors. The failed coups had led to a partial nuclear stand-down between the United States and the provisional governments of what had been the Soviet Union.

This new terrorist effort was, suddenly, very, very real. The improbable had just been elevated to the probable. The possibility of the total destruction of the entire Middle East was not a part of the equation, as yet.

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

30 November

0700 hours

British Airways flight 109 touched down on Runway Two-S with a slight bump, a squeal of the tires and the roar of the engines being reversed to brake the aircraft. As it taxied slowly to the terminal, the passengers began to arrange their belongings and prepare to leave, Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail, among them. He was dressed in western clothes, except for his checkered khaffiye. A western style hat would have made it impossible for him to recite his prayers. The brim would have interfered with his ritual obeisances. He carried a small soft-sided suitcase, his attache case and the Arabic language newspaper which he had purchased in London. He winced as he left the aircraft; the heat was evident even in the air cooled gangway. In the terminal, he adjusted his sunglasses to soften the effect of the bright sunlight which permeated the arrivals area.

Dr. Abu Ismail retrieved the balance of his luggage and took his place in line to clear Customs and Immigration. His passport identified him as a citizen of Jordan. He resented the fact that although he had lived in the United Arab Emirates for many years, he was still an alien. If that was to be the case, at least, he felt that he should have carried a "Palestinian" passport. After a cursory examination of his passport, the doctor passed through Customs. His luggage was not inspected. He went to the building exit, where Alfar Habibi was waiting with a hospital staff car.

By agreement, English was the preferred language between the physician and his senior staff. "Good morning, Doctor. How was your flight?" Alfar asked.

"Quiet and uneventful, thank you, Alfar. I should like you to take me to my quarters, wait for me and then proceed to the Hospital. Dr. Lyons has arrived, has she not?" he answered.

"Yes, Doctor. Dr. Lyons arrived several days ago. She has begun working on the joint project. The Hospital is quite full, sir. There was a gas leak explosion in the commercial area yesterday and most of the casualties were brought to us. For the first time in my memory, the burn unit is overflowing. We have several beds free in the Nuclear Medical Unit, but Dr. al Yasir refused to relinquish them. He says only you can authorize the release of the beds! Some of the injured are on gurneys in the hallway," Alfar reported.

"That is ridiculous and Dr. al Yasir knows it. Take me directly to the hospital. I need to release those beds at once! After that, you can drive me to my apartment," said the exasperated physician. In the absence of Dr. MacPherson, the decision was his.

Alfar Habibi brought the staff car to a smooth halt in the underground garage. He left the doctor's luggage in the vehicle.

Mary was already in the office with Khalifa Hasan when the two men entered.

Dr. Abu Ismail removed his suit jacket and put on his lab coat before sitting down at his desk. He picked up the telephone and paged Dr. al Yasir. In a peremptory tone tinged with anger, he ordered the other physician to report to him at once.

"Excuse me, Dr. Lyons, but may I ask you to leave the office for a few minutes after Dr. al Yasir arrives? This is an internal problem with which I do not wish to burden you. Miss Hasan and Mr. Habibi, will you also please leave," he ordered.

Mary and the technicians left at once. None wished to wait until "The Ibis" arrived. Their abrupt departure as

soon as he entered would have proved more embarrassing to them than to him. The three walked down to the staff cafeteria.

Dr. Hussein al Yasir came into the Department Office to face a furious Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail. The Nuclear Medicine Department Chief sat behind his desk fingering his worry beads. For almost two minutes, he sat silent, simply staring at the other physician.

"Mr. Habibi tells me that you refused to release empty beds on this ward to help care for the injured from yesterday's tragedy," he began. "Since when do you have to wait for me to be on the premises to make such decisions! The first rule of this institution, Doctor, is patient care! If I am not here and you are in charge, emergency decisions are your responsibility. There is no need for patients to be on gurneys in a hallway if there are vacant beds in this department when all the other beds in the hospital are in use. Rest assured that there will be a report of this inaction on Dr. MacPhearson's desk this afternoon. Get back to your patients!" he ended half-rising from his chair.

The doctor called Admitting and order as many of the injured still on gurneys as possible to be transferred to his ward. With the Egyptian physician gone, Dr. Abu Ismail removed his lab coat and put on his jacket as he prepared to leave for his home.

He stopped at the cafeteria and asked Alfar Habibi to drive him. Habibi rose from the table he was sharing with the two women and accompanied his superior to the garage where they took the staff car and drove to Dr. Abu Ismail's residence. When they came to his apartment, Alfar Habibi took the doctor's bags from the back of the car and carried them to the door. His servant, Yusuf al-Khali, took the bags from Habibi and carried them into the apartment.

Alfar Habibi left the apartment and drove to the souk, where he made a short report and gave it to the travel agent to transmit to Crete. His latest orders were to inform his control of Dr. Abu Ismail's return.

Mary and Khalifa walked back to the office. Khalifa went directly to her work station and resumed working on the tests. Mary sat reading several reports which related, directly and indirectly, to the joint project. Alfar came into the office and quietly resumed his tasks. Nothing was said about the dressing down which all three were certain that Dr. Abu Ismail had given "The Ibis."

Back in his apartment, Dr. Abu Ismail looked at his watch. There was still time for him to pray before noon. He unrolled his prayer rug and began the centuries old ritual. When he finished, he took a shower, changed his clothes and sat down to the meal Yusuf had prepared. He ate quietly and was almost finished when the phone rang. He picked it up and listened without speaking and replaced the phone on its cradle. The message was simple. "It and they have arrived."

MacLean, Virginia

CIA Headquarters

29 November

0900 hours

CIA Director Miller leafed through the mail which had accumulated in his in-basket overnight. He opened the envelopes containing the early transmissions from the station agents and special field personnel, among which was the status report on Mary's activities since her arrival in Dubai. Included in the report was a copy of the memo with the 856 area code number. The duty officer had written Farid Attiyeh's name and address, as well as Ted Bradley's translation of the scribbled note. It was Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail's reminder to call back when

Attiyeh's line was open. Unfortunately, there was no date or time on the slip. It was, however, the first tangible evidence linking the two to the French meeting prior to his arrival. It also identified the call made to Attiyeh's home came from the hospital. Miller faxed a copy of the report to FBI Director Richard Grant.

Washington, DC

FBI Headquarters

29 November

0945 hours

Richard Grant's secretary, Ellen Arthur, knocked and entered his office and handed him the fax. She was a statuesque woman, in her early forties, an inch above six feet tall, with dark brown hair and deep blue, almost black, eyes. Widowed, with two children in college, she had been Richard Grant's secretary prior to his coming to Washington, when he was a Federal Judge in Arizona, and accompanied him to the nation's capitol at his request. Although she was totally loyal and admired him, Ellen had no romantic interest in her boss. In all the time they had worked together, Richard Grant never addressed his secretary as "Ellen." His upper class New England heritage precluded familiarity on the job. They had no appreciable contact outside their professional relationship. The FBI Director read the message and returned it to her to be entered into the TROIKA file.

"Miss Arthur, get me Ed Carter in our Camden, New Jersey office, please," he requested. Within seconds, Ed Carter was on the line.

"Good morning, Ed. Could you please let me have your file on Farid Attiyeh? More specifically, his telephone log. I just got some information which definitely ties him to a Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail from the Ibn Rosht Hospital in Dubai, and that sudden flight to Paris. I want those calls to Attiyeh's residence separated out from his overseas calls to and from his office. Thank you," he said as he hung up. Grant sat back in his chair, folded his hands behind his head and smiled faintly. Pieces of the puzzle were coming together. As soon as he received the phone logs from Ed Carter, he would set up the mechanics of apprehending Attiyeh on his return to New York.

Camden, NJ

FBI Field Office

29 November

1000 hours

Edwin Anderson Carter, the Agent-In-Charge of the Camden FBI office was a fifteen year veteran. His prematurely gray hair and rimless glasses gave him the appearance of a successful attorney or judge. A graduate of Hofstra University Law School, he had been an Assistant District Attorney in Nassau County, New York, before joining the FBI. Carter had served in FBI Offices in Austin, Texas, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and, Seattle, Washington, before being put in charge of the Camden office. His main skills lay in pursuing and apprehending terrorists and in identifying money laundering operations.

As soon as he ended the call from Washington, Carter had his secretary pull the file on Farid Attiyeh. In less than an hour the logs were copied and transmitted to FBI Headquarters for Dick Grant's study.

Washington, DC

FBI Headquarters

29 November

1100 hours

Ellen Arthur brought the file to Grant as soon as it came. He thanked her and asked that she call Miller. Grant took the report, read it and placed it in the TROIKA file Ellen Arthur had brought to him just after he called Ed Carter. After all the years together, she was often able to anticipate his needs. Bringing him the file was just one of those things. Her high security clearance gave her access to everything he did. Grant closed the file and left it in his out basket. A copy of the phone logs had already been sent to Phil Miller, to Ed Forbes at NSC and Eric Short at ONI.

Washington, DC

29 November

1530 hours

The four middle-aged men walking toward the American Cartological Historical Association building did not rate even a momentary glance from passers-by. Each was carrying a standard issue U.S. Government brief case with a large Internal Revenue Service Seal.

They entered the building, signed the register, were recognized by the hand-print scanner, and entered one of the smaller conference rooms on the second floor. Like every such room, it was swept for possible bugs and a white noise machine was activated to drown any wisps of conversation which may have eluded the sweeper.

Miller opened the conversation. "The CIA and FBI have been trying to link an American citizen, Farid Attiyeh, to terrorist organizations. Until now, this has been unsuccessful. However, now that we have established his connection with a new group, 'Al 'Suyuf Al Kharb, part of the missing nuclear material mystery may be solved. I've brought the translation of a series of taped meetings which took place in France a few days ago. It is unfortunate that we did not get the first day's deliberations on tape, but we couldn't until Mr. Attiyeh showed up so we could put our surveillance teams in place." He handed each of the others a copy of the material Ron Grover's people had taped.

"One thing hasn't changed, Phil," said an amused Ed Forbes. "They still hate each other's guts. They still have this total loathing for Israel. We almost handed that country to them on a serving board a few years ago when we convinced Shamir's government not to retaliate for the Scud attacks. Luckily the damned things did so little damage. We almost lost our Eastern Mediterranean base on that go-round. Without Haifa, we don't have a secure refitting and leave port east of Naples, and that's not too secure, either. That whole mess with politicians on both sides daring each other to knock the chip off the shoulder nearly ruined everything Navy had put together in fifty years."

"Now we have something to go on with Farid Attiyeh," said Dick Grant. "But I won't move on him until OPERATION TROIKA is in its final stages. We don't want to spook this new terrorist outfit. I'll alert our liaison people along with Surete and Interpol, so they'll be ready to move when we wrap this thing up."

"Next step?" asked the CIA Director.

"I'll show this to the President and have him get back to you and Dick. I guess ONI has just about finished its job on this one, Admiral," Ed Forbes said as he rose from his chair.

The copies of the reports were shredded immediately. They left the room and the building separately. Miller, Grant, and Short returned to their offices. Forbes drove to the White House for a meeting which had already been set up with President Dunstan.

Washington, DC

The Oval Office

1700 hours

An unsmiling President Peter Dunstan finished reading the CIA report and handed it back to his National Security Advisor.

"I want a copy of this hand delivered to President Kronsky and Prime Minister Shalom by special courier from our embassies in Moscow and Jerusalem. Then I want to see Miller first thing in the morning. It may be time to move on Dubai, but I want his opinion and then I can give him absolute authority to take what ever steps are necessary to stop this outrage. I'll have Bill Lakin, the White House Chief of Staff, brief the House and Senate leaders on the move. Finally, I want a separate meeting with Grant to get the details in place to arrest the people here in the United States," he ordered.

Ever the sensitive administrator, President Duncan leaned across the table toward Ed Forbes. "I'm sorry, Ed. I barked this at you as if you were still a plebe at Annapolis, but there are times when I get scared as hell about things like this report and the possible consequences."

The National Security Advisor smiled. "It's all part of the job, Mr. President. Hell, sir, if you and I weren't scared, we'd be bigger damned fools than people think we are. What was it Einstein said, 'God doesn't play dice with the universe'. Well we sure ain't the Almighty. Good afternoon, Mr. President."

General Forbes left the Oval Office and went to the National Security Council staff offices to have the Grover report sent to the National Security Agency to be encoded and sent to the United States Embassies in Russia and Israel as the President had ordered. The entire process was completed in just over two hours. The report was first translated into Russian and Hebrew by two independent teams for each language and checked by a third team for errors in translation or in spelling. Cyrillic and Hebrew can change the meaning of a word by simply misplacing a letter. The two-team simultaneous translation efforts and the final editing by the third teams made human error almost impossible. Once translated, the documents were encoded and transmitted to Moscow and Jerusalem.

The Oval Office

30 November

0830 hours

The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency was admitted to the Oval Office by President Dunstan's secretary. The call from Ed Forbes was vague as to the President's wishes other than Miller be at his office at 8:30 A.M., promptly, regarding OPERATION TROIKA. Miller was puzzled by the call from Forbes. Normally, the White House would call him directly, rather than through the NSC.

"Good morning, Phil. I had Ed Forbes call you simply because the fewer people who are involved in this matter, the less chance there is of a leak. This place is like an open faucet. We need to decide what our next moves need to be. I'm having a meeting this afternoon with Dick Grant to discuss his agency's role," explained the President.

"Mr. President, I don't think we're ready to move on this. We need something more concrete than these tapes to go on. I'm ready to send Henry Wheatland to Dubai when things jell. Right now, Dr. Mary Mallory is already in place. Her report is alarming, sir. A very preliminary check of the amount of nuclear material at the hospital is shocking. She estimates that there is enough to supply the hospital for the next several decades. I understand that copies of the transcriptions are on their way, or have already arrived there. However, Dr. Mallory's information has not been shared with them."

"I promised that I would stay out of the day-to-day workings of the operation, so if you feel we aren't ready to move--so be it! I'm going to call Kronsky and Shalom. I don't want them to think that the United States is grandstanding on this," said President Dunstan as he rose to end the meeting.

30 November

1400 hours

Snow had been falling steadily since just after noon and begun to accumulate. Government Offices were preparing to close early.

The FBI Director was admitted to the Oval Office, after the doorman had taken his snow covered coat.

"Good afternoon, Mr. President," he said.

"Good afternoon, Dick," the President began. "As I told Phil Miller this morning, I had Ed Forbes call you to keep things as contained as possible. Ed told me that you have already let Surete and Interpol know what is going on. Is there anything else you would suggest we do here in the United States?"

"Mr. President, I have placed the Camden, New Jersey field staff on alert. Right now, we have no idea of the full scope of Attiyeh's involvement. I have a man, Willem Vermaat, working in his firm. The FBI is working with Naval Intelligence in tracking down the truck and driver who picked up the material from Earle. The work order and the billing order appear to be genuine. We, FBI and ONI, believe that someone either in Earle or on Staten Island is involved. This is no nickel-and-dime operation, sir. It's highly sophisticated and well planned. Right now, unfortunately, we must wait."

"O.K., Dick. Thus far, things have been quiet, politically, and I hope they stay that way. Keep me informed," said the President, as he ended the meeting.

The White House doorman helped Dick Grant into his coat. Grant stepped out into the driveway and into his car. The snow was falling harder and visibility was poor as his driver moved out into traffic on Pennsylvania Avenue. The drive back to the FBI Building was slowed by the snow.

He pulled into the garage underneath the FBI building and parked in the spot marked DIRECTOR GRANT. "Business as usual," he thought. "That's what keeps us sane. Or at least as sane as being inside the Beltway permitted you to be."

Moscow, Russia

The United States Embassy

30 November

0400 hours

The laser printer in the United States Embassy quietly printed out the encoded transcript from Washington. When it finished, an alarm bell rang to alert the night duty code clerk. Due to the time difference between the two capitals, much of the code material arrived between midnight and four in the morning, Moscow time.

Letter mail arrived by Diplomatic Pouch, always accompanied by a State Department Security Officer, several times during the day when United States Flag airlines arrived at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport. An Embassy vehicle, driven by a U.S. Marine, drove the courier and the pouch to the newly finished United States Embassy Building. It had been torn down and completely rebuilt under American supervision after hundreds of KGB sensors and microphones were found imbedded in the walls and even in the Great Seal of the United States.

The code clerk, Alfred Armbruster, put down the book he was reading and took the multipage document from the printer basket and transferred it to a special decoder. Within five minutes, the decoder had returned the message to clear language, in this case, Russian, with a cover letter in English with instructions to deliver the contents by special courier directly to President Kronskey. The orders were that the document was to be delivered at ten o'clock in the morning, local time. This would keep any Russian surveillance personnel from noticing an unusual arrival at President Kronskey's office. Armbruster placed the decoded transcript in the special courier service basket. After entering the arrival information in the night log, he returned to his book. Code traffic that night was lighter than usual.

Tel Aviv, Israel

United States Embassy

30 November

0400 hours

Like his counterpart in Moscow, Mark Latham, the night duty officer in the code room, was taking his watch. The code machine began humming and whirled to a stop after a few minutes.

Latham took the coded sheets to the decoder where the message was translated into it a Hebrew clear language original. The English language cover sheet followed. It, too, ordered the Embassy Courier Service to hand deliver the document to Prime Minister Levi Shalom at 10:00 A.M.

As in Moscow, Letter Mail arrived at Ben Gurion International Airport, accompanied by a State Department Security Officer. The pouch, which on occasion was actually several boxes as well as soft sided luggage, was loaded onto an Embassy vehicle and driven to the United States Embassy.

Moscow

President Kronskey's Office

30 November

1000 hours

U.S. Marine Gunnery Sergeant Ken Wager drove his Embassy car to the Kremlin check point where he showed his identity card. A Kremlin guard permitted the car to enter and Wager drove to the Foreign Diplomatic garage. He took the elevator up to President Kronskey's Office.

Sergeant Wager was stopped by Sergei Mikhailovich Dvinsky, the President's Senior Aide. He requested the

envelope, but when he read the cover letter, Dvinsky shrugged his shoulders and knocked on Kronsky's private office door. When he was admitted, both men entered the room. The American Marine saluted and handed the envelope to President Kronsky. Kronsky glanced at the Embassy Seal which covered the closing flap on the back of the envelope and dismissed Dvinsky and Wager.

In the ante-room Sergeant Wager picked up his Russian escort and returned to his car. At the checkpoint, the Russian guard got out. The American Marine drove back to the Embassy. Excepting for Dvinsky's initial request for the envelope, not a word had been spoken. The sergeant looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock.

Jerusalem

Prime Minister Shalom's Office

30 November

1000 hours

At the same time that Gunnery Sergeant Wager was being cleared at the Kremlin check point, Staff Sergeant Don Lattimore was entering the Prime Minister's office with the Grover report. He was passed on to Malka Bar-On, Levi Shalom's private secretary. Like Sergei Mikhailovich Dvinsky, she attempted to take the envelope from the sergeant. He showed her the cover letter and was immediately ushered into the Prime Minister's private office. Lattimore placed the item on the desk and prepared to leave. Shalom nodded his thanks, the Marine saluted and left the office. It was ten twenty.

Moscow

1100 hours

President Kronsky slit open the envelope, took out the report, adjusted his glasses, hunched forward over the desk and began to read. As he read, Kronsky pressed the numeric combination which unlocked a secret file drawer under the modesty panel of his desk. To any observer, casual or other wise, the drawer seen from underneath looked like a simple deep center drawer. He withdrew his copy of the original report which Col. Voroshilov had sent on to Admiral Bulgarov before he had cooked it and placed the altered report into the official FSB file for Chevchevadze to see.

The Russian President placed the two reports side by side and read readily turning from one to the other from time to time. Individually, the reports were troublesome enough. Together they were a prescription for a holocaust. Kronsky lifted the receiver on his scrambler phone and punched in Ignatiev's and Bolgarov's numbers.

"Lunch. Noon at my apartment," he requested.

"Fine!" both men replied.

"Sergei Mikhailovich, I'm leaving for lunch at my apartment. I'll be back in time for my meeting with the Finance Minister," said Kronsky as he reached for his coat and hat.

The usually taciturn Dvinsky nodded and returned to the material on his desk. After working with Kronsky for over twenty years, there was little need for spoken conversation between them. Years of eluding taps and bugs had helped them develop a special hand and eye language which defied interception.

It was, for Moscow, a relatively warm November day. Kronsky decided to walk from the Kremlin to his

apartment. He smiled as he strode, recalling how impossible it would have been for any of his predecessors to move so freely around the city. He also was aware of the presence of several security agents who were walking at discreet distances -an almost invisible shield.

Since the failure of the aborted coup d'etat by the disgruntled hard-liners of the old nomenklatura, Kronsky felt less fearful of the common citizens of Moscow. The new Commonwealth of Independent States, of which Russia was *primus inter pares* (first among equals), had survived the difficult transition from the centralized society to the more open society which was still evolving. Minsk was the nominal capitol of the CIS, but Moscow was still its head, heart and soul.

He arrived at the apartment just as Ignatiev and Bolgarov approached in the staff car. The fuel distribution system was still somewhat faulty. Gasoline, even for senior commanders' cars, was in relatively short supply, so many men shared vehicles when they were attending meetings in the same, or nearby, locations.

The three old friends greeted each other and walked together into the apartment complex where Andrei Kronsky had his permanent residence. Dvinsky, Kronsky's aide, had called ahead to the President's only servant, a retired Soviet Army Senior Sergeant, Stefan Ivanovich Volkovsky. A simple lunch had been laid out for them.

Kronsky, Ignatiev and Bulgarov, all Great Russians, had been friends since their early days in the Komsomol. Although each entered a different career, they never lost sight of one another. By judicious use of the Party apparatus, Ignatiev's Jewish ancestry was hidden. It was Kronsky who, as secretary of their Komsomol cell was able to change Ignatiev's internal passport from "Yevrei" to "Russki"--from "Jew" to "Russian".

Volkovsky was standing at the door when Kronsky, Ignatiev and Bolgarov arrived. They entered the small dining area and seated themselves. Volkovsky served the meal and tactfully withdrew to his own quarters.

The Russian leader placed the Grover and Verdansky reports on the table side-by-side.

"Read them both and tell me what you think. To me, they seem to meld together into a more complete picture of what OPERATION TROIKA is all about."

Ignatiev read the reports first and passed them on to Bolgarov. After both had finished reading them, the reports were put back on the table.

"Suggestions?" Kronsky queried.

"A conference call to Washington and Jerusalem seems to be the first order of business. Dunstan and Shalom must have had time to digest these data," recommended Marshal Ignatiev. "Then we had better let Grisha know what we have."

"We'd better speed up the investigations in the Crimea. Our senior intelligence officers in Sevastopol and Simferopol are already in touch with each other. Now is the time, I suggest, to push them harder," offered Fleet Admiral Bolgarov.

"Thank you, Lenka. Thank you, Vladi," said President Kronsky.

The request being made and the suggestions forthcoming, they sat down to the typical Russian lunch Stefan Ivanovich had prepared for them. It consisted of dark, dense black bread, cabbage borscht, boiled potatoes, tea and vodka. After finishing the meal, Bolgarov and Ignatiev offered their chief a ride back to the Kremlin, which he accepted. Kronsky held his briefcase, tightly, at his side, almost as if he was trying to contain Armageddon--the Final Battle.

Jerusalem

1100 hours

Levi Shalom sat at his desk re-reading the report. He absent-mindedly kept removing and returning his richly embroidered kippah, skull cap, to the back of his head. When he first read the reports, his reaction was one of fear, then almost of despair. As he was re-reading it, he became agitated and angry.

Shalom punched his intercom button. "Malka, please ask Hanoach Caleb to come to my office. Also call Moshe Arielson. Tell both of them to be here within the hour. Todah. Thank you."

Malka Bar-On had been Shalom's private secretary ever since he first became Prime Minister. Middle-aged, she had remained single. The joke in political circles was that she was married to the Knesset and all of its members were her children, without regard for party affiliation. She had the absolute trust of the men and women who constituted Israel's Parliament. It was just those qualities which made Levi Sharon ask her to serve him.

Malka Bar-On looked at the large clock on the wall behind her desk. It read eleven-fifteen. She calculated that if she made the calls promptly, her regular routine would not be interrupted. Since the heads of Mossad and Shin Bet were notoriously punctual, she could place a lunch order and have it delivered and set up in the small conference room adjoining the PM's office just before they arrived.

She made a conference call to Caleb's and Arielson's secretaries. There was momentary silence and then confirmation that their bosses would be at the Prime Minister's office by twelve-fifteen.

Malka called a restaurant near the Knesset Building and ordered lunch for the three men. With deference to Hanoach Caleb, she had a vegetarian lunch brought in. It was said that Caleb had never eaten meat, poultry nor fish. When the restaurant owner demurred, saying that there was not enough time to prepare and send in the order by noon, she quietly reminded him to which office, and, to whom he was speaking. He quickly agreed. The secretary grinned, put the phone back on its base and bustled into the conference room to set up the meal.

Malka placed pads and pencils at each place setting. Levi Shalom rarely had luncheon meetings in his office. When he did, it was almost always because of a crisis, real or impending. Considering the persons called, she had no doubt that this would be just such a meeting. She changed her mind, called the restaurant back and ordered a meal for herself.

The food had just been delivered and set out when Caleb and Arielson walked into the room. Levi Shalom was seated at the conference table, waiting. The other two men sat quietly while the Prime Minister recited the Motzi, the blessing over the food. Non-religious, themselves, they respected Shalom's observance.

"B'teyavon! Enjoy the meal", he said. They ate quietly. When they were through, Levi Shalom, recited the Birkat HaMazon, the Grace after Meals. He then handed each man a copy of the report he had received from Washington.

"It would appear that we're not dealing with a bunch of fanatic Muslim amateurs. None of these men are apt to go off half-cocked. The new wrinkle is this Dr. Abu Ismail. Mossad has been aware of the 'Al 'Suyuf Al Kharb group, but this is the first time it appears to be going operational," said the Memuneh--the Mossad Chief.

"It may explain the theft of the material from Dimona," the head of Shin Bet stated. "I have a full team working on it now. We've established, thus far, that the work order from Rehovot was from a batch which was accidentally discarded a few weeks ago. Those orders are numbered sequentially, but there is no way Dimona

could know the next serial number. My men did and that's when we discovered the discrepancy. That order number was several numbers earlier than the preceding one.

"The fuel chit was a standard form that could have been bought at any stationery store. The Institute information was from a rubber stamp. The guy at the pump in Be'er Sheva just filled out his part and gave driver the carbon. Each day's receipts are sent to their central accounting office every day. We questioned him, but with a hundred or more cars, buses, and, trucks passing through the gas station every day, he couldn't remember the Weizmann Institute van."

"I'm leaving the details up to you," said the Prime Minister. The heads of Shin Bet and Mossad left. The conference was over. Malka cleared the table and returned to her office, the Prime Minister to his.

Moscow-Washington-Jerusalem

30 November

1600 hours local time, Moscow

1700 hours local time, Jerusalem

0900 hours local time, Washington

Levi Shalom's secure phone blinked. The two Presidents and the Prime Minister were immediately connected when the Israeli lifted his receiver.

"We all have Peter's report," Kronsky began. "I have sent each of you a copy of a report we received from Paris, which was forwarded to me yesterday. It seems to complete another part of the puzzle. By my reckoning, the messengers from our embassies in Washington and Tel Aviv should be in your offices, gentlemen, within the next few minutes. It was translated, in each case, by special staff answerable only to me. In the somewhat unstable situation, here, I cannot risk using the regular personnel."

"Understood," the others said simultaneously, as their secretaries entered with the Russian document. Dunstan and Shalom each took several minutes to read the report.

"So," Shalom said, speaking softly, "my initial premise was correct. My nation is, indeed, the target. I am sending both reports to the inter-agency staff here in Tel Aviv."

"I'm sending my copy of your report, Andrei, to the Directors of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for their input and action," Dunstan added.

Tel Aviv

30 November

1800 hours

The head of Mossad received the documents from the Prime Minister's Office. He opened the envelope, read the contents, and summoned Ari Meron, whose office was just down the hall from his.

"Nu, chaver, read it, don't weep, but get it to Zvika!" said the Memuneh, as he handed Meron the report.

"Bits and pieces. Bits and pieces. They're beginning to fit together. Damn!" Meron muttered as he blew his

breath out with a whoosh and a sigh. He picked up the report and strode back to his office at the end of the corridor and phoned Zvi.

"I have something for you. It should be there by seven o'clock," Meron informed him.

The courier arrived at the team's office a few minutes after seven. He handed Miriam Safti the envelope. She thanked him and walked over to Zvi's desk. He swung around in his chair, which had been facing the window, and took the envelope, leaned back, opened it and drew deeply on his pipe. As he read, the Israeli agent's eyes began to burn. At first, he thought a stray bit of tobacco ash had flown into his eye. Then he realized that he was crying angry tears. Zvi began to curse, under his breath, in every language he knew.

The CIA report had moved from possibility to probability to virtual certainty. He felt that he knew what the next step should be, but neither he, nor Obadivsky, nor Wheatland, could exceed the mission purpose. Only their superiors' superiors could do so. Policy decisions were still the governments' prerogative and role.

The Russian and American agents had left for the evening. Zvi reached for the phone to call them, but realized that nothing could be done until they received further orders.

"Miriam," he said as he rose from his desk, "let's close shop. It's getting late."

The computer specialist nodded. She secured the computer, locked the files and took a key from her hand bag. Zvi took a similar key from his pocket. They closed the door behind them and turned the keys simultaneously. This activated the silent alarm system which was wired into Mossad's security office.

At about an hour or so, later, Levi Shalom in what, for him, was an unprecedented act, placed a call to Washington and Moscow. He felt absolutely sure that the time had come to move from data collection to action.

Jerusalem-Moscow-Washington

30 November

2010 hours, local time, Jerusalem

1910 hours, local time, Moscow

1210 hours, local time, Washington

It was shortly after seven o'clock in the evening in Moscow, eight o'clock in Jerusalem, and noon in Washington, when the red phones in Kronskey's and Dunstan's offices began blinking.

Kronskey picked up his phone at once. He was still at his desk. The Russian President found these early evening hours more conducive to work than the hectic period of usual office hours.

The phone in the Oval Office was answered just as rapidly.

Levi Shalom cleared his throat. "I'm sorry to disturb you, gentlemen, but I have read your respective reports and I think we need to come to some decisions."

"It's very clear, to me, that Israel is most assuredly the target. When I put the information together, I came to the conclusion that immediate and expeditious action must be taken!"

The Israeli Prime Minister hesitated. His language was very stilted. He realized that in the earlier conversations, no decision had been made, except to alert their respective intelligence agencies.

"What do have in mind, Levi?" Kronskey asked.

"I think we should let our field men move on Dubai, Paris, and America as soon as possible," Shalom answered.

"It seems a bit premature," Dunstan added. "I think a joint meeting of our Intelligence Chiefs is in order. The problem is where."

"Agreed," Kronskey said. "Brussels seems to be a nice place. It's convenient and all three of our airlines have berthing privileges there."

"What about the Hague?" Dunstan suggested. "Nobody goes there much for meetings. Only the World Court is there."

"What about Geneva, or Zurich?" This from Levi Shalom. "There are so many agencies in Switzerland, that less notice would be taken of these men there."

There was silence as the three leaders mulled over the question of a meeting place for the Central Intelligence and FBI Directors, Bolgarov and Ignatiev, and Caleb and Arielson, which would be convenient and neutral enough not to elicit too much interest.

Then there was the matter of the actual quarters for the meeting which needed be arranged on very short, and totally discreet, notice.

"There's a fine hotel on Lake Geneva that could be used. The Brits had it for a while, but Swissotel operates it now. The Swiss are used to having small meetings in the place. We can have it gone over for bugs by an advance team. That is, if Geneva is OK with you, Andrei and Philip."

"Sounds good to me," affirmed President Dunstan.

"As good as most and better than some," concluded President Kronskey.

"Let's let our people know and have them set the date and the agenda," said the Israeli Prime Minister.

They hung up their red phones and called their intelligence chiefs to inform them of the results of the latest conversation.

Washington

1345 hours

In response to an urgent call from the White House, the Directors of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Chief of Naval Intelligence converged on the Oval Office.

As soon as they were seated, the President explained the need for immediate action.

"Mr. President, I would suggest that only one of us go to Geneva," said the DCI.

"I was thinking of two, actually, Phil," President Dunstan answered. "I invited Admiral Short, because ONI is

involved in uncovering the Earle Station matter, and Director Grant because his agency is involved in the Attiyeh situation. President Kronsky will probably send his Defense Minister or Chief of Naval Operations, since they have been instrumental in the Russian phase and in keeping Moscow Center's nose out of the operation. I have no idea whom Prime Minister Shalom will send, but he initiated the call."

"If I may, Mr. President," Dick Grant interjected. "I agree with Phil Miller. It would seem to me that the fewer who go the better. I can understand the CIA Director going, but I can't see why Eric Short or I should be at the meeting."

Admiral Short's statement was characteristically brief, "Sir, if the idea is to keep this meeting as quiet as possible, then if any person other than Phil Miller makes the trip, every spook in Washington, Moscow and Tel Aviv will have nose twitches. Sometimes, Mr. President, less is more."

President Dunstan sat quietly listening to the three intelligence men. He picked up a pencil which was laying on his desk and began to doodle on a pad. He placed the pencil and pad in the center of his desk, stared at them for a moment and said, "I guess you will make the trip alone, Phil. I just want to make sure that whomever the other two send, that English will be the language of choice for the discussion."

"Let's check the calendar so that I can give Kronsky and Shalom a couple of alternative dates."

The DCI took a small electronic calendar from his brief case, pushed the button illuminating the small screen which was filled with cryptic notes listing his appointments for the next month.

"Mr. President, I can change my schedule, of course, but the earliest clear dates are December fifth and sixth."

The President wrote the dates on the pad on which he was doodling. He rose from behind his desk and reached over it, shook hands with the three men and dismissed them, saying, "Thank you all for coming."

Moscow

2000 hours

President Andrei Kronsky waited patiently for Fleet Admiral Bolgarov, whom had already decided to send to Geneva. The Russian leader felt that he needed to keep his Defense Minister in Moscow. The departure of the Navy chief would elicit much less interest by either Chevchevadze's people and for the host of spies from other nations working in Moscow.

Prompt as ever, Bolgarov was ushered into Kronsky's office at precisely eight o'clock, Moscow time.

"Please sit down, Lenka. I got off the phone a while ago with Dunstan and Shalom. We discussed the need to move to action. It's been decided that you, and someone from each of the other parties will meet in Geneva as soon as possible. What's the earliest you can be there?"

Admiral Bolgarov consulted a small pocket calendar, "December sixth or seventh, Andrei."

Kronsky nodded. "I'll check with Washington and Tel Aviv about this. Thank you, Lenka. By the way, there will be no 'lunch meeting' on this matter. I can see no purpose for the three of us to get together."

Bolgarov smiled as he returned to his office. Things were beginning to move.

Tel Aviv

2000 hours

The Mossad chief listened carefully as Levi Shalom recounted his conversation with Dunstan and Kronskey. The Prime Minister asked Caleb the same questions which had been put by the other leaders.

Like Miller and Bolgarov, Caleb consulted his calendar.

"December six, seven or nine," he told Shalom.

"Fine. I'll call the others and we will set a date."

Washington-Moscow-Jerusalem

2230 hours local time, Tel Aviv

2330 hours local time, Moscow

1530 hours Washington

Andrei Kronskey and Peter Dunstan were in their offices awaiting Levi Shalom's call.

"Good afternoon, Peter. Good evening, Andrei. May I assume you have already spoken with your representatives for the Geneva meeting?" he asked.

The leaders compared the dates given them by Miller, Bolgarov and Caleb. The date chosen was December sixth. They discussed the logistics of the trip. It was decided that the CIA Chief of Station in Geneva would make the necessary hotel arrangements. Having completed their parts, the two Presidents and the Prime Minister alerted their people.

The three men had never met together, but each had met separately with the other two. Still, in the short time since the TROIKA affair had been instated, Dunstan, Kronskey and Shalom had formed a close bond each to the others. A sort of personal Triple Alliance was evolving.

Moscow

Sheremetyevo International Airport

5 December

0945 hours

The middle aged man with the military bearing attracted little attention as he presented his papers and received his pre-paid coach ticket on Aeroflot Flight 271, to Geneva, Switzerland. The security agent glanced at the well-used passport of Konstantin Kyrilovitch Spassky; Occupation, Mining Engineer. He stamped the Exit Permit and handed the document to its owner.

Fleet Admiral Leonid Moiseyevitch Bolgarov placed the "Spassky" passport in his inside suit jacket pocket. This was his first trip on an altered passport in many years, but the initial fear of detection remained the same. The last time he had used such a document was when he left The Netherlands, hurriedly, just before a Soviet Naval Intelligence network was discovered and rolled up by the Dutch authorities. Contact lenses which altered his eye color and horn-rimmed eyeglasses worn for the passport photograph changed his appearance sufficiently to disarm any potentially inquisitive "Chekists" who might be covering the airport.

Geneva

1145 Hours

The stewardess tapped him, gently, on the shoulder.

"We are about to land, Mr. Spassky. Would you kindly fasten your seat belt."

As soon as the aircraft rolled to a stop, the passengers disembarked. Bolgarov carried just one piece of luggage. He cleared Customs and Immigration without incident, hailed a cab outside the airport and directed it to Hotel Geneve, where the meetings were to take place the following day and, if needed, the next.

Tel Aviv

Ben Gurion International Airport

5 December

0740 hours

Like his Russian counterpart, Hanoch Caleb, carried a false passport. In his case, he was Ezra Tanhum, a diamond merchant from Netanya, Israel. He wore the traditional black coat and hat of the Orthodox Jew. His beard was his own, but the long earlocks were fastened with make-up cement to the hair just beside his ears. While Israelis must fly on El Al Airlines when on government business, Mossad was not bound by that condition. He was booked on Alitalia Flight 805 to Milan, transferring to flight 580 to Geneva.

Caleb's flight was on time. He passed through Swiss Customs and Immigration quickly. At the cab rank he ordered the driver to take him to Hotel Geneve, where he arrived shortly after Bolgarov.

Frankfurt

Frankfort Airport

5 December

0745 hours

Philip Miller, traveling as "Arthur Gordon", an American business man, boarded United Airlines flight 3768 for Geneva, having transferred from flight 3509, the red-eye from DC. Like Bolgarov, and Caleb, he, too, had changed his appearance just enough to elude any foreign agents who might be at the airport. In his case, it meant a short, almost military length, hair cut and a well trimmed mustache.

Miller traveled in Business Class on the 737. His staff felt that it was more in keeping with his cover to do so. He was not at all averse to the idea. A flight across the Atlantic and half-way over Europe was tedious enough without being cramped in a coach seat with out being able to stretch his legs. He was almost six and a half feet tall.

The plane taxied to a stop. Like the Israeli and Russian, Miller cleared the airport quickly. He also took a cab to the Hotel Geneve.

Hotel Geneve

6 December

1000 hours

Bolgarov, Caleb, and Miller met in a specially soundproofed, de-bugged, windowless conference room in the basement of the hotel. Each had sent a small advance party to the meeting site, consisting of a personal aide, and an official interpreter. Although English had been approved as the basic language of communication, some nuances of meaning might require clarification.

Copies of the reports, as well as drafts of the information gathered by the inter-agency group in Tel Aviv, were already on the table when the principals arrived.

The opening session was somewhat stiff and formal. The three men knew each other only from the dossiers their respective agencies had accumulated over time. Even with recent photographs, a face-to-face meeting served to give an identity to what were, essentially, pieces of paper.

Philip Miller began the discussion, "We've read the documents. I suggest that we implement the final stage of OPERATION TROIKA. It seems abundantly clear that Prime Minister Shalom was right when he suspected that Israel was the primary, indeed the only, target of Al Suyuf Al Kharb's mission. Each of us has an agent in place in Dubai. It is my feeling, however, that none of these people are able to handle the next step--the apprehension of Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail and the interdiction of the aircraft before it can complete its mission."

"Our information," Leonid Bolgarov interjected, "indicates Iran as the most likely supplier of the aircraft. Al Suyuf Al Kharb appears to have direct connections with Rafsanjani. Our Air Force is close enough to shoot down the plane just after it leaves Iranian air space."

Hanoch Caleb demurred. "If the plane is shot down before it reaches Dubai, those fanatics would simply postpone the mission and secure another. I would suggest that the nuclear material be replaced in Dubai with dummy bombs; that the plane be permitted to leave and be tracked by AIWAC. If Mr. Miller could convince President Dunstan to request Saudi Arabia to permit the aircraft to enter and leave its air space, we would deploy Israeli fighters who would intercept, after the dummy bombs were dropped, and shoot it down then."

"Dr. Mary Mallory is presently in Dubai. She is, as you know, a nuclear expert. She could supervise the removal of the nuclear material, and substitution of the non-explosives. I am also prepared to send Dr. Henry Wheatland, our man in Tel Aviv, to take charge of the entire Dubaian situation," the CIA Director offered.

"Russian Military and Naval intelligence are working together to discover who was involved in the theft of the material from Sevastopol," Bolgarov stated, opening a new phase of the discussion. "Apparently, a truck was stolen from the Sevastopol Barracks and driven to the Nuclear Breeder Station, where the fissionable material was loaded. The truck was found near the barracks parked in the wrong space. Shortly thereafter, one of our patrol boats encountered two men, with what proved to be forged papers, identifying them as frogmen on a training mission, paddling a rubber dinghy. On a routine return sweep, the patrol boat found the dinghy, partially deflated, floating just inside Russian territorial waters. The false papers were in the dinghy, but there was no trace of the frogmen.

"We suspect that the material was smuggled aboard the Turkish vessel, the Bogusz Kevi, which was anchored a few miles inside Turkish waters. She had just been re-fitted and was returning to service. Some cargo had already been put aboard. We have been able to check her manifest with Lloyd's. She never was anywhere near Cyprus, nor any other port once she left Turkish waters. We received a copy of the manifest several days ago from the American Commercial Attache in London. The ship was carrying oil drilling equipment, medical supplies and raw wool. There was no mention of nuclear medical material on the sheet," said Miller.

"Interesting, Mr. Miller. Our agent in Dubai reported that he had found raw wool adhering to the bottom of a crate in which some nuclear material, ostensibly from Kidderminster, England, in the storage room at the Hospital," added a somewhat ruffled Hanoch Caleb.

"Obviously," concluded Bolgarov, "that is our missing material. Now we can intensify our investigation in Sevastopol. I think we should adjourn for lunch and contact our chiefs of state." The habits of his years under the old system still resonated in Bolgarov's mind.

"My understanding, Admiral," said an exasperated head of Mossad, "is that we have carte blanche to move on this matter without further consultation with our superiors."

"That is what President Dunstan told me before I left Washington. The longer we delay, sir, the greater the menace. You, Admiral, have been saying that there is a need to keep the FSB in the dark. The sooner we make the decisions, the last chance there is for a leak. I will, however, pass on the request for air clearances to President Dunstan, as soon as we finish this session. Let's return later this evening. With the six hour time difference I should have an answer by then," stated the CIA Director, agreeing with Hanoch Caleb.

Fleet Admiral Leonid Bolgarov shrugged his shoulders, nodding agreement and acquiescence. Further delay could truly prove catastrophic.

The three men left the subterranean conference room by a special elevator. None of the conference participants, nor their staffs had meals together. Philip Miller went to a small restaurant which he had frequented when vacationing in Switzerland several years earlier. Hanoch Caleb was directed to a vegetarian restaurant by the Mossad Travel Section before leaving Israel. Lenka Bolgarov ate in a restaurant in the center of town frequented by businessmen and their local clients.

The White House

6 December

0800 hours

The call from Phil Miller was put through to President Dunstan just as he sat down at the Theodore Roosevelt desk in the Oval Office. He listened without interruption as Miller made his request.

"It's a delicate matter, Phil. I may be able to work things with the Saudis, they still owe us. Give me a day on this end, but you and the others work out the details as if I have gotten the OKs."

The President buzzed his secretary, Janet White. "Janet, please call the Saudi Embassy and ask the ambassador to have lunch with me? Just tell him it is a delicate matter which is best discussed in person. Please, as gently as possible, ask him to come alone. Both he and I know he speaks and understands American English quite well. An interpreter would be superfluous. The fewer people involved, the better."

Within the hour, Janet White informed the President that the Ambassador would be pleased to have lunch. She further told him she had arranged for lunch at just past noon in the private quarters dining room in the White House.

Peter Dunstan buzzed his press secretary, Bill Bennett. Bennett, a genial Texan, had been associated with Dunstan from early in the President's career. Well liked by the press corps, he was as forthcoming as was possible for a Presidential press secretary. Reporters knew that he sometimes made small errors in releasing the schedule. While they would tease him about it, they trusted his statements.

"Bill, I've had a change in my schedule. Let the press know that I am lunching with the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia. Tell them that the lunch meeting was set up sometime ago, but wasn't calendared by an oversight from your office."

"Yes, Mr. President. So I goofed again. Oh, well." said the Press Secretary with a chuckle in his voice. He spun around in his chair, typed the new information and faxed it to the press room.

The White House

Private Quarters' Dining Room

6 December

1215 hours

The Saudi Ambassador, Al-Latif al-Ahmed bin Sultan, arrived at the more private entrance to the White House. A University of Chicago MBA Graduate, he preferred to dress in Western clothing. He wore traditional Arab garb only on formal occasions.

"It is good to see you, Mr. Ambassador," said the President as he greeted his guest.

"It is always a pleasure to meet with you, Mr. President," he replied rather formally.

The two men moved to a small table set to one side of the room. In deference to his guest's food and drink prohibitions, the vegetarian meal was served with tea and coffee, instead of any alcohol. When they had finished, President Dunstan led Ambassador bin Sultan to his study.

"Let me come to the point, Mr. Ambassador. We have reason to believe that a terrorist group is trying to acquire or build a crude atomic device to be delivered by plane and dropped over Tel Aviv. Our sources also indicate the aircraft would have to enter your nation's air space. We wish your Air Force to permit the plane to overfly Saudi Arabia, where it will be tracked by the joint Saudi-United States Air Forces AIWAC. I assure you it will not be a threat to your nation. The trip will be a one way ticket."

Bin Sultan put down his coffee cup and stared at Peter Dunstan. After a long moment, he leaned forward and spoke. "Mr. President, why should Saudi Arabia assist Israel in any way? Israel has atomic weapons. Our nation does not. We still have no peace treaty. We are still at war. She is our enemy!"

"Because," said Dunstan quietly, "it is in your best interest. If an atomic war breaks out in the Middle East, no nation is safe. Remember the Iraqis are still hostile to you. You humiliated Saddam Hussein. His people will try to even the score. Aside from that, there is, undeclared, de facto, peace between you and Israel. Are you willing to risk that peace?"

"Of course, Mr. President, I shall have to consult with His Majesty. I will need at least four days. The King is not in our capital, at the moment. It will be necessary to find him and then to consult," the Saudi demurred.

President Dunstan smiled. "I'm not a diplomat, Mr. Ambassador. While this is not an ultimatum, I suggest, very strongly, that you call His Majesty from the Oval Office. I have a secure line, and so does he. We have no idea how soon this plot will hatch, but we don't--nor does anyone else--have time for games. I am certain you can reach him at a moment's notice."

At first the Saudi diplomat was outraged. Then, as he realized the gravity of the situation, he relaxed. Bin Sultan understood that Peter Philip Dunstan, President of the United States, was not given to either idle

gestures, or vague threats. He rose and followed Dunstan from the family residence to the Oval Office.

Janet White looked up from her desk as the two men went into the room which actually served as the President's work place. She saw the grim faced President and the troubled looking ambassador. Her antennae were up. Janet felt a sense of urgency, and waited for a call from the President. The light on the secure line on her desk lit up, which automatically turned on a tape recorder in a false front desk drawer in her office. Presidents had all used some sort of recording device to preserve conversations.

Inside the work room, Ambassador bin Sultan punched in the code numbers which put him through to Riyadh by satellite and to a dish at the King's winter palace.

"This is Ambassador bin Sultan in Washington," he began, speaking in Arabic. "I must speak to His Majesty at once. It is most important!" After a few seconds he continued.

"Your Majesty, I am speaking to you from President Dunstan's office at the White House. He asks me to make a most unusual request of the Kingdom. His government is in possession of information regarding a possible atomic air attack on Israel by a terrorist group which is not known to us, or to other nations. He wishes to have our Air Force and that of the United States monitor the flight of this aircraft by AIWAC over our air space, but permit it to continue on to Israel, where its mission will be intercepted and the plane shot down over the Mediterranean."

The Saudi diplomat turned to Dunstan, "His Majesty wishes to know why you make this request, Mr. President."

The American Chief Executive rubbed his temples, took a deep breath and leaned across the table. By now he was upset and becoming angry. Couldn't these idiots understand that the world had shrunk and that no one was safe!

"Tell His Majesty," he said, releasing his breath, "exactly what I told you at lunch. It's not a threat nor an ultimatum, but a simple statement of fact. If nothing is done by your government, the BCCI scandal will seem like little boys using play money. A nuclear holocaust may result if there is a delay. This has nothing to do with supposed hurt and injured pride. It has to do with survival Dammit! Inform His Majesty that I need an answer within twenty-four hours at the most, in fact if he will make the decision as you speak, it may save more lives, including Saudi lives. Perhaps the Kingdom itself. Strategically, your country needs the continued existence of Israel as a deterrent against Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Let me say this again, Mr. Ambassador, we do know why, who, and where, but we don't know when!!"

There was an electric silence in the room as bin Sultan passed the information to the King. After two or three minutes of further discussion between them, Ambassador bin Sultan shook his head affirmatively. The Saudis would co-operate.

"Miss White, would you please ask the kitchen to bring a pot of Turkish coffee and a pot of regular coffee to the Oval Office. Thank you."

About five minutes later, a White House waiter appeared with the beverages and placed them on the side board. The two men sat on opposite sides of the desk and drank quietly. After a decent interval, the Saudi ambassador took his leave.

President Dunstan, leaned back in the swivel chair behind his desk and closed his eyes. He knew had strong-armed the Arab diplomat. There was no time to wait for the Mid-Eastern backing and filling, polite palaver, and interminable meetings. The decision needed to be made then and there. If the Saudi monarch had refused, an alternative plan would have had to be developed, and God alone knew how long that could take.

The President gave Janet White a short note to be sent to Geneva, authorizing Miller to move ahead with TROIKA.

Moscow

6 December

1500 hours

Before leaving Moscow for Geneva, Fleet Admiral Bolgarov, had set up a secure line back to President Kronskey's office. A nondescript office in an old commercial block was a cover for the Naval officer's new identity, a necessary precaution against possible FSB interference. The Cyrillic lettering on the door read K. K. SPASSKY, ENG. DR., CONSULTANT. A female ONI officer, posing as a secretary, was on duty during pre-set hours to receive and forward calls on the secure line, which by-passed the usual security system. An open line served as decoy for anyone wishing to utilize "Dr. Spassky's" services. A Navy yeoman also manned the office during that time, and told prospective clients that her employer was out of town at the moment, but she would take a message and have him call back, usually within a few days.

The secure line light blinked three or four times before the call was transferred to the President's office.

"Da?" Kronskey answered as he lifted the receiver. "Good afternoon, Lenka," he continued as he recognized the Navy Chief of Staff's voice. "Where do things stand?"

"We're due to reconvene just after dinner. Mr. Miller is calling President Dunstan about several suggestions," Bolgarov began. "In essence, he's trying to get permission for an overflight of Saudi air space by a rogue plane, most likely Iranian, to proceed to the target area before being destroyed. We've confirmed that our material was loaded onto a Turkish freighter. It's time our people in the Crimea rolled up that network. Also, I'd like Grisha to return to Moscow as soon as the American is re-assigned."

"Lenka, you already have the authority to do what ever is necessary. So why this call?" Kronskey questioned.

"Essentially," he explained, "to keep you abreast of the situation, here in Geneva and also to affirm my authority. In the old days, I'd have moved on my own, but it's not that simple, any more!"

"The accountability is mine, old friend. Your responsibility is clear. Rest assured, I'll back you up! Goodbye, Lenka," said the Russian President, quietly.

"Defense Minister, please." Kronskey requested.

"Lunch? In about an hour?" he asked, when Field Marshal Ignatiev acknowledged the call.

"That would be fine. About an hour," Ignatiev answered.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Minister," he began formally, as he touched a button which activated the "white noise" apparatus. "I've just had a call from Lenka in Geneva. TROIKA is ready to move into high gear. The American delegation has been in touch with Washington. President Dunstan is being asked to pressure the Saudis into opening their air space to a rogue plane headed for Israel. They've confirmed that our nuclear material was loaded onto a Turkish freighter. He's asking that Sevastopol move in to solve the problem there."

"No problem, Andrei. As soon as I get back to my office, I'll call the ONI-GRU task force there and tell them to move on it at once," said the Defense Minister as he rose to return to his headquarters. Field Marshal Ignatiev placed the call to Black Sea Fleet Headquarters, immediately upon his return from Kronskey.

Valinsky and Blaskovich had decided to locate their operation in a secure area inside the Naval Station. The designation was Joint-Interservice Planning Committee, a title vague and bureaucratic enough, not to elicit a response from anyone, including the apparatchiks detailed to shadow the Captain and the General.

Tel Aviv

6 December

1500 hours

Prime Minister Levi Shalom listened quietly while Hanoch Caleb made his report of the proceedings of the morning meeting. He kept removing and replacing his knitted kippah.

"You're certain that this replacement maneuver and shoot down are possible? What kind of measure of success are we talking about? Ninety-nine percent, ninety-nine and a half? Hanoch, I don't want to be the last Prime Minister of Israel, evaporating with my country in a mushroom cloud if this fails," he asked.

"Levi, I can't give you absolute assurance. The most important part will take place in Dubai. The Americans have a nuclear arms expert on site. They'll be sending a top level CIA man to oversee the operation. In the meantime, how is Motti doing running down the Dimona mess? We need to break this so that it can't happen again. I know it's internal and not Mossad's job, but tell him he can get anything he needs from me."

"You have my total confidence, Hanoch. Work with the Russians and the Americans. I will, personally, brief Motti Arielson. He seems to have broken part of the case, but I don't want to talk about it now. L'Hitraot, my friend," said Levi Shalom.

Geneva, Switzerland

Hotel Geneve

6 December

2245 hours

Bolgarov, Miller, and Caleb reconvened after dinner, which, in the European tradition was at nine o'clock in the evening. This meant a little variation from the normal routine of business conferences. Even the separate dinner sites fit into the proper niche.

Philip Miller opened the session. "Washington has given me the go ahead to re-assign Henry Wheatland from Tel Aviv to Dubai. Saudi Arabia has consented to the overflight of their airspace."

"Prime Minister Shalom has agreed to the plan to permit the plane to enter Israeli airspace without interception and to its interdiction once it has dropped its dummy load. We just hope that the bomb casing doesn't land in a residential area," the Mossad Chief stated.

"President Kronsky is in full accord with the proposed action. Our forces will stand down on the Iranian border with the Confederation, but will provide tracking information to the AIWAC coverage. We, too, wish to avoid any unnecessary casualties," the Russian Chief of Naval Operations said in closing.

The actual details of the operation were left to the planning staffs as the principals made arrangements to return to their respective capitals. The entire evening session lasted less than thirty minutes. Each of the participants felt less than completely satisfied with the outcome.

Tel Aviv, Israel

7 December

0900 hours

The TROIKA team had been at work for several hours when Henry Wheatland was called to the Consulate. He went immediately to the CIA Bureau Chief's office. A morning meeting must mean that a serious change was in the works. The call was outside the regular pattern of their meetings. Those usually took place in Stockton's home over dinner.

"Good morning, Hank. Plan to wrap up your work here by tomorrow. You're going back to Paris for a more complete briefing. Here's a ticket on the afternoon flight on December 9th on El-Al. Airport clearance has been arranged. There will be no Israeli stamps on your passport," he said opening the conversation. Roger Stockton passed an airlines ticket envelope to him.

"Any other information?" Hank inquired.

"Langley simply sent the orders without explanation," Stockton replied.

1500 Hours

When Hank returned to the office he shared with Zvi and Grisha, neither was at his desk. Miriam Safti was working quietly at the computer entering bits of data.

"Where are the others, Miriam?" he inquired.

"I have no idea, Dr. Lyons. Both received telephone calls and left. I don't know when they will return," she replied.

The American agent turned to his desk and began sorting the material. By the time he had finished, the others had returned.

The three men sat silently at their desks. Zvi went through his pipe ritual. Grisha removed his glasses and was pinching the bridge of his nose. It was obvious that not only Hank, but also the others, had received a change in orders.

"I've been recalled to Moscow," Grisha opened. "It would appear that this phase of OPERATION TROIKA is finished. I'll be leaving the day after tomorrow. The planning sessions for the Australian conference have been completed. I guess Moscow feels I need to act the part of conference attendee."

The GRU officer turned toward his work space and began the tedious job of clearing his desk. As anxious as Grisha was to return home, he had the sense that OPERATION TROIKA was not over. He could only surmise what would happen upon his return to Moscow. Had the mission been infiltrated somehow? Was he, personally, being held responsible? Had the three heads of state decided to scrub TROIKA?

Grisha had mixed feelings about leaving Tel Aviv. Working closely with Zvi and Hank had created a bond among them. It could almost compromise their ability to return to their agencies and work on projects which might bring them into conflict. In the past, the GRU and Mossad had worked almost at bayonet point. It might be that way again. After all, the last time he and Zvi Ben Yosef had been in confrontation with each other his men were trying to kill him. Now the enemy had a face. It was no longer an impersonal struggle between antagonists. In the end, however, Colonel-General Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky was a professional and

obeyed his superior's commands.

"For the moment, I'm here to keep gathering what ever other information we receive from the field. Miriam Safti and I will staff the office. It seems that our work has paid off. "Zvi explained.

"I'm off to Paris, the day after tomorrow. I agree with Grisha. This part of the mission must be over. What will happen next isn't up to us. We all know that. I know it sounds trite, but we do our jobs in something of a vacuum, rarely knowing what the total outcome is. There's no telling what Washington, Moscow, or for that matter, Jerusalem, are up to. What ever it is, we may be out of the loop," Hank concluded.

Zvi turned from his desk and suggested, "Let's have dinner together. The four of us. I'll call that Yemenite restaurant down the street and reserve the table. Miriam, please close the office for today. We've been so busy cleaning up that we didn't even notice that it's dark. I don't know about the three of you, but I haven't eaten a thing since breakfast."

Miriam Safti was about to refuse the invitation, but changed her mind. She realized that this was something of a farewell dinner.

Zvi made the call and they left the office. When the computer expert turned out the lights and double locked the door, there was an odd sense of emptiness, finality--and dread.

Tel Aviv, Israel

Ben Gurion International Airport

9 December

0500 hours

Roger Stockton drove Henry Wheatland to the airport, where they were met by Zvi Ben Yosef. He accompanied the Americans to the security office. When his flight was called, Hank was taken by security to the plane. He carried his single piece of luggage with him. The aircraft cleared the runway at 7:30.

1030 hours

Grisha Obadivsky picked up his ticket at SwissAir and proceeded to clear Customs and airport security. He and Zvi had decided that it would be best if they parted before the Russian went to the airport. Grisha carried his single carry-on case with him into the lounge and settled down to await the boarding call. At precisely 12:15 the flight was called. He boarded the bus to the aircraft. The 12:30 lift-off was, as usual, uneventful.

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

3 December

0700 hours

In an apartment with a separate entrance, above a warehouse several blocks from the dock where the Bogusz Kevi had unloaded her cargo, the two Tatar armorers sat restless. Since their arrival, they had been kept in virtual imprisonment. Food and other necessities were brought to the apartment by several delivery services. After dark, on a few occasions, they were permitted to take short walks around the dock area. On each trip they were accompanied by a guard. Without papers, they were liable for arrest by the Dubaian authorities. All means of identification had been removed from them just before the vessel made port.

Down below, the bomb casing and detonator, listed as "Oil Drilling Equipment" rested in several crates. The bill of lading listed the manufacturer as E.J. Kasai, KKI, Osaka, Japan. Beside them were two crates marked "Glassware-FRAGILE" in several languages. They contained the arming mechanism and shaped charges. That document listed the shipper as E. J. Arjansani, Tabriz, Iran. Neither company existed.

The cargoes were assigned to two dummy corporations which the doctor had created specifically for material related to Al Suyuf Al Kharb. The invoices were delivered to a freight forwarding company owned by two local merchants, Ahmed Abdullah and Faisal Farahji, members of Abu Ismail's group. Neither man knew, nor wanted to know, what was in either shipment. Each was adept at bribing customs inspectors to look away when the goods were dockside for examination, and place the proper identifiers on each crate as well as filing the proper forms with the United Arab Emirates Customs Department.

In the pre-dawn darkness, Abu Ismail arrived at the warehouse apartment in a small FIAT registered in the name of his long-dead father-in-law. It was usually housed in a corner of the same garage where his own vehicle was placed when he was overseas, or when it needed servicing. Payment for the parking slot was always in cash, and always by his man, Yusuf al-Khali, a Palestinian, born in Jordan, who had worked for the doctor's family and had been with him since his student days at the Medical School in London.

Yusuf had no connection with Al Suyuf Al Kharb, which was by design. If the project failed, Abu Ismail did not want his servant's life endangered. The physician simply told him that it was inconvenient for him to take the time to pay the rent, and that Yusuf would have to add this chore to his existing tasks.

As he entered the building, the guard at the foot of the stairs challenged him, using the password which changed on each shift. Abu Ismail gave the correct countersign and was admitted.

"When I reach the top of the stairs, wake the two men, gently. Place a light between them and me, so that I am in darkness, but can see them clearly," he ordered, as he trod quietly up the stairs, preceded by the guard.

The head of Al Suyuf Al Kharb waited patiently while the Tatars were roused from their sleep, and the light was adjusted. It did not shine in their eyes, but the light beam was narrow enough to serve Abu Ismail's purpose.

"Within the next few days, an aircraft will arrive, at which time you will assemble the instrument. It will be delicate, tedious work. You must pay careful attention to the insertion of the timing and detonating devices. You are dealing with highly volatile explosives."

"We are professionals," answered the older of the two, acidly. "When we were hired, we knew that the load was nuclear bomb material. Although it was never used in Afghanistan, we were drilled in the procedure many times. Neither of us wishes to be blown up, nor do we need to be instructed by anyone as to our job. Just make certain that the remainder of our fee is on hand when we arm the bomb--and that our papers are in order so we can leave without being held up by the local police."

"You do your job," said Abu Ismail, dryly, "and you will get what is due you at the end of your part in the operation."

As he descended the stair case, the doctor said quietly, "When they complete their work--kill them!"

Ibrahim Abu Ismail was planning the next steps in his private vengeance. With the nuclear material at hand and the armorers in place, it was time to initiate the delicate process of procuring the obsolete fighter-bomber which the Iranians had promised his agent, Jamal Ali Akhbar. The aircraft was an old French Mirage which had been sold to Iran when the Shah was in power. It had remained virtually unused during the Iran-Iraq War, since it was too slow to be effective against Saddam Hussein's superior Air Force.

The destruction which might result from the operation, and the fact that it placed much of the Arab World in jeopardy did not enter into his fanatical scheming. It was just retaliation for the death of his family! If others, even if Arabs died--Insh'Allah! Allah had willed it!

It was nearly light when he made his way back to the garage and walked to his apartment. He recited his morning prayers, ate his breakfast and left for the Hospital. When the 'Al 'Suyuf Al Kharb mission was completed, there would still be need for his hospital to provide services to the Emirates' people.

By the time he arrived, his staff had placed the patient files in order. The Palestinian-born physician took the file folders and, with his entourage in tow, visited each patient. At their bedsides, he quietly discussed every case as if it was the only patient whom he had in his care. Charts were noted, changes in medications and dosages entered as he and his staff moved smoothly through the Nuclear Medicine Wing. He was, once more, the healer.

When rounds were over, he asked Mary to meet him for a conference at noon. He would need her expertise to help resolve the remaining difficulties with the Joint Project.

Mary arrived at his office promptly at the appointed hour with her notes and the files of the joint project in her attache case. She was nervous. This was the first time she would be meeting with him without Ed Braithwate to run interference.

"Dr. Lyons, may I see what progress you have made since your arrival in Dubai? You, surely, must have formed some opinion as to what needs to be done." His tone was almost supercilious.

Ed had sized him up correctly. The man was going to make it difficult for her to do anything which might bruise his considerable ego. She reached into the attache case and handed him the reports with her notations.

Mary bit her tongue and took a deep breath before answering him. "Here is my preliminary reaction. As you will see from my notes, there are several large gaps in the protocols for sharing the data. Some of them are technical, Doctor, but many of them are simply the result of not having been thought through. I will be going over the reports again. I would, however, like to have the correspondence related to the project, and any informal materials you might have. Mr. Habibi and Miss Hasan have been very helpful, but they indicate that there may be material in your personal files which might fill in the gaps."

"I was under the impression, Dr. Lyons, that Dr. Braithwate had given you copies of all correspondence between our hospitals. I can think of nothing in my files which could be of any assistance," he answered brusquely.

Mary sensed that she was in a sparring match with Abu Ismail. She knew she would get the data, but that in the process she would have to appear to lose in order to win. Mary also understood that her demeanor had to be far from overbearing, but short of subservient. More than the joint project was at stake. TROIKA could be compromised if she was unable to gain his trust, however, grudgingly.

"I did not wish to imply that you have withheld information, Doctor. It is simply that scribbled notes are often aids in jogging memories, or to record incomplete ideas that rate later development. These are the kinds of data about which I am inquiring. Often in my work, I have found that these slips of paper are blessings, because in the pressure of the daily work on a project such notations help me to solve problems which on a conscious level I find almost impossible to work through," she explained.

Dr. Abu Ismail suddenly spoke with quiet concern, "I have been told about the gas explosion. Were you injured, Dr. Lyons? During rounds, Mr. Habibi and Miss Hasan were telling me of your great assistance at the explosion site." His entire manner and body language had changed. He was, once again, the committed

physician.

"Nothing, really," she said lightly. "I had a few scratches and bruises. My clothing was covered with the blood of some of the injured. Miss Hasan was kind enough to get me some greens and a lab coat while I showered away the blood and grime. Thank you for asking."

"Well, then, Dr. Lyons, I should be able to provide those rough notes by this time tomorrow. There is some pressure from your colleagues to complete the project with how did they put it, with 'all deliberate speed'," he said with a faint smile.

"Here is that damned superciliousness--again," Mary thought. Still as she had sensed earlier in the meeting, he would give her what she needed. The bigger problem was trying to relate the project to the large amount of nuclear material in his "Special Projects Area." It was entirely possible that there was a connection between what Johns Hopkins expected and what Dubai needed. Still, the presence of the gray canisters gnawed at her.

She was brought back to the present by Dr. Abu Ismail's thanking her and requesting a meeting the next day. Mary said something innocuous and left the office. As she walked down the corridor to the cafeteria to get some lunch, Mary felt drained. Her lab coat was stained with perspiration, which in the air conditioned atmosphere became cold and left her shivering slightly. It was then that she realized how tense she had been during the meeting, and hoped Abu Ismail had not noticed.

There was nothing for Mary to do at the hospital until the next morning. She returned to the hotel for a short nap. After just a few days in the area, her body-clock had adjusted itself to include the siesta. The room was cool and comfortable and she fell asleep almost as soon as she had changed and leaned back on the bed.

Less than an hour later, Mary was startled awake. She sensed, rather than heard the whisper of footsteps, as if the person was either barefoot or wearing soft slippers. The sound stopped in front of her door. Mary quietly swung out of bed and went into the bathroom. She left the door ajar, pushed the medicine cabinet mirror door open a couple of inches and stepped into the shower stall, which she left open slightly. From her position in the shower stall, she could see the door of her quarters.

There was a faint click as a master "key" was slid into the door slot and the door was opened. The local surveillance officer came into the room and began rummaging through her dresser drawers and night table. Unable to find anything, he went into the walk-in closet and began to move her clothing. Mary moved out of the bathroom. Using the heel of one of her shoes she jammed the closet door shut. The trapped Dubaian began to shout in Arabic from inside the closet.

Mary slipped out of the room and went to the public telephones in the lobby. She placed a call to Frank Boyer, at the travel agency, using a code conversation to alert him to an emergency. About ten minutes later, Ted Ericson, Mary Cassidy's replacement, arrived at the hotel.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Lyons," he said. How can we help?"

Mary spoke loudly enough so that the desk clerk could not help but overhear her. "I'd like to check my return reservation, if it's not too much trouble."

"Not at all, Doctor. I'd be only too happy to assist you. My car is outside."

Ericson pulled up at the hotel entrance and called for Mary. Still shaken, she accompanied the American travel agent to his car. As they drove to the agency, Mary explained what had happened, including trapping the intruder in the closet. By that time, they had arrived at International Travel Services.

The offices were still somewhat of a mess. The debris had been cleaned up. Some of the ceiling panels were still not replaced. The air conditioning was not working, but number of large fans made the heat almost bearable. Only one window had been repaired. The others were still covered with plywood. Most of the cubicles had been reset. The phones were working and the computer monitors had been replaced. Business was returning to normal.

Ted Ericson brought her into Frank Boyer's office, which was straightened up, but still far from refinished. He motioned her to a chair across from his desk. She repeated what she had told Ericson.

"Why didn't you call the desk?" asked Frank Boyer.

"Because I recognized the man. He sits in the hotel lobby all day, watching who comes and goes. I think that he's some sort of cop, or house detective. I'm sure if I had called the desk, there would be trouble. Besides, on the day I arrived here, my room was searched. Who ever did it was very meticulous in putting things back, but my clothes and personal belongings were not in the order in which I left them. You see, Frank, I arrange my clothes carefully so that I don't have to think about what goes with what when I'm in as hurry to get dressed," Mary explained.

Frank Boyer's expression did not change. He sat observing Mary as she described the incident. He noticed the rapid change in her appearance as she spoke. By the time she finished, it was clear that while she was frightened, she was not panicking.

"How soon are you to move to quarters at the Hospital?" Boyer asked.

"When I was in Paris, Dr. MacPherson indicated that they would be ready for me when I got here. So far nothing. Tomorrow, I'll ask Dr. Abu Ismail about moving, but for tonight, I'm not sure how to get back into my room without causing all hell to break loose. Up to now, I've been a model guest," she answered.

"That's exactly what I want you to do! Ericson will drive you back to the hotel. Go to the desk; raise your voice. Tell the desk clerk you need to speak with the manager. Tell him you apprehended an intruder, but now that you have calmed down, you will be making other arrangements and will move out of the Sheraton as soon they are complete. Request to be escorted up to your room, so that you can have the intruder removed and, if necessary, to be arrested. Play the outraged American," he ordered.

"I'll call Alice Bradley and suggest that you stay with them until Hospital quarters are arranged. By the time you've finished with the manager and packed an overnight case, someone will be there to drive you to the Bradleys," he continued.

Ted Ericson brought Mary back to the hotel. As ordered, she approached the desk. The clerk looked somewhat surprised.

"How may I be of assistance? Is there a problem, Dr. Lyons?" he asked.

"There most certainly is! I wish to speak with the manager. At once!" she said, snapping each word off.

The desk clerk picked up his phone. "M. Duplessies, could you please come to the desk. Dr. Mary Lyons wishes to speak with you. She seems upset, sir." He remained silent for a few seconds. "M. Duplessies wishes you to come to his office. I shall escort you, Madame."

Andre Duplessies, the hotel manager, motioned Mary to a sofa. He had ordered coffee and cold drinks. Mary sat rigidly upright on the sofa.

"M. Duplessies," she began. "I have trapped an intruder in my room. He must have a master key. I was able to slip out of the room and call my travel agent. As soon as possible, I shall move to another hotel. I wish to be escorted to my room, where I shall pack a small bag and await the arrival of friends. I expect to return to the Sheraton only to retrieve my belongings. I am prepared to press charges if anything is missing from the room. I am disappointed in your hotel security, sir! Rest assured that I will report this outrage to Sheraton's corporate headquarters. Now please arrange that escort."

"At once, Dr. Lyons. Mr. Gardner, our assistant manager will accompany you," Duplessies answered as he rang for his assistant.

The assistant manager, Alfred Gardner, a retired British Army Officer, had settled in Dubai after completing thirty years of service. He came into the manager's office and led Mary to the elevator.

When the elevator arrived at her floor, the shouts of the trapped surveillance man could be heard. Gardner laughed as they opened the door. He removed Mary's shoe from the jammed door and freed the man. Gardner stopped laughing when he saw who the intruder was. There was a short interchange in Arabic between the two men.

"I'll take it from here, Doctor. I'm sure everything will be taken care of to your complete satisfaction. Good afternoon," Gardner said as he left the room with the other man.

Mary packed enough clothing for several days. She was not certain how long it might take to get the hospital quarters.

Meanwhile, Gardner and Duplessies were in touch with the Dubaian authorities. It was standard operating procedure, they understood, for guests to be checked. It was not normal, however, to enter the rooms without first informing hotel security.

A senior police official appeared within five minutes of the call. He immediately relieved the surveillance man and apologized to the Hotel management. They accepted his apology, but retrieved the illegal master "key" before the other men left.

Gardner called the hotel security chief, handed him the "key" with strict orders not to let it out of his possession, on threat of immediate dismissal.

By the time Mary came down to the lobby, Alice Bradley was waiting for her. It was clear that Frank Boyer's call was taken very seriously by the Bradleys. As they drove back to Alice's home, Mary recounted, for the third time, what had happened. Alice remained quiet. Frank Boyer had not told her why Mary would need to stay at her home. When she called her husband, he insisted that she follow through and pick up Mary at the hotel. Ted only said that if Frank Boyer made as unusual request as that, that she was to accommodate him.

It was dusk when Mary and Alice arrived at the American compound. Ted was waiting for them in the living room. He had already prepared Alice's drink, but left a bottle of scotch, a pitcher of cubes and a glass for Mary. She took the tumbler, filled it with ice and poured herself a double shot of liquor.

"There's no need to go into the details, Mary," Ted Bradley explained. "Frank gave me a complete report. He sent Ted to my office with a tape of your statement. Don't look so surprised. Your phone call set the entire apparatus in motion. As soon as you came into his office he turned it on. I don't think you were compromised, but the locals are probably still puzzled. An unaccompanied American woman is viewed with suspicion and is likely to attract a great deal of attention. If Hank had come with you, chances are that they would not have bothered to do more than a casual check up on the two of you."

"Ed Braithwate and Ron Grover briefed me in Paris. I thought they were worried about me being approached, sexually, by Arab men," Mary commented.

"I'm sure that they thought about all possibilities, but the sexual thing was uppermost. Your cover is so tight that no one can tie you to the Company. Phil Miller and I have been able to keep my connection to Langley quiet. I doubt that even Brits know and they've been snooping around here since World War One," said her host.

Mary and the Bradleys spent a quiet evening. In the morning, Ted Bradley drove Mary to the hospital. She went to the Nuclear Medicine Office and sat quietly waiting for the Medical Staff to complete rounds. The technicians were busy with their own work.

Dr. Abu Ismail finished rounds about an hour or so after she arrived. He greeted her with a nod of the head and sat down at his desk.

"Yesterday afternoon, Doctor, my hotel room was entered and was being searched by a man I have seen in the lobby every day. I trapped him in the large closet in my room. Fortunately, so far as I can tell, nothing was taken, but I was thoroughly frightened. I spent the night with friends.

"When we met in Paris, I was assured by Dr. MacPherson that quarters would be found for me here in the hospital complex. While the hotel is quite comfortable, I would rather move here, to the hospital, as soon as possible. Could you please make those arrangements? I don't wish to impose on my friends," she concluded.

Dr. Abu Ismail picked up his phone, spoke a few words in Arabic, completed the call and turned to Mary. "Please accept my apology, Dr. Lyons. All should have been ready when you arrived, or at the latest within a day. Our traditional hospitality seems to have failed us. I have just spoken to housekeeping. An apartment in the staff quarters will be ready for you by this evening. They will arrange to have your clothing and what ever you have left at the hotel to be brought here. Might I suggest that you accompany them, or better yet, meet them there to make certain every thing is in order," he stated.

There were several file folders marked JOINT PROJECT sitting on the Nuclear Medicine Chief's desk. Mary had noticed them when she came in, but decided to handle the housing problem first. With that taken care of, she looked, pointedly, at the folders. Abu Ismail slid the folders across the desk toward her.

"Here are all my notes, Dr. Lyons. Fortunately, they are all in English. Many times I move back and forth between English and Arabic, depending on my needs. For example, my confidential patient notes are in Arabic; chart notes in English," he said in something of the same condescending tone he had used the day before. Mary chose to ignore it.

"Thank you, Dr. Abu Ismail," she replied. "It was not my intention to make you uncomfortable, but the open files are somewhat skimpy. The Johns Hopkins files were rather more extensive. My only thought was that, like so many of us, you would keep certain insights in your files, especially if they might appear to be mental doodling."

"I did not take offense. Dr. Lyons. My initial reaction was automatic. Dealing with many bureaucrats makes one edgy. It is most unusual to request private documents. It was only after I re-read the open files that it became clear that your reasoning was accurate," he said.

Ibrahim Abu Ismail permitted himself a small smile as he relaxed behind his desk. It was clear that the American scientist was interested only in the joint project. His polite questioning of Alfar Habibi and Khalifa Hasan had confirmed this. Neither had mentioned her interest in the number of containers of nuclear isotopes which were in the secure area.

The Russian and Israeli agents had sensed from Mary's body language that more than a joint project with an American hospital was involved. The day she reported to the hospital and looked at the contents of the nuclear isotopes room, each had sent a note to their respective agencies about her arrival. The return replies were much too non-committal for trained agents not to understand the unstated message. Dr. Mary Lyons was in some way involved in the nuclear materials mystery.

From then on, Mary was under constant watch by one of the other agents. Alfar Habibi had seen her leaving the hotel after the break-in and followed her to International Travel Services. To his trained eyes, there something unusual. She was not as well dressed as one would have expected for an appointment with her travel agent. Her clothing was rumpled and her hair was mussed.

The next afternoon, when she left to pack and move from the hotel, Khalifa Hasan arranged to go with her and the housekeeping staff. Habibi had spoken to her about the visit to the travel agency and suggested that it might be wise to keep her in sight.

As soon as her bags were packed Mary checked out of the Sheraton. She and Khalifa returned to the hospital residence. Housekeeping had prepared the apartment and one of the maids helped her to unpack. While this was being done, Khalifa quietly checked the rooms for bugs. There was one. Afterward Mary, Khalifa Hasan and Alfar Habibi had dinner together in Khalifa's apartment.

Paris

9 December

1330 hours

When Henry Wheatland arrived in Paris, Didier was waiting at the airport baggage claim area and drove him to the pension. As he checked in, the concierge handed him a note from Ron Grover requesting a meeting late that afternoon. Hank groaned as he entered the creaking elevator. For him, it was three-thirty in the afternoon. He had had nothing to eat since leaving Tel Aviv. As usual, he had fallen asleep almost as soon as the plane reached its cruising altitude and speed. When he reached his room, Hank called the Embassy.

"Ron," he said. "I've just arrived at the pension. Would it be O.K. if we made it a late lunch at your place? I missed breakfast on the plane and I'm hungry."

Grover replied, "Fine, Hank. Have Didier drive you here and I'll arrange to have lunch brought up from the mess. That'll save us some time. We'll just move up the briefing. Then you can go back and rest up, if you wish."

Hank had come back to Paris in light clothing. He took the opportunity to change into something more suitable for the Parisian winter. He had left a tweed jacket, gray flannel slacks and Burberry rain coat with a zip-in lining in the room closet, as well as several turtlenecks and changes of underwear in the drawer. By the time he came down to the lobby, Didier was waiting for him for the drive to the United States Embassy.

Fran Harding, Ron Grover's secretary, was waiting in the Embassy lobby when he arrived. She escorted him to a small conference room where lunch had been set up. Fran was about to leave when her boss motioned her to join them. The Embassy mess had set several places, since Grover had not indicated how many would be attending the meeting. There was a buffet table at the far end of the room.

After the meal, they went up to the CIA Station Chief's office where she had placed several multi-colored, tabbed, folders on the desk. Grover handed Hank the folders. There was nothing new.

"I knew, before I left Tel Aviv, that we had just about wrapped up our part of the operation. Now what?" he queried.

"You're going directly from Paris to Dubai. Mary isn't expecting you, just yet, but Ted Bradley, our man there, thinks she may have been spotted. Her room was searched the day she came, and a couple of days ago, she trapped an intruder in her room. Mary identified him as some sort of surveillance type. She's moved out of the Sheraton to quarters in the hospital. Langley feels that her 'husband' should join her.

"Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail is back in Dubai. Things are heating up. He's been down to the docks at Jebel Ali, that's Dubai's port, a couple of times. One of Ted's tailers saw him there. He was driving a different car from the one he usually uses. Fortunately, the local laws require the registration for the vehicles to remain with the car, so Bradley's man was able to read it. The car is registered to his father-in-law whose been dead for ten years.

"We need you there to head up the operational part. Mary is going to have to figure out how to switch the active material for inert, without Dr. Abu Ismail become curious. There is one new development. The Saudis have agreed to let the flight enter and leave their air space. The plane will be tracked from landing to arrival over the target zone by AIWAC and Israel Air Force tracers. The Russians and the Israelis agreed to this.

"At the right time, UAE officials and the Dubai Police Department will be informed so they can dismantle their end of the Al Suyuf Al Kharb conspiracy. Back home, the FBI will round up Farid Attiyeh and, hopefully, the driver of that semi. The Russians will roll up the network out of Sevastopol. The Israelis are still working on their end, but hope to have it ready to move as soon as the signal is given. Mossad and GRU are still monitoring the situation. Moscow and Tel Aviv have identified their field agents for us. When you get to Dubai, Ted Bradley will be your control. Langley will feed him the names of those agents.

"Don't even unpack. There's a flight to Dubai about 11:30 tonight. Give me your passport. We'll get it validated and have the visa OK'ed in a couple of hours. Didier will pick it up here, along with your ticket. It will have an open return. I will send a cable, in your name, to Mary," the Station Chief concluded.

Hank handed over his passport, retrieved his coat and walked out of Ron Grover's office with decidedly mixed feelings. He was elated at the thought of seeing Mary again, but worried she had been compromised. Hank set aside his feelings and cleared his mind for the task ahead.

Didier pulled up to the entrance as Hank walked down to the sidewalk. In a few minutes they arrived at the pension. Hank went up to his room and immediately packed the clothing he had worn on the trip from Tel Aviv. The concierge had them cleaned while Hank was at his lunch meeting.

For the rest of the afternoon, he reviewed the TROIKA material. Everything was in place in Dubai, excepting for the arrival of the plane which would carry the "bomb" from there to Israel.

In the evening, Hank walked down to the small restaurant at the corner of the street. He smiled, wry, when he spotted Didier at a table near the window. The former Maqui was speaking with an older woman. The words were unintelligible from his distance, but it was obvious that these were not casual acquaintances. When Didier and his eyes locked for a moment, neither gave the slightest indication that he knew the other.

He read the English language paper he had purchased that morning in Tel Aviv, while he ate a leisurely meal. When he rose to leave the restaurant, Didier and his companion also left and walked a few paces behind him. Apparently engrossed in conversation, the pair kept him, and the area, under close observation.

When Hank arrived at the pension, the concierge handed him an envelope with the logo of the International Travel Services' Paris office. Hank thanked him and went up to his room. He found his validated passport and

plane ticket for his flight that night. There was a small note attached to the ticket folder asking him to get in touch with Frank Boyer, the ITS manager in Dubai, upon his arrival.

At nine o'clock, Didier took him to Charles de Gaulle Airport. He went directly to the Lufthansa desk and checked in. Hank chose his usual seat, took his boarding pass and sat down to wait for the boarding call. As soon as the call came, at 10:45, he took his carry-on and boarded the plane. The aircraft taxied down the runway and took off with a thrust of her powerful jets. Once the plane had reached its flight height and direction, he began to doze. In his semi-somnolent condition, Hank kept seeing Mary sitting at his side on the plane. On a low level of consciousness, he was aware that it was an illusion. He did nothing to dispel it.

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

International Arrivals Terminal

10 December

0930 hours

As soon as his flight landed, Hank hurried to the Arrivals area to clear Customs and Immigration. He stood still for a moment, searching the waiting crowd for Mary. Suddenly, he saw her and began to walk rapidly toward where she was standing, just as she saw him and began to run to him with outstretched arms. Seconds later, they were locked in a fierce embrace.

Mary stepped back. "Oh darling, what a delicious surprise! I got your cable yesterday. I've been so damn lonely. If it wasn't for the Project, I'd have gone nuts! We'll be able to stay at the hospital. My quarters are comfortable enough for both of us."

By the time they had made their way out of the Arrivals Building, Alfar Habibi was waiting with an Ibn Rosht Hospital car. He took Hank's luggage, stowed it in the trunk and drove to the hospital.

In the back seat of the car, Mary rested her head against Hank's shoulder, just as she had done that first night in Philadelphia and later in Paris. The pair sat in anticipatory silence. Mary shivered slightly as Hank's hand caressed her neck. She responded by kissing his cheek. A discreet Habibi kept his eyes on the road.

The car stopped at the Hospital security gate. Alfar Habibi identified himself and his passengers and was passed through to the staff living quarters. He pulled up to the entrance, helped Hank and Mary out of the car and unloaded the luggage. The chief technician offered to carry the bags to Mary's quarters. Hank and Mary declined.

Mary's apartment was on the fourth floor of the seven story building. It consisted of a bedroom, living room, small kitchen and bath. The living room faced East with a view of the harbor area. Double drapes effectively shut out the early morning light.

Hank unpacked and stretched out on the living room sofa. Mary started to sit down, when he reached up and pulled her on top of him. They kissed with complete abandon, trying to make up for the time they had been apart. After several minutes, Mary lifted herself off Hank and guided him into the bedroom. By the time they reached the bed, both were completely nude. Their lovemaking reached climaxes several times before they fell asleep in each others arms.

"What's so funny, darling?" she queried, when they awoke.

"I was just thinking, love and lovemaking are wasted on the young. They don't even think we still know how!"

Hank replied.

Mary began to chuckle, then giggle and, finally, full-throated laughter, in which he joined. For the next fifteen or twenty minutes, every time their eyes met, both dissolved in paroxysms of uncontrolled laughter.

Hank had been looking idly at the prints on the wall. He noticed one was slightly off center. As he went to straighten it, his hand touched a small metal object behind it. He carefully took it down. Fastened to the wall hanger was the small microphone which Khalifa had left in place. The room was bugged. He smiled and replaced the picture. This was to be expected. All foreigners were under suspicion. Hospital security must be connected with the local police.

Mary looked at her watch. It was just past noon. If they were to get any lunch, they'd have to get to the hospital cafeteria before it closed for the afternoon. Mary led the way to the elevator which brought them down to the air conditioned covered walkway between the residence and the hospital proper.

As they entered the dining area, Mary noticed Dr. Abu Ismail sitting alone at a table in the senior staff dining area. He looked up as the Americans approached the table.

"Doctor, this is my husband, Dr. Henry Lyons," said Mary as they reached Abu Ismail. "He has just arrived from Paris."

Abu Ismail rose and shook hands with Henry Lyons. "Welcome to our hospital, Doctor. Your wife has been most helpful to us. Please join me."

"It is our pleasure, Dr. Abu Ismail. Mary has told me something of the project you and she are working on. Fortunately, I'm on sabbatical and can enjoy just being a tourist," he explained.

"Where are you staying, Dr. Lyons?" Abu Ismail asked.

"With my wife, here in the hospital residence. The quarters are quite comfortable," he responded.

Hank took the opportunity to study the physician. He was struck by his light coloring and sandy hair. What ever his faith, he was obviously not an ethnic Arab. This further confused the issue. Why would this man become involved with a terrorist group? Above all a physician. Then he remembered that George Habash, one of the most radical Palestinian leaders, was also a physician.

After the meal, Abu Ismail rose to leave the table. He spoke to Mary, "Dr. Lyons, there is little for us to do for the next few days. Please feel free to spend the time with your husband. Good afternoon, Doctors."

Mary looked up over her husband's shoulder and noticed Dr. Robert MacPherson entering the room. He saw the Americans and walked over to them.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Lyons. This must be your husband. He was on the flight from Paris which brought me back. I was originally scheduled to leave from London, but Heather was fogged in, so I took the Cross Channel Hydrocraft from Dover and made it to Paris with not much time to spare. Welcome to Dubai, Dr. Lyons." For Bob MacPherson, that was a long speech.

"We're just into our second cups of coffee, Dr. MacPherson, please join us." Mary's tone was cordial. She was fairly certain that the Scotsman was not involved with whatever clandestine activities Dr. Abu Ismail was undertaking.

The Medical Director declined, "Thank you, but I have a lunch meeting with the chief of ophthalmology."

Hank and Mary finished their coffee, excused themselves, and returned to the apartment.

"What really brings you here, darling?" Mary asked as they walked down the corridor from the elevator.

"The Company knows about the two break-ins at the Sheraton. They don't know if you've been compromised. It was decided that since some local might make advances on a lone Western woman, it would make a lot of sense for her husband to be with her. Believe me, dearest, I didn't fight the assignment.

"Can I rent a car here?" he asked. "I have to get downtown to the Dubai office of the travel agency that arranged for my flight from Paris."

Mary glanced at her watch. "Nope, it's still siesta, or what ever the Arabic name for it is. Nothing will be moving for at least another hour. There are a couple of rental agencies down town. I'll call and find out if Alfar Habibi can drive us down to the agency. By the way, which one?"

Hank took his ticket folder out of his jacket. "Some outfit called International Travel Services. The person I'm supposed to meet is the manager, Frank Boyer," he answered placing the folder back into the pocket.

Mary stopped short. Hank really was in Dubai on Company business! "Yes," she said, hesitatingly, "I know the place. My ticket was placed through them too. I know Frank Boyer. He and Ted Bradley, the husband of an old friend, Alice Crandall, are acquaintances. By the way, Alice was the double date the night I met you and David. I told her about the divorce and our 'marriage'. It'll be interesting to see her reaction when we have dinner together tonight."

Hank did not respond to the information about Ted Bradley's wife. He could only hope that as a good company wife, Alice would gloss over the past. He didn't know how much Langley had told Bradley about his relationship with Mary other than that they were "married".

At four o'clock, Mary called Alfar. Dr. Abu Ismail gave him permission to drive the Lyonses to the travel agency. Habibi told her he would be at the residence entrance in fifteen minutes. They were waiting in the lobby when he arrived and drove them to International Travel Services. Ted Bradley and Frank Boyer were waiting for them in Boyer's office.

"Hello, Ted. How've you been?" said Hank as he shook Bradley's hand.

"You two know each other?" asked an astonished Mary. "How much did you know before I came, Ted? You didn't blink when I told you my husband was coming to meet me and finish his sabbatical here!"

Ted Bradley answered, "Langley didn't say anything about who "Dr. Henry Lyons" is. Like everything else in this business, it's on a strictly 'need-to-know' basis and I didn't need to know until today."

"Ted and I worked together in Langley for a couple of years. He was an Assistant Deputy Director under me when I first was brought back from the field," her husband explained.

"I'm afraid I haven't met, Mr. Boyer" said Hank as he turned toward Frank Boyer.

"Frank is agent-in-place, here in Dubai. I'm Station Chief for the entire United Arab Emirates," Bradley said by way of introduction.

Frank Boyer reached out and shook Hank's hand. He said nothing.

"How much does Alice know, Ted?" asked Mary. "She recognized me at once. I'm hoping she doesn't

remember Hank. It was only one date. As I remember it, the room was pretty dark."

"Don't worry. Even if she recognizes him, I'm sure she won't say anything. I simply told her, before I left home this morning, that you and your husband would be coming for dinner," Ted assured her.

"She never met Hank when he was my boss. Company protocol doesn't encourage social contacts. He was my superior and it wouldn't have been proper for us to have any personal connections outside the office. Since he had to evaluate my performance, our relationship had to remain entirely professional," Bradley concluded.

"There is one piece of business, we must finish before you leave for dinner," said Frank Boyer. "I think it best that any contact you have to make with Langley be through this office. I'll handle all the traffic, personally. It isn't unusual for visitors to the area check with their travel agents on an almost daily basis. Have a pleasant evening."

Ted led the way to his car, which was parked in front of the still shattered building across the street. Most of the debris had been removed and a plywood fence was erected around the site. Since the explosion, the street became one way.

The trip from downtown Dubai to the Western enclave outside the city was just long enough for the three occupants of the car to relax after the meeting at the travel agency. As the car pulled into the garage, Alice Bradley stood in the doorway of the house. She kissed her husband, hugged Mary and stood, expectantly, waiting for an introduction to Mary's husband. Alice, obviously, had not recognized him. Mary was right, it had been only one date and the room was dimly lit. The introduction was warm. Alice was as ready to accept Hank as she had Mary when she arrived.

After dinner, Mary and Alice remained in the living room chatting. The meal went well as soon as Mary was comfortable in the knowledge that Alice had truly not remembered her husband. The men went into Ted Bradley's study.

Bradley unlocked the file drawer safe on the left side of his desk and withdrew a slim folder. Inside was a sealed envelope which had arrived on the same Lufthansa flight and was addressed to him at the oil company. So much mail arrived for that organization that the Emirate intelligence officials rarely checked it. This, fortunately, was one of those occasions. He handed it to Hank, who opened it carefully. There was a single sheet of paper with a short message:

Israeli - Alfar Habibi,

Chief Nuclear Medicine Technician

GRU - Khalifa Hasan,

Senior Nuclear Medicine Technician

They will have your identity within twenty-four hours of your arrival. The identity code will be a salt shaker on the left of your plate and the pepper shaker on Habibi's left at lunch in the hospital staff cafeteria. He will move them so that they will be on the right side of your plates. If you are invited to sit with the Medical staff, decline politely. Make any excuse.

Your control has been filled in on what he needs to know re: OPERATION TROIKA.

There was no signature.

He read the note, memorized it and handed it back to Ted, who tore the sheet into strips and burned them in a large metal ashtray beside his desk.

"I was pretty sure that Mary's being sent here was more than the Company's interest in the hospital, but there was no way I could connect it with the atomic material on that sunken freighter. My work here has been pretty routine. We think that there's some illegal shipment of crude from Iraq, down this side of the Gulf and transshipped as local crude. So far, we've been unable to sniff it out. The UN types insist that there must be a leak. Local oil production is up substantially, but it seems to be out of the ground here.

"This is the first active field operation since I was sent here. I thought that this was Phil's way of either returning me to full Operational or to give me a backwater job outside Langley," Bradley concluded with a smile.

"There's one small detail, Ted. I still need a car, but I don't have an International Driver's license and I can't keep on imposing on either the hospital staff, or you, to chauffeur me around. Can you work that, and a rental car through the travel agency?" asked Hank.

"No problem. I'll have the car and your license delivered to you at the hospital by noon tomorrow. Frank's staff can take care of that. The International License is a formality," answered his host.

The two agents returned to the living room. A still smiling Ted Bradley was quietly humming "Back in the Saddle Again." He excused himself, went into the bathroom and flushed the tissue and its contents down the toilet. When he returned, the others were sitting drinking coffee.

It was almost midnight when Ted drove his guests back to the hospital. Mary slept much of the time, while Hank sat quietly mulling over his next move. He was relying on Frank Boyer and Ted Bradley to let him know when the Iranian plane arrived. They also would have to call in the local authorities.

The car arrived at the hospital gate. Mary produced her staff badge, and were admitted to the grounds. Bradley and the Lyonses said good night as he drove off.

11 December

1130 hours

Dr. Henry Lyons entered the hospital dining room just as the two nuclear medical technicians picked up their trays. He followed them to a corner table toward the rear of the dining area. Alfar Habibi set down his tray, cleared it and placed the salt shaker to his left. After sitting down, the Mossad agent moved it to his right.

"May I join you?" Hank asked.

"Of course, Dr. Lyons. We are honored," Khalifa Hasan answered as she placed the pepper shaker to the American's right. The movement was so smooth that to any observer it would appear that the table re-arrangement was totally casual. The trio ate quietly, with little conversation.

As soon as they had finished, Alfar and Khalifa left the table. As he did so, Alfar dropped his paper napkin on the floor and shoved it closer to the American agent. Hank stooped down, retrieved the napkin. A time and a place was written on it. He nodded almost imperceptibly as he made eye contact with Habibi and put the crumpled napkin in his jacket pocket. The method "hide in plain sight" was so crude and elementary that it insured success.

11 December

1445 hours

The change of shifts made it relatively easy for him to move into the corridor from the cafeteria to the Nuclear Medicine office. It was approximately 2:45 when Hank walked into the empty consultation room at the center of the arc of the Nuclear Medical Wing wards. The others were waiting. Experienced operatives, neither had shared knowledge of the identification procedure until he placed the salt shaker in position.

He pushed a piece of paper toward them:

BUGS?

The others shook their heads from side to side. Khalifa Hasan made a sweeping motion with her hands. The room was "clean".

Alfar Habibi spoke first, "Dr. Lyons, our instructions are to co-operate fully with you. They further stated that you would know how and why we are to be involved in OPERATION TROIKA."

"However, Doctor," Khalifa Hasan said quietly. but firmly, "we need to have some bona fides. We do not know you. For most of this century, our agencies have been in competition--and worse. Now we are asked to work with you. Alfar and I have just become accustomed to working together outside our regular positions here in the Department."

"Miss Hasan and Mr. Habibi, let me fill you in. I am with the Central Intelligence Agency. Your agency, Miss Hasan, Russian Military Intelligence, the GRU, and, yours, Mr. Habibi, Israeli Intelligence, Mossad, and mine, are involved in a project to avoid a nuclear catastrophe. We have traced certain illegally provided sub-critical masses of bomb quality nuclear material to this institution, in particular to your Department. That is Dr. Mary Lyons' real purpose for being here. She has already ascertained that the amount of nuclear material in your Special Projects area is sufficient for the next several decades. An expert in the military uses of nuclear material, her task will be to switch the atomic for non-nuclear material to be loaded into the bomb casing. Our agencies are quite certain Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail is involved. In fact, he may be the head of a new terrorist group called Al Suyuf Al Kharb. Their plan seems to be to drop an atomic device on Tel Aviv, or another target in Israel. None of us know what this group's agenda is other than the destruction of Israel. Our analysts think that it has something to do with a grudge or revenge. It is our job to prevent them fulfilling their mission.

"Your task will be to keep track of Dr. Abu Ismail's movements. You will be supplied with a very sophisticated bug to be placed in his telephone lines. From that moment, all his calls will be monitored and recorded."

"That's fine for the office, Dr. Lyons," Alfar Habibi asked, "but what about his home phone? He makes calls from there, too."

"His phone line will be interrupted. When he calls from the hospital for it to be repaired, a lineman connected with one of our agencies will restore service. Meanwhile he will place an equally sophisticated device on that phone."

"The doctor's cars, he has two, have already been fitted with homing devices. One receiver is already installed on your vehicle, Mr. Habibi. There is a second, elsewhere. Between them, every move he makes will be under constant surveillance."

"And mine?" queried Khalifa Hasan.

"You and my wife will be working out of the Special Projects area, making the transfer of the nuclear explosives for the inert matter. You will also be working with her on the joint hospitals project."

Alfar Habibi opened the consultation room door and peered down the corridor in both directions. It was clear. The three agents left the room and hurried toward the elevator. The two technicians continued to their laboratory.

1535 hours

Hank took the elevator to the mezzanine walkway which joined the hospital and the living quarters. The walkway was empty. Most of the off duty employees were taking advantage of the afternoon break. Mary was sitting on a comfortable chair in the living room of the apartment reading the newspaper. She looked up, smiled and removed her glasses. Hank stood still, as he looked down at Mary. After a moment he relaxed.

"I was thinking, Mary," he began, "I'd like to go out to dinner, just the two of us. We haven't had a chance to see much of each other since I got here. Yesterday afternoon was marvelous, but I'd feel better if we could sit quietly, let someone else do the cooking and cleaning up. Do you know of a decent restaurant?"

"Well, there's the Sheraton dining room, a couple of places in the market area Alfar told me about, but it's not a good idea to eat al fresco. I'll call the hotel and make a reservation. They don't begin to serve dinner until about ten o'clock. Most of the residents eat their big meal in the afternoon. Some of the visitors, Arab and Western wait, if they aren't invited for the afternoon. Besides, even if it cools off pretty rapidly after dark, I don't like to share my meal with winged creatures that I can't even identify. By the way, do we have a car?"

"Yes. I picked it up this morning when I got my International Driver's License. Dr. Abu Ismail was kind enough to arrange for me to park in the senior staff garage."

"O.K., honey. You drive. I'll direct. Even if I had a license, it's not a good idea for a woman to drive in this town. A local woman can be arrested, and a foreigner might not be, but she could be detained for hours as they check her papers. All very polite, but slightly menacing."

Mary picked up the phone and made the reservation. She finished the paper and handed it to Hank, then opened her attache case and began to do some work on the Johns Hopkins project. After a while, she closed the case, and leaned back. Just having Hank around was comforting. They spoke quietly, about trivialities.

At seven thirty, they changed for dinner. Mary and Hank dressed appropriately for the climate and for the local customs.

Mary gave careful directions to the hotel. Hank drove cautiously down the darkened streets. Periodically, he glanced at the rear view mirror. Nothing suspicious. Either the locals were very good at tailing, or they were simply not being followed. After the short drive, they pulled up to the front of the hotel. The doorman whistled for the valet parker and ushered them into the lobby. The new local intelligence agent saw them arrive, checked his list and made a small notation, nothing unusual to report.

They were led to their table by the maitre d', a tall, imposing looking Swiss. He placed the menus before them. As was the case in Paris, Mary's menu did not have the prices. It felt good to be pampered a little. Their waiter arrived and stood expectantly. Hank read the menu carefully. He was not sure how clean the kitchen was.

"Perhaps, Monsieur, would like to have a little more time before selecting?" he suggested.

"Yes, thank you," he answered as he looked across the table at Mary. She looked back, quizzically. It was unlike him to be indecisive.

"Can the kitchen be trusted? I wouldn't like to come down with something," he explained.

"Oh, yes. Anything on the menu is first rate."

The waiter returned after about five minutes. Hank ordered for them.

The Americans sat sipping Perrier from the already filled water goblets, when Mary looked up and noticed the assistant manager, Alfred Gardner, enter the room. He saw Mary and made his way over to the table.

"Good evening, Dr. Lyons. Everything is in order, I trust?" he remarked.

"Yes, it is Mr. Gardner." she said, "Hank, Mr. Gardner is the gentleman who helped me out of an awkward situation the other day."

"Thank you for your consideration, Mr. Gardner," Hank said. "I'm Henry Lyons, Mary's husband. Would like to join us?"

Gardner recognized the gesture for what it was and said, "No thank you. I'm on duty and must keep moving. Nice to have met you, sir."

The Englishman left their table and made his way to the other side of the room.

"This isn't just a chance for us to have a quiet dinner together, Mary. I have some orders for you from Langley. Phil wanted me to deliver them in person. You and Khalifa Hasan are going to be working together. I want you to be overwhelmed by the amount of detail work necessary to get the Dubai-Johns Hopkins Hospital Project going. You will ask for help. She will volunteer. That's part of the cover. The rest is up to me. We won't discuss anything about your clandestine work in the apartment. There's a bug. I left it in place. There's no reason to let Hospital security, or the local police, know that we found it. Just be careful," he admonished her.

Mary sat upright in her chair. Her initial response was a shudder, as the full import of her husband's words entered her conscious mind. Up to now, her involvement in TROIKA was almost a game. It was one thing to give advice and information to Hank, Zvi and Grisha. If she mishandled the nuclear material, she could contract a fatal dose of radiation in an instant. If Dr. Abu Ismail discovered her mission, she could get a fatal dose of lead in an equally short time.

She thought for a moment--this was what she had agreed to in Philadelphia. Although she had no illusions as to her ability, it was comforting to have Hank near her. If all went well, she would be an ex-spy in a few days, or weeks, at most. Mary relaxed.

For Mary, the biggest gain from TROIKA was Henry Lyons Wheatland. At first, any contact with her ex-husband's family was painful. Hank was traveling and might be out of touch for months at a time. Still it was her brother-in-law who kept up a warm relationship with his nephew, sporadic as it might have been. All the time Davey was growing up, his father was both too busy, and too guilty, to act like a parent. Uncle Hank was the stabilizing force in his life. Over the years since her divorce from David, Mary thought she had thoroughly suppressed any feelings of love or desire for Hank. That night in Philadelphia was both a shock and the realization that the feelings were there and stronger than ever.

When she finally spoke, Mary surprised herself at how calm her voice sounded. "Making the switch won't be too difficult. The radio-isotopes are shipped in containers similar enough to the atomic explosives that Khalifa and I can re-arrange the positions of the canisters. What will be hard will be my getting into the Special Projects area without the doctor becoming suspicious. About the only time the technicians and I are together is

when the Medical staff is either on rounds or in conference. Even those times are not on an even schedule. They may last a couple of hours, or all day, depending on the case load."

"That will be Khalifa's problem. Duplicating a key isn't wise. She, or Alfar Habibi, will have to be with you. I briefed them thoroughly this afternoon. Tomorrow, I'll be at the travel agency. I want you set things up with them during rounds," Hank said.

All during the conversation, Hank held her hand and looked directly into her eyes. Other diners who observed the Americans smiled at what appeared to be a loving couple enjoying a night out.

It was late when they returned to the hospital. Both were exhausted from the tension caused by the dinner conversation and the increased pressure on them to complete the mission as soon as possible. As they entered the lobby, the lights flickered and failed. There were several people in the elevator. The doors had not closed, nor had the elevator begun its climb. The group left it and moved back into the lobby. There was enough light from the clear night to make it possible to see the furniture. People moved toward the pieces that were closest together.

Someone breathed an almost inaudible "It's Allah's will."

Another voice answered "More like Dubai Electric's Won't!"

Everyone laughed at the retort. There was a general buzz of conversation. Mary and Hank sat quietly in a settee near the front door. As suddenly as the power failed, it was restored. The people in the lobby returned to the elevator which was functioning somewhat erratically. It stopped at only the even numbered floors. The third floor residents got off on the fourth and walked down the staircase to their destination.

The Lyonses got off on their floor and went directly to the apartment. Within half an hour they were in bed, sleeping fitfully.

Dubai

12 December

0230 Hours

Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail drove onto the little used longest runway on an airfield twenty kilometers from Dubai. Originally an RAF fighter-bomber base during World War Two, it had been maintained as a private installation for non-commercial flights ever since. The grounds were immaculate, the runways were in perfect order. A pilot and a member of the United Arab Emirates Royal Flying Club, he was thoroughly familiar with its ability to handle any aircraft up to a medium sized multi-engine jet.

To the right of the runways were the storage sheds holding the materials needed to keep the grounds in order. On the left were the hangars for the owners' planes. The control tower was above the clubhouse in the center of the lawns. At the back of the lawns were the carefully restored revetments where the munitions had been stored during the war. Several were empty. When he had news of the arrival date for the Iranian aircraft, Abu Ismail would have the various components of the bomb brought to the field for assembly. The largest revetment would hold the plane until it was ready to begin its mission. He would man the control tower himself and guide it to the field. The inspection completed, Dr. Abu Ismail drove back to Dubai. The trip to the Club and back to his home took about two hours. The homing device on the doctor's car had been monitored from the moment he removed the vehicle from his garage. He was followed at a discreet distance by an unmarked closed van. When the doctor turned off the main road to the entrance of the Flying Club, the van stopped behind a stand of stunted palms about forty meters from the entrance. Inside the van, the driver

recorded the location and the times of arrival and departure.

Teheran, Iran

11 December

1830 hours

Jahmal Ali Akhbar had returned to his home from a meeting with an aide to the Iranian leader. Al Suyuf Al Kharb's liaison to the Hezbollah, Ali Akhbar, was in the midst of the delicate negotiations for the delivery of an aging French Mirage fighter-bomber.

In the tortuous procedure, a senior aide to the Hajayatollah met with the terrorists who were under his protection. They were to be given a free hand in Southern Lebanon. The aide, in turn, met afterward with the president, who gave final approval. Then Ali Akhbar was given a final date for delivery of the aircraft to his group. Part of the processes were necessary precautions, but much of it was equally necessary theatrics.

He had just sat down to a light meal when the phone rang. The go-between was not surprised to hear Abu Ismail's voice.

"Good evening, Jahmal," said Abu Ismail, "What is going on? Where are we with the delivery of the merchandise? Everything else is awaiting its arrival."

The Iranian answered, "Good evening, Ibrahim. You can expect delivery on December fourteenth or fifteenth. Where is the merchandise to be stored? The shipping agent needs that information."

"In the agreed upon facility. Have you forgotten?" asked an exasperated Abu Ismail. "I will, personally, accept delivery. The shipper as been advised to take extreme precautions to ensure safe delivery, has he not?"

"Yes," he answered, and quietly placed the instrument on its cradle. It was almost time!

Dubai

12 December

1700 hours

The bug attached to Dr. Abu Ismail's home telephone began recording as soon as he lifted the receiver. The entire transmission, including Jahmal Ali Akhbar's telephone number in Teheran, was on the tape. As soon as the conversation was ended, Ted Bradley's eavesdropper drove the tape to International Petroleum Explorations where it was translated from Arabic into English. When the transcription was completed and encoded, the driver took it to the American Embassy to be sent by satellite to Langley. A copy was taken to International Travel Services.

Frank Boyer took the transcript, read it and called Hank at the hospital. The phone rang several times before it was answered.

"Hello," Hank responded.

"Dr. Lyons. Frank Boyer. Could you come to the ITS office? The brochures for which you asked have arrived. They should provide you with some interesting information about short trips in the area," he said.

Hank hesitated for a moment, then answered, "I'll be happy to, Mr. Boyer. As soon as I speak to my wife, we'll leave for your office."

"There is no need for you to disturb her. The material is in a small envelope which you can take with you," Boyer assured him.

"Fine, Mr. Boyer. I'll leave her a note and come right now," he said as he scribbled a note, then left the note on the dresser, and took the elevator to the garage. He took the car and drove to the travel agency's office. There was a small lot behind the building where he parked car, walked to the front and entered.

Ted Ericson met him at the door and took Hank first to his cubicle where he handed him the brochures. Frank Boyer stepped out of his office and nodded to Ericson. The two men walked across the floor in full view of the rest of the staff and their clients. To all appearances this was routine. From time to time, the manager would request a sales person to bring his or her client to his office for a quiet chat about the quality of service.

The travel agency manager closed his office door as soon as Ted Ericson left. When he and Hank had seated themselves, Boyer handed him the sealed envelope with the transcript of the conversation between Teheran and Dubai. Hank opened the envelope and took out the pages, which he read with complete concentration.

"This doesn't tell me much, Frank. We knew that Al Suyuf Al Kharb had an arrangement with Iran for the delivery of a plane. Now we know the date of delivery. I must assume that the aircraft won't land at the International Airport. We still need that information. It would also help to know what kind of plane is being provided," he said as he handed the sheets to Boyer.

"I think that this will help answer part of your problem. It was delivered just before you got here, Bradley forwarded it to me," he said as he handed him a single sheet of paper with the information from the van which had followed the physician's car to and from the Flying Club.

"What are the chances of my doing a drive-by of the place?" Hank asked. "I might be able to figure out how he's going to hide the plane after it arrives and how he hopes to get it out of the local air space without being spotted on take-off."

"One of the brochures is from the Flying Club with an invitation to see the place and to have dinner there. Suppose I call the Club and arrange for you and your wife to take the tour and have dinner there tomorrow night?" Boyer suggested.

"That would be O.K. with me. I'm sure Mary will appreciate the change from the hospital routine. She's been working hard ever since she got here. The break will do her good. We haven't had a non-work-related meal since I arrived," Hank said as accepted the offer. He took the packet of brochures, went to his car and drove back to the hospital.

Mary was awake when he returned. She was sitting on the easy chair in the corner of the living room. "Hi, darling," she said. "I missed you. It's getting late and I'm hungry. How about just staying here this evening and having dinner in the Senior Staff dining room?"

"That's fine," he answered. "I was down at the travel agency for those brochures he promised. Mr. Boyer has made arrangements for us to have a tour of the United Arab Emirates Royal Flying Club and dinner there tomorrow night. I thought it would be a change of pace and atmosphere. I know you're working, but I'm on vacation and I'd like to break the routine. Boyer assures me the food at the Flying Club is excellent. He's eaten there a number of times."

"That will be a welcome change," she agreed. "I've been going a little stir crazy, anyway. Can Frank Boyer

wangle an invitation for the Bradleys? I've stayed with them a couple of times since I got to Dubai. It would be nice to reciprocate."

Her husband dialed Frank Boyer's number. When he answered Hank made the request. Boyer said that wouldn't be necessary. Ted Bradley was well known in the business community and had been to the Club several times in the past. He would, however, extend the invitation. Hank thanked him and hung up. He shrugged his shoulders; it was still mixing business with pleasure, but this time, Mary wouldn't be involved.

He and Mary freshened up and made their way to the Senior Staff dining room. Several of the medical staff were coming in. Dr. Al-Yasir pointedly ignored them and moved to a corner table where he sat alone. Mary had not met the majority of the medical staff, but she had been in the facility long enough for them to have at least a nodding acquaintance with her as she passed them in the hall or when she ate in the dining room.

After dinner, the Americans returned to the apartment. Neither spoke much, but each felt a rising tension. There was a sense that the entire mission would soon be over.

Hank asked, "How about a ride in the country? The car's air-conditioned and I'd like to get out of here for a little while."

A surprised Mary agreed. They left the apartment and went to the car. Henry drove out toward the Western enclave, which was almost due north of the city. He had no intention of driving to the Bradleys.

"I'm afraid this is a business drive, Mary," he began. "Our Dubaian friend is expecting to receive a military aircraft from Iran on the fourteenth or fifteenth. That doesn't leave you and Khalifa much time to make the switch. What are the chances that you and she can do it tomorrow morning? I'd like to have it done as soon as possible. Dr. Abu Ismail must make his move in the next twenty- four to thirty-six hours. Everything in that warehouse has to be moved and the nuclear material with it."

Mary thought rapidly, "As soon as the doctors leave on rounds, she and I can get into the restricted area. We'll have fifteen minutes to make the switch. That's how often the security patrol makes its pass. The simplest thing for us to do is to switch the positions of four of the suspect canisters. They're already stenciled. Alfar is responsible for moving the material in and out of the restricted area. He'll know which ones to move."

Hank turned the car around and drove back to the hospital. In the morning he would have to get in touch with Ted Bradley. Washington, Moscow, and Tel Aviv must be alerted.

13 December

0815 hours

The medical staff left for rounds The team wished to see and evaluate the new patients a few minutes earlier than usual. As soon as they were gone, Mary approached Khalifa Hasan.

"Khalifa, it's time. There will be an arrival sometime in the next two or three days. Dr. Abu Ismail will need to move everything to the assembly site before then. We need to move as rapidly as we can to make the switch."

Khalifa motioned to Alfar, "Dr. Lyons and I have to get into the restricted area right now. Things are moving more rapidly than we had thought. Please come with us and transfer the canisters."

He moved off his stool and took the key to the restricted area from a drawer in his desk. Dr. Abu Ismail had the only other key, which was on his key ring. No one was in sight as Alfar unlocked the room. He closed the door after them and switched on the light. To Mary, the shadows cast by the isotope containers were ominous.

For the technicians, entering and leaving the area was a simple, automatic routine.

Alfar and Khalifa moved quickly down the aisles of isotope canisters. They stopped at the four which had arrived from the United States and Russia. They carefully removed the Russian material and put it into two similar containers. Then the empty canisters were filled with sand from several of the bags which provided additional protection to the room. The technicians had just removed the Russian materiel from its original casings when they heard the footsteps and voices of the security patrol. Mary looked at her watch and froze. Khalifa switched off the light. Either the patrol was four minutes early or she, Alfar and Khalifa had miscalculated the time. When Khalifa switched on the light, Alfar resumed the transfer. As soon as the delicate operation was complete, Mary and the others left the area unseen.

By the time Dr. Abu Ismail returned to the office, the technicians were busy at their work tables and Mary was transcribing his notes and comments onto the personal computer which had been placed at her disposal by Dr. MacPherson. The rest of the work day went smoothly.

1700 hours

They were finishing their preparations for the tour of the Flying Club and subsequent dinner when the phone rang. Hank reached for it. The call was from Ted Bradley accepting the invitation. He offered to pick them up at the hospital and drive to his home. Dinner at the Flying Club was always formal, a carry-over from the British days. Ted was certain that he could fit him with a tuxedo.

Hank hung up the phone and smiled, "Honey, Ted is going to pick us up. Dinner at the Club is formal, so he's lending me a tux. I guess you had better change into something appropriate."

When the Bradleys arrived about three quarters of an hour later, Ted was carrying a spare tuxedo. The Americans greeted each other, warmly, and went up to the Lyons' apartment for Hank to change.

"I wish Frank had told me that dinner was formal. That's why I called you to ask if you had a spare," Hank explained.

"It's O.K., Hank," Ted replied. "Frank takes for granted that everyone has formal clothes. I had to remind him that you were not here on business, but on vacation. We're about the same size. My spare should fit you."

Hank excused himself and went into the bedroom to change. He returned a few minutes later. The two couples went down to Ted Bradley's waiting car and drove to the Flying Club.

In the car Bradley's tone changed. "I sent the information my men got yesterday to Langley. The boss faxed me an acknowledgment and said that the other interested parties have been informed. This morning's pouch had a simple instruction for you. Phil wants you to stay put and watch the doctor's moves. When the plane arrives, the Company figures we have about seventy-two hours. My job will be to use our Embassy people to alert the local intelligence agency and have them move in on Dr. Abu Ismail just after take-off. That gives Mary time to hand Dr. MacPherson a completed proposal for the joint Dubai-Johns Hopkins project. That needs to be finished, too. He and the hospital aren't parties to this madness. When this part of TROIKA is finished, you and Mary will return to the States. "

1930 hours

The American foursome arrived at the Flying Club, where they were greeted by the president, Alfred Gardner, the assistant manager of the Sheraton Hotel. He was in formal dress with miniature medals pinned to the left side of his immaculately tailored white jacket.

He smiled broadly at the confused look on Mary's face. "Good evening. I understand that you are here to see our facility. Mr. and Mrs. Bradley have been here often. I shall see to them. Our Club Managing Director, Arnold Simpson, show you around. Mr. Simpson is a retired RAF Wing Commander. The last commandant of this field before it was exsessed by the Air Force, Commander Simpson decided to remain on to establish and operate the Club."

Before Granger moved on to the bar with the Bradleys for a drink, he introduced the Lyonsees to Wing Commander Simpson. Simpson was shorter than Hank, but carried himself with the disciplined assurance of a former combat pilot. He greeted the Americans and led them out to the parking lot where a car was waiting.

"We're proud of the restoration of the base," he began. "Of course, much of the military aspects have been removed. What is left has been converted to proper civilian uses. For example, we have maintained the runways, since many of our members have small jets which need the length to take off and land. The control tower has been modernized and the old revetments are used for storage and as repair units. The hangars have been completely renovated to accommodate as many as fifteen aircraft. Our dining room is the old Officers Mess and Ready Room."

As they drove, Hank made mental notes of the positions of the runways, the access to the revetments and the lighting system for nighttime landings. When he finished the immediate observations, Hank realized that Dr. Abu Ismail had picked an excellent place for his next step. The facility could still handle a small fighter-bomber. The tour, completed Hank, Mary, and the Commander went into the dining room to rejoin the Bradleys and Alfred Granger. It was almost midnight when the Bradleys dropped their friends back at the hospital.

MacLean, Virginia

CIA Headquarters

12 December

0800 hours

The CIA Director was already at his desk when Barbara Little entered his office with the overnight field reports. She had already placed the folders alphabetically by region and level of urgency, reports first. Ted Bradley's report was tabbed MOST URGENT.

Miller opened the folder. Copies of the reports had already been sent to Moscow and Tel Aviv. Calls were made to FBI Director Richard Grant and Chief of Naval Intelligence Rear Admiral Eric Short, both of whom arrived at their offices by seven o'clock in the morning. They agreed to meet at ten in Miller's office.

At exactly ten o'clock Short and Grant entered the DCI's office. The ever efficient Barbara Little had arranged for a pot of coffee to be set-up in the small conference room off the Director's office. She showed them into the room and closed the door. To insure no interruptions, there was no telephone in the conference room. All communications had to come to her desk.

Miller had prepared copies of the reports from Dubai and handed them to the others. The reports were short, basically the transcript of Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail's conversation with Jamal Ali Akhbar in Teheran and the report of his inspection of the Royal Flying Club's facilities.

"We located the company whose driver picked up the material from Earle Depot." Short reported. "The day this guy worked for them, they were two rigs short. He was hired as a one time replacement from a standby outfit called Transcontinental Shipping. He had the proper clearances, so they didn't check any further. Our

forensic people came up with a set of prints from the top copy of the recited bill of lading from Earle. The Marine Gunnery Sergeant on duty remembered the driver. We sent an artist's reconstruction and the prints over to the FBI for identification."

Richard Grant, the FBI Director spoke next. "Our files came up with the name of the driver. He's an ex-Marine named Alex Burr, no previous record. For the last five years Burr's been living in Toms River, New Jersey. He works as an independent contractor with his own rig, for which he paid cash two years ago. We don't know where the money came from. Right now Burr is hauling for Transcontinental Shipping out of Ogdensburg, New Jersey. That outfit does a lot of work with Farid Attiyeh, so that may be the connection. The trucking company must have arranged the 'shorting' for Attiyeh. No questions asked. No answers given.

"Transcontinental is under investigation by the ICC. They have a history of 'shorting' loads. As soon as Alex Burr makes his next stop, we'll hold him for questioning.

"Willem Vermaat told us that Farid Attiyeh's nephew, Tom Crespi, drove the truck to Attiyeh. His family is related to Attiyeh and the kid has done small jobs for him in the past, but nothing like this. Evidently, Attiyeh, who's never married, dotes on Crespi. We're sure he had no idea what was going on. We let him go. The prints on the truck steering wheel were too smudged to be of any use. Crespi's and my man Vermaat's were the only clear ones. The rest could have been anybody's. We haven't been able to find out who bought the pick-up. The buyer paid cash and gave a false name and non-existent address in Camden, New Jersey. Finally," Grant concluded, "Farid Attiyeh's back in the country. We'll pick him up when we pick up Burr."

"Things must be moving toward the climax. Hank Wheatland and Mary Mallory are both in Dubai. She'll be finishing up her part of TROIKA in the next couple of days, if she hasn't already. He's working with our Station Chief to wind up his part. We're waiting for the arrival of the plane from Iran. President Dunstan had gotten the Saudis to permit it to overfly their territory. Our AWACs and their Air Force will monitor it. When it reaches Israel, it will be tracked by Israel's Air Force, where it will be dealt with," Miller added. The meeting adjourned at just past eleven o'clock.

Black Sea Fleet Headquarters

Sevastopol Naval Station

12 December

1300 hours

In the office of the Joint-Interservice Planning Committee, the cover name for the GRU-ONI operation, Captain Second Class Vasily Valinsky and Brigadier General Generikh Blaskovich were in conference when their new orders arrived from Moscow. No written records were kept, excepting those which would show normal, dry, information on the cover operation. So far as the FSB was able to find out, its mission was to devise an interactive computer network to co-ordinate Army and Navy intelligence work during field maneuvers. The bogus operation generated a snow field of paper deep enough to bury any attempt to penetrate its real purpose. Enough material was left in non-secure files to satisfy Chevchevadze that the whole thing was bureaucratic games playing with nothing of interest to him. His aide, Colonel Voroshilov, was instrumental in keeping his chief informed of its progress.

Valinsky's aide brought the specially sealed tamper proof envelope to them and left before it was opened. There was no way that Chevchevadze's people could get a prior look at it. He broke the seal and slit open the envelope. The message was simple and direct:

MOST SECRET MOST URGENT

Priority One

MOVE ON OPERATION TROIKA. COMPLETE ARRANGEMENTS TO ROLL UP LOCAL NETWORK WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

Signed:

Ignatiev, Defense Minister

Bolgarov, Chief, Naval Operations

Valinsky handed the single sheet to Blaskovich, who read it and returned it to his partner. It was immediately shredded.

"I've been working with the Security Chief at Simferopol. His people have questioned every man on duty that day. Everyone remembered the truck and the two men in it. The work order proved to be false, and not particularly good, but it was dark and cold. The guards and loading dock people said it seemed to be real. The lighting in the warehouse isn't too bright. All they really had to read was the number of canisters to be transferred. Stupid, perhaps, but no conspiracy." General Blaskovich stated.

"The Navy Provost Marshal at our station has listed two deserters, both frogmen and both Tatars. He's arrested the commander of the unit, a Turkoman. The Provost's people think he deliberately accepted the two knowing that their papers were false. When their foot lockers were opened, they found old pay stubs, copies of transfer orders, some of the scrip we used for money in Afghanistan. The stubs and orders were forgeries, the scrip was genuine. The material in the rubber dinghy was real enough. The deserters were on a legitimate training mission. They must have planned the pick up and desertion for some time. We're sweating the unit commander. He's still insisting that he had nothing to do with anything illegal. There is still enough trouble in the Moslem republics to make the whole operation possible. We just don't know. Those guys are real professionals and left no trail to follow," Valinsky offered.

"It's my guess that our job is finished, Vasiliy, and so may be our promotions," Generikh Blaskovich, said somberly. "There is just nothing to roll up."

"I agree. Let's let Moscow know. We may still be able to salvage something from this mess," added a rueful Valinsky

Within the hour, Ignatiev and Bulgarov had received the reports from Sevastopol. The two old comrades met for "lunch" with President Kronsky. They decided to close the book on TROIKA, promote Valinsky and Blaskovich and send Grisha Obadivsky to Australia from Moscow.

Jerusalem, Israel

12 December

1300 hours

At the same time the Russian Military and Naval Intelligence Officers were reading their orders from Moscow, Mossad Chief Hanoach Caleb, Moshe Arielson, head of Shin Bet, and Ari Meron were meeting with the Prime Minister. He had called them as soon as he had received the copies of the Dubai documents.

"I just received these from Washington. It's just as we thought, Israel is the target," he said as he put the pages on his desk for the others to examine.

"It seems our 'cousins' want to give us a Hanukkah gift. The holiday starts the 14th. I guess they want to really light one hell of a big candle," said Hanoch Caleb, as he finished reading. The reference was to the Festival of Lights and the memorial of the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrians two thousand years earlier.

Levi Shalom answered, "I've been informed that there will be no explosion. Evidently the CIA agents are going to switch the nuclear explosives for inert material. President Dunstan has convinced the Saudis to let the aircraft overfly their air space and will track it with AWACs. We will pick it up on our radar and follow it until it completes its bomb run and then shoot it down."

"I guess there is nothing more for Mossad in this. My people will finish their investigation and round up our suspects--and the rest of the FSB apparatchiks that are still here," added Motti Arielson, the head of Shin Bet.

"If that's the case," said Ari Meron, "I'll send Zvika back to the States as soon as he finishes a few details."

Dubai

Ibn Rosht General Hospital

14 December

0630 hours

When Alfar Habibi arrived at the hospital, he was not surprised to find Dr. Abu Ismail already in the office.

"Alfar, I need to ship several isotopes to the hospital in Bahrain. There is a truck waiting at the loading dock. Would you kindly take the ones I have marked to the dock? The truckers will load them. I must prepare for rounds," he said as he moved from his desk to the clothes rack and put on his lab coat.

"Of course, Doctor. I shall see to it at once," said Habibi as he retrieved the key from the desk drawer. By the time Dr. Abu Ismail had walked down the corridor to the conference room, Alfar had unlocked the storage room and placed the two Russian marked canisters on a dolly. He left the room and went to the freight elevator and down to the loading dock. He carefully eased the canisters onto the platform. The truckers placed the material, gingerly, into the cargo space and drove away.

After Alfar had taken the canisters down to the loading dock, Mary and Khalifa returned to the storage room. Although the remaining material had been repositioned, she noticed that they were not quite in the original places. Mary had a gut-wrenching sense that they might have loaded a nuclear device into the canister and it was on its way to its final destination! Dr. Abu Ismail had returned to the floor. There was no way the three agents could check on the transfer.

At the same time, the two mercenaries were blindfolded and placed in the back of the truck which was moving the detonators, the shaped charges, and the bomb casing to the revetment at the start of the long runway at the Flying Club.

Mary had just come into the office when Alfar Habibi completed the transfer. As he placed the key in the drawer, he turned to her. "It is happening. I just loaded our canisters onto a truck. The doctor is not the least bit suspicious. Evidently when he checked the room and the packing crates, he was satisfied that everything is as it should be."

"Thank you, Mr. Habibi," she replied as she dialed the apartment. She quietly gave Hank the technician's information by prearranged code and hung up.

Hank finished dressing and called Ted Bradley. An eavesdropper would have heard two old friends arranging to meet for breakfast. He went to the garage and drove to the Sheraton to wait for Bradley who entered the dining room less than ten minutes after Hank arrived.

"It's going down, Ted. Our friend has moved the material from the hospital. The plane should arrive, I think, sometime after dark tonight," Hank reported.

"My tailer has been following a truck from the docks. It's headed for the Flying Club. I'll alert the Embassy. They'll get in touch with the locals. We want no bloodshed. The boss wants Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail taken alive, after the plane takes off. Anyone else in the operation is for the locals to handle," Ted said.

Hank returned to the apartment to wait for Ted Bradley's call confirming that everything was in place at the Flying Club. At four-twenty the call came. He left a message on the dresser simply saying that he was out with Ted and Frank.

Mary walked into the apartment, saw the note and settled down for a long, tense, evening. Without a car, she was virtually stranded at the hospital. When she heard nothing by six-thirty, she called Khalifa Hasan to invite her to dinner. The apartment refrigerator was kept well stocked, so meal preparation was not difficult. Khalifa accepted and arrived at about seven-thirty with a tabbouleh salad as her contribution. They ate quietly. After dinner Khalifa returned to her apartment. Mary hesitated for a moment, but decided to ignore the bug and called the Flying Club.

Royal Flying Club

1830 hours

By the time it was fully dark, Hank, Ted Bradley, Frank Boyer and Alfred Granger were sitting in the darkened dining room with a full view of the revetments, hangars and runways.

"I'm not entirely surprised to see you here, Mr. Granger. When you greeted the Bradleys the other night at dinner, I sensed that you and Ted had more than a casual acquaintance. Just what is your position, here, aside from being President of the Club?" Hank inquired.

"Us old MI5 and MI6 types never really retire, you know. We're always at Her Majesty's call. Ever since the Emirates' status was changed, we have been keeping a discreet presence. When your Embassy types called the local police and intelligence agencies, I was informed as a matter of routine. I, in turn, called Ted Bradley. Yes, of course we know who he is--have known, for quite a while. Glad to be of help," Granger explained as he offered Hank his hand.

"The local government doesn't want to be involved in an international incident that could be traced to their negligence. As it stands now, Hank, the local police have the entire airfield staked out. They have strict orders not to move in until the plane is safely airborne. There is a SWAT squad hidden in the revetment, a second in the main hangar and a third at the exit road from the club. Just in case," said Ted Bradley.

The phone rang. Granger picked it up and said quietly, "Granger".

"Mr. Granger, it's Mary Lyons. I need to speak with my husband. It's an emergency!"

Granger handed Hank the phone. "It's your wife," he whispered.

"Hank, I think there's been an awful mistake. When we were switching the--the containers, we heard the security patrol and dowsed the lights for a minute. We made, what I hope, was the right transfer. When I went

back this afternoon to check, I noticed that the remaining containers were not in their previous places. My God, Hank. I may have sent the real things!" Mary said in a strained voice.

Hank controlled his anger and anguish. "Mary", he said, "I'll let the others know and Ted will have to get to the Company and let them know. This will change our plans. The plane must be blown out of the sky before it completes its run. I'll deal with the local matter later."

He hung up and motioned to Ted Bradley. Hank reported the gist of Mary's call. Bradley shook his head, left the room and drove back to Dubai, passing Dr. Abu Ismail on the road.

Bradley went directly to his office and placed an urgent call on the scramble line to the CIA Director. Afterward he called the Flying Club and spoke with Hank. "I called home. Phil is alerting all the others. His feeling is that nothing will be changed but an order as to where the plane is to be intercepted and destroyed."

Hank and Granger resumed their vigil. As they finished placing themselves, the roar of a car engine was heard. The headlights illuminated the far corner of the room. Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail parked the vehicle at the side entrance to the control tower and mounted the stairs. As soon as he entered the room, he activated the tower equipment and sat still at the console.

The waiting began.

Air Force Base

Chabahar, Iran

14 December

0700 hours

Captain Suliman Bakr stood at rigid attention in the Commandant's office. Though a career officer, Bakr's promotions had been deferred several times because of a seeming inability to master the controls of the most advanced aircraft on the base. But his handling of the older Mysteres and Mirages was impressive: he made the older "birds" sing.

"At ease, Captain," said the base commander, "Our nation has need of a pilot with your special abilities. It is a mission of extreme danger. One which may end with your entry into Paradise as a soldier of immense courage."

The young officer stood at ease. "As the Hajayatollah commands, Sir. What is the mission I must perform for our glorious Islamic Republic?"

"You are to fly to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates in a Mystere fitted with extra fuel tanks. Once there, you will be fitted with an atomic device, designed to attack and destroy our hated enemy, the Zionist Entity!" his superior said as he stood and shook his hand.

"Insh'Allah. Allah-hu Akhbar" he replied, as he saluted and turned to leave. Bakr was not given to bouts of anxiety or fear, but as he left the Command Headquarters, he had both emotions. He could not refuse the assignment, but he was not yet ready to enter the next world.

By mid-morning, flight preparations were completed and he made ready for take-off at dusk. His flight instructions ordered him to fly out of Iran, over the Persian Gulf, always in international waters, and down to an airfield outside Dubai, where he would be met by the partisans of a group known only as Al Suyuf Al

Kharb--The Swords of War.

The next step in the mission would be divulged to him just before leaving the airfield in Dubai. All maps, recognition codes and final instructions would be given to him there.

1800 hours

As Captain Suliman Bakr's Mystere lumbered down the runway with two extra wing-tip fuel tanks, a slightly different scenario was forming in his mind.

At 1815 hours local time, he was airborne and hugging the Iranian border preparatory to his flight down the Persian Gulf to the airfield outside Dubai.

USAF AIRWACS

Saudi Air Space

14 December

1905 hours

"Skywatch One to Skywatch base!"

"Go Skywatch One."

"We just picked up a bogie out of Iran. He's flying straight down the middle of the Gulf. Request RSAF to have bogie identify himself."

"Roger. Skywatch One. He's OK. His flight plan was cleared for training trip down Gulf with permission to do turn-around over UAE."

"Thanks Skywatch Base. Skywatch One out."

In his Mystere, Capt. Suliman Bakr said a short prayer of thanks.

Dubai

2015 hours

He saw the lights of Dubai almost directly below him on his right wing-tip, banked to his right and began a slow descent onto the Royal Flying Club runway, when Abu Ismail turned on the lights. The pilot slowed his aircraft to a crawl and moved it to the far end of the long runway. A tanker truck moved onto the runway, waited for Capt. Bakr to get out of the cockpit and topped off his fuel tanks. The flight had taken just under two hours.

Inside the revetment, the two armorers were busy installing the canisters, shaped charges and detonators into the casing. Their guards stood directly behind and to one side of each man, armed with AK47 assault rifles. As soon as that task was completed, the armorers placed the bomb on a dolly, moved it out to the Mystere, loaded and armed it. With the installation completed, the older Tatar spoke quietly to his partner. Before the guards had a chance to fire, their supposed victims turned and killed each with one blow from Russian Army knives they had hidden in the casing crate on the second day the Tatars were freed to walk around in the warehouse.

The dead men's rifles fired as their hands convulsed in a death grip and they fell to the ground. Unable to see what was happening, Dr. Abu Ismail smiled. The mercenaries received what was due them, as promised. In their hidden positions, the SWAT Teams held their fire.

The leader of Al Suyuf Al Kharb descended from the control tower with a flight case containing the bearings to Tel Aviv, the International recognition codes, and the final orders. Capt. Suliman Bakr saluted and climbed back into the cockpit. The physician went back to the control tower and guided the Mystere down the runway. The Iranian pilot took off into the night. It was 8:25 PM, local time.

Dr. Abu Ismail climbed down from the control tower, The entire area was flooded with light from the cars and vans surrounding the revetment and hangars.

"Dr. Ibrahim Abu Ismail, in the name of the United Arab Emirates, I place you under arrest. Please do not make a sudden move, sir, we have no desire to harm you," said the head of UAE Intelligence.

Boyer, Wheatland and Granger stood in the deep shadows behind the vehicles. Their mission was, for the moment, completed.

"I'm finished here, Ted," Hank said as he turned to Al Granger. "I'd like to call my wife and tell her I'm on my way. May I use your phone?"

The "not quite retired" MI5 man handed the phone to Hank who called Mary.

"It's over, Mary. I'm on my way back to the apartment," he said.

Mary and Khalifa had just finished dinner preparations, when Hank arrived. Mary served. The conversation was seemingly casual.

"My vacation is over in a few days, Mary. Do you think you can wind up your consultation by the end of the week?" Hank asked.

"I guess so Hank. I would like to meet with Dr. MacPherson and give him the preliminary findings. As the Medical Director, he has the right to anything I found. It's going to be difficult for him to find a new project director, but that isn't my area of expertise," she replied.

When the meal was over, Mary and Khalifa cleared the table and placed the dishes in the dishwasher. They returned to the living room and had the ritual three cups of coffee. In her short period in Dubai, Mary had learned the Middle Eastern custom of offering guests three cups of coffee as a signal the meal was ended and guests were free to leave.

When the third cup was drunk, Khalifa returned to her apartment. Her feelings were very mixed. On the one hand, she had enjoyed working with Dr. Abu Ismail. It made her espionage work palatable. On the other, she was horrified that he was so willing to destroy so many others for a egomaniacal dream. Khalifa sat down on her sofa and slipped into exhausted sleep. She awoke several hours later, just as dawn was breaking. Her body ached from the uncomfortable position in which she slept.

Mary had not been able to reach Alfar Habibi at his apartment during the evening. She sensed that a late night call might well be monitored more carefully than it would have been earlier. Hank had shown her the bug in the wall. She could only assume that all the staff quarters were also bugged. It was almost seven o'clock when she finally reached him. The call was very short. She simply said that she would be a little late, and that Dr. Abu Ismail would probably not be in that morning. The Israeli agent understood.

When Mary completed her calls, Hank turned to her and said, "I hope you didn't make a mistake. You're not a trained agent, but there isn't a hell of a lot of room for a margin of error. This plane will be shot down and with luck, there won't be an atomic fallout. Nevertheless, you should have kept better control over the transfer. We'll just have to sit tight and find out what will happen."

USAF AWACS

Saudi Arabian Airspace

14 December

2310 hours

"Hunter One to Hunter base."

"Roger, Hunter One."

"We have a bogie clearing UAE airspace, moving into ours. Doesn't respond to identify request."

"He's O.K. Hunter One. Just monitor. RSAF has orders to permit the overflight. Out."

Capt. Suliman Bakr altered his flight plan as he cleared the United Arab Emirates airspace and entered Saudi Arabia. It called for him to fly almost directly West, out over the Persian Gulf into Saudi airspace then West to a point near the Saudi town of Khurs. From there he was to follow a course Northwest to the tip of the Red Sea where Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia almost met. Once over Israel, he was to skirt the Israeli-Egyptian border to the Mediterranean Sea, fly North to Tel Aviv and drop his bomb.

He turned at Khurs, but altered his flight path to a more North by Northwest position. He carefully checked his fuel gauges. There was more than enough to complete his flight. He reached the Red Sea about two hundred kilometers South of the original plan.

Capt. Bakr lifted his aircraft to the drop height and released his load over the water and veered toward the coast of Israel. At fifteen hundred meters the detonators imploded, the bomb exploded. There was a roar and flash as the canisters erupted. The debris from the blast fell, harmlessly, into the waters of the Red Sea. No mushroom cloud filled the sky.

"Blue Leader to Blue Two. Nahum, what the hell was that?" asked the surprised IAF flight leader who had picked up the Mystere as ordered.

"Blue Two to Blue Leader. It looks like the bogie blew up, Juval. Wait a minute, he's still flying! He just wagged his wings, turned on his landing lights and lowered his flaps. Seems to be heading toward our base."

"Follow him down. I think he wants to defect," answered Blue Leader.

The two Israeli aircraft escorted the foreign plane as he flew directly to the joint military-civilian airfield north of Eilat. Capt. Suliman Bakr landed his plane and climbed out of the cockpit into a ring of armed Israeli soldiers with guns pointed. He raised his arms above his head. He had completed his plan.

An Israeli Airbase

14 December

0500 hours

The Iranian pilot was seated in a small room off the ready room being interrogated by a Farsi speaking Israel Air Force intelligence officer.

"Why did you defect, Captain?" the interrogator asked.

"I am a Baha'i. Ever since the overthrow of the Shah, I have been looking for a chance to leave Iran--they persecute us there even more virulently than they persecute what Jews remain. At first, there was the chance of retaliation against my family. That disappeared when it was wiped out in the earthquake," Bakr explained.

"Baha'is are not permitted to serve. Why were you not dismissed?" The interrogation continued.

"From the beginning, when I first volunteered for the Air Force, I hid my Baha'i identity. Even in the Shah's forces we were suspect. After all, sir, the center of our faith is in Haifa, is it not?" he said, calmly.

"What was your mission, Captain?" the Farsi speaking officer inquired.

"I was to fly from Dubai to Tel Aviv, climb to a great height, and drop a bomb. I realized that if the device would be exploding so high above the land, it had to be an atomic device, which would destroy all of Israel, including our sacred city of Haifa. When I took off from Dubai and opened my flight packet, I decided that the half-formed plans I have had for all the years could be accomplished at the same time I could avoid the disaster. At that point, I altered the flight plan and dropped the device out over the open sea. There was no doubt, sir, that I was not supposed to survive. That is counter productive," said a smiling Captain Bakr.

"Captain, You will remain here under surveillance until I have filed my report with IAF Headquarters. The final decision is theirs." The IAF intelligence officer motioned to the guard standing behind the Iranian and who led the pilot out to a building at the perimeter of the base.

Captain Salim Bakr's Mystere was standing on a pad across the field from his room. It looked tired and grimy, but she had done the job exceedingly well. He would miss her.

Tel Aviv, Israel

15 December

0900 hours

The IAF intelligence officer returned to Tel Aviv and immediately dictated his report. It was taken directly to Major General Amnon Safran, Commandant of AMAN Israeli Military Intelligence. Safran read it and called Hanoch Caleb, Moshe Arielson and Defense Minister, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Eliahu Krochmal.

"I just got this from Southern Command. I knew that we were expecting a rogue plane over our territory, but I understood it was to be shot down after overflying Tel Aviv. Evidently the pilot chickened out and defected. I think we need to wrap this up."

Moshe Arielson said, "Shin Bet has identified the driver of the phony Weizmann van. He and two other employees of the Marine Institute were recently hired as drivers and maintenance men. Their contact was a Christian Arab from Shomron-Nablus. The driver was told to pick up the van and the work order at a cafe in Eilat. It was already parked behind the cafe with the Weizmann Institute uniform in it. His orders were to drive the vehicle to Dimona, get back to Eilat, bury the canisters, then, after dark, dig them up, head out to Aqaba, deliver the containers to the Jebel al Tarik and get back. They claim the man from Shomron said it was

part of something called Al Suyuf Al Kharb. My men are still sweating them. We want the man from Shomron."

"I will relieve Zvi Ben Yosef and send him back to Swarthmore College to finish his sabbatical. He can be back there within a week," added Hanoch Caleb. "May I use your phone Eliahu? I'd like to get him at Ari Meron's office, right now."

The Defense Minister handed the phone to Caleb. The call was short. He was smiling as he handed the instrument back to General Krochmal.

By ten-thirty the heads of the intelligence agencies had met with Prime Minister Levi Shalom. Gen. Safran had sent a copy to the Prime Minister's office in preparation for the meeting. Levi Shalom read the interrogation report, and asked his private secretary, Malka Bar-On, to bring him the entire OPERATION TROIKA file. As she turned to leave, the Prime Minister asked her to remain.

"Malka, I'll need you with your pad. We, Hanoch, Motti, Amnon and Eliahu, are going to draft a news release. It will be intentionally vague. Before it is released, I want to call Presidents Dunstan and Kronskey."

It was noon before the draft release was finished. Malka Bar-on placed calls to the United States and Russia. The Israelis waited impatiently as the Red Phone light blinked. Finally, the indicator light glowed steadily.

Washington, DC

President Dunstan's bedroom

15 December

0530 hours

President Peter Dunstan was awakened by the telephone ring. He glanced at the line light and picked up instantly. Levi Shalom was calling.

Moscow, Russia

President Kronskey's Office

15 December

1330 hours

Simultaneous with the Washington call, President Andrei Kronskey's red phone buzzed. He lifted the receiver to hear Levi Shalom's voice.

Prime Minister Shalom's Office

Jerusalem, Israel

1330 hours

"I'm sorry to disturb you gentlemen, but there has been an interesting development in OPERATION TROIKA. The suicide pilot of the terrorists jet, decided that it was not time for him to visit the houris in Islamic heaven. He jettisoned his load over the Red Sea and defected to us. For his protection we will state

that he was killed when his plane was shot down. Our Festival of Lights, which began last evening, evidently will not have a spectacular and lethal light show," said an elated Levi Shalom.

As his American and Russian counterparts offered their congratulations, the Israeli leader continued, "We have prepared a press release to be aired at the evening radio and television news broadcasts. It reads as follows:

Jerusalem, Israel

15 December

The Israel Defense Forces announced just moments ago that an unidentified plane was downed over the Mediterranean. The pilot was killed. The aircraft's mission is not clear, but evidently it was timed to coincide with this evening's Hanukkah celebration at the Sound and Light Show over Dizengoff Square.

Prime Minister Levi Shalom said in an interview with Kol Israel and the Israel Defense Forces Network, that a co-operative effort has been launched by Israel's Shin Bet, the Russian Police, the American Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Interpol to apprehend other terrorists involved in the aborted terror attack.

"Before we release it, gentlemen, do either of you have comments or suggestions for changes?" he requested.

"Just one, Levi," offered Peter Dunstan. "I think Andrei and I should issue statements within the hour of your release offering congratulations and expressing our desires to be fully co-operative."

"I'm in complete agreement with Peter, Levi. We have been most successful in keeping the operation from leaking to the press. At some point, however, we must label it as an 'attempted nuclear attack'. I doubt very much that any Arab state would be in a position to object to our working with you," added Andrei Kronskey.

"I will send a private letter to the King of Saudi Arabia thanking him for his permission for the overflight. We've been able to keep this under wraps, so he won't be embarrassed in his own turf," President Dunstan added, just before the international connection was broken.

Washington

The Oval Office

15 December

0630 hours

President Dunstan dressed hurriedly after the call from Levi Shalom and went to the Oval Office from which he called FBI Director Richard Grant.

"Dick. I just got a call from Israel. The terror attack won't take place. The pilot defected. I want you to move ASAP to wind up our end."

"Thank you, Mr. President. I'll order the immediate arrest of Farid Attiyeh. We've already apprehended the driver of the truck who picked up the material from Earle."

The President placed his next call to CIA Director Philip Miller. "Phil. The attack on Tel Aviv won't happen. The pilot landed his plane in Israel and has asked for asylum. Do whatever is necessary to finish your part of OPERATION TROIKA."

"Yes, Mr. President", he answered as he swiveled his desk chair around to his scramble phone. In an instant he was connected with Ronald Grover in Paris.

"Grover," the station chief answered.

"Ron, Phil. Let Surete know. I want the pick up of Kaoukji to be their operation. So far, Moscow Center is out of the loop. The Russians want it that way. It's up to France to decide what to do about Kaoukji."

"What about Mary and Hank?" Grover inquired.

"I'm ordering them back home by the end of the week. It would be nice for them to be home for Christmas," he said.

"Phil, when did you get sentimental?" asked a chuckling Grover.

"Good by, Ron," said Phil Miller as he hung up.

Miller called Ted Bradley in Dubai directing him to inform Henry Wheatland and Mary Mallory to be prepared to leave the United Arab Emirates no later than December twenty-first.

Moscow Radio

15 December

1800 hours

The evening news broadcast had just finished reporting the Israeli press release and had gone live to President Kronskey's Kremlin Office.

"Mr. President, what is your reaction to the Israeli statement?"

Kronskey adjusted his reading glasses and read from the prepared script on his desk.

"On behalf of the Russian people, I congratulate Prime Minister Shalom and have placed the entire apparatus of our Military and Naval Intelligence Offices at the disposal of the Chief of Naval Operations, Fleet Admiral Bolgarov. We wish to end international terrorism forever."

"Thank you, Mr. President."

FSB Headquarters

A glowering Dimitri Chevchevadze watched the darkening screen of the television set in his office and called for his aide.

Colonel Voroshilov entered his superior's office having adjusted his face from its smile to the proper somber scowl he knew was expected of him.

"What the fuck is that son-of-a-bitch Kronskey talking about, Voroshilov? Is there a terrorist group in the Middle East we don't have in our pocket? Can this be part of that operation Grisha Obadivsky is connected with?" Chevchevadze said, his voice quivering with anger and frustration.

"It comes as surprise to me, sir. So far as I know, there are no terrorist groups that we do not control in some

fashion," Voroshilov replied, blandly. The mole was thoroughly successful. For all his cunning, the Director had not been able to smoke out Bolgarov's plant.

Washington

The Oval Office

1900 hours

"Good evening, my fellow Americans. As you have just heard, the Government of Israel has, once more, overcome a crisis. I congratulate Prime Minister Shalom and his security forces for their diligence and determination to maintain and strengthen that bastion of democracy. It would appear that there has been some involvement of American citizens in the dastardly endeavor. I have, this evening, ordered FBI Director, Richard Grant to quickly bring those individuals to justice.

"God bless you. God bless the United States Of America".

Epilogue

Berkeley, California

The University of California Chapel

29 June

1430 hours

A proud, recently graduated Dr. David Wheatland, Jr. walked down the Chapel aisle with his mother. At the altar he moved aside as his uncle, Henry Lyons Wheatland, approached, with his best man, Philip Miller. The four participants stood at altar together.

Seated in the first row were Zvi and Elisheva Ben Yosef. Beside them sat Colonel-General (Retired) Grigory Osipovich Obadivsky.

When the ceremony was over, the four TROIKA comrades met in the reception hall.

"What next, you two?" asked Zvi and Grisha simultaneously.

"I've retired and will be teaching International Relations here at Berkeley," said a beaming Hank Wheatland.

"I'm returning to Lawrence-Livermore," Mary said smiling.

"My husband has no manners," said Elisheva Ben Yosef. "I'm Zvika's wife. Mazel Tov, best wishes. We're on our way home just after the Fourth of July. Our sons are here visiting and Zvi wanted them to enjoy a typical American Fourth."

"As for me," added Grisha Obadivsky. "I too, will be teaching. I've been named to a new chair in Nuclear Physics at Moscow University."

"Dr. Abu Ismail?" Hank asked.

"Dead, I've been told. Apparently a suicide," said Zvi Ben Yosef, with grim satisfaction.

About the Author

Hersch Zitt lives in Verona, NJ, with his wife Ruth and several dogs.

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