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STORAGE

(The) sorcerers

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The bizarre red-enameled charm looked like nothing more than a broken letter T. But, as Peter Ward soon discovered, the strange little ornament had a diabolic significance. It would introduce him very promptly to a world that made his former life seem commonplace: the world of the occult. The world of the black mass, satanism, and diabolic rites.

The trail began in Washington and soon led to Geneva, a modern center for intrigue. To Paris, where a group of devil-worshippers had been performing their malevolent ceremonies since the reign of Louis XIV. And to Africa and the Caribbean, where the power of black magic was real, even when the magic itself was not.

Among many others, Peter Ward soon encountered the headmistress of a chic private school, a dead officer of the Soviet Secret Police who seemed very much alive, a sorcerer who practiced other-worldly magic for this-worldly political gain, and a pair of willing schoolgirls. He would also encounter cruelty, love, fanaticism, and, especially, evil. For although Peter Ward had been around, he really didn't know the power and the pervasiveness of evil until he ran up against *The Sorcerers*.

This new Peter Ward novel of intrigue is his second hardcover appearance, following publication of *The Mongol Mask* in 1968.

DAVID ST. JOHN is the name that clothes the identity of a man involved in U.S. intelligence work for over twenty years, now married and the father of several children. Earlier Peter Ward novels are *On Hazardous Duty*, *Return from Vorkuta*, *The Towers of Silence*, *Festival for Spies*, *One of Our Agents is Missing*, and *The Venus Probe*.



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The Sorcerers

DAVID ST. JOHN

WEYBRIGHT AND TALLEY

NEW YORK

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THE SORCERERS

SPRINTING AROUND THE CORNER, HE RAN DOWN Connecticut Avenue in long loping strides, glancing back from time to time to see whether he had lost his pursuer. One block, then a second, startled strollers staring at the running man.

Looking back again, he glimpsed a face under a streetlight locked in a grimace of strain. The same broad, stolid face, the same black serge suit. No, he had not lost him.

Checking his run, he slowed to gain the shelter of a doorway, walked down the tiled lobby, and nodded at the night watchman reading beside the elevator.

Lowering his paper, the watchman said, "Back so soon, Mr. Pedersen?"

"Sooner than I thought." He breathed heavily as he went up the staircase, pulling on the railing to ease the strain on his legs. On the third floor he took out a small key ring and opened the door of office Number 9, dropping the keys as he entered and closed the door. It was lettered *Paul Pedersen*, and below it: *Imports and Exports*.

Walking past a secretarial desk, he turned on a lamp in the inner office and doubled back. Standing beside the door, close to the wall, he glanced across the office and beyond the avenue to an illuminated display clock. Its hands pointed to 11:14.

As he waited, his breathing slowed and he listened intently. When the outer door opened, he realized he had heard no creaking stairs in the stillness, no heel clicks on the flooring. Very professional, he thought; the man knew how to take stairs, make a quiet approach.

Footsteps whispered toward him. His muscles tensed, and as the man came through the doorway, he struck the back of

his neck with the edge of his hand. The gun hit the carpet before the body.

Rolling over the limp man, Pedersen peeled back one eyelid, saw the immobile eyeball, and got up. From a desk drawer he took a small brown bottle, shook it, and drew out a swab set into the stopper. He turned the man's head, pressed the left ear forward, and swabbed the mastoid region. Then he got up and replaced the bottle that held a hypnotic in a skin-penetrating solution. Within a minute the drug should reach the bloodstream; seconds later, the brain.

Without the telltale mark of a needle.

Recovering the automatic, he jacked the ready shell from the chamber, fed it back into the magazine, and applied the safety. Carrying the pistol, he went through the office and into the hall. Over the railing he called, "Fred, I'm ready for that paper."

"Coming up."

He went back to the office, opened a wall safe and drew out a Polaroid flash camera. Fred came in, setting the catch behind him, and handed over the paper. It was the early edition of the morning *Post* that hit the street at eleven. The night watchman eyed the unconscious man and pulled off his cap. "You took the mother fast, Peter. No time to build a cultural bridge between East and West?"

"Not even to open a dialogue."

"What now?"

"Hang the *Out of Order* sign on the elevator, and ring me if anyone starts up the stairs. This creep may have had his own countersurveillor."

Fred went out of the office. Pedersen made camera adjustments and spread out the paper, front page up, beside the sleeping man's head. On it he placed the automatic, then got out the man's billfold. In it was a blue diplomatic card issued by the Department of State in favor of Yuri A. Makarov, third secretary of the Embassy of the U.S.S.R. in Washington.

Pedersen grimaced at the innocent designation. Makarov held the rank of major in the KGB, even though tonight he had done the shabby work of foot surveillor, a mere *topol-shchik*.

Placing the credential below the pistol, Pedersen stood up and took six Polaroid shots at different ranges and angles. He

developed each in turn, satisfied there would be no mistaking the man on the floor whose shallow, regular breathing signified he was deep in drugged sleep.

Pedersen opened the lower right-hand drawer of his desk and took out a half-pint of cheap gin. Placing it near the phone, he pressed a suction mike on the receiver and plugged the mike cord into a tape recorder concealed in a desk drawer.

Activating the recorder, he dialed the time signal, then the weather report, replaced the receiver, and began to speak: "My name is Peter Ward, and I am an attorney and a member of the District Bar. Tonight, at the request of Fred Prévost, security officer of the Canadian Embassy in Washington, I undertook to monitor the movements of Valentin Klimov of the Soviet Embassy. Klimov's name appears on the Washington diplomatic list as first secretary and cultural attaché. In reality Klimov heads the KGB *rezidentura* in the United States and holds the rank of colonel. Klimov previously served the KGB in Vienna, Berlin, Ottawa, and Cairo, and has appeared as a member of Soviet delegations at Bandung, Geneva, and the United Nations.

"At 2015 hours tonight Klimov's black Buick driven by a KGB assistant, Major Yuri Makarov, left the Soviet Embassy and proceeded to the Rive Gauche in Georgetown. They dined together, leaving the restaurant at 2205, proceeded north on Wisconsin, and cut east on Q as far as Twenty-third Street. Makarov, driving, alternately speeded and slowed, delayed at intersections, and otherwise gave indications of trying to detect and avoid surveillance."

He looked at the slowly revolving reel and wet his lips.

"The KGB Buick went south to Washington Circle and proceeded north on New Hampshire Avenue to Du Pont Circle. There they followed Massachusetts Avenue as far as the Iranian Embassy, where they turned down into Rock Creek Park. There, in a picnic area, they parked. Makarov and Klimov got out, and while Makarov stayed with the car, Klimov proceeded on foot to the next clearing, twenty or thirty yards away.

"Waiting for him was a man I was able to identify as Donald T. Waring, minister of the Canadian Embassy and liaison officer for NATO affairs."

Mentally he added: The man whose job it is to receive and transmit to Ottawa every classified paper he receives from State and Defense.

“Waring and Klimov appeared to be in conversation. I was unable to determine whether any material passed between them due to the darkness and the fact that Makarov detected my presence while I was photographing the rendezvous.

“He took out after me, following me to my office, where I was able to knock out Makarov and identify him from his documents. I then photographed him and administered a hypnotic that will prevent him from remembering the episode. So at this point there is no reason to believe that either Makarov or his chief will realize Waring has been compromised.”

Shutting off the recorder, Peter Ward ran a patch cord to a second recorder and duplicated the tape. By now, Makarov was stirring, so Peter knelt beside the Russian and spoke lowly and distinctly. “Tonight you dined with Klimov at the Rive Gauche, then drove him to Rock Creek Park for his meeting with Donald Waring. Feeling ill, you left the car and made your way to Connecticut Avenue where you visited a series of bars. You are now in the last of those bars, and when you get up you will take a taxi to your apartment on Harvard Street. You will tell Klimov, your wife, and others only what I have told you. Repeat my last instruction.”

Makarov opened his eyes and looked dully around. Sitting up he said, “I will tell Klimov, my wife, and others only what you have told me.”

Peter handed back his pistol and billfold. Makarov pocketed them unconcernedly while Peter opened the gin bottle, sprinkled a little on the Russian’s coat, and said, “Drink a little.”

Dutifully, Makarov swallowed a mouthful and returned the bottle to Peter, who turned him around and pointed him at the door. Unlocking it, he said, “Good night, Yuri Alexandrovitch.”

“Good night,” Makarov said in the same monotonous voice, and left the office.

Listening, Peter heard the sound of his shoes descending the stairs, and after a minute the voice of Fred. “The zombie just left. Not even a glance at me.”

“Come on up, *ami*.”

Peter boxed both tape reels in their cardboard mailers, put

one in his wall safe along with the Polaroid prints. Locking the safe, he concealed the slave recorder and was removing the suction microphone when Prévost came in. Taking off his cap, he said, "I never thought it would work, Peter."

"But it did." He gave the tape to the Canadian, who looked at it and grimaced.

"Going through with it?"

Prévost pocketed the tape. "I'd be a hell of a security officer if I didn't. Still, Waring's got a lot of friends in high places. Some of the wrong kind." He smiled bleakly. "I'm laying my job on the line, Peter—not to mention yours."

"We knew the risks. Stand fast and we'll see justice done."

"Yeah? My first class in law school the professor told us there was no connection between justice and the law."

"He was right."

They shook hands and the Canadian left the office.

Peter peeled the false name and number from his office door, crumpled the gummed strips, and put them in his pocket. Then he turned out the office lights and locked his door, reflecting that the dropped keys had been the only uncertain part of the lure. But by then Makarov was too eager to take alarm, too hot after his prey to sense that the episode had been staged.

He walked down the stairs, heels making sharp sounds that echoed hollowly through the deserted building. Letting himself out, Peter locked the street entrance and glanced up and down Connecticut Avenue. No Makarov, no black Buick with Klimov at the wheel; nothing. A block away, he hailed a taxi and told the driver to take him to an apartment building on upper Massachusetts Avenue.

It was one of the newer constructions, floodlighted outside, with armed guards and special locks for residents' protection. Through the glass lobby doors he could see a uniformed watchman, a holstered revolver on his belt, a German police dog at his feet. Dog and man eyed Peter suspiciously as he spoke through the intercom. "Miss Toni Jackson, please."

"She expecting you?"

"Yes. Peter Ward."

The watchman dialed the apartment extension, relayed the message, and opened the electric lock. As Peter entered, the man said, "No offense, sir. We have to be careful."

"Glad you are." He crossed the silent lobby and took the

elevator to Toni's sixth-floor duplex. She was waiting for him in slacks and sweater, a slim olive-skinned girl with dark eyes and shoulder-length dark hair. Kissing him, she said huskily, "I hated leaving you there in the park. After I drove away what happened?"

"Two men made contact, the third chased me off."

"Which one?"

"The driver—Makarov."

Locking the door, she exhaled. "A drink?"

"With pleasure."

He followed Toni through the studio room, hung with large camera portraits of children, took the carpeted staircase to her living area. The coffee table, he noticed, held a percolator and several cups; an ashtray mounded with half-smoked cigarettes.

He tamped and lighted his pipe and watched her mix Scotch highballs at the cellarette. "You're a good tail-job," he said approvingly.

"Anytime," she said with a tight laugh. "And thanks for dinner. I don't score the Rive Gauche every night."

"You should—with your talents and . . . attractions."

Their glasses touched and they drank. Toni tilted her head and eyed him. "Care to tell me what it was all about?"

"In time." From his trouser pocket he drew a Minox camera and handed it to her. "Thanks for the loan."

"Did you use it?"

"Four frames."

"Then I'll start developing," she said. "Infrared can be tricky." Lithely she went down the stairs and Peter heard the darkroom door open and close.

Toni Jackson, he thought; one brief, unhappy marriage to a Foreign Service officer, then a career in which she had become Washington's leading photographer of children. He had met her and her husband at the Buenos Aires Embassy, and after the death of his own wife, Toni had come to him in Washington on a minor legal matter. At the time she had not known his Agency connection, but over the two years of their friendship his sporadic working schedule and long absences from Washington made question and answer unnecessary. Still, tonight was the first time he had involved Toni in anything remotely related to espionage.

As he added Scotch to his glass, he saw her come up the stairs.

"I think you'll have some pictures, Peter. Who was the man the Russians met?"

"Confidentially?"

"Of course. Isn't everything you do confidential—if not secret?"

"Donald Travis Waring."

Her face paled. "Don Waring. The Canadian?"

"Afraid so."

"But how—*why* . . . ?"

He shook his head. "Not my job to find out. In fact, everything we did tonight was unofficial."

"But Waring . . ." She shook her head unbelievably. "Such a handsome man—wealth, social prominence, a brilliant career—why would *he* work for the Russians?"

"That's the kind they love—guys with access to power and information."

"They must have some hold over him."

"Probably they do."

Breathing deeply she finished her drink and built a second, lips tight, her face troubled.

"You won't be involved, Toni. You didn't actually see the contact, so there's nothing you could testify to if things ever reach court."

"I wouldn't mind, if it helped."

"Thanks. Anyway, from now on it's Canada's bag."

Her wristwatch buzzed, she shut off the timer and went back to the darkroom. Peter laid a Wes Montgomery tape on her recorder and set the volume low. When Toni came back, she brushed hair from her forehead and said, "Developed fine. They're drying now, and then we can print."

"Sorry about the overtime."

She shrugged. "My first sitting's not until eleven. What are you doing tomorrow—I mean, today?"

"A little shooting—pheasant season in Virginia."

"At your sister's place?"

He nodded. "Southlands."

"How did you happen to get involved if this is a Canadian affair?"

"Favor for a friend who works in security. About a month ago he took his family to an outdoor concert at Carter Bar-

ron Amphitheater. After they got home his wife discovered she'd lost a brooch, so Fred went back to look for it. In the process he noticed a black Buick with DPL tags near another car whose number he thought to write down. Next day he learned the cars were registered to Klimov and Waring. He reported to his ambassador and was told to lay off, forget it—he was imagining things. Fred couldn't forget it. He notified External Affairs and got nowhere. So, because the U.S. has a pretty heavy commitment to NATO—and because our own security might be compromised—he got in touch with me.”

She smiled. “Peter Ward—court of last resort.”

“How about those prints?”

Together they went into the darkroom, and while Peter relaxed against a workbench, Toni focused her enlarger and made four-by-five blowups of each negative. Removing her apron, she said, “Plenty of definition. Waring's easily recognizable and so is Klimov. Lucky for the ladies you don't handle divorce cases.”

“The Agency keeps me too busy to handle much of anything.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Peter, will this get you in trouble?”

“Maybe. To lower the odds I'll take one set of prints. Keep the others and the negatives for me.”

They went back to the living room and settled down on the sofa. Peter finished his drink and stifled a yawn. Stretching, he said, “Time to curtain the episode and go home.”

“You won't get a taxi at this hour.”

“I'll borrow your car.”

Rising, she gathered his lapels in her hands and pulled him to his feet. “Unavailable.”

“Alternatives?”

“None. I played in the sandlot with the boys and now I don't want to be one of the fellows any longer. I want to be me again. I'm a girl, Peter. Remember?”

“How could I forget?” Smiling, he took her in his arms and kissed lips that were no longer cool. When Toni drew back, she murmured, “Do *all* your ladies have to have a speciality?”

“It's not an absolute requirement.”

“Liar,” she breathed, and flicked her tongue across his lips. Lifting her, he carried her into the darkness of the bedroom.

2

TREADING SOFTLY, HE MOVED DOWN A ROW OF corn shucks watching his German shorthair weaving among them two rows away. Suddenly the pointer froze and Peter angled toward her, holding his Browning superposed with both hands. Ten feet behind her he slipped off the safety and said, "Go, Shelagh!"

At once the dog lunged forward and a brace of pheasants lurched into frantic flight. Swinging on the cock, Peter fired and watched the ringneck tumble. The hen spread her wings in a long glide that carried her to the safety of thick gorse on the cornfield's border. Shelagh was racing happily after the downed cock when she braked and came to a point, nostrils twitching in the light afternoon breeze.

Going to his dog, Peter touched her flank and saw her bound away. Two cocks jumped skyward and Peter dropped one with his remaining shell. He broke the gun, blew through the barrels, and waited while his pointer retrieved the birds. Fine cocks, he thought; the last would have been a perfect double. Rising, he added both pheasants to a prior kill in the game pocket of his coat, patted Shelagh, and heard the sound of an approaching engine.

His sister's jeep bucked over the trail, and he angled toward it until she braked. Engine still running, Anne said, "Your office called. A man's coming out to see you."

He got onto the seat beside her and whistled Shelagh into the rear. "Three birds," he said. "Dad always told us there was nothing like a cornfield to change your luck."

Shifting into gear, Anne said, "You don't seem surprised. Were you expecting a call?"

"I'm always expecting a call."

She backed around and headed toward the house. "I wonder why he's coming here, whoever he is?"

"When he arrives he'll probably tell me."

"Yes," she said dryly, "very likely he will. Except that you've been preoccupied and somber ever since you got here."

"Somber?"

"Yes. Quite unlike you."

"Did the man have a name?"

"Forster. Bob Forster. I don't believe you've mentioned him before."

I haven't had occasion to, Peter thought. Forster headed the Office of Special Security Affairs, and OSSA had direct access to Avery Thorne, the Director of Central Intelligence. Normally, Forster would have summoned him to Langley, not driven twenty miles into the Fairfax countryside. So, his mission would be an urgent one, and Peter could guess what it was.

In the kitchen he emptied his game pocket and presented the cook with three plump pheasants, pulled off his coat, and stood his Browning in the corner. His nephew, Kyle, would enjoy cleaning it after school.

At the bar Peter mixed a Canadian Club highball and sipped as he scanned the morning paper. After a while the doorbell rang, his sister answered it, and he heard her say, "Mr. Forster? You'll find my brother in the library."

Pulling off his topcoat, Forster came in. He was a man of medium height with a ruddy face and dark hair streaked with gray. Without getting up, Peter said, "Drink, Bob?"

"No thanks, Peter." He glanced around uncomfortably and sat down.

"Coffee?"

Forster shook his head. "I imagine you know why I'm here."

"You tell me."

The security officer ran a hand through his wiry hair. "It has to do with your activities last night. Fellow named Fred Prévost—friend of yours—who works in the Canadian Embassy turned in a tape to the FBI this morning. The tape reported an alleged meeting between Klimov, the KGB *rezident*, and one of the embassy's higher-ups."

"Donald T. Waring," Peter said musingly. "Yes, I saw the contact."

Muscles worked in Forster's face. "I thought as much. Well,

the director heard from the FBI and sent me to see you. What the hell's it all about?"

"Seems simple enough. On the face of it Waring's working with or for the KGB."

"That can't be proved," Forster snapped. "Even if it could, it's no business of yours—of CIA's. It's Canadian business first, then State's. CIA doesn't figure."

"And hasn't." Sitting forward, Peter pulled Toni's envelope from his hip pocket and tossed it to his inquisitor. "Not officially or even provably."

Forster opened the envelope and studied the four photographs in turn. Then he replaced them in the envelope. "Your work?" he said hostilely.

"My work—accomplished after duty hours. At no cost to the Agency."

"I never heard about these photographs," Forster complained, and eyed the envelope as though it were scorching his hands.

"You're the first to know."

"Why weren't they mentioned?"

"At the time I recorded my report I wasn't sure I'd photographed anything. It was dark, and infrared film isn't always reliable." He began filling his pipe with Middleton 5.

Forster grimaced. "What made you get into this?"

"Did I do something wrong? Like violating a regulation?"

"You know damned well you did. How many violations I couldn't begin to tell you. What's behind it, Peter?"

Stretching his legs, Peter ran one hand through his sandy hair. "So many people are busy building bridges to Moscow and Peking, our closest ally's been ignored. Just giving Canada a hand can't be all that bad."

"Embarrassing to Ottawa—not to mention the Canadian ambassador. *And* the director."

Peter's pipe made a sucking sound. "Think Waring will be embarrassed, or Prévost lose his job?"

The security officer blinked.

"Well?" said Peter.

"I—well, that's up to the Canadians. They may want to hush things up. Domestic political considerations, not to mention the NATO angle."

Peter nodded slowly. "I wouldn't like a hush-up. Not at all. What I'd like is to have Waring grilled jointly by the Moun-

ties and the Bureau to find out if there's anything on NATO he *hasn't* passed to the Soviets. Then between them they might want to run him against the KGB." He sat forward. "It's been done before. Successfully."

"I know. But—"

"Prévost's prepared to follow through," Peter said levelly. "So am I. To encourage corrective measures by responsible elements I made a duplicate of the tape plus additional prints. If necessary, exposure in the press will force Waring out of business, though it doesn't seem entirely sensible to kill so golden a goose."

"You'd do that? Embarrass the director?" Forster stared at him.

"Oh, I'd do it," Peter said calmly, "but the director can't be held accountable for my after-hours activities. So—" He broke off as the security officer rose. "What are you going to do?"

"Endorse your recommendations."

"Good. And if this is handled with the right amount of cool, Waring's pals need never know."

Forster picked up his topcoat. "I was a little hot when I came here, but I have to admit you played it just about right. No hard feelings?"

"None."

"I'm glad you got those photos and kept a tape, Peter. I've got leverage now."

Use it, Peter said silently and watched his visitor go down the steps toward his car. Forster drove up the road, veering onto the lawn to let the bus from the Potomac School swerve past.

Peter picked Kyle and Robin off the steps and carried them into the kitchen where the cook was plucking the pheasants. The children begged colored feathers for their hats, and Kyle began cleaning the Browning.

Then Peter went up to the sewing room and told his sister what it was all about.

Toward evening a call from Avery Thorne took Peter to the Chevy Chase Club where the director had invited him for coffee and brandy.

They sat in a quiet corner of the men's bar, Thorne relaxed after paddle tennis and a rubdown, his silver hair im-

peccably combed. Fitting a cigarette into his ebony holder, the director said, "I gather Forster didn't handle my inquiries with an excess of diplomacy."

"We managed to communicate."

Thorne smiled faintly. "After hours you're kind of a gung-ho fellow. Any reason you couldn't have put the problem to me?"

"Two reasons, sir. First, as Agency jurisdictions go, you'd have had to forbid me to take a hand. Then, you'd have been personally involved when I went ahead. What I did was on my own." He set down his brandy glass. "What about Waring?"

"He was confronted and made no effort to deny his KGB contacts. Your photos did it. But he claims he hasn't passed anything worthwhile."

"Standard defense."

Thorne raised his Grand Marnier and sipped thoughtfully. "As we sit here, Waring's on the polygraph."

"What made him do it?"

"Claims his daughter was abducted from her school near Geneva—Villa Beauvoir. Klimov approached him here and said either Waring cooperated or he'd be flying to Europe to identify Diana's body."

"Lovely people, the KGB. But as treason motives go, that's one of the most understandable."

"So we've agreed," Thorne said calmly. "Throughout the two governments, not quite a dozen people know about the case, and if the polygraph shows Waring cooperative, the Bureau will double him against Klimov—a little deception op we'll help in along with the Mounties."

"And Waring's daughter?"

"That's his price for full disclosure. She's to be brought back alive and sound from wherever the Sovs are holding her."

Peter sat forward. "That's a big order, sir."

"And that's why I'm bucking the job to you."

AT DULLES AIRPORT NEXT EVENING PETER boarded a TWA nonstop jet that landed him on Geneva's Cointrin runway at dawn. During the three-mile ride to the city he reflected that there was more urgency to his task than even Thorne had suggested: having lost his virginity with the KBG, Donald Waring's next move could be defection, a matter easily arranged by Klimov and his group. What could bring the Canadian to that ultimate step? Desperate that his daughter would not be returned to him alive, by CIA, Waring might then cross over on the Soviet promise of finding her alive and well in Moscow.

From Cointrin the taxi followed the Route de Meyrin, crossed the oily Rhône, and skirted the old part of the city to the Route de Florissant where Peter's hotel was located.

In Geneva he usually stayed at the Richemond or the Beau Rivage, but this trip he craved anonymity. La Résidence was quiet, clean, and undistinguished, with no tourist-attracting view of Lake Geneva.

Registering at the desk, he filled out police forms and turned over his passport to the clerk. Traveler's checks and most of his operational cash he locked in a safe-deposit box, then followed the *chausseur* to his room. Handing the boy a franc, he opened a window, filled his lungs with cool morning air, and unpacked his single suitcase. Then he rang for the room waiter and ordered breakfast; by the time he had shaved it was waiting for him.

As he ate he studied photographs of Diana Traxell Waring, committing her face to memory. Blonde, with even features and an oval face, she looked like any cotillion's debutante of the year. The mouth, he noticed, was a trifle small, and the lips suggested self-indulgence. Apart from that she was a beauty.

An equestrian snapshot silhouetted her figure's slim lines

showing boyish hips and no more than a suggestion of breasts. But that was two years ago, he reflected; Diana was nineteen now, heavier probably from the starchy regimen customary in most European boarding schools, and more obviously feminine.

Scanning a full-face portrait, he found himself noting its passivity. Either Diana Waring was a tightly controlled young lady, or she lived on the thin border of hysteria.

Peter buttered a final croissant, added more coffee to his cup, and reviewed what he had learned of her family.

Her father graduated from McGill in 1942 and left law school to join Canada's diplomatic service—first post, Veracruz. At war's end Waring was assigned to Vienna, served in Trieste until partition, and moved to Rome as counselor. By then Donald Waring was married to a Long Island-Hobe Sound heiress who compensated for the limitations of embassy life with alcohol. A missed turn in her Lancia near Turin made Waring a widower, after which he entrusted their only child, Diana, to fashionable Villa Beauvoir.

Hardly a unique tale, he reflected as he finished his coffee and went to the mirror. He knotted and adjusted a conservative tie, arranged certain of his clothing in the open suitcase, closed the top, and left the room.

Through the concierge Peter hired an Alfa Romeo, crossed Mont Blanc bridge, and took the autoroute toward Nyon. It followed the west side of Lake Geneva, steely blue in the morning light, past well-kept parks and quais, and where the land bulged outward he looked up and saw the International Labor Organization Building, a landmark useful from the water.

A few kilometers beyond, he turned into a stone postern gate and clutched into low gear to climb the steeply winding road. It ended in a circular drive, beyond which rose a large gingerbread edifice whose entrance walk was surmounted with wrought-iron letters: Villa Beauvoir.

Turning, he saw that the view of the lake was indeed beautiful, the eastern shore, then the length of the lake until it vanished in morning mist. Signs in French, German, English, and Italian warned against parking along the drive, so Peter edged the Alfa onto the shoulder and got out.

Inside, he gave the receptionist his name and asked to see Mme. des Roziers.

The woman's dry, prim face seemed to elongate. "Do you have an appointment with Madame la Directrice?"

"Mr. Waring cabled I'd be here today."

"I see. The disappearance of his daughter?"

Peter smiled noncommittally, strolled over to the window where he viewed the calm lake while the receptionist telephoned the headmistress.

In a few moments he was shown down a carpeted, high-ceilinged corridor. The receptionist knocked on a paneled door, then opened it. Entering, Peter heard his escort withdraw and close the door.

Behind a massive walnut desk sat Villa Beauvoir's headmistress. Her blue-tinted hair was handsomely coiffed, and the restraints on her bosom suggested sternly repressed sexuality. Agency files had told him Clothilde des Roziers was born into a prominent Parisian family, enjoying the comforts of wealth and position until her father was imprisoned in a banking scandal. Impoverished, she had become the mistress of an industrialist, an affair lasting more than twenty years. On her protector's death a large legacy enabled her to acquire Villa Beauvoir, over which she had exercised benign reign for nearly a decade. These things flashed through his mind in the moment before she spoke.

"M. Ward? Welcome to Villa Beauvoir. Please be seated and tell me how we may be of assistance to Diana's father."

"Thank you." He sat in a velvet-covered chair and crossed his legs. From the distance came the muffled chatter of schoolgirls. "When did Diana leave here? What were the circumstances?"

Dark eyes regarded him appraisingly. "M. Waring did not tell you?"

"He learned of my Geneva trip only yesterday. There was little time for details."

"I see. You are in Switzerland on business?"

"As an attorney I represent certain hotel interests in America."

"Very well. When term ended last June—the 16th, I believe—Diana went in the school bus to Cointrin airport where she boarded a Swissair flight to New York."

"A direct flight?"

Madame la Directrice considered. "No, I believe it stopped briefly at Paris."

"She never reached New York, Mme. des Roziers. Perhaps she left the plane during the stopover."

"Evidently that is what she did."

"One wonders why. To join the New Wave in Paris? To delay reunion with a father she saw only infrequently?"

The headmistress shrugged delicately. "Even after so many years directing Villa Beauvoir I find that I know little of what goes on in the minds of the young."

A safe observation, Peter reflected, and frowned. "Perhaps I might be allowed to speak with her friends—her roommate?"

"The police have already questioned them."

Peter smiled winningly. "Police often loom rather formidably in the minds of young girls. Besides, by now they have had time to reflect—perhaps remember something overlooked before. After all"—he paused—"until Diana is located this . . . pall hangs over Villa Beauvoir."

With a resentful glance, Mme. des Roziers laid one hand on her telephone. "I will arrange an interview with Diana's former roommate, Solange Arnoux."

Peter rose. "And Diana's other friends?"

"Solange will know whom to suggest."

"Thank you, Madame." Peter bowed slightly and left the office. The receptionist showed him into a pleasant waiting room overlooking the garden court, and told him Mlle. Arnoux would come at the end of the class period.

Settling himself in a brocade chair, Peter filled his pipe and lighted it, feeling he should have asked the receptionist for permission. As he smoked, he thought back over the years and recalled excursions to girls' schools that had been less purposeful and more romantic: Walker, Mary C. Wheeler, Foxcroft, Pine Manor . . . as a sixth-former at Andover and even as an undergraduate at Brown. The waiting rooms all had in common the scent of flowers and perfume mingled with an air of high propriety. Still, he thought with a musing smile, iron bars do not a prison make.

A building bell gave out a stern, stentorian ring, followed in a few moments by the sounds of opening doors, massed feet on carpeted floors, and the rising hum of girls' voices.

Having emptied his pipe in a marble ashtray, Peter fitted it into his pocket and stood up. Presently the door opened and a voice said, "M. Ward? You wish to see me?"

Turning, he saw a young lady in a high-collared forest-

green uniform. Legs that might have been shapely were camouflaged under black cotton stockings that ended in blunt-toed black shoes. With gripper soles for mountain climbing, he said silently, then looked at her face.

Clear skin, a small, fine nose; dark eyes and shoulder-length hair as black as wet flint. No makeup whatever, but the girl was beautiful. "Mlle. Arnoux? Thank you for coming. Please sit down."

Shifting her schoolbooks to a marble-topped table, the girl arranged herself in a chair and leaned slightly forward. "Diana was my best friend," she said earnestly. "I want to do anything I can to help. Did you know Diana?"

"No, only her father. I was coming to Geneva on business and he asked me to stop by."

Her face hardened. "Why didn't he come himself? He didn't even write me."

"A man in his position isn't always his own master," Peter said before realizing the implicit irony. "That's why I'm here."

"If you find Diana, will you take her back to her father?"

"That's the general idea." A thought occurred to him. "You mean she might not want to go?"

One finger on her lips, Solange began to write on a sheet of paper. Handing it to him, she said, "Oh, not at all."

But what she had written said: *We can be overheard.*

Nodding, he handed back the paper. "Mind if I smoke?"

"Please do." Now she was scribbling furiously.

He tapped his pipe on the ashtray, waited and flicked his lighter a few times, then put them both away. To the written warning she had added: *Meet me tonight at eleven. The bus shelter two blocks north of the school.*

Nodding again, he pocketed the paper and said, "Did she give any impression of being mentally disturbed?"

"None at all, sir."

"Why do you suppose she left the plane at Paris? To meet a boyfriend?"

"Hardly. Young ladies at Villa Beauvoir are not permitted boyfriends," but her eyes lifted roguishly.

"Then you can offer no suggestions that might lead to finding her?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Think," he said sternly. "Perhaps she had other friends in whom she confided."

Again no, and the verbal charade went on until Peter felt they had satisfied any possible eavesdropper. Rising, he thanked Solange, bowed briefly over her hand, and showed her to the door.

"By the way, M. Ward, if I *should* think of anything, where might I reach you?"

"La Résidence," he told her and said good-bye.

Leaving the school, he drove north of the entrance, checking the bus shelter for tonight's assignation, continued on a few kilometers toward Nyon, and pulled in at a service station with a red and white telephone kiosk. There he dialed an unlisted number and heard a male voice answer guardedly.

"This is Charleroi," Peter said. "Hit the stratosphere."

In a moment the carrier hum rose high, screamingly higher until it faded somewhere above fifteen thousand cycles. From now on their voices would carry over the wire at ultrasonic pitch. A wiretapper would hear nothing at all.

"Do you read me?"

"I read you fine," the inside contact said. "Shoot."

"I've just left the school. Headmistress wasn't overly cooperative, but Diana's roommate was. She has something to tell and wants me to meet her at eleven, two blocks from the school."

"You're meeting her?"

"Unless you can locate DI.* Not a full index trace, just a fast name check by Paris."

"Her name?"

"Solange Arnoux. Age between eighteen and twenty. Born in Bordeaux where her family owns a synthetic textile factory."

"Father's name?"

"The Bordeaux Industrial Register ought to list him. Villa Beauvoir costs a bundle."

"Right. Doesn't give us much time to contact Paris, does it? Where will you be?"

"Around. I'll check my hotel box for messages. If a Mr. Gentian called, she's clean. If not, my caller was Mr. Black."

"Got it, Peter. Out."

* Derogatory Information.

Hanging up, Peter got back into his Alfa and paused to view Mont Blanc in the distance. Driving back to Geneva, he visited hotels for the balance of the morning, calling on the managers of the Richemond, Président, De la Paix, and Métropole—living his cover in case he was being watched. For lunch he drove into the Savoises quarter and entered l'Or du Rhône, where he was allotted a table near enough the open fireplace that he could hear sputtering fat from the spit-roasted chickens.

After a Canadian Club highball, Peter ordered a chilled bottle of tangy, dry Johannisberg, consommé, and a plump chicken from the spit. Strawberries with kirsch, and syrupy espresso rounded out a fine luncheon, after which he repaired to his hotel for rest and undisturbed thought.

Before lying down he checked his suitcase and noticed a trouser cuff disarranged from the position in which he had left it. Either an overzealous room maid, he thought, or his baggage had been searched by someone with near-professional competence.

Calling the switchboard, he asked the operator not to ring his room until further notice, and to take messages instead. As he stretched out in the darkened room, he wondered whether Donald Waring was cooperating in good faith, or whether he had let the Sovs know of his compromise. Without showing their hand there was no way the FBI could keep Waring under airtight surveillance, and a few moments in the right place at the right time would be enough to let Waring alert Klimov or some underling in the KGB Washington *rezidentura*.

If Waring was really cooperating, Peter felt he could continue tracing Diana's background without Soviet interference. But if the KGB was expecting an investigator, there might well be trouble.

For so long as they held his daughter hostage, Waring was chained to the KGB.

INSISTENT KNOCKING AT HIS DOOR WOKE PETER from profound sleep. Sitting up groggily, he glanced around the room and noticed daylight was no longer leaking through the blinds. Peering at his wristwatch dial he saw the time was eight o'clock.

The knocking became pounding.

"All right!" he shouted, "I'm coming," turned on the bedside lamp and unlocked the door.

"M. Ward?"

"That's right." He peered at his visitor, a burly, heavy-set man in the gray, red-piped uniform of the Swiss Federal Police. Behind him, standing uncomfortably, was the floor valet.

"I am Lieutenant Colonel Fertig of the Sûreté Suisse. May I have a few words with you?"

Rumpling his hair, Peter shrugged, stood back, and let the officer enter, closing the door on the valet. "Sit down, Colonel."

"Thank you." One hand stroked gray gloves gripped in his other hand. He sat down and leaned forward. Peter yawned and rubbed his eyes, found his way to the bed, and sat on the edge.

Fertig cleared his throat. "To what do we owe the honor of your visit, M. Ward?"

"Honor?" Peter said vaguely, and smothered a yawn. "I'm here on business, Colonel."

"What sort of business?"

"Legal business." Adjusting the heavy bolster, Peter leaned back and regarded his caller with mild interest.

"For instance?"

"Representing certain American clients."

"Who are—"

"Oh, Crawford Associates of Chicago, the Tenley Group

of Atlanta, Marlane Industries of Boston . . . shall I go on?"

"Do you have the means to verify your clients?"

Peter gestured at his suitcase. "The manila envelope contains my instructions."

Colonel Fertig rose and opened the envelope. Glancing at letters and telegrams prepared by CIA's Cover Division, Fertig grimaced and restored them to the envelope. "And beyond these commercial affairs?"

Peter frowned. "I—I don't think I understand."

Fertig wet his lips. "I prefer not to waste time in idle games—your time or mine. So let me tell you that you are under strong suspicion of being an agent of American Intelligence, and—"

Abruptly, Peter sat up. "Good God! Not a—a *spy!*"

"Precisely," Fertig grunted. "And for that reason I have come to warn you against attempting to carry out any intrigues on Swiss soil."

"Intrigues?" Peter shook his head in bafflement. "What in the world would give anyone the idea I was a—a spy, as you put it?"

Fertig's lips curled. "We have our sources—as I am sure you have yours." Drawing a black-bound notebook from his pocket, he thumbed through the pages, paused, and began reading. "You arrived at Cointrin this morning from Dulles Airport at Washington—"

"I live in Washington."

"—registered at this hotel, hired a vehicle, and drove to Villa Beauvoir. What was your business with Madame des Roziers?"

"I was inquiring about the daughter of a friend—at his request."

"I see. You are prepared to verify that statement?"

"Madame la Directrice has the telegram requesting our interview."

"Very well. Next, you visited four hotels, lunched at l'Or du Rhône, and returned here."

"Very thorough," Peter said. "Is that what spies do when they come to Geneva?"

"They might. Tell me—was your morning's business so successful that you could afford to sleep away the afternoon?"

"I was tired," Peter complained. "A sleepless flight—the time zone change."

"What was your business at the Richemond, the Métropole, and the others?"

"I was surveying them for my clients." Leaning forward, he pulled on his shoes.

"But you did not discuss business with the managers," Fertig said smugly.

Peter laughed shortly. "Hardly. The best way to inflate the price would be to indicate interest in buying." Pouring a glass of water from the bedside carafe, he drank it and eyed the colonel. "Anything else?"

"At the moment, no." Fertig rose. "I hope it will not be necessary for me to call again. If I should, it would be with a warrant for your arrest."

"Very civilized," Peter said. "I'm glad you use warrants here."

"But of course. We are a country where law prevails." Turning, he unlocked the door and left the room.

Peter poured a second glass of water and drank it slowly, wondering who had given his name to the SFP. Fertig, he thought, an unpleasant fellow, and wondered if the colonel was as hostile to transient Soviets. In any case, it was better to know he was under surveillance; nothing like a solid warning to brace the spine.

Quarter after eight. As adrenalin drained from his blood, Peter realized the long sleep had been refreshing, and his mind was more alert. Ringing for the valet, he turned on the shower and stripped to the waist. The valet entered, gave Peter a guilty look, and said, "*Oui, m'sieu?*"

"Brush and press my pants, launder the shirts, and polish my shoes."

"*Mais oui,*" the valet said stiffly, tugged at his striped waistcoat, and moved toward the suitcase. Peter handed him a ten-franc note and the valet blurted, "Oh, thank you, M. Ward. You do not resent that I was required to—?"

"Not at all. Each of us has his work to do."

"I am glad *m'sieu* comprehends."

"Completely. Now, I have nothing of value to a thief, only business papers that I leave here because it is not convenient to have them always with me. For that reason, I should like

to think they will be safe." He gestured at the envelope, and the valet colored.

"It will be my mission to safeguard them, *m'sieu*."

Peter showered and shaved, and when he reentered the room he found freshly pressed clothing laid out on the bed, gleaming shoes nearby.

As he dressed, he reflected that it was probably Clothilde des Rozières who had denounced him to the police—Madame or the grim-faced receptionist. Within a brief space of time, staid Villa Beauvoir had developed interesting aspects.

In the lobby he bought a copy of the *Journal de Genève*, sat in a corner of the reading room, and studied the Bourse quotations. After a while he strolled to the desk and handed his key to the clerk, who fitted it into the box and brought back a telephone message. It read simply: *M. Gentian called*.

Solange Arnoux was clean.

A taxi took him across the river, turning up from the boat landing to the Brunswick Monument where Peter got out. Paying the driver, he scanned the lighted quais, the flickering lights on the water, and the four-hundred-foot-high illuminated fountain rising from the harbor—the Jet d'Eau that was so much a trademark of the city. Then he entered the Richemond and walked to the Gentilhomme bar where he ordered a glass of Long Life sherry and looked around, reasonably sure he had not been tailed. There was background music and the hum of conversation from well-dressed couples. Peter felt himself begin to relax and ordered a second sherry, leaving it on the bar while he threaded his way toward the men's room. At the end of the corridor there was a telephone from which he could observe anyone entering from the bar. He dialed his contact number, heard the word *Oui?*, said "Charle-roi, here," and the ultrasonic shriek took over.

"I'm calling from Le Gentilhomme to acknowledge receipt of the Arnoux clearance. At eight, a Colonel Fertig dropped by my room and grilled me a little, accused me of being a spy and warned me not to conduct intrigues in Suisse."

"I'll be damned!"

"Is the colonel legit?"

"A Colonel Fertig is assistant chief of the internal security section. Husky, about five-ten, weight one-eighty. More of a cop than an intelligence type."

"Close make," Peter acknowledged. "Well, I thought you ought to know because I gather someone slipped him my name as a prospect."

"Who?"

"Probably one of two ladies at Villa Beauvoir."

"Not the girl?"

"I don't think so, Mac. I'm sort of counting on her."

Mac cleared his throat. "Fertig's people could have spotted your name on the travel list. You've operated here before."

"True. But if the colonel inquires about Peter Ward, don't burn me. I have larger worries than the Sûreté."

"Right. Goes without saying. Uh—if you find out who tipped Fertig we'd be glad to know."

"So would I."

"Will you be checking back before morning?"

"Stand by until midnight. After that, get some sleep."

Leaving the booth, Peter entered the men's room, washed his hands, and allowed the attendant to wield the clothes brush. Then he went back to the bar.

At nine o'clock he took a wall table, selected hors d'oeuvres from the buffet, and ordered *Chateaubriand à pointe* with a split of Sabayon to wash it down. At ten fifteen he taxied back to La Résidence, claimed his key from the night clerk, and requested no calls until morning. His floor was quiet. He opened and closed his door, then went quietly to the fire stairs and descended to the hotel garage.

The Alfa took him around the bend of the lake where he followed the Lausanne highway toward Villa Beauvoir, slowing twice and stopping once to check on surveillance. He passed the bus-stop rendezvous, continued half a mile along the highway, and pulled over to the side. For a while he smoked his pipe in the darkened Alfa, and at five to eleven, started the engine and headed back.

A lightolier showed him a waiting figure in the shadows, and as he pulled to the curb, he saw a girl in a dyed sheepskin outercoat, outside dark glasses, and black leather boots. Braking, he called, "Solange," and opened the door.

She came quickly toward him, moving with a feline grace he had not noticed at their earlier meeting, peered into the car, and said, "Hello. You're very prompt." Then she got in beside him, shifting a large handbag onto her lap. "I'm supposed to be safely asleep in my room."

"So I gathered. Where shall we go?"

"There's a bistro six kilometers toward Lausanne—La Délice—where the *maître* doesn't report us. Villa students, I mean. We can talk there."

"We can talk now," he said, making a U-turn. "For instance, why does Madame la Directrice listen in on that reception room?"

She laughed. "To prevent intrigues, I suppose—or escapes."

"Escapes?"

"The Villa's a jail. Diana escaped successfully."

Glancing at her, he saw her remove the mod glasses and take a cigarette from her purse. Inhaling, Solange breathed deeply. "Mon Dieu, how I needed that!"

"I seem to be contributing to all sorts of delinquency," Peter remarked.

"But not for the first time."

He swerved to avoid a faster, overtaking car. A Maserati, he noticed as it snarled by. "The Swiss police called on me a few hours ago. Evidently someone denounced me as a suspicious character."

"*Madame!* Oh, what a *bitch* she is."

Peter chuckled, remembering his sister's hostility to Oldfields. "Does she make a practice of denouncing visitors?"

"Only if she's uncertain of them. Now, do you see what a dreadful place the Villa is?"

"It's certainly unusual."

She was leaning back now, eyes partly closed as she watched the road unwind ahead. "We're very near, Peter—there by the neon sign."

Slowing, he pulled into the parking area and drove behind the chalet where a row of trees would screen the Alfa from the road. The setting was right for discreet transactions of any sort, he reflected as they walked to the entrance.

A uniformed doorman greeted them, and when their coats were checked, the *maître* showed them to a table.

What light there was revealed a high-beamed ceiling, sooted from decades of table candles and the smoke of the open hearth. There were twenty or thirty couples in the big room, faces undefined in the soft obscurity.

To the waiter, Solange said, "Scotch—no ice."

"*Oui, mademoiselle. M'sieu?*"

"Canadian Club—a reasonable amount of ice."

“Water? Soda?”

“A little water.”

“*Merci.*”

Solange produced another cigarette that Peter lighted, and as she looked happily around, he realized that to her the escapade symbolized high adventure. Lifting her drink, she said, “*Salut.*”

“*A votre santé.*”

They drank and Solange set down her glass. Fixing him with her eyes, she said, “Now—tell me where Diana is.”

5

SWALLOWING HARD, PETER STARED BACK.

“Where Diana is?”

“Peter, you can trust me. You were the one she wrote to.”

“I was?”

Lifting her glass, she eyed him, flicking the liquor delicately with the tip of her tongue. “And to think her father never suspected! But then, you look so terribly trustworthy and . . . innocent.”

“Innocent?”

Her eyes petted him. “Well . . . not entirely. I must say Diana was fabulously lucky to find someone like you. Oh, I knew I should have gone skiing with her last winter at Villars . . . then your ardent letters . . .”

“Go on.”

“. . . meeting her at Orly and spiriting her away to your apartment with its breathtaking view of the Etoile.”

“Then why did I come looking for her at Villa Beauvoir?”

“Well, you could hardly refuse her father if he asked you.”

Peter inhaled deeply. “I see. Did Diana give you my name?”

“No. But I saw the Paris return address on one of your

letters. Not your name—just the Valmy Post Office box. Tenth Arrondissement.”

Sipping his drink, he said, “You’re very observant. I suppose you get straight A’s.”

“I do—only there’s not much challenge at the Villa. Next year, if father lets me, I’ll be at the Sorbonne.”

“Do you remember the Valmy box number?”

“Testing me? Three two eight. Now”—she leaned forward and her eyes sparkled—“is Diana divinely happy?”

“I hope she is.”

Solange tilted her head and studied Peter’s face. “If she isn’t, she’s an utter fool.”

“Compliment noted.” Glancing at his wristwatch, he saw it was nearing eleven thirty. So far he had the post office box number of someone who corresponded with Diana Waring, and nothing more.

“Peter—if I could get away, would you let me join you? I mean, Diana and you. It would mean so very much to me.”

“It would mean a lot to your parents also,” he said dryly. “But what of next year and the Sorbonne?”

Her nose wrinkled. “I’d pass it up. Will you let me come?”

“What do you have in mind? *A ménage à trois*?”

“Oh, no . . . at least, not at first.”

“Then shouldn’t Diana be consulted?”

“I—I suppose so.” She glanced away. “How long are you staying in Geneva?”

“Until my business is concluded.”

She drained her glass and said, “I’d like another,” and beckoned the waiter.

For a while they listened to a young Belgian guitarist playing unobtrusively at the rear of the room. Then Solange said, “Oh, Peter, I’d almost forgotten to give you this for Diana.” Rummaging in her purse, she brought out a wristlet of fine gold links and placed it in his hand. Under the candlelight he saw it had a single charm: a red, cloisonné *T* with half of the crossbar missing.

“Before term ended, she turned our room upside down looking for it. Then I found it a month ago—in a crack in the closet floor. You’ll tell her, won’t you?”

“As soon as I see her,” he promised, and pocketed the wristlet.

Now, with eyes adjusted to the near-darkness, Peter saw

that a minimal amount of makeup had transformed Solange Arnoux from a schoolgirl into a surprisingly beautiful young female. Breasts that had been concealed by the school uniform were provocatively evident, and Peter found himself regretting that Solange was an operational contact.

The third Scotch slurred her speech, and one hand crept across the table to cover his. Clearing his throat, Peter said, "Don't you think we ought to be getting back for bed check?"

"'S already over. Not often I get to come here—never with someone like you." She pressed his hand warmly. "Diana has you all the time, and I've only got tonight . . . don't rush me back to prison."

Sipping his drink, Peter tried to think of a way out, but his thoughts were interrupted by Solange's throaty laughter. "I can't get over it—the shrewd Donald Waring sends to find his daughter his daughter's lover. Really, Peter, it's too much."

"It wasn't hard."

"And when you see him again?"

Peter shrugged.

"Let's dance."

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Reluctantly, he followed her to the floor where the guitarist had been reinforced by saxophone, piano, and drums. Sinuously, her body fitted against his as her hands clasped behind his neck. The insistent pressure of her pelvis against him removed any lingering doubts that Solange was thoroughly nubile. Glancing around he noticed they were the only couple not dancing at arms' length.

The hoarse bray of the sax, the pounding rhythm, seemed to excite his partner, whose teeth nipped the flesh of his throat. Then her legs began moving unsteadily until, finally, Solange halted, brushed one arm across her forehead, and said, "Sorry, I guess I'm a little dizzy. Not used to liquor . . ."

Guiding her back to the table, he gestured at the waiter for the check, paid it, and steered her outside. Coated, they moved through the cool night air, Solange breathing deeply until they were in the roadster.

"A little coffee might be in order," Peter suggested.

"No—I'll be all right. In fact, I'm fine right now." Leaning sideways, she turned his face and covered his mouth with hers. Her tongue forced his teeth apart, lanced into his

mouth, and her breathing became heavy. Eyelids fluttering, she moaned, twisting her body against his in a surge of desire.

Headlights flashing across the windshield shattered the moment, giving Peter a chance to shift gears and clamp both hands on the steering wheel.

Resentfully, the girl murmured, "Don't—the other car's gone."

"It's late," he said huskily.

Resignedly she straightened her skirt and relaxed into the seat. "It's a promise, isn't it? Diana . . . when you see her . . . me. I'll join you in Paris?"

Her voice trailed off, and when he glanced at Solange he saw her eyes were closed. Taking a sharp curve, he saw her begin to lean toward him, her hair brushed his shoulder. Slowing, he tried to move her upright, but her body seemed nerveless.

The rest of the way back, he could hardly keep her face out of his lap.

MacGillivray returned Diana's bracelet to Peter, sipped his stein of Reinfelden, and gazed out over the hotel terrace, crowded with midday diners. "The bauble wasn't made in Suisse. Sorry."

"And the Valmy box?"

"Paris is still checking. Chances are it's an accommodation drop, serviced once or twice a week. If so, they'll have to stake it out, see who picks up the mail and where it's taken."

"I know the routine," Peter said irritably.

MacGillivray nodded. "Guess you feel you haven't gotten very far."

"That's understatement." Peter took a long swallow of Tuborg and blinked at the sunlight. "Solange—the one source I uncovered—thinks I'm the one who spirited Diana away."

"Probably just as well she does. Otherwise she might have clammed up entirely. What are you going to do next?"

"Wait until we get a make on the Valmy box."

"That could take up to a week." MacGillivray sat forward, glanced around, and lowered his voice. "Anticipating a *cul de sac*, Headquarters sent in a suggestion you're free to use or ignore."

"Shoot."

Pausing until a waiter moved out of earshot, MacGillivray said, "Remember Rudin?"

"Sergei Rudin? Of course. Lieutenant General. Head of the KGB's First Chief Directorate."

"What else?"

"Let's see. Been dead the last four or five years. Killed here in Switzerland, as a matter of fact. Automobile crash."

Mac nodded approvingly. "Near Aubonne—about four miles from here."

"So—what about Rudin?"

In an even lower voice, Mac said, "Suppose he were available—I said *suppose*, Peter. Would it be worth your while to consult him?"

"Goes without saying. Only how do we communicate with the spirit world?"

"All right. Damned few Agency guys even know this, but Rudin wasn't killed. The crash was staged to cover his defection."

"But the Sovs examined his corpse—buried it."

"The corpse they PM'd wasn't Rudin's. It was a cadaver flown here from the States and altered by our own dentists and medics. Oh, the timing had to be good, and it was. It was perfect. For two years we had him within fifty miles of Washington while he gave us his detailed memoirs—everything he knew. We even interrogated him under narcosynthesis to bring out anything tucked back in his subconscious. After that he opted for resettlement in Suisse, and following plastic surgery he came here. He's stayed here ever since."

The revelation stunned Peter. "Doing what?"

"Seeing how well a portfolio of nearly a million dollars can do when administered by clever Swiss bankers. Rudin put about a hundred thou into a small business. He runs it like any bourgeois capitalist, and in short he's snug as a mouse in cheese."

"The Sovs never spotted him?"

"Why should they? On the books, Rudin is dead. In life he's got a new face, one the Sovs couldn't possibly recognize. Under his postmortem identity he even plays in local chess tournaments."

"That's right, he was a master—one of the KGB's few intellectuals." Peter swallowed more Tuborg and set down his stein. "When do I see him?"

"As soon as we can lay it on. This has to be confirmed with the director and Bern. In the meantime, you might be thinking over what you want to ask him."

Peter nodded. "Why did he defect?"

"A lot of things that added up to an intolerable weight. Wife trouble, frictions with Semichastny after Khrushchev's ouster, growing doubts about certain Kremlin moves. For instance, he was against the whole idea of sending missiles to Cuba. Rudin was right, of course, but it created powerful enemies . . ." MacGillivray emptied his stein. "You've talked with defectors—you know how hard it is to pinpoint any one factor. If we could do that, we'd be welcoming a good many more men of Rudin's caliber." He smiled. "Still a little startled, aren't you?"

"I may never get over it."

"Well, this Waring affair—abducting the daughter and using her as a hostage— isn't standard for the KGB. That's why Rudin might be able to shed some light. Whether she's in the Soviet Union, whether she's dead or alive, what an answering ploy might be—things like that."

"He could be helpful," Peter agreed. "Anything else, Mac?"

"That little redhead on your right—can't keep her eyes off you. As a married man, I'll move off while you move in."

"Thanks, but I've got an admirer—at Villa Beauvoir."

With a grin, MacGillivray left the table and moved away. Peter paid the check and was about to leave when the waiter returned.

"Pardon, *m'sieu*, but the young *mademoiselle* of the *cheveux roux* wondered whether you were an American."

He looked down at the table and the small glass vase that held a single bloom of begonia, his dead wife's favorite flower. "Tell her I'm from Tasmania, and thanks, anyway. All of us make mistakes."

Turning, he bowed in the direction of her table and left the terrace.

In his room he stretched out and considered the remarkable information Mac had supplied. Sergei Rudin, the ruthless master of the First Chief Directorate; in charge of all foreign *sektors*, emigré counter-ops, Scientific Intelligence, Counter Intelligence, and the 13th Department—*mokryie dela*, the liquidators. The "Department of Wet Affairs." For

Rudin's knowledge, one million U.S. dollars had been a bargain.

How many KGB ops did we invest using Rudin's information, he wondered? How much Kremlin political and scientific planning were we able to anticipate? And how much more secure are we today because Rudin was able to talk when the Kremlin thought him dead?

Only Thorne would know, he reflected. Thorne and the President.

Peter smiled at the thought of the KGB watching one operation after another blow up in their faces, the officers denouncing each other in a frenzy to survive, and none of them suspecting the reason.

I like the idea, he said half-aloud, and most particularly I like it because the press never got hold of it to chew and vomit up. One major operation, thank God, served its purpose without anyone being the wiser.

The telephone rang, and when he answered it, Solange said, "Peter? I'm sorry I drank too much last night. Please forgive me?"

"Nothing to forgive. My bad judgment for ordering the third."

"Would you trust me again if I promised to drink no more than two? Tonight, for instance?"

"Client dinner," he lied.

Sulkily, she said, "How much longer will you be here?"

"Not sure. Day or so at the most."

"Well, I've got to see you again," she said determinedly, "and I refuse to be put off."

"Hmmm. I thought roommates were supposed to be loyal to one another."

Her laugh was low and feral. "They are—except where men are concerned. Please don't disappoint me, Peter."

He hesitated. Then, "Tell you what, when my schedule's firm, I'll call you."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

For a moment the line was silent. "You don't sound very enthusiastic."

"Paris isn't very far away. Now go back to class and give them fits in trig."

"If you say so, *cher maître. A bientôt.*"

What she needs, he told himself, is a good, sound spanking, grinned at the thought of administering it, and sat at the desk to compose a letter to his nephew and niece.

In the morning he drove to the Quai des Bergues and walked over the bridge to the pentagonal island in midstream where Rousseau's statue stood, surrounded by poplars. From there he could see the façade of the American consulate off the open Place du Rhône. People entered and left, not a few hurrying with passports into the nearby offices of Air France, KLM, and SAS. Mont Blanc's distant peak was still hidden in haze. High above, lakeward, sparkled the Jet d'Eau, sunlight topping it with a shower of gold, and he reflected that it was an ideal morning to do something—anything at all—other than waiting for a message from the Base.

Recrossing the bridge, Peter had late breakfast in a quai-side café: crisp croissants with Alpine butter, and rich hot chocolate made for the palates of chocolate-makers. Then he found a kiosk and called MacGillivray. On the ultrasonic frequency he said, "Any word?"

"All you need. I'm laying it on now. Check the drop in an hour."

"Right."

"Uh—you remember where it is?"

"I remember," Peter said patiently. "The time is now eleven past ten."

"Check."

Returning to his car, Peter became aware of a man who had seated himself in the café during breakfast. The man wore an ill-fitting gray topcoat and a gray hat whose brim was somewhat wider than current fashion. He appeared to be reading a morning paper, but when Peter crossed the street, the man followed.

Peter began to recross the street, halted for a tramway, and turned back; he was rewarded by an expression of confusion on his tailer's face. Doggedly, the man followed Peter into an office building and began to run when Peter slipped into a crowded elevator. The door closed and the lift began its ascent. On the fifth floor, Peter got out, located the fire stairs, and walked down to the service alley.

This time he went west, entering Cornavin Station to lose himself among the crowd. The station clock showed nearly 10:40, and as he bought a morning paper, he reflected that

hide-and-seek was a one-sided game when you didn't know who the seeker was.

Not Fertig's men, he told himself, as he squeezed into a bench space and raised the paper in front of his face. The police would have covered me from both sides of the street to avoid that crisscross comedy. Swiss men were not noted for high fashion, but the surveillant's bad tailoring suggested east of the Curtain.

Like Makarov, he remembered, thinking of Klimov's clumsy chauffeur, the man he had trapped and drugged.

Makarov, he mused, who set the stage for what I'm going through today; and through his mind flashed the faces of Donald Waring, Toni, and Diana. And Solange Arnoux.

For a quarter of an hour he browsed the pages, glancing around from time to time when departures were announced; then when he was satisfied he had shaken Gray Hat, he waited for the next announcement, rose, and merged with three voluble train-bound travelers. At the gate he broke off and left by the taxi exit, where he hailed a cab and rode as far as the Dufour Monument beside the university. After inspecting it, he crossed the tramline and entered the park in front of the university, where he viewed the Reformation Monument until he spotted a passing cab.

With a certifying glance around, he got in and directed the driver to a café on the Rue Versonnex, a dozen blocks from the consulate. Instead of taking a sidewalk table, he went inside to the bar, ordered coffee and Cognac, and spiked one with the other.

Tasting the aromatic mix, Peter turned and saw the men's room at the rear; his watch showed 11:17. He drank half of the demitasse and left the bar to walk to the men's room.

Locking the door, he saw a chromed paper-towel dispenser on the wall above the washbasin. Turning the tap, he opened his wallet and got out a thin, blue-steel pick whose ends terminated in claw-like spicules. It opened the simple lock, and as he lowered the front, he saw lying on the crisply folded towels a sheet of white paper folded lengthwise.

Lifting it off, he relocked the dispenser and unfolded the message sheet. On it was typed: At 12:00 you are expected by Herr Heinrich Klausen whose place of business is at 97, rue des Vollandes. Ask for an 1879 Chilean stamp: Colon, 5 centavos. Klausen will ask if you want the blue; your re-

sponse is "No, the orange." Klausen will inform you that the orange Colon was issued only in 10 centavo denominations and offer to show you the catalogue. K's picture is below.

The passport-size photograph showed a commonplace Germanic face, surmounted by a bristling shock of gray-streaked hair.

Peter reread the recognition instructions, then tore the paper and photograph into stamp-size pieces which he flushed down the toilet. He rinsed and dried his hands, then unlocked the door.

As he sipped the rest of his coffee, Peter recalled photographs of Rudin he had seen in the Agency's KGB mug book, the Slavic slant of the cheekbones that gave an Oriental cast to the eyes; the cast-iron jaw and the long nose, unusually thin for a Russian's. Yes, the medics had transformed the former general into something else entirely—a placid Schweizerdeutscher, a beer-drinking burgher.

Leaving a franc by the saucer, Peter left the café and scanned the street. He was tempted to get the Alfa and drive to Klausen's store, but caution held, and he made the trip by taxi, changing twice along the way, and walking the final two blocks to reach Rue des Vollandes from the intersecting street.

The storefront was unassuming: old books and cellophane envelopes of assorted stamps. Flaking white lettering across the glass read: H. Klausen . . . Bibliothèque . . . Timbres . . . Curiosités.

Opening the door, he heard a bell tinkle above him, and at the rear of the store a pleasant-faced blonde rose from her rolltop desk. In French, he said, "I wonder if I might see Herr Klausen?"

"You have a particular interest, sir?"

"Chilean stamps of a certain period."

"Of course. My husband will come in a moment." From a stack of books she lifted a feather duster, trailing it across stacked books as she walked the length of the store.

Three wooden steps rose to a closed-in office from which, Peter felt sure, he was being watched. Moving among the display tables he found them loaded with old volumes of Kant, Schiller, and Goethe which might be worth a few dollars if the sets were complete and undamaged. He picked up a vol-

ume of *Barrack Room Ballads* in German and was thumbing through it when he heard the office steps creak.

Looking up, he saw the Klausen of the photograph walking toward him. The man was broad-shouldered and close to six feet tall. The lips were thick, the nose somewhat bulbous, and his hands looked powerful enough to strangle an ox.

“Ja?”

“I was told you may have a particular stamp I’ve been looking for. A Chilean Colon, five centavos, 1879.”

“Blue, of course?”

“Why, no. The one I want is orange.”

“You must have been misinformed, sir. The five centavos of that year were issued only in blue.”

Peter frowned.

Klausen said, “If you care to examine my catalogue, I can verify the point.”

“By all means.”

“This way, please.”

Peter followed the one-time head of the First Chief Directorate into his office, then through a door in the opposite wall.

The room was a parlor, comfortably furnished with needle-point chairs and sofa. As he sat down, his host said, “Now that we have exchanged *bona fides*, let us come to the point. Precisely, in what way can I contribute to your knowledge of the KGB?”

6

COVERING RUDIN AS A GERMAN-SWISS HAD BEEN an inspired idea, Peter reflected, for it explained the heavy accent in his grammatically correct French.

Opening a box of Montecristos, Klausen offered it to him. Peter took one and watched his host clip the end of another. When their cigars were drawing, Peter said, “It’s a rather cu-

rious case, Herr Klausen, with perhaps more than one level of action.”

The ex-spymaster smiled. “Like all interesting cases.”

“A senior American diplomat was detected in clandestine contact with a *resident* of the KGB,” Peter began, having decided to disguise case details without holding back on essentials. “Under questioning the American said he had been forced to pass classified documents because the KGB had kidnapped his daughter and were holding her as security for his cooperation.”

“Go on.”

Exhaling fragrant smoke, Peter sat forward. “The diplomat refuses to reveal the specific information he passed to the KGB until his daughter is returned to him. Time, as you can imagine, is precious.”

“The girl’s school was Swiss?”

Peter nodded.

“Abducting her would not require a great deal of operational talent.”

“No. However, I’ve come across information suggesting the girl left voluntarily, or was lured.”

“Lured? In what way?”

“We have the number of a post office box in another city to which she addressed letters. The girl was young and unusually attractive, but isolated from male company. Even her father she saw only occasionally.”

Stretching out his legs, Klausen sent a series of smoke rings spiraling toward the ceiling. “I concede the elements of conspiracy. Continue.”

“For unknown reasons I’ve been tailed ever since I reached Geneva.”

Klausen’s face sagged. “Yet you came *here*?”

“Unobserved,” Peter assured him.

“Let us hope so,” said Klausen after a deep breath, removing the cigar from his mouth and turning it in his fingers. “It seems there are two possibilities. Either the KGB 13th Department did what her father alleges—abducted the girl and used her captivity as a lever—or else your diplomat became an agent for other reasons, and the disappearance of his daughter was an unrelated factor. Tell me, was this diplomat ever stationed in the socialist countries where he could have been recruited?”

"No."

"Was he in debt?"

"Not to my knowledge—that's being verified, of course."

"Does he have—let us say—an ideological background that would condition him to betray his country?"

"That's harder to answer. On the face of it, negative."

"Still, it cannot be dismissed entirely," Klausen mused. "He may have been one of the many Spanish Republican enthusiasts whose blind ardor continued over the decades."

"Possibly."

Klausen's wife entered with a tray of coffee and oven-warm pastry, served the men, and withdrew.

Gesturing at the doorway, Peter said, "Does she know your background?"

Klausen shook his head. "She is a good woman, and together we lead a quietly pleasant life. Such things as you and I are engaged in would be totally beyond her comprehension. Deception might trouble an ordinary man, but to me it has always been a normal way of life. The Russian way," he finished bitterly, grimaced, and lifted the cup to his lips.

"I suppose what I'm trying to get at is whether—supposing the KGB snatched the girl—she would have been taken to the Soviet Union. What would the 13th Department be likely to do?"

Klausen sat back, his narrowed eyes studying the ceiling, as he thought. Peter sipped coffee and waited.

Finally, Klausen said, "You see no possibility of a Chinese hand in this affair?"

"I hadn't considered it. Why?"

"Because this *ante facto* abduction of the girl seems more Chinese than Russian—not that the KGB doesn't practice it, but those abductions that I authorized ended in trial and execution of the victim. Also, if the girl is alive in the Soviet Union, she would never be permitted to leave. You know that, and your diplomat must realize it as well."

"Then why has he been cooperating?"

"He may have felt he had no alternative. Or, he may believe her to be somewhere other than in the Soviet Union. To me, that seems entirely possible; perhaps you have additional information?"

"She left her flight on a stopover in the city where the mail box was located. Since then she hasn't been seen."

Klausen exhaled slowly. "If I had been conducting the operation, I would have directed that she be lured to the stop-over city on some suitable pretext. There I would have had her sequestered in some secure location: a rest home, a sanatorium, or mental institution. Even a brothel."

"Why?"

"Several reasons. First, so she could be easily returned if and when the time came. Second, so she could not claim she had been taken to the Soviet Union. Third—and this is perhaps most important—so she would be unwilling to say where she *had* been, what she had undergone. In that context a house of prostitution would be ideal."

Quietly, reluctantly, Peter considered his logic, then handed over Diana's gold bracelet. "The girl lost this," he told his host. "I think it somehow figures in her disappearance."

Klausen fitted a loupe to one eye and held the chain under the light of a table lamp while he examined it carefully. Then he turned to Peter. "What do you make of it?"

"The charm needs repair."

"How so?" Again Klausen studied it through the magnifier.

"It's a *T* with one arm missing."

Klausen shook his head slowly. "On the contrary. You who are accustomed to Roman letters would naturally think so. But with Cyrillic as my primary alphabet, I assumed the pendant to be something else entirely. And so it is: the Greek letter gamma."

"But—"

"No, the pendant is intact, unbroken—the lens shows it clearly. What you have is the letter gamma in red enamel. The *gamma rouge*."

Through the loupe, Peter verified Klausen's discovery, then pocketed the ornament.

"To me, it suggests the emblem or talisman of some sort of occult society. Had she wanted to display the initial of her lover's name, the girl would have used the Roman *G*. The Greek transliteration could be for concealment, while the red color must be significant in itself. You consider red the communist color, but I am reminded of an orthodox Christian concept."

"Yes?"

"The flames of Hell."

He left Klausen's store by a rear exit that led into the rear of the block. From a kiosk he phoned MacGillivray to report the interview and mentioned the surveillant he had shaken en route.

"Sure he didn't spot our friend's establishment?"

"Ninety-nine percent sure. I must have been followed from the hotel to the quai, meaning my car's been made. So I'll turn it in and try to decide the next move. Pickings have been slim here."

"You're thinking of moving on? Paris?"

"That's where Diana went. Let's see—we're waiting word on the Valmy box."

"Yeah, but don't hold your breath."

From there, Peter taxied to Cornavin Station, entered by one gate, and left by another. A second cab drove him to the Quai des Bergues, and as he walked toward the curb, he saw the Alfa being dusted by one of the *pensionnaires* who eked out a livelihood from this gentle extortion. The old gentleman had a white handlebar moustache and a kindly, wizened face. Identifying Peter as the car's owner, he stiffened, saluted, and said, "Your keys, *m'sieu*."

With a smile Peter tossed him the key ring, and in that instant his peripheral vision caught movement in a shadowed doorway. Halting, he turned and made out his gray-coated pursuer, who froze until Peter began to run. Then he pivoted and sprinted into the building. Lost. With a curse, Peter slowed and began walking back.

The old pensioner had opened the door and was groping for the ignition lock. An extra service for his franc, Peter thought, and saw the roadster blow apart. Jets of flame shot skyward before the stunning blast slammed his eardrums. Debris rattled around him, and nearby shrubbery was neatly scythed by the hurtling door. Gray-black smoke vomited from the disintegrated car, concealing its skeleton, and as Peter watched in numb horror, he heard the raucous warning of a fire engine racing to the scene.

THROUGH BARRED WINDOWS ON THE THIRD floor of the Hôtel de la Police, Peter could see the tall Gothic spire of Saint-Pierre Cathedral starkly outlined by the setting sun. The room was cold and he chafed his hands, wishing the interrogation would end. So far, he was held only as a material witness, but the police were nothing if not thorough.

He smoked his pipe and watched the Place du Bourg-de-Four fill with traffic, university students, and homeward-bound tradespeople, and after a while a door opened and Major Dessins came in.

Turning, Peter waited, noticing Dessins' waxed blond moustache which had twitched so frequently during the questioning.

"M. Ward, I believe there is no further reason to detain you."

"Have you found the man who placed the bomb?"

"No, but three witnesses were located. Independently they testified to seeing a man who appeared to be working on the engine of your vehicle. His description was the same in all three cases, and it did not fit you."

"May I ask what it was?"

"The man was shorter than you, and broader. He wore a gray hat and gray overcoat."

"Not much to go on."

"No. Today at least a thousand—two thousand—men on the streets of Geneva were dressed like that." He shrugged. "Nevertheless, we will find him."

"I hope so." Again Peter remembered the cheerful little man who had died in his place. "Before I go, I'd like to see Colonel Fertig."

Dessins' eyebrows lifted and his moustache twitched. "You know Colonel Fertig?"

"Slightly. He—paid a call on me at my hotel."

"Then I will take you to him."

They went down a cold, gloomy corridor that ended at an ornamented wooden door. Dessins knocked, then stood aside while Peter entered.

Behind a cluttered desk sat a broad-shouldered middle-aged man in a gray uniform with red piping. The light was poor and at first Peter thought the major had made a mistake. Then Dessins said, "Colonel Fertig, this is the American, Ward."

The officer behind the desk looked up. "Yes? What is it you want? You are free to go."

He was a total stranger.

Wetting his lips, Peter said, "*You* are Colonel Fertig?"

"Yes." Wearily. "Come to the point, please."

Moving toward him, Peter said, "The point is, someone calling himself Colonel Fertig visited me yesterday at my hotel."

"Perhaps you had better sit down. Dessins, that will be all."

When the door closed, Peter settled himself and told the officer that a man representing himself as Fertig had warned and threatened him.

"Why?"

"I didn't entirely understand. I gathered he was opposed to my looking into the disappearance of one of the *jeunes filles* from Villa Beauvoir."

"The Waring girl? How are you involved?"

"Through her father."

"She left her plane at Paris, so it is a French rather than a Swiss affair, you understand?"

"Then this morning I was followed by a man who fits the description of the person seen tinkering with the engine of my car."

"Why would anyone follow you, M. Ward?"

Peter spread his hands bewilderedly. "Perhaps I was mistaken for someone else."

"Possibly." Lighting a cigarette, Fertig rose and opened a locked safe drawer. From it he took a thick loose-leaf book and turned back the cover. Each page held six photographs identified only by serial numbers. "Perhaps you will find my impersonator among these gentlemen."

Adjusting a gooseneck lamp, Peter scanned each photograph. He turned page after page and estimated three hundred pages in the volume. Finally, he stopped, tilted one photograph to the light, and said, "This is the one, Colonel. Number R-218."

"R-218," Fertig repeated and consulted a separate list of names keyed to the serial numbers. "You are sure?"

"Positive."

"The man's name is Moisev. Kyrill Moisev. He is listed as a simultaneous translator for the Soviet delegation to the Bureau International du Travail, the International Labor Organization. I might add that this office has reason to believe Moisev exercises parallel secret functions."

"You mean he's a spy?"

"Something on that order." Fertig closed the heavy book and returned it to his safe. "In Geneva alone we have more than twelve hundred Soviet citizens to contend with—most, if not all of them cloaked with diplomatic immunity in greater or lesser degree by virtue of assignment to these international organizations that favor my country with their patronage." He smiled wryly. "I do not believe you are entirely a stranger to this knowledge, so it will not surprise you when I say that between eight and nine hundred of these resident Soviets are agents of the GRU or KGB. We watch them when we can, ignore them when we cannot, our sole aim being to prevent damage to the interests of Switzerland." Sitting down, he looked up at Peter. "What my office particularly dislikes is conflict erupting between these Soviets and, shall I say, 'representatives' of the West. Do I make myself clear?"

"I believe so."

Fertig flicked ash from his cigarette. "I can do nothing about Moisev's impersonation, M. Ward. But we will do everything in our power to bring to justice the murderer of an innocent Swiss citizen. Unless he has left the country, he will be found."

"So Dessins said."

"I appreciate your informing me of the impersonation."

"Then perhaps you would be willing to tell me if anything out of the ordinary has come to your attention concerning Villa Beauvoir—or its *directrice*?"

"Madame Clothilde des Roziers? An extraordinary woman, M. Ward, with an intriguing background. She and her late

protector were Nazi collaborators in France. Just before the liberation of Paris they crossed the Swiss frontier, her *ami* having transferred substantial gold credits here with the help of a bribed Abwehr officer. For a time their names were on the list of proscribed French. Then Maurice Thorez, head of the French Communist party, returned from Moscow where he had spent the war in safety, was installed by de Gaulle as Vice-President of France, and *zut!* As though by magic, the two names disappeared from the list of wanted collaborators. I draw no conclusions, you understand, although the Soviet technique is well known to us—*Die Huck*, we call it. The Hook. I merely suggest a certain coincidence.”

“I understand completely. Thank you, Colonel.”

“You will be leaving Geneva soon?”

“Very soon.”

“Then *bon voyage*.”

Peter left the Hôtel de la Police, turned down the Rue Verdaine and stopped at a telephone kiosk where he telephoned MacGillivray.

“Where the devil have you been, Peter?”

“Turn on the recorder, Mac. This might take a little time.”

Telling it all took several coins, and when Peter had finished, MacGillivray said, “You’ve had quite a day. What are you going to do next?”

“I’m going to Paris. It’s where Diana went, and I’m obviously not popular in Geneva. You could say I was bombed out.”

“Yeah. What do you think the bombing meant?”

“What I don’t want to think—that Waring peached to his handlers. Also, Madame des Roziers’ background suggests she’s been under Soviet control for a long time.”

“Agreed.”

“And the sequence of events: I visit the school—Moisev visits me with a warning. I keep nosing around and, suddenly, the bomb. Either Madame la Directrice suspected I wasn’t Donald Waring’s good friend, or she had instructions to let the Soviets know any time someone made inquiries about Diana.”

“Then there’s your little *demoiselle*, Solange.”

Peter grimaced. “All that could have been an act—mistaking me for Diana’s lover.”

“But you don’t think so.”

"No. It may be a long shot, but with so little else to go on. I'd like to have someone review the register of the hotel where Diana stayed on her skiing trip last winter. Male names for the Squirrel system to chew and digest."

"Peter, there's about a hundred hotels and *pensions* in Villars."

"But only one where the Villa Beauvoir group stayed."

"All right, we'll get on it. Only don't expect miracles."

"Final item: Cable Paris I'll check in sometime tomorrow."

"Right, Peter. Good luck."

He left the kiosk and searched nearly vacant streets until he found a taxi. At the hotel there were no messages in his box, and he was about to tell the clerk to ready his bill for morning when he decided against it. Moisev and colleagues were still around, and there was nothing to be gained from giving them advance notice of his plans.

In his room Peter mixed a stiff highball, relaxed in the shower, and had the waiter bring him an *entrecôte*, salad, and a bottle of delicate D ezaley.

For a while he stood by the window, watching the quiet residential street while his mind reviewed the events during his two days in Geneva. They bulked much larger than the scant intelligence he had been able to develop, and on balance he felt pessimistic that Paris would offer more.

Peter addressed a plain envelope to Mlle. Solange Arnoux and wrote a note asking her to let him know if anything involving Diana took place at Villa Beauvoir. For his Paris address he listed a letter-drop controlled by the Paris Station. Sealing the envelope, he decided to mail it from the airport rather than trust it to the concierge.

He packed in preparation for early departure, made a nightcap, and got into bed, only then realizing how physically and mentally tired he was.

In the morning he reached Cointrin by nine and was standing in the Swissair ticket line when he heard his name paged over the public-address system. He answered at a desk phone and in a moment heard MacGillivray's voice.

"Hoped I could reach you before takeoff because I have a piece of spot news to cheer you on your way."

"Go ahead."

"The police pulled a corpse from the river this morning. It

was wedged in some pilings, otherwise it would have been carried out into the lake. Man with a bullet hole at the base of his skull, wearing a gray overcoat. The face was smashed beyond recognition, but fingerprints identified him. Looks like he's the one who rigged your car, Peter."

"I suppose he had a name?"

"Kyrill Moisev. You pay for mistakes when you work for the KGB."

8

CLEARING FRENCH CUSTOMS, PETER SPENT THE next three hours moving through Orly's huge glass-and-steel complex, showing Diana's photographs to guards and immigration officers, airline hostesses and ticket clerks, hoping to establish whether the girl had been met when she left her plane. The results of his work were zero.

Morosely, he took a taxi to the Invalides Aéro-Gare, where he switched to a second cab, left that one, and taxied to the fashionable La Muette district and a small safehouse on Boulevard Murat.

The house was surrounded by a high stone wall, entrance through a sheet-steel gate. He unlocked it, went into the house, and was pleased to find it freshly aired and dusted.

There was food and ice in the refrigerator, a stocked liquor cabinet, two telephones, and a concealed transceiver whose mate was inside Station premises at the embassy.

There was no garage, but a middle-aged black Peugeot stood in the drive, keys in the ignition lock, tank filled, and a five-liter spare in the trunk.

Locking the house door, Peter drew the blinds and took the transceiver from behind a row of false-front books. He pressed the button and said, "Seraph calling Base. Acknowledge . . ."

"*Bienvenu*, Seraph," came a disembodied voice. "Over."

He related what he had attempted at Orly, then, "If the trail was ever warm, it's subzero now."

"Afraid so. What are your requirements?"

"I'd like a makeup man and a weapon—Colt .380—some francs and a change of clothes. Size 44. And documents."

"Take an hour or so."

Peter grunted. "The girl's been gone over five months. I don't think a short delay's going to make much difference."

"The Valmy box is staked out but nobody's serviced it. Considering the months since the girl used it, the box could have changed hands a couple of times."

"Still, today's Saturday—a logical day for picking up the week's mail." He said it more to reassure himself than from valid hope.

"Safehouse satisfactory?"

"You've outdone yourselves. The milk even has today's date."

"Good. Fellow named Cliff will stop by. Out."

Peter replaced the transceiver and lunched on cheese, a stick of fresh bread, and a cold bottle of beer. Then he unpacked his bag and shaved to give the Operational Disguise technician a better surface to work with.

When Cliff came in, Peter signed for the automatic, the francs, and the brown suit which he noticed had come from Aux Trois Quartiers.

The tech was a white-haired man whose fingernails were stained from the powerful dyes he used. Studying Peter's face in the light of a high-intensity bulb, he said, "Have anything in mind?"

"On Paris streets I'd look out of place without a beard."

"True. Dye job?"

Peter nodded.

"I brought along horn-rimmed glasses, just in case. They look like prescription lenses, but they don't refract."

He filled the basin with warm water, added the contents of a plastic bottle, and with plastic gloves, began dyeing Peter's hair and eyebrows. When that was done, the tech applied clear adhesive to Peter's skin and carefully fitted on a medium black beard and moustache. Adding spectacles, the tech stood back to admire his work. "Even your friends wouldn't know you, sir."

"I'm not worried about friends. Just my enemies."

From his bag the tech produced a Belgian passport and photographed Peter with a Polaroid camera. The passport, Peter saw, already bore the Orly series of stamps. The tech trimmed Peter's photograph, glued it into the passport, and embossed it with a seal. Peter signed as Paul Warvell, and with a different pen the tech filled in his physical description.

"I'd say you're ready to go."

Peter examined his new face in the mirror and nodded. When the technician left, Peter changed into the French suit and shoes, put money and passport in his pockets, and slid the Colt under his belt. He was, as the tech said, ready to go. The entire transformation had taken less than two hours.

Calling on the transceiver, Peter reported his new status and heard his contact say, "Glad you called in, Seraph. I was about to let you know the Valmy box was serviced."

Peter felt excitement rise. "Did you get a make?"

"Yeah, but don't get hopeful. Seems the key to Box 328 is held by a priest."

Peter groaned.

"It's not impossible Diana Waring entered a convent. Give it some thought."

"The KGB doesn't run convents," Peter rasped. "What church did the priest go to?"

"He didn't go to a church. Let's see—here's the address: 13, rue de Paradis. Modern padre, eh? Found his paradise on earth."

"Bad joke," Peter said sourly. "There could be other keys to that box, or the priest could have been collecting mail for a sick parishioner."

"Planning to quiz the padre?"

"Not for the foreseeable future." Deactivating the unit, he returned it to the bookshelf.

The time was now midafternoon. Years ago as a Sorbonne student he would be at a sidewalk café, going through lecture notes and making nocturnal plans that had nothing to do with university curriculum. Now he was older, somewhat wiser, and burdened with what appeared to be a hopeless mission.

But that was no reason to ignore all that Paris offered.

Leaving La Muette by Métro, he crossed under Paris to Saint-Germain-des-Prés and found himself moving almost automatically to the Deux-Magots. Sidewalk tables were

crowded with students and tourists savoring life in the Latin Quarter, but Peter squeezed into a chair and managed to order *fine café* from a sweating waiter.

Not a lot had changed, he reflected as he looked around; the same number of tables, the covered sandwich assortment by the window. Just more customers, with more arriving every year.

Beards outnumbered hairless faces by four to one, and long male hair plus sandals was *de rigueur*. The heavy odor of marijuana fogged the air. The female clientele were in their teens or early twenties; they wore hip-length coats, shirts or sweaters, sandals, boots, and psychedelic medallions on long leather thongs. All but the Asians had pale skins; some looked undernourished, and Peter could understand why, given the wildly inflated prices of Paris. By husbanding his coffee, a student could make a demitasse last more than an hour. After that the waiter got surly.

He sipped the aromatic coffee and found himself wishing he could relive his exchange year at the Sorbonne. Life had not then polarized, and he remembered hours spent here in the same café trying to decide among law and business or just living on in a Paris that seemed to promise eternal youth.

La jeunesse, he murmured, and forced his mind back to the present.

From a pocket he drew Diana's gold wristlet and let it move like heavy silk among his fingers. The red charm caught his eye, *gamma rouge*. The red G. But what did the G mean, or symbolize?

Beside him, a voice said, "Do you want to sell?"

He turned and saw a jowly man in his forties eyeing the gold. "No," Peter said. "It's a souvenir."

"I understand. No offense intended."

Peter nodded. "Are you a jeweler?"

"I—let us say I deal in jewelry. Gold . . . stones . . ." He leaned closer. "Is there something you would like to buy?"

So the man was a fence. "Perhaps," Peter told him. "But if I wanted a duplicate of this red charm, where could I have one made?"

A loupe appeared. Thick fingers lifted the charm toward the light. "The enamel work is unusual, *mon ami*. I would say there are no more than three manufacturers in Paris that could duplicate it." The loupe disappeared, the bracelet

dropped into Peter's hand. "La Bijouterie du Roi, Seligman et Fils, and Charenton Frères. But to have only one made, it would cost four, five hundred new francs."

A hundred dollars. Peter nodded sadly. "In any case, let me offer you a cognac."

"With pleasure." The fence edged his chair to Peter's table and flagged a waiter. "*Cognac à double*," he ordered, and turned to Peter. "Swiss?"

"Belgian."

"Come here often?"

"From time to time."

"Business?"

"No—a mere teacher." Peter sipped from his demitasse.

"I thought as much. In my business it pays to be able to analyze people at a glance. What do you teach?"

"History." Peter was tiring of the interrogation. Finishing his coffee, he placed money beside his saucer and stood up, murmuring *adieux*.

"So soon?" The man's hand covered Peter's, and he realized the man was not only a fence but a fairy. With a hard look, Peter freed his hand and walked away.

When he was out of sight of the café, he paused at a kiosk to look up La Bijouterie du Roi, found its address on Boulevard Derot, and taxied there across the Pont d'Austerlitz.

Behind the display counter, a white-haired, sallow-faced old man said, "We supply only the wholesale trade."

Peter laid the bracelet on a black velvet square and slid a twenty-franc note under the cloth. The jeweler's lined face brightened. "An appraisal, *m'sieu*?" he inquired, manner suddenly respectful.

"Did your firm manufacture the enameled charm?"

Loupe in his eye socket, the old man studied it and shook his head. "No, *m'sieu*, but we could duplicate it if you desire."

"Is it possible the charm was manufactured without your knowledge?"

"*Mais, non*. I am familiar with every model offered since 1921. Have you inquired of Charenton Frères? Their *maga-sin* is only four blocks distant—near Rue Chaligny."

Thanking him, Peter set out for the next establishment, reflecting that it had been cited by two professionals as a possibility.

Inside the showroom, three clerks were attending a number of bored-looking French retailers at counters filled with glittering display cases. A fourth clerk appeared to wait on Peter. His manner was cloying, and from his accent and complexion Peter judged him Algerian.

With the bracelet between them Peter outlined his inquiry. The Algerian deigned to examine the enameled letter and shook his head. "Not a product of this firm, I assure you."

Peter glanced at the other clerks. "Perhaps one of the older employees . . . ?"

"I am here already ten years, and I know the stock," he said rudely, and stepped back from the counter.

"*Algérie Française*," Peter said audibly, saw the man's face stiffen in sudden terror, and left the premises.

Seligman et Fils proved to be on Rue de Lafayette, within walking distance of the Gare de l'Est, in a shoddy commercial district with a higher than average quota of skeletal alley cats. But the display room was clean, well-lighted, and business-like. The man who greeted him was a plump Lebanese, and over his welcoming voice Peter could hear the hum of polishing wheels and the clank of heavy molds in the workshop above.

Placing the bracelet on the counter, Peter said, "I was told your firm manufactured the small red ornament. My wife would like five more added to the bracelet. For symmetry."

Adjusting a loupe, the jeweler scrutinized the charm. "May I ask where you obtained it?"

"Le Marché aux Puces." The Flea Market. Peter placed a twenty-franc note on the far side of the counter. The Lebanese noticed it and shrugged. "I am afraid it was not this firm, *m'sieu*. Have you applied to Charenton Frères or La Bijouterie du Roi?"

Peter nodded and saw a thin-faced older man shuffle toward them from the desk where he had been seated unobserved. The bank note disappeared, and the Lebanese spoke to the newcomer. "Philippe, you will verify that the firm of Seligman did not manufacture the little piece?"

Silently, the older man got out his loupe and examined the charm. Then he returned the bracelet to Peter and pocketed the loupe. "No," he said quietly, "it is not our design," but one eye winked meaningfully. "There is a house in Marseilles —" he began, and broke off. "But no—not if you have rea-

son to believe the charm was made in Paris. Perhaps some small jeweler undertook it as a favor for a friend."

"Or mistress," the Lebanese smirked. "A thousand regrets, *m'sieu*," and turned away.

Politely, the older man escorted Peter to the door. Gesturing as though he were giving directions, he said softly, "I know something of this, *m'sieu*. Would you pay for information?"

"How much?"

"You are a detective—let the client pay. Two hundred francs?"

"*D'accord.*" At last a lead. "How—?"

"The Lebanese—I cannot talk now. Tonight at ten—by the ticket entrance of the Tour Eiffel."

9

"THANK YOU FOR YOUR COURTESY, M. PHILIPPE," Peter said loudly, shook his hand, and walked away.

Gray evening had come, and with it light mist that seemed to hang in the air like smoke. Lightoliers went on, their lamps diffused in orange-blue halos that cast gaunt shadows behind the kiosks and railings. In the Place Lafayette he waited beside a vacant cab until the driver came out of Saint-Vincent de Paul Cathedral and unlocked the door. Three blocks down the Rue d'Hautville, the cab slowed and Peter noticed the sign of the intersecting street.

Rue de Paradis.

The Valmy Post Office, Seligman et Fils, and the mail-carrying padre—all were housed in the Tenth Arrondissement.

Coincidence, Peter mused, but perhaps not entirely, and found himself interested in the priest. Probably he served at Saint-Vincent de Paul. Tomorrow, he would get a description of the padre and go to church.

High time I did, he told himself as the driver found an opening and accelerated through the stagnant traffic.

A ten-minute drive brought him to the Gare Saint-Lazare where he took the Métro to La Muette and walked the rest of the way to his house.

He turned on the TV set, found a bottle of Canadian Club, and dropped ice into a three-finger drink. Stretched out on a sofa, Peter watched an evening news program—the news as presented by government-controlled commentators. For a while he watched and listened with growing distaste, flicked off the tube, and drank a long swallow of his drink. I might as well be in Moscow getting the Kremlin's version of world events, he thought angrily, and located Juke Box International on the FM radio band. Jazz, at least, was nonpolitical.

Relaxed, finally, he went to the transceiver and reported the one slim lead he had found, knowing he had no live listener. After six a tape recorder activated automatically; in the morning someone would play it back to hear what he had to say.

Still a couple of hours to kill before his rendezvous at the Eiffel Tower. Suddenly he felt lonely, cut off in a metropolis he knew better than he knew New York. He had lived and loved in Paris—Valérie was still here in her Avenue Montaigne apartment. Still the mistress of Dumesnil, unless she had moved on to someone else.

Valérie, he reflected, was Clothilde des Roziers in her youth, and he found nothing enviable in the life of a kept mistress. Loyalty, fidelity, based on apartment leases, servants, charge accounts, and travel to Cannes and the Caribbean. When money ran out, there was nothing left.

Moodily, he refilled his glass, glanced at the telephone, and toyed with the idea of phoning her. But that would mean explanations, and the explanations would be lies. At least, he thought, there was never deception between us, and the time to begin it is not now.

To break his mood he went to the kitchen and made a cheese omelette, eating mechanically because he had been drinking and his duty hours were far from over.

Refreshed, Peter left the house a little after eight and rode the Métro back to the Gare de l'Est. From the station he took the Faubourg Saint-Denis, and where it crossed the Rue Magenta he glanced up and saw a second-story window

whose lettered advertisement glittered in the light of a nearby streetlamp.

Thiéry, Détective, it read. Forty years at the Same Address. Private & Commercial Inquiries. Confidential Information. Marital Verifications.

Peter smiled and walked on. Forty years at the same address was a long time for any firm, but in Paris the success of Thiéry, Détective, was understandable. Particularly since marital—or premarital—verifications were a speciality of the house. *Enquêtes Privées*, and all the rest of it. *Ma belle Paris . . .*

At the intersection of the Rue de Paradis, Peter paused, and glanced across Saint-Denis. There, angling off obliquely, was the Place du Désir. He was standing at the conjunction of Desire and Paradise, and the coincidence amused him. Less and less it seemed a priestly neighborhood.

Rather, the section was old, shabby, ill-lighted and given over largely to wholesale-retail trade in glass, ceramics, and crystal ware. Allied furniture stores offered nondescript tables and bedroom suites, their dusty windows grimed and cobwebbed.

Turning into the Rue de Paradis, Peter passed a confectionery, a mirror shop, a window offering a jumble of assorted glasses alleged to be Bohemian Crystal and a customs agency, and headed toward a lighted café-bar bearing the name Hubac.

Seating himself just outside the doorway, he ordered *fine café* and surveyed the far side of the street. Number 13 was diagonally across, its unlighted entry separating two stores selling ceramics and glass. The building itself was a section in the solid, block-long façade, five or six floors high, depending on whether you counted the mezzanine.

He smoked his pipe and sipped the Cognac-laced coffee while a chestnut vendor trudged past, pushing his cart. Charcoal smoke rose from a miniature stovepipe; already the chestnuts were roasting. Hot *marrons*, Peter thought, with brown, burst shells, and remembered the countless times he had bought cones of them along the Boul' Miche.

A taxi rounded the corner, stopped, and let out two men in long toga-like robes—Africans, he saw, wearing native *kente*. The taxi drove on, and after glancing around, the two walked quickly to the doorway of Number 13 and disappeared in-

side. Five minutes later a glittering black Bentley arrived and let out a well-dressed Negro wearing Muslim headdress. Probably Malgache, Peter thought, and noted the Bentley's diplomatic license number. The Muslim entered the doorway of Number 13, and when the limousine left, the street was quiet for a while.

The contrast between the arrivals' elegance and the neighborhood's shoddiness interested Peter. He ordered a second coffee and saw two young men walk toward the dark doorway. They, too, were Negro, and from their clothing he judged them to be students. Apparently some sort of conclave was taking place.

In twenty minutes he counted thirty-eight arrivals, the large majority Negro, with half a dozen whites. They came by taxi, limousine, and on foot, well-dressed and shabby, young and middle-aged. The single common denominator was that they were males.

He waited on the quiet street, deserted now even by the chestnut vendor, left two francs beside his saucer, and crossed the cobbles to the other side. Entering the doorway, he halted to listen, heard no sound, and shined his pencil flash on the button beside the door.

Underneath it was a tarnished brass plate incised with a cross above a half-round bowl:



An ideograph, he thought; a hieroglyph that was meaningless to him. He turned off the tiny beam and left the doorway to walk to the far end of Rue de Paradis, reflecting that the unfamiliar symbol might have nothing whatever to do with the men who had entered the doorway. Still, the furtive manner of some of the arrivals suggested something clandestine, as though they were members of an illegal lodge.

He would give 13, rue de Paradis, further attention at an-

other time. Now, he had to cross Paris for his rendezvous below the Eiffel Tower.

From the Gare de l'Est he took the Métro to the Ecole Militaire station, emerging near Place Joffre at the foot of the Champ de Mars. The far end, nearly half a mile away, was marked by the looming grandeur of the Eiffel Tower. Aircraft warning lights blinked from its broadcasting spire, the flagstaff of France, a thousand feet high.

He was early, he knew, for the appointment, but Peter had seen something close to fear in the face of M. Philippe, and he wanted time to reconnoiter their meeting place. So he took tree-lined Avenue Deschamel, bordering the Champ de Mars, and walked at an easy pace through the misted night. In the late eighteenth century, he reflected, the Champ de Mars had been a huge, open parade ground for cadets from the Ecole Militaire whose *patronne* was La Pompadour. More than a century later the field was converted into public gardens, laid out in geometric patterns of trees and shrubs and graveled walks.

From the shadows a frayed-looking *poule* sauntered toward him, but he waved her off and saw the resentful jerk of her oversize handbag as she turned away. No, this was not a night for dalliance.

His mind turned to Donald Waring and his missing daughter, to Villa Beauvoir and its provocative inhabitants. One hand closed around Diana's bracelet; he fingered the charm that might—just might—prove a clue to her disappearance. And he recalled the symbol on the door at 13, rue de Paradis. The cross could be a crucifix, the bowl the Southern Hemisphere. Perhaps the combination signified Christians on the continent of Africa; if so, the priestly connection was explained. The padre could be a missionary whose goal was the conversion of Muslims and members of witch-doctor cults. A laudable enterprise, he thought, and knocked his pipe against a lamppost to free the bowl of ashes.

Still, he mused as he walked on, what did it have to do with Diana?

Crossing the broad intersection that marked the center of the gardens, he checked his watch and found the time eighteen minutes to ten. M. Philippe had chosen well, he told himself; the area around the base of the tower was open, while

the massive legs and their deep shadows offered concealment for the meeting.

Another ten minutes' walking and Peter left the avenue, angling toward the tower's east leg through a lane of shoulder-high hedge. The moon was out, dimly visible through mist and cloud, and the only sound was wind-borne music from a Bateau Mouche gliding along the nearby Seine. The music faded then resumed, telling him the tourist boat had passed under the Pont d'Iéna. Beyond it but still invisible stood the Palais de Chaillot with its spreading colonnades and picture-postcard view of the Tower and the Champ de Mars.

He was walking softly now, trying to minimize the crunch of fine gravel beneath his feet. From time to time he paused, listening, then went on until finally he could see the brown steel lacework of the mammoth leg that housed the ticket office.

No lines of waiting tourists inching toward the darkened windows, no grinding of lift cables or feet reverberating on the platform two hundred feet above. In summer the restaurant offered good food and dancing, but now in late October it was closed, deserted.

Quietly he approached, still concealed by shrubbery, until he had an unrestricted view of the zone around the Tower's four latticed legs. Eiffel's genius, he remembered, had so distributed the Tower's weight that it pressed the ground with no more force than a man seated in a chair.

Stationary, Peter scanned the area, then looked at his watch. Hard on ten o'clock. M. Philippe should be arriving at any moment. He removed the Colt from his belt and pocketed it, slipping off the safety. Not that M. Philippe seemed dangerous, but he might have aggressive friends. And if there was guilty knowledge within the house of Seligman et Fils, this rendezvous could be a trap.

He chafed his hands to warm them, peered to the north, and saw a figure walking toward the base of the Tower: a thin, rather stooped man who looked behind him occasionally as he approached.

Peter scanned the dark border of trees and shrubs, saw no followers, and prepared to leave his hiding place. Brief moonlight flooded the clearing, and Peter glimpsed the man's face. It was the jeweler, Philippe, and he was walking toward the vacant ticket booth.

Quietly, Peter moved out from his cover, pointing his steps to converge with Philippe at the leg of the tower. Less than a hundred yards separated them when the jeweler halted and looked around. Before he resumed walking the sharp report of a pistol shot sounded from somewhere in the dark backdrop. Philippe cried out and stumbled into a run. Frozen, Peter heard a second shot, then a third, and with a cry the jeweler pitched forward, rolling over when his body struck the gravel. Dropping, Peter fired in the direction of the shots, fired four times, and heard the distant sound of running feet. He fired again, rose to a crouch, and the engine of a motor scooter exploded into life. The exhaust roar rose, gravel sprayed from speeding tires, and the engine sound diminished.

Peter sprinted to where the man had fallen, knelt beside him, and saw the open, staring eyes, the twitching mouth. His chest was a massive stain of blood flooding from the exit wound. Peter grasped one bony wrist for pulse, felt none, and pressed his fingers into the carotid artery.

Cupping his hands, he bent toward the ear and husked, "Philippe. I came to meet you—someone else shot you."

The eyelids closed, then opened. The lips drew back and one hand clawed at a coat pocket, fell away. Rales sounded in the old man's throat as the lungs contracted one final time.

A feeling of utter helplessness gripped Peter's mind. Sitting back, he wiped cold perspiration from his face, breathed deeply, and felt inside the pocket Philippe's hand had tried to enter. His fingers drew out a sheet of thin colored paper and transferred it to his inside pocket. The dead man's other pocket yielded nothing but a box of matches. Swallowing, Peter stood up, his mind already evaluating avenues of escape.

Someone, surely, had heard the fusillade, and the *flics* would soon be blanketing the place. He remembered his bargain and placed two hundred francs in the dead man's pocket, hesitated, and added another hundred—in case the jeweler left a widow, he told himself as he moved toward the shadows of the base. Jogging, he left the Champ de Mars and crossed the Quai de Bramly, slowing to walk over the lighted Pont d'Iéna. Down the Seine bore a glass-topped sightseeing boat, a Beatles record braying from its loudspeakers. He could see a mass of dancers, other passengers dining on the

protected upper deck, and he felt the incongruity of merriment after the violent death he had witnessed.

At the far end of the bridge he saw a taxi parked by the Chaillot reflecting pool, roused the nodding driver, and got inside. Only when the taxi was in motion did Peter shine his pencil flash on the paper that had cost three hundred francs and a man's life.

A pink flimsy copy, it was an invoice for the manufacture by Seligman et Fils of two hundred gamma letters at a price of forty-two francs each. The drawing and printed description made them identical with the one in his pocket. And as his flash probed for the buyer, he saw the name of Emil Bailot.

Address?

13, rue de Paradis.

10

AT THE GARE DE L'EST HE LEFT THE TAXI AND took Chabrol to the Rue de Lafayette. When he was within sight of Seligman et Fils, he turned down a side street, walking until he found a service alley running parallel with Lafayette. His entering footsteps provoked a scurrying of rats, and as he moved on he saw thin feline shadows streaking after them.

His estimate of the distance to Seligman's rear entrance was confirmed by a number painted on the door of a large garage. Stepping back, he surveyed the barred windows and steel-shod door. Because of the jewels and gold inside there would be entry alarms.

But there might be access through the garage.

Warming his hands, Peter examined the garage door keyhole with his pencil light and located the retaining spring. Then he got out his lock-picking kit and chose a sliver of blued steel. A bent nail would have served better, he

reflected, but the pick finally caught and held. His fingers ached as he forced the spring, then pulled.

Because the old door sagged, he levered it from the ground while he swung it outward. Hinges creaked until he set it down and slipped inside, closing the door behind him.

Panting, he waited in the darkness until he could hear above the pulse in his eardrums, and then he shined his light around. There were two panel trucks, one old, the other fairly new, and both with the firm's name lettered in gold. There were stacks of old tires, crates, a rusted foundry furnace, and a litter of discarded jewelry dies. The air was heavy with the odor of oil and grease.

He moved toward the far end and a rat skittered away, the rasp of its claws setting his nerves on edge. From a crouch he shined his flash on the steel connecting door and saw that it was closed by a tumbler lock. It would be a double lock, he told himself, one that unlocked from either side with the same key.

Picking his way over the floor, he reached the door and was bending down to examine the lock when he saw something glint beyond the second truck. Whirling, he fixed it with his light and saw a motor scooter half-hidden behind a crate. Its plated handlebars had reflected the light of his flash; the rest of the body was painted in black enamel. He went to it and touched the engine's cooling vents, jerking his hand from the unexpected heat. The tires were warm, too—warm enough, he decided, to have traveled from the Eiffel Tower within the last three quarters of an hour. Behind the rider's seat a steel delivery box was welded to the frame. A little smaller than a bread box, it had a hasp, but the padlock was missing. Opening the lid, he saw a bundle of cleaning rags, probed them with his fingers, and felt the chill of solid metal. He took out the bundle, peeled back the rags, and saw the snout of an automatic pistol. Sniffing it, he smelled the acrid scent of burned powder: the weapon had been recently fired.

He replaced the rag-wrapped pistol and stood in the darkness pondering this new assortment of facts. Philippe might have ridden the motor scooter to the Eiffel Tower, but he had not steered it back into the garage. Someone else had done it—undoubtedly the killer—and the killer could be any of the Seligman employees. Any of them at all. The list would be a

long one, and he could not attempt to select the murderer from among the workers. That was police work. Still . . .

Heavy footsteps neared the inside door. A key grated loudly in the lock, and Peter ducked between the trucks as the door opened and an overhead light went on. He heard soles rasp the garage floor. The door closed behind the newcomer and, shielding his eyes, he saw a bulky body cross in front of the trucks. The scooter stand snapped up and Peter heard the man grunt as he began pushing the machine toward the alley door.

Waiting until he could see the man's hands clench the steering grips, Peter barked, "*Don't move!*"

With a cough of surprise, the man froze and Peter moved toward him from behind. As he expected, it was the Lebanese, but he was far from the sleek *bon vivant* Peter had encountered that evening. He now wore a greasy cap, a black sweater, and work trousers.

Shivering, the Lebanese blurted, "You want money, jewels? I'll give them to you. Only don't hurt me. I have the key. Together we can take—"

"Drop the key," Peter snapped.

"Yes, yes, *m'sieu.*" Through the heavy sweater, rolls of fat quivered. "Anything you say." One hand fumbled in his pocket, and a key ring jingled against the floor.

Walking on the balls of his feet, Peter moved soundlessly until the Lebanese was only a yard away. He gripped his Colt by the barrel and swung the butt hard against the back of his skull. The Lebanese gave out a choked cry and pitched forward against the scooter, knocking it to the floor.

From the wall Peter snatched a length of rope and bound the wrists behind the corpulent body, dragged the man beside the front wheel of the truck, and tied him to the axle. He got a rag from the half-spilled delivery box and gagged the man's mouth. Then he turned out the light, closed the door, and walked quickly from the alley.

On Rue de Lafayette there was a taxi waiting outside a *brasserie* and he rode as far as the Gare du Nord. Inside the station, he found a telephone booth and looked up the number of the Police Commissariat for the Tenth Arrondissement. When the duty clerk answered, Peter said, "Near the base of the Tour Eiffel is the body of a murdered man. In the garage behind Seligman et Fils is the murderer. The pistol he

used is in the box of the delivery scooter beside him. In the name of France I charge you to see that justice is done. *Vive la France!*"

Breaking the connection, Peter left the booth and found space at one of the station bars where he ordered a double Cognac. He swallowed half without stopping, drank the rest while the bartender brought him a demitasse. Fortified, he walked out of the station, noticing the train clock showed close to midnight. By taxi he rode to within two blocks of Rue de Paradis, and slipped into the parallel service alley.

More refuse and garbage with half-starved dogs snarling for possession. Peter avoided them and noticed scavenger cats lining the alley waiting for the dogs to leave.

There was no alley sign to distinguish Number 13 from the drab sameness of the other buildings, but as he cased the section for access he concluded that entrance from that side was impossible. All reachable windows were barred, doors faced with iron and locked from inside. One building—probably Number 13—had no glass at all in the windows of the first three floors. Instead there were panels of sheet iron that seemed, by the absence of rust, to have been recently installed. Stepping back, Peter glanced up at the sharply angled roof and visualized himself sliding to his death in a clatter of loose slates. No, there would have to be another way.

Returning to the Café Hubac, he sipped coffee and watched the doorway through which the motley group had passed. Among them, very likely, would be Emil Bailot, or the man who had used that name. At the bar he checked both the alphabetical and street listings for an Emil Bailot, finding none. Nor did the bartender admit knowing such a man in the neighborhood.

Peter would have liked to question him about the gathering across the street, but decided against it. In this part of Paris only the *flics* asked direct questions, and they were armed with the majesty of the law.

By one o'clock the air was uncomfortably chill, mist hugging the street like smoke. Peter yawned and saw the bartender begin to clean the espresso machine while his wife up-ended chairs on tables. To the family Hubac, at least, the night had come to an end.

Peter paid his bill and lingered at the table over the last quarter inch of coffee. But the doorway remained inactive.

He had nearly decided that the building had been emptied during his absence in the Seligman garage, when a car came around the corner and drove to the far end of the Rue de Paradis. Its lights went out, and soon a second car followed. The diplomatic Bentley was third. When the fourth car parked, two figures emerged from the doorway and staggered down the street away from the string of cars. They were the students Peter had noticed among the first arrivals, and they seemed reasonably well drunk.

From the doorway issued men in twos and threes. The cars filled and drove away. All but the black Bentley. Finally its owner emerged, the Bentley backed up, and as he stood swaying by the curb, the chauffeur got out and helped him inside. Then the Bentley vanished and the street was as deserted as it had been before.

Behind Peter heavy riot blinds rolled down over the bar's façade, and he abandoned the table to turn back onto the Faubourg Saint-Denis. He had taken only a few steps when he heard a door open and saw a woman lurch onto the street from the doorway he had been watching. She walked unsteadily, propping herself against building walls from time to time. Her direction was opposite his, so Peter reversed and followed at a pace no faster than hers.

Near the intersection, she tripped and fell, struggled to rise, and rolled off the curb. Hurrying to her, Peter lifted her limp body from the gutter and sat it on the sidewalk, leaning against a building wall. What light there was showed a chalky face with glazed eyes. She was hatless, and while he was carrying her he had noticed a distinctive odor in her breath and hair. He flashed his pencil light in her eyes and saw no closure reaction. Her pupils were so dilated that their irises were almost invisible. And now, as he cut off the light he knew the scent that clung to her hair, remembered it from a Cairo bazaar. It was hemp, hashish, *khif*. The woman was drugged, not drunk.

No wonder the group had gathered furtively, he thought as he tried to cover her thighs with her skirt. They had smoked or eaten *khif*, a drug producing hypnotic and erotic effects, and an orgy of some sort had ensued. He played the light over her lips and saw they were bruised and swollen. On her neck and throat there were fresh strawberry marks. Yes, the lady had been part of the evening's revels.

Her purse had fallen in the street, so he brought it back to where she sat, corpse-like, breathing shallowly, deep in some drugged dream. One hand lifted toward her face, failed, and fell back. In her purse were keys, money, and a stamped receipt for a month's rent, covering an apartment on the Rue d'Amaule, made out to Mlle. Justine Fachon. The sum was small, and the street not far from Pigalle. The combination suggested prostitution, and as he studied her face, he saw that she was not unattractive. Searching for a pocket in her coat where he could secure her purse, Peter moved her left hand and heard the dull jangle of jewelry. Better put that away, too, he thought, and lifted her arm to remove the bracelet.

To find the catch he flicked on his pencil flash and stared hard at the gold and red enamel charm swaying from her bracelet. It was the same red gamma he had seen before.

Under the light he compared it with the one from his pocket—Diana's—and knew them to be identical, made in the same molds by the same careful craftsmen.

The discovery was worth all the hours of waiting, and more. Now, as he rose, he regarded Justine Fachon with new respect and interest. If she could not lead him to Diana Waring, at least she could name names among the *hashishin* and give him some idea of why Diana wore the little symbol.

Still watching her impassive face, Peter decided no harm must come to Justine Fachon. For hours until the drug wore off she would be helpless, prey to thieves, rapists, and footpads. He would have to get her home, protect her until he could devise a means of entering her confidence. And that would take both time and thought.

Stooping, he lifted her across his shoulders in fireman's carry and walked to Lafayette where he put her gently down, supporting her limp body by the waist, until a taxi stopped.

With the driver's help Peter got her into the rear seat, agreeing that she was very drunk indeed and promising the driver a generous tip for further assistance.

Her apartment proved to be on the third floor of the building. The stairs creaked and the halls stank, and while the driver held Justine upright, Peter opened the door with her key and went in, praying it was unoccupied. He found an unmade bed, a basin and bidet behind a wooden screen, an empty armoire, and helped the driver lay her on the bed. Twenty francs brought fervent blessings on Peter's head, and

when the stairs took the driver's weight, Peter locked the door and turned on the light.

Under the single overhead bulb, her face seemed whiter than before, and as he sat down, he decided she was ten years younger than she looked, putting her at twenty one or two.

He looked at the cheap, cracked mirror, scratched with initials and obscenities, at furrows in the bureau burned by long-forgotten cigarettes, and wondered how Justine Fachon had managed to end up here. Her rather thick legs and thighs suggested country breeding: from the Midi, perhaps, or the Alpes-Maritimes. A rural hut, dull, hard-working farmer parents, an older brother, a younger sister . . . He shook his head to break off the chain of sentimental thought, fitted a pillow under her head, and heard her sigh.

He took off one shoe, the other not having arrived in the room, and drew a blanket over her legs. From her wrist he detached the bracelet and dropped it into his pocket. He was reaching for the light cord when a thought struck him. So, getting out her bracelet, he hid it between bed spring and mattress, turned off the light, and set the spring catch to lock from inside.

As he reached the street, he felt fatigue dragging at his legs. There was a great deal to be done but he was too tired to think clearly, and he would need help from the Station. But that would not be available until morning.

He trudged through Pigalle, warding off whores and wheedling *macreaux*, too tired even to attempt polite refusals, immune to shouted insults, until he found the Métro station, bought a ticket, and leaned against a pillar until the train rumbled to a stop.

When it pulled into La Muette station at three fifteen, the trainman had to shake Peter awake.

A MORNING CALL FROM THE EMBASSY GOT Peter out of bed, and while coffee was brewing he used solvent to remove the false beard, shaved, and took a needed shower. Still groggy, he made *petit déjeuner* from croissants and coffee, and was dressing when the doorbell rang.

Griffin, from the Station, drove Peter in a curtained car along the Seine, cutting in to Rond-Point, then beyond the Champs to Avenue Gabriel and the embassy's high, grilled gate. A marine guard admitted the car and Griffin steered it down the ramp into the embassy garage. Leaving the car, they crossed to a vault-like door where Griffin pressed the levers of an electronic sequential lock and opened it.

The room inside was hung with sound-deadening drapes; there was thick carpeting and indirect lights. At the far end of a walnut conference table sat Hart Ramsdell the Station Chief, and Walter Zirkin, his Soviet Operations Officer. Nearby were television receivers and two TV cameras. Peter knew what they were for.

Shaking hands with his colleagues, he took a seat next to Zirkin, and Ramsdell said, "Griff, better get up to the office and check the overnight traffic."

"Yes, sir. Peter, I'll ride you back after the meeting."

He left and Ramsdell switched on the electrostatic field making the area immune to microphone surveillance.

"About time we had an op review, Peter; I don't think I've got the full flavor of the thing and I know Walter hasn't. These goddamned special missions of yours tend to bring normal Station routine to a halt."

"Well, I go where the big man sends me," Peter said mildly.

Zirkin smothered a grin. Ramsdell said, "Speaking of the director, Thorne will be talking with us sometime this morn-

ing." He gestured at the TV equipment. "Actually, that's why you're here. All I know is you're chasing the delinquent daughter of some VIP, so you'd better fill me in before Thorne flashes on the screen."

For the next half hour, almost uninterruptedly, Peter briefed the two officers, then filled his pipe and lighted it.

Ramsdell said, "Sounds mad to me, Walter—the whole damned *schmier*. Make sense to you?"

Zirkin shrugged. "My sympathies are with Peter. Mind if I take a look at the charm?"

Peter handed the wristlet to Zirkin, who examined and passed it to the Chief of Station. Ramsdell held it to the light and grunted, then he slid it back across the polished wood. Peter gave him the Seligman invoice and said, "Let's check the morning papers."

Zirkin went to a wall intercom and asked his secretary to bring them down. On *Le Monde's* fourth page, Peter found the story. "Here it is, lads: Murder at the Tour Eiffel. Assassin captured by police . . . the victim was Philippe Roger, widower, of 716-bis, rue Saint-Lazare; his confessed murderer is Raul Khoury of 29, boulevard Pereire. Khoury alleged that his victim had been embezzling funds from the jewelry firm where they worked. He followed the older man to the Eiffel Tower, accused him of theft, and struggled with Roger when Roger produced a pistol. The pistol went off, and Khoury fled." Peter put aside the paper. "He'll have a little trouble explaining how the bullets that killed the old man entered from behind but, as confessions go, it's not a bad try."

"At least *les crocqs* get confessions," Zirkin remarked.

Taking out his .380, Peter said, "I'd like to trade this for another, Hart. The shells I left behind have its signature in brass."

"Make a note, Walter. What's your next move, Peter?"

"I'd like surveillance on Justine Fachon—where she goes, who sees her."

"Telephone?"

"The only phone I saw was in the first-floor hall—public. She had a head full of hemp, so I don't think she'll drag herself out until afternoon."

Zirkin said, "We'll cover her from midday. Think she'll lead to Waring's daughter?"

Peter lifted the wristlet and let it fall against the table.

"I've so little to work with I'm grasping at anything and everything. How about checking the car files for the address—13, rue de Paradis? In case it's ever figured before."

"I was planning on doing that routinely. Want coverage there?"

Peter shook his head. "It's a tough place to watch—only so much coffee you can drink at Hubac's. But there's that diplomatic license number—CD 4089—black Bentley limousine."

Ramsdell cleared his throat. "One of yours, Walter?"

"Not Soviet. No, I'll have to check the list."

"You've got time for a few chores before Thorne eyes us from the Silver Screen. Might send down coffee, too."

Tearing his note sheet from the pad, Zirkin left the room, and Ramsdell loosened his collar. "How are things back home?"

"Not much change. The outfit rolls on—like Ol' Man River."

"Think you'll turn legitimate again? Take a Station and revel in the diplomatic life?"

"I don't have any long-range plans."

"Well, the company needs loners like you. I heard your last job was in China."

"That's where it started out—ended on the Greenland ice."

"Heard that too. By comparison Paris must be pretty mild."

"It's always nice to be back."

Ramsdell smiled. "When you're in town, I get the feeling I'm just the doorman around here. Still, you generally add your share of excitement." He looked at his watch and yawned. "They got me in at five to read Thorne's cable setting up this conference so I stayed on—slept an hour on the sofa and did some back work. Think you'd like some help on this job?"

"Can you spare it?"

"I was thinking about a fellow we've had here for the last six months. He's bright and experienced, and I've been telling Walter he's wasted where he is."

"What's he been doing?"

"Watching a dozen KGB *stagiaires* learn the language and customs as students. Students . . . Christ, they're all over thirty, even the women. This fellow—Ray Moffit—came here after a three-year workout in Africa where he got shot up a

little. He's deep, and so far as we know, he hasn't been made by the opposition. Travels with the left-wing Vietnik crowd, demonstrates against the U.S.A., and helps our army deserters find pads and pillows. His credentials are in perfect order. Hell, he's even got a goatee."

"When can I meet him?"

"Probably this afternoon."

Two commo technicians came in, one with a thermal decanter of coffee and paper cups. Ramsdell poured and watched the techs ready the TV equipment to receive the satellite signal relay. They worked quietly and efficiently while Peter sipped his coffee. His mind traveled back to Geneva and the Villa Beauvoir, to the two Colonel Fertigs—one still alive—to Solange Arnoux the would-be dropout, and the odd assemblage at 13, rue de Paradis.

After a while one of the techs said, "Permission to test, sir?"

"Go ahead." Ramsdell roused himself and moved his chair to face one of the cameras. Monitor screens lighted up and Peter saw Ramsdell on one, himself in another. The main receiver glowed, showing a test pattern. A tech positioned a mike on the table, checked the audio, and said, "We're ready for Langley, sir."

Ramsdell grunted. "The next face you see will be old Silver Top himself. More coffee, Peter?"

Refilling his cup, Peter made notes for the briefing and set aside his pipe. Then, instead of the test pattern, they saw the upper half of Thorne's body, seated behind his desk, American flag behind his right shoulder.

"Circuits open," the tech called.

Sitting forward, Thorne said, "I think I'm current on everything you reported from and about Geneva. But before you bring me up to date on your Paris findings, I think I ought to let you know the Canadians decided to inform the NATO Standing Group about Waring. The members are pretty nervous over what he may have told the Sovs, and the Secretary of State is putting pressure on me to learn the extent of Waring's disclosures. So, I'm putting pressure on you."

Peter cleared his throat. "What's Waring's situation?"

"Unchanged. He won't talk until his daughter's safe. That's admirable, in a way—the only admirable thing about the guy.

Our concern is he'll bolt for the other side or somehow tell them the game's been found out. Hart?"

"Sir?"

"I'll ask you to give Peter every facility and help the Station can muster. Understood?"

"Yes, sir. We've already begun close support."

"Good. Now, Peter, suppose you bring me up to date."

For fifteen minutes Peter briefed the director, watching Thorne's face frown from time to time, seeing the director's long fingers scratch notes on a legal-length pad. When Peter finished speaking, he swallowed coffee and Thorne said, "You think the girl's in the Rue Paradis house?"

"I think she's associated with it. Or was."

Thorne grimaced. "There's the rub. We've checked other sources and there's no indication she's in Moscow. She could be, of course, and she could be dead. I suppose you've thought of that?"

"Many times. If her father bolts, they may kill her anyway."

"So we've told him—but he isn't in too rational a state of mind."

"I suppose not."

"The Canadians are willing to send over your partner in crime—Fred Prévost—if you can use him."

"Thanks, but not just now."

Thorne shrugged. "Whatever you say. But don't alibi later you didn't have enough manpower for the job."

"Hart's providing assistance."

"He can send me a daily report, too," the director said. "I like to be able to respond intelligently when State and the White House call. Hear that, Hart?"

"Yes, sir. Daily report. On your desk by five."

"Or earlier." Tiredly Thorne plucked the lobe of one ear and Peter felt sudden sympathy for his chief. "Good luck, Peter."

The image left the screen and for a moment there was only the carrier hum. Turning to Peter, the Chief of Station muttered, "I guess we've got our orders. I'll get back to the office. Wait here for Walter and Griff."

"Right."

They shook hands, and Peter finished his tepid coffee while

the techs wheeled the cameras to wall positions and turned off the monitor sets.

When they left, Zirkin and Griffin came in, the SovOps officer with a cable for Peter from Geneva Base:

CHECK OF PUBLIC LIBRARY REFLECTS FOLLOWING OVERDUE BOOKS BORROWED BY DIANA WARING: HUYSMAN'S NOVEL "LÀ BAS," "MALLEUS MALEFICARUM" IN FRENCH, AND "TERRESTRIAL APPEARANCES OF THE DEVIL" BY THOS. STAPLETON. LATTER VOLUME VALUABLE AS STAPLETON DIED A.D. 1598. SUGGEST SUBJECT PURLOINED IT TO SELL. PARIS STATION MAY WANT TO CHECK RARE BOOK DEALERS THIS MATTER.

Peter looked up at Zirkin, who muttered, "It's weird. I never heard of those books before."

Slowly, Peter said, "*Malleus Maleficarum* was compiled for the Inquisition—the Latin title means Witches' Hammer. *Là Bas* contains a description of the Black Mass. And the Stapleton book—they all have one thing in common, Walter: witchcraft, Satanism. Worship of the Devil."

He got up from the table and handed the cable to Griffin. "For the first time I've got an idea of what we're working against."

12

TWO HOURS LATER, BEARDED ONCE MORE, PETER sat in an office overlooking the intersection of Rue Magenta and the Faubourg Saint-Denis, scanning the reverse lettering on the window. Thiéry, Détective, it said, along with the rest of what he had first read the night before. Thiéry *fil*s had accepted his inquiry along with fifty francs and left the office to go through card files that had been begun by his father while he was still a member of the Metropolitan Police.

The son and successor was a man in his forties, of below-average height, dressed like a shopkeeper, and with commonplace features that would pass unremarked in any bar. Peter smoked his pipe and heard the rattle of file cards, then an exclamation from the detective. Feet trod the worn flooring, and in a moment Thiéry *fils* returned, waving a card triumphantly. "From the time of the Second Empire!" he exclaimed, and thrust the card into Peter's hands. "Who but my father would have been so thorough as to copy the entire files of the prefecture before he retired? Here is your answer, *m'sieu*, and remember—it was Thiéry who was able to supply it!"

Typed on a brittle yellow card was the following excerpt from an ancient police report:

The prefecture has discovered a lupanar at 13, rue de Paradis. Only initiates who give the password and show a countersign are admitted. One enters into a vast room without lights where one found unknown women and associated with the first one encountered. They were of every rank and country. The agent who gained admittance was able to discover the identities of several frequenters. Among them were a Danish woman of distinction, a rich Englishwoman, and three noble ladies. The men included a banker, a prominent barrister, solicitors, a count, and two marquises. Investigation disclosed that in the reign of Louis XIV the premises were occupied by the notorious witch La Voisin who is credited with securing for the Marquise de Montespan the affections of the King. In 1679 La Voisin was imprisoned as was the renegade Abbé Guiborg who participated in the abominable affair.

"I want a copy," Peter told him.

"Read the other side," the detective said happily, and turned over the card. A notation said:

Subsequent investigation revealed that the house was more than a place of secret assignation. It was, in fact, a sort of chapel whose congregation practiced sorcery and diabolic rites.

"Fifteen francs, *m'sieu*." Thiéry collected them and departed with the card. In a few minutes he returned with legible machine copies, placed the sheets in an envelope, and handed it to Peter with a bow. "I hope I may have the pleasure of serving you again."

"It's entirely possible," Peter told him, and left the office.

On Magenta, he entered a kiosk, consulted a phone directory, and noted an address on the envelope. Then he got into a taxi and rode across the Seine to Quai Saint Michel, in easy sight of Notre Dame.

The bookstore on the quai had some of its browsing stock outside on old wooden tables. Behind them the dusty window was lettered: *Librairie Quirie. Livres Exotiques et de l'Occulte*. This was the place: exotic and occult books. *Librairie Quirie*. The tables were heaped with sexual encyclopedias, nude studies, health magazines, and books on astrology. Come-ons for what might be inside. He went in and saw ceiling-high bookshelves jammed with books, sections hidden by weird, psychedelic posters. More tables piled with books, very old books, in all the languages of the world. The store was dim, and a faint, sweet-sour smell hung in the musty air.

Curtains parted with hardly a ripple, and a girl glided toward him. Long black hair hid her forehead, fell over her shoulders, and he saw that she wore glistening black boots, black miniskirt, and tight, black turtleneck sweater. Her lips seemed bloodless. They parted and she said throatily, "*Oui, m'sieu?*"

"I was expecting someone a little older—gray-haired, with spectacles."

She pouted. "*M'sieu* is disappointed?"

"Not really." She was about twenty-two, he decided, and she must have been sewn into her costume; there was no slack at all. "Is M. Quirie about?"

"Only in the afternoons." Her eyes appraised him. "But I am sure I can help."

"You know the stock?"

"All of it." She came a step closer. "You are American?"

"And you are—Marseillaise?"

She nodded. "Simone is my name—and I go to the university."

"When you have time."

"When I have time." Her buttocks pressed the table edge. "What can I show you?"

"Everything."

"That will take time," she said dreamily. "Hours, even days."

She was, he realized, only partly in the present. She had been smoking when he came in, and around her the odor of well-cured pot was strong. The *magot* was probably still smoldering in the back room.

"Well," he said, "I'm interested in diabolism. I was told this was the place to come."

"It is. I'm doing my thesis on diabolism. That's why I'm here—to use the . . . library."

"You have the *Malleus Maleficarum*?"

"Dozens of copies."

"Anything by Stapleton?"

"Of course."

"The *Terrestrial Appearances of the Devil*?"

"Several copies. English, German, and Italian."

"French?"

She shook her head. "But I have Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* in French from the original of 1626. Let me show you."

Following her to the rear of the store, he saw her point out a table that held the *Testament of Solomon*, *The Black Pullet*, *Grimorium Verum*, and the *Heptameron*, along with more recent volumes on the Witches Sabbath, devil worship, and the Cult of Astarte.

"I suppose," he said, "there are congregations in Paris?"

"Any number of them—covens, you mean."

"Covens," he agreed, and saw her lick dry lips. Abruptly, she walked away and disappeared behind the curtain. Following quietly, Peter peered through the narrow space and saw her dragging on a beige-colored cigarette. The stench of weed was unmistakable.

On the far wall hung a massive pen-and-ink portrait of a seated human body surmounted by the hairy head of a goat with long spreading horns. On the goat's forehead two linked triangles formed the Seal of Solomon. Thrusting up between the horns was a phallic torch, and across the creature's thighs lay the smaller form of a full-breasted, naked woman. The only color on the stark portrait was in the goat's burning

eyes, and near a dark moon in the background was the symbol Peter had seen on the door of 13, rue de Paradis—the cross above the semicircular bowl. Inhaling a final time, Simone glanced up at the portrait of the *bouc-du-Sabbat*, bowed slightly, and laid the roach on an ashtray. Peter left the curtain and was opening a book when the girl came back.

“Feeling better?” he asked.

“Oh, much better. What were we discussing?”

“Witches, devil worship, covens.”

“Crazy. Well, you might visit Le Fétiche. It’s a sort of café-boîte on Boul’ Saint-Germain—143, I believe.”

“You frequent the place?”

She smiled caressingly. “When I have time.” Her thighs touched his, then her hips and the hard points of her breasts. Exhaling gutturally, she drew down his head and covered his lips with hers. Almost at once, her tongue pried apart his teeth, searching his mouth as she began to moan. Her body moved sinuously, urgently against his, then footsteps sounded near the doorway. With a gasp, she moved back a little, lowered her hands from his shoulders, and called, “*Un moment, m’sieu.*” Reluctantly, she broke contact and walked unsteadily toward the front of the store where Peter saw a well-dressed, bearded African eyeing them with interest.

Wiping his damp face, Peter reflected that it was just as well the customer had come. Another two minutes and they would have been oblivious of an earthquake.

While Simone talked with the African, Peter selected three volumes from the special table and carried them to the cash register.

The African went out and began looking through the sidewalk display. Simone came back and looked at Peter in surprise. “You are leaving?”

“Not that I want to.”

“But you’ll come back?”

“When I know more about the subject.”

Pouting, she picked up his books, wrote down the price of each, and said, “Seventy-two francs, *m’sieu-who-has-no-time-for-me.*”

Peter reached into his pocket and brought out the bracelet as though by mistake. He laid it on the top book and began counting out francs. Simone lifted the bracelet and murmured, “You will give this to me?”

"It belongs to my *chère amie*," he lied, and pointed to the *gamma rouge*. "Perhaps you could tell me what this represents. A Greek letter?"

Simone laughed shortly, pushed hair from her forehead, and said, "That is what uninitiates are supposed to think, but of course it is not that at all. Your *chère amie* frequents Le Fétiche?"

Peter frowned. "I don't think so. Why?"

"Because the letter is really an *L*, *m'sieu*. To members of the cult it stands for Lucifer—the Light Bearer, the Grand Master. The Dark Brother who was wronged."

"In other words, the Devil."

"*Oui. Le Diable.*"

On her pad he drew the cross-and-bowl symbol and asked what it meant.

"The sign of the Devil—*everyone* knows that. The cross above the Underworld. You don't know much about these things, do you?"

"I'm learning."

"And I could teach you many things."

Pocketing the wristlet, he finished paying for the books and placed fifty francs in Simone's hand. "Buy a bracelet with this."

"I would rather you stayed . . . but, if you insist, *m'sieu*. You are very generous and I hope we will meet at Le Fétiche."

"I would like nothing better."

She wrapped the books in plain brown paper and gave him the package. "*Au'voir, m'sieu.*"

"*Au revoir, Simone.*"

He left the store, and as he turned past the browsing African, he heard in colonial-accented French: "An interesting establishment. May I inquire if the lady is your *femme*?"

"She is not."

"Hospitable, then?"

"She's in that mood," Peter agreed, and walked to the corner. Pausing, he looked back and saw the African enter the store. *Bonne chance*, Peter thought, and walked on until he found a taxi idling near Rue Séguier.

He reached his safehouse by an indirect route and was making a cheese omelette when the transceiver sounded.

Answering, he heard Zirkin say, "Peter, that diplomatic license number is assigned to a Czech Embassy vehicle."

"That was no Czech who got out of it."

"So I gathered. Next point: Justine, the lotus-eater, is still abed I'm told. Third, we have nothing on 13, rue de Paradis, in the files."

"Never mind, I got a full readout dating from the Second Empire. Extracted from prefectural files." He read the report and refolded the copies.

"Do you suppose—after all these years—the place is *still* a Black Chapel?"

"Why not? How else do you explain the evidence? And when the Sovs like a place, they hang on to it. Take number 8, rue de Prony. In the twenties it was the OGPU's 'House of Special Destinations' where people entered never to be seen again. During the Spanish Civil War it was the Soviet propaganda center and headquarters for the Cominform. Today it houses Tass and *Etudes Soviétiques*. So let's not worry about antiquity. The Devil had worshipers long before Lenin."

"You may be right. But is this whole thing degenerating into a witch-hunt?"

"That remains to be seen," Peter said, and told Zirkin about his encounter at the Librairie Quirie and the significance of the red-gold charm.

"You get all the fun," Zirkin complained. "If I weren't married and the father of four, I'd look into Simone myself."

"She was cruising the stratosphere when I left, and ready to take on anything up to and including tigers."

"*Sal Américain*," Zirkin growled. "Griff made contact, and Ray Moffit will be calling on you in a little while. He'll be briefed, with the exception of what you've just told me. Count on him for everything except gun-slinging. He prefers quiet work—a knife."

"I'll be glad of his company."

"What's your next move?"

"I'll work it out with Ray. In the meantime, keep me posted on Justine."

He went back to the kitchen and disposed of the spoiled omelette. Making another, he ate it with two glasses of Chablis and put on a pot of coffee. Then he undid his package of books and settled down to read.

Toward four o'clock the front bell rang, and when Peter

unlocked the gate he saw a handsome, bearded young Negro whose muscles rippled under his striped turtleneck. "I'm Ray Moffit," he said quietly. "Griff said you had things for me to do."

13

WHEN PETER FINISHED TALKING, RAY LIGHTED another cigarette and said, "Eerie stuff, but I've had echoes of it before. Nothing worth reporting because it wasn't really tangible. For instance, I've been to Le Fétiche any number of times. In Paris the world of the African student is almost a subculture. He comes here from Dahomey usually on a scholarship of some kind and with barely enough money to eat. He sleeps where he can, unaccustomed to cold as he is, and has a pretty miserable time of it. To begin with, his schooling is probably entirely inadequate for the Sorbonne or the university, so allowances are made for him. He's aware of it and that makes him feel all the more inferior. If he's in school with fellow countrymen, chances are they have different tribal backgrounds that cut off rapport, so it's damned hard to find companionship with his own kind. He withdraws into a kind of cultural and personal isolation that makes him easy prey for the ChiComs and Sovs who've infiltrated the milieu. They give him pocket money, pay his rent, and see that he has a good time—hell, they even provide tutors from their 'cultural institutes.' Naturally the young man is grateful; he's found understanding and kind friends. From them he gets political indoctrination focused on the problems of his country, but in Marxist terms. He swallows it without a thought; capitalism hasn't done much for him, while the Socialists' way seems to promise everything. So he goes back with a full Marxist repertoire, ideologically a Communist and a trained agent of subversion and violent revolution." Ray exhaled a smoke ring and watched it revolve toward the ceiling. "That's

what we're up against, Peter; and those are the chinks the free world fails to fill. We're too busy with today and yesterday to reflect that today's ill-clothed, hungry African student is tomorrow's revolutionary leader, the prime minister of the future with whom we'll have to deal on a damned uncomfortable basis."

Peter added coffee to their cups. "Go on."

"My ancestors came from Africa. I'm black, and I'm accepted by these young Africans. If they knew what 'soul brother' meant, I'm one of them. And I know this: Christianity has had no mass, lasting effect on the Dark Continent. Look back over the last twenty years when the winds of change began their hurricane, and you've seen God swept away in the dust of charging warriors. Still, superstition is a natural part of the human makeup—awe of and belief in the supernatural. With Christianity dissipated, what returns to fill the void but gods eons old in the African psychological fabric. And some of those gods are easily identifiable with the Christian concept of a king of the Underworld—a Devil. Lucifer, Simone called him. So don't be surprised to find connections here in Paris between the long-range goals of the Sovs and ChiComs, the African colony, and the cult of the Devil. Think back—Satanism developed in Europe as a desperate alternative to the harsh repressions of the medieval Church and the grinding misery of feudalism. Those people had had enough of the works of Christ, and since the Devil was His enemy, he offered at least the glimmerings of hope. The Black Mass was the antithesis of Roman sacraments, an obscene parody that provided the worshipers an outlet for their hatred against their oppressors. And in those days the Church was in charge of everything. So it was *glavni vrug*—the number-one enemy."

"You've studied the subject," Peter observed.

Moffit smiled. "I spent a year doing my master's thesis in Haiti, where *vodun* is a living thing. For a decade at least our enemies have been harnessing and channeling the strength and emotions of able young Africans into activities that serve them mutually—the anarchic overthrow of order, racist hatred against white colonists, a holy, or rather *unholy jihad*." He spread his hands. "I'm almost willing to say Europe's lost to us, but I don't think it's too late to save Africa."

He grimaced. "My ethnic homeland, *malheureusement*. Now, what can I do?"

"I'd like you to try entering Number 13 tonight."

"I'm willing to try anything."

Peter tossed him the bracelet. "This may be the talisman that gets you past the guard. If there's a password, some sort of spoken formula, you're on your own."

"Did one of those student participants wear a beard?"

"Yes. But he came with a companion."

"Then I'd better wear a *kente* and try to mingle."

"Covens—congregations—are in multiples of thirteen, so you'll have to arrange for a dropout."

"No problem." From under his trouser leg, Moffit drew a black-bladed knife with a knurled handle. "And if I see the girl—Diana?"

"Forget the knife. She's no use to us dead, and neither are you."

Ray put away the knife, stubbed out his cigarette, and leaned back on the sofa cushions. "Happen to know the date?"

"Today? The thirtieth."

"And tomorrow's the thirty-first. Of October, Peter. A night significant to Christians as well as diabolists."

"All Hallows' Eve."

"And I'd like to be there. On one of those special occasions they say a Black Mass isn't just a lot of mumbo-jumbo—it's dynamite."

"Just get through the warm-up tonight. Don't push your luck. Stay cool."

"Like dead."

Half an hour after Moffit left, the call came. Justine Fachon had emerged from her building and crossed the street to a sidewalk café called Le Pelicon. She was sitting there trying to get down coffee and a sandwich, and having a hard time of it.

Peter backed the Peugeot out of the drive, locked the gate, and made two stops en route the Rue d'Amaule: first at a pet shop, then a *fromagerie*. Parking a block from Le Pelicon, Peter walked to it and saw Justine sitting deep under the awning, in the shadows. She was wearing dark glasses, and her face was the color and texture of dough. He took a wall

table ten feet from hers and ordered Rémy-Martin from the waiter.

She was in bad shape, he saw; her face twitched and she moved jerkily in her chair. With a hemp hangover she would feel every nerve exposed, her head a punching bag. Light would strike her sensitive eyes like splinters of incandescent steel. Instead of coffee she should be drinking Cognac or Paraldehyde, he mused, and felt an urge to suggest it.

In his left pocket the black mouse stirred. Peter bought *Le Figaro* from a passing newsboy and pretended to read while using it to screen himself from Justine. In his right pocket, his thumb and index finger broke small grains from the slice of Liederkranz, and when there was a supply, he began flipping the crumbs in a line leading to Justine's table, then formed a second line leading back. It took the better part of ten minutes, the mouse becoming more restless as it sniffed the intoxicating odor. Peter wet a paper napkin and cleaned his hands, put aside the newspaper, and studied his target.

Justine was staring at her coffee, lips drawn in distaste. Reaching into her purse, she brought out some coins and was counting them when Peter drew the black mouse from his pocket. Letting him drop gently to the walk, he coughed loudly and saw Justine look up.

The black mouse scurried along the cheese line inhaling the nearly invisible crumbs without breaking his pace. He raced under Justine's table and she screamed. Peter barked, "*Jacomet!*" and the mouse weaved back among the chair and table legs, racing along the homeward course. When he was within reach, Peter scooped him up and replaced the mouse in his pocket. Walking quickly to Justine, he sat down and said, "The Grand Master appears in many forms, Justine. Have no fear."

She seemed to freeze, mouth open. Through the dark glasses he could see her eyes were wide. She drew in one shuddering breath, gasped, "*La souris . . . la souris noire!*" and leaned forward weakly.

"Jacomet," Peter said. "My familiar sought you out. You are a Sister of the Shadow."

Her eyes closed. She swayed from side to side and he thought she was going to faint. His hand steadied her arm as he said, "Your soul belongs to the Devil, to Asmodeus, the

all-powerful. Take me to him who leads your coven in worship."

Her face was death-like. Her lips moved and she whispered, "You knew my name. How did you know my name?"

Peter smiled pityingly. "From Jacomet there are no secrets. Take me now, Justine."

Wordlessly Justine rose, turned, and stared at the street. Peter dropped the cheese beneath the table and took her arm. Drawing back her sleeve, he touched the bare wrist. "You do not wear the talisman of Lucifer," he said accusingly. "Without it you lack the protection of the Grand Master."

Limply, she leaned against him. In a hoarse voice she said, "I . . . I must have lost it."

"Then Jacomet will tell me where it can be found."

Steadying herself, she said, "Our leader lives near the Etoile."

Guiding her by the elbow, Peter walked to the corner and waited until a taxi stopped. They got in, and Justine gave the address to the driver: 27, avenue Friedland. Twenty minutes later they entered the apartment building and took the lift to the fifth floor. Halting, Justine said, "I should have told him we were coming."

Peter shrugged. "By now he should know we are here." He lifted the mouse in his cupped hand and it squeaked. Justine shuddered and walked ahead. Predictably, the door at which she rang was numbered 13. Standing behind her, Peter saw an eyehole open, heard the rasp of a snub chain, and the door swung inward.

The man who stood there was tall and thin. On his chin was a black, pointed goatee. His high forehead was divided by a deep widow's peak of jet-black hair. He had a pale, ageless face, and he was wearing a red silk smoking jacket with black lapels. For a moment he stared at them, said, "Come in, Justine," and stepped back.

Entering, Peter said, "I am called Black Paul—Paul le Noir. My familiar led me to Justine."

"Welcome, Brother," the man said, but his eyes were hostile. "I am Lucien de Réseau." Lucien of the Caul.

Peter stroked the mouse and held it to his ear. Justine watched in fascination while his lips moved silently. Lucien said, "What—?" but Peter quieted him. After a few moments he put away the mouse and said to Justine, "Jacomet says

your talisman was found by a cleaning woman who placed it beneath your mattress next to the bedspring. She did so thinking you would believe it lost. Then when you moved from the room she could 'find' the talisman and its chain without being accused of theft."

Lucien gazed at him through slit eyes. "Look for it there, Justine. And tell me what you find."

Peter smiled amiably. "It will be found, brother."

"We will see." Turning, Lucien led them through a sumptuously furnished room to another, dimly lighted and hung with black drapes. Except for a black coffin mounted above the black rug, it was unfurnished. Lifting a large oil painting of the Crucifixion from the wall, Lucien turned and rehung it. "Lucifer welcomes you," he said sonorously, and Peter saw the *bouc-du-Sabbat* in colored oils. The goat's eyes and the nipples of the naked woman smoldered like rubies.

"I pay homage to Lucifer who was wronged," Peter replied.

"What brings you to our coven, brother?"

"To join in celebrating All Hallows' Eve."

"That will be difficult, Paul le Noir. Our congregation is complete." His voice was hard.

Justine said, "Perhaps one will not attend tomorrow night, Lucien."

Lucien ignored her. "From what country do you come?"

"Belgium. My coven was persecuted and disbanded by the police."

"But you escaped."

"Forewarned by Jacomet." He heard the quick intake of Justine's breath. If he doubted it before, he knew now that she was a believer. Lucien, of course, was not.

Peter walked to the coffin, opened it, and saw on the red silk interior the black robes of a priest, essential in the rites. There was a chalice, a folded altar cloth, and large phallic candlesticks with thick black candles. He was probing to learn what else the coffin concealed when Lucien called harshly, "Close the coffin, brother." And as Peter lowered the lid, Lucien spoke to the woman. "Return to your room, sister, and tell me if the talisman is there."

Bowing her head meekly, Justine left the room. The only sound in the heavy silence was the opening and closing of the door.

Peter's back to Lucien, he heard the coven leader say, "She will find it, Paul le Noir?"

"Jacomet told me it is there," he answered, and turned to see a pistol in Lucien's hand. Frowning, he said, "Brother Lucien, what is—" breaking off when the man shook his head. With a sardonic smile, Lucien said, "You are clever, Paul le Noir—or whatever your name happens to be. Justine is stupid, and probably still half-drugged, or she would not have brought you here. Never before has someone uninvited penetrated our coven. How did you manage it?"

"My familiar made her known to me."

"Rubbish. Give me the *souris noire*—and only it."

Reluctantly, Peter dug out the mouse and placed it in Lucien's left hand. Long wiry fingers closed around the furry head, and with a flick of his wrist, Lucien broke its neck. Tossing the body into a corner, Lucien said, "So much for Jacomet, your familiar. You stole Justine's talisman and hid it in her room—or had it done."

Peter shook his head.

"Of course, you are lying, so let us have no more pretense. Why did you come here?"

"To join your coven," Peter said weakly. "Celebrate the Devil's rites."

"You've learned the *argot*," Lucien sneered, "but I am unimpressed. Yes, I am the leader of a coven—a large and very special congregation—but as I told Justine, there are no vacancies just now. You will turn around. Place your hands behind your back."

Peter complied, heard the soft rustle of footsteps, and kicked backward. His foot glanced off Lucien's thigh and brought a quick yelp of pain. Whirling, he ducked and tried to butt the coven leader but Lucien was too agile. Leaping aside, he smashed the pistol against the back of Peter's skull. Strength dissolved and he fell forward in a galaxy of flashing lights. In the brief moments of lingering consciousness he tried to rise. Then darkness clouded his eyes, and from a great distance he heard the coven leader snarl, "You will assist at the Devil's rites, Brother Paul. The coven will drink your blood."

DARKNESS WAS UNENDING AND ETERNAL. SLOWLY, slow as the parallactic swing of Sirius, the darkness changed into a lesser thing, became impersonal, external. With the change grew bulbous, spreading pain. Rooted in his brain it sent red-hot tendrils along his arms and into the tips of fingers that were immeasurably far away. His body throbbed in a dull, rhythmic ache, and he realized that his eyes were open.

Panic gripped him with the thought that he was blind. He rolled over, gasping in fear, dreading the unknown, and saw a difference in the lightless texture around him. Breathing deeply, he managed to sit up, prying his torso erect with bound hands and feet. The bonds were tight, restricting circulation, and as he tried to moisten cracked lips, he became aware of the heavy aftertaste of drugs. Memory returned, and with it the knowledge that he was no longer in the lush apartment of Lucien de Réseau. He moved again and heard the frantic clawing of a rat. He remembered Jacomet, the little black mouse he had bought in the pet shop, remembered the scent of cheese that clung to his pocket and had drawn the rat to where he lay.

The aftereffects of the drug blunted the edges of his pain, and with the realization that he was alive and not blind, Peter began to estimate his situation and his chances of survival. Hours had passed since Lucien had struck him down, hours spent in drugged unconsciousness. Because his wrists were bound behind him, he could not see his watch, but a faint aura of moonlight outlined a skylight above. Without the use of his arms, it was too high to reach and smash; besides, the noise would bring someone.

The coven will drink your blood. He shivered at the remembered words and tested his bonds. Drinking human blood

was integral to the Devil's Mass; a perverse substitution for the consecrated wine.

And he had seen the sacramental chalice.

The room was cold. He shivered again, rolled toward the far wall, and forced his heels against his thighs. The nail of his index finger scraped a layer of adhesive from the arc of one rubber heel, dug underneath, and pulled out a plastic tab that shielded the point of a thin nine-inch blade. One edge was razor-sharp, the other finely serrated. Straightening his cramped legs, he rested a moment, flexed them again, and worked his wrist bonds over the saw-tooth edge. The nylon cords cut cleanly, and in a moment he was sawing at his ankle ties, the rush of new blood painfully prickling his numbed toes and fingers.

Peter chafed his hands, rubbed his wrists, and slid the blade into his trousers pocket, then tiptoed to the door. The handle turned but the door was locked from the other side. Leaving it, he searched the garret and carried an old barrel into position below the skylight. By stretching he could reach the wooden frame, found a crude wooden keep that closed the skylight, and pushed it open.

Looking out and around, he recognized the service alley below; he was in or next to 13, rue de Paradis. He lowered himself to the barrel, thinking: I finally got inside, but not the way I intended.

To the alley below it was almost a sheer drop; the alternatives were over the roof or through the locked door and down. As he considered the choice, it came to him that they would probably not kill him tonight. Tomorrow night—All Hallows'—was when Lucien would need hot, fresh blood. Drug him again and slit his throat on the altar.

The altar, he thought, and remembered the black coffin. Draped on a catafalque, it would make an excellent altar. Perhaps Lucien had used it to bring him here; a coffin for the dead-in-life. The to-be-dead.

His mouth was dry; thirst clawed his throat. He was studying the skylight again when he heard—or rather felt—the beat of drums. It came in a ponderous threnody and he glanced at the dial of his watch: three minutes to midnight. This would be the dress rehearsal. The drums seemed to follow the beat of his pulse. He pressed his ear to the door panel and heard a subdued hum, as though a muffled machine were running

somewhere nearby. Its pitch and phase seemed somehow familiar, and he searched his memory to identify the sound, abandoning the effort finally, and turning his attention to the lock on the door.

They had not taken his lockpicks; even his wallet was intact. Lucien was more interested in the body than its identity. Kneeling, he worked in the dark, snapping two picks before the third held, and he forced the spring to give. Quietly he opened the door and the motor hum rose in volume. Still on his knees he peered into what seemed a vast and vacant space, then crawled through the doorway and found himself on a narrow catwalk. The drums were louder now, their rhythm faster than before, but they seemed far away. Then above them rose a chant of many voices, the words indistinguishable, a harmonic of ecstasy crowning the weird, barbaric music.

As the chanting crescendoed, Peter felt his neck hairs rise. The drums pounded a frenetic climax, there was momentary silence, then a groan of awe from the throats below.

It seemed to him that he was high above the back of a stage, in the flies where scenery was stored. He had worked as a stagehand in Sock and Buskin and knew the sensation of height, distance, and detachment from the spectacle below. Only he could see nothing; the celebrants must be below a false ceiling hung for sound insulation. Looking toward the invisible motor hum, he decided it came from a film projector. Special effects for the Mass—or a Ciné Bleu.

Reaching through the guardrail, he felt the fluffy substance of glass-wool insulation. His fingers probed and struck the rough surface of sheet *bagasse*. No, the ceiling would not take his weight. He stood and followed the catwalk along the bare wall to its end. The door was metal-faced; there was no keyhole so it must be barred on the other side. The skylight was his only way of escape.

Turning back, he reached the garret door and heard through the unaccustomed silence the clank of chain, the drawing of a bolt. Quietly, he slipped through the doorway and closed his door, standing at the hinge side. The far door clanked shut and he heard heavy footsteps coming along the catwalk. Tensing himself, he waited for a key to enter the lock, but the footsteps continued past, fading until he could hear nothing but a low scraping sound. After a while the

footsteps returned, walking faster and less heavily. This time they halted outside his door and a key turned in the lock. Gripping his blade, Peter poised on the balls of his feet. The door swung inward and a flash struck the wall, dropped, and fixed on the barrel. With a grunt the man came in, moving fast. Peter's left arm circled his throat and hauled back, overbalancing the big body, while his right hand drove the blade between the ribs and into the heart. Sound bubbled through the strangling throat and the flashlight hit the floor, rolling crazily from side to side. For a moment the arms flailed, then dropped to the sides where they hung like pendulums. Peter lowered the body, drew out his blade, and wiped it on the dead man's shirt. Closing the door, he picked up the still-moving light and played it on the body.

His victim was a huge, bearded mulatto. Six-feet-three, and at least 240 pounds. Dead eyes glinted in the light, and as it traveled the body's length, Peter saw a large knife inside the belt. He pulled it out, put it in his own, and turned off the light. When the dead man was missed, others would come to investigate; there was no time left to explore the building.

He stepped onto the barrel, shoved open the skylight, and pulled himself through, then closed the opening. Gripping the sides of the frame, he sat there, chilled by the outside air, seeing through his feet the alley far below. When his heart slowed its pounding, he turned and, with his belly against the sharply angled roof, began to move beyond the skylight. His hands searched and clawed for purchase as his feet slid along the ancient gutter. A moving cloud freed the moon, and gray light showed him a chimney with handholds leading to it. A distant searchlight swept the sky. Through it whined a jet, red lights blinking like some child's toy. His fingers were stiff with cold. Under his weight the gutter sagged, his fingers brought slate from the siding, and it slithered loose, fragmenting on the alley below.

Sweating despite the cold, he inched his way toward the chimney, gripped the nearest handhold, and hung there taking deep breaths. Then he climbed slowly to the summit where the roof leveled off into a dark plateau. With the aid of the light, he thought, he could cross the length of the block over adjoining roofs. One of the buildings would have a fire escape, he told himself, or an entrance to an elevator

shaft; the worst was behind him. He wiped his wet face and stood up, peering to find the best way from the building.

Then he heard a sound.

As he listened, his spine seemed to congeal. The sound was far yet near; disembodied but recognizable. Turning, he searched for the source and realized it was near at hand: the chimney.

Forcing himself to move, he put his ear beside the sooty opening and felt his heart skip a beat as the sound came upward.

It was the sound of a young girl weeping; despairing gasps of fear and hopeless solitude. His jaw muscles set, he breathed deeply and moved off from the chimney. As he crossed the low building divider; he told himself that now was not the time to speculate about the sobbing girl. His first obligation was to get away. Later he could think about her and what could be done . . .

Flashing the light from time to time, he picked his way over the building roofs until he reached the final one. Then, searching all three sides, he found a rusty fire escape and lowered himself by the upper rungs until he reached the grilled platform where stairs led down to safety.

15

REACHING THE MURAT SAFEHOUSE, PETER raised the Station duty officer by transceiver, made a brief report, and learned Ray Moffit was en route to meet him. Ray arrived forty minutes later, after Peter had iced the bruise on his skull, taken pain-killer, and made a pot of coffee.

While Peter told him what had happened since their meeting, Moffit sat forward and clenched his hands. "So you just killed him."

"That bother you?"

"Yeah."

"The place was full of hopped-up celebrants. One yell from him and they'd have been all over my back."

Moffit shrugged. "I suppose so. But what I wonder is would you have knifed him so fast if he'd been white?"

"I was hoping he would be—Lucien, specifically. The guy who was going to nourish the coven on my blood. If it makes you feel any better, color wasn't a factor. It was too damned dark to see."

"All right. What was he doing up there?"

"I think he must have carried up the girl I heard crying later, locked her in a room beyond mine, and opened my door to check."

"It was probably the girl you've been looking for—Diana Waring. I recognized her in the chapel." He swallowed. "She was the high priestess."

Peter felt sickened. "I was afraid of that," he said huskily. "So we know where she is."

Moffit opened his fists and stared at his palms. "I feel dirty, filthy. The things I saw and heard tonight were inhuman. They were bestial. This Lucien of yours—he was the priest, Peter. And for the first time in my life I believe in the Devil." He took something from his pocket and gave it to Peter. It was a small dark-brown wafer. "The Host," he said. "Hashish. They were eating it and blowing their minds. Did you hear the shots?"

"No."

"Toward the end of the rites, Lucien raised Diana from the altar and stood her upright—naked, of course. He fired a shot at her, and nothing happened; fired at a wine bottle and broke it; another shot at her: nothing. Then he broke another bottle. Six shots in all, Peter, and the crowd was pretty impressed. Know how he did it?"

"The gun was loaded alternately with blanks and live cartridges."

"Not quite—he let some of the celebrants look at the cartridges before he fired. And I could *see* bullets strike her body and dissolve."

"Frangible bullets."

"Graphite that looks like lead and becomes dust on impact. But I don't think the crowd would believe you. They believed him and they believed *her*. He promised them immunity from bullets. I think that's what the whole occult buildup was for."

He grimaced. "Dawas. Mama Onema in the Congo, Alice Lenshima in Zambia. They made big medicine for a while, but their followers couldn't help noticing that government bullets killed and wounded, so the Dawas went out of business. The Mau Mau ritual promised bullet immunity, and if I'm not mistaken, it's part of Papa Doc's *vodun* in Haiti. Now I won't say every devotée in the chapel believed supernatural power protected the girl, but enough of them did to carry the word back to Africa and start a new round of slaughter."

"How did you get in?"

"Waylaid one of the brothers, borrowed his robes, and stepped inside. Luckily, the guy ahead of me has a loud voice and I heard the recognition phrases. The door guard asks, 'Do thorns prick tonight?' and the answer is: 'Thorns prick no follower of Lucifer.' So there's the invulnerability theme before they even get inside."

"And once inside?"

"When the coven assembled—there were thirty-nine of us—what light there was went out, and we were treated to about five minutes of the wildest visual effects I've ever seen. In color. That sets the mood. Probably a hidden projector somewhere."

"I heard it running."

"Then Lucien appears in smoke and lightning, and I see the altar draped with this naked girl—Astarte-Ishtar. Later when I saw her face, I realized she was Diana Waring. The Mass begins, and I'll tell you it was enough to make me want to throw up. This big cat, Lucien, cuts the throat of a black chicken, spills the blood in a chalice, and everyone drinks. After that we kiss the *bouc's* rump and he shouts, '*Melez, melez.*' Then the orgy begins."

"Including Diana?"

"I got the impression she's being reserved for something big. Tonight, maybe. Or she could be Lucien's private stock. In any case she was so docile she must have been drugged—like a robot. Oh—her hair was dyed black, but I couldn't mistake the face. Other women materialized and served the brothers. Probably Justine was one of them—I couldn't see their faces. But I made some identifications: the big one who came in the Czech car is Ben Sidida, a Sudanese I've seen around the club."

“Le Fétiche?”

“The Club International des Etudiants Africains, down the street from Le Fétiche. It’s sort of a Communist USO. The other fellow was Muhammad Hilsum from Uganda. I also heard Cuban Spanish from three or four of the light-skinned brothers, so there’s that element, too. And I saw Marc Byong, chief of the Jeunesse Nationale de la Révolution. In the Congo he was one of Lumumba’s *barbouzes*. After that he set up a guerrilla training camp in Tanzania at Chunya.”

“You really know these fellows.”

“It’s my business, Peter—and tonight I earned my salary. I guess we both did.” He added coffee to their cups and sat down again. “Thirteen, rue de Paradis, is a large, complicated, and expensive setup with much more to it than obscene rites. I think that’s just the come-on. There has to be a percentage for the organizers. I think the brothers are being trained and indoctrinated for butchery. Their heritage preconditions them to satanism, and here in Paris they’re being shown how the white folks do it. In their scale of values that automatically inflates the gimmick, gives it special validity.” His eyes narrowed. “The bullets didn’t penetrate Diana’s white skin, but they broke the bottles. It occurs to me they have long-range plans for her: the beautiful white Dawa of Pan-African revolution.” He stood up. “Let’s go back and get her.”

Peter shook his head. “By now that body’s been found. We’d be walking into an armed camp.”

“You chicken?”

“Where her life’s concerned. I can’t risk it against those odds. Besides, we’re overtired and emotional. When we take her, it has to be in cold blood.”

Moffit exhaled, drew one hand across his eyes. “Sorry about the outburst. What are you going to do?”

“Get some sleep. There’s a spare bed in my room.”

By midafternoon the safehouse had become a command post staffed with six Station officers. The single transceiver link had been augmented with closed-circuit TV and a slave decoding machine. Two officers manned walkie-talkies that received reports from surveillance teams covering 13, rue de Paradis, and the apartment building of Lucien de Réseau.

Griff tore off a length of the continuous sheet issuing from

the decoder and brought it over to Peter. "From Geneva," he said. "Staying at the ski lodge along with the Villa Beauvoir group was a man named Emil Bailot. French, age twenty-five. Same address on Friedland as Lucien." Peter looked at the cable and handed it back. "That was the name on Philippe's invoice." Opening a street directory, he checked the list of occupants at 27, avenue Friedland, and shook his head. "*Personne*. Just an alias for Lucien or someone else. So we don't know who met Diana at Villars. Any word from Langley?"

"Not yet. And until we get the director's okay we can't move."

"I know," Peter said irritably, and got up. "Where's Mof-fit?"

"Checking the Club des Etudiants, Le Fétiche—all the hangouts. So far he hasn't spotted any of last night's crowd."

Peter tugged an earlobe. "I wonder how Waring reacted to the news."

"The Canadians weren't going to give him details—only that we'd located Diana alive in Paris."

"Now all we have to do is get her out safely." In the background he could hear the walkie-talkies working. Everything was readied for the big try—and Thorne would have to decide yes or no. "Anyone covering the ChiCom Embassy?"

"Just the French. It's a big place out in Neuilly and the DST uses the only good observation post. They don't know what we'd be looking for, and if they did they wouldn't tell us. Orders from on high."

Peter grimaced. "Lafayette, we are here," he said sourly and ran hot coffee from the big electric maker into his cup.

Griff said, "Peter, do people really *believe* in the Devil?"

"Why not? Three hundred, four hundred years ago they did. It was a big con game, of course. A hoax. A man set himself up in business and kept the coven happy. Most of them were old women—ugly or deformed—unhappy in any case. No one paid any attention to them except this spurious Devil, and when he visited their beds he was the incubus providing unbridled sensualism. From it the women gained a sense of belonging, a feeling of life and power. He was tangible, a god incarnate, and they were privy to the mysteries. The younger women, the better-looking ones, were obligated to visit male converts by night as succubi. So there was some-

thing for everyone, and when they went to the stake, they thumbed their noses at the crowd, thinking of all the good times waiting for them in the Underworld. In Hell. Sure they believed in the Devil—hadn't he been in their beds? The Church gave them nothing but misery; the Devil gave them the life of the senses."

"Hard to believe—in this day and age."

"People believe and they don't believe. Spill salt, and you toss a pinch over your left shoulder where the Devil sits. A horseshoe over a doorway is the Devil's horns. And how many skyscrapers or hotels have a thirteenth floor? Superstition is perdurable. When you think of New Orleans, what comes to mind? Good food and voodoo. In Haiti, just voodoo. In Brazil, macumba. In Africa—" He shrugged. "In Africa it's everywhere: in the cities, in the bush. Harnessing superstition was natural for the Commies; it's an operational extension of their organized atheism."

"Never thought of it that way."

"Until recently, neither did I." He gestured at the books he had bought from Simone. "While we're waiting, educate yourself."

Griff laughed uncomfortably. "I don't think my minister would approve—much less my wife."

"Taboos, the dark side of the coin." He drank from his coffee mug. "What are they *doing* at Headquarters?" Peter wandered over to the TV receiver and saw Hart Ramsdell's empty desk on the screen. The Chief of Station might be in the embassy basement talking with Thorne, face to face. Getting the ever-lovin' word.

One of the team controllers spoke to Peter. "Lucien isn't in his apartment; the concierge looked in."

"Then he probably won't be back," Peter said slowly. "With his jailer dead and me on the loose, Lucien is probably holed up at Number 13. So pull the team off and deploy them around the target area. If Lucien gets Diana away from there, we'll never see her again. Not alive."

"Right." He gave orders into the mike. "They'll report when they get there—in half an hour or so."

At least, Peter told himself, Lucien isn't sure I was looking into his setup for intelligence reasons. If he was even half sure, he'd have interrogated me. By now it must have occurred to him that it's too late to report the episode to his

bosses. So late that it's dangerous to let them know what happened. And he recalled the way Kyrill Moisev had been disciplined—with a bullet in the brain.

That means, he reflected, Lucien won't dare cancel tonight's celebration. He has to go through with it and hope nothing happens. He doesn't know how much I know, and he'll prefer to think I've only got a fragment of the picture. Or he may write me off as just another would-be con man.

Something moved on the TV screen, and Peter saw Hart Ramsdell sit behind his desk. "I've just spoken with Thorne," the Chief of Station said, "and he wants to know if you can guarantee no violence, Peter, no crowd-attracting brawl."

"You know I can't."

Ramsdell nodded. "That's what I told him. He said normally he wouldn't approve an open-end job like this, but with all the NATO pressure he can't refuse. So it's go ahead. Walter will hold down things there; I'm coming out to join you."

The officers cheered, and Peter felt his throat go dry. "This is what we've been waiting for," he said. "Now we'll activate the plan."

16

RAY MOFFIT BESIDE HIM, PETER SAT IN THE REAR of a car and watched the dark street two blocks from the Rue de Paradis.

"Any time now the cats will come," Moffit said, and scratched at the rough material of his *kente*. "You look hot, man, just when you ought to stay cool."

Peter wiped his face on the flowing *kente* sleeve. A round African cap hid his hair; his hands and face were stained black. Under the heavy robe he wore a black leotard that itched his flesh. Inside the waists of their *kentes* were pockets for the gear they carried.

The dash clock showed 11:35. Twenty-five minutes to midnight—All Hallows' Eve. The coven should be gathering.

Ray spoke Peter's next thought: "Maybe Lucien spooked and the deal's off. A hang-up."

"I hope not, but if it is, we'll have to get Diana anyway."

A couple passed, a man and woman conventionally dressed. Moffit shook his head. Turning, Peter glanced back at a panel truck in the next block.

"Take it easy," Moffit said. "Don't let me think you never did a job like this before." He grinned at Peter. "Look who's talking."

Peter chuckled and the tension dissolved. "We'll be okay," he told his colleague. "Don't worry about me. Just keep your eyes on the girl."

"Okay. By now the other guys ought to be in position."

Peter gripped his arm. "Here comes one now."

"Well, well," Moffit drawled. "Welcome to the fold, brother."

A man in *kente* was walking toward their car, glancing behind him from time to time. As he neared, Moffit opened the door catch. The couple was in the next block, out of sight and hearing.

When the man was even with the car, Moffit got quickly out and went to him, followed by Peter. The man halted, looked at them apprehensively until Moffit said, "Greetings in the name of Lucifer."

The African seemed to relax. "Greetings," he replied, and began to walk on. Moffit took his arm companionably as Peter slid down his wrist-tied cosh and slashed it across the back of the man's skull. His body collapsed, held only by Moffit's arms, as behind them they heard the panel truck speed forward. When it stopped behind their car, they carried the man upright to the rear. Doors opened and hands dragged the body inside. Moffit removed a chain from the man's neck, placed it around his own, and the doors closed. The panel truck backed away to where it had been before, and Peter and Moffit got into their car. "You get the next necklace," Ray said, and turned to scan the street.

The black Czech Bentley purred around the corner, passed them, and drew up in front of Number 13. Three men hurried down the block, then there was a five-minute wait until another singleton came into view, wearing a topcoat and a

black beret. "Cuban and just your size, Peter," Moffit husked, and opened the door a crack.

They disposed of him as easily as they had the first, and Peter put on his gold-link chain that held a red and gold *L*.

When the panel truck drove off, Peter said, "Let's go," and together they walked toward the target building. Before they reached it, a taxi arrived and let out two passengers at the doorway. Peter and Moffit lengthened their stride and fell into line behind the other two just as the door opened. In turn the doorman asked each man: "*Do thorns prick tonight?*" admitting him when he responded, "*Thorns prick no followers of Lucifer,*" and displayed the talisman.

Inside, a ramp led down to black drapes. Beyond them was a room whose vastness Peter could sense even in the dark. They moved forward ahead of new arrivals until Peter whispered, "Break off," and saw Moffit begin heading slowly toward the far side of the room.

The silence, the utter darkness, was awesome, preconditioning the congregation for the impact of light and sound—for the spectacle they had come to witness.

Through thin soles, Peter could feel thick carpeting as he moved casually toward the right front of the chapel. Gradually his eyes were accommodating to the darkness; he could make out forms and striped robes. The soundproofed false ceiling must be at least forty feet above him, he thought, and bore gradually toward the rear.

He was within a dozen feet of the curtained wall when he heard a gasp from the congregation. Looking quickly up, he saw the symbol of the Underworld seemingly suspended against the darkness. The effect was stark and compelling; rear projection, he told himself, and halted to watch it fade. Gradually it was replaced by a massive cone of whirling color. The cone expanded into the changing shapelessness of quicksilver. In rapid succession colors merged and faded into each other, another color briefly predominating. Barely at the threshold of hearing there rose a slow rhythmic pulse that seemed to evoke the primal, generative urge. Hidden speakers on each wall and the ceiling, playing the output of a concealed tape recorder. That explained the absence of the booming drums he had heard the night before; the program was taped. Gradually, volume increased, the whirling colors flashed erratically, stabbing out like sabers, and Peter felt his

damp skin prickle. Wiping his face, he steeled himself against the hypnotic effect of *son et lumière*, took a few more paces forward, and saw sudden blackness. The drumbeat loudened, became more insistent, and reached a thunderous erotic climax. At the moment, there appeared, spotlighted in red, the satanic form of Lucien de Réseau.

With a gasp the congregation fell to its knees, and the amplified voice of the hierophant cried, "*Lucifer who has been wronged greets thee!*"

A prolonged wail was the response, and as Peter watched, he saw hidden lights gradually reveal the repulsive likeness of a gigantic *bouc*. Its shaggy hair was long and black, its coppery horns curling up and outward. The eyes glowed malevolently, and to Peter the animal replica was the embodiment of Evil. A shudder of ecstasy ran through the crowd. The exaltées groaned and approached the lewd effigy on their knees. In turn, each celebrant kissed the animal's rump in adoration. Peter was moving closer to the curtained wall when he saw the form of a woman begin to materialize on the far side of Lucien.

Naked, she lay on her back, seemingly suspended in air. Her legs, flexed at the knees, hung over what he saw was an altar. More light now, and he saw the altar draped in black with red cabalistic symbols. Behind her were the phallic candlesticks and, as he watched, small flames appeared on their tips. The woman lay there lifelessly, eyes closed, her long black hair hanging down the far side of the altar. To the watchers she was utterly vulnerable, he told himself, and made his gaze focus on her features.

Young and impassive, it was the face of Diana Waring.

The last celebrant paid homage to the goat, and once again it became invisible. Moving behind the altar, Lucien held out a black chicken, lifted it above the body of the girl, and cried out:

*Oh Satan, le plus puissant des dieux,
C'est à toi que nous faisons ce sacrifice!*

The knife rose, glinted, and flashed across the pullet's throat. Blood gushed into the waiting silver chalice.

All eyes were on the spectacle. Peter covered the remaining distance, dropped to his knees, and jerked the curtain from the floor. Crawling under it, he emerged in a narrow

space between curtain and wall and began edging toward the altar. He had gone only a few feet when his hands lost contact with the wall, and he realized he had reached the working area, backstage.

There would have to be a platform, he reasoned, with steps leading to it, a slit in the backdrop through which Lucien materialized. Slowly, he groped for the feel of wood, staring into the darkness for a telltale sliver of light somewhere above him. Beyond the curtain he could hear the chalice being passed from mouth to mouth. Then his foot stubbed a vertical support—the beginning of the stairway, his hands verified.

Peter pulled off the *kente* and spread it on the bare floor. From one pocket he took a rubber mask; from another a small metal cylinder whose needle end was sheathed by a thin plastic cap.

Wiping his face, he drew the rubber mask over his head, twisting and turning it until the twin holes coincided with his eyes. The bottom of it fed into the tight throat of the jersey. He felt his forehead for the short curled horns to make sure both were erect, and took the final item from his discarded robe. The size of a golf ball, it was a hard plastic shell packed with flash powder and impact primers.

The ball in his left hand, the syringe in his right, Peter began to ascend the wooden steps.

He reached the platform that formed the rear extension of the stage, knelt, and sought the entrance slit.

His eyes found it, and now he could see the faces of the congregation as each received the hashish Host from Lucien. Diana still lay as he had seen her, but now the candelabra were between them. She was, he estimated, hardly five feet away.

Leaving the congregation, Lucien strode to the altar and carried the candelabra into position below the figure of the goat. Only a spotlight from above illumined the girl.

As the *khif* took effect, the congregation gasped and moaned, began to strip off their clothing, disrobe. This was the night the devotées had been promised. The night each one would be granted violation of the virgin.

He saw Lucien's face coming toward him, fixed in an exultant, satanic smile. Then it veered away and he saw the hierophant's back as he took position behind the altar, near the body of the girl, and directly in front of Peter.

Raising his arms, Lucien threw back his head and began chanting a litany to invoke the Devil. His voice rose in pitch and volume until it reached a frenzied climax:

"Viens, Diable! Viens! Viens!"

In that moment, Peter stabbed the syringe through the slit and felt the needle pierce Lucien's flesh. The master of the revels yelped, tried to brush away the syringe emptied of its curare solution, and dropped to the floor, clawing at his throat.

Peter's hand hurled the plastic ball beside the altar as he entered the opening. The bomb exploded in a blinding flash, and Peter stepped through the cloud of smoke.

"Je suis le Diable!" he roared, and heard a mass shriek fill the room. Stepping behind the altar, he lifted Diana's limp body, hoisted it until he could bear her above him on the palms of his hands, and strode down through the crazed worshippers.

Naked and half-naked bodies writhed on the carpeted floor, faces mad with fear. He saw glazed eyes, frothed lips, as space appeared before him. Framed by her arms and legs, he bore her toward the end of the chapel, saw a shadow detach itself and hurry toward the door. Moffit.

Outside, one of the team had cut all electricity from the building and now the only light came from the candles below the *bouc*.

The man who had challenged them at the entrance appeared on the ramp, but Moffit coshed him and swept him aside like straw. He crashed the door with his shoulder and held it aside until Peter passed through, pulled out a pistol and covered Peter's exit.

Cold air slapped his face. He lowered Diana to cradle her in his arms and ran to the waiting truck. The rear doors opened and two men lifted her inside. Peter gained the interior, grabbed a pistol, and covered Ray's quick exit. Helping him to the truck floor, Peter slammed the doors and the panel truck bucked ahead, accelerating down the Rue de Paradis. It took the corner on two wheels, sliding Peter crazily against the stretcher where Diana lay blanketed and still unconscious.

Lights went on and Peter saw a doctor kneeling beside her taking her pulse, examining her pupils with a flashlight. He

picked himself up and reached for the radio-telephone. Pressing the button, he spoke to Ramsdell at the command post.

"We made it," he said chokingly. "Call the police."

Beside him, Moffit said in an awed voice, "When you materialized in that flash of brimstone you were the Devil himself. The real article."

Tugging off his mask, Peter blotted his wet face and felt his body shiver. "No encores," he said hoarsely, and saw the medic slide a hypodermic into Diana's arm as the truck raced through the night.

17

THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON, PETER MET WITH Fred Prévost in the residence of the Canadian ambassador. They sat in a booklined study overlooking a garden littered with wind-blown leaves, and the cheerless view added to his depression.

"How's Diana?" he asked.

"Coming around, improving, but still totally docile. So far the medics won't say how much her mind has been affected." His eyes lifted. "She just lies up there, Peter, quietly weeping most of the time." His jaw set. "I'd like to kill the men responsible. Men? They're animals."

"The police grabbed about half the gang in the chapel and jailed them on narcotics and obscenity charges. The rest got away."

"Lucien?"

"That curare jolt paralyzed him, so he's in jail, too. But I don't think the law can hold any of them long—there's nobody to testify against them."

Sitting back, Prévost lighted a cigarette and gazed at the gray light filtering through the study window. "Seems like a long time ago I asked you to help me, Peter. I never thought it would end like this."

"Is it ended?"

"I thought so. You mean the African angle?"

Peter nodded. "For the Commies this is just a temporary setback. They can rig other chapels, find other Luciens. Even other Donald Warings. Their conspiracies take the long-range view—the world view. Remove a cancerous organ and the disease shows up in some other part. We'd be ingenuous to think otherwise." From his pocket he took a letter with a Geneva postmark and handed it to Fred. "Solange Arnoux, Diana's roommate, is leaving school to come here. I can't prevent her coming and it may be good if Diana had a friend to talk to. By the same token, it will be good for Solange to learn some of life's hard facts."

"I think you're right." He scanned the letter. "She'll be staying at the Hotel Madison until she hears from you. What then?"

"If the ambassador's willing, I'll have her brought here."

"I'm sure he won't object. He was fond of Donald Waring—even now I don't think he's entirely convinced Waring is a traitor. Old school ties. And the ambassador's wife wants to do everything she can to help Diana—their only child died a few years ago."

The door opened and the ambassador's secretary came in. "Mr. Ward, the doctor says you may see Miss Waring for a few moments now."

"Thank you." He got up, knocked ashes from his pipe, and pocketed it.

Upstairs the nurse admitted him to the guest room and he approached the bed quietly. There, seated in its center, arms hugging her thighs to her bosom, was Diana Waring. In the dim light the contrast of her long, jet-black hair made her pale skin seem almost translucent; so delicate that a touch would bruise it. She was staring vacantly at the far wall, and when he sat down she murmured, "Hullo."

"Hello. How are you feeling?"

"I don't know . . . I'm not sure." Her face turned and she surveyed him. "Are you the one who . . . ?" Her lips trembled and she closed her eyes.

"It's all right," he said gently. "You're safe and with friends. Solange is coming to visit you."

"Solange . . . ?"

"From Villa Beauvoir. Your roommate."

"Oh. I . . . I must have forgotten." Turning away, she stretched out on one side, drew the covers around her neck. For a while the room was silent, then Diana whispered, "My father . . . Is he going to come? Do I have to see him?"

Peter and the nurse exchanged glances. "Don't you want to see him?" he asked.

"No. Oh, no! Please don't make me see him. He never had time for me before, not even when Mother was alive. Then all he could think of was to put me away somewhere, out of sight. No, I don't *want* to see him." Her body shuddered.

Huskily, Peter said, "You won't have to do anything you don't want to, Diana."

Rising, the nurse signaled him to leave. Peter got up and said, "I'll come again if I may."

"Yes . . . please come . . . when I can remember."

"Of course he'll come, dear," the nurse soothed, and ushered Peter from the room. As he went slowly down the staircase, he thought it might be a good deal better if Diana remembered nothing at all about the last six months. The mind was a curious mechanism; in time it would heal its wounds, scars would insulate destructive memories. He reached the end of the stairs and saw Prévost come from an office, his face grave and thoughtful.

"Our Washington embassy just phoned, Peter. Donald Waring is dead."

"*Dead?*"

"After he was told Diana was safe the Mounties arrested him. They were going to fly him back to Ottawa but he hung himself in the men's room at Dulles. With his belt."

Peter stared at his Canadian colleague. "Then—?"

"Waring carried out his part of the bargain. On his body was a list of all the NATO documents he'd given to the KGB. I guess he couldn't face public disgrace. Can't say I blame him." He looked up the staircase. "How is Diana?"

"Disoriented. You and the ambassador have to decide when and what to tell her." He sucked in a deep breath. "I'll be getting back to the office."

"Thanks again, Peter—for everything."

They shook hands. Peter pulled on his topcoat and left the residence. Outside, he started the engine of his car and glanced up at the front of the old château, thinking of the girl who lay in the room behind drawn blinds. It would be a

long struggle for her sanity, he told himself, prayed for her recovery and drove away to the American Embassy.

Hart Ramsdell came from around his desk and poured coffee for Peter. "Thank the Lord Waring came through—his final, decent act."

Peter sipped his coffee in silence.

"What's on your mind, Peter?"

"The girl. The innocent victim of so many things."

"Yeah, I feel sorry for her. A lush for a mother, a traitor for a father. Not much to look forward to." He glanced at the wall clock. "We'd better go down now. Thorne doesn't like to be kept waiting."

They took the elevator to the basement and entered the conference room. The electrostatic shield was working and the TV equipment already manned by technicians. Taking a seat at the table, Peter tamped and lighted his pipe. Abruptly the signal pattern vanished from the receiver screen and they saw the director of Central Intelligence seated at his desk, coat off, a microphone in front of him. "Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "I want to congratulate all of you who were involved in the successful recovery of Waring's daughter. The death of her father closes the initial phase of this investigation." For a moment he studied a pencil held between both hands. "What has evolved is of even greater importance than the revelation of NATO secrets to the enemy. Changing mutual defense plans will be laborious and costly, but at least the planners now know what will have to be changed. Beyond that, our country, and an unknown number of African states, are faced with violent insurrections across the continent of Africa. To this very real threat we must now address ourselves. As I understand it, the Paris group you uncovered represented a cadre whose ideological indoctrination and training had been completed. They were to be transferred to Africa where they would in turn organize and train adepts according to an overall communist plan of subversion and violence. Care to comment, Hart?"

The Chief of Station nodded. "Ultimately, yes. But interrogation of the two activists for whom Peter and Ray substituted last night indicates they were to be taken as a group to some assembly point, a holding area, possibly, where the final plan is to be coordinated. I think it's safe to assume they

were to assemble on African soil and be deployed from there.”

Thorne frowned. “No clue where the place might be?”

“No, sir. Because they didn’t know themselves. They’d been alerted for departure, however, within the next few days. As you know, half the cadre escaped and the others will be freed whenever their solicitor can persuade the court. My guess is that those who got away will be removed from Europe as soon as transportation can be arranged; with the others leaving later.”

“My thought, too,” Thorne agreed. “Obviously, we need to penetrate the cadre, locate the assembly point, and learn the plan. Peter?”

“Sir?”

“How well known are you?”

“Only Lucien can recognize me—and he’s in jail.”

“Then you might be able to join the first departing element—as a Cuban, say.”

“It’s possible.”

“And Moffit could follow with the jailed group.”

“Also possible, sir.”

“Then I want you to work on it. Hart, perhaps you could persuade the Metropolitan Police to keep Lucien in the pokey—maintaining a public nuisance, violating the fire and housing codes . . . do what you can.”

“Yes, sir.”

Thorne put aside the pencil and rubbed his chin. “How is Miss Waring?”

“Not well, sir,” Ramsdell told him. “She’s been habituated to some sort of hypnotic drug, and withdrawal will be slow. What its ultimate effects on her mind will be the medics aren’t prepared to say.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. The Canadian ambassador will be getting in touch with the families of her father and mother; doubtless, relatives will want to take charge of her. Anything else, gentlemen?”

“No, sir,” Ramsdell said. Thorne nodded, and the screen went blank. When the lighting increased, Peter rose and looked down at the table. “Have Moffit meet me at the safe-house. Meanwhile, I’ve got some loose ends to attend to.”

“Such as?”

“Solange Arnoux.”

He found her at a sidewalk table outside the Madison Hotel, wearing black vinyl boots and watching students pass along Boulevard Saint-Germain. She was so absorbed that he sat down beside her before she noticed him. At first she seemed startled, then her face broke into an ecstatic smile and she kissed his cheek. "Peter! How lovely that you came. I'd begun to think myself abandoned and alone in Paris. But you've shaved . . ." She stroked his cheek. "Where's Diana?"

"I'll take you to her."

"Wonderful." She gripped his hand tightly. "I've broken with school and family and I feel absolutely unfettered. I've never known the feeling of *real* freedom before."

Counting the number of saucers on the table, Peter paid for her vermouths and stood up. As Solange rose, she said, "Shall I bring my suitcase?"

"Later." He guided her to a standing taxi and opened the door. Seated beside her, he gave directions to the driver and settled back. Huskily, she said, "I guess you know I'm mad about you, Peter—that's really why I'm here."

"A couple of things have to be understood," he told her quietly. "First, I'm not Diana's lover. I only met her a little while ago. Secondly, she was brought to Paris on a pretext and ended up serving as priestess to a Devil's coven created by the Communists. Third, my job was to set her free, and I did it at the request of the Canadian government—and my own."

Her face froze in shocked incredulity.

"She needs help," Peter went on, "and you can help her, Solange. There's only so much doctors can do—the rest will have to come from a deep feeling of security and understanding. As her friend you can provide that. Will you?"

"Yes, yes . . . of course. But—I don't understand."

"In Geneva you misinterpreted the situation, and it was useful for me that you did." He drew out Diana's bracelet and held it in one hand. "Through this I was able to trace her and I'm grateful for your help. Now Diana needs your help."

She nodded quickly. "And you? Where will you be?"

"I'm not sure."

"I see," she faltered. "At least I think I do. You—you're some kind of agent for your government."

"What I am isn't important; the role you can play is. Her father was involved with the Soviets and killed himself last

night. For the time being, she's not to know. Another burden on her mind . . ."

Convulsively she embraced him, hot tears wet her cheeks. "Oh, Peter," she cried, "I've been such a little fool. I'll do whatever you think is right—anything you say."

"Stay with her, then."

"I will. Yes—oh, if only I'd *known!*"

"No one really knew." With his handkerchief he dried her eyes, let her blot her streaming cheeks.

"Will . . . will I ever see you again?" she blurted.

"I'll come back as soon as I can."

"*Vraiment?*"

"Truly," he promised, and patted her shoulder.

The taxi drew into the Residence drive and braked. The front door opened and Fred Prévost came out, waiting at the top of the steps. Peter got out and helped Solange from the taxi. "He'll take you to her," he said.

"Won't . . ." she bit her lip. "Won't you come, too?"

"Not now." He took her in his arms, then watched her hurry up the steps. Prévost waved and closed the door. Peter got back into the taxi and drove away.

At the Murat safehouse, the command post was nearly dismantled, and technicians were removing the last of the communications gear when Ray Moffit arrived. Peter took him to an upstairs bedroom removed from the noise and closed the door. "We've got our orders."

"So Griff told me."

"I'm going to try to travel on the documents of that Cuban we waylaid last night."

"Sounds risky, Peter."

"Got a better idea?"

"Wish I had. I'll be traveling the same road."

"At least you know the country."

Shrugging, he lighted a cigarette and inhaled. "If we actually get to this place, how the hell are we supposed to get out?"

"The Escape and Evasion staff's working on it."

Moffit grunted. "What do you want me to do now?"

"Try to locate those Black Panther pals of yours, find out when they're alerted to move."

"Logical. Now if you were in charge of the op, how would you handle their transportation?"

“By air.”

“Right. From Le Bourget we’ve learned that the Czech Embassy just requested landing rights for an unscheduled flight from Prague—to Cairo. A Tupolev 114 with Ceskoslovenske Aerolinie markings. Sounds like a black flight, doesn’t it?”

“When?”

“Tomorrow night, man. All aboard.”

18

THE ROOM WAS A DUSTY GARRET HIGH ABOVE the Rue du Sentier a few blocks from the Bourse. Through its grimy window Peter watched dusk settle over the city, changed position on the thin straw mattress, and wondered when the call would come.

He was documented and disguised as José Villamor, the previous occupant of the room; his skin colored a dark brown, his nostrils and cheeks widened, an upper incisor capped with silver, and a thin fag moustache added to his face along with a wispy goatee. In beret and dark glasses he resembled the captive Cuban enough to pass for Villamor among uncritical African eyes.

Half an hour ago the Czech airliner had landed at Le Bourget; now it was taking on fuel while the crew filed their flight plan and got a weather briefing for the Mediterranean area. If this was the black flight, no passengers would be loaded until after dark. The Tupolev would fly toward Cairo until it cleared French territory, then change to a heading for its final destination. Whatever that might be.

He picked up Villamor’s battered transistor radio, turned it on and listened to the six-thirty news, checked the time signal with his chronograph, and got up to pace the floor again.

He had entered the building at four o’clock and climbed to the room after listening to the concierge chaff him for his

two-night absence. The disguise had been good enough to fool the concierge; it remained to be seen how it would work with the others.

Luckily, he thought, the Brothers of the Shadow usually convened in darkness, and they watched the perverted Mass rather than each other.

I might make it, he told himself. I might make it with a great deal of luck. And there were other things working for him. The flight had been hastily arranged; only half the cadre was expected. That meant lists would have to be revised, and in revisions there was always the possibility of confusion and error. Clerks were clerks, and they were fallible—even if they worked for the KGB.

Technically, though, the Czech Intelligence service would be in charge of flight arrangements, and the *Statni Bezpecnosti*, the StB, would want to perform well in the eyes of its masters, the KGB. So there was the hazard of overmeticulousness to contend with. Still, their Cuban allies were notorious for professional slovenliness, and certain shortcomings might be overlooked on that account.

He noticed that the last traces of daylight had left the window and were replaced by a dark blue-gray. Like a windshield wiper a distant searchlight began to sweep the sky. Sound from the street abated as the quietness of evening prevailed. He picked up a Cuban Army musette bag packed with Villamor's possessions and a few things of his own. From it he took a hard roll, pared off a slice of cheese, and ate slowly while he considered the job ahead.

To Peter it seemed unlikely the plane would actually fly to Cairo. There were watchful Israeli fighters in the area, and to the south inhospitable desert for a thousand miles. Algeria, though, was a possibility; certainly the Czechs would have no difficulty in arranging a refueling stop. After that, the whole of Africa was within flight range of the Tupolev. His personal bet, he decided, was the Congo. Or Guinea.

He finished his meal, closed and strapped the musette bag, and reflected that speculation was futile. Worse, the special flight might not even be for the Brothers. Moffit had reported their absence from customary haunts.

But he told himself that, like himself, they had holed up to await final instructions. With half the cadre in jail, the remaining men were doubly valuable. Setting the musette bag

under his head, he stretched out on the ancient ticking and closed his eyes.

Time passed while he dozed and half-dreamed himself in the veldt, crossing the Kalahari on foot, hearing the talking drums as he hacked a path through the bush . . .

"*José!*" Rousing himself, he recognized the rough voice of the concierge. "*José! Téléphone. Vite!*"

"Coming," he shouted back, left the room, and began running down the stairs. In the concierge's room, he picked up the receiver and said, "José Villamor. *Quién habla?*"

"Marco. *Oye, chico*, are you ready?"

"Ready." He kept up the heavy breathing to disguise his voice.

"Then listen carefully. Be at the corner of Réaumur and Dussoubs precisely at eight o'clock. Do you understand?"

"*Sí.*"

"Then repeat the instructions."

"I am to be at the corner of Rue Réaumur and Dussoubs precisely at eight o'clock. What then?"

"You will be picked up, imbecile. So look for a dark blue airlines bus and board it at once. It will not linger for you—everything is precisely timed. Don't go there directly, you understand; the police may try to follow."

"Leave it to me," Peter said confidently.

"Then, have a good trip, comrade. *Viva Fidel!*"

"*Viva libertad,*" Peter responded and replaced the receiver.

From his chair the concierge said, "You are leaving, José?" Peter nodded.

"But not before you pay the rent for last week, eh? Sixty-two francs, to refresh your memory."

Climbing the stairs, Peter saw that he had forty minutes to reach the pickup point. He collected his bag, put on Villamor's beret and topcoat, and gave the concierge sixty-five new francs. Considering the accommodations, he thought, the rent was outrageous.

On a side street he found a public telephone and called a Station number. When Griffin answered, Peter reported Marco's instructions, and said, "So I'm off."

"Sounds like. I'm just sorry there wasn't more time to prepare you."

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be. Thanks, Griff."

"Good luck, Peter."

Replacing the receiver, he stared at it for a moment and swung the musette bag over his shoulder. Then he walked slowly away.

In accordance with Marco's instructions he approached the pickup point indirectly, reaching the corner a bare three minutes before eight. Acting out his role, he glanced nervously around from time to time, paced the curbing, tried to light a Cuban cigar, and threw it away distractedly. Then he saw coming toward him a blue bus of the kind used by smaller airlines for the run to Orly. It braked, and as he jogged toward the opening door, he read the lettering on a muslin banner fixed to the side of the bus: *Association Forestière*. He pulled himself aboard and walked rapidly to the rear as the bus jerked forward. He found an unoccupied seat and shoved the musette bag on the seat beside him, thinking that the banner legend was not only a cover but a *double entendre*, for some of Africa's most violent groups cloaked themselves as Pioneers and Foresters.

Lighting another cigar, he clamped it between his teeth and looked slowly around the bus. Three-quarters full, it held perhaps thirty Africans, some lighter-skinned Arabs, and half a dozen whites of whom three had Slavic features. In a few minutes the bus picked up another man, repeating the procedure until the bus was full. By now, he saw, the bus was on Route de Flandre that became National Highway 2 as it approached Le Bourget field.

There was little conversation among the passengers; the mood was subdued, preoccupied. Half an hour's ride brought the bus to the airport's truck entrance, a barred gate with a uniformed sentry who stepped out to challenge the driver. As the bus braked, one of the Slavs swung down and rudely demanded passage. The guard demurred, the Slav swore and produced papers that Peter gathered were Soviet diplomatic credentials and perhaps a pass from the French Ministry of Air. Nodding, the guard turned and gestured toward a large four-engine aircraft parked away from the commercial hangars. The Russian nodded rapidly, the guard opened the barrier, and the Russian motioned the bus ahead, boarding it as it moved through.

The bus accelerated directly toward the big Tupolev, some of whose cabin lights showed through its windows. Runway lights were blinking, and as the aircraft grew larger, Peter

could see dim lights in the cockpit area where the crew was going through the takeoff checklist. The plane was one of the Soviet Union's older passenger models that had been systematically fobbed off on the state airlines of satellite countries. A huge version of the Lockheed Constellation, the TU-114 could fly six thousand miles at altitudes of up to forty thousand feet—with 220 passengers and a crew of 10. From its underbelly a hatch swung down and a crew member descended, his flashlight playing across the ground. Obviously, loading was to be accomplished as unobtrusively as possible.

The bus ground to a halt, the Russian jumped up and ordered them out. Shuffling across the hardstand, the "Foresters" reached the hatch and handed their belongings to a crewman who flung bags, parcels, and baskets into the cargo compartment of the plane.

The Russian led the column forward to the boarding hatch and counted heads as each man climbed up the loading ramp. There was no stewardess to greet them, Peter reflected, no welcoming smile along with the evening paper; this was a black flight and it was trimmed to essentials.

With 220 seats to choose from Peter had no difficulty in finding four abreast on which to stretch out. As he lifted his feet onto the cushions, a steward barked at him to sit up and fasten his seat belt. Complying, Peter glanced at his wrist chronograph and zeroed the elapsed time setting. He heard the passenger hatch slam shut and wondered whether his musette bag had been damaged by the crewman's vigorous handling. Among its contents was a miniaturized UHF transmitter whose special frequency would be received and reported by a chain of WU-2's already positioned along the Tupolev's ostensible route ten miles above the earth. As soon as the signal was received, two other WU-2's would join in triangulating the Tupolev's position and following the flight to its ultimate destination. The *drosky*, he thought, trailed by friendly and invisible wolves.

Cabin lights blacked out as the first of the turboprop engines whined into life; in turn the other three revved up and the Tupolev shuddered as though it were facing a stiff gale. Brakes released and the plane moved forward.

Stewards closed window curtains, warning passengers not to look outside until the aircraft landed. Alone in the near dark of the cabin, Peter felt the plane pause as it reached the

end of the runway, heard the engines scream high as the flaps rolled down. Then, like a bolt from a crossbow, the Tupolev shot down the runway and lifted smoothly off the end. It climbed steeply, banking, then leveled off on the first leg of the flight plan filed at Le Bourget. Its cruising speed of over five hundred miles per hour would be increased by the light load, so they should reach the Mediterranean in less than an hour. After that, French radar would lose interest in the flight and the Tupolev could take another course.

Thirty minutes later the seat-belt light went off and Peter stretched out, grateful that so far his presence had not been challenged. Among his companions, he knew, were selectees of the African Liberation Committee; others came from Syria and Algeria. As José Villamor he was a demolitions instructor and part-time commissar, detailed to the group after previous guerrilla experience in Ghana. With Diana missing, I wonder what they'll do for a Dawa, he thought drowsily, then closed his eyes and tried to sleep.

Someone shook his arm and he woke to the glare of a flashlight in his eyes. Shielding his face, he cursed and pushed aside the light as a voice rasped, "Sí, you are the one. I saw you that night in the chapel."

19

ALMOST AT ONCE THE MAN SAT DOWN BESIDE him. Peter would have bolted had there been any place to run; instead, he sat frozen, his sleep-dulled mind grasping for a reply. Finding none, he snarled, "*Hijo de la puta,*" and turned away.

"Eh? What kind of talk is that? Have a drink, comrade. I smuggled a bottle on board."

An open pint bottle smelling of rum was thrust under his nose. Weakly, Peter grasped it and drank, hoping none of the alcohol would dribble and bleach his dyed skin. "*Gracias,*" he

managed, and returned the bottle. "I should have brought one, too."

"So you were not arrested, comrade?"

"No, I escaped." He could see the man's rat-like features. Bearded, he wore a black Cuban beret.

After a long pull on the bottle the Cuban capped it and said confidentially, "What do you think of all this, comrade?"

"I don't think—I follow orders."

"*Sí*, it is better that way. Only I wonder where they are taking us."

Peter shrugged. "Does it make any difference?"

"To me, yes. In Paris I grew accustomed to drinkable water and decent food. Now we go back to the jungle. Who knows what they will give us there."

"As soldiers of the Revolution we must be satisfied with what is provided," he said sententiously. "Not many of us are given such an opportunity to serve the cause."

"True. But for myself I would have preferred Chile or Brazil—anywhere in our hemisphere. These Africans are animals, comrade—pigs."

"They have been exploited by the imperialists—remember that. With our help all that will be changed. It is our privilege to advance the African Revolution."

"Of course, comrade. Here—another drink."

"No more now. I want to sleep." Peter looked at his watch and saw the plane had been airborne three hours: by now they should be somewhere over the African continent. Yawning, he muttered, "Get some rest, comrade. We'll talk in the morning."

"Well . . . good night." The cushions lifted as the man rose and walked down the aisle. Peter wiped perspiration from his palms, breathed deeply, and felt his pulse subside. He tried to sleep again but the incident had pumped too much adrenalin into his blood. Instead, he lay belly down to conceal his face, using his topcoat as a pillow, wondering whether the UHF device was transmitting, and if it was, whether the plane's position was known to the unseen monitors. Since the Tupolev could remain aloft a total of ten hours, a potential seven hours remained before landing to refuel was necessary. In that time it could fly nearly to the tip of Africa, but no one expected it to go that far. No one in Headquarters, at least.

The funny thing is, he told himself, once we get there I probably won't know where I am. The WU-2's will know, but I won't. Jungle looks pretty much the same whether its Burundi or the Congo. He was tempted to part the curtains and look outside, but it would still be dark, and even in daylight there would be cloud cover below. Under that, millions of square miles of anonymous jungle.

Well, he mused, the morning will bring its own revelations, and lay still until sleep returned.

Two hours later he woke, sat up, and stretched. Even the Soviet escorts were sleeping soundly so Peter went quietly aft and entered one of the four lavatories. Locking the door, he ran tap water into a paper cup, drank, and lifted a section of carpeting from the floor. According to the TU-114 plans he had been shown, there should be a trapdoor connecting the lavatory and the cargo section. Hopefully the space was pressurized; if not he would have to wait until the plane went below ten thousand feet, and it would only reach the lower altitude when landing, giving him only a few brief minutes to do what he had to do. Yes, the door was there, a lift-ring countersunk in its surface. Very carefully he pulled, testing for suction, felt none, and lifted the trap the rest of the way. Lowering himself into the space below, he felt the bite of bitter cold air; his feet struck the deck, and he crouched to scan the baggage with his pencil flash. Because he had been one of the last to board, his musette bag was near the top of the pile. Opening it, he drew out what appeared to be a metal candy box smaller and flatter than a brick, closed his bag, and forced the UHF transmitter behind a portion of the airframe insulation. Hidden there it could continue to transmit after the plane landed; transmit until its battery was exhausted on the following day. When its job should be done.

It was close to zero in the compartment, and his hands and legs were growing numb. Turning off the flash, Peter pulled himself up through the trapdoor. In the lavatory again he replaced door and rug, and filled the basin with hot water to warm his chilled hands. That done, he went back to his seat, reflecting that if the transmitter were ever discovered, it could not be connected to him.

After a while cabin lights went on and stewards served viscous black coffee with hard rolls. Peter ate ravenously, noticing how surly and unhelpful the stewards were to their Afri-

can charges. The Czechs had been early in the African game with their Economic Studies Institute, so the crew should be used to Freedom Fighters by now.

Toward four o'clock, Peter felt pressure in his ears and realized the Tupolev was losing altitude.

At four-thirty, a steward came down the aisle telling them to put on seat belts and prepare for landing. The plane began a wide slow swing and eardrum pressure increased until Peter had to swallow hard. Finally, he felt the aircraft settle into a shallow glide, and in a few moments the wheels ground down and locked. Tires hit and screeched, the plane bounced, and the engines lost power as the Tupolev coasted down the bumpy strip. Forward motion ended, brakes whined, and the plane turned back, lumbering along on two engines. When they died away, hatches opened and the Soviet in charge yelled at the passengers to deplane. As Peter came down the ladder, crewmen were tossing baggage on a pile beside the plane.

Retrieving his musette bag, Peter slung it over his shoulder and followed the line of men moving toward a cluster of low-lying buildings where a few lights showed. Breeze touched his face and its taste was fresh; for a moment he thought he heard the soft lapping of water, then dismissed the idea only to have it recur more strongly. Stepping out of line, ostensibly to tie a shoelace, he cupped a hand around his ear and listened.

Above the shuffling shoes he now heard surf distinctly, and the sound seemed to come from all sides. He straightened and saw tall palms against the skyline. There was no jungle miasma around him, no stinking, wet humidity; only clean, fresh ocean air. Resuming his place in line, he told himself that he was not on the African continent, but on an island, a secret base whose approaches were closely and easily controlled. Or was it possible the Tupolev had crossed the Atlantic and landed them on Cuban territory or in Brazil? Possible, yes, but as he neared the buildings he saw thatched bamboo *bandas* that identified with Africa alone.

Unless, of course, this was all somehow a gigantic deception, a Castro hoax.

Then lights went on inside the longest of the buildings and he saw loinclothed African messboys padding among the ta-

bles, heard them shout in sonorous dialect. Yes, he was in Africa.

Somewhere.

Screen doors opened, and passengers exchanged their gear for eating bowls. Pots simmered behind the mess line; glistening cooks filled their bowls with rice and beans interspersed with meat. The smell was savory and Peter found himself eager to eat.

At the wooden table the other Cuban sought him out and dug in with a steel fork. "Not bad," he said. "Better than I expected."

Peter nodded curtly, wanting to establish a reputation for nontalkativeness. His companion produced a bottle and they added rum to their water mugs.

By now the flight crew and the Soviets were going through the mess line, sneering at the coarseness of the food. Among them was a tall, thin man who moved in a familiar way. Halting his fork, Peter watched until he was under a light and turning to talk with one of the Russian escorts. The high, peaked forehead, the hooked nose, belonged to only one man and that was Lucien de Réseau, late master of the revels.

The one man who knew Peter's face and could identify him.

Forcing down food, Peter gulped watered rum and dried his palms on his thighs. Lucien had ridden in the crew's compartment, he decided, sleeping in a bunk. And he could only hope Lucien would stay apart from the trainees, keep to himself for the next few days.

The Cuban nudged him. "Those *Rusos*," he growled. "Steak and beer for them while we get this lousy *wat*. The European comrades always get the best of it—even in Havana."

Peter glowered and snapped, "Your identification."

Face stiffening, the Cuban handed over a red-bound *tarjeta* with his photograph. Below was the name Felipe Zabala. Rank, *Teniente de Milicia*. Returning the credential, Peter said, "If you were not of the People's Army I would report you. In the future be careful what you say—and think."

"*Sí, Capitán*," Zabala said hastily. "In the last few weeks so many things have happened—so many strange things . . ." He shook his head. "I have a *nóvia* in Cienfuegos—she is a *miliciana*, too—and I often wonder whether I will ever see

her again." He looked around. "Or die in some rotten hole like this."

"A soldier follows his destiny," Peter said, and accepted another jolt of rum.

Through the screened openings he could see the orange glow of the rising sun that marked the east. On the pretext of winding his chronograph he adjusted the interval hand to compensate for the time since sunup. By comparing the periods of day and night, and marking the azimuth of the rising sun he would be able to form a rough estimate of the island's latitude. Six weeks had passed since autumnal equinox when the sun rose at 90 degrees on the equator. With that as a base he could make his calculations. Longitude he could approximate from the local time.

Two Sudanese in their gandouras left the mess hall and went outside. When another three men had left, Peter followed them and saw in the increasing light a large cleared area a hundred yards from the buildings. Some palm trunks had been embedded upright in the sandy ground, and near them there was what looked like a tackling dummy hanging from a framework of poles. Beyond, he could make out target ranges and a series of slit and zigzag trenches. Waterbags hung in the shade of palm trees and, as he watched, native boys began refilling them from water carts.

The flight crew was leaving the mess hall, enjoying a final cigarette as they strolled toward the waiting Tupolev. Peter reflected that if the WU-2's had not yet located the flight's destination, it would soon be too late. The plane had another fifteen hundred miles in its fuel tanks; not enough to return it to Europe, so it would head for a refueling stop—some secret jungle airstrip or an overt landing arranged for in advance by local Czechs.

"*Villamor!*" A man outside the mess hall shouted his name.

"*Sí,*" Peter called, but did not move toward him. After a pause, the man began walking in his direction, and as he emerged from shadows, Peter saw Lucien de Réseau. Diffidently, Peter lighted a cigar.

"What are you doing here?" Lucien demanded.

"Stretching my legs. On a long flight a man gets stiff."

"I want to talk to you about the day's schedule."

Biting hard on his cigar, Peter worked his face into a fixed grimace and squinted at the diabolist.

De Réseau gestured toward the clearing. "The *guerrilleros* will gather here in half an hour. Start right in with weapons training. After an hour of that there'll be a special demonstration."

Peter nodded.

"How do you feel?"

"*Más o menos.*" Removing the cigar, Peter spat on the ground. "Am I expected to work in these clothes?"

"No, you'll draw uniforms near the barracks."

"And weapons?"

"They come by truck from the armory. At the end of each day's training make sure the same number go back." He patted Peter's shoulder. "Good luck, comrade."

Peter turned away, flicked ash from his cigar, and pretended to survey the training area until he heard Lucien's departing steps. Exhaling, he breathed deeply, realizing he had not been detected. In this, he decided, you lived from one minute to the next.

The whine of a turbine broke the stillness, and he saw smoke billow from the transport's outboard engine. In succession the other engines fired and the plane moved awkwardly down the crushed stone runway, its mission accomplished. Peter went back to the mess hall and saw Zabala come out carrying his suitcase. Peter picked up his musette bag and followed an uneven procession toward half a dozen barracks in a palm grove away from the mess hall and cooking sheds. He went into the nearest barracks and elected its only room, referring Zabala to one of the row bunks. Then he latched the door and stripped naked. Carefully he untied a black nylon belt that bulged with equipment he had brought, slit a hole in the stained mattress cover, and packed the belt inside the straw. He made the bed with coarse muslin sheets from the end of the cot, fitted the pillow into a pillowcase, and put on his trousers. Just then there was a knock on his door.

"*Quién es?*"

"Teniente Zabala. They are issuing uniforms now, Capitán."

"Coming."

He pulled on his shirt and followed Zabala's directions to a hut where he drew two sets of green fatigues, underwear, and combat boots. To the Cuban lieutenant he said, "Without sidearms I feel naked."

"I, also. We will visit the armory next."

After getting into his fatigues, Peter put on sunglasses and found Zabala waiting outside the barracks in a battered Czech jeep. A rutted road wound through thick vegetation to a tin-clad hut surrounded by a high, dense barricade of barbed wire.

Inside, an African clerk gave them weapons belts with holsters, sheath knives, and pouches for spare clips. Then he let them select pistols from dowels where they hung by their trigger guards. Peter chose a 9-mm. Belgian Browning, dry-fired it, filled its magazine and two extras as he mentally inventoried the armory's lethal stock: Kalashnikov automatic rifles, Colt M-16's, grenade launchers, mortars, Russian Moisin rifles, Maxim machine guns, and Simonov automatic weapons. Cartridge clips and filled machine-gun drums and belts were stacked in orderly piles on the cement floor whose binding lime, he noticed, came from coarsely ground seashells.

In French, he said to the clerk, "Where are the explosives kept?"

"Outside—below ground." He pointed through a grilled opening at a cement-topped, vented structure with wooden steps leading down to a metal-shod door.

With a nod at Zabala, Peter left the armory and got into the jeep. As they drove toward the training area, he looked around for radio antennae but saw none. Somewhere there must be a commo shack, and he intended to find it.

The jeep followed the road among the palms, and through them Peter could see the clearing was no longer empty. Instead, there were two to three hundred Africans and Arabs squatting on the ground, their skins glistening in the warming sun.

One of the Soviet overseers halted the jeep and gave them instructions: Peter was to demonstrate field-stripping the Moisin rifle, while Zabala was to show another group the principles of trench warfare. "But be patient, eh? These blacks are nothing but animals. Most have never seen military weapons before." He snorted. "And we're supposed to make Liberation fighters out of them!"

Peter went over to the nearest water bag, and when he and Zabala had drunk the Cuban said, "I don't like this, comrade Capitán; too many tribes here, and they won't mix." Turning, he squinted at the waiting natives: "Lele, Kaguru, Ashanti,

Kikuyu, Pondo . . . others, too. One little thing, comrade, and they'll be at each other's throats—then ours.”

“Courage,” Peter said, and walked into the sunlight where his group waited. On a rustic table lay an oiled, Russian Moisin. Rising from his haunches, a stocky African greeted him with “*Hatujambo.*” Then, in French: “I will interpret for you, comrade.”

“Good. Let us begin.”

Picking up the rifle Peter turned the magazine cutoff into position and slowly drew the bolt back until it lifted out. He described what he had done and waited while the interpreter shouted, “*Nyamazeni!*” and brandished the rifle. “*Bunduki,*” he yelled. “*Hili bunduki. Hili bunduki Muzungu.*” And having identified the piece, began to explain what Peter had done with the bolt.

Alternating demonstration and interpretation, Peter instructed his group of thirty-three for an hour. Then at the shrill blast of a whistle he turned and saw Lucien standing at the center of the clearing. Nearby, bound to one of the palm trunks was a tall, handsome African, naked but for a breechcloth.

“*Njooni!*” Lucien shouted. “*Njooni nyote!* I show you an imperialist agent. *Moja wenu amekosa.* Mdowo is the one. He would have betrayed you, betrayed us all. Instead, it is he who shall die. Comrades . . .” his voice rose shrilly. “*Comrades—wet your spears!*”

From the far end of the field rose an ululating chorus and Peter saw a phalanx of tribesmen approach, long spears at the ready. Beside them danced a witch doctor wearing a grotesque crocodile mask streaked with red and ocher. He shrieked frenziedly and their spears flashed through the air. They curved up and downward in long trajectory. Some struck the dirt around the palm pole, but three spears impaled the victim, shafts quivering as his dying body screamed, bucked, and hung limply in the sun, little swirls of dust moving beside his twitching feet.

THAT NIGHT, PETER OILED HIS DOOR HINGES with *sim-sim* saved from the evening meal, and stole through the barracks whose occupants were in deep sleep from millet beer—*marissa*.

Still revolted by the savage execution he had witnessed, he slipped outside and waited in shadows until his senses accommodated to the night and its stillness. Then, taking the armory road, he walked along its border praying he would not step on some venomous snake. Gradually he began to hear the sounds of nocturnal animals—tree toads, birds, and unidentifiable rustlings beyond the heavy foliage. One hand gripped the sheath knife, while his Browning rested loosely in its holster. The pouched nylon belt girdled him under his shirt.

Nearing the armory he stepped softly and saw a native guard stretched sleeping before its gate. Beyond was the sunken explosives building, grim in the filtering moonlight. He made a wide circle around the guard and went down to the iron-faced door. It was secured, he saw, by a sliding bar held in place by a heavy padlock. For a while he studied it, then returned to ground level and stepped onto the convex roof. Lying flat, he put his face to one of the vents and sniffed. The inside air was rank with the oily odor of explosives: plastic and nitro, he told himself, and moved on.

A quarter mile down the rutted road, Peter glimpsed faint light ahead. As he neared he saw a large wooden shack in the clearing; a few yards from it stood a tall pole anchored by guy wires. From the darkness he observed the scene until he was satisfied there were no roving guards. Then he ran to the building's side and heard the high keening of a wireless key. Putting his eyes to the light crack, he looked inside and saw three Russians beside tall banks of radio equipment. One was keying the transmitter, a second recorded an incoming mes-

sage, while a third seemed to be transcribing from a manual decoding machine. The open safe attracted his attention. About four feet tall and three wide it held a stack of cloth-bound folios that were probably signal plans—and two locked steel compartments.

He reasoned that the shack was not guarded externally because there was always someone inside. That complicated the entry problem. Somewhere on the island there had to be secure storage for operational plans, and logically, the safe was it. The heavy, recessed door showed ten countersunk bolts that moved by outside handle leverage once the combination tumblers were in line. But once inside, the compartments could be opened with ordinary ward keys—or picks.

His gaze shifted and he saw a chronometer mounted atop the transmitter panel: the brass GMT hand pointed to 3:35, the blue hand showed local time an hour earlier. So did his chronograph. That meant the island was in the same longitude as Paris, somewhere far to the south. So the Tupolev had flown across the western bulge of Africa to the extreme southeast portion of the Atlantic. By rough dead-reckoning calculations the island was somewhere south of the Gulf of Guinea. The daytime heat alone suggested proximity to the equator.

Transmission ceased and the key man leaned back to stretch. Ducking, Peter heard footsteps along the road and lay flat against the base of the building.

Two lanky Nilotes strolled through the moonlight, one holding a spear as a walking stick. Peter hugged the ground and heard their voices.

“Nina njaa.”

“Unanung’unika nini basi?”

“Huna adabu we.”

“Mambo yoye ni juu yako.”

They passed on and were lost in the darkness.

Like soldiers everywhere, he thought; griping about food and life in general.

The door opened and light splashed the steps. The radio man stepped out and filled his lungs with cool night air. Then he reentered the shack and closed the door. Creeping to it, Peter examined the lock and saw it was a simple keyhole arrangement. He moved away until he gained the shadows,

then walked quietly back toward camp, aware that there might be other braves taking the night air.

This time, the cook shed attracted Peter, and as he neared the *jikoni*, he noticed an ash-dump to its rear. The shed seemed to be empty so he went inside and looked around. There were huge cast-iron cooking pots over half-smothered fires. One held warm sesame oil, another water for boiling rice. At a noise he pivoted and dropped to his knees, then returned his knife to his sheath. A foot-long lizard was scavenging on one of the tables, and as he watched it, an idea grew. Very quietly he approached the lizard from behind, grabbed its neck and cut its throat. The rough, scaly body thrashed a few times then hung limply from his hand. He carried it outside and dropped it near the pile of gray ashes, then walked to the beach where he filled his pockets with sea-shells. Returning to the cookshed he found a stick and dipped it in sesame oil, then stuck it into the pile of gray ashes. He held the dead lizard by the head to prevent dripping blood and walked toward one of the long *laini* where forty-odd trainees slept. Daubing the steps with oily ashes, Peter laid the lizard on the ground and surrounded it with a little wall of stones and shells.

He liked the effect, but decided it was not enough. So steeling himself, he jogged to where the body of Mdowo hung stiffly in the moonlight, a dark pool of drying blood at its feet. As he reached for the head, he remembered how volley after volley of spears had pierced the corpse, and how after that, it had been slashed with the sharp *kisus* of the howling mob. Lifting his own knife, Peter cut off the longest lock of hair, fought back an impulse to vomit, and took the lock back to where the lizard lay. Then he placed the hair on the ground in front of the reptile, threw the ash-daubed stick as far as he could, and left the silent *laini*.

The organizers had brought their own shrieking sorcerer to the island, Peter thought, so let him undo *this* spell. It'll be something for him to sink his murderous teeth into.

He got safely back to his room, concealed his equipment belt in the ticking, and tried to sleep. But there was still too much adrenalin in his blood, and it was nearly an hour before sleep came.

In the morning he woke to the sound of buzzing flies and realized that it was long after dawn. Wondering why Zabala

had not wakened him he strode out of the doorway and saw the Cuban sitting on his cot, staring at a barracks filled with sullen-looking trainees.

"What's happened?" Peter demanded.

The Cuban got up and went into his room. When the door was closed, he gestured through the window at a crowd of Africans gathered around the front of the next *laini*. It was their voices that had wakened him, not flies.

"*Hivi-hivi*," Zabala grunted. "They think they're bewitched. One of Mdowo's friends put a spell on the place and they won't do anything until the *mukindi* takes off the magic. Our own *amigos* here won't even step outside."

Peter's eyes narrowed. "Make them."

"I tried."

Peter buckled on his weapons belt, clicked off the Browning safety, but Zabala held his arm. "They'll kill us," he pleaded, "and I'm not ready to die."

Peter wet his lips. "What about Lucien?"

"He's there with the *mukindi*. They're working something out."

Peter went to the window and allowed himself a brief smile. In the center of the milling crowd, he could see Lucien's peaked forehead, the garish colors of the witch doctor's ritual mask.

"All right," he said shortly, "I don't want to waste time. Let's eat and wait for the spell to be lifted."

They strode through seated ranks of Africans and entered the mess hall. Other than themselves there were only Russians in it, and two had been in the radio shack the night before. There was rice and bread and boiled eggs, tea and coarse brown sugar, and when Peter had eaten he went to the latrine area and stripped for an open-air shower. After that Zabala brought a jeep and drove him to the demolitions building where a clerk issued him a mortar and shells, but balked at his request for explosives with "*Hakuna baruti*."

"*Tele baruti*," Peter snapped and pulled out his Browning.

The clerk shrugged, muttered "*Ndiyo*," and pried the top from a wooden case of dynamite. Peter holstered his pistol and gathered blasting caps, fuse, a crimper, and a few blocks of plastic explosive. They loaded it all into the jeep, and Peter ordered Zabala to drive along the beach.

"May I ask why, comrade Capitán?"

"To locate an instruction area," Peter grated, and as the jeep ground onto sand, he punched a button on his chronograph.

The sand, like the island, he had noticed, was of volcanic origin rather than coral atoll. From the blue water's edge he could see a slight inland rise that probably marked the island's spine. They drove on, sluing sometimes out of sea-wet sand, dodging boulders, and splashing through drainage creeks. Peter's left arm rested behind Zabala's seat so he could watch the chronograph unobserved. After three miles they reached a flat, straight stretch and Peter told his aide to stop. Offshore was a broken row of boulders, some half as big as a house that could serve as range targets. Between them, they unloaded the mortar, set it up, and fired a few rounds, straddling the target boulder with explosions. The next round struck the boulder and blew fragments from the top. Peter grunted approval, carried a stick of dynamite to the water's edge, and shortened the fuse. Lighting it, he heaved the explosive in a high looping arc, ducked and saw the water erupt in an angry geyser. In a few moments they saw a litter of fish floating belly-up and waited until the waves beached them. None was under five pounds, the largest might have been twenty-five. Wrapping the fish in palm leaves, they stowed the catch in the jeep and drove on, leaving the mortar tripoded in the sand, above high-water mark.

Another two miles and Peter saw the chronograph's red hand begin to waver. Peter told Zabala to slow and saw the indicator hold firm. "*Alto,*" he said. The jeep skidded to a stop and he got out.

From the rear he took plastic explosive and molded a shaped charge. Next, he crimped a blasting cap on the end of a yard-long fuse and inserted it in the charge. While Zabala watched, Peter placed the explosive on the sand at the high-tide mark, lighted the fuse, and walked back to the jeep. "Let's go," he said, and got in. When they were a hundred yards away, the explosive detonated with a tremendous roar, blasting a wide, deep hole into the sand. Returning to the site he saw the crater already filling with subsurface water, walked directly inland, and selected a tall palm tree that angled toward the beach. With the other half of the soft plastic he molded a thick, snake-like roll and girdled the palm's sea-side circumference, then detonated the explosive as before.

When the tree crashed onto the sand Zabala pulled off his beret and scratched his head. "Comrade Capitán, may I ask why you did that?"

"Practice, comrade. I am a violent man."

"Are you ready to turn back now?"

"No. Even though we don't know where we are, it might be nice to know what the place looks like."

With a nod Zabala steered the jeep around a tidal pool and Peter's reconnaissance continued.

The rest of the trip he did not bother to watch his chronograph, for it had done its job; the little hand had located a beacon submerged offshore. Crater and felled palm tree marked the site unmistakably, for cached with the beacon was the only means of escape from the island whose circumference of nine miles suggested it was less than three miles across. He lighted a Montecristo and smoked with a pervading sense of satisfaction, knowing that the guerrillas' location had been disclosed to Headquarters and the major part of his mission accomplished.

Now all he had to do was crack the commo safe and get away.

21

BY EARLY AFTERNOON THE *MUKINDI'S* WAILING, dancing, and incantations convinced the tribesman the curse had been purged, and most of them joined their trainers. Peter moved his group to the rifle range, issued Moisins, and showed the standard firing positions from prone to offhand. Then he invoked the principle of "each one teach one," and moved to the shade of a palm tree to watch the ensuing chaos. Bickering and arguments broke out among the trainees who had been paired without regard to tribal origin. The interpreter rushed frantically back and forth with Peter's orders and instructions, and finally the session ended when a Masai

shot a Nyoro in the leg. The trainees separated into glowering tribal clusters and Peter was thinking that *kisus* might flash, when Lucien de Réseau hurried over and demanded to know what was happening.

Peter let cigar smoke drift from his mouth and shrugged. "They say the rifles are bewitched. It's a job for the *mukindi*."

"No! It is your job to maintain order in your group."

Peter spat on the ground. "At Minas del Frío we never had these problems, comrade."

"*Cuba!*" Lucien shouted. "Cuba, Cuba! Everything is wonderful in Cuba. Fidel knows everything. Only—"

Peter sat up, eyes narrowed. "Only *what?*"

Lucien swallowed and wiped his dripping face. "Never mind. I can't bring the *mukindi*. After that performance I had to give him three calabashes of *marissa*. He'll be drunk the rest of the day."

Peter looked around at the sullen faces, the hostile eyes of his charges. "I don't think they can do much with rifles right now," he said thoughtfully. "Get the armory to collect them and have the Russians bring the big trucks over here."

"Why?" Lucien snapped.

"Because the mortar range is three miles down the beach. The mood they're in, they won't walk it, comrade." He drew one finger across his neck and saw the other man pale. Wetting his lips, Lucien said, "Can't you set up another range nearby? Off the beach here?"

Peter nodded. "Target rafts will have to be built, towed offshore, and anchored."

"There isn't time for that!"

"How much time is there?"

"Less than a week." Flushing, Lucien bit his lip. "All right, I'll see if I can get transportation."

"A few water bags, too," Peter suggested. "To cool them down."

It took half an hour for two trucks to arrive, the Russian drivers cursing at having to work in the sun's worst heat. Then, as they headed down the beach, one of the trucks mired in a tidal pool, and while Peter watched, the driver got out and tried to force the trainees to get off and push. When they refused, he produced a pistol and began to shout, "*Kutoka! Harambi! Kutoka!*" His words ended in a gurgling cry

as a thrown *mkuko* pierced his throat. With savage yells the trainees leaped to the sand and jabbed his body mercilessly with their spears. Peter's last glimpse of the scene showed them disappearing into jungle vegetation.

More work for the sorcerer, he reflected, not unhappy that Mdowo's brutal slaying had been, to a degree, avenged.

His half of the trainees had been interested witnesses to the episode, and he hoped the example would not be lost on them. As well as he could tell, there was a fair number of unreconciled Lumumbists among the trainees, as well as unassimilated Mau Maus. Types, he thought, we could well do without.

Once, his truck bogged in wet sand, but he advised the driver not to ask African help. Instead, Peter got out and shoveled dry sand under the drive wheels until the truck was able to pull free.

When they reached the mortar site, Peter broke open a canister of shells and showed the interpreter how to set fuses. Intrigued by the new weapon, the group gathered near. Peter dropped a live round into the muzzle, and at its loud *pop* the trainees fell flat with shouts of terror. The distant detonation brought applause, however, and awe for the power of a weapon that could pulverize the top of a boulder. Selecting another target, he decreased the elevation and fired a second round. This one missed, but brought up a school of stunned fish. That was even more impressive.

To the Soviets' disgust, Peter let selected trainees fire random rounds that sailed into the water and produced unfailing geysers of fish. He did not bother to show them how to alter range by changing muzzle elevation, and when ammunition was exhausted, he stood up and said, "Everybody understand how this works?"

The interpreter repeated the question and the group response was a chorus of "*Naams.*" Peter beamed, cleaned oil from his hands with sand, and managed to drop a handful into the mortar barrel. The next fellow who fired it, he thought, had better be a fast sprinter to avoid being killed by the stuck shell.

On the way back, their truck passed the one that had bogged down. Another truck was trying to pull it free of the advancing tide, but the tow ropes broke, and finally the res-

cue truck drove away. Peter did not know what had happened to the body of the slain Russian.

As they neared camp, Peter noticed smoke from a large bonfire, and when he dismounted, he saw a pyre burning at the edge of the training area. On it, Mdowo's mangled body was being cremated.

Someone had second thoughts about respect for the dead, he told himself, went into the shower and cleaned up for dinner.

Lucien ate with the Russians whose number was now fewer by one. He seemed angry and apprehensive, and Peter remarked it to Zabala.

Nodding, the Cuban said, "I'm not surprised, comrade. Eighteen natives hiding out in the jungle. Tonight while we sleep they could cut all our throats."

Peter grunted disdainfully. "Finish your bottle of rum," he advised, "and have a good sleep."

Zabala left the mess hall and Lucien came over to take his place in front of Peter.

His gaze was intent as he said, "We lost eighteen men, one Soviet comrade, and a truck—thanks to your brilliant ideas."

"You agreed with them." Peter picked bits of fish from his teeth with the point of his knife.

"No matter," he said sourly. "How was your group?"

"No problems. They're fully qualified mortarmen."

Lucien wiped his face. "That's something. Let's hope nothing else happens before—before the training ends." He stood up.

"I have another suggestion," Peter said casually. "Impress the trainees with that bullet-invulnerability demonstration. Of course, you'd need another priestess, a Dawa."

His eyes glinted. "Excellent, comrade José. An excellent idea! Yes, something dramatic is called for."

"And the Dawa?"

Lucien's lip curled suggestively. "She is here, my friend. Very much here." Patting Peter's shoulder, he hurried off.

In the dusk, Peter strolled among barracks and thatched *tukuls*, smoking a cigar and appearing interested only in his after-dinner walk. But he learned where the leaders who had come with him from Paris were housed, identified the *mukindi's* hut, and spotted the board building inhabited by Lucien and the Soviets. Beside it was a smaller building guarded by

two muscular Ibo warriors, and feminine laundry on a line confirmed the new Dawa was in residence.

As he turned back to his own *laini*, he saw that Mdowo's pyre was almost consumed. In its last flaming logs there was nothing recognizably human. All that remained was the stench of burned flesh hanging in the cool, gray air.

From the edge of the jungle came the marimba-like sound of some native percussion instrument, the whine of a one-stringed violin, and the eerie wail of a wooden flute. In a little while, the trio was augmented by bass and tenor drums. Sitting on the barrack steps to listen, Peter saw a truck drive up and men hang skins of *marissa* from the palm poles while trainees piled firewood in great heaps along the center of the training area. He went to his room, passing Zabala sprawled in his cot, snoring drunkenly, empty Bacardi bottle on the floor beside his hand.

Evidently Lucien had decided to put on the show tonight; a morale-boosting spectacle that would divert the trainees' minds from the ill omens of the day. What plans Peter had formed were centered on tomorrow night, but assembling all hands for a drunken evening was a gift. It spared his having to create a diversion, and it had come about almost naturally.

Kneeling, he got out his nylon equipment belt and fitted it on, checked the Browning magazine, and slid the knife from its sheath, letting it drop smoothly back in place. Opening his door, he saw a runner shout into the barracks, the trainees rose and followed at a jog to the clearing. Already the fires had been lighted, and the beer skins were doing heavy business. Around the perimeter toasts were being drunk with calabashes, and some impromptu dancing was under way. From the *laini* steps he saw musicians beyond the leaping flames and estimated that at least a dozen drums were being pounded; some with open palms, larger ones with padded sticks and bones. The ground underfoot seemed to be pulsing to their insistent rhythm.

He left the barracks and went to the nearest water bag where he drank slowly and deeply, not knowing how long it would be before he might taste fresh water again. Then he got into the jeep and lounged behind the wheel, lighted a cigar, and waited.

As the night darkened, the flames leaped higher and the clearing filled with dancing, half-drunk men. Even the desert-

ers might be tempted to join, he reflected, if they could see the debauch that was under way. And he was sure they could. Rather than crouching hungry and thirsty at the edge of the jungle, watching the *marissa* bag deplete, they might well join in the revelry, the day's events forgotten. He hoped they would, for he did not like to think of them intercepting him on the dark road between camp and the commo building.

An hour went by, and now a sort of snake dance was going on; tribal enmities put aside as warriors joined hands to jump and sway beyond the fires. When the pounding of the drums was deafening, Peter started the jeep and slowly backed away. Just then the drums roared to a thundering crescendo and fell silent except for echoes reverberating through the trees. Quickly, he cut the engine and stepped down, unnoticed, because now Lucien was entering the clearing, leading a black-haired woman, covered like himself by a cloak of black and red.

From beside the drummers the *mukindi* staggered to his feet, yelled, "*Njoooni nyote!*" and fell back, toppling one of the big drums.

In sonorous French that not a quarter of the tribesmen understood, Lucien cried, "Faithful comrades, followers of Lucifer and freedom, I show you one whose magic is greater than any you have known before. I bring you a being whose spells will turn to water the bullets of the imperialists you have sworn to destroy!"

Shrill yells surged from the *exaltés*, the drums rolled an apostrophe and died away.

"You will see!" Lucien shouted. "You will see that, naked, she destroys all bullets—even mine. To prove it, I give you—your Dawa!" With a swift tug, he undid the knot of his cloak and it dropped to her feet. If Peter had not recognized her face, he would have known from her figure that the naked woman was Justine Fachon. She stood beside Lucien, a drugged smile playing over her face as the clearing reverberated with the roaring of the audience. Knowing what was to come, Peter dropped into a crouch and loped toward the jungle road.

Once in darkness he straightened and strode on, regretting that he had watched the spectacle instead of letting his eyes accommodate to the dark. Nearing the armory, he paused to

peer ahead and saw a guard squatting beside the gate. His walk slowed and became casual, but the guard shot upright and held his spear at port arms. Peter's right hand freed a plastic-covered syringe from its pouch as his other hand drew a cigar from his breast pocket. "*Hatujambo*," he said pleasantly as he neared the guard, and when the greeting brought no response, shifted to the Arabic, "*Masalkheri*."

"*Karibu*," the guard returned, and eyed the proffered cigar.

For a long moment, Peter thought it would not work. Then the spear lowered and Peter stepped close enough to smell his breath. As the guard took the cigar, Peter stabbed the syringe into his belly and snatched the spear from his left hand. The guard yelled in pain and surprise, but Peter swung the spear against his head and the man fell to the ground. Dazedly, he tried to rise, but the curare in his bloodstream locked his muscles. His throat uttered a hoarse rattle and he lay back.

Dropping the spear, Peter sprinted down the road, heading for the lights of the commo installation. As he ran he heard the soft *putt-putt* of a generator. It was a sound he had not heard the night before, and he reasoned that the generator must be charging storage batteries before the transmitter was used. The thought altered his plan and he went quickly to the window. Inside, there were only two men; one encoding a message, the other reading a magazine, feet propped on an empty chair.

The door of the safe was open.

Leaving the building, he circled around to the source of the engine noise and found it under a canvas dew-shelter. The gasoline engine was linked to the generator by a drive belt, and from it, thick wires led to a stand of batteries larger than a pair of coffins. Stooping, Peter scooped up a handful of sandy soil and fed it into the engine's oil intake, recapped the tube, and faded into the shadows of the building's far side.

He knelt to rest and listened to the engine rhythm begin to slow. By lying prone he could see under the shack. As the engine gasped, its cylinders began to glow. It chugged and coughed and the shack lights flickered. Suddenly the cylinders exploded in quick succession, the engine shuddered and stopped. In that moment the shack lights went out.

Loud voices from the radiomen. The door opened outward

as both ran yelling toward the generator, and as the door slammed, Peter opened it and stepped inside the dark room.

He bolted the door, closed the curtain crack, and turned on his pencil flash. Through the screening he could hear the radiomen disputing the cause of the failure as he squatted in front of the safe and got out his assortment of picks. Hands slick with sweat, heart pounding, Peter inserted first one pick, then another. The third found the lock spring and pried it up as his fingernails clawed open the door. All the compartment contained was money: gold and silver bars and stacks of currency. He clicked the door shut and began working on the second, aware, as the pick's little spicules scraped the interior mechanism, that he could no longer hear the men talking. His steel strip found the lock spring just as he heard footsteps nearing the door. The pick slipped and he cursed silently, took a deep breath, and steadied his hand. Wiping his fingers dry, he began again, and now the men were trying to open the door a dozen feet away. His left hand got out the Browning and laid it on the floor beside his knee while his right hand kept the little tool searching inside the lock. Suddenly it held and he put the strength of his shoulders into prying it back. With a click the door opened and he played the flashlight inside.

No money, no folios. Just three glassine envelopes that held strips of microfilm.

The radiomen were trying to break down the door. A panel splintered and Peter emptied the compartment, closed the steel door, and headed for the farthest window. His knife slit the screen, and he plunged outside just as the door burst and the two men spilled inside.

Springing through the night, Peter told himself the radiomen would not immediately take up the chase; not until the slit screen was noticed. They would check the shack with emergency lanterns, and in those few minutes he would be able to reach safety. As soon as he could, he stopped, unbuckled one boot, and laid the microfilms inside the sole. Then he jogged on, hoping the envelopes would protect the film from the perspiration of his foot. The rest of his plan depended on the jeep; without it, all that had gone before would end in nothing.

Gasping, he passed the armory fencing, glanced down at the paralyzed guard, and kept on running toward camp.

He glimpsed the jeep silhouetted dimly by the bonfire glow beyond, slowed and stumbled forward, tripped by something that had been thrust between his legs. A spear shaft, he told himself, as his knees hit the roadway. He tried to jerk out his Browning, but the butt of another spear crashed into the back of his head.

Then, nothing.

22

HIS WRISTS ACHED. HIS HEAD WAS A SHATTERED mass of pain. There was heat and light. The light was painful to his eyes.

Through them he saw bonfires glistening from African faces and bodies. The trunk of a palm held him upright; his wrists tied behind him had been supporting the entire weight of his body. Dully, he lifted his head to see the leering face of Lucien; behind it, the chalky features of the Dawa—Justine.

The drums were silent, the clearing filled with an expectant hush. From the ground rose the *mukindi* to prance crazily toward them, his face hideously striped in red, white, and yellow.

“Who are you?” yelled Lucien and stepped closer. “*Who are you?*” he roared and jerked the beard from Peter’s chin. The sharp pain cleared his mind as a low hum of approval greeted his unmasking.

Brandishing the equipment belt, Lucien grated. “Unless you tell me, I will have you killed a millimeter at a time.”

“And if I do?” Peter husked.

“Spears. The quick death of Mdowo.” Stepping aside, he pointed at ranks of squatting warriors whose spears formed a forest of black bamboo.

Peter licked his puffed lips. “Of what am I accused?”

“Of trying to steal arms, sabotage this island.”

Good, Peter thought. At least they don't know about the microfilm. Not yet, and turned his head as the *mukindi* thrust a rattle at his eyes and shrieked unintelligibly.

He studied the dull face of Justine, noticed two smudges on her naked thorax. From Lucien's disintegrating graphite bullets.

"As Paul le Noir," Lucien said heavily, "you came to my apartment with Justine. I said then I would drink your blood, and now I will. But first, I must know your name."

"*Je suis le Diable.*"

"*You!*" The damp face paled. "*You were the one!*"

"My pleasure," Peter croaked, and tried to turn his face to avoid Lucien's crashing fist. The blow snapped his head against the pole, half-stunning him. When he lifted it, he saw a sea of hostile eyes.

Lucien gripped his shoulders and shook him. "Tell me," he yelled, "or I'll kill you now. What have you done? When . . . ?"

"Kill me and you'll never know," Peter gasped.

"Kill?" Justine echoed. "Kill, Lucien?"

"Shut up, idiot."

"I want to go to bed," she whimpered. "I'm tired. I don't like all these men looking at me."

Furiously, he whirled and struck her face. She tottered backward, and suddenly the *mukindi* pinioned Lucien's arms. In French, to Peter's astonishment, the witch doctor grated, "You shall not strike her. You will not harm our Dawa!"

"*Dawa,*" Lucien sneered, then recovered himself. Shaking off the *mukindi*, he pulled the woman to her feet, wrapped his cloak around her shoulders. "Let her rest," he said loudly, and the *mukindi* began to lead her away.

"Wait!" Peter called in French, and when the *mukindi* turned, said, "The Dawa is not the only one immune to bullets. I say my magic is as powerful as hers. So let the test be made on me."

"No!" Lucien shouted. "No. He is lying!"

"Let him prove it," Peter said loudly. "Prove it with the same gun."

Lucien looked wildly around and jerked out his revolver, but one of the witch doctor's bodyguards seized his wrist in a paralyzing grip.

Slowly the *mukindi* swayed toward him, muttering, "It is a

good idea. If he is immune to bullets, he will be our Dawa's companion. If he is not, the legend of her magic will be greater still."

Snatching the revolver from Lucien's hand, he gestured at Peter and a knife slashed the cords that bound his wrists. Freed, he staggered forward, nearly falling; then he stood erect and massaged his numbed hands. Calling for silence, the *mukindi* launched into a shrill monologue, pointing in turn at Peter, Lucien, and Justine. In the silence that followed, Peter said, "Let the test be made on both of us, great *mukindi*: on Lucien and on me."

Lucien shouted wildly, but a large hand clamped over his mouth. Glancing at him, the witch doctor said, "It is an idea to my liking. We know the Dawa's powers; let us see which of these two is the greater." Breaking the revolver, he gazed at the cylinder and said, "Two cartridges remain."

Lucien struggled violently. With reason, Peter thought; he has everything to lose, and I have nothing. Quick death by bullet is better than the death of a thousand cuts. Through the surge of emotion his mind tried to recall Ray Moffit's words. Slowly, achingly slow, they returned:

He fired a shot at her and nothing happened; fired at a wine bottle and broke it; another shot at her: nothing . . .

Two smudges on Justine's body. Two bullets remaining, one of which was lethal.

Peter licked his lips. "Shoot me, great *mukindi*. Shoot now and show our comrades whose magic is the greater!"

The witch doctor's eyes narrowed. Stepping back, he eyed Peter and Lucien; then motioned his men to free the coven leader's arms.

"No!" shouted Lucien. "The test is not fair. I am your friend, *mukindi*. I have always been your friend. So shoot me first!"

The striped lips parted in a horrid grimace. "Since we are friends, I will shoot this man before you." Whirling, he pointed the revolver at Peter's chest and fired.

The impact was like a blunted arrow. The graphite bullet struck Peter's left breast and vanished in a puff of dust. The *mukindi* brought the revolver to bear on Lucien, but the diabolist was breaking into a run. At the report, the fleeing man staggered forward, recovered, and tried to breach the phalanx of blocking bodies. The *mukindi* screeched two frenzied

words and Peter saw spear heads emerge from Lucien's back. With a scream of agony, the dying man fell sideways to the ground, surrounded by bodies and stabbing spears.

With Lucien the center of attention, Peter backed away until he was free of the crowd. Before he began to run he saw that he was watched by only the dully hopeless eyes of Justine.

The noise of the jeep engine was smothered by the blood cries of inflamed, half-drunken warriors. Lights out, Peter speeded the jeep onto the sand of the beach, turned north, and raced along the water's edge, clenching fear in his teeth like a bit.

The spinning wheels whined through damp patches, speeded over the firmer, higher edge of the sand as he peered through the windshield for obstacles. Ahead, through the foliage he saw a glimmer of light and realized it was the radio shack, illuminated by storage batteries. He turned off the headlights and drove by the phosphorescence of the surf until he was beyond the commo clearing. Then he slowed and coasted to a stop, switching off the engine. Jumping down, he tossed palm leaves from the jeep, exposing what remained of his supplies, squatted in the sand, and bound four sticks of dynamite with a length of fuse. He made a yoke-shaped fuse, crimped blasting caps on their ends, and forced them into two sticks of dynamite. The fuse that remained was close to four feet long; it would give him enough time, he estimated, to reach the beach.

Entering the thick foilage, Peter heard the calls of birds and tree toads as he forced his way through palmettos and clinging vines. Thorns tore his naked chest and arms; blood wet his hands and he tried to wipe them on his dew-drenched trousers. The fuse had to be kept dry; nothing else was important. Creepers blinded him; he felt a hairy spider on his back and slapped it away, feeling his body's involuntary shudder. Huge leaves tilted and drained water on his body. He moistened his lips and plunged on. The vegetation began to thin, and he made out an orange glow in the direction of the camp. Pausing, he heard the sonorous pounding of drums.

Then as he parted branches, he saw the rear of the armory, approached cautiously until he could touch its circling barbed-wire strands. Weaponless, he prayed the guard was

sleeping—or better, had abandoned his post at the call of the drums. Following the wire, he trod the undergrowth as quietly as he could, one step at a time, until through a screen of fronds, he made out the demolitions building.

Moving on, Peter reached the farthest point from the armory and climbed onto the rounded concrete roof where he crouched and laid down the dynamite. Flat, the four sticks should slide easily through the air vent. Floor impact might extinguish the fuse, but he had to take that chance. Three tries of the lighter wheel and the wick flamed; the fuse ignited in a shower of sparks. When he was sure the flame would hold, he fitted the dynamite through the ventilator slit, lowered it slowly, and as the ignition reached his fingers, he released the fuse and heard the sticks strike the floor below.

Rising, he pivoted swiftly, but a spear tore the flesh of his thigh and whistled on. Stunned, he lurched from the roof as a tall warrior leaped at him. Peter dodged the slashing knife and struck the naked throat before steel-strong arms caught and circled his body. Twisting and turning, Peter doubled over and crashed his boot heels onto the guard's bare insteps. A yell of agony and the arms freed him. He stumbled forward, found the dropped knife, and snatched it from the ground. Turning, he crouched to defend himself but the warrior was hobbling off beyond knife range. Weakly, Peter sucked deep breaths to clear his head, remembered the burning fuse, and bolted for the safety of the jungle. Knife in his belt, he circled his thigh with both hands to stem the flow of blood, gritted his teeth against sharply stabbing pain, and fought onward through streaming foliage. In his mind was one objective: to reach the beach before the demolitions exploded. When that happened the area would come alive with tribesmen howling for his blood. Grimly he thought, I've left plenty of it behind me, released pressure momentarily, and felt the surge of liquid blood.

Urgently he stumbled on, gasping through constricted throat and nostrils, feeling his heart pound as never before. Finally, in a gigantic effort, he reached the edge of the jungle and pitched forward onto sand. His body screamed for rest, but he rose and scanned the beach, finally making out the jeep. Sand slowed his progress, and as he grew weaker, he wondered whether the spear tip had been poisoned. The thought gave him a measure of strength; he reached a stretch

of wet sand and realized that the tide was receding, going out. Stumbling into the water he splashed brine over the spear wound and saw a gash four inches long and at least an inch deep. Letting the blood flow, he cut trouser strips, folded one into a pressure pad, and bound it in place with another. Then he splashed water on his face and chest, filled his mouth, and swallowed a little, aware from the stinging that even his lips were cut. As he limped away, salt burned his lacerated body. He reached the jeep and pulled himself into the seat, grateful for momentary rest.

Then he started the engine and was shifting into low when he saw the nearest trees bend. Blast shook the moving jeep, plastering his body with sand before he heard the deafening roar. Stones and jungle debris rattled against the jeep, and the sky lighted above the vanished building. Half-stunned by the detonation, he pressed the accelerator and guided the jeep between moonlit water and the jungle's edge. His windshield reflected an orange glow surmounting the dark background as fire spread into the jungle.

There was no reason now to drive without headlights, so he turned them on, squinting at the unaccustomed glare, the jeep bouncing wildly over corrugated stretches of sand.

Once quicksand sucked the wheels but he spun them free and gunned on. Wind freshened his face, cleared his mind, and he felt the ponderous throb of his wounded thigh. The leg was stiffening so he pressed his left foot to the accelerator and held it there, peering ahead for the landmarks he had made.

He saw the fallen palm tree first and headed for its base. Nearing it, he angled toward the foliage, slowed, and crashed through a barrier of scrub and palmettos. Switching off the lights, he pulled himself painfully from the seat, tested his numbing leg, and slackened the bandage for a moment. Then he filled his arms with plastic explosive and dynamite and looked around. Hours ago his chronograph had been stripped from his wrist but the crater in the sand remained. He limped to where tree and crater made a line extending invisibly beyond the beach and walked into the water, swimming when it reached his chest.

Like the breeze the current was offshore. He lay face down and peered into the ocean, keeping his legs motionless and sculling with his hands as he searched the bottom. From time

to time he lifted his head for air and to regain position along the invisible line. He searched for nearly ten minutes before his eyes made out a contrasting blackness on the ocean's dark gray floor. At first he thought it was no more than an elongated boulder, but he filled his lungs and dolphined down until his fingers touched smooth black neoprene. The object was a deflated bag with a trailing yellow lanyard at one end. Using the last of his air, he pulled himself toward it, jerked hard, and shot to the surface.

As he gulped air, he estimated his distance from the beach at fifteen yards, the water's depth, ten feet, and turned and saw the inflating bag rise beside him. As released air filled its contours, it formed a bulbous, covered raft about twelve feet long. He pulled himself clear of the water and lay gasping on the tent-like surface, then searched for the zipper tab and worked it down the middle of the covering. Inside, were watertight bags of gear. Looking around, he saw that he was drifting toward a point of land and tossed out the nylon drogue—the sea anchor. As it filled, the drift slowed, and he sat on the inflated thwart to concentrate on the anonymous bag of equipment. With his knife he slit open the nearest and found it held four cylinders of gas. There was plastic tubing in a second, the third held a large, flat rectangle of aluminum mesh, and the last one—the largest—the plastic envelope of his balloon.

Methodically, ignoring his pain, Peter opened the folded aluminum into a five-sided cube, fitted the feed tube to the nozzle of one hydrogen cylinder, and worked the other end over the envelope's intake valve. Then he paused to review the ascent checklist he had memorized five months before at CIA's Ballooning Area. There, he thought with a wry smile, there had been sand and salt crust stretching endlessly away; now he was faced with the reverse. Again he loosened the pressure pad, felt blood throb the length of his leg, and tightened the wet fabric again.

The raft was sixty feet offshore. Before he began inflation he would have to retrieve the microfilm. While he still had strength to swim.

Cutting two plastic squares, he bound one inside the other, bit into the container, and went over the side. Breaststroking, he made slow headway against the tide, stumbling half-ex-

hausted onto the beach. He rested a few moments and staggered to where he had left his shoes, opened the container, and drew out the dry piece inside. Then he placed the microfilm frames in its center, folded it carefully, and clamped it between his teeth. Looking around, he saw that the glow had increased; flames now danced above the tops of distant trees.

He returned to the water and breaststroked toward the raft, aided this time by tide and current; still, he could barely pull himself over the foot-high side when he reached it. Resting again, he secured the microfilm inside the aluminum basket, then opened the valve of the first cylinder.

Gas fed into the folded envelope, the plastic swelled and writhed. Peter drew the crown to the far end of the raft, unfolded other pleats, and saw them slowly fill as he fastened nylon gondola lines to the balloon's neck ring. When the first cylinder gave out, he pinched the feed line and fitted it to the second. A fresh rush of gas billowed the center of the balloon, and now the breeze began to toy with the rising bag. On the desert, inflating had seemed comparatively rapid; now it was taking a lifetime.

With the third cylinder working, Peter levered the fourth into the mesh gondola and stood beside it, feeling the growing pain of his thigh. Above him the plastic bag bobbed like a tethered kite, straining at the weighted basket. The polyethylene envelope was twenty-five feet in diameter and held thirty thousand cubic feet of gas. Disconnecting the third cylinder, he fitted the tubing over the fourth. Opening the valve, he looked back at the island, at the spreading, consuming flames, realizing that he was entirely vulnerable now. A shot from shore could puncture his balloon, and he was weaponless. Except for the knife of the guard.

He drew it from his belt and tossed it into the water, looked up, and saw that the plastic bag was almost fully distended. Bending over, he heard the hiss of gas diminish, lower in pitch and finally end. With that he closed the intake valve above, removed the tubing, and lifted the last cylinder to the rim of the basket.

Gathering his strength, he shoved the cylinder free and sank down into the gondola. With a lurch it rose, hauling him slowly skyward, swaying in the offshore wind.

For a while he sat where he was, knees close to his chin in

the cramped basket. Then he struggled upright, clutching the rim to steady himself, and pulled out antennae from the metal box of the transponder. They would reflect identifying signals emitted by a master unit, and he hoped that even now the unit was scanning for him. There was no altimeter in the basket, no rate-of-climb indicator; not even a compass. No way to tell where the wind was taking him.

His throat gave a cracked chuckle as he reminded himself that he did not even know where he had been. Then, slowly, painfully, he fitted himself into a corner that let him move his knees a few inches farther from his chin. Through the mesh he could see the burning jungle recede. Ahead the blue of night met indigo ocean at the horizon. He loosened the pressure pad again and felt no rush of blood. With luck a clot would form, he thought, as he tightened the strip again.

The air was cooler now; much cooler. His skin began to chill, and thirst tormented his throat. The motion of the balloon was almost unnoticeable; a smooth, steady sway. He knew that he must not rise so high that he would freeze or the thin bag burst. Because he could not estimate how long it might be before the transponder reflections brought help, he would have to remain awake. His body begged for sleep, but it was a luxury he could not afford. Not if he wanted to live.

So he peered over the rim at a whitecap below, and estimated his altitude at better than a thousand feet. If he were clothed, he could go higher, but this was high enough. Pulling himself upright, he let hydrogen hiss from the valve until the rising sensation seemed to end. Then he settled into the gondola again, hoping he had not lost too much buoyancy. There was no auxiliary gas to save him from the waves.

Drowsing, he shook himself and lapsed back into a half-conscious fantasy of warm, quilted beds, of goose-down bolsters and electric heating pads. His mind visualized a spring of crystal water where he could slake his thirst, but he roused himself and scanned the starlit heavens. After a while he recognized Cassiopeia and located the Dipper with its pointers that identified Polaris. He watched the rigging lines and found the balloon drifting generally westward—away from the African coast if his calculations had been correct. But winds blew in layers of contrary directions. Too high, and he might be carried back over trackless jungle. He looked up at

the control valve, decided it was too far away to reach; hopelessly far away.

Huddled in the swaying basket, Peter closed his eyes and felt sleep come over him like a wave.

23

COLD WOKE HIM; INTENSE COLD, COUPLED WITH a sensation of light. Numbly he peered around and realized that he could see the basket sides, his naked toes. Looking up, Peter saw gray sky; the balloon was much too high.

Inch by inch he pulled himself erect, shivering in chill wind that surrounded his body. Stiff hands fumbled with the release valve, and in a few moments he heard the saving hiss of gas. Waiting, he reasoned that the light of dawn had caused the hydrogen to expand. From now, he would have to regulate altitude continually. At nightfall the cooling bag would lose its lift, so his hours of surviving were limited to the span of day.

Looking down, he saw scattered whitecaps on the ocean's surface, turned and scanned in all directions, but there was nothing to be seen: no land, no ships or flotsam; nothing. And until the sun rose he could not tell his course.

Not that it matters, he thought, as he shut off the flow of gas and settled again into the semiprotection of the basket. After a while the air warmed a few degrees, and when he looked down again, he estimated the balloon had lost two thousand feet. There it steadied and drifted, soundless in the clearing sky.

Mechanically he loosened the pressure pad, felt blood course tingling through his unconstricted veins, and saw that only a little oozed under the red-soaked pad. Clotting was well along, he reflected, and bound it in place with less pressure. Then his mind dulled and his chin dropped against his

chest. This was the longest balloon voyage he had ever made, he mused, and as things stood it would probably be his last.

Through the mesh he noticed that he was drifting toward the rising sun, back toward land, a plaything of the winds. As the sun rose, the warming envelope gained buoyancy, and once again he had to release a portion of his precious lift.

The effort plunged him into a doze. He felt an impulse to dive from the gondola and end things quickly. The urge was so powerful that he half rose and was staring down at the water when he saw a feather wake that angled toward the wind. Swallowing, he shielded his eyes and tried to see what caused the phenomenon—a shoal, possibly, or . . . No, a black stick. It emerged from the surface, thickened, and white wake flared behind it. Then a conning tower, stabilizer, and diving fins. Water streamed from its rounded back as, like Leviathan, the submarine rose hugely from the deep.

Tears wet his cheeks as hatches opened and men swarmed over the deck; frogmen in wet suits—the Navy Seals who had cached his balloon offshore. He saw a raft inflating as the sub bore on ahead. Signal lights laced the morning sky before he heard their dull reports. From the conning tower a bullhorn spoke.

“Mr. Ward. We’re launching now. When the raft is manned, commence letdown. Repeat. When the raft is manned, begin your letdown.”

He shook the nylon rigging like a madman, fatigue and pain forgotten as the dream rescue became reality. The raft went over the side followed by four black-clad Seals who swam to it and clambered aboard. One started the electric motor and now the raft was on its own.

Reaching above, he found the valve and opened it. Gas whistled through the nozzle; the balloon shuddered and began to sink. Too fast, too fast. He turned it off, and saw the sub heading downwind at flank speed, followed by the rescue raft.

Comparing its speed and the rate of his descent, Peter released more gas and saw that wind was altering his course. The raft responded to the new heading, and now he was only three hundred feet above and sinking steadily.

He remembered the microfilm, retrieved it in its pouch, and tied the pouch around his neck. Two hundred feet remaining, but the raft was far behind. He could no longer

slow the rate of descent; the motion vectors were resolved. At a hundred feet he struggled onto the basket rim and gripped the nylon cords, looking down at the water between his naked feet, coming toward him fast.

Fifty feet, twenty-five. He had lost track of the raft. Easing forward, he gulped a deep breath, held it and dropped clear. Before his feet hit the water he saw the balloon pass overhead, and then he was submerged in the green-blue sea. The velocity of his drop plunged him deep below surface, so deep his eardrums seemed to break. Then momentum slowed, and his arms braked until he could begin the lung-bursting upward thrust. Forgetting his wound, he kicked both legs, breaststroking toward the lightening surface, until finally his face felt air. Gasping, he filled his lungs, filled them again, and heard shouting. As he turned, he saw the raft heading toward him, saw three Seals dive off while the fourth hurled him a ring. Grasping it, he rested his chin on its painted cork, clenched the handholds, and waited for the swimmers to arrive. Strong arms boosted him from the water, hauled him into the raft. A flask of brandy reached his lips; he drank deeply and gagged; drank again and forced it down. One of the Seals climbed aboard, and with the other two alongside, the raft turned toward the closing sub. Shivering, he glanced around and saw a plastic bubble diminishing in size until, with a *pop*, it vanished. Thanks for the ride, he said half-aloud, and let more brandy trickle down his aching throat.

From the quarterdeck someone tossed down a blanket as the raft nosed against the submarine's hull. A line held it fast and he pulled the blanket around his shoulders. "Need help, Mr. Ward?" someone asked, and he answered, "A little."

Slowly, propped by rescuers, he climbed the curving ladder until his arms were grasped. Vision swam, and when it cleared, he saw Ray Moffit's worried face. "You all right, man?"

"I'm okay." He gestured at the pouch around his neck. "This is for you."

Carefully, they lowered him down the hatch, helped him along the passageway into wardroom country where a bunk and a medic waited. Water first, to replenish his depleted cells, then his trousers were cut off and the wound examined. "It'll take a few stitches, Mr. Ward. Okay?"

“Okay.”

Blanketed on a stretcher, he was carried to sick bay and transferred to a shiny, padded table. Diffused lighting came from above.

“Hemoglobin under two million,” someone said, “and he’s the worse for wear. We’d better transfuse now.”

The doctor’s masked face neared his. “Your blood type, Mr. Ward?”

“Alpha.”

“Good. Gas or injection?”

“I don’t like gas.”

He heard the clink of needles in a tray, then the compartment seemed to tilt and external sounds grew muffled. The sub was diving.

“We’re on our way,” the doctor said, and Peter felt his lips twist into a smile. “Mind telling me where I’ve been?”

“Kilima Island.”

“Never heard of it.”

“Neither had we. This is the needle, now. Relax.”

He felt momentary pain as something foreign pierced a vein. Blood or anesthetic? It didn’t matter.

Ray Moffit’s voice: “When we saw the island burning, we thought we’d lost you.”

“What took you so long?”

“Transponder failure. When that was discovered, we had to use radar. By then you were miles away.”

Cotton was filling his ears. With an effort he slurred, “Film’s from their safe. Have it enlarged and report.”

“Right. This was a great job, Peter. Wish we could stay and see the show.”

“What . . . show?”

“There’s a flotilla heading for the island. The navies of the three nearest countries. Whatever was going on there, they’ll put an end to it. Can you tell me . . . ?” His voice faded, drifted, dissolved away. Into warm, comforting oblivion.

AFTER TWO WEEKS IN WASHINGTON, PETER FLEW to Martinique and a rented villa near Vauclin on the eastern coast. Morning sun struck the swimming pool that had been hollowed out of volcanic rock, and when he lolled on its edge in the afternoons, he could view the light green Caribbean framed by hibiscus, oleander, and huge banana leaves. For a week he did nothing but sun, swim, and enjoy the excellent cuisine of Antoinette, his tall, *peau-cannelle* maid. Once a day he would go down the winding road to the village post office, inquire for mail, and send a postcard or two to absent friends.

At Headquarters, Peter had learned that Emil Bailot was the alias of a young and handsome KGB officer who had figured in other dangle operations, while Lucien was identified as a native of Bessarabia; juggler, magician, and clairvoyant. The KGB controlled him through suspended sentences for money-changing and theft.

At least half the trainees had been killed in frenzied tribal slaughters that took place before the African flotilla arrived and enforced order on the smoking island. Survivors had been taken to detention areas in their native countries, there to ponder the merits of sorcery and insurrection.

Of the Dawa—Justine—no trace whatever.

His leg wound was healed. Only a finger-wide pink scar contrasted with the rest of his deeply tanned skin. Snorkeling off the beach below one afternoon, he gathered coral for his niece and conch shells for his nephew, then trudged up the steep path to the kitchen door. He placed the conches on the table, intending to ask Antoinette to prepare a bisque of conch and crab. She appeared, head bound in flamboyant madras, and said, "I have been attending your visitors, *m'sieu.*"

"Visitors?" He knew of no one who planned to drop by.

Her eyebrows arched. "Yes, visitors. *Jeunes filles*. They are at the pool."

Possibly his sister and a friend—though Anne could hardly be described as a young lady. Dropping his face mask, Peter walked through the spacious living room and out to the swimming pool terrace. Halting, he gaped at the scene.

Two beautifully formed young ladies were seated at the poolside, legs in the water. One was blonde, the other brunette. Both wore large sunglasses and identical microscopic bikinis. Noticing his arrival, the dark-haired one called, "We like it, Peter."

"Very much," said the blonde approvingly.

Swallowing, Peter moved forward. "Like it?"

"The pool—the house," Solange said with a wave of her hand.

"Everything about it," Diana agreed, removed her sun glasses, and smiled. "You're so important in our lives we thought we'd visit you. Do—do you mind?"

"I'm—delighted."

They slipped into the water and stood waist-deep, beckoning him to join them. Beside him, Antoinette placed three sweating glasses of Martinique punch on the table. Like a sleepwalker, Peter entered the pool and went toward them. Diana's hair had been restored to its natural color and cut shoulder-length. Her lips were red and her skin pulsed with health. Holding out her hands, she took his and closed the space between them. "I want to thank you," she said huskily. "For everything." Her lips pressed his and her arms circled his shoulders. He felt the pressure of her flat, hard belly, the little promontories of her hips. After a while she sighed and let Solange take her place. "I want to thank you, too," the French girl murmured, and kissed his lips.

"Thank me?"

"For all you've done—for both of us." She kissed him again, more passionately, until Diana splashed water on them and said, "That's enough for now." She dove underwater and glided toward the deep end followed by Peter and Solange. Like dolphins they gamboled in the warm water, bandeaus disappearing, ignored, as they dove and swam until, gasping, they sat on the poolside and gulped icy punch. The lost bandeaus surfaced and floated on the rippling water, gaily col-

ored strips of nonessential fabric. When their glasses were drained, Peter took them to the kitchen for refilling and found a note from Antoinette: if *m'sieu* would not mind she was paying a long-delayed visit to her aunt at Trinité ten miles up the coast. The bisque was simmering on the stove. Pursing his lips, Peter dropped the note into a wastebasket and drew a chill pitcher from the refrigerator.

Carrying it to the terrace, he saw the girls were sunning on the polished stones, filled the glasses, and stretched out between his guests. From a quiet, dull existence, his life had suddenly become interestingly unconventional.

"It's a long, hot climb from the village," Solange remarked drowsily, and Peter felt Diana's fingers lace through his. "Quite long," she murmured, "and very dusty."

Prévost was behind their visit, he told himself. Thorne might know about it, vaguely, and the Canadian ambassador might even have concurred, but the visitation was Fred's work. Thanks, old buddy, he said half-aloud, and reflected that they were a long way from Villa Beauvoir. In every sense they had come a long way, all three of them. To Diana he said, "How do you feel?"

"Wonderful. I've never felt so well before."

"It wasn't her mind at all," Solange explained. "It was the drugs they'd been giving her."

"Please—no more," Diana said, and sat up.

"You'll stay for dinner? *Pot-au-feu*."

"We had every intention of it. Do you have sun oil, Peter?"

"I'll get it."

Rising, he tried not to stare at the topless sunbathers, found coconut oil in the medicine chest, and was returning through the bedroom when he noticed their baggage. A suitcase and cosmetic box each, Air France baggage tags on the handles. A thought struck him, but he dismissed it and returned to his guests. They oiled their fronts and he noticed a small dark mole below Solange's left nipple. Diana's body was unblemished. He smoothed oil over their backs, and then it was time to pour the rest of the punch.

As Peter settled back and closed his eyes, a feeling of euphoria invaded his body. The sun was hot, the drinks delicious, and the company incomparable. An hour passed, the girls cooled themselves in the pool and stretched out again.

Peter had a swim, oiled their backs, and cautioned, "Not too much the first day."

"We're so pale compared to you," Solange pouted.

"But I've been here a week."

"I know," Diana said, "and it's a month since I met you. I'm sorry I was so—confused then. But that's all over."

"Best to forget it."

"I'm so glad it was you, Peter," Diana said quietly, and brushed his cheek with her lips.

"Yes," Solange agreed, "even though you lied to me."

Relaxed by the high-test rum, they sculled in the pool and Peter persuaded them to leave the sun. They returned in beach jackets, occupied chairs in the shade, and seemed to fall asleep. Peter went to his bedroom to change and saw their opened suitcases on luggage racks, cosmetic cases on the wide dressing table. Frowning, he showered, shaved, and got into madras shorts and sandals. He made another pitcher of Martinique punch, filled it with ice cubes, and carried it to the terrace where his guests were looking lazily at the calm evening sea.

After filling their glasses he eased into a lounge chair and watched tropical birds flit through the surrounding foliage. Diana said, "I know the island guerrillas were taken prisoner, Peter. What happened with the information you brought back?"

Normally he would have turned the question aside, but both girls seemed to be somewhat in the confidence of the Agency. "Arrests were made," he told them, "forestalling uprisings in the target countries."

"Then," Solange suggested, "things will be quiet in Africa."

"For a while."

Diana sipped and gazed down at her frosty glass. "Meanwhile, what do you intend to do?"

"They haven't told me."

"Surely you'll be given a long vacation?" Her eyes studied his face.

"After all you went through they *owe* it to you," Solange chimed in.

"Anything's possible." He wondered whether they planned to stay at a village guest house, or whether he would have to call a taxi to take them over the long, bumpy road to Fort-de-France. Tourism had not yet really enveloped the island,

and facilities were comparatively limited. On the other hand Diana, as mistress of an inherited fortune, could afford to stay wherever she chose. And she had chosen Martinique.

Solange disappeared into the house, returning with silver and dinner china. She set places at the terrace table while Diana stacked records on the player. The girls certainly seemed at home, he reflected, and wondered how long they had been around before he returned from the beach. The sun was dropping below the sea, cool shadows lengthened across the pool.

"I didn't know my maid had an aunt at Trinité," he remarked. "Awkward time to pay her a visit—just when I have guests. Of course, it could be some old Creole custom."

The girls exchanged glances.

"It was our idea," Diana admitted, "and Antoinette seemed glad to go."

"Wasn't that a little conspiratorial?"

"That from a master conspirator," Solange laughed, and lighted table candles. Their flames reflected from the pool's calm surface. In the near-darkness, Diana served the bisque and Peter uncorked a bottle of iced Chablis. They dined with only desultory conversation and Peter felt a growing atmosphere that was almost tangibly charged.

After dinner he danced in turn with the girls on the terrace. The music was slow and sensuous, and glass after glass of punch clouded his objectivity. When the candles guttered out, he was no longer even sure which girl was in his arms. Walking unsteadily to the record player, he reversed the stack and noticed one of his guests turning down the covers of the oversize bed. Evidently they realized he was tired and had drunk too much.

He yawned and felt a body nestle against his. Music resumed, but he decided against more dancing. "I'd better call a taxi," he said. "Where are you staying?"

"Why, Peter, we thought we'd stay here."

With difficulty he swallowed. "But there's only one bed."

"Peter"—Solange? Diana?—"we're both in love with you. So instead of being selfish, we agreed to share."

"Share?" he echoed, and felt himself being drawn toward the bedroom. The confusion of his mind increased. Dazedly he allowed himself to be guided onto the welcome softness of the bed, surrendering to ardent lips and questing hands. Be-

tween twin succubi—one dark, one fair—distinctions blurred, delineations merged, and after a while it seemed that he was making love to one, responding to the other's lips. Identities were unimportant, immaterial.

But it was all illusion, he told himself; the witchcraft of rum-filled dreams. Let morning sun sort truth from sorcery.

If anybody cared.

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