

On a tenth floor balcony overlooking the beaches of the Avenue Ramlet el Baida, Iziz Kalaq leaned on the railing and stared out at the blue horizon of the Mediterranean as Rajai explained the role for Kalaq and his Palestinians in the action. He listened to the details for minutes before finally interrupting Rajai:

"But you are saying nothing of the most important information. Where we assemble, the target, the day and the time."

"I was not told. Therefore, I cannot tell you. However, the target will be of no concern to your force. You will not make the strike. Though you will share fully in the the international glory--"

"And the pay."

"-- your force will not make the attack. Others have volunteered for the joy of martyrdom."

"Unless the Americans counter-attack."

"There will be no time for a counter-attack." He glanced from his hand-written notes to the other balconies. He saw no one. Kalaq and his squads of Palestinian gunmen occupied the entire top floor of the apartment tower. And in the interior of Kalaq's apartment, where his Revolutionary Guards waited with one of the Palestinians, no one could overhear him. "When the unit of martyrs leaves for the target, your fighters will fly back to Lebanon. Regardless of the outcome of the attack-- victory or failure-- your unit will be gone."

"And if the Americans learn of this operation and attack?"

Rajai smiled at the question. "When have the Americans attacked? Before or after an action?"

## RECON

"This will be in the Americas."

"The Americans will not even know you were there, until long after the martyrs strike."

"You want twenty men. If there is no threat, why--"

"Twenty men and the technicians. There is always a threat of American action-- or Zionist. We must anticipate even the impossible. Also, the fighters must be there to help the technicians."

"How can a man with a rifle help prepare explosives?"

"Your men ..." Rajai considered his words carefully. He did not want to reveal the immense power of the bomb. "Your men may be needed to transfer explosives from one vehicle to another. There will be Latins there, comrades in the struggle. But I would not want them involved with the explosives. We cannot take any chances with errors due to misunderstandings. Your men will work at the direction of your technicians. That way, there will be no accidents."

"Another truck bomb? An embassy? Where?"

"My superiors will reveal the target only when I must know."

"They do not trust you," Kalaq laughed. "Rajai the loyal clerk. Why do the spymasters of Tehran not trust you?"

"I do not trust myself."

"Half the money will be paid before the action?"

"Of course. We can pay tomorrow. We will pay the second half when your group returns."

"Gold or dollars?"

"Dollars."

"I want all my money in advance."

"Only your share? There is no problem with that."

"And when do you want my men ready?"

## RECON

"The second week of January. They must be ready to leave at the moment I call."

"And if your call does not come?"

"If my superiors cancel the operation, if the operation is compromised, then your unit will be paid."

"Good. This business is agreed."

"Must you not consult with your superiors in the movement?"

"No. This will be our operation."

"Good, Iziz. I had anticipated also paying your officers."

"Who will receive that money?"

"If they do not learn of this operation, if the participation of your group remains secret, the money goes to you."

"Agreed. Total secrecy. They will not learn of this operation until after the victory."

Rajai returned his notes to his briefcase. "I need your assistance on another matter. One of my countrymen needs an escort to the airport. May I request the help of several of your men?"

"Why does this Iranian need the protection of my men? Why not send him in a taxi?"

"It is a political matter. And there may be some danger."

"A kidnapping? Then he must be sent back through Syria. In a car or truck."

"No, you misunderstand. The danger is to me. My other concern is that my compatriot leave Beirut without incident. Only with the assistance of--"

Impatient, Kalaq cut off the explanation. "Four men? Take them."

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On a narrow street in the Shatila refugee camp, Rajai waited in a Land Rover,

## RECON

watching the footpath that cut through the broken concrete that had been shops and homes before the Israeli bombardment of June 1982. Three-story apartments-- haphazard cubes with windows and twisting stairways, constructed without plans as the population of the camps increased-- walled the street, blocking the late-afternoon sun. Laundry flapped on lines strung across the street as wind channelled along the street carried dust and trash. The voices and laughter of children, the Arabic melodies of radios came from the windows near the Land Rover.

Two Palestinians with Kalashnikovs sat in the front seat. One man dozed. The other man sat half-turned to Rajai, waiting for his signal. At the other end of the long block, two other Palestinians waited in a Volkswagon.

Fifteen minutes after they parked, a Palestinian patrol appeared-- summoned by suspicious residents. Trucks blocked both ends of the street and gunmen approached the Volkswagon and Land Rover. Kalaq's men showed their identification and talked with the patrol, explaining their surveillance with a complex lie involving UNESCO. The patrol leader did not believe the lie. A handful of American ten dollar bills resolved the problem. The patrol left immediately.

Women stared from windows. From time to time in the next hour, residents dashed along the street-- men carrying their toolboxes, women with market bags. Everyone watched the parked cars.

As the afternoon light failed, Mohammed Farzan stumbled along the footpath. He wore torn jeans and a ragged windbreaker. Two years before in Paris, Farzan had sported the image of a rock star, playing guitar, wearing expensive jeans and leather jackets imported from the United States, drifting into a chic addiction to injections of cocaine and heroin-- all financed by inherited wealth. After Farzan wasted the last of the money producing rock videos, Rajai paid him to join the Mujahedeen. Rajai then returned to Iran to lead Revolutionary Guard units. Farzan failed to report and Rajai stopped sending money. Farzan flew to Beirut to live on

the charity of an uncle but the uncle demanded the end of his use of drugs. Addicted, Farzan moved to a rented room in the squalor of Shatila camp and sold drugs to Lebanese students and foreigners on the Rue Hambra.

"There," Rajai alerted the gunmen.

They watched Farzan shuffle across the dirt street. He did not look to either side as he went directly to his apartment house. Taking his briefcase and a bundle, Rajai left the Land Rover and casually walked up behind Farzan as he stepped into his room. Two gunmen followed. They stood outside the door.

Rajai greeted the addict like a friend. "My dear Mohammed. All these months you have lived in Beirut and you did not tell me. I feared for you, but there was no one to ask."

"Who ... " Startled, Farzan stumbled. He fell backwards onto the wood slat bed, a board cracking under him. Drugs had not provided a good income for the young man. Looking for weapons, Rajai saw only the furnishings provided with the room, a cassette player, a bag of dirty clothes, and a David Bowie poster. Farzan wore a beard over his gray face and his wrists looked like sticks. Rajai smelled the stink of rotting teeth.

"Mohammed, I am Fahkr," he said softly in Farsi. He had requested the use of the Palestinian gunmen because they did not understand Farsi. He could not risk his own Iranian bodyguards overhearing this conversation. "Your old friend Fahkr Rajai. From our student days in Paris. I saw you by chance on the street and followed you here. What has been the misfortune that has befallen you? Why do you live like this when you have friends?"

His face twisting into a smile that displayed his yellowed teeth, Farzan staggered upright. He looked like a grinning rat as he embraced Rajai. "Fahkr, I did not know you remembered me. Everyone else forgot me. I lost my money and my French friends. But now I see you again. I thank god for the strength of our friendship."

## RECON

Rajai took a seat on a wobbling chair. On the table, he noticed a spoon with a scorched-black underside. "I feared greatly for you. I thought perhaps the hypocrites in Paris had associated us somehow. I fled when their suspicions turned on me, but I thought you would be safe. But then I heard no more from you and I--"

"Those Mujahedeen dogs! Hypocrites. They live in luxury and--"

"In decadence and corruption," Rajai prompted.

"Decadence! Corruption! And they talk revolution and sacrifice. I worked for them but they demanded I forsake my music and friends. And then ... then all my money was gone."

"Mohammed," Rajai leaned closer and spoke very quietly. "I stopped sending the money because I thought you had been compromised. But my sources have told me that did not happen."

Backhanding the air as if waving away a fly, Farzan laughed. "They suspected me of nothing, but--" He switched to English. "Good times! Sex and drugs and boogie-woogie--" "Very good!" Rajai tossed the bundle to Farzan. He opened his briefcase. "There is clothing-- You can leave this unfortunate city immediately. You have lost your papers and passport? You are free to travel?"

"I guard my papers like my life." Farzan reached into a box of clothes and cassette tapes. He found a plastic envelope with an Iranian passport and other documents. "I can go anywhere-- even America. My music and my dreams. I have hoped for so long to go to America ...."

"Perhaps America will be possible." Taking the papers, Rajai flipped through the pages of the passport. He saw the multiple-entry French visa-- no void stamp had revoked the privilege. "But how can I go there? I do not even have the bus fare to Jounieh."

"The Foreign Ministry will pay," Rajai held up five American one hundred dollar bills. "Here is the money. You will go to Paris. You will work--"

## RECON

"But why should I return there?"

"You will work in Paris until I can transfer you to Los Angeles. There is a place there called Beverly Hills--"

"Yes! Where the stars of the cinema live."

"And many Iranians who plot against the Revolution. First you will go to Paris. You will go directly to the offices of the Mujahedeen. Make a story of fighting with the Palestinian Marxists. But your health forced you to return to Paris. So you want to join the resistance again. They will take you."

"But how will I live? They pay nothing to their workers."

"I have other friends in the organization. They will provide for you. Do as they instruct you and you will receive the money you need. Soon you will continue on to California. Put on the clothes-- don't be modest. If I have failed to purchase the correct sizes, we will return the clothing to the shop tonight."

"I have only my joy to offer in return for your gifts, for your unselfish friendship."

Rajai turned his eyes away from the image of the addict's thin limbs, gray skin, and pustules. If the French customs authorities body-searched this pathetic specimen, they would not allow him into their country. Farzan pulled on the slacks and shirt. A fashionable American-styled sportscoat and American jogging shoes completed the transformation.

"A coat, new shoes-- I am ready to travel."

"And here--"

"A hundred dollars? Thank you, Fahkr."

"It is nothing. Only an advance on your salary from the Foreign Ministry. If you need more, ask in Paris."

"Ask who?"

"I will inform my agents of you. They will come to you."

RECON

"What will my salary be?"

"One thousand United States dollars a month."

"But Fahkr, Paris is very expensive! That is why I came to Beirut."

"We will see about your expenses also. But I cannot promise now. That I must discuss with our superior. Are you ready?"

"Ready? Ready for--"

Rajai took an airline ticket from his briefcase. "Your flight leaves tonight."

"But-- but I have friends to inform. I have business to conclude--"

"Friends? Friends who allowed you to exist like this? I think you should leave these friends and business behind-- come, I have a car waiting." Rajai took the addict's stick-thin arm. Farzan tried to jerk away. Calling out in Arabic, Rajai told the Palestinians to open the room's door.

Farzan saw the two men with rifles and panicked. Thrashing, he struck out at Rajai. A Palestinian immobilized his other arm and they walked him out to the Land Rover. He did not struggle as they helped him into the back seat. A Palestinian sat on one side, Rajai on the other. As they rode through the darkness of the narrow streets, the driver winding through the maze of the Shatila camp by memory, Rajai spoke soothingly to the addict:

"Perhaps I am rushing you away from Beirut, but when I see how you are living here, I feel sorrow. It is only by the grace of God that I have this opportunity from the Ministry to offer. Otherwise, I could only offer my own insufficient funds. But with the Ministry, you can receive the funds you require for only sending a few letters a month."

"Will there be danger?" Farzan whined.

"Was there danger before?"

"You were there to advise me."

"You are experienced now. And the Ministry expects only informal reports

until you go on to Beverly Hills. Then, among the rich ones, then you will begin your long-term assignment."

"In Beverly Hills!" The addict nodded with enthusiasm. "In California. Near Hollywood. I could not have dreamed of this today. And now I am leaving."

"Very soon."

At the entrance to the airport complex, an Army checkpoint stopped the Land Rover. The driver used UNESCO credentials to avoid the delay of a search.

In the terminal, Rajai and the Palestinians waited with Farzan. They did not allow the addict out of their sight. Rajai talked with Farzan throughout the wait, detailing the information he required and describing how to gain the information in the Paris offices of the Mujahedeen. Finally, the airline announced the flight to Paris.

Rajai accompanied Farzan to the departure gate. There, in the crowd of wealthy Lebanese and departing journalists, Rajai passed him a card. "Send your reports to him by airmail. He is now the head of all the operations against the Mujahedeen. Under Secretary of Exports Abas Zargar, in the Foreign Ministry, Tehran."

Minutes later, Farzar boarded the direct flight to Paris. Rajai waited in the departure lounge and watched the jet taxi across the runways. When the jet soared away, he went to the long-distance telephones and called the apartment of a Mujahedeen leader living in Auvers-sur-Oise, a village outside of Paris.

"I am a friend of the resistance to the mad ayatollahs. I am calling to tell you of an assassin coming to your organization. He is Mohammed Farzan ...."

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Blood-slick fingers pinched a fold of white flesh. A knife blade slashed across the fold, leaving a triangular flap of skin hanging. With the point, the knife cut two parallel lines down from the flap. Plier jaws gripped the flap and pulled away the

strip of skin, jerk by jerk.

Shrieking, his scream of pain muffled by rope between his jaws, Mohammed Farzan thrashed against the ropes securing his naked body to the high backed chair. He could not retreat from the agony. Ropes bound his head, arms, waist, legs, and ankles to the heavy chair. His drug-wasted body convulsed, his chest heaving as he sucked down gasps of air to power his choked screams.

Torture earlier in the day had left Farzan's fingertips charred. Blackened skin and blisters formed lines on his arms and legs. Strips of skin hung down and blood clotted on the floor. But his answers had not satisfied the Mujahedeen officers. The Iranian with the pliers paused as another man leaned down to their shrieking, gasping prisoner. The interrogator asked:

"What are the names of the informers in the organization?" Farzan panted. He tried to turn to the interrogator, his neck straining against the ropes across his mouth and forehead, his eyes going wide and white against the gray of his face. He gasped out, "I don't know. He did not tell me. How can I know if he did not tell--"

With a jerk, the man with the pliers tore away more skin, then stopped as Farzan convulsed, shrieking. The interrogator leaned down and waited for an answer. Sucking down breath after breath, Farzan finally sobbed out. "I told you of Rajai--"

"We know of Rajai."

"And Zargan, the Foreign Minister of Commerce--"

"He is a new one, thank you."

"But Rajai did not tell me the names of his agents here."

"How would you contact these agents without their names?" "He said they would come to me."

"I find that difficult to believe. When you were here before, you knew many French women. Are you protecting one of your women? Is the agent a woman?"

## RECON

"No!"

"Who is the agent?"

"I don't know."

"Who are you protecting?"

"I told you the names! Rajai. Zargan."

"Then Mohammed, I cannot save you ...."

A butane blow-torch flared.

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At the bar of the transit lounge, Randall Mason gulped down a valium and two gins with tonic water. He paid and left the air-conditioned darkness, stepping into the warmth of the Hawaiian night. He wove through the crowds of departing and arriving passengers to a atrium. A long narrow roof sheltered the passenger walkway, but on both sides palms and flowers glistened from a gentle tropical rain. Mason wiped the concrete of a planter with a newspaper and sat there, rain splattering on ferns only an arm's distance away. He closed his eyes and dreamed of beaches. His body seemed to float, as if he lay in clear, warm water of a quiet lagoon.

Mason had received a telex and a first class air ticket the previous day. He had flown from London to New York, on to Los Angeles, now to Hawaii. In thirty minutes, the next stretch of the flight took him on to Singapore, then Sri Lanka-- and the final transaction of his brief but lucrative career in shipping weapons for the Iranians.

"Randall?" A voice asked.

Turning, he saw young woman with olive skin and black hair. She wore her hair pulled straight back to accentuate her sharp features. A gold cruxifix glinted at her throat. She wore a polo shirt with the words University of Florida, running

shorts, and white tennis shoes. Small breasted, with thin boyish legs, he guessed her to be twenty one years old.

"Who are you looking for, miss?"

"For you, Randall." She sat with him, casually laying one hand on his thigh. "My name will be Linda Gomez. I'm a very good friend of Salah. I'm going with you to Colombo."

"And why will you go with me?" Slow with alcohol and Valium, he tried to take her hand off him.

She gripped his hand and leaned close to him, her lips touching his neck as she whispered, "Because I have instructions. Because you do not speak Arabic. I will help you with the transfer."

"Miss, perhaps there is a misunderstanding. I have my own associates there. Associates who speak English."

"You do not know the men who will take the cargo. The new men speak only Arabic."

"Oh. How convenient." He studied her features. Though she gave the name of Gomez, he recognized the middle eastern lines to her features-- Palestinian.

"And I will travel with you as your lover to the resorts of Ceylon. It will all look very ordinary, the handsome man-of-the -world." She caressed his face. "With his young girlfriend. My instructions are to do whatever is required to make the transfer successful."

"Well, my dear Linda. Please have no illusions-- there will be very little required of you."

The public address system announced the boarding of their flight. Other passengers-- Chinese and Thais and British expatriates-- left the gift shops and bookstores. Gomez pulled Mason away, already acting like a woman with her lover. She clung to him as they checked through security and took their places in the first

class seats.

Drugged, Mason slept through the long, trans-Pacific flight to Singapore. He woke to find himself sharing a blanket with Gomez. Stewardesses guided him from the jet. He stumbled through the transit lounges to the next plane, an Air India commuter flight. With only an hour's air time to Sri Lanka, he could not indulge in the luxury of sleep. Cup after cup of tea cleansed his blood of thirty hours of Valium and alcohol, turning his stupor to impatient anxiety.

Linda Gomez showed him photos and maps of tourist attractions, chatting with him and laughing mindlessly, the personification of the college girl with the older man. Mason smiled and nodded at the brochures but kept his thoughts on the transfer of the explosives.

The container ship had docked in the Port of Colombo. As a major transshipment point in South Asia, Colombo serviced hundreds of freighters a month. The facility assembled or divided cargos, using modern container transport systems and gangs of Singalese workmen to route shipments.

Mason had often used Colombo for the transshipment of material and weapons to Iran-- helicopter parts from Latin America, aviation electronics from the United States, high-tech NATO rockets stolen from warehouses in Europe. The cargos had arrived in the Port of Colombo in containers, left in crates with forged documentation. The shipment of explosives did not require break down to crates-- only the rerouting of the container to another freighter.

However, for this shipment, the Iranians had placed Palestinian guards on the freighter leaving Colombo. Why, Mason could not guess. He foresaw no difficulties with the transfer of the container. In the last minutes of the flight, he mentally checked off every detail.

None of his men had cabled him with problems. The supervisor had prepared the false documents. The government clerks had received their payments. Though

the Palestinians serving as security created an unknown in the exchange, the Iranians had anticipated any difficulties by assigning the girl to accompany him.

At Katunayake International Airport, lines of complaining Singalese waited as customs officers searched their luggage and boxes for weapons. The recent Buddhist riots in which hundreds of minority Tamils died had panicked the nation with fears of revenge by the Tamils. But the customs officers only glanced into the suitcases of foreigners. Mason and Gomez cleared customs in minutes. The driver of the Hotel Intercontinental van waited for them in the lobby. Mason pushed through a crowd of porters grabbing for the luggage and threw the cases into the van. No other tourists came to the van.

They rode through the chaos of the Negombo Highway, the driver somehow avoiding the bicycles, roller-board cripples, the transport trucks, the buses, and three-wheeled Honda jitneys. Horns, engines, and shops with loudspeakers created an unending cacaphony of noise. Gomez watched the passing scenes of tropical Asia. Shops lined the highway, signs advertising their wares in three languages-- Singalese, Tamil, and British. Pigs nosed through the trash and discarded coconuts littering the muddy roadsides. Smoke drifted from smouldering heaps.

"Not like the tourist books, is it now?"

Gomez shook her head, no.

"Colombo is worse. There, look."

Though dust and diesel soot from the highway covered the lush foliage at the roadside, an intersecting road offered a view into the radiant green of the flat countryside. They saw saronged boys walking along a macadam road cutting across wind -swayed rice fields. Wild tropical flowers lined the road. Then their speed took the image away.

"If we are forced to wait, I'll ring up a car hire agency. We'll motor up into the hill country. Beautiful there. Not like this."

They endured thirty kilometers of the highway before entering the filth and crowds of Colombo. The city had no expressways. The highway became an avenue of bumper to bumper vehicles, buffalo carts, and jitneys. Gomez stared around at the sprawl of decaying buildings and narrow, rutted streets. As the van crept through a jammed traffic circle, she shouted over the blare of a hundred horns:

"Why do people come here?"

"Clever media management, dear. Propaganda. The authorities ban all photography outside of the tourist areas. On the penalty of forced permanent residence."

At the Intercontinental, Gomez rushed into their room and closed the drapes on the view of the Gulf of Mannar. In the darkness, she turned on the air-conditioning and threw herself on one of the beds. "Finally!"

"My pretty lover overwhelmed by the beauty of Sri Lanka?"

"Completely!"

Mason checked his watch. "Then to work. My associates will still be in their offices."

The hotel featured a modern switchboard and a multi-lingual operator. However, the telephone system of Colombo had declined since the departure of the British in 1948. Connections crossed, relays failed to close, sometimes voices spoke over the ringing of the phone. But Mason persevered. The only alternative would be to walk across the city to the port offices. Three calls took two hours.

"And that is that, now we go."

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In the tenth-floor restaurant of the Hotel Taprobane, Mason studied a series of forms. The first page bore the letterhead of the Colombo Port Authority. He read the strange Asian English slowly, searching for errors. A Singalese he knew only as

Mr. Nilaveli sat beside him, watching as Mason flipped to the forms stapled to the cover page. Mason checked the official seals and every entry typed into the spaces-- the fictitious company names, the numbers, the transshipment codes, the names of the agents. He compared the entries on one form to the following sheets. Any omission or error might block the transfer of the container to the outward bound freighter-- and force Mason to remain in Sri Lanka to expedite the shipment.

Linda Gomez, in jeans and a University of Florida windbreaker, looked out at the harbor. She sipped from a tall arrack and cola. Below the hotel, thousands of lights illuminated the Price of Wales Jetty. Freighters and cranes and trucks remained motionless, all activity stopped for the night. Unlike other ports, the loading and unloading of the vessels ended in the afternoon. No threat or bribe induced the supervisors and work crews to break their union statutes.

"A totally false document." Mason commented.

"Yes, yes, my dear Mr. Mason, all is in order," Nilaveli nodded. "The authorities will have no questions as to the validity of the papers. The cargo was from Mexico with the destination of Saudi Arabia. The cargo is presently from Saudi Arabia with the destination of Colombia."

"Your bank received the telexed transfer of funds from your cousin?"

"Oh, yes." Nilaveli smiled. "The generosity of my dear London cousin overwhelms this humble and undeserving fellow."

"When the ship leaves Colombo, you will receive the second payment."

"How can I ever thank my cousin?"

"When is the ship scheduled to depart?"

"Soon. I can promise no more than the immediate loading of your goods. The departure is out of my hands."

"It appears," Mason told Gomez. "That I will do business tomorrow, then we will see the sights while we wait for the ship to sail."

## RECON

"We won't be waiting in Colombo! Tell me we won't."

"I would not be so cruel."

After another hour of drinks and talk, they left Nilaveli. Gomez giggled and staggered, unsteady with arrack. Mason endured her embrace as they waited for the elevator, then stepped away when the elevator doors closed.

"Am I so ugly," Gomez asked. "That you can't even pretend?"

"It's nothing personal."

As the elevator lurched to a stop, she pressed herself against him, kissing him, one hand clutching his crotch. Two sunburned, overweight foreigners laughed, commenting on her antics in Russian. Gomez clung to him through the lobby.

"Only doing my job," she teased him.

"And with enthusiasm. I'm sure your performance is effective. I only question if it is needed."

In their room, Mason took a bottle of gin from his luggage. He watched as Gomez stripped off her clothes.

"Valium? A drink? You'll need your sleep. We must be at the dock at first light."

"You English are cold fish." Wearing only panties, she searched through her luggage. Her long, slim legs flared to wide hips. She had an very narrow waist. A livid scar cut diagonally across one shoulder blade, marring the flow of her back.

She is very young to be involved in this, Mason thought to himself. He took a pill and gulped from the bottle. "Miss, didn't your superiors explain the situation?"

"What situation?"

"You are the wrong sex."

"They didn't--"

"Then they didn't know. I must apologize for keeping my private affairs private. They thought of you-- as what? A bonus? A tart for my pleasure? But it is

unnecessary for us to be bitchy about their error. It will only interfere with our work."

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A wind from the north-east brought a light monsoon rain. Over the gray skyline of the Pettah slums, a gaudy dawn broke through the smoke and clouds. Mason and Gomez waited in a taxi on Sea Beach Road, watching the port workers crowd through the gates to the harbor. Betel vendors lined the curb, displaying their trays of leaf-wrapped portions of betelnut and shredded coconut. Other vendors dodged through the buses, offering umbrellas, wristwatches, and radio batteries.

Gomez stared out at the urban scenes, questioning Mason on the narcotic effect of betel, the history of the Pettah district, the rate of exchange of the dollar for the Rupee-- performing her role as the girlfriend of the international businessman.

As they waited to enter the harbor complex, Mason silently thanked the Iranians for sending the young woman. Security conditions had changed since his last trip in June. He knew that two tourists did not attract the same notice as a foreign man alone.

Police at the gates checked the cards of all the workers. Soldiers with Sterling submachineguns stood inside the gates. Before the communal riots of August, unarmed watchmen had served to block vendors and petty thieves from the complex. The police and soldiers reflected new concerns with terrorism. Mason hoped the security-- as at the international airport-- did not apply to foreign tourists.

A horn sounded. Nilaveli waved from his Fiat. Mason paid the taxi driver and splashed through the street water to the Fiat. He opened a back door for Gomez, then he sat in the front with Nilaveli. Nilaveli joined the line of cars and trucks

waiting to enter the gates.

"You didn't mention the security men. Will they pass us?"

"Of course, my dear Mr. Mason. Why should they halt you? Are you not my guest?"

"I'm a foreigner."

"A guest in our lovely Sri Lanka."

"Then why the security?"

Nilaveli smiled to Mason, his white false teeth startling against the South Asian black of his face. "Of course you have heard of the incidents of Tamil terrorism. Very unfortunate, but true."

A policeman leaned down to the window of the Fiat. Nilaveli presented his identification, then gestured toward Mason and Gomez. The officer nodded. Accelerating through the gate, Nilaveli waved to the soldiers. Other soldiers paced through crowds of workers. Policemen and soldiers at the doors of warehouses.

"Not bloody good ...." Mason cursed.

"Do not trouble yourself. You will see that the officers do not concern themselves with foreign guests. Or with the business of the port."

Driving to the end of an access lane between the warehouses, Nilaveli parked his Fiat and ushered the strangers past a guard. Inside the warehouse, thousands of tons of crates stood in stacks three meters high. Only one forklift operated. Arriving push cart workers squatted in circles and chatted, smoking cigarettes and spitting red betel juice on the concrete while foremen argued over paperwork. Nilaveli interrupted an argument and pointed to a page in a collection of papers. A foreman went to a telephone and spoke rapidly for minutes, nodding and gesturing into space. The foreman returned and explained to Nilaveli. Mason waited for the conversation to end. Nilaveli finally translated:

"The telephone is out of order. Come."

## RECON

A few steps behind the two Singalese, Mason whispered to Gomez, "One must retain one's appreciation of the absurd on this lovely isle. Security men who do not question strangers. Workers who do not work. Talking for an hour on a phone that doesn't work."

They walked through intermittant rain to a mechanized wharf. Singalese technicians supervised the beginning of the work day, the loading of a rusted freighter with the name of the Manhattan. A crane above the ship creaked and groaned, moving a container from the wharf to the deck of the ship. Nilaveli and the warehouse foreman spoke with a technician. They compared papers. The technician finally pointed to the containers stacked on the deck of the Manhattan. Nilaveli returned to Mason:

"All is well. Your cargo is aboard."

"What? But we didn't bring the papers until this morning."

"All was ready yesterday, as according to your specifications. Through our long association, I have come to know your business. As you this very moment saw, I perfectly prepared the instructions. Is it now a surprise that the transfer went through without delay?"

"No, of course not. But I want to confirm

that it's actually on the ship."

"Very well. Let us go."

On the deck of the freighter, Mason searched for the container while Gomez spoke quickly with a crewman. The crewman-- a short, powerful Arab with curly hair and a beard-- ran to Mason and guided him through the stacked containers. Mason recognized the container from Tronah, California by the color and dents. He checked the code numbers. The numbers matched. He examined the doors. No one had tampered with the locks or seals.

"This is amazing. The shipment is here. It is loaded. It has not been looted."

The crewman shrugged-- he did not understand English. Mason hurried back

to Gomez and hugged her. "Linda, you are a godsend. There can be no explanation but the supernatural. The work was done exactly as specified." "Now do we get to play tourists?"

"An excellent idea. We cannot leave until the ship sails-- why not enjoy the wait? To the hill country, we go."

"I want to walk back to the hotel. The map says it's an easy walk. I want to see the Pettah Mosque and the Fort and ...."

Like lovers, they walked arm in arm from the port. Mason led the young woman through the narrow streets of the Pettah-- the centuries-old colonial commercial district-- to the red and white striped mosque on 3rd Cross Street. Loud speakers called the faithful to prayer. Muslim men in traditional white pants and shirts crowded around the mosque entrance. Shopkeepers in modern summer-weight suits stood in the shops lining the muddy street. A few women passed in the saris of the Singalese or Tamils, others in the pants and long dresses of the Moslems. The men watched the foreigners pass. All eyes followed Gomez in her tight jeans.

"I don't like them staring at me," she told Mason. She stepped into a narrow alley. There, she watched the passing crowds of Asians.

"Isn't visiting a mosque is out of character," Mason asked. "For Linda Gomez, the Latin-American college girl?"

"This is important," she laughed. "I'm your little tourist girl, right?"

"Right."

A razor slashed across his throat. As his life pulsed from his severed arteries, hands pulled him back into the darkness of alley. He called out in panic. Breath and blood sprayed from his open throat. He saw the bearded face of the Arab from the freighter and the faces of other men as they dragged him around a corner.

As they wrapped him in black plastic, as he died, he heard Gomez answer her

final question to him:

"Wrong."