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Locking the heavy carved doors behind him, Rajai went to the desk of Abas Zargar and opened the folder. The papers still smelled of the dead man's cologne. He spread the typescripts and photocopies across the desk and scanned the several languages-- telexes in English and Farsi and French, harbor forms in English and a strange Asian scrawl, bank documents in English and Spanish, and pages of typed numbers and dates. He immediately recognized his own reports from Lebanon and Paris. With amusement, he read the note of praise attached to a cover page, recommending Rajai for more responsibility in the next operation against the United States. That note had won Zargar's position for Rajai -- after Rajai had engineered the assassination of Zargar.

A joke, Rajai laughed, enjoying his victory.

Early that morning, the call from Iran woke Rajai in his Baalbek villa. Rajai and his aide Hasani drove to Damascus for a flight to Tehran. There, Rajai met with the five-man committee of mullahs and Pasdaran officers who had conceived the attack against the United States. They told him of the assassination of Zargar, an event that threatened to disrupt the operation at its most critical moment-- the assembly of all the diverse elements and groups in South America. Circumstances forced the committee to throw the burden of the operation on a new coordinator immediately. They had already reviewed the candidates-- they wanted the coordinator to be Rajai. Like Zargar, Rajai spoke and wrote the principle languages of the squads: Farsi, Arabic, and French. No other officer in the operation had his unusual qualifications-- and no other officer could take over the operation that day.

Rajai accepted the responsibility. The committee told him the strike would be

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launched from Colombia and that all his forces absolutely must be in place by 20th of January-- only ten days away. They gave him the briefing folder prepared by the dead Zargar, telling him the collection of papers provided every detail he required.

Alone in the Foreign Ministry office, Rajai studied the information for hours, reading documents spanning the months of preparation by agents everywhere in the world-- Palestinians, Englishmen, Iranians. He read of the reconditioned DC-4 waiting in Panama and the pilots who would fly the airliner and its cargo of American dynamite and C-4 plastic explosive. He now saw the limited role of the Colombian and Palestinian squads he had recruited-- they would be only a security force around a remote jungle airstrip. But he still did not learn the target or the exact date of the attack. The committee had not trusted Zargar and they did not trust Rajai.

He did not need to know. Satisfied with his overview, he sketched a timetable for the assembly, scheduling the Colombian guerrillas to secure and patrol the airfield and the transport of the Palestinians to Colombia to reinforce the guerrilla unit. The American dynamite and military explosive required trucks to move the tons of explosives from the port to the interior of the country. Finally, at the last possible moment, the airliner and the pilots must be delivered to the airfield.

The intercom interrupted his work. His aide Hasani announced a call from Lebanon, then switched lines. Rajai heard the static and interference of the thousands of kilometers of cables and relays.

"This is Moinfar, from Baalbek. The journalist Angelique Chardon was here to interview and photograph patients in the hospital. The name of her photographer did not appear in any of the files--"

"What photographer?"

"Jean Monory."

"French? Did he have the correct identification?"

"Yes. But my men were suspicious of him and we detained him and the woman

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for questioning. We are holding them in a hotel. My men are maintaining a watch."

"Why did you not call me sooner?"

"I called your office in Baalbek many times. Even the Frenchwoman called. I have called Tehran five times. And each time with great difficulty."

"What are the suspicions?"

"He does not look like the other journalists."

"You questioned him?"

"He speaks only French. When you return, I would like for you to interrogate the man."

"Describe him."

Except for the hair and beard, Moinfar described the Marine captain photographed by Chardon.

"Take them both! Imprison them. The man is an American soldier."

Nothing moved in the hallway. Standing at the louvers, Niles listened to the sounds of the hotel. The radio played in the dining room, now tuned to the melodies of an Arabic station. A truck passed on the street in front of the hotel. Metal clanked very faintly somewhere. He smelled cigarette smoke. But he heard no voices or footsteps.

In a pause between songs on the radio, he heard ragged breathing. He listened for a few more minutes. The breathing outside become a snore.

Niles glanced to Chardon. She sat on the bed, her back to the wall, waiting. He eased the door open a crack. The snoring outside continued. Niles looked into the hallway. The angle allowed a partial view of the stairway landing.

Boots and fatigue pants extended from one side of the hallway. Niles pulled the door open and slowly stepped out, lowering his boot silently to the tiles before

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transferring his weight.

One of the Revolutionary Guard militiamen lay on the hallway tiles, sleeping, his folding-stock Kalashnikov by his outstretched hand, the fire-selector lever down to full-auto. The other man leaned back on the steps, staring into space and smoking. His rifle leaned on the steps beside him. Niles stepped back into the room and silently eased the door closed.

"The Iranians are there. There's no way out unless I put them down."

"Kill them?"

"Yeah. Can't get past them to the street or the roof."

"Then you must."

"I kill two of their men, you are out of business. You can't stay in Lebanon."

"I know that. Did you get the information?"

"Enough. Can't come back for more."

"Then you'll pay?"

"Five thousand."

"I have more information. If I must leave this country, I will sell that also."

"What information?"

"Of the Revolutionary Guard and the bombing of the Marines."

"Woman, we will talk about that. If we get out."

Outside, the radio's music continued. But through the reverberating music and singing, he heard the snoring of two men. He took a long breath of the hallway air-- and smelled no tobacco smoke. He silently swung the door open and stepped out.

Both Revolutionary Guards slept, one on the hallway tiles, the other on the steps. Niles considered his action, then took the razor-sharp kitchen knife from his back pocket. Step by slow, silent step he approached the men. He stepped over the man sleeping on the hallway tiles.

The other Iranian slept on the stairway. He lay to one side, his face resting on

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his outstretched arm. Slowly, Niles crouched, the knife ready in his right hand, his left hand open and ready.

Driving the blade between the vertebrae of the man's neck, Nile felt steel scrape on bone. The Iranian exhaled and slumped, suddenly dead. Niles jerked the blade free and spun, one step taking him to the other man.

The Iranian's eyes opened and his hand clutched for the Kalashnikov. Niles dove onto him, his left hand going for the man's mouth, his right jamming the knife into the man's chest. The blade skipped over ribs. He jerked the knife clear and thrust again, the blade plunging deep into the Iranian's gut. Nile wrenched the blade sideways and blood fountained out over his hands.

A slow, shuddering gasp came from above him. He looked up to see Chardon watching from the doorway of the room, her eyes fixed on the scene of blood and death. Then her eyes met his and he saw her face alive with fascination and dread-- and in that instant, Niles understood why she worked in Lebanon, a country of war and atrocity, risking her own life to interview and write of the victims, to observe and photograph the horrors.

Niles dragged the Iranian off the stairs and dropped him beside the other man. Jerking a fatigue jacket off one of the corpses, Niles wiped the blood from his hands and face and shirt.

"Get my coat," he told Chardon. "Get my pack. We are going."

He searched the pockets of the dead men but did not find the keys to his Ford. Unbuckling the web gear of the larger man, Niles slipped the suspender straps over his own shoulders and fastened the belt buckle. Four pouches carried a total of eight 30-round magazines. He took the folding-stock Kalashnikov and hinged the stamped-metal struts of the stock closed. Pulling back the cocking handle, he saw a cartridge fly away and felt the bolt close on the next cartridge. He palmed the fire-selector lever to semi-auto.

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Chardon held out his coat. She wore the daypack containing the recorder and cameras over her shoulder like a purse. He took his coat and put it on over the web gear.

"I'm going down there. There must be more than two of them guarding us."

The music continued in the dining room. Listening for voices or movement, Niles went down the tiled steps. Metal clattered. Pausing, he listened for the shuffling of the old woman. He heard only the radio.

He went to the bottom of the steps and crouched. The angle of the wall screened him from the lobby. To his left, he saw the registration desk. He leaned out and scanned the lobby. The door to the dining room remained open. No one sat at the couches. But on the table he saw a militiaman's fatigue jacket.

Advancing one step from the stairwell, Niles looked toward the street. No one guarded the entry. He cut to the right, walking quickly to the diningroom door. Crouching down, he eased one eye past the doorframe.

An Iranian sat at one of the tables. He drank tea and read a magazine. As the man turned a page, Niles saw pink breasts jutting out from the chest of a blonde. The Iranian poured another cup of tea, the teapot clattering on an aluminum tray, then he turned the magazine on its side and studied the long centerfold photo of a nude blonde stretching out on the blue satin of a bed.

Niles eased the fire-selector lever of the Kalashnikov up to safe. He tried to silence the lever with his palm but it clicked against the stamped-steel receiver of the rifle, the metal-on-metal noise loud despite the radio's music.

The Iranian turned. Niles rushed the seated militiaman. Losing an instant as he startled back, the Iranian reached across the table for the Kalashnikov there. One hand knocked over the teapot, the other closed on the foregrip of the rifle. Niles raised his rifle and slammed the blunt end of the stamped-steel receiver down on the Iranian's skull. The man cried out and Niles smashed him again and again.

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Stunned, the Iranian fell sideways, sprawling onto the floor. Niles kicked the chair away and brought the heel of his boot down on the man's throat. Choking, the Iranian clawed at his destroyed throat as his consciousness failed.

Doors slammed. Voices called out in Farsi. Niles snatched the rifle from the dying man and went to the doorway. Weapons clattered in the lobby and boots ran up the steps.

A rifle fired on full-automatic, the hammering noise overwhelming in the tiled interior of the hotel. Other rifles fired quick bursts but the first rifle continued, spraying out an entire magazine. All the shooting stopped for a second. Niles heard men shouting to one another. Another man screamed, his voice shrill, his words long and drawn out with agony.

Niles chanced a glance, looking and snapping back his head. In that instant, he saw dead militiamen tangled at the foot of the steps. Other men-- Iranians and Hizbullah-- crowded on both sides of the stairwell.

Another burst came from the top of the steps. The Iranians and Lebanese did not return the fire. Niles swung out the steel strut stock of his Kalashnikov and put it on the floor, ready. He took the second rifle and confirmed a round in the chamber. Holding the weapon left-handed, he looked out again and saw what he expected:

The militiamen pulled ComBloc grenades from their webbing pouches. Sheltered by the wall, exposing only his hands and the left side of his face, Niles raised his rifle and sighted on a militiaman with a grenade in his hand. The Iranian spoke to a second man, then they both pulled the pins from grenade and allowed the levers to flip away. Niles waited until they swung their arms back, then snapped single shots into their backs.

As the shots echoed, Niles pushed down the fire-selector to full-auto and swept the groups of militiamen, emptying the magazine in a wild, sweeping spray of bullets before leaning back behind the solid brick of the wall and throwing the rifle aside.

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A burst gouged the wood door and the grenades exploded. Taking the folding-stock Kalashnikov, he rushed out the door. He sprayed one-handed fire in the direction of the gunman and slid flat on the slick tiles of floor, bracing his rifle on his elbows and sighting on a bloody man with a rifle. Niles fired a three-shot burst into the man's chest, throwing him back, dead before he fell. No other fire came at Niles.

Wounded men cried out in the mass of bodies at the entry and stairwell. A crawling militiamen tried to raise a rifle. Staying prone for a moment, Niles fired single shots into the moving and wounded militiamen, then rushed to wall beside the steps. "Hey, Cha

She ran down the steps, a rifle in her hands. Magazines of ammunition rattled in her coat pockets and the daypack.

"Back up there!" Niles searched through the corpses, taking more ammunition, finding three grenades. "We're not going out on that street--"

"What?"

"We go out that door, we get shot. Go! Back up--"

"But to where?"

Niles shoved her. "Go! The roof." Half-turning, he watched the lobby as they ran up the steps. Niles paused at the dead men in the second floor hallway. He dragged a corpse to the stairwell and put a grenade under the dead man, his weight holding down the safety lever.

Slamming the padlock with the wooden stock of her rifle, Chardon pushed open the door. Niles sprinted up the steps and followed her. Steps led to the roof. By the third floor hallway light, he scanned the tools, buckets, and boxes cluttering the interior of the stairwell housing. He kicked a box against the door.

"Where did you learn to use a rifle?"

"I reported on the P L O," she told him as she passed a book of matches to him.

"They taught me."

He found a can of roofing tar. "Up the stairs, get on the roof."

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Papers and dust swirled as she shoved the door open. Niles pulled the pin on another ComBloc grenade. He put the grenade on the box and used the can to hold down the safety lever-- opening the door would shift the can and cause the lever to flip away. Running up the stairs, he closed the roof door.

Gusts of wind roared out of the east. The door banged closed behind them. The wind had swept the clouds away, leaving the night clear. Brilliant stars and a fragment of moon illuminated the rooftop, casting faint shadows. Niles surveyed the the neighboring buildings, the night sky allowing him to see not only forms but details.

Niles went to the front of the hotel roof and looked down to the street. He saw his white Ford Falcon. In the center of the street, a cargo truck idled with the lights on. Several Revolutionary Guards crouched behind parked cars, rifles pointed at the entry of the hotel.

Shouts came from the end of the street. A group of militiamen ran toward the hotel. Engine whining, a pickup truck skidded around the corner. More militiamen rode in the back.

Niles hurried back to Chardon. "Only got two or three minutes, then they'll close off the block."

They angled to the back of the hotel roof. A drop off stopped them. An alley ran the length of the block. No ladder or fire escape went down to the alley. They went to the roof of the next building. The walls had been built brick to brick with the hotel. Scrambling over the wall, an easy step down put them on the roof. Niles looked for a way down but saw nothing. They wove through the wires and poles of clothes lines to a third rooftop, then a fourth. At the last building on the block, Niles hurried around the edge of the roof, looking for a way down to the street. On one side, he saw apartment balconies overlooking an avenue of shops. In the front, he looked down the block to see the street crowded with trucks and militiamen. He

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rushed to a back wall-- and Chardon had gone.

"Here!" She signaled him from a flight of stairs. Not waiting for him, she went down. The old wooden slats creaked with her slight weight.

A dull thud came from the hotel. An instant later, automatic rifles fired in wild bursts-- the militiamen had found the grenade at the door to the roof. Niles followed Chardon. Pottery smashed. Chardon kicked aside the shards of the pot and continued down another flight of stairs. A voice called out from a window. Moving fast, Niles ignored the noise and voices and lights coming on in the windows.

Chardon continued to the ground floor. The stairs ended at a door. Niles motioned her back. Going flat against the wall and pointing his Kalashnikov with one hand, he turned the latch. He pushed the door open with his boot. The stairwell light revealed a narrow passage. Above them, footsteps crossed the third floor walkway and two men talked in Arabic, asking who had broken the flower pot. Niles eased the door open and stepped out, holding the door for Chardon, then silently closing it behind him.

In total darkness, Niles moved by touch toward the alley. He heard every step of Chardon's fashionable boots on the concrete. Rats skittered. His hands found a lock handle.

Opening the door, wind brought him the smells of oil and garbage. Light came from windows. He scanned the alley, his eyes searching for movement or the shapes of militiamen, but he saw only windblown trash.

Niles dropped to a squat and crept out the door. Bins of trash higher than his head concealed him. Rising, he looked in the opposite direction. He saw the avenue a few meters away. Past the avenue, the alley continued through the next block. Keeping his back to the wall, he stood.

"Alright," he whispered to Chardon.

She slipped out the door. In the darkness, her white face flashed as she turned

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her head from side to side. "Where now?"

"Next block." Keeping close to the wall, Niles dashed to the mouth of the alley. He pressed himself to the wall and looked around the corner. Chardon's boots clicked on the concrete behind him.

A Land Rover raced in the direction of the hotel. Niles heard the squeeling of tires. He turned to Chardon, "Come on, time to make distance."

Niles sprinted across the avenue. Crouching in the shadows of the alley, he glanced at the rooftop of the building overlooking the avenue-- but saw no one. Their pursuit had not reached that building.

They ran. Half-way down the block, he heard an engine with a bad muffler. He jerked Chardon to the side, pushing her against the wall. Crouching down in a doorway, he looked back and watched as a small pickup truck turned in the other direction, its unmuffled engine deafening in the narrow alley. Highbeams illuminated the alley from the avenue back to the hotel. Militiamen searched the trashheaps and doorways on both sides of the alley.

"Go," Niles hissed to Chardon. "We got a minute or two."

Staying close to the buildings, they dashed from doorway to doorway, kicking through litter and stones. The echoing staccato from the truck's exhaust pipe covered their noises. They stopped at the next street.

The alley ended there, at a muddy and tire-rutted dirt street. Across the street, they saw only the wide doors of a wholesaler. No windows or doorways broke a stark brick wall continuing the width of the block. To their right, metal flapped and banged in the gusting wind. Niles edged out. Corrugated sheet metal covered the front of a shop. Sand covered the sidewalk. He saw a pale spill of cement in the street. Looking to the left, he saw only a long wall.

"That way." Niles pointed left, to a street a thirty meters away. "We're almost out of here."

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Then Niles heard shouts. Turning, he went flat and looked back. A second truck had stopped behind the pickup. The silhouettes of men filled the back of a Land Rover. Others gathered around the driver's window. Spotlit in the headlights of the Land Rover, a militiaman pointed toward Niles.

But no shots came. The Land Rover accelerated away. Against the taillights of the pickup, Niles saw two militiamen run into the alley where he and Chardon hid. Niles pushed Chardon toward the banging corrugated sheets.

"We didn't make it."

Her breath caught. "What?"

He grabbed at the corrugated sheets, trying one, then another and another. Only wire secured the sheets. He found one loose and pulled it back. He held it for Chardon, then followed her into the interior of a gutted, roofless shop. By the moonlight, they saw stacks of lumber and bricks. Scaffolding went up two stories.

Tires splashed through mud. Headlights flashed across the screen of sheet metal and tires skidded to a stop. Men shouted. Niles went to the loose sheet and peered out. Above him, the wind continued rattling and smashing the corrugated sheets of steel.

Militiamen left the Land Rover. The driver jerked the handbrake back. Leaving the motor running, he stepped down from the seat. He stood beside the Land Rover and watched the search of the alley. Niles signaled for Chardon. She crouched down beside him.

"I'm going to take that truck," Niles whispered. He took the short-bladed kitchen knife out of his pocket. Slowly pushing the corrugated sheet aside, he slipped out. His Kalashnikov clattered across the steel and he stopped. The driver did not turn, the panels banging in the wind covering the noise of steel on steel. Niles angled across the sidewalk to the soft sand and mud of the street. Silently, he came up behind the driver. He paused, looking past the driver. Illuminated by the headlights,

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the Revolutionary Guards and Hizbullah searched the alley.

Throwing his left arm around the throat of the driver, choking off his voice and breathing, Niles drove the blade into the man's kidney as he dragged him backwards. The driver arched, going rigid with agony. His hands grabbed at the arm around his throat. Niles twisted the blade, then kicked the man's feet from under him, turning him sideways in the air and falling on top of him. He pressed the driver's face into the mud. The man bubbled, then breathed mud. Niles pulled back the dying man's head by the hair and cut his throat.

Niles ran to the Land Rover and released the brake. He waited until Chardon threw open the passenger side door and jumped inside, then jammed the transmission in reverse. Spinning the wheels in the mud, he whipped the steering wheel to the left, then shifted and accelerated, careening off the curb and fishtailing across the street, managing to force the truck through a skidding right hand turn. Flooring the accelerator, he raced away from the militiamen.

"Do you know where we are? How do we get out of this town without hitting a checkpoint?"

"Go slowly, Marine. Or a patrol will shoot us without questions."

"If I drive slow, they'll know we're foreigners." Speeding through the old, narrow streets, he came to an intersection with a red traffic signal. Niles did not brake. Downshifting, the engine whining with rpm's, he swerved past the taillights of an old Fiat. Headlights filled the windows, tires shrieked-- the corner had blocked Niles' sight of a truck coming from the opposite direction-- but his speed took him past the truck's bumper. Niles shifted and accelerated, leaving the blaring airhorn of the truck behind.

A block farther, he switched off the headlights and turned off the paved street. He slowed to a idle along a twisting road of one-story workshops and equipment yards. Junked cars rusted in weed overgrown lots. The pavement ended. Pausing for

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a moment, he stepped out of the Land Rover and looked at the stars and moon, plotting his approximate compass bearing. He turned left at the next road, a muddy lane lined by slat fences and walls of piled rocks. No light came from the shanties. He continued for a few hundred meters before stopping. Niles cranked down the windows and listened. He heard only the wind through the fences.

"We're south-east of the center of town," he whispered. "You recognize any of those streets behind us?"

"We must continue," Chardon pointed straight ahead. "This road-- I don't know, but there are roads to the farms. If we go on those roads, it is possible to avoid the checkpoints. I did. But they will search for us."

"They find us, it's their problem." Niles put the Land Rover in gear and lurched over the ruts and stones. "They ain't taking me. Maybe the Syrians would help you out, but I got no hope if they--"

"Marine, the Syrians could not help me. I also would have no hope."

"Great. Then we're in this together."

Leaving the shanties behind them, they passed orchards of winter-bare trees. The dirt roads on the outskirts of the town had no streetlights. The shacks had no electricity-- only lanterns. Niles left the headlights off and drove by the moonlight, maintaining an even speed through the darkness. With the windows open, he listened for other vehicles. He heard only the rattling of gravel against the fenders and wind tearing through the branches of the trees.

A wide intersection appeared. The straight black band of a paved road cut through the center. Other dirt strips converged at odd angles, the haphazard farm roads twisting along the lines of the terrain and the fields. Niles scanned the south-- the ridges of low hills, the orchards and fields, the black band of the paved road continuing over a ridge. Looking to the north, he saw lights a kilometer away. He remembered these roads from satellite photos. The lights marked the houses on a

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rise outside of the village of Ain Bourday. By weaving through the back roads, they had already left Baalbek and Ain Bourday behind him. By memory, Niles plotted their way through the other roads and villages.

Distant noise warned him. He saw headlights to the north. Jamming the Land Rover in reverse, he sped backwards, struggling with the steering wheel as the truck bounced over the road. He aimed the truck's rear bumper at a tangle of branches overhanging a low wall of stone. Not slowing until the absolute last instant, branches scratched the paint and he stomped on the brakes and the bumper smashed stone.

The pickup truck roared past on the road, its muffler loud even a hundred meters away. Militiamen crouched in the back. The pickup's highbeams illuminated the broken asphalt of the road and both sides of the road. Niles watched the suddenly bright fields until the pickup went over the next rise. Silence returned. Branches scraped the Land Rover as the wind gusted.

Despite the early morning darkness and their isolation, Chardon whispered, "They are searching for us."

"No. That truck's taking the word to other militias."

"Then they will search."

"If they do a search, they'll wait for day. Our problem is checkpoints."

Niles put the truck in gear and idled to the road. Again, he listened, then accelerated across to another dirt road cutting through the fields. Almost frozen mud filled deep parallel ruts, forcing Niles to downshift for traction. But the mud silenced the wheels of the Land Rover. When they came to a group of houses, they saw cracks of lantern light behind heavy curtains. The curtains did not move as the truck passed.

After a kilometer, another rutted and rock-strewn dirt track intersected the road. Not much more than a wide footpath scarred by tire marks, the track angled to the south-west. Niles followed the track to the crest of a hill.

An asphalt road ran along the foot of the hill. To the south, they saw the lights

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of another village-- Taibi. One point of light took Niles' attention. Outside of the village, a flame flashed and sank. He watched the fire.

"Can't go that way. Checkpoint."

"Then they are searching."

"Give you odds that fire is there every night."

"But then how can we pass?"

"Do you want to stop at that checkpoint? Maybe interview the boys with the guns?"

Her white face flashed as she turned to stare at him. "Why do you joke?"

"Then we'll just stick to the scenic route."

Scanning the land on the other side of the asphalt road, he saw the winding lines of tracks through the fields. He let gravity take the Land Rover down the hillside, then followed two ruts leading off the road. A slight rise blocked the sight of the militiamen at the checkpoint and Niles went faster over the ruts and stones. The wheels smashed into rocks from time to time, but he risked the noise to make speed.

They reached the north-south Beeka Valley highway in minutes. Niles turned south and accelerated through the darkness.

"The headlights American!"

"They've got men on this road."

"But you'll kill us."

A front wheel hit a deep pothole and the frame smashed the axel. The Land Rover went airborne for an instant, coming down at an angle. Niles fought the steering wheel, muscling the truck on line.

"Maybe. But if the Syrians or Pasdaran spot us, it's a sure thing."

Driving by moonlight, he watched the road ahead and in the rear view mirrors for other vehicles. The clear, cold night allowed unlimited visibility. Kilometers away, he saw a line of red lights-- truck brake lights and the small running lights of trailers.

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No distance separated the lights. Perhaps a line of truckers tailgated each other-- but more likely they waited at a checkpoint where the north-south Beeka Valley highway met the east-west highway to Jounieh. Then, he spotted his turn.

Another road led to the west. The high-altitude photos had shown a railroad a kilometer west of the highway. By memory, he followed the single rutted lane of mud and stones to railroad tracks, then turned south onto the maintenance road paralleling the rails. Years of neglect had left the maintenance road eroded and overgrown with weeds. But Niles saw tire marks. He wrestled the Land Rover over the road, stepping on the accelerator at every straight away.

Covering four kilometers in only a few minutes, they came to the railroad crossing at the Jounieh road. He waited for a truck and trailer to pass, then turned west. Finally he turned on the headlights.

"We are away from them?" Chardon asked.

"No one but the Sixth Brigade between us and the coast. They might not be with the government anymore, but they don't take orders from the Iranians or the Syrians."

"A miracle! I thought I would die this night."

"Hey, woman. No miracle. I learned to drive on nights like this, running illegal liquor out of the mountains. What is this other information you've got? What is it that you know about the bombing of the Marines?"

"For what price?"

"You'll be paid."

"You have not yet paid for Baalbek."

"I've got the money and you'll be paid."

"And now I must leave Lebanon. I must negotiate a good price for the other information."

"It's not up to me to negotiate. But I can get the money. And I think I can get

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you help working in other countries. You won't go hungry."

"You are with the C I A?"

"Don't talk that shit to me. I'm no Harvard rich boy."

"I will talk of the information when I can talk of the money."

Niles stopped the Land Rover. He took the Kalashnikov from her, palmed the safety up, and dropped the rifle behind the seats. Outside, the icy fields continued to the distant mountains, desolate and gray.

"I told you I'd get you out of Baalbek and I got you out. Here you are. Out. See how far those fancy boots get you."

Her hands clutched at the dash. She spoke in a tight, controlled voice. "No. They will find me and take me to the Pasdaran."

"Then talk."

Taking his hand in hers, she lowered her voice almost to a whisper. "But you are a good man. You would not--" Niles pulled his hand away. "Hey, cookie. Don't confuse the issue. I told you I would get you out. It was my word. But if you don't talk now, you walk."

Chardon laughed. "You are a strange one. I cannot trick you."

"Maybe, maybe not. We got hours before we get back to Beirut. Quit this shit about selling what you know to the C I of A. For all I know, the rich boys bombed the Marines. So you tell me what you know, I'll get you paid, I'll get you help when you leave Lebanon. Then you can try to sell the information to the Agency."

"Okay, Marine." She pulled the door closed. "I will tell you what I know."

As they followed the winding highway from the Beeka Valley up into the mountains, Chardon told Niles of meeting Fahkr Rajai during a series of interviews of the Mujahedeen exiles in Paris. The multi-lingual young man had introduced her to many members of the organization and often helped with the translation, verification, and editing of the interviews. He demonstrated an encyclopedic knowledge of the

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revolutionary movements in Iran. He knew the biographies of the leaders and the backgrounds of hundreds of minor figures. With his help, she gained a reputation as a specialist despite her limited understanding and experience. And in return, he asked only for duplicates of her interview cassettes and photocopies of her articles.

She described Rajai as a odd creature, simultaneously a meticulous clerk and charming diplomat, a slight young man who devoted his working hours to the organization and enjoyed the evening hour perquisites of an exile organization based in Paris-- the international society, the fine restuarants, the arts. He saw no conflict-- or never commented on the conflict-- in the Marxist ideology of his revolutionary organization and the decadence of the French capitol. However, unlike his comrades, he seemed to observe the severe moral prohibitions of Islam. Chardon never saw him drink alcohol or pursue Frenchwomen. And despite working together for more than a year, he never propositioned her. Nor did he frequent the prostitutes of Paris. Even other devout Muslims considered Rajai curious.

The kidnapping of a Mujahedeen leader and the theft of lists of members operating in Iran exposed Rajai as an agent of the Revolutionary Guard. Closely associated with Rajai, Chardon became suspect. She suddenly had no contact with the inner committees of the exile organization. The leaders forbid the exile membership to speak her. Stripped of her contacts and sources, she had no interviews or articles to offer her editors. She left Paris for Lebanon, where her French and fluent Arabic allowed her to restart her career.

By chance, she met Rajai again in the Shia slums of South Beirut. He refused to confirm his Paris role as an agent of the Revolutionary Guard. Nor would he tell her of his new duties in Beirut. But he did channel information to her and introduce her to various militia and religious leaders. Her editors contracted for a series of her interviews.

Rajai demanded information in return. As before, he wanted duplicates of the

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interview recordings and copies of the newspaper articles. Chardon guessed that he used her work to confirm information from his own sources. But he also told her to gather other information-- interviews of Multi National Peacekeeping Force personnel and photographs of both the American and French headquarters.

Through her own sources in Beirut, she learned that Rajai served as a liaison officer between the Syrians, the Revolutionary Guard, various Syrian-based Palestinian gangs, and the most extreme militia of the armed religious factions in Lebanon, the Hizbullah-- The Party of God. She feared the fanatics and did not risk questions. Instead, she noted what she learned of Rajai even as she followed his instructions.

In early October, she learned of Syrian and Iranian technicians working in one of the warehouses outside of Baalbek. Trucks came from Syria with a cargo that required a twenty-four hour a day security detail of Revolutionary Guards. A Palestinian contact in West Beirut reported the arrival of an ex-comrade in Beirut. This Palestinian had deserted the Arafat-faction of the P L O for explosives training in Syria. Her contact saw the Palestinian peddling souvenirs to the French legionnaires at the entrance to their headquarters.

Then, on the twenty-second of October, Rajai told her to be at the arrivals terminal of the Beirut International Airport at no later than six in the morning. She thought he wanted her to meet someone flying into the country.

Only after the massive blast did she realize Rajai had played a role in the bombing of the Marines.

"And what work has he sent you since then?"

"After the bombing, he broke off contact. He may be in Lebanon, perhaps in Iran. I do not know."

Niles questioned her on dates and details and names, comparing what she told him to what he knew. He believed she told the truth about her work with the Iranian before the bombing. However, he knew she lied about the end of her contact with

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Rajai-- she had called him in Baalbek. To confirm this, Niles asked, "Can you get in contact this Rajai?"

"I think perhaps it is impossible. He will believe it is a trick for you Americans. How can I explain taking an American to spy on the Revolutionary Guard? I am sorry I did not reveal the information on Rajai before Baalbek. But I feared you Americans. And I feared Rajai. Now it is impossible."

"Yeah, maybe. But it's not too late to debrief you. This is something my commander and his staff has to get in on. They'll get all the background available on this Iranian and gang, then question you."

Chardon remained silent for a moment. Then she asked, "When will this be?"

"A few days. We've got to move fast."

"And where?"

"Not here. Maybe Washington. Doesn't matter. We've got to get you out. Or you won't live to be debriefed."

"No. I cannot leave immediately. I must risk remaining a few days. I have business to conclude here before I return to Paris. Also, perhaps I can arrange for others to provide information for you. I cannot do that if I am not in Beirut. If you must question me very soon, is it possible your commander can come here to Beirut?"

"Yeah, but why you willing to risk it?"

She smiled to him, "For money."