

In the late night silence of the Foreign Ministry office, Rajai stared at the schedule of movements he had prepared. He had worked for hours without pause. His eyes ached with fatigue but he had accounted for every significant detail of the assembly of the groups, vehicles, explosives, and aircraft at the remote airfield in Colombia.

Uncertainties remained-- weather, personal conflicts between the Colombian and Palestinian squads, the questions of local people, or a raid by the national police-- but nothing beyond the ability or responsibility of the group leaders to counter. And Rajai knew he must trust the leaders on the scene to respond to what could not be anticipated. Chance threatened every operation with disaster. Rajai had planned for every foreseen need, then prepared for the impossible, but what could not be imagined required the intelligence and daring of the squads in Colombia.

The telephone jarred him from his thoughts. After the telephone rang for a full minute in the outer office, his aide Hazani woke and answered. The intercom buzzed a moment later. He heard the distant voice of Moinfar, calling from Baalbek:

"The woman and the American escaped."

"How?"

"After I talked with you, I sent a squad to the hotel. The American killed them all. We lost two more men searching the hotel and the streets. They took a car and escaped. We alerted the militias and the militias watched all the roads from Baalbek. But they escaped."

"Could they be in Baalbek?"

"No. The American and the woman passed through a Lebanese Army roadblock

RECON

at Nabi. We have an informer there who told us. They are returning to Beirut."

"Is there no way to stop them on the highway?"

"We have no units in the mountains. It is the territory of the Army and the Phalangists."

"What did they learn?"

"They were in the hospital all day. The American watched my men. He knows of the offices on the second floor of the hospital."

"Then he learned nothing that the Israelis could not tell him."

"But now we must fear a bombing."

"Why did not the Israelis bomb the offices before? Nothing has changed. The jets will not bomb your offices because they will not attack the hospital. They may risk commandos and helicopters but not more stories of dead children."

"We are ready for helicopters."

"Then nothing is changed. Did they go to my headquarters?"

"No. My men escorted the car from the highway to the hospital. He will know only what the woman tells him."

Rajai paused. He visualized the highway through the mountains, the winding roads and sheer drops. Storms in December and the first weeks of January had covered the mountains with snow. The night and icy roads would slow the American and Frenchwoman. They would not reach Beirut until morning.

"What she tells that American means nothing. I do not fear the dead."

Rajai ended the conversation. Keying the intercom, he woke Hasani again. "Call Beirut. I will speak to Iziz Kalaq."

As the American drove the mountain roads, Chardon slept, her heavy coat pulled around her like a blanket. Hours later, the voices of teenagers woke her. Three

RECON

Lebanese Army soldiers blocked the Land Rover, their weapons and heavy winter clothing monstrous silhouettes against the light of a fire. Niles showed an officer his false French passport. Chardon pretended to continue sleeping and considered her next action. Taking the American to Baalbek had ended her work in Lebanon-- and she had earned only five thousand dollars. She needed much more.

Niles shook her as he accelerated away from the soldiers. "Wake up. We're on the coast road. At Nahr el Kelb. Ten minutes to Beirut."

She looked to the west and saw the gray horizon of the Mediterranean. "It will soon be dawn. Let us go to my hotel first."

"Do you want to chance that?" Niles asked her. "Chances are, the Iranians are looking for you. They could be at the hotel, waiting."

"No. I did not have that address on my press documents. But others know of my hotel, so I must leave it for another. If I go immediately, there will be no threat."

"A beautiful young Frenchwoman is not invisible." "Now I am beautiful. But only hours ago, you pushed me away."

"Won't now. Stay with me in my apartment. You'll be safe there."

"And we will be lovers?"

"If the situation requires."

Chardon laughed. In the Beeka, he had threatened to put her out on the highway. Now he wanted to lock her in his apartment. The promise of information on Rajai had succeeded where the offer of sex had failed. "I know of a safe hotel. And I can dress to hide my face and nationality. No one will know who I am."

"A blue-eyed Shiia?"

"The Iranians do not have the organization to search all of East Beirut. I will be safe if I go to a new hotel immediately. Do we go there first?"

"Why not?"

"And the five thousand dollars?"

RECON

"You've got it today."

"Then we will talk of meeting with your officer."

She wanted no protection from the Americans. Protection, any restriction on her movement complicated her plans. The escape from Baalbek had confirmed the suspicions of Revolutionary Guards. Those fanatics wanted revenge but they did not know of her hotel. Only Rajai knew her address and he had always operated independently of the main unit of Iranians.

The fanatics of the Revolutionary Guard could not search for her and find her quickly in East Beirut. She could risk going to her hotel. But Rajai had contacts with all the militias of Beirut-- Islamic, Socialist, Palestinian, even the criminal gangs of kidnapers and assassins. She must contact Rajai immediately or leave Lebanon with only the five thousand dollars for the disastrous trip to Baalbek. And to deal with Rajai, she needed freedom of communication and movement. If Niles insisted on posting men at her new hotel, she became a prisoner-- and lost the opportunity to profit on the naivety of the Americans.

"First we go to another hotel. Then we call your officer, yes? Is my information so important to justify waking him?"

"You got it. I think he'll be flying out of Washington today."

Staring through the darkness of the park, Iziz Kalaq watched the hotel. A car sped passed, headlights flashing on the windows of shops and other cars. The black forms of trees broke his view of the street but he had clear line-of-sight of the hotel entry less than one hundred meters away.

Few people in East Beirut left their shelters this morning. The truck bombing of a mosque the evening before had enraged the Islamic militias. Druze and Shiite artillery crews fired randomly into the Christian suburbs, the shells screaming down at

RECON

odd intervals. Kalaq heard the false thunder of explosions as he watched for Chardon and the American.

A man left the hotel, the lights of the entry illuminating his face and clothing: Lebanese. The two-cycle whine of a motorcycle cut the quiet and the headlight wobbled away in the pre-dawn. The simultaneous shriek-explosion of a shell covered the noise of the motorcycle, then the engine whine returned as the motorcycle raced east on the corniche.

Kalaq sat in the back seat of a van parked on the Corniche Pierre Geymayel. Two of his fedayeen slept in the front seat while he watched the hotel entry. Smoking his ninth cigarette of the day, he took a long drag and felt it burn his fingers. He flicked the butt out the window. He looked back to the second van. The gray light of the eastern horizon backlit the forms of four more of his fedayeen watching and waiting.

Headlights stopped at the hotel. Kalaq strained to see the type of car. Then, in the trees of the park, he saw the swinging of the flashlight-- the signal. He woke the fedayeen in the front seat of the van. His walkie-talkie buzzed:

"A man and a woman," the look-out told him. "Perhaps they are the American and the journalist."

"You are positive?"

"They are going into the hotel."

But the boxy form of the car blocked Kalaq's view of the entry. "Did you see their faces?"

"I think the man was a foreigner. The woman dressed very modestly. Not like the woman you described. I did not see her hair or face."

"Describe the car."

"It is a Land Rover. Very muddy."

"Did the man have a rifle?"

RECON

"I did not see."

Kalaq cursed under his breath. Until the look-out confirmed the identities of the man and the woman, Kalaq could not order his squads into motion. He leaned forward to the front seat. "Start the motor and signal--"

The driver immediately turned on the ignition. Reving the engine, he flashed the taillights to the van behind them. Then Kalaq spoke into the walkie-talkie again to alert the fedayeen waiting in cars on a sidestreet.

"Squads number three and four, be ready. We think they have come. The moment we are positive, we will capture them." Taking the Beretta pistol from his shoulder holster, he touched the extractor to confirm a round in the chamber. He gripped the pistol and stroked the oil-smooth steel of the slide. Flicking the safety off and on with his thumb, he thought of that night months before with Chardon-- her words, her demands, her mocking laughter. That night he silenced her with a slap. Today he would take his revenge. First he and his men would enjoy her, then they would question her. After the screaming, when she had no more to say, he would stop all her words forever-- with the pistol.

Then he would question the American.

Showing no concern, Chardon casually pushed through the plywood-covered doors of the old hotel. The chemical stink of disinfectant almost covered the smells of mildew, old food, and tobacco. They saw no one in the lobby. Niles rushed past the office and searched for the rear doors of the hotel. Chardon heard him rattle the chains securing the fire doors.

"Is it not as I told you?" She asked him. "Are you satisfied? They do not have the means to pursue me everywhere, you know." "You could be wrong, Miss Chardon. Dead wrong. Let's go to your room."

RECON

As they passed the registration desk, she looked through the doorway of the office and saw the clerk sleeping on a cot. Niles took his short rifle from under his coat and preceded her up the stairs. Niles moved quickly from landing to landing, his boots somehow silent, the rifle pointing at every shadow and doorway. No gunmen assaulted them. At her room, he took the key and motioned for her to stand to the side. First, he listened. But a radio in another room echoed in the hallway. He carefully turned the key. Going flat against the solid brick wall, he kicked the door open. Niles waited a few seconds before looking inside the room. He did not go inside.

"Do you expect an explosion?" Impatient, she pushed past him. "No one has entered."

"Don't turn on the light. There could be a bomb wired to it."

"But I can't see." She flicked the lightswitch and surveyed the room. "Everything is as it was."

"Positive? Check everything."

"I know my own room. And my possessions."

Niles left. She glanced into the hall and saw him standing near the stairs, watching the hallway. Closing the door and locking it, she went to the room's telephone. The clerk finally answered after a minute of ringing.

"I want you to place a telephone call for me. The operator will need time. Perhaps it will take a few minutes, perhaps longer. I must pack. I will pay you if you listen and call for me when the operator finally makes the connection."

"How much will you pay?"

"Five United States dollars."

"Done, mademoiselle." She gave the number of the villa in Baalbek.

"That call will be difficult."

RECON

"Have the operator try. I know I must wait. Perhaps it will go through without delay because of the early hour." Looking in the hallway again, she saw Niles at the stairs. She packed quickly. Her suitcase contained her clothing. She needed only five minutes to gather her few personal effects from the bathroom and closet and bed table.

Carrying only her typewriter and attache case, she rushed to Niles. "Can you bring my suitcase? I will go to the desk to settle my account."

He nodded and she continued down the stairs to the registration desk. Slapping the bell brought the clerk stumbling from the office, a red-eyed young man wearing a New York Yankees sweatshirt. He reeked of tobacco and stale wine. Chardon asked:

"Is my call complete?"

He picked up the desk phone and asked for the operator. At that moment, Niles came from the stairs. Chardon motioned for him to continue to the car.

"Have I received calls? Has anyone asked for me?"

"No calls. But a letter."

A statement from her Paris bank detailed the decline of her finances-- a fact she knew.

"The operator said there are difficulties," the clerk told Chardon.

"Always." She took the receiver from the clerk. "Total my account while I wait."

Listening for the voice of the operator, Chardon watched the hotel entry. The plywood sheets over the blown-out windows blocked the sight of Niles. She counted the seconds, hoping his patience continued. The clerk finally returned with a long list of charges. Using a battered hand-calculator, he slowly keyed the numbers.

The door opened. Hiding the receiver against her side, she looked behind her to see the hotel's elderly janitor struggling to guide a two-wheeled shopping cart through the door. Past the old man, she saw the Land Rover at the curb. Niles

RECON

crouched beside the Land Rover, watching the street, the bulk of the Land Rover shielding him. Then, glancing to the hotel, he saw Chardon at the reception desk. She pointed to the clerk working with the hand calculator.

Niles called out, "Hurry!"

A voice spoke from the telephone. The old man still struggled with his cart in the open doorway. Turning her back on Niles, she blocked his sight of the telephone and said, "Just one moment."

The old man jerked his cart clear of the entry. As the door swung closed, Chardon raised the receiver to her ear. Someone spoke Farsi. She asked for a French or Arabic speaker as she pulled the telephone away from the clerk. The long cord stretched to the corner of the desk. The noise from the television continued. Turning her back to the clerk, she covered her other ear with her hand and leaned over the receiver, using her body to contain her words-- no one could overhear her conversation. An Iranian answered in Arabic.

"This is Angelique Chardon," she whispered into the telephone. "I must give you a message for Rajai--"

"You! The Frenchwoman. You agent of the Americans. You are dead."

Her body went cold as she recognized the voice of Moinfar, the Revolutionary Guard leader from the offices at the hospital. If Moinfar had taken command of Rajai's staff, he had access to all the information on her and contacts with the militias of Beirut. She could not speak for a moment.

"You are dead, hear me? You will not live another day."

Taking a long breath, she forced herself to speak calmly. "Then you do not know of my work for Rajai? Call him. He will explain."

"What is this you say?"

"Call Rajai. He will explain."

"How can he explain the deaths of my men?"

RECON

"If I could have spoken with Rajai, or if I could have explained to you, there would have been no killing. Unfortunately, the circumstances did not allow me to explain. The American forced me to escape with him. And it is better. He trusts me now. If you had discovered his identity, if you had imprisoned him, I could not help you now to capture a colonel who is an aide to the President of the United States."

"What? I knew nothing of this."

"I cannot tell you more. I told you of the meeting only to convince you of the urgency of my call. I must speak with Rajai immediately or this opportunity will be lost. Contact him. I will call again soon."

Chardon hung up. The call had changed everything-- the Revolutionary Guards pursued her with the advantage of all of Rajai's information and contacts. She hoped her talk of kidnapping an advisor to the American President had won her time. But until she spoke with Rajai, she remained in danger.

She paid the clerk and ran through the lobby with her attache case and typewriter, shouldering open the plywood door. Dashing to the Land Rover, she put her case of papers inside with her suitcase--

A roar and high-pitched shrieking tore the dawn quiet. For a moment, she thought an artillery shell had passed overhead, then she realized she heard the sound of engines and spinning tires. She saw Niles looking in all directions, trying to identify the source of the noise. Then he raised his Kalashnikov and fired toward the park on the opposite side of the street.

Chardon crouched behind the Land Rover. She still gripped her typewriter. In the street, a form with an outstretched arm fell backwards. Niles fired again into the fallen man, then pivoted and aimed at an onrushing Mercedes, firing a long, hammering burst at the windshield. The windshield went white with shatters and the Mercedes drifted to the side, crashing into a parked truck. Momentum spun the Mercedes sideways to block the street.

RECON

A second car skidded to a stop behind the wreck. Men with rifles came out of both cars and took cover in the doorways and behind the parked truck. A grenade popped in the street and tear gas clouded into the gray morning light. Wind carried the gas into the park.

Rifles fired from the street. In the park, Palestinians sprinted from cover to cover to encircle Niles and Chardon. The gunmen coughed and cursed in the drifting tear gas. One man shouted commands to the others. And at that moment, Chardon recognized the leader: Iziz Kalaq.

The rifle of the American only delayed the attack. She had no hope. The call to Moinfar had been too late. She would die there on the sidewalk--

Unless she demonstrated that she did not work for the American. If she lived to be the prisoner of Kalaq, she gained the time to talk to Rajai, to explain

Bullets zipped past her as she rushed at Niles' back. Swinging the typewriter case with all the strength of her panic, she brought it down on the back of his head, sending him sprawling face down onto the sidewalk. And then she ran to Kalaq: "Iziz! Iziz! Take me Rajai! I have much to tell him!"

In his peripheral vision, Niles saw a blur of motion. He threw himself sideways-- but too late. The plastic and chrome case glanced off the back of his head and hit his shoulder. Bells rang and keys clattered, then the typewriter smashed on the concrete as he fell. Stunned but conscious, he lay on the sidewalk, blinking away the pain.

The gunfire stopped. He heard Chardon shouting out the name "Iziz" and then a confusion of voices speaking Arabic covered her words.

Iziz Kalaq, Niles realized. The leader of a Palestinian gang. Niles had read her interview of the radical-faction militiaman.

Under the Land Rover, he saw boots crowd around her long skirt. Men dragged

RECON

her away. Others came for him. Niles pulled another 30-round magazine out of the ammo pouches under his coat. He looked up and saw two Palestinian gunmen run from the cover of the truck. Firing by reflex, not aiming, he skipped a burst of 7.62 ComBloc off the sidewalk. Ricochettes tore through the legs of the running gunmen, dropping them hard to the concrete. Cursing and screaming, they pointed their rifles at him. Niles brought the Kalashnikov to his shoulder and fired killing bursts through their faces.

Boots ran toward the Land Rover. He aimed at a boot and pulled the trigger. The rifle did not fire. He dropped out the empty magazine and threw it over the Land Rover. Men shouted out and ran in opposite directions. Niles jammed the new magazine into the rifle. Then he saw the boots running around the front bumper.

Jerking his legs up under him, Niles dove forward, his shoulder catching the man sideways in the knees. Cartilage popped and the gunman fell onto a parked Fiat, the tinny bumper clanging with the impact of his head. The Palestinian kicked Niles and tried to bring up his automatic rifle, but the magazine tangled with his coat. Jerking back the rifle's cocking handle to chamber the first round, Niles put the muzzle of his rifle against the man's chest and fired. At the same instant, the Palestinian fired.

The impact of a bullet spun Niles. He did not feel the wound or lose consciousness. Sprawling on his back, the rifle locked in his hands, Niles saw a gunman running toward him and he fired wild into the man's torso, slugs punching through the man's chest, spraying blood and bone out the back of his neck, two bullets to the face exploding his skull. The corpse fell next to Niles, the dead eyes staring at him.

The street went silent. Niles saw no one moving. Scrambling to the shelter of the Land Rover, he scanned the sidewalk. He saw only corpses. Then he searched for his wound.

Blood stained his shirt. And he saw a bent magazine. The bullet had hit one of

RECON

his ammunition pouches, smashed through the the steel of the magazine, then slashed through the flesh at his side. He touched the wound and felt only a shallow gouge.

Crouching, Niles rushed to the back of the Land Rover. He looked across at the park. In the gray dawnlight, he saw militiamen with rifles escorting Chardon away, jerking and dragging her toward two vans parked on the Corniche.

If they took Chardon, Niles lost his contact with the gang responsible for 23 October.

Niles dodged around the back of the Land Rover and looked into the street. One dead man lay on his back, a tear-gas canister still smoking in his hand. He saw no one else. Running back to the driver's door, he threw the door open and twisted the key. He pumped the accelerator and screeched through a turn.

A bullet punched through the back window and exited through the windshield, tempered glass spraying the interior. Wrenching the steering wheel from side to side, he zigzagged across both lanes of the street.

The vans raced away. Niles saw Chardon in the backseat of the first van, a white Toyota. The second van, a red Volkswagon, contained more gunmen. They did not see Niles as he accelerated along the curving sidestreet. Downshifting as the street merged with the Corniche, he flashed behind the red Volkswagon as he forced the Land Rover through a right-hand power-drift.

He picked up the Kalashnikov off the front seat and aimed a one-handed burst back at the gunmen in Volkswagon. He scored on the windshield of the van, the driver swerving into the curb.

The driver of the white van spotted him. Niles saw the man's shoulders move and he anticipated the right-hand turn onto a sidestreet. He forced the Land Rover through a smoking-tire turn. Only fifty meters behind the white Toyota, he accelerated, racing through a quiet neighborhood of shops and apartments. The

RECON

random shelling of the city had cleared the neighborhood streets of traffic.

A hand dropped a grenade from the van. Niles saw the steel oval bounce off the asphalt and go high over him. An instant behind him, the grenade banged. Bits of spent shrapnel tapped the Land Rover. He saw the brakelights of the van flash red. The tires smoked as the van swayed through an extreme left turn onto another street.

The street intersected at an angle. Niles guessed the Palestinian driver would follow the street back to the Corniche and then race for a crossing into West Beirut. He downshifted and drifted through the turn, sideswiping a parked car. The white van pulled ahead.

One-handed, Niles shoved the muzzle of the Kalashnikov through the shattered windshield. The foregrip rested on the dash board. The plastic and glass laminate of the safety glass held the rifle in place. On the straightaway of the street, he pointed the muzzle at the back tires of the van and hoped for a lucky hit as he squeezed off a round.

A long streak appeared in the hood of the Land Rover. But ahead, he saw thousands of bits of glass falling from the back window of the Toyota van. The van wobbled, then skidded through another left hand turn. Niles did not risk Chardon's life by firing again. He powered through the turn, staying close behind the van.

They paralleled another park. Beyond the trees and walkways, Niles saw the Corniche. If they made the Corniche, they had only a one kilometer race to a crossing. Niles floored the accelerator.

More grenades came from the van. One went under a parked car and exploded, the other bounced high. The small charge popped above and behind the Land Rover. Dozens of bits of steel shrapnel punched holes in the aluminum of the roof.

A muzzle flashed from the back window of the Toyota and bits of the windshield cut Niles. He whipped the Land Rover from side to side to deny the gunman an easy target.

Then he saw the red Volkswagon van coming head-on. Standing on the brakes,

RECON

controlling the skid with one hand while he grabbed the Kalashnikov with the other, he sprayed full-automatic fire at the Volkswagon. But he did not stop the driver from turning and blocking the street.

Two men left the far side of the Volkswagon. Niles jerked the steering wheel to the side, aiming the Land Rover for a space between two parked cars. He knocked a headlight off a Fiat and got the front wheels of the Land Rover over the curb, then bullets hammered the side, smashing the windows and filling the interior with flying glass.

Niles threw open the other door. Pulling out the Kalashnikov, he dodged around the parked cars as he reloaded the rifle. Bursts of fire raked the cars. Glass sprayed around him. He sprinted past the Volkswagon, the gunmen leaving their positions to follow him. Niles spun and threw himself flat. A gunman ran from between two cars and Niles dropped him with two shots through the chest. Blood frothed from the wounds and the dying gun man called out as he reached for his Kalashnikov. Niles triggered a coup de grace.

Bullets smashed into the car shielding Niles. On his knees and one hand, Niles scrambled to the dead man. He dropped down flat behind the dead man's body as bullets punched into sheet metal and chipped concrete. A Palestinian teenager ran across the street, spraying full automatic fire from his Kalashnikov to cover his dash. Niles fired a long burst, the ComBloc slugs shattering the running boy's legs. Legs bending at impossible angles, his hand convulsively emptying his rifle, he fell in the street and screamed.

Niles pulled a new magazine from the pocket of the dead man and jammed it into his rifle. In the street, the wounded boy pleaded for help. Niles searched for other Palestinians.

The driver of the Volkswagon lay against the steering wheel, blood draining from bullet holes in his face and chest. Niles saw no one else in the street. Looking behind him, through the trees of the park, he saw the Corniche. But the white Toyota

RECON

van-- carrying Chardon-- had gone.

Rifle ready at his hip, Niles ran back to the Land Rover. Bullets had ripped both back tires. He ran to the Volkswagon. The dead man's foot kept the engine going steady. Niles went around to the driver's side. Then behind him, he heard the wounded Palestinian teenager.

The boy lay where he fell, his voice rising and falling with cries for help. Niles went to him and looked at his wounds. Though the bullets had shattered bones in both legs, the blood flow had slowed. He would not bleed to death.

Niles had lost Chardon. But this teenage militiaman knew where the kidnapers had taken her.

Checking the Palestinian quickly for concealed weapons, Niles grabbed an arm and dragged him to the Volkswagon. The boy screamed and pleaded every time the motion twisted his legs. Using the dead driver's belt, Niles tied the boy's hands behind his back and heaved him into the Volkswagon.

Neighborhood people watched from windows and doorways, no one daring to call out, as Niles transferred his equipment and Chardon's possessions into the Volkswagon and raced away from the scene.

As he drove, he turned to the wounded teenager: "You are alone. The others abandoned you. I have questions. Answer my questions and I will take you directly to a doctor. Lie and I will return and kill you. Stay silent and I will make you answer. And believe me, you will answer. Answer now and I promise you a doctor and a hospital."

Before Niles reached the Lebanese compound near the Beirut International Airport, the Palestinian had told him of Iziz Kalaq and his offices overlooking the Ramlet el Baida.

RECON

Following the code names and commercial phrases established by the dead Zargar, Rajai typed cablegram instructions. An organizational chart hand-written by Zargar provided the actual names of the leaders and groups. Rajai had cross-checked the chart against the code sheet and the schedule of mobilization prepared by Zargar. But Rajai had rewritten the schedule the night before. He had not wasted time plotting an exact hour by hour timetable-- it meant nothing in the execution of the attack. In rewriting the schedule, he subordinated all movements of secondary personnel to the loading and departure of the aircraft. Now the cablegrams went to each group.

Security did not allow him to delegate this task to Hazani. The series of cablegrams directly linked the Foreign Ministry office to the several groups assembling at the remote airfield in Colombia. For that reason, Rajai typed the forms himself-- in the business jargon of Arabic, French, and English. The forms then went into diplomatic pouches bound for Iranian embassies in Cairo, Paris, and London. Non-Iranian operatives would take the forms to local offices and pay cash. If American anti-terrorist investigators discovered the identities of the groups in Colombia, they could trace the forces back to their headquarters in Paris or Beirut or Geneva, and then the directives ordering the assembly to the cable offices-- but no farther. The plan conceived by the mullahs and the Pasdaran commanders eliminated any chance of retaliation by the United States.

In the future, this would change. Rajai wanted a war with the Americans. Only after the devastation of his country could he sever Iran from its history and religion. That war would be Year Zero and the first year of the future

Fatigue brought these dreams to Rajai as he typed. Outside, he heard the traffic of Tehran, the trucks, the whining motor scooters, the blaring of horns. He heard telephones ringing in the other offices. He almost did not notice the ringing of his own telephone in the outer office. He waited for Hazani to answer. The ringing

RECON

continued. Rajai picked up the nearest telephone on his desk, but heard nothing. He tried the second telephone, a modern European telephone with buttons and indicator lights for various lines. He punched buttons but the ringing did not stop.

Rajai rushed to the outer office. The door to the corridor stood open. Early morning clerks and bureaucrats glanced inside the office as they passed, noting the slim, well-dressed young man who had taken over the duties of the assassinated Zargar. Rajai grabbed the ringing telephone. He heard the voice of an international operator, then Moinfar spoke from Baalbek:

"It has been difficult to call you. The lines from Baalbek are very bad. The woman Chardon called and asked to talk with you."

"From where did she call?"

"The operator told me Beirut. Chardon told me she worked for you. She says she must speak with you."

"I have nothing to say to her. In the past, I used her. But now she has betrayed us to the Americans."

"I am not arguing for this woman, Rajai. But perhaps it is different than we believe. She said she brought the American here to gain his trust. Those are her words. She said she has a chance to arrange the capture of an aide to the American president."

"Forget the woman, she is no longer your concern. A team of technicians will bring radio equipment today. They will need a room for the equipment in my villa."

"It will be done."

"I return to Baalbek in two days. The equipment must be functioning then." Another telephone line rang. "Attend to that work. I will return in two days."

Rajai broke the connection. An international operator announced another call from Lebanon. This time the call came from Kalaq in Beirut:

"The woman is with us."

RECON

"Very good. You have your instructions."

"She tells us that she is working for you."

"That is a lie."

"I do not want there to be an error. I saw her fight with the American. She freed herself and ran to my squad. She says she took the American to Baalbek as a trick. You say this is a lie?"

Rajai closed his eyes against his fatigue. "Did I not tell you that you would leave Lebanon today?"

"My main unit is already in Damascus. They wait for instructions. If not for this job with the woman, I would be with them."

"Then why do you listen to the lies of that whore? There is no time to waste. Do as you were instructed."

"Then she lies?"

"And what of the American?"

"I will know soon."

"What?"

"I don't think he lived."

"You do not know?"

"It was only minutes ago. He attempted desperately to escape and I dispatched squads to take him. My men have not yet reported."

"Do as I instructed and join your men in Damascus. One other instruction. A joke on Miss Chardon. Did she have her camera and tape recorder with her?"

"No camera. No film. No tape."

"Do you have a camera there?"

"Yes."

"Photograph the interrogation. And record it."

Through the thousands of kilometers of telephone line, Rajai heard Kalaq laugh.

RECON

"I will, my friend, I will. It will be my pleasure."