

# THE BEAR AND THE DRAGON

Tom Clancy

## PROLOGUE

### The White Mercedes

Going to work was the same everywhere, and the changeover from Marxism-Leninism to Chaos-Capitalism hadn't changed matters much--- well, maybe things were now a little worse. Moscow, a city of wide streets, was harder to drive in now that nearly anyone could have a car, and the center lane down the wide boulevards was no longer tended by militiamen for the Politburo and used by Central Committee men who considered it a personal right of way, like Czarist princes in their troika sleds. Now it was a left-turn lane for anyone with a Zil or other private car. In the case of Sergey Nikolay'ch Golovko, the car was a white Mercedes 600, the big one with the S-class body and twelve cylinders of German power under the hood. There weren't many of them in Moscow, and truly his was an extravagance that ought to have embarrassed him... but didn't. Maybe there were no more nomenklatura in this city, but rank did have its privileges, and he was chairman of the SVR. His apartment was also large, on the top floor of a high-rise building on Kutusovskiy Prospekt, a structure relatively new and well-made, down to the German appliances which were a long-standing luxury accorded senior government officials.

He didn't drive himself. He had Anatoliy for that, a burly former Spetsnaz special-operations soldier who carried a pistol under his coat and who drove the car with ferocious aggression, while tending it with loving care. The windows were coated with dark plastic, which denied the casual onlooker the sight of the people inside, and the windows were thick, made of polycarbonate and specced to stop anything up to a 12.7-mm bullet, or so the company had told Golovko's purchasing agents sixteen months before. The armor made it nearly a ton heavier than was the norm for an S600 Benz, but the power and the ride didn't seem to suffer from that. It was the uneven streets that would ultimately destroy the car. Road-paving was a skill that his country had not yet mastered, Golovko thought as he turned the page in his morning paper. It was the American International Herald Tribune, always a good source of news since it was a joint venture of The Washington Post and The New York Times, which were together two of the most skilled intelligence services in the world, if a little too arrogant to be the true professionals Sergey Nikolay'ch and his people were.

He'd joined the intelligence business when the agency had been known as the KGB, the Committee for State Security, still, he thought, the best such government department the world had ever known, even if it had ultimately failed. Golovko sighed. Had the USSR not fallen in the early 1990s, then his place as Chairman would have put him as a full voting member of the Politburo, a man of genuine power in one of the world's two superpowers, a man whose mere gaze could make strong men tremble... but... no, what was the use of that? he asked himself. It was all an illusion, an odd thing for a man of supposed regard for objective truth to value. That had always been the cruel dichotomy. KGB had always been on the lookout for hard facts, but then reported those facts to people besotted with a dream, who then bent the truth in the service of that dream. When the truth had finally broken through, the dream had suddenly evaporated like a cloud of steam in a high wind, and reality had poured in like the flood following the breakup of an ice-bound river in springtime. And then the Politburo, those brilliant men who'd wagered their lives on the dream, had

found that their theories had been only the thinnest of reeds, and reality was the swinging scythe, and the eminence bearing that tool didn't deal in salvation.

But it was not so for Golovko. A dealer in facts, he'd been able to continue his profession, for his government still needed them. In fact, his authority was broader now than it would have been, because as a man who well knew the surrounding world and some of its more important personalities intimately, he was uniquely suited to advising his president, and so he had a voice in foreign policy, defense, and domestic matters. Of them, the third was the trickiest lately, which had rarely been the case before. It was now also the most dangerous. It was an odd thing. Previously, the mere spoken (more often, shouted) phrase "State Security!" would freeze Soviet citizens in their stride, for KGB had been the most feared organ of the previous government, with power such as Reinhart Heydrich's Sicherheitsdienst had only dreamed about, the power to arrest, imprison, interrogate, and to kill any citizen it wished, with no recourse at all. But that, too, was a thing of the past. Now KGB was split, and the domestic-security branch was a shadow of its former self, while the SVR--- formerly the First Chief Directorate--- still gathered information, but lacked the immediate strength that had come with being able to enforce the will, if not quite the law, of the communist government. But his current duties were still vast, Golovko told himself, folding the paper.

He was only a kilometer away from Dzerzhinskiy Square. That, too, was no longer the same. The statue of Iron Feliks was gone. It had always been a chilling sight to those who'd known who the man was whose bronze image had stood alone in the square, but now it, too, was a distant memory. The building behind it was the same, however. Once the stately home office of the Rossiya Insurance Company, it had later been known as the Lubyanka, a fearsome word even in the fearsome land ruled by Iosef Vissarionovich Stalin, with its basement full of cells and interrogation rooms. Most of those functions had been transferred over the years to Lefortovo Prison to the east, as the KGB bureaucracy had grown, as all such bureaucracies grow, filling the vast building like an expanding balloon, as it claimed every room and corner until secretaries and file clerks occupied the (remodeled) spaces where Kamenev and Ordzhonikidze had been tortured under the eyes of Yagoda and Beriya. Golovko supposed that there hadn't been too many ghosts.

Well, a new working day beckoned. A staff meeting at 8:45, then the normal routine of briefings and discussions, lunch at 12:15, and with luck he'd be back in the car and on his way back home soon after six, before he had to change for the reception at the French Embassy. He looked forward to the food and wine, if not the conversation.

Another car caught his eye. It was a twin to his own, another large Mercedes S-class, iceberg white just like his own, complete down to the American-made dark plastic on the windows. It was driving purposefully in the bright morning, as Anatoliy slowed and pulled behind a dump truck, one of the thousand such large ugly vehicles that covered the streets of Moscow like a dominant life-form, this one's load area cluttered with hand tools rather than filled with earth. There was yet another truck a hundred meters beyond, driving slowly as though its driver was unsure of his route. Golovko stretched in his seat, barely able to see around the truck in front of his Benz, wishing for the first cup of Sri Lankan tea at his desk, in the same room that Beriya had once...

...the distant dump truck. A man had been lying in the back. Now he rose, and he was holding...

"Anatoliy!" Golovko said sharply, but his driver couldn't see around the truck to his immediate front .

...it was an RPG, a slender pipe with a bulbous end. The sighting bar was up, and as the distant truck was now stopped, the man came up to one knee and turned, aiming his weapon at the other white Benz---

---the other driver saw it and tried to swerve, but found his way blocked by the morning traffic and---

---not much in the way of a visual signature, just a thin puff of smoke from the rear of the launcher-tube, but the bulbous part leapt off and streaked into the hood of the other white Mercedes, and there it exploded.

It hit just short of the windshield. The explosion wasn't the fireball so beloved of Western movies, just a muted flash and gray smoke, but the sound roared across the square, and a wide, flat, jagged hole blew out of the trunk of the car, and that meant that anyone inside the vehicle would now be dead, Golovko knew without pausing to think on it. Then the gasoline ignited, and the car burned, along with a few square meters of asphalt. The Mercedes stopped almost at once, its left-side tires shredded and flattened by the explosion. The dump truck in front of Golovko's car panic-stopped, and Anatoliy swerved right, his eyes narrowed by the noise, but not yet---

"Govno!" Now Anatoliy saw what had happened and took action. He kept moving right, accelerating hard and swerving back and forth as his eyes picked holes in the traffic. The majority of the vehicles in sight had stopped, and Golovko's driver sought out the holes and darted through them, arriving at the vehicle entrance to Moscow Center in less than a minute. The armed guards there were already moving out into the square, along with the supplementary response force from its shack just inside and out of sight. The commander of the group, a senior lieutenant, saw Golovko's car and recognized it, waved him inside and motioned to two of his men to accompany it to the drop-off point. The arrival time was now the only normal aspect of the young day. Golovko stepped out, and two young soldiers formed up in physical contact with his heavy topcoat. Anatoliy stepped out, too, his pistol in his hand and his coat open, looking back through the gate with suddenly anxious eyes. His head turned quickly.

"Get him inside!" And with that order, the two privates strong-armed Golovko through the double bronze doors, where more security troops were arriving.

"This way, Comrade Chairman," a uniformed captain said, taking Sergey Nikolay'ch's arm and heading off to the executive elevator. A minute later, he stumbled into his office, his brain only now catching up with what it had seen just three minutes before. Of course, he walked to the window to look down.

Moscow police--- called militiamen--- were racing to the scene, three of them on foot. Then a police car appeared, cutting through the stopped traffic. Three motorists had left their vehicles and approached the burning car, perhaps hoping to render assistance. Brave of them, Golovko thought, but an entirely useless effort. He could see better now, even at a distance of three hundred meters. The top had bulged up. The windshield was gone, and he looked into a smoking hole, which had minutes before been a hugely expensive vehicle, and which had been destroyed by one of the cheapest weapons the Red Army had ever mass-produced. Whoever had been inside had been shredded instantly by metal fragments traveling at nearly ten thousand meters per second. Had they even known what had happened? Probably not. Perhaps the driver had had time to look and wonder, but the owner of the car in the back had probably been reading his morning paper, before his life had ended without warning.

That was when Golovko's knees went weak. That could have been him... suddenly learning if there were an afterlife after all, one of the great mysteries of life, but not one which had occupied his thoughts very often...

But whoever had done the killing, who had been his target? As Chairman of the SVR, Golovko was not a man to believe in coincidences, and there were not all that many white Benz S600s in Moscow, were there?

"Comrade Chairman?" It was Anatoliy at the office door.

"Yes, Anatoliy Ivan'ch?"

"Are you well?"

"Better than he," Golovko replied, stepping away from the window. He needed to sit now. He tried to move to his swivel chair without staggering, for his legs were suddenly weak indeed. He sat and found the surface of his desk with both his hands, and looked down at the oaken surface with

its piles of papers to be read--- the routine sight of a day which was not now routine at all. He looked up.

Anatoliy Ivan'ch Shelepin was not a man to show fear. He'd served in Spetsnaz through his captaincy, before being spotted by a KGB talent scout for a place in the 8th "Guards" Directorate, which he'd accepted just in time for KGB to be broken apart. But Anatoliy had been Golovko's driver and bodyguard for years now, part of his official family, like an elder son, and Shelepin was devoted to his boss. He was a tall, bright man of thirty-three years, with blond hair and blue eyes that were now far larger than usual, because though Anatoliy had trained for much of his life to deal with and in violence, this was the first time he'd actually been there to see it when it happened. Anatoliy had often wondered what it might be like to take a life, but never once in his career had he contemplated losing his own, certainly not to an ambush, and most certainly not to an ambush within shouting distance of his place of work. At his desk outside Golovko's office, he acted like a personal secretary more than anything else. Like all such men, he'd grown casual in the routine of protecting someone whom no one would dare attack, but now his comfortable world had been sundered as completely and surely as that of his boss.

Oddly, but predictably, it was Golovko's brain that made it back to reality first.

"Anatoliy?"

"Yes, Chairman?"

"We need to find out who died out there, and then find out if it was supposed to be us instead. Call militia headquarters, and see what they are doing."

"At once." The handsome young face disappeared from the doorway.

Golovko took a deep breath and rose, taking another look out the window as he did so. There was a fire engine there now, and firefighter were spraying the wrecked car to extinguish the lingering flames. An ambulance was standing by as well, but that was a waste of manpower and equipment, Sergey Nikolay'ch knew. The first order of business was to get the license-plate number from the car and identify its owner, and from that knowledge determine if the unfortunate had died in Golovko's place, or perhaps had possessed enemies of his own. Rage had not yet supplanted the shock of the event. Perhaps that would come later, Golovko thought, as he took a step toward his private washroom, for suddenly his bladder was weak. It seemed a horrid display of frailty, but Golovko had never known immediate fear in his life, and, like many, thought in terms of the movies. The actors there were bold and resolute, never mind that their words were scripted and their reactions rehearsed, and none of it was anything like what happened when explosives arrived in the air without warning.

Who wants me dead? he wondered, after flushing the toilet.

The American Embassy a few miles away had a flat roof on which stood all manner of radio antennas, most of them leading to radio receivers of varying levels of sophistication, which were in turn attached to tape recorders that turned slowly in order to more efficiently use their tapes. In the room with the recorders were a dozen people, both civilian and military, all Russian linguists who reported to the National Security Agency at Fort Meade, Maryland, between Baltimore and Washington. It was early in the day, and these people were generally at work before the Russian officials whose communications they worked to monitor. One of the many radios in the room was a scanning monitor of the sort once used by American citizens to listen in on police calls. The local cops used the same bands and the exact same type of radios that their American counterparts had used in the 1970s, and monitoring them was child's play--- they were not encrypted yet. They listened in on them for the occasional traffic accident, perhaps involving a big shot, and mainly to keep a finger on the pulse of Moscow, whose crime situation was bad and getting worse. It was useful for embassy personnel to know what parts of town to avoid, and to be able to keep track of a crime to one of the thousands of American citizens.

"Explosion?" an Army sergeant asked the radio. His head turned. "Lieutenant Wilson, police report an explosion right in front of Moscow Center."

"What kind?"

"Sounds like a car blew up. Fire department is on the scene now, ambulance..." He plugged in headphones to get a better cut on the voice traffic. "Okay, white Mercedes-Benz, tag number---" He pulled out a pad and wrote it down. "Three people dead, driver and two passengers and... oh, shit!"

"What is it, Reins?"

"Sergey Golovko..." Sergeant Reins's eyes were shut, and he had one hand pressing the headphones to his ears. "Doesn't he drive a white Benz?"

"Oh, shit!" Lieutenant Wilson observed for herself. Golovko was one of the people whom her people routinely tracked. "Is he one of the deaders?"

"Can't tell yet, ell-tee. New voice... the captain at the station, just said he's coming down. Looks like they're excited about this one, ma'am. Lotsa chatter coming up."

Lieutenant Susan Wilson rocked back and forth in her swivel chair. Make a call on this one or not? They couldn't shoot you for notifying your superiors of something, could they...? "Where's the station chief?"

"On his way to the airport, ell-tee, he's flying off to St. Petersburg today, remember?"

"Okay." She turned back to her panel and lifted the secure phone, a STU-6 (for "secure telephone unit"), to Fort Meade. Her plastic encryption key was in its proper slot, and the phone was already linked and synchronized with another such phone at NSA headquarters. She punched the # key to get a response.

"Watch Room," a voice said half a world away.

"This is Station Moscow. We have an indication that Sergey Golovko may just have been assassinated."

"The SVR chairman?"

"Affirmative. A car similar to his has exploded in Dzerzhinskiy Square, and this is the time he usually goes to work."

"Confidence?" the disembodied male voice asked. It would be a middle-grade officer, probably military, holding down the eleven-to-seven watch. Probably Air Force. "Confidence" was one of their institutional buzzwords.

"We're taking this off police radios--- the Moscow Militia, that is. We have lots of voice traffic, and it sounds excited, my operator tells me."

"Okay, can you upload it to us?"

"Affirmative," Lieutenant Wilson replied.

"Okay, let's do that. Thanks for the heads-up, we'll take it from here."

Okay, Station Moscow out," heard Major Bob Teeters. He was new in his job at NSA. Formerly a rated pilot who had twenty-one hundred hours in command of C-5s and C-17s, he'd injured his left elbow in a motorcycle accident eight months before, and the loss of mobility there had ended his flying career, much to his disgust. Now he was reborn as a spook, which was somewhat more interesting in an intellectual sense, but not exactly a happy exchange for an aviator. He waved to an enlisted man, a Navy petty officer first-class, to pick up on the active line from Moscow. This the sailor did, donning headphones and lighting up the word-processing program on his desktop computer. This sailor was a Russian linguist in addition to being a yeoman, and thus competent to drive the computer. He typed, translating as he listened in to the pirated Russian police radios, and his script came up on Major Teeters's computer screen.

I HAVE THE LICENSE NUMBER, CHECKING NOW, the first line read.

GOOD, QUICK AS YOU CAN.

WORKING ON IT, COMRADE. (TAPPING IN THE BACKGROUND, DO THRE RUSSKIES HAVE COMPUTERS FOR TIS STUFF NOW?)

I HAVE IT, WHITE MERCEDES BENZ, REGISTERED TO G. F. AVSYENKO, (NOT SURE OF SPELLING) 677 PROTOPOPOV PROSPEKT, FLAT 18A.

HIM? I KNOW THAT NAME!

Which was good for somebody, Major Teeters thought, but not all that great for Avsyenko. Okay, what next? The senior watch officer was another squid, Rear Admiral Tom Porter, probably drinking coffee in his office over in the main building and watching TV, maybe. Time to change that. He called the proper number.

"Admiral Porter."

"Sir, this is Major Teeters down in the watch center. We have some breaking news in Moscow."

"What's that, Major?" a tired voice asked.

"Station Moscow initially thought that somebody might have killed Chairman Golovko of the KG--- the SVR, I mean."

"What was that, Major?" a somewhat more alert voice inquired.

"Turns out it probably wasn't him, sir. Somebody named Avsyenko---" Teeters spelled it out.

"We're getting the intercepts off their police radio bands. I haven't run the name yet."

"What else?"

"Sir, that's all I have right now."

By this time, a CIA field officer named Tom Barlow was in the loop at the embassy. The third-ranking spook in the current scheme of things, he didn't want to drive over to Dzerzhinskiy Square himself, but he did the next best thing. Barlow called the CNN office, the direct line to a friend.

"Mike Evans."

"Mike, this is Jimmy," Tom Barlow said, initiating a prearranged and much-used lie.

"Dzerzhinskiy Square, the murder of somebody in a Mercedes. Sounds messy and kinda spectacular."

"Okay," the reporter said, making a brief note. "We're on it."

At his desk, Barlow checked his watch. 8:52 local time. Evans was a hustling reporter for a hustling news service. Barlow figured there'd be a mini cam there in twenty minutes. The truck would have its own Kuband uplink to a satellite, down from there to CNN headquarters in Atlanta, and the same signal would be pirated by the DoD downlink at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and spread around from there on government-owned satellites to interested parties. An attempt on the life of Chairman Golovko made it interesting as hell to a lot of people. Next he lit up his desktop Compaq computer and opened the file for Russian names that were known to CIA.

A duplicate of that file resided in any number of CIA computers at Langley, Virginia, and on one of those in the CIA Operations Room on the 7th floor of the Old Headquarters Building, a set of fingers typed A-V-S-Y E-N-K-O... and came up with nothing other than:

ENTIRE FILE SEARCHED. THE SEARCH ITEM WAS NOT FOUND.

That evoked a grumble from the person on the computer. So, it wasn't spelled properly.

"Why does this name sound familiar?" he asked. "But the machine says no-hit."

"Let's see..." a co-worker said, leaning over and respelling the name. "Try this..." Again a no-hit. A third variation was tried.

"Bingo! Thanks, Beverly," the watch officer said. "Oh, yeah, we know who this guy is. Rasputin. Low-life bastard--- sure as hell, look what happened when he went straight," the officer chuckled.

Rasputin?" Golovko asked. "Nekulturniy swine, eh?" He allowed himself a brief smile. "But who would wish him dead?" he asked his security chief, who, if anything, was taking the matter even more seriously than the Chairman. His job had just become far more complicated. For starters, he had to tell Sergey Nikolay'ch that the white Mercedes was no longer his personal conveyance. Too ostentatious. His next task of the day was to ask the armed sentries who posted the corners of the building's roof why they hadn't spotted a man in the load area of a dump truck with an RPG--- within three hundred meters of the building they were supposed to guard! And not so much as a warning over their portable radios until the Mercedes of Gregoriy Filipovich Avseyenko had been blown to bits. He'd sworn many oaths already on this day, and there would be more to come.

"How long has he been out of the service?" Golovko asked next.

"Since '93, Comrade Chairman," Major Anatoliy Ivan'ch Shelepin said, having just asked the same question and received the answer seconds earlier.

The first big reduction-in-force, Golovko thought, but it would seem that the pimp had made the transition to private enterprise well. Well enough to own a Mercedes Benz S-600... and well enough to be killed by enemies he'd made along the way... unless he'd unknowingly sacrificed his own life for that of another. That question still needed answering. The Chairman had recovered his self-control by this point, enough at any rate for his mind to begin functioning. Golovko was too bright a man to ask Why would anyone wish to end my life? He knew better than that. Men in positions like his made enemies, some of them deadly ones... but most of them were too smart to make such an attempt. Vendettas were dangerous things to begin at his level, and for that reason, they never happened. The business of international intelligence was remarkably sedate and civilized. People still died. Anyone caught spying for a foreign government against Mother Russia was in the deepest of trouble, new regime or not--- state treason was still state treason--- but those killings followed... what did the Americans call it? Due process of law. Yes, that was it. The Americans and their lawyers. If their lawyers approved of something, then it was civilized.

"Who else was in the car?" Golovko asked.

"His driver. We have the name, a former militiaman. And one of his women, it would seem, no name for her yet."

"What do we know of Gregoriy's routine? Why was he there this morning?"

"Not known at this time, Comrade," Major Shelepin replied. "The militia are working on it."

"Who is running the case?"

"Lieutenant Colonel Shablikov, Comrade Chairman."

"Yefim Konstantinovich--- yes, I know him. Good man," Golovko allowed. "I suppose he'll need his time, eh?"

"It does require time," Shelepin agreed.

More than it took for Rasputin to meet his end, Golovko thought. Life was such a strange thing, so permanent when one had it, so fleeting when it was lost--- and those who lost it could never tell you what it was like, could they? Not unless you believed in ghosts or God or an afterlife, things which had somehow been overlooked in Golovko's childhood. So, yet another great mystery, the spymaster told himself. It had come so close, for the first time in his life. It was disquieting, but on reflection, not so frightening as he would have imagined. The Chairman wondered if this was something he might call courage. He'd never thought of himself as a brave man, for the simple reason that he'd never faced immediate physical danger. It was not that he had avoided it, only that it had never come close until today, and after the outrage had passed, he found himself not so much bemused as curious. Why had this happened? Who had done it? Those were the questions he had to answer, lest it happen again. To be courageous once was enough, Golovko thought.

Dr. Benjamin Goodley arrived at Langley at 5:40, five minutes earlier than his customary time. His job largely denied him much of a social life, which hardly seemed fair to the National

Intelligence Officer. Was he not of marriageable age, possessed of good looks, a man with good prospects both in the professional and business sense? Perhaps not the latter, Goodley thought, parking his car in a VIP slot by the cement canopy of the Old Headquarters Building. He drove a Ford Explorer because it was a nice car for driving in the snow, and there would be snow soon. At least winter was coming, and winter in the D.C. area was wholly unpredictable, especially now that some of the eco-nuts were saying that global warming would cause an unusually cold winter this year. The logic of that escaped him. Maybe he'd have a chat with the President's Science Adviser to see if that made any sense talking with someone who could explain things. The new one was pretty good, and knew how to use single-syllable words.

Goodley made his way through the pass-gate and into the elevator. He walked into the Operations Room at 5:50 A.M.

"Hey, Ben," one said.

"Morning, Charlie. Anything interesting happening?"

"You're gonna love this one, Ben," Charlie Roberts promised. "A big day in Mother Russia."

"Oh?" Narrowed eyes. Goodley had his worries about Russia, and so did his boss. "What's that?"

"No big deal. Just somebody tried to whack Sergey Nikolay'ch."

His head snapped around like an owl's. "What?"

"You heard me, Ben, but they hit the wrong car with the RPG and took out somebody else we know--- well, used to know," Roberts corrected himself.

"Start from the beginning."

"Peggy, roll the videotape," Roberts commanded his watch officer with a theatrical wave of the arm.

"Whoa!" Goodley said after the first five seconds. "So, who was it really?"

"Would you believe Gregoriy Filipovich Avseyenko?"

"I don't know that name," Goodley admitted.

"Here." The watch officer handed over a manila folder. "What we had on the guy when he was KGB. A real sweetheart," she observed, in the woman's neutral voice of distaste.

"Rasputin?" Goodley said, scanning the first page. "Oh, okay, I have heard something about this one."

"So has the Boss, I bet."

"I'll know in two hours," Goodley imagined aloud. "What's Station Moscow saying?"

"The station chief is in St. Pete's for a trade conference, part of his cover duties. What we have is from his XO. The best bet to this point is that either Avseyenko made a big enemy in the Russian Mafia, or maybe Golovko was the real target, and they hit the wrong car. No telling which at this point." Followed by the usual NIO damned-if-I-know shrug.

"Who would want to take Golovko out?"

"Their Mafia? Somebody got himself an RPG, and they don't sell them in hardware stores, do they? So, that means somebody deeply into their criminal empire, probably, made the hit--- but who was the real target? Avseyenko must have had some serious enemies along the way, but Golovko must have enemies or rivals, too." She shrugged again. "You pays your money and you takes your choice."

"The Boss likes to have better information," Goodley warned.

"So do I, Ben," Peggy Hunter replied. "But that's all I got, and even the fuckin' Russians don't have better at this point."

"Any way we can look into their investigation?"

"The Legal Attaché, Mike Reilly, is supposed to be pretty tight with their cops. He got a bunch of them admitted to the FBI's National Academy post-grad cop courses down at Quantico."

"Maybe have the FBI tell him to nose around?"

Mrs. Hunter shrugged again. "Can't hurt. Worst thing anybody can say is no, and we're already there, right?"



Goodley nodded. "Okay, I'll recommend that." He got up. "Well," he observed on his way out the door, "the Boss won't bitch about how boring the world is today." He took the CNN tape with him and headed back to his SUV

The sun was struggling to rise now. Traffic on the George Washington Parkway was picking up with eager-beaver types heading into their desks early, probably Pentagon people, most of them, Goodley thought, as he crossed over the Key Bridge, past Teddy Roosevelt Island. The Potomac was calm and flat, almost oily, like the pond behind a mill dam. The outside temperature, his dashboard said, was forty-four, and the forecast for the day was a high in the upper fifties, a few clouds, and calm winds. An altogether pleasant day for late fall, though he'd be stuck in his office for all of it, pleasant or not.

Things were starting early at The House, he saw on pulling in. The Blackhawk helicopter was just lifting off as he pulled into his reserved parking place, and the motorcade had already formed up at the West Entrance. It was enough to make him check his watch. No, he wasn't late. He hustled out of his car, bundling the papers and cassette into his arms as he hurried inside.

"Morning, Dr. Goodley," a uniformed guard said in greeting.

"Hi, Chuck." Regular or not, he had to pass through the metal detector. The papers and cassette were inspected by hand--- as though he'd try to bring a gun in, Ben thought in passing irritation. Well, there had been a few scares, hadn't there? And these people were trained not to trust anybody.

Having passed the daily security test, he turned left, sprinted up the stairs, then left again to his office, where some helpful soul--- he didn't know if it was one of the clerical staff or maybe one of the Service people--- had his office coffee machine turning out some Gloria Jean's French Hazelnut. He poured himself a cup and sat down at his desk to organize his papers and his thoughts. He managed to down half of the cup before bundling it all up again for the ninety-foot walk. The Boss was already there.

"Morning, Ben."

"Good morning, Mr. President," replied the National Security Adviser.

"Okay, what's new in the world?" POTUS asked.

"It looks as though somebody might have tried to assassinate Sergey Golovko this morning."

"Oh?" President Ryan asked, looking up from his coffee. Goodley filled him in, then inserted the cassette in the Oval Office VCR and punched PLAY.

"Jeez," Ryan observed. What had been an expensive car was now fit only for the crushing machine. "Who'd they get instead?"

"One Gregory Filipovich Avseyenko, age fifty-two---"

"I know that name. Where from?"

"He's more widely known as Rasputin. He used to run the KGB Sparrow School."

Ryan's eyes went a little wider. "That cocksucker! Okay, what's the story on him?"

"He got RIF'd back in '93 or so, and evidently set himself up in the same business, and it would seem he's made some money at it, judging by his car, anyway. There was evidently a young woman in with him when he was killed, plus a driver. They were all killed."

Ryan nodded. The Sparrow School had been where for years the Soviets had trained attractive young women to be prostitutes in the service of their country both at home and abroad, because, since time immemorial, men with a certain weakness for women had often found their tongues loosened by the right sort of lubrication. Not a few secrets had been conveyed to the KGB by this method, and the women had also been useful in recruiting various foreign nationals for the KGB officers to exploit. So, on having his official office shut down, Rasputin--- so called by the Soviets for his ability to get women to bend to his will--- had simply plied his trade in the new free-enterprise environment.

"So, Avseyenko might have had 'business' enemies angry enough to take him out, and Golovko might not have been the target at all?"

"Correct, Mr. President. The possibility exists, but we don't have any supporting data one way or the other."

"How do we get it?"

"The Legal Attaché at the embassy is well connected with the Russian police," the National Security Adviser offered.

"Okay, call Dan Murray at FBI and have his man nose around," Ryan said. He'd already considered calling Golovko directly--- they'd known each other for more than ten years, though one of their initial contacts had involved Golovko's pistol right in Jack's face on one of the runways of Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport--- and decided against it. He couldn't show that much immediate interest, though later, if they had a private moment together, he'd be able to ask a casual question about the incident. "Same for Ed and MP at CIA."

"Right." Goodley made a note.

"Next?"

Goodley turned the page. "Indonesia is doing some naval exercises that have the Aussies a little interested..." Ben went on with the morning briefing for twenty more minutes, mainly covering political rather than military matters, because that's what national security had become in recent years. Even the international arms trade had diminished to the point that quite a few countries were treating their national military establishments as boutiques rather than serious instruments of statecraft.

"So, the world's in good shape today?" the President summarized.

"Except for the pothole in Moscow, it would seem so, sir."

The National Security Adviser departed, and Ryan looked at his schedule for the day. As usual, he had very little in the way of free time. About the only moments on his plan-of-the-day without someone in the office with him were those in which he'd have to read over briefing documents for the next meeting, many of which were planned literally weeks in advance. He took off his reading glasses--- he hated them--- and rubbed his eyes, already anticipating the morning headache that would come in about thirty minutes. A quick re-scan of the page showed no light moments today. No troop of Eagle Scouts from Wyoming, nor current World Series champs, nor Miss Plum Tomato from California's Imperial Valley to give him something to smile about. No. Today would be all work.

Shit, he thought.

The nature of the Presidency was a series of interlocking contradictions. The Most Powerful Man in the World was quite unable to use his power except under the most adverse circumstances, which he was supposed to avoid rather than to engage. In reality, the Presidency was about negotiations, more with the Congress than anyone else; it was a process for which Ryan had been unsuited until given a crash course by his chief of staff, Arnold van Damm. Fortunately, Arnie did a lot of the negotiations himself, then came into the Oval Office to tell the President what his (Ryan's) decision and/or position was on an issue, so that he (van Damm) could then do a press release or a statement in the Press Room. Ryan supposed that a lawyer treated his client that way much of the time, looking after his interests as best he could while not telling him what those interests were until they were already decided. The President, Arnie told everyone, had to be protected from direct negotiations with everyone--- specially Congress. And, Jack reminded himself, he had a fairly tame Congress. What had it been like for presidents dealing with contentious ones?

And what the hell, he wondered, not for the first time, was he doing here?

The election process had been the purest form of hell--- despite the fact that he'd had what Arnie invariably had called a cakewalk. Never less than five speeches per day, more often as many as nine, in as many different places before as many diverse groups--- but always the same speech,

delivered off file cards he kept in his pocket, changed only in minor local details by a frantic staff on the Presidential aircraft, trying to keep track of the flight plan. The amazing thing was that they'd never made a mistake that he'd caught. For variety, the President would alter the order of the cards. But the utility of that had faded in about three days.

Yes, if there were a hell in creation, a political campaign was its most tangible form, listening to yourself saying the same things over and over until your brain started rebelling and you started wanting to make random, crazy changes, which might amuse yourself, but it would make you appear crazy to the audience, and you couldn't do that, because a presidential candidate was expected to be a perfect automaton rather than a fallible man.

There had been an upside to it. Ryan had bathed in a sea of love for the ten weeks of the endurance race. The deafening cheers of the crowds, whether in a parking lot outside a Xenia, Ohio, shopping mall, or in Madison Square Garden in New York City, or Honolulu, or Fargo, or Los Angeles--- it had all been the same. Huge crowds of ordinary citizens who both denied and celebrated the fact that John Patrick Ryan was one of them... kind of, sort of, something like that--- but something else, too. From his first formal speech in Indianapolis, soon after his traumatic accession to the Presidency, he'd realized just how strong a narcotic that sort of adulation was, and sure enough, his continued exposure to it had given him the same sort of rush that a controlled substance might. With it came a desire to be perfect for them, to deliver his lines properly, to seem sincere--- as indeed he was, but it would have been far easier doing it once or twice instead of three hundred and eleven times, as the final count had been reckoned.

The news media in every place asked the same questions, written down or taped the same answers, and printed them as new news in every local paper. In every city and town, the editorials had praised Ryan, and worried loudly that this election wasn't really an election at all, except on the congressional level, and there Ryan had stirred the pot by giving his blessing to people of both major parties, the better to retain his independent status, and therefore to risk offending everyone.

The love hadn't quite been universal, of course. There were those who'd protested, who got their heads on the nightly commentary shows, citing his professional background, criticizing his drastic actions to stop the terrorist-caused Ebola plague that had threatened the nation so desperately in those dark days--- "Yes, it worked in this particular case, but...!" ---and especially to criticize his politics, which, Jack said in his speeches, weren't politics at all, but plain common sense.

During all of this, Arnie had been a godsend, preselecting a response to every single objection. Ryan was wealthy, some said. "My father was a police officer" had been the answer. "I've earned every penny I have--- and besides [going on with an engaging smile], now my wife makes a lot more money than I do."

Ryan knew nothing about politics: "Politics is one of those fields in which everybody knows what it is, but nobody can make it work. Well, maybe I don't know what it is, but I am going to make it work!"

Ryan had packed the Supreme Court: "I'm not a lawyer, either, sorry" he'd said to the annual meeting of the American Bar Association. "But I know the difference between right and wrong, and so do the justices."

Between the strategic advice of Arnie and the preplanned words of Callie Weston, he'd managed to parry every serious blow, and strike back with what was usually a soft and humorous reply of his own--- leavened with strong words delivered with the fierce but quiet conviction of someone who had little left to prove. Mainly, with proper coaching and endless hours of preparation, he'd managed to present himself as Jack Ryan, regular guy.

Remarkably, his most politically astute move had been made entirely without outside expertise.

Morning, Jack," the Vice President said, opening the door unannounced.

"Hey, Robby." Ryan looked up from his desk with a smile. He still looked a little awkward in suits, Jack saw. Some people were born to wear uniforms, and Robert Jefferson Jackson was one of them, though the lapel of every suit jacket he owned sported a miniature of his Navy Wings of Gold.

"There's some trouble in Moscow," Ryan said, explaining on for a few seconds.

"That's a little worrisome," Robby observed.

"Get Ben to give you a complete brief-in on this. What's your day look like?" the President asked.

"Sierra-square, Delta-square." It was their personal code: SSDD--- same shit, different day. "I have a meeting of the Space Council across the street in twenty minutes. Then tonight I have to fly down to Mississippi for a speech tomorrow morning at Ole Miss."

"You taking the wheel?" Ryan asked.

"Hey, Jack, the one good thing about this damned job is that I get to fly again." Jackson had insisted on getting rated on the VC-20B that he most often flew around the country on official trips under the code name "Air Force Two." It looked very good in the media, and it was also the best possible therapy for a fighter pilot who missed being in control of his aircraft, though it must have annoyed the Air Force flight crew. "But it's always to shit details you don't want," he added with a wink.

"It's the only way I could get you a pay raise, Robby. And nice quarters, too," he reminded his friend.

"You left out the flight pay," responded Vice Admiral R. J. Jackson, USN, retired. He paused at the door and turned. "What does that attack say about the situation over there in Russia?"

Jack shrugged. "Nothing good. They just can't seem to get ahead of things, can they?"

"I guess," the Vice President agreed. "Problem is, how the hell do we help them?"

"I haven't figured that one out yet," Jack admitted. "And we have enough potential economic problems on our horizon, with Asia sliding down the tubes."

"That's something I have to learn, this economic shit," Robby admitted.

"Spend some time with George Winston," Ryan suggested. "It's not all that hard, but you have to learn a new language to speak. Basis points, derivatives, all that stuff George knows it pretty good."

Jackson nodded. "Duly noted, sir."

"'Sir'? Where the hell did that come from, Rob?"

"You still be the National Command Authority, oh great man," Robby told him with a grin and a lower-Mississippi accent. "I just be da XO, which means Ah gits all the shit details."

"So, think of this as PCO School, Rob, and thank God you have a chance to learn the easy way. It wasn't like that for me---"

"I remember, Jack. I was here as J-3, remember? And you did okay. Why do you think I allowed you to kill my career for me?"

"You mean it wasn't the nice house and the drivers?"

The Vice President shook his head. "And it wasn't to be a first-black, either. I couldn't say 'no' when my President asks, even if it's a turkey like you. Later, man."

"See ya at lunch, Robby," Jack said as the door closed.

"Mr. President, Director Foley on Three," the speakerphone announced.

Jack lifted the secure phone and punched the proper button. "Morning, Ed."

"Hi, Jack, we have some more on Moscow"

"How'd we get it?" Ryan asked first, just to have a way of evaluating the information he was about to receive.

"Intercepts," the Director of Central Intelligence answered, meaning that the information would be fairly reliable. Communications intelligence was the most trusted of all, because people rarely lied to one another over the radio or telephone. "It seems this case has a very high priority over there, and the militiamen are talking very freely over their radios."

"Okay, what do you got?"

"Initial thinking over there is that Rasputin was the main target. He was pretty big, making a ton of money with his female... employees," Ed Foley said delicately, "and trying to branch out into other areas. Maybe he got a little pushy with someone who didn't like being pushed."

You think so?" Mike Reilly asked.

"Mikhail Ivan'ch, I am not sure what I think. Like you, I am not trained to believe in coincidences," replied Lieutenant Oleg Provalov of the Moscow Militia. They were in a bar which catered to foreigners, which was obvious from the quality of the vodka being served.

Reilly wasn't exactly new to Moscow. He'd been there fourteen months, and before that had been the Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the New York office of the FBI--- but not for Foreign Counter-Intelligence. Reilly was an OC-Organized Crime-expert who'd spent fifteen busy years attacking the Five Families of the New York Mafia, more often called LCN by the FBI, for La Cosa Nostra. The Russians knew this, and he'd established good relations with the local cops, especially since he'd arranged for some senior militia officers to fly to America to participate in the FBI's National Academy Program, essentially a Ph.D. course for senior cops, and a degree highly prized in American police departments.

"You ever have a killing like this in America?"

Reilly shook his head. "No, you can get regular guns pretty easy at home, but not anti-tank weapons. Besides, using them makes it an instant Federal case, and they've learned to keep away from us as much as they can. Oh, the wiseguys have used car bombs," he allowed, "but just to kill the people in the car. A hit like this is a little too spectacular for their tastes. So, what sort of guy was Avseyenko?"

A snort, and then Provalov almost spat the words out: "He was a pimp. He preyed on women, had them spread their legs, and then took their money. I will not mourn his passing, Mishka. Few will, but I suppose it leaves a vacuum that will be filled in the next few days."

"But you think he was the target, and not Sergey Golovko?"

"Golovko? To attack him would be madness. The chief of such an important state organ? I don't think any of our criminals have the balls for that."

Maybe, Reilly thought, but you don't start off a major investigation by making assumptions of any kind, Oleg Gregoriyevich. Unfortunately, he couldn't really say that. They were friends, but Provalov was thin-skinned, knowing that his police department did not measure up well against the American FBI. He'd learned that at Quantico. He was doing the usual right now, rattling bushes, having his investigators talk to Avseyenko's known associates to see if he'd spoken about enemies, disputes, or fights of one sort or another, checking with informants to see if anyone in the Moscow underworld had been talking about such things.

The Russians needed help on the forensic side, Reilly knew. At the moment they didn't even have the dump truck. Well, there were a few thousand of them, and that one might have been stolen without its owner/operator even knowing that it had been missing. Since the shot had been angled down, according to eyewitnesses, there would be little if any launch signature in the load area to help ID the truck, and they needed the right truck in order to recover hair and fibers. Of course, no one had gotten the tag number, nor had anyone been around with a camera during rush hour--- well, so far. Sometimes a guy would show up a day or two later, and in major investigations you played for breaks--- and usually the break was somebody who couldn't keep his mouth shut. Investigating people who knew how to stay silent was a tough way to earn a living. Fortunately, the criminal mind wasn't so circumspect--- except for the smart ones, and Moscow, Reilly had learned, had more than a few of them.

There were two kinds of smart ones. The first was composed of KGB officers cut loose in the series of major reductions-in-force--- known to Americans as RIFs--- similar to what had happened

in the American military. These potential criminals were frightening, people with real professional training and experience in black operations, who knew how to recruit and exploit others, and how to function invisibly--- people, as Reilly thought of it, who'd played a winning game against the FBI despite the best efforts of the Bureau's Foreign Counter-Intelligence Division.

The other was a lingering echo of the defunct communist regime. They were called *tolkachi*--- the word meant "pushers"--- and under the previous economic system they'd been the grease that allowed things to move. They were facilitators whose relationships with everyone got things done, rather like guerrilla warriors who used unknown paths in the wilderness to move products from one place to another. With the fall of communism their skills had become genuinely lucrative because it was still the case that virtually no one understood capitalism, and the ability to get things done was more valuable than ever--- and now it paid a lot better. Talent, as it always did, went where the money was, and in a country still learning what the rule of law meant, it was natural for men with this skill to break what laws there were, first in the service of whoever needed them, and then, almost instantly afterward, in the service of themselves. The former *tolkachi* were the most wealthy men in their country. With that wealth had come power. With power had come corruption, and with corruption had come crime, to the point that the FBI was nearly as active in Moscow as CIA had ever been. And with reason.

The union between the former KGB and the former *tolkachi* was creating the most powerful and sophisticated criminal empire in human history.

And so, Reilly had to agree, this Rasputin--- the name meant literally "the debauched one"--- might well have been part of that empire, and his death might well have been something related to that. Or something else entirely. This would be a very interesting investigation.

"Well, Oleg Gregoriyevich, if you need any help, I will do my best to provide it for you," the FBI agent promised.

"Thank you, Misha."

And they parted ways, each with his own separate thoughts.

## C H A P T E R - 1

### Echoes of the Boom

So, who were his enemies?" Lieutenant Colonel Shablikov asked. "Gregoriy Filipovich had many. He was overly free with his words. He insulted too many people and---"

"What else?" Shablikov demanded. "He was not blown up in the middle of the street for abusing some criminal's feelings!"

"He was beginning to think about importing narcotics," the informant said next.

"Oh? Tell us more."

"Grisha had contacts with Colombians. He met them in Switzerland three months ago, and he was working to get them to ship him cocaine through the port of Odessa. I heard whispers that he was setting up a pipeline to transport the drugs from there to Moscow."

"And how was he going to pay them for it?" The militia colonel asked. Russian currency was, after all, essentially valueless.

"Hard currency. Grisha made a lot of that from Western clients, and certain of his Russian clients. He knew how to make such people happy, for a price."

Rasputin, the colonel thought. And surely he'd been the debauched one. Selling the bodies of Russian girls--- and some boys, Shablikov knew--- for enough hard currency to purchase a large German car (for cash; his people had checked on the transaction already) and then planning to import drugs. That had to be for cash "up front," too, as the Americans put it, which meant that he planned to sell the drugs for hard currency, too, since the Colombians probably had little interest in rubles. Avseyenko was no loss to his country. Whoever had killed him ought to get some reward...

except someone new would certainly move into the vacuum and take control of the pimp's organization... and the new one might be smarter. That was the problem with criminals. There was a Darwinian process at work. The police caught some--- even many--- but they only caught the dumb ones, while the smart ones just kept getting smarter, and it seemed that the police were always trying to catch up, because those who broke the law always had the initiative.

"Ah, yes, and so, who else imports drugs?"

"I do not know who it is. There are rumors, of course, and I know some of the street vendors, but who actually organizes it, that I do not know."

"Find out," Shablikov ordered coldly. "It ought not to tax your abilities."

"I will do what I can," the informant promised.

"And you will do it quickly, Pavel Petrovich. You will also find out for me who takes over Rasputin's empire."

"Yes, Comrade Polkovnik Leytnant." The usual nod of submission.

There was power in being a senior policeman, Shablikov thought. Real human power, which you could impose on other men, and that made it pleasurable. In this case, he'd told a mid-level criminal what he had to do, and it would be done, lest his informant be arrested and find his source of income interrupted. The other side of the coin was protection of a sort. So long as this criminal didn't stray too far from what the senior cop found to be acceptable violations, he was safe from the law. It was the same over most of the world, Lieutenant Colonel Yefim Konstantinovich Shablikov of the Moscow Militia was sure. How else could the police collect the information they needed on people who did stray too far? No police agency in the world had the time to investigate everything, and thus using criminals against criminals was the easiest and least expensive method of intelligence-gathering.

The one thing to remember was that the informants were criminals, and hence unreliable in many things, too given to lying, exaggeration, to making up what they thought their master wanted to hear. And so Shablikov had to be careful believing anything this criminal said.

For his part, Pavel Petrovich Klusov had his own doubts, dealing as he did with this corrupted police colonel. Shablikov was not a former KGB officer, but rather a career policeman, and therefore not as smart as he believed himself to be, but more accustomed to bribes and informal arrangements with those he pursued. That was probably how he had achieved his fairly high rank. He knew how to get information by making deals with people like himself, Klusov thought. The informant wondered if the colonel had a hard-currency account somewhere. It would be interesting to find out where he lived, what sort of private car he or his wife drove. But he'd do what he was told, because his own "commercial" activities thrived under Shablikov's protection, and later that night he'd go out drinking with Irina Aganovna, maybe take her to bed later, and along the way find out how deeply mourned Avseyenko was by his... former... employees.

"Yes, Comrade Polkovnik Leytnant," Klusov agreed. "It will be as you say. I will try to be back with you tomorrow:"

"You will not try. You will do it, Pasha," Shablikov told him, like a schoolmaster demanding homework from an underachieving child.

It is already under way," Zhang told his Premier.

"I trust this one will go more smoothly than its two predecessors," the Premier replied dryly. The risks attached to this operation were incomparably greater. Both previous times, with Japan's attempt to drastically alter the Pacific Rim equation, and Iran's effort to create a new nation from the ashes of the Soviet Union, the People's Republic had not done anything, just... encouraged,

behind the scenes. This venture, though, was different. Well, one could not really expect great things to happen on the cheap, could one?

"I--- we have been unlucky."

"Perhaps so." A casual nod as he switched papers on his desk.

Zhang Han San's blood went a little cold at that. The Premier of the People's Republic was a man known for his detachment, but he'd always regarded his Minister Without Portfolio with a certain degree of warmth. Zhang was one of the few whose advice the Premier usually heeded. As indeed today the advice would be heeded, but without any feeling on the part of the senior official.

"We have exposed nothing and we have lost nothing," Zhang went on.

The head didn't come up. "Except that there is now an American ambassador in Taipei." And now there was talk of a mutual-defense treaty whose only purpose was to place the American navy between the two countries, regular port visits, perhaps even a permanent base (to be built entirely, most certainly, from Taiwanese money) whose only purpose, the Americans would innocently say, was merely to be a replacement for Subic Bay in the Philippines. The economy on Taiwan had exploded after the renewal of full U.S. diplomatic recognition, with an influx of massive new capital investments from all over the world. Much of that money would--- and should--- have come to the PRC, except for the change in Americas outlook.

But the American President Ryan had taken his action entirely on his own, so the intelligence services claimed, contrary to political and diplomatic advice in Washington--- though the American Secretary of State, that Adler man, had reportedly supported Ryan's foolish decision.

Zhang's blood temperature dropped another degree or so. Both of his plans had gone almost as he'd calculated they should, hadn't they? In neither case had his country risked anything of consequence--- oh, yes, they'd lost a few fighter aircraft the last time around, but those things and their pilots regularly crashed to no purpose anyway. Especially in the case of Taiwan, the People's Republic had acted responsibly, allowing Secretary Adler to shuttle directly back and forth between Beijing and its wayward province across the Formosa Strait, as though giving them legitimacy--- something obviously not intended by the PRC, but rather as a convenience to aid the American in his peacemaking task, so as to appear more reasonable to the Americans... and so, why had Ryan done it? Had he guessed Zhang's play? That was possible, but it was more likely that there was a leak, an informer, a spy this close to the summit of political power in the People's Republic. The counterintelligence agencies were examining the possibility. There were few who knew what emerged from his mind and his office, and all of them would be questioned, while technical people checked his telephone lines and the very walls of his office. Had he, Zhang, been in error? Certainly not! Even if his Premier felt that way... Zhang next considered his standing with the Politburo. That could have been better. Too many of them regarded him as an adventurer with too great an access to the wrong ear. It was an easy thing to whisper, since they'd be delighted to reap the profits from his policy successes, and only slightly less delighted to pull away from him if things went awry. Well, such were the hazards of having reached the summit of policy-making in a country such as his.

"Even if we wished to crush Taiwan, unless we opted for nuclear weapons, it would require years and vast amounts of treasure to construct the means to make it possible, and then it would be a vast risk to little profit. Better that the People's Republic should grow so successful economically that they come begging to us to be let back into the family home. They are not powerful enemies, after all. They are scarcely even a nuisance on the world stage." But for some reason, they were a specific nuisance to his Premier, Zhang reminded himself, like some sort of personal allergy that marked and itched his sensitive skin.

"We have lost face, Zhang. That is enough for the moment."

"Face is not blood, Xu, nor is it treasure."

"They have ample treasure," the Premier pointed out, still not looking at his guest. And that was true. The small island of Taiwan was immensely rich from the industrious effort of its mainly



ethnic-Chinese inhabitants, who traded nearly everything to nearly everywhere, and the restoration of American diplomatic recognition had increased both their commercial prosperity and their standing on the world stage. Try as he might, wish as he might, Zhang could not discount either of those things.

What had gone wrong? he asked himself again. Were not his plays brilliantly subtle ones? Had his country ever overtly threatened Siberia? No. Did even the People's Liberation Army's leadership know what the plans were? Well, yes, he had to admit to himself, some did, but only the most trusted people in the operations directorate, and a handful of senior field commanders--- the ones who would have to execute the plans if the time ever came. But such people knew how to keep secrets, and if they talked to anyone... but they wouldn't, because they knew what happened to people who spoke of things best left unspoken in a society such as theirs, and they knew that the very air had ears at their level of "trust." They hadn't even commented on the draft plans to anyone, just made the usual adjustments in the technical arrangements, as senior officers always tended to do. And so, perhaps some file clerks had the ability to examine the plans, but that was exceedingly unlikely as well. Security in the PLA was excellent. The soldiers, from private to the lower general ranks, had no more freedom than a machine bolted to the factory floor, and by the time they reached senior rank they'd mainly forgotten how to think independently, except perhaps in some technical matters, like which sort of bridge to build over a particular river. No, to Zhang they might as well have been machines, and were just as trustworthy.

Back to the original question: Why had that Ryan fellow reestablished relations with the "Republic of China"? Had he guessed anything about the Japan and Iran initiatives? The incident with the airliner had certainly looked like the accident it was supposed to simulate, and afterward the PRC had invited the American navy to come to the area and "keep the peace," as they liked to put it, as though peace were something you could place in a metal box and guard. In reality it was the other way 'round. War was the animal you kept in a cage, and then released when the time suited.

Had this President Ryan guessed the PRC's intentions to begin the dismemberment of the former Soviet Union, and then decided to punish the People's Republic with his recognition of the renegades on Taiwan? It was possible. There were those who found Ryan to be unusually perceptive for an American political figure... he was a former intelligence officer, after all, and had probably been a good one, Zhang reminded himself. It was always a serious mistake to underrate an adversary, as the Japanese and the Iranians had learned to their considerable sorrow. This Ryan fellow had responded skillfully to both of Zhang's plans, and yet he hadn't so much as whispered his displeasure to the PRC. There had been no American military exercises aimed even indirectly at the People's Republic, no "leaks" to the American media, and nothing that his country's own intelligence officers operating out of the embassy in Washington had discovered. And so, he was again back to the original question: Why had Ryan taken that action? He just didn't know. Not knowing was a great annoyance to a man at his level of government. Soon his Premier might ask a question for which he needed to have the answer. But for now the leader of his government was flipping papers on his desk, ostensibly to tell him, Zhang, that he, the Premier, was displeased, but not at this moment doing anything about his emotions.

Ten meters away through a solid-core wood door, Lian Ming had her own emotions. The secretarial chair she sat in was an expensive one, purchased from Japan, the price of it equal to the wages of a skilled worker for, what? Four months? Five? Certainly more than the price of the new bicycle she could have used.

A university graduate in modern languages, she spoke English and French well enough to make herself understood in any city in the world, and as a result she found herself going over all manner of diplomatic and intelligence documents for her boss, whose language skills were considerably

less than her own. The comfortable chair represented her boss's solicitude for the way in which she organized his work and his day. And a little more.

## CHAPTER - 2

### The Dead Goddess

This was where it had all happened, Chester Nomuri told himself. The vast expanse of Tiananmen Square, the "Square of Heavenly Peace," with the massive walls to his right, was like... what? On reflection he realized that he had nothing with which to compare it. If there were another place in all the world like this place, he had neither visited nor even heard of it.

And yet the very paving stones seemed to drip with blood. It was almost as if he could smell it here, though that was more than ten years in the past, the massed students, not much younger than he had been at the time in California, rallying here to protest their government. They hadn't protested the form of their country's government so much as the corruption of those at its highest levels, and, predictably, such actions had been hugely offensive to the corrupted. Well, that's how it usually went. Only with discretion did one point out the nature of a powerful man to himself, Eastern or Western, but this was the most dangerous place of all, because of its long history of gross brutality. Here there was an expectation of it...

...but the first time it had been tried right here, the soldiers ordered to clear things up had balked. And that must have frightened the leadership in their plush and comfortable offices, because when the organs of the state refused to do the bidding of the state, that was when something called "Revolution" started (and in a place where there had already been a Revolution, enshrined on this very spot). And so, the initial troop formations had been pulled back and replaced with others, drawn from farther away, young soldiers (all soldiers were young, Nomuri reminded himself). They had not yet been contaminated by the words and thoughts of their contemporaries demonstrating in the Square, not yet sympathetic with them, not yet willing to ask themselves why the government which gave them their weapons and uniforms wished for them to hurt these people instead of listening to what they had to say... and so, they'd acted like the mindless automatons they'd been trained to be.

There, just a few yards away, were some soldiers of the People's Liberation Army on parade, wearing the strange wax-doll look they tended to have, looking not quite human in their green wool uniforms, almost as though they used makeup, Chet thought, wanting to look more closely at their faces to see if maybe they really did. He turned away with a shake of his head. He hadn't flown JAL to China for that. Wangling this assignment for Nippon Electric Company had been difficult enough. It was a major drag working two jobs, as an upper-middle account executive for NEC and a field intelligence officer for CIA. To succeed in the second, he had also to succeed in the first, and to succeed in the first he had to simulate a true Japanese salaryman, one who subordinated everything short of his breathing to the good of the company. Well, at least he got to keep both of his salaries, and the Japanese one wasn't all that bad, was it? Not at the current exchange rate, anyway.

Nomuri supposed that this whole deal was a great sign of confidence in his abilities--- he'd established a modestly productive network of agents in Japan who would now report to other CIA case officers--- and also of desperation. The Agency had been singularly unsuccessful in getting a spy network operating over here in the PRC. Langley hadn't recruited many Chinese Americans into the fold... and one of those it had gotten was now in Federal prison after having developed a serious case of divided loyalties. It was a fact that certain federal agencies were allowed to be racist, and today Chinese ethnicity was strongly suspect at CIA headquarters. Well, there wasn't anything he could do about that--- nor could he pretend to be Chinese himself, Nomuri knew. To some half-blind racist European types, everyone with crooked eyes looked the same, but here in

Beijing, Nomuri, whose ancestry was a hundred percent Japanese (albeit entirely of the southern California variety), figured he stood out about as much as Michael Jordan would. It wasn't something to make an intelligence officer without diplomatic cover feel comfortable, especially since the Chinese Ministry of State Security was as active and well-supported as it was. MSS was every bit as powerful in this city as the Soviet KGB had ever been in Moscow, and was probably just as ruthless. China, Nomuri reminded himself, had been in the business of torturing criminals and other unloved ones for thousands of years... and his ethnicity would not be overly helpful. The Chinese did business with the Japanese because it was convenient--- necessary was a more accurate term--- but there was precisely zero love lost between the countries. Japan had killed far more Chinese in World War II than Hitler had killed Jews, a fact little appreciated anywhere in the world, except, of course, in China, and that set of facts only added to a racial/ethnic antipathy that went back at least as far as Kublai Khan.

He'd gotten too used to fitting in. Nomuri had joined CIA to serve his country, and to have a little fun, he'd thought at the time. Then he'd learned what a deadly serious business field-intelligence was, followed by the challenge of slipping into places he wasn't supposed to be, of obtaining information he wasn't supposed to get, and then giving it to people who weren't supposed to know it. It wasn't just serving his country that kept Nomuri in the business. There was also the thrill, the rush of knowing what others didn't know, of beating people at their own game, on their own turf.

But in Japan he looked like everyone else. Not here in Beijing. He was also a few inches taller than the average Chinese--- that came from his childhood diet and American furniture--- and better dressed in Western-style clothes. The clothes he could fix. His face he could not. For starters, he'd have to change his haircut, Chet thought. At least that way he could disappear from behind, and perhaps shake an MSS tail that way. He had a car to drive around, paid for by NEC, but he'd get a bicycle, too, a Chinese make rather than an expensive European one. If asked about it, he'd say it was good exercise--- and besides, wasn't it a perfectly fine socialist bicycle? But such questions would be asked, and notice of his presence would be taken, and in Japan, Nomuri realized, he'd gotten slack and comfortable running his agents. He'd known that he could disappear in a place as intimate as a steaming bathhouse, and there talk about women and sports and many other things, but rarely business. In Japan every business operation was secret at some level or other, and even with the intimate friends with whom he discussed their wives' shortcomings, a Japanese salaryman would not discuss goings-on in the office until after they were overt and public. And that was good for operational security, wasn't it?

Looking around like any other tourist, he wondered how he would handle such things here. But most of all he noticed that eyes lingered on him as he walked from one side of this immense square to the other. How had this place sounded when the tanks were here? He stood still for a moment, remembering... it was right there, wasn't it? . . . the guy with the briefcase and shopping bag who'd held up a company of tanks, just by standing there... because even the private in the driver's seat of a Type 80 PRC tank didn't have the stones to run over the guy, despite whatever his captain might have been screaming at him over the interphones from his place on top of the turret. Yeah, it was right about here that had happened. Later on, of course, in about a week, the guy with the briefcase had been arrested by MSS, so said CIA's sources, and he'd been taken away and interrogated to see what had persuaded him to take so public and so foolish a political stand against both the government and the armed forces of his country. That had probably lasted a while, the CIA officer thought, standing here and looking around from the spot where one brave man had taken his stand... because the MSS interrogators just wouldn't have believed that it had been one man acting on his own... the concept of acting on one's own was not something encouraged in a communist regime, and was therefore entirely alien to those who enforced the will of the State on those who broke the State's rules. Whoever he'd been, the guy with the briefcase was dead now--- the sources were pretty clear on that. An MSS official had commented on the matter with satisfaction later on, before someone whose ears were distantly connected to America. He'd taken the bullet in the back of the

head, and his family--- a wife and an infant son, the source believed--- had been billed for the pistol round needed to execute the husband/father/counterrevolutionary/enemy-of-the-state in question. Such was justice in the People's Republic of China.

And what was it they called foreigners here? Barbarians. Yeah, Nomuri thought, sure, Wilbur. The myth of central position was as alive here as it had been on the Ku-Damm of Adolf Hitler's Berlin. Racism was the same all over the world. Dumb. That was one lesson his country had taught the world, Chester Nomuri thought, though America still had to absorb the lesson herself.

She was a whore, and a very expensive one, Mike Reilly thought from his seat behind the glass. Her hair had been unnaturally blonded by some expensive shop in Moscow--- she needed another treatment, since there was a hint of dark brown at the roots--- but it went well with her cheekbones and eyes, which were not quite any shade of blue he'd ever seen in a woman's eyes. That was probably a hook for her repeat customers, the color, he thought, but not the expression. Her body could have been sculpted by Phidias of Athens to be a goddess fit for public worship, ample curves everywhere, the legs thinner than normal for Russian tastes, but ones that would have gotten along well at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, if that were still a nice neighborhood in which to be spotted...

...but the expression in her lovely eyes could have stopped the heart of a marathon runner. What was it about prostitution that did this to women? Reilly shook his head. He hadn't worked that particular class of crime very often--- it was mainly a violation for local cops--- and not enough, he supposed, to understand its practitioners. The look in her eyes was frightening. Only men were supposed to be predators, so he and most men thought. But this woman belied that belief to a fare-thee-well.

Her name was Tanya Bogdanova. She was, she said, twenty-three years of age. She had the face of an angel, and the body of a movie star. It was her heart and soul the FBI agent was unsure of. Maybe she was just wired differently from normal people, as so many career criminals seemed to be. Maybe she'd been sexually abused in her youth. But even at twenty-three, her youth was a very distant thing, judging from the way her eyes looked at her interrogator. Reilly looked down at her dossier-folder from Militia headquarters. There was only one shot of her in it, a distant black-and-white of her with a john--- well, probably an ivan, Reilly thought with a grunt--- and in this photo her face was animated, youthful, and as alluring as the young Ingrid Bergman had been to Bogie in Casablanca. Tanya could act, Reilly thought. If this were the real Tanya in front of him, as it probably was, then the one in the photo was a construct, a role to be played, an illusion--- a wonderful one, to be sure, but potentially a highly dangerous lie to anyone taken in by it. The girl on the other side of the one-way mirror could have dug a man's eyeballs out with her nail file, and then eaten them raw before going to her next appointment at the new Moscow Four Seasons Hotel and Convention Center.

"Who were his enemies, Tanya?" the militiaman asked in the interrogation room.

"Who were his friends?" she asked in bored reply. "He had none. Of enemies he had many." Her spoken language was literate and almost refined. Her English was supposed to be excellent as well. Well, she doubtless needed that for her customers... it was probably worth a few extra bucks, D-marks, pounds, or euros, a nice hard currency for whose printed notes she'd give a discount, doubtless smiling in a coquettish way when she told her john, jean, johannes, or ivan about it. Before or after? Reilly wondered. He'd never paid for it, though looking at Tanya, he understood why some men might...

"What's she charge?" he whispered to Provalov.

"More than I can afford," the detective lieutenant grunted. "Something like six hundred euros, perhaps more for an entire evening. She is medically clean, remarkably enough. A goodly collection of condoms in her purse, American, French, and Japanese brands."

"What's her background? Ballet, something like that?" the FBI agent asked, commenting implicitly on her grace.

Provalov grunted in amusement. "No, her tits are too big for that, and she's too tall. She weighs about, oh, fifty-five kilos or so, I would imagine. Too much for one of those little fairies in the Bolshoi to pick up and throw about. She could become a model for our growing fashion industry, but, no, on what you ask, her background is quite ordinary. Her father, deceased, was a factory worker, and her mother, also deceased, worked in a consumer-goods store. They both died of conditions consistent with alcohol abuse. Our Tanya drinks only in moderation. State education, undistinguished grades in that. No siblings, our Tanya is quite alone in the world--- and has been so for some time. She's been working for Rasputin for almost four years. I doubt the Sparrow School ever turned out so polished a whore as this one. Gregoriy Filipovich himself used her many times, whether for sex or just for his public escort, we're not sure, and she is a fine adornment, is she not? But whatever affection he may have had for her, as you see, was not reciprocated."

"Anyone close to her?"

Provalov shook his head. "None known to us, not even a woman friend of note."

The interview was pure vanilla, Reilly saw, like fishing for bass in a well-stocked lake, one of twenty-seven interrogations to this point concerning the death of G. F. Avseyenko--- everyone seemed to forget the fact that there had been two additional human beings in the car, but they probably hadn't been the targets. It wasn't getting any easier. What they really needed was the truck, something with physical evidence. Like most FBI agents, Reilly believed in tangibles, something you could hold in your hand, then pass off to a judge or jury, and have them know it was both evidence of a crime and proof of who had done it. Eyewitnesses, on the other hand, were often liars; at best they were easy for defense lawyers to confuse, and therefore they were rarely trusted by cops or juries. The truck might have blast residue from the RPG launch, maybe fingerprints on the greasy wrapping paper the Russians used for their weapons, maybe anything--- best of all would be a cigarette smoked by the driver or the shooter, since the FBI could DNA-match the residual saliva on that to anyone, which was one of the Bureau's best new tricks (six-hundred-million-to-one odds were hard for people to argue with, even highly paid defense attorneys). One of Reilly's pet projects was to bring over the DNA technology for the Russian police to use, but for that the Russians would have to front the cash for the lab gear, which would be a problem--- the Russians didn't seem to have the cash for anything important. All they had now was the remainder of the RPG warhead--- it was amazing how much of the things actually did survive launch and detonation--- which had a serial number that was being run down, though it was doubtful that this bit of information would lead anywhere. But you ran them all down because you never knew what was valuable and what was not until you got to the finish line, which was usually in front of a judge's bench with twelve people in a box off to your right. Things were a little different here in Russia, procedurally speaking, but the one thing he was trying to get through to the Russian cops he counseled was that the aim of every investigation was a conviction. They were getting it, slowly for most, quickly for a few, and also getting the fact that kicking a suspect's balls into his throat was not an effective interrogation technique. They had a constitution in Russia, but public respect for it still needed growing, and it would take time. The idea of the rule of law in this country was as foreign as a man from Mars.

The problem, Reilly thought, was that neither he nor anyone else knew how much time there was for Russians to catch up with the rest of the world. There was much here to admire, especially in the arts. Because of his diplomatic status, Reilly and his wife often got complimentary tickets to concerts (which he liked) and the ballet (which his wife loved), and that was still the class of the world... but the rest of the country had never kept up. Some at the embassy, some of the older CIA people who'd been here before the fall of the USSR, said that the improvements were incredible. But if that were true, Reilly told himself, then what had been here before must have been truly dreadful to behold, though the Bolshoi had probably still been the Bolshoi, even then.

"That is all?" Tanya Bogdanova asked in the interrogation room.

"Yes, thank you for coming in. We may call you again."

"Use this number," she said, handing over her business card. "It's for my cellular phone." That was one more Western convenience in Moscow for those with the hard currency, and Tanya obviously did.

The interrogator was a young militia sergeant. He stood politely and moved to get the door for her, showing Bogdanova the courtesy she'd come to expect from men. In the case of Westerners, it was for her physical attributes. In the case of her countrymen, it was her clothing that told them of her newfound worth. Reilly watched her eyes as she left the room. The expression was like that of a child who'd expected to be caught doing something naughty, but hadn't. How stupid father was, that sort of smile proclaimed. It seemed so misplaced on the angel-face, but there it was, on the other side of the mirror.

"Oleg?"

"Yes, Misha?" Provalov turned.

"She's dirty, man. She's a player," Reilly said in English. Provalov knew the cop-Americanisms.

"I agree, Misha, but I have nothing to hold her on, do I?"

"I suppose not. Might be interesting to keep an eye on her, though."

"If I could afford her, I would keep more than my eye on her, Mikhail Ivan'ch."

Reilly grunted amusement. "Yeah, I hear that."

"But she has a heart of ice."

"That's a fact," the FBI agent agreed. And the game in which she was a player was at best nasty, and at its worst, lethal.

So, what do we have?" Ed Foley asked, some hours later across the river from Washington.

"Gornischt so far," Mary Pat replied to her husband's question.

"Jack wants to be kept up to speed on this one."

"Well, tell the President that we're running as fast as we can, and all we have so far is from the Legal Attaché. He's in tight with the local cops, but they don't seem to know shit either. Maybe somebody tried to kill Sergey Nikolay'ch, but the Legat says he thinks Rasputin was the real target.

"I suppose he had his share of enemies," the Director of Central Intelligence conceded.

Thank you," the Vice President concluded to the packed house at the Ole Miss field house. The purpose of the speech was to announce that eight new destroyers would be built in the big Litton shipyard on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which meant jobs and money for the state, always items of concern for the governor, who was now standing and applauding as though the Ole Miss football team had just knocked off Texas at the Cotton Bowl. They took their sports seriously down here. And their politics, Robby reminded himself, stifling a curse for this tawdry profession that was so much like medieval bargaining in a village square, three good pigs for a cow or something, toss in a mug of bitter ale. Was this how one governed a country? He grinned as he shook his head. Well, there had been politics in the Navy, too, and he'd scaled those heights, but he'd done it, by being one hell of a good naval officer, and the best fucking fighter pilot ever to catapult off a flattop. On the last score, of course he knew that every fighter pilot sitting and waiting for the cat shot felt exactly the same way... it was just that he was totally correct in his self-assessment.

There were the usual hands to shake coming off the platform, guided by his Secret Service detail in their dark, forbidding shades, then down the steps and out the back door to his car, where another squad of armed men waited, their vigilant eyes looking ever outward, like the gunners on a B-17 over Schweinfurt must have done, the Vice President thought. One of them held open the car door, and Robby slid in.

"TOMCAT is rolling," the chief of the VP detail told his microphone as the car headed off.

Robby picked up his briefing folder as the car got onto the highway for the airport. "Anything important happening in D.C.?"

"Not that they've told me about," the Secret Service agent answered.

Jackson nodded. These were good people looking after him. The detail chief, he figured, was a medium-to-senior captain, and the rest of his troops j.g.'s to lieutenant commanders, which was how Robby treated them. They were underlings, but good ones, well-trained pros who merited the smile and the nod when they did things right, which they nearly always did. They would have made good aviators, most of them--- and the rest probably good Marines. The car finally pulled up to the VC-20B jet in an isolated corner of the general-aviation part of the airport, surrounded by yet more security troops. The driver stopped the car just twenty feet from the foot of the self-extending stairs.

"You going to drive us home, sir?" the detail chief asked, suspecting the answer.

"Bet your ass, Sam" was the smiling reply.

That didn't please the USAF captain detailed to be co-pilot on the aircraft, and it wasn't all that great for the lieutenant colonel supposed to be the pilot-in-command of the modified Gulfstream III. The Vice President liked to have the stick---- in his case the yoke--- in his hands at all times, while the colonel worked the radio and monitored the instruments. The aircraft spent most of its time on autopilot, of course, but Jackson, right seat or not, was determined to be the command pilot on the flight, and you couldn't very well say no to him. As a result, the captain would sit in the back and the colonel would be in the left seat, but jerking off. What the hell, the latter thought, the Vice President told good stories, and was a fairly competent stick for a Navy puke.

"Clear right," Jackson said, a few minutes later.

"Clear left," the pilot replied, confirming the fact from the plane-walker in front of the Gulfstream.

"Starting One," Jackson said next, followed thirty seconds later by "Starting Two."

The ribbon gauges came up nicely. "Looking good, sir," the USAF lieutenant colonel reported. The G had Rolls-Royce Spey engines, the same that had once been used on the U.K. versions of the F-4 Phantom fighter, but somewhat more reliable.

"Tower, this is Air Force Two, ready to taxi."

"Air Force Two, Tower, cleared to taxiway three."

"Roger, Tower AF-Two taxiing via three." Jackson slipped the brakes and let the aircraft move, its fighter engines barely above idle, but guzzling a huge quantity of fuel for all that. On a carrier, Jackson thought, you had plane handlers in yellow shirts to point you around. Here you had to go according to the map/diagram--- clipped to the center of the yoke--- to the proper place, all the while looking around to make sure some idiot in a Cessna 172 didn't stray into your path like a stray car in the supermarket parking lot. Finally, they reached the end of the runway, and turned to face down it.

"Tower, this is Spade requesting permission to take off." It just sort of came out on its own.

A laughing reply: "This ain't the Enterprise, Air Force Two, and we don't have cat shots here, but you are cleared to depart, sir."

You could hear the grin in the reply: "Roger, Tower, AF-Two is rolling."

"Your call sign was really 'Spade'?" the assigned command pilot asked as the VC-20B started rolling.

"Got hung on by my first CO, back when I was a new nugget. And it kinda stuck." The Vice President shook his head. "Jesus, that seems like a long time ago."

"V-One, sir," the Air Force officer said next, followed by "V-R."

At velocity-rotation, Jackson eased back on the yoke, bringing the aircraft off the ground and into the air. The colonel retracted the landing gear on command, while Jackson flipped the wheel half an inch left and right, rocking the wings a little as he always did to make sure the aircraft was

willing to do what he told it. It was, and inside of three minutes, the G was on autopilot, programmed to turn, climb, and level out at thirty-nine thousand feet.

"Boring, isn't it?"

"Just another word for safe, sir," the USAF officer replied.

Fucking trash-hauler, Jackson thought. No fighter pilot would say something like that out loud. Since when was flying supposed to be... well, Robby had to admit to himself, he always buckled his seat belt before starting his car, and never did anything reckless, even with a fighter plane. But it offended him that this aircraft, like almost all of the new ones, did so much of the work that he'd been trained to do himself. It would even land itself... well, the Navy had such systems aboard its carrier aircraft, but no proper naval aviator ever used it unless ordered to, something Robert Jefferson Jackson had always managed to avoid. This trip would go into his logbook as time in command, but it really wasn't. Instead it was a microchip in command, and his real function was to be there to take proper action in case something broke. But nothing ever did. Even the damned engines. Once turbojets had lasted a mere nine or ten hours before having to be replaced. Now there were Spey engines on the G fleet that had twelve thousand hours. There was one out there with over thirty thousand that Rolls-Royce wanted back, offering a free brand-new replacement because its engineers wanted to tear that one apart to learn what they'd done so right, but the owner, perversely and predictably, refused to part with it. The rest of the Gulfstream airframe was about that reliable, and the electronics were utterly state-of-the-art, Jackson knew, looking down at the color display from the weather-radar. It was a clear and friendly black at the moment, showing what was probably smooth air all the way to Andrews. There was as yet no instrument that detected turbulence, but up here at flight level three-niner-zero, that was a pretty rare occurrence, and Jackson wasn't often susceptible to airsickness, and his hand was inches from the yoke in case something unexpected happened. Jackson occasionally hoped that something would happen, since it would allow him to show just how good an aviator he was... but it never did. Flying had become too routine since his childhood in the F-4N Phantom and his emerging manhood in the F-14A Tomcat. And maybe it was better that way. Yeah, he thought, sure.

"Mr. Vice President?" It was the voice of the USAF communications sergeant aboard the VC-20. Robby turned to see her with a sheaf of papers.

"Yeah, Sarge?"

"Flash traffic just came in on the printer." She extended her hand, and Robby took the paper.

"Colonel, your airplane for a while," the VP told the lieutenant colonel in the left seat.

"Pilot's airplane," the colonel agreed, while Robby started reading.

It was always the same, even though it was also always different. The cover sheet had the usual classification formatting. It had once impressed Jackson that the act of showing a sheet of paper to the wrong person could land him in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary--- at the time, actually, the since-closed Portsmouth Naval Prison in New Hampshire--- but now as a senior government official in Washington, D.C., he knew he could show damned near anything to a reporter from The Washington Post and not be touched for it. It wasn't so much that he was above the law as he was one of the people who decided what the law meant. What was so damned secret and sensitive in this case was that CIA didn't know shit about the possible attempt on the life of Russia's chief spymaster... which meant nobody else in Washington did, either....

## C H A P T E R - 3

### The Problems with Riches

The issue was trade, not exactly the President's favorite, but then, at this level, every issue took on sufficient twists that even the ones you thought you knew about became strange at best, unknown and alien at worst.

"George?" Ryan said to his Secretary of the Treasury, George Winston.



"Mr. Pres---"

"Goddammit, George!" The President nearly spilled his coffee with the outburst.

"Okay." SecTreas nodded submission. "It's hard to make the adjustment... Jack." Ryan was getting tired of the Presidential trappings, and his rule was that here, in the Oval Office, his name was Jack, at least for his inner circle, of which Winston was one. After all, Ryan had joked a few times, after leaving this marble prison, he might be working for TRADER, as the Secret Service knew him, back in New York on The Street, instead of the other way 'round. After leaving the Presidency, something for which Jack prostrated himself before God every night--- or so the stories went--- he'd have to find gainful employment somewhere, and the trading business beckoned. Ryan had shown a rare gift for it, Winston reminded himself. His last such effort had been a California company called Silicon Alchemy, just one of many computer outfits, but the only one in which Ryan had taken an interest. So skillfully had he brought that firm to IPO that his own stock holdings in SALC--- its symbol on the big board--- were now valued at just over eighty million dollars, making Ryan by far the wealthiest American President in history. It was something his politically astute Chief of Staff, Arnold van Damm, did not advertise to the news media, who typically regarded every wealthy man as a robber baron, excepting, of course, the owners of the papers and TV stations themselves, who were, of course, the best of public-spirited citizens. None of this was widely known, even in the tight community of Wall Street big-hitters, which was remarkable enough. Should he ever return to The Street, Ryan's prestige would be sufficient to earn money while he slept in his bed at home. And that, Winston freely admitted, was something well and truly earned, and be damned to whatever the media hounds thought of it.

"It's China?" Jack asked.

"That's right, Boss," Winston confirmed with a nod. "Boss" was a term Ryan could stomach, as it was also the in-house term the Secret Service--- which was part of Winston's Department of the Treasury--- used to identify the man they were sworn to protect. "They're having a little cash-shortfall problem, and they're looking to make it up with us."

"How little?" POTUS asked.

"It looks as though it will annualize out to, oh, seventy billion or so."

"That is, as we say, real money."

George Winston nodded. "Anything that starts with a 'B' is real enough, and this is a little better than six 'Bs' a month."

"Spending it for what?"

"Not entirely sure, but a lot of it has to be military-related. The French arms industries are tight with them now, since the Brits kiboshed the jet-engine deal from Rolls-Royce."

The President nodded, looking down at the briefing papers. "Yeah, Basil talked the PM out of it." That was Sir Basil Charleston, chief of the British Secret Intelligence Service, sometimes called (erroneously) MI6. Basil was an old friend of Ryan's, going back to his CIA days. "It was a remarkably stand-up thing to do."

"Well, our friends in Paris don't seem to think the same way."

"They usually don't," Ryan agreed. The odd thing was the dichotomy inherent in dealing with the French. In some things, they weren't so much allies as blood brothers, but in others they were less than mere associates, and Ryan had trouble figuring out the logic by which the French changed their minds. Well, the President thought, that's what I have a State Department for.... "So, you think the PRC is building up its military again?"

"Big time, but not so much their navy, which makes our friends in Taiwan feel a little better."

That had been one of President Ryan's foreign-policy initiatives after concluding hostilities with the defunct United Islamic Republic, now restored to the separate nations of Iran and Iraq, which were at least at peace with each other. The real reasons for the recognition of Taiwan had never been made known to the public. It looked pretty clear to Ryan and his Secretary of State, Scott Adler, that the People's Republic of China had played a role in the Second Persian Gulf War, and

probably in the preceding conflict with Japan, as well. Exactly why? Well, some in CIA thought that China lusted after the mineral riches in eastern Siberia--- this was suggested by intercepts and other access to the electronic mail of the Japanese industrialists who'd twisted their nation's path into a not-quite-open clash with America. They'd referred to Siberia as the "Northern Resource Area," harkening back to when an earlier generation of Japanese strategists had called South Asia the "Southern Resource Area." That had been part of another conflict, one known to history as the Second World War. In any case, the complicity of the PRC with America's enemies had merited a countermove, Ryan and Adler had agreed, and besides, the Republic of China on Taiwan was a democracy, with government officials elected by the people of that nation island--- and that was something America was supposed to respect.

"You know, it would be better if they started working their navy and threatening Taiwan. We are in a better position to forestall that than---"

"You really think so?" SecTreas asked, cutting his President off.

"The Russians do," Jack confirmed.

"Then why are the Russians selling the Chinese so much hardware?" Winston demanded. "That doesn't make sense!"

"George, there is no rule demanding that the world has to make sense." That was one of Ryan's favorite aphorisms. "That's one of the things you learn in the intelligence business. In 1938, guess who was Germany's number one trading partner?"

SecTreas saw that sandbag coming before it struck. "France?"

"You got it." Ryan nodded. "Then, in '40 and '41, they did a lot of trade with the Russians. That didn't work out so well either, did it?"

"And everyone always told me that trade was a moderating influence," the Secretary observed.

"Maybe it is among people, but remember that governments don't have principles so much as interests--- at least the primitive ones, the ones who haven't figured it all out yet..."

"Like the PRC?"

It was Ryan's turn to nod. "Yeah, George, like those little bastards in Beijing. They rule a nation of a billion people, but they do it as though they were the new coming of Caligula. Nobody ever told them that they have a positive duty to look after the interests of the people they rule--- well, maybe that's not true," Ryan allowed, feeling a little generous. "They have this big, perfect theoretical model, promulgated by Karl Marx, refined by Lenin, then applied in their country by a pudgy sexual pervert named Mao."

"Oh? Pervert?"

"Yeah." Ryan looked up. "We had the data over at Langley. Mao liked virgins, the younger the better. Maybe he liked to see the fear in their cute little virginal eyes--- that's what one of our pshrink consultants thought, kinda like rape, not so much sex as power. Well, I guess it could have been worse--- at least they were girls," Jack observed rather dryly, "and their culture is historically a little more liberal than ours on that sort of thing." A shake of the head. "You should see the briefs I get whenever a major foreign dignitary comes over, the stuff we know about their personal habits."

A chuckle: "Do I really want to know?"

A grimace: "Probably not. Sometimes I wish they didn't give me the stuff. You sit them down right here in the office, and they're charming and businesslike, and you can spend the whole fucking meeting looking for horns and hooves." That could be a distraction, of course, but it was more generally thought that as in playing poker for high stakes, the more you knew about the guy on the other side of the table, the better, even if it might make you want to throw up during the welcoming ceremony on the White House South Lawn. But that was the business of being President, Ryan reminded himself. And people actually fought like tigers to get there. And would again, when he left, POTUS reminded himself. And so, Jack, is it your job to protect your country from the kind of rat who lusts to be where all the really good cheese is stored? Ryan shook his head

again. So many doubts. It wasn't so much that they never went away. They just kept getting bigger all the time. How strange that he understood and could recount every small step that had led him to this office, and yet he still asked himself several times every hour how the hell he'd come to be in this place... and how the hell he'd ever get out. Well, he had no excuses at all this time. He'd actually run for election to the Presidency. If you could call it that--- Arnie van Damm didn't, as a matter of fact--- which you could, since he'd fulfilled the constitutional requirements, a fact on which just about every legal scholar in the nation had agreed, and talked about on every major news network ad nauseam. Well, Jack reminded himself, I wasn't watching much TV back then, was I? But it all really came down to one thing: The people you dealt with as President were very often people whom you would never willingly invite into your home, and it had nothing to do with any lack of manners or personal charm, which, perversely, they usually displayed in abundance. One of the things Arnie had told Jack early on was that the main requirement to enter the political profession was nothing more nor less than the ability to be pleasant to people whom you despised, and then to do business with them as if they were bosom friends.

"So, what do we know about our heathen Chinese friends?" Winston asked. "The current ones, that is."

"Not much. We're working on that. The Agency has a long way to go, though we are started on the road. We still get intercepts. Their phone system is leaky, and they use their cell phones too much without encrypting them. Some of them are men of commendable vigor, George, but nothing too terribly scandalous that we know about. Quite a few of them have secretaries who are very close to their bosses."

The Secretary of the Treasury managed a chuckle. "Well, a lot of that going around, and not just in Beijing."

"Even on Wall Street?" Jack inquired, with a theatrically raised eyebrow.

"I can't say for sure, sir, but I have heard the occasional rumor." Winston grinned at the diversion.

And even right here in this room, Ryan reminded himself. They'd changed the rug long since, of course, and all the furniture, except for the Presidential desk. One of the problems associated with holding this job was the baggage piled on your back by previous officeholders. They said the public had a short memory, but that wasn't true, was it? Not when you heard the whispers, followed by chuckles, and accompanied by knowing looks and the occasional gesture that made you feel dirty to be the subject of the chuckles. And all you could do about it was to live your life as best you could, but even then the best you could hope for was for people to think you were smart enough not to get caught, because they all did it, right? One of the problems with living in a free country was that anyone outside this palace/prison could think and say whatever he wished. And Ryan didn't even have the right that any other citizen might have to punch out whatever twit said something about his character that the twit was unwilling to back up. It hardly seemed fair, but as a practical matter, it would force Ryan to visit a lot of corner bars, and break a lot of knuckles, to little gain. And sending sworn cops or armed Marines out to handle matters wasn't exactly a proper use of Presidential power, was it?

Jack knew that he was far too thin-skinned to hold this job. Professional politicians typically had hides that made a rhinoceros's look like rose petals, because they expected to have things hurled at them, some true, some not. By cultivating that thick covering, they attenuated the pain somehow, until eventually people stopped hurling things at them, or such was the theory. Maybe it actually worked for some. Or maybe the bastards just didn't have consciences. You paid your money and you took your choice.

But Ryan did have a conscience. That was a choice he'd made long before. You still had to look in the mirror once a day, usually at shaving time, and there was no easy fix for not being able to like the face you saw there.

"Okay, back to the PRC's problems, George," the President commanded.

"They're going to juice up their trade--- one way, that is. They're discouraging their own citizens from buying American, but all they can sell, they sell. Including some of Mao's young virgins, probably."

"What do we have to prove that?"

"Jack, I pay close attention to results, and I have friends in various businesses who shake the bushes and talk to people over drinks. What they learn frequently gets back to me. You know, a lot of ethnic Chinese have some weird medical condition. You get one drink into them, it's like four or five for us--- and the second drink is like chugging a whole bottle of Jack Daniel's, but some of the dummies try to keep up anyway, some hospitality thing, maybe. Anyway, when that happens, well, the talk becomes freer, y'know? It's been going on quite a while, but lately Mark Gant set up a little program. Senior executives who go to certain special places, well, I do own the Secret Service now, and the Secret Service does specialize in economic crimes, right? And a lot of my old friends know who I am and what I do now, and they cooperate pretty nice, and so I get a lot of good stuff to write up. It mainly goes to my senior people across the street."

"I'm impressed, George. You cross-deck it to CIA?"

"I suppose I could, but I was afraid they'd get all pissy over turf rights and stuff."

Ryan rolled his eyes at that bit of information. "Not Ed Foley. He's a real pro from way back, and the bureaucracy over at Langley hasn't captured him yet. Have him over to your office for lunch. He won't mind what you're doing. Same thing with Mary Pat. She runs the Directorate of Operations. MP's a real cowgirl, and she wants results, too."

"Duly noted. You know, Jack, it's amazing how much people talk, and the things they talk about under the proper circumstances."

"How'd you make all that money on The Street, George?" Ryan asked.

"Mainly by knowing a little more than the guy across the street," Winston replied.

"Works the same way for me here. Okay, if our little friends go forward with this, what should we do?"

"Jack--- no, now it's Mr. President--- we've been financing Chinese industrial expansion for quite a few years now. They sell things to us, we pay cash for them, and then they either keep the money for their own purposes on the international money markets, or they purchase things they want from other countries, often things they could as easily buy from us, but maybe half a percent more expensive from an American manufacturer. The reason it's called 'trade' is that you theoretically exchange something of yours for something of the other guy's--- just like kids with baseball cards, okay?--- but they're not playing the game that way. They're also dumping some products just to get dollars, selling items here for less than what they sell them to their own citizens. Now, that is technically in violation of a couple federal statues. Okay," Winston shrugged, "it's a statute we enforce somewhat selectively, but it is on the books, and it is the law. Toss in the Trade Reform Act that we passed a few years ago because of the games the Japs were playing---"

"I remember, George. It kinda started a little shooting war in which some people got killed," POTUS observed dryly. Worst of all, perhaps, it had begun the process that had ended up with Ryan in this very room.

SecTreas nodded. "True, but it's still the law, and it was not a bill of attainder meant only to apply to Japan. Jack, if we apply the same trade laws to China that the Chinese apply to us, well, it'll put a major crimp in their foreign exchange accounts. Is that a bad thing? No, not with the trade imbalance we have with them now. You know, Jack, if they start building automobiles and play the same game they're playing on everything else, our trade deficit could get real ugly real fast, and frankly I'm tired of having us finance their economic development, which they then execute with heavy equipment bought in Japan and Europe. If they want trade with the United States of America, fine, but let it be trade. We can hold our own in any truly fair trade war with any country, because American workers can produce as well as anybody in the world and better than most. But if we let

them cheat us, we're being cheated, Jack, and I don't like that here any more than I do around a card table. And here, buddy, the stakes are a hell of a lot higher."

"I hear you, George. But we don't want to put a gun to their head, do we? You don't do that to a nation-state, especially a big nation-state, unless you have a solid reason for doing so. Our economy is chugging along rather nicely now, isn't it? We can afford to be a little magnanimous.

"Maybe, Jack. What I was thinking was a little friendly encouragement on our part, not a pointed gun exactly. The gun is always there in the holster--- the big gun is most-favored-nation status, and they know it, and we know they know it. TRA is something we can apply to any country, and I happen to think the idea behind the law is fundamentally sound. It's been fairly useful as a club to show to a lot of countries, but we've never tried it on the PRC. How come?"

POTUS shrugged, with no small degree of embarrassment. "Because I haven't had the chance to yet, and before me too many people in this town just wanted to kiss their collective ass."

"Leaves a bad taste in your mouth when you do that, Mr. President, doesn't it?"

"It can," Jack agreed. "Okay, you want to talk this over with Scott Adler. The ambassadors all work for him."

"Who do we have in Beijing?"

"Carl Hitch. Career FSO, late fifties, supposed to be very good, and this is his sunset assignment."

"Payoff for all those years of holding coats?"

Ryan nodded. "Something like that, I suppose. I'm not entirely sure. State wasn't my bureaucracy." CIA, he didn't add, was bad enough.

It was a much nicer office, Bart Mancuso thought. And the shoulder boards on his undress whites were a little heavier now, with the four stars instead of the two he'd worn as COMSUBPAC. But no more. His former boss, Admiral Dave Seaton, had fletted up to Chief of Naval Operations, and then the President (or someone close to him) had decided that Mancuso was the guy to be the next Commander in Chief, Pacific. And so he now worked in the same office once occupied by Chester Nimitz, and other fine--- and some brilliant--- naval officers since. It was quite a stretch since Plebe Summer at Annapolis, lo those many years before, especially since he'd had only a single command at sea, USS Dallas, though that command tour had been a noteworthy one, complete with two missions he could still tell no one about. And having been shipmates once and briefly with the sitting President probably hadn't hurt his career very much.

The new job came with a plush official house, a sizable team of sailors and chiefs to look after him and his wife--- the boys were all away at college now--- the usual drivers, official cars, and, now, armed bodyguards, because, remarkably enough, there were people about who didn't much care for admirals. As a theater commander Mancuso now reported directly to the Secretary of Defense, Anthony Bretano, who in turn reported directly to President Ryan. In return, Mancuso got a lot of new perks. Now he had direct access to all manner of intelligence information, including the holy of holies, sources and methods--- where the information came from, and how we'd gotten it out--- because as America's principal executor for a quarter of the globe's surface, he had to know it all, so that he'd know what to advise the SecDef, who would, in turn, advise the President of CINCPAC's views, intentions, and desires.

The Pacific, Mancuso thought, having just completed his first morning intel brief, looked okay. It hadn't always been like that, of course, including recently, when he'd fought a fairly major conflict--- "war" was a word that had fallen very much out of favor in civilized discourse--- with the Japanese, and that had included the loss of two of his nuclear submarines, killed with treachery and deceit, as Mancuso thought of it, though a more objective observer might have called the tactics employed by the enemy clever and effective.

Heretofore he'd been notified of the locations and activities of his various submarines, but now he also got told about his carriers, tin cans, cruisers, and replenishment ships, plus Marines, and even Army and Air Force assets, which were technically his as a theater commander-in-chief. All that meant that the morning intel brief lasted into a third cup of coffee, by the end of which he looked longingly to the executive head, just a few feet away from his desk. Hell, his intelligence coordinator, called a J-2, was, in fact, an Army one-star doing his "joint" tour, and, in fairness, doing it pretty well. This brigadier, named Mike Lahr, had taught political science at West Point, in addition to other assignments. Having to consider political factors was a new development in Mancuso's career, but it came with the increased command territory.

CINCPAC had done his "joint" tour along the way, of course, and was theoretically conversant with the abilities and orientation of his brother armed services, but whatever confidence he'd had along those lines diminished in the face of having the command responsibility to utilize such forces in a professional way. Well, he had subordinate commanders in those other services to advise him, but it was his job to know more than just how to ask questions, and for Mancuso that meant he'd have to go out and get his clothes dirty seeing the practical side, because that was where the kids assigned to his theater would shed blood if he didn't do his job right.

The team was a joint venture of the Atlantic Richfield Company, British Petroleum, and the largest Russian oil exploration company. The last of the three had the most experience but the least expertise, and the most primitive methods. This was not to say that the Russian prospectors were stupid. Far from it. Two of them were gifted geologists, with theoretical insights that impressed their American and British colleagues. Better still, they'd grasped the advantages of the newest exploration equipment about as quickly as the engineers who'd designed it.

It had been known for many years that this part of eastern Siberia was a geological twin to the North Slope region of Alaska and Northern Canada, which had turned into vast oil fields for their parent countries to exploit. The hard part had been getting the proper equipment there to see if the similarity was more than just cosmetic.

Getting the gear into the right places had been a minor nightmare. Brought by train into southeastern Siberia from the port of Vladivostok, the "thumper trucks"--- they were far too heavy to airlift--- had then spent a month going cross-country, north from Magdagachi, through Aim and Ust Maya, finally getting to work east of Kazachye.

But what they had found had staggered them. From Kazachye on the River Yana all the way to Kolymskaya on the Kolyma was an oilfield to rival the Persian Gulf. The thumper trucks and portable computer--- carrying seismic-survey vehicles had shown a progression of perfect underground dome formations in stunning abundance, some of them barely two thousand feet down, mere tens of vertical yards from the permafrost, and drilling through that would be about as hard as slicing a wedding cake with a cavalryman's saber. The scope of the field could not be ascertained without drilling test wells--- over a hundred such wells, the chief American engineer thought, just from the sheer scope of the field--- but no one had ever seen as promising or as vast a natural deposit of petroleum during his professional lifetime. The issues of exploitation would not be small ones, of course. Except for Antarctica itself, there was no place on the planet with a less attractive climate. Getting the production gear in here would take years of multistage investment, building airfields, probably building ports for the cargo ships that could alone deliver the heavy equipment--- and then only in the brief summer months--- needed to construct the pipeline which would be needed to get the oil out to market. Probably through Vladivostok, the Americans thought. The Russians could sell it from there, and super-tankers, more precisely called VLCCs or ULCCs--- for Very Large to Ultra-Large Crude Carriers--- would move it out across the Pacific, maybe to Japan, maybe to America or elsewhere, wherever oil was needed, which was just about everywhere. From those users would come hard currency. It would take many more years until

Russia could build the wherewithal needed for its own industries and consumers to use the oil, but, as such things happened, the cash generated from selling the Siberian crude could then be flipped and used to purchase oil from other sources, which would be much more easily transported to Russian ports and thence into existing Russian pipelines. The cash difference of selling and buying, as opposed to building a monstrous and monstrously expensive pipeline, was negligible in any case, and such decisions were usually made for political rather than economic reasons.

At precisely the same time, and only six hundred miles, or nine hundred sixty or so kilometers, away, another geology team was in the eastern extreme of the Sayan mountain range. Some of the semi-nomadic tribes in the area, who had made their living for centuries by herding reindeer, had brought into a government office some shiny yellow rocks. Few people in the world have been unaware of what such rocks mean, at least for the preceding thirty centuries, and a survey team had been dispatched from Moscow State University, still the nation's most prestigious school. They had been able to fly in, since their equipment was far lighter, and the last few hundred kilometers had been done on horseback, a wonderful anachronism for the survey team of academics, who were far more used to riding Moscow's fine subway system.

The first thing they'd found was an eighty-ish man living alone with his herd and a rifle to fend off wolves. This citizen had lived alone since the death of his wife, twenty years before, quite forgotten by the changing governments of his country, known to exist only by a few shopkeepers in a dreary village thirty kilometers to the south, and his mental state reflected his long-term isolation. He managed to shoot three or four wolves every year, and he kept the pelts as any hunter/herdsman might, but with a difference. First he took the pelts and, weighting them down with stones, set them in the small river that ran near his hut.

In Western literature there is the well-known story of Jason and the Argonauts, and their heroic quest for the Golden Fleece. It was not known until recently that the legend of the artifact sought was quite real: The tribesmen of Asia Minor had set the skins of sheep in their streams to catch the gold dust being washed down from deposits higher up, changing the pale wool fibers into something almost magical in appearance.

It was no different here. The wolf pelts the geologists found hanging inside the old soldier's hut looked on first inspection to be sculptures by Renaissance masters, or even artisans of the Pharaohs of dynastic Egypt, they were so evenly coated, and then the explorers found that each pelt weighed a good sixty kilograms, and there were thirty-four of them! Sitting down with him over the necessary bottle of fine vodka, they learned that his name was Pavel Petrovich Gogol, that he'd fought against the Fascisti in the Great Patriotic War as a sniper, and, remarkably, was twice a Hero of the Soviet Union for his marksmanship, mainly in the battles around Kiev and Warsaw. A somewhat grateful nation had allowed him to return to his ancestral lands--- he was, it turned out, descended from the entrepreneurial Russians who'd come to Siberia in the early nineteenth century--- where he'd been forgotten by the bureaucrats who never really wondered much where the reindeer meat eaten by the locals came from, or who might be cashing his pension checks to buy ammunition for his old bolt-action rifle. Pavel Petrovich knew the value of the gold he found, but he'd never spent any of it, as he found his solitary life quite satisfactory. The gold deposit a few kilometers upstream from the place where the wolves went for their last swim--- as Pavel Petrovich described it with a twinkle in the eye and a snort of vodka--- turned out to be noteworthy, perhaps as much as the South African strike of the mid-nineteenth century, and that had turned into the richest gold mine in the history of the world. The local gold had not been discovered for several reasons, mainly relating to the dreadful Siberian climate, which had, first, prevented a detailed exploratory survey, and, second, covered the local streams with ice so much of the time that the gold dust in the streambeds had never been noticed.

Both the oil and rock survey teams had traveled into the field with satellite phones, the more quickly to report what they found. This both teams did, coincidentally on the same day.

The Iridium satellite-communications system they used was a huge breakthrough in global communications. With an easily portable instrument, one could communicate with the low-altitude constellation of dedicated communications satellites which cross-linked their signals at the speed of light (which was almost instantaneous, but not quite) to conventional communications birds, and from there to the ground, which was where most people were most of the time.

The Iridium system was designed to speed communications worldwide. It was not, however, designed to be a secure system. There were ways to do that, but they all required the individual users to make their security arrangements. It was now theoretically possible to get commercially available 128-bit encryption systems, and these were extremely difficult to break even by the most sophisticated of nation-states and their black services... or so the salesmen said. But the remarkable thing was that few people bothered. Their laziness made life a lot easier for the National Security Agency, located between Baltimore and Washington at Fort Meade, Maryland. There, a computer system called ECHELON was programmed to listen in on every conversation that crossed the ether, and to lock in on certain codewords. Most of those words were nouns with national-security implications, but since the end of the Cold War, NSA and other agencies had paid more attention to economic matters, and so some of the new words were "oil," "deposit," "crude," "mine," "gold," and others, all in thirty-eight languages. When such a word crossed ECHELON's electronic ear, the continuing conversation was recorded onto electronic media and transcribed--- and, where necessary, translated, all by computer. It was by no means a perfect system, and the nuances of language were still difficult for a computer program to unravel--- not to mention the tendency of many people to mutter into the phone--- but where a goof occurred, the original conversation would be reviewed by a linguist, of which the National Security Agency employed quite a few.

The parallel reports of the oil and gold strikes came in only five hours apart, and made their way swiftly up the chain of command, ending in a "flash" priority Special National Intelligence Estimate (called a SNIE, and pronounced "snee") destined for the President's desk right after his next breakfast, to be delivered by his National Security Adviser, Dr. Benjamin Goodley. Before that, the data would be examined by a team from the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Science and Technology, with a big assist from experts on the payroll of the Petroleum Institute in Washington, some of whose members had long enjoyed a cordial relationship with various government agencies. The preliminary evaluation--- carefully announced and presented as such, preliminary, lest someone be charged for being wrong if the estimate proved to be incorrect someday--- used a few carefully chosen superlatives.

Damn, " the President observed at 8:10 EST "Okay, Ben, how big are they really?"

"You don't trust our technical weenies?" the National Security Advisor asked.

"Ben, as long as I worked on the other side of the river, I never once caught them wrong on something like this, but damned if I didn't catch them underestimating stuff." Ryan paused for a moment. "But, Jesus, if these are lowball numbers, the implications are pretty big."

"Mr. President" ---Goodley was not part of Ryan's inner circle--- "we're talking billions, exactly how many nobody knows, but call it two hundred billion dollars in hard currency earnings over the next five to seven years at minimum. That's money they can use."

"And at maximum?"

Goodley leaned back for a second and took a breath. "I had to check. A trillion is a thousand billion. On the sunny side of that number. This is pure speculation, but the guys at the Petroleum Institute that CIA uses, the guys across the river tell me, spent most of their time saying 'Holy shit!'"

"Good news for the Russians," Jack said, flipping through the printed SNIE.

"Indeed it is, sir."



"About time they got lucky," POTUS thought aloud. "Okay, get a copy of this to George Winston. We want his evaluation of what this will mean to our friends in Moscow."

"I was planning to call some people at Atlantic Richfield. They were in on the exploration. I imagine they'll share in the proceeds. Their president is a guy named Sam Sherman. Know him?"

Ryan shook his head. "I know the name, but we've never met. Think I ought to change that?"

"If you want hard information, it can't hurt."

Ryan nodded. "Okay, maybe I'll have Ellen track him down." Ellen Sumter, his personal secretary, was located fifteen feet away through the sculpted door to his right. "What else?"

"They're still beating bushes for the people who blew up the pimp in Moscow. Nothing new to report on that, though."

"Would be nice to know what's going on in the world, wouldn't it?"

"Could be worse, sir," Goodley told his boss.

"Right." Ryan tossed the paper copy of the morning brief on his desk. "What else?"

Goodley shook his head. "And that's the way it is this morning, Mr. President." Goodley got a smile for that.

## C H A P T E R - 4

### Knob Rattling

It didn't matter what city or country you were in, Mike Reilly told himself. Police work was all the same. You talked to possible witnesses, you talked to the people involved, you talked to the victim. But not the victim this time. Grisha Avseyenko would never speak again. The pathologist assigned to the case commented that he hadn't seen such a mess since his uniformed service in Afghanistan. But that was to be expected. The RPG was designed to punch holes in armored vehicles and concrete bunkers, which was a more difficult task than destroying a private-passenger automobile, even one so expensive as that stopped in Dzerzhinskiy Square. That meant that the body parts were very difficult to identify. It turned out that half the jaw had enough repaired teeth to say with great certainty that the decedent had indeed been Gregoriy Filipovich Avseyenko, and DNA samples would ultimately confirm this (the blood type also matched). There hadn't been enough of his body to identify--- the face, for example, had been totally removed, and so had the left forearm, which had once borne a tattoo. The decedent's death had come instantaneously, the pathologist reported, after the processed remains had been packed into a plastic container, which in turn found its way into an oaken box for later cremation, probably--- the Moscow Militia had to ascertain whether any family members existed, and what disposition for the body they might wish. Lieutenant Provalov assumed that cremation would be the disposal method of choice. It was, in its way, quick and clean, and it was easier and less expensive to find a resting place for a small box or urn than for a full-sized coffin with a cadaver in it.

Provalov took the pathology report back from his American colleague. He hadn't expected it to reveal anything of interest, but one of the things he'd learned from his association with the American FBI was that you checked everything thoroughly, since predicting how a criminal case would break was like trying to pick a ten-play football pool two weeks before the games were played. The human minds who committed crimes were simply too random in their operation for any sort of prediction.

And that had been the easy part. The pathology report on the driver had essentially been useless. The only data in it of any use at all had been blood and tissue types (which could be checked with his military-service records, if they could be located), since the body had been so thoroughly shredded as to leave not a single identifying mark or characteristic, though, perversely, his identity papers had survived in his wallet, and so, they probably knew who he had been. The same was true of the woman in the car, whose purse had survived virtually intact on the seat to the right of her, along with her ID papers... which was a lot more than could be said for her face and upper torso.

Reilly looked at the photos of the other victims--- well, one presumed they matched up, he told himself. The driver was grossly ordinary, perhaps a little fitter than was the average here. The woman, yet another of the pimp's highpriced hookers with a photo in her police file, had been a dish, worthy of a Hollywood screen test, and certainly pretty enough for a Playboy centerfold. Well, no more.

"So, Mishka, have you handled enough of these crimes that it no longer touches you?" Provalov asked.

"Honest answer?" Reilly asked, then shook his head. "Not really. We don't handle that many homicides, except the ones that happen on Federal property--- Indian reservations or military bases. I have handled some kidnappings, though, and those you never get used to." Especially, Reilly didn't add, since kidnapping for money was a dead crime in America. Now children were kidnapped for their sexual utility, and most often killed in five hours, often before the FBI could even respond to the initial request for assistance from the local police department. Of all the crimes which Mike Reilly had worked, those were by far the worst, the sort after which you retired to the local FBI bar--- every field division had one--- and had a few too many as you sat quietly with equally morose and quiet colleagues, with the occasional oaths that you were going to get this mutt no matter what it took. And, mostly, the mutts were apprehended, indicted, and then convicted, and the lucky ones went to death row. Those convicted in states without a death penalty went into the general prison population, where they discovered what armed robbers thought of the abusers of children. "But I see what you mean, Oleg Gregoriyevich. It's the one thing you have trouble explaining to an ordinary citizen." It was that the worst thing about a crime scene or autopsy photo was the sadness of it, how the victim was stripped not merely of life, but of all dignity. And these photos were particularly grisly. Whatever beauty this Maria Ivanovna Sablin had once had was only a memory now, and then mainly memories held by men who'd rented access to her body. Who mourned for a dead whore? Reilly asked himself. Not the johns, who'd move on to a new one with scarcely a thought. Probably not even her own colleagues in the trade of flesh and desire, and whatever family she'd left behind would probably remember her not as the child who'd grown up to follow a bad path, but as a lovely person who'd defiled herself, pretending passion, but feeling no more than the trained physician who'd picked her organs apart on the dented steel table of the city morgue. Is that what prostitutes were, Reilly wondered, pathologists of sex? A victimless crime, some said. Reilly wished that such people could look at these photos and see just how "victimless" it was when women sold their bodies.

"Anything else, Oleg?" Reilly asked.

"We continue to interview people with knowledge of the deceased." Followed by a shrug.

He offended the wrong people," an informant said, with a shrug of his own that showed how absurdly obvious the answer to the preceding question was. How else could a person of Avseyenko's stature turn up dead in so spectacular a way?

"And what people are they?" the militiaman asked, not expecting a meaningful answer, but you asked the question anyway because you didn't know what the answer was until you did.

"His colleagues from State Security," the informant suggested.

"Oh?"

"Who else could have killed him in that way? One of his girls would have used a knife. A business rival from the street would have used a pistol or a larger knife, but an RPG... be serious, where does one get one of those?"

He wasn't the first to voice that thought, of course, though the local police did have to allow for the fact that all manner of weapons, heavy and light, had escaped one way or another from the coffers of what had once been called the Red Army into the active marketplace of criminal weapons.

"So, do you have any names for us?" the militia sergeant asked.

"Not a name, but I know the face. He's tall and powerfully built, like a soldier, reddish hair, fair skin, some freckles left over from his youth, green eyes." The informant paused. "His friends call him 'the boy,' because his appearance is so youthful. He was State Security once, but not a spy and not a catcher of spies. He was something else there, but I am not sure what."

The militia sergeant started taking more precise notes at this point, his pencil marks far more legible and much darker on the yellow page.

"And this man was displeased with Avseyenko?"

"So I have heard."

"And the reason for his displeasure?"

"That I do not know, but Gregoriy Filipovich had a way of offending men. He was very skilled at handling women, of course. For that he had a true gift, but the gift did not translate into his dealings with men. Many thought him a zhopnik, but he was not one of those, of course. He had a different woman on his arm every night, and none of them were ugly, but for some reason he didn't get along well with men, even those from State Security, where, he said, he was once a great national asset."

"Is that a fact," the militia sergeant observed, bored again. If there was anything criminals liked to do, it was boast. He'd heard it all a thousand times or more.

"Oh, yes. Gregoriy Filipovich claims to have supplied mistresses for all manner of foreigners, including some of ministerial rank, and says that they continue to supply valuable information to Mother Russia. I believe it," the informer added, editorializing again. "For a week with one of those angels, I would speak much."

And who wouldn't? the militiaman wondered with a yawn. "So, how did Avseyenko offend such powerful men?" the cop asked again.

"I have told you I do not know. Talk to 'the boy,' perhaps he will know."

"It is said that Gregoriy was beginning to import drugs," the cop said next, casting his hook into a different hole, and wondering what fish might lurk in the still waters.

The informant nodded. "That is true. It was said. But I never saw any evidence of it."

"Who would have seen evidence of it?"

Another shrug. "This I do not know. One of his girls, perhaps. I never understood how he planned to distribute what he thought about importing. To use the girls was logical, of course, but dangerous for them--- and for him, because his whores would not have been loyal to him in the face of a trip to the camps. So, then, what does that leave?" the informant asked rhetorically. "He would have to set up an entirely new organization, and there were also dangers in doing that, were there not? So, yes, I believe he was thinking about importing drugs for sale, and making vast sums of money from it, but Gregoriy was not a man who wished to go to a prison, and I think he was merely thinking about it, perhaps talking a little, but not much. I do not think he had made his final decision. I do not think he actually imported anything before he met his end."

"Rivals with the same ideas?" the cop asked next.

"There are people who can find cocaine and other drugs for you, as you well know."

The cop looked up. In fact, the militia sergeant didn't know that for certain. He'd heard rumbles and rumors, but not statements of fact from informants he trusted (insofar as any cop in any city truly trusted any informant). As with many things, there was a buzz on the streets of Moscow, but like most Moscow cops he expected it to show up first in the Black Sea port of Odessa, a city whose criminal activity went back to the czars and which today, with the restoration of free trade with the rest of the world, tended to lead Russia in--- well, led Russia to all forms of illicit activity. If there was an active drug trade in Moscow, it was so new and so small that he hadn't stumbled across it yet. He made a mental note to check with Odessa, to see what if anything was happening down there along those lines.

"And what people might they be?" the sergeant asked. If there was a growing distribution network in Moscow, he might as well learn about it.

Nomuri's job for Nippon Electric Company involved selling high-end desktop computers and peripherals. For him that meant the PRC government, whose senior bureaucrats had to have the newest and best of everything, from cars to mistresses, paid for in all cases by the government, which in turn took its money from the people, whom the bureaucrats represented and protected to the best of their abilities. As in many things, the PRC could have bought American brands, but in this case it chose to purchase the slightly less expensive (and less capable) computers from Japan, in the same way that it preferred to buy Airbus airlines from the European maker rather than Boeings from America--- that had been a card played a few years before to teach the Americans a lesson. America had briefly resented it, then had quickly forgotten about it, in the way America seemed to handle all such slights, which was quite a contrast to the Chinese, who never forgot anything.

When President Ryan had announced the reestablishment of their official recognition of the Republic of China government on Taiwan, the repercussions had thundered through the corridors of power in Beijing like the main shocks of a major earthquake. Nomuri hadn't been here, long enough yet to see the cold fury the move had generated, but the aftershocks were significant enough, and he'd heard echoes of it since his arrival in Beijing. The questions directed at himself were sometimes so direct and so demanding of an explanation that he'd momentarily wondered if his cover might have been blown, and his interlocutors had known that he was a CIA "illegal" field officer in the capital of the People's Republic of China, entirely without a diplomatic cover. But it hadn't been that. It was just a continuing echo of pure political rage. Paradoxically, the Chinese government was itself trying to shove that rage aside because they, too, had to do business with the United States of America, now their number-one trading partner, and the source of vast amounts of surplus cash, which their government needed to do the things which Nomuri was tasked to find out about. And so, here he was, in the outer office of one of the nation's senior officials.

"Good day," he said, with a bow and a smile to the secretary. She worked for a senior minister named Fang Gan, he knew, whose office was close by. She was surprisingly well dressed for a semi-ordinary worker, in a nation where fashion statements were limited to the color of the buttons one wore on the Mao jacket that was as much a part of the uniform of civilian government workers as was the gray-green wool of the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army.

"Good day," the young lady said in reply. "Are you Nomuri?"

"Yes, and you are...?"

"Lian Ming," the secretary replied.

An interesting name, Chester thought. "Lian" in Mandarin meant "graceful willow." She was short, like most Chinese women, with a square-ish face and dark eyes. Her least attractive feature was her hair, short and cut in a manner that harkened back to the worst of the 1950s in America, and then only for children in Appalachian trailer parks. For all that, it was a classically Chinese face in its ethnicity, and one much favored in this tradition-bound nation. The look in her eyes, at least, suggested intelligence and education.

"You are here to discuss computers and printers," she said neutrally, having absorbed some of her boss's sense of importance and centrality of place in the universe.

"Yes, I am. I think you will find our new pin-matrix printer particularly appealing."

"And why is that?" Ming asked.

"Do you speak English?" Nomuri asked in that language.

"Certainly," Ming replied, in the same.

"Then it becomes simple to explain. If you transliterate Mandarin into English, the spelling, I mean, then the printer transposes into Mandarin ideographs automatically, like this," he explained, pulling a sheet of paper from his plastic folder and handing it to the secretary. "We are also working on a laser-printer system which will be even smoother in its appearance."

"Ah," the secretary observed. The quality of the characters was superb, easily the equal of the monstrous typewriting machine that secretaries had to use for official documents--- or else have them hand-printed and then further processed on copying machines, mainly Canons, also of Japanese manufacture. The process was time-consuming, tedious, and much hated by the secretarial staff. "And what of inflection variations?"

Not a bad question, Nomuri noted. The Chinese language was highly dependent on inflection. The tone with which a word was delivered determined its actual meaning from as many as four distinct options, and it was also a determining factor in which ideograph it designated in turn.

"Do the characters appear on the computer screen in that way as well?" the secretary asked.

"They can, with just a click of the mouse," Nomuri assured her. "There may be a 'software' problem, insofar as you have to think simultaneously in two languages," he warned her with a smile.

Ming laughed. "Oh, we always do that here."

Her teeth would have benefited from a good orthodontist, Nomuri thought, but there weren't many of them in Beijing, along with the other bourgeois medical specialties, like reconstructive surgery. For all that, he'd gotten her to laugh, and that was something..

"Would you like to see me demonstrate our new capabilities?" the CIA field officer asked.

"Sure, why not?" She appeared a little disappointed that he wasn't able to do so right here and now.

"Excellent, but I will need you to authorize my bringing the hardware into the building. Your security people, you see."

How did I forget that? he saw her ask herself, blinking rather hard in a mild self-rebuke. Better to set the hook all the way.

"Do you have the authority for that, or must you consult someone more senior?" The most vulnerable point in any communist bureaucrat was their sense of importance-of-place.

A knowing smile: "Oh, yes, I can authorize that on my own authority."

A smile of his own: "Excellent. I can be here with my equipment at, say, ten in the morning."

"Good, the main entrance. They will be awaiting you."

"Thank you, Comrade Ming," Nomuri said with his best officious (short) bow to the young secretary--- and, probably, mistress to her minister, the field officer thought. This one had possibilities, but he'd have to be careful with her both for himself and for her, he thought to himself while waiting for the elevator. That's why Langley paid him so much, not counting the princely salary from Nippon Electric Company that was his to keep. He needed it to survive here. The price of living was bad enough for a Chinese. For a foreigner, it was worse, because for foreigners everything was--- had to be--- special. The apartments were special--- and almost certainly bugged. The food he bought in a special shop was more expensive--- and Nomuri didn't object to that, since it was also almost certainly healthier.

China was what Nomuri called a thirty-foot country. Everything looked okay, even impressive, until you got within thirty feet of it. Then you saw that the parts didn't fit terribly well. He'd found it could be especially troublesome getting into an elevator, of all things. Dressed as he was in Western-made clothing (the Chinese thought of Japan as a Western country, which would have amused a lot of people, both in Japan and the West), he was immediately spotted as a qwai--- a foreign devil--- even before people saw his face. When that happened, the looks changed, sometimes to mere curiosity, sometimes to outright hostility, because the Chinese weren't like the Japanese; they weren't trained as thoroughly to conceal their feelings, or maybe they just didn't give a damn, the CIA officer thought behind his own blanked-out poker face. He'd learned the practice from his time in Tokyo, and learned it well, which explained both why he had a good job with NEC and why he'd never been burned in the field.

The elevator ran smoothly enough, but somehow it just didn't feel right. Maybe it was, again, because the pieces didn't quite seem to fit together. Nomuri hadn't had that feeling in Japan. For all

their faults, the Japanese were competent engineers. The same was doubtless true of Taiwan, but Taiwan, like Japan, had a capitalist system which rewarded performance by giving it business and profits and comfortable salaries for the workers who turned out good work. The PRC was still learning how to do that. They exported a lot, but to this point the things exported were either fairly simple in design (like tennis shoes), or were manufactured mostly in strict accordance to standards established elsewhere and then slavishly copied here in China (like electronic gadgets). This was already changing, of course. The Chinese people were as clever as any, and even communism could keep them down only so long. Yet the industrialists who were beginning to innovate and offer the world genuinely new products were treated by their government masters as... well, as unusually productive peasants at best. That was not a happy thought for the useful men who occasionally wondered over drinks why it was that they, the ones who brought wealth into their nation, were treated as... unusually productive peasants, by the ones who deemed themselves the masters of their country and their culture. Nomuri walked outside, toward his parked automobile, wondering how long that could last.

This whole political and economic policy was schizophrenic, Nomuri knew. Sooner or later, the industrialists would rise up and demand that they be given a voice in the political operation of their country. Perhaps--- doubtless--- such whispers had happened already. If so, word had gotten back to the whisperers that the tallest tree is quickly cut for lumber, and the well with the sweetest water is first to be drunk dry, and he who shouts too loudly is first to be silenced. So, maybe the Chinese industrial leaders were just biding their time and looking around the rooms where they gathered, wondering which of their number would be the first to take the risk, and maybe he would be rewarded with fame and honor and later memories of heroism--- or maybe, more likely, his family would be billed for the 7.62x39 cartridge needed to send him into the next life, which Buddha had promised but which the government contemptuously denied.

So, they haven't made it public yet. That's a little odd," Ryan thought. "It is," Ben Goodley agreed with a nod.

"Any idea why they're sitting on the news?"

"No, sir... unless somebody is hoping to cash in on it somehow, but exactly how..."

CARDSHARP shrugged.

"Buy stock in Atlantic Richfield? Some mine-machine builder---"

"Or just buy options in some land in eastern Siberia," George Winston suggested. "Not that such a thing is ever done by the honorable servants of the people." The President laughed hard enough that he had to set his coffee down.

"Certainly not in this administration," POTUS pointed out. One of the benefits the media had with Ryan's team was that so many of them were plutocrats of one magnitude or another, not "working" men. It was as if the media thought that money just appeared in the hands of some fortunate souls by way of miracle... or some unspoken and undiscovered criminal activity. But never by work. It was the oddest of political prejudices that wealth didn't come from work, but rather from something else, a something never really described, but always implied to be suspect.

"Yeah, Jack," Winston said, with a laugh of his own. "We've got enough that we can afford to be honest. Besides, who the hell needs an oilfield or gold mine?"

"Further developments on the size of either?"

Goodley shook his head. "No, Sir. The initial information is firming up nicely. Both discoveries are big. The oil especially, but the gold as well."

"The gold thing will distort the market somewhat," SecTreas opined. "Depending on how fast it comes on stream. It might also cause a shutdown of the mine we have operating in the Dakotas."

"Why?" Goodley asked.

"If the Russian strike is as good as the data suggests, they'll be producing gold for about twenty-five percent less than what it costs there, despite environmental conditions. The attendant reduction of the world price of gold will then make Dakota unprofitable to operate." Winston shrugged. "So, they'll mothball the site and sit until the price goes back up. Probably after the initial flurry of production, our Russian friends will scale things back so that they can cash in in a more, uh, orderly way. What'll happen is that the other producers, mainly South Africans, will meet with them and offer advice on how to exploit that find more efficiently. Usually the new kids listen to advice from the old guys. The Russians have coordinated diamond production with the De Beers people for a long time, back to when the country was called the Soviet Union. Business is business, even for commies. So, you going to offer our help to our friends in Moscow?" TRADER asked SWORDSMAN.

Ryan shook his head. "I can't yet. I can't let them know that we know. Sergey Nikolay'ch would start wondering how, and he'd probably come up with SIGINT, and that's a method of gathering information that we try to keep covert." Probably a waste of time, Ryan knew, but the game had rules, and everyone played by those rules. Golovko could guess at signals intelligence, but he'd never quite know. I'll probably never stop being a spook, the President admitted to himself. Keeping and guarding secrets was one of the things that came so easily to him--- a little too easily, Arnie van Damm often warned. A modern democratic government was supposed to be more open, like a torn curtain on the bedroom window that allowed people to look in whenever they wished. That was an idea Ryan had never grown to appreciate. He was the one who decided what people were allowed to know and when they'd know it. It was a point of view he followed even when he knew it to be wrong, for no other reason than it was how he'd learned government service at the knee of an admiral named James Greer. Old habits were hard to break.

"I'll call Sam Sherman at Atlantic Richfield," Winston suggested. "If he breaks it to me, then it's in the open, or at least open enough."

"Can we trust him?"

Winston nodded. "Sam plays by the rules. We can't ask him to screw over his own board, but he knows what flag to salute, Jack."

"Okay, George, a discreet inquiry."

"Yes, sir, Mr. President, sir."

"God damn it, George!"

"Jack, when the hell are you going to learn to relax in this fucking job?" SecTreas asked POTUS.

"The day I move out of this goddamned museum and become a free man again," Ryan replied with a submissive nod. Winston was right. He had to learn to stay on a more even keel in the office of President. In addition to not being helpful to himself, it wasn't especially helpful to the country for him to be jumpy with the folderol of office-holding. That also made it easy for people like the Secretary of the Treasury to twist his tail, and George Winston was one of the people who enjoyed doing that... maybe because it ultimately helped him relax, Ryan thought. Backwards English on the ball or something. "George, why do you think I should relax in this job?"

"Jack, because you're here to be effective, and being tight all the time does not make you more effective. Kick back, guy, maybe even learn to like some aspect of it."

"Like what?"

"Hell." Winston shrugged, and then nodded to the secretaries' office. "Lots of cute young interns out there."

"There's been enough of that," Ryan said crossly. Then he did manage to relax and smile a little. "Besides, I'm married to a surgeon. Make that little mistake and I could wake up without something important."

"Yeah, I suppose it's bad for the country to have the President's dick cut off, eh? People might not respect us anymore." Winston stood. "Gotta go back across the street and look at some economic models."

"Economy looking good?" POTUS asked.

"No complaints from me or Mark Gant. Just so the Fed Chairman leaves the discount rate alone, but I expect he will. Inflation is pretty flat, and there's no upward pressure anywhere that I see happening."

"Ben?"

Goodley looked through his notes, as though he'd forgotten something. "Oh, yeah. Would you believe, the Vatican is appointing a Papal Nuncio to the PRC?"

"Oh? What's that mean, exactly?" Winston asked, stopping halfway to the door.

"The Nuncio is essentially an ambassador. People forget that the Vatican is a nation-state in its own right and has the usual trappings of statehood. That includes diplomatic representation. A nuncio is just that, an ambassador--- and a spook," Ryan added.

"Really?" Winston asked.

"George, the Vatican has the world's oldest intelligence service. Goes back centuries. And, yeah, the Nuncio gathers information and forwards it to the home office, because people talk to him--- who better to talk to than a priest, right? They're good enough at gathering information that we've made the occasional effort to crack their communications. Back in the '30s, a senior cryptanalyst at the State Department resigned over it," Ryan informed his SecTreas, reverting back to history teacher.

"We still do that?" Winston directed this question at Goodley, the President's National Security Adviser. Goodley looked first to Ryan, and got a nod. "Yes, sir. Fort Meade still takes a look at their messages. Their ciphers are a little old-fashioned, and we can brute-force them."

"And ours?"

"The current standard is called TAPDANCE. It's totally random, and therefore it's theoretically unbreakable--- unless somebody screws up and reuses a segment of it, but with approximately six hundred forty-seven million transpositions on every daily CD-ROM diskette, that's not very likely."

"What about the phone systems?"

"The STU?" Goodley asked, getting a nod. "That's computer-based, with a two-fifty-six-kay computer-generated encryption key. It can be broken, but you need a computer, the right algorithm, and a couple of weeks at least, and the shorter the message the harder it is to crack it, instead of the other way around. The guys at Fort Meade are playing with using quantum-physics equations to crack ciphers, and evidently they're having some success, but if you want an explanation, you're going to have to ask somebody else. I didn't even pretend to listen," Goodley admitted. "It's so far over my head I can't even see the bottom of it."

"Yeah, get your friend Gant involved," Ryan suggested. "He seems to know 'puters pretty well. As a matter of fact, you might want to get him briefed in on these developments in Russia. Maybe he can model the effects they'll have on the Russian economy."

"Only if everyone plays by the rules," Winston said in warning. "If they follow the corruption that's been gutting their economy the last few years, you just can't predict anything, Jack."

We cannot let it happen again, Comrade President," Sergey Nikolay'ch said over a half-empty glass of vodka. This was still the best in the world, if the only such Russian product of which he could make that boast. That thought generated an angry frown at what his nation had become.

"Sergey Nikolay'ch, what do you propose?"

"Comrade President, these two discoveries are a gift from Heaven itself. If we utilize them properly, we can transform our country--- or at least make a proper beginning at doing that. The earnings in hard currencies will be colossal, and we can use that money to rebuild so much of our infrastructure that we can transform our economy. If, that is"--- he held up a cautionary finger--- "if we don't allow a thieving few to take the money and bank it in Geneva or Liechtenstein. It does us no good there, Comrade President."



Golovko didn't add that a few people, a few well-placed individuals, would profit substantially from this. He didn't even add that he himself would be one of them, and so would his president. It was just too much to ask any man to walk away from such an opportunity. Integrity was a virtue best found among those able to afford it, and the press be damned, the career intelligence officer thought. What had they ever done for his country or any other? All they did was expose the honest work of some and the dishonest work of others, doing little actual work themselves--- and besides, they were as easily bribed as anyone else, weren't they?

"And so, who gets the concession to exploit these resources?" the Russian president asked.

"In the case of the oil, our own exploration company, plus the American company, Atlantic Richfield. They have the most experience in producing oil in those environmental conditions anyway, and our people have much to learn from them. I would propose a fee-for-service arrangement, a generous one, but not an ownership percentage in the oil field itself. The exploration contract was along those lines, generous in absolute terms, but no share at all in the fields discovered."

"And the gold strike?"

"Easier still. No foreigners were involved in that discovery at all. Comrade Gogol will have an interest in the discovery, of course, but he is an old man with no heirs, and, it would seem, a man of the simplest tastes. A properly heated hut and a new hunting rifle will probably make him very happy, from what these reports tell us."

"And the value of this venture?"

"Upwards of seventy billions. And all we need do is purchase some special equipment, the best of which comes from the American company Caterpillar."

"Is that necessary, Sergey?"

"Comrade President, the Americans are our friends, after a fashion, and it will not hurt us to remain on good terms with their President. And besides, their heavy equipment is the world's finest."

"Better than the Japanese?"

"For these purposes, yes, but slightly more expensive," Golovko answered, thinking that people really were all the same, and despite the education of his youth, in every man there seemed to be a capitalist, looking for ways to cut costs and increase his profits, often to the point of forgetting the larger issues. Well, that was why Golovko was here, wasn't it?

"And who will want the money?"

A rare chuckle in this office: "Comrade President, everyone wants to have money. In realistic terms, our military will be at the front of the line."

"Of course," the Russian president agreed, with a resigned sigh. "They usually are. Oh, any progress in the attack on your car?" he asked, looking up from his briefing papers.

Golovko shook his head. "No notable progress, no. The current thinking is that this Avseyenko fellow was the actual target, and the automobile was just a coincidence. The militia continues to investigate."

"Keep me posted, will you?"

"Of course, Comrade President."

## CHAPTER - 5

### Headlines

Sam Sherman was one of those whom age hadn't treated kindly, though he himself hadn't helped. An avid golfer, he moved from lie to lie via cart. He was much too overweight to walk more than a few hundred yards in a day. It was rather sad for one who'd been a first-string guard for the Princeton Tigers, once upon a time. Well, Winston thought, muscle just turned to blubber if you didn't use it properly. But the overweight body didn't detract from the sharpness of his brain.

Sherman had graduated about fifth in a class not replete with dummies, double-majoring in geology and business. He'd followed up the first sheet of parchment with a Harvard MBA, and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas, this one in geology as well, and so Samuel Price Sherman could not only talk rocks with the explorers but finance with his board members, and that was one of the reasons why Atlantic Richfield stock was as healthy as any oil issue in the known world. His face was lined by a lot of low sun and field grit, and his belly swollen by a lot of beers with the roughnecks out in many godforsaken places, plus hot dogs and other junk food preferred by the men who drifted into such employment. Winston was surprised that Sam didn't smoke, too. Then he spotted the box on the man's desk. Cigars. Probably good ones. Sherman could afford the best, but he still had the Ivy League manners not to light up in front of a guest who might be offended by the blue cloud they generated.

Atlantic Richfield's home office was elsewhere, but as with most major corporations, it didn't hurt to have a set of offices in Washington, a better to influence members of Congress with the occasional lavish party. Sherman's personal office was in a corner on the top floor, and plush enough, with a thick beige carpet. The desk was either mahogany or well-seasoned oak, polished like glass, and probably cost more than his secretary made in a year or two.

"So, how do you like working for the government, George?"

"It's really a fun change of pace. Now I can play with all the things I used to bitch about--- so, I guess I've kinda given up my right to bitch."

"That is a major sacrifice, buddy," Sherman replied with a laugh. "It's kinda like going over to the enemy, isn't it?"

"Well, sometimes you gotta pay back, Sam, and making policy the right way can be diverting."

"Well, I have no complaints with what you guys are doing. The economy seems to like it. Anyway," Sherman sat up in his comfortable chair. It was time to change subjects. Sam's time was valuable, too, as he wanted his guest to appreciate. "You didn't come here for small talk. What can I do for you, Mr. Secretary?"

"Russia."

Sherman's eyes changed a little, as they might when the last card was laid in a high-stakes game of stud. "What about it?"

"You have a high-powered exploration team working with the Russians... they find anything nice?"

"George, that's sensitive stuff you're asking. If you were still running Columbus, this would constitute insider-trading information stuff. Hell, I can't buy any more of our stock now, based on this stuff."

"Does that mean you'd like to?" TRADER asked with a smile.

"Well, it'll be public soon enough anyway. Yeah, George. Looks like we've found the biggest goddamned oil field ever, bigger 'n the Persian Gulf, bigger 'n Mexico, damned sight bigger than Prudhoe Bay and Western Canada combined. I'm talking big, billions and billions of barrels of what looks like the very best light-sweet crude, just sitting there and waiting for us to pump it out of the tundra. It's a field we'll measure in years of production, not just barrels."

"Bigger than the P.G.?"

Sherman nodded. "By a factor of forty percent, and that's a very conservative number. The only beef is where it is. Getting that crude out is going to be a mother-humper--- to get started, anyway. We're talking twenty billion dollars just for the pipeline. It'll make Alaska look like a kindergarten project, but it'll be worth it."

"And your end of it?" the Secretary of the Treasury asked.

That question generated a frown. "We're negotiating that now. The Russians seem to want to pay us a flat consulting fee, like a billion dollars a year--- they're talking a lot less than that now, but you know how the hog-tradin' works at this stage, right? They say a couple of hundred million, but they mean a billion a year, for seven to ten years, I'd imagine. And that isn't bad for what we'd have

to do for the money, but I want a minimum of five percent of the find, and that's not at all an unreasonable request on our part. They have some good people in the geology business, but nobody in the world can sniff out oil in ice like my people can, and they've got a lot to learn about how to exploit something like this. We've been there and done that in these environmental conditions. Ain't nobody knows this like we do, even the guys at BP, and they're pretty good--- but we're the best in the world, George. That's the barrel we have them over. They can do it without us, but with us helping, they'll make a ton more cash, and a hell of a lot faster, and they know that, and we know they know that. So, I got my lawyers talking to their lawyers--- actually, they have diplomats doing the negotiating." Sherman managed a grin. "They're dumber than my lawyers."

Winston nodded. Texas turned out more good private-practice attorneys than most parts of America, and the excuse was that in Texas there were more men needin' killin' than horses needin' stealin'. And the oil business paid the best, and in Texas, like everywhere else, talent went where the money was.

"When will this go public?"

"The Russians are trying to keep a cork in it. One of the things we're getting from our lawyers is that they're worried about how to exploit this one--- really who to keep out of it, you know, their Mafia and stuff. They do have some serious corruption problems over there, and I can sympathize--"

Winston knew he could ignore the next part. The oil industry did business all over the world. Dealing with corruption on the small scale (ten million dollars or less), or even the monstrous scale (ten billion dollars or more), was just part of the territory for such companies as Sam Sherman ran, and the United States government had never probed too deeply into that. Though there were federal statutes governing how American companies handled themselves abroad, many of those laws were selectively enforced, and this was merely one such example. Even in Washington, business was business.

"---and so they're trying to keep it quiet until they can make the proper arrangements," Sherman concluded.

"You hearing anything else?"

"What do you mean?" Sherman asked in reply.

"Any other geological windfalls," Winston clarified.

"No, I'm not that greedy in what I pray for. George, I haven't made it clear enough, just how huge this oil field is. It's---"

"Relax, Sam, I can add and subtract with the best of 'em," SecTreas assured his host.

"Something I need to know about?" Sherman only saw hesitation. "Give and take, George. I played fair with you, remember?"

"Gold," Winston clarified.

"How much?"

"They're not sure. South Africa at least. Maybe more."

"Really? Well, that's not my area of expertise, but sounds like our Russian friends are having a good year for a change. Good for them," Sherman thought.

"You like them?"

"Yeah, as a matter of fact. They're a lot like Texans. They make good friends and fearsome enemies. They know how to entertain, and Jesus, do they know how to drink. About time they got some good luck. Christ knows they've had a lot of the other kind. This is going to mean a lot for their economy, and damned near all of it's going to be good news, 'specially if they can handle the corruption stuff and keep the money inside their borders where it'll do them some good, instead of finding its way onto some Swiss bank's computer. That new Mafia they have over there is smart and tough... and a little scary. They just got somebody I knew over there."

"Really? Who was that, Sam?"

"We called him Grisha. He took care of some high rollers in Moscow. Knew how to do it right. He was a good name to know if you had some special requirements," Sherman allowed. Winston recorded the information in his mind for later investigation.

"Killed him?"

Sherman nodded. "Yup, blew him away with a bazooka right there on the street--- it made CNN, remember?" The TV news network had covered it as a crime story with no further significance except for its dramatic brutality, a story gone and forgotten in a single day.

George Winston vaguely remembered it, and set it aside. "How often you go over there?"

"Not too often, twice this year. Usually hop my G-V over direct out of Reagan or Dallas/Fort Worth. Long flight, but it's a one-hop. No, I haven't seen the new oil field yet. Expect I'll have to in a few months, but I'll try for decent weather. Boy, you don't know what cold means 'til you go that far north in the winter. Thing is, it's dark then, so you're better off waiting 'til summer anyway. But at best you can leave the sticks at home. Ain't no golf a' tall in that part of the world, George."

"So take a rifle and bag yourself a bear, make a nice rug," Winston offered.

"Gave that up. Besides, I got three polar bears. That one is number eight in the Boone and Crockett all-time book," Sherman said, pointing to a photo on the far wall. Sure enough, it showed a hell of a big polar bear. "I've made two kids on that rug," the president of Atlantic Richfield observed, with a sly smile. The pelt in question lay before his bedroom fireplace in Aspen, Colorado, where his wife liked to ski in the winter.

"Why'd you give it up?"

"My kids think there aren't enough polar bears anymore. All that ecology shit they learn in school now."

"Yeah," SecTreas said sympathetically, "and they do make such great rugs."

"Right, well, that rug was threatening some of our workers up at Prudhoe Bay back in... '75, as I recall, and I took him at sixty yards with my .338 Winchester. One shot," the Texan assured his guest. "I suppose nowadays you have to let the bear kill a human bein', and then you're supposed to do is just cage him and transport him to another location so the bear doesn't get too traumatized, right?"

"Sam, I'm Secretary of the Treasury. I leave the birds and bees to EPA. I don't hug trees, not until they turn the wood chips into T -Bills, anyway."

A chuckle: "Sorry, George. I'm always hearing that stuff at home. Maybe it's Disney. All wild animals wear white gloves and talk to each other in good Midwestern Iowa English."

"Cheer up, Sam. At least they're laying off the supertankers out of Valdez now. How much of the eastern Alaska/Western Canada strike is yours?"

"Not quite half, but that'll keep my stockholders in milk and cookies for a long time."

"So, between that one and Siberia, how many options will they give you to exercise?" Sam Sherman got a nice salary, but at his level the way you earned your keep was measured in the number of options in the stock whose value your work had increased, invariably offered you by the board of directors, whose own holdings you inflated in value through your efforts.

A knowing smile, and a raised eyebrow: "A lot, George. Quite a lot."

Married life agrees with you, Andrea," President Ryan observed with a smile at his Principal Agent. She was dressing better, and there was a definite spring in her step now. He wasn't sure if her skin had a new glow, or maybe her makeup was just different. Jack had learned never to comment on a woman's makeup. He always got it wrong.

"You're not the only one to say that, sir."

"One hesitates to say such things to a grown adult female, especially if you're fashion-bereft, as I am," Jack said, his smile broadening somewhat. His wife, Cathy, still said she had to dress him

because his taste was entirely, she said, in his mouth. "But the change is sufficiently marked that even a man such as myself can see it."

"Thank you, Mr. President. Pat is a very good man, even for a Bureau puke."

"What's he doing now?"

"He's up in Philadelphia right now. Director Murray sent him off on a bank robbery, two local cops got killed in that one."

"Caught that one on TV last week. Bad."

The Secret Service agent nodded. "The way the subjects killed the cops, both in the back of the head, that was pretty ruthless, but there's people out there like that. Anyway, Director Murray decided to handle that one with a Roving Inspector out of Headquarters Division, and that usually means Pat gets to go do it."

"Tell him to be careful," Ryan said. Inspector Pat O'Day had saved his daughter's life less than a year before, and that act had earned him undying Presidential solicitude.

"Every day, sir," Special Agent Price-O'Day made clear.

"Okay, what's the schedule look like?" His "business" appointments were on his desk already. Andrea Price-O'Day filled him in every morning, after his national-security briefing from Ben Goodley.

"Nothing unusual until after lunch. National Chamber of Commerce delegation at one-thirty, and then at three the Detroit Red Wings, they won the Stanley Cup this year. Photo op, TV pukes and stuff, take about twenty minutes or so."

"I ought to let Ed Foley do that one. He's the hockey fanatic---"

"He's a Caps fan, sir, and the Red Wings swept the Caps four straight in the finals. Director Foley might take it personally," Price-O'Day observed with half a smile.

"True. Well, last year we got the jerseys and stuff for his son, didn't we?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good game, hockey. Maybe I ought to catch a game or two. Trouble to arrange that?"

"No, sir. We have standing agreements with all the local sports facilities. Camden Yards even has that special box for us--- they let us help design it, the protective stuff, that is."

Ryan grunted. "Yeah, I have to remember all the people who'd like to see me dead."

"My job to think about that, sir, not yours," Price-O'Day told him.

"Except when you won't let me go shopping or to a movie." Neither Ryan nor his family was entirely used to the restrictions imposed on the life of the President of the United States or his immediate family members. It was getting especially tough on Sally, who'd started dating (which was hard on her father), and dating was difficult with a lead car and a chase car (when the young gentleman drove himself) or an official car with a driver and a second armed agent up front (when he did not), and guns all over the place. It tended to restrain the young gentlemen in question--- and Ryan hadn't told his daughter that this was just fine with him, lest she stop speaking to him for a week or so. Sally's Principal Agent, Wendy Merritt, had proven to be both a good Secret Service agent and a superb big sister of sorts. They spent at least two Saturdays per month shopping with a reduced detail--- actually it wasn't reduced at all, but it appeared so to Sally Ryan when they went out to Tyson's Corner or the Annapolis Mall for the purpose of spending money, something for which all women seemed to have a genetic predisposition. That these shopping expeditions had been planned days in advance, with every site scouted by the Secret Service, and a supplementary detail of young agents selected for their relative invisibility who showed up there an hour before SHADOW's arrival, had never occurred to Sally Ryan. That was just as well, as the dating problems grated on her badly enough, along with being followed around St. Mary's School in Annapolis by the rifle squad, as she sometimes termed it. Little Jack, on the other hand, thought it was pretty neat, and had recently learned to shoot at the Secret Service Academy in Beltsville, Maryland, with his father's permission (and something he'd not allowed the press to learn, lest he get hammered on the front page of The New York Times for the social indiscretion of encouraging

his own son to touch, much less actually to fire, something so inherently evil as a pistol!). Little Jack's Principal Agent was a kid named Mike Brennan, a South Boston Irishman, a third-generation Secret Service agent with fiery red hair and a ready laugh, who'd played baseball at Holy Cross and frequently played catch and pepper with the President's son on the South Lawn of the White House.

"Sir, we never don't let you do anything," Price said.

"No, you're pretty subtle about it," Ryan allowed. "You know that I'm too considerate of other people, and when you tell me about all the crap you people have to go through so that I can buy a burger at Wendy's, I usually back off... like a damned wimp." The President shook his head. Nothing frightened him more than the prospect that he'd somehow get used to all this panoply of "specialness," as he thought of it. As though he'd only recently discovered royal parentage, and was now to be treated like a king, hardly allowed to wipe his own ass after taking a dump. Doubtless some people who'd lived in this house had gotten used to it, but that was something John Patrick Ryan, Sr., wanted to avoid. He knew that he was not all that special, and not deserving of all this folderol... and besides, like every other man in the world, when he woke up in the morning the first thing he did was head to the bathroom. Chief Executive he might be, but he still had a working-class bladder. And thank God for that, the President of the United States reflected.

"Where's Robby today?"

"Sir, the Vice President is in California today, the Navy base at Long Beach, giving a speech at the shipyard."

Ryan grinned a little sideways. "I work him pretty hard, don't I?"

"That's the Vice President's job," Arnie van Damm said from the door. "And Robby's a big boy about it," added the President's Chief of Staff.

"Your vacation was good for you," Ryan observed. He had a very nice tan. "What did you do?"

"Mainly I laid on the beach and read all the books I haven't had time for. Thought I'd die of boredom," van Damm added.

"You actually thrive on this crap, don't you?" Jack asked, a little incredulous at the thought.

"It's what I do, Mr. President. Hey, Andrea," he added with a slight turn of the head.

"Good morning, Mr. van Damm." She turned to Jack. "That's all I have for you this morning. If you need me, I'll be in the usual place." Her office was in the Old Executive Office Building, just across the street, and upstairs from the new Secret Service command post, called JOC, for Joint Operations Center.

"Okay, Andrea, thanks." Ryan nodded, as she withdrew into the secretaries' room, from which she'd head down to the Secret Service Command Post. "Arnie, get some coffee?"

"Not a bad idea, boss." The Chief of Staff took his usual seat and poured a cup. The coffee in the White House was especially good, a rich blend, about half Colombian and half Jamaica Blue Mountain, the sort of thing that Ryan could get used to as President. There had to be some place he could buy this after escaping from his current job, he hoped.

"Okay, I've had my national security brief and my Secret Service brief. Now tell me about politics for the day."

"Hell, Jack, I've been trying to do that for over a year now, and you still aren't getting it very well."

Ryan allowed his eyes to flare at the simulated insult. "That's a cheap shot, Arnie. I've been studying this crap pretty hard, and even the damned newspapers say I'm doing fairly well."

"The Federal Reserve is doing a brilliant job of handling the economy, Mr. President, and that has damned little to do with you. But since you are the President, you get credit for all the good things that happen, and that's nice, but do remember, you will also get the blame for all the bad things that are going to happen--- and some will, remember that--- because you just happen to be here, and the citizens out there think you can make the rain fall on their flowers and the sun come out for their picnics just by wishing it so.

"You know, Jack," the Chief of Staff said after sipping his coffee. "We really haven't got past the idea of kings and queens. A lot of people really do think you have that sort of personal power---"

"But I don't, Arnie, how can that be?"

"It just is the truth, Jack. It doesn't have to make sense. It just is. Deal with it."

I do so love these lessons, Ryan thought to himself. "Okay, today is...?"

"Social Security."

Ryan's eyes relaxed. "I've been reading up on that. The third rail of American political life. Touch it and die."

For the next half hour, they discussed what was wrong and why, and the irresponsibility of the Congress, until Jack sat back with a sigh.

"Why don't they learn, Arnie?"

"What do they need to learn?" Arnie asked, with the grin of a Washington insider, one of the anointed of God. "They've been elected. They must know it all already! How else do you think they got here?"

"Why the hell did I allow myself to stay in this damned place?" the President asked rhetorically.

"Because you had a conscience attack and decided to do the right thing for your country, you dumbass, that's why."

"Why is it you're the only person who can talk to me like that?"

"Besides the Vice President? Because I'm your teacher. Back to today's lesson. We could leave Social Security alone this year. It's in decent enough fiscal shape to last another seven to nine years without intervention, and that means you could leave it to your successor to handle---"

"That's not ethical, Arnie," Ryan snapped.

"True," the Chief of Staff agreed, "but it's good politics, and fairly Presidential. It's called letting sleeping dogs lie."

"You don't do that in the knowledge that as soon as it wakes up, it's going to rip the baby's throat out."

"Jack, you really ought to be a king. You'd be a good one," van Damm said, with what appeared to be genuine admiration.

"Nobody can handle that kind of power."

"I know: 'Power corrupts, and absolute power is actually pretty neat.' So said a staffer for one of your predecessors."

"And the bastard wasn't hanged for saying it?"

"We need to work on that sense of humor, Mr. President. That was meant as a joke."

"The scariest part of this job is that I do see the humor of it. Anyway, I told George Winston to start a quiet project to see what we can do with Social Security. Quiet project, I mean classified---black, this project doesn't exist."

"Jack, if you have one weakness as President, that's it. You're into this secrecy thing too much."

"But if you do something like this in the open, you get clobbered by ill-informed criticism before you manage to produce anything, and the press crawls up your ass demanding information you don't have yet, and so then they go make up stuff on their own, or they go to some yahoo who just makes up bullshit, and then we have to answer it."

"You are learning," Arnie judged. "That's exactly how it works in this town."

"That does not constitute 'working' by any definition I know of."

"This is Washington, a government town. Nothing is really supposed to function efficiently here. It would scare the hell out of the average citizen if the government started to function properly."

"How about I just fucking resign?" Jack asked the ceiling. "If I can't get this damned mess to start working, then why the hell am I here?"

"You're here because some Japanese 747 pilot decided to crash the party at the House Chamber fifteen months ago."

"I suppose, Arnie, but I still feel like a damned fraud."

"Well, by my old standards, you are a fraud, Jack."

Ryan looked up. "Old standards?"

"Even when Bob Fowler took over the statehouse in Ohio, Jack, even he didn't try as hard as you to play a fair game, and Bob got captured by the system, too. You haven't yet, and that's what I like about you. More to the point, that's what Joe Citizen likes about you. They may not like your positions, but everybody knows you try damned hard, and they're sure you're not corrupt. And you're not. Now: Back to Social Security."

"I told George to get a small group together, swear them to secrecy, and make recommendations-- more than one--- and at least one of them has to be completely outside the box."

"Who's running this?"

"Mark Gant, George's technical guy."

The Chief of Staff thought that one over for a moment. "Just as well you keep it quiet. The Hill doesn't like him. Too much of a smart-ass."

"And they're not?" SWORDSMAN asked.

"You were naïve with that, Jack. The people you tried to get elected, non-politicians, well, you semi-succeeded. A lot of them were regular people, but what you didn't allow for was the seductive nature of life in elected government service. The money isn't all that great, but the perks are, and a lot of people like being treated like a medieval prince. A lot of people like being able to enforce their will on the world. The people who used to be there, the ones that pilot fried in their seats, they started off as pretty good people, too, but the nature of the job is to seduce and capture. Actually, the mistake you made was to allow them to keep their staffs. Honestly, I think the problem down there is in the staffers, not the bosses. You have ten or more people around you all the time telling you how great you are, sooner or later you start believing that crap."

"Just so you don't do that to me."

"Not in this lifetime," Arnie assured him, as he stood to leave. "Make sure Secretary Winston keeps me in the loop on the Social Security project."

"No leaks," Ryan told his Chief of Staff forcefully.

"Me? Leak something? Me?" van Damm replied with open hands and an innocent face.

"Yeah, Arnie, you." As the door closed, the President wondered how fine a spook Arnie might have made. He lied with the plausibility one might associate with a trusted member of the clergy, and he could hold all manner of contradictory thoughts in his head at the same time, like the best of circus jugglers... and somehow they never quite crashed to earth. Ryan was the current president, but the one member of the administration who could not be replaced was the chief of staff he'd inherited from Bob Fowler, by way of Roger Durling...

And yet, Jack wondered, how much was he being manipulated by this staff employee? The truthful answer was that he couldn't tell, and that was somewhat troubling. He trusted Arnie, but he trusted Arnie, because he had to trust him. Jack would not know what to do without him... but was that a good thing?

Probably not, Ryan admitted to himself, checking over his appointment list, but neither was being here in the Oval Office, and Arnie was at worst one more thing not to like about this job, and at best, he was a scrupulously honest, extremely hardworking, and utterly dedicated public servant...

...just like everyone else in Washington, D. C., Ryan's cynicism added.

## C H A P T E R - 6

### Expansion

Moscow is eight hours ahead of Washington, a source of annoyance to diplomats who are either a day behind the times or too far out of synch with their body clocks to conduct business properly. This was more a problem for the Russians, as by five or six in the evening, most of them had had a



few stiff drinks, and given the relative speed of all diplomatic exchange, it was well into the falling night in Moscow before American diplomats emerged from their "working lunches" to issue a *démarche* or communiqué, or a simple letter of reply to whatever the Russians had issued the previous working day. In both capitals, of course, there was always a night crew to read and evaluate things on a more timely basis, but these were underlings, or at best people on their way up but not quite there yet, who always had to judge which possibility was worse: waking up a boss with something unworthy of the nighttime phone call, or delaying until the post-breakfast morning something that the minister or secretary ought to have been informed of right now! And more than one career had been made or broken on such seeming trivialities.

In this particular case, it would not be a diplomat's hide at risk. It was six-fifteen on the Russian spring evening, the sun high in the sky still, in anticipation of the "White Nights" for which the Russian summer is justly famous.

"Yes, Pasha?" Lieutenant Provalov said. He'd taken over Klusov from Shablikov. This case was too important to leave in anyone else's hands--- and besides, he'd never really trusted Shablikov: There was something a little too corrupt about him.

Pavel Petrovich Klusov was not exactly an advertisement for the quality of life in the new Russia. Hardly one hundred sixty-five centimeters or so in height, but close to ninety kilos, he was a man the bulk of whose calories came in liquid form, who shaved poorly when he bothered at all, and whose association with soap was less intimate than it ought to have been. His teeth were crooked and yellow from the lack of brushing and a surfeit of smoking cheap, unfiltered domestic cigarettes. He was thirty-five or so, and had perhaps a fifty-fifty chance of making forty-five, Provalov estimated. It was not as though he'd be much of a loss to society, of course. Klusov was a petty thief, lacking even the talent--- or courage--- to be a major violator of the law. But he knew those who were, and evidently scampered around them like a small dog, performing minor services, like fetching a bottle of vodka, the Militia lieutenant thought. But Klusov did have ears, which many people, especially criminals, had an odd inability to consider.

"Avseyenko was killed by two men from St. Petersburg. I do not know their names, but I think they were hired by Klementi Ivan'ch Suvorov. The killers are former Spetsnaz soldiers with experience in Afghanistan, in their late thirties, I think. One is blond, the other red-haired. After killing Grisha, they flew back north before noon on an Aeroflot flight."

"That is good, Pasha. Have you seen their faces?"

A shake of the head: "No, Comrade Lieutenant. I learned this from... someone I know, in a drinking place." Klusov lit a new cigarette with the end of its predecessor.

"Did your acquaintance say why our friend Suvorov had Avseyenko killed?" And who the hell is Klementi Ivan'ch Suvorov? the policeman wondered. He hadn't heard that name before, but didn't want Klusov to know that quite yet. Better to appear omniscient.

The informant shrugged. "Both were KGB, maybe there was bad blood between them."

"What exactly is Suvorov doing now?"

Another shrug: "I don't know. Nobody does. I am told he lives well, but the source of his income, no one knows."

"Cocaine?" the cop asked.

"It is possible, but I do not know." The one good thing about Klusov was that he didn't invent things. He told the (relatively) unvarnished truth... most of the time, the militia lieutenant told himself.

Provalov's mind was already spinning. Okay, a former KGB officer had hired two former Spetsnaz soldiers to eliminate another former KGB officer who'd specialized in running girls. Had this Suvorov chap approached Avseyenko for cooperation in a drug venture? Like most Moscow cops, he'd never grown to like the KGB. They'd been arrogant bullies most of the time, too besotted with their power to perform proper investigations, except against foreigners, for whom the niceties

of civilized behavior were necessary, lest foreign nations treat Soviet citizens--- worse, Soviet diplomats--- the same way.

But so many KGB officers had been let go by their parent service, and few of them had drifted into menial labor. No, they had training in conspiracy, and many had done foreign travel, and there met all manner of people, most of whom, Provalov was sure, could be persuaded to undertake illegal operations for the right inducement, which invariably meant money. For money, people would do anything, a fact known by every police officer in every country in the world.

Suvorov. Must track that name down, the militia lieutenant told himself as he took a casual sip of his vodka. Examine his background, determine his expertise, and get a photo. Suvorov, Klementi Ivanovich.

"Anything else?" the lieutenant asked.

Klusov shook his head. "That is all I have uncovered."

"Well, not too bad. Get back to work, and call me when you discover more."

"Yes, Comrade Lieutenant." The informant stood up to leave. He left the bill with the cop, who'd pay it without much in the way of annoyance. Oleg Gregoriyevich Provalov had spent enough time in police work to understand that he might just have discovered something important. Of course, you couldn't tell at this stage, not until you ran it down, every single option and blind alley, which could take rather some time... but if it turned out to be something important, then it was worth it. And if not, it was just another blind alley, of which there were many in police work.

Provalov reflected on the fact that he hadn't asked his informant exactly who had given him this new flood of information. He hadn't forgotten, but perhaps had allowed himself to be a little gulled by the descriptions of the alleged former Spetsnaz soldiers who'd made the murder. He had their descriptions in his mind, and then removed his pad to write them down. Blond and red-haired, experience in Afghanistan, both living in St. Petersburg, flew back just before noon on the day Avseyenko was murdered. So, he would check for the flight number and run the names on the manifest through the new computers Aeroflot used to tie into the global ticketing system, then cross-check it against his own computer with its index of known and suspected criminals, and also with the army's records. If he got a hit, he'd have a man talk to the cabin crew of that Moscow-St. Petersburg flight to see if anyone remembered one or both of them. Then he'd have the St. Petersburg militia do a discreet check of these people, their addresses, criminal records if any, a normal and thorough background check, leading, possibly, to an interview. He might not conduct it himself, but he'd be there to observe, to get a feel for the suspects, because there was no substitute for that, for looking in their eyes, seeing how they talked, how they sat, if they fidgeted or not, if the eyes held those of the questioner, or traveled about the room. Did they smoke then, and if so, rapidly and nervously or slowly and contemptuously... or just curiously, as would be the case if they were innocent of this charge, if not, perhaps, of another.

The militia lieutenant paid the bar bill and headed outside.

"You need to pick a better place for your meets, Oleg," a familiar voice suggested from behind. Provalov turned to see the face.

"It is a big city, Mishka, with many drinking places, and most of them are poorly lit."

"And I found yours, Oleg Gregoriyevich," Reilly reminded him. "So, what have you learned?"

Provalov summarized what he'd found out this evening.

"Two shooters from Spetsnaz? I suppose that makes some sense. What would that cost?"

"It would not be inexpensive. As a guess... oh, five thousand euros or so," the lieutenant speculated as they walked up the street.

"And who would have that much money to throw around?"

"A Muscovite criminal... Mishka, as you well know, there are hundreds who could afford it, and Rasputin wasn't the most popular of men... and I have a new name, Suvorov, Klementi Ivan'ch."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know. It is a new name for me, but Klosov acted as though I ought to have known it well. Strange that I do not," Provalov thought aloud.

"It happens. I've had wise guys turn up from nowhere, too. So, check him out?"

"Yes, I will run the name. Evidently he, too, is former KGB."

"There are a lot of them around," Reilly agreed, steering his friend into a new hotel's bar.

"What will you do when CIA is broken up?" Provalov asked.

"Laugh," the FBI agent promised.

The city of St. Petersburg was known to some as the Venice of the North for the rivers and canals that cut through it, though the climate, especially in winter, could hardly have been more different. And it was in one of those rivers that the next clue appeared.

A citizen had spotted it on his way to work in the morning, and, seeing a militiaman at the next corner, he'd walked that way and pointed, and the policeman had walked back, and looked over the iron railing at the space designated by the passing citizen.

It wasn't much to see, but it only took a second for the cop to know what it was and what it would mean. Not garbage, not a dead animal, but the top of a human head, with blond or light brown hair. A suicide or a murder, something for the local cops to investigate. The militiaman walked to the nearest phone to make his call to headquarters, and in thirty minutes a car showed up, followed in short order by a black van. By this time, the militiaman on his beat had smoked two cigarettes in the crisp morning air, occasionally looking down into the water to make sure that the object was still there. The arriving men were detectives from the city's homicide bureau. The van that had followed them had a pair of people called technicians, though they had really been trained in the city's public-works department, which meant water-and-sewer workers, though they were paid by the local militia. These two men took a look over the rail, which was enough to tell them that recovering the body would be physically difficult but routine. A ladder was set up, and the junior man, dressed in waterproof coveralls and heavy rubber gauntlets, climbed down and grabbed the submerged collar, while his partner observed and shot a few frames from his cheap camera and the three policemen on the scene observed and smoked from a few feet away. That's when the first surprise happened.

The routine was to put a flexible collar on the body under the arms, like that used by a rescue helicopter, so that the body could be winched up. But when he worked to get the collar under the body, one of the arms wouldn't move at all, and the worker struggled for several unpleasant minutes, working to get the stiff dead arm upward... and eventually found that it was handcuffed to another arm.

That revelation caused both detectives to toss their cigarettes into the water. It was probably not a suicide, since that form of death was generally not a team sport. The sewer rat--- that was how they thought of their almost-police comrades--- took another ten minutes before getting the hoist collar in place, then came up the ladder and started cranking the winch.

It was clear in a moment. Two men, not old ones, not badly dressed. They'd been dead for several days, judging by the distortion and disfigurement of their faces. The water had been cold, and that had slowed the growth and hunger of the bacteria that devoured most bodies, but water itself did things to bodies that were hard on the full stomach to gaze upon, and these two faces looked like... like Pokémon toys, one of the detectives thought, just like perverse and horrible Pokémon toys, like those that one of his kids lusted after. The two sewer rats loaded the bodies into body bags for transport to the morgue, where the examinations would take place. As yet, they knew nothing except that the bodies were indeed dead. There were no obviously missing body parts, and the general dishevelment of the bodies prevented their seeing anything like a bullet or knife wound. For the moment, they had what Americans would call two John Does, one with blond or light brown hair, the other with what appeared to be reddish hair. From appearances, they'd been in the

water for three or four days. And they'd probably died together, handcuffed as they were, unless one had murdered the other and then jumped to his own death, in which case one or both might have been homosexual, the more cynical of the two detectives thought. The beat cop was told to write up the proper reporting forms at his station, which, the militiaman thought, would be nice and warm. There was nothing like finding a corpse or two to make a cold day colder still.

The body-recovery team loaded the bags into their van for the drive to the morgue. The bags were not properly sealed because of the handcuffs, and they sat side by side on the floor of the van, perversely like the hands of lovers reaching out to each other in death... as they had in life? one of the detectives wondered aloud back in their car. His partner just growled at that one and continued his drive.

It was, agreeably, a slow day in the St. Petersburg morgue. The senior pathologist on duty, Dr. Aleksander Koniev, had been in his office reading a medical journal and well bored by the inactivity of the morning, when the call came in, a possible double homicide. Those were always interesting, and Koniev was a devotee of murder mysteries, most of them imported from Britain and America, which also made them a good way to polish up his language skills. He was waiting in the autopsy room when the bodies arrived, were transferred to gurneys at the loading ramp and rolled together into his room. It took a moment to see why the two gurneys were wheeled side by side.

"So," the pathologist asked with a sardonic grin, "were they killed by the militia?"

"Not officially," the senior detective replied, in the same emotional mode. He knew Koniev.

"Very well." The physician switched on the tape recorder. "We have two male cadavers, still fully dressed. It is apparent that both have been immersed in water--- where were they recovered?" he asked, looking up at the cops. They answered. "Immersed in fresh water in the Neva. On initial visual inspection, I would estimate three to four days' immersion after death." His gloved hands felt around one head, and the other. "Ah," his voice said. "Both victims seem to have been shot. Both have what appear to be bullet holes in the center of the occipital region of both bodies. Initial impression is a small-caliber bullet hole in both victims. We'll check that later. Yevgeniy," he said, looking up again, this time at his own technician. "Remove the clothing and bag it for later inspection.

"Yes, Comrade Doctor." The technician put out his cigarette and came forward with cutting tools.

"Both shot?" the junior detective asked.

"In the same place in both heads," Koniev confirmed. "Oh, they were handcuffed after death, strangely enough. No immediately visible bruising on either wrist. Why do it afterwards?" the pathologist wondered.

"Keeps the bodies together," the senior detective thought aloud--- but why might that be important? he wondered to himself. The killer or killers had an overly developed sense of neatness? But he'd been investigating homicides long enough to know that you couldn't fully explain all the crimes you solved, much less the ones you'd newly encountered.

"Well, they were both fit," Koniev said next, as his technician got the last of their clothes off. "Hmm, what's that?" He walked over and saw a tattoo on the left biceps of the blond one, then turned to see--- "They both have the same tattoo."

The senior detective came over to see, first thinking that maybe his partner had been right and there was a sexual element to this case, but---

"Spetsnaz, the red star and thunderbolt, these two were in Afghanistan. Anatoliy, while the doctor conducts his examination, let's go through their clothing."

This they did, and in half an hour determined that both had been well dressed in fairly expensive clothing, but in both cases entirely devoid of identification of any kind. That was hardly unusual in a situation like this, but cops, like everyone else, prefer the easy to the hard. No wallet, no identity papers, not a banknote, key chain, or tie tack. Well, they could trace them through the labels on the

clothes, and nobody had cut their fingertips off, and so they could also use fingerprints to identify them. Whoever had done the double murder had been clever enough to deny the police some knowledge, but not clever enough to deny them everything.

What did that mean? the senior detective wondered. The best way to prevent a murder investigation was to make the bodies disappear. Without a body there was no proof of death, and therefore, no murder investigation, just a missing person who could have run off with another woman or man, or just decided to go someplace to start life anew. And disposing of a body was not all that difficult, if you thought about it a little. Fortunately, most killings were, if not exactly impulse crimes, then something close to it, and most killers were fools who would later seal their own fates by talking too much.

But not this time. Had this been a sexual killing, he probably would have heard about it by now. Such crimes were virtually advertised by their perpetrators in some perverse desire to assure their own arrest and conviction, because no one who committed that kind of crime seemed able to keep his mouth shut about anything.

No, this double killing had every hallmark of professionalism. Both bodies killed in the same way, and only then handcuffed together... probably for better and/or lengthier concealment. No sign of a struggle on either body, and both were manifestly fit, trained, dangerous men. They'd been taken unawares, and that usually meant someone they both knew and trusted. Why criminals trusted anyone in their community was something neither detective quite understood. "Loyalty" was a word they could scarcely spell, much less a principle to which any of them adhered... and yet criminals gave strange lip-service to it.

As the detectives watched, the pathologist drew blood from both bodies for later toxicology tests. Perhaps both had been drugged as a precursor to the head shots, not likely, but possible, and something to be checked. Scrapings were taken from all twenty fingernails, and those, too, would probably be valueless. Finally, fingerprints were taken so that proper identification could be made. This would not be very fast. The central records bureau in Moscow was notoriously inefficient, and the detectives would beat their own local bushes in the hope of finding out who these two cadavers had once been.

"Yevgeniy, these are not men of whom I would have made enemies lightly."

"I agree, Anatoliy," the elder of the two said. "But someone either did not fear them at all... or feared them sufficiently to take very drastic action." The truth of the matter was that both men were accustomed to solving easy murders where the killer confessed almost at once, or had committed his crime in front of numerous witnesses. This one would challenge their abilities, and they would report that to their lieutenant, in the hope of getting additional assets assigned to the case.

As they watched, photos were taken of the faces, but those faces were so distorted as to be virtually unrecognizable, and the photos would then be essentially useless for purposes of identification. But taking them prior to opening the skull was procedure, and Dr. Koniev did everything by the book. The detectives stepped outside to make a few phone calls and smoke in a place with a somewhat more palatable ambience. By the time they came back, both bullets were in plastic containers, and Koniev told them that the presumptive cause of both deaths was a single bullet in each brain, with powder tattooing evident on both scalps. They'd both been killed at short range, less than half a meter, the pathologist told them, with what appeared to be a standard, light 2.6-gram bullet fired from a 5.45-mm PSM police pistol. That might have generated a snort, since this was the standard-issue police side arm, but quite a few had found their way into the Russian underworld.

"The Americans call this a professional job," Yevgeniy observed.

"Certainly it was accomplished with skill," Anatoliy agreed. "And now, first..."

"First we find out who these unlucky bastards were. Then, who the hell were their enemies."

The Chinese food in China wasn't nearly as good as that to be found in LA, Nomuri thought. Probably the ingredients, was his immediate analysis. If the People's Republic had a Food and Drug Administration, it had been left out of his premission briefing, and his first thought on entering this restaurant was that he didn't want to check the kitchen out. Like most Beijing restaurants, this one was a small mom-and-pop operation, operating out of the first floor of what was in essence a private home, and serving twenty people out of a standard Chinese communist home kitchen must have involved considerable acrobatics. The table was circular, small, and eminently cheap, and the chair was uncomfortable, but for all that, the mere fact that such a place existed was testimony to fundamental changes in the political leadership of this country.

But the mission of the evening sat across from him. Lian Ming. She wore the standard off-blue boiler suit that was virtually the uniform of low to mid-level bureaucrats in the various government ministries. Her hair was cut short, almost like a helmet. The fashion industry in this city must have been established by some racist son of a bitch who loathed the Chinese and tried his level best to make them as unattractive as he could. He'd yet to see a single local female citizen who dressed in a manner that anyone could call attractive except, maybe, for some imports from Hong Kong. Uniformity was a problem with the Orient, the utter lack of variety, unless you counted the foreigners who were showing up in ever-increasing numbers, but they stuck out like roses in a junkyard, and that merely emphasized the plethora of junk. Back home, at USC, one could have--- well, one could look at, the CIA officer corrected himself--- any sort of female to be had on the planet. White, black, Jewish, gentile, yellow in various varieties, Latina, some real Africans, plenty of real Europeans--- and there you had ample variety, too: the dark-haired, earthy Italians, the haughty French, the proper Brits, and the stiff Germans. Toss in some Canadians, and the Spanish (who went out of their way to be separated from the local Spanish speakers) and lots of ethnic Japanese (who were also separated from the local Japanese, though in this case at the will of the latter rather than the former), and you had a virtual deli of people. The only sameness there came from the Californian atmosphere, which commanded that every individual had to work hard to be presentable and attractive, for that was the One Great Commandment of life in California, home of Rollerblading and surfing, and the tight figures that went along with both pastimes.

Not here. Here everyone dressed the same, looked the same, talked the same, and largely acted the same way...

...except this one. There was something else to be had here, Nomuri thought, and that's why he'd asked her to dinner.

It was called seduction, which had been part of the spy's playbook since time immemorial, though it would be a first for Nomuri. He hadn't been quite celibate in Japan, where mores had changed in the past generation, allowing young men and young women to meet and... communicate on the most basic of levels--- but there, in a savage, and for Chester Nomuri a rather cruel, irony, the more available Japanese girls had a yen for Americans. Some said it was because Americans had a reputation for being better equipped for lovemaking than the average Japanese male, a subject of much giggling for Japanese girls who have recently become sexually active. Part of it was also that American men were reputed to treat their women better than the Japanese variety, and since Japanese women were far more obsequious than their Western counterparts, it probably worked out as a good deal for both sides of the partnerships that developed. But Chet Nomuri was a spook covered as a Japanese salaryman, and had learned to fit in so well that the local women regarded him as just another Japanese male, and so his sex life had been hindered by his professional skills, which hardly seemed fair to the field officer, brought up, like so many American men, on the movies of 007 and his numerous conquests: Mr. Kiss-Kiss Bang-Bang, as he was known in the West Indies. Well, Nomuri hadn't handled a pistol either, not since his time at The Farm--- the CIA's training school off Interstate 64 near Yorktown, Virginia--- and hadn't exactly broken any records there in the first place.

But this one had possibilities, the field officer thought, behind his normal, neutral expression, and there was nothing in the manual against getting laid on the job--- what a crimp on Agency morale that would have been, he considered. Such stories of conquest were a frequent topic of conversation at the rare but real field-officer get-togethers that the Agency occasionally held, usually at The Farm, for the field spooks to compare notes on techniques--- the after-hour beer sessions often drifted in this direction. For Chet Nomuri since getting to Beijing, his sex life had consisted of prowling Internet pornography sites. For one reason or another, the Asian culture made for an ample collection of such things, and while Nomuri wasn't exactly proud of this addiction, his sexual drive needed some outlet.

With a little work, Ming might have been pretty, Nomuri thought. First of all she needed long hair. Then, perhaps, better frames on her eyeglasses. Those she wore had all the attraction of recycled barbed wire. Then some makeup. Exactly what sort Nomuri wasn't sure--- he was no expert on such things, but her skin had an ivory-like quality to it that a little chemical enhancement might turn into something attractive. But in this culture, except for people on the stage (whose makeup was about as subtle as a Las Vegas neon sign), makeup meant washing your face in the morning, if that. It was her eyes, he decided. They were lively and... cute. There was life in them, or behind them, however that worked. She might even have had a decent figure, but it was hard to tell in that clothing.

"So, the new computer system works well?" he asked, after the lingering sip of green tea.

"It is magical," she replied, almost gushing. "The characters come out beautifully, and they print up perfectly on the laser printer, as though from a scribe."

"What does your minister think?"

"Oh, he is very pleased. I work faster now, and he is very pleased by that!" she assured him.

"Pleased enough to place an order?" Nomuri asked, reverting back to his salaryman cover.

"This I must ask the chief of administration, but I think you will be satisfied by the response."

That will make NEC happy, the CIA officer thought, again wondering briefly how much money he'd made for his cover firm. His boss in Tokyo would have gagged on his sake to know whom Nomuri really worked for, but the spook had won all of his promotions at NEC on merit, while moonlighting for his true country. It was a fortunate accident, Chet thought, that his real job and his cover one blended so seamlessly. That and the fact that he'd been raised in a very traditional home, speaking two native tongues... and more than that, the sense of on, the duty owed to his native land, far over and above that he pretended to owe to his parent culture. He'd probably gotten that from seeing his grandfather's framed plaque, the Combat Infantryman's Badge in the center on the blue velvet, surrounded by the ribbons and medallions that designated awards for bravery, the Bronze Star with combat "V," the Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation, and the campaign ribbons won as a grunt with the 442nd Regimental Combat team in Italy and Southern France. Fucked over by America, his grandfather had earned his citizenship rights in the ultimate and best possible way before returning home to the landscaping business that had educated his sons and grandsons, and taught one of them the duty he owed his country. And besides, this could be fun.

It was now, Nomuri thought, looking deeply into Ming's dark eyes, wondering what the brain behind them was thinking. She had two cute dimples at the sides of her mouth, and, he thought, a very sweet smile on an otherwise unremarkable face.

"This is such a fascinating country," he said. "By the way, your English is very good." And good that it was. His Mandarin needed a lot of help, and one doesn't seduce women with sign language.

A pleased smile. "Thank you. I do study very hard."

"What books do you read?" he asked with an engaging smile of his own.

"Romances, Danielle Steel, Judith Krantz. America offers women so many more opportunities than what we are used to here."

"America is an interesting country, but chaotic," Nomuri told her. "At least in this society one can know his place."

"Yes." She nodded. "There is security in that, but sometimes too much. Even a caged bird wishes to spread its wings."

"I will tell you one thing I find bad here."

"What is that?" Ming asked, not offended, which, Nomuri thought, was very good indeed. Maybe he'd get a Steele novel and read up on what she liked.

"You should dress differently. Your clothing is not flattering. Women should dress more attractively. In Japan there is much variety in clothing, and you can dress Eastern or Western as the spirit moves you."

She giggled. "I would settle for the underthings. They must feel so nice on the skin. That is not a very socialist thought," she told him, setting down her cup. The waiter came over, and with Nomuri's assent she ordered mao-tai, a fiery local liqueur. The waiter returned rapidly with two small porcelain cups and a flask, from which he poured daintily. The CIA officer nearly gasped with his first sip, and it went down hot, but it certainly warmed the stomach. Ming's skin, he saw, flushed from it, and there came the fleeting impression that a gate had just been opened and passed... and that it probably led in the right direction.

"Not everything can be socialist," Nomuri judged, with another tiny sip. "This restaurant is a private concern, isn't it?"

"Oh, Yes. And the food is better than what I cook. That is a skill I do not have."

"Truly? Then perhaps you will allow me to cook for you sometime," Chet suggested.

"Oh?"

"Certainly." He smiled. "I can cook American style, and I am able to shop at a closed store to get the correct ingredients." Not that the ingredients would be worth a damn, shipped in as they were, but a damned sight better than the garbage you got here in the public markets, and a steak dinner was probably something she'd never had. Could he justify getting CIA to put a few Kobe beef steaks on his expense account? Nomuri wondered. Probably. The bean-counters at Langley didn't bother the field spooks all that much.

"Really?"

"Of course. There are some advantages to being a foreign barbarian," he told her with a sly smile. The giggling response was just right, he thought. Yeah. Nomuri took another careful sip of this rocket fuel. She'd just told him what she wanted to wear. Sensible, too, for this culture. However comfy it might be, it would also be quite discreet.

"So, what else can you tell me about yourself?" he asked next.

"There is little to tell. My job is beneath my education, but it carries prestige for... well, for political reasons. I am a highly educated secretary. My employer--- well, technically I work for the state, as do most of us, but in fact I work for my minister as if he were in the capitalist sector and paid me from his own pocket." She shrugged. "I suppose it has always been so. I see and hear interesting things."

Don't want to ask about them now, Nomuri knew. Later, sure, but not now.

"It is the same with me, industrial secrets and such. Ahh," he snorted. "Better to leave such things at my official desk. No, Ming, tell me about you."

"Again, there is little to tell. I am twenty-four. I am educated. I suppose I am lucky to be alive. You know what happens to many girl babies here..."

Nomuri nodded. "I have heard the stories. They are distasteful," he agreed with her. It was more than that. It was not unknown for the father of a female toddler to drop her down a well in the hope that his wife would bear him a son on the next try. One-baby-per-family was almost a law in the PRC, and like most laws in a communist state, that one was ruthlessly enforced. An unauthorized baby was often allowed to come to term, but then as birth took place, when the baby "crowned," the top of the head appearing, the very moment of birth, the attending physician or nurse would take a syringe loaded with formaldehyde, and stab it into the soft spot at the crown of the almost-newborn's head, push the plunger, and extinguish its life at the moment of its beginning. It wasn't



something the government of the PRC advertised as government policy, but government policy it was. Nomuri's one sister, Alice, was a physician, an obstetrician/gynecologist trained at UCLA, and he knew that his sister would take poison herself before performing such a barbarous act, or take a pistol to use on whoever demanded that she do it. Even so, some surplus girl babies somehow managed to be born, and these were often abandoned, and then given up for adoption, mainly to Westerners, because the Chinese themselves had no use for them at all. Had it been done to Jews, it would have been called genocide, but there were a lot of Chinese to go around. Carried to extremes, it could lead to racial extinction, but here it was just called population control. "In due course Chinese culture will again recognize the value of women, Ming. That is certain."

"I suppose it is," she allowed. "How are women treated in Japan?"

Nomuri allowed himself a laugh. "The real question is how well they treat us, and how well they permit us to treat them!"

"Truly?"

"Oh, yes. My mother ruled the house until she died."

"Interesting. Are you religious?"

Why that question? Chet wondered.

"I have never decided between Shinto and Zen Buddhism," he replied, truthfully. He'd been baptized a Methodist, but fallen away from his church many years before. In Japan he'd examined the local religions just to understand them, the better to fit in, and though he'd learned much about both, neither had appealed to his American upbringing. "And you?"

"I once looked into Falun Gong, but not seriously. I had a friend who got very involved. He's in prison now."

"Ah, a pity." Nomuri nodded sympathy, wondering how close the friend had been. Communism remained a jealous system of belief, intolerant of competition of any sort. Baptists were the new religious fad, springing up as if from the very ground itself, started off, he thought, from the Internet, a medium into which American Christians, especially Baptists and Mormons, had pumped a lot of resources of late. And so Jerry Falwell was getting some sort of religious/ideological foothold here? How remarkable--- or not. The problem with Marxism-Leninism, and also with Mao it would seem, was that as fine as the theoretical model was, it lacked something the human soul craved. But the communist chieftains didn't and couldn't like that very much. The Falun Gong group hadn't even been a religion at all, not to Nomuri's way of thinking, but for some reason he didn't fully understand, it had frightened the powers that be in the PRC enough to crack down on it as if it had been a genuinely counterrevolutionary political movement. He heard that the convicted leaders of the group were doing seriously hard time in the local prisons. The thought of what constituted especially hard time in this country didn't bear much contemplation. Some of the world's most vicious tortures had been invented in this country, where the value of human life was a far less important thing than in the nation of his origin, Chet reminded himself. China was an ancient land with an ancient culture, but in many ways these people might as well have been Klingons as fellow human beings, so detached were their societal values from what Chester Nomuri had grown up with. "Well, I really don't have much in the way of religious convictions."

"Convictions?" Ming asked.

"Beliefs," the CIA officer corrected. "So, are there any men in your life? A fiancé, perhaps?"

She sighed. "No, not in some time."

"Indeed? I find that surprising," Nomuri observed with studied gallantry.

"I suppose we are different from Japan," Ming admitted, with just a hint of sadness in her voice.

Nomuri lifted the flask and poured some more mao-tai for both. "In that case," he said, with a smile and a raised eyebrow, "I offer you a friendly drink."

"Thank you, Nomuri-san."

"My pleasure, Comrade Ming." He wondered how long it would take. Perhaps not too long at all. Then the real work would begin.

## CHAPTER - 7

### Developing Leads

It was the sort of coincidence for which police work is known worldwide. Provalov called militia headquarters, and since he was investigating a homicide, he got to speak with the St. Petersburg murder squad leader, a captain. When he said he was looking for some former Spetsnaz soldiers, the captain remembered his morning meeting in which two of his men had reported finding two bodies bearing possible Spetsnaz tattoos, and that was enough to make him forward the call.

"Really, the RPG event in Moscow?" Yevgeniy Petrovich Ustinov asked. "Who exactly was killed?"

"The main target appears to have been Gregoriy Filipovich Avseyenko. He was a pimp," Provalov told his colleague to the north. "Also his driver and one of his girls, but they appear to have been inconsequential." He didn't have to elaborate. You didn't use an antitank rocket to kill a chauffeur and a whore.

"And your sources tell you that two Spetsnaz veterans did the shooting?"

"Correct, and they flew back to St. Petersburg soon thereafter."

"I see. Well, we fished two such people from the River Neva yesterday, both in their late thirties or so, and both shot in the back of the head."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. We have fingerprints from both bodies. We're waiting for Central Army Records to match them up. But that will not be very fast."

"Let me see what I can do about that, Yevgeniy Petrovich. You see, also present at the murder was Sergey Nikolay'ch Golovko, and we have concerns that he might have been the true target of the killing."

"That would be ambitious," Ustinov observed coolly. "Perhaps your friends at Dzerzhinskiy Square can get the records morons moving?"

"I will call them and see," Provalov promised.

"Good, anything else?"

"Another name, Suvorov, Klementi Ivan'ch, reportedly a former KGB officer, but that is all I have at the moment. Does the name mean anything to you?" You could hear the man shaking his head over the phone, Provalov noted.

"Nyet, never heard that one," the senior detective replied as he wrote it down. "Connection?"

"My informant thinks he's the man who arranged the killing."

"I'll check our records here to see if we have anything on him. Another former 'Sword and Shield' man, eh? How many of those guardians of the state have gone bad?" the St. Petersburg cop asked rhetorically.

"Enough," his colleague in Moscow agreed, with an unseen grimace.

"This Avseyenko fellow, also KGB?"

"Yes, he reportedly ran the Sparrow School."

Ustinov chuckled at that one. "Oh, a state-trained pimp. Marvelous. Good girls?"

"Lovely," Provalov confirmed. "More than we can afford."

"A real man doesn't have to pay for it, Oleg Gregoriyevich," the St. Petersburg cop assured his Moscow colleague.

"That is true, my friend. At least not until long afterwards," Provalov added.

"That is the truth!" A laugh. "Let me know what you find out?"

"Yes, I will fax you my notes."

"Excellent. I will share my information with you as well," Ustinov promised. There is a bond among homicide investigators across the world. No country sanctions the private taking of human life. Nation-states reserve such power for themselves alone.

In his dreary Moscow office, Lieutenant Provalov made his notes for several minutes. It was too late to call the RVS about rattling the Central Army Records cage. First thing in the morning, he promised himself. Then it was time to leave. He picked his coat off the tree next to his desk and headed out to where his official car was parked. This he drove to a corner close to the American Embassy, and a place called Boris Godunov's, a friendly and warm bar. He'd only been there for five minutes when a familiar hand touched his shoulder.

"Hello, Mishka," Provalov said, without turning.

"You know, Oleg, it's good to see that Russian cops are like American cops."

"It is the same in New York?"

"You bet," Reilly confirmed. "After a long day of chasing bad guys, what's better than a few drinks with your pals?" The FBI agent waved to the bartender for his usual, a vodka and soda. "Besides, you get some real work done in a place like this. So, anything happening on the Pimp Case?"

"Yes, the two who did the killing may have shown up dead in St. Petersburg." Provalov tossed down the last of his straight vodka and filled the American in on the details, concluding, "What do you make of that?"

"Either it's revenge or insurance, pal. I've seen it happen at home."

"Insurance?"

"Yeah, had it happen in New York. The Mafia took Joey Gallo out, did it in public, and they wanted it to be a signature event, so they got a black hood to do the hit--- but then the poor bastard gets shot himself about fifteen feet away. Insurance, Oleg. That way the subject can't tell anybody who asked him to take the job. The second shooter just walked away, never did get a line on him. Or it could have been a revenge hit: whoever paid them to do the job whacked them for hitting the wrong target. You pays your money and you takes your choice, pal."

"How do you say, wheels within wheels?"

Reilly nodded. "That's how we say it. Well, at least it gives you some more leads to run down. Maybe your two shooters talked to somebody. Hell, maybe they even kept a diary." It was like tossing a rock into a pond, Reilly thought. The ripples just kept expanding in a case like this. Unlike a nice domestic murder, where a guy whacked his wife for fucking around, or serving dinner late, and then confessed while crying his eyes out at what he'd done. But by the same token, it was an awfully loud crime, and those, more often than not, were the ones you broke because people commented on the noise, and some of those people knew things that you could use. It was just a matter of getting people out on the street, rattling doorknobs and wearing out shoes, until you got what you needed. These Russian cops weren't dumb. They lacked some of the training that Reilly took for granted, but for all that, they had the proper cop instincts, and the fact of the matter was that if you followed the proper procedures, you'd break your cases, because the other side wasn't all that smart. The smart ones didn't break the law in so egregious a way. No, the perfect crime was the one you never discovered, the murder victim you never found, the stolen funds missed by bad accounting procedures, the espionage never discovered. Once you knew a crime had been committed, you had a starting place, and it was like unraveling a sweater. There wasn't all that much holding the wool together if you just kept picking at it.

"Tell me, Mishka, how worthy were your Mafia adversaries in New York?" Provalov asked after sipping his second drink.

Reilly did the same. "It's not like the movies, Oleg. Except maybe Goodfellas. They're cheap hoods. They're not educated. Some of them are pretty damned dumb. Their cachet was that once upon a time they didn't talk, omertà they used to call it, the Law of Silence. I mean, they'd take the fall and never cooperate. But that changed over time. The people from the Old Country died out and the new generation was softer--- and we got tougher. It's a lot easier to laugh your way through three years than it is to handle ten, and on top of that the organization broke down. They stopped taking care of the families while the dad was in the slammer, and that was real bad for morale. So,

they started talking to us. And we got smarter, too, with electronic surveillance--- now it's called 'special operations'; back then it was a 'black bag job'--- and we weren't always very careful about getting a warrant. I mean, back in the '60s, a Mafia don couldn't take a leak without us knowing what color it was."

"And they never fought back?"

"You mean fuck with us? Mess with an FBI agent?" Reilly grinned at the very thought. "Oleg, nobody ever messes with the FBI. Back then, and still somewhat to this day, we are the Right Hand of God Himself, and if you mess with us, some really bad things are going to happen. The truth of the matter is that nothing like that has ever happened, but the bad guys worry that it might. The rules get bent some, but, no, we never really break them--- at least not that I know about. But if you threaten a hood with serious consequences for stepping over the line, chances are he'll take you seriously."

"Not here. They do not respect us that much yet."

"Well, then you have to generate that respect, Oleg." And it really was about that simple in concept, though bringing it about, Reilly knew, would not be all that easy. Would it take having the local cops go off the reservation once in a while, to show the hoods the price of *lèse-majesté*? That was part of American history, Reilly thought. Town sheriffs like Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, and Wild Bill Hickock, Lone Wolf Gonzales of the Texas Rangers, Bill Tilghman and Billy Threepersons of the U.S. Marshal Service, the cops of their time who didn't so much enforce the law as embody it in the way they walked down the street. There was no corresponding Russian lawman of legend. Maybe they needed one. It was part of the heritage of every American cop, and from watching movies and TV westerns, American citizens grew up with the expectation that breaking the law would bring such a man into your life, and not to your personal profit. The FBI had grown up in an era of increased crime during the Great Depression, and had exploited the existing Western tradition with modern technology and procedures to create its own institutional mystique. To do that had meant convicting a lot of criminals, and killing a few on the street as well. In America there was the expectation that cops were heroic figures who didn't merely enforce the law, but who protected the innocent as well. There was no such tradition here. Growing it would solve many of the problems in the former Soviet Union, where the lingering tradition was of oppression rather than protection. No John Wayne, no Melvin Purvis in Russian movies, and this nation was the poorer for it. As much as Reilly liked working here, and as much as he'd come to like and respect his Russian counterparts, it was much like being dumped into a trash heap with instructions to make it as orderly as Bergdorf-Goodman's in New York. All the proper things were there, but organizing them made Hercules' task in the Augean stables seem trivial in comparison. Oleg had the right motivation, and the right set of skills, but it was some job he had ahead of him. Reilly didn't envy him the task, but he had to help as best he could.

"I do not envy you very much, Mishka, but your organization's status in your country is something I would like to have."

"It didn't just happen, Oleg. It's the product of many years and a lot of good men. Maybe I should show you a Clint Eastwood movie."

"Dirty Harry? I have seen it." Entertaining, the Russian thought, but not overly realistic.

"No, Hang Em High, about the Marshal Service, back in the Old West, when men were men and women were grateful. Actually it's not true in the usual sense. There wasn't much crime in the Old West."

That made the Russian look up from his drink in surprise. "Then why do all the movies say otherwise?"

"Oleg, movies have to be exciting, and there isn't much exciting about raising wheat or punching cattle. The American West was mainly settled by veterans of our Civil War. That was a hard and cruel conflict, but no man who'd survived the Battle of Shiloh was likely to be intimidated by some bozo on a horse, gun or not. A professor at Oklahoma State University did a book on this subject

twenty or so years ago. He checked court records and such, and found out that except for saloon shootings--- guns and whiskey make a crummy mix, right?--- there wasn't a hell of a lot of crime in the West. The citizens could look after themselves, and the laws they had were pretty tough--- not a hell of a lot of repeat offenders--- but what it really came down to was that the citizens all had guns and all pretty much knew how to use them, and that is a big deterrent for the bad guys. A cop's less likely to shoot you than an aroused citizen, when you get down to it. He doesn't want to do all the paperwork if he can avoid it, right?" A sip and a chuckle from the American.

"In that we are the same, Mishka," Provalov agreed.

"And, by the way, all this quick-draw stuff in the movies. If it ever happened for real, I've never heard of such a case. No, that's all Hollywood bullshit. You can't draw and fire accurately that way. If you could, they would have trained us to do it that way at Quantico. But except for people who practice for special performances and tournaments and stuff, and that's always at the same angle and the same distance, it just can't be done."

"You're sure of that?" Legends die hard, especially for an otherwise pretty smart cop who had, however, seen his share of Westerns.

"I was a Principal Instructor in my Field Division, and damned if I can do it."

"You are good shot, eh?"

Reilly nodded with uncharacteristic modesty on this particular issue. "Fair," he allowed. "Pretty fair." There were less than three hundred names on the FBI Academy's "Possible Board," identifying those who'd fired a perfect qualifying course on graduating. Mike Reilly was one of them. He'd also been assistant head of the SWAT team in his first field division in Kansas City before moving over to the chess players in the OC--- Organized Crime--- department. It made him feel a little naked to walk around without his trusty S&W 1076 automatic, but that was life in the FBI's diplomatic service, the agent told himself. What the hell, the vodka was good here, and he was developing a taste for it. For that his diplomatic license plates helped. The local cops were pretty serious about giving tickets out. It was a pity they still had so much to learn about major criminal investigations.

"So, our pimp friend was probably the primary target, Oleg?"

"Yes, I think that is likely, but not entirely certain yet." He shrugged. "But we'll keep the Golovko angle open. After all," Provalov added, after a long sip of his glass, "it will get us lots of powerful cooperation from other agencies."

Reilly had to laugh at that. "Oleg Gregoriyevich, you know how to handle the bureaucratic part of the job. I couldn't do that better myself!" Then he waved to the bartender. He'd spring for the next round.

The Internet had to be the best espionage invention ever made, Mary Patricia Foley thought. She also blessed the day that she'd personally recommended Chester Nomuri to the Directorate of Operations. That little Nisei had some beautiful moves for an officer still on the short side of thirty. He'd done superb work in Japan, and had volunteered in a heartbeat for Operation GENGHIS in Beijing. His cover job at Nippon Electric Company could hardly have been better suited to the mission requirements, and it seemed that he'd waltzed into his niche like Fred Astaire on a particularly good day. The easiest part of all, it seemed, was getting the data out.

Six years before, CIA had gone to Silicon Valley--- undercover, of course--- and commissioned a modern manufacturer to set up a brief production run of a very special modem. In fact, it seemed to many to be a sloppy one, since the linkup time it used was four or five seconds longer than was the usual. What you couldn't tell was that the last four seconds weren't random electronic noise at all, but rather the mating of a special encryption system, which when caught on a phone tap sounded just like random noise anyway. So, all Chester had to do was set up his message for transmission and punch it through. To be on the safe side, the messages were super-encrypted with a 256-bit

system specially made at the National Security Agency, and the double-encipherment was so complex that even NSA's own bank of supercomputers could only crack it with difficulty and after a lot of expensive time. After that, it was just a matter of setting up a www-dot-something domain through an easily available public vendor and a local ISP--- Internet Service Provider--- with which the world abounded. It could even be used on a direct call from one computer to another--- in fact, that was the original application, and even if the opposition had a hardwire phone tap, it would take a mathematical genius plus the biggest and baddest supercomputer that Sun Microsystems made even to begin cracking into the message.

Lian Ming, Mary Pat read, secretary to... to him, eh? Not a bad potential source. The most charming part of all was that Nomuri included the sexual possibilities implicit in the recruitment. The kid was still something of an innocent; he'd probably blushed writing this, the Deputy Director (Operations) of the Central Intelligence Agency thought to herself, but he'd included it because he was so damned honest in everything he did. It was time to get Nomuri a promotion and a raise. Mrs. Foley made the appropriate note on a Post-it for attachment to his file. James Bond-san, she thought with an internal chuckle. The easiest part was the reply: Approved, proceed. She didn't even have to add the "with caution" part. Nomuri knew how to handle himself in the field, which was not always the rule for young field officers. Then she picked up the phone and called her husband on the direct line.

"Yeah, honey?" the Director of Central Intelligence said.

"Busy?"

Ed Foley knew that wasn't a question his wife asked lightly. "Not too busy for you, baby. Come on down." And hung up.

The CIA Director's office is relatively long and narrow, with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the woods and the special-visitors' parking lot. Beyond that are the trees overlooking the Potomac Valley and the George Washington Parkway, and little else. The idea of anyone's having a direct line of sight into any part of this building, much less the Office of the Director, would have been the cause of serious heartburn for the security pukes. Ed looked up from his paperwork when his wife came in and took the leather chair across from his desk.

"Something good?"

"Even better than Eddie's marks at school," she replied with a soft, sexy smile she reserved for her husband alone. And that had to be pretty good. Edward Foley, Jr., was kicking ass up at Rensselaer Polytechnic in New York, and a starter on their hockey team, which damned near always kicked ass itself in the NCAA. Little Ed might earn a place on the Olympic team, though pro hockey was out. He'd make too much money as a computer engineer to waste his time in so pedestrian a pursuit. "I think we may have something here."

"Like what, honey?"

"Like the executive secretary to Fang Gan," she replied. "Nomuri's trying to recruit her, and he says the prospects are good."

"GENGHIS," Ed observed. They ought to have picked a different name, but unlike most CIA operations, the name for this one hadn't been generated by a computer in the basement. The fact of the matter was that this security measure hadn't been applied for the simple reason that nobody had ever expected anything to come of it. CIA had never gotten any kind of agent into the PRC government. At least not above the rank of captain in the People's Liberation Army. The problems were the usual ones. First, they had to recruit an ethnic Chinese, and CIA hadn't had much success at that; next, the officer in question had to have perfect language skills, and the ability to disappear into the culture. For a variety of reasons, none of that had ever happened. Then Mary Pat had suggested trying Nomuri. His corporation did a lot of business in China, after all, and the kid did have good instincts. And so, Ed Foley had signed off on it, not really expecting much to result. But again his wife's field instincts had proven superior to his. It was widely believed that Mary Pat

Foley was the best field officer the Agency had had in twenty years, and it looked as if she was determined to prove that. "How exposed is Chet?"

His wife had to nod her concern at that one. "He's hanging out there, but he knows how to be careful, and his communications gear is the best we have. Unless they brute-force him, you know, just pick him up because they don't like his haircut, he ought to be pretty safe. Anyway---" She handed over the communication from Beijing.

The DCI read it three times before handing it back. "Well, if he wants to get laid--- it's not good fieldcraft, honey. Not good to get that involved with your agent---"

"I know that, Ed, but you play the cards you're dealt, remember? And if we get her a computer like the one Chet's using, her security won't be all that bad either, will it?"

"Unless they have somebody pick it apart," Ed Foley thought aloud.

"Oh, Jesus, Ed, our best people would have a cast-iron mother-fucker of a time figuring it all out. I ran that project myself, remember? It's safe!"

"Easy, honey." The DCI held up his hand. When Mary used that sort of language, she was really into the matter at hand. "Yeah, I know, it's secure, but I'm the worrier and you're the cowgirl, remember?"

"Okay, honey-bunny." The usual sweet smile that went with seduction and getting her way.

"You've already told him to proceed?"

"He's my officer, Eddie."

A resigned nod. It wasn't fair that he had to work with his wife here. He rarely won any arguments at the office, either. "Okay, baby. It's your operation, run with it, but---"

"But what?"

"But we change GENGHIS to something else. If this one pans out, then we go to a monthly name cycle. This one has some serious implications, and we've got to go max-security on it."

She had to agree with that. As case officers, the two of them had run an agent known in CIA legend as CARDINAL, Colonel Mikhail Semyonovich Filitov, who'd worked inside the Kremlin for more than thirty years, feeding gold-plated information on every aspect of the Soviet military, plus some hugely valuable political intelligence. For bureaucratic reasons lost in the mists of time, CARDINAL had not been handled as a regular agent-in-place, and that had saved him from Aldrich Ames and his treacherous betrayal of a dozen Soviet citizens who'd worked for America. For Ames it had worked out to roughly \$100,000 per life given away. Both of the Foleys regretted the fact that Ames was allowed to live, but they weren't in the law-enforcement business.

"Okay, Eddie, monthly change-cycle. You're always so careful, honey. You call or me?"

"We'll wait until she gives us something useful before going to all the trouble, but let's change GENGHIS to something else. It's too obviously a reference to China."

"Okay." An impish smile. "How about SORGE for the moment?" she suggested. The name was that of Richard Sorge, one of the greatest spies who'd ever lived, a German national who'd worked for the Soviets, and just possibly the man who'd kept Hitler from winning his Eastern Front war with Stalin. The Soviet dictator, knowing this, hadn't lifted a hand to save him from execution.

"Gratitude," Iosif Vissarionovich had once said, "is a disease of dogs."

The DCI nodded. His wife had a lively sense of humor, especially as applied to business matters. "When do you suppose we'll know if she'll play ball with us?"

"About as soon as Chet gets his rocks off, I suppose."

"Mary, did you ever...?"

"In the field? Ed, that's a guy thing, not a girl thing," she told her husband with a sparkling grin as she lifted her papers and headed back out. "Except with you, honey-bunny."

The Alitalia DC-10 touched down about fifteen minutes early due to the favorable winds. Renato Cardinal DiMilo was pleased enough to think through an appropriate prayer of thanksgiving. A

longtime member of the Vatican's diplomatic service, he was accustomed to long flights, but that wasn't quite the same as enjoying them. He wore his red--- "cardinal"--- and black suit that was actually more akin to an official uniform, and not a conspicuously comfortable one at that, despite the custom tailoring that came from one of Rome's better shops. One of the drawbacks to his clerical and diplomatic status was that he'd been unable to shed his suitcoat for the flight, but he'd been able to kick off his shoes, only to find that his feet had swollen on the flight, and getting them back on was more difficult than usual. That evoked a sigh rather than a curse, as the plane taxied to the terminal. The senior flight attendant ushered him to the forward door and allowed him to leave the aircraft first. One advantage to his diplomatic status was that all he ever had to do was wave his diplomatic passport at the control officers, and in this case a senior PRC government official was there to greet him at the end of the jetway.

"Welcome to our country," the official said, extending his hand.

"It is my pleasure to be here," the cardinal replied, noting that this communist atheist didn't kiss his ring, as was the usual protocol. Well, Catholicism in particular and Christianity in general were not exactly welcome in the People's Republic of China, were they? But if the PRC expected to live in the civilized world, then they'd have to accept representation with the Holy See, and that was that. And besides, he'd go to work on these people, and, who knew, maybe he could convert one or two. Stranger things had happened, and the Roman Catholic Church had handled more formidable enemies than this one.

With a wave and a small escort group, the demi-minister conducted his distinguished visitor through the concourse toward the place where the official car and escort waited.

"How was your flight?" the underling asked.

"Lengthy but not unpleasant" was the expected reply. Diplomats had to act as though they loved flying, though even the flight crews found journeys of this length tiresome. It was his job to observe the new ambassador of the Vatican, to see how he acted, how he looked out the car's windows, even, which, in this case, was not unlike all the other first-time diplomats who came to Beijing. They looked out at the differences. The shapes of the buildings were new and different to them, the color of the bricks, and how the brickwork looked close up and at a distance, the way in which things that were essentially the same became fascinating because of differences that were actually microscopic when viewed objectively.

It took a total of twenty-eight minutes to arrive at the residence/embassy. It was an old building, dating back to the turn of the previous century, and had been the largish home of an American Methodist missionary--- evidently one who liked his American comforts, the official thought--- and had passed through several incarnations, including, he'd learned the previous day, that of a bordello in the diplomatic quarter in the 1920s and '30s, because diplomats liked their comforts as well. Ethnic Chinese, he wondered, or Russian women who'd always claimed to be of the Czarist nobility, or so he'd heard. After all, Westerners enjoyed fucking noblewomen for some reason or other, as if their body parts were different somehow. He'd heard that one, too, at the office, from one of the archivists who kept track of such things at the Ministry. Chairman Mao's personal habits were not recorded, but his lifelong love for deflowering twelve-year-olds was well known in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Every national leader had something odd and distasteful about him, the young official knew. Great men had great aberrations.

The car pulled up to the old wooden frame house, where a uniformed policeman opened the door for the visiting Italian, and even saluted, earning himself a nod from the man wearing the ruby-red skullcap.

Waiting on the porch was yet another foreigner, Monsignor Franz Schepke, whose diplomatic status was that of DCM, or deputy chief of mission, which usually meant the person who was really in charge of things while the ambassador--- mainly a man chosen for political reasons--- reigned in the main office. They didn't know if that were the case here yet.



Schepke looked as German as his ancestry was, tall and spare with gray-blue eyes that revealed nothing at all, and a wonderful language gift that had mastered not only the complex Chinese language, but also the local dialect and accent as well. Over the phone this foreigner could pass for a party member, much to the surprise of local officials who were not in the least accustomed to foreigners who could even speak the language properly, much less master it.

The German national, the Chinese official saw, kissed his superior's ring. Then the Italian shook his hand and embraced the younger churchman. They probably knew each other. Cardinal DiMilo then led Schepke to the escort and introduced them--- they'd met many times before, of course, and that made the senior churchman appear just a little backward to the local official. In due course, the luggage was loaded into the residence/embassy building, and the Chinese official got back in the official car for the ride to the Foreign Ministry, where he'd make his contact report. The Papal Nuncio was past his prime, he'd write, a pleasant enough old chap, perhaps, but no great intellect. A fairly typical Western ambassador, in other words.

No sooner had they gotten inside than Schepke tapped his right ear and gestured around the building.

"Everywhere?" the cardinal asked.

"Ja, doch," Monsignor Schepke replied in his native German, then shifted to Greek. Not modern, but Attic Greek, that spoken by Aristotle, similar to but different from the modern version of that language, a language perpetuated only by a handful of scholars at Oxford and a few more Western universities. "Welcome, Eminence."

"Even airplanes can take too long. Why can we not travel by ship? It would be a much gentler way to getting from point to point."

"The curse of progress," the German priest offered weakly. The Rome-Beijing flight was only forty minutes longer than the one between Rome and New York, after all, but Renato was a man from a different and more patient age.

"My escort. What can you tell me of him?"

"His name is Qian. He's forty, married, one son. He will be our point of contact with the Foreign Ministry. Bright, well educated, but a dedicated communist, son of another such man," Schepke said, speaking rapidly in the language learned long before in seminary. He and his boss knew that this exchange would probably be recorded, and would then drive linguists in the Foreign Ministry to madness. Well, it was not their fault that such people were illiterate, was it?

"And the building is fully wired, then?" DiMilo asked, heading over to a tray with a bottle of red wine on it.

"We must assume so," Schepke confirmed with a nod, while the cardinal poured a glass. "I could have the building swept, but finding reliable people here is not easy, and..." And those able to do a proper sweep would then use the opportunity to plant their own bugs for whatever country they worked for--- America, Britain, France, Israel, all were interested in what the Vatican knew.

The Vatican, located in central Rome, is technically an independent country, hence Cardinal DiMilo's diplomatic status even in a country where religious convictions were frowned upon at best, and stamped into the earth at worst. Renato Cardinal DiMilo had been a priest for just over forty years, most of which time had been spent in the Vatican's foreign service. His language skills were not unknown within the confines of his own service, but rare even there, and damned rare in the outside world, where men and women took a great deal of time to learn languages. But DiMilo picked them up easily--- so much so that it surprised him that others were unable to do so as well. In addition to being a priest, in addition to being a diplomat, DiMilo was also an intelligence officer--- all ambassadors are supposed to be, but he was much more so than most. One of his jobs was to keep the Vatican--- therefore the Pope--- informed of what was happening in the world, so that the Vatican--- therefore the Pope--- could take action, or at least use influence in the proper direction.

DiMilo knew the current Pope quite well. They'd been friends for years before his election to the chair of the Pontifex Maximus ("maximus" in this context meaning "chief," and "pontifex" meaning "bridge-builder," as a cleric was supposed to be the bridge between men and their God). DiMilo had served the Vatican in this capacity in seven countries. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, he'd specialized in Eastern European countries, where he'd learned to debate the merits of communism with its strongest adherents, mostly to their discomfort and his own amusement. Here would be different, the cardinal thought. It wasn't just the Marxist beliefs. This was a very different culture. Confucius had defined the place of a Chinese citizen two millennia before, and that place was different from what Western culture taught. There was a place for the teachings of Christ here, of course, as there was everywhere. But the local soil was not as fertile for Christianity as it was elsewhere. Local citizens who sought out Christian missionaries would do so out of curiosity, and once exposed to the gospel would find Christian beliefs more curious still, since they were so different from the nation's more ancient teachings. Even the more "normal" beliefs that were in keeping, more or less, with Chinese traditions, like the Eastern Spiritualist movement known as Falun Gong, had been ruthlessly, if not viciously, repressed. Cardinal DiMilo told himself that he'd come to one of the few remaining pagan nations, and one in which martyrdom was still a possibility for the lucky or luckless, depending on one's point of view. He sipped his wine, trying to decide what time his body thought it was, as opposed to what time it was by his watch. In either case, the wine tasted good, reminding him as it did of his home, a place which he'd never truly left, even in Moscow or Prague. Beijing, though--- Beijing might be a challenge .

## CHAPTER - 8

### Underlings and Underthings

It wasn't the first time he'd done this. It was exciting in its way, and arousing, and marginally dangerous because of the time and place. Mainly it was an exercise in effective memory and the discerning eye. The hardest part was converting the English units to metric. The perfect female form was supposed to be 36-24-36, not 91.44-60.96-91.44.

The last time he'd been in a place like this had been in the Beverly Center Mall in Los Angeles, buying for Maria Castillo, a voluptuous Latina who'd been delighted at his error, taking her waist for twenty-four rather than its true twenty-seven. You wanted to err on the low side in numbers, but probably the big side in letters. If you took a 36B chest to be a 34C, she wouldn't be mad, but if you took a twenty-four-inch waist for a twenty-eight-inch, she'd probably be pissed. Stress, Nomuri told himself with a shake of the head, came in many shapes and sizes. He wanted to get this right because he wanted Ming as a source, but he wanted her as a mistress, too, and that was one more reason not to make a mistake.

The color was the easy part. Red. Of course, red. This was still a country in which red was the "good" color, which was convenient because red had always been the lively choice in women's underthings, the color of adventure and giggles and... looseness. And looseness served both his biological and professional purposes. He had other things to figure out, too. Ming was not tall, scarcely five feet--- 151 centimeters or so, Nomuri thought, doing the conversion in his head. She was short but not really petite. There was no real obesity in China. People didn't overeat here, probably because of the lingering memory of times when food had not been in abundance and overeating was simply not possible. Ming would have been considered overweight in California, Chester thought, but that was just her body type. She was squat because she was short, and no amount of dieting or working out or makeup could change it. Her waist wouldn't be much less than twenty-seven inches. For her chest, 34B was about the best he could hope for... well, maybe 34C--- no, he decided, B+ at most. So, a 34B bra, and medium shorts--- panties--- red silk, something feminine... something on the wild, whorish side of feminine, something that she could look into the

mirror alone with and giggle... and maybe sigh at how different she looked wearing such things, and maybe smile, that special inward smile women had for such moments. The moment when you knew you had them--- and the rest was just dessert.

The best part of Victoria's Secret was the catalog, designed for men who really, and sensibly, wanted to buy the models themselves, despite the facial attitudes that sometimes made them look like lesbians on quaaludes--- but with such bodies, a man couldn't have everything, could he? Fantasies, things of the mind. Nomuri wondered if the models really existed or were the products of computers. They could do anything with computers these days--- make Rosie O'Donnell into Twiggy, or Cindy Crawford obsolete.

Back to work, he told himself. This might be a place for fantasies, but not that one, not yet. Okay, it had to be sexy. It had to be something that would both amuse and excite Ming, and himself, too: That was all part of it. Nomuri took the catalog off the pile because it was a lot easier for him to see what he wanted in a filled rather than an unfilled condition. He turned pages and stopped dead on page 26. There was a black girl modeling it, and whatever genetic stew she'd come from must have had some fine ingredients, as her face would have appealed to a member of Hitler's SS just as much as Idi Amin. It was that sort of face. Better yet, she wore something called a Racerback bra with matching string bikini panties, and the color was just perfect, a red-purple that the Romans had once called Tyrrian Scarlet, the color on the toga stripe of members of the senatorial order, reserved by price and custom to the richest of the Roman nobility, not quite red, not quite purple. The bra material was satin and Lycra, and it closed in front, the easier for a girl to put it on, and the more interesting for a guy to take it off, his mind thought, as he headed over to the proper rack of clothing. Thirty-four-B, he thought. If too small, it would be all the more flattering... small or medium on the string bikini? Shit, he decided, get one of each. Just to be sure, he also got a no-wire triangle-pattern bra and thong panties in an orange-red color that the Catholic Church would call a mortal sin just for looking at. On impulse he got several additional panties on the assumption that they soiled more quickly than bras did, something he wasn't sure of despite being a field intelligence officer of the Central Intelligence Agency. They didn't tell you about such things at The Farm. He'd have to do a memo on that. It might give MP a chuckle in her seventh-floor office at Langley.

One other thing, he thought. Perfume. Women liked perfume. You'd expect them to like it, especially here. The entire city of Beijing smelled like a steel mill, lots of coal dust and other pollutants in the air--- as Pittsburgh had probably been at the turn of the last century--- and the sad truth was that the Chinese didn't bathe as diligently as Californians did, and nowhere nearly as regularly as the Japanese. So, something that smelled nice...

"Dream Angels," the brand was called. It came in a perfume spray, lotion, and other applications that he didn't understand, but he was sure Ming would, since she was a girl, and this was a quintessential girl thing. So, he bought some of that, too, using his NEC credit card to pay for it--- his Japanese bosses would understand. There were skillfully arranged and choreographed sex tours that took Japanese salarymen to various places in Asia that catered to the sex trade. That was probably how AIDS had gotten to Japan, and why Nomuri used a condom for everything there except urinating. The total came to about 300 euros. The salesclerk wrapped everything and commented that the lady in his life was very lucky.

She will be, Nomuri promised himself. The underthings he'd just bought her, well, the fabrics felt as smooth as flexible glass, and the colors would arouse a blind man. The only question was how they would affect a dumpy Chinese female secretary to a government minister. It wasn't as though he was trying to seduce Suzie Wong. Lian Ming was pretty ordinary rather than ordinarily pretty, but you never knew. Amy Irvin, his first conquest at the ripe old age of seventeen years and three months, had been pretty enough to inspire him--- which meant, for a boy of that age, she had the requisite body parts, no beard like a Civil War general, and had showered in the previous month. At least Ming wouldn't be like so many American women now who'd visited the plastic surgeon to

have their tummies tucked, tits augmented to look like cereal bowls, and lips pumped full of chemicals until they looked like some strange kind of two-part fruit. What women did to attract men... and what men did in the hope of seducing them. What a potential energy source, Nomuri thought, as he turned the key in his company Nissan.

"What is it today, Ben?" Ryan asked his National Security Adviser. "CIA is trying to get a new operation underway in Beijing. For the moment it's called SORGE."

"As in Richard Sorge?"

"Correct."

"Somebody must be ambitious. Okay, tell me about it."

"There's an officer named Chester Nomuri, an illegal, he's in Beijing covered as a computer salesman for NEC. He's trying to make a move on a secretary, female, for a senior PRC minister, a guy named Fang Gan---"

"Who is?" Ryan asked over his coffee mug.

"Sort of a minister without portfolio, works with the Premier and the Foreign Minister."

"Like that Zhang Han San guy?"

"Not as senior, but yes. Looks like a very high-level go-fer type. Has contacts in their military and foreign ministries, good ideological credentials, sounding board for others in their Politburo. Anyway, Nomuri is trying to make a move on the girl."

"Bond," Ryan observed in a studiously neutral voice, "James Bond. I know Nomuri's name. He did some good work for us in Japan when I had your job. This is for information only, not my approval?"

"Correct, Mr. President. Mrs. Foley is running this one, and wanted to give you a heads-up."

"Okay, tell MP that I'm interested in whatever take comes out of this." Ryan fought off the grimace that came from learning of another person's private--- well, if not private, then his sex--- life.

"Yes, sir."

## CHAPTER - 9

### Initial Results

Chester Nomuri had learned many things in his life, from his parents and his teachers and his instructors at The Farm, but one lesson he'd yet to learn was the value of patience, at least as it applied to his personal life. That didn't keep him from being cautious, however. That was why he'd sent his plans to Langley. It was embarrassing to have to inform a woman of his proposed sex life-- - MP was a brilliant field spook, but she still took her leaks sitting down, Nomuri reminded himself--- but he didn't want the Agency to think that he was an alley cat on the government payroll, because the truth was, he liked his job. The excitement was at least as addictive as the cocaine that some of his college chums had played with.

Maybe that's why Mrs. Foley liked him, Nomuri speculated. They were of a kind. Mary Pat, they said in the Directorate of Operations, was The Cowgirl. She'd swaggered through the streets of Moscow during the last days of the Cold War like Annie Fucking Oakley packing heat, and though she'd been burned by KGB's Second Chief Directorate, she hadn't given the fuckers anything, and whatever operation she'd run--- this was still very, very secret--- it must have been a son of a bitch, because she'd never gone back in the field but had scampered up the CIA career ladder like a hungry squirrel up an oak tree. The President thought she was smart, and if you wanted a friend in this business, the President of the United States was right up there, because he knew the spook business. Then came the stories about what President Ryan had once done. Bringing out the chairman of the fucking KGB? MP must have been part of that, the boys and girls of the DO all

thought. All they knew even within the confines of CIA--- except, of course, for those who needed to know (both of them, the saying went)--- was what had been published in the press, and while the media generally knew jack shit about black operations, a CNN TV crew had put a camera in the face of a former KGB chairman now living in Winchester, Virginia. While he hadn't spilled many beans, the face of a man the Soviet government had declared dead in a plane crash was bean enough to make a very rich soup indeed. Nomuri figured he was working for a couple of real pros, and so he let them know what he was up to, even if that meant causing a possible blush for Mary Patricia Foley, Deputy Director (Operations) of the Central Intelligence Agency.

He'd picked a Western-style restaurant. There were more than a few of them in Beijing now, catering both to the locals and to tourists who felt nostalgic for the taste of home (or who worried about their GI systems over here--- not unreasonably, Nomuri thought). The quality wasn't anything close to a real American restaurant, but it was considerably more appealing than the deep-fried rat he suspected was on the menu of many Beijing eateries.

He'd arrived first, and was relaxing with a cheap American bourbon when Ming came through the door. Nomuri waved in what he hoped was not an overly boyish way. She saw him do so, and her resulting smile was just about right, he thought. Ming was glad to see him, and that was step one in the plan for the evening. She made her way to his corner table in the back. He stood, showing a degree of gentlemanliness unusual in China, where women were nowhere near as valued as they were back home. Nomuri wondered if that would change, if all the killing of female babies could suddenly make Ming a valuable commodity, despite her plainness. He still couldn't get over the casual killing of children; he kept it in the front of his mind, just to keep clear who the good guys were in the world, and who the bad guys were.

"It's so good to see you," he said with an engaging smile. "I was worried you might not meet me here."

"Oh, really? Why?"

"Well, your superior at work... I'm sure that he... well... needs you, I suppose is the polite way to put it," Nomuri said with a hesitant voice, delivering his rehearsed line pretty well, he thought. He had. The girl giggled a little.

"Comrade Fang is over sixty-five," she said. "He is a good man, a good superior, and a fine minister, but he works long hours, and he is no longer a young man."

Okay, so he fucks you, but not all that much, Nomuri interpreted that to mean. And maybe you'd like a little more, from somebody closer to your age, eh? Of course, if Fang was over sixty-five and still getting it on, then maybe he is worthy of some respect, Nomuri added to himself, then tossed the thought aside.

"Have you eaten here before?" The place was called Vincenzo's, and pretended to be Italian. In fact the owner/operator was a half-breed Italian-Chinese from Vancouver, whose spoken Italian would have gotten him hit by the Mafia had he tried it in Palermo, or even Mulberry Street in Manhattan, but here in Beijing it seemed genuinely ethnic enough.

"No," Ming replied, looking around at, to her, this most exotic of locations. Every table had an old wine bottle, its bottom wrapped in twine, and an old drippy red candle at the top. The tablecloth was checked white and red. Whoever had decorated this place had evidently seen too many old movies. That said, it didn't look anything like a local restaurant, even with the Chinese servers. Dark wood paneling, hooks near the door for hanging coats. It could have been in any East Coast city in America, where it would have been recognized as one of those old family Italian places, a mom-and-pop joint with good food and little flash. "What is Italian food like?"

"At its best, Italian cooking is among the very finest in the world," Nomuri answered. "You've never had Italian food? Never at all? Then may I select for you?"

Her response was girlish in its charm. Women were all the same. Treat them in the right way, and they turn into wax in your hand, to be kneaded and shaped to your will. Nomuri was starting to like this part of the job, and someday it might be useful in his personal personal life, too. He waved

to the waiter, who came over with a subservient smile. Nomuri first of all ordered a genuine Italian white wine--- strangely, the wine list here was actually first rate, and quite pricey to boot, of course--- and, with a deep breath, fettuccine Alfredo, quintessential Italian heart-attack food. From looking at Ming, he figured that she'd not refuse rich food.

"So, the new computer and printer systems continue to work out?"

"Yes, and Minister Fang has praised me before the rest of the staff for choosing it. You have made me something of a hero, Comrade Nomuri."

"I am pleased to hear that," the CIA officer replied, wondering if being called "comrade" was a good thing for the current mission or a bad one. "We are bringing out a new portable computer now, one you could take home with you, but which has the same power as your office mainframe, with all the same features and software, of course, even a modem for accessing the Internet."

"Really? I get to do that so seldom. At work, you see, it is not encouraged for us to surf the 'Net, except when the Minister wants something specific."

"Is that so? What 'Net interests does Minister Fang have?"

"Mainly political commentary, and mainly in America and Europe. Every morning I print up various pieces from the newspapers, the Times of London, New York Times, Washington Post, and so on. The Minister especially likes to see what the Americans are thinking."

"Not very much," Nomuri observed, as the wine arrived.

"Excuse me?" Ming asked, getting him to turn back.

"Hmph, oh, the Americans, they don't think very much. The shallowest people I have ever encountered. Loud, poorly educated, and their women..." Chet let his voice trail off.

"What of their women, Comrade Nomuri?" Ming asked, virtually on command.

"Ahh." He took a sip of the wine and nodded for the waiter to serve it properly. It was a pretty good one from Tuscany. "Have you ever seen the American toy, the Barbie doll?"

"Yes, they are made here in China, aren't they?"

"That is what every American woman wishes to be, hugely tall, with massive bosoms, a waist you can put your hands around. That is not a woman. It's a toy, a mannequin for children to play with. And about as intelligent as your average American woman. Do you think they have language skills, as you do? Consider: We now converse in English, a language native to neither of us, but we converse well, do we not?"

"Yes," Ming agreed.

"How many Americans speak Mandarin, do you suppose? Or Japanese? No, Americans have no education, no sophistication. They are a backward nation, and their women are very backward. They even go to surgeons to have their bosoms made bigger, like that stupid child's doll. It's comical to see them, especially to see them nude," he concluded with a dangle.

"You have?" she asked, on cue.

"Have what--- you mean seen American women nude?" He got a welcome nod for his question. This was going well. Yes, Ming, I am a man of the world. "Yes, I have. I lived there for some months, and it was interesting in a grotesque sort of way. Some of them can be very sweet, but not like a decent Asian woman with proper proportions, and womanly hair that doesn't come from some cosmetics bottle. And manners. Americans lack the manners of an Asian."

"But there are many of our people over there. Didn't you...?"

"Meet one? No, the round-eyes keep them for themselves. I suppose their men appreciate real women, even while their own women turn into something else." He reached to pour some more wine into Ming's glass. "But in fairness, there are some things Americans are good at."

"Such as?" she asked. The wine was already loosening her tongue.

"I will show you later. Perhaps I owe you an apology, but I have taken the liberty of buying you some American things."

"Really?" Excitement in her eyes. This was really going well, Nomuri told himself. He'd have to go easier on the wine. Well, half a bottle, two of these glasses, wouldn't hurt him in any way. How

did that song go... It's okay to do it on the first date... Well, he didn't have to worry about much in the way of religious convictions or inhibitions here, did he? That was one advantage to communism, wasn't it?

The fettuccine arrived right on time, and surprisingly it was pretty good. He watched her eyes as she took her first forkful. (Vincenzo's used silverware instead of chopsticks, which was a better idea for fettuccine Alfredo anyway) Her dark eyes were wide as the noodles entered her mouth.

"This is fine... lots of eggs have gone into it. I love eggs," she confided.

They're your arteries, honey, the case officer thought. He watched her inhale the first bit of the fettuccine. Nomuri reached across the table to top off her wine glass once more. She scarcely noticed, she attacked her pasta so furiously.

Halfway through the plate of pasta, she looked up. "I have never had so fine a dinner," Ming told him.

Nomuri responded with a warm grin. "I am so pleased that you are enjoying yourself." Wait'll you see the drawers I just got you, honey.

Attention to orders!"

Major General Marion Diggs wondered what his new command would bring him. The second star on his shoulder... well, he told himself that he could feel the additional weight, but the truth was that he couldn't, not really. His last five years in the uniform of his country had been interesting. The first commander of the reconstituted 10th Armored Cavalry Regiment--- the Buffalo Soldiers--- he'd made that ancient and honored regiment into the drill masters of the Israeli army, turning the Negev Desert into another National Training Center, and in two years he'd hammered every Israeli brigade commander into the ground, then built them up again, tripling their combat effectiveness by every quantifiable measure, so that now the Israeli troopers' swagger was actually justified by their skills. Then he'd gone off to the real NTC in the high California desert, where he'd done the same thing for his own United States Army. He'd been there when the Bio War had begun, with his own 11th ACR, the famous Blackhorse Cavalry, and a brigade of National Guardsmen, whose unexpected use of advanced battlefield-control equipment had surprised the hell out of the Blackhorse and their proud commander, Colonel Al Hamm. The whole bunch had deployed to Saudi, along with the 10th from Israel, and together they'd given a world-class bloody nose to the army of the short-lived United Islamic Republic. After acing his colonel-command, he'd really distinguished himself as a one-star, and that was the gateway to the second sparkling silver device on his shoulder, and also the gateway to his new command, known variously as "First Tanks," "Old Ironsides," or "America's Armored Division." It was the 1st Armored Division, based in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, one of the few remaining heavy divisions under the American flag.

Once there had been a lot of them. Two full corps of them right here in Germany, 1st and 3rd Armored, 3rd and 8th Infantry, plus a pair of Armored Cavalry Regiments, 2nd and 11th, and the POMCUS sites--- monster equipment warehouses--- for stateside units like the 2nd Armored, and the 1st Infantry, the Big Red One out of Fort Riley, Kansas, which could redeploy to Europe just as fast as the airlines could deliver them, there to load up their equipment and move out. All that force--- and it was a whole shitload of force, Diggs reflected--- had been part of NATO's commitment to defend Western Europe from a country called the Soviet Union and its mirror-image Warsaw Pact, huge formations whose objective was the Bay of Biscay, or so the operations and intelligence officers in Mons, Belgium, had always thought. And quite a clash it would have been. Who would have won? Probably NATO, Diggs thought, depending on political interference, and command skills on both sides of the equation.

But, now, the Soviet Union was no more. And with it was also gone the need for the presence of V and VII Corps in Western Germany, and so, 1st Armored was about the only vestige left of what had once been a vast and powerful force. Even the cavalry regiments were gone, the 11th to be the

OpFor--- "opposing force," or Bad Guys--- at the National Training Center and the 2nd "Dragoon" Regiment essentially disarmed at Fort Polk, Louisiana, trying to make up new doctrine for weaponless troopers. That left Old Ironsides, somewhat reduced in size from its halcyon days, but still a formidable force. Exactly whom Diggs might fight in the event hostilities sprang unexpectedly from the ground, he had no idea at the moment.

That, of course, was the job of his G-2 Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Richmond, and training for it was the problem assigned to his G-3 Operations Officer, Colonel Duke Masterman, whom Diggs had dragged kicking and screaming from the Pentagon. It was not exactly unknown in the United States Army for a senior officer to collect about him younger men whom he'd gotten to know on the way up. It was his job to look after their careers, and their jobs to take care of their mentor--- called a "rabbi" in the NYPD or a "Sea Daddy" in the United States Navy--- in a relationship that was more father/son than anything else. Neither Diggs nor Richmond nor Masterman expected much more than interesting professional time in the 1st Armored Division, and that was more than enough. They'd seen the elephant--- a phrase that went back in the United States Army to the Civil War to denote active participation in combat operations--- and killing people with modern weapons wasn't exactly a trip to Disney World. A quiet term of training and sand-table exercises would be plenty, they all thought. Besides, the beer was pretty good in Germany.

"Well, Mary, it's all yours," outgoing Major General (promotable) Sam Goodnight said after his formal salute. "Mary" was a nickname for Diggs that went back to West Point, and he was long since past getting mad about it. But only officers senior to him could use that moniker, and there weren't all that many of them anymore, were there?

"Sam, looks like you have the kids trained up pretty well," Diggs told the man he'd just relieved.

"I'm especially pleased with my helicopter troops. After the hoo-rah with the Apaches down in Yugoslavia, we decided to get those people up to speed. It took three months, but they're ready to eat raw lion now--- after they kill the fuckers with their pocket knives."

"Who's the boss rotor-head?"

"Colonel Dick Boyle. You'll meet him in a few minutes. He's been there and done that, and he knows how to run his command."

"Nice to know," Diggs allowed, as they boarded the World War II command car to troop the line, a goodbye ride for Sam Goodnight and welcome for Mary Diggs, whose service reputation was as one tough little black son of a bitch. His doctorate in management from the University of Minnesota didn't seem to count, except to promotion boards, and whatever private company might want to hire him after retirement, a possibility he had to consider from time to time now, though he figured two stars were only about half of what he had coming. Diggs had fought in two wars and comported himself well in both cases. There were many ways to make a career in the armed services, but none so effective as successful command on the field of battle, because when you got down to it, the Army was about killing people and breaking things as efficiently as possible. It wasn't fun, but it was occasionally necessary. You couldn't allow yourself to lose sight of that. You trained your soldiers so that if they woke up the next morning in a war, they'd know what to do and how to go about it, whether their officers were around to tell them or not.

"How about artillery?" Diggs asked, as they drove past the assembled self-propelled 155-mm howitzers.

"Not a problem there, Mary. In fact, no problems anywhere. Your brigade commanders all were there in 1991, mainly as company commanders or battalion S-3s. Your battalion commanders were almost all platoon leaders or company XOs. They're pretty well trained up. You'll see," Goodnight promised.

Diggs knew it would all be true. Sam Goodnight was a Major General (promotable), which meant he was going to get star number three as soon as the United States Senate got around to approving the next bill with all the flag officers on it, and that couldn't be rushed. Even the



President couldn't do that. Diggs had screened for his second star six months earlier, just before leaving Fort Irwin, to spend a few months parked in the Pentagon--- an abbreviated "jointness" tour, as it was called-before moving back to Germany. The division was slated to run a major exercise against the Bundeswehr in three weeks. First AD vs. four German brigades, two tanks, two mechanized infantry, and that promised to be major test of the division. Well, that was something for Colonel Masterman to worry about. It was his neck on the line. Duke had come to Germany a week early to meet with his also-outgoing predecessor as divisional operations officer and go over the exercise's rules and assumptions. The German commander in the exercise was Generalmajor Siegfried Model. Siggy, as he was known to his colleagues, was descended from a pretty good Wehrmacht commander from the old-old days, and it was also said of him that he regretted the fall of the USSR, because part of him wanted to take the Russian Army on and rape it. Well, such things had been said about a lot of German, and a few American senior officers as well, and in nearly every case it was just that--- talk, because nobody who'd seen one battlefield ever yearned to see another.

Of course, Diggs thought, there weren't many Germans left who had ever seen a battlefield.

"They look good, Sam," Diggs said, as they passed the last static display.

"It's a hell of a tough job to leave, Marion. Damn." The man was starting to fight back tears, which was one way of telling who the really tough ones were in this line of work, Diggs knew. Walking away from the command of soldiers was like leaving your kid in the hospital, or maybe even harder. They'd all been Sam's kids, and now they would be his kids, Diggs thought. On first inspection, they looked healthy and smart enough.

Yeah, Arnie," President Ryan said. His voice betrayed his emotions more than a growl or a shout could have.

"Nobody ever said the job was fun, Jack. Hell, I don't know why you're complaining. You don't have to schmooze people to raise money for your reelection campaign, do you? You don't have to kiss ass. All you have to do is your work, and that saves you a good hour--- maybe an hour and a half--- per day to watch TV and play with your kids." If there was anything Arnie loved, Ryan thought, it was telling him (Ryan) how easy he had it in this fucking job.

"But I still spend half my day doing unproductive shit instead of doing what I'm paid to do."

"Only half, and still he complains," Arnie told the ceiling. "Jack, you'd better start liking this stuff, or it'll eat you up. This is the fun part of being President. And, hell, man, you were a government employee for fifteen years before you came here. You should love being unproductive!"

Ryan nearly laughed, but managed to contain himself. If there was anything Arnie knew how to do, it was to soften his lessons with humor. That could be annoying as hell.

"Fine, but exactly what do I promise them?"

"You promise that you'll support this dam and barge-canal scheme."

"But it's probably a waste of money."

"No, it is not a waste of money. It provides employment in this two-state area, which is of interest to not one, not two, but three United States Senators, all of whom support you steadfastly on the Hill, and whom you, therefore, must support in turn. You reward them for helping you by helping them get reelected. And you help them get reelected by allowing them to generate about fifteen thousand construction jobs in the two states."

"And screw with a perfectly good river for"--- Ryan checked the briefing folder on his desk--- "three and a quarter billion dollars... Jesus H. Christ," he finished with a long breath.

"Since when have you been a tree-hugger? Cutthroat trout don't vote, Jack. And even if the barge traffic up the river doesn't develop, you'll still have one hell of a recreation area for people to water-ski and fish, toss in a few new motels, maybe a golf course or two, fast-food places..."

"I don't like saying things and doing things I don't believe in," the President tried next.

"For a politician, that is like colorblindness or a broken leg: a serious handicap," van Damm noted. "That's part of the job, too. Nikita Khrushchev said it: 'Politicians are the same all over the world, we build bridges where there aren't any rivers.' "

"So wasting money is something we're supposed to do? Arnie, it isn't our money! It's the people's money. It belongs to them, and we don't have the right to piss it away!"

"Right? Who ever said this is about what's right?" Arnie asked patiently. "Those three senators who're"--- he checked his watch--- "on their way down here right now got you your defense appropriations bill a month ago, in case you didn't remember, and you may need their votes again. Now, that appropriations bill was important, wasn't it?"

"Yes, of course it was," President Ryan responded with guarded eyes.

"And getting that bill through was the right thing for the country, wasn't it?" van Damm asked next.

A long sigh. He could see where this was going. "Yes, Arnie, it was.

"And so, doing this little thing does help you to do the right thing for the country, doesn't it?"

"I suppose." Ryan hated conceding such things, but arguing with Arnie was like arguing with a Jesuit. You were almost always outgunned.

"Jack, we live in an imperfect world. You can't expect to be doing the right thing all the time. The best you can expect to do is to make the right thing happen most of the time--- actually, you will do well to have the right things outbalance the not-so-right things over the long term. Politics is the art of compromise, the art of getting the important things you want, while giving to others the less important things they want, and doing so in such a way that you're the one doing the giving, not them doing the taking--- because that's what makes you the boss. You must understand that." Arnie paused and took a sip of coffee. "Jack, you try hard, and you're learning pretty well--- for a fourth-grader in graduate school--- but you have to learn this stuff to the point that you don't even think about it. It has to become as natural as zipping your pants after you take a piss. You still have no idea how well you're doing." And maybe that's a good thing, Arnie added to himself alone.

"Forty percent of the people don't think I'm doing a good job."

"Fifty-nine percent do, and some of those forty percent voted for you anyway!"

The election had been a remarkable session for write-in candidates, and Mickey Mouse had done especially well, Ryan reminded himself.

"What am I doing to offend those others?" Ryan demanded.

"Jack, if the Gallup Poll had been around in ancient Israel, Jesus would probably have gotten discouraged and gone back to carpentry"

Ryan punched a button on his desk phone. "Ellen, I need you."

"Yes, Mr. President," Mrs. Sumter replied to their not-so-secret code. Thirty seconds later, she appeared through the door with her hand at her side. Approaching the President's desk, she extended her hand with a cigarette in it. Jack took it and lit it with a butane lighter, removing a glass ashtray from a desk drawer.

"Thanks, Ellen."

"Surely." She withdrew. Every other day Ryan would slip her a dollar bill to pay off his cigarette debt. He was getting better at this, mooching usually no more than three smokes on a stressful day.

"Just don't let the media catch you doing that," Arnie advised.

"Yeah, I know. I can get it on with a secretary right here in the Oval Office, but if I get caught smoking, that's like goddamned child abuse." Ryan took a long hit on the Virginia Slim, also knowing what his wife would say if she caught him doing this. "If I were king, then I'd make the goddamned rules!"

"But you're not, and you don't," Arnie pointed out.

"My job is to preserve, protect, and defend the country---"

"No, your job is to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, which is a whole lot more complicated. Remember, to the average citizen 'preserve, protect, and defend' means that they get paid every week, and they feed their families, get a week at the beach every year, or maybe Disney World, and football every Sunday afternoon in the fall. Your job is to keep them content and secure, not just from foreign armies, but from the general vicissitudes of life. The good news is that if you do that, you can be in this job another seven-plus years and retire with their love."

"You left out the legacy part."

That made Arnie's eyes flare a bit. "Legacy? Any president who worries too much about that is offending God, and that's almost as dumb as offending the Supreme Court."

"Yeah, and when the Pennsylvania case gets there---"

Arnie held up his hands as though protecting against a punch. "Jack, I'll worry about that when the time comes. You didn't take my advice on the Supreme Court, and so far you've been lucky, but if--- no, when that blows up in your face, it won't be pretty." Van Damm was already planning the defense strategy for that.

"Maybe, but I won't worry about it. Sometimes you just let the chips fall where they may."

"And sometimes you look out to make sure the goddamned tree doesn't land on you."

Jack's intercom buzzed just as he put out the cigarette. It was Mrs. Sumter's voice. "The senators just came through the West Entrance."

"I'm out of here," Arnie said. "Just remember, you will support the dam and canal on that damned river, and you value their support. They'll be there when you need them, Jack. Remember that. And you do need them. Remember that, too."

"Yes, Dad," Ryan said.

You walked here?" Nomuri asked, with some surprise.

"It is only two kilometers," Ming replied airily. Then she giggled. "It was good for my appetite."

Well, you went through that fettuccine like a shark through a surfer, Nomuri thought. I suppose your appetite wasn't hurt very much. But that was unfair. He'd thought this evening through very carefully, and if she'd fallen into his trap, it was his fault more than hers, wasn't it? And she did have a certain charm, he decided as she got into his company car. They'd already agreed that they'd come to his apartment so that he could give her the present he'd already advertised. Now Nomuri was getting a little excited. He'd planned this for more than a week, and the thrill of the chase was the thrill of the chase, and that hadn't changed in tens of thousands of years of male humanity... and now he wondered what was going on in her head. She'd had two stiff glasses of wine with the meal-- and she'd passed on dessert. She'd jumped right to her feet when he'd suggested going to his place. Either his trap had been superbly laid, or she was more than ready herself.... The drive was short, and it passed without words. He pulled into his numbered parking place, wondering if anyone would take note of the fact that he had company today. He had to assume that he was watched here. The Chinese Ministry of State Security probably had an interest in all foreigners who lived in Beijing, since all were potential spies. Strangely, his apartment was not in the same part of the building as the Americans and other Westerners. It wasn't overt segregation or categorization, but it had worked out that way, the Americans largely in one section, along with most of the Europeans... and the Taiwanese, too, Nomuri realized. And so, whatever surveillance existed was probably over on that end of the complex. A good thing now for Ming, and later, perhaps, a good thing for himself.

His place was a corner second-story walk-up in a Chinese interpretation of an American garden-apartment complex. The apartment was spacious enough, about a hundred square meters, and was probably not bugged. At least he'd found no microphones when he'd moved in and hung his pictures, and his sweep gear had discovered no anomalous signals--- his phone had to be bugged, of course, but just because it was bugged didn't mean that there was somebody going over the tapes

every day or even every week. MSS was just one more government agency, and in China they were probably little different from those in America, or France for that matter, lazy, underpaid people who worked as little as possible and served a bureaucracy that didn't encourage singular effort. They probably spent most of their time smoking the wretched local cigarettes and jerking off.

He had an American Yale lock on the door, with a pick-resistant tumbler and a sturdy locking mechanism. If asked about this, he'd explain that when living in California for NEC, he'd been burglarized--- the Americans were such lawless and uncivilized people--- and he didn't want that to happen again.

"So, this is the home of a capitalist," Ming observed, looking around. The walls were covered with prints, mainly movie posters.

"Yes, well, it's the home of a salaryman. I don't really know if I'm a capitalist or not, Comrade Ming," he added, with a smile and arched eyebrow. He pointed to his couch. "Please have a seat. Can I get you anything?"

"Another glass of wine, perhaps?" she suggested, spotting and then looking at the wrapped box on the chair opposite the couch.

Nomuri smiled. "That I can do." He headed off into the kitchen, where he had a bottle of California Chardonnay chilling in the fridge. Popping the cork was easy enough, and he headed back to the living room with two glasses, one of which he handed to his guest. "Oh," he said then. "Yes, this is for you, Ming." With that he handed over the box, wrapped fairly neatly in red--- of course--- gift paper.

"May I open it now?"

"Certainly." Nomuri smiled, in as gentlemanly a lustful way as he could manage. "Perhaps you would want to unwrap it, well..."

"Are you saying in your bedroom?"

"Excuse me. just that you might wish some privacy when you open it. Please pardon me if I am too forward."

The mirth in her eyes said it all. Ming took a deep sip of her white wine and walked off into that room and closed the door. Nomuri took a small sip of his own and sat down on the couch to await developments. If he'd chosen unwisely, she might throw the box at him and storm out... not much chance of that, he thought. More likely, even if she found him too forward, she'd keep the present and the box, finish her wine, make small talk, and then take her leave in thirty minutes or so, just to show good manners--- effectively the same result without the overt insult--- and Nomuri would have to search for another recruitment prospect. No, the best outcome would be...

...the door opened, and there she stood with a small, impish smile. The boiler suit was gone. Instead she wore the red-orange bra and panties set, the one with the front closure. She stood there holding her wine glass in salute, and it looked as if she'd taken another sip of her drink, maybe to work up her courage... or to loosen her inhibitions.

Nomuri found himself suddenly apprehensive. He took another drink himself before standing, and he walked slowly, and a little uneasily, to the bedroom doorway.

Her eyes, he saw, were a little uneasy themselves, a little frightened, and with luck maybe his were, too, because women everywhere liked their men to be just a little vulnerable. Maybe John Wayne hadn't gotten all the action he wanted, Nomuri thought quickly. Then he smiled.

"I guessed right on the size."

"Yes, and it feels wonderful, like a second skin, smooth and silky." Every woman has it, Nomuri realized: the ability to smile and, regardless of the exterior, show the woman within, often a perfect woman, full of tenderness and desire, demureness and coquetry, and all you had to do...

...his hand came out and touched her face as gently as his slight shaking allowed. What the hell was this? he demanded of himself. Shaking? James Bond's hands never shook. This was the time when he was supposed to scoop her up in his arms and stride in a masterful way off to the bed, there to possess her like Vince Lombardi taking over a football team, like George Patton leading an

attack. But for all his triumphal anticipation of this moment, things were different from what he'd expected. Whoever or whatever Ming was, she was giving herself to him. There was no more in her than that--- that was all she had. And she was giving it to him.

He bent his head down to kiss her, and there he caught the scent of the Dream Angel perfume, and somehow it suited the moment perfectly. Her arms came around him sooner than he'd expected. His hands replicated her gesture, and he found that her skin was smooth, like oiled silk, and his hands rubbed up and down of their own accord. He felt something strange on his chest and looked down to see her small hands undoing his buttons, and then her eyes looked into his, and her face was no longer plain. He unbuttoned his own cuffs, and she forced his shirt off, down his back, then lifted his T-shirt over his head or tried to, for her arms were too short to make it quite all the way--- and then he hugged her tighter, feeling the silklike artificial fibers of her new bra rub on his hairless chest. It was then that his hug became harder, more insistent, and his kiss harder on her mouth, and he took her face in his hands and looked hard into her dark, suddenly deep eyes, and what he saw was woman.

Her hands moved and unfastened his belt and slacks, which fell to his ankles. He nearly fell himself when he moved one leg, but Ming caught him and both laughed a little as he lifted his feet clear of his loafers and the slacks, and with that they both took a step toward the bed. Ming took another and turned, displaying herself for him. He'd underestimated the girl. Her waist was a full four inches slimmer than he'd thought--- must be the damned boiler suit she wore to work, Nomuri thought at once--- and her breasts filled the bra to perfection. Even the awful haircut seemed right just now, somehow fitting the amber skin and slanted eyes.

What came next was both easy and very, very hard. Nomuri reached out to her side, pulling her close, but not too close. Then he let his hand wander across her chest, for the first time feeling her breast through the gossamer fabric of the bra, at the same time watching her eyes closely for a reaction. There was little of that, though her eyes did seem to relax, perhaps even smile just a little at his touch, and then came the obligatory next step. With both hands, he unfastened the front closure of the bra. Instantly Ming's hands dropped to cover herself. What did that mean? the CIA officer wondered, but then her hands dropped and she pulled him to her, and their bodies met and his head came down to kiss her again, and his hands slid the bra straps off her arms and onto the floor. There was little left to be done, and both, so it seemed, advanced with a combination of lust and fear. Her hands went down and loosened the elastic band of his briefs, with her eyes now locked on his, and this time she smiled, a for-real smile that made him blush, because he was as ready as he needed to be, and then her hands pushed down on the briefs, and all that left was his socks, and then it was his turn to kneel and pull down on the red silklike panties. She kicked them loose and each stood apart to inspect the other. Her breasts were about a large B, Nomuri thought, the nipples brown as potting soil. Her waist was not nearly model-thin, but a womanly contrast with both the hips and upper body. Nomuri took a step and then took her hand and walked her to the bed, laying her down with a gentle kiss, and for this moment he was not an intelligence officer for his country.

## CHAPTER - 10

### Lessons of the Trade

The pathway started in Nomuri's apartment, and from there went to a web site established in Beijing, notionally for Nippon Electric Company, but the site had been designed for NEC by an American citizen who worked for more than one boss, one of whom was a front operated by and for the Central Intelligence Agency. The precise address point for Nomuri's e-mail was then accessible to the CIA's Beijing station chief, who, as a matter of fact, didn't know anything about Nomuri. That was a security measure to which he would probably have objected, but which he would have understood as a characteristic of Mary Patricia Foley's way of running the Directorate

of Operations--- and besides which, Station Beijing hadn't exactly covered itself with glory in recruiting senior PRC officials to be American agents-in-place.

The message the station chief downloaded was just gibberish to him, scrambled letters that might as easily have been typed by a chimpanzee in return for a bunch of bananas at some research university, and he took no note of it, just super-encrypting on his own in-house system called TAPDANCE and cross-loading it to an official government communications network that went to a communications satellite, to be downloaded at Sunnyvale, California, then uploaded yet again, and downloaded at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. From there the message went by secure fiber-optic landline to CIA headquarters at Langley, and then first of all into Mercury, the Agency's communications center, where the Station Beijing super-encryption was stripped away, revealing the original gibberish, and then cross-loaded one last time to Mrs. Foley's personal computer terminal, which was the only one with the encryption system and daily key-selection algorithm for the counterpart system on Chet Nomuri's laptop, which was called INTERCRYPT. MP was doing other things at the time, and took twenty minutes to log into her own system and note the arrival of a SORGE message. That piqued her interest at once. She executed the command to decrypt the message, and got gibberish, then realized (not for the first time) that Nomuri was on the other side of the date line, and had therefore used a different key sequence. So, adjust the date for tomorrow... and, yes! She printed a hard copy of the message for her husband, and then saved the message to her personal hard drive, automatically encrypting it along the way. From there, it was a short walk to Ed's office.

"Hey, baby," the DCI said, without looking up. Not too many people walked into his office without announcement. The news had to be good. MP had a beaming smile as she handed the paper over.

"Chet got laid last night!" the DDO told the DCI.

"Am I supposed to break out a cigar?" the Director of Central Intelligence asked. His eyes scanned the message.

"Well, it's a step forward."

"For him, maybe," Ed Foley responded with a twinkling eye. "I suppose you can get pretty horny on that sort of assignment, though I never had that problem myself." The Foleys had always worked the field as a married couple, and had gone through The Farm together. It had saved the senior Foley from all the complications that James Bond must have encountered.

"Eddie, you can be such a mudge!"

That made the DCI look up. "Such a what?"

"Curmudgeon!" she growled. "This could be a real breakthrough. This little chippy is personal secretary to Fang Gan. She knows all sorts of stuff we want to know."

"And Chet got to try her out last night. Honey, that's not the same thing as recruitment. We don't have an agent-in-place quite yet," he reminded his wife.

"I know, I know, but I have a feeling about this."

"Woman's intuition?" Ed asked, scanning the message again for any sordid details, but finding only cold facts, as though The Wall Street Journal had covered the seduction. Well, at least Nomuri had a little discretion. No rigid quivering rod plunging into her warm moist sheath--- though Nomuri was twenty-nine, and at that age the rod tended to be pretty rigid. Chet was from California, wasn't he? the DCI wondered. So, probably not a virgin, maybe even a competent lover, though on the first time with anybody you mainly wanted to see if the pieces fit together properly--- they always did, at least in Ed Foley's experience, but you still wanted to check and see. He remembered Robin Williams's takeoff on Adam and Eve, "Better stand back, honey. I don't know how big this thing gets!" The combination of careful conservatism and out-of-control wishful thinking common to the male of the species. "Okay, so, what are you going to reply? 'How many orgasms did the two of you have?'" "God damn it, Ed!" The pin in the balloon worked, the DCI saw. He could almost see steam coming out of his wife's pretty ears. "You know damned well what

I'm going to suggest. Let the relationship blossom and ease her into talking about her job. It'll take a while, but if it works it'll be worth the wait."

And if it doesn't work, it's not a bad deal for Chester, Ed Foley thought. There weren't many professions in the world in which getting sex was part of the job that earned you promotions, were there?

"Mary?"

"Yes, Ed?"

"Does it strike you as a little odd that the kid's reporting his sex life to us? Does it make you blush a little?"

"It would if he were telling me face-to-face. The e-mail method is best for this, I think. Less human content."

"You're happy with the security of the information transfer?"

"Yeah, we've been through this. The message could just be sensitive business information, and the encryption system is very robust. The boys and girls at Fort Meade can break it, but it's brute force every time, and it takes up to a week, even after they make the right guesses on how the encryption system works. The PRC guys would have to go from scratch. The trapdoor in the ISP was very cleverly designed, and the way we tap into it should also be secure--- even then, just because an embassy phone taps into an ISP doesn't mean anything. We have a consular official downloading pornography from a local Web site through that ISP as another cover, in case anybody over there gets real clever." That had been carefully thought through. It would be something that one would wish to be covert, something the counterintelligence agency in Beijing would find both understandable and entertaining in its own right, if and when they cracked into it.

"Anything good?" Ed Foley asked, again, just to bedevil his wife.

"Not unless you're into child abuse. Some of the subjects for this site are too young to vote. If you downloaded it over here, the FBI might come knocking on your door."

"Capitalism really has broken out over there, eh?"

"Some of the senior Party officials seem to like this sort of thing. I guess when you're pushing eighty, you need something special to help jump-start the motor." Mary Pat had seen some of the photographs, and once had been plenty. She was a mother, and all of those photographic subjects had been infants once, strange though that might seem to a subscriber to that Web site. The abusers of girls must have thought that they all sprang into life with their legs spread and a welcoming look in their doll-child faces. Not quite, the DDO thought, but her job wasn't to be a clergyman. Sometimes you had to do business with such perverts, because they had information which her country needed. If you were lucky, and the information was really useful, then you often arranged for them to defect, to live in the United States, where they could live and enjoy their perversions to some greater or lesser degree, after being briefed on the law, and the consequences of breaking it. Afterward there was always a bathroom and soap to wash your hands. It was a need of which she'd availed herself more than once. One of the problems with espionage was that you didn't always do business with the sort of people whom you'd willingly invite into your home. But it wasn't about Miss Manners. It was about getting information that your country needed to guard its strategic interests, and even to prevail in war, if it came to that. Lives were often at stake, either directly or indirectly. And so, you did business with anyone who had such information, even if he or she wasn't exactly a member of the clergy.

"Okay, babe. Keep me posted," Foley told his wife.

"Will do, honey-bunny." The DDO headed back to her own office. There she drew up her reply to Nomuri: MESSAGE RECEIVED. KEEP US POSTED ON YOUR PROGRESS. MP. ENDS.

The reply came as a relief to Nomuri when he woke and checked his e-mail. It was a disappointment that he didn't wake up with company, but to expect that would have been

unrealistic. Ming would have been ill-advised to spend the night anywhere but in her own bed. Nomuri couldn't even drive her back. She'd just left, carrying her presents--- well, wearing some of them--- for the walk back to her own shared flat where, Nomuri fervently hoped, she wouldn't discuss her evening's adventures with her roommates. You never knew about women and how they talked. It wasn't all that dissimilar with some men, Nomuri remembered from college, where some of his chums had talked at length about their conquests, as though they'd slain a dragon with a Popsicle stick. Nomuri had never indulged in this aural spectator sport. Either he'd had a spy's mentality even then, or he'd been somehow imbued with the dictum that a gentleman didn't kiss and tell. But did women? That was a mystery to him, like why it was that women seemed to go to the bathroom in pairs--- he'd occasionally joked that that was when they'd held their "union meetings." Anyway, women talked more than men did. He was sure of that. And while they kept many secrets from men, how many did they keep from other women? Jesus, all that had to happen was for her to tell a roomie that she'd had her brains fucked out by a Japanese salaryman, and if that roomie was an informant to the MSS, Ming would get a visit from a security officer, who at the very least would counsel her never to see Nomuri again. More likely, the counseling would involve a demand to send that degenerate American bourgeois trash (the Victoria's Secret underthings) back to him, plus a threat to lose her ministry job if she ever appeared on the same street with him again. And that also meant that he'd be tailed and observed and investigated by the MSS, and that was something he had to take seriously. They didn't have to catch him committing espionage. This was a communist country, where due process of law was a bourgeois concept unworthy of serious consideration, and civil rights were limited to doing what one was told. As a foreigner doing business in the PRC, he might get some easiness of treatment, but not all that much.

So, he hadn't just gotten his rocks off, Nomuri told himself, past the delightful memories of a passionate evening. He'd crossed a wide red line in the street, and his safety depended entirely upon on how discreet Ming was. He hadn't--- could not have--- warned her to keep her mouth shut about their time together. Such things weren't said, because they added a level of gravity to what was supposed to have been a time of joy and friendship... or even something potentially bigger than friendship. Women thought in such terms, Chester reminded himself, and for that reason he might see a pointed nose and whiskers the next time he looked in the mirror, but this was business, not personal, he told himself as he shut down his computer.

Except for one small thing. He'd had sexual relations with an intelligent and not entirely unattractive young female human being, and the problem was that when you gave a little bit of your heart away, you never really got it back. And his heart, Nomuri belatedly realized, was distantly connected to his dick. He wasn't James Bond. He could not embrace a woman as a paid whore embraced a man. It just wasn't in him to be that sort of heartless swine. The good news was that for this reason he could stand to look in a mirror for the time being. The bad news was that this ability might be short-lived, if he treated Ming as a thing and not a person.

Nomuri needed advice on how to feel about this operation, and he didn't have a place to get it. It wasn't the sort of thing to e-mail to Mary Pat or to one of the pshinks the Agency employed for counseling DO people who needed a little guidance with their work. This sort of thing had to be handled face-to-face with a real person, whose body language you could read and whose tone of voice would deliver its own content. No, e-mail wasn't the medium he needed right now. He needed to fly to Tokyo and meet a senior officer of the Directorate of Operations who could counsel him on how to handle things. But if the guy told him to cut himself off from intimate contact with Ming, then what would he do? Nomuri asked himself. It wasn't as though he had a girlfriend of any kind, and he had his needs for intimacy, too--- and besides, if he cut her off, what effect would that have on his potential, prospective agent? You didn't check your humanity by the door when you joined up with the Agency, despite what all the books said and the public expectations were. All the chuckles over beer during the nights after training sessions seemed a distant thing now, and all the expectations he and his colleagues had had back then. They'd been so far off the mark, in spite of



what their training officers had told them. He'd been a child then, and to some extent even in Japan, but suddenly he was a man, alone in a country that was at best suspicious, and at worst hostile to him and his country. Well, it was in her hands now, and that was something he couldn't change.

Her co-workers noted a slight difference in their colleague. She smiled a little more, and in a somewhat different way. Something good must have happened to her, some of them thought, and for this they rejoiced, albeit in a reserved and private way. If Ming wished to share the experience with them, all well and good, and if not, that, too, was okay with them, because some things were private, even among a group of women who shared virtually everything, including stories of their minister and his fumbling, lengthy, and occasionally futile efforts at lovemaking. He was a wise man, and usually a gentle one, though as a boss he had his bad points. But Ming would notice none of those today. Her smile was sweeter than ever, and her eyes twinkled like little diamonds, the rest of the admin/secretarial staff all thought. They'd all seen it before, though not with Ming, whose love life had been an abbreviated one, and whom the minister liked a little too much, but whom he serviced imperfectly and too seldom. She sat at her computer to do her correspondence and translations of Western news articles that might be of interest to the Minister. Ming had the best English skills of anyone in this corner of the building, and the new computer system worked superbly. The next step, so the story went, was a computer into which you'd just speak, making the characters appear by voice command, sure to become the curse of every executive secretary in the world, because it would largely make them obsolete. Or maybe not. The boss couldn't fuck a computer, could he? Not that Minister Fang was all that intrusive in his demands. And the perks he delivered in return weren't bad at all.

Her first morning assignment took the customary ninety minutes, after which she printed up the resulting copy and stapled the pages together by article. This morning she'd translated pieces by the Times of London, and The New York Times, plus The Washington Post, so that her Minister would know what the barbarians around the world thought of the enlightened policy of the People's Republic.

In his private office, Minister Fang was going over other things. The MSS had a double report on the Russians: both oil and gold, the reports said. So, he thought, Zhang had been right all along, even more right than he knew. Eastern Siberia was indeed a treasure-house, full of things everyone needed. Oil, because petroleum was the very blood of modern society, and gold, because in addition to its negotiable value as an old but still very real medium of exchange, it still had industrial and scientific uses as well. And each had a cache of its own. What a pity that such riches should fall to a people without the wit to make proper use of them. It was so strange, the Russians who had given the world the gift of Marxism but then failed to exploit it properly, and then abandoned it, only to fail also in their transition to a bourgeois capitalist society. Fang lit a cigarette, his fifth of the day (he was trying to cut back as his seventieth birthday approached), and set the MSS report down on his desk before leaning back in his chair to puff on his unfiltered smoke and consider the information this morning had brought. Siberia, as Zhang had been saying for some years now, had so much that the PRC needed, timber, minerals in abundance--- even greater abundance, so these intelligence documents said--- and space, which China needed above all things.

There were simply too many people in China, and that despite population-control measures that could only be called draconian both in their content, and in their ruthless application. Those measures were an affront to Chinese culture, which had always viewed children as a blessing, and now the social engineering was having an unexpected result. Allowed only one child per married couple, the people often chose to have boys instead of girls. It was not unknown for a peasant to

take a female toddler of two years and drop her down a well--- the merciful ones broke their necks first--- to dispose of the embarrassing encumbrance. Fang understood the reasons for this. A girl child grew up to marry, to join her life to a man, while a boy child could always be depended upon to support and honor his parents, and provide security. But a girl child would merely spread her legs for some other couple's boy child, and where was the security for her parents in that?

It had been true in Fang's case. As he'd grown to a senior party official, he'd made sure that his own mother and father had found a comfortable place to live out their lives, for such were the duties of a child for those who had given him life. Along the way, he'd married, of course--- his wife was long dead of cardiovascular disease--- and he'd given some lip service to his wife's parents... but not as much as he'd done for his own. Even his wife had understood that, and used her shadow-influence as the wife of a party official to make her own special but lesser arrangements. Her brother had died young, at the hands of the American army in Korea, and was therefore just a memory without practical value.

But the problem for China that no one really talked about, even at Politburo level, was that their population policy was affecting the demographics of their country. In elevating the value of boy children over girls, the PRC was causing an imbalance that was becoming statistically significant. In fifteen years or so, there would be a shortage of women--- some said that this was a good thing, because they would achieve the overarching national objective of population stability faster but it also meant that for a generation, millions of Chinese men would have no women to marry and mate with. Would this turn into a flood of homosexuality? PRC policy still frowned upon that as a bourgeois degeneracy, though sodomy had been decriminalized in 1998. But if there were no women to be had, what was a man to do? And in addition to killing off surplus girl babies, those abandoned by their parents were often given away, to American and European couples unable to have children of their own. This happened by the hundreds of thousands, with the children disposed of as readily and casually as Americans sold puppies in shopping malls. Something in Fang's soul bridled at that, but his feelings were mere bourgeois sentimentality, weren't they? National policy dictated what must be, and policy was the means to achieving the necessary goal.

His was a life as comfortable as privilege could make it. In addition to a plush office as pleasant as any capitalist's, he had an official car and driver to take him to his residence, an ornate apartment with servants to look after his needs, the best food that his country could provide, good beverages, a television connected to a satellite service so that he could receive all manner of entertainment, even including Japanese pornographic channels, for his manly drives had not yet deserted him. (He didn't speak Japanese, but you didn't need to understand the dialogue in such movies, did you?)

Fang still worked long hours, rising at six-thirty, and was at his desk before eight every morning. His staff of secretaries and assistants took proper care of him, and some of the female ones were agreeably compliant, once, occasionally twice per week. Few men of his years had his vigor, Fang was sure, and unlike Chairman Mao, he didn't abuse children, which he'd known of at the time and found somewhat distasteful. But great men had their flaws, and you overlooked them because of the greatness that made them who they were. As for himself and people like him, they were entitled to the proper environments in which to rest, good nourishment to sustain their bodies through their long and grueling workdays, and the opportunities for relaxation and recreation that men of vigor and intelligence needed. It was necessary that they live better than most other citizens of their country, and it was also earned. Giving direction to the world's most populous country was no easy task. It demanded their every intellectual energy, and such energy needed to be conserved and restored. Fang looked up as Ming entered with her folder of news articles.

"Good morning, Minister," she said with proper deference.

"Good morning, child." Fang nodded with affection. This one shared his bed fairly well, and for that reason merited more than a grunt. Well, he'd gotten her a very comfortable office chair, hadn't he? She withdrew, bowing proper respect for her father figure, as she always did. Fang noticed nothing particularly different about her demeanor, as he lifted the folder and took out the news

articles, along with a pencil for making notations. He'd compare these with MSS estimates of the mood of other countries and their governments. It was Fang's way of letting the Ministry of State Security know that the Politburo members still had minds of their own with which to think. The MSS had signally failed to predict America's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, though in fairness, the American news media didn't seem to predict the actions of this President Ryan all that well, either. What an odd man he was, and certainly no friend of the People's Republic. A peasant, the MSS analysts called him, and in many ways that seemed both accurate and appropriate. He was strangely unsophisticated in his outlook, something The New York Times commented upon rather frequently. Why did they dislike him? Was he not capitalist enough, or was he too capitalist? Understanding the American news media was beyond Fang's powers of analysis, but he could at least digest the things they said, and that was something the intelligence "experts" at the MSS Institute for American Studies were not always able to do. With that thought, Fang lit another cigarette and settled back in his chair.

It was a miracle, Provalov thought. Central Army Records had gotten the files, fingerprints, and photographs of the two bodies recovered in St. Petersburg--- but perversely sent the records to him rather than to Abramov and Ustinov, doubtless because he was the one who had invoked the name of Sergey Golovko. Dzerzhinskiy Square still inspired people to do their jobs in a timely fashion. The names and vital statistics would be taxed (faxed?) at once to St. Petersburg so that his northern colleagues might see what information could be developed. The names and photographs were only a start--- documents nearly twenty years old showing youthful, emotionless faces. The service records were fairly impressive, though. Once upon a time, Pyotr Alekseyevich Amalrik and Pavel Borissovich Zimyanin had been considered superior soldiers, smart, fit... and highly reliable, politically speaking, which was why they'd gone to Spetsnaz school and sergeant school. Both had fought in Afghanistan, and done fairly well--- they'd survived Afghanistan, which was not the usual thing for Spetsnaz troops, who'd drawn all of the dirtiest duty in an especially dirty war. They'd not reenlisted, which was not unusual. Hardly anyone in the Soviet Army had ever reenlisted voluntarily. They (Then?) they'd returned to civilian life, both working in the same factory outside Leningrad, as it had been called then. But Amalrik and Zimyanin had both found ordinary civilian life boring, and both, he gathered, had drifted into something else. He'd have to let the investigators in St. Petersburg find out more. He pulled a routing slip from his drawer and rubber-banded it to the records package. It would be couriered to St. Petersburg, where Abramov and Ustinov would play with the contents.

A Mr. Sherman, Mr. Secretary," Winston's secretary told him over the intercom. "Line three."

"Hey, Sam," SecTreas said, as he picked up the phone. "What's new?"

"Our oil field up north," the president of Atlantic Richfield replied

"Good news?"

"You might say that. Our field people say the find is about fifty percent bigger than our initial estimates."

"How solid is that information?"

"About as reliable as one of your T -bills, George. My head field guy is Ernie Beach. He's as good at finding oil as you used to be playing up on The Street." Maybe even better, Sam Sherman didn't add. Winston was known to have something of an ego on the subject of his own worth. The addendum got through anyway.

"So, summarize that for me," the Secretary of the Treasury commanded.

"So, when this field comes on line, the Russians will be in a position to purchase Saudi Arabia outright, plus Kuwait and maybe half of Iran. It makes east Texas look like a fart in a tornado. It's huge, George."

"Hard to get out?"

"It won't be easy, and it won't be inexpensive, but from an engineering point of view it's pretty straightforward. If you want to buy a hot stock, pick a Russian company that makes cold-weather gear. They're going to be real busy for the next ten years or so," Sherman advised.

"Okay, and what can you tell me of the implications for Russia in economic terms?"

"Hard to say. It will take eight to twelve years to bring this field fully on line, and the amount of crude this will dump on the market will distort market conditions quite a bit. We haven't modeled all that out--- but it's going to be huge, like in the neighborhood of one hundred billion dollars per year, current-year dollars, that is."

"For how long?" Winston could almost hear the shrug that followed.

"Twenty years, maybe more. Our friends in Moscow still want us to sit on this, but word's perking out in our company, like trying to hide a sunrise, y'know? I give it a month before it breaks out into the news media. Maybe a little longer'n that, but not much."

"What about the gold strike?"

"Hell, George, they're not telling me anything about that, but my guy in Moscow says the cat's gobbled down some kind of canary, or that's how it appears to him. That will probably depress the world price of gold about five, maybe ten percent, but our models say it'll rebound before Ivan starts selling the stuff he pulls out of the ground. Our Russian friends--- well, their rich uncle just bit the big one and left them the whole estate, y'know?"

"And no adverse effects on us," Winston thought.

"Hell, no. They'll have to buy all sorts of hardware from our people, and they'll need a lot of expertise that only we have, and after that's over, the world price of oil goes down, and that won't hurt us either. You know, George, I like the Russians. They've been unlucky sonsabitches for a long time, but maybe this'll change that for 'em."

"No objections here or next door, Sam," TRADER assured his friend. "Thanks for the information."

"Well, you guys still collect my taxes." You bastards, he didn't add, but Winston heard it anyway, including the chuckle. "See you around, George."

"Right, have a good one, Sam, and thanks." Winston killed one button on his phone, selected another line, and hit his number nine speed-dial line.

"Yeah?" a familiar voice responded. Only ten people had access to this number.

"Jack, it's George, just had a call from Sam Sherman, Atlantic Richfield."

"Russia?"

"Yeah. The field is fifty percent bigger than they initially thought. That makes it pretty damned big, biggest oil strike ever, as a matter of fact, bigger than the whole Persian Gulf combined. Getting the oil out will be a little expensive, but Sam says it's all cookbook stuff--- hard, but they know how it's done, no new technology to invent, just a matter of spending the money--- and not even all that much, 'cause labor is a lot cheaper there than it is here. The Russians are going to get rich."

"How rich?" the President asked.

"On the order of a hundred billion dollars per year once the field is fully on line, and that's good for twenty years, maybe more."

Jack had to whistle at that. "Two trillion dollars. That's real money, George."

"That's what we call it on The Street, Mr. President," Winston agreed. "Sure as hell, that's real money."

"And what effect will it have on the Russian economy?"

"It won't hurt them very much," SecTreas assured him. "It gets them a ton of hard currency. With that money they can buy the things they'd like to have, and buy the tools to build the things they can make on their own. This will re-industrialize their country, Jack, jump-start them into the new century, assuming they have the brains to make proper use of it and not let it all bug out to Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

"How can we help them?" POTUS asked.

"Best answer to that, you and I and two or three others sit down with our Russian counterparts and ask them what they need. If we can get a few of our industrialists to build some plants over there, it won't hurt, and it'll damned sure look good on TV."

"Noted, George. Get me a paper on that by the beginning of next week, and then we'll see if we can figure out a way to let the Russians know what we know."

It was the end of another overlong day for Sergey Golovko. Running the SVR was job enough for any man, but he also had to back up Eduard Petrovich Grushavoy, President of the Russian Republic. President Grushavoy had his own collection of ministers, some of them competent, the others selected for their political capital, or merely to deny them to the political opposition. They could still do damage on the inside of Grushavoy's administration, but less than on the outside. On the inside they had to use small-caliber weapons, lest they be killed by their own shots.

The good news was that the Economics Minister, Vasily Konstantinovich Solomentsev, was intelligent and seemingly honest as well, as rare a combination in the Russian political spectrum as anywhere else in the known world. He had his ambitions--- it was a rare minister who did not--- but mainly, it seemed, he wanted his nation to prosper, and didn't want to profit himself all that much. A little self-enrichment was all right with Golovko, just so that a man wasn't a pig about it. The line, for Sergey Nikolay'ch, was about twenty million euros. More than that was hoggish, but less was understandable. After all, if a minister was successful at helping his country, he or she was entitled to get a proper reward for doing so. The ordinary working people out there wouldn't mind, if the result was a better life for them, would they? Probably not, the spymaster thought. This wasn't America, overrun with pointless and counterproductive "ethics" laws. The American President, whom Golovko knew well, had an aphorism that the Russian admired: If you have to write your ethics rules down, you've already lost. No fool, that Ryan, once a deadly enemy, and now a good friend, or seemingly so. Golovko had cultivated that friendship by providing help to America in two serious international crises. He'd done it because it had, first of all, been in his nation's interest, and secondly, because Ryan was a man of honor, and unlikely to forget such favors. It had also amused Golovko, who'd spent most of his adulthood in an agency devoted to the destruction of the West.

But what about himself? Was someone intent on his own destruction? Had someone desired to end his life in a loud and spectacular manner on the paving stones of Dzerzhinskiy Square? The more his mind dwelt on that question, the more frightening it became. Few healthy men could contemplate the end of their lives with equanimity, and Golovko wasn't one of them. His hands never shook, but he didn't argue at all with Major Shelepin's increasingly invasive measures to keep him alive. The car changed every day in color, and sometimes in make, and the routes to his office shared only the starting place--- the SVR building was sufficiently large that the daily journey to work had a total of five possible end points. The clever part, which Golovko admired, was that he himself occasionally rode in the front seat of the lead vehicle, while some functionary sat in the back seat of the putative guarded car. Anatoliy was no fool, and even showed the occasional spark of creativity.

But none of that now. Golovko shook his head and opened his last folder of the day, scanning first of all the executive summary--- and his mind skidded to an almost instant halt, his hand reaching for a phone and dialing a number.

"This is Golovko," he told the male voice who answered. He didn't have to say anything else.

"Sergey Nikolay'ch," the minister's voice greeted him pleasantly five seconds later. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, Vasily Konstantinovich, you can confirm these numbers to me. Are they possible?"

"They are more than possible, Sergey. They are as real as the sunset," Solomentsev told the intelligence chief cum chief minister and advisor to President Grushavoy.

"Solkin syn, " the intelligence chief muttered. Son of a bitch! "And this wealth has been there for how long?" he asked incredulously.

"The oil, perhaps five hundred thousand years; the gold, rather longer, Sergey."

"And we never knew," Golovko breathed.

"No one really looked, Comrade Minister. Actually, I find the gold report the more interesting. I must see one of these gold-encrusted wolf pelts. Something for Prokofiev, eh? Peter and the Golden Wolf."

"An entertaining thought," Golovko said, dismissing it immediately. "What will it mean to our country?"

"Sergey Nikolay'ch, I would have to be a fortune-teller to answer that substantively, but it could be the salvation of our country in the long term. Now we have something that all nations want--- two somethings, as a matter of fact--- and it belongs to us, and for it those foreigners will pay vast sums of money, and do so with a smile. Japan, for example. We will answer their energy needs for the next fifty years, and along the way we will save them vast sums in transportation costs--- ship the oil a few hundred kilometers instead of ten thousand. And perhaps America, too, though they've made their own big strike on the Alaskan-Canadian border. The question becomes how we move the oil to market. We'll build a pipeline from the field to Vladivostok, of course, but maybe another one to St. Petersburg so that we can sell oil more easily to Europe as well. In fact, we can probably have the Europeans, especially the Germans, build the pipeline for us, just to get a discount on the oil. Serge, if we'd found this oil twenty years ago, we---"

"Perhaps." It wasn't hard to imagine what would come next: The Soviet Union would not have fallen but grown strong instead. Golovko had no such illusions. The Soviet government would have managed to fuck up these new treasures as it had fucked up everything else. The Soviet government had owned Siberia for seventy years but had never even gone looking for what might have been there. The country had lacked the proper experts to do the looking, but was too proud to let anyone else do it, lest they think less of the Motherland. If any one thing had killed the USSR, it wasn't communism, or even totalitarianism. It was that perverse amour propre that was the most dangerous and destructive aspect of the Russian character, created by a sense of inferiority that went back to the House of Romanov and beyond. The Soviet Union's death had been as self-inflicted as any suicide's, just slower and therefore far deadlier in coming. Golovko endured the next ninety seconds of historical speculation from a man who had little sense of history, then spoke: "All this is good, Vasily Konstantinovich, but what of the future? That is the time in which we will all live, after all."

"It will do us little harm. Sergey, this is the salvation of our country. It will take ten years to get the full benefit from the outfields, but then we shall have a steady and regular income for at least one whole generation, and perhaps more besides."

"What help will we need?"

"The Americans and the British have expertise which we need, from their own exploitation of the Alaskan fields. They have knowledge. We shall learn it and make use of it. We are in negotiations now with Atlantic Richfield, the American oil company, for technical support. They are being greedy, but that's to be expected. They know that only they have what we need, and paying them for it is cheaper than having to replicate it ourselves. So, they will get most of what they now demand. Perhaps we will pay them in gold bricks," Solomentsev suggested lightly.

Golovko had to resist the temptation to inquire too deeply into the gold strike. The oil field was far more lucrative, but gold was prettier. He, too, wanted to see one of those pelts that this Gogol

fellow had used to collect the dust. And this lonely forest-dweller would have to be properly taken care of--- no major problem, as he lived alone and was childless. Whatever he got, the state would soon get back, old as he was. And there'd be a TV show, maybe even a feature film, about this hunter. He'd once hunted Germans, after all, and the Russians still made heroes of such men. That would make Pavel Petrovich Gogol happy enough, wouldn't it?

"What does Eduard Petrovich know?"

"I've been saving the information until I had a full and reliable reading on it. I have that now. I think he will be pleased at the next cabinet meeting, Sergey Nikolay'ch."

As well he should, Golovko thought. President Grushavoy had been as busy as a one-armed, one-legged paperhanger for three years. No, more like a stage magician or conjurer, forced to produce real things from nothing, and his success in keeping the nation moving often seemed nothing short of miraculous. Perhaps this was God's own way of rewarding the man for his efforts, though it would not be an entirely unmixed blessing. Every government agency would want its piece of the gold-and-oil pie, each with its needs, all of them presented by its own minister as vital to the security of the state, in white papers of brilliant logic and compelling reasoning. Who knew, maybe some of them would even be telling the truth, though truth was so often a rare commodity in the cabinet room. Each minister had an empire to build, and the better he built it, the closer he would come to the seat at the head of the table that was occupied, for now, by Eduard Petrovich Grushavoy. Golovko wondered if it had been this way under the czars. Probably, he decided at once. Human nature didn't change very much. The way people had acted in Babylon or Byzantium was probably little different from the way they'd act at the next cabinet meeting, three days hence. He wondered how President Grushavoy would handle the news.

"How much has leaked out?" the spymaster asked.

"There are doubtless some rumors," Minister Solomentsev answered, "but the current estimates are less than twenty-four hours old, and it usually takes longer than that to leak. I will have these documents messengered to you--- tomorrow morning?"

"That will be fine, Vasily. I'll have some of my own analysts go over the data, so that I can present my own independent estimate of the situation.

"I have no objection to that," the economics minister responded, surprising Golovko more than a little. But then this wasn't the USSR anymore. The current cabinet might be the modern counterpart to the old Politburo, but nobody there told lies... well, at least not big lies. And that was a measure of progress for his country, wasn't it?

## CHAPTER - 11

### Faith of the Fathers

His name was Yu Fa An, and he said he was a Christian. That was rare enough that Monsignor Schepke invited him in at once. What he saw was a Chinese national of fifty-plus years and stooped frame, with hair a curious mix of black and gray that one saw only rarely in this part of the world.

"Welcome to our embassy. I am Monsignor Schepke." He bowed quickly and then shook the man's hand.

"Thank you. I am the Reverend Yu Fa An," the man replied with the dignity of truth, one cleric to another.

"Indeed. Of what denomination?"

"I am a Baptist."

"Ordained? Is that possible?" Schepke motioned the visitor to follow him, and in a moment they stood before the Nuncio. "Eminence, this is the Reverend Yu Fa An--- of Beijing?" Schepke asked belatedly.

"Yes, that is so. My congregation is mainly northwest of here."

"Welcome." Cardinal DiMilo rose from his chair for a warm handshake, and guided the man to the comfortable visitor's chair. Monsignor Schepke went to fetch tea. "It is a pleasure to meet a fellow Christian in this city."

"There are not enough of us, and that is a fact, Eminence," Yu confirmed.

Monsignor Schepke swiftly arrived with a tray of tea things, which he set on the low coffee table.

"Thank you, Franz."

"I thought that some local citizens should welcome you. I expect you've had the formal welcome from the Foreign Ministry, and that it was correct... and rather cold?" Yu asked.

The Cardinal smiled as he handed a cup to his guest. "It was correct, as you say, but it could have been warmer."

"You will find that the government here has ample manners and good attention to protocol, but little in the way of sincerity" Yu said, in English, with a very strange accent.

"You are originally from...?"

"I was born in Taipei. As a youth, I traveled to America for my education. I first attended the University of Oklahoma, but the call came, and I transferred to Oral Roberts University in the same state. There I got my first degree--- in electrical engineering--- and went on for my doctor of divinity and my ordination," he explained.

"Indeed, and how did you come to be in the People's Republic?"

"Back in the 1970s, the government of Chairman Mao was ever so pleased to have Taiwanese come here to live--- rejecting capitalism and coming to Marxism, you see," he added with a twinkling eye. "It was hard on my parents, but they came to understand. I started my congregation soon after I arrived. That was troublesome for the Ministry of State Security, but I also worked as an engineer, and at the time the state needed that particular skill. It is remarkable what the State will accept if you have something it needs, and back then their need for people with my degree was quite desperate. But now I am a minister on a full-time basis." With the announcement of his triumph, Yu lifted his own teacup for a sip.

"So, what can you tell us about the local environment?" Renato asked.

"The government is truly communist. It trusts and tolerates no loyalty to anything except itself. Even the Falun Gong, which was not truly a religion--- that is, not really a belief system as you or I would understand the term--- has been brutally suppressed, and my own congregation has been persecuted. It is a rare Sunday on which more than a quarter of my congregation comes to attend services. I must spend much of my time traveling from home to home to bring the gospel to my flock."

"How do you support yourself?" the Cardinal asked.

Yu smiled serenely. "That is the least of my problems. American Baptists support me most generously. There is a group of churches in Mississippi that is particularly generous--- many are black churches, as it turns out. I just received some letters from them yesterday. One of my classmates at Oral Roberts University has a large congregation near Jackson, Mississippi. His name is Gerry Patterson. We were good friends then, and he remains a friend in Christ. His congregation is large and prosperous, and he still looks after me." Yu almost added that he had far more money than he knew how to spend. In America, such prosperity would have translated into a Cadillac and a fine parsonage. In Beijing, it meant a nice bicycle and gifts to the needy of his flock.

"Where do you live, my friend?" the Cardinal asked.

The Reverend Yu fished in his pocket for a business card and handed it over. Like many such Chinese cards, it had a sketch-map on the back. "Perhaps you would be so kind as to join my wife and myself for dinner. Both of you, of course," he added.

"We should be delighted. Do you have children?"

"Two," Yu replied. "Both born in America, and so exempt from the bestial laws the communists have in place here."



"I know of these laws," DiMilo assured his visitor. "Before we can make them change, we need more Christians here. I pray on this subject daily."

"As do I, Eminence. As do I. I presume you know that your dwelling here is, well..."

Schepke tapped his ear and pointed his finger around the room. "Yes, we know"

"You have a driver assigned to you?"

"Yes, that was very kind of the ministry," Schepke noted. "He's a Catholic. Isn't that remarkable?"

"Is that a fact?" Yu asked rhetorically, while his head shook emphatically from side to side.

"Well, I am sure he's loyal to his country as well."

"But of course," DiMilo observed. It wasn't much of a surprise. The Cardinal had been in the Vatican's diplomatic service a long time, and he'd seen most of the tricks at least once. Clever though the Chinese communists were, the Catholic Church had been around a lot longer, loath though the local government might be to admit that fact.

The chitchat went on for another thirty minutes before the Reverend Yu took his leave, with another warm handshake to send him on his way.

"So, Franz?" DiMilo asked outside, where a blowing breeze would impede any microphones installed outside the dwelling itself.

"First time I've seen the man. I've heard his name since I arrived here. The PRC government has indeed given him a bad time, and more than once, but he is a man of strong faith and no small courage. I hadn't known of his educational background. We could check on this."

"Not a bad idea," the Papal Nuncio said. It wasn't that he distrusted or disbelieved Yu, just that it was good to be sure of things. Even the name of a classmate, now an ordained minister, Gerry Patterson. Somewhere in Mississippi, USA. That would make it easy. The message to Rome went out an hour later, over the Internet, a method of communication that lent itself so readily to intelligence operations.

In this case, the time differences worked for them, as sometimes happened when the inquiries went west instead of east. In a few hours, the dispatch was received, decrypted, and forwarded to the proper desk. From there, a new dispatch, also encrypted, made its way to New York, where Timothy Cardinal McCarthy, Archbishop of New York and the chief of the Vatican's intelligence operations in the United States of America, received his copy immediately after breakfast. From there, it was even easier. The FBI remained a bastion of Irish-Catholic America, though not so much as in the 1930s, with a few Italians and Poles tossed in. The world was an imperfect place, but when the Church needed information, and as long as the information was not compromising to American national security, it was gotten, usually very quickly.

In this case, particularly so. Oral Roberts University was a very conservative institution, and therefore ready to cooperate with the FBI's inquiries, official or not. A clerk there didn't even consult her supervisor, so innocuous was the phoned inquiry from Assistant Special Agent in Charge Jim Brennan of the FBI's Oklahoma City office. It was quickly established via computer records that one Yu Fa An had graduated the university, first with a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering, and then spent an additional three years in the university for his doctor of divinity, both degrees attained "with distinction," the clerk told Brennan, meaning nothing lower than a B+. The alumni office added that the Reverend Yu's current address was in Beijing, China, where he evidently preached the gospel courageously in the land of the pagans. Brennan thanked the clerk, made his notes, and replied to the e-mail inquiry from New York, then went off to his morning meeting with the SAC to review the Field Division's activities in enforcing federal law in the Sooner State.

It was a little different in Jackson, Mississippi. There it was the SAC--- Special Agent in Charge-- himself who made the call on Reverend Gerry Patterson's First Baptist Church, located in an upscale suburb of the Mississippi state capital. The church was three-quarters of the way into its second century, and among the most prosperous of such congregations in the region. The Reverend

Patterson could scarcely have been more impressive, impeccably turned out in a white button-down shirt and a striped blue tie. His dark suit coat was hung in a corner in deference to the local temperature. He greeted the visiting FBI official with regal manners, conducted him to his plush office, and asked how he could be of service. On hearing the first question, he replied, "Yu! Yes, a fine man, and a good friend from school. We used to call him Skip--- Fa sounded too much like something from *The Sound of Music*, you know? A good guy, and a fine minister of the gospel. He could give lessons in faith to Jerry Falwell. Correspond with him? You bet I do! We send him something like twenty-five thousand dollars a year. Want to see a picture? We have it in the church itself. We were both a lot younger then," Patterson added with a smile. "Skip's got real guts. It can't be much fun to be a Christian minister in China, you know? But he never complains. His letters are always upbeat. We could use a thousand more men like him in the clergy."

"So, you are that impressed with him?" SAC Mike Leary asked.

"He was a good kid in college, and he's a good man today, and a fine minister of the gospel who does his work in a very adverse environment. Skip is a hero to me, Mr. Leary." Which was very powerful testimony indeed from so important a member of the community. First Baptist Church hadn't had a mortgage in living memory, despite its impressive physical plant and amply cushioned pews.

The FBI agent stood. "That's about all I need. Thank you, sir."

"Can I ask why you came here to ask about my friend?"

Leary had expected that question, and so had preframed his answer. "Just a routine inquiry, sir. Your friend isn't in any trouble at all--- at least not with the United States government."

"Good to know," the Reverend Patterson responded, with a smile and a handshake. "You know, we're not the only congregation that looks after Skip."

Leary turned. "Really?"

"Of course. You know Hosiah Jackson?"

"Reverend Jackson, the Vice President's dad? Never met him, but I know who he is."

Patterson nodded. "Yep. Hosiah's as good as they come." Neither man commented on how unusual it would have been a mere forty years earlier for a white minister to comment so favorably on a black one, but Mississippi had changed over time, in some ways even faster than the rest of America. "I was over at his place a few years ago and we got talking about things, and this subject came up. Hosiah's congregation sends Skip five or ten thousand dollars a year also, and he organized some of the other black congregations to help us look after Skip as well."

Mississippi whites and blacks looking after a Chinese preacher, Leary thought. What was the world coming to? He supposed that Christianity might really mean something after all, and headed back to his office in his official car, content at having done some actual investigative work for a change, if not exactly for the FBI.

Cardinal McCarthy learned from his secretary that his two requests for information had been answered before lunch, which was impressive even by the standards of the FBI-Catholic Church alliance. Soon after his midday meal, Cardinal McCarthy personally encrypted both of the replies and forwarded them back to Rome. He didn't know why the inquiry had come, but figured that he'd find out in due course if it were important, and if not, then not. It amused the churchman to be the Vatican's master spy in America.

It would have amused him less to know that the National Security Agency at Fort Meade, Maryland, was interested in this sideshow activity also, and that their monster Thinking Machines, Inc. supercomputer in the cavernous basement under the main building in the sprawling complex was on the case. This machine, whose manufacturer had gone bankrupt some years before, had been both the pride and joy and the greatest disappointment in the huge collection of computers at NSA, until quite recently, when one of the agency's mathematicians had finally figured out a way to

make use of it. It was a massive parallel-processing machine and supposedly operated much as the human brain did, theoretically able to attack a problem from more than one side simultaneously, just as the human brain was thought to do. The problem was that no one actually knew how the human brain worked, and as a result drafting the software to make full use of the hugely powerful computer had been impossible for some years. This had relegated the impressive and expensive artifact to no more practical utility than an ordinary workstation. But then someone had recognized the fact that quantum mechanics had become useful in the cracking of foreign ciphers, wondered why this should be the case, and started looking at the problems from the programming unit. Seven months later, that intellectual sojourn had resulted in the first of three new operating systems for the Thinking Machines Super-Cruncher, and the rest was highly classified history. NSA was now able to crack any book or machine cipher in the world, and its analysts, newly rich with information, had pitched in to have a woodworker construct a sort of pagan altar to put before the Cruncher for the notional sacrifice of goats before their new god. (To suggest the sacrifice of virgins would have offended the womenfolk at the agency.) NSA had long been known for its eccentric institutional sense of humor. The only real fear was that the world would learn about the TAPDANCE system NSA had come up with, which was totally random, and therefore totally unbreakable, plus easy to manufacture--- but it was also an administrative nightmare, and that would prevent most foreign governments from using it.

The Cardinal's Internet dispatches were copied, illegally but routinely, by NSA and fed into the Cruncher, which spat out the clear text, which found its way quickly to the desk of an NSA analyst, who, it had been carefully determined beforehand, wasn't Catholic.

That's interesting, the analyst thought. Why is the Vatican interested in some Chink minister? And why the hell did they go to New York to find out about him? Oh, okay, educated over here, and friends in Mississippi... what the hell is this all about? He was supposed to know about such things, but that was merely the theory under which he operated. He frequently didn't know beans about the information he looked at, but was honest enough to tell his superiors that. And so, his daily report was forwarded electronically to his supervisor, who looked it over, coded it, and then forwarded it to CIA, where three more analysts looked it over, decided that they didn't know what to make of it either, and then filed it away, electronically. In this case, the data went onto VHS-sized tape cassettes, one of which went into storage container Doc, and the other into Grumpy--- there are seven such storage units in the CIA computer room, each named after one of Disney's Seven Dwarfs--- while the reference names went into the mainframe so that the computer would know where to look for the data for which the United States government as yet had no understanding. That situation was hardly unknown, of course, and for that reason CIA had every bit of information it generated in a computerized and thoroughly cross-referenced index, instantly accessible, depending on classification, to anyone in either the New or Old Headquarters Buildings located one ridgeline away from the Potomac River. Most of the data in the Seven Dwarfs just sat there, forevermore to be untouched, footnotes to footnotes, never to be of interest even to the driest of academics.

And so?" Zhang Han San asked.

"And so, our Russian neighbors have the luck of the devil," Fang Gan replied, handing the folder over to the senior Minister Without Portfolio. Zhang was seven years older than Fang, closer to his country's Premier. But not that much, and there was little competition between the two ministers. "What we could do with such blessings..." His voice trailed off.

"Indeed." That any country could have made constructive use of oil and gold was an obvious truth left unsaid. What mattered here and now was that China would not, and Russia would.

"I had planned for this, you know."

"Your plans were masterful, my friend," Fang said from his seat, reaching inside his jacket for a pack of cigarettes. He held it up to seek approval from his host, who'd quit the habit five years before. The response was a dismissive wave of the hand, and Fang tapped one out and lit it from a butane lighter. "But anyone can have bad luck."

"First the Japanese failed us, and then that religious fool in Tehran," Zhang grouched. "Had either of our supposed allies performed as promised, the gold and the oil would now be ours..."

"Useful, certainly, for our own purposes, but I am somewhat doubtful on the subject of world acceptance of our notionally prosperous status," Fang said, with a lengthy puff.

The response was yet another wave of the hand. "You think the capitalists are governed by principle? They need oil and gold, and whoever can provide it cheaply gets to sell the most of it. Look whom they buy from, my old friend, anyone who happens to have it. With all the oil in Mexico, the Americans can't even work up the courage to seize it. How cowardly of them! In our case, the Japanese, as we have learned to our sorrow, have no principles at all. If they could buy oil from the company which made the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they would. They call it realism," Zhang concluded scornfully. The real cite came from Vladimir Il'yich Ulyanov, Lenin himself, who'd predicted, not unreasonably, that capitalist nations would compete among themselves to sell the Soviet Union the rope with which the Russians would later hang them all. But Lenin had never planned for Marxism to fail, had he? Just as Mao hadn't planned for his perfect political/economic vision to fail in the People's Republic, as evidenced by such slogans as "The Great Leap Forward," which, among other things, had encouraged ordinary peasants to smelt iron in their backyards. That the resulting slag hadn't been useful even to make andirons with was a fact not widely advertised in the East or West.

"Alas, fortune did not smile upon us, and so, the oil and gold are not ours.

"For the moment," Zhang murmured.

"What was that?" Fang asked, not having quite caught the comment.

Zhang looked up, almost startled from his internal reverie. "Hmph? Oh, nothing, my friend." And with that the discussion turned to domestic matters. It lasted a total of seventy-five minutes before Fang went back to his office. There began another routine. "Ming," Fang called, gesturing on the way to his inner office.

The secretary stood and scampered after him, closing the door behind before finding her seat.

"New entry," Fang said tiredly, for it had been a lengthy day. "Regular afternoon meeting with Zhang Han San, and we discussed..." His voice went on, relating the substance and contents of the meeting. Ming duly took her notes for her minister's official diary. The Chinese were inveterate diarists, and besides that, members of the Politburo felt both an obligation (for scholarly history) and a personal need (for personal survival) to document their every conversation on matters political and concerning national policy, the better to document their views and careful judgment should one of their number make an error of judgment. That this meant his personal secretary, as, indeed, all of the Politburo members' personal secretaries, had access to the most sensitive secrets of the land was not a matter of importance, since these girls were mere robots, recording and transcription machines, little more than that--- well, a little more, Fang and a few of his colleagues thought with the accompanying smile. You couldn't have a tape machine suck on your penis, could you? And Ming was especially good at it. Fang was a communist, and had been for all of his adult life, but he was not a man entirely devoid of heart, and he had the affection for Ming that another man, or even himself, might have had for a favored daughter... except that you usually didn't fuck your own daughter.... His diary entry droned on for twenty minutes, his trained memory recounting every substantive part of his exchange with Zhang, who was doubtless doing the same with his own private secretary right at this moment--- unless Zhang had succumbed to the Western practice of using a tape machine, which would not have surprised Fang. For all of Zhang's pretended contempt for Westerners, he emulated them in so many ways.

Theyd also tracked down the name of Klementi Ivan'ch Suvorov. He was yet another former KGB officer, part then of the Third Chief Directorate, which had been a hybrid department of the former spy agency, tasked to overseeing the former Soviet military, and also to overseeing certain special operations of the latter force, like the Spetsnaz, Oleg Provalov knew. He turned a few more pages in Suvorov's package, found a photograph and fingerprints, and also discovered that his first assignment had been in the First Chief Directorate, known as the Foreign Directorate because of its work in gathering intelligence from other nations. Why the change? he wondered. Usually in KGB, you stayed where you were initially put. But a senior officer in the Third had drafted him by name from the First... why? Suvorov, K. I., asked for by name by General Major Pavel Konstantinovich Kabinet. The name made Provalov pause. He'd heard it somewhere, but exactly where, he couldn't recall, an unusual state of affairs for a long-term investigator. Provalov made a note and set it aside.

So, they had a name and a photo for this Suvorov fellow. Had he known Amalrik and Zimyanin, the supposed--- and deceased--- killers of Avseyenko the pimp? It seemed possible. In the Third Directorate he would have had possible access to the Spetsnaz, but that could have been a mere coincidence. The KGB's Third Directorate had been mainly concerned with political control of the Soviet military, but that was no longer something the State needed, was it? The entire panoply of political officers, the zampoliti who had so long been the bane of the Soviet military, was now essentially gone.

Where are you now? Provalov asked the file folder. Unlike Central Army Records, KGB records were usually pretty good at showing where former intelligence officers lived, and what they were doing. It was a carryover from the previous regime that worked for the police agencies, but not in this case. Where are you? What are you doing to support yourself? Are you a criminal? Are you a murderer? Homicide investigations by their nature created more questions than answers, and frequently ended with many such questions forever unanswered because you could never look inside the mind of a killer, and even if you could, what you might find there didn't have to make any sort of sense.

This murder case had begun as a complex one, and was only becoming more so. All he knew for certain was that Avseyenko was dead, along with his driver and a whore. And now, maybe, he knew even less. He'd assumed almost from the beginning that the pimp had been the real target, but if this Suvorov fellow had hired Amalrik and Zimyanin to do the killing, why would a former--- he checked--- lieutenant colonel in the Third Chief Directorate of the KGB go out of his way to kill a pimp? Was not Sergey Golovko an equally likely target for the killing, and would that not also explain the murder of the two supposed killers, for eliminating the wrong target? The detective lieutenant opened a desk drawer for a bottle of aspirin. It wasn't the first headache this case had developed, and it didn't seem likely that this would be the last. Whoever Suvorov was, if Golovko had been the target, he had not made the decision to kill the man himself. He'd been a contract killer, and therefore someone else had made the decision to do the killing.

But who?

And why?

Cui bono was the ancient question--- old enough that the adage was in a dead language. To whom the good? Who profited from the deed?

He called Abramov and Ustinov. Maybe they could run Suvorov down, and then he'd fly north to interview the man. Provalov drafted the fax and fired it off to St. Petersburg, then left his desk for the drive home. He checked his watch. Only two hours late. Not bad for this case.

General Lieutenant Gennady Iosifovich Bondarenko looked around his office. He'd had his three stars for a while, and sometimes he wondered if he'd get any farther. He'd been a professional soldier for thirty-one years, and the job to which he'd always aspired was Commanding General of

the Russian Army. Many good men, and some bad ones, had been there. Gregoriy Zhukov, for one, the man who'd saved his country from the Germans. There were many statues to Zhukov, whom Bondarenko had heard lecture when he was a wet-nosed cadet all those years before, seeing the blunt, bulldog face and ice-blue determined eyes of a killer, a true Russian hero whom politics could not demean, and whose name the Germans had come to fear.

That Bondarenko had come this far was no small surprise even to himself. He'd begun as a signals officer, seconded briefly to Spetsnaz in Afghanistan, where he'd cheated death twice, both times taking command of a panic-worthy situation and surviving with no small distinction. He'd taken wounds, and killed with his own hands, something few colonels do, and few colonels relished, except at a good officers' club bar after a few stiff ones with their comrades.

Like many generals before him, Bondarenko was something of a "political" general. He'd hitched his career-star to the coattails of a quasi-minister, Sergey Golovko, but in truth he'd never have gone to general-lieutenant's stars without real merit, and courage on the battlefield went as far in the Russian army as it did in any other. Intelligence went farther still, and above all came accomplishment. His job was what the Americans called J-3, Chief of Operations, which meant killing people in war and training them in peace. Bondarenko had traveled the globe, learning how other armies trained their men, sifted through the lessons, and applied them to his own soldiers. The only difference between a soldier and a civilian was training, after all, and Bondarenko wanted no less than to bring the Russian army to the same razor-sharp and granite-hard condition with which it had kicked in the gates of Berlin under Zhukov and Koniev. That goal was still off in the future, but the general told himself that he'd laid the proper foundation. In ten years, perhaps, his army would be at that goal, and he'd be around to see it, retired by then, of course, honorably so, with his decorations framed and hanging on the wall, and grandchildren to bounce on his knee... and occasionally coming in to consult, to look things over and offer his opinion, as retired general officers often did.

For the moment, he had no further work to do, but no particular desire to head home, where his wife was hosting the wives of other senior officers. Bondarenko had always found such affairs tedious. The military attaché in Washington had sent him a book, *Swift Sword*, by a Colonel Nicholas Eddington of the American Army National Guard. Eddington, yes, he was the colonel who'd been training with his brigade in the desert of California when the decision had come to deploy to the Persian Gulf, and his troops--- civilians in uniform, really--- had performed well: Better than well, the Russian general told himself. They'd exercised the Medusa Touch, destroying everything they'd touched, along with the regular American formations, the 10th and 11th cavalry regiments. Together that one division-sized collection of forces had smashed a full four corps of mechanized troops like so many sheep in the slaughter pen. Even Eddington's guardsmen had performed magnificently: Part of that, Gennady Iosifovich knew, was their motivation. The biological attack on their homeland had understandably enraged the soldiers, and such rage could make a poor soldier into an heroic one as easily as flipping a light switch. "Will to combat" was the technical term. In more pedestrian language, it was the reason a man put his life at risk, and so it was a matter of no small importance to the senior officers whose job it was to lead those men into danger.

Paging through the book, he saw that this Eddington--- also a professor of history, the flap said; wasn't that interesting?--- paid no small attention to that factor. Well, maybe he was smart in addition to being lucky. He'd had the good fortune to command reserve soldiers with many years of service, and while they'd only had part-time practice for their training, they'd been in highly stable units, where every soldier knew every other, and that was a virtually unknown luxury for regular soldiers. And they'd also had the revolutionary new American IVIS gear, which let all the men and vehicles in the field know exactly what their commander knew, often in great detail... and in turn told their commander exactly what his men saw. Eddington said that had made his job a lot easier than any mechanized-force commander had ever had it.

The American officer also talked about knowing not only what his subordinate commanders were saying, but also the importance of knowing what they were thinking, the things they didn't have the time to say. The implicit emphasis was on the importance of continuity within the officer corps, and that, Bondarenko thought as he made a marginal note, was a most important lesson. He'd have to read this book in detail, and maybe have Washington purchase a hundred or so for his brother officers to read... even get reprint rights in Russia for it? It was something the Russians had done more than once.

## CHAPTER - 12 Conflicts of the Pocket

Okay, George, let's have it," Ryan said, sipping his coffee. The White House had many routines, and one that had evolved over the past year was that, after the daily intelligence briefing, the Secretary of the Treasury was Ryan's first appointment two or three days of the week. Winston most often walked across--- actually under--- 15th Street via a tunnel between the White House and Treasury Building that dated back to the time of FDR. The other part of the routine was that the President's Navy messmen laid out coffee and croissants (with butter) in which both men indulged to the detriment of their cholesterol numbers.

"The PRC. The trade negotiations have hit the wall pretty hard. They just don't want to play ball."

"What are the issues?"

"Hell, Jack, what aren't the friggin' issues?" TRADER took a bite of croissant and grape jelly. "That new computer company their government started up is ripping off a proprietary hardware gadget that Dell has patented--- that's the new doohickey that kicked their stock up twenty percent, y'know? They're just dropping the things into the boxes they make for their own market and the ones they just started selling in Europe. That's a goddamned violation of all sorts of trade and patent treaties, but when we point that out to them over the negotiating table, they just change the subject and ignore it. That could cost Dell something like four hundred million dollars, and that's real money for one company to lose, y'know? If I was their corporate counsel, I'd be flipping through the Yellow Pages for Assassins 'R Us. Okay, that's one. Next, they've told us that if we make too big a deal of these 'minor' disagreements, Boeing can forget the 777 order--- twenty-eight aircraft they've optioned--- in favor of Airbus."

Ryan nodded. "George, what's the trade balance with the PRC now?"

"Seventy-eight billion, and it's their way, not ours, as you know."

"Scott's running this over at Foggy Bottom?"

SecTreas nodded. "He's got a pretty fair team in place, but they need a little more in the way of executive direction."

"And what's this doing to us?"

"Well, it gets our consumers a lot of low-cost goods, about seventy percent of which is in low-tech stuff, lots of toys, stuffed animals, like that. But, Jack, thirty percent is upscale stuff. That amount's almost doubled in two and a half years. Pretty soon that's going to start costing us jobs, both in terms of production for domestic consumption and lost exports. They're selling a lot of laptops domestically--- in their country I mean--- but they don't let us into the market, even though we've got 'em beat in terms of performance and price. We know for sure they're taking part of their trading surplus with us and using it to subsidize their computer industries. They want to build that up for strategic reasons, I suppose.

"Plus selling weapons to people we'd prefer not to have them," POTUS added. Which they also do for strategic reasons.

"Well, doesn't everybody need an AK-47 to take care of his gophers?" A shipment of fourteen hundred true--- that is, fully automatic--- assault rifles had been seized in the Port of Los Angeles

two weeks before, but the PRC had denied responsibility, despite the fact that U.S. intelligence services had tracked the transaction order back to a particular Beijing telephone number. That was something Ryan knew, but it had not been allowed to leak, lest it expose methods of intelligence collection--- in this case to the National Security Agency at Fort Meade. The new Beijing telephone system hadn't been built by an American firm, but much of the design work had been contracted to a company that had made a profitable arrangement with an agency of the United States government. It wasn't strictly legal, but different rules were attached to national security matters.

"They just don't play by the rules, do they?"

Winston grunted. "Not hardly."

"Suggestions?" President Ryan asked.

"Remind the little slant-eyed fucks that they need us a shitload more than we need them."

"You have to be careful talking like that to nation-states, especially ones with nuclear weapons," Ryan reminded his Treasury Secretary. "Plus the racial slur."

"Jack, either it's a level playing field or it isn't. Either you play fair or you don't. If they keep that much more of our money than we do of theirs, then it means they've got to start playing fair with us. Okay, I know"--- he held his hands up defensively--- "their noses are a little out of joint over Taiwan, but that was a good call, Jack. You did the right thing, punishing them. Those little fucks killed people, and they probably had complicity in our last adventure in the Persian Gulf--- and the Ebola attack on us--- and so they had it coming. But nooooo, we can't punish them for murder and complicity in an act of war on the United States, can we? We have to be too big and strong to be so petty. Petty, my ass, Jack! Directly or indirectly, those little bastards helped that Daryaei guy kill seven thousand of our citizens, and establishing diplomatic relations with Taiwan was the price they paid for it--- and a damned small price that was, if you ask me. They ought to understand that. They've got to learn that the world has rules. So, what we have to do is show them that there's pain when you break the rules, and we have to make the pain stick. Until they understand that, there's just going to be more trouble. Sooner or later, they have to learn. I think it's been long enough to wait."

"Okay, but remember their point of view: Who are we to tell them the rules?"

"Horseshit, Jack!" Winston was one of the very few people who had the ability--- if not exactly the right--- to talk that way in the Oval Office. Part of it came from his own success, part of it from the fact that Ryan respected straight talk, even if the language was occasionally off-color.

"Remember, they're the ones sticking it to us. We are playing fair. The world does have rules, and those rules are honored by the community of nations, and if Beijing wants to be part of that community, well, then they have to abide by the same rules that everyone else does. If you want to join the club, you have to pay the cost of admittance, and even then you still can't drive your golf cart on the greens. You can't have it both ways."

The problem, Ryan reflected, was that the people who ran entire nations especially large, powerful, important nations--- were not the sort to be told how or why to do anything at all. This was all the more true of despotic countries. In a liberal democracy the idea of the rule of law applied to just about everyone. Ryan was President, but he couldn't rob a bank just because he needed pocket change.

"George, okay. Sit down with Scott and work something out that I can agree to, and we'll have State explain the rules to our friends in Beijing." And who knows, maybe it might even work this time. Not that Ryan would bet money on it.

This would be the important evening, Nomuri thought. Yeah, sure, he'd banged Ming the night before, and she seemed to have liked it, but now that she'd had time to think it over, would her reaction be the same? Or would she reflect that he'd plied her with liquor and taken advantage of



her? Nomuri had dated and bedded his share of women, but he didn't confuse amorous successes with any sort of understanding of the female psyche.

He sat at the bar of the medium-sized restaurant--- different from the last one--- smoking a cigarette, which was new for the CIA officer. He wasn't coughing, though his first two had made the room seem to spin around some. Carbon monoxide poisoning, he thought. Smoking reduced the oxygen supply to your brain, and was bad for you in so many ways. But it also made waiting a lot easier. He'd bought a Bic lighter, blue, with a facsimile of the PRC flag on it, so that it appeared like their banner was waving in a clear sky. Yeah, he thought, sure, and here I am wondering if my girl will show up, and she's already--- he checked his watch--- nine minutes late. Nomuri waved to the bartender and ordered another Scotch. It was a Japanese brand, drinkable, not overly expensive, and when you got down to it, booze was booze, wasn't it?

Are you coming, Ming? the case officer's mind asked the air around him. Like most bars around the world, this one had a mirror behind the glasses and bottles, and the California native examined his face quizzically, pretending it was someone else's, wondering what someone else might see in it. Nervousness? Suspicion? Fear? Loneliness? Lust? There could be someone making that evaluation right now, some MSS counterintelligence officer doing his stakeout, careful not to look toward Nomuri too much of the time. Maybe using the mirror as an indirect surveillance tool. More likely sitting at an angle so that his posture naturally pointed his eyes to the American, whereas Nomuri would have to turn his head to see him, giving the surveillance agent a chance to avert his glance, probably toward his partner--- you tended to do this with teams rather than an individual--- whose head would be on the same line of sight, so that he could survey his target without seeming to do so directly. Every nation in the world had police or security forces trained in this, and the methods were the same everywhere because human nature was the same everywhere, whether your target was a drug dealer or a spook. That's just the way it was, Nomuri said to himself, checking his watch again. Eleven minutes late. It's cool, buddy, women are always late. They do it because they can't tell time, or it takes them fucking forever to get dressed and do their makeup, or because they don't remember to wear a watch... or most likely of all, because it gives them an advantage. Such behavior, perhaps, made women appear more valuable to men--- after all, men waited for them, right? Not the other way around. It put a premium on their affection, which if not waited for, might not appear one day, and that gave men something to fear.

Chester Nomuri, behavioral anthropologist, he snorted to himself, looking back up in the mirror.

For Christ's sake, dude, maybe she's working late, or the traffic is heavy, or some friend at the office needed her to come over and help her move the goddamned furniture. Seventeen minutes. He fished out another Kool and lit it from his ChiComm lighter. The East is Red, he thought. And maybe this was the last country in the world that really was red... wouldn't Mao be proud...?

Where are you?

Well, whoever from the MSS might be watching, if he had any doubts about what Nomuri was doing, they'd damned sure know he was waiting for a woman, and if anything his stress would look like that of a guy bewitched by the woman in question. And spooks weren't supposed to be bewitched, were they?

What are you worrying about that for, asshole, just because you might not get laid tonight?

Twenty-three minutes late. He stubbed out one cigarette and lit another. If this was a mechanism women used to control men, then it was an effective one.

James Bond never had these problems, the intelligence officer thought. Mr. Kiss-Kiss Bang-Bang was always master of his women--- and if anyone needed proof that Bond was a character of fiction, that was sure as hell it!

As it turned out, Nomuri was so entranced with his thoughts that he didn't see Ming come in. He felt a gentle tap on his back, and turned rapidly to see---

---she wore the radiant smile, pleased with herself at having surprised him, the beaming dark eyes that crinkled at the corners with the pleasure of the moment.

"I am so sorry to be late," she said rapidly. "Fang needed me to transcribe some things, and he kept me in the office late."

"I must talk to this old man," Nomuri said archly, hauling himself erect on the barstool.

"He is, as you say, an old man, and he does not listen very well. Perhaps age has impeded his hearing."

No, the old fucker probably doesn't want to listen, Nomuri didn't say. Fang was probably like bosses everywhere, well past the age when he looked for the ideas of others.

"So, what do you want for dinner?" Nomuri asked, and got the best possible answer.

"I'm not hungry." With sparkles in the dark eyes to affirm what she did want. Nomuri tossed off the last of his drink, stubbed out his cigarette, and walked out with her.

So?" Ryan asked.

"So, this is not good news," Arnie van Damm replied.

"I suppose that depends on your point of view. When will they hear arguments?"

"Less than two months, and that's a message, too, Jack. Those good 'strict-constructionist' justices you appointed are going to hear this case, and if I had to bet, I'd wager they're hot to overturn Roe. "

Jack settled back in his chair and smiled up at his Chief of Staff. "Why is that bad, Arnie?"

"Jack, it's bad because a lot of the citizens out there like to have the option to choose between abortion or not. That's why. 'Pro choice' is what they call it, and so far it's the law."

"Maybe that'll change," the President said hopefully, looking back down at his schedule. The Secretary of the Interior was coming in to talk about the national parks.

"That is not something to look forward to, damn it! And it'll be blamed on you!"

"Okay, if and when that happens, I will point out that I am not a justice of the United States Supreme Court, and stay away from it entirely. If they decide the way I--- and I guess you--- think they will, abortion becomes a legislative matter, and the legislature of the 'several states,' as the Constitution terms them, will meet and decide for themselves if the voters want to be able to kill their unborn babies or not--- but, Arnie, I've got four kids, remember. I was there to see them all born, and be damned if you are going to tell me that abortion is okay!" The fourth little Ryan, Kyle Daniel, had been born during Ryan's Presidency, and the cameras had been there to record his face coming out of the delivery room, allowing the entire nation--- and the world, for that matter--- to share the experience. It had bumped Ryan's approval rating a full fifteen points, pleasing Arnie very greatly at the time.

"God damn it, Jack, I never said that, did I?" van Damm demanded. "But you and I do objectionable things every so often, don't we? And we don't deny other people the right to do such things, too, do we? Smoke, for example?" he added, just to twist Ryan's tail a little.

"Arnie, you use words as cleverly as any man I know, and that was a good play. I'll give you that. But there's a qualitative difference between lighting up a goddamned cigarette and killing a living human being."

"True, if a fetus is a living human being, which is something for theologians, not politicians."

"Arnie, it's like this. The pro-abortion crowd says that whether or not a fetus is human is beside the point because it's inside a woman's body, and therefore her property to do with as she pleases. Fine. It was the law in the Roman Republic and Empire that a wife and children were property of the paterfamilias, the head of the family, and he could kill them anytime he pleased. You think we should go back to that?"

"Obviously not, since it empowers men and dis-empowers women, and we don't do things like that anymore."

"So, you've taken a moral issue and degraded it to what's good politically and what's bad politically. Well, Arnie, I am not here to do that. Even the President is allowed to have some moral

principles, or am I supposed to check my ideas of right and wrong outside the door when I show up for work in the morning?"

"But he's not allowed to impose it on others. Moral principles are things you keep on the inside, for yourself."

"What we call law is nothing more or less than the public's collective belief, their conviction of what right and wrong is. Whether it's about murder, kidnapping, or running a red light, society decides what the rules are. In a democratic republic, we do that through the legislature by electing people who share our views. That's how laws happen. We also set up a constitution, the supreme law of the land, which is very carefully considered because it decides what the other laws may and may not do, and therefore it protects us against our transitory passions. The job of the judiciary is to interpret the laws, or in this case the constitutional principles embodied in those laws, as they apply to reality. In *Roe versus Wade*, the Supreme Court went too far. It legislated; it changed the law in a way not anticipated by the drafters, and that was an error. All a reversal of *Roe* will do is return the abortion issue to the state legislatures, where it belongs."

"How long have you been thinking about that speech?" Arnie asked. Ryan's turn of phrase was too polished for extemporaneous speech.

"A little while," the President admitted.

"Well, when that decision comes through, be ready for a firestorm," his Chief of Staff warned. "I'm talking demonstrations, TV coverage, and enough newspaper editorials to paper the walls of the Pentagon, and your Secret Service people will worry about the additional danger to your life, and your wife's life, and your kids. If you think I'm kidding, ask them."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"There's no law, federal, state, or local, which compels the world to be logical, Jack. The people out there depend on you to keep the fucking weather pleasant, and they blame you when you don't. Deal with it." With that, an annoyed Chief of Staff headed out and west toward his corner office.

"Crap," Ryan breathed, as he flipped to the briefing papers for the Secretary of the Interior. Smokey Bear's owner. Also custodian of the national parks, which the President only got to see on the Discovery Channel, on such nights as he had free time to switch the TV on.

There wasn't much to be said for the clothing people wore in this place, Nomuri thought again, except for one thing. When you undid the buttons and found the Victoria's Secret stuff underneath, well, it was like having a movie switch from black-and-white to Technicolor. This time Ming allowed him to do her buttons, then slide the jacket down her arms, and then get her trousers off. The panties looked particularly inviting, but then, so did her entire body. Nomuri scooped her up in his arms and kissed her passionately before dropping her on the bed. A minute later, he was beside her.

"So, why were you late?"

She made a face. "Every week Minister Fang meets with other ministers, and when he comes back, he has me transcribe the notes of the meetings so that he has a record of everything that was said."

"Oh, do you use my new computer for that?" The question concealed the quivering Jesus! he felt throughout his body on hearing Ming's words. This girl could be one hell of a source! Nomuri took a deep breath and resumed his poker face of polite disinterest.

"Of course."

"Excellent. It's equipped with a modem, yes?"

"Of course, I use it every day to retrieve Western news reports and such from their media web sites."

"Ah, that is good." So, he'd taken care of business for the day, and with that job done, Nomuri leaned over for a kiss.

"Before I came into the restaurant, I put the lipstick on," Ming explained. "I don't wear it at work."

"So I see," the CIA officer replied, repeating the initial kiss, and extending it in time. Her arms found their way around his neck. The reason for her lateness had nothing to do with a lack of affection. That was obvious now, as his hands started to wander also. The front-closure on the bra was the smartest thing he'd done. Just a flick of thumb and forefinger and it sprang open, revealing both of her rather cute breasts, two more places for his hand to explore. The skin there was particularly silky... and, he decided a few seconds later, tasty as well.

This resulted in an agreeable moan and squirm of pleasure from his... what? Friend? Well, okay, but not enough. Agent? Not yet. Lover would do for the moment. They'd never talked at The Farm about this sort of thing, except the usual warnings not to get too close to your agent, lest you lose your objectivity. But if you didn't get a little bit close, you'd never recruit the agent, would you? Of course, Chester knew that he was far more than a little bit close at the moment.

Whatever her looks, she had delightful skin, and his fingertips examined it in great detail as his eyes smiled into hers, with the occasional kiss. And her body wasn't bad at all. A nice shape even when she stood. A little too much waist, maybe, but this wasn't Venice Beach, and the hourglass figure, however nice it might look in pictures, was just that, a picture look. Her waist was smaller than her hips, and that was enough for the moment. It wasn't as though she'd be walking down the ramp at some New York fashion show, where the models looked like boys anyway. So, Ming is not now and would never be a supermodel--- deal with it, Chet, the officer told himself. Then it was time to put all the CIA stuff aside. He was a man, dressed only in boxer shorts, next to a woman, dressed only in panties. Panties large enough maybe to make a handkerchief, though orange-red wouldn't be a good color for a man to pull from his back pocket, especially, he added to himself with a smile, in some artificial silk fabric.

"Why do you smile?" Ming asked.

"Because you are pretty," Nomuri replied. And so she was, now, with that particular smile on her face. No, she'd never be a model, but inside every woman was the look of beauty, if only they would let it out. And her skin was first-class, especially her lips, coated with after-work lipstick, smooth and greasy, yet making his lips linger even so. Soon their bodies touched almost all over, and a warm, comfortable feeling it was, so nicely she fit under one arm, while his left hand played and wandered. Ming's hair didn't tangle much. She could evidently brush it out very easily, it was so short. Her underarms, too, were hairy, like many Chinese women's, but that only gave Nomuri something else to play with, teasing and pulling a little. That evidently tickled her. Ming giggled playfully and hugged him tighter, then relaxed to allow his hand to wander more. As it passed her navel, she lay suddenly still, relaxing herself in some kind of invitation. Time for another kiss as his fingertips wandered farther, and there was humor in her eyes now. What game could this be...?

As soon as his hands found her panties, her bottom lifted off the mattress. He sat up halfway and pulled them down, allowing her left foot to kick them into the air, where the red-orange pants flew like a mono-colored rainbow, and then---

"Ming!" he said in humorous accusation.

"I've heard that men like this," she said with a sparkle and a giggle.

"Well, it is different," Nomuri replied, as his hands traced over skin even smoother than the rest of her body. "Did you do this at work?"

A riotous laugh now: "No, fool! This morning at my apartment! In my own bathroom, with my own razor."

"Just wanted to make sure," the CIA officer assured her. Damn, isn't this something. Then her hand moved to do to him much the same as he was doing to her.

"You are different from Fang," her voice told him in a playful whisper.

"Oh? How so?"

"I think the worst thing a woman can say to a man is 'Are you in yet?' One of the other secretaries said that to Fang once. He beat her. She came into work the next day with black eyes--- he made her come in--- and then the next night... well, he had me to bed," she admitted, not so much with shame as embarrassment. "To show what a man he still is. But I knew better than to say that to him. We all do, now."

"Will you say that to me?" Nomuri asked with a smile and another kiss.

"Oh, no! You are a sausage, not a string bean!" Ming told him enthusiastically.

It wasn't the most elegant compliment he'd ever had, but it sufficed for the moment, Nomuri thought.

"Do you think it's time for the sausage to find a home?"

"Oh, yes!"

As he rolled on top, Nomuri saw two things under him. One was a girl, a young woman with the usual female drives, which he was about to answer. The other was a potential agent, with access to political intelligence such as an experienced case officer only dreamed about. But Nomuri wasn't an experienced case officer. He was still a little wet behind the ears, and so he didn't know what was impossible. He'd have to worry about his potential agent, because if he ever recruited her successfully, her life would be in the gravest danger... he thought about what would happen, how her face would change as the bullet entered her brain... but, no, it was too ugly. With an effort, Nomuri forced the thought aside as he slipped into her. If he were to recruit her at all, he had to perform this function well. And if it made him happy, too, well, that was just a bonus.

"I'll think about it," POTUS promised the Secretary of the Interior, walking him to the door that led to the corridor, to the left of the fireplace. Sorry, buddy, but the money isn't there to do all that. His SecInterior was by no means a bad man, but it seemed he'd been captured by his departmental bureaucracy, which was perhaps the worst danger of working in Washington. He sat back down to read the papers the Secretary had handed over. Of course he wouldn't have time to read it all over himself. On a good day, he'd be able to skim through the Executive Summary of the documents, while the rest went to a staffer who'd go through it all and draft a report to the President--- in effect, another Executive Summary of sorts, and from that document, typed up by a White House staff member of maybe twenty-eight years, policy would actually be made.

And that was crazy! Ryan thought angrily. He was supposed to be the chief executive of the country. He was the only one who was supposed to make policy. But the President's time was valuable. So valuable, in fact, that others guarded it for him--- and really those others guarded his time from himself, because ultimately it was they who decided what Ryan saw and didn't see. Thus, while Ryan was the Chief Executive, and did alone make executive policy, he made that policy often based solely on the information presented to him by others. And sometimes it worried him that he was controlled by the information that made it to his desk, rather as the press decided what the public saw, and thus had a hand in deciding what the public thought about the various issues of the day.

So, Jack, have you been captured by your bureaucracy, too? It was hard to know, hard to tell, and hard to decide how to change the situation, if the situation existed in the first place.

Maybe that's why Arnie likes me to get out of this building to where the real people are, Jack realized.

The more difficult problem was that Ryan was a foreign-policy and national-security expert. In those areas he felt the most competent. It was on domestic stuff that he felt disconnected and dumb. Part of that came from his personal wealth. He'd never worried about the cost of a loaf of bread or a quart of milk--- all the more so in the White House, where you never saw milk in a quart container anyway, but only in a chilled glass on a silver tray, carried by a Navy steward's mate right to your hands while you sat in your easy chair. There were people out there who did worry about such

things, or at least worried about the cost of putting little Jimmy through college, and Ryan, as President, had to concern himself with their worries. He had to try to keep the economy in balance so that they could earn their decent livings, could go to Disney World in the summer, and the football games in the fall, and splurge to make sure there were plenty of presents under the Christmas tree every year.

But how the hell was he supposed to do that? Ryan remembered a lament attributed to the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. On learning that he'd been declared a god, and that temples had been erected to him, and that people sacrificed to the statues of himself in those temples, Augustus angrily inquired: When someone prays to me to cure his gout, what am I supposed to do? The fundamental issue was how much government policy really had to do with reality. That was a question seldom posed in Washington even by conservatives who ideologically despised the government and everything it did in domestic terms, though they were often in favor of showing the flag and rattling the national saber overseas--- exactly why they enjoyed this Ryan had never thought about. Perhaps just to be different from liberals who flinched from the exercise of force like a vampire from the cross, but who, like vampires, liked to extend government as far as they could get away with into the lives of everyone, and so suck their blood--- in reality, use the instrument of taxation to take more and more to pay for the more and more they would have the government do.

And yet the economy seemed to move on, regardless of what government did. People found their jobs, most of them in the private sector, providing goods and services for which people paid voluntarily with their after-tax money. And yet "public service" was a phrase used almost exclusively by and about political figures, almost always the elected sort. Didn't everyone out there serve the public in one way or another? Physicians, teachers, firefighters, pharmacists. Why did the media say it was just Ryan and Robby Jackson, and the 535 elected members of the Congress? He shook his head.

Damn. Okay, I know how I got here, but why the hell did I allow myself to run for election? Jack asked himself. It had made Arnie happy. It had even made the media happy--- perhaps because they loved him as a target? the President asked himself--- and Cathy had not been cross with him about it. But why the hell had he ever allowed himself to be stampeded into this? He fundamentally didn't know what he was supposed to do as President. He had no real agenda, and sort of bumped along from day to day. Making tactical decisions (for which he was singularly unqualified) instead of large strategic ones. There was nothing important he really wanted to change about his country. Oh, sure, there were a few problems to be fixed. Tax policy needed rewriting, and he was letting George Winston ramrod that. And Defense needed firming up, and he had Tony Bretano working on that. He had a Presidential Commission looking at health-care policy, which his wife, actually, was overseeing in a distant way, along with some of her Hopkins colleagues, and all of that was kept quiet. And there was that very black look at Social Security, being guided by Winston and Mark Gant.

The "third rail of American politics," he thought again. Step on it and die. But Social Security was something the American people really cared about, not for what it was, but for what they wrongly thought it to be--- and, actually, they knew that their thoughts were wrong, judging by the polling data. As thoroughly mismanaged as any financial institution could possibly be, it was still part of a government promise made by the representatives of the people to the people. And somehow, despite all the cynicism out there--- which was considerable--- the average Joe Citizen really did trust his government to keep its word. The problem was that union chiefs and industrialists who'd dipped into pension funds and gone to federal prison for it had done nothing compared to what succeeding Congresses had done to Social Security--- but the advantage of a crook in Congress was that he or she was not a crook, not legally. After all, Congress made the law. Congress made government policy, and those things couldn't be wrong, could they? Yet another proof that the drafters of the Constitution had made one simple but far-reaching error. They'd

assumed that the people selected by The People to manage the nation would be as honest and honorable as they'd been. One could almost hear the "Oops!" emanating from all those old graves. The people who'd drafted the Constitution had sat in a room dominated by George Washington himself, and whatever honor they'd lacked he'd probably provided from his own abundant supply, just by sitting there and looking at them. The current Congress had no such mentor/living god to take George's place, and more was the pity, Ryan thought. The mere fact that Social Security had shown a profit up through the 1960s had meant that--- well, Congress couldn't let a profit happen, could it? Profits were what made rich people (who had to be bad people, because no one grew rich without having exploited someone or other, right?), which never stopped members of the Congress from going to those people for campaign contributions, of course) rich, and so profits had to be spent, and so Social Security taxes (properly called premiums, because Social Security was actually called OASDI, for Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance) were transformed into general funds, to be spent along with everything else. One of Ryan's students from his days of teaching history at the Naval Academy had sent him a small plaque to keep on his White House desk. It read: THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC WILL ENDURE UNTIL THE DAY CONGRESS DISCOVERS THAT IT CAN BRIBE THE PUBLIC WITH THE PUBLIC'S MONEY--- ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE. Ryan paid heed to it. There were times when he wanted to grab Congress by its collective neck and throttle it, but there was no single such neck, and Arnie never tired of telling him how tame a Congress he had, the House of Representatives especially, which was the reverse of how things usually went.

The President grumbled and checked his daily schedule for his next appointment. As with everything else, the President of the United States lived a schedule determined by others, his appointments made weeks in advance, the daily briefing pages prepared the day before so that he'd know who the hell was coming in, and what the hell he, she, or they wanted to talk about, and also what his considered position (mainly drafted by others) was. The President's position was usually a friendly one so that the visitor(s) could leave the Oval Office feeling good about the experience, and the rules were that you couldn't change the agenda, lest the Chief Executive say, "What the hell are you asking me for now!" This would alarm both the guest and the Secret Service agents standing right behind them, hands close to their pistols--- just standing there like robots, faces blank but scanning, ears taking everything in. After their shift ended, they probably headed off to whatever cop bar they frequented to chuckle over what the City Council President of Podunk had said in the Oval Office that day--- "Jesus, did you see the Boss's eyes when that dumb bastard...?"-- - because they were bright, savvy people who in many ways understood his job better than he did, Ryan reflected. Well they should. They had the double advantage of having seen it all, and not being responsible for any of it. Lucky bastards, Jack thought, standing for his next appointment.

If cigarettes were good for anything, it was for this, Nomuri thought. His left arm was curled around Ming, his body snuggled up against her, staring at the ceiling in the lovely, relaxed, deflationary moment, and puffing gently on his Kool as an accent to the moment, feeling Ming's breathing, and feeling very much like a man. The sky outside the windows was dark. The sun had set.

Nomuri stood, stopping first in the bathroom and then heading to the kitchenette. He returned with two wine glasses. Ming sat up in bed and took a sip from hers. For his part, Nomuri couldn't resist reaching over to touch her. Her skin was just so smooth and inviting.

"My brain is still not working," she said, after her third sip.

"Darling, there are times when men and women don't need their brains."

"Well, your sausage doesn't need one," she responded, reaching down to fondle it.

"Gently, girl! He's run a long hard race!" the CIA officer warned her with an inner smile.

"Oh, so he has." Ming bent down to deliver a gentle kiss. "And he won the race."

"No, but he did manage to catch up with you." Nomuri lit another cigarette. Then he was surprised to see Ming reach into her purse and pull out one of her own. She lit it with grace and took a long puff, finally letting the smoke out her nose.

"Dragon girl!" Nomuri announced with a laugh. "Do flames come next? I didn't know you smoked."

"At the office, everyone does."

"Even the minister?"

Another laugh: "Especially the minister."

"Someone should tell him that smoking is dangerous to the health, and not good for the yang."

"A smoked sausage is not a firm sausage," Ming said, with a laugh. "Maybe that's his problem, then."

"You do not like your minister?"

"He is an old man with what he thinks is a young penis. He uses the office staff as his personal bordello. Well, it could be worse," Ming admitted. "It's been a long time since I was his favorite. Lately he's fixed on Chai, and she is engaged, and Fang knows it. That is not a civilized act on the part of a senior minister."

"The laws do not apply to him?"

She snorted with borderline disgust. "The laws apply to none of them. Nomuri-san, these are government ministers. They are the law in this country, and they care little for what others think of them or their habits--- few enough find out in any case. They are corrupt on a scale that shames the emperors of old, and they say they are the guardians of the common people, the peasants and workers they claim to love as their own children. Well, I suppose sometimes I am one of those peasants, eh?"

"And I thought you liked your minister," Nomuri responded, goading her on. "So, what does he talk about?"

"What do you mean?"

"The late work that kept you away from here," he answered, waving at the bedclothes with a smile.

"Oh, talk between the ministers. He keeps an extensive personal political diary--- in case the president might want to oust him, that is his defense, you see, something he could present to his peers. Fang doesn't want to lose his official residence and all the privileges that come along with it. So, he keeps records of all he does, and I am his secretary, and I transcribe all his notes. Sometimes it can take forever."

"On your computer, of course."

"Yes, the new one, in perfect Mandarin ideographs now that you've given us the new software."

"You keep it on your computer?"

"On the hard drive, yes. Oh, it's encrypted," she assured him. "We learned that from the Americans, when we broke into their weapons records. It's called a robust encryption system, whatever that means. I select the file I wish to open and type in the decryption key, and the file opens. Do you want to know what key I use?" She giggled. "YELLOW SUBMARINE. In English because of the keyboard--- it was before your new software--- and it's from a Beatles song I heard on the radio once. 'We all live in a yellow submarine,' something like that. I listened to the radio a lot back then, when I was first studying English. I spent half an hour looking up submarines in the dictionary and then the encyclopedia, trying to find out why a ship was painted yellow. Ahh!" Her hands flew up in the air.

The encryption key! Nomuri tried to hide his excitement. "Well, it must be a lot of folders. You've been his secretary for a lot of time," he said casually.

"Over four hundred documents. I keep them by number instead of making up new names for them. Today was number four hundred eighty-seven, as a matter of fact."



Holy shit, Nomuri thought, four hundred eighty-seven computer documents of inside-the-Politburo conversations. This makes a gold mine look like a toxic waste dump.

"What exactly do they talk about? I've never met a senior government functionary," Nomuri explained.

"Everything!" she answered, finishing her own cigarette. "Who's got ideas in the Politburo, who wants to be nice to America, who wants to hurt them--- everything you can imagine. Defense policy. Economic policy. The big one lately is how to deal with Hong Kong. 'One Country, Two Systems' has developed problems with some industrialists around Beijing and Shanghai. They feel they are treated with less respect than they deserve--- less than they get in Hong Kong, that is--- and they are unhappy about it. Fang's one of the people trying to find a compromise to make them happy. He might. He's very clever at such things."

"It must be fascinating to see such information--- to really know what's going on in your country!" Nomuri gushed. "In Japan, we never know what the zaibatsu and the MITI people are doing--- ruining the economy, for the most part, the fools. But because nobody knows, no action is ever taken to fix things. Is it the same here?"

"Of course!" She lit another smoke, getting into the conversation, and hardly noticing that it wasn't about love anymore. "Once I studied my Marx and my Mao. Once I believed in it all. Once I even trusted the senior ministers to be men of honor and integrity, and totally believed the things they taught me in school. But then I saw how the army has its own industrial empire, and that empire keeps the generals rich and fat and happy. And I saw how the ministers use women, and how they furnish their apartments. They've become the new emperors. They have too much power. Perhaps a woman could use such power without being corrupted, but not a man."

Feminism's made it over here, too? Nomuri reflected. Maybe she was too young to remember Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, who could have given corruption lessons to the court of Byzantium.

"Well, that is not a problem for people like us. And at least you get to see such things, and at least you get to know it. That makes you even more unique, Ming-chan," Nomuri suggested, tracing the palm of his hand over her left nipple. She shivered right on command..

"You think so?"

"Of course." A kiss this time, a nice lingering one, while his hand stroked her body. He was so close. She had told him of all the information she had--- she'd even given him the fucking encryption key! So her 'puter was wired into the phone system--- that meant he could call in to it, and with the right software he could go snooping around her hard drive, and with the encryption key he could lift things right off, and cross-load them right to Mary Pat's desk. Damn, first I get to fuck a Chinese citizen, and then I can fuck their whole country. It didn't get much better than this, the field spook decided, with a smile at the ceiling.